

Into the Poem of the Universe: *Exempla*, Conversion, and Church in Augustine's *Confessiones*

by Lewis Ayres

The prime profit and utility of the study of historical events is that you may observe lessons of every type of example (*omnis [...] exempli documenta*) set down in a glorious monument, from which you can select what you and your country might imitate¹.

Antony, as though God had put him in mind of the saints, and the passage had been read on his account, went out immediately from the Church².

Introduction

Despite the fact that scholars have paid increasing attention to the rhetorical traditions central to late antique Latin culture, interpreters of Book 8 of Augustine's *Confessiones* still find it difficult to see the extent to which this most famous of conversions is presented to the reader as an act of imitation. Augustine's actions in the final moments before he "puts on Jesus Christ" follow a structure that any ancient educator, rhetor or historian would have understood and approved. Considering how the *Confessiones* presents *exempla* as a tool in the hands of providence will demonstrate the extent to which the internalization of *exempla* and the reshaping of memory are central not only to Augustine's theology of conversion, but to his account of Christian life as a whole.

The text that forms my point of departure is well known, but its argument easily avoided:

Suddenly I heard a voice from the nearby house chanting as of a boy or a girl (I do not know which), saying and repeating over again "pick up and read, pick up and read". At once my countenance changed, and I began to think intently whether there might be some sort of children's game in which such a chant is used. But I could not remember ever having heard of one anywhere (*nec occurrebat omnino audisse me uspiam*), and having checked the flood of tears I

¹ Liv., praef. 10.

² Ath., v. Anton. 2,4 (SC 400, 132.134 Bartelink): 'Ο δὲ Ἀντώνιος, ὡσπερ θεόθεν ἐσχηκῶς τὴν τῶν ἁγίων μνήμην, καὶ ὡς δι' αὐτὸν γενομένου τοῦ ἀναγνώσματος, ἐξελεθὼν εὐθὺς ἐκ τοῦ κυριακοῦ. Interestingly the clarity of the reference to τὴν τῶν ἁγίων μνήμην is lost in the translation of Evagrius that was probably available to Augustine. It reads (PG 26, 842f. Migne): *quo audito, quasi diuinitus huiusmodi ante memoria concepisset, et ueluti propter se haec esset scriptura recitata.*

stood up, interpreting (*interpretans*) it as nothing other than a divine command to me to open the book and read the first chapter I might find. For I had heard (*audieram enim*) how Antony happened to be present at the gospel reading, and took it as an admonition addressed to himself when the words were read: “Go sell all you have, give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and, come, follow me.” By such an inspired utterance he was immediately converted to you³.

Augustine tells us that he was unable to understand what the voice was telling him because he lacked any appropriate memory. In his perplexity he decides to interpret the voice as a command to imitate Antony – the one memory that comes to mind. Thus, while we so easily read this scene as God speaking to Augustine in the child’s voice, when we do so we miss the relationship between memory, interpretation and understanding that makes the scene possible.

Pierre Courcelle initiated modern scholarship on this text by contending that the entire conversion scene was shaped in imitation of the *Vita Antonii*⁴. Unfortunately, Courcelle offered virtually no reflection on the extent to which Augustine’s reference to Antony there reveals some of the most basic dynamics of the work as a whole⁵. Recent discussion of the *Confessiones* has been helpful in turning increasingly to the theological content and message of the work and in moving beyond an obsessive concern with the text’s historical accuracy. This latter shift has been marked by increasingly sophisticated analysis of Augustine’s “communicative purpose” of the *Confessiones*, and by growing acceptance that the work is best viewed not as a peculiar form of autobiography, but as a form of protreptic discourse aiming to teach and persuade toward conversion⁶. My own concern is

³ Aug., conf. VIII 29 (BSGRT, 177,22-178,7 Skutella), English translations by L. Ayres.

⁴ P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin*, Paris 1951, 200: “La scène du jardin de Milan paraît donc s’expliquer tout entière (sauf la mention du figuier, qui derive de l’épisode de Nathanaël) par l’influence de la *Vie d’Antoine*. Le cri divinatoire des jeunes gens chastes et la consultation des sortes constituent seulement un mode de presentation Romanesque.”; cf. p. 198: “Comme les convertis de Trèves, il s’est conformé à l’exemple de saint Antoine”. See also P. Courcelle, *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin dans La Tradition Littéraire*, EAUG, Paris 1963, especially the nuances he added to his earlier view cited above at chapter 12, p. 191-197. One of the few commentators to see the importance of the theme is W. Geerlings, *Christus Exemplum. Studien zur Christologie und Christusverkündigung Augustins*, Tübingen 1978, 173f. Geerlings’ discussion of *exemplum* occupies the pages 168-228, but the fundamentals are summarized at 179-183. My account differs somewhat from that of Geerlings in that I argue Augustine, at least at this point in his career, envisages some living persons and some of the saints only recently deceased as *exempla*.

⁵ There is of course a vast literature on Augustine’s conversion which may be accessed via the following articles: E. Feldmann, art. *Confessiones*, AL 1, 1986-1994, 1134-1193; G. Madec, art. *Conversio*, AL 1, 1986-1994, 1282-1294.

⁶ This literature is helpfully summarized by A. Kotzé, *Augustine’s Confessions. Communicative Purpose and Audience*, SVigChr 71, Leiden 2004, 13-43. “Communicative purpose” is her phrase, see chapter 2 passim. I have also found very helpful (as did Kotzé) C. Joubert, *Le Livre XIII et la structure de Confessions de Saint Augustin*, RevSR 66, 1992, 77-117.

with Augustine's use of *exempla* in the *Confessiones*. My contention will be that Augustine's use of this rhetorical device fits within his account of the manner in which the will responds to external stimuli, and shows some of the fundamental ways in which he sees God's providential action re-ordering the memory. At the same time, Augustine also adapts Roman *exempla*-traditions by arguing that all true *exempla* follow an identical plot, a plot paradigmatically found in Christ's own descent and ascent, and a plot which seems to be woven into the very temporal structure of the created order. Finally, this argument suggests some reasons why Augustine seems reticent elsewhere to deploy all the resources of the theology of *exempla* with which he experiments in the *Confessiones*.

Let us begin by noting the extent to which *Confessiones* VIII is a Russian doll of interlocking stories, providentially put before Augustine. First comes the story of Victorinus told by Simplicianus, or better a series of stories about Victorinus, his conversion and then his resistance to the Emperor Julian's anti-Christian campaigns in the 360s. As Augustine himself notes, Simplicianus shrewdly picks stories that match the needs of Augustine's own dilemmas⁷. Then comes Ponticianus. Ponticianus first relates the story of Antony himself, ending with the story of the many inspired by him, and then he turns to the story of how he and his companions encountered the story of Antony. It is this last tale that prompts Augustine to go off by himself in search of a tree under which to sit.

