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The Christological Substructure of Augustine's Figurative Exegesis

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Introduction: Tracking Augustine the Exegete

Augustine's experience of conversion in the year 386 was momentous but not unique; he was a man of several large conversions and a number of small ones. Reading Cicero's *Hortensius* ignited him with the love of wisdom; the books of the *Platonici* uncovered for him the panoply of the spiritual world; the necessity of authority for understanding truth devolved on him all at once; and within his catholic experience he suddenly moved to a radical understanding of operative grace. But Augustine's development is a story, not of vacillation, but of change through the accumulation of insights.¹ This paper will track one thread of change in the ten years between *On Genesis Against the Manicheans* (388) and *Against Faustus* (398), which reveals development in his approach to the figurative exegesis of the Old Testament. Eventually his approach represented a creative synthesis of the two major strands of early Christian exegesis, traditionally called the allegorical and the typological.²

Because of the symbiotic relationship in his thought between human language and the Word of God,³ correlations exist between Augustine's christology, theory of signs and practice of figurative exegesis, and suggest a field of coherence within his theology. How to describe such fields and their changes is a challenge, but recent interest in adapting Thomas Kuhn's language of "paradigms" to the concerns of historical theology suggests one option. Since Kuhn's definition of paradigm

stresses not only a constellation of meaning but the exemplary form and the revisionary power of a "concrete puzzle solution" such as Augustine labored to find, "paradigm" will be the term used here for describing the bishop's shifting interpretive structures.⁴ This paper will argue that in the period after his conversion Augustine's understanding of signs, figurative exegesis and christology are identifiable as elements of a "spiritualist" paradigm, and that in the early 390's they gradually and coordinately shift to an "incarnational" paradigm which, as the name implies, was generated by an advance in his christology.⁵

In the mid-380's Augustine broke free from what might be called a "materialist" paradigm and achieved a conception of immaterial and immutable spirit (*Conf.* 7.17.23). Though releasing him from the Manichaean strain of dualism, the new spiritualist paradigm carried its own pronounced disjunction between the world of spirit and the world of sense. In its wake, Augustine formed a disjunctive theory of signs which radically distinguished the signifying realm of sense from the signified world of true being. After he became a catholic Christian, this theory privileged a practice of figurative exegesis in which Old Testament events, characters, rites and texts served as signs pointing either to eternal realities or to the future advent of Christ. Meanwhile Augustine's christology, while orthodox from the time of conversion, emphasized the distinction between the Word in heaven and the assumed man Jesus on earth. He understood the divinity of the Word to have used the man Jesus didactically as an exemplar of humility who opened the way to the spiritual realm. But in time Augustine's restless desire to understand what he believed forced a revision of that disjunctive perspective, because it only partly explained the function of the Word's assumed mutability and weakness. The incarnational paradigm interrelated the eternal and temporal by embracing Christ not only as exemplar but also as mediator whose ensouled flesh was the nexus of a saving exchange between immutable divinity and mutable humanity. The conceptual conjunction of the temporal and eternal correlatively produced a conjunctive theory of signs which acknowledged the ductility of God's power for the world of history and language. In turn, the Old Testament appeared not only to anticipate but also to dispense the grace of the New, though made to wear a "veil" because of its different place in salvation history. Becoming less distinguishable from the New, the Old began to function pastorally and polemically in Augustine's figurative exegesis as the first book of the New Testament.

I. Exegesis, Signs and Christology in the Spiritualist Paradigm

A. Exegesis: History and Prophecy

Augustine wrote the two books of *On Genesis Against the Manicheans* about 388, shortly after his return to Africa following his baptism by Ambrose at Easter Vigil the previous year.⁶ This work defended the Old Testament against Manichaean objections to its anthropomorphisms and immoralities by showing the possibility of interpretation along the allegorical lines he learned from the bishop of Milan. In the main it followed a "rule of contradiction" which authorized figurative interpretation where the literal sense clashed with the spiritual understanding of God.⁷ Augustine intended to give both a literal and spiritual interpretation for the first three chapters of Genesis, but the end product heavily weighted the spiritual. The treatise proposed a two-fold schema for interpretation according to the contrasting perspectives of history and prophecy. "According to history past events are narrated, according to prophecy future events are foretold."⁸ *Historia* envisioned the visible, time-bound, corporeal world of matter, sense, and serial events, as contrasted or linked with the invisible, timeless, incorporeal world of spirit, understanding and truth (*On Genesis Against the Manicheans* 1.1.1–1.22.33; 1.25.43; 2.1.1–2.23.35). *Prophetia* related the events, characters, rites and texts of salvation history to the schema of promise and fulfillment of God's self-revelation on the temporal plane (1.23.35–24.42; 2.2.3; 2.24.37ff.). History and prophecy each contained a literal and figurative sense.

A text may be read as a straightforward chronicle, "according to history," a text's referent being understood to reside within ordinary parameters of verbal meaning. But for Augustine *historia* was patient of both a literal and a figurative sense, much the way lexically the same word may carry a proper and a transferred sense. In contrast to modern definitions, this history deals not only with events and people in the flow of space and time, but by virtue of its verbal medium includes figurative meanings which extend from the literal descriptions. Figurative expressions can point either to an indescribable literal event or to spiritual truth, e.g., as the authority over animals granted to Adam may represent an actual command or the stages of the soul's ascent (1.20.31). In the former case the reality referred to by the verbal signs of the text resides in the visible world, in the latter the invisible. Augustine's usual word for the figurative sense was allegory (*allegoria*), which despite some inconsistent language functioned at this time within Augustine's sense of *historia*.

But the same text may also be read "according to prophecy." After many pages of literal and spiritual interpretation of the days of creation, Augustine declared the need for God's rest on the seventh day to be considered "more carefully" (*diligentius*; 1.23.35). The seven days are reconsidered first as a literal prophecy foretelling the six ages of salvation history followed by a seventh age of eternal rest (1.23.35–41); then as figurative prophecy focusing on "the sixth age" of Christ and the Church which extends from the incarnation to the current moment of the Church's temporal journey (1.23.40; 2.24.37–26.40). Augustine's figurative approach attempted to "explain all those figures of things according to the catholic faith, either those which belong to *historia* or those which belong to *prophetia*" (2.2.4). As the figures belonging to history were characteristically discovered by reason and observation, figures belonging to prophecy were laid down through "the apostolic authority by which so many enigmas in the books of the Old Testament are resolved" (2.24.37).

Augustine's immediate reference was to the Pauline declaration of Eph. 5.32 that Genesis 2.24 ("the two shall become one flesh") refers to Christ and the Church; but he took this as a "clear sign" (*signum manifestum*) to interpret the remainder of Genesis 1–3 within a christo-ecclesiological frame. This frame sharply differentiated the figures of history and prophecy. Augustine said that Genesis narrative considered as *historia* signified Adam, but as *prophetia* portrayed Christ and the Church (2.24.37ff.). As *historia* the creation of woman from the side of sleeping Adam figuratively described either an actual event or the spiritual reality of the human carnal appetite; but as *prophetia* it foresaw the emergence of the Church from the sleep of Christ's death. As *historia* the serpent signified evil, but as *prophetia* it anticipated heresy's attempt to draw the Church from pure devotion to Christ. As *historia* the coats of skin signified the mortality merited by sin; but as *prophetia* they foretold the enslavement to carnal images of spiritual things.

