

Towards Articulating the Unity of Augustine's *Confessiones*

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Abstract:

This essay argues that the unity of Augustine's *Confessiones* is found, as Augustine later remarks in the *Retractationes*, in his profound notion of *confessio*. Some commentators maintain that the text lacks a discernible unity; others claim that it has a spiritual unity located in some kind of progressive account of how, by God's grace, Augustine and/or 'everyman' can attain unity with God. The latter commentators characterize the matter in terms of spiritual increase, the biblical parable of the Prodigal Son, or the text's various triads and trinitarian structures. In this regard, *Confessiones* is viewed as progressive, universal, and structured by some kind of 'return to origin' (*exitus-reditus*) pattern. This study agrees with the commentators' assessments, but finds the ultimate source of the text's progression, development on the plane of universality, and *exitus-reditus* pattern in the nature of *confessio* that Augustine introduces and explains at the outset, i.e. in 1.1.1-5.6, and develops and endeavors to validate in the biographical (books 1-10), and exegetical (books 11-13) segments that follow. *Confessio*, consisting in the person's enjoying, cultivating, and encouraging spiritual unity with divine goodness, is intrinsically restless, developmental, and dynamic because, led by God, its *telos* consists in attaining (albeit in an afterlife) complete unity with Him. As such, *Confessiones* derives its progressive, universal, and *exitus-reditus* elements from Augustine's disposition of *confessio*. In short, the unity of *Confessiones* results from the unity of *confessio*.

Keywords: *confessio*, *exitus-reditus*, divine goodness, spiritual union, immutability, progressive, universal, Wisdom, Manicheans, Platonists, Trinity, trinitarian.

I.) Introduction

Many studies have focused on Augustine of Hippo's (354-430 A.D.) famous *Confessiones* (*conf.*) [397-401 A.D.]¹ but, to my mind, none has taken adequate account of Augustine's claim that his main topic therein is *confessio*.² By this, Augustine means to encourage both his own and his readers'³ understanding *and* affectivity towards God by praising God's goodness and justice for governing his (i.e. Augustine's) good and evil acts. Therefore, as Augustine states retrospectively in his *Retractationes* (*retr.*), *conf.*'s principal theme consists in distinguishing and inspiring man's proper disposition towards God. In his words:

The thirteen books of my *Confessiones* praise (*laudant*) the just and good God concerning both my evil acts and my good acts, and they excite the understanding and affection of men towards Him. That, in any event, pertains to me – when they were written they had that effect upon me and they bring about [the same effect upon me] when they are read. What others think about them, they themselves shall determine; nevertheless, I know that they give pleasure to many [Christian] brothers and that they greatly pleased them.⁴

Augustine also remarks that *conf.* includes two major parts, viz. (i) a biographical component found in books 1-10 and (ii) an exegetical component in books 11-13. In his words: “The first ten books were written about myself; the final three [were written] about the holy scriptures from this passage, ‘In the beginning God created heaven and earth,’ all the way to the sabbath rest.”⁵

Questions arise, therefore, concerning exactly how Augustine’s effort to encourage praising God encompasses the two topics he places in *conf.* What, in other words, connects together the content for praising God Augustine manifests in books 1-10, concentrating on biography, with that shown in books 11-13, focusing on ‘the holy scriptures’ to give an account of God’s creation from its beginning unto its sabbath rest?

On this matter, interpretations abound. While some imply that the unity Augustine speaks of is illusory⁶ or beyond comprehension⁷ – but that attempts to distinguish it are helpful,⁸ others, considered immediately below, maintain that *conf.*’s unity can be distinguished. In the latter regard, one recent commentator maintains that *conf.*’s unity is found in “a sophisticated exercise in affective mimesis.” It is said that “through language ... content, and ... the way he paces his narrative” Augustine strives “to replicate in the reader his own emotions – his affective state – at a given time in his progress [towards God].”⁹ Another, older and traditional, perspective claims that *conf.* follows the pattern of the Prodigal Son parable¹⁰ and/or, in some form, a Neoplatonic¹¹ or a Neoplatonic influenced pattern of *exitus-reditus* (i.e. outgoing from and return to origin)¹² whereby Augustine details how he abandoned and then returned to God. A third view, related to the second, maintains that *conf.*’s unity consists in an assortment of intimately related triads,¹³ the most decisive being the divine trinity expressed in books 11-13,¹⁴ that is sometimes said to underlie the other triads *conf.* employs.¹⁵ Therefore, while some find the link between Augustine’s doctrine of praise in *conf.* 1-10 and 11-13 more in Augustine’s description of his affective state as he becomes progressively united with God, others locate it in various theological structures whereby the God who has created man progressively moves man towards unity with Himself. In general, then, the commentators agree that Augustine’s presentation in *conf.* is essentially progressive, universal,¹⁶ and structured by some kind of *exitus-reditus* pattern centered in divine generosity. But they attempt to explain all of this by ignoring the unity Augustine’s emphasis on praising God, and therefore on *confessio*, intends.¹⁷

Accordingly, this essay acknowledges insight in each of the above interpretations by agreeing that Augustine’s presentation is essentially progressive, universal, and structured by an *exitus-reditus* pattern. However, it argues that *conf.*’s unity is found in Augustine’s articulation and sharing of his profound notion of *confessio* as man’s¹⁸ proper disposition towards God/Wisdom/divine goodness.

In this regard, *confessio*, which Augustine introduces to his reader at *conf.*'s outset as mutable man's teleological spiritual union with an immutable God (1.1.1-5.6) – given through God's mediation in Christ (1.1.1; 1.5.5), constitutes *conf.*'s fundamental ground or baseline. In other words, Augustine uses the aforementioned *relationship* to show *confessio*'s coherence and gauge its development. On the one hand, this relationship underlies each teaching of man's union with divine goodness that *conf.* presents; on the other hand, it is the standard by which greater enjoyment and understanding of human-divine union is measured. *Confessio*, therefore, is presented as an intrinsically dynamic reality centered in enjoying and augmenting man's right relationship with God. Upholding and developing this relationship is *confessio*'s origin and goal; it is Augustine's motive for analyzing his life (*conf.* 1-10) and the scriptures (*conf.* 11-13); and growing *confessio* is the object Augustine's analysis hopes to achieve. Hence *confessio*, understood as outgoing from and return to origin (in the sense of augmenting spiritual union), underlies *conf.*'s *exitus-reditus* structure, and is responsible for the text's progressive and universal characteristics.

II.) *Confessio*'s Progressive Focus on Man's Proper Response to Divine Goodness

What supports this claim about *conf.*? To begin with, we notice that *confessio*'s theological dimension can be simplified in one respect. Since Augustine prominently claims that God's goodness (*bonus*, e.g. 1.5.5; 1.7.12/*bonitas*, e.g. 13.1.1) is His pre-eminent characteristic – as he teaches that God creates man entirely for his good, i.e. so man can share eternally in God's goodness (13.2.2) – God's justice (*justitia*, e.g. 4.3.4), particularly as punishment, is essentially remedial.¹⁹ Its purpose is to encourage its patient towards *confessio* by punishing him/her for vice (e.g. 1.20.31). Yet, Augustine's account of God's goodness also contains significant complexity. On the one hand, he claims that God only shares His goodness as such, or positively, with His elect – everyone else receives His goodness under the form of justice (13.14.15). On the other hand, Augustine especially identifies God's goodness with His Spirit (e.g. 13.1.1-10.11; 13.34.49-38.53) Who, for His part, belongs to a triune Godhead (e.g. 13.5.6). Moreover, God's goodness, and therefore His Spirit and Godhead, is manifested to humanity in all things – particularly by His incarnation (1.1.1; 7.9.13), church (1.1.1), and scriptures (books 11-13), whereby God helps men achieve beatitude. Therefore, although Augustine's eschatology and philosophical theology in *conf.* are not systematic, they are obviously centered in his teaching on divine goodness.

That said, Augustine's narrative also shows that *conf.*'s eschatology and philosophical theology are subordinate, in a way, to distinguishing and encouraging his notion of man's proper relationship to God's goodness. Therefore, while Augustine's account of divine goodness is multi-faceted, it is ultimately shaped by his theological anthropology. Thus, in 10.27.38, Augustine evinces that he writes *conf.* from the perspective, and for the purpose, of praising God's goodness since he understands that this disposition establishes him in right relationship with God and leads to perfect union with Him,²⁰ i.e. to a sabbath rest (13.35.50-38.53). In this respect, Augustine upholds as ideal the very same disposition towards God that he confesses (in the first-person) to his reader as he

narrates *conf.* It seems, then, that Augustine names his text *Confessiones* since, based on *confessio*, it intends to encourage narrator and reader alike to know and embrace divine goodness. As I will emphasize later, Augustine often confesses that he narrates *conf.* for human persons (including for himself) rather than for God since, as he judges that God Is good (e.g. 7.4.6), it is only man who requires inspiration and encouragement towards embracing God's goodness. Hence, Augustine commences his second major confession, beginning in *conf.* 11, with these words:

Lord, eternity (*aeternitas*) is yours, so you cannot be ignorant of what I tell you. Your vision of occurrences in time is not temporally conditioned. Why then do I set before you an ordered account of so many things? It is certainly not through me that you know them (*non utique ut per me noveris ea*). But I am stirring up love for you in myself (*sed affectum meum excito in te*) and in those who read this (*et eorum qui haec legunt*), so that we may all say 'Great is the Lord and highly worthy to be praised (*laudabilis valde*)' (Ps. 47:1). I have already affirmed this and will say it again: I tell my story for love of your love (*amore amoris tui facio istuc*).²¹

Augustine's principal point, then, is that humans, as God's creatures, properly owe humble thanks to Him for their opportunity to attain eternal union with Him – to which all other goods (personal, social and ecclesial) are subordinate. Hence, if man humbly pursues and/or receives the goods towards which he is innately oriented, he orders himself towards his *telos*; if he otherwise pursues and/or receives goods, he becomes disordered. *Confessio* is owed to God, then, not insofar as humans exist (1.2.2) but because their existing is for the sake of attaining His sabbath rest (1.5.6; 13.35.50-38.53). Consequently, man achieves his *telos* by conforming his thought and action, or heart, to God's thought and action. Augustine's approach, then, entails that each human is fundamentally *relational and teleological*. To his mind, each person (whether recognizing this or not, e.g. 10.27.38) always stands in relationship with God and acts, in all things, either for his *telos*, by embracing *confessio*, or against his *telos*, by practicing *praesumptio* (7.20.26). There is no middle ground; one loves God and neighbor in due proportion or, as Augustine's pear-theft shows (2.6.14), one loves oneself above God and neighbor.

Nevertheless, *conf.* teaches that this ideal structure is complicated by three related factors, viz. by original sin, personal sin, and the vicissitudes or contingencies of the church's historical development (e.g. 1.1.1). Due to original sin (1.6.7-8), the human being is disposed to direct itself more towards creatures than towards God. On account of personal sin (1.20.31), a human embraces creatures as its *telos*. Finally, because of the contingent character of church development (1.9.14; 1.11.17-18), i.e. since the gospel's proclamation depends on historical factors, only some have the full opportunity to aim themselves towards God to the extent He makes that possible, in this life, through Christ and His church.

For his part, however, Augustine has the good fortune of encountering Christ's church from infancy onwards (e.g. 1.11.17). Hence, as the entirety of *conf.* shows, Augustine's relationship with God and, consequently, his encounter with original and personal sin, is always responsive to Christ's church. This brings to mind two important points. First, Augustine writes *conf.* for an audience that shares his good fortune of engaging the church.²² Second, the presence of original sin, personal

sin, and the church's historical development do not alter Augustine's central point: whether man is fallen or not, he properly responds to God with *confessio* since he is a product of, is governed by, and exists for the sake of enjoying God's goodness.

Most important, *conf.* recounts the stages (in a progressive manner) whereby Augustine's heart, i.e. understanding and love, came to embrace *confessio* and tries to explain, first on the personal level but ultimately on eschatological and theological levels, what that entails. To aid comprehension I divide this overview of *conf.* into four parts, distinguishing Confessor Augustine's first major division, books 1-10, into three parts (viz. 1-4, 5-7 and 8-10), while leaving as is his other major division, books 11-13.

