Reading Report of the Last Three Books of Augustine’s Confessions: Book XI to XIII

Referee: Dr. Benedict Kwok  
Author: Jimmy Chan

I. Introduction

Augustine [354-430], the overseer of the church at Hippo, North Africa, is considered by many as the most influential church father to Western Christianity. And, among his numerous works, Confessions, written from 397-400 is the most widely read and known. [1]

Concerning the title of the book, Albert C. Outler, the Professor of Theology at Southern Methodist University, rightly points out the ambivalence meaning of the word “Confessions”:

One does not read far in the Confessions before he recognizes that the term “confess” has a double range of meaning. On the one hand, it obviously refers to the free acknowledgment, before God, of the truth one knows about oneself--and this obviously meant, for Augustine, the “confession of sins.” But, at the same time, and more importantly, [the Latin word] confiteri means to acknowledge, to God, the truth one knows about God. To confess, then, is to praise and glorify God; it is an exercise in self-knowledge and true humility in the atmosphere of grace and reconciliation. [2]
In other words, for a proper appreciation of this “extraordinary spiritual legacy” [3] of Augustine, the reader of Confessions should keep in mind that the bishop of Hippo does not intend this to be mere confessions about his sins before his conversion (the part on self-recollection is covered from Book I to Book X, with Book X being a discourse on memory), but a work of praise to God and contemplation to his wisdom and love, especially demonstrated through His creation (a theme explored in Book XI to XIII). In fact, Augustine was concerned about the correct perspective necessary of reading Confessions properly such that in his two other works, Retractions 2.6.1 (AD 426/427) and Letter to Darius (AD 429), he made his intent on Confessions explicit that he wants the reader of the work to “praise the just and good God”, and that the reader should view that his/her life is to praise Him who made us, and not “him”, Augustine. [4]

As James J. O'Donnell succinctly puts it, the ‘Confessions’ motif that runs through the entire work can be summarized as the following:

Confession of sin is the negative form of confession. Confession of praise, on the other hand, is the acknowledgment by the creature of the greatness and goodness of God. Confession of faith is then emphatic assent to a set of facts about God and God's relation to mankind.

All three confessions occur in the Confessions. If God and the soul are all Augustine wants to know, and if they are to be known best in relation to each other, then acknowledgement of the weakness of the individual and of the power and greatness of God are two sides of the same coin…confession of praise restores God's place in the sinner's eyes. Confession of faith declares what has transpired to the community of believers. Seen this way, confession is the working out of redemption itself in the life of the sinner. It is prayer itself.
With the foregoing understanding in mind, the sincere reader should also notice that the great spiritual epic of Confessions can be naturally divided into two parts, [5] as mentioned in the previous paragraph: The first part is the first ten books and the second part is the last three books. [6] A good mnemonic for this general division could be that the first ten books is focused on the word of Augustine himself (to God and the reader), and the last three books is focused on the word of God, the Holy Scripture, who creates the “heaven and earth”. Further description and critical appreciation will be done only on the last three books of Confessions, mainly for three reasons:

1. By exploring the nature of God’s creation mentioned in the first few verses in Genesis, these three books are at the climax of the entire Confessions in terms of confession of praise. His praise and devotion to God is transgenerational and hence worth to study.

2. The influence of Plotinian Neoplatonism on Augustine is full blown in these three books when creation is discussed. These three books, especially Book XII, is philosophically profound and complex that is worth to appreciate.

3. Augustine’s the allegorical hermeneutical approach is demonstrated as he expounds on Genesis.

4. Finally, the author of this paper is undertaking research in Augustine’s Trinitarian thought, especially focusing on his view of the Holy Spirit. These three books together shows the insight of his theology on Trinity and the related pneumatology; Second to his subsequent classic work of De Trinitate, Augustine’s Confessions is Trinitarian because of these three books, so an investigation from a Trinitarian perspective is indispensible.
The subsequent investigation into these three books will pay attention to these four aspects. Nevertheless, before we dive into these three books, the author will do fair justice to provide an overview of the other books as well, in order to understand how they lead to the climax. Below is a table that shows the general structure of *Confessions* as a big picture view:

**Table 1.1: Outline and Theme of the Books in Augustine’s *Confessions***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Categorical theme</th>
<th>Individual Book’s themes</th>
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Augustine’s word on his personal conversion history, and his disposition on his and moral and spiritual

- Begins with a prayer from Psalms: "Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great i
Highlights the contradictions of Augustine youth – looking for ideological commitment in a society not faithful to older traditions; knows about God because of his mother but not ready to commit to it.

II

- Describes his stealing of pears from a neighbor’s tree when he was 16, as an, supposedly a type of, adolescence sin.

III

- Augustine’s student days in Carthage

- His discovery of Cicero’s Hortensius

- The enkindling of his philosophical interest

- His infatuation with the Manichean heresy,

- His mother (Monica)’s dream which foretold his eventual return to the true faith and to God.
IV

It includes the following about Augustine (when he was among the Manicheans):

- An account of his teaching at Tagaste
- His taking a mistress
- The attractions of astrology
- The poignant loss of a friend which leads to a searching analysis of grief and transience.
- Mentioning of his first book, De pulchro et apto, and his introduction to Aristotle’s Categories and other books of philosophy and theology.

