



The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199566273.001.0001>

Published: 05 May 2015 **Available in print:** 28 March 2019

Online ISBN: 9780191749926

Print

ISBN: 9780199566273

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CHAPTER

28 Origen and Augustine

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199566273.013.41> Pages 481–495

Published: 07 November 2018

Abstract

At the foundation of Catholic theology are to be found Origen of Alexandria and Augustine of Hippo. They are so foundational not, most importantly, because of their positions on particular theological questions, but because of their conception of theological thinking itself. Both articulate accounts of the role of attention to Scripture and the use of philosophical reasoning that are formative in the centuries that follow. Both thinkers were original geniuses who also represent the approach of earlier Christian traditions. Widespread controversy over Origen's thought throughout the Christian world means that Augustine's conception of theology can also be understood as something of a corrective to his predecessor (even if this is often unconscious).

Keywords: [Origen](#), [Augustine](#), [Scripture](#), [philosophy](#), [theology](#), [allegory](#), [literal sense](#)

Subject: [Christianity](#), [Religion](#)

Series: [Oxford Handbooks](#)

Collection: [Oxford Handbooks Online](#)

ORIGEN of Alexandria (c.185–c.254) and Augustine of Hippo (354–430) are foundational for later Catholic theology. They are foundational because of their positions on a variety of theological questions, but also, and perhaps more fundamentally, because of their conception of theological thinking itself. Together they articulate an account of the role of attention to Scripture and the use of philosophical reasoning that would be formative for the centuries that follow. However, two provisos are necessary. In the first case, both thinkers were not only original geniuses, but also mediators of earlier Christian traditions. They articulated with particular clarity and vision approaches that most of their peers would have recognized as the common practice of Christian thinkers. In the second place, because Origen was a controversial figure, Augustine may be read as a partial (if sometimes unconscious) corrective to Origen even as he pursues very similar lines of thought. Various other chapters within the volume discuss their opinions on particular theological topics; my focus here will be to sketch something of their shared vision of what it is to think theologically so that its significance for the subsequent history of Catholic theology maybe more clearly grasped.

Origen and the Shape of Christian Thinking

p. 482 Origen of Alexandria is a figure loved openly by theologians at different periods in the Church's history, and loved in secret at others. As well as admirers, he has always had detractors; he seems to have come under suspicion during his lifetime, and within fifty years of his death there was a well-developed literature arguing that various aspects of his thought were heretical. In the late fourth century a fairly widespread conflict over the interpretation of his works erupted, and in the sixth century some aspects of his thought taken to be heretical were formally condemned at an ecumenical council. ↪ And yet, during his lifetime he was also called upon as a theological 'expert' around the Mediterranean and, in the centuries that followed, his works were an inspiration for many (for Origen's life and works see Heine 2010; Crouzel 1989; and McGuckin 2004). During the Middle Ages, when a great deal of his corpus in Greek was lost, much was preserved in Latin under various other names. From the Renaissance onwards he has been subject to continuing critiques and yet often simultaneous revivals. Since the mid-twentieth century his star has risen to heights perhaps not seen since antiquity.

In an introductory discussion of Origen as interpreter one might expect to see a discussion of 'allegory' appearing pretty quickly; this is, after all, a feature of his thought that has been controversial since the third century. But before I allow that discussion out of the bag it is important to think about the techniques Origen used to read Scripture at the literal level. It is here that we can see the full flowering of a significant shift that had been underway since the middle of the second century.

Origen used reading techniques that had been developed within ancient traditions of literary commentary and which were, by his time, taught to young students by the 'grammarian' (an excellent summary of Origen's relationship to these practices is Martens 2012: 41–66; more broadly see Irvine 1994). The grammarian taught basic techniques for textual articulation and study. I say 'textual articulation' because texts were presented without spacing or punctuation, and were copied by hand—which often led to mistakes being incorporated—not least in manuscripts of the Scriptures (to say nothing of mistakes and ambiguities introduced when translations were produced and copied). Students learned to read aloud, separating words as they went. The grammarian would comment on the language and terminology used, showing students by example what was considered appropriate grammatical form. The very texts that were chosen for commentary also served to inculcate a particular moral vision. In this sense, the grammarian's teaching served a key role in perpetuating the cultural values of the communities in which it was found.

