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THE CONTEXT OF AUGUSTINE'S EARLY THEOLOGY
OF THE *IMAGO DEI*

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Durham University
Department of Theology and Religion
2013

Abstract: The Context of Augustine's Early Theology of the *Imago Dei*
Gerald Peter Boersma

This thesis engages with Augustine's early thought to analyze what sources influenced and shaped the African Doctor's initial theology of the *imago dei* and allowed him to affirm the "image of God" of both Christ and the human person. My thesis is attentive to two significant sources of influence. First, I argue that Augustine's early theology of image builds on that of Hilary of Poitiers, Marius Victorinus, and Ambrose of Milan. Latin pro-Nicene theology was committed to an articulation of the "image of God" that was aligned with the doctrine of the *homoousion*. Defenders of the Nicene cause considered anathema any expression of "image of God" that suggested that as image Christ was secondary, subordinate, or different from his source in substance. Latin pro-Nicene theology could envision the *imago dei* only as equality with God. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it was difficult for such theology to link the *imago dei* with the notion that the human person was created in the image of God.

The second significant source of influence on Augustine's early theology of the *imago dei* is a Plotinian philosophical conception of the world. At the heart of Plotinus's cosmogony and metaphysics lies a philosophy of image. In this framework, an image is derived, revelatory, and, ultimately, ordered to return to its primary source. By definition, this conception of an image entails subordination and is ideally suited to articulate the human person as *imago dei*.

The genius of Augustine's theology, evident already clearly in his early writings, is his synthesis of these two influences. By drawing on Plotinian thought, Augustine articulates a theology of the *imago dei* that had eluded his Latin pro-Nicene

predecessors. My thesis suggests that this achievement was the result of Augustine's early deep engagement with Plotinian philosophy.

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Acknowledgments

I vividly recall nervously walking up the steps of the Theology Department right next to Durham Cathedral to meet Prof. Lewis Ayres for the first time late in the summer of 2009. “Ahhhh, you must be Gerald,” he said. So began three wonderful years of research and writing under Prof. Ayres’s direction. It is not possible to express in writing all that I have received from Prof. Ayres. He taught me the mechanics of writing a thesis – how to conduct research, which sources to consult, and how to develop and defend an argument. I owe a great debt of gratitude for the abundant time Prof. Ayres offered, sharing his wisdom and direction as he taught me to become a careful reader of Augustine. Over my three years in Durham I got to know Prof. Ayres and his family very well; frequently Sunday afternoon was spent at the Ayres’s house playing football with the kids, developing a more refined pallet for Western and World War II films, and learning the art of barbequing with the “Green Egg.” I am profoundly grateful for the friendship and love of Prof. Ayres and his family during my time in Durham. Prof. Ayres would frequently joke, “I run a full-service graduate program.” Indeed, and so much more!

A distinct pleasure at Durham was meeting so many different people studying theology. One important hub for me was the Centre for Catholic Studies. I benefited immensely from the frequent seminars, public lectures, and social events that the Centre puts on. The Centre provided me with an academic and social home at Durham among a close-knit community of friends. I am especially grateful to Prof. Paul Murray, Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies, for warmly inviting me to become a part of the Centre. I am also profoundly grateful for the generous financial support that he provided through the Centre for Catholic Studies during my entire time studying at Durham.

I look back with particular fondness to the second year I was living in Durham at the Catholic Chaplaincy among a wonderful community of friends. I am grateful for the hospitably and friendship shown by Fr. Tony Currer, who headed up our communal life of cooking, eating, discussing, and praying together. It was wonderful to share this special time with Prof. Paul Lakeland, the visiting scholar at the Centre for Catholic Studies, as well as with fellow students Gino Jeyanayagam and Dennis Walton. A major component of this thesis was written in the context of the support, discussion, and encouragement had among friends in the living room of the Durham Chaplaincy.

I am grateful to the many other professors I have had over the years, and who liberally gave of their time and wisdom. Especially attentive in helping me to develop the habits of reading, writing and thinking during undergraduate studies at Trinity Western University were Craig Allert, Kent Clarke, Christopher Morrissey, and Robert Stackpole. My time studying graduate theology at Ave Maria University in Florida was profoundly enriching and formative. I think back frequently to the

wonderful classes taught by Marc Guerra, Fr. Matthew Lamb, Steve Long, and Roger Nutt. I am particularly grateful for the wisdom and direction I received from my MA thesis director, Matthew Levering. I have benefited enormously from the hours of theological conversation I had with Prof. Levering while I was a graduate student. I am fortunate to be able to call Prof. Levering a friend, and it is in large part due to his encouragement and support that I chose to do doctoral studies and study the theology of Augustine in particular.

It is difficult to know where to begin in expressing thanks to the people who gave me life. My parents, Hans and Linda Boersma, not only brought me into the world, but raised me with immense love, care and devotion. They handed on the faith to me and encouraged my early interest in theology. A line from the Lutheran hymn, *Nun danket alle Gott* springs to mind:

*Who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.*

“Countless gifts of love” have indeed been given me all my life through my parents, not least in their ongoing support of my research and writing. They encouraged me – even when I was unsure – to pursue a Ph.D., they gave me advise and direction in the process, motivated me to persevere when I wanted to stop, and encouraged me to “just get the thing done” when I could no longer stomach looking at my thesis. My mom’s wisdom and vision reminded me to keep things in perspective and my Dad’s theological expertise gave me pointers, tactics, and indefatigable editing. From as early as I can remember I have always looked up to my Dad and have admired what he does as a theologian; I do not doubt at all that it is on account of his example that I decided to pursue theology. I am also blessed with an amazing family; the care, camaraderie, and love of my siblings, John and his wife Jennifer, Corine, Pete, and Meghan is a wellspring of joy.

Above all I am thankful to my beautiful wife, Maria de los Angeles; my best friend and companion in life. Except for trips across the Atlantic, my first two years studying in Durham entailed a considerable distance between us while we were dating. It was, then, a beautiful experience after Maria graduated and we were married to move into our first home together in Durham. We share many fond memories of our first year together in Durham. My thesis has been a major part of our life together up to this point, and through it all Maria has been an amazing source of strength, support, and solace. I thank God for her love and presence every day.

Contents

	Introduction	1
I.	Hilary of Poitiers	12
	Image in the Anti-Monarchian Writings (Tertullian and Novatian)	13
	Hilary's Development of Anti-Monarchian Image Theology	26
	Hilary's Image Theology in the Nicene Context	33
	Image as a Christological Term (Colossians 1:15)	37
	Image as an Anthropological Term (Genesis 1:26)	46
II.	Marius Victorinus	52
	Substance and Image	54
	Christ as <i>Imago Dei</i>	68
	The Human Person <i>secundum imaginem</i>	77
III.	Ambrose of Milan	96
	The <i>Imago Dei</i> as a Spiritual Reality	98
	The Embodied <i>Imago</i>	115
	The Moral Imperative of the <i>Imago Dei</i>	126
	Conclusion	146
IV.	The Plotinian Image	149
	<i>Participatio, Imago, Similitudo</i>	150
	The Plotinian Image	156
	The Philosophy of Image in the <i>Soliloquia</i>	166
V.	Proteus and Participation	172
	Outline of <i>Contra Academicos</i>	176
	The Preface to Book II (<i>Contra Academicos</i> II.1-II.3)	181
	Proteus (<i>Contra Academicos</i> III.11-III.13)	194
	The Platonic Image and the Incarnation (<i>Contra Academicos</i> III.17-20)	200
VI.	The Analogical and Embodied <i>Imago Dei</i>	208
	<i>Analogia, Aequalitas</i> , and the <i>Imago</i>	210
	<i>Aequalitas</i> in Victorinus and Augustine	225
	The Body and the <i>Imago Dei</i>	231
	Conclusion	247

VII. The Ascent of the Image in <i>De vera religione</i>	251
The Plotinian Metaphysic of Image	256
Intellectual and Moral Obstacles to the Ascent of the Image	261
The Necessity of Grace in the Ascent	273
Ascent to the Holy Trinity	279
Conclusion	284
Conclusion	287
Bibliography	292

Introduction

Image theology takes on particular significance in the wake of the reception of the council of Nicaea. What does it mean for Christ to be the “image of God”? And, if Christ is the “image of God,” could the human person also unequivocally be understood as the “image of God”? Augustine’s early theology of the *imago dei*, prior to his ordination, is a significant departure from Latin pro-Nicene theologies only a generation earlier. This thesis argues that although Augustine’s early theology of image builds on that of Hilary of Poitiers, Marius Victorinus, and Ambrose of Milan, Augustine was able to affirm, in ways that his predecessors were not, that both Christ and the human person are the *imago dei*.

The various answers to the question of what it means for Christ to be the “image of God” lie at the heart of Christological debates of the fourth century. Was the image a derivation from its source? Does the image serve to reveal its source? Does a positive answer to these two questions imply that the image is ontologically inferior to its source? What is the relation between the image and source? Are they two separate substances? New Testament descriptions of Christ as “image of God” were ambiguous and were certainly claimed as proof texts by all parties involved in the post-Nicene debates. The letter to the Hebrews describes Christ as the “brightness of God’s glory” (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης) and the “image of his substance” (χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως) (Hebrews 1:3). In the same vein, the Apostle Paul describes Christ as the “image of God” (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ) (2 Corinthians 4:4). The “image passage” that appeared most frequently in Christological controversy was Colossians 1:15-20:

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου), the first-born of all creation; ¹⁶ for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning (ἀρχή), the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (RSV)

Paul’s description of Christ as “image” is the first term in a series of cascading Christological descriptors. The Apostle first notes the relation of the eternal image to the “invisible God” and the radical transcendence of the image from all created things. Paul then shifts to articulate the work of the image in reconciling creation. The Fathers saw in this two-step Christology of Colossians 1 a distinction between the *theologia* of the image and the *oikonomia* of the Son. Naturally, this passage in Colossians 1 would be fertile ground for all parties to the Nicene debates. Is the image also invisible? Or is the image the visible manifestation of an invisible substance? The image is shown in the work of creation – of all *creation*, visible and invisible, material and spiritual. The image is, then, not a creature but distinct from all things; indeed, all created things (τὰ πάντα) exist *in* him. However, what is his relation to the invisible God? All the parties involved in the debate noted that in the *oikonomia* or *dispensatio* the image is the archetype and fulfillment of humanity. He is the head (κεφαλή) of the church, that is to say, the beginning (ἀρχή) of restored

humanity because he is firstborn (πρωτότοκος) of the dead. As head of reconciled humanity the image assumes “preminence” (πρωτεύων) in everything. In interpreting Colossians 1 the Fathers attempted to make a distinction that Paul does not explicitly make between Christ the image of the invisible God (*theologia*) and his role as head of reconciled humanity (*oikonomia*). Indeed, it is the same subject – the image of the invisible God – that Paul fluidly describes as image, firstborn, creator, beginning, and reconciler. What, then, did it mean to say that in the image “the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”?

The first three chapters of this thesis present three Western pro-Nicene theologies of the *imago dei*. They face, I suggest, common problems and questions in attempting to articulate what it means to say that Christ is the image of God. Hilary of Poitiers, Marius Victorinus, and Ambrose of Milan all are unequivocal that the *imago dei* is principally a Christological term. As such, it designates a unity of divine substance. No inferiority is to be predicated of the image vis-à-vis the source; rather, the entire being, life, and essence of the Father is received in the eternal image. A difficulty that confronts all three theologians is the interpretation of Genesis 1:26. If Christ is “image of God,” how is the human person also an “image of God”? Given the loaded theological import that the *imago dei* has garnered in the Nicene controversy the term clearly cannot unequivocally be transferred to the creature. Hilary, Victorinus, and Ambrose give differing answers to the problematic in their struggle to preserve the unique Christological character of “image” language while still attempting to do justice to the unambiguous language of Genesis 1:26.

The second half of my thesis turns to Augustine’s early theology of the *imago dei*. I argue that Augustine’s philosophical immersion in a Plotinian account of image allows him to affirm the *imago dei* of both Christ and the human person in a way that

eluded his predecessors. As such, I am focusing on two streams of influence that shape Augustine's early theology of image: Nicene Christologies and a Plotinian philosophy of image.

In chapter one I suggest that Hilary builds his image Christology on the foundation of the anti-Monarchian theology of Tertullian and Novatian. Important to these early Latin theologians is the distinction between the eternal unity of Father and Son and the *dispensatio* of the Son in time. The eternal image is, like its source, invisible, immaterial, and eternal. However, "for us men and for our salvation" the invisible image becomes visible. Thus, theology of the *dispensatio* initiates a *logos-sarx* theology that distinguishes between the eternal *logos*, who is the invisible image, and Christ, who takes on flesh. Colossians 1:15, for Tertullian and Novatian, does not refer to the *sarx*, but to the *logos*. The theophanies of the Old Testament, on the other hand, especially to Hagar and Abraham, are linked in anticipation to the Incarnation. They are manifestations of Christ, not as the invisible image but as the visible flesh. Hilary reworks this anti-Monarchian *logos-sarx* theology. The Bishop of Poitiers sustains a developed trope based on Philippians 2 distinguishing between the *forma dei* and the *forma servi*. Like the *logos-sarx* theology of Tertullian and Novatian this distinction preserves the nature of the invisible image, in whom there is "no diversity of substance," from the Father, while allowing for the visible manifestation in time.

Given that "image of God" refers to the *forma dei*, Hilary will not speak of the human person as created in the image of God but as created *ad imaginem dei*, that is to say, the human person is created after the *exemplum* of the eternal image. However, as the eternal image is one with its source, having no diversity of substance, the image after which the human person is created is a "common image." The unity of divine substance entails, for Hilary, that there is no "likeness" (*similitudo*) in the

eternal image. The human person is, in turn, created in the likeness of a common image, that is, of the one image who said “Let *us* make man in *our* image and likeness.” Thus, for Hilary, Christ as *forma dei* is the image of God who in the economy becomes visible (as *forma servi*). The human person, on the other hand, is created *ad imaginem dei*, that is, according to the likeness of the consubstantial unity of the divine persons.

Embroided in the same controversies as Hilary, but being much more comfortable deploying philosophical distinctions in the Nicene cause, Marius Victorinus insisted against his imagined Arian opponent Candidus that the divine image could in no way be of a different substance than his source. While other images are, philosophically speaking, antithetical to the substance they image, that is, they have a borrowed, derived, and secondary character, divine simplicity entails that in God image and source are one. Victorinus articulates this simplicity and unity of image and source with the language of act and potency. To distinguish between act and potency in God is only to maintain a logical distinction; ultimately, the revelation of God in act cannot be separated from who God remains in potency, maintains Victorinus. He, much like Hilary, uses Colossians 1 as a critical proof text in his image theology: the articulation of the creative and reconciling work of the image attests to the shared divine substance of the image.

Like Hilary, Victorinus maintains that the human person should not be considered the image of God, but is created *secundum imaginem*. The *imago dei* refers to divine simplicity; to the consubstantial unity of image and source. The human person, on the other hand, is created according to this eternal image and is made according to the likeness (*similitudo*) of God. The preferred term of Victorinus’s opponents with regards to the Son – *homoiousion* (similar or like with

respect to being) – is a logical absurdity, insists Victorinus; there can be no “likeness” in one simple substance. Only the human person is *homoiousion* and in the likeness of God. How, for Victorinus, is the human person created *secundum imaginem*? He is comprised of two souls or *logoi* after the two natures of the Logos. The heavenly soul is an image of the “triad on high”; this heavenly soul is an image of the consubstantial unity of *esse, vivere, and intellegere*, according to which the human person is fashioned as described in Genesis 1:26 (“Let *us* make man to *our* image”). The material soul is suggested in Genesis 2:7; here Adam is formed out of the dust of the earth, anticipating the material embodied nature of the Logos. Nevertheless, Victorinus insists on the unity of these two souls that form one composite as they image the two natures of Christ. For Victorinus, therefore, the human person created *secundum imaginem* is intelligible only in light of Christ who is the *imago dei*.

The *imago dei* is, then, for Hilary and Victorinus in the first place a Christological term, and the human person is understood as image only in a derivative sense. Ambrose of Milan follows this Nicene intuition. However, while Hilary and Victorinus assiduously avoid predicating the *imago dei* of the human person, preferring instead the phrase *ad imaginem dei* or *secundum imaginem*, Ambrose is less circumspect. Certainly also for the Bishop of Milan the *imago dei* refers principally to Christ. To Ambrose, Colossians 1:15 is unambiguous in insisting that the image is like its source – invisible, immaterial, and eternal. What it means for the human person to be the image of God is seen in light of Christ; it is not a temporal and material image, but an eternal and immaterial one; the *imago dei* is of the spiritual order. One should not, therefore, look to the body as the image of God, but to the soul. Nevertheless, of the three Latin theologians it is Ambrose who is most attentive to the embodied character of the human person and the corollary moral implications.

A rich ethical theology derived from the *imago dei* is evident in Ambrose's preaching, particularly in his sermons to the catechumens. These sermons are suffused with Platonized Stoic injunctions to "flee the body." I argue, however, that Ambrose adopts this counsel not to set up a body-soul dualism, but to invite his hearers to embrace a spirit of detachment towards temporal and material goods, including the body. I suggest that Ambrose does not denigrate the body, but urges a "transvaluation" of bodily desires. Ambrose does so along the lines of two foundational Stoic ethical categories that he infuses with Christian content. First, he develops the Stoic ideal of *sequi naturam*. To follow one's nature as a creature in the *imago dei* is, for Ambrose, to transvalue one's desires from the temporal to the eternal. Second, a Stoic ethic of *apatheia* (or equanimity of soul) allows one to perfect this spirit of detachment towards temporal goods.

The created *imago dei* is not, for Ambrose, a static datum of nature that can be made philosophically intelligible as may seem to be the case for Hilary and Victorinus, for whom the image-like nature of the human person is expressed as an ontological predicate of human nature. Precisely because of the ethical dimension of Ambrose's theology, the *imago dei* seems to be held much more tenuously. Indeed, in some of Ambrose's preaching the image is presented as a treasured gift that can be lost when it fails as an image to imitate its source. That the image of God is realized in its propensity to imitate is, for Ambrose, integral to the definition of an image. The *imago dei* is, in the human person, a dynamic movement by which one is being "conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29). Thus, the moral imperative that issues from Ambrose's theology of the *imago dei* is not peripheral or an addendum to his thought on the image of God, but rather is integral thereto; it is in imitation of virtue that the human person is constituted as an image of God.

Evidently a recurring problematic in Nicene theology of the image of God is the way in which the human person can be described as the *imago dei* when this is most immediately a Christological term of loaded significance in the Nicene controversy. Augustine's early theology, however, approaches this problematic not immediately from within the context of the Nicene debate; instead his early dialogues at Cassiciacum develop a philosophy of image apart from the Nicene controversy. This philosophical account of image will bring new possibilities to the original problematic. In the *Soliloquies* Augustine is attentive to the dual nature – both negative and positive – of an image. This is the focus of chapter four. An image has, first of all, a negative or false character. It claims to be something that it is not; it is a *simulacrum*, a deceptive dissemblance. One can think here of the Greek mythological figure Narcissus, who confuses his image with reality. However, this negative evaluation of image is predicated on a more primordial positive evaluation, suggests Augustine. Only because an image participates in its source can it be a genuine reflection.

Augustine's philosophy of image expressed in the dialogues builds on a Plotinian metaphysic in which all finite reality is an image of ultimate reality. This image has in its genesis an egress from this eternal, immaterial realm, and the image is destined to return to this source of which it is an image. An awareness, then, of the dual nature of image is critical to Augustine's early thought. An image is true rather than deceptive when it is recognized to exist in a participatory union with its source, that is to say, when the temporal, material order is not absolutized, but recognized to be a reflection of ultimate reality. My thesis suggests that it is this positive, Platonic and participatory evaluation of the nature of image that allows Augustine's early theology of the *imago dei* to go beyond that of his Latin predecessors.

Chapter five is devoted to the theology of image operative in *Contra Academicos*. This dialogue is committed to exploring the question of whether eternal, immaterial truth can be known in the temporal, material order. The title of the dialogue intimates that the focus of Augustine's intentions is to refute the philosophical skepticism held by the New Academy. A philosophy of image is fundamental to this enterprise. The dialogue introduces the literary figure Proteus, "the reflected image of truth." Proteus was known to reveal truth to whomever captured him, but he was impossible to capture, as he would perennially change form as soon as he was thought to be grasped by the hand. Only if Proteus was handed over by a god could access to the truth be had. I argue that Augustine uses the literary figure of Proteus as an analogy of the incarnate Christ. Proteus affirms the possibility that eternal truth can be known in the temporal state of flux if it is revealed by a god. As an analogy of the incarnate Christ, Proteus overcomes the skepticism of the New Academy by affirming the possibility that the finite order can participate in and reveal infinite reality.

In chapter six I turn to consider Augustine's early theology of the *imago dei*. The previously developed philosophical account of an image, which is "true" or revelatory inasmuch as it is seen not as static and "unhinged" but as existing by way of participation in the source that draws it to return to itself, is the ground of Augustine's early theology of the *imago dei*. In *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* Augustine suggests that image is not identical with equality; there can be more or less equal images. The same is true of the *imago dei*. Augustine is intent to affirm that both Christ and the human person are *imago dei*, but in an unequal likeness. This is a significant departure from pro-Nicene theology, which had been hesitant to describe the human person as "image of God" *simpliciter*. However, it is precisely

the character of image expressed at Cassiciacum, namely that a finite reality can point to and participate in something beyond itself, that allows for various degrees of likeness to an image and, therefore, of various degrees of likeness to the *imago dei*. Augustine also goes beyond the Latin pro-Nicene tradition in affirming the *imago dei* of the human person's embodied nature. Hilary, Victorinus, and Ambrose were unequivocal that the image resides solely in the human person's intellectual faculties. Already in Augustine's first commentary on Genesis, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, Augustine is keen to affirm that the body also participates in the image of God. This is predicated, once again, on the philosophy of image developed in the dialogues: the temporal, material order can function as "the reflected image of truth."

Finally, chapter seven focuses on *De vera religione*. This work is the culmination of Augustine's early theology of the *imago dei*. I suggest that in *De vera religione* Augustine articulates a theology of ascent in the context of a Plotinian metaphysic of the return of an image to participate most fully in its source. If the figure Proteus introduced in *Contra Academicos* hints towards a theology of the Incarnation that makes possible finite participation in eternal truth, *De vera religione* makes this theology explicit. Augustine insists that a successful ascent of the image is predicated on the initial descent of the *imago dei* in the Incarnation. Augustine's early theology of ascent expressed in *De vera religione* suggests that the created image of God needs to be refashioned according to the eternal image of God.

Augustine's early theology – composed before his ordination – is unique when compared to the previous generation of Latin pro-Nicene theologians in linking the human image and the divine image. Although his thought clearly builds on Hilary, Victorinus, and Ambrose, this earlier Latin tradition had been reluctant to associate Christ the image of God with the creature, created *ad imaginem dei*. In contrast, the

broad participatory ontology that Augustine received from the neo-Platonic tradition allowed him to posit various degrees of likeness to an image and, in turn, provided him the latitude to affirm that both Christ and the human person were the *imago dei*. A recurring motif in Augustine's early thought is that all finite good functions as a likeness of God and ought to lead the rational creature – the image of God – to ascend and return to God. This fulfillment and realization of human nature as a created image is, however, predicated on the prior descent of the divine image that restores the image after himself.

Chapter I: Hilary of Poitiers

Image theology takes on particular importance in the reception of Nicaea in the second half of the fourth century. In the wake of the “the Blasphemy of Sirmium” in 357, the articulation of how the eternal Son is to be understood as “image of God” develops in its Western theological expressions with unprecedented precision. This chapter will study the theology of the *imago dei* in Hilary of Poitiers (300-368). The challenge of the Homoian crisis that occupied Hilary forged a unique and Christologically focused theology of the *imago dei* that stands in sharp relief to that of Augustine. In the second half of this thesis I will articulate the way that Augustine was able to affirm the *imago dei* of both Christ and the human person. This chapter, then, expresses how this synthesis eluded Hilary of Poitiers. I will argue that the Nicene debate informed Hilary’s exegesis of key Christological and anthropological scriptural passages regarding the image of God (Colossians 1:15 and Genesis 1:26) and that, in this debate, Hilary deployed a Western anti-Monarchian image theology that, while well-suited to the task at hand of the defence of the *homoousion*, did little to advance his anthropology. I will proceed in three steps. First, I will interact with the anti-Monarchian Latin predecessors to Hilary’s writings. I will argue in support of recent scholarship that suggests the significance of this earlier Western period for the Gaullist Bishop’s thought. As yet unaffected by the Eastern controversy surrounding Nicaea, Hilary’s early writings demonstrate a profound engagement with the Western theological tradition of Novatian (circa 200-258) and Tertullian (160-225). Second, I will explore how Hilary’s understanding of image directly develops and builds on that of Tertullian and Novatian. Third, I will analyze Hilary’s later image theology in its Nicene context. I will interact in detail with a number of key

passages in Hilary's *De Synodis*, *De Trinitate*, and *Tractus super Psalmos* in order to present a systematic expression of what could be described as Hilary's mature "theology of image." I will suggest that in his engagement with the controversies surrounding Nicaea, "image" becomes a stand-in for "equal," and I will further argue that, as such, "image" language cannot operate in the same manner in his anthropology. There is a tension between Hilary's exegesis of Colossians 1:15 (Christ as image) and his exegesis of Genesis 1:26 (the human person as image). The tension that marks these two different expressions of the *imago dei* in Hilary's thought also comes to the fore – albeit in different forms – in Hilary's Nicene contemporaries. This chapter, then, serves to add one example of a difficulty that is common to Latin pro-Nicene theologies of the image of God. As such, this is the first of three chapters in which I establish the theological context for Augustine's early theology of the *imago dei*.

Image in the anti-Monarchian Writings (Tertullian and Novatian)

Hilary's initial theological formation was unaffected by the Nicene controversy. Indeed, the works written before his exile (356-361) do not show any real engagement with what was, at this point, largely an Eastern concern. Rather, Hilary's early writings demonstrate a profound reliance on the traditional Latin anti-Monarchian theology that dominated the West in the first half of the fourth century, that is, the theology of Novatian and Tertullian.

At its most basic level Monarchianism was a theological attempt to preserve the unity of God by proposing that the one God reveals himself sometimes as Father

and at other times as Son or Spirit.¹ The theological response to Monarchian theology became profoundly significant for subsequent Western theology.² Preeminent among the anti-Monarchian works is Tertullian's *Adversus Praxeas*.³ This polemical work was probably penned in AD 213; it can be inferred from the treatise that Monarchianism had lain dormant for some time but had recently sprung up again.⁴ Tertullian seems to indicate that the movement arose as a response to polytheism

¹ One of scholarship's great sources for knowledge about Monarchianism is the Roman presbyter Hippolytus's treatises, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* and *contra Noetum*; given Hippolytus's polemical nature, the accuracy of these writings has been questioned. Ronald Heine has suggested that our knowledge of Monarchianism is well served by turning to other sources verifying Hippolytus's treatment. Heine points to two sources in particular: first, the beginning of Origen's commentary on the Gospel of John (*Jo.* 1-2). In this work, suggests Heine, Origen is retrospectively considering his time in Rome, particularly during the difficult season of the Monarchian controversy. The second source is Tertullian's *Adversus Praxeas*. Ronald E. Heine, "The Christology of Callistus," *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (1998): 56-91. Other propitious literature surrounding the Monarchian controversy is Cuthbert H. Turner, "The 'Blessed Presbyters' Who Condemned Noetus," *Journal of Theological Studies* 23 (1921-1922): 28-35; George La Piana, "The Roman Church at the End of the Second Century," *Harvard Theology Review* 18 (1925): 201-277; Robert Sample, "The Christology of the Council of Antioch (268 CE) reconsidered," *Church History* 48 (1979): 18-26; Manlio Simonetti, "Sabellio e il sabellianismo," *Studi storico-religiosi* 4 (1980): 7-28. The history of the Monarchian movement is traced by J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Black, 1977), pp. 115-126.

² "Monarchians" may have been the self-styled term used by the movement begun by Noetus and continuing until Sabellius. In addition to this self-referential description, later Greek writers would refer to them as Sabellians after the writer who gave the most articulate philosophical defense to their teachings. Latin Fathers would describe them as *patripassians* because their doctrine results in the Father suffering as Son in the passion. In modern history they have been termed *modalists*, a term coined by Adolf von Harnack that accurately portrays the "modes" in which they understood God to manifest himself. Ernest Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise against Praxeas* (London: S.P.C.K., 1948), p. 10. Cf. "Monarchianism" in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1997).

³ Evans, *Praxeas*, p. 8. This accounts for Tertullian's derision of the "novelty of Praxeas" whose opinions arose only recently; Praxeas manifests the "comparative lateness of all heretics," and stands as a warning that "whatever is earliest is true and whatever is later is counterfeit." *Adv. Prax* 2.

⁴ *Prax.* 1. An excellent treatment of Tertullian's theological response to Monarchianism is offered by Joseph Moingt, *Théologie Trinitaire de Tertullien*, vol 1, *Histoire, doctrine, méthodes* (Paris: Aubier, 1966), pp. 183-276.

among under-catechized Christians intent on preserving monotheism.⁵ They taught that the “Father himself came down into the virgin, himself was born of her, himself suffered, in short himself is Jesus Christ.”⁶ A certain Praxeas initially propagated the heresy during the pontificate of Victor (193-202), explains Tertullian. Praxeas, who came to Rome from Asia, was a man of “restless character” and filled with pride; he considered himself a confessor for the faith on account of a “mere short discomfort of imprisonment.”⁷

In *Adversus Praxean* 14-15 Tertullian attempts to distinguish, against modalism, the Father and the Son. Initially, he follows the thesis that the Father is invisible and the Son visible: God said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” (Ex. 33.20). However, many patriarchs and prophets did see God, notes Tertullian. Abraham, Jacob, Isaiah, and Ezekiel all saw God and did not die. What is one to make of this apparently blatant contradiction? Tertullian suggests a certain “regulating principle” (*regula*) to govern the discussion, namely, that there are always *two* – Father and Son. Thus, the Old Testament theophanies reveal “another,”

⁵ *Prax.* 3: “For all the simple people, that I say not the thoughtless and ignorant (who are always the majority of the faithful), since the Rule of Faith itself brings <us> over from the many gods of the world to the one only true God, not understanding that while they must believe in one only <God> yet they must believe in him along with his economy, shy at the economy. They claim that the plurality and ordinance of trinity is a division of unity” (brackets in original).

⁶ *Prax.* 1.

⁷ *Prax.* 1. Since Praxeas remains an historically shadowy figure it is difficult to know precisely how he raised the ire of Tertullian. Regardless, Tertullian’s pique is not simply on account of the heresy Praxeas propagated. Rather, Tertullian suffered a personal setback on Praxeas’ account. Pope Victor had just sent out letters giving his *imprimatur* to the new prophecies of the Montanists with which Tertullian was very involved when Praxeas put forth all sorts of “false assertions concerning the prophets themselves and their churches.” *Prax.* 1. Victor recalled his letters of peace and discontinued his support of Tertullian’s prophetic movement. Tertullian was left furious: “Thus Praxeas at Rome managed two pieces of the devil’s business: he drove out prophecy and introduced heresy: he put to fight the Paraclete and crucified the Father.” *Prax.* 1.

that is to say, the Son. (*Iam ergo alius erit qui uidebatur.*) But now, in pressing the distinction of the divine Persons contra modalism, Tertullian realizes he has opened himself up to the charge of predicating “another” God – a lower, visible God who is “seen” in the theophanies. The challenge for Tertullian is to chart a course between the Scylla of failing to properly distinguish the divine Persons, as in modalism, and the Charybdis of proposing another God. Tertullian quickly affirms that the “other” (*alius*) who is seen in the theopanies is also God in every sense. By way of analogy he suggests the distinction between the sun and its rays. The Son, considered according to his substance (*ex substantiae condicione*), is also Word and Spirit of God (*sermo et spiritus dei*) and, therefore, like the Father is invisible.⁸ Nevertheless, in the economy of salvation the Son allows himself to be seen. Thus, the Old Testament theophanies are anticipations of the Incarnation, and the visibility of the Son is, for Tertullian, understood in light of this Incarnational principle.

Tertullian introduces the foundational Western exegetical tradition regarding the Old Testament theophanies: while it is, indeed, the Son who is seen in these manifestations, he is seen according to his mission or proper to the economy of salvation. According to his divine nature or substance, the Son remains of the same invisible substance with the Father. The Old Testament theophanies reveal that “another was seen.... [I]t will follow that we must understand the Father as invisible because of the fullness of his majesty; let us recognize the Son as visible in accordance with the limitation of derivation (*uisibilem uero filium agnoscamus pro modulo deriuationis*).”⁹ And so, Tertullian initiates an anti-Monarchian line of interpretation, taken up by Novatian and then redeployed with much more precision

⁸ *Prax.* 14 (CCSL 2 1177): *Dicimus enim et filium suo nomine eatenus inuisibilem, qua sermo et spiritus dei, ex substantiae condicione iam nunc.*

⁹ *Prax.* 14.

by Hilary, in whom the theophanies of the Old Testament are said to be manifestations of the pre-incarnate Christ that demonstrate the distinction of the divine Persons and by implication the illegitimacy of Monarchian modalism.

For Tertullian, the nature of the Son as “image of God” does *not*, therefore, entail that the Son is the visible manifestation of the invisible God. According to substance (as Word and Spirit), the Son shares the invisible nature of the Father.¹⁰ Tertullian’s interpretation of the language of “image” in Colossians 1:15 emphasizes that the eternal image, like its source, is by nature invisible. Christ is not the visible image mediating the invisible God. The distinction between Father and Son does not correspond to a distinction between a visible and an invisible God, maintains Tertullian.¹¹ Christ was with the Father in the beginning and shares the fullness of the divine glory with Him, and thus, also of the Son does Scripture say that no one can see God and live.¹² Tertullian links the “image of God” in Colossians 1:15 with the following verse, which describes the creative power of the image. (“In him all things were created...”). The “image of the invisible God” cannot be less or of a different substance than its source, because the following verse, and indeed all of Scripture, describes one creative power working to fashion creation. Linking Colossians 1:15 with the *Logos* of the prologue of the Gospel of John, Tertullian notes that the creative

¹⁰ Tertullian speaks of “image of God” in a various ways. A number of times Tertullian uses “image of God” language in interesting, but for my purposes, theologically insignificant ways. In two different works he describes an activity in the bacchanalian festivities of the Roman amphitheaters in which a condemned criminal would wear a mask (*imago*) representing a god so as to cover the face of the indicted criminal. Cf. *Apologeticus* 15.12 and *De spectaculis* 18.2.

¹¹ *Marc.* 5.19.

¹² *Marc.* 5.19.

power of the Son is evidence that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him.¹³ As will become clear, Hilary adheres closely to Tertullian's exegesis of Colossians 1:15.

It is in condescension to the weakness of humanity that the Son was made visible to manifest the invisible God. And so, insists Tertullian, when Scripture maintains that no one has ever seen God, we must ask, "Which God?"¹⁴ Clearly not the Father, because the Apostle John says, "We have seen and heard and handled the Word of Life."¹⁵ It was the Son who was seen, heard, and handled. The Father, on the other hand, is described by the Apostle Paul as dwelling in light unapproachable, as the "king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God."¹⁶ By nature the Son is in the bosom of the Father – he too is eternal, immortal, invisible – but in the economy the Son is seen, heard and handled. For Tertullian, as later for Novatian and Hilary, there is continuity between the theophanies of the Old Testament and the incarnate Christ: "[F]rom the beginning he always was seen who was seen at the end, and that he was not seen at the end who from the beginning had not been seen."¹⁷ Both in the Old Testament theophanies and in the Gospel, asserts Tertullian, there are two, "one seen and one unseen."¹⁸ Even in his anti-Monarchian *Adversus Praxeam*, Tertullian is keen to clarify that an underlying unity of substance is prior to the distinction between the visible and invisible God. This distinction, after all, posits merely a dispensation in which the *Logos* is revealed as *sarx*. Tertullian writes, "We are also sure that the Son, being indivisible from Him, is everywhere with Him. Nevertheless, in the

¹³ *Marc.* 5.19.

¹⁴ *Prax.* 15.

¹⁵ *Prax.* 15.

¹⁶ *Prax.* 15.

¹⁷ *Prax.* 15.

¹⁸ *Prax.* 15. While the theophanies are intelligible in light of the principle of the incarnation, they are not identical with the incarnation. Tertullian wants to underscore that in the theophanies of the Old Testament Christ was seen dimly as through a glass. *Prax.* 14.

economy itself, the Father willed that the Son should be regarded as on earth, and Himself in heaven. (*Tamen in ipsa oikonomia pater uoluit filium in terris haberi, se uero in caelis*).¹⁹ The subtlety of the *logos-sarx* theology in Tertullian's thought allows him to affirm both the distinction of the persons as manifest in the economy of salvation (particularly against the Monarchians) and the unity of divine substance.²⁰

Tertullian does not limit the *imago dei* to Christ. For Tertullian, the human person also can legitimately be described as *imago dei*. At times Tertullian will speak of the human person as fashioned "towards" the image of God (*ad imaginem dei*) and sometimes simply as *imago dei*.²¹ In *De Baptismo*, Tertullian asserts that the baptized are given new life according to the likeness of God; this likeness, which had been lost in the fall, is now restored in baptism through the breath of the Holy Spirit. Tertullian distinguishes between the human form – the created datum of the "image" (*ad imaginem dei*) – and the spiritual "likeness" (*similitudo*) given with the breath of God

¹⁹ *Prax.* 23.

²⁰ In a significant article on Augustine's exegesis of "seeing God" in Matthew 5:8, Michel Barnes argues that prior to Hilary and Augustine the Latin tradition had always distinguished between the visible Son and the invisible Father. Barnes writes, "This way of distinguishing Father from Son is the bedrock of Latin Trinitarian theology: the Son is distinguished from the Father as the visible Image of the invisible Father." Michel Barnes, "The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity," *Modern Theology* 19 (2003): 341. While on the whole I believe this is certainly accurate, it does not capture the whole picture. The distinction between the visible Image and the invisible Father pertains, for Tertullian, *only* to the economy of salvation. Thus, while Barnes maintains that it is only with Hilary that we first find a Latin who "will argue that the Son, too, is invisible, and that the Son must be invisible if he is truly the Image" (Barnes, 341), it seems to me that this is equally already the position of Tertullian. Another helpful article that traces the Latin distinction between the visible Son and the invisible Father is offered by Kari Kloos, "Seeing the Invisible God: Augustine's Reconfiguration of Theophany Narrative Exegesis," *Augustinian Studies* 36 (2005): 397–420. Kloos does not interact with the influence of the anti-Monarchian theologians on Augustine, but rather with Justin Martyr, Hilary, and Ambrose.

²¹ In *De Spectaculis* 2 Tertullian describes the efforts of the Devil to undo the unique relation of the human person to God; this relation derives from God's creative intent to fashion creatures as his "work and image (*opus et imaginem dei*)."

through which the human person is fashioned for eternity.²² As created in the image of God the human person bears certain divine elements – an immortal soul, free will, and rational capacity. It is not in his physical appearance – the beauty of his face or the shape of his body – that the image of God is said to reside; rather, a divine, spiritual stamp gets impressed on the human soul.²³ This notion of a divine stamp on the human soul has a two-fold implication for Tertullian’s anthropology. First, the human person is ordered to know God through the power of the intellect; and, second, through the endowment of free will the human person can love him whom he knows.²⁴ Thus, the intellectual and volitional faculties of the human soul are expressions, for Tertullian, of the image of God. Tertullian frequently reiterates the *spiritual* constituent of the *imago dei*. God is spirit, and so the image too must be spiritual.

Nevertheless, the human person remains radically dissimilar to the divine power; always reliant on that power in which he participates but which is not his by nature.²⁵ In many ways Tertullian’s exegesis of Genesis 1:26 acts as a precursor to that of Augustine. Tertullian suggests that not all images are equal; this gives him the theological leverage to describe both Christ and the human person as *imago dei*, but not in the same sense. Tertullian notes, “Now the image is not in any case equal to the very thing. It is one thing to be like the reality, and another thing to be the reality itself.”²⁶ In his discussion of the human person as image, Tertullian goes on to

²² *Bapt.* 5.

²³ *Marc.* 2.5; CSEL 47 340.

²⁴ *Marc.* 2.6; CSEL 47 341.

²⁵ *Marc.* 5.19; CSEL 47 643-46.

²⁶ *Marc.* 2.9; CSEL 347 46. *Porro imago ueritati non usquequaque adaequabitur.* Likewise, in a discussion surrounding a prophecy in Ezekiel about the resurrection, Tertullian writes, “Now, although there is a sketch of the true thing in its image, the image itself still possesses a truth of its own.” *Res.* 30; CSEL 47 68.

explain that an image is by definition less than the reality it shows forth: “An image, although it may express all the lineaments of the reality, is yet wanting in its intrinsic power.”²⁷ Although the image is a spiritual characteristic of the human person, it is of a different spirit than the Spirit of God, remaining “unable to express the simple power thereof”; the human image, for Tertullian, exists in this anomalous state, coming from God and participating in God but not sharing in God’s essence: “[N]ot everything which pertains to God will be regarded as God.”²⁸

Tertullian’s understanding of the *imago dei*, then, is that it constitutes a certain share in the divine nature while retaining the human person’s distinction from God. A general account of image as derived from its source but inferior to its source informs his account of the human person as image of God and also gives shape to his exegesis of the creation narrative. Christ as *imago dei* is a unique exception to this general understanding of image. The context of Colossians 1:15 affirms, for Tertullian, that Christ as image is not only invisible, like its source, but also shares in the divine creative power and nature of its source. As image, Christ is the same substance as his source and not the mediating visible image of the invisible God. Nevertheless, in the economy of salvation, Tertullian distinguishes between the *Logos*, who as invisible image shares the invisible substance of the Father, and the *sarx* – the visible image that Christ manifested in the theophanies of the Old Testament and the Incarnation. Thus, within anti-Monarchian *logos-sarx* theology Tertullian will speak of both an invisible and visible God.

Like Tertullian, Novatian works out a theology regarding the distinction of the divine Persons based on the theophanies of the Old Testament. However, some of the

²⁷ *Marc.* 2.9; CSEL 47 346.

²⁸ *Marc.* 2.9; CSEL 47 346.

subtly of Tertullian's image theology is absent in Novatian. Tertullian was able to employ the category of *imago dei* to describe the Son (Colossians 1:15) without succumbing to the subordinationist implications of distinguishing between a visible and invisible God. Novatian does not employ the distinction between economy and theology as clearly and definitively as did Tertullian. While Tertullian was adamant that the Old Testament theophanies and the Incarnation belong clearly to the dispensation and do not imply a difference of substance this distinction is less apparent in Novatian. The difference between the two theologians is most apparent in their respective interpretations of Colossians 1:15. While most Latin theologians, including Tertullian, interpret the "image of the invisible God" of Colossians 1:15 as in no way secondary or inferior to its source, by insisting that the image also is invisible, Novatian stands as a notable exception. In his *De Trinitate* Novatian distinguishes sharply between the Father who was never seen and the Son who descended to take on the frailty of human nature. The Son is the image of the invisible God as a condescension to human weakness.²⁹ In this sense the incarnate Christ, the image of God, is the last and most perfect divine self-expression in a long history of theophanies – of manifestations of the image of God. Slowly the human race was being strengthened and accustomed to see the radiance of God. Novatian adopts and develops Tertullian's analogy of the distinction between the sun and its rays. If Christ had revealed himself in his glory rather than as the visible image, the human race would have been blinded by the glory of God's self-revelation; therefore, in the economy of grace, God deigned to show himself in the flesh as the image of God. Novatian writes, "And thus the weakness and imperfection of the human destiny is nourished, led up, and educated by Him; so that, being accustomed to look

²⁹ *Trin.* 18.

upon the Son, it may one day be able to see God the Father.”³⁰ Novatian situates the mediation of God’s self-revelation through the visible image of the Incarnate Son as a final step within the divine pedagogy. While Novatian’s *De Trinitate* smacks at times of subordinationism, his anti-Monarchian intention is to distinguish the Father from the Son; he does so along the lines of image theology. The *imago dei* makes the invisible God visible.

The anti-Monarchian intention is also the context in which Novatian’s “angel Christology” should be understood.³¹ Novatian wants to affirm both that the Son is true God and that he is distinct from the Father – an angelic messenger announcing the Father’s mind and will. As the “Angel of Great Counsel,” Christ assures the continuity between the theophanies of the Old Testament and the dispensation in Jesus Christ.³² It is Christ, the angelic messenger, who appears to Hagar, the maidservant of Sarah. For this reason, explains Novatian, Scripture describes the angel as both Lord and God, because only God could give a promise of future offspring.³³ While it certainly was not the Father who was seen, it was, nevertheless, God who was seen, maintains Novatian. This appearance of the divine messenger to Hagar describes neither an ordinary angelic appearance nor the appearance of the

³⁰ *Trin.* 18 (CCSL 4 44): *Imago est enim inuisibilis Dei, ut mediocritas et fragilitas condicionis humanae Deum Patrem uidere aliquando iam tunc assuesceret in imagine Dei, hoc est in Filio Dei. Gradatim enim et per incrementa fragilitas humana nutriri debuit per imaginem ad istam gloriam, ut Deum Patrem uidere posset aliquando.*

³¹ Novatian’s “angel Christology” is developed in *De Trinitate* 20. Cf. Felix Scheidweiler, “Novatian und die Engelchristologie,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 66 (1954/55): 126-139; P. Joseph Barbel, “Zur ‘Engelchristologie’ bei Novatian,” *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift* 67 (1958): 96-105; and idem, *Christos Angelos: Die Anschauung von Christus als Bote und Engel usw* (Theophaneia 3; Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1941).