Before considering this progressive development, however, we note three significant matters. First, Confessor Augustine aims to show that *confessio* is philosophically coherent. As *conf.* 7 makes clear, Augustine's justification for *confessio*, rooted in his claim that the Catholic religion rightly proclaims that Christ, i.e. 'the Word made flesh,' is Wisdom, is governed by his notion of Wisdom. In this respect, Confessor Augustine's concept seems to have three principal parts. These are: (i) that God is immutable substance;²³ (ii) that man is a mutable substance, composed of soul and body, with orientation towards permanent union with God;²⁴ and (iii) that man, by God's gift, can be permanently united with God (ultimately in the afterlife [10.43.69-70]) through adhering to His incarnation, formally distinguished as 'the Word made flesh.'²⁵ To Confessor Augustine's mind, then, knowing Wisdom requires attaining knowledge of God, man, and divine mediation; this underlies his writing of *conf.* and account, therefore, of young Augustine's intellectual development. Secondly, the above implies that, in agreement with Confessor Augustine's account of spiritual progress in 10.27.38,²⁶ *conf.* could be divided into two parts. While in books 1-7, Confessor Augustine explains how he achieved insight into the nature of Wisdom and that *confessio* is rational, the remainder of *conf.*, books 8-13, explains how he came to enjoy spiritual union with God, i.e. embraced *confessio*, what that entails and, therefore, how practicing *confessio* brings additional insight into *confessio*'s reasonableness.

In the third place, as the above distinctions imply, Confessor Augustine always handles his non-Catholic philosophical/intellectual/religious sources in the service of Catholic doctrine. Confessor Augustine makes evident in 3.4.8-9, 5.14.25, and 7.9.13-15 that he is only interested in non-Catholic texts and doctrines to the extent that they help him show that the Catholic religion discloses Wisdom (cf. *Teaching Christianity*, 2.39.58-42.63 [~ 396 A.D.]). My point is not that Confessor Augustine deliberately falsifies these sources or his own intellectual development (though these matters are sometimes debated)²⁷ but that he only takes from them specific notions and/or implications that help – whether directly or indirectly – to validate his claim that Christ is Wisdom. On this basis, Confessor Augustine never displays a neutral attitude towards non-Catholic sources; he does not want to know them for their own sake but only for validating the Catholic doctrine of Wisdom. From beginning to end, the latter is Augustine's final cause.

How, therefore, is *conf.* progressive? In books 1-4, Confessor Augustine explains that, though

having Christ and His church present to him, he succumbed to the influence of original sin and personally sinned during his youth but subsequently began his climb towards *confessio*. Books 1-2 describe young Augustine's embracing an explicitly anti-*confessio* or presumptuous attitude towards reality that reached its nadir in his theft of pears as an early adolescent (2.10.18).²⁸ Then books 3-4 detail how adolescent Augustine mitigated that attitude – albeit with only minor success – when, after vowing to pursue Wisdom (3.4.7-8) under the condition of identifying Wisdom with Christ (3.4.8-9), he joins the Manichean religion.²⁹ In the former regard, Confessor Augustine claims that reading Cicero's *Hortensius*³⁰ at the age of eighteen inaugurated his *reditus* to God. He writes:

That book of his [i.e. of Cicero] ... entitled *Hortensius* ... changed my feelings (*mutavit affectum meum*). It altered my prayers, Lord, to be towards you yourself. It gave me different values and priorities. Suddenly every vain hope became empty to me, and I longed for the immortality of wisdom with an incredible ardour in my heart. I began to rise up to return to you (*surgere coeperam ut ad te redirem*). ... My God, how I burned, how I burned with longing to leave earthly things and fly back to you.³¹

However, in the remainder of book 3 and throughout book 4, Confessor Augustine explains that his affiliation with Manichean religion curbed but did not cure his egoism for, on this score, his intellectual aims and practical life were riddled with vanity, superstition, and error. In terms of understanding Wisdom, Confessor Augustine implies that young Augustine's (i) reflection on Manichean religion in light of the death of his dear friend (4.4.7-7.12), and (ii) study of the liberal arts (4.16.30), including a translation of Aristotle's *Categories* (4.16.28), prepared him to consider Wisdom in a more thoughtful manner than before. On the one hand, young Augustine's reflection on his friend's death seems to have caused him to reconsider his thoughts about man and about God. Concerning his friend, what young Augustine missed was not the good particles in which (by the Manichean cosmology) his friend temporarily shared, but that friend, i.e. the concrete unified entity, which he (i.e. the concrete entity Augustine) had loved and lost (4.8.13-9.14). Moreover, since the Manichean God could not provide Augustine with consolation at the death of his friend (4.7.12), it is easily inferred that Augustine entertained doubts concerning the Manichean account of God since, under such circumstances, the latter appeared uncaring and abstract. How, Augustine might have wondered, is the Manichean God compatible with Wisdom since what He appeared to love was not man but His own particles, i.e. Himself. Is the Manichean God good? Does He really care for man?

On the other hand, Augustine's study of Aristotle's *Categories* might have helped to crystallize considering man as some kind of organized unit and contributed to rethinking the Manichean notion of God. In the former regard, Aristotle's account of substance agreed with the notion of man Augustine derived from loving his friend for both sources imply that man is some kind of organized entity rather than a temporary amalgam of good materials and evil materials (4.1.1; 5.10.18-20). Furthermore, Augustine's attempt to achieve an intelligible notion of God by employing to that end the literal mode of the *Categories* (4.16.29-31) in conjunction with disappointment (as

stated above) concerning the Manichean God, shows that he was beginning to consider God as some kind of organized entity rather than divided, to a degree, by some bad principle/material (3.6.10-7.12; 7.3.4). Hence, Augustine was seeking a knowledge of God that differed from Manichean doctrine. Confessor Augustine strongly suggests, therefore, that although young Augustine lacked conceptual understanding of Wisdom (3.7.12; 4.16.31), his learning, from experience and from texts, caused doubt concerning aspects of the Manichean religion and seems to have turned him in the direction of recognizing certain conditions involved in knowing Wisdom. In these respects, we find progress towards *confessio*.

This continues in books 5-7 since Confessor Augustine discloses how he discovered that a rational attitude towards Wisdom belongs to *confessio*. In general, this occurs through the conjunction of three factors: (i) leaving the Manicheans to re-enroll as a catechumen in the Catholic Church, (ii) existential anguish, and (iii) consecutive study of the liberal arts, Neoplatonist philosophy, and the Christian doctrine of Christ as 'The Word made flesh.' In particular, book 5 details the steps whereby young Augustine, based on his study of the liberal arts in general (5.3.3) and affinity for the skepticism embraced by the Academic philosophers in particular (5.10.19), resolved to end his affiliation with the Manicheans and re-enroll as a catechumen in the Catholic Church (5.14.25). *Conf.* 6 depicts the profound difficulties in Augustine's practical life concerning his pursuit of wealth, honor, and friendship (6.6.9-16.26) due to his despair regarding his, even then recognized (6.11.18-19), unreasonable desire to attain an indubitable knowledge of the entirety of Wisdom on par with the mathematical teaching that $7+3=10$ (6.4.6).

In book 7, Confessor Augustine describes how young Augustine came to see that the Catholic account of Wisdom is cogent. By studying Neoplatonist philosophy, he learned that it was possible to attain indubitable knowledge of key aspects of Wisdom (7.10.16-16.22).³² These include that: (i) God is immutable (7.17.23); (ii) God created all things good (7.11.17); (iii) evil, looked at in terms of the aforementioned understanding of God and creation, is a privation concerning substance rather than substance itself – in other words, it is not God's creature (7.12.18-13.19); (iv) humans sin by free choice of will (7.16.22); and (v) God provides a way, i.e. mediation, for man to attain temporal and eternity unity with Him (7.10.16). Then, by studying the Catholic teaching that Wisdom is 'the Word made flesh,' Augustine discovered that the latter contains both the indubitable truths concerning Wisdom found in Neoplatonist philosophy as well as, contrary to Neoplatonist teaching on divine mediation (which, to Augustine's mind, subverts immutable to mutable reality [7.9.13-15]), a cogent account concerning how Wisdom can be attained. Augustine writes:

I was certain (*certus*) that you are infinite without being infinitely diffused through finite space. I was sure that you truly are, and are always the same; that you never become other or different in any part or by any movement of position, whereas all other things derive from you, as is proved by the fact they exist. Of these conceptions I was certain (*certus quidem in istis eram*), but to enjoy you I was too weak (*nimis tamen infirmus ad fruendum te*). ... With avid intensity (*avidissime*) I seized the writings of your Spirit and especially the apostle Paul. ... I began reading and found that all the truth I had read in the

Platonists (*inveni, quidquid illac verum legeram*) was stated here together with the commendation of your grace, so that ... he is not only admonished to see you, who remain ever the same, but also healed to make it possible for him to hold on to you. ... 'Who will deliver him from this body of death' except your grace through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 7:24), who is your coeternal Son³³

Confessor Augustine has now shown his reader what belongs to knowledge of Wisdom, i.e. of God, man, and divine mediation. Everything recounted in the earlier books is intended to lead to this insight. By studying Cicero's *Hortensius*, young Augustine was motivated to embrace Christ as Wisdom. By experiencing the Manichean religion in conjunction with suffering the death of his friend and studying Aristotle's *Categories*, young Augustine, contrary to Manichean doctrine, implicitly sees that knowledge of Wisdom – and therefore of God, man, and mediation – includes recognizing that God is good and that existing things are organized units or substance. Then, by considering the Manichean and Catholic claims that Christ is Wisdom through the prism of learning gained (i) from astronomy, (ii) the skeptical doctrines of the Academics, and (iii) the sermons of bishop Ambrose of Milan (5.14.24; 6.3.4), young Augustine sees that Wisdom (if it can be known with certitude)³⁴ must include 'rational' accounts of God, man, and mediation. Therefore, because he finds that the Catholic account of Wisdom is more credible than its Manichean rival, young Augustine formally detaches himself from the Manichean religion and enrolls as a catechumen in the Catholic Church.

Finally, by studying the 'Platonist books,' young Augustine attains philosophically satisfying accounts of God and of man and, by analyzing the Catholic scriptures, discovers that Catholic doctrine holds the aforementioned teachings and, in that light, offers a cogent account of mediation. Confessor Augustine teaches, therefore, that young Augustine discovered the key components of Wisdom and learned that since man owes his being and beatitude to God, i.e. to divine goodness, his right attitude towards God consists in acknowledging human imperfection and seeking unity with Him. As these are characteristics of *confessio*, Confessor Augustine has now shown that *confessio* has a rational basis. Again, we find progress towards *confessio*.

Progress is also visible in *conf.*'s remaining books since Confessor Augustine describes how, through having the good fortune of becoming joined with Christ and His church, he embraced a *confessio* attitude towards reality and discovered more of its reasonableness. While books 8-10 concentrate on the relatively greater knowledge and lifestyle given by joining with Christ, books 11-13, by the medium of exegesis, focus on still greater knowledge and lifestyle given through joining oneself, in Christ, to a triune God.

Book 8 discloses the steps whereby young Augustine was converted to Christ and began to practice *confessio*. In book 9, Confessor Augustine details the stages by which he came, especially by his friendship with mother Monnica, to embrace formally the vocation of *confessio*. In this regard, Augustine imitates key aspects of Monnica's *confessio* lifestyle and learns more about it – including its limitations in this life (9.10.23-6) – through sharing a vision of heaven with Monnica at Ostia and striving to respond to her death in an appropriately Christian manner (9.8.17-13.37). Then, in book 10,

the last of *conf.*'s overtly biographical passages, Augustine, now serving in Christ's church as priest and bishop and writer of *conf.*, discloses key aspects of the psychological structure of *confessio* that he recognizes both in himself and in fellow Christians.

