

Augustine's Confessiones : The Structure of Humility ¹⁾

Augustine's techniques of composition have proved somewhat puzzling to some of his nineteenth and twentieth century commentators. H. I. Marrou, writing in the 1930s, notes that for 'un Français d'aujourd'hui : « Saint Augustin compose mal », « sa composition est beaucoup trop lâche », telle est la critique qui se formule spontanément' ²⁾. In his « Retractatio » of 1949, however, he confesses his shame for this remark, and comments 'Reprocher au rhéteur Augustin « de ne pas savoir composer », c'est prétendre que Braque ou Picasso n'étaient pas capables de dessiner une guitare selon les lois de la perspective' ³⁾.

Marrou's initial judgment can surely be understood. The *Confessiones*, for instance, seems a very puzzling mixture of autobiography (Bks I-IX), epistemology (Bk X), and the theory and practice of Biblical commentary (Bks XI-XIII). But one can sense, too, the justice of his retreat from that judgment, and this article, I hope without too much presumption, sets out to try to suggest « laws » of composition appropriate to the *Confessiones*.

Marcia Colish's recent book *The Mirror of Language : A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* ⁴⁾ has offered a new approach to the structure of the work, an approach which makes the final four books an integral part of a complete work rather than an afterthought with no real relevance to what has gone before. She defines the relationship thus : 'In the treatment of his conversion itself, Augustine illustrates the function of the spoken and written word as media of revealed wisdom, and he concludes the work with a schematic outline of the various uses of redeemed speech' (p. 20). Again '... from the point of view of Augustine's theory of words

¹⁾ I am grateful to acknowledge the help of Father E. A. Synan and Professor D. Fox in matters concerned with this article.

²⁾ *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris, 1938), p. 61.

³⁾ *Ibid.*, (Paris, 1949 printing), p. 665.

⁴⁾ New Haven and London, 1968.

as signs in the knowledge of God, the last four books of the *Confessiones* are as important as the first part of the work, since it is here that he shows how words served to deepen his knowledge of God and to express it to others after he had received the gift of faith' (pp. 45-6).

I want to suggest a further way of looking at the structure of the *Confessiones*, a way which uses Miss Colish's discovery to suggest a very complex series of interrelationships in the work. I shall start from Book X for reasons which will become apparent as we proceed. It opens with a plea that Augustine might know God, all other things being worthless. 'Cognoscam te, cognitor meus, cognoscam, sicut et cognitus sum. virtus animae meae, intra in eam et coapta tibi, ut habeas et possideas sine macula et ruga. haec est mea spes, ideo loquor et in ea spe gaudeo, quando sanum gaudeo'⁵). And, basically, the Book is a record of means to the knowledge of God. There are three stages in what can be regarded as an ascent. Augustine describes how he first turned outwards and asked the earth, the sea, the sky, all that sense can experience, to tell him of his God. They answered in turn that they were not God. All they could tell was that He who had made them was God. 'interrogatio mea intentio mea, et responsio eorum species eorum' (X, 6). So he turned to himself, to his inner self rather than to his body, for that inner self is superior: the body serves it bringing it information. But his inner part too is made up of various stages. There is the power which makes his body a living thing; there is the power of perception through the senses. But neither of these can lead to God for they are properties too of horses and mules. 'Transibo ergo et istam naturae meae, gradibus ascendens ad eum, qui fecit me...' (X, 8). Next is memory, which can store those impressions received through the senses, knowledge gained (or rather knowledge remembered in Augustinian epistemology), emotions experienced. The power of memory, which Augustine examines at length, is astonishing. Yet it is still *his* memory, and he is a changeable and transient man. Besides, the beasts and the birds have memory. 'quid igitur agam, tu vera mea vita, deus meus? transibo et hanc vim meam, quae memoria vocatur, transibo eam, ut pertendam ad te, dulce lumen. quid dicis mihi? ego ascendens per animum meum ad te, qui desuper mihi manes, transibo et istam vim meam, quae

⁵) All quotations from the *Confessiones* are from the edition in the Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1912).

memoria vocatur volens te attingere ...' (X, 17). But, Augustine argues, if he cannot remember God how can he look for Him? When he has lost a thing he knows what he has lost and can look for it intelligently, for he remembers its nature. In looking for God he is looking for a life of utter happiness. In fact all men are looking for happiness, whatever perverted way they might think to accomplish it. But how can they look for it if they do not remember it? 'Ubi ergo te inveni, ut discerem te? neque enim iam eras in memoria mea, priusquam te discerem. ubi ergo te inveni, ut discerem te, nisi in te supra me?' (X, 26). It is a natural step to a remembrance of man's dependence on God's grace and to prayer for that grace to give complete dependence on God's will (X, 29).