³² For a discussion of Novatian’s treatment of the theophanies in the Old Testament see Jean Daniélou, *History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea*, vol. 3, *Origins of Latin Christianity*, trans. David Smith and John Austin Baker (London: Westminster, 1977), pp. 229-38.

³³ *Trin.* 18.

Father; rather, the “person of Christ ... the Announcer of the Father’s mind”³⁴ appeared to comfort Hagar with the promise of a child. Likewise, it was the same divine messenger who came to Abraham to prophesy of the child Isaac and who also came to carry out the destruction of Sodom. Like Hagar, Abraham calls this angel “Lord.” In entertaining the divine messenger, Abraham was certainly not showing hospitality to the Father, but rather to the Son. Novatian explains “So that the proper invisibility should be restored to the Father, and the proper moderate status should be remitted to the angel (*propria mediocritas remittitur*), it should be believed that no other than the Son of God, who is also God was seen by Abraham and received by him as a guest.”³⁵ And so, it was not the Father who was seen by Abraham but the Son; similarly, it was the Son who was made visible in the Incarnation while the Father remains at all times invisible.³⁶ The distinction of the divine Persons underlies Novatian’s understanding of the Son as the revelation or messenger of the Father.³⁷

Novatian’s anti-Monarchian polemic is likewise at work in the interpretation of the beatitude that the pure in heart shall see God (Matthew 5:8). Novatian explains that by this beatitude Christ was distinguishing himself, who was seen by all, from the

³⁴ *Trin.* 18 (CCSL 4 45): *Nisi quoniam ex utroque latere nos ueritas in istam concludit sententiam, qua intellegere debeamus Dei Filium fuisse qui, quoniam ex Deo est, merito Deus, quia Dei Filius dictus sit, quoniam Patri subditus et annuntiator paternae voluntatis est, magni consilii angelus pronuntiatus est.*

³⁵ *Trin.* 18 (CCSL 4 46): *Ut Deo Patri inuisibilitas propria reddatur et angelo propria mediocritas remittatur, non nisi Dei Filius, qui et Deus est, Abrahae uisus et hospitio receptus esse credetur.*

³⁶ Perhaps Barnes overstates his case in maintaining that in Novatian’s thought “the Son is to be understood as intrinsically visible in contrast to the Father’s intrinsic invisibility” (Barnes, 341). Novatian simply does not seem to speak of the Son’s intrinsic nature or of divine “substance” in contrast to the economic dispensation with the same precision as Tertullian. While “intrinsic visibility” captures the tenor of Novatian’s description of the Old Testament theophanies as well as his explication of Matthew 5:8, this could be limited to the economic dispensation.

³⁷ Cf. Geoffrey Dunn, “The diversity and unity of God in Novatian’s *De trinitate*,” *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses* 78 (2002): 385-409.

Father, who will be seen only by the pure in heart. The invisible God, explains Novatian, was hereby pointed out by the visible image of God.³⁸ In responding to his Monarchian interlocutor, Novatian is keen to underscore both the distinction between the image of God and the invisible God and the union between the image and its source.

Novatian's *De Trinitate* demonstrates a sustained subordinationist theology of the image of God predicated on the key distinction between the visible Son and the invisible Father. Erik Peterson succinctly notes, "The subordinationist note of his predecessors is not wanting in Novatian. Only the Father is invisible; the Son manifested Himself in the theophanies. He is subordinate and inferior to the Father."³⁹ Keilbach rightly comments, "In fact the Father according to Novatian could not descend; otherwise He would be enclosed in space. This, however, involves a manifest and absolute repugnance, since the Father Himself encloses all space and cannot be in any place, but rather all place is in Him. For the Son, indeed, according to Novatian's statements, such a repugnance does not hold. He therefore could descend."⁴⁰ Keilbach rightly draws attention to the necessary "inferiority" of the Son

³⁸ *Trin.* 28 (CCSL 4 68): "[I]f Christ had been the Father himself, why did he promise, as though it were a future reward, what he had already bestowed and granted? When he says 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God,' we find him promising the contemplation and vision of the Father. Therefore, he had not yet granted it; for why would he promise it, if he had already granted it? He would have given it, were he the Father; for he was being seen and had been touched. When Christ himself is seen and touched by the crowd and yet promises and declares that the clean of heart shall see God, he proves by this very fact that he, who was then present, was not the Father because he promised, while actually present to their gaze, that whoever was clean of heart would see the Father.... However, because he was the Son and not the Father, it was fitting that the Son, inasmuch as he is the Image of the Father, should be seen; and the Father, because he is invisible, is deservedly promised and designated as the one who would be seen by the clean of heart."

³⁹ Erik Peterson, "Novaziano e Novazianismo," *EC* 8 (1952), p. 1979.

⁴⁰ G. Keilbach, "Divinitas Filii eiusque Patri subordinatio in Novatiani libro de Trinitate," *Bogoslovska Smotra* 21 (1933): 208.

in relation to the Father; this is a *tension* in Novatian's thought, in which he fails to articulate as clearly as Tertullian the distinction between Christ's divine nature and his temporal dispensation.

Novatian will at times emphasize the divinity of the Son by frequent recourse to passages in the Gospel of John such as "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Again, it is Novatian's theology of image that allows him to express his understanding of the relation between Father and Son. Russel Simone notes the value of this image theology to affirm divine unity while retaining the distinction of the Persons: "[Image theology] expresses very well the relation of origin between the Father and the Son, their unity, and the role of revealer of the Father which is incumbent on the Son. Since an image is a relative name that supposes and opposes an origin, duality of persons results; moreover the perfect image of God cannot but be also God, hence unity of nature."⁴¹

Novatian is less clear than Tertullian in distinguishing between the eternal nature of the Son and his manifestation in the economy (*logos-sarx* theology). For Novatian, Christ as "image of God" is most fundamentally revealer of the Father. His nature as revealer is evident both in the Old Testament theophanies and in the Incarnation. If the image is to be the visible manifestation of the invisible God, he must be united to and distinct from the Father, maintains Novatian, in traditional anti-Monarchian terms.

Hilary's Development of Anti-Monarchian Image Theology

⁴¹ Russel J. DeSimone, *The Treatise of Novatian the Roman Presbyter on the Trinity* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum, 1970), p. 102.

Mark Weedman, among others, has noted the importance of Latin anti-Monarchian theology in Hilary's early work, particularly his *In Matthaëum*.⁴² Weedman focuses on three theological loci in which he sees clear evidence that the earlier Latin tradition is taken up by Hilary. First, Hilary adopts Tertullian's *regula fidei*, which underscores the pre-existence of the Son and includes the language of "substance" to bespeak the unity of Father and Son.⁴³ Second, the *logos-sarx* Christology of Tertullian and Novatian features prominently in Hilary's *In Matthaëum*. Like his Latin predecessors, Hilary distinguishes between the Word and the flesh of the Son; he insists that both the substance of the divinity and the substance of the humanity must be affirmed.⁴⁴ Lastly, Weedman notes that in interpreting the passion of Christ, Hilary follows closely the received theology of his Latin theological predecessors. Hilary maintains that the Son's fear and suffering do not mitigate his union with the Father; nor is it the case that the Father suffered in the Son; rather, the Son's passion is articulated as present to his humanity but not to his divinity.⁴⁵ By drawing on the theology of his Latin predecessors, Hilary preserves both the Son's union with the Father and his distinction from the Father. These elements of anti-Monarchian theology served him well in the Nicene debate.

⁴² Mark Weedman, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 89 (Leiden: Brill, 2007). Cf. Paul Burns, *The Christology of Hilary of Poitiers' Commentary on Matthew* (Rome: Augustinianum, 1981), pp. 18-19; Jean Doignon, *Hilaire de Poitiers avant l'exil* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1971), pp. 369-79; D. H. Williams, "Defining Orthodoxy in Hilary of Poitiers' *Commentarium in Matthaëum*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001): 162-68; Carl Beckwith, "Photinian Opponents in Hilary of Poitiers' *Commentarium in Matthaëum*," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58 (2007): 611-627.

⁴³ *Mat.* 4.14; SC 254 132. For a discussion of Tertullian's use of the *regula fidei* see Joseph Moingt, *Théologie Trinitaire de Tertullien*, vol 1, *Histoire, doctrine, méthodes* (Paris: Aubier, 1966), pp. 75-86.

⁴⁴ *Mat.* 12.18; SC 254 284.

⁴⁵ *Mat.* 31.2; SC 258 226.

While Hilary's familiarity with the earlier Latin anti-Monarchian tradition is well documented, particularly by Mark Weedman's study, an investigation of how this tradition informs Hilary's *theology of image* has not been undertaken. Having considered the theology of image operative in the anti-Monarchian writers, I now want to move in two steps. First, in this section, I will consider how this anti-Monarchian image theology is adopted in Hilary's writings, particularly *De Trinitate*. In the second section I will turn to Hilary's pro-Nicene works that demonstrate his reliance on and adaptation of an anti-Monarchian theology of image.

In many ways, Hilary, whose obvious concern is Homoian subordinationism, adheres more closely to Tertullian's interpretation of Colossians 1:15 than to that of Novatian. Hilary allows for a distinction between the visible and the invisible God only with the caveat that the "visible God" is understood to be a "dispensation only and not a change of nature." (*Dispensatio itque tantum est, non demutatio.*)⁴⁶ That is, in the context of the Nicene crisis Hilary permits discussion of a "visible God" under the rubric of the *logos-sarx* theology as it has developed from Tertullian. However, Hilary explicitly does not follow Novatian in interpreting Colossians 1:15 as the visible manifestation of the invisible God. Rather, more like Tertullian, Hilary interprets the image as eternally invisible and the Incarnation as only a temporal dispensation.

I will focus on two significant topics in Hilary's exegesis of Scripture that indicate the influence and development of Latin anti-Monarchian theology in Hilary's thought: first, his development of Novatian's "angel Christology" and, second, his re-articulation of *logos-sarx* theology in ways consonant with the faith of Nicaea.

⁴⁶ *Trin.* 11.49 (CCSL 62 A 577).

The theophanies of the Old Testament explored by Tertullian and Novatian – such as the Angel of God appearing to Abraham and to Hagar – are also mined for their Christological import by Hilary. There are, however, certain significant departures, where Hilary takes up the interpretive tradition from Novatian. I have already pointed out how for the anti-Monarchian writers the appearance of the messenger of God in the Old Testament theophanies served to underscore the distinction between Christ and the Father. Novatian's *De Trinitate* was less concerned with the underlying subordinationist implications of “angel Christology.” Hilary's own *De Trinitate*, however, explicitly has subordinationist theologies in his scope and, as such, his understanding of the appearance of Christ in these two narratives in Genesis departs in some significant ways from the interpretive tradition articulated by Novatian.

Hilary notes that an “Angel of the Lord” came to Hagar comforting her with the promise of a rich posterity. Like Novatian, Hilary notes that this promise far exceeds the office of an angel; indeed, the angel “spoke about matters that are proper to God alone.”⁴⁷ Also, like Novatian, Hilary notes that Hagar called the angel “Lord” and “God,” thereby indicating that this angel was “the angel of Great Council.” Clearly, Hilary is marching in step with the Latin exegetical tradition of Tertullian and Novatian in this passage. He concludes, “In order that the distinction of persons should be complete, He was called the angel of God, for He who is God from God is also the angel of God.”⁴⁸ The anti-Monarchian concern regarding the distinction of the divine Persons is thus affirmed in Hilary's interpretation.

⁴⁷ *Trin.* 4.23 (CCSL 62 126).

⁴⁸ *Trin.* 4.23 (CCSL 62 126).

Immediately following his discussion of the appearance of the divine messenger to Hagar, Hilary considers the appearance of the same messenger to Abraham. A promise of posterity is made also to Abraham and his wife Sarah, again indicating that this is no ordinary angel. Hilary writes, “It is God, therefore, who is also the angel, because He who is also the angel of God is God, born of God. He was called the angel of God, therefore, because He is the angel of the great council.”⁴⁹ Clearly, Hilary is content to follow Novatian’s exegesis of the theophanies in the Old Testament as manifestations of Christ that distinguish the Father from the Son. However, Hilary does not adopt Novatian’s language that contrasted the “visible God” and the “invisible God.” What smacked of subordinationism in Novatian’s exegesis is purged in Hilary’s interpretation. Indeed, Hilary is keen to insist that the divine messenger is God in the fullest sense. When Hagar and Abraham call the angel “Lord” and “God,” they are articulating a reality about his divine nature: “A name is suited to the nature.”⁵⁰ Hilary writes, “Although Abraham saw Him as a man, he adored Him as the Lord, that is, he recognized the mystery of the future Incarnation.”⁵¹ Like the Incarnation, the appearances of Christ in the theophanies of the Old Testament are a dispensation only and not a change of the Son’s divine nature, nor an indication of his ontological inferiority to the Father.

Hilary’s development of the *logos-sarx* theology of the anti-Monarchians, particularly Tertullian, allows him to advance beyond the subordinationism of Novatian’s thought. In Book Nine of *De Trinitate*, Hilary adopts Philippians 2 as a prism through which to read those scriptural passages that seem to suggest the inferiority of the Son. In accepting the form of a servant (*forma servi*) Christ does not

⁴⁹ *Trin.* 4.24 (CCSL 62 127).

⁵⁰ *Trin.* 4.26. (CCSL 62 130).

⁵¹ *Trin.* 4.27 (CCSL 62 131).

lose his form of God (*forma dei*). Hilary insists, “Keep in your mind that in our Lord Jesus Christ we are discussing a person of two natures, because He who was in the form of God received the form of a slave in which he was obedient unto death. The obedience unto death is not in the form of God, just as the form of God is not in the form of a slave.”⁵² By rightly distinguishing those passages that speak of the *forma servi* from those that speak of the *forma dei* Hilary suggest that an anti-Monarchian *logos-sarx* Christology can still be judiciously employed against Homoian subordinationism.

All of Book Nine of Hilary’s *De Trinitate* is devoted to defending the “unity of the undivided Godhead.”⁵³ Novatian’s and Tertullian’s *logos-sarx* theology is amplified and given theological precision with the *forma dei* / *forma servi* trope. The Son is certainly image, manifesting the Father (as in the theophanies of the Old Testament), but he is the perfect image, sharing the substance and nature of the Father. Hilary writes, “He is the image which comes from Him. He reveals what is in Him, while He is the image and the true nature of His origin, for the perfect birth bestows the perfect image.”⁵⁴ *Imago dei*, then, is said not of the *forma servi*, but of the *forma dei*.

It is precisely on account of the two natures of Christ that human salvation is won:

Jesus Christ, therefore, who became all these things for our sake, and who was born as the man of our flesh, spoke in accordance with the custom of

⁵² *Trin.* 9.14 (CCSL 62 A 385).

⁵³ *Trin.* 9.1 (CCSL 62 A 371).

⁵⁴ *Trin.* 9.1 (CCSL 62 A 371): *et ex se per imaginem referens quod in se est, dum et imago est auctoris et ueritas; quia perfecta natiuitas perfectam imaginem praestat.*

our nature, but does not forget that He is God in accordance with His own nature. Even though He performed the deeds of our nature in the birth, passion, and death, He did all these very things by the power of His own nature, while He Himself is the cause of His own birth, while He wills to suffer what He could not suffer, while He who dies lives.⁵⁵

The *forma dei / forma servi* trope, then, is a sustained attempt by Hilary to hold in dialectic tension Christ's two natures. Christ is seen in the Gospels as at once weak, ignorant, and dying, as well as invincible, all-knowing, and resurrected. Hilary insists, "While each action is done in accordance with its proper nature, bear in mind that it is the one Christ who is present in each of them."⁵⁶ The assumed flesh, Hilary refers to as a "dispensation" in which Christ emptied Himself of the form of God to take on a new nature without losing his divine nature, only changing in his appearance.⁵⁷ Only the two natures could save the fallen human race; while assuming the form of a slave Christ retained the nature of the form of God in order to "glorify the form of a slave with Himself."⁵⁸ And so the form of slave is adopted that it might participate in the form of God.

The *forma dei / forma servi* theology is thus the outworking of the anti-Monarchian *logos-sarx* tradition, particularly molded so as to safeguard the unity and equality of the divine nature while allowing for the economy of salvation. The eternal image of God is in no way less than its source; admittedly, the image of God took on the form of a slave, but this was to assume a temporal dispensation only and did not

⁵⁵ *Trin.* 9.7 (CCSL 62 A 377).

⁵⁶ *Trin.* 9.11 (CCSL 62 A 383).

⁵⁷ *Trin.* 9.38 (CCSL 62 A 411-12).

⁵⁸ *Trin.* 9.39 (CCSL 62 A 414).

imply a change in divine nature. The Son is an image, and, therefore, he does indeed say, “The Father is greater than I.” But precisely because he is perfect image and perfect expression of the Father, the Son is just as great as the Father, since the Father “bestows the image of His unbegotten nature upon Him by the mystery of the birth, since he begets Him from Himself and into His own form, since He again renews Him from the form of a slave into the form of God.”⁵⁹ “Form of God” and “image of God” are synonyms for Hilary; thus, after the temporal dispensation in which Christ raised up and glorified the form of the slave that he assumed, he again takes up the image and form which is eternally his.

Hilary follows Novatian by linking the theophanies of the Old Testament (“angel Christology”) with the Incarnation. Both are a manifestation of God, a proclamation of the mind and will of God. Indeed, the theophanies of Genesis to Hagar and Abraham are, for Hilary, prophecies of the future Incarnation, for which reason Christ will say, “‘Abraham your father rejoiced that he was to see my day. He saw it and was glad.’ The man who was seen, therefore promises that He will return.”⁶⁰ However, unlike Novatian, Hilary does not predicate this linkage upon an understanding of Christ as the “visible image.” The anti-Homoian intention of Hilary’s *De Trinitate* does not allow him to follow Novatian down the subordinationist path of distinguishing between the “visible God” and the “invisible God.” Rather, Hilary builds on the anti-Monarchian *logos-sarx* Christology, reading the theophanies and the Incarnation through the lens of Philippians 2.

Hilary’s Image Theology in the Nicene Context

⁵⁹ *Trin.* 9.54 (CCSL 62 A 433).

⁶⁰ *Trin.* 4.27 (CCSL 62 131).

Having become sole Emperor of both East and West in 350, Constantius forged ahead with unifying the Empire around the Homoian cause.⁶¹ An aggressive campaign was begun in the West at Constantius's bidding, spearheaded by two Eastern bishops, Valens and Ursacius, to depose bishops who refused to subscribe to the condemnation of Athanasius. The Synods of Arles (353), Milan (355) and Beziers (356) were effective in condemning Athanasius and gave, perhaps unwittingly, assent to Homoian theology.⁶² The theological intentions of Valens and Ursacius became transparent at the Council of Sirmium in 357. The Creed issued at Sirmium was explicit in its subordinationism and also banned all language of *ousia* as unbiblical. Only after the Council of Sirmium in 357 do we have major Latin pro-Nicene figures responding to the challenge. It is within this Christologically charged context that I want to consider Hilary of Poitiers's image theology as a response to Homoian polemics.⁶³

De Synodis is Hilary's attempt to educate the Latin bishops about Eastern theology of the *homoousion* as it had developed from Nicaea and to argue against Homoian doctrine.⁶⁴ "Image" in this work is used to identify the relation between Father and Son. Although an image must be distinguished from its original, it is also

⁶¹ Constantius's role in the attempts from 357-361 to formulate a creed is outlined in R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God. The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), pp. 371-80.

⁶² For a detailed discussion on the events surrounding these three councils, see Hans Christof Brennecke, *Hilarius von Poitiers und die Bishopsopposition gegen Konstantius II* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984), pp. 133-222; and Hanson, *Search*, pp. 329-344.

⁶³ For situating image theology in a broader Western context see Gustave Bardy, "L'Occident et les documents de la controverse arienne," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 20 (1940): 28-63; and Jörg Ulrich, *Abendländische Rezeption des Nizänums* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994).

⁶⁴ Cf. Paul Burns, "West meets East in the *De Synodis* of Hilary of Poitiers," *Studia Patristica* 28 (1993): 24-8; Michel Meslin, "Hilaire et la crise arienne," in *Hilaire et son Temps* (Paris: Études Augustinienne, 1969), pp. 19-42.

the “species and nature” of the original.⁶⁵ Hilary is keen to note the ontological identity between the image and its source: “[A]n image is the figured and indistinguishable likeness of one thing equated to another.” (*Imago itaque est rei ad rem coaequandae imaginata et indiscreta similitudo.*)⁶⁶ For one to be the “image of God” is, according to Hilary, to share the “properties” (*propria*) of the Father – to share the Father’s “glory, worth, power, invisibility, and essence (*gloria, virtus, potestas, invisibilis, essentia*).”⁶⁷ *De Synodis* unequivocally asserts that the Son as image is “indistinguishable and entirely similar” to the Father.⁶⁸ Indeed, there is no “diversity of substance” (*diversitatem substantiae*); rather, the image “embraces in Himself the whole form of His Father’s divinity both in kind and in amount.”⁶⁹ Image is, for Hilary, another way of denoting the equality of the Son’s nature with that of the Father.

Sharing the “properties” of the Father is essential to the Son’s nature as image, for he reflects “the truth of the Father’s form by perfect likeness of the nature imaged in Himself.”⁷⁰ If the Son is to be “truly an image,” writes Hilary, he “must have in

⁶⁵ *Syn.* 13; PL 10 490.

⁶⁶ *Syn.* 13; PL 10 490.

⁶⁷ *Syn.* 15; PL 10 491-92.

⁶⁸ *Syn.* 15; PL 10 492.

⁶⁹ *Syn.* 15; PL 10 492: *Atque ita in his paribus divinitatis bonis intelligitur neque ille minor esse, cum filius sit; neque hic praestare, cum pater sit: cum patri filius et coimaginatus ad speciem sit, nec sit dissimilis in genere; quia diversitatem substantiae geniti ex substantia patris filii similitudo non recipit, et omnem in se divinitatis paternae, qualis et quanta forma est, invisibilis Dei filius et imago complectitur: et hoc vere est esse filium, paternae scilicet formae veritatem coimaginatae in se naturae perfecta similitudine retulisse.* Cf. Doignon, *Hilaire de Poitiers Avant l’Exil*, pp. 364-66.

⁷⁰ *Syn.* 15; PL 10 492. Hilary continues, “[T]he Son is the image of the Father in species, and not dissimilar in genus.” Cf. Mark Weedman, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 99-100. Weedman demonstrates that Hilary’s identification of “nature” with “image” derives from Basil of Ancyra, who argues that the Son is like the Father according to substance, but that they are distinguished as source and image.

himself his original's species, nature and essence in virtue of the fact that he is an image."⁷¹ In *De Synodis*, then, Hilary develops a theology of image in precise response to the Homoian crisis; the polemical context of the work entails that the ontological identity between image and its source is accentuated.⁷² Mark Weedman rightly notes that the overarching intention of Hilary's treatment of the relation between Father and Son is to affirm that they "are distinct but not diverse ... whatever is granted or given by the 'original' (*origo*), whether that is 'life' or 'image,' shares a similar substance to the original."⁷³ Hilary, then, develops pro-Nicene language of "image" to defend the *homoousion*. "Image" in this context is used to bespeak the unity of being of Father and Son. Colossians 1:15 ("Christ the image of the invisible God, first-born of all creation") is the preeminent image text marshaled by Hilary to identify the equality of Father and Son. Given the Christologically charged context, in which "image" is used to affirm or deny the co-equality of the Son with the Father, Hilary will not use give "image" language the same meaning in his exegesis of Genesis 1:26, where "image" refers to a created, temporal human being.⁷⁴

⁷¹ *Syn.* 13; PL 10 490.

⁷² "The Son is the perfect image of the Father (*Filius Patris imago perfecta est*): there under the qualities of an identical essence, the Person of the Son is not annihilated and confounded with the Father: there the Son is declared to be image of the Father in virtue of a real likeness (*similitudinis veritatem*), and does not differ in substance (*substantiae diversitate non differt*) from the Father, whose image He is." *Syn.* 27; PL 10 500.

⁷³ Weedman, *Hilary*, 101.

⁷⁴ For literature on Hilary's Christology, see Pierre Smulders, *La Doctrine trinitaire de S. Hilaire de Poitiers* (Rome: Universitatis Gregoriana, 1944); Gabriel Giamberardini, "De Incarnatione Verbi secundum S. Hilarium Pictaviensem," *Divus Thomas* 50 (1947): 35-56; and idem, "S. Hilarius Pictaviensis de praedestinatione Verbi Incarnati," *Miscellanea Francescana* 49 (1949): 266-300, 514-533; Jean Doignon, "'Adsumo' et 'adsumptio' comme expression du mystère de l'Incarnation chez Hilaire de Poitiers," *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 23 (1953): 123-35; Paul Galtier, *Saint Hilaire de Poitiers* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1960), pp. 108-58; Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* (London: Mowbray, 1965), pp. 305-313;

Image as a Christological Term (Colossians 1:15)

A lemma search of Hilary's corpus for the use of some form of *imago dei* reveals that the Bishop uses such language 47 times.⁷⁵ These instances are nearly equally divided between two major works: the *Tractus super Psalmos* and *De Trinitate*. The vast majority of the uses of "image" language occur in an anti-Homoian context in which Colossians 1:15 is quoted. Hilary underscores two theological motifs in this verse in his dealings with the Homoians: the unity of creative power in Father and Son and the *invisible* nature of the image. I have argued that these two interpretive accents were critical elements in anti-Monarchian theology. First, Tertullian and Novatian underscore the unity of the Son's creative power with the Father in their exegesis of "image" in Colossians 1:15. Hilary will follow this emphasis, and, like them, link this verse with the creative *Logos* of the Johannine prologue. Second, Tertullian's emphasis in exegeting Colossians 1:15 is that the substance of the Son is also *invisible*. Hilary will strategically adapt both these elements in what is essentially cultivated anti-Monarchian theology.

The image in Colossians 1:15 is associated with creative power: the following verse reads, "By Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him."⁷⁶ Hilary will argue that the unity of creative power between Father and Son testifies to their unity of being. (As a proof text Hilary

Paul Burns, *The Christology in Hilary of Poitiers's Commentary on Mathew* (Roma: Institutum Patristicum, 1981).

⁷⁵ Cf. *Library of Latin Texts* electronic database (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols).

⁷⁶ *Psal.* 91. 4 (CSEL 22 348): *Qui est imago dei, primogenitus omnis creaturae, quia in ipso constituta sunt omnia in caelis et in terra, uisibilia et inuisibilia, siue throni siue dominationes siue principatus siue potestates: omnia in ipso et per ipsum facta sunt.*

quotes John 5:17: “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.”⁷⁷

The second theological motif of importance to Hilary in Colossians 1:15 is that the image is *also* invisible. The Son, as “image of the invisible God” is not a manifestation of an invisible God. Appreciating the *invisible* nature of the image of the invisible God undermines Homoian exegesis of this passage, which considered the image to be of a subordinate and different substance as the image is derived and revelatory and, on that account, made visible in the Incarnation.⁷⁸ I will analyze both these elements of image theology in Hilary’s exegesis of Colossians 1:15.

In the *Tractatus* on Psalm 91, Hilary notes the greatness of God displayed in creation – the heavens, the sun, stars, and other lights. In the creation narrative, maintains Hilary, Moses taught a knowledge of God from the glory of creation in

⁷⁷ *Psal.* 91. 4 (CSEL 22 348): *Verum cum in omnibus Christus operetur, eius tamen opus est, qui operatur in Christo: et ideo, Pater meus, ait, cotidie operatur, et ego operor, quia opus Patris est, quicquid manente in se Deo Patre, Filius Dei Deus Christus operatur; atque ita per filium cotidie omnia, quia omnia Pater operatur in filio.*

⁷⁸ Representative of this Latin Homoian position that contrasts the visible Christ with the invisible Father is a fragment from Palladius collected in the *Scolia Arriana*. Palladius writes, “There is the question of whether the Son is the invisible God. It is written of the Father: ‘No man has ever seen, nor can see’ [1 Tim. 6.16] him; and similarly, ‘The invisible, immortal, only God’ [1 Tim. 6:17]; and ‘No one has seen God and lived’ [Ex. 33.20]; and again ‘No one has ever seen God, the only-begotten who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known’ [Jn. 1.18]. But about the Son it is said, ‘We have seen his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father’ [Jn. 1.14]; and ‘God appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre’ [Gen. 18.1]; and then there is the episode with the blind man, who said, ‘Where is the Son of God, that I may believe in him?’ and the Son of God himself said in reply, ‘He whom you would see, and to whom you would speak, I am that one.’ [Jn. 9.36–37].” *Fragments of Palladius*, #106. Gryson, *Scolies Ariennes*, pp. 290–291. See also Michel Barnes’s commentary on this passage: Barnes, “The Visible Christ,” 337. It is important to recognize that although Hilary’s rhetoric lumps Homoian theology under the category of “Arian,” and assumes of their theology the blunt Arian distinction between the visible created God and the invisible uncreated God, in actuality Homoian Christology was much more complex and subtle. Homoian Christology recognized degrees of divinity and invisibility and affirmed Christ’s divine sonship. Cf. Hanson, *Search*, pp. 348–86. Nevertheless, as is clear in *De Synodis*, for Hilary, *imago dei* indicates unity of divine substance – a position he thinks is lacking in Homoian Christology.

order that people “could understand and see through these great visible works [God’s] power, who made it, and that by the admiration of the creature they might understand the power of the Creator.”⁷⁹ In the New Testament Paul teaches the same truth as Moses, explains Hilary, this time not with milk but with bread. Quoting Colossians 1:15-16 Hilary asserts that all things in heaven and on earth – these great visible works of God’s power – are created by the Son and exist in him. It is in Christ, who is firstborn of God the Father, that heaven and earth are created and upheld in being.⁸⁰ Colossians 1:16, therefore, is ideally suited to Hilary’s anti-Homoian polemic, because this verse demonstrates that “image” does not necessitate a different or reduced ontological status of the Son, but that the image is rather one in creative power with the Father, expressing the Father’s action and will. Jean Doignon expresses this well: “La présence en Dieu de son image explique, comme une véritable connaturalité du Père et du Fils dans la connaissance, que le Fils voie à l’intérieur de la volonté du Père l’image de son action, parce que tout est formé comme un archétype de l’avenir dans la predestination divine.”⁸¹ Thus, Hilary finds this ontological identity of image and source represented in the description of the one creative power articulated in Colossians 1:16.⁸²

Hilary frequently groups Colossians 1:15 with both John 1:1 and a prophet of the Old Testament so that a prophet, the Evangelist, and the Apostle all testify to the

⁷⁹ *Psal.* 91. 4 (CSEL 22 348) (my translation): *quae possent intellegi et uideri, ut per hanc conspicabilium operum magnitudinem uirtus eius, qui operatus est, cognosceretur et creatoris potestas per creaturae admirationem posset intellegi.*

⁸⁰ *Psal.* 91. 4 (CSEL 22 348): *Verum haec ex nutu dei patris et in caelis et in terra manent atque existerunt, et licet per filium omnia, tamen a deo omnia.*

⁸¹ Jean Doignon, *Hilaire de Poitiers: Disciple et témoins de la Vérité*, 356-367 (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 2005), p. 106.

⁸² For a discussion of Hilary’s exegesis of Colossians 1:15 in terms of creative power, see C. F. A. Borchardt, *Hilary of Poitiers’ Role in the Arian Struggle* (Hague: Nijhoff, 1966), p. 104.

unity of Father and Son in the work of creation.⁸³ The unity of operations in the creation narrative attested to throughout Scripture is, for Hilary, evidence that the Son, as image, is coequal with the Father.⁸⁴ Hilary writes:

Do you now know what it is to be the image of God? It surely means that all things were created through Him and unto Him. Since all things are created in Him, then understand that He whose image He is also creates all things in Him. But, since these things which are created in Him are created through Him, then realize that in Him who is the image there is also present the nature of Him whose image He is (*in hoc quoque qui imago est naturam eius cuius imago est in esse cognosce*). He creates through Himself (*Per se enim creat*) what is created in Him, just as all things are reconciled in Him through Himself. Since they are reconciled

⁸³ *Psal.* 125. 6 (CSEL 22 609): *cognoscentes a propheta: ego sum, qui feci caelum et terram ex nihilo, credentes ab euangelio: in principio erat uerbum et uerbum erat apud deum et deus erat uerbum, pronuntiantes ab apostolo: qui est imago dei inuisibilis, primogenitus omnis creaturae, quia in ipso constituta sunt omnia in caelis et in terra.* *Psal.* 148. 4 (CSEL 22 862): *facta autem sunt per eum, de quo euangelista testatus est: omnia per ipsum facta sunt, et sine ipso factum est nihil et apostolus ait: qui est imago dei inuisibilis, primogenitus omnis creaturae, quia in ipso condita sunt omnia in caelis et in terra, uisibilia et inuisibilia; siue sedes, siue dominationes, siue principatus, siue potestates, omnia per ipsum et in ipso condita sunt. et Sapientia ita de se locuta est: ego eram apud illum conponens; mihi adgaudebat, cum laetaretur orbe perfecto.* Here John 1:1 and Colossians 1:15 are tied with Proverbs 8, a frequently quoted Christological referent employed by both Arian and pro-Nicene parties.

⁸⁴ While unity of power and unity of operations are distinct Hilary, in his anti-Homoian theology, usually pairs them. Thus, the work of creation demonstrates one work done through one power. Cf. *Trin.* 8.51 (CCSL 62 A 363-64). Both a “similarity of power” and a “similarity of operation” are for Hilary demonstrative of a similarity of nature.

in Him, grasp the nature of the paternal unity in Him that reconciles all things to Himself in Him!⁸⁵

With recourse to image language, Hilary reiterates the ontological identity of Father and Son. The same united power operative in creation is also at work in recreation. As all things were created in the Son, so too, all things are restored in the Son. However, both operations are carried out through one divine power.⁸⁶ In reconciling all things in Himself, the Son reconciles all things into the unity He shares with the Father.⁸⁷

The second theological motif of importance to Hilary's exegesis of Colossians 1:15 is that while the Son is the "image of God," he is not the visible mediation of the invisible God; the Son is not "image" as a midway point between God and humanity who as ontologically inferior reveals the incomprehensible Father.⁸⁸ This is a radically different account of image than one would expect from a thoroughgoing Platonic model in which image is revelatory of its source but remains derived, secondary, and inferior to it.⁸⁹ Indeed, it is precisely this Platonic understanding of

⁸⁵ *Trin.* 8.51 (CCSL 62 A 363-64).

⁸⁶ "[W]e acknowledge the same similarity of power and the fullness of the divinity in each of them. The Son received everything from the Father, and He is the form of God and the image of His substance." *Trin.* 3.23 (CCSL 62 95).

⁸⁷ Doignon notes, "La similitude du Père et du Fils donne son fondement à leur égalité, car il ne peut y avoir d'égalité entre des choses dissemblables; elle requiert une unité d'essence." Doignon, *Hilaire de Poitiers: 'Disciple et témoins de la Vérité,'* 356-367, pp. 104-5.

⁸⁸ "For the Father to be in the Son and the Son to be in the Father means that there is a perfect fullness of the Godhead in each of them. The Son is not a diminution of the Father nor is He the imperfect Son from the Father." *Trin.* 3.23 (CCSL 62 95).

⁸⁹ Hilary's writings demonstrate genuine reluctance to adopt Platonic explanations perhaps because they were prevalent in Homoian theology. Cf. H. D. Saffrey, "Saint Hilaire et la philosophie," in *Hilaire et son temps: Actes du Colloque de Poitiers* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1969), pp. 247-265.

image adopted by the Homoian party to which Hilary is responding.⁹⁰ The image too is invisible, stresses Hilary.⁹¹ While the Son draws his life from the Father he receives the fullness of divinity from the Father, perfect from perfect, whole from whole, “The invisible one from the invisible one, because He is the image of the invisible God and because He who sees the Son sees also the Father.”⁹² The Arians praise God’s incomparable attributes, contends Hilary, not out of pious devotion, but to distance the image of God from its source.⁹³ The Arians consider the Son weak and the Father mighty; how then is the Son a true image? They call the Father incorporeal, but the Son incarnate; how then is the Son the form of the incorporeal God? They call the Father ineffable (*Ineffabilis Pater est*), but the Son revealed in speech (*Filium sermo complectitur*); however, outside of the image, explains Hilary, the Son’s nature is also ineffable (*extra imaginem inenarrabilis est natura narrabilis*).⁹⁴ In short, how can a true image be less than its source? Against his Homoian interlocutor, Hilary asserts, “The Apostle could not teach the nature of the Godhead in the Son more explicitly than by the invisibility of God, so that Christ is the image of the invisible God, and certainly He whose substance is visible would not reproduce the image of an invisible nature.”⁹⁵ “Image” is demonstrative of equality,

⁹⁰ For a discussion of how this theology of the *invisible* image is operative in Augustine’s thought see Barnes, “Visible Christ,” 329-55.

⁹¹ Manlio Simonetti has demonstrated that Hilary’s emphasis on the invisible nature of the image in his exegesis of Colossians 1:15 follows Origen: “D’altra parte, nella tradizione di Origene, Ilario ribadisce che, in quanto immagine, il Figlio è invisibile alla pari del Padre di cui è immagine, anzi incomprendibile come quello.” Manlio Simonetti, “L’esegesi ilariana di Col 1, 15a,” *Vetera Christianorum* 2 (1965): 167.

⁹² *De Trinitate*, 2.11 (CCSL 62 48): *Inconpraehensibilis ab inconpraehensibili: nouit enim nemo nisi inuicem. Inuisibilis ab inuisibili, quia imago Dei inuisibilis est, et quia qui uidit Filium, uidit et Patrem.*

⁹³ *Trin.* 11.5 (CCSL 62 A 533-34).

⁹⁴ *Trin.* 11.5 (CCSL 62 A 533).

⁹⁵ *Trin.* 11.5 (CCSL 62 A 534). Michel Barnes rightly notes, “According to Latin Homoians in the second half of the fourth century, the appearance of the Son in the

for Hilary, for which reason the image cannot be anything less than its invisible source.

Nearly every time Hilary quotes Colossians 1:15 in *De Trinitate*, he stresses the invisible nature of the image. Christ does not present the Father visibly, for as image of the Father he is the same form as that of which he is an image.⁹⁶ God is Spirit and Christ is spirit, and a corporeal Christ cannot be the image of the invisible God.⁹⁷ Hilary asks rhetorically, “I ask whether there is a visible image of the invisible God, and whether the infinite God can be brought together in an image so that He is visible through the image of a limited form?”⁹⁸ After quoting Colossians 1:15 again, Hilary writes, “Certainly, the creator of invisible things is not compelled by any necessity of nature to be the visible image of the invisible God. And in order that we might not regard Him as the image of the form rather than of the nature, He is therefore the image of the invisible God; the nature of God in him is to be understood

theophanies and the Incarnation serves as proof that the Son is not true God; only the invisible – and non-appearing – Father is the true or real God. These appearances by the Son, his visibility, constitute sufficient evidence that the Son is not God.” Barnes, “Visible Christ,” 336.

⁹⁶ *Trin.* 2.11 (CCSL 62 48): “Again comprehend the mystery of the undivided nature, while the one is, as it were, the image of the one! He is an image in such a manner that the brightness does not proceed from the reflected image of an external nature, but, a living nature is identical with a living nature, since it is the whole from the whole, and since, while it is the only-begotten nature, it possesses the Father in itself and abides in the Father, while it is God.”

⁹⁷ *Trin.* 8.48 (CCSL 62 A 360-61): *Sed numquid doctor gentium Paulus uirtutem dicti dominici aut ignorauit aut tacuit, dicens: Qui est imago Dei inuisibilis? Et interrogo, utrum uisibilis imago est inuisibilis Dei, et utrum infinitus Deus per formae imaginem coimaginari possit ad speciem? Imago enim formam necesse est eius reddat, cuius et imago est. Qui uolunt autem alterius generis in Filio esse naturam, constituent cuiusmodi Filium imaginem esse inuisibilis Dei uelint. Anne corpoream et contemplabilem et ex locis in loca motu incessu que circumuagam? Meminerint tamen secundum euangelia et profetas et Christum Spiritum et Deum Spiritum. Qui si circumscribent hunc Spiritum Christum formabili et corporali modo, non erit inuisibilis Dei imago corporeus, nec indefiniti species definita moderatio.*

⁹⁸ *Trin.* 8.48 (CCSL 62 A 360).

through the power of his nature, not in a visible property.”⁹⁹ Contrary to his Homoian opponents, Hilary maintains that the visibility and materiality of Christ’s Incarnation does not in the least mitigate the Son’s divine nature, which, like the Father, is spiritual and invisible.¹⁰⁰

The relation of source and image is not one of gradations or even of different natures, insists Hilary. Unlike the seal of wax that is a different nature than the impressing iron, the form of God is nothing other than God.¹⁰¹ Hilary writes:

He is also the living image of the living nature (*uiuentis quoque naturae esse uiuentem imaginem*), and the form of God in God has been impressed upon Him by nature (*consignatam naturaliter Dei in Deo formam*) to such an extent that they are indistinguishable both in power and substance, so that in Him neither the work, nor the speech, nor the appearance differ from those of the Father, but, since the image naturally possesses in itself the nature of its author, the author also worked, spoke and was seen through His natural image (*sui imago naturam*).¹⁰²

⁹⁹ *Trin.* 8.49 (CCSL 62 A 361-62): *Nam utique inuisibilium conditor non est in ea naturae necessitate, ut inuisibilis Dei imago uisibilis sit. Ac ne formae potius quam naturae imago esse intellegeretur, idcirco inuisibilis Dei imago est: natura in eo Dei per naturae suae uirtutem intellegenda, non in uisibili qualitate.*

¹⁰⁰ “For, as the Father is inexplicable by the fact that He is unborn, so the Son cannot be described because He is the only-begotten, since He who is born is the image of the unborn. When we conceive an image in our mind and words, we must also include in it the one of whom He is the image. But we are pursuing invisible things, and we are venturing upon incomprehensible things, we whose understanding is restricted to visible and material objects.” *Trin.* 3.18 (CCSL 62 90).

¹⁰¹ *Trin.* 8.46 (CCSL 62 A 358-59).

¹⁰² *Trin.* 10.6 (CCSL 62 A 463).

Being the image of God is not to be less than God; rather, it is precisely as image that the Son is God.¹⁰³ When the Son did take on a visible form in the Incarnation, this did not undermine his divine nature; he remained always God, always the invisible image, but for a time also appearing visibly in the flesh. Hilary will therefore describe the Incarnation as a “dispensation only” and not a change of this invisible nature.

*(Dispensatio itaque tantum est, non demutatio.)*¹⁰⁴

Thus, Hilary’s exegesis of Colossians 1:15 is that “image” is demonstrative of ontological identity.¹⁰⁵ He makes this explicit in two ways: first, in his interpretation of the Apostle’s statement in the following verse that all things are created in Christ and through Him;¹⁰⁶ second, in the fact that the image is ontologically identical with what it images – Christ is the invisible image of the invisible God. The Son’s creative power and sustaining love exist on account of the shared divine nature with the Father. Giving expression to this theology Hilary writes, “[R]ealize that in [the Son] who is the image there is also the nature of Him whose image He is.”¹⁰⁷ Hilary adapts these two key components of anti-Monarchian theology to fit his response to

¹⁰³ *Trin.* 8.50 (CCSL 62 A 363): *Qui cum Filius sit, imago est; cum imago Dei est.*

¹⁰⁴ *Trin.* 11.49 (CCSL 62 A 577): *Dispensatio itaque tantum est, non demutatio: in eo enim est in quo erat.* Simonetti suggests that in stressing the *invisible* nature of the image, Hilary might target Marcellus of Ancyra, who interpreted Colossians 1:15 as the image made visible in the Incarnation. Simonetti writes that perhaps there can be detected “una punta polemica contra Marcello di Ancira, che aveva attribuito Col. 1,15 al Cristo incarnato, insistendo proprio sul fatto che immagine, in quanto tale, deve necessariamente essere visibile, per poterci far conoscere l’invisibile modello.” Simonetti, “Esegesi Ilariana,” 168.