All told, Augustine teaches in books 8-10 that, by God's goodness, the lifestyle of *confessio* consists in the love of God and neighbor. In particular, however, this requires conforming to God's providence, wherein temporal reality is not loved for its own sake, i.e. as end in itself, but to adhere to God's eternal plan³⁵ and enjoy Him forever in the afterlife (9.10.25-6). This claim is fortified by recognizing not only that soul's innate pursuit of happiness, as 'joy in the truth (10.23.33),' represents a fixed orientation towards *confessio* insofar as happiness really consists in the enjoyment of God (10.22.32), but also that attaining to Him requires cultivating Christ's present and future activity upon the soul. Therefore, while an immutable God is ontologically and spiritually present to each soul, cultivating His presence is decisive since that is the purpose of soul's intrinsic ontological structure and inchoate spiritual union with Him. By 'the Word made flesh,' human substance explicitly participates in divine immutability so that man – even though participation in this life is limited (10.40.65)³⁶ – is on the way to participated immutability. While Augustine is painfully aware that much remains to be accomplished (10.42.67), he recognizes that he has made progress in the moral life (10.35.56), and that loyalty to Christ will bring him (in the afterlife – 10.43.69) to the perfect union he seeks. Thus, Augustine's conclusion to book 10 contains these important words concerning Christ's mediation:

With good reason my firm hope is in him. For you will cure all my diseases (Ps. 102: 3) through him who sits at your right hand and intercedes with you for us (Rom. 8:34). Otherwise I would be in despair (*alioquin depererem*). Many and great are those diseases (*multi ... et magni sunt ... languores*), many and great indeed. But your medicine is still more potent. We might have thought your Word was far removed from being united with mankind and have despaired of our lot unless he had become flesh and dwelt among us (*nisi caro fieret et habitaret in nobis*) (John 1:14).³⁷

Confessor Augustine has now detailed that, through Christ, he embraced the lifestyle of *confessio*, and that his understanding of Wisdom and character improved. By this, Augustine intends to give cognitive *and* existential evidence concerning the Catholic religion's claim that Christ is Wisdom. So, his presentation has progressed. But it is not complete. For, as *conf.* 11-13 will show, Augustine maintains that that lifestyle's center is not simply Christ but what He points to as Word, viz. to God in Himself, the divine Trinity – Father, Word, and Spirit. In this respect, Christ is the gateway to what stands beyond. God's goodness is, in one way, more transcendent over man and, in another way, more intimate to him than what Augustine has said so far. Therefore, in the context of engaging in scriptural exegesis, Augustine augments his 'proof' that Christ is Wisdom – and consequently, that *confessio* is man's proper disposition – by considering divine Trinity, man's trinitarian structure, and God's plan, through His church, to bring humanity to participate immutably in His immutability. How does this fortify Augustine's proof? He claims that practicing *confessio* allows one to better understand not only God, man, and divine mediation but,

more significantly, how the opportunity to participate immutably in divine immutability stands at the core of the Godhead and therefore at the heart of God's purpose for creating. In this regard, Confessor Augustine's presentation progresses by grounding its evidence for *confessio* in God in Himself rather than in Christ.

Thus in books 11-13 Confessor Augustine, the priest and bishop exegete, transitions through Christ (e.g. 11.2.4) from microcosm to macrocosm (from unity with God in Christ *to* unity with the Godhead through Christ) while offering a profound *confessio*-centered exegesis of Gen 1.1-2.3 concerning God's creating and governing His church unto the sabbath rest. Until he reaches 13.12.13, Augustine shows how the scriptures, when approached with the disposition of *confessio*, can disclose four closely related matters. To begin with, it is claimed that the principal aspects of God's providence – pertaining to creation as such – are structured by divine goodness, as specified by the divine Trinity (13.5.6). This is because exegesis teaches that *confessio's* ultimate exemplar is no less than God in Himself. Stated in terms of the Godhead, this is (i) the eternal Father, Who is creator (books 11-12), (ii) the eternal Word (begotten by the Father) through Whom the Father creates and is therefore the exemplar of creatures (books 11-12), and (iii) the eternal Spirit, the cause of motion/love (12.9.9-32.43; 13.1.1-9.10). On the basis, then, of distinguishing God as eternal Trinity (13.5.6-12.13), Augustine holds that the created order derives from God its being, intelligibility, and activity. In other words, God gives creatures their existing, mode of existing, and motion towards their *telos*. As a result, each of (i) the scriptures (e.g. 12.18.27-31.42 – cf. 3.5.9), (ii) man's nature (13.2.3-4), and (iii) man's inner life (13.11.12) are structured in likeness to the Godhead for the sake of man's achieving unity with God.

I will now show Augustine's progressive identification of divine goodness with his notion of the Godhead, i.e. that God is Trinity, in books 11-13 by tracing Augustine's account therein of God's purpose for creating humanity and therefore, in a related vein, concerning the nature of God's presence to the human mind and, by His church, to the human race. To begin with, Augustine focuses on the Godhead to argue that an immutable God creates mutable humanity so it can permanently share in His immutability. Whereas books 8-10 argued that man requires the mediation God offers (and grows more rational by receiving it), books 11-13 argue that God's creating is governed, from beginning to end, by His intention to mediate (and therefore to grow man in rationality). So, while Augustine's earlier perspective views Wisdom mostly from the order of human discovery, his new perspective views Wisdom from the order of being. Augustine now claims, in other words, that man's pursuit of Wisdom is neither particular nor parochial but stands at the heart of God's creating. Pursuing Wisdom, then, not only shows how the Catholic religion exceeds the perspectives of the Manicheans and Platonists but also that this is the reason for divine creation in the first place. Therefore, human mutability seeks divine immutability not simply because man knows that is good but because divine immutability has created and, as Augustine's renewed focus on divine presence will assert, structured humanity to know and seek His immutability. Consequently, Augustine's progressive *confessio* of divine goodness has a pronounced universal focus.

In book 11, Augustine begins to give evidence for this claim by confessing the mode of divine creating and, in a related vein, the mode of divine presence. In these matters, Augustine uses the analogue of mutable mind's intellect and will (11.10.13-31.41) to show divine goodness in God the Father's creation by His immutable Word. Whereas human thought and action in the *saeculum* is inextricably time-conditioned because mind is time-conditioned (11.27.34-30.40), God creates temporal reality apart from temporality since His substance is eternal (11.4.6-5.7; 12.14-13.15). Therefore, while mind's making requires change in intellect and will, God the Father creates by His Word apart from any change in His immutable substance (11.31.41).

By this, Confessor Augustine shows two things on the plane of universality. First, he makes evident the ontological gap between divine immutability and human mutability. While God is immutable or eternal creator, man is a mutable or temporal creature. Secondly, he evinces that God creates mutable man so the latter can share immutably in His immutability (11.29.39-30.40). This is visible not only in Augustine's account of man's ability to know of eternity and that man would rather know eternally, but also in his developing account of mind's ontological kinship with the Godhead. While the former shows that mind participates in divine immutability (for how else could it recognize the difference between time and eternity?) and wants greater participation therein, the latter shows that divine goodness structures and governs mind for unity with itself.

This is because Augustine claims that God's presence to mind is intimate, consisting in God in Himself united with mind in itself. In this respect, we notice that, based on his account of divine presence in *conf.* 10, Augustine is now paralleling more of God in Himself with mind in itself. In this regard, Augustine has expanded the divine side by specifying immutable divinity into immutable Father and immutable Word. As mind is distinguished into intellect and will, the human side of divine presence appears essentially the same as in book 10. However, Augustine's teaching at the end of book 11 actually parallels intellect with Father in two ways and will with Word in two ways. On the one hand, intellect both knows the Father (11.29.39) and, imitating Him, plans to make the things that are made (11.31.41); on the other hand, will loves the Father through the Word (11.29.39-30.40) so it can attain immutability and, imitating the Word, it makes things (11.31.41). Hence, Augustine distinguishes intellect and will with ontological functions that look to the Godhead both for participating immutably in God's immutability and for making mutable things. Can these apparently opposed accounts be united? Although Augustine does not mention the matter here, it seems that his second account is rightly subordinated to the first since, as *conf.* 9-10 have shown, mind's proper activity of knowing and loving God should govern its temporal activity.

In any event, Augustine's matching of mind with Godhead is incomplete not only because the former distinctions require clarification but also since Catholic doctrine, as he knows, distinguishes the Godhead as triune.³⁸ Thus far, Augustine has made no mention of God's Spirit and, therefore, considered mind in relation to God the Father, Word, and Spirit. He has begun to parallel God in Himself with mind in itself, yet there is more terrain to cover. In that respect, progress is visible but the goal is not yet accomplished. The latter, moreover, falls beneath Augustine's

ongoing progressive account of Wisdom. For it shows not only that God has structured Augustine to participate immutably in divine immutability but also that He has structured man for that purpose. Augustine's progressive consideration of Wisdom continues to develop on the plane of universality.

Augustine advances his project in book 12 by focusing both on God's creating and on mind's relationship with God through His scriptures. On the one hand, Augustine's distinction of God the Father's creation by His immutable Word of the abode of the blessed (signified by "heaven" in Gen. 1.1)³⁹ and corporeal beings (signified, in a way, by the term "earth" in Gen. 1.1)⁴⁰ shows that man, though mutable, participates in divine immutability and longs for complete participation. On the other hand, and more significantly, Augustine instructs that God's Spirit (12.9.9, 30.41) encourages the exegete towards complete participation in divine immutability, i.e. towards the 'heaven' signified in Gen. 1.1, by interpreting the scriptures according to the principle of love. How so? Augustine sees this in mind's ability to distinguish a multitude of reasonable interpretations of Gen. 1.1 (12.18.27). Based on recognizing that God alone is omniscient (12.25.35-28.38) and that His goodness inspires men to love Him and neighbor through interpreting the scriptures (12.18.27), Augustine claims that love requires those with more sophisticated understandings of the scriptures to encourage those seeing less, and contrariwise. Hence, Augustine is motivated to speak of God's immutable Spirit as what inspires Moses' words in Gen. and, therefore, to encourage Gen.'s interpreters to imitate God's Spirit by loving as He loves (12.32.43). As such, God's Spirit employs the scriptures to encourage its interpreters to participate more fully in divine immutability.

Augustine's introduction of God's Spirit, moreover, makes evident his claim that God has structured and governs man to participate immutably in His immutability. Why is that? This is not only because Augustine thinks that the Spirit inspires the lifestyle of love that leads to 'heaven,' but also because this implicitly expands his account of divine presence towards showing that God has created man (not just Catholic Christians) in His likeness. In this regard, Augustine's doctrine of God's presence is now extended on the divine side by specifying immutable divinity into Father, Word, and Spirit. On the divine presence's human side two distinctions are implied. First, we see that will, as love, corresponds with God's Spirit (as *conf.* 10 had implied) rather than, as *conf.* 11 suggests, with God's Word and second, that intellect, which understands God via scripture, is better affiliated with the immutable Word, through whom the immutable Father creates scripture, than with the immutable Father (which *conf.* 11 implies). However, if will is affiliated with Spirit, and intellect with Word, how is mind (the subject of intellect and will) associated with the Father, the ultimate source of created reality? Although Augustine has resolved the apparent contradiction we noticed concerning the functions of intellect and will at the end of book 11 by maintaining that intellect and will's knowledge and love for divine immutability causes it to know and make salutary interpretations of God's scripture, trinitarian considerations make it clear that Augustine's account of God's presence to mind requires development. Augustine's concern with studying divine presence belongs to his larger intention to provide evidence that Christ is Wisdom but, by his principles, more effort is needed.

Augustine's project to validate his notion of Wisdom culminates in book 13 for three related reasons. To begin with, his account of divine goodness – subsequently affiliated with God's Spirit – claims that God's motive for creating is entirely for the welfare of His creature. According to Augustine, God creates him, humanity, and the angels, so each can share immutably in His immutable goodness. Augustine presents divine goodness, initially, by focusing on it as such (13.1.1) and then by identifying it as primary cause of the blessed angels' and humans' movement in love towards God (13.2.2-4.5). Hence, Augustine maintains that God creates because He is Wisdom, i.e. so that persons can share in His immutable goodness.

