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Kevin Kress

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St. Augustine's Use of Genesis 1 in His
Conversion Account in Book 8
of the *Confessions*

Kevin Kress
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Part I: Introduction

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The *Confessions* of St. Augustine is a highly complex literary and philosophical work which has been carefully constructed by the author to fit into a structure based largely on the story of creation in Genesis 1. The central form is one of nine stages, a form which Augustine finds in the nine distinct acts of creation by God in Genesis. This nine-part form is the basis for the structure of the *Confessions* as a whole, as Augustine uses it structurally and thematically throughout the work. In Book 13, he reads the creation story in Genesis as an allegory for the creation of the Church, as he relates each of the nine acts of creation by God to the nine stages which he discerns in the creation of the Church. In Book 8, at the climax of his spiritual autobiography, he again uses the nine-part structure in recording the account of his conversion to Christianity, a process which Augustine the character undergoes in nine distinct stages. The nine-part form is again employed in the very construction of the autobiographical section of the *Confessions*, as it consists of nine narrative chapters, each of which records a separate stage of Augustine's young life. In each of these constructions, recurrent imagery, language, and thematic concerns distinguish the stages from each other and relate the stages to Genesis 1.

This structure, as I will argue, is present in the text and planned by Augustine as an attempt to unify and to give greater meaning to the story of his own life for himself, as he writes his autobiography. The internal form highlights Augustine's main theme, that of conversion and creation, two processes guided by God which result in something new and good. Whether it be the world, the Church, or an individual Christian soul, each

process is guided by God and results in an ordered creation. As a bishop, Augustine is writing his “autobiography” as a model for others to follow; it is his attempt to influence individuals to join the Church and accept the ways of Christianity. Augustine also acts on the desire to create a text worthy of his method of Biblical interpretation, which he had explained just one year previously to writing the *Confessions* in his didactic work *On Christian Doctrine*. By inserting various structures and creating allegories in his work, Augustine attempts to imitate the literary forms present in the Bible.

More importantly for Augustine as an individual, however, is his desire to view his own life as a part of God’s divine plan for creation. As a neo-Platonist, he seeks order on the earth and in his own life, and he attempts to see how his existence fits into God’s plan. The structure of his conversion account, adapted from Genesis by Augustine, allows him to view his own life as a part of God’s ordered plan, as he can see how his personal conversion has been guided by God in the same manner in which God has guided all creation. In viewing his conversion as an allegory and reading it on many different levels, he can see his self as a reflection of the higher creations of the world and the Church, and he can see how his own life is a part of this chain of ordered existence. With regard to time, through this structure Augustine is able to see his own life as a temporal reflection of God’s plan, the world as this plan expanded to long amounts of time, and the Church as the eternal being of God’s plan. By re-structuring his conversion account to fit into the pattern set out in Genesis 1, Augustine gives order to his life and places great importance on his conversion as a part of God’s plan for creation.

Previous scholarship on the form of the *Confessions* generally concludes that it lacks one. John J. O’Meara, in his introductory book *The Young Augustine*, blatantly

states that Augustine's efforts produced "a badly composed book" (O'Meara 13). And as a whole, the internal connections of the text are awkward at times. But my study indicates that beyond somewhat confusing shifts in tone and style, the work as a whole is unified in the themes of creation and conversion and also through the allegory of Genesis 1. The relation of the story of creation to Book 13 has long been recognized; even if it is difficult to follow at times, Augustine thoughtfully provides his readers with a summary in Book 13, Chapter 32. Robert McMahon points out the relationship between the allegory in Book 13 and the rest of the *Confessions* in his 1989 book, *Augustine's Prayerful Ascent*. This argument shows that the work as a whole has a great deal of internal structure. Previous scholarship on the conversion account itself has mainly focused on its historical accuracy and truth. This debate has been summarized by Colin Starnes in *An Essay on the Historicity Debate*, which points out the many valid arguments on both sides and offers an alternative of returning to the text itself, and to the social and intellectual environment in which it was written, in an attempt to put forth a unified view. However, no one as of yet has recognized that the structure of the conversion account itself in Book 8 is an allegory based on Genesis 1. This relationship is central to this thesis, as it provides the *Confessions* with a great deal of internal and external structure, unified in the climax of the autobiography.

This thesis proposes that there are nine distinct stages to the conversion account in Book 8 and that they each relate to a corresponding stage in the creation of the world and of the Church. The textual evidence is quite strong for most individual stages, especially the first and last, a fact which strongly supports the structure as a whole. At some points, when the text of the conversion does not align directly with the creation stories, thematic

concerns and shared images illustrate the connections. I readily admit, however, that some stages are weaker than others in my argument, particularly stages four and six. My studies have failed to arrive at a tight and convincing argument for these individual points, but my main argument does not rely on these stages treated individually. When the pattern as a whole is seen, the larger structure is quite evident, and I believe that this fact compensates for any weak individual components. The number of clear textual and thematic parallels between the two creation stories and the conversion account in Book 8 which are pointed out in my argument outweigh, I think, the individual stages at which I as a reader have been unable to explain Augustine's purpose and method more clearly.

Part II: Book 8 as Microcosm

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As a writer who pays great attention to detail and relies on form to convey meaning, St. Augustine fills his works with many carefully planned literary structures. Perhaps the most important of these occurs at the climax of his conversion narrative, in Book 8 of the *Confessions*, where the author describes the point in his younger life when he was dramatically converted to Christianity. In this first person recounting of spiritual awakening and transformation, Augustine is successful both in telling an exciting story and also in following a preconceived literary form which creates additional levels of meaning. Because of his careful and complex planning, Augustine is able to convey his central theme of conversion and relate it structurally to his larger concerns of the final book of the *Confessions*, those of the creation of the world by God and the creation of the Church by Christ as God's main instrument on Earth. As Augustine relies heavily on Biblical sources, the structure of Augustine's conversion is based on the Creation narrative in Genesis 1, a technique that he employs to illustrate further his major themes of conversion and creation. When this structure is recognized in his writing, the skill and talent of Augustine as a thinker and as a writer becomes more evident to the reader, and the *Confessions* may be seen as a carefully constructed and well-planned work of literature.

