Augustinian Perspectives in the Renaissance

The study investigates four areas in which the Augustinian presence was felt throughout the Renaissance: psychology, epistemology, the arts, and politics (one chapter is dedicated to each area). Augustine's intellectual and spiritual development is interpreted as consisting of an early Plotinian period (ca. 386–396), and a later Pauline period (ca. 386–430). These influences resulted in two partially contradictory perspectives: one predominantly vertical (incorporeal and a-historical), the other more horizontal (taking into account the vicissitudes of time and history). The argument of the study is that the Plotinian and Pauline paradigms influenced the Renaissance in different ways, traceable in its literature. Without pretending comprehensiveness, the study follows a rough chronological outline. After an introduction that investigates Augustine's development, the first chapter centers on Petrarch while the last three have Edmund Spenser as their special focus. Chapters two and four have a broader perspective that in addition to Spenser take in seminal thinkers from Ficino and Luther to Greville and Hooker.
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ABSTRACT


The study investigates four areas in which the Augustinian presence was felt throughout the Renaissance: psychology, epistemology, the arts, and politics (one chapter is dedicated to each area). Augustine’s intellectual and spiritual development is interpreted as consisting of an early Plotinian period (ca. 386-396), and a later Pauline period (ca. 386-430). These influences resulted in two partially contradictory perspectives: one predominantly vertical (incorporeal and a-historical), the other more horizontal (taking into account the vicissitudes of time and history). The argument of the study is that the Plotinian and Pauline paradigms influenced the Renaissance in different ways, traceable in its literature. Without pretending comprehensiveness, the study follows a rough chronological outline. After an introduction that investigates Augustine’s development, the first chapter centers on Petrarch while the last three have Edmund Spenser as their special focus. Chapters two and four have a broader perspective that in addition to Spenser take in seminal thinkers from Ficino and Luther to Greville and Hooker.

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Acknowledgments

The making of a study like this is a long and at times confusing process, and relies on many helping hands. I have been intrigued by St Augustine for almost two decades, and some of that interest was channeled into my dissertation on Sir Philip Sidney, published in 1989. The present book had its genesis in an essay (now forming the second half of chapter 3), yet it received its overall shape during a research leave at the University of North Carolina in the fall of 1991 and spring of '92. Thanks to a generous grant from the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation I could spend many a stimulating hour poring over books at the Davis Library in Chapel Hill. The igniting spark, though, came not from a printed book but from a work-in-progress manuscript: S.K. Heninger, Jr. asked me to read what was to become The Subtext of Forn in the English Renaissance. While I had very little to add to his study, it triggered in my mind the importance of a basic dichotomy between an "early Plotinian" and a "late Pauline" Augustine, a dichotomy which had influenced the Renaissance in different and complex ways. As this initial insight developed, Tim Heninger has remained a trusted and valuable critical reader of the various essays and chapters that gradually coalesced into the present book.

Several of these essays are in print, and I want to thank the following journals for permission to use published material in revised and expanded form: *English Literary Renaissance, SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500–1900, Studies in Philology, The Sixteenth Century Journal, and Connotations*. As part of the process of publication I have also received many useful suggestions from several (to me) anonymous readers. Thank you! In addition to these unknown helpers I am especially grateful to Arthur F. Kinney for his general support, and to Sara Sturm-Maddox for her expert suggestions on my Petrarch chapters. Other careful readers include Inge Leimberg and Roger D. Sell. A special *gracias* to Henrik Vitalis from the Uppsala classics department.
for his invaluable help with the Latin. Like Marvin Gaye, however, I can be a stubborn kind of fellow, and therefore assume full responsibility for any errors or infelicities still left.

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Last but not least, this book (as so many other valuable things in my life) would never have come to fruition without the loving and caring support of my wife Rose.

Karlstad, October 2001

Á.B.

Abbreviations

WORKS BY AUGUSTINE SERIES

AGW
Ancient Christian Writers (Westminster, 1946-)

CCSL
Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Turnholt, 1954-)

CSEL
Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna, 1866-)

FOTC
The Fathers of the Church (New York, 1948-)

LCC

EDITIONS (LATIN AND ENGLISH)

Conf.

C. Acad.

De Civ. Dei

De Dialec.

De Doctr. Ch.

De Gen. e. M.

De Div. Q.

De Lib. Arb.

De Mag.

De Mus.
Introduction
The Augustinian Perspectives

How know we that saint Augustine (which is the best or one of the best that ever wrot upon the scripture) wrot many things amisse at the begynnynge / as many other doctors doo? Verely by the scriptures / as he him selve well perceived afterwarte when he loket moare diligently upon them / and revoket many thynges agayne. He wrot of many thynges which he vnderstoode not when he was newly converted / yer he had thorowly sene the scriptures / and followed the opinions of Plato and the commune persuasions of mans wisdome that were then famous.

—William Tyndale

I

St. Augustine, the fifth-century Church Father, cast a long shadow over early modern Europe, inspiring and troubling writers from Petrarch to Spenser. Faced with the newly discovered treasures of classical thought, poets and humanists, who with a few exceptions took their religion seriously, needed guidance in how to deal with the non-Christian heritage. Many felt that the Schoolmen with their arid logic were no longer adequate. Following Petrarch’s lead, the humanists instead returned to the rhetorically trained patristic authors who had developed strategies for interaction with the surrounding pagan culture and thus could provide patterns for study and emulation.² “The Church Fathers,” concludes Charles Trinkaus, “provided the frame within which renaissance humanists in great preponderance viewed

¹ William Tyndale, The obedience of a Christen man (Antwerp, 1529), fol. 16v.
the antique past. As a result, the original writings of the Fathers, perceived by the humanists as "classical" texts, gradually supplanted the redactions and compendia provided by Peter Lombard and others. The eastern Fathers were translated into Latin or studied in the original Greek, while new editions of the Latin Fathers were published at an increasing pace. Augustine played an especially exciting part in the early history of printing, so much so that by the sixteenth century more students and teachers at Cambridge University owned books written by him than by Plato or Calvin, not to speak of Ficino.

The list of seminal writers whose thought was profoundly shaped by Augustine is long indeed. Even a partial inventory (with an English bias) would include names such as Petrarch, Salutati, Valla, Ficino, both Picos, Erasmus, Vives, More, Colet, Fisher, Luther, Melanchthon, Calvin, Sidney, Spenser, Donne, Herbert, Milton—not to speak of the countless writers who show only intermittent interest. Not that any of these slavishly copied Augustine or agreed with him in everything. The point of this study is precisely to show how those authors most influenced by Augustine could differ greatly with each other and, on occasion, with uncongenial aspects of the Father's thought. If the Renaissance saw Augustine as a guide, it mattered tremendously which Augustine it sought. Instead of talking about some all-encompassing "Augustinianism," we must learn to distinguish between several quite distinct Augustinian strains.

The need for a more discerning approach stems from the growing realization among patristic scholars that during his more than forty years of incessant writing, Augustine changed his views and indeed his complete outlook on some fundamental issues. He was himself frank about the process. "I endeavor to be one of those," he confesses in a letter, "who write because they have made some progress, and who, by means of writing, make further progress" (Epist. 143.2). In the prologue to the Retractations, a survey of all his published works written towards the end of his life, Augustine warns readers about what he now considers errors in his early thought. To better follow his development, he suggests we read his books in chronological order:

5 The very first Italian incunabulum was a 1467 Subiaco edition of De Cui. Dei, while the fourth book of De Doct. Cha, entitled De arte practicandi, had been printed in Strasbourg the same year. The first to appear in England was followed by the De Cui. Dei in 1469. Pride of place among early Augustinian publishers is taken by John Amherbach of Basle, who in 1499–97 published an edition consisting of the Sermones, the Epist., and the De Cui. Dei, and in 1506 was the first to publish the complete Opera omnia, an edition even more important than that of Erasmus, whose Froben Opera (also Basle) came out in 1528–29. In addition to various reprints and pirated versions, the other big sixteenth-century edition of Augustine was published by Plantin in Louvain in 1576–77, providing the copy-text for numerous later editions. For the printing history of these early Augustinian editions, see Joseph de Ghellinck, SJ., Patristique et Moyen Age, vol. 3 (Brussels: Edition Universelle, 1948), pp. 366–405. To this complete edition, we shall also add the widely used patristic anthologies, in which Augustine accounts for some two thirds of the total number of entries. At least six anthologies, four of which were Protestant, were dedicated to Augustine alone. The Protestant anthologies were Johann Fiscator's three-volume Omnium operum dicis Augustini opera (1587, and six later editions); Erasmi Sacertiius's Przepiszcwa sacre scripturae communis loci (1593), as well as his shorter De consensu veriae ecclesiastica et patrum (1540, and two other later editions); vol. 1 of Jean Crespin's three-volume Bibliotheca studii theologici (1565). Two others were Catholic: Sebastian Ammianus's Collectanea cataleae ex duci Augustini diecit (1585, and one later edition), and the reprint of Bartholomew Ursimbate's 14th-century Ducis Aurelii Augustini millesiquinquaginta veritate (1555). On these anthologies, see Anthony N.S. Lane, "Justification in Sixteenth-Century Patristic Anthologies," in Auctores Patrum: Contributions on the Reception of the Church Fathers in the 15th and 16th Century, ed. Lel Frane, Alfred Schindler and Markus Widrart (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1993): 69–95.

6 The mandatory sixteenth-century inventories (consisting mainly of book titles) made for deceased persons within the jurisdiction of Cambridge University, compiled and studied by E.S. Leedham Green, present a clear picture. While Augustine was among the top ten authors (41% of the 16th century inventories contain at least one of his works), we find Plato in the company of Luther at about half that figure (22%, trailing Calvin at 26%), while Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola do not reach even double digit figures. Excluding the writers of the Bible, only five authors were more widely owned than Augustine: Erasmus (by an amazing 73%), Cicero (99%), Aristotle (90%), Melanchthon (50%), and Chrysostom (49%). See Leedham Green, Romanesque Cambridge: A Survey of Libraries, 1200–1500, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986). While Leedham Green lists 200 inventories made from 1533 to 1760, I have based my computations on the 176 inventories made in the sixteenth century. The library catalogues at Cambridge underscore the Augustinian dominance; consult "Augustine" in H.M. Adams, Catalogue of Books Printed on the Continent of Europe, 1501–1600 in Cambridge Libraries, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967).

7... qui proficisciens scribunt et scribendum proficiunt..."
Let those, therefore, who are going to read this book not imitate me when I err, but rather when I progress toward the better. For, perhaps, one who reads my books in the order in which they were written will find out how I progressed while writing. (Prologue to Retr.)

While many renaissance writers seem unaware of the complexity of Augustine’s thought, others, however, were aware of his changing outlook, as is clearly seen in William Tyndale’s comment in the epigraph above. The Protestant Reformers, who saw themselves as Augustine’s direct heirs, were particularly conscious of his shift of focus, yet they were by no means the only ones to recognize it. Recognition, however, did not necessarily translate into consent. While Luther and Calvin held to the late anti-Pelagian bishop, some Catholic writers because of the Reformation gravitated towards the young Augustine. Yet if the Reformation highlighted the Augustinian tensions, Petrarch already had struggled to reconcile them, while others had aligned themselves squarely with either the young neoplatonic convert or the elder bishop. Ficino is a good example of the first category while Erasmus preferred the mature Augustine, brushing aside the early dialogues in which the Father “boasts with youthful conceit of any smattering of philosophy he had acquired.” In whichever direction their preferences led them, renaissance writers appropriated the “Augustine” that suited them best.

II

In our own time patristic scholars have sometimes ignored Augustine’s own pointers towards a diachronic interpretation of his writings and have instead presented his views as a seamless synchronic system. Yet in recent years there has been a greater stress on the development, sometimes discontinuity, of Augustine’s thought: “It is now generally accepted that Augustine himself must be studied as a man whose thought changed and developed over the years from his conversion through the many diverse controversies until the final revision of his works.” In particular, many scholars now distinguish between an earlier period, the years between his conversion in Milan in 386 and entering the priesthood in 391 (followed by his consecration as a bishop in 396), and the long ecclesiastical career, right up to his death in 430. Not that we have two clear-cut periods separated by some cataclysmic event. Prodded by external circumstances or internal convictions, Augustine’s exploring mind discarded or revised old assumptions throughout his life. Becoming the shepherd of souls, though, quickened the pace of change by radically changing the context for his thought. Being thrust into the active life of a churchman, he had to deal with the spiritual and social needs of a largely uneducated church.

Between 386 and 391, however, he had dedicated his life to a more philosophical pursuit, seeking God through solitary contemplation or in the conducive environment of a select circle of friends. At Cassiciacum, a peaceful country villa near Milan, he had most nearly realized his philosophic aspirations by gathering a select group (including his...
mother Monica and his son Adeodatus) to explore the nature of God and the soul.\textsuperscript{13} Augustine transcribed and edited these conversations in the form of Platonic dialogues—indeed, not so much by Plato as by the neoplatonism of Plotinus.\textsuperscript{14} Indeed, neoplatonic writings (some of the earlier essays from Plotinus’ Enneads and possibly some works of Plotinus’ disciple Porphyry)\textsuperscript{17} had been instrumental in releasing Augustine from the materialistic dualism of the Manichees. These works “stirred up an incredible conflagration” (C. Acad. 2.2.5)\textsuperscript{18} as they helped him resolve long-standing doubts concerning the nature of evil and the non-corporeality of the soul. Another result, however, was to steer him back to the Catholic faith of his youth:

Swiftly did I begin to return entirely to myself. Actually, all that I did—let me admit it—was to look back from the end of a journey, as it were, to that religion which is implanted in us in our childhood days and bound up in the marrow of our bones. . . . Therefore, stumbling, hastening, yet with hesitation I seized the Apostle Paul. (C. Acad. 2.2.5)\textsuperscript{19}

Plotinus led Augustine to St. Paul! To us the two seem unlikely bedfellows, but the Christian intelligentsia of Milan felt differently. Not only were Plotinus and Paul compatible, but they proclaimed the same message: by leaving the things of this world and turning within, one can return to the heavenly fatherland.

To the new convert, Paul was therefore in general agreement with Plotinus’ On Beauty.

We must ascend again to the good, which every soul desires. . . . The attainment of it is for those who go up to the higher world and are converted and strip off what we put on in our descent; . . . until, passing in the ascent all that is alien to the God, one sees with one’s self alone. That alone, single and pure, from which all depends and to which all look and are and live and think: for it is the cause of life and mind and being.\textsuperscript{20}

For Plotinus, that “stripping off” meant a turning inwards (which Augustine found congenial):

Let him who can, follow and come within, and leave outside the sight of his eyes and not turn back to the bodily splendours which he saw before. When he sees the beauty in bodies he must not run after them; we must know that they are images, traces, shadows, and hurry away to that which they image. For if a man runs to the image and wants to seize it as if it was the reality . . . then this man who clings to beautiful bodies and will not let them go, will . . . sink down into the dark depths where intellect has no delight, and stay blind in Hades, consorting with shadows there and here.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{13} Rist affirms that “our three signposts (conversion in 386, ordination to the priesthood in 391 and the reply to Simplicianus in 396 [the year of the ordination to bishop]) are indispensable, and the evidence for them is easily discovered in Augustine’s own text. But important changes,” he adds, “in both the broad substance and the more minor details of Augustine’s thought continued well after 396” (p. 15). Even a thematic study like Isabelle Bochet’s Saint Augustin et le Désir de Dieu (Paris: Écoutes Augustiniennes, 1982) distinguishes between the two periods (p. 17), and limits her study to Augustine the bishop. My brief survey of Augustine’s development is indebted to Peter Brown’s excellent biographical study, Augustine of Hippo (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), and R.A. Markus, Sacerdotium: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970). I have also benefited from Brian Stock, Augustine the Reader (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996), as well as Carol Harrison, Beauty and Revulsion in the Thought of Saint Augustine (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), and Robert O’Connell’s “trilogy”: St. Augustine’s Early Theory of Man, A. D. 386–391 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), St. Augustine’s Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1989), and The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine’s Later Works (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1987). While both Harrison and O’Connell give detailed accounts of Augustine’s changes, the first tends to read the views of the mature bishop into the works of the young convert, while the second, in his single-minded attempt to prove that Augustine retained a neoplatonic belief in the pre-existence of the soul, does the opposite.

\textsuperscript{14} See De Ord. 2.18.47 and the Soliloquies 1.2.7.

\textsuperscript{17} There has been a heated discussion about whether Augustine’s initial conversion was Christian or, in a first stage, only Platonio. But, according to Frederick Van Fleteren, “Out of this discussion has come an almost universal agreement that: (1) Augustine’s conversion to Christianity was sincere insofar as he, a Christian neophyte, understood the faith it was about to embrace; (2) Augustine was converted to a kind of Neoplatonic Christianity which was in the air in Milan in the ninth decade of the fourth century; (3) both Plotinus and Porphyry influenced his conversion” (“St. Augustine’s Theology of Conversion,” in Augustine: Second Founder of the Faith, ed. Joseph C. Schnabel and Frederick Van Fleteren [New York: Peter Lang, 1990], p. 65).

\textsuperscript{18} There has been an ongoing debate since the early decades of this century as to whether Augustine was primarily influenced by Plotinus or by Porphyry. Of more recent participants, John O’Meara (followed by Frederick Van Fleteren and others) has supported the Porphyrian connection while Robert O’Connell has vigorously defended the Plotinian cause. Today the general consensus seems to be that Augustine was first introduced to a Latin translation of certain essays in Plotinus’ Enneads (1.6 [On Beauty], 4.8 [On the Descent of the Soul into the Body], and 5.1 [On the Three Divine Hypostases]) are the ones suggested by Rist, p. 5), while the dating of his first contact with Porphyry’s The Return of the Soul (now lost, apart from certain passages salvaged by quotation in De Civ. Dei) is uncertain. For a discussion of this topic see Porphyrii propherar Hetaian akriphi apostulon Paulum a. The same order of events is recalled ten years later in Conf. 7.21.27 and 8.12.29.


\textsuperscript{20} Plotinus, On Beauty 8.
When Augustine gathered some of his best friends at Cassiciacum to discuss God and the soul, passages such as these were very much on his mind. He was suspicious of the body (with its troublesome sexuality) and the physical world in general; indeed, with Plotinus he seemed to perceive the soul as being fallen from some unsullied original state into the prison-house of the body. This Fall into the body was a punishment for the original sin of pride, which the soul had committed before entering the body. The soul’s return to God consequently meant discarding the body in order to regain the purity of the original blissful state.

Augustine was able to ferret out verses from Paul’s epistles, which he had taken with him to Cassiciacum, to support these teachings from the Enneads. There undoubtedly are Pauline passages susceptible to Platonic interpretation, especially if read out of context: Paul’s admonishment in Colossians 3: 2 to “set your minds on things above, not on earthly things,” for example, or the report in 2 Corinthians 12 of how the Apostle, not unlike Plotinus, had been “caught up to the third heaven.” And Augustine could easily have misconstrued Paul’s “if you live according to the flesh, you shall die” in a Platonist light. Yet the verse that spoke most clearly of the concord between the Platonic and the biblical traditions, thereby justifying the Platinian ascent, was Romans 1: 20: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—has been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.”

The young convert therefore came to believe that Paul supported a vertical and hierarchical perspective. The corporeal creation was seen as a prison-house for a soul that must strive to rid itself of everything earthly in order to ascend to the unity of the One. While Augustine saw the created universe as a graded order, beautiful in its symmetry, his focus was on the Platonic realm of “being,” the intelligible world that he conflated with the Kingdom of God. The hierarchical order was not so much a description of the universe as a ladder on which to ascend. God’s “invisible qualities” permeated the sensible world by way of mathematical ratios, which could be abstracted by the wise man into the timeless forms of the intelligible world. The return to the heavenly kingdom was therefore an intellectual undertaking guided by the arithmetic certainties of pure number. Accordingly, book six of On Music, with its mixture of Plotinian dogma and Pythagorean numerology, in the words of the Retractions sought to demonstrate “how, from corporeal and spiritual but changeable numbers, one comes to the knowledge of unchangeable numbers which are already in unchangeable truth itself” (Retr. 1.11.1).

While the young Augustine stressed mathematical certainties, he was caught in the old Platonic dilemma of having to conceptualize the transcendent in human categories, even if that meant beginning with fallible sense impressions or an imprecise language that was ultimately to be discarded for pure number. In the dialogue On Order he spelled out a program of liberal studies that would purify the mind, dispensing with the distractions of time and place, an order of studies, as he summarized his intellectual program in the Retractions, “by which one can proceed from the corporeal to incorporeal things” (Retr. 1.3.1). He then ambitiously set out to produce the required humanistic textbooks on grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic, music, and philosophy. The very ordering of these studies—from the language arts via the mathematical disciplines to philosophy—speaks of his desire to reach the incorporeal through a systematic and progressively more abstract study of the liberal arts.

Thinking highly of the capabilities of the human intellect, Augustine was quite sanguine about the possibility of achieving the contemplative goal in this life. Perfectibility was within the reach of the wise

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22 Robert O’Connell even contends that “The underlying notion is one that makes the ‘I’ essentially soul. The composite of body and soul becomes accordingly an uneasy amalgam, its semi-accidental unity being explained by a ‘fall’ of soul into body, a fall that (at this point in Augustine’s career) seems to require that the soul ‘return’ to a pre-embodied state” (Early Theor. p. 185). O’Connell’s advocacy of Augustine’s adherence to neo-Platonic theories of the origin of the soul has been hotly contested by other scholars; see, for example, Harrison, pp. 32–35.

23 This can be seen in Augustine’s first commentary on Genesis, De Gen. c. M. (388–390). The first six chapters of book 2 imply that Adam and Eve were disembodied souls until they fell. See also De Q. An. 20.34. For Augustine’s later repudiation of this tenet, see Retr. 1.7.2.

24 By 414 he had come to see that the Pauline “flesh” could not be identified with the body (see Margaret R. Miles, Augustine on the Body (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), pp. 61, and Harrison, pp. 152–62, on Augustine’s mature appreciation of the body).

25 The troubling context of that verse, to which I shall return in later chapters, limited its concord with Platonism only later in Augustine’s career.

26 See De Ord. 1.11.32. In Retr. 1.5.2 Augustine regrets confusing Christ’s words, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18.36), with the Platonic world of ideas.

27 “... quomodo a corporalis et spiritualis sed mutabillibus numeris perveniatur ad immutabiles numeros, qui iam in ipsa sunt immutabiles veritate, ...”

28 “... quo a corporalis ad corporalis potent profici.”

human. But since he realized that not everybody had the required intellectual capacity (he was particularly pained by his mother’s lack of it, despite her evident piety), he devised a two-pronged approach to God: one for the few, those who possessed the necessary understanding, and another for the many, those who had to fall back on the authority of the Church and the example of Christ.

The implication is clear: if you are one of the “few,” you can ascend to God without either Christ or the Church. While “faith” might precede both “understanding” and “vision” for the young Augustine, that faith, like the body, can be discarded as soon as the initiate reaches the higher levels.

Before Augustine had time to finish the textbooks, however, changing circumstances forced him to re-evaluate his whole project. He had tried to practice what he taught: for the first few years after his conversion, he had dedicated himself to the pursuit of perfection. The Cassiciacum dialogues in particular should be seen as stepping-stones designed to purify his mind in preparation for the beatific vision. Despite its Plotinian echoes, the vision that finally occurs in Ostia (related in Conf. 9.10.23–26) is centered on the Incarnation and is thus radically different from the neoplatonic model. As we shall see in more detail in chapter 3 below, the doctrine of the incarnate Christ, the Word made flesh, increasingly placed language in general and the Holy Scriptures in particular at the center of Augustine’s attention. Back in Africa, he finished the sixth book of On Music, but that high point proved to be the end of his intellectual program.

Visiting the Episcopal center of Hippo in 391, he was reluctantly convinced to become a presbyter, a position that forced him to deal with the less philosophic needs of the North African Church. He was called upon to preach

Augustine did not “discover” Paul at this time. He merely read him differently. Previously, he had interpreted Paul as a Platonist; he had seen him as the exponent of a spiritual ascent . . . . The idea of the spiritual life as a vertical ascent, as a progress towards a final, highest stage to be reached in this life, had fascinated Augustine in previous years. Now, he will see in Paul nothing but a

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34 It has been estimated that Augustine preached some 8000 times in the following 30 years, normally extemporaneously. More than one-third of his extant writings consist of sermons, to date around 900, some of which were discovered as late as 1990. See George P. Lawless, Augustine of Hippo Preacher, in Saint Augustine the Bishop: A Book of Essays, ed. Fannie LeMoine and Christopher Kleinhenz (New York and London: Garland, 1994), pp. 13–57.

35 See Epist. 21.3–6. According to Charles Kannengiesser, even before this request, Augustine had “studied Scripture intensively for a substantial part of the two and a half years he spent in Thagaste from the fall of 388 through the spring of 391” (“The Interrupted De doctrina christiana,” in “De Doctrina Christiana”: A Classic of Western Culture, ed. Duane W.H. Arnold, and Pamela Bright [Notre Dame and London: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1998], p. 5).

36 Augustine wrote five commentaries on Genesis (or on its first three chapters to be more exact, dealing with the seven days of creation and the fall): De Gen. c. M. (388 or 389), an unfinished On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis (389), the last three books of Conf. (401), the monumental The Literal Meaning of Genesis (404–409), and part of book eleven of De Civ. Dei (417 or 418). The Psalms stimulated a comprehensive series of sermons, En. in Ps., that occupied Augustine intermittently from 391 to his death in 430.

37 The immediate results were an Unfinished Commentary on Romans (which did not get beyond the first verses of chapter one), a short Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans and an equally short Propositions from the Epistle to the Galatians (all three written in 394), questions 66 to 75 of De Div. Q. (394–395), and the first book of To Simplician (397). On Augustine’s study of Paul, see William S. Babcock, Augustine’s Interpretation of Romans (1979), 110–114, and Paula Fredriksen, “Beyond the Body/Soul Dichotomy: Augustine on Paul against the Manichees and the Pelagians,” Recherches Augustiniennes 23 (1988): 87–114.

38 On Augustine’s development into a reader of scripture, see Stock, esp. p. 74: “Paul thus replaced Plutus; progress through reading superseded the ascent of the mind on its own.” See also John C. Cavadi, “The Sweetness of the Word: Salvation and Rhetoric in Augustine’s De doctrina christiana,” in Arnold and Bright, pp. 164–81.
single, unresolved tension between “flesh” and “spirit.” ... It is a flattened landscape; and in it the hope of spiritual progress comes increasingly to depend, for Augustine, on the unfathomable will of God.  

The book that hit Augustine the hardest was Romans; chapters 7 to 9 in particular would not leave him alone. During the next two decades he felt the weight of these dense passages, which increasingly questioned or modified the equilibrium he had achieved. Paul’s description in Romans 7 of the internal struggle between will and will (to use the Elizabethan terms) challenged his assumptions about perfectibility, while the stark words in Romans 9: 11 about God choosing Jacob before Esau regardless of their own merits became the starting point for protracted meditations on God’s sovereignty and grace. 

The development of a more Pauline theology was also encouraged by external developments. Pelagianism, a new heresy that emphasized human free will at the expense of God’s grace, was brought to North Africa by Pelagius himself in 411, thereby supplanting Manichaeism and Donatism as Augustine’s favorite bugbear. Especially galling was the fact that Pelagius had drawn from Augustine’s own early writings to support his claims. While Augustine felt impelled to defend the catholicy of his own works, the challenge from Pelagius’ concept of unaided human progress must at the same time have made him painfully aware of the dangers of some of his earlier ideas. In the words of James J. O’Donnell, “His vehemence in the face of the Pelagians is vehemence in the face of his younger, deluded self.” 

For the impact of the Bible was not simply a matter of isolated insights: it had provoked a radical shift of perspective. R.A. Markus explains it well:  

The imagery derived from the philosophic context is part of a cosmological scheme. The “spiritual” is on a higher level than the “carnal” in the cosmic order. Their relation can be pictured in spatial terms, as “above” and “below.” The biblical opposition, on the other hand, depends on Christ’s redemptive work: the “spiritual” is what is transformed, the “carnal” is unregenerated. The opposition is not between something cosmologically “higher” and something “lower.” It is one best expressed in temporal rather than spatial terms, as “new” and “old.” Thus, though capable of being rendered in the same terms, the two sets of contrasts are in reality essentially disparate. But Augustine did pass from the cosmological dualities of neo-Platonism to the temporal dualities of biblical redemption history. 

Whereas the neoplatonic perspective had been strictly vertical and incorporeal, the Prologue to St. John’s Gospel (a favored Augustinian text), with its message of God descending to earth in order to become a human, insisted on the horizontal level. The Incarnation of Christ stressed corporeality, history, time, language, all these aspects of “becoming” that a true Platonist distrusted. And with the Incarnation came the complementary dogma of the physical Resurrection. The return to God, according to the New Testament, is the prerogative not only of the soul but of the body as well. That the Logos, the divine reason, could have become mixed up with the corporeal realm in this way was much too hard for a neoplatonist to stomach. Indeed, Porphyry had launched his bitter attack on Christianity precisely because of the absurdity of the Incarnation. For Augustine, this meant that his earlier enthusiasm for Plotinus was tempered by an increasing critique of the neoplatonic tradition noticeable in his later writings, especially the City of God and On the Trinity.

III

The Plotinian and Pauline perspectives are particularly evident in two different schemes Augustine used to describe the progress towards God. The first scheme, taken from the early dialogue The Greatness of the Soul (387–88), is significantly termed the seven levels of the soul,

39 Brown, pp. 151–52.  
40 For Augustine’s developing views and increasing reliance on the concept of grace, see Dennis R. Cresswell, Augustine’s Dilemma: Grace and Eternal Law in the Major Works of Augustine of Hippo (New York: Peter Lang, 1997).  
41 As one of the ironies of history one can note that early Augustine and Pelagius was close enough for Erasmus to include Pelagius’ Confession of Faith in Pope Innocent as an Augustinian work (entitled Sermon 236) in his 1528/9 Froben edition of the Father’s Opera omnia, an attribution that Calvin was later to question (see Lane, p. 76).  
42 O’Donnell, 1: xliii, note 71.  
43 Markus, p. 79. Also Lewis Ayres distinguishes between “Augustine’s use of the two main anthropological patterns or metaphors of his day […] the Plotinian scheme of an ascending order pointing to the One, … [and] the ‘horizontal’ pattern of humanity portrayed as progressing towards the new Jerusalem” (“Between Athens and Jerusalem: Prolegomena to Anthropology in De Trinitate,” Modern Theology 8:1 [January 1992]: 53). See also Paula Fredriksen, “Augustine on History, the Church, and the Flesh,” in LeMone and Kleinhenz, pp. 109–23.  
45 Augustine, arguing pointedly against the neoplatonic distrust of the Incarnation, writes that he had not found in the books of the Platonists that “the Word was made flesh and came to dwell among us [verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis]” (Conf. 7.8.14).
while the second, here cited from his *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans* 13–18, is called “four stages of man” (my emphasis). Plotinus is clearly the guiding light behind *The Greatness of the Soul*. After having proved to his friend Evodius that the soul cannot be corporeal, Augustine explicates its seven levels, or as he summarizes the progression: acts of the soul “from the body”; ‘through the body’; ‘about the body’; ‘toward itself’; ‘in itself’; ‘towards God’; ‘with God’ (*De Q. An. 35.79*).

I shall put it in diagram form for greater clarity (reversing the usual order of numbering so as not to destroy the upward progression):

7. Contemplation (with God)
6. Initiation (towards God)
5. Tranquillity (in itself)
4. Virtue (toward itself)
3. Art (about the body)
2. Sensation (through the body)
1. Vitality (from the body)

The first two levels are simply descriptions of what the soul has in common with the plant and animal kingdoms, and the third what the soul alone possesses. But with level four we are moving beyond enumeration:

Take hold now and swing yourself onto the fourth level, which goodness and true worth call their home. Here it is that the soul ventures to take precedence not only over its own body, acting some part in the universe, but even over the whole body of the universe itself. The goods of the world it does not account its own, and comparing them with its own power and beauty, it keeps aloof from them and despises them. Hence, the more the soul turns to itself for its own pleasure, the more does it withdraw from sordid things and cleanse itself and make itself immaculately clean through and through. (*De Q. An. 33.78*)

Augustine conceded that this purification requires strenuous effort, yet he is confident that “so great is the soul that it can do even this, by the help, of course, of the goodness of the supreme and true God” (*De Q. An. 33.79*).

Coming after this difficult task of self-purification, advancing towards the last three levels is easy:

When the soul will be free from all corruption and purified of all its stains, then at last it possesses itself in utter joy and has no fears whatever for itself nor any anxiety for any reason. . . . Then with unbounded and wondrous confidence it advances toward God, that is to the immediate contemplation of truth; and it attains that supreme and transcendent reward for which it has worked so hard. (*De Q. An. 33.74*)

Having arrived at the seventh level (in his narrative at least), Augustine thinks it fit to praise the nurture of Mother Church and the nourishing milk of St. Paul’s teaching. Like all mother’s milk, however, this is meant for children only, while those who have grown up and arrived at the higher levels can dispense with it for an unspecified meeter nourishment. There are a few passages in all of Augustine where the elitist tendencies of his early thought shine through as clearly as here.

Before describing the second scheme in its fully developed form, it is instructive to follow Augustine as he modifies his “seven levels” in succeeding works before finally assimilating them into the Pauline model. In the *Two Books On Genesis Against the Manichaeans*, written soon after *The Greatness of the Soul*, he is forced by his allegorical method to square the seven levels with the seven days of creation, a self-imposed task that does not make for clear exegesis. Yet the scriptural context does blunt the neoplatonic edge by introducing an historical dimension. Before allegorizing the seven days of creation as the seven levels of a just life (1.25), Augustine describes the seven ages of the world in terms of human development from infancy to old age (1.23–24). When he returns to the topos in *Of True Religion* (389–91), it has been transformed into the seven spiritual ages of “the new man” (*De Ver. Rel. 26.49*). There is a clear upward progression toward “eternal rest and

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46 “. . . quatuor . . . gradus hominis . . .”
47 “. . . de corpore, per corpus, circa corpus, ad scipsam, in scipsa, ad deum, apud deum.” Translation amended.
48 “Suscepte igitur acque insilii quarti gradui, ex quo bonitas incipit atque omnis vera laudatio. Hinc enim anima se non solum suo, si quam universi partem agit, sed ipsi etiam universo corpore audet praepone bonaque eius bona sua non putare atque potentiae pulchritudineque suae comparata discernere atque contemnere et inde, quo magis se delectaverit, ea magis esse abstrahere a sordibus totumque emaculare ac mundissimam et compussissimam reddere.”
49 “Tanta est . . . anima, ut etiam hoc positum adivisisse plane justissima summi et veri dei, . . .”
50 “Quod . . . cum fuerit anima ab omni tabe libera maculatibus diluita, tum se denique in scipsa laetissime tenet nec omnino aliquid metuit sibi aut ulla sua causa quaequam angitur. . . . tunc vero ingenii quadam et incredibilis fiducia perigit in deum, id est in ipsam contemplationem veritatis, et illud, propter quod tantum laboratum est, aliissimum et secretissimum praesumum.”
51 Tendencies he had already abandoned by the time of writing *De Ver. Rel. 390*; see Stock, p. 65.
52 “. . . novus homo . . .”
perpetual beatitude," yet the Pauline coloring is unmistakable. It is no longer possible to achieve the final contemplation of God in this life because the biblical discourse has preempted much of the original Plotinian force: "A man can live the whole of this life as 'the old and earthly man.' But no one in this life can live as 'the new and heavenly man,' but must associate with 'the old man'" (De Ver. Rel. 27.50). 53

The process of assimilation is carried a step further in his commentary on The Lord's Sermon on the Mount (595–94), where the seven steps have been grafted on to the Beatitudes of Matthew 5 (but without the historical dimension seen in the last two works):

7. Peace (contemplation of the truth)
6. Purity (cleanliness of heart)
5. Mercy (divine assistance)
4. Justice (effort to wrench itself from sin)
3. Sorrow (over sin)
2. Meekness (acquaintance with Scriptures)
1. Humility (submission to divine authority)

While the goal is still the contemplation of truth, not much else remains of the original scheme. The greatest difference is perhaps the humble admission that nothing can be accomplished without divine assistance. This is reinforced by the addition of another progression to complement the first: the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit (from Isaiah 11:2). All in all, we are left in no doubt about the need for God's grace. 54

After these transitional versions, we are ready for Augustine's mature model, elaborated during his period of immersion in St. Paul while preparing for the priesthood. This model, derived from Romans 5: 12–21, centers on the Incarnation of Christ and emphasizes the dimension of time and history, its four periods being "prior to the Law; under the Law; under grace; and in peace" (Eph. Rom. 13–18). 55

The operative terms are law and grace, concepts central to Pauline theology. The scheme has two distinct but interrelated parts: the salvific history of God's people and the history of the individual Christian. The first part provides a thumbnail sketch of human history:

Given the entire life span of the human race, this period in which the grace of Christian faith is given is the third period. The first is before the Law, the second, under the Law, and the third, under grace . . . . There yet remains a fourth period in which we shall achieve the abundant peace of the heavenly Jerusalem . . . (De Div. Q. 61.7). 56

While the fourth period is actually outside time, the first three neatly divide all of human history: from Adam to Moses, from Moses to Christ, from Christ's coming to his second coming. The hub is clearly the period of grace, "this period in God's plan, in which the Lord has deigned to appear in time and visibly as a man and has given us as a pledge the Holy Spirit, by whose sevenfold working we are given life" (De Div. Q. 61.7). 57 Notice how Augustine incorporates and thereby collapses the earlier vertical perspective by introducing the seven Gifts of the Spirit into his horizontal scheme. In his later writings he manages to combine the two systems by juxtaposing the first three periods with the six days of creation, sometimes allotting a round thousand years to each day, while letting the last period (fourth or seventh) dissolve into God's final Sabbath rest. 58

The same four stages are at work also on the individual level: "There are four different phases even in the life of one man, and after the progressive completion of these he will abide in eternal life" (De Div. Q. 66.3). 59 As with the seven levels of the soul, we have a progression

53 ["quies aeterna et beatitudine perpetua"] . . . veterem atque terraeum positum in hac vita unum homo agere, novum vero et caelestem nemo in hac vita positum nisi cum vetera." In an early seed of the City of God, Augustine goes on to apply the concept of the "old" and the "new" to two classes of people throughout world history. The further steps towards De Civ. Dei can be seen in De Div. Q. 58.2 and in particular in The First Catechetical Instruction 18.29–23.45, where Augustine traces the two cities through history, while still making the connection with the hexameron.

54 The Gifts of the Spirit is the aspect that Augustine stresses when he refers to the sevenfold progression of the individual believer in later works: En. in Ps. 11.7 and 119.2, De Dott. Ch. 2.7.9–11, and Sermones 24/8–250, 270, and 947 (see Canisius van Lierde, "The Teaching of St. Augustine on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit from the Text of Isaiah 11:2–3," in Augustine: Mystic and Mystagogue, ed. Frederick Van Fleteren et al. [New York: Peter Lang, 1994]: 8–110).

55 = . . . ante legem, sub lege, sub graia, in pace.
56 = "in toto enim accepli generis humani tertium tempus est, quod unius evanescenciae data est: primium est ante legem, secundum sub lege, tertium sub graia; et . . . quarto adhuc resat, quod ad plenissimam pacem Hierusalem caelestis venturi sumus . . . ."
57 = "Ista . . . dispensatio, quae nobis dominii temporali et visibiliter in homine apparere dignatus est et dedit nobis pignus spirituali sanctum, cuius operatione septemaria vegetaretur, . . . ."
58 See De Trin. 4.4.7.
59 = " . . . quattuor esse differentias etiam in uno homine, quibus gradatim peractis in vita aeterna manebit." The same explication is given in Ev. Rom. 13–18. That this twofold (historical/personal) scheme remained an important part of Augustine’s thinking is demonstrated by his inclusion in the brief but influential catechism he published in 421, the Enarration (51.118), which in turn stands behind both the first version of Calvin’s Institutes and Spenser’s description of the House of Holiness. We shall return to the influence of this twofold scheme on Spenser in chapter 4.
toward beatitude and peace; yet unlike the neoplatonic perspective, this model stresses the saving work of Christ. Without his grace one gets nowhere, and even with it one does not reach the last level in this life. Though the goal is still otherworldly, it no longer is incorporeal, since both soul and body are resurrected at the last day.

But why have I spent so much ink on these two models in a study of Augustine’s influence on early modern literature? First of all because versions of both perspectives turn up with some frequency in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the writings of Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, for example, we find the steps (sometimes seven) of the soul’s return to God, while the same Pico in a later work was to describe the fourfold “horizontal” scheme. Melanchthon did the same in Carion’s Chronicles, which in turn influenced Tudor England. Indeed, both the vertical and the horizontal schemes became cultural commonplaces. But even more important than these direct borrowings is how the two perspectives reflect two distinct ways of structuring reality, ways that define the extreme positions of early modern Europe.

IV

Everything Augustine wrote was motivated by a profound faith, and all subsequent theology owes him a great debt. No one outside the Bible comes even close to matching his overall impact on western Christendom. He dominated medieval dogma, while the Protestant and Catholic reformations might not even have occurred if it had not been for him; they certainly would have looked very different. We must not, however, limit his influence to the religious sphere. Endowed with a penetrating and inquisitive intellect, coupled with the communicative skills of a professional rhetor, he managed to discuss, not seldom with great sophistication, every conceivable topic under the sun. There is something for everyone in Augustine, and few were those early mod-
ern thinkers who at one point or another did not avail themselves of some little part of his thought, whether directly or channelled through others.

Although theology inevitably will color aspects of this study, my interest is centred on a few large topics that Augustine himself would have placed within what Markus terms the saeculum, the sphere that while lying within divine jurisdiction is dedicated to humanity’s earthly rather than heavenly existence. We shall begin in chapter 1 where Augustine himself often begins: with the volition of the introspective self. Another reason for starting with psychology is that the genesis of the period under investigation—whether called Renaissance or early modern—is habitually associated with the increasing importance given to the individual will, often located to a single historical person, Petrarch. Chapter 2 then moves on to another mental faculty: what is the function and limits of human reason within the saeculum? The epistemological question was of fundamental importance to early modern Europe since it involved the relationship between sacred and secular, and the place and function of classical culture and education. And, as Trinkaus reminded us above, Augustine had provided some of the basic answers. In the third chapter we shall investigate a related topic: the Augustinian semiology behind both Renaissance numerology and language theory. If the first three chapters centre on various aspects of the individual mind, with its educational and poetic dimensions, chapter 4 moves out by investigating the Augustinian political theory behind the heated Renaissance discussions on the relationship of church and state.

The four chapters have been organized around particular Augustinian and Renaissance texts. If chapter 1 centers on On True Religion and the Confessions, chapters 2 and 3 take their cue from On Christian Doctrine (as well as On Order and The Free Choice of the Will), while chapter 4 deals with aspects of the City of God. Of early modern authors I have concentrated on the works of two poets separated by some two-hundred years: Petrarch (in chapter 1) and Edmund Spenser (in chapters 2 to 4; two of these chapters have a broader perspective that in addition to Spenser takes in seminal thinkers from Ficino and Luther to Greville and Hooker). I have a two-fold reason for my choice of authors: both were Augustinian to the core, but for both that Augustinianism was not simplistic or uncomplicated. In both the tension between what I term the “vertical” and the “horizontal” perspectives is acutely felt, if in different ways.
Let us end this introduction by reviewing these dominant perspectives of Augustine’s pre- and post-Episcopal periods. The earlier “Plotinian” perspective is predominantly vertical, meaning that an unbroken intellectual ascent is possible in this life by the wise and morally perfect individual, or rather “soul.” In the “Pauline” perspective the vertical ascent is modified by a horizontal perspective that takes account of the vicissitudes of time and history. The elder bishop of course remained committed to the heavenly homeland, but the favored metaphor for getting there had become the physical journey rather than the climb: we are pilgrims en route to the heavenly Jerusalem. The Incarnation in particular forced Augustine to become more focused on the here-and-now of that pilgrimage. The earth and the human body, no longer simply impediments to the soul’s ascent, were not to be discarded but acquired value as God’s creation and the vessel for the divine Word. As Carol Harrison puts it, “The Christian doctrines of Creation ex nihilo, of the Incarnation, of a historical revelation, and of the resurrection of the body, ... have the effect of making Augustine’s thought much more positive concerning the beauty of the temporal realm.” Yet Augustine’s anthropology was at the same time increasingly tempered by the Fall and its effects on creation, including original sin. In the Plotinian perspective, earth is a copy (however distant) of the ideal realm, thereby providing points of contact and thus of ascent. For the mature Augustine, the Fall had seriously marred the copy. As a result, the direct vertical ties between the sensible and the intelligible world were severed. No longer was the human microcosm able to reflect in any direct way the heavenly patterns. Earthly life, according to a tag from the City of God that was to leave a lasting impression on early modern Europe, takes place in a Haraclit-

ean world in which there is “nothing substantial, nothing lasting” (De Civ. Dei 20.3). In such a world, as St. Paul had confessed in Romans 7 and Augustine elaborated in the Confessions, even a Christian cannot reach perfection but is torn by a divided will. God, in his inscrutable wisdom and grace, must instead reach down to redeem his chosen people.

Perhaps without knowing it, Augustine’s view of the cosmos became more Aristotelian than Platonist in the process. Instead of a ladder he began to envision the creation as a series of interconnected levels. Rather than one seamless order that held everything together, there were several distinct if interrelated orders. Within the saeculum, Augustine envisioned spheres for reason and for the political order, spheres that were necessary and ultimately depended on God, but which were not part of any unbroken ladder of Plotinian return to the One. Education, operating under the guidance of reason, could no longer defy mankind but was needed as a handmaiden to faith and for the ordering of this life. Nor could human language transparently reflect the divine logos, but was subject to the temporal and conventional rules of each speech community. The secular state was no copy of the heavenly kingdom, but its task was to control the sins of its citizens by maintaining an earthly peace. It was the incarnate Christ, not intellectual vision, imperial rulers, or Craytilian theories of language, that provided the only guarantee for human salvation.

This is not to argue, however, that Augustine completely exchanged one perspective for the other. Insights gained from his encounters with Paul and Plotinus remained at the core of his thought. The two coexisted for long periods in an uneasy and constantly redefined alliance, with Paul slowly gaining the upper hand. And it is not simply a matter of chronology. A horizontal or a vertical model may govern any particular book, depending on what question Augustine is addressing.

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62 No Augustinian model is purely horizontal, of course, since the “here and now” is always subject to the ultimate authority of God. This is perhaps best expressed by the basic Augustinian distinction between “use” and “enjoyment,” the former characterizing our attitude towards the created world, while the latter applies only to our relationship with God.

63 Harrison, p. 32.

64 Harrison shows how consciousness of the fall actually contributes to his more positive assessment of the created world: “implicit in Augustine’s conviction of man’s fall and divinity is his attribution of a more positive role to the beauty of the created, temporal realm and divine revelation within it. . . .” From a rational, spiritual idea of beauty (since man can no longer clearly see or understand it) the emphasis is placed upon an appreciation of beauty in Creation, history, man, and the Incarnate, met by faith in their divine source, hope for vision of it, and love which moves towards it” (p. 46) see also her conclusion, pp. 272-75).

65 “... nihil solidum, nihil stabile . . .” So Petrarch, as we will see in chapter 1 below, opens his “Triumph of Eternity” with the affirmation that “Da poi che sotto ’l ciel cosa non vidi / stabile e ferma . . . [When I had seen that nothing under heaven / is firm and stable . . .],” while John Donne can praise “that there is nothing in this world perfect; And then, That such as it is, there is nothing constant, nothing permanent” (“Gokayne Funeral Sermon,” in The Sermons of John Donne, ed. Evelyn Simpson and George R. Potter [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1962], 7: 259). Henry Cornelius Agrippa, in the context of changing language use, paraphrased the expression as “there is nothing stable and of continuance [nihil stabile, nihil diuturnum]” (“On the vanitie and uncertainty of artis and science,” trans. James Sanford [1569; rpt. Northbridge: California State Univ., 1974], p. 376).

66 See Harrison, pp. 54-96.
If the *City of God* is an extension of the historical aspects of the Pauline scheme, then *On the Trinity* is an equally good example of a mature work composed along the vertical axis, but with a new non-Plotinian emphasis on the Incarnation. For that reason, while Augustinian works were to affect western culture profoundly for centuries to come, that influence was not uniform. Both perspectives were transmitted and assimilated throughout the period, and never in their pure forms. The examples of Petrarch and Spenser show that many vacillated between the two. We would do well to investigate which "Augustine" a renaissance writer is using as a starting-point or justification for his own particular concerns. That Ficino and Calvin both thought they were following the bishop of Hippo should give us pause.

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**CHAPTER 1**

**Psychology**

**The Divided Self**

Amid my winds and tempests I can recognize from time to time the traces of your own storm-tossed passions. So that as often as I read the book of your Confessions, and am made partaker of your conflict between two contrary emotions, between hope and fear; (and weep as I read), I seem to be hearing the story of my own self, the story not of another’s wandering, but of my own.