The grammarian also taught basic techniques of analysis and composition. From Egypt we have a good deal of papyrological evidence that enables us to see the sort of exercises in composition that students were assigned (see Morgan 1998). The sort of textual analysis taught by grammarians involved bringing to bear a great deal of knowledge—philological, literary, historical, mythical, and scientific—on the text to illustrate the meaning of terms, historical allusions, the plausibility of narratives, and scientific claims. Obviously, what was taught at an introductory level differed considerably from the range of material that could be deployed in more advanced commentary. But, at all levels, when assessing the meaning of terms, much emphasis was placed on examining how a particular term was commonly used throughout a text, and on the broader history and common usage of a term. These procedures, when applied to the Christian Scriptures, would obviously have significant consequences—not least bolstering and giving more form to the principle that the Scriptures were a unity.

p. 483 These techniques were the basis of all ancient literary culture—they were the foundation for the analysis and composition of texts one would have learned at the hands of the teacher of rhetoric, and anyone else who handled texts, from lawyers to philosophers ↪ made use of them. Ancient techniques of logic and dialectic—with which Origen was familiar—involved the use of skills far beyond those possessed by the average grammarian, and yet they also were in continuity with the basic tools of division and categorization taught at that introductory level. Grammarians and philosophers, for example, when commenting on a text, would

frequently engage in practices of cataloguing and definition. The grammarian might identify five ways a word was commonly used in order to select one meaning as most appropriate for a given usage; the philosophical commentator might also catalogue five ways a term—such as ‘cause’ or ‘generation’—was used and defined in philosophical traditions in order to interpret a term in a text, or to propose a sixth possibility previously unnoticed. For a philosophically educated commentator such as Origen this was one way in which philosophical material was an essential tool in teasing out the meaning of Scripture.

It was natural that Christians would read their own texts using these techniques, but the manner in which they did so resulted from particular Christian concerns and identity-defining controversies in the second half of the second century. In response to a range of other ways of proceeding (particularly against those Gnostics whom modern scholars draw together as ‘Valentinians’), figures such as Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian in Carthage, developed earlier Christians’ piecemeal usage of grammatical reading techniques. They shaped a far more integrated vision in which what would gradually come to be termed the ‘New Testament’ was seen as a textual unity alongside and in union with the body of the ‘Old Testament’. The text of the ‘New’ was now to be read and analysed with the care and closeness previously visited upon the ‘Old’. The work of ‘analysing’ was to be conducted with a range of grammatical techniques, which promoted careful attention to the overall thrust and plot of the text (its *hypothesis*), careful attention to the ways in which key vocabulary was used within the Scripture as a whole, and a fundamental priority given to the basic sense of the words on their face—the ‘literal’ sense of the text. None of this prevented Christian exegetes engaging in figurative, allegorical reading to different degrees, but it did mean that the fundamental story of the one God’s work in creating and redeeming could be known from the literal sense—Gnostic attempts to read even the elements of this basic story allegorically were disallowed a priori.

The development of this vision of what it meant to think scripturally was interwoven with the development of the Christian scriptural canon. Developing a canon of Scripture involved not only increasing clarity about which books Christians should treat as their ‘New Testament’, it also involved the emergence of an agreed method for reading those texts and thus for giving their authority a practical form. Saying that a text is authoritative in general does not answer the question of the form that authority should take: once we know that we are to attend carefully to its letters, trying to (initially) interpret the meaning of terms according to their common usage—and their usage within that text, and once we know that the meaning we might come to in this way is then binding on us—once we have this system in place we can answer much more clearly the question ‘what does it mean for that text to be authoritative?’. Of course, agreement on a set of reading techniques does not result in every interpreter reading texts in the same way, ↴ disputes over interpretation are inevitable. But this agreement does result in notions of what counts as good and bad argument gradually becoming institutionalized.