¹⁰⁵ Because *imago dei* denotes, for Hilary, the ontological identity of Father and Son, he refers in the *Tractus super Psalmos* 118 to the *imago dei* as one Christological referent among many, such as power of God, wisdom of God, and arm of God: “*Os autem Dei est ille qui et uirtus Dei est, qui et sapientia Dei est, qui et brachium Dei est, qui et imago Dei est, Deus scilicet et Dominus noster Iesus Christus.*” Hilary, *Psal.* 118. teth, 9 (CCSL 61A, 87).

¹⁰⁶ In this vein Hilary asserts, “He is the image of God by the power of these works.” (*Per horum igitur operum uirtutem imago Dei est.*) *Trin.* 8.49 (CCSL 62 A 361).

¹⁰⁷ *Trin.* 8.51 (CCSL 62 A 363): *in hoc quoque qui imago est naturam eius cuius imago est inesse cognosce.*

Homoian subordinationism. Thus, Hilary's writings, borne out of the Nicene controversy, make clear that image is meant to denote the *equality* of the Father and the Son.

Image as an Anthropological Term (Genesis 1:26)

Hilary consistently employs image language gleaned from Colossians 1:15 to denote the unity of being of Father and Son. The Son as image attests to the common nature of the two divine Persons – everything that the Father has is shared in and reflected by the Son. Unsurprisingly, the Christological identification of image as denoting co-equality and unity of divine being entails that Hilary cannot refer to the human person as “image” in the same sense, and his exegesis of Genesis 1:26 reflects this tension.

At only one point in Hilary's corpus are Genesis 1:26 and Colossians 1:15 referred to in the same context.¹⁰⁸ In his *Tractus super Psalmos* 118 10.7 Hilary refers to both texts to differentiate sharply between the anthropological and Christological image.

The human person is created *ad imaginem dei*.¹⁰⁹ Thus, he is not the image of God, writes Hilary, because the image of God is the firstborn of all creation (Colossians

¹⁰⁸ Hilary is not alone in keeping two almost hermetically sealed theologies of image operative in his theology, namely, the Christology of Colossians 1:15 and the anthropology of Genesis 1:26. Frances Young has noted that in addition to these image texts there is also the prohibition against images in Exodus 20:4. These three concentric Scripture texts regarding image receive a lot of treatment in the fourth century. Nevertheless, Young is struck by the fact that fourth-century authors never explicitly relate these three scriptural discussions of image to each other. Frances Young, “God's Image: The ‘Elephant in the Room’ in the Fourth Century?” *Studia Patristica* 50 (2011): 57-71. The lack of explicit connection between these texts might simply reflect a disinterest in systematic theological presentation in its modern form, but it could also be explained, as I am arguing in this chapter, by the place of anti-Homoian polemics in the Christological account of image, which is ill-suited to linking various theologies of image. That is to say, if image denotes equality of nature, then Genesis 1:26 cannot be read in a straightforward manner.

¹⁰⁹ *Psal.* 118. iod, 7 (CCSL 61A 92): *Non Dei imago, quia imago Dei est primogenitus omnis creaturae; sed ad imaginem, id est secundum imaginis et similitudinis speciem.*

1:15), rather, to be *ad imaginem* is to have the character of the “image and likeness” of God (Genesis 1:26).¹¹⁰ The human soul has a divine and an incorporeal element by which he is said to be created according to the image and likeness of God, that is, according to the *exemplum* of the image of God, the firstborn of all creation.¹¹¹

The sustained emphasis on divine unity and simplicity entails that when Hilary speaks of the human person as image he means not merely image after the *exemplum* of the eternal image, but more frequently image of the Trinity. In his exegesis of Genesis 1:26, Hilary finds more Scriptural warrant for the unity of Father and Son. He writes, “By declaring: ‘Let us make mankind in our image and likeness,’ He does away with any idea of isolation, since He reveals this mutual participation.”¹¹² The verb *faciamus* and the pronoun *nostram* indicate that God is not alone; He is not a monad, as “both of them possess the property of the one nature, because He says ‘our image’ and not ‘our images.’”¹¹³

A number of times in *De Trinitate* Hilary refers to a “common image” (*imago communis est*).¹¹⁴ God made the human person in a “common image and in the same

¹¹⁰ The distinction between *imago* referring to the eternal Son and *ad imaginem* referring to the created human person is of venerable tradition. Cf. Philo, *Op.* 24; *All.* 3,96. Origen, *Cels.* 6,63; 7,66. Hilary, *Psal.* 118 iod 7. Ambrose, *Psal.* 118,10,16; *Luc.* 10,49.

¹¹¹ *Psal.* 118. iod, 7 (CCSL 61A 92): *Diuinum in eo et incorporale condendum, quod secundum imaginem Dei et similitudinem tum fiebat; exemplum scilicet quoddam in nobis imaginis Dei est et similitudinis institutum. Est ergo in hac rationali et incorporali animae nostrae substantia primum, quod ad imaginem Dei factum sit.*

¹¹² *Trin.* 4.17 (CCSL 62 120): *Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram. Sustulit singularis intellegentiam professione consortii.*

¹¹³ *Trin.* 4.18 (CCSL 62 121). See the discussion of the “common image” in Borchardt, *Hilary of Poitiers’ Role*, pp. 60-61.

¹¹⁴ *Trin.* 4.8 (CCSL 62 158); *Trin.* 5.8 (CCSL 62 158): *Discerne si quid potes in hac imaginis communionem uerum adque falsum. Trin.* 5.9 (CCSL 62 159): *Et fecit Deus hominem, ad imaginem Dei fecit eum. Imago communis est. Deus ad imaginem Dei hominem fecit.*

likeness of God.”¹¹⁵ This demonstrates for Hilary both that the Creator does not work in isolation, and, at the same time, that there is no diversity in the Godhead on account of the commonality of the image.¹¹⁶ *Nostram* suggests, for Hilary, that “there is no union, no unlikeness, no distinction” in God; rather, the human race was fashioned “according to a common image.”¹¹⁷ Even though Hilary does not want to relate the Christology of the image of God to his anthropology of the image of God, he does use the language of Genesis 1:26 in *De Trinitate* as an exegetical support to defend the *homoousion*:

Man is fashioned according to the image of the Father and the Son.

The name [of the nature] does not differ, nor is there any distinction in their nature. The image after which man was made has only one form.

And how will the true nature be lost, since the two of them have a mutual share in what was made, as well as in the truth of the common image? ... For now we will remain with this question: was he true God or not of whom the true God said, ‘Let us make man according to our own image and likeness?’ Distinguish, if you can, anything true or false in this sharing together! In your heretical rage, divide what is indivisible! For they are one according to whose image and likeness mankind is the one copy.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ *Trin.* 4.18 (CCSL 62 121).

¹¹⁶ *Trin.* 4.18 (CCSL 62 121-22): *Adque ita Deus ad communem sibi cum Deo imaginem adque eandem similitudinem hominem repperitur operari, ut nec solitudinis intellegentiam significatio efficientis admittat, nec diuinitatis diuersitatem ad eandem imaginem ac similitudinem constituta patiatur operatio.*

¹¹⁷ *Trin.* 5.8 (CCSL 62 158).

¹¹⁸ *Trin.* 5.8 (CCSL 62 158-59): *Ad Patris et Fili imaginem homo conditur. Nomen*

Hilary's exegesis of Genesis 1:26 affirms that while the human person is made after the *exemplum* of the Son (because all things are made through the Son), the unity of the Godhead does not allow for diversity; rather, the unity of the divine nature necessitates a common image: "*Imago communis est.*"¹¹⁹

The human person is fashioned after the common image of the Father and the Son. Hilary writes, "He is according to the image (*ad imaginem*) and likeness of God the Father and God the Son."¹²⁰ There is no likeness within this common eternal image, insists Hilary. While the human person is created according to the *likeness* of a common image, the Father and Son have no likeness, because they are one image.¹²¹ Therefore, Genesis 1:26 describes the human person as fashioned according to the

non discrepat, natura non differt. Vna enim est imaginis ad quam homo creatus est species. Et inter haec ueritas ubi deperit, manente inter utrumque et facti communionem et communis imaginis ueritate? ... Nunc interim hoc tenemus, an uerus Deus non sit cui uerus Deus dixerit: Faciamus ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram. Discerne si quid potes in hac imaginis communionem uerum adque falsum, et heretico furore haec indissecabilia decide. Vnum enim sunt, quorum imaginis et similitudinis unum est homo factus exemplum.

¹¹⁹ *Trin.* 5.9 (CCSL 62 159).

¹²⁰ *C. Const.* 20. Translation mine. While the human person is fashioned according to a "common image," there is still the sense that the *imago dei* is principally the Son (who is one with the Father) and that the human person is created as image of the eternal image. Hilary seems to be the first Latin author to speak of the creation of the human person according to a *common* image. This language is, however, similar to that of Ambrose. Like Hilary, Ambrose develops an anti-Homoian theology out of the grammar of Genesis 1:26: God (in the singular pronoun) creates *one* image, notes Ambrose. He writes, "At the beginning of the universe itself, as I read, the Father and the Son existed, and I see one creation. I hear Him that speaks. I acknowledge Him that does: but it is of one image, one likeness, that I read. This likeness belongs not to diversity but to unity" *Fid.* 1.53; CSEL 78 23. Likewise, "The Father says to the Son 'in Our image and likeness,' and you say that the Son of God is unlike the Father" *De fide* 1.51; CSEL 78 23. Also, in *De spiritu sancto*, Ambrose writes, "[T]he Father confesses the Son as equal to Himself in the oneness of the work, saying, 'Let us make man to Our image and likeness.' For what else do image and working and common likeness signify than the oneness of the same majesty?" *Spir.* II.2; CSEL 79 87.

¹²¹ *C. Const.* 20: *Nunc autem homo ad similitudinem et imaginem Dei conditur, non etiam similitudo intra Patrem et Filium praedicatur.*

image and likeness of God, but of the Son Scripture says nothing about likeness; rather, the Apostle Paul synonymously describes the Son as image and equal.¹²² The Nicene debate informed Hilary's exegesis of Colossians 1:15 and Genesis 1:26; the debate committed him to interpreting "image of God" as coequality with God, for which reason *imago dei* was a Christological rather than an anthropological term.

I have suggested that Hilary's theology of image is the development of anti-Monarchian theology applied in the Homoian crisis. Tertullian and Novatian developed a *logos-sarx* hermeneutic to express the dispensation in which the Son as image reveals the Father. This *logos-sarx* dialectic retained both the invisible divine nature of the Son and his nature as the disclosing image of the Father in the economy. Hilary is evidently familiar with this tradition. In his theology this *logos-sarx* tradition is expressed with the *forma dei / forma servi* trope. This allows Hilary to interpret Colossians 1:15 along traditional anti-Monarchian lines: the image is both invisible and creative; these two properties manifest the consubstantial union of the divine nature. To be the *imago dei* is to share the properties of God. The theophanies of the Old Testament and the Incarnation are a dispensation only – the taking on of the form of a servant – and not a change in divine nature. The implication of this for Hilary is that the human person cannot be referred to as *imago dei*, as this is a Christological term (Colossians 1:15). Although the human person is fashioned *ad imaginem dei*, that is, after the *exemplum* of the Son, the consubstantial union of the divine Persons necessarily entails that the human person is fashioned after the one common image of the substance of God. Hilary's emphasis in the creation narrative

¹²² C. Const. 21: *Quae ergo callida religionis tuae professio est similem secundum Scripturas Patri Filium dicere, cum ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei homo tantum factus sit? Quid itaque uerbis fallis? quid arte eludis? cur non aequalem Deo, hoc enim secundum Scripturas, pie dicis?*

on the “common image” after which the human person is fashioned initiates an exegetical tradition in Latin theology that appears again in Marius Victorinus and Ambrose and becomes a focal point in Augustine’s theology of the *imago dei*.

In this first of three chapters on Latin pro-Nicene theologies of the image of God, I have depicted Hilary as committed to a Nicene theology of the *imago dei* that serves as an expression of the equality of Father and Son and that necessarily excludes the human person from the image. The second half of my thesis will maintain that Augustine breaks with this pro-Nicene theology. Augustine is intent to underscore the continuity of “image” language in his exegesis of Genesis 1:26 and Colossians 1:15. Three interlocking terms swirl about the discussion of the image of God: *likeness*, *image*, and *equality*. Augustine’s early writings will endow these words with a different sense than his predecessors. Hilary is typical of Latin fourth-century theology that contrasts “image” and “likeness.” For the Bishop of Poitiers there could be no *likeness* in the Son because he was the *image* of God, which is to say *equal* with God. Conversely, the human person was not *equal* with God and, therefore, not the *image* of God, but merely the *likeness* of God.

Chapter II: Marius Victorinus

Among a protracted list of “illustrious men” of the Church, Jerome includes Marius Victorinus (circa 300-370), accompanied by a very pithy and not too flattering description of what he considers to be Victorinus’s impenetrable style. Victorinus, writes Jerome, was an African who taught in Rome under the emperor Constantius. “In extreme old age, yielding himself to faith in Christ he wrote books against Arius, written in dialectic style and very obscure language, books which can only be understood by the learned.”¹ Were it not for Augustine’s writings, Jerome’s brief description would be all we would have to go on for knowledge of the famed Roman philosopher. Prior to his late conversion into the Church, Victorinus wrote prolifically: he composed treatises on grammar, rhetoric, and logic and wrote commentaries and translations of the ancient philosophers – Cicero, Aristotle, and Porphyry. In this way he brought the treasures of Greek learning to Roman culture. Robert Markus notes that more than anyone else Victorinus is the “link between Greek philosophy and the Latin world in the fourth century.”²

It is this link between Greek philosophy and the Latin world that allowed Victorinus to be the force he was against the Arians. His command of the Platonic tradition provided him a philosophically robust response to the Arian challenge as he defended the Nicene doctrine of the consubstantial nature of the Father and the Son.³

¹ Jerome, *De vir. Ill.* 101.

² Robert Markus, “Marius Victorinus,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 332.

³ Mary Clark writes, “Victorinus seems to have been aware, as many Latins were not, not only of the intransitive sense of *hypostasis* which corresponds to the *substantia*, but also of the active sense in which Eastern theologians used the term.” Mary Clark, “The Neoplatonism of Marius Victorinus,” *Studia Patristica* 11 (1972): 13.

Nowhere is this more evident than in his theology of “image.” That the Son is the image of the Father attested to their unity of being, maintained Victorinus, in standard pro-Nicene language. His profoundly philosophical account of “image” was, like that of Hilary of Poitiers, forged in the heat of Arian controversy. Victorinus demonstrates concerns regarding the equality of image and source that become much less pronounced in Augustine’s early theology of image. Writing thirty years after Victorinus, Augustine is content to suggest that not all images are equal with their source. It is this insight, we will see, that affords Augustine the latitude to describe both Christ and the human person as *imago dei* in a way that escaped Victorinus.

Victorinus and Augustine shared a Platonic theology in which created being exists as an image of uncreated being. However, in this chapter I will argue that Victorinus’s rigorous adherence to a distinction between substance and image resulted in a particular understanding of Christ as image of God that, while it might have been well suited to the Nicene debates, did not afford Victorinus the latitude to describe the human person in his own right as *imago dei*. As such, this chapter is a second example of the common difficulty in Latin pro-Nicene image theology of affirming the *imago dei* of the human person, because the term functions primarily Christologically. I will proceed in three steps. First, I will consider Victorinus’s strict philosophical distinction between substance and image. Second, I will suggest that the clear separation of the substance from the image of created being meant that Victorinus needed to employ a subtle theological move when speaking of Christ as “image of God.” Appealing to the utter simplicity of God, Victorinus insists that in God image and substance are one. Thus, for Victorinus, the *imago dei* is God’s own life. Third, I will argue that the identification of the *imago dei* with God’s own substance entails that, for Victorinus, the human person could not be termed “image

of God”; rather, the human person is created *secundum imaginem*, that is, according to the image of Christ. Ultimately, however, the inclusive participatory Christology that Victorinus develops entails that the human person, as “image of the image,” is not excluded from the *imago dei*, but as a unique participant in the *Logos* bears the image of Christ’s consubstantial unity. And so, in the final analysis, since Victorinus understands the human soul as image of the image, he does see it, in some sense, as the *imago dei*.

Substance and Image

As with other pro-Nicenes, the theology of image is integral to Victorinus’s defense of the *homoousion*. While other Nicenes, such as Hilary and Ambrose, are content to use standard proof texts such as Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:3 filtered through the anti-Monarchian tradition, Victorinus develops a self-standing theology of image to fit the Homoousian cause. While this theology can function as a philosophically self-contained synthesis of Plotinian and Aristotelian understandings of image, Victorinus is always attentive to the fact that his theology is thoroughly grounded in Scripture; Victorinus is keen to present a biblical theology of the *imago dei*.

Victorinus’s commentators have noted his commitment to remaining scripturally tethered.⁴ Indeed, Victorinus himself states, “[A]ll that I say is said by Holy Scripture and comes from Holy Scripture.”⁵ The African philosopher’s Nicene treatise, *Adversus Arium*, may best be described as a “biblical theology” of the

⁴ “Despite his extensive use of Neoplatonic terminology and thought ... Victorinus regarded Scripture as foundational for theological discussion.” Stephen Andrew Cooper, *Marius Victorinus’ Commentary on Galatians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 31.

⁵ *Adv. Ar.* I 46.

homoousion.⁶ In this work Victorinus is mining Scripture to demonstrate the consubstantial unity of Father and Son.⁷ The Arians maintained that no one could speak of the Son's generation and that his relation with the Father was unintelligible to the human mind. On the contrary, asserts Victorinus, Scripture discloses something of the mystery of the relation of the Father to the Son. He tells Candidus, "But since you are a Christian in name, you must necessarily accept and venerate the Scriptures which proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ."⁸ And so, *Adversus Arium* – particularly Book I – is a study of the biblical names of the Son. I will limit my inquiry predominantly to Book I.⁹ In this first book, Victorinus first methodically moves through the Gospel of John to develop a biblical theology of the *Logos*.¹⁰ Then he turns to the Synoptics¹¹ and the Pauline Epistles¹² before finally proposing a theology consonant with Nicaea

⁶ Cf. Gustavus Koffmane, *De Mario Victorino philosopho christiano* (Breslau: Lindner, 1880), p. 12; John Voelker, "Marius Victorinus' Exegetical Arguments for Nicene Definition in *Adversus Arium*," *Studia Patristica* 38 (2001): 406-502.

⁷ Stephen Cooper writes, "While it is an exaggeration to say that for Victorinus exegesis was theology, it would be more distorting to minimize the importance of Scripture and theology in his Christianity on account of the Neoplatonic elements which find a place in both his Trinitarian treatises and his exegetical work." Cooper, *Galatians*, p. 31.

⁸ *Ad Cand.* I 1.

⁹ I will be limiting my focus especially to Book I. The four books of *Adversus Arium* were almost certainly originally separate and self-standing works comprising nine treatises. Cf. Pierre Hadot, *Marius Victorinus: Recherches sur sa vie et ses oeuvres* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1971), pp. 253-80; Stephen Cooper, "Marius Victorinus" in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lloyd Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 540-41. The first four treatises are presented as an epistolary exchange between Candidus "the Arian" and Victorinus. The fourth letter, which is framed as the second response of Victorinus to Candidus, is by far the longest letter. I will focus my attention on this letter. Here Victorinus intends to demonstrate from Scripture that the same Son who is "born" is "substantially Son." *Adv. Ar.* I 2. The subsequent five treatises (5-9) express Victorinus's concerns both with the proposal of *homoiousion* suggested by Basil of Ancyra and with the conclusions of the Council of Ariminum (359).

¹⁰ *Adv. Ar.* I 5-15.

¹¹ *Adv. Ar.* I 15-17.

¹² *Adv. Ar.* I 17-26.

constructed on the foundation of this biblical study.¹³ This structure comports with Victorinus's understanding of the theological task before him: to offer a biblical theology of the image of God that remains impervious to Arian philosophical challenges.

What does it mean for the Father and the Son to be consubstantial? How does Victorinus understand substance? Victorinus's *De definitionibus* demonstrates that the African philosopher was, at the very least, familiar with Aristotle's *Categories*. This is significant because it is Aristotle's *Categories* that famously distinguish between a substance and its various qualities or properties.¹⁴ Victorinus's familiarity with this work stems from the fact that he not only translated Aristotle's *Categories*, but also both the Aristotelian *Peri Hermeneias*¹⁵ and Porphyry's *Isagoge*, which is an introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*. Unfortunately, none of these three translations

¹³ The same structure of beginning with an exposition of Scripture and from there defending the *homoousion* is employed by Victorinus in his first response to Candidus. This is a deliberate attempt to reverse the order of operations employed by Candidus and to underscore the primacy of Scripture in the defense of the consubstantial nature of Father and Son. In his commentary Pierre Hadot notes, "Candidus avait terminé sa lettre par la citation de quelques textes d'Écriture; Victorinus fait l'inverse: il commence par elle, montrant ainsi que sa pensée veut partir du texte sacré. Hadot, *Commentaire*, p. 692 in *Marius Victorinus: Traités théologiques sur la Trinité*, trans. and ed. Pierre Hadot, Sources Chrétiennes 69 (Paris: Cerf, 1960).

¹⁴ "[E]ach [individual term] signifies either substance or quantity or qualification or a relative or where or when or being in a position or having or doing or being affected. To give a rough idea, ideas of substance are man, horse; of quantity: four foot, five foot; of qualification: white, grammatical; of a relative: double, half, larger; of where: in the Lyceum, in the market-place; of when: yesterday, last year; of being in a position: is-lying, is-sitting; of having: has-shoes-on, has-armor-on; of doing: cutting, burning; of being-affected: being-cut, being-burnt." Aristotle, *Categories*, 1b25 - 2a4. Trans. John Lloyd Ackrill in *Clarendon Aristotle Series* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).

¹⁵ The *Peri Hermeneias* was formerly ascribed to Aristotle, but seems in fact to be a later developed commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*.

in the Aristotelian tradition remain extant.¹⁶ Only Boethius's (improved) translations and commentaries on these three works provide a witness to the significant philosophical debt that Victorinus owed to Aristotle.¹⁷ Can we, then, say that Victorinus's understanding of "substance" was influenced by Aristotle? I propose a positive answer to this question, while keeping the significant caveat in mind that there is no extant literary witness to Victorinus's familiarity with the *Categories* or with the subsequent commentarial tradition on the *Categories*. Nevertheless, three reasons lead me to suggest a positive answer to the question. First, although Victorinus's translation of the *Categories*, the *Peri Hermeneias*, and the *Isagoge* are no longer available, we can be certain from Boethius that Victorinus did translate them. Second, in *De definitionibus* Victorinus demonstrates striking familiarity with Aristotle's definition of substance.¹⁸ Here Victorinus defines *substantia* in terms of

¹⁶ See Pierre Hadot's impressive research surrounding Victorinus's translation of the *Categories*, the *Isagoge* and the *Peri Hermeneias*. Hadot, *Victorinus: Recherches*, pp. 179-90.

¹⁷ Boethius preserves in part Victorinus's translation of Porphyry's *Isagoge*. Cf. Cooper, "Victorinus," p. 539. Significantly, Boethius remarks on Victorinus's introduction of the philosophically momentous term *contingens* as the Latin equivalent to Aristotle's "accidental." Cf. Hadot, *Victorinus: Recherches*, p. 189.

¹⁸ *De definitionibus*, which follows the translation of Porphyry's *Isagoge* and refers to the work, is, as the title would suggest, a series of definitions of philosophical terms both of Ciceronian and Aristotelian provenance. It is unique as it is the only work of antiquity dedicated to definitions. Pierre Hadot, *Marius Victorinus: Recherches*, p. 164. For my purposes it is worth noting that *De Definitionibus* defines "substance" in terms of Aristotle's five predicables: *Quidam tamen, cautiores plenioresque in docendo, definitionis ipsius quasi quaedam membra constituunt dicuntque eam debere consistere – perfectam definitionem istam quam appello substantialem – ex quinque partibus: id est genere, specie, differentia, accidenti, proprio. Sed accidens in definitione minimum, proprium plurimum valet. Et recte quidem ac vere ista commemorant, nec aliena aut a principe harum artium Aristotele aut a Tullio, qui de istis praecepta tradiderunt, iudicanda sunt: constat enim hi quinque partibus veluti membris suis integra definitio.* Marius Victorinus, *De Definitionibus* ed. Th. Stangle, *Tulliana et Mario-Victoriniana*, Munich: Programm, 1888) 8.31-9.9. Pierre Hadot provides an overview of the structure of *De Definitionibus* and comments on significant Aristotelian and Ciceronian terminology. He also notes the historical reception of this text. Hadot, *Victorinus: Recherches*, pp. 164-78.

Aristotle's five predicables. Third, I will argue that an Aristotelian distinction between substance and qualities renders intelligible much of Victorinus's theological argument in the treatises of the *Adversus Arium*.

For Aristotle, "substance" is the ontological substructure that remains despite any changes that may occur in various categories. A material substance appears only as a composite of form and matter; it is the categories of a form that reveals the substance. The senses apprehend the matter and the mind makes a judgment regarding the form from the sense data. Hence, Aristotle's well known dictum: "All knowledge comes through the senses." Victorinus adopts Aristotle's understanding of substance from the *Categories*. He writes, "For the heavens and all in them and the entire world are a mixture consisting of *hule* (matter) and form; therefore it is not simple."¹⁹ It is the categories of material existence that the senses apprehend; the mind then renders a judgment regarding the substantial form.

The intellect turns to a material subject to ask, "What is it?" The senses can only respond by describing the material qualities that are changeable and transient, explains Victorinus. However, the intellect in turn translates the material sense data, understanding them according to their immaterial and unchanging form. So, sense knowledge, for Victorinus, is "an imitation of intellectual knowing."²⁰ The material order is understood through "intelligence but intelligence according to sense (*sed iuxta sensum intellegentia*) and according to sense they are changeable and alterable (*versibilia et mutabilia*), but according to intelligence unchangeable and unalterable (*inversibilia et inmutabilia*)."²¹ The senses can only understand the qualities, what Aristotle called "categories," and not the underlying substance, explains Victorinus.

¹⁹ *Ad Cand.* I 9.

²⁰ *Ad Cand.* I 9: *imitationem intellegendi etiam sensu*.

²¹ *Ad Cand.* I 9.

(*Sensus nihil aliud comprehendit nisi qualitates.*)²² The objects of sense observation are “an image (*simulacrum*) of what is understood and an imitation (*imitamentum*) of intellectual knowing.”²³ The substance that the mind knows in material things is a substance that holds its being tenuously. It is being, but it is a being given to non-being. Victorinus writes, “[I]n some way they are *onta* (existents) insofar as they have a soul, and in some way they are *me onta* (nonexistence) insofar as they have a changeable *hulen* (matter) and changeable qualities.”²⁴ It is the qualities (or categories) that render material existence transitory, fleeting, and, therefore, not a substance, but rather an image. Victorinus sustains this distinction throughout *Adversus Arium*:

Now everything which is to each thing its own “to be” is substance. But this “to be” of which we speak must be understood in one way with respect to that which is “to be,” in another way with respect to that which is “to be in a certain mode”; inasmuch as the former is that of substance, the latter that of quality.²⁵

Victorinus’s commitment to an Aristotelian understanding of substance entails that for him image and substance are antithetical. He underscores the borrowed existence that is fundamental to the nature of a material image. They are as “a sort of shadow in air or in water through a sort of corporeal light formed through the

²² *Ad Cand.* I 9.

²³ *Ad Cand.* I 9.

²⁴ *Ad Cand.* I 10.

²⁵ *Adv. Ar.* III 1: *Omne autem quod est unicuique suum esse, substantia est. Sed hoc esse quod dicimus, aliud intellegi debet in eo quod est esse, aliud vero in eo quod est ita esse, ut unum sit substantiae, aliud qualitatis.*

reflection of a corporeal emanation.”²⁶ Substance, on the other hand, is the form that subsists and that the changing and transitory categories relate to the senses. The corporeal nature of the created image entails its dependence on the form of a more primary light without which is “no longer anything nor anywhere.”²⁷ The nature of a created “image” is that it is derivative and secondary. It is an expression and manifestation of another – of a more primary source, namely, substance.

While the distinction between form and matter is of Aristotelian provenance, the view of material images as fundamentally ephemeral in character is a standard Neoplatonic theme. Victorinus points to shadows that we see cast in the air or in the water; we understand that they have no independent being. The African philosopher writes, “By itself [an image] is nothing nor has it movement of its own – only what is manifested by it is a substance; and it has neither body, nor senses, nor understanding.”²⁸ The image is wholly dependent on, and less than, its source – it reflects the movements, energy, and life of its source. A created image is fundamentally different from its form as it has no substance of its own: “[T]he image is other, according to substance, from that which can be imaged.”²⁹ Victorinus notes that every existing thing is a substance inasmuch as it has a unique species that defines it, and this form is, properly speaking, its substance, whereas its material manifestation (image) exists only in potency to reflect its form. It is likely that the Aristotelian tradition, to which Victorinus devoted so much attention, lies behind his identification of substance with form, and behind his notion that the qualities are given by the sense data. Victorinus, however, infuses Neoplatonic language into the

²⁶ *Adv. Ar.* I 19.

²⁷ *Adv. Ar.* I 19.

²⁸ *Adv. Ar.* I 19.

²⁹ *Adv. Ar.* I 19: *aliud secundum substantiam ab eo quod imaginabile est.*

Aristotelian description of an image to underscore the fleeting and unsubstantial character of an image.

God is radically beyond matter and form. God is beyond being. Standing in the tradition of Plato,³⁰ Victorinus writes: “God is above all existence, above all life, above all knowledge, above every *on* (existent) and the *ontos onta* (truly existents); indeed he is unknowable, infinite, invisible, without idea, insubstantial, inconceivable, and because transcendent, he is nothing of existence, and because he is above existents, he has nothing from existence. God is therefore *me on* (nonexistent).”³¹ There is no real relation on the part of God to the creature, insists Victorinus; his understanding of creation *ex nihilo* entails that God is not a substance like any other;³² indeed, any understanding of being in relation to God must be negated – ultimately, God is only “knowable in ignorance.”³³ On account of this infinite transcendence, Victorinus’s theology moves away from an Aristotelian understanding of substance as revealed by categories in his discussion of the character of God.

³⁰ Cf. Plato, *Rep.* 509b, where Socrates compares the sun, which provides “generation, growth, and nourishment,” while being itself none of those things, with the eternal Being / Good: “[E]xistence and being are in [things] besides as a result of it, although the good isn’t being but is still beyond being.” Victorinus sustains the Platonic dialectic between the presence of Being animating all things and the utter transcendence and remove of Being from all things.

³¹ *Ad Cand.* I 13. Victorinus is sympathetic, therefore, to those who say that God is *anousion* (without substance), but suggests that since we confess that God *is*, it is better to speak of *hyperousion* (hypersubstance): “For his ‘to be’ is his substance, but not that substance known to us; but he himself, because he is ‘To Be’ itself, is not from substance but is substance itself, the parent of all substances, giving himself ‘to be’ from himself, first substance, universal substance, substance before substance.” *Adv. Ar.* II 1.

³² Hadot, *Commentaire*, p. 713.

³³ *Ad Cand.* I 13. The presence of apophatic theology in Victorinus’s writing is explored by Chiara O. Tommasi Moreschini, “Linguistic Coinages in Marius Victorinus’s Negative Theology,” *Studia Patristica* 43 (2006): 505-510. Mark Edwards remarks categorically: “The negative theology of Victorinus is floridly expressed beyond all precedent in Latin, though its logical rigour bears witness to his schooling in philosophy.” Mark Edwards, “Marius Victorinus and the *Homoousion*,” *Studia Patristica* 46 (2010): 115.

It is the Son who reveals the Father. The Father is above *on* (existent) or, better yet, the “hidden *on* (existent)”³⁴; he produces from himself the manifestation of himself, and this manifestation is the “begetting” of the Son. However, the revelation of God is nothing other than God himself, insists Victorinus. The hidden *on* (existent) and the begotten *on* (existent) exist as one substance: “[T]he *on* (existent) in potentiality begets the *on* (existent) in action.”³⁵ Victorinus introduces what *prima facie* seems like an improbable distinction between God in potency and God in act. He uses the analogy of someone who is pregnant and contains within her that which will be begotten. He writes, “For the embryo is not nonexistent before birth but it is hidden and by birth there comes into manifestation the *on* (existent) in action which was *on* (existent) in potentiality.”³⁶ This is a fertile analogy because it illustrates Victorinus’s intention of highlighting both distinction and union between the hidden and the begotten God.

The radical simplicity of God – infinitely more so than is indicated by the analogy of a pregnancy – entails that the distinction of God as *esse* (being) and *agere* (act) remains purely logical, as the Son is *esse* in act. There is one *Logos*, who is both hidden and manifest. Victorinus writes, “God acts through the *Logos* and always acts. The *Logos* is therefore the active power which puts itself in motion so that what was potentiality might be actuality.”³⁷ It is the distinction between God in potency (*esse*)

³⁴ *Ad Cand.* I 14.

³⁵ *Ad Cand.* I 14.

³⁶ Hadot rightly notes that for Victorinus “God in potency” is not simply privation of actuality. “L’Existant en puissance n’est donc pas simple possibilité d’être, mais superabundance de puissance.” Hadot, *Commentaire*, p. 719. The language of the hidden and revealed *Logos* is confusing in Victorinus because sometime he employs this language to distinguish between the begotten and unbegotten and at other times to refer to the hidden *Logos* as the Holy Spirit in distinction from the visible *Logos* of the incarnate Christ (Cf. *Adv. Ar.* I 13).

³⁷ *Ad Cand.* I 17.

and God in act (*agere*) that allows for a relation on the part of the creature to God. God manifests his goodness in movement outside of himself (*agere*) while remaining utterly simple: “For up there ‘to be’ does not differ from ‘to act.’ For that ‘to be’ is one and simple and always one and alone.”³⁸ Thus, Victorinus wants to underscore the simple unity of the one substance. *Esse* and *agere* are the movement of one substance: “For in ‘to be’ there is also inherent ‘to act.’”³⁹ Act follows upon being as a logical progression; however, for Victorinus, this notion of progression must be stripped of all temporal and material associations because God is utterly simple and outside of time.⁴⁰

While the language distinguishing *esse* and *agere* or God in potency and God in act, is unique to Victorinus it articulates a common Nicene tradition that St. Thomas will later refer to as the doctrine of “appropriation,” according to which names particularly predicated of one of the divine persons can without exclusion be applied to the other divine persons on account of the divine simplicity, excepting those terms of relative relation such as filiation or paternity.⁴¹ Immediately after the

³⁸ *Ad Cand.* I 19.

³⁹ *Ad Cand.* I 20.

⁴⁰ The apophatic element in Victorinus’s thought is critical to his preservation of divine simplicity. Material and temporal distinctions are inappropriate analogues for the distinction between *esse* and *agere* in God. Mark Edwards expresses this well: “[O]ur notions of numerical distinctness, which we derive from the observation of material particulars, become otiose and misleading [when applied to God].” Edwards, “Marius Victorinus,” 109.

⁴¹ Theological “appropriation” refers to the attribution of a name or quality to all three of the divine persons based on the doctrine of divine simplicity; the name or quality, however, principally designates one of the persons. For example, the Father is principally designated as omnipotent, the Son as wisdom, and the Holy Spirit as love, but on account of “appropriation” all three of the divine persons can be designated, omnipotent, wisdom, and love. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, Q. 39 A. 7-8. The principle of analogy is foundational to an account of appropriation; language regarding creation and created relations is analogically transposed to bespeak divine realities and divine relations. Further, the analogical language employed in appropriation finds its source in revelation. Other examples where one might point to

introduction to *Adversus Arium*, Victorinus sums up the distinction between Father and Son that he sees in the Gospel of John: “[T]he Son will differentiate himself this way, that he moves himself and acts for the sake of manifestation, whereas the Father, because of his transcendent divinity, acts in a way unknowable to us. For the Father is beyond beatitude, and for that reason he is ‘to repose’ itself.”⁴² For Victorinus, the outward movement (*agere*) is integral to the nature of the first principle. Although *esse* exists in repose, what is *esse*, asks Victorinus, except action, life and understanding?⁴³ Therefore, *esse* cannot be referred to apart from *agere*; in Victorinus’s words, they are “simultaneous and simple.”⁴⁴ The doctrine of “appropriation,” then, plays a key theological role in Victorinus’s understanding of the relation between Father and Son. The only way to differentiate Father and Son is in reference to generation – for in all else, they are one substance and the names principally attributed to designate one of the divine Persons (e.g. *esse*) can be appropriated by the others. Victorinus writes, “[I]t is generation which defines and divides them according to repose into ‘to be’ and substance, and according to movement into action, operation.”⁴⁵

a doctrine of appropriation in the Latin Fathers of the fourth and fifth century are Hilary, *De Trin* II.1 and Augustine, *De Trin* VI.10. It is perhaps stretching the definition to describe Victorinus’s distinction between *esse* and *agere* as “appropriation” because these terms are not technically of Scriptural provenance.

⁴² *Adv. Ar.* I 3.

⁴³ *Adv. Ar.* I 4.

⁴⁴ *Adv. Ar.* I 4.

⁴⁵ *Adv. Ar.* I 4. In concluding Book Three of *Adversus Arium*, Victorinus explains that the doctrine of appropriation necessitates the identity and simplicity of persons who are distinguished in eternity only by generation and in the economy by their acts: “For these among themselves are identical; without any conjoining they are one and without multiplicity they are simple, different only by their own act of existing – but by strength and power, since never is there one without the other, they are identically one; they are different only by their acts, since, while the act which is exterior advances even to the experiencing of suffering, the other act remains always interior and eternal, being original and substantial.” *Adv. Ar.* III 17.

Victorinus's understanding of appropriation entails that the *agere* of the Son is a manifestation of the entire Trinity. This is expressed in Victorinus's interpretation of Jesus' words in John 7:37: "[I]f anyone thirsts, let him come and drink. Whoever believes in me as the Scripture has said, out of him flow streams of living water."⁴⁶ The living water is the Spirit, but the source of this water is Christ. Victorinus writes, "Now therefore Jesus is the source whence flow the streams of the Spirit. For just as the Son is from the bosom of the Father and 'in the bosom' of the Father, so the Spirit is from within the Son. The three are therefore *homoousioi* (consubstantial) and on that account in all there is one God."⁴⁷ Victorinus goes on to describe the consubstantial unity as "one sole movement."⁴⁸ The Father simply *is*; the Son is *act*, and the Spirit that which *acts*.⁴⁹ The Son receives being from the Father, the Spirit receives being from the Son and therefore also from the Father. This unity of being Victorinus expresses with the triad of "to be" (*esse*) "to live" (*vivere*) and "to understand" (*intellegere*).⁵⁰ *Esse* is predicated principally of the Father, *vivere* of the

⁴⁶ *Adv. Ar.* I 8.

⁴⁷ *Adv. Ar.* I 8.

⁴⁸ *Adv. Ar.* I 13.

⁴⁹ *Adv. Ar.* I 13. The distinction between the Father who simply *is*, the Son who is *act*, and the Spirit which *acts* is a logical distinction and secondary to the unity of substance. Victorinus insists, "All three are therefore *homoousia* (consubstantial) with respect to action and *homoousia* (consubstantial) with respect to substance, because all three are Spirit; and because Spirit is from the Father, substance is from the Father" *Adv. Ar.* I 18.

⁵⁰ *Adv. Ar.* I 13. This triad, repeated frequently throughout *Adversus Arium*, is first expressed here at *Adv. Ar.* I 13. The triad of *esse*, *vivere*, and *intellegere* plays a critical role in Victorinus's theology. The Neoplatonic triad is fitted to serve Victorinus's Nicene cause. Victorinus develops a theological articulation of this triad in *Adv. Ar.* III 4-17. The immediate source for the triad is likely Plotinus and Porphyry. The triad also appears in Proclus's *Elements of Theology* 252-54. Given the length of discussion surrounding the triad, the significant theological role it plays in Victorinus's thought, and Victorinus's own philosophical background it is likely he was also familiar with the more remote sources of the triad, particularly Plato's *Sophist* 250A, 254D and the *Phaedo* 105C as well as Aristotle's *De anima* II 4 (415b 13). Cf. Hadot, "L'Image," 411-24. One of the best essays that broadly traces the

Son, and *intellegere* of the Holy Spirit. Of course, the doctrine of appropriation

philosophical origins and later medieval expressions of Victorinus's triad is David Neil Bell, "Esse, vivere, intelligere: The Noetic Triad and the Image of God," *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 52 (1985): 5-43. Matthias Baltes accurately expresses the inexpugnable unity operative in this triad for Victorinus: "Alles ist hier in allem, weil alle Momente zirkulär aufeinander bezogen sind und jedes an jedem teilhat oder vielmehr jedes zugleich mit allen anderen existiert und alle gleichsam eine in sich geschlossene Kugel bilden, die erste und vollkommenste Kugel überhaupt." Matthias Baltes, *Marius Victorinus: Zur Philosophie in seinen theologischen Schriften* (München: K.G. Saur, 2002), p. 77.

The triad appears clearly in Plotinus: *Enneads* I,6, 7; V,4, 2; V,6, 6; VI,6, 15; and VI,6, 18. Discussion surrounding the Plotinian origins of the triad *esse, vivere, and intellegere* is found in Pierre Hadot, "Être, vie, pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin," in *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique*, vol. 5, (Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1960), pp. 107-57. In this work Hadot has suggested that Plotinus's immediate source is Aristotle. Hadot, "Être, vie, pensée chez Plotin," p. 112. See also Peter Manchester, "The Noetic Triad in Plotinus, Marius Victorinus, and Augustine," in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, ed. R.T. Wallis, Studies in Neoplatonism, Ancient and Modern 6 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 207-22.

Plotinus's disciple, Porphyry, is also recognized to be a well-spring for Victorinus's understanding of the noetic triad. Cf. Mark Edwards, "Porphyry and the Intelligible Triad," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 110 (1990): 14-25; Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neo-Platonic Tradition* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974); Pierre Hadot, *Porphyry et Victorinus* (Paris, Études augustiniennes, 1968); Pierre Hadot, "Citations de Porphyre dans Augustin," *Revue des Études augustiniennes* 6 (1960): 205-244; Pierre Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers and their Greek Sources*, trans. Harry Wedeck (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1969); John O'Meara, *Porphyry's philosophy from Oracles in Eusebius' Praeparatio Evangelica and Augustine's Dialogues of Cassiciacum* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1969); idem, *Porphyry's Philosophy from the Oracles in Augustine* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1959); Willy Theiler, *Porphyrios und Augustin* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1933).

Also, Luise Abramowski has noted striking similarities between Victorinus's triad and the triad operative in the Gnostic *Allogenes* of the Coptic Gnostic writings in the Nag Hammadi Library. She has presented a compelling case for a mutual dependency on Porphyry in Victorinus and the *Allogenes*. Luise Abramowski, "Marius Victorinus, Porphyrius und die römischen Gnostiker," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 74 (1983): 108-28. Here, she lends support to the arguments laid out in Hadot's great work, *Porphyry et Victorinus* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1968). Ruth Majercik has built on the research of Abramowski and Hadot to underscore the mutual dependence not just on the *Allogenes*, but also other literature of the Nag Hammadi Library, such as the *Steles, Seth, and Zostrianos*. Majercik's article focuses particularly on the exchange of ideas between Porphyry and these Coptic Gnostic texts, but she frequently notes that, like Abramowski, Victorinus had access to the same Porphyryian source evident in the Gnostic texts; this is, for Majercik, most evident in Victorinus's use of the term *tridunamos*. Ruth Majercik, "The Existence-Life-Intellect Triad in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism," *The Classical Quarterly* 42 (1992): 475-88.

governs these terms, as well, so that all three divine persons are equally *esse, vivere,* and *intellegere*, precisely because they “are named in accordance with that which predominates in each one (*sed ita ut qua suo plurimo sunt, hoc nominentur et esse dicantur*).”⁵¹

The first half of *Adversus Arium* is devoted to an analysis of scriptural proof texts regarding the divinity and equality of the Son. It is from Scripture that Victorinus wants to demonstrate the principle that “in God there is completely identity between power, substance, divinity, and act. For in him all is unity and simple unity.”⁵² Sometimes Scripture speaks of Christ as inferior to the Father, such as when Jesus says, “The Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). At other times the Son is described as equal to the Father, as when St. Paul says, “He did not consider it robbery to be equal to God” (Phil 2:6). Victorinus explains that this variation is because sometimes Scripture refers to Christ in his consubstantial unity with the Father and at other times in point of view to his eternal generation:

But the Father is great because he gave all to the Son and is cause of the Son’s being and action.... But the Son receives being and advancing by action towards act, comes into perfection by achieving fullness by movement, having made all things which exist. But since ‘in him, for him, through him are created all things,’ he is always the fullness and

⁵¹ *Adv. Ar.* IV 5. This principle of predomination within the triad of *esse, vivere,* and *intellegere* (for which I have borrowed the term “appropriation”) is expressed very well by Hadot: “L’unité des trois est assurée par le principe de prédominance, cf. I 20,15-16 n.; I 54,9-12 n.; II 3,41. Chacun est, par son être même, les autres (5,45-47 = 1,15-16), donc est trois, mais est nommé par ce qu’il est le plus.” Hadot, *Commentaire*, p. 989.