Both Simplicianus and Ponticianus appear on the stage through the action of providence. In the first case Augustine tells us directly that God put it into his heart that he should visit the old priest⁸. In the second the work of providence is a little more hidden, but only a little. Ponticianus arrives by surprise, and by chance and in amazement finds Augustine's manuscript of Paul on the 'coffee table'⁹. Augustine is also clear that the telling of their various stories is fundamental to the reshaping of his desire and will. In fact, in both cases we do not only have stories of conversion but also stories of reaction to conversion: we are shown both *exempla* and how they work in Christian contexts. With Victorinus we hear how his conversion affects the congregation. With Antony the same structure is mirrored but here the focus is the written word: already we can sense that Augustine is fascinated by the possible impact of his own story as written *exemplum*¹⁰.

⁷ Aug., conf. VIII 10 (161f. S.).

⁸ Aug., conf. VIII 1 (152,27-153,2 S.).

⁹ Aug., conf. VIII 14 (164,21f. S.).

¹⁰ One significant aspect of Aug., conf. VIII which I do not consider in this paper is the role that the reading and hearing of Scripture plays in many of the *exempla* Augustine describes. See I. Bochet, *Le Firmament de L'Écriture. Herméneutique Augustinienne*, EAUG, Paris 2004, 265-293.

Donovan Johnson helpfully draws our attention to the extent to which Augustine shapes the narrative of the garden scene around echoes of the story that Ponticianus tells about encounter with the *Vita Antonii*. Two companions enter a garden, one considers the life of Antony and undergoes a conversion, his friend is informed of the decision and quickly decides to follow¹¹. We should also note, following Johnson, that Augustine further heightens the dramatic tension by telling us in general terms that Ponticianus spoke of Antony, but holding the dramatic story of Antony's actual conversion in reserve until his own moment of conversion¹². Augustine shapes his account so that his readers will reflect on the function of *exempla*. At this point, however, his modern readers may be at something of a loss, unaware of the engagement with Latin rhetorical and historiographical culture that founds the literary and theological choices Augustine has made here.

Exempla in Rhetorical and Theological Context

Augustine's use of *exempla* follows the basic lines of Roman rhetorical tradition. The functions of *exempla* are described well in the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*:

Exemplum is the citing of something done or said in the past, along with the certain name of the author [...]. It renders a thought more brilliant (*ornatiorem*) when used for no other purpose than beauty; clearer (*apertioem*), when throwing light upon what was somewhat obscure; more plausible (*probabiliorem*), when rendering the matter closer to the truth; more vivid (*ante oculos ponit*), when it expresses everything so lucidly that the matter can, I can almost say, be touched with the hand¹³.

At *Rhetorica ad Herennium* IV 44,57 the same text offers a perfect Latin example: reference to the Roman hero Publius Decius Mus who threw

¹¹ See D. Johnson, *Story and Design in Book Eight of Augustine's Confessions*, Biography 14, 1991, (39-60) 54. Johnson notes a number of further structural parallels.

¹² Johnson, *Story and Design* (see note 11), 51.

¹³ *Rhet. Her.* IV 49,62. Cf. Quint., *inst.* V 11. There is a large literature on this theme. The following pieces indicate the general lines of modern work: H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik. Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft*, München 1960, § 410-426; T.D. Barnes, *Literary Convention, Nostalgia and Reality in Ammianus Marcellinus*, in: G. Clarke (ed.), *Reading the Past in Late Antiquity*, Rushcutters Bay 1990, 59-92; R. Blockley, *Ammianus Marcellinus's Use of Exempla*, *Florilegium* 13, 1994, 53-64; K.-J. Hölskamp, *Exempla und mos maiorum. Überlegungen zum kollektiven Gedächtnis der Nobilität*, in: H.-J. Gehrke/A. Möller (eds.), *Vergangenheit und Lebenswelt. Soziale Kommunikation, Traditionsbildung und historisches Bewußtsein*, Tübingen 1996, 301-338; K. Stierle, *Geschichte als Exemplum – Exemplum als Geschichte*, in: R. Koselleck/W. Stempel (eds.), *Geschichte. Ereignis und Erzählung*, München 1973, 347-375; J. Gaillard, *Auctoritas exempli. Pratique rhétorique et idéologique au Ier s. av. J.-C.*, *REL* 56, 1978, 30-34; T. Hölscher, *Die Anfänge römischer Repräsentationskunst*, *MDAI.R* 85, 1978, 315-357.

himself into certain death against the Samnites in 295 BC in order to instill courage and determination in his fellow soldiers, is offered as a powerful way to convey the point that “the wise man will, on the republic’s behalf, shun no peril”. This example illustrates two key features of *exempla* in classical tradition: they are narrative in form (in distinction from the broader category of *similitudo*), and they are most appropriately drawn from events in the distant past.

We find narrative *exempla* used not only throughout political and forensic oratory, but also in such diverse historians as Livy and Ammianus. In rhetorical literature *exempla* are classically presented as having three functions: ornamentation, clarification and proof. All three of these functions are unified in being aimed at persuading one’s audience. Cicero himself distinguishes between Greek and Latin usage and views *exempla* in Latin tradition as having a primarily moral and exhortative function¹⁴.

Rhetorical tradition also presents *exempla* as mirrors in which one may see one’s own faults and virtues. Seneca’s *De Clementia* opens with a description of intent:

I have undertaken, Nero Caesar, to write on the subject of mercy, in order to serve in a way the purpose of a mirror, and thus reveal you to yourself (*et te tibi ostenderem*)¹⁵.

The text of the first book is then constructed around a subtle play on the function of *exempla*. Various *exempla* are held up to Nero as a mirror within which he should see and judge his own actions, while Nero himself is acclaimed as an example outshining the *exempla* from Rome’s past that one would otherwise need. In his *Epistula* 189 Augustine advises Count Boniface that even in military service he may please God, but that his conduct must still exhibit a chastity and moderation befitting a Christian. Of course, he remarks, Boniface already exhibits these qualities:

This letter, therefore, may serve rather as a mirror in which you see what you are, than as a directory from which to learn what you ought to be¹⁶.

Throughout the *Confessiones* Augustine uses the term *exempla* in ways that reflect Roman rhetorical practice. At *Confessiones* I 26 Augustine chastises Terence’s *Eunuchus* for its depiction of a young man who cites a painting of Jupiter deceiving a woman as an *exemplum* for his own lustful actions. Augustine has no time for the use of Terence’s text to teach vocabulary: the main effect of using it is to encourage illicit acts¹⁷. At *Confessiones* VI

¹⁴ Cic., de orat. III 137.