There are three stages then in knowledge of God — the world outside, the mind inside, God above who gives knowledge of the truth to memory⁶). Man, in his limitations, must use concepts of the first two to describe the third; but the intrinsic value of those first two, when they lead to the third and are not themselves valued, can be seen by the extraordinary lyric intensity of the two descriptions of God in Book X:

quid autem amo, cum te amo? non speciem corporis nec decus temporis, non candorem lucis ecce istum amicum oculis, non dulces melodias cantilenarum omnimodarum, non florum et ungentorum et aromatum suaveolentiam, non manna et mella, non membra acceptabilia carnis amplexibus: non haec amo, cum amo deum meum. et tamen amo quandam lucem et quandam vocem et quandam odorem et quandam cibum et quandam amplexum, cum amo deum meum, lucem, vocem, odorem, cibum, amplexum interioris hominis mei, ubi fulget animae meae, quod non capit locus, et ubi sonat, quod non rapit tempus, et ubi olet, quod non spargit flatus, et ubi sapit, quod non minuit edacitas, et ubi haeret, quod non divellit satietas. hoc est quod amo, cum deum meum amo. (X, 6)

Sero te amavi, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova, sero te amavi! et ecce intus eras et ego foris, et ibi te quaerebam, et in ista formosa, quae fecisti, deformis inruebam. mecum eras, et tecum non eram. ea me tenebant longe a te, quae si in te non essent, non essent. vocasti et clamasti et rupisti surditatem meam: coruscasti, splenduisti et fugasti caecitatem meam: fragrasti, et duxi spiritum, et anhele tibi, gustavi et esurio et sitio, tetigisti me, et exarsi in pacem tuam. (X, 27)

⁶) For a brief but extremely stimulating discussion of this subject see E. K. RAND, *Founders of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), pp. 259ff.

The catalogue of sins which follows the analysis of the ascent to God described above is of real appropriateness. It is of course led into perfectly logically. Man's helplessness and illness acknowledged, the great Guide and Physician must set about restoring man to the goal for which he was made and from which he has strayed through sin. The systematic analysis of sin which follows is what might have been expected. But this analysis is appropriate in an even more organic sense. For it follows up the three stages of the ascent, purging the appropriate sins at each level. So the section begins with a cleansing of the senses: touch first, then taste, smell, hearing, sight (X, 29-34). Of course what is asked for is a curing, not a removal of these faculties. Then Augustine moves to sins appropriate to the second stage of ascent, the sins of the mind: mental self-indulgence in inquisitiveness, knowledge for personal satisfaction (X, 35). However, there is a sin which must be cured before the knowledge God gives can become in any way relevant, which therefore is that sin central to our perverse natures. 'et tu scis, quanta ex parte mutaveris, qui me primitus sanas a libidine vindicandi me, ut propitius fias etiam ceteris omnibus iniquitatibus meis, et sanes omnes languores meos, et redimas de corruptione vitam meam, et coronas me in miseratione et misericordia, et saties in bonis desiderium meum, qui compressisti a timore tuo superbiam meam et mansuefecisti iugo tuo cervicem meam' (X, 36). The receiving of the knowledge of God demands humility, the slaying of self. And this can be achieved only through the mediation of His Son, the pattern of humility:

Verax autem mediator, quem secreta tua misericordia demonstrasti hominibus, et misisti, et eius exemplo etiam ipsam discerent humilitatem, mediator ille dei et hominum, homo Christus Iesus, inter mortales peccatores et immortalem iustum apparuit ... In quantum nos amasti, pater bone, qui filio tuo unico non pepercisti, sed pro nobis inpiis tradidisti eum! quomodo nos amasti, pro quibus ille non rapinam arbitratus esse aequalis tibi factus est subditus usque ad mortem crucis ... potuimus putare verbum tuum remotum esse a coniunctione hominis et desperare de nobis, nisi caro fieret et habitaret in nobis ... Ideo Christus pro omnibus mortuus est, ut et qui vivunt iam non sibi vivant, sed ei qui pro omnibus mortuus est. (X, 43)