The conversion narrative of St. Augustine, described in Book 8.7-12, can be divided into nine distinctive parts. Each of these steps correlates with the nine stages of the creation of the world and the Church, as described later in Book 13. Augustine's

conversion brings his life from the chaos and confusion of his pagan and sinful past to the order and joy of his Christian future. Likewise, the creation of the world by God brings the formless mass and void of existence to an ordered form. The conversion of Augustine is a new birth for him, a re-creation of his self. His self can be seen as representative of the world, as it undergoes the process of creation. Augustine's personal conversion represents creation on a small and individual level, the creation of the world brings this theme of creation to a communal and wider level, and the creation of the Church, the highest form of existence, brings it to the highest possible level of importance. Augustine has successfully portrayed himself as a microcosm, revealing all that is important to him about God's divine plan through his individual experience of conversion. The structure of this account invites the reader to view him as such and thereby gain knowledge of more important and more universal matters, such as the proper position of the Church in the life of a Christian and the correct path which any person must follow to achieve rest in God.

The nine stages of Augustine's tripartite structure will be examined and explained in this thesis. Each stage of Augustine's personal conversion story will be defined, then related to its corresponding stage in the creation story in Genesis. The relationship of each of the stages of creation to the allegory of the creation of the Church in Book 13 will then be explained. The relationship between Book 8 and Book 13, united through the creation story in Genesis, provides additional support for the argument of the internal structure of this work, the main idea which this thesis is based upon. This textual examination will comprise the majority of this thesis, and it will be comprised of nine numbered sections. Each stage will be dealt with individually in this examination, and

the major themes which arise from this discussion will then be discussed in the next major section of this thesis.

I

The story of conversion told by Ponticianus in Book 8.6 affects Augustine greatly and compels him toward his own conversion. The first stage of his conversion takes place as he hears this story, described in the beginning of Chapter 7. Augustine writes that upon hearing the story, "you, O Lord turned me back upon myself" (8.7.16). He is forced by God to see himself objectively, as if from outside of his own body. As he is "stood face to face with [him]self" (8.7.16), Augustine is able to see the extreme degree of his own sinfulness. His iniquities and sordid past have affected his well being, and he can see physical manifestations of his past in the "stains and sores" covering his face. At this stage in his conversion, he recognizes his sinful nature, but he is still unwilling to change his ways to good ones. He recalls how he had been resistant to conversion in the past, using various excuses in order to continue living with his sinful ways.

At this point, the beginning of his conversion process, faced with the positive and viable alternative of joyous conversion shown to him by Ponticianus, Augustine begins to realize that he can no longer use his former excuses. However, he still wishes not to accept the truth of his situation and attempts to put this vision of disease out of his mind for the time being. The text has a tone of uncertainty at this point, shown in Augustine's self-appraisal that he was "gnawed within [him]self" (8.7.18). This fact illustrates two important points: one, that the young Augustine is wavering on the issue of conversion, and two, that he is undergoing a process, and still requires more development to reach a calm state. He is aware that his attempts to hide his sins from himself will no longer be

successful, as he is being guided by God and has begun the process of conversion. There will be no return to his former state, an outlook which he sums near the end of Chapter 7, as he writes, "All arguments were used up, and all had been refuted" (8.7.18).

This first stage of conversion is related to the first day of the allegory of the Creation story in Book Thirteen, Chapters 12-14. On the first day, God created light and separated the light from the darkness. Augustine correlates this to the first stage in the creation of the Church, as all believing people came out of the darkness of unknowing into the light of Christ and of knowledge. These early members of the Church, the converted Jews, recognized the sinful ways of their past and the promise of redemption and goodness in the Church. The creation of the Church by Christ was a very far-reaching action, as it brought the entire world out from under "the darkness of ignorance" (13.7.13) into the light of understanding available in the Church. Augustine sets up a clear parallel in Book 13 between Christ's command to his followers to "Do penance" (Matthew 4.17) and God's command to "Be light made" (Genesis 1.3), as they both bring order to chaos and both begin a process of creation.

The young Augustine makes this first step, away from the darkness of ignorance, as he recognizes his own sinful past and the possibility of a future goodness with God. He writes that God forced him to see himself, a parallel to God's command that there be light. With this command, and with the effect that self-awareness has on Augustine, it becomes possible for the process of conversion to continue. He is an image of the earth before creation, as his life is currently comparable to the "formless mass" which existed before the act of creation by God. The earth, the early pre-Christian community, and Augustine himself all are compelled by the words of God to enter into the light of true

knowledge and faith, away from ignorance and chaos. Augustine, as he has made clear throughout the *Confessions*, is being acted upon by God, and, even if he resists at times, he still lives out the will of God. He is on an individual journey of conversion, but he is guided by God the entire way.

II

After recognizing his sinful and disfigured state, Augustine turns inward and studies his knowledge of God. He remembers his study of Christianity and philosophy, guided by Ambrose, which led to the conversion of his intellect described in Book Seven. This memory leads him to the second stage of his conversion, his realization of the difference between the two types of knowledge, that of the head and that of the heart, intellect and reason. He discovers that he lacks a knowledge of God with his heart, and that without this all of his intellectual knowledge of Him is useless. He shares this feeling with his friend Alypius, as he describes their true condition and relationship with God. He cries out that "with all our erudition," their knowledge gained from study of philosophers and scripture, they are still "empty of heart" (8.8.19). Inspired by the example of Ponticianus, Augustine realizes that with simple faith one can more easily reach spiritual fulfillment in one instant of reading scripture than in a dozen years of careful intellectual study, which he himself has done as a lover of philosophy. At this point, Augustine knows that he lacks this required faith, a fact also realized by Alypius, not through the words of Augustine, but because of his countenance (8.8.19). His worldly knowledge is acting as a hindrance to his required full acceptance of God into his heart, a fact which he sees present in his community, in the figures of the intellectually

ignorant, yet pious and faithful, common Christian people who “rise up and take heaven by storm”(8.8.19).