⁵² *Adv. Ar.* I 9.

always the receptacle; for this reason he is both impassible and passible.

Therefore he is both equal and unequal. Hence the Father is greater.⁵³

Scripture affirms both the Son's unity of being with the Father and the Father's generation of the Son. It is within this dialectic of the Son's equality of nature and inferiority of origin that Victorinus presents an account of Christ as image of God.

Victorinus is intent to present a biblical theology of the Son's equality with the Father. However, his philosophical background is inexpugnably operative in the task at hand – the defense of the *homoousion*. He turns to Aristotle for a definition of substance and adopts the latter's differentiation of form and matter. The categories of material existence are subject to the vicissitudes of time and change. Following Plotinus and Porphyry, Victorinus is attentive to the “image-like” nature of material existence. Substance, in this sense, is held in contradistinction to image. The substance of God, however, is radically unlike this Aristotelian conception of substance; Victorinus instead borrows the Aristotelian language of potency and act to explain how God is repose as well as movement, while endowing these terms with a meaning consonant with the eternal simplicity of God.⁵⁴

Christ as *Imago Dei*

⁵³ *Adv. Ar.* I 13.

⁵⁴ Although one point of contact for the distinction in the philosophical tradition between “God in potency” and “God in act” certainly seems to be Aristotle, the distinction is also (and perhaps more immediately) present in Porphyry and the Gnostic text of the Nag Hammadi Library, particularly *Allogenes*. Ruth Majercik has noted that Victorinus's description of the Father as the being which “remains in himself (*manens in se*) . . . also called silence, rest, and immobility (*silentium, quies, cessatio*)” (*Adv. Ar.* III 7) finds a source in *Allogenes* and the Prophyryian reflections on the *Oracles*. Cf. Majercik, “Existence-Life-Intellect Triad,” 482-83.

It is the doctrine of the *homoousion* – the unity of the divine substance – that Victorinus sets out to defend in *Adversus Arium*. Although there are distinctions in terms of *esse* and *agere* as well as different names deriving from paternity and filiation that are particularly suited to one Person of the Holy Trinity, Victorinus always circles back to the Nicene understanding of consubstantiality. It is in exegeting the Pauline epistles that Victorinus is confronted with the language of image. That Christ is the image of God seems, *prima facie*, better suited to the Homoioan cause.⁵⁵ Indeed, image language in the neo-Platonic tradition of which Victorinus availed himself seems ineluctably associated with that which is derived, secondary, and even fleeting. Does an image not necessitate a different substance? Is image not by definition an emanation from *another*?⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Homoians cannot simply be equated with Arians. There is a diversity and broadness in fourth-century Christological expression to which the appellations “Arian” and “Homoioan” are insufficiently subtle. Regardless, in Victorinus’s polemics he is content to lump “Homoioans” under the umbrella of Arians. Cf. Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 133-66.

⁵⁶ Victorinus’s Arian interlocutor, Candidus, is also aware of his philosophical advantage as a Platonist. Immutability is the *sine qua non* of the first principle. The unbegotten must be unbecetting, or else he shall cease to be immutable. To beget is to undergo change in the Platonic (and Aristotelian) worldview. Victorinus puts the Platonic objection in the mouth of his interlocutor: “For to beget or to be begotten is a certain change and alteration. Moreover, to beget is to give something to the one begotten: either all or part. Whoever begets something either perishes, if he gives all, or is diminished, if he gives a part. But then God remains always the same. Therefore he does not beget.” *Cand. Ad Vict.* 3. In appealing all the more forcefully to the utter simplicity of the first principle, Victorinus attempts to evade the charge of mutability: in the simplicity of eternity, begetting is not change. Marcia Colish has proposed that Victorinus evades the charge of divine mutability by appealing to Stoic categories of thought: “Rejecting the idea that activity or motion signify imperfection, a view shared by both the Platonic and Aristotelian schools, [Victorinus] draws on the Stoic conception of God as dynamic energy, associating action and motion with divine perfection and using this constellation of ideas to describe God’s self-creation and plenitude of being.” Marcia Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), p. 135.

In *Adversus Arium* IA 19-20, Victorinus gives a detailed exposé of what it means for Christ to be the “image of God” while at the same time holding to the consubstantial unity of Father and Son. The description of Christ as the “image of God” by the Apostle Paul affirms, for Victorinus, Christ’s teaching that he is from God.⁵⁷ And yet, given his Nicene context, Victorinus knows that the nature of *this* image must be different from all other images. While every other image is an expression of another, and, therefore, has a different and more fleeting substance than that which it expresses, Christ the “image of God” is consubstantial with the Father; somehow, Christ the image does have his own movement, energy, and life in union with his source.

Generally, Victorinus admits, an image is, indeed, “second and different in substance from that which is manifested.”⁵⁸ But in this case, “God is manifested.”⁵⁹ The nature of this image is such that it participates in the simplicity of God; this image cannot be of different substance from that which it manifests, because then it would not be a manifestation of the simple God. While some Neoplatonic emanation accounts of image seem ideally suited to the Homoian cause,⁶⁰ Victorinus’s insistence

⁵⁷ *Adv. Ar.* I 19.

⁵⁸ *Adv. Ar.* I 19.

⁵⁹ *Adv. Ar.* I 19.

⁶⁰ Certainly not all neo-Platonic thought equally supports Homoian interests. Peter Manchester has made a compelling argument that while the more “hierarchical scheme” of Plotinus’s “noetic triad” is conducive to a subordinationsist theology, Plotinus’s vision was by no means adopted *tout court*: “The Plotinian hypostatic series never made a plausible model for the Christian trinity even when it held the field more or less alone.” Peter Manchester, “The Noetic Triad in Plotinus, Marius Victorinus, and Augustine,” in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, ed. Rich Wallis and Jay Bregman (New York: SUNY, 1992), p. 208. Manchester suggests that as opposed to the “vertical” and “derivational” model of Plotinus, the model that had more traction for contending Christologies was that of Porphyry, which in dialectic with Gnostic Nag Hammadi literature and the Porphyryian *Chaldaean Oracles*, presents a more “horizontal” triad. Ultimately, this is the “noetic triad” that most influenced *Adversus*

on the utter simplicity of the first principle will not allow for a division between source and image.⁶¹ Victorinus writes, “But we do not conceive the image up there (*ibi*) as it is in sensible things (*sicuti in sensibilibus*). For here we do not conceive the image to be substance (*substantiam*). For it is a shadow in air or in water through a sort of corporeal light formed through the reflection of a corporeal emanation.”⁶² The fleeting, secondary and derivative nature of sensible images is the reason why the Arians misunderstand the nature of Christ, asserts Victorinus; they confuse Christ as image with the nature of all other images.

Certainly, temporal and material images are nothing on their own; they exist only as reflection of a more primary substance; they lack their own substance and movement: “[O]nly what is manifested by it is a substance; and it has neither body, nor senses, nor understanding.”⁶³ Christ the image of God is not image in this way. (*Alio igitur modo dicimus Christum imaginem dei esse.*) Rather, Christ the image of God has being from himself; the eternal image is knowing, living, and life giving.⁶⁴ Mary Clark argues that Victorinus evades the subordinationism of Platonism by becoming more Platonic rather than less Platonic. Appealing to the Platonic sensibilities of his interlocutor, Victorinus insists on the absolute simplicity of the

Arium, suggests Manchester: “There is no doubt that, following Porphyry, [Victorinus] has ‘telescoped’ the Plotinian distinction between the One and Nous.” Manchester, “Noetic Triad,” 215.

⁶¹ Robert Markus writes, “Victorinus’s originality is the result of the tension between his concern to vindicate the equality and consubstantiality of the divine hypostases, and his use of a conceptual framework with a strong tendency to subordinate the hypostases to one another.” Robert Markus, “Marius Victorinus and Augustine,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 323.

⁶² *Adv. Ar.* I 19.

⁶³ *Adv. Ar.* I 19.

⁶⁴ *Adv. Ar.* I 19: *Primum esse et per semet esse et quae sit intellegens esse et viventem dicimus imaginem et vivefacientem et semen omnium quae sunt; logos enim per quem omnia et sine isto nihil.*

First Principle. Pure *esse* does not have qualities; his qualities are his substance.

Thus, the revelation, relation, and action of God are not secondary and subordinate to him, but are who he is.⁶⁵ By appealing all the more strongly to his interlocutor's Platonic proclivities regarding the absolute simplicity of the One, Victorinus evades the subordinationism of image that his philosophical commitments would seem initially to involve.⁶⁶

Like many pro-Nicene writers, Victorinus points to the role of the *Logos* in the creation account to argue that Christ as image is not derivative and secondary but the eternal cause of all that is derivative and secondary. Everything was created through the *Logos* and is held in being by him; the *Logos* is described as “*vivefacientem [sic] et semen omnium.*”⁶⁷ Clearly, to be Creator is the role of God alone and not that of a created image. Victorinus logically concludes, “Therefore God and the *Logos* are *homoousion* (consubstantial).”⁶⁸ The unity of operations manifest in the creation account serves for Victorinus as the theological demonstration of Christ being the consubstantial image of the Father.

⁶⁵ On this score, Mary Clark rightly notes, “This doctrine of the ontological priority of being over act and of their identity results from substantializing among divine realities what is merely accidental among finite things.” Mary Clark, “The Neoplatonism of Marius Victorinus,” *Studia Patristica* 11 (1972): 16.

⁶⁶ Mark Edwards has also suggested that Victorinus evades the implications of subordinationism latent in a Platonic doctrine of image by a more rigorous engagement with Platonic principles. However, Edwards suggests that means Victorinus reworks the concept of image itself so that it no longer is imbued with a derivative and secondary sense, but understood instead as a participatory union with its source. Edwards writes, “Victorinus replies [to the charge of subordinationism] by adopting a Platonic interpretation of the word *eikōn* (‘image’), according to which it signifies not the ectype but the archetype – not mere iteration, in a new medium, of an object which, if present, would be as open to inspection as the image, but the representation of that which, but for the image, would have remained unknowable, even to itself. The image is, in short, the objectification of the subject; it is that in actuality which the subject is potentially.” Edwards, “Victorinus,” 111.

⁶⁷ *Adv. Ar.* I 19.

⁶⁸ *Adv. Ar.* I 19.

I have suggested that Victorinus's understanding of the unity of the divine substance within the diversity of the Persons is predicated upon an Aristotelian distinction between "God in potency" and "God in act" – a distinction between *esse* and *agere*. This distinction is developed within Victorinus's Christology, particularly his theology of Christ as image. This distinction, which does much of the heavy lifting in Victorinus's treatise against the Arians, is the first of its kind in theological literature. The distinction is fundamental to Victorinus's understanding of how the *Logos* is the image of God; he writes, "God is hidden, for he is in potentiality; but the *Logos* is manifest, for he is action."⁶⁹ The image cannot be separate from the source because his action is nothing other than a manifestation of the hidden God. Action and potentiality are intimately united; the *Logos* in act shares all being, life, and knowledge with the Father. Victorinus writes, "That is why action is the image of all that which is in potentiality."⁷⁰ Outside of time, the Father is the cause of the Son, giving being to the image. Nevertheless, their union remains one of perfect simplicity, so that we can speak of only one being, existing simultaneously in potency and in act.

On account of divine simplicity, Victorinus is hesitant to press the distinction between the Father as potentiality and the Son as action. He writes, "For both 'to be' and 'to act' are one and simple there."⁷¹ Since the two Persons are consubstantial, the Father shares in the *agere* of the Son and the Son in the *esse* of the Father. Potency gives birth to act, and act springs from potency; apart from each other they are unintelligible. Victorinus follows Aristotle, whom he translated, in speaking causally

⁶⁹ *Adv. Ar.* I 19: *Quoniam deus in occulto, in potentia enim; logos autem in manifesto, actio enim.*

⁷⁰ *Adv. Ar.* I 19.

⁷¹ *Adv. Ar.* I 20: *Unum enim et simplex ibi et esse et operari.*

about the relationship between Father and Son by maintaining that being precedes act. However, Victorinus is also quick to assert that in God this remains a purely logical distinction; being and act are one: *homoousioi*.⁷² Victorinus writes, “[T]here is one Father according to ‘to be,’ one Son according to ‘to act,’ each one of them simultaneously existing in the other, as has been proven. They are therefore *homoousioi*.”⁷³

It is particular to the *agere* of the image to *give form* to that which is in potentiality. Victorinus says that image *specifies* “each one of the things which are in potentiality.”⁷⁴ Everything, explains Victorinus, has its own form (*speciem*), which is the substance of a particular being. In the created order the form cannot be separated from the *esse* of a being – so too, in the eternal relations, *esse* and *agere* are inextricably one and are only logically distinguished.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, it is *agere* that *informs esse* because it is always the species that defines “to be” (*quod definitum facit*

⁷² While Victorinus adopts Aristotelian linguistic categories to distinguish between God in potency and act he is quick to dismiss the mutability and temporality associated with these terms. Marcia Colish rightly notes, “Victorinus adds that motion, in God’s case, is not to be confused with local motion on earth or with passion, corruption, growth, diminution, or other features of motion that might be attributed to natural phenomena, *more Aristotelico*. In God’s case, motion is the self-movement of being itself, which is simple, simultaneous, and one. And so, he concludes, God’s self-moving life is His very substance; it is not an accident.” Colish, *Stoic Tradition*, pp. 139-40. Thus, while action in God is like all action in that it expresses life and intelligence as a manifestation of being, the simplicity and eternity of God’s action does not involve change.

⁷³ *Adv. Ar.* I 19.

⁷⁴ *Adv. Ar.* I 19: *unicuique eorum quae in potentia sunt speciem perficiens*.

⁷⁵ “Indeed for that reason it was said that the Son is ‘form’ of the Father. But here the form is not understood as outside the substance, nor as with us, as an appearance added to substance; but this form is a certain subsisting substance in which there appears and is shown that which is hidden and veiled in another.” *Adv. Ar.* I 53.

species illud quod est esse).⁷⁶ Therefore, in Victorinus's terms, the image manifests *esse*: "[F]or this reason 'to be' is the Father, the species is the Son."⁷⁷

One analogy that Victorinus finds valuable to express the distinction of *esse* and *agere* within one divine substance is that of light. He argues that the article of the Creed, *lumen de lumine*, could just as well be rendered "light *in* light" because there is only one common term that is twice heard and understood.⁷⁸ Both Father and Son are light. Consequently, Victorinus writes, "that which is born of it, the image, is not by division nor by emanation, but by radiance; not by extension but by appearance, not so much duplicating the power as activating the power."⁷⁹ The inseparability of power and action, of *esse* and *agere*, is why the Victorinus uses the analogy of light – light from light is the same as light in light. No distinction is possible except a logical distinction deriving from causality. While power only manifests itself in action, the analogy of light underscores that it is one substance that is manifest.

Light is also a valuable analogy because it illumines, that is, it manifests what is hidden. Clearly, the analogy breaks down at some point, because what is manifest is also light (*lumen de lumine*). Regardless, Victorinus weaves "image" language in with the language of "light" to express that it is through Christ that we see and know God. It is *in* Christ, in the true image who as perfect image is the same substance (*lumen de lumine*), that the Father is known. Light is both revelatory and a continuation of the same being. The Platonic understanding of the terms *nous* and

⁷⁶ *Adv. Ar.* I 19.

⁷⁷ *Adv. Ar.* I 19: *Etenim quod est esse causa est speciei esse in eo quod est esse et ideo quod est esse pater est, quod species filius.* In the second book of *Adversus Arium* Victorinus writes, "Therefore, 'to be' we give to God, but 'form' to Christ because through the Son the Father is known, that is, through the form the 'to be' is known." *Adv. Ar.* II 4.

⁷⁸ *Adv. Ar.* II 11.

⁷⁹ *Adv. Ar.* III 1.

“*form*” expresses the light or image of the second Person of the Trinity that makes the eternal *esse* known. The divine *esse* is, of course, unknowable; it is, suggests Victorinus, “*huparktoteta* (superabundance), *ousioteta* (substantiality) *ontoteta* (existentiality).”⁸⁰ Victorinus explains that with all these terms *esse* remains “perfect in all ways, full, absolute, above all perfections. This is God, above the *Nous*, above truth, omnipotent power, and for that reason not a form.”⁸¹ Nevertheless, the revealing form is not less than the hidden *esse*. It is the nature of the illuminating image to be the *nous* and form revealing the unknowable *esse*; the image or form is “an identical substance . . . inseparably linked to the power of God the Father,”⁸² for how else, asks Victorinus, could it be an image? The Father is called “silence, repose, immobility.”⁸³ The manifestation of this silent, immutable power, then, is not a separation but a “continuation”; it does not leave “that from which it proceeds, but is progress with continuity.”⁸⁴ And so for Victorinus *esse* and *agere* are one movement, one life, one substance, all in perfect simplicity. (“For there on high there is not anything which is an accident.”⁸⁵)

Although Christ is the image of God, that is, the *agere* of the Father’s *esse*, Victorinus reminds Candidus that all this is “without reference to time”; it is, rather, a causal distinction; the Father is Father and the Son is Son only in reference to generation. Nevertheless, in respect to *esse* Father and Son are *homoousion*. The

⁸⁰ *Adv. Ar.* III 7.

⁸¹ *Adv. Ar.* III 7.

⁸² *Adv. Ar.* III 7.

⁸³ *Adv. Ar.* III 7. See Majercik’s analysis of the Gnostic *Allogenes* informing Victorinus’s description of the Father as “silence, repose, and immobility (*silentium, quies, cessatio*).” Majercik, “Existence-Life-Intellect Triad,” 483.

⁸⁴ *Adv. Ar.* III 7.

⁸⁵ *Adv. Ar.* III 8. The following sections of Book Three (sections 9-11) note the interchangeability of the terms “life,” “knowledge,” and *logos*; Scripture describes all three of the divine Persons by these names, contends Victorinus, thereby underscoring the inseparability of the divine nature.

distinction between potentiality and action is a causal distinction of generation, not a differentiation of substance. Victorinus recalls the text from the Gospel of John previously considered: “All that the Father has, the Son likewise has.” That is to say, “[T]here all is simplicity.... For the ‘to be’ itself of the two is *homoousion* (consubstantial). But because one is from the other, there is the image, and there is that which is represented.”⁸⁶ The distinction between Father and Son, between unbegotten and begotten is outside of reference to time, and its eternity secures its simplicity.

Victorinus’s Christology maintains the basic neo-Platonic understanding of an image as derived and revelatory, manifesting that of which it is an image, while not succumbing to the subordinationism that this theology would, at first blush, seem to imply. Appealing to the utter simplicity of God, Victorinus suggests that *agere* is inextricably linked to *esse* as light from light. There is a continuation of one principle, the manifestation of one movement; the Son as *agere* fully participates in the Father’s *esse*. Thus, the hidden potentiality of the Father is manifested in the action of the Son as image—all, however, within the simplicity of eternity, so that the manifestation is consubstantial with what is manifested.

The Human Person *secundum imaginem*

Christ as image is one substance with what is manifest. Is the human person also the image of God? To be image of God means, for Victorinus, to manifest the substance of God, which on account of the divine simplicity entails nothing other than *being* God; there can be no distinction of substance, between *esse* and *agere*. Temporal created images, on the other hand, are of different, reduced, and fleeting substance.

⁸⁶ *Adv. Ar.* I 19.

The Nicene definition of the *homoousion* that Victorinus is defending remains present in his exegesis of Genesis 1:26. Victorinus, therefore, quite simply asserts that the human person is not made in the image of God. Human beings are made “according to the image” and only Christ is the image of God *simpliciter*. Victorinus will bluntly say, “*homo non imago dei, sed secundum imaginem.*”⁸⁷ While being and act are one in the divine nature (the image being one of consubstantial unity) the human person is radically dissimilar to God and can only be said to be created *secundum imaginem*. He is created in the image of the image;⁸⁸ his soul is rational but it is not the *Logos*. The soul is only *logikos* because it participates in the *Logos*.⁸⁹

Victorinus devotes considerable attention to the distinction between “image” and “likeness.” The two terms are anything but a tautology: “image” bespeaks substance while “likeness” conveys a quality.⁹⁰ Christ is one substance (*imago*) with the Father, and the human person is made *according to* this image. “Likeness” expresses a quality inherent in this substance; it is a relational denomination that conveys the association of two terms.⁹¹ Thus, although there cannot be more or less

⁸⁷ *Adv. Ar.* I 20.

⁸⁸ Robert Markus notes, “The soul is primarily the image of the Logos; it is the image of the Trinity indirectly, in so far as the Logos itself mirrors the life of the whole Trinity.” Markus, “Marius Victorinus,” p. 337.

⁸⁹ *Adv. Ar.* I 20.

⁹⁰ *Adv. Ar.* I 20. Victorinus’s contrast between “image” and “likeness” follows a long tradition originating in Philo (*leg. alleg.* III 31, 96, Cohn, p. 128) passing to Clement of Alexandria (*Protrept.* 98.4, Stählin, pp. 71,24) and the Greek Fathers: Origen (*in Ioh.* II 3, Preuschen, p. 55; *in Gen. hom.* I 13, Baehrens, p. 15,8) and Athanasius (*contra gentes* 2, PG 25,8 a 1; *de incarnat.* 6, PG 24,105 d; *de incarnat.* 13, PG 24,120.) Henri de Lubac suggests that these Fathers understand “image” to bespeak a datum of nature while “likeness” implies a movement of spiritual progress. Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel* (Paris: Aubier, 1946), p. 189. Cf. Hadot, *Commentaire*, pp. 764-65.

⁹¹ *Adv. Ar.* I 20.

“image,” there can be more or less “likeness.”⁹² Indeed, Victorinus distinguishes between the initial static gift of the “image” at creation and the dynamic “likeness” that one matures towards, which is finally perfected through faith in Christ in the eschaton.⁹³ The human soul is fashioned *secundum imaginem* inasmuch as it participates by the interior man in the *Logos* and it is *secundum similitudinem* inasmuch as it is to be perfected by grace. This distinction is not peripheral to the context of Victorinus’s theological intentions in the treatise. When the Homoians describe Christ as “like the Father” (*homoiousion*), this, to Victorinus’s ears, is tantamount to blasphemy. Christ does not move towards perfection, but is the perfect image, which, he always insists, is said according to substance. The perfect *imago* cannot be more or less in likeness, which the creature *secundum imaginem* is able to be, because in God *imago* is equivalent with substance.

As we will see Augustine do in the *Soliloquia* and *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, so Victorinus here introduces the term “equality” into the discussion of image and likeness.⁹⁴ Remarking on the Apostle Paul’s Christological hymn in Philippians 2, which describes Christ as “existing equal to God,” Victorinus notes the distinction between the human person created *secundum similitudinem* and Christ who is *aequalis deo*. Just as “image,” so “equality” is predicated of the substance of God, again, on account of God’s simplicity. Since Victorinus explains *aequalitas* in Christ philosophically in the same way as *imago*, the introduction of *aequalis deo* does not

⁹² Pierre Hadot rightly suggests that for Victorinus image is said according to the order of substance while likeness is said according to the order of quality or perfection. Pierre Hadot, “L’Image de la Trinité dans l’âme chez Victorinus et chez saint Augustin,” *Studia Patristica* 6 (1962): 424.

⁹³ *Adv. Ar.* I 20. Robert Markus describes Victorinus’s understanding of *similitudinem* as “dynamic.” Markus, “‘Imago’ and ‘Similitudo’ in Augustine,” 126.

⁹⁴ *Adv. Ar.* I 21.

bring anything new to Victorinus's discussion of "image."⁹⁵ Victorinus notes simply, "[T]he substance of man is one thing, the substance of God another."⁹⁶ And so, when Philippians 2 describes Christ as being equal "in the form of God" he is referring to the Son's nature as image. The *Logos* as form or image "is always 'with God'; the *Logos* is *homoousion* (consubstantial) with God."⁹⁷

A substance cannot be more or less similar; because image is, as Victorinus repeats, synonymous with substance, neither can an image be more or less similar. The preferred term of the Homoians, *homoiousion*, is for Victorinus, as I have suggested, a logical absurdity.⁹⁸ There can be no similarity or likeness within the same substance: only with different *genera* can one speak of similarity or likeness.⁹⁹ In God there are, however, not two principles but one: "[T]he Father is the cause of all existents through the *Logos* who was 'in the principle' and consequently always was."¹⁰⁰ Quite simply, "a like God is 'another God.'"¹⁰¹ Leaning on Aristotle's distinction between substance and accidents, Victorinus understands "likeness" to bespeak a quality of a different *genus*, and so is a predicate of human nature, whereas

⁹⁵ Unlike what we will see in Augustine's thought, *æqualis deo* functions exactly as the *imago dei* in Victorinus's theology, namely, to reinforce the ontological identity of Father and Son.

⁹⁶ *Adv. Ar.* I 22.

⁹⁷ *Adv. Ar.* I 22.

⁹⁸ Mark Edwards expresses Victorinus's position well: "A sound metaphysic, [Victorinus] argues, holds similarity to be a *property* in qualities, not in the substance; hence a similarity in substances is nonsensical. Logic, moreover, prescribes that if there were two similar substances, they could not both possess the same property of universal causation, for if there is a cause of all things, it must be one." Edwards, "Marius Victorinus," 108.

⁹⁹ *Adv. Ar.* I 23. Hadot comments, "[L]'âme est à l'image du Logos parce qu'elle est rationnelle (= logique), c'est-à-dire selon sa substance; elle est à la ressemblance de Dieu et du Logos, dans l'ordre de la qualité. Donc on ne peut parler de substance semblable." Hadot, *Commentaire*, p. 764.

¹⁰⁰ *Adv. Ar.* I 23. "Consequently, that which is born of [the Father], is not by division nor by emanation, but by radiance; not by extension but by appearance, not so much duplicating the power as activating the power." *Adv. Ar.* III 2.

¹⁰¹ *Adv. Ar.* I 30.

“image” is a predicate of the divine nature.¹⁰² He writes, “But Jesus, that is, the *Logos*, is the ‘image of God,’ not the likeness. He is called ‘image of God’; for God is not image, but God as image and God as substance are not as two things: for there is one substance and one image, whence there is one God and one *Logos* and one Father, one Son and they are one.”¹⁰³ Clearly, Victorinus’s account of Christ as image assumes the doctrine of divine simplicity and proceeds from that premise of the unity of substance in discussing divine relations. The human soul is “an image of the image,”¹⁰⁴ it is created from the life of the *Logos*. Victorinus, therefore, borrows the term dear to the Homoians and describes the human soul as *homoiousios* (similar) to God in whose image and likeness it is fashioned (whereas only Christ is *homoousios* with the Father).¹⁰⁵

The human soul is located at a midway point between the intelligible world and the world of matter (*hule*).¹⁰⁶ It is created as an image of the eternal image, participating

¹⁰² “Likeness” for Aristotle exists in similitude of qualities and therefore necessitates different substance: “[T]he fact that likeness and unlikeness can be predicated with reference to quality only, gives to that category its distinctive feature. One thing is like another only with reference to that in virtue of which it is such and such; thus this forms the peculiar mark of quality.” *Categ.* 11a17. Trans. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928). Victorinus seems to refer to this understanding of “likeness” as expressive of quality when he writes, “It was already stated that ‘similar in substance’ is neither said nor is it the case with substance; but, above all, if it is a case of resemblance in one same substance, the substance is called the same, not similar. For things are similar according to qualities (*Simile enim iuxta qualitates*) ... by their qualities, they are similar or dissimilar (*qualitatibus autem simile aut dissimile*).” *Adv. Ar.* I 41.

¹⁰³ *Adv. Ar.* I 30.

¹⁰⁴ *Adv. Ar.* I 61.

¹⁰⁵ *Adv. Ar.* III 12. God and the *Logos*, writes Victorinus, “are, therefore, *homoousia* (consubstantial). The soul, in fact, is *homoiousios* (similar).”

¹⁰⁶ *Adv. Ar.* I 61. Here Victorinus’s thinking is proximate to Plotinus: “[Soul] is of the boundary order, situated between two regions, and has a tendency to both.” *Enn.* IV, 4, 3. Mary Clark explains that for Victorinus “the soul realizes that it is part of an order of being inferior to that of the intelligibles or the truly existents: the soul exists but is not fully self-identical being.” Mary Clark, Mary Clark, “The psychology of Marius Victorinus,” *Augustinian Studies* 5 (1974): 152.

in the *Logos* and in *nous*, but when it inclines to the mortal it turns away from the life in which it has being. Here Victorinus's psychology is proximate to that of Plotinus. Plotinus's cosmogony finds its origin in the movement of eternal Soul outside of itself. As such Soul has two phases: the contemplative and the active. Inasmuch as it is contemplative, Soul retains the link to Intelligence (the second hypostasis) and thereby to the One. However, in action Soul generates a multitude of images (matter). Thus, Soul has two distinct elements: the contemplative, "higher part" of Soul, which retains unity with Intelligence, and the active "lower part" of Soul, which is the life source in all material existence. In contact with matter and in the drama of bodily existence, the "lower part" of Soul can forget its union with Intelligence and the One. The task of the "return" is the charge laid on the "lower part" of Soul. The human soul, in Plotinus's thought, mirrors eternal Soul. It too is composed of a "higher" and "lower" part. It too is deceived by material images when it forgets its divine origins. The injunction to "return" through contemplation to the higher region from whence the soul has its origin animates Plotinus's entire psychology. Victorinus's account of the two-fold soul – heavenly and material – is intelligible in light of Plotinus's psychology. Victorinus writes, "It is not *Nous*, but when it looks toward the *Nous*, it is as if it were *Nous*. For there, vision is union."¹⁰⁷ It is the nature of the soul as *secundum imaginem* to move, by retaining the vision of the *Logos*, back to that of which it is an image by participation. Victorinus underscores the tenuous nature of participatory existence for a created image. When the soul turns away from this

¹⁰⁷ *Adv. Ar.* I 61. Similarly, Victorinus writes, "Indeed, the soul has been made according to the image of the image of God: 'Let us make man according to our image and likeness.' Therefore the soul is inferior; in addition, it originated or was created by God and the *Logos*, [the soul is] never God himself or the *Logos*, but a certain *logos*, not the *Logos* who is Son, not the general and universal seed, origin, source of all." *Adv. Ar.* III 12.

vision, in which is its union, it becomes like that which it desires – temporal and intellectual; it descends towards the material.

The participatory ontology that undergirds Victorinus's understanding of the human soul suggests the influence of Plotinus's anthropology. The human person is comprised of a body made out of the four elements (symbolized by the dust of the earth) and a two-fold soul, heavenly and material. The material soul is shared with all living creatures that have the breath of life. The heavenly soul, which is rational, is reserved for the human person, since God breathed his own life into the face of Adam. Victorinus sees these two souls or *logoi* in the human person suggested in the Gospel passage that describes the two women grinding at the mill (Matthew 24).¹⁰⁸

Victorinus equates the Apostle Paul's "inner man" with the immaterial or divine soul and contrasts it with the material soul – the "outer man."

Some commentators have suggested that Victorinus's Platonic influences entail a thoroughgoing dualism – even more so than in Plotinus – and that Victorinus's understanding of matter and embodied existence is *de facto* Gnostic. Marcia Colish, for example, states emphatically:

The body is not redeemed, in any way; it is, rather, to be cast aside. And, far less than Plotinus, does he [Victorinus] argue that material things can be treated as rungs on a ladder of ascent to the deity, or as adumbrations of the splendor of the deity, which yield a partial but helpful knowledge of Him that is to be used even as it is transcended.... By flesh he means,

¹⁰⁸ *Adv. Ar.* I 62.

literally, the material body, which alone is the source of the human dilemma.¹⁰⁹

This reading of Victorinus, to my mind, fails to take into account his commitments as a biblical theologian. *Adversus Arium* I 62-64 is an attempt to wrestle with the embodied nature of the human person presented in Genesis 1:26.

Victorinus is inquiring how Scripture can describe the human person as *secundum imaginem* (which is immaterial) while “God ‘took dust and formed Adam’ [Genesis 2:7].”¹¹⁰ How does the Bible relate the immaterial soul and the material body vivified by the material soul? Scripture distinguishes between the creation of the soul as image of God in Genesis 1:26 and the creation of the human body in Genesis 2:7, and the Apostle Paul likewise distinguishes between the heavenly man and the earthly man.¹¹¹ For this reason, Victorinus suggests that the human person is comprised of two souls (*logoi*), the heavenly and the material. On the one hand, it is the heavenly soul that is in the image of the “triad on high”; the consubstantial unity

¹⁰⁹ Marcia Colish, “The Neoplatonic Tradition: The Contribution of Marius Victorinus,” in *The Fathers and Beyond*, Marcia Colish, ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 63. This supposed denigration of the body (the material soul) further entails that Victorinus maintains that only faith is salvific, because it is by nature spiritual and, as an immaterial aspect of the human soul, inclines upwards; works, on the other hand, are grounded in the material – the very locus of the human problematic – and pull the soul down. A discussion of the soteriological implications of Victorinus’s alleged dualisms is presented by Werner Erdt, *Marius Victorinus Afer. Der erste lateinische Pauluskommentar* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1980), pp. 60-78. Colish is certainly not unique in criticizing Victorinus for dualism. Mark Edwards maintains that Victorinus “holds not merely that the body is less essential to our humanity than the soul, but that it is radically depraved.” Edwards, “Marius Victorinus,” 116. See also, Arjo Vanderjagt, “Mysterium magnum: Marius Victorinus on Man’s Corporeal Relationship with God,” *Studia Patristica* 28 (1993): 130-34.

¹¹⁰ *Adv. Ar.* I 62.

¹¹¹ The distinction between the creation of the soul in Genesis 1:26 and the creation of the body in Genesis 2:7 is prominent especially in the Eastern tradition and goes back, ultimately, to Philo. It finds later expression in Numenius, Clement, and Origen. Cf. Clark, “Psychology of Marius Victorinus,” 163.

of *esse*, *vivere*, and *intellegere* in the heavenly soul images the simple unity of the eternal Trinity. It is for this reason that God says, “Let *us* make man to *our* image.” On the other hand, it is the material soul that is suggested in Genesis 2:7 when God takes dust and forms Adam. It is important for Victorinus, however, that the distinction between the two-fold soul is not absolute: indeed, he insists on the integral unity of the heavenly and the material souls. It is the material soul that is perfected by the *Logos* to become united with the heavenly soul. Salvation is the perfection of the one composite: “But the divine soul (*divina anima*) is itself in the material mind (*hylico spiritu*), the material mind (*hylicus autem spiritus*) in the material soul (*hylica anima*), the material soul (*hylica autem anima*) in the carnal body (*carnali corpore*) which, with all three, must be purified to receive the eternal light and eternal life.”¹¹² Salvation is an embodied experience and the body too is taken up in the purification of the soul.¹¹³ Indeed, body and flesh, too, must rise, reminds Victorinus; however, they shall rise as “spiritual flesh,” as Christ did when he ascended to heaven.¹¹⁴ Thus, when Scripture speaks of the human person created “according to the image” it refers to this resurrected, “higher flesh of the *Logos*.”¹¹⁵ The material soul by which the human person is rational and the divine soul through which he inclines to God are thoroughly integrated and will be perfectly ordered within the resurrected body. How

¹¹² *Adv. Ar.* I 62. For a discussion of Victorinus’s understanding of the human composite, see Marcia Colish, “The Neoplatonic Tradition: The Contribution of Marius Victorinus,” in *The Neoplatonic Tradition. Jewish, Christian and Islamic Themes*, A.J. Vanderjagt and D. Pätzold, eds. (Cologne: Dinter, 1991), pp. 55-72. See also Arjo Vanderjagt, “Mysterium magnum: Marius Victorinus on Man’s Corporeal Relationship with God,” *Studia Patristica* 28 (1993): 130-4.

¹¹³ *Adv. Ar.* I 62. Nevertheless, the human person remains a composite and, as such, his entire person – body and two-fold soul – needs the sanctification that comes through faith in Christ (*hoc autem perficit fides in Christo*).

¹¹⁴ *Adv. Ar.* I 64. Arjo Vanderjagt rightly comments, “Man is saved as a composite creature of matter and spirit.” Vanderjagt, “Mysterium magnum,” p. 133.

¹¹⁵ *Adv. Ar.* I 64.

this integration is to be understood remains a “great mystery (*magnum mysterium*),”¹¹⁶ admits Victorinus.

The movement of life flowing from the eternal *Logos* outside of himself into creation and the Incarnation safeguards Victorinus from the charge of dualism. Indeed, Victorinus distinguishes between the *Logos*-Christ who is eternally generated from the Father and the Carnal Christ who comes in the flesh. It is perhaps Victorinus’s Christology that provides the ultimate defense against the charge of dualism. Victorinus sees in the two souls of the human person (the heavenly and the material soul) an image of the two natures of Christ. The creation in Genesis 1:26 of the heavenly soul is a mirror of that triad on high – *esse, vivere, and intellegere* – and, therefore, is an image of the *Logos*-Christ. Genesis 2:7 refers to the creation of the material soul, which, in turn, is an image of the Carnal Christ.¹¹⁷ The earthly man (or material soul) is created by God and taken on and redeemed by Christ in the Incarnation. As a biblical theologian, Victorinus is committed to the reality of the Incarnation, and therefore maintains, that the distinction between the heavenly and the

¹¹⁶ *Adv. Ar.* I 64.

¹¹⁷ *Adv. Ar.* I 64. That God fashioned the human person as male and female does not mitigate against the immaterial “higher flesh of the *Logos*,” in which is found the heavenly image. Rather, the two sexes signify bodily the androgynous state of the *Logos*, who in his exterior movement is both male and female “since he was for himself his own Son, in the first and the second birth, spiritually and carnally.” *Adv. Ar.* I 64. The incarnation reveals something of both genders, because the Incarnation is an affirmation of the bodily creation and of the material soul taught in Genesis 2:7. The Incarnation, for Victorinus, manifests something both masculine and feminine. The birthing reveals something feminine, while it remains the masculine Father who sends the Son and the masculine Spirit by whom he is conceived. God did not just create the heavenly soul as image of the image; “he also says this: ‘He made him male-female,’ ... it is evident that also according to the body and the flesh, extremely mystically, he made him according to the image of God, the *Logos* being himself both male and female.” *Adv. Ar.* I 64. Similar statements are found in Origen (*De principiis* I 7.1) and Gregory of Nyssa (*De opificio hominis* 16).

earthly soul is not absolute. With evangelical fervor (and without a trace of dualism) Victorinus writes,

In the flesh itself, therefore, life is present, that is, the *Logos* of life; it follows that Christ is present, whereas the ‘*Logos* has been made flesh.’ It is not astonishing then that the *Logos* has taken flesh mysteriously to come to the aid of the flesh and of man. But when he took on flesh, he took the universal *logos* of flesh (*universalem λόγον carnis sumpsit*). Now for that reason he had triumphed, in the flesh (*in carne triumphavit*), over the powers of all flesh, and for that reason he has come to the aid of all flesh, as was said in Isaiah: ‘All flesh will see you as the salvation of God.’ And in the book of Psalms: ‘All flesh will come to you.’ Likewise he also took the universal *logos* of the soul (*universalem λόγον animae*). For it is clear that he had a soul, since the Savior said: ‘My soul is sorrowful even unto death.’ Therefore the whole man has been taken (*adsumptus*), both taken and liberated. For in him were all universals, universal flesh, universal soul (*universalis caro, anima universalis*); and these universals have been raised upon the cross and purified by the Savior God, the *Logos*, the universal of all universals.¹¹⁸

Victorinus unapologetically insists that salvation is achieved in the flesh and life is given in the flesh. This incarnational motif is sustained in his writings but has mostly evaded scholarly attention. Because of the Incarnation, Christ is no longer simply the source of the heavenly image in the human person, but has also joined himself to the

¹¹⁸ *Adv. Ar.* III 3.

earthly image.¹¹⁹ The “universal logos” is, through the Incarnation, the archetype of both souls – the material and the heavenly. Pierre Hadot has rightly noted that for Victorinus Christ assumes not just a particular soul and a particular body, but in the Incarnation, assumes *all* bodies and souls.¹²⁰ Victorinus is able to situate a thoroughgoing incarnational theology within a neo-Platonic context.¹²¹

How then is the human soul an image of the image of God? The substance of the soul, suggests Victorinus, is the *form* of the human person. In this way it mirrors the *forma dei*. In the divine substance, the eternal form expresses the *esse* of the Father. Victorinus writes, “But since this form is substance which is that image and *Logos* that we call the Son of God, insofar as it is the *Logos*, is the *Logos* of all existents.”¹²² So too, the human soul as form expresses the nature of the person. On account of the divine simplicity, the eternal image as *forma* and *vivere* remains itself impassible even in its movement outside of itself in expression of the divine *esse*. In the Incarnation, insists Victorinus, the Son retains his impassible divine nature:

“[T]here is no suffering of the *Logos*, that is, of the Son. Therefore, according to the

¹¹⁹ Likewise, in one of his hymns Victorinus writes,

Have mercy Lord! Have mercy Christ!
Thou art the *Logos* of my spirit!
Thou art the *Logos* of my soul!
Thou art the *Logos* of my flesh!

(Second Hymn, 2)

¹²⁰ Hadot, *Commentaire*, p. 937-38. Discussion of Christ assuming “universal flesh” is not unique to Victorinus. It is suggested perhaps most pointedly in Irenaeus’s doctrine of recapitulation, and it also sustains Athanasius’s theology of the Incarnation. In the West prior to Victorinus, Hilary writes, “*Naturam in se universae carnis adsupsit per quam effectus vera vitis, genus in se universae propaginis tenet.*” (*Psal.* 51.16; PL 9,317 c). Likewise, in his *De Trinitate*, Hilary repeats twice: “*Assumptione carnis unius interna universae carnis incolet.*” *Trin.* II 24; PL 10,66 a-b and *Trin.* II 25; PL 10,67 a. Finally, in the commentary on Matthew, Hilary writes, “*Erat in Christo Iesu homo totus, atque ideo in famulatum spiritus corpus adsumptum, omne in se sacramentum nostrae salutis explevit.*” *Mat.* II 5; PL 9,927 a.

¹²¹ Plotinus famously writes, “Soul, then, is one and many, one in its nature, many in those other things.” *Enn.* VI, 2, 6.

¹²² *Adv. Ar.* I 22.

flesh the Savior has suffered, but according to the Spirit which he was before he was in the flesh, he is without suffering.”¹²³ The human soul also bears this distinction between the impassible *logos* and the passible flesh because, as image of the *Logos*, it too has a heavenly and material soul. The soul as a participant in the *Logos* (as *logikos*) is both impassible and passible. The *esse* of the interior man, the heavenly man, is a united movement of *vivere* and *intellegere*. Suffering, passions, and passibility occur when the movements of *vivere* and *intellegere* come in contact with an external object to vivify and know.¹²⁴ Thus, as the *Logos* is only passible in his flesh, so too the soul is only passible in its contact with the flesh. The soul, in its inner impassibility and exterior passibility, is an image of the interior and exterior movements of the *Logos*.¹²⁵

Through the breath received from God, the human person comes to share in the *nous* and *Logos* of God; the created image is fashioned according to the eternal image. However, because the eternal image is never alone, but on account of his consubstantial nature perfectly manifests the Father, the created image also somehow participates in this consubstantial unity. The soul is an image of the image; it is therefore an image of the entire Trinity; the created image is also *esse*, *vivere*, and *intellegere*.¹²⁶ Victorinus writes, “[T]o live’ is the *Logos*, and if life itself is ‘to be,’ and ‘to be’ is the Father, if again, life itself is ‘to understand,’ and this is the Holy Spirit, all these are three, in each one are the three, and the three are one and

¹²³ *Adv. Ar.* I 44.

¹²⁴ *Adv. Ar.* I 45-46. This is in imitation of Plotinus’s eternal Soul that becomes passible in its “lower part” by contact with matter. Cf. Mary Clark, “Psychology of Marius Victorinus,” p. 159.

¹²⁵ Here too Victorinus is proximate to Plotinus. Cf. *Enn* I, 1, 2.

¹²⁶ *Adv. Ar.* I 63.

absolutely *homoousia* (consubstantial).¹²⁷ The soul participates in the *esse, vivere,* and *intelligere* that the eternal image has because of its simplicity. The soul, says Victorinus, is, therefore, “the image of the image of the Triad on High.”¹²⁸ *Esse, vivere,* and *intelligere* inhere in the soul as in one movement; like the eternal Trinity, this “unique second Trinity” always exists consubstantially.¹²⁹ Victorinus writes, “The soul is therefore also *homoousion* (consubstantial) in its unity, and it is of similar substance in its triple power; it therefore begets itself, moves itself, is always in movement, as source and principle of movement in the world.”¹³⁰ Victorinus’s understanding of the soul as image is sustained by a participatory understanding of the nature of an image. He writes, “But everything which is from the divine reality is related to them not as part of them but as an image.”¹³¹ The created image has everything from the uncreated image, even a share in the consubstantial union that the eternal image enjoys.

¹²⁷ *Adv. Ar.* I 63.