Thus, in all of this Origen is not really so much the innovator as the inheritor and perfecter of an intellectual culture developed as he was himself growing up and learning his trade as an intellectual. Origen himself is a particularly interesting figure in these developments because while he was eventually ordained in Caesarea in Palestine, and seems to have previously worked in Alexandria in close relationship with the emerging hierarchy of the Church, he also had a wealthy patron who provided him with the resources to devote himself to intellectual activities. Origen may also have had a first-class philosophical education. Previous Christian writers (especially Justin Martyr) had seen themselves inheriting the mantle of the ancient philosophical teacher, whereas Origen was able to bring this to a new level and develop a complex vision of the Christian intellectual as exegete and philosopher. In his extensive apologetic response to Celsus, a pagan critic of Christianity from an earlier generation, Origen makes the argument that disagreements among Christians are to be expected: any groups who study texts closely and with real philosophical skill naturally find themselves falling into dispute (see *cels.* 3.12–13)! In making this argument Origen is trying to show that Christian intellectual culture is every bit as serious as that of non-Christian philosophy. Origen conceives the task of the

Christian philosopher as attending to that which has been revealed and in its light sifting what human beings have learned in order to develop an ever more comprehensive vision of the truth.

And yet, this vision—which certainly endorses speculative thinking as something called for (not just mandated by) God’s mode of revealing—is also governed by the assumption that the virtues, especially humility, are prerequisites for knowledge of God, and that this search for knowledge is part of an ascent towards unity with God. That path may involve suffering, it may involve opposition to the ways of the world, and it should never involve a rejection of the simple faith of those with fewer intellectual gifts (for Origen’s theological vision of scholarship see especially Martens 2012: ch. 4–5). Indeed, it is also important to note that Origen sees the Christian interpreter’s basic guide to the meaning of the Scriptures to be the Church’s inherited faith, the rule or rules of piety and faith handed down to us by previous generations (see esp. *Princ.* 1, *prol.*).

We have already begun to discuss an aspect of Christian interpretation and thinking that Origen thought to be at the very heart of his tradition, searching for Scripture’s deeper senses. Origen sees Scripture as addressing audiences on a continuum. Scripture addresses those who require a simple clear message—and a message that, even when speaking of the divine, uses the categories of time, materiality, and space that we recognize. But Scripture also addresses those who are able to see that sometimes Scripture speaks in terms that are analogous to the experience we have of the visible created world, but which in reality also invite us to see how they speak of a reality that is beyond them. These people are growing into a deeper contemplation of the truth. Thus, when Scripture speaks of God ‘repenting’ or of God as ‘spirit’, Origen assumes that the skilled interpreter will know that God does not literally repent and that God is spirit in the sense of being immaterial and intelligible.

p. 485 From here it is only a few steps to Origen’s conception of figurative reading. Precision in terminology here is difficult to achieve. Many modern commentators use a distinction between ‘allegory’ and ‘typology’ but this distinction is not present in Origen’s works. Origen uses a range of terms to talk about what we might call first the ‘higher’ meaning of Scripture. Origen believed that the Hebrew Scriptures are best understood in the light of the revelation that is Christ and his teaching. This practice has a number of dimensions, each of which find precedents in earlier Christian literature even as Origen offers a dense version of them all that is the result of his own integrative theological vision. He frequently interprets the prophetic texts of the inherited Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament as fulfilled by Christ and the life of the Church. He also reads other sections of those texts, such as historical and poetic texts, as speaking of Christ—or *also* of Christ. Many texts also are read as having a higher meaning that speaks of the history of the Church and the nature of Christian life (on the relationship between allegory and history see especially Dawson 2002. On Origen’s allegorical reading see also Lubac 2007). It is in his extended allegorical readings of Old Testament texts as discussions of Christian life that we see the full flowering of a mode of exegesis seen only piecemeal before him.

Thus, for example, his series of homilies on Exodus treat every detail of the text as speaking about some element of the Christian life; as the Israelites went from Egypt, so Christians are drawn and educated and shaped away from the world and towards the kingdom of God. In the homilies Origen insists that this style of reading is that which discovers why the text has been preserved for us:

... we who have learned that all things which are written are written not to relate ancient history, but for our discipline and use, understand that these things which are said also happen now not only in this world, which is figuratively called Egypt, but in each of us also

(Origen, *Hom Ex.* 2.1; Origen 1982: 240).