This second stage of his conversion reflects the second day of Creation in theme and in images. God separated the waters from the sky just as Augustine separates the two types of knowledge and places one over the other. The water is symbolic of earthly knowledge, his erudition, as it is lower than the sky, which is symbolic of the knowledge of the heart that brings one closer to God. The knowledge symbolized by the sky, the heavens, is the type of knowledge which God’s angels possess. As Augustine relates, the angels do not need to read any written documents to learn God’s will, for they are able to read God’s face and learn all that is necessary. This apparently simple form of knowledge fulfills even the highest of God’s creations, yet Augustine has up to this point been unable to achieve this faith. In his process of conversion, he grows to realize that these two types of knowledge should be ordered correctly, that one type is indeed higher than the other is. This realization and separation is required of the new Christians, as they must look away from the waters of earthly knowledge up to the sky, where true knowledge of the heart exists in company with God and His angels. Augustine also relates these two texts with a memorable image, as he describes the “firmament of Scripture” as “stretched over us like a skin” (13.15.16). This image unites the image of the firmament of the heavens, the sky, which is created over us in Genesis 1:7, and the image of a “skin,” or a scroll, on which the Scripture was written for Augustine to read. In many ways, then, these two texts, Book 8 and Genesis 1, are united.

The conflict between the earthly and the spiritual types of knowledge discussed in this second stage of conversion relates not only to Augustine’s position in Book 8 but

also to the position of the early Christian Church. Augustine realizes that his lifetime of study of rhetoric and his classical education are useless to him with regard to his hopes for spiritual fulfillment. Likewise, the early Christian Church began a tradition that broke away from the classical tradition of Greek and Roman thought. Augustine makes it clear that God prefers simple faith to merely worldly knowledge, and Christians are therefore required to look away from the knowledge available through the traditional pagan sources, the works of classical authors. God has provided the source for this knowledge in the Bible, described by Augustine as “a firmament of authority over us” (13.15.16). Ideally, one must “look upwards” to the heavens, to God’s presence, in order to find fulfillment and “know [His] mercy” (13.15.16). Augustine, as a potential convert, realizes and accepts this, although it does shatter his former image of the nature of knowledge.

III

Immediately following his exclamation to Alypius, Augustine is forced by inner struggle to rush out of the house and into the attached garden. His entrance into the garden marks the third stage in his conversion. A garden is a suitable location for his conversion, as he has already heard of a conversion in a garden in the story of Ponticianus. By choosing the garden as the setting for the conversion, Augustine the writer also invites comparison to the garden in Book 2 of the *Confessions* as well as the Garden of Eden from Genesis. He leaves the house, symbolic of his leaving worldly concerns and intellectual knowledge, and enters the environment of the garden, which symbolically serves as a place outside and above the world, as it is free from the intervention of men. Symbolically, he physically separates the two types of knowledge

which he previously defined by emphasizing the difference between the environment of the house and that of the garden, and he is “hurried out into” the higher state of the garden. This idea, that some higher force is acting on Augustine, reinforces the theme from earlier in the conversion narrative of God’s plan at work. The convert is an active participant in the conversion, but the hand of God scripts the whole event.

This stage of conversion corresponds to the first part of the third day of Creation, on which God separated the land and the water. Just as the sky was placed above the waters in stage two, God also places the land on a higher plane than the water in this stage. The garden in the conversion story is parallel to the refuge of dry land, which God raises up and out of the waters on the third day of creation. This land is described in Book 13 as something which “thirsts after you [God]” (13.17.20). This thirst of the land, although it is surrounded by water, is a paradox which points out that the waters of this world cannot satisfy the thirsts of men. The house in the conversion story is symbolic of the water, as it is filled with worldly pleasures. For Augustine, the waters are the false teachings of Manicheism, which crash upon the shores of Christianity. This contrast is further developed by the traditional and natural symbolism of the water and the land, as the waters are chaotic while the land remains stable and formed. The newly created Church becomes the dry land, the ordered and solid refuge, above the deadly salt waters of Manicheism, which can never provide nourishment for men.

In creating the Church, Christ is providing a refuge from the sinful nature of the world, for those who desire it, in the form of morality rules. These teachings of the Church keep Christians on the correct moral path, even when they are surrounded by the temptations of the world. This action keeps sinners in the “waters” and keeps Christians

safe on the “dry land” of the Church. This image is related in Book 13 as Augustine writes, “You restrain the wicked lusts of souls, and fix limits for them, as to how far the waters may be permitted to go, so that their waves may break upon one another” (13.17.20). By keeping the sinners, those who will not live by the rules of the Church, away from the refuge of dry land, Christ has provided a reward for all those willing to live by His rules. In creating the Church, He has raised up an area of “dry land” out of the “waters” of immorality which has previously covered the earth.

Augustine can only hope to reach his new life as a member of the Church by choosing the higher state, and he does this by rushing to the garden. This may also be compared to the creation of the Church, as the early members have sought higher truths than the heresy present in mainstream society and relief from the pagan cultures which surround them. Augustine symbolically separates himself from his past beliefs in falsehoods, such as Manicheism when he leaves the house and enters the garden. All new members of the Church must act in this same way, yet in reality this action cannot be so easy or decisive a break. Rather, the move into the Church must be one preceded by a conversion of intellect, an experience which Augustine has previously undergone, in Book 7.