¹²⁸ *Adv. Ar.* I 63. For a discussion of this triad in the human soul as an image of the Trinity on high see David Bell, “Esse, Vivere, Intelligere: The Noetic Triad and the Image of God,” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 52 (1985): 6-43. Victorinus elsewhere suggests that not just the human soul, but all things share an “appropriate ‘to be,’ ‘to live,’ ‘to understand,’ ‘to feel,’ so that these are the shadow or the image of [the] three highest of all.” (*Est enim in omnibus esse suum, vivere suum, intelligere suum suum que sentire, ut sint ista umbra vel imago trium omnium superiorum.*) *Adv. Ar.* IV 22.

¹²⁹ *Adv. Ar.* I 64. How is the unity of the triad *esse, vivere,* and *intelligere* to be understood? Victorinus suggests the example of vision. The power of sight is the *esse* of vision; the act of seeing is *vivere*, and finally the comprehension of vision can be understood as *intelligere*. However, this distinction remains a purely logical one; in reality they are simple: “[B]y their very ‘to be’ vision, seeing, and discernment are only one.” All three are present to each other as one, “all are in each one, or each one is all or all are one.” *Adv. Ar.* III 5. This simple unity is likewise present in the divine Trinity: “This will then make it clear enough that ‘to be’ which is the Father, that life, which is the Son, that knowledge which is the Holy Spirit, are one sole substance, while being three subsistences.” (*Hoc igitur satis clarum faciet, esse quod pater est et vitam quod est filius et cognoscentiam quod est spiritus sanctus, unum esse et unam esse substantiam, subsistentias tres.*) *Adv. Ar.* III.9.

¹³⁰ *Adv. Ar.* I 63.

¹³¹ *Adv. Ar.* III 1.

As image of the image, the soul exists in participation with the consubstantial Trinity. In an effort to demonstrate that the term *homoousion* is scriptural even though it is not explicitly found in Scripture, Victorinus notes the petition of the *Our Father*: “*Dos hemin epiousion arton* (Give us our supersubstantial bread) [Matthew 6:11].”¹³² What, asks Victorinus, is this supersubstantial bread? This is the bread of life, he explains, that came down from heaven (John 6: 51); it is “bread from the same substance, that is, consubstantial life coming from the life of God. For whence would we be sons of God except by participation of eternal life (*nisi participatio vitae aeternae*)?”¹³³ The *epiousion arton* is bread from the substance of God.¹³⁴ Not only does this demonstrate that Scripture does, in fact, speak of “substance” in relation to God, but also, maintains Victorinus, it suggests that the human person can participate in this divine substance. It is this participation in the divine substance that Victorinus understands the Epistle of Titus to refer to. In this letter Paul describes those who are redeemed as a people close to God’s substance (*laos periousios*).¹³⁵ It is the substance of life that “Christ both has and gives (*habet et dat*)” that human beings can participate in.¹³⁶

¹³² *Adv. Ar.* II 8.

¹³³ *Adv. Ar.* II 8.

¹³⁴ The Greek *epiousion* is rendered *cotidianum* (daily) by the Latins, explains Victorinus, perhaps “because they could not render it in their own langue.” *Adv. Ar.* II.8.

¹³⁵ *Adv. Ar.* II 8. “[T]hat he might redeem us from all iniquity and might cleanse to himself a people around his substance (*periousion*), a pursuer of good works” (Titus 2:14).

¹³⁶ It is likely that Victorinus is here quoting a Eucharistic prayer offered in the presence of the consecrated elements, which borrows from Titus 2:14: “Thus the payer of oblation, understood in that way, is addressed to God: *soson periousion laon zeloten kalon ergon* (save a people around your substance, a pursuer of good works).” *Adv. Ar.* II.8. Cf. Klaus Gamber, “Ein kleines Fragment aus der Liturgie des 4. Jahrhunderts,” *Revue Bénédictine* 77 (1967): 148-55.

Victorinus's theology of image, I have suggested, is in many ways a neo-Platonic and Aristotelian commentary on scriptural texts that consider the relation of Father and Son. It could accurately be said that Victorinus is attempting to present a philosophically rigorous biblical theology of the *homoousion*. In this context the broad and often nebulous concept of "participation" plays a pivotal role in his thought. The Son as *agere* "participates" in the *esse* of the Father; the image "participates" in its source. This participation is, of course, not the participation of diverse substances, but expresses one sole movement, one being. The human person as image also participates in God. As image of the image he reflects the triad of *esse*, *vivere*, and *intelligere* on high. The Eucharistic connotations of the petition in the Lord's Prayer suggest, for Victorinus, a participation in the divine substance.¹³⁷ Likewise, those united and sanctified in the Eucharistic sacrifice are a people who participate in the divine substance (*laos periousios*).

The participation of the created image is of a different order than that of the eternal image, as the divine *vivere* is different from the created *vivere*.¹³⁸ What then is the "participatory relation" that links these two orders of *vivere*? Victorinus appeals to what "Plato calls these 'ideas' (*Has Plato ideas vocat*)."¹³⁹ The *Logos* is both the life of all (*vivere*) and contains the purest forms of all being (*specierum species principales*).¹⁴⁰ Victorinus explains, "Therefore the genera of all genera are poured

¹³⁷ *Adv. Ar. II 8: Unde enim filii dei erimus, nisi participatio vitae aeternae, quam nobis Christus a patre adferens dedit?*

¹³⁸ *Adv. Ar. IV 5: "But this 'to live' of God is the 'to live' from which all those things, according to their mode of existence, receive life and live, he somehow advancing and breathing on them in the measure that they are capable of receiving the power of his living strength."*

¹³⁹ *Adv. Ar. IV 5.*

¹⁴⁰ *Adv. Ar. IV 5.*

forth abundantly by God.”¹⁴¹ The Platonic understanding of participation in universal substances is given Christian, indeed Christological, expression by Victorinus.

Everything has being and life inasmuch as it exists in the eternal image. This is the meaning of the prologue of John: “That which has been made in him is life.”¹⁴² All things have life in him because the Son is the image and form of God, the image and form of primordial *vivere*.¹⁴³ Christ is “universal life,” who does not have *vivere* from another, but participates by nature in the very *esse* and *vivere* of God “by the gift of the Father.”¹⁴⁴ All temporal, created, contingent being is life in Christ.¹⁴⁵ Victorinus writes, “[T]here is a force, a power by which all things are vivified, by which, as from a source of life, they are raised into vital spirits so that they are living, they have ‘to be’ by participation (*esse sortita sint*).”¹⁴⁶ The understanding of Christ as *imago dei* is critical to Victorinus’s theology of participation. The image or form of life is impressed on the creature according to his capacity to receive it.¹⁴⁷

Victorinus understands the human soul in the context of image theology. The human person is not the *imago dei* – a term reserved for Christ, who shares the substance of God – rather, the human person is created *secundum similitudinem*, that

¹⁴¹ *Adv. Ar.* IV 5.

¹⁴² *Adv. Ar.* IV 6.

¹⁴³ *Adv. Ar.* IV 8.

¹⁴⁴ *Adv. Ar.* IV 11.

¹⁴⁵ Victorinus suggests an analogy between the tenuous nature of participated being existing as image and the fleeting nature of time. Heraclitus famously stated that one cannot step into the same river twice. The present is the only time we have, explains Victorinus, but it is never in our grasp: “[T]ime, is said to be the image *tou aionos* (of the aeon), that is, of eternity.” *Adv. Ar.* IV 15. Created being and time are fleeting and effervescent but find their intelligibility as participating in eternity. Cf. Lenka Karfiková, “Time according to Marius Victorinus, *Adversus Arium* IV 15,” *Studia Patristica* 46 (2010): 119-123.

¹⁴⁶ *Adv. Ar.* IV 11: [*U*]tique confitendum est esse vim quandam vel potentiam qua cuncta vivefiant et, quasi vivendi fonte, in vitales spiritus erigantur ut, ex hoc, et vivant, et quia vivunt, esse sortita sint.

¹⁴⁷ *Adv. Ar.* IV 12: “[He] gives ‘to be’ to all others, dispensing, according to the proper force and power of those who receive it, the power and substance of ‘to live.’”

is to say, he progresses towards God in imitation. Victorinus's understanding of the human person as image remains fundamentally Christological. The soul is an image of the eternal image existing in participation with this image, sharing its divine substance. The two-fold soul with which the human person is endowed mirrors the two natures of Christ. The material soul corresponds to the Carnal Christ revealed in the Incarnation. As such, it is passible, because it comes in contact with that which is passible. The heavenly soul corresponds to the *Logos* Christ and is impassible.

Genesis 1:26 refers to the heavenly soul that, because it is an image of Christ, is also an image of the consubstantial unity of the triad on high: *esse, vivere, and intellegere*.

Genesis 2:7 refers to the created material soul that Christ assumed. The two souls of the human person and of Christ are allegorically suggested in the Gospel accounts of the two men working in the field and the two women grinding at the mill (Matt. 24.39-41; Luke 17.34-3).

¹⁴⁸ Although the two souls are distinct, there is an underlying unity in the human composite, because Christ assumed a unity of two natures. Victorinus insists that the body too is adopted by Christ and redeemed inasmuch as it participates in his universal substance.

The Aristotelian and Neoplatonic background that informs Victorinus's theology distinguishes sharply between image and substance. The fleeting temporal nature of an image is, therefore, by definition unsubstantial. Victorinus insists that Christ is the *imago dei* in a completely different manner. I have argued that Victorinus's theological commitment to divine simplicity allows him to evade the subordinationism that image theology seems *prima facie* to involve on account of his philosophical background. The result that this seems to entail is a strict opposition

¹⁴⁸ *Adv. Ar. I 62: Ergo qui in argo, λόγοι duo sunt vel νόες, λόγος caelestis et alius hylicus, et molentes, duae animae, caelestis et hylica.*

between Christ who is the image of God and the human person who is not the image of God but created *secundum imaginem*. Ultimately, I am arguing, Augustine will advance beyond this stark opposition and will instead posit a continuity of image theology as it refers to Christ and to the human person. Nevertheless, the breadth of Victorinus's Christology entails that even for him the human person is not ultimately excluded from the *imago dei*: inasmuch as he participates in the universal substance of the *Logos*, his soul shares in the divine consubstantial triad of *esse*, *vivere*, and *intellegere*.

The common pro-Nicene difficulty of affirming the *imago dei* of the human person when that is most immediately a Christological term is clearly evident also in Victorinus. However, the sustained emphasis on participation in Victorinus's theology of the image of God anticipates what is essential to Augustine's early thought. Like Augustine, Victorinus leans on a neo-Platonic philosophy of participation to link Christ and the human person as *imago dei*.

Chapter III: Ambrose of Milan

What most struck Augustine about Ambrose's (337-397) preaching was his theology of the *imago dei*. Augustine recounts in *Confessions* VI that it was Ambrose's theology of the image of God in the human person that brought him to the Catholic faith.¹ Augustine credits Ambrose with dissuading him from a crude Manichean materialist understanding of the image and leading him to consider the possibility of spiritual substances. That the human person is created in the image and likeness of God with respect to his immaterial soul is something Augustine heard frequently reiterated in the preaching of Ambrose. Indeed, it is especially in his preaching to catechumens and his sermons on the days of creation that Ambrose delved deeply into the implications of a theology of the *imago dei*. This chapter will argue that Ambrose's theology of the human person as *imago dei* is predicated on his Christology. Most fundamentally, for Ambrose, Christ is the image of God. The human person is image by way of a dynamic movement of imitation towards its source; this movement is realized in the transvaluing of desires from the temporal to the eternal.

What, in Ambrose's theology, is the *imago dei*? Christ is the image of God and the human person is the image of God inasmuch as he imitates Christ. Ambrose's theology of the image of God operates similarly to that of Hilary and Victorinus: the

¹ The "knotty problems and clever calumnies" regarding the creation of the human person in the image and likeness of God raised by the Manichaeans dissolved when Augustine heard Ambrose preaching: "I also learnt that your sons, whom you have regenerated by grace through their mother the Catholic Church, understood the text concerning man being made by you in your image (Gen. 1:26) not to mean that they believed and thought you to be bounded by the form of a human body.... I had been barking for years not against the Catholic faith but against mental figments of physical images." *Conf.* VI.3.4.

imago dei is principally a Christological denominator that affirms the unity of the divine substance. As image of God, Christ shares the nature of the Father; the Son as image is also immaterial, invisible, and eternal. As for Hilary and Victorinus, so for Ambrose, Colossians 1:15 serves as the standard proof text to articulate his pro-Nicene image theology.

In the previous two chapters, I suggested that Hilary and Victorinus interpret *imago dei* as a Christological term. Both Latin theologians are intent to draw the human person into this Christological denominator. Hilary, I noted, considers the human person to be created *ad imaginem dei*; that is, Hilary regards him as fashioned after the “common image” of the Holy Trinity. Victorinus notes that the Logos has two natures, passible and impassible. The human person is created *secundum imaginem* because he is the image of the Logos, imaging the eternal image according to the interior and exterior man.

Ambrose is less reluctant than either Hilary or Victorinus to use the term *imago dei* to refer to the human person. Instead, Ambrose distinguishes between Christ who has the image by nature and the human person who has the image by imitation. In this third chapter, I offer one last example of the recurring Latin pro-Nicene difficulty in giving anthropological expression to the *imago dei* when as a result of the Nicene crisis this title was endowed with unique Christological resonances. Nevertheless, Ambrose is more willing to affirm the *imago dei* of the human person, and this situates his thought closer than either Hilary or Victorinus to Augustine’s early theology.

This chapter will proceed in three steps. First, I will suggest that like Hilary and Victorinus, Ambrose sees the *imago dei* principally as a Christological referent, and as such as a spiritual reality – immaterial, invisible and eternal. Second, I will

argue that despite regarding the *imago dei* as a spiritual reality, Ambrose has a profound appreciation for the unity of body and soul. I will suggest that at the base of his anthropology there is an insistence on the nature of the human person as a composite; aware of the post-lapsarian disorder in the body-soul relation, Ambrose hedges his optimism surrounding the composite nature of body and soul with a Pauline and Plotinian injunction to flee the body. Third, I will demonstrate that Ambrose reworks a Stoic philosophy of *apatheia*; however, he does not counsel detachment *simpliciter*, but urges a transvaluation of desires from the temporal and material to the eternal and immaterial. His understanding of the soul as image of God entails that this transvaluation of desire is, in fact, consonant with the Stoic aphorism *sequi naturam*.

The *Imago Dei* as a Spiritual Reality

Image theology, for Ambrose, is in the first place Christology. Even in the last book of the *Hexameron*, in which Ambrose discusses the creation of the human person, the discussion is framed around the divine discourse of the Holy Trinity. The Father says to the Son, “Let us make mankind ... in our image and likeness.”² What does “our image and likeness” refer to? It cannot be anything material. God is not flesh, but spirit; spirit has no commonality with flesh. Ambrose makes the opposition clear: “[T]he spirit is in the “incorporeal and invisible.”³ Clearly, then, the image too is incorporeal and invisible. What, then, does it mean for the Father to say to the Son, “Let us make mankind ... in our image and likeness”? Ambrose answers, “Listen to the Apostle who tells us who is the image of God: ‘Who has rescued us from the

² *Hex.* VI.7.40 (CSEL 32.1 231).

³ *Hex.* VI.7.40 (CSEL 32.1 231).

power of darkness ... who is the image of the invisible God and the first-born of every creature.”⁴ It is almost reflexive for Ambrose to turn to Colossians 1:15 in explaining the character of “our image and likeness.” Like other pro-Nicenes, Ambrose insists that the image is, like its source, eternal and invisible. The image referred to in “our image and likeness” is one with the Father, “possessing the likeness of the Father so as to have a unity of divinity and of plenitude.”⁵ The verb *faciamus* and the pronoun *noster* indicate to Ambrose a unity of operation that manifests a unity of substance.⁶

To understand what it means for the human person to be created in the image of God, Ambrose first directs his listeners to the eternal image of God. Genesis 1:26 is to be read in light of Colossians 1:15, and so the created image too must be incorporeal and invisible. Thus, Ambrose’s insistence that the proper locus of the *imago dei* is the soul rather than the body is not primarily predicated on an undue adherence to Platonic dualism,⁷ but issues from his Nicene theological vision that the *imago dei* is primarily a Christological referent. It is because the eternal image is incorporeal and invisible that the created image must also be incorporeal and invisible.⁸

It is, therefore, important to situate Ambrose’s theology of the *imago dei* within the Christological discussion of image issuing from the Nicene debates. Ambrose’s understanding of Christ as image of God stands squarely in the pro-Nicene tradition considered in chapters one and two. Marius Victorinus and Hilary of

⁴ *Hex.* VI.7.41 (CSEL 32.1 232).

⁵ *Hex.* VI.7.41 (CSEL 32.1 233).

⁶ *Hex.* VI.7.41 (CSEL 32.1 233).

⁷ Even the construal of neo-Platonic literature popular in Ambrose’s time as “dualistic” is problematic, as Margaret Miles has persuasively demonstrated in her book, *Plotinus on Body and Beauty* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

⁸ In *De paradiso* I.5 Ambrose writes, “Take note that He placed man [in the garden] not in respect to the image of God, but in respect to the body of man. The incorporeal does not exist in a place.”

Poitiers, building on the theology of the anti-Monarchians, insisted that the image of the invisible God fully shares the properties and nature of the invisible God; the image, too, is invisible and eternal: “If you are seeking after the splendor of God,” writes Ambrose, “the Son is the image of the invisible God. As God is, so is the image. God is invisible; then the image also is invisible. It is ‘the brightness of the glory of His Father and an image of His substance.’”⁹ Like Victorinus and Hilary, Ambrose maintains that the unity of the divine substance attested to in Colossians 1:15 is manifest in the creation narrative; for this reason the following verse (1:16) considers the role of the eternal image in creation (“Through Him all things were created...”).¹⁰ Ambrose, like other pro-Nicenes, interprets Colossians 1:16 as an affirmation of the unity of operations between Father and Son, confirming the unity of substance that he sees in the Apostle Paul’s use of image language in Colossians 1:15.

In the first doctrinal treatise of his episcopacy, *De fide* 1-2, presented at Emperor Gratian’s request,¹¹ Ambrose defends the *homoousion* with the same

⁹ *Hex.* I.5.19 (CSEL 32.1 15). The materiality and visibility of the incarnation are not to be “divided” from Christ’s immaterial and invisible nature, asserts Ambrose. In *De incarnationis dominicae sacramento* 7.75 (CSEL 79 262) he writes, “When we adore both His divinity and flesh, do we divide Christ? When we adore the image of God in Him and the cross, do we divide Him?”

¹⁰ *Hex.* I.5.19.

¹¹ The questions surrounding why Emperor Gratian chose Ambrose to give a defence of the Nicene faith are addressed by D. H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene-Arian Conflicts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), pp. 128-148 and Neil McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 79-157. Most studies date the first two books of *De fide* between the death of Emperor Valens in August 378 and the ascension of Theodosius to power in January 379. Cf. Jean-Rémy Palanque, *Saint Ambroise et l’Empire romain: Contribution à l’histoire de l’Eglise et de l’Etat à la fin du IV^e siècle* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1933), p. 498; Homes F. Dudden, *The Life and Times of Saint Ambrose*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 189; Angelo Paredi, *Saint Ambrose: His Life and Times*, trans. J. Costelloe (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), p. 180; Williams, *Ambrose*, p. 129.

theological argumentation deployed by his Latin predecessors.¹² The theology of image plays an important role in Ambrose's anti-Arian intentions in *De fide*. In this work Ambrose also turns to the creation of the human person in the image and likeness of God to argue for the unity of the divine substance. The human person is created after the common image shared by the divine persons, and this attests to the one nature of God.¹³ Scripture uses the singular noun "God," who creates one, singular image, notes Ambrose; Scripture thereby retains both the unity of operation and the unity of the divine name (*igitur unitas operationis seruat et nominis*).¹⁴ Ambrose writes,

At the beginning of the universe itself, as I read, the Father and the Son existed, and I see one creation. I hear Him that speaks. I acknowledge Him that does: but it is of one image, one likeness, that I read. This likeness belongs not to diversity but to unity. What, therefore, you claim for yourself, you take from the Son of God, seeing, indeed, that you cannot be in the image of God, save by help of the image of God.¹⁵

¹² D. H. Williams rightly notes that the first two books of *De fide* do not show any theological ingenuity but follow standard pro-Nicene argumentation. Williams, *Ambrose*, p. 147.

¹³ "The Father says to the Son 'in Our image and likeness,' and you say that the Son of God is unlike the Father" *Fid.* 1.51; CSEL 78 23.

¹⁴ *Fid.* I.23 (CSEL 78 12). Similarly in *De spiritu sancto*, Ambrose writes, "[T]he Father confesses the Son as equal to Himself in the oneness of the work, saying, 'Let us make man to Our image and likeness.' For what else do image and working and common likeness signify than the oneness of the same majesty?" *Spir.* II.2; CSEL 79 87.

¹⁵ *Fid.* I.53 (CSEL 78 23).

If the human person is made according to the image of God, he must be made after one, united image; the creation account confirms, for Ambrose, the common image of the Father and Son.

When Ambrose speaks of the human person created in the image of God he tends also to speak about the uncreated image. He does so here, as well. Referring to Colossians 1:15, Ambrose notes that Paul describes Christ as the image of the invisible God. Thus, if the Apostle explicitly calls Christ image of the Father, why does Arius call Christ dissimilar to the Father?¹⁶ If the Son is image, he cannot be *homoiousios* (similar); the image must have perfect likeness. Seizing the rhetorical advantage, Ambrose notes that whenever people have a painting made of themselves they do not tolerate a dissimilar representation, yet the Arians would have the Father begetting a dissimilar image, as he would somehow be unable to generate a Son in his likeness: “Why, then, is He called an image, if He has no likeness? Men will not have their portraits unlike them, and Arius contends that the Father is unlike the Son, and would have it that the Father has begotten one unlike Himself, as though unable to generate His like.”¹⁷ Clearly, Ambrose sees “image” and “likeness” as synonyms. Christ is both the image and perfect likeness.

Ambrose’s understanding of “image” and “likeness” as synonyms is different from Hilary and Victorinus. In chapter one I suggested that for Hilary there is no likeness between Father and Son. Image, for him, denotes unity of substance and, therefore, while the human person is in the likeness of God and is created *ad imaginem dei*, only the Son is the image of God. Likewise, in chapter two I suggested

¹⁶ *Fid. I.48 (CSEL 78 21): Imaginem apostolus dicit, et Arrius dicit esse dissimilem?*

¹⁷ *Fid. I.48 (CSEL 78 21): Cur imago, si similitudinem non habet? In picturis homines nolunt esse dissimiles, et Arrius dissimilem patrem contendit in filio et uult, ut pater dissimilem genuerit sui, quasi inpotens, qui generare similem non potuerit.*

that for Victorinus, also, image is a Christological term and the human person is created *secundum imaginem*. Both Hilary and Victorinus distinguish between image and likeness. “Image” is the language of substance, the language of the *homoousion*, whereas “likeness” expresses a quality of gradation; something can be more or less “like” another. It is precisely because of the Homoian crisis that Hilary and Victorinus avoid the use of “likeness” (*similitudo*) to bespeak the Son, insisting that there can be no likeness within a common substance. Ambrose, however, does not understand *similitudo* in this way. For the bishop of Milan something is either “similar” (*similis*) or “dissimilar” (*dissimilis*) and, therefore, either an image or not an image. “Image” and “likeness” are synonymous terms and both are Christological referents.

The Book of Wisdom suggests how the unity of Father and Son should be expressed, explains Ambrose: “Wisdom is the brightness of everlasting light, and the spotless mirror of God’s majesty, the image of His goodness” (Wisdom 7:26).

Ambrose writes,

See what great names are declared! “*Brightness*,” because in the Son the Father’s glory shines clearly: “*spotless mirror*,” because the Father is seen in the Son: “*image of goodness*,” because it is not one body seen reflected in another, but the whole power [of the Godhead] in the Son. The word “*image*” teaches us that there is no difference; “*expression*,” that He is the counterpart of the Father’s form; and “*brightness*” declares His eternity.

The “*image*” in truth is not that of a bodily countenance, not one made up

of colours, nor modeled in wax, but simply derived from God, coming out from the Father, drawn from the fountainhead.¹⁸

The eternal procession of the Son from the Father is articulated with the traditional Latin analogy of the fountainhead of a spring.¹⁹ The unity of the divine substance is affirmed with the Nicene understanding of “image” expressing of ontological identity. Like others in the pro-Nicene tradition, Ambrose is keen to note that as image the Son, like the Father, is invisible. When Philip asks Jesus to show his disciples the Father (John 14:9-10), Jesus responds that the one who has seen him has already seen the Father. Christ does not say this because he is the visible expression of the invisible God, explains Ambrose, but because Christ shares everything of the divine nature with the Father; he who sees Christ sees “Truth, Righteousness, [and] the Power of God.”²⁰ The description of the Son in Scripture as “image,” “effulgence,” or

¹⁸ *Fid.* I.49 (CSEL 78 22): *Vide quanta dicantur: Splendor, quod claritas paternae lucis in filio sit, speculum sine macula, quod pater uideatur in filio, imago bonitatis, quod non corpus in corpore, sed uirtus in filio tota cernatur. Imago docet non esse dissimilem, character expressum esse significat, splendor signat aeternum. Imago itaque non uultus est corporalis, non fucis composita, non ceris, sed simplex de deo, “egressa de patre”, expressa de fonte.*

¹⁹ The imagery of a river and a fountainhead, the rays and the sun, and a tree and its root are all stock anti-Monarchian images employed by Tertullian, Novatian and Lactantius to express the union of divine substance within the diversity of persons. Cf. Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 70-76.

²⁰ *Fid.* I.50 (CSEL 78 22). Similarly, in the Sermon against Auxentius, Ambrose states, “I only know of one Image, that is the Image of the invisible God, of whom God has said: ‘Let us make man in our image and our likeness’ [Genesis 1:26]; that Image of which it is written, that Christ is the brightness of his glory and the image of His substance [Hebrews 1:3]. In that Image I perceive the Father, as the Lord Jesus himself has said: ‘He that sees me sees the Father’ [John 14:9]. For this Image is not separated from the Father. (*Sed in ecclesia unam imaginem novi hoc est imaginem dei invisibilis de qua dixit deus: Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram; illam imaginem de qua scriptum est quia Christus splendor gloriae et imago substantiae eius. In ista imagine patrem cerno sicut dixit ipse dominus Iesus: Qui me videt videt et patrem. Non enim haec imago a patre est separata.*)” *Aux.* 32.

“expression” of God does not entail that the Son somehow makes the inscrutable Father visible. Ambrose asserts, “[The same] incomprehensible and unsearchable Majesty [is] dwelling in the Son, and the expression of His likeness [is] in Him.”²¹

Ambrose also deploys “image theology” against the Arians in *De Incarnationis dominicae sacramento*. Ambrose admits that the Arians pose a subtle distinction in suggesting that the Son is “like” the Father while not being of one substance with him.²² However, Ambrose insists that the Arian “likeness” (*similitudo*) implies “unlikeness” (*dissimilitudo*). Following Hilary and Victorinus, he notes that the Arian use of *similitudo* suggests a distinction between two distinct natures. Milk, a swan, and snow are all “alike” in whiteness but differ completely in their nature. Of course, in the invisible God there is no material form or colour. However, this only serves, *a fortiori*, to make the term “alike” all the more untenable: “How, then, can these men say that the Father and the Son are similar, who deny their unity of substance?”²³ If Christ is the splendour, glory and figure of the Father’s substance, as Scripture asserts, he must be perfectly “like” the Father, that is to say, he must be the “image” of the Father. The manner in which the Arians use the term “likeness” for the Son, asserts Ambrose, is simply a roundabout way of proposing dissimilarity between Father and Son. If “likeness” appropriately describes the Son, it cannot be understood to include any dissimilarity of substance; rather, it must be a perfect likeness, which is to say, an image.²⁴ A study of Ambrose’s theology of the

²¹ *Fid.* II.8 (CSEL 78 60). Similarly, Ambrose writes, “Why need I tell you that the Son is of one substance with the Father, when we have read that the Son is the image of the Father’s substance, that you may understand that there is nothing wherein, so far as Godhead is regarded, the Son differs from the Father.” *Fid.* III.108 (CSEL 146-47).

²² *Incarn.* 10.106 (CSEL 79 275).

²³ *Incarn.* 10.108 (CSEL 79 276).

²⁴ *Fid.* I.48 (CSEL 79 21).

image of God must situate the Bishop's thought within his Nicene context and be attentive to the theological denotation of the term "image of God."

When Ambrose considers the human person as created in the image of God, as in the *Hexameron*, he always links the discussion with Colossians 1:15; it is in light of the eternal image that the human person as image becomes intelligible. "We shall be like him," says the letter of John, and yet the Arians refuse to admit this even of Christ. How then can they themselves be created in the image of God? asks Ambrose.²⁵ The image in the human person is spiritual and immaterial because Christ, the image of God, is spiritual and immaterial. In *De Incarnationis dominicae* for instance, Ambrose writes, "For one likeness is according to imitation, another according to nature." (*Alia enim secundum imitationem similitudo, alia secundum naturam.*)²⁶ The image in the human person is held tenuously and only inasmuch as he exists as image of the image.

The created image of God, for Ambrose, is most properly the soul. Deuteronomy 4:9 states, "Attend to thyself alone."²⁷ Interpreting this injunction, Ambrose suggests we distinguish between "ourselves," "ours," and "what surrounds

²⁵ *Fid.* I.52 (CSEL 79 23). In *De mysteriis*, Ambrose writes, "Let your works also shine and bring forth the image of God, according to whose image you were made." *Myst.* 7.41 (CSEL 73 106). The created image attains to the eternal image through the Holy Spirit. In *De spiritu sancto*, Ambrose insists that the Spirit too is of the same divine substance as the Father and Son: "Who, then, can dare to say that the Holy Spirit is separated from the Father and the Son, since through Him we attain to the image and likeness of God, and through Him, as the Apostle Peter says, are partakers of the divine nature? In which there is certainly not the inheritance of carnal succession, but the spiritual connection of the grace of adoption." *Spir.* I.80 (CSEL 79 48).

²⁶ *Incarn.* 10.111 (CSEL 79 277-79).

²⁷ *Hex.* VI.7.42 (CSEL 32.1 233). Similarly, in *De Isaac*, Ambrose writes, "For a wise man should remove himself from fleshly pleasures, elevate his soul, and draw away from the body; this is to know oneself." *Is.* 1.1 (CSEL 32.Pref. 642).

us.”²⁸ Here he is following a standard Stoic interpretation of the Delphic oracle.²⁹ “Ourselves” refers to the body and the soul; “ours” consists of our bodies and senses; “what surrounds us” consists of money, slaves and possessions. Ambrose numbers the body both with “ourselves” (body and soul) and with the material contrast “ours” (bodies and senses). Thus, while insisting that the *imago dei* is a spiritual reality of the human person, Ambrose, nevertheless, refers to *both* body and soul as “ourselves.”³⁰ “Body” has two different senses for Ambrose. On the one hand, the body can draw the soul down as a distraction and temptation. On the other hand, the body is also the instrument of the soul, which the soul can skilfully play and direct. I will elaborate further on this distinction in the next section of this chapter. Suffice it to say for now that these two senses of “body” are critical to understanding Ambrose’s anthropology of the *imago dei* and are already subtly suggested in the *Hexameron*: the body, inasmuch as it is united to the soul, is “ourselves”; and when the body is considered as distinct from the soul it is consigned to be with the senses: “ours.”

The Delphic oracle and Scripture both call us to attend to our soul and mind, suggests Ambrose, because only there “is the fullness of wisdom, the plenitude of

²⁸ *Hex.* VI.7.42 (CSEL 32.1 233).

²⁹ Cf. Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, 13-14. Ambrose’s reference to the precept of the Delphic oracle is sustained throughout his writing. Cf. Pierre Courcelle, “Saint Ambroise devant le précepte delphique,” in *Forma futuri: Studi in onore del cardinale Michele Pellegrino* (Torino: Bottega d’Erasmus, 1975), pp. 178-88. Helen North has demonstrated the importance of the Delphic oracle in classical education and presents an accurate picture of the type of education that Ambrose received. Helen North, *Sophrosyne: Self-knowledge and Self-restraint in Greek Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 121-96.

³⁰ Warren Smith also takes note of this passage. Warren Smith, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue: The Theological Foundation of Ambrose’s Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 17-18.

piety and justice of which God speaks.”³¹ And yet such virtue is only manifest through the operations of the body. The actions of the body are not virtuous per se, but are so only when actions derive from the deliberation and intention of a soul acting in accordance with wisdom, piety and justice.³² In this sense too, the soul is distinct from and superior to the body. Bodily actions manifest the state and intention of the soul; likewise, the reward and glory of a virtuous act belong to the soul because from it “all our deliberations emanate.”³³ The nobility and virtue of a beautiful soul is, of course, incorporeal and invisible, but it is “painted by God, who holds in himself the flashing beauty of virtue and the splendor of piety.”³⁴ The beautiful soul is the invisible painting of God that radiates through visible embodied action.

In what way is the soul the image of God?³⁵ The soul constitutes everything that is essential to the human person, maintains Ambrose: *In hac totus es, homo, quia sine hac nihil es.*³⁶ Ambrose epigrammatically states, “Your soul is made to the image of God, whereas your body is related to the beasts.”³⁷ If the body were to be in the image of God, one would have to come to the ludicrous conclusion that God is corporeal, weak, and given to passions. Rather, it is the soul that is the refulgence of God, painted by the divine artist as his own image, and that by “its brilliance is in accord with that divine reflection.”³⁸ Ambrose certainly does not denigrate the body:

³¹ *Hex.* VI.7.42 (CSEL 32.1 233).

³² *Hex.* VI.7.42 (CSEL 32.1 233).

³³ *Hex.* VI.7.42 (CSEL 32.1 234).

³⁴ *Hex.* VI.7.42 (CSEL 32.1 233-34).

³⁵ The anthropology that issues from Ambrose’s theology of the *imago dei* is addressed in S. E. Szydzik, *Ad imaginem Dei: Die Lehre von der Gottebenbildlichkeit des Menschen bei Ambrosius von Mailand* (Diss., Free University, Berlin, 1961), especially pp. 24-33, 34-75. Also, idem, “Die geistigen Ursprünge der Imago-Dei-Lehre bei Ambrosius von Mailand,” *Theologie und Glaube* 53 (1963): 161-76.

³⁶ *Hex.* VI.7.43 (CSEL 32.1 234). Cf. Smith, *Ambrose’s Ethics*, p. 20.

³⁷ *Hex.* VI.7.43 (CSEL 32.1 234).

³⁸ *Hex.* VI.7.42 (CSEL 32.1 233).

he notes the body's erect stature, the ability to see and hear. Yet, despite its manifest abilities, he regards the body as limited by material constraints. Sight and hearing are quickly impeded. Embodiment entails specificity of place. The soul is not encumbered in this way. Ambrose writes, "Our souls are able to envisage and reflect on all things (*quae considerando spectat omnia*)."³⁹ The soul can see itself in Italy, have dealings with people in Persia, and imagine people living in Africa. The soul can be united with those absent in a land far away or even entertain those who have passed away.⁴⁰ The soul, as image of God, is endowed "with that vigour of the mind which sees those absent, encounters with sight places across the sea, scans with its gaze, surveys hidden things (*sed mentis uigore, quae absentes uidet, transmarina uisu obit, transcurrit aspectu, scrutatur abdita*)."⁴¹ Most importantly the soul alone is fitted to embrace God, because it is the nature of the soul to attain to immaterial being. Therefore, Paul describes our true citizenship as being in heaven.⁴²

Not only is the body encumbered by material constraints, but it is also limited by its mortality. The human body is something that is given unto death, while the soul, created in the image of God, shares in immortality. Therefore, Scripture offers the comfort that one should not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.⁴³ Of course, the corollary principle to this comfort is the fear engendered in those who presume in the flesh, because their hope lies in what is mortal.⁴⁴ The body (considered apart from its relation to the soul) is a body of death; in its materiality, distraction, and weight, it is not only dead but deadly, because it can pull down the

³⁹ *Hex.* VI.8.45 (CSEL 32.1 236).

⁴⁰ *Hex.* VI.8.45 (CSEL 32.1 236).

⁴¹ *Hex.* VI.8.45 (CSEL 32.1 236).

⁴² *Hex.* VI.8.48 (CSEL 32.1 239).

⁴³ *Hex.* VI.7.43 (CSEL 32.1 234).

⁴⁴ *Hex.* VI.7.43 (CSEL 32.1 234).

immortal soul with it. Indeed, this was the downfall of Adam. He preferred the temporal image to the eternal and lost his immortal image by loving the mortal image.⁴⁵ Ambrose writes, “Let us flee from this image which cannot enter the city of God, for it is written: ‘In thy city, O Lord, thou shall bring their image to nothing.’”⁴⁶ When the soul prefers temporal goods to eternal good, it is dragged down to that which it prefers and abandons its own dignity.

Ambrose’s theology of the image of God in his exposition on Psalm 118 (119) has received little scholarly attention. Nevertheless, many of the themes expressed in the sixth book of the *Hexameron* and in *De fide* are rearticulated in Ambrose’s commentary on this psalm. Ambrose distinguishes sharply between body and soul, insisting – as he does in the *Hexameron* – that the locus of the *imago dei* is the soul. As in *De fide*, Ambrose maintains that it is precisely because “image” is *principally* a Christological referent – that is to say, the image is immaterial, invisible and eternal (Colossians 1:15) – that the image of Genesis 1:26 refers especially to the soul rather than to the body. After all, the soul too is immaterial, invisible, and eternal.

Commenting on verse 63 of Psalm 118 (119) (“Your hands have made me and formed me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments.”⁴⁷), Ambrose notes the splendour of created existence, particularly of human beings. Despite being creatures of clay, “clothed in flesh” and “woven of bones and nerves,” God’s handiwork is marvellously displayed.⁴⁸ Ambrose remarks on the beauty of the

⁴⁵ *Hex.* VI.7.42 (CSEL 32.1 234).

⁴⁶ *Hex.* VI.7.42 (CSEL 32.1 234).

⁴⁷ I have consulted Íde Ní Riain’s translation of Ambrose’s use of the Septuagint. Ambrose, *Homilies of Saint Ambrose on Psalm 118 (119)*, trans., Íde Ní Riain (Dublin: Halcyon, 1998), 3.20.

⁴⁸ *Psal. 118*, 10.6.

person: his tall, dignified stance, august demeanour, and beautiful hair.⁴⁹ Particularly noble and distinctive is the human person's ability to stand upright and "freely look up to the heavens."⁵⁰ Despite all this, the *imago dei* does not reside in the human being's corporeal existence: "Man, however, is lovelier in that which is not seen than in the body that is seen."⁵¹ He is the only creature aware of his created dignity and splendour, and is thereby "an eloquent witness of his maker."⁵² Further, the human person bears eternity within him, something on which the corrosive vicissitudes of history and the ravages of time have no effect. Ambrose writes, "In this terrestrial lodging he is clothed with heavenly habitation; he who simultaneously is visible on earth is also joined to God."⁵³ From the beginning, creatures made in the image of God are unique participants of God.

Thus, the phrasing of the Psalm, "Your hands have made me and formed me," recalls for Ambrose the creation narrative, in which God decreed, "Let us make man to our image and likeness" (Gen 1:26).⁵⁴ The creation account, for Ambrose, confers a special dignity on the human person; he is more than dust and matter, for he bears within himself an eternal and immaterial soul: "Know yourself, O soul; know that you are not of earth and clay: God has breathed on you and made you a living soul."⁵⁵ Obeying the Delphic oracle – to know oneself – means, for Ambrose to know that one's soul, not one's body, partakes of the image of God. In his sermon, this

⁴⁹ *Psal. 118*, 10.6.

⁵⁰ *Psal. 118*, 10.6. Cf. *Psalm 118*, 5.32: "So lift up your mind and make use of your natural intelligence. You are made in the likeness of God. You must seek the things that are above, rather than things that are below, bending your neck to take upon it the weight of this world."

⁵¹ *Psal. 118*, 10.7.

⁵² *Psal. 118*, 10.6.

⁵³ *Psal. 118*, 10.7.

⁵⁴ *Psal. 118*, 10.8.

⁵⁵ *Psal. 118*, 10.10.

insistence is coupled with a moral injunction: to raise the mind to things above; it is beyond the dignity of the human soul, created in the image of God, to be trapped in “worldly and mundane things”.⁵⁶

Learn, O man, in what you are great, in what you are precious. Earth shows you to be vile, but virtue makes you glorious. Faith makes you rare, the likeness you bear makes you precious (*imago pretiosum*). For what is so precious as an image of God? (*an quicquam tam pretiosum quam imago est dei?*) This likeness to him should fill you with faith. A sort of picture of your maker should shine out from your heart, so that if anyone were to question your soul they would not fail to find the creator.⁵⁷

For Ambrose, the beauty of the human body is secondary to the eternal soul in which his true glory resides: the image of God.

Ambrose’s theology of the image of God frequently links creation of the flesh with redemption through the flesh. God came to dwell with human beings, notes Ambrose, and thereby made them participants of his glory. The bishop writes, “For our sake he took flesh. Rather, he received us in that flesh which established the Son

⁵⁶ *Psal. 118*, 10.10. Hence, Ambrose tells his congregation to live according to the image within them: “The Lord made your soul in his own image and likeness. He made it rational, just and chaste. You are in God’s image if you are so just as to be the very image of justice; and if you are so chaste as to be a shining reflection of God’s immaculate purity.” *Psal. 118*, 8.23.

⁵⁷ *Psal. 118*, 10.10. Similarly Ambrose writes: “To her the Spouse replies: ‘Place me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm’ [Song of Songs 8:6] because you have kept both the new and the old for me. You are my seal; in my image and likeness. Let the image of justice, wisdom and power shine in you. And because the image of God is in your heart, may it also be in your works; let the portrait of the Gospel be in your deeds, so that you keep my precepts in all your ways.” *Psal. 118*, 22.34.

of Man upon God's throne.... I read that not angels but men are buried with Christ and rise again with Christ. Consequently, the Apostle says, 'He brought us to life with Christ – it is through grace, you have been saved – and at the same time he raised us up to sit with him in heaven, in Christ Jesus [Eph 2:5-6].'"⁵⁸ Ambrose here introduces the Incarnation as a corollary to the doctrine of creation in the *imago dei*. Human beings are raised to participate with Christ in glory because of his condescension in participating in our humanity.⁵⁹

Commensurate with and following from Ambrose's discussion of the *imago dei*, is an exposition on the nature of Christ. He is most properly *the* image of God, whereas the human person is made *to* Christ's image: "The Image comes to him who is made in the image. The Image seeks him who is made in his likeness to put his mark on him again."⁶⁰ Thus, for Ambrose, human beings have the *imago dei* by participation in the eternal image. Following the Apostle Paul he, therefore, enjoins the faithful to "put on the new man, renewed in the image of his creator (Col 3:9-11)."⁶¹ Recreation follows the pattern of creation. As Ambrose puts it: "The Lord

⁵⁸ *Psal. 118*, 10.13.

⁵⁹ Similarly, in his exposition on the Gospel of Luke, Ambrose writes, "For whoever receives the imitator of Christ receives Christ, and whoever has received the image of God receives God. But because we could not see the image of God, His presence came into being for us through the Incarnation of the Word, so that the Godhead which is above us may be united with us." *Luc. 7.24* (CSEL 32.4 292). Again, it is clear that the created image of God becomes intelligible in light of the eternal image, and there is, therefore, a moral imperative issuing from this linkage. Christ's identification with the marginalized in Matthew 25 is given ontological density in the lived moral order: the image that is lost in Adam is regained in Christ by participating in him with the vulnerable. Cf. *Luc. 7.24* (CSEL 32.4 292).

⁶⁰ *Psal. 118*, 10.16. Ambrose's insistence that human beings are made according to the image of Christ (*ad imaginem dei*) implies some element of dynamic maturation into, and growth towards, the image of God. That the created image is realized in imitation of the eternal image is a theme I will explore in the next section of this chapter.

⁶¹ *Psal. 118*, 10.17. Allan Fitzgerald notes that Paul is the theological bridge that for Ambrose holds together the Old Testament and the life of Christ: "Just as the

Jesus, who first made man in his image, is also the author of our body, which he shaped out of clay. He wanted to keep what he had made and to save what he had molded.⁶² Christ, the image of God, refashions human beings in himself, explains Ambrose, so that they once again reflect their prototype.

Colossians 1:15 is the lens through which Ambrose articulates his theology of the image of God in the human person. The sixth book of the *Hexameron*, *De fide*, and *Expositio psalmi cxviii* all understand the created image to be immaterial, invisible, and eternal because that is the nature of Christ, *the* image of God. Like Victorinus and Hilary, Ambrose employs image theology (especially Colossians 1:15) to express the relation between the Father and the Son, that is, between the source and the image. The eternal image shares the nature and substance of the Father. If the eternal image of God is immaterial, eternal, and invisible, the created image must also somehow share these properties. For this reason, the *imago dei*, which constitutes the essence of the human person, is, for Ambrose, a spiritual reality; it is the soul that is fashioned in the *imago dei*.