V

- Augustine decides to flee from his known troubles at Carthage, and leaves Manicheism which
Here he meets Ambrose, who confronts him as an impressive witness for Catholic Christianity.

Scripture. Augustine decides to become a Christian catechumen.

Augustine is standing the doorstep of the church, confused and perplexed whether to enter.

VI

Turmoil in the twenties. Monica follows Augustine to Milan and finds him a catechumen in the Catholic Church.

Both admire Ambrose but Augustine gets no help from him on his personal problems. Ambition spurs and Alypius and Nebridius join him in a confused quest for the happy life.

Augustine becomes engaged, dismisses his first mistress, takes another, and continues his fruitless search for truth.

VII

A candid report of:
· Augustine's ecstasy of Plotinus' Neoplatonism (and Manichean conceptions of God and evil),

· An analysis of the differences between Platonism and Christianity

· From this, he comes finally to the diligent study of the Bible, especially the writings of the apostles.

VIII

· Describes a multitude of influences on Augustine:
  
o Cicero's *Hortensius* awakened his thirst for wisdom
  
o Manicheans deluded him with their promise of true wisdom
  
o The Academics (successors of Plato) upset his confidence in certain knowledge -- they released...
· The last moment of encounter with Augustine’s mother, Monica.

· The end of the autobiography of Augustine the sinner.

A way to God, a way which begins in sense experience but swiftly passes beyond it, through...
Augustine’s allegorical exploration of the word of God in the creation history (in the Mosaic Book of Genesis).

Augustine explores two main topics related to God’s creation according to the Book of Genesis:

- the nature of time in the context of creation

- the metaphysical worldview of a Christian using the first verse in Genesis: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”

- No creature, not even the angels, is co-eternal with God, who is the eternal Creator.
XII

- The theme is the mode of creation and the truth of the Word of God, the Holy Scripture.

- Augustine especially explores the relation of the visible and formed matter of heaven and earth, which is created by God de nihilo.

- Analysis of Genesis 1:1-2 for the purpose above, and in the process Augustine came to light that there can be pluralistic true interpretations of the text.

XIII

- The mysteries and allegories of the days of creation. Augustine interprets Gen. 1:2-31 in a mystical and allegorical way in order to exhibit the profundities of God’s power, wisdom and love.

- He also develops his hermeneutics on the topic of creation.

- He finds the Trinity in the account of creation and he ponders the work of the Spirit moving over the waters. In ... the dry land and bitter sea he finds the division between the people of God and the conspiracy of the unfaithful.

- He develops the theme of man’s being made in the image and likeness of God.
As a final note for the introduction, the reader of this paper should be aware that Confessions is translated to more than fifty modern languages, including about then in English. [12] The primary translation that the paper uses is from Vernon J. Bourke’s from 1953, who claims to provide a version “which follows the Latin as closely as English idiom will permit”. [13]

The translation from Dr. Albert C. Outler published in 1955 and the original text provided online by the contemporary renowned Augustinian scholar Dr. James J. O’Donnell, [14] will be occasionally referenced as well. But unless otherwise stated, all the “Book.Chapter.Paragraph” notations mentioned below are taken from Bourke’s translation. [15]

II. Book XI

Book XI concerns the seeking of God the eternal creator and His creation in time. This is how the Book begins:

Since eternity is Thine, O Lord, dost Thou not know what I am saying to Thee, or dost Thou see what is going on in time, in relation to time? Why, then, do I tell Three the detailed story of so many things? Certainly not for Three to learn them through me, but to arouse my feeling of love toward Thee, and that of those who read these pages, so that we may all say: ‘Thou art great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised’.

I have already said it [in Book X], and I shall say it again: in the love of Thy Love am I doing
the Truth says: ‘your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.’ … [16]

The reader will notice right away an upfront introduction of the theme of time, and achieves a beautiful transition from the first part of Confessions (Book I to X) and the second part (Book XI to XIII) through three devices:

1. Augustine reflects on his reason for telling God “the detailed story of so many things” [17] (alluding to his recollection of personal history in the first part)

2. He repeats Psalm 95:4, which he uses to begin the entire Confessions, as a motif (and central theme) of the “Confessions of praise”

3. He continues his seeking of God in his love which he expressed in the beginning of Book X:

Notice that it is out of a strong love and longing for God that Augustine desire ardently to meditate on His law and confess to Him “the extent of his knowledge and lack of skill in it” [18], and contemplates on His mode and time of creation; In 11.4.6, Augustine begins to start pondering over how God created the heaven and earth that caused them to come into existence, as narrated by Moses in Genesis 1:1.