IV

After the young Augustine has entered the environment of the garden, the remaining stages in his conversion can proceed. As the difference between the two types of knowledge, reason and intellect, was distinguished in the second stage of his conversion account, the two wills which control the actions of men are now similarly distinguished in this fourth stage. The two wills of men are associated with the flesh and

the spirit by Augustine, and he places the will of the spirit higher than that of the flesh. In the garden, he begins to act in ways which show his inner desires and the conflicts surrounding his wish to know God truly, the physical manifestations of the desires of his body, as "all [his] bones cried out"(8.8.19). He shakes, tears at his hair, and falls to the ground in convulsions. Again, the role of Augustine as a semi-active participant in the conversion process is seen, as some higher force is at work, compelling him towards conversion. These actions are the outward signs of the fourth stage of his conversion, the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, which is evidenced by the "monstrous state"(8.9.21) of his body as it suffers this conflict between higher and lower motives. His bodily actions, although semi-conscious, show his physical desire for God, but his two wills are not yet working in concert. Until this happens, until his life becomes rightly ordered, his two wills will not work as one, and he will be trapped in this state of convulsions and discontinuity.

The second part of the third day of the Creation of the world is reflected in this fourth stage of conversion.¹ God created vegetation as the fourth step of Creation, filling the earth with plants and fruit trees. In the allegory of the creation of the Church, Augustine interprets the vegetation to represent acts of goodness and charity made by early Christians. These actions of charity are created by God's will, reflecting the creative theme of Genesis. This point is clearly made by Augustine as he writes, "By command of you, its Lord God, our soul germinates works of mercy according to its

¹ The third day of creation in Genesis contains two distinct acts, the separation of water and land and the creation of vegetation. Augustine saw these as separate acts, as God sees them individually as "good" in the creation story. Because of this, Augustine treats them separately in Book 13 and in his refiguration of the story in Book 8.

kind” (13.17.21). The desires of the souls and bodies of the early Christians bring forth these good works, signs of their new and ordered state. The earth, represented by the garden, brings forth vegetation just as Augustine’s body produces physical acts of desire and contrition. At this point, however, these acts not those of a Christian, as they are brought about by an involuntary power; Augustine still must undergo a conversion of his soul in order to perform the works worthy of Christian attention willfully, good deeds and acts of charity.

V

The crucial point at which he rejects the sinful ways of his past and accepts the new practices of Christian continence and morality marks the fifth stage of Augustine’s conversion. He describes himself as moving forwards, toward the way “in which [he] had set [his] face” (8.11.27), the way of continence. As he progresses toward the Christian way of living, he knows that he is about to change into something new, a Christian. As he moves forward, he hears the voices of all of his vices in his head, tempting him to return to his past ways and not to travel on to his new life. At an earlier stage in his life, Augustine would not have been able to resist these temptations, but now that he has been through many stages of his conversion, he has the strength of heart to put them aside and continue toward the good. By this stage in his conversion, the will of his spirit has taken control of his actions and it pushes him away from these desires of the flesh. His determination and inner strength, brought on by his journey of conversion and the power of God acting within him, cause these voices of sin to become weaker, softer, and more feeble. Augustine writes of his state at this point and the weakening power of the evil voices, saying “But now by far less than half did I hear them”(8.11.26). He has

grown a great deal in his spiritual life and in his morality, and he is now able to reject sin openly in favor of Christian living.

The fifth stage of the Creation of the world is reflected through images in this fifth stage of Augustine's conversion. This stage correlates to the fourth day, but the fifth act, of the Creation narrative, the creation of the sun, moon, and stars by God. These two stages are united in the image of heavenly bodies, which bring light to the world and allow men to see their way in the world. The angel of Continence is symbolic of the moon, the feminine form, as she reflects all of the light of morality given off by God, while the men, women, and children surrounding the angel are symbolic of the stars in the sky, each one giving off the light of goodness. Augustine sees this light as he responds to the "voice of Continence," and he is able to move out of the darkness of his sinful past, and towards the future light promised in his imminent conversion to Christianity, the path to which he can now see clearly.

In the fifth stage of the creation of the Church described by Augustine, the new members must put aside their old, sinful ways of living and embrace the morality of Christianity. Once they give up their pagan past and follow the Church, these members will become witnesses of their faith and spread Christianity to others through their words and their actions. These members act as evangelists and spread the light of Christ to the whole world by putting the words of Scripture into actions, by fulfilling the commands of Christ to "clothe the naked" and "break bread with the hungry" (13.18.22). Once informed by the light of knowledge, the members of the Church are compelled to spread the Gospel message to all people who remain in the "darkness of ignorance." Augustine uses the image of the cosmos and the night sky to symbolize his view of the evangelical

nature of the Church and its members. He describes the Christians who use their gifts to spread the Gospel as “you holy fires, you beautiful fires!” and explicitly states that “all of them are like stars” (13.19.25).

This theme of “spreading the word” dominates stages five, six, and seven in the creation of the Church; it takes up this large amount of space because of its importance to Augustine. The final command of Christ recorded in the Gospels was to “teach ye all nations; baptizing them” (Matthew 28.19), an order crucially important to the growth of the Church. This is of particular interest to Augustine the author, as he personally spreads the message of Christianity throughout his post-conversion life, not only by his good works and example, but also as a powerful bishop, a leader in the Church. One of Augustine’s main goals in writing the *Confessions* is to spread the Word of Christ to his readers, and he concentrates on this theme in Book 13 clearly and in Book 8 implicitly.