Secondly, Augustine validates his teaching on Wisdom by completing his account of divine presence. In this respect, he parallels God in Himself, as presented by the Church Creeds, with mind in itself. Therefore, after claiming that Gen. 1.2 signifies the immutable Spirit and, consequently, that Gen.1.1-2 indicates the entire Trinity (13.5.6-10.11), Augustine reconsiders the nature of divine presence in 13.11.12. While distinguishing mind's self-certain knowledge that it (i) exists, knowing and loving, (ii) knows, existing and loving, and (iii) loves, knowing and existing, Augustine juxtaposes what constitutes the Godhead, viz. Father, Word, and Spirit, with mind, now conceived as trinitarian. Hence, Augustine's doctrine of divine goodness' presence to mind has been expanded again, but this time on the human side so that he now parallels God in Himself with mind in itself. The contrast with Augustine's previous accounts is obvious. *Conf.* 10 presented the divine presence in terms of immutable divinity united with mind's intellect and will/love. *Conf.* 11's teaching juxtaposed Father and Word with intellect and will; and *conf.* 12 implied that Word (and perhaps Father) is united with intellect and Spirit with will. However, *conf.* 13.11.12 explicitly parallels a specified immutable divinity, viz. Father, Word, and Spirit, with mind now specified in terms of the apparently co-implicate and co-equal activities of existing, knowing, and willing/loving.

In this regard, will (as book 12 implied) is explicitly affiliated with God's Spirit. Intellect (as book 12 intimated) is allied with God's Word instead of being loosely affiliated with the Father. Moreover, a new distinction, viz. existing/*esse*, is fittingly introduced whereby mind is associated with God the Father. Why is this fitting? For two related reasons. On the one hand, if the Spirit represents God's motive for creating, and the Word represents the created order, then the Father, by logical priority, must represent that order's creator. Put differently, since the existence of created being is logically prior both to knowing created being and to loving created being, it is appropriate, by way of analogy, to assign *esse* to the Father, *nosse* to His Word, and *velle* to His Spirit. On the other hand, moreover, it is obvious that mind must exist in order to know and to love. If mind does not exist, it cannot know or love. Hence, *esse* logically precedes *nosse* and *velle*. Therefore, as Augustine's study of kinds of priority in *conf.* 12 shows (12.29.40),⁴¹ what he means to posit regarding the above distinctions is priority neither in time nor in preference but in origin or order. This is because what Augustine signifies by God and/or by mind are existing things, i.e. things existing in a certain way.⁴²

Looking back to *conf.* 10, we see that Augustine's account of divine presence continues to consist in paralleling immutable divinity with mutable mind. But both sides are now specified,

according to the mode of divine Trinity, so that divine goodness is shown to be more intimate to mind than ever before. Whatever one thinks of Augustine’s pathway to his doctrine in 13.11.12, it is obvious that his account of divine goodness’ presence in the soul has progressed. Augustine’s claim that God has created man to share immutably in His immutable goodness is augmented by his claim that God creates mind’s structure and is present to it as such. By this, Augustine adds to his claim that God is Wisdom. Progress continues.

The third reason Augustine’s project to validate Wisdom culminates in book 13 is found in his exegesis of the church (13.12.13-38.53) which is closely related to his account of divine presence, and by which he also finishes *conf.* In this regard, Augustine’s conviction to complete his exegesis of God’s church and *conf.* is probably motivated by his claim that divine goodness, now specified in the divine Trinity, is first cause of being and therefore structures the exegete’s mind. In this regard, Augustine recognizes not only that the church, as God’s creature, must have a trinitarian structure but also that his interpreting *Gen.* to distinguish God’s creating His church (wherein are included his own life together with his writing *conf.*) has divine goodness, now identified with the triune Godhead, as its primary cause, exemplar, governor, and goal. Therefore, as Christian priest, exegete, and narrator of *conf.*, Augustine’s ultimate inspiration is divine goodness as that is now manifest in the Godhead. Accordingly, Augustine’s immediate operation, considered in terms of the co-implicate activities he understands to structure mind, viz. *esse, nosse, and velle* (13.11.12), is analogous to the divine Trinity. Moreover, Augustine’s media, both his temporal life considered in books 1-10 and study of the scriptures in books 11-13, are likewise; and his goal, to understand God’s creating His church, and thereby become conformed to Him in His sabbath rest, also has a trinitarian character. Hence, Augustine knows and loves that he exists and is moved by, through, and to God’s goodness. In this respect, Augustine understands that *confessio* is both structured by and united with the Godhead.

It is fitting, therefore, that Augustine completes books 11-13 and *conf.* itself with these words:

At one time *we* were moved to do what is good, after our heart (*cor nostrum*) conceived through your Spirit (*de spiritu tuo*). But at an earlier time *we* were moved to do wrong and forsake you. But you God, one and good (*une bone*), have never ceased to do good. Of your gift (*ex munere quidem tuo*) *we* have some good works, though not everlasting. After them *we* hope to rest (*nos requieturos*) in your great sanctification. But you, The Good (*bonum*), in need of no other good (*nullo indigens bono*), are ever at rest (*semper quietus*) since you yourself are your own rest (*tu quies tu ipse es*).

What man can enable *the human mind* to understand this? Which angel can interpret it to an angel? What angel can help a human being to grasp it? Only you can be asked, only you can be begged, only on your door can we knock (Matt. 7:7-8). Yes, indeed, that is how it is received, how it is found, how the door is opened.⁴³

Looking at things from the perspective of the macrocosm (note Augustine’s use of the word ‘we’ signifying his first-person narrative of his location in the church), Augustine now sees, by God’s

goodness, his own life (and therefore his writing *conf.*) not only within the church but also within God. In this respect, Augustine manifests profoundly eschatological and theological perspectives. For by virtue of his remarkable exegesis in books 11-13, Augustine's biographical emphasis in books 1-10 is now assumed not only into his study of the church's eternal destiny but also, and more significantly, into his account of the Godhead, understood as the source, governor, and goal of created reality. In this respect, Augustine underscores *confessio's* universal dimension.

Taken altogether, then, *conf.* 13 caps Augustine's doctrine in books 11-13 that Christ is Wisdom, and therefore that *confessio* is reasonable, by providing cognitive and existential evidence that is more on the plane of universality than ever before. How so? On the one hand, Augustine grounds his cognitive evidence for Wisdom in his notion of the Godhead. In this respect, Augustine locates his teaching on God's motive for creating – and, therefore, his notions for divine scripture, divine presence, and the church – in an account of God's inner life, specified in terms of immutable relationships between immutable Father, immutable Word, and immutable Spirit. On the other hand, that *confessio* discovers these matters provides existential evidence concerning Wisdom for it suggests that practicing *confessio*, i.e. actively loving Wisdom, leads to deeper insight into Wisdom. If Wisdom is *confessio's* proper object, and if Wisdom is God in Himself, then *confessio's* proper object is God in Himself. All told, Augustine's confession in books 11-13 intends to provide more validation for the claim that Christ is Wisdom by grounding the entirety in an account of God in Himself.

III.) *Confessio's* Universal and Progressive Dimensions show *Conf.'s* *Exitus-Reditus* Structure

We have seen how *conf.* teaches that *confessio* is progressive and universal but the latter characteristic is worthy of continued analysis both for its own sake and because study thereof helps towards distinguishing *conf.'s* essential structure. By viewing *conf.* from the perspective of its conclusion in the Godhead and sabbath rest, we see, to a greater extent than before, that Augustine intends his text to be as much about *confessio qua* universal as about *confessio qua* personal. In fact, Augustine has emphasized his universal scope from the very first, disclosing in *conf.'s* opening words that what follows is a work in theological anthropology aiming to encourage men, especially Christians who (like Augustine) have been 'stirred' by God, to embrace a lifestyle praising Him. Augustine writes:

'You are great (*magnus*), Lord, and highly to be praised (*laudabilis valde*) [Spirit] (Ps 47:2): great (*magna*) is your power (*virtus*) [Father] and your wisdom (*sapientiae tuae*) [Word] is immeasurable' (Ps 146:5). Man, a little piece of your creation, desires to praise you (*laudare te vult*), a human being 'bearing his mortality with him' (2 Cor 4:10), carrying with him (*circumferens*) the witness of his sin (*testimonium peccati sui*) and the witness that you 'resist the proud' (1 Pet 5:5). Nevertheless, to praise you (*laudare te*) is the desire of man, a little piece of your creation. You stir man (*tu excitas*) [Spirit] to take pleasure in praising you (*ut laudare te delectet*), because you have made us for yourself (*quia fecisti nos ad te*), and our heart is restless (*et inquietum est cor nostrum*) until it rests in you (*donec requiescat in te*).⁴⁴

Hence, prior to introducing *conf.'s* biographical elements, Augustine addresses God and

describes the dimensions of the proper relationship that man, as God’s creature, should have with Him. Moreover, Augustine immediately follows the above passage with a progressive and universal meditation on key aspects of the nature of God’s presence to the human soul that concludes in 1.5.6 and whereby he endeavors to explain and validate his notion of human-divine union. Augustine commences (1.1.1) with his account of the conditions underlying man’s proper union with God, viz. receiving the divine incarnation *via* (i) church preaching and (ii) the sacraments. By this, Augustine means the benefits of ‘the Word made flesh’ whereby man is established in an explicitly teleological relationship with God. On this basis, Augustine presents the nature of man’s union with God, beginning with a materialist, pseudo-Manichean, view – which has the chief disadvantage of viewing God as divisible (1.2.2-3.3), transitioning to an incorporeal, pseudo-Platonist, view that truncates the human-divine union – which has the chief disadvantage of limiting divine goodness (1.3.3-4.4), but finishes with his understanding of proper union (1.5.5-5.6). The latter upholds soul’s union with God as incorporeal, and therefore spiritual, and culminates, as Augustine’s opening paragraph in 1.1.1 asserts, in soul’s total union with God.⁴⁵ As is found throughout *conf.*, Augustine’s theology in these passages is ordered to his theological anthropology to progressively distinguish what he thinks is man’s proper relationship with God. In other words, what is said (i) to and about God – including His attributes, adumbrations of His Godhead, and His action upon man, and (ii) about man, is said simultaneously by Augustine to himself and to his fellow readers to distinguish and encourage the disposition of *confessio*. On this basis, *conf.*’s author uses his own relationship with God as a medium to describe the nature of man’s proper relationship with God. In agreement with his own understanding, attainment, and enjoyment of *confessio*, Augustine explains *confessio*’s nature in conjunction with his affiliations first, with Manichean religion (and its materialist ontology) later, with Platonist teaching (whereby he learned of the primacy of incorporeal being), and finally with the Catholic religion (whereby he learned the proper ontology of human-divine union). In this regard, Augustine equates his personal spiritual progress with spiritual progress as such.

As the above shows, recognizing Augustine’s account of *confessio* in 1.1.1-5.6 opens a window onto *conf.*’s universal dimension. Viewed from this perspective, we find that *conf.* presents its reader with an ascent to God, and ultimately to the Godhead, as *Summum Bonum*. Confessor Augustine details *confessio*’s nature and encourages its practice by transitioning, through the benefit of Christ’s mediation (1.1.1), *from* (books 1-4) the realm of sense (first descending and then ascending), *to* the realm of mind (books 5-7), and subsequently *to* God via mind’s principal powers, viz. intellect and will joined together in union with Christ (viz. books 8-10). Then, in books 11-13, with intellect and will united in Christ, Augustine goes higher, as it were, by meditating on the scriptures, divine creating, human selfhood, and God’s church, in the context of considering the Godhead that is above all and in all.

Hence in divine goodness distinguished as triune, sense, mind, and church, wherein Augustine himself is found with all other Christians, are contained in their completeness in God’s gift of

the sabbath rest. According to Augustine, what begins in the Godhead without the church finishes, by the Godhead, with the church connected. In His immutable Wisdom, God decided to create His church (which includes Augustine); and this concludes in the church's eternal enjoyment of God. Consequently, the church's journey from its creation in the eternal angels (book 12) to the sabbath rest and what is included therein, notably Augustine's personal journey from infancy to his present longing for the sabbath rest, have their origin and end in the Godhead. Thus, Augustine's argument is progressive and universal so far as it moves from embracing *corporeal reality* to *mind* and finally to *God* as *Summum Bonum* – first in Christ and then, through Him, in a triune Godhead.