¹⁵ Sen., clem. I 1,1.

¹⁶ Aug., epist. 189,8.

¹⁷ Cf. his roughly contemporary account in those who come to us as we are sick and fighting in the arena of this life suggesting easy cures: Aug., serm. Dolbeau 18,7 (AnBoll 110, 1992, 301): *deinde tibi ab eo qui hoc suadet, et eorum qui sic sanati sunt multa*

21 Augustine argues against Alypius's call to chastity by offering *exempla* of those who have combined marriage with the cultivation of Wisdom. This text is then paralleled by one in Book 8 when Lady Continenace holds out to Augustine a multitude of *exempla* for him to follow into a life of chastity. At *Confessiones* VII 25 Augustine, speaking as he returns to his Christian faith, says that he saw the virgin birth as provided for us as an *exemplum* of despising temporal things. This, in turn, is paralleled at *Confessiones* X 68 where Augustine argues that the *mediator* is most truly an *exemplum humilitatis*, an example of humility¹⁸.

In Book 9 Augustine again speaks of the *exempla* of the saints, and here we see his strong interest in emphasizing the effect *exempla* have on the soul. He writes:

The *exempla* given by your servants whom you had transformed from black to shining white and from death to life, crowded in upon my thoughts (*congesta in sinum cogitationis nostrae urebant*). They consumed (*absumebant*) my heavy sluggishness [...]. They set me on fire (*accendebant*)¹⁹.

The motif of “setting on fire” that Augustine uses here is identical to the language he uses when describing the effect of the *Vita Antonii* on Ponticianus and his friends in Book 8:

One of them began to read it, he was amazed and set on fire (*et mirari et accendi*)²⁰.

Indeed, he uses the same terminology immediately after hearing about Victorinus:

As soon as your servant Simplicianus told me this story about Victorinus, I burned to imitate. He had indeed told it to me with this object in view (*exarsi ad imitandum; ad hoc enim et ille narrauit*)²¹.

This language has a very specific referent for Augustine throughout the *Confessiones*: as we shall see, it refers to the creation of desire for God that ‘stretches’ the soul away from the *spes saeculi*, the hope for worldly possessions and place.

proponantur exempla et dicatur tibi: ‘ille cum hoc haberet, fecit ei, incantauit ei, lustrauit eum, adfuit ei, et sanus est factus.’

¹⁸ Aug., conf. X 68 (261,15 S.). His other uses of the term, rather different in character, are to be found at Aug., conf. IV 24.28 (71,13; 74,10 S.); V 21 (94,18 S.). At conf. IV 2 (55,12 S.) Augustine also speaks of himself as an *exemplum* to himself of the difference between a true marriage and relationship of convenience. I am uncertain how to categorize this use.

¹⁹ Aug., conf. IX 3 (181,15-19 S.). As Kotzé, Augustine's Confessions (see note 6), 65, argues the language of “setting on fire” is to some extent a typical aspect of protreptic language. At the same time this language is particularly prominent in Augustine and is taken up into his account of the soul learning to love God. See e.g. Aug., serm. Dolbeau 26,7, which dates from 404.

²⁰ Aug., conf. VIII 15 (165,27f. S.).

²¹ Aug., conf. VIII 10 (161,8-10 S.).

Augustine is also attentive to the process by which the very narrating of *exempla* catches and holds the attention. Again in a famous passage Augustine writes:

This was the story Ponticianus told. But while he was speaking Lord, you turned my attention back to myself. You took me up from behind my own back where I had placed myself because I did not wish to observe myself, and you set me before my face so that I should see how vile I was, how twisted and filthy, covered in sores and ulcers. And I looked and was appalled, but there was no way of escaping from myself. If I tried to avert my gaze from myself, his story continued relentlessly and you once again placed me in front of myself; you thrust me before my own eyes (*et si conabar a me auertere aspectum, narrabat ille quod narrabat, et tu me rursus opponebas mihi et inpingebas me in oculos meos*)²².

It is tempting to read the divine agency here as consisting in God's internal turning round of Augustine to face himself. Augustine is engaged in internal monologue while Ponticianus drones on; the camera focuses on the main character and we hear his thoughts as the voices of those others present fades. It is, however, the on-going telling of the story that Augustine wishes to identify as the means through which God focuses Augustine's gaze upon himself: 'if,' Augustine says, 'I tried to avert my gaze from myself, his story continued relentlessly' – or more literally 'he continued to narrate what he was narrating.' We should not separate the external action of narration from the internal action of God on Augustine²³.

As one might gather from Augustine's comments on the *exempla* presented by Terence, he is attentive to the function of *exempla* in forming not just individuals but also a culture or society as a whole²⁴. When Victorinus is in Church before reciting the creed his presence stimulates a "murmur of delight" (*streptitus gratulationis*)²⁵ among those who recognized him. When he speaks, "all of them wanted to clasp him to their hearts, and

²² Aug., conf. VIII 16 (167,11-20 S.).

²³ One interesting parallel to this passage is to be found in Lucian of Samosata's *Nigrinus*. Lucian presents the memory of the philosopher Nigrinus as a constant spur to correct action (Lucianus, Nigr. 6f.). Not only does Lucian remember his words, but he consciously calls to mind the image of Nigrinus speaking in times of difficulty. The bulk of the dialogue is occupied by Lucian's recitation to his interlocutor of the speech of Nigrinus that drew Lucian himself to the philosophical life. At the end of his recitation Lucian describes Nigrinus carefully choosing his terms and mode of address to suit the vulnerabilities of his target (Nigr. 36f.). The interlocutor admits that he too has been caught, but at second-hand: "as you talked I felt something of a change of heart [...] to speak in your own style, I am wounded" (Nigr. 38). Lucian then emphasizes the need for the 'patient' to seek the one who inflicted the wound as the only plausible doctor (Nigr. 37). In both Lucian and Augustine it is the telling of the story that prompts the inner 'wound', although Augustine's account focuses more dramatically and vividly on the inner turmoil resulting from being 'held' by the narration.

²⁴ For those uncertain whether Augustine would have understood the idea of "culture", there is still much to be gained from Note A ("L'idée de Culture et le vocabulaire Latin") of H.-I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la Fin de la Culture Antique*, Paris 1938, 549-560.