B. Signs: Anagogic and Dramatic

In *On the Teacher* (389) Augustine imagined language "running parallel to the stream of experience and alongside it, so to speak, rather than within it."⁹ The mind's images arise from within human captivity to the senses, alerting and fitting the mind for a movement of understanding which occurs entirely in the intelligible realm. A sign (*signum*) indicates a certain intelligible or spiritual reality (*res*), and prompts the mind to seek the immediate contact which creates understanding. Spiritual interpreta-

tion is possible because a likeness (*similitudo* |) exists between the sensory images conveyed by verbal signs in Scripture, and the truth of either the intelligible world or salvation history. But likeness only juxtaposes sign and reality; understanding remains incommensurate with expression, coming not from the sign *per se* but from enlightenment by God, who readies the soul by co-opting its capacity to be moved by likenesses. This disjunctive theory of signs is operative in the figurative exegesis of both history and prophecy in *On Genesis Against the Manicheans*. On the one hand the visible *signum* of history invites either an inward look to an immanent *res* of the spatio-temporal world (literal history), or an upward look to a transcendent *res* of the eternal spiritual world (figurative history); on the other hand the visible *signum* of prophecy invites a forward look to a *res* of the future, either to the events of salvation history (literal prophecy) or its culmination in Christ and the Church (figurative prophecy). The figurative signs of history and prophecy possess no revelatory value of their own, but are as it were windows, "diaphanous" to the realities of which they speak.¹⁰

The spiritualist paradigm's correlation of signs, exegesis and christology comes to expression in parts of Augustine's energetic, rambling synthesis of neoplatonism and catholic Christianity, *De uera religione* (390). In this construction of the faith, the main concern is with "the history and prophecy of the temporal dispensation" which providence made for salvation (7.13). Pride had turned the human soul outward to the things of sense, perverted its love and numbed its capacity for spiritual understanding. This diseased condition blocked the soul's immediacy to truth and necessitated both serial existence and communication by signs. But God accommodated to the fragmented human condition by sending his Wisdom into the world, who assumed and lived a perfect human life in order to remind humanity demonstrably of its original perfection (16.30), not by force but by persuasion and admonition (16.31). His life, death and resurrection were lessons in right conduct and hope (16.32). He taught both clearly and obscurely in order to incite the search for truth, a strategy which encapsulated the divine method in all the Scriptures; this showed that the obscurities of the Old Testament remained valid for faith through figurative interpretation (17.33). The unity of Old and New Testaments is rooted in their common subject, the one God who revealed through them the stages of movement from the imperfect to the perfect (17.34). The play of human language in their parables and similitudes used events, characters, rites and texts to create a stairway to heaven.

These "visible words" configure spiritual reality as words in a sentence configure semantic meaning (50.98). The incommensurability of the eternal and temporal realms, as well as the differing capacities of human understanding, is reflected in the contrasting modes of human response to these likenesses, spiritual faith and historical faith (50.99). The modes are hierarchically ordered; the historical is the lowest step in the climb to the spiritual, and *allegoria* provides the thrust of ascent in Scripture's "ennobling and uplifting game" (51.100).

Rather than a finished product of neoplatonic Christianity, *De uera religione* is the report of that work in progress. In particular the mood of the eloquent culminating passage of 50.98 – 51.100 can only be described as interrogative. He wonders about the ends of allegorical exposition, whether the realities underlying the words of Scripture reside in visible events or in the intelligible world of the soul—referring to either movements of the affections, decisions of the will, or images of the mind—or whether the texts may refer to all of these. He asks about the kinds of allegorical exposition which differ depending on whether the text is a history-like narrative, the report of a real event, speeches or dialogues of characters, or the description of a rite.¹¹ He seeks to understand the function of the relativities and cultural idiosyncrasies of figurative representation in finding the truth which transcends the particularities of space and time.

Augustine's fluid categories suggest the need to import some terminology for the sake of clear analysis. He attempted during this time to assimilate the Church's traditional language about the four senses of Scripture, but it never was a comfortable fit.¹² His early language about figurative interpretation continued to contrast history and prophecy in a way roughly approximating the modern distinction often made between allegory and typology. But Augustine eventually grew restless with distinguishing these categories too sharply and gradually amalgamated them under the comprehensive term "figure" (*figura*).¹³ The opposition between these traditional terms seems to undermine their usefulness for describing the synthesis of Augustine, who yoked them in a comprehensive figurative approach which operated often in the same passage and sometimes in the same sentence. Therefore I propose to consider his approach as a unified practice with two aspects which I will call the *anagogic* and *dramatic* perspectives of figurative exegesis. The anagogic perspective focuses on a synchronic, upward movement of understanding which is driven by a likeness, usually discerned by rational observation, between a visible figure in the temporal, corporeal world of sense and an invisible

referent in the supratemporal, incorporeal world of understanding. The figurative sign incites the soul to engage the world of spirit and truth, but is essentially *ad hoc*, incidental to its reality and obsolescent because of its incommensurability with the intelligible world. By contrast the dramatic perspective focuses on a diachronic, back-and-forth movement of understanding which is driven by a likeness, usually posited by authority, between a figure and a referent which both belong to the visible world of history and language.¹⁴ The anagogic and dramatic perspectives share the pattern of the sign pointing beyond itself to a complete manifestation of its reality; their major difference is that the dramatic perspective indicates a *res* which belongs to space and time. But there is also the difference that within the dramatic perspective the relation between a prophetic sign and its reality occurs in either of two ways. The first is analogous to anagogic signs of history and characteristic of the spiritualist paradigm: both literal and figurative prophetic signs are interpreted disjunctively, pointing forward to a fulfillment in future space and time. The sign is obsolescent; after its fulfillment the sign serves only as a support for faith by proving the prophecy's credibility. But the second relation breaks new ground that is characteristic of the incarnational paradigm: figurative prophetic signs are also interpreted conjunctively, not only indicating but also somehow mediating the power of the signified reality, the *res* itself as it were present within the *signum* and anticipating its own full disclosure. For this sign the medium is the message, and intrinsic to the reality it signifies. It is therefore also permanent, because after fulfillment in Christ and the Church it serves not only as a proof for faith but also as an interpreter for understanding. Because of the close relation of signs, exegesis and christology for Augustine, I argue that his expansion of the theory of signs to include the conjunctive, and with it the practical interrelation of the anagogic and dramatic perspectives of figurative exegesis, derives from a paradigmatic reconfiguration of his exemplar christology to include the idea of mediator.

C. Christ as Exemplar

In the christology of the treatises Augustine wrote within the spiritualist paradigm, God approaches lost humanity especially through the mind, sending the Word into flesh and history in order to reveal the way to the spiritual realm. God circumvented diseased human patterns of perception by using Christ, a human being on the plane of history, to prompt and fit the dormant higher part of the soul to choose to seek the

spiritual realm. Christ's humility formed a prototype or *exemplum* of humility from which humble faith retrieves enough health for the eye of the soul that spiritual beauty breaks in, stirs love, and initiates the rise into the spiritual world. The historical images of the Savior provide a framework, but the locus of salvation is the free response of the one who believes. The words which describe Christ's function at this time are predominantly didactic; he "teaches" (*On the Teacher* 11.38), "admonishes" (*On Free Choice* 3.10.30), "persuades" (*De uera religione* 16.31), "demonstrates" (*On Faith and the Creed* 4.6).¹⁵

On Faith and the Creed, originally an address to the Council of Carthage in October 393, contains the longest sustained reflection on christology to date among the early writings. In 2.3 Augustine explains that in his divine nature Christ is called the Word because he makes the Father known as a person uses words to make thoughts known. In 4.6 he says that the Word assumed the garb of humanity in order to demonstrate a certain way of humility by offering the soul a dynamic "example of living" (*uiuendi exemplum*). But in 4.7 he juxtaposes images of black and white, hot and cold, fast and slow, to rhetorically generate wonder at the incarnation's mysterious intersection of time and eternity, change and changelessness, being and non-being. For the time being in 4.8 he explains the unity of opposites in Christ as the result of a *temporalis dispensatio*.

But through what I have called a temporal dispensation—because by a work of God's goodness our mutable nature was assumed by that immutable wisdom of God for our salvation and restoration—we adjoin (*adiungimus*) faith in temporal things done with a view to our salvation when we believe in him, "the Son of God who was born through the Holy Spirit from the virgin Mary."

Augustine's underlying restlessness to understand better what he believed concerning the functional association of the divine and human in Christ made for an uneasy alliance of conceptual paradigms. The disjunctive christology of the spiritualist paradigm was under stress, perhaps from the countervailing conjunctive language of Scripture, the inner logic of creedal claims, and his own sacramental ministry. His difficulty interrelating the two realms continued to contrast spiritual and historical faith as in *De uera religione*; their "adjoining" points to the juxtaposition rather than interrelation of the temporal and eternal. This spiritualist understanding of christology and faith corresponded to his separation of the sign and the reality, with divinity running alongside the stream of humanity rather than within it. While the reality remained above, the sign remained

below, displaying humility by its appearance in the world, and pointing the way to heaven. The organizing principle was synchronic and anagogic, subordinating the diachronic and dramatic as the first step on the way of spiritual ascent.