Augustine's moral conversion in this fifth stage is marked by his acceptance of "the voice of Continence." He continues on his inner journey toward the good, and as the voices of sin become mere murmurings, Augustine is faced with a vision of personified morality, as he describes the “chaste dignity of continence” (8.11.27) using feminine terms, creating an image of an angel in the mind of the reader. She radiates love and warmth to him, and men, women, and children who do the same surround her. These souls are the spirits of light who espouse the Christian value of continence. The angel speaks to Augustine and calms his fears about leaving his past behind. She tells him of the goodness and reliability of God, saying, "Have no fear. He will not draw back and let you fall...He will receive you and He will heal you" (8.11.27). Augustine is faced with his greatest choice thus far, and it is clear that he will choose continence and Christian

morality and reject his old ways, which have become mere mumblings when faced with the clear and true voice of goodness.

VI

The sixth stage of Augustine's conversion shows his desire for a clean soul, as he cries out to God and asks for absolution from his sins. He is rejecting the voices of his sins and showing his desire for the goodness of his new life as he cries out to God through his tears and his prayers under the fig tree. His tears are a sign of the power with which the voice of the angel of Continence has touched him and of the sincerity of his present desire to be converted, to find fulfillment in God. His tears are also a symbol of the waters of baptism, a sign that he undergoes a cleansing and purification through his conversion process. His desire to become a Christian in this stage of his conversion will be later fulfilled when he is baptized physically, in Book 9. With the words of his confession at this stage, his crying out to God for forgiveness, Augustine's desire to become a Christian is made clear. Under the fig tree, the young Augustine "gasped forth mournful words," asking God, "Why not in this very hour an end to my uncleanness?" (8.12.28).

The evangelical theme of these crucial stages is also echoed in his actions, as Augustine desires to have a role in spreading the Word of God as a member of the Church, as he is doing in the writing of the *Confessions*. Augustine himself has heard the message of the Gospels from familiar evangelists, most notably his mother, Monica, and his mentor, Ambrose. He himself, as he is now ready and willing to undergo conversion, is an example of the success possible from this process. He has seen the light of God and

is almost ready to make a full conversion, one of intellect and will, of mind and body, of flesh and spirit.

In this thesis, the sixth stage is the weakest point. The textual evidence in this stage alone is not sufficient to be fully convincing in my argument; the connections to Genesis 1 and to the allegory in Book 13 are not fully evident or clear. Further study may find this statement to be false, but I see that work (linguistic or otherwise) as beyond the scope of this project. The general pattern laid out by the other stages, however, is strongly supported by textual and thematic evidence, and I believe that this fact compensates for this weak link and supports my view, that the argument as a whole is very convincing.

On the fifth day of Creation, God created the birds and the sea creatures as his sixth creative act. The main images of the sixth stage of this conversion, the tears of Augustine and the tree under which he cries, may be associated with the birds and sea creatures on a basic level. The tears of Augustine are of salt, a connection to the salt water of the oceans in which the sea creatures live, while the tree provides a home for the birds. More important to Augustine, however, is the imagery that connects this stage to the creation of the Church. The image of the waters of baptism, seen in his tears, is recalled in Augustine's speech to God Book 13, as he writes that the sea "bring[s] forth your works," one of which is to "imbue the nations with your name in baptism" (13.20.26). He relates the image of birds to Christians who spread the Word of Christ, as he describes them as "your messengers, winged creatures above the earth, in the firmament of your book" (13.20.26). Augustine connects the image of the birds, which

“fly over the earth under the firmament of heaven” (Genesis 1.20), with the early evangelists, who spread Christianity throughout the earth under the authority of Scripture.

VII

The dramatic seventh stage of Augustine's conversion, which mirrors the conversion story of Ponticianus, is his recognition of the voice that commands him to read the Word of God in Scripture. As he is weeping under the fig tree, he hears "the voice of a boy or girl" (8.7.29) calling out to him to read from the Bible. He remembers the story of Anthony, who was converted as soon as he read a single verse out of Matthew. Augustine takes the voice as a command from God, and rushes to the codex of Paul's letters that he left near Alypius. It is evident that his progression through his conversion process has enabled him to open his ears and hear the voice, a sign that he is open to the possibility of accepting a new life as a Christian. It is made clear by Augustine the writer that this voice had been calling out to him for his entire life, but up to this point it had been drowned out by the other voices calling to him, those of his many sins, and by his attachment to the world. He has now rejected those voices in favor of the "voice of continence" in the fifth stage of his conversion, and he is ready to hear the only voice that matters, that of God's will.

God created the land animals, as his seventh creative act, on the first part of the sixth day of Creation.² This stage is the last of those that concentrate on evangelization, and Augustine uses the image of "beasts" in Book 13 to describe those to whom the message of God must be spread. He describes those who are not yet Christians as

² As on the third day of the creation story, there are two distinct creative acts by God on the sixth day. God views each of them as "good," and Augustine treats them separately.

ignorant since they follow false teachings. The Christian preachers, through the power and words of God and through their own evangelization practices, are given control over these masses, a reflection of Genesis, in which Man and Woman are given control over the land animals. In the creation of the Church, the early Christians had to spread the Word of God to all people. In order to do this, the early Christians must read and understand the scriptures, and follow the command of God. Once they are familiar with the Gospel message, they will be able to spread it to other people and lands, an action made by the young Augustine as he reads from the Scripture. This command, to read the Scripture, is given by God to all who desire to be Christians and spread their faith, reflected in the command to the young Augustine to “take up and read” (8.7.29).

This seventh stage in the Creation of the Church is one after preaching has begun, as it concerns instruction in the method of preaching. Augustine writes that the early Christian preachers had to act differently from pagan preachers, who commonly spread their message “upon the waters of infidelity by preaching and speaking through miracles and mysteries and mystic words, where ignorance, mother of wonder, is made attentive out of fear” (13.21.30). Rather, Christian preachers are instructed to “be a pattern to the faithful by living before them and by arousing them to imitation” (13.21.30). They are called to live out their faith in their actions, so that not only the Word of God will be spread, but also the pattern of moral behavior. In this way, through proper preaching, “the wild beasts may be tamed, the cattle mastered, and the serpents rendered harmless” (13.21.30), as Augustine cleverly relates the images from Genesis to this stage in the Creation of the Church.