²⁵ Aug., conf. VIII 5 (157,15 S.).

the hands with which they embraced him were their love and their joy” (*uolebant eum omnes rapere intro in cor suum. et rapiebant amando et gaudendo: hae rapientium manus erant*)²⁶. The Latin is striking when we remember Augustine’s insistence that the love of God can be seen in the Church, but only as the hands and feet of Christians acting in love²⁷. Victorinus’ public confession shapes not simply individual desire, it increases mutual desire for God:

When many share in the joy, individuals also feel a richer delight. They kindle excitement among themselves and are inflamed by one another. Then those who are known to many are to many a personal influence towards salvation. Where they lead many will follow. That is why on their account even those who preceded them feel great joy; for their rejoicing is not only for them²⁸.

The discussion of how *exempla* move the soul here seems intentionally to parallel the discussion of the orator Hierius in Book 4. Hierius is loved from afar by many who praise his rhetorical skill: praise is all the greater because Hierius has learnt to perform in the high culture of Greek and Latin despite being Syrian by birth²⁹. Augustine’s own love for the man is “kindled” not because love somehow passes from one who praises a person to the one hearing; rather, the passing of such love occurs when the one hearing believes in the sincerity and love of the one offering praise. The mutual kindling of desire for *exempla* spoken of in Book 4 is possible because of shared cultural values. Indeed, throughout that book of the *Confessiones* Augustine is concerned with the mutual encouragement towards false goals apparent in a culture and system of signification that knows not the relationship of things to their creator. This is clearest in Book 4 in relation to the Manichees, who provide Augustine’s only solace when his un-named friend dies. There Augustine connects his life with friends and inappropriate grief both to a lack of knowledge of the human condition and thus to a lack of understanding the material and temporal

²⁶ Aug., conf. VIII 5 (157,20-22 S.). Although it does not directly use *exemplum* language, much may be learnt from Aug., serm. Dolbeau 11,8-11. Augustine presents the Church as a gladiatorial arena in which the mutual desire and love of the audience is inflamed by the combat of our favourite gladiators, the martyrs. One who feels this love drags his friend from bed to bring him to the arena; but unlike the potential disappointment that may befall when a favourite champion is defeated, Christians drag their neighbours to love one who is never defeated. The text stands in fascinating parallel to the description of Alypius’s experience at Aug., conf. VI 13. Alypius is dragged to the arena by friends and even though he hopes to escape its lure he is overcome by blood lust. Augustine describes the result in terms both startling and ecclesiastical (Aug., conf. VI 13 [112,18-20 S.]): *et non erat iam ille, qui uenerat, sed unus de turba, ad quam uenerat, et uerus eorum socius, a quibus adductus erat.*

²⁷ Aug., in epist. Ioh. 7,10 (SC 75, 330 Agaësse): *Deus dilectio est [...] quales pedes habet? quales manus habet? nemo potest dicere. habet tamen pedes, nam ipsi ducunt ad Ecclesiam; habet manus nam ipsae pauperi porrigunt.*

²⁸ Aug., conf. VIII 21 (171 S.).

²⁹ Aug., conf. IV 21 (69,18-22 S.).

creation in relationship to the eternity of God³⁰. In such contexts love for shared values, for those who exemplify those values, and the simple love of companions catches fire and brings many into unity. This mutual kindling is both mysterious and yet – in retrospect – the result of a soul wounded both in its rational and affective ‘part’³¹.

In writing of the shaping of desire for God through *exempla* later in the *Confessiones* Augustine thus begins to sketch the contours of a new culture being drawn out of the old. The shape of this new culture – especially the role of those who function as *exempla* in relation to the God who arranges them – will become a little clearer later in the paper. For now we can note that 10-15 years later, in *De trinitate* 8, Augustine argues that our love for the apostle Paul’s just mind is not the result of images of justice that have come to us from sense data, but because justice is in some sense mysteriously present to the mind³². The images, memories and *exempla* that draw us towards contemplation of this mysterious divine presence draw out a desire rooted in awareness of the soul’s confession of its place before God. Thus this desire in restoration both mirrors the mutual desire of Augustine and his friends for Hierius, and yet is different precisely insofar as it shapes a new sense of human/ecclesial society as founded in confession of the divine majesty and mystery. Thus, while, in the first place, Augustine adapts traditional accounts of *exempla* by focusing on their use in the hands of a persuasive God, in the second place, he also, in the *Confessiones*, attempts to explore how *exempla* shape a society of those who acknowledge the true relationship between Creator and creation. I want to turn next to interaction between *exempla* and the will, and then back to the conversion scene itself.

Exempla and the Conversion of Augustine’s Will

One of the central facts of Augustine’s emerging conception of the will in his early work is the insistence that the will is drawn to that which delights it³³. Whatever we do must be, in the most fundamental sense, done will-

³⁰ See, first, Aug., conf. IV 12 (62,13f. S.): *O dementiam nescientem diligere homines humaniter!* A little later at conf. IV 15 (64,30-65,4 S.) we find: *Deus uirtutum, conuerte nos et ostende faciem tuam, et salui erimus. Nam quoquoersum se uerterit anima hominis, ad dolores figitur alibi praeterquam in te, tametsi figitur in pulchris extra te et extra se.*

³¹ Aug., conf. IV 24. Characterizing Augustine’s psychology against the background of other ancient options is complex, but the loose distinction between a lower and a higher soul, the higher being the rational governing “part” runs throughout his corpus. See G. O’Daly, *Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind*, London 1987, 11-15.

³² Aug., trin. VIII 6,9.

³³ E.g. Aug., lib. arb. III 74 (CChr.SL 29, 319 Green): *Sed quia uoluntatem non allicit ad faciendum quodlibet nisi aliquod uisum, quid autem quisque uel sumat uel respuat est in potestate, sed quo uiso tangatur nulla potestas est.*

ingly, because no action occurs unless through the will³⁴. This picture is complicated in the years immediately prior to the *Confessiones* by a growing sense that the will cannot be re-shaped purely by the provision of new objects: the will can only be shaped by divine provision both of the power to will and an object of will³⁵. With this realization Augustine's account of the will's reformation could have become disjunctive, leading to a number of questions about the relative importance of outer and inner assistance and to a questioning of the seemingly heteronomous action of God. We see in the *Confessiones* some of the ways in which Augustine refuses this possibility through reflection on the complex mediation of divine grace. Most importantly, and understanding the significance of *exempla* in the *Confessiones* serves to reinforce this point, Augustine argues that God's provision of new objects for the will is the provision of objects congruous with the will's occluded or distorted desire for God. Grace is irresistible precisely because God always holds out to us something that will delight the soul. Indeed, while Augustine clearly acknowledges the inner working of God moving the heart in the *Confessiones*³⁶, when he talks about the work of God in particular circumstances it is virtually always in connection with God's provision of *exempla* that draw the soul³⁷.