For Origen, the true purpose of the text is not to convey the history of Israel—although it certainly does so—but to provide a text to help us meditate on the nature of divine reality, the Incarnation, and the character of Christian life. The very events of Israel’s history are designed as a series of signs that we now understand as also being about our own interior lives.

It might seem circular to read the text to find in it a conception of Christian life already known. But that would be to misunderstand the nature of the exercise. For Origen we attend to Scripture not only to decode a meaning, but to exercise the mind to better understand and appreciate the character of reality, and to shape our desire towards God. Scripture has been given to us to serve this end. And yet, at the same time, this act of meditating upon the text can provide an ever deeper understanding of the Christian life; working through the details of the text may bring out for us new details, emphases, and connections.

p. 486 Throughout these homilies and elsewhere, one way in which Origen justifies his reading strategies is to point to ways in which the text fails to present convincing history if read only from this angle. Where the text appears to be historical and yet offers us contradiction or incoherence, Origen sees the text as itself indicating to us that we should read it figuratively. In other contexts Origen simply claims that the whole text is both a drama given to us by Solomon, and yet is full of symbolic language. Readers who are still at the stage of needing the ‘milk’ of initial instruction will simply miss much; only those who have gone on to Paul’s ‘solid food’ will be able to penetrate its mysteries.

Origen offers us a holistic vision of Christian thinking and intellectual life, focusing around the reading of Scripture and leading the contemplative mind towards God, and yet a process that is also deeply shaped by God’s providential care for us. The context for our reading is the Christian life, the virtues of the interpreter are those of the Christian, and the fundamental key to grasping what the Scriptures say is the basic confession of the Church’s inherited faith.

Origen: Disputed Questions

Throughout this chapter I have focused on the conception of theological argument that one finds in Origen and Augustine, but it is important also to offer a few comments on some of the theological questions on which Origen’s positions were deeply influential. I will mention four (further discussion maybe found in Heine 2010; Crouzel 1989; and Edwards 2002). The first three are his possible teaching that the creation is eternal, his conception of universal salvation (*apokatastasis*), and his understanding of how souls fell from contemplation of God. In each case we meet positions that stem from Origen’s speculative attempts to advance on questions that he takes previous interpreters to have left undecided. In each case we face a constant in the study of Origen’s most controversial opinions: the difficulty of knowing what he actually said. In some cases, the strongest texts arguing for these controversial opinions come in out-of-context quotations from Origen and even from summaries of his positions offered by his opponents. It is not likely that all of these are trustworthy. Because of the controversy about his work, much of his corpus is lost, or known only in Latin translations done by those trying to defend him (especially Rufinus of Aquileia)—those who confess they have sometimes altered passages to make clearer his meaning—and thus we sometimes possess a sanitized text that hides as much as it reveals.

It is noteworthy, however, that the three areas in which Origen’s thought came under question all stem from his attempts to offer a systematic vision of the whole of cosmic history and to flesh out—at either end, as it were—the story that Christianity tells. This may well be because he wrote against a background of continuing dispute over ‘Gnostic’ theologies, almost all of which seem to have offered strongly competing accounts of the origin of the created order and of salvation. It may also be that Origen saw part of his life’s work as offering a systematic account of themes that had been treated only piecemeal by his forebears.

p. 487 The fourth theme in Origen’s theology that demands brief mention is his Trinitarian theology. A number of different controversies shaped Origen’s accounts of the relationships between Father, Son, and Spirit. One of the most important concerns the complex phenomenon that modern scholars have called Monarchianism. ‘Monarchians’ were those within the Christian community who saw themselves as upholding the monarchy or sole rule of the Father. Origen was also opposed to ‘Gnostic’ thinkers who incorporated Christian language into

complex mythologies in which divine realities unfolded in a complex chain. In response to these challenges Origen insisted that Father, Son, and Spirit were three irreducible realities—he used the term *hypostases* that would eventually become a standard Greek term for this purpose—and explored a number of ways to speak of the Son as one with the Father. Origen’s conception of the Spirit is difficult to pin down. He speaks fairly consistently of the Spirit as ‘participating’ in holiness, and as pouring out that holiness on the saints, that is, in the Christian community. Later, after the controversies of the fourth century that defined classical Trinitarian belief, this picture of the Spirit as ‘participating’ in higher realities will be unacceptable (and will be edited out of some of Origen’s works). And yet, Origen’s experimental Trinitarian theology provided inspiration for all sides in the fourth-century Trinitarian controversies, and enables us to identify him as one of the great architects of classical Trinitarian expression.