Confessor Augustine's progressive disclosure of *confessio qua* universal is also visible by comparing his approaches to divine immutability in the four sections of *conf.* we distinguished. However, the latter needs modification in light of recognizing how 1.1.1-5.6 distinguishes the nature of (divine) immutability's presence in the human soul. (We will present this modification in a bit.) For now, however, we note that within book 1-4's biographical elements, Augustine does not offer any proof for immutability since, by the materialist ontology he ascribes to Manichean theology, the latter is impossible to attain. Although the Manicheans acknowledge divine presence (and Augustine implies they are right about that – e.g. 1.2.2-3.3), their interpretation of its nature contradicts its reality. This is because while divine presence is incorporeal, and therefore presupposes that God and soul are incorporeal and indivisible entities, the Manichean theology Augustine embraces shortly after deciding to pursue Wisdom holds that God is corporeal and mutable (3.6.10-7.14). Hence, Augustine maintains that Manichean ontology is unable to explain the phenomenon of divine presence that Manichean religion upholds. Towards the end of books 5-7, long after recounting how he had once embraced certitude, in a modified way, as his criteria of judgment (5.10.19; 6.4.6), Augustine presents a Neoplatonist-aided proof for divine immutability that moves from sense *to* mind *to* divinity, and shows that the immutable God both transcends and is present to mind (7.17.23).

In book 10's ascent to God (10.6.8-26.37), however, Augustine (as in book 9's ascent to God with Monnica at Ostia, 9.10.23-5) presupposes divine immutability and presence (e.g. 10.1.1) while transitioning *from* sense *to* mind *to* immutable divinity, for the sake of disclosing that immutability's presence causes mind's, i.e. intellect and will's, cardinal activity to seek happiness, i.e. immutable divinity (10.20.29-23.34). Finally, in 13.11.12 Augustine assumes what had been argued about immutability in books 11-13.10.11 and immutability's presence to mind in books 10-12. But now he (i) holds by faith that God is immutably triune and (ii) asserts that mind can achieve self-certain knowledge that it exists, knows, and loves, to argue that God's triunity, which specifies His goodness, both structures and is spiritually present to mind. Unlike before, divine goodness is squarely identified with an immutable Godhead. That is what *confessio* now praises.

It is fitting, therefore, that Augustine's *retr.* mentions how pleased he and his brothers are by *conf.* as a work that encourages praising God. Augustine writes:

The thirteen books of my *Confessions* praise [*laudant*] the just and good God ... and they excite the understanding and affection of men towards Him. That, in any event, pertains to me – when they were

written they had that effect upon me and they bring about [the same effect upon me] when they are read. What others think about them, they themselves shall determine; nevertheless, I know that they give pleasure to many [Christian] brothers and that they greatly pleased them.⁴⁶

Most important, focusing on *conf.*'s encouragement of praise helps us consider the text's overall structure. In general, *conf.*'s handling of divine immutability transitions *superiora-exteriora-interiora-superiora* to illustrate that divine immutability, ultimately understood as triune, both structures and is present to mind.⁴⁷ For, considering now the importance of Augustine's introduction to *conf.*, we see that *conf.*'s handling of immutability actually begins with a relatively sophisticated account of spiritual union between an immutable God and mutable man, and then offers progressive justification for that teaching. Hence, after Augustine presents his account of spiritual union in 1.1.1-5.6, *conf.* moves from viewing God and man: (i) as spiritually united yet incomprehensible to mind (*conf.* 1.6.7-4); (ii) as spiritually united but ultimately comprehensible to mind – and whereby man, through Christ, is motivated to seek greater unity with God (*conf.* 5-7); (iii) as spiritually united and growing in unity through Christ (*conf.* 8-10); and finally (iv) as spiritually united and growing in unity through the Godhead (*conf.* 11-13). In a rough manner, the distinctions stated above parallel Augustine's treatment of divine presence in 1.1.1-5.6. After stating what he thinks are the conditions for spiritual union, viz. participation in 'the Word made flesh' (1.1.1), Augustine then explains that union first, by the mode of a materialist ontology (1.2.2-3.3) second, by the manner of an ontology that recognizes the primacy of incorporeal substance but is truncated (1.3.3-4.4) and finally, by the mode of Catholic doctrine which presents divine-human union as incorporeal and teleological (1.5.5-5.6). Therefore, while *conf.* 1.6.7-4 have kinship with 1.2.2-3.3, *conf.* 5-7 have likeness to 1.3.3-4.4, *conf.* 8-10 have kinship with 1.5.5 (insofar as Augustine appears to invoke Christ, 'the Word made flesh'⁴⁸), and *conf.* 11-13 have likeness to 1.5.6 (since Augustine seems to invoke God's Spirit,⁴⁹ thereby signifying the Godhead). In general, *conf.*'s structure follows Augustine's original account of *confessio* and, therefore, unites *conf.*'s conclusion with its beginning.

Philosophical study of *conf.* shows, then, that the text has an essentially progressive structure rooted in Augustine's intention to encourage *confessio*. However, as the symmetry between Augustine's introduction and conclusion shows, the nature of *conf.*'s progress is more circular than linear. In this regard, the text has an *exitus-reditus* or 'return to origin' structure wherein linear progress is built into circular progress. By following Augustine's claim that mutable humanity depends for its existence and operation on immutable divinity, we can see how *conf.* moves from cause to effect and then from effect to cause. In other words, the text transitions from Augustine's progressively distinguished notion of the order of being (in 1.1.1-5.6) to his notion of the order of discovery and, after a lengthy study of man's proper response to God, back to the order of being which details key aspects of *conf.*'s introduction. Therefore, although Augustine places biography before exegesis, it is really, as *conf.*'s introduction shows, exegesis' content that informs biography. More exactly, the biography Augustine presents in books 1-10 is grounded in distinguishing and encouraging the nature of *confessio* as that is stated at *conf.*'s outset and developed and clarified

in books 11-13. As the general identity between Augustine's introduction and conclusion to his text shows, *conf.*'s universal progress is set within an *exitus-reditus* structure exhorting *conf.*'s reader to practice *confessio*.

We notice, therefore, that insight into the order of being, conceived by and as *confessio*, gives *conf.* its overall unity so that the text, as a whole, has a kind of *exitus-reditus* structure akin both to God in Himself and to the scriptures. In the former regard, *conf.* shows a pattern similar to the Godhead wherein, according to the Church Creeds Augustine knows,⁵⁰ the Father 'eternally begets' the Word (11.13.16) and the eternal Spirit (13.5.6) designates L/love. Likewise, *conf.* shows a pattern similar to the scriptures, which begin with Gen., finish with Rev., and progress in between from human particularity to universality, i.e. from individuals to families to tribes to a nation to the Church and, through that, to humanity as such. Hence, the 'return to origin' structure found in *conf.* is similar to relatively more significant structures with which Augustine is familiar. However, although the matter is worth considering,⁵¹ it is unclear whether *confessio* takes explicit inspiration from any of those structures.

IV.) Conclusion: *Conf.*'s *Exitus-Reditus*, i.e. Return to Origin, Structure is Governed by *Confessio*

We see, then, that the commentators mentioned at the outset correctly claim that (i) *conf.*'s biographical elements are carefully linked to Augustine's universal purpose, (ii) *conf.* is progressive, and (iii) *conf.* has an *exitus-reditus* structure. But we also understand that the latter's principal content is neither 'affective mimesis' as Augustine progresses towards God, nor the parable of the Prodigal Son as an example of human exile from and return to God. Nor is it the divine Trinity as the ultimate exemplar of created, and especially of psychological, reality. Rather, *conf.*'s *exitus-reditus* structure derives from Confessor Augustine's doctrine of *confessio* that governs his entire narrative and which *conf.* endeavors to explain.

To begin with, it is certainly the case that *conf.* contains an account of Confessor Augustine's growing affectivity as he progresses in union with God. In this regard, Augustine expresses a constant love for God that peaks, in a way, with his depiction of the sabbath rest at *conf.*'s conclusion. But this fails to explain *conf.*'s transition from biography to exegesis or consider the nature of the means, viz. the conjunction of divine goodness and man's intrinsic desire to praise God, whereby God inspires the human heart towards Him. Why, one asks, does Augustine concentrate on exegesis in books 11-13 if that is not because he also wants to consider creation, selfhood, and church in light of the Godhead? Additionally, by what realities does Augustine achieve growth in affectivity? Moreover, how is that connected to the aforementioned transition from biography to exegesis? In short, Augustine's growing love for God requires proper explanation.

Second, Confessor Augustine's historical relationship with God has an *exitus-reditus* pattern much like what the parable of the Prodigal Son displays. Augustine was introduced to God as a young child but, as a teenager, turned away from Him; however, as *conf.* 7-10 makes clear, an older and more

learned Augustine returns to God with great zeal. However, *conf.*'s transition from biography to exegesis also militates against the claim that *conf.*'s structure formally imitates the parable of the Prodigal Son. Where, for instance, does the prodigal son meditate on the scriptures to detail God's creating His church, the structure of exegesis, the Godhead, and human selfhood as trinitarian? Still this interpretation is beneficial because it (i) recognizes, like the 'affective mimesis' thesis, that the text is about man's account of his relationship with God, (ii) depicts man's burgeoning love for God, and (iii) implies that *conf.* has some kind of *exitus-reditus* structure.

So what constitutes *conf.*'s *exitus-reditus* structure? Is it centered in Confessor Augustine's grasp of the divine Trinity? It cannot be that either. Analysis of books 11-13 shows that Augustine progressively specifies God into Trinity and acknowledges the Godhead as the created order's, and therefore mind's, exemplar. This is also implied at *conf.*'s outset where (as my quote from 1.1.1 suggests) God's power can be identified with the Father, His wisdom with the Son, and His goodness (which stirs man to praise Him) with the Spirit. Hence, some might say that *conf.* takes its *exitus-reditus* structure from the divine Trinity and that Augustine, both as exegete and prodigal son, comes to embrace God in a trinitarian manner. This claim, like the previous ones, has merit since it sets together God with man – and that is by a more intimate manner than ever before. However, this thesis is offset by the fact that Augustine only formally distinguishes God as Trinity and human selfhood as trinitarian in book 13. Although interpreting *conf.* as trinitarian has the advantage of alerting the reader to Augustine's developing notion of man's relationship with God, it cannot account for *conf.*'s *exitus-reditus* structure since Augustine has only narrated his trinitarian specification at the end.

Our analysis of the aforementioned views makes it evident, however, that *conf.*'s *exitus-reditus* structure is properly identified with Confessor Augustine's account of *the relationship* man has with God that permeates his narration of *conf.* What is this relationship? As I hope I have now shown, it consists in the disposition of *confessio*, i.e. enjoying and augmenting spiritual union with God, that Augustine intends to (i) validate (ii) but especially encourages his audience to embrace. On a strictly cognitive level, Confessor Augustine endeavors to confirm *confessio* by arguing, explicitly in *conf.* 7, that its proper object, viz. Wisdom, is grounded in the claims (i) that God is immutable substance, (ii) that man, composed of soul and body, is a mutable substance with orientation towards immutable participation in divine immutability, and (iii) that God offers man opportunity to participate immutably in His immutability through His mediation in 'the Word made flesh.' This teaching has central importance in *conf.* 1-7, and is augmented in books 8-13 by Augustine's respective focuses on Christ and Godhead. Viewed in light of upholding immutable divinity as Wisdom, *conf.*'s speculative argument transitions *from* divine immutability presupposed (books 1-4) *to* divine immutability recognized (books 5-7), *to* divine immutability enjoyed in Christ (books 8-10), *to* divine immutability enjoyed in the Godhead (books 11-13).