Augustine will be a member of the Church, and so he will also be called upon to spread the Gospel. He will not be able to do this, however, if he does not first read and understand the Word of God. He answers the command of God to read and absorb the Scripture at this point so that he will be able to answer His command to spread this Gospel later in life. By this point, Augustine has opened himself up to the wishes of God and he shows that he is fully prepared to enter into the spiritual community of the Church and become a Christian. He moves smoothly toward the “volume of the apostle” (8.12.29), as his two wills act as one, and he takes up the Scripture. He is physically and mentally ready to absorb the words of the Bible. This is indeed crucial, for once this level of willingness has been attained, the rest of the conversion will come easily.

VIII

The eighth stage of Augustine's conversion marks his re-birth as a member of the community of God. He reads the scripture, a passage from Paul's letter to the Romans, and is overtaken by the power of the light of Christ. Instantly he becomes at peace, and has a “countenance now calm” (8.12.30). This change is notable, as his physical expressions throughout the entire conversion process have as yet been anything but calm. At this point, his conversion process is complete. He has “put on Christ,” as commanded by the words of Paul, and he is instantly fulfilled. In this new state, he rushes to show his friend Alypius, so that he too might experience the grace of Christ and join Augustine in his happiness.

This stage corresponds to the final act of Creation by God, the creation of Man. In this eight stage of the creation narrative, God wishes to create something in His likeness, and so He creates Man and Woman, giving them power over all of the earth. God also

commands them to “Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it” (Genesis 1.28). As Augustine reads and understands the words of Paul, he is converted to Christianity, and this action is viewed as the creation of a new person. The old Augustine has been cast off, and a new Christian Augustine has been created. As God has led this entire process, the parallel with Genesis is clear, and the young Augustine functions a figure of Adam. He is now “in God’s image,” and will become a member of the Church in order to have “dominion” over “the whole earth” (Genesis 1.26). Through his conversion, God has blessed Augustine, as He blessed Adam and Eve. The relevant imagery is also present in the fact that this conversion takes place in a garden, the same setting in which Man and Woman were created.

As Augustine accepts the grace of Christ at this stage, he gains the redemption which Christ brought to His people. This image, based in the writings of Paul, of Christ as redeemer, is especially relevant to Augustine as he writes of his experience. As this conversion occurs in a garden, it illustrates the Pauline idea that Christ serves as a new Adam. As the sins of Augustine are redeemed by the grace of his conversion, so have the sins of Adam been redeemed by Christ’s death and resurrection. Paul clearly demonstrates this allegory, as he refers to Adam as “a figure of him who was to come” (Romans 5.14). Paul goes on to complete the allegory, writing, “For if by one man’s offence death reigned through one; much more they who receive abundance of grace, and of the gift, and of justice, shall reign in life through one, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5.17). Augustine, through the salvation offered to all by Christ, has at this point gained the peace which he has sought for all of his life.

Augustine skillfully relates this stage of creation to the Creation of the Church in Book 13. He uses many phrases and images from Genesis to discuss the physical creation of the Church, relying mainly on the traditional image of the Church as the “body of Christ.” This “body,” created by Christ “in his own image,” does indeed have power over the whole earth, as it performs the will of God on earth. The roots of this image of the Church as a body are found, of course, in the writings of Paul, as he addresses the early members of the Church, writing, “So we being many, are one body in Christ” (Romans 12.5). Paul goes on to explain the image of the Church as a body in his Letter to the Corinthians, writing, “For as the body is one, and hath many members; and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also *is* Christ. For in one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free; and in one spirit we have all been made to drink” (Corinthians 12.12-13). As an administrative body, the Church has the duty to “judge and approve” (13.23.34) the actions of men. This duty was a stage in the growth of the Church, as it gained judicial authority in the Roman world. Also, the formalization of duties of the Church is discussed, as the “sacramental administration” (13.23.34) is assumed by the Church as a way of carrying out God’s will. Finally, Augustine writes of another duty of the Church, one which he was currently doing, namely, “interpreting, expounding, discoursing” (13.23.34) the words of Scripture for the common people so that they might understand more about their faith. In short, Augustine relates this stage of the story in Genesis, the creation of Man and Woman, to the historical act of the physical creation of the body of the Church.

The Church is the body of God on earth, and the two men, Augustine and Alypius, symbolically create this body at this stage through the act of sharing the Word of God. Augustine will be given a new life by his membership in the Church, and this life is created just as God created the first life, Adam. As these two men symbolically create the Church, they reflect the power given to men by God to baptize others and create more Christians, spreading the Word of God through the Sacraments. The acceptance of the Word by Alypius is symbolic of the creation of the Church, a community of believers who make up the earthly body of Christ. Augustine acts a witness for Christ and spreads the Gospel to Alypius. He reads for himself and is also overtaken with the power that attracted Augustine. Together, these two men symbolically form a Church, as they will work together to spread the Word of Christ to others in their community.

IX

The final stage in the conversion of Augustine is a stage of rest, of enjoyment of the state of grace to which his conversion has brought him. He and Alypius rush to tell his mother, Monica, of the conversion, and she responds with great joy and praises God for his good works. She sees that God has answered her prayers in a more abundant way than she had ever hoped for, making her son into a true man of God and bringing her spiritual fulfillment. These gifts of the soul are far greater than any worldly gifts that she could have received, greater even than her hope of grandchildren from Augustine. These three people, Augustine, Alypius, and Monica, are all in a state of joy and rest at the end of Augustine's process of conversion.

The final stage of Creation is reflected in this state of conversion, as God rested on the seventh day. The work of conversion has been completed, a state of grace has

descended upon Augustine, and all that is left to do is to rest and enjoy the goodness of the conversion. He finds personal rest in the fulfillment given to him in the Scripture and also in the comfort of the companionship of his friend and the joy of his mother.