—Petrarch

At the end of a long and eventful life, Petrarch begins his last poem, the "Triumph of Eternity," with a confession:

Da poi che sotto 'l ciel cosa non vidi
stabile e ferma, tutto sbigottito
mi vola al cor e dissi: "In che ti fidi?"
Rispose: "Nel Signor, che mai fallito
non à promessa a chi si fida in lui;
ma ben veggio che 'l mondo m'à schernito,
e sento quel ch'è sono e quel ch'è fui,
e veggio andar, anzi volare, il tempo,
e doler mi vorrei, né so di cui,
che la colpa è pur mia, che più per tempo
deve' aprir gli occhi, e non tardar al fine,
ch'a dir il vero, omai troppo m'attempo.
Ma tarde non fur mai grazie divine;
in quelle spero che 'n me ancor faranno
alte operazioni e pellegrine.

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67 On the Incarnation in *De Trin.*, see Harrison, pp. 202-10, and on Augustine’s critique of Plotinus in the work, see Ayres, pp. 56-62.

When I had seen that nothing under heaven
Is firm and stable, in dismay I turned
To my heart, and asked: "Wherein hast thou thy trust?"
"In the Lord," the answer came, "Who keepeth ever
His covenant with one who trusts in Him.
Well do I see the mockery of the world,
And know what I have been, and what I am,
And see Time marching, nay more, flying on;
Yet there is none of whom I may complain.
For the fault is mine: long since I should have opened
Mine eyes, instead of waiting to the end,
And true it is that I have delayed too long.
But divine mercies never come too late:
In them I hope, that they may work in me
A transformation deep and excellent."2

What might seem a conventional deathbed rite epitomizes many of Petrarch's life-long concerns. The poem starts by echoing the Augustinian commonplace from the City of God 20.3: "nihil solidum, nihil stabile."3 Petrarch, like Augustine, lived in a world in which much was uncertain, including the state of his own spiritual well-being.4 If he turns to his heart, it is not to find there the stability lacking in aickle world. He instead must join Augustine’s celebrated cry to God: “Our hearts find no peace until they rest in you” (Conf. 1.1.1).5 Indeed, Petrarch’s heart had been the main battleground for the world’s disruptive powers. Even at the end of a life of intense spiritual struggle, he still longed for “a transformation deep and excellent” that he apparently had not yet achieved. Spiritual perfection, at least for the poet, does not seem possible in this world. His hope rests in the stability of eternity.

In the “Triumph of Eternity” the poet’s beatific vision of the transfigured Laura comes to symbolize that eternal rest. Yet the lady is at the same time a potent reminder of Petrarch’s lifelong strife: “amor mi diè per lei sì lunga guerra / che la memoria ancora il cor accenna [Love gave to me for her a war so long / My heart still bears the memory thereof]” (ll. 140–41). He had expressed these tensions graphically in the Rime sparse:

Pace non trovo et non ̀a dar guerra,
cemo et spero, et ardo et son un ghiaccio,
et velo sopra 'l cielo et giacchio in terra,
et nulla stringo et tutto 'l mondo abbraccio.

Tal m’à in preghion che non m’apre né serra,
né per suo mi riten né scioglie il laccio,
et non m’ancide Amore et non mi sferra,
né mi vuol vivo né mi trae d’impaccio.

Veggio senza occhi, et non ̀a lingua et grido,
et bramo di perir et cheggo aita,
et ̀a in odio me stesso et amo altiru.

Pascomi di dolor, piangendo ride,
eguamente mi spiaçe morte et vita.
In questo stato son, Donna, per vie.

Peace I do not find, and I have no wish to make war; and I fear and hope, and burn and am of ice; and I fly above the heavens and lie on the ground; and I grasp nothing and embrace all the world.

One has me in prison who neither opens nor locks, neither keeps me for his own nor unites the bonds; and Love does not kill and does not unchain me, he neither wishes me alive nor frees me from the tangle.

I see without eyes, and I have no tongue and yet cry out; and I wish to perish and I ask for help; and I hate myself and love another.

I feed on pain, weeping I laugh; equally displeasing to me are death and life. In this state I am, Lady, on account of you. (Rime sparse 134)6

The antithetical pairings—peace/war, fear/hope, burning/freezing, weeping/laughing, death/life—that characterize the Petrarchian dictio embody the internal tension. And Laura is the metaphorical vehi-

cle of the unrest: “In this state am I, Lady, on account of you.” Furthermore, through her semantic connection with the laurel, Laura becomes the symbol not only of love, but also of worldly glory. And love and glory, as the poet confesses in the Secretum (III; 168; 108), are the two strong chains that keep him from reaching inner peace.

Yet at the end of Petrarch’s life we find Laura beckoning him to heaven, as Beatrice had done for Dante and countless other donne had done for their stilnovist lovers. It seems as if Laura not only symbolizes the poet’s inner turmoil, but also embodies the tension between conflicting views of human achievement and the function of human love. To use the language of the “Vergine bella” (Rime sparse 365), is Laura a Beatrice or a Medusa? Does she bring beauty or destruction? This, of course, is not a new question. But Petrarch’s devotion to Augustine may shed new light on it. Particularly illuminating is Petrarch’s view of the human predicament in terms of the two Augustinian perspectives, Plotinian and Pauline. Which Augustine does Petrarch follow, the young convert or the mature bishop? It is doubtful whether he himself would even understand the question: to him Augustine was a revered authority not to be dissected into periods. Like the Renaissance at large Petrarch was apt to be eclectic, borrowing whatever he found useful from any text that came in his way. As he grew older, however, he seemed to move towards a mature Augustine (or Pauline) theology of grace. This did not hinder him, though, from holding on to tenets culled from the “Plotinian” Augustine. One consequence of this is the contradictory view of Laura in the Rime sparse and the Triumphs: in the first she is seen ultimately as Medusa, while the second portrays her as a Beatrice.

I

Ever since 1907, when Pierre de Nolhac documented Petrarch’s reliance on Augustine, there has been a growing number of studies that investigate the nature and chronology of that dependence. At the age of 21, two years before first seeing Laura in Avignon in 1272, Petrarch bought his first Augustinian manuscript, the City of God. Ten years later he acquired Of True Religion, on the flyleaf of which he compiled a list of his “specially prized books.” The fifty or so titles were mainly classical, led by philosophical works by Cicero. But four Augustinian works were included. In addition to the City of God, Petrarch listed the Confessions, the Soliloquies, and Epistle 130. Of these, the Confessions was to become one of his most prized books. Pocket-size, it had been given to him in 1333 by a friend and mentor, the Augustinian monk Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro. For the next forty years Petrarch carried the book with him, until he finally passed it on to another Augustinian monk in 1374, the year of his death. In a cover letter, the aging poet apologizes for the threadbare condition of his gift:

As in my restless youth I was a wanderer by nature, I carried the book through most of Italy and through France and Germany because I was delighted with its substance, with its author, and with its handy pocket size. Thus by constant use hand and book became so inseparable that they seemed to grow together.

Next to the Confessions, Of True Religion proved the most important Augustinian work throughout the 15th and 16th centuries. But additional works were also acquired, such as the massive Expositions on the Psalms in 1357. After 1355, when Petrarch settled in Milan (the city of Augustine’s conversion), the pace of his patristic studies increased. Augustinian works that impressed him in his last decades were On the Trinity and in particular On Christian Doctrine, which “served him well in his


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defense of himself both as a humanist and a Christian, as it did generations of humanists after him."

Although Petrarch already had access to the City of God in his twenties, most scholars agree that it was the acquisition of the Confessions and Of True Religion in the 1380s that sparked an interest in the Father that was to develop almost into an obsession over the next decades. The young poet (he had written the first sonnets of what was to become the Rime sparse) felt a close kinship with the struggles of the young unconverted Augustine. Since both had difficulty controlling their sexual drives, in Augustine’s conversion Petrarch saw an example to emulate. Augustine’s attraction to the Platonic tradition also appealed to him, and in particular the fact that the Saint had begun his road towards Christianity by reading the Hortensius, a (now lost) work by Petrarch’s cultural hero Cicero.12 The desire for emulation was so strong that Petrarch tried to copy the manner of Augustine’s famous conversion in a Milanese garden (as related in Conf. 8.12.28–80). After the young rhetor had heard a voice say “tolle lege [pick up and read],” he had looked randomly in the Bible next to him and come upon some verses in St. Paul’s letter to the Romans. Petrarch, for his part, was led to take a random look, not in the Bible, but in the Confessions.

The incident is related in a famous letter, “The Ascent of Mont Ventoux,” supposedly sent in 1336 to Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro, the monk who had given Petrarch his copy of the Confessions. If not explicitly as in the Secretum, the whole letter is a dialogue with Augustine, the outcome of which has attracted much critical attention.13

Petrarch describes in the letter how after a strenuous climb of the French mountain he and his brother Gerardo reached the top with its breathtaking view:

I admired every detail, now relishing earthly enjoyment, now lifting up my mind to higher spheres after the example of my body, and I thought it fit to look into the volume of Augustine’s Confessions… Where I fixed my eyes first, it was written: “And men go to admire the high mountains, the vast floods of the sea, the huge streams of the river, the circumference of the ocean, and the revolutions of the stars—and desert themselves” [Conf. 10.8.15]. I was stunned, I confess. . . I was completely satisfied with what I had seen of the mountain and turned my inner eye toward myself. ("Ventoux" 371–75; 44)14

As we shall see when we turn to the Confessions in a moment, Petrarch actually misinterprets Augustine through partial quotation. What virtually all modern commentators agree on is that Petrarch, for all his reliance on the Confessions, does not in fact experience any “conversion” himself. The mountain-top experience instead results in an Augustinian introspection, bordering on a fixation on his own inner life: his epiphany excludes even his own brother.15

Petrarch’s introspection is evident already during the ascent of the mountain, which he turns into an elaborate allegory. While his brother, later to become a monk, goes straight for the top, Petrarch loses his way among the foothills and valleys. Sitting down exhausted, he turns on himself:

What you have so often experienced today while climbing this mountain happens to you, you must know, and to many others who are making their way towards the blessed life. . . . However, having strayed far in error, you must

11 Rabil, p. 111. I shall return to Petrarch’s use of De Dost. Chs in chapter 2.
12 See Courcelle, pp. 335–34. Courcelle also discusses Petrarch’s various responses to Augustine as seen in his letters (pp. 384–492).

14 "Que dum mirar sinula et nunc terrenum aliquld saperem, nunc exemplo corporis animus ad aliora subvehereberem, visum est michi Confessionum Augustini librum . . . inspicer; . . . ubi primum defixi oculos, scriptum erat: ‘Et eunt homines admirari alta montum et ingentes fluctus maris et latissimi lapsus fluminum et oceani ambitum et giro siderum, et relinquunt se Ipsos’ [Conf. 10.8.15]. Osubruipe, fatare; . . . Tunc vero mentem salis videas contentus, in me ipsum interiores oculos reflexi; . . .” (Petrarca, Le Familiari 4.1, ed. Ugo Dotti, 2 vols. [Urbino: Argelía, 1974]); Petrarch, "The Ascend of Mont Ventoux," trans. Hans Nachod, in The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, ed. Ernst Cassirer et al. (Chicago and London: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948). References to these two editions are given in the text. To ensure that the reader does not miss the parallel to Augustine’s own conversion, Petrarch pointedly elaborates the similarities on pp. 375–77 (trans. p. 45).

either ascend to the summit of the blessed life under the heavy burden of hard striving, ill deferred, or lie prostrate in your slothfulness in the valleys of your sins. ("Ventoux" 367-69; 39-40)  

Looking forward to a time when he will have reached the spiritual summit, he confides to Dionigi that he then wants to follow Augustine's example ("Ventoux" 371; 42). What Petrarch proposes is the writing of his own confessions.

In the meantime, however, his assurance is peeled off layer by layer, exposing a heart torn by a divided will:

Many dubious and troublesome things are still in store for me. What I used to love, I love no longer. But I lie: I love it still, but less passionately. Again have I lied: I love it, but more timidly, more sadly. Now at last I have told the truth; for thus it is: I love, but what I should love not to love, what I should wish to hate. Nevertheless I love it, but against my will, under compulsion and in sorrow and mourning. ("Ventoux" 371; 42)

Although never mentioned by name, Laura is the source of his inner turmoil, being the recipient of the tormented love Petrarch now tries to renounce with the help of Augustine. He sees 1333, the year when the copy of the Confessions had reached him, as the starting point for a spiritual battle:

The third year has not yet elapsed since that perverted and malicious will, which had totally seized me and reigned in the court of my heart without an opponent, began to encounter a rebel offering assistance. A stubborn and still undecided battle has long been raging on the field of my thoughts for the supremacy of one of the two men within me. ("Ventoux" 371-73; 42-43)

The “two men within me”—one being Petrarch, the lover of Laura; and the other, the admonishing voice of Augustine—were to battle it out in that most personal of Petrarch’s works, the Secretum. The two men were also to reappear conspicuously in the Rime sparse. It can be argued that the two works—Secretum and Rime sparse—together form the Confessions Petrarch had intimated to Dionigi he would one day write. To these can perhaps be added Petrarch’s “Epistle to Postery,” written in 1351.

A common impetus behind the three works is all the more likely since they were probably written or planned during the same period, sometime in the late 40s or early 50s. Petrarch had compiled earlier versions of what was to become the Rime sparse, but in the years following Laura’s death in 1347 the collection assumed its permanent form, in two parts introduced by the pivotal poems 1 and 264. The Secretum used to be dated to 1342, but the scholarly consensus is now that it too was written after 1347. Scholars have likewise recognized that the “Ascend” was most likely written, or at least heavily revised, long after the purported date of 1336. The latter year was probably chosen to allow Petrarch’s age at the time of the ascent to coincide with Augustine’s age at the time of his conversion (both would have been 32 years old). As Hans Baron argues, “The chronology of [Petrarch’s] spiritual life—not only in his fictional letters but also in the autobiographical sections of his other works—has been modeled on Augustine’s development.” To better understand the nature of Petrarch’s Augustinian emulation, we must now turn to the works that served as models: the Confessions, but also Of True Religion. This return to the sources is all the more important since the scholarly consensus seems to be that the main difference between the model and the copy was that Augustine did enjoy a genuine conversion, while Petrarch did not. “Augustine’s will was transformed and his old habits abandoned once and for all,” judges Albert Rabill, while “Petrarch carried his dissidio ["sadness of soul"] with him throughout his life.”

16 “Quod totiens hodie in ascensu montis hulius expertus es, id scito et tibi accidere et multus, accedentibus ad beatam viam; ... veruntamen, ubi multum erraveris, aut sub pondere male dilati laboris ad ipius te beate veste culmen operat ascendere aut in convallibus peccatorum tuorum segnem procumbere; ...”
17 “Meh quidem multum adhuc ambigui molestius negotii superest. Quod amare solebam, iam non amo; mentio: amo; ser paciar; iterum ecce mentius sum: amo, sed verecundius, sed tristius; lantandem verum dixit. Sic est enim; amo sed quod non amare amem, quod odisse cupiam; amo tamem, sed invitatur, sed coactus, sed mutus et inter sens.”
18 “Nondum michi tertius annus effluui, ex quo voluisti illa perversa et nequam, que me totum habebat et in aula cordis mi tibi sola sine contradicto regnas, capit aliam habere rebeliem et relucan tem sibi, inter quas iudicium in campis cogitationum meorum de utrique hominis imperti laboriosissima et ances etiam nunc pugna connectur.”
19 Fosler, p. 100.
20 Baron, Secretum.
21 Baron, Secretum, p. 197.
22 Rabill, p. 106. O’Connell is more careful to limit himself to Petrarch’s view of the Father: “Here [in the “Ascend”], as in the Secretum, St. Augustine is the champion of the decisive and exclusive turning of the will towards God and the things of the spirit” (p. 511).
II

Of True Religion and the Confessions enclose a crucial period of transition for Augustine. The earlier work was written in 390, the year before he became a presbyter in Hippo, while the Confessions, “the last product of Augustine’s youth and the first work of his maturity,” was written in 397, the year after his consecration as bishop. The ‘90s were dedicated to intense Bible study caused by new preaching duties, the pivotal years between what I have termed Augustine’s “early” and “late” periods. Both works therefore exhibit a tension between the Platonic and the Pauline perspectives.

Of True Religion (De vera religione) is patterned after the Platonic ascent. One of Augustine’s objectives is to show that the Christian religion fulfills what Plato had anticipated. The Greek philosopher had in fact been a proto-Christian; had he lived under the new dispensation he would have become a follower of Christ. Taking the place of an imaginary student, Augustine approaches Platon in a dialogue, beginning with what unites them:

He was persuaded that truth is seen not with the bodily eyes but by the pure mind, and that any soul that cleaves to truth is thereby made happy and perfect. Nothing hinders the perception of truth more than a life devoted to lusts, and the false images of sensible things, derived from the sensible world and impressed on us by the agency of the body, which begot various opinions and errors. (De Ver. Rel. 3.3)

The imaginary student then asks Plato the rhetorical question if it would not be wonderful if some “great and divine man” should arise to help mankind overcome these errors. God’s Son, who is also the divine Logos, he continues, has indeed appeared “in order that men may receive the Word, love him, and enjoy him so that the soul may be healed and the eye of the mind receive power to use the light” (De Ver. Rel. 3.4). The Platonists are right about the general outline and necessity of the ascent of the soul, but that ascent can be accomplished

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24 [“... persuaderetur non corporei oculis, sed pura mente veritatem videri, cu quae-cunque animis inhaesisset, essem beatam fieri aequo perfequenti. Ad quam perspicuam nihil magis impedit quam vim libidinis deditam et falsas imaginum rerum sensibilium, quae nobis ab hoc sensibilis mundo per corpus impressione varias opiniones erroneasque generaverit.” Translation emended.]

25 [“... vir magnus atque divinus...”; “... ad hoc [sc. verbum] perspicuam, diligentiam, persuenendum, ut anima sanetur et tanta luci aurea coelestis addicta...”]

26 Yet in De Ver. Rel. 26.48–27.50 we also find the first “horizontal” references to the Pauline “old” and “new man” with their corresponding cities, a premonition of the psychological perceptions of the Conf. and the historical perspective of De Civ. Dei.

27 [“... transcende et te ipsum.”]

28 [“... quatenus ratio posuit progressu and invisibilitas et temporabilius et aeterna concenden.”]

29 [“... falsas imaginum rerum sensibilium...”]

30 “phantasma... de specie corporis corporum sensu auctum frigant...”

31 “... constantem unitatem videre non sinunt.” See also De Ver. Rel. 50.95–98, and 55.108.
rived from things seen in the flesh” (De Ver. Rel. 34.64). Again alluding to Romans 1: 21, he clinches the matter by seemingly blocking all ways of human ascent:

It is sin which deceives souls, when they seek something that is true but abandon or neglect truth. They love the works of the artificer more than the artificer or his art, and are punished by falling into the error of expecting to find the artificer and his art in his works, and when they cannot do so they think that the works are both the art and the artificer. God is not offered to the corporeal senses, and transcends even the mind. (De Ver. Rel. 36.67) 32

If there is a way to God, it does not seem to start from below. To solve this dilemma, Augustine falls back on the Incarnation: God has intervened by sending his Son, who as true God and true human bridges the gap between God and humanity (De Ver. Rel. 16.30, and 36.66). Yet since the divine Logos is not only “the grace whereby we are reconciled,” but also “the form we imitate” (De Ver. Rel. 65.118), 34 that solution involves Pythagorean numerology (De Ver. Rel. 29.52). Number, found both in the beauty of the human form (De Ver. Rel. 40.75) and in poetry (De Ver. Rel. 22.42), can lead to the unity of the One:

If fleshy pleasure is loved, let it be carefully considered and vestigial traces of number will be recognized in it. We must, then, seek the realm where number exists in complete tranquillity; for there existence is, above all, unity. (De Ver. Rel. 42.79) 35

As we shall see when we return to Petrarch, both the problem of the phantasms and the formal solution will figure prominently in the Secretum and the Rime sparse.

A decade after his conversion, Augustine decided to write his Confessions, a spiritual autobiography that internalizes and subjectivizes the theory of ascent expounded and explored in earlier philosophical and doctrinal treatises. His own experience becomes the testing-ground for the viability of his theoretical hypotheses—in particular, 32 “O animae pervaces, data mithi, qui videat sine uia imaginazione visorum carnalium, ...”
33 “... peccata animas fallunt, cum verum querunt relict et neglecta veritate. Nam quoniam opera magis quam artificem atque ipsum artem dilexerunt, hoc errore puniuntur; ut in operatoribus artificem artemque conquiritur, et cum inventre nequiverint—deus enim non corporalibus sensibus subiacet, sed ipsi mentes superminet—ipsa opera existimant esse et artem et artificem.”
34 “... formam, quam sequimus, et gradiam, qua reconciliamus,...”
35 “Si ergo voluptas carnis diligent, ea ipsa diligentius consideretur; et cum ibi recognita fuerint quorumdam vestigia numerorum, quiserendum est ubi sine tumore sint. Ibi enim magis unum est quod est.”

the relation between Plotinus and Paul: do they complement or confront each other? After having covered his early life up to the point of his coming to Milan, the newly consecrated bishop in Book 7 relates how God had used proud men to provide him with “books of the Platonists, translated from the Greek into Latin” (Conf. 7.9.13). 36 He believes that despite differences of wording, their sense was the same as St. John’s gospel and the Pauline epistles. That is, the heavenly Word of John I had much in common with the Platonist logos. Yet he also realized that if the divinity of Christ could be explained in Plotinian terms, his humanity could not: he had not read in his writings that “the Word was made flesh and came to dwell among us” (Conf. 7.9.14). 37 What Augustine instead stresses is the resulting introspection: “These books served to remind me to return to my own self. Under your guidance I entered into the depths of my soul” (Conf. 7.10.16). 38 The turn within leads to a Plotinian ascent, characteristically clinched with a reference to Romans 1: 20:

So, step by step, my thoughts moved on from consideration of material things to the soul. ... And so, in an instant of awe, my mind attained to the sight of the God who is. Then, at last, I caught sight of your invisible nature, as is it is known from your creatures.

But the Pauline reference leads to a confession of shortcomings:

But I had no strength to fix my gaze upon them. In my weakness I recoiled and fell back into my old ways, carrying with me nothing but the memory of something that I loved and longed for, as though I had sensed the fragrance of the fare but was not yet able to eat it. (Conf. 7.17.23) 39

Augustine instead finds the answer outside himself, in the Word: 40 he regained his strength by embracing “the mediator between God and men, 36 “... platonicorum libros ex graeca lingua in latinam versos,...”
37 “... verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis,...”
38 “Et inde ad omnium reddire ad memet ipsum, intra in intima mea duce in...”
39 “Atque ita gradatim a corpore ad sentimentem per corpus animam,... et pervenit ad id quod est in ictu trepidantis aspectus. Tunc vero invisibilis tua per ea qua facta sunt intellecta conspicui, sed acie figere non evolui, et repercu rsa infirmitate redditus solitius non mecum ferebam nisi amantem memoriam et quasi olefacta desideratam quae comedere nondum possem.”
40 As Brian Stock explains, “In Confessions 7, [Augustine] took a step in a new direction: he effectively domesticated the neoplatonic ascent by uniting its goals to those of Christian reading and meditation. The move permitted him to remain critical of philosophy while incorporating the key feature of meditative reflection into a programme accessible to all. ... At the end of book 7, he wants us to be students of scripture like himself, not neoplatonic mystics” (Augustine the Reader [Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996], pp. 65 and 69).
When Augustine enters a small Milanese garden, the tensions come to a crisis. He describes the inner turmoil in a passage that almost certainly found an echo in Petrarch’s tortured antitheses: “Meanwhile I was beside myself with madness that would bring me sanity. I was dying a death that would bring me life. I knew the evil that was in me, but the good that was soon to be born in me I did not know” (Conf. 8.8.19). The release comes with the hearing of children’s voices urging him to “pick it up and read”; he takes this to mean the Bible that he carries with him, and his eyes fall on some verses in Romans 15 that admonish him to seek Christ’s help in his battle against the flesh (Conf. 8.12.29).

A growing awareness of the need for divine grace made Augustine revise but not completely discard the general Plotinian outline of his theology. He can therefore dedicate book 10 of the Confessions to the theoretical ramifications of his own broken ascent, centering on an important faculties of the soul, the memory and the imagination. Book 10 is also a justification of the project Augustine has been involved in throughout the preceding nine books: the gathering and structuring of the scattered images of a torn life, stored in the memory, into a coherent narrative of conversion. Based on Aristotelian faculty psychology, the memory and the imagination stand between the senses and the intellect. As Albert Russell Ascoli explains: “The imagination is the faculty by which sense impressions are converted into mental records; while memory is the faculty in which such records are conserved over the passage of time. . . . they mediate the mental movement from the sensual to the intellectual world by the formation and retention of images and words, which, respectively, represent, but do not parake essentially of, the purely sensual and purely ideal realms.” It is in this context that Petrarch’s reading of the Confessions on Mont Ventoux comes in:

When it must go beyond this natural faculty of mine [i.e., the senses], as I rise by stages towards the God who made me. The next stage is memory, which is like a great field or a spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images of all kinds.

44... sed tamum insaniebam salubriter et moriebar vitaliter, gnarus quid mal essent et ignarus quid boni post paululum futurus essent.
45 And as a narrative of conversion, explains Freccero, the Confessions “came to be regarded only in the modern era for what it is: not simply the life of a saint, but also the paradigm for all representations of the self in a retrospective literary structure. . . . When he told his life story in terms of a conversion from paganism to Christianity, Augustine was at the same time establishing a literary genre, the confession, or narrative of the self” (p. 17).
46 Ascoli, p. 17.
which are conveyed to it by the senses. . . . Yet men go out and gaze in astonishment at high mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad reaches of rivers, the ocean that encircles the world, or the stars in their courses. But they pay no attention to themselves. They do not marvel at the thought that while I have been mentioning these things, I have not been looking at them with my eyes, and that I could not even speak of mountains or waves, rivers or stars, which are things that I have seen, or of the ocean, which I know only on the evidence of others, unless I could see them in my mind's eye, in my memory, and with the same vast spaces between them that would be there if I were looking at them in the world outside myself. (Conf. 10.8.12 and 15)\textsuperscript{47}

Where Petrarch found a renunciation of the physical world, Augustine was rather marvelling at the glory of his mental faculties, which, explains Ascoli, were “responsible for mediating the human self’s passage between the sensual world of time and space and the infinite, eternal world of the ‘beata vita.’”\textsuperscript{48}

Characteristically, however, Augustine’s inquiries about the memory and imagination reveal rupture rather than smooth continuity. With Of True Religion in fresh memory, we are aware that images may turn into disruptive phantasms. Augustine’s mental ascent, covering chapters 6 to 27, in fact never gets beyond the faculty of memory, and the last 15 chapters emphasize the debilitating impediments to a successful ascent.\textsuperscript{49} In the end, progress is impossible without God’s direct intervention:

During this life, which may be called a perpetual trial, no one should be confident that although he has been able to pass from a worse state to a better, he may not also pass from a better state to a worse. Our only hope, our only confidence, the only firm promise we have is your mercy. (Conf. 10.32.48)\textsuperscript{50}

Unless illumined by grace, the human microcosm suffers from the same fragmentation as the fluctuating macrocosm: “my life is a kind of

distraction and dispersal, . . . I am divided up in time whose order I do not know”  (Conf. 11.29.39).\textsuperscript{51} Only in God, through the mediation of Christ the Logos, can the scattered images of the past be pieced together:

But in all the regions where I thread my way, seeking your guidance, only in you do I find a safe haven for my mind, a gathering-place for my scattered parts, where no portion of me can depart from you. (Conf. 10.40.65)\textsuperscript{52}

Confessing to God in writing permeated by scriptural quotations constitutes for Augustine that “gathering place” into which the “scattered parts” of his life gain coherence and meaning.

The question remains if Augustine’s conversion meant the immediate healing of his divided self. Were the tensions only pre-conversion pangs resolved once and for all in the garden? When he looked back on his first ten years as a Christian, his own assessment is not so assured:

And sometimes you [i.e., God] allow me to experience a feeling quite unlike my normal state, an inward sense of delight which, if it were to reach perfection in me, would be something not encountered in this life, though what it is I cannot tell. And my heavy burden of distress drags me down again to earth. Again I become a prey to my habits, which hold me fast. (Conf. 10.40.65)\textsuperscript{53}

As Augustine met the challenge of Pelagius, he became less and less optimistic about the possibility of reaching earthly perfection even under grace. According to Frederick H. Russell, he even came to see the presumption of perfectibility as the defining mark of heresy: “The common denominator of all his foes was that they advanced the possibility of spiritual perfection here below.”\textsuperscript{54} The question of perfectibility could be put in exegetical terms: when Paul wrote about the inter-

\textsuperscript{47} “Transibis ergo et istam naturae meae, gradibus ascendens ad eum qui fecit me, et venio in campos et ina praetoria memoriae, ubi sunt thesauri innumerae imaginum de cuiuscumque rebus sensis invenctorum . . . Et cum homines mirari alta montium et ingentes fluctus mare et latissimos lapso fluminum et oceani ambitum et gyros siderum, et reliquum se ipsum, nec miratur quod haec omnia, cum dicerem, non ea videbam oculis, nec tamen dicere, nisi montes et fluctus et fluminia et sidera quae visi et occe

\textsuperscript{48} Ascoli, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{49} See Stock, pp. 215–16.

\textsuperscript{50} “. . . nemo securus esse debet in ista vita, quae tota temptatio nominatur, utrum qui fieri potuit ex detiori melior non fiat etiam ex meliore detior. Una spe, una fiducia, una firma promissio misericordiae tuae.”


\textsuperscript{52} “Neque in his omnibus quae percurro consules te invenio utum locum animae meae nisi in te, quo congeneratur sparsa mea nec a te quicquam recedat ex me.”

\textsuperscript{53} “Et aliquando intromitis me in affectum mutum insonum inornatus, ad nescio quam dulcedinem, quae si perficiatur in me, nescio quid erit quod vita ista non erit. Sed recido in haec aerumnosse ponderibus et resorbo solsitii et tenero . . .”

nal battle in Romans 7, the central text for Augustine’s discussion of the divided will, was he talking about an unregenerate person still living under the law, or was he talking about a Christian living under grace? In *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans* (394), Augustine’s first struggling exegesis of Paul, he was confident enough that “the man described here [in Romans 7: 15–16] is under the Law, prior to grace; . . . For by his free will man has a means to believe in the Liberator and to receive grace so that, with the liberating assistance of him who gives it, he might cease to sin” (*Exp. Rom.* 44). 50 Commenting on his earlier verdict at the end of his life, however, he now felt that even a Christian living under grace had to struggle with sin: “every saintly person already living ‘under grace’ can say all those things which I have said are the words of the man not yet living ‘under grace,’ but ‘under the Law’” (*Retr.* 1.23.1). As for himself, he confessed that “I do not claim this perfection for myself even now when I am old, and even when, in early manhood, I had begun to write and speak to the people” (Prologue to *Retr.*). 51 The humanity and humility of the aging bishop, who on his death-bed recited the penitential Psalms of David, shines through as it had not done in the youthful philosopher.

III

In “The Ascent of Mont Ventoux,” Petrarch’s divided self is expressed through two men (373; 43, see above), the poet himself and Augustine. “Augustinus” and “Franciscus” 58 return in that most introspective of documents, the *Secretum*. Both are internal voices, subjective representa-

sentations not to be identified in any simplistic way with the historical Augustine or with Petrarch. They can profitably be interpreted in the Freudian categories of the author’s ego trying to negotiate between the id (Franciscus) and the superego (Augustinus). A parallel approach, used in this chapter, is to see both men as differing Augustinian voices, representing the perspectives of the “young” and the “old” Augustine. Here Freud is not as useful, since the focus is less on the ego of either Augustine or Petrarch than on the transmission of anthropological world views.

Scholars have stressed the divergence between the opinions of the dialogue’s fictive “Augustinus” and the views found in the writings of Augustine himself. Some even associate the fictive “Franciscus” with the real Augustine, while “Augustinus” is perceived as a representative of Ciceronian Stoicism, with a touch of Platonism. 59 Trinkaus comes close to my own position when he posits: “The two figures are seen dynamically as the ‘before’ and ‘after’ of a single man; they are Augustine, and they are Petrarch too, as he feels he is and aspires to become.” 60 The focus for Trinkaus is the conversions of Augustine (as recorded in the *Confessions*) and of Petrarch (longed for in the *Secretum* but not achieved). To use the Pauline terms from Romans 7 that were central to both Augustine and Petrarch, Francis of Assisi would still be living under the law, while Augustine speaks from a position of grace. Yet as we have seen, the mature Augustine recognized that even as a Christian, living in a state of grace, he suffered from the divided self that he as a young convert considered a sign of the unconverted life under the law. Seen from this perspective, the *Secretum* (or at least large parts of it) can be read as a dialogue between the perfectionist assumptions of the young Augustine (in the persona of Augustinus) and the more realistic assessment of the old bishop (in the persona of Franciscus).

50 “Nunc enim homo descriptur sub lege positus ante gratiam . . . In liberorum arbitrio habet, ut credat liberatori et accipiat gratiam, ut iam illo, qui eam donat, liberae et adiuvans non pecet.”

51 “. . . post quosque sanctus iam sub gratia positus dicere ists omnia, quae hic esse dixi verba hominis nondum sub gratia positae sed lege.” For a comprehensive discussion of Augustine’s views on Paul’s status in Romans 7, see James Weitzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), esp. pp. 144–97.

52 “Ego mihi hanc perfectionem nec nunc arrago, cum iam sim senex, quoto minus quo venisse costerni scribere vel apud populos dicere.” The importance that the mature Augustine attaches to the inability of reaching perfection in this life can be gauged by the frequency with which he corrects his earlier writings on this issue (see *Retr.* 1.7.5; 1.15.2; 1.19.1–2; 1.23.1; 1.24.2; 1.26.66; 1.28.1) or brings it up in his anti-Pelagian works (see Against Two Letters of the Pelagians 8.13–11.24; On the Spirit and the Letter 2.2.4 and 36.65–66; On Nature and Grace 35.41 and 50.7; On Man’s Perfection in Righteousness 7.16 and 21.44; On Forgiveness of Sins, and Baptism 2.1–34; Against Julian 2.3 and 5.23). Following established scholarly practice, I distinguish these fictive personas from the historical Augustine and Petrarch by using their Latin/Italian name forms.

58 See, among others, Trinkaus, “Petrarch and Classical Philosophy,” p. 271 (yet for a divergent view, see his own *Petrarch as Philosopher*, p. 58), and Foster, pp. 163–71. In an influential article first published in 1975, William J. Bouwsma sees Stoicism and Augustinianism in the *Secretum* as representing two contradictory traditions: “The Two Faces of Humanism: Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance Thought,” reprinted in *A Usable Past* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990), pp. 19–73. There are points of contact between Bouwsma’s categories and my own “early” and “late” Augustinian perspectives in that Bouwsma’s Augustinianism is that of the mature bishop, while the young Augustine was influenced not only by Platonism (which I have emphasized) but also by Stoicism. Both Augustine and Petrarch first encountered Stoicism and Platonism in Ciceron, who had already partially conflated the two schools.

59 Trinkaus, *Petrarch as Philosopher*, p. 58.
The argument of the first of the three dialogues that comprise the
Secretum centers on the question whether Franciscus can muster the
will-power to lead a holy life, in order that “optimus fiam [I may be-
come better and better, even to perfection]” (Secretum I; 72; 24). To
achieve this goal, a conspicuously medieval Augustinus urges him to
meditate on death. Augustinus’ own example proves that a trans-
formed will is possible:

And then my will after that became fully changed, and my weakness also was
changed in that same moment to power, and by a marvelous and most blessed
alteration I was transformed instantly and made another man, another August-
us altogether. (Secretum I; 66; 20)

The change, however, is made possible not only by religious medita-
tion, but also by listening to the precepts of philosophy (Secretum I;
58; 12). Stoicism in particular is useful, but also the Platonism medi-
ated by Petrarca’s favourite Cicero (Secretum I; 94; 44).

The philosophical perspective is vertical and non-incarnate. As
Augustinus teaches Franciscus, “It was from heaven your soul came forth:
never will I assert a lower origin than that. But in its contact with the
flesh, wherein it is imprisoned, it has lost much of its first splendour.
Have no doubt of this in your mind” (Secretum I; 92; 41–42).
Referring to Of True Religion, Augustinus warns Franciscus of the phantasms
that prove the greatest hindrance for a successful ascent:

Of a truth the countless forms and images of things visible, that one by one are
brought into the soul by the senses of the body, gather there in the inner
centre in a mass, and the soul, not being akin to these or capable of learning
them, weigh it down and overwhelm it with their contrariety. Hence that
plague of too many impressions tears apart and wounds the thinking faculty of
the soul, and with its fatal, distracting complexity bars the way of clear medita-
tion, whereby it would mount up to the threshold of the One Chief Good.
(Secretum I; 94; 43)

61 “Itaque postquam plene volui, ilicet et potui, miraque et felicissima celeritate trans-
formans sum in altem Augustum, ...”
62 Animum quidem uam, sicut celitus bene instituam esse non negaverim, sic ex
contagio corporis huius, ubi circumspecta est, multum a praevena nobilitate sua dege-
nerasse ne dubies.
63 Conglobanor siquidem species innemere et imaginem rerum visibilium, quae cor-
poris integro sensibus, postquam singulariter admisse sunt, cattavigo in animo
penetrabilibus densanentur; samque, nec ad id geniam nec tam multorum diffimiumque
capacem, pregratant atque confundunt. Hinc pestis illa fantastamut vetros discernens
laseramina cogitatis, meditatiobusque clariscit, quibus ad unum solum summumque
lumen ascendit, iter obstruens varietate morifera.

64 “... in carcerem tenebrosum atque humentem olentemque pestiferum ...”
65 “... animum a liubinitibus corporis arcendum et eranda fantastama, ut ad perva-
denda divinitatis archana, cui propio mortaliati annexa cogitatione, cur pus exigui-
tus consurgat.”
66 “Quia multos vidiscis mei videteor, inter quos et me ipsum, nihil molestius ferentes
quum quod visidetum lugum non liceret excutere, quamvis ad id per omnem vim natum
sumis virtus nitentur.”
67 “... inter procellas mesqu fluctuatione ase vestigium recognoscis. Ex quo fit ut, quos
agens Confessionum tuorum libros lego, inter duo contrarios affectus, spem videlicet et
metum, levis non sine lacrimis interdum legere me arbitrare non alienam sed propriam
mee peregrinationis historiam.”
The medieval component in Augustinus’ persona in fact goes against the grain of his Platonism, subtly undercutting his own optimism. The ascent to heaven does not go through some Platonic meditation on the One, but, paradoxically, through “the perpetual recollection of our mortal nature” (Secretum I; 74; 26). To become perfect requires a realization of our imperfect nature.

In the final dialogue, Augustinus attacks what he believes to be the areas of Franciscus’ principal weaknesses: love and desire for glory. As the object of the poet’s love and the figurative representation of “the laurel of empire or of poetry” (Secretum III; 198; 194), Laura is intimately connected with both impediments. These weaknesses function like “two strong chains” (Secretum III; 168; 108) that prevent the poet’s spiritual ascent. Petrarch borrows this metaphor from Conf. 8.5.10, where Augustine describes himself as having been fettered by the iron chains of an uncontrollable lust. Sexual purity was of paramount importance to the Father, a troubled topic that became central also to Petrarch’s quest for salvation. In an image that I believe colored Petrarch’s conception of Laura, Augustine pictures his imminent release from the “chains” of lust through the female figure of Continenence: “I had turned eyes elsewhere, and while I stood trembling at the barrier, on the other side I could see the chaste beauty of Continenence in all her serene, unsullied joy, as she modestly beckoned me to cross over and to hesitate no more” (Conf. 8.11.27). This at least is how Franciscus would like to picture Laura: she is “the image of virtue” (Secretum III; 172; 111), “whose character is the image and picture of perfect honour” (Secretum III; 176; 114).

Augustinus, as is to be expected, does not accept that argument. If Laura is an image, she is an example of the detrimental phantasms of Of True Religion. Alluding to Romans 1: 20–25, that key Pauline text about the scope and limitations of the intellectual ascent, Augustinus punctures the stilnovist adoration of the domus: “She has detached your mind from the love of heavenly things and has inclined your heart to love the creature more than the Creator” (Secretum III; 186; 124). Demonstrating that the love of human beauty leads to idolatry rather than beatitude, Augustinus echoes the strictures of Of True Religion:

But the mind operates perversely, for it and not the eye was made to contemplate supreme beauty. Such a man as we have been speaking of wants to turn his mind to corporeal things and his eyes to God. He seeks to know carnal things and to see spiritual things. But that is impossible. (De Ver. Rel. 33.62).

Franciscus is eventually forced to concede what Petrarch also admits in “The Ascent Of Mont Ventoux”: he had turned off the straight and narrow road when he first laid eyes on Laura (Secretum III; 192; 129).

Victoria Kahn has demonstrated that the Secretum is both a reading and a willful misreading of the Confessions. Franciscus ends the dialogue with a halfhearted promise to follow Augustinus’ admonitions:

I will collect the scattered fragments of my soul, and will make a great endeavor to possess myself in patience. But even while we speak, a crowd of important affairs, though only of the world, is waiting for my attention. (Secretum III; 258; as translated in Kahn, 163)

Franciscus attempts to follow Augustine’s example in the Confessions, in which a “converted memory . . . collects and orders the fragments of past experience into a coherent self, that is, a coherent narrative.” Yet, as Kahn points out, while Augustine writes a confessional narrative that gathers his fragmented experiences into the unity of God’s larger purpose, Franciscus uses writing (a “crowd of important affairs”) as an excuse for not meditating on his mortality. The Secretum, therefore, does not qualify as a redemptive narrative any more than “The Ascent of Mont Ventoux,” which also ends on a note of dispersal:

75 “Ab amore celestium elongavi animum et a Creatore ad creaturam desiderium inclinavi.”
76 “Sed animus perversus, cui ad contemplandam summam pulchritudinem mens, non oculus factus est. Ille autem vult mentem convertere ad corpora, oculos ad deum. Quaeserit enim intelligere carnali et videre spirituali, quod fieri non potest.”
77 Victoria Kahn, “The Figure of the Reader in Petrarch’s Secretum,” PMLA 100 (1985): 154–66.
78 “. . . sparsa anime fragmenta recolligam, moraborque mecum sedulo. Sane nunc, dum loquimur, multa me magnaqua, quamvis adsue mortalia, negotia expectant.”
79 Kahn, p. 156, rephrasing Augustine’s own words: “The collection of the broken condition of mine, wherein I was piecemeal scattered asunder [configit me a dispersione, in qua frustatim discissa sunt]” (Conf. 2.1.1, as translated in Kahn, p. 157).
Pray for these thoughts, I beseech you, that they may at last find stability. So long have they been idling about and, finding no firm stand, been uselessly driven through so many matters. May they now turn at last to the One, the Good, the True, the stably Abiding. ("Ventoux" 377; 46)

IV

In the same period that Petrarch engages in this dialogue with Augustine (and perhaps writes "The Ascent of Mont Ventoux" as well), he organizes the basic structure of what he terms his *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, "Fragments of vernacular poetry." Might this collection of fragments constitute the poet's attempt at a coherent and salvific narrative of the self?

Voi ch' ascoltate in rime sparse il suono
di quei sospiri ond' io nudriva 'l core
in sul mio primo giovine errore,
quand' era in parte alt' uman da quel ch' i' sono:
del vario stile in ch' io piango et ragiono
fra le van speranze e 'l van dolore,
ove sia chi per prova intenda amore
spero trovar pietà, non che perdono. . . .

You who hear in scattered rhymes the sound of those sighs with which I nourished my heart during my first youthful error, when I was in part another man from what I am now:

for the varied style in which I weep and speak between vain hopes and vain sorrow, where there is anyone who understands love through experience, I hope to find pity, not only pardon. (*Rime sparse* 1)

Does Petrarch expect the reader or listener of his "scattered rhymes" to collect the fragments into a coherent unity? Is the poet to be pardoned and pitied?

One way to achieve such coherence would be through the unifying and redemptive force of his lady. Petrarch had a powerful example of such a force near at hand in Dante's Beatrice, and both the *Vita nuova* and the *Divina comedia* function as persistent subtexts throughout the *Rime sparse*. Dante announces his reliance on an Augustinian poetic in the very first lines of the *Vita nuova*, when he introduces the key concepts of memory and imagination culled from *Confessions* 10:

"pro quibus ora, queso, ut tandiug vagi et instabiles aliqua quo subsistent, et inutiliter per multa laceri, ad unum, bonum, verum, certum, stabilis ete se convertant."

80 In that part of the book of my memory before which little could be read, a rubric is found that says: *Inevita vita nova*. . . Nine times since my birth had the heaven of light returned to almost the same point in its orbit when to my eyes first appeared the glorious lady of my mind, who was called Beatrice by many who did not know her given name. . . I say that from that time forward, Love ruled over my soul, which was so early espoused to him, and he began to assume over me such assurance and such mastery, through the power that my imagination gave him, that I was obliged to do all his bidding fully. . . And although her image, which continually stayed with me, gave Love its strength to rule over me, it was nevertheless of such noble power that at no time did it allow Love to rule me without the faithful counsel of reason, in those things where such counsel was useful to heed. (VN 1-2.9)

81 Right from the start, the image of Beatrice recollected from the book of his memory leads the poet towards moral and spiritual purification. The religious significance of her name is immediately hinted at, and her numerological status as a "miracle" associated with the Triune God, later in the book to be explicated, 82 makes the first of many obtrusive appearances. While the poet is warned in words remiscent of *Of True Religion* that "it is time for our false images to be put aside"
Never was mortal so disposed to place his mind on God, and none surrendered e’er his heart to God with so much willingness, as I did, when I heard that call to prayer; and so on Him was all my longing stayed, that Beatrice, eclipsed, seemed no more there. (Paradiso 10: 55–60)

While Aldo Bernardo has perhaps most forcefully claimed that Laura in the *Rime sparse* is modelled on Beatrice, holding that Petrarch “had felt all along that somehow Laura had indeed served as a ‘scala al fato’,” Sara Sturm-Maddox has argued persuasively that “the experience of the poet of the *Rime* stands in direct contrast [to Dante’s solution]: here the attempts to transcend the attachment to Laura’s earthly image is intermittent, and ultimately it ends in failure.” Augustine had provided both poets with a powerful female symbol of coherence and unity in lady Continentine: “Truly it is by continence that we are made as one and regain that unity of self which we lost by falling apart in the search for a variety of pleasures” (Conf. 10.29.40). If the “unity of self” is the answer to the perennial human dilemma of the divided soul, lady Continentine must overcome lady Pleasure. As lady Continentine, Laura could have taught Petrarch, as Beatrice had taught Dante, in Bernardo’s words, “how to overcome Man’s original sin, *cupiditas.*” As Augustine had admonished the male readers of *Of True Religion*: “Let us conquer the blandishments and troubles of desire. If we are men let us subdue this woman, *Cupiditas.* With our guidance she will herself become better and be called no longer Cupidity but Temperance” (De Ver. Ral. 41.78). The problem for Petrarch, however, is that he cannot make up his mind which of the two ladies Laura represents. One voice sees Laura as the “sol già d’onestate intero albergo [sole unblemished dwelling place of

Beatrice’s death and subsequent elevation to glory, having been intimated already on the first page, does not radically change the poet’s writerly situation. The whole text is a recollection, written from a “in morte” perspective, and with the “wonderful vision” (VN 42:1) of the *Commedia* already in view. All along, it has been the salvific image of Beatrice, in vita or morte, that has lead Dante onward and upward. Her physical presence never once distracted him while she was alive (even if that of other women did), and after death she “became great spiritual beauty,” moving the intellect rather than the body (VN 33:8). All in all, she fulfils the role of Lady Continentine in *Conf.* 8.11.27 and 10.29.40, a role she also performs to perfection from Canto 50 of the *Purgatorio,* guiding the poet towards a beatific vision of God that ultimately leaves her behind:

> Cor di mortal non fu mai si digesto a divozione ed a renderi a Dio
> Con tutto il suo gradir cotando presto
> come a quelle parole mi fec’io,
> a sì tutto il mi’ amore in lui si mise
> che Beatrice eclissò nell’oblio.

> 85 “... tempus est ut praetermictantur simulacra nostra.”
> 86 “... mi cominciari molii et diversi pensamenti a combattere et a tentare.”
> 87 “... mirabile visione...”
> 88 “... divenne spiritual bellezza grande.”

