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By

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Creation in Saint Augustine's *Confessions*

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With the exception of the Bible, perhaps no work has received as many and as various interpretations as Augustine's *Confessions*. Yet, despite the plethora of studies from a variety of disciplines, Annemaré Kotzé (2004) could still recently observe that while the *Confessions* is "Augustine's most read work . . . it is arguably one of the least understood pieces of ancient literature." Indeed, a work which on Augustine's own account was written to "stir up the human intellect and affections into God" (*retr.* 2.6.1) has often been reduced to "an 'autobiography' of a sinful, guilt-ridden soul" (Crosson, 1989). Though most agree that the *Confessions* is important, there seems to be little consensus about what it means, what holds it together, or how one should approach reading it.

This dissertation approaches the *Confessions* via what is, arguably, most important to Augustine: namely, creation, understood in a broad sense. Following St. Paul, Augustine thinks that creation is a revelation (cf. Rom. 1:20); it is that which reveals the truth about God and the world. For Augustine, creation is not one doctrine or theme among others, but is the foundational context for all doctrines and all themes. By systematically expounding Augustine's understanding of creation, this dissertation draws out how the narrative of Augustine's life can be understood as a "coming to terms" with creation which establishes a "new context," a transformation of living and thinking in light of his keen awareness of the gratuitous gift of existence. Moreover, creation, for Augustine, is dynamically ordered toward the Church, toward the deified destiny which the Body of Christ both is and brings

about. Thus, the *Confessions* itself can be understood as Augustine's prayer of praise in thanksgiving for the unmerited gift of creation (and re-creation). It is his self-gift back to God—importantly, one of his first acts as bishop—which turns out to be a kind of Eucharistic offering intended to take up and bring about the same in his readers. The dissertation concludes by arguing that Augustine's rich understanding of creation can account for the often despaired of meaning, structure, and unity of the *Confessions*.

This dissertation by Jared Ortiz fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Historical Theology approved by Tarmo Toom, Ph.D., as Director, and by Philip Rousseau, D.Phil., and Paul McPartlan, D.Phil., as Readers.

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Abbreviations

The standard abbreviations for Augustine's complete works are found in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Allan Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), pp. xxv–xlii. Those used in this work are as follows:

<i>c. Acad.</i>	<i>Contra Academicos</i>
<i>c. Adim.</i>	<i>Contra Adimantum Manichei discipulum</i>
<i>b. vita</i>	<i>De beata vita</i>
<i>bapt.</i>	<i>De baptismo</i>
<i>cat. rud.</i>	<i>De catechizandis rudibus</i>
<i>civ. Dei</i>	<i>De civitate Dei</i>
<i>conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones</i>
<i>div. qu.</i>	<i>De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus</i>
<i>doc. Chr.</i>	<i>De doctrina christiana</i>
<i>duab. an.</i>	<i>De duabus animabus</i>
<i>en. Ps.</i>	<i>Enarrationes in Psalmos</i>
<i>ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
<i>c. ep. Man.</i>	<i>Contra epistulam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti</i>
<i>c. Faust.</i>	<i>Contra Faustum Manicheum</i>
<i>f. et symb.</i>	<i>De fide et symbolo</i>
<i>Gn. litt.</i>	<i>De Genesi ad litteram</i>
<i>Gn. adv. Man.</i>	<i>De Genesi adversus Manicheos</i>
<i>haer.</i>	<i>De haeresibus</i>
<i>Jo. ev. tr.</i>	<i>In Johannis evangelium tractatus</i>
<i>lib. arb.</i>	<i>De libero arbitrio</i>
<i>mag.</i>	<i>De Magistro</i>
<i>mor.</i>	<i>De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum</i>
<i>mus.</i>	<i>De musica</i>
<i>nat. b.</i>	<i>De natura boni</i>
<i>ord.</i>	<i>De ordine</i>
<i>reg. 2</i>	<i>Regula: Ordo monasterii</i>
<i>reg. 3</i>	<i>Regula: Praeceptum</i>
<i>retr.</i>	<i>Retractationes</i>
<i>c. Sec.</i>	<i>Contra Secundinum Manicheum</i>
<i>s.</i>	<i>Sermones ad populum</i>
<i>Simpl.</i>	<i>Ad Simplicianum de diversis quaestionibus</i>
<i>sol.</i>	<i>Soliloquia</i>
<i>spir. et litt.</i>	<i>De spiritu et littera</i>
<i>Trin.</i>	<i>De Trinitate</i>
<i>util. cred.</i>	<i>De utilitate credendi</i>
<i>vera rel.</i>	<i>De vera religione</i>

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INTRODUCTION: APPROACHING THE *CONFESSIONS*

*haec omnia videmus et bona sunt valde,
quoniam tu ea vides in nobis
-conf. 13.34.49*

In the *Confessions*, Augustine lives, speaks, and thinks in terms of creation. Creation lies at the heart of the various struggles of his life, it informs the way he crafts his speech, and it makes up the fundamental rhythms of his thought. For Augustine, creation is not simply one doctrine among others; rather, it is, as Carol Harrison has argued, “the point at which he naturally begins, but it is also that which determines the way in which he subsequently expounds his entire understanding of the faith.”¹ If the *Confessions* is to be understood, it needs to be situated within Augustine’s understanding of creation.

This approach is not immediately obvious, but the following is suggestive: the *Confessions* begins with Augustine seeking for a way to understand the distinction between the “Great Lord” (*magnus dominus*) and the “part of Your creation” (*portio creaturae tuae*)² and ends with a discussion of the eternal Sabbath Rest prefigured on the Seventh Day of creation.³ The last three books are an extended meditation on the literal and allegorical

¹ Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine’s Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 114.

² Aug. *conf.* 1.1.1. All Latin quotations for the *Confessions* are taken from James O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), generously made available online for free at <http://www.stoa.org/hippo>. These have often been checked against *Les Confessions, Bibliothèque Augustinienne* 13-14, ed. Aime Solignac (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962), hereafter abbreviated *BA*, as well as *Sancti Augustini Confessionum libri XIII, Corpus Christianorum, series Latina* 27, ed. Luc Verheijen (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981). All English translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated. The following translations of the *Confessions* have been consulted for guidance: John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), Frank J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), and Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997).

³ *conf.* 13.35.50-38.53.

meaning of the creation account in Genesis and the most frequently used phrase in the *Confessions* is “God who made heaven and earth” (*qui fecit caelum et terram*).⁴ For Augustine, creation is decisive and, while its importance for Augustine’s thought in general has been increasingly recognized, its fundamental role in the *Confessions* has, with few exceptions, been overlooked.⁵

I. Select Recent Approaches

Every year produces a steady flow of books and articles on the *Confessions*, the cumulative effect being what one scholar has dubbed as “boundless research.”⁶ In order to constrain the review of the scholarly output into some reasonable form, this survey will be limited to book-length studies written within the past ten years which approach the

⁴ See O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, ad loc. 1.2.2.

⁵ For the importance of creation in Augustine’s thought in general, see, for example, N. Joseph Torchia, *Creatio ex nihilo and the Theology of St. Augustine: The Anti-Manichean Polemic and Beyond*. (New York: Peter Lang, 1999): “In a very real sense, this seminal Christian teaching constitutes a crucial, if not the pivotal element in his theological deliberations on a wide variety of topics. For this reason, it might serve as a useful point of departure for assessing the mainlines of Augustine’s theology as a whole” (ix); Tarsicius van Bavel, “The Creator and the Integrity of Creation in the Fathers of the Church especially in Saint Augustine,” *Augustinian Studies* 21 (1990): “Where did theological reflection begin? In all probability it began with the first article of faith: God as creator” (1); John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): “Augustine’s extant writings are entirely Christian, and his theology from the first is based on the absolute supremacy of an immaterial God and on the unhellenic notion of the creation of all things by God from nothing” (9; though, whether Augustine thought creation was an “unhellenic” notion is a question that will be considered in Chapter Two). Also, see Marie-Anne Vannier, “*Creatio*”, “*Conversio*”, “*Formatio*” chez S. Augustin (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1997); Scott Dunham, *Trinity and Creation in Augustine* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008); and, for the importance of creation in Augustine’s early thought, see Harrison, *Rethinking*, 74-114. The exceptions which treat creation in the *Confessions* will be discussed in the course of the dissertation.

⁶ See Hubertus R. Drobner, “Saint Augustine: an overview of recent research,” in *Augustine and His Critics*, eds. R. Dodaro and G. Lawless (New York: Routledge, 2000), 20. See also Richard Severson, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine: An Annotated Bibliography of Modern Criticism, 1888-1995* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996) as well as Vannier and Kotzé below for recent surveys of *Confessions* scholarship.

Confessions as a whole (rather than just one aspect of it or which treat the *Confessions* as part of a larger argument).⁷ This will reveal how scholars are generally approaching the *Confessions* today, in particular, how they are approaching the question of the meaning, structure, and unity of the work as a whole. Five studies stand out within these criteria: John M. Quinn's *A Companion to the Confessions of St. Augustine* (2002); Carl G. Vaught's trilogy *The Journey toward God in Augustine's Confessions: Books I-VI* (2003), *Encounters with God in Augustine's Confessions: Books VII-IX* (2004), and *Access to God in Augustine's Confessions: Books X-XIII* (2005); Annemaré Kotzé's *Augustine's Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience* (2004); Marie-Anne Vannier's *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin* (2007); and Garry Wills's *Augustine's Confessions: A Biography* (2011).⁸

⁷ For example, Philip Burton's *Language in the Confessions of Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) and John Peter Kenney's *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine: Rereading the Confessions* (New York: Routledge, 2005), which treat only aspects of the *Confessions* (albeit, very important ones), will not be treated here, though they have been consulted in different places throughout the dissertation. Nor will Isabelle Bochet's very fine *Le Firmament de l'Écriture: L'herméneutique augustinienne* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2004), which treats the *Confessions* as part of her larger argument about Augustinian hermeneutics. Nor will Frances Young's essay, "Creation and Human Being: The Forging of a Distinct Christian Discourse," *Studia Patristica* 44 (2010): 335-48, be treated. This article provides a general framework for understanding the *Confessions* in light of creation. "Creation out of nothing lies at the heart of what it means to live a human life, and so shapes the subject of Augustine's reflections in the *Confessions*" (339). While Young provides an intriguing account of the emergence of the creation doctrine and its importance, she only hints at how this might shape the *Confessions*: "The *Confessions* may tell the story of this intellectual journey [rejecting Manichaeism and moving beyond Platonism], but the point of the story is to celebrate what it means to be a creature in the process of being formed according to the will of the Creator. The presence of the final three books simply confirms that assessment" (339).

⁸ John Quinn, *A Companion to the Confessions of St. Augustine* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002); Carl G. Vaught, *The Journey toward God in Augustine's Confessions: Books I-VI* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), *Encounters with God in Augustine's Confessions: Books VII-IX* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), and *Access to God in Augustine's Confessions: Books X-XIII* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Annemaré Kotzé, *Augustine's Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Marie-Anne Vannier, *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Cerf, 2007); Garry Wills, *Augustine's Confessions: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

Each of these major studies offers a distinct approach to the *Confessions* which will help make clear where this dissertation fits in the current conversation.

John Quinn's *A Companion to the Confessions of St. Augustine* provides "a roughly point-by-point commentary on all chapters" of the *Confessions*.⁹ Quinn adopts the approach recommended by Eugene TeSelle that "the *Confessions* should be read sentence by sentence in the original guided by a detailed commentary [that captures] all the resonances."¹⁰

Beyond this "rough" approach, Quinn makes no other positive claims about how he understands the *Confessions* as a whole. He surveys a number of other approaches to the *Confessions*¹¹ and though "the work no doubt exhibits a broad unity," he says, none of the prevailing accounts of the overall unity of the *Confessions* convinces.¹² Quinn remains agnostic, if not a skeptic, on the question of unity: "Despite multiple and varied solutions the cognitive discontinuity between the last and the earlier books stays unresolved."¹³ He ventures that one reason for this may be that the *Confessions* "is more of an informal exposition than a treatise," thus it has, "at best an informal unity, one that writers of late antiquity rated adequate."¹⁴ Thus, one should look for unity in "a broad directive idea

⁹ Quinn, *Companion*, xv.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-5, quoting TeSelle.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1-3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

instead of rigorous development of closely knit notions.”¹⁵ Quinn’s *Companion* proceeds accordingly: rather than interpreting the *Confessions* along any particular lines or as having any overall coherent meaning, structure, or unity, it moves from line to line illuminating first one and then another idea as they recommend themselves to the author. Quinn looks at the trees and has very little to say of the forest.

On the other end of the spectrum is Carl G. Vaught’s trilogy. Vaught offers an account of the structure and unity of the *Confessions* as well as what he considers the dominant themes and “axes” which determine the work.¹⁶ He divides the *Confessions* into three non-traditional parts and devotes a book of his trilogy to each: Books 1-6, he says, describe the story of Augustine’s life; Books 7-9 give an account of Augustine’s encounters with God (philosophically, Christianly, and mystically, respectively); and Books 10-13 describe the necessary conditions that make Augustine’s conversion possible.¹⁷ Vaught, like Quinn, seems reticent to assert anything definitive on the question of unity: “It should go without saying that no single principle of interpretation is an adequate way of binding Augustine’s text together.”¹⁸ He thinks that, broadly speaking, “faith seeking understanding

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ In each book of the trilogy, Vaught provides a “Preface” and “Introduction.” This summary has been culled from all three. Oddly, each “Preface” and “Introduction” is largely identical, large portions from the first volume being repeated verbatim in the other two. Interspersed throughout the identical text are new and different reflections on the books of the *Confessions* under consideration. Why Vaught re-uses the original “Preface” and “Introduction” in each volume is unclear, because they are not equally useful or applicable to each and the repetition is distracting.

¹⁷ Vaught, *Access to God*, ix. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, a common way to divide the *Confessions* is between Books 1-10 and 11-13 and, within this division among Books 1-9, 10, 11-13.

¹⁸ Ibid., 23.

binds the text together” and that the tri-part division of journey, encounters, and interpretation help to make sense of the unfolding of the text.¹⁹ The dominant themes of the *Confessions* are twofold: first, the relationship between God and the soul (drawing on the *Soliloquies*); and second, finding a language to express this relationship.²⁰ Later, though, Vaught will say that “language is *the* key to the *Confessions*.”²¹

Vaught argues that the *Confessions* as a whole “develops within a three-dimensional framework”: there is a “temporal” axis, which moves backward and forward in the past and future; a “spatial” axis, which moves inward and outward toward the soul and the cosmos; and an “eternal” axis, which moves up and down toward God and away from him.²² He calls this framework “philosophical,” though he is also attentive to psychological and rhetorical facets of the work.²³ Vaught uses his “philosophical framework” to analyze each book of the *Confessions* and traces the dominant themes throughout. Vaught also makes the claim, rare in Augustine scholarship, that the reader or interpreter must examine himself just as Augustine examines himself. Indeed, in the *Confessions*, Augustine presents his story as a “pattern” or “type” in which the reader can see himself and evaluate his life: “It is the

¹⁹ Ibid., 22.

²⁰ Vaught, *Journey toward God*, 1.

²¹ Ibid., 18, emphasis added.

²² Ibid., 4-8. These are Vaught’s terms.

²³ Ibid., x, 6-7. Though Vaught speaks of Augustine as a theologian (ix), he does not formally make theology a part of his approach. He speaks of the role of *creatio ex nihilo* as part of the “metanarrative” which Augustine presupposes (1).

microscopic expression of a macroscopic theme.”²⁴ Vaught echoes Augustine’s own sentiments when he argues that there must be some kind of existential identification with the author if readers are to understand him.²⁵ “We cannot,” Vaught warns, “plunge into the *Confessions* without calling ourselves into question.”²⁶

Annemaré Kotzé’s aim is more modest than Vaught’s: she does not intend to account for the whole of the *Confessions*—she remains wary, but hopeful that such an account can be had—but instead proposes to do some of the groundwork for future accounts of the whole.²⁷ In particular, she seeks to discern to what extent the *Confessions* conforms to the traditional protreptic genre and to what extent the Manichees are among the “ideal audience” of this protreptic. Kotzé tries to show how the common understanding of the *Confessions* as an unhappy combination of autobiography and exegesis leads interpreters astray. Instead, she argues, Augustine’s aim should be understood as “that of a traditional protreptic, namely to change the course of the life of its reader.”²⁸ Augustine’s aim is to convert his readers and, to a large extent, Kotzé says, Augustine has Manichean readers in mind. Augustine’s work, she says, is “a literary product of its time,” and so she explores “how the principles of genre in general and the literary practices of Late Antiquity in particular can and should influence a

²⁴ Ibid., 1.

²⁵ See, for example, Aug. *conf.* 10.1.1-4.6.

²⁶ Vaught, *Journey toward God*, ix.

²⁷ Kotzé, *Communicative Purpose*, 1-2.

²⁸ Ibid., 3.

present day reading of the *Confessions*.²⁹ By highlighting the protreptic dimensions of the work, Kotzé offers an analysis which, she modestly hopes, “can be no more than the unraveling of one strand of meaning while we remember that what is not said here is so much more than what is said.”³⁰

Marie-Anne Vannier’s most recent book is a short, introductory commentary on the *Confessions*. In it, Vannier deftly analyzes the *Confessions*, offering a brief literature survey, an account of the structure of the whole, as well as a suggestion for coherently reading each book. Following Landsberg and Solignac, Vannier argues that “*la clef de l’ouvrage se trouve dans la confession même et plus précisément dans la confession louange*.”³¹ There is, she says, a triple movement of confession—admitting faults, testifying to pardon, and testifying to “prevenient” grace—which governs the “*composition très libre et parfaitement nécessaire*.”³² Vannier, though, goes farther than her predecessors by immediately adding an important qualification: “*qui l’amène a la connaissance de lui-même, comme un être créé et recréé par son créateur, comme un sujet qui trouve son identité véritable dans l’intersubjectivité, dans le dialogue avec son créateur, ce qui est tout a fait original dans la littérature de l’époque*.”³³ For Vannier, this dialogue with the Creator, which bears fruit in

²⁹ Ibid., 2.

³⁰ Ibid., 4. To the extent possible, Kotzé attempts to avoid an “elaborate exposition of a methodological framework . . . [which] with all its terminological particularities have the effect of estranging the reader, rather than the opposite” (2).

³¹ Vannier, *Les Confessions*, 32.

³² Ibid., 34, quoting P.L. Landsberg.

³³ Vannier, *Les Confessions*, 32. See Chapter Five for a discussion of her predecessors.

the discovery of one's true identity as created and recreated, is essential for understanding the meaning of the *Confessions*. Drawing on the work of Isabelle Bochet as well as her own work on creation, Vannier offers an account of the overall structure of the work (see Chapter Five below) as a story of *aversio* and *conversio* (Books 1-10) which is then illumined and judged in the theological "mirror of Scripture" (Books 11-13), in particular, the creation account of Genesis, which opens up the truth about Augustine's own identity, his own *forma*, which he can see more clearly in the *Forma omnium*, Christ himself.³⁴

Garry Wills's new book on the *Confessions* is a kind of popular "biography of *Confessions*," in which he provides an overview of the history of the work itself—its genesis, content, and a brief history of its reception from Augustine's time to the present day. He makes the somewhat rare claim that the "*Confessions* is written as a deliberate whole."³⁵ He dismisses those who think the work is disjointed or that the last three books are tacked on. Wills does not seem to offer any sustained argument about the meaning of the *Confessions*, though he does hint at how he understands the work.

Genesis is present all through the book. Episodes in Genesis lie behind key events in Augustine's life. The God who made the world is still remaking Augustine by his secret providence and graces. Furthermore, Augustine finds the mystery of the Trinity implicit in the creation story, and the Trinity has also been haunting the entire book.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid., 41. One only laments that Vannier's illuminating work is too short to expand on any of the many excellent suggestions and paths for understanding the *Confessions*. This dissertation could very well be understood as a development of her work, though many of the same conclusions were arrived at independently.

³⁵ Wills, *Augustine's Confessions*, 13.

³⁶ Ibid., 13.

Throughout his analysis, Wills seems to have in mind Genesis 2-3, the Adam and Eve story, more than Genesis 1, the creation of all things from nothing in seven days. Wills concludes from the presence of Genesis in the *Confessions* that “the superimposition of Genesis patterns on the events of his life makes the question of literal historicity beside the point, since Augustine is not writing history or autobiography.”³⁷ The work as a whole has the “overall framework as a prayer,”³⁸ it is a “theological construct of a highly symbolic sort,”³⁹ and could be understood as a “spiritual psychodrama.”⁴⁰ Wills even hints at certain liturgical elements in the *Confessions*, stating at one point that Book 10 “is like the examination of conscience (*Confiteor*) before beginning the Mass,”⁴¹ though he does not return to this or many of his other intriguing suggestions.

II. Argument and Contribution

This dissertation draws on insights from all of these studies, but has the most in common with the creation and liturgical dimensions that Vannier and Wills highlight. It begins with what is, arguably, most important for Augustine: creation, understood in a deep, Pauline sense. For Augustine, the doctrine of creation is not conceived as a static set of dogmatic teachings (though it is this too), but rather is an encounter of the awake mind with

³⁷ Ibid., 142.

³⁸ Ibid., 22.

³⁹ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 25.

⁴¹ Ibid., 13.

the truth about reality. Following St. Paul, Augustine thinks that creation reveals who God is and who man is; it is a light which illumines all other things.⁴² It is the light within which Augustine understands his own past experiences, as well as his present state and future hope. It is the light which inspires, even necessitates, *confessio*, the reflexive response of the heart which has encountered the truth about God and itself. It is, finally, the light within which Augustine composed the *Confessions* and which can illumine the whole work. What emerges from reading the *Confessions* in this light is a vision of Augustine's rich understanding of creation as dynamically oriented toward God, of the Church as the locus of transformation into God, and of *confessio* as the liturgical response which con-forms human beings to Christ and takes up all of creation into the Church and offers it back to God in a thanksgiving offering of praise. This is the deep meaning of the *Confessions* which Augustine's understanding of creation brings to light.

Approaching the *Confessions* in this way is not necessarily meant to be an alternative to other approaches; it is not offered here in competition to the studies above or to other literary, historical, psychological, philosophical, or theological approaches. Yet, neither is it offered as an approach alongside these other approaches. Instead, it is an approach meant to enrich all other approaches by situating them within what Augustine would understand as their proper theological context, namely, the foundational doctrine of creation. Thus, the approach adopted here aims to preserve the integrity of the insights of other approaches, while at the same time refining them and locating them within a vision of the whole.

⁴² See Rom. 1:20 and the discussion in Chapter One below.

The argument of this dissertation proceeds in five chapters. Chapter One will offer a systematic account of Augustine's understanding of creation at the time of writing the *Confessions*.⁴³ This account serves as the foundation and a kind of grammar for the rest of the dissertation. Chapter Two will build on this understanding of creation in order to show how Augustine's life can be coherently interpreted as an intellectual and moral "coming to terms" with creation. This chapter treats two inseparable aspects of creation in Augustine's life: one, creation as the explicit or implicit content of his various intellectual and moral struggles; and two, creation as the light within which he interprets the events of his life. Chapter Three gives an account of the "new context" which creation establishes, in other words, it describes what changes after Augustine comes to terms with creation. Chapter Four completes this inquiry by exploring the relationship between creation and the Church and concluding that creation is dynamically oriented toward fulfillment in the Church. Finally, Chapter Five takes the understanding of creation established in the previous chapters and offers a coherent account of the meaning, structure, and unity of the *Confessions*.

⁴³ Throughout the dissertation, Augustine's other works are liberally drawn upon to help interpret his thought in the *Confessions*. Works written before or contemporaneous with the *Confessions* have been consulted more often than those written after. The principle of inclusion was whether the thought in the other work could be found in some form in the *Confessions* itself. So, for example, *De Civitate Dei*, written many years after the *Confessions*, is used to help illumine Augustine's understanding of sacrifice, since the explicit account in the later work is remarkably similar to the spirit and pattern of thought in the *Confessions*. Yet, there is no mention here of the notion of *rationes seminales* or the account of angelic knowledge from the *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, a work written much nearer the *Confessions*, because these really are subsequent developments of Augustine's thought and do not seem to be present in any substantial way in the *Confessions*.

CHAPTER ONE: AUGUSTINE'S UNDERSTANDING OF CREATION

fecisti nos ad te
- *conf.* 1.1.1

I. Some Conceptual Clarifications

Augustine's understanding of creation is, first and foremost, the faith of the Church. Augustine did not seek to discover some new insight about creation that had never been thought of before. Rather, he struggled to accept and understand the traditional Christian inheritance, the faith given to the Apostles and contained explicitly or implicitly in every Creed from the beginning.¹ Still, Augustine developed this traditional inheritance in distinctive ways.

Augustine uses a variety of Latin terms to express different aspects of what is here being called "creation." Sometimes, he uses *facere* and *creare* interchangeably to mean the divine activity which introduces being from nothing.² Other times, he distinguishes these words: *facere*, in a more technical sense, can refer to creation from nothing, while *creare* is

¹ See, for example, Aug. *div. qu.* 67.1: "It is said, in accordance with Catholic teaching, that creation is whatever God the Father has made and established through the only-begotten Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit" (*dicitur autem secundum catholicam disciplinam creatura quidquid fecit et condidit deus pater per unigenitum filium in unitate spiritus sancti*). For the early Christian understanding of creation, see Peter C. Bouteneff, *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3d ed. (London: Continuum, 2006); J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (London: Continuum, 2006); Gerhard May, *Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A.S. Worrall (London: T&T Clark, 2004); Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Tarsicius van Bavel, "The Creator and the Integrity of Creation," 1-35; N. Joseph Torchia, *Creatio ex nihilo*, 1-64.

² Compare, for example, "You made us toward yourself" (*fecisti nos ad te*) (Aug. *conf.* 1.1.1) and "Thus man is renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of him who created him" (*ita homo renovatur in agnitione dei secundum imaginem eius, qui creavit eum*) (*conf.* 13.22.32, quoting Col. 3:10). Though *facere* and *creare* can mean different things, Augustine often uses each one to refer to *creatio ex nihilo*.

used to refer to the “constituting and ordering” (*condere et ordinare*) of things already made.³ Augustine uses the word *creatura* to refer to all the things God has created, all of material and spiritual reality, what will often simply be called here “creation” or “the world.” For Augustine, God is the “Creator of all creation” (*creator universae creaturae*),⁴ the one invoked as “he who made all things” (*qui fecit omnia*).⁵ Creation is an act of the whole Trinity, though Augustine will argue that just as the persons of the Trinity can be distinguished, so too can their involvement in the one creative act.⁶ In relation to the persons of the Trinity, Augustine uses *creatio* in a more specific sense to refer to the Father bringing into being formless matter from nothing.

All these senses of creation are present in the *Confessions* at different times, but there is a deeper sense in which creation is present in Augustine’s thought. Following St. Paul in Romans 1:20—a foundational verse for Augustine’s thinking on creation—Augustine thinks that creation is a revelation: “Your invisible things are understood through that which has been made” (*invisibilia tua per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspexi*).⁷ Augustine says, “With the whole creation testifying together, I found You, our Creator and Your Word, God

³ Augustine makes this distinction in *mor.* 2.7.9. See *conf.* 7.5.7 for this use of *creare*.

⁴ *conf.* 13.5.6.

⁵ *conf.* 2.4.10. In the *Confessions*, Augustine invokes God as *Creator* thirty times and addresses him with “You made” (*fecisti*) ninety times; the phrase *qui fecit* or *deus fecit* occurs thirteen times. According to O’Donnell, *qui fecit caelum et terram* is “the most frequently repeated verbal pattern in *conf.*” (*Confessions*, ad loc. 1.2.2).

⁶ See discussion of *creatio*, *conversio*, *formatio* below.

⁷ Rom. 1:20. Augustine uses Rom. 1:20 six times explicitly in the *Confessions*, four of which occur in Book Seven when he comes to the proper distinction between God and the world for the first time. See *conf.* 7.10.16; 7.17.23 (2x); 7.20.26; 10.6.10; 13.21.31.

with You and with You one God, through whom You created all things” (*contestante universa creatura inveneram te creatorem nostrum et verbum tuum apud te deum tecumque unum deum, per quod creasti omnia*).⁸ Creation not only sheds light on, but determines our understanding of the Creator, what and how he creates, and how his creation is distinct from and related to him.⁹ In this deeper, Pauline sense, Augustine understands creation “as that which defines how we are to understand God, how we are to understand the world, and how we are to understand the relationship between the world and God.”¹⁰ Creation, in this deep sense, is determinative of Augustine’s thought and, moreover, it opens up the conceptual space to understand the other Christian mysteries, such as the Incarnation and the Trinity.¹¹

⁸ *conf.* 8.1.2. See the section entitled “How Creation is Perceived as Revelation” in Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 112-22.

⁹ I am indebted to Msgr. Sokolowski for his conceptual clarity in illuminating this revelatory dimension of creation. See his “Creation and Christian Understanding” in *Christian Faith and Human Understanding: Studies on the Eucharist, Trinity, and the Human Person* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 38-50, and *The God of Faith and Reason* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995). Sokolowski is engaged in what he calls a “theology of disclosure,” a phenomenological approach to doing theology which, he suggests, Augustine also practices (*God of Faith and Reason*, 139). Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 92, affirms something similar.

¹⁰ Sokolowski, “Creation and Christian Understanding,” 38. Sokolowski calls this understanding of creation “the Christian distinction,” by which he means the thing that sets Christians apart from pagans and other religions as well as the unique way Christians understand the distinction between God and the world. Augustine and Sokolowski diverge somewhat on the matter of what pagans could know. Sokolowski thinks all pagan thought makes God into the highest thing in the world, while Augustine would say all the pagans *except* the Platonists do. See Sokolowski, *God of Faith and Reason*, 12-19; See *Aug. conf.* 7.9.13-15; *ep.* 118.16-18. Also, see Eugene Kevane, “Christian Philosophy: The Intellectual Side of Augustine’s Conversion,” *Augustinian Studies* 17 (1986): “In the pagan philosophy of the past, even at its best, the mind remained in confinement within the cosmos” (62). See Kenney, *Mysticism of Saint Augustine*, 17, for a lucid description of the pagan gods understood as bound by time and space and 18ff for how Platonists offered something different. This question will be revisited in Chapter Two.

¹¹ See, for example, *Aug. conf.* 8.1.2.

Augustine first achieves this understanding of creation after reading the books of the Platonists and, once it is achieved, God and the world can no longer be understood in the same way; everything changes.¹² The “horizon” of thinking has changed, for it is no longer confined to the things of the world, but profiled against God who could be all there is, and the world, which did not have to be. “Belief in Creation introduces . . . a dimensional difference, a new way of taking things. It introduces a new way in which the world as a whole, and everything in the world, can be interpreted.”¹³ This “dimensional difference” is, for Augustine, a radical transformation of thinking and living in the light of distinction between God and the world; it is what shall be described in Chapter Three as the “new context” which creation establishes.¹⁴

A. Clarifying Errors

For Augustine in the *Confessions*, God is not a part of the world, but utterly transcendent to it. This seeming truism is not as obvious as it might seem.¹⁵ It certainly was not obvious to the young rhetor from Thagaste. Augustine thought that there was a perennial human temptation to reduce God to something within the horizon of the world. This can arise, he says, from identifying God with some part of creation, as he claims Anaximenes did

¹² See Aug. *conf.* 7.10.16ff. Also, see Chapter Two, “Infinite in a Different Way,” for a discussion of these changes.

¹³ Sokolowski, “Creation and Christian Understanding,” 46.

¹⁴ The phrase “new context” comes from Sokolowski. See *ibid.*, 41.

¹⁵ See Young, “Creation and Human Being,” 335-48, for a discussion of the uniqueness of the doctrine of creation in antiquity.

when he identified God with the air.¹⁶ But it can also arise from a natural habit of the mind which tries to *imagine* God, that is, to make an image of him when thinking of him.

Augustine calls this “smacking of the flesh in one’s thoughts” (*carnaliter sapere*).¹⁷

Augustine relates two of these imaginative reductions familiar in his day: when people ask, “What was God doing before he made heaven and earth” (*quid faciebat deus antequam faceret caelum et terram*)?,¹⁸ or when they “think of God as a man, or as some immense mass endowed with power, who by some new and sudden decision made heaven and earth outside himself, as it were, in spaces at a distance from himself” (*cogitant deum, quasi hominem aut quasi aliquam molem immensa praeditam potestate novo quodam et repentino placito extra se ipsam tamquam locis distantibus, fecisse caelum et terram*),¹⁹ they are imagining God as a being in the world subject to time and space. Instead of understanding God as the transcendent Source of creation, he is understood as the highest thing *in* creation. This kind of thinking makes creation ultimate; it makes the stuff of the world all there is. God, in these examples, is only a higher form of what humans are, since time and space would be prior and therefore more fundamental than God. For the mature Augustine, though, the world is not ultimate, but radically contingent, for God created it from

¹⁶ See *Aug. conf.* 10.6.9 as well as *ep.* 118.16-20 and 53. In *ep.* 118, Augustine discusses Anaximenes as well as the Stoics and Epicureans who, he says, identify God with mind and body (respectively), that is, as some part of the world.

¹⁷ *Aug. vera rel.* 20.40. This humorous translation comes from Edmond Hill, *On True Religion in On Christian Belief*, ed. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2005), ad loc.

¹⁸ *Aug. conf.* 11.10.12.

¹⁹ *conf.* 12.27.37.

nothing. God is ultimate and surpasses time and space, as Augustine says, by his “eternally stable abiding” (*aeterne stabili permansione*).²⁰

After his conversion, Augustine was able to resist the “fleshly” thinking which reduces God to another being in the world, though not all Augustine scholars have been able to recognize this. There is a tradition, stretching from Vernon Bourke to Robert O’Connell to the semi-canonical *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, which, perhaps unwittingly, sees God as the highest thing in the universe or, at least, thinks Augustine holds such a position.²¹ Though these scholars differ in terms of emphases, their basic understanding of Augustine is the same. Since O’Connell provides a helpful diagram, he shall be the focus. He suggests that Augustine holds the following image of reality, what O’Connell calls the *Omnia*, or the “All Things”²²:

<i>Unum, Summum</i> The One, Highest	GOD	<i>Aeternum, Immutabile</i> Eternal, Unchangeable
<i>Superiora, altiora</i>	<i>Angels and Souls</i>	<i>Spiritualia</i> : Spirituals (even bodies)

²⁰ *conf.* 12.28.38.

²¹ This genealogy may not be exhaustive, but the line of influence is clear. See Vernon Bourke, *Augustine’s View of Reality* (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1964), 3-7; Robert O’Connell, *Soundings in St. Augustine’s Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), 21-68 and *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine’s Confessions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 105-06; Leo Ferrari, “Cosmology,” in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 246-48 (hereafter abbreviated *ATA*); Ronald H. Nash, “Wisdom,” in *ATA*, 885-86. Bourke approaches Augustine as a philosopher and is in search of Augustine’s metaphysical understanding of the reality. O’Connell wants to put “flesh” on Bourke’s skeleton and focuses on Augustine’s imagined universe. The two entries in *ATA* follow O’Connell and Bourke, respectively, without critical comment. None of these scholars uses creation as a primary category for understanding Augustine’s thought on reality or the universe.

²² O’Connell, *Soundings*, 22; cf. O’Connell, *Images of Conversion*, 105-06. O’Connell derives the name for this image from Augustine’s *div. qu.* 41, which very clearly refers to the hierarchy of *creation* in which God does *not* appear.

Above this line: <i>Invisible, suprasensible, Intelligible realities:</i>		
i.e., “Heaven” and “Truth”		
Below this line: <i>Visible, sensible, “opinative” realities:</i>		
“Earth” and “Vanities”		
<i>Multa, Inferiora</i>	Sun (Heat)	<i>Temporalia,</i>
<i>Mutabilia</i>		Temporals,
The Many, Lower		Changeables
And the	Air (Dryness)	<i>Corpora, Bodies</i>
<i>Infima, Extrema</i>	Water (Dampness)	
Lowest, “Last”	Earth (Coldness)	

This diagram reflects Augustine’s thought in important respects, for example, in its hierarchy of created things and the sharp line between visible and invisible. Yet, for all that it helps to sort out Augustine’s imagined universe, there is a fundamental misrepresentation. For Augustine, God is not one thing among other things in the “all things,” he is not *a part* of the *Omnia*. O’Connell claims that Augustine imagines a “three-tiered universe”²³ in which his “imagination accords to God, and to each of the ‘all things’ (*Omnia*) which he created, what he calls their proper ‘places’ (*loca*).”²⁴ O’Connell says that Augustine distinguishes God from the *Omnia*, but then O’Connell places God *within* it. Yet, this is the very error that Augustine spent his whole early life overcoming and his later life guarding against.²⁵ In O’Connell’s “world-image,” God occupies the highest place, that is, God is imagined to be

²³ O’Connell, *Soundings*, 21. Vernon Bourke, *Augustine’s View of Reality*, speaks of a “triple-layered scheme of reality. At the top is God, in the middle is the human soul, and at the bottom is the world of bodies. Apart from these three levels . . . there are no other general types of beings” (3). For Augustine, as already noted, God is not a type of being, but Being Itself.

²⁴ O’Connell, *Images of Conversion*, 105.

²⁵ See Aug. *vera rel.* 20.40; *conf.* 7.1.1-2; *ep.* 118.16-18 for an early (390/1), middle (397/401), and late (410/1) discussion of this temptation, especially in relation to pagan ways of thinking about God and the world.

the highest thing *in* the world, rather than ontologically distinct from it.²⁶ Augustine thinks this error arises from not taking creation, in the deep sense, seriously enough. And, indeed, though O’Connell mentions creation, it does not figure into his understanding of the image in any serious way.²⁷

Knowing the dangers of trying to imagine God, Augustine would probably be wary of O’Connell’s *Omnia* image, but were he momentarily to entertain it, he might improve it by adding a thick line between God and everything else. Not, as Bourke thought, because of the difference between mutable and immutable (as important as this is),²⁸ but because God is Creator and the *Omnia*, visible and invisible, is created.²⁹ God is the Creator of the *Omnia*, not a being within it.

B. God’s Being and Created Being

Augustine comes to the understanding that God is “Being Itself,” *idipsum*, the “Selfsame,” who is utterly simple, complete, and sufficient unto himself.³⁰ He says in Book

²⁶ The phrase “world-image” comes from O’Connell, *Images of Conversion*, 105. Compare Frederick Crosson, “Structure and Meaning in St. Augustine’s *Confessions*,” in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 27-38, on the meaning of the “hiddenness of God.” “[God] does not, because he cannot, fit into the world picture” (28).

²⁷ Bourke does not discuss creation either.

²⁸ See Bourke, *Augustine’s View of Reality*: “In one sense, Augustine’s triple-layered schematism reduces to a dualism. The great difference is between the mutable and immutable” (5).

²⁹ In this connection, see the definitive text Aug. *conf.* 7.10.16 where Augustine distinguishes the Light in terms of creation. See Chapter Two below. See also Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 189, for a discussion of this distinction in *De Trinitate*, though without reference to Bourke or O’Connell.

³⁰ *conf.* 13.1.1; cf. *vera rel.* 14.28; *ep.* 121.5. See Jean-Luc Marion, “*Idipsum*: The Name of God according to Augustine,” in *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, eds. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 167-90.

13 that God does “not exist in a certain way, but he is is” (*non aliquo modo est, sed est est*).³¹

“By repeating the word *est* in this striking way, Augustine says that God *is* simply.”³²

Augustine evokes Exodus 3:14 and suggests that God *is* without qualification. All creatures exist in a certain way—the way God made them—but God is not a part of creation, so “he exists not in any particular mode nor as any particular kind.”³³ God is *est* itself, sheer is.

This understanding of God’s nature means for Augustine that God is utterly transcendent to the world he created while, at the same time, being wholly and intimately present to it without competing with it in any way. There is a sense in which God is “absent” or “hidden” from the world. “God does not belong to the nature of the whole or appear within it because he is not a kind of being.”³⁴ But this necessary absence or hiddenness is identical to an understanding of his intimate presence to the world. As Augustine says, God is “most hidden *and* most present” (*secretissime et praesentissime*).³⁵ God is everywhere

³¹ Aug. *conf.* 13.31.46. The construction *est est* is odd in Latin, as is “is is” in English. Another possible translation, which brings out the Ex. 3:14 resonances, is O’Donnell’s suggestion, “he is ‘he is’” (*Confessions*, ad loc.)

³² Robert Sokolowski, “The Science of Being as Being in Aristotle, Aquinas, and Wippel” (paper presented at The Fall 2008 Lecture Series: Metaphysical Themes – In Honor of John F. Wippel, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., December 5, 2008), 14.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Crosson, “Structure and Meaning,” 28.

³⁵ Aug. *conf.* 1.4.4.

wholly and intimately “present” to the world, *ubique totus*, in Augustine’s phrase,³⁶ because he is utterly and totally transcendent to it.³⁷

According to Augustine, a true understanding of God inevitably leads to the corollary doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. In the *De libero arbitrio*, he offers a neat argument: God is “omnipotent and not changeable in any particular . . . he is the Creator of all good things, in regard to which he himself stands before as more excellent, the most just ruler of all that he created; nor was any other nature a helper in creating, as if he were not sufficient unto himself. From this, it follows that he created all things from nothing” (*omnipotentem atque ex nulla particula commutabilem . . . bonorum etiam omnium creatorem, quibus est ipse praestantior, rectorem quoque iustissimum eorum omnium quae creauit, nec ulla adiutum esse natura in creando, quasi qui non sibi sufficeret. ex quo fit ut de nihilo creauerit omnia*).³⁸ Because God “is is” he is perfectly self-sufficient and lacking in nothing. He need not create, for need implies lack, of which there is none in God; nor does creation increase God’s goodness, for God is Goodness Itself; nor, finally, when he creates is he aided in any way, neither by a Demiurge or by some pre-existing material, for this, too, would imply a lack, an insufficiency of power on God’s part. God creates freely and for no further reason than his own Goodness.³⁹ “For You made them not out of need of them,” says Augustine,

³⁶ *conf.* 1.3.3 and 6.3.4; cf., *ep.* 187.5.16: “God is everywhere present through his divinity” (*ubique esse deum per diuinitatis praesentiam*).

³⁷ See *lib. arb.* 2.12.

³⁸ *lib. arb.* 1.2.

³⁹ In *div. qu.* 22, Augustine makes a neat syllogism to show that there is no necessity in God: “Where there is no lack there is no necessity; where there is no deficiency there is no lack. However, there is no

“but out of the plenitude of Your Goodness, holding them together and converting them to form, but not as though Your joy was somehow completed from them” (*non ex indigentia fecisti sed ex plenitudine bonitatis tuae, cohibens atque convertens ad formam, non ut tamquam tuum gaudium compleatur ex eis*).⁴⁰ Augustine can say this because God is so transcendent from the world and in no way depends on it. For Augustine, then, creation from nothing is the logical conclusion from a certain understanding of God.⁴¹

This doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* has profound implications for how Augustine views the world and his own existence; it demands that he understand them as a gift, a freely chosen and gratuitously given gift of God, who was under no compulsion to create and gains nothing by creating, but who freely shares his being and goodness with creation and so reveals himself as Love.⁴² Thus the being and well-being of creatures is God’s utterly gratuitous gift and so their relationship to him is one of utter dependence. The very fact of creation, then, insists on a response of perpetual gratitude, for “what do you have that you have not received” (*quid autem habes quod non accepisti*)?⁴³ All is gift; and therefore

deficiency in God, and therefore no necessity” (*ubi nulla indigentia, nulla necessitas; ubi nullus defectus, nulla indigentia. nullus autem defectus in deo, nulla ergo necessitas.*).

⁴⁰ *conf.* 13.4.5.

⁴¹ This line of reasoning will have important consequences for how Augustine understands the Platonists.

⁴² Thomas Pruffer offers a similar insight: “‘God is all there is,’ although false, is meaningful for a sense of the being of creatures within the context of creation, which is free and out of nothing, that is, creatures are chosen by God as the alternative to there being only God” (“A Reading of Augustine’s *Confessions*, Book X,” in *Recapitulations: Essays in Philosophy* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 28).

⁴³ 1 Cor. 4:7. See *Aug. conf.* 7.21.27.

gratitude—or, more accurately, praise in thanksgiving, what Augustine calls, *confessio*—is the only fitting response.

II. Trinity and *Creatio de nihilo*

For Augustine, creation from nothing is an act of the whole Trinity.⁴⁴ “The Father has simultaneously made each and every nature through the Son in the Gift of the Holy Spirit” (*et simul omnia et unamquamque naturam patrem fecisse per filium in dono spiritus sancti*).⁴⁵ In the *Confessions*, the word *Trinitas* and the phrase *de nihilo*⁴⁶ each occur for the first time in the same passage:

And there was not another thing besides You from which You might make them, O God, one Trinity and threefold Unity, and therefore, from nothing You made heaven and earth, a great thing and a small thing, since You are omnipotent and good, to make all things good. You were, and nothing else. From nothing, You made the

⁴⁴ Augustine understood the importance of the Trinity from the time of his pre-baptismal retreat in Cassiciacum where in his first post-conversion work he shows his mother—as the voice of piety and therefore authority—identify the happy life with the Trinity (*b. vita* 4.35). He reiterates his mother’s opinion in the *lib. arb.* 3.21. A full treatment of Augustine’s understanding of the Trinity is beyond our scope. See Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* and Scott Dunham, *Trinity and Creation in Augustine*. Also, see Lewis Ayres, “The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology,” in *Augustine and His Critics*, 51-76; Lewis Ayres, “‘Remember That You are Catholic’ (*serm.* 52.2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000): 39-82; Michel R. Barnes, “Re-reading Augustine’s Theology of the Trinity,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, eds. S.T. Davis, D. Kendall, & G. O’Collins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 145-76; Mary T. Clark, “*De Trinitate*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, eds. Eleanore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 91-102.

⁴⁵ *Aug. vera rel.* 7.13. This is an article of the faith, taught by the Church and confirmed by the opening of Genesis: following John 8:25, Augustine identifies the *principium* with the Son; the Father is the *Deus* who creates; and the Holy Spirit is the one who hovers over the abyss. See *conf.* 13.5.6-6.7; cf. *Gn. adv. Man.* 1.2.3.

⁴⁶ Augustine uses both the phrases *de nihilo* and *ex nihilo*. In the *Confessions*, *de nihilo* is used six times (five times in Book 12; once in Book 13), while *ex nihilo* is used only once. He seems to use them without any difference in meaning, though O’Donnell suggests that *de nihilo* somehow helps to rule out Gnostic and Platonic notions of emanation (*Confessions*, ad loc. 12.7.7). See *Aug. c. Sec.* 8.9. See also, Chapter Two, “Rethinking Augustine’s Reception of the Platonists” below.

heaven [of heavens] and [the formless] earth, these two, one to which [only] You would be superior, the other to which [only] nothing would be less.

*et aliud praeter te non erat unde faceres ea, deus, una trinitas et trina unitas, et ideo de nihilo fecisti caelum et terram, magnum quiddam et parvum quiddam, quoniam omnipotens et bonus es ad facienda omnia bona. Tu eras et aliud nihil, unde fecisti caelum et terram, magnum caelum et parvam terram, duo quaedam, unum prope te, alterum prope nihil, unum quo superior tu esses, alterum quo inferius nihil esset.*⁴⁷

Augustine is careful not to make *Trinitas* and *nihil* the two extremes of being in the created world, the highest and the lowest. Instead, Augustine says that heaven and earth, that is, the heaven of heavens and the original formless matter, are the limits of created being.⁴⁸ *Nihil* has no ontological status which could be contrasted with God, and God, who is Being Itself, has no contrast.

God is *una trinitas et trina unitas*. In the *De doctrina Christiana*, a work contemporaneous or at least contiguous with the *Confessions*, Augustine articulates his dogmatic understanding of this teaching:

Thus, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and each one of them [are] God, and all at once, one God, and each one of them [is] a full substance, and all, at once, one substance. The Father is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit; the Son is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son; but the Father is only the Father and the Son is only the Son and the Holy Spirit is only the Holy Spirit: in all three, the same eternity, the same unchangeability, the same majesty, the same power.

Ita Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus et singulus quisque horum Deus, et simul omnes unus Deus et singulus quisque horum plena substantia, et simul omnes una substantia. Pater nec Filius est nec Spiritus Sanctus, Filius nec Pater est nec Spiritus Sanctus, Spiritus Sanctus nec Pater est nec Filius, sed Pater tantum Pater et Filius

⁴⁷ Aug. *conf.* 12.7.7.

⁴⁸ Heaven and earth will be discussed below.

*tantum Filius et Spiritus Sanctus tantum Spiritus Sanctus. Eadem tribus aeternitas, eadem incommutabilitas, eadem maiestas, eadem potestas.*⁴⁹

The teaching here is what he has inherited from the Church, though he appropriates this inherited teaching in his own distinctive way. Augustine does not use the language of persons and nature here, but he clearly sees that there is a distinction between what is three in God and what is one.⁵⁰ This three-in-oneness and the one-in-threeness of the Trinity can only be coherent with the understanding of God which arises from the Christian understanding of creation. Within the horizon of the world, it would “be incoherent to speak of three persons in one nature or one being, to speak of three persons in one substance. Each agent or person we experience is one being.”⁵¹ But, creation opens up a new way of understanding God’s transcendence; it allows for “the possibility of a new union and a deeper communion.”⁵² In *De Doctrina Christiana* and in the *Confessions*, Augustine does not go into detail about how the three are one and the one is three—and neither shall this inquiry—but it should be noted how the transcendence of God, which was opened up by the Christian understanding of creation (and, it will be shown, deepened by the Incarnation), opens up the intellectual space for the belief in the simultaneous threeness and oneness of the Trinity. Perhaps this is why *Trinitas* and *de nihilo* appear for the first time in the same passage.

⁴⁹ *doc. Chr.* 1.5.5; cf. *ep.* 11.2; *f. et symb.* 9.20.

⁵⁰ For an early attempt to find a vocabulary for threeness and oneness in God, see *f. et symb.* 9.20; for a later attempt, see *Trin.* 5.8.9-9.11.

⁵¹ Sokolowski, “Creation and Christian Understanding,” 44.

⁵² *Ibid.*

When discussing the Trinity, Augustine makes a distinction between what “is born from God’s substance” (*nata est de substantia tua*) and what God “made even from nothing” (*fecisti aliquid et de nihilo*).⁵³ What is born of God’s substance is equal to God and this is the Word, his only-begotten Son, who is the perfect Image and Likeness of the Father, perfectly reflecting the Father’s Being.⁵⁴ The Father has his being from himself, while the Son, being the perfect Likeness, shares the fullness of divinity: “For God is in no need of another’s good, since from his own self he is. Moreover, what is begotten from him, It is him [or, is the Selfsame], since it is not made, but begotten” (*deus enim bono alterius non indiget, quoniam a se ipso est. quod autem ab eo genitum est, id ipsum est, quia non est factum, sed genitum*).⁵⁵ Creation, in contrast, is not born of God’s substance, but is created from nothing. It is therefore distinct and, at least initially, unlike God.⁵⁶ For Augustine, creation can only be like God if it turns toward him, if, in Augustine’s words, it “converts.”⁵⁷

A. *Creatio, Conversio, Formatio*

Through a combination of philosophical reflection and Christian exegesis, Augustine discerns a fourfold simultaneous, non-temporal act of creation in the opening verses of

⁵³ Aug. *conf.* 12.7.7.

⁵⁴ See *vera rel.* 34.63, 36.66, 43.81.

⁵⁵ *vera rel.* 14.28. One could read *id ipsum* as *idipsum*, hence the bracketed translation.

⁵⁶ See *conf.* 13.2.3.

⁵⁷ See *conf.* 13.2.2-3.

Genesis which he describes under the terms, *creatio*, *revocatio*, *conversio*, and *formatio*.⁵⁸

This can in fact be reduced to a threefold act because *revocatio* and *conversio* describe two aspects of the same activity of the Word. Though the action of the Trinity is one, the persons of the Trinity are involved in the one act in distinct ways.⁵⁹ The Father introduces being from nothing: *creatio*. He calls his (at this point) unformed creation back to himself through the Word, *revocatio*, and creation turns toward God and becomes like him in some way: *conversio*. The Word is efficacious *revocatio* who brings about *conversio* in creation. The Holy Spirit gives each thing its orientation, its final end, its dynamism toward the Father: *formatio*. The Trinity acts inseparably and simultaneously, but there are aspects of the act of creation which are more properly “appropriated” to each person in our understanding. This Trinitarian pattern of creation becomes part of the grammar of Augustine’s thought throughout his post-conversion life. Let us look more closely at his understanding of this act.

Through a close reading of the opening of Genesis, Augustine discerns that in the beginning the Father introduces being by creating “unformed matter” out of nothing: “For, You, Lord, made the world from unformed matter, which You made an almost no-thing from no-thing” (*tu enim, domine, fecisti mundum de materia informi, quam fecisti de nulla re*

⁵⁸ Augustine exegetically discerns these four “stages” most clearly in the *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* (cf. 1.4.9), where he develops this line of thought most fully, but the pattern is there in principle from the beginning (cf. *mor.* 2.6.8). For *creatio*, *conversio*, *formatio*, see Marie-Anne Vannier, “*Creatio*”, “*Conversio*”, “*Formatio*” chez S. Augustin. For this pattern in the early works of Augustine, see Harrison, *Rethinking*, 74-114.

⁵⁹ For a good discussion of how the creative act is one act of the Trinity with distinctions, see Dunham, *Trinity and Creation*, 57-80.

paene nullam rem).⁶⁰ This is how Augustine interprets Genesis 1:1, *Deus fecit caelum et terram*. God calls this formless “almost no-thing” through the Word, back to himself: *Et dixit Deus*.⁶¹ Augustine says, “through the same Word they are called to Your unity” (*per idem Verbum revocarentur ad unitatem tuam*).⁶² Here, *revocatio* is God’s eternal speech, his Word, beckoning unformed matter back from unlikeness to likeness through the Likeness himself. God’s Word calls the creature, whom he created from nothing, *and* brings about the “response” of *conversio* back to God.⁶³ Augustine sees this *revocatio* and *conversio* in the *Fiat lux*.⁶⁴ Formless creation would have remained “dissimilar to You, unless it had been converted through the same Word toward the Same, by whom it was made” (*tui dissimilis, nisi per idem verbum converteretur ad idem, a quo facta est*).⁶⁵ Though Augustine “appropriates” dimensions of the creative act to different persons of the Trinity, this cannot be understood too rigidly—Augustine also says that the Word is both Creator and Converter. Formless matter is created by the Word, it is called through the Word back to the Word who

⁶⁰ Aug. *conf.* 12.8.8.

⁶¹ Gen. 1:3.

⁶² Aug. *conf.* 13.2.2.

⁶³ The relationship between the creative Word and his creation is not “dialectical,” that is, it is not a relationship between two agents, even radically unequal ones. If it were, then God would be reduced to an agent in the world, who deals with creatures in terms of the world. For Augustine, the relationship between Creator and creation is not one of cause and effect or even of active and passive, but an act of the eternal Word who eternally calls and brings about in time what he calls for (see *conf.* 11.7.9). Michael Hanby argues that in the act of *conversio*, the creature “is not purely passive as its activity consists precisely in its proper response to the Word, moved and mediated by that same Word” (*Augustine and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003), 87).

⁶⁴ Gen. 1:3.

⁶⁵ Aug. *conf.* 13.2.3.

brings about the conversion to himself, the *Forma omnium* equal to God.⁶⁶ The final “stage” of this simultaneous act of creation is *formatio: et facta est lux*.⁶⁷ God calls the unformed creature, through the Word, “who holds it together and converts it toward form” (*cohibens atque convertens ad formam*).⁶⁸ For rational creation, *formatio* means being “illuminated by the Word” so that “it became light, though not equal to the form equal to You, yet conformed to It” (*ab [Verbo] illuminata lux fieret, quamvis non aequaliter tamen conformis formae aequali tibi*).⁶⁹ The ordering of creation toward its final end is the work of the Holy Spirit.

That a primordial *conversio* to the Creator is a central aspect of Augustine’s understanding of creation already sheds light on how creation can be the fundamental context of the *Confessions*. This creational *conversio* is the foundation for all Augustine’s later

⁶⁶ *ver. rel.* 43.81. See also *Gn. litt.* 1.4.9: “What Scripture narrates: ‘God said, ‘Let there be,’” we may understand as the incorporeal speech of God in the nature of His coeternal Word, who *calls back* the imperfection of creation toward himself, so that it may not be formless but may be *formed* according to each thing, which He executes in order. In *this conversion and formation* the creature in its own way imitates God the Word, that is, the Son of God, who adheres always to the Father in the full likeness and equal essence, by which He and the Father are one” (*quod scriptura narrat: dixit deus: fiat, intellegamus dei dictum incorporeum in natura uerbi eius coaeterni, reuocantis ad se imperfectionem creaturae, ut non sit informis, sed formetur secundum singula, quae per ordinem exequitur. in qua conuersione et formatione quia pro suo modo imitatur deum uerbum, hoc est dei filium semper patri cohaerentem plena similitudine et essentia pari, qua ipse et pater unum sunt*).

⁶⁷ *Gen.* 1:3.

⁶⁸ *Aug. conf.* 13.4.5; cf. 13.2.2. Augustine will soon develop the idea of *rationes seminales* in order to account for the formation of creatures over time (see *Gn. litt.* 6.1.1-29.40). This idea is not yet present in the *Confessions*, though the idea of “number,” which is present from his earliest writings, seems to have a similar governing function (cf. *lib. arb.* 2.16). For more on seminal reasons, see Jules M. Brady, “St. Augustine’s Theory of Seminal Reasons,” *New Scholasticism* 38 (1964): 141-58 and Michael J. McKeough, *The Meaning of the Rationes Seminales in St. Augustine* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1926).

⁶⁹ *conf.* 13.2.3.

conversions.⁷⁰ But what does Augustine mean by this *conversio* in the act of creation?⁷¹ In the act of creation, *conversio* does not have a moral sense; it is not a conscious decision of the will (for wills belong to rational natures and natures have not been formed yet). Rather, conversion, in this context, means “a change for the better toward that which neither can be changed into better or worse” (*conversa per commutationem meliorem ad id quod neque in melius neque in deterius mutari potest*).⁷² Conversion means becoming better by becoming like God in some way through the activity of the Word in the creature.⁷³

The creative act of *conversio* gives the created thing a kind of “conversion torque,”⁷⁴ a dynamic orientation toward the Creator in its very constitution, which is properly part of its form. Creatures are constituted, in their very being, as created, converted by being called, and formed by and through the Word of God. The very holding together of each thing is its abiding in its converted form to which it was called in creation.⁷⁵ For rational creatures,

⁷⁰ See Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959): This “*revocatio-conversio* must be considered the archetype of all later *reformatio*” (170).

⁷¹ There are Plotinian overtones in Augustine’s discussion of *conversio* and *illuminatio* (cf. Plotinus *Enn.* 2.4.5; 6.7.17). Plotinus applies this *conversio* to the *Nous*, though Augustine does no such thing with the Word; rather, Augustine speaks of the heaven of heavens in a similar way as Plotinus does the *Nous*. For Augustine, the first and highest thing in creation is the heaven of heavens, created Wisdom, which must undergo a *conversio* to God (*Aug. conf.* 13.2.3). Augustine, though, does not seem to be aware that Plotinus holds this view of the *Nous*. As *conf.* 7.9.13-15 makes clear, he thinks the Platonists share the view that the Word is equal to the Father. See Chapter Two below for further discussion of this question.

⁷² *conf.* 13.3.4.

⁷³ TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 138; cf. *Gn. litt.* 1.5.10.

⁷⁴ Philip Rousseau coined this very apt phrase in conversation.

⁷⁵ See *Aug. Gn. litt.* 4.18.34.

conversion takes on a moral sense as well—conversion means turning toward God in obedience. This preserves the ontological *conversio* toward God and augments their being.

For Augustine, human beings are created formed, but not fully formed; their created being is intrinsically ordered toward its completion in God, a completion it strives to attain, but cannot attain on its own power. In contrast, the heaven of heavens suffers no lapse in time between its creation and its blessedness; for them, *fiat lux* means cleaving to God forever.⁷⁶ But for humans there is a lapse in time between creation and blessedness. “In us, there is a distinction in time, because we were darkness and were made light” (*in nobis enim distinguitur tempore, quod tenebrae fuimus et lux efficitur*).⁷⁷ Human beings are created *in via* and are completed over time in the process of *formatio* and now, after sin, *re-formatio*.

B. Participation

Since, for Augustine, God is Being Itself and creates from nothing, the only way that something could exist is if God shared being with it. This sharing of being Augustine calls “participation” (*participatio*).⁷⁸ To understand what this means for Augustine it will be helpful to contrast it with three alternatives which he rejects: first, being as a substance independent of God and creation; second, God’s being as identical with some aspect of the world; and third, God’s being as divisible. In the first alternative, being is thought of as an independent quality which God *has* in the highest degree and other things *have* in a lesser

⁷⁶ See Gen. 1:3; cf. Aug. *conf.* 12.9.9.

⁷⁷ *conf.* 13.10.11.

⁷⁸ For *participatio*, see *conf.* 7.9.14, 7.18.24, 7.19.25; cf. *particeps* at 12.9.9, 12.15.19. See also discussion in “The Incarnation” in Chapter Two.

degree. This notion arises when the eternity of God *and* world are taken for granted: if both are eternal, then both have a share in the same pool of being, just in different degrees.⁷⁹ But, for Augustine, only God is eternal and he introduces the being of things *ex nihilo*. The second alternative arises in certain forms of materialist understandings of God, as when the youthful Augustine thought of God as an infinite sea and the universe as a sponge.⁸⁰ On this account, larger creatures would have more of God than lesser creatures. God is identified with space or the spatial conditions of beings, perhaps something like a material World-Soul. But, for Augustine, God does not *have* being, but *is* Being and there is no being or beings apart from God sharing his own Being. The last alternative arises from a mistaken notion of “sharing being” and is related to the materialist worldview, namely, that God is the kind of thing that can be divided. Augustine encountered this claim in the Manichees who suggested that each human had a particle of God in them which was identical to God’s Being. Augustine argues that the Manichean error comes about from their materialist notions of God: they imagine God to be an infinite extension and anything with extension can be divided. But, for the mature Augustine, God is incorporeal and cannot be divided. The “sharing” of his Being must happen in a different way.

⁷⁹ See *conf.* 11.5.7. This notion can be found in Plato’s *Timaeus*, though Augustine is at pains to say that Plato does not hold this opinion. A common contrast in early Greek Christian writing as well as in much Augustine scholarship is between the Demiurge of Plato’s *Timaeus* who is limited by both pre-existent matter and the eternal Forms and the Christian God who creates *ex nihilo*, creating form and matter together, and who is not limited in any way by matter or Ideas. Augustine, in the *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* and his other writings, seems unaware of this common contrast. Indeed, in *div. qu.* 46.2 he even says the notion of limitations on God is “sacrilegious,” and then goes on to discuss Plato approvingly as not holding this pernicious opinion. Perhaps this is more evidence that Augustine did not have full access to Plato’s *Timaeus*. See TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 254-55. See also Chapter Two below.

⁸⁰ *Aug. conf.* 7.5.7.

For Augustine, “sharing being” or “participation” means that things exist insofar as God has created them. Creatures are because God has caused them to be like him in some way. God *is* being; creatures *have* being, because God has freely shared or bestowed this on them by creating them from nothing.⁸¹ Nothing exists independently of God and all things which exist depend on God for their existence. To be at all is to participate in God.⁸² Not all things, though, participate in God to the same extent. Things participate in God insofar as they are like him. For example, rocks have existence, which makes them like God; plants have not only existence, but life which make them more like God; animals have existence, life, and some capacity of will and memory, which elevates them above plants; and rational creatures have these as well as reason which make them most like God.⁸³

Even among rational creatures there are levels of participation: for Augustine, likeness to God is a sliding scale. Augustine distinguishes between being and well-being, which are the same in God, but for rational creatures are not identical. Well-being is a higher form of participation than simple being. For humans, who are created as converted toward God, being is not complete, but is ordered to something higher, toward greater participation

⁸¹ See *mor.* 2.4.6.

⁸² To be is good because God is good and so what he creates is also good. The more creatures there are the more good there is (see *conf.* 7.13.19). God looks at each thing he creates and calls it “good,” but when he looks at the whole of creation he calls it “very good” (see *conf.* 13.28.43; Gen. 1:31). So, man and a rock are better than a man alone; a dog and an angel are better than a dog alone. But, God and the world are *not* better than God alone because God is completely Good in himself. Creation does not add anything to the Goodness or Being of God because God wholly Is and wholly is Good even without creation. God “could be, in undiminished goodness and greatness, even if the world were not” (Sokolowski, *God of Faith and Reason*, x). Thomas Pruffer says that in the Christian understanding, God is understood in such a way that he could be all there is, even though he is not, and “the plenitude of goodness would not be diminished, and goodness would not be impugned for lack of generosity if creatures were not” (“A Reading of Augustine’s *Confessions*,” 28).

⁸³ See, for example, Aug. *div. qu.* 51.3 and *civ. Dei* 11.16 for similar accounts of hierarchy.

in, and likeness to, God. “The participation of simple existence . . . is finalized in its entirety by the participation of wisdom, in which alone it finds its meaning.”⁸⁴ The incompleteness of human being makes man restless; it gives all humankind an “ontological hunger” which makes it unsatisfied with anything less than true well-being, namely, abiding in God.⁸⁵

C. Eternal Reasons

According to Augustine, all things are created according to Ideas in the mind of God. “For the Ideas are certain principal forms or stable and unchangeable reasons of things, which are not themselves formed—and so are eternal and always holding themselves in the same mode—which are contained in the divine intelligence” (*sunt namque ideae principales quaedam formae uel rationes rerum stabiles atque incommutabiles, quae ipsae formatae non sunt ac per hoc aeternae ac semper eodem modo sese habentes, quae diuina intelligentia continentur*).⁸⁶ Augustine identifies the divine ideas with the Word of God and so they do not “belong” to God as an accident or attribute, but are identical with his essence.⁸⁷ “For no other is able to make except You, the One, from whom is every mode, You, the supreme Form, who form all things and order all things by your law” (*quae nemo alius potest facere nisi tu, une, a quo est omnis modus, formosissime, qui formas omnia et lege tua ordinas*

⁸⁴ Emilie Zum Brunn, *St. Augustine: Being and Nothingness* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1988), 22.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 51, coins this fitting expression.

⁸⁶ *Aug. div. qu.* 46.2.

⁸⁷ See *conf.* 11.8.10. Compare Zum Brunn, *Being and Nothingness*: “The form possessed by any changing (that is, created) being keeps it from falling back into nothingness. It postulates the existence of an original form, eternal and immutable, creative of the other beings through their forms” (36).

omnia).⁸⁸ The Ideas, then, “neither arise nor perish; nonetheless everything that can arise and perish and everything that does arise and perish is said to be formed according to them” (*et cum ipsae neque oriantur neque intereant, secundum eas tamen formari dicitur omne quod oriri et interire potest et omne quod oritur et interit*).⁸⁹

All created things are imitations of their eternal Ideas.⁹⁰ They imitate because they are made through the Image, the Word, who “stamps” his form on their being. Their participation in the Ideas, the Word himself, is what makes them like God in some way. They all receive their form because they are made through the Form who “contains” within himself all forms and Ideas. Augustine says that the Son “came forth as the form of all things, supremely fulfilling the One, from whom he is, so that other things that are, inasmuch as they are similar to the One, become a form through him” (*praecessit enim forma omnium summe implens unum, de quo est, ut cetera quae sunt, in quantum sunt uni similia, per eam formam fierent*).⁹¹ He is the Exemplar of all things which are created through him and patterned after him. “It is by participation in them that whatever is is, in whatever mode it is” (*quarum participatione fit ut sit quidquid est, quoquo modo est*).⁹² The Ideas order all things according to measure, number, and weight, which determine the degree of likeness to, and

⁸⁸ Aug. *conf.* 1.7.12.

⁸⁹ *div. qu.* 46.2.

⁹⁰ In the *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, the *rationes seminales* are the earthly counterpart which guides the development of the thing (cf. 6.4.5).

⁹¹ Aug. *ver. rel.* 43.81; cf. *lib. arb.* 2.16.

⁹² *div. qu.* 46.2.

therefore participation in, God. This is what determines how much being they have and in what way they have it.

D. Measure, Number, Weight

To describe how created things are ordered and ordained, Augustine often employs the terms measure, number, weight. Although there are philosophical precedents for this triad,⁹³ Augustine most often employs the verse from the Book of Wisdom, “You disposed all things in measure and number and weight” (*omnia in mensura, et numero et pondere dispouisti*).⁹⁴ In the *Confessions*, Augustine quotes this verse from Wisdom once⁹⁵ and has an extended discussion of the meaning of weight.⁹⁶ Still, the triad is presupposed throughout and forms part of the essential backdrop for understanding the work.

In the *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, a work begun as the *Confessions* was finished, Augustine offers a concise definition of these three terms: “measure (pre-)fixes the mode of each thing and number (pre-)determines the form of each thing and weight draws each thing to rest and stability” (*mensura omni rei modum praefigit et numerus omni rei speciem praebet et pondus omnem rem ad quietem ac stabilitatem trahit*).⁹⁷ Measure refers

⁹³ See *nat. b.* 21-23 for the parallel *modus*, *species*, and *ordo*. Also, Plotinus *Enn.* 5.1.7.

⁹⁴ Wis. 11:21. See Aug. *Gn. litt.* 4.3.7-6.13 and *Jo. Ev. tr.* 1.13 for a more developed discussion from Augustine. See also Carol Harrison, “Measure, Number and Weight in Saint Augustine’s Aesthetics,” *Augustinianum* 28 (1988): 591-602; W. Roche, “Measure, Number and Weight in Saint Augustine,” *The New Scholasticism* 15 (1941): 350-76.

⁹⁵ Aug. *conf.* 5.4.7.

⁹⁶ *conf.* 13.9.10.

⁹⁷ *Gn. litt.* 4.3.7.

to the boundedness or the created limitations of a thing. In the *Confessions*, Augustine refers to measure when he says of all created things, “in Your Word, by which they are created they hear: ‘From here’ and ‘up to here’” (*in verbo enim tuo, per quod creantur, ibi audiunt, ‘hinc’ et ‘huc usque’*).⁹⁸ Number refers to form or proportion. In the *Confessions*, Augustine prefers the term “form” rather than number, though he does make several important references to number. Most significantly, in the very first line of the work, Augustine refers to Wisdom of whom *non est numerus*.⁹⁹ He also has a discussion of the hierarchy of number, stretching from what he calls corporeal numbers, available to the senses, to those which are truly, in the mind of God.¹⁰⁰ This means that number, in the highest sense, is identical to the Son.¹⁰¹ “The world is built up of numbers which are direct manifestations of divine wisdom. The realm of numbers is not instituted by human beings; it is rather that part of the eternal truth which acts as the all-inclusive order of spiritual as well as of corporeal creation.”¹⁰² Number is integral to every discussion of beauty and form (with which it is often used interchangeably). Thus, “numbers belong to the realm of creation and they have a special function in leading man back to God . . . The realm of number is within the realm of creation

⁹⁸ Aug. *conf.* 4.10.15.

⁹⁹ *conf.* 1.1.1.

¹⁰⁰ *conf.* 10.12.19. See Book 6 of *De Musica* for an extended meditation on the hierarchy of number as well as how Augustine understands sin and redemption in terms of number.

¹⁰¹ See *lib. arb.* 2.8-16.

¹⁰² Ladner, *Idea of Reform*, 214.

and re-creation, of formation and reformation.”¹⁰³ Weight refers to the directionality, desire, or order of things. In the *Confessions*, Augustine devotes the most direct attention to this idea. He explains, “Weight is not so much toward the bottom, but toward its place. Fire tends upwards, stone downwards; by their weight they are moved, they seek their places . . . Things too little ordered are restless; they are ordered and they rest” (*pondus non ad ima tantum est, sed ad locum suum. ignis sursum tendit, deorsum lapis; ponderibus suis aguntur, loca sua petunt . . . minus ordinata inquieta sunt; ordinantur et quiescunt*).¹⁰⁴

For Augustine, measure, number, and weight “correspond” or can be “appropriated” to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit respectively.¹⁰⁵ It is the Father who gives being and causes something to exist as a “this” (measure). He does this in the Son, who is Form Itself and gives form to all things (number), and through the Holy Spirit, the Inspirer and Gift, who hovers over the abyss and draws creation to God by inspiring and ordering them toward their end (weight).¹⁰⁶

Measure, number, and weight constitute the unity of a creature, they are what hold the creature together as a thing, and are what make a thing “this thing” instead of “that.” In an earlier work, Augustine says, “To be is nothing else than to be one. And in as much as anything attains oneness, in that much it is” (*nihil est autem esse, quam unum esse. itaque in*

¹⁰³ Ibid., 212-13.