First, in 5.7, he deduced that God cannot, logically speaking, create heaven and earth in the air or upon the water, because those belong to heaven and earth too. He concluded from Psalm 32:9 that in God’s Word He made heaven and earth. But then he noted that this “Word” cannot be spoken words in terms of audible sounds such as the voice from heaven saying “This is my beloved Son” (Matt 3:17), for the voice, according to Augustine, is mediated through the angelic order and is transitory. Augustine asserts then it is the Word, the Son of God, who is also the Power, the Wisdom and Truth of God, the “Principle” who created the heaven and earth. (11.9.11) Using what the logical principle of non-contradiction, Augustine proclaims in 11.12.14 that “no creature was made before any creature was made.” Starting from 11.13.15 to
11.13.30, which is more than half of the content of Book XI, Augustine leads a brilliant investigation of the nature of time. The discussion is philosophical and Neoplatonic in nature. Basically it comes down to the following:

1. Future does not exist

2. Past does not now exist

3. Present time has no length

This is to say, what comes the way from the future (which does not exist) will momentarily become the past (which does not exist now either). Hence there is not a ‘long time’ or ‘short time’ for these are only a subjective experience – what we can objectively measure is not time itself, but the ‘present mental disposition’ which things pass by. [19] In concluding Book XI, Augustine reinforces the immutability of God the eternal Creator, who knows all future and past things. According to him, this knowledge of God does not change; what is changed and extended are the feelings and sense perceptions, and our expectation of the future things and memory of the past ones. In other words, temporal matters are under the “great knowledge and foreknowledge” of the Lord our God. [20]

Apart from the philosophical discourse on time mentioned above, Augustine shows a heavy influence by Neoplatonism in various places: For example, in 11.4.6: Augustine renders “So, Thou, O Lord, didst make them: Thou who art beautiful, for they are beautiful; Thou who art good, for they are good;” (Today we often rephrase this as to say that when the created things are good and beautiful, there implies that there is a created One that is the Supreme Good and Supreme Beauty.) This actually comes a Neoplatonic form which asserts that “all the many lower beautiful things are inexplicable without the One, Supreme Beauty; so, too, are the goods in relation to the Form of Goodness.” [21] Another Neoplatonic influence (from Plotinus) is observed in 11.29.39, where Augustine describes that “his life is but a distraction”, and that he needs to strain forward to what is before, “not according to distraction, but with mental concentration and press on toward the prize of his heavenly calling. The concept of distraction of consciousness to the many is strongly Neoplatonic. [22]

Finally in the 11.30.40, Augustine describes a mystical metaphor: “And I shall become firm and solidify in Thee, in the form made for me in Thy Truth”, which is the Neoplatonic Plotinus’
attempts to describe the union with the One.

In addition to his strong Neoplatonic affinity, Augustine seems to show a trait, to say the least of Gnostic hermeneutics when he mentions in 11.6.8 that in Christ’ baptism scene, the voice of the Father is effected through “the movement of a creature”; here, Augustine shows his view that all apparitions of God to man, except incarnation, were made possible through the mediation of creatures, that is, the “angels”, through created medium (the air). The author of this paper has the buzzword Gnosticism in mind when reading that Augustine try to enforce the necessity of a creature to be the vocal mediator between God and man. Gnostics embrace spirituality and devaluate physical matters, and the Supreme Being is supreme to the extent that reaching carnal physical being of man necessitates going through some junior spiritual beings like angels. Augustine’s frequent mention of ‘angels’ (11 times in Confessions, with ten times in the last three books, Book XI to XIII, one time in Book X) and his highlight of angels who may exist above time are another evidence that Augustine is also influenced by Gnosticism. Given that Gnosticism is believed by many to have a root of Neoplatonism, and that Augustine has a strong Neoplatonic affinity, the Gnostic influence on Augustine should not be a surprise. Indeed, there are similar criticisms out there on Augustine for exactly this, but in Confessions, and many of his other words, Augustine is able to ‘contain’ this tendency such that it does not become detrimental to the biblical faith, though the interested reader can study further on whether and how this Gnostic traits have influenced Augustine in his other writings and subsequent Christian generations.

In regard to Augustine’s Trinity, only the Father and the Son are more prominent in Book XI, and there is no explicit mention of the Holy Spirit yet. However, apart from what is mentioned on the footnote on P. 17, the person of the Holy Spirit is here hidden as the “fire of Thy love’, in which the fire imagery of the Holy Spirit will be expanded further in Book XIII.
III. Book XII

Book XII is can be considered the most philosophically complex among the three books. Here Augustine explores the ‘how’ of God’s creation through a detailed analysis and internal debate of the different possible interpretations of Genesis 1:1-2, especially focused on the nature and source of ‘formlessness’ of matter. In an attempt to resolve how the heaven and earth is created, Augustine confessed to God and resorted to His word of Holy Scripture. (The reader would appreciate Augustine’ attitude of finding answers and not merely inquires; his comment that “the poverty of human understanding is expressed in rich talk” at the beginning of Book XII is so true.) Augustine then quickly turned into the key question of the book, ‘Where is ‘heaven’ (caelum) and the ‘heaven of heaven’ (caelum caeli)?” The Augustinian meaning of ‘heaven of heaven’ refers to God’s Heaven, as distinguished from the sky, that is, the earth’s heaven, so to speak. The following table summarizes the different interpretations of the three key phrases of Book XII: ‘heaven and earth’, ‘In the beginning’ and ‘formlessness of matter', raised by Augustine and his hypothetical ‘man’ of alternate views, which are merely the various internal opinions within Augustine’s philosophical mind:
Table 3.1 The various positions on the key phrases in Book XII of *Confessions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Phrase:</th>
<th>Position:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Heaven and earth”, <em>caelum et terram</em></td>
<td>12.17.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“In the Beginning” <em>principio</em></td>
<td>12.20.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The earth was invisible and unorganized”</td>
<td>12.21.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First man (Augustine)