90 “Per continentiam quiique conligitur et redigitur in unum, quo in multa defleximus.” See Stock on the similarities between memory and continence as “unifiers of disordered experience” (p. 227).
91 A role Bernardo claims for Laura in the *Triumphs* (p. 183; see also p. 194).
92 “Vincamus ergo huius cupiditatis et blanditiae et molestias. Subigiemos nobis hanc feminam, si vir sumus. Nobis ducibus et ipsa erit melior nec iam cupiditas, sed temperantia nominabitur.”
chastity]" (Rime sparse 146). While the other accuses her of causing the "fero desio ch' al cor s'accese [fierce desire that was lit in my heart]" (Rime sparse 62). The Rime sparse as a whole, as Sturm-Maddox demonstrates, contrasts two incompatible cosmologies that Dante to his own mind had succeeded in bridging: the Christian religion and the quasi-religious adoration of the donna, grounded in neoplatonic theory. As a result, "the itinerary of the Rime, rather than a journey from sin to redemption, is that from the embracing of an illusion to the end of illusion."54 Indeed, there is a debate, carried out by the now internalized voices from the Secretum,55 between the two cosmologies—or using my terminology, between the two Augustinian perspectives—reverberating throughout the Rime and adding to the poet's mental turmoil.

The debate comes to a head in "I vo pensando" (264), the opening Canzone of the "in morte" section purportedly added after Laura's death in 1348 as part of the restructuring of the Rime sparse.56 The narrator of "I vo pensando" is torn by internal voices, voices that echo those of Augustinus and Franciscus in the Secretum. As in the dialogue, the perspectives of the "young" and "old" Augustine—neoplatonic perfectionism versus a theology of grace—rub shoulders in the introduction (lines 1–18):

I vo pensando, et nel penser m'assale
una pietà si forte di me stesso
che mi conduce spesso
ad altro lagrimar ch'io non soleva:
ché vedendo ogni giorno il fin più presso,
mille fiate o chiaio a Dio quell'ale
co le qual del morale
carcer nostro intelletto al Ciel si leva.

I go thinking and in thought pity for myself assails me, so strong that it often leads me to weeping different from my accustomed one: for, seeing every day the end coming near, a thousand times I have asked God for those wings with which our intellect raises itself from this mortal prison to Heaven.

But until now no prayer or sigh or weeping of mine has helped me; and that is just, for he who, able to stand, has fallen along the way deserves to lie on the ground against his will. Those merciful arms [of the crucified Christ] in which I trust I see still open; but fear grasps my heart at the examples of others, and I tremble for my state; another spurs me and I am perhaps at the end.

Contemplating his final end (a meditation initiated by the death of Laura, but also responding to Augustinus' call for contrition in the Secretum), the poet weeps because he has not achieved perfection, despite asking God repeatedly for the Platonic wings "with which our intellect raises itself from this mortal prison to Heaven." The problem, he accuses himself, is that his soul is divided: he remains earthbound against his own will. Recognizing that Christ's "merciful arms" are still open to him, he nevertheless doubts they will avail him.

As a response to this dilemma, two contradictory voices come to Petrarch's mind. The first voice is clearly the Augustine of Of True Religion, warning him in well-known terms against the world's lack of "pace et di fermezza [peace and stability])" (line 31). Unless the poet plucks up every root of the world's pleasure (II. 24–26), his soul will never achieve peace. The destructive pleasure comes from the "image [image]" (I. 42) of Laura, which prevents Petrarch from raising himself "a più beata spene / mirando 'l ciel [to a more blessed hope by gazing at the heavens]" (II. 48–49). As in the Secretum, the Augustinian voice makes the love of human beauty, in the person of Laura, a tempting and disruptive phantasm rather than a divine reflection of the heavenly beauty or a lady Continente.

The admonishing voice of Augustinus is answered by the piled-up oxymora of the poet-lover's "pensier dolce et agro [sweet sharp
thought]," speaking the language of instability and psychic tension: "faticosa e dillettoso salma [difficult and delightful weight]," "io agghiamo / io furo [I freeze / I flame]" (ll. 55–60). Francis' heart is oppressed with desire and tied down by the "duo nodi [two knots]" (l. 83) of love and fame, another metaphor for what Augustinus in the Secretum had termed Francis' "two chains." The mood is similar to the ending of the Secretum: the poet accepts the Augustinian verdict, an adaptation of St. Paul's words in Romans 1: 25: "Ché mortal cosa amar con tanta fede / quanto a Dio sol per debito conversi / più si disdice a chi più pregio brama [For the more one desires honor, the more one is forbidden to love a mortal thing with the faith that belongs to God alone]" (ll. 99–101).

Yet with death before his eyes, and having asked Christ to take away his shame, Petrarch nevertheless has "a soffir l'aspra guerra / che 'ncontra me medesmo seppi ordire [to suffer the bitter war that I have managed to combine against myself]" (ll. 111–26). The mature Augustinian perspective now makes itself felt, reminding us how the dying bishop had read the penitential Psalms of David with tears. The Pauline cry became the cry of both Augustine and Petrarch: "What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. . . . For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7: 22–25). When Petrarch echoes this passage in the last line of the Canzone—"vangelo 'l meggio et al peggior m'appiglio [I see the better but I lay hold on the worse]"—he not only recognizes his inability to live up to perfectionist standards, but also he embraces a mature Augustinian theology of grace.

This was not the first time Petrarch had alluded to Romans 7. We have already seen a similar echo in "The Ascent of Mont Ventoux." In a letter written to Giacomo Colonna in 1336, he conflates the message of Paul with words of Vergil from the Aeneid:

"Voluntas mea fluctuat et desideria discordant et discordando me lacerant. Sic adversus interiorem hominem exterior pugnant, "Nunc dextra ingenuam iratus, nunc ille suitor; / Nec mora nec requies" (Petrarca, Le Familiar, ed. Dotti, p. 307; Letters, p. 31).

My analysis of De oio is based on Trinkaus, Post as Philosopher, pp. 85–88.

99 "et de sola Dei misericordia se resumpta ipse [sc. infelix homo] sibi respondet: "Gratia Dei per Iesum Chritum dominum? Ad illum unum qui solus potens est succurre in hoc intestino et domestico prelo clamandum est: ille suppliciter exaudiont us nos liberet de corpore mortis hulcis, unde meretrum hominis non liberat, sed gravis Dei solidus, cui nihil, ne dicam impossibile, sed ne dicam quidem est" (Petrarca, De oio religio, in Opera Latina, I. 720; English transl. in Trinkaus, Post as Philosopher, p. 85).


101 See Petrarca, Epiistolae de Renis Semilibus 8.1.
sinner]”. “licet peccator, certe cristianus sum [Though I am a sinner, I certainly am a Christian].”108

The scriptural references speak of a growing familiarity with St. Paul, but they also reveal a move towards a more Pauline Augustine, a combination that made some Averroist detractors taunt Petrarch for “your Paul and Augustine.”109 Petrarch’s adherence to a more Pauline perspective meant that some of the Platonic and perfectionist assumptions of the young Augustine had to go. As he writes in On His Own Ignorance (finished in 1370), “The very men who know most and understand most possess, I presume, in the highest degree this knowledge of themselves and of their own imperfection, this knowledge which I have called their consolation” (Ignorantia 1050; 67).105 A purely intellectual ascent was therefore no longer an option: “In this Life it is impossible to know God in his fullness” (Ignorantia 1110; 105).106 Likewise, the Platonic view of the body as a prison was replaced with a much more positive assessment of the human frame. This change was influenced by the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Resurrection,107 but also by a better understanding of the mature writings of Augustine, in particular the City of God.108

Petrarch as a result becomes more at ease with Laura’s physical beauty in “The Triumph of Eternity,” probably the last poem to leave his pen. While the Laura of the in morte section of the Rime had appeared more alive than she had ever been in vita, “there are compelling indications in the poems in morte,” explains Sturm-Maddox, “that she is no less the creation of [the poet’s] deliberate imagining, no less a projection of his desires, than the ‘old’ Laura.”109 In a conflation of the salvific strategies of Confessions 10 with the dangerous use of phantasmal visions warned against in Of True Religion, the poet is entwined by his recollection of the living Laura, creating “fantasies, the cherished projections of a cherishing imagination.”110 In the Triumphs, however, the tensions within the Rime sparse are much less evident, and Laura is finally given the beatific status never achieved in the sonnet sequence.111 For the first time she is given a voice and a story of her own, no longer being reduced to a projection of the poet’s desires. As a result, “memory too is to be redeemed,”112 as she is able to follow the example of Beatrice, guiding her lover without the interference of phantasm. When she, body and soul, beckons Petrarch to join her in the last lines of “The Triumph of Eternity,” her beauty speaks of the glories of the redeemed creation. Yet it is not her beauty but the Lord of Creation that redeems both her and her poet:

che, poi ch’avarà ripreso il tuo bel velo,  
se fu beato chi la vide in terra,  
che fia dunque a rivederla in cielo!

And now that her beauty has resumed,  
If he was blessed that saw her on earth,  
What then will it be to see her again in heaven!

But if Laura in the end can be both Beatrice and Medusa, depending on which poem we read, one conclusion we can draw is that Petrarch, for all his drift towards what I call a mature Augustinian theology of grace, was still attracted by the neoplatonist leanings of the young Augustine (as mediated through Dante).

Petrarch felt an attraction even in old age for a particular aspect of the Platonic inheritance: the priority of form. The sublunar world was unstable and the postlapsarian heart divided, yet there was a divine unity behind the transient world. The Pythagorean imperatives as mediated by Augustine inclined Petrarch, as it had Dante,113 to see that unity in mathematical and formalist terms. I shall return to this issue at greater length in chapter 8, but a few observations are germane at this point. If the macrocosm and the microcosm, despite their appar-


106 Further references to this work, abbreviated Ignorantia, will be given in the text by page references to both the Latin and the English version (in that order). On Petrarch and Luther, see Trinkaus, “Religious Thought,” pp. 349–52.

107 As related in another letter to Boccaccio written in 1364 (Ser. 5.2), translated by Hans Nachod in The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, p. 141.

108 “Et haec sui cognitio sec prope imperfectionis extimationem, sicque ipsius quam dixi consolationem, his maxime qui plus sciant plusque intelligant insese augurior.”

109 “Nam et cognosco ad plenum Dei in hac vita nullo potest modo.”


111 Murphy, p. 292. We shall return to Augustine’s changing views of the human body in chapter 3.

112 Sturm-Maddox, Petrarch’s Laurels, p. 191.


114 In addition to the numerology associated with Beatrice (see VN 293, cited in note 36 above), integers of 3 structure both the Vita Nuova and the Commedia, reinforcing the connection with the Trinity.
ent multeity, point toward the ultimate unity of their Maker, so does a work of art. *Rime sparse* and *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, Petrarch's own designations for his sonnet sequence, speak of dispersal and fragmentation (if with the implied Augustinian promise of recollection and reintegration). Yet the *Canzoniere*, the title given to a later generation, refer to music, and thus to harmonious proportionality. Petrarch had in vain hoped that the Laura of the *Rime* could function as the poem's (as well as the poet's) unifying form in an unstable world:

I di miel più leggier che nessun cervo
fuggir come ombra, et non vider più bene
ch' un bater d' occhio, et poche ore serene
ch' amare et dolci ne la mente servo.

Misero mondo instabile et protervo!
del tutto è cieco chi 'n te pon sua spene,
ché 'n te mi ſu I cor tolto, et or sel tene
tal ch' è già terra et non giunge osso a nervo.

Ma la forma miglior che vive ancora
et vivrà sempre su ne l' alto cielo,
di sue bellezze ogni or più m'innamora;
et vo sol in pensar cangiando il pelo
quale ella è oggi e 'n qual parte dimora,
qual a vedere il suo leggadro velo.

My days, swifter than any deer, have fled like a shadow and have seen no good any longer than an instant, and few cloudless hours, which bitter and sweet I preserve in my memory.

Wretched world, unstable and obstinate! He is entirely blind who puts his hope in you! For in you my heart was taken away, and one holds it who is dust and does not join bone to muscle.

But her better form, which still lives and shall always live up in the highest Heaven, makes me ever more in love with her beauties,

and I go with my hair turning, only thinking of what she is like today and where she dwells, and what her lovely veil is to see. (*Rime sparse* 519)

Yet Augustinian strictures had denied Laura that role. While Petrarch would have liked to see her as lady Continence, through whom "we are made as one and regain the unity of self" (*Conf.* 10.29.40),[114] her

function in the *Rime* was more like the phantasms that "do not permit us to see abiding unity" (*De Ver. Rel.* 35.65).[115]

But if beauty in female form is too closely allied to desire, there remains the beauty of the poetry itself: "The verse is beautiful as exhibiting the faint traces of the beauty which the art of poetry keeps steadfastly and unchangeably" (*De Ver. Rel.* 22, 42).[116] Poetry partakes of the unity of art, based on the harmony of each individual part within the whole: "In all the arts it is symmetry that gives pleasure, preserving unity and making the whole beautiful" (*De Ver. Rel.* 30, 55).[117] For Petrarch this meant that the form of his poems could point to the unity that eluded him in the image of Laura. The collection as a whole, as Thomas Roche has argued, has a theological and numerical meaning since the 365 poems are sequenced according to the liturgical year.[118] The same is true also for the individual sonnet. Since 4 is a mundane number and 3 is sacred, the sonnet form itself, as S. K. Heninger has convincingly demonstrated, with its "proportion 4/3 leads inexorably toward heaven, toward arrival in the presence of God, toward salvation."[119] But if the "interplay between the subtext of form and the verbal system in a sonnet," as he goes on to argue, was for Petrarch "wondrously suited to the conflict between body and soul,[120] that only shows how aware Petrarch was of the tensions within the Augustinian system, and indeed within Augustine himself. Giuseppe Mazzotta, discussing "Petrarch's poetics of fragmentation," argues that in the Petrarchian "universe of desire, totality is never possible: desire knows only shreds and fragments, even if plenitude is its ever elusive mirage." The *Rime sparse*, he therefore contends, is only "the attempt to restore the pieces, to give an illusory unity to the fragments."[121] Mazzotta is at least partially right. But if the collection is a failed attempt at unity, this does not make Petrarch an early deconstructionist; his philosophy and religion were too firmly logoscentric for that.

[115] "... constantem uniatem videre non sinunt."

[116] "... pulchrum [sc. versum]. qua extrema vestigia illius pulchritudinis ostentat, quam constanter atque incommutabiliter ars ipsa custodit."

[117] "... in omnibus aribus convenientia placet, qua una salua et pulchra sunt omnia, ...


[112] *... conligimur et redigimur in unum....*
Rather, he had come to agree with the mature Augustine that no human endeavor can produce or even replicate a unity barely glimpsed in this life. Until the veil is pulled back in epiphany or death, we rely upon the grace of a hidden God.\textsuperscript{122}

V

The human dilemma of living in an unstable world, yet looking in faith to the “stably Abiding,”\textsuperscript{123} created in Petrarch a “double consciousness,” “dual elements of tension, or dialectical interplay.”\textsuperscript{124} The divided self is just one area in which this tension is felt. Guided by God through internal illumination and written revelation, the human subject still has to live in the fallen world of Romans 7, resulting in a conflict between wit and will (to use the Elizabethan terms).\textsuperscript{125} Although of classical origin, the double consciousness, as Trinkaus shows, was a fundamental tenet for the mature Augustine. Derived from the heavenly and earthly cities of the City of God, it also incorporated the distinction between “uti et frui,” to use and to enjoy, from On Christian Doctrine 1.4.4. As pilgrims en route to the heavenly city, Christians use the services of the earthly city, yet only God is to be enjoyed. Within the area of “use” Augustine placed education and political life, precariously situated in the unstable environment of postlapsarian experience. This was also the existential condition for Petrarch, as it was for the Christian world around him. “Petrarch’s double consciousness of both an experienced and a revealed truth”\textsuperscript{126} was therefore analogous to Thomas Aquinas’s distinction between nature and grace (to

\textsuperscript{122} Ascoli draws an analogous conclusion about Petrarch’s strategies in the “Ascent of Mont Ventoux”: “Petrarch is actually constructing a radically existential Christian stance—one based on the perception . . . . that within this life there can be no true and secure ‘perspective of the end,’ that man is always in via, caught between the body and spirit. . . . In this view, what Petrarch’s confession loses in authenticity and authority by revealing its continuing bondage to the physical world and the ‘old will’ and by demonstrating its imitative dependence on literary models, it soon regains by admitting its all-too-human instability and mobility, and thus deferring to divine Grace” (30–31).

\textsuperscript{123} Petrarch, “Ventoux”, p. 46.

\textsuperscript{124} Trinkaus, Poet as Philosopher, p. 51n. This distinction, elaborated on pp. 27–51, forms the basis for Trinkaus’s discussion of Petrarch’s philosophy; my whole last paragraph relies on that discussion.

\textsuperscript{125} Or as Petrarch puts it, “It is one thing to know, another to love; one thing to understand, another to will [Alid est enim scire atque alid amare, alid intelligere atque alid velle]” (Ignorantia 1106; 103).

\textsuperscript{126} Trinkaus, Poet as Philosopher, p. 52.
CHAPTER 2
Epistemology
Reason and Revelation

In the ministry Christ works by His Spirit; but in civil government men must be guided by reason (which is the source of human laws): for God has placed secular government and our physical state under the control of reason, and has not sent the Holy Spirit for that purpose.
—Martin Luther

I

When four high-ranking Venetians in 1366 declared that Petrarch was "certainly a good man but a scholar of poor merit," the "father of humanism" responded with a biting refutation. Yet while the barb of On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others may lie in the second half of the title, the invective was more than a case of hurt pride. The manifesto pitted Ciceronian ethics and rhetoric against Averroist and Aristotelian physics and dialectics. Of equal importance for the following centuries, Petrarch outlined the Christian parameters, as defined by the mature Augustine, within which classical culture as a whole was allowed to operate. Turning the taunt of ignorance into a valued tenet of his philosophy, he set the tone for generations of humanists to come. Learning, and not just a little, is a dangerous thing: "It inflates, it tears down; it does not build up. It is a glittering shackle, a toilsome pursuit, and a resounding burden for the soul." There are fideist assumptions behind the distrust of classical learning:

Happier by far is one of these feeble ones who believe in Thee, than Plato, Aristotle, Varro, and Cicero, who with all their knowledge did not know Thee. (Ignorantia 1046; 64)

Petrarch goes on to apply to these heathen writers an epithet from Augustine's Epistle 150: not knowing the Christian teaching, it is they who suffer from "literata ignorantia," "learned ignorance."

Later thinkers, as this chapter will show, followed this lead by employing ancient scepticism (the "Academy") for fideist purposes, but Petrarch was not prepared to go quite that far:

It is by now a well-known fact that man cannot know everything, not even many things. On the other hand, the Academy is disproved and rebutted long since, and it is established that something can be known when God reveals it. Therefore, it may be sufficient to know as much as is necessary for salvation. (Ignorantia 1142, 126)

Paraphrasing Conf. 8.1.2., he instead falls back on the Pauline language of the mature Augustine:

Many people who knew more than they ought to know have perished, and those who profess to be wise "became fools and their foolish heart was darkened," as the Apostle says [in Romans 1: 21–22]. It will be enough if I succeed in being wise within the limits of sobriety; and this can be achieved without much learning, even without any, as is clearly shown by the long line of illiterate saints of both sexes. (Ignorantia 1142; 126–27)

Classical learning does have a value, but only as a handmaiden to the Christian faith. Petrarch found Ciceronian rhetoric and ethics particularly useful, and Jerome and Augustine provide the examples:

3 "... infantium dirutumque, non edificant: fulgida vincta laboriosumque negotium ac sonorum pondus animae" (Petrarch, De sui iipsi et multorum ignorantia, in Opera Latina, vol. 2, ed. Antonietta Bufano [Torino: Unione Tipografico, 1975], p. 1044); English trans. Hans Nachod, in The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, p. 64. All references to this work, abbreviated Ignorantia, are given in the text by page references to both the Latin and the English version (in that order).

4 "feliciaeque est multis unus ex puellis istis qui in te credend, quam Plato, quam Aristotelis, quam Varro, quam Cicero, qui suis omnibus cum literis te non norunt,..."

5 "Sed quoniam iam nec sciri omnin, imo nec multa per hominem certum est, et confusata lambramique et exploso Achademia, ac revelante Deo sciri aliquo posse constat, si aut scire quantum sufficit ad salutem."

6 "Multi plus sapientes quam aperito pervire, et dicentes se esse sapientes, ut ait Apgastolus: 'stulti facit sunt, et obscumarum est insipiens cor eorum.' Michi ad sobriorem sapere si contingat, quod aine multi, imo et aine ullis literis facri posse illiterata utriusque sexus sanctorum cohaors indicat, satis est, etc."
Cicero, read with a pious and modest attitude, did no harm to [Jerome] or to anybody else at any time. He was profitable to everybody, so far as eloquence is concerned, to many others as regards living. This is especially true in Augustine's case, as I have already said. Augustine filled his pockes and his lap with the gold and silver of the Egyptians when he was about to depart from Egypt. (*Ignorantia* 1192; 114)7

The "Egyptian" metaphor was of course picked up from Augustine himself, who had used it in *On Christian Doctrine* to delineate the Christian response to heathen culture.8 Like the Egyptians had not only idols and burdens to offer the Israelites, but also useful things in gold and silver,

similarly all the branches of pagan learning contain not only false and superstitious fantasies and burdensome studies that involve unnecessary effort, . . . but also studies for liberated minds which are more appropriate to the service of the truth, and some very useful moral instructions, as well as the various truths about monotheism to be found in their writers. (*De Doct. Ch. 2.40.60*)9

*On Christian Doctrine* provided Petrarch not only with a colorful metaphor, but with a method how to integrate classical and Christian culture. He transmitted the lesson to others,10 and the lesson was heeded. As Albert Rabil comments, "Humanists could find in *On Christian Doctrine* not only many reasons for learning pagan literature but also a justification of their interests in the recovery and editing of texts and the need for persuasion in moral philosophy. All these tendencies, present in Petrarch—in significant measure through his reading of Augustine—culminated in Erasmus."11

But if Petrarch, advocating the mature Augustinian view of human reason and the humanitites, provided the most widely copied pattern, there was also an influential minority that took the early neoplatonic Augustine as its champion. Before we proceed with these later thinkers, however, we need to return ad fontes to see within what Augustinian parameters the choices could be made.

II

In compendia and handbooks, Augustine's philosophical legacy is often reduced to his dictum that "faith must precede reason," usually bolstered with one of his most favored scriptural verses: "unless you have believed, you will not understand" (Isaiah 7: 9). The connotative freight of the terms "faith" and "reason" is indeed heavy and justifies the importance attached to this saying. Not only are the areas of philosophy and religion involved, but also the weight of the Hebraic-Christian and the classical traditions. The problem with this reduction of Augustine's position, however, is that it reflects the views of the mature bishop only, not the thought of the young rhetor.12

7 "Nec vero Cicero dedit certe multa uti [i.e., Jerome] nocuit, aut cuique alteri, cum ad eloquentiam cunctis, ad vitam multa valde profuerit, nominatim, ut diximus, Augustino, qui ex Egitpo egressurus, Epistulam auro et argentum sinum sibi griminumque complavit, . . . ."
8 See Carol E. Quillen, "Flaunting the Egyptians: Petrarch and Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*," in *Renaissance and Reformation: The "De Doctrina Christiana" of Augustine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Edward D. English (Notre Dame and London: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1995), pp. 153–71. Quillen goes too far, however, when she claims that Petrarch creates "an Augustine for whom the reading of poetry can bring redemption" (160).
9 "... sic doctrinae omnes gentilium non solum simulata et superstitionis figmenta graevaque sacratice supervaceae laboris habent, ... sed etiam liberales disciplinas usui veritatis apiores et quaedam mororum praecepta utilissima continent deque ipso uno decolenda nonnulla vera inveniuntur apud eos, ... ."
10 In *Ser. 15.6*, Petrarch writes: "But there is one thing I shall not pass over, so that you will not lend ear and heart to those who, under pretext of theological studies, try hard to dissuade you from acquaintance with secular letters. Without them, Lactantius and Augustine, not to mention others, would not have dialoged so easily the superstitious notions of the heathen, nor would Augustine have built the *City of God* with such skill and such walls. . . . And that same Augustine discusses these matters in the second book of *On Christian Doctrine*" (as cited in Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch* [Durham and London: Duke Univ. Press, 1993], p. 161).


For the newly converted Augustine, reason was the essential factor. Faith and the authority of the Scriptures are only preparatory in the ascent toward the higher rungs of "understanding and knowledge":

The treatment of the soul, which God’s providence and ineffable loving-kindness administers, is most beautiful in its steps and stages. There are two different methods, authority and reason. Authority demands belief and prepares man for reason. Reason leads to understanding and knowledge. (De Ver. Rel. 24.45)\(^\text{13}\)

As Augustine states bluntly in On Order, the prolegomenon of his intellectual agenda: “It is not by faith alone, but by trustworthy reason, that the soul leads itself little by little to most virtuous habits and the perfect life” (De Ord. 2.19.50).\(^\text{14}\) Indeed, for the educated few, faith is hardly needed at all: “Although the authority of upright men seems to be the safer guide for the un instructed multitude, reason is better adapted for the educated” (De Ord. 2.9.26).\(^\text{15}\) The authority of the Scriptures, therefore, is needed only for the unlettered, and it shines through how the enlightened rhetor pities their unhappy lot:

As to those who are content to follow authority alone and who apply themselves constantly to right living and holy desires, while they make no account of the liberal and fine arts, or are incapable of being instructed in them—I know not how I could call them happy as long as they live among men. (De Ord. 2.9.26)\(^\text{16}\)

With his confidence in culture and education, Augustine at times sounds much like Matthew Arnold or J.A. Richards.

Behind this reliance on reason stands the young Augustine’s supposition that a seamless vertical order permeates the universe. A central

\(^\text{13}\) “Quaestum ipse quoque animae medicina, quae divina providentia et ineffabilis beneficentia geritur gradation distincque pulcherrima est. Tributam enim in auctoritatem atque rationem. Auctoritas idem flagravit et ratione praeparat hominem. Ratio ad intellectum cognitonnementque perducit, . . .”

\(^\text{14}\) “Gradatim enim et ad mores vitamque optimam non iam sola fide sed certa ratione perducit.”

\(^\text{15}\) “. . . quamquam bonorum auctoritatim imperiae multitudini videatur esse salubrior, ratio vero aptior eruditias, . . .” In De Ord. 2.5.16 Augustine outlines in embryonic form what was to become his mature view of the relationship between reason and revelation, i.e., reason preparing us for the mysteries of faith. This is an isolated occurrence, however, and the intellectualist perspective reigs in the rest of the book.

\(^\text{16}\) “Qui autem sola auctoritate contenti bonus tantum moribus rectisque voce constantier operam dederint aut contemnetem aut non valentiae discipulums liberalissiis atque optimis eruditis, beatos eos quidem, cum inter homines vivunt, nescio quo modo appellerem . . .”

... per quem deus aget omnem.”


\(^\text{18}\) “Ordo est, quem si tenevimus in vita, perdutum ad deum, et quem nisi tenevimus in vita, non perveniemus ad deum.” The mature Augustinian view of order can be found in De Civ. Dei 19.19 (to which we shall return in chapter 4).

\(^\text{19}\) “Iam in musica, in geometria, in astrorum motibus, in numerorum necessitibus ordo ibi dominatur, ut si quis quis eius fontem atque ipsum penetrare videre desideret, aut in hiem est aut per haec eo sine ullo errore Ducatur.”

saintly persons do not know much—some, in truth, know them and are not saintly" (Retr. 1.3.2). He had quietly dropped his intellectual agenda after he had been ordained priest and then consecrated bishop. This did not mean, however, that he gave these issues no more thought. His new concerns about the Church and his deepened understanding of St. Paul forced him rather to reconsider the relationship between reason and faith, and the function of the liberal arts.

The change of heart must have come rather quickly, because soon after his consecration as bishop in 395 Augustine began writing On Christian Doctrine, the work that encapsulates his mature views on education. The impact of this work on Western culture cannot be overstressed; its shadow reached beyond both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Erasmus, to take but one important example, depended heavily on it and constantly referred to it in his writings. Without dismissing the classical heritage as Tertullian had done, the work drastically modified the earlier program through a desacralizing of human learning. In On Order Augustine had regretted that the unlearned could expect no happiness; in the later work he warns "young people who are keen and intelligent":

... displicet mihi... quod multum tribui liberalibus disciplinis, quas multi sancti multum nesciant, quidam ei tam sicuent eas sanctis non sunt."

Which does not make the work primarily an educational or humanistic undertaking; it was specifically designed as an aid for biblical studies. "Nonetheless," explains Christoph Schublin, "with De doctrina christiana [Augustine] did produce one of the classics of Western Culture: more or less by accident, perhaps, since the work seems to have had a reception rather different from what he intended" ("De doctrina christiana: A Classic of Western Culture?", in "De doctrina christiana: A Classic of Western Culture", ed. Duane W.H. Arnold, and Pamela Bright (Notre Dame and London: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1985), pp. 47-57.

On its meaning and influence, see the two companion volumes: "De doctrina christiana: A Classic of Western Culture (see note above), and Reading and Wisdom: The "De doctrina christiana" of Augustine in the Middle Ages, ed. Edward D. English (Notre Dame and London: Univ of Notre Dame Press, 1985).

"Augustine," writes Leif Grane, "is important to [Erasmus] as an authority for the necessity of the liberal arts in connection with the study of theology" ("Some Remarks on the Church Fathers in the First Years of the Reformation," in Auctoritas Patrum, p. 26).


On Augustine’s changing views from De Ord. to De Doctr. Chr., see Frederick Van Fleren, St. Augustine, Neoplatonism, and the Liberal Arts: The Background to De doctrina christiana, in Arnold and Bright, pp. 14-24.

Do not venture without due care into any branches of learning which are pursued outside the church of Christ, as if they were a means to attaining the happy life, but discriminate sensibly and carefully between them. (De Doctr. Chr. 2.29.58)"

As in the earlier work, he goes through the arts systematically, but they are no longer rungs on a metaphysical ladder. Each art has an independent value based upon its usefulness for earthly living, or its service as a handmaiden to faith by equipping the Christian with the tools needed to understand the Scriptures. Augustine still has room for mathematics, music, and astronomy (De Doctr. Chr. 2.16.25-18.28; 2.29.45; 2.38.56), but they are included for their practical utility and not as part of a progression towards the unity of the One.

His new emphasis is upon the mutable language arts. In a program that was to permeate both the humanists’ and the reformers’ educational outlook, he especially pushes the study of Greek and Hebrew in addition to his own Latin (De Doctr. Chr. 2.11.16; 2.14.21; 2.26.40). He also introduces new terrestrial disciplines which had not fitted into his earlier intellectual program: natural history, geography, and the practical arts (De Doctr. Chr. 2.29.45-30.47). His change of heart is particularly felt in the strong endorsement of a discipline that was to take center stage in the humanist curriculum: history (De Doctr. Chr. 2.28.42-44). The altered perspective is most strikingly seen in the new view of dialectics: instead of treating it as an art of exact logic, Augustine transforms it into a probabilistic language art placed next to rhetoric, a combination that was to be characteristic of the humanist reform (De Doctr. Chr. 2.51.48-37.55, and the whole of Book 4). As he did for his earlier program, Augustine was to write influential "textbooks" of sorts: book four of On Christian Doctrine, added to the earlier three books at the end of his life, set a pattern for all subsequent Christian rhetorics, while the City of God shaped the renaissance conception of history.

... studiosis et ingeniosis adolescentibus, "ut nullas doctrinas, quae praeter ecclesiam Christi exercentur tamquam ad bestam viam capessendam secure sequi audeant, sed eam diligentiusdiuicient, . . ."
III

It was Augustine's mature view, as expressed in On Christian Doctrine, that informed most renaissance educational theories, yet some adhered to the minority view characteristic of the young convert. Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), and to a lesser extent Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), are prime examples of the choices inherent in the young Augustine. Yet before his death in 1494, Pico, under the influence of Savonarola, had moved towards the position of the mature Augustine; and his nephew Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533), by his espousal of scepticism and fideism (the two almost always went together in the Renaissance), advanced even beyond the parameters of the aging bishop of Hippo.

Paul Oskar Kristeller, who has laid the foundation for all modern Ficinian research, stresses the Augustinian stamp on Ficino's work: "Augustine is Ficino's guide and model in his attempts to reconcile Platonism with Christianity." It was not the views of the mature bishop that interested the Florentine, however, but the preoccupation of the young Augustine, the twin concepts of "Soul" and "God." Augustine provided the impetus and the stamp of approval for Ficino's Platonist investigations of the fall of the soul into the body and its return to the One. The liberal arts were to both Augustine and Ficino rungs on a metaphysical ladder. All along flashing his Christian credentials (and we have no reason to doubt his sincerity), Ficino is at pains to show that nothing in his philosophy is contrary to the received dogma of the Church. Yet such is the power of his Platonic metaphors that they color every corner of his religion. Only token space is left for the mystery of the Incarnation in Ficino's Platonic Theology. Reason and Faith, like Philosophy and Religion, are simply different names for the same thing, since Plato—via Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, and the other ancient theologians—had learned from Moses, and the later neoplatonists in turn had learnt from Dionysius the Areopagite, the disciple of St. Paul. This equality can of course work both ways. If two separate entities are to be united, one or the other—or, more likely, both—will have to give. As we shall see, with similar premises Giovanni Pico forced much of the Platonist tradition (and the Jewish Kabbala to boot) into a largely Christian (and Aristotelian) mold. For Ficino, Christianity yielded as much to Platonist thought patterns as vice versa. This conflation is particularly evident in a work that became something of a sixteenth-century blockbuster: the De amore, Ficino's free commentary on Plato's Symposium.

The basic framework for the De amore is a largely pseudo-Dionysian version of Plotinian emanation theory:

This divine beauty has generated love, that is desire for itself, in all things. Since if God attracts the World to Himself and the World is attracted, there exists a certain continuous attraction (beginning from God, emanating to the world, and returning at last to God) which returns again, as if in a kind of circle, to the same place whence it issued. (De amore 2.2) 36

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32 Kristeller, p. 204. For additional examples of Augustinian influence in such important areas as the will and aesthetics, see Kristeller, pp. 24, 206, 211, 213, 257, and 306. Yet at the same time, as Michael Allen points out, "Ficino seems never to have been particularly inspired by the problems of sin, the infected will, the necessity of prevenient grace, and other dogmas associated with Pauline and/or Augustinian views on the Atonement and its theology" (The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984], p. 182).
33 Allen believes that in the commentary on the Phaedrus, Ficino "successfully arrived at an interpretation that was wholly compatible with Christianity, and most notably with the great dogmas concerning the Fall, the Incarnation, and the Redemption" (Platonism, p. 257). I cannot apply that assessment to the De amore, however.
From the perspective of man, however, this produces not so much a circle as a vertical ladder, where going up is by definition good and going down (especially into the body with its sexuality) is bad. Ficino does give lip-service to human procreation (but not to sexual pleasure) through the earthly Venus, the lower of the two Venuses (De amore 2.7; 6.8, 11); yet that concession is vitiated by the whole rigid vertical setup. For while he acknowledges two kinds of love, within the individual they compete rather than cooperate: “These two loves certainly oppose each other in man.” While human love “drives him down to the bestial or voluptuous life,” the divine love “raises him up to the angelic or contemplative life” (De amore 7.1). For Ficino only the vulgar masses follow the earthly Venus, and they in reality are afflicted with a certain madness by which “man sinks back to the nature of beasts” (De amore 7.12). This madness is not to be confused with the “furor divinus,” the divine madness by which a prophet, a priest, a poet, or a lover (“the four faces of the truly Platonic philosopher”) “is raised above the nature of man and passes into a god” (De amore 7.13).

For Ficino, the heart of the Symposium is Diotima’s address to Socrates. The De amore therefore builds towards the end of Speech 6, where Ficino “quotes” Diotima’s speech on “How the soul is raised from the beauty of the body to the beauty of God” (De amore 6.18). The speech is based on Plotinus’ “On Beauty” (Enneads 1.6), the same essay that inspired the young Augustine in The Greatness of the Soul. Like Augustine, Ficino sees the ascent in terms of moral and intellectual purification; and, as in the young Augustine, there is a Pelagian assurance about its easy accomplishment. Furthermore, in the Dedication of his own Italian translation of De amore, Ficino places Diotima’s message on the same level as the Scriptures. Not simply recovering an important philosophical text, the philosopher is striving for the salvation of his readers. No doubt Ficino felt that Diotima’s message was compatible with that found in the Scriptures. This was a case of direct divine inspiration: according to his Dedication it had been the Holy Spirit that inspired Diotima. With such a salvation, what need is there for the redemptive work of Christ? Philosophy, in this influential work at least, has indeed become Religion.

IV

Even more than Ficino himself, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola has, at least since Jakob Burckhardt, come to embody Renaissance aspirations of perfectability. The picture we get when we look closer at Pico’s writings, however, is not quite what we have been led to believe. Pico wrote a love treatise in the wake of the De amore, a Commentary on a Canzone of Bemivieni. But unlike other popular treatises that were to follow, Pico’s is abstruse and contentious, seemingly designed to mark his distance from Ficino. While its general Neoplatonic framework, Pico undertakes the religious claims of De amore. The love of beauty leads only to the outsides of heaven. To reach God, he has to be loved for himself, “because love for God is not a desire for beauty.” Pico in effect negates Diotima’s redemptive vision.

For over a century now Pico’s Oration On the Dignity of Man has been viewed as the quintessential Renaissance manifesto. Protemp man, completely unhampered, is free to turn himself into whatever he pleases along the chain of being, including “an angel and the son of God.” While the possibility of a descent to the animal or plant kingdom is allowed in theory, Pico assumes we all want to climb up. As with Ficino and the young Augustine (who both followed Plotinus), the rungs of this Jacob’s-ladder consist of moral and intellectual

37 I use “man” deliberately, and in an exclusive sense, since these kinds of theories without fail seem to be male-oriented. Who has ever heard of a woman being led to God by contemplating the beauty of a man? For a male to love a male is all right, indeed even preferable to loving a female, as long as no homosexual inclinations are displayed (see De amore 6.14 and 7.2.9, where Ficino is clearly embarrassed by Plato’s description of physical male love).

38 “Hos unique amores sibi ipsi in homine repugnare, et illum deorum ad fernam et voluptuosam depelle, hunc sursum ad angelicam vitam contemplativamque attollere.”

39 “... in homines naturam devovit.”

40 Allen, Platonism, p. 42.


42 “Quomodo Anima a Corporis Pulchritudine ad Dei Pulchritudinem Elevetur.”

43 See Jayne’s translation of Ficino’s dedication, p. 181.

44 Pico distanced himself from Ficino one step further in Of Being and Unity, where, in the process of subjecting Plato to Aristotle, he dismisses Ficino’s Platonic separation of “being” and “unity.” In his final Platonic commentaries, Ficino objected strenuously to Pico’s Aristotelian interpretation; see Michael J.B. Allen, Issues: Marsilio Ficino’s Interpretation of Plato’s “Sophist” (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989), pp. 9–48.


46 Giovanni P. Pico, Commentary, p. 164. I have not been able to consult the Latin original.
purging. The vision of man turning into anything he pleases, from animal to angel, proves to be an extended metaphor for this ascent. Protean man is simply Pico’s fanciful way of expressing what moralists had said for millennia: by giving one’s passions free rein, one becomes like a beast; but by following reason’s rule, one becomes like an angel (Oratio 1:316; 226). Pico, like Ficino, seems to blur the distinction between reason and faith by turning Pythagoras and Plato into ancient theologians. And in an inclusive gesture that embraces not only the various pagan philosophies but also the Kabbala of the Jews, Pico everywhere finds traces of the Christian religion. Yet where Ficino molds the Gospel to fit a Platonic frame, Pico does the reverse. In his desire to reconcile all philosophies, first with each other and then with Christianity, it is Christianity that comes out on top. It is arguable whether Pico transforms the Catholic faith (the censors thought so in some instances and put him on the Index), but it is undeniable that he twists the pagan and Jewish sources into new shapes.

Even with these qualifications, Pico’s encomium may seem to follow Ficino’s pattern of equating philosophy with religion, reason with faith. If we look closer, however, this is not quite the case. While Pico starts by claiming that there is no internal “discord” that philosophy cannot allay, he immediately refines that assertion:

But [natural philosophy] will so assuage [strife and differences of opinion] as to compel us to remember that, according to Heraclitus, nature was begotten from war, that it was on this account repeatedly called “strife” by Homer, and that it is not, therefore, in the power of natural philosophy to give us in nature a true quiet and unshaken peace but that this is the function and privilege of her mistress, that is, of holiest theology.³⁸

Describing the unstable situation of the postlapsarian world, Pico refers to the same Heraclitean flux as did Augustine in the City of God 20.3. Even more revealing is Pico’s appellation “mistress.” It points us to a very different tradition from the one seen in De amore philosophy as a handmaiden to theology. This had of course been the prevailing view for over a millennium, based as it is on On Christian Doctrine. Pico agrees with the traditional Augustinian teaching that philosophy (with reason as its guiding light) should function as a pro parte of theology (based on the revelation of the Scriptures): “She [natural philosophy] will show us the way and as comrade lead us to her [theology] who, seeing us hastening from afar, will exclaim ‘Come to me, ye who have labored. Come and I will restore you. Come to me, and I will give you peace, which the world and nature cannot give you.’”³⁹ Pico’s reliance on Augustinian formulas should come as no surprise. Throughout his oeuvre the Fathers had been favored and much quoted authors. As Thomas More was to translate the verdict of Pico’s nephew and first biographer, Gianfrancesco Pico: “Of the old fathers of the church / so gret kowlewe he had as hit were harde for hym to haue

³⁸ “Sed ita sedabit [naturals philosophia opinionis lites et dissidiae], ut meminiuse nos lubeat esse naturam iuxta Heraclitum ex bello genitam, ob id ab Homero contensionem vocitatum. Idcirco in ea veram quietem et solidam pacem se nobis praeest non posse esse hoc domine suae, id est, sanctissimae Theologiae munus et privilegium” (Oratio 1:318; 231).³⁹ “Ad illam ipsa et viam monstrabit & comes ducet, quae procul nos videns properantes, Venite inlambiat ad me qui laboratis, venite & ego reficiam vos, venite ad me & dabo vobis pacem, quam mundus & natura vobis dare non posset” (Oratio 1:518; 251), paraphrasing Matthew 11:28 and John 14:27.

³⁸ Of the books in Pico’s library, writes Pearl Kibre, Augustine together with Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas “held numerical precedence over all other writers except Aristotle” (The Library of Pico della Mirandola [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1936], pp. 112–13). According to the preserved library inventory that forms the basis of Kibre’s study, Pico owned at least seventeen Augustinian volumes (several of which contained more than one work), including the early Soliloquies and De Q. An., but also one or two of Augustine’s commentaries on Genesis (which influenced the Hipotopos), En. in Ps., Translates on the Gospel of John, De Trin., De Civ. Dei, and, intriguingly, the anti-Pelagian The Spirit and the Letter, which is to say such a large part in the genesis of the Lutheran Reformation.
that hath lyed longe & all his lyfe hath done thynges els but red them."  

In a recent study, Kristeller makes a crucial point: "Several of the most striking phrases [of the Oration], often quoted out of context, are actually addressed by God to Adam before his fall." If the encomium is addressed to the pre-lapsarian Adam, this has far-reaching consequences for our reading of the whole oration, which takes on a much less Pelagian coloring. Even John Calvin heaped praise on Adam, giving him both free will and the power to reach God through his own reason: "With these noble gifts the first state of man excelled, so that he not only had enough of reason, understanding, wisedome, and judgement, for the government of this earthly life, but also to clime vp eu en to God and to eternal felicitie. . . . In this Integritie, man had freewill, whereby if he would he might haue atteined eternall life." The wide-ranging allusive metaphors and the syncretist drive of Pico's oration set it apart from Calvin's cool scholasticism, yet they agree on the main point: the dignity of unfallen humankind. The difference is of course that Calvin immediately turns to the much bleaker prospects of the post-lapsarian Adam, while Pico in the Oration only obliquely alludes to it.

However, when Pico returns to Genesis in his Discourse on the Seven Days of Creation, the Heptaplus, he presents a much less rosy picture of our post-lapsarian condition. A panegyric on man is included, complete with the famous Hermetic outcry, "Great miracle, O Asclepius, is man" (Heptaplus 5.6). Yet the tone is much more restrained and the context is scriptural and patristic rather than neoplatonic. Not much is left of the Oration's protean freedom:

But, when the image of God has been forgotten through the stain of sin, miserable and unhappy, we begin to serve the beast within us. . . . Indeed, all of us—through the first Adam, who obeyed Satan more than God, and of whom [Adam] we are offspring by flesh—were dishonored and have degenerated from men to beasts. (Heptaplus 6.6–7)

This is not a Plotinian but a Pauline "fall." Pico aligns himself with the Augustinian theory of original sin, and the continuation makes clear that only the redemptive work of Christ can bring mankind back to God. This is traditional Christian dogma, with only a thin layer of neoplatonism. Indeed, while Pico continues to refer to the pagan philosophers, that is only to win those over "who have been persuaded by an evil spirit to believe [the pagans] rather than the Church" (Heptaplus 6.5). The man so often billed as the supreme syncretist makes it quite clear that unless the pagan philosophers and the Jewish Kabbalists yield to the incarnate Christ, all their efforts are in vain:

Let us be led back to the great sacrament that is madness to heathens, a scandal to the Hebrews, and the virtue and wisdom of God for us: Man can be united with God only through Him Who—since in Himself He united man to God—can, as a true Mediator, so unite men to God that just as in Him the Son of God put on manhood, so through Him men are made sons of God . . .; and if that ineffable grace by which the Word becomes flesh can be realized only in Christ, then it is only through Christ that the flesh can ascend to the Word; and there is not (as John correctly wrote so well) under the heavens another name through which it is possible for men to be saved. (Heptaplus 6.7)

Based on St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1: 22–25, Pico's position is as dogmatic as that of the Protestant reformers, who indeed made good use of the same text.

54 Pico states in the introductory materials to Heptaplus that he tried to imitate Basil and Augustine in the structure of his work. Its sevenfold division he got from Augustine's The Literal Meaning of Genesis.

69 *sed obliertata imagine Dei per maculam peccati coepimus miseri & infoelicis servire bestis nostris, . . . Verum . . . omnes in primo Adam qui obedivet Satanae magis quam Deo: Culus illi secundum carnem deformato ab homine degeneramus ad brutum, . . ."
70 *quiolum a malo daemonre persuasum, ut genitus potius credant quam ecclesiases, . . ."
71 "Admonemur hinc magni illius sacramenti, quod genitus stultitia, Hebraeis scandalum, nobis Dei virtus & sapientia est, non posse hominem Deo coniungi, nisi per eum, qui cum in seispio hominem Deo coniunxerit, verus mediator effectus, poeit homo Deo annectere, ut sicut in eo filius Dei hominem induit, iac eum homines Dei filii fiunt. . . . prefaco si dispensatio illa ineffabili in solo continget Christo, ut verbum fieret caro, solus etiam est Christus, per quem ad verbum caro poeit ascendere, nec est (ut recte scriptum loannes) aliud sub coelo nomen in quo oporteat salvos homines fieri."
If Giovanni Pico shows increasing restraint in his encomium of human aspirations, that is nothing compared to his nephew Gianfrancesco Pico’s Savonarolian condemnation of philosophy in *An Examination of the Vanity of Pagan Teaching and the Verity of Christian Doctrine (Examen vanitatis)* (1520). Under the sway of Savonarola, even the elder Pico had moved from philosophy to scriptural piety. The change of heart comes out clearly in two letters which Giovanni wrote to his nephew at the end of his life, and which were later included in More’s translation of Gianfrancesco’s *Life of Pico*. As he had done in the *Heptapla* 6.7, Giovanni quotes St. Paul’s condemnation of worldly wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1: “The wisdom of this world is foolishness afore god” (*Life*, sig. D iii). One contributing factor in this move away from philosophy to fideism was Giovanni’s and Gianfrancesco’s increasing interest in the early Fathers, Augustine not the least.

The work that most clearly reveals Gianfrancesco’s dependence upon Augustine’s mature views on the relationship between faith and reason is not the *Examen vanitatis*, but the early *On the Study of Divine and Human Philosophy* (1496). A brief work written before Pico’s esposal of scepticism, the *De studio* is based largely upon *On Christian Doctrine*. “Human philosophy,” Gianfrancesco begins, “is not necessary for a Christian, although it may be useful” (1.2). While there had been learned men in the Church, many (like the twelve disciples) “were not experts in grammar (as Augustine says), not armed with dialectics, nor


64 As Charles B. Schmitt observes: “One might almost say that the philosophical position which reaches maturity in the *Examen Vanitatis* is nothing other than a logical progression from that which was expressed more and more clearly during the last few years of Giovanni Pico’s life” (Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533) and His Critique of Aristotle (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1967), p. 53). Schmitt discusses Giovanni’s letters on pp. 53–54. My discussion of Gianfrancesco Pico relies heavily on Schmitt’s seminal study.

65 “Humanam philosophiam non esse necessarium Christiano, quanquam usque esse poterat,” quoted from Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *De studio divine et humana philosophiae*, in *Opera omnia* (Bâle, 1758). I have consulted a copy in Carolina Rediviva, the Uppsala University Library. I am grateful to my friend Per Landgren for his help with translating the Latin. See also Schmitt’s explication of the work in *Gianfrancesco Pico*, pp. 37–43.