Now, with the pattern of three-fold ascent — body, mind, grace — established in Book X, I would like to suggest that it is exactly this pattern which the description of Augustine's conversion (Bks I-IX)

follows. I want to begin my study in an analysis of part of Book VII, ranging widely in reference from that passage. Augustine is in Milan, dissatisfied in his struggle with himself. 'totum tamen ibat in auditum tuum, quod rugiebam a gemitu cordis mei, et ante te erat desiderium meum et lumen oculorum meorum non erat mecum. intus enim erat, ego autem foris, nec in loco illud. at ego intendebar in ea, quae locis continentur, et non ibi inveniebam locum ad requiescendum, nec recipiebant me ista ...' (VII, 7). This understanding is of course a key to Augustine's whole life until this stage: the seeking of joy in the material world where it could not be found or could only be found if that world were referred constantly to God, its transience seen in the light of, as an image, distorted, of God's permanence. He had sought happiness in friendship, but that had been distorted through its lack of focus: so it had become lust, or the blind folly of communal theft of those things he did not even want, or sheer despair when a friend died. In retrospect he comments on this latter event thus:

Si placent corpora, deum ex illis lauda, et in artificem eorum retorque amorem, ne in his, quae tibi placent, tu displiceas. si placent animae, in deo amentur, quia et ipsae mutabiles sunt et illo fixae stabiliuntur: alioquin irent et perirent. in illo ergo amentur, et rape ad eum tecum quas potes ... bonum, quod amatis, ab illo est: sed quantum est ad illum, bonum est et suave; sed amarum erit iuste, quia iniuste amatur deserto illo quidquid ab illo est. (IV, 12)

Augustine's initial search for God in religion had also been a search in the material world: for Manicheism is inherently materialistic, so is astrology, and so were his objections to Christianity at that stage — part of his repugnance was rooted in his inability to get beyond the literal, the material in his approach to the Bible.

But from this vain search in the material world he is rescued as he begins to read — through God's guidance — in the books of the Platonists. These books teach him of the nature of God and of His Word, of the divinity of the Word, of His creation by God, of His existence beyond time, of the creation of all things through Him, of the dependence of all souls on Him for their wisdom. But the books do not tell him of the Incarnation, of that humility of which Jesus is the exemplar and through which man can receive that wisdom. Augustine cites at length Philippians 2, 7-11 and passages from Matthew 11 and the Psalms: 'abscondisti enim haec a sapientibus

et revelasti ea parvulis, ut venirent ad eum laborantes et onerati et reficeret eos, quoniam mitis est et humilis corde, et dirigit mites in iudicio, et docet mansuetos vias suas, videns humilitatem nostram et laborem nostrum et dimittens omnia peccata nostra' (VII, 9). This movement in Augustine's thought to the search for God outside His creation, to the Wisdom of the Platonists, is, it seems to me, exactly that of the second stage in Bk X — and the lack in the books of the Platonists is the third stage of the ascent. We should turn again to Augustine's description of what is happening to himself as he reads the books:

Et inde admonitus redire ad memet ipsum, intravi in intima mea, duce te, et potui, quoniam factus es adiutor meus. intravi et vidi qualicumque oculo animae meae supra eundem oculum animae meae, supra mentem meam, lucem incommutabilem: non hanc vulgarem et conspicuam omni carni, nec quasi ex eodem genere grandior erat, tamquam si ista multo multoque clarius claresceret totumque occuparet magnitudine. non hoc illa erat, sed aliud, aliud valde ab istis omnibus. nec ita erat supra mentem meam, sicut oleum super aquam, nec sicut caelum super terram; sed superior, quia ipsa fecit me, et ego inferior, quia factus ab ea. qui novit veritatem, novit eam, et qui novit eam, novit aeternitatem. caritas novit eam. (VII, 10)