\textit{caelum} is the spiritual celestial \textit{creature}, \textit{material}

means
"the coeternal Word"

the unformed matter of corporal things

Second man [35]

\textit{caelum \textit{et terram}} = the visible world as a whole

means
"the coeternal Word"

the unformed matter of corporal heaven and earth

Third man

\textit{caelum \textit{et terram}} = together the confusion of unformed matter
“means “the coeternal Word”

unformed matter from which would come intelligible heaven and corporal heaven and earth

Fourth man

caelum = invisible nature, terra = visible nature

“means “the coeternal Word”

unformed matter from which would come heaven (= spiritual creature) and earth (=corporal creature)

Fifth man

caelum et terram = the unformed first state caelum et terram

“means “the coeternal Word”

pre-existent informity that would be the matter out of which corporal heaven and earth would be drawn
It is important to understand that the different interpretations of these key phrases represent the diverse possible biblical interpretations can be tolerated, because either one of them can be the intent of the original author (Moses in this case), Augustine argues. Hence he is saying that while there is one absolute truth for a statement in the Bible, which is known the best from the original intent of the Scripture writer who is imbued with the Holy Spirit [36], multiple interpretations ("speaking the truths") should be tolerated because he, as well as his contradictores, does not know which one is the original intent of the author [37].

(12.30.41) Note the humility that Augustine has to those who have different views of interpretations here; in fact, not only humility, but with love for one another and for God that Augustine says we should treat people with different interpretations of truths: “But let all of us whom I acknowledge to see and speak in truths in these words love each other and also love Thee, our God, the Fountain of truth” (12.30.41) [38]. On the other hand, to the arrogant people who do not accept others’ possible interpretation of truth, Augustine is sharp in pointing out their self-centeredness:

These people…did not know Moses’ meaning; rather, they love their own opinion, not because it is true, but because it is their own. Otherwise, they would love another true one equally, just as I love what they say, when they tell the truth – not because it is theirs, but because it is true, and, precisely because it is true, not theirs either. But, if they love it for this reason, that is true, then it becomes both they love it for this reason, that it is true, then it becomes both theirs and mine, since it is in common for all loves of truth. [39]

What a beautiful argument here that Augustine offers here on the attitude of doing philosophy and hermeneutics. Augustine’s point here should shed insight on contemporary philosophers and theologians. On the ground of seeking the truth, people with different views can come together and debate over things, but in the end, brotherly love and love for God should be the result, as the Truth is immutable and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth (12.20.29). Let those who claim to be seekers of truth bear in mind the lesson from Augustine here: Truth and Love goes together. [40]
In 12.7.7, on his way to understand ‘heave of heaven’ and expound on the mutability and goodness of created things, Augustine expresses his doxology to the God of Trinity (the first time Trinity is explicitly in *Confessions*) who is immutable and good:

Thus it was Thou, O Lord, who art not different at different times, but the Selfsame, the Selfsame, the Selfsame – ‘Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God Almighty, who in the beginning which is from Thee, in Thy wisdom born of Thy Substance, didst make something and from nothing. For, Thou didst not make heaven and earth out of Thyself; otherwise, it would have been equal to Thy Only-begotten Son, and in this way to Thee. And, apart from Thee, there was nothing else from which Thou mightiest make them, O God, One Trinity and Threefold Unity…For Thou almighty and good to make all good things, the great heaven and the small earth…

Again this is a logical deduction: The Son is the Word of God (mentioned in Book XI) did not create anything out of His own substance, otherwise that thing will be of His own nature and hence co-eternal with Him, which Augustine has argued, from the Scripture, that it is not true, because all created things are mutable. Therefore, it must mean that all created things are not from the substance of Trinity and, vice versa, the substance of Trinity is not created. In 12.14.20, Augustine made a clear distinction between Son of God who is the Wisdom as the creator and the created wisdom that his created being possesses: “there is a great difference between the wisdom which creates and that which is created” [42]. By making this assertion, Augustine has done his due diligence to counter the Gnosticism (which believe Christ is a created wisdom), the very belief that could very well have influenced his thought, as we discussed earlier. As for the third person of Trinity, the Holy Spirit is first mentioned among the last three books here in Book XII. In 12.9.9, he describes the Holy Spirit as the Teacher of Moses, the author of Genesis, the Scriptural Book that Augustine is investigating at the moment. And we already saw that in 12.20.29, Augustine echoes John 14:17 to refer to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth. And in the final chapter of the Book (12.32.43), we see Augustine describing the Spirit as a good Spirit who reveals the truth of God’s word, as the Mosaic books are actually oracles of the Holy Spirit (13.15.22). Finally, Augustine demonstrates a good poetic skill of resonating verse formulation in the beginning of Chapter 11:
Already hast Thou told me, O Lord, by means of a loud voice in my interior ear...In Thy right, this is clear to me: may it become more and more clear, I pray Thee, and may I continue to live soberly under Thy protecting wings, within the influence of this revelation.” (12.11.11, twice; 12.11.12)

There is no doubt a sincere prayer of Augustine. But more to it, the loud voice in the interior ear, echoes the “Those who have ears, let him hear” by either the Lord in the Gospel or the Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation. And when the second part “Thy protecting wings” is mentioned, the reader can see the image in the beginning of Genesis (the very topic of the Book), and the last diction of “revelation” points the reader exactly to the second option of person, the Holy Spirit, who speaks of “Those who have ears, let him hear” and now Augustine is tuned interior to the Holy Spirit in this process of the search of truth. Not only Augustine provides the reader with foreshadowing of Book XIII, which is centered on the Holy Spirit’s work in Genesis and creation, but also he gives insight to worship theology: There are some contemporary discussions on whether we can and should pray to the Holy Spirit; Augustine demonstrates a definite yes in his own devotion elicited in *Confession*.