Nevertheless, as Augustine's focus in books 8-13 highlights, *conf.*'s overall argument for Wisdom subordinates its strictly cognitive element to what is cognitive *and* affective. Throughout *conf.*, Confessor Augustine exhorts his audience to know *and* love what he himself everywhere

confesses, viz. that, through ‘the Word made flesh,’ he is stably united with God and aims to augment that spiritual unity unto the sabbath rest. Stated cognitively, Augustine constantly confesses (i) that God, as made known though ‘the Word made flesh,’ is good, (ii) that he is created and governed by God solely for his welfare, and (iii) that man’s proper end is achieved by conforming to God’s immutable goodness. As such, *conf.*’s determining *exitus-reditus* pattern, to which Confessor Augustine introduces his reader at the outset (1.1.1-5.6), depicts man *in relationship* with God, according to what Augustine confesses is man’s proper mode of conformity to God’s immutable goodness. Whether Augustine considers (i) his past, present, and hoped-for future, (ii) biography or scripture, (iii) or divine immutability, either, as such (e.g. *conf.* 7), in Christ (e.g. *conf.* 8-10), or in Trinity (e.g. *conf.* 11-13), the disposition of *confessio* centers and governs his activity. This basic notion of *confessio*, consisting (as 1.1.1-5.6 shows) in mutable man’s spiritual union, given through Christ, with immutable divinity, is the text’s fundamental or baseline account of man’s relationship with God. *Confessio*, therefore, is intrinsically dynamic since it is, in one way, its own origin and goal. As soul’s spiritual union with God, *confessio* is where Augustine’s analysis begins; *confessio* is the motive to analyze; *confessio* is the prism by which analysis occurs; and *confessio* is analysis’ goal insofar as the latter aims to augment spiritual union – for which reason *confessio* guides *conf.*’s progress. Hence, Augustine’s *confessio* has an *exitus-reditus*, i.e. outgoing from and return to origin, structure insofar as it actively enjoys and strives to augment itself (i.e. its spiritual unity with divine goodness), and this orders and gives unity to *conf.* as a whole.

Confessor Augustine begins *conf.* with the teaching that ‘the heart is restless until it rests in God’ because, to his mind, an immutably good God has created and governs man ‘to rest in Him.’ Here Augustine speaks of each human heart, as he does everywhere in *conf.*, from the depth of his own heart as, by teleological spiritual union with God, it enjoys and strives to attain perfect rest in Him. While narrating *conf.*’s biographical and exegetical segments, Confessor Augustine presupposes, employs, validates, and develops his fundamental paradigm of *confessio*, and highlights it at *conf.*’s end to explain something of *confessio*’s origin in the Godhead and consummation in the sabbath rest. *Confessio*, Augustine instructs, is restless; its restlessness (as *conf.* 1-13 shows) motivates it to know its origin and *telos*, and attaining the latter will require more *confessio*. Accordingly, *confessio* governs *conf.*’s *exitus-reditus* structure, causing the latter’s biographical and exegetical elements to be progressive and universal, and shows the way to fulfillment.

Why does Augustine confess? So his disposition of *confessio* can grow and encourage others to want and pursue the same. In fine, *Confessiones* is about *confessio*; and *confessio*, by God’s immutable goodness, consists in loving God, self, and neighbor.

Endnotes:

1. For discussion of *conf.*’s background see *inter alii*: C. Hammond, “Title, Time, and Circumstances of Composition; The Genesis of the *Confessions*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine’s ‘Confessions’*, (ed.) T. Toom (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press; 2020), 11-27; C. Conybeare, *The Routledge Guidebook to Augustine’s Confessions* (New York, NY: Routledge; 2016), 4-9; G. Wills, *Augustine’s Confessions: A Biography* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press; 2011), 1-25; P. Brown, in F.J. Sheed, *Augustine: Confessions*, 2nd edition, introduction by P. Brown, edited and notes by M.P. Foley (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Co.; 2006), xv-xxxii, and idem., *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber; 1967), 158-81; J.J. O’Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers; 2005), 35-86, and idem., *Augustine: Confessions*, Volume 1, Introduction and Text (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press; 1992), xli-li; A. Solignac, *Les Confessions, Livres I-VII*, Oeuvres de Saint Augustin, vol. 13, text de l’édition de M. Skutella; introduction et notes par A. Solignac, traduction de E. Tréhorel et G. Bouissou, Bibliothèque Augustinienne (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes; 1998, 1992, 1962), 26-36; H. Chadwick, *Saint Augustine: Confessions*, translated and with an introduction and notes by H. Chadwick (New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 1991), xi-xiii; and E. TeSelle, *Augustine The Theologian* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers; 1970), 189-91.

For recent bibliography see *inter alii*: C.G. Vaught, *Access to God in Augustine’s Confessions: Books X-XIII* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press; 2005), 257-63; C. Conybeare, *The Routledge Guidebook to Augustine’s Confessions* (New York, NY: Routledge; 2016), 151-61; B. David, *Pursuing and Praising God: Augustine’s Confessions (PPG)* (Hobe Sound, FL.: Lectio Press; 2019), 273-84; and *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine’s ‘Confessions’* (*op. cit.*), 26-7, 45, 59, 74, 90-1, 106, 122, 137, 152-3, 174, 190, 207, 226, 241, 261, 275-6, 293-4, 316, 334.
2. On the meaning of *confessio* as praising God see *inter alii*: Brown (1967, *op. cit.*), 175-81; O’Donnell (1992, *op. cit.*) vol. 1, xlii-li and vol. 2, 3-5; G. Wills, *Saint Augustine’s Childhood* (New York: Viking Penguin; 2001), 13-15; M.P. Foley, in F.J. Sheed, *Augustine: Confessions*, 2nd edition, (*op. cit.*), 329; J. Ortiz, “Creation in the *Confessions*,” in *Saint Augustine, The Confessions*, (ed.) D.V. Meconi, *Ignatius Critical Editions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press; 2012), 475-90, 488-9; J.-L. Marion, *In the Self’s Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, translated by J.L. Kosky (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012), 11-55; P. Rigby, *The Theology of Augustine’s Confessions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2015), 6-33; and David (*op. cit.*), 3-7, 9-12.
3. Taking its cue from T.F. Martin (“Book Twelve: *Exegesis and Confessio*,” in *A Reader’s Companion to Augustine’s Confessions*, [ed.] K. Paffenroth and R.P. Kennedy [Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press; 2003], 185-206, 255-8, 196), and Brown (1967, *op. cit.*, 161-2), this essay holds that *conf.*’s principal audience consists in Catholics, especially Catholic bishops like Alypius, Augustine understands to have imperfect notions – shared with Manicheans and/or Platonists and/or Donatists – of the doctrine that Christ, ‘the Word made flesh’ is Wisdom. (Cf. J.D. BeDuhn, “Anticipated Readers,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine’s ‘Confessions’* [*op. cit.*], 46-59, and A. Kotzé, *Augustine’s ‘Confessions’: Communicative Purpose and Audience* [Leiden & Boston: Brill; 2004], who claim that Augustine’s principal audience consists in those Catholics having some kind of Manichean mindset. This is certainly plausible, but Augustine’s presentation in 1.1.1-5.6 [see ahead] also emphasizes concern with a Platonist mindset. To Augustine’s mind, it is more exact to refer, respectively, to Manichean ontology and Platonist ontology since each ‘mindset’ is centered in what is, by Augustine’s standard of the Catholic doctrine of Wisdom, an incorrect and/or incomplete ontology. Moreover, since Augustine claims that a Platonist ontology is next to [since in some ways identical with] Catholic doctrine, his concern is either for a Platonist mindset’s transition to Catholic doctrine or for a Manichean mindset’s transition, through Platonist ontology, to Catholic doctrine. Augustine’s focus

on Platonist ontology, therefore, is decisive. I have not mentioned Augustine's concern with a Donatist mindset but, as the Donatists claim that spiritual purity is available to some in this life [Brown, 1967, *op. cit.*, 213], that matter is certainly addressed in 10.28.39-43.70, and might be implied within 1.5.5-6's account of the impediments involved in attaining complete spiritual union with God in this life. In any event, it is fitting to consider Augustine's Catholic audience broadly rather than narrowly.)

In general, therefore, Augustine's approach is 'protreptic' (Kotzé [*op. cit.*] 250); he intends to persuade his Catholic audience to more fully embrace Catholic doctrine. In particular, Augustine writes for an audience implicitly sharing his view concerning the nature of Wisdom whom he wants to have knowledge of Wisdom. What, to Augustine's mind, does knowledge of Wisdom consist in? As I see it, the latter is comprised of three key claims. These are: (i) that God is immutable (and therefore incorporeal, self-sufficient, good, creator etc.) (7.10.16-17.23), (ii) that man, a soul-body composite, has orientation towards immutable participation in God (7.10.16), and (iii) that God in Christ (understood as 'the Word made flesh') offers man the opportunity to immutably participate in Him (7.21.27) – which, for its part, is only brought to completion in the afterlife (10.43.69-70). Augustine thinks, then, that his Catholic audience shares with him general notions of (i) God as creator and good, (ii) man as a unified being with orientation towards enjoying God forever, and (iii) Christ as God's appointed way for man to enjoy God now and forever. But, to Augustine's mind, these notions are vitiated by limited ontologies. Therefore, while recounting his own philosophical discovery and subsequent (including present) enjoyment of Wisdom, Augustine aims to lead his audience from right opinion to knowledge. Moreover, to show that the Catholic doctrine of Wisdom is philosophically sound, Augustine employs everything else – even if it means developing non-Catholic doctrine – towards that end. Hence, when Augustine speaks of what he learned from Cicero's *Hortensius*, Manichean doctrine, the *Categories*, the teachings of the secular scientists, the skeptical doctrines of the Academics, the Epicureans, and the Platonists, that learning is never presented for its own sake but for showing that the Catholic doctrine of Christ as Wisdom is sound.

Augustine's focus on Catholic doctrine pervades *conf.*'s introduction (1.1.1-5.6). While trying to explain and validate the Catholic doctrine of divine-human union, Augustine thinks that his Catholic reader shares with him the assumptions that (i) man, a soul-body composite, is united with God, (ii) God is unchanging, and (iii) man has orientation towards enduring participation in God that is ultimately achieved in the afterlife. On this basis, Augustine aims to show that the Catholic account of divine-human union is reasonable because it claims that that union's nature is incorporeal and teleological – holding, in the latter regard, that man is structured for complete union with God so that He permanently centers the human heart. In particular, Augustine argues his claim by showing that the Catholic view of divine-human union is neither materialist (1.2.2-3.3), since that would make God mutable instead of immutable (1.3.3), nor incorporeal but limited (1.3.3-4.4), since that would ultimately deny divine goodness (1.5.5-6) which Christ's mediation makes evident and accessible (1.5.5).

For its part, *conf.*'s narrative of Augustine's coming to know and enjoy Wisdom shows that while the first view has a Manichean provenance (e.g. 3.6.10-7.14), the second has a Platonist provenance (e.g. 7.10.16; 17.23). However, the specific views of divine-human union Augustine employs in 1.2.2-4.4 towards validating the Catholic view of divine-human union are neither Manichean nor Platonist since neither party shares Augustine's underlying assumptions concerning God, man, and Christ's mediation. The Manicheans hold that (i) God is mutable in one respect (so far as He is divided) yet immutable in another (so far as part of Him remains intact), (ii) man, composed of divine and anti-divine particles, is mutable and perishes, and (iii) Christ's 'mediation' brings the divine particles constituting part of man back to God after man dies (J.J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine* [London: Longman's, Green and Co. Ltd.; 1965], 69-79; and J.D. BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma, I: Conversion and Apostasy*, 373-388 C.E. [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; 2010], 42-105; and *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma, 2: Making a "Catholic"*

Self, 388-401 C.E. [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; 2013], 331-6). The Platonists, (if we take the writings we now have of Plotinus and Porphyry as the content of the ‘Platonist books’ Augustine reads in 386 A.D. – see L. Ayres [*Augustine and the Trinity* (New York: Cambridge University Press; 2010), 13-20] claim that (i) supreme divinity is incorporeal and immutable (e.g. *Ennead* 5.1.5), (ii) man, the soul body composite, ultimately perishes (i.e. man is not made for immutable participation in God – e.g. *Ennead* 1.1.9-10), and (iii) divine mediation is not needed since *nous* and/or the rational soul containing *nous* is akin to supreme divinity and can achieve unity with Him in an afterlife by the combination of *nous*-centered philosophical activity in this life and bodily death (e.g. *Ennead* 1.1.10, and see L.P. Gerson, “Virtue With and Without Philosophy in Plato and Plotinus,” in *Passionate Mind: Essays in Honor of John M. Rist*, [ed.] B. David [Baden-Baden: Academia Verlag; 2019], 191-208).