¹⁰⁴ Aug. *conf.* 13.9.10.

¹⁰⁵ Note how the Father and the Son are related to the “past” of a thing as it relates to the “present,” while the Spirit is related to the “present” as it is drawn into the “future.” This also corresponds with Augustine’s understanding of *creatio, conversio, formatio*.

¹⁰⁶ See *conf.* 1.1.1 and 13.9.10.

quantum quidque unitatem adipiscitur, in tantum est).¹⁰⁷ Measure, number, and weight give a thing unity and therefore cause it to be; they are what make a thing to exist, “to stand out” from nothingness.¹⁰⁸

There is, for Augustine, measure, number, and weight for both material and spiritual things. It is important to note how this creational idea, which primarily pertains to physics, is transformed by Augustine into a spiritual principle pertaining to salvation. For rational creatures, says Augustine, spiritual measure, number, and weight are what determine unity and therefore likeness to God.

There is also a certain measure of acting, lest it progress immoderately and beyond calling back; and there is a number of the affections of the soul and of the virtues, by which the soul is collected from the deformity of foolishness and toward the form and beauty of wisdom; and there is the weight of the will and of love, which shows what each thing is worth and how much it is to be sought or fled, put first or put last.

*est autem mensura aliquid agendi, ne sit irreuocabilis et immoderata progressio; et est numerus et adfectionum animi et uirtutum, quo ab stultitiae deformitate ad sapientiae formam decus que conligitur; et est pondus uoluntatis et amoris, ubi adparet, quanti quidque in adpetendo, fugiendo, praeponendo postponendo que pendatur.*¹⁰⁹

In the *Confessions*, spiritual measure, number, and weight all play important roles, but especially the idea of weight. Augustine famously says, “My love: my weight! Wherever I am borne, I am borne by it” (*pondus meum amor meus; eo feror, quocumque feror*).¹¹⁰ This weight depends on volition; it is what allows for spiritual conversion and reform. And so,

¹⁰⁷ *mor.* 2.6.8.

¹⁰⁸ See Harrison, *Rethinking*, 86.

¹⁰⁹ *Aug. Gn. litt.* 4.4.8; cf. *mus.* 6.13.39.

¹¹⁰ *conf.* 13.9.10.

contrary to the downward motion brought about by the flesh (or, more to the point, fleshly thinking), it is possible to rise above to find the place for our spirit and thus find rest: “By Your gift we are on fire and are borne upwards: we flame and we go” (*dono tuo accendimur et sursum ferimur; inardescimus et imus*).¹¹¹ This important creational idea informs Augustine’s understanding of the restless heart in the opening lines of the *Confessions*.

Lastly, measure, number, and weight, have a pedagogical or “sacramental” function in pointing rational creation back to the Creator. “When you see measures and numbers and order in all things, look for the Craftsman. You will not find any other, except where there is the highest Measure and highest Number and highest Order, that is, God” (*in omnibus tamen cum mensuras et numeros et ordinem uides, artificem quaere. nec alium inuenies, nisi ubi summa mensura, et summus numerus, et summus ordo est, id est deum*).¹¹² The lower leads to the higher; the imitation to that which it imitates; “the invisible things of God are understood through the things which are made.”¹¹³ Created things can have this power because they participate in God’s Being and, through their likeness, point back to God. Indeed, Augustine is even so bold as to say in the *Confessions* that creation not only points to God but, in a sense, commands human beings to love him.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ *conf.* 13.9.10.

¹¹² *Gn. adv. Man.* 1.16.26. Augustine uses “order” here rather than weight, though later in the same section he quotes the verse from Wisdom and uses the word “weight.” They are interchangeable for him.

¹¹³ Rom. 1:20.

¹¹⁴ See Aug. *conf.* 10.6.8: “Heaven and earth and all things that are in them, behold, everywhere they say to me that I should love You, and they do not cease to say this to all men, so that they are inexcusable” (*caelum et terra et omnia quae in eis sunt, ecce undique mihi dicunt ut te amem, nec cessant dicere omnibus, ut sint inexcusabiles*).

III. The Created World

Several important aspects of the structure of the created world have already be touched upon, though a few things need to be considered further, namely, how Augustine understands the extremes of created being, how God has ordered creation both “vertically” and “horizontally” within those extremes, and the peculiar status of rational creatures made toward the image and likeness of God.

A. *Caelum et terram*

In Book 12, Augustine offers four legitimate interpretations of the Genesis 1:1 phrase *caelum et terram* in addition to his preferred one.¹¹⁵ The significance of alternative interpretations will be considered in Chapter Four, but for now the focus will be on the interpretation Augustine thinks is the most coherent for the Genesis story: *caelum* means the spiritual heaven and *terram* means formless matter.¹¹⁶ On this reading, the first verse of Genesis names, for Augustine, the range of created being. The spiritual heaven is the highest thing in creation and formless matter is the lowest thing. The former is most like God—being spiritual and wholly illumined by God—and the latter is least like God—lacking all

¹¹⁵ *conf.* 12.14.17ff. Augustine argues that (1) *caelum* means spiritual heaven and *terram* means unformed matter. He accepts four other interpretations: (2) *caelum et terram* could also mean the visible world as a whole; (3) the phrase could mean the confusion of unformed matter; (4) *caelum* could be invisible nature, while *terra* is visible nature; or, (5) the phrase could mean the unformed first state of creatures which, when formed, would be called *caelum* (spiritual creature) and *terra* (corporal creature). Each of these interpretations fits the text and is consistent with the *regula fidei*. See “Ecclesial Hermeneutics” in Chapter Four for further discussion of Augustine’s exegetical practice.

¹¹⁶ See *conf.* 12.14.17, 13.2.2-4.5; cf. *Gn. adv. Man.* 1.3.5 and 1.5.9.

form and therefore beauty, and is barely superior to non-existence.¹¹⁷ At its highest, creation is most like God because most in union with him and transformed by him; at its lowest, it has existence, in its way, but is unlike God because not in union with him, though, importantly, capable of union with him because of the potential for change.

Augustine interprets *caelum* to be not the sky or heavens—this would be the highest thing in the visible world—but the *caelum caelorum*, the heaven of heavens, the highest thing in the superior invisible world, which Augustine describes as the spiritual community of the blessed, “a pure mind, one in the most harmonious stability of the peace of holy spirits, citizens of Your city in the heavens above these heavens [which we see]” (*mentem puram concordissime unam stabilimento pacis sanctorum spirituum, civium civitatis tuae in caelestibus super ista caelestia*).¹¹⁸ In the *Confessions*, Augustine speaks of the *caelum* mostly in terms of the angels, but understands this blessed community as “our Mother” which gives new birth in baptism.¹¹⁹ They constitute the heavenly Church in which the earthly Church participates and toward which it is ordered.¹²⁰

The heaven of heavens (as well as unformed matter) holds a unique status in the created world: it is truly created, but it is created in a sense “prior” to time. Because of its relationship to God it does not suffer any change, though it is changeable in its essence: “Although in no way co-eternal with You, the Trinity, it is yet a partaker in your eternity, and

¹¹⁷ Compare *vera rel.* 18.36 and *Gn. adv. Man.* 1.6.10.

¹¹⁸ *conf.* 12.11.12; cf. Ps. 112:4, 113:24.

¹¹⁹ *Aug. conf.* 12.15.20.

¹²⁰ *conf.* 12.15.21.

it holds its mutability back because of its most sweet and most happy contemplation of You; and by clinging to You, without any lapse from when it was made, it surpasses every twisting vicissitude of the times” (*quamquam nequaquam tibi, trinitati, coaeterna, particeps tamen aeternitatis tuae, valde mutabilitatem suam prae dulcedine felicissimae contemplationis tuae cohibet et sine ullo lapsu ex quo facta est inhaerendo tibi excedit omnem volubilem vicissitudinem temporum*).¹²¹ It has its blessedness through God’s gift and it abides in its blessed state through continual cleaving to God through grace. It participates in Light Itself and Wisdom Itself so fully that it becomes wholly illumined and wise and can actually be called “light” and “wisdom,” though utterly distinct from the true Light and Wisdom because created. It is “wisdom which is created, that intellectual nature which by the contemplation of Light is light” (*sapientia quae creata est, intellectualis natura scilicet, quae contemplatione luminis lumen est*).¹²² Augustine is always careful to preserve the distinction between the Creator and his creation, between Wisdom and Light Itself and that which participates in them, between He Who Is Blessed In Himself and that which has its blessedness as a gift. The heaven of heavens “is from You, our God, in such a way that it is completely other than You and not the Selfsame” (*unde ita est abs te, deo nostro, ut aliud sit plane quam tu et non idipsum*).¹²³

¹²¹ *conf.* 12.9.9; cf. 12.15.21.

¹²² *conf.* 12.15.20.

¹²³ *conf.* 12.15.21.

On the scale of created being, nothing is so far from the heaven of heavens as formless matter, the *terra invisibilis et incomposita* of Genesis 1:2. Whereas the heaven of heavens is supremely intelligible, and so difficult to grasp fully, formless matter is supremely unintelligible and perhaps impossible to grasp. Augustine says that formless matter is neither an intelligible nor a sensible form and so the best that can be hoped for is a kind of “knowing by not knowing or not knowing by knowing” (*nosse ignorando vel ignorare noscendo*).¹²⁴ It is certainly something created—it is not some kind of pre-existent matter, co-eternal with God, waiting for him to form it. But it is created with the barest minimum of being. It is “something between form and nothing, neither formed nor nothing, an unformed almost nothing” (*quiddam inter formam et nihil, nec formatum nec nihil, informe prope nihil*).¹²⁵ Because it is lacking all form, Augustine has difficulty speaking about it—it is inarticulateable—but imagination also fails, because imagination deals with sensible things and, moreover, with forms. Perhaps, he says, it could be called a “nothing-something” (*nihil aliquid*) or an “is-is-not” (*est non est*).¹²⁶ Because it lacks all form, it is also, in a sense, “outside” of time “for where there is no form, no order, neither does anything come nor pass away, and where this does not happen, there are certainly no days nor change of temporal spaces” (*ubi enim nulla species, nullus ordo, nec venit quicquam nec praeterit, et ubi hoc non fit, non sunt utique dies nec vicissitudo spatiorum temporalium*).¹²⁷ According to Augustine,

¹²⁴ *conf.* 12.5.5.

¹²⁵ *conf.* 12.6.6.

¹²⁶ *conf.* 12.6.6.

¹²⁷ *conf.* 12.9.9.

the existence of time requires change and where there is no form there can be no change and, though he will soon qualify this suggestion by arguing that matter is concreated with form, there is a sense in which formless matter has a kind of “priority” to time.

In discussing formless matter in this way, Augustine is trying to be faithful to Scripture, which speaks of a formless abyss, and to the *regula fidei*, which rules out pre-existent matter as incompatible with the Christian understanding of God’s nature. But he is also trying to give an account for the mutability of mutable things. For Augustine, it is formless matter which accounts for change in things. Formless matter is pure potentiality: “For the changeability of changeable things is its capacity for all the forms into which changeable things are changed” (*mutabilitas enim rerum mutabilium ipsa capax est formarum omnium in quas mutantur res mutabiles*).¹²⁸ God creates formless matter from nothing and he creates all things from formless matter.¹²⁹ All things, then, have a kind of radical mutability as a dimension of what they are. Moreover, this means that creatures do not have their form from themselves, but receive it from the outside. Since all things come from formless matter, they need God to give them form and to hold them together.

Augustine discusses formless matter at length because he wants to account for change, especially the change he has seen in his own not-yet-formed life, from better to worse and from worse to better. For Augustine, formless matter is not so much a “stage” in creation, a primordial ooze at the beginning of time; rather, it is a “principle” of being, an

¹²⁸ *conf.* 12.6.6.

¹²⁹ See *conf.* 12.4.4, 12.6.6.

ontological declaration, which is true to Scripture and true to human experience. Augustine himself argues that matter and form are concreated.¹³⁰ Matter precedes form not in time or dignity or preference, but “in origin,” in the same way that sound precedes song.¹³¹

B. *Ordo*: Hierarchy of Being and Providence

For Augustine, only that which is begotten of God is equal to God; everything else is made and has being in varying degrees depending on their degree of participation in God. Thus, argues Augustine, all of creation is arranged in a hierarchy of being.¹³² God is not a part of the hierarchy, not even the highest part, since he is Being Itself. God is ontologically distinct from the hierarchy of being, which nevertheless derives from him and participates in him according to his gift. Within the hierarchy, the most important division for Augustine is between intelligible and sensible things. Both of these are created, but the intelligible are closer to God in virtue of being more like him and the sensible are further from God because they are less like him. Among the intelligible things are angels, souls and, when these are blessed and in communion, the heaven of heavens. Among the sensible things are all the elements of the material world, including the heavenly bodies, the human body, animals, plants, insects, and earth.

As discussed above, each thing, no matter how close or far from God, has a kind of integrity and order in itself which makes it a unity and gives it existence. According to

¹³⁰ *conf.* 13.33.48.

¹³¹ *conf.* 12.29.40.

¹³² See *conf.* 7.11.17-16.22.

Augustine, this order is not only internal to each thing, but also in relation to all other things. Augustine calls the ordering of all things in harmony together “providence” (*providentia*).¹³³ It is the Son who gives all things their form and therefore degree of likeness to God and place in the hierarchy of being. The Son not only gives form to each thing, but form to their arrangement in the universe and their course through history. The Son *is* God’s providence who governs all things both internally and externally.¹³⁴

Augustine discusses both the hierarchy of being and providence under the idea of *ordo*. “There is an order to be found within things and between them that binds and directs the world” (*ordinem rerum . . . consequi ac tenere cuique proprium, tum vero universitatis quo coercetur ac regitur hic mundus*).¹³⁵ God arranges all things internally and externally. He orders them within themselves and toward all other things, each harmonizing with others in its place and according to its season. There is a “vertical” harmony in the hierarchy of being where each thing finds its place according to its likeness to God and there is a “horizontal” harmony of providence where things fit together through times and place.

¹³³ See *ord.* 1.1.1-2.

¹³⁴ *lib. arb.* 2.17. Although Augustine needed to read the Platonists before he could conceive of a hierarchy of being, he always held to some kind of understanding of God’s providence. See *conf.* 6.5.8 and, especially, 4.3.4, where Augustine consults astrologers, who offer what he later understands as a false Providence, one which confines providence to this world and thereby confuses the distinction between God and the world.

¹³⁵ *ord.* 1.1. Translated by Silvano Borruso, *De Ordine* (Nairobi: Consolata Institute of Philosophy Press, 1997). See also, *conf.* 8.3.8 for the dynamic *ordo* of creation in contrast to God’s stable abiding joy.

Augustine discusses providence in terms of the body and the soul. In terms of the body, there is a “natural providence,”¹³⁶ by which God provides both the body and its integrity¹³⁷ as well as for the needs of the body.¹³⁸ There is also what Augustine will later call a “voluntary providence” by which God directs the wills of rational creatures. This kind of providence also pertains to the body, as when Augustine says of his nurses that “by an ordered affection, they wanted to give to me what they abounded in from You [i.e., milk]” (*dare enim mihi per ordinatum affectum volebant quo abundabant ex te*).¹³⁹ There is, of course, providence in regard to the soul as well.¹⁴⁰ Through natural providence, the soul has its life and abilities, but, more importantly, through voluntary providence the soul grows in knowledge and wisdom, and conversion and reform are made possible. The narrative thrust of the *Confessions* is largely about this latter providence of the soul.

When discussing God’s governance of the universe and the course of events there is a danger of impugning the integrity of the natural world. Augustine knew this danger from the

¹³⁶ For Augustine’s understanding of various kinds of providence, see *Gn. litt.* 8.9.17.

¹³⁷ e.g., *conf.* 1.7.12: “You, O Lord my God, Who in my infancy gave me life and a body, which, as we see, You fitted out with with senses, bound together its members, adorned it with shape, and for its overall well-being and safety, You implanted in it all the instincts of a living being” (*tu itaque, domine deus meus, qui dedisti vitam infanti et corpus, quod ita, ut videmus, instruxisti sensibus, compegisti membris, figura decorasti proque eius universitate atque incolumitate omnes conatus animantis insinuasti*).

¹³⁸ e.g., *conf.* 1.6.7: “It was not my mother or my nurses who filled their breasts, but through them You gave me the food of my infancy according to Your law and the riches You allotted even to the lowest part of things” (*nec mater mea vel nutrices meae sibi ubera implebant, sed tu mihi per eas dabas alimentum infantiae secundum institutionem tuam et divitias usque ad fundum rerum dispositas*).

¹³⁹ *conf.* 1.6.7 ; cf. *Gn. litt.* 8.9.17.

¹⁴⁰ See *Gn. litt.* 8.9.17.

inside because of his longtime obsession with astrology.¹⁴¹ The astrologers claimed that the stars determined one's destiny which, if true, directly imputed the guilt of human actions to God who made the stars. In his mature thought, Augustine argues that astrology undercuts free will and reduces providence to forces in the world; it undercuts free will *because* it reduces providence to forces in the world. For Augustine, this error arose because of his youthful habit of materialist thinking. This will be discussed more in the next chapter, but for now it can be noted how the young Augustine reduced providence to some thing in the world which competed with the natural operations of the world.¹⁴²

But for the mature Augustine, God's activity in the world does not violate the integrity of the world. This is the very drama which Augustine consistently tries to bring out in the *Confessions*. On the one hand, God is always present and acting in his life. On the other, Augustine is making his own decisions, good and bad, often wholly ignorant of God. Augustine's decisions and God's actions in the world are both efficacious, are both true causes which have complete integrity and in no way conflict or cancel each other out. This can only make sense in light of the Christian understanding of creation outlined above. Since

¹⁴¹ "Obsession" is not too strong a word here. Augustine not only consulted astrologers, but in the little spare time he had (*conf.* 6.11.18), he studied the requisite mathematics, observed the heavens himself (5.3.6), and acquired the art of casting horoscopes (7.6.8). He believed in the truth of these on authority and refused to be dissuaded by anything other than rational proof which, even when presented, he did not give over his attachment (4.3.6).

¹⁴² For Augustine's mature criticisms of astrology, see *conf.* 4.3.4-5, 5.3.3-6, 7.6.8-10; *doc. Chr.* 2.21.32-22.33; *div. qu.* 45.1-2; *Gn. litt.* 2.17.35-37. Also, see Frederic van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, trans. B. Battershaw and G.R. Lamb (London: Sheed and Ward, 1983), 60-67, for a good discussion of the general practice at the time and the Bishop's constant striving against it.

God is not a competing cause in the world, he acts in the world without encroaching on the integrity of the world.

A brief example will help illumine this point which will be returned to time and again. After his disappointing meeting with Faustus, Augustine decides to leave Carthage for Rome. He gives a number of reasons: he wants better students, he wants a better job, and he wants to distance himself from the Manichees. But Augustine also says that it was *God* who brought him to Rome in order to eventually meet Ambrose.¹⁴³ The two actions of the two agents, God and Augustine, are not in competition because “the divine action is not an action by a worldly agent, it does not insert itself into the sequence of motives and causes.”¹⁴⁴ Both these claims can be true, at the same time, because God does not appear in the same order of causes. Augustine can freely choose to go to Rome for the reasons he stated and *at the same time* God can draw him there to meet Ambrose without in any way compromising his freedom. Augustine can say both of these things without contradiction because of his understanding of creation: God is not a part of the world, but utterly transcendent to it, which allows God to work in the world without infringing on its integrity. God and Augustine act freely, without cancelling each other out, and God’s purposes are accomplished. This understanding of creation, then, “allows apparently random events to take on the status of being integrated into God’s foresighted plan for all things. If God were not the creator of all

¹⁴³ Aug. *conf.* 5.13.23.

¹⁴⁴ Crosson, “Structure and Meaning,” 31. The analysis of this episode also comes from Crosson.

events as well as of creatures, then what happens . . . could simply be a chance event.”¹⁴⁵ In other words, for Augustine, creation establishes providence.

C. *Ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei*

All creatures are created through the Word, but not all creatures are created through him in the same way. In his *De vera religione*, Augustine makes a distinction which will be important for understanding the *Confessions*:

Some of these are through this [Form] so that they are also *toward* it, just as every rational and intellectual creature, among which man is most rightly said to have been made *toward* the image and likeness of God. In no other way, after all, would man be able to see clearly the unchanging Truth with his mind. Other things, truly, are made *through* this Form, so that they are not *toward* It.

*horum alia sic sunt per ipsam, ut ad ipsam etiam sint, ut omnis rationalis et intellectualis creatura, in qua homo rectissime dicitur factus ad imaginem et similitudinem dei. non enim aliter incommutabilem ueritatem posset mente conspicere. alia uero ita sunt per ipsam facta, ut non sint ad ipsam.*¹⁴⁶

All creatures receive their form through the Word, but rational creatures are made, as Augustine says in the opening of the *Confessions*, *ad te*, “toward God.”¹⁴⁷ The difference between these creatures lay in the rational soul, whose being and well-being consists in consciously turning to God in order to be what it was created to be. Other creatures abide in their created state simply through their created gifts—God guides their abiding through creation. But rational creatures have a mind and a will and these must be freely turned to

¹⁴⁵ Frederick J. Crosson, “Book Five: The Disclosure of Hidden Providence,” in *A Reader’s Companion to Augustine’s Confessions*, eds. Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2003), 87.

¹⁴⁶ Aug. *vera rel.* 44.82.

¹⁴⁷ See *conf.* 1.1.1: *fecisti nos ad te*.

God in order to abide where they were created to be.¹⁴⁸ For Augustine, the metaphysical make-up of human beings is maintained by their moral and intellectual choices.¹⁴⁹ “But it is good for [spiritual creation] to adhere to you always, lest the light it had acquired by conversion, it lose by aversion, and so fall back into a life of darkness similar to the abyss” (*bonum autem illi [spiritui] est haerere tibi semper, ne quod adeptus est conversione aversione lumen amittat et relabatur in vitam tenebrosae abyssos simile*).¹⁵⁰ The God-given ontological constitution of rational creatures must be actively preserved by them, through the activity of what Augustine calls “clinging (*haerere*) or “adhering” (*inhaerere*).

In saying that rational creatures are made “toward God,” Augustine is faithfully following his Latin version of Genesis, where human beings are said to be made *ad imaginem et similitudinem nostrum* (Gen. 1:26) and *ad imaginem Dei* (Gen. 1:27).¹⁵¹ Augustine interprets the preposition *ad* here to mean both “according to” and “toward.” The image and likeness is a “model” or “form” *according to* which rational creatures are made, but they are also created to be *toward* the image and likeness, which means, for Augustine, that they are not God, but ordered toward him. Rational creatures are not *the* Image and Likeness Itself; only the Son is the perfect Image of Father because he is begotten of God’s substance which means that the Son is also the perfect Likeness because he is in no way

¹⁴⁸ See Zum Brunn, *Being and Nothingness*, who says there is an “ontological finality inscribed in us and the blissful life . . . consists in accepting it” (38).

¹⁴⁹ See Aug. *conf.* 7.11.17.

¹⁵⁰ *conf.* 13.2.3; cf. 4.8.12, 4.14.23.

¹⁵¹ See Ladner, *Idea of Reform*, 185-203 for an extensive discussion of Augustine’s understanding of *imago Dei* in the context of *reformatio*.

unlike the Father. Rational creatures are made *toward* God: they are not God, but they are in a special relationship to him.

Augustine says that everything God creates bears some degree of likeness to God, some *vestigia Trinitatis*, though not everything bears an image of God. “Where there is an image there is also similitude, but not vice versa. In order to become an image, similitude must originate from that which it resembles; the image relationship requires that the image is somehow produced or begotten by that which is reproduced in it.”¹⁵² For Augustine, to be the image of God is greater than to be like him, for there are degrees of likeness to the image. In the original creation of human beings, image and likeness coincided as they will again when they are perfected. But after the fall, by turning away from the Image, they become dissimilar to the image and though it is never lost, it is defaced and deformed. “The road back from such dissimilarity is for Augustine identical with the process of reform of the image of God in man.”¹⁵³

Human beings are made “toward the Image,” i.e., the Son, yet their souls are an image of the whole Trinity. They are made in a Trinitarian act and their souls bear the imprint, they have a *vestigia*, of the whole Trinity. In the *Confessions*, Augustine suggests that in their *esse, nosse, velle* one can see “how there is an inseparable life: one life and one mind and one essence; finally how inseparable a distinction there is and yet still a distinction” (*quam sit inseparabilis vita et una vita et una mens et una essentia, quam*

¹⁵² Ibid., 186. See Aug. *div. qu.* 74 for a painstaking discussion of the distinction between image, likeness, and equality. Also, see *div. qu.* 51 for early discussion of image and likeness.

¹⁵³ Ladner, *Idea of Reform*, 189.

denique inseparabilis distinctio et tamen distinctio).¹⁵⁴ This little trinity of the human soul is “far different than that Trinity” (*longe aliud sunt ista tria quam illa trinitas*) “which is unchangeable above it: which is unchangeably and knows unchangeably and wills unchangeably” (*quod supra ista est incommutabile, quod est incommutabiliter et scit incommutabiliter et vult incommutabiliter*).¹⁵⁵ Still, the inseparability yet distinction of the three in each person provides a glimpse of what God is like. But what God is like also provides a glimpse of what human beings are like. The image of God here mutually illumines the mystery of God and the mystery of man.¹⁵⁶

For Augustine, salvation is a matter of “abiding toward the image” (*manere ad imaginem tuam*),¹⁵⁷ that is, remaining converted toward God and progressing in *formatio* (now *reformatio*) toward the Image and Likeness. This is a matter of abiding in God’s grace, which, for Augustine, forms part of his understanding of creation itself. “Grace is therefore not something that suddenly becomes necessary because of human sinfulness, but is part of what defines the relation of Creator and creature. Creation is of grace; its continued existence is of grace; the goodness, form, order, and unity it possesses is of grace.”¹⁵⁸ This is not to say that salvation is an inevitable conclusion of human nature or that it is within the

¹⁵⁴ Aug. *conf.* 13.11.12.

¹⁵⁵ *conf.* 13.11.12.

¹⁵⁶ Augustine will develop the *imago Trinitatis* in the *De Trinitate*, though a consideration of his discussion there is beyond the scope of this project.

¹⁵⁷ *conf.* 7.7.11.

¹⁵⁸ See Harrison, *Rethinking*, 92. This insight, as will be seen in Chapter Four, is key for understanding Book 13 of the *Confessions*.

natural powers of human beings to accomplish it, but that creation is intrinsically ordered to salvation and that salvation is the proper culmination of creation.

IV. Creation and Sin

For Augustine, creation forms the essential context for understanding sin.¹⁵⁹ Sin, he thinks, primarily consists in seeking “pleasures, high things, and truths not in God but in his creatures, myself and others” (cf. *hoc enim peccabam, quod non in ipso [Deo] sed in creaturis eius me atque ceteris voluptates, sublimitates, veritates quaerebam*).¹⁶⁰ In other words, Augustine follows Paul again in saying that sin means preferring creation to the Creator.¹⁶¹ “Sin is a disorder of man and a perversity, that is, an aversion from the most excellent Creator and a conversion toward inferior creations” (*est autem peccatum hominis inordinatio atque peruersitas, id est a praestantiore conditore auersio et ad condita inferiora conuersio*).¹⁶² As a Manichee, Augustine will intellectually conflate the Creator and his

¹⁵⁹ Augustine’s understanding of “original sin” at the time of writing the *Confessions* should also be considered. Augustine mentions the term “original sin” only once in the *Confessions*: “the chain of original sin in which we all die in Adam” (*originalis peccati vinculum quo omnes in Adam morimur*) (5.9.16). He refers to it another time as “the hidden punishments of men and the most utterly dark griefs of the sons of Adam” (*latebrae poenarum hominum et tenebrosissimae contritiones filiorum Adam*) (8.9.21; cf. 8.10.22) and mentions the consequences as curiosity, pride, instability, and dependence on sacraments and signs (13.20.28). The least that can be said is that, for Augustine, original sin refers to consequences of Adam’s sin which are somehow passed down to all people. These consequences include a life lived in ignorance and difficulty where human beings are more dependent on their senses which constantly fail them. See *lib. arb.* 3.19ff for more on original sin. See *Simpl.* 1.10-11 for the first use of *peccatum originale* and *vera rel.* 11.21 the parallel *primum peccatum*.

¹⁶⁰ *conf.* 1.20.31.

¹⁶¹ Rom. 1:25.

¹⁶² Aug. *Simpl.* 2.18.

creation, but the conflation usually arises in actions, that is, in what the actions bespeak.¹⁶³

Augustine's life makes clear that the temptation to replace the Creator with creation arises in every desire, every aspiration, and every thought.

Aversio from God is incoherent. The sinner, says Augustine, can recognize the distinction between God and the world, but chooses against it. Sin arises from the creature denying his creaturehood, his dependence on God, and the Source of his existence. Instead, he desires to be the source of himself and attempts to turn himself into God, thereby distorting the very distinction which defines him.¹⁶⁴ “Whence this aversion, then, unless someone whose good is God, wants to be his own Good by his own self, just as if he were God to himself” (*unde autem haec auersio nisi dum ille cui bonum est deus, sibi ipse uult esse bonum suum, sicuti sibi est deus*)?¹⁶⁵ For Augustine, this action can hardly be explained for it makes no sense.¹⁶⁶

Sin is a subset of evil. While sin is always connected with the will, evil can include even non-voluntary privations of good, such as disease and death and even suffering caused

¹⁶³ See *conf.* 10.6.10. Compare Wetzel, “Time After Augustine,” *Religious Studies* 31(1): “As an intellectual mistake, the conflation [of creation and Creator] is obtuse, but as it is rarely if ever an intellectual mistake, it admits of endless variation and appears to be endlessly tempting” (350-51). See also, Carol Harrison, “Taking Creation for the Creator: Use and Enjoyment in Augustine’s Theological Aesthetics,” in *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. Stephen Barton (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 179-97.

¹⁶⁴ See *Aug. conf.* 13.16.19; *lib. arb.* 3.25; *s.* 340A.1; *Trin.* 13.23.

¹⁶⁵ *Aug. lib. arb.* 3.24; cf. Wetzel, “Time After Augustine,”: “With Augustine, insight into motives almost always involves rediscovering the difference between being God and being human” (350).

¹⁶⁶ See Paul Griffiths, *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004): “Everything—all that can be had [i.e. God himself]—has, however, already freely been given to all and is held in common by all. To exchange everything for something . . . is the incoherent desire of the soul dazzled by itself” (62).

by God's justice. According to Augustine, "There is no evil at all for You, and not only for You but for Your entire creation" (*et tibi omnino non est malum, non solum tibi sed nec universae creaturae tuae*).¹⁶⁷ Augustine does not mean that evil is an illusion, but that evil means "to fall away from being and to tend toward [evil] so that it is not" (*deficere ab essentia et ad id tendere ut non sit*).¹⁶⁸ Evil has no positive ontological status. As sin, it is a defective motion rather than effective. Evil, in general, is a privation of being, a vacuum which parasitically draws on the good natures of other things to make them less. It is not a thing. It is, therefore, not knowable "for what is nothing is not able to be known" (*sciri enim non potest quod nihil est*).¹⁶⁹

For Augustine, sin is a moral decision which has ontological consequences; there is no way to separate the ethical from the ontological. Sin is rooted in the will, which turns away from true Being and therefore from the true Good. The rational creature who chooses lesser things becomes less himself; he diminishes his existence, for "to fall away is not already nothing, but to tend toward nothing" (*deficere autem non iam nihil est, sed ad nihilum tendere*).¹⁷⁰ Note here that Augustine uses the word, *deficere*, which is composed of *de + facere*. For Augustine, to "fail" or "fall away" is, etymologically, to "un-make" oneself.

¹⁶⁷ *conf.* 7.13.19.

¹⁶⁸ *mor.* 2.2.2.

¹⁶⁹ *Aug. lib. arb.* 2.20.

¹⁷⁰ *c. Sec.* 11; cf. *vera rel.* 17.34. Also, Zum Brunn, *Being and Nothingness*: "It is a matter of showing the ontological reduction the 'nihilation' to which the man is condemned who chooses the terrestrial values, in contrast with the ontological edification, 'solidification,' and consistency that result from his choosing being" (50).

By loving what has less being, humans make themselves less for “one becomes conformed to that thing which one loves” (*ei rei quemque conformari quam diligit*).¹⁷¹

For Augustine, sin is the attempt to undo the order and unity of the human being. He says that when humans sin they turn away from God, *aversio* instead of *conversio*, and this distorts their very selves. The language he uses is striking: “With You, our good always lives, because when we are averted, we are perverted. Let us revert even now, that we might not be everted” (*vivit apud te semper bonum nostrum, et quia inde aversi sumus, perversi sumus. revertamur iam, domine, ut non evertamur*).¹⁷² By sinning, human beings dis-order the ordering within them. They undo God’s creative work as they, in a sense, fall backward through the “process” of creation. Human beings are creatures, called from a primordial formlessness, converted through the Word, and illumined by the Holy Spirit. In sinning, they turn away from the light and plunge themselves toward the formlessness whence they came. Since conversion is constitutive of their very being, sin is not just a moral *aversio* from God, but a perversion of their very ontological makeup. For Augustine, ethical decisions have ontological consequences.¹⁷³ “The ironic result of this ‘per-version,’ Augustine tells us, is an ‘in-version’—the soul has quite literally turned things upside down: no longer subject to God

¹⁷¹ See Aug. *mor.* 1.21.39.

¹⁷² *conf.* 4.16.31. For similar language, see *conf.* 13.2.3. For different, but related images, see *conf.* 8.7.16.

¹⁷³ See Zum Brunn, *Being and Nothingness*: “Augustine constantly insists on the fact that the perverse soul keeps a level of being superior to that of the body. But it is lessened in the order that is its own by right” (40). See also Aug. *mus.* 6.13-14; *vera rel.* 41.77.

above it, it finds to its dismay that realities below it . . . no longer remain subject to the ruling power it once so easily exercised over them.”¹⁷⁴

The result of sin is de-formation and therefore dis-integration. What God has beautifully ordered and held together in his creature is undone and jumbled. Augustine describes the result of sin as *tenebrae*¹⁷⁵ and being at the bottom of an *abyssum*.¹⁷⁶ These are not merely metaphors or literary allusions to Genesis, but ontological claims. In sinning, human creation literally tend toward formless disintegration which was their precreational condition. After sin, Augustine finds himself in a state of “dispersion, in which I was chopped into pieces while averted from You, the One; I emptied myself into the many” (*dispersione, in qua frustatim discissus sum dum ab uno te aversus in multa evanui*).¹⁷⁷ The unity of God and the multiplicity of disordered life on earth is another constant theme in the *Confessions*. Sin “succeed[s] in spiritually distending us, deflecting our love from the ‘One’ and consequently scattering our interior riches in greedy pursuit of the ‘many’.”¹⁷⁸ The restless striving of the divided will seeks satisfaction in the “many,” but it can only be satisfied by the One.

Following the Apostle John, Augustine thinks there are three root sins—
“concupiscence of the flesh and concupiscence of the eyes and the ambition of the world”

¹⁷⁴ O’Connell, *Soundings*, 39.

¹⁷⁵ Aug. *conf.* 11.9.11.

¹⁷⁶ *conf.* 2.4.9.

¹⁷⁷ *conf.* 2.1.1.

¹⁷⁸ O’Connell, *Soundings*, 47.

(*concupiscentia carnis et concupiscentia oculorum et ambitione saeculi*).¹⁷⁹ Augustine understands this trio of lust, curiosity, and pride as “a macabre parody of the one substance or essence of the Holy Trinity.”¹⁸⁰ James O’Donnell helpfully draws out how creation is at the heart of this perverse imitation of the Trinity:

Ambitio saeculi . . . defeats humility, the virtue of the self as created being, counterpart of God as creator; *concupiscentia oculorum* seeks illicit knowledge to the detriment of *sapientia*, the authentic knowledge that marks in us the illumination of the divine Word; and *concupiscentia carnis* runs amok in love of created things without reference to God and thus destroys the *caritas* that comes of the Spirit. Thus even in sin, we reflect the image and likeness of God.¹⁸¹

These triads suggest “the triune nature of creation, as well as suggesting that, for Augustine to be healed of his sickness, only a triune medicine, administered by a triune agent, will do.”¹⁸² They structure Augustine’s understanding of the moral life as well as the narrative of his own *aversio* and *conversio*.¹⁸³

V. Creation and Recreation

It was mentioned above that creation ought to be considered as a form of grace, but, for Augustine, the converse is also true: grace must be understood as a kind of creation. How can we be saved, Augustine asks, if not by “Your hand remaking what You have made”

¹⁷⁹ 1 John 2:16

¹⁸⁰ John Cavadini, “Pride,” in *ATA*, 680; cf. *Aug. conf.* 10.30.41.

¹⁸¹ O’Donnell, *Confessions*, ad loc. 10.30.41.

¹⁸² Gareth B. Mathewes, “Book 1: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning,” in *A Reader’s Companion*, 226n18. The structure of sin will give shape to the narrative of *aversio* in Books 2-5, while the “triune medicine” will chiasmatically give shape to the narrative of *conversio* in the corresponding Books 6-8. See Chapter Five for further discussion on this topic.

¹⁸³ See the section “*Vestigia Trinitatis*” in Chapter Five.

(*manum tuam reficientem quae fecisti*)?¹⁸⁴ Making and re-making, creating and re-creating—these are the terms with which Augustine discusses creation and grace. In one of his homilies, Augustine has God say, “Not you, but I am God: I created, I recreate; I formed, I reform; I made, I remake. If you are not able to make yourself, how would you be able to remake yourself” (*Non vos, sed ego sum Deus: ego creavi, ego recreo; ego formavi, ego reformo; ego feci, ego reficio. Si non potuisti facere te, quomodo potes reficere te*)?¹⁸⁵ For Augustine, there is no stark dichotomy between creation and grace, but creation is of grace and grace is understood in terms of creation. “Creation is both the work of grace and the way grace works.”¹⁸⁶

This should come as no surprise really since the vocabulary with which Augustine articulates his theology of creation—*creatio, revocatio, conversio, formatio*—is the same vocabulary with which he describes the grace of God in human life. For example, he says, “When our father and mother and nurses are absent, You are present, You who created, You who calls, You who work some good for the salvation of souls through those placed over us” (*absente patre et matre et nutritoribus tu praesens, qui creasti, qui vocas, qui etiam per*

¹⁸⁴ Aug. *conf.* 5.7.13. See *lib. arb.* 3.7 and 3.22. See section “*Ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei*” above.

¹⁸⁵ *en. Ps.* 45.14.

¹⁸⁶ Harrison, *Rethinking*, 100. Augustine affirms this point in *ep.* 177.7, written in 416, while the Pelagian controversy was in full swing: *etsi enim quadam non inprobanda ratione dicitur gratia dei, qua creati sumus, ut non nihil essemus nec ita essemus aliquid ut cadaver, quod non uiuit, et arbor, quae non sentit, aut pecus, quod non intellegit, sed homines, qui, ut essemus, et uiueremus et sentiremus et intellegeremus et de hoc tanto beneficio creatori nostro gratias agere ualeamus, unde merito et ista gratia dici potest, quia non praecedentium aliquorum operum meritis sed gratuita dei bonitate donata est, alia est tamen, qua praedestinati uocamur, iustificamur, glorificamur, ut dicere possimus: si deus pro nobis, quis contra nos?*

praepositos homines boni aliquid agis ad animarum salute).¹⁸⁷ The God who *created* is the same God who *calls* human creatures back through others to salvation.¹⁸⁸ From their dispersion in sin, they are *re-formed* and *made new* and squeezed back into shape.¹⁸⁹ The goal of this re-creation is salvation, to be restored to the form of their creation and to continue along that path until they are completed, that is, until they are trans-formed into God.

Augustine attributes all his good acts to God who “goes before” him when he acts. This going before is not just in Augustine’s temporal acts, but in the fact that Augustine can act at all. Guardini suggests what this might mean:

Precisely because God creates them are things themselves. Precisely because God orders events, does every event within that order receive the density of its existence. Precisely because God founds all human action and is its real motivating power, the act becomes individual, and the individual its performer. That is why for Augustine grace is a category not only of salvation, but also of existence.¹⁹⁰

Even though creation is grace, things of the world preserve their natural integrity. Indeed, as Guardini points out, it is precisely because creation is grace that things have this integrity. Augustine does not undermine the nature of things by saying that they come from grace; rather, he shows how all things must be understood if they are to be understood at all, namely, within the context of God’s gift. God has given Augustine that he is and that he can

¹⁸⁷ Aug. *conf.* 9.8.18.

¹⁸⁸ See *en. Ps.*, 32(2).16.

¹⁸⁹ See *conf.* 4.11.16: “And all [our] flux will be reformed and renewed and brought together” (*et fluxa tua reformabuntur et renovabuntur et constringentur*).

¹⁹⁰ Romano Guardini, *The Conversion of Augustine* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1960), 124.

do and, especially, that he can be and can do well. All this belongs to God's grace because God made Augustine who, prior to his creation, did not even exist to be given anything. And yet, Augustine still acts, acts freely, and his actions have weight. Otherwise, there would be no *Confessions*.

Carol Harrison, with characteristic insight, summarizes Augustine's thought on this point:

Once again, we find that everything is of grace: both creation and recreation are the work of the Trinity. There is no gap between creation and redemption, not least because created reality, which is inherently temporal, mutable, and corruptible, is completely and absolutely dependent upon the eternal and immutable Trinity to remain in existence at all. Without this grace to continually form and reform, call and convert, figure and reconfigure, it will lapse back and fall into the nothingness from which it was derived.¹⁹¹

Harrison makes clear that Augustine does not use creation language as a poetic conceit, but as an accurate description of how he understands the reality of God's grace in the world.

Augustine is very clear: in order to attain salvation, he must be *re-made*.

It is important for Augustine that both material and spiritual creation underwent a conversion to God in the original creation. This means that their re-creation will also be both material and spiritual: salvation is not an escape from the material, but its redemption.

The reformation of man, therefore, was not to be the undoing as it were of bodily creation but rather a continuation of creation in its entirety. For Augustine that reform of the inner man which was made possible by Incarnation and Redemption was not a return only to the spiritual aspect of creation but the completion and elevation of a spiritual-corporal compound.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Harrison, *Rethinking*, 114.

¹⁹² Ladner, *Idea of Reform*, 184.

This also accounts for why human formation and re-formation were intended to be a process which developed over time. Augustine's understanding of time will be treated in Chapter Three, but here it should be noted how its importance is rooted in the way human beings were created. Humans, unlike the angelic heaven, are not pure spirits, but spirit-body composites. Therefore, unlike the heaven of heavens which escapes the ravages of time,¹⁹³ humans live in time and are completed over time.¹⁹⁴

As sinning truly unmade the human being, God's grace remakes him. Man must in a very real sense re-undergo the process of his original creation. The first nine books of the *Confessions* tell this story about Augustine. Sin had plunged him into the formless abyss, indeed, made him an abyss to himself¹⁹⁵ but, just as in the original creation, God calls him back, converts him through the Word, and re-forms and illumines him, for "it was pleasing in Your sight to reform my deformities" (*et placuit in conspectuo tuo reformare deformia mea*).¹⁹⁶ The *aversio* which had previously de-formed and therefore diminished his being is countered by a *conversio*, which reorients him back to the proper order of his being, and *reformatio*, which increases his being. The order of his original creation is, for Augustine, "the archetype of all later *reformatio*."¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Aug. *conf.* 12.12.15.

¹⁹⁴ *conf.* 12.29.39.

¹⁹⁵ See, for example, *conf.* 13.2.3.

¹⁹⁶ *conf.* 7.8.12.

¹⁹⁷ Ladner, *Idea of Reform*, 170.

Reform therefore is a second turning to God from nothingness, starting with a new recall, a new conversion, this time to the creational condition of formation, lifted up however to an even higher plane through regeneration in Christ, which becomes possible only through the Incarnation and Redemption, and continued in a ceaseless process of reform . . . until the ultimate return of all creation to God.¹⁹⁸

For Augustine, creation is the interior structure of conversion and reform. The original *conversio*—constitutive of human being and perverted by sin—is reconstituted by God as he calls back his fallen creatures to himself. When a person is reformed, he does not return to some pristine, ultimately fulfilled, condition of Paradise. Rather, he is gathered back into unity and ordered back toward God, so that over time he can come to be more like him until, after this life, he can by cleaving to the light become light itself.¹⁹⁹ For Augustine, this happens through the Church and, in an important sense, is the Church. From their original creation, human beings were called to something higher than their original creation—they were made incomplete, ordered toward God, *ad te*, and so restless until they are definitively “taken up” in Christ and “changed into God” (cf. *tu mutaberis in me*).²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ See Aug. *conf.* 12.15.20.

²⁰⁰ *conf.* 7.10.16.

CHAPTER TWO: COMING TO TERMS WITH CREATION

*cum de deo meo cogitare vellem,
cogitare nisi moles corporum non noveram . . .
maxima et prope sola causa erat
inevitabilis erroris mei
-conf. 5.10.19*

I. Creation and Augustine's Life

It is one of the remarkable features of Augustine's remarkable life how deeply his thought and experience penetrated one another. His experiences raised the questions with which his mind would wrestle and disposed him to the kinds of answers he would find attractive. The answers he found, in turn, shaped the way he lived his life. As the epigraph of this chapter suggests, when the mature Augustine evaluated his earlier opinions, he understood himself to have gone wrong by conceiving of God in bodily terms, terms appropriate to things in the visible world. Augustine thought of the Creator in the terms of creation. This intellectual error, he says in the *Confessions*, led to moral difficulties or, perhaps, exacerbated the moral difficulties he already had which were already pointing him toward some dubious intellectual conclusions.

Because of this intimate connection between thought and life, Augustine's life, as related in the *Confessions*, could be understood as one long struggle to come to terms with creation. The phrase "come to terms" has a fruitful ambiguity because it can refer to both intellectual and moral development. In his intellectual life, Augustine struggled to come to the proper metaphysical terms for *thinking* about God and the world, while in his moral life,

he had to come to terms with this truth, that is, he had to learn to *accept* in his life what he had come to in his thought. Both aspects of this coming to terms will be considered here.

Augustine's life and conversions have been well studied and they will not simply be rehearsed here. Instead, this study will look at the main incidents of his life, as recounted in the *Confessions*, and demonstrate how, at heart, they are struggles to come to terms with creation. Augustine understands his descent into error and sin to have come about by conflating Creator and creation and choosing the latter over the former, while his liberation consists in his mind and will being healed so that he can properly recognize the distinction between Creator and creation and order his love accordingly. The process of liberation, the story he tells of coming to terms with creation, is, for Augustine, nothing less than his re-creation, the illumination of his beclouded mind and the slow re-formation of the image of God in him. It will also be shown how Augustine understands and interprets these events in the light which creation sheds on the meaning of his life.

Since this inquiry is attempting to interpret Augustine's life in light of creation, it will be helpful to divide the analysis according to the various stages of his thinking on this issue. Augustine himself suggests one possible division of the main lines of his evolving thought when, in the midst of describing his first true vision of God, he offers a brief history of his religious opinions.

[1] And since my soul would not dare that my God be displeasing to it, it was unwilling that anything displeasing to it was Yours. [2] And from there, it went into the opinion about two substances, and it did not rest, and it spoke the opinions of others. [3] And from there, turning away, it made for itself a God through the infinite space of all places and thought that it was You and set it up in its heart, and was made again a temple of its own idol, an abominable thing to You. [4] But afterwards, You

nurtured the head of one who did not know and You closed my eyes so that they would not see vanity. I ceased from myself a little, and my insanity was lulled, and I awoke in You and I saw You infinite, in a different way, and this sight was not drawn from the flesh.

et quia non audebat anima mea ut ei displiceret deus meus, nolebat esse tuum quidquid ei displicebat. et inde ierat in opinionem duarum substantiarum, et non requiescebat, et aliena loquebatur. et inde rediens fecerat sibi deum per infinita spatia locorum omnium et eum putaverat esse te et eum conlocaverat in corde suo, et facta erat rursus templum idoli sui abominandum tibi, sed posteaquam fovisti caput nescientis et clausisti oculos meos, ne viderent vanitatem. cessavi de me paululum, et consopita est insania mea, et evigilavi in te et vidi te infinitum aliter, et visus iste non a carne trahebatur.¹

Augustine delineates four stages in his thinking about God and the world based on the dominant mode of understanding at the time: first, a kind of “pre-intellectual,” unformed piety of his boyhood and youth (roughly, the years 354-372); second, the Manichean-influenced theory of two substances (roughly, 373-384); third, the notion of God as material infinity, perhaps influenced by his reading of the Stoics but also, he says, the result of his own imaginative efforts (385-386); and, finally, the true infinity inspired by the Platonists which eventually culminates in and is integrated into his orthodox Catholic beliefs (386 to the end of his life in 430). Within these four stages or main lines of Augustine’s thought, the various moral and intellectual struggles of his life will be contextualized. This will allow everything from his youthful rebellions to his affair with the Manichees to his developing Christology to be understood in the light of creation. Thus, a consistent and coherent interpretation of his life as a struggle to come to terms with creation will be presented.

¹ Aug. *conf.* 7.14.20. Augustine also describes these phases of his thought in the first half of Book 7 (cf. 7.1.1-3.4, 7.4.6-7.11, and 7.8.12-13.19).

II. Stage One: Early Life

In his early life, Augustine is not deliberately engaged with questions about creation. Yet, his very existence raises questions and the mature Augustine looking back cannot help but think through what they mean. Augustine knows that his youthful actions were by no means neutral, either morally or metaphysically, but like all actions they, as it were, bespeak a theology of creation. In regard to his “pre-intellectual” youth, then, the focus will be not so much on the thoughts of the young Augustine (though this will be considered to the extent possible), but rather on how the mature Augustine understands creation to be implicit in his coming into being, growth, and early experiences.

A. Plunged into Existence

Augustine begins the *Confessions* at the beginning: with God and his creative Word. Against the greatness, power, and wisdom of God, Augustine profiles the *portio creaturae*, the human being, created finite as part of a whole greater than himself. God creates and Augustine is created. For Augustine, this is a cause for wonder and is the context for understanding all other things, including his own beginnings.

After this brief Prologue (1.1.1-6.6),² Augustine begins his narrative by confessing ignorance about his origins: “I do not know whence I came to here, into that which I call a ‘mortal life’ or a ‘living death’” (*nescio unde venerim huc, in istam dico vitam mortalem an*

² The Prologue establishes the “new context” of creation as the setting within which Augustine writes the *Confessions*. This Prologue will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

mortem vitalem).³ His beginning is veiled, he says, by forgetfulness and mystery. Augustine does not remember his earliest existence, it does not form part of his conscious identity, and he is loath to include it as part of his life.⁴ Since there are no memories of this time, what is treated here is not so much Augustine's early "experience," but Augustine's later reflections on what is most certainly a part of his life, but which is largely inaccessible to him. These reflections are dominated by an awareness of how strange it is to exist and to exist in such a way as to be ignorant of the extent of one's own existence. In other words, his reflections are framed by the mystery of creation and the strangeness of being "plunged into existence."⁵

Augustine knows that he comes from a father and mother and he believes that these are Patricius and Monnica, but neither reason nor the authority of others can penetrate the mystery of *unde*, "whence" he comes. Before he was born, he was in his mother's womb, but did he exist in some way before that? He does not know nor can he come to know and the awareness of ignorance reveals his finitude and the strangeness of finite being. Though the question of when and in what manner he came to exist remains obscure, one thing is clear: finitude means that he does not have his being from himself. "Will anyone be the Craftsman for the making of himself? Or is there any other channel drawn from elsewhere through which being and life could flow into us, besides You, who made us, Lord" (*an quisquam se faciendi erit artifex? aut ulla vena trahitur aliunde qua esse et vivere currat in*

³ *conf.* 1.6.7.

⁴ *conf.* 1.7.12.

⁵ This phrase comes from Guardini, *Conversion*, 87.

*nos, praeterquam quod tu facis nos, domine)?*⁶ Augustine was not; now, he is. He did not make himself, nor can it be said that he is simply from his parents since the powers of generation are not their own but gifts of God.⁷ God gives Augustine existence, from nothing, and brings him into being through his parents.

When Augustine arrives, he enters as well as establishes a matrix of relationships: Monnica and Patricius become a mother and a father; his nurses are filled with milk and Augustine desires their nourishment; they love him and he reciprocates; they root out his infant behavior and he is incorporated into human society (which, after the fall, is a mixed good to be sure). All these goods are “not from them but through them” (*ex eis non sed per eas*).⁸ God has ordered the bodies and hearts of those whom he involves in bringing life into existence. This matrix of relationships is written into creation; it is ordained and ordered by God, who establishes and sustains these relations.

For Augustine, even the sheer fact of existing is a reminder that human beings bear traces of God’s creative activity. “For even [in childhood], I was; I was living and feeling and had concerns for my safety, a vestige of the most secret unity from whom I was” (*eram enim etiam tunc, vivebam atque sentiebam meamque incolumitatem, vestigium secretissimae*

⁶ Aug. *conf.* 1.6.10.

⁷ Augustine does not simply come from his parents as though they were the efficient cause of his existence (as they would be for, say, Aristotle); rather, his parents are an instrumental cause: “for from one and in one You formed me in time” (*ex quo et in qua me formasti in tempore*) (*conf.* 1.6.7).

⁸ *conf.* 1.6.7.

unitatis ex qua eram, curae habebam).⁹ Being at all means having a kind of unity which, for Augustine, is a source of wonder and a sign of God's handiwork.

Augustine describes the transition from infancy to childhood as something mysterious and as something which bespeaks his createdness.¹⁰ The very fact that there is a transition at all is a sure sign that he does not have the fullness of being, that he has his being over time, that there is an impermanence about his existence which is different from and dependent on God. "And behold, my infancy is long dead, and I still live. Yet, You O Lord, You live always and nothing dies in You, since before the origins of the ages, and before anything that can even be called 'before,' You are, and You are God and Lord of all that You have created, and with You stand the causes of all impermanent things" (*et ecce infantia mea olim mortua est et ego vivo. tu autem, domine, qui et semper vivis et nihil moritur in te, quoniam ante primordia saeculorum, et ante omne quod vel ante dici potest, tu es, et deus es dominusque omnium quae creasti, et apud te rerum omnium instabilium stant causae*).¹¹ For Augustine, there must be some stable "thing" which gives some semblance of order and stability to unstable things. This stable "thing" is God who contains all things and whose eternity is the

⁹ *conf.* 1.20.31.

¹⁰ *conf.* 1.8.13. The terms infancy (*infantia*) and childhood (*pueritia*) are also the common terms of the Ages of Man which, for Augustine, correspond to the Ages of the World as well as the Days of Creation. See, for example, *Gn. adv. Man.* 1.23.35-25.43 and *vera rel.* 26.48. See Chapter Five for a discussion of how the days of creation both illumine and structure Augustine's account of his life in the *Confessions*.

¹¹ *conf.* 1.6.9.

measure of human temporality.¹² Augustine's very growing up, he suggests, points to the distinction between Creator and his creation.

B. Creation and Language

The transition from infancy to childhood also gives rise to a linguistic reflection for it is language which marks the transition from one stage to another. Augustine is very aware that to be an *in-fans* means being "one without speech" and his transition to the next age means he becomes "a speaking boy" (*puer loquens*).¹³ For Augustine, the ability to speak as well as language itself are among the gifts which God has given in creation. Though the *expression* of each language is conventional (e.g., Latin and Punic arise from circumstance not nature), the *fact* of language as well as its rules are universal gifts instituted by God.¹⁴ All humans are born *in-fans*, that is, unable yet to manifest in speech. More importantly, they are born without the ability to *con-fess*, a word etymologically related to *in-fans* (both have the same root, *for*). Confession, for Augustine, is the proper response to God's gifts, especially the gift of creation. All people begin life without confession, without the ability to respond properly to the gift of existence they have been given. It must be cultivated over time through learning and education and, for Augustine, the way human beings acquire language is designed by God to reinforce this goal.

¹² Time and eternity will be treated more fully in Chapter Three.

¹³ For more on Augustine and language, see Tarmo Toom, "'I Was a Boy with Power to Talk' (*conf.* 1.8.13): Augustine and Ancient Theories of Language Acquisition," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 357-73.

¹⁴ See Aug. *doc. Chr.* 2.31.48-37.55.

In his essay, “Book 1: The Presumptuousness of Autobiography and the Paradoxes of Beginning,” Charles Mathewes uses Wittgenstein’s critique of Augustine’s “language theory” as a way of highlighting how creation is at the heart of his account of language.¹⁵ Wittgenstein argues that “Augustine describes the learning of human language as if the child came into a strange country and did not understand the language of the country; that is, as if it already had a language, only not this one.”¹⁶ If Wittgenstein is right, Mathewes suggests, then Augustine understands humans as “self-starting, *ex nihilo* creators” who enter “the realm of language in an entirely voluntary, self-conscious, and intentional way, by *naming* things.”¹⁷ But Augustine rejects this understanding as fundamentally at odds with what it means to be created. To see why, says Mathewes, one must consider the Augustinian notion that learning occurs through authority and love and how this relates to creation.

Augustine famously narrates how he learned Greek poorly because he was forced to learn it under the threat of punishment, but how he learned Latin easily because he learned “by turning toward it, without any fear and torture, among the coaxing of nurses and the jokes of those smiling at me and the happy games of playmates” (*advertendo didici sine ullo metu atque cruciatu, inter etiam blandimenta nutricum et ioca adridentium et laetitias*

¹⁵ This discussion follows Mathewes, “Book 1,” 7-23. It is, of course, not the only way of discussing the role of creation in Augustine’s understanding of language, but one that was particularly helpful. For more comparisons of Augustine’s thought with modern language theory, see Tarmo Toom, “Augustine Becoming Articulate: *conf.* 1.8.13,” *Studia Patristica* 49/19 (2010): 253-8.

¹⁶ Mathewes, “Book 1,” 15, quoting Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 1.32.15-16.

¹⁷ Mathewes, “Book 1,” 15.

adludentium).¹⁸ Pleasantness, playfulness, and love draw out language. On the other side, the infant Augustine desired to speak what was being drawn out of him. “But I myself, with the mind You gave me, my God, with various cries and sounds and the various motions of my members, I wanted to express the sense of my heart” (*sed ego ipse mente quam dedisti mihi, deus meus, cum gemitibus et vocibus variis et variis membrorum motibus edere vellem sensa cordis mei*).¹⁹ At the core of language-learning is love and authority.²⁰ The heart yearns to express itself, to communicate to others, while others, in authority and in relationships of love, draw out the heart’s desire through trust, affection, and playfulness. By observing their example and striving to imitate them (another creation notion), the child is incorporated into the rational world.

Augustine’s understanding of language-learning is rooted in his understanding of the structure and meaning of creation. Language is something which is received as gift: both the capacity for it, given by God, and the particular language inherited from family and friends. Language is not something human beings create, but something they are given, something which comes to them from the outside, from others and from Another, and must be accepted on authority. “Yet this authority is not tyrannically imposed on the infants; they actually seek it out, driven forward by the love of others and the craving for their love.”²¹ This love is

¹⁸ Aug. *conf.* 1.14.23.

¹⁹ *conf.* 1.8.13.

²⁰ For Augustine, there is even a providential role for the authoritative fear which his teachers inspired for it keeps in check the naturally good, but perhaps undirected love of learning. See *conf.* 1.14.23.

²¹ Mathewes, “Book 1,” 16.

given as part of the created order. It, too, is a gift. “When we love, we are more basically responding to aspects of the world than bestowing value on the world *ex nihilo*. Love—that which is most intimate to us, what is most deeply ours—is not simply our own. It comes from beyond us, and reaches out before us.”²² In the pre-reflective learning of language, human beings manifest that they are created and not autonomous creators. They have been loved into existence, born into a matrix of love, and been given an unconscious love so that they might learn to speak. By reading Augustine’s discussion of language in the light of creation, its interior structure and its true depths can be seen, as well as how, in its very nature, it is ordered to *confessio*, to grateful praise for and of the gift of creation.²³

C. A Catechumen and His Catechism

Augustine was a catechumen from his infancy. As a newborn he was salted and signed with the cross, the first rite of initiation into the Church.²⁴ As a child, he was instructed in the basics of the faith and remained a nominal Christian until his baptism at age thirty-three. Augustine’s adult conversion, then, is not so much a conversion *to* Christianity

²² Ibid.

²³ There is another way in which creation is present in Augustine’s understanding of language, namely, the Trinitarian and incarnational understanding of the speech act. Augustine locates the image of God in the soul, more precisely, in the relation between remembering, understanding, and willing. The human soul represents and participates in the Trinity. This “inner Trinitarian” relationship is the place from which proceeds human speech acts, the final stage of which is vocalization. For Augustine, vocalization occurs when our non-temporal thoughts “take flesh” in time in speech; this has its analogy in the Incarnation. See Aug. *doc. Chr.* 1.13; also, *Trin.* 12.24 for discussion of how the mind is “subjoined” (*subiuncta*) to the world because they have the same Author.

²⁴ *conf.* 1.11.17; cf. *cat. rud.* 26.50.

as it is a return to the Christian faith he was given as a child.²⁵ As a young boy, Augustine was rather pious: he prayed, had true enough ideas about God, loved Christ, and believed in the efficacy of baptism. He learned to pray from watching others and imagined God as “some sort of mighty one, not appearing to our senses, who could hear us and come help us” (*esse magnum aliquem qui posses etiam non apparens sensibus nostris exaudire nos et subvenire nobis*).²⁶ Augustine makes no comment on this childhood notion of God and it seems vague and pious enough to warrant his approval. His childhood notion of a God who cares for humans and is not present to the senses is closer to the truth, he suggests, than the sophisticated fables he would soon embrace. This is a notion of God on the way to a full appreciation of the ontological distinction between God and the world, but which is soon derailed by the Manichean materialist myth of two substances.

Augustine relates how he had a belief in Christ (of some sort) which never left him and that in all his seeking he was seeking a Christ he could give his heart to.²⁷ He had learned “of the eternal life promised to us through the humility of the Lord our God who descended to our pride” (*de vita aeterna promissa nobis per humilitatem domini dei nostri descendentis ad superbiam nostram*).²⁸ Once, when he fell ill as a boy, he sought out the

²⁵ See *conf.* 1.11.17, 5.14.25, 6.4.5, 6.11.18. For more on this, see Chapter Four, “Hints of a Liturgical Structure.”

²⁶ *conf.* 1.9.14.

²⁷ *conf.* 3.4.8.

²⁸ *conf.* 1.11.17.

saving power of baptism, which was deferred upon his speedy recovery.²⁹ Though Augustine loved Christ, he admits that he was too proud to imitate Christ's example of humility.³⁰ This, as will soon be seen, is a key component in coming to terms with creation and his failure to imitate this humility, he says, kept him from the full truth until he reached manhood.

D. Creation and Youthful Sinning

For Augustine, human beings are “conceived in iniquity” (*in iniquitate conceptus*) and the evidence of this lies in the disordered affections of the infant who acts contrary to his own good and resents those who do what is best for him.³¹ Both reason and custom demand that adults not be harsh with children who are ignorant of their own disordered acts and too weak to carry out their bad intentions, but the very fact that parents and nurses root out these habits means that the acts are not good.

Augustine understands sin as a preference for creation over the Creator, by which the sinner attempts to subvert the primacy of the Creator while perversely imitating him. This is true, says Augustine, even of the sins of youth: “For I was disobedient, not in order to choose better things, but from love of play; I loved proud victories in contests, and itching my ears with false fables by which they would more ardently be aroused, with the same curiosity bursting more and more through my eyes for spectacles, the games of older men” (*non enim*

²⁹ *conf.* 1.11.17.

³⁰ See, for example, *conf.* 3.3.6, 3.8.16, 4.1.1, 4.15.26-27, 5.10.18, 7.7.11.

³¹ *conf.* 1.7.12; cf. Ps. 50:7.

meliora eligens inoboediens eram, sed amore ludendi, amans in certaminibus superbas victorias et scalpi aures meas falsis fabellis, quo prurirent ardentius, eadem curiositate magis magisque per oculos emicante in spectacula, ludos maiorum).³² Augustine sees the triadic structure of sin—pride, lust, curiosity—already at work in his childhood. “The presence of all three temptations *in nuce* here shows that the *puer* Augustine was completely innocent in no essential way.”³³ The triad of sins often works together. In the instance just cited, the fleshly pleasure of games holds primacy in the heart of the young Augustine and pride and curiosity are in the service of lust. At different times, different vices will take first place, but Augustine will often show how they mutually reinforce one another. Their threefold, unified activity is another way they perversely imitate the Trinity.

In the last chapter, it was seen how creation was related to this triad of sins (see “Creation and Sin” above), but is it possible to see creation present in the details of Augustine’s youth? Is it at play in the actual struggles he had? How do his youthful sins manifest a struggle with creation? Let us look at some particular sins of Augustine’s youth in light of the discussion above.

1. Pride

Although the young Augustine would never baldly assert that he desired to overthrow God, the older Augustine says that his actions bespoke such a pride. This can be seen in one of his first comments on his childhood sins: “O Lord, my God, I sinned by doing contrary to

³² Aug. *conf.* 1.10.16.

³³ O’Donnell, *Confessions*, ad loc. 1.10.16.

[or, *making* my own way against] the precepts of my parents and of those teachers” (*domine deus meus, peccabam faciendo contra praecepta parentum et magistrorum illorum*).³⁴ This youthful rebellion against authority is, for Augustine, tantamount to a rebellion against God. For in rejecting the legitimate authority of those ordained by God in creation, “You were condemned by me” (*contemnebaris a me*).³⁵ This rebellion continues into his youth in his rejection of his mother’s exhortations to chastity,³⁶ in his rejection of the state’s laws against theft,³⁷ and his disregard for ecclesial propriety.³⁸ “At the time, Augustine was going through a period of revolt against the moral order in general,” and, as his depiction of the pear-stealing incident makes plain, “reveling in evil for its own sake.”³⁹ Augustine is, indeed, the *eversor*, the “overturner” of God’s created *ordo*, who asserts an *ordo* of his own making in its place.⁴⁰

³⁴ Aug. *conf.* 1.10.16.

³⁵ *conf.* 2.3.7.

³⁶ *conf.* 2.3.7.

³⁷ See James T. Doull, “Augustinian Trinitarianism and Existential Theology,” *Dionysius* 3 (1979): 128ff, for an interesting discussion of the progression of this rebellion.

³⁸ Aug. *conf.* 3.3.5; 3.6.10.

³⁹ Guardini, *Conversion*, 164. Augustine says, “My pleasure was not in the pears, it was in the deed itself” (*quoniam in illis pomis voluptas mihi non erat, ea erat in ipso facinore*) (*conf.* 2.8.16).

⁴⁰ See *conf.* 2.5.10-10.18 and 3.3.6.

By his actions, Augustine replaces the Creator and his *ordo* with himself, a *portio creaturae*, and his attempt to conform reality to his own will.⁴¹ Augustine shows this in other ways as well, such as his desire to be superior to his friends, even in inconsequential things, like games. He even cheats in order to attain supremacy or, at least, the recognition of supremacy in his own imagination. He boasts of lustful exploits, real and fabricated, so as to appear first among his friends.⁴² He wants to be first, he says, because he desired the praise of his friends and teachers and this, perhaps more than anything, shows the heart of pride.⁴³ In seeking to be above others and in seeking praise for his accomplishments (real and fabricated), Augustine tacitly denies that he is created; he denies that his goodness comes from God. For “what do you have that you have not received? And if you have received it, why do you glory as if you did not receive it” (*quid autem habes quod non accepisti? si autem accepisti, quid gloriaris quasi non acceperis*)?⁴⁴ Augustine deflects the praise due to God to himself, thereby inserting himself into the role of God. At its heart, pride tells the creature that he has his goodness from himself as though he were *sui generis* and not created from nothing: “in essence, pride is the desire to replace God with oneself.”⁴⁵

⁴¹ See *lib. arb.* 3.24: “Whence this aversion, then, unless someone whose good is God, wants to be his own Good by his own self, just as if he were God to himself” (*unde autem haec auersio nisi dum ille cui bonum est deus, sibi ipse uult esse bonum suum, sicuti sibi est deus*)?

⁴² *conf.* 2.3.7. Note again how the vices always act together: Augustine lies about lust to excite the curiosity of others so he can appear superior to them.

⁴³ See *conf.* 1.10.16, 1.17.27.

⁴⁴ 1 Cor. 4:7. See *Aug. conf.* 7.21.27.

⁴⁵ Cavadini, “Pride,” in *ATA*, 679.

2. Lust

When Augustine was a young boy, the lust of the flesh took the form of an excessive love of play, which invited a whole host of other vices. As he got older, lust took the form of excessive interest and pursuit of sexual delights. Augustine begins one discussion of his youthful lust by reflecting on how it corrupted even his friendships. He says that “the mode from mind toward mind was not kept, wherein there is a luminous boundary of friendship” (*sed non tenebatur modus ab animo usque ad animum quatenus est luminosus limes amicitiae*).⁴⁶ It matters little whether he means he could not remain friends with female acquaintances or had an inordinate attachment to his male friends or whether he engaged in some kind of homosexual acts.⁴⁷ What is important for the purpose of this inquiry is to note that by proudly trampling the distinction between Creator and creation, Augustine shows how he inevitably tramples the relationship between creatures themselves. There is a *modus* for friendship—a measure, an integrity, which God has given it in creation and must be observed for its flourishing. But, “the flesh’s lure brings clouds and darkness into the bright world of the mind, blurring boundaries and intermingling things better kept separate—not out of any abstract or arbitrary ethical imperative, but in respect of the innate quality of the beings themselves, the *modus* with which they were created.”⁴⁸ Just as Augustine pridefully places himself in the place of God, ignoring or confusing the distinction between God and

⁴⁶ Aug. *conf.* 2.2.2.

⁴⁷ See O’Connell, *Images of Conversion*, 25-30 for a survey of these possibilities and their likelihood.

⁴⁸ O’Donnell, *Confessions*, ad loc. 2.2.2.

man, so too does he lustfully blur the boundaries between friend and friend which are established in creation. By getting the Creator wrong, he inevitably gets creation wrong as well.

There are other ways that Augustine relates lust and creation. For example, he often calls the inordinate love of this world, “fornication,”⁴⁹ which John Cavadini describes in Augustinian terms as a “ceaseless intercourse with created and worldly things to the exclusion of God.”⁵⁰ This need not refer to sexual deeds only, but to anything which pits the world over against its Creator. Lust and creation come together in a pointed way in the bathhouse episode with Patricius where the proud father sees the signs of manhood in Augustine and already looks forward to his imagined grandchildren. Patricius “rejoiced, drunk in that which this world forgets You, its Creator, and loves the creature instead of You” (*gaudens vinulentia in qua te iste mundus oblitus est creatorem suum et creaturam tuam pro te amavit*).⁵¹ Here, Patricius rejoices in the immortality of his seed on earth without due regard for the immortality of his or Augustine’s soul in heaven. Indeed, Augustine even presents this episode as a perverse imitation of the baptismal scrutiny, reinforcing the profound confusion about temporal and eternal things.⁵² Patricius is excited about procreation, though without consideration of the moral bounds ordained by the Creator. Augustine is interested neither in procreating nor in the ordinations of the Creator nor,

⁴⁹ See Aug. *conf.* 1.13.21; 2.2.2.

⁵⁰ Cavadini, “Pride,” 680.

⁵¹ Aug. *conf.* 2.3.6.

⁵² See Wills, *Augustine’s Confessions*, 23-34.

moreover, in becoming a “new creation.” For, as Augustine has already shown, without due regard for God, one inevitably disregards God’s creation.⁵³

3. Curiosity

In his boyhood and youth, the third vice, curiosity, took the form of a restless desire to see the spectacles (*spectacula*) of the theater. These spectacles included romantic tragedies, “lubricious pantomimes,” gladiatorial fights, and quasi-liturgical stories of the gods.⁵⁴ These spectacles also carried an almost undisputed authority: of the state, which commissioned the performances and payed the wages of the actors;⁵⁵ of the general public, who eagerly attended the shows;⁵⁶ of the educational establishment, which held up the actors as models of eloquence;⁵⁷ and of the gods, who had purportedly authorized these performances.⁵⁸ Augustine’s teachers frequented the shows and encouraged their students to do the same (though not when they should be studying!) because the theater was also an informal school for learning rhetoric. Even some of Augustine’s lessons were modeled on

⁵³ Aug. *conf.* 2.2.3.