Augustine of Hippo

Few figures in Christian history have been as influential as Augustine—St Thomas Aquinas is the obvious competitor, but one need not go far in reading Thomas to see his frequent appeal to Augustine. And yet there is something odd about Augustine’s authority. Augustine did not have Origen’s high level of philosophical education, nor his predecessor’s desire to offer a systematic and consciously scholarly exposition of Christian teaching and the whole of the Christian Scriptures. Like Bl. Cardinal Newman, many of the great works of his corpus were the product of polemical battles. In his writings he is frequently experimental and rarely demonstrates any deep knowledge of contemporary Greek theology. His education was that of a Latin orator; in almost all else he was self-taught (for Augustine’s life see the biographies of Brown 2000 and Lancel 2002. For an introduction to his thought see Harrison 2000 and the edited companions Vessey 2012 and Meconi and Stump 2014). And yet, his deep intellectual gifts, and the sheer range of his corpus, helped him to become one of the great authorities for subsequent Latin theology. Augustine’s monastic community also played a role in his rise to prominence: his work was assiduously promoted after his death by those who had known him, and they did so at a time when the Latin world was taking an increasingly distinct path from the Greek.

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Despite some attempts to argue for a deeper relationship, the vast majority of scholars argue that Augustine knew little of Origen’s corpus. And yet, there are important continuities between their accounts of the character of theology. In parallel with Origen, Augustine’s conception of the task of scriptural interpretation involved the use of grammatical techniques to analyse the text. He himself had been trained by grammarians and teachers of rhetoric and knew those practices very well. Augustine’s famous *On Christian Teaching* (*De Doctrina Christiana*) shows well the importance he placed on these techniques.

In Book 2 Augustine provides an outline of the various skills required for the interpretation of signs (more precisely, ‘unambiguous signs’). He focuses on the sorts of knowledge and skills that we would expect from one with a good grammatical education. Augustine recommends a good knowledge of the Scriptures themselves (*doc.* 2.8.12.24), a knowledge of languages, and the importance of knowing how to compare manuscripts to assess translations (*doc.* 2.12.17.34ff.). It is also helpful to have in place a knowledge of numbers and music. Knowledge of history is also of immense importance (*doc.* 2.28.42.105ff), and logic is chief among the skills that one should cultivate as an interpreter (*doc.* 2.31.48.117ff.). By understanding logic one can grasp the ‘network of muscles’ that lie beneath the surface of Scripture (*doc.* 2.39.59.143; Augustine 1995: 125). In philosophical terms, one should be willing to use what the Platonists say, when it does not conflict with Christian belief (*doc.* 2.40.60.144). In his practice Augustine displays many of the same techniques as Origen, though with less concern to show the reader his scholarly skill (probably because he wrote far less that is formal commentary), and with a far greater attention to rhetorical tropes and figures (which is not surprising, given the shape of his education).

In this discussion Augustine shows himself walking a tightrope; he sees the educational culture of his day as in some ways necessary for the precise interpretation of the Scriptures, and yet he also sees that culture as seductively imparting a false morality and false objects of desire. Thus, Augustine devotes a good deal of space in Book 2 to the dangers of being led astray by the myths contained in pagan learning and of being drawn to an excessive cultivation of those ancient disciplines themselves:

... all the branches of pagan learning contain not only false and superstitious fantasies and burdensome studies that involve unnecessary effort, which one of us must loathe and avoid as under Christ's guidance we abandon the company of pagans, but also studies for liberated minds which are more appropriate to the service of the truth ... These treasures—like the silver and gold, which they did not create but dug, as it were, from the mines of providence, which is everywhere—which were used wickedly and harmfully in the service of demons must be removed by Christians, as they separate themselves in spirit from the wretched company of pagan, and applied to their true function, that of preaching the gospel

(*doc. 2. 40.60.145*; Augustine 1995: 125).