Augustine, therefore, is not actually comparing the Catholic view with Manichean and Platonist views, but with pseudo-Catholic views he has made by grafting certain ontological claims, found in Manichean and/or Platonist teaching, onto Catholic assumptions about God, man, and divine mediation. Hence, the views Augustine produces derive from Catholic teaching and function as stepping-stones, in the manner of dialectical aids, towards showing its validity. Augustine’s understanding of Catholic doctrine is his *alpha and omega*.

4. *Retr.* (~427 A.D.), 2.6.1. I have translated this passage in consultation with: *The Retractations*, book 2, chapter 6, paragraph 1, translated by Sister M.I. Bogan, *The Retractations*, chapter 32, 130. The Latin text is from Solignac (*op. cit.*), 270.
5. *Ibid.*
6. E.g. H.-I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris: Boccard; 1938), 63; and O’Meara (*op. cit.*), 13. While Marrou remarks that “The plan of the *Confessiones* has something bizarre about it” so far as it transitions from autobiography (books 1-9) to dogmatic considerations (book 10) and then to an allegorical interpretation of Gen. 1 (books 11-13), O’Meara describes *conf.* as “a badly composed book ...”
7. E.g. O’Donnell (1992, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, xxiii) writes: “But for a text as multi-layered and subtle as the *Confessiones*, any attempt to find a single key is pointless. Augustine says himself that he meant to stir our souls, not test our ingenuity as lock-picks” (see also *ibid.*, i-ii). Likewise, Vaught (2005, *op. cit.*, 23) states: “no single principle is an adequate way of binding Augustine’s text together.”
8. As A. Kotzé, (“Structure and Genre of the *Confessiones*,” *The Cambridge Companion To Augustine’s ‘Confessiones’* [*op. cit.*], 28-45, 33) writes: “Thus while it is true that scholarship has not yet come up with one satisfactory explanation that adequately expresses the essence of the *Confessiones* (and probably never will), the many different ways of explaining its unity all reinforce the other.”
9. Conybeare (*op. cit.*), 25.
10. (Luke 15.11-32.) For example, TeSelle (*op. cit.*), 190; and *Augustine: Confessions Books I-IV*, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics, (ed.) G. Clark (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press; 1995), 114.
11. This is exemplified by R.J. O’Connell, *St. Augustine’s Confessions; The Odyssey of Soul* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press; 1969), 5-12.
12. See, for example, R. McMahon, *Augustine’s Prayerful Ascent: An Essay on the Literary Form of the Confessiones* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press; 1989), 148. Cf. *idem.*, “Book Thirteen: The Creation of the Church as the Paradigm for the *Confessiones*,” in *A Reader’s Companion to Augustine’s Confessiones* (*op. cit.*), 207-23, 258-9.
13. F.J. Crosson’s article (“Structure and Meaning in St. Augustine’s *Confessiones*,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 63 [1989], 84-97) traces Augustine’s reliance on the triad of the sins of the world, flesh, and devil in books 1-9 (87-9). However, he says nothing about Augustine’s pronounced focus on that triad in 10.28.39-41.66 (90-1), and views *conf.*’s overall unity according to

- Augustine's doctrine of divine incarnation (89-95). Cf. idem., "Book Five: The Disclosure of Hidden Providence," in *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions* (op. cit.), 71-87, 237-39.
14. O'Donnell (1992, op. cit., vol. 1), xxxii-xli. Cf. idem., (2005, op. cit.), 70-2.
 15. Wills (2011, op. cit.), 148; O'Donnell (2005, op. cit.), 70-2; R.D. Crouse, "'In Aenigmatè Trinitas' (Confessions, XIII, 5,6)," *Dionysius*, vol. 11, (1987), 53-62, 61-2, and idem., "Recurrrens in te unum: The Pattern of St. Augustine's Confessions," *Studia Patristica*, vol. 14 (1976), 389-92; and C.J. Starnes, "The Unity of the Confessions," *Studia Patristica*, vol. 18:4 (1983), 105-11, 105-6, and idem., *Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX* (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press; 1990), xiv, n. 1.
 16. I mean 'universal' in the sense that Augustine's audience is his fellow Catholics who he intends to show that Catholic doctrine is broadly universal, i.e. applicable to each human person and community, rather than to Catholics alone.
 17. My recent book on *conf.*, viz. *PPG* (op.cit.), focuses on Augustine's doctrine of *confessio* as *conf.*'s unifying principle but, all things considered, I now think that *PPG* over-emphasizes the trinitarian character of *confessio*. This study agrees with *PPG* that *confessio* governs *conf.* and therefore lies at the heart of its every topic. However, while acknowledging that Augustine ultimately specifies *confessio* as trinitarian, this essay claims that Augustine's formal doctrine of *confessio* focuses on the relationship between God, generally conceived, and man, generally conceived, that Augustine confesses at *conf.*'s outset (1.1.1-5.6). On this basis, more attention is paid to analyzing *confessio* as a departure from and return to origin, i.e. as an *exitus-reditus*, reality in its own right. Accordingly, the reason for *confessio*'s activity, i.e. going forth from and returning to origin, is to develop its spiritual union with God – and this accounts for *conf.*'s focuses on biography and exegesis whereby Augustine explains not only how he came to embrace and enjoy *confessio* (*conf.* 1-10) but also the latter's ultimate origin and *telos* in God (*conf.* 11-13).
On *confessio* as *conf.*'s central doctrine see also: J. Ratzinger "Originalität und Überlieferung in Augustins Begriff der Confessio," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*, vol. 3 (1957), 375-92; and A. Solignac, *Les Confessions*, vols. 13 and 14 (Paris: Bibliothèque Augustinienne; 1962), vol. 13, 25.
 18. Unlike the Manicheans and Platonists (see above, n. 3), Augustine holds that man, a soul-body composite, is a substance with orientation towards the immutable enjoyment of God.
 19. Thus, in *conf.* 2.2.4, Augustine does not speak of divine justice as such but certainly has that in mind. He writes (translated by H. Chadwick [*Saint Augustine: Confessions* (op. cit.), 25]): "I exceeded all the bounds set by your law, and did not escape your chastisement – indeed no mortal can do so. For you were always with me, mercifully punishing me ... You 'fashion pain to be a lesson' (Ps. 93:20 LXX), you 'strike to heal', you bring death upon us so that we should not die apart from you (Deut. 32:39)." This typifies Augustine's approach to divine justice throughout *conf.*
 20. In *conf.* 10.27.38, Augustine distinguishes three kinds of relationships with God. First, there is an implicit (or natural) relationship, signifying that man is structured by but does not necessarily acknowledge divine presence. Second, there is an explicit (or supernatural) relationship, signifying that man is structured by, acknowledges, and is aided by divine presence; and that he pursues the perfect union with God that is ultimately attained in an afterlife. Third, there is the perfect relationship which man enjoys in the afterlife. *Conf.* 10.27.38 states: "Late have I loved you, beauty (*pulchritudo*) so old and so new: late have I loved you! [Implicit Union – Augustine's relationship towards God before his conversion] But behold, you were within (*intus*) and I was in external things (*foris*) and sought you there; and in those beautiful things that you made I plunged into deformity (*deformis inruebam*). You were with me but (*et*) I was not with you. Those things – which would not exist if they did not exist in you – were keeping me far away from you. [Explicit Union – Augustine's present relationship with God] You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness; you blazed up (*coruscasti*), you shone forth (*splenduisti*), and you chased away (*fugasti*) my blindness; you were fragrant, and I drew in my

breath and now pant after you; I tasted you and I hunger and thirst; you touched me, and I was set on fire [Complete Union in a sabbath rest] for your peace.” (I have translated this passage from the latin [O’Donnell (1992, *op. cit.*, vol. 1), 134], while consulting Chadwick [*op. cit.*], 201).

Most important, Augustine writes *conf.* from the viewpoint of an explicit relationship with God. Within that perspective he confesses, on the one hand, how he once embraced an implicit relationship with God but transitioned, by Christ’s grace, to an explicit relationship with God and, on the other hand, what the latter relationship with God entails, including the hope that, by Christ’s grace, he will attain a perfect relationship with God in the afterlife.

21. *Conf.* 11.1.1, 221, translated by Chadwick (*op. cit.*); latin is from O’Donnell (1992, *op. cit.*, vol. 1) 11.1.1, 148.
22. See above, n. 3, for discussion of Augustine’s audience. As stated there, this essay follows Martin’s and Brown’s claims that Augustine’s principal audience is both (i) ill-educated Catholics who might harbor certain Manichean and/or Platonist and/or Donatist notions concerning Wisdom, and (ii) North African Catholic bishops, like Augustine’s friend Alypius, who might have any of the aforementioned notions but are being exhorted, especially by Augustine’s exegesis in *conf.* 11-13, to embrace the ideal of ‘monk-scholar.’
23. E.g. *conf.* 7.17.23.
24. E.g. *ibid.*, 7.10.16; 7.17.23.
25. E.g. *ibid.*, 7.21.27.
26. See above, n. 20, where, in 10.27.38, Augustine describes three stages in his relationship with God, viz. natural, supernatural, and perfect. Since Augustine is not in heaven, i.e. does not have a perfect relationship with God, *conf.* recounts his natural and supernatural relationships with God. Hence, by Augustine’s principles, *conf.* might be divided (as stated above) into two parts, viz.(i) coming to see that *confessio* is rational (books 1-7), and (ii) living *confessio* (books 8-13).
27. For discussion see: O’Meara (*op. cit.*, 131-42) and O’Donnell (2005, *op. cit.*, 35-86, 171-208). When all is said and done, I think that Augustine’s case (in *conf.*) for Wisdom is philosophically defensible since each of the three claims it is based on concerning God, man, and divine mediation (see above n. 3) can be validated. But that, of course, is another argument for another time.
28. For study of this important passage see *inter alii*s: B. David, “Augustine’s Analysis of his Theft of Pears – the Medium Represents the Message,” *Humanities Bulletin*, 1 (2) (2018), 8-32; G. Wills, *Saint Augustine’s Sin* (New York: Viking Penguin; 2003), 7-17; S. MacDonald, “Petit Larceny, The Beginning Of All Sin: Augustine’s Theft Of The Pears,” *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 20.4 (2003), 393-414; J. Cavadini, “Book 2: Augustine’s Book of Shadows,” in *A Reader’s Companion to Augustine’s Confessions* (*op. cit.*), 25-34; C. Vaught, *The Journey Toward God in Augustine’s Confessions: Books I-VI* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press; 2003), 52-65; J. Crosby, “How Is It Possible Knowingly To Do Wrong?” *American Catholic Philosophical Association Proceedings*, Vol. 74 (2001), 325-33; O’Donnell, (1992, *op. cit.* vol.2), 104-44; Starnes (1990, *op. cit.*), 37-51; L. Ferrari, “The Pear-Theft in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 16 (1970), 233-41, and “Symbols Of Sinfulness In Book II Of Augustine’s “Confessions”,” *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971), 93-104; and W. Mann, “The Theft of Pears,” *Apeiron* 12 (1978), 51-9, and “Inner-Life Ethics” in (ed.) G. B. Matthews, *The Augustinian Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; 1999), 140-65, 157-60.
29. Confessor Augustine discloses (*conf.* 3.4.7-5.9) that young Augustine joined the Manicheans, rather than embracing Cicero’s approach to Wisdom or the Catholic Christianity in which he was nurtured, because he identified Wisdom with Christ (which excluded Cicero) and his egoism and materialist leaning found appealing the Manichean claim that Christ is Wisdom (which excluded Catholic Christianity).
30. For discussion of what is known of Cicero’s *Hortensius* see O’Meara (*op. cit.*, 57-8) and O’Donnell

(1992, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 162-3, 165-6). It seems that although the text had an extraordinary effect on Augustine, it was not an extraordinary text. Moreover, all that remains of it are fragments culled from various places in Augustine's written *corpus*.