Augustine can now look back on the process of his conversion, as God looked upon the earth, and see that it was all “very good” (Genesis 1.31). At this point, satisfaction for Augustine lies in the simple joy of rest.

This state of rest is also seen in the final stage of the creation of the Church, which has not yet been reached. When all of the people in the world have been exposed to the Good News and everyone has been baptized, there will actually be one Holy Catholic Church. This is the goal of the early founders and leaders of the Church and also the goal of God, as He created the world in order to produce the Church. For Augustine, this joy of rest also exists on an individual level, an experience which he discusses in Book 13 through his prayers to God for the eternal rest promised for Christians in heaven. He calls on God to provide “the peace of rest, the peace of the sabbath, the peace without an evening” (13.35.50). He ends the whole of the *Confessions* with these wishes, a sign of their importance, and a sign that they are the goal of his life as a Christian. Augustine ends his work with this calm and relaxed tone, just as he ends his conversion account in Book 8 in this quiet and peaceful manner.

Part III: Importance

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Augustine illustrates the major themes of the *Confessions*, conversion and creation, in the account of his conversion and through the structure of that story. Because of the great deal of planning put into this literary work, it is evident that these themes are of great importance to Augustine the writer. Book 8 mainly concerns the conversion of the young Augustine, or rather, his re-creation as a Christian, a new state of being for him. Book 13 mainly concerns the exegesis of Genesis 1, the creation of the world, and Augustine's relation of this to the creation of the Church. There is a strong connection between these two major concerns, these two themes of creation, and this illustrates the fact that Augustine saw a great deal of importance in this relationship, not only for himself but also for his readers. By portraying himself in the figure of the young Augustine as a symbol of the Church as he undergoes the process of re-creation, he emphasizes the process of creation by God with regards to the Church and further shows how God has guided his personal conversion.

Augustine uses the figure of himself to symbolize the process of creation by God on an individual and personal level. This effect is sought for the sake of the common reader of his book, one who could enjoy the narrative section of the life of the young Augustine, identify with his struggles as a man, and witness and appreciate his dramatic conversion without becoming intellectually bogged down by the more complex and difficult philosophical second half of the *Confessions*. Augustine, as a writer and Church leader, has successfully compressed his major themes and contained them within a few short chapters describing his conversion. In this way, his key ideas are available to all of

his readers in compact and memorable form, and his book is successful in spreading his message of conversion guided by God.

Augustine's major message in the final Book of the *Confessions* is the high importance of the Church as God's main instrument on earth. He also emphasizes that the ideal role of Christians in this life is to serve the Church and witness to the message of Christ, fulfilling their duty as a part of God's divine plan. With his exegesis of Genesis 1, Augustine relates the creation of the world by God to the creation of the Church by Christ with a point-by-point comparison of historical events and stages of creation. With this relationship, he is pointing out both the eternal significance of the Church and the divine influence present in its creation. The importance of the Church is made clear in the final Books; it is repeatedly viewed as central in God's plan of salvation and as a refuge from a world full of heresy, base desires, and unfulfilled individuals. Augustine views the Church as the only way for all people to grow closer to God and to achieve the "rest" sought from the first chapter of the *Confessions*. In the instrument of the Church, Augustine finds the one true way for people to gain spiritual fulfillment, sought by him in his younger life as a pagan and sought by many like him in the world in which he lived.

The Church was of supreme importance to Augustine in his life after his personal conversion. He uses the medium of Book 13 to show just how important it is because, for him, the Church was something new and not fully established. Augustine, as a bishop, writes Book 13 to justify the existence of the Church as an institution set up by God Himself, a fact which separates it from the other religious sects gaining popularity at this time. Augustine lived in late fourth-century North Africa, surrounded by various

pagan cultures and heretical movements. To distinguish the movement of Christianity and the Church, of which he was a part, he applied his skills as a rhetorician and as a literary interpreter in order to produce many works which supported the message of the Church. In the *Confessions*, he chooses to concentrate on the theme of creation and justifies the Church as a part of God's divine plan for creation, as a part of the plan of which he himself was also a component.

This thesis proposes that Augustine also relates the creation of the world and of the Church to his personal conversion recorded in Book 8. By doing this, he is extending the importance which he has already given to the two acts of creation to his personal conversion to Christianity. He accomplishes this in a number of ways. First, the process of conversion can be viewed as also one of creation, as a new Christian is being created out of a disordered and ignorant soul, and at the end of the process something exists which did not exist previously. Secondly, he emphasizes the role of God in this process, as he recalls the commands of God while creating the earth and the commands of Christ while creating the Church and also views himself as a recipient of God's will and a passive participant in his own conversion. And thirdly, the end product of the conversion process, a new Christian, is something which is seen to be "very good," to echo Genesis, and this goal is important for Augustine the bishop and teacher, acting as a good Christian, and hoping to influence his readers with his story of conversion.

Augustine's conversion is thus easily seen as related to the process of creation. Although a dramatic stage exists, when he reads from Paul and "Instantly...all of the dark shadows of doubt fled away" (8.12.29), this is only a part of a larger process. Each stage is important and necessary, and they build upon one another. For example, the young

Augustine must reject the vices of his past and take on the virtue of Continence before he can hear the call to “take up and read,” as the former temptations clouded his mind and kept him ignorant of his true calling. This process of growth is laid out in order to reflect the process of creation of the world, as dry land must appear before vegetation may grow on it, or the process of the creation of the church, as Scripture must be written down before the words may be spread to other peoples. In this basic way, the three processes of creation may be related in the fact that they build upon themselves and produce unique and original results.