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As Augustine makes clear a few sentences earlier, the gold and silver of which he speaks here is an allusion to the taking of Egyptian treasure by the departing Israelites (Exod. 3 and 12). However Augustine came himself by the image, his use of this example is similar to Origen's use of the same (for Origen's version see Gregory 1998: 190ff). The distinctive note is perhaps Augustine's concern that his readers are not only encouraged to see the importance of these disciplines as a framework for Christian thought, but that they are also equally strongly warned against being too drawn by the enticements and distractions they offer. The whole section of Book 2 that I have discussed here is framed by an account of seven stages we must take towards wisdom (which is itself the seventh stage). The third stage, knowledge (within which we find all that I have discussed here) comes only after the stages of fear (of the Lord) and piety (taking the particular form of submission to Scripture). In Book 1 Augustine has already famously argued that the most important test of an interpretation is that it build up love of God and neighbour (*doc. 1.36.40*).

Like Origen, Augustine also sees Scripture speaking to those of very different intellectual abilities. Both he and Origen work with Paul's language in 1 Cor. 3:2 'I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not yet ready for it' (see also Heb. 5:12):

... solid food is not incompatible with milk, even so much that [solid food] itself turns into milk whereby it can be suitable for infants to whom it comes through the flesh of a mother or a nurse; so also did Mother Wisdom herself, who, although on high she is the solid food of the angels, deigned in a manner of speaking to turn into milk for the little one, 'when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us'. But this very man Christ who, in his true flesh, true cross, true death, true Resurrection, is called the pure milk of little ones, when he is correctly apprehended by spiritual men, is found to be the Lord of the angels

(*Io. ev. tr. 98.6*; Augustine 1994: 214).

A few sentences later Augustine explains that thinking of the incarnate Christ as a 'foundation' is probably more helpful, for one always builds on a foundation and without it the building collapses. The man Jesus is here the object of faith not only for those who do not have the gifts also to 'see' what it means to speak of the Word and of eternal Wisdom, he is the *necessary* object of faith for those who *do* have such gifts. Augustine draws on an ancient scientific theory in which the food ingested by a mother is turned into milk for her children to emphasize that eternal Wisdom has, as it were, become milk for us. Elsewhere in his work Augustine argues that the mind in the process of being restored must follow the same path to contemplation of the Father that the Word becoming incarnate set out for us. Faith becomes sight only in the *eschaton*; and as we are drawn

there by grace, through incorporation into the man Jesus Christ, we must continue to cling to Christ and his cross. All meaningful intellectual work must take place within an awareness of this prior (and only truly significant) movement (on this theme see Ayres 2010: ch. 6).

One of the most striking treatments of Augustine's views about the Christian's approach to Scripture—and hence about the very enterprise of Christian thinking—is to be found through the twelfth and thirteenth books of the *Confessions*. In the twelfth book Augustine offers a meditative interpretation of the beginning of Genesis, and ↵ reflects on the phenomenon of multiplicity of meaning when Scripture is read according to the letter:

... what difficulty is it for me when these words can be interpreted in various ways, provided only that the interpretations are true? ... In Bible study all of us are trying to find and grasp the meaning of the author we are reading, and when we believe him to be revealing truth, we do not dare to think he said anything which we either know or think to be incorrect. As long as each interpreter is endeavouring to find in the holy scriptures the meaning of the author who wrote it, what evil is it if an exegesis he gives is one shown to be true by you, light of all sincere souls, even if the author whom he is reading did not have that idea, and though he had grasped a truth, had not discerned that seen by the interpreter?

(*conf.* 12.18.27; Augustine 1991: 259-260)

In this passage, Augustine emphasizes not only that the literal sense may be read in a plurality of ways, but also that mistaken readings, as long as they speak of some truth, are still for the good. We see here the importance Augustine places on interpretation having the clear goal of building up love of God and neighbour. Mistakes are not to be sought, but mistakes which speak truthfully of God are not to be rejected (see also *doc.* 1, *pro.*).

A little later we find him returning to the question of plurality in interpretation:

A spring confined in a small space rises with more power and distributes its flow through more channels over a wider expanse than a single stream, rising from the same spring even if it flows down over many places. So also the account given by your minister [Moses], which was to benefit many expositions, uses a small measure of words to pour out a spate of clear truth. From this each commentator, to the best of his ability in these things, may draw what is true, one this way, another that, using longer and more complex channels of discourse

(*conf.* 12.27.37; Augustine 1991: 266).