66 The real use of the doctrine and eloquence of the philosophers, Pico contends (alluding to Augustine’s metaphor of the Israelites appropriating the gold of the Egyptians), is as a handmaiden to faith (1.3). The liberal arts should be used to better understand the Scriptures (1.6), but, according to *On Christian Doctrine*, like the rest of philosophy they are subordinated to the authority of the Bible (1.8). Pico dedicates Book 2 to the “divine philosophy,” which turns out to be not Ficino’s Platonic theology, but biblical studies: “The Holy Scriptures, the true and divine philosophy, should be studied carefully and with the Christian’s full attention” (2.1). Compared to these studies, the arts are of little value. Towards the end, however, in a gesture that seems to go against the grain of the rest of the treatise, Pico refers to the mysticism of Dionysius the Areopagite and Augustine by means of which we may scale the ladder towards the highest being (2.7). In the very last chapter this view is qualified by a contrast with the better Scriptural way; as Charles Schmitt writes, “Even here where human philosophy reaches its highest value as an aid to the apprehension of God himself, it falls short of divine philosophy.”

Yet as Pico’s thought developed in contact with ancient scepticism, he would not grant even that much to human reason. If the ladder of the world had become unscaleable levels for the old Augustine, this was even more true for the later Gianfrancesco Pico. He objected strenuously to Ficino’s *De amore*. While his uncle had limited himself to a subtle critique of the ladder of love, Gianfrancesco wrote *De amore divino* in 1516 to show, in Sears Jayne’s words, “that both Ficino and [Giovanni] Pico were wrong and that the only proper way to deal with the subject of love is in Christian terms.” Yet the sustained attack came with the *Examen vanitatis*, which “is conceived as a polemic against the philosophy of the gentes.” Augustine’s very first work *Against the Aca-
demics had been written to counteract the Ciceronian scepticism he had flirted with before his conversion. 72 Pico, on the other hand, taking up a suggestion by Savonarola, made the scepticism of Sextus Empiricus an ally of faith. Although Augustine never wrote a work in support of scepticism, Gianfrancesco nevertheless drew inspiration from the mature bishop: “Pico saw Scepticism as a service to Christianity; it could serve the function of destroying the claims of dogmatic philosophers, thereby allowing Christian doctrine to become recognized as the one valid source of knowledge. Understanding for him, as for [the old] Augustine, came through faith and not through reason.” 73 So while not willing to call himself a sceptic, Pico uses Sextus Empiricus for the purpose of demolishing the edifices of pagan learning:

Even if in many things I certainly do not approve of the sceptic philosophers, nevertheless, I do not disapprove of them up to a certain point; that is, up to the point that they diminish the arrogance of those who declare that they know and are in possession of all or at least most things. . . . The sceptics refute those other philosophers who declare that they know something by virtue of human philosophy. (Examen vanitatis 3.14) 74

In the first three books Gianfrancesco Pico therefore attacks philosophy in general, and in the last three the Aristotelian philosophy in particular. Turning against the big project of his uncle Giovanni Pico, Gianfrancesco believes “that it is more proper and more useful to render the teachings of the philosophers uncertain than to reconcile them as my uncle wished to do.” In this he consciously follows certain of the Fathers: “I prefer to follow in this matter those ancient theologians of our faith who held that some action must be taken against the pagan philosophers and that their teachings must be demolished” (Examen vanitatis 1.2). 75 This tearing down is only preparatory for building a better edifice: he will invalidate the teachings of Aristotle “so that following the example of the early theologians we may devote more study henceforth to the Sacred Scriptures” (Examen vanitatis

4.2). 76 That certain views of the aging Augustine are included amongst the advice of the “early theologians” is clear, but on the whole one must conclude that Pico had moved beyond the mature position of the bishop of Hippo to the uncompromising stance of Tertullian, who had wondered what Athens had to do with Jerusalem. No place whatsoever seems to be allowed for philosophy or for human reason.

VI

I have outlined the two extreme renaissance positions concerning human reason. One extreme, influenced by the young Augustine, virtually makes religion out of philosophy; the other, going beyond the doubts of the old bishop, seems to assign no value whatsoever to reason. To trace the developments of the first extreme we can turn to the influential love treatises and sonnet sequences, with their simplistic expositions of the cult of beauty, that followed in the wake of Ficino’s De amore. There we find Pietro Bembo’s commendation of “the power to follow reason and to raise ourselves to that which is above us,” 77 or Baldassare Castiglione’s promise, put into the mouth of “Bembo” in The Courtier, that the soul, “rid of vices, purged with the studies of true philosophy, occupied in spiritual, and exercised in matters of understanding,” can reach the heavenly beauty. 78 At the acme of this tradition are Giordano Bruno’s writings, including The Heroic Frenzies, the work dedicated to Philip Sidney. With Bruno, though, philosophy has shed its ties with Christianity altogether (and thus with Augustine), becoming a religion of its own. In a less extreme form a syncretistic and neoplatonic impulse, often consciously derived from Augustine via Ficino and Giovanni Pico, can be seen in Symphorien Champier, Francesco Giorgio, Agostino Steuco, Guillaume Postel, Jacques Charpentier, Paul Scalchius, 79 and Andreas Camutius. 80

72 “. . . ut malius inde studium sacris litteris possimus imparit et exemplo veterum theologorum” (as cited and translated in Schmitt, Gianfrancesco Pico, p. 62).


75 “. . . contentanum magis esse et utile magis incerta reddere philosophorum dogmatum, quam consiliare, ut patruus volebat. Sequi enim in hac re reale antiquos illos ex nostra fide theologos qui in genitum philosophos potius agendum duxere et eorum excitenda dogmatum” (as cited and translated in Schmitt, Gianfrancesco Pico, p. 48).

76 “. . . ut malius inde studium sacris litteris possimus imparit et exemplo veterum theologorum” (as cited and translated in Schmitt, Gianfrancesco Pico, p. 62).


At the other end of the spectrum we find a developing tradition of Christian scepticism with a more or less overt Augustinian pedigree that included in its ranks Cornelius Agrippa, Peter Ramus and his assistant Omer Talon, the publisher Henri Estienne, Montaigne, and (spilling into the next century) Pascal. Of these, it was Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535), author of *Of the Uncertainty and Vanity of the Arts and Sciences* (1530), who was to have the greatest impact on Tudor writers. In 1510 Agrippa had been in England and spent time with John Colet, who may have initiated Agrippa's evangelical interest through his lectures on the Epistles of St. Paul. Colet was a thoroughly Augustinian, and very likely some of that interest rubbed off on Agrippa. Whatever Colet's impact may have been, by the time Agrippa came to write the *De vanitate* he was himself saturated with Augustinian doctrine. Unlike Gianfrancesco Pico, who borrowed liberally from Sextus Empiricus, Agrippa depended less upon ancient scepticism than patristic sources. Also unlike Pico, he relied less on close argumentation than on rhetorical flourish. Much like the later iconoclast Jacques Derrida, he sought to deconstruct the structures of human reason by means of his own "very strong reasons" (*Vanitas* 1:11), and demolish human traditions by flaunting his own thorough knowledge of those traditions.

The target of Agrippa's attack is revealed up front:

It is an ancient, and almost an agreeable and common opinion, of all the Philosophers, by the which they thine, that every Science dothe bring vnto man some Diuinitie, according to the capacite and value of them both, so that oftentimes, beyonde the limits of Humanitie, they may be reckened amonge the felowship of the Gods. From hence arose the divers and infinite commendations of Sciences, with whiche every man dooth endeavour with no lesse eloquence, then longe discourse, to exalte and extolbe above the Heauen, these Artes and Disciplines. . . Notwithstanding, . . . there can chauce to the life and salvation of our Soules, nothing more hurtfull and pestilente, then these Artes and Sciences. (*Vanitas* 1:11)

It is the philosophers' religious presumptions that gall Agrippa, and he quickly pulls in Augustine to buttress his case: "Augustine knew this, and was afraid, speaking with a lowe voice, this sayinge of Paule: The Ignorante arise, and tak the Kingdome of Heauen: and we with our learnings, fall headlonge into Hell" (*Vanitas* 1:15). As Agrippa proceeds to demolish the pretensions of the arts one by one, the bishop is repeatedly called upon to testify: "Augustine witnesseth, that many for the desire of knowledge haue lost their witte, neither is there any thinge more contrary to Christian faithe and religion, then knowledge" (*Vanitas* 101:579). More significant than these separate testimonies (Agrippa after all calls up many other witnesses as well) is the underlying Augustinian world view that prevents Agrippa from relying on human reason. In chapter 100, "Of the Woorde of God," he sketches a picture of the sublunary world that reminds us of Gianfrancesco Pico. Perhaps unwittingly, Agrippa criticizes the thought of the young Augustine in the process. In *On Order* Augustine had made the facile assumption that the knowledge of numbers, as practiced in arithmetic and music, will lead to an upright and harmonious soul:

Indeed, it is not by faith alone, but by trustworthy reason, that the soul leads itself little by little to most virtuous habits and the perfect life. For, to the soul that diligently considers the nature and the power of numbers, it will appear manifestly unfitting and most deplorable that it should write a rhythmic line and play the harp by virtue of this knowledge, and that its life and very self—which is the soul—should nevertheless follow a crooked path and, under the domination of lust, be out of tune by the clangor of shameful vices. (*De Ord. 2.19.50*)


83 As Nauert writes, "The only theology which Agrippa could praise was that of the Church Fathers" (p. 186), and again: "The writers whom he cites most frequently and for the most significant doctrines are St. Augustine and, above all, Dionysius the Areopagite" (p. 128).


85 See also 4: 32 and 34; 11: 58; 17: 68; 53: 158. This is not an exhaustive list of Augustinian references, but only some of those that pit the Father against particular disciplines. "Gradatim enim [animas] se et ad mores quamque optimam non iam sola fidem sed certa ratione perduci. Cuius numerorum vim atque potentiam diligenter inuenti nimiis indigium videbitur et nimiis fundam per suam scientiam versum bene curriere cithara que concinere et suam vitam seque ipsum, quae anima est, devium iter sequi et dominante sibi libidine cum turpissimo se virotrum strepetu dissonare."
For Agrippa, however, in a rundown of the shortcomings of the arts that was to influence Sidney’s *Defence of Poetrie*, the lesson to learn is the very opposite: “The Arithmetitians [sic], and the Geometricians number and measure all things, but they make no account of the numbers and measures of soul and life. The Musitians also entrate of sounds and songs, disipinge the manners and discoursances of the minde” (*Vanitie* 100: 374). The reason for this inability to move from theoretical to moral harmony lies in the nature of the post-lapsarian experience. Only God’s Word offers a fixed point in an unstable world. Compared to it, “all other knowledges are subjecte to time and forgetfulness, and not onely these sciences and Artes, but also these letters, caractters, and tongues, whiche we vse, shall perishe, and other shall arise.” The changing nature of both knowledge and language leads Agrippa to paraphrase Augustine’s influential conclusion in the *City of God*: “There is nothing stable and of continuance” (*Vanitie* 100: 376). For Agrippa the sceptic, this leaves only fideism as a viable option.

Although Agrippa often sounds as though he allows no benefits to accrue from reason, careful reading reveals that this is not quite the case. Looking back at the long quotation above from his introductory chapter, we will see that he has inserted an important qualification: science should not go “beyonde the limits of Humanitie” (*Vanitie* 1: 11). On the next page he repeats the proviso: the sciences “bringe to vs, aboue the limite of Humanitie,” only the serpent’s deceitful promise of the knowledge of good and evil. To use the arts within the limits of humanity is to restrict their operation to society: “But, if some good and wyse man possesse the same, peradventure the Sciences, wilbe good and available to the Common Weale, yet therefore they will not make their possessour the more blessed” (*Vanitie* 1: 14). Put succinctly, reason, and all the arts that go with it, has the earth as its permitted sphere: “So much as we are men, we must not seeke to know any thing

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91 Agrippa’s Latin reads “nihil stabile, nihil diuturnum,” as against Augustine’s “nihil solidum, nihil stabile [nothing substantial, nothing lasting]” (De Civ. Dei 20.3).

92 Or possibly fideism coupled with magic. There is disagreement amongst the scholars whether Agrippa renounced the magic of his younger days. Nauert, pp. 220–81, believes he did (taking his denunciation of magic in chapters 41–46 of *De vanitate at face value*), while Michael H. Keefer, “Agrippa’s Dilemma: Hermetic ‘Rebirth’ and the Ambivalences of *De vanitate and De occulta philosophia*,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 41 (1988): 614–53, sees occult substrata lurking below the fideistic surface of *De vanitate*.

above our reach: but earthly things alone” (*Vanitie* 31: 102). Sidney, familiar as he was with *De vanitate*, was to make the analogous point: “The ending end of all earthly learning [is] virtuous action,” while theology has “his scope as far beyond any of these [human skills, including poetry,] as eternity exceedeth a moment” (*Defence*, pp. 83–84).

For both, as it had been for Giovanni Pico, it is the clear demarcations between different levels set by the mature Augustine that underpin their distinctions. Pico and Agrippa (if we leave Sidney out for the moment) may come from different ends of the spectrum we have delineated in this chapter, yet they meet in common agreement that the Fall separates the spheres of reason and faith.

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VII

For Martin Luther, an analogous distinction between faith and reason became the cornerstone of his theological and social teaching. As this chapter has shown, Luther’s strictures on reason did not occur in a vacuum. It is important to place his views against this cultural backdrop, if only to show the continuities between Renaissance and Reformation. Luther’s reliance on Augustine hardly needs documentation. Even Erasmus grudgingly admitted that the reformer followed his own advice to return ad fontes: “[Luther] has done a service to the world at large. Many people have been driven to study the works of the early divines.” As Luther himself boasted in 1517:

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91 William J. Bouwsma even argues that the Renaissance as a whole can be characterized by its distinctions between faith and reason; see “Renaissance and Reformation: An Essay on Their Affinities and Connections,” in *A Usable Past* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990), p. 229.

92 As David G. St. John notes: “No one doubts for a moment that Luther was profoundly influenced by Augustine . . . or that Luther regarded Augustine as the one Father really worth intense study. His own knowledge of Augustine . . . grew almost geometrically in the period from 1513 to 1518, the period in which Luther struggled to interpret the Psalter and the writings of St. Paul” (*Luther in Context* [Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986], p. 12). On the Augustinian roots of the Lutheran movement, see Grane, in *Auctórias Patrum*, pp. 21–52, Helko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 158–61, and the entries on “Luther, Martin” (pp. 516–18) and “Reformation, Augustinianism in the” (pp. 705–07) in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

93 Written 1520 in a letter to the rector of the University of Erfurt, as cited by Grane, p. 52.
Our theology and St. Augustine are making good progress, and are dominant in our university, thanks to what God has done. Aristotle is gradually declining, and is approaching his imminent and final demise. To an astonishing extent, lectures on the Sententiae [of Peter Lombard] are disdained, and the only people who can expect anyone to attend their lectures are those who have resolved to deal with this theology, that is, the Bible or St. Augustine, or one of the other neglected Fathers of the Church.¹⁹⁴

Luther's gloating over the demise of Aristotle proved premature. Philip Melanchthon, who the following year joined Luther on the faculty of Wittenberg University, soon spearheaded a Protestant neo-Aristotelianism that proved influential throughout northern Europe. Yet Luther was correct about the dominance of Augustine. Together with St. Paul he became one of the two founding fathers of Protestantism.

Not that Luther always agreed with Augustine. He did not care for the philosophically inclined convert. "Where Luther is dependent on Augustine," writes David Steinmetz, "he is dependent on the old anti-Pelagian Augustine."⁶⁶ As early as 1521 Melanchthon had claimed the same thing: "Augustine's books against the Pelagians are extant, which he wrote when advanced in years. If you compare them with Luther's doctrines, you will see that they agree on the sum of the matter."²⁶⁶ In its broad outlines, Luther's theology was an elaboration of Augustine's differentiation of spheres. Gerhard Ebeling, one of the great Luther scholars of this century, emphasizes these differentiations: "The remarkable fact [is] that the touchstone of [Luther's] theology, the point which decides whether one has really grasped its true substance, is presented as a distinction."²⁶⁷ Luther's master distinction, according to Ebeling, is that between "the law and the gospel," developed from an earlier distinction between "the letter and the Spirit."

Both pairs derive from St. Paul's Epistles (especially Romans) via The Spirit and the Letter, the Augustinian work that inflamed the young Luther (significantly, the same work may also have influenced Giovanni Pico, who had a copy of it in his library). Yet the law and the gospel is only the most basic of a whole range of dichotomies that touch all areas of life: the "civil" vs. the "theological" use of the law, philosophy vs. theology (or reason vs. revelation), freedom vs. bondage of the will, or the distinction between the two kingdoms (or regiments).²⁸⁸ All these pairs are characterized both by unrelieved tensions and by mutual interdependence. Typically, one side of the dichotomy is not the stepping stone to the other (except for the theological use of the law to prepare a sinner for the gospel of grace); instead, the two sides reflect the individual's position before God (coram Deo) and before the world (coram mundo). Both positions are necessary, as Ebeling shows: "To exist before God and to exist before the world are not two possible and mutually exclusive choices, two separate realities, but an alternate relationship which is necessarily simultaneous."²⁹⁹ To be a Christian is therefore to have two different modes of existence (but not two different lifestyles).

Coram Deo, Luther is as suspicious of intellectual attempts to ascend to God as was his contemporary Gianfrancesco Pico. Grace is the key concept. Human kind has no free will, except to sin, and reason is "Frau Hulda," the Devil's whore.¹⁰⁰ Luther is therefore averse to any form of Dionysian mysticism (even though he accepted Christocentric varieties).¹⁰¹ The Incarnation provides him with the only possible ladder to God. "Every ascent to the knowledge of God is dangerous," he writes, "beyond the ascent which takes place through the humanity of Christ, because this humanity is Jacob's ladder, by which one should ascend."¹⁰² Yet the situation is totally different coram mundo. On the earthly level Luther even allows for free will,¹⁰³ and he waxes lyrical in

⁹⁸ We shall return to Luther's Zwei-Beichte-Lehre in chapter 4.

⁹⁹ Ebeling, p. 200.


¹⁰² As cited in Steinmetz, Luther and Staatstheorie, p. 140.

¹⁰³ See Luther's On the Bondage of the Will "Free choice is allowed to man only with respect to what is beneath him and not what is above him. That is to say, a man should know that with regard to his faculties and possessions he has the right to use, to do, or to leave undone, according to his own free choice, though even this is controlled by the free choice of God alone, who acts in whatever way he pleases. On the other hand in relation to God, or in matters pertaining to salvation or damnation, a man has no free choice, but is captive, subject and slave either of the will of God or the will of Satan" (Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969], p. 149).
his description of reason as “the best [of the things of this life] and something divine.”

It is easy to forget that Luther instigated his reforms from a platform as a university lecturer, but the fact is that Wittenberg, especially after Melanchthon had joined the faculty in 1518, “far surpassed every other German university. For several decades it was far and away the leading one.” Luther and Melanchthon saw their roles as reciprocal: Luther’s biblical studies were directed coram Deo, while Melanchthon’s classical studies were directed coram mundo. This division of labor, however, did not mean that Luther did not actively promote education. In a “Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen of all the Cities of Germany in Behalf of Christian Schools” (1524) he sets out the two-fold use of the liberal arts: “The languages and other liberal arts... [are a great] ornament, benefit, and honor... both for understanding the Holy Scriptures and carrying on the civil government” (pp. 57–58). Coram Deo, the arts serve as a handmaiden to the gospel: “We will not preserve the Gospel without the languages. The languages are the scabbard in which the Word of God is sheathed... St. Augustine himself was obliged to confess that the Christian teacher, in addition to Latin, should be acquainted with Hebrew and Greek” (“Christian Schools,” pp. 60–63). When Luther suggests what books should be put in the school library, we recognize the emphasis from On Christian Doctrine. Next to Bibles “in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, German, and other languages,” we find patristic commentaries, but also “such books as are useful in acquiring the languages, as the poets and orators, without considering whether they are heathen or Christian, Greek or Latin.” In addition, Luther also wants “books treating of all the arts and sciences, books on jurisprudence and medicine.” And last but not least: “A prominent place should be given to chronicles and histories” (“Christian Schools,” p. 77).

The library inventory also shows that in addition to aiding biblical studies, the arts have an equally important function coram mundo. Luther spells it out in no uncertain terms (note the novel recognition of female education):

Even if there were no soul, ... and men did not need schools and the languages for the sake of Christianity and the Scriptures, still, for the establishment of the best schools everywhere, both for boys and girls, this consideration is of itself sufficient, namely that society, for the maintenance of civil order and the proper regulation of the household, needs accomplished and well-trained men and women. (“Christian Schools,” p. 68)

He couples this recommendation with what we may think an uncharacteristic paean to learning:

We have, alas! lived and degenerated long enough in darkness; we have remained German brutes too long. Let us use our reason, that God may observe in us gratitude for His mercies, and that other lands may see that we are human beings, capable both of learning and of teaching, in order that through us, also, the world may be made better. (“Christian Schools,” p. 73)

And this was no empty rhetoric. Spearheaded by Melanchthon, Wittenberg became a pattern for primary and secondary education throughout Germany, and with the Reformation the influence spread to England as well. Indeed, it was largely because of Melanchthon’s authority within English higher education that the Lutherian distinction between the realms of faith and reason caught hold.

Throughout his vast educational output, Melanchthon follows Luther’s distinction. Melanchthon associates it with Augustine in

105 Ebeling, p. 18.
106 “Luther’s and Melanchthon’s roles at Wittenberg not only complemented each other,” explains Ralph Keen, “but do so similarly in the way in which revelation and reason, and the constituent members of each category, complement each other in this system that both men shared” (“Introduction to A Melanchthon Reader,” p. 34).
107 Trans. F.V.N. Painter, In Early Protestant Educators. Page references are given in the text.
109 Among renaissance authors, Melanchthon’s impact on 16th century Oxbridge was second only to that of Erasmus; see my “Melanchthon and Tudor England,” in Cultural Exchange between European Nations during the Renaissance, ed. Gunnar Sorelius and Michael Srigley (Uppala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994): 85–95.
110 See On Philosophy (1536; Keen, pp. 65–70); Oratio on Aristotle (1544; Keen, pp. 86–87), Commentary on Aristotle’s Ethics, Book 1 (1546; Keen, pp. 179–81, 185, 190, 196–201), Summary of Ethics (1532; Keen, pp. 208–05), and On the Soul (1553; Keen, p. 267). For a discussion of the similarities to, and the differences from, Luther’s distinctions, see Keen’s Introduction, pp. 27–34. See also Quirinus Brenn, Christianity and Humanism: Studies in the History of Ideas, ed. Nelson Peter Ross (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 69–85.
the university disputation "On the Discrimination between the Gospel and Philosophy," but the Church Father's historical importance is most evident in The Church and the Authority of the Word (1539). The main problem facing the fifth-century church, according to Melanchthon, was the blurring of the spheres of philosophy and revelation: "For nowe in his [Augustine's] tyme, there had crepte into the Churche philosophicall opinions which Pelagius confirmed, transforming the Gospel into philosophic." The same confusion was later perpetrated by the Schoolmen, and still threatens the church, since "now agayne in our time many doe slide away into Pelagian opinions" (Church, fol. 35v; p. 162). Augustine, on the other hand, "believed touching Grace & faith the very same which we do teach" (Church, fol. 41v; p. 167). That is why his voice again needs to be heard:

Augustine in his tyne restored afreshe and agayne lightened the doctrine of the gospel touching Grace & faith in Christe, when as it was almost extinguished. For this benefit, the Church is much bounde unto him. Touching Original sinne, he speaketh with much more perspicuity, than all others. Also hee speaketh more distinctly and more rightely, as touching Free will. That by force of free will, man may doe the externall worke of the lawe and other honest civil worke. But hee sayeth without the holy Ghoste, men can not have spiritual motions, true feare of God, true fayth, and true patience .... Hee giveth vs a profitable difference betweene the Letter and the Spirite. He teacheth vs of the free remission of sinnes. Hee admonisheth howe and after what manner Faule is to bee understood of vs, where hee sayeth: By the worke of the lase, is no man justified. (Church, fol. 35v–36r; p. 162)

What is unusual about this passage is the clear acknowledgment of the Augustinian pedigree for the central insight of the Reformation. We recognize Luther's and Melanchthon's master distinction between the realms of law and grace, exemplified in the passage by the restrictions on free will. Of additional interest is that Philip Sidney may have had something to do with Richard Robinson's English translation of Melanchthon's work. What we know for sure is that Sidney actively patronized Robinson, and had been the dedicatee of another Melanchthon translation the year before.

Like Luther, Melanchthon bases his discussion on the fundamental distinction between law and grace, but he also incorporates Aristotelian ethics by allowing it to operate within the sphere of the law. He begins his Commentary on Aristotle's "Ethics" by insisting that "the difference between law and gospel must be kept in mind, and it must be realized that ethical teaching is a part of the divine law of civil behavior." As the Summary of Ethics makes clear, despite its great usefulness in the civil sphere, the law (and philosophy) is of no avail except through Christ, not through law or philosophy.

VIII

Even if Luther was the fountain-head of the Reformation, it was John Calvin who systematized the new doctrines. Calvin's views on reason, not unexpectedly, show substantial concord with those of Luther. Also

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112 This is the title given by Hill, who translates the work in Melanchthon: Selected Writings, pp. 131–86. I will cite Richard Robinson's Elizabethan translation (references in the text, however, will be given to both Robinson and Hill): A godly and learned assertion in defence of the true church (London, 1580). STC 17790. For a discussion of the work, see Peter Fraenkel, Testimonia Patrum: The Function of the Patristic Argument in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon (Geneva: Droz, 1961), pp. 92–107 (in particular pp. 95–96 on Augustine).

113 Robinson dedicated to Philip Sidney Godly prayers, meant to be used in these later times: collected out of Philip Melanchthon and others (London, 1579). STC 17790:5. He later looked back on the generous support he had received over a period of time from both Philip and his father: "Philip Sidney" gave me for his book (i.e., the book dedicated to him) 4 angels, and his honourable father gave me for his book ten shillings. These two honourable personages many times benevolent unto my poor study" (as cited in Katherine Duncan-Jones, Sir Philip Sidney, Courter and Poet (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991), p. 229).

114 Keen, p. 179.

115 Keen, p. 204.
Calvin cherished and repeatedly cited Augustine, “with whom he felt a deep affinity.” As we saw with Giovanni Pico, Calvin had a high opinion of Adam’s pre-lapsarian reason: “He not onely had enough of reason, vnderstading, wisedome, and judgemen, for the gouvemement of this erthly lyfe, but also to clime yp euyn to God and to eternaI felicitie” (Institutes 1.15.8). After the fall, however, the situation was completely different: “The common sayenge whyche thei [i.e., the schoolmen] haue borrowed oute of Augustine pleaseth mee well, that the naturall gyftes were corrupted in manne by synne, and of the supernaturall hee was made emptye” (Institutes 2.2.12). Calvin immediately introduces a distinction: some gifts are completely extinguished by the Fall, others only corrupted. To the first category belong those of the kingdom of God. In the human sphere, the situation is somewhat different. In human nature, Calvin concedes, “there shyne yet some sparkes that shewe that hee ys a creature hauinge reason, and that hee differeth from brute beasts, because he is endued with understanding.” He then makes explicit Luther’s (and Augustine’s) distinction between the two kingdoms:

Lette thys therefore bee the distinction, that there is one vnderstandinge of earthly thynges, an other of heauenly thynges. Earthly thynges I call those that doe not concerne God and his Knygedome, true ryghteousnesse, and the blessednesse of eternall lyfe, but haue all theye respecte and relation to thys presente lyfe, and are as it were conuyned within the boundes thereof. Heavenly thynges, I cal the pure knowledge of God, the ordre of true righteousnesse and the mysteries of the heavenly kyngdom. Of the fyste sort are policy, gouernance of householde, all handy craftes, and liberall Sciences. Of the seconde sorte are the knowledge of God and Gods will, and the rule to frame our lyfe accordyng to yt. (Institutes 2.2.13)

116 Richard S. Stouffer, “Calvin,” in International Calvinism 1541-1715, ed. Menno Prestwich (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 29. See also the entry on “Calvin, John” in Fitzgerald, pp. 115-30. Calvin even more than Luther pored over Augustine, as Luchesi’s Smits has conclusively shown in Saint Augustin dans l’ouvrage de Jean Calvin, 2 vol. (Assen: van Gorcum, 1957-1958). By painstakingly examining Calvin’s large oeuvre, Smits has instanced over 3800 references to a total of 88 genuine Augustinian works (calculations are mine). Calvin’s Top Ten Augustinian works were the Epist. (582 references, all to letters written after 396), Sermons (382 refs.), On the Cofess of John (358 refs.), En. in Ps. (327 refs.), The Augmentations of Grace (175 refs.), De Civ. Dei (149 refs.), Against Two Letters of the Pelagians (146 refs.), Ench. (125 refs.), The Predestinaion of the Saints (129 refs.), and On Grace and Free Will (116 refs). Other major Augustinian works often consulted were Against Faustus (85 refs.), Against Julian (74 refs.), Baptism (60 refs.), On the Spirit and the Letter (54 refs.), Conf. (49 refs.), and De Doct. Chr. (49 refs.). The dominance of late Augustinian works is almost total: less than 3% of the references are to works written before Augustine was consecrated bishop.

“In the orderynge of thy lyfe,” he concludes, “no manne ys voyde of the lyghte of reason.” As with Luther, within the human sphere—again constituted by the humanist curriculum—reason, however frail, is not to be discounted. What follows are words of appreciation we may not have expected from the reformer:

So ofte therefore as we lyghte vpon profane wyters, lette vs be sette in mynde by that marauslye lyghte of trueth that shyneth in them, that the wyte of manne, howe mueh sucheuer yt bee peruerued and fallen from the fysste integrete, ys yet stille clothed and garnisshed wyth excellente gyftes of God. If wee conceyder that the spyryte of God ys the onely fountayne of trueth, wee wyll neyther refuse nor despise the truth yt selfe, whereoover yt shall appeare, excepte wee wyll dishonourably use the spyrtye of God. (Institutes 2.2.15; italics added)117

By a wonderful sleight of hand, Calvin is able to raise human dignity and capability. We may be totally depraved, but by a “generall grace” (Institutes 2.2.17) available to everybody, God empowers us to function adequately within the human kingdom. The Holy Spirit, even in pre-Christian times, had illuminated the human understanding and enabled the pagans to produce writings of enduring value. Calvin here reveals his humanist and Erasmian sympathies. “Everything in the pagan world,” Erasmus had written in the Antic cristiani, “that was valiantly done, brilliantly said, ingeniously thought, diligently transmitted, had been prepared by Christ for his society.”118

God’s general illumination thereby provides Calvin with a platform for his reformed academies, whose curriculum was based on the classics:

Shall we say that thei had no wyte, whiche by settinge in ordre the arte of speache [arte disserendi], haue taught vs to speake wyth reason? Shall we say that they were madde, whiche in settinge fouthe the Physycke, haue employed theyr diligence for vniust? What of all the mathematicall sciences? shall we syne the them the doynte erreors of madde menne? no, rather wee canne not reade the wrytynges of the oulde menne [i.e., the ancients], concerninge these thynge, wythoute great admiration of theuy wyte. . . If it haue ben the Lords will that we shoulde be holpe by the traualse and servicie of the wicked in naturall Phylosophie, Dialectike, the mathematicall knowledges, and others: lette vs use it. (Institutes 2.2.15-16)

117 As so ofte, Calvin is here echoing Augustine: “A person who is a good and true Christian should realize that truth belongs to his Lord, wherever it is found [immo vero quisquis bonus verusque christianus est, domini sui casi intellige, ubicumque invenerit veritatem]” (De Doct. Chr. 2.18.28).

From Geneva to Harvard College and beyond, the Reformed Church, spurred by Calvin, consequently worked for the establishment of centers of learning. Sidney, with his active interest in these schools, is a good example of the attitude of the Protestant intelligentsia. In addition to an early training under the Puritan schoolmaster Thomas Ashton and his years at Oxford, he spent several months of his grand tour at Johann Sturm’s famous Strasbourg Academy; and while serving in the Low Countries, he kept in close contact with the University of Leiden, founded by the Calvinists in 1574.

Calvin wavered as to which sphere to delegate one important area of the humanist study: ethics. The traditional view held that moral philosophy, in Sidney’s words, “extendeth itself out of the limits of a man’s own little world to the government of families and maintaining of public societies” (Defence 83). Calvin unequivocally placed government and household management within the earthly sphere, but he seemed to relegate personal ethics to God’s kingdom, thereby putting it out of bounds for the fallen intellect. His reason was that the moral law, in the form of the Decalogue, belonged to the Scriptures. But he made a further distinction, shared with Luther, between the two tablets of the Mosaic law. The first tablet covers humankind’s relation with God. Only the special illumination of the Spirit can enlighten man about these issues. Calvin, however, expresses a more qualified view about the second tablet, which prescribes a human’s relation to other humans:

Truely [reason] atteineth not at all to those that are the chief things in the First table, ... In the commandements of the Second table it hath some more vnderstandyng, by so much as they came nerer to the preseruation of cuiuer felowshyppe among menne. (Institutes 2.2.24).

With the first tablet, God’s word is our only guide, but with the second a certain space is allotted to human reason, and a door is thereby opened to study the writers of antiquity. Their views had to be complemented and corrected by the Scriptures, but they were not shut out.

Calvin’s overriding concern, of course, is humanity’s eternal salvation, and here humankind has need of outside help. The reformer falls back on an Augustinian concept, divine illumination: “And Augustine so farre acknowledgeth this defect of reason to vnderstande those thinges that are of God, that he thinketh the grace of illumina-

tion to be no lesse necessarie for our mindes, than the light of the sunne is for our eyes” (Institutes 2.2.25). The Holy Spirit must become “an inwarde teacher, by whose workynge the promise of salvation pearceth into oure mindes” (Institutes 3.1.4). This special saving illumination of the Spirit, however, should not be confused with the general illumination which everyone benefits from, the “generall grace” that enables mankind to function coram mundo.

IX

Thanks to Melanchthon’s and Calvin’s enormous influence, Luther’s educational theories became a permanent fixture at northern universities. As far as the English universities were concerned, the Reformation modified earlier humanist reforms by strengthening the two facets—coram Deo and coram mundo—of the Protestant vision. On the one hand there was a new stress on educating the clergy: “A majority of those students who took degrees at the university,” writes the historian of education Rosemary O’Day, “appears to have entered the Church.” (120) The reason for this was that “the Protestant Church of England was in the process of developing a distinctive attitude to education” by insisting “upon the need for a pastoral, preaching ministry.” (121) On the other hand, the social élite increasingly felt the need for higher education (if not necessarily for a degree) in order to better serve the state, so that by the end of the century more than half of the Oxford matriculants were gentlemen or above. (122)

The Augustinian stamp on the developing Protestant educational vision is revealed in a fascinating letter that the educator Roger Ascham wrote from Cambridge in 1545 to Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. “If you would like to know how the University flourishes and what harvest of learning we reap,” Ascham begins, “I shall give my opinion in a few words. Many pursue the road to a knowledge of sacred learning, but different men have different ideas.” (123) He then contrasts

(121) O’Day, p. 132. O’Day contrasts this new emphasis with the situation before the Reformation, when only the clerical élite received higher education, while “the clergy who performed the pastoral work ... [only rarely] possess[ed] more than a modicum of education.”
(122) O’Day, p. 90.
those at Cambridge that follow the Catholic polemicist Albert Pighius with those that “follow the right way with St. Augustine.” He delineates this “right way,” which unsurprisingly turns out to be derived from On Christian Doctrine.

In connection with the daily reading of God’s word, others follow Augustine’s thinking above all, and go as far as they can in bringing to it the full range of their knowledge of languages, as though calling in the reserves. Everywhere languages are taught by those who are considered the best teachers of both knowledge and understanding, so that no thought is silent for want of speech and no language swells loquaciously for want of wisdom. We bring in Plato and Aristotle . . .; from the throng of Latinus Cicero is almost the only one we add to them.

Ascham is primarily interested in training the clergy, and is less favorably disposed than Luther to those who “use their thin and superfluous knowledge to get themselves more easily into some government position.” Yet he confirms what was to become the pattern at Elizabethan Oxbridge: the faculty of arts functioned as the training ground for the later study of theology. In other words, the educational program of the mature Augustine had become university policy in England.

X

Even though the Reformation provides a relevant background to the intellectual milieu of Tudor England, it nevertheless cannot account for the whole picture. Not only were there important connections between the Florentine neoplatonists and the early English humanists, but the Catholic Church for a long time provided an imposing counterbalance to the newfangled ideas of Luther and Calvin. It is an old commonplace that after the council of Trent, especially, the authority of Augustine became tainted by too close a contact with the Reformation. The Catholic Church instead renewed its dedication to Thomas Aquinas, whose Aristotelian synthesis was reaffirmed as the basis for its teachings. Yet the bishop of Hippo was too important an ally to be handed over to the Protestants. Instead, he was interpreted in ways that salvaged Catholic dogmas, a process facilitated by the fact that Augustine had been a respected authority for virtually every medieval doctor, Aquinas not the least. The Protestant threat sometimes led to the Catholic adoption of the neoplatonic views of the early Augustine rather than the suspect thoughts of the anti-Pelagian bishop. Such a dichotomy holds true even today to some extent, as Protestants have tended to prefer the mature Augustine, while a fair number of Catholics have placed greater emphasis on the early writings. Yet there have also been recurring movements within the Catholic Church, such as the Spirituals of sixteenth-century Italy or the Jansenists of seventeenth-century France, that have rediscovered the anti-pelagian bishop.

How do the early English humanists fit into this picture? Thomas More was the earliest and most important Catholic polemicist to enlist Augustine against Luther. More’s Augustinianism is well-known. He lectured on the City of God early in the century, and the Father remained with him for his later bouts with Luther and Tyndale. Colet was another dedicated Augustinian, who unlike his friend died before the Reformation. Thomas Starkey, finally, is not known as an Augustinian, yet that makes him all the more interesting. Writing in the midst of the confessional and political turmoil of the first phase of the English Reformation, and seemingly with one foot in each religious camp, Starkey provides a convenient testing ground for my Augustinian claims.

124 Ascham, p. 69.
125 Fletcher, p. 24.
The situation is complicated by the English humanists' links with Italy. While Colet corresponded with Ficino and actually visited Italy (though without meeting the philosopher), More admired Giovanni Pico and—at roughly the same time that he lectured on the City of God—translated Gianfrancesco Pico's Life of Johan Pico.130 Starkey for his part spent much of the 1520s in Italy, where he received a thorough humanistic training. It would be deceptively easy to conclude that these early English humanists favored the views of the young Augustine, especially after Luther had made the anti-Pelagian bishop odious. When it comes to their views on reason and faith, however, this in fact was not the case. At this crucial juncture between Florentine neoplatonism and English humanism, it is rather the differences of perspective and temper that stand out.

More's and Colet's reactions to Ficino and Pico are significant, I believe, because they reflect the prevailing English mood throughout the Tudor period. Sears Jayne, after investigating Colet's contacts with Ficino, sums up their relationship: "Colet was interested in Platonism mainly in the Oxford years of his career, and almost exclusively as a source of material for his required theological lectures on the Bible. The marginalia [in Colet's copy of Ficino's Letters] emphasize his moral fervor, his Augustinian view of human frailty, and his acceptance of St. Paul as the pole star of his life."131 When we study Colet's views on the powers of the human intellect, the divergence from Ficino is most acutely felt.132 At his most uncompromising, Colet sounds much like Tertullian: "We ought to banquet with Christ alone, at the choice table of the Scriptures... At other tables, even the books of heathen authors in which there is nothing that savors of Christ, nothing that does not savour of the Devil, ... no Christian ought to sit, unless he chooses to be thought a guest of the Devil."133 As with Luther, however, we must note carefully the context of such a pronouncement. When Colet does not fear intrusion into the sphere of faith, he can be more generous. It is a noteworthy fact, nevertheless, that this supposed arch-humanist leaves less room for heathen authors at St. Paul's School than does Luther in his "Letter... in behalf of Christian Schools."134

More's attitude towards Pico is equally fraught with problems. Which Pico is it that More celebrates in his Life, the writer of the Oration or the follower of Savonarola? A clue is provided when we note that More is translating (with some significant editing) Gianfrancesco Pico. While Gianfrancesco greatly admired his uncle, we know how little value he himself assigned to human reason, and this comes out clearly in his Life. Pico's famous theses, for example, prefaced by the Oration of twentieth-century fame, received short shrift: "Now had he ben .vii. yere conuersant in these [humane and deuyne] studies whan full of pryde & desyroues of glory and mannes pryase (for yet was he not kendled [kindled] in the loue of god) he went to ryme" (Life, sig. Av'; see also the subsection entitled "How moche he set more by deuocyon then connynge [knowledge]," sig. Bv'). As Alistair Fox shows, More's translation had not just copied but strengthened these tensions between piety and haughty learning.135 Like his friend Colet, More cannot be bracketed with the Florentine neoplatonists.136

If we study More's views on the place of education, we find the mature Augustinian position expressed in On Christian Doctrine. Given the work's centrality in the Renaissance, this of course should not surprise us, in particular when we remember what importance More's good friend Erasmus had given it. In More's "Letter to Oxford" we find the clearest enunciation of the Augustinian program. Defending secular learning from the attacks of the "Trojans," More begins by admitting the validity of their main charge, that education is no guarantee of salvation: "Now then, as for secular learning, no one denies that a person can be saved without it, and indeed without learning of any sort."137 He then turns around and explains what beneficial role learning does have:

130 On Colet's intentions with St. Paul's, see Gleeson, pp. 225–27.
131 Fox, pp. 28–30.
132 As did Ernst Cassirer in his influential study The Platonic Renaissance in England, trans. James P.ettegrove {Edinburgh: Nelson, 1925), pp. 8–24. In the intellectual life of England, claims Cassirer, "the fundamental philosophical tendency of the Florentine Academy hit upon a kindred atmosphere and kindred religious forces" (p. 11). While the "religious temper of the Florentine Circle... determined the direction and goal of [Colet's] humanism" (p. 15), More "maintains and promulgates... a religion within the bounds of reason" (p. 29). Unfortunately, pronouncements such as these still carry weight in some circles.
Not everyone who comes to Oxford comes just to learn theology; some must also learn law. They must also learn prudence in human affairs, ... And I doubt that any study contributes as richly to this practical skill as the study of poets, orators, and historians. Indeed, some plot their course, as it were, to the contemplation of celestial realities through the study of nature, and progress to theology by way of philosophy and the liberal arts ... thus despoothing the women of Egypt to grace their own queen [i.e., theology]. But since theology is the only subject he [i.e., the "Trojan"] seems to allow (if he actually allows even this), I do not see how he can pursue it without any skill in either Hebrew or Greek or Latin.\(^{138}\)

While progressing "to theology by way of philosophy and the liberal arts" echoes Giovanni Pico, the context shows that More is thinking rather of Augustine’s Egyptian treasures: secular learning as a handmaiden to faith, in addition to its utility in earthly matters. What is most striking about More’s views on education is how similar they are to those of the later Protestant Roger Ascham, or even to those of More's bugbear, Luther. This congruence is caused not so much by mutual influence (except perhaps from Luther to Ascham), but by the general acceptance of Augustine’s synthesis of sacred and secular values. Even without a Luther, Tudor England would have hewn pretty close to the mature Augustine; yet there can be no doubt that the Reformation strengthened that inclination.

Starkey's A Dialogue between Pole and Lupton, written sometime between 1529 and 1532, has received increasing attention from scholars of political history, renaissance humanism, and literary criticism.\(^{139}\) The Dialogue, although remaining in a unique manuscript until 1878 and therefore exerting virtually no contemporary influence, has been called a schoolbook example of “Christian humanism” in England.\(^{140}\)

The work deserves its high reputation, written as it is in a time of political and religious upheaval by an unusually gifted humanist with close connections to the centers of power. A follower and friend of Reginald Pole, Starkey supplemented his MA from Oxford with “a thorough grounding in civic humanism, rhetoric and dialectic” ac-

quired on the Continent, mainly in Italy but also in France.\(^{141}\) But what does Starkey's humanism entail? More specifically, what is his view of human reason? Is he a follower of the Florentine Neoplatonists, or has he been formed more by the evangelical movements (not necessarily Lutheran) that flourished both in England and on the Continent?

For some, the answer has been simple: as close as possible to the Ficinian end.\(^{142}\) On the face of it, there is much to recommend such a judgment. The Dialogue abounds with references to the “excellent dygnyte” of man, reminiscent not only of Ficino but of Pico’s Oration. Yet does Starkey’s Dialogue really fit the Ficinian bill? First there are the biographical complications. Starkey showed evangelical interests, as T.F. Mayer points out: “Starkey may well have come under the religious shadow of Colet in Oxford as well as other Pauline Christians in Italy. Although evangelical religion would make only a brief appearance in the ‘Dialogue,’ it became Starkey’s major preoccupation in the last years of his life.”\(^{143}\) Not that he was an outspoken or even crypto-Lutheran, but he was in favor of at least some of the ideas of the Reformation, such as the use of the vernacular in both liturgy and the Bible.\(^{144}\) But if, as I will argue, Starkey had more in common with Luther’s views on reason than with Ficino’s, that can be explained as much by a general adherence to On Christian Doctrine as by any direct Lutheran influence.

Starkey’s Dialogue is not strictly a work on reason, nor is it an encomium of human kind; it is a political discussion of the best way to govern the English commonwealth. The fictional dialogue between Starkey’s friends Reginald Pole and Thomas Lupton takes place over three days, where the first day is given to a discussion of the ideal commonwealth, the second enumerates the multitude of ills that afflict any real commonwealth, while the third day provides practical suggestions on how to alleviate the particular ills of the English commonwealth.\(^{145}\)

\(^{138}\) More, pp. 139–41.


\(^{140}\) See Headlam Wells, Spenser’s "Faerie Queene" and the Cult of Elizabeth (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1989), p. 35.

\(^{141}\) Mayer, Introduction to A Dialogue, p. vii.

\(^{142}\) According to Wells, for example, Starkey’s work was “the most complete statement by an Englishman of the central tenets of Christian humanist thought” before Hooker. By “Christian humanism” Wells means something very close to the Ficinian position: “The Christian humanist asserts, at the same time, the potential dignity of man and claims that, with divine assistance, he is capable of realizing an ideal of perfection through virtuous self-discipline” (p. 85).

\(^{143}\) Mayer, Introduction to A Dialogue, pp. vii–viii.

\(^{144}\) See A Dialogue, pp. 88–91.

\(^{145}\) See Mayer, Introduction to A Dialogue, pp. xx. For my purposes it will not be necessary to distinguish between the two fictional speakers (their positions are not really at variance), and I shall throughout refer to Starkey as the originator of the statements.
Starkey’s views on “man” must therefore be extrapolated from a work that has a different focus; furthermore, only by limiting the discussion of the work to the first day can it be presented as an unqualified encomium. On the first day Starkey lets Pole and Lupset affirm mankind’s “excellent dyngnyte”: “He hath in him a sparkul of dyngnyte, & ys surely of a celestyal & dyynynce nature” (Dialogue 9). While Starkey is open to the possibility that God may permit an alternative route to salvation for Jews and Moslems, who live outside the pale of the Christian religion, the laws of a Christian commonwealth provide the superior way:

Our laws & ordynancys be agreeable to the law of nature, seying they are al layd by chryst hymselfe & hye holy spryte, we are sure they schal brynge us to our salvacion yt we gyue perfayt fayth & sure trust to the promys of god in them to us made, ... let us be assured that our laws by Chryst the sone of god, & by his holy spryte incresyd & confirmyd, schal brynge us to such perfecyon as accordyng to the dyngnyte of the nature of man. (Dialogue 14)

While one must agree that Starkey seems to conflate religious with civic values in this passage, one also notes that provisions such as “yt we gyue perfayt fayth & sure trust to the promys of god in them” point to religious values beyond simply living a virtuous life. We should also note that the “dyngnyte of the nature of man” in the last line acts as a limit on, rather than as a guarantee of, the perfectibility of humanity.

But more importantly, this picture of the ideal commonwealth must be balanced by the discussions of actual commonwealths found in the rest of the dialogue. When Starkey turns to “the state of chrystynsdom,” he bluntly confesses that “hyt wanteth manys thyngys requyryd to the most perfayt state” (Dialogue 40). He notes Plato’s ideal commonwealth, conceding what orthodox Christians had always taught: if it had not been for the fall, humanity would indeed have been able to follow right reason, which is God-given: “gud hathe made man of al creaturyes in erth most perfayt gyving un to hym a sparkyl of his owne dyngnyte that ys to say ryght reson” (Dialogue 109). From a pre-lapsarian perspective, the attainment of moral excellence would be easy enough: “Yf man wold folow ever ryght reson & the jugement theroff[,] remembyryn alway the excellence & dyngnyty of his nature, hyt schold be nothyng hard to brynge man wythout many lawys to true cyvylyte, plato igitur in sua republica nullas tulit leges” (Dialogue 97). Yet our post-lapsarian experience tells a different story:

Thys hathe bryn tryde by processe of thousandys of yerys, thys hathe bryn concludyd by the most wyse & poylykye men, that man by instruction & general exhortation can not be brought to hys perfecyon, wherfor hyt was necessary to descend to the instytuyon & ordynance of lawys cyvylyte & poylykye that where as man blynkyd by affectys & vanytes therof wold not folow the trade of ryght reson, he schold at the lest by feare of punnyschment be constrayndyd to occupy hymselfe & apply hys mynd to such thynges as were convenyent to hys excellent nature & dyngnyte, & so at the last by long custom be inducyd to folow & dow that thyng for the love of vertue, wych befor he dyd only for fere of the punnyschment prescrybyd by the law, thys ys the end & vertue of al law, ... but forbycause the multynude of men, be so corrupt frayle & blynkyd with pesylent affectys, we must consyndyr the imbeyclyyte of them & wekenes of mynd & apply our remedies accordyng thereto. (Dialogue 97-98; emphasis added)

As this passage shows, Starkey is apprehensive about the perfectibility of mankind. Plato had “imagynyd only & dremydyd apoin such a commyn wele as never yet was found nor never I thinge schalbe” (Dialogue 108).