Through the early 390's Augustine's project of synthesis affirmed antinomies which inspired faith but vexed reason, and put his thought on parallel tracks related by juxtaposition rather than coordination. Faith held the two perspectives in tension, but his longing for synthetic understanding made this tension increasingly difficult to sustain. Constitutionally dissatisfied with contradiction and paradox, Augustine continued to search for the way conceptually to bring the two planes together. Like his trial use of spiritualist language about Christ as "the Lord's man" (*homo dominicus*; see *Revisions* 1.19.8), Augustine's experiment with the phrase "temporal dispensation" to explain the incarnation fell into virtual disuse after 396.

II. Christology, Signs and Exegesis in the Incarnational Paradigm

A. Christ the Mediator

Imaginative projections of a newer understanding begin to appear in 392 among Augustine's first homilies and notes on the Psalms, in which he continued an already ancient Church tradition of reading the Psalter as the transcript of Christ's inner life. It opened the design of the incarnation by graphically displaying the movements of his human soul, which "so inhered and somehow coalesced with the surpassing excellence of the Word when it took up a human being that it was not laid aside even by a humiliation as great as the passion."¹⁶ The texts injected images of seething human passions into the neat christology of the spiritualist paradigm, and pressed Augustine beyond mere affirmation to a more exact understanding of the function of Christ's full humanity. The sixteenth psalm pictured for him the soul of Christ as the instrument of God's power:

"My soul is your weapon" which your "hand"—that is, your eternal power—assumed in order that through it your power might conquer the kingdoms of iniquity and divide the just from the ungodly. (*Commentaries on the Psalms* 16.3)

These notes on the Psalms mark the first appearance, without elaboration, of the image of Christ as mediator (e.g., *Commentaries on the Psalms* 25.1). In

the meantime study of Christ the teacher proceeded in 393 with an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount (*De sermone Domini in monte*).

But the year 394 marked a turning point in Augustine's integration of christological faith and understanding. In studying Paul's letter to the Galatians he explored the complex of ideas associated with Christ as mediator in order to answer the essentially dramatic question of how the old covenant saints were justified through faith before his advent.¹⁷ Paul declared in Gal. 3.19 that, because God's promises were based on faith, the law had been given pedagogically for the sake of transgressions until the promised seed of Abraham should come, who is Christ; to this he appended the rabbinic idea that, unlike the promise given directly to Abraham, the law had been "ordered" through angels by the hand of a mediator, i.e. Moses. In Augustine's *Expositio epistulae ad Galatas* (394), the interpretation of this text combined certain elements of the bishop's preunderstanding and a mistake in translation to crystallize decisive ideas relating to christology and the exegesis of the Old Testament.

First, Augustine out-christologized even Paul with his understanding of Scripture as a unified verbal mosaic, according to which the word "mediator" referred not to Moses but to Christ, in light of 1 Tim. 2.5, the first quotation of this critical text in Augustine's works. Well understanding Paul's dramatic transposition of the story of Israel into Christian salvation history, Augustine saw Christ mediating the interrelation of the old and new covenants. This image of interrelation, fertilized by his neoplatonic fascination with the number one, gave him conceptual ground for joining rather than merely juxtaposing the eternal and temporal realms.¹⁸ Because the Word is eternally one with God he is excluded from functioning as a mediator, who by definition belongs to two parties and so "is not of one, whereas God is one" (Gal. 3.19). But the mediator was nevertheless also "one," according to the text in which the apostle speaks "more clearly" (*planius*), 1 Tim. 2.5: "God is one, one also is the mediator between God and humans, the human Christ Jesus." For Augustine this text legitimated the unity of God with a trinity of persons as a pattern for conceiving the unity of the mediator with a duality of natures. However, it was applied to speculation, not about the unity of the two natures in Christ's person, but about their reciprocity in his work. Conflating the image of the mediator with the self-emptying christology of Phil. 2.6ff., Augustine articulated a saving "exchange" between human weakness and divine strength.¹⁹ Instead of the Word assuming flesh only in order to exemplify and incite the human will to humility, the mediator

was a double agent who also cured human weakness and injected divine strength. Christ's power not only enlightened the mind but remade the will; therefore his humanity was not only the theater but also the protagonist of the drama of redemption.

So the only Son of God was made a mediator of God and the human, when the Word of God, God with God, both laid aside his majesty in descent to the human, and bore aloft human humility in ascent to the divine, so that he might be the mediator between God and humans, through God a human beyond the human. (*Expos. ep. ad Galatas* 24)

After 394 the power of the exchange based on the unity of God and humanity in the mediator was soon reflected in the appearance of a word group built around the image of "transfiguration."²⁰ Lexically the verb *transfiguro* denoted the act of changing the appearance or form of a thing, a sense Augustine often used in quoting New Testament references to Satan's self-transformation into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11.4), Jesus' transfiguration before the disciples (Matt. 17.2ff. and parallels), and bodily change at the resurrection after the pattern of the glorified Christ (Phil. 3.21). His first use of the concept occurred about this time in reference to the Word's immutability in the incarnation, which occurred not by transforming his deity (*non transfiguratione*) but by wearing humanity as a garment (83 *Diverse Questions*, qu. 73.2). However, the word also carried a metaphorical sense which rhetorically subsumed a constellation of people or things "under the figure of" some other person or thing. Thus Paul's references in Rom. 7.14ff. to being "under the law" were not literally autobiographical, but typical of every person enslaved to the letter of the law (*On Diverse Questions to Simplicianus* 2.3.2). The transition from the reality to the figure was emphasized by appending the phrase "into oneself" (*in me, in se*); understanding was conveyed by "carrying over" the subject into the type. So Paul wrote (1 Cor. 4.6), "I have carried over the figure of these things into myself and Apollos for your sake" (*haec transfiguravi in me et Apollo propter nos*), in order to project the Corinthians' attitudes onto a larger screen (*Against the Letters of Petilianus* 3.2.3). The critical use of the word in Augustine appears in reference to Christ's passion in which he "transfigured us in himself," or more sharply, "transfigured our weakness in himself."²¹ Christ assumed in his suffering not only the condition of humanity's finitude, but also its sinful self-absorption. The classic text in this regard is Matt. 26.39 where Christ confesses, "my soul is sorrowful even unto death," and prays "may this cup pass from me." According to Augustine, Jesus spoke not from himself but from the

weakness and fear which he "carried over" into his humanity from every person's mortal desperation.

This representational use of "transfiguration" recurs throughout his writings and especially fits the exemplary emphasis which dominated the spiritualist paradigm. However the powerful double agency of the one mediator is also reflected in Augustine's contention that Christ not only *demonstrated* change for the human will, as in the second sense of *transfiguro*, but also *effected* change within it, as in the first sense. Both senses are carefully delineated in a comment on the agony in the garden from a homily of 403:

Wherefore Christ, carrying the human and laying down a rule for us, teaching us to live and granting us to live (*docens nos uiuere et praestans nobis uiuere*), displays as it were a private human will ... But because he willed the human to be upright in heart, so that whatever in the human that was somewhat crooked he should bend (*dirigeret*) toward the One who is always upright, he says, "nevertheless not what I will, but what you will, Father" ... In the person of the human he assumed, transfiguring his own in himself, he displayed as it were humanity's own will. He showed you, and he rectified you (*ostendit te et correxit te*). Look, he says, see yourself in me. (*Commentaries on the Psalms* 2.32, sermon 1.2)

Augustine understands the incarnation to have collected chaotic human striving into a single entity and remarkably united it to the will of Jesus, who displayed its characteristic self-concern in the agonized words, "let this cup pass from me." But his passion not only revealed the human will, but "bent" it flush with God's straightedge; Christ taught *and* gave, showed *and* rectified. Humanity so embraced the divinity of the mediator that the sign of his deed cured the infirmity of all, and divinity so inhabited the humanity of the mediator that the same sign bestowed God's strength upon all. It was in order to convey the full impact of this exchange that Augustine conflated the literal and transferred senses of *transfiguro*.

The second insight of 394 generated by Augustine's study of Galatians concerned the exegesis of the Old Testament. Latin translators had garbled Augustine's text by rendering the Greek masculine participle *diatageis* ("ordered") by the neuter *dispositum*, thus referring the action not to the law but to the corporate seed who is Christ.²² This moved him toward a nuance of the Latin which construed the angels as having "prepared" Christ and the Church in the time of the Old Testament. This trajectory of interpretation pushed him toward taking the preposition "in" with a locative rather than with Paul's instrumental sense, so that the hand or power of the mediator became the superintendent rather than

the instrument of the angels' work. In other words, the angels did not use Moses as their agent but were themselves used as agents by Christ, whose divinity acted proleptically through them to prepare its own advent.