⁵⁴ See *conf.* 1.10.16; 1.16.26; 1.19.30; 3.2.2-4; 6.7.11-8.13. Also, *civ. Dei* 2, especially 2.4 where Augustine describes what kinds of shows he saw as a youth. The felicitous phrase “lubricious pantomimes” comes from Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 43. See also Paul Blowers, “Pity, Empathy, and the Tragic Spectacle of Human Suffering: Exploring the Emotional Culture of Compassion in Late Ancient Christianity,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 18.1 (Spring 2010 18.1): 1-27; Donnalee Dox, *The Idea of the Theater in Latin Christian Thought: Augustine to the Fourteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 14-19.

⁵⁵ See Aug. *conf.* 1.16.26.

⁵⁶ See *conf.* 6.8.13; *civ. Dei* 2.4.

⁵⁷ *conf.* 1.16.26-17.27.

⁵⁸ See *civ. Dei* 2.8, 2.14.

the theater as when he had to imitate the wrath of the goddess Juno in a declamation contest.⁵⁹

Augustine outgrew his fascination with the theater and, even before his conversion, he was critical of the madness which the theaters induced in their spectators.⁶⁰ Later, he would be critical of their immoral content as well. But more than this, why was Augustine so critical of the theaters and what has this to do with creation? Augustine has numerous criticisms of the theater,⁶¹ but the primary one seems to be that the theater presents bad examples for imitation.⁶² If it is recalled that the vice of curiosity is a perversion of the desire to know, corresponding in some way to the Second Person of the Trinity, then it can be seen how, for Augustine, the theater is an attack on Christ and his saving work.

The Word is the perfect Image of the Father and is therefore Truth Itself.⁶³ All things are created through this Image, who is the *Exemplar* of all things, which are created through him and which imitate him insofar as they are. To that extent they are also true. Things are false insofar as they imitate God imperfectly. When the Son becomes incarnate, he becomes the *exemplum* which human beings can see and imitate so as to become more like God. The curiosity which compels people to watch shows perverts this Trinitarian theology of creation.

⁵⁹ *conf.* 1.17.27.

⁶⁰ *conf.* 6.7.11-8.13.

⁶¹ See Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 61-66.

⁶² Words related to imitation occur four times in Book 1 in regard to the theater: *Aug. conf.* 1.16.25 (2x); 1.18.28; 1.19.30.

⁶³ *vera rel.* 36.66.

It perverts the desire to know by filling the eyes with spectacles which are not true and which stir up the audience to imitate false gods and base heroes doing false things. It delights the audience with titillating things which they enjoy seeing and knowing.⁶⁴ Unlike imitation of the Son, the imitation of the theater leads away from God, *aversio* instead of *conversio*.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine comments on the theaters and the imitation they inspired in his youth. “There is,” he says, “not only one way to offer sacrifice to the transgressor angels” (*non enim uno modo sacrificatur transgressoribus angelis*).⁶⁵ This is not hyperbole, but an insight into how Augustine understands the real problem of the theater. With their air of authority, their power to unite the hearts of many, their ability to inspire imitation, the theatrical spectacles are, for Augustine, a demonic liturgy.⁶⁶ “For Augustine, the theater has played the role of a false temple, or anti-temple, standing in mocking antithesis to the true temple, masquerading indeed as the true temple, with its own antipriests and antirituals, inhabited by demons, devoted to the Devil, and dedicated to the overthrow of humanity.”⁶⁷ In a sermon contemporaneous with the *Confessions*, Augustine boldly contrasts the spectacles of the theater with the “spectacle” of the Eucharist. “Compare,” he says, “the pleasures and allurements of the theaters with this holy spectacle. There eyes are defiled, here hearts are cleansed. Here the spectator is praisable if he would be an imitator [of what

⁶⁴ *vera rel.* 49.94.

⁶⁵ *conf.* 1.17.27.

⁶⁶ Years later, in *De civitate Dei*, Augustine will make an extended contrast between the true sacrifice of Christians and the perverse imitation of the liturgy which the theaters proffer. Compare his discussions in *civ. Dei* 10 (Christian liturgy) and 2 (pagan liturgy).

⁶⁷ Barish, *Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 63-64.

he sees]; there, however, the spectator is a disgrace, and the imitator, infamous” (*comparate huic sancto spectaculo uoluptates et delicias theatrorum. ibi oculi inquinantur, hic corda mundantur: hic laudabilis est spectator, si fuerit imitator; ibi autem et spectator turpis est, et imitator infamis*).⁶⁸ In the theater, Augustine says one can see Terrance’s play, *The Eunuch*, wherein a young man, proudly and lustfully, looks to Jove as his model of adultery.⁶⁹ This is in marked contrast to the Christian liturgy, where one can look upon the “sacrament of our price” (*pretii nostri sacramentum*)⁷⁰ to see the *exemplum humilitatis*⁷¹ which inspires one to imitate his chastity and become a “eunuch for the kingdom of heaven.”⁷² In the theater, the playwrights assign human attributes to the gods, “so that, whoever does these [base things], would not seem to imitate degenerate men, but the heavenly gods” (*ut, quisquis ea fecisset, non homines perditos sed caelestes deos videretur imitatus*).⁷³ But in the Christian liturgy, humans learn to take on God’s attributes, thereby imitating the Image and becoming more true insofar as they become more like the God in whose image and likeness they are made. In the theater, God’s gift of imitation, by which human beings participate in God so as to be and become more like him, is inverted and perverted. For the creature, true imitation of the

⁶⁸ Aug. s. 301/A, delivered c. 400.

⁶⁹ *conf.* 1.16.25-26. Note how the all three of the triad of vices are at play again in this episode.

⁷⁰ *conf.* 9.13.36. This is, of course, the “price of our redemption.”

⁷¹ See *conf.* 10.43.68.

⁷² See *conf.* 2.2.3; 8.1.2; 8.11.27.

⁷³ *conf.* 1.16.25.

divine “takes the form of imitation of Christ’s humility.”⁷⁴ But the theater, Augustine argues, makes the divine like fallen humans in order to give divine sanction to perverse delights rather than making perverse humans like the divine in order to become what they were created to be.⁷⁵

III. Stage Two: Two Substances

In his early life, Augustine held generally pious, but unformed ideas about God and the world, though his actions often bespoke something different: a rebellion against and inversion of the truth about Creator and creation. But as he enters more fully into young manhood, questions about the nature of God and the world come into the fore. When Augustine reads Cicero’s *Hortensius*, he undergoes the first of a series of conversions: here, a conversion to a desire for the “immortality of wisdom” (*immortalitatem sapientiae*).⁷⁶ For the first time, Augustine comes upon a comprehensive way of approaching reality: “a view of the whole by which to orient one’s life.”⁷⁷ Though hazy in its details, he is given a new orientation, the beginnings of a new context from which to understand the world. Though clearly not aware of this at the time, Augustine is seeking and wrestling with the truth of creation. For, as Augustine himself says, the life of philosophy consists in coming to terms intellectually and morally with this truth: “The whole discipline of wisdom consists in

⁷⁴ Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 61.

⁷⁵ See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, I, XXVI, 65, quoted in Aug. *conf.* 1.16.25.

⁷⁶ *conf.* 3.4.7.

⁷⁷ Frederick J. Crosson, “Religion and Faith in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” in *Rationality and Religious Belief*, ed. C.F. Delaney (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 158.

distinguishing the Creator and the creature, and to worship the one as Lord, to acknowledge the other as subject” (*omnis sapientiae disciplina . . . est creatorem creaturam que dinoscere, et illum colere dominantem istam subiectam fateri*).⁷⁸

The *Hortensius*, though, lacks the name of Christ; it offends Augustine’s piety and so it “could not totally ravish me” (*non me totum rapiebat*).⁷⁹ In the *Hortensius* Augustine sees the end, but he does not see the way. He flirts with Scripture for a while, but it does not move him and he is repelled by the seeming ignorance of the Catholic Church and its demands of belief. Augustine later interprets his rejection of Scripture as simple pride, that perverse imitation of God which balks at the humility of God and God’s style.⁸⁰ After rejecting Scripture and the Church, he encounters the Manichees, who are Christians, of a sort, and promise him truth through reason. Augustine’s adolescent prejudices against his mother’s religion and his uninformed piety about the goodness of God leave him open to the Manichean idea of two substances. This idea will dominate his thinking about God and the world for the next nine years.

⁷⁸ Aug. *div. qu.* 81.1. The numerology of the rest of this passage is also illuminating for how fundamental the right understanding of creation is for Augustine.

⁷⁹ *conf.* 3.4.8. In this passage, *rapere* could perhaps be translated as “captivate” or “hold my attention,” though Augustine often uses the word in ascensional contexts to refer not only to the experience of being drawn toward God, but to the intimacy and union with God at the height of the ascent. See *conf.* 7.17.23 and 9.10.25. The word has sexual undertones, though understood by Augustine in a spiritual sense. See section “Being Ravished” in Chapter Three below.

⁸⁰ *conf.* 3.5.9.

A. Manichees

According to Augustine, the Manichees taught that there was a harmonious Kingdom of Light which was composed of all things good opposed to which was a Kingdom of Darkness, filled with all things pernicious.⁸¹ This latter Kingdom suffered from an inherent and unbridled passion which drove it to lust after and then attack the Kingdom of Light. In this cosmic struggle, Dark and Light intermingled and as a result the world was brought into existence.⁸² The first human beings in this mingled world were the offspring of demons, their bodies being composed of evil material which had trapped a particle of good Light within.⁸³ Light had also become trapped in other parts of the world, particularly, in fruit.⁸⁴ Jesus (perhaps one of several in the Manichean story) came to the first man and woman to

⁸¹ See *mor.* 1.10, 2.2; *vera rel.* 49.96; *haer.* 46; *c. Faust.* 21.1. The concern in this section is not so much with what the historical Manichees actually believed, but what Augustine says they believed. There has been a flurry of Manichean scholarship in the past twenty years, some of which has challenged Augustine's account of the Manichees. While important, this is not the concern of this dissertation; rather, the focus is on how Augustine understood the role of creation in the Manichean problem. For an account of Manichean beliefs, see Samuel N.C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 7-32; Johannes Van Oort, Otto Wermelinger, and Gregor Wurst, *Augustine and Manichaeism in the Latin West* (Leiden & Boston, MA: Brill, 2001); Volker Henning Drecoll and Mirjam Kudella, *Augustin und der Manichäismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Nicholas J. Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism: An Ancient Faith Revisited* (London: T&T Clark, 2011). For another good, short introduction to the Manichees, see Michel Tardieu, *Manichaeism*, trans. Malcolm DeBevoise (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009). For a revisionist interpretation from a Manichean perspective, see Jason BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma*, Vol. 1: *Conversion and Apostasy, 373-388 C.E.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). For a quick reference guide to where different Manichean beliefs are discussed in Augustine's work, see Appendix I in John P. Maher, "Saint Augustine and Manichean Cosmogony," *Augustinian Studies* 10 (1979): 102-3. On the reliability of Augustine's reporting of Manichean beliefs, Lieu says, "Surprisingly, these [newly discovered Egyptian manuscripts of Manichean] texts have shown that some of the polemicists, especially Augustine and Theodore bar Koni, have been remarkably accurate in their presentation of Mani's teaching" (10). BeDuhn and Baker-Brian have challenged this in important respects.

⁸² See *nat. b.* 44-44; *mor.* 2.21.

⁸³ See *c. Faust.* 2.3-4, 21.14; *mor.* 2.19; *haer.* 46; *nat. b.* 46-47.

⁸⁴ See *conf.* 3.10.18.

bring them the knowledge of good and evil. Augustine says that although the Manicheans accepted some of the New Testament witness to the life of Christ, they taught that his passion and death were only apparent; Jesus only seemed to suffer on the cross and did so in order to reveal that there is saving fruit on every tree.⁸⁵ Jesus also appeared to Mani, revealing the whole saving history as well as the knowledge of how to free the entrapped Light.⁸⁶ Mani was to divide his followers into Elect and Hearers in order to perpetuate a system of ritual eating which would liberate the Light so that it could return to the sun and moon, the repositories of the liberated Light.⁸⁷ Augustine recounts that the Manicheans claimed that Jesus sent Mani as the promised Paraclete⁸⁸ and also that Mani asserted that this revelation was not allegorical in any way, but the literal truth.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ See *c. ep. Man.* 8.9; *c. Faust.* 20.2, 33.7.

⁸⁶ See *c. ep. Man.* 5.6-8.9; *c. Faust.* 13.4; *haer.* 46; *util. cred.* 3.7.

⁸⁷ See *conf.* 3.6.10; *haer.* 46; *nat. b.* 44.

⁸⁸ See *conf.* 5.5.8.

⁸⁹ See *Aug. conf.* 5.3.6. It is often a source of wonder and consternation, both now and in the fifth century, that someone as intelligent as Augustine could be hoodwinked into spending nine years with the Manicheans and their “fabulous tales.” Clearly, one of the immediate reasons was his desire for a rational, Christian way to achieve the goal he saw in the *Hortensius* (Augustine discusses some other reasons in *duab. an.* 9.11 and the limits of his adherence to their teachings in *beat. vita* 1.4). The Manichees denigrated ecclesial authority, but still had the name of Christ and promised the truth through reason. Augustine was likely attracted to their seeming austerity in fasting and continence as well as their enthusiasm in religious matters. He was likely drawn to their deep sense of friendship and devotion to one another (see the moving description of friendship in *conf.* 4.8.13; cf. *duab. an.* 9.11). Perhaps there was even a bit of a perverse thrill in being a part of a heretical and, if not formally illegal, then at least imperially discouraged and occasionally persecuted movement (see, for example, *Theodosian Code*, 16.5.36 and *Novels of Valentinian*, 18.1-4 in *The Theodosian Code*, trans. Clyde Pharr (Clark, New Jersey: Law Book Exchange, 2001); also, Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 174). The rebellion against his mother, the state, and the Church—and therefore God—persists in his affair with the Manichees.

From his other anti-Manichean works, it is clear that Augustine was intimately familiar with the details of the Manichean myths, but, interestingly, he does not avail himself of these details in the *Confessions*.⁹⁰ Rather, he distills the Manichean myth into its metaphysical principles and attendant moral consequences, thereby rendering Manichaeism a plausible, alternative vision of God and the world. Augustine's approach in the *Confessions* to his Manichean past, then, suggests another reason why he found the Manichees attractive: they offered a persuasive account of creation.

Augustine relates how when he first met the Manichees, he was seduced by their questions and criticisms of Scripture and the Catholic faith. Lieu suggests that practice of Manichean missionaries and debaters was not to present their own positive doctrine at first, but to criticize the beliefs of others.⁹¹ And, when arguing with Catholics, creation was the Manichean way of shaking things up. Augustine says that the first things the Manichees asked about were evil in the world, the corporeality of God, morality, and mediation.⁹² If,

⁹⁰ This fact seems to undercut the oft heard claim that the *Confessions* is yet another work of apologetics against the Manichees. If it were so, one would expect to hear much more of these damaging tales, as one does in his other anti-Manichean polemical works, *mor.*, *haer.*, *c. Faust.*, *nat. b.*, *Gn. adv. Man.*, etc. In the *Confessions*, Augustine's intention toward and in relation to the Manichees is more protreptical, that is, he is more interested in converting them than refuting them. See Kotzé, *Communicative Purpose*, 3.

⁹¹ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 152-68.

⁹² *Aug. conf.* 3.7.12: "For I did not know that Other, which truly is, and I was, as it were, subtly moved so that I endorsed these foolish deceivers, when they sought of me whence evil, and whether God is confined by a corporeal form and has hair and nails, and whether they are to be judged just who had many wives at the same time and killed men and offered sacrifice of animals" (*nesciebam enim aliud vere quod est, et quasi acutule movebar ut suffragarer stultis deceptoribus, cum a me quaerent unde malum, et utrum forma corporea deus finiretur et haberet capillos et ungues, et utrum iusti existimandi essent qui haberent uxores multas simul et occiderent homines et sacrificarent de animalibus*).

they would ask, a good God created the world, where does evil come from?⁹³ Is God a body as Genesis suggests with its notion that man is created in the “image of God”? Should one emulate the way of life this God encourages in the Old Testament, where men are polygamous murderers and fleshy animals serve as mediators between God and man? These are the first questions the Manichees put to Augustine and they resonated with the struggles of the young man. And these questions are, at root, questions about creation. It is no accident, then, that after his conversion, Augustine’s first exegetical work is not only on the creation account in Genesis, but also written against the Manichees.⁹⁴

The Manichees offered Augustine not only questions, but plausible answers: evil does not come from God, but from a separate evil substance which has invaded the good and taken it captive. God is not limited to a human shape, but is a “luminous and immense body” (*corpus lucidum et immensum*), while the human soul is a particle of God’s body (*frustum de illo corpore*) which is trapped in an evil material body.⁹⁵ Man’s essentially good nature is, then, under attack by the evil substance. The Old Testament is objectionable, the New Testament has been corrupted by Judaizers,⁹⁶ and the truth, knowable by reason without faith, has been given only to Mani, who taught that the Elect mediate between God and

⁹³ Titus of Bostra, the fourth century bishop and polemicist against the Manicheans, says that the Manichean missionaries were in the habit of asking, “Whence evil if it is not derived from some sort of principle?” (Titus Bostra, *adv. Manich.* 2.4-24).

⁹⁴ This is, of course, Augustine’s *De Genesi adversus Manicheos*, written in 388-89.

⁹⁵ *conf.* 4.16.31.

⁹⁶ *conf.* 5.11.21.

man.⁹⁷ These answers had an air of plausibility and they directly addressed Augustine's intellectual and moral struggles.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine argues that these answers also demonstrate a profound confusion about creation. Manichean theology, he says, blurs the distinction between God and the world, between Creator and his creation, and in blurring the distinction, Augustine shows how they confuse the relationship as well. Augustine shows how the Manichees, starting from the notion of a co-eternal Light and Darkness, develop a consistent vision of God, the world, and human beings, as well as how humans, as a part of the world, relate to God, the world, and other humans.

1. The Manichean View of God

Augustine says that the Manichean idea of two eternal principles puts them in the position of claiming there are two highest beings, in a sense, two Gods.⁹⁸ These two are not One God like the Father and the Son in the Catholic understanding. The contrast is illuminating and goes right to the heart of how Augustine later understands their error about creation. For the Manichees, the eternal Light extends to the North, West, and East, while the eternal Darkness extends South. Each is infinite, but bounded by the other where they meet.⁹⁹ This directional understanding of God (meant to be taken literally) comes about

⁹⁷ *conf.* 4.1.1. See also Doull, "Augustinian Trinitarianism," 132.

⁹⁸ *Aug. mor.* 1.10.16. J. Kevin Coyle thinks Augustine gets the Manicheans wrong on this point ("What Did Augustine Know about Manichaeism When He Wrote His Two Treatises *De moribus*?" in *Augustine and Manichaeism in the Latin West*, 47).

⁹⁹ See *Aug. c. ep. Man.* 19.21-22.24.

because God is understood in terms of things in the world. These two principles are corporeal and so they *have* extension and cannot interpenetrate without admixture and corruption. The Manichees, and the young Augustine with them, cannot conceive of a spiritual substance. “When I wanted to think about my God, I did not know how to think about him except as a corporeal mass (for it seemed to me that whatever was not such was not at all); this was the greatest and almost sole cause of my inevitable error” (*et quoniam cum de deo meo cogitare vellem, cogitare nisi moles corporum non noveram (neque enim videbatur mihi esse quicquam quod tale non esset), ea maxima et prope sola causa erat inevitabilis erroris mei*).¹⁰⁰ Augustine will later contrast this to the Catholic understanding of the Trinity who though three persons is only one God. This understanding arises because God is not a part of the world and so not in conflict with any other part of the world. The being of God takes on a new sense which enables there to be threeness and oneness without contradiction. The Manichees, as Augustine understands them, can only theologize within the horizon of the world and so are bound to a fundamental ditheism.¹⁰¹

That the Manichees understood God (or the Gods) as a part of the world is confirmed for Augustine when they speak about God *and* the world. For the Manichees, God and the world make up the whole of the cosmos, the whole of Manichean reality. The divine elements are the highest things *in the universe*, but they are still considered a part of the universe. God does not transcend the world, nor is he distinct from it in any essential way.

¹⁰⁰ *conf.* 5.10.19.

¹⁰¹ See *c. Faust.* 21.1ff.

Rather, God is “reduced” to another being in the world who is divided among it and, along with the co-eternal Darkness, *is the very stuff* that makes up the world.¹⁰² This stuff is arranged into the world by yet another divine being, a Demiurge, and so Augustine imputes another error to the Manichees, namely, that the one good God is not the creator of matter and form.¹⁰³ Though, perhaps one cannot even make a distinction between divine and non-divine in the Manichean system: since God, both Good and Evil, are in some way identical to the world, which *is* the admixture of them, all things are, in some sense, divine.

Augustine later argues that contained within this misunderstanding is another error about God, namely, he is corruptible. Though the Manichees denied they thought this, Augustine relates that they had no intelligent response to Nebridius’ famous question to them about what would happen to the Kingdom of Darkness if the Kingdom of Light had refused to fight.¹⁰⁴ If the Light could be corrupted, then they have revealed their contempt for God. If he was incorruptible, then there is no reason to fight and their whole myth falls apart. Not only does the Manichean understanding of God admit that God is corruptible, but, Augustine argues, that God has already been corrupted.¹⁰⁵ Augustine thinks that this error inevitably arises from the inability to conceive of God as transcendent and therefore distinct from the world. The Manichees understand God like other things in the world that have accidents which wax and wane in a substance.

¹⁰² *Gn. adv. Man.* 2.15.36.

¹⁰³ *conf.* 13.30.45.

¹⁰⁴ *conf.* 7.2.3.

¹⁰⁵ See *Gn. adv. Man.* 2.11.21.

2. The Manichean View of the World

From the Manichean understanding of God springs their understanding of the nature and order of the world. Augustine says, “They spoke false things, not only about You, who are truly truth, but even about the elements of this world, Your creation” (*sed falsa loquebantur, non de te tantum, qui vere veritas es, sed etiam de istis elementis huius mundi, creatura tua*).¹⁰⁶ Two of these “false things” have already been noted, namely, that God and the world are essentially the same substance and that the world is not the good creation of God, but the result of a Demiurge manipulating tainted Light. These errors, Augustine argues, beget other errors. The Manichees condemned parts of creation, in particular, those parts which displeased them—like scorpions and mice—which they took as evidence of a substantial evil.¹⁰⁷ When Augustine comes to the Catholic understanding of creation, this displeasure of creation is tantamount to blasphemy since all creation is God’s creation from nothing and so must be understood as his good gift. All things have their place in the *ordo* of God, but for the Manichees the displeasing things are not from the good God.

There are two last errors about the universe which Augustine thinks the Manichean understanding of creation proffers. First, Mani, an amateur astrologer, was a poor observer of the created world and his books were filled with factual errors about the stars. The fact that the pagan philosophers observed the stars much more accurately is one factor which

¹⁰⁶ *conf.* 3.6.10.

¹⁰⁷ *mor.* 2.8.11; *conf.* 7.13.19.

helped Augustine separate from the sect.¹⁰⁸ Second, Augustine argues that the Manichean myth leads to a perverted understanding of the hierarchy of being. Since they held the sun and the moon to be the storehouses of divine Light, these visible things were the highest beings in the world, the places where God was most highly concentrated and where the truth was to be found.¹⁰⁹ Clearly, they conflated God and a creature by naming the sun and moon God. But more than this, they also ignored “Your spiritual works which are prior to those corporeal ones, however bright and heavenly they are” (*priora enim spiritualia opera tua quam ista corporea, quamvis lucida et caelestia*).¹¹⁰ This is because, for the Manichees and for the young Augustine, “reality is synonymous with corporality.”¹¹¹

3. The Manichean View of the Human Being

The Manichean view of God (or the Gods) and the created world has already shown the elements of what Augustine will later find problematic with their anthropology. The human soul is considered either a “certain portion or member of God” (*quaedam portio tua et membrum tuum*) or the “offspring of God’s substance” (*proles de ipsa substantia tua*) which is under attack from evil material elements—the human body being the chief example—and which were not created by the good God.¹¹² For the Manichees, each person is “a

¹⁰⁸ *conf.* 3.6.10, 5.5.8, 5.14.25.

¹⁰⁹ See *conf.* 3.6.10; *haer.* 46; *nat. b.* 44.

¹¹⁰ *conf.* 3.6.10.

¹¹¹ Guardini, *Conversion*, 184.

¹¹² *Aug. conf.* 7.2.3; cf. *Gn. adv. Man.* 2.11.21.

microcosm, an exact miniature of the universe (macrocosm) since both possessed a mixture of Light and Matter.”¹¹³ In essence, the human soul is identical with the eternal Light and his body is identical with evil Matter: each person contains the two eternal principles within himself. On this understanding, the human being represents not only the whole cosmos, but *the whole of any reality whatsoever*. For the mature Augustine, each person is a microcosm as well, but in a different sense. He contains within him a spiritual, an animate, and a corporeal element which makes him a mini-universe, uniting the highest and the lowest *in creation*.¹¹⁴ The cosmos for Augustine is distinct from the God who created it: God is not a part of the microcosm that is the human person, but the ontologically distinct Creator of him. For the Manichee, though, there is an identity between the elements which compose each person and the elements which compose the co-eternal principles, that is, there is no ontological distinction between God and man.

Augustine argues that this leads to inevitable moral problems. First, it leads to a “dreadful arrogance” (*horrenda arrogantia*) because “they want to be Light, not in the Lord but in themselves, by supposing that the nature of the soul is what God is” (*illi enim dum volunt esse lux, non in domino sed in se ipsis, putando animae naturam hoc esse quod deus est*).¹¹⁵ In short, Augustine thinks that Manichean anthropology amounts to a denial that

¹¹³ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 21.

¹¹⁴ See *div. qu.* 67.5. Augustine’s understanding of the human being as microcosm will be important for his understanding of man’s participation in the redemption of all creation.

¹¹⁵ *Aug. conf.* 8.10.22; cf. 4.15.26: “What more proud than that I asserted, with remarkable madness, that I was naturally that which You are” (*quid autem superbius quam ut adsererem mira dementia me id esse naturaliter quod tu es*)? Note: Augustine never criticizes the Platonists this way.

human beings are created, a denial of the most fundamental truth of what it means to be human. It denies that God is creator and so the relationship between God and man is muddied because they cannot be totally distinguished. The Manichean cosmology leads to an anthropology which overthrows the Creator-creation distinction, effectively claiming that human beings are “self-created.” This is the very definition of pride for Augustine. The most egregious example of this, Augustine says, is Mani who claimed that the Holy Spirit was “personally in him with full authority” (*auctoritate plenaria personaliter in se*).¹¹⁶

4. Manichean Metaphysics and Morals

It is a remarkable feature of the Manichean system how closely metaphysics and morals are connected. Starting from the two eternal principles of Good and Evil, the Manichees understood and interpreted their moral life accordingly. According to Augustine, the Manichean system led to the conclusion that humans are not moral agents, but victims of a cosmic struggle “between good and evil whose basis lies before and beyond the creation of the world, of a divided will which is only the instantiation, the battlefield of that struggle, of an individual who has no permanent significance.”¹¹⁷ For the Manichees, “the genuinely ethical is dissolved in the cosmic; evil simply becomes part of world happening, thus mitigating personal responsibility for it.”¹¹⁸ For the mature Augustine, the metaphysical establishes what the moral is, while the moral maintains the metaphysical as what it should

¹¹⁶ *conf.* 5.5.8.

¹¹⁷ Crosson, “Religion and Faith in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” 165.

¹¹⁸ Guardini, *Conversion*, 170.

be and brings it to fulfillment. For the Manichees, in Augustine's account of them, the moral is dissolved into the metaphysical, and so undermines moral responsibility. Augustine felt this acutely. He wrestled with vice, but understood himself to be the victim of an evil principle which waged war on his essentially good self. "Sin, from the Manichean point of view, is not an act of one's own volition, but a temporary loss of consciousness by the soul."¹¹⁹ Under the influence of the Manichees, Augustine understood his divided will not as the result of the self-fracturing of sin, but rather as evidence of two natures, good and evil, in his one person which were ever in conflict.¹²⁰ On this view, Augustine was not responsible for the problems from which he suffered.

Though the Manichees discouraged consulting astrologers, Augustine consulted them regularly and even, for a time, aspired to be one. Perhaps he did so as a response to the Manichean understanding of moral agency. The astrologers replaced God's providence with a mathematical knowledge of the stars, a reduction of providence to forces in the world. For those, like the Manichean Augustine, whose horizon is what can be sensed, this kind of providence can be assuring. Instead of faith in an unseen God, one can know with mathematical certainty and observe with one's own eyes, the unknown future. This would have been particularly attractive to Augustine, laboring under the notion of two eternal substances. "To say that evil is external and therefore uncontrollable, as did the Manichaeans, can leave people feeling powerless to influence their fate or luck. Astrology

¹¹⁹ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 25. For an alternative interpretation of the Manichean view of volition, see Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 116-18.

¹²⁰ Aug. *conf.* 8.10.22.

gives at least some premonition of the next onslaught of evil.”¹²¹ It would have offered a way to cope with the cosmic evil which was part of human being.

According to Augustine, Manichean metaphysics has very concrete effects on how the Manichees—and the Manichean Augustine—make their way in the world. If the goal of the Manichean system is the liberation of Light, then anything that works against that goal is problematic. Hence, procreation is a problem. Though the Manichees do not disparage marriage or mistresses, they condemn the further entanglement of the Light in matter and encourage contraceptive measures.¹²² This teaching seems to have had a direct bearing on Augustine’s life: he took a concubine in 372, Adeodatus was born in 373, and he joined the Manichees that same year. Augustine had no more children after this year. Perhaps it was a prudential move on his part, knowing that he would have to dismiss his mistress at some point, but given his embrace of Manichean dualism, it seems likely that their influence guided his course here.

Augustine also charges the Manichees with turning around the double commandment to love God and neighbor. Certainly, the Manichees encouraged their followers to love the good God, but the love of neighbor was muddled by their muddled metaphysics. Since God was trapped in the fruits of the earth and was liberated by the eating of the Elect, it was forbidden to give these foods to another person, even a starving one. “And I, a great wretch,

¹²¹ Lieu, *Manichaeism and the Later Roman Empire*, 177. For more on astrology, see H.G. Schipper, “Melothesia: A Chapter of Manichean Astrology in the West,” in *Augustine and Manichaeism in the Latin West*, 195-204.

¹²² See Aug. *mor.* 2.18.65-66; *c. Faust.* 22.84.

believed that it was better to be merciful to the fruits of the earth than to men for whose sake they were brought forth. For if someone who was not a Manichean was hungry and asked for those fruits, it would have seemed like damning them to a capital punishment if they were given to him” (*et credidi miser magis esse misericordiam praestandam fructibus terrae quam hominibus propter quos nascerentur. si quis enim esuriens peteret qui manichaeus non esset, quasi capitali supplicio damnanda buccella videretur si ei daretur*).¹²³ For Augustine, the wrong understanding of God leads, inevitably, to the wrong understanding about the world and one’s neighbor, and perverts the relationship toward them by misunderstanding their true value.

5. The Manichean View of Salvation

Augustine argues that not only is the order of creation inverted in the Manichean view, but the order of salvation as well. For the Manichees, human beings are God trapped in matter and it is their salvific task to liberate God from his confinement. Augustine chides the Manichees for styling themselves as the “Saviors of God” (*salvatores Dei*).¹²⁴ Salvation comes from releasing the Light in the world and in human beings through participation in the dietary regimen of the Elect, whose ritual masticating released the entrapped Light so it could return to the sun and moon.¹²⁵ Their meals were a kind of “sacrament,” a pseudo-Eucharist, which did not involve a personal transformation into God, but rather an effort to help God go

¹²³ *conf.* 3.10.18.

¹²⁴ *en Ps.* 140.12. See BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichean Dilemma*, 83ff for a sympathetic Manichean perspective.

¹²⁵ *Aug. conf.* 3.6.10.

home.¹²⁶ In Augustine's understanding of his one time religion, creation, salvation, and the sacraments—the whole saving economy—is turned around by the Manichees. God does not save people from their sins (for there is no sin); rather, human beings save God from confinement and thereby save themselves.¹²⁷

Augustine relates how blurring Creator and creation inevitably led to an error, or errors, about Christ. The Manichees spoke of a Jesus with three separate identities, “which were not always kept distinct by the Manichaeans in controversies, although they were clearly discernible in the genuine writings of the sect.”¹²⁸ There was Jesus the Luminous who was a kind of “guardian angel,” bringing gnosis to Adam and Man; a “docetic” Jesus the Messiah, who was divine but appeared human, adopted at his baptism rather than born of the virgin, and appeared to undergo the passion; and the highly symbolic Suffering Jesus, whose “*mystica crucifixio* was present in every tree, herb, fruit, vegetable and even stones and the soil.”¹²⁹ Augustine comments on his own understanding of Christ while a Manichee:

And our Savior himself, Your Only-begotten, I supposed as protracted from the mass of your luminous stuff for our salvation, so that I would not believe anything about him except what I, in vanity, was able to imagine. I judged that nature such as his

¹²⁶ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 28; cf. *Aug. haer.* 46.22-30.

¹²⁷ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 15-17 tells a somewhat complex part of the Manichean revelation (which was too involved to summarize above) in which one of the emanations, Primal Man (who was the bait for demons on the Father's fishhook) answers the call of the Living Spirit. Subsequently, this call and answer become hypostasized as deities. The whole event becomes “an act of self-redemption which is the prototype of all human salvation” (16). Augustine does not relate this part of the myth in the *Confessions*, but it does not much matter, since, for Augustine, this proto-Pelagian arrogance is contained in the claim to be identical with the Light.

¹²⁸ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 161.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* See BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichean Dilemma*, 50, 88 and Baker-Brian, *Manicheism*, 112-13, for a criticism of this understanding of the Manichean Jesus.

could not be born from the virgin Mary, unless mingled with flesh. I did not see how what I pictured for myself could be mingled and not polluted. I feared to believe him born in the flesh, lest I was compelled to believe him polluted by the flesh.

*ipsumque salvatorem nostrum, unigenitum tuum, tamquam de massa lucidissimae molis tuae porrectum ad nostram salutem ita putabam, ut aliud de illo non crederem nisi quod possem vanitate imaginari. talem itaque naturam eius nasci non posse de Maria virgine arbitrabar, nisi carni concerneretur. concerni autem et non inquinari non videbam, quod mihi tale figurabam. metuebam itaque credere in carne natum, ne credere cogerer ex carne inquinatum.*¹³⁰

Augustine was clearly familiar with the different strands of Manichean teaching on Christ and he shows how their notions about creation determine their notions about Christ. For the Manichean Augustine, the horizon of being is the visible world. He can, then, only think in terms of what he can picture with his imagination, what he could, if permitted, experience with his senses. Thus, Christ was, what he will later call, a *phantasma*. This word has a dual sense. On the one hand, Augustine means that he thought that Christ did not have a real body and so only *appeared* to be human and suffer. But this word is also used to denote figments of one's imagination: Augustine will later understand that the Manichean Christ was not the image in his memory of something he had seen, but a fabricated projection of his own imagination.¹³¹ Augustine the Manichee understood God as a "mass" and Christ as a part or emanation from that mass. When Christ entered history to save humankind, he could not, on the Manichean understanding, become incarnate, since God and man compete within the same order of causes; they are both beings in the world, so they cannot be united without being mingled or one canceling out the other. Moreover, on the Manichean view of God and

¹³⁰ Aug. *conf.* 5.10.20.

¹³¹ *conf.* 5.9.16.

the world, the Incarnation could in no way be the solution, but is the very problem itself: God trapped in matter. The only way for the Manichean Augustine to preserve the integrity of God is to adopt a form of “docetism.”¹³² At the time, Augustine understood this as a movement of piety.

Because matter is evil and not compatible with the good God and Christ, there is no redemption of the flesh for the Manichee. In Augustine’s mature thought, it is important that both material and spiritual creation underwent a primordial conversion to God. For him, this means that both the human body and soul are destined for redemption, for a final conversion and re-formation: this is the meaning of the doctrine of the resurrection. For the Manichees, however, salvation means the liberation of the Light from the slavery of matter. For the Manichees, then, salvation means not the redemption of body and soul, but the separation of these incongruous elements and thus the dissolution of the human being.¹³³ There is no personal identity which is redeemed, but the composite elements of the cosmos are resolved back to their co-eternal places of origin.¹³⁴

B. Excursus: Ascent, in General

During his time as a Manichee, Augustine wrote his first book, *De Pulchro et Apto*, and made his first recorded attempt at ascending to God. Before looking at Augustine’s

¹³² See *conf.* 5.10.20.

¹³³ Doull, “Augustinian Trinitarianism,” 132.

¹³⁴ Salvation, though, looks different for the Elect and Hearers: “At death, the soul of the Elect returns direct to the Kingdom of Light and is received with great honour. The soul of the Hearer, however, has to remain on earth and by a series of reincarnations in the luminous bodies of fruits and finally in the body of the Elect it too will return to the Kingdom of Light” (Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 29).

discussion of his ascent there, it will be worthwhile to consider the importance and pattern of ascent in general. In the *Confessions*, the topic of ascent arises for the first time in the immediate context of the Incarnation and how it is the path to attain God: only by the Word's descending are humans able to ascend to God. But this discussion is in the broader context of the transition from Augustine's consideration of the fleetingness of time and created being after the death of his friend to the writing of *De Pulchro et Apto*.¹³⁵ What will enable human beings to rise above their created limitations?

Augustine describes three phases in his attempts to ascend to God: first, under the influence of the Manichees (Book 4); second, as an active catechumen in the Catholic Church reading the Platonists (Book 7); and third, after he is baptized and in the light of the Catholic faith (Books 9, 10, and 11-13).¹³⁶ Though there are differences in these various attempts, each one contains a similar threefold pattern: first, a consideration of the beauty of the world; second, a withdrawal from the world into oneself; and lastly, a movement beyond the self to God.¹³⁷ The first two parts pertain to creation, the material and spiritual, outer to inner, while the third part (presumably) goes beyond creation to the Creator himself.

Augustine says that created things can lead to their Creator because they bespeak their own createdness and so urge their beholders to move beyond them to God. As Augustine often reminds his reader in these ascensional contexts, "the invisible things of God

¹³⁵ Aug. *conf.* 4.12.19.

¹³⁶ The ascent of Book 7 is treated in this chapter below and the ascent of Book 9 in Chapter Three.

¹³⁷ Augustine gives a concise summary of this progression in *conf.* 7.17.23.

are understood through the things that are made” (*invisibilia dei per ea quae facta sunt intellecta*).¹³⁸ To move beyond creation to the Creator, reason must properly judge the reports of the senses,¹³⁹ that is, it must properly perceive form and beauty (or their equivalent: number or species).¹⁴⁰ When Augustine seeks for God in creation (cf. *interrogatio mea intentio mea*), the form of created things points him beyond creation to the One who made it (cf. *et responsio eorum species eorum*).¹⁴¹ The fact that created things *have* form, rather than *are* Form means that they are created, that is, they have their being and unity from Another. This means that for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, creation unfailing tells them, “We are not your God! Seek above us” (*non sumus deus tuus; quaere super nos*)!¹⁴² The forms of created things can lead one up to the Form without form who gives form to all things.

The forms of things, then, have a pedagogical, even “sacramental,” function in leading the wayward soul back to God. Ladner suggests,

¹³⁸ Rom. 1:20. This verse (with slight variation) occurs six times in the Aug. *conf.*: 7.10.16; 2x in 7.17.23; 7.20.26; 10.6.10; 13.21.31. The first five occur in ascensional schemes, while the last occurs in reference to the taming of the passion of curiosity so that the mind rightly orders creation to the Creator. Interestingly, and perhaps significantly, the verse does not occur in the ascent in Book 9. Verses from Rom. 1:17-26 occur numerous times throughout the *Confessions*.

¹³⁹ *conf.* 10.6.10 and 13.21.31.

¹⁴⁰ In his first failed attempt at ascent, Augustine focuses on beauty about which he says, “But I did not see yet that the hinge of this question was in Your art” (*sed tantae rei cardinem in arte tua nondum videbam*) (*conf.* 4.15.27). *Ars* here can have the double meaning of the Word and the work, that is, the Art through which God created and the work of art which He created.

¹⁴¹ *conf.* 10.6.9.

¹⁴² *conf.* 10.6.9; cf. 9.10.25.

The forms of things constitute a sort of vindication of the sensible material aspects of the created world and can help in converting man, in reforming him toward God. When man becomes involved in sensible and sensual things, he can be led beyond them by their aesthetic and intelligible forms. This, in fact, happened in the life of St. Augustine himself, as almost every page of his *Confessions* demonstrates.¹⁴³

The forms of things show that creation is good and can lead to God for “from corporal and temporal things we may grasp the eternal and spiritual” (*de corporalibus temporalibus que rebus aeterna et spiritalia capiamus*).¹⁴⁴ The forms play a providential part in re-forming fallen humanity after the Form who made them. They can heal the mind so that man can be “renewed unto the knowledge of God, according to the image of his Creator.”¹⁴⁵

1. A Failed Ascent: The Weight of Two Substances

Augustine’s *De Pulchro et Apto*, though lost now, seems to have been a philosophical exercise in ascending to God. The attempt fails, Augustine says, and does so because of his deep misunderstanding of creation. Augustine begins with the beauty of bodily forms and properly distinguishes the beautiful (which is so by itself alone) and the fitting (which is so because it is adapted to something else).¹⁴⁶ From here, he “ascends” to the mind which he considers the “highest and unchangeable good” (*summum atque incommutabile bonum*).¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Ladner, *Idea of Reform*, 185. Carol Harrison concurs: “Every contact with the beauty of the world was therefore significant, either confirming him in being or, if wrongly approached and used, effecting his demise into non-being” (*Rethinking*, 94); cf. *Aug. lib. arb.* 3.7.21.

¹⁴⁴ *Aug. doc. Chr.* 1.4.4.; this is Augustine’s gloss on Rom. 1:20.

¹⁴⁵ See Eph. 4:23-34, Col. 3:10; *Aug. conf.* 13.22.32-23.33.

¹⁴⁶ *Aug. conf.* 4.15.24.

¹⁴⁷ *conf.* 4.15.24.

Although the movement from what he sees to that with which he sees seems appropriate, Augustine encounters several problems already. First, because Augustine considers the spiritual and material to be varying degrees of the same substance, the mind is only a more refined material than the body. By turning inward, Augustine does not ascend to the higher, spiritual creation, but moves laterally from body to body. He then tries to ascend from soul toward God which, in this treatise, takes the form of a discussion of the monad and dyad, a Pythagorean interpretation of the Manichean myth of the two kingdoms.¹⁴⁸ Here, he encounters more difficulties: both God and evil are material substances and, since his mind is the highest good, he finds that he is the same substance as God.¹⁴⁹ He cannot ascend from mind to God because he identifies his mind with God, both of which are corporeal. Once again, there is not ascent, but only a further mental refining of material substance. The Manichean-influenced ascent to God is, for Augustine, doomed from the start for “the false opinion which I held about spiritual things did not permit me to discern the truth” (*non me sinebat falsa opinio quam de spiritalibus habebam verum cernere*).¹⁵⁰ He cannot ascend from creation to Creator because creation and Creator are, for the Manichean Augustine, essentially the same.

¹⁴⁸ See O'Donnell, *Confessions*, ad loc. 4.15.24.

¹⁴⁹ Aug. *conf.* 4.15.26.

¹⁵⁰ *conf.* 4.15.24.

C. Aristotle

Augustine read Aristotle's *Categories* in his twentieth year, a few months after he became a Manichee.¹⁵¹ The *Categories* is the first of Aristotle's six works on logic which were meant to serve as the tools for doing philosophy. It is a careful discussion of substance and accidents, or subjects and predicaments—the thing spoken about and the things which are said about it. Augustine read this difficult treatise and, he says, understood it without difficulty. Perhaps it did not have a great influence on him when he first read it, but it is clear that he returned to it and used it to try to understand God.

What did this profit me, when it even hindered me, since I supposed that whatever is at all is understood in these ten predicaments? I tried to understand You, my God, most wonderfully simple and unchangeable, as if even You were a subject in relation to Your greatness and beauty, so that they were in You as in a subject, as if in a body.

*quid hoc mihi proderat, quando et oberat, cum etiam te, deus meus, mirabiliter simplicem atque incommutabilem, illis decem praedicamentis putans quidquid esset omnino comprehensum, sic intellegere conarer, quasi et tu subiectus esses magnitudini tuae aut pulchritudini, ut illa essent in te quasi in subiecto sicut in corpore.*¹⁵²

Augustine uses the categories of creation to try to understand the Creator and he is drawn to doing so because he is still laboring under the Manichean notion of two substances.

Immediately preceding his discussion of Aristotle, he discusses his evangelical efforts as a Manichee. He was, he says, used to arguing that God's "unchangeable substance was forced to err" (*incommutabilem tuam substantiam coactam errare*) under the attack of substantial

¹⁵¹ Interestingly, Augustine does not mention this literary endeavor until the end of Book 4 when discussing the struggles of his twenty-sixth year. See Crosson, "Structure and Meaning," 30 for a suggested meaning of this.

¹⁵² Aug. *conf.* 4.16.29.

evil.¹⁵³ This, coupled with the image of God as a “luminous body,”¹⁵⁴ makes Aristotle an articulate spokesman for the being of God. Augustine imagines God’s substance and equally imagines the qualities which inhere in it, some of which are forced to change while others are not.¹⁵⁵

Looking back, Augustine thinks that Aristotle’s categories are helpful for thinking about things in the world since the distinction between substance and accident usefully and accurately distinguishes the abiding identity of a creature from its changeable features. But, the Christian understanding of creation opens up a new sense of the divine so that God transcends the usual categories of being. Augustine already points to this different understanding of God when, in the passage quoted above, he invokes God as “wonderfully simple and unchangeable.” Looking back, Augustine sees how Aristotle needs to be modified in order to speak fittingly of God: God does not *have* a substance in which accidents inhere; rather substance and accidents are one and the same in God’s utterly simple and unchangeable Self. “Your greatness and Your beauty”—in a word, all of God’s attributes—“are You Yourself” (*tua magnitudo et tua pulchritudo tu ipse sis*).¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ *conf.* 4.15.26.

¹⁵⁴ *conf.* 4.16.31.

¹⁵⁵ See Crosson, “Book Five,” 77, for a brief but helpful treatment of these difficulties.

¹⁵⁶ *Aug. conf.* 4.16.29; cf. 7.4.6: “For God’s will and power is God himself” (*voluntas enim et potentia dei deus ipse est*).

IV. Stage Three: God Through Infinite Spaces

After his disappointing meeting with Faustus (year 383), Augustine lingers with the Manichees but resolves to find another path. In a mood of despair about ever finding the truth, he is drawn to the Academics, who hold true things about the structure of the world and also exercise a certain modesty before knowledge of the truth.¹⁵⁷ At the same time, they do not have the saving name of Christ and so Augustine returns to the catechumenate into which he had been initiated as an infant. Under the influence of Ambrose's preaching, some of his Manichean prejudices against the Church begin to dissipate.¹⁵⁸ Still, Augustine retains certain aspects of his previous understanding about God and the world, which are, however, modified under the influence of the Academics and the efforts of his own imagination. This skeptical period is dominated by the notion that God is a materially infinite being spread throughout all space.¹⁵⁹ As a Manichee, Augustine thought that the divine Good and Evil principles were divided into different places, but in this next phase of his thinking, he removes substantial evil from his imagination and fills that space with (the good) God alone. "I was forced to imagine something corporeal [spread] throughout the space of places, whether infused in the world or diffused through infinity outside the world" (*corporeum*

¹⁵⁷ *conf.* 5.14.25.

¹⁵⁸ The first Manichean knot which becomes unraveled for Augustine is what it means to be made in the image of God, a difficulty related to the interpretation of the creation story of Genesis (*conf.* 6.3.4). Augustine learns from Ambrose that the Catholic Church does not teach that God is bounded by a finite corporal body.

¹⁵⁹ For the influence of the Stoics on Augustine's thought, see R.M. Bushman, "St. Augustine's Metaphysics and Stoic Doctrine," *New Scholasticism* 26 (1952): 283-304; Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 142-53; Joseph Torchia, "Stoics, Stoicism," in *ATA*, 816-20. See also Guardini's thoughtful comments on this period (*Conversion*, 209).

tamen aliquid cogitare cogerer per spatia locorum, sive infusum mundo sive etiam extra mundum per infinita diffusum).¹⁶⁰ He thinks of God as infinitely spread out through all spaces and as containing all things spatially.¹⁶¹ In other words, Augustine confuses God with space itself.

A. Skeptics

Augustine is drawn to the Academic claim that “there ought to be doubt about all things and . . . that not anything of truth was able to be comprehended by man” (*de omnibus dubitandum esse . . . nec aliquid veri ab homine comprehendi posse*).¹⁶² Later, he learnt that this radical opinion was held by only a few, that the Academics really teach that truth can be known, and that they are the true heirs of Platonism, but did not want to cast their philosophic pearls before swine.¹⁶³ Augustine does not seem to borrow any ideas about God and the world directly from the Academics, but rather an attitude of skeptical detachment toward attaining the truth. At this time, he desires to be as certain about things unseen—both bodily things not present and spiritual things (which he thought of in a corporeal way)—as he

¹⁶⁰ *conf.* 7.1.1.

¹⁶¹ See Aug. *div. qu.* 20 for a concise refutation of these two possibilities: God is not in a place nor does He function as a place for other things.

¹⁶² *conf.* 5.10.19.

¹⁶³ See *c. Acad.* 2.13.29, 3.18.41-19.42. For the Academics as the true heirs of Platonism, see also *ep.* 118.3.16. For discussion of Augustine and the Academics, see Miles Burnyeat, ed., *The Skeptical Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Bruce Bubacz, *St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge: A Contemporary Analysis* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981); John Heil, “Augustine’s Attack on Skepticism,” *Harvard Theological Review* 65 (1972): 99-116; Rist, *Ancient Thought Baptized*, 41-91.

is that seven and three equals ten.¹⁶⁴ The Academic approach to knowing seems to provide Augustine, at the least, a safeguard against being hoodwinked again by a promise of certainty.

Augustine's skepticism was not a systematic Cartesian doubt, but more of a wariness about deception and a desire for absolute knowledge. It was directed primarily at his former Manichean beliefs, in particular, the notion of two eternal substances. Augustine finds this idea untenable since it forces one to say that God is mutable.¹⁶⁵ Thus, he removes the idea of a co-eternal evil opposite of God and tries (though not successfully) to fully embrace the implications of God's incorruptibility.¹⁶⁶ He begins to entertain the idea of free will as the source of human actions and of evil, though his notion of God still hinders him. He continues to reject the idea that God is confined to a body, though he still holds God to be a corporeal mass.¹⁶⁷ Still, the possibility of free will as an answer to the problem of evil "lifted me up into Your Light" (*sublevabat enim me in lucem tuam*).¹⁶⁸

Augustine tells how he made some progress in his understanding of God and the world, but that new errors arose. In his imagination, he extends God into the space which evil used to occupy. God is no longer bounded on one side by the Kingdom of Darkness, but

¹⁶⁴ *conf.* 6.4.6. This choice of example is, perhaps, an allusion to creation. Augustine says that "the number ten signifies knowledge of the Creator and the creature" (*denarius numerus creatoris atque creaturae significat scientiam*) (*doc. Chr.* 2.16.25). See Chapter Four for more on creation and numerology.

¹⁶⁵ *conf.* 7.2.3.

¹⁶⁶ *conf.* 7.4.6.

¹⁶⁷ *conf.* 5.10.19.

¹⁶⁸ *conf.* 7.3.5.

spreads out infinitely in all directions. “Thus, I even thought that You, Life of my life, were everywhere great and that You penetrated through infinite spaces, the whole mass of the world and outside it, everywhere on all sides, through immense spaces without end” (*ita etiam te, vita vitae meae, grandem per infinita spatia undique cogitabam penetrare totam mundi molem et extra eam quaquaversum per immensa sine termine*).¹⁶⁹ For the skeptical Augustine, God was like light which permeated the air¹⁷⁰ or an infinite sea which filled up a great but finite sponge.¹⁷¹

This material understanding of God leads Augustine to other difficulties: larger parts of creation would have more God in them than the smaller parts, an elephant more than a sparrow, an inanimate mountain more than a human, made in God’s image, an idea repugnant to reason.¹⁷² Moreover, on this account, the problem of evil in which Augustine relates some progress in understanding becomes insoluble, for there is, literally, no room for evil in this vision of God and the world. Evil is not a co-eternal principle nor did God create evil, but if God is materially everywhere and fills all things, then there is no place from which evil can spring. Augustine becomes agnostic on the question, *unde malum?*

Augustine later reflected, in the *Confessions*, that these mistaken notions about God and the world all arise from an erroneous way of approaching the question, namely, trying to deduce God’s being from his experience of the world. This prevents him from properly

¹⁶⁹ *conf.* 7.1.2.

¹⁷⁰ *conf.* 7.1.2.

¹⁷¹ *conf.* 7.5.7.

¹⁷² *conf.* 7.1.2.

conceiving of a spiritual substance.¹⁷³ Augustine criticizes his Academic self for fabricating a corporeal God extended through infinite space, that is, for creating *phantasmata* in his imagination. In *De Musica*, Augustine helpfully distinguishes *phantasmata* from *phantasiae*: the latter arises from things that have been seen or experienced and retained in the memory, while the former arise from the imagination working on those *phantasiae* to create other things.¹⁷⁴ Augustine's criticism of his old opinions is instructive: his understanding of God is derived from his imagination working on sense impressions from the world. From the things in creation he has seen with his eyes, Augustine calls up the images of those things in his memory. Then, like a Demiurge, he works on this raw material of memory and makes for himself *phantasmata*, "images of images" (*imagineum imagines*),¹⁷⁵ which he calls God. It is as though he says, "Behold God and behold what God has created" (*ecce deus et ecce quae creavit deus*).¹⁷⁶ Both God and creation are things which can be "beheld" with the imagination.

When Augustine finally comes to a true understanding of God, he will marvel that he loves the real God and "not a phantom instead of You" (*non pro te phantasma*).¹⁷⁷ The remarkable thing for Augustine is that God simply *is*, that he abides, and is neither the product nor the achievement of mental efforts. Augustine comes to learn that man is not the

¹⁷³ *conf.* 5.14.25.

¹⁷⁴ *mus.* 6.11.32.

¹⁷⁵ *mus.* 6.11.32.

¹⁷⁶ *conf.* 7.5.7.

¹⁷⁷ *conf.* 7.17.23.

creator of God, but his creation who comes to know him not through deduction, but through faith in God's revelation of himself.

B. Authority and Reason

After his disappointing encounter with Faustus, Augustine is in doctrinal limbo: no longer a Manichee, but not yet a Catholic, Augustine is drawn to the seeming non-commitment of the Academics. Reflecting on the beginning of this period, Augustine says, "I despaired, O Lord of heaven and earth, Creator of all things visible and invisible, of being able to find the truth in Your Church, from which the Manichees had averted me" (*desperantem in ecclesia tua, domine caeli et terrae, creator omnium visibilium et invisibilium, posse inveniri verum, unde me illi averterant*).¹⁷⁸ The Manichees had averted Augustine from God's Church, the locus of *conversio*, and, consequently, from God himself, who had created Augustine as *converted* to him. In this passage, Augustine invokes God in terms of the first article of the Nicene Creed and despairs of the Church's authority to teach it. This deliberate combination reveals the heart of the related problems Augustine had at the time: who had the authority to teach the truth about creation?

Augustine desires certainty, but he does not know how to attain it. As a young man, he rejected the path of authority offered in his mother's faith and, as a Manichee, he failed in his attempt to follow the promised path of reason. The question of how to attain the truth, whether by authority or reason, becomes acute at this time. Looking back, the bishop later said, "by believing, I could have been healed, so that my mind's cleaner sight would be

¹⁷⁸ *conf.* 5.10.19.

directed in some mode into Your truth, abiding always and deficient of nothing” (*et sanari credendo poteram, ut purgator acies mentis meae dirigeretur aliquo modo in veritatem tuam semper manentem et ex nullo deficientem*).¹⁷⁹ The mature Augustine unflinchingly argues for the path of belief, of trusting the proper authorities, as the way of most securely coming to the truth. It will be worth reviewing Augustine’s understanding of the role of authority and reason and how these relate to creation.

For Augustine, belief heals the mind and paves the way for reason. Faith is not a substitute for reason, but a preparation for it.¹⁸⁰ Augustine is fond of quoting Isaiah, “Unless you believe, you will not understand.”¹⁸¹ Authority, by its nature, commands a certain deference which provides the occasion for reasonable belief and gives one access to the truth. Reason then has the opportunity, with the help of grace, to “catch up” to what it has assented. This order of things is written into the structure of creation itself.¹⁸² The events of history, facts about places he had not visited, stories about friends, advice from physicians, and the

¹⁷⁹ *conf.* 6.4.6.

¹⁸⁰ There are, though, important ways in which reason precedes faith. First, only rational creatures can have faith. Second, one must know or understand in some way what is to be believed. And third, one must evaluate which authority to believe. For Augustine, this last way is the most important in which reason precedes authority. Still, to make matters even a little more complex, there is a sense in which a kind of faith precedes these reasons: the natural trust humans have in the senses that they convey reliable information about the world. See Ronald H. Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine’s Theory of Knowledge* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1969), 29-30, for a fuller discussion of these nuances.

¹⁸¹ See Isaiah 7:9. Augustine was well aware that this passage was alternately translated “understand” and “continue” (the *Vetus Latina* and *Vulgate*, respectively). He offers an interpretation of the fruitful ambiguity in *doc. Chr.* 2.12.17.

¹⁸² In an early anti-Manichean work, Augustine says, “The order of nature certainly holds itself such that when we learn anything, authority precedes reason” (*naturae quidem ordo ita se habet, ut cum aliquid discimus, rationem praecedat auctoritas*) (*mor.* 1.2.3).

unassailable faith he had that Monnica and Patricius were his parents were all things Augustine held to be true on the authority of others.¹⁸³ These things are either truly or practicably impossible to investigate for oneself, but are *naturally* believed on the authority of the one who tells it. This is right and proper, says Augustine, for it is the natural order of coming to know things in the world. In the hierarchy of the world created by God, there is a natural order of teaching and learning in which by a kind of “intrinsic right . . . the higher thing instructs the lower.”¹⁸⁴ For Augustine, this is an image of a more fundamental order which the distinction between God and the world introduces. Authority “is the prerogative by which God speaks to his creatures.”¹⁸⁵

When Augustine discusses coming to know God, he speaks of God’s initiative.¹⁸⁶ This is the case not only because God is superior and prior in wisdom, but because God’s nature is not accessible to the senses or to unaided human reason. God does not appear as an object in the world which can be known by man. God must reveal himself as an “object” of knowledge to human beings and he must also instruct and elevate their faculties so that they can recognize him. Since it is only God who knows God, then it is only God who can teach about God. This is why the Incarnation is so important for Augustine: God appears as an object in the world which can be seen and sensed and which others can report about. He

¹⁸³ *conf.* 6.5.7.

¹⁸⁴ Guardini, *Conversion*, 190.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ See, for example, Augustine’s description of his own experience in *conf.* 7.10.16 where three times he mentions God’s help.

becomes an object of belief, like the others mentioned above, and leads to the deeper belief in the invisible God. But Augustine does not understand this in his Academic period and it is part of the reason he remains confused about God.

How, though, does one move from believing the truth on authority to knowing it by reason? For Augustine, the answer is love, understood as both a desire and a way of life.¹⁸⁷ When something is assented to on authority, there is a gap of understanding between what reason knows and what is believed. This gap can only be bridged if there is desire, if one lovingly seeks to understand what one believes. The role played by love here means that for Augustine the will is primary in coming to know the truth, though at this Academic stage in his life, his will is divided and in need of divine healing.¹⁸⁸ In coming to know God, the motion seems to work “backward” through the creating Trinity. In creation, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created in a threefold act of *creatio, conversio, formatio*, but in the coming to the knowledge of God it is the Holy Spirit who dynamically orients man back *toward* the Son (*ad filium*) who mediates the knowledge of the Father. The love which leads him to knowledge of God is both an imitation and a gift of the Holy Spirit. Because God transcends the world, human beings cannot understand him without his help. God cannot be known by human effort because he does not appear within the horizon of what is knowable by man’s natural faculties. Human beings can only know God with his aid and by imitating him.

¹⁸⁷ On the meaning of love, see *div. qu.* 35 and 36. On the relation of faith, hope, and love in coming to know God, see *doc. Chr.* 1.37.41.

¹⁸⁸ See *conf.* 8.5.10ff.

C. Epicureans

On his own admission, Augustine's attraction to the Epicureans was due to an error about the nature of creation, namely, that the material, visible world is all there is. "Being drowned and blind, I was not able to conceive a light of integrity and beauty embraced for its own sake, since the eye of the flesh does not see this, but it is seen from the innermost" (*demersus et caecus cogitare non possem lumen honestatis et gratis amplectendae pulchritudinis quam non videt oculus carnis, et videtur ex intimo*).¹⁸⁹ Augustine's thought is still dominated by the idea of God as an infinite mass, which leads him argue that if human bodies lived forever then the life of bodily pleasure would be the greatest good. The only thing, he thinks, which makes this not the best way of life is the fact that people die and that he believes there is an afterlife in which human beings are judged. Augustine cannot conceive of a non-material good because his mind is still enmeshed in the senses and the phantasms to which they give rise. The grossness of his materialism, he says, even cuts him off from basic philosophical insights for (he later argues) even if bodies lived forever the pleasures of the immaterial mind—demonstrated here by the pleasant conversation with his friends—were superior to enduring bodily pleasure.

In the time preceding his conversion in the Milan garden (386), Augustine's pattern of thinking is, in important respects, very similar to the Epicureans. He is drawn to their elevation of bodily pleasure as something consistent with his own way of life and thinking. Their vision of reality is consistent with his understanding of God and the world at this time:

¹⁸⁹ *conf.* 6.16.26.

Augustine's *phantasma* of God as a kind of refined material substance does not differ terribly much from the atomic theory of Epicurus.¹⁹⁰ Piety and fear keep Augustine from going over to the Epicureans, but the logic of his thinking propels him toward them.

V. Stage Four: Infinite in a Different Way

Augustine cannot finally give himself to the Academics or the Epicureans. He is increasingly skeptical of ever finding a way of reaching the Wisdom which he so desires. He is a reluctant catechumen in the Catholic Church, but he is not able to totally give himself there either. Augustine holds some heterodox Christian beliefs,¹⁹¹ but he faithfully clings to certain truths of the Church he will soon join: God exists, is incorruptible, has care for human beings, and saves them through Christ and through Scripture.¹⁹² At this time, Augustine reads the *libri Platoniorum* and though the Platonists do not provide a way to the end, they do establish the necessary mental groundwork for attaining it. For it is thanks to these noble philosophers that Augustine comes to recognize God as “infinite in a different way” (*infinitum aliter*),¹⁹³ not like the material infinity of Augustine's skeptical period, but a true

¹⁹⁰ According to Augustine, the Epicureans rooted the cause of all things in atoms, which, they argued, were the underlying source of all reality. They thought the senses could not be deceived and, accordingly, “placed the standard for understanding truth in them” (*regulam comprehendendae veritatis in sensibus ponerent*) (Aug. ep. 118.3.19).

¹⁹¹ For example, Augustine thinks that Jesus is true man, but not true God (*conf.* 7.19.25); also, that God is materially extended throughout the universe (*conf.* 7.5.7).

¹⁹² *conf.* 7.7.11.

¹⁹³ *conf.* 7.14.20.

infinity which transcends the world.¹⁹⁴ The Platonists help clarify the confusions of the Manichean teachings as well as Augustine's own vain imaginings which blur the distinction between God and the world. They teach Augustine the truth about creation. The Platonists do not, though, teach him the truth about the Incarnation, though they do give him the conceptual tools for thinking about this mystery in a fitting way. Augustine's understanding of God and the world does not fundamentally alter throughout the rest of his life. Thus, his Catholic beliefs can be treated in this section as well.

A. Rethinking Augustine's Reception of the Platonists

In Augustine scholarship, there are a number of generally accepted commonplaces about the Platonists.¹⁹⁵ For example, it is often asserted that Plato's *Timaeus* puts forth the idea of three eternal principles: God, the Forms, and pre-existing matter. A good God looks

¹⁹⁴ *conf.* 7.14.20, 7.20.26. The term "Platonist" is used here as Augustine used it to refer to the tradition of philosophical thought which comes from Plato.

¹⁹⁵ For the *status questionis*, see Robert Crouse, "Paucis mutatis verbis: St. Augustine's Platonism," in *Augustine and His Critics*, 37-50. Among the abundant literature on the Platonists, especially on Augustine's relationship to them, see: Hilary A. Armstrong, "Spiritual or Intelligible Matter in Plotinus and Augustine," in *Augustinus Magister* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1954), 277-83, as well as his *St. Augustine and Christian Platonism* (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1967); Joseph Cropsey, "The Whole as Setting for Man: Plato's *Timaeus*," *Interpretation* 17/2 (Winter 1989-1990); E.R. Dodds, "Tradition and Personal Achievement in the Philosophy of Plotinus," *Journal of Roman Studies* 50 (1960): 1-7; Peter King, "Augustine's Encounter with Neoplatonism," *Modern Schoolman* 82, no. 3 (March 2005): 213-26; Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); Robert O'Connell, *Saint Augustine's Platonism* (Philadelphia: Villanova University Press, 1984); Dominic O'Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); John J. O'Meara, "The Neoplatonism of Saint Augustine," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. Dominic J. O'Meara (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 34-41; John M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); John Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

to the Forms and crafts the world from pre-existing matter. It is commonly repeated that Plotinus modified this Craftsman understanding of creation into a vision of all things emanating from a transcendent, non-material God, called “the One,” who generously but impersonally, unfolds its own simplicity, giving rise to the divine Intellect (*Nous*), who turns back to the One in thought and eternally establishes itself. Another divine being, Soul, emanates from the Intellect, who in turn emanates the world and all life on it. For Plotinus, the world, in some sense, is eternally being emanated in this process of contemplative derivation. A hierarchy is established, with the transcendent One as the highest and distinct origin of all else; the *Nous* and Soul are understood as subordinate, but divine; and the world, though eternal, is also arranged in a hierarchy in which the lower things participate in the higher and can become better by participating in what is above. The human soul has an essential kinship with the divine, but fell into the world; it belongs with the divine and longs to return home.

From this general picture of the Platonists it is often suggested that Augustine saw all these things in the Platonists, accepted whatever was compatible with the Christian faith (e.g., transcendence, light, return) and rejected whatever was not (e.g., the Demiurge, emanation, the subordination of the *Nous*, the divinity of the human soul, and the eternity of the world). For example, one often hears that, for Augustine, “Christianizing the Platonic doctrine of creation meant distinguishing *creatio ex nihilo* from the *Timaeus*’s doctrine of the formation of pre-existent matter, and from the Neoplatonic doctrine of the cosmos as a great continuum in which “creation” amounts to the emergence of the different levels of the One’s

power and goodness’.”¹⁹⁶ Similarly, a typical comment in Augustine literature claims that “the dramatic ontological gap between Creator and creation which characterizes the Christian doctrine is completely lacking in the continuous outflowing, or emanation, of the One in Neoplatonism.”¹⁹⁷ The common take on Platonic subordination runs: “Augustine’s account of the Divine Word, consubstantial with the Father, is radically different from Plotinus’ theory of the *Nous* in its relation to the One. The *Nous* is inferior to the One and of itself unformed until it turns to the One to be illuminated and perfected (*Enn.* 2.4.5).”¹⁹⁸ It is commonly asserted that Augustine distinguishes himself from the Platonists on the divinity of the soul as well: the “chasm” that Augustine sees between God and the human soul is “nowhere found in Neoplatonism. Does not a good Platonist recognize the divine within himself? He is part of the divine.”¹⁹⁹ According to these scholarly commonplaces, the

¹⁹⁶ John Cavadini approvingly quoting Joseph Torchia in a book review of Torchia’s *Creatio ex nihilo*, 111, in *Thomist* 65(3) (2001): 496. Compare Harrison, *Rethinking*, 77.

¹⁹⁷ Harrison, *Rethinking*, 77. Harrison gives no references to Augustine to substantiate this claim. See also William Mallard, *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine’s Religious Thought Through the Confessions Story* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Press, 1994), 84.

¹⁹⁸ John Hammond Taylor, *St. Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis: Vol. 1 (Ancient Christian Writers, 41)*, trans. John Hammond Taylor (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 226n20. Interestingly, the *Ennead* that Taylor cites as evidence is not one of those which Augustine is commonly thought to have read (see note below). Compare Armstrong, “Spiritual and Intelligible Matter,” 277-83, which attempts to show how Augustine “takes over and adapts” the Plotinian idea of *Nous*.

¹⁹⁹ David Vincent Meconi, “The Incarnation and the Role of Participation in St. Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Augustinian Studies* 29.2 (1998): 69. He also quotes Sr. Mary Garvey, *St. Augustine: Christian or Neo-Platonist?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1939): “In Neo-Platonic thought . . . God is above man and man must aspire to be united to him, but, after all, man in his true nature is, so to speak part and parcel of the One” (71). See also, Mallard, *Language and Love*: “Plotinus saw the world as . . . filled with ‘created divinities,’ of which the human soul was one—created eternally . . . More than Plotinus, Augustine pressed the line of distinction between immutable God and the mutable creation” (91-92). Also, Armstrong, *Augustine and Christian Platonism*: Augustine and other Christian Platonists of the fourth and fifth century “were very conscious of their opposition to the pagan Platonists on this point, and very careful to exclude any suggestion of

Platonists do not achieve the ontological distinction between God and the world; rather, because they are limited by Plato's Demiurge or Plotinus' emanation, they blur the distinction, so much so that the soul is pretty much identical to God. Augustine, the argument goes, purified these erroneous doctrines in the crucible of the distinctly Christian understanding of *creatio ex nihilo* and thus rendered them serviceable to the faith.

While this thesis is very attractive and would lend great support to the argument of this dissertation, it does not seem to fit the facts. However accurately these opinions reflect the thought of the Platonists, they do not accurately reflect the thought of Augustine on the Platonists.²⁰⁰ It is well-known that Augustine was familiar with the *Timaeus*, though it is probably not one of the works among the *libri Platoniorum* he mentions in Book 7. Still, whenever he read it, Augustine was influenced by it, though he has a very different reading of the *Timaeus* than most modern scholars do. On a number of occasions, Augustine goes out of his way to defend the *Timaeus* creation account as perfectly compatible with the creation account of Genesis, that is, Augustine does not think that Plato teaches pre-existing

natural divinity from their often Platonic-sounding accounts of the nature of man and his way to spiritual perfection and the vision of God" (4).

²⁰⁰ Augustine, as will be discussed soon, thinks that the Platonists achieved the Christian distinction. Scholars, though, are divided about whether Plotinus does: Robert Sokolowski thinks not, arguing that Plotinus, like all pagan philosophers, thought the One to be the highest thing in the world which emanates two divine beings (Mind and Soul) as well as the cosmos (*God of Faith and Reason*, 18). A.H. Armstrong disagrees. He argues that Plotinus has a clear understanding of "a transcendent Source of Being from which all things derive their existence, which is cause of being and not only of world-formation and world-order" (*Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy*, 5). This, he says, is like the Christian understanding of creation, but not exactly. Kathryn Tanner holds a middle position, suggesting that Plotinus wants to make God transcendent, but his linguistic habit of contrasting highest and lowest commits him to an inner-worldly divinity. Also, because Plotinus is an emanationist, he cannot escape undermining God's transcendence (*God and Creation in Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 43). See notes below for the opinions of other scholars on this question.

matter and a limited Demiurge; rather, Plato teaches *creatio ex nihilo*.²⁰¹ But, the real focus of this discussion must be what Augustine learns from Plotinus, for the *libri Platoniorum* most likely refer to his writings.²⁰² It seems clear from the *Confessions* and other works that in Plotinus, Augustine found rational proofs of the Christian faith. In particular, Augustine found the transcendence of the Father, the co-eternity and co-equality of the Word, the non-divinity of the soul, the meaning of true happiness, and the creation of the world from nothing.²⁰³ If this is correct, then the scholarly commonplaces about Augustine's reception of the Platonists needs to be rethought.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ In *div. qu.* 46.2, written some time between 388 and 396, Augustine says "it is sacrilegious to opine that there was something located outside himself that he looked at [i.e., the Forms], so that in accordance with it he could establish what He established" (*non enim extra se quidquam positum intuebatur, ut secundum id constitueret quod constituebat; nam hoc opinari sacrilegum est*). He then goes on to discuss Plato approvingly as *not* holding this opinion. See *vera rel.* 1.1-4.7, written around 390, for suggestion that Platonists are almost Catholic, especially with reference to their understanding of creation, and *civ. Dei.* 8.1-11, especially, 8.11, written sometime after 413, for same argument as well as a reconciling of the *Timaeus* with Genesis. See TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 254-55 for an argument that Augustine never read the whole of the *Timaeus*. Compare, for example, Athanasius' very clear criticism of Plato in *De Incarnatione* 1.2, a criticism not found in Augustine.