Significantly, Pole and Lupset begin their third day of discussion, dedicated to the remedies for a sick commonwealth, by asking God to send the Holy Spirit, “wythout the wych manns hart ys blaynd & ignoyrant of al vertue & truth, ” “to ylumnoynate & lyght hys harres & myndys” (Dialogue 95). The remedy turns out to be the traditional Augustinian answer (culled from Book 19 of the City of God): the job of the civil magistrate, and of the civil law, is to restrain the “pesylent affectys” caused by the fall. Starkey had earlier alluded to the equally traditional Augustinian topos of “usying” the things of this life in preparation for the enjoyment of God (Dialogue 44). The law, accordingly, “ys the pedagoge of chryst” that “preparhyth manns mynd to the recyvyng of vertue” (Dialogue 197). Yet the law “ys not suffycyent to brynge man to hys perfecyon, but to that ys requyryd a nother more celestyal remedy, the wych our mattrur chyrste cam to set & stabylchys in the harths of hys electe pepul, he cam to make perfayt man, & supply the defecte of the law, by hys celestyal & dyynynce doctryne” (Dialogue 188). Here we are surely much closer to the Lutheran/Augustinian distinction between law and gospel than to any Ficinian intellectualism. Starkey’s use of the law, furthermore, is analogous to Augustine’s (and Luther’s) view of the liberal arts: they are needed for civil life and are preparatory for the gospel, yet they cannot take its place.

Starkey was a humanist with evangelical sympathies, even if we cannot class him as a Protestant. Yet when we consider the attitude toward faith and reason, no forced distinction between “humanist” and “Protestant” is tenable in Tudor England. In both groups, insofar as they

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146 Starkey is cited from Mayer’s edition (but without its detailed scribal apparatus), with page numbers given in the text.
can even be distinguished from each other, the mature Augustinian vision predominated. Of course, there were a few exceptions, like John Dee in a later generation. Yet they remained just that: exceptions that prove the rule.

XI

We shall end this chapter by looking at two Elizabethan writers: Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, and Edmund Spenser. At first glance the two seem to exemplify the extreme points of the spectrum we have delineated, with Greville leaning toward the sceptics and Spenser toward the neoplatonists. There is much truth to such a generalization, but the differences become less significant when we pay closer attention to their writings. Both should be situated closer to the mature Augustinianism of the Reformers than to either of the extremes.

Fulke Greville is mainly famous for being Philip Sidney’s close friend and first official biographer. His London mansion had also the honor of being used as the setting for one of Giordano Bruno’s philosophic dialogues, the *Ash-Wednesday Supper* (1584). This fictitious account has some relation to known facts, since Bruno made friends with both Sidney and Greville during his stay in England. Yet physical proximity did not translate into closeness of ideas. It is hard to find an Elizabethan writer with views further distant from Bruno’s neoplatonic frenzies than Fulke Greville, one of England’s first outspoken sceptics. His views shine through in his dramas and in his sonnet sequence *Caestica*, but are most clearly expressed in his long poem *A Treatise of Humane Learning*. Most of these works were not published until 1639, but as the title page of the first edition announces, some of them had been “written in his Youth, and familiar Exercise with Sir Philip Sidney.” While this is not true for the *Treatise*, written sometime in the first two decades of the seventeenth century, its topic would almost certainly have been discussed by Sidney and Greville.

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147 I am quoting from Fulke Greville, * Certaine learned and elegant works* (London, 1639). STC 12861. References to the *Treatise* will be given in the text by stanza.


The treatise on learning seems to borrow much from both Gianfrancesco Pico and Cornelius Agrippa. The power and vaunting ambition of human knowledge is immediately portrayed: “This Knowledge is the same forbidden tree, / Which man lusts after to be made his Maker” (*Treatise 3*). Following Gianfrancesco Pico’s lead, Greville then reveals the defects of each of the faculties of the mind, from the senses to the imagination, memory, and the understanding. He next turns to the liberal arts:

But all these natural Defects perchance
May be supplied by Sciences, and Arts;
Which see thou after; study, admire, advance,
As if to restore our fall, recure our smarts
They could, bring in perfection, burne our rods;
With *Demades* to make us like our Gods.149 (*Treatise 21*)

But as he goes through the arts one by one, as had Agrippa, all pretenses of perfection are demolished. He ends by repeating Agrippa’s critique of the bland assumptions of the young Augustine:

What thing a right line is, the learned know;
But how asails that him, who in the right
Of life, and manners doth desire to grow?
What then are these humane Arts, and lights,
But Seas of errors? In whose depths who sound,
Of truth finde only shadowes, and no ground.

Then if our Arts want power to make vs better,
What foole will think they can vs wiser make. (*Treatise 34-35*)

We are also reminded of Sidney’s use of the same topos: “By the balance of experience it was found that the astronomer, looking to the stars, might fall in a ditch, that the inquiring philosopher might be blind in himself, and the mathematician might draw forth a straight line with a crooked heart” (*Defence 82*). For Sidney, however, the critique of abstract knowledge led to a praise of “the knowledge of a man’s self, in the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of well-doing and not of well-knowing only.” Greville’s poem paints a bleaker picture, suggesting radical doubts about the arts.

Yet Greville stands actually quite close to Sidney’s more positive view. From stanza 60 he ponders whether any good can be achieved

149 The rhetorician Demades was fined for introducing Alexander the Great as a god.
from human learning. As it turns out, the benefits are plentiful as long as learning keeps within its ordained limits. Following Luther, Greville in effect looks at learning coram mundo and coram Deo (if without using these terms). The different arts and sciences are again scrutinized, but this time for their practical use "In Workes, and Arts of our Humanity" (Treatie 118):

For thus, these Arts passe, whence they came, to life,
Circle not round in self-Imagination,
Begetting Lines upon an abstract wife,
As children borne for idle contemplation;
"But in the practise of mans wisdome danke,
Meanses, for the Worlds inhabitant to live." (Treatie 122)

Coram Deo, however, Christians must build on "A sound foundation,
not on sandy parts / Of light Opinion, Selfenesse, Words of men, /
But that sure roche of truth[,] Gods Word, or Pennel" (Treatie 145). But
when they do, depending on the "gifts of Grace, and Faith" (Treatie 149), true learning can indeed take place:

Thus are true Learnings in the humble heart
A Spirituall workes, raising Gods Image, raised
By our transgression .

Hard Characters (I grant) to flesh and blood,
Which in the first perfection of creation
Freely resign'd the state of being good,
To know the euell, where it found pruination;
And lost her being, ere she understood
Depth of this fall, paine of Regeneration:
"By which she yet must raise herselfe againe,
'Ere she can judge all other knowledge vaine." (Treatie 150–51)

By employing the technical term "pruination" of evil in a very precise Augustinian sense, Greville reveals the pedigree of his thought. The contrast is between the pre-lapsarian "perfection of creation" and the ambivalent state of post-lapsarian existence. Like Augustine before him, he concludes paradoxically that only by acknowledging the full effects of the fall and the vanity of human knowing can mankind

rise again through a "true learning in the humble heart," a "spirituall" rather than an intellectual work.

Greville and Sidney had been classmates from childhood, and remained close friends until Sidney's death in 1586. That they share common beliefs should not surprise us, therefore, especially since both aligned themselves with the Reformed wing at court. This congruence (if not identity) can also be felt in the area under investigation. Despite his indebtedness to Agrippa, Sidney never made himself a spokesman for Christian scepticism, yet in his Defence of Poesie we find a position that has much in common with that found in the Treatise of Humane Learning. The similarities are particularly striking when Greville discusses "Poesie and Musicke" in stanzas 111 to 115. It is indeed likely that Sidney's celebrated Defence was in Greville's mind, or even before his eyes, when he penned those lines. Yet we should not complacently assume a one-way influence. Greville, like Sidney, frames his treatment of poetry (and music) as a defence against the colunnies of Plato and others, who had seen it "Onely as pleasing sauce to daunty food," without the ability "either to enrich the Wit, / Or, which is lese, to mend our states by it" (Treatie 111–12). Yet, contends Greville, "both these play noble parts": music "to outward Church-rites if applied, / Helps to move thoughts, while God may touch the hearts / With goodnesse," while poetry,

The other twinne, if to describe, or praise
Goodnesse, or God she her Ieades frame,
And like a Maker, her creations raise,
On lines of truth, it beautifies the same;
And while it seemeth onely but to please,
Teaceth vs order vnder pleasures name;
"Which in a glasse, shows Nature how to fashion
"Her selfe againe, by ballancing of passion." (Treatie 114)

Although Sidney does not treat music separately, his discussion of the divine kind of poetry, typified by David's Psalms, hinges upon their being "nothing but songs," which "rightly applied, devesrth not to be scourged out of the Church of God" (Defence 77). More specifically, when Greville refers to the poet as a "Maker" who "her creations raise / On lines of truth" he undoubtedly has the Defence in mind: "give right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works

151 The Augustinian basis for Greville's thought comes out even clearer in the final stanza of the Treatise of Religion, which hinges on Augustine's distinction between "use" and "enjoyment," and that perennial dictum from the Conf. I.1.1, "our hearts find no peace until they rest in you [inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te]." The latter is also alluded to in stanza 7 of the same poem, as well as in Galatian 86.

152 For Sidney's views, see also my The "Enabling of Judgement," pp. 53–57.
of that second nature" (Defence 79). While Greville’s allusion to Horace’s *vitae et dulce* may sound conventional, we recognize many of the details from Sidney:

For these [poets] indeed do merely [i.e., wholly] make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach; and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger; and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved—which being the noblest scope to which ever any learning was directed, yet want there not idle tongues to bark at them. (Defence 81)

Specifically, both Sidney and Greville see ethics as the domain par excellence of poetry. Poetry, writes Greville, "shows Nature how to fashion / Her selfe againe, by ballancing of passion" (Treatise 114), while Sidney claims that “it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by" (Defence 81–82).

Sidney deals with the poet’s role and mission with much greater subtlety and at much greater length than can Greville in his few stanzas, but Greville on the other hand provides the larger philosophical setting that Sidney only hints at in his treatise. After stanzas in praise of music and poetry, Greville ends with a word of caution:

> Let therefore humane Wisedome vse both these,  
> As things not precious in their proper kind;  
> "If studied for it selfe, disease of mind;  
> The one [music] a harmony to move, and please;  
> The next [poetry] (like Nature) doth Ideas raise,  
> Teaches, and makes; but hath no power to binde:  
> Both, ornaments to life and other Arts,  
> While they do serve, and not possess our hearts.  
> (Treatise 115)

Both music and poetry, like the other arts, occupy a clearly delimited area of operation: they should serve, but not "possesse our hearts." Again, we recognize Augustine’s “use but not enjoy.”

XII

The religious and philosophical thought of Edmund Spenser has always been harder to pin down than that of Sidney or Greville. This difficulty applies in particular to Spenser’s attitudes to the early and late Augustinian perspectives under investigation. His views are harder to deduce not just because he left no theoretical essay (the unreliable letter to Raleigh comes the closest), but because he at different times seem to waver between Ficino’s intellectual neoplatonism and Calvin’s anti-Pelagian theology, alluding in his works to everything from De Amore to the Institutes. The conclusion that springs to many minds is that he is incorrigibly eclectic. While there have been dissenting voices that have stressed the Protestant (even Puritan) Spenser, there seems to be a growing faction that wants to place him squarely within a neoplatonic tradition that subsumes all other intellectual movements. This view has recently and most forcefully been propagated by Elizabeth Bieman, who argues that “to be Neoplatonic in the Renaissance, if one imaginatively reconstructs that thinking, is to be Pythagorean, Socratic-Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Middle Platonist, Philonist, Pauline, Augustinian, Ficinian, kabbalistic, and so forth. Spenser’s mind had the elasticity to embrace that intextual field.” I think we all agree that many renaissance minds, including Spenser’s (as well as Sidney’s and Greville’s), were conversant with, and borrowed congenial parts of, most if not all of these differing traditions. But Bieman means something more than that. For her, as for the young Giovanni Pico, all these thinkers, including even St. Paul, share the same all-embracing neoplatonic message. Indeed, she goes even further than Pico, who had reservations on several counts. To fit Spenser into this picture, she relies on “imaginative reconstructions” to such an extent that the poet’s own words pale into insignificance when placed next to her imposing edifice.

Bieman’s assumptions bring into acute focus the standing of neoplatonism in Elizabethan England, and the even larger issue of the period’s ability to discriminate between competing world views. She gives the impression that Spenser, or even the Renaissance as a whole, was not equipped with the tools to sort out basic discrepancies (as well as points of convergence) between, say, Paul and Plotinus, or Calvin and Ficino. Yet as this and many other studies have demonstrated, the
Renaissance should rather be characterized by its strong need to interrogate the classical heritage, keeping what was felt to be good and useful, and discarding the rest. Exactly what and how much was kept of course varied, but even syncretists like Giovanni Pico did not swallow Pluto whole. As for the Elizabethans, we simply cannot overlook the Reformation. It left its intellectual mark on Europe as a whole, and this regardless of whether one was an active participant or not. Or put differently: the Reformation was only one important manifestation of the growing need for discrimination that was felt in the sixteenth century. Humanism and scepticism were some of the other forces that took part in the same discussion, not necessarily coming up with the same answers but nevertheless engaged in the same project of sifting and sorting.

It has been claimed that the fresh synthesis between faith and reason accomplished by Ficino and Pico made the old patristic answers dated. The historical evidence, however, tells a different story. The authority of Augustine in particular remained steady throughout the sixteenth century; when Spenser matriculated at Cambridge in the late sixties, the bishop was one of the most commonly read authors at the university.\(^{156}\) I am not claiming that Spenser did not know his Ficino; we know that he had read the De amore at the very least. What I am arguing is that Ficino was far overshadowed by Augustine, whom Spenser like all his university peers was compelled to study at great length. As this and the following two chapters will show, Spenser was deeply affected by Augustinian patterns of thought.\(^{157}\)

The work that forces itself into any discussion of Spenser’s neoplatonism is the *Fourfe Hymnes*, published in 1596 towards the end of his poetic career. The work clearly belongs to the tradition of the love treatise, and we find sustained references to Plotinian philosophy via Ficino’s *De amore*. Yet it is also one of Spenser’s most Pauline and late-Augustian works. On the face of it, there seems to be some truth to Bieman’s syncretistic claims as these disparate authorities rub shoulders. The form of the poem—four interlocking parts, each carefully and symmetrically designed to interact with the others—certainly speak for organic unity and a holistic vision.\(^{158}\) The debate about the genesis of the first two hymns, whether they were composed in Spenser’s “greener times” of youth or were revised or newly written together with the heavenly hymns, is largely beside the point; regardless of their origin, we have to interpret all four hymns in the form in which Spenser saw fit to publish them. But a corollary of this decision is that we cannot arbitrarily slice off unconvincing parts of the poem or the dedicatory letter. Indeed the two go together, since the stanzas most often under attack, *HHL* 2–3 in particular, repeat the recantation of the letter. Precisely because the *Fourfe Hymnes* form a carefully coordinated whole, we are not allowed to disrupt its delicate balance. If Spenser deliberately inserted faultlines into his edifice, they will have to be included in our interpretation of its totality. Even if his “greener youth” was a poetic fabrication, it was included in the poem for far weightier reasons than the fear of reprimands from some honorable and virtuous Ladies.

The most striking feature of the dedicatory letter is not its dismissal of the pleasures of youth, but its carefully contrived adherence to literary convention. Through the deliberate selection of vocabulary, Spenser places himself and his poem within an august tradition stretching beyond Benivieni and Petrarch (both of whom figure prominently in the hymns to follow) to Augustine:

But being unable [to call in the former two Hymnes], by reason that many copies thereof were formerly scattered abroad, I resolved at last to amend, and by way of retracution to reforme them, making in stead of those two Hymnes of earthly or naturre love and beautie, two others of heavenly and celestall.\(^{159}\)

The first significant word is “scattered,” ostensibly referring to the fate of the physical copies of the first two hymns, yet simultaneously bringing in the whole tradition of love poetry developed from Petrarch’s

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\(^{157}\) Like Harold L. Weatherby, in *Mirrors of Celestial Grace* (Toronto: Univ of Toronto Press, 1994), I stress the patristic element in Spenser’s fiction; yet while I think it likely that Spenser had come in contact with some of the Greek Fathers, a reading of *The Faerie Queene* that places the poet in opposition not only to Latin Fathers like Augustine but to both Protestant and Catholic dogma is a bit odd.


\(^{159}\) The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser, ed. William A. Oram et al. (New Haven: Yale Univ Press, 1989), p. 690. References to the *Fourfe Hymnes* will be given in the text by their standard abbreviations (*HHL*, *HHB*, and *HNB*) and stanza.
“scattered rhymes,” the *Rime sparse.* The second carefully selected word is “retraction,” a concept that can embrace the practice of Petrarch as well as Benvenuti, but whose origin goes much further back. I am of course thinking of the work with the same title, Augustine’s *Retractiones.* Spenser’s use of the form “retraction” rather than the more common “retraction” is the clearest indication of a conscious allusion. While both forms were used in Elizabethan English, the longer version was more closely associated with the Augustinian work. It was Augustine who had set the pattern for literary renotations, a pattern that Petrarch consciously followed in his sonnet sequence (if not very successfully) as well as in his *Triumphs,* and that Benvenuti and Spenser emulated when both decided to write a mature set of poems to counteract (or appearing to counteract) an earlier immature effort.

Both Petrarch’s sonnet sequence and *Triumphs* inscribe a progression from earthly to heavenly love, hinging on the death of Laura, the poet’s unreachable mistress. In both collections, the poet purportedly retracts his earlier human love for Laura, who has to die to quell the antipathy between eros and agape. But while the retraction in the *Rime* must be termed futile, the poet never being able to transform earthly to heavenly love, the one in the *Triumphs* proves more successful. The *Rime* is consciously divided into two sections, *in vita* and *in morte.* The first portrays the poet’s frustrated efforts to master his own lust in order to be a worthy lover of the living Laura, while the latter describes his hardly more successful striving for spirituality, gauged by the transfigured vision of his now dead lady, who in the final poem is superseded by the Virgin Mary. The *Triumphs* describe a similar progression, but on a more abstract level and with greater idealism. While the *Rime* seems to suggest that Laura proves more an obstacle than an incentive to the poet’s spiritual progress, the last of the *Triumphs* portrays her in a transfigured light. Spenser’s *HL* and *HB* have certain similarities with the *in vita* section of the *Rime sparse,* even if Spenser is more optimistic about the possibility of overcoming lust. The first two hymns are much more “Petarchan” than was Petrarch himself, coming as they do at the end of a tradition turned rigid, even fossilized. What for Petrarch were deeply felt tensions have in Spenser become hackneyed clichés.

When we compare the *in morte* section of the *Rime* with Spenser’s two heavenly hymns, however, the similarities are much less evident. No Laura-figure is present; the progress no longer has love for a human woman as its starting point. The female Sapience of *HBB* 27–38 only underscores the differences with Petrarch’s Laura. Spenser makes a point of stressing her divine transcendence: “For she the daughters of all wemens race, / And Angels eke, in beautie doth excelle, / . . . That it doth farre exceed all humane thought, / Ne can on earth compare be to ought” (*HBB* 30). In *HB* 15 Spenser had sung the praises of “that faire lampe, . . . which kindleth lovers fire.” Sapience, on the other hand, puts that light in the shade: “And that faire lampe, which useth to enflame / The hearts of men with selfe consuming fyre, / Thenceforth seemes fowle, and full of sinful blame” (*HBB* 40). Spenser’s “selfe consuming fyre” may echo Petrarch’s laments over his own lust (it certainly functions as an ironic comment on Spenser’s own facile treatment of lust in the first two hymns), yet Petrarch was not willing to give up Laura. To find a better model for Spenser’s heavenly hymns we instead have to turn to Benvenuti.

In Girolamo Benvenuti (1459–1542) the retraction takes a form different from Petrarch. In his early *Canzone della Amore,* he uses Petrarchan language to summarize the neoplatonic ascent of Ficino’s *De amore.* What made the canzone famous, however, was Giovanni Pico’s *Commentary,* which encrusts the few stanzas of the poem with page upon page of abstruse philosophical glosses (often arguing against the Ficinian work that Benvenuti based his poem upon). Yet Benvenuti like Pico came under the spell of Savonarola. In his old age the poet was no longer happy about his youthful canzone or with its commentary:

108 For the Augustinian resonances of “scattered” (e.g., in *Conf.* 10.29.40), see chapter 1 above.
109 See both forms in the OED.

112 See Petrarch, *De amore,* 6.2.32, 213.13, 12.2.11. In the *Laurels,* 15.2.87, 19.3.12, 109.13. Laura is thus given a homoerotic dimension.

113 The correspondences between Spenser’s earthly and heavenly *Hymns* may owe something to what Sturm-Maddox terms the “specular” correspondences between the *in vita* and *in morte* parts of the *Rime.* These many correspondences strongly suggest that the structural relation between the two parts of the *Rime* is not linear but in a special sense specular. In both parts, groups of texts that may be characterized as intermediate structures between the micro- and the macrostructural levels . . . organize the carefully elaborated set of correspondences” (p. 234).
Wishing to discuss the subject of divine love, I departed from the truth of Christian religion and dallied in the Academy of Plato, where, enticed by the apparent sweetness of that doctrine, I set out to compose a canzone on heavenly or divine love, following the interpretation and teaching of the Academy. To make my mistake even worse, this poem was later not only analyzed and explicated in a very learned commentary (by the illustrious Count Giovanni Pico . . .), but also disseminated in a thousand copies.165

To remedy this state of affairs, Benivieni decided to write a new Christian canzone that would counteract the harmful effects of his youthful effort. Instead of Ficino's De amore, he now turned to the works of Augustine for guidance, in particular On the Trinity. What makes Benivieni's example so important for Spenser's Foure Hymnes is that instead of simply publishing the new poem, Benivieni decided to print it together with the original. Furthermore, as Sears Jayne explains, he designed the new poem "to parallel the original Platonic canzone very closely. . . . But the purpose of these similarities is to heighten the central difference between the two poems. The old poem was Platonic; the new one is Christian."166 If Petrarch poses the question (without clearly answering it) whether it is possible to progress from earthly to heavenly love, then Benivieni responds with a resounding No! His ladder does not progress from the Platonic poem to the Christian, but attempts a clean start with the latter. This is true also for Spenser, if with a further Protestant twist.

The biggest difference between Spenser and the other two is that the first two Hymnes, for all their talk of ascending to "heaven," never leave the ground. If we look beyond their Petrarchan and Ficinian metaphors, we find that they, in the words of Spenser's dedication, are "two Hymnes of earthly or naturall love and beautie" (Foure Hymnes, p. 690; emphasis added). Even when Spenser gleams from Ficino, he selects those aspects most congenial to his own purposes. He ignores the main drift of De amore, that man has to move beyond physical love in order to achieve union with the beauty of the One. Instead, he zeros in on the few and uncharacteristic passages that talk about the earthly Venus:167

166 Jayne, Commentary, pp. 16-17.
167 I.e. De amore 5.7, 6.8 and 6.11 (in these stanzas Spenser is specifically echoing 6.11).

But man, that breathes a more immortal mynd,
Not for lusts sake, but for eternitie,
Seekes to enlarge his lasting progenie.

For having yet in his deducted spright,
Some sparks remaining of that heavenly fyre,
He is enamlied with that goodly light.
Unto like goodly semblant to assyre:
Therefore in choice of love, he doth desyre
That seems on earth most heavenly, to embrace,
That same is Beautie, born of heavenly race. (HL 15-16)

For Spenser, the "lasting progenie" and "goodly semblant" that results from the love of beauty consists of children. Lust for him is not sexuality, as it seems to be for Petrarch, but the misuse of sexuality. When he "doth desyre . . . to embrace" the beauty "that seems on earth most heavenly," he is not using metaphysical metaphors, but is sensuously literal.

Of course, like all Petrarchan poetry, the "heavens" and "enshrined saints" of Spenser's first two hymns are blasphemous if taken at face value. But not only as religious statements: the hymns are equally blasphemous when seen from a narrow Ficinian perspective. If the neoplatonist or the mystic transforms physical love into a metaphor of divine love, Spenser does the exact opposite. Like John Donne in "The Canonization," he is using metaphysical metaphors to describe sexual pleasure. The HL and the HB end up in a heaven of "earthly or naturall love and beautie," with no indication that there is any more to be had:

By these, o Love, thou dost thy entrance make,
Unto thy heaven, . . .

There with thy daughter: Pleasure they doe play
Their hurlesse sports, without rebuke or blame,
And in her snowie bosome boldly lay
Their quiet heads, devoyd of guilty shame,
After full joyance of their gentile game. (HL 40-42)

As William Nelson puts it, "Spenser's earthly and heavenly loves are sharply distinguished. His earthly lover learns to perceive the inward beauty of his lady, but climbs at last not to a perception of the essence which generated it but into bed. . . . The ascent of the lower slope may
be a reflection or a symbol of the higher, perhaps even a preparation for it; it is not part of the same expedition.\(^{168}\)

Spenser's emphasis should come as no surprise after the Amoretti and Epithalamion, published the year before Foure Hymnes. He had turned the Petrarchan assumptions upside-down by ending his sonnet sequence with the ceremonial marriage of the lovers. As many critics have noted, it was the Reformation that was responsible for the new perspective. More specifically, it was Luther's distinction between realms that had caused the change. The Catholic Church had always seen celibacy and female virginity, especially as practiced in the monasteries, as exalted and meritorious states. The former monk from Wittenberg, however, set a new practical pattern by marrying a former nun. Luther thereby exalted marriage and procreation, which like reason had their place coram mundo. Physical love was good and indeed necessary, but he refused to view it (any more than the absence thereof) as a rung within any pseudo-Dionysian ladder of salvation.

Luther's coram mundo and coram Deo were of course his terms for what Augustine had called the "two kingdoms," perhaps better known as the spheres of "nature" and "grace" after Thomas Aquinas had developed Augustine's original conception. And ever since A.S.P. Woodhouse's seminal essay "Nature and Grace in The Faerie Queene" we all know the importance of this dichotomy for Spenser's poetry, The Faerie Queene in particular.\(^{169}\) More recently Sean Kane has demonstrated the Augustinian basis for the dichotomy within the poem.\(^{170}\) I shall return to The Faerie Queene in the last two chapters, investigating the linguistic and political ramifications of Augustine's thought. Here it is sufficient to point out that Spenser also in Foure Hymnnes makes use of the Augustinian distinction. While the first two hymns move within the earthly realm, the latter two, in Spenser's own words, are "heavenly and celestial."

But what does that distinction mean? If we interpret Spenser's first two Hymnmes at least in part as a Protestant inversion of the Petrarchan/Ficinian love tradition, what are we to make of the heavenly counterparts? The latter two Hymnmes are obviously intended as serious panegyrics to heavenly love and heavenly beauty. On the face of it, the HHIB in particular seems to fall within the scope of a neoplatonic cult of beauty, reminiscent not only of Ficino but of the young Augustine. But as Benveniini had shown, the old Petrarchan wineskins could hold new wine. Spenser was well aware of Benveniini's example. Not only does the HL begin by echoing the initial stanza of Benveniini's youthful canzone, but when Spenser comes to the HHL, he emulates Benveniini's mature description of the origin of love within the Trinity, drawn from Augustine's On the Trinity.\(^{171}\)

Spenser's emulation of Benveniini's two canzonze is of crucial importance to our interpretation of the structure of the Foure Hymnmes. Much has been made of the fact that Spenser scrupulously parallels the latter two hymns with the earlier pair. The conclusion to be drawn from this is not so obvious as syncretizing scholars would have us believe, however. There is a strong likelihood that Spenser, like Benveniini, cross-referenced the two pairs with the intention not of assimilating but of contrasting them.\(^{172}\) Those that see the series of parallels as proofs of "a forward and upward movement in the series by which the earlier pair leads into the later" have not considered the full implications of Benveniini's example. They have also to dismiss Spenser's own words. To say with Bieman that the HHL "is fully congruent with the Platonism of the first two hymnmes" is to sweep whole stanzas un-

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169 Woodhouse's 1949 article was reprinted in Critical Essays on Spenser from "ELH" (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 24–58. Many have added to and refined Woodhouse's analysis, which was not always persuasive in details or emphasis. For a more recent survey of the debate see Darryl J. Cleas's entry on "Nature and Grace" in The Spenser Encyclopedia, ed. A.C. Hamilton et al. (Toronto and Buffalo: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1990).


171 HHIB 4–7 as compared to stanza 3 of Benveniini's "Amor sotto celi." Both poems then go on to discuss the angels (HHL 8–11 and "Amor" 4).

der the carpet. In the introduction to the HHL, for example, Spenser conforms to the example of both Augustine and Benvenieni when he retracts the “liew lays” composed “in th’ heat of youth” (HHL 2). Completing the frame around the two heavenly Hymnes, Spenser once more distances himself from the “false beauties” that “enflame / The hearts of men with selfe consuming fyre” (HHB 40–42). What this frame encloses is obviously meant not as a simple continuation of the earlier hymns but as something new and different. Like Benvenieni, Spenser draws that different approach from the mature Augustine, especially as expressed in the City of God and On the Trinity.

After the introductory recantation Spenser begins the HHL with a meditation on the origin of love within the Trinity, culled from On the Trinity. This is followed by a lengthy discussion of the creation and fall of the angels and of mankind (HHL 8–18). While most of the hymn is ultimately based on the Scriptures, the more immediate source for these stanzas is Books 12 and 13 of the City of God. In 1920 Edwin Greenlaw realized that the third Hymne explicates “the complete statement of the scheme of salvation, the theme that Milton was afterwards to develop.” What was not clear before C.S. Lewis, however, was the common denominator in Augustine, the source of so much of the doctrine behind Paradise Lost. If it can be said that Spenser in the first two hymns plays around with later Ficinian developments of the thought of the young Augustine, in this Hymne he has moved on to the mature Augustinian perspective, centering not on the human ascent but on the descent of the incarnate Christ:

Out of the bosom of eternall bliss,
In which he reigned with his glorious syre,
He downe descended, like a most demisse
And albeith thrall, in fleshes fraile attyre,
That he for him might pay sinnes deadly hyre,
And him restore unto that hapless state,
In which he stood before his hapless fate. (HHL 20)

The Incarnation forms the thematic and structural centerpiece of the hymn. It is here, in HHL 19–24, rather than in the introductory recantation that we find the real rupture between the two sets of hymns. The starting point for the HHL is not human beauty but God’s love, first within the Trinity and then for mankind. It is true that the object of this love, like its counterpart in the earthly Hymnes, is beauty: “It [the Trinity] lov’d itself, because it selfe was faire” (HHL 5). Stressing the ethical aspect of the divine beauty, Spenser sees sin as a disfigurement of that beauty. While the Son is “voide of sinfull blot” (my emphasis), some of the angels originally created “full of beautie” (HHL 8) became tarnished by pride. Mankind follows suit: “How then can sinfull flesh it selfe assure,” asks Spenser, “Sith purest Angels fell to be impure?” (HHL 14). It is the Incarnation, however, which most decisively breaks with a Plotinian cult that can love only what is beautiful. Christ exchanges his beauty for “vileness” in order to restore the original beauty of mankind:

And that most blessed bodie, which was borne
Without all blemish or reproachfull blame,
He freely gave to be both rent and torne
Of cruel hands, who with despightfull shame
Revelyng him, that them most vile became,
At length him nailyd on a gallow tree.
And slew the just, by most unjust deeree. (HHL 22)

179 Elizabeth Bieman, “Four Hymns,” The Spenser Encyclopedia, p. 316. Bieman is much influenced by Bennett. Other recent examples of Bennett’s approach are Heninger, pp. 927–41, and Terry Comito, “A Dialectic of Images in Spenser’s Four Hymns,” Studies in Philology 74 (1977): 301–21. Despite my disagreement with their overall reading, I nevertheless depend on these and many other prominent interpreters of the Hymnes for specific details of Spenser’s allusions and borrowings. I do not claim any originality in pointing out the influences from Augustine, Ficino or Benvenieni. Where I may have something new to contribute is in the way I put these pieces together in light of my specific theme.

176 Bieman, “Four Hymns,” p. 316.

178 See Eliot, pp. 179–82.

177 Edwin Greenlaw, “Spenser’s Influence on Paradise Lost,” Studies in Philology 17 (1920): 345. It was Greenlaw who also started the influential trend of seeing the four Hymnes as a continuous ladder of neoplatonic ascent (pp. 345–51).

178 From Augustine on, Christianity had singled out pride as the cardinal sin responsible for the fall of both angels and humanity. This should be contrasted with the Plotinian perspective, in which the “fall” of the pure soul is caused by the entanglement with matter, the hyde of Platonic thought (cf. HB 25: “the soul is faire and beauteous still, / How ever fleshes fault it endlesse make.”). For the mature Augustine, the sinful soul contaminates the body, not the other way around: “nece caro corruptibilis animam peccatirimum esse corruptibilem carnem [Moreover, it was not the corruptible flesh that made the soul sinful; on the contrary, it was the sinful soul that made the flesh corruptible]” (De Co. Dei 14.3).

177 The scriptural analog here is Isaiah 53:2–3: “He hathe nether forme nor beautie: when we shall see him, there shalbe no forme that we shalde desire him. He is despised and rejected of men.”
Spenser here follows traditional Augustinianism. In a recent study Carol Harrison explains how the bishop had made the Incarnation the cornerstone of his mature theory of beauty. On the one hand he saw Christ as the supreme beauty of God. Yet Augustine came to believe that to redeem a mankind made ugly by sin Christ had to become ugly. The change of perspective from the neoplatonic perspective is obvious. While beauty is the goal in both instances, the thought that God should become deformed in order to restore the beauty of mankind would have been unthinkable to Plotinus.

Human love in the HHL is therefore a response not to female beauty, but to the love of God. When Spenser in HHL 26 turns to that response, he consciously echoes the message of the First Epistle of John: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his sonne to be a reconciliation for our sinnes. Beloued, if God so loved vs, we ought also to loue one another. . . . We loue him, because he loued vs first” (4: 10, 11, and 19). Commenting on these verses, Augustine provides an apt gloss on Spenser’s hymn as well:

“Let us love, because He first loved us.” We did not yet love Him: by loving we are made beautiful . . . our soul, my brethren, is ugly because of sin: by loving God it becomes beautiful . . . He first loved us, Who is always beautiful; and what were we when He loved us, but foul and ugly? But not to leave us foul; but to change us, and from deformity make us beautiful. How shall we become beautiful? By loving him who is always beautiful. Inasmuch as love grows in you, in so much beauty grows; for love is itself the beauty of the soul.

Spenser’s continuation (HHL 27–31) is therefore a scriptural meditation on what Augustine saw as a central message of the Bible, Christ’s exhortation in Matthew 22: 27–29 that we should love God above everything and our neighbor as ourselves. In HHL 30 Spenser adds a reference to Christ’s “new commandment” of love in John 13: 34–35, and then once more paraphrases 1 John 4: “[we should] love our brethren; thereby to approve, / How much himselfe that loved us, we love” (HHL 31). Before wrapping up the hymn by again referring to Matthew 22 (HHL 38), he returns to a prolonged meditation on.

Christ’s humility, leading up to a repugnant description of His “torne and mangled” corpse (HHL 36). Love, in this hymn, sacrifices His divine beauty on behalf of the ugly. Christ, as Augustine had put it at his most succinct, “made Himself ugly for the sake of the ugly Bride [the Church, or the individual Christian], in order to make her beautiful.”

We must keep in mind this agape when we now turn to the HHB by way of the final stanza of the HHL:

Then shall thy ravished soule inspired bee
With heavenly thoughts, farre above humane skill,
And thy bright radiant eyes shall plainly see
Th’Idee of his pure glorie present still,
Before thy face, that all thy spirits shall fill
With sweete enfragement of celestiall love,
Kindled through sight of those faire things above. (HHL 41)

The first thing to note is the initial “then.” All that follows, Spenser stresses, is based upon the message of HHL, the redemptive love of the incarnate Christ. There can be no talk of going back to an intellectual ascent based on our own perfectibility: the soul is “ravish’d” with heavenly thoughts “farre above humane skill.” Our eyes become “bright radiant” because of the “Lambes integrity” (HHB 22) and the omnipotent will that “Vouchsafileth to her presence to receave, / And leteth them her lovely face to see” (HHB 37). The object of contemplation, “Th’Idee of his pure glorie,” is the Godhead, but more specifically the glorified Christ that can reveal what the Father is really like. A large part of HHB hinges on the fact that frail mankind cannot view the undimmed glory of the hidden God without the refracting mirrors provided by the created universe, and in particular by the Logos, the incarnate Word.

After three initial stanzas where the poet asks for divine illumination, HHB begins by a contemplative ascent up the chain of the created universe, “mount[ing] aloft by order dew, / To contemplation of th’immortal sky” (HHB 4). Yet when the poet approaches “that Highest farre beyond all telling” (HHB 15), he turns dumb, since the Creator is ultimately beyond his creation and cannot be fully understood by means of it:


181 The scriptural references in HHL are noted by the Variorum, pp. 544–45.


183 For Augustine’s strong endorsement of Matthew 22: 37–39, see De Doct. Chr. 1.22.21, 1.26.27, and De Trin. 8.7.10.

184 Augustine, Sermon 95.4, as cited in Harrison, p. 234.
Cease then my tongue, and lend unto my mynd
Leave to bethinke how great that beautie is,
Whose utmost parts so beautifull I fynd,
How much more those essential parts of his,
His truth, his love, his wisedome, and his blis,
His grace, his doome, his mercy and his might.
By which he lends us of himself a sight. (HHB 16)

The parallel here is with Psalm 19. The first half of the psalm, proclaiming how "the heavens declare the glory of God," prepares the way for the second half, dedicated to God's written word, "the Law of the Lord." Only in the word do we find revealed what Spenser terms God's "essential parts," the divine characteristics. But even more revealing than God's written word is the living Word, the Logos of John 1:

Those [essential parts] unto all he daily doth display,
And sheweth himselfe in th'image of his grace,
As in a looking glasse, through which he may
Be seene, of all his creatures vile and base,
That are unable else to see his face,
His glorious face which glistereth else so bright,
That th'Angels selues can not endure his sight. (HHB 17)

God, says Spenser, reveals himself through "the image of his grace." And as St. Paul had explained, Christ was "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). Spenser alludes not just here but throughout the rest of the Hymne to Colossians 1 and especially to the Prologue of St. John's Gospel:

In the beginning was the Worde, and the Worde was with God and that Worde was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by it, & without it was made nothing that was made. In it was life, and the life was the light of men. . . . And the Worde was made flesh, and dwelt among vs (and we sawe the glory thereof, as the glorie of the onely begotten Sonne of the Father) ful of grace and truth. . . . And of his fulnesse have all we received, and grace for grace. . . . No man hathe sene God at any tyme: the onely begotten Sonne, which is in the bosome of the Father; he hath declared him. (John 1:1–18; emphasis added)

As Spenser had put it in HHL 20, the incarnate Christ had come "out of the bosome of eternall blisse." This is again repeated when he introduces Sapience ("Wisdom") as sitting "in [God's] bosome" (HHL 27).

In the figure of Sapience, female both in deference to the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament and to function as a contrast to the Venus of HB, Spenser continues his preoccupation with the Logos. As Augustine had written in On the Trinity, "The Son is the Word of the Father, which is also called His wisdom" (De Trin. 4.20.27). While HHL had emphasized the sacrificial aspect of the incarnate Word, HHB praises the glorified Christ. Even stanzas that at first sound narrowly neoplatonic turn out to have specific scriptural analogs. Take HHB 29 for example:

Both heaven and earth obey unto her [Sapience's] will,
And all the creatures which they both containe:
For of her fulnesse which the world doth fill,
They all partake, and so in state remaine,
As their great Maker did at first ordain.
Through observation of her high beheast,
By which they first were made, and still increat.

The "fulnesse" of line 3 may at first remind us of some Plotinian plenitude, but the whole stanza is actually a loose paraphrase of Colossians 1, starting from the verse we have already referred to:

[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature. For by him were all things created, which are in heaven, and which are in earth, things visible and invisible: whether they be Thrones, or Dominions, or Principalities, or Powers, all things were created by him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things consist. . . . For it pleased the Father, that in him shulde all fulnesse dwell. (verses 15–16) 187

In both passages there is the contrast between the creatures of the earth and the angels of the heavens. And in both, Christ/Sapience is described as creator and sustainer of the created universe.

This analysis has brought us beyond Augustine to the scriptural archetypes that inform Spenser's heavenly Hymnes. The contemplative mode of these hymns, however, is infused with mature Augustinian spirituality. Where the young Augustine had relied on the intellectual ascent of Plotinus, the old bishop penned classics of visionary literature that were centered on the Incarnation. As Harrison writes: "It is

186 "Verbum enim patris est fillius, quod et sapiens est eius diciture." On Sapience as Christ see also Ellrond, pp. 164–66.
187 Bennett, for example, claims that Sapience's "metaphysical function, as outlined in stanza 29, is Neo-Platonic, not Hebraic" (p. 141). It may or may not be "Hebraic" but it certainly is Pauline.
188 Cf. John 1:16: "And of his fulnesse have all we received, and grace for grace."
Christ, in the union of his divinity and humanity, who defines and gives meaning to Augustine's ideas on beauty:"

It is in expounding the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Word of God . . . who, in assuming flesh, humbled himself to become part of the sensible realm and to share human temporality, so that fallen man might have faith in his earthly acts and teachings (since darkened reason could not otherwise grasp him) that Augustine can be seen as his most critical in respect of Platonism. Against the Platonist's and his own former "presumptions" in relying upon reason in order to attain truth, against their devaluation of the body, and their doctrine of daemonic mediators, Augustine sets his "confession" of the grace of the humility of the Word made flesh for fallen man as he found it recounted in Scripture and of his faith in the Word as the unique mediator, who calls for a humble following of his death and resurrection in the flesh, as the only way for man to reach God.

This Augustinian tradition even Luther was not averse to, as long as it was centered on the humanity of Christ, who "is the sacred ladder by which we ascend to the knowledge of God." Although this Christo-centric mysticism has affiliations with the neoplatonic ascent to the One, there are very real differences between the two ascents, differences that boil down to the Incarnation. Where the one tradition leaves all "horizontal" earthly values behind, the other stresses that "God so loved the world" that He took on bodily form and chose to live in time and history.

"In principio erat verbum. Quod Graece logos dicitur Latine et rationem et verbum significat. Sed hoc loco melius verbum interpretemur, ut significetur non solum ad patrem respectus, sed ad illa etiam quae per verbum facta sunt operativa potentia. Ratio autem, et si nihil per illam fiat, recte ratio dicatur" (De Div. Q. 65.) Written between 389 and 396, De Div. Q. reflects Augustine's gradual change from a Platonian to a more Pauline perspective during these years.

I am aligning myself with S.K. Heninger Jr. "England throughout the sixteenth century was essentially a logoscentric culture." "Spenser, Sidney, and Poetic Form," Studies in Philology 88:2 (1991): 141; see also Heninger's Subtext of Form in the English Renaissance: Proportion Poetical (University Park: Penn State Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 22–27. There are differences of emphasis, however, between my approach and Heninger's. While The Subtext of Form contrasts logoscenticism with a more forward-looking "hylocentric" paradigm, grounded in matter, my approach will be to distinguish further nuances within the logoscentric paradigm.

Early modern literature was logoscentric, grounded in Christ the logos. Logocentric imperatives explain much of renaissance epistemology (discussed in chapter 2), but permeated also its semiology, including its poetic practice. The seminal inspiration came from Augustine. While Pythagoras and Plato remained the revered founders of this tradition, it was the Church Father who provided the sanctioned form,
mulations most useful for the Christian writers of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Of course, despite Augustine’s humanist training it was not the study of fiction but of biblical texts that had interested him: “Putting aside, therefore, all theatrical and poetic trifling, let us by the diligent study of the divine Scriptures, find food and drink for our minds” (De Ver. Rel. 51.100). But as is well known, Augustine’s esthetics and biblical hermeneutics proved immensely important for humanist poetics. Research on logocentrism so far, however, has been preoccupied almost exclusively with the structural and proportional aspects of renaissance poetry. My contribution in this chapter will be to distinguish between the formal logocentrism of these investigations, centering on mathematical ratios, and a verbal logocentrism that finds its governing metaphor in language rather than in number. Augustine’s thoughts on the translation of the logos of the first verse of the Gospel of St. John, quoted in the epigraph above, form the starting point for my distinction and for my chapter.

In line with Augustine’s shift from a vertical to a horizontal perspective, both his theoretical and hermeneutic writings moved from a predominantly formal to an increasingly verbal paradigm. The decade following his conversion saw significant changes in his views not only on human reason but also on semiology. In the early years the fine arts were enlisted in a Pythagorean and Plotinian progression towards pure number. On Music provided the theoretical foundation for music and versification, both being grounded in mathematical proportion, the ratio of the epigraph above. No treatise was written specifically for the pictorial and plastic arts, yet they were briefly but suggestively treated in On Free Choice of the Will. In later works, however, On Christian Doctrine in particular, Augustine’s changing perspective resulted in interpretive strategies based not on number but on language.

The Incarnation formed the wedge between the two logocentric paradigms. As a young convert, he viewed language with suspicion, much preferring the certainty of number. Yet he at length came to realize that, although the mutability of human language had originated as a consequence of the Fall, salvation could be achieved only through language. Mathematical purity was all right in theory, but did not work in practice. Instead, Christ the living Word had to enter the vicissitudes of human history, and inscribe a redemptive path by means of the written word of Scripture. The divine message, as Augustine explains in 83 Different Questions, had become incarnated in our everyday language: “To raise us from the earthly and human meaning up to the divine and heavenly, the divine Scriptures have come down to those words which even the most simple customarily use among themselves” (De Dtn. Q. 52). The body of the text, with its mutable language structures, became the locus for the redemptive logos.

This paradigm shift provided the next millennium with two separate yet easily confused logocentric models. For Edmund Spenser, as for Petrarch before him, both were viable options. The formal aspects of Spenser’s verse have received a great deal of attention in recent decades. The Shepheardes Calender; the Epithalamion, Foure Hymnes, and, above all, The Faerie Queene have all undergone intensive scrutiny, from Kent Hieatt and Alastair Fowler to S.K. Heninger, Jr. and Maren-Sofie Ræstvig. These studies share an interest in the underlying numerical properties of the verse, properties that invoke a Pythagorean or a Platonic matrix that places the ontological value of a literary work not in the body of the text but in the eternal mathematical forms embodied or shadowed forth in its verbal structures. The vestiges of these forms

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4 “Omismisigit et repudiatis nugis theatricis et poetici divinarum scripturarum consideratione et tractatione pasceamus animam…”


6 Following Augustine’s own example in De Doct. Chr., I treat numerology and linguistics, i.e., both number and language, as subcategories of a general theory of signs.

7 On the Pythagorean basis for subsequent Platonic and Christian theorizing about numbers, see S.K. Heninger, Jr., Touches of Sweet Harmony: Pythagorean Cosmology and Renaissance Poetics (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1974).

8 On the Incarnation in Augustine’s thinking, see Robert J. O’Connell, Art and the Christian Intelligence in St. Augustine (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), esp. pp. 3, 47–49, and 133–41, and Carol Harrison, Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). Both scholars trace the growing importance of the Incarnation, but O’Connell’s Augustine never allows a “sacramental” view of the universe to fully shape his thought (see p. 59), while Harrison claims that “what O’Connell sees glimmering on the horizon of Augustine’s thought is, I would maintain, actually at the centre: an ‘incarnate aesthetic’” (p. 95). I think O’Connell is right about the disincarnate views of the early Augustine, while Harrison is more faithful to the thought of the mature bishop.

9 “Divinae scripturae a terreno et humano sensu ad divinum et caelestium nos erigentes usque ad ea verba descenderunt, quibus inter se multissimorum etiam utrum consueuit.”

have been found at all structural levels of *The Faerie Queene* in the placement of words within a line or of lines within individual stanzas; in the precise location of stanzas within individual books and in relation to other stanzas in other books; in the symmetry and numerological semantics of the seven books within the totality of the poem.