Looking outside — turning inside — God's gift of a superior vision, a sight of Himself. The three steps are there already though, really, Augustine is still on the level of the second in essence. 'et non stabam frui deo meo, sed rapiebar ad te decore tuo, moxque diripiebar abs te pondere meo, et ruebam in ista cum gemitu; et pondus hoc consuetudo carnalis. sed mecum erat memoria tui ...' (VII, 17). He wonders how he can appreciate material beauty, how he can make correct judgments about things subject to transience — and then realizes that above his own mind, transient itself, is permanence of truth. He describes again his ascent:

atque ita gradatim a corporibus ad sentientem per corpus animam, atque inde ad eius interiorem vim, cui sensus corporis exteriora nuntiaret, et quousque possunt bestiae, atque inde rursus ad ratiocinantem potentiam, ad quam refertur iudicandum, quod sumitur a sensibus corporis. quae se quoque in me comperiens mutabilem, erexit se ad intellegentiam suam, et abduxit cogitationem a consuetudine, subtrahens se contradicentibus turbis phantasmatum, ut inveniret, quo lumine aspargeretur; cum sine ulla dubitatione clamaret

incommutabile praeferendum esse mutabili, unde nosset ipsum incommutabile — quod nisi aliquo modo nosset, nullo modo illud mutabili certa praeponeret — et pervenit ad id, quod est, in ictu trepidantis aspectus. tunc vero invisibilia tua per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspexi, sed aciem figere non evalui, et repercussa infirmitate redditus solitis, non mecum ferebam nisi amantem memoriam et quasi olefacta desiderantem, quae comedere nondum possem. (VII, 17)

But this strength can come only through Jesus Christ who 'in inferioribus autem aedificavit sibi humilem domum de limo nostro' so that men 'ne fiducia sui progredierentur longius, sed potius infirmarentur, videntes ante pedes suos infirmam divinitatem ex participatione tunicae pelliciae nostrae, et lassi prosternerentur in eam, illa autem surgens levaret eos' (VII, 18). But, still on the second plane as it were, Augustine knows of God but can not experience Him, in fact is proud of his knowledge, 'inflabar scientia' (VII, 20) he claims, quoting Paul. So the books of the Platonists have brought him a certain way: in the end he is glad to have come across them first rather than after studying the Scriptures for in this way he has learnt 'quid interesset inter praesumptionem et confessionem'; if he had come across them later he might have been swept from the truth or, even if he had remained constant, he might have thought that the Platonists' books by themselves might lead to man's salvation. So, having been taken part of the way to God by the books of the Platonists, he turns to the Scriptures, particularly the writings of Paul.

Book VIII reveals the third stage of Augustine's ascent, the bending of the will, the acceptance of dependence. It seems to me that in many cases this Book has been approached too simply, that Augustine's statement 'sed adhuc tenaciter alligabar ex femina ... et propter hoc unum volvebar in ceteris' (VIII, 1) has been removed from the context of argument that he has been developing throughout, and particularly in the seventh Book as I have tried to indicate. To see Augustine's problem quite simply as lust is, too, to take away that element of typification which the whole of the first nine books — the whole of the *Confessiones* in fact, but in another way, a way to which I shall return later — has striven to assert: the Augustine presented is of course, in a very real way, distinctive, with his own foibles and quirks; but that very individuation is in some ways a universalization as we are forced into an emotional empathy. And other techniques make of Augustine Everyman: his life is full of