²⁰² Research into the *libri Platoniorum* has yielded some assurances: in Marius Victorinus' translation, there is reasonable certainty that Augustine read Plotinus *Enn.* 1.6 ('On Beauty'), 5.1 ('On the Three Hypostases'), 3.2-3 ('On Providence'), 4.3-4 ('On the Soul'), 5.5 ('That Intelligibles Are Not Outside Intelligence'), and 6.4-5 ('How What is One Can Be Everywhere'). It is not known if these were complete, accurate, or modified (e.g., Christianized) translations or paraphrases.

²⁰³ Augustine holds this opinion about what the Platonists knew throughout his whole life: compare *div. qu.* 46.2 (388/96); *vera rel.* 1.1-4.7 (390); *ep.* 118 (410/11); and *civ. Dei.* 8.1-11 (after 413). One might think that his comment in the *retr.* 1.1.4 might suggest otherwise. There, he expresses regret at his unqualified exuberance for the Platonists in *c. Acad.* 3.20.43, where he says, "I am going to find what is to be sought out by the most subtle reasoning with the Platonists, which will not be opposed to our Sacred Writings" (*quod autem subtilissima ratione persequendum . . . apud platonicos me interim, quod sacris nostris non repugnet, reperturum esse confido*). His comment in the *Retractationes* cannot refer to the Platonist teachings on God and creation, which Augustine consistently praises, but must refer to their rejection of the Incarnation and Redemption, their denigration of the body, the transmigration of souls, and their idolatrous theurgy. Augustine does diverge more from the Platonists as he grows older, but not on the essentials of God and creation. See, in particular, the list of truths in which "they agree with us" (*nobiscum sentiunt*) in *civ. Dei.* 8.10.

²⁰⁴ A notable exception to the common interpretation is Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* (Toronto: Vintage Books, 1960), 105-11. "If Augustine had had the slightest doubt about the

1. Augustine's Understanding of What the Platonists Knew

In Book 7 of the *Confessions*, Augustine summarizes what he learned from the *libri Platoniorum*. Using terms from the Prologue of John's Gospel and the Christological hymn of Philippians, Augustine boldly *identifies* the Platonist teaching about God and the world with the Christian: though they use different words, the content of what the Church authoritatively proposes for belief on this matter is "entirely the same thing" (*hoc idem omnino*) as what the Platonists teach by reason.²⁰⁵ Augustine will criticize the Platonists on a number of counts, for they do not recognize the Incarnation nor embraces its attendant humility, and thereby fall into idolatry and its attendant pride. Yet, the Platonists, according to Augustine, understand the distinction between God and the world and, to an extent, they understand the relation as well.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine says that the Platonists, like the Catholics, recognize the transcendence of God and the co-eternity of the Word. He reads in their books that

purity of Plotinus' notion of creation, he would have had to reveal it when saying things of this sort [praise of the Platonists in *civ. Dei* 8.6]. However, he did not do so, either here or in the *Confessions*, and this leads one at least to assume that, from the outset, he read the *Enneads* as a Christian. It is certainly not true, therefore, that Augustine ever understood the Christian notion of creation as Plotinian emanation; on the contrary, everything leads us to believe that he always mistook Plotinus' emanation for the Christian notion of creation" (108). How much of a mistake Augustine made, will be considered below, but that Augustine saw creation in the Platonists, Gilson, at least, affirms.

²⁰⁵ Aug. *conf.* 7.9.13 and ff.; cf. *civ. dei* 8.10.2: *nobiscum sentiunt*; *c. Acad.* 3.20.43. See Kenney, *Mysticism of Saint Augustine*, 56, for discussion of what Augustine learns from *libri Platoniorum*. O'Donnell, *Confessions*, says, "The book reflects a structure of A.'s thought that du Roy has patiently excavated. A. comes, through reading the *platoniorum libri*, to a knowledge of the triune Godhead, a knowledge he may be thought to have shared on most essentials with some non-Christian philosophers. Then he began an ascent to a knowledge of the incarnate Christ, a knowledge not attained by the philosophers. This approach is the reverse of what, on A.'s own terms, it should be. On his theory, it should be the mediator of God and man, Christ Jesus, who introduces us to the full triune deity; but in practice (and du Roy shows how it is always this way for A.), it is the other way around. The trinity is accessible to philosophical speculation, the incarnate redeemer is not" (Book Seven Introduction). Though, compare, "Consequences of Seeing God" below for the possibility that Augustine thought the Incarnation was philosophically knowable.

“before all times and above all times, Your Only-begotten Son abides unchangeably coeternal with You” (*ante omnia tempora et supra omnia tempora incommutabiliter manet unigenitus filius tuus coaeternus tibi*).²⁰⁶ For the Platonists, says Augustine, the Word is not a subordinate emanation, but “equal to God, since he is naturally the Selfsame” (*aequalis deo, quia naturaliter idipsum est*).²⁰⁷ The Platonists, like the Catholics, recognize that God created the world through his Word. The Word “was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not know him” (*in hoc mundo erat, et mundus per eum factus est, et mundus eum non cognovit*).²⁰⁸ The Word is, in some way, present to the world and knowable, but was not recognized by the world. The Platonists, like the Catholics, but unlike the Manichees, recognize that the “the soul of man, although it holds forth testimony about the Light, it is not the Light itself; but the Word, God, is the true Light that enlightens every man coming into the world” (*hominis anima, quamvis testimonium perhibeat de lumine, non est tamen ipsa lumen, sed verbum deus est lumen verum, quod inluminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum*).²⁰⁹ In other words, Augustine thinks that the Platonists, like the Catholics, think the soul is not divine.²¹⁰ This means that, according to Augustine, the

²⁰⁶ Aug. *conf.* 7.9.14.

²⁰⁷ *conf.* 7.9.14. For Augustine, *idipsum* is “a mystical name for God, equated with Exod. 3.14, ‘*ego sum qui sum*’” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, ad loc. 9.4.11). See Marion, “*Idipsum*: The Name of God according to Augustine,” 167-90. Augustine says that the Platonists recognize God and His Word as equally Being Itself, with distinction but without subordination.

²⁰⁸ Aug. *conf.* 7.9.13.

²⁰⁹ *conf.* 7.9.13.

²¹⁰ Compare *civ. Dei* 8.6: “[The Platonists] saw that whatever is changeable is not the supreme God; and therefore, seeking for the supreme God, they transcended every changeable soul and spirit” (*viderunt, quidquid mutabile est, non esse summum deum, et ideo animam omnem mutabiles que omnes spiritus*

Platonists, like the Catholics, think happiness is not a restoration to some originally divine status, but rather receiving of God's fullness so as to become blessed and participating in his wisdom so as to become wise.²¹¹

How can one explain Augustine's seemingly facile identification of Christian and Platonist thought? It is possible that Augustine is simply a bad reader of philosophy and misinterprets his sources. It is also possible that Augustine is doing violence to his philosophical interlocutors and forcibly conscripting them into Christian service. It is also possible that Augustine simply did not have access to the original texts and could not make sound judgments about what they really taught—between the translations of select portions by Marius Victorinus and the excerpts from philosophical doxologies, Augustine would have had a good general idea of the philosophic tradition, but no real detailed knowledge of actual works, with a few partial exceptions. Peter King offers another suggestion, which would augment the previous one: he suggests that the limited access Augustine had to Plotinus' works combined with the Latin theological and linguistic milieu at the time, would have lent itself to Augustine reading the Platonists in a Christian way.²¹² “The texts were initially

transcenderunt quaerentes summum deum). Augustine often uses the verb *transcendere* to describe the ascent from created to uncreated things (see *conf.* 8.1.2, 9.10.24). In *civ. Dei* 10.2, Augustine reiterates the same point, though at 10.31 he criticizes the Platonic idea that the soul is co-eternal with God. The Platonists, says Augustine, do not think that the soul is the same thing as God, but that it did not have a beginning in time; rather, it is eternally created or, in other words, in an eternal relation of dependence. He does not seem to have this criticism of the Platonists in the *Confessions*.

²¹¹ See *conf.* 7.9.14: *quia de plenitudine eius accipiunt animae ut beatae sint, et quia participatione manentis in se sapientiae renovantur ut sapientes sint*.

²¹² Peter King, “Augustine's Encounter with Neoplatonism,” 216-20, is one of the few scholarly efforts to take Augustine at his word. His approach is justified by Augustine's bold identification of Platonist and Christian thought in the *Confessions* but also by Augustine's philosophical criticisms of the Platonist understanding of mediation in *civ. Dei* 10.23-28. Still, King goes too far in saying that Augustine says he finds

mediated through the influence of Ambrose and his Christian intellectual circle in Milan.”²¹³

Augustine, this argument goes, is not doing violence to Plotinus nor is he reading him poorly; rather, given what he read and the context in which he read it, it was not a stretch to read, for example, “emanation” as “procession,” or “hypostasis” as “person,” or *Nous* as “Son.”

Another possibility is that Augustine is a good reader of Plotinus and that Plotinus does, in fact, hold to some doctrine of creation. Joseph Torchia suggests that while there is clearly a difference between strict emanationism and the doctrine of creation, “we find an extremely fine line between emanation and creation in the *Enneads*.”²¹⁴ Sorabji concurs, “Creation not out of matter is, in a sense, accepted by Neoplatonism . . . it is the most orthodox Neoplatonism and follows from Plotinus’ own theory.”²¹⁵ Indeed, in *Enneads* 6.8.19, Plotinus says four times that the One “makes being” (ἐποίησε τὴν οὐσίαν).²¹⁶

Whether Augustine read this passage or others like it, cannot be determined with any certainty (it is not listed among the usual things he read), but Torchia suggests the possibility

the full Trinity in the Platonists. In *civ. Dei* 10.23, he says that Plotinus truly recognizes the Father and the Son, but seems ignorant of the Holy Spirit. Porphyry, though, seems to recognize the Holy Spirit as well. Of course, neither recognizes the Incarnation of the Son.

²¹³ Kenney, *Mysticism of Saint Augustine*, 15.

²¹⁴ Torchia, *Creatio ex nihilo*, 37. See also Lloyd P. Gerson, “Plotinus’s Metaphysics: Emanation or Creation?” *Review of Metaphysics* 46, no. 3 (March 1993): 559-74, for a technical, but helpful, discussion of this question. Gerson argues that Plotinus had an understanding of creation in a qualified sense, though not in a sense that Augustine would necessarily accept. Still, Gerson’s argument shows that Plotinus could be read as having some notion of creation and, in light of the other arguments above, it is plausible to suggest that Augustine could have read this in them in a way he saw as wholly compatible with the Christian doctrine.

²¹⁵ Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum*, 313-14.

²¹⁶ Rist, *Road to Reality*, comments on this passage: “The One must be the cause of all finite Beings . . . they are different in kind from the One, since the One is actually their creator. This point should be stressed, for it is only in the light of the One’s infinity that its role as creator of all else can be properly grasped, and the enormous difference between Plotinus and Plato be seen” (26).

that this passage influenced Augustine's discussion in *Confessions* 7.9.13-14.²¹⁷ That Plotinus may have taught some doctrine of creation reinforces King's point that a sympathetic Christian reading of a Latin translation of Plotinus could easily yield something like the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. These arguments can be bolstered even more by a philosophical one: Augustine thinks that the simplicity of God is philosophically knowable and that *creatio ex nihilo* logically follows from this insight.²¹⁸

Without in any way seriously misreading his sources or doing violence to the Platonists, Augustine could agree with Simplicianus that "God and his Word had been insinuated in them in all ways" (*in istis autem omnibus modis insinuari deum et eius verbum*).²¹⁹ Augustine points out a number of places where the Platonists diverge from the Christian faith (which will be discussed more below), but he thinks they have a true understanding of God and the world and he credits them with opening up these truths to his confused mind.

2. Ascent: Seeing God

Augustine did not recognize all these similarities and distinctions when he first read the *libri Platoniorum*. The synthesis and contrast with John's Gospel comes later, though

²¹⁷ Torchia, *Creatio ex nihilo*, 63, n. 174.

²¹⁸ See Aug. *civ. Dei* 8.6: "On account of this unchangeability and simplicity, [the Platonists] understood that God made all these things, and that He himself is not able to be made from anything else" (*propter hanc incommutabilitatem et simplicitatem intellexerunt eum et omnia ista fecisse, et ipsum a nullo fieri potuisse*). See also Rist's comments in *Road to Reality*, 26-27, for a confirmation of this point in Plotinus.

²¹⁹ Aug. *conf.* 8.2.3.

perhaps not much later.²²⁰ Still, he read those same truths in the Platonists and this finally cleared away his old patterns of thought about God and the world. It opened the way for Augustine to encounter God truly for the first time.

Inspired by the *libri Platoniorum*, Augustine attempts another ascent and, instead of gross failure, he sees, as the Platonists saw, “the invisible things of God which are understood through the things that are made” (*invisibilia dei per ea quae facta sunt intellecta*).²²¹ The “things that are made” lead Augustine to a true understanding of God which, in turn, sheds new light on the things that are made. This knowledge, though, is not yet a “saving knowledge”—it must be completed by the Incarnation. This the Platonists do not give, though as will be seen, they perhaps could have given it, at least partially. Still, their true understanding of God and the world opens up the intellectual space for Augustine to later understand this mystery as well. How does he get there?

Augustine describes this new ascent in 7.10.16-20.26 and there is much disagreement about how to understand this section. Scholars argue about how many ascents Augustine experiences, if any at all: Courcelle suggests there are three ascents, O’Donnell two, du Roy

²²⁰ In *De civitate Dei*, Augustine mentions that Simplicianus used to relate the story of a Platonist philosopher in Milan who used to admire the Gospel of John and recommend that the Prologue be written in gold and hung in every church (10.29). It is not unlikely, then, that Simplicianus introduced some of these connections to Augustine early on. See *conf.* 8.2.3.

²²¹ *conf.* 7.17.23, quoting Rom. 1:20. Moreover, Rom. 1:19 says that *God* revealed the truth about himself to the pagans, not that the pagans achieved this by their own efforts. Similarly, Augustine thinks God revealed this truth to the Platonists (see *civ. Dei* 8.6) and to himself while still unbaptized (see below). See “Appendix I: How Does Augustine See God?” for further discussion of what this seeing consists.

one, and Cary only a psychological and epistemological pattern of insight.²²² The way the narrative unfolds suggests that Augustine presents not so much a series of discrete experiences as something more like a lens slowly coming into focus,²²³ which could just as likely have happened in an afternoon of excited reading as over a period of days or weeks.²²⁴

Augustine is clearly inspired by the pagan books he is reading, but he in no way has a pagan experience. Indeed, as the first lines of his description show, grace is already at work: “And thus admonished to return to my very own self, I entered into my innermost with You as Leader; and I was able, since You had become my Helper” (*et inde admonitus redire ad*

²²² Respectively: Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin* (Paris: de Boccard, 1950), 160-64; O’Donnell, *Confessions*, ad loc. 7.10.16; Oliver du Roy, *L’intelligence de la foi en la trinité selon saint Augustin: genèse de sa théologie trinitaire jusqu’en 391* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1966), 85; Philip Cary, “Book Seven: Inner Vision as the Goal of Augustine’s Life,” in *A Reader’s Companion*, 116. The structure of this section can be outlined as follows: in 7.10.16, God gives Augustine an understanding of the divine nature as distinct from the world; in 7.11.17-16.22, Augustine describes the consequences of this graced insight for understanding the world as creation; and in 7.17.23, Augustine describes how creation leads to God.

²²³ The circular way the narrative proceeds and the repeated use of Rom. 1:20 suggest that Augustine is trying to express the ineffability of the experience of coming to the truth about God. In *conf.* 7.10.16, Augustine quotes Rom. 1:20 and says he saw the invisible things of God. What follows is a description of the problems which were then solved: the metaphysics of finite and infinite being and the metaphysics of evil (7.11.17-13.19). He then has a brief interlude in which he gives a brief summary of his religious opinions as a Manichean (two substances), a skeptical catechumen (God is an infinite ocean), and the new truth he has discovered in the Platonists (7.14.20). Augustine then returns to the questions of being and evil, though from an epistemological and ethical perspective (7.15.21-16.22) before discussing how happy he is to have discovered the invisible things of God (7.17.23). He then makes a formal ascent from exterior material things, to interior immaterial things, and ascends to see, in a flash, the invisible things of God (7.17.23). He then speaks of the need of understanding Christ aright (7.18.24-19.25) before summarizing again his experience of reading the Platonists, quoting Rom. 1:20 again (7.20.26). For a similar account, see Kenney’s chapter “A Trembling Glance,” 61-72, in *Mysticism of Saint Augustine*.

²²⁴ See Kenney, *Mysticism of Saint Augustine*: “As the text stands, we have neither one event, nor two, but a long personal narrative of transformed understanding, punctuated with certain vivid points of subjective reference, such as the ‘flash’ of recognition” (67); also, “The text itself, from VII.x (16) through VII.xvii (23) has a recapitulatory character. The reader is invited to survey, from a variety of contiguous angles, the same spiritual development” (Ibid.).

*memet ipsum, intravi in intima mea duce te, et potui, quoniam factus es adiutor meus).*²²⁵

This ascent does not begin with Augustine's own personal initiative, but is wholly situated in the context of grace. God "takes Augustine up toward himself" (*ad-sumere*)²²⁶ by initiating the ascent through admonition, by leading the way through, and by helping to complete it. By grace, God goes before, acts during, and brings to completion.

Once Augustine enters into his own soul, he "sees" an unchangeable Light above him. It is different from the light he sees with his eyes: it is not simply a brighter version of natural light. Augustine recognizes that the light is not something within the horizon of the world; it is not just another lofty thing at a higher level of space or intensity of being. Instead, for the first time, Augustine comes to the distinction between God and the world. He sees the Light was above him "because it made me, and I was beneath it, because I was made by it" (*quia ipsa fecit me, et ego inferior, quia factus ab ea*).²²⁷ Creation makes the difference: it is that which distinguishes God and the world.

In this ascent, Augustine recognizes God truly for the first time (cf. *cum te primum cognovi*) and in fact sees "an unchangeable light with, as it were, the eyes of my soul" (*vidi qualicumque oculo animae meae . . . lucem incommutabilem*).²²⁸ This "seeing" is at the same

²²⁵ *conf.* 7.10.16.

²²⁶ *conf.* 7.10.16. The importance of this incarnational word will be discussed below.

²²⁷ *conf.* 7.10.16.

²²⁸ *conf.* 7.10.16. Augustine first knows God here and a memory remains (7.17.23). This memory has special status because God now dwells in Augustine in a new way: "And so ever since I learned You, You abided in my memory, and I find You there when I remember You, and I delight in You. These are my holy delights, which You gave me in Your mercy looking back on my poverty" (*itaque ex quo te didici, manes in*

time like a “hearing” (cf. *tamquam audirem vocem tuam*).²²⁹ Augustine is not referring to his bodily senses, for he has transcended these when he entered into himself, but is referring to the “spiritual senses,” the analogical faculties of his soul.²³⁰ It is worth briefly considering how Augustine understands the bodily and spiritual senses so as to better understand what is happening at the height of his ascents.

In regard to the body, he says, “the eyes are to be known as the prince among the senses” (*oculi autem sunt ad noscendum in sensibus principes*)²³¹ since they are most closely related to knowing, a knowing that is all at once and not over time. Beneath sight, in the order of conveying knowledge, would be hearing, smell, then touch and taste, these last being the lowest senses, having the least detachment from the object to be known and informing the least about it. Indeed, touch and taste involve knower physically with the object, the latter often by destroying and incorporating the thing into him. But, with the “spiritual senses,” the hierarchy is inverted.²³² “Taste” and “touch” are the highest, implying intimacy with the object to be known, while “sight” is the lowest, implying distance. In the realm of the spirit,

memoria mea, et illic te invenio cum reminiscor tui, et delector in te. hae sunt sanctae deliciae meae, quas donasti mihi misericordia tua, respiciens paupertatem meam (10.24.35).

²²⁹ *conf.* 7.10.16.

²³⁰ See *conf.* 10.6.8 for a clear contrast of the two senses; cf. 10.27.38 for a discussion of the spiritual senses and 10.30.41-34.51 for a discussion of all five bodily senses considered under the lust of the flesh. Note, also, the hierarchical arrangement of the senses in each section.

²³¹ *conf.* 10.35.54.

²³² See, for example, *conf.* 10.27.38.

what is called “taste” reveals the most about thing to be known, while “sight” reveals the least.

In the ascent in Book 7, Augustine mixes the sense imagery in order to convey the ineffability of the experience. He has withdrawn from his bodily senses into himself. In his spirit, he experiences a “seeing” which is almost heard and unfolds as a revelation. Augustine “hears” the Truth “from on high” and “from afar” (*de excelso* and *de longinquo*), which suggests that there is a distance between him and the Truth, even while there is a true knowledge of it. Indeed, the spiritual senses engaged here, seeing and hearing, imply this distance. Though there is distance, there is still a direct encounter with truth. “In a flash of trembling sight” (*in ictu trepidantis aspectus*),²³³ Augustine “sees” that which is. The immediacy and comprehensiveness of sight has a kind of timeless quality which is the human analogue to the eternity which is beheld. Augustine’s use of the word *ictus* could even be an allusion to 1 Corinthians 15:52, the resurrection text wherein Paul describes how humans shall all be changed “in the twinkling of an eye,” *in ictu oculi*. This timeless flash of intellectual vision perceives the truth about God, though Augustine will have to progress further and engage different spiritual senses before he can enter more deeply into the invisible things of God. The experience of ascent described in Book 7 is a great success for Augustine. For the first time in his life, he has become certain that the truth is “clearly *seen*, being understood by the things that are made” (*veritatem, quae per ea quae facta sunt*

²³³ *conf.* 7.17.23. The word *ictus* also has musical applications.

intellecta conspicitur). He has received a glimpse of eternal life, of the vision all will share in the resurrection, a vision which transforms one into what is seen.

Though Augustine's experience at the height of ascent is inaccessible to the reader, what he sees is not: "He who knows the truth, knows [the Light], and he who knows it knows eternity" (*qui novit veritatem, novit eam, et qui novit eam, novit aeternitatem*).²³⁴ Augustine comes to know God as Being Itself, "I Am Who Am," who "is diffused neither through the finite nor infinite space of places" (*neque per finita neque per infinita locorum spatia diffusa est*),²³⁵ but is *totus ubique*, "everywhere wholly present."²³⁶ This knowledge, the same as the Platonists have, is mediated through the divine Word.²³⁷ The Word is the Image of God who gives knowledge to human intellects as the Light which illumines them. If one sees this, then he sees the Father.²³⁸ This is how the Platonists can see God: they can see him as "something" present in a unique way; they can understand him as *totus ubique*, seemingly absent, but in fact wholly present everywhere. This insight is an encounter with the Divine Word, beyond the bounds of the mind. In Book 7, Augustine ascends to this remarkable height in an encounter with the truth about the Divine Word. What he lacks is an encounter with the Word made flesh (though the knowledge, or at least the seeds of the knowledge, are perhaps already present) and so he can only take with him "a loving memory and a longing

²³⁴ *conf.* 7.10.16.

²³⁵ *conf.* 7.10.16.

²³⁶ *conf.* 1.3.3, 6.3.4; cf. *ep.* 147.29.

²³⁷ *conf.* 7.9.13-15; cf. *vera rel.* 3.3.

²³⁸ *ep.* 147.29.

as though having caught the scent of that which I was not able to eat yet” (*amantem memoriam et quasi olefacta desiderantem quae comedere nondum possem*).²³⁹ Augustine gets close enough to “catch a whiff” of God, but not close enough to “touch” and “taste” him, to embrace him and be transformed into him by eating him.

3. What Creation Teaches Augustine

Augustine sees God through “the things that are made,” but the new understanding of God, which creation opens up, immediately sheds light on how these created things are understood. In the midst of elevating Augustine to this new understanding, God first turns Augustine’s gaze back onto Augustine, “a thing that is made.” In one of the most remarkable passages in the *Confessions*, God shows himself to Augustine and, in the Light which is God’s Self, God shows Augustine to himself.

When first I knew You, You took me up [toward Yourself], so that I might see that what I saw *is*, and that I who saw *am* not yet. And You beat back the weakness of my sight, radiating in me most powerfully, and I trembled with love and horror. And I found myself to be far from You in a region of unlikeness, as if I heard Your voice from on high: “I am the food of grown men; increase and you will eat Me. You will not change Me into you as food of your flesh, but you will be changed into Me.”

*et cum te primum cognovi, tu adsumpsisti me ut viderem esse quod viderem, et nondum me esse qui viderem. et reverberasti infirmitatem aspectus mei, radians in me vehementer, et contremui amore et horrore. et inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis, tamquam audirem vocem tuam de excelso: ‘cibus sum grandium: cresce et manducabis me. nec tu me in te mutabis sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me’.*²⁴⁰

²³⁹ *conf.* 7.17.23.

²⁴⁰ *conf.* 7.10.16. The translation of the first sentence comes from Robert O’Connell, *St. Augustine’s Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1969), 2-3, whose translation I have slightly adapted. The subsequent discussion of the *regio dissimilitudinis*, Exodus 3:14, as well as the next

In shockingly brief compass, Augustine goes from creation as revealing the ontological distinction between God and world to deification through the sacraments as the destiny of fallen man. Let this passage be considered more closely.

Augustine says that God “took him up toward himself,” *ad-sumere*. For Augustine, this is Incarnation language: when the Word became flesh, the Word “assumed” man, he “took him up.”²⁴¹ The use of the word here suggests that something Christologically transforming is happening, the deifying process has begun. God is re-forming the image of God in Augustine by illuminating his mind, by giving him a new and true memory of himself. When God takes him up, Augustine is shown that God is true being and that he is participated being. Augustine sees that God *is* and that he *is not yet*. But the word “yet” (*nondum*) suggests a recognition that participated being is somehow ordered toward true being, toward that which brought it into being. Augustine discovers he is in a *regio dissimilitudinis*, where unlikeness is understood primarily in ontological terms, rather than moral ones (though moral failings can exacerbate the ontological unlikeness to God). Only the eternally begotten Son is perfectly like the Father; everything else, that is, everything created, is unlike God because it does not perfectly reflect his substance. This new awareness of the region of unlikeness must also plant the seed of the notion that conversion is constitutive of created being, for what is not God can only be like God if God makes it like him, if he calls it back from unlikeness to likeness. “*Pour la première fois, en effet, Augustin*

chapter on finite and infinite being confirm O’Connell’s insightful translation. Also, note the use of *adsumere* and its dynamic *ad-*.

²⁴¹ See, for example, *ep.* 187.9-40.

se perçoit comme un être créé recevant sa vie de son créateur et il en vient par la même à comprendre le lien entre conversion et création.”²⁴² This also provides Augustine with the metaphysical reason for his restless heart—the “not yet” yearns for what *is* simply and cannot be at rest until it rests in true being.²⁴³

The recognition of the ontological distinction between God and the world reveals itself as a Christological insight. This is suggested by the “as if” (*tamquam*). Augustine’s graced vision and recognition impress an almost Eucharistic insight on his soul, a deified destiny revealed in the very recognition of creation. The revelation of God as true Being *is* the revelation of salvation, not just the Goal, but the Way as well.²⁴⁴ God is Being Itself and Augustine is not. This fact comes as the revelation that human destiny is to *become God* and that the Way is by eating God.²⁴⁵ This crucial passage gives a glimpse into the whole thrust of *Confessions*: Augustine recognizes that the destiny of humankind is to be Christologically transformed into God; creation points directly to deification. The Eucharistic overtones place this within an ecclesial context: the Church is the means and the goal of creation, the Body conformed and transformed into the Head.

This eating language only makes sense in light of creation. In the world, one cannot eat another thing without transforming it into oneself, without destroying it and making it a

²⁴² Vannier, *Les Confessions*, 57.

²⁴³ This will be discussed in Chapter Three.

²⁴⁴ This is why Augustine can criticize the Platonists for failing *philosophically* to come to the Incarnation, as shall be discussed below.

²⁴⁵ See Aug. *lib. arb.* 3.10 for the Word as food whose nature is not changed by the Incarnation. Also, see *conf.* 3.1.1, 4.1.1, 10.6.8, 13.18.23 for eating as assimilation of God’s truth.

part of oneself. This is the way of things in the world: they are parts of a whole and so are in competition with one another. For Augustine, to “eat God” is to take in his truth, but instead of destroying it and assimilating it to themselves, human creatures are assimilated into it. They assimilate by being assimilated. This is because God is not a kind of being, but Being Itself. He is not the kind of thing that can be changed, because he is not a kind. Therefore, he changes whatever comes into “contact” with him. When God is “consumed,” the consumer is changed, transformed because he now participates more in God.

The truth about God’s nature makes the very fact that anything else exists rather shocking. Augustine concludes from the sheer fact of existence that God desires to save human beings by deifying them. Creation, the very notion of it, bespeaks salvation, moreover, salvation as deification. Since God is his attributes, he is love and goodness itself—this is manifest in the very fact of creation. This means that God cannot leave human creatures as not-God, but desires to share himself fully with them. This powerful insight is impressed on Augustine when he first learns the truth of creation, though he does not fully grasp all of this at the time.

After seeing himself in God’s Light, Augustine turns his gaze on the world. “I beheld other things below You” (*et inspexi cetera infra te*)²⁴⁶ which, he now sees, participate in God and have varying degrees of being insofar as they are more or less like him. Once he begins to behold creation in this new Light, his previous stumbling blocks begin to be cleared away.

²⁴⁶ *conf.* 7.11.17.

The truth rapidly “becomes manifest” (*manifestum est mihi*).²⁴⁷ Interestingly, one of the first things to become clear is how Aristotle is true. It seems as though the light of the Christian distinction redeems Aristotle, for Augustine makes the distinction between substance and accidents in terms of nature and corruption, and concludes that all being is good. Corruption must corrupt something and since corruption diminishes the good of that which it corrupts, it must inhere in something good. Thus, evil cannot be a substance, for if it were something it would be good, which is absurd. Evil, then, is a privation of good, the diminishment or corruption of being. Augustine realizes that his previous harping on the question *unde malum?* was the wrong starting point, for it presupposed that evil was some thing.²⁴⁸ It was a question that could only dominate within the context of an erroneous understanding of God and the world. The prior question which must be asked is *quid sit malum?*, “what is evil?,” which, paradoxically, leaves open the possible answer that evil is not anything, but a privation of being.²⁴⁹

Because created things do not have the fullness of being, but are parts of a whole, Augustine sees that they are arranged in a hierarchy which has a kind of harmony.²⁵⁰ Even

²⁴⁷ *conf.* 7.12.18.

²⁴⁸ Compare the questions about evil in *conf.* 7.12.18 and 7.16.22. Also, see *Gn. adv. Man.* 2.2.2. “You persistently ask me, ‘Where is evil from?’, but I in turn persistently ask you ‘What *is* evil? Whose question is more just? Those who seek where it comes from, though they are ignorant of what it is, or someone who thinks that we should first seek what it is in order to avoid asking about the origin of something of which we are ignorant? For what is more absurd than that?” (*percunctamini me unde sit malum; at ego uicissim percunctor uos quid sit malum. cuius est iustior inquisitio? eorum ne qui quaerunt unde sit, quod quid sit ignorant; an eius qui prius putat esse quaerendum quid sit, ut non ignotae rei - quod absurdissimum est - origo quaeratur?*)?

²⁴⁹ See *nat. b.* 4.

²⁵⁰ *conf.* 7.12.18, 7.15.21.

when something seems to disrupt this harmony—because one part does not agree with another—they are still governed by God’s overarching *ordo*. Though the disagreement of parts may be evil for particular things, no thing is evil in itself. This is true in the ordering of irrational things as well as rational things (whose harmony consists in justice). These things are arranged in an orderly manner in God, but not as though God were space itself, as Augustine previously imagined, but rather, they are in God insofar as God upholds them in being with his “truth hand” (*manu veritate*).²⁵¹

The truth about creation reveals the truth about God which, in turn, sheds new light on creation. Creation, now, becomes a clear sign of who God is. No longer is it the occasion of dissipating himself; no longer can part of it be taken for the Creator; no longer can the Creator be reduced to his creation. Instead, creation takes on a sacramental quality which leads to God, for now Augustine “clearly and truly saw Your invisible things of God, understood through the things which are made” (*vero invisibilia tua per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspexi*).²⁵² Indeed, creation even reveals the sacraments themselves. And it is through the Platonists that God teaches Augustine all of this.

B. Catholics

It is neither their understanding of God nor creation that sets the Catholics apart from the Platonists, but accepting the Incarnation and its effects. The *libri Platoniorum* “do not have the Face of his piety, the tears of confession, Your sacrifices: a crushed spirit, a contrite

²⁵¹ *conf.* 7.15.21: *quia tu es omnitenens manu veritate, et omnia vera sunt in quantum sunt.*

²⁵² *conf.* 7.17.23.

and humble heart; the salvation of the people, the espoused city, the pledge of the Holy Spirit, the cup of our redemption” (*non habent illae paginae vultum pietatis huius, lacrimas confessionis, sacrificium tuum, spiritum contribulatum, cor contritum et humilatum, populi salutem, sponsam civitatem, arram spiritus sancti, poculum pretii nostri*).²⁵³ This is a comprehensive list of how Augustine understands the difference between Christians and Platonists at the time of writing the *Confessions*: the Platonists lack first and foremost, the Incarnation and from this all the other errors follow: they are presumptuous about themselves rather than humble; they lack the Way and so they do not know salvation, there is no redemption, no Church and so no baptism or Eucharist, that is, those extensions of the Incarnation and Christ’s saving work through time.²⁵⁴

According to Augustine, the failure to accept the Incarnation is both a philosophical and moral failing. The Platonists—unlike any of the other philosophers—achieved a true understanding of God and, says Augustine, their true understanding of creation logically followed. They also recognized that happiness consists in participation in God, who is Wisdom, and that they need some kind of purification to achieve this end.²⁵⁵ Based on these principles, Augustine thinks that the Platonists make the *philosophical* error of not understanding the need for a mediator who is both God and man. “Neoplatonism was faced

²⁵³ *conf.* 7.21.27.

²⁵⁴ Perhaps, the lack of the “pledge of the Holy Spirit” also suggests that they do not know third Person of the Trinity and are therefore cut off from the grace of conversion and reformation. See *civ. Dei* 10.23, where Augustine argues that Plotinus is ignorant of the Holy Spirit, though Porphyry seems to have some notion of him.

²⁵⁵ See *conf.* 7.9.14.

with internal philosophical difficulties the Incarnation/Redemption would have resolved, and its not seeing so was a failure.”²⁵⁶ This leads to a moral failure which compounds the intellectual failure: “Even if they know God,” says the mature Augustine, “they do not glorify him or give him thanks,” and so they “become vain in their thoughts” (*etsi cognoscunt deum, non sicut deum glorificant aut gratias agunt, sed evanescent in cogitationibus suis*).²⁵⁷ The Platonists get so much right that they fall into pride about their knowledge.

But with the *libri Catholicorum* things are different. These books contain the same truth as the *libri Platoniorum* but “with the commendation of Your grace” (*cum commendatione gratiae tuae*).²⁵⁸ In the writings of Paul especially, Augustine finds the same truth, but with humble acknowledgement that the truth and the ability to see the truth are God’s gift. This, for Augustine, is very much an acknowledgement of what it means to be created. He immediately continues, “so that, he who sees may not so glory as if he did not receive not only *that* he sees, but even that he *may* see” (*ut qui videt non sic gloriatur, quasi non acceperit non solum id quod videt, sed etiam ut videat*). He then quotes one of his favorite Scripture passages about the meaning of creation, “for what does anyone have that he has not received?” (*quid enim habet quod non accepit*)?²⁵⁹ Accepting this truth about one’s own createdness is intimately related to accepting the truth about Christ.

²⁵⁶ King, “Augustine’s Encounter with Neoplatonism,” 216.

²⁵⁷ Aug. *conf.* 7.9.14, alluding to Rom. 1:19.

²⁵⁸ *conf.* 7.21.27.

²⁵⁹ *conf.* 7.21.27, quoting 1 Cor. 4:7.

According to Augustine, the Platonists know that they are mortal and sinful and they sincerely desire to be purged of sin so as to be reconciled to God who is immortal and sinless.²⁶⁰ But God is remote, distant, and not gracious: for the Platonists, the Word was *not* “made flesh and dwelled among us” (cf. *sed quia verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis, non ibi legi*).²⁶¹ In their pride, they try to attain God by their own power. This blinds them to the truth and leads them into curiosity. They fall in with demons, who are also proud, because like attracts like. The demons appear as viable mediators because they occupy a middle position between God and the world: they are non-bodily like God, so above man, but also not God themselves, so able to be engaged in some way.²⁶² This is, says Augustine, a false mediation: the demons are like man insofar as they are sinners and they are not truly like God, but only wish to appear so. Thus, they deceive those who seek God in pride.

Knowledge of God does not necessarily lead to confession, for how the heart responds to that knowledge makes all the difference. After seeing God for the first time, Augustine is not converted but, he says, follows the path of the proud Platonists: “Philosophical pride, the sense of being one who knows.”²⁶³ It is only when he has an encounter with the Word made flesh, with Christ Incarnate, that Augustine begins to acquire

²⁶⁰ *conf.* 10.42.67. See *civ. Dei* 8 and 10 for a later and more extensive critique of Platonic mediation and a properly Christian one.

²⁶¹ *conf.* 7.9.14; cf. 10.43.69.

²⁶² *conf.* 10.42.67.

²⁶³ Guardini, *Conversion*, 225; cf. *Aug. conf.* 7.20.26.

the requisite humility to recognize the truth about Christ, a truth which is made possible by the insights of the Platonists, but which, in turn, will profoundly deepen them. Though this truth is philosophically knowable, none of the philosophers knew it. This truth is found only with the Catholics.

To see this, it will be helpful to consider how the mature Augustine understands the Incarnation at the time of writing the *Confessions*. Then Book 8 will be examined in order to show how he comes to that understanding and how creation and the Incarnation function in Augustine's famous conversion narrative.

1. The Incarnation

Throughout his whole life, Augustine clung to a piety toward Christ, but he always struggled with how to understand him. As a Manichee, Augustine understood the Word to be an extrusion of God and the Incarnation to be repugnant; this led him to adopt a docetic view of Christ. When he is liberated from Manichean metaphysics, he adopted what he calls a "Photinian" view of Christ, namely, that Christ was a "man of excellent wisdom whom no one could equal" (*de excellentis sapientiae viro cui nullus posset aequari*), who, above all, was a great ethical teacher.²⁶⁴ For Augustine, right before and after his experience with the *libri Platoniorum*, Christ was a model of wisdom, a moral *exemplum*, whose life all were encouraged to imitate. But by the time he gets to Cassiciacum a few months later, he has abandoned this truncated view and has embraced a fully orthodox understanding of the

²⁶⁴ *conf.* 7.19.25. Whether this is truly the view of Photinus is not of primary concern. It is the content of Augustine's belief which is important for this study.

Incarnation.²⁶⁵ The hinge, which converts him from a Photinian to a Catholic, is his experience of Christ, God and man, in the garden at Milan which, it will be argued, is made possible by the new understanding of creation which the Platonists have given him.

a. Revealing the Distinction and Relationship Between God and the World

When Augustine was a Manichean, he feared that if God had any contact with the world, he would be polluted. But Augustine learned from the Platonists that God is utterly transcendent to the world and therefore totally present to it without competition. The Christian understanding of the Incarnation is a deepening of this understanding of God's transcendence, but also a clarification as well as a revelation about how God and the world are related.

In a later work, Augustine discusses the different ways God is present to the world and, though he does not articulate this as systematically in the *Confessions*, the same distinctions are clearly operative.²⁶⁶ First, "God is everywhere present through his divinity" (*ubique esse deum per diuinitatis praesentiam*).²⁶⁷ Second, though present to all equally and without diminishment, God is present by grace in some more than others: "He dwells in those who possess him according to their diverse capacities" (*in quibus habitat, habeant eum pro*

²⁶⁵ According to Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 64, Augustine most likely read the *libri Platoniorum* in June 386, had his experience in the garden at Milan at the end of August, and was in Cassiciacum writing away by November. See William Mallard, "The Incarnation in Augustine's Conversion," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 15 (1980): 98, and Harrison, *Rethinking*, 256-65 for discussions of the orthodoxy of Augustine's early Christology. For examples of Augustine's early understanding of Christ, see, *inter alia*, Aug. c. Acad. 2.1.1; div. qu. 83.16; Gn. adv. Man. 1.2.3; fd. et sym. 3; lib. arb. 2.15.39; ep. 11; ord. 2.5.16.

²⁶⁶ Aug. ep. 187, written in 417 to Dardanus, which Augustine later renames *De Praesentia Dei*.

²⁶⁷ ep. 187.5.16; cf. conf. 1.3.3, 6.3.4.

suae capacitatis diversitate).²⁶⁸ Lastly, God dwells in Christ in his fullness and “by a certain unique taking on of that man he is made one Person with the Word” (*singulari quadam susceptione hominis illius una facta est persona cum Verbo*).²⁶⁹ In each of these levels of presence to creation, the understanding of creation Augustine learned from the Platonists is at play, but in the last mode of presence—what is now called the “hypostatic union”—the understanding of God’s transcendence is deepened in proportion to the depth of his union with creation. The more radical the union, the more radical must be his transcendence.

Augustine does not quite have the Chalcedonian vocabulary to articulate the mystery of the Incarnation, but it is clear from what he says that he grasps the distinction and integrity of the human and divine natures (or substances) of Christ as well as the union of the Person.²⁷⁰ No longer misled by the Manichean teaching that Christ’s body was a phantom, Augustine was able to accept the humanity of Christ: “I acknowledged the whole man in Christ, not just the body of a man, or a soul with a body but without a mind, but an actual man” (*totum hominem in Christo agnoscebam, non corpus tantum hominis aut cum corpore sine mente animum, sed ipsum hominem*).²⁷¹ This is obvious, he says, from the fact that Christ moved, acted, and experienced emotions in places and times, as the Gospels amply attest. Christ is also true God, “equal to God and God with God and simultaneously one

²⁶⁸ *ep.* 187.6.19; cf. *conf.* 7.21.27, 12.11.12, 13.9.10.

²⁶⁹ *ep.* 187.13.40, referring to Col. 2:9; cf. *Aug. conf.* 7.19.25, 10.43.68, 11.2.4.

²⁷⁰ See Gerald Bonner, “Christ, God and Man, in the Thought of St Augustine,” *Angelicum* 61 (1984): 284-285 for an argument that Augustine’s Christology is consistent with Chalcedonian dogma. Also, Brian E. Daley, “Christology,” in *ATA*, 164-68, makes the same argument. See also *Aug. ep.* 137.3.9; *Jo. ev. tr.* 19.15.

²⁷¹ *conf.* 7.19.25.

God” (*equalis deo et deus apud deum et simul unus deus*).²⁷² In the womb of the Virgin, Augustine says, “human creation was wedded to Life Itself” (*ipsa vita . . . ei nupsit humana creatura*).²⁷³ Moreover, Christ, with both his divine and human natures, is one “Person of Truth” (*persona veritatis*), that is, one Divine Person.²⁷⁴ God and man become one, but do so, as in marriage, while remaining distinct.²⁷⁵

The fact that God assumes man reveals a new relationship between God and the world; it reveals a new possibility for intimacy with creation. The Incarnation reveals that the same God who created human beings, recreates them by “bridging the gap” which separates them in their *regio dissimilitudinis*. He bridges it not by becoming some third thing in between, but by uniting creation to the Creator in a Personal way. Though creation is gratuitous and reveals God’s love, the gratuitous redemption of creation deepens the understanding of that love and calls forth an even more profound response of gratitude. Augustine did not learn this from the Platonists. It is only when he encounters Christ himself that his knowledge of God becomes saving.

b. Participating Down

In discussing this radicalization, Augustine seemingly proposes an inversion of Platonic metaphysics. As was seen in the last chapter (see section entitled, “Participation”),

²⁷² *conf.* 10.43.68.

²⁷³ *conf.* 4.12.19.

²⁷⁴ *conf.* 7.19.25.

²⁷⁵ See also the remarkable *div. qu.* 73.2.

Augustine uses the idea of participation to help understand creation, the ontological distinction between God and the world, the hierarchy of being, and the fluctuation of being as it relates to virtue. Lower things always participate in the higher and can become better by participating more in them (or in the highest thing). In all of this, Augustine is a good Platonist. But when Augustine discusses the Incarnation, he turns this traditional metaphysics on its head: God, he says, participates in humanity. God comes to save “by participation in our coat of skins” (*participatione tunicae pelliciae nostrae*).²⁷⁶ In other words, the Incarnation reveals that participation can “move downward” as well as “upward.”²⁷⁷

At first blush, this would seem to be a contradiction: participation cannot work both ways; such a claim would overthrow the very stability of being itself. It does not make sense to say that higher things participate in lower since the lower depends on the higher for its being and well-being. By participating in the lower, the higher would become worse, it would undermine itself, and would also undermine the lower by ceasing to be the superior thing on which the lower depends. Participating in both directions would seem to cause the whole ontological hierarchy to fall into being-destroying conflict with itself.

²⁷⁶ *conf.* 7.18.24. See also *ep.* 187.6.20: “Through our Head, we are reconciled to God, because in him the divinity of the Only-Begotten becomes a participator in our mortality, so that we might become participators in his immortality” (*per caput nostrum reconciliamur deo, quia in illo est diuinitas unigeniti facta particeps mortalitatis nostrae, ut et nos participes eius immortalitatis essemus*).

²⁷⁷ See Meconi, “Incarnation and Role of Participation in St. Augustine’s *Confessions*,” 62-83. Meconi seems to suggest that Augustine uses a form of *participatio* only three times and only in Book 7, though the word *particeps* occurs numerous other times in the *Confessions*. See also, Mallard, “Incarnation in Augustine’s Conversion,” 80-98, for discussion of “divine participation ‘downward’” in the Cassiciacum dialogues.

This seems to be the very problem that the Platonists and the catechumen Augustine had with the Catholic faith.²⁷⁸ Augustine explicitly says that while reading the Platonists he thought of Christ as an excellent man who somehow had “a more perfect participation in wisdom” (*perfectiore participatione sapientiae*) rather than as the “Person of Truth” (*persona veritatis*).²⁷⁹ In other words, Augustine sees Christ as a part of the world, a very noble participator in something higher, rather than the uncreated, unchanging, transcendent source of Truth in whom all creatures participate. When Augustine finally accepts Christ, he comes to understand him as a participator in a different sense: Christ does not participate in something above him, but he unchangingly participates in something beneath him. Does this make any metaphysical sense? For the Bishop Augustine, it does. If God is radically not a part of the world, then he does not compete with it, so that while all creation participates in him, God can participate in a part of his creation without diminishment of his Being or Well-Being since these are unchangeably the same in him. “The immutable perfection of deity is now named as an eternal clemency or mercy, sealed in the self-humbling of Incarnation.”²⁸⁰

In the Incarnation, God does not undergo any change, but instead acts in a perfectly consistent way with his own unchanging nature. William Mallard provides this neat formula:

²⁷⁸ Colin Starnes suggests that the Platonists reject Christ “on the grounds that the eternal and the temporal cannot be united in this way. It is true that human understanding distinguishes between these two, but there is nothing in their knowledge of God that shows that he cannot or does not unite what we must hold apart. Indeed, their knowledge recognizes a higher mystery in which all things are contained - and yet, spurning this wisdom which goes beyond the limits of their own understanding, they fall instead into the folly of limiting God to the powers they themselves possess” (Starnes, “Prolegomena to the Last Three Books” (paper presented at Celebrating Augustine’s *Confessions*: Reading the *Confessions* for the New Millennium, Pruitt Memorial Symposium, Baylor University, Waco, TX, October 4, 2001): 12).

²⁷⁹ *Aug. conf.* 7.19.25.

²⁸⁰ Mallard, “Incarnation in Augustine’s Conversion,” 98.

God's "Immutability = perfection = perfect goodness = mercy = its actualization in self-abasement."²⁸¹ God participates in human nature not by depending on it or becoming more or better by it, but by personally uniting himself to it in a mysterious union. This union does not change God, but it does change human beings or, at least, offers the possibility of change. "The Word," Augustine says, "is not changed by taking up man, just as the members [of the body] are not changed by putting on clothes; nevertheless, that taking up ineffably joined together the taken up thing with the one who took it up" (*non mutatum esse uerbum susceptione hominis, sicuti nec membra ueste induta mutantur, quamquam illa susceptio ineffabiliter susceptum suscipienti copulauerit*).²⁸²

c. Mediator

Perhaps the most important thing the Incarnation teaches Augustine is a way to understand mediation. In the Incarnation, God becomes Mediator. As God, he is the Goal; as man, he is the Priest, the Victim, the Sacrifice, and the Way.²⁸³ As Mediator, Christ "implies not only the remission of sins, but the fulfillment of the destiny for which human nature was originally created."²⁸⁴ He is the deifying food which was revealed in his first glimpse of creation and which the Platonist catechumen feared was remote. This food comes

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Aug. *div. qu.* 73.2. Augustine has another helpful formulation in the same question: *hoc ergo nomine habitus satis significauit apostolus, quemadmodum dixerit in similitudinem hominum factus, quia non transfiguratione in hominem, sed habitu factus est, cum indutus est hominem, quem sibi uniens quodammodo atque conformans immortalitati aeternitati que sociaret* (Ibid.).

²⁸³ *conf.* 10.43.68-69.

²⁸⁴ Bonner, "Christ, God and Man," 275.

to him in the humble form of flesh in order to take flesh back up into God.²⁸⁵ The Platonists looked for something between God and man, but Augustine learns that the true Mediator must be *both God and man*. If the Mediator was simply like God, then he would be far from man; if he is simply like man, he would be far from God. As a man, Christ mediates between fallen humanity and God, but as Word he does not stand between but stands as the Goal.

For Augustine, the Incarnation provides an example of what human beings should be now—humble—and what they are destined to be—God, by participation. But Christ is not only an inspiring example: through his Incarnation, death, and resurrection, he helps bring about this transformation through grace. By becoming submissive to him, he “heals swellings and nourishes love, not that [humans] might progress further in reliance on themselves, but rather that they become weaker” (*sanans tumorem et nutriens amorem, ne fiducia sui progredierentur longius, sed potius infirmarentur*).²⁸⁶ He does this so that “Your Word, Eternal Truth, surpassingly above the highest parts of Your creation, [can] raise up there to himself those who have become submissive” (*verbum enim tuum, aeterna veritas, superioribus creaturae tuae partibus supereminens subditos erigit ad se ipsam*).²⁸⁷ The Incarnation offers a preview of what humans will be and how they will get there. Unlike the Manichees who thought they were God already and the Platonists who thought they could achieve God on their own, Augustine learns from the Catholics that it is only by Christ’s

²⁸⁵ Aug. *conf.* 7.18.24.

²⁸⁶ *conf.* 7.18.24.

²⁸⁷ *conf.* 7.18.24.

participating in their humanity that human beings can participate fully in God. “He who was God was made man to make Gods those who were men” (*deos facturus qui homines erant, homo factus est qui deus erat*).²⁸⁸ This is something which is begun in this life, especially by participating in the sacraments,²⁸⁹ but is completed in the next when God shall be seen face to face. “For even us, though we are loved by Your Son, *it has not yet appeared what we shall be*. He stretched toward us through the lattice of the flesh and coaxed us and inflamed us, and we ran after his odor. *But when he appears, we will be like him, since we shall see him as he is*. Just as he is, Lord, it will be ours to see, but it is not for us yet” (*et nos quamvis filio tuo dilecti sumus, nondum apparuit quod erimus. attendit per retia carnis et blanditus est et inflammavit, et currimus post odorem eius. sed cum apparuerit, similes ei erimus, quoniam videbimus eum sicuti est. sicuti est, domine, videre nostrum, quod nondum est nobis*).²⁹⁰ Human beings are not God, but they are destined to become God by participation because God participated in them.

2. Grace: Creation’s Relation to God

For Augustine, grace means participation in the divine life. It means participating in the Word who illumines the mind and the Holy Spirit who converts the will. God works on the mind and heart of fallen humanity in order to “stretch” (*extentio*) them to the point where

²⁸⁸ s. 192.1, likely given on Christmas some time after 411.

²⁸⁹ See Harrison, *Rethinking*: “It is Christ, the Word, the one Mediator between God and man in the Eucharist, who is the most powerful medicine provided by God for man’s redemption (10.43.69)” (63). See Chapter Four for more on the sacraments.

²⁹⁰ Aug. *conf.* 13.15.18.

they can begin to receive him. Though the *capacity* to participate fully in God is given in creation, its *fulfillment* does not come about by any natural powers, but through God's freely offered gift of himself, that is, through grace.²⁹¹

Only in humility, the humility both modeled and graciously given by Christ, can Augustine recognize this. No longer can Augustine take pride in his knowing or doing; no longer can he assert his will on the world; no longer can he disdain the order of creation as though he were God himself. For, there is nothing he has that he has not been given. He can boast of nothing except God's merciful grace which brought him into existence from nothing, gives him a capacity for being with him, and expands this capacity so that he can fulfill Augustine's deepest longings. God works in Augustine without in any way undermining the integrity of his nature: God makes it flourish as it was created to flourish and instead of becoming less human by God's presence, it becomes more human, more fully what it was created to be. And not only does it become more human, but it becomes elevated and, on the model of the Incarnation, taken up and transformed by God's presence.

²⁹¹ Guardini notes a three stage development in Augustine's attitude toward grace, each of which reveals a different understanding of creation (the following comes from *Conversion*, 31). "At first," Guardini says, grace "appears as something alien, oppressive, destructive, which seems to threaten the natural personality." God's grace appears as something in competition with human nature; it is understood as something in the world which cannot coexist with our nature. As God converts Augustine's mind and heart, they expand and begin to transform so that the offer of grace "is recognized as the truly delectable, a delight" which, however "requires the surrender of the personal." It is something attractive, but external, which draws Augustine to it. He cannot, though, achieve what he desires by his own powers: only by "surrendering" to God's power at work in him. "Finally comes the realization that it is not 'alien' at all, but bearer of the person's most real reality; that only through 'surrendering' his soul does the person find his truest self." A true understanding of God opens up the truth about how he relates to the world: not in competition with it but, as J. Patout Burns says, "the divine presence and power working and thereby present in the world, upon which the creatures' own operations are totally dependent" ("Grace," in *ATA*, 392).

Book 8 is devoted to describing how Augustine comes to this understanding of God's relationship to the world or, more particularly, God's relationship of grace toward Augustine himself. In Book 7, Augustine came to the truth about God's distinction from the world; in Book 8, he comes to the truth about God's relationship to the world. The hinge in coming to this new understanding is his own heart which can only recognize the truth of the latter by becoming humble, that is, by entering into Christ's humility. The full truth about creation and human beings as created is intimately related to the truth about Christ. The truth about creation opens up the truth about Christ who reveals the truth about the human relationship to God and who they are as "certain portions of his creation" (cf. *aliqua portio creaturae tuae*).²⁹²

3. Creation and Conversion

Augustine's conversion in Book 8 is well-known and well-studied. The details and the scholarship will not be rehearsed here.²⁹³ Instead, this section seeks to demonstrate how creation is operative in the story, indeed, how creation constitutes the deep grammar of Augustine's conversion. Book 8 begins with a conflicted Augustine hearing a number of

²⁹² Aug. *conf.* 1.1.1.

²⁹³ Among the abundant literature on Augustine's conversion, see, for example, Brian Dobell, *Augustine's Intellectual Conversion: The Journey from Platonism to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Paula Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self," *Journal of Theological Studies* 37(1) (1986): 3-34; Guardini, *The Conversion of Augustine*; Eugene Kevane, "Christian Philosophy: The Intellectual Side of Augustine's Conversion," *Augustinian Studies* 17 (1986): 47-83; O'Connell, *Images of Conversion in Augustine's Confessions*; Colin Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1990); Frederick Van Fleteren, "St. Augustine's Theory of Conversion," *Augustine: Second Founder of Faith*, eds. by Frederick Van Fleteren and Joseph Schnaubelt (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 65-82. Also, see references throughout section.

conversion stories after which, he says, “I was on fire for imitating” (*exarsi ad imitandum*).²⁹⁴ This phrase gives an insight into how Augustine understands the process of his conversion, for imitation is a category of created being and the language of “fire” points to the creative role of the Holy Spirit (that is, to *formatio*). All things are created through the Son, the true Image of God, and so all things imitate God because they bear the creative mark of the Image through whom they were made.²⁹⁵ They are like God because they are created through the Likeness. Thus, imitation is written into the very structure of things; it is what makes a thing like God and enables it to exist as that thing.

Imitation, though, is not only a category of creation, but also of re-creation.

Following St. Paul, Augustine says that conversion does not begin by imitating Christ directly, but “by imitating the imitators of your Christ” (*imitando imitatores Christi tui*).²⁹⁶

Those who have achieved the imitation of Christ become his image and thus become imitable images for others; the imitators imitate the Exemplar and so become examples themselves.

In Book 8, God providentially puts before Augustine a series of examples to imitate—

²⁹⁴ *conf.* 8.5.10.

²⁹⁵ It is important to note that the Son does not convert. Thus, creatures do not imitate the Son’s *turning*, but bear the mark of the Son’s perfect Likeness so that they reflect God in some way. Creatures convert by being made like God; they are turned by being created through the Word. Compare Plotinus *Enn.* 5.2.1, where the *Nous* does, in fact, convert. It is unclear whether Augustine knew this passage, but either way it is clear that he has a different understanding than Plotinus on this point. In Augustine’s metaphysics, the notion of the Son converting would be ontologically Arian.

²⁹⁶ *Aug. conf.* 13.21.31. Compare Sokolowski, *God of Faith and Reason*: “The imitation of Christ in the life of the Christian is the primary and proper repetition of the Christian distinction between God and the world. The need to imitate Christ . . . is not simply a matter of pious exhortation or moral excellence; it is based on the kinds of events that occurred in the life of Jesus, on the distinctions that were brought out in those events. It is based on the ‘nature’ of things made manifest in Christ. We cannot hear about these realities without, simultaneously, being called to imitate them and to involve ourselves with them” (124).

Victorinus, Anthony, the two government officials, the children of Lady Contenance—who are presented as men and women *converted* through and *con-formed* to the Word, that is, they are presented as those who have been *re-created* in Christ.²⁹⁷ The Holy Spirit sets Augustine on fire to imitate them, for the Spirit is that bond of love between the one imitating and the one imitated. By inspiring rightly ordered desire, the Holy Spirit re-forms the distended soul, focusing it on God (*intentio*), “stretching” it (*extensio*), and thus “making room” for God to enter in.²⁹⁸ It is no accident, then, that the last examples offered for Augustine’s imitation are the children of Lady *Contenance*, for continence is that reforming virtue by which, Augustine says, “we are collected together and brought back into the One from whom we have been dissipated into many things” (*per continentiam quippe conligimur et redigimur in unum, a quo in multa defluximus*).²⁹⁹

Augustine narrates how he struggles with himself, weeps, hears children playing, reads Scripture, and is flooded with light.³⁰⁰ He narrates his conversion. But what has happened in this familiar sequence? The Word being imitated by others prepares Augustine to hear the Word speaking through the children’s words, which leads to the Word of Scripture, which leads to the Word made flesh. In each of these temporal events, the

²⁹⁷ See Lewis Ayres, “Into the Poem of the Universe: *Exempla*, Conversion, and Church in Augustine’s *Confessiones*,” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 13 (2009), 263-281.

²⁹⁸ See Aug. *conf.* 11.29.39, 10.1.1, 1.5.6. Compare *en. Ps.* 37.27: “By desiring [Christ] and imitating his passion, we are renewed” (*desiderando eum et passionem eius imitando renovamur*).

²⁹⁹ *conf.* 10.29.40. See also *conf.* 13.34.49, Augustine’s commentary—in the form of an allegorical interpretation of the creation story—on imitation leading to continence.

³⁰⁰ *conf.* 8.12.29.

unchanging Word beckons Augustine to *conversion*, to increased likeness to Christ. When Augustine hears the *tolle lege*, he remembers Anthony's conversion and is moved to imitate him.³⁰¹ This detail sheds light on the "mechanics" of how creation is operative in Augustine's conversion: the examples put before Augustine form his memory so that he begins not to be "conformed to this world, but reformed in [his] mind . . . Thus, a man is renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of him, who created him" (*nolite conformari huic saeculo, sed reformamini in novitate mentis vestrae . . . ita homo renovatur in agnitione dei secundum imaginem eius, qui creavit eum*).³⁰² The examples participate in the Light and thus become a light which can shed light for others. By providing new, light-filled memories, the examples illumine Augustine's mind so he can see the world in a new light. The process of *reformatio* has begun. Augustine is now able to rightly interpret the children's words. He interprets them as a divine command to read Scripture and when he sees the Way in the call of the scriptural Word he is further illumined: it was, he says, "as if a light of surety was infused into my heart" (*quasi luce securitatis infusa cordi meo omnes dubitationis tenebrae diffugerunt*).³⁰³ Augustine is exhorted to "put on Christ," to be baptized, which will incorporate him into the Body of Christ, the Church,³⁰⁴ drawing him ever closer to that Image toward which he was made.

³⁰¹ *conf.* 8.12.29.

³⁰² *conf.* 13.22.32. These two sentences are based on Rom. 12:2 and Col. 3:10, respectively. See also *Aug. conf.* 13.13.14, 13.23.33, 13.26.40, 13.34.49.

³⁰³ *conf.* 8.12.29. This language clearly refers to illumination, that is, *formatio* for rational creatures.

³⁰⁴ See *conf.* 9.6.14.

Augustine's conversion and reformation is not completed in the experience in the garden, as important as it is. There is a necessary sacramental dimension to conversion and reformation which confirms, sustains, and completes what was begun there. In Baptism, Augustine will be incorporated into the Body of Christ and in the Eucharist he will be continually con-formed to him.³⁰⁵ These sacraments are the full entering into and conforming oneself to the Word, begun in this life and completed in the next. This sacramental dimension will be discussed in Chapter Four.

4. Creation and Free Will

It is not until Augustine experiences the liberating effects of God's grace that he understands what free will is.³⁰⁶ He offers the definitive statement on it in Book 9, right after discussing his conversion:

But where in that time full of years and from what secret and deep hidden-place was my free choice called out in a moment, by which I subdued my neck to Your gentle yoke my shoulders to Your light burden, O Christ Jesus, my Helper and my Redeemer?

*sed ubi erat tam annoso tempore et de quo imo altoque secreto evocatum est in momento liberum arbitrium meum, quo subderem cervicem leni iugo tuo et umeros levi sarcinae tuae, Christe Iesu, adiutor meus et redemptor meus?*³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ Augustine even calls baptism the *conversionis sacramentum* (ep. 98.9). See next chapter.

³⁰⁶ *conf.* 7.3.4. A good treatment of Augustine's understanding of the will, especially in its relationship to grace, is Mary T. Clark's underappreciated *Augustine: Philosopher of Freedom* (New York: Desclée Company, 1958); see, in particular, her chapter on the *Confessions* (70-81). For an overview of the way Augustine uses the term *voluntas*, see Marianne Djuth, "Will," in *ATA*, 881-85. For Augustine's early understanding of will and grace in the context of creation, see Harrison, *Rethinking*, 91-100, as well as the two chapters devoted to these topics. Also, James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); T. Kermit Scott, *Augustine: His Thought in Context* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), especially, "Part Three: Augustinianism," 141-229; Frederick Sontag, "Augustine's Metaphysics and Free Will," *Harvard Theological Review* 60, no. 3 (July 1967): 297-306; Mallard, *Language and Love*, 103-68; John M. Rist, *Ancient Thought Baptized*, 148-202.

For Augustine, the grace of Christ is central to his understanding of free will. As the passage suggests, the grace which God gives Augustine through Christ is the summoning, the calling forth, of Augustine's free will. God can help him through grace without in any way denying his free will. In fact, for Augustine, grace is precisely the freeing of free will to act freely.³⁰⁸ There is no contradiction between God's aiding him and his freely acting: both occur at the same time, indeed, *must* occur at the same time. Because human beings are created as converted toward God, their will is most truly what it was created to be when it is turned toward God, when it is attuned to the Divine Will. God's transcendence from his creation means that there is not any competition between God's activity in man and man's activity in God. God liberates Augustine's will, through Christ, whose own humanity is perfectly ordered to God, so that Augustine can freely participate in Christ and so be truly free.

Augustine's understanding of grace and free will is rooted in his understanding of *creatio ex nihilo* as a kind of primordial grace. This means, for Augustine, that rational creation is brought into being not as a thing which passively receives God's gifts (for this would imply that the creature existed in some way already), but because God "brings being out of nothing, his 'causal' activity is manifest in the creature as effect, *precisely in the creature's own actuality and activity.*"³⁰⁹ The human creature is at all because God freely creates him with a "hylomorphic" integrity which is manifest in the freedom to act. The

³⁰⁷ Aug. *conf.* 9.1.1.

³⁰⁸ See *spir. et litt.* 30.52, written in 412: "Do we, then, by grace empty free choice? Let that be far from our thoughts! Rather, we establish free choice even more" (*Liberum ergo arbitrium evacuumus per gratiam? Absit, sed magis liberum arbitrium statuimus*).

³⁰⁹ Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, 85, emphasis original.

context of this freedom is God's freely causing him to be a form-matter unity from nothing. God "is free of all creatures and . . . lets creatures be because he freely wills them to be. The being of creatures is given in noncreaturely freedom and knowledge, and human freedom and knowledge are ordered toward this noncreaturely free letting be of creatures out of nothing."³¹⁰

In the present case this means that God does not manipulate Augustine's heart to make it work; this would undermine his freedom. Rather, God frees it from the external hindrances which divide it so that it can be fully at work in God while God is fully at work in it.³¹¹ In light of the Incarnation, Augustine can make sense of his experience in the garden: God's assuming man and God's dwelling in him through grace, though different in important respects, both carry the same creational principle within them. The God who transcends the world can be present and active in it without destroying its integrity, but because he freely created it *ex nihilo* he not only does not destroy its freedom, but establishes it.

C. Conclusion

In the garden, Augustine comes to terms with what it means to be created, that is, he learns the truth that he is utterly dependent on the grace of God for both his being and well-being. Through the Platonists, God opened up the truth of creation, but it was Augustine's direct encounter with the Word made flesh—in the *exempla*, the children, and Scripture—which brought him to the full truth about himself and about how God relates to the world.

³¹⁰ Prufer, "A Reading of Augustine's *Confessions*," 28.

³¹¹ Clark, *Philosopher of Freedom*, 70.

The experience in the garden enables him to move beyond his “Photinian” errors about Christ, beyond the impersonal relationship between God and the world of the Platonists, and to see that God works incarnationally and unconfusedly in the world.

Augustine comes to understand his own life not as something he has a proud claim to, but as a gift to be accepted in humility. This is the radical truth about creation, which the pride of the Platonists blinded him to and which the humility of the Incarnation taught him. Obedient to that Word, Augustine must not only take up and read Scripture, but also his own life. Augustine repeats the child’s words *tolle lege* two times: he is obedient to the first command in the garden. But the second one is not fulfilled until ten years later when Augustine writes the *Confessions* wherein he takes up and reads his own life profiled against the horizon of the God who is *infinitum aliter*, who is not in competition with him, but who bears him up, establishes his freedom, and makes him to be what he was created to be.³¹²

³¹² See Crosson, “Religion and Faith,” 163.

CHAPTER THREE: THE NEW CONTEXT CREATION ESTABLISHES

*consopita est insania mea,
et evigilavi in te
-conf. 7.14.20*

I. The New Context of Creation

In Chapter One, Augustine's understanding of creation was discussed; in Chapter Two, how he came to that understanding. In this chapter, it will be shown how Augustine's new understanding of creation establishes a new context from which all things are now understood. In some sense, this discussion has already been anticipated in the last chapter, especially in the discussion of Augustine's early life and his developing Christology. Still, only aspects of the new context were touched on there; now it will be explored in depth.

In a powerful image, Augustine describes this new context as a transition from madness to sanity: "But afterwards, You nurtured the head of one who did not know and You closed my eyes so that they would not see vanity. I ceased from myself a little, and my insanity was lulled, and I awoke in You and I saw You infinite, in a different way, and this sight was not dragged from the flesh" (*sed posteaquam fovisti caput nescientis et clausisti oculos meos, ne viderent vanitatem. cessavi de me paululum, et consopita est insania mea, et evigilavi in te et vidi te infinitum aliter, et visus iste non a carne trahebatur*).¹ Augustine's understanding of creation is a new way of seeing things; it gives him a new perspective on God and the world. Creation introduces a "dimensional difference, a new way of taking things. It introduces a new way in which the world as a whole, and everything in the world,

¹ Aug. *conf.* 7.14.20; cf. Plotinus *Enn.* 5.5.12.

can be interpreted.”² In the new context that creation establishes, the world and all the things in it are profiled against the transcendent God who freely chose to bring them into being from nothing. This is not simply an insight alongside other insights, but a radical and life-changing fact about the being of things which inevitably transforms how they are understood. As noted in the last chapter (see “Stage Four: Infinite in a Different Way”), this understanding is completed and radicalized by the Incarnation, the understanding of which was opened up by creation. It will be the task of this chapter to draw out more clearly both what the new context is and how things are newly understood within it.

II. The *Confessions* in the New Context

In the Prologue of the *Confessions* (1.1.1-5.6), Augustine establishes the creational context for how to understand the book that follows. The Prologue is both the fruit of living in the new context which creation establishes and it reveals the tensions that are always present within this new context.³ In the first line of the *Confessions*, Augustine sets up a distinction and a relation which situates everything that follows:

Great are You, Lord, and very praisable! Great is Your Power and of Your Wisdom there is no number. And man, a little portion of Your creation, desires to praise You, man who carries about his mortality, carries about the testimony of his sin and the testimony that You resist the proud; and yet man, a little portion of Your creation desires to praise You.

magnus es, domine, et laudabilis valde. magna virtus tua et sapientiae tuae non est numerus. et laudare te vult homo, aliqua portio creaturae tuae, et homo circumferens

² Sokolowski, “Creation and Christian Understanding,” 46.

³ Compare Frances Young, “Creation and Human Being,” who says, “The opening words of the *Confessions* suggest a re-reading of the first book in terms of a reflection on creatureliness” (336).

*mortalitatem suam, circumferens testimonium peccati sui et testimonium quia superbis resistis; et tamen laudare te vult homo, aliqua portio creaturae tuae.*⁴

The *Confessions* begins by employing the deeper Pauline sense of creation discussed in the first chapter, that is, by making a *distinction* and establishing a *relationship* between the *magnus dominus* and the *homo, aliqua portio creaturae*. God and man are distinct. God is great, praiseworthy, powerful, wise and limitless, while man is a certain part of God's creation, circumscribed by death, lugging about his sins, and therefore bearing witness to his pride and limitations, both his created limitations and his self-inflicted ones. Yet, God and man have a relationship which, here, has three related aspects: praise, creation, and "conflict." First, God is highly praisable—*laudabilis valde*, intrinsically worthy of praise—and, by nature it seems, man desires to praise him. There is a relation between human desire and God's nature. Second, man is *aliqua portio creaturae tuae*: he is created and limited, a particular part of a larger creation, related to God as creature to Creator. Third, man sins against God, his mortality bears witness to this, and God resists his pride (*superbis resistis*). There is a relation of rebellion on man's part and a healing resistance on God's part. "And still, man desires to praise God."⁵

Augustine not only contrasts God and man, but contrasts his use of language when speaking to or about them. Though these are *Augustine's Confessions*, they do not begin with Augustine, but with God, the Beginning and End of all things. The text opens with a

⁴ Aug. *conf.* 1.1.1.