The Neoplatonic influence on Augustine is even more obvious in the entire Book XII. First, the affinity for angels is again seen here: Augustine’s cosmic view holds high the position of the angels: they are “no way co-eternal with Thee, the Trinity, is nonetheless a participant in Thy eternity” (12.9.9) [43]. The invocation of angels is also observed in 13.15.18: “Let them praise Thy Name...” Moreover, there is a constant allegorical image of ‘illumination’ and ‘light versus darkness’, in Book XII, such as here: “There was a great difference...between the light which is a source of illumination and that which receives it” (12.18.20). This reminds the reader the Neoplatonic cosmological dualism. [44] The darkness of abyss is contrasted with the light of the Word throughout a major part of Book XII. This dualism is even more obvious in Book XIII and will be described in the next section.

But after all, why is Augustine so interested in investigating formlessness? Apart from a zeal for truth (in both biblical and philosophical senses of the word), Augustine is actually reflecting on his spiritual journey; how he moved from the darkness and formlessness to a how precious, ‘formed’ life that he gains in God’s fountain (12.10.10). Hence while he asserts in Book XII that
God creates heaven and earth from formless matter, he takes this to an additional, allegorical level of meaning and meditates on his own spiritual experience.

IV. Book XIII

The last Book of Confessions, Book XIII, is among the longest book of Confession (only second to Book X). In this final book, Augustine discusses the mysteries and allegories of the first seven days of creation, and continues from Book XII to interpret the beginning verse of Genesis, Chapter 1, verses 2-31. In the process, Augustine shows the God’s power and wisdom and love through his Spirit upon his creation.

In Book XIII, the purposes and styles of Augustine is at its climax and so are even more explicit to the reader. On the Neoplatonic influences, we can see the image of illumination is even more intensely displayed in Chapter 2 to 5, 11, 16, 17 of Book XIII [45]. In the book, one can also find Analogy of the fallen spirits, fallen souls

In addition, Augustine emphasized the mystery of Trinity, criticizing anyone who thinks they have grasped Trinity:

Who understands the Almighty Trinity? Yes, who does not speak of It – if it is really of It that he speaks. It is a rare soul who, saying anything whatever concerning the Trinity, knows of what he speaks. They argue, and engage in controversies, yet no one may see this vision without peace. (13.11.12)
Even Augustine himself does not claim that his upcoming formulation of Trinity is the ‘one’ or the best.

Here are three things I should like men to cogitate upon within themselves. These three things are far different from that Trinity, but I mention them so that men may think them over carefully, test them, and realize how distant they are from the Trinity. (13.11.12)

Note that Augustine here does emphasize by putting a disclaimer here that the analogy that he is going to make is only a tool to contemplate Trinity, and not by itself an analogy of Trinity. Augustine knows well the profundity of Trinity. And what does he proposes? It is a formulation that he has built up in the previous two books:

Now, I speak of these three: to be, to know, to will. For, I am, I know, and I will. I am a knowing and willing being; I know that I am and that I will; I will to be and to know…[The Trinity] in God is immutably, knows immutably, and wills immutably. Is the Trinity in God because of these three, or are these three in each [Person] in such fashion that all three things belong to each; or is the Selfsame, in the abundant greatness of unity…? (13.11.12)

Augustine does not intend to engage in a full-blown discussion on Trinity in Confessions, but set the stage for his later writings on the doctrine, primarily in De Trinitate, his other classics that got started immediately after Confessions. Due to the space and scope of this paper, the comment on this part will be limited. Suffice to comment now that this analogy is one of a combined philosophy/metaphysics and cognitive psychology (“to be” is a philosophical concept, not surprisingly since we already mentioned that
Augustine is very much a Neoplatonic Christian. “To know” and “To will” are concerned with the activities of the mind. In a way Augustine is smart not to do a formulation from a relational approach, otherwise, he has to figure out how the Spirit fits into the Father and Son relationship. (In his later work De Trinitate, he formally proposes Spirit as the bonding love between the two.) However, one may wonder why the Spirit is the “I will” part and the Son is the “I know” part? In Confessions, at least, it seems that this formulation is coming from Son being the Wisdom (as mentioned in Book XI and XII) and the Spirit is described as the active person who will to love and lift us up from “our lowliness” (13.9.10), since He is the person who ‘moved over the waters’ (which symbolizes our lowliness, according to Augustine).

But in a way, this is an arbitrary formulation: The Spirit can as well be the “to know” and the Son be the “to will”, because we can find scriptural text that the Holy Spirit knows, and the Son wills to love and die for us in obedience, and the Father’s will for the Son to die and resurrect for us. Immediately following the Trinitarian proposition, in 13.12.13, Augustine offers to the Triune God a confession of faith: “Holy, holy, holy” and mentions something he mentions in 12.12.13 that the God has made the “spiritual and carnal members” of His Church. Two things are to be noted here. By using Isaiah 6:3 in the doxology, Augustine reminds the reader that the Triune God is a holy God, and he intends to sanctify (make holy) the members of His church. In fact, towards the end of Book XIII, the reader is reminded that the church members are at eternal rest God’s great sanctification.