This process of drawing does not, of course, happen just once: it is a process by which the interwoven memory and will are together reformed. James Wetzel's "Augustine and the Limits of Virtue" draws out with precision how, for Augustine, desires are shaped by and shape one's

³⁴ E.g. Aug., lib. arb. III 29 (292 G.): *nam sicut propria cogitatione non peccat inuitus, ita dum consentit male suadenti non utique nisi uoluntate consentit*. Cf. lib. arb. III 7 and III 3.

³⁵ E.g. Aug., Simpl. I 2,21 (BAug 10, 502-504 Bardy): *Quis habet in potestate tali uiso attingi mentem suam, quo eius uoluntas moueatur ad fidem? [...] aut quis habet in potestate ut uel occurrat quod eum delectare possit, uel delectet cum occurrerit? [...] quia ut sit nutus uoluntatis, ut sit industria studii, ut sint opera caritate feruentia, ille tribuit, ille largitur [...] quid ergo aliud ostenditur nobis, nisi quia et petere et quaerere et pulsare ille concedit, qui ut haec faciamus, iubet? 'igitur non uolentis, neque currentis sed miserentis est Dei' (Rom. 9,16), quandoquidem nec uelle nec currere, nisi eo mouente atque excitante, poterimus'. Simpl. I 2,22 (506 B.): *Restat ergo ut uoluntates elegantur. sed uoluntas ipsa, nisi aliquid occurrerit quod delectet atque inuitet animum, moueri nullo modo potest: hoc autem ut occurrat non est in hominis potestate*. The basic account as the will drawn to that which delights remains the foundation for his later work. See Aug., spir. et litt. 60. It is noticeable in this latter text that God's inner work is conceived directly as God's inner provision of that which draws the will. Cf. Aug., in euang. Ioh. 26,4.*

³⁶ E.g. Aug., conf. X 40f.; XIII 52f. Pierre-Marie Hombert offers a particularly useful recent reading of *Confessiones* as made possible by the discussion of God's appeal to the will's delight in Aug., Simpl. I 2: P.-M. Hombert, *Gloria Gratiae. Se glorifier en Dieu, principe et fin de la théologie augustinienne de la grâce*, EAUG, Paris 1996, 112-130, esp. 121. See also the very helpful discussion of V.H. Drecoll, *Die Entstehung der Gnadenlehre Augustins*, BHT 109, Tübingen 1999, 298-324.

³⁷ Thus, for example, when Augustine asks about Victorinus *quibus modis te insinuasti illi pectori?* the very next sentence answers: *legebat, sicut ait Simplicianus, sanctam scripturam omnesque christianas litteras inuestigabat studiosissime et perscrutabatur* (Aug., conf. VIII 4 [155,20-23 S.]).

developing sense of what is most desirable. Our perceptions of the good have temporal extension: over time Augustine's memory has been shaped to respond to certain objects of desire³⁸. Thus providence must not only present new and desirable objects, it must also enable a synthesis between memory and desire strong enough to overcome habit³⁹. The reformation of the will must enable a new process of judgment about the good.

When Wetzel comes to discuss the moment of conversion itself he argues that Augustine does not want us to know at what moment God acts in the conversion because conversion itself is a recognition that God has been an agent in his life long before the moment in the garden: "If I were to speculate about the silence in Augustine's moment of inner illumination, when he reads the verse and finds peace, I would say that it contained his recognition that the divine presence had been with him all along [...]. Conversion marks the moment when he has regained sufficient self-possession to tell his story"⁴⁰.

Wetzel provides us with the tools to understand the 'moment' of conversion far better than many previous accounts. But, strangely, one thing is passed over. Wetzel identifies only two places where we might locate divine action in the conversion scene: "But as the 'tolle lege' episode stands, can we even tell when the moment occurs? [...] He seems to identify the voice as God's point of entry into the scene, but it is in reading the verse from Paul that his torment ends. He gives no indication, however, that he chose with deliberation to respond to either. His obedience to the command to take up and read follows as a matter of course from his interpretation of the voice as a personal address [...]. This moment of inner clarity and conversion is memorable precisely because it is the moment when Augustine no longer needs to choose"⁴¹.

One of the fundamental ways in which Augustine has been led to this moment is through the provision of *exempla*, through the stamping of Antony and Antony's place as example in the Church on the memory. This is in fact the pivotal point in the conversion scene: Augustine has finally been drawn to conversion because he has been drawn to a point where, with the help of grace, the movement of memory, understanding and will brings to light and moves towards the correct *exempla*. His will is not

³⁸ J. Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, Cambridge 1992, 134.

³⁹ Wetzel, *Augustine* (see note 38), 135: "Synthesis represents whatever is involved in our ability to translate judgment and desire into self-knowledge and intentional action." As James Wetzel has pointed out to me it is also important to note that one must be cautious in speaking about the formation of new Christian 'habits' after conversion. For Augustine providential ordered *exempla* and the work of grace certainly produce new memories of God (cf. Aug., conf. X 35 on *memoria Dei*) and a new or restored will, but the work of grace here is essential and this true desire is more than simply habit within the human mind.

⁴⁰ Wetzel, *Augustine* (see note 38), 160. Cf. p. 143: "Perhaps the art of divine agency lies in the telling of the human drama."

⁴¹ Wetzel, *Augustine* (see note 38), 153f.

so much finally forced out of old habit: it has been drawn to a point at which new memories and desires triumph over old.

Yet, to understand the role of *exempla* in the *Confessiones* we need to differentiate a little more: *exempla* constitute only an initial step towards the refashioning of the soul. In his allegorical reading of Genesis in *Confessiones* XIII Augustine distinguishes two stages in the soul's reformation. In the first place, it is the function of Christ's ministers on earth to live as examples that will encourage the faithful to practice their faith through imitation⁴². By imitating one will gain the 'living soul' (*anima uiuens*) that is produced by God at Gen 1,24. The soul lives when it avoids this world, when it becomes continent and restrains the passions of the 'dead' soul⁴³. The death that comes upon the soul stems from a turning away from the fount of life that is the Word. In the second place, the fulfilling of the command not to be conformed to this world is followed immediately by the renewing of the mind spoken of at Rom 12,2. This renewal involves the restoration of the image of God such that the restored person no longer needs to imitate human examples⁴⁴. This person judges by perceiving what is of the Spirit of God and even understands the Trinity and Unity in God! The same distinction is repeated in Augustine's brief summary at the very end of the work⁴⁵.