⁵ See *conf.* 1.1.1.

verse from a Psalm,⁶ addressed to God and confessing his greatness. This is immediately followed by a comment in Augustine’s own words—that is, not a quotation from Scripture—on man’s limitations and his relation to God.

For Augustine, Scripture perfectly unites the Word of God with human words and both the Word himself and the Scriptures are to be contrasted with the mere words of human beings. In Book 11, Augustine says, “These [merely human words] are below me and they are not, since they flee and pass away; but the Word of my God abides above me in eternity” (*haec longe infra me sunt nec sunt, quia fugiunt et praetereunt; verbum autem dei mei supra me manet in aeternum*).⁷ And in Book 13, Augustine has the Trinity say to him, “What my Scripture says, I say” (*quod scriptura mea dicit, ego dico*).⁸ Though spoken in time, Scripture transmits an unchanging Word. The non-scriptural words of human beings, in contrast, while also spoken in time, pass away and “are not.”

Thus, the form of what Augustine says in these opening lines reflects the content as closely as possible. Augustine contrasts the greatness of God with the shortcomings of human beings and this same contrast is reflected in using Scripture to speak about the former and his own words for the latter. The language not only reinforces the distinction, but also the relationship. Augustine’s use of Psalms is no accident for as Michael McCarthy suggests, “the psalms not only articulate the intimacy of Creator with creation but also voice the

⁶ Perhaps one or a combination of Ps. 47:1, 95:4, 144:3, or 146:5.

⁷ Aug. *conf.* 11.6.8.

⁸ *conf.* 13.29.44.

natural response of all creatures.”⁹ The meaning of the Psalms will be discussed further below. For now, it should be noted how closely Augustine’s rhetoric reflects and reinforces his meaning.

The contrast between God and human beings is reinforced further by the actual grammar of the statements. The first statement about God is *Magnus es, domine, et laudabilis valde*. It is a direct address to God which predicates something of his being: God is great and very praisable. Given what follows, it would not be a stretch to say that God is identified with his qualities by the use of a kind of timeless present. This is followed by two more sentences, both of which, grammatically, reflect a kind of timelessness in God. First, *magna virtus tua* is what is sometimes called a “nominal sentence,” that is, a sentence which contains no verb and therefore no tense.¹⁰ This is followed by *et sapientiae tuae non est numerus*, which again uses the abiding, present tense of *esse*. The terms *virtus* and *sapientia* refer to the second person of the Trinity,¹¹ Who like the Father is eternal. All three sentences about God, by their very grammar, hint at God’s eternity. Finally, except perhaps for

⁹ Michael C McCarthy, “Creation through the Psalms in Augustine’s *Enarrationes in Psalmos*,” *Augustinian Studies* 37/2 (2006): 191.

¹⁰ This construction is found both in Greek and Latin; see, for example, *beati pauperes spiritu* (Mt. 5:2). Augustine often uses this construction when speaking of God. Of these kinds of constructions (in Greek), Alfred Mollin and Robert Williamson suggest “they are called ‘nominal sentences’ because they are expressed through nouns, adjectives and the definite article alone, that is, through the parts of speech which are ordinarily employed only for *naming*, as opposed to *predicating*. Nominal sentences lack a verb, and the *verb* is preeminently the predicating part of speech . . . Lacking a verb, a nominal sentence has no built-in reference to the speaker or the occasion of speaking. Accordingly, nominal sentences are best suited to the impersonal and timeless character of maxims or folk-sayings (compare *Finders keepers, losers weepers*, with which children attempt to justify sudden appropriations through an appeal to ageless custom). When the verbs [for being] are used, the speaker *himself* asserts the truth of what he says” (*An Introduction to Ancient Greek*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), 31).

¹¹ See 1 Cor. 1:24.

laudabilis, none of the words here refer to anything beyond God: grammatically, Augustine suggests God's self-sufficiency.

In both content and grammar, the statements about *homo* are different. First, he is a creature and “creatures (as the word already suggests) are defined exhaustively in terms of their relation to God.”¹² Augustine emphasizes that man is not great, self-sufficient, and timeless like God, but is needy (*vult*), partial (*portio*), bounded (*circumferens*), finite (*mortalitatem*), sinful (*peccati*), and referable (*testimonium*). Augustine repeats the phrase, *laudare te vult homo, aliqua portio creaturae tuae*, which frames the initial comments about man, perhaps rhetorically suggesting multiplicity as well as limitation: man is a part of the whole, a piece among pieces, and is bounded by these limits. Yet, there is hope, for human beings belong to God: two times “*Your* creation” is mentioned. But this hope is checked by the contrast with the two things which belong to *homo*: “*his* death” and “*his* sin.” Importantly, the contrast is between what God has made and what humans have made, a contrast Augustine later makes explicit: “And finding *that You have made them*, they do not give themselves to You, so that You should preserve *what You have made*, and they do not slay [in sacrifice] to You *what they have made themselves to be*” (*et inveniētes quia tu fecisti eos, non ipsi se dant tibi, se ut serves quod fecisti, et quales se ipsi fecerant occidunt se tibi*).¹³ The two “makings” are brought together in the *testimonium quia superbis resistis*:

¹² Griffiths, *Lying*, 46.

¹³ Aug. *conf.* 5.3.4; cf. *en. Ps.* 29.22: *Confitere ergo modo quod tu fecisti in Deum, et confiteberis quod tibi fecerit Deus. Quid fecisti? Peccata. Quid Deus? Confitemini iniquitatem tuam dimittit tibi peccata tua, ut ei postea laudes ipsius confitens in aeternum, non compungaris peccato.*

human rebellion is met by God's (healing) resistance. *Homo* is *circumferens*, "carrying about," encircled and weighed down by his burden of sin and death. He is not an end in himself, but a *testimonium*, a sign of something else, namely, sin and pride and God's resistance. Within the rhetorical framework of this passage, Augustine repeats the words *circumferens . . . circumferens . . . testimonium . . . testimonium*, forming a kind of chain of words which show humanity's self-inflicted constraints. Human beings, it seems, could not be farther from God: in contrast to God's greatness, limitlessness, and self-sufficiency, they are weak and sinful, bounded and scattered, and suffering from a misery of their own making.

And yet, Augustine says, humans are God's creation and they desire to praise him: *creatura* and *laudare* reveal God's intended distinction and relationship between God and his creation. These abide, even after human beings have sinned (which, it should be recalled, means confusing the distinction between God and the world and thereby perverting the relationship). In the opening lines, *laudare* is the only verbal link between God and rational creation (*laudabilis* and *laudare*), while the phrase *creatura tua* reveals the origin of human beings and their dependence on God. Creation and praise are intrinsically related.¹⁴ It is precisely *because* rational creatures are created by God that they desire to praise him for what he has done. The relation of creation and praise opens up a dimension mentioned in the first chapter: gratitude. Human beings give God thanks for what he has done and praise him for Who He Is (*laudabilis*). But they come to know Who He Is through what he has done for

¹⁴ Compare *lib. arb.* 3.7 and 3.13.

them. Creation rightly understood calls for gratitude which, in a sense, mediates or leads to praise. It opens up the truth not only of what God has done for his creation, but Who He Is in himself, which is praisable simply. God calls forth this praise (*laudabilis*) because of Who He Is, while human beings, as creatures who lack, desire to give due praise to their Creator, thereby making up for their own lack (though they do not always recognize this desire or act on it).

The next sentence of the first chapter reveals a new dimension of the relationship between God and man: “You stir him up so that he might delight in praising You” (*tu excitas ut laudare te delectet*).¹⁵ Augustine says that God helps him do what he, by nature, desires to do, but cannot achieve by his natural powers alone.¹⁶ God intervenes to facilitate the praise human creation wants to give; he makes it easy for man to praise him by giving him delight in the praise he naturally desires to give. God is, by his nature, very praisable and easily able to be praised, but the *homo*, who desires this, cannot accomplish it. So, God conforms the desires of human creation to his own Being. In other words, God makes human beings to delight in what is truly delightful and so heals their desires so that they accord with what is true about their own human nature. Creation leads to praise; praise has a re-forming effect on the soul. Again, the interplay of creation and recreation can be seen. On this point, McCarthy notes that Augustine “consistently remarks that the great works of creation reveal

¹⁵ *conf.* 1.1.1.

¹⁶ On the natural desire for God, see *conf.* 10.23.33.

God by stimulating the human mind to regard the utter gratuity of the Creator. Precisely through such a stimulus, however, the image of God is refashioned in the one who praises.”¹⁷

Why, though, must God intervene for human beings to praise him? Augustine offers two reasons: the first reason, which is true but less to the point, is that human beings are fallen and their desires are confused because clouded by sin. God must step in and heal their desires so that they desire him aright. But even if humans were without sin, God would have to intervene. The second reason, which is less obvious but more true, has to do with the distinction between Creator and creation. For Augustine, the natural desires of humans can, for the most part, be satisfied in a natural way. The desire for food can be satisfied by eating. The desire for beautiful music can be satisfied by listening to Ambrose’s hymns. The desire to contemplate the heavens can be satisfied by looking up. These natural desires, and all other ordinate ones, can generally be satisfied by actions within the natural competence of human beings. But the natural desire to praise God is not within this natural competence because God is not a thing in the world on which human powers can operate. Human beings are a part of the whole, a *portio creaturae*, and can, for the most part, act on or towards other parts of the whole. But God transcends the whole and so humans cannot act on or toward him. God must intervene so that what is naturally desired, but is beyond the natural ability to achieve, can be achieved by his help.¹⁸

¹⁷ McCarthy, “Creation through the Psalms,” 214.

¹⁸ See discussion of *confessio* below.

When Augustine came to see the distinction between God and the world, he discovered himself to be in a *regio dissimilitudinis*.¹⁹

This is an ontological dissimilarity, or alienation, for it expresses [Augustine's] acute awareness of his own identity as a created being, in contrast to God, who is Being itself . . . The encounter with divine Being makes human beings, created from nothing, aware of the frightening ontological chasm which separates them from it. This is not, primarily, a gulf opened up by sin, but one that permanently exists at the most basic level of existence itself.²⁰

The new context which creation establishes does not leave one in a comfortable place. In fact, God has created things in such a way that there can be no true rest for human beings in this world. The next sentence of the opening lines bears this out: “You made us toward Yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in You” (*fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te*).²¹ The *inquietum* arises from an “ontological dissimilarity,” because human beings lack the fullness of being. It arises because God wants it to arise, because he has created humans this way, so that they seek their rest in him.

This famous sentence, one could argue, sums up all the fruits of Augustine's exegesis, metaphysics, and ethics at this point in his life and, moreover, contains the whole of the *Confessions*. Augustine says, *fecisti nos ad te*. Most English translators translate this phrase as “You made us for Yourself,” which, though not wrong, dulls the force of what Augustine seems to have in mind. In a recent English translation effort, Maria Boulding offers: “you

¹⁹ Aug. *conf.* 7.10.16.

²⁰ Harrison, *Rethinking*, 91.

²¹ Aug. *conf.* 1.1.1.

have made us and drawn us to yourself,”²² which captures something of the Augustinian dynamism in the *fecisti nos ad te*. She is closer to Augustine’s meaning, but her suggestion does not convey the ontological weight which *ad te* carries for him. Garry Wills offers, “you made us tilted toward you,” which, in addition to being bold, is oddly on point and has the virtue of making one pause to think through Augustine’s too familiar phrase.²³ Mary Clark, though, comes the closest when she translates, “You have made us to be *toward Yourself*.”²⁴ This conveys both the ontological and dynamic force of Augustine’s phrase. Still, the French translation of Tréhorel and Boissou in the *Bibliothèque Augustinienne*²⁵ conveys Augustine’s meaning most accurately (even if a bit over-translated): *tu nous as faits orientés vers toi*. God has made us “oriented, turned toward” himself. This orientation and turning is written into the very being of humans. Augustine came to understand created being as created from nothing, called, converted and formed toward God. The phrase *ad te* is Augustine’s summary statement of these constitutive elements of the dynamic ontological and moral make up of humankind.

There is even more packed into this little *ad te*. As was discussed in the section “*Ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei*” in Chapter One, *ad te* is linked in Augustine’s mind with the

²² Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 1.1.1.

²³ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Garry Wills (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 1.1.1. He finishes the line, “and our heart is unstable until stabilized in you.”

²⁴ Mary Clark, “Introduction,” in *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings*, trans. Mary T. Clark (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 9. Clark has not translated the whole of the *Confessions*, but offers a translation of this line in the context of discussing Augustine’s spirituality as a whole. She says that in praying this line, Augustine “was declaring creation to be a call to union with God” (ibid).

²⁵ BA 13, 1.1.1.

ad imaginem of Genesis 1:26. According to Augustine, the Word is the Image—the true and perfect reflection—of the Father, while human beings are created *ad imaginem*, oriented toward the Image. They are not a perfect reflection of God, but ordered toward him through the Word. There is a necessary separation between God and humanity by the very fact that the latter is created and the former is not, but this separation is immediately transformed by the fact that God creates through the Word, who turns creation back to its Source in a dynamic relation. The brief sentence, *fecisti nos ad te*, then, beautifully sums up the distinction and relation which creation establishes: *fecisti* connotes a definitive ontological chasm between the Creator God and his creation. But God has also created human beings *ad te*, that is, dynamically oriented back to the Word, and therefore to whole Trinity, in whom, through whom, and for whom they were made. Here, the “duller” translation of *ad te*, “for Yourself,” can be revisited and redeemed. The same Word who mediates creation, also mediates recreation for the sake of uniting human beings and God in himself. Humans truly are created *for* God, for the sake of intimate union with him. This brief sentence contains the whole of Augustine’s understanding of “salvation history,” from God in himself (“You”) to creation (“made us”) to the drama of salvation (“for”) to the final End (“Yourself”).

The latter part of the *fecisti nos* sentence bears this out and deepens the understanding of how Augustine understands the foundational context of creation: *et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te*. In the *Confessions*, rest and restlessness are key themes and behind them are certain notions of classical physics wedded to biblical notions of the

Sabbath.²⁶ The idea of rest is inseparable from the idea of place and weight.²⁷ All things have their proper place, toward which they tend by their weight, and when they are in their place they are at rest. For human beings, their weight is their love, that is, they move toward or away from God according to the disposition of their heart. Importantly, this heart is both individual and ecclesial—the *cor nostrum* of the opening lines refers both to the hearts of all people taken up into the one heart of the Body of Christ. This point will be taken up again in the next chapter.

The discussion of the heart is connected to the *laudare te vult homo* which opened these reflections and the *regio dissimilitudinis* which gives rise to it. Being created means that humans are not Supreme Being, but they do long for it and are created ordered toward it. For “in no way does anything that is less than You suffice for blessed rest, and for this neither is the creature sufficient for itself” (*nullo modo sufficit ad beatam requiem quidquid te minus est, ac per hoc nec ipsa sibi*).²⁸ Humans find themselves separated from true Being, their place of rest, by an unbridgeable ontological gulf. They cannot achieve what they desire and so they are restless, never finding full satisfaction because nothing can offer them fullness except God, who is himself their rest.²⁹

²⁶ See Gen. 2:2-3; Heb. 4:4-11.

²⁷ Compare Aug. *Gn. litt.* 4.4.8, which could serve as the metaphysical justification for the experiential insight about the restless heart of *conf.* 1.1.1. See Chapter One, “Measure, Number, and Weight.”

²⁸ *conf.* 13.8.9.

²⁹ See *conf.* 13.35.50-38.53.

By examining the first few lines, it has become clear that Augustine is writing from within the new context which creation has established. He is keenly aware of the distinction and relationship between God and man, of how this changes the perspective of all things, and how praise is the proper response to the unmerited and merciful gift of creation. Augustine situates his own story in the deeper context of creation. He “indicates that his story does not begin with his own existence in time but with God’s creation of him in eternity. The context of his life thus stretches from the eternity of God’s creative act to the eternity of God’s final redemption.”³⁰

A. Faith Seeking Understanding: Questing in the New Context

Coming to the truth about creation does not obviate all questions and difficulties. Rather, it creates a new set of questions and a new set of difficulties. No longer, though, is Augustine groping in the dark; instead, the task is to become more accustomed to the light. The light of the new context transforms the nature and quality of the questions and the answers which are available, for the horizon has changed; so too have the modes of inquiry and the way things can be known.

In his own distinctive way, Guardini expresses the relationship between the new context and the rise of questions for Augustine:

How different everything is when existence—the world’s and one’s own—is experienced as God’s immediate doing; when God is no remote “First Cause” or unapproachable “Other One,” but One who is continually lifting existence out of nothingness, who constantly and totally effects it, establishing its significance and

³⁰ Robert P. Kennedy, “Book Eleven: The *Confessions* as Eschatological Narrative,” in *A Reader’s Companion*, 167.

reality, who links destiny with destiny, and who speaks and judges in all that takes place. The stronger and more genuine this attitude, the more the questions about existence become direct questions about God. When all existence is eloquent of him, all existence also becomes one great question about him.³¹

The questions arise spontaneously; they emerge, as Guardini says, from the profound awareness his own existence continually effected by God. This awareness, though, is not simply an insight that one arrives at and stores away to be called up again later. Rather, it leads to ever new and ever deeper questions about and questing for this unfathomable God who is utterly distinct from everything known, yet who wants his creatures to know him.

The rest of the Prologue (1.1.1-5.6) shows the kinds of questions that emerge from within the new context. Although Augustine asks many questions, they can generally be grouped under four: How can God be known? Where is he found? What is this God? And how does human creation relate to him? Most of these questions, and some initial responses, have been hinted at in the discussion of the opening lines, but it will be worthwhile to spend some time thinking through why Augustine asks these questions and how his responses unfold. By doing so, a glimpse of a life lived in the new context which creation has established will be revealed.

1. How Can God be Known?

The first few lines of the *Confessions* are addressed directly to God: they are words of confession, of praise of God, and acknowledgement of human limitation. Each line contains declarative sentences, which state, in a variety of ways, what is the case about God and about

³¹ Guardini, *Conversion*, 121.

human beings. But then Augustine shifts his way of speaking. He still addresses God directly, but no longer is he making declarative statements, but beseeching God for help in understanding: “Give to me, Lord, to know and to understand whether invoking You is first or praising You, and whether knowing You is first or invoking You” (*da mihi, domine, scire et intellegere utrum sit prius invocare te an laudare te, et scire te prius sit an invocare te*).³² Augustine begins this shift with *da mihi*. God is the giver of gifts: the gift of existence, of delight in praising, and now of knowledge and understanding. God is the Giver of both being and well-being. The first thing Augustine asks for is to know and understand how one approaches God in the new context. The first object of inquiry is about how to inquire.

Within the horizon of the world, each object of inquiry has an approach proper to inquiring into it: when making an inquiry in nature, one uses the methods appropriate to the natural sciences; when inquiring into moral questions, one uses the methods appropriate to ethics; when inquiring into questions of truth, one uses the methods appropriate to dialectics.³³ But what is the proper way to inquire into God? If God were a part of the world, then there would be an appropriate method within human faculties for seeking him, but he is not a part of the world and so the normal modes of seeking do not apply to him. Augustine resolves this thorny question by invoking a series of Scripture verses and concludes that the beginning of knowing God is believing what is preached about him. This

³² Aug. *conf.* 1.1.1.

³³ See *ep.* 118.

leads to invoking him.³⁴ Since believing is not knowing, seeking arises which, as promised in the Gospel, leads to finding as well as praising.³⁵

The first chapter ends with a sentence which is notable for how disconcerting it would be to a Manichee or Platonist: “My faith calls upon You, Lord, which You gave me, which You inspired in me, through the humanity of Your Son, through the ministry of Your preacher” (*invocat te, domine, fides mea, quam dedisti mihi, quam inspirasti mihi per humanitatem filii tui, per ministerium praedicatoris tui*).³⁶ Without in any way denigrating their contrasts, Augustine emphasizes faith over knowledge, passivity over activity, hearing over seeing, and the scandal of the Incarnation over the immutability of the Divine Word. Both Manichees and Platonists would reverse the order of emphasis and, in most cases, reject the contrast. Augustine’s interest here is not the order of knowledge itself (in which case, the Platonic and Manichean emphasis would be correct though not their rejections), but of *coming* to know. Human beings need authority to heal their minds, clouded by sin, but also to learn about God who does not appear in the world as a knowable object. Because of the *regio dissimilitudinis*, how one comes to know God remains an issue in the new context, indeed, the new context is an expression of this issue.

³⁴ Rom. 10:14; Ps. 21:27; Mt. 7:7. O’Donnell helpfully schematizes how these verses are related (*Confessions*, ad loc 1.1.1): *praedicare* → *credere* → *invocare*
requirere/quaerere → *invenire/laudare*.

³⁵ O’Donnell, *Confessions*, ad loc. 1.1.1: “*et laudabunt . . . requirunt eum*: Ps. 21.27, The verse recurs in the last words of Bk. 10 (10.43.70--see there for important eucharistic overtones), completing what is begun here, preparatory to beginning again in 11.1.1.”

³⁶ Aug. *conf.* 1.1.1. The sentence is also notable for the *vestigia Trinitatis* in the language. It suggests the activity all the whole Trinity in coming to know the Trinity: *Domine* refers to the Father, *inspirasti* to the Holy Spirit, and, of course, *filius tui* to the Son.

Faith comes to the rescue and, important for this discussion, faith begins with created things—the humanity of the Son, preachers, the words of Scripture—and leads back through them to the Uncreated “Thing.” The human Christ is the medium through which faith works to come to knowledge of God. According to Augustine, the infirm minds of human beings cannot see God because the brightness of truth is too much for their sick gaze, but they can gaze upon the humanity of the Son who is one with the Father. To see the Son is to see God. The humanity of the Son has a healing function on their minds: Christ is “the Medicine of our wounds” (*medicina vulnerum nostrorum*),³⁷ who appeared as an object of sense experience so that humans might believe and so be healed.³⁸ Although Augustine does not disparage raptures, revelations, and violent flashes of insight, he continually emphasizes in this context the slow healing power of faith, which accustoms the mind, over time, to the light of the truth. This is the very process of re-forming the image of God in man, the activity of grace which renews his mind so that he becomes illumined, that is, a partaker of God’s light.

2. Where is God Found?

Augustine has found a way to approach God in the new context—a faith which heals reason—but then a new question arises from his new conclusions: where is God so that I can direct my faith toward him? The problem arises for Augustine by thinking through the Latin word, *invocare*, which Augustine reads etymologically as “call into.” “And what place is

³⁷ *conf.* 9.13.35.

³⁸ See *conf.* 6.4.6.

there in me into which my God may come into me? How may God come into me, God who made heaven and earth” (*et quis locus est in me quo veniat in me deus meus, quo deus veniat in me, deus qui fecit caelum et terram*)?³⁹ The problem is one of place: is God in a place? Can he move from his place to the place that is Augustine? Is there any place that God is not? God is great and Augustine is not: can God “fit” into Augustine?

These questions arise, in part, because of Augustine’s Manichean and pre-Platonist past. If God is a vastly extended body, then God “coming into” someone becomes a rather muddled affair. But, for Augustine, this error is only one manifestation of a more fundamental difficulty, the perennial temptation to fit God into the whole in some way. The problem of “place,” then, arises from taking God as another thing which operates within the matrix of the world.

The question, as Augustine poses it, already contains the solution, for Augustine invokes God as *deus qui fecit caelum et terram*.⁴⁰ Creation makes the difference. God is ontologically distinct from what he has made and so is not a thing within it, nor is he the “spatial container” for the things he has made. Rather things are “in” God because he sustains them in being and God is “in” things according to their capacity to receive his ubiquitous presence. Because God is not in the world, he needs to be sought through faith, but because he is everywhere present he can be found anywhere, if one turns to him and he discloses himself.

³⁹ *conf.* 1.2.2.

⁴⁰ According to O’Donnell, this is “the most frequently repeated verbal pattern in the *Confessions*” (O’Donnell, *Confessions*, ad loc. 1.2.2).

3. What Is This God?

Augustine’s understanding of creation opens up this new sense of God. Human beings cannot know him by their normal ways of knowing; they cannot think or imagine him. So, Augustine asks, “What, then, are You, my God” (*quid es ergo, deus meus*)? And answering with a rhetorical question, says, “What, I ask, if not the Lord God” (*quid, rogo, nisi dominus deus*)?⁴¹ Augustine then embarks upon a bold endeavor to say something positive about God. He does this by employing a variety of often “language-stretching” devices. The first is superlatives: “highest, best, most powerful” (*summe, optime, potentissime*). He even invents a superlative, “most all-powerful” (*omnipotentissime*), about which O’Donnell says, “Language here is pressed beyond its own extremes.”⁴² Augustine adds paradox to his superlatives, “most merciful and most just” (*miseriordissime et iustissime*), which “is another way beyond the limits of language.”⁴³ He mixes these paradoxes with the notion of God’s immutability and causality: “unchangeable changing all things, never new never old, renewing all things” (*immutabilis mutans omnia, numquam novus numquam vetus, innovans omnia*). Finally, he names the attributes of God, but transforms their common meaning: “You love and do not burn; You are zealous and yet untroubled; You repent and yet do not suffer; You are angry and yet tranquil” (*amas nec aestuas, zelas et securus es, paenitet te et non doles, irascaris et tranquillus es*).

⁴¹ Aug. *conf.* 1.4.4 for this and all the following quotes in this section.

⁴² O’Donnell, *Confessions*, ad loc.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Augustine employs all these modes of speaking in order to convey the incomprehensible mystery of God. These descriptions of God exercise the mind; they free it from its habitual way of thinking, so that by holding in mind superlatives, paradoxes, limitless notions, and common terms with uncommon meanings about God it might cease to try holding God as a thought in the mind and thereby practice a less inadequate way of thinking about him. In each way of speaking, Augustine pushes the possibilities of language to their limits, only to show that at their limits, even beyond their limits, language falls short of adequately speaking about God. “What does anyone say when he speaks about You” (*quid dicit aliquis cum de te dicit*)?⁴⁴ Needless to say, the normal way of speaking in the world about things of the world—which Augustine finds problematic enough—is wholly inadequate for speaking about God who is not in the world. There is one partial exception to this, which shall be revisited below.

4. How Does Human Creation Relate to God?

God is ineffable, yet human beings must speak about him. But speaking about God is not the same as reaching him, as attaining union with him. The last chapter in the *Confessions* Prologue inquires about how one can achieve intimacy with God. “Who will give me rest in You” (*quis mihi dabit adquiescere in te*)?⁴⁵ Augustine returns to the notions

⁴⁴ *conf.* 1.4.4. See Marion, “*Idipsum*: The Name of God according to Augustine,” 169. Also, Vladimir Lossky, “Les éléments de ‘Théologie négative’ dans la pensée de saint Augustin,” in *Augustinus Magister*, 575-81; Deirdre Carabine, “Negative Theology in the Thought of Saint Augustine,” *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 59 (1992): 5-22.

⁴⁵ *Aug. conf.* 1.5.5.

of “rest”⁴⁶ and of the insufficiency of human efforts to achieve that rest. Someone outside of them must give it. This, of course, will only be God since no one can give what he does not already possess.

But, Augustine further wonders, why would God want such a thing? “What am I myself to You, that You command me to love You” (*quid tibi sum ipse, ut amari te iubeas a me*)? And twice he asks, “What are You to me” (*quid mihi es*)?⁴⁷ Augustine is asking, What are you and what is our relationship; indeed, how can we have one when we are so different? He has God answer with the Psalm verse, “I am your salvation” (*salus tua ego sum*).⁴⁸ Perhaps there is a faint echo of Exodus 3:14 (*ego sum qui sum*) here, and if so, Augustine is again identifying the Creator God with the saving God. The God who creates, recreates; and the Source of human being abides as the Source of their regeneration. Human beings relate to God in a relationship of utter dependence, both for their being and their well-being. God is present to them as salvation itself; in fact, Augustine seems to suggest that God’s very being is identical to his saving activity. God as sheer being is sheer salvation.

Another interesting thing arises in this final part of the Prologue. After stretching language beyond its limits to show how God is beyond anything humans can say or think or experience, Augustine immerses the reader in the language of the senses: he wants to “embrace” (*amplectar*) God, he wants God to “speak” so that he might “hear” (*dic ut*

⁴⁶ Perhaps it is important that the rest here uses the prefix *ad-*, *ad-quiescere*.

⁴⁷ *conf.* 1.5.5.

⁴⁸ Ps. 34:3.

audiam); he wants to “see” God’s face (*faciem tuam . . . videam*), and have him “enter” the “house of his soul” (*domus animae meae quo venias ad eam*).⁴⁹ After going to such lengths to say that God is unattainable by the senses, Augustine’s return to such sensual language may seem rather odd. The bodily senses, which are wholly insufficient for coming to know God, can be transcended and transformed into “spiritual senses.” These new senses are the new mode of knowing God in the new context.

III. *Confessio*: A New Language in a New Context

For Augustine, the new context calls forth a new language. This he describes under the term *confessio*. In the ecclesiastical Latin of the fourth century, *confessio* had three generally recognized meanings: the confession of faith, especially of the martyrs before a tribunal; the admitting of sins in penitential discipline; and finally, though less common, praise and thanksgiving.⁵⁰ Augustine was aware of all three meanings and employs them in his writings.⁵¹ He uses *confessio* in relation to faith and martyrdom the least, though he enfolds a transformed understanding of martyrdom into his understanding of *confessio* as an acceptable sacrifice.⁵² Augustine primarily uses *confessio* in reference to praise and

⁴⁹ Aug. *conf.* 1.5.5-6.

⁵⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, “Originalität und Überlieferung in Augustins Begriff der *Confessio*,” *Revue des études augustiniennes* 3 (1957): 390-91. See also Luc Verheijen, *Eloquentia Pedisequa: Observations sur le style des Confessions de saint Augustin* (Nijmegen: Dekker & van de Vegt N.V., 1949), 69, for a discussion of the biblical roots of confession as praise and thanksgiving.

⁵¹ For example, see Aug. *bapt.* 2.1.2 for confession of martyrs; *conf.* 8.2.4 for confession of faith; *en. Ps.* 29.9, 94.4, and *conf.* 10.2.2 for confession of sin and praise found together.

⁵² See *conf.* 5.1.1, 12.24.33.

thanksgiving,⁵³ but close upon this meaning is that of sin. Both, however, are understood in terms of sacrifice and all are considered a form of prayer.

Augustine took pains to emphasize the importance of the *confessio laudis*, something which went against the linguistic grain of the time.⁵⁴ Using *confessio* to mean praise was in decline among his North African hearers who primarily associated *confessio* with sin, even to the point of beating their breasts whenever they heard the word.⁵⁵ But Augustine saw the importance of reviving the fading meaning and did so vigorously. He knew that the *confessio laudis* was biblical and put its practitioners in the confession line with both Christ and the heavenly *civitas Dei*. Christ is without sin, so he can *only* make a confession of praise, as he does in an important passage from Matthew in which he praises the Father (*Confiteor tibi, Domine*) for revealing wisdom to the humble.⁵⁶ Augustine also knows that in eternal life, which the angels already enjoy, “there will no longer be any lamenting of sins, but yet in the divine praises of that supernal and perpetual City, there will not be wanting an everlasting confession of such happiness” (*et in illa vita aeterna non erit iam quidem gemitus peccatorum, sed tamen in divinis laudibus supernae illius ac perpetuae civitatis non deerit sempiterna confessio tantae felicitatis*).⁵⁷ The Perfect and the perfected offer *confessio laudis* to God. Augustine wants to train up his hearers in this sense of *confessio*, for their

⁵³ The confession of praise is almost synonymous with gratitude (cf. *conf.* 9.8.17).

⁵⁴ Solignac, *BA* 13, 10.

⁵⁵ See Aug. *en. Ps.* 137.2.

⁵⁶ Mt. 11:25. See Aug. *en. Ps.* 78.17.

⁵⁷ *en. Ps.* 44.33.

eternal destiny as rational creatures is to “confess to God always” (cf. *semper confitebor illi*).⁵⁸

The confession of praise would still be due to God even if there had been no Fall. For not only is the desire to praise God given to the created nature of human beings, but *because* of the fact that they are created they desire to praise God. As discussed above, praise in thanksgiving is the proper response to the gift of creation. This form of confession makes humans most like God, not in perverse imitation of him, but precisely because it arises from recognizing the truth about God and themselves. In other words, in *confessio laudis* human beings imitate the humility of Christ by acknowledging the truth of what it means to be created. By being like Christ, they imitate God and so become more like him.

In the *Confessions* and his other works, the two meanings, *confessio laudis* and *confessio peccati*, are often found together. “Confession,” says Augustine, “is twofold: either of sin or of praise” (*confessio gemina est, aut peccati, aut laudis*).⁵⁹ There is, Augustine seems to suggest, but one *confessio* which expresses itself differently depending on the state of the confessing soul. “When I am evil, to confess to You is nothing other than to be displeased with myself; when I am truly pious, to confess is nothing other than this: not to attribute it to myself” (*cum enim malus sum, nihil est aliud confiteri tibi quam displicere mihi; cum vero pius, nihil est aliud confiteri tibi quam hoc non tribuere mihi*).⁶⁰ There is one

⁵⁸ *conf.* 13.14.15.

⁵⁹ *en. Ps.* 29.19. See also *en. Ps.* 94.4.

⁶⁰ *conf.* 10.2.2.

confessio because there is one Truth which speaks through the person confessing: the Truth speaks the truth about human beings, *confessio peccatis*, and the truth about himself, *confessio laudis*. The expression of the one *confessio* varies depending on circumstances, but the Truth which it bespeaks is the same. Solignac offers a similar insight: “*la confessio est l’aveu du péché qui établit l’homme dans la vérité et le dispose au pardon: avouer le péché c’est identiquement louer Dieu qui est sans péché, qui pardonne et assure le relèvement de l’homme.*”⁶¹ The confession of praise can stand alone and can have no relation at all to sin. But the confession of sin is always related to praise, indeed, it could be considered a “subset” of the confession of praise. The confession of sin *is* the confession of praise because it speaks the truth taught by God, but also because sin is a defect or privation of something good and the admission of this proclaims that God is just and creation is good and so bears witness to the goodness that should be there.⁶²

Augustine speaks of *confessio* in another important way when he says, “Let Your mercies, O my God, confess to You from the innermost guts of my soul” (*confiteantur etiam hinc tibi de intimis visceribus animae meae miserationes tuae, deus meus*)!⁶³ Mercies confess to Mercy. All of the gracious things God has done for Augustine in time call back to the eternal Source of grace. “But suffer me to speak of Your mercy, I, earth and ash, suffer me yet to speak, since behold it is to Your mercy, not to man, my mocker, to which I speak”

⁶¹ Solignac, *BA* 13, 9, n. 1. See Ratzinger, “Originalität,” 385-87.

⁶² See Aug. *vera rel.* 45.83-85, 48.93.

⁶³ *conf.* 7.6.8.

*(sed tamen sine me loqui apud misericordiam tuam, me terram et cinerem sine tamen loqui. quoniam ecce misericordia tua est, non homo, inrisor meus, cui loquor).*⁶⁴ In confession, God speaks to God. The deeds God has effected in time are eloquent, they speak through those who have received those gifts, and give due thanks and praise to the Giver of all good gifts. “Let me, O my God, remember in giving thanks to You and let me confess Your mercies upon me” (*deus meus, recorder in gratiarum actione tibi et confitear misericordias tuas super me*).⁶⁵

When God speaks to God in confession, the confessing soul is not simply passive, but, indeed, fully alive and active: “Let my soul . . . confess to You Your mercies” (*anima mea . . . confiteatur tibi miserationes tuas*).⁶⁶ To understand how this can be, it must be considered in light of Augustine’s understanding of creation. Michael Hanby provides a dense but helpful analysis of the relationship between the work of God and the work of human beings in relation to creation and praise.

We must understand creatures to exhibit their status as creatures, as received effects, in their active response to the call to form from the divine *vox*. Paradoxically, this movement is utterly distinct and yet utterly indistinguishable from the movement of the *vox* in them. In consequence, it is a response, a movement which fully belongs to creatures *precisely insofar as it belongs to God*. It is a conversion to form, to actuality, to beauty, precisely to the extent that it is a participation in the doxology, the intention, delight and gift which is the *forma* of God. Thus we actually become fully human, fully ourselves, as we pass through a doxological offering which is at

⁶⁴ *conf.* 1.6.7.

⁶⁵ *conf.* 8.1.1.

⁶⁶ *conf.* 5.1.1.

once ours *and* a gift of the Holy Spirit, as we pass from the similitude to the image in which we are created.⁶⁷

The simultaneous, non-competitive activity of God and man, which fully belongs to the creature “precisely insofar as it belongs to God,” helps to make sense of how God’s mercies can confess to God (as Mercy Itself) while at the same time the confession can be an integral human act. It also helps to make sense of how Augustine can say that confession is both a divine command and a natural desire, both God’s perfecting activity in man and a true human act.⁶⁸

God knows what Augustine is going to confess even before he confesses it. God knows because he is outside the flow of time and because confession, and the *Confessions*, is God’s own activity in the life of Augustine. Because of this, true confession is not in words nor, perhaps, is it even in time. “And so my confession, O my God, is made silently in Your sight: and yet not silently, for if it is silent with noise, it shouts with affection. For I do not say anything rightly to men that You did not hear previously from me; nor do You hear something good from me that You did not previously say to me” (*confessio itaque mea, deus meus, in conspectu tuo tibi tacite fit et non tacite: tacet enim strepitu, clamat affectu. neque enim dico recti aliquid hominibus quod non a me tu prius audieris, aut etiam tu aliquid tale audis a me quod non mihi tu prius dixeris*).⁶⁹ God’s mercies cry out from the heart that has

⁶⁷ Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, 87.

⁶⁸ Respectively, Aug. *conf.* 1.7.12, 1.1.1, 10.30.42, and 10.1.1. It also helps us to understand Augustine’s soon-to-be controversial statement, “Give what You command and command what You will” (*da quod iubes et iube quod vis*) (*conf.* 10.29.40).

⁶⁹ *conf.* 10.2.2.

received them, but this, at first, is without words. Perhaps this is a reference to the *verbum mentis* or *verbum cordis*, that interior, unchanging, pre-articulated “thought,” which, here, participates in eternal Mercy.⁷⁰ The importance of silence will be considered below.

Why then does Augustine confess in words? Certainly not so that God might learn something from Augustine, but rather “simply that I and anyone else who reads this may clearly reflect upon from what depth one must cry to You” (*ut videlicet ego et quisquis haec legit cogitemus de quam profundo clamandum sit ad te*)⁷¹ and in order to “excite my affection for You and of those who read these things” (*affectum meum excito in te, et eorum qui haec legunt*).⁷² And, finally, “that You may free us wholly, since You have begun, so that we may cease to be miserable in ourselves and be happy in You” (*ut liberes nos omnino, quoniam coepisti, ut desinamus esse miseri in nobis et beatificemur in te*).⁷³ True confession is to God, the articulation of confession, the telling of its contents, is to others. The confession is not for God’s sake, but for Augustine’s and for others who might hear or read it. Augustine confesses in order to remind himself and others of their own need for God, in order to stir up their love for God, and in order to be free so as to love God and be happy in

⁷⁰ For more on *verbum mentis*, see *conf.* 11.7.9; *doc. Chr.* 1.13; *f. et symb.* 3.3; *Trin.* 7.1, 7.4, 9.12, 15.20. Also, Tarmo Toom, “The Potential of a Condemned Analogy: Augustine on *logos endiathetos* and *logos prophorikos*,” *Heythrop Journal* 48 (2007): 205-213.

⁷¹ *Aug. conf.* 2.3.5.

⁷² *conf.* 11.1.1.

⁷³ *conf.* 11.1.1.

him forever. By freely performing this act of confession, through God's grace, they render themselves fit (*coapta tibi*), through God's grace, for eternal happiness.⁷⁴

A. *Facere Veritatem*

For Augustine, confession is a matter of *facere veritatem*, "doing" or "making the truth," and given the context of creation that has been highlighted, this is a rather striking phrase. Augustine does not mean that truth does not somehow always abide so that one has to fabricate or create his own truth. Rather, as James O'Donnell suggests,

Augustine "made the truth" - in this sense, became himself truthful - when he found a pattern of words to say the true thing well . . . For Augustine to write a book, then, that purported to make truth and seek light was not merely a reflection upon the actions of his life but pure act itself, thought and writing become the enactment of ideas.⁷⁵

"Making truth" means placing oneself voluntarily in God's truth,⁷⁶ participating in that truth, and thereby "becoming truth" or, in creational terms, being recreated by the Word and according to the Word who is, after all, Truth Itself.⁷⁷ *Facere veritatem*, in this sense, is the goal of the *Confessions*, indeed, of all human life.

But there are two difficulties that stand in the way of making the truth: the first is ontological, the second is moral. First, the ontological gulf separating God and creation makes human speech almost entirely inadequate for speaking about God. Augustine

⁷⁴ *conf.* 10.1.1.

⁷⁵ O'Donnell, *Confessions*, Prolegomena.

⁷⁶ Guardini, *Conversion*, 4.

⁷⁷ See John 14:6; Aug. *conf.* 7.18.24; *vera rel.* 36.66.

recognizes acutely that not only does speech fail to convey God, but his mind as well fails to grasp anything of God. This is because God is not an object in the world on which the mind and words can dwell.⁷⁸ In one passage, he suggests both the problem as well as the solution: “Certainly no one knows the things which are of God, except the Spirit of God. How then do we know the things that have been given us from God” (*certe nemo scit quae dei sunt, nisi spiritus dei. quomodo ergo scimus et nos quae a deo donata sunt nobis*)?⁷⁹ God does not appear within the context of the world; he cannot be grasped or spoken of by the means available in the world. The new context which creation establishes sets up a seemingly unbridgeable difficulty, though the introduction of the Spirit’s knowledge introduces a potential solution.

The moral difficulty initially arises out of the ontological, but is exacerbated by sin. God is “Truth, and every man a liar” (*tu sis veritas, omnis autem homo mendax*).⁸⁰ In one sense, all men are “liars” because they do not perfectly reflect the Truth, that is, they do not have (or are not) the fullness of Being. This is a simple fact of being created. But more than this, “all men are liars” because they distort the Truth by sinning. For Augustine, “every sin is a lie” (*omne peccatum esse mendacium*)⁸¹ and the lie is the opposite of Truth and thus the

⁷⁸ See *conf.* 1.4.4; 11.19.25.

⁷⁹ *conf.* 13.31.46.

⁸⁰ *conf.* 13.25.38.

⁸¹ *en. Ps.* 91.6.

enemy of confession. Reflecting on Augustine's understanding of the lie will shed light on Augustine's understanding of *confessio*.⁸²

Augustine says, "He who speaks a lie, speaks out of his own" (*et ideo qui loquitur mendacium, de suo loquitur*).⁸³ The phrase *de suo* provides a quick insight into Augustine's meaning here. The liar is, of course, a sinner, but the sinner is a liar because his actions are, what could be called, "performative contradictions." Sin bespeaks a perversity which willfully distorts the truth about the human person, the world, and God according to the sinner's preferences. The key to understanding this is that both the lie and the sin come *de suo*. Sin is a turning away from the source of being toward something with lesser being. This motion has no effective cause; it is the mysterious, deficient motion of a confused soul uncreating itself. Thus, it is *de suo*, from the sinner himself. "And all this happens, O Fountain of Life, You who are one, and the true Creator and Ruler of the universe, whenever You are forsaken, and by a private pride a false one is loved in the part" (*et ea fiunt cum tu derelinqueris, fons vitae, qui es unus et verus creator et rector universitatis, et privata superbia diligitur in parte unum falsum*).⁸⁴ Truth, says Augustine, is "in common for all lovers of truth" (*in commune omnium est veritatis amatorum*)⁸⁵ but the sinner and the liar make their own private truth. The Truth—God himself—is there "for the taking," or more

⁸² Augustine was interested in the problem of lying throughout his whole life and returned to it repeatedly. He devoted two treatises to it, *De mendacio* (394/95) and *Contra Mendacium* (420). See Griffiths, *Lying*, for a discussion of Augustine's understanding of lying situated in his broader theology.

⁸³ Aug. *conf.* 13.25.38; cf. John 8 :44, Rom. 3 :4

⁸⁴ *conf.* 3.8.16.

⁸⁵ *conf.* 12.25.34.

accurately, for the receiving. He is common to all, freely given, yet the sinner and liar choose a part and turn it into the whole, a “false One,” from which they attempt to derive or organize the rest of reality. This is the moral problem which prevents “making the truth,” that is, becoming truth in the act of confession.

The only way to overcome the ontological gap and moral failing that separates God and man is *confessio*. “With You inspiring me, I will speak the true things that You willed that I should say about these words [of Scripture]. For I do not believe that I could speak truth except by your inspiration . . . Thus that I may speak truth, I shall speak out of Yours” (*vera enim dicam te mihi inspirante quod ex eis verbis voluisti ut dicerem. neque enim alio praeter te inspirante credo me verum dicere . . . ergo ut verum loquar, de tuo loquor*).⁸⁶

Augustine can only speak the truth by inspiration, from the Holy Spirit, by speaking the words God wants him to speak. He can only speak the truth if he renounces speech *de suo* and embraces speech *de tuo*. In order to speak Truth, the Spirit must speak through him. Augustine provides a parallel case in terms of sight: “For those who see these things through Your Spirit, You see in them” (*qui autem per spiritum tuum vident ea, tu vides in eis*).⁸⁷ This kind of true sight, and parallel speech, is a gift: “but I shall be able from You, when You give it, O sweet Light of my hidden eyes” (*potero autem ex te, cum dederis tu, dulce lumen occultorum oculorum meorum*).⁸⁸ For Augustine, though it is God’s gift and though it is God

⁸⁶ *conf.* 13.25.38.

⁸⁷ *conf.* 13.31.46. In this passage, Augustine is speaking about seeing the truth of creation.

⁸⁸ *conf.* 11.19.25.

who does the seeing and the knowing and the speaking, the action still belongs integrally to the human creature: “Even those things which we know through his Spirit, no one knows except the Spirit of God” (*quae per eius spiritum scimus etiam sic nemo scit nisi spiritus dei*).⁸⁹ There is no way to express this paradox clearly, but Augustine affirms time and again that *the person himself* knows, by God’s gift, and that because the things known are beyond his ability to know, it is God who knows in him. This is not a contradiction, but a necessary way of understanding things in the new context which creation establishes.

B. Imitating the Psalms

After his conversion in the garden, Augustine goes on retreat and starts praying the Psalms.⁹⁰ He relates how he appropriated these inspired words for himself and prayed them in his own person.⁹¹ He calls the Psalms “faithful songs, sounds of piety, which exclude the swollen spirit” (*cantica fidelia, sonos pietatis excludentes turgidum spiritum*),⁹² and which hold up a mirror in which human beings can see the truth about themselves.⁹³ Augustine also

⁸⁹ *conf.* 13.31.48.

⁹⁰ For the role of the Psalms in the *Confessions*, see G.N. Knauer, *Psalmenitate in Augustini Confessiones* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1955); Susan Poque, “Les Psaumes dans les Confessions,” in *Saint Augustin et la Bible*, ed. A.-M. La Bonnardière (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1986), 155-61; J.A. Sylvester Johnson, *The Psalms in the Confessions of Augustine* (Diss. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, 1981); Annemaré Kotzé, “Reading Psalm 4 to the Manicheans,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 55 (2001): 119-35.

⁹¹ *Aug. conf.* 9.4.8.

⁹² *conf.* 9.4.8.

⁹³ *conf.* 9.4.9.

believes that the Holy Spirit speaks directly through the Psalms.⁹⁴ The Psalms, then, are the Word of God in the words of human beings directed back to God. They are the prayers of the *totus Christus*, the “whole Christ,” Head and Body.⁹⁵ They are the new language for the new context, the model and premier form of *confessio*. In the Psalms, “God is spoken to with words first spoken by God to us (prayer as quotation and appropriation of Scripture) and in the Word spoken in common with us (Christ, human and divine, Mediator).”⁹⁶ By quoting Scripture, Augustine allows God to speak through him; he lets God “speak for himself,” without in any way imposing himself on the words or meaning of the quote. Instead, Augustine conforms himself to the quote, to the Word being spoken through him, while that same Word helps to bring about that conformation.

By imitating the Psalms, the one confessing participates in the recreative process. Maria Boulding puts it boldly, “Confession, in Augustine’s pregnant sense, is personal engagement in the creative process. It is a willingness to stand in God’s truth and become a

⁹⁴ *conf.* 9.4.9.

⁹⁵ For Augustine’s understanding of the *totus Christus*, see *en. Ps.* 17.2, 17.51, 26.2.2, 29.1.2, all composed before 400; also *en. Ps.* 37 and 79.1; cf. *conf.* 13.34.49; *doc. Chr.* 3.31.44. The Head and Body, though, do not always speak in the Psalms at the same time. Augustine practices what is called “prosopological exegesis,” the task of which is to discern who the speaker of the Psalms was—Christ, Church, sinner, or the whole. See Marie-Josèphe Rondeau, *Les Commentaires patristiques du Psautier* (IIIe-Ve siècles), vol. 2 (Rome: Orientalia Christiana Analecta 220, 1985). For the underappreciated role of the *totus Christus* in Augustine’s thought, see Tarsicius van Bavel, “The ‘Christus Totus’ Idea: A Forgotten Aspect of Augustine’s Spirituality,” in *Studies in Patristic Christology: Proceedings of the Third Maynooth Patristic Conference*, ed. Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1998), 84–94; Michael Cameron, “*Enarrationes in Psalmos*,” in *ATA*, 290-96; Kimberly Baker, “Augustine’s Doctrine of the *Totus Christus*: Reflecting on the Church as Sacrament of Unity,” *Horizons* 37.1 (2010): 7-24.

⁹⁶ Pruffer, “A Reading of Augustine’s *Confessions*,” 29.

co-creator with God in his creation of oneself.”⁹⁷ Though Augustine would probably balk at the term “co-creator,” Sr. Boulding’s insight seems spot on. Confession orders human beings toward God and remakes them so that they become what they were created to be.⁹⁸

Augustine wishes that the Manichees could see what praying Psalm 4 “had made out of me” (*quid de me fecerit ille psalmus*).⁹⁹ For Augustine, the Spirit-inspired Psalms take human chaos, the abyss humans have made themselves into, and give it form, indeed, a Christological form. “By joining our voice with the praise given in the psalms our status as creatures before God the Creator is actualized in the very performance. Our re-creation is advanced.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Boulding, “Introduction,” in *Confessions*, 32.

⁹⁸ Augustine makes the same point in *en. Ps.* 97.7: “‘Confession and beauty are in His clear sight.’ Do you love beauty? Do you want to be beautiful? Confess! He did not say, ‘beauty and confession’, but ‘confession and beauty.’ You were foul; confess, that you may be beautiful. You were a sinner; confess, that you may be righteous. You were able to make yourself filthy; you are not able to make yourself beautifully formed” (*Confessio et pulchritudo in conspectu eius. Pulchritudinem amas? vis esse pulcher? Confitere. Non dixit: Pulchritudo et confessio; sed: Confessio et pulchritudo. Foedus eras, confitere ut sis pulcher: peccator eras, confitere ut sis iustus. Foedare te potuisti; formosum te facere non potes*). Note the use of *conspectus*, the same verb used in Rom. 1:20. The “sight” which sees the invisible things of God through that which is made is the same as God’s “sight.”

⁹⁹ *conf.* 9.4.8.

¹⁰⁰ McCarthy, “Creation through the Psalms,” 217. “Praying the psalms “with understanding” initiates such renewal, precisely because the psalms themselves foster a relationship of utter dependence of the creature on God’s continuing work. The profit that accrues to the soul in this process is nothing other than the self-gift of God, whose impression again returns to the soul” (*Ibid.*, 210). Guardini makes the same point in relation to the *magis-minus esse*: “Ultimately, man is comprehensible only in God, because only in him is his essence fulfilled. Hence, the real meaning of the *confessio* is the soul’s attempt to reach God in order to attain to fullness of being and self-realization” (*Conversion*, 5).

C. Transformation of Public and Private

Augustine's understanding of *confessio* also reveals a transformed understanding of public and private. The pre-conversion Augustine was a public man. A talented professor of rhetoric, climbing the social ladder, Augustine was "chomping after honors, profits, and marriage" (*inhiabam honoribus, lucris, coniugio*).¹⁰¹ Though he had a rich private life, which consisted in his non-public pursuits, namely, his studies, his friendships, and his interior life, he was primarily a typical Roman citizen who desired to see and be seen in the public eye.

In 384, he was appointed to teach rhetoric in Milan a post where he was responsible for delivering official panegyrics on the Emperor and crafting the "propaganda" for the government.¹⁰² Remembering one particularly anxious day in which he was to deliver a speech for the emperor, Augustine recalls, "I would lie about many things and be befriended for lying by those who knew" (*plura mentirer et mentienti faveretur ab scientibus*).¹⁰³ Here is Augustine's purely negative assessment of Roman public life: liars telling lies to those who praise them for flattering with lies, and Augustine, the chief rhetor, presiding over it all as he sat upon the *cathedra mendacii*, his "throne of the lie."¹⁰⁴ Augustine, rhetor and citizen of the Empire, understood his public presence always to tend toward mendacity, pride, and vainglory. What could be more opposite to *confessio* than rhetoric thus understood?

¹⁰¹ Aug. *conf.* 6.6.9.

¹⁰² Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 59.

¹⁰³ Aug. *conf.* 6.6.9.

¹⁰⁴ *conf.* 9.2.4.

But after his conversion, a transformation occurs in his understanding of public and private life. This transformation is not only a moral one in which he, as a Christian, would desire not to lie, but a “dimensional” one which his new understanding of creation brings about. In light of the new context, Augustine can say, “To You, then, Lord, I am manifest, whatever I am” (*tibi ergo, domine, manifestus sum, quicumque sim*).¹⁰⁵ Because Augustine is created, he is manifest to his Creator. Nothing is hidden from God—neither his private life nor his public life escapes God’s sight.¹⁰⁶ Rather, “man *is* because he is manifest to another.”¹⁰⁷ Augustine confirms this throughout the *Confessions* when he says things like, “upon this matter my heart is in Your clear sight (*et ita est in conspectu tuo de hac re cor meum*).¹⁰⁸ In the light of creation, Augustine comes to understand that *God* is his public, both the public of his public deeds and the public of his private inner thoughts, for even “the closed heart does not shut out Your eye” (*quia oculum tuum non excludit cor clausum*).¹⁰⁹

Human beings are not always aware that God is their public since God is hidden. “This publicity to God is as hidden as God himself, unless God’s eloquence manifests him as our public and as the friend who confirms us in our knowledge of ourselves and of one

¹⁰⁵ *conf.* 10.2.2. This line is perhaps a play on Ex. 3:14, *Ego sum qui sum*, with the *quicumque*, serving to emphasize the difference between the ambiguous, unknown, changing “whatever” of man and the unchanging, stable God who simply *is*.

¹⁰⁶ See Aug. *conf.* 5.2.2.

¹⁰⁷ Pruffer, “A Reading of Augustine’s *Confessions*,” 28, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ Aug. *conf.* 6.2.2.

¹⁰⁹ *conf.* 5.1.1.

another.”¹¹⁰ God must reveal himself to human beings and, in doing so, he reveals them to themselves. As Augustine prays, “May I know You, O my Knower, may I know even as I am known” (*cognoscam te, cognitor meus, cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum*).¹¹¹ The order of these knowings is important, for human beings are even hidden to themselves and so cannot know themselves unless God reveals them to themselves. “There is,” says Augustine, “something of man that even the spirit of man which is in him does not know. You, though, Lord, You know all of him, *since You made him*” (*est aliquid hominis quod nec ipse scit spiritus hominis qui in ipso est. tu autem, domine, scis eius omnia, quia fecisti eum*).¹¹² Man does not know his own depths, but God knows all of him because God created him.

The way Augustine understands the transformation of public and private in light of creation helps explain what is often considered a “disturbingly scrupulous examination of conscience” in Book 10.¹¹³ What really is so wrong with being fascinated by a dog chasing a hare or a lizard catching a spider?¹¹⁴ Are not these interesting things? And if Augustine subsequently praises God for these creatures, isn’t he being a bit fastidious in calling these “acts” sinful? But God sees the heart and, in his light, Augustine sees his own heart. There, Augustine finds a motion toward the creature *for its own sake*, as though the creature had interest or worth in itself. In its initial movement, this motion is not different from any other

¹¹⁰ Pruffer, “A Reading of Augustine’s *Confessions*,” 28-29.

¹¹¹ Aug. *conf.* 10.1.1.

¹¹² *conf.* 10.5.7.

¹¹³ O’Donnell, *Confessions*, Prolegomena.

¹¹⁴ Aug. *conf.* 10.35.57.

sin. To be sure, Augustine is quick to refer these wonderful scenes back to God, but his initial motion is toward the creature for its own sake and, in God's light, Augustine can see how problematic this is. Augustine understands this motion to be motivated by the vice of curiosity which, he says, establishes these trivial things in the memory and subsequently hinders the ability to pray, that is, to direct the heart to God.¹¹⁵

The human heart is utterly transparent to God; nothing intervenes between God and the soul, for God "is more inward than my innermost" (*tu autem eras interior intimo meo*).¹¹⁶ Nothing is hidden and nothing is insignificant in God's eyes. This could, of course, lead to a paralyzing scrupulosity, but it could also be understood, as Augustine does, as a call "to love God from the whole heart and the whole soul and the whole mind" (*diligere deum ex toto corde et ex tota anima et ex tota mente*).¹¹⁷ From inside out, all belongs to God because God has given it all.

In the transformation which creation introduces, human beings become mysteries to themselves and to one another. They have hidden depths where "neither eye nor ear nor mind can reach into" (*nec oculum nec aurem nec mentem possunt intendere*).¹¹⁸ This helps explain the wonder Augustine felt at seeing Ambrose read silently and why he, too, reads silently when he responds to the *tolle, lege*.¹¹⁹ There is a profound interior life which is

¹¹⁵ See *conf.* 10.35.57.

¹¹⁶ *conf.* 3.6.11.

¹¹⁷ Mt. 22:37; cf. Aug. *conf.* 3.8.15, 12.25.35

¹¹⁸ *conf.* 10.3.4.

¹¹⁹ *conf.* 6.3.3 and 8.12.29, respectively.

inaccessible to others. What Augustine says of Alypius immediately after his conversion is true of all human relations: “He showed me what had happened in himself, *of which I knew nothing*” (*at ille quid in se ageretur (quod ego nesciebam) sic indicavit*).¹²⁰ This is the human lot in regard to others. The heart, where man is what he is,¹²¹ is inaccessible to others and, often enough, even to himself. But the heart is not hidden to God, before Whom everything and everyone is manifest. God manifests men to themselves¹²² in order that they might manifest themselves to one another.¹²³

Humans become manifest to one another in *confessio*. They align themselves with the truth about themselves (which is already known to God and which he has revealed to them) and make confession by bringing the truth to light in speech.¹²⁴ “We turn away from the speaking and listening, the seeing and being seen of citizenship and become strangers to one another in the hidden thoughts of the heart, being witnessed by the eyes of the Lord and moved in imitation of the Word to a new rhetoric: public witness or *confessio* before others.”¹²⁵ For Augustine, the new context which creation establishes creates a new dynamic of hidden hearts and manifestation in God’s truth. This new context requires not only a new

¹²⁰ *conf.* 8.12.30.

¹²¹ *conf.* 10.3.4.

¹²² See *conf.* 8.7.16; 10.3.3.

¹²³ See *conf.* 10.3.3; 11.1.1.

¹²⁴ See *conf.* 9.4.8, 10.2.2, 11.2.3, 13.36.51.

¹²⁵ Pruffer, “A Reading of Augustine’s *Confessions*,” 29.

kind of speech, but also requires a new kind of relationship to others, a new kind of citizenry,¹²⁶ namely, a community of love in truth.¹²⁷

No one can see the hidden depths of another, but in the manifesting truth of confession they can become known to one another if that truth is received in love. Those who love believe the truth which they cannot see for themselves. “Because ‘charity believes all things’ among them whom it makes one, joining them to itself, I, O Lord, confess to You so that men may hear, to whom I cannot show whether I confess true things. But they will believe me whose ears charity has opened to me” (*sed quia caritas omnia credit, inter eos utique quos conexos sibimet unum facit, ego quoque, domine, etiam sic tibi confiteor ut audiant homines, quibus demonstrare non possum an vera confitear. sed credunt mihi quorum mihi aures caritas aperit*).¹²⁸ With the introduction of a community united in love, Augustine has pointed to the Church, the necessary ecclesial context of confession. For Augustine, the Church is the community of love in truth which extends and participates in the Divine Community of Love which is the Trinity, Truth Itself. The God who creates out of love and in the Incarnation recreates out of love, extends his love through time in the Church, the Body of Christ, who maintains unity in love through the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the Holy Spirit, the Church offers the acceptable sacrifice of itself in the sacraments and thereby becomes the unifying instrument of truth and love on earth.

¹²⁶ See Aug. *conf.* 9.13.37; 10.4.6.

¹²⁷ See *conf.* 12.30.41; 13.7.8. Also, see discussion in section “Ecclesial Hermeneutics” in Chapter Four.

¹²⁸ *conf.* 10.3.3.

IV. Memory

In order to confess, in the sense just discussed, there is need for memory.¹²⁹ “Confession springs from a review of the past, from the memory.”¹³⁰ It is fitting that Augustine treats the meaning of confession and memory in Book 10, after just having confessed his past in Books 1-9. But memory alone is not enough to achieve confession; the memory must be informed by faith if it is to bear the fruit of *confessio*.¹³¹ “In faith, our remembering becomes ‘confession’.”¹³² For Augustine, memory is not simply the warehouse of past experiences, but is identified with who human beings are;¹³³ is the prerequisite of confession;¹³⁴ finds its proper context in the Eucharist; and, when illumined by faith,

¹²⁹ The major studies of Augustine on memory are: J.A. Mourant, *St. Augustine on Memory* (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1979) and Gerard O’Daly, *Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). Also, helpful is Howard G. Coward, “Memory and Scripture in the Conversion of Augustine,” in *Grace, Politics, & Desire: Essays on Augustine*, ed. Hugo Meynell (Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 1990), 19-30; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Mystery of Continuity: Time and History, Memory and Eternity in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986); Roland Teske, “Augustine’s Philosophy of Memory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, 148-58. For much of what follows, I am particularly indebted to John Cavadini’s remarkable “Eucharistic Exegesis in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Augustinian Studies* 41/1 (2010): 87-108, which treats memory in relation to the Eucharist.

¹³⁰ Guardini, *Conversion*, 9.

¹³¹ See Crosson, “Religion and Faith in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” 154.

¹³² John C. Cavadini, “Time and Ascent in *Confessions* XI,” in *Collectanea Augustiniana: Presbyter Factus Sum*, eds. Joseph Lienhard, Earl Muller and Roland Teske (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 177.

¹³³ Aug. *conf.* 10.17.26: “Great is the power of memory, I know not how dreadful, my God, a profound and infinite multiplicity. And this is my mind, and this I myself am. What, therefore, am I, my God? What nature am I? A life various, manifold, and exceedingly immense” (*magna vis est memoriae, nescio quid horrendum, deus meus, profunda et infinita multiplicitas. et hoc animus est, et hoc ego ipse sum. quid ergo sum, deus meus? quae natura sum? varia, multimoda vita et immensa vehementer*).

¹³⁴ See Guardini, *Conversion*, 15.

provides the only access humans have to the truth about their lives. To understand why this is the case, it must be considered in light of Augustine's understanding of creation.¹³⁵

A. Experience and Faithful Interpretation

If God is transcendent to the world, then he cannot be experienced as a thing in the world. Therefore, any so-called "religious experience" or any recognition of God's providence in one's life cannot be attributed to the senses or even to some kind of mental insight. This is because God is not a thing that can be experienced by these natural faculties. Augustine argues that if God is to be known, then *God* must take the first step; God must reveal himself. And human beings only have access to this revelation through the gift of faith. All human experiences, even religious ones, occur within the horizon of the world. For them to take on the kind of meaning Augustine discusses in the *Confessions* they must be understood and interpreted in the light of faith.

It really is one of the remarkable features of the *Confessions* that every experience Augustine narrates has a kind of natural integrity, a perfectly natural explanation and is not experienced with any accompanying sense of *Deus ex machina*.¹³⁶ But when Augustine recalls these events in the light of faith, in the light of the Mercy he has received, all these

¹³⁵ Many treatments of memory focus only on Book 10 where Augustine offers an extended analysis, but his discussion of memory actually permeates the whole *Confessions* (there are 175 references in the *Confessions* to words related to *memor*, at least one occurrence in every book). The first mention of memory comes in 1.6.9 in the context of the *regio dissimilitudinis* where Augustine speaks of the limits of created memory in contrast to the all-embracing knowing of God's memory. Augustine's discussion of memory becomes more focused in Book 9, which not only prepares the ground but determines the more extensive discussion in Book 10.

¹³⁶ Perhaps the only exception to this is the healing of the toothache (*conf.* 9.4.12), but what a remarkably mundane experience which calls out a supernatural intervention. This is a special case of the divine entering the natural and, for Augustine, shows that God truly cares for the material world.

natural events are illumined and seen anew, that is, they are seen for what they truly are. The only way he can recognize God acting in his life is through interpreting his experiences in the light of faith, “a light which stems, not from one more intellectual intuition, similar in kind to philosophical or scientific insight, but from the Christian distinction between God and the world, with the particular blend of faith, action, and reason that this distinction requires.”¹³⁷

The first nine books of the *Confessions* are written from this uniquely creational perspective—the natural experiences of Augustine’s life are remembered and then interpreted in the light of faith. This explains, for example, why a trivial act of teenage mischief can come to be seen as a paradigm for the incoherence and nihilating evil of sin. Augustine is not being prudish, as some have condescendingly suggested, rather, he sees the incident for what it is. He remembers what happened, but understands and interprets it in a new light.

This insight can be approached from another angle by asking how Augustine recognizes God acting in his past life when he writes the *Confessions*. Certainly, he cannot be remembering God, because he was ignorant or oblivious of him for most of his life.¹³⁸ In Book 10, Augustine discusses the possibility that God is found by a kind of Platonic recollection, but his inquiry reveals that God is not present in the memory as, say, the truths of geometry or the principles of logic are present.¹³⁹ Rather, Augustine finds that God is the Lord of the memory” (cf. *dominus deus animi tu es*), who discloses himself in the memory

¹³⁷ Sokolowski, *God of Faith and Reason*, 140.

¹³⁸ See Crosson, “Religion and Faith in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” 162, which is followed in this section.

¹³⁹ See Aug. *conf.* 10.10.17 and 10.24.35-25.36.

and is present to it.¹⁴⁰ When one becomes aware of this a memory of God indeed remains, but this is not like other memories which are stored away and called back to mind. Instead, God freely chooses to dwell in the memory as abiding truth, the light always present to the mind, of which one can be more or less aware.¹⁴¹

Frederick Crosson suggests that there are two stages to Augustine's answer to how God can be recognized in Augustine's past: first, a theory of presence as when Augustine says, "You were within and I without" (*intus eras et ego foris*).¹⁴² Because God is Who He Is, he is always there with Augustine even if Augustine was unaware of this or has alienated himself from God through sin. But this way is preparatory for the next. "Faith sees the history it narrates as having a second level of meaning exhibiting God's saving actions. In the *Confessions*, Augustine compares man's life to a sentence, whose sounds pass away, while the sense of the whole is collected in memory."¹⁴³ Creation has its being in succession, like fleeting syllables in a song, yet these passing moments are eloquent, they carry meaning within them. Crosson suggests that when Augustine hears the children singing *tolle lege* in the garden, he hears God speak to him. Through this, Augustine "comes slowly to realize that *all of the course of his life can be read* in that additional dimension."¹⁴⁴ Faith opens up

¹⁴⁰ *conf.* 10.25.36.

¹⁴¹ See *conf.* 10.25.36. Compare *conf.* 7.10.16 and 7.17.23, where Augustine discusses seeing God for the first time and retaining a memory of him, and *conf.* 10.24.35-26.37, where he refers back to this event and how God abides as a memory, but also how this memory is different from other memories.

¹⁴² *conf.* 10.27.38.

¹⁴³ Crosson, "Religion and Faith in Augustine's *Confessions*," 163.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

this dimension. Faith in the hidden God who is ever present in his ever changing life, undergirding it, sustaining it, collecting its parts, and giving it meaning. This meaning cannot be recognized at the time because God is not experienced—the events of his life must be remembered and then faithfully interpreted in an abiding light so that their true depth can be brought to light. Perhaps this is why Augustine begins and ends the *Confessions* with a discussion of God.

B. Eucharistic Remembering

The discussion of the memory illumined by faith suggests that there is a properly ecclesial context for memory. If memory must be informed by faith and faith comes through hearing,¹⁴⁵ then there is need of the Church, the guardian and proclaimer of faith, to mediate memory. For Augustine, it is the Church's memory which shapes memory and it does this by reminding human beings of God's mindfulness of them. Augustine outlines this in Book 9, where in the course of remembering his dead loved ones, he establishes the proper context for memory. He remembers Verecundus whom God mercifully made sure was baptized before he died.¹⁴⁶ He remembers Nebridius whom Augustine is sure drinks from God's fountain of wisdom but is not "so inebriated from it as to forget me, since You, O Lord, Whom he drinks, are mindful of us" (*inebriari ex ea ut obliviscatur mei, cum tu, domine, quem potat ille, nostri sis memor*).¹⁴⁷ He remembers Adeodatus whom "You made well" (*tu*

¹⁴⁵ See Aug. *conf.* 1.1.1.

¹⁴⁶ *conf.* 9.3.5.

¹⁴⁷ *conf.* 9.3.6.

bene feceras).¹⁴⁸ Finally, he remembers at length his mother, who “only desired that her memory be made at Your altar, which she had served without ever missing a day on which she knew the holy Victim was to be dispensed, by which the handwritten decree against us was blotted out, by which the enemy was overcome” (*sed tantummodo memoriam sui ad altare tuum fieri desideravit, cui nullius diei praetermissione servierat, unde sciret dispensari victimam sanctam qua deletum est chirographum quod erat contrarium nobis, qua triumphatus est hostis*).¹⁴⁹ These brief references to the remembered dead bring out all the essential elements of Augustine’s ecclesial understanding of memory: the sacraments, the relation of human memory to God’s memory, creation, and confession. John Cavadini brings out how these elements are related:

“Confession” is a way of remembering that is Eucharistic, that is formed in the memory of the one who paid the price of his innocent blood and now intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father . . . The whole of *conf.* is an exercise in Eucharistic remembering, though we do not grasp that fully until Augustine is able to recount his baptism and then his own participation, as a baptized Catholic, in the Eucharist at his mother’s graveside.¹⁵⁰

According to Cavadini, the true locus of memory for Augustine is the altar of the Lord.¹⁵¹ It is here that sacrament, memory (ours and God’s), creation, and confession come together. In the sacrifice of the Eucharist, the faithful remember the infinite mercy God has shown them in sacrificing his Son to redeem fallen humanity. This sacrament of redemption forms an

¹⁴⁸ *conf.* 9.6.14.

¹⁴⁹ *conf.* 9.13.36.

¹⁵⁰ Cavadini, “Eucharistic Exegesis,” 95.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

unbreakable bond of faith.¹⁵² “The person bound to the Eucharist in faith is bound to a memorial of God’s mercy that configures or even defines all of one’s own memory, which is to say, one’s identity, and impels it into hope.”¹⁵³ Mercies confess to Mercy. Augustine’s fallen past is “inscribed in a prior narrative of mercy,”¹⁵⁴ the mercy which created him *ex nihilo* and the mercy that recreated him after he had uncreated himself. The Eucharist, then, mediates identity: remembering his life in the context of God’s mercy gives Augustine hope that he will not simply be condemned for the wickedness of the past. The daily celebration of the Eucharist is, for Augustine, the constant reminder of God’s economy of mercy which forms his memory, reforms the image of God in him, and informs how he understands the experiences of his life.¹⁵⁵ This understanding leads, inevitably, to confession which, Augustine thinks, is the proper response to the gift of creation and recreation.