Heninger makes perhaps the most radical claim when he wonders why we do not easily recollect stanzas or even individual lines from *The Faerie Queene* the way we remember whole passages from Shakespeare. The reason for this, he suggests, is that the words on the page are for Spenser ultimately unimportant in comparison with the eternal verities to which the words are meant to point: "The verbal system is a disposable husk of no value in itself, to be thrown away as soon as possible in the construal of a poem." In this Heninger gets backing from unsuspected quarters: Graham Greene has the male protagonist of the short story "Mortmain" effortlessly rattle off chunks of Shakespeare from memory, but makes him stumble when it comes to a single line from *The Faerie Queene*.

For Spenser, it seems, logos means *ratio*, not *verbum*.

In this chapter, however, I shall broaden the discussion by arguing from a contrary position, that Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene* is as much about language, its use and misuse, its potential and its limitations. And I shall enlist Augustine to buttress my argument for a reading that is squarely grounded in the *verbum* of the text. If the formal version of logocentrism depicts the Deity as the One, subsuming all numerical multiplicity, I shall investigate a verbal paradigm that portrays God as the transcendental Sign: "In the beginning was the Word." But how can this be squared with the overwhelming weight of earlier research (which I do not wish to deny or sidestep)? Perhaps the two paradigms—based on number and language, *ratio* and *verbum*—are simply two sides of the same coin? Representing traditions that in the final analysis may be irreconcilable, they were nevertheless intermingled in Augustine’s mind. For a poet like Spenser, trying to follow the divergent Augustinian patterns set down in *On Music* and *On Christian Doctrine*, this meant that while numerology formed one possible escape from the mutability of language, the redemptive power was also available within and through language itself. If *The Faerie Queene* can be interpreted from the vantage point of either paradigm, that, I would suggest, is because Augustine had supplied two models, models that were not necessarily distinct in Spenser’s mind.

II

My study of the *ratio* is based not upon *On Music* (which William Pahlka has already investigated in detail), but upon *On Free Choice of the Will* (*De Libero Arbitrio*), begun in 388 and finished in 395. In the work we find the theory behind Augustine’s formal logocentrism. The Platonic assumption underlying *On Free Choice* is that the soul, "free of all inclination towards the things of time and space," should want to "grasp that which is one, the same, and eternal" (*De Lib. Arb.* 2.16.41). The soul reaches this transcendent goal, however, through the immanent manifestations of beauty:

Wherever you turn, wisdom speaks to you through the imprint it has stamped upon its works. When you begin to slip toward outward things, wisdom calls you back, by means of their very forms, so that when something delights you in the body and entices you through the bodily senses, you may see that it has number and may ask whence it comes. Thus you return to yourself, you know that you cannot approve or disapprove of what you touch with the bodily senses, unless you have within you certain laws of beauty to which you refer the beautiful objects that you perceive outside of you.

Look at the sky, the earth, and the sea, and at whatever in them shines from above or crawls, flies, or swims below. These have form because they have number. Take away these forms and there will be nothing. Whence are these except from number? Indeed, they exist only insofar as they have number. (*De Lib. Arb.* 2.16.41–42)


12 "Mortmain" was first published in the collection *May We Borrow Your Husband and Other Comedies of the Sexual Life* (London: Heinemann, 1967).

13 See note 3 above; Forman also analyzes *De Max.* on pp. 15–40.

14 In *Rat. 1.0.1* Augustine writes that he had started the work in Rome, but "completed [terminavi]" books 2 and 3 in Africa after his ordination.

15 "... exuit omnibus temporum et locorum adpositionibus reprehendat id quod unum atque idem semper est." As Robert O’Connell argues, "Augustine’s view at Cassici- acum [where the early Platonist dialogues were conceived] is more spiritual than Christian- ity would require; indeed, far more spiritual than it will allow." (p. 44).

16 "Quoquo enim te vereris, vestigies quisquidam quae operibus sui insigni loquitur [sapientia] tibi et in exteriora relabem in ipsius exteriorum formis intro revocat, ut, quidquid te delectat in corpore et per corporeos illicit sensus, vide sensitum in aliorum vestrum est et in ipsum deses atque intelleges te id quod adtingis sensibus corporis probare aut inprobare non posse, nisi apud te habebis quidam pulchritudinis leges ad quas referras quaeque pulchra sensis exteras.

Interea caelum et terram et mare et quaequamque in ea vis desuper fulgent vel deor- sum repunt vel volant vel natant. Formas habent quia numeras habent; adimis haece, nihil erunt. Quo ergo sunt nisi a quo numerus? quandoquidem in tanta illis est esse in quantum numerosa esse."
This is a process of abstraction and sublimation; once the smallest common denominator, number, has been reached, there is no longer any need for its temporal manifestation. The telos of life, put concisely, is an equation whose solution is the unity of the eternal One.

Augustine then turns to the human artist, whose work illustrates and embodies the divine artistry:

In art, the makers of all bodily forms have numbers by which they organize their works. They move their hands and instruments in producing their work until what has been formed externally achieves completion by corresponding as closely as possible to the inward light and when it has been communicated by the intermediaries of the senses, it delights the inner judge who gazes upward upon numbers. (De Lib. Arb. 2.16.42) 17

The artistic process imitates the emanation from and return to the Plotinian One. The Deity bases His creation on the eternal numbers; likewise “the skill of each artificer,” to quote Philip Sidney’s application of the same Platonic theory, “standeth in that idea or fore-conceit of the work.” 18 The beholder of the sculpture or the picture, the listener to the piece of music, or the reader of the poem, in turn needs “only” backtrack the creative process to the fore-conceit of the artist. For the young Augustine, if not for Sidney, that fore-conceit by definition had to be the same thing in each case: number.

The inherent paradox of this model is that although number, and by extension the Deity, transcends space and time, humans can experience number only in space and time:

Look closely at the beauty of the graceful body and you will see that numbers are held in space. Then look closely at the beauty of motion in a body and you will see that numbers are involved in time. Enter into the art from which the numbers come, and ask there for time and space. Neither will exist; yet number lives there. Number has no location in space, no duration of time. (De Lib. Arb. 2.16.42) 19

One could say that number has to be incarnated into space and time in order to draw the souls from their incarceration in matter back into the original perfection of pure number. I am intentionally using the word “incarnated.” When Augustine later in the same work turns to the Incarnation of Christ, we find striking structural similarities:

From this [i.e., the Fall] it has come about that the Word of God, “through which all things were made” (John 1:3), and of which all angelic natures partake, extended His mercy toward our unhappiness, and “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Thus man, who was not yet equal to angels, was able to eat the Bread of angels [i.e., Christ], if the Bread of angels designed to become equal to men.

For the rational creature is fed by the Word, which is, as it were, the best Food. The human soul, moreover, is rational, though it is bound by the mortal chains of the punishment of sin. Its rationality is reduced, however, to the point that it must struggle by conjecture about visible things toward an understanding of invisible ones. The Food of the rational creature was made visible not through a change in its own nature, but by Its being attired in the clothing of our nature, so that It recalls us to invisible things even as we pursue visible ones. In this way, the soul finds Him whom it forsook in pride, outwardly humble, and will imitate His visible humility and return to His invisible height. (De Lib. Arb. 3.10.30) 20

Like number, Christ the Word was originally “invisible,” but became “attired in the clothing of our nature,” thereby becoming a bridge between the “invisible height” and the space and time continuum. Even more striking is the similarity between the two modes of ascent. Just as we are supposed to abstract the transcendent qualities of number from its earthly manifestations, so Christ the Word “recalls us to invisible things even as we pursue visible ones.” Using Augustine’s own terminology from his explication of John 1:1, both “reason” and “word” are viable translations of the logos. For the young convert, standing in the shadow of Plotinus, the first term (ratio) exerted a strong pull on the second (verbum), to the point of blurring the dis-

17 “Et omni quidem formarii corporis artificioe homines in arte habent numeros quibus coaptant opera sua, et tantiu manus aequo instrumenta in fabricando movent, donec illud quod formatur foris ad eam quae est lucem numerorum rematum, quantum potest, impetet absolutiorem placatique per interpretum sensum interno judicii supernos intuentem.” See also De Div. Q. 78.
19 “... inspicite iam pulchritudinem formati corporis: numeri tenentur in loco; inspicite pulchritudinem mobilitatis in corpore: numeri verantur in tempore; intra ad artem unde iste procedunt, quaerens in ea tempus et locum: numquam erit, numquam sit, vivit in ea tamen numerus nec eius regio spatiatu est nec etas dierum.”
20 “Ex quo [i.e., the Fall] factum est ut illud dei verbum, per quod facta sunt omnia et quod frutur omnis angelica beatitudo, usque ad miseriam nostram clementiam suam porrigere et verum caro fieret et habitaret in nobis. Sic enim posset panem angelorum [i.e., Christ] homo manducare, nondum angelis adequatus, si panis ipse angelorum hominibus dignaretur aquari... Quia enim rationalis creatura verbo ilio tamquam optimo cibo suo pasturit; humana autem anima rationalis est—quae mortuum vitellus pecati poena tenebat; ad hoc diminutio redacta, ad perочкиrcum rerum visibilem ad intelligendam invisibilibus nihilatur—cibus rationalis creaturae factus est visibilis, non commutatione naturae suae sed habitu nostrae, ut visibilis sequantur se ad invisibilem revocaret. Sic est anima quam superniens intus reliquelur foris humiliem invenit, imitatura eius humilitatem visibilem ed ad invisibilem altitudinem reditura.”
distinction between the two, making Christ almost a neoplatonic intermediary.

Almost, but not quite. Even in this early work Augustine is aware of some of the rupures between the two traditions. In his exposition of ratio in book 2, the ascent seems fairly unhampered. The body may entice, but the soul can become “free of all inclination towards the things of time and space.” In dealing with the verbum in book 3, however, the context is the devil and the Fall, and Augustine concedes that the rationality of the human soul is reduced “to the point that it must struggle by conjecture about visible things towards an understanding of invisible ones.” Indeed, the return to the invisible heights is not possible unless Christ “recalls us.” Behind the distinction of visible and invisible stands the familiar passage from Romans 1:20: “For the invisible things of him, that is, his eternal power and Godhead, are seen by the creation of the world, being considered in his works” (Geneva Bible). Here we have the scriptural warrant both for the passage about number in book 2 and that about the Word in book 3: God’s invisible power can be seen through His created works (as well as through His Word).

Yet there was a hitch. To St. Paul this fact did not justify the ancient philosophers, but condemned them:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, which withhold the truth in unrighteousness, Forasmuch as that, which may be known of God, is manifest in them: for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him, that is, his eternal power and Godhead, are seen by the creation of the world, being considered in his works, to the intent that they shuld be without excuse: Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was ful of darkness. (Romans 1:18-21)

When Augustine, forced by his new preaching duties, began to study the Scriptures in greater depth, the cleavage between the Plotinian and the Pauline perspective was brought home to him, and the passage in Romans 1 took on a new meaning. A study of his use of these verses from Romans 1 shows that the stress was increasingly placed on the latter part of the quotation.21 This did not mean that he gave up Pythagoras altogether. The universe was still created according to “number, weight, and measure,” and revealed an underlying ratio that pointed to the Creator. Yet original sin no longer permitted the human intellect to ascend unhampered along the route of number. A redemptive intermediary was needed. Christ, the Word, had instead become the operative concept.

The process from ratio to verbum can be followed in some detail through a series of commentaries on Genesis that Augustine attempted between 388 and 414. The first of these, Two Books on Genesis against the Maniches, written only two years after his conversion, was also his first hermeneutical effort. Its neoplatonic content reveals the preoccupations of the young convert. Roland J. Teske explains: “Perhaps no other work of Augustine’s provides such a clear insight into his early view of man as a soul fallen into a mortal body. The second book provides us with an extraordinary view of man as an incorporeal creature created in a spiritual paradise and nourished by the font of truth with no need for human words that sound and pass away.”22 Language, in this work, is only an impediment caused by the Fall: “For with God there is pure intellect, without the noise and diversity of languages” (De Gen. c. M. 1.9.15).23 This suspicion of language is also reflected in the actual exegesis of the three first chapters of Genesis. Through “a spiritual, highly figurative, almost ahistorical interpretation of the text,”24 Augustine at all costs avoids the literal in his search for a higher transcendental meaning. This can be seen, for example, in his exposition of an innocent line in Genesis 2:5 that talks about “all the green of the field before it was upon the earth.”25 The “green” cannot simply be shrubs and trees, Augustine concludes; rather it must mean “the spiritual and invisible creature [i.e., the disembodied soul],” while “before they were upon the earth” means “before the soul sinned” (De Gen. c. M. 2.3.4-5).26 Following the example of Origen, he is with these ingenious means able to read Plotinian emanation into the Genesis account. Indeed, the hermeneutics itself follows logically from the Plotinian perspective. Like time and space, history or the physical body, language too is

23 “... sed apud deum purus intellectus est sine strepitu et diversitate linguarum.”
24 Teske, p. 38.
25 “... omnia viridis agri, antequam essent super terram, ..."
26 “... spiritalem atque invisibalem creaturam... antequam anima peccaret...”
tainted with becoming and should therefore be transcended and discarded. It is the form that counts, the hidden meaning that leads to the haven of being.

Augustine, however, was not satisfied for long with this method. In 399 he set out to write a new commentary on Genesis, this time “according to [its] historical signification” (*Retr. 1.18.1.*). Yet, as he went on to admit in the *Retractations*, to take the text at face value was more difficult than the allegorical flights of the earlier commentary: “but in explaining the Scriptures, my inexperience collapsed under the weight of so heavy a load and, before I had finished one book, I rested from this labor which I could not endure” (*Retr. 1.18.1.*). It took another eight years of intensive Bible study before he dared approach Genesis again, and this time his efforts bore fruit in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, a massive work completed only in 414. The title says it all. This time Genesis was interpreted, in Augustine’s own words, “not according to allegorical meaning but according to the proper historical sense” (*Retr. 2.24.1.*). The shifting perspective is symptomatic of a wider change. History had become important because earthly existence as such had become important. It all stemmed from a growing realization that God, through the Incarnation of Christ, had not only created the physical universe, but also had assumed a human body and had entered human history. And since Christ was the Word, the body of the sacred text could be discarded no more than the physical body. Augustine did not lose his interest in allegory, but it had to be anchored in the historical and literal dimension of the text, which was not to be dismissed. This new interest in language comes to the fore in a work written between the allegorical and the literal interpretations of Genesis: *On Christian Doctrine*, which sets out a hermeneutics centered on Christ the Word, and located in the text of the Scriptures.

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27 “... secundum historicam proprietatem...”
28 “sed in scripturis exponendis iurocinum meum sub tanta sarsciae mole succubuit, et nondum perfecto uno libro ab eo quom susinere non poteram labore conquiesi.”
29 “... non secundum allegoricas significaciones, sed secundum verum gestum proprietatem.”
30 As O’Connell comments: *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* is so much more “incarnate” than *De Gen. e. M.* as almost to negate the ‘spiritualist’ tendencies of the earlier work at important points (p. 140, n. 84).
31 Augustine’s mature evaluation of allegory is found in *De Civ. Del*. 17.3.
32 “Numerorum etiam imperita multa facta non intellegi translate ac mystice posita in scripturis.”
33 “Posse etiam de numeris fieri, ut eorum tunnum modo numerorum exposita ratio conscribatur, quos divina scriptura meminit.” The same strictures apply to music: “we should not avoid music because of the associated pagan superstitions if there is a possibility of gaining from it something of value for understanding holy scripture [nos tamen non propter superstitionem profanorum debemus musicam fugere, si quid de utili ad intellelendas sanctas scripturas rapere possurimus, ...]” (*De Doct. Chr. 2.18.28*).
34 “… simpum eius congruit duplo nostro.”
35 See the Introduction above for further examples.
the Son of man, that He might recreate us after the image of God, in the sixth age of the human race... We recognize also in this sanya number a kind of figure of time, in that threefold mode of division, by which we compute one portion of time before the Law; a second, under the Law; a third, under grace. (De Trin. 4.4.7)36

The Incarnation, forming the hub of these historical periods, means not only that the Word becomes flesh, but that through Him all flesh may reach God without forfeiting its fleshly nature:

But cleansed we could not be, so as to be tempered together with things eternal, except it were through things temporal... The truth itself, coeternal with the Father, took a beginning from earth, when the Son of God came as to become the Son of man. (De Trin. 4.18.24)37

While it took the bishop a lifetime to come to grips with this truth, so uncongenial to Plotinian thought, On the Trinity shows how he is able to harness the useful parts of the neoplatonic heritage in the service of a new scriptural vision.

Augustine no longer sees number in itself as a viable road to salvation. Indeed, a neoplatonic ascent without Christ has become the height of presumption: “There are, however, some who think themselves capable of being cleansed by their own righteousness, so as to contemplate God, and to dwell in God; whom their very pride itself stains above all others” (De Trin. 4.15.20).38 As in On Christian Doctrine, Augustine bases his judgment of the pagan philosophers on Romans 1:19–21 (De Trin. 4.16.21–17.23). They may well have seen the Fatherland through intellectual contemplation, yet like Moses they are unable to reach it.39

36 Caius [sc. senarii numeri] perfectionem nobis sancta scriptura commendat in eo maxime quod Deus in eis divinos sanctus operum sua, et sexagesim atque ad imaginem dei. Et sexa septuagesim et sexa sexaginta sunt et sexa nonaginta et sexa centesim et sexa centenario et sexa millenario. In this context, the number 600 is associated with the perfect man, whose virtues are symbolized by the Ten Commandments.

37 “Purari autem ut contemplaremurus aeternas non nisi per tempora... ipsa veritas patri coexterna de terra orta est cum filius dei sic venit ut fieret filius hominis...”

38 “Sunt autem quidam qui se putant ad contemplandum deum et inhaerendum deo virtute prorsa posse purgari, quos ipsa superbia maxime macularit.”

39 See also Roe 1.1.1, where Augustine at the end of his life still considers numbers worthy of investigation and justifies it, characteristically, by quoting Romans 1:20. The continuation, however, reveals the changed character of the larger context of Romans 1 he now knows that those who climb the intellectual ladder without faith in Christ “perish with all their wisdom [cum tota sapientia sua perirent],” while the simple Christian will perceive the numerosity of music “assuredly and happily after this life [certe etiam felicius... post hanc vitam].” As in De Trin., the progression as such is still valid, but cannot be accomplished through philosophy.

The final blending of Platonism with biblical terminology comes in the last chapter of the City of God, in which Augustine celebrates the coming joys of heaven:

Every fiber and organ of our imperishable body will play its part in the praising of God. On earth these varied organs have each a special function, but in heaven, function will be swallowed up in felicity, in the perfect certainty of an untroubled everlastingness of joy... These movements of our bodies will be of such unimaginable beauty that I dare not say more than this: There will be such poise, such grace, such beauty as become a place where nothing unbecoming can be found. (De Civ. Dei 22.30)40

Here spiritual beauty and physical reality have truly merged in a “marvelous Order,” uniting a transformed Platonism with a thoroughly biblical vision. The body is no longer a husk to be discarded,41 but takes its honored place praising a Creator who Himself had assumed a human body.42

Although the young Augustine, in works like On Music and On the Free Choice of the Will, had elaborated the theory behind the formal paradigm, it was the strictures of the mature bishop that defined the response of the succeeding ages to that theory. The limiting admonition of On Christian Doctrine was not forgotten: as we saw earlier in this chapter, the study should be “confined to numbers mentioned in the divine scripture” (De Doct. Chr. 2.39.59; emphasis added).43 Even those who went directly to On Music found its climactic sixth book framed by a preface and an afterword (added by Augustine some 15–20 years after the rest of the book was written) that substituted the Scriptures for the vanities of secular letters, and sounded a warning against the pride of human reasoning: “For they are purified, not by flashing human reasoning, but by the effective and burning fire of charity” (De Mus. 6.17.59).44 Consequently, when formal logocentrism informs me-
dieval or renaissance poetics, it is almost always number mediated through a Scriptural matrix. It is surely no coincidence that Dante’s *Vita nuova* and *Divina comedia* reverberate with the divine Trinity, or that the 365 poems of Petrarch’s *Rime sparse* are sequenced according to the liturgical year. As the first of a long line of renaissance poets, Petrarch struggles in the *Rime sparse* to accommodate the formal paradigm to the realities of a fallen world. The Reformation, inspired largely by Augustine’s anti-Pelagian writings, resolves Petrarch’s tensions by denying the power of number altogether, insisting on the words of Scripture as the only means of salvation. When a Protestant sonneteer like Philip Sidney widens the gap in *Astrophel and Stella* between optimistic form and pessimistic content beyond the breaking point, this is the logical outcome of attitudes that had been anticipated by Petrarch.46

With Spenser the situation is somewhat different. Being of a more conservative bent than Sidney, he found the formal paradigm alluring. Yet no more than Dante or Petrarch could he perceive it without the corrective lenses provided by the mature Augustine: the *ratio* had to be subject to the scriptural *verbum*. His solution in the *Amoretti* was to resolve the Petrarchan tension between form and content into a Protestant marriage hymn, the *Epithalamion*.47 The twelve eclogues of *The Shepheardes Calender* or the projected 12 books of *The Faerie Queene*, on the other hand, realize “Augustine’s aesthetic of concordia discord,” of the reconciliation of opposites.48 Their form—the revolving year or Gloriana’s twelve-day feast—therefore points to eternity, but in both poems—as in Petrarch’s sonnets—the verbal content depicts a fallen world, thereby undercutting any final and formal resolution. It is perhaps symptomatic that the symmetry of Spenser’s original plan for *The Faerie Queene* was collapsed into six finished books. The number six traditionally represents the world as well as humanity (six days of creation, with Adam and Eve created on the sixth day), but also sin (six being one short of the perfect number seven). Only in the Mutability Cantos, the broken remnants of a seventh book that would complete the perfection of the heptameron, are we given the poet’s prayer for “that Sabaoth’s sight” (*FQ* 7.8.2), an eternal rest that lies outside a poem characterized by mutability.49 The six books as we have them speak therefore of the created world in all its varied beauty. Yet the six books also speak of the impossibility of reaching that final rest by means of the beautiful forms of this world, unaided by the divine Word (the topic of Book 1): “And in the sixth age of the human race the Son of God came and was made the Son of man, that He might recreate us after the image of God” (*De Trin.* 4.4.7).50 Or as Spenser himself put it in an eerie premonition penned in the first book of *The Faerie Queene* (12.17–18; my emphasis) long before the Mutability Cantos: Redcrosse, clothed in the armor of the Word, instead of immediately enjoying the “ease and everlasting rest” envisioned by Una’s aged father, “must return to that great Faerie Queene / And her to serve six yeares in warlike wise.”

**IV**

Now for the verbal paradigm. The early dialogue *The Teacher (De magistro)* (889) records an actual conversation between Augustine and his then 16 year old son Adeodatus on the use of words. The give and take of actual dialogue give way to the father lecturing his son on a modified version of a platonic theory of remembrance (*De Mag.* 1.2). The dialogue examines the linguistic sign (without, however, reaching the semiological sophistication of *De doctrina*), but Augustine views language per se as strangely powerless:

The utmost value I can attribute to words is this. They bid us look for things, but they do not show them to us so that we may know them. . . . From words we can learn only words. Indeed we can learn only their sound and noise. (*De Mag.* 11.36.55)

49 See Augustine’s explication of the number six in *De Trin.* 4.4, cited in the text above.
52 “Et sexus aenate generis humani filius dei semit et factus est filius hominis ut nos reformat et imaginem dat.” Translation emended.
53 “Hactenus verba valuerunt, quisus ut plurimum tribuam, admonent tamen, ut quærandum res, non exhibent, ut normis . . . Verbs igitur nisi verba non dicimus, immo sonitum strepitumque verborum.”
Taken out of context, the last sentence sounds almost like an early version of the linguistic slippage envisioned by the poststructuralists. The fundamental difference between these moderns and Augustine, of course, is that the Father counts on the inner illumination of the divine Logos: "Our real Teacher is he who is listened to, who is said to dwell in the inner man, namely Christ, that is, the unchangeable power and eternal wisdom of God" (De Mag. 11.38). Yet despite the example of Christ the Word, the favoured metaphors are those of light rather than of language: listening to a voice is transformed into seeing the inner light:

But when we have to do with things which we behold with the mind, that is, with the intelligence and with reason, we speak of things which we look upon directly in the inner light of truth which illumines the inner man and is inwardly enjoyed. There again if my hearer sees these things himself with his inward eye, he comes to know what I say, not as a result of my words but as a result of his own contemplation. (De Mag. 12.40)

As a consequence, Augustine had begun the dialogue by claiming that when praying "there is no need of speech" (De Mag. 1.2) since the inner communication with God is not only non-vocal but non-linguistic. In this early work, purportedly dedicated to the linguistic sign, the young convert shows little or no faith in the communicative power of language.

While Augustine was to retain his belief in the non-linguistic nature of the inner illumination, On Christian Doctrine evinces a much more constructive attitude to language, and his favoured metaphor has now become the divine speech. Considering that the work was written by a former (highly successful) rhetor, it perhaps should not surprise us that it is permeated by language theory. The work contains four books: the first three are a help to the understanding of the Scriptures, while the fourth, added in 426 towards the end of Augustine's life, explains how to present what has been understood. Book 4 is the first Christian rhetoric, and became a seminal medieval and ren-

One possible reason for putting off the 4th Book for so long was the writing of The Catechising of the Uninstructed (De catechizandis rudibus) in 399, which became something of a stop-gap. Trying to help a fellow clergyman who experienced problems teaching Christian fundamentals to potential converts, Augustine detailed practical hints on instructions, including two sample speeches, on how to minimize disruptions in the communicative process, whether caused by the speaker, the listener or the message.

There is some slippage in Augustine's use of the term res. In a rhetorical context the res is conceptual, the thought to be clothed in words, not physical as here (for the latter usage see De Doct. Chr. 1.2.2 or De Doct. 5.8).
introduced a third factor: the human subject. The human mind forms a mental concept of the res, which it then translates into verba. Augustine's sign, like Saussure's, therefore contained two parts: a signifier that is primarily the spoken word, and a signified that is not the thing itself but a mental concept of the thing. Along with the human subject, Augustine also posited speech communities and the conventionality of the sign:

All these meanings, then, derive their effects on the mind from each individual's agreement with a particular convention. As this agreement varies in extent, so do their effects. People did not agree to use them because they were already meaningful; rather they became meaningful because people agreed to use them. (De Doct. Chr. 2.24.37)


Saussure, however, further distinguishes between the spoken word and its mental sound-image, which together with the concept form the sign. The written word Augustine, following Aristotle, saw as a sign of a sign. The priority of spoken over written language is, *pace* Derrida, not hard to establish (see John M. Ellis, *Against Deconstruction* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989], pp. 18-25). Saussure agrees with Augustine: "Language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first" (Course in General Linguistics, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Wade Baskin (1968; rpt. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 23).

See Saussure, pp. 65-70 and 111-22. Charles Sanders Peirce and Edmund Husserl made analogous distinctions. Augustine's terms were *dicibile* and *dicatio*. "Now that which the mind not the ears perceives from the word and which is held within the mind itself is called a dicibile. When a word is spoken not for its own sake but for the sake of signifying something else, it is called a dicatio. The thing itself which is neither a word nor the conception of a word in the mind, whether or not it has a word by which it can be signified, is called nothing but a re in the proper sense of the name. (Quiddium autem ex verbo non aures sed animus sentit ei ipso animo tenetur inclusum, dicibile vocatur. Cum vero verbum propter non propter se sed propter aliquid aliquum significandum, dicatio vocatur. Res autem ipsa, que iam verbum non est neque verba in mente concepto, sive habebat verbum quo significari posset, sive non habebat, nihil alium quam res vocatur proprium iam nomine)" (De Dial. 5.8). Augustine's authorship has been questioned, but Jackson proves the attribution convincing. *De Dial.* furthermore, was included among the authentic works in the great edition of Augustine's *Opera omnia. *See also Stock, pp. 138-45.

Although Augustine does not discuss the arbitrariness of the sign in terms of Saussure's *difference*—i.e., that all signs are defined by their differences from other signs within a self-consistent system—he is aware of the practical implications of such a view. "There are certain words in particular languages," he concedes, "which just cannot be translated into the idioms of another language" (De Doct. Chr. 2.11.16). Translation, because two different speech communities are involved, is therefore no simple one-to-one equation.

Induced by Plato's Cratylius, classical thinkers had debated the meaning and origin of words. Plato not only initiated the debate but set its boundaries by letting Cratylius argue for the naturalness and Hermogenes for the conventionality of language. Although Socrates does not give his full imprimitur to either of the speakers, the opinions of Cratylius were often taken as Platonic dogma (the name of the dialogue seemed to confirm this assumption). Socrates' own summation, however—that while the Ideas are permanent, the words that express them are not—comes close to Augustine's position. By late classical times the Cratylian view had become a commonplace. Aulus Gellius' *Attic Nights*, a second-century collection of geographical and humanist trivia (read by Augustine), touches on the nature of words, "a subject very popular in the discussion of the philosophers." Gellius voices both neoplatonic and stoic opinion when he explains that "nouns and verbs were formed, not by chance use, but by a certain power and design of nature." Augustine's conviction that the sign is conventional was therefore not uncontested. Many Christian (and Jewish) writers asserted that when creating the world God had devised an immutable link between res and verba. As proof they took the Genesis account of Adam naming the animals. Since Adam (they thought) had spoken Hebrew, they saw in this pristinal language a natural connection to the res, even after the pride of Babel had multiplied the languages of the world. In the Renais-

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60 "Sunt enim quaedam verba certarum linguarum, quae in usu alterius linguae per interpretationem transire non possint."

61 See Eugene Vance's important *Mundane Signs: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (Lincoln, NE: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1985), pp. 54-50. Vance's "metaphysics of the Word" (p. 50) corresponds to my "theology of the sign."

62 Marcia L. Colish believes Augustine was familiar with the dialogue; see *The Mirror of Language* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1968), p. 66.


sance these neoplatonic theories, mixed with Hermeticism and the Jewish Kabbala, were embraced enthusiastically by Marsilio Ficino and his followers.\(^6\) Augustine also has at times been put in this camp. Yet he did not believe that etymology leads anywhere: “Discerning the origin of words is like the interpretation of dreams; it is a matter of each man’s ingenuity” (De DIAL. 6.9).\(^7\) Even if the prelrasperian sign had once possessed the stable function described by Cramer, he believed that Hermogenes was more in step with postlapsarian reality. Hebrew, he thought, survived Babel as the primitive and common language (see De CIV. DEI 16.11), yet he did not give it any preeminence in his theory of signs. It is true that writers in the Augustinian tradition did not always follow the Father on this point. Yet whenever the humanists turned to the original sources—and during the Renaissance, this happened increasingly—the effect was felt. Some of the linguistic advances made by Lorenzo Valla, for example, can be traced back to Augustine.

Yet if Augustine agrees with Saussure on the conventional nature of the human sign, his emphasis is very different from the acknowledged aim of modern linguistics, determined as it has been to view language in splendid isolation. To Augustine, linguistics is theology; and theology, linguistics. At the center of both stands the transcendental Sign that gives validity to all conventional human signs. Jacques Derrida has perceived the issues clearly by showing that Saussurian language theory is actually closer to Augustine than Saussure cared to admit:

[Saussure] accedes to the classical exigency of what I have proposed to call a “transcendental signified,” which in and of itself, in its essence, would refer to no signifier, would exceed the chain of signs, and would no longer function as a signifier.\(^7\)

\(^6\) See Allison Coudert, “Some Theories of a Natural Language from the Renaissance to the Seventeenth Century,” in Magia Naturalis und die Enstehung der Modernen Naturwissenschaften, ed. Albert Heinekamp and Dieter Mettler (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1978), pp. 56–118. Ficino, for example, taught that “a name, as the Platonists say, is nothing else than a certain power of the thing itself” (Coudert, p. 75), while for Johannes Reuchlin “the speech of the Hebrews is simple, pure, uncompromised, holy, brief and constant,” and therefore discloses “the innate property of every word” (Coudert, p. 80). And John Dee in the Monas hieroglyphica (1564) purported to describe a “holy language” that set forth “that which is” rather than merely “that which is said” (Nicholas H. Chute, John Dee’s Natural Philosophy [London: Routledge, 1988], p. 86).


Where Saussure seems unaware of the ramifications, Derrida knows what is at stake: “The sign and divinity have the same place and time of birth. The age of the sign is essentially theological.”\(^7\) Augustine and Derrida thus agree on the underlying issues even as Derrida point by point tries to expose and sidestep what the Church Father posits. The French iconoclast, seeking to deconstruct the effects of a logocentric semiology based on a “transcendental signified,” can allow no signifier to exceed the chain of signs, and consequently finds no referential “meaning” outside the text. Augustine, on the other hand, consciously and deliberately builds his system upon the transcendental Sign: it is God who validates the meaning of human discourse. For them both, in their opposing ways, the bond between verba and res is problematic. But while Derrida, unable to accept metaphysics, must deny the possibility of such a bond, Augustine is free to explore its complex status.

Augustine’s basic query is how signs can have epistemological validity, and his famous solution, developed already in The Teacher, is the theory of divine illumination. Through “the inner light of truth” (De MAG. 12.40)\(^7\) God provides the human mind with the epistemological foundation for making judgments about propositions and sense impressions. The non-linguistic nature of the divine illumination is the reason Augustine can be so casual about the conventional nature of the vocal sign:

A thought that is formed from a thing that we know is a word that we say in the heart. It is neither Greek nor Latin nor any other language, but when we need to bring it to the notice of those to whom we speak, a sign is picked with which to signify it. (De Trin. 15.10.19)\(^7\)

The inner word transcends all language, and cannot be recovered through a search for linguistic origins. The prelapsarian Adam had direct access to the divine speech and had not needed Hebrew or any other human language in order to communicate.

Indeed, language as we know it is a divine concession to our fallen nature:


\(^7\) “illa interiore luce veritatis...”

\(^7\) “Formata quippe cogitatio ab ea re quam scimus verbum est quod in corde dicimus, quod nec graecum est nec latinum nec linguae alienae alterius, sed cum id opus est in eorum quibus loquimur perferre noitiam aliquo signum quo significetur assumitur.” English trans. by Christopher Kirwan, Augustine (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 56. See also Vance, pp. 45–44.
God alone can operate on rational souls, not through a body, but through Himself. But such is the state of sin that souls are allowed to act upon souls, moving them by signifying by one or the other body, or by natural signs as look or nod, or by conventional signs as words. (De Mus. 6.13.41) 75

An attentive reader might object to my quoting here from On Music, a work I have previously associated with the formal paradigm. The nonvocal nature of God’s speech, however, Augustine retained in his mature works as well; see, for example, the City of God:

For the speaking of God antecedent and superior to all His works, is the immutable reason of His work: it has no noisy and passing sound, but an energy eternally abiding and producing results in time. Thus he speaks to the holy angels; but to us, who are far off, He speaks otherwise. When, however, we hear with the inner ear some part of the speech of God, we approximate to the angels. (De Civ. Dei 18.6) 76

It is God speaking “otherwise,” however, that concerns Augustine in On Christian Doctrine. Precisely because of the Fall the formal, nonvocal paradigm no longer works, leaving the Incarnation of the Word as the only viable option.

Humanity may be vitiated not only spiritually but intellectually, with linguistic and moral error going hand in hand (as the serpent’s use of words to deceive our first parents had made abundantly clear). Language, originating at the Fall, is subject to “the shifting nature of the present time, in which there is nothing substantial, nothing lasting” (De Civ. Dei 20.3). 77 Yet if Augustine acknowledges the theological roots for the deficiencies of human language, such is his holistic vision that he also turns the tables, describing the redeeming drama in linguistic categories. At the center of this drama stands the transcendental Sign, the subject of On Christian Doctrine. 78

75 “Sed operari de animis rationalibus, non per corpus, sed per seipsum, solus Deus potest. Facfatorum tamen conditione sit, ut permissit animae de animis aliquid agere, significando eam moventis per altrum corpora, vel naturalibus signis, sicut est: valvis vel muto, vel placiis, sicut sunt verba.”

76 “Del quippe sublimior ante summum factum locutio iusius sui facti est inmutabilis ratio, quae nos habet somum streporem atque transeuntem, sed sem vivipiter manentem et temporali operam. Haec loquitur angelis sanctis, nobis autem aliter longe postis. Quando autem etiam nos aliud tali locutionis interioribus suribus capimus, angelis propinquamus.”


Book 1 deals with “things,” the res of the Scriptures. Yet the res is not just a compendium of Christian dogma; it is God himself. And more is at stake in the effort to get to the res through the verba than simply to understand the words of the Scriptures. The goal is nothing less than humankind’s union with God. Augustine begins by dividing the res into three sub-categories: “There are some things which are to be enjoyed, some which are to be used, and some [i.e., humans] whose function is both to enjoy and use” (De Doct. Chr. 1.3.3). 79

The human subject, able to enjoy or use the things of the two other categories, itself constitutes the third category. The distinction between “enjoyment” and “use” refers to the fundamental Augustinian tenet that only in God does all human desire find its ultimate satisfaction (“enjoyment”). Our love (“use”) of all aspects of God’s creation, however necessary and laudable, must not become an end in itself. By “things to be used,” Augustine therefore means all created things, while the category of “things to be enjoyed” contains only one member: God. All other things, signs included, should be only a means of enjoying God. The whole category of things to be used should function as signs pointing to the one member of the other category. Human life, in short, consists in the quest for the transcendent referent in a world of slippery signifiers.

Yet how can any human sign even attempt to express this ultimate res? Augustine’s initial efforts peter out in silence:

Have I spoken something, have I uttered something, worthy of God? No, I feel that all I have done is to wish to speak; if I did say something, it is not what I wanted to say. How do I know this? Simply because God is unspeakable. . . . It is better to evade this verbal conflict silently than to quell it disputatiously. (De Doct. Chr. 1.6.6) 80

What signifier can express the unspeakable? We seem to be back to the fundamental distrust of language seen in The Teacher. If God is unspeakable, and all signs are made to point to Him, then no sign is possible: only silence remains. Yet the impasse is only temporary. If human signs are powerless to reach the absolute res, Augustine rests on the Word: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was

79 “Res ergo alia sunt, quibus fuissent et sint, aliae quibus utemur, aliae quae fruuntur et nunquam.”

80 “Diximus aliquid et sonum aliquid dignum deo. Ipse vero nihil me aludit quam dicere voluisse sentio; si autem dixi, non hoc est quod dicere volui. Hoc unde scio, nisi quia dea ineffabils est. . . . Quae pugna verborum silentio cavenda possit quam voce pacanda est.”
with God and the Worde was God. . . . The Worde was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1: 1). Since human words could not reach the unspeakable, the unspeakable reached down and spoke with human voice:

All other things may be expressed in some way; He alone is ineffable. Who spoke and all things were made. He spoke, and we were made; but we are unable to speak of Him. His Word, by Whom we were spoken, is His Son. He was made weak, so that He might be spoken by us, despite our weakness. (St. in Ps. 99.6) 81

To describe the Incarnation, Augustine uses a bold linguistic metaphor:

And what was the manner of his coming, if not this: “The word was made flesh and lived among us” (John 1: 14)? When we speak, the word which we hold in our mind becomes a sound in order that what we have in our mind may pass through ears of flesh into the listener’s mind: this is called speech. Our thought, however, is not converted into the same sound, but remains intact in its own home, suffering no diminution from its change as it takes the form of a word in order to make its way into the ears. In the same way the word of God became flesh in order to live in us but was unchanged. (De Doct. Chr. 1.13.12) 82

The radical nature of this pronouncement may at first elude us. We need to be reminded of the classical view of the logos. Heninger explains it well: “The Greek logos does not mean the uttered word, but rather the idea that the word signifies. To use the familiar terminology of Saussure, the logos is the ‘signified,’ not the ‘signifier.’” 83 Yet let us follow the analogy of Augustine’s comparison: If God the Father is the transcendental signified, the divine res, then Christ is the transcendental signer; the verbum 84 which translates God’s unspeakable essence into human speech (and action). Through the Incarnation, God has privileged not only the human body, but also human language (through the uttered word of Christ, and the written word of Scripture). 85 It is the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, that communicates this Sign to humankind, both through the general illumination of the human mind and, as a special instance of this illumination, through the written Word. In this divine Sign there is no arbitrariness or slippage, and in it all human signs have their referent.

So the Word is both Christ and the Holy Scriptures. The relationship between the two, set out by the hermeneutics of On Christian Doctrine, is far from casual. The chain of signifiers within the written Word lead to Christ, the living Word and the transcendental signer. Not only is he the obvious focus of the New Testament (NT), but the Old Testament (OT) anticipates and prepares for his coming. Augustine sees the historical panorama delineated in the Bible as centering on Christ. In the OT the stage is set by the Fall—the reason for His coming—and continues with the history of the people chosen to give birth to Him, while in the NT the focus is on Christ’s words and actions, and on the Church, which is His body and therefore “the corporate extension of the Word into the present.” 86 The forward-looking signs of the OT include typological signs foreshadowing His mission, the elucidation of which takes up so much of Augustine’s hermeneutical effort, while the NT Church is augmented by two powerful “supsersigns” that look back to Christ’s death and resurrection: baptism and communion. 87 All these signs, on their various levels, have the Logos as their Signifier; and through Him, God the Father as their Signified.

The essence of the scriptural message, according to Augustine’s continued exploration of the res in On Christian Doctrine, can be re-

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81 Postremo cetera dicem possum usque, ille solus est ineffabilis, qui dixit, et facta sunt omnia. Dixit, et facta sunt omnia. Sed nos eum dicere non possimus. Verbum eius quo dixit omnem, Filius est; ut a nobis utique infirmitate dicere, facta est infirma. English translation in Colish, p. 35.

82 Quomodo venit, nisi quod verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobiscum? Sic uti loquimur, ut id, quod animo gerimus, in audientibus animo per aerem carmen inlabatur, et verbum caro quod corde gestatur, et vocabulum vocatur, nec tamen in eundem sonum cogitari nosis convertitur, sed apud se manens integra, formam vocis qua se insinuat auribus, sine aliqua labe suae mutationis adductum: ipsa verbum dei non commutatum caro tamen factum est, ut inhabitaret in nobis.” De Doct. Chr. is not the only work in which Augustine uses this illustration. For a more detailed investigation of this favored comparison, see chap. 3 of Faith and the Creed (De fide et symbole).

83 Heninger, “Spenser, Sidney, and Poetic Form,” p. 146, and repeated in Subject of Form, p. 44.

84 Or: sermon (speech), as Erasmus, stirring up the learned community of the early 16th century, translated the logos of John 1. See Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle, Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977). Erasmus, according to Boyle, built his “theological methodology” on the Word.


86 Colish, p. 60.

87 In De Doct. Chr. 3.9.13 Augustine argues that while the typological and ritual signs of the OT (such as the law and the offerings) spoke to the patriarchs and prophets about Christ, the present-day Christian, living after Christ’s death and resurrection, needs only a few easy signs, such as baptism and communion. (In this wider discussion of signs, we should remember that the linguistic sign was for Augustine just a special category within semiology.)
duced to Christ’s words: “you shall love your neighbour as yourself” but God “with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22: 37–39, quoted in De Doct. Chr. 1:22.1). For Augustine the message of the Word, not surprisingly, boils down to the quest for the transcendental signified. Human love parallels (or is simply a different name for) the use of signs: only the Creator is to be enjoyed/loved for his own sake, while creation should be used/loved for the Creator’s sake:

Someone who attends to and worships a thing which is meaningful but remains unaware of its meaning is a slave to a sign. But the person who attends to or worships a useful sign, one divinely insti tuted, and does realize its force and significance, does not worship a thing which is only apparent and transitory but rather the thing to which all such things are to be related [i.e., God]. (De Doct. Chr. 3.9.13) 88

Sin, in this system, is to be “a slave to a sign,” to find the final meaning in one of the lesser signifiers by loving it for its own sake. When this linguistic fall takes place, lust replaces our love for God:

By love I mean the impulse of one’s mind to enjoy God on his own account and to enjoy oneself and one’s neighbour on account of God, and by lust I mean the impulse of one’s mind to enjoy oneself and one’s neighbour and any corporeal thing not on account of God. (De Doct. Chr. 3.10.16) 89

The existential quest for the transcendental sign, as Augustine establishes at great length in The City of God, has far-reaching ethical and political ramifications. The two loves of On Christian Doctrine create two cities, the city of man and the city of God, the former containing those lost among the signifiers and the latter those whose quest leads them towards the transcendent signified. In the final analysis, both ethics and politics are simply adjuncts to Augustine’s theology of the sign. 90

88 “Sub signo enim servit, qui operatur aut veneratur aliquam rem significantem, necesse, quod significat: qui vero aut operatur aut veneratur utile signum divinitatis institutum, cives enim significacionisque intelligat, non hoc veneratur, quod videat et transit, sed illud positum, quo tali cuncta referenda sunt.” The context of this quotation is Augustine’s discussion of the sacraments.

89 “Caritatem voco motum animal ad fruendum deo propere ipsum et se arque proximo propere deum; cupiditatem autem motum animi ad fruendum se et proximo et quilibet corpore non propere deum.”


V

If Book 1 of The Faerie Queene is preeminently about language, then it is not inappropriate to study the text from the perspective of modern linguistic theory. Jonathan Goldberg in one such study points out that Redcrosse is named “only through a sign.” 91 I shall even go further and argue that Redcrosse forms a sign. Yet what does this explicit semiology mean for our interpretation of the Legend of Holiness? For Goldberg it carries clear poststructuralist implications. Following Derrida’s lead, he draws the conclusion that any meaning in the text is dogged by difference and therefore “endlessly deferred.” I believe Goldberg’s analysis captures certain aspects of Book 1, but Spenser’s own vantage point is forgotten in the process. The poem was after all composed within a context of patristic and humanistic speculation about words and the Word. That context can incorporate certain of Derrida’s insights, yet within a completely different framework. Our seminal subtext will instead remain On Christian Doctrine.

Augustine’s City of God, as we shall see in the next chapter, provides an overt pattern for The Legend of Holiness, yet On Christian Doctrine is of equal, if more subtle importance. 92 The opposing cities of the City of God, Jerusalem and Babylon, furnish the book’s structural poles, yet it is Redcrosse’s love for the two ladies that creates the momentum of the plot. In Augustine we find the link between structure and plot: “These two cities are caused by two kinds of love: Jerusalem is caused by the love of God; Babylon is caused by the love of the world” (En. in Ps. 64.2). 93 Redcrosse’s changing loves propell the plot towards the structural centers: love of Una towards the new Jerusalem, love of Duessa towards the House of Pride. Yet Redcrosse’s choices involve more than plot. As we have seen, the two loves were for Augustine intimately connected with his theory of signs. Misdirected love, or lust, is equated with bondage to lower signs. Redcrosse’s loss of Una and


92 Patrick Grant, in Images and Ideas in Literature of the English Renaissance (London: Macmillan, 1979), also uses De Doct. Chr. (together with Conf.) as the starting point for a study of Redcrosse’s shield (pp. 55–60). We approach Book 1 with similar aims, but while Grant focuses on the Image of the cross, I will look at “Redcrosse” as a sign. For additional support of the linking of Augustinian semiology to Redcrosse’s quest, see John N. King, Spenser’s Poetry and the Reformation Tradition (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990), p. 212.

93 “Duas icas ciusstatis faciunt duo amores: Ierusalem facit amor Dei; Babyloniam facit amor saeculi.” My translation. See also De Civ. Del 14.25.
willful attachment to Duessa ("Will was his guide" [FQ.1.2.12]) demonstrate his fall from caritas to cupiditas, from the city of God to the city of man. Yet it also indicates his separation from the Unity of the transcendental sign and his bondage to the Duplicity of postlapsarian language. The larger part of the Legend of Holiness is therefore an investigation of the linguistic havoc created by the Fall. It is no coincidence that the allusions to the Fall and to Babel, glossing Redcrosse's moral and spiritual deterioration, are also key texts in medieval or renaissance discussions of language. The serpent's successful temptation of Adam and Eve not only damaged their relationship with God, but also undid the natural and unified sign. And the building of the prideful tower led not only to the scattering abroad of its inhabitants, but to further linguistic confusion.

Goldberg claims that Redcrosse "enters the poem clothed as another; the 'bloodie Crosse he bore' (2.1) names him only through a sign." I would argue, however, that he is not simply "a sign of someone else," but that the young man and the "mightie armes" together form the two halves of the sign "Redcrosse." I also would suggest that it is Una, as "Truth," that holds the sign together, vouching for its epistemological validity. It is she who unites the "clownishe young man," an untried and therefore empty signifier, with the armor, an exacting signified. The young knight initially views himself a natural sign, a signifier immutably united with its concept, but his quest shows that a signifier in a fallen world remains a vagrant thing. Even with Una by his side, he faces difficulties. Within a few stanzas of the first canto the two stray among "lofite trees yched with sommers pride" (FQ.1.1.7), a first oblique allusion to Babel. Redcrosse soon fights an uneven battle with Error, whose vomit is "full of books and papers" (FQ.1.1.20), the dregs of language. Although Una rescues him for the moment, she is no guarantor of Redcrosse's linguistic and existential unity. A veil, which she has worn ever since her parents lost Eden, dims the brightness of her radiance. An emblem of her fallen condition, the veil will not be removed before the celebration of her apocalyptic marriage to Redcrosse. Even if that marriage is not "endlessly deferred," as Goldberg would have it, its consummation will not take place until all lower signs have found rest in the transcendent Sign. Till then the world of The Faerie Queene remains one "of fissures, of losses, of disconnections," and Una herself, like T. S. Eliot's "Word in the desert," will be assailed by "Shreiking voices / Scoldings, mocking, or merely chattering."