Biblical parallels — the Prodigal Son, the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Widow's Son — which are themselves types of all fallen humanity; the imagery in which he describes his condition is that appropriate to Everyman's condition: the patient whose only Physician can be God, the schoolboy directed by his Master, the prisoner who needs to be freed; Augustine weaves the Bible into his text so seamlessly that it takes on something of the Biblical exalted tone of revelation, of universal folly and salvation, especially in those prayers which depend so markedly on the Psalms, the Church's pattern of prayer; and, further, he almost totally neglects all background description which would confine the experiences too narrowly. Book VIII then is concerned with a far more universal problem than lust, both for Everyman and for Augustine himself: '*... et contestante universa creatura, inveneram te creatorem nostrum, et verbum tuum apud te deum, tecumque unum deum, per quod creasti omnia. et est aliud genus in piorum, qui cognoscentes deum non sicut deum glorificaverunt aut gratias egerunt. in hoc quoque incideram ...*' (VIII, 1). Lust may be the particular instance, but the refusal to bend the will is the universal. Hence the story of Victorinus, which is one of the means of grace given to Augustine as a help in breaking down his resistance, grace often brought to him through God's ministers such as Ambrose and Simplicianus. Victorinus, an outstanding and revered teacher, in his age '*non erubuerit esse puer Christi tui, et infans fontis tui, subiecto collo ad humilitatis iugum, et edomita fronte ad crucis opprobrium*' (VIII, 2). At first he would not acknowledge his new position publicly but, on reflection, '*si eum timeret coram hominibus confiteri, reusque sibi magni criminis adparuit, erubescendo de sacramentis humilitatis verbi tui, et non erubescendo de sacris sacrilegis superbiorum daemoniorum, quae imitator superbus acceperat ...*' (VIII, 2). Augustine longed to do the same but he was a prisoner, '*ligatus non ferro alieno, sed mea ferrea voluntate ... quippe voluntate perversa facta est libido, et dum servitur libidini, facta est consuetudo, et dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas*' (VIII, 5). The misdirection of will is crucial. But God will not leave Augustine alone. Again by chance it may seem — by grace it is — he is told the story of Antony the hermit, then of those who hear that story and turn away from worldly ambition. He feels confronted with his own situation, and by a resolution of that situation which he cannot yet accept. In a garden, in some ways reminiscent of Gethse-

mane — and the reminiscence is surely intended for Augustine must follow the way of Christ « Not my will but thine O Lord », 'moriebar vitaliter' (VIII, 8) — he feels torn apart by the conflicting desires of his own nature. In his agony he must be alone, leaves Alypius who has been with him and 'ego sub quadam fici arbore stravi me nescio quomodo, et dimisi habenas lacrimis, et proruperunt flumina oculorum meorum, acceptabile sacrificium tuum ...' (VIII, 12). Again God directs him and he hears a child's voice repeating 'tolle lege, tolle lege'. He already knows what this means for the story of Antony has prompted him: when he opens his book of Scripture the first words on which his eyes will fall will be meant for him. Antony had been told, from Matthew 19, 21, to sell all he had, give the money to the poor and then to follow Christ. Augustine is told what is basically the same thing — the redirection of the will — though in terms more directly relevant: Romans 13, 13-14: 'non in comissionibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubilibus et in pudicitias, non in contentione et aemulatione, sed induite dominum Iesum Christum, et carnis providentiam ne feceritis in concupiscentiis'. So 'convertisti ... me ad te' (VIII, 12). As he says at the opening of Book IX, what was required was 'totum nolle, quod volebam, et velle, quod volebas' — which, of course, leads to perfect freedom. The movement of his will finds expression in the significations of the sacrament of baptism.

To conclude this section on the threefold ascent as seen in Augustine's own experience I want to comment on two passages in Book IX which seem especially relevant. He retires to the country as a catechumen, and studies the Psalms. Much of section 4 is taken up with a meditation on the fourth Psalm and in this he sees rehearsed the process of his conversion. The Psalmist calls on God to have mercy on him, to hear his prayer. He wonders how long the hearts of the great ones of the world will be hardened: 'Vt quid diligitis vanitatem et quaeritis mendacium?' He counsels them 'Trascimini et nolite peccare'. God gives gladness, gives harvest, gives rest. The pattern is Augustine's own: 'nec iam bona mea foris erant, nec oculis carneis in isto sole quaerebantur. volentes enim gaudere forinsecus facile vanescunt ... ibi enim, ubi mihi iratus eram, intus in cubili, ubi conpunctus eram, ubi sacrificaveram, mactans vetustatem meam, et inchoata meditatione renovationis meae, sperans in te, ibi mihi dulcescere coeperas et dederas laetitiam in corde meo'. Now he can take his rest in God, an idea which is taken up again in the second

passage from Book IX on which I want to comment, the very famous description of Augustine's vision of God. I want to quote at length for, in the context of the present discussion, I think that certain of the priorities and attitudes implied will take on something of a new light. Augustine and his mother Monica are talking:

Cumque ad eum finem sermo perduceretur, ut carnalium sensuum delectatio quantalibet, in quantalibet luce corporea, prae illius vitae iucunditate non comparatione, sed ne commemoratione quidem digna videretur, erigentes nos ardentiore affectu in id ipsum, perambulavimus gradatim cuncta corporalia, et ipsum caelum, unde sol et luna et stellae lucent super terram. et adhuc ascendebamus, interius cogitando et loquendo et mirando opera tua, et venimus in mentes nostras et transcendimus eas, ut attingeremus regionem ubertatis indeficientis, unde pascis Israel in aeternum veritate pabulo, et ibi vita sapientia est, per quam fiunt omnia ista, et quae fuerunt et quae futura sunt. et ipsa non fit, sed sic est, ut fuit, et sic erit semper: quin potius fuisse et futurum esse non est in ea, sed esse solum, quoniam aeterna est: nam fuisse et futurum esse non est aeternum. et dum loquimur et inhiamus illi, attingimus eam modice toto ictu cordis; et suspiravimus, et reliquimus ibi religatas primitias spiritus, et remeavimus ad strepitum oris nostri, ubi verbum et incipitur et finitur. (IX, 10)

But that fragmentary moment will last for all eternity as one rests in His eternal joy. It is thus fitting that the autobiographical section of the *Confessiones* ends with Monica's death, for as Augustine following Christ had died into life in self-offering so physical death opens the gate to the eternal Jerusalem 'cui suspirat peregrinatio populi tui ab exitu usque ad reditum' (IX, 13). The span of human life, from birth to death, is encompassed in the *Confessiones*, but that span is no completion, for those who live in Christ pass beyond it to real life of which this transient existence is but the merest shadow.

I hope to have established certain structural parallels between Books I-IX and Book X. To the differences I shall return, but if so far I have begun to suggest certain reasons why the two parts are not completely irrelevant to each other I shall be happy. I want to look now at the last three books and their connection with what has preceded. In one sense Book XI is a continuation of Book X for it too tackles the problem of knowledge. But in another way it, and the two Books which follow, are quite separate for they are in the form of an extended meditation on Genesis i. Certain of the concepts

examined are of obvious relevance to the subjects discussed in Books I to X: to illustrate solely from Book XI — the extended discussion of the nature of time with the conclusion that Augustine looks forward ‘non in ea quae futura et transitura sunt, sed in ea quae ante sunt non distentus, sed extensus ... ubi audiam vocem laudis et contempler delectationem tuam nec venientem nec praetereuntem ... at ego in tempora dissilui, quorum ordinem nescio, et tumultuosis varietatibus dilaniantur cogitationes meae, intima viscera animae meae, donec in te confluam purgatus et liquidus igne amoris tui’ (XI, 29); the means of entry into that eternity through God’s Word, His Son, Strength, Wisdom and Truth (XI, 9). But there is another and more organic way in which these three books relate to what has gone before. This way is primarily concerned with Book XIII, but the two preceding books prepare for that. Book XI establishes that the only true knowledge comes from God, not from man’s intelligence, and that this knowledge comes through God’s Word ‘in quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae absconditi’ (XI, 2), a knowledge which is sought in the Word of God, the Scriptures. Book XII asks how these Scriptures can be studied, how one can be assured of the validity of the meaning one sees there, and answers that correct responses are supported by an «inner voice», and that varying interpretations of the same passage are in fact valid, for the Scriptures sustain the faithful of varying stages of Christian development, and all understandings whose effect is charity are consistent with the truth. So, with arguments to support interpretation deployed, Augustine provides us with interpretation in Book XIII. And the interpretation he gives sees the process of Creation as the creation of the soul, then of the New Man. ‘dono tuo accendimur et sursum ferimur; inardescimus et imus. ascendimus ascensiones in corde et cantamus canticum graduum. igne tuo bono inardescimus et imus, quoniam sursum imus ad pacem Hierusalem ...’ (XIII, 9). Man, a spiritual creation, was once all darkness, sunk in the sea of concupiscence, having turned away from God, but even in that darkness God did not neglect man as His Spirit moved over the waters and in offering the way of repentance created Light. He made for man the firmament, that is the authority of the Scriptures. In it He placed luminaries, the saints who shine on the world. He created the creatures of sea and air, the sacraments which ‘repererunt ... inter medios fluctus temptationum saeculi, ad imbuendas gentes nomine tuo in baptismo tuo’, the words