V. Time

For Augustine, memory cannot be understood without considering time which is its “ontological precondition.”¹⁵⁶ This is why Book 10, which treats memory, ascends to Book 11, which deals with time. Although Augustine discusses time throughout the *Confessions*,

¹⁵² Aug. *conf.* 9.13.36: *ad cuius pretii nostri sacramentum ligavit ancilla tua animam suam vinculo fidei.*

¹⁵³ Cavadini, “Eucharistic Exegesis,” 89.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 93; cf. Aug. *conf.* 9.4.9.

¹⁵⁵ Cavadini, “Eucharistic Exegesis,” 93.

¹⁵⁶ Robert McMahon, “Book Thirteen: The Creation of the Church as the Paradigm for the *Confessions*,” in *A Reader’s Companion*, 213.

he first takes it up extensively in Book 4 where he describes his response to the death of his friend. There the young Augustine collides with mortality, with the limit of created being, and he is distraught because of (what he later recognizes as) his inappropriate attachment to his friend. Augustine loved his friend “as if he would not die” (*quem quasi non moriturum dilexeram*).¹⁵⁷ This “as if” (*quasi*) reveals Augustine’s heart to have confused Creator and creation. It is a classic violation of Romans 1:25.

The death of his friend brings Augustine face to face with the ephemerality of creation and he experiences firsthand that all temporal things “tend to not be” (*tendit non esse*).¹⁵⁸ This event gives the older Augustine the opportunity to reflect on the relation of created being to time: created things “rise and tend to be, the more quickly they grow so as to be, the more they hasten to not be: such is their way. So much have You given them, since they are parts of things, which are not all at once, but by yielding and succeeding, they make up all the things of the universe of which they are parts” (*ergo cum oriuntur et tendunt esse, quo magis celeriter crescunt ut sint, eo magis festinant ut non sint: sic est modus eorum. tantum dedisti eis, quia partes sunt rerum, quae non sunt omnes simul, sed decedendo ac succedendo agunt omnes universum, cuius partes sunt*).¹⁵⁹ For Augustine, human creatures

¹⁵⁷ Aug. *conf.* 4.6.11.

¹⁵⁸ *conf.* 11.14.17.

¹⁵⁹ *conf.* 4.10.15. Augustine begins this section with a prayer to God that He “convert us” so that “we shall be saved” and ends this passage by invoking *Deus, Creator omnium*. Creation, conversion, redemption and salvation are all present in this rich passage, which concludes: “Let my soul praise You out of all these things, God, Creator of all, but let it not by a gluey love get stuck in them through the body’s senses. For they go to where they were going, so that they are not; and they rend the soul with pestilent desires, since it wants to be and loves to rest in those things which it loves” (*laudet te ex illis anima mea, deus, creator omnium, sed non*

do not have their being all at once, but in succession, which is to say, over time. “The finite exists in the form of time. It does not find itself in time as in a container, but has its being in succession, hence, in its very passing.”¹⁶⁰ This is true of their individual lives, of all human history of which their lives are a part, as well as of the whole universe of which human history is a part.¹⁶¹ Augustine suggests that if human sensibility were not fallen, it would, in fact, desire things to pass away so that the whole could come about. Just as when listening to a pleasant speech, no one clings to the individual syllables, but desires each to pass so that the pleasure can be increased by beholding the whole.¹⁶² Augustine contrasts the whole of things (the *Omnia*) with God, who made the whole and who does not have his being in succession, but always is. God is wholly present everywhere—wholly present without variation to the part and the whole as they come to be and pass away.

A. Time as a Song

Augustine revisits the question of time at length in Book 11 when he turns his attention to the first chapter of Genesis. A full discussion of the questions raised in this rich Book is beyond the scope of this dissertation.¹⁶³ Rather, two questions will be considered

in eis figatur glutine amore per sensus corporis. eunt enim quo ibant, ut non sint, et conscindunt eam desideriiis pestilentiosis, quoniam ipsa esse vult et requiescere amat in eis quae amat).

¹⁶⁰ Guardini, *Conversion*, 91.

¹⁶¹ See Aug. *conf.* 11.28.38 and 4.11.17.

¹⁶² *conf.* 4.11.17.

¹⁶³ There are many good treatments of Book 11 on time. See Eva Brann, *What, Then, Is Time?* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 111-25; Cavadini, “Time and Ascent,” 171-85; Angus T. Johnston, “Time as a Psalm,” *Animus* 1 (1996): 68-72; Kennedy, “Book Eleven,” 167-84; Torrance Kirby, “Praise as the Soul’s Overcoming of Time in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine,” *Pro Ecclesia* 6, no. 2 (Summer

which relate to creation and especially to the questions of time which still persist, indeed, which are made more poignant in the new context: How can a human come to terms with his own ephemerality? How can a temporal creature be united with an eternal God?

Augustine often compares human life to a song in which each syllable must pass away and give way to the next in order for the song to be complete, but in Book 11 even the mature bishop can cry out that he does not know how the song goes: “Now truly my years [are wasted] in sighs . . . and I am broken up in times whose order I do not know, and my thoughts, the innermost guts of my soul, are torn apart in various tumults” (*nunc vero anni mei in gemitibus . . . at ego in tempora dissilui quorum ordinem nescio, et tumultuosis varietatibus dilaniantur cogitationes meae, intima viscera animae meae*).¹⁶⁴ The lives of human beings flit by in meaningful succession, but they often do not understand the meaning and they experience the song of their life as cacophony. This arises, Augustine suggests, because they inordinately love created things, which are bound by time, which bind them to time, and dissipate them. They “devour times and are devoured by times” (*devorans tempora et devoratus temporibus*).¹⁶⁵

1997): 333-50; Pelikan, *Mystery of Continuity*; Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, 157-72, 233-41, 249-52; James Wetzel, “Time After Augustine.” *Religious Studies* 31, no. 1 (1995): 341-57. Also worth consulting and comparing with these studies is: Michael Futch, “Augustine on the Successiveness of Time,” *Augustinian Studies* 33/1 (2002): 17-37; Hugh M. Lacey, “Empiricism and Augustine’s Problems about Time,” *Review of Metaphysics* 22/2 (1968): 219-45; Matthew Robinson, “Christ as the Central Metaphysical Principle in St Augustine’s Theory of Time: *Confessions*, Book 11,” *Studia Patristica* 43 (2006): 227-32; Christopher J. Thompson, “The Theological Dimension of Time in *Confessions* XI,” in *Presbyter Factus Sum*, 187-93; and Thomas L. Humphries, “*Distentio Animi: praesens temporis, imago aeternitatis*,” *Augustinian Studies* 40:1 (2009) 75–101.

¹⁶⁴ Aug. *conf.* 11.29.39.

¹⁶⁵ *conf.* 9.4.10.

Importantly, Augustine illustrates his point by using Ambrose's *Deus Creator Omnium*, a song which reinforces the sense of the fleetingness of human existence: not only do the syllables pass away as one sings this song, but the words of the song are a reminder that human beings are not God and will pass away like the syllables.¹⁶⁶ This song unites form and content to convey the transience of human existence. Indeed, even the title conveys this: *Deus* invokes God in himself, self-sufficient; *Creator* points to his relation to the world; and *Omnium* indicates the world itself, significantly, in the genitive plural; that is, derivative and many, contrasted with the underived, complete God who created it all.

Yet, ephemerality is not the last word. Ambrose's hymn also brings consolation, as after Monnica's death, and conveys hope because of the way the Creator is understood in the hymn, namely, as One Who creates out of love.¹⁶⁷ The same God Who created human beings, redeems them and gives them hope of salvation when he sends his Son. The Word becomes flesh, the eternal has entered the temporal, and, for Augustine, there is hope not of escaping time, but of transforming it in Christ. There is hope because there is the possibility of reform. Indeed, for Augustine, "time is the fulcrum of reform."¹⁶⁸

Augustine holds that there two kinds of time: "that time which together with space belongs to all created existence and that time which is specifically human because it belongs

¹⁶⁶ *conf.* 11.27.35; see *conf.* 9.12.32 for first verse of Ambrose's hymn.

¹⁶⁷ See Cavadini, "Time and Ascent," 173 and Kirby, "Praise as the Soul's Overcoming of Time," 338-39 for more on this.

¹⁶⁸ Ladner, *Idea of Reform*, 209. See also McCarthy, "Creation through the Psalms": "This personal recreation effected through the psalms, however, requires abiding in an open-ended length of time, during which our will must be conformed to God's through continuous and even laborious prayer" (211).

only to the soul.”¹⁶⁹ The former has already been discussed, so let the latter sense of time be considered. Augustine argues that in the soul there is only one time, the present, which has three aspects—*praesens de praeteritis, praesens de praesentibus, praesens de futuris*.¹⁷⁰ This tri-present time is brought about by the memory. Memory, then, gives a hint of what God’s eternity might be like as well as a way in which human beings can in some sense transcend their temporal limitations.¹⁷¹ They are subject to the ravages of time, but because of memory, they have the possibility to transform their experience of time. This opportunity is rooted in the presence of memory which is an image of the eternal present of the Trinity and can be renewed by a greater participation in that which it imitates.

In Book 10, Augustine calls his memory a “profound and infinite multiplicity” and then identifies himself with it (cf. *profunda et infinita multiplicitas. et hoc animus est, et hoc ego ipse sum*).¹⁷² This is the mental equivalent of the temporal claim he makes in Book 11,

¹⁶⁹ Ladner, *Idea of Reform*, 204. This simple assertion about two kinds of time, though not without difficulties of its own, does much to obviate the unfair criticism that Augustine has a purely subjective idea of time. See Wetzel, “Time after Augustine,” for a discussion of the criticisms and an intelligent response to them. See also Eva Brann, *What, Then, Is Time?*, 122 for a helpful diagram of the two times and how they relate. Also, Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 182-84, is concise and accurate on the two kinds of time.

¹⁷⁰ Aug. *conf.* 11.20.26.

¹⁷¹ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 182. Ratzinger calls this “memoria-time.” “Man, insofar as he is body, shares in physical time measured as that is in terms of the velocity of moving bodies by parameters which are themselves in motion and thus also relative. Man, however, is not only body. He is also spirit. Because these two aspects inhere inseparably in man, his belonging to the bodily world affects the manner of his spiritual activity. Nevertheless, that activity cannot be analyzed exclusively in terms of physical data. Man’s participation in the world of bodies shapes the time of his conscious awareness, yet in his spiritual activities he is temporal in a different, and deeper, way than that of physical bodies” (183).

¹⁷² Aug. *conf.* 10.17.26.

when he says “my life is a distention” (*distentio est vita mea*).¹⁷³ There is, for Augustine, no doubt that the lot of fallen humanity is one of division, multiplicity, scattering, and the experience of being stretched thin. This is so because human memory receives its images from the senses and holds all the past within itself, stretching back over it, while also anticipating the future and dispersing its attention over many things in the present. Human beings are dispersed in this temporal multiplicity, deceived by the images in their own minds, and held captive by the love of the shadows in their memory. But memory is also what allows for *confessio*, the retrieving of disparate memories in the light of faith and the ability to offer up a collected life as a sacrifice to God.¹⁷⁴ Memory, then, is the place where human creation, in Christ, can transform *distentio* into *extensio*, thereby re-forming the distended soul in time.¹⁷⁵

B. Time as a Psalm

Time must be good because God created it. Moreover, because the Word entered time, the eternal is now in some way wedded to it. Time allows for reform by stretching the

¹⁷³ *conf.* 11.29.39.

¹⁷⁴ See Kennedy, “Book Eleven”: “Each time someone makes a sentence, she or he gives shape to sounds that are in themselves meaningless. In a real way, every time we use language, therefore, we transcend our temporal condition . . . The distention of mind, by which we create narratives and discover meaning in our individual and collective lives, is evidence of the divine image in us” (80).

¹⁷⁵ John Milbank suggests, “Elsewhere Augustine seems to insist on *remaining* in time to get to God. *Intention* and *distention* appear to be resolved Christologically. One only intends God via Christ, thus if the answer to what is time is ‘self’, then the answer to ‘what is self’ is not simply dispersal *or* intention, but, rather, the receiving back of our true self from Christ via the church. Hence, Christ restored the true process of time” (“Sacred Trials: Augustine and the Indo-European Soul,” in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, eds. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (London: Routledge, 2001), 101-02, n. 61). The ecclesial dimension of *extensio* (what Milbank calls “intention”) will be considered in the next section.

soul toward God so that its capacity for God is increased. “I call on You, my God, my Mercy, You who made me and did not forget me who forgot You. I call You into my soul, which You prepare for accepting You, out of the desire which You inspire in it” (*invoco te, deus meus, misericordia mea, qui fecisti me et oblitum tui non oblitus es. invoco te in animam meam, quam praeparas ad capiendum te ex desiderio quod inspirasti ei*).¹⁷⁶

According to Augustine, God stretches the soul—not by spreading it thin in *distentio*, but by making its desires intent on him and thereby enlarging the soul’s capacity for him. There is a good stretching of the soul which Augustine learned from St. Paul, who “forgetting the things which are behind, is stretched into those things which are before” (*quae retro oblitus, in ea quae ante sunt extenditur*).¹⁷⁷ God extends human creatures toward the things ahead, but they are not distended in future times, but rather yearn toward the End, God himself. God transforms *distentio* into *extensio* by making his creation intent on him.¹⁷⁸

To see how this transformation happens, Augustine’s discussion of song needs to be revisited. In Book 11, Augustine uses the song image twice.¹⁷⁹ The first song is Ambrose’s hymn, a liturgical text whose words and personal meaning are deeply significant, but in the end a human product. The second song is an unnamed *canticum*, a Psalm, a part of inspired

¹⁷⁶ Aug. *conf.* 13.1.1.

¹⁷⁷ See Phil. 3:12-14, a passage about the resurrection. Augustine paraphrases or alludes to this passage a number of times in the *Confessions*: 9.10.25, 11.29.39, 11.30.40, 12.16.23; the version quoted here is from *conf.* 13.13.14.

¹⁷⁸ See Aug. *conf.* 11.29.39.

¹⁷⁹ See *conf.* 11.27.34 for *Deus Creator Omnium* and 11.28.38 for unspecified *canticum*.

Scripture and the formal prayer of the Body of Christ.¹⁸⁰ What intervenes between these two discussions of song is a brief reminder of the triple aspect of the memory's present.¹⁸¹ In the memory, understood as an image of the Trinity, the temporal song undergoes a Christological transformation. The human song which so poignantly brought to mind the fleetingness of existence is transformed in the example of the inspired song: the Divine word perfectly conveyed in the inspired words of men.¹⁸² Just as Christ's human nature is perfectly conformed to his divine nature, so too the human words of the Psalm are perfectly conformed to the Divine Word which inspired them. There is no conflict or contradiction. As Augustine sings, the human words pass away, but the Divine Word abides—in the Psalm these are somehow one. In the Psalm, God speaks eternally and temporally, the latter perfectly conformed to the former.¹⁸³ Importantly, this is not a Platonic escape from time, but a conversion of time. In Christ, human distention in time is “purged and melted by the fire of Your love” so that “I flow into You” (*in te confluam purgatus et liquidus igne amoris*

¹⁸⁰ *Canticum* could be a generic song, but most likely here means Psalm, as has been Augustine's practice in the *Confessions* (e.g. 9.2.2, 9.4.8, 9.6.14, 13.9.10). Augustine refers to Ambrose's hymn as a *versus* (11.27.35).

¹⁸¹ *conf.* 11.28.37.

¹⁸² See Kennedy, “Book Eleven”: “The very fact that the words of Scripture are both temporal and yet the perfect expression of God's eternal will shows that the incomparability between time and eternity does not imply an opposition between them” (183). Compare Kirby, “Praise as the Soul's Overcoming of Time,”: “Given that the whole difficulty faced in his inquiry into the possibility of praise has to do with mediation between the undivided being of the Creator and the divided being of creature, it is significant that speech in temporal succession and eternal utterance *both* belong to God” (338).

¹⁸³ See Aug. *conf.* 11.30.40; cf. 12.16.23.

tui).¹⁸⁴ In other words, Christ gathers the scattered notes of human life and transforms them into a Spirit-inspired song, a perfect offering to the Father.

VI. Ecclesial Ascent: Being Ravished

Augustine demonstrates what this transformation of time is in his post-baptismal ascent with his mother described in Book 9.¹⁸⁵ This ascent has much in common with the description of ascent in Book 7. In both, Augustine ascends with the help of God. In both, Augustine ascends by moving from exterior to interior to above. In both, beauty plays a key role. In both, there are Platonist and Christian elements. In both, there is a vision of God which lasts only a moment. But the similarities end here. In Book 7, Augustine embraces the Plotinian maxim of “the flight of the alone to the Alone,”¹⁸⁶ while in Book 9, Augustine ascends together with his uneducated mother. In Book 7, Augustine does not mention where he is; he only describes the development of his interior life, while in Book 9, he gives a surprising amount of detail about how God arranged for him and Monnica to be together, leaning out a window, overlooking a garden, in Ostia, on the Tiber, resting between two journeys. In Book 7, Augustine ascends by thought alone, while in Book 9, Augustine and

¹⁸⁴ *conf.* 11.30.40. The terms melting, purging, and flowing suggest not a static state of eternal bliss, but rather a process of transformation and a final state which still has some kind of temporal dimension or, at least, a dynamic aspect to it.

¹⁸⁵ There are three post-baptismal ascents in the *Confessions*: one, Augustine’s account of his experience of ascent with Monnica at Ostia (Book 9); two, his account in the present offered in the presence of believing readers (Book 10); and three, his extended, collective, ecclesial ascent through Scripture (Books 11-13). Augustine’s ascent with Monnica will be taken as representative of a post-baptismal ascent, while the others will be drawn upon to illumine this one.

¹⁸⁶ Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.9.11.

Monnica ascend “by thinking and by speaking and by wondering” (*cogitando et loquendo et mirando*).¹⁸⁷ In Book 7, the primary spiritual sense is the *oculi animae* though, hearing also had some role. In Book 9, Augustine and Monnica strain with *ore cordis*, “the mouth of their heart,” and by the end of their ascent all the spiritual senses are engaged.¹⁸⁸ In Book 7, Augustine begins his ascent by starting with judgments about beauty, something lofty, but earthly. In Book 9, Augustine and Monnica begin their ascent by setting their minds on heaven, then going back down to work their way back up. In Book 7, Augustine strains after God with “a beat of a trembling glance” (*ictu trepidantis aspectus*).¹⁸⁹ In Book 9, he strains with “the whole beat of our heart” (*toto ictu cordis*).¹⁹⁰ In Book 7, Augustine takes with him a memory of God, while in Book 9, he and Monnica leave the “first-fruits of their spirit” bound to heaven (cf. *ibi religatas primitias spiritus*).¹⁹¹ What accounts for these differences? And what do they signify?

In short, what accounts for the difference and illumines the post-baptism ascent is the Incarnation or, more precisely, the whole Christ (*totus Christus*), Head and Body. When Augustine saw the truth of God for the first time, he recognized the divine Word, but not the Incarnate Word. His newfound knowledge of God in Book 7, while true, led to pride, the

¹⁸⁷ Aug. *conf.* 9.10.24.

¹⁸⁸ *conf.* 9.10.23.

¹⁸⁹ *conf.* 7.17.23.

¹⁹⁰ *conf.* 9.10.24; perhaps another allusion to the ecclesial *cor nostrum*.

¹⁹¹ *conf.* 9.10.24, quoting Rom. 8:23.

pride of having a great insight and being able to bestow it on others.¹⁹² So, at one and the same time, Augustine came to the truth about God and separated himself from the truth of God. This pride arose, he says, because he did not embrace the truth about Christ. For Augustine, the Incarnation gives one strength to enjoy God by healing pride and helping one to acknowledge his dependency.¹⁹³ God became human in a shocking mutual participation so that the Word made flesh might “transfer to himself” (*ad se traiceret*) those who became obedient to him.¹⁹⁴ Through the Church, Christ incorporates human beings into himself and gives them the grace to participate in God. Indeed, Christ makes possible “not just discerning the blessed fatherland, but also dwelling there” (*beatificam patriam non tantum cernendam sed et habitandam*).¹⁹⁵

The ascent in Book 9 could most accurately be described as an ecclesial ascent and there are a number of allusions which recommend this interpretation. First of all, there is the presence of Monnica herself who, for Augustine, represents the Church in all the simplicity of her faith.¹⁹⁶ Second, the setting in the garden suggests an ecclesial context for, following

¹⁹² Aug. *conf.* 7.20.26-27.

¹⁹³ *conf.* 7.18.24.

¹⁹⁴ *conf.* 7.18.24.

¹⁹⁵ *conf.* 7.20.26.

¹⁹⁶ Brown suggests that Augustine saw Monnica “as an oracle of primitive Catholic piety” (*Augustine of Hippo*, 111); cf. Aug. *conf.* 9.8.17; *b. vita* 2.10, 3.16-20. Compare how Hans Urs von Balthasar draws together Monnica, the Church and creation: *Monnica als ein wahres Bild der Kirche begleitet hatte und daß er sein ganzes “Bekenntniswerk” in ein Buch über die Kirche als Endziel der Schöpfung münden lassen* (*Augustinus: Die Bekenntnisse* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 2002), 23).

the Song of Songs, Augustine understood gardens to signify the Church.¹⁹⁷ Lastly, the references to the “eternal life of the saints” (*vita aeterna sanctorum*),¹⁹⁸ the “region of abundance” (*regionem ubertatis*),¹⁹⁹ and the heavenly Israel²⁰⁰ all suggest that Augustine has the Church in mind (in this case, the heavenly Church).

The ecclesial context changes things. For example, the fact that Augustine gives specific details when and where the ascent took place suggests a new appreciation of time and place. Time and place were, previously, signs of multiplicity, division, limitation, but by entering the world, Christ has redeemed creation and transformed these things. They are now the vehicles of redemption rather than the things humans need to be redeemed from.

The ascent happens collectively. Augustine does not need to flee the world and others in order to enter into himself. Rather, in the context of the Church, he *must* be with others and this is part and parcel of the ascent. Going into himself and up to God now means binding himself ever closer to others in the Eucharistic community. The way he loves or does not love others binds him to them and to time, to before and after, but this does not

¹⁹⁷ For the Church as a garden, see Augustine’s interpretation of Song of Songs 4:12 in *bapt.* 5.27, 6.9, and 7.51. Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2002) suggests that in the garden setting “the bishop is giving a subtle hint that true vision can be achieved only within the saving community of the church of Christ” (234). This is not meant, though, to call into question the historicity of the scene. Augustine says that God himself arranged that he and Monnica could talk together at that time (cf. *provenerat, ut credo, procurante te occultis tuis modis . . .*) and, providentially, did so in a setting rich in ecclesial symbolism.

¹⁹⁸ *Aug. conf.* 9.10.23.

¹⁹⁹ *conf.* 9.10.24.

²⁰⁰ *conf.* 9.10.24.

become distention and distraction.²⁰¹ Rather, Augustine finds himself, finds unity for himself and with others, in the Church. This transformed sense of time and relation to others is evident in the reference to *extensio* which begins this ecclesial ascent: Augustine and Monnica “forget those things that are behind” and “are stretched into those which are before” (cf. *praeterita obliviscentes in ea quae ante sunt extenti*).²⁰² Importantly, this passage from Paul is a resurrection text. In the Church, *distentio* becomes *extensio*, a graced stretching forth, with others, toward God. This is why Augustine can say that they ascended “by thinking and speaking and wondering”: Augustine does not flee time and relation, but after his baptism he can experience them as redeemed and redeeming. Augustine and Monnica can speak fleeting words together which, in this new context, are the very vehicle for ascending to God. Maybe the discussion of time and song above is helpful here as well for Augustine says that they touched Wisdom with *toto ictu cordis*.²⁰³ The word *ictus* could be translated as “effort,” but perhaps this would carry too much proto-Pelagian weight. *Ictus* also has a musical sense; it means “a beat.” On this reading, at the height of ascent Augustine and Monnica have become attuned to God’s “inner melody” (*interiorem melodiam*).²⁰⁴ The newly baptized Augustine and his mother, united in love in the Church,

²⁰¹ See Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 183-84 for a brief but insightful discussion of temporality and relationality in Augustine.

²⁰² Aug. *conf.* 9.10.23, paraphrasing Phil. 3:12-14.

²⁰³ *conf.* 9.10.24.

²⁰⁴ *conf.* 4.15.27. Compare *mus.* 6.11.29: *ita coelestibus terrena subiecta, orbis temporum suorum numerosa successione quasi carmini universitatis associant.*

lift up their transformed heart to God and, anticipating the resurrection, make themselves into an ecclesial offering that sings “in tune” with God’s eternal song.

One should not presume to know what Augustine and Monnica experienced at the height of their ascent. But Augustine does say some things and the words he chooses perhaps reveal something. At the height of the ascent in Book 7, Augustine saw God with the *oculi animae* and found himself in a *regio dissimilitudinis* which bespoke the truth about God and himself. The height was a “vision” which was experienced almost as an “audition.” In Book 9, something different seems to happen. Augustine and Monnica are talking and at the same time yearning for God with the *ore cordis*, the mouth of their (one ecclesial) heart, and when they arrive at the *regio ubertatis* where God “feeds Israel in eternity with truth food” (*ubi pascis Israhel in aeternum veritate pabulo*),²⁰⁵ they touch it for a brief moment. Augustine describes how they ascend from creation to their own minds to God, and how they hear creation bespeak the Creator, but they move beyond this to hear the eternal Word himself without sound. In Book 7, the heights have a noetic character which leads to love.²⁰⁶ But in Book 9, love is involved from the start. The ascent does not result in love, but begins with love and is carried along by love. Rather than a strictly noetic seeing as in Book 7, at the height of their ascent in Ostia, they touch, they taste, and without words they hear eternal Wisdom, of Whom there is a vision which, interestingly, Augustine never says they actually

²⁰⁵ *conf.* 9.10.24.

²⁰⁶ *conf.* 7.17.23.

see.²⁰⁷ Rather, this vision “ravishes and absorbs and hides away the beholder in its inner joy” (*rapiat et absorbeat et recondat in interiora gaudia spectatorem suum*).²⁰⁸ Augustine and Monnica experience only a *momentum intelligentiae*, but if it could be prolonged it would be heaven.²⁰⁹ Mother and son have achieved, albeit briefly, the life of the saints after which they were panting. They have begun to “eat God” and they “assimilate” him by being assimilated into him. They have begun to participate in eternal life, though, as Augustine’s prayers for his deceased mother make clear, this participation is not final salvation, but a sign of hope.²¹⁰

Herein lies perhaps the key difference between the ascent at Milan and Ostia: the latter has a salvific character while the former does not. Understanding God through things that are made is essential for coming to salvation, but the knowledge itself does not save. Ostia is different. Augustine and Monnica attain heaven, they touch eternal Wisdom, where they “leave behind, bound to It, ‘the first-fruits of the spirit’” (*reliquimus ibi religatas primitias spiritus*).²¹¹ This *momentum intelligentiae* is a redeemed and redeeming experience,

²⁰⁷ McGinn says, “Despite this visual context, within which the analysis is contained, what is remarkable . . . is the way in which he piles up metaphors taken from the senses of touch and of hearing rather than that of seeing to try to describe what took place” (*The Foundations of Mysticism*, 235). Still, it is important to note that even in this ascent, Augustine calls the experience a *visio*.

²⁰⁸ Aug. *conf.* 9.10.25.

²⁰⁹ *conf.* 7.10.25; cf. 10.40.65.

²¹⁰ *conf.* 9.13.36.

²¹¹ *conf.* 9.10.24; cf. 13.13.14; *div. qu.* 67.6. See J. Pépin, “*Primitiae spiritus*. Remarques sur une citation paulinienne des *Confessions* de saint Augustine,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 140 (1951): 155-202; also, Mamerto Alfeche, “Groaning Creation in the Theology of Augustine,” *Augustiniana* 34 (1984): 5-52: “Our *spiritus* are therefore the *primitias*. Our *spiritus* that are being offered are our first offerings. Our second

which can only happen in and through Christ. It can only happen in Christ in the sense that only those incorporated into his Body can attain it. Why? Because in Christ their actions are different. They are no longer simply actions of Augustine or Monnica, even actions which are helped by God's grace. Rather, they are the actions Christ, Head and Body. That is, they are actions which belong fully to Christ, while also fully belonging to Augustine and Monnica.²¹² Yet, because they fully belong to Christ they are "meritorious," they merit eternal life because Eternal Life has accomplished these actions in them. By binding themselves to heaven and leaving the first fruits there, they already participate in the resurrection.

offering will be our the body. This will take place at the resurrection of the body" (19). Though, it should be added, that for Augustine this bodily offering can begin here as well.

²¹² Compare Augustine's striking formulation in *Jo. ev. tr.* 21.8: "Therefore, let us rejoice and give thanks that we are made not only Christians, but Christ" (*ergo gratulemur et agamus gratias, non solum nos christianos factos esse, sed christum*).

CHAPTER FOUR: CREATION AND THE CHURCH

*sine me itaque brevius in eis confiteri tibi
et eligere unum aliquid quod tu inspiraveris
verum, certum et bonum
-conf. 12.32.43*

I. The *Confessions* as a Liturgical Response to Creation

The discussion of the Church in the last chapter recommends treating a somewhat neglected topic: the liturgical aspects of the *Confessions*. “Liturgical” here means anything related to or informed by the rites of the Church. This includes the sacraments and their celebration, the rites of initiation, prayers, preaching, hymns, the “Divine Office,” and what are now called “sacramentals.” James O’Donnell says that for Augustine “cult was decisive . . . without cult, no Christianity.”¹ Moreover, the celebration of the Eucharist “was the center of Augustine’s ordained ministry.”² Although many of the references are subtle, there seems to be a growing awareness that there is an essential liturgical aspect,³ which, it will be

¹ O’Donnell, *Confessions*, Prolegomena. In the prelude to this passage, O’Donnell again emphasizes the importance of the liturgy or what he calls here “cult”: “The central decision he makes in the period narrated in the *Confessions* is not to believe the doctrines of the Catholic Christians (that is important, but preliminary), but to present himself for cult initiation - and the threshold there is a matter not of doctrine but of morals.” Though O’Donnell is right to emphasize cult, he diverges from Augustine in separating belief and cult in the way he does. As Augustine’s *De Vera Religione* makes clear, what distinguished Christians from other religious cults is that they do not separate these two (see 5.8).

² O’Donnell, *Confessions*, Prolegomena. The relative paucity of clear references to the liturgy could be attributed to the *disciplina arcani* about which Augustine himself says, “What is it that is hidden and not public in the Church? The sacrament of baptism, the sacrament of the Eucharist” (*quid est quod occultum est, et non publicum in ecclesia? sacramentum baptismi, sacramentum eucharistiae*) (*en. Ps.* 103.1.14). It is perhaps not wrong to say that the importance of the liturgy is in almost direct proportion to the lack of explicit references.

³ See, for example, Cavadini, “Eucharistic Exegesis,” 87-108; Michael P. Foley, “The Liturgical Structure of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Studia Patristica* (2006): 95-99, as well as his “The Sacramental Topography of the *Confessions*,” *Antiphon* 9.1 (2005): 30-64; also, William O’Brien, “The Liturgical Form of Augustine’s Conversion Narrative and its Theological Significance,” *Augustinian Studies* 9 (1978): 45-58.

argued below, reveals the deep meaning and purpose of the *Confessions* and shows the ecclesial response to the gift of creation.

A. Hints of a Liturgical Structure

As discussed in Chapter Two (see “A Catechumen and His Catechism”), Augustine’s conversion was not so much a conversion to Christianity, but a return to the faith he was given as a child. The *Confessions* “documents that Augustine’s conversion happened within the ancient ritual process known as the catechumenate. It began with his inscription in the catechumenate in 354 [when he was salted and signed with the cross⁴] and culminated in the mysteries of baptismal initiation on Easter 387.”⁵ These stages of initiation, which could “be extended over an entire lifetime, formed a single coherent entity and one full meaning, in which the great sacrament that came at the end could not be divorced from the various lesser ones that preceded it.”⁶ In light of this ancient understanding, the story Augustine narrates in Books 1-9 could be understood as one lifelong catechumenate in which the Divine Teacher uses the events of Augustine’s life to catechize him about the mysteries of the faith. Or, to put perhaps too fine a point on it, Augustine’s conversion story could be understood as one profound, thirty-three year catechetical lesson in the first article of the Creed.⁷

⁴ Aug. *conf.* 1.11.17; cf. *cat. rud.* 26.50.

⁵ Thomas M. Finn, *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 230.

⁶ Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 348.

⁷ For Augustine, the first article of the Creed contains the whole of the Creed. See *vera rel.* 7.13.

These liturgical elements inform the structure of the *Confessions*. A full treatment of this rich and understudied theme is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but a brief outline will be necessary to advance the argument. Michael Foley makes the case that Books 1-9 are dominated and framed by the theme of baptism. Book 1 speaks of an averted baptism, while Book 9, its chiasmic counterpart, contains five baptisms, and “with virtually everything in between acting as either an aversion from or conversion towards the sacrament.”⁸ Book 8 culminates in the proclamation of the Gospel and Book 9 culminates in Augustine and his friends attending the Eucharist.

Book 10 is addressed only to the “brethren” (*fratres*)⁹ suggesting that the unbaptized have been “dismissed” at this point. This, of course, is similar to the catechumens being dismissed after the “liturgy of the word” has ended. Augustine then prays that the hymns and weeping of the brethren may ascend to God “from these brotherly hearts, your censers” (*de fraternis cordibus, turibulis tuis*)¹⁰—the incensing of the altar. Book 10 also contains the long discussion of memory which, recalling the discussion of memory and the Eucharist from the last chapter (see “Memory” in Chapter Three), provides the preparatory metaphysics for understanding the universal effects of the “sacrament of our price” (*cuius pretii nostri sacramentum*), that is, how the past and future can be taken up into the always present saving

⁸ Foley, “Sacramental Topography,” 32. The chiasmic structure of Books 1-9 will be treated in the next chapter.

⁹ Aug. *conf.* 10.4.5-6. Augustine also says that Book 10 is written for those whose “ears charity has opened” (*aures caritas aperit*) (10.3.3), which for Augustine could mean only those who have the Spirit, that is, those who have been baptized.

¹⁰ *conf.* 10.4.5.

economy of Christ's sacrifice.¹¹ After an extensive examination of conscience, this book is crowned with the most explicit discussion of the Eucharist,¹² about which O'Donnell says, "such dense eucharistic imagery . . . may best be thought of as perhaps the only place in our literature where a Christian receives the eucharist in the literary text itself."¹³ Augustine, in a sense, holds up the Eucharist and says, "I think upon my price [the price of my redemption] and I eat it and I drink it and I dispense it to others" (*cogito pretium meum, et manduco et bibo et erogo*).¹⁴ He "has presented us here with discourse that does not *represent* liturgical prayer, but rather accompanies or, more venturesomely, embodies it. He will not tell us what it is like to participate in the eucharist; he appears before us as he appears at the altar."¹⁵

In Books 11-13, Augustine does his episcopal duty of expounding Scripture and, not coincidentally, he focuses on the beginning of Genesis. The creation story of Genesis was the text traditionally used during Easter time to instruct the newly baptized about the "new creation" they had become.¹⁶ It is no accident, then, that Augustine treats the creation

¹¹ *conf.* 9.13.36. See Foley, "Sacramental Topography," 46-52 for a penetrating discussion of memory and Eucharist in the *Confessions*.

¹² *Aug. conf.* 10.43.69-70.

¹³ O'Donnell, *Confessions*, Prolegomena.

¹⁴ *Aug. conf.* 10.43.70.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, ad loc. 10.43.69.

¹⁶ See 2 Cor. 5 :17. Marie-Anne Vannier says, "*Chaque année, en effet, les évêques commentaient la Genèse pour les catéchumènes qui allaient être baptisés dans la nuit de Pâques et ils leur faisaient ainsi comprendre le lien qui existe entre la création et la création nouvelle qu'ils allaient connaître*" (*Les Confessions*, 38).

narrative in a literal and figurative way, the latter being an extended meditation on life in the Spirit after baptism.¹⁷

Augustine's use of the Psalms—the daily prayers of the *totus Christus*—reinforces the structural point. By weaving together his narrative with the Psalms, Augustine “is showing, rather than telling, his reader that he considers the most suitable context for what has happened in his life to be the biblical context made present to him in the liturgy.”¹⁸ The *Confessions* is not strictly organized around the liturgy of the Mass, since certain elements are out of order (like the homily coming after the Eucharist), but, there is a liturgical motion to the work which, it will be argued in the next chapter, is intimately related to creation and is determinative of its meaning.¹⁹ On this reading, the *Confessions* could be understood as a mystagogy, a literary initiation into the mysteries of God through the sacraments of the Church.²⁰

¹⁷ Books 11 and 12 contain Augustine's literal interpretation of Genesis, while Book 13 begins as literal (up to 13.11.12) and then transitions to a figurative interpretation. See “The Church as the Goal of Creation” below.

¹⁸ O'Brien, “The Liturgical Form of Augustine's Conversion Narrative,” 47.

¹⁹ Foley speaks instead of a “sacramental topography.” Augustine, he says, “has structured, at least in some measure, all thirteen books of his *Confessions* according to the sacraments that he received during his lifetime [baptism, the Eucharist, presbyteral orders, and episcopal orders] . . . It is these sacraments that Augustine uses to configure the various parts of the *Confessions*: baptism serves as a *locus* or *topos* for the narration of his past (Books I-IX), priestly orders and the Eucharist for the narration of his present (X), and episcopal orders for his explication of Genesis 1:1-[2:4] (XI-XIII)” (“Sacramental Topography, 31).

²⁰ See discussion of *exercitatio animi* in “The Summary of the Master Teacher” below.

B. Creation and Daily Prayer

Another fruitful liturgical consideration would be to examine how Augustine's community prayed throughout the day "in psalms and hymns,"²¹ or what is now called "the Liturgy of the Hours."²² This is not discussed in the *Confessions*, but Augustine would have said these prayers every day as he worked on the thirteen books. Of this liturgical practice, Van der Meer writes,

The songs of praise for the different times of the day all started by proclaiming the hour of day and at the same time invoked the Creator. Each then treated of one of the six days of the *hexameron*, then mounted upward by almost imperceptible stages from the transitoriness and symbolism of the first creation to a vision of the second creation, which would appear with Christ and would be imperishable, and which has in a certain sense already begun.²³

For Augustine, every day would be structured by the creation narrative understood as ordered to and illumined by the new creation. Every day, Augustine would sing Ambrose's hymn, *Deus Creator Omnium*.²⁴ The song which Augustine sings to console himself after his mother's death,²⁵ which he mentions in his discussion of memory,²⁶ and which he uses to

²¹ Aug. *reg.* 3 2.3, quoting Col. 3:16.

²² See Aug. *reg.* 2 2; *reg.* 3 2.1-4. On the question of Augustinian authorship of these rules, see Gerald Bonner's comments in *Augustine of Hippo: The Monastic Rules* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2004), 22-49. For Augustine's practice of daily prayer, see Robert F. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: The Origins of the Divine Office and Its Meaning for Today* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1986), 94-96.

²³ Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 330.

²⁴ In Aug. *conf.*, the phrase, *Deus Creator omnium*, or some slight variation thereof, occurs eight times: 2.6.12, 4.10.15, 5.5.9, 5.10.19, 9.6.14, 9.12.32, 10.34.52, 11.27.35. The last three refer explicitly to Ambrose's hymn.

²⁵ Aug. *conf.* 9.12.32.

²⁶ *conf.* 10.34.52.

help illumine the nature of time²⁷ and perhaps even hylomorphic creation²⁸ is the same song he would sing every day as the lamps were being lit to fend off the darkness of the descending night.²⁹ Indeed, every day Augustine would liturgically revisit the days of creation and ingrain them on his heart as he sang of the fleetingness of this darkened world and his hope in the stability of God who can heal and transform what he has made. In the next chapter, an argument that the days of creation structure the *Confessions* will be considered.

C. Worship: Sacraments and Deeds

For Augustine, the purpose of the liturgy is to worship and serve, to render *latreia* to the one true God.³⁰ Error in worship, *idol-latreia*, occurs when one mistakes creation for the Creator.³¹ The essential element of this worship is sacrifice,³² which comes in two interpenetrating forms: sacraments and deeds.

²⁷ *conf.* 11.27.35.

²⁸ *conf.* 12.29.40.

²⁹ Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 331.

³⁰ See Aug. *c. Faust.* 20.21 ; *vera rel.* 1.1.

³¹ Augustine says in *vera rel.* 10.19 (quoting Rom. 1:25, 21): “Therefore, let us not ‘serve the creature rather than the creator’, nor ‘become vain in our thoughts’ and religion is complete” (*non ergo creaturae potius quam creatori seruiamus nec euanescamus in cogitationibus nostris et perfecta religio est*).

³² *c. Faust.* 20.21.

Augustine says that sacraments can be broadly understood as “sacred signs,” that is, visible things which refer in some way to God and his providence.³³ The ultimate sacrament, to which all the Old Testament sacraments point and from which the New Testament sacraments flow, is Christ. By uniting something visible and invisible together in himself, Christ calls humanity to move from the visible to the invisible, from the material to the spiritual, from a lower to a higher reality.³⁴ The sacraments of the new covenant have the same pedagogical purpose but also provide the grace which heals the human mind and heart to bring it about. By using the sacraments “one comes to understand and participate in the divine mystery.”³⁵ The Incarnation has transformed the relationship between creation and its Creator, not only in how this relationship is understood, but in the material world which now, in the sacraments, has become a privileged place to encounter the presence of God.

For Augustine, the two most important sacraments are baptism and Eucharist. Within the context of Augustine’s understanding of creation, baptism is intimately related to

³³ Augustine says the Old Testament is filled with sacraments among which he includes various feasts, historical events, and rituals, such as Passover, the crossing of the Red Sea, the Sabbath, circumcision, the temple, and the Levitical sacrifices among others. In regard to the Old Testament, Augustine understands sacraments as “sacred signs,” that is, visible things which refer in some way to God and His Providence. See *doc. Chr.* 3.9.13. In regard to the New Testament, Augustine uses the term *sacramenta* in a broad and a specific sense. In the broad sense, *sacramenta* refers to any of the liturgical activities of the Church: holy days, rituals, singing, etc. This broad meaning is similar to the Old Testament sacraments in that the sacraments are material signs which point to a spiritual reality, though they differ in that the older sacraments were types of Christ and his Church, while the new sacraments *proceed* from the mystery of Christ and continue his saving work in his Church. In the specific sense, Augustine uses *sacramenta* to refer to the “liturgical sacraments,” especially baptism and Eucharist. Emmanuel J. Cutrone, “Sacraments,” in *ATA*, also includes chrismation, penance, orders, and matrimony as special liturgical sacraments (743).

³⁴ See *doc. Chr.* 1.13; also, *s.* 261.7: “Through the man Christ you tend toward the God Christ” (*per hominem Christum tendis ad Deum Christum*).

³⁵ Cutrone, “Sacraments,” 742.

conversio, while the Eucharist is intimately related to ongoing (*re*)*formatio*.³⁶ Baptism is the “sacrament of conversion” (*conversionis sacramentum*),³⁷ the non-repeatable initiation into the death and resurrection of Christ which remits sins³⁸ and makes the baptized a “new creation.” As in the original creation of human beings where God created them *ad te* and formed them according to the Son and in order to bring them to completion over time through the Spirit, so too in the re-creation of baptism are they made “new creations” who are patterned after the Image,³⁹ not perfected, but oriented toward God toward Whom they move in a lifetime process of re-formation.⁴⁰ For Augustine, the Eucharist is the sacrament of reformation, the “daily physic” which conforms one to Christ over time, “changing my soul by faith and by Your sacrament” (*mutans animam meam fide et sacramento tuo*).⁴¹ It is the “sacrament of humility”⁴² which enables human beings to accept what it means to be created and so render true worship to the Creator rather than the creature.

Augustine understands each mystery to illumine the other⁴³ and often suggests that there is not only a symbolic relationship but also a kind of mystical identity between the

³⁶ See Ladner, *Idea of Reform*, 32.

³⁷ Aug. *ep.* 98.9.

³⁸ See *conf.* 1.11.17.

³⁹ See *conf.* 1.11.18.

⁴⁰ See *conf.* 10.30.42.

⁴¹ *conf.* 10.3.4 and 10.4.5.

⁴² See *conf.* 8.2.4.

⁴³ See for example, the beautiful *s.* 229.1 and 229/A.1, both most likely preached within five to ten years of the *Confessions* at Easter Vigils.

baptized congregation and the Eucharist. Following a tradition which goes back to the founding of Church, Augustine will often play with the symbolic possibilities of scattered grain and grapes which are gathered and transformed, just as the congregation has been.⁴⁴ But this symbolic element is in no way separated from the reality which it signifies: in baptism, one is truly incorporated into the Body of Christ; in the Eucharist, the bread truly becomes the Body of Christ. In the celebration of the Eucharist, the congregation offers itself up on the altar along with the bread and wine: the Body of Christ (the baptized congregation) offers itself along with and precisely as the perfect sacrifice of the Body of Christ (the Eucharist). Augustine tells his congregation, “So if you are the Body of Christ and its members, it is your mystery that has been placed on the Lord’s table; you receive your own mystery . . . Be what you see, and receive what you are” (*si ergo uos estis corpus christi et membra, mysterium uestrum in mensa dominica positum est: mysterium uestrum accipitis . . . Estote quod videtis, et accipite quod estis*).⁴⁵ The congregation conforms itself to the “sacrament of redemption” (*cuius pretii nostri sacramentum*),⁴⁶ while the sacrament brings about the redemption of the congregation. By partaking of the sacrament, the congregation advances the mysterious process of “changing into God,” which was revealed to Augustine when he first came to the proper understanding of creation, but did not yet understand.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ For example, s. 229.1; 272; compare, for example, *Didache* 9.

⁴⁵ s. 272.

⁴⁶ *conf.* 9.13.36.

⁴⁷ See *conf.* 7.10.16.

For Augustine, human deeds are a form of sacrifice as well: good ones to God (offering him his own),⁴⁸ evil ones to the devil.⁴⁹ Evil deeds come *de suo*; they are of his own making. Good deeds are God's gift which should be offered back to him in gratitude. "May I sacrifice to You the service of my thinking and my tongue; and give what I offer You" (*sacrificem tibi famulatum cogitationis et linguae meae, et da quod offeram tibi*).⁵⁰ All of Augustine's good qualities, all of his good deeds, indeed, that he exists at all and exists in a way so as to have good qualities and deeds, are properly understood as God's prior gifts.⁵¹ This understanding arises, as has been said, because of the Christian understanding of creation *ex nihilo*.

The proper response to this gift, according to Augustine, is the self-offering of the congregation; the response of their whole self. Just as the bread and wine were God's gifts which were transformed by God into a thanksgiving sacrifice, so too should the congregation "be what they see" and be transformed by God into the same Eucharistic offering.⁵² The

⁴⁸ See, for example, *civ. Dei* 10.6: "Every deed is a true sacrifice which is done so that we might cling to God in a holy society" (*proinde uerum sacrificium est omne opus, quo agitur, ut sancta societate inhaereamus deo*).

⁴⁹ See, for example, *conf.* 3.3.5: "I wasted myself in such iniquity and I pursued a sacrilegious curiosity so that, deserting You, it led me toward the uttermost infidelity and the deceitful subservience of demons, to whom I made a burnt offering of my evil deeds" (*in quantas iniquitates distabui et sacrilega curiositate secutus sum, ut deserentem te deduceret me ad ima infida et circumventoria obsequia daemoniorum, quibus immolabam facta mea mala*). Importantly, this passage refers to something wicked Augustine did in a church when he was a teenager: the evil sacrifice here is juxtaposed and contrasted with the sacrifice of altar. See *conf.* 4.2.3, 4.16.30, 5.3.16, 8.2.4-5, 9.4.7-11.

⁵⁰ *conf.* 11.2.3. cf. *conf.* 4.16.31, 13.1.1.

⁵¹ 1 Cor. 4:7.

⁵² See Aug. *en. Ps.* 30. en. 1.1: *vita mea est confiteri te*.

mystical identity between the baptized congregation and the consecrated bread and wine extends to their whole lives. Their deeds, their speech, their very selves must be sacrificed and conformed to God, offering back to him the gifts he has given, transformed by his grace. The *Confessions* itself is just such an offering⁵³ and throughout the work Augustine demonstrates that he strives to turn his whole life into a Eucharist which is not only conformed to Christ but, like the Eucharist, gathers together the Church into a unified sacrifice.⁵⁴

II. Ecclesial Hermeneutics

Augustine devotes Books 11-13 of the *Confessions* to the opening of Genesis. In Book 12, Augustine raises two difficulties for interpreting Scripture: the problem of discerning the author's intention and the possibility of a multiplicity of true meanings. For Augustine, these related problems seem not only to call into question the whole interpretive enterprise, but, more gravely, they seem to call into question the whole confessional enterprise. If we cannot know the scriptural author's intention, how can we know the truth of what the text means?⁵⁵ And, if there are many true interpretations, how can the Church avoid conflict in teaching the truth? In the midst of addressing these difficulties, Augustine

⁵³ *conf.* 11.2.3.

⁵⁴ See *conf.* 1.15.24, 2.3.5, 11.1.1.

⁵⁵ The intention here is not to equate the meaning of the text with authorial intention—this would be a reduction of Augustine's thought on this topic—but only to point out that both the equation and the reduction are seeming problems when first approaching the question of authorial intention and multiplicity of meanings. For a helpful treatment of this point, see Tarmo Toom, "Was Augustine an Intentionalist?" *Studia Patristica* (forthcoming).

outlines what could be called an “ecclesial hermeneutic,” one which draws on the *regula caritatis*, first articulated in the *De doctrina Christiana*, but then deepens it in order to provide a vision of the Church wherein exegesis is transformed into communal confession. The last three books of the *Confessions*, then, should not be primarily understood as an exegesis, but as a *confessio* from sacred Scripture.⁵⁶

According to Augustine, one text can have many interpretations: not just one true meaning and many false ones, but many true interpretations of the same text at the same time. This multiplicity of true meanings, he says, is a gift provided by God in response to human *distentio*: because human beings are fallen, their minds and hearts are scattered amongst a multiplicity of things, but the multiplicity of true meanings provides many paths for them to come back to the One Who is Truth.⁵⁷ In the *De doctrina Christiana*, Augustine suggests that a multiplicity of true meanings is not really a problem: if a single passage has many meanings “there is no danger if any of the meanings can agree with the truth being taught from other passages of the holy Scriptures” (*nihil periculi est, si quodlibet eorum congruere ueritati ex aliis locis sanctarum scripturarum doceri potest*).⁵⁸ Augustine broadens the traditional interpretive rule, *scripta sacra sui ipsius interpres*, to include a legitimate plurality of true interpretations in regard to a single passage.

⁵⁶ See discussion in “*Retractationes*” in Chapter Five for the development of this argument.

⁵⁷ See Aug. *doc. chr.* 3.27.38; cf. *conf.* 10.40.65. See also *doc. chr.* 2.4.5 for a historical account of this dispersion; also, *conf.* 13.20.27 and 13.23.34 for an account in the form of allegorical confession.

⁵⁸ *doc. Chr.* 3.27.38.

Eliciting many true meanings from a single passage is acceptable, even if the author's intended meaning remains obscure, for the author may have intended one of the many true meanings suggested "and certainly the Spirit of God, who worked through him, undoubtedly foresaw that this meaning would occur to the reader or listener" (*et certe dei spiritus, qui per eum haec operatus est, etiam ipsam occursuram lectori uel auditori sine dubitatione praeuidit*).⁵⁹ In the *Confessions*, Augustine allows for two possibilities in regard to multiple meanings and authorial intention: either the author of Scripture perceived all the possible true meanings that could be drawn out of a passage⁶⁰ or he had one particular meaning in mind, in which case that one should be preferred to the other true meanings.⁶¹ Either way, though, whatever the author "saw was true and he expressed it fittingly" (*verum eum vidisse apteque id enuntiavisse*).⁶² Augustine recognizes that discerning the author's meaning is a difficult, maybe impossible, task and so he accepts as many meanings as accord with the truth.

Augustine says that it is easier to see the truth itself than it is to see what Moses meant when he wrote Genesis.⁶³ In Book 12, Augustine offers five true interpretations of first verse of Scripture, each of which, he says, "You, O Light of all true-speaking minds, show to be true" (*quod tu, lux omnium veridicarum mentium, ostendis verum esse*).⁶⁴ Each

⁵⁹ *doc. Chr.* 3.27.38; cf. *conf.* 13.24.35-37.

⁶⁰ *conf.* 12.31.42.

⁶¹ *conf.* 12.32.43.

⁶² *conf.* 12.24.33.

⁶³ See *conf.* 12.24.33.

⁶⁴ *conf.* 12.18.27. See O'Donnell, *Confessions*, ad loc. 12.14.17, for a summary of the interpretations.

interpretation is an illumined, true interpretation and so could be held as a true reading of the text, but which among them Moses had in mind is not at all clear.⁶⁵ This leads to an important insight: for Augustine, perceiving the truth itself is more important than finding out what the author intended. O'Donnell makes this point well:

The text is an instrument, but ultimately dispensable. The goal is not a stable situation in which text and interpretation sit side-by-side happily married for eternity, but one in which both text . . . and interpretation . . . have fallen by the way as direct cognition of things replaces the mediated cognition through signs that is a condition of material, time-bound creation.⁶⁶

For Augustine, seeing the truth directly is more important than interpreting Scripture accurately or claiming to know what Moses had in mind. The Scriptures are a sign, a divine and privileged one to be sure, but still a temporal sign which points beyond itself to eternal truth. God has, Augustine (allegorically) says, “made for us a firmament of authority over us in your divine Scriptures” (*fecisti nobis firmamentum auctoritatis super nos in scriptura tua divina*).⁶⁷ The Scriptures are authoritatively fixed above us, containing the luminous truths which guide the way. Yet, there is something higher than the Scriptures. First of all, the truth itself to which the Scriptures point. But also the community of angels, the heaven of heavens, the “waters above this firmament” (*aliae aquae super hoc firmamentum*) who “always see Your face and, without any syllables of time, read what your eternal will wills” (*vident enim faciem tuam semper, et ibi legunt sine syllabis temporum quid velit aeterna*

⁶⁵ Aug. *conf.* 12.24.33.

⁶⁶ O'Donnell, *Confessions*, 12.19.28.

⁶⁷ Aug. *conf.* 13.15.16. See Isabelle Bochet, “*Le Firmament de l'Écriture*,” 7-9, for a discussion of this phrase. Compare *sol.* 1.1.4; *mus.* 6.11.29.

voluntas tua).⁶⁸ The heavenly Church, toward which the earthly Church is ordered, already sees God “face to face.” The Church on earth, though, does not: she sees “through the mirror of heaven” (*per speculum caeli*),⁶⁹ that is, through the Scriptures. They are not an end in themselves, they are not the goal, but a sign to lead to the goal.

Augustine’s discussion here indicates one reason why it is incorrect to call the last three books of the *Confessions* merely “exegetical.” Augustine is not primarily interested in the interpretation of a text as such, but in participating in the light, in penetrating the Scriptures so that he can encounter the truth to which they point and lead others to that same truth.⁷⁰

While in the *De doctrina Christiana*, Augustine simply affirmed that a multiplicity of true interpretations was not a problem, in the *Confessions*, he now also recognizes that it could seem scandalous that Christian interpreters who were bound together in charity could disagree about the proper interpretation of Scripture. How could presumably holy men with illumined minds interpret Scripture differently? To address this potential problem, Augustine reasserts his *regula caritatis*, first outlined in the *De doctrina Christiana*. There, he says, “Whoever, therefore, seems to understand the divine Scriptures or any part of them so that he does not build up the double love of God and of our neighbor does not understand it yet” (*quisquis igitur scripturas diuinas uel quamlibet earum partem intellexisse sibi uidetur, ita ut*

⁶⁸ Aug. *conf.* 13.15.18.

⁶⁹ *conf.* 13.15.18.

⁷⁰ See next chapter for more on this topic.

eo intellectu non aedificet istam geminam caritatem dei et proximi, nondum intellexit).⁷¹ If the interpretation builds up charity, even if it is not what the author intended, then the interpreter has arrived at his goal, just like “someone leaving the road by mistake, but who passes through a field to the same place toward which the road itself leads” (*ac si quisquam errore deserens uiam eo tamen per agrum pergat, quo etiam uia illa perducit*).⁷² When reading Scripture, love is more important than true interpretations, for the ultimate truth of Scripture is the double love to which it points.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine reaffirms the *regula caritatis*, yet also broadens it. In Book 12, Augustine is not concerned with people who have erred in their interpretation, but with those who have seemingly grasped the truth of the matter. In contrast to the *De doctrina Christiana*, the *res* is not at stake; these interpreters in Book 12 have seen a true meaning of the text, but because there are multiple true meanings there is the possibility of personal conflict. At stake is not interpreting the text in regards to charity, but practicing charity in regards to other interpretations. Augustine suggests that the multiplicity of true interpretations is an occasion for this practice of charity. Since God “publicly calls us to a communion of truth” (*ad eius communionem publice uocas*) and “proposes it for the enjoyment of all” (*tu omnibus ad fruendum proponis*),⁷³ the interpreters should not assert their true interpretation to the exclusion of others, lest “by destructive contention [they]

⁷¹ *doc. chr.* 1.36.40.

⁷² *doc. chr.* 1.36.40.

⁷³ *conf.* 12.25.34.

offend against charity itself, on account of which [Moses] said everything” (*et perniciosis contentionibus ipsam offendere caritatem propter quam dixit omnia*).⁷⁴ Therefore, Augustine insists throughout Book 12 that multiple true interpretations are acceptable and that the *regula caritatis* demands that other interpreters accept one another’s true interpretations.⁷⁵

Augustine’s broadened understanding of the *regula caritatis* brings to the fore the ecclesial dimension of his scriptural hermeneutic.⁷⁶ For Augustine, interpreting Scripture is essentially communal, an ecclesial activity, done not for its own sake, but as he says in the very first line of Book I of the *De doctrina Christiana*, for the sake of passing on to others what has been understood.⁷⁷ The discussion in Book 12 of the *Confessions*, though, suggests a deeper way in which Augustine’s hermeneutic is ecclesial. Pamela Bright makes the point nicely:

The hermeneutical principles developed by Augustine, particularly but not exclusively in the last books of the *Confessions* of a multiplicity of true interpretations . . . call for a dialogic mode of hermeneutics so that *contradictores* (*conf.* XII 30.41), those who disagree, can become *con-loquitors*, those who are in conversation with each other, and finally to recognize their common ministry as *laudatores*, giving praise together (even through differing interpretations) in the community of the church.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *conf.* 12.25.35.

⁷⁵ See *conf.* 12.14.17, 12.18.27, 12.23.32-25.35, 12.30.41-32.43.

⁷⁶ For Augustine, the Church’s relationship to Scripture is manifold: among other things, the Church has an important role in safeguarding the *regula fidei*, determining the canon, and establishing the authority of Scripture. See, for example, *conf.* 6.4.5-5.8; *doc. Chr.* 2.8.12; *c. ep. Man.* 4.5; *mor.* 1.10.17. These aspects are not able to be treated here.

⁷⁷ *doc. chr.* 1.1.1.

⁷⁸ Pamela Bright, “Augustine of Hippo (354-430),” in *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity*, ed. Charles Kannengieser (Boston: Brill, 2006), 1232.

Reading and interpreting Scripture happens not for the sake of getting to the bottom of what the text says—as important as this is—but for the sake of praising God together. The purpose of interpreting Scripture is communal confession. Augustine embraces a polyphony of true meanings sung by a chorus of holy men who all see true things in the light of the one Truth. Holding forth different true interpretations in dialogue with one another is an occasion of charity, an opportunity for the brethren to rejoice together in the abundance of truth revealed by God. In Augustine’s vision, what could have easily devolved into *contentio* is transformed into *extensio*, the graced stretching forth toward God of those whose intention is focused in praise on the one who reveals the truth.

Augustine knew that this kind of charity did not always prevail in the Church, but he prays for its realization: “In this diversity of true views, may truth itself beget concord” (*in hac diversitate sententiarum verarum concordiam pariat ipsa veritas*).⁷⁹ The truth-engendered concord which Augustine prays for here gives flesh to the *res* of the Scripture and, as will be shown, becomes an embodied sign which leads the Church back to the Truth. In his ecclesial hermeneutic, Augustine envisions the Church as a community of converted hearts,⁸⁰ a *conversatio* of charity in which fellow seekers imitate as well as commune with the *conversatio* of heaven,⁸¹ which cleaves to God in love and, “lit and warmed by You as a perpetual noonday” (*semper meridies luceret et ferveret ex te*), enjoys his unfailing light.⁸²

⁷⁹ Aug. *conf.* 12.30.41.

⁸⁰ See *doc. Chr.* 2.7.9-11 for the importance of conversion in Augustine’s ecclesial hermeneutics.

⁸¹ See *doc. Chr.* 2.7.11.

⁸² *conf.* 12.15.21.

A. The Summary of the Master Teacher

After establishing why and how different interpretations of Scripture should be handled in the Church, Augustine ends his discussion in Book 12 with a prayer: “Permit me to confess to You in these [words of Scripture] more briefly and to choose any one, true, certain and good [meaning] which you shall inspire” (*sine me itaque brevius in eis confiteri tibi et eligere unum aliquid quod tu inspiraveris verum, certum et bonum*).⁸³ At the end of the *Confessions*, Augustine seeks to pass on to others one of the many “true, certain and good” meanings of the Genesis creation story—the one, he prays, which God inspires him to choose. Book 13 is, presumably, God’s response to this prayer.

An extensive treatment of the unique style and content of Book 13 is beyond the scope of this chapter and has, besides, been well treated by others.⁸⁴ Instead, this chapter will briefly note some key aspects of the book which make it distinctive and which help illumine the relationship between creation and the Church.

First, more than the other books of the *Confessions*, Book 13 is saturated with allusions to Scripture. Compare, for example, the number of Scripture references in the last three books: Book 11 has 120; Book 12 has 169; while the inspired Book 13 has 365!⁸⁵

⁸³ *conf.* 12.32.43, quoted in the epigraph above.

⁸⁴ Among others, see Robert McMahan, *Prayerful Ascent: An Essay on the Literary Form of the Confessions* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 22-37; Catherine Joubert, “Le Livre XIII et la Structure des *Confessions* de Saint Augustin,” *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 66 (1992): 77-117; and Bochet, “*Le Firmament de l’Écriture*,” 230ff.

⁸⁵ These figures come from McMahan, *Prayerful Ascent*, 30. There are different ways of counting Scriptural references, so the actual number need not be of concern as much as the difference in quantity between Book 13 and the other books. Still, if the number 365 were accurate, one could see numerological

Book 13 has more than twice as many references as any other book: it is a virtual tapestry of Scripture quotes taken, moreover, from throughout the Bible.⁸⁶ Second, Book 13 contains both a literal and an allegorical interpretation of Genesis. This is different from Books 11 and 12 which are strictly literal. The significance of this will be discussed below. Third, Book 13 has the distinct quality of “recapitulation.” As will be discussed in the next chapter, the allegory of the seven days in Book 13 could be understood as a recapitulation of Augustine’s life, but more than this, as Robert McMahon has argued, there is a certain sense in which Book 13 could be understood to recapitulate “the whole of Scripture and, hence, the sweep and meaning of all history.”⁸⁷ Juxtaposing texts from Genesis 1 and the rest of Scripture, Augustine treats creation and the Trinity (13.1.1-11.12), describes the life of the Church in the Spirit (13.12.13-34.49), and concludes with eternal beatitude (13.35.50-38.53). Augustine has swept his readers from the beginning to the end, from God’s introduction of created existence to the final culmination of all things in God through the Church. This is the

significance: one verse of Scripture for each day of the year might suggest a kind of Christological transformation of time in the Spirit.

⁸⁶ McMahon, *Prayerful Ascent*: “Augustine quotes from or alludes to over half the books of Scripture, sixteen from the Old Testament and twenty-two from the New” (34).

⁸⁷ McMahon, *Prayerful Ascent*, 35-36. See McMahon’s excellent treatment of these recapitulations in his chapter “Recapitulation” in *Prayerful Ascent*, 142-55. He argues, “The allegory in book 13 offers a vision of such astonishing compass that it could only be ‘divinely inspired.’ It envisions the scope of all creation, set forth in Genesis 1, the sweep of all time, from the Creation to the Last Judgment, and the truths of all Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, as subsumed in ‘the creation of the Church.’ Augustine discovers all of Scripture in its first chapter, and the meaning of all history, for a Christian, in the origin of time. In scrutinizing the origin of the universe in God’s intention to create, Augustine discovers the end of providence: the salvation of humankind through the Church” (146-47). McMahon, though, unduly limits both inspiration and recapitulation to the allegory in the Book 13. The prayer at the end of Book 12 as well as internal evidence in Book 13 recommends reading the whole of last book—both the literal and allegorical parts—as inspired and as participating in the recapitulation.

motion of the whole *Confessions*, so Book 13 is also a recapitulation of the *Confessions* as well.

All these distinctive qualities of Book 13 recommend Robert O’Connell’s intriguing suggestion that the *Confessions* is an *exercitatio animi*, a “training” or “exercise of the soul.”⁸⁸ Following O’Connell’s suggestion, an aspect he left unexplored will be developed, namely, how Augustine employs the traditional meaning and structure of the *exercitatio animi* in the *Confessions*, while also transforming them in the light of creation.

In a traditional *exercitatio animi*, the master teacher leads his students toward the truth by engaging them in dialogue, often focused on a text or a question, with the intention of stretching their minds and hearts—a preparatory process of purification—for the sake of progressing to a more profound understanding of the matter at hand. Often enough, this was an education in how to ascend from corporal to spiritual realities. After a sufficient amount of exercise, these dialogues end with an authoritative summary from the teacher. This structure is found in many of Augustine’s early dialogues. In his *De ordine*, *Contra*

⁸⁸ This suggestion, as far as I know, originates in O’Connell, *Odyssey of Soul*, 15-17, though it is not necessary to follow the Neoplatonist anthropological assumptions which O’Connell thinks necessarily attend the *exercitatio animi*. Indeed, the Christian understanding of creation provides a much richer and, ultimately, much more Augustinian understanding of the *exercitatio animi*. For a good treatment of *exercitatio animi* in the *Confessions*, see Thomas F. Martin, “Augustine’s *Confessions* as Pedagogy: Exercises in Transformation,” in *Augustine and Liberal Education*, eds. Kim Paffenroth and Kevin L. Hughes (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 25-51. Isabelle Bochet makes the same suggestion about the *Confessions* being an *exercitatio animi* in which *le livre XIII a, semble-t-il, fonction de récapitulation de tout l’ouvrage* (“*Le Firmament de l’Écriture*,” 229). For an extended discussion on the role of *exercitatio animi* in Augustine’s thought—though without considering the *Confessions*—see Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris: Bocard, 1938), 299-327. A helpful summary can also be found in Gilles Emery, “Trinitarian Theology as Spiritual Exercise in Augustine and Aquinas,” in *Aquinas the Augustinian*, eds. Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2007), 1-17. For a discussion of the history of *exercitatio animi*, see Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

Academicos, and *De magistro*, for example, the dialogue between master teacher and student(s) occupies a first part, while Augustine's authoritative monologue brings the work to completion.⁸⁹

As in a traditional *exercitatio*, Augustine is concerned in the *Confessions* with helping his students—his readers—to advance in knowledge and transition from corporal to spiritual realities. But as important as these things are, they remain within the realm of creation. Augustine undertakes the much more radical task of leading his readers from creation to the Creator, to “the invisible things of God which are understood through the things that are made” (*invisibilia dei per ea quae facta sunt intellecta*).⁹⁰ This is Augustine's explicit teaching in many places as well as the implicit teaching in the movement of the whole work.

The structure of *exercitatio animi*—anagogical dialogue followed by magisterial summary—is also operative in the *Confessions*. The first twelve books are primarily a dialogue with God, but also a dialogue with himself and with his readers, in which Augustine uses the “text” of his life (past and present) and the text of Scripture, to lead the reader from lower to higher things, from creation to the Creator. Book 13, then, is the magisterial summary which concludes the dialogue of the *Confessions*. It is Augustine's Spirit-guided

⁸⁹ See, for example, Aug. *ord.* 2.7.24ff; *acad.* 3.7.15ff; *mag.* 10.33ff for the magisterial summaries. In his early works, Augustine argued that the liberal arts, dialogically engaged, were capable of preparing the soul for the vision of God (e.g., *ord.* 2.7.24-9.27). In his later works, though less sanguine about the power of the liberal arts, he still believed that spiritual exercise was necessary for coming to the truth about God (see, for example, *Trin.* 15.1.1).

⁹⁰ Rom. 1:20. In light of the discussion in Chapter Two, it could be said that the whole story of Augustine's early life could be understood as an *exercitatio animi* in which the young materialist is led to the truth about God and the world. God, of course, would be the master teacher and Augustine the student. The older Augustine narrates this story in such a way as to exercise his readers.

interpretation of the most fundamental text of Genesis which God inspires in response to the prayer at the end of Book 12.

Before looking at the content of Book 13, one other transformation Augustine introduces into the *exercitatio animi* should be noted. The traditional *exercitatio* was, in a sense, a process of self-transformation, an exercise in purification in which one would attempt to rise by his own powers. This is Augustine's criticism of the Platonists and their pride.⁹¹ But Augustine's profound emphasis on creation means that the requisite transformation and subsequent achievement can only happen through grace, in particular, the grace of the humility of Christ. Indeed, this is the very lesson of Books 7 and 8 considered together.

Book 13 is presented as the magisterial summary of a master teacher. Though, given the special inspiration Augustine claims and the sheer density of Scripture quotes, it would perhaps be more accurate to say that Augustine presents it as an inspired summary of *the* Master Teacher. The Master Teacher uses the occasion of Augustine's life and his writing of the *Confessions* to lead the reader to the truth of creation. In Book 13, he does this by giving a definitive (though not the only) interpretation of the Genesis creation story for the purpose of leading the minds and hearts of the faithful from created things to the one who made them. Book 13 is intended to show the deep meaning and purpose of creation as revealed by God in Scripture. This meaning and purpose, he shows, is the Church.

⁹¹ See Aug. *conf.* 10.42.67; also, Martin, "Augustine's *Confessions* as Pedagogy, 42-43, has a helpful discussion of this point.

B. The Church as the Goal of Creation

One prevailing scholarly view about the last three books claims that they present a primarily allegorical reading of Genesis.⁹² But, even a cursory comparison of *Confessions* 11-13 with Augustine's allegorical exposition of Genesis in the *De Genesi adversus Manicheos* and his literal interpretation in the *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* would make clear that Augustine reads Genesis literally in Books 11 and 12, while in Book 13 he starts with a literal and then transitions to an allegorical interpretation (at 13.12.13).⁹³ Let us briefly consider the meaning of literal and allegorical for Augustine before turning to his use of them in Book 13.

For Augustine, the words of Scripture signify things: this is the literal (*ad litteram*) or proper (*propria*) meaning of the text. But the things signified can also signify other things: this is the spiritual meaning, what Augustine calls in the *Confessions* the allegorical (*allegoria*) or figurative (*figurata*) meaning.⁹⁴ The literal meaning is intended when the

⁹² See Frederick van Fleteren, "Confessiones," in *ATA*: "Confessions 11-13 is an exegesis, principally allegorical, of Genesis 1:1-31" (232); Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, "The Prudential Augustine: The Virtuous Structure and Sense of his *Confessions*," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 22 (1987): "The investigation of Genesis in books 11-13 of the *Confessions*, however, is allegorical" (37); O'Donnell, *Confessions*: "the last three books contain an allegorical exposition of the first chapter of Genesis" (Prolegomena); Vannier, *Les Confessions: Sans doute l'interprétation qu'Augustin donne du ciel et de la terre* [in Book 12] *est-elle allégorique* (140). See also Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 259.

⁹³ In Book 13, there are some important exceptions to this neat division: in the first part of Book 13, there are hints of allegory woven into his literal interpretation which anticipate the fulfillment of the literal (see *Aug. conf.* 13.2.3, 13.7.8, 13.8.9). Also, the literal and the allegorical interpretations coincide in two places: Augustine's discussion of the image of God (13.22.32) and the Sabbath (13.35.50ff). These will be treated below. Book 13 also contains a summary of Augustine's literal interpretation of the six days (13.32.47-33.48, though this differs from his literal interpretation at the start of Book 13) and a summary of his allegorical interpretation of the six days (13.34.49).