The angels' service as temporary surrogates for the incarnation implied a dramatic unity between the Old and New Testaments that was deeper than the anagogic. Expanding Paul's salvation-historical focus, Augustine explained that "through the angels was administered the entire dispensation of the Old Testament" in the stead and for the sake of the mediator to come.²³ Through the various elements of this dispensation the Spirit revealed Christ's future humility to the spiritual people of that age—the patriarchs, the prophets and their followers. They were justified by a "prophetic faith" which was no less effectual before the incarnation as Christian faith was after it. For the carnal people of Abraham's seed, the law generated an awareness of sin which positioned them to seek the grace to come. For this the angels became visible agents, quasi-incarnate mediators who were sometimes called by divine names because "the Spirit of God was acting in them, along with the Word of Truth himself, who though not yet incarnate, never withdrew from any part of the process of dispensing the truth."²⁴ The angels' activity was exactly analogous to that of the prophets who acted sometimes in their own person, at other times in the person of God, in order to indicate that God was acting in them.

Through the same assimilation of persons Augustine understood the traditional "prosopological exegesis" of the Psalms in which the psalmist prophetically but actually spoke the words of the mediator.²⁵ Augustine began to unfold his earlier intuitions more fully about 395, especially through the use of Psalm 21, whose first line ("My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?") the mediator had spoken "in the psalm and on the cross."²⁶ In the Psalm the Word anticipated his future exchange of human weakness for divine strength in a mysterious conjunction of sign and reality which united his voice with that of the prophet. On the cross Jesus' words signified not only his burden of sins but the burden of the old human nature itself, "as though he were saying, 'these words were transfigured in me from the person of the sinner'" (*Commentaries on the Psalms* 37.27). Based on Augustine's vision of the whole Christ of head and body (*totus Christus*), the exchange was predicated on the inference that "if there is 'two in one flesh' why not also two in one voice?"²⁷ For Augustine this act of bedrock exegesis from the lips of the dying Savior disclosed of the voice of Christ in all of Scripture; the rest of the Psalter and the whole Old Testament accordingly indicated not only that the mediator would appear on the earth, but

also that he himself was secretly acting in all the persons, events, rites and texts of the prophetic people. He gave New Testament grace in human history and language both before and after his advent; the signs of the old covenant were fragmentary but effective means of grace for people of their time by which the Holy Spirit conveyed incomplete but genuine knowledge of the mediator's future humility. Augustine took a number of years to polish his language for this, but eventually spoke of the Old as "the secret of the New," the New in the Old "like fruit in the root," the grace of the New "hidden" in the Old, and, in the famous couplet, "the New is in the Old concealed, and the Old is in the New revealed."²⁸

The new perspectives on christology and exegesis which came to expression in the commentary on Galatians imply a correlative shift in Augustine's understanding of signs. Prophecy's fulfillment meant that the New Testament neither contradicts nor cancels but unveils and completes the Old; this conclusion was pressed immediately into service against the Manichaean claim of antithesis between Old and New. Augustine's treatise *Against Adimantus* (394), rooted the counterclaim of their harmony primarily in the literal sense, but also explored fresh ground regarding figurative interpretation, in particular Paul's "rule" for figurative exegesis found in 1 Cor. 10. 4.²⁹ The assertion that the Israelites "drank from the spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ," drew him to reflect on a nuance of the relation between sign and reality that was different from the disjunctiveness characteristic of the spiritualist paradigm.³⁰ He noted that Paul used a copulative verb rather than a transitive: "he did not say, 'the rock signifies Christ,' but 'the rock was Christ.'" Of course Paul meant the statement to be taken in a spiritual sense; but Augustine seems to have thought further that it suggested two modes within the spiritual sense which are confused if the word "signify" is taken to imply a disjunction which makes the sign obsolete.³¹ Signifying power is generated from the qualities of an already existing thing in such a way that sign and reality intimately meet in a relation which the bishop increasingly reserved for the idea of "sacrament." It is sacramental because in the same way "our Lord did not hesitate to say 'this is my body' when he gave the sign of his body," the same conjunction operative in the Old Testament rite whose reality he understood to have been "placed within" the sign.³² This conjunctive understanding binds a reality of the spiritual world to its sign in such a way that, despite their incommensurability, the effectiveness of the reality depended on the presence of this particular sign. Therefore, even if "the flesh's blood is its soul"—the text

of Deut. 12.23 which generated the discussion of *Against Adimantus* 12—is literally true only with respect to animals, its interrelation of sign and reality is paradigmatic for the sacraments of the Old Testament which anticipate redemption and those of the New which recall it.³³

Ultimately the difference between disjunctive and conjunctive signs lies in discriminating between a reality which is merely signified and the signified reality which in turn signifies some other reality; e.g. the geological reality which is signified by the word "rock," but which in turn also signifies Christ. In this case the geological reality and its image in Scripture is a hybrid which he eventually called a "signifying reality" (*res significans*) and treated as a special class of sign (*On Christian Doctrine* 3.5.9). Like "the seven corn ears which are seven years" (Gen. 41.26), or the building called "church" because it houses the Church, the bond of sign and reality is so close that the signifying thing takes the name of the signified thing, and that which contains is named by that which is contained (*Questions on the Heptateuch* 3.57). His reflections are ultimately rooted in rhetorical analysis of figures of speech, especially metonymy.³⁴

B. *On Christian Doctrine*: Movement between Paradigms

In light of his path of development the *On Christian Doctrine* of 396 is paradoxically both profound and puzzling, because it seems to catch Augustine midway between the spiritualist and incarnational paradigms. It works with the anagogic view of christology, signs and exegesis, but also reflects a dramatic christology and conjunctive understanding of signs.³⁵ But the anomaly of the incomplete *On Christian Doctrine* is that it does not go on to articulate a method of prophetic and christological exegesis of the Old Testament. Whatever its merits on theological and philosophical grounds, this omission made the treatise an inadequate theoretical representation of Augustine's practice of figurative exegesis even as it was being written.³⁶

Augustine proceeded anagogically in both passages relating to christology, 1.11.11–15.14 and 1.34.38. In 1.11.11, while discussing the freedom from moral obstruction needed for loving enjoyment of the Trinity, Augustine declared that human purity was impossible except that the Word deigned to conform to human weakness and to offer "an example of living" (*exemplum uiuendi*). The second passage, following the anagogic distinction between "use" and "enjoyment," invoked the incarnation to speak of the important but impermanent role of visible and temporal things in the spiritual ascent. Because human beings are unable to seek the invisible

God, their believing perception of the visible humility of the incarnate Word brings them humility and strength; Christ launches the return to the invisible. The process was exemplified in the apostle Paul, who declared that having once known Christ "according to the flesh" he knew him thus no longer (2 Cor. 5.16), referring to humbly believing the Gospel narrative's picture of Christ's abasement in the world.³⁷ Linking this text in typical cumulative fashion with Phil. 3.13, Augustine saw Paul "forgetting what is behind," transcending Christ's humanity as the starting point of faith, and "straining for what is before," attaining to immediate knowledge of his divinity. The Word assumed a practical obsolescence by submitting to use as a vessel, making possible the soul's enjoyment of God and prompting the "forgetting" which leaves the earthly form behind. The humanity of Christ is one of those *transitoria* to be used rather than enjoyed, a vehicle whose beauty transports a person to enjoyment of the Trinity:

... we ought to use such things not with an abiding but a passing love and delight, like that for the road, like that for vehicles or some other means of transportation. Or if it can be said more accurately, let us love those things by which we are carried for the sake of that to which we are carried.

The transitional love and delight honors Christ's actual though ultimately temporary capacity to reveal God. Incarnation did not compromise the Word's nature because its eternal will was to assume serial existence; when the Word accepted temporality and "wore it for our salvation," it included accepting the transitional human love which is appropriate to momentary things. This anagogic approach conforms to the *exemplum* christology of the spiritualist paradigm.