The distinction that Augustine makes here may be seen a little more clearly when we consider the pairing of *exempla* and *sacramenta* in Augustine's writing. Generally speaking *exempla* shape the 'old,' the 'outer' man, while *sacramenta* the inner: the former are concerned with education in virtue and with "inciting desire for virtuous living," while the latter are concerned with initiating the reform of the soul's attention to the mystery of God⁴⁶. Only the latter bring about the transformation of the inner man in the Christian life. Basil Studer argues that Augustine understands this pairing by parallel with Christ's two natures: just as it is the unity of the two natures in one person that is the means of our salvation, so too it is the unitary purpose of Christ's sacraments and examples that reforms the soul⁴⁷. Robert Dodaro has supplemented Studer's conclusions by emphasizing that the pairing of *exemplum* and *sacramentum* is not an antithesis parallel to that between the outer and the inner person. *Exempla* engage

⁴² Aug., conf. XIII 30 (351,20f. S.): *et sint forma fidelibus uiuendo coram eis et excitando ad imitationem*. My focus in this paper has mostly been on passages in which Augustine uses the language of *exemplum*. Were there space we might also examine those places (many of which overlap of course) where Augustine uses the language of imitation. E.g. conf. I 26,28.

⁴³ Aug., conf. XIII 31.

⁴⁴ Aug., conf. XIII 32 (354,2f. S.): *non indigent, ut suum genus imitetur*. Cf. conf. XIII 40.

⁴⁵ Aug., conf. XIII 49.

⁴⁶ R. Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in Augustine*, Cambridge 2004, 147-159. The distinction is made particularly clearly at Aug., trin. IV 6; XI 1; XII 1f.

⁴⁷ B. Studer, *Sacramentum et exemplum chez saint Augustin*, *RechAug* 10, 1975, 87-141.

the reasoning faculties of the soul and thus also shape the inner man; *sacramenta* have a material and linguistic foundation even while through them grace transforms the inner man, through its “therapeutic influence on the mind”⁴⁸.

In the *Confessiones* we see this account confirmed. Here *exempla* aid the shaping of Christian desire for God, a shaping that finds its culmination in the second stage of the soul’s reformation where desire has become also a contemplation of divine mysteries⁴⁹. *Exempla* bring to life the ‘living soul’ whose passions have been ‘tamed,’ preparing the soul for the next stage of interior transformation⁵⁰. The moral life that is accepted by imitation finds its cause in a humility of desire that in turn both aids that on-going moral change and is the foundation for acceptance of the Mediator’s inner teaching. Moreover when Augustine describes Paul as one who is “renewed in the knowledge of God”, that is, as one who needs no *exempla*, he describes Paul as being also a ‘living soul’: one never moves from this initial stage because the humility in desire formed there is the foundation of all later transformation⁵¹.

Augustine thus presents *exempla* as used by God toward the re-ordering of memory and the stimulating of desire. And if we see that Augustine presents them thus, we should also see that Augustine also presents good *exempla* as leading toward the same act of conversion, and as stimulating the same desire for and humility before God. Our next step must be to examine further this thread of argument, and so come to a fuller picture of the tensions in Augustine’s exploration of *exempla* in the *Confessiones*.

The Story of Things

Immediately after describing the love with which the congregation wishes to embrace Victorinus as he confesses in public, Augustine comments on the way in which Victorinus’ story follows a plot that universally delights:

God of Goodness, what causes man to be more delighted by the salvation of a soul who is despaired of but then is liberated from great danger than if there has always been hope or if the danger has only been minor? You also, merciful Father, rejoice “more over one penitent than over ninety-nine just persons who need no penitence”⁵².

⁴⁸ Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society* (see note 46), 154.

⁴⁹ E.g. Aug., conf. XIII 32.

⁵⁰ Aug., conf. XIII 34 (356,21-26 S.): *iudicat etiam spiritalis approbando quod rectum [...] de anima uiua mansuefactis affectionibus, in castitate, in ieiuniis, in cogitationibus piis.*

⁵¹ Aug., conf. XIII 40.

⁵² Aug., conf. VIII 6.

In this passage the plot that delights most is one in which all seems lost but all is gained. Surprisingly, even God seems, dare we say, “drawn” by such a plot. Augustine goes on to identify that this is so even in secular narratives, and that such narratives mirror a basic physiological plot:

Drunkards eat salty things to make their desire uncomfortable. As drinking extinguishes the desire, there is delightful sensation. The phenomenon appears universal, fitting even the one “who was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found”⁵³.

The use of Luke 15,32 here does not refer only to the prodigal son himself: following his usage elsewhere it is intended to include Victorinus, Augustine himself and all the converted⁵⁴. The narrative of conversion is thus a universal one and one that seems universally to delight and draw in those exposed to it.

Augustine now turns again to God, noting the distinction between God and creation:

Why is this, my Lord God? You are eternal to yourself, you are your own joy; and beings round you continually rejoice in your society. Why is it that this part of the creation alternates between regress and progress, between hostilities and reconciliations? Or is it that a measure (*modus*) placed on them, a limit you have imposed, when “from the highest heaven” down to the lowest things on earth [...] you have assigned to its proper place and time all kinds of good things and all your just works⁵⁵?

The plot that stories of conversion follow is a universal *modus* shaped by God’s providential hand for the created order. *Modus* is a rich term in Augustine’s theology, connected in particular to his distinctive understanding of creation as ordered according to *modus*, *species* and *ordo* (used as synonymous with Wis 11,21: *omnia in mensura, et numero et pondere disposuisti* [you have ordered all things in measure, number and weight]), and thus to his reflections on the ability of created existence to imitate, via temporality, the divine constancy.

His usage in Book 4 of *De Genesi ad litteram*, written only a few years after the *Confessiones*, provides useful context. At *De Genesi ad litteram* IV 7 Augustine notes (after some numerological speculation) that we must take from God’s creating of the world in six days that the creation occurs in steps and following a pattern. When we recognize this “we should call to mind what Scripture says elsewhere ‘You have ordered all things in measure and number and weight’.” There follows an account of the ordering of creation such that it may move towards rest in God.

⁵³ Aug., conf. VIII 7 (158,29-159,5 S.).

⁵⁴ E.g. Aug., conf. X 45; in euang. Ioh. 19,8. For the extensive use of the prodigal son story in conf. see L.C. Ferrari, The Theme of the Prodigal Son in Augustine’s Confessions, *RechAug* 12, 1977, 105-118.

⁵⁵ Aug., conf. VIII 8 (159,10-19 S.).

Measure indicates not only the limitations and bounds of the created thing (physical, temporal and teleological), but also the measured activity of the soul “which keeps it from going on without control or beyond bounds.” But measure here is understood as inseparable from number; the number and order of the virtues are able to turn the soul towards wisdom and weight (the weight of the will and love by which the worth of everything is assessed). Measure is thus one essential component of the ordering of creation towards its divine end⁵⁶.