This dramatic image not only reveals very clearly why Augustine sees a plurality of literal readings as possible, it also shows how Augustine often ties that plurality to the possibility or necessity of extensive expansion of Scripture's words. Scripture, for Augustine, positively invites us to bring to bear philosophical tools to try and grasp the realities of which it often speaks. And yet, there is a complex dynamic at work here. In the following paragraphs of Book 12 one of the main ways in which Augustine differentiates the different kinds of readings is by reference to different levels of maturity in faith. But the question is complex because with maturity in faith seems to come a greater awareness of the mystery of divine transcendence, and a greater ability to recognize that the Creator transcends—in other words maturity in faith seems to overlap in significant ways with intellectual maturity in faith and greater philosophical maturity. Remember, though, that maturity in faith itself takes many forms; the one who does not abandon the human Christ and his cross is the one truly faithful. This set of concerns will run throughout ↵ the patristic and medieval periods: intellectual inquiry is always to be valued, and some certainly can be described as possessing greater maturity in their understanding of the divine. But at every stage true faithfulness and grace is what renders such insight transformative, and that true faithfulness maybe possessed as strongly by the unlettered as by the lettered.

Book 13 of *Confessions* offers a figurative reading of the same text, using it to give an account of the relationship between creation and the new creation in Christ. In passing it is important to note that Augustine sustains a variety of ways of reading Scripture allegorically, an aspect of the preaching of Ambrose of Milan that made a great affect on him as he moved towards his conversion in the mid 380s. But there are differences from Origen. Augustine offers us fewer examples of the practice, perhaps because of controversies over allegory that were prevalent before and around him. He also reflects a number of times on where and why allegory is possible (e.g. *doc.* 3.10.14.33). Some of the most striking examples of the practice are to be found in his expositions of the Psalms (see especially Cameron 2012. For a brief introduction and further bibliography on Augustine's use of allegory see Dawson 1999 and Margerie 1994).

Returning to *Confessions* 13, we find Augustine offering a series of striking images:

Who but you, O God, has made for us a solid firmament of authority over us in your divine scripture? For 'the heaven will fold up like a book' (Isa. 34:4), and now 'like a skin it is stretched out' above us (Ps. 103:2). Your divine scripture has more authority since the death of the mortal authors through whom you provided it for us ...

There are, I believe, other waters above this firmament, immortal and kept from earthly corruption ... Their codex is never closed, nor is their book ever folded shut. For you yourself are a book to them and you are 'for eternity' (Ps. 47:15) ...

(*conf.* 15.16–17; Augustine 1991: 282–283).

The relationship between the situation of the angels and that of human beings is essential here. Over us, human beings, Scripture has been 'stretched' across the heavens; the angels have no such book stretched above them for they contemplate God directly. Scripture is thus the means by which we can, in this life, contemplate God. Just a little later we find:

Now your word appears to us in the 'enigmatic obscurity' of clouds, and through the 'mirror' of heaven (1 Cor. 13:12), not as it really is. For although we are beloved by your Son, 'it does not appear yet what we shall be' (1 John 3:2). 'He looked through the lattice' of our flesh and caressed us and set us on fire; and we run after his perfume (Cant. 2:9, 1:3, 11). 'But when he appears, we shall be like him as he is' (1 John 3:2). 'As he is' Lord will be ours to see; but it is not yet given to us

(*conf.* 13.15.18; Augustine 1991: 284).

p. 492 Here Augustine emphasizes, first, that the divine Word appears to us in obscure form: we do not see it/him as he is. But, second, Augustine complements this with insistence that our movement towards the Word as he is has been stimulated by the Word's descent to us in the Incarnation and his enkindling of our desire for God. We should believe that our movement towards God through the Scriptures will be completed because he himself draws us on, even if we must recognize we are not there yet. Finally, a few paragraphs later:

Passing from the lower good works of the active life to the delights of contemplation, may we 'hold the word of life' which is above and 'appear as lights in the world' (Phil. 2:15) by adhering to the solid firmament of scripture. For there you hold conversation with us to teach us to distinguish between intelligible and sensible things as between day and night, or between souls dedicated to the intelligible realm and souls dedicated to the material world of the senses

(*conf.* 13.18.22; Augustine 1991: 285).