The Embodied *Imago*

organization of the liturgy of the Word passed from prophet to apostle to Christ, so does the role of the apostle Paul hold together – as glue – Ambrose’s efforts to unite the human experience he finds in David’s words with the daily ideals he proposes from the life of Christ. Paul does appear to have a specific role in facilitating the passage from shadow to reality, from the human to the divine, from the incomplete or imperfect to the all, the fullness or the perfection of Christ.” See, “Ambrose, Paul, and Expositio Psalmi CXVIII,” *Augustiniana* 54 (2004): 141. Viktor Hahn has also underscored Ambrose’s Paulinism. Viktor Hahn, *Das wahre Gesetz: Eine Untersuchung der Auffassung des Ambrosius von Mailand vom Verhältnis der beiden Testamente* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1969), p. 514.

⁶² *Psal. 118*, 10.17. Similarly, in *Luc. 7.24* (CSEL 32.4 292) Ambrose writes, “It is possible to understand, here, the likeness of the human race in one man. Adam was, and we were all in him. Adam was lost, and in him all were lost. Man is refashioned in the man who was lost, and he is made in the likeness of God and restored to His image through Divine patience and magnanimity.”

Ambrose regards the soul as the locus of the *imago dei*. The soul is image because it is invisible, incorporeal, and eternal, like the eternal image. Naturally, this raises the question, “Does the body, too, participate in the image of God?” For Ambrose this is a complex question. On the one hand, he says this is certainly not the case, as it would lead to the implication that flesh, passions, and mortality are likewise applicable to God. On the other hand, the body is inextricably tied up in the life of the soul and expresses the life, deliberation, and virtue of the soul. I have alluded already to Ambrose’s use of two senses of the word “body.” The body is “ourselves” inasmuch as it is the instrument manifesting the virtue of the soul, but it is “ours” inasmuch as it is distinct from the soul, tempting the soul with material loves, dragging it down through concupiscence.⁶³ It is in this latter sense that Ambrose states with remarkable terseness, “God preferably seeks the soul when it is alone, thus dissociating Himself from the slime of the body and cupidity of the flesh.”⁶⁴ Ambrose constructs an account of the body in relation to the soul by exploiting a similar tension found in Romans 7. In what follows, I will suggest that this Pauline tension, which expresses “body” in two distinct ways, accounts for the Bishop’s reluctance to fully embrace a neo-Platonic understanding of the body-soul relation. Thus, while urging the soul to flee the body, Ambrose will also describe body and soul as a harmonious and integral unit.⁶⁵

Ambrose’s understanding of the relation between soul and body is expressed most clearly in *De Isaac*.⁶⁶ This work is related directly to Ambrose’s preaching to

⁶³ *Hex.* VI.7.42. (CSEL 32.1 233).

⁶⁴ *Hex.* VI.8.46 (CSEL 32.1 237).

⁶⁵ Cf. Donna M. Foley, “The Religious Significance of the Human Body in the Writings of Ambrose of Milan,” Ph.D. Diss (Ottawa, University of Saint Paul, 1996).

⁶⁶ Helpful literature surrounding *De Isaac et anima* that touches on the theology of the image of God includes Alan Fitzgerald, “Ambrose at the Well: *De Isaac et anima*,”

the catechumens who were being prepared to receive the Easter mysteries.⁶⁷ This context is important. Before baptism, the soul of the catechumen was to be purified, formed, and educated in the life of virtue, after the models of Isaac and Rachel. Fundamental to this process was the extrication of the soul from material attachments. This is why the story of Isaac begins with the Patriarch going out into the field to meditate: “For a wise man should remove himself from fleshly pleasures, elevate his soul, and draw away from the body.”⁶⁸ The ability to follow the injunction of the Delphic oracle, an injunction that Ambrose sees reiterated throughout Scripture, is predicated on a proper understanding of human nature. “What, then, is man?” asks Ambrose, “soul, or body, or a union of both? (*quid est itaque homo? utrum anima an caro an utriusque copula?*)”⁶⁹ This is the key question that *De Isaac* will address.⁷⁰

Revue des études Augustiniennes 48 (2002): 79-99; Volker Henning Drecoll, “Neuplatonismus und Christentum bei Ambrosius, De Isaac et anima,” *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 5 (2001): 104-30; Roberto Iacoangeli, “Anima ed eternità nel *De Isaac* di Sant’Ambrogio,” in *Morte e immortalità nella catechesi dei Padri del III-IV secolo*, ed. Sergio Felici (Roma: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1985), pp. 103-37; Gerard Nauroy, “La structure du De Isaac vel Anima et la cohérence de l’allégorèse d’Ambroise de Milan,” *Revue des Études Latines* 63 (1985): 210-236; Luigi F. Pizzolato, *La dottrina esegetica di Sant’Ambrogio* (Milano: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1978); Solange Sagot, “La Triple sagesse dans le *De Isaac vel anima*: Essai sur les procédés de composition de saint Ambroise,” in *Ambroise de Milan: XVI centenaire de son élection épiscopale*, ed. Yves-Marie Duval (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1974), pp. 67-114; Giuseppe Piccolo, “Per lo studio della spiritualità ambrosiana: I sermoni *De Isaac vel anima*,” *La Scuola cattolica* 98 (1970): 32-74; Pierre Hadot, “Explication du ‘De Isaac’ d’Ambroise,” *Annuaire de l’École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses* 73 (1965-66): 150-52.

⁶⁷ For the context of Ambrose’s preaching on the patriarchs, see Marcia Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs: Ethics for the Common Man* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 13-29.

⁶⁸ *Is.* 1.1 (CSEL 32.pref. 642).

⁶⁹ *Is.* 2.3 (CSEL 32.pref. 643).

⁷⁰ An excellent study of Ambrose’s understanding of body and spirit is offered by Wolfgang Seibel, *Fleisch und Geist beim heiligen Ambrosius* (München: Zink, 1958), pp. 7-9, 16-69. See also Ragnar Holte, *Beatitudo et Sagesse* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1962), pp. 167-76.

Themes found in the *Hexameron* are also expressed in *De Isaac*, with many of the same linguistic tropes and philosophical references employed. Employing a distinction similar to that between “ourselves,” “ours,” and “what surrounds us,” Ambrose writes in *De Isaac*, “We are one thing, our possessions are something else; he who is clothed is one person, his clothing something else.”⁷¹ Clearly, clothing, that is, one’s possessions, is distinct from the human person. But this does not yet answer the question regarding the relation of body and soul; rather, Ambrose has only sharpened the question more precisely.

The question “What, then, is man?” is complex, explains Ambrose, because Scripture itself refers to “man” in two ways: first, “all souls (*omnes animae*) that went into Egypt” is a reference to human beings; second, “My spirit shall not remain those men, since they are flesh (*carnes*)” bespeaks a judgement.⁷² In Scripture, there are, therefore, two ways of understanding “man”: either in terms of the soul (*anima*) or in terms of flesh (*caro*). The first is a neutral term indicating the human composite of soul and body. When Scripture uses the term “soul,” it expresses the man “who cleaves to God, and not to the body (*corpori*).”⁷³ The second term, flesh (*caro*), is a negative judgment of the body that drags down the soul. “[W]hen ‘flesh’ (*caro*) is employed in reference to man, a sinner is meant.”⁷⁴ Although one might wish for

⁷¹ *Is.* 2.3 (CSEL 32.pref. 643).

⁷² *Is.* 2.3 (CSEL 32.pref. 643-44).

⁷³ *Is.* 2.3 (CSEL 32.pref. 644).

⁷⁴ *Is.* 2.3 (CSEL 32.pref. 644). Referencing the same scriptural citations in the *Exhortatio uirginitatis*, Ambrose suggests that the *imago dei* implies an “ought”; the soul ought not to follow corporeal beauty but, rather, its inner beauty: “*Scire ergo se debet siue uir, siue mulier, quia ad imaginem dei est et similitudinem, ut animae sequatur, non corporis, pulchritudinem.*” *Exh. uirg.* 10.68 (PL 16 372). Ambrose inquires, “In what are we?” The true self, he answers, consists in the substance of the soul and in the strength of mind. (*In quo enim sumus? In animae substantia et mentis uigore.*) *Exh. uirg.* 10.68 (PL 16 372). As the soul is the true self, David does not fear what flesh (*caro*) can do to him, because he knows he is spirit (*spiritus*). Those

consistency in the use of *caro* to convey a negative valuation of the “body” pulling down the soul and of *corpus* as a neutral expression of the “body” as a composite with the soul, Ambrose uses *caro* and *corpus* interchangeably. Warren Smith has rightly suggested that only the context can indicate how Ambrose understands “body.”⁷⁵

The tension between two ways of expressing “body” is for Ambrose in many ways a commentary on the same tension in the Apostle Paul. Ambrose devotes considerable attention to Romans 7. Paul writes, “I am carnal, sold into the power of sin. For I do not understand what I do, for it is not what I wish to do, but what I hate, that I do” (Rom. 7:15). It is almost as if there are two men wrestling inside the Apostle, notes Ambrose, because Paul says, “I see a law of my flesh warring against the law of my mind and making me prisoner to the law of sin” (Rom. 7:23).⁷⁶ The Apostle’s soul is warring against his body – not the body as it part of the composite, but as it is “flesh,” and desirous of material good. This is why, explains Ambrose, Paul prefers to speak of the internal and the external man.⁷⁷ Both inner and outer man are “Paul,” and yet the Apostle identifies with the inner man; – it is the true man, the soul that cries out, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24).⁷⁸

who rely on the flesh rely on a body of death, for which reason the Lord says, “My spirit shall not remain in them, since they are flesh (*quia caro sunt*).” *Exh. uirg.* 10.68 (PL 16 372). Here too Ambrose makes Moses’s command to the people of Israel something consonant with the Delphic oracle: know thyself. Moses instructs the people: “Attend to yourself, that is to your soul in order that you do not lose it, that you do not become carnal (*Et ideo tibi dicit Moyses: Attende tibi, hoc est animae tuae, ne pereat, ne carnalis fias*).” *Exh. uirg.* 10.68 (PL 16 372). Frequently, Ambrose compares the soul as image of God to Jerusalem, whose walls have been painted by the Lord to reflect his glory (*Ecce ego, Ierusalem, pinxi muros tuos*). *Exh. uirg.* 10.68 (PL 16 372).

⁷⁵ Smith, *Ambrose’s Ethics*, p. 22.

⁷⁶ *Is.* 2.3 (CSEL 32.pref. 644).

⁷⁷ Cf. Goulven Madec, “L’Homme intérieure selon saint Ambroise,” in *Ambroise de Milan: XVIe centenaire de son élection épiscopale*, ed. Yves-Marie Duval (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1974), pp. 283-308.

⁷⁸ *Is.* 2.3 (CSEL 32.pref. 644).

The inner man, the soul, is the true man. Ambrose is clear that the soul both rules and gives life to the body. Apart from the soul, the body is only dust and earth: “Man according to the image of God is not like to vanity, but he who has lost it and has fallen into sin and has tumbled into material things – such a man is like to vanity.”⁷⁹ The nature of the soul created as the image of God is excellent, but becomes corrupt by turning from his rational nature and inclining to “bodily pleasures”; not retaining an equilibrium, the soul “turns to matter, and is glued to the body.”⁸⁰ The perfect soul, on the other hand, moves in the opposite direction; it turns from matter and all that is excessive: “It is attentive to things divine but shuns earthly matter.”⁸¹

Marcia Colish has called attention to Ambrose’s positive evaluation of the body-soul unity. While Ambrose differentiates between the rational and the irrational element of the human person, neither is superfluous.⁸² The soul is both the ruling and animating principle of the body; this necessitates for Ambrose that they belong together. Indeed, insisting on the unity of body and soul, Ambrose borrows the Platonic language of the soul as the form of the body. The soul gives the body its life and essence – what the Platonic tradition would call its “animating principle” and “formal cause.” Ambrose writes, “Like a highly skilled artisan the soul leads the body in its service where it will, fashions out of it the form it has chosen, and makes the virtues it has willed resound in it: now it composes the melodies of chastity, again those of temperance, the song of sobriety, the charm of uprightness, the sweetness of

⁷⁹ *Is.* 2.4 (CSEL 32.pref. 645).

⁸⁰ *Is.* 2.5 (CSEL 32.pref. 645).

⁸¹ *Is.* 3.6 (CSEL 32.pref. 646).

⁸² Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, p. 33. Colish suggests that Ambrose’s evaluation of the unity of body and soul situates him squarely in the Aristotelian tradition: “Ambrose comes down vigorously in favour of a hylomorphic understanding of human nature.” Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, p. 33.

virginity, the seriousness of widowhood.”⁸³ With rhetorical prowess, Ambrose exploits the analogy in the *Phaedo* of a musical instrument, which on its own is lifeless and dumb, but in the hands of an accomplished musician becomes alive and sonorous. Later in this chapter, I will draw attention to the ethical implications, in terms of human flourishing, of Ambrose’s adoption of this integrated anthropology. It is important, however, first to note the complications that afflict what should be a united composit: post-lapsarian existence adversely effects the desires of the soul and drives a wedge between body and soul.

The unity of body and soul entails, for Ambrose, that sin and disordered desires expressed through the body are not to be attributed to faults in the body; their originating principle are the misdirected loves of the soul. While it is true that bodily loves can affect the soul, even darkening the soul, this concupiscence and ignorance affecting the soul are “to be ascribed more to form than to matter.”⁸⁴ Nevertheless, because form and matter co-inhere there is a certain “culpability” even in the body: “The flesh is matter, ignorance and concupiscence form. Then why is the flesh blamed when there are such great blemishes in the form? Because the form can do nothing without the matter. For what would concupiscence be if the flesh did not

⁸³ *Bon. mort.* 6.25 (CSEL 32.pref. 726). Likely, the *Phaedo* lies behind Ambrose’s musical analogy: “One might say that the harmony is invisible and incorporeal, and very beautiful and divine in the well attuned lyre, but the lyre itself and its strings are bodies, and corporeal and composite and earthy and akin to that which is mortal.... And I fancy, Socrates, that it must have occurred to your own mind that we believe the soul to be something after this fashion; that our body is strung and held together by heat, cold, moisture, dryness, and the like, and the soul is a mixture and a harmony of these same elements, when they are well and properly mixed. Now if the soul is a harmony, it is clear that when the body is too much relaxed or is too tightly strung by diseases or other ills, the soul must of necessity perish, no matter how divine it is, like other harmonies in sounds and in all the works of artists.” *Phaedo*, 85e-86c.

⁸⁴ *Is.* 7.60 (CSEL 32.pref. 685).

inflammate it?”⁸⁵ For Ambrose, evil cannot *simply* be attributed to misdirected desires stemming from the soul that act on a morally neutral body. There is something, as Paul would say, in the “flesh” that also affects the soul. And so, body and soul or matter and form act as a loop, each affecting the other. The result is that even the body can adversely affect the life of the soul; what Paul describes as the external man, positively or negatively affects the internal man.

I have suggested that both Ambrose’s Christology and his insistence on understanding body and soul as a composite should mitigate any hasty judgements of undue commitment on Ambrose’s part to Platonic dualism. Indeed, representative of the Bishop’s thought is a line from *De Abraham*, “So now man is saved, not in part, but in his whole body.”⁸⁶ However, this is not a complete picture; there are, as I have explained, complications in Ambrose’s understanding of “body.” He can certainly speak positively of the body as part of a holistic, Aristotelian composite, but he can also speak of it with Pauline disparagement, as the “body of death” weighing down the soul. The negative connotation of “body” is typically expressed with recourse to Plotinian language. It is particularly in Ambrose’s catechetical works, in which he urges his neophytes to abandon temporal, material delights, that the presence of Plotinian metaphors, tropes and quotations are evident.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ *Is.* 7.60 (CSEL 32.pref. 685).

⁸⁶ *Abr.* I.4.29 (CSEL 32.pref. 524): *Iam enim non ex parte, sed totus homo saluatur in corpore, saluatur in anima.*

⁸⁷ Pierre Courcelle has offered an invaluable study of the place of Plotinian thought in Ambrose’s sermons, particularly those that Courcelle suggests Augustine heard when he was present to hear the Bishop preach in Milan. Courcelle points to echoes of Plotinus’s *Enneads* 1.6, 1.7, and 3.5 in two of Ambrose’s sermons: *De bono mortis* and *De Isaac*. Courcelle sees not only traces of Plotinus, but also of Porphyry in these two sermons. Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin* (Paris: De Boccard, 1968), pp. 93-138. Cf. idem, “Plotin et saint Ambroise,” *Revue de philologie, de littérature et d’histoire anciennes* 76 (1950): 29-56. See also idem, “Nouvelle aspects du platonisme chez saint Ambroise,” *Revue des études latines* 34

Pierre Courcelle has demonstrated that two of Ambrose's sermons preached to catechumens, *De bono mortis* and *De Isaac*, borrow and adapt from Plotinus's *Enneads*. In *De Isaac* 8.78, Ambrose urges the new Christians to take up wings like flames to the higher regions. He enjoins them, "Let each man divest his soul of her base coverings and approve her when she is cleansed of the mire just as he would approve gold cleansed by fire. For the soul is cleansed just like the finest gold."⁸⁸ Plotinus similarly writes, "This is the soul's ugliness, not being pure and unmixed, like gold, but full of earthiness; if anyone takes the earthy stuff away the gold is left, and it is beautiful, when it is singled out from other things and is alone by itself."⁸⁹ The parallels are unmistakable; Plotinus's call to take flight from materiality and bodily distractions is adopted by Ambrose.

A passage in one of Plotinus's *Enneads* most well-known in the ancient world urges its readers not to be caught up by temporal, ephemeral images but to seize reality itself:

Let us fly to our dear country.... Our country from which we came ... our Father is there. How shall we travel to it, where is our way of escape? We cannot get there either on foot; for our feet only carry us everywhere in this world.... You must not get ready a carriage, either, or a boat. Let

(1956): 220-39; and Aimé Solignac, "Nouveaux parallèles entre saint Ambroise et Plotin," *Archives de philosophie* 19 (1956): 148-56. Also, in *De bono mortis* and *De Isaac*, Pierre Hadot has discovered additional citations from Plotinus (*Enneads* 1.8; 4.8), as well as references to the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus*. Pierre Hadot, "Platon et Plotin dans trois sermons de saint Ambroise," *Revue des études latines* 34 (1956): 202-20.

⁸⁸ *Is.* 8.78 (CSEL 32.pref. 696-97).

⁸⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* I.6.5 (Loeb 440 249).

all these things go, and do not look. Shut your eyes, and change to and wake another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use.⁹⁰

Ambrose is clearly familiar with Plotinus's injunction; adopting the same metaphor, language, and urgency the Bishop writes:

Let us flee therefore to our real, true fatherland. There is our fatherland and there is our Father, by whom we have been created, where there is the city of Jerusalem, which is the mother of all men. But what is this flight? Not at all a flight with the feet, which belong to the body; for wherever they run, they run upon the earth and pass from one soil to another. Let us not flee neither on ships or chariots or horses, which are impeded and fall, but let us flee with the spirit and eyes and feet that are within.⁹¹

Ambrose has reworked Plotinus's language of the "fatherland" into the ecclesial and eschatological discourse of the maternal Jerusalem. Following Plotinus, Ambrose underscores that this flight is of a spiritual nature: the body cannot travel this journey. Thus, it is especially in urging the catechumens to "flee the body" that Ambrose aligns himself closely with Plotinus, quoting his language and adopting his analogies.⁹²

⁹⁰ Plotinus, *Eneads* I.6.8 (Loeb 440 255-51).

⁹¹ *Is.* 8.78-79 (CSEL 32.pref. 698).

⁹² Ambrose's proximity to and familiarity with Plotinus is far-reaching. I have limited my focus to the relation between soul and body.

The new “way of seeing” that Plotinus enjoins, which is a turning within to make one’s soul beautiful like a polished and chiselled image of a statue,⁹³ is reworked by Ambrose. The Bishop also urges the neophytes to “cleanse that inner eye”; but the statue which they are called to chisel and polish is the soul that is “conformed to the image of His Son.”⁹⁴ Plotinus writes that the soul must become like that of which it is an image: “No eye ever saw the sun without becoming sun-like, nor can a soul see beauty without becoming beautiful. You must become first all godlike and all beautiful if you intend to see God and beauty.”⁹⁵ Ambrose echoes this call: “This is the eye that looks upon the true and great beauty. Only the strong and healthy eye can see the sun; only the good soul can see the good.”⁹⁶ The quintessentially Plotinian language of inner purification and flight from the world is ideally suited to Ambrose’s hortatory intentions in *De Isaac*. Therefore, this work, more explicitly than most, exhibits the tension in Ambrose’s anthropology between body and soul.

Ambrose’s catechetical preaching makes clear that it is difficult for him to affirm the created unity and the integrity of body and soul, precisely because, like Plotinus, Ambrose is profoundly attentive to the tension of the body-soul union in temporal, material existence.⁹⁷ Ambrose cautions against the dangers lurking in the body-soul union: “For if there is a joining, the flesh (*caro*), which is the lesser element, becomes better than the soul, which is the greater, because the soul gives life to the body (*corpori*), but the flesh (*caro*) pours death into the soul.”⁹⁸ Therefore,

⁹³ Plotinus, *Eneads* I.6.9 (Loeb 440 259).

⁹⁴ *Is.* 8.79 (CSEL 32.pref. 698-99).

⁹⁵ Plotinus, *Eneads* I.6.9 (Loeb 440 260).

⁹⁶ *Is.* 8.79 (CSEL 32.pref. 699).

⁹⁷ Warren Smith, *Ambrose’s Ethics*, p. 31.

⁹⁸ *Bon mort.* 7.26 (CSEL 32.pref. 727).

rather than discard the unity of body and soul, Ambrose's catechetical works point to the dangers of this union for the higher soul, which is dragged down by the desires of the body. The soul is immaterial and eternal because it is the image of the immaterial and eternal, but it is led to lust after material beauty and goods on account of its union with the body. Ambrose urges his catechumens, "Therefore let us flee evils and elevate our souls to the image and likeness of God. The flight from evils is the likeness of God, and the image of God is gained through the virtues."⁹⁹ The soul of the intemperate and greedy becomes subject to intemperance and greed when it no longer plays the instrument of the body with dexterity but instead "is brought down by the allurements."¹⁰⁰

There is, therefore, a certain tension in Ambrose's thought. While he is committed to affirming the composite nature of the body-soul union, he is at the same time profoundly aware of the weight of the body that drags down the soul; the strain that Paul feels between his flesh and spirit is a tension that Ambrose also feels. Warren Smith sums up this tension well: "[T]he soul gives life to the body by being in the body and yet is able to govern the body rightly only by remaining sufficiently detached from the pleasures of the body that it may properly be focused upon God."¹⁰¹ Ideally, the soul animates and rules the body like the proverbial Platonic charioteer.¹⁰² Ambrose writes, "The soul, then, is the user, the body that which is being used, and

⁹⁹ *Bon mort.* 5.17 (CSEL 32.pref. 719)

¹⁰⁰ *Bon mort.* 6.24 (CSEL 32.pref. 725).

¹⁰¹ Smith, *Ambrose's Ethics*, p. 32.

¹⁰² *Is.* 8.65 (CSEL 32.pref. 687-88): "Now the soul is the chariot which carries its good master. If the soul is a chariot, she has horses that are either good or bad. The good horses are the virtues of the soul, the bad horses the passions of the body. So the good master restrains the bad horses and draws them back but urges on the good. The good horses are four: prudence, temperance, fortitude, justice; the bad horses: wrath, concupiscence, fear, injustice.... But the good horses fly up, ascend from earth to the higher regions, and raise up the soul, especially if they have the sweet yoke and light burden." Cf. *Phaedrus* 246a - 254e.

thus the one is in command, the other in service; the one is what we are, the other what belongs to us.”¹⁰³ Ambrose is well aware, however, that this ideal of a soul in control of the body is not realized in human experience. Ambrose’s attentiveness to the reality of post-lapsarian existence means that he complements his affirmation of the created body-soul integrity with a healthy dose of Plotinian thought, particularly, its injunction to flee the body.

The Moral Imperative of the *Imago Dei*

For Ambrose the embodied *imago dei* is not a simply a static datum that can be explained by means of an Aristotelian distinction between form and matter, corresponding to the union of soul and body. I have drawn attention to the complexity of Ambrose’s understanding of embodied human nature, particularly in its post-lapsarian existence, which necessitates a Pauline-Plotinian caveat. This complexity is also reflected in Ambrose’s ethics. In the last section of this chapter, I will consider how Ambrose expresses an ethical theology in light of the complex relation between the soul and the body. Ambrose’s sermons lend themselves to such an analysis as he is constantly urging his congregation to redirect their desires from the temporal to the eternal. Attentiveness to the two senses of “body,” which we can find throughout Ambrose’s writings, is critical to understand his ethics. Prima facie, Ambrose, in typically Plotinian fashion, urges his catechumens simply to flee the body. However, as I have suggested, Ambrose is profoundly attuned to the realities of embodied existence, and his ethics, therefore, do not simply counsel the abandonment of the body.

¹⁰³ *Bon mort.* 7.27 (CSEL 32.pref. 728).

In this next section, then, I will inquire what Ambrose means when he urges his catechumens to “flee the body.” I will suggest that while employing Stoic ethical categories, Ambrose invites the neophytes to a life of detachment; not detachment predicated on a dualism of body and soul, but detachment couched in terms of a “transvaluation” of bodily desires. Two key ethical motifs operative in Stoic philosophy are ubiquitous in Ambrose’s writings. First, he develops the ideal of *sequi naturam*. Ambrose enjoins his audience to obey the Delphic oracle – “know thyself.” This counsel is interpreted as a self-understanding of one’s true spiritual nature as created in the *imago dei*, thereby fulfilling one’s nature. Second, to follow one’s true nature as image of God it is necessary to perfect a spirit of detachment with regard to material and temporal goods. Thus, a Stoic ethic of *apatheia* governs Ambrose’s moral theology. I will engage with Ambrose’s Christian appropriation and transposition of these two Stoic ethical categories of *sequi naturam* and *apatheia* in two profoundly embodied loci: cosmetics and virginity. This analysis will help articulate the moral imperative issuing from the Bishop’s theology of the image of God. I will conclude this section by considering desire and imitation as integral to the realization of the image of God in the human person.

The place of Stoic thought in Ambrose’s writings has received frequent attention.¹⁰⁴ In many ways, Ambrose invites this attention; *De officiis ministrorum* is, after all, a Christian transposition of Cicero’s work by the same title.¹⁰⁵ It is

¹⁰⁴ Jean Pépin, *Théologie cosmique et théologie chrétienne (Ambroise Exam. I.I.1-4)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964).

¹⁰⁵ Roman Stoicism, of which Cicero is the ideal representative, is certainly a dominant philosophical dialogue partner in Ambrose’s theology. Nevertheless, Dudden’s biography overemphasizes Ambrose’s reliance on Roman Stoicism. F. Homes Dudden, *The Life and Times of St. Ambrose* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1935), I, 14-16. Pierre Courcelle and Goulven Madec complement Dudden’s study in that they note the importance of Greek philosophy, particularly Plotinus, on the Bishop’s

particularly in his account of human nature, and in the ethical imperative that derives from this account of nature, that Ambrose is beholden to Stoic thought. However, as has been pointed out by Ivor Davidson, it is a transposition in the fullest sense of the word. Ambrose completely reworks his Stoic sources: the *goal* of a well ordered life is no longer to thrive in the world but to prepare for the world to come.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into a Stoic philosophy of nature or to consider in detail what it means to live according to nature.¹⁰⁶ I will consider instead how Ambrose appropriates and then re-informs a Stoic ethic of *sequi naturam* with Christian content. For Ambrose, human nature is to be understood in light of the *imago dei*; to ask what *sequi naturam* means is to ask what it means to live according to one's nature as image of God. Certainly, nature remains a normative principle; the implications of the natural law articulated in the Stoic tradition continue to find an echo in Ambrose's writing. Thus, for example, the universality of reason and its accessibility to the human intellect is a theme dear to Ambrose; likewise, his insistence on human equality, the communal ownership of property, and the priority of the common good over the private good are all essential elements of a Stoic ethic derived from natural law, which finds deep resonance in Ambrose's moral theology.¹⁰⁷

thought. Cf. Pierre Courcelle, "L'Humanisme chrétien de Saint Ambroise," *Orpheus* 9 (1962): 21-34; Goulven Madec, *Saint Ambroise et la philosophie* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1974), pp. 12-19.

¹⁰⁶ Classic monographs on Stoic thought that contain pertinent information on the adage of *sequi naturam* within a Stoic ethical paradigm includes John M. Cooper, "Eudaimonism, the Appeal to Nature, and 'Moral Duty' in Stoicism," in *Reason and Emotion*, ed. John M. Cooper (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 427-448; A. A. Long, "The logical basis of Stoic Ethics" and "Stoic Eudaimonism," in *Stoic Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 134-155 and 179-201; Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Malcolm Schofield and Gisela Striker, eds., *The Norms of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Colish, *Stoic Tradition*, p. 52.

Ambrose, however, radically reorders the adage *sequi naturam* in light of the *imago dei*. That the human person has his origins in the word of God, that he is intelligible only in light of this source, and that he is directed back to this source provides a Christological backdrop to Ambrose's understanding of natural law. Natural law now receives a clarity and precision on account of the revealed Word of God. Thus, in *De fuga saeculi* Ambrose recognizes a "two-fold" law: the natural law written on the heart and the written law given on the tablets of stone. Ambrose explains that while "nature herself is the teacher of good conduct," the written law was given for "recognition of sin."¹⁰⁸ For Ambrose, the natural law inscribed in the heart is more than an abstract universal norm accessible to all (though it certainly remains such); rather, it issues from human nature as image and implies a dynamic movement realized in imitation of its source. Ambrose writes,

[T]he flight consists in this: to keep away from sins, to take up the rule of the virtues unto the likeness and image of God, to enlarge our strength unto the imitation of God according to the limits of our potential. For the perfect man is the image and glory of God.... This, therefore, is to be like God, to possess justice, to possess wisdom, and to be perfect in virtue. For God is without sin, and so the man who flees from sin is like to the image of God.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ *Fug.* 3.15 (CSEL 32.2 175). Other helpful literature on Ambrose's adoption of a Stoic ethic that derives from the natural law include Carlo Alberto Maschi, "Un problema generale del dritto in Sant' Ambrogio e nelle fonti romano-classico," in *Sant' Ambrogio* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1940), pp. 423-30; Baziel Maes, *La Loi naturelle selon Ambroise de Milan* (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1967); Thomas Gerhard Ring, *Auctoritas bei Tertullian, Cyprian und Ambrosius* (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1975), pp. 130-33.

¹⁰⁹ *Fug.* 4.17 (CSEL 32.2 178).

Ambrose has thoroughly “Christianized” natural law. For the ideal Stoic sage *sequi naturam* implies justice, wisdom, and virtue; for the Christian, however, these virtues are concretized in the person of Christ and realized in imitation of that model.

Ambrose takes up a Stoic account of natural law and informs it by his image theology.

The “perfect man” now fulfils the adage of *sequi naturam* inasmuch as he is conformed to the image of God. To live according to one’s nature is to live according to one’s nature as image, insists Ambrose. Thus, both the origin and the end of the human person are informed by image theology, something that significantly transposes Ambrose’s Stoic account of the natural law.¹¹⁰ Colish puts Ambrose’s relationship with Stoic thought very well: “Ambrose does not labour under the uncritical delusion that Stoicism is isomorphic with Christianity. Nor does he reveal the slightest need to agonize or to fulminate over the relation between Athens and Jerusalem.”¹¹¹ Indeed, Ambrose’s fusion of Stoic natural law tradition with image theology is demonstrative of his effortless appropriation of differing intellectual paradigms.

Similar to his reworking of the Stoic natural law tradition, Ambrose also reworks the Stoic ethic of *apatheia* (equanimity of soul).¹¹² The transvaluation of

¹¹⁰ Cf. Marica Colish, “Cicero, Ambrose and Stoic Ethics: Transmission or Transformation?” in A. Bernardo and S. Levin eds., *The Classics in the Middle Ages* (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 95-112.

¹¹¹ Colish, *Stoic Tradition*, p. 50. In a similar vein see Ivor Davidson, “A Tale of Two Approaches: Ambrose, *De Officiis* I.1-22 and Cicero, *De Officiis* I.1-6,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 52 (2001): 61-83.

¹¹² For an overview of Stoic detachment and an account of *apatheia*, see John Rist, “The Stoic Concept of Detachment,” in *The Stoics*, ed. John M. Rist (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978). A more general exposition on the transformation of Stoic *apatheia* within Christian ethics is offered by Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

desire that, as I have already noted, is foundational to Ambrose's Lenten sermons, is couched in terms of Stoic ethics. The patriarchs, whom Ambrose holds up as paragons of the various virtues, have much in common with the Stoic sage. The patriarchs resemble Ambrose's ideal, stalwart Stoic exemplum, whose soul remains unaffected by material forces. However, both the reason for the inner peace of the patriarchs and the ultimate goal of this inner peace are radically altered. The *apatheia* that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph manifest in the face of pleasure, pain, desire, and fear springs not from inner reserves but from the grace of Christ.¹¹³ The inner peace of the patriarch's is the peace of Christ. The patriarchs disdain material riches not so much because they prefer inner stability, but because they now desire eternal riches.¹¹⁴ Colish writes, "What [Ambrose] borrows, Christianizes, and transmits, therefore, is not a pure and unadulterated Stoicism but Stoicism as he himself appropriates it."¹¹⁵ The *apatheia* of the patriarchs derives from grace and is ordered to glory; Ambrose significantly transvaluates Stoic values, and it is these re-forged virtues manifest in the lives of the patriarchs that Ambrose holds up as ideals for his catechumens.

The exhortation to *apatheia* in the face of the allures and fleeting nature of material and temporal existence is most stark in the exegetical works that Ambrose preached to the catechumens preparing to receive the Easter mysteries. The intention is obvious. Ambrose wants the neophytes to reorder their desires and loves from the temporal to the eternal, from the material to the immaterial, from the body to the soul. It is these sermons in particular, then, that at first impression may seem dualistic. The

¹¹³ Cf. Maria Becker, *Die Kardinaltugenden bei Cicero und Ambrosius: De officiis*. Chrêsis: Die Methode der Kirchenväter in Umgang der antiken Kultur, 4 (Basel: Schwabe, 1994).

¹¹⁴ Colish, *Stoic Tradition*, pp. 54-55.

¹¹⁵ Colish, *Stoic Tradition*, p. 55.

Bishop of Milan writes, “And so the good soul scorns visible and material things and does not linger over them or delay or tarry in despising them. Rather, she rises to things eternal and immaterial and [is] filled with wonders, for she rises with pure thought from pious mind.”¹¹⁶ The urgency is unmistakable. The soul has been “darkened” by its union with the body, so that it no longer knows itself, no longer knows its true nature. It has disregarded the injunction of the Delphic oracle.¹¹⁷ *Apatheia* is achieved, suggests Ambrose, by turning again to the ancient oracle, γνῶθι σεαυτόν; turn within to consider the nature of the soul as image, he urges. Adopting scriptural language to fuse together the Delphic oracle and the Stoic adage, *sequi naturam*, Ambrose reminds the catechumens: “[K]now yourself and the beauty of your nature.... The kingdom of God is within you.”¹¹⁸

Despite what is at first blush starkly dualistic language, Ambrose does not denigrate the body or material existence; nor does he counsel a flight into Platonic spiritualism. The key word in *De Isaac* is *detachment*. Ambrose writes that the flight from earthly matter “is not to depart from the earth but to remain on the earth, to hold to justice and temperance, to renounce the vices in material goods, not their use.”¹¹⁹ For Ambrose, the virtuous man is, in the words of Marcia Colish, “the man who knows how to live in this world with innocence and without reproach.”¹²⁰ This is why, in preparation for Rachel’s coming, Isaac retreats to the field to meditate. He is a model of detachment and tranquillity.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ *Is.* 4.11 (CSEL 32.pref. 651).

¹¹⁷ *Is.* 4.15 (CSEL 32.pref. 653).

¹¹⁸ *Is.* 4.16 (CSEL 32.pref. 653-54).

¹¹⁹ *Is.* 3.6 (CSEL 32.pref. 646).

¹²⁰ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, p. 72.

¹²¹ Likewise, the story of the Patriarch Abraham originates with him being called out of his own land and people. This, for Ambrose, is a call to “depart from the habitation

The call to abandon bodily pleasures is always couched in the language of moderation and of avoiding excess; Ambrose does not counsel extreme asceticism. Here too he is in line with the Stoic tradition; Isaac models the chief cardinal virtue of temperance for the catechumens. Like the perfected Stoic sage, Isaac is not given to excesses; his use of material goods follows a spirit of detachment, moderation and equanimity. Colish writes, “Unaffected either by good or bad fortune, he possesses tranquility of mind, the only true riches. The peace he enjoys is the peace that passes all understanding... His untroubled soul is rooted in faith, grounded in charity, and perfected in Christ.”¹²² Thus, Ambrose has redefined the Stoic principle of *apatheia*, making it amenable to Christian teaching.

This dialectic in the exhortation “to renounce the vices in material goods, not their use,”¹²³ is ubiquitous in Ambrose’s preaching. The exhortation both to use and renounce material goods follows the Stoic adage, *sequi naturam*, maintains Ambrose, because our true nature is spiritual, not material, and the spiritual is called to have dominion over the material. Ambrose writes, “For like a musician with his instruments, or a physician with his medications, or a shipwright with the things needful for the fitting out of a ship ... how much more does the wise man who lives according to nature (*uiuuit secundum naturam*) adjudge his own whatever is natural! For he remembers that he is made in the image of God.”¹²⁴ Constituted in the *imago dei*, the soul skilfully uses the material like an instrument, while, like the Stoic sage, the soul also retains sovereign detachment from it.

of this land, viz. our body ... and from bodily enticements and delights.” *Abr.* I.2.4 (CSEL 32.pref. 504).

¹²² Colish, *Stoic Tradition*, p. 54.

¹²³ *Is.* 3.6 (CSEL 32.pref. 646).

¹²⁴ *Abr.* II.7.38 (CSEL 32.pref. 593).

The transposition of a Stoic ethic of *sequi naturam* and *apatheia* so as to fit it with a Christian theology of the *imago dei* is evident in Ambrose's concern with two profoundly material and embodied practices: the application of cosmetics and the life of virginity. Ambrose's invective against makeup in his discussion of the image of God in the *Hexameron* is, on first reading, rather perplexing. However, when read in light of his principle of renouncing only the *vice* in material goods rather than their use as such, some sense can be made of this passage. Ambrose describes God as an artist – “a craftsman and a painter of distinction” – who paints beautiful images after himself.¹²⁵ One would do grave injury and injustice to “erase that painting, one that is the product of truth, not of semblance, a picture, expressed not in mere wax, but by the grace of God.”¹²⁶ At first glance it seems that Ambrose is speaking of a spiritual reality. He has suggested that the justified soul is an image conformed to Christ and that this “painting” must be safeguarded. Surprisingly, however, in the very next sentence Ambrose launches into a tirade against the rather bodily practice: the application of makeup. He writes,

I speak, also, of women. They erase that painting by smearing on their complexion a color of material whiteness or by applying an artificial rouge. The result is a work not of beauty, but of ugliness; not of simplicity, but of deceit. It is a temporal creation, a prey to perspiration or to rain. It is a snare and a deception which displeases the person you aim to please, for he realizes that all this is an alien thing and not your own.

¹²⁵ *Hex.* VI.8.47 (CSEL 32.1 393).

¹²⁶ *Hex.* VI.8.47 (CSEL 32.1 393).

This is also displeasing to your Creator, who sees His own work obliterated.¹²⁷

Prima facie, this paragraph is most unusual in terms of its placement. Ambrose has been describing the *soul* made beautiful, the soul that by imitation is transformed and conformed to Christ, the image of God. He has been describing the work of the divine artist, the “painter of distinction,” who paints an immaterial and incorporeal image of justice after his own likeness. Why this tirade against cosmetics? How does this bodily practice obliterate the *immaterial* image?

Ambrose’s invective against cosmetics has, especially in popular portrayals of the Bishop’s thought, been simply read as another manifestation of his ambivalence and even outright hostility to the body and sexuality. John Moorhead, for example, writes that Ambrose’s neo-Platonic influences inculcate in him a distaste and suspicion of the body, which for the Bishop is like a prison. It is especially Ambrose’s understanding of human sexuality and gender that Moorhead finds distasteful. No one, exclaims Moorhead, “could accuse Ambrose of having been well disposed to the human body.”¹²⁸ Likewise, Peter Brown suggests that Ambrose’s Platonic influences inculcated in the Bishop “a dualism of soul and body of exceptional sharpness.”¹²⁹

¹²⁷ *Hex.* VI.8.47 (CSEL 32.1 393). Marcia Colish takes a different interpretation of this passage. See “Cosmetic Theology: The Transformation of a Stoic Theme,” *Assay* 1 (1981): 3-14.

¹²⁸ John Moorhead, *Ambrose, Church and Society in the Late Roman World* (London: Longman, 1999), p. 56. Cf. Frank Bottomley, *Attitudes to the Body in Western Christendom* (London: Lepus, 1979); Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

¹²⁹ Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 348.

It is important to situate Ambrose's concern with cosmetics within his broader understanding of the body as expressing the virtue of the soul. He regards the artificial colouring of the face a manifestation of misplaced love. It is attempting to endow the temporal with eternity and the mortal with immortality. This is why Ambrose underscores the fleeting nature of cosmetics: it falls "prey to perspiration or to rain." Cosmetics is a *simulacrum* that snares and deceives by suggesting eternity when, in fact, the body is subject to death. Here again we see the distinction between two types of "body" in Ambrose. The body with makeup is not, for Ambrose, an instrument of the soul that expresses the soul's virtue; rather, it is the "body" inasmuch as it stands in opposition to the soul. The soul is destined for immortal, immaterial good, while the body displayed with makeup pulls the soul down to mortal and material goods. In short, cosmetics, for Ambrose, mistake the temporal for the eternal.

The soul as the image painted by the "painter of distinction" has profound dignity and integrity; it is "product of truth, not of semblance." While Ambrose concerns himself with the soul, his vociferous opposition to makeup indicates that the soul's virtue is expressed bodily. I would contend that Ambrose is not principally concerned with makeup, because he is never concerned with the body per se. Rather his concern is that the soul perfect its spirit of *apatheia* with respect to the body and conform, *secundum naturam*, to that of which it is an image. In typically Stoic fashion, Ambrose maintains that it is the body that expresses the desires of the soul. Image, I have suggested, is for Ambrose a dynamic term, a movement of love towards an end. The soul no longer expresses the divine image truthfully when it ceases to be

conformed to the artist, and instead loves temporal and material goods.¹³⁰ This “*material* whiteness” and “*artificial* rouge” expresses bodily the disorder of the soul that loves fleeting and unsubstantial reality.¹³¹ Of course, on this reading, the use of makeup, for Ambrose, reflects a more disordered love of temporal and material good. The principle of *apatheia* remains “to renounce the vices in material goods, not their use.”¹³²

Ambrose’s writings on virginity have come under similar censure as indicative of an antipathy to the body.¹³³ Ambrose’s theology of virginity needs to be read, much like his theology of cosmetics, in the light of his re-articulation of Stoic themes of detachment and of his counsel to transvaluate temporal desires. In nearly every treatise devoted to the state of virginity, Ambrose links the discussion with martyrdom. This literary trope provides insight into Ambrose’s understanding of virginity and by extension of the goods of embodied existence. He initiates *De virginibus* with an encomium on St. Agnes the virgin martyr, on whose birthday Ambrose states he is writing the treatise. Girls at the age of twelve are generally unable to bear the angry look of a parent, and they shriek at the prick of a needle,

¹³⁰ Regarding the dissemblance of the body, Ambrose writes, “[I]f we desire to be in good things after the death of the body, let us take care that our soul not be glued to the body, nor mingled with it, that it not cleave to it nor be pulled by it, that it not totter and stagger as if drunk under the passions of the body nor trust itself to bodily pleasures, to commit itself to the feelings of the body. For the eye of the body is error and fraud, because sight is deceived, and its ear is deception, because hearing too is mocked, and its taste is deception.” *Bon. mort.* 9.40 (CSEL 32.pref. 737).

¹³¹ Similarly, Ambrose writes in *De Isaac* that the soul – “man’s image” – is “smeared by the harlot’s rouge of worldly pleasure.” *Is.* 4.24 (CSEL 32.pref. 658).

¹³² *Is.* 3.6 (CSEL 32.pref. 646).