But, more than this, measure, number and weight all exist in the eternal Word of God prior to their instantiation in the created order: and yet God is the measure beyond measure and without measure. Interestingly Augustine here does not leave this paradox without comment: “there is a measure without measure, and what comes from it must be squared with it (*mensura autem sine mensura est, cui aequatur quod de illa est*)”⁵⁷. Augustine seems to mean here that the ‘measure’ – the form or limit – of any created thing can only be understood in relation to the source of all measure if it is to be appropriately understood. In this case he is discussing the soul’s ‘measure,’ the appropriate shape of its activity and virtue which is only understood as we come to see its place in relationship to the divine activity and virtue.

The modus of the created soul enables that soul to return constantly towards its Creator, to find itself harmoniously expressing, as created, the qualities that find their unity and perfection in God. In *De Musica* VI, Augustine argues that the form of any thing or event can only be understood as part of a set of proportional harmonious relations both within the created order and as a harmonious reflection of God’s own ‘internal’ order⁵⁸. In a way that foreshadows one of the main arguments of the *Confessiones*, Augustine presents the divine providence as itself arranging lives in a parallel harmonious order, but one that remains all too often hidden from us⁵⁹.

Thus the ordering of lives towards God through the ordering of lives towards and in the Church creates a human temporality that mirrors both the intended order of things and (somehow) the divine constancy. The original creation was ‘converted to God’ in its creation, turned from being formless towards God’s own form. Existing in the forming Word, all

⁵⁶ On these dynamics see M.-A. Vannier, ‘Creatio,’ ‘Conversio,’ ‘Formatio’ chez S. Augustin, Fribourg 1991, esp. 123-172. We must be careful not to assume a simple ‘neoplatonic’ provenance for these ideas. On the transformation of earlier ideas of the ‘liberal arts’ in neoplatonic contexts see I. Hadot, *Arts libéraux et philosophie dans la pensée antique*, EAUG, Paris 1984, 63-137.

⁵⁷ Aug., Gen. ad litt. IV 4.

⁵⁸ Aug., mus. VI 7,19-8,20.

⁵⁹ Aug., mus. VI 11,30 (PL 32, 1169 Migne): *Non igitur absurde credimus motus suos animam, uel actiones, uel operationes, uel si quo alio nomine commodius significari possunt, non latere cum sentit*. The theme is taken up at Aug., civ. XI 18 (CChr.SL 47, 337 Dombart/Kalb) in describing the *ordinem saeculorum tamquam pulcherrimum carmen*.

things should come to live more and more from the ‘fount of life’ that is the Word and thus come to be perfect and radiant with life⁶⁰. This ‘converting’ that is at the heart of the original creative act is now mirrored and brought to fulfillment in the redemptive act: the plot of conversion is also a plot that restores the intended modus of created life. Slowly, in living from the same ‘fount of life’ we come to the radiance of restored vision⁶¹. Augustine describes this living from the fount of life in striking terms when he speaks eschatologically: in *Confessiones* XIII, when we are led to see the beauty of things, the beauty of the part within the whole, God sees with a non-temporal vision through our temporal vision and delights in the created reflection of the divine glory through our delight⁶².

When Augustine, in *Confessiones* X, emphasizes that his work is best read by the Christian, he is in part arguing that his work will be read by someone who recognizes the same plot within themselves. His true readers will both fight against the *curiositas* that seeks more details of his past failings, and find in Augustine’s story further confirmation that God has acted to shape her or his own life according to the same plot: desire for God will then grow more ardent⁶³.

The Tensions of Imitation

The Christian, then, does not just find him or herself in the same plot as Augustine, running on parallel but isolated tracks: Christians find themselves following the plot that delights others, they find themselves following a plot used by God for mutual encouragement within the body of Christ. The divine ordering of one life is always the ordering of one thread within the wider cloth of being-redeemed existence, and each human thread contributes not simply to the ‘objective’ beauty of the whole, but to the mutual encouragement of all. The same perspective may be seen in other works of the period.

A decade before the *Confessiones* Augustine wrote in the *De uera religione*: “so divine providence uses all kinds of men as *exempla* for the

⁶⁰ Aug., conf. XIII 5. Cf. the later development of the theme at Aug., in euang. Ioh. 1,16f.; 2,10.

⁶¹ Aug., conf. XIII 9.

⁶² Aug., conf. XIII 46 (366,5f. S.): *Qui autem per spiritum tuum uident ea, tu uides in eis*. Cf. conf. XIII 44. For Augustine’s insistence that the temporal progress of creation is essential to its purpose of praising God see conf. XIII 48. At conf. XIII 49 the Church is presented as a parallel creation with a parallel function of revealing God in ordered fashion. As part of this function of the Church God creates the *exempla* of the saints and the sacraments (Aug., conf. XIII 49 [369,18-24 S.]): *et inde accendisti quaedam luminaria in firmamento, uerbum uitae habentes sanctos tuos et spiritalibus donis praelata sublimi auctoritate fulgentes; et inde ad imbuendas infideles gentes sacramenta et miracula uisibilia uocesque uerborum secundum firmamentum libri tui*.

⁶³ Aug., conf. X 4.

oversight of souls and for the building up of his spiritual people”⁶⁴. That sentence occurs as the culmination of an argument begun at the very outset of the book: even when one realizes that the soul’s problems stem from its own obsession with created things, how can we change our affections? Only one somehow preserved from the desires of fallen human beings and illuminated by God could teach us. Jesus is, of course, such a one. And yet, Augustine immediately turns not to a brief summary of Christ’s function as mediator, but to an outline of the manner in which the apostles “by their virtues and their words have kindled the fires of the divine love”⁶⁵. Following this initial generation the martyrs and ascetics have persuaded many (even Barbarians!) to lift up their hearts towards God. A few paragraphs later the Church as the agent of providence makes use of those who err to correct the faithful and continues to “use all kinds of men as examples”⁶⁶. The *exempla* of the apostles and martyrs thus play their part in the Father’s drawing of those who are to be saved.

And yet, this is not a full picture. In the *Confessiones* Augustine mostly speaks of the dead as suitable *exempla* (following Latin tradition), although we have seen him also pray that living ministers of Christ may live in order to be imitated⁶⁷. Despite the fact that the direction of my argument seems to be that Augustine is offering himself as *exemplum*, he never speaks directly thus (however much the protreptic intent of the work and the universal plot of the redeemed seems to point in this direction). In his sermons Augustine only rarely speaks of Christians as *exempla* to one another. If one looks forward to what ought to have been his *magnum opus* on the Church as a community of mutually reinforcing *exempla*, *De ciuitate Dei*, his reticence is palpable. In the first few books Augustine speaks frequently of *exempla*, but even when Christians may learn something from them⁶⁸, the *exempla* themselves are from Roman tradition. Throughout the work Augustine occasionally speaks of *exempla* in the Old Testament⁶⁹, and very occasionally in the New Testament, but he never identifies the living as good *exempla*⁷⁰. Christ is occasionally an *exemplum*, of humility, of grace and of our resurrection⁷¹.