Correlatively, *On Christian Doctrine* continues the spiritualist discussion about signs of *On the Teacher*. Augustine's statement of 1.2.2, "things are learned by means of signs" (*res per signa discuntur*), summarizes the anagogic, utilitarian interpretation; in biblical language of Rom. 1.20, "the invisible things of God are understood from the things that are made" (1.4.4). Incommensurability in the spiritualist paradigm between "things" (book 1) and "signs" (book 2) is reflected in his intention to separate their discussions. Further, charity is the pervasive end of interpreting the signs of Scripture, the achievement of which relativizes any technical errors made by the interpreter and relativizes even Scripture itself among those whose perfection has obviated the need for external instruction (1.39.43). This anagogic pattern is displayed in Christ who taught us to relativize temporal things, for "although he deigned to become our

way, he did not want us to clutch (*tenere*) but to move along (*transire*) this way lest we cling weakly to temporal things, although he assumed and bore them for our salvation" (1.34.38).

On *Christian Doctrine's* focus on the anagogic perspective is a product of the spiritualist paradigm. However, Augustine's concessive language, "although he became our way" and "although he assumed and bore temporal things," is a tip that the other, dramatic perspective on the humanity of Christ is also present. Cardinal elements of the dramatic perspective appear in both christological passages. In 1.11.11 a new instrumental use of John 14.6 is unveiled in which Christ is declared not only to reveal but to be himself the way to God: "Therefore, while he himself is the home country, for us he also made himself the way to the home country."³⁸ In 1.14.13 the new note is struck again by modifying a familiar medical image; the humanity of the Word brought not merely knowledge of possible healing but also the actual healing itself. Like a physician who applies different remedies for different maladies, Wisdom brought a medicine which is nothing other than his own being.

The medicine of Wisdom accommodated to our wounds by assuming a human being ... So the Wisdom of God in curing humanity furnished (*exhibuit*) himself for the healing; the doctor was himself the medicine (*ipsa medicus, ipsa medicina*).

Compared with earlier formulations the originating point of saving health has shifted from the will of the enlightened soul to Christ; the way to healing has been paved by the power of his virtue.³⁹ The early idea of the *exemplum* has quietly widened from being a mere source of knowledge to include a healing power which inheres in the knowledge; in terms of Augustine's brief exposition of 1 Cor. 1.24, Christ gives not only the wisdom but power to act. The Word took flesh "so that what he shows us should be done we might do."⁴⁰ He says further in a summary passage that divine providence engineered the temporal dispensation—here referring to all of salvation history—in order to provide both knowledge and ability to obey the twofold command to love God and neighbor: "that we might know and be able [to so love], the whole temporal dispensation was made through divine providence for our salvation."⁴¹

Because of the relationship of christology and language for Augustine, we expect that a modification in christology will be registered in a modified theory of signs. In 1.2.2 Augustine had defined a thing from the anagogic perspective as a brute reality "which is not used to signify something else, like wood, stone and cattle." The disjunctive sign-thing

relation which is characteristic of the spiritualist paradigm can be diagrammed as follows:

S ("ox") — R (ox-animal)

But brute realities can signify other realities. For the sake of separating his treatments of signs and things, Augustine bracketed this category of signs by insisting that for the sake of clarity his discussion could not concern things such as the wood Moses threw into the water, or the stone Jacob placed under his head, or the animal Abraham sacrificed in place of his son, "for these are things in such a way that they are also signs of other things." However, in 2.10.15 the concept of metaphoric or figurative signs (*signa translata*) compromised that intention and dissolved the brackets by reintroducing the complex sign-thing relation in which signification is predicated on the reality of a thing previously signified.

Figurative signs occur when the things themselves, which we signify by literal words, are also taken over (*usurpantur*) for signifying some other thing, as we say "ox" and through this syllable we understand a herd animal because it is usually called by this name, but again through that animal we understand an evangelist, which Scripture signified when the apostle interpreted it, saying "You will not muzzle the ox who is threshing." [1 Cor. 9.9; cf. Deut. 25.4]

Augustine's term for this hybrid is "signifying thing" (*res significans*; 3.9.13). Analogous to the interrelation of divine and human in the incarnation, the disjunctive relation of sign and reality has given birth to a conjunction in which a *signum* points to a *res* which acts as *signum* for yet another *res*. The original relation conjoins with another so that the *res* of the first equation becomes the *signum* of the second, diagrammed as follows:

S ("ox") — R (ox-animal) / S ("ox" [Scripture]) — R (evangelist).

The distinguishing characteristic of the figurative prophetic sign is that it is both thing and sign, *both* literal *and* figurative (cf. 3.12.20, 3.22.32). Similarly, the Sabbath was not merely a diaphanous image of a heavenly reality; literally obeying the command for physical rest generated its signifying force as prophecy of the Christ who gives heavenly rest, as the patriarchs, prophets and writers of Scripture recognized. In "the prophetic sacrament"⁴² the Sabbath and the whole Old Testament in a sense mediated the mediator to come, as the angels prepared Christ in the hand of the mediator; for each the reality and its sign is one ("R/S"). Their paradigm was the incarnate Word whose humanity mediated his

divinity, and was therefore both the prophesied "reality" of the Old Testament signs from the dramatic perspective, and effective human "sign" of the divine reality from the anagogic perspective. Christ's Sabbath cures worked in both ways, revealing him "to have come from God," anagogically signifying spiritual rest, but also that "he was himself God," dramatically signifying that one resorts to him for rest (3.6.10). The conjunctive crucible of the incarnation was at work in Augustine's understanding of signs in *On Christian Doctrine* when the anagogic disjunction of thing and sign was qualified by the conjunction of a second sign-thing relation whose middle term was both figurative and literal, witness of grace and medium of grace.

But *On Christian Doctrine* leaves this conversation dangling. Though conjunctive signs combine the literal and the figurative, Augustine was very concerned to prevent the fatal mistake of understanding spiritual things carnally; his formulations therefore concentrate on their distinction. His rule for preventing confusion between the literal and figurative ("Whatever cannot be referred to virtuous behavior or the truth of faith you should understand to be figurative," 3.10.14) does liberalize the rule of contradiction to include superfluities among legitimate material for figurative interpretation.⁴³ But it still limits such interpretation to a separate non literal sphere, and does not explain the presence of both literal and figurative in a *res significans* such as the Sabbath. Contradiction and superfluity simply indicate the limits of the literal sense and warrant the necessity of finding a figurative sense. But figurative exegesis based on such dissimilitude discloses an underlying likeness between a sign and its reality whose discovery is possible before it is necessary. If Augustine had written from the dramatic perspective, a rule for figurative exegesis recognizing things which are also signs would have concerned not only the narrow hermeneutical conditions which make figurative interpretation *necessary*, but the broad conditions which make it *possible*; not only how an anagogic sign must be *either* literal *or* figurative, but also how a dramatic sign may be *both* literal *and* figurative. In the end it would not only negatively concern the contradiction or superfluity which *discloses* figurative relationships, but would also positively concern the similitude which *forms* them. Further, since the incarnation paradigmatically shows that temporal things conduct grace, then the capacity for grace in prophetic signs should have been apparent, and prophecy and christology should have been analyzed as mutually interpreting. Book 3 should have gone on to use this two-way hermeneutical key to

explore Moses' wood as a sign of the cross, Jacob's stone as a sign of the incarnation, and Abraham's ram as a sign of redemption. But an explanation of the relation prophecy and christology to exegesis is conspicuous by its absence in the treatise of 396.