31. *Conf.* 3.4.7-8, 39, translated by Chadwick (*op. cit.*); latin is from O'Donnell (1992, *op. cit.*, vol. 1), 3.4.7-8, 25.
32. As mentioned before (see n. 3), the doctrines that Confessor Augustine identifies as Neoplatonist are, in many respects, his own. These are developments on Neoplatonist philosophy, i.e. what the latter includes (e.g. the primacy of incorporeal/immutable substance) and some of what it implies, that depend, in various ways, on Confessor Augustine's Catholic notions of God, man, and divine mediation. In this respect, Augustine is, in certain respects, reporting philosophical doctrine he has made rather than Neoplatonist doctrine itself. For example (as n. 3 stated), Augustine, holds that man, the soul-body composite, is made for immutable participation in God. By contrast, the Neoplatonists claim that man's *nous*, so to speak, immutably participates in supreme divinity and can immutably participate in God, apart from divine mediation, in the afterlife. Hence, Augustine's accounts of man, divine mediation, and God differ, to some extent, from the Neoplatonist accounts thereof.

This is not to say that Augustine is wrong philosophically concerning Catholic doctrine or that he misreports *key elements* in Neoplatonist philosophy. Rather, to focus on the latter matter, the point is that he commonly reports *key elements* in Neoplatonist philosophy instead of the entire Neoplatonist doctrine. Put differently, Confessor Augustine identifies and employs Neoplatonist learning within the context of Catholic doctrine; while the former is his material cause, the latter is his formal cause. Augustine's handling of the Neoplatonist teaching that supreme divinity and the human soul are incorporeal can illustrate this point. While Augustine learns of incorporeal reality (7.10.16) from the 'Platonist books' (7.9.13), his notions of God (e.g. 7.9.13-15; 7.17.23) and of the human soul (7.10.16; 7.17.23) are distinct. Hence, what Confessor Augustine often claims as Neoplatonist philosophy is, in certain respects, a result of his development of that philosophy based on (i) identifying the extent to which Neoplatonist philosophy agrees with Catholic doctrine, (ii) treating that common ground, i.e. *key elements*, within the domain of philosophical assumptions belonging to Catholic doctrine, and (iii) seeking to validate Catholic doctrine.

33. *Conf.* 7.20.26-21.27, 130-1, translated by Chadwick (*op. cit.*); latin is from O'Donnell (1992, *op. cit.*, vol. 1), 7.20.26-21.27, 86-7.
34. In *conf.* 6.1.1, Confessor Augustine remarks that young Augustine despaired of finding Wisdom after enrolling as a catechumen in the Catholic Church. In his words: "I had no confidence, and had lost hope that truth could be found" (translated by Chadwick [*op. cit.*], 6.1.1, 90).
35. E.g. *conf.* 9.2.2-3.6, 5.13-6.14, 8.17; 10.43.70.
36. For helpful discussion of Augustine's understanding of the nature and reasons for limited spiritual growth in the *saeculum* see N. Wolterstorff, "Happiness in Augustine's *Confessions*," in *Augustine's Confessions: Philosophy in Autobiography* (*op. cit.*), 46-70.
37. *Conf.* 10.43.69, 220, translated by Chadwick (*op. cit.*); latin is from O'Donnell (1992, *op. cit.*, vol. 1), 10.43.69, 146.
38. E.g. *conf.* 13.5.6.
39. *Conf.* 12.2.2; 9.11; 11.12-13. Augustine's concept of *caelum caeli* is widely interpreted. Some (e.g. Vaught [2005, 162-3], J.P. Kenney ["The *Contradictores of Confessions XII*," in *Augustine and Philosophy*, (ed.) P. Cary, J. Doody, K. Paffenroth (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books; 2010), 145-65, 150-5], and C. Tornau ["Intelligible Matter and the Genesis of Intellect: The Metamorphosis of a Plotinian Theme in *Confessions 12-13*," in *Augustine's Confessions: Philosophy in Autobiography*, (*op. cit.*), 181-218]) view his meaning simply as 'heaven', i.e. the ultimate abode of the blessed. Others (e.g. L. Karfíková, "Memory, Eternity, and Time," *The Cambridge Companion To Augustine's 'Confessions'* [*op. cit.*], 175-190, 188) and R. Teske ("The Heaven of Heaven and the Unity of Augustine's *Confessions*," in *To Know God And The Soul*:

Essays on the Thought of Saint Augustine [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press; 2008], 259-74, 267-73] view *caelum caeli* as also meaning something akin to the Plotinian notion of the World-Soul. According to Teske (*op. cit.*, 272), 'heaven of heaven' means both the abode of the blessed and "the fatherland from which some angels fell and from which human souls fell, from which we souls are presently on pilgrimage, and to which we are returning."

40. *Ibid.*, 12.8.8. Of course, Augustine's primary meaning for 'earth' is formless matter (*informis materia*) by which he signifies a principle structuring creatures (12.3.3-8.8). For commentary on the Plotinian and biblical background to Augustine's notion of formless matter, including its distinction from Aristotle's account of formless matter, see Teske (*op. cit.*), 266-70); P. Hochschild (*Memory in Augustine's Theological Anthropology* [Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2012], 172-4); and Tornau (*op. cit.*, 184-94). In the long run, however, Augustine uses 'earth' to signify mutable creatures (e.g. 12.8.8), wherefore Hochschild (*op. cit.*, 172) appropriately remarks that "... the significance of formless matter... is the idea that there is an intrinsic instability at the heart of created things, understood as mutability, or an ontological non-necessity. This is the tendency to non-being that Augustine experiences as an embodied creature in the eleventh book."
41. See M.P. Foley ("Augustine, Aristotle, And The *Confessiones*," *The Thomist* 67 [2003], 607-22) for helpful commentary on the provenance of Augustine's distinction in this context. Foley (*ibid.*, 621) traces Augustine's distinctions to 11b15-15b32 in Aristotle's *Categories*. Augustine obviously read more of the *Categories* than is reported in *conf.* 4.16.28, and was willing to apply his learning from the *Categories* to help towards understanding other matters.
42. To clarify: Augustine's doctrine of *esse* might be viewed as problematic since it can designate a substance or subject responsible for the activities of knowing (*nosse*) and loving or willing (*velle*). In this respect, it might appear that *nosse* and *velle* depend on *esse* instead of sharing co-equality and consubstantiality with it. Hence, someone might suggest that *esse* is prior in time (or even in preference) to *nosse* and *velle*. However, it is possible to view them as co-equal and consubstantial when it is understood that whatever exists has essence, i.e. exists in a certain way or mode, and activity, i.e. orientation towards its *telos*. In this respect, then, existing can be viewed as co-equal to and consubstantial with knowing and loving. So in light of Augustine's analysis of kinds of priority in 12.29.40, it is probably on the basis of priority in origin/order that he views *esse* as co-equal to and consubstantial with *nosse* and *velle*. (For recent study of *conf.* 13.11.12 and its significance in Augustine's development of trinitarian doctrine see Ayres [*op. cit.*], 133-41.)
43. *Conf.* 13.38.53, 304-5, translated by Chadwick (*op. cit.*); latin is from O'Donnell (1992, *op. cit.*, vol. 1), 13.38.53, 205; italicizations are mine.
44. *Conf.* 1.1.1, 3, translated by Chadwick (*op. cit.*); latin is from O'Donnell (1992, *op. cit.*, vol. 1), 1.1.1, 3; trinitarian considerations are mine.
45. See n. 3 for discussion of Augustine's philosophical approach in this passage.
46. *Retr.* (*op. cit.*), 2.6.1.
47. Cf. Crosson (1989, *op. cit.*), 92. Crosson claims that classifying Augustine's *itineraria* by the mode '*ab exterioribus ad interioria, ab inferioribus ad superiora*' is "inadequate, if not misleading" on account of what it means to "encounter ... the God of Jesus" (viz. the significance given to temporal realities). By contrast, this study maintains that *conf.* presents the aforementioned structure so that it includes both Christ and the mutable realities that He includes through His church. In this regard, Augustine's pathway from bodies – supreme divinity is not ultimately Neoplatonic (whose content and method Augustine shows he understands in the ascents to God he recounts in book 7) but, as the ascents to God in book 9 and 10 make clear, a form of neoplatonized Christian Wisdom.

So Crosson rightly claims that Augustine's principal *itinerarium*, and therefore that *conf.*'s ultimate message, differs from the Plotinian ascent to God. However, Augustine's decisive modification to the latter ascent is really what structures *conf.* itself, viz. a movement '*ab superioribus ad*

- exterior, ab exterioribus ad interior, ab inferioribus ad superior.*' In this way, *conf.* exhibits an *exitus-reditus* structure that begins, develops and ends with an account of the proper relationship man should have with God, i.e. of *confessio*. Moreover, it is (i) within and (ii) for the purpose of encouraging men to embrace this uniquely Christian *itinerarium*, wherein, through Christ, an immutable God and mutable man are explicitly spiritually united, that Augustine presents various Neoplatonist and Christian Neoplatonist *exteriora-interiora-superiora itineraria*. Augustine not only recognizes the incomplete nature of the traditional Plotinian ascent to supreme divinity but he also furnishes a new, specifically Christian, mode of ascent that uses aspects of the Plotinian ascent as its material cause.
48. *Conf.* 1.5.5 begins by speaking in a manner that points to Christ, the 'Word made flesh,' since Augustine understands Him as the corridor to the proper mode of spiritual union. Hence, in a manner evoking 1.1.1's account of God in Christ, Augustine writes (translated by Chadwick [*op. cit.*], 1.5.5, 5): "Who will enable me to find rest in you? Who will grant me that you come to my heart and intoxicate it, so that I forget my evils and embrace my one and only good, yourself?"
49. *Conf.* 1.5.6 speaks of God but, based on Augustine's implicit signification of God's Spirit in 1.1.1 and explicit account of His Spirit in books 12-13 as cause of soul's motion towards God, it seems reasonable to maintain that here Augustine has in mind God's Spirit. Augustine writes (translated by Chadwick [*op. cit.*], 1.5.6, 6): "The house of my soul is too small for you to come to it. May it be enlarged by you. It is in ruins: restore it."
50. Confessor Augustine's statements concerning the divine Trinity in 11.13.16, 13.5.6, 13.11.12, 13.12.13 and 13.16.19 show that he interprets scripture in general and Gen. in particular according to the account of God given in the Church's Creeds. In this regard, Augustine probably relies on some combination of the Nicene (~325 A.D.) and Romano-Milanese (~380 A.D.) Creeds that his book, *De fide et symbolo* (*On Faith and the Creed*), written in 393 A.D. (well before *conf.*), seems to have engaged. For discussion of Augustine's acquaintance with Church Creeds from prior to his baptism and thereafter see: J.T. Lienhard, "Creed, *Symbolum*," in *Augustine through the Ages* (*op. cit.*), 254-5; and F.G. Clancy, "*Fide et symbolo, De*," in *Augustine through the Ages* (*op. cit.*), 360-1.
51. For example, Augustine states in *On Free Choice of Will* (*lib. arb.*) 3.21.60, which he writes (~395 A.D.) just before commencing *conf.*, that the goal of human thought and action is to embrace the divine Trinity. In Augustine's words: "All Christian vigilance is bent upon the pious and thoughtful understanding of the Trinity, and that understanding is the goal of all one's progress" (translation is mine; Latin text is from *De libro arbitrio, Libri Tres*, ed. W.M. Green, in *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*, vol. 29 [Turnhout: Brepols Publishers; 1970], 3.21.60.205, p. 310). *Conf.*'s account of the divine Trinity and mind as trinitarian in book 13 certainly supports this goal. But, as will be argued above, while *conf.*'s doctrine of *confessio* is specified as trinitarian, it is more concerned with articulating and encouraging the fundamental relationship between God and man.

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