⁶⁴ Aug., vera relig. 11.

⁶⁵ Aug., vera relig. 5.

⁶⁶ Aug., vera relig. 11 (CChr.SL 32, 195 Martin): *ita omnibus generibus hominum et explorum ad animarum curationem et ad institutionem spiritalis populi utitur diuina prouidentia.*

⁶⁷ Cf. Aug., serm. 228,1.

⁶⁸ See Aug., civ. I 34; V 16.

⁶⁹ E.g. Aug., civ. X 8; XVI 31.

⁷⁰ At Aug., civ. X 19 some angel stories exemplify their concern not to be worshipped in place of gods, this is then imitated by Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14. At civ. XVIII 49 Judas is an example to us. At civ. XIX 16 Augustine does speak of the Christian *paterfamilias* as chastising only for correction or to create an *exemplum* for others.

⁷¹ See Aug., civ. VII 33; X 29.32.

The answer seems, however, clear. In the *Confessiones* Augustine experiments with a Christian adaptation of the *exempla* tradition (in part because of its great significance within protreptic), but the seeds of his later reticence are already present. Because he sees all good *exempla* as examples of the one plot, exemplified for us by the shepherd who carries his sheep home, and resulting in the formation of the same desire for God, Augustine wishes us always to look beyond the examples, to look in the direction that the examples themselves humbly teach. Christ himself, as has been long noted, is primarily the *exemplum humilitatis*, an example of the humility before God that lies at the heart of human renewal for Augustine. It should not surprise us that against this background Augustine quickly becomes cautious about treating of apostles, martyrs and his fellow Christians as anything more.

When Augustine returns to discussing Victorinus, after reflecting on the value of the conversion of the famous, he emphasizes that in seeing such conversion Christians rejoice because they see their “king” at work “binding the strong man”: they rejoice not simply because Victorinus is saved, but because they see God at work for salvation⁷². Earlier, when I discussed the parallels between Augustine’s account of Victorinus and Hierius, I noted that one of Augustine’s central concerns is the cultural context within which desire is formed. The communal shaping of desire to emulate Hierius is presented as a self-centered desire for individual status. True desire for dependable *exempla* is dependent on a common acknowledgment of the dependence of all on the creator and the soul’s need for external help⁷³.

With this we should compare the contemporary discussion of *Sermo Dolbeau 26*, delivered on January 1st 404. One section of this extremely long text opposes, on the one hand, the worship of demons and the praise and constant remembrance that proud people seek to, on the other hand, the worship of God that the apostles and martyrs seek to inculcate. Paul himself, writes Augustine “did not want people to place any hopes in himself, but rather in the truth he was proclaiming”⁷⁴. A little later we find:

And just as there are holy human beings – they would rather God were worshipped than themselves – so in the same way all the holy angels, which we must undoubtedly believe about the martyrs, would rather God were worshipped than

⁷² Aug., conf. VIII 9.

⁷³ Thus, immediately after describing how his respect for Hierius was both serious (Aug., conf. IV 22) and at the mercy of the winds of gossip (*aurae linguarum*; conf. IV 23), Augustine explains how he should have structured the *De pulchro et apto* around admission of the distinction between material and immaterial and the status of God as source of all beauty (conf. IV 24). But awareness of such a cosmology is immediately treated as the partner of awareness of the soul’s need for external help (conf. IV 25 [72,7-11 S.]): *errores et falsae opinionones uitam contaminant, si rationalis mens ipsa uitiosa est. qualis in me tunc erat nesciente alio lumine illam inlustrandam esse, ut sit particeps ueritatis.*

⁷⁴ Aug., serm. Dolbeau 26,44.

they themselves [...]. In worshipping God, you worship everyone who cleaves to God with pious love and holy devotion⁷⁵.

The thought is completed by emphasis on the presence of Christ as head in all the members of his body⁷⁶. The parallel I offer is not strict, but it shows Augustine's deep concern for the shaping of true desire for God and God above all: this is both built into his sense that all good *exempla* illustrate the same plot, and it is the most plausible explanation for his reticence to follow to what might seem to be its logical end his account of God's use of the converted within the body of Christ.

Examining Augustine's use of *exempla* in the *Confessiones* reveals much about the project of that work. We find him adapting this traditional rhetorical device as part of his attempt to show how God draws toward conversion, and as part of his attempt to show that redemption restores us to our true status as created beings, playing our part in the great poem of the universe and acting as signs of the one through whom all is created and the one from whom all things come. At the same time, this examination reveals also a tension that will run through Augustine's subsequent literary corpus. Even as he is crafting an account of the Church as a body for mutual exhortation of the love of God, the very direction of his thoughts about *exempla* simultaneously drive him to play down their importance and to insist on the place of Christ above all. The head is before the members and yet before us to teach true humility before the Father, to teach the direction of all worship. The head is in the members, but in us so that we love each other only in him who holds the whole together. It is not surprise that once caught in this theological vice the traditional device of the *exemplum* began to buckle under the strain.

ABSTRACT

Der vorliegende Artikel untersucht den Begriff *exemplum* innerhalb der *Confessiones* Augustins. Der Autor vertritt die These, Augustin gestalte die berühmte Gartenszene in *Confessiones* VIII mit ihrem Kindersingsang (*tolle, lege*) parallel zur Reaktion des Ambrosius auf das erstmalige Hören des Evangeliums. Diese nachahmende Bezugnahme befindet sich im Zentrum einer Reihe weiterer Bekehrungsszenen bekannter Vorbilder (*exempla*), die ihrerseits Wirkung göttlicher Vorherbestimmung sind und maßgeblich zur Bekehrung Augustins beitragen. Die Untersuchung der augustininischen Verwendung von *exemplum* im Zusammenspiel mit Augustins sich entwickelnder Auffassung vom menschlichen Willen lässt den Autor zu der Auffassung gelangen, dass die durch *exempla* wirkende göttliche Vorhersehung dazu dient, die Christen in einen universellen Heilsplan einzubinden, der bereits in der Schöpfung angelegt ist. Der Artikel schließt mit einer Reflexion des experimentellen Charakters des augustininischen Gebrauchs von *exemplum/exempla* innerhalb der *Confessiones* im Rückgriff auf die heidnisch-antike Tradition.

⁷⁵ Aug., serm. Dolbeau 26,46.

⁷⁶ Aug., serm. Dolbeau 26,53.