Why did Augustine not further develop his conjunctive understanding of figurative signs in *On Christian Doctrine*? And why did he give no analysis of the dramatic perspective which is evident everywhere in his actual practice of interpretation, particularly the homilies? Augustine may have been concerned primarily to present first the less familiar method of anagogic figurative interpretation, to which he intended later to append the dramatic. It is intriguing to consider the possibility that the dramatic perspective was to be the subject of the latter part of book 3 when he suspended the work. An oblique piece of evidence for this is the summary of Tyconius' rules of interpretation which eventually completed the book when he resumed writing in 426. The "keys and lamps" of the Donatist exegete's *Book of Rules*, as the bishop understood them,⁴⁴ offer what had not been discussed thus far in *On Christian Doctrine*, namely a prophetic, christological and indeed christo-ecclesiological hermeneutic. But Augustine may have needed more time to achieve theoretical clarity about the dramatic figurative perspective; the challenge of Tyconius' ideas may well have been a major factor in stalling the progress of writing his handbook of scripture interpretation.⁴⁵

C. *Against Faustus*: Flowering of the Dramatic Perspective

Signals of the emerging dramatic perspective multiply in the *Confessions*, in which conjunctive language telescoped the new bishop's understanding of the 390's with his faith of the 380's. In 5.14.24 he reported having listened before conversion to the preaching of Ambrose in order to critique his eloquence; but "together with the words, which I was enjoying, came into my mind the realities (*res*), which I was ignoring—because I could not separate them" (*dirimere*). After narrating his neoplatonic enlightenment in book 7, Augustine recounted his inability to enjoy God until "embracing the mediator" of 1 Tim. 2.5, who had been secretly calling to him in the words of John 14.6, "I am the way" (7.18.24). He had taken charge of redemption by building himself a humble "cottage of clay" in the incarnation, and "mixing" (*miscentem*) divine food with our flesh. His humility wrenched humans from their pride and "carried them across" (*traiceret*) to the sphere of his wisdom and power, where he healed their hearts and nourished their charity. To the extent Augustine once

saw in Jesus only "an example of despising temporal things for the sake of gaining immortality" he did not realize "of what reality (*res*) his weakness was the teacher (*magister*)," or what mysterious depths lay hidden in John 1.14, "the Word was made flesh" (7.19.25). But having embraced the mediator Augustine remembered seeing past the Manichaean charge of contradiction between the Testaments, and desecrating in them the simple unity of "one face" (*una facies*; 7.21.27) which not only admonished him to see God, but healed him to hold God. In the figurative exegesis of book 13, Genesis 1 is explored first anagogically for its vision of the Trinity attained through charity (1.1–11.12), then dramatically with reference to Christ and the Church (12.13ff.).

With *Against Faustus* (c. 398) the dramatic perspective came into its own and indeed dominated Augustine's interpretation of the Old Testament. In it Augustine explored the ancient books of Israel exactly as one whom Tyconius had described, "walking through an immense forest of prophecy."⁴⁶ But he did so with an anti-Manichaean agenda in hand, exploiting the hints of the commentary on Galatians and the treatise against Adimantus on grace in the Old Testament springing from Christ its deep center: "everywhere Christ meets me and refreshes me" (12.27); "not only some things but everything Moses wrote pertains to Christ" (16.26); "everything there was written either about him or because of him" (12.7). Augustine had argued for the necessity of the Old Testament to launch the anagogic process of understanding heavenly realities; however by itself this argument was vulnerable to the Manichaean claim to have rendered such launch points superfluous. *Against Faustus* argued assiduously from the dramatic perspective that the Old Testament was necessary because it not only launched but sustained the understanding of Christ, supplying not one but both poles of what modern thought would call the hermeneutical circle. When a Gentile inquirer reads the Old Testament, "from the present accomplishments of Christian realities the true prophecy of the books is proven to him, while from those very books the Christ to be revered is understood."⁴⁷ Augustine said in effect, "If you say 'our understanding of Christ is the only key we need,' then you should know that the Old Testament is key for understanding Christ." The reason is that while the promise needed fulfillment in order to be confirmed, the fulfillment needs the promise in order to be understood, as was evident from the citations of the Old Testament on every page of the New. Augustine worked consecutively through each passage to which Faustus had objected, showing its dramatic inner unity with the New Testament,

first treating the possibility of figurative prophetic interpretation based on authorized likenesses between Old and New (especially book 12), and then the necessity of prophetic interpretation based on likenesses disclosed by contradiction and superfluity, i.e. the prophetic significance of even the immoral acts and unintelligible rites of Old Testament figures (especially book 22). In both its practice of interpretation and its theoretical reflections *Against Faustus* fully exploits the figurative exegetical implications of the incarnational paradigm.

It is instructive to compare *On Christian Doctrine* and *Against Faustus* for their differences of emphasis. Anagogic unity between the Old and New Testaments emphasized by the spiritualist paradigm and presupposed in *On Christian Doctrine* came from their participation in the same invisible spiritual reality; dramatic unity of the incarnational paradigm and *Against Faustus* was based on the hidden presence of the New within the Old through figurative prophetic signs. While *On Christian Doctrine* left the field virtually untouched, *Against Faustus* explored the dynamics of prophecy and fulfillment as a primary design of revelation. *On Christian Doctrine* concentrated on *caritas* as the end of Scripture interpretation; *Against Faustus* focused on the centrality of Christ and the Church. *On Christian Doctrine* posited contradiction and superfluity as warrants for the necessity of figurative exegesis in certain texts; *Against Faustus* also explored the possibility of figurative interpretation inherent in any text. *On Christian Doctrine* concentrated on likenesses between signs and things discerned by extratextual reasoning and experience; in *Against Faustus* authority licensed the lines of intratextual correspondence between dissimilar constellations of meaning. Finally, *On Christian Doctrine* was concerned primarily with explaining the anagogic perspective of figurative exegesis; *Against Faustus* so interrelated the anagogic and the dramatic perspectives that, while *caritas* remained the ultimate goal of interpretation of Scripture, christo-ecclesiological exegesis emerged as the key to *caritas*.

Characteristically, *Against Faustus* displays these advances not only in theoretical reflections but also in the actual exegesis of specific texts. Book 12 contains a brief but complex interpretation of the story of Jacob dreaming as he slept on the stone at Bethel (Gen. 28.10–22). Augustine saw the unity of the two Testaments in Paul's expression of longing for his kinfolk, the Israelites, to whom belonged "the covenants," of which the apostle would not have spoken in the plural unless "they had been given both the old covenant as well as the new figured in the old" (12.3). Because the New is in the Old, a Christian cannot fail to see the figures

foretelling the Christ of head and body in the pages of Old Testament, because "these pages teem (*uiligant*) with such foretelling" (12.25). The stone which Jacob anointed signified nothing but Christ, the head of "the Man," the whole Christ of head and body. In John 1.49 the apostle Nathanael was a new Jacob who "anointed the Stone" by confessing Jesus as the Christ (12.26). Jesus' response to him authorized the similitude between himself and the Jacob story in the plainest possible terms (*apertissime*) when he portrayed himself as the ladder of the angels. Christ in his humanity was therefore to be seen as the (dramatic) fulfillment of the promised ladder which initiates the (anagogic) rise to his divinity. In both the descent to the visible and the ascent to the invisible Christ is the destination to be reached (*ad ipsum*) as well as the given means of reaching (*per illum*). "In him is the ladder reaching from earth to heaven, reaching from the flesh to the spirit, because by progressing or ascending in him the fleshly-minded become the spiritually-minded."⁴⁸

Conclusion: The Old Testament as the First Book of the New

Augustine first attacked the Manichaean disregard for the Old Testament from the anagogic perspective, perhaps believing that to demonstrate even the possibility of such interpretation was to conquer their objection. Through a deeper understanding of the incarnation Augustine saw more clearly not only the initiating but the continuing role of faith in Christ for generating the love which made spiritual understanding possible. A corresponding increase of attention to the dramatic perspective developed the second christo-ecclesiological line of interpretation. As Christ in his flesh effectually offered God to the world, so sacramental signs effectually offered spiritual reality to the soul. This critical turn of mind so interrelated the two realms that reality could be said to inhabit the sign. If Christ as the *res significans* of God had acted within history, and was not merely witnessed by history, then in principle every historical sign was open to bearing something of its *res*, either before or after his advent. This revision made the Old Testament into a bearer of New Testament grace, and opened prophecy to sacramental interpretation. Where Augustine had once thought the prophetic sign acted as the diaphanous and obsolescent pointer to the future reality, Christ was now understood to have been present within the sign both to denote and to communicate his power. The ancient saints did not merely anticipate but actually partook of him; salvation came to the patriarchs and prophets who witnessed through the Spirit the mediator's future humility, and the Church itself

was constituted among the people of the Old Testament (cf. *On Catechizing of the Uninstructed* 3.6).