of spiritual teachers 'volantes super terram iuxta firmamentum libri tui, praeposito illo sibi ad auctoritatem, sub quo volitarent, quocumque irent' (XIII, 20). From baptism comes the dry land, which has faith, on which exist living creatures, 'motus ... animae sunt isti in allegoria' — 'fastus elationis et delectatio libidinis et venenum curiositatis' (XIII, 21) in their untamed form — who must be tamed but who then will be useful. So the Pauline New Man is created: Paul, 'dispensator tuus, generans per evangelium filios, ne semper parvulos haberet, quos lacte nutriret et tamquam nutrix foveret: reformamini, inquit, in novitate mentis vestrae ad probandum vos, quae sit voluntas dei, quod bonum et beneplacitum et perfectum' (XIII, 22). The essence of the New Man — and this we have seen in our study of the first two parts of the *Confessiones* — is surely that new will, God's will accepted instead of one's own. The New Man can judge aright (he rules all creatures), has the ability to see the various significations of the Scriptures (increases and multiplies), is nourished with the joy of good works. The very goodness of God is shown by the marvels of this new Creation — behold it is very good. And His Word tells us that 'nos post opera nostra ideo bona valde, quia tu nobis ea donasti, sabbato vitae aeternae requiescamus in te. Etiam tunc enim sic requiesces in nobis, quemadmodum nunc operaris in nobis, et ita erit illa requies tua per nos, quemadmodum sunt ista opera tua per nos' (XIII, 36-7). So the meaning Augustine sees in the first chapter of Genesis is that pattern we have seen before in his own life, and in his speculative examination of how man may know God.

But this is not mere repetition: for though the pattern described is the same it comes from very different sources, through very different means. The first had as base Augustine's own personal experience, was strongly autobiographical even though the parallels between Augustine's own experiences and those common to all men were not neglected. The second had as base speculation, an intellectual examination of personal experience and also of the nature of memory. The third has as source something quite outside of man, God's Word the only source of true knowledge. Now it will be seen that these three sources of the pattern of experience are those three stages in the pattern of ascent marked earlier — the world outside as it were, knowledge/intelligence, God above — or, to put it another way, those three things which make up man and which, Augustine argues

in XIII, 11, can be seen as shadows of the meaning of the Trinity: existence, knowledge, will. The very shape of the *Confessiones* then can be seen to echo the shape of man, can be seen indeed to echo the shape of the New Man in God, for the focus turns progressively from Augustine the individual as source of information to God's Word, as he decreases that He might increase, as he becomes absorbed in his maker. This is indeed the rhetoric of humility, a redeemed rhetoric ⁷).

The *Confessiones*, then, conforms to Augustine's own artistic canons: 'hoc dicunt etiam quaeque pulchra corpora, quia longe multo pulchrius est corpus, quod ex membris pulchris omnibus constat, quam ipsa membra singula, quorum ordinatissimo conventu completur universum, quamvis et illa etiam singillatim pulchra sint' (XIII, 28). But the work of art must not exist for itself. In describing the effect of music he worries lest singing hymns may be merely gratification of the senses, but acknowledges the benefit of that gratification if it leads to love of God. Beautiful artefacts 'addiderunt homines ad inlecebras oculorum, foras sequentes quod faciunt, intus relinquentes a quo facti sunt et exterminantes quod facti sunt. at ego, deus meus et decus meum, etiam hinc tibi dico hymnum et sacrifico laudem sacrificatori meo, quoniam pulchra traiecta per animas in manus artificiosas ab illa pulchritudine veniunt, quae supra animas est, cui suspirat anima mea die ac nocte' (X, 34). To put this in the terminology of *De Doctrina Christiana*, art must be sign and not thing. In this sense the *Confessiones*, unity in trinity, is the perfect work of art, the perfect self-offering.

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⁷ Cf. Erich AUERBACH, *Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, tr. Ralph Manheim (London, 1965), esp. ch. 1.