The action of God also unites these three creation stories. Augustine constantly portrays himself as being acted upon by an outside force throughout his process of conversion. He does not intentionally enter the garden to undergo his conversion, but rather he is guided by urges which come from outside himself. God reached out to the young Augustine when he was covered over by the ignorance of his pre-Christian state and brought order to his life. Even the crucial point, the reading of the Scriptures, is reached because he hears “the voice of a child” command him to do what God wills for him. This outside force, the external will of God in control of the process, is directly evident in the creation of the world in Genesis 1, as God directly commands the world to be created in six days. This aspect is also present in the creation of the Church discussed by Augustine, as he shows how the will of God is carried out through Christ and the Holy Spirit. This relationship is illustrated in the exegesis most clearly when Augustine points out the parallel between the command by God in Genesis 1, “Be light made,” and the command by Christ in the gospel of Matthew, “Do penance” (13.12.13). The three

creation stories are united as a part of God's divine plan, further linking them through theme.

The end result of each of these three processes is something which is seen as "very good" by God and also by Augustine. Each creation results in something worthy of praise, and they are united by their end products. Augustine's conversion ends with the creation of a new Christian and a valuable addition to the Church. As this is a part of God's plan, He sees the creation of a new Christian soul as good. And for Augustine the bishop, looking back on his past life, he views his conversion as the most important thing in his life, the thing which brought him to his present state, and therefore, something "very good." The creation of the world in Genesis 1 records the thoughts of God as he viewed each stage, when he saw what he created to be good. God sees the final product, the entire world, all of the things that he had made, as "very good" on the eve of the sixth day. (Genesis 1.31) And the Church, which Augustine views as the most important thing possible, is obviously seen by him and by God as something which is "very good," as it allows the work of God to be done on earth.

This relationship between these three stories of creation with regards to theme further illustrates the structural relationship between Book 8 and Book 13 which Augustine has created in order to highlight the importance which he sees in his conversion. He has compacted the plans of God into the story of his personal conversion, which shows the importance with which he views his account of the event. But surely if he put this much effort into constructing this conversion account it must have some great importance to Augustine at the point in his life when he is writing it down. He is not simply writing the story of his young life and of his conversion for his own memory, or

even as a part of a prayer to God. Rather, as a prominent bishop in Hippo in a time when the Church was fighting the Pagan and heretical influences of the outside world, he has a more practical reason for writing the *Confessions*. And he gives this reason clearly and briefly in Book 2:

To who do I tell these things? [His past] Not to you, my God, but before you I tell them to my own kind, to mankind, or to whatever small part of it may come upon these books of mine. Why do I tell these things? It is that I myself and whoever else reads them may realize from what great depths we must cry unto you. (2.3.5)

From this admission, it is easy to see that Augustine's work is directed towards one goal, that is, to influence his readers to turn away from sin and towards God. He is not writing in order to praise God, but to help himself and his readers, the others of his "own kind," an echo of Genesis. He sees his action of writing his story as a part of the evangelical role which he has been called by God to fill. Because of this reason, his effort in clarifying his message through thematic and structural means may be seen as clearly intentional and important to him.

Yet Augustine was, for all his humility, a great intellect. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, he sought order in his own life as a Neo-Platonist. Reflecting on the most important experience of his life ten years after it occurred, his conversion, he naturally looks for the involvement of God in the event. He seeks this involvement in order to view his life as a part of God's plan for creation. Augustine, as a scholar and literary master, finds all of these desires fulfilled in his use of the creation story of Genesis 1 for the story of his own autobiography. He adopts the structure of the story for his conversion account and is thus able to view his life as a part of God's design. This

action surely gave him a great deal of personal satisfaction and a sense of order in his own life.

Further support for the main argument of this thesis, that the *Confessions* does indeed have an intentional form, can be found in the historical background of the work, the environment in which Augustine composed the book. As a former professor of rhetoric and a man who was a part of the main intellectual circles of his day, Augustine was aware of the intellectual appeal of a complex literary work. It seems fitting, then, that in his own autobiography he would seek to create something of this complex nature. In recognizing this, however, a more important point arises, namely, that Augustine was attempting to justify his Christianity to the pagan intellectual elite of which he had formerly been a member. And he had already begun this process, on a literary level, with the writing of *On Christian Doctrine* one year earlier.

In *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine presents his method for reading Scripture based on allegory. In Book 13 of the *Confessions*, he puts this method into practice. With this process, he effectively makes the Bible able to be viewed on the same level as classical texts with regards to their complexity and levels of meaning. He is providing, as a teacher, a Christian alternative to Pagan scholasticism by placing the Bible on the same level as classical works with regard to its layers of meaning, yet on a higher level with regard to its subject matter. He viewed the Bible as “veiled by God,” and believed that one who wished to could gain much from close reading of the Scripture, as they would understand much by diffusing the allegorical sense from the literal.¹ In this way, Book 13 is a teaching text, relating Augustine’s thoughts on the Creation of the Church to his

¹ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, (Berkeley, 1967), 261.

readers. He follows the example of St. Paul in reading the Old Testament allegorically for the sake of his audience, as both Paul and Augustine are acting as evangelists.

With this established view, it is easy to see that Augustine was writing to fulfill a personal plan. He models his own work on that of St. Paul in his interpretation in Book 13, and he models his own work on Genesis 1 in Book 8. He is attempting to write a story of himself which contains different layers of meaning. Just as Genesis 1 contains the allegory of the Creation of the Church, so Augustine's conversion account contains this allegory. With this point made, the main argument of this thesis is made clear: in the *Confessions* Augustine's life, or more specifically, his conversion, fits into God's divine plan in a deeper way than has been previously noticed. By modeling his conversion account on the story of the creation of the Church and the World, Augustine sees his own life as a reflection of these higher creations and as a part of this ordered chain of existence. With his background and his belief that the Bible contains many different levels of meaning, it seems natural that he would create a story of himself which contained many different levels of meaning. And he does so, in what he sees as the most important story of his life, his conversion account.

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