If Una's veil is an emblem of the intellectual fog brought about by the Fall, at Archimago's hermitage Redcrosse experiences his own personal fall. Archimago, hating Una "as the hissing snake" (FQ.1.2.9), acts the archetypal tempter when he separates Redcrosse from her:

The guilefull great Enchaunter parts
The Redcrosse Knight from Truth:
Into whose stead faire falshood steps,
And worke him wofull ruth. (1.2.argument)

From now on Redcrosse, and the narrative with him, is jostled along slipping signifiers, a postlapsarian (even poststructuralist) world where nothing is what it seems (a favorite Spenserian expression). Words of deception play an increasingly important function, leading up to Despair's devilish rhetoric. Verbal labels no longer have stable meanings as Duessa masquerades as Fidessa, Archimago as Redcrosse, and most crucial—Redcrosse himself step by step severs the (never very stable) connection with his name. At his nadir in Orgoglio's dungeon the sign is finally broken as the knight, in exchange for Duessa's caresses, has lost not only Una, but also his armor. As an abandoned signifier, he is contained in the prison house until Una and Arthur return the armor and reconstitute him as a sign.

United to Duessa, Redcrosse not only becomes a false sign himself, but also he simultaneously forfeits his ability to interpret other signs. Meeting his doppelgänger Fradubio, he is blind to the pointed references to his own situation, even after the true name and nature of his consort have been revealed.

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95 Goldberg, p. 7. As we shall see at the end of this study, Goldberg is correct about the other, if in ways he has not anticipated.

96 As Spenser describes him in the Letter to Raleigh.

97 Goldberg, p. 7.

98 Goldberg, p. 178.

99 "Burnt Norton," lines 159-55. Cf. Abessa's "hollow howling, and lamenting cry / Shamefully at her [i.e., Una] raying all the way" (FQ.1.3.23).


101 On Redcrosse (and Fradubio) as a second Adam, see Nohrnberg, pp. 159-66.
Increasingly misjudging the words and labels of those around him, Redcrosse is drawn deeper into the vortex of Babel, and at the House of Pride its curse fully enters the Spenserian discourse. Babel, as Genesis taught and Augustine noted, means linguistic confusion (De Civ. Del 16.4). The confusion of signs and minds was a punishment for the building of the “famous tower”:

These signs could not be shared by all nations, because of the sin of human disunity by which each one sought hegemony for itself. This pride is signified by the famous tower raised towards heaven at the time when wicked men justly received incompatible languages to match their incompatible minds. (De Decl. Chc. 2.4.5)\(^2\)

This pandemic confusion implicates not only the protagonists within Spenser’s fiction, but also us as readers of the fiction. When the poet sounds a warning at the start of canto 7, it is directed not just at Redcrosse, but also at us:

What man so wise, what earthly wit so ware,
As to descrie the crafty cunning traine,
By which decept doth maske in visour faire,
And cast her colours dyed deep in graine,
To seeme like Truth, whose shame she well can faine,
And fitting gestures to her purpose frame,
The guiltesse man with guile to entertain?
Great maistresse of her art was that false Dame,
The false Duessa, cloaked with Pidessaes name. (FQ 1.7.1)

The Duessan deceit is ever-present in the language of the poem, as indeed in all human discourse.

All along, the reader to an extent has shared the hero’s interpretative difficulties. We no more than Redcrosse are led initially to suspect the “aged Sire” of the “little lowly Hermitage,” lovingly situated next to “a Cristall streame” (FQ 1.1.29,34). Yet Spenser in the next stanza separates the reader from the hero’s limited perspective by hinting that things are not what they appear. A hermit that can “file his tongue as smooth as glas” is not to be trusted; and when the hermit begins to tell “of Saints and Popes,” Spenser’s Protestant readers have their suspicions aroused, and then confirmed when Archimago’s true self is re-

\(^2\) "Ista signa igitur non potuerunt communia esse omnibus genibus peccato quodam dicensionis humanae, cum ad se quisque principatum rapit. Cuius superbiae signum est erecta illa turris in caelum, ubi homines impii non solum animos, sed etiam voce dissonas habere meruerunt."

The first four lines might possibly be construed as voicing Redcrosse’s “restlesse passion,” but this cannot be maintained for the stanza as a whole. Rather, the voice of the narrator blends with Redcrosse’s in praise of the “glorie excellent” to be achieved in the “doughty” fight against Sansjoy. A number of critics have joined the chorus of praise; but surely, are they not as misled as Redcrosse and the narrator? To say with the narrator; “So th’one for wrong, the other strites for right” (FQ 1.5.8 and 9), is clearly to be afflicted with Redcrosse’s myopia. Let us not forget that Redcrosse is still within the House of Pride, which he should never have entered in the first place. As Douglas Brooks-Davies stresses: “What Lucifera and her palace signify for Redcrosse is summed up in his fight there with Sansjoy for the shield of Sansjoy.”\(^3\)

The “victors glory” (FQ 1.4.39) he fights for is not the shield of faith, but that of Sansjoy, its very opposite. It is symptomatic that he wins the battle because he misconstrues Duessa’s call of encouragement, aimed at Sansjoy: “The conquest yours, I yours, the shield, and glory yours” (FQ 1.5.14). The glory may be his, but it comes at the cost of a continuing fealty to Duessa.

The confusion of Babel, particularized through Redcrosse’s inte-

\(^3\) Douglas Brooks-Davies, in The Spenser Encyclopedia, ed. A.C. Hamilton et al. (Toronto and Buffalo: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 441.
pretative blindness, manifests itself in the devious use of the word “glory,” so central to The Faerie Queene as a whole. Again, the Augustinian context provides a clue. “The City of God,” explains Peter Brown, “is a book about ‘glory.’ In it, Augustine drains the glory from the Roman past in order to project it far beyond the reach of men, into the ‘Most glorious City of God.’” The city of man, like Redcrosse in the House of Pride, “seeks the praise of men” and “lifts up its head in its own boasting,” while the heavenly city glories in God (De Civ. Dei 14.28). When we overhear Redcrosse’s confession during his vision of the New Jerusalem, we know a radical change has taken place: “Vn-worthy wretch (quoth he) of so great grace, / How dare I think such glory to attaine?” (FQ 1.10.62). This clearly is not the glory of Duessa. The change in Redcrosse, of course, has taken place within the House of Holinesse, and it is here that we find Spenser’s (and the traditional Christian) response to the curse of Babel.

After Una, once again united with her knight, has rescued Redcrosse from Despair’s “vaine words” (FQ 1.9.58), she takes him to Caelia, the heavenly guardian of “an aumtient house,” “Renownd throughout the world for sacred lore, / And pure ivspotted life” (FQ 1.10.3). Caelia together with her two sisters Speranza and Charissa embody the three theological virtues, the “faith, hope and charity” of 1 Corinthians 13 that also provided the structure for countless catechisms, going back to Augustine’s influential Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love. What is immediately striking is how the erratic signs we have met earlier in the book have their true counterparts within the house. While Abessa represents false piety, Caelia’s “bidding of her bedes” is a true emblem of her “good and godly deeds” (FQ 1.10.3). Similarly, the old hermit who resides on the Mount of Contemplation is a sign in which signifier and signified form a meaningful unity, in contradistinction to Archimago’s hypocritical hermit. And most important, while Fidessa was a cover-up for Duessa, the very symbol of linguistic duplicity, Fidella (“Faith”) shows Redcrosse a way out of the labyrinth. Duessa had deceived the knight through the misuse of words; Fidella now restores him through the right use of the word. Spenser operates within a tradition stretching beyond Augustine back to the NT when he makes Fidella enter with “a booke, that was both signd and seald with blood” (FQ 1.10.13). The two theological meanings of the Logos—Christ and the Scriptures—are here conflated. Fidella’s book contains the written Word of God, which is “both signd and scald” by the blood of the Son of God, the living Word. Human intellect and language being confused, the words of the book are “darke” and “hard to be understood,” but solving this difficulty is Fidella’s role. What the “weaker wit of man” can “neuer reach,” her “words diuine” reveal: “she him taught celestiall discipline, / And opened his dull eyes, that light mote in them shine” (FQ 1.10.18–19).

Just as Christ the Savior is the theological bridge from alienation to wholeness, so Christ the Word, dispensed by Fidella, is the linguistic bridge from confusion to comprehension. Or seen from the human perspective, Redcrosse’s understanding of the words of the Scriptures leads him to the Word, the transcendent Signifier, which in turn provides the basis for his deciphering other linguistic and existential signs.

Of Fidella’s four (very Augustinian) themes, “Of God, of grace, of justice, of free will,” Spenser has already given allegorical prominence to the second. Prince Arthur, and in particular the shield he carries, is a vehicle for the saving grace needed to free Redcrosse from Orgoglio, the overt manifestation of the knight’s own cupiditas. The shield, sharing important features with Una, carries linguistic significance. Its chief stone shines as brightly as Una’s countenance, and like her face it “all closely couer’d was, / Ne might of mortall eye be euer seene” (FQ 1.7.33). Both represent God’s illuminating light, burning away the fog of confusion. Una’s presence, even when she is covered with the veil, saves Redcrosse from his worst interpretative blunders, while the shield exposes even the “bloudie wordes” of Archimagoian deceit:

104 Spenser in the Letter to Raleigh states that by Queen Gloriana, and thus metonymically The Faerie Queene as a whole, “I meanes glory in my generall intension.”
106 “... quaerit ab hominibus gloriam... in gloria sua exaltat caput suum.”
107 The first edition of Calvin’s Institutes, for example, was structured around the three theological virtues. The Enchiridion proved important to the Legend of Holiness in other ways as well, as we shall see in the next chapter.
108 To these examples we may add John King’s observation that “Error’s ‘bookees and papers’ parody the Bible carried by Fidella, a figure for true faith,” while Fidella’s sacramental cup filled with “wine and water” has its counterpart in Duessa’s cup of “secret popcon” (Spenser’s Poetry, pp. 83 and 92; see also pp. 130–91).
109 See De Doct. Ch. 2.5.6.
110 The radiance from both is compared to the sun (cf. 1.3.4 with 1.7.34), and both Arthur and Una are associated with grace. In the first stanza of cantus 8 it is not clear whether the “heavenly grace” of line 3 refers to Una (mentioned in lines 5–9) or to Arthur (mentioned in line 9).
No magick of arts had any might,
Nor bloudie wordes of bold Enchaunters call,
But all that was not such, as seemd in sight,
Before that shield did fade, and suddeine fall.  (FQ 1.7.35)

All through the poem Spenser has warned the reader that in a fallen world many signs are not what they seem. The divine Word, however, exposes false significations and establishes interpretative bearings.

The key lesson Redcrosse learns from his encounter with the Word is self-knowledge. He began his quest with a grandiose opinion of himself as a natural sign, but the House of Holiness teaches him humility. The sign “Redcrosse” has validity only to the extent that its meaning is provided by an other: the divine Logos, who alone is worthy to carry the name and the armor. This is the crowning lesson Contemplation teaches the “man of earth” (FQ 1.10.52), as the young knight’s real name is revealed to be:

Thence she [a fairy] thee brought into this Faerie lond,
And in a heaped furrow did thee hyde,
Wherefore a Ploughman all vnweeting found,
As he his toylesome tene that way did gyde,
And brought thee vp in ploughmanes state to hyde,
Wherefore George he thee gau to name.  (FQ 1.10.66)

It is true that as the dragon-slayer he is Saint George, but that is still in the future. For now he is reduced to earth, a Piers Plowman or an Adam, needing to “put... on the Lord IESVS CHRIST” (Romans 13:14). My use of Pauline language is deliberate. The biblical passage provides the key to our interpretation of the knight’s armor and to the last cantos of the book. Only when George puts on the armor of Christ can he defeat the dragon and deliver Una’s parents. Only when the sign “Redcrosse” is anchored in the transcendental Logos does it have the necessary validity.

The “putting on of Christ” also carries clear sacramental connotations. The sacraments of baptism and communion are intimately connected with Redcrosse’s quest; it is not by coincidence that the knight is strengthened by the well of life and the balm from the tree of life during his dragon-fight. And as we saw earlier, the sacraments were

112 See John King’s entry on “sacraments” in the _Spenser Encyclopaedia_, p. 628.

for Augustine “supersigns” that linked the believer to the Logos. This was indeed the context in which most Elizabethans encountered discussions about signs. “Concernning that whiche wee call signe,” Theodore Beza commented on the communion, “wee meane not by that word a bare signe, naked and emptie, . . . but wee understeande of signes which represente to vs most great and excellent things, declared effectuallye in the liuely word of God.”113 Protracted altercations between Catholics and Protestants (or within the Protestant fold) on how to view the “signs” of bread and wine ensured the topic’s perennial interest. That Redcrosse initially views himself as a natural sign takes on new significance if seen from a Reformed vantage-point. Unlike the papists (argued Beza) who confuse the bread and wine with Christ, “wee confound not the signes with the thing signified, nor abolish the substance of the signes, but make a distinction of that which is conioynd.”114 Beza’s point is analogous to the lesson learned on the Mount of Contemplation: Redcrosse is an earthly signifier “conioynd” to a heavenly Signified, while what Beza considered the papist view of the sign parallels Redcrosse’s initial sacrilege. Obliterating the distinction between the earthly and the heavenly components of the sign, the proud knight becomes an easy prey to the wiles of the Roman Duesse.115

If readers are implicated in Redcrosse’s linguistic alienation, they are also urged to follow him in his pursuit of wholeness, or holiness. Words, the confused reminders of the Fall, are at the same time the only road to the Word.116 Spenser’s allegorical method is simply an extension of the basic reading of signs. As the signifier “indicates” the signified, so the allegorical figures indicate mental constructions, and the two halves form the allegorical sign, a “signum translatum,” to use Augustinian vocabulary.117 As we have seen in the case of Fidessa, these signs, like the ordinary verbal sign, may be erratic. Yet, as Augustinian...
tine takes pains to demonstrate in *On Christian Doctrine*, allegory and typology are important hermeneutical tools. There can be no doubt that Spenser designed the Legend of Holiness, immersed as it is in biblical allusions,\textsuperscript{118} to be a vessel for the Word. He urges the reader to join Redcrosse in the quest for the transcendental Sign.

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CHAPTER 4

Politics

The Two Kingdoms

This doth S. Augustyne proue in these worde. Seyng that we be made of soule and of body / as longe as we do lyve in this temporelle lyffe we must vse / to the norysheying of this lyffe / these temporelle goodes[.] Therfore muste we of that parte that belongethe to this lyfle be subiect vn to powers / that is / vn to men that do minister worldly thynges with some honour / but as concernynge that parte / wherby we beleue in god and be calyled vn to his kyngdum we ought not to be subiect vn to any man that wille peruerce that same thyng in vs / that hath plesyd god to geue vs eternalle liffe.

—Robert Barnes\textsuperscript{1}

So far we have investigated how the vertical and horizontal Augustinian perspectives affected renaissance views on psychology, epistemology and semiology. In this final chapter we shall move out into the larger world of politics, specifically into the contentious area of the political power of the “city of God,” whether seen as official Church or the communion of saints, and the “city of man,” the secular society to which every Christian must relate. This topic may appear tangential to a discussion about politics, yet it focuses on one of the hottest political controversies in sixteenth-century Europe. My strategy will be slightly different from the earlier chapters in that the political position of the young Augustine, due to his reticence on the subject, will be explicated largely through the writings of another Church Father, Eusebius of Ceasarea, who influenced the thinking of both Augustine and his spiritual mentor Ambrose. The mature Augustine, on the other hand, wrote copiously on the topic in the *City of God*, Book 19 of which will provide our basic proof text.

In 1522 Juan Luis Vives, the Spanish humanist who later tutored Princess Mary, after long labors dedicated a new Latin edition of the

\textsuperscript{1} Robert Barnes, *A supplication ... unto Henry VIII* (n.p., 1531), fol. 121v. STC 1470.

City of God to Henry VIII. The dedication reveals what standing the bishop of Hippo had reached by the 1520s: Augustine, Vives writes the king, is "a writer knowne of all, and familiar to you." The message of the City of God was timely, Vives intimates in his dedication, since Augustine had been involved in a task similar to that of King Henry, the "Defender of the Faith". "You and Saint Augustines point and purpose in writing, seeme almost to intend and attaine the same end. For as you wrote for that better Rome against Babilon, so Saint Augustine against Babilon defended that ancient, Christian and holier Rome." The writing "against Babilon" on behalf of the papacy ("that better Rome") was of course the king's celebrated refutation of Luther, the Assertio of 1521. In typical medieval fashion Vives has identified the city of God with the papacy, yet his association of Babylon with Lutheran heresies is obviously a new twist. But by one of the many ironies of history, within a decade the political theories of the "Babylonian" Luther were shaping Henry VIII's official policy. And by another twist, that policy was based on Luther's reinterpretation of the political theory of the City of God. However, Eusebius of Caesarea had provided a different, highly influential pattern for Tudor political thinking, a position initially embraced also by the young Augustine before changing circumstances forced him to reformulate his views in the City of God. This chapter will investigate the history of these competing ideologies and their Tudor pedegrees before trying them out on Spenser's The Fairie Queene, a work that seems caught in the crossfire between two incompatible views.

During its first three centuries Christianity had been of marginal political importance. Indeed, because of long periods of intense persecution the early Christians had often perceived Roman society as an unhinged violence. Using the vocabulary of Revelation, early Fathers like Tertullian not seldom delineated church and state in stark apocalyptic terms as the New Jerusalem and Babylon. All of this had changed, however, with the deathbed conversion of Constantine in 337. Earlier apprehensions about political interference in the affairs of the church were suddenly replaced by a much more optimistic view of the secular powers. The empire was no longer an enemy of the church, but an ally in the fight against pagan surroundings.

Eusebius of Caesarea, whose thought was deeply indebted to Origens and through him to Middle Platonism, became the spokesman for a new imperial theology in which "the monarch represents God on earth, he is God's image as his monarchy is the image of God's kingdom." After recording the history of Roman persecution against the early church in his Ecclesiastical History, Eusebius could end the work on a note of praise "to the pious emperor with his sons, so dear to God." He proclaimed the new ideology in two orations presented before the emperor in 335 and 336, and later appended to his Life of Constantine. Timothy Barnes explains the purpose of one of the orations: "The greater part of the Panegyric consists of variations and elaborations on a single theme: the similarity of Constantine to Christ. The empire of Constantine is a replica of the kingdom of heaven, the manifestation on earth of that ideal monarchy which exists in the celestial realm. Constantine governs with his eyes ever gazing upward, patterning himself on the divine model of monarchical rule." According to Eusebius, Christ's mission and the Roman Empire had a single divine origin: "Together, at the same critical moment, as if from a single divine will, two beneficial shoots were produced for mankind:

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2 Vives' edition, which included his own copious commentary, became part of Erasmus' edition of Augustine's Opera omnia, published by Froben in 1528-1529.
3 Augustine, The city of God: with the learned comments of Io. Ludovico Vives, trans. John Healey, 2nd ed. (London, 1660). STC 917. Vives' dedicatory letter and Henry VIII's reply are printed immediately after the title page on unnumbered pages. I am citing the second rather than the first edition of 1616 since it has been "compared with the Latin Original, and in very many places corrected and amended" (title page).
4 Assertio septem sacramentorum aduersus M. Lutherum (London, 1521). STC 1807. It has been questioned whether Henry actually wrote the work himself, but the papacy rewarded him for it by making him sene defender in 1524.
9 Constantine himself had set the tone in the Speech to the Assembly of the Saints, presented to a Christian audience sometime between 321 and 324 (see Barnes, pp. 73-76).
10 Barnes, p. 254.
the empire of the Romans and the teachings of true worship." The emperor ("God's friend") plays a crucial role in bringing mankind to the heavenly kingdom:

And in this God's friend henceforth shall participate, having been furnished by God with natural virtues and having received in his soul the emanations from that place. His ability to reason has come from the Universal Logos, his wisdom from communion with Wisdom, goodness from contact with the Good, and justness from his association with Justice. (In Praise, p. 89)

Indeed, the emperor is almost divine in his mission. As Barnes writes, "like the Savior of the world, Constantine prepares men for the kingdom of God." Or as Eusebius himself puts it: "As the Universal Savior renders the entire heaven and earth and highest kingdom fit for His Father, so his friend, leading his subjects on earth to the Only-Begotten and Savior Logos, makes them suitable for His kingdom" (In Praise, p. 85). In Eusebius' ordered and vertical universe, the Christian emperor is head not only of the state but of the state religion, leading the human kingdom towards the heavenly kingdom, different from each other only in degree.

Ambrose, bishop of Milan (then the capital of the western part of the empire) and Augustine's spiritual mentor, had incorporated Eusebian imperialism into his neoplatonic theology, and his North-African convert was duly influenced. Not that the young Augustine was very much interested in politics per se; he saw society rather as a means of reaching beyond the temporal. As R.A. Markus explains,

Being part of the all-embracing order in the world, human society is one of the stages of man’s advance towards God. Hence the importance of ensuring that the social order really does conform to the divinely established order of the universe. Like Plato long ago, Augustine seemed to think, at this stage of his career, that this would be secured by making sure of the perfection of the ruler. ... Thus under the guidance of the wise ruler emanicated from the appeal of what is temporary and partial, the social order assists men in advancing towards their goal. This advance is accomplished by reason, within a universe conceived as substantially accessible to human comprehension.13

11 Eusebius, In Praise of Constantine, trans. H.A. Drake (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976), p. 120. This translation comprises Eusebius' two orations: Panegyric to Constantine and Treatise on the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which are often added as an appendix to the Life of Constantine. References to the orations will be given in the text by page.

12 Barnes, p. 384.

13 R.A. Markus, Sacrum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970), p. 78. Disagreeing with Markus, van Oort (pp. 154–59) believes that even the young Augustine never adhered to an Eusebian vision of the Roman Empire as a Christian state.

Augustine was rather slow to draw the political conclusions from his philosophy, and he did not give it much space in his early writings. His adherence to a Eusebian "Christian Empire" reached its zenith about the turn of the fifth century, but it proved a short-lived infatuation.14 When Rome was sacked by Germanic tribes in 410, his civic optimism was shattered. The shock waves from this blow to Roman civic pride spread throughout the Empire and led him to construct a new and hugely influential political synthesis, expressed in the City of God (written between ca. 416–426).15 The work, as Markus explains, "is a radical and sustained rejection of the Eusebian type of view of the Empire":16

Like the ancients, Augustine believed that the life of the wise man is a social life; what must be rejected, he thought, is the claim that felicity can be found in it, that the polis can be the means of securing perfection. More fundamentally, what is being repudiated is the idea of a final end within the range of human achievement.17

Even without the sack of Rome it is likely that Augustine would have revised his political theory. The outward events shaking the Roman Empire had gone hand in hand with his changed theological and philosophical outlook. "Perfection" was no longer tenable—not just in the political sphere, but as a viable human possibility generally. His Pauline insights on sin and the fall, sharpened by his duels with Manicheans and Pelagians, had seen to that. Taking a new path, Augustine sought to avoid both early Christian distrust and more recent adulation of the state. In Frederick H. Russell’s words, "Augustine emancipated Christianity from the unstable amalgam of the Roman yoke by pursuing a middle way, the way of ambivalence, between the earlier Christians who had seen themselves as a righteous but persecuted sect beset by a wicked Rome, and the Eusebian (and Ambrosian) apotheosis of the Roman Empire."18

15 If Augustine rejected some of the Eusebian heresies, he made good use of other parts. According to Chaucer, "Augustine was using the overview of history drawn from Eusebius' Chronicle," which had outlined the twin history of the Roman Empire and the Christian Church, "to attack the kind of theology of history that had appeared in Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History and Life of Constantine" (pp. 691–92).
16 Markus, From Augustine, p. 347.
17 Markus, Sacrum, p. 83.
We find Augustine’s most influential discussion of the secular order in Book 19 of the *City of God*, which expounds the relationship between the heavenly and the earthly cities. The central passage of the book provides his mature definition of order. The context is a discussion of different types of peace:

The peace, then, of the body lies in the ordered equilibrium of all its parts; the peace of the irrational soul, in the balanced adjustment of its appetites; the peace of the reasoning soul, in the harmonious correspondence of conduct and conviction; the peace of the body and soul taken together, in the well-ordered life and health of the living whole. Peace between a mortal man and his Maker consists in ordered obedience, guided by faith, under God’s eternal law; peace between man and man consists in regulated fellowship. The peace of a home lies in the ordered harmony of authority and obedience between the members of a family living together. The peace of the political community is an ordered harmony of authority and obedience between citizens. The peace of the heavenly City lies in a perfectly ordered and harmonious communion of those who find their joy in God and in one another in God. Peace, in its final sense, is the calm that comes of order. Order is an arrangement of like and unlike things whereby each of them is disposed in its proper place. (*De Civ. Dei* 19.13).

At first glance this may appear a simple restatement of Augustine’s earlier position, yet there are fundamental differences. Instead of a single peace and a single vertical order, we have horizontal slices each defined by its own kind of peace and its own kind of order, with only the peace of the heavenly City “perfectly ordered.” The preceding chapters had shown how little real peace and felicity there is to be found in the different human spheres. The life of virtue that according to Augustine’s earlier philosophy was to come with education is now reduced to an unending war against temptation (*De Civ. Dei* 19.4), while in chapters 5 through 7 the different communities—family, city, world—are described in terms of their shortcomings: “the bigger it is, the fuller it is of dangers” (*De Civ. Dei* 19.7). The chapters following the definition of peace quoted above do erect a progression of sorts from earthly to heavenly peace, but it turns out to be the fundamental distinction of the mature Augustine between *use* and *enjoyment*. The Christian, already saved by God’s grace, is to use the earthly peace for a higher end:

In the earthly city, then, temporal goods are to be used with a view to the enjoyment of earthly peace, whereas in the heavenly City, they are used with a view to the enjoyment of eternal peace. . . . And because, so long as man lives in his mortal body and is a pilgrim far from the Lord, he walks, not by vision, but by faith. Consequently, he refers all peace of body and soul, or their combination, to that higher peace which unites a mortal man with the immortal God.” (*De Civ. Dei* 19.14)

So while the vertical order has been ruptured by the Fall, and while no perfection is possible in this life—“Any peace we have on earth, whether the peace we share with Babylon or our own peace through faith, is more like a solace for unhappiness than the joy of beatitude” (*De Civ. Dei* 19.27)—Augustine nevertheless posits a positive space for the human city in his theology. In doing so he steers a hugely influential middle course between the withdrawal from society of the early Christians and the Christian imperialism of Eusebius.

Let us take a closer look at Augustine’s middle way. Book 19 makes a basic differentiation between the city of God, which deals with humankind’s eternal well-being, and the city of man, which deals with its civic well-being. Yet we have to make further discriminations in Augustine’s use of terms. Sometimes the city of man (or “Babylon”) represents the evil empire of the devil and his followers, including all those humans that are not citizens of the city of God. This indeed is the normal meaning in the *City of God*. Yet at other times, as here in Book 19, it stands for the civil state (in Augustine’s time, the Roman), hovering between the “earthly” and the “heavenly” cities. As Markus explains, “‘Babylon’ is both the city of the impious, and the secular sphere in which good pious Christians may discharge important functions.” The secular state is part of a divine plan, yet its purpose is not

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20 “Pax itaque corporis est ordinata parturium, pax animae rationalis ordinata cognitionis actionisque consensui, pax corporis et animae ordinata vita et salutis animantis, pax hominis mortalis et Dei ordinata in fide sub aeterna legem obedientia, pax hominum ordinata concordia, pax domus ordinata imperandri atque obediendi concordia cohabitantium, pax civitatis ordinata imperandri atque obediendi concordia civitatem, pax caelestis civitatis ordinatisimae et concordissimae societati fratrum Deo et invicem in Deo, pax omnium rerum quadrallianissimae ordinis. Ordo est parium disparitium quem saepe loca tribuens dispositio.”

21 “... quanto maiore est, tanto periculis plenior.”

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to lead mankind to eternal felicity, but “to deal with the disorganisation and conflict resulting from the Fall.” Augustine fought hard against this view, and in his many anti-Donatist works increasingly he was forced to defend the active cooperation of church and state, even to the point of condoning governmental compulsion in the implementation of the edicts of the church. The Donatist challenge was in effect neutralized through state intervention. The ecclesiastical use of secular force is a less savory aspect of the Augustinian heritage that has earned the bishop the epithet “Father of the Inquisition,” and it clearly strains his own distinction between the two kingdoms (without, however, conflating them into Eusebianism). What can be said is that Augustine never envisioned a radically secular state; he saw the cooperation between the two kingdoms as part of the control of the wicked within the bonds of the saeculum.

II

The millennium separating Augustine and Luther saw developments unforeseen by the bishop of Hippo. Yet as Walter Ullmann has explained, the age of Augustine set the tone: “It was in the late Roman period from the fourth to the fifth century that the foundations were laid for the basic conceptions and ideas relating to government.” Christian imperialism acquired a rival when Pope Leo I (440–61) in the generation after Augustine propagated a papal-hierocratic political system based on the pope’s supposed “plentitude of power”—that is, the claim of both spiritual and temporal power through the reduction of the political realm to the theological. Both papal and imperial theory, in Ullmann’s terms, adhered to “descending” theocratic sys-

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29 Markus, Saeclum, p. 84.
30 Tyconius, a gifted Donatist theologian, propagated the dichotomy of Jerusalem and Babylon in a Commentary on Revelation (now lost). Tyconius’ two cities provided Augustine with the framework for his own City of God. Yet while the Donatist view is truly “onedimensional,” Augustine’s vision is multifaceted and complex in its distinctions. It is unsettling, however, to see how often modern scholars collapse Augustine’s political vision into Tychonian dichotomies.


tems influenced by neoplatonic ideas. When the papacy lost contact with the Byzantine Emperors in the 8th century, the Franks filled the gap. The Donation of Pepin (754) inaugurated the temporal power of the popes through the grant of what was to become the Papal States, while the popes crowned Charlemagne Emperor of the West in 800. Meanwhile, the Donation of Constantine, a forgery finally exploded by Lorenzo Valla in the 15th century, granted the papacy even more: Constantine had purportedly given to the bishop of Rome the dominion formerly exercised by the Empire in Italy.

In between these papal and imperial extremes we can position the Augustinian vision as described in the City of God. Yet while the Augustinian terminology was retained, its meaning was diluted. As medieval society became permeated by Christianity, the distinction between the two cities became blurred. Finally, in the twelfth century—at about the time Frederick Barbarossa named his German kingdom the "Holy Roman Empire"—the writer of universal history Otto of Freising felt that he had "been writing the history not of two cities but, almost, of one, which I call 'Christendom.'" But with only one "city" to rule, pope and emperor kept quarrelling about their respective jurisdictions.

Some writers, however, such as William of Ockham returned to Augustine for support of the position that church and state had to be separated again. Objecting to papal jurisdiction in worldly matters, Ockham wanted to reestablish the secular state. He therefore cites the City of God to distinguish between an eternal and a temporal lord.

The unitary vision of the extreme points, whether papalist or imperialist (with Dante as a good example of the latter), tended to adhere to a vertical order reminiscent of the young Augustine, while the middle ground was occupied by followers of the mature Augustinian vision of dual secular and sacred spheres.

These medieval thinkers had been inspired by the political vision of the City of God, yet only with the Reformation did a return ad fontes take place on a larger scale and with clearer practical results. Luther knew of Ockham's writings, but he was more at home with the City of God itself. In polemical struggle with the papacy he could play the same
game as Vives, by reducing the Augustinian cities in rather simplistic fashion to a struggle between the true (i.e., Protestant) church and the false (i.e., Roman) church: “There be two manner of churches, from the beginning of the world unto the end, the which s. Augustyn calleth Cayn, & Abel." Yet Luther is normally much closer to the mature Augustine in his differentiation between spheres. Chapter 2 investigated the reformer’s fundamental distinction between the Christian’s two positions: towards God (coram Deo) and towards the world (coram mundo). In the political sphere this distinction is expressed as the two kingdoms, or “regiments” (to use the term widely used in both Germany and Tudor England). Luther’s political creed is expressed most clearly in a hugely influential pamphlet written in 1523, *Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed.* In it Luther establishes that “God has ordained the two governments; the spiritual, which by the Holy Spirit under Christ makes Christians and pious people, and the secular, which restrains the unchristian and wicked so that they must needs keep the peace outwardly, even against their will.” Recognizing that “the masses are and always will be unchristian” (371), he did not believe in any blurring of the two spheres into a theocratic society. Instead, “these two kingdoms must be sharply distinguished, and both be permitted to remain; the one to produce piety, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds; neither is sufficient in the world without the other” (371). Luther, however, no more than Augustine, envisioned a society that is radically secular in the modern sense (even if his theory clearly is a step in that direction). In a dictum that was to be echoed by Elizabethan propagandists, Luther stresses that the secular ruler is responsible for the enforcement of both tablets of the Mosaic law—not just the second dealing with social mores, but also the first dealing with the relationship to God. Augustine’s anti-Donatist writings were therefore used by virtually all mainline Protestants against the Anabaptists and other members of the radical reformation who wanted to separate themselves from society.

So while the non-Christians have a single citizenship and “belong to the kingdom of the world and are under the law” (370), the believer is not restricted to the heavenly kingdom, but has civic obligations as well: “Because the sword [i.e., the civil government] is a very great benefit and necessary to the whole world, to preserve peace, to punish sin and to prevent evil, [the Christian] submits most willingly to the rule of the sword, pays tax, honors those in authority, serves, helps, and does all he can to further the government, that it be sustained and held in honor and fear” (373). Having both secular and religious obligation, the Christian is consequently a member of both kingdoms. Luther saw his distinction between the two kingdoms as a necessary correction of the medieval distinction between secular and spiritual that had separated the Christian community into two halves: the ordinary laity and, on a higher level, the “professional” estates of priest, friar, and nun. The former monk instead abolished convent and priory, and taught the priesthood of every believer. All Christians

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41 As John Headley explains in a recent article: “Ravageing the Pseudo-Dianysian/Thomistic hierarchy [which is based on similar premises as the philosophy of the young Augustine] that arises from earth heavenward, Luther withdrew the secular authority, or what a later age would recognize as the state, from his impressive theoretical structure and set it up in his worldly Regimen as coextensive and cooperating with the church in its spiritual Regimen. Luther boasted that not since Augustin...there had been anyone who had so promoted the secular authority as had he” (“Luther and the Problem of Secularization,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* 55:1 [1987]: p. 22). Many other Luther scholars, however, while seeing the Augustinian connection, make too little of the rapprochement between Augustine’s and Luther’s political ideas. Eric W. Grischi is fairly typical with his claim that “Luther went far beyond Augustine” (“Luther and the State: Post-Reformation Ramifications,” in *Luther and Modern State in Germany,* ed. James D. Tracy, Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies, vol. 7 [Kirkville: SC) Publishers, 1986]: 44).
43 As he perceived both the papacy, with its conflation of spiritual and worldly power, and some of the Anabaptist sects, with their saincy societies. Also some of the Swiss Reformers (e.g., Zwingli and Bullinger in Zurich) advocated a more theocratic system in which church and society conmmingled.
44 See, e.g., John Jewel, *The Apology of the Church of England* (London, 1562), fol. 57r: “God hath committed unto every faithful Prince the charge of both the tables, to the entent he standeth understanding that not only civil matters, but also religious & Ecclesiastical causes appertaineth to his office.” STC 14590.
45 As the Protestants themselves were accused of Donatism by the Catholics. In general it is remarkable to see to what a large extent the Augustinian bugbears were appropriated by everyone along the confessional spectrum: the Protestants habitually accused the Catholics of Pelagianism while the Catholics saw the Protestants as Manichees (as well as Donatists). It is as if they all relived the turmoil of the third and fourth centuries A.D.
had the same relationship to God, and the demarcation between secular and spiritual was not external but internal. For the same reasons Luther objected to the papalist doctrine of plenitude of power. In the long struggle between emperor and pope, Luther therefore joined Ockham in his critique of the papacy for confusing the heavenly with the earthly kingdom and for denying the existence of a legitimate civil society outside the church.

If Luther followed earlier thinkers, he soon inspired others to follow suit. His humanist co-worker at Wittenberg, Philip Melanchthon, immediately transferred the theory to the educational sphere, where the relationship between the "twofold government" became a topic of academic debate and was incorporated into the curriculum of the Protestant schools and universities. And among second-generation reformers, John Calvin echoed Luther's distinctions, stressing that humanity is under a twofold government (see Institutes 4.20.1, 2.2.13, 3.19.15, and 4.11.1). While these reformers may differ in detail, they nevertheless share a similar Augustinian emphasis: the civil government, in the words of Melanchthon, has its legitimate sphere, the "external matters which even the saints use," while its main job is the "coercion of the bodies of those who are without the Spirit of God." This congruence of ideas had repercussions not just within the religious sphere but for society at large: "The social and political doctrines associated with the Reformation," writes Quentin Skinner, one of our most respected historians of renaissance political theory, "came to be officially recognised by the secular rulers of Germany, England and Scandinavia." We, however, shall limit ourselves to the English connection.

III

But how could the political theory of Luther, whom Henry VIII had recently decreed as a heretic, become official English policy? The answer is, of course, "the King's matter," Henry's divorce and the subsequent split with Rome. The king desperately needed authoritative backing for his moves, and what could be better than the distinctions between secular and sacred jurisdiction culled from the most prestigious of the Church Fathers, St. Augustine? Luther supplied the Tudor propagandists with a blueprint of the Augustinian theory. In addition to the direct influence of Lutheran pamphlets and books surreptitiously imported from the Continent even before the break with Rome, William Tyndale and Robert Barnes provided the first and most important bridge between Wittenberg and London. "Both Tyndale and Barnes studied at Wittenberg University," Carl R. Trueman explains, "and . . . used Luther's writings as the textual basis for significant portions of their own literary output." In The obedience of a Christian man (1528) Tyndale first enunciated the Augustinian-Lutheran distinction between "the kyngdome of god and of christe" and "the temporall regimente." Barnes then added A supplication

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50 Not that the Augustinian influence was new. According to Thomas Reema, "Virtually all English authors after 1300 who wrote about the nature of the Church claimed to be followers of the Bishop of Hippo. They were especially attracted to Augustine's De civitate dei" ("Augustine's 'City of God' in John Wyclif and Thomas More," in Schnaubelt and Van Fleteren, p. 261).

51 Trueman, p. 54. None of Luther's political tracts were translated into English during the sixteenth century, but Melanchthon played a more active role in "the King's matter" and some of his works appeared in English dress—e.g., A civile nosegay where contayned not onlye the office and duty of all magistrates and judges but also of all subjectes, trans. John Goodale (London, 1550). STC 17788.

... unto Henry VIII (1531), in which he makes the Augustinian connection very clear, as can be seen in the opening epigraph of this chapter.\textsuperscript{55}

In an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), Tyndale comprehensively sets forth the theory: "Ye must understand that there be two states or degrees in this world: the kingdom of heaven, which is the regiment of the gospel; and the kingdom of this world, which is the temporal regiment."\textsuperscript{54} Tyndale spells out the believer's twofold responsibilities and in the process prescribes the extent and limits of the jurisdiction of the king on the one hand and of the preachers and bishops on the other:

Moreover when I say, there be two regiments, the spiritual and the temporal; even so I say that every person, baptized to keep the law of God and to believe in Christ, is under both the regiments, and is both a spiritual person and also a temporal, and under the officers of both the regiments; so that the king is as deep under the spiritual officer, to hear out of God's word what he ought to believe, and how to live, and how to rule, as is the poorest beggar in the realm. And even so the spiritual officer, if he sin against his neighbour, or teach false doctrine, is under the king's or temporal correction, how high soever he be.\textsuperscript{59}

The pope has lost all authority and has been replaced by the reformed clergy as representatives of the heavenly kingdom—not as intermediaries between God and the Christian, but as stewards and dispensers of the Word. But as Luther already had made clear, it was part of the temporal ruler's job to ensure that the church and its ministers de facto followed the Word.\textsuperscript{60} The ruler, on the other hand, was not free to live and rule as he or she pleased, but was to be guided by the moral and doctrinal teaching of the Scriptures. Theoretically the church had the right—indeed, the obligation—to correct an errant ruler; but there is no doubt that Tyndale came down much heavier on the side of the obligations of a Christian towards the ruler, as The obedience of a Christian man made abundantly clear. And this is why Henry found the book so useful.\textsuperscript{57}

Here is where we find the greatest dissimilarities with Luther's views. Where Luther distinguished clearly between the two regiments and thereby provided a certain space for secular society, in Tudor polemics this distinction is blurred because the king or queen is not only the ruler of the political commonwealth, but also the head of the Church of England. Right from the start there was therefore more room for absolutist tendencies than in Luther's own thought. The shifting emphasis is clearly connected with the realpolitik of each country. As long as the reformers (whether Continental or English) saw the rulers as God's instrument for the reformation of the church, they supported their regal claims. Yet, if a ruler upheld the opposing faction, his or her authority became disputed.\textsuperscript{58} While Luther had his princely protectors, he nevertheless had to deal with a Holy Roman Emperor who turned out to be resistant to the lures of Lutheranism. As a result, in his old age Luther came to condone the active resistance to the ruler if he (like Charles V) proved unwielding to the Gospel. The English reformers and apologists, on the other hand, saw Henry (and, after him, Edward and Elizabeth) as the guarantor of the break with Rome. Any theoretical subservience to the ruler was preferable to the greater tyranny of the papacy.

\textsuperscript{55} Trueeman writes: "The influence of patristic writers upon the work of Robert Barnes can scarcely be overestimated. His earliest work consists of a collection of quotations from early Christian writers in support of a series of Reformation propositions . . . . His later work, A Supplication, is essentially an expansion of this collection" (p. 53). In an appendix to A Supplication Barnes gathers the citations from the Church Fathers used in the work. Of its 21 pages, Augustinian citations take up 9, while the remaining 11 pages are divided between ten other writers.

\textsuperscript{54} William Tyndale, An Exposition upon the V, VI, VII chapters of Matthew (1533), in Expositions and Notes (Cambridge, 1849), p. 60. As Tyndale followed Luther in his Introduction to Romans, so here he hews very close to Luther's own Commentary on Matthew 5–7, published in the fall of 1522.

\textsuperscript{56} Tyndale, Exposition, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{57} Soon the Tudor propaganda machinery had produced their own officially sanctioned defenses of the break with Rome, such as Edward Fox's De vera differentia regum potestatis et ecclesiasticae (London, 1594), published for a larger audience under Edward VI as The true differens between the regall power and the Ecclesiasticall power (London, 1548). STC 11220. And by another twist of fate, Stephen Gardiner, who as Queen Mary's Chancellor was to become the nemesis of the Protestants, had earlier followed Tyndale's lead with his De vera obedientia oratio (London, 1535). This work was to harry him under Mary since an anonymous translator (most likely John Bale), who also added a lengthy and tendentious preface and a conclusion, published the work in English under the title De vera obedientia en oration (Roane? [London?], 1553). STC 11585.

\textsuperscript{58} As was the case under Mary Tudor. Some of the English Protestants in exile put clear limits on a Christian's obedience to a recusant regent and accused Mary of confusing the two regiments (in much the same way as the Catholics were to complain under Elizabeth); see John Poyntz, A short treatise of politike power (Strasbourgh, 1556). STC 2078.
These absolutist tendencies were increased by the propagandistic use of Eusebius, whose political ideology was to compete with the Augustinian vision. It was natural for Charles V as the latest of a long line of Holy Roman Emperors to appropriate the Cult of Constantine in his battles against the papacy, and as Frances Yates and others have shown, the same strategy was employed (with however lessened justification) by the emerging national states of Europe, England not the least. Henry VIII saw himself as a new Constantine, but under Elizabeth I the imperialist propaganda rose to an even higher pitch. Eusebius was widely read, and his support was enlisted by the Elizabethan propaganda machinery. The main benefit of the imperial claims was to safeguard English autonomy by allowing the English regents to sidestep both papal power and Spanish imperial claims. Being Europe’s only super-power, Spain was ruled by a bona fide Emperor until Charles V abdicated in 1556, and remained a real threat to English sovereignty until the 1588 Armada. Symptomatically, only under Queen Mary, married to Philip II of Spain, does the Tudor imperial propaganda remain comparatively silent.

Nowhere is the propaganda as blatant as in the Acts and Monuments, where as Yates points out, John Foxe blames Elizabeth as the incarnation of the first Christian emperor and in the process makes himself the new Eusebius. Christianity had come to England through the efforts of Constantine, explains Foxe, but the queen is not to be outdone: “Let Constantine be never so great, yet wherein is your noble grace to him inferior?” To underline the connection, Foxe encloses a portrait of the queen within the capital C of “Constantine.” As several scholars have argued, Spenser’s Faerie Queene was another influential disseminator of the imperial propaganda. Yet as we shall see, Spenser’s attitude towards the cult of the queen was ambivalent at best, and he was as much influenced by the political vision of Augustine as by Eusebian imperialism.

The Elizabethan establishment itself vacillated between Eusebius and Augustine. Tudor spokesmen from William Tyndale to Richard Hooker made the theory of the two regents a cornerstone of Anglican policy, yet their confessional adversities kept accusing them of hewing too close to Eusebius. The attack, peaking in the reign of Elizabeth, came from both the left and the right. Catholic recusants and Puritan nonconformists shared a common distrust of royal meddling with the kingdom of God—Catholics because they wanted to reinstate the sovereignty of the pope in ecclesiastical affairs, and Puritans because they believed the magistrate hampered further reform along Presbyterian lines. What is quite amazing is the extent to which the

60 To clarify, by “Eusebius” I mean the imperialist use of Constantine inspired by the writings of the Father, in particular the Life of Constantine with the appended orations. Eusebius was regarded as the authority on the first Christian emperor even if his name was not always mentioned as a source. This imperial “Eusebianism” sometimes merged with the thought of Thomas Erasmus (1524–1583), and the Eusebian and Erastian strands cannot always be disentangled. For my purposes I shall have to disregard these further distinctions, well aware that “Eusebian” will sometimes function metonymically for larger forces.


62 A gauge of Eusebius’ provenance in Tudor England is provided by E.S. Leedham Green, Books in Cambridge Inventories, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986). Leedham Green has transcribed and compiled the 200 inventories (largely consisting of booklists) made for deceased persons within the jurisdiction of Cambridge university between 1535 and 1760. For my part I have studied the 176 inventories made in the sixteenth century in order to see which authors were the most widely owned (and presumably read). Of these 176 inventories, 25% contained at least one copy of Eusebius. This places him fourth among the Church Fathers, almost shoulder to shoulder with Jerome (at 26%) and trailing only Augustine and Chrysostom (both just over 40%). Of Eusebius’ works, the Eclesiastical History was by far the most widely owned (39 out of the 44 inventories that included Eusebius). The Eclesiastical History was “enlarged” by M. Hammer as The ancient ecclesiastical histories (London, 1777). STC 10572. New editions followed in 1585, 1607, 1615, and 1636, the last of which also included a new translation of the Life of Constantine.

63 Yates, p. 42.

64 As cited in Yates, p. 42.


66 In a fine study that nicely complements this chapter Richard F. Hardin traces the Erasmian political influence in Tudor and Jacobean England, arguing convincingly that “Spenser neither believes in James VI of Scotland’s divine rights of kings nor defends absolute rule or the imperial concept of monarchy” (Civil Idolatry: Desacralizing and Monarchy in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1992), p. 80).
alterations were conducted within the parameters of Lutheran theory. Even Cardinal William Allen, the foremost Catholic apologist, talks about the different “regiments,” seemingly oblivious to the fact that the concept was Tyndale’s direct appropriation of Luther’s regimini. The whole religious spectrum from Catholic to Puritan seems to have accepted the basic outline of Luther’s version of the Augustinian theory. The link to the Church Father is indeed the most likely reason for its general acceptance, as each side is anxious to enlist the support of such an important ally.

What Cardinal Allen especially objected to was the “othe of the Queenes souraintie in spiritual regiment, a thing improvable, unreasonable, vnnatural, impossible.” We can understand his concern since committed Catholics, being unable to take the royal oath, were effectively barred from any civic career and risked being executed for treason if they were caught proselytizing. The Cardinal also had a valid point when he looked back on the religious turmoil of the previous decades and wondered if it was such a good idea to tie the faith of the people to the confessional preferences of the ruler.