¹³³ Peter Brown does not locate in Ambrose’s writings on virginity the presence of Stoic themes of *apatheia* and the transvaluation of desire as much as the bodily *integritas* that virginity preserves. Brown, *Body and Society*, pp. 341-65. Brown rightly notes the correlation between Ambrose’s Marian theology and his high regard for virginity. However, to my mind, Brown fails to underscore that the bodily *integritas* of the virgin is so significant to Ambrose precisely because it signifies and lives out the inner *integritas* of the soul.

exclaims Ambrose; yet, St. Agnes was completely unmoved by the thought of pain. Ambrose writes, “She was fearless under the cruel hands of the executioners, she was unmoved by the heavy weight of the creaking chains, offering her whole body to the sword of the raging soldier, as yet ignorant of death, but ready for it.”¹³⁴ Ambrose marvels at her Stoic resolve, her *apatheia*, in the face of pain and death. While Agnes displays the virtue of a Stoic sage, the origin of her *apatheia* is not an inner store of resolve, but the grace of Christ, and her goal is not inner stability, but desire for eternity.

The Stoic detachment that Agnes displays in the face of her martyrdom is inseparable from her virginity, maintains Ambrose. There is “in one victim a twofold martyrdom.”¹³⁵ In both cases, Ambrose suggests, Agnes abandons the temporal and material goods of the body (both of life and of marriage) not because they are not goods, but because they are penultimate goods; Agnes’s desires have been transvalued. Virginity is that which makes for martyrdom, states Ambrose, because it is the spirit of virginal detachment to earthly goods that trains the soul to suffer martyrdom for the sake of that which is eternal.¹³⁶ Surprising as it may seem, therefore, Agnes’s “twofold martyrdom” is in keeping with the Stoic adage of *sequi naturam*; because her true desire as an image is to be united with her source.

Commenting on the verse of the Canticle, “A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed” (Song 4:12), Ambrose suggests that this enclosed garden with its pure and sealed fountain is an allegory of the soul of a virgin,

¹³⁴ *Virg.* 2.7. Cf. Yves-Marie Duval, “L’Originalité du De virginibus dans le mouvement ascétique occidental: Ambroise, Cyprien, Athanase,” in *Ambroise de Milan. XVIe Centenaire de son élection épiscopale. Dix études* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1974), pp. 9-66.

¹³⁵ *Virg.* 2.9.

¹³⁶ *Virg.* 3.10.

which likewise “shines, reflecting the features of the image of God.”¹³⁷ To use Ambrose’s metaphor, her detachment from the body allows the body to become the instrument of her chaste soul. She uses her body to express the transvalued desires of her soul. The virgin says in the Canticle, “Set me as a signet upon your heart, and as a seal upon your arm,” because in her detachment from the body she is given what she truly desires: “[T]he Son is the image of the Father, and in the Spirit is the seal of the Son.”¹³⁸ In *De institutione uirginis* Ambrose contrasts the outer man from the inner man. Consecrated virginity, he suggests, originates in the rightly ordered desire of the inner man to be conformed to the image and likeness of God.¹³⁹ While one ought certainly to praise the beauty of the created body, much greater beauty is to be found in the grace of the inner man, for that beauty, Ambrose explains, is the image of God.¹⁴⁰

Thus, rather than denigrate the body and sexuality per se, Ambrose’s writings on virginity suggest that by perfecting a spirit of *apatheia* the soul can use its embodied state to anticipate the life to come. That is to say, by recognizing the penultimate nature of the body and sexuality, the soul can skillfully use its embodied existence like an instrument. In panegyric style, Ambrose writes, “Virginity has

¹³⁷ *Virg.* 9.45 (PL 16 211-212). Ambrose employs the exact same exegesis of this verse in *De institutione uirginis*: “*Fons signatus es, uirgo, nemo aquam tuam polluat, nemo conturbet, ut imaginem tuam in fonte tuo semper attendas.*” *Inst.* 9.61 (PL 16 336). Similarly, see *Ep.* 63.36.

¹³⁸ *Virg.* 9.48 (PL 16 213). In *De spiritu sancto* Ambrose gives a pneumatological interpretation to this verse: “For although we were visibly sealed in our bodies, we are in truth sealed in our hearts, that the Holy Spirit may portray in us the likeness of the heavenly image.” *Spir.* I.79 (CSEL 79 48). In a letter to Irenaeus (*Ep.* 80) Ambrose writes, “[The soul] will receive Christ like a signet ring upon her, for He is the image of God. Then, she will be according to that image, because heavenly is the heavenly man. And we need to bear the image of the heavenly one, that is, peace.”

¹³⁹ *Inst.* 3.20 (PL 16 324): *ad imaginem dei est ac similitudinem.*

¹⁴⁰ *Inst.* 4.30 (PL 16 327): *Non possumus reprehendere diuini artificis opus, sed quem delectat corporis pulchritudo, multo magis illa delectet uenustas, quae ad imaginem dei est intus, non foris comptior.*

brought from heaven that which it may imitate on earth. And not unfittingly has she sought her manner of life from heaven, who has found for herself a Spouse in heaven.”¹⁴¹ Ambrose’s use of a traditional Stoic ethic of detachment should not simply be attributed to Plotinian suspicions of the body; rather, it derives from his understanding of the body, which in its temporality and materiality is a penultimate good – something that is good inasmuch as it can be used to live already, like St. Agnes, so as to attain the eternity and immateriality of heaven.¹⁴² Ambrose is, therefore, urging his catechumens to transvalue their desires from the earthly to the heavenly, that is, from the concerns of the body to those of the soul.

For Ambrose, the *apatheia* that the soul ought to have towards material and temporal goods derives from the soul’s self-knowledge: it knows itself to be superior to bodily goods below it. Further, the soul knows itself as image of God, and its nature is fulfilled by returning to its source. Thus, the Stoic ethic of *apatheia* and *sequi naturam* is transposed by Ambrose to fit a Christian *telos*; Ambrose’s counsel of detachment and transvaluation of desire does not so much restrict the soul’s desires as conform them to the soul’s nature as *imago dei*.

It is in Ambrose’s *De officiis* that the influence of Stoic ethics is perhaps most explicit.¹⁴³ The moral theology of *De officiis* is rooted in Ambrose’s understanding of the image of God. As in his writings on cosmetics and virginity, so here, Ambrose

¹⁴¹ *Virg.* 3.11.

¹⁴² A more polemical reading of Ambrose’s panegyric to St. Agnes is suggested by Virginia Burrus, “Reading Agnes: The Rhetoric of Gender in Ambrose and Prudentius,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995): 25-46.

¹⁴³ Ivor Davidson offers a superb contextualization of Ambrose’s *De officiis* in “Ambrose’s *De officiis* and the Intellectual Climate of the Late Fourth Century,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 49 (1995): 313-33. Cf. Gioacchino Nosari, *Del preteso stoicismo ciceroniano nei libri “De officiis” di S. Ambrogio* (Parma: Federale, 1911); C. Rossi, “Il De officiis di Cicerone e il De officiis di Ambrogio: rapporti di contenuto e forma,” in Felici Sergio ed., “*Humanitas*” classica e “*sapientia*” cristiana: scritti offerti a Roberto Iacoangeli (Rome: LAS, 1992), pp. 145-62.

counsels Stoic *apatheia* and detachment from material goods not because they are evil but because they are dissonant with the nature of the soul, which is “like God.” The soul is called to detachment, so that its desires can be transvalued to that which is in keeping with the soul’s true nature; this becomes clear in Ambrose’s discussion of what it means to “delight yourself in the Lord” (Ps 36:4).¹⁴⁴ This eternal delight, suggests Ambrose, is for those who are given to “grasp the higher delights, those who can appreciate what the pure, spiritual delight of the soul is really like.”¹⁴⁵ To satiate this delight, the Lord has offered the bread of wisdom (*panis sapientiae*). Ambrose contrasts this bread, which fulfills the soul’s true nature, with the bread of which Christ was speaking when he said that man shall not live by bread alone. Ambrose urges his clergy, “So let us eat the bread of wisdom, and let us be filled with the word of God, for the life of man made in God’s image does not consist in bread alone, but in every word of God.”¹⁴⁶ Constituted in the *imago dei*, the goods that the human soul should desire ought to be commensurate with its nature. Likewise, the Stoic injunction *sequi naturam* counsels detachment toward temporal bread in order that this desire may be transvalued into desire for the bread of wisdom.

Ambrose builds on the contrasting desires of temporal and eternal goods later on in book one of *De officiis*. In this context, “bread” is temporal wealth. Such riches do not enhance your true nature, explains Ambrose; “all they do is remove the image of God from you and clothe you with the image of the earthly man.”¹⁴⁷ Elaborating on the Pauline analogy of the inner man and the outer man, Ambrose suggests that

¹⁴⁴ *Off.* 1.31.164. I will be using Ivor Davidson, trans. *Ambrose: De Officiis*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁵ *Off.* 1.31.164.

¹⁴⁶ *Off.* 1.31.164.

¹⁴⁷ *Off.* 1.49.245: *immo exuunt te imaginem Dei et induunt terreni imaginem.*

desiring to accumulate goods for the earthly man does not allow for the detachment necessary to focus on the heavenly man.¹⁴⁸ The Bishop of Milan writes,

You are laying aside the image of the eternal Emperor and setting up within yourself the image of death. Instead, cast out the image of the devil from the kingdom of your soul, and raise up the image of Christ. This is the image that should shine in you, that should be resplendent in your kingdom, or your soul, the one which effaces all the images of evil vices. This is what David has to say about these things: ‘Lord, in your kingdom you shall bring their images to nothing.’ When the Lord adorns Jerusalem according to his own image, then every image of his enemies is destroyed.¹⁴⁹

Here Ambrose presents a very stark contrast: the image of Christ is set in opposition to the image of the Devil. The monarch and the tyrant are warring for the “kingdom of your soul.” The city of Jerusalem, then, is an allegory for the kingdom of the soul; by rights it belongs to the divine Monarch: he has put his stamp and seal on the

¹⁴⁸ This Pauline trope is also at work in Ambrose’s discussion regarding the “image” of Caesar on the coin, in his commentary on Luke. Ambrose comments, “Questioned concerning the penny, [Christ] asks about the image, for there is one image of God, another image of the world. Therefore, the Apostle, also, admonishes us, ‘As we have borne the image of the earthly, let us bear also the image of the heavenly.’ Christ does not have the image of Caesar, because He is the image of God. Peter does not have the image of Caesar, because he said, ‘We have left all things and have followed thee....’ If, then, [Christ] did not have the image of Caesar, why did He pay tax? He did not give from His Own, but gave back to the world what was of the world. And if ye would not be beholden to Caesar, do not possess what belongs to the world.” *Luc.* 9.34-35. While the traditional interpretation of this passage focuses on Christ’s command to give to Caesar that to which he has legitimate claim, Ambrose interprets this passage to underscore the necessity of transvaluing one’s desires; the image of Caesar on the coin is the image of the world, to which one must display a spirit of detachment.

¹⁴⁹ *Off.* 1.49.245.

soul.¹⁵⁰ However, the Devil invites the soul to rebellion, to throw off its true allegiance; he does so by luring the soul with bodily delight – temporal and material goods that cannot satiate the soul’s desires, but instead obstruct its true desire to live according to its nature (*sequi naturam*).¹⁵¹

De officiis links the discussion of “image” with desire. By nature the soul desires the eternal good because, explains Ambrose, “the Lord adorns Jerusalem according to his own image”; the image is created to desire the eternal Emperor. The desire for riches and wealth, then, is a *simulacrum* of what the soul by nature desires; ultimately this *simulacrum* is an “image of death,” because by desiring materiality and temporality the soul partakes in the body of death. Ambrose’s counsel to transvalue the soul’s desires, then, is intended to redirect the soul back to what by nature fulfils its desire as image of the eternal Emperor.

This paragraph of *De officiis* also makes clear that for Ambrose the image becomes what it imitates. Ambrose is, therefore, more ambiguous than most fourth-century Latin Fathers on the question of whether the *imago dei* can be lost. The *Hexameron* makes clear that the *imago dei* constitutes what is quintessentially the human essence; the image is a created *datum* of “nature.” In this sense it seems to be a permanent character of the human person. Nevertheless, for Ambrose, image is also realized in imitation. In this sense, the *imago dei* is not simply a static *datum*, but is something that reveals itself in desire and movement. Ambrose writes, “While we are

¹⁵⁰ Similarly, in *De Isaac* Ambrose writes that while the body shares an association with beasts and wild animals, the soul is inscribed with “the holy seal of imitation of the divine.” *Is.* 7.43.

¹⁵¹ Ivor Davidson notes the wordplay in Ambrose’s use of “*terreni imaginem*.” The earthly image is the image of the Devil; *terreni* (earthly) and *tyrannis* (tyranny) sound very similar in Latin. Having lost the heavenly image, humanity now bears the image of the Devil until Christ pays the debt of sin and restores the divine image. Cf. Ivor Davidson, *Commentary on Ambrose’s De officiis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), I.49.245.

here, then, let us make sure that we preserve the image, so that we attain to the truth that awaits us there. Let us have the image of justice in us, and let us have the image of wisdom in us, for that day will come for each of us, and we shall be assessed according to the measure in which we display that image.”¹⁵² In Ambrose’s moral injunctions, the state of the image and likeness in this life seems tenuous; it must be resolutely guarded, lest it be lost. Never let the Devil find his own image in your soul, warns Ambrose.¹⁵³ The soul that prefers the temporal to the eternal becomes like that which it desires – a being unto death. In *De officiis*, then, Ambrose cautions the clergy about the double-edged sword that being an image entails; one becomes that which he imitates: “You are laying aside the image of the eternal Emperor and setting up within yourself the image of death.”¹⁵⁴

It is in Ambrose’s preaching that the ambiguity surrounding the permanence of the image of God in the face of human sin is perhaps most pronounced. In the *Expositio psalmi cxviii*, the moral injunction issuing from the *imago dei* contains an interesting corollary: it appears that, at least in some sense, this image can be lost on account of sin. In sinning, the human person becomes less than his nature; Scripture describes him as an animal: “For Scripture calls man those whom God made in his own image and likeness. When, however, he sins it usually calls him not man but serpent, horse neighing after the mares, little fox, or mule.”¹⁵⁵ Thus, it almost seems that the *imago dei* is for Ambrose a treasured gift that can be lost: “Take care not to

¹⁵² *Off.* 1.49.240.

¹⁵³ *Off.* 1.49.241: “Do not allow the enemy to find his image in you, or his rage or his fury, for all that these reflect is the image of wickedness.... Do not allow [the Devil] to find in you a desire for gold, or piles of silver, or the idols which are all evil vices, or he will deprive you of your claim to be free.”

¹⁵⁴ *Off.* 1.49.245.

¹⁵⁵ *Psal.* 118, 10.11.

lose the great gift God has given you, the gift of being made in his own image.”¹⁵⁶ In sinning, human beings debase themselves; they become less than what they were created to be, so that they no longer seem to bear the *imago dei*. Ambrose writes, “Having shed the beauty of the heavenly image we lose also the name of man, for we lose the grace of man (*gratiam hominis non tenemus*).”¹⁵⁷ Ambrose is ambiguous whether human beings can actually lose the *imago dei* or whether this is a rhetorical flourish to his homily. He certainly presents a unique and striking anthropological nuance to his theology of the image of God: the human person not only has the *imago dei* and not only is *capax dei*, but this also inscribes a supernatural end already in his created nature: by turning away from this supernatural end one becomes less than human. Human volatility underscores the participated nature of the *imago dei*; the tenuous state of the image safeguards the genuine dynamism of the divine-human relationship.

¹⁵⁶ *Psal. 118*, 10.11: *Vide ne quod deus tribuit amittas magnum illud munus, quod es ad imaginem dei*. The distinction between “image” and “likeness,” so prevalent in the Eastern Fathers, is remarkably absent in this discussion. Here, as elsewhere, Ambrose uses the terms “image” and “likeness” interchangeably. Dudden similarly notes, “It may be observed that Ambrose does not distinguish between ‘the image’ and ‘the likeness’ of God, but uses the terms indifferently” (Dudden, *Ambrose*, vol. 2, p. 612, n. 3).

¹⁵⁷ *Psal. 118*, 10.11. Unlike some Fathers, Ambrose has a very stark understanding of the Fall. Dudden explains that for Ambrose the Fall had profound effects on the human person: “He ceased to be ‘a heavenly being’ and became ‘a being of earth’; he ‘laid aside the image of the heavenly and took the image of the earthly.’” When he lost the image and likeness of God, the human person “ceased to be what he had been.” “The loss of the image of God involved the loss of original righteousness.” “He became irrational, carnal, animal” (Dudden, *Ambrose*, vol. 2, pp. 615-16). It is, however, important to note that when Ambrose speaks of the loss of the image it is often in a rhetorically charged setting. In the eulogy surrounding the death of his brother, *De excessu fratris Satyri*, Ambrose is emphatic that the image is not lost. He writes, “For what is better than to be sure that the work of God does not perish, and that those who are made in the image and likeness of God cannot be transformed into the shapes of beasts; since in truth it is not the form of the body but of the spirit which is made after the likeness of God.” *Exc.* 130 (CSEL 73 323).

Ambrose's moral theology is in many ways the result of a Stoic ethic brought to bear on a theology of the image of God. The soul is called to perfect *apatheia* in the face of material and temporal goods so that, following its true nature, it can ascend back to its source. The nature of the image of God is something moving and dynamic, realized by rightly ordered desire and imitation. Of course, this comes with the corollary condition that in imitating that which is less than itself, the soul gets dragged down to the material and even seems to lose its spiritual nature. Ambrose's writings on cosmetics and virginity underscore that it is in transvaluing one's desires from temporal goods to eternal good that one's nature is fulfilled.

Conclusion

The sharp and sustained antithesis between soul and body that runs throughout Ambrose's corpus is not primarily a display of thoroughgoing Platonic dualism or a rejection of embodied existence. Instead, it issues from his robust Christology. Genesis 1:26 is understood in light of Colossians 1:15. If Christ is the eternal and invisible image of God, the human soul comes to share in this divine nature by desire and imitation of eternity. There is an active, dynamic teleology to Ambrose's theology of the image of God. He writes, "The soul, then, is made to the image of God, in form like the Lord Jesus. Those men are saints who are conformed to the Son of God."¹⁵⁸ Paul's theology of justification as a dynamic and ongoing transformation from glory to glory into the eternal image of God (2 Cor. 3:18) also has much currency for Ambrose's theology of the image of God.¹⁵⁹ The image of God is a

¹⁵⁸ *Hex.* VI.8.46 (CSEL 32.1 237).

¹⁵⁹ *Hex.* 8.45 (CSEL 32.1 236).

dynamic movement realized in love as the human image is being “conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29).¹⁶⁰

It is precisely because the nature of the image is realized in imitation that Ambrose counsels not only Stoic *apatheia* but also the transvaluation of desires. As image, the soul is unintelligible apart from that which it images. Integral to the definition of an image, then, is *imitation*; an image must imitate. Either the created image will imitate and desire material goods so that the soul will be pulled down to that which is lower than its nature, or else in keeping with its nature the soul will imitate that which is higher and will ascend to the immaterial and eternal good. In *De bono mortis* Ambrose writes, “Therefore, the soul that cleaves to the invisible God, good and immortal, flees from the things of this body, abandons earthly and mortal concerns, and becomes like the object of its desire.”¹⁶¹ The urgency of redirecting and reordering one’s desires is unequivocal in Ambrose’s preaching to the catechumens. He exhorts the catechumens to understand that in the Canticum Christ himself is calling them: “Open to me, my sister.... ‘Open to me,’ but close to strangers. Close to the times, close to the world, do not go out of doors to material things.”¹⁶² Christ is inviting the soul to come to him, not in the flesh, but in the spirit; the soul is to conform itself to Christ, “that she also might be conformed to the image of Christ.”¹⁶³ This union through imitation can only occur, reiterates Ambrose, by divesting oneself of attachments to the body, not because the body is evil but because it is a penultimate good.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Cf. *Hex.* 8.46 (CSEL 32.1 237).

¹⁶¹ *Bon. mort.* 9.41 (CSEL 32.pref. 739).

¹⁶² *Is.* 6.51 (CSEL 32.pref. 675).

¹⁶³ *Is.* 6.52 (CSEL 32.pref. 676).

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *Is.* 6.52 (CSEL 32.pref. 676).

Once the soul has abandoned the lures of the body and is able to detach itself from the world, then the soul gains a new allegiance, a new citizenship; it is a citizen with the saints.¹⁶⁵ When the soul has been purified and remade in the image of Christ, then the soul “is allowed to imitate Christ” by saying with him, “The prince of this world is coming, and in me he will find nothing.”¹⁶⁶ The prince of this world finds nothing because the soul in imitation of Christ has become dead to the world and alive to Christ.

Ambrose’s theology of the image of God serves as a point of departure for Augustine. While the common Latin pro-Nicene difficulty in affirming the image of God in the human person is evident also in Ambrose, he is less reluctant than Hilary and Victorinus to affirm the *imago dei* of the human person. The second half of this thesis will suggest that Ambrose’s emphasis on the mimetic character of the human image, allowing it to return and to be like its source, functions in many ways as the theological framework for Augustine’s early theology of image, most especially in his description of the soul’s movement of ascent. In significant ways, however, we will see Augustine’s broader theology of image affording him even greater latitude than Ambrose to affirm the character of the human person as image in its own right.

¹⁶⁵ *Is.* 6.54 (CSEL 32.pref. 678). The theme of a new citizenship is a trope frequently used trope by Ambrose, to express the change of allegiance and desires on the part of the catechumens.

¹⁶⁶ *Is.* 6.55 (CSEL 32.pref. 679-80).

Chapter IV: The Plotinian Image

This chapter is in a number of ways preliminary to the following three chapters. In this second part of the thesis, I will offer a constructive reading of Augustine's early theology of image. These chapters will present Augustine's early theology of the *imago dei* as a significant departure from that of the pro-Nicene theologians considered in the preceding three chapters. The first half of my thesis underscored a common challenge that faced Augustine's immediate Latin theological predecessors: How could they affirm the *imago dei* of the human person when this title was immediately associated with the *homoousion* and implied an affirmation of divine equality? This second half of my thesis argues that Augustine's appropriation of a Plotinian philosophy of image offers him a broader theological conception of the "image of God" than was available to his Latin predecessors. In chapter five I argue that *Contra Academicos* and *De ordine* overcome the negative evaluation of "image" suggested by the Skeptics, who understood "image" as that which is deceptive and deluding. Drawing on a participatory account of image, Augustine proposes instead the possibility that image might be revelatory of the truth; in doing so, image philosophy becomes the foundation to his early theology of the Incarnation. In chapter six, I demonstrate that Augustine's anthropology allows him to affirm the *imago dei* of the human person, even in his embodied state. Finally, chapter seven considers Augustine's theology of ascent in *De vera religione* as integral to his understanding of the *imago dei*. To develop this constructive reading in the following chapters I need to consider in this chapter the philosophical foundations on which Augustine's early theology of image is predicated.

Augustine's early theology of image is predicated on a Plotinian participatory ontology. "Image," in this metaphysical framework, is an expression and reflection of the One; as derived from the One, "image" is inscribed with a desire to return to its source. I will consider Augustine's reliance on a Plotinian participatory account of image in three steps. First, I will analyze the vocabulary Augustine employs in the Cassiciacum dialogues to express a participatory account of image. I will look especially at the terms *imago* and *similitudo*. Second, I will devote considerable attention to Plotinus's cosmogony in which the philosophy of image plays a significant role. An understanding of image derived from Plotinian cosmogony, is critical to Augustine's early theology of image. The account of image that Plotinus advances presents a tension: the image contains at once something true and something false. The third part of this chapter will consider this tension as it is expressed in the *Soliloquies*. As such, the conclusions of this chapter are propedeutic to the following chapter, in which I argue that in the *Contra Academicos* and *De ordine* Augustine explicitly links image theology with the Incarnation and asserts the possibility, in the face of Skeptic uncertainty, that truth can be grasped within temporal material reality.

Participatio, Imago, Similitudo

"Image" (*imago*) and its cognate "likeness" (*similitudo*) are unintelligible apart from a concept of "participation" (*participatio*). Somehow an image or likeness conveys the source it "participates" in. All three of these terms are foundational to a basic Platonic cosmology, in which the material order is an image of the immaterial world in which it participates. However, rather than speaking generally of a "Platonic" or "participatory ontology" in Augustine's thought, it is propitious to analyze precisely how Augustine uses these terms in his early dialogues. The broad semantic range of

participatio revolves around “sharing in” and bespeaks an intimate relationship.

Although the word appears 585 times in Augustine’s corpus, it occurs only once in the Cassiciacum dialogues.¹ Augustine uses the noun to describe the generous character of his patron, Romanianus, who shares his wealth with Augustine.² *Participatio* is a centrifugal theme in Augustine’s writings, around which various other words and concepts revolve.³ Other words frequently employed by Augustine to denote the

¹ In an article analyzing how Augustine’s theology of participation evolved with his growing understanding of the Incarnation, David Meconi analyzes three passages of *Confessions* VII in detail. David Meconi, “The Incarnation and the Role of Participation in St. Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Augustinian Studies* 29 (1998): 61-75. He notes that Augustine augmented his early Platonic account of participation to include Christ’s descent to participate in our humanity (*participatione tunicae pellicae nostrae* [Conf. VII. 18.24; CCSL 37, 108]). Meconi writes, “This use of participation represents a significant turning point in Augustine’s thought. An intellectual conversion has taken place. With this new ability to imagine an undivided, immutable essence participating in the imperfect, mutable contingents of this fallen world, Augustine is now able to speak of the perfect participating in the imperfect: that which-is taking part in that which-is-not.” Meconi, “The Incarnation and the Role of Participation,” 68. Cf. David Meconi, “Saint Augustine’s Early Theory of Participation,” *Augustinian Studies* 27 (1996): 79-96. This “downward participation,” highlighted by Meconi, is also operative in Augustine’s Cassiciacum dialogues. The condescension of Christ to participate in human nature is, I will argue, an integral part of Augustine’s early image theology, although it is less explicitly articulated than in the mature corpus.

² *Acad.* II.2.4 (CCSL 29 20): *omnia mea uincula etiam patrimonii tui mecum participatione rupturum* (Even going to share your patrimony with me).

³ Important literature on Augustine’s theology of participation includes Ianuarius di Somma, “De naturali participatione divini luminis in mente humana secundum S. Augustinum et S. Thomam,” *Gregorianum* 7 (1926): 321-38. This article is an epistemological consideration of participation in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas that considers divine illumination as an epistemological access to reality. M. Annice, “Historical Sketch of the Theory of Participation,” *The New Scholasticism* 26 (1952): 49-79. Annice situates Augustine’s thought within a survey of philosophical accounts of participation. Georges Folliet, “*Deificari in otio: Augustin, Epistula 10, 2,*” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 2 (1962): 225-36. Patricia Wilson-Kastner, “Grace as Participation in the Divine Life in the Theology of Augustine of Hippo,” *Augustinian Studies* 7 (1976): 135-52. Juan Pegueroles, “Participacion y conocimiento de Dios en la predicacion de San Agustin,” *Espiritu* 27 (1979): 5-26. This article explores how knowledge of God through his created effects remains, for Augustine, real knowledge of God because of His participatory presence in all being. Gerald Bonner, “Augustine’s Conception of Deification,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986): 369-86. Bonner develops an element of Augustine’s theology not frequently

same general idea, are *connectere*, *adhaerere*, *consortium*, and even *deificare*; these words are, however, not found in the Cassiciacum works – though *cohaerere* does make a lone appearance in *De ordine*. The latter instance is worth some consideration. In the context of discussing what it means to be *with* God, Licentius asserts that it involves a rational union; it is a union through understanding not with sense perception but with intellectual knowledge. This rational union constitutes wisdom and is what it means to be *with* God. Licentius says, “The soul of the wise man [that is] thoroughly cleansed by acts of virtue and already cleaving to God (*cohaerens deo*), merits the name of wise, and it is unfitting that any other part of him be called wise.”⁴ With the term *cohaerere*, Licentius posits a participatory union of the rational soul with God that is different from the way in which all other created realities are said to be *with* God. Another word that approaches the semantic range of *participatio* is *communio*; forms of this word occur sixteen times in the dialogues.⁵

explored, namely deification. Bonner demonstrates how an account of participation sustains Augustine’s theology of deification. Roland Teske, “The Image and Likeness of God in St. Augustine’s *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus*,” *Augustinianum* 30 (1990): 441-51. Teske makes explicit the link between participation and the *imago dei*. Matthias Smalbrugge, “La Notion de la participation chez Augustin: Quelques observations sur le rapport christianisme-platonisme,” *Augustiniana* 40 (1990): 333-47. Like Meconi, Smalbrugge notes how Augustine radically alters the Platonic account of participation to include a “downward” theology of participation that takes the incarnation into its purview: “Augustin renverse donc le schème habituel. Pour lui, l’unité de la réalité n’est pas uniquement une question de l’ascension de l’inférieur au supérieur, mais également celle de la descente du supérieur à l’inférieur.” Smalbrugge, “La Notion de la participation chez Augustin,” 339.

⁴ *Ord.* II.II.6 (CCSL 29 109): *anima, inquit, sapientis perpurgata uirtutibus et iam cohaerens deo sapientis etiam nomine digna est nec quicquam eius aliud delectat appellare sapientem*

⁵ *Acad.* II.2.3 (CCSL 29 19): *tu in nostro ipso municipio fauore familiaritate communicatione domus tuae paene te cum clarum primatem que fecisti*. It is in expressing his thanks to Romanianus that Augustine uses the word *communio*. A number of times the word expresses something that is held in “common” as in *Acad.* II.9.23 (CCSL 29 30): *nam ignoratio ueri aut mihi, si illi fingebant, peculiaris est aut certe utrisque communis*. *Acad.* III.7.16 (CCSL 43): *uoluptatem que illam Epicuri solis inter se pecoribus esse commune*. *Acad.* III.8 (CCSL 45): *hoc cum isto commune*

Evidently *participatio* and its synonyms are not vocabulary that Augustine frequently uses in the Cassiciacum works, and yet an account of image and its relation to truth is a recurring motif. It seems that despite the absence of the language of participation, the concept itself is operative throughout the dialogues and is, in fact, key to understanding Augustine's early expression of the mind's union with truth. I will suggest that the concept of *participatio* in truth is most clearly seen in Augustine's use of "image" language. Forms of the word *imago* appear 24 times in the dialogues, and 28 times forms of the word *similitudo* is used. It is worth highlighting some of these uses, so as to understand the contexts and breadth of Augustine's use of these words.

Often a form of *imaginare* or of *imago* will be used to describe something wrongly "imagined" such as Augustine recounting his desire for a wife, whose "imagined caresses and their bitter sweetness" still had a pull on his soul.⁶ This sense is also used to bespeak mistaken judgments: Augustine says, "[O]ne of us must have suffered from a mistaken appearance (*imaginationem falsam*)"⁷; such misjudgments occurs in dreams, when we are "mistaken by the resemblance of images,"⁸ or in the wrong "imagination" of those schooled in the liberal arts, who think that they now know the whole truth.⁹ Five times in the *Soliloquies* "image" is used in the context of a mirror that portrays a false image. Augustine writes, "Is it not evident to you that

habeo, quod dubitat, quis uestrum uerum sequatur. At one instance the word is used to express a communication, that is, a sharing of information: *Acad.* III.20.44 (CCSL 29 61): *communicabo ergo eam uobiscum.*

⁶ *Sol.* I.XIV.25 (CSEL 89 38): *imaginatae illae blanditiae et amara suauitas titillaverit.*

⁷ *Sol.* II.III.3 (CSEL 89 49).

⁸ *Sol.* II.VI.12 (CSEL 89 61): *Quid? cum talia nos uel olfacere, uel gustare, uel tangere somniamus, nonne similitudine imaginum eo deteriore quo inaniore decipimur?*

⁹ *Sol.* II.XX.35 (CSEL 89 96): *Ipsae sunt illae imaginationes magna cautione uitandae.*

your image in a mirror desires, so to speak, to be you, and yet is false precisely because it is not you?”¹⁰ Three times in *Soliloquies* II.XX.35, Augustine uses a form of the word *imago* to bespeak the failure of mental images to convey the truth of geometric principles.¹¹ He explains that although it is geometrically possible to infinitely place lines inside a tiny circle, nevertheless, our minds cannot imagine (*imaginando*) filling this space smaller than the hole of the tiniest needle.¹² In all these instances in the *Soliloquies*, *imago* conveys a negative connotation – it describes a wrongly imagined or dreamed occurrence, the image of a mirror claiming authenticity, or the inability of the imagination to express mathematical principles.

Contra Academicos and *De ordine* suggest that a more positive connotation of image is also present in Augustine’s dialogues. When various forms of the word *imago* appear in these works, it is also against the backdrop of a Platonic worldview. The material, temporal world is an image of the immaterial, eternal world of forms. Augustine speaks approvingly of Plato’s theory of the true world of forms, which is the model of the sensible world made in its image.¹³ In this Platonic context, image is given a positive connotation – a connection exists between the form and the material

¹⁰ *Sol.* II.IX.17 (CSEL 89 66-67): *An non tibi uidetur imago tua de speculo quasi tu ipse uelle esse, sed ideo esse falsa, quod non est?* Cf. *Sol.* II.VI.11 (CSEL 89 59): *Quis enim in speculum adtendat et recte dicat se esse illius imaginis similem ac non potius illam sibi?* *Sol.* II.VI.11 (CSEL 89 59): *Quamuis enim pleraque specula homines faciant, non tamen ipsi effingunt eas quae redduntur imagines.* *Sol.* II.VII.13 (CSEL 89 62): *Quid? cum de speculo resultare imaginem uidemus?* *Sol.* II.X.18 (CSEL 89 69): *unde in speculo uera hominis imago, si non falsus homo?*

¹¹ *Sol.* II.XX.35 (CSEL 89 96): *Quid tale umquam oculus uidit, aut uidere potest, cum ipsa imaginatione cogitationis fingi quicquam huiusmodi non potest?*

¹² *Sol.* II.XX.35 (CSEL 89 97): *An non hoc probamus, cum etiam minimum circulum imaginando animo describimus, et ab eo lineas ad centrum ducimus? Nam cum duas duxerimus, inter quas quasi acu uix pungi possit, alias iam in medio non possumus ipsa cogitatione imaginaria ducere.*

¹³ *Acad.* III.17.37 (CCSL 29 57): *Sat est enim ad id, quod uolo, Platonem sensisse duos esse mundos, unum intellegibilem, in quo ipsa ueritas habitaret, istum autem sensibilem, quem manifestum est nos uisu tactuque sentire; itaque illum uerum, hunc ueri similem et ad illius imaginem factum.*

representation of the form. The “truth-like” representation participates in its source. In this regard, Augustine writes, “Whoever contemplates the exemplar approves the representation (*imaginem*).”¹⁴ *De ordine* and *Contra Academicos* refer to “image” also within a discussion of Proteus. Five times the word *imago* is used in the Cassiciacum dialogues in reference to this elusive character Proteus, the “image of the truth.”¹⁵ This positive evaluation of image as revelatory of the truth is the subject of the following chapter (chapter five).

The central theme of human ability to know and participate in truth entails that the dialogues also frequently use forms of the word *similitudo*, with a variety of meanings, such as likeness, imitation, similarity, and resemblance. It is worth highlighting some examples in the Cassiciacum works. Often *similitudo* appears in the same context as the word *imago*. When Augustine is told that the difference between knowledge of God and knowledge of earthy things is even greater than the difference between the splendor and beauty of the heavens and that of the earth, Augustine remarks that he finds this comparison (*haec similitudo*) convincing.¹⁶ The relation between a false resemblance and the truth is a major source of discussion in the second book of the *Soliloquies*, which contains seventeen references to *similitudo*. The discussion surrounding false resemblances is initiated by Augustine’s reason saying, “Certainly, that which the eyes see is not called false unless it has some

¹⁴ *Acad.* III.18.40 (CCSL 29 59): *Probat enim bene imaginem, quisquis eius intuetur exemplum.*

¹⁵ *Acad.* III.6.13 (CCSL 29 42): *Proteus enim ille, ut uos adulescentes non penitus poetas a philosophia contemnendos esse uideatis, in imaginem ueritatis inducitur; ueritatis, inquam, Proteus in carminibus ostentat sustinetque personam, quam obtinere nemo potest, si falsis imaginibus deceptus comprehensionis nodos uel laxauerit uel dimiserit. Sunt enim istae imagines.* Cf. *Ord.* II.15.43; *Acad.* III.5.11.

¹⁶ *Sol.* I.5.11 (CSEL 89 19). This same comparative sense of *similitudo* is found in *Sol.* I.8.15 (CSEL 89 23): *Nunc accipe, quantum praesens tempus exposcit, ex illa similitudine sensibilibus etiam de deo aliquid nunc me docente.*

likeness to the true (*similitudinem veri*). For example, a man whom we see in our dreams is, of course, not a true man; he is false for the very reason that he bears a resemblance to a true one (*habet veri similitudinem*).¹⁷ In *Contra Academicos* Augustine explains that the Academics fear the “similarity of things” (*similitudinem rerum*), which is often confused with certain knowledge of philosophical truth, and so the Academics only grant knowledge of the “truth-like” (*veri simile*) or what they term the “probable.”¹⁸

The use of the terms “image” and “likeness” in the dialogues can be understood in relation to the concept of participation. The terms have both a positive and a negative connotation: they are positive inasmuch as they participate in and are revelatory of eternal truth; they contain a negative implication in that they conceal their derived nature and hence deceive. As such, there is an inauthentic element in an image, which remains in some sense a dissemblance.¹⁹

The Plotinian Image

The suffusion of “image” language in the dialogues entails that despite the absence of the precise language of *participatio*, the concept is, without a doubt, operative throughout these early works. The character of Augustine’s early philosophy of image is heavily informed by a neo-Platonic, particularly Plotinian, understanding of image. Simply by analyzing the usage of the terms *imago* and *similitudo*, I have made clear that a participatory ontology marks Augustine’s account of “image” in the

¹⁷ *Sol.* II.6.10 (CSEL 89 58).

¹⁸ *Acad.* II.5.12 (CCSL 29 24). The Academics, explains Augustine, “are following what resembles the true, although they do not know what truth itself is.” *Acad.* II.7.19. Cf. *Acad.* II.10.24; *Acad.* II.12.27; *Acad.* III.10.25; *Acad.* III.11.26.

¹⁹ In what follows, I will suggest that this tension between two senses of “image” evident in the dialogues is already present in Plotinus’s philosophy of image.

dialogues. Images exist in the temporal, material order as derived representations of a more stable form.

Augustine's theology of image in his early writings has its philosophical roots principally in Plotinian cosmology.²⁰ The vocabulary of "image" in the early works, which I have analyzed, makes clear that Augustine unequivocally aligns himself with Plato's teaching on the distinction between the sensible world and the world of the forms; Augustine is consonant with the Platonic tradition that recognizes the world of the forms as a model for the sensible world.²¹ In what follows, I will limn the

²⁰ I am not suggesting that Augustine has unmediated access to the *Enneads* of Plotinus; perhaps the Plotinian thought in his early writings comes via the influence of his teachers, especially Ambrose and Marius Victorinus, his reading of philosophical works, both Stoic and Platonic, and the general neo-Platonic intellectual milieu in Milan during Augustine's time in the city. In each of these influences, the type of Platonism prominent was the neo-Platonism of Plotinus. Thus, while the influence of Plotinus on Augustine is immense, *how* precisely he was influenced is debated. The suggestion that Augustine first converted to Platonism and only after his period at Cassiciacum converted to Christianity was first proposed by Adolf von Harnack and Gaston Boissier, "La Conversion de Saint Augustin," *Revue des Deux Mondes* 85 (1888): 43-69. This thesis was then expounded and enlarged by Pierre Alfarié, *L'Évolution intellectuelle de saint Augustin* (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1918). Charles Boyer definitively put the proposition to rest with his *L'Idée de vérité dans la philosophie de saint Augustin* (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1921). The theory, which assumes a false antithesis between Platonism and Christianity, has largely been abandoned. A more substantial question still remains, however, namely, *how* Augustine was influenced by Platonic thought. And more particularly, was it through Plotinus or Porphyry? John O'Meara has presented the *status quaestionis* as it now stands: "The Neoplatonism of Saint Augustine," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. Dominic J. O'Meara (Albany: State University of New York, 1982), pp. 34-41. He explains that while Willi Theiler was adamant that Porphyry was the principal influence, Paul Henry held that it was Plotinus. O'Meara situates himself in the middle, arguing that the influence of both philosophers is evident. Cf. Paul Henry, *Plotin et l'Occident: Firmicus Maternus, Marius Victorinus, Saint Augustin et Macrobie* (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1934); Willi Theiler, *Porphyrios und Augustin* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1933); John O'Meara, *The Young Augustine* (New York: Longmans and Green, 1954). For the purposes of this chapter I will argue from the premise that Plotinus was the dominant influence of Augustine's Platonism.

²¹ In the *Timaeus* Socrates asks what model the maker and father of the universe used to fashion the sensible world. Timaeus responds, "Now surely it's clear to all that it was the eternal model he looked at, for, of all the things that have come to be, our universe is most beautiful, and of course the craftsman is the most excellent. This,

contours of Plotinian cosmology and highlight three elements of this tradition that form the basis of Augustine's early theology of image. First, Plotinian cosmology is an answer to the question of how the One is everything but not one single thing. The emanationist philosophy of Plotinus expresses the relation between the existing world and the One with recourse to "image" language. This relation preserves both the origin of the world in the One and the infinite distance of the world from the One. Second, on account of this relational dialectic the material order is an image that is both true and false; it is at once a reflection of the One and a failure to reflect the One. Third, the nature of the material order as image entails not only a movement from the One, but also a dynamic desire to return to the One. Indeed, the longing to "return" to the divine, and to find there true happiness through participation in immaterial truth is a pervasive theme in Plotinus,²² deriving ultimately from Plato.²³

then, is how it came to be: it is a work of craft, modeled after that which is changeless and is grasped by a rational account, that is, by wisdom. Since these things are so, it follows by unquestionable necessity that this world is an image of something." Plato, *Timaeus*, 29a-b.

²² Drawing on the images of the *Theaetetus*, Plotinus writes, "Let us flee then to the beloved Fatherland': this is the soundest counsel.... The Fatherland to us is There whence we have come, and There is the Father. What then is our course, what the manner of our flight? This is not a journey for the feet; the feet bring us only from land to land; nor need you think of coach or ship to carry you away; all this order of things you must set aside and refuse to see; you must close the eyes and call instead upon another vision which is to be waked within you, the birth-right of all, which few turn to use." Plotinus, *The Enneads*, I.6.8.

²³ Plato's allegory of the cave in the *Republic* springs immediately to mind. The cave-dweller has been enlightened to the fact that his true home is in a world much more real than the cave with its shadows – the world of the forms. This is his true home, to which he desires to return; it is in participation in this reality that happiness is found. Likewise, in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates gives the injunction, "[W]e should make all speed to take flight from this world to the other, and that means becoming divine, so far as we can, and that again is to become righteous with the help of wisdom" (*Theaetetus* 176a-b).

The question of how the One is all things and yet not a single thing is a discussion that harkens all the way back to the *Parmenides*.²⁴ This question is expanded upon and answered in more particular language by Plotinus. Indeed, a dominant motif running through the *Enneads* is the relation of the One to the many.²⁵ How is the One the principle of everything while remaining a monad within itself and utterly simple? Plotinus inquires how all things overflow from the One, which remains simple, having no variation or change.²⁶ The One is perfect within itself: “Seeking nothing, possessing nothing, lacking nothing, the One is perfect.”²⁷ Nevertheless, out of the overflow of its goodness the One generates something. This first being is called Intellect and is constituted by turning and gazing back at the One. An account of “image,” then, lies at the foundation of Plotinian cosmology.²⁸ The arrival of this image – Intellect – is, however, not an act of creation. The One, although it generates being, is itself beyond being. Utterly simple and unmoving, the One does not create, explains Plotinus, for this would involve movement and change. Rather, Intellect is self-generated; it is established by turning back and gazing upon the One.

Intellect resembles the One and has being, life, and movement from the One.

Like the One, Intellect overflows with goodness and reproduces of itself an inferior

²⁴ Cf. Eric R. Dodds, “The *Parmenides* of Plato and the origin of the neoplatonic One,” *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1928): 129-142; Frederic M. Schroeder, “The Platonic Parmenides and imitation in Plotinus,” *Dionysius* 2 (1978): 51-73.

²⁵ Plotinus, *Ennead*, V.2.1.

²⁶ Plotinus, *Ennead*, V.2.1.

²⁷ Plotinus, *Ennead*, V.2.1.

²⁸ Cf. Jean-François Pradeau, *L’Imitation du Principe: Plotin et la participation* (Paris: Vrin, 2003), pp. 57-79. Pradeau writes, “Celle-ci suppose une participation qu’on peut dire active du principé à la ressemblance qu’il entretient avec son principe: le premier montre pour le second un désir comme un besoin qui sont la cause d’une imitation, d’une tentative d’assimilation.” Pradeau, *L’Imitation*, p. 79. See also, Dominic J. O’Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

likeness called Soul. Intellect remains immutable and stable as pure being, but its likeness, Soul, is not so. Soul generates many images of herself; she is the life source of plants, irrational animals, and humans. Nevertheless, all inferior images generating from Soul participate in the One, with the One all the while remaining simple and immutable: “All these are the One and not the One: they are he because they come from him; they are not he, because it is in abiding by himself that he gives them.”²⁹ The answer, then, to how the One is the principle of all being while nevertheless remaining utterly simple lies in a participatory account of image. The One is participated in but does not participate. Thus, there is an emanation from the One through Intellect and Soul to all being; each inferior product turning back to its producer, desiring to return and be like its model.