⁹⁴ See *conf.* 13.21.30, 13.24.37, 13.25.38, 13.24.36-37. Augustine uses different terms in different works: in *De Genesi adversus Manicheos*, he contrasts *secundum historiam* and *secundum litteram* with

words are interpreted “as a faithful account of things that happened” (*secundum fidem rerum gestarum*),⁹⁵ while the allegorical is intended when the things themselves are interpreted according to a spiritual meaning, which Augustine understands to be the mystery of the “whole Christ” (*totus Christus*), Christ the Head and the Church his Body.⁹⁶ The allegorical reading is the deep meaning of Scripture which pertains to salvation.

A brief example from the *Confessions* will illustrate the distinction between the literal and the spiritual meanings: Augustine interprets *caelum et terram* literally when he says these refer to the heaven of heavens and formless matter, for these are the “things” (*res*), the realities, to which the words refer.⁹⁷ He interprets *caelum et terram* allegorically when he says the things themselves (*caelum et terram*) refer to spiritual realities, in this case, to the spiritual and carnal members of the Church⁹⁸ or to the Head and Body of the Church.⁹⁹

Understanding this basic Augustinian distinction on the meanings of Scripture is essential for

secundum prophetiam (2.2.3). In the *De doctrina Christiana*., Augustine contrasts *propria* and *translata*: the interpretation is called *propria* when the words of Scripture “are used for signifying those things on account of which they were instituted” (*propria dicuntur, cum his rebus significandis adhibentur, propter quas sunt instituta*) (2.10.15). This is to be contrasted with the *translata* meaning when “the things themselves, which we signify by the literal words, are utilized for signifying some other thing” (*translata sunt, cum et ipsae res, quas propriis uerbis significamus, ad aliquid aliud significandum usurpantur*) (*Ibid.*). Augustine seems to use the various terms for the literal meaning and for spiritual meaning interchangeably (see *Gn. litt.* 1.1.1-1.2).

⁹⁵ *Gn. litt.* 1.1.1.

⁹⁶ “The whole mystery of all of the Scriptures is Christ and the Church” (*et totum omnium scripturarum mysterium christum et ecclesiam*) (*en. Ps.* 79.1); compare *conf.* 13.34.49; *doc. Chr.* 3.31.44.

⁹⁷ For example, *conf.* 13.2.2-3.

⁹⁸ *conf.* 13.12.13.

⁹⁹ *conf.* 13.34.49.

understanding the last three books of the *Confessions*, in particular, their dynamic ecclesial orientation.

In Book 13, God inspires Augustine to confess both a literal and a spiritual interpretation of the Genesis creation story. The significance of this is often overlooked. For the first twelve chapters, Augustine offers a summary of one literal interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2 (his preferred one among the many true interpretations articulated in Book 12). In the thirteenth chapter, Augustine transitions to an allegorical reading of Genesis: he starts over briefly at Genesis 1:1 and completes his interpretation of the six days of creation as the story of the Church.¹⁰⁰ Together, these are the “one, true, certain and good” meaning which God has inspired.¹⁰¹ In his literal reading of the first two verses of Genesis, Augustine lays out his understanding of creation, much of which was already discussed in Chapter One. It will not be reviewed here, except to note that Augustine finds *creatio (ex nihilo)*, *conversio*, *formatio* as well as the Trinity in the first two verses of Genesis. When Augustine transitions to his allegorical *confessio de scripturis sanctis* at 13.12.13, he describes the creation of the Church, starting with baptism.¹⁰² Why, though, does Augustine transition from a literal to an allegorical reading at this point or, really, at all?

¹⁰⁰ McMahan points out that Augustine’s allegory of Genesis takes twenty-seven chapters which, he suggests, is “a perfect Trinitarian number (3 x 3 x 3) for a divinely inspired allegorical exposition” (*Prayerful Ascent*, 32). See *ibid.*, 36 for other delightful numerical suggestions about the last three books.

¹⁰¹ See Aug. *conf.* 12.32.43.

¹⁰² Augustine begins the allegorical confession thus: “Proceed in confession, my faith. Say to the Lord, your God, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord, my God, in Your name we are baptized, O Father and Son and Holy Spirit,’ because also among us God made us a heaven and earth in Christ, the spiritual and carnal members of his Church” (*procede in confessione, fides mea; dic domino deo tuo, ‘sancte, sancte, sancte, domine deus meus, in nomine tuo baptizati sumus, pater et filii et spiritus sancte, in nomine tuo baptizamur, pater et filii et spiritus*

When Augustine reads Genesis 1:1-2 literally, he discovers there the most important truths about the nature of creation as well as the persons of the Trinity.¹⁰³ Having arrived at the Trinity, there is, in a sense, nothing left for the literal meaning to do. Augustine is, after all, making a *confession* from Genesis, not giving an exegesis of it. He need not follow his literal interpretation through to the end. Rather, the truth of creation has led him to the Creator Trinity and so the literal reading has fulfilled its highest and noblest purpose.¹⁰⁴

At this point in his confession, Augustine transitions from the Trinity to baptism in the Trinity. The transition from literal to spiritual occurs at the very locus where creation becomes a new creation. The literary structure of Book 13 reinforces Augustine's theological insight: just as the spiritual meaning of Scripture reveals the deep meaning of the literal and brings it to completion, so too does the Church reveal the deep meaning of creation and bring it to completion. There is a kind of continuity, as well as real transformation, between creation and the new creation which Augustine demonstrates in the very structure and style of Book 13.¹⁰⁵ The subject after the transition is no longer creation proper, but transformed creation. Thus, there is need for a new mode of discourse. The

sancte, ' quia et apud nos in Christo suo fecit deus caelum et terram, spiritales et carnales ecclesiae suae) (conf. 13.12.13). Note the rich liturgical language in this passage.

¹⁰³ See *Gn. litt.* 1.6.12 for another instance of finding the Trinity literally in Gen. 1:1-2.

¹⁰⁴ In the final paragraph before the transition (*conf.* 13.11.12), Augustine speaks of the three things within man—*esse, nosse, velle*—which are at once three and one, a pale image of the Trinity. “These three things are far different than that Trinity, but I indicate where men may *exercise* themselves and examine and think how far different they are” (*longe aliud sunt ista tria quam illa trinitas, sed dico ubi se exercent et probent et sentiant quam longe sunt) (conf. 13.11.12). This is Augustine's final “literal exercitatio,” which leads one into God himself, where the interpretation remains for the rest of the book.*

¹⁰⁵ See Vannier, *Les Confessions*, 156.

literal mode, which has served Augustine to this point, is now insufficient for dealing with the new creation, the new ecclesial reality of the baptized. More suitable for treating life in the Spirit is a spiritual mode of discourse: an allegorical confession.

Augustine allegorically interprets the days of creation as a series of stages through which the baptized progress in the life in the Spirit.¹⁰⁶ According to Augustine, the sinner is drowned in an abyss of sin; he converts by withdrawing from his sinful activity and being baptized: “Do penance; let there be light” (*‘paenitentiam agite’*; *‘fiat lux’*).¹⁰⁷ Baptism incorporates one into Christ’s Body, thereby completing the conversion process and sacramentally re-orienting the sinner back toward God. From here the process of reformation begins: under the authority of Scripture (the firmament), nourished by the sacraments (the creeping things which arise out of and because of the sea of sin), especially the Eucharist (the Fish), and imitating the examples of good ministers and saints (the luminous heavenly bodies), the Spirit draws the baptized toward likeness to Christ, subduing the passions (the wild beasts, cattle, and serpents) until he becomes an image of God. This image of God is the spiritual man, whom St. Paul discusses, the Spirit-filled person who provides a glimpse into the ecclesial destiny of all creation.¹⁰⁸

An interesting thing happens when Augustine interprets the image of God in Genesis 1:26: the literal and allegorical meaning coincide or, to put it another way, the literal meaning

¹⁰⁶ The following is a brief summary of Augustine’s allegory in *conf.* 13.12.13-22.32.

¹⁰⁷ *conf.* 13.12.13. Compare Augustine’s remarkable Easter vigil homily (*s.* 223.1) where he identifies the newly baptized with the light of the first day of creation. Also, see the similar but more obscure reference at *conf.* 13.8.9.

¹⁰⁸ See 1 Cor. 2:15; Aug. *conf.* 13.22.32ff.

is the spiritual meaning in this passage. In the original creation, God made man according to his image, that is, illumined and with the capacity to know him. In his re-creation, this “man is renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of him who created him” (*homo renovatur in agnitione dei secundum imaginem eius, qui creavit eum*).¹⁰⁹ Augustine does not think that humans were created in a perfect, fully formed state—their formation was still to be completed—but they were created in a graced state, a state of union with God, and sovereignty over their own bodies, and harmony in their thoughts; so too the spiritual person who has been renewed. His re-formation will not be complete until he knows God, until he sees him “face to face” (*facie ad faciem*).¹¹⁰ The spiritual person has been restored to his originally created status, dynamically oriented toward God, and already beginning to progress beyond his original creation. John Cavadini suggests,

In the Spirit-filled person we see, as fully as we can, what it means to *be* in the image and likeness of God, to be the subject of God’s creative love. The Spirit filled person *is* the image and likeness of God, as close as we can see it, being perfected, being fully formed. Can we perhaps even say that he or she is being fully created? The Spirit filled person fulfills the intention that God had for Creation all along.¹¹¹

The Spirit-filled person is the work of the Holy Spirit, who takes the one “con-formed to this world” and “re-forms him in the newness of his mind” (cf. *nolite conformari huic saeculo . . . sed reformamini in novitate mentis vestrae*).¹¹² The Holy Spirit fills this person, making

¹⁰⁹ Aug. *conf.* 13.22.32, quoting Col. 3:10; cf. *conf.* 13.23.33, 13.26.40, 13.34.49.

¹¹⁰ See *conf.* 10.5.7 and 12.13.16, quoting 1 Cor. 13:12. See also *conf.* 4.10.15: “Convert us and show us Your Face, and we will be saved” (*converte nos et ostende faciem tuam, et salvi erimus*). For the heaven of heavens, who always see God’s face, see *conf.* 12.15.21, 12.17.24, and 13.15.18.

¹¹¹ Cavadini, “Eucharistic Exegesis,” 107.

¹¹² Aug. *conf.* 13.13.14, 13.22.32 (2x), quoting Rom. 12:2.

him spiritual so that he now sees, says, and knows through the Spirit of God.¹¹³ Quoting God himself(!), Augustine makes a remarkable comparison between the Spirit-filled person and Scripture: “O man, truly what my Scripture says, I say. Yet, it speaks temporally, while time does not come near my Word, because it abides with me in equal eternity. Thus, those things which you see through my Spirit, I see, just as those things which you say through my Spirit, I say” (*o homo, nempe quod scriptura mea dicit, ego dico. et tamen illa temporaliter dicit, verbo autem meo tempus non accedit, quia aequali mecum aeternitate consistit. sic ea quae vos per spiritum meum videtis ego video, sicut ea quae vos per spiritum meum dicitis ego dico*).¹¹⁴ Just as the words of Scripture are temporal but are united to and perfectly convey the unchanging Word, so too the Spirit-filled person.¹¹⁵ The Spirit-filled person has become the image of God, an imitation of Christ himself; he now, as fully as possible in this life, reflects and therefore conveys God’s Spirit. He is a light in the firmament of heaven, firmly fixed in the Scripture, a light to others, and, like Scripture, a Spirit-inspired sign who gives unique access to the things of God.

C. Becoming a Beginning

According to Augustine, the Spirit-filled person who has become an image of God reveals both the destiny of mankind and, interestingly, their origin as well. He reveals their

¹¹³ See Aug. *conf.* 13.18.22, 13.29.44, 13.31.46, and 13.34.49.

¹¹⁴ *conf.* 13.29.44.

¹¹⁵ Recall the discussion of the non-competition between grace and free will from above. The Spirit-filled person sees, says, and knows with his own faculties while at the same time—and without in any way truncating those integral human activities—God sees through him.

destiny insofar as he points toward what they should be and what will happen to them in the end, namely, be transformed into God. Yet, he reveals their origin as well because he tells them something of the original creation, of how they were made and what they were intended to be like from the beginning. The Spirit-filled person is a privileged place of insight—or it could be said, revelation—about the original creation. One could go as far as to say that, for Augustine, the creation story of Genesis cannot be understood without the Spirit-filled person. This is not only because there is a requisite holiness for reading Scripture properly—for only the spiritual can understand spiritual things—but because only the re-created image of God has a kind of direct access to the otherwise inaccessible and unknowable beginning, for he has, in a sense, become a beginning. To understand this line of reasoning, a brief consideration of Augustine's *scientia signorum*, which he developed in the *De Magistro* and the *De doctrina Christiana*, is needed.¹¹⁶

In the latter half of the *De Magistro*, Augustine defends the thesis, “nothing is learned through its signs” (*nihil . . . per sua signa discatur*).¹¹⁷ He argues that words themselves do not show forth the things that they signify and are meaningless unless the things signified are

¹¹⁶ In addition to the studies of Augustine's understanding of language discussed in previous chapters, see also Duane W.H. Arnold and Pamela Bright, eds. *De doctrina christiana: A Classic of Western Culture* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); Bruce S. Bubacz, “Augustine's Illumination Theory and Epistemic Structuring,” *Augustinian Studies* 11 (1980): 35-49; Michael Mendelson, “‘By the Things Themselves’: *Eudaimonism*, Direct Acquaintance, and Illumination in Augustine's *De Magistro*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 39, no. 4 (2001): 467-89; Gareth B. Mathews, “Knowledge and Illumination,” in *Cambridge The Companion to Augustine*, 171-85; Ronald H. Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge*; Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*; Marie-Anne Vannier, “Light and Illumination in Augustine: Revisiting an Old Theme,” *Studia Patristica* 49 (2010): 59-64; Rowan Williams, “Language, Reality, and Desire in Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*,” *Journal of Literature and Theology* 3, no. 2 (July 1989): 138-50.

¹¹⁷ *Aug. mag.* 10.33.

already known beforehand. “That I may attribute as much as possible to them, words have force only to the extent that they admonish us to seek the things; they do not display them so that we might know” (*hactenus uerba ualuerunt, quibus ut plurimum tribuam, admonent tantum, ut quaeramus res, non exhibent, ut norimus*).¹¹⁸ In fact, only by knowing the things themselves can one learn the signs.¹¹⁹ According to Augustine, one “learns not from words but *from the things themselves* manifested by God disclosing within” (*docetur enim non uerbis meis, sed ipsis rebus deo intus pandente manifestis*).¹²⁰

This is true for both sensible and intelligible things. Sensible things are perceived by the senses, while intelligible things are perceived by reason.¹²¹ For Augustine, there is a helpful analogy between these two kinds of perception: just as corporeal things can be seen by the light of the sun with the eyes, so incorporeal things can be “seen” with the mind by the light of Truth. The senses can perceive sensible things; the mind can perceive intelligible things; but human beings have no faculty that can perceive historical events which are inaccessible in the past. Yet Augustine still argues that the things themselves teach historical events as well. To illustrate this point, Augustine uses the story from Daniel 3 of the three boys who are thrown into the furnace by the king.¹²² He *believes*, rather than *knows*, that these things happened, yet it was not the words of Scripture that taught him, but the things he

¹¹⁸ *mag.* 11.36.

¹¹⁹ See *mag.* 10.33 and 11.36.

¹²⁰ *mag.* 12.40, emphasis added.

¹²¹ See *mag.* 12.39-40.

¹²² See *mag.* 11.37 for this example.

already knows that taught him. Augustine already knows what boys are, what a furnace is, what unharmed is, etc. and the Scriptural report calls up in his mind things he already knows. The Scriptural report does this in a particular order (the narrative) and gives particular names (Ananias, Azarias, and Misahel) to things known (boys) for a particular purpose (moral instruction) and these particular events Augustine *believes* happened, though the things themselves are *already known* to him.

Now, how does Augustine's *scientia signorum* apply to Genesis? Though each *word* in the opening of Genesis seemingly refers to a sensible or intelligible reality to which there is some kind of direct access—beginning, God, heaven, earth, are things generally known—the *sentence*, as a whole, refers to a unique “historical” event to which there is no direct access. Thus, one must rely on the report of another, in this case, Moses. The creation story recounted in Genesis 1:1, then, is not *known*, but *believed*. But a further problem arises once it is realized that Moses was not present at the beginning either, so he, too, does not know the thing.¹²³ By its very nature, the original creation is something to which no human has any direct acquaintance. In a historical report, one trusts the witnesses who have seen the event and therefore know it. One trusts their knowledge of the event. But the original creation has no human witnesses; there can be no direct acquaintance with it and so it cannot be known; there seemingly is no thing to teach it. In Genesis, one encounters something utterly unique to which there seems to be no access at all.

¹²³ A consideration of the unique status of Moses' knowledge or belief must be set aside for another time.

Yet, Augustine speaks at tremendous length about the meaning of creation in Genesis. It has been discussed, for example, how Augustine understands God to have created in a threefold act of *creatio, conversio, formatio*. On his account, it cannot be the words of Genesis which teach him this, that is, his conclusion is not a result of a creative insight into the text alone or of playing with the words of Scripture. There must be some *thing* which teaches him. This thing is the spiritual person, the re-created one, who has been restored to his converted and re-formed state. This one, as Cavadini says, “is being fully created.”¹²⁴ For Augustine, it is the spiritual ones who are the “things themselves” which teach about creation. The re-created person is a knowable “object,” who by knowing himself gains direct access to the otherwise inaccessible beginning. The converted and re-formed Christian is a new creation; he has become a beginning.

This is also true, perhaps even more true, of the “community of converted hearts” mentioned above: they become, albeit imperfectly, the heaven of heavens, that “timeless” community of converted hearts which abides as it was created to be, turned toward God in praise. It becomes clear, now, why conversion holds such a high place in Augustine’s ecclesial hermeneutics, particularly when treating Genesis, for it is only through the knowledge of the converted self that one can gain insight into the original creation event.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Cavadini, “Eucharistic Exegesis,” 107.

¹²⁵ For the importance of conversion in Augustine’s ecclesial hermeneutics, see also the “spiritual ladder” of Aug. *doc. Chr.* 2.7.9-11, where *conversio* is necessary *ante omnia* (2.7.9).

III. The Sabbath of Eternal Life

The culmination of the magisterial summary, and of the *Confessions* as a whole, is Augustine's discussion of the seventh day, the Sabbath rest. The Sabbath, for Augustine, is nothing other than God himself, who is always the same, and, just as in the discussion of the image of God, the discussion of the Sabbath rest is another place where the literal and the spiritual meaning coincide.

Augustine treats the notion of rest at the beginning and end of Book 13.¹²⁶ As discussed in Chapter One (see section entitled, "Measure, Number, and Weight"), this term originally comes from the realm of physics: each thing has a place in which it finds its rest. For example, oil mixed with water is in restless motion until the oil rises above the water, its place, and rests there. Augustine transforms these traditional notions of physics when he speaks of human beings and does so in light of his understanding of creation. The place for humans is not physical, but spiritual, for their "place" is God himself, their Sabbath rest, who is not a part of creation. Thus, human beings are brought to their place not by physical motion, but by affective motion (cf. *pondus meum amor meus*).¹²⁷

Rest is achieved—God is achieved—through a good will, which "will place us there, so that we want nothing other than to abide there in eternity" (*ibi nos conlocabit voluntas bona, ut nihil velimus aliud quam permanere illic in aeternum*).¹²⁸ God is the end of all

¹²⁶ See *conf.* 13.9.10 and 13.35.50-38.53.

¹²⁷ *conf.* 13.9.10.

¹²⁸ *conf.* 13.9.10.

desires, both in the sense of being the goal as well as the fulfillment of all desires. This is why when Augustine prays, “Give us peace” (*pacem da nobis*),¹²⁹ he does not mean another gift beyond God which he bestows; rather, peace is God himself. If it were otherwise, then humans would not be made for God, but for something he could give them. So, Augustine prays, “Give me yourself” (*da mihi te*).¹³⁰ A good will is a gift of the Holy Spirit who “pours charity into our hearts” (*caritas tua diffusa est in cordibus nostris per spiritum sanctum*)¹³¹ and conforms the will to God, making it good. Love determines the goodness of the will, the love of the Holy Spirit, who “carries us above by a love beyond care, so that we might hold our heart up toward you, where your Spirit is borne over the waters, and we might come to that an all-surpassing rest” (*attollens nos superius amore securitatis, ut sursum cor habeamus ad te, ubi spiritus tuus superfertur super aquas, et veniamus ad supereminentem requiem*).¹³²

The reference here to “holding up the heart toward God” (cf. *sursum cor habeamus ad te*) is significant. The phrase *sursum cor* comes from the prayers at the preface of the Eucharistic liturgy.¹³³ In the prayers leading up to the Eucharist, the priest says *sursum*

¹²⁹ *conf.* 13.35.50. This could be an allusion to the *Agnus Dei* of the Eucharistic liturgy.

¹³⁰ *conf.* 13.8.9.

¹³¹ *conf.* 13.7.8, quoting Rom. 5:5.

¹³² *conf.* 13.7.8.

¹³³ Augustine analyzes this preface a number of times. See *s.* 25.7, 53.13, 68.4, 227; *vera rel.* 3.5; *s. Den.* 6.3; *civ. Dei* 10.3. Maria Boulding suggests, “This familiar phrase, ‘Lift up your hearts,’ was in use in the liturgy from at least the mid-third century; see Cyprian, *On the Lord’s Prayer*, 31. Augustine occasionally used it as a shorthand (and deliberately discreet) way of referring to the whole eucharistic liturgy” (*Confessions*, 325, fn. 61). See *sursum corde* at 12.16.23 in O’Donnell, *Confessions*; Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 398-400.

*cor*¹³⁴ and the people respond *habemus ad Dominum* (note the very dynamic and significant *ad!*). Augustine says, “When our heart is up to the Lord, it is his altar” (*cum ad illum sursum est, eius est altare cor nostrum*).¹³⁵ As the congregation lifts up their heart to God in the Eucharistic liturgy, it becomes an altar on which they offer themselves back to God as the Body of Christ.¹³⁶ Or, since it is his altar, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that in lifting up their heart, Christ the high priest offers himself through their heart back to the Father.¹³⁷ “Lift up the heart! The whole life of true Christians: Lift up the heart” (*sursum cor. tota uita christianorum uerorum, sursum cor*)!¹³⁸ In this motion, their hearts become one heart in which the congregation offers the one sacrifice of themselves, mystically identical to the sacrifice of bread and wine on the altar. In doing this, they give back to God what he has already given them: everything. Not only themselves, but Christ in them and all that he has taken up as well.

¹³⁴ For Augustine, this is always in the singular, though in the current Roman canon it is plural.

¹³⁵ Aug. *civ. Dei* 10.3.

¹³⁶ See *conf.* 10.4.5.

¹³⁷ See *ep.* 105.3.12 for the relationship between God’s grace and the actions of the minister.

¹³⁸ s. 229.3. Augustine continues: *quid est, sursum cor? spes in deo, non in te: tu enim deorsum es, deus sursum est. si spem habes in te, cor deorsum est, non est sursum. ideo, cum audieritis a sacerdote, sursum cor, respondetis habemus ad dominum. laborate ut uerum respondeatis, quia apud acta dei respondetis: sic sit, quomodo dicitis; non lingua sonet, et conscientia neget. et quia hoc ipsum, ut sursum habeatis cor, deus uobis donat, non uires uestrae, ideo sequitur, cum dixeritis habere uos sursum cor ad dominum, sequitur sacerdos et dicit, domino deo nostro gratias agamus. unde gratias agamus? quia sursum cor habemus, et, nisi ille illud leuasset, in terra iaceremus. et inde iam quae aguntur in precibus sanctis quas audituri estis, ut accedente uerbo fiat corpus et sanguis christi. nam tolle uerbum, panis est et uinum: adde uerbum, et iam aliud est. Compare *civ. dei* 10.3; *conf.* 9.8.17, 13.7.8.*

According to Augustine, the Holy Spirit brings human beings to God by transforming their hearts through true worship. The restless heart begins to find rest when it worships, when it is lifted up in self-offering, when it confesses, in the deep sense discussed above. This heart is necessarily both individual and ecclesial. “Not only is every human heart restless toward God, but also a single corporate heart seeks rest in the divine presence. In the church, the divine creation continues in the divine providence guiding our restless heart, individually and corporately, toward its eternal rest in God’s eternal Sabbath.”¹³⁹ God transforms hearts and brings about rest through worship, through the sacraments and the liturgical life of the Church. It is only through the Body of Christ that anyone can offer true worship for then it is Christ who worships in him. Through baptism and the Eucharist human beings are converted and reformed so that they can, in Christ, turn their lives into an acceptable sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving. This transformation will be completed when they are definitively taken up into God. Then, as Augustine says, they shall be like the angels, the heaven of heavens, who obediently cleave to God forever.¹⁴⁰ Then, they shall “confess to him forever” (*semper confitebor illi*).¹⁴¹ The activity of the Holy Spirit in them in this life anticipates the next, when the Church’s worship shall be perfected and never cease. This is rest for human beings. For the spiritual ones, who already live the life of the Spirit, rest has already begun. God is at work in them now, just as God will be at rest in them

¹³⁹ McMahon, “Book Thirteen,” 215-16.

¹⁴⁰ See Aug. *conf.* 13.8.9.

¹⁴¹ *conf.* 13.14.15.

in the next life.¹⁴² But God is always the same; his work and his rest are the same in him, though they are different for humans who experience God in time. Still, insofar as God is transforming them into his image by re-forming their hearts, they already participate in their final end.¹⁴³

¹⁴² *conf.* 13.37.52.

¹⁴³ See Bonner, “Augustine’s Understanding of the Church as a Eucharistic Community,” in *Saint Augustine the Bishop: A Book of Essays*, eds. Fannie LeMoine and Christopher Kleinhenz (New York: Garland, 1994) : “Although Augustine saw humanity as currently living in the Sixth Age of the world—an age which extended from the Incarnation to the Last Judgment—he thought of the Church as already, in some way, living in the Seventh Age, the age of the Kingdom of God” (44).

CHAPTER FIVE: CREATION AS THE STRUCTURE, UNITY, AND MEANING OF THE *CONFESSIONS*

si tunc ego essem Moyses . . .
-conf. 12.26.36

I. The Lingering Consensus

Despite subsequent contrition and retraction, Henri Marrou will always be saddled with his fateful criticism, *Augustin compose mal*, which has set its mark on Augustine scholarship even unto today.¹ Marrou seems to have been articulating a consensus view of his time, a view very much intact twenty years later when echoed by John O'Meara and sixty years later when echoed by Serge Lancel.² The consensus view, in its various forms, claims that Augustine was not concerned with the overall structure of his works because the ancients, it was thought, had a different understanding of composition. This is seemingly evident in the *Confessions* which Augustine composed in three disparate parts: the autobiographical books (1-9), the philosophical reflection on his present state (10), and the last three exegetical books (11-13). These three parts sit uncomfortably together and their relation has eluded easy explanation. The younger Marrou concedes that "*il reste possible*

¹ Marrou, *Saint Augustin*, 75. See for example, Crosson, "Structure and Meaning," 29 and Kotzé, *Communicative Purpose*, 7, who cite Marrou's comment as setting its mark on Augustine scholarship. Marrou recanted ten years later in a revised edition of the same work (1949, 665-72). For equally critical judgments of the composition of the *Confessions*, see John J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine* (New York: Alba House, 1965), 11-13, 44.

² Marrou, *Saint Augustin*, 63. O'Meara, *Young Augustine*, states that it is "a commonplace of Augustinian scholarship to say that Augustine was not able to plan a book" (44). Serge Lancel, *St. Augustine* (London: SCM Press, 1999) says: "The error of this 'architectural' view (or any other similar inspiration) lies in striving at all costs to recognize in the *Confessions* a literary unity which they do not possess—and which Augustine did not try to impose on them" (209). Even Solignac, who strongly argues for the unity of the *Confessions*, shrugs his shoulders when it comes to its compositional structure (*BA*, 13, 19-26, with footnotes to Marrou).

d'affirmer qu'el existe entre ces trois parties des Confessions une unité profonde et secrète. Mais . . . cette unité est d'ordre psychologique et non littéraire."³ There may be unity in the *Confessions*, but not structure.

Though there have been many efforts to account for the structure and unity of the *Confessions*,⁴ the ghost of this consensus view still haunts Augustine scholarship. It arises today not so much in the blunt criticism of Augustine's compositional talents, but in a certain scholarly agnosticism toward the whole question. This attitude is on display in James O'Donnell's criticism of recent attempts to find unity:

One prevailing weakness of many of these efforts has been the assumption that there lies somewhere unnoticed about the *Confessions* a neglected key to unlock all mysteries. But for a text as multilayered and subtle as the *Confessions*, any attempt to find one, or even a few, keys is pointless. Augustine says himself that he meant to stir our souls, not test our ingenuity as lock-picks.⁵

³ Marrou, *Saint Augustin*, 64.

⁴ See K. Grotz, *Warum bringt Augustin in den letzten Büchern seiner Confessiones eine Auslegung der Genesis?* (Diss. Tübingen, 1970), for a list of thirty-five attempts organized into nineteen categories of ways to account for the structure. See also Vannier, *Confessions*, 45-54 and Kotzé, *Communicative Purpose*, 7-43 for concise surveys of recent scholarship. Individual studies will be discussed in the course of this chapter.

⁵ O'Donnell, *Confessions*: "We may also mistrust readers who insist, or who insist on denying, that the work is perfect and beyond reproach," and then O'Donnell poetically shrugs his shoulders, "That form of idolatry, like the complementary iconoclasm with which it long disputed, has had its day. Better to heed an early reader of T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*: 'it seems to me that an attempted work of art may be so much more splendid for its very broken imperfection revealing the man so intimately.' If we can hope to read on those terms, expecting little, grateful for every fragmentary beauty, some further reflections may be in order" (Prolegomena). A similar attitude can be seen in Richard Severson's *The Confessions of Saint Augustine: An Annotated Bibliography of Modern Criticism, 1888-1995*, in his chapter on the "Structural Unity of the Text": "The first nine books of the *Confessions* are autobiographical . . . Books X-XIII, on the other hand, are something altogether different . . . How to explain this puzzling shift in style and purpose is one of the significant questions of modern *Confessions* criticism" (9). This is almost a translation of Marrou's comment (*Saint Augustin*, 63). Severson does go on to say that English language scholars are less inclined to argue that Augustine was a poor writer (thereby breaking from Marrou), though the sense of disjunctive parts loosely tied together remains (thereby displaying Marrou's influence). Also, see John Quinn, *Companion*, 1-9, who after surveying a number of possible ways to account for the unity of the *Confessions* simply moves on without commenting on them or offering his own suggestion. Later, he says, "The inclusion of the last three books

A similar attitude can be found in *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions*, edited by Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy.⁶ While they ask their contributors to take a stand on the “key” to the *Confessions* (each author argues for the primacy of one book), they agnostically, perhaps even relativistically, hold back.⁷ Though the author of each chapter argues for a unity, the editors opt for plurality. They raise good questions, but do not attempt to answer them. Their purpose is to bring out the complexity of the *Confessions* and stir up further discussion. In this, they are successful. They do not, however, attempt to give any suggestion of how one might evaluate, order, or integrate the various approaches and accounts, which are not equally illuminating, even if each illumines in its own way. In this reticence, one can see the specter of the old consensus view.⁸

Contemporaneous with the young Marrou, P.L. Landsberg put forth an argument for unity which has generated something of a parallel consensus and shown a way to understand the *Confessions* as a more integral work.⁹ He suggests that the unity of the *Confessions* is in

remains a puzzle that apparently lies beyond complete solution” (663), though one must admit that Quinn does not seem to try very hard.

⁶ See Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy, “Introduction,” in *A Reader's Companion*, 1-3, for their editorial comments.

⁷ “As one can see, our analyses are literary, philosophical, theological, historical, psychological, structural, and rhetorical. And we ourselves are Catholic and Protestant, female and male, old and young, liberal and conservative, for the *Confessions* speak powerfully to every human being and through every human experience” (Ibid., 6).

⁸ Note the parenthetical wariness in their comment, “Rather than finding (or imposing) some overarching view on the thirteen individual books, we have let each individual book project its vision onto the whole” (Ibid., 2).

⁹ This opinion was first put forth by P.L. Landsberg, “La conversion de saint Augustin,” *Supplément de la Vie Spirituelle* (1936), 33-34 and affirmed by Solignac, *BA* 13, 21; Luc Verheijen, “The *Confessions* of Saint Augustine: Two Grids of Composition and Reading,” in *Augustine: Second Founder of Faith*, eds. by Frederick

the title: *confessio*. This fundamental notion gives form to all the disparate topics, themes, and stories that Augustine writes about. “*Qu’Augustin interprète le premier verset de la Bible ou n’importe quel autre, qu’il parle du grand cirque des Romains ou du désert des anachorètes—à travers toutes ces choses, c’est la même fonction qui s’accomplit: la confession.*”¹⁰ The sufficiency of this suggestion will be considered below, but for now two things should be noted. First, positively, this suggestion goes a long way in responding to those who would exaggerate the disunity of the *Confessions* for, indeed, the *experience* of reading the *Confessions* all the way through is not disjunctive in the way that its critics often describe. The younger Marrou and others exaggerate the problem of how disparate the “parts” of the *Confessions* are. Landsberg’s argument for the unifying power of *confessio* confirms a common experience reading the work.¹¹ Second, negatively, those who propose unity often do so at the expense of structure and here the abiding influence of the Marrou consensus can still be seen. Following Landsberg, Solignac proposes that the unity is “*plus intérieure que logique: unité d’esprit et d’intention plus que suite cohérente et progressive de développements.*”¹² With a footnote to Marrou, Solignac suggests that the ancients did not have

Van Fleteren and Joseph Schnaubelt (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 175; and most recently, Vannier, *Les Confessions*, 53.

¹⁰ Landsberg, “La conversion de saint Augustin,” 34.

¹¹ O’Donnell’s comment seems to be a confirmation of this experience: “Rhetorical and stylistic unity and the intensity that runs through the book like an electric current make it easiest to read as a work written entirely in 397” (*Confessions*, Prolegomena). Indeed, he even canvasses the possibility—impossible to confirm or deny—that the *Confessions* was written in a fortnight. See also Garry Wills, *Augustine’s Confessions*, who rather serenely makes the case that the *Confessions* was written in a brief span in 397 (13-15).

¹² Solignac, *BA*, 13, 20.

plans when they wrote, but only rhetorical styles they imitated.¹³ Landsberg, too, flattens out any structural elements in the *Confessions*, as his quote above demonstrates, by subsuming them under his principle of unity. While arguing for *confessio* as the unifying element in the *Confessions*, these scholars are still working within the confines of the old consensus view.

II. Principles for Moving Forward

The more one studies the *Confessions*, the more one realizes that there are layers of meaning, structure, and thematic relations which cry out for understanding. The positive and negative accounts canvassed so far are simply not intellectually satisfying. The rejection of Marrou, the agnosticism of O'Donnell, and the flattening of Landsberg cripple efforts to make progress on the question of the overall coherence of the work. As Augustine might have urged: unless one seeks, he shall not find, and unless one knocks, the door shall not be opened. Moreover, there are internal and external clues that structure, unity, and purpose are present in the text and it will be worthwhile to seek them out and try to understand them. It will be helpful, then, to articulate some working principles which will guide the inquiry into this question.

As a starting principle, it will be assumed, following Colin Starnes, that Augustine “had omitted nothing which was important to his purpose, whatever that was, nor included any irrelevant digressions . . . so that whenever I found what seemed to be a gap between one part and the next, or looked like a nodding digression, I supposed that *I* had not understood

¹³ Ibid., 25.

Augustine rather than that *he* was at fault.”¹⁴ This should not imply any lack of critical inquiry or scholarly judgment, but simply a necessary modesty before an enduring work. This principle also encourages modesty before some of the important scholarly efforts on this question from the past twenty years.

Another principle has already been stated, namely, that the claim of disunity is overstated and the experience of reading the *Confessions* is not disjunctive. The *Confessions* is often approached, as O’Donnell rightly notes, as though it were a problem or a lock which is in need of a *profonde et secrète* solution or key. Even those who criticize the efforts to find a hidden key cannot avoid seeing the *Confessions* as a mysterious problem. This attitude is evident in O’Donnell’s criticisms above, but also in the question he thinks legitimate to ask about the text: “What are the last four books doing there?”¹⁵ This question shows that he thinks the *Confessions* is a problem (though he wants to be agnostic about solutions). This question is stated, in a slightly different form (since there is even disagreement about what the “problem” is), in the title of K. Grotz’s dissertation, *Warum bringt Augustin in den letzten Büchern seiner Confessiones eine Auslegung der Genesis?*, and the article by John Cooper, “Why Did Augustine Write Books XI-XIII of the *Confessions*?”¹⁶ By posing the question this way, these scholars presuppose disunity, a rather glaring compositional weakness in the very structure of the work which, as Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle humorously notes, is “a

¹⁴ Starnes, *Augustine’s Conversion*, 12.

¹⁵ O’Donnell, *Confessions*, Prolegomena.

¹⁶ John Cooper, “Why Did Augustine Write Books XI-XIII of the *Confessions*?” *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971): 37-46.

rhetorical fault for which as a schoolboy Augustine would have been flogged.”¹⁷ It seems that the prevailing scholarly question is unhelpful, the claim of disunity exaggerated, and that experience and argument can show that there is structure and unity in the *Confessions*.

Perhaps, then, another approach to the question of composition can be taken. Assuming that the problem is not Augustine’s text but how it is often understood, unity and structural coherence should be assumed unless it can be shown to be otherwise. In the *Retractationes*, Augustine seems rather sanguine about the structure of the *Confessions* and as the literature on the composition of the *Confessions* accumulates it should be clear that there are deliberate (and perhaps also unconscious) unifying and structural elements in the text. Instead of posing the question as O’Donnell, Grotz, Cooper and others have done, perhaps the inquiry would yield more fruit by reversing their question: “How could Augustine *not* have included the last three (or four) books?” The question one asks determines the possibility and the kind of answers that can be found, so rather than assuming a flogging-worthy fault in Augustine’s composition, it should be assumed that there is unity and structure in the work which can be laid bare.¹⁸ Maybe Marrou’s suggestion in his retraction that “*Saint Augustin procede comme un habile musicien*” and Robert O’Connell’s idea that the *Confessions* is a symphony could also be followed.¹⁹ The *Confessions* need not

¹⁷ Boyle, “The Prudential Augustine,” 129.

¹⁸ See Annemaré Kotzé’s helpful discussion of this in “‘The Puzzle of the Last Four Books’: An Illegitimate Issue?,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 60 (2006): 65-79.

¹⁹ Marrou, *Saint Augustin*, 667. See Robert J. O’Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence in St. Augustine* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 91, 101.

be considered “perfect and beyond reproach,”²⁰ but like any work of musical genius the *Confessions* has unity, order, structural coherence, meaning, and an inexorable movement. If any element were removed the whole would be lacking in some way. The *Confessions* could not *not* be the way it is without being somehow incomplete. If the text is approached as though it were an integral whole, rather than presumed to be inherently problematic, then perhaps it will open up in surprising ways.²¹

Another principle that should guide the interpretation is that what Augustine holds as more fundamental should have more interpretive weight. Similarly, less comprehensive interpretations should be integrated into higher and more comprehensive ones.²² Moreover, any reflection on the structure of the *Confessions* should start with Augustine’s own comments, especially, in the *Retractationes*, but also any explicit markers in the *Confessions*. This will be the starting point below, after which implicit clues in the text will be considered. O’Donnell’s method of “allowing Augustine to be his own commentator”²³ is a fruitful one.

²⁰ O’Donnell, *Confessions*, says that those who insist that the work is “perfect and beyond reproach” fall into “idolatry” (Prolegomena). While one could agree with the claim, his intention here is to discourage attempts to find structural unity and so the extreme formulation functions as something of a bogeyman.

²¹ This is also the approach of Balthasar. See his *Augustinus*, 214 and 288. Aidan Nichols comments on Balthasar’s approach: “The ‘biographical’ books (I-IX) have to be seen *as on their way* to the theologically contemplative books (X-XIII)” (*Divine Fruitfulness: A Guide through Balthasar’s Theology beyond the Trilogy* (London: T&T Clark, 1988), 51), emphasis added. For Balthasar, there is inexorable movement in the *Confessions* which is rooted in creation. It moves from the one creature to all of creation praising God.

²² See McMahon, *Prayerful Ascent*, 39-40, for a brief confirmation of this principle.

²³ O’Donnell, *Confessions*, Prolegomena.

In terms of compositional practice, Augustine holds up Moses as his ideal and it is not unreasonable to assume that Augustine imitated him when writing the *Confessions*.²⁴ It will be discussed below how and why Augustine employs these Mosaic principles, but for now let it be assumed that, following Moses, Augustine

would wish . . . that such a power of eloquence be given to me and such a way of weaving words that those who were not yet able to understand how God creates, would not reject my words as exceeding their powers; and that those who are already able to understand this, in whatever true meaning they have come to by thinking, might not find that meaning overlooked in your servant's few words; and if another saw another meaning in the light of truth, neither would that one be absent from what could be understood in these same words

*si tunc ego essem Moyses . . . vellem ergo . . . talem mihi eloquendi facultatem dari et eum texendi sermonis modum ut neque illi qui nondum queunt intellegere quemadmodum creat deus, tamquam excedentia vires suas, dicta recusarent et illi qui hoc iam possunt, in quamlibet veram sententiam cogitando venissent, eam non praetermissam in paucis verbis tui famuli reperirent, et si alius aliam vidisset in luce veritatis, nec ipsa in eisdem verbis intellegenda deesset.*²⁵

From Augustine's comments on Moses in Book 12, there are at least four principles which can be articulated to help one think about the composition of the *Confessions*. These Mosaic principles often coincide with rhetorical principles Augustine learned from the schools, though not without modification.²⁶

²⁴ See Aug. *conf.* 12.26.36. Also, see Crosson, "Book Five," 71-73 for a concise and penetrating discussion of this question.

²⁵ Aug. *conf.* 12.26.36; see 12.31.42 for the same sentiments expressed again.

²⁶ See Boyle, "The Prudential Augustine," 131ff. for a possible Ciceronian influence on the structure of the *Confessions*. See also Crosson, "Book Five," 71-73, for discussion and references to pagan and Christian rhetorical practices and how Augustine transforms these practices in service of his overall purpose in the *Confessions*

First, according to Augustine, Moses' purpose in writing Scripture (or God's purpose through Moses) is to help others and himself fulfill the double commandment to love God and neighbor.²⁷ Similarly, Augustine says that he writes the *Confessions* in order to "stir up my affection into You and of others who read this, that we all might say, 'Great is the Lord and very praisable!' Already, I have said and will say again, 'For love of Your love I do this'" (*affectum meum excito in te, et eorum qui haec legunt, ut dicamus omnes, 'magnus dominus et laudabilis valde.' iam dixi et dicam, 'amore amoris tui facio istuc'*).²⁸ This, it should be recalled, is also how Augustine understands the purpose of creation: "Heaven and earth and all things that are in them, behold, everywhere they say to me that I should love You, and they do not cease to say this to all men, so that they are inexcusable" (*caelum et terra et omnia quae in eis sunt, ecce undique mihi dicunt ut te amem, nec cessant dicere omnibus, ut sint inexcusabiles*).²⁹ Augustine's purpose in writing the *Confessions* could be understood as an imitation of Moses and an imitation of creation itself.

Arising out of this first principle comes the second: Augustine, like Moses, would want to write a text which had layers of meaning as well as allowed for a multiplicity of

²⁷ See Aug. *conf.* 12.24.33, 12.25.35, 10.4.6; *retr.* 2.6.1; *doc. Chr.* 1.26.27, 1.36.40. See also Kotzé, *Communicative Purpose*, 3, 30-35; Raymond D. DiLorenzo, "Non Pie Quaerunt: Rhetoric, Dialectic, and the Discovery of the True in Augustine's *Confessions*," *Augustinian Studies* 14 (1983): 125.

²⁸ Aug. *conf.* 11.1.1.

²⁹ *conf.* 10.6.8. Note that the last clause is an allusion to Rom. 1:20. Carol Harrison draws out the intimate and interesting relation between creation and Scripture for Augustine. Both are "temporal revelations of the Word of God, and both therefore mutually illuminate each other, enabling the believer on the one hand, by Scripture to have a clearer perception of what it is he is seeking for in Creation, and on the other, by Creation, to have the Scriptural account confirmed, and be moved by praise and wonder at Creation to seek for Scripture's inspiration and author" (*Beauty and Revelation*, 114-15).

interpretations,³⁰ so that it could reach as many people as possible in order to lead them back to God.³¹ Like Moses, Augustine would hide truths in “levels” of the text in order to shield them from the wicked and exercise the minds and hearts of the pious.³² Also, there is a legitimate plurality of meanings which Augustine would not only have allowed, but encouraged in the reading of his work. “There is nothing dangerous, as long as any of those [interpretations] agrees with the truth” (*nihil periculi est, si quodlibet eorum congruere ueritati*).³³ This does not mean that all interpretations are equal, but that many interpretations are possible. Two things determine the validity of an interpretation: its truthfulness and whether it leads to increased love of God and neighbor.

Third, it can be assumed that Augustine strove to match the style of his text to the meaning: the rhetoric is in the service of the purpose. As he says of Moses, “He saw what was true and expressed it fittingly” (*verum eum vidisse apteque id enuntiavisse*).³⁴ Elements of this were seen in the discussion of the opening lines in “The *Confessions* in the New Context” in Chapter Three. The selection of content, the structure, the form of expression, and any other rhetorical elements should be understood as ordered toward Augustine’s overall meaning and purpose for writing the *Confessions*.

³⁰ See Aug. *conf.* 6.5.8, 12.27.37, 12.31.42, and *doc. Chr.* 3.27.38.

³¹ See *conf.* 10.40.65.

³² See *conf.* 6.5.8; *doc. Chr.* 2.6.7-8, 4.9.23. Also, see discussion of *exercitatio animi* in “The Summary of the Master Teacher” in the previous chapter.

³³ *doc. Chr.* 3.27.38.

³⁴ *conf.* 12.24.33; cf. Emmet Flood, “The Narrative Structure of Augustine’s *Confessions*: Time’s Quest for Eternity,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* XXVIII, 2, 110 (June 1988): 141-62.

Fourth, Augustine argues that there can be true meanings in the text of which Moses was not aware when composing it.³⁵ This last point is necessary for understanding the composition of the *Confessions* for three creation-related reasons: first, the subject Augustine is treating—creation in the broad sense—demands that this be the case. The truth of creation is not something that can simply be grasped, but always remains mysterious. Second, because God created the world and it bears his imprint, there are structures of meaning and patterns of truth which are written into the very fabric of the universe. An attentive observer of reality like Augustine would certainly see some of these, but others he might only intuit. That intuition could make its way into the sinews of his thought and writing; later generations could uncover explicitly the things that Augustine only intuited. Third, Augustine claims that the *Confessions* is inspired in some way and, just as in the case of inspired Scripture, there may be meanings of the text which God intended and of which Augustine was not aware. Without undermining human authorial integrity, God has his own intentions in inspiring the text.³⁶

With these markers in place and with assumptions made clear, this inquiry will seek to understand Augustine's work as it is presented. Without dismissing it or idolizing it, this chapter will try to make manifest what is present in the text.

³⁵ See Aug. *conf.* 12.31.42-32-43; cf. *doc. Chr.* 3.27.38.

³⁶ For Augustine's self-understanding of the *Confessions* as "inspired" in some way, see *conf.* 12.32.43, 9.7.16, 12.11.11-12. For comments on this sense of inspiration, see Solignac, *BA* 13, 14 and McMahon, *Prayerful Ascent*, 146-47. For human and divine authorial intent, see Toom, "Was Augustine an Intentionalist?"

III. Creation as the Organizing Principle

All accounts of unity and structure must be understood in light of Augustine's overall purpose which, he says, is to "stir up the human intellect and affections into God" (*in eum excitant humanum intellectum et affectum*).³⁷ Augustine has the salvation of souls as his goal and this means, as his life demonstrates and he says explicitly in the *De Vera Religione*, being re-formed and prepared for eternal life (cf. *pro salute generis humani in aeternam vitam reformandi atque reparandi*) by believing in God's providence and purifying their minds so that they can come to the most fundamental saving truth "that the Father made each and every nature simultaneously through the Son in the Gift of the Holy Spirit" (*simul omnia et unamquamque naturam patrem fecisse per filium in dono spiritus sancti*).³⁸ Augustine's goal in the *Confessions* is to help his readers come to terms with creation, to help them recognize that their very existence is a gift from the Creator Trinity (*trinitate creatrice*).³⁹ The *Confessions* itself is a response to this gift and in it Augustine wants to do for others what was done for him: to bring his readers to praise God with him and with all creation for the gift of creation and redemption.

In the last chapter, a possible liturgical structure to the *Confessions* was canvassed (see section entitled, "Hints of a Liturgical Structure"), which will be important for the final synthesis below. In this chapter, four ways, or categories of ways, will be presented that

³⁷ Aug. *retr.* 2.6.1.

³⁸ *vera rel.* 7.13.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

show how creation can account for the structure, unity, and meaning of the *Confessions*. The first begins from *Retractationes* where Augustine divides the text into Books 1-10 and 11-13. His comments on the purpose of the *Confessions* will be considered as well as a few possible meanings of this division in light of creation. The second category starts from Augustine's understanding of creation itself: one interpretation suggests that the *Confessions* is divided in half between the quest to understand the distinction and the quest to understand the relationship between God and the world; the other suggests that the *Confessions* topically ascends to what is ontologically prior. The next category of structural interpretations takes its bearings from the Genesis creation story itself. The first uses the seven days of creation as a structuring principle, while the second takes the nine creative acts recounted in Genesis as its starting point. Lastly, the *Confessions* will be considered as a kind of *vestigia trinitatis*, bearing the imprint of the Trinity's creating and saving activity. Each approach will be presented individually before a synthesis of them all is offered.

A. Excursus: Creation and Other Interpretations

Although, the primacy of creation has been put forth as the primary structuring principle of the *Confessions*, there is no problem with a plurality of interpretations, so long as they are true to the text, even if the interpretations do not take creation as their starting point. Those who, for example, highlight literary elements, such as Augustine's use of Virgil, Cicero, or other classical sources,⁴⁰ or who pick a theme, such as language or love,⁴¹ offer

⁴⁰ See, for example, O'Connell, *Odyssey of Soul*; Sabine MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry: Vergil in the Mind of Augustine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Charles Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University

helpful insights into the text, but these insights must be ordered and integrated into what is more fundamental. Creation is the starting point because this is what is most fundamental for Augustine. The accounts from creation offered here do not undermine the integrity of other accounts, but put them in their proper context and can bring out their fullness.

Consider, for example, the important suggestion of Landsberg and Solignac that *confessio* is the unifying principle of the *Confessions*. If their account is considered in the light of creation it can both be purified of errors and deepened. *Confessio* does, in fact, give a sense of unity to the *Confessions*. It unites all thirteen books, with all their various details, divergences, and seeming digressions, under the same style and intention. Landsberg and Solignac offer illuminating and helpful insights on this point, but they do not go far enough. One shortcoming has already been noted, namely, that these scholars flatten out structural elements in the name of unity. But the problems go deeper. As discussed in Chapter Three (see section entitled, “*Confessio*: A New Language in a New Context”), the notion of *confessio* is rooted in Augustine’s understanding of creation and cannot be understood in its depths without it. Because of the intimate relation of confession and creation, it cannot simply be said, as Landsberg does, “*Qu’Augustin interprète le premier verset de la Bible ou*

Press, 1944); Laurie Churchill, “*Inopem Me Copia Fecit*: Signs of Narcissus in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Classical and Modern Literature* 10 (Summer 1990): 37-79; John O’Meara, “Augustine the Artist and the *Aeneid*,” in *John J. O’Meara: Studies in Augustine and Eriugena*, ed. Thomas Halton (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 59-68.

⁴¹ See, for example, William Mallard, *Language and Love*; Charles T. Mathewes, “Book 1,” in *A Reader’s Companion*, 7-23; William Stephany, “Thematic Structure in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Augustinian Studies* 20 (1989): 129-42; David Chidester, “The Symmetry of Word and Light: Perceptual Categories in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Augustinian Studies* 17 (1986): 119-31; Ralph Flores, “Reading and Speech in St. Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Augustinian Studies* 6 (1975): 1-13.

n'importe quel autre . . . c'est la même fonction qui s'accomplit: la confession."⁴² The first verse of the Bible is a deliberate, and therefore significant, choice for Augustine; the *Confessions* would be a very different book if the last three books were devoted to, say, Paul's Letter to the Romans. The first verse of the Bible and the truth about creation it reveals are essential for understanding not only the structure, which Landsberg and Solignac neglect, but also the intention and therefore deep unity of the work. Creation is also essential for understanding the very theme which they elevate as unifying, for confession is a response to the gift of creation and therefore prior and necessary for properly understanding it. Landsberg and Solignac do not consider this fundamental aspect of *confessio* and could strengthen their argument by taking creation more fundamentally into their account.

IV. The First Way: *Retractationes*

A fruitful place to begin thinking about the structure, unity, and purpose of the *Confessions* is Augustine's own thoughts on the matter. These are most clearly laid out in his much misunderstood comments in the *Retractationes*. It will be worth quoting Augustine at length here because his comments are surprisingly rich and will set the course for all that follows. He says,

The thirteen books of my *Confessions* praise the just and good God both from my evils and from my goods and also stir up the human intellect and affections into him. Inasmuch as I am concerned, they did this in me when they were written and they do it [now] when they are read. What others think about them, they themselves will see. I know, however, that many brothers were and are very pleased with them. From the first up to the tenth were written from me; in the three others, from the Holy

⁴² Landsberg, "La conversion de saint Augustin," 34.

Scriptures: from that which is written, “In the beginning God made heaven and earth” up to the Sabbath Rest.

*confessionum mearum libri tredecim et de malis et de bonis meis deum laudant iustum et bonum, atque in eum excitant humanum intellectum et affectum. interim quod ad me attinet, hoc in me egerunt cum scriberentur et agunt cum leguntur. quid de illis alii sentiant, ipsi uiderint; multis tamen fratribus eos multum placuisse et placere scio. a primo usque ad decimum de me scripti sunt, in tribus ceteris de scripturis sanctis, ab eo quod scriptum est: in principio fecit deus caelum et terram, usque ad sabbati requiem.*⁴³

Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle says that the way this passage is usually interpreted seems “to promote the problem of disunity,” for does not Augustine divide the text into two disparate parts, one, *de me* and one, *de scripturis sanctis*, that is, one, “about me” and one, “about the Holy Scriptures”?⁴⁴ She argues that *de* can certainly mean “about,” as in *De Trinitate*, “to designate the theme or subject of discourse,” but that this usage is derivative “from the primary meaning of *de* as ‘from’ or ‘out of’ . . . the preposition *de* denotes the person or place from which a thing is taken, that is, its origin. Augustine employs *de* in this primary sense and as a technical term. He indicates the ‘place’, rhetorically the topic or place (τόπος, *locus*) from which he has derived his encomium.”⁴⁵ This suggestion about *de* opens up the *Retractationes* passage in a new way.

In this passage, Augustine is not saying what the *Confessions* is about, but what they do and where they come from. The thirteen books praise God both *from* himself and *from* the Holy Scriptures, *de me* and *de scripturis sanctis*. If *de* is taken to mean “about,”

⁴³ Aug. *retr.* 2.61.

⁴⁴ Boyle, “The Prudential Augustine,” 130.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

difficulties arise, for then Augustine would be said to have written one work in two genres, autobiography and exegesis, which are connected in some mysterious way.⁴⁶ But if *de* is taken to mean “from,” then there is one work taken from two sources, unified by the form of *confessio*, for the purpose of praising God and stirring up his neighbor as himself. The two sources are “myself” and the “Holy Scriptures,” in particular, the opening chapter from Genesis which deals with creation.

Within these sources, Augustine has two more “sources”: “my evils and my goods.” Augustine takes the “material” from these sources to praise God. Augustine praises God from his evil deeds, which show that God is just (because God judges and punishes those evil deeds), and from his good deeds, which show that God is good (because God is the source of those good deeds). He makes confession of his evils and goods from his own life (*de me*) and from the Scriptures (*de scripturis sanctis*).⁴⁷ It is clear how he can make this confession *de me*, but how can Augustine confess his evils and goods *de scripturis sanctis*? At the beginning of Book 11, the beginning of his confession *de scripturis sanctis*, he says, “For a long time, I have been on fire to meditate on Your law and *in it* to confess to You my

⁴⁶ This is the violation of unity for which, Boyle says, Augustine would have been flogged. This interpretation crops up often: see, for example, Quinn says, “A marked dissimilarity divides the last part from the first ten books. Simply put, the last three books are in no way substantially autobiographical. Succeeding phenomenology and analysis of self is exegesis; personal history and soul-searching give way to a detached probing of the meanings of Genesis” (*Companion*, 663).

⁴⁷ Boyle’s suggestion that *de malis* and *de bonis* correspond to *de me* and *de scripturis sanctis* of the last sentence (“The Prudential Augustine,” 130) seems inaccurate. This would unduly limit God’s goodness to the Scriptures, when it is evident that there is good in Augustine’s life which he attributes to God. Also, *de bonis* is modified by *meis* and if the correspondence she suggests were correct, then it would seem that his goods would come from the Scriptures alone, which does not make sense. The parallel is with *justum* and *bonum* (which, for some reason, Boyle does not mention). See Aug. *conf.* 11.2.2 for Augustine’s goods and evils in relation to the last three books.

knowledge and ignorance, the first beginnings of Your illumination and the ashen remnants of my darkneses, until my weakness is devoured by Your strength” (*et olim inardesco meditari in lege tua et in ea tibi confiteri scientiam et imperitiam meam, primordia inluminationis tuae et reliquias tenebrarum mearum, quousque devoretur a fortitudine infirmitas*).⁴⁸ In the law—here, referring to the first chapter of Genesis—Augustine will confess the good which comes from God and the evils which come from his own sinfulness. Scripture holds up a fit mirror in which Augustine can see himself and what he ought to be.

Annemaré Kotzé follows Boyle in interpreting *de* in reference to origin, but she also rightly emphasizes another neglected aspect of the *Retractationes* passage, namely, Augustine’s protreptic intentions in writing the *Confessions*.⁴⁹ In addition to praising God, Augustine also wants to “stir up the human intellect and affections into him” (*atque in eum excitant humanum intellectum et affectum*).⁵⁰ If Augustine is taken at his word, then the primary purpose of the *Confessions* is not to provide a polemic against the Manichees or Donatists, nor to influence how history would remember him in response to recent slanderous attacks, nor as an “act of therapy,”⁵¹ even if all of these are a factor in its composition.

⁴⁸ *conf.* 11.2.2.

⁴⁹ See Kotzé, *Communicative Purpose*, 22. Kotzé makes the case the *Confessions* is perhaps not as novel as is often supposed (33), for if it is a protreptic, then it can be understood as part of a tradition in the line of Justin’s *Dialogues* with Trypho, Cyprian’s *Ad Donatum*, and Hilary’s *De Trinitate*, even if Augustine has modified the genre in novel ways. See also, Lancel, *St. Augustine*, 210, who anticipated Kotzé’s argument. Also, Martin, “Augustine’s *Confessions* as Pedagogy,” 25-51.

⁵⁰ See *Aug. conf.* 11.1.1 for a similar formulation. Also, see *conf.* 1.1.1 for use of *excitare*, a word often related to the Holy Spirit, who inspires and bestows the gift of love. The clause *in eum* may also be an allusion to an ascent, which may again give a clue as to the purpose and structure of the *Confessions*.

⁵¹ The quote comes from Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 158. See also, Solignac, *BA* 13, 26-36, who surveys the common historical and personal arguments for why Augustine may have written *conf.* Henry

Rather, like Moses, Augustine intends to fulfill and encourage others to fulfill the double command to love God and one's neighbor.⁵² The purpose of the *Confessions*, according to Kotzé, is the conversion of its readers. It should be added, though, that Augustine also intends to encourage the converted as well.⁵³ He says as much in the first line of the *Retractationes* passage and, as noted above, there are numerous indications in the *Confessions* itself that suggest the same.⁵⁴

If this is the case, then perhaps what seems like digressions or poor planning in the *Confessions* can be understood as deliberate pedagogical occasions in the text, like the obscure passages of Scripture. Perhaps Pierre Hadot's suggestion can be followed, namely, that the purpose is to help the reader "traverse a certain itinerary in the course of which he will make spiritual progress . . . in which all the detours, starts, stops, and digressions of the

Chadwick, *Saint Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) suggests that Augustine had Donatists in mind when he wrote the *Confessions* (xii-xiii); cf. Brook Manville, "Donatism and St. Augustine: The *Confessions* of a 4th Century Bishop," *Augustinian Studies* 8 (1977): 125-37. Also, James O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006) argues that the *Confessions* must be understood as a dual polemic against the Manichees and Donatists (53).

⁵² One can see a reflection of the "loving your neighbor *as yourself*" in Augustine's comment that when he wrote and now reads the *Confessions* he too is stirred up toward God. Kotzé argues that the neighbor Augustine primarily has in mind is the Manichees (*Communicative Purpose*, 3), though she admits "this can be no more than the unraveling of one strand of meaning while we remember that what is not said here is so much more than what is said" (4). Also, see the suggestion of Colin Starnes, "Prolegomena to the Last Three Books," who argues that the *Confessions* shifts audiences from section to section.

⁵³ See Aug. *conf.* 11.2.3.

⁵⁴ See, for example, *conf.* 1.1.1, 5.1.1, 10.1.1-5.7, and 11.1.1. These are all structural nodes in the text as well. The move from the praise of God to the love of God may have seemed like a sleight of hand, but there is Augustinian warrant for it: "Let my soul praise You so that it may love You" (*te laudet anima mea ut amet te*) (*conf.* 5.1.1; Augustine speaks of love of neighbor in 5.2.2). According to Augustine, praise leads to love, for the more one praises, the more one recognizes not only who he is, which is very praisable, but the depths of what he has done for humankind, which inspires them to love him. This connection between praise and love shows, for Augustine, how the command to love God, and subsequently your neighbor as yourself, is related to, indeed, rooted in, the gift of creation.

work are formative elements.”⁵⁵ Perhaps Kotzé’s suggestion that the *Confessions* is a protreptic could be augmented by recalling the discussion of *exercitatio animi* from the previous chapter (see section entitled, “The Summary of the Master Teacher”): the goal is not just conversion, but formation, and thus re-creation, and given the necessary ecclesial locus of this process, it can be argued again that the *Confessions* is a mystagogy.

Boyle makes the persuasive case that, in the transition from Books 1-10 to 11-13, Augustine employs a common rhetorical device he learned from Cicero, what she calls a move from “the individual to the universal.”⁵⁶ Indeed, this move is found in small ways throughout the *Confessions*.

Let my soul praise You so that it may love You and let it confess to You Your mercies so that it may praise You. Your whole (*universa*) creation does not cease Your praises nor does it keep silent; neither does every spirit through a mouth converted toward You, neither do animals or corporal things through the mouth of those who ponder them, so that our soul may rise into You out of its weariness, leaning on those things which You have made and passing on toward You, who made these wonderful things. And there: remaking and true strength.

te laudet anima mea ut amet te et confiteatur tibi miserationes tuas ut laudet te. non cessat nec tacet laudes tuas universa creatura tua, nec spiritus omnis per os conversum ad te, nec animalia nec corporalia per os considerantium ea, ut exurgat

⁵⁵ Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 64. He says in the same passage, “This procedure is clear in the works of Plotinus and Augustine.”

⁵⁶ Boyle, “Prudential Augustine,” 131. The *Confessions* “is composed quite classically according to the ordinary Ciceronian rules for the invention of argument which Augustine habitually practiced as rhetor, then preacher” (ibid.; cf. Cicero, *De legibus* 1.23.60). Boyle’s argument, while helpful, needs to be augmented by the considerations here. For, unfortunately, Boyle does not consider the protreptic dimension of the work nor does she move beyond classical categories to connect epideictic rhetoric with the double love of God and neighbor. Compare DiLorenzo, “*Non Pie Quaerunt*”: “In the final analysis, Augustine’s *Libri confessionum* are a respeaking of God’s Word, persuasively converting the soul from the false love of creatures to the love of the creator” (127). Also, Boyle fails to take seriously the difference between the “universe” for Cicero and the “universe” for Augustine, for the Christian understanding of creation makes a difference for how the whole is understood and, subsequently, how the motion from “individual” to “universal” would work (see Crosson, “Structure and Meaning,” 27-28).

*in te a lassitudine anima nostra, innitens eis quae fecisti et transiens ad te, qui fecisti haec mirabiliter. et ibi refectio et vera fortitudo.*⁵⁷

This passage clearly shows an easy transition from a consideration of himself to a consideration of the whole universe. This is the same rhetorical move, Boyle suggests, that the whole *Confessions* makes. She goes on to say that the *Confessions* is epideictic rhetoric concerned primarily with praising God.⁵⁸ The *Confessions* is one unified work, an argument in praise of God, drawn from two sources.

This passage raises another crucial point, one which Boyle does not discuss. Not only does it demonstrate the motion from individual to universal, but it shows Augustine's understanding of praise, in particular, how the individual and the universe are related in terms of praise. The individual, "through a mouth converted toward You" (*per os conversum ad te*), can give voice to all creation: the mouth rightly ordered toward God (*ad te*), as it was created to be, can take up the whole of creation and sing the praise that creation silently bespeaks. Through the human microcosm, converted toward God, all creation can participate

⁵⁷ Aug. *conf.* 5.1.1. There are many illuminating elements in this rich passage which can shed light on the *Retractationes*. The first line contains a confession of praise and sin which parallels the *de malis* and *de bonis* of the *Retractationes*. Note how Augustine praises God and then how all of creation praises God through converted mouths. Creation and conversion come together once again in praise. For the rational creature, created *ad te*, can lift up the rest of creation and give it a voice of praise. Lastly, the language of moving through creation and passing on to God is clearly ascent language. Perhaps there is in miniature here the motion of the whole *Confessions*. Missing from the passage quoted here is solicitude for his neighbor, though Augustine dwells at length on this in the next paragraph, 5.2.2.

⁵⁸ Compare DiLorenzo's more nuanced and theologically grounded suggestion: "In Augustine's *Confessions*, the psalmic modes of confession and rhetorical *epideixis* or demonstration merge together in the praise of God and the vituperation of sin and manifest to men the spiritual psychotherapy of God's mercy (*miser cordia*) and the beneficent designs of his providence. In so far as Augustine's books of *Confessions* are a laudatory discourse about God, they are a theology . . . Here, in fact, is God's own persuasive rhetorical activity. And in so far as Augustine's confessional theology is addressed to other men, it seeks, as he himself says, to raise both his and their understanding and affections to God—a form of persuasion clearly contemplative and mystical in nature" ("*Non Pie Quaerunt*," 125).

in God's redemption of humankind.⁵⁹ Thus, this passage reflects the motion of the whole *Confessions*, which progresses from the praise of one man to that of all creation through that man.⁶⁰

Before examining the various structural arguments, one suggestion should be canvassed which, in a general way, accounts for the structure and unity of the *Confessions*. The first ten books are drawn from the story of Augustine's *aversio* and *conversio* back toward God, while the last three books are drawn from the scriptural account of creation. If the discussion about the relationship between creation and conversion from Chapter One is recalled (see section entitled, "*Creatio, Conversio, Formatio*"), then it becomes clear that there is an intimate connection between the content of the two sources. The last three books provide the theological and metaphysical underpinnings for the first ten. They are interior to one another, just as creation is constituted by a primordial *conversio*, and conversion must be understood as a form of *creatio*. This general suggestion, which will be nuanced below, should show that even on a first glance at the whole there is a deep current of meaning and unity that runs through the whole work.

⁵⁹ For the debate about Augustine's understanding of cosmic redemption, compare Thomas E. Clarke, "St. Augustine and Cosmic Redemption," *Theological Studies* 19 (1958): 133-64, who argues that Augustine thinks there is no redemption of the cosmos, and Alfeche, "Groaning Creation," 5-52, who argues that Augustine has a highly developed understanding of the redemption of the material world. Neither draws on Augustine's understanding of *confessio* and redemption outlined here.

⁶⁰ See Balthasar, *Augustinus*, 214, who describes the subject of the last three books as "the contemplation, in light of the Word of God, no longer of this one creature but of the creation at large" (quoted and translated in Nichols, *Divine Fruitfulness*, 51). See also *Aug. conf.* 13.33.48.

A. Numerology

There have been many efforts to understand what Augustine means by dividing his text between the first ten books and the last three, though very few of them have actually considered the possible significance of the numbers ten and three.⁶¹ Augustine often spoke of the meaning and symbolism of numbers. For him, they were essential for understanding creation, the liberal arts, history, and for interpreting Scripture.⁶² In the *De doctrina Christiana*, Augustine says, “Ignorance of numbers makes many things which are put forth figuratively or mystically in the Scriptures not to be understood” (*numerorum etiam imperitia multa facit non intellegi translate ac mystice posita in scripturis*).⁶³ In light of the importance of number for Augustine, it is certainly possible that, like Moses and the other Scriptural authors, he used numbers in a symbolic way in the *Confessions*. One suggestion

⁶¹ One exception is Catherine Joubert’s “Le Livre XIII et la Structure des *Confessions* de Saint Augustin,” who devotes a section to *Augustin et l’arithmologie* (104-07), where she offers a number of interesting and occasionally humorous suggestions for why Augustine chose to write thirteen books. Surprisingly, though she treats a possible meaning for ten, she never considers the significance of ten and three. Lancel, *St. Augustine*, 208-9, has some intriguing comparisons with Apuleius and Virgil, before giving up entirely on all structural investigations. Compare, Michael Scott Neukam’s “Saint Augustine of Hippo, Arithmology, and the Numerical Structure of the *Confessions*,” (BA Honors thesis. Ball State University, 2005) which, despite the author’s youth, contains some valuable suggestions. See also McMahon, *Prayerful Ascent*, 36, who offers a series of delightful suggestions about the meaning of the number of *chapters* in Books 11-13.

⁶² See, for example, *Aug. mus.* 1.11.18-12.26; *lib. arb.* 2.8-16; *Trin.* 4.6.10. See also the discussion of number above, as well as the excellent treatment in Ladner, *Idea of Reform*, 212-38. For another good summary, with numerical connections to the liturgy, see Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 287-301. Also, William G. Most, “The Scriptural Basis of St. Augustine’s Arithmology,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 13 (1951): 284-95.

⁶³ *Aug. doc. Chr.* 2.16.25.

for the meaning of Augustine's use of ten and three will be offered here,⁶⁴ before looking at different ways the content within this division can be understood.

To be completely accurate, it should be said that Augustine does not actually use two numbers, but one number (*in tribus ceteris*) and one set or range of numbers (*a primo usque ad decimum*). In the *De Musica*, Augustine calls the set of ten an *articulus*, a decade, a unit of counting, "for, in counting, we proceed from one to ten, and from there we return to one" (*in numerando enim progredimur ab uno usque ad decem, atque inde ad unum reuertimur*).⁶⁵ The number one, of course, is the "principle" or "beginning of numbers" (*principium numerorum*).⁶⁶ In the *Retractationes* passage, the *articulus* is given in ordinal numbers, that is, Augustine names these ten books as an ordered set which moves from "the first up to the tenth." The number three, on the other hand, is given as a cardinal number, not as something necessarily to be counted up to or arranged, but as one number. What, then, is the significance of the set of ten and the number three? And what does it have to do with creation?

According to Augustine, the number three signifies the Trinity, while "the number ten signifies knowledge of the Creator and the creature" (*denarius numerus creatoris atque*

⁶⁴ Much of Augustine's number symbolism comes from Pythagorean sources. A useful comparison is Eusebius' *Tricennial Orations*, 6.10-19. Eusebius is giving a speech on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of Constantine's reign and so gives an interpretation of the symbolic meaning of the numbers three and ten. He is clearly drawing on the same sources as Augustine.

⁶⁵ Aug. *mus.* 1.11.19.