And it were the pitifullest hazard, and uncertainity of our faith and salvation, that could be, to hang on the Princes will, or the lawes (commonly wholy thereon depending) that there could be imagined no neerer way to religion, then to beleese what our temporal Lord and Maister list. And it is the turpitude of our Nation through the whole world, whereat we blush before strangers that sometimes fall into discourse of such things, that in one mans memorie and since this strange mutation began, we haue had to our Prince, a man [Henry], who abolished the Popes authory by his lawes, and yet in other points kept the faith of his fathers: we haue had a child [Edward], who by the like lawes abolished altogether with the Papacie, the whole ancient religion: we had a woman [Mary], who restored both againe, and sharply punished Protestants: and lastly her Maleste that now is [Elizabeth], who by the like lawes hath long since abolished both againe, and now severely punishteth Catholikes, as the other did Protestants: and at these strange differences within the compass of about 30 yeares.60

Allen was not the only Catholic to advocate the separation of state and church. The Jesuits under Cardinal Bellarmine, according to J.N. Figgis, developed an Augustinian doctrine “of the civil state as being purely secular and having no ends that were not material.” Some Catholics were indeed unwittingly closer to Luther’s political vision than was many a Protestant.

The Presbyterian nonconformists with Thomas Cartwright in the vanguard voiced similar grievances against the Elizabethan settlement. The war of words between Cartwright and Archbishop Whitgift in the 1570s was to a great extent fought over the spheres of state and church. “The godly Magistrate is the head of the common wealth, but not of the church,” argued Cartwright, because “the regiment of the Church is spiritual, and respecteth the conscience, and therefore hath not to doe with ciuill offices, which respect properly the common wealth, and the outwarde, godly, honest, and quiet behauteur [sic].” Richard Hooker came to Whitgift’s rescue with his magisterial defense of the Elizabethan church, The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity. His main targets were Cartwright and the Puritans, but he also takes time to counter the attacks from Allen and other Catholics. In Book 8, dedicated to countering the Puritans’ assertion “That unto no Civill Prince or Governor there may be given such power of Ecclesiastical Dominion as by the Laws of this Land belongeth unto the Supreme Regent thereof,” Hooker defines the two sides of what he considered the same coin: “When we oppose the Church therefore and the Commonwealth in a Christian Societie, we mean by the Commonwealth that societie with relation unto all the publicke affayres thereof, only the matter of true religion excepted. By the Church, the same societie with only reference unto the matter of true religion without any other affayres besides” (Laws 8.1.5). He meets the Puritan objection “that the Fathers do oftentimes mention the Commonwealth and the Church of God by way of opposition” with the counterargument: “Can the same thing be opposite unto it selfe?” (Laws 8.1.5). This made sense to him since “Saints and Citizens are one and

67 See, e.g., William Allen, An apologie and true declaration (Henault, 1581), fol. 40v–41r. STC 369. Although the OED traces the first English occurrence of “regiment” in our sense to John Gower’s Confessio Amantis of 1390, it also notes that it was “very common c. 1550–1680,” no doubt as a result of the dissemination of Lutheran political theory.

68 Allen, fol. 10v.

69 Even if the Elizabethan government tried to distinguish between the two regiments by executing recusants for treason against the state rather than for heresy against the church (which had been the policy under Queen Mary), the end result was of course the same. Many more were burned for heresy during Mary’s brief reign, however, than were executed for treason during Elizabeth’s 45 years in office.

70 Allen, fol. 54v.


the same people" (Laws 8.1.6). Although he recognizes the distinction between the church and the commonwealth, thereby maintaining the scaffolding of Augustine's mature political theory, Hooker nevertheless approaches the more Eusebian position of the young Augustine in his adherence to a "Christian Society."

The queen's position as head of the church remained a touchy question throughout her reign, as is especially evident in Thomas Bilson's The true difference betwixt the religious sects of this commonwealth and the church of England (1585), the officially sanctioned answer to Allen's charges against the Elizabethan settlement. Following Tyndale closely, Bilson distinguishes between the offices of prince and preacher:

The spiritual regiment which Christ hath over the faithfull in his Church is infinitely before the temporal regimen of Princes over their subjects. . . . As in spiritual perfection and consolation the preacher excelleth the Prince by many degrees, God having appointed Preachers not Princes to be the sowers of his seed, messenger[s] of his grace, stewarde[s] of his mysteries: so for externall power and authority to compell and punish, which is the point that we stand on, God hath preferred the Prince before the Priest, so long as the Prince commandedeth that which God alloweth. (True difference 219).

Bilson is clear about where to draw the line: "We give Princes no power to devise or invent new religions, to alter or change Sacraments, to decide or debate doubts of faith, to disturb or infringe the canons of the church" (True difference 240). These prerogatives belonged to the spiritual regimen, in which sphere the queen stood on equal terms with her subjects.

There is some evidence that Elizabeth herself felt strongly about this issue, despite an apparent endorsement of the imperialist program. The 39 Articles of 1562, approved by the queen, is quite explicit in spelling out her limits. Where King Edward, following Henry VIII's example, in the 42 Articles of 1552 had boldly proclaimed that "The King of England is Supreme head in earth, next under Christ, of the Church of England, and Ireland," the corresponding Elizabethan article is much more guarded: "The Queense Maiestie hath the chiefe power in this Realme of England, and other her domin-

ions, vnto whom the chiefe government of all estates of this Realme, whether they be Ecclesiastical or not, in all causes, doth appertayne, and is not, nor ought to be subject to any foraine jurisdiction." To this has been added an explanation, completely lacking in the Edwardian Articles:

Where we attribute to the Queenes Maiestie, the chiefe government, by whiche titles we understannde the myndes of some slanderous folkes to be offended, we geue not to our Princes, the ministerring eyther of Gods word, or of Sacramentes, the which thynge, the Injunctions also lately set forth by Elizabeth our Queene, doth most playnely testifie: But that only prerogative, whiche we see to haue ben geuen alwayes to all godly Princes in holy scriptures, by God himselfe, that is, that they shoulde rule all estates & degrees, committed to their charge by God, whether they be Ecclesiastical, or no, and restraine with the cuill sword, the stubborne and eyll doers.76

Although Head of the Church, Elizabeth was not allowed to trespass into the domain of the clergy. As John Guy, citing A Declaration of the Queen's Proceedings, points out: "Elizabeth denied herself power 'to define, decide or determine any article or point of the Christian faith and religion.' . . . As a matter of principle as much as to sidestep the Presbyterian lobby in pulpit and parliament, she upheld the separation of church and state in practice, ruling both but through different channels of administration." The Queen's main task, in the wording of the Articles, was that of restraining "with the civil sword, the stubborne and eyll doers." Or as Augustine himself had expressed it: "control of the wicked within the bonds of a certain earthly peace."77

It is important to stress these restrictions, spelled out in the key doctrinal document of the Elizabethan settlement. The fear of papal intervention made the establishment fall back on the time-honored language of imperialism, yet it also acknowledged that radical Eusebianism did not square with central tenets of the reformation. What Ullmann has to say about the declining relevance of papal ideology is equally true for the imperialist extreme: "It was no longer faith in the function of the pope [or of the emperor] standing mid-way between God and man, but faith in the Bible, that is, faith in the individual's

74 Whigfield had countered with a similar argument: "In divers places, [Cartwright] maketh such a distinction betwixt the church of Christ, & a Christian common wealth that hath a Christian magistrate, as he would betwixt the church & a Heathenish common wealth, that hath a persecuting and an vnbeteuing magistrate" (p. 695).
75 The 42 Articles of 1552 (London, 1558); article 58, "Of Civile magistrates." STC 10034.2.
76 The 39 Articles of 1562 (London, 1564); article 56, "Of Civile Magistrates." STC 10038.5.
78 De Genesi ad litteram 9.9.14, as cited in Markus, Sacellum, p. 96.
own ability to interpret the Bible. When that stage was reached, the
days of the papal-hierocratic [or imperial-hierocratic] government be-
came shorter and shorter." 79 It was rather the political vision of the
mature Augustine, with its clear limits surrounding the secular sphere,
that conformed to the Protestant emphasis on the limited human co-
operation in matters of faith: it was the redemptive work of Christ,
unaided by human effort (imperial, papal, or otherwise), that
brought about salvation. These caveats are important when we now
turn to The Faerie Queene. Although the work contains its fair share of
Eusebian imperialism, this influence is strongly tempered by an Au-
 gustinian political outlook.

IV

The Augustinian presence is particularly evident in Book 1 of The
Faerie Queene. As C.A. Patrides puts it, “The mighty panorama in St.
Augustine’s the City of God of the time-bound conflict between the
‘cities’ of centripetal love and centrifugal self-love became, for
Spenser as for Milton, the ultimate foundation of their respective al-
egorical theologies.” 80 Spenser was in no way novel, but simply followed
the lead of Ariosto and Tasso. The City of God, according to Andrew
Fichter, provides “the two cities that oppose each other in Renaissance
epic.” 81 Du Bellay’s Roman poetry, translated and imitated by Spenser,
was another transmitter of this Augustinian topos. Yet even if Spenser
encountered the topos in a number of other sources, he was almost
certainly familiar with its origin as well.

The two cities correspond to the allegorical centers of Book 1: the
House of Pride and the House of Holiness (together with its adjunct
the New Jerusalem). 82 Just as the tower of Babel typifies Augustine’s

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79 Ulmann, pp. 128-29.
27.
82 The similarity between Augustine’s cities and Spenser’s houses is pointed out but left
undevolved in A.C. Hamilton, The Structure of Allegory in “The Faerie Queene” (Oxford:
Queene”: A Critical Commentary on Books I and II (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press,
1977), p. 42; Isabel Rivers, Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry (Lon-
al. (Toronto and Buffalo: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1990), pp. 299 (“Fall and Restoration of
Man”), 303 (“Fathers, Latin”), and 441 (“Lucifera”).

83 All quotations from The Faerie Queene (FQ) are taken from Edmund Spenser, The
Faerie Queene, ed. Thomas P. Roche Jr., and C. Patrick O’Donnell, Jr. (New Haven and
London: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), with references to book, canto, and stanza given in the
text.
84 Spenser follows Augustine almost verbatim in a sonnet prefixed to The Commonwealth
and Government of Venice. “The antique Babel, Empresse of the East,/ Upraised her build-
inges to the threatened skie;/ And Second Babell tyrant of the West,/ Her ayr ye Towera
upraised much more high” (The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser, ed.
85 The three Saracen brothers of Spenser’s epic, for example, are a remnant from the
Italian models, in which the “city of man” was inhabited by Moslems (the Ottoman Turks
remained a serious threat to Christian Europe throughout the sixteenth century). With
European society—both sacred and secular—having been compressed into a single “city
of God” during the Middle Ages, the “city of man” had to be found outside Christian
Europe altogether.
Papacy with Babylon and the Pope with antichrist. The Avignonese “Captive” brought the criticism to its head, and even Petrarch joined the chorus. But it was Luther that completed the equation by identifying the Protestant church with the heavenly City. John Bale then transplanted this dualism to English soil with The Image of both churches (1548?). The provocative book displays an odd Protestant mixture of Revelation and the City of God:

Herein is the true Christen church ... in her right fashioned colours described. So is the proud church of hypocrites, the rose coloured whore, the paramour of Antichrist, and the sinfull sinagoge of Satan, in her lust proportion depainted, ... And after the true opinion of saint Austin, euyther we are citizens in the new Hierusalem with Jesus Christ, or els in the old supersticious Babylon with antichrist the vicar of Satan.

It only remained for John Foxe to saturate the English consciousness with this scheme by incorporating it into his Acts and Monuments. Spenser was therefore thoroughly up to date when he made poetic capital of Augustine’s two cities: Una typifies not simply the universal church, but also its contemporary Reformed incarnation; while Duessa is not just another metonymic extension of the House of Pride, but also the papal “rose coloured whore, the paramour of Antichrist.”

Yet Spenser deals not only with the eschatological dimensions of the Augustinian cities, but also discusses their political and civic dimensions through the cities of Cleopolis and the New Jerusalem. By separating the argument into two contrasting pairs, Spenser not only portrays the cosmic battle between the cities of God and the devil (his main interest in Book I), but he also shows the interaction between the civic state and these two other cities. Seeing the heavenly city from the Mount of Contemplation, Redcrosse in canto 10 distinguishes it from Cleopolis, the civic state:

With the help of a characteristic pun, Spenser distinguishes between the New Jerusalem and Cleopolis. Following Augustine, who had contrasted the “earthly peace” of the human city with the “eternal peace” of the heavenly city, he calls the new Jerusalem a city of “eternal peace” (FQ 1.10.55), while Cleopolis is “for earthly frame, / The fairest peece, that eye beholden can” (FQ 1.10.59). If the “peece” of the latter citation puns on the “earthly peace” that for Augustine was the hallmark of the city of man (in its positive sense), then perhaps Redcrosse’s vision of the New Jerusalem from the Mount of Contemplation is an allusion to the city of God, since Augustine had made the erroneous yet influential etymological interpretation of Jerusalem as “the vision of peace” (De Civ. Dei 19.11). Yet what are we to make of the fact that Gloriana, the ruler of Spenser’s earthly city, is “heavenly borne” (FQ 1.10.59), a Eusebian intrusion into the very stanzas that expound the Augustinian dichotomy between the earthly and heavenly societies? And not only that, she also grants “glory” (FQ 1.10.59) to her retainers, for Augustine a dubious practice within the earthly city. How do Spenser’s Augustinian distinctions square with the Eusebian cult of the queen, a stance that on the face of it fuses sacred and secular? Is Spenser making the
Fairy Queen (and thereby Queen Elizabeth) a ruler with divine prerogatives? Is she dispensing heavenly glory?92

The immediate context of Book 1, canto 10, speaks against such clear-cut pronouncements. When Contemplation continues his instruction of Redcrosse, he drastically modifies the glory just promised. The fealty to Gloriana, however necessary, is bought at a terrible price: "Thenceforth the suit of earthly conquests shone, / And wash thy hands from guilt of bloody field: / For blood can nought but sin, & wars but sorrowes yield" (FQ 1.10.60). We are reminded that Redcrosse's "glory" has been won in great part within the House of Pride and in company with Duessa.93 No, the glory of Redcrosse will one day receive in the New Jerusalem will not depend on his service to Cleopatra: "Worthy wretch (quoth he) of so great grace, / how dare I think of such glory to attain?" (FQ 1.10.62). To enter the city of God, as stanza 57 has already made clear, he must instead be "purged from sinfull guilt, / With precious bloud" of "that vsnspotted lam, / That for the sinnes of all the world was kilt." Yet neither is Redcrosse to follow the Anabaptists or the Donatists by withdrawing from society. As citizen of two kingdoms, he has dual and compatible responsibilities. When he begs Contemplation not to send him back to the service of Gloriana, he is admonished not to make a shortcut to the heavenly city by "forgoing that royall maides bequeathed care" (FQ 1.10.63). Serving Cleopatra, even with its "guilt of bloody field," is in one sense part of his pilgrimage towards the New Jerusalem.

The glory of Gloriana is further tempered by the implicit comparison between Cleopatra and the House of Pride, where "glorie vaine" (FQ 1.4.15) is flaunted for all the wrong reasons. As Spenser follows Augustine in distinguishing between the heavenly and the earthly church, he separates Lucifera's infernal city from Gloriana's earthly city. Yet he at the same time invites us to compare the two by stressing their similarities, both cities being ruled by virgin queens in the midst

d of courtiers hungry for fame.94 The Augustinian warning is clear: even if Cleopatra has its legitimate place in the divine dispensation by administering an earthly peace, it turns into Babylon whenever it starts building towers toward heaven. The description of Lucifera in FQ 1.4.8–10, therefore, is in part Spenser's answer to Cardinal Allen's accusations of civic idolatry. Yes, he seems to be saying, if the queen actually takes her cult as more than exaggerated rhetoric, she, like Phæbus in FQ 1.4.9, is only presuming. Yet Spenser at the same time aims a political punch directly at Allen and the Catholics by making Duessa, the papal whore, an honored guest at the House of Pride. With Protestant glee he turns the medieval identification of the papacy with the city of God upside down by depicting how it has instead fallen in with the evil city in its bid for earthly power and glory. What is only an oblique warning to Elizabeth against exaggerated Eusebianism is an open indictment of papalism.

Despite the religious imagery, the poet's motive in blazoning Gloriana, like the official cult itself, is largely political. To bolster English morale through hyperbole was a strategy of survival in the decade of the Armada. Only in such a political context does the Elizabethan rhetoric make sense. To take the flattery of Spenser's Proems at face value as a religious statement would surely be misguided.95 At the very least we have to admit that like so many Elizabethan propagandists, the poet is caught vacillating between Eusebius and Augustine.

If we neglect the political tensions between the Eusebian and the Augustinian vision within Tudor society, we are apt to arrive at too simple a picture of the role of Elizabeth I. This has been true of some one-sided research into the cult of the queen, and especially of Spenser's participation in it. Frances Yates' important and influential studies have led some to forget the context of Spenser's encomium of Elizabeth. Thomas Cain in particular has made some exaggerated claims about the poet's mission:

That Elizabeth bridges the potentially opposed realms of heaven and earth is an idealistic conception essential to Spenser's encomium as presented in 1590. By defining a real monarch, it avoids the traditional Augustinian dualism between the Cities of God and This World that would set heaven and England at odds and that would place a low valuation on human achievement in the service of the state.96

92 Earlier critics have answered that question differently. While Rashbourn, for example, thought that "this glory, symbolized by the Fairy Queen herself, is . . . an earthly glory" (p. 33), Jan Karel Kouwenhoven has more recently argued that "Spenser's statement that the Faery Queen represents glory and Arthur magnificence in particular means that his poem is about the temporal manifestations of God" (Apparent Narrative as Thematic Metaphor [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988], p. 20). Kouwenhoven's disagreement with Rashbourn is not quite as radical, however; if we stress the "temporal" in his citation, we may indeed find ourselves within Augustine's civic city.

93 Earlier in Book 1 "glory" has been mentioned ten times (the references are to canto and stanza): 1.27; 2.37; 4.9; 4.15; 4.39; 4.42; 5.1; 5.14; 6.20; 7.46. Seven of these occurrences are connected with the House of Pride or Duessa.

95 See Hackett, esp. pp. 78–83, and 139–44.
96 Cain, p. 53.
In addition to the all too common simplistic view of the "opposed realms" of "the traditional Augustinian dualism," Cain claims that Queen Elizabeth is "part of the fixed order of eternity" and "a celestial Idea that sheds meaning upon the milieu of experience and history"; indeed, she is "the principle impelling man to realize his proper rational nature." 97 These lyrical rhapsodies, presented without a hint of a qualification, make the most deferential Elizabethan panegyric pale in comparison. Yet should Elizabethan propagandist rhetoric be the norm for modern criticism? The issue boils down to Cain's wholesale identification of Elizabeth I with Una, which in turn leads to an equally rigid equation that "makes the queen identical with the True Church." 98 I am not holding the equally untenable position that the two have nothing in common; yet a more rigorous reading of the Legend of Holiness is called for, one that looks at contexts and makes necessary distinctions. To better focus the problem, let us look at two other characters in the poem.

Several decades ago S.K. Heninger convincingly showed that Orgoglio represented Philip II of Spain, yet he also made clear that the political was only one of several interpretative levels, and not the most important at that. 99 Similarly, Spenser himself in the Mercilla episode of Book 5 makes the clear identification of Duessa with Mary Stuart. Yet to insist that Duessa throughout Book 1 stands for the Queen of Scots would make short shrift of any coherent reading of the book. These are obvious points that we all agree on. Yet when it comes to Elizabeth, these strictures somehow do not seem to apply anymore. The reason for this is the recent urge to see the queen in any and every female (and sometimes male) hero of the poem. I concede the general relevance of this thesis, but it has sometimes been driven ad absurdum, and especially with Una, where every detail of her quest is explicated in sixteenth-century political terms. A close reading of the text reveals instead a more basic panorama into which England is fitted as part of a larger whole. If Una represents the Anglican church

(with Elizabeth I as its head), that is only because she on a more fundamental level stands for the universal church, born in Eden and striving to be united in the regained paradise with her true head, Christ.

The beginning and end of the Legend of Holiness tie together the two levels. When Una is first presented, she can be seen as both the universal church and as its Anglican incarnation:

So pure an innocent, as that same lambe,
She was in life and every vertuous lore,
And by descent from Royall lineage came
Of ancient Kings and Queenes, that had of yore
Their scepters streight from East to Westerne shore,
And all the world in their subjection held;
Till that infernal feend with foule vprore
Forwasted all their land, and them expelled:
Whom to suenge, she had this Knight from far compeld. (FQ 1.1.5)

We are expected to recognize Una as the lady of the St. George legend, with its nationalistic implications, while Spenser tones down the theological connotations by making her the descendant of "ancient Kings and Queenes," rather than of the single royal couple that later is to define her as the daughter of Adam and Eve. The implied juxtaposition of Una's universal reign with Duessa's more limited Roman lineage (in FQ 1.2.22) no doubt points to the contemporary strife between the papacy and the reformed church. It was a commonplace of Protestant polemic to see the Roman confession as a pseudo-church gone wrong during the Middle Ages, while the Protestants were heirs of the original church with an ancestry going back not just to the apostolic age but to Eden. 100 Yet this does not necessarily imply a Christian worldwide empire. Luther for one had contrasted the papalist claims with the rule of the worldwide church found within different political systems, some of which were not even Christian: "And the same Christianitie is not onely vnder the Romysse Churche, or Pope, but dispersd throughout the whole worlde . . . So that vnder the Pope, Turkes, Perses, Tatters, and euerwhere the Christianitie is dispersd bodely. But congregated spiritually in one Gospel and faythe,

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97 Cain, pp. 67, 72, and 73.
98 Cain, p. 60. Cain admits that "recurrent figures in The Faerie Queene do not maintain the allegorical senses at all points," and that Una therefore does not "consistently figure forth the queen" (p. 71). Yet for Cain this only strengthens the encomium: whenever something blameworthy is said about Una, the queen is not intended, while everything positive has Elizabeth as the target. This view can hardly be a constructive basis for making useful distinctions, since it knows the answers before asking the questions.
100 As John Calvin, in a representative statement, asserted: "The universall or Catholike Church is the whole multitude of them, who from the beginning of the world, have beleue in Christ, that now do beleue, and shall beleue to the worlde end" (Aphorisms of Christian Religion [London, 1596], p. 114). STC 4374. Or as Melancthon had stated: "Una est Ecclesia Dei perpetua unde usque ad Adam" (cited in Peter Franckel, Testimonia Patrum [Geneva: Droz, 1961], p. 62).
wnder one heade which is Christe."101 After all, neither the Roman
empire nor the papacy was universal. Only the church, with Christ as
its head, had members spread over the then known world.

Una's knight is portrayed as St. George, the patron saint of England,
right from the start (although he does not know it himself until canto
10), while his "infernal feed," the dragon, on one level stands for the
Spanish threat, a reading that is corroborated by oblique references to
the Armada during the dragon-fight (i.e., FQ 1.11.14). Spenser con-
tinues to allude to the contemporary situation throughout the book and
wraps it up with a betrothall between Redcrosse and Una that John
Dixon was not the only Elizabethan to read as both a theological and a
political statement: "The Church and the Lambe Christe united by god
himselfe. a happie knotte whereby peace hath begune Continentalised 39
year."102 Yet Dixon unites more than the text allows. Despite the heav-
ely analogs, Spenser stresses that it is not the heavenly wedding we are
witnessing in canto 12. Redcrosse is only betrothed and has to return
to further service in the earthly city of Geopolis, politely declining the
request of Una's father to remain in "ease and euerlastinge rest" (FQ
1.12.17). The New Jerusalem has not yet descended to earth.103 Only
with the last few lines of the Mutabililitie cantos does Spenser envision
(in a hazy future) "that Sabaoths sight."

If Spenser at the beginning and end of his Legend of Holiness ties
in the contemporary present, at other points he clearly has a wider
perspective. When Una relates her own story to Arthur in canto 7,
spenser presents her as the daughter of Adam and Eve:

The forlorne Maiden, whom your eyes haue seene
The laughing stocke of fortunes mockeries,
Am th: only daughter of a King and Queene,
Whose parents deare, whilst equall destines
Did runne about, and their felicities

104 Luther, Articles, sig. K ii. Augustine, in the De Civ. Dei 4.15, had likewise contrasted
the limited expansion of the Roman empire with the universality of Christendom; see
Dougherty, p. 211.
105 As cited in Cain, p. 59.
106 As Merlin, echoing Christ's words in Matthew 24: 6, prophesies: "But yet the end is
not" (FQ 3.5.50). Joseph Wittreich comments on Merlin's words: "Here he quickens millen-
ian expectations and dampens apocalyptic fervor..." Spenser's objective in The Faerie
Queene is not to further the Tudor's messianic pretensions but to scrutinize them. In
the process, he resists the expectations of his own time by distancing apocalypse into the
context, see also The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature, ed. C.A.
Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1984), and Bauckham.

The favorable heaven did not envy,
Did spread their rule through all the territories,
Which Phison and Euphrates floweth by,
And Gehons golden waues doe wash continually.

Till that their cruel cursed enemy,
An huge great Dragon horrible in sight,
Bred in the loathly lakes of Tartarys,
With murdrous raine, and devouring might.
Their kingdome spolied, and country wasted quight:
Themselves, for feare into his lawes to fall,
He forse to castle strong to take their flight,
Where fast embard in mightie brasen wall,
He has them now foure yeres besieged to make them thrall.

(FQ 1.7.43–44)

A dragon has driven Una's parents away from Eden, and "fast embark
in mightie brasen wall, / He has them now foure yeres besieged
to make them thrall." This presentation has only an indirect connection
with the contemporary situation; instead, we are given a fairly tradi-
tional Christian view of the redemption drama.

Augustine had delineated a historical progression in four steps: be-
fore the law (ante legem), under the law (sub leges), under grace (sub
gratia), and in peace (in pace).104 This scheme informs these stanzas
and indeed a large section of Book 1. The Elizabethan reader had easy
access to this progression even without going back to Augustine. It
had become common property long before the sixteenth century.105
and the reformers adopted it for their own ends. One of the more
popular presentations was in the widely read Carion's Chronicles.
Despite its title this was largely the work of Philip Melanchthon, who kept
adding to it until his death in 1560. The whole structure of the Chron-
icles, like so many similar works, was based on Augustine's fourfold
scheme:

The worlde shall stande syx thousand yeres and after shall it falle.
Two thousand yeares wythout the Lawe.
Two thousand yeares in the lawe.
Two thousand yeares the tyme of Christ.
And ye these yeres be not accomplished, our synne shall be the
cause, whyche are great and many.106

104 See e.g. De Divin. Q. 61.7; Exp. Rom. 13–18; De Trin. 4.4.7; Ench. 31.118.
105 Thomas Aquinas, among others, had passed along the scheme in his Summa theologi-
ica 2.1 (questions 91, 95, 106–07).
The age of the world was supposed to reach six thousand years (unless foreshortened by sin): four thousand from Adam to Christ,\textsuperscript{107} and two thousand from Christ to the End. As it had for Augustine, this made the fourfold scheme correspond to the seven days of creation: the first three ages of 2000 years each equal the six first days of creation, while the fourth, in peace, merges with God’s rest on the seventh day.\textsuperscript{108}

Much of stanza 44 of canto 7 falls into place in this perspective. The “four yeeres” of the last line allude to the period from the Fall to Christ,\textsuperscript{109} while the “brassen wall” is a reference to the Old Testament (OT) law that was both a protection and a prison until the period of grace under Christ. As Paul expressed it in the Epistle to the Galatians 3:23: “Before faith came, we were kept under the Law, and shut up unto the faith, which shulde afterwarde be reuelleed.”\textsuperscript{110} When Una and Redcrosse, about to engage the dragon, approach the brazen tower, Una notices on top of the tower “the watchman warying tidings glad to hear” (FQ 1.11.3). This reference to Isaiah 52 underlines the OT background, since the passage was seen as a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah.\textsuperscript{111} A historical perspective beginning with Adam stretches be-

\textsuperscript{107} The 1560 Geneva Bible, e.g., contains “A Perfit Image of the Yeres and Times from Adam unto Christ, proued by the Scriptures,” which finds that “from Adam unto Christ 1934 yeeres, six moneths and ten dayes,” while John Foxe settleth for the round figure of 4000 years. For a study of the apocalyptic context of the computations, see Katherine R. Firch, The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530–1645 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), esp. pp. 20–21, 93–94 (Foxe), and 182 (Raleigh). Also see C.A. Patrides, Promises and Motifs in Renaissance Thought and Literature (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 52–85.

\textsuperscript{108} Also John Bale transmitted the conflated four- and sevenfold schemes in his Comedy consarranging thre lyes (1549). See Witrerich (Spenser Encyclopaedia, p. 47), who applies both these schemes to The Faerie Queene with its six completed books and a seventh that yearns towards “that Sabbath sight” (FQ 7.8.2). While Witrerich corroborates my conclusions by seeing periods of “nature, bondage, and grace” depicted throughout the poem, his examples in Book 1 are different from mine. Maren-Sofie Rastvig sees the same sevenfold pattern in The Shepherds Calendar: “The Shepherds Calendar: A Structural Analysis,” Renaissance and Modern Studies 13 (1960): 49–75.


\textsuperscript{111} “The voice of thy watchmen shall be heard: they shall lift vp their voyce, and shout together: for they shall se eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring againe Zion” (Isaias 52:7–8). The marginal gloss in the Geneva Bible amplifyes: “The Prophets which are they watchmen, shal publish this thyn deliverrance: this was accomplished under Christ.” See Kaske p. 631, note.

dore us, culminating in a dragon-fight that reenacts Christ’s victory at Calvary over “the great Dragon, or captayn of all the unfaithful sort, that olde crooked serpent which decayed Adam,” to quote John Bale.\textsuperscript{112} This philosophy of history, glimpsed in the biblical narrative and expounded by Augustine, was part of a medieval heritage that had been taken over by the Reformation. Calvary, according to this tradition, was the hub, the “All-circling point”\textsuperscript{113} from which spread the spokes of redemption history. In a mythical typology that connected the first and the last book of the Bible with its central gospels, Eden was seen to prefigure both Calvary and the New Jerusalem. Bale could therefore connect the river flowing out of the heavenly city in Revelation 22 with “the swete flood of Eden,” and the trees lining the river with “the tree of lyfe . . . in the myddes of Paradise at the beginnyng,”\textsuperscript{114} while John Donne assimilated Eden with Calvary: “We thynke that Paradise and Calvarte, / Christes Crosse, and Adams tree, stood in one place.”\textsuperscript{115} Throughout canto 11 with its dragon-fight, healing trees, and reviving water, Spenser taps into this myth by conflating Genesis, Calvary, and the Apocalypse.\textsuperscript{116} And the earlier cantos, leading up to the dragon-fight, can similarly be read on different historical planes: Una as the church is depicted both in an OT, a New Testament (NT), and in a contemporary/apocalyptic embodiment.\textsuperscript{117} The subdivision of the OT into a period without law and a period under the law provides the structure for the cantos that depict Una’s wanderings “as in exile, / In wildernessse and wastfull desarts strayd, / To seke her knight” (FQ 1.3.3). Augustine had expressed the progression of the Church in The Enchiridion:

[God’s people] existed at first before the law; then under the law, which was given by Moses; then under grace, which was first made manifest in the coming

\textsuperscript{112} Bale, sig. e viii.


\textsuperscript{114} Bale, sigs. O viii’ and P vii’.


\textsuperscript{116} It is clearly seen in stanza 46, to give only one example, where the “apples rotie red” and the “pure vermilion” juxtapose images from the Passion and the Fall.

\textsuperscript{117} Una, watching Redcrosse’s fight “from farre” (FQ 1.11.32), not only plays her part as the Lady of the St. George legend or as the woman clothed with the sun in the apocalyptic dragon-battle, but also reenacts the role of the faithful women who remained at Calvary (after the men had fled) and then were the first to come to the open grave: “And many women there were [at the crucifixion], beholding him a farre off, which had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him” (Matthew 28:55; my emphasis).
of the Mediator. Not, indeed, that this grace was absent previously, but, in harmony with the arrangements of the time, it was veiled and hidden. (Ench. 51.118) 118

In addition to glossing Una as the Church and as a symbol of grace, this passage also provides an exegesis as good as any of her much-discussed veil. In canto 3 Spenser investigates the period sub lege, while in canto 6 the emphasis is on a society living before or outside the mosaic law. Una’s wanderings in the deserts of these cantos is an appropriate and traditional symbol for the history of the church. From Abraham’s journey to the promised land until the Babylonian exile ("exile" in FQ 1.3.3 is a carefully chosen word), deserts form a vital part of the biblical narrative. The most important was of course the exodus from Egypt under Moses, a desert wandering that was habitually seen as a symbol for the whole OT era. 119

The sub lege character of canto 3 is most graphically portrayed in Abessa, carrying her Hagarite pot in the shade of mount Sinai. 120

Vnder the steep foot of a mountaine hore; ... 
A damzell spyde slow footing her before, 
That on her shoulders sad a pot of water wore. (FQ 1.3.10)

Paul had explicated the story of Sarah and Hagar in Genesis 21 as an allegory of law and grace: "For these mothers are the two Testaments, the one which is Agar of mounte Sina, which gendreth vnto bondage, (For Agar or Sina is a mountaine in Arabia, & it answereth to Jerusalem which now is [i.e., to the Jews]) ... But Jerusalem, which is above, is fre" (Galatians 4: 24–26). Paul identifies Hagar with the OT law given at Sinai and thereby with the Jewish religion, while Sarah (with her son Isaac) symbolizes the promises given to Abraham, and thus the faith of the Christian church. The same holds true for Una and Abessa. Throughout this canto Spenser, in Luther’s words, "shows the difference between Hagar and Sarah, that is, between the synagogue and the church, or between the Law and the Gospel." 121 The one difference from Paul is that Spenser (with Luther) also includes the legalistic Romanists in his depiction of the synagogue. 122 This doublevision is in line with the general tendency to see the periods before and after Christ in tandem, and is encouraged by the reformers’ insistence that grace and law were universal concepts that could not be equated with the old or new testaments. 123 Abessa therefore represents the legalistic impulse throughout history, while Una stands for the covenant of grace both in biblical and Tudor times.

Canto 6 repeats canto 3. Una roamis the “deserts” in search of Redcrosse, when she is suddenly threatened by danger. After the allegorical core (1.3.10–25 and 1.6.7–34) Archimago appears, and furious battles with Sansloy bring both cantos to a close. These parallels underline the complementary nature of the allegory. As the veiled Una in canto 3 is contrasted with a sung grace living sub lege, so here she is confronted with the satyrs, living outside the law altogether. The satyrs have traditionally been interpreted as representing pagans living according to natural religion, and the emphasis has most often been upon their innocence, even “a human perfectability untainted by original sin.” 124 The first part of this interpretation I believe to be correct,

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118 Luther’s lectures on Galatians, in Luther’s Works, ed. E. Pelican (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958) 56: 449.
120 “The old Testament,” says Calvin, “is taken two manner of wyues: sometymes to signifie the Legall covenant, sometymes to signifie the covenant of grace as it was established with Abraham & his posterity” (Aphorismes, p. 41).
121 See Kathryn Wallis, “Abessa and the Lion: The Faerie Queene, 1.3.1–4.2,” Spencer Studies 5 (1964): 4–50. Unfortunately, despite Wallis’s conclusive affiliation of Abessa with Hagar (for the pot on her shoulder, see Geneva 21: 14), the old but unconvincing identification with the Semarian woman still lingers on (the even more unlikely allusion to Rebecca at Haran has at least been dropped): see “Abessa” in The Spencer Encyclopedia, p. 3.
mans contrasts the Christians with the law-less Gentiles (as well as with the law-abiding Jews, so here Spenser contrasts the faith of the true church with classical pagan society, and the picture is not a pretty one.

But what of the Greek achievements in philosophy and the arts? Is not Spenser supposed to stand in the forefront of renaissance humanism? Yes, but in Book 1 he is talking about faith. As he is wary of mixing freely the political and the spiritual realm, so he distinguishes the realms of reason and revelation.

Yet Sylvanus is not the whole picture: we must also take Satyrane into account. Satyrane’s allegorical function has been subject to a plethora of interpretations, ranging from a faculty of the soul or a part of Redcrosse’s psyche to external identifications such as primitive Christianity or Henry VIII. But if the satyrs represent pagan civilization, a more natural interpretation would be to see Satyrane as the acme of such a society, in the form of those Greek philosophers who had arrived at a position that was as close to revealed truth as was humanly possible: the belief in a supreme deity and a system of ethics not unlike the one given the church. Had not Socrates been likened to a satyr by Alcibiades in the Symposium (215d–222b)? The Greek names of Satyrane’s ancestors—Thamus (“passion”), Labryde (“turbulent,” “greedy”), and Therion (“wild beast”)—reveal both the geographical setting and the ethical morass from which he rises. His name, like Greek philosophy, has spread over the world (FQ.1.6.39); and coming into contact with divine Truth, he (in the same way that Plato, according to an persistent tradition, had sat at the feet of Moses) learns Una’s “discipline of faith and verite” (FQ.1.6.31). In return Satyrane brings Una out of the sylva, the place “where wild animal nature and passion dominate.” But ultimately he cannot take Redcrosse’s place: “But she all vowd onto the Redcrosse knight, / His wandering peril closely did lament, / Ne in new acquaintance could delight” (FQ.1.6.32). Battling Sansioly, who was the one to lead Una


129 See FQ.3.10.48 and 3.11.55; Daphneida 11. 158–61; The Teares of the Muses 2. 267–72; Virgils Gnaul 2. 177–78; Belvedee vision 12.


131 As Servius, the medieval commentator on the Aeniad, explicates the term. Also Augustine in Conf. 10.35.36 describes the “imensa silva” in similar language, echoed by Dante’s “selva oscura” (Inferno I, 2) as well as by Petrarch (see Sara Sturm-Maddox, Petrarch’s Laureate (University Park: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 84–85, and Nelson, p. 159).
"away into a forest wild" (FQ 1.6.3), Satyrane’s power is strained, and we are left in suspense as to the final outcome.\textsuperscript{138} That may be as it should, since the Saracen’s name ("without law") speaks of Satyrane’s own origin.\textsuperscript{139} One thing is clear: against the dragon he would have done no better than the knights in FQ 1.7.45 that became its "pithy pray"; only Redcrosse can be victorious against such an enemy. In the natural sphere, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle have their value, but they cannot be relied upon in matters of salvation.

For Augustine the fourfold scheme was seen not only as historical periods, but also as stages in the religious development of the individual, from a state of ignorance via the knowledge of the law to the freedom of grace and the final beatitude in peace. He puts it most succinctly in The Enchiridion:

When, sunk in the darkest depth of ignorance, man lives according to the flesh, undisturbed by any struggle of reason, this is the first state. Afterwards, when the law has come the knowledge of sin, and the Spirit of God has not yet interposed His aid, man, striving to live according to the law, is thwarted in his efforts and falls into conscious sin, and so, being overcome of sin, becomes its slave … This is man’s second state. But if God has regard to him, and inspires him with faith in God’s help, and the Spirit of God begins to work in him, then the mightier power of love strives against the power of the flesh; and although there is still in the man’s own nature a power that fights against him (for his disease is not completely cured), yet he lives the life of the just by faith, and lives in righteousness so far as he does not yield to evil lust, but conquers it by the love of holiness. This is the third state of a man of good hope; and he who by steadfast piety advances in this course, shall attain at last to peace, that peace which, after this life is over, shall be perfected in the repose of the spirit, and finally in the resurrection of the body. (Ench. 31.118)\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{138} His success as knight "is limited" in other parts of the poem too (Spenser Encyclopedia, p. 229); see cantos 7 and 11 of Book 4, and cantos 4 and 5 of Book 4.

\textsuperscript{139} Cf. Gloss, Interpretation, p. 109.

\textsuperscript{134} "Sed cum in ulissimis ignorantiae tenebris, nulla resistente ratione, secundum carnem vivitur, haec sunt prima hominis. Deinde cum per legem cognito fuerit facta peccati, si nondum divinus adiuvat spiritus, secundum legem volens vivere vincitur et sciens peccati, peccatoque subditus servit … Haec sunt secunda hominis. Si autem respeetit deus ut ad implexa quae mandat ipse adiuvare credatur, et agi homo coeperit dei spiritus, concupiscitur adversus carnem fortiore robore caritatis, ut quantum adhuc sit quod hominum repugnet ex homine, nondum tota inimicitia sanata, ex idem tamen justus vivat, justeque vivat in quantum non cedit malae concupiscientiae, vincente dextro costa iustitiae. Haec sunt tercia bona spei hominis, in quibus si pia perseverantia quisque proficiat postrema pac restat, quae post hanc vitam in requie spiritus, deinde in resurrectione etiam carnis implerius."

The reformers, with Luther in the forefront, likewise described the spiritual progression in the same categories, with an emphasis upon the move from the condemnation of the law to salvation by grace.\textsuperscript{155}

We find the same dual historical and individual progression in the Legend of Holiness. We have looked at the historical stages in cantos 3 and 6, but Spenser also makes Redcrosse advance from a state of ignorance (seen in particular during his first meeting with Archimago), through condemnation under the law (most acutely felt when he encounters Despair), to the healing grace encountered in the House of Holiness and the peace glimpsed from the Mount of Contemplation. When Redcrosse has come within sight of that final goal, Spenser sums up the progression of the whole book by comparing four different mountains:

That done, he [Contemplation] leads him to the highest Mount; Such one, as that same mighty man of God, That bloud-red billowes like a walled front On either side disparted with his rod, Till that his army dry-foot through them yod, Dwelt forte dies synon; where with in stone With bloudy letters by the hand of God, The bitter doome of death and balefull mones He did receiv, whiles flashing fire about him shone.

Or like that sacred hill, whose head full hee, Adornid with fruittfull Olivies all around, Is, as it were for endless memory Of that deare Lord, who oft thereon was fownd, For euer with a flowing gironld crowd: Or like that pleasaut Mount, that is for ay Through famous Poets verse each where renownd, Or which the thirse three learned Ladies play Their heauenly notes, and make full many a louely lay.

(FQ 1.10.58-54)

If Mount Parnassus represents ante legem, then Mount Sinai stands for sub lege and the Mount of Olivies for sub gratia. And of course, from the Mount of Contemplation (which these three other mountains are in the dichotomy between law and grace goes back to St. Paul, but Augustine extended its application in a number of works. Of these, On the Spirit and the Letter (De spiritu et littera) was of crucial importance for Luther’s theological development and for the development of the Reformation at large.
compared to) Redcrosse is shown the city of "eternall peace" (PQ 1.10.55).\textsuperscript{156}

Which brings us back to where we started: Spenser's presentation of Augustine's two cities in stanzas 55 to 63. What needs to be emphasized again in our own summary is that this progression, in both its historical and its individual guise, leads up to the heavenly city, not to Cleopolis. Elizabeth I, as head of the Church of England, has a part to play in that city; yet her own progression towards peace lies primarily on the personal level. Gloriana is not Una.

\begin{flushright}
Postscript
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This study has traced St. Augustine's enduring effect on a number of seminal early modern writers. His greatness can be gauged not only by the breadth and penetration of his ideas as such, but also by the complex and highly influential responses to the different strands of his thought. The full width of the multifaceted Augustinian perspectives encompasses a surprisingly large part of the continuum we call the European Renaissance. Yet the "Augustine" of the Renaissance most often assumed a different character from that envisioned by modern historical or patriotic studies. Indeed, being dressed up to fit various needs was one key to the Father's success. Since the inherent diversity of his writings, with their emphasis on vertical or horizontal perspectives, catered to the differing needs of early modern humanists, philosophers and reformers, Augustine assumed a multitude of shapes. While some made him into a Plato in cowls, others refashioned him into a fideist skeptic, a scriptural ciceronian or a Pauline predestinarian.

Yet there were also continuities in these protean perspectives. If we compare the "Augustines" of Petrarch and Spenser we find common concerns in spite of differing social and religious contexts. To both poets the Father delineated a world of fluctuation and error, yet ultimately meaningful through the intervention of the divine Logos. The erratic desire of the Petrarchian lover in \textit{Rime sparse} or the errant knights' aimless wandering through the silvas of \textit{The Faerie Queene} are for both poets redeemed by a combination of the formal harmony of number and the verbal message of grace. The divided self of Petrarch's poetic persona, seeking solace in Augustine's similar fate, set a pattern for Catholic and Protestant sonneteers all the way to Sidney's \textit{Astrophil and Stella} and Spenser's \textit{Amoretti}. Petrarch's Augustinian insistence in \textit{On His Own Ignorance} that the spheres of reason and revelation are compatible yet distinct are echoed in the structuring of Spenser's \textit{Fourie Hymnes}, in the implicit distinction between nature and grace in the division of \textit{The Faerie Queene}, but also seen in the

\textsuperscript{156} Spenser's rearrangement of the Augustinian scheme is admittedly odd, but repeats the reverse order of the first two eras in cantos 3 and 6. Carol V. Kaske, "Spenser's Pluralistic Universe: The View from the Mount of Contemplation," in \textit{Contemporary Thought on Edmund Spenser}, ed. Richard C. Fushill et al. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1978), has also interpreted the three mountains (Parnassus, Sinai, and Olives) as representing "the traditional three dispensations: Nature, Law, and Grace" (p. 147), but for her the mountains do not represent a progression along Augustine's fourfold scheme but "different dispensations or ways to heaven" (p. 152). See also her \textit{Spenser and Biblical Poetics} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1999), which unfortunately reached me too late for inclusion in this study.
different roles of Satyrane and Redcross in the Legend of Holiness. In these continuities Petrarch and Spenser are perhaps more typical than Calvin and Ficino, who exemplify the extreme poles of the Augustinian legacy. Having a spectrum of choices on a variety of topics, most writers muddled their way through the Father’s thought to positions that cannot always be described as clearly vertical or horizontal. Yet it is the tensions between these two perspectives that best describes the multivalency of the Renaissance.

What might be surprising is the extent to which Augustine is still with us, still engaging us, even as our perceptions of him are no longer those of earlier periods. When we read recent books not only in theology or philosophy but also in psychology, semiology or hermeneutics (not to speak of Newsweek or The Washington Post), we find his name with some frequency, and his ideas discussed with more than historical interest. I want to end this study by very briefly outlining two possible “Augustines” for our own times: one hierarchical and conservative, the other hybrid and post-colonial (to use some modern buzz-words). These two versions are of course not the only possible modern ones, but provide the extremes of the spectrum. Like its Renaissance counterparts, both reflect certain aspects of the Father’s thought while neither captures its full width and complexity.

The first Augustine is a dummy set up only to be knocked down by a variety of modern-isms: the arch-reactionary system-builder standing behind a strictly vertical, logocentric, hierarchical and patriarchal construct. I’m thinking of the Augustine made responsible for the inquisition and the continuation of slavery, as well as other forms of political and religious oppression, including the misogyny and sexual repression of the last 1500 years. This description of the hierarchy can easily be combined with the picture of the other worldly mystic who despoits the world with all its forms of human life, the anti-humanist (or arch-humanist, depending on where one comes from) who chains language to a fixed Logos that stifles the liberating play of signifiers. Of course I’m exaggerating, even demonising my picture, but milder versions are not hard to come by.

Then there is the Augustine of political pessimism, existential angst and the decentered subject,1 the early theorist of the post-modern dilemma, the grandfather of Freud, Kierkegaard and Derrida. The latter and Augustine in fact share strikingly similar personal trajectories. Both are outsiders born on the margins of empire, indeed the very same periphery (present-day Algeria), and both cross borders as they move towards the political and cultural centers (Paris and Milan) only to radically question the basic assumptions of those centers. Both refuse to be pinned down, never being satisfied with earlier positions in their intellectual inquisitiveness. Both deal with dichotomies or contradictions; what Karl Jaspers said about Augustine is equally true for Derrida: “Augustine is one of the thinkers who ventures into contradictions, who draw their life from the tensions of enormous contradictions. . . . Augustine faces the contradictions. And more than that: he presses them to their utmost limits.”2 Finally, both see themselves and humanity at large as being in a state of exile. The following statement could have been culled from a book on or by Augustine, but is in fact written about Derrida:

Exile is our condition, for each of us to bear and make use of in our own way. In this universal exile and alienation lie also an ethical appeal, namely that a possible recognition of what is human is not opened up by desperately holding on to cultural identities, but by recognizing that humanity’s deepest fate entails an unavoidable lack of identity and belonging.3

As with the “hierarchical” Augustine described above, this picture of a “post-modern” Augustine is exaggerated, yet being close enough for us to recognize crucial aspects of the Father’s thought. Which Augustine is the true one? As in the Renaissance, that depends on who you are, and what you are looking for.

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1 See, for example, the cultural materialist Jonathan Dollimore on Augustine as one of the most important originators of “the neurosis, anxiety and alienation of the subject-in-crisis” (“Shakespeare and Theory,” in Post-Colonial Shakespeare, ed. Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin [London and New York: Routledge, 1998], p. 271).


3 My translation of Hans Ruiz’s “Främlingskap som filosofi [Exile as Philosophy],” a book review of Derrida’s autobiographical Le monologuisme de l’auteur ou La prothèse d’origine in Dagons Nyheter 29 March 2000. Another fascinating parallel can be made to the French feminist Hélène Cixous, also an “exile” grown up in Algeria, who in recent autobiographical works connects her own life story to Augustine’s Confessions.
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