This interrelational view explains the superficially contradictory assertions that the end of Scripture interpretation is *caritas*, and the meaning of Scripture is Christ (e.g., *On Christian Doctrine* 1.36.40, *Commentaries on the Psalms* 45.1). Augustine disclosed the relationship between the dramatic and anagogic perspectives by joining them so that each became essential to the other. If charity is the prerequisite for rising to God, then Christ is the prerequisite of arousing charity, and all Scripture "proclaims Christ and enjoins love" (*On Catechizing the Uninstructed* 4.8). *Caritas* is the end of Scripture from the anagogic perspective, and Christ is the end from the dramatic. In contrast to the sharp distinction between prophecy and history in *On Genesis Against the Manicheans*, their interrelation gradually blurred these categories and Augustine eventually came to speak of "prophetic history."⁴⁹

Augustine's development of the figurative exegesis of prophecy in the 390's infused life into what had become a tired argument with Manichaeism over the canonicity of the Old Testament. Certainly the thirty-three books of *Against Faustus*, some of which are themselves as long as entire treatises, as Augustine himself noted (*Revisions* 2.33.1), stand as evidence that the schema of prophetic promise and fulfillment filled his mind and heart in the late 390's. The length and energy of this work freshly reveals a dimension of Scripture interpretation which had been only hinted in earlier works. The advance in understanding the incarnation and its correlative advance to a conjunctive theory of signs led to a new appreciation of the possibilities of prophecy as a tool of argument along the lines of a dramatic and figurative—specifically christo-ecclesiological—interpretation of Old Testament. What facilitated Augustine's advance at this time? His immersion in the life of the Church had certainly modified his outlook from that of retiring religious philosopher to active Catholic bishop. Primary impetus surely came from the work of ministry, perhaps especially his responsibility for instructing catechumens.⁵⁰ The reading of Scripture by all accounts became a constant preoccupation (*Letters* 21.3). The narrative structure of Genesis, the impassioned voices of the Psalms and the salvation history of Paul's letters each in their own way challenged the neat anagogic distinctions of the spiritualist paradigm. At the same time his search for aids to reflection on Scripture introduced him to theorists like Tyconius (*Letters* 41.7). This reading was not unique, but seems to have fed a larger hunger to assimilate

the tradition of the Church, at least the part that was accessible to him in Latin. Through Ambrose and translations, he was exposed to Philo and Origen, and by the time of his elevation as bishop, Augustine had been reading Tertullian, Cyprian, and Hilary.

The enemies of the faith were a constant spur to his strong apologetic streak. A major resource for polemical work, as well as a strong impetus toward a conjunctive understanding of the incarnation and of figurative exegesis, may have come from reading Irenaeus' *Aduersus Haereses*.⁵¹ With full development of the christological substructure of Augustine's figurative exegesis, the Old Testament functioned as a prologue of the New, and therefore became legitimate territory for apologetic controversy concerning Christ and the Church. In a sense the Manichaean controversy prepared the ground for argument with the Donatists which intensified in the mid 390's. The dispute with Manichaeism was over *whether* the Old Testament was to be received; with Donatism the controversy turned on *how* the Old Testament was to be received. In other words, the dispute with the Manicheans concerned canonicity; the dispute with Donatists concerned hermeneutics. And by a kind of organic growth the conclusions harvested in the former controversy germinated seeds of arguments for the latter.

In the end Augustine's strongest goad, as in other matters, may have been the experience of his own life. Early dreams of spiritual perfection receded over the years under the press of daily living and the growing understanding of the power of grace. Book 10 of the *Confessions* amply shows his painful sensitivity to continuing imperfection. But that book's culminating reflection on the power of the mediator (42.67–43.69) also reveals the presupposition of his new understanding of operative grace. And an almost offhand pair of quotes from the Psalms (54.23, 118.1–8), just before turning to consider Scripture in the next three books, reveals the role of christological spirituality in his work of exegesis. "Look, Lord," he says, "I have cast my care on you that I may live, and I will consider the marvels coming from your law" (43.70).

NOTES

1. Eugene TeSelle elegantly characterizes Augustine's theology as a "continuity in process of becoming ... a coherence always changing." *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), p. 20. Augustine himself said, "I count myself one of the number of those who write as they progress and make progress as they write" (*Letters*. 143.2). *Revisions* prologue 3 invited readers to retrace his progress.

2. Erich Auerbach, "Figura," trans. Ralph Mannheim, in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, Theory of History and Literature Series, vol. 9 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984 [orig. 1944]), p. 36f.
3. See, e. g., *On Faith and the Creed* 4.6, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.13.12
4. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 175; cf. *Paradigm Change in Theology*, ed. Hans Küng and David Tracy, trans. Margaret Köhl (New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp. 3–33.
5. This thesis goes against standard scholarly opinion of Augustine's christology. Joanne McWilliam says, "Christology did not lead the way but changed in response to other changes in his thinking." See "The Study of Augustine's Christology in the Twentieth Century," in *Augustine: From Rhetoric to Theologian*, ed. Joanne McWilliam (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992), p. 197.
6. Roland J. Teske, S. J., *St. Augustine on Genesis*, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 84 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), p. 4ff.
7. In 2.2.3 he intends to interpret literally "unless no way out (*exitus*) is given for what is written to be understood reverently and worthily of God" (*pie et digne Deo*).
8. 2.2.3: *Secundum historiam facta narrantur, secundum prophetiam futura praenuntiantur*. Cf. Robert A. Markus, "History, Prophecy and Inspiration," appendix A in *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, revised edition (Cambridge: University Press, 1988), pp. 187–96.
9. Robert A. Markus, "St. Augustine on Signs," in *Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. R. A. Markus (New York: Doubleday, 1972 [orig. 1957]), p. 72. The treatise enlarges on views first advanced in *De dialectica* (386).
10. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
11. 50.99: *et quid intersit inter allegoriam historiae, et allegoriam facti, et allegoriam semonis, et allegoriam sacramenti?*
12. *On the Usefulness of Belief* 3.5.391 and *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book* 2.5.393; note the revision in *On Genesis Literally Interpreted* 1.1.1.
13. Robert W. Bernard, "In Figura: Terminology pertaining to Figurative Exegesis in the Works of Augustine of Hippo" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1984), p. 105ff.
14. The movement is forward from the angle of the prophetic sign, and backward from the angle of its fulfillment; i.e., the prophetic sign of the rock from which Israel drank points faith to Christ (Num. 20.8, 1 Cor. 10.4), but the Church looks back to the rock both to confirm faith and to deepen its understanding of Christ.
15. Cf. Wilhelm Geerlings, *Christus Exemplum: Studien zur Christologie und Christusverkündigung Augustins* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1978), p. 173ff.

16. *Commentaries on the Psalms* 3.3: ... ita inhaesit et quodammodo colauit excellenti supereminentiae Uerbi hominem suscipientis, ut tanta passionis humilitate non deponeretur. Cf. J. M. Dewart, "The Influence of Theodore of Mopsuestia on Augustine's Letter 187," *Augustinian Studies* 10 (1979), pp. 113–15.
17. *Expositio epistulae ad Galatas* 24. On the importance of this text see Gérard Remy, *Le Christ médiateur dans l'oeuvre de saint Augustin*, vol. 1 (Lille: Université de Lille, 1979), pp. 46–52. Augustine's text of Gal. 3.19–20 reads as follows: *Quid ergo? Lex transgressionis gratia proposita est, donec ueniret semen cui promissum est, dispositum per angelos in manu mediatoris. Mediator autem unius non est, Deus uero unus est.*
18. Cf. Augustine's remarkable development of the theme of Christ's mediation between the one and the many in the plan of redemption in *On the Trinity* 4.2.4–7.12.
19. William S. Babcock ("The Christ of the Exchange," [Ph.D. diss. Yale University, 1971], p. 331ff.) articulates Augustine's "identity–action structure" in which "human weakness and suffering have as their grammatical subject the Word himself, and not the man or the human nature assumed by the Word." The contention here is that this was the achievement of the incarnational paradigm.
20. M.-J. Rondeau, *Les commentaires patristiques du Psautier*, vol. 2, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 220 (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1985), pp. 380–88; cf. T. J. van Bavel, *Recherches sur la christologie de saint Augustin*, pp. 116–18.
21. A series of such references may be found in *Letters* 140.6, 10, 11, 12 and 13.
22. Many years later he recognized the mistake in reading the Greek text, *Revisions* 2.24.2. But this translation was still operative for the latter books of the *On Genesis Literally Interpreted* (5.19.38; 9.16.30, 18.35).
23. *Expos. epist. ad Gal.* 24: *per angelos autem ministrata est omnis dispensatio ueteris testamenti ... per angelos disposita est illa dispensatio legis* Cf. F. Edward Cranz, "The Development of Augustine's Ideas on Society before the Donatist Controversy," in *Augustine: a Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert A. Markus (New York: Doubleday, 1972 [orig. 1954]), p. 355f.
24. *Expos. epist. ad Gal.* 24: ... agente in eis spirito sancto, et ipso uerbo ueritatis, nondum incarnato, sed numquam ab aliqua ueridica administratione recedente.
25. Rondeau, *Les commentaires patristiques du psautier*, vol. 2, *Exègèse prosopologique et théologie*, 7–14; on Augustine, p. 365ff.
26. See especially *Commentaries on the Psalms* 37, delivered in Lent of 395. The quote is from *On the Trinity* 4.3.6.
27. *Commentaries on the Psalms* 30, sermon 1.4; cf. *Commentaries on the Psalms* 49.4: "the two Testaments have one voice."
28. Respectively, *On Catechizing the Uninstructed* 4.8 (c. 400); *Commentaries on the Psalms* 72.1 (c. 411); *Letters* 140.3.6 (c.412); and *Questions on the Heptateuch* 2.73 (c. 419).