As the concept of “image” is foundational to Plotinus’s cosmology, it is also a pervasive and all-embracing concept in the rest of his philosophical account in the *Enneads*. Terms as ὁμοίωσις, εἰκόν, εἶδωλον, ὁμοιότης, ἵνδαλμα, μίμημα, ἴχνος, σκιά, μίμησις, ὁμοειδής, and ὁμοίωμα are all words that, as in an overlapping Venn diagram, approach and shape the concept of “image” in Plotinus’s thought. Fundamentally, “image” is always something less than its source. The sensible universe we experience is described by Plotinus as standing almost in a relationship of potency to its source and, thus, as tending towards non-being. Plotinus writes that matter “is no more than the image and phantasm of Mass, a bare aspiration towards substantial existence.”³⁰ Paul Aubin comments, “On notera donc tout de suite que, chez Plotin, la notion d’image est toujours liée à l’idée d’une dégradation et d’une

²⁹ Plotinus, *Ennead*, V.2.1.

³⁰ Plotinus, *Ennead*, III.6.7.

irradiation.”³¹ The inverse is also true, namely, that the nearer the image is to its source the more “true” it is. Plotinus describes sensible matter as “molded upon the archetype” of the divine Intellect, so that an image as an emanation always retains a relation by participation to that which it images, always “preserving some faint likeness of the source.”³² Augustine’s early understanding of image in the dialogues stresses, like Plotinus, the borrowed character of existence or, to employ the terminology I have been using, its participatory character. The “very nature of an image,” states the *Enneads*, “is that as a secondary it shall have its being in something else.”³³

The image is always, for Plotinus, in some sense “false.” This is a theme with which Augustine will interact in depth in the dialogues. Plotinus writes, “Its every utterance, therefore, is a lie; it pretends to be great and it is little, to be more and it is less; and the Existence with which it makes itself is not Existence, but a passing trick making trickery of all that seems to be present in it, phantasms within a phantasm.”³⁴ It is more than simply the spiritualism of Plotinus’s thought that makes him describe matter as a “lie” and a “trick.” Rather, like Augustine after him, Plotinus regards an image as false when it is not recognized as existing in a participatory relationship with immaterial and eternal being. I will suggest in the following chapter that *Contra Academicos* and *De ordine* attempt to counteract the skepticism of the New Academy, developed and expressed most notably by Sextus Empiricus. According to the Skeptics all material existence is completely “false,” that is to say, they do not understand the temporal order as an image participating and partially reflecting its

³¹ Paul Aubin, “L’‘Image’ dans l’oeuvre de Plotin,” *Recherches de Sciences religieuses* 41 (1953): 353.

³² Plotinus, *Ennead*, V.3.7.

³³ Plotinus, *Ennead*, V.3.8.

³⁴ Plotinus, *Ennead*, III.6.7.

eternal source. The image is for Plotinus partly “false,” because it deceives those who, enticed by its façade of permanence, fail to be reconciled to the fact that it is “ghostly and feeble.”³⁵ Plotinus describes the material image as a mirror, “showing things as in itself when they are really elsewhere.”³⁶ Images are empty but appear full – in reality, the image contains nothing of substance because it lacks form.³⁷ Of the material order, Plotinus writes, “Feeble, in itself, a false thing and projected upon a falsity, like an image in a dream or against water or on a mirror, it can but leave Matter unaffected.”³⁸ Many of the examples that Augustine employs to describe an image are already present in the *Enneads*.³⁹

For Plotinus, the material order exists as an image derived from the One; inasmuch as it originates and participates in the One it is true; it is false when the

³⁵ Plotinus, *Ennead*, III.6.7.

³⁶ Plotinus, *Ennead*, III.6.7. Plotinus is clearly far removed from a materialist notion of image. He writes, “If, then, there is, really, something in a mirror, we may suppose objects of sense to be in matter in precisely that way: if in the mirror there is nothing, if there is only a seeming of something, then we may judge that in Matter there is the same delusion and that the seeming is to be traced to the Substantial-Existence of Real-Beings, the Substantial-Existence in which the Authentic has the real participation.” Plotinus, *Ennead*, III.6.13. The analogy of the mirror serves to underscore the participatory ontology that sustains Plotinus’s account of image. Should the source no longer be present to the mirror, neither can the image continue; by the same token, should the substantial form be lacking, the ephemeral character of matter also ceases to exist. Plotinus repeats the example of the mirror a number of times. Cf. *Ennead*, I.4.10, III.6.9 and IV.5.7.

³⁷ The form that is conferred on matter comes from above. In Plotinus’s cosmology, when Soul imprints its image on matter it impresses a specific form. In this way, the sensible world retains a likeness and a relation to the immaterial world: “[T]he relation is like that of a portrait or reflection to the original which is regarded as prior to the water or the painting reproducing it.” *Ennead*, VI.2.22.

³⁸ Plotinus, *Ennead*, III.6.7.

³⁹ Propitious literature on Plotinus’s philosophy of image includes Rein Ferwerda, *La Signification des images et des métamorphoses dans la pensée de Plotin* (Amsterdam: Wolters, 1965); John Fielder, “Plotinus’ Copy Theory,” *Apeiron* 11 (1977): 1-11; Claude Gaudin, “La Production des êtres chez Plotin et la question de l’économie des principes,” *Revue des sciences religieuses* 68 (1994): 267-288; Pierre Hadot, *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997); Michel Fattal, *Logos et image chez Plotin* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998).

participatory ontology of temporal existence is not recognized. It is within this participatory framework that the desire inscribed on the image to “return” to its source can be understood. Paul Aubin’s foundational 1953 article on “image” in Plotinus’s thought traces four distinct “movements” of an image that are reflected in the relation between Intellect (which is constituted as image) and the One: genesis, conversion, contemplation, and radiance.⁴⁰ The first movement demonstrates the utter causal dependence Intellect has on the One. The eternal generation bespeaks a hierarchal relation outside of time. Plotinus wants to maintain that in the generation of the Intellect, a fall occurs from the pure simplicity of the One.⁴¹ The One, which is, therefore, called “source,” “first,” “beginning,” and even “Father.” In its generation, Intellect, as image, is established as a degradation from the supreme reality, a dissipation from the centre, and a dispersion of light. Aubin traces Plotinus’s dominant metaphors: rays issuing from the sun, rivers streaming from their source, and the flowering of a tree from its roots. Despite the physicality of the metaphors, Plotinus always recalls the immaterial and eternal nature of the generation of Intellect as image; it is a genesis without movement or change and so is a relation to be believed rather than seen.

The second movement of an image is conversion. After the *exitus* of its generation, the image begins its *reditus* by turning back to the One.⁴² The vast ontological void that marked its generation, however, means that the conversion is never complete; rather, its conversion is a constant turning back to the One. Aubin

⁴⁰ Aubin, “Image,” 360-367.

⁴¹ Cf. Jesús Igal, “La génesis de la inteligencia en un pasaje de las *Enéadas* de Plotino (VI.7.4-35),” *Emerita* 39 (1971): 129-157.

⁴² Cf. Pierre Hadot, “*Epistrophe* et *Metanoia* dans l’histoire de la philosophie,” in *Actes du XI Congrès International de Philosophie 12, Brussels 1953* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1953), pp. 31-36.

notes that the conversion of the image is established in contrast to its genesis. It puts a sudden halt to the constant dispersion from the centre and degradation from the One.⁴³ Unlike its genesis, the conversion of the image is not imposed from outside; rather, it desires from its own will to turn back to the One and make its ascent.

Thirdly, contemplation follows from conversion. Again, the desire to “return” issues from the image. Contemplation is almost like a second movement of conversion; it adds intentionality and permanence to the conversion. The stage of contemplation marks the dialectic of ascent and return, through which the image’s end is identical to its beginning.⁴⁴ The last movement – radiance – is in some sense outside of the *exitus – reditus* schema. Here the image rests in perfection. Now the image once again resembles its source, as the image is now also fecund, defusing its own creative goodness. Although the image is now “radiance” and mirrors the One, it is still of a radically different ontological identity; it is non-being, a reflection, shadow, mirror, or emanation.⁴⁵

These four movements of the “image” also characterize the human soul. The movement away from and the desire to return are constitutive dimensions of the human soul for Plotinus.⁴⁶ Indeed, the human soul is an emanation from the divine and can, from its knowledge of this emanation, take courage in its ascent back to its

⁴³ Aubin, “Image,” 364.

⁴⁴ Cf. John N. Deck, *Nature, Contemplation and the One: A Study in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (Burdett: Larson, 1991).

⁴⁵ Aubin, “Image,” 367.

⁴⁶ The desire to return that underwrites the Plotinian philosophy of image will give expression also to the dynamism of Augustine’s longing. Andrew Louth has expressed this well: “The soul’s longing for God: a longing that is a longing to *return*, to return to the One who made it, a longing that is experienced as restlessness, inability to settle and rest anywhere, a pressing sense that in all created things there lies something beyond, something that calls us to God.” Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 134.

home: “The Soul once seen to be thus precious, thus divine, you may hold the faith that by its possession you are already nearing God: in the strength of this power make upwards towards Him.”⁴⁷ The divine Soul is our soul’s “upward neighbor” and only a step more divine than we who proceed from her, insists Plotinus.⁴⁸ The human soul is an image of the divine Soul and desires to return above, to what is clear, true, and primary.⁴⁹ While the human image is weak and mutable, it nevertheless retains its being by participation (μετοχή) in eternal Being. The *Enneads* insist that the soul as image “is a thing which can have no permanence except by attachment, by living in that other.”⁵⁰ Thus, the soul as an image is constituted in a participatory ontological relationship with its archetype.

The image for Plotinus not only needs to cling to the divine for being, but is, in fact, eager to do so; it desires to be more and more united with its divine source. The human intellect becomes illumined by Intellect. Plotinus writes, “[B]y one light it sees another, not through any intermediate agency; a light sees a light, that is to say a thing sees itself. This light shining within the Soul enlightens it; that is, it makes the Soul intellectual, working it into likeness with itself, the light above.”⁵¹ In this description of the soul one can also see the last movement of “radiance” in Paul Aubin’s description of the “return” of the image, where it too becomes fecund and generative. It is in recognizing itself to be an image of Intellect and dwelling on this mystery that the human soul becomes “godlike and intellect-like” and is drawn back

⁴⁷ Plotinus, *Ennead*, V.1.3.

⁴⁸ Plotinus, *Ennead*, V.1.3.

⁴⁹ Plotinus, *Ennead*, V.3.8.

⁵⁰ Plotinus, *Ennead*, V.3.8. Plotinus here relies on Plato’s *Timaeus* 52C.2-4: “Since an image does not have as its own that which it has come to signify (an image is invariably borne along to depict *something else*), it stands to reason that the image should therefore come to be *in* something else, somehow clinging to being, or else be nothing at all.”

⁵¹ Plotinus, *Ennead*, V.3.8. Cf. Ps. 36: “In your light we see light.”

up whence it came. Contemplation (θεωρία), then, becomes the means through which union and participation (μετοχή) is realized. As Plotinus writes, “Every soul is, and becomes, that which she contemplates.”⁵² It is the divine intellect contemplating itself in the One that produces the eternal soul.⁵³ The created soul in turn participates in the divine by turning to the forms and the divine intellect in contemplation. The noblest calling for the human person is to engage in the θεωρία of divine things,⁵⁴ because in the act of contemplation that which is highest in the human person participates in the divine.⁵⁵ By growing in the knowledge of the universal Intellect and by truly participating in and possessing “the memory” of one’s origin, one matures in the likeness of Intellect.⁵⁶

The Philosophy of Image in the *Soliloquia*

Thus far I have begun by analyzing how Augustine uses the vocabulary of *imago* and *similitudo* to express a participatory ontology. From there I moved to survey the Plotinian philosophical backdrop to Augustine’s understanding of image in the dialogues. I will now set the groundwork for subsequent chapters in which I engage

⁵² Plotinus, *Ennead*, IV.3.8.

⁵³ Plotinus, *Ennead*, V.1.7.

⁵⁴ The nobility of θεωρία is often reiterated by Plotinus: “When people are too weak for contemplation, they switch to action, which is a mere shadow of contemplation and of reason. Since, owing to the weakness of their souls, their faculty of contemplation is insufficient, they cannot grasp the object of their contemplation and be fulfilled by it. Yet they still want to see it; and so they switch to action, in order to see with their eyes what they could not see with their spirit.” Plotinus, *Ennead*, III.8.4. The injunction to contemplation is likewise a pronounced theme in the *Soliloquia*. Cf. Jean Doignon, “Les ‘Nobles disciplines’ et le ‘visage de la vérité’ dans les premiers dialogues d’Augustin: Un commentaire de Soliloques 2,20,35,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 27/28 (1984/1985): 116-23.

⁵⁵ This teaching is expressed clearly in Plotinus’s last words. His friend at his deathbed commented that Plotinus was trying to make the divine in him rise up to what was divine in the universe. *Life of Plotinus*, 2, 23-30.

⁵⁶ Plotinus, *Ennead*, V.3.8.

with Augustine's early theology of the *imago dei*. An analysis of Augustine's understanding of "image" in the *Soliloquia* will make clear how dependent Augustine's philosophy of image is on a Plotinian metaphysic.

Three critical elements of Plotinus's philosophy of image become foundational in Augustine's early theology. First, an account of image is, for Plotinus, a means to articulate the relation between the infinite, immaterial, and eternal One to the finite, material, and temporal order. The philosophy of image answers the question, How is the One present in all things while at the same time infinitely transcending all things? Second, this relational dialectic between the finite and the infinite entails for Plotinus that the material order as image is both true and false. I will argue in subsequent chapters that Augustine avails himself of the theological opportunities that this dialectic offers. That the image is false entails that stability, permanence, and eternal enjoyment (*frui*) cannot be found in the material order. Nevertheless, the temporal order is "true" inasmuch as it is recognized to be a derived and participatory expression of the One. In chapter five I will suggest that this "truthful" character of the temporal image provides Augustine a way out of the skeptical impasse of the Academics. Third, within the genesis of the image there is, for Plotinus, an inscribed desire to "return" to its source. This innate desire to return on the part of the image becomes a key to Augustine's early theology of ascent (chapter seven).

Augustine first broaches the topic of "image" in the *Soliloquia* by inquiring what the relation is between "truth" and "true." Are they two separate things or one and the same? Augustine initially suggests a causally predicated relation based on a Platonic account of participation: something is true because of its relation to truth.⁵⁷ Augustine frames this participatory account from an epistemological perspective. We

⁵⁷ *Sol.* I.XV.27.

know things exists that, with various limitations, are truth-like; therefore, the True must also exist. Employing classical Stoic logic Augustine writes, “Therefore truth is not in mortal things. But truth exists, and cannot be nowhere. Therefore there are immortal things.”⁵⁸ The problem still remains with regard to the human ability to know the truth. This is the recurring problematic of the *Cassiciacum* dialogues, namely, how eternal and immaterial truth can be grasped in the temporal and material order, given the comparison (*similitudino*) according to which knowledge of divine things and of human things is as disparate as heaven and earth.⁵⁹

Soliloquia II.VI.10–II.VII.13 is an extended discussion on the relation between the image and its form. Like Plotinus, Augustine is keen to note the ontological difference between the image and its source. If the image is not the same as its archetype, asks Augustine, must we conclude that it is then something false, a deceiving imitation? Since Augustine has already defined “the true” as an objective reality irrespective of one’s knowledge of it, he now sets out to offer a definition of “the false.” In the exchange, Augustine and his Reason discover that the false is only intelligible in reference to the true, and so falsehood is initially defined as a false resemblance. Augustine’s Reason argues, “We also speak of a false tree which we see in a picture, a false face which is reflected in a mirror, the false motion of towers as seen by those sailing by, a false break in an oar in the water: these are false for no other reason than that they resemble the true (*nisi quod verisimilia sunt*).”⁶⁰ Many of these same examples of “false images” are also found in the *Enneads*. Augustine follows the Plotinian philosophical tradition by underscoring the lack of ontological density in an image; the image lacks substantial being. In the *Soliloquia*, then,

⁵⁸ *Sol.* I.XV.29.

⁵⁹ *Sol.* I.V.11.

⁶⁰ *Sol.* II.VI.10 (CSEL 89 58).

Augustine and his Reason are initially agreed that falsehood is a resemblance of the true – an image that does not perfectly express its prototype.

Reason proceeds to delineate two types of resemblances, those that are equal, such as a twin or various imprints of a signet ring, and those that are inferior, such that they resemble the superior; an example of the latter is the image of a person in a mirror.⁶¹ The discussion is devoted to this latter category. There is first of all an inherent inequality between the object and the image in the mirror.⁶² This inequality is causally predicated; no one would look in a mirror and say that he resembles the image; rather, the person standing before the mirror causes the image and the image resembles him. Augustine's example highlights two things: first, the image is a production; and, second, it is inferior to what it is representing.⁶³

False resemblances deceive the senses; one can mistakenly hear, touch, or see an image and think it to be something other than what it really is. Reason concludes, "Therefore it is clear that in all our senses we are deceived by an enticing resemblance, whether it is between equal things or inferior things. Even if we are not deceived, because we keep ourselves from agreeing or because we see the difference, nevertheless we call things false because we see in them a resemblance to the true (*tamen eas res falsas nominare, quas verisimiles deprehendimus*)."⁶⁴ Thus, an image is defined in relation to truth; it is true inasmuch as it resembles its archetype. As dissimilitude defines falsehood, so, too, similitude defines truth. From this Augustine concludes that all images desire to be completed, that is, to return to their archetype;

⁶¹ *Sol.* II.VI.11.

⁶² "Equality" becomes an important denominator in Augustine's early theology of image. See my discussion of *aequalitas* in chapter six.

⁶³ Augustine writes, "Nature makes inferior resemblances either by producing them or reflecting them." *Sol.* II.6.11.

⁶⁴ *Sol.* II.VI.12 (CSEL 89 61).

to be more *like* the original from which they are an inferior production.⁶⁵ Reason comments, “Does it not seem to you that your image in a mirror wants, in a way, to be you, and is false because it is not?”⁶⁶ The closer the image is to the original, the more it is a true image. It is the nature of an image to desire to return to the original, to be similar and true; by extension, an image is false inasmuch as it tries to be like the original but is found lacking. Augustine writes, “Do not all pictures and replicas of that kind and all artists’ work of that type strive to be that in whose likeness they are made?”⁶⁷ Augustine’s proximity here to a Plotinian, participatory understanding of image is clear. The image for Augustine, as for Plotinus, is constituted in the *exitus* from the artist, but already in its genesis, it is inscribed with the mark of truth from the artist; it bears the artist’s likeness and desires to “return” to its source. This insight will stay with Augustine and appear throughout his early writings, culminating, I will suggest, in *De vera religione*.

The issue of the nature of images is not resolved in the *Soliloquia*. Material participation in truth is understood as to varying degrees false. When asked whether a body could contain truth, Augustine’s Reason suggests that it can only be understood as “some sort of an image of truth (*quasi quaedam imago veritatis*).”⁶⁸ Ultimately, the *Soliloquia* considers a material instantiation of eternal truth to be always both derived and deficient.⁶⁹ At the end of the dialogue, Augustine articulates the failure

⁶⁵ The return of the image to its source in Augustine’s dialogues is well expressed in Jean Doignon, “Allégories du retour dans le *Contra Academicos* de saint Augustin,” *Latomus* 52 (1993): 860-867.

⁶⁶ *Sol.* II.IX.17.

⁶⁷ *Sol.* II.IX.17. Cf. Herman Somers, “Image de Dieu et illumination divine: Sources historiques et élaboration augustinienne,” *Augustinus Magister* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1954): 1,451-462.

⁶⁸ *Sol.* II.XVIII.32 (CSEL 89 90). This phrase, *imago veritatis*, will play a significant role in the theology of *Contra Academicos*.

⁶⁹ *Sol.* II.XVIII.32.

of images to fully express the truth they signify by using the example of geometrical principles. He points to the example of an infinitely divisible line; this abstraction is inherently true despite the mind being unable to imagine the principle instantiated in the material order.⁷⁰ Thus, while the *Soliloquia* retains the participatory link between material existence and immaterial forms, that is to say, the relationship between an image and its source, this relation is not a perfect *adequatio*.

The terms *imago* and *similitudo* are used in the dialogues to express a participatory relation between the temporal, material order and the eternal immaterial world of the forms. I have suggested that Augustine's early understanding of image is informed by a Plotinian philosophy of image. Plotinian cosmology expresses the origins of the universe as a movement of an image away from the One and, ultimately, back to the One. This image relationship of the material universe to the One entails that the finite order is both a true image as a derived reflection of the One and a false image on account of its mutability and temporality. The philosophical tension between the "truth" and the "falsity" of an image is explored by Augustine in the *Soliloquia*. Ultimately, this tension remains unresolved. Nevertheless, as will become clear in wrestling with the dialectical nature of Plotinian image philosophy in the *Soliloquia*, Augustine lays the foundation for his early theology of image.

⁷⁰ *Sol.* II.XX.35.

Chapter V: Proteus and Participation

The next three chapters grow out of the tension expressed in the *Soliloquia* regarding the nature of an image as both true and false. In the next chapter, I suggest that *Contra Academicos* affirms that ultimate realities can really be known in the finite order. The elusive mythological figure of Proteus, who appears at a number of key points in the dialogue, serves I maintain, as an affirmation by Augustine that eternal truth can be incarnated in the temporal and material order. Proteus is described as an “image of the truth” and serves in the dialogue to affirm against the Skeptics that genuine knowledge or truth of ultimate realities can be had through the finite order, but only if this temporal material order is recognized precisely for what it is, namely, an image.

Chapter six considers how Augustine brings this Platonic participatory account of image to bear on his early theology of the *imago dei*. Finite images participate in their source to varying degrees, and, therefore, it is significant to Augustine’s early theology of image that not all images are equal; rather, there are different ways in which something can be said to be an image. It is this insight, first articulated in the philosophy of image operative at Cassiciacum, that allows Augustine to affirm that both Christ and the human person can unequivocally be said to be the *imago dei*, although to different degrees of *likeness*. The second part of chapter six considers the implications of Augustine’s theology of the *imago dei* for embodied creatures. Focusing on Augustine’s exegesis of the creation narrative I note his repeated emphasis on the integrated nature of body and soul. In this respect also Augustine breaks with the received tradition of the *imago dei*, by affirming that the body also participates in the divine image.

Finally, chapter seven is devoted to the spirituality of ascent operative in Augustine's early theology of the image of God. If the Cassiciacum dialogues make clear that the fundamental nature of an image in a Plotinian metaphysic is a dynamic movement of return, then Augustine's early catechetical treatise, *De vera religione*, written before his ordination, develops this philosophy of image into a spiritual injunction. *De vera religione* is Augustine's most optimistic vision of Plotinian philosophy in his early development of the *imago dei*. This work, like in the Cassiciacum dialogues, underscores the image-like character of all material, temporal goods that are penultimate and become "false" when their participatory character fails to be recognized. It is Augustine's identification with a Plotinian metaphysic of image that provides the intellectual framework within which he is able to advance beyond the contextually limited position of Latin pro-Nicene theology, for which "image of God" could only entail equality with God.

Augustine is adamantly insistent that eternal truth can be incarnated in the temporal order. To make this point, he turns a number of times in the Cassiciacum dialogues to Proteus, the Greek literary figure of Homer's *Odyssey*.¹ Proteus always appears in the context of a discussion of "image" and of the participation of the image in an immaterial reality more stable than itself. Proteus, the Greek sea monster whose name is a derivation of his status as "first born" of Poseidon, was, according to legend, able to tell the future to whoever would capture him. However, Proteus would always change his shape as soon as he was seen, taking on a different form in order to avoid capture. In the Cassiciacum dialogues Augustine links this elusive character

¹ In Greek mythology Proteus was a god of the sea who could change his shape whenever he wanted. Should he be captured and held he would use his gift of prophesy to tell the truth about the future; however, it was extremely difficult to hold him because he would assume countless different shapes. Cf. Karl Kerényi, *Gods of the Greeks* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1974).

with a Platonic account of “image.” This chapter will argue that Proteus, as an “image of the truth,” is a philosophical representation in the dialogues of the person of Christ, the image of God. This is an interpretation of Augustine’s early dialogues that has never before been argued.² Proteus both “manifests and bears the person of truth”³ and, as image, is at once derived from and revelatory of the truth. The truth, like Proteus, can be grasped only when, in the words of Augustine’s counterpart at Cassiciacum, Alypius, “some deity was directing them toward him.”⁴ The debate regarding the validity of the Academics’ claim that truth cannot be known and that no real correspondence exists between the truth and the “truth-like” is really, I argue, a debate regarding the possibility of the Incarnation.

What is the relation between an image and its source? Can a temporal image be revelatory of its eternal source? Can immaterial truth be known in a material world that exists in a state of flux? Although Alypius demanded that the name of Christ be excluded from the dialogues,⁵ a major theme at Cassiciacum remains the “image of the truth” and the possibility that knowledge of eternal truth might be revealed through the image.

The problematic “truth-like” nature of temporal and material images is the concern of *Contra Academicos*. The context is the skeptical stance held by the Academics regarding the possibility of knowing eternal truth in a state of flux. I will

² To my knowledge, only Robert O’Connell has mentioned the significance of the figure of Proteus and briefly suggests Proteus be identified with Christ. However, this is not a thesis he develops. I think the figure of Proteus as a hermeneutical key to *Contra academicos* is worthy of much greater attention than it has received. Cf. Robert O’Connell, “The Visage of Philosophy at Cassiciacum,” *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 71.

³ *Acad.* III.VI.13.

⁴ *Acad.* III.5.11.

⁵ *Conf.* XI.6.10.

suggest that Augustine's theology of the Incarnation in *Contra Academicos* bridges the chasm posited by the Academics between the truth and the truth-like. Thus, the debate in *Contra Academicos*, I argue, concerns the possibility of the Incarnation. The dialogue is presented as a response to the skepticism of the New Academy.⁶

Augustine upholds the participatory character of created existence: truth is intelligible and can be known in the finite order precisely because this order is an image of the truth. In his preface to Romanianus, Augustine writes, “[Philosophy] promises to give a lucid demonstration of the most true and distinct God; and even now it deigns to furnish a glimpse of Him, as it were, through transparent clouds.”⁷ After outlining *Contra Academicos*, I will focus on three significant selections from this dialogue that allow one to understand this debate with the Academics about the possibility of knowing the truth as, in fact, a debate about the possibility of the Incarnation. First, I

⁶ The most helpful literature regarding the dominant themes in *Contra Academicos* includes Brian Harding, “Skepticism, Illumination and Christianity in Augustine’s *Contra Academicos*,” *Augustinian Studies* 34 (2003): 197-212. Harding maintains that *Contra Academicos* should be read as Augustine’s limited endorsement of skepticism apart from the assent of faith. Harding writes, “[The] famous Augustinian motto of *fides quarens intellectum*, wherein faith must precede understanding, is the fruit of his own limited skepticism: the human mind of its own powers is incapable of knowing the truth, but illuminated by faith, it is capable.” Harding, “Skepticism,” 212. Many authors have noted the epistemological concerns of *Contra Academicos*. Cf. Christopher Kirwan, “Augustine against the Skeptics,” in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. M. Burnyeat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 205-223; and idem, *Augustine* (New York: Routledge, 1989). Other commentators have suggested that eudaimonistic philosophy is central to the dialogue and that epistemological questions are of the second order. Cf. Roger Holte, *Béatitude et Sagesse: Saint Augustin et le problème de la fin de l’homme dans la philosophie ancienne* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1962), pp. 73-110; A. Michael Neiman, “The Arguments of Augustine’s *Contra Academicos*,” *The Modern Schoolmen* 59 (1982): 255-279. A significant contribution to the discussion of whether the *Contra Academicos* is primarily concerned with the epistemic or with eudaimonistic philosophy has been added by Brian Harding, who concludes, “The *Contra Academicos* then is not concerned with a refutation of skeptical epistemology so much as it is concerned with the refutation of the skeptic’s teleology.” Brian Harding, “Epistemology and Eudaimonism in Augustine’s *Contra Academicos*,” *Augustinian Studies* 37 (2006): 271.

⁷ *Acad.* I.1.3 (CCSL 29 5).

will discuss three *terms* used to describe the incarnate Christ in the direct discourse to Romanianus in the preface to Book II: “wisdom,” “truth,” and “philosophy.” Second, I will consider how Augustine describes the figure of Proteus in *Acad.* III.5.11-III.6.13. Third, I will demonstrate that in the conclusion to the dialogue (*Acad.* III.17.37-III.20.45), Augustine makes explicit that its aim is to overcome the position of the Skeptics about ever knowing the truth with an account of the Incarnation.

Outline of *Contra Academicos*

The opening of *Contra Academicos* finds the consortium at Cassiciacum all in agreement that it “behooves us to know truth,” for it is in truth that the happy life is found.⁸ Trygetius and Licentius, the son of Romanianus, are not at one, however, as to the question as to whether happiness resides merely in searching for truth or in actually finding the truth. How, asks Trygetius, can “a man be at the same time perfect and still searching for the truth?”⁹ A person searching for the truth is in error and cannot be happy, maintains Trygetius. Licentius disagrees. To be searching, he avers, is not to be in error; approving the false as true is the only thing that constitutes genuine error. To be searching is rather the mark of the wise man, contends Licentius, taking up the position of the New Academy: “[The wise man] is happy, because, to the utmost of his power, he is extricating himself from the entanglements of the body and devoting himself to sheer introspection.”¹⁰ The conclusion of the first book of *Contra Academicos*, then, frames the debate regarding the validity of the skepticism of the New Academy by allowing the reader to attend to the discussion of the junior philosophers, Trygetius and Licentius.

⁸ *Acad.* I.2.5 (CCSL 29 5).

⁹ *Acad.* I.2.9 (CCSL 29 8).

¹⁰ *Acad.* I.8.23 (CCSL 29 16).

Before Alypius and Augustine take up the debate from the hands of their younger disciples in Book II, Augustine interjects with a discourse to Romanianus regarding the trials that beset those seeking wisdom. The turmoil of life, of which Augustine acknowledges Romanianus to have had his fair share, and the ardor of the search, leave wisdom rarely attained. Therefore, one must especially “implore divine aid with all devotion and piety,” asserts Augustine.¹¹ He proceeds to delineate the position held by the ancient Academics, also known as the Skeptics, whose best known exponent was perhaps Cicero. Indeed, they held a similar position to Licentius, explains Augustine, for they thought that certain knowledge cannot be achieved in this life, but that the wise man is devoted to the *search* for true knowledge while giving assent to nothing. The worst thing that could possibly befall a wise man, according to the Academics, is to give assent to that of which he was unsure and thereby fall into error. To withhold assent does not, however, condemn the Academics to living a life of uncertainty and inactivity, because they maintained that the truth contains certain marks that denote a probability of truth. These “truth-like” notes are guides for living the best one can in this life. The chief difference, then, between the Old Academy (“Socrates, Plato, and all the other ancients”¹²) and the New Academy lies in the answer to the question of whether “a wise man can know truth.”¹³

¹¹ *Acad.* II.1.1 (CCSL 29 18): *in primis diuinum auxilium omni deuotione atque pietate implorandum est.*

¹² *Acad.* II.6.14 (CCSL 29 26).

¹³ *Acad.* II.6.15 (CCSL 29 26). A humorous exchange follows Augustine’s description of the New Academy. Augustine turns to Licentius and asks whether the tenets of the New Academy meet his approval. “Most decidedly,” responds Licentius quickly. Augustine asks, “Then, do you think they speak truth?” Licentius was about to give an unequivocal “yes,” but quickly catches himself as he sees Alypius smiling. After hearing the question again and thinking for some time, Licentius remarks, “Whether it be truth, I known not; but it is probable. And I see nothing better for me

For the Academics, the value of speaking about the “truth-like” or the “probable” is that it allows for moral action in a state of intellectual uncertainty.¹⁴ But, how could one know something to be truth-like, that is, to resemble the truth, unless he first knew the truth? It would be absurd, argues Augustine, turning to Licentius, for someone who has seen only you to tell you that you look like your father Romanianus. Similarly, how can one follow what resembles the true if one does not know what the truth is? asks Augustine.¹⁵ The debate about the ability to know the truth is quickly revealed to be a debate about the moral life; how can one follow the right path based only on the “probable”? Book II concludes with Alypius and Augustine agreeing on the parameters of the debate to be carried out in the last book. Alypius will carry the position of the Academics: “[T]hat nothing can be perceived, and that assent should be given to nothing.”¹⁶ Augustine will defend the opposite opinion: that “a wise man can reach the truth, and that assent is not always to be withheld.”¹⁷

Alypius maintains that even if he should be forced to admit that a wise man knows wisdom, he will not be forced to abandon the corollary, namely, that assent is not to be given to anything. Truth in this world is rather like a “reflected image,” maintains Alypius – impossible to pin down and forever evasive; this is why the wise man withholds assent. The truth can be compared to the literary figure of Proteus, of whom it was said that he successfully evaded all capture unless he was pointed out by

to follow.” Augustine asks, “Do you know that by them the probable was also called the ‘truth-like’?” “So it seems,” responds Licentius. Evidently Licentius has carefully listened to Augustine’s description of the opinions of the New Academy and is, by his equivocation, attempting to answer according to their tenets. Cf. *Acad.* II.7.16 (CCSL 29 26-27).

¹⁴ *Acad.* II.11.26 (CCSL 29 32).

¹⁵ *Acad.* II.7.19 (CCSL 29 28).

¹⁶ *Acad.* II.13.29 (CCSL 29 33).

¹⁷ *Acad.* II.13.29 (CCSL 29 33).

some deity.¹⁸ Alypius continues, “Now, if that deity be with us, and show us that truth which is of so much anxiety to us, then I shall admit that the Academics are vanquished.”¹⁹ At this point, the dialogue reaches its climax. Augustine exclaims, “That is well said. I desired absolutely nothing more.”²⁰ Augustine’s jubilant response is at first blush perplexing and seemingly out of place. Why this apparent capitulation to Alypius’s position? Augustine continues, however: “But Alypius, you have told us who it is that is able to show us truth, and I must sedulously endeavor not to disagree with you. Alike with brevity and piety, you have said that only some kind of deity is able to show a man what truth is. . . . I have heard nothing more pleasing, nothing more weighty, nothing more worthy of approval, and – if, as I trust, that deity be present – nothing more true.”²¹

The third book of *Contra Academicos* concludes with Augustine arguing that there are in fact wise people in possession of truth and wisdom and thereby made happy. The reluctance of the Academics to assent to truth and wisdom, and to follow only the “probable” in practical matters results in a relativism that can only end in moral turpitude, by which one would “commit every heinous crime whenever it seems probable to him that such an act ought to be performed, provided that he accept nothing as true.”²² This then is the argumentative structure of *Contra Academicos*: Augustine and Alypius take over the argument surrounding the validity of the position

¹⁸ *Acad.* III.5.11 (CCSL 29 41): [*S*]uamque imaginem et quasi speculum quoddam in Proteo illo animaduerti oportere, qui traditur eo solere capi, quo minime caperetur, inuestigatoresque eius numquam eundem tenuisse nisi indice alicuius modi numine.

¹⁹ *Acad.* III.5.11 (CCSL 29 41).

²⁰ *Acad.* III.5.12 (CCSL 29 41).

²¹ *Acad.* III.6.13 (CCSL 29 42).

²² *Acad.* III.16.36 (CCSL 29 56-57). The moral dimension of *Contra Academicos* has been well articulated by John Heil. He notes that skepticism severs the relation between reason and will, so that a moral action is no longer predicated on the knowledge of the good. John Heil, “Augustine’s Attack on Skepticism: The *Contra Academicos*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 65 (1972): 99-116.

held by the New Academy from Trygetius and Licentius. The figure of Proteus, introduced by Alypius, offers Augustine an opportunity to assert that eternal truth can in principle be revealed in the temporal and material world of flux. Finally, it is in this revealed “image of truth” that the path to the happy life is discovered.

I will now analyze in depth three selections from *Contra Academicos*, which demonstrate that Augustine’s theology of the Incarnation is the answer to the difficulty raised by the Academics of the inability to know eternal truth. The “image of the truth” was understood in the *Soliloquies* and expressed by the Skeptic position in *Contra Academicos* as “truth-like” and “probable,” with the temporal and material image having no real participation in eternal, immaterial truth. Interacting first with Augustine’s direct discourse to Romanianus in the preface to Book II (*Acad.* II.1.1-II.3.9), second, with the discussion surrounding the figure of Proteus (*Acad.* III.5.11-III.6.13), and, third, with the conclusion in which Augustine reworks Plato’s philosophy of the sensible world as image of the world of forms (*Acad.* III.17.37-III.20.45), I will demonstrate that these all contain veiled references to the Incarnation and are, in fact, foundational to Augustine’s attempts to overcome the skepticism of the Academics.²³

²³ The aim of the dialogue as upholding the possibility of the instantiation of wisdom in the person of the incarnate Christ has not been brought out in earlier scholarship on *Contra Academicos*. While most studies written in the first half of the twentieth century carefully note the philosophical attack on skepticism and the insistence that the intellect is able to know truth, they are unable to link the philosophical goals of the dialogue with Augustine’s expressed theological conclusions “never to deviate in the least from the authority of Christ, for I find none more powerful.” *Acad.* III.20.43 (CCSL 29 61). Cf. Prosper Alfaric, *L’Évolution intellectuelle de saint Augustin. I. Du Manichéisme au néoplatonisme* (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1918), pp. 259-78, 349-58, and 415-28; Charles Boyer, *L’Idée de vérité dans la philosophie de saint Augustin* (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1921), pp. 12-46; Vernon J. Bourke, *Augustine’s Quest of Wisdom: Life and Philosophy of the Bishop of Hippo* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1945), pp. 72-74; Fulbert Cayre, *Initiation à la philosophie de saint Augustin* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1947), pp. 67-70 and 97-99; Regis Jolivet, “Contra Academicos:

The Preface to Book II (*Contra Academicos* II.1-II.3)

At the beginning of the first book of *Contra Academicos*, Licentius remarks on the task laid out for the debaters in attempting to find the happy man: “We are seeking a perfect man, but a *man*, nevertheless.”²⁴ By analyzing the preface to Book II, I will suggest that the “perfect man” is the person of the incarnate Christ, later personified in the mythical figure of Proteus. I will analyze the three dominant references used to identify the “perfect man” in the direct discourse to Romanianus in the preface to Book II: “wisdom,” “truth,” and “philosophy.”

The language of “wisdom” suffuses all of *Contra Academicos*. In the first book, Trygetius is insistent that one cannot be happy in this life, because certain wisdom cannot be found. Augustine is asked to abdicate his position as judge

Introduction,” in *Bibliothèque augustinienne* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1948), 4.7-11 and idem, *Dieu soleil des esprits* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1934), pp. 3-20; Bernard J. Diggs, “St. Augustine Against the Academicians,” *Traditio* 7 (1949-51): 73-93; Étienne Gilson, *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin* (Paris: Vrin, 1949), pp. 48-55; Johannes Hessen, *Augustins Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* (Leiden: Brill, 1960), pp. 19-50; Armand A. Maurer, *Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1964), pp. 5-8; Jean Felix Nourrisson, *La Philosophie de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Frankfurt Minerva, 1968), pp. 53-164; Julius R. Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 30-34. David Mosher has rightly noted the Cartesian underpinning present in many earlier twentieth-century studies of *Contra Academicos*. The Cartesian quest for epistemic certainty is seemingly the only lens through which much traditional scholarship has read *Contra Academicos*. More recent scholarship by Brian Harding and David Mosher has corrected this tendency and noted the importance of faith for Augustine’s epistemology; faith in the Augustinian sense as a form of knowing. Mosher argues that Augustine is less concerned with proving the certainty of knowledge than he is with expressing an *apologia* for the place of faith and authority in “knowing” divine and human things. Cf. David Mosher, “The Argument of St. Augustine’s *Contra Academicos*,” *Augustinian Studies* 12 (1981): 103. Despite these necessary corrections in reading *Contra Academicos* as an *apologia* for the place of faith in knowledge, Mosher and Harding have not taken the argument to the next level. Augustine not only wants to demonstrate the possibility of attaining true wisdom in this life through faith, but he also wants to demonstrate that this wisdom has, in fact, dwelt on earth, which makes human possession of wisdom a genuine possibility.

²⁴ *Acad.* I.3.9 (CCSL 29 8): *perfectum enim quaerimus, sed tamen hominem.*

between the two debaters in order to propose a definition of wisdom. The definition he proposes is critical: “[W]isdom is the knowledge of divine and human things.”²⁵ While this is immediately a reference to Cicero’s definition of wisdom,²⁶ it is also, I maintain, an oblique reference to the two natures of the incarnate wisdom. The insurmountable gulf between the knowledge of human and of divine things surely entails that no one is wise, asserts Trygetius, for if we are honest with ourselves, we do not even really know ourselves, much less divine things.²⁷ On the contrary, maintains Licentius, wisdom involves not just the knowledge of but also the search for divine and human things – knowledge refers to God and the search refers to man.²⁸ Trygetius quickly points out that knowing and searching are two completely different things. Book One ends with the debate surrounding the definition of wisdom as the knowledge of divine and human things as yet unconcluded.

The preface to Book Two contains Augustine’s apologetic appeal to Romanianus and seems *prima facie* unrelated to the discussion in Book One. However, when we analyze more closely the vocabulary Augustine employs to entice his friend into the “delightful port of wisdom” and the language Augustine uses to describe his own conversion narrative, we see that he is, in fact, pointing to the one who has knowledge of divine and human things. Augustine is setting the stage to invite Romanianus to consider whether there is a way out of the skepticism of the Academics – a way beyond the impasse in which knowledge of divine things eludes those searching in this life. In the preface to Book II, Augustine presents a theology

²⁵ *Acad.* I.6.16 (CCSL 29 12).

²⁶ Cicero, *De officiis* 2.2.5; *Tuscul. Quaest.* 4.26.57.

²⁷ “[D]ivine things are universally conceded to be higher and nobler than human things, how was he able to reach those things, since he knew not what he himself was?” *Acad.* I.8.22.

²⁸ *Acad.* I.8.23 (CCSL 29 16).

of the Incarnation by borrowing the metanarrative of a Plotinian philosophical *Weltanschauung* of the soul as image that goes out from the Divine and has its return to the Divine inscribed in its constitution.²⁹ Augustine rearticulates these Plotinian movements first in the conversion narrative of Romanianaus and second, in recounting his own conversion. In both cases Augustine blends Incarnation theology with Plotinian philosophy of image.

This search for the face of wisdom necessities that “one implore divine aid with all devotion and piety,” for which reason, explains Augustine, “I am beseeching the very power and wisdom of the most high God, for what else is He whom the Mysteries reveal to us as the Son of God.”³⁰ Scholarship on *Contra Academicos* has not noted the significance of this prayer. However, when this dialogue is read as proposing the possibility of the Incarnation, the prayer’s significance is unmistakable. The prayer in this dialogue is the first time Augustine explicitly links *wisdom* with Christ and, equally significant, the prayer is situated within the context of the ecclesial rites (*mysteria nobis*) in which this truth is handed over (*tradunt*). The mysteries celebrated in the Church, asserts Augustine, proclaim the one who fulfils the definition of Wisdom: the one who has knowledge of divine and human things.

On account of this “power and wisdom of the most high God,” Augustine encourages his friend not to despair of ever arriving at wisdom, because wisdom will show itself and will allow others to participate in his intimate knowledge of divine and human things. Augustine writes, “Consequently, will that power not burst forth some day and change into dread and amazement the jeers of many who now despair?

²⁹ Paul Aubin describes this Plotinian movement of the soul as image in helpful ways. Cf. Paul Aubin “L’Image dans l’oeuvre de Plotin,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 41 (1953): 348-379.

³⁰ *Acad.* II.1.1 (CCSL 29 18): *Oro autem ipsam summi dei uirtutem atque sapientiam. Quid est enim aliud, quem mysteria nobis tradunt dei filium?*

And, having shown on earth some signs, as it were, of things to come, will it not hasten back to heaven when the burden of the entire body will have been cast off?³¹

This assurance to Romanianus is, I believe, a description of Augustine's early understanding of the Incarnation. The divine power (*uirtus*) challenges the cynicism of the Skeptics and converts (*conuertet*) them of their despair of ever finding truth. This power is meant to alter Romanianus towards Christ, who, having spoke on the earth (*locuta in terris*), bridges the way back to heaven (*recurreret in caelum*). The dynamic between the image and its source in Plotinian cosmology is mirrored in Augustine's description of the appearance of Wisdom in the soul of Romanianus. The image is derived from its source and as such is revelatory of its source – showing signs on earth of the place from which it proceeds. Lastly, the image is drawn to return to its source, to “hasten back to heaven.” Thus, within a Plotinian metaphysic of image, Augustine has