The Christian life is, then, a passing through the active life towards the contemplative that will be ours in heaven. But we make this movement by being ever attentive to the scriptural firmament set above us. This firmament set above is the means through which God 'holds conversation with us', teaching us and reforming

the mind's abilities to make appropriate distinctions (one of the very best accounts of how Augustine views the graceful engagement with Scripture is that of Dodaro 2004: chs. 4–5).

Augustine: Disputed Questions

As with Origen, I want to end by turning away from the vision of theological thinking articulated by Augustine and merely note a few themes of his thought that were formative for later Latin theological tradition. Two of the most obvious is Augustine's teaching on original sin and grace. I will not treat that here because it is covered in other chapters. I want instead to mention briefly some other themes: the Trinity, ecclesiology, and a complex of questions concerning asceticism, sex, and marriage.

Augustine's Trinitarian theology is fundamentally a pro-Nicene theology, one of a family of theologies that were articulated in Greek and Latin (and Syriac) contexts after about the year 360 (see Ayres 2010 and 2011). In the twentieth century one strand of influential scholarship strongly criticized Augustine for supposedly being inattentive to the distinctions between the divine persons, inattentive to the true hypostatic reality of the Spirit, and even setting Latin Trinitarian theology on a path toward deism. These readings of Augustine have been strongly refuted in recent decades, which has enabled us to see him more clearly as a highly distinctive defender of Nicene theology. Augustine became a key authority in later Latin theology and, because of this status it is easy for us to forget both that he was often experimental in his thought, and that for most of his career he did not have extensive access to contemporary Greek Trinitarian theology.

p. 493 Augustine came a little late to a major controversy in Latin theology about the value of marriage and sexual renunciation (see Hunter 2007). Although one strand of modern thinkers has presented Augustine as still shot through with the dualistic Manichaeism of his youth and as virtually the architect of later Western thought's supposed antipathy to sex, in fact his approach to contemporary debates over marriage steered a middle course. Augustine's negotiation of the relationship between married couples shows considerable nuance, and his clear recognition that women are in the image of God qua being human (rather than through their relationship with a husband) is of obvious significance for theological anthropology.

While Augustine's views on grace are explored in another chapter of this volume (see ch. *24, it is important to note the interaction between those views and his approach towards marriage and towards ascetic communities. While many of his contemporaries assumed not only that the celibate ascetic life was a higher version of the Christian life, but also that ascetics, by virtue of their decision for celibacy were more advanced in the path towards God, Augustine's theology of grace did not allow him this certainty. Pride in one's own supposed virtue is, for Augustine, a sure sign that one has simply misunderstood that all merit comes to us through grace. Augustine's highly influential views on the state, his vision of the intertwining of the two cities that was to be so important an influence on later Western thought, are treated in detail elsewhere in the volume (see 'Catholic Teaching on Politics and the State,' Pecknold, this volume).

The Legacy of Origen and Augustine

It was the earliest Christian centuries that delivered to us the heart of the Catholic conception of what it means to argue theologically. It was in these centuries that Christians came to a basic shared vision of Christian thinking as a meditation on the meaning of Scripture understood as a unified corpus of 'Old' and 'New' Testaments. Christian writers continued to dispute about which methods one should apply when and where, and what did and did not count as plausible or faithful interpretation, but this dispute occurred within some key boundaries. This vision of Christian thinking as scripturally focused brought with it also the insistence that Christian thinking was (to different degrees and in different ways) a philosophical enterprise. There is a direct line between the early Christians' adoption of the idea that their thinking was philosophical—made evident through their attempts to incorporate all that could be judged true about the cosmic order, and through their adoption and adaptation of philosophical techniques of argument—and the later rise of scholasticism. Origen and Augustine, as mediators of emergent traditions of theological argument, and as individual contributors to those traditions, stand as providentially ordered figures aiding the Catholic tradition in its struggle to explore what it means to be attentive to revelation as well as speculative and generous in thought.

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