⁶⁶ *mus.* 1.11.19.

creaturae significat scientiam).⁶⁷ In another place, he says that “the number ten can signify knowledge of everything” (*denarius numerus potest significare uniuersitatis scientiam*).⁶⁸ Ten is composed of three and seven wherein three refers to the Trinity and seven refers to the creature (seven being composed of three and four: the three of the creature referring to spiritual life in the image of the Trinity and the four to the material elements of which he is composed).⁶⁹ The numbers with which Augustine divides the *Confessions* show, once again, how foundational creation is for understanding this work. The whole work is structured according to a set which moves from the first book through the tenth and then comes to three others. Augustine confesses *de me* progressively in ten books—these form a unit, an *articulus*, which signifies “knowledge of the Creator and the creature.” He then “returns to one,” that is, he returns to the *principium* who, in his understanding, is tri-une. So, he confesses *de scripturis sanctis* for three more books, one for each of the three persons of the Trinity.

The progression of the numbers suggests that the *Confessions* has the motion of a “return to the Origin.” This is reinforced by the fact that Book 1 and Book 11 both contain

⁶⁷ *doc. Chr.* 2.16.25. See *Jo. ev. tr.* 122.8 as well as *s.* 8 and 9 for discussion of the number ten in reference to the Decalogue.

⁶⁸ *div. qu.* 55.

⁶⁹ Compare *div. qu.* 57.1-3 and *doc. Chr.* 2.16.25. Perhaps this meaning is seen in Augustine’s desire expressed in *conf.* 6.4.6 “to be made certain of things I did not see, as I was certain that seven and three are ten” (*volebam enim eorum quae non viderem ita me certum fieri ut certus essem quod septem et tria decem sint*) and his prayer in the first line of Book 10, “May I know You, O my Knower, may I know even as I am known” (*cognoscam te, cognitor meus, cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum*) (*conf.* 10.1.1).

the same Psalm verse, *Magnus es Domine et laudabilis valde*.⁷⁰ Augustine has rhetorically returned to the beginning in returning to this verse. He has also theologically returned to the beginning, because the Great Lord is the beginning of all things. And, finally, he has returned to the beginning of the Scriptures, Genesis, with its opening verse, *in principio . . .*

In this account of the numerical structure of the *Confessions*, the content has not been considered. Yet, the numbers alone strengthen the arguments about the centrality and meaning of creation put forth in previous chapters. The significance of the set of ten and the return to the one-in-three also suggests that the *Confessions* is not poorly composed, but a deliberate work in which the overall structure is determined by its meaning, while the meaning is the marrow of the structural bones to which it gives rise. The numbers suggest that the *Confessions*, in a way, had to be written in thirteen books. The “necessity” is not externally imposed; rather, Augustine’s overall purpose to bring others to the Creator through creation had an interior logic which expressed itself in thirteen books: ten which covered the knowledge of Creator and creation from his own experience, before returning to the principle himself from his own revelation of himself in the creation story of Genesis.

B. *Creatio, Conversio, Formatio*

The number of books and the numbers with which Augustine divides them are significant for highlighting creation’s foundational role in the *Confessions*. But does the structure of the content *within* these significant numbers also support this? Marie-Anne

⁷⁰ Perhaps one or a combination of Ps. 47:1, 95:4, 144:3, or 146:5. The verse in 11.1.1 does not contain the verb *es*, otherwise it is identical.

Vannier offers one compelling suggestion by drawing on the importance of the *creatio*, *conversio*, *formatio* schema which “*soustend la pensée d’Augustin.*”⁷¹ She suggests that, in the *Confessions*, Augustine does not just juxtapose the ten books on himself with the three on Scripture, but that “*l’unité de son ouvrage répond à la constitution et à l’unification de son être.*”⁷² Like all created being, the structure of the *Confessions* has a “conversion torque,” a dynamic motion back to the Creator. Vannier argues that Books 1-5 treat Augustine’s creation and subsequent self-destruction, his *aversio* from God. Books 6-10 treat Augustine’s *conversio* and *re-formatio* by and in his Creator. In the last three books, Augustine holds up the *miroir de l’Ecriture* in which he can both come to understand himself and “actualize” himself.⁷³ “*La creation nouvelle qu’il connaît et qu’il exprime par le schème creatio, conversio, formatio, faisant ainsi de son itinéraire un paradigme pour tout être humain qui connaît la renaissance par le baptême.*”⁷⁴ Vannier, following Landsberg and others, emphasizes the central importance of *confessio* as a unifying element in the *Confessions*, for it is only through *confessio*, arising from a Christ-inspired humility, that one can move from the self-destruction of sin to the reunification in the Creator.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Vannier, *Les Confessions*, 47.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 46.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 47, 171-73.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 53. Happily, Vannier avoids the limitations of Landsberg and Solignac by attempting to bring together *confessio* and some of the structural elements in the text. She does not, however, draw out the connection between confession and creation as clearly as she might have.

C. Hidden Providence

Vannier's divisions can be refined further. Frederick Crosson has done remarkable work on the structure of the *Confessions* which not only coincides with what has been argued so far, but adds depth and nuance to it.⁷⁶ Crosson, like Vannier, begins with Augustine's division from the *Retractiones*. Within Books 1-10, Crosson thinks that Book 10 can be separated. Books 1-9 form a narrative (of sorts), while 10 is different both in tone, content, and time period (present instead of past). According to Crosson, Books 1-9 divide neatly in the middle of Book 5. He makes a number of observations: Books 1-5 take place in Africa and end with Augustine leaving for Italy, while Books 5-9 take place in Italy and end with Augustine leaving for Africa. There is an *exitus-reditus* structure to the narrative, a story of wandering and homecoming, which corresponds to the *aversio* and *conversio* structure which Vannier pointed out. But there is more: in Books 1-5, Augustine does not mention anybody's name, while in Books 5-9, names abound. Crosson discerns two principles which determine Augustine's naming practice: "one, he names only those who have been instrumental (whether knowingly or not) in the path of ascent toward God. Two, the silence about names in the first half results from the overall movement there toward his increasing estrangement from God and man."⁷⁷ The *aversio* in the first half of the narrative means separation from God *and* neighbor, while the *conversio* of the second half means not only a

⁷⁶ In this section, the argument of Crosson's "Structure and Meaning" and "Book Five" is followed.

⁷⁷ Crosson, "Structure and Meaning," 30. Compare, Crosson, "Book Five," 83-84, for parallel discussion.

reunification in God, but “a progressive return to community.”⁷⁸ The ascent to the Creator, the re-creative process which Vannier noted, is intimately related to being at peace with the human community, in particular, the Church. Crosson’s point is confirmed by the above discussion of Augustine’s ecclesial ascent with Monnica at the end of Book 9.

Crosson and others have pointed out that there is a chiasmic structure to the first nine books, where the *aversiones* of the earlier books are taken up again and converted in the later books.⁷⁹ Book 1 corresponds to Book 9, 2 to 8, 3 to 7, 4 to 6, while Book 5 is a hinge, divided between the two bishops: Faustus in the first half and Ambrose in the second. “In the chiasmic structure of Augustine’s autobiography, the spiritual regress traced through books 1-4 is reversed, book by book and theme by theme, in the young man’s spiritual progress through books 6-9.”⁸⁰ So, for example, Books 1 and 9, both contain an invocation of Christ (the only two direct addresses in the whole *Confessions*) as well as an encounter with baptism, the former averted, the latter successful. Books 2 and 8 deal with dissipation in lust and unification in continence; both contain trees, one of the knowledge of good and evil, the other of life. Books 3 and 7 deal with *phantasmata* and the problem of evil, while Books 4 and 6 treat Augustine’s affair with and liberation from *ambitio saeculi*. This too cursory

⁷⁸ Crosson, “Structure and Meaning,” 30.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Crosson, “Structure and Meaning,” 30-31 as well as “Book Five,” 73-84; Dominic Doucet, “L’*Ars Memoriae* dans les *Confessions*,” *Revue des études augustiniennes* 33 (1987): 49-69; Robert O’Connell, *Images of Conversion in Augustine’s Confessions*; Carl Levenson, “Distance and Presence in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Journal of Religion* 65 (October 1985): 500-12; Marjorie Suchocki, “The Symbolic Structure of Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50 (September 1982): 365-78; David Leigh, “Augustine’s *Confessions* as a Circular Journey,” *Thought: A Review of Culture and Ideas* 60 (March, 1985): 73-88.

⁸⁰ McMahon, *Prayerful Ascent*, 144.

summary again confirms that the *Confessions* is a highly structured work and sets the foundation for further creation structures below.⁸¹

Crosson argues that Augustine does not *compose mal*, but just the opposite: he attempts to embody his understanding and purpose in the very form of his composition.⁸²

Crosson formulates Augustine's task as such: "to tell the story of one's life in such a way that the sequence of events related is adequately accounted for and yet to tell that story in such a way that those events are not adequately accounted for."⁸³ Augustine consistently demonstrates that the world has an integrity which God does not violate when he acts in it. In the *Confessions*, Augustine must somehow convey that the actions and events of his life were, in fact, the responsibility of the actors in his story—"It was I who was willing; it was I who was unwilling; it was I" (*ego eram qui volebam, ego qui nolebam: ego eram*)⁸⁴—while at the same time show that God is acting in and through the actors and events to bring about his own ends—"You converted me toward Yourself" (*convertisti enim me ad te*).⁸⁵ It has been discussed already how this makes sense in light of the Christian distinction between God and the world; now, Crosson shows how Augustine attempts to make this understanding present in the structure of his work. "The problem, then, of the literary form of the

⁸¹ See Crosson, "Book Five," 75-84 for a more extended treatment of the already mentioned principles as well as other perceptive suggestions.

⁸² Crosson, "Structure and Meaning," 31.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Aug. *conf.* 8.10.22.

⁸⁵ *conf.* 8.12.30.

Confessions, as it confronted Augustine meditating through those years of its gestation, was the problem of speaking to his readers on two levels, so that the admonition of the child's voice, 'Tolle, lege', could be applied to the text of his life and to the text of the *Confessions*, as well as to that of sacred scripture."⁸⁶ Just like Moses, Augustine wrote on different levels; just like Moses, Augustine wrote in a way suited to his content and purpose. Crosson makes the suggestion that

Augustine wants to present that hidden providence for the reader not only by asserting it, but by leaving partially hidden what he has discovered about God's providence in the events of his life through the process of thinking back on that life and writing the story of his *Confessions*, by indicating to the alert reader the latent dimensions of his story. In such a case, part of the confession of God's secret providence will be explicit, but part will remain implicit.⁸⁷

After his conversion and incorporation into the ecclesial community, Augustine begins to see his life anew, in the new context, which means that he sees it, in a sense, from God's perspective or, perhaps more accurately, God sees it through him as he see it.⁸⁸ What Augustine sees is that his life is neither a meaningless garble nor simply the story of his quest for Wisdom. Rather, the events of his life have order and meaning; together, they form a song written by God. The *Confessions* does not tell of Augustine's search for God, but God's search for Augustine. It is the story of God's providence, a providence which cannot be understood without the Christian understanding of creation. "God not only brought the world into being long ago, but continues to preserve it in existence along with all of its

⁸⁶ Crosson, "Structure and Meaning," 32.

⁸⁷ Crosson, "Book Five," 73.

⁸⁸ See *Aug. conf.* 13.31.46.

coming-and-going creatures. This conception of creation is the ontological context for the affirmation of God's providential design for us."⁸⁹ This is what Augustine tries to show in the structure of his narrative.

Crosson has given an account of Books 1-9, but what about the rest of the *Confessions*? Crosson argues that Book 10 takes up the question of how one can discern the hidden God acting in one's life. His arguments will not be rehearsed here, but Book 10 follows logically upon Books 1-9. After narrating the story of God's providence, Augustine turns to examine how he can recognize God providentially acting in his past, when for most of his life he was almost totally ignorant of him. After exploring this question philosophically by examining the memory, Augustine turns to explore it in Scripture, in particular, in the creation story of Genesis. The last three books "address the question of the relation between God's eternity and our temporality, and how a narrative like the opening of Genesis can be told about the immutable God."⁹⁰ For Crosson, the whole *Confessions* is a well-designed protreptic in which form and content mutually illumine the meaning of Augustine's masterpiece.

V. The Second Way: The Understanding of Creation

So far, only the structural possibilities within the framework which Augustine himself provided in his *Retractationes* have been considered. But there are other structures in the

⁸⁹ Crosson, "Book Five," 86. Crosson continues, "Only the foundation of the doctrine of creation allows apparently random events to take on the status of being integrated into God's foresighted plan for all things. If God were not the creator of all events as well as of creatures, then what happens to me could be simply a chance event" (87).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

text which move away from Augustine's divisions. Two studies will be drawn from which treat the structure of the *Confessions* in light of Augustine's *understanding* of creation. The first draws on the notion that creation establishes a distinction and relationship between God and the world. The second draws on the notion of a hierarchy of being. By considering the themes or topics of each book, another layer of the meaning and structural coherence of the *Confessions* will be uncovered.

A. Distinction and Relationship

It was discussed in Chapter One (see section entitled, "Some Conceptual Clarifications") how creation establishes a distinction and relationship between God and the world. Because of the way God is understood in light of creation, he is both "absent" from the world and intimately "present" to it. Frederick Crosson argues that "the center of the whole of the thirteen books is book 7, which neatly demarcates the two philosophical problems of God's transcendence and his acting in time, his Word becoming flesh."⁹¹ Books 1-7 treat Augustine's quest to understand the distinction between God and the world, while Books 7-13 treat his quest to understand the relationship between God and the world. Crosson's argument comes out of his discussion of God's hidden providence, which was discussed above. The first half of the *Confessions* deals with "how God is to be understood as everywhere and yet as not in the world."⁹² This is the problem Augustine sets up in Book

⁹¹ Crosson, "Structure and Meaning," 36.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 35.

1 in his discussion of whether God is in a place,⁹³ a problem that arises by conceiving of God as something within the horizon of the world and is resolved after reading the *libri Platoniorum* (recounted in the first half of Book 7). The second half of the *Confessions* deals with “how such a transcendent God who cannot appear in the world can act within the world, can speak audibly to us, can call us to himself.”⁹⁴ This problem arises from Augustine’s encounter with the Platonists: on the one hand, they teach him the truth about the incorporeal nature of God and his Word; on the other, they reject the Word made flesh so in them “no one hears him calling” (*nemo ibi audit vocantem*).⁹⁵ The Platonists, Augustine thinks, understand God’s transcendence and omnipresence, but they do not grasp how this God can personally act in the world.

Books 1-7 form a clear narrative which culminates in a true understanding of God’s transcendence—and was discussed in some detail in the second chapter—but Books 7-13 are not a simple narrative as they deal with different topics and temporally different time periods. Even if there is a unity, as has been argued here, dividing the text into two halves is not entirely obvious. Crosson makes an eloquent argument which shall be summarized briefly.⁹⁶

After reading the Platonists, Augustine recognizes that while they know the truth about God’s transcendence, they do not have a personal understanding of God who acts in the world and in one’s life. They do not “hear God calling.” Book 8 deals with this calling,

⁹³ Aug. *conf.* 1.2.2-3.3.

⁹⁴ Crosson, “Structure and Meaning,” 35.

⁹⁵ Aug. *conf.* 7.21.27.

⁹⁶ See Crosson’s lucid presentation in “Structure and Meaning,” 32-37.

which culminates in God calling Augustine through the children in the garden. Crosson argues that Augustine's *hearing* God speak to him in time is the key to understanding the structure of the second half. When Augustine hears God speak to him through the child in the garden of Milan in 386, his life is transformed. Crosson describes the new context as an "epiphany" which "radiates outward, suffusing and transmuting the meaning of the whole of finite beings."⁹⁷ In contrast to Augustine's "vision" of God after reading the Platonists, Augustine "hears" God in the garden, "an essentially temporal mode of apprehension."⁹⁸ Faith comes through hearing and the rest of the *Confessions* deals with Augustine's seeking to understand what he apprehended in faith in the garden. That means understanding "what the relation of God to the temporal world is."⁹⁹ That is why Book 10 takes up the question of memory, "a faculty that recovers the meaning obscured by the diaspora of time."¹⁰⁰ Books 11 and 12 treat God's relation to the temporal world, to time (Book 11) and space (Book 12). Book 13 deals with the redemption of creation, with how creation becomes a new creation in the Church. It is, of course, no accident that Augustine turns to Genesis in the last three books for "Genesis gives an account of how the temporal universe is related to God's action . . . [and] how, in the ultimate origin of all things, temporality and finitude are interfaced with eternity."¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 36.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 36.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 35.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

This summary hardly does justice to the subtly and elegance of Crosson's argument. But it does show how Augustine's understanding of creation structures the *Confessions* on a macro level. Augustine tells the story of his coming to terms with creation, he demonstrates this by the example of his own life, he discusses it explicitly, and he embeds it in the very structure of his work. Form and content work together to convey Augustine's purpose.

B. Ascent to the Prior

The discussion of the numerical structure of the *Confessions* revealed a motion of "return to the Origin." Robert McMahon says that this motion is based in the Christian-Platonist *exitus-reditus* scheme.¹⁰² "A work in this genre enacts the 'return to the Origin' by ascending reflectively to principles always logically prior and, therefore, ontologically higher . . . Hence ascent moves . . . to realms of being more universal and real, because they comprehend more of reality."¹⁰³ Augustine uses this traditional pattern, though he transforms it. The *exitus* and *reditus* is set within the context of creation, of God's abiding presence and sustaining care of the world he brought into being from nothing. The *Confessions* begins with the *Magnus Dominus* and ends with the eternal Sabbath Rest. "*Le temps s'ouvre pour nous à partir de l'éternité du fiat créateur et il se ferme dans l'éternité du repos céleste, sans*

¹⁰² See McMahon, *Prayerful Ascent* and "Book Thirteen," in *A Reader's Companion*, 207-23. McMahon draws on the work of Robert M. Durling, "Platonism and Poetic Form: Augustine's *Confessions*," in *Jewish Culture and the Hispanic World: Essays in Memory of Joseph H Silverman*, eds. Samuel G. Armistead and Mishael M Caspi (Newark, Del.: Juan de la Cuesta, 2001), 179-190, and John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).

¹⁰³ McMahon, "Book Thirteen," 213.

cesser d'être dominé par la transcendance de l'éternité divine."¹⁰⁴ It begins with God and ends with God and in between tells the story of God's providence hovering over and working in the life of Augustine and in all of creation.

There are adumbrations of this motion throughout the *Confessions*: in Augustine's *aversio* and *conversio* in Books 1-9, in his various attempts at ascent, and other places. In regard to the whole work, McMahon treats Books 1-9 as a unit and then 10-13 individually.¹⁰⁵ Books 1-9, he argues, deal with memories, deeds in the past which Augustine treats in his confessional narrative. Book 10 ascends to the next level of being: memory itself which, for Augustine, "is the logical and ontological precondition for having any memories at all."¹⁰⁶ In Book 11, Augustine explores time which, similarly, "is the logical and ontological precondition of memory."¹⁰⁷ Memory is but one dimension of time. In Book 12, Augustine treats the extremes of created being, the heaven of heavens and formless matter. Each of these extremes is, in a sense, "outside" of time, because they do not change and are not (yet) subject to time. These extremes of being are "prior" to time, they are "higher" and more fundamental; they are the ontological preconditions of time. Book 13 contains both a literal and figurative exegesis of Genesis 1. The literal exegesis is a summary of Augustine's understanding of creation, while the figurative uses allegory to tell the story

¹⁰⁴ Solignac, *BA* 13, 24.

¹⁰⁵ See McMahon's chapter, "Recapitulation" in *Prayerful Ascent*, 142-55, for a concise discussion of this recurring pattern on micro and macro levels.

¹⁰⁶ McMahon, "Book Thirteen," 213.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

of the creation and growth of the Church. “According to Augustine, the church represents God’s purpose for creating the universe” for “the church is the divine origin and goal of all things.”¹⁰⁸ The Church, then, is ontologically prior in two senses: first, there is an eternal dimension to the Body of Christ which “precedes” creation (by abiding eternally above it) and will perdure beyond it; second, “God’s *purpose* in creating is logically prior to and ontologically higher than all created things.”¹⁰⁹ God’s will is eternal; it transcends time and creation; it is identical to his substance and so nothing higher or ontologically prior to God’s will can be discovered.¹¹⁰ The Church, the personal locus where creation is taken up into God, is God’s will for creation from all eternity.¹¹¹

In the logical progressions of the *Confessions*, Augustine has ascended the hierarchy of being until he moves beyond it into God’s eternal will. “The *Confessions* recapitulates, on multiple levels and in different ways, the fundamental structures of Being: of the eternal God, of the temporal universe, and of their relationship in the history of salvation. And that recapitulation presents itself as an act of the eternal God, in time, for the salvation of its writer and of all who read him.”¹¹² McMahon shows how Augustine uses the structure and

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 214.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 214, emphasis added.

¹¹⁰ See Aug. *conf.* 12.11.11 and 12.15.18.

¹¹¹ There is a creational corollary in Augustine’s understanding of the Church: just as God is not one god among other gods or one being among others, neither is the Church one church among other churches. Rather, Augustine understands the Church as “the true religion,” not the best religion among many, but the only religion among false ones. This is the argument of his *De vera religione*.

¹¹² McMahon, *Prayerful Ascent*, 149.

content of his work to convey his meaning: creation leads to God and is only properly understood in light of God. In the very fabric of its composition is embedded Augustine's understanding of God and the world, how they are distinct and related, and how these elements are ordered toward his purpose in writing, namely, to ascend with his neighbor to God for the sake of salvation.¹¹³

VI. The Third Way: The Creation Story

Another possible approach to understanding how creation informs the structure of the *Confessions* is to look to the book of Genesis, a book which Augustine commented upon repeatedly throughout his whole life and which provides the material for the last three books of the *Confessions*. Two structural possibilities which arise from the narrative of the Genesis creation story will be presented here: first, the idea first put forth by Luigi Pizzolato that Augustine structures the *Confessions* according to the seven days of creation;¹¹⁴ second, Robert McMahon's suggestion that Augustine structures the first nine books of the *Confessions* on the nine creative acts recounted in Genesis.

A. Days of Creation

In the discussion of Augustine's numerology above, it was noted that the number seven is significant. Because God creates in seven days, this number becomes foundational: there are seven days in a week, seven ages in a person's life, and seven ages of world history.

¹¹³ Aug. *conf.* 4.12.19.

¹¹⁴ Luigi Pizzolato, *Le "Confessioni" di Sant'Agostino: Da biografia a 'confessio'* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1968).

Augustine did not invent these patterns, but inherited them and recognized their fundamental importance. “The six creational days and the Sabbath day taken together represented through their septenary number the temporal condition of the created and historical world.”¹¹⁵ These patterns of seven were not some kind symbolism conjured up for pedantic purposes, but were understood as structures which constituted the very fabric of temporal reality. For Augustine, they were essential for understanding the history of the world and individual human lives.

Augustine employs these patterns in a number of works throughout his life (not without variation), but the clearest exposition comes in *De Genesi adversus Manicheos*.¹¹⁶ Using both literal and allegorical exegesis of the Genesis story, Augustine elaborately describes how the ages of man and of the world can be divided and illumined by God’s creative activity on each of the seven days. Luigi Pizzolato argues that this same sevenfold pattern can be seen in the *Confessions*. The clue that this pattern is operative in the *Confessions* is that Augustine marks his narrative with the key terms of the ages of man: *infantia, pueritia, adolescentia, iuventus, declinatio a iuventute ad senectutem, senectus,* and *quies*. “For each one of us,” Augustine says, “has those six days, as distinguished in our good works and upright life, after which each should hope for rest” (*habet etiam unusquisque nostrum in bonis operibus et recta uita tanquam distinctos istos sex dies, post quos debet*

¹¹⁵ Ladner, *Idea of Reform*, 225. See his chapter, “The Ages of the World and of Man,” 222-38, for a helpful discussion of the use and variation of these patterns in Augustine and other Fathers.

¹¹⁶ See Aug. *Gn. adv. Man.* 1.23.35-41, for a discussion of the literal meaning of these patterns, and 1.25.43, for an allegorical interpretation. Compare *vera rel.* 26.48-49; *div. qu.* 44 and 64; *c. Faust.* 12.8; *civ. Dei* 2.30.

quietem sperare).¹¹⁷ By noting the places where Augustine uses these terms (and interpolating a bit), Pizzolato divides the *Confessions* into seven parts and compares them to the treatment of the days of creation, ages of man, and ages of the world in the *De Genesi adversus Manicheos*. Pizzolato makes the following parallels.¹¹⁸

Day of Creation	Thing Created	Ages of Man	Ages of World	Allegorical Interpretation	Confessions
One	Light	<i>Infantia</i> (pre-verbal)	Adam to Noah	Light of faith	1.1.1-7.12
Two	Sky and Earth	<i>Pueritia</i> (speaking)	Noah to Abraham	Distinguish flesh and spirit	1.8.13-20.31
Three	Waters and Plants	<i>Adulescentia</i> (15-30)	Abraham to David	Separate from temptations	2-6
Four	Heavenly bodies	<i>Juventus</i> (30-45)	David to Babylon	See unchangeable truth	7-9
Five	Fish and Fowl	<i>Declinatio</i> (45-60)	Babylon to Christ	Produce good works for others	10
Six	Animals and Image of God	<i>Senectus</i> (60-90)	Christ to End	Serve reason and justice	11-13
Seven	Sabbath	<i>Quies</i> (death)	Eschaton	Eternal life	<i>Chiusura</i>

The first day of creation will be considered in some detail here and then the other days will be more briefly summarized. This will illustrate Pizzolato's overall method and

¹¹⁷ *Gn. adv. Man.* 1.25.43.

¹¹⁸ The parallels come from Pizzolato; the design of the chart is mine.

provide a glimpse of his whole argument. He begins by quoting Augustine from the *De*

Genesi adversus Manicheos:

The origins of the human race, in which it begins to enjoy the light, can be well compared to the first day in which God made light. This time should be regarded as kind of infancy of the whole world, which in proportion to its magnitude, we ought to think of as one man: since every single man when he is first born, and goes out toward the light, bears the first time, infancy. This age stretches from Adam up to Noah, in ten generations. A certain evening of this day is made from the flood, because even our infancy is, as it were, destroyed by the flood of oblivion.

*primordia enim generis humani, in quibus ista luce frui coepit, bene comparantur primo diei quo fecit deus lucem. haec aetas tanquam infantia deputanda est ipsius uniuersi saeculi, quod tanquam unum hominem proportione magnitudinis suae cogitare debemus: quia unusquisque homo cum primo nascitur, et exit ad lucem, primam aetatem agit infantiam. haec tenditur ab adam usque ad noe generationibus decem. quasi uespera huius diei fit diluuium; quia et infantia nostra tanquam obliuionis diluuiio deletur.*¹¹⁹

One can note a certain fluidity between Augustine's interpretation of the days and ages.

There is not a kind of rigid correspondence, but an overall kinship between them which mutually illumines. On the first day, God creates light. This is similar to a child being born, who emerges into the light, and similar to the first stages of human existence, in which the first man came into being and humanity emerged on the scene. The evening of this first day corresponds to the flood and the oblivion of forgetfulness which overtakes every infant and which overtook the world as they transition(ed) to the next stage of life and history.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Aug. *Gn. adv. Man.* 1.23.35. Pizzolato's treatment of *infantia* can be found in *Le "Confessioni" di Sant'Agostino*, 68-71.

¹²⁰ Up to this point, the parallels Augustine draws are all part of his literal exegesis: that is, the words point to the things and the things do not signify other things (cf. *doc. Chr.* 1.1.1-2.2). The days of creation establish the pattern for and shed light on the meaning of the life of a person and of history. Augustine's treatment might be called "poetic," but it is still literal in the sense that the words point to the things and mean what they say. The parallels he discerns are part of the structures of created reality, so the events he describes have a depth of meaning and set the groundwork for understanding the things that follow.

These literal interpretations give rise to allegorical interpretations. They are, in a sense, baptized; the literal becomes spiritual. Augustine uses the allegory to describe the spiritual life of the faithful. For example, Augustine says, “On the first day there is the light of faith, because one believes visible things first, on account of which faith the Lord deigned to appear visibly” (*Primo die lucem fidei, quando prius visibilibus credit, propter quam fidem Dominus visibiliter apparere dignatus est*).¹²¹

One can readily see how these elements are present in the first part of the *Confessions* (1.1.1-7.12). The Prologue (1.1.1-5.6), written from the mature perspective as a bishop, treats faith in visible things, especially the faith arising from the humanity of the Son.¹²² The rest of the first part (1.6.7-7.12) corresponds to the literal meaning of day one and its parallels in the ages of man and of history. Augustine’s discusses his own infancy with a sense of wonder that he came into being from nothing. This time is lost in the “dark regions of my oblivion” (*ad oblivionis meae tenebras*), the same word which is used to describe the result of the flood.¹²³ Since he cannot remember his infancy, he must depend on the testimony of his nurses as well as his own observations of others. Indeed, he must have faith in visible things in order to have any knowledge of this time, a time when he himself unreflectively trusted the material world. Pizzolato says, “*Infantia come tappa dell’oblio*

¹²¹ Aug. *Gn. adv. Man.* 1.25.43.

¹²² *conf.* 1.1.1.

¹²³ *conf.* 1.7.12.

della autobiografia, ma anche tappa della fides e della sua luce: fede nelle cose visibili, nelle cose create. Attorno a questi due nuclei ruota la struttura dell'infanzia."¹²⁴

For each day, Pizzolato quotes the two passages, the literal and allegorical, from the *De Genesi adversus Manicheos* and proceeds to draw out the elements in each stage of Augustine's life. The rest of the days will be treated more briefly; only the broad parallels will be indicated. The second day, the introduction of the firmament to separate the waters, corresponds to the age from Noah to Abraham, and the age of childhood, when memory arises and distinctions are able to be made.¹²⁵ In the *Confessions*, this corresponds to the second half of Book 1, where Augustine describes the acquisition of language, his early education, and the "torrent of human custom" (*flumen moris humani*).¹²⁶ The third day of creation, when God separates the earth from the sea, corresponds to the call of Abraham in history and adolescence in the age of man.¹²⁷ This time is marked by the turbulence of the sea in which one is tossed about by "the vain teachings about images" (*uanis simulacrorum doctrinis*)¹²⁸ and, allegorically, "the flood of fleshly temptations" (*fluctibus tentationum carnalium*).¹²⁹ This time is also marked by the ability to procreate, Abraham being the

¹²⁴ Pizzolato, *Le "Confessioni" di Sant'Agostino*, 69.

¹²⁵ Aug. *Gn. adv. Man.* 1.23.36. See Pizzolato, *Le "Confessioni" di Sant'Agostino*, 72-78 for his discussion of *pueritia*.

¹²⁶ Aug. *conf.* 1.16.25.

¹²⁷ See Pizzolato, *Le "Confessioni" di Sant'Agostino*, 79-95 for his discussion of *adolescencia*.

¹²⁸ Aug. *Gn. adv. Man.* 1.23.37.

¹²⁹ *Gn. adv. Man.* 1.25.43.

“father of many nations.” In the *Confessions*, this period corresponds to Books 2-6 when Augustine’s own desires “boiled in confusion and ravaged my feeble age over the cliff of lusts and plunged me into the whirlpool of shameful deeds” (*utrumque in confuso aestuabat et rapiebat inbecillam aetatem per abrupta cupiditatum atque mersabat gurgite flagitiorum*).¹³⁰ This is the age when he is taken in by the “splendid imaginings” (*phantasmata splendida*) of the Manichees.¹³¹ Procreation is also a theme in these chapters, as Patricius proudly points out and Adeodatus attests.¹³² But this period is also the separation of the earth from the water, the separation of Israel from the nations and, in the *Confessions*, Augustine from the Manichees.¹³³ Augustine emerges from the turbulence of the third day on the fourth day when God makes the sun, which corresponds to *juventus*,¹³⁴ and, as the *De Genesis adversus Manicheos* puts it, “one sees what the unchangeable truth is, which shines in the soul like the sun” (*uidet quae sit incommutabilis ueritas, quae tanquam sol fulget in anima*).¹³⁵ This corresponds to Books 7-9, where Augustine sees for the first time “an unchangeable light above the eye of my soul, above my mind” (*supra eundem oculum*

¹³⁰ *conf.* 2.2.2.

¹³¹ *conf.* 4.6.10.

¹³² See *conf.* 2.3.6 and 4.2.2.

¹³³ *conf.* 5.14.25.

¹³⁴ In *conf.* 7.1.1, Augustine opens the book with the transition from *adulescentia* to *juventus* as he turns thirty. See Pizzolato, *Le “Confessioni” di Sant’Agostino*, 96-111 for his discussion of *juventus*.

¹³⁵ Aug. *Gn. adv. Man.* 25.43.

animae meae, supra mentem meam, lucem incommutabilem)¹³⁶ and comes to the fullness of truth in the Catholic Church.

Augustine himself divides his life according to the ages of man and Pizzolato has astutely drawn parallels between the ages of Augustine's life and the days of creation. Pizzolato, though, has been criticized for "minimizing Augustine's abandonment of the pattern after Bk. 7."¹³⁷ But this criticism does not seem entirely fair. It is true that Augustine does not mention *declinatio* and *senectus* explicitly, which Pizzolato says correspond to Books 10 and 11-13, respectively, but the parallels hold when the content is considered.¹³⁸ Augustine writes Book 10 in the present tense, ten years after the events of Book 9. Thus, he is speaking of himself at the time of writing—some time between 397-401, which would make Augustine 43-47 years old, certainly within the standard range of *declinatio*. Moreover, Book 10 corresponds very well with Augustine's interpretation of the fifth day, especially the spiritual interpretation: "Having been made stronger by the knowledge of these things [the unchanging light of the fourth day], on the fifth day, one begins on actions in this most turbulent world . . . for the sake of usefulness to the brotherly community" (*quarum*

¹³⁶ *conf.* 7.10.16. There is another interesting difficulty in trying to apply the days of creation to Augustine's life. In the ages of the world, Christ comes during the sixth age, the *senectus* of the world; he comes to transform the Old Man into the New Man. But Christ comes to Augustine in the age of *juventus*, the fourth age or day. Interestingly enough, in *div. qu.* 44, Augustine says that it is more fitting for Christ to come during *juventus*, for that is when a man is teachable. In *div. qu.* 64.2, he reiterates the common position on Christ's coming, namely, that he came in the *senectus* of the world. In his *Retractationes* comments on *div. qu.* 44, he says that while youth and old age cannot co-exist in the body, they can in the soul and thus his one interpretation is spiritual, while the other chronological. Thus, while Augustine is *juventus* in body, he is *senectus* in soul. Christ comes to Augustine at teachable age in order to make his old soul new.

¹³⁷ O'Donnell, *Confessions*, ad loc. 1.8.13.

¹³⁸ See Pizzolato, *Le "Confessioni" di Sant'Agostino*, 112-26 for his discussion of *declinatio*, and 127-56 for his discussion of *senectus*.

rerum notitia fortior effectus incipiat quinto die in actionibus turbulentissimi saeculi . . . propter utilitatem fraternae societatis).¹³⁹ This corresponds with his explicit intention in Book 10 to confess before “your servants, my brothers, whom you want to be your sons, whom you commanded that I serve, if, with you, I want to live from you” (*servi tui, fratres mei, quos filios tuos esse voluisti dominos meos, quibus iussisti ut serviam, si volo tecum de te vivere*).¹⁴⁰ Pizzolato draws out other substantial parallels between Augustine’s discussion of *confessio* and *memoria* in Book 10 and the meaning of the fifth day.¹⁴¹

It is true that Augustine himself is not a *senectus* when he writes Books 11-13, but the meaning of this age is very much present in the last three books. This age is marked by both oldness and newness, it combines the waning of the world, the body, and history with the renewal of all these in Christ. The Old Man in body becomes a New Man in spirit. “Thus, in this age, any spiritual man, who is a good minister of Christ and imitates him as well as he is able, is spiritually fed with his people from the food of the holy scriptures and the divine law” (*sic ista aetate spiritualis homo quicumque bonus minister est christi, et eum bene quantum potest imitatur, cum ipso populo spiritualiter pascitur sanctarum scripturarum alimentis et lege diuina*).¹⁴² This is the age of the coming of Christ and the Church. In the last three books, Augustine stands before his audience in the role of “a good minister” and preaches to them about the old and new creation, including an extended meditation on the

¹³⁹ Aug. *Gn. adv. Man.* 1.25.43.

¹⁴⁰ *conf.* 10.4.6.

¹⁴¹ See Pizzolato, *Le “Confessioni” di Sant’Agostino*, 112-26.

¹⁴² Aug. *Gn. adv. Man.* 1.23.40.

Church. The very things which characterize the sixth day and the age of *senectus* are found in Books 11-13.¹⁴³ Book 13, of course, ends with an anticipation of the eternal Sabbath, prefigured in the seventh day of creation.

Pizzolato does not insist that Augustine rigidly adhered to this pattern when composing the *Confessions*, but that he had it in mind as a kind of vestigial creation template which gives rational order to the work.¹⁴⁴ Augustine does not try to cram his life into an unyielding pattern of seven ages. Rather, God's creational patterns are important and discernible in the world and history. They reveal a pattern of God's saving design for his creation. They give meaning and order to the flux. Augustine experiences being "broken up in times whose order I do not know" (*in tempora dissilui quorum ordinem nescio*),¹⁴⁵ but the patterns discernible in creation give coherence and order to his life. They give it form and therefore more being because by recognizing his own temporal history as created according to God's pattern, he comes to participate more in God's saving design.¹⁴⁶ "Augustine's story" is no longer his, but God's. God tells his own story; he is the author and Augustine a character. By recognizing this, Augustine comes to co-operate with God's saving plan and participates in the salvation God has ordained for him from the dawn of creation.

¹⁴³ Technically, *quies* and the Sabbath are not a part of history, though they complete it. They are beyond it and mark the end of it. This is why Book 13 ends with an anticipation of the eternal Sabbath and why Pizzolato does not include it in the division of the *Confessions*.

¹⁴⁴ Pizzolato, *Le "Confessioni" di Sant'Agostino*, 58-59.

¹⁴⁵ *Aug. conf.* 11.29.39.

¹⁴⁶ See Pizzolato, *Le "Confessioni" di Sant'Agostino*, 62.

B. Nine Acts of Creation

Robert McMahon employs an approach similar to Pizzolato, but instead of using the creation account from *De Genesi adversus Manicheos*, McMahon uses Augustine's allegorical interpretation in Book 13.¹⁴⁷ In Book 13, Augustine notes that God calls his creation "good" seven times and, after he creates man and woman, he calls the whole of what he created "very good."¹⁴⁸ There are eight "good" or "very good" creative acts in the six days of creation (days three and six contain two acts of creation each). Add to this the creation of the Sabbath on the seventh day and there are nine creative acts recorded in Genesis. There are, not coincidentally, McMahon suggests, nine books in Augustine's "autobiography." The parallels are suggestive: the first day of creation deals with the watery abyss and the creation of light. In Book 1, Augustine treats "the chaotic waters of 'this world'."¹⁴⁹ He is tossed around by "the stormy society of human life" (*vitae humanae procellosam societatem*), alienated from God "in his dark passion" (*in affectu tenebroso*), and lost in "the whirlpool of shameful deeds" (*gurgite flagitiorum*).¹⁵⁰ But he also moves away from the "dark regions of my oblivion" (*oblivionis meae tenebras*) into the light of memory.¹⁵¹ And just as in God's creation, the light comes to be through speech.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ McMahon's arguments can be found in *Prayerful Ascent*, 38-116 and, in an abbreviated form, "Book Thirteen," 207-12.

¹⁴⁸ Aug. *conf.* 13.28.43.

¹⁴⁹ McMahon, "Book Thirteen," 208.

¹⁵⁰ Aug. *conf.* 1.8.13, 1.18.28, and 1.19.30, respectively.

¹⁵¹ *conf.* 1.7.12.

There are parallels for each day of creation and each book, but only a few of them will be noted here. “The seven ‘good’ acts of Creation culminate in an eighth, which is ‘very good’; seven books in the autobiography culminate in an eighth, the young Augustine’s conversion, also ‘very good.’”¹⁵³ In Book 8, Augustine brings his will under the guidance of reason by dedicating himself to continence, while in the eighth act of creation God creates Adam and Eve which, allegorically, is interpreted as the subjection of the “feminine” appetite to “masculine” reason.¹⁵⁴ The ninth act is the creation of the Sabbath, while “Book 9 ends with the death of Monnica and a chapter-long prayer for the repose of her soul.”¹⁵⁵ Also, Book 9 deals with baptism, his own and that of his friends, and, for Augustine, the Sabbath is allegorically-linked with baptism.¹⁵⁶

McMahon suggests that these correspondences are not happy accidents nor a rigid structure imposed on the structure of the *Confessions*. Rather, they serve as “a paradigm . . . not a mold.”¹⁵⁷ The paradigm is the one God established in creation and which he

¹⁵² Note how McMahon portrays these two parts of Book 1 as two aspects of the first day of creation, while Pizzolato treats them as two distinct days. There is enough flexibility in their interpretive approaches—and Augustine’s imagery—for both to be true interpretations. See McMahon, *Prayerful Ascent*, 39: “This treatment of correspondence, therefore, attempts to encompass books 1-9 but does not presume to exhaust them. It accounts for certain significant patterns of imagery but not every significant pattern, to be sure.” His quick dismissal of Pizzolato in the same section is thus disappointing. See Appendix I.

¹⁵³ McMahon, *Prayerful Ascent*, 38.

¹⁵⁴ Aug. *conf.* 13.32.47.

¹⁵⁵ McMahon, *Prayerful Ascent*, 38.

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, *Gn. litt.* 4.13.24.

¹⁵⁷ McMahon, “Book Thirteen,” 208.

providentially works out in Augustine's life. "God guides the *Confessions*."¹⁵⁸ He providentially structures all reality, including Augustine's reality and the reality of the *Confessions*, according to the deep rhythms of his original creation.

VII. The Fourth Way: *Vestigia Trinitatis*

A final suggestion for how creation structures the *Confessions* comes from the creational notion of *vestigia Trinitatis*. In the first chapter, it was discussed how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit create in one Trinitarian act and how all creation bears a Trinitarian stamp.¹⁵⁹ Augustine sees the threefold mark of the Trinity, to greater or lesser degrees, in all created beings. It would not be surprising, then, to find such Trinitarian marks on the *Confessions*. And, indeed, over the past twenty-five years, there has been a growing number of scholars who have recognized these patterns.¹⁶⁰ Although these voices do not all agree with one another in the details, they do agree that the *Confessions* bears a Trinitarian stamp or, more accurately, bears many Trinitarian vestiges.

¹⁵⁸ McMahan roots this claim in the (to me unconvincing) notion that there are "two Augustine's": the omniscient author and the unsuspecting narrator. What Augustine the author wants to show in his *Confessions* is the "providential plan," not only for Augustine's life, but for the world and for the *Confessions* itself. "The speaker is not aware that a 'divinely inspired' understanding of Genesis informs the progress, themes, and metaphors of his autobiographical record. Yet the two prove strikingly aligned" (*Prayerful Ascent*, 41). It is not necessary to follow all of McMahan's suggestions about narrative to appreciate his otherwise helpful discussion.

¹⁵⁹ See section entitled, "Trinity and *Creatio de nihilo*" in Chapter One.

¹⁶⁰ In 1985, James O'Donnell could find only one other who had written of Trinitarian patterns in the *Confessions*: H. Kusch, "Trinitarisches in den Büchern 2-4 und 10-13 der *Confessiones*," *Festschrift Franz Dornseiff* (Leipzig 1953) 124-183. Now, it seems as though there is a growing number of Trinitarian interpretations of the *Confessions*, though they do not all agree on the details. See following notes for some examples.

There is a common tripartite division of the *Confessions*—Books 1-9, 10, and 11-13—in which some see a Trinitarian pattern. This is a refinement of Augustine’s own division, which arises out of indications in the text itself. In the Prologue of Book 10, Augustine makes a contrast between the first nine books, which deal with his past sins, and the present book, which will deal with the present. Moreover, he says that there is a shift in audience as well: Books 1-9 were confessed to God for the benefit of a general public, while Book 10 is directed only to “brotherly souls” (cf. *animus fraternus*).¹⁶¹ The first nine books were written to “stir up the affections” of the unbaptized and to please the already converted,¹⁶² but in this book he addresses “himself to the continuing concerns of his fellow Christians, all of whom are engaged in a common struggle to conform their individual lives to the demands of Christ - a struggle in which the final outcome is not knowable either to themselves or to any one else.”¹⁶³ Without making any exaggerated claims to disjunction, it can be said that in the transition from Books 1-9 to 10 there is a shift in time, audience, and purpose, while also keeping in mind that they are understood by Augustine to be *de me* and contain the unity of style already discussed. Book 11 also marks a shift; it marks a kind of new beginning which is indicated by the recurrence of the *Magnus Dominus* Psalm and the shift of source material from *de me* to *de scripturis sanctis*.

¹⁶¹ Aug. *conf.* 10.4.5, where a form of *fraternus* is used 4x; cf. 10.34.51 and 11.2.3.

¹⁶² *conf.* 10.3.4.

¹⁶³ Starnes, “Prolegomena to the Last Three Books,” 5.

In light of these signposts, at least one Trinitarian pattern becomes clear: the three parts of the *Confessions* correspond to the three dimensions of time discussed in Book 11: past, present, and future (the future, here, understood in the Pauline sense of “stretching toward the things ahead”) or, in relation to the soul, *memoria*, *continuitus*, *expectatio*.¹⁶⁴ Another suggestion for these three parts comes from Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle who divides the *Confessions* into the same threefold pattern, but she sees a different reason for it. She argues that the three parts correspond to conventions of classical rhetoric, in particular, the threefold pattern of memory, intelligence, and foresight used in epideictic oratory.¹⁶⁵ She does not say so, but, for Augustine, these too are a vestige of the Trinity. Colin Starnes, who has perhaps done the most extensive work in English on Trinitarian patterns in the *Confessions*, goes farther, assigning each part to a person of the Trinity.¹⁶⁶ He argues that Books 1-9 are written in terms appropriate to the Father as Creator, Book 10 to the Son who unites the divine and the human, and Books 11-13 to the Holy Spirit who has inspired the Scriptures Augustine is exegeting.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ See Aug. *conf.* 11.20.26; cf. O’Donnell, *Confessions*, ad loc.; Landsberg, “La conversion de Saint Augustin,” 31-46.

¹⁶⁵ Boyle, “Prudential Augustine,” 133-37.

¹⁶⁶ See Starnes, “Prolegomena to the Last Three Books” and “The Place and Purpose of the Tenth Book of the *Confessions*,” *Studia Ephemeridis “Augustinianum”* 25 (1987): 95-103. What follows is a summary of these works. Starnes sees these three parts as indications not only of a Trinitarian structure, but also of a threefold confession.

¹⁶⁷ Starnes, “Place and Purpose of the the Tenth Book,” argues that this Trinitarian pattern runs even deeper. Within Books 1-9, there is a further Trinitarian division: 1-7 deal with Augustine’s relationship to the Father, 8 to the Son, and 9 to the Holy Spirit. Within Book Ten, chapters 6-26 deal with memory which is analogous to the Father, 27-29 with the role of the Word in the interior life, and 30-40 with how much Augustine is informed by the Holy Spirit. The last three books deal with time, space, and motion—the

James O'Donnell does not see the overall Trinitarian structure of the *Confessions*, but thinks that there are Trinitarian patterns throughout the work. The last three books have a Trinitarian structure because they deal with creation, Scripture, and the Church, the province of the Father, Son (Word), and Holy Spirit, respectively.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Frederick Crosson does not argue for an overall Trinitarian structure, but points to an important Trinitarian vestige in one part of the work. He shows that Augustine's descent into sin in Books 2, 3, and 4 follow the sinful triad, lust, curiosity, and pride, while in Books 6, 7, and 8 those sins are chiastically healed.¹⁶⁹ As told in the *Confessions*, the structure of Augustine's *aversio* moves according to a perverse imitation of the Trinity, while his subsequent *conversio* has a properly Trinitarian structure.

These are just a few brief suggestions of how the *Confessions* bears the mark of the Trinity. There are other possibilities and perhaps even others yet to be discovered.¹⁷⁰ The important point for this study is that the *Confessions* is marked by Trinitarian vestiges. Indeed, "every aspect of reality is understood by Augustine to have a Trinitarian form."¹⁷¹ This includes not only created being, but history as well. It should come as no surprise, then,

threefold and universal conditions of creation in its otherness from God" (103)—and correspond to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, respectively.

¹⁶⁸ James O'Donnell, *Augustine* (Boston: Twayne, 1985), www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/augustine/twayne.html (August 2011).

¹⁶⁹ Crosson, "Structure and Meaning," 31.

¹⁷⁰ It is also possible that some of these patterns are unconsciously formulated in the *Confessions*. Inasmuch as the rhythms of Augustine's thought were deeply cut by Trinitarian piety, it is not unlikely that these patterns emerged in his writing without conscious intention.

¹⁷¹ Harrison, *Rethinking*, 111; cf. *Aug. vera rel.* 1.1.

that Augustine's *Confessions* would be shaped by his deep belief in the Trinity and that this mystagogical work would contain *vestigia* which would point the attentive reader back to the Source.

VIII. An Account of the Whole: *sursum universam creaturam*

Four categories of creational structuring principles for the *Confessions* have been surveyed: from the *Retractationes*, from Augustine's understanding of creation, from the Genesis creation story, and from the creation idea of *vestigia Trinitatis*. In addition, there is the liturgical structure discussed in the last chapter (see "Hints of a Liturgical Structure"). In light of the principles articulated above, it would be justifiable to let these five approaches sit side by side, since each has sufficient warrant in the text. But much more satisfying would be the integration of these creation and liturgical structures into a kind of comprehensive "template," which demonstrated how the structure, unity, and content of the *Confessions* were coherently ordered toward its purpose. A concise account will be offered, before fleshing out in more detail how these elements can be integrated.

The *Confessions* has an overall motion of a return to God, whether this is understood numerically; or as the fulfillment of the "conversion torque" constitutive of created being; or as God's providential *revocatio*, *conversio*, and *re-formatio*; or as a prayerful search into the distinction and relationship between God and the world; or as a progression from the first to the seventh day of creation. The whole motion of the *Confessions* is a motion back to God, an ascent to the Creator, a prayerful lifting up of the heart of Augustine, his congregation, and then of all creation to the God who made them. The structure of the *Confessions*

embodies the dynamic motion of all creation, the dynamic orientation back to the Creator, given to human beings in creation and brought to completion in re-creation.¹⁷² This is neatly summarized in Augustine's famous *fecisti nos ad te*.¹⁷³ The *Confessions*, like creation itself, is an act of the Trinity; it bears the creative and saving mark of the God who brought it into being. Importantly, the *Confessions* is also an act of Augustine, the bishop, who in the act of writing this work, recapitulates and participates in God's redeeming action in creation. In the *Confessions*, God works through Augustine to take up all of creation liturgically and offer it back to God in a kind of Eucharistic offering of praise in thanksgiving. This is the deep meaning of the deliberate structure, unity, and purpose of Augustine's *Confessions*.

Far, then, from the rejection of structural unity inherited from Marrou and equally far from the agnosticism of O'Donnell and others, it can be said with McMahon that "it would be difficult to discover any literary work more richly unified, more fully coherent, more carefully planned, than Augustine's *Confessions*."¹⁷⁴ Indeed, "Augustine's *Confessions* embodies a fully coherent unity of form and content, of narrative structure and central themes."¹⁷⁵ The synthesis of creation accounts offered here demonstrates the coherence of

¹⁷² Compare McMahon, *Prayerful Ascent*: "The *Confessions*, thus, can rightly be considered a microcosm: a literary text embodying patterns fundamental to the universe, as Augustine understood it" (147). Also, "The fundamental processes of all Being and history, as Augustine understood them, are not only discussed in the *Confessions* but are also recapitulated in its literary form" (150).

¹⁷³ Aug. *conf.* 1.1.1.

¹⁷⁴ McMahon, *Prayerful Ascent*, 150. O'Connell makes a similar suggestion (though one that is perhaps not entirely in the spirit of the *Confessions*): "Augustine may actually have composed his work too well for us to detect the traces of his composition. And that failure on our part may signify a mildly ironic triumph on his" (*Odyssey of Soul*, 10).

¹⁷⁵ McMahon, *Prayerful Ascent*, 148.

Augustine's masterpiece and can serve as both a model for how to integrate and a dynamic "template" for integrating other accounts which deal with important, but less fundamental themes. Let this integration be considered again in more detail.

Augustine divides the *Confessions* between the first through the tenth books and the last three. This division bespeaks a creational understanding: ten refers to knowledge of Creator and creation, while the three refers to the Trinity. Augustine moves through the first ten books, acquiring knowledge of Creator and his creation, only to return to the *principium*, the One-in-Three of the Trinity as he can be discovered in the Genesis creation story. There is a motion of return to the Origin embodied in the number of books. This is reinforced by the content of these books which moves progressively up the hierarchy of being to that which is ontologically prior and more essential. All of creation is created in a Trinitarian act of *creatio, conversio, formatio* in which all creatures bear a dynamic orientation toward God in their very being. The *Confessions*, too, bears this Trinitarian stamp and its dynamic orientation toward God. This Trinitarian stamp can be seen in smaller Trinitarian patterns, as in the motion of *aversio* and *conversio* in Augustine's life, as well as in larger ways as leaving its mark on the macro structure of the work. These hidden hints of the Trinity's presence in the *Confessions* embody Augustine's understanding of the Trinity in creation. They are vestiges which point rational creation back to the Creator. Moreover, they suggest that the *Confessions* is an example of a larger pattern of redemption, an act of the whole Trinity re-creating what it has created.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ See McMahon, *Prayerful Ascent*: "The Trinitarian form of *Confessions* imitates the Trinitarian form of universal history . . . The triune God inspires the Scripture that reveals the shape of history. For Augustine

The Trinity creates and recreates according to a “seven day” pattern revealed in Genesis and seen in Augustine’s story, thereby revealing Augustine’s participation in God’s saving plan. Redemption occurs when God brings rational creation to the deep truth of creation, both the distinction and relationship between God and the world, the two primary inquiries of the *Confessions*. This leads to conversion and reformation, which are completed and advanced by baptism and the Eucharist in the Church. The Church is the place where all creation can make *confessio*, the unifying literary form of the *Confessions* and Augustine’s prayerful response of praise in thanksgiving for the unmerited gift of creation and re-creation. The *Confessions* moves, inexorably, from the praise of one man, a *portio creaturae*, to the praise of all creation through that *portio*.¹⁷⁷ In the last three books, Augustine gives voice to all of creation from the highest to the lowest, from the beginning to the end, and through him all creation sings the praises of the God who created it. Augustine does this, importantly, in the language of the Psalms, God’s own words: Augustine “respeaks” God’s words and in these hymns of praise he participates in God’s taking up all creation.¹⁷⁸

Drawing on the liturgical dimensions of the *Confessions* discussed in the last chapter, the integration can be completed. Let it be recalled that Book 9 deals with baptism, includes

the triune God shapes the course of history, which thus bears a Trinitarian stamp. Likewise, according to the premise of the *Confessions*, Augustine’s prayer is guided by God . . . Providentially governed, like universal history, it comes to have the same form as universal history: a threefold return to the Origin emerging over time at ever-higher, recapitulatory levels” (148). Interestingly, McMahon divides the *Confessions* into three parts differently than the standard division put forth here: he suggests 1-9, 10-12, and 13.

¹⁷⁷ See Augustine’s comments at *conf.* 5.1.1, quoted above. Also, see *conf.* 13.33.48.

¹⁷⁸ Compare the striking use of *assumere* in *conf.* 10.34.52 in reference to the hymn, *Deus Creator Omnium*, Christologically “taking up” and transforming the otherwise potentially dangerous visible light.

the participation in the Eucharist at Monnica's funeral, and ends with an anticipation of continued prayer at the Eucharistic liturgy.¹⁷⁹ Book 10 takes place in the presence of the brethren—the unbaptized are dismissed—and ends with Augustine's remarkable discussion of the Eucharist in which the reader, after examining his conscience with Augustine,¹⁸⁰ in a sense, receives the Eucharist from the hands of the bishop.¹⁸¹ Books 11-13 are Augustine's Easter homily, his preaching to the "spiritual ones," made a new creation by being incorporated into the Body of Christ and offering themselves on the altar with the Eucharist. He preaches of creation and re-creation, of the literal and figurative meaning of Genesis, and shows precisely what baptism and the Eucharistic sacrifice anticipate: the taking up of all creation into God through the redeeming work of Christ in the self-offering of the faithful. Augustine stands as bishop before the Church—remarkably, before those present and those to come, but also those who have gone before¹⁸²—and gathers them together so that through his *Confessions* and through the sacraments he might offer them back to God as an acceptable sacrifice. The *Confessions* thus participates in God's redemptive activity on behalf of all creation. It is Augustine's literary sacrifice in which he takes his past (Books 1-9) into the present (Books 10), and there takes the "everything" of the first ten books, and stretches it all toward the Trinitarian God (Books 11-13) in a Eucharistic offering. This

¹⁷⁹ See *conf.* 9.13.36-37.

¹⁸⁰ See *conf.* 10.30.41-39.64.

¹⁸¹ See *conf.* 10.43.69-70.

¹⁸² See *conf.* 10.4.6: *praecedentium et consequentium et comitum vitae meae.*

offering is a foretaste of the communion that redeemed creation will enjoy when it rests in that Sabbath day without end.

For Augustine, creation is ordered toward the Sabbath rest; the six days of creation culminate in the Seventh Day, the Sabbath, “a peace without evening” (*pacem sine vespera*),¹⁸³ which is God himself. The six days are a pattern for Augustine’s life and for all of human history, all of which have God as their origin and end. The Sabbath rest, God himself, hovers over the *Confessions*; he hovers over creation and history; and he hovers over their re-creation. God draws all things toward himself. He made human beings toward himself and for himself; he made them to eat him and to be transformed into him. They are restless because they are not God; they are not true being, but being on the way, being toward God, *ad te*. They rest by becoming God. This is written into the very structure of their created being which is brought into existence from nothing, called back to God from unlikeness to likeness, converted toward and formed according to his image.

In generosity and freedom, God loves creation into being. Love, then, is the interior reality of creation, while creation is the exterior expression of God’s love. God freely willed not-God, but for not-God to be at all it had to become like God and ordered toward him. It had to participate in him. The very fact of creation bespeaks this motion toward God; the very fact of freely willed creation from nothing is a kind of promise, a pledge of God to bring

¹⁸³ *conf.* 13.35.50. For Augustine’s early treatment of the Sabbath, see *vera rel.* 26.49; *Gn. adv. Man.* 1.22.33, 1.23.41, 1.25.43; and *div. qu.* 57. For his later treatment, see *Gn. litt.* 4.8.15-21.38 and *civ. dei.* 22.29-30. For a discussion of the development of this idea up to the time of the *Confessions*, see G. Folliet, “La typologie du sabbat chez Saint Augustin: son interprétation milénariste entre 389-400,” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 2 (1956): 271-90.

all things into one in him. Not-God must become God, not as God is, but by participation. This is the meaning of the Sabbath for Augustine. The six days are ordered toward the seventh, toward God, which means that salvation or transformation into God is not something external to creation. This deified destiny is intrinsic to creation—not because God is part of creation or because creation is somehow divine, but because God is the very ground of creation and is always present to it. God has given creation an inbuilt dynamism toward him which can only be fulfilled by God because the goal is to be transformed into God. This happens through the Church and in the Church.

For Augustine, the Church, both divine and human, is the place where creation becomes a new creation, where creation is transformed into God. The Incarnate Word is the model here, who unites divine and human together in one “Person of Truth” (*persona veritatis*).¹⁸⁴ Creation is destined to be united to God in a similar way by being transformed in the Church and into the Church, the Body of Christ. This is the very thing that God revealed to Augustine when he revealed the truth of creation for the first time, “I am the food of grown men; increase and you will eat Me. You will not change Me into you as food of your flesh, but you will be changed into Me” (*cibus sum grandium: cresce et manducabis me. nec tu me in te mutabis sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me*).¹⁸⁵

The *Confessions* ends on a note of hope; it ends with an exhortation to keep the *exercitatio* alive, to make the *exercitatio* a way of life or, more accurately, a Way of Life.

¹⁸⁴ Aug. *conf.* 7.19.25.

¹⁸⁵ *conf.* 7.10.16.

Ask, knock, and seek—this is the *exercitatio animi* which the Way himself recommends.¹⁸⁶ Augustine echoes this exhortation, not because no answers have been or can be found, but precisely because they have been and can be, precisely because there is hope. But the answers or the Answer is not something that can ever be fully grasped by us—the Creator cannot be contained by his creation. To achieve God he must be asked after, sought for, and knocked at and, moreover, we must ask, seek, and knock “from him” (*a te*), for “thus, and only thus, will it be received, thus will it be found, thus will it be opened” (*sic, sic accipietur, sic inveniatur, sic aperietur*).¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Mt. 7:8.

¹⁸⁷ *conf.* 13.38.53.

CONCLUSION: CREATION IN THE *CONFESSIONS*

tu mutaberis in me

-conf. 7.10.16

In *Confessions* 7.10.16, Augustine describes how he came to the truth of creation for the first time after reading the *libri Platoniorum*. This passage plays a crucial role in the *Confessions*. It is crucial because in it Augustine describes how he was first freed from the habit of materialist thinking which had dominated his life since his youth. It is crucial because he tells how he came to a true understanding of God's nature and thus was able to encounter God truly for the first time. It is crucial because this encounter leaves behind a memory of God which Augustine will always return to whenever he thinks of God and which he discusses at length in Book 10. It is crucial because it is a crux, a kind of center of the *Confessions*: Book 7 itself is the middle book in the thirteen books of the *Confessions* and this passage occupies the middle of the middle book. It is also a crux, because it is a crossroads or the hinge on which the two halves of the *Confessions* turn: it contains Augustine's discovery of the distinction between God and the world—the inquiry of the first half of the *Confessions*—and an insight into how God and the world are related—the inquiry of the second half.

But more than this, the passage reveals something important and perhaps unique about Augustine's understanding of creation, namely, that the truth about creation contains the truth about salvation, both the Goal *and* the Way. The very fact the God is Creator and that Augustine is created comes as the revelation that God is “the food of grown men; increase and you will eat Me. You will not change Me into you as food of your flesh, but you will be changed into Me” (*cibus sum grandium: cresce et manducabis me. nec tu me in*

te mutabis sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me).¹ For Augustine—to make the point as stark as possible—creation reveals the truth about who God is, who human beings are, and also reveals God’s intention to deify humanity through the Incarnation by participation in the sacraments of the Church. For Augustine, creation, in the broad sense in which it has been understood in this dissertation, contains the whole truth. This seems like a radical claim, though the inquiry into the role of creation in the *Confessions* has confirmed what this central passage seems to claim.

This study began by articulating the fundamental elements of Augustine’s theology of creation which made manifest Augustine’s understanding of creation as dynamically ordered toward salvation. With this as a base, it was shown how Augustine understood his own life in terms of creation, both as the content of his moral and intellectual struggles as well as the light within which he interpreted his life. It was shown how his embrace of the Christian understanding of creation transformed his life and thought, how it established a new context from which all things were to be understood anew. This led to a series of reflections on the intimate connection between creation and Church for Augustine, how the former has an interior motion toward fulfillment in the latter where it is taken up and transformed into God. Finally, Augustine’s rich understanding of creation was used to show how the *Confessions* could be read as an integral whole, a deliberate and well-structured literary unity, which Augustine wrote in imitation of the dynamic motion of creation for the sake of liturgically taking up his readers into God. In short, it has been shown how creation forms the deep

¹ Aug. *conf.* 7.10.16.

grammar of the *Confessions* and how this determinative aspect of his thought can illumine from within Augustine's most famous work.

The study of the *Confessions* in light of creation has led to a number of conclusions:

First, contrary to many of the interpretive trends over the past century, this inquiry has demonstrated how Augustine's understanding of creation can successfully give a coherent account of the *Confessions*. Principles of interpretation were articulated which gave a more satisfying account of Augustine's work and, by starting with creation, this inquiry has started with what is most fundamental to Augustine. Moreover, this approach is open to other interpretations, while also clarifying and integrating them in a properly Augustinian context.

Second, the dissertation has shown how creation forms the interior fabric of so much of Augustine's thought. There is an intimate link between Augustine's evolving notions of creation and the consequent development of his Christology; how he understands salvation in terms of creation; how creation and grace are somehow interior to one another; how creation and conversion mutually illumine; and how *confessio*, the liturgy, and the sacraments are rooted in Augustine's understanding of creation. Without situating these Augustinian themes in the foundational context of creation, much of their true depth is missed.

Third, though it is common in Augustine scholarship to offer apologies for producing yet another treatise on the much-studied *Confessions*, this inquiry has actually uncovered a number of lacunae which call for further study. One, of course, is the dynamic role of creation, which has been explored in depth, but which has also left many themes and topics

unexplored or lightly touched upon (such as how creation is related to friendship, the theft of the pears, Lady Contenance, etc.). Many aspects of the *Confessions* could be understood more deeply by considering them in light of creation.

Another avenue for future research is Augustine's reception of the Platonists. This dissertation has argued that there are common assumptions in Augustine scholarship that may be in need of rethinking. The outlines of a new approach to this question have been suggested, though much more work remains to be done to show how Augustine himself understood what he read.

A third theme that deserves more study is the role of the liturgy in the *Confessions* and its relation to creation. This study has highlighted some fundamental elements, but this rich topic has only begun to be explored. The liturgy, as the dissertation has revealed, is essential for understanding the *Confessions*.

A fourth line of inquiry would be to explore Augustine's understanding of the revelatory power of creation. It has already been suggested how Augustine might understand this, but a deeper study into his thought would yield fruit, especially because it seems so radically different from what future ages will say about creation's revelatory power. In other words, though it is now common to affirm that the Creator and Redeemer are One and the Same, there is a tendency to think of creation and redemption as distinct stages in God's plan; a tendency to think that creation is a revelation of a certain sort, while the Incarnation is another revelation of a different sort. There is a tendency to think that creation can only reveal God as First Cause, while, for Augustine, the revelation of creation also reveals God,

his Word, *creatio ex nihilo*, something of Jesus Christ, and his purpose in coming, namely, to change human beings into God by participation in his divine nature.

This points to a final aspect for future study: the role that deification plays in Augustine's thought and in the *Confessions* in particular. Much more work needs to be done to draw out the relationship between creation and deification as well as how Augustine's dynamic understanding of these leads to what might be called a "creation spirituality," that is, a way of life animated by the Holy Spirit, primarily understood under the fundamental category of creation and ordered toward Christological transformation into God.

Lastly, this inquiry has shown that the *Confessions* must be understood as the work of Augustine *the bishop*. This is not simply a chronological point, but has deep implications for the meaning and intention of the work. Augustine took his role as bishop extremely seriously; he knew he would have to account for the souls that were entrusted to his care.² As a bishop, Augustine understood himself to be a minister of Christ and therefore a participant in God's work of redemption.³ The *Confessions* must be understood in this light, as the work of a bishop—indeed, among his first works as bishop—who has the care of souls as his foremost concern. The *Confessions* is a sacrifice which the bishop Augustine offers as a kind of Eucharist, an offering of praise in thanksgiving, for the sake of taking up his readers into God and through them advancing the redemption of all creation.

² See *mor.* 1.32.69; *s.* 355.2; *b. vita* 1.1-5; *ep.* 21.1; cf. Possidius, *Vita Augustini*, 4. George Lawless says that when writing "pastoral care, *cura animarum*, was foremost in [Augustine's] mind" ("Augustine of Hippo and His Critics," in *Presbyter Factus Sum*, 9). See also, Paul Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

³ See *Aug. conf.* 13.20.26-21.31.

APPENDIX I: HOW DOES AUGUSTINE SEE GOD?

In trying to understand Augustine's ascents, James O'Donnell offers a suggestion which, though not entirely accurate, is helpful.¹ He points to Augustine's discussion of the three types of vision, most fully developed in Book 12 of *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* (412/15),² but also articulated more briefly in *Contra Adimantum* (393/4).³ In these works, Augustine says that there is (1) a *corporeal vision* which sees such things as physical bodies and the transfigured Lord by means of the bodily eyes. There is (2) a *spiritual vision* which sees the impressions of physical things by means of the imagination. God can "take up" (*assumere*) this faculty and reveal things in it, such as when Peter had the vision of animals being lowered in a large sheet. Finally, there is (3) an *intellectual vision* which clearly understands truth and wisdom by means of the mind. These three kinds of vision correspond to the three stages of ascent: exterior, interior, above in relation to things in the world, in the mind, and above the mind.

O'Donnell makes the intriguing suggestion that these three kinds of vision correspond to the three attempts at ascent in Books 4, 7, and 9 respectively. He particularly emphasizes the fact that Augustine uses the word *assumere* in *Contra Adimantum* to describe elevated spiritual vision (2) and in Book 7 to describe his "Platonic" ascents.⁴ If O'Donnell is correct, then what Augustine describes in Book 7 is a revealed *vision*, a kind of figurative or

¹ O'Donnell, *Confessions*, ad loc. 7.10.16.

² See Aug. *Gn. litt.* 12.7.16ff.

³ *c. Adim.* 28.2.

⁴ *conf.* 7.10.16: *cum te primum cognovi tu adsumpsisti me . . .*

symbolic image which God shows to Augustine's imagination (2). Unfortunately, nothing in Book 7 seems to suggest that this is the case. In fact, Augustine explicitly says that he withdrew his mind "from the crowds of contradictory phantasms" (*contradicientibus turbis phantasmatum*) and that he "clearly saw the invisible things of God, understood through the things which are made" (*vero invisibilia tua per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspexi*).⁵ That Augustine says he sees the *invisibilia* of God is significant. This phrase comes from Romans 1:20 and is the same passage he uses in the *Contra Adimantum* to illustrate what intellectual vision (3), the highest form of vision, consists in.⁶ This verse, quoted four times in Book 7, seems to suggest that Augustine did not see God in some symbol-laden image with spiritual sight (2), but saw the Truth Itself with intellectual vision (3). O'Donnell, though incorrect in attributing the kinds of visions to the various ascents, has pointed to Augustine's self-understanding of the ascent: he understands himself to be engaged in the highest form of vision possible and truly sees God in whatever way that is possible in this life.⁷

⁵ *conf.* 7.17.23.

⁶ *c. Adim.* 28.2: *ex hoc tertio genere est illa uisio, quam commemoravi dicente apostolo: inuisibilia enim dei a constitutione mundi per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur.*

⁷ Importantly, Augustine also sees with this kind of vision at Ostia in Book 9.

APPENDIX II: CONFLICTING CREATION INTERPRETATIONS

McMahon criticizes Pizzolato for using an interpretation of creation external to the *Confessions*, when the work itself has its own creation account. Given the significant placement at the summit of the *Confessions*, the allegory of creation in Book 13 suggests itself as an interpretive paradigm. On the one hand, McMahon is certainly correct: if one wants to take the literary unity of the *Confessions* seriously, then one should look to the text as a whole for understanding. Moreover, the account of creation in the *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* differs in important ways from what Augustine does in Book 13 and one should perhaps favor the latter over the former in this case. On the other hand, the pattern of the ages of man which Pizzolato sees is in fact present in the *Confessions*. McMahon does not acknowledge this. Pizzolato has a substantial argument, even if he neglects to consider the Genesis account in the *Confessions* as a paradigm.

In light of the seemingly valid but conflicting claims of these two scholars, the principles from above should be remembered: it is possible that both McMahon and Pizzolato are correct. Augustine well knew that one text can offer many possible interpretations, especially the text of Genesis. He himself offers a variety of interpretations of Genesis, without seeming terribly troubled by the discrepancies between them. Perhaps the two different interpretations could be reconciled by imitating another Augustinian practice: exegetical playfulness. Once one grasps the general method of Pizzolato, McMahon, and, presumably, Augustine, then one can also freely make interesting and exciting connections between the details of Genesis and Augustine's (or one's own) life.

More importantly, even though they disagree in the details, Pizzolato and McMahon seem to agree on the deep meaning of the Genesis story as a paradigm for Augustine's life, namely, that God tells Augustine's story, one part of a larger story which participates in God's saving design, revealed in the opening of the Scriptures. Though their interpretations differ, they see the same truth. One need not necessarily choose between McMahon and Pizzolato, but if both give a faithful account of the *Confessions* then, as Augustine would pray, "in this diversity of true opinions, may truth itself beget concord" (*in hac diversitate sententiarum verarum concordiam pariat ipsa veritas*).¹ This may not satisfy everyone, but it exemplifies the interpretive flexibility, within the confines of the truth, that Augustine himself advocated.

¹ Aug. *conf.* 12.30.41.

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- 31 *Epistulae*
- 46 *De haeresibus*
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- 29 *De Magistro*
- 29 *De ordine*
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