In addition, the “tongues of fire” again explained in Book XIII, where the image is reinforced with the light imagery motif: “The lights were made in the firmament of heaven, holding fast the word of life….Run in every direction, O holy fires…you are “the light of the world”, the latter is what Jesus uses to describe himself according to John 8:12. Augustine here refers here the Holy Spirit as Jesus’ Spirit, furthering reinforcing the idea of one-ness of Trinity. On the ministering of the gifts, Augustine encourages the ministers to proclaim and preach “by means of miracles, and mysteries, and mystical words, [and] secret symbols [i.e. sacraments]”. In other words, he sees positive values in the use of miracles and mystical words as a means to proclaim and preach God’s word, which should be the critical, “life-giving” focus of the communication to the “living soul” (13.21.29). Hardly can one see Augustine as a cessionalist, in today’s language; on the other hand, he is very bold in declaring his authority is from God; in 13.25.38, Augustine sounds like a prophet when he declares: “Therefore, that I may speak the truth, I shall speak from what is Thine.” One can infer that he treats himself as a humble prophet indeed, to utter God’s guidance. But if carried too far, Augustine’s words maybe cited by modern-day prophets to refute the use of “close-canon” to reject modern-day prophets. Last but not least, Augustine describes the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the context of ecclesial application in 13.18.23:
1. Greater light: wisdom

2. Lesser light: knowledge

3. Star: Faith + supernatural gifts (so he thinks faith is part of the ‘supernatural gift’ set too)

In contemporary issues, wisdom prevails as the greater light. This is where Augustine’s *Confessions* can give insight to those who wants to understand spiritual gifts and contemporary charismatic movement in at least two ways: First, Augustine lists the supernatural gifts in the same “Star” category as “faith”. We can imply from this that Augustine regards faith as an encapsulating element for exercising the supernatural gifts. Second, even for these faith gifts, they are not as important as the gifts of the “greater light” and “lesser light”. Hence even Augustine, while acknowledging the usefulness of supernatural gifts, does not place them in the highest rank of benefiting people and glorifying God.

Moreover, Augustine’s Neoplatonic disposition is expressed through the rich dualistic symbolism [53] shown in Book XIII, which is summarized below:

1. Day vs Night à Things of Understanding and Things of Sense (13.18.22)

2. Heaven vs earth à spiritual and carnal man [54]

3. Light vs darkness à God and Evil [55]

5. In the rough sea vs under the firmament of heaven à bodily work vs spiritual meritorious works

6. Earth vs Waters of the sea à (via personification) faith vs bitter in infidelity

In addition, towards the end of Book XIII, Augustine points out the keys of sanctification, for those who has accepted the word of admission, which include:

1. Seek firm, well-defined knowledge of “something not increased through generations”

2. Restrain the evil concupiscence of souls and dost fashion boundaries, up to which the waters are permitted to reach; one needs to avoid “Pride, Luxury and Science”

3. Love the neighbor of the soul (13.17.21); be a Onesiphorus, bearing fruits of mercy to others

4. Suffers injury from the hand of the mighty and accepts a sheltering protection in the strong support of just judgment of God

5. Follow Christ: “But, you, ‘a chosen race,’ the weak things of the world...who have left all to follow the Lord, go follow Him an...go, follow after him...” We as followers of Christ, needs to “shine in the firmament”. (13.19.25)

6. Have a hope to see God in eternity: In 13.15.19, Augustine expresses the eschatological dimension of his subject of analysis: Heaven and earth will pass away: “1 John 3:2: Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he
appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."

7. Take part in society; He also takes care to recommend Christians to actively engage and serve in society (13.17.20).

8. Be active in the body of Christ: “Diverse corporeal workings of the same things, and they are multiplied by the growth of one from another, under Thy blessing, O God…one thing in our mind’s knowledge may be symbolized and expressed in many ways through movements of the body…” [60], including what Augustine calls “multiplication” of members of the body (i.e. evangelism), to generate “children through the Gospel” (13.22.32)

These advices are probably followed by the Augustinian monks. But actually they are in general very good advices to the sincere followers of Christ in the generations after him.

V. Summary and Conclusion

To conclude this paper, let us review the comment by James J. O’Donnell concerning the “Confession” multifaceted motif that runs through the entire work:

We ordinarily interpret "confession" as a single-valued term, acknowledgment of wrongdoing by a miscreant. But the etymology has simply to do with emphatic agreement or acknowledgment. Confession of sin is the negative form of confession. Confession of praise, on the other hand, is the acknowledgment by the creature of the greatness and goodness of God. Confession of faith is then emphatic assent to a set of facts about God and God's relation to mankind. [61]
The majority of “negative confession” of sins is mentioned in the first part of Confessions, from Book I to X, when Augustine recalls his memory of the past and see how God has moved him from darkness to light through conversion. Augustine does not stop at Book X though: there must be something important that Augustine has to deal with through the last three books – and that is, how the God of Trinity creates the heaven and earth. In Book XI, Augustine looks into the beginning of the world and time and shows that time and creation are cotemporal. There he also talks about eternal Word of God who creates the heaven and earth versus temporal word of God which is uttered through created angels. This is followed by a thorough investigation of the nature of time, where Augustine devotes a detailed analysis of the subjectivity of time and the relation of all temporal process to the abiding eternity of God. From this, turns to a detailed interpretation of Gen. 1:1, 2 in Book XII, where he beseeches God eagerly to understand how the formed matter is created from “unformed matter” that is implied by Genesis 1:2, and in doing so referencing and interpreting the Scriptural phrase “heaven of heavens”. Not only the reader is marveled at the brilliant philosophical mind of Augustine, but also he or she should appreciate the tolerance of pluralistic interpretations of the Scripture. In this book, Augustine also unveils his invocation to the Holy Spirit and His gifts in seeking the Truth. The topic of the Holy Spirit is further discussed in Book XIII, together with a continued discussion of creation in Genesis, focusing on the first seven days of creation. Augustine made explicit that in creation he finds the God of Trinity, and continues to ponder the work of the Spirit moving over the waters. In the firmament he finds the allegory of Holy Scripture and in the dry land and bitter sea, he finds the division between the people of God and the conspiracy of the unfaithful. He develops the theme of man’s being created in the image and likeness of God. He brings his Confessions to a climax with a meditation on the goodness of all creation and the promised rest and blessedness of the eternal Sabbath.

Although the last three books show that Augustine writes under Neoplatonic (and to some extent, Gnostic) influences, he has managed to lift up the Triune God in a uniquely Augustinian Christian way.

The following table summarizes the key idea of each of the last three books of Confessions; note that there are three key themes that can be drawn from them, namely, creation, Trinity and confession. These three are actually related in this fashion: Augustine in his last three books of Confession, expounds on creation history described in the first chapter of Genesis in the Holy Scripture, and there he discovers the almightiness, love and mystery of the God of Trinity, who created the heaven and earth and all things within from nothing. Finally, this increased knowledge of the God of Trinity prompts him to increase Augustine’s confession of faith and praise.
Table 4.1: The Books and Themes of the last Three Books of Trinity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On à</td>
<td>Creation</td>
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<td>On</td>
<td>Trinity</td>
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<tr>
<td>On</td>
<td>Confession</td>
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<td>XI</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Theme: TIME OF CREATION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key questions:

1. How did God make the heaven and earth?" (The question for the entire Book XI to XIII.)

2. “What is time?”

Depicts primarily the God of eternity - the first person of the Trinity, with mentioning of the Son as the Word, Wisdom, Power and Truth of God. (The Holy Spirit is not explicitly mentioned yet.)

The term “confess” (in all its forms) appears 12 times, with 5 times meaning acknowledging to one’s weakness or limitation.

XII

Theme:

MODE OF CREATION

Key questions:

1. What is “heaven of heaven (“caelum caeli”)”?
2. How was formed matter formed?

- Depicts the God of the Word - the second person “Son of God”, Christ

- First mentioning of Trinity (12.7.7)

- First mentioning of the Holy Spirit

The term “confess” (in all its forms) appears 13 times, with only 3 times meaning acknowledging to one's weakness or limitation, other times are confessions of faith or praise to God.

XIII

Theme:

DAYS OF CREATION

Key question:

1. Who is the Holy Spirit that moved over the waters in the creation history?

2. How does the God of Trinity, especially the Holy Spirit, relate to the Church?
Depicts the God who acts through the church--the third person “Holy Spirit”

The term “confess” (in all its forms) appears 4 times, none of which are related to acknowledging to one's weakness or limitation; all are confessions of faith or praise!

Just like the other patristic fathers, Augustine has built his doctrine from his spiritual experience. His Neoplatonic influence to Christianity, his allegorical hermeneutics of creation of Genesis, and his Trinitarian theology mentioned in the last three books of *Confessions* have permeated his subsequent Christian generations to continue to develop and challenge his thoughts.

[65]

Indeed, at the end of *Confessions*, the reader is invited once again to knock the door of the good Spirit of God to seek the truth: “From Thee must it be asked; in Thee must it be sought; at Thy door must one knock. Thus, thus, will it be received; thus, will it be found; thus, will Thy door be opened.” Amen!

VI. Bibliography

All About Religion. "Gnostic Chrisitanity."


A. Craig Troxel asserts that the Augustine wants his reader to focus on his confessing (acknowledging) God more than his confessing his sins; In his *Retractions* (AD 426/427), which serves as a critical bibliography of his major works, Augustine stated part of his purpose in writing the *Confessions* is to praise the just and good God, despite his good or evil deeds, and stimulate his reader to approach Him like he does. Also, in a letter to Darius (AD 429), Augustine noted the perspective that the reader should take in reading the *Confessions* should be a doxological one; there. Again, Augustine clearly desired the reader to view his life as a means for the reader to praise "him whom" he wished to be praised. These texts show that Augustine intended to give more than a conventional biographical account of his life.


[6] Augustine himself made this clear to the reader as well in Refractions 2.6.1, where he concluded that the first through the tenth books were written about himself; the other three about Holy Scripture. See, for example, Augustine, *Refractions, 2.6.1*, http://www.sullivan-county.com/id3/confessions/augconf.htm; Internet; accessed 2 May 2009.