29. *Against Adimantus* 12.5; cf. *Against Faustus* 12.29, where Paul's statement authorizes christological interpretation of other phenomena of the Exodus.
30. At this point the following interpretation steps away from C. P. Mayer's magisterial work, *Die Zeichen in der geistigen Entwicklung und in der Theologie des jungen Augustinus*, 2 vols. (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1969, 1974). Mayer traces the neoplatonic ontology of sign and reality which was characteristic of what I have called the spiritualist paradigm (I, 141–49), but contends that Augustine's encounter with biblical understanding did not affect it (I, 287), and that the salvation–historical understanding was "integrated into" his neoplatonic structure (I, 248ff.). The different view offered here is that after he studied Paul this perspective seemed to Augustine, as Prof. Mayer's thesis applied to *On Christian Doctrine* seemed to H. J. Sieben, to be one-sided ("Die 'res' der Bibel: eine Analyse von Augustinus, *De doct. christ.* I–III," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 21 (1975), p. 73). This was remedied by an advance in the dramatic perspective which gave it integrity as the condition of the anagogic. Even if the continuing power of the anagogic makes it an exaggeration to speak of "a radical conversion of [Augustine's] platonism" provoked by the discovery of the mediator (Remy, *Le Christ médiateur*, p. 175), the critical and distinctive role of the dramatic perspective makes it misleading to call its christo–ecclesiological focus the "flipside" (*Kehrseite*) of his philosophy (Mayer II, 438). In the incarnational paradigm, both of these irreducible perspectives on signs were operative, as in his reflections on the Paschal and Christmas feasts in *Letters*. 55.1ff., and in the different nuances of *sacramentum* and *exemplum* in *On the Trinity* 4.3.6 (cf. B. Studer, "'Sacramentum et exemplum' chez saint Augustin," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 10 [1975] pp. 89–93, 106–109). In themselves contrary, they came to function as complements in a single process. This development allowed Augustine's different strategy for defending the unity of the Old and New Testaments against the Manicheans. A purely neoplatonic ontology of signs could only argue for the possibility of retaining the Old Testament. Like the signs of *On the Teacher* the Old Testament possessed "no semantic function," serving only as reminder of knowledge to be gained elsewhere. The "weakness" of such a view of signs (I, 330: "This disjunction (*Auseinanderfallen*) of sign and reality is the ontological weakness of signs.") was also the weakness of this view of Scripture's unity. Only an interlocking understanding in which the reality *necessitated* the given sign, in which to deny the Old is to deny the New, could defend the bond of the Testaments. That necessity was emerged in the wake of the fuller christology of the mature dramatic perspective. See the reflections on *Against Faustus* below.
31. See Jolivet and Jourjon's *notes complémentaires* 27, 29 to *Against Adimantus*, BA 17, 775. But cf. Augustine's distinction in *On the Trinity* 2.6.11 between signs of Christ and signs of the Spirit. The former signify through

- a symbolic (= sacramental) action performed upon an existing reality, like Jacob anointing the stone; the latter such as a dove or fire come into being *ad hoc* and pass away.
32. 12.3: *possum etiam interpretari praeceptum illud in signo esse positum.*
 33. The reciprocity of the anagogic and dramatic in the incarnational paradigm comes into view when Augustine views a dramatic sign anagogically. In *Questions on the Heptateuch* 2.139 [c. 419] Augustine says that eternal rest remained in God while the Sabbath was given as a sign of the eternal reality "just the way (*quodammodo*) 'the rock was Christ' because the rock signified Christ." Note that *Questions on the Heptateuch* 3.57 repeats the statement of *Against Adimantus* that Paul avoids the word "signified."
 34. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 8.6.23f.
 35. H. J. Sieben similarly sees in the hermeneutic of *On Christian Doctrine* the twofold goal of charity and the whole Christ of head and body; "Die 'res' der Bibel," 90.
 36. In the categories of *On Genesis Against the Manicheans* 2.2.3ff., *On Christian Doctrine* does not adequately interpret "the figures of things which belong to prophecy."
 37. 1.34.38; Augustine takes this phrase adverbially in reference to Paul's "fleshly" manner of knowing, and not adjectivally as if to speak of the Christ of flesh, i.e. the Jesus seen by humans.
 38. Cf. Crazz, "Augustine's Ideas on Society," p. 375f. L. C. Ferrari noted the use of this text "as early as 396" ("Christus Via' in Augustine's Confessions," *Augustinian Studies* 7 [1976], 49). But because the early writings often used other parts of the verse, "I am the truth" (*De beata vita* 34), "I am the life" (*On Two Souls* 1.1) and "no one comes to the Father but through me" (*On the Morals of the Catholic Church* 16.28), the question would seem rather to be why "I am the way" does not appear any earlier. (Cf. Ferrari, "Young Augustine: Both Catholic and Manichee," *Augustinian Studies* 26:1 [1995], p. 117.) I suggest he avoided the quote until his understanding concerning the saving role of Christ's humanity fully matured, particularly because of the Manichaean invocation of Christ as "the way."
 39. 1.11.11: *exemplo uirtutum eius uitia nostra curantur*; cf. Geerlings, *Christus Exemplum*, 213–15.
 40. 1.15.14: *ut id quod ostendit esse faciendum ... faciamus.*
 41. 1.35.39: *ut nossemus atque possemus, facta est tota pro salute nostra per diuinam prouidentiam dispensatio temporalis.*
 42. In *Against Faustus* 16.23 Moses is called the "absolutely faithful dispenser of the prophetic sacrament" (*fidelissimus dispensator prophetici sacramenti*).
 43. H.-I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, 4th ed. (Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1958), p. 479; cf. J. Pepin "L'absurdité, signe de l'allégorie," in *Tradition de l'allégorie* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1987 [orig. 1957]), p. 173ff.). I use the term "liberalizes" rather than R. Teske's

- "maximizes" ("Criteria for Figurative Interpretation in St Augustine," in *De Doctrina Christiana: A Classic of Western Culture*, ed. Duane W. H. Arnold and Pamela Bright [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995], 110, 116ff.) because dramatic figures are not included. But the rule certainly maximizes the field of anagogic figures.
44. *Liber regularum*, preface: *regulae mysticae ... claves et luminaria*; cf. Pamela Bright, *The Book of Rules of Tyconius* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), p. 119ff.
 45. Charles Kannengiesser, "The Interrupted *De doctrina christiana*," in *De Doctrina Christiana: A Classic of Western Culture*, 3-13.
 46. *Liber regularum*, preface: *prophetiae immensam siluam perambulans.*
 47. 16.20: *illi ex rerum christianarum iam praesentatis effectibus librorum prophetia uera probaretur; ex librorum uero prophetia Christus colendus agnosceretur.*
 48. 12.26: *In illo enim scalae a terra usque ad caelum, a carne usque ad spiritum, quia in illo carnales proficiendo uelut ascendendo spiritales fiunt.*
 49. *City of God* 16.2.3; cf. Markus, *Saeculum*, pp. 188–92.
 50. His first known homily, *Sermon 214*, explained the creed to catechumens.
 51. Cf. Berthold Altaner, "Augustinus und Irenäus," in *Kleine patristische Schriften* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1967 [orig. 1949]), p. 203, who dates Augustine's first exposure to Irenaeus in the mid 390's.

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THROUGH THE AGES

Volume 2

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