[7] In fact, the first part can be further divided into two subparts: Book 1 to 9, which is a personal conversion history up to the death of Augustine’s mother, Monica. Book 10 is a survey of self-disclosure of Augustine’s moral and spiritual dispositions. See Augustine, *Th
Augustine contemplates the events that led him to his new spiritual life. The reader should take note that Augustine focuses on theological and spiritual, rather than strict chronological, accuracies.

From two Psalm texts (144:3 and 146:5).

His thought is still bound by his materialistic notions of reality.


Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid., 328; The reader should keep in mind the willing love, the knowledge, and the being of God that foreshadows Augustinian formulation.

Ibid., 360. Notice Augustine’s cosmic view of sun orbiting around the earth; according to him, measuring days are not really measuring time because the movement of body is not time itself.

Ibid., 365.

Ibid., 333.
[22] Ibid., 363.

[23] Ibid., 354.


[25] Ibid., 365.


tianity-faq.htm; accessed 24 April 2009.

[28] For example, two times in 11.22.28 the reader sees this formulation: “…O Father… I beseech Three through Christ…”


[31] Note that by ‘formlessness’, Augustine does not mean ‘lacking form’ as the word may suggest; To Augustine, formless matter means ‘something that had form of an imperceptible kind that would confuse the human perception’, see 11.6.6.
The key concept of Augustine is that formlessness cannot show change of time, because of the following deduction:

1. Definition:

a. Form = Species (agreeable to sight)

b. Formlessness = no species (= no form)

2. Logic:

a. Vicissitude (= change) of Time è (implies) diversity of movements (There is always some periods of time with diversity of movements/There are no periods of time without diversity of movements)

b. Diversity of movements è Species

c. No Species è No diversity of movements è No change of time

Key summary sentence in 12.19.28: “...a being which adheres so closely to an immutable form
that, though mutable, it is not changed, does not experience vicissitude of time


[34] Augustine summarizes his position in 12.19.29; Note that repeated use of “it is true” (verum est) in that chapter.

[35] These hypothetical men of internal conflicts are described in Chapters 17, 18, 20, 21.

[36] Ibid., 405.

[37] Ibid., 404.

[38] Ibid., 404-405.

[39] Ibid., 396

[40] The reader should be aware of the foreshadowing here as well: The Holy Spirit is later described as love.

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[41] Ibid., 372-273.

[42] Ibid., 382.

[43] Ibid., 374-375.

[44] Ibid., 382; The expression “Quod inluminat et quod inluminatur” this is Plotinian (BA cites Plot 5.2.8.21-223, the One seen by the Nous)

[45] For example, 13.2.2, 13.3.4

[46] Augustine purports that “Thy intellectual truth does not need a man to show him how to imitate his own kind. Rather, with Thee as a guide, he himself discerns what is Thy will…And Thou dost teach him, now that he is able, to see the Trinity of unity and the unity of the Trinity.”

[47] See also 13.7.8, where Augustine quotes Romans 5:5 “Love…Holy Spirit”; uplifting power
of charity through Thy Spirit to associate Him with love, something that he does more elaborately in the later work *De Trinitate*.

[48] 1 Corinthians 2:10-11; John 14:26; Augustine quotes the former himself in 13.31.46.

[49] See, for example, 1 Peter 1:2.

[50] See, for example, Isaiah 53:10.

[51] Though, Augustine’s using heaven and earth to symbolize spiritual and carnal man is, again, rather Gnostic.

[52] Augustine shows his passion in the use of “tongue of fire”, which symbolizes the decent of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, in a passionate way: “we are set on fire and we go!”

[53] Apart from dual symbolism, Augustine turns the created beings and matter in Genesis into ecclesial symbols, that are followed in generations after him; for example: Fish = Christ (Eucharist); Waters = Baptism; See, for example, 13.24.35:

[54] Augustine reminds that at the end that man are equal in God’s spiritual grace

“And so, spiritual persons, whether they hold positions of authority or of obedience, judge in a spiritual way, not of the spiritual kind of knowledge which shine in the firmament…nor of Thy Book itself…because we submit our understanding to it and hold as certain that even what has been concealed from our gazes is rightly and truthfully spoken.

[55] Including a slight modification of it applied to the saved, chosen ones: The light of the perfect (the maximum brightness will not exceed that of the angels) and the darkness of the
little ones, which “are not without hope” – the least sanctified one will have the eternal hope. Augustine seems to be opposing his spiritual children who uphold salvation by works!

[56] In 13.20.27, we see the word of admission then complete perfection, this is similar to the justification (admission to the kingdom of God) and sanctification (complete perfection).

[57] Note that in 13.20.27, we see the word of admission then complete perfection, this is similar to the justification (admission to the kingdom of God) and sanctification (complete perfection).

[58] Note that the symbolism in Genesis for the soul (13.10.11) continues in 13.17.20.


[60] On this point, Augustine has a good point on understanding people with a different opinion than oneself: Understood in one way by the mind à Expressed in many ways through the body; Expressed in one way through the body à understood in many ways by the mind.


Augustine’s subsequent classic works of *De civitate Dei* (City of God) and *De Trinitate* continue to develop the ideas of a heavenly city and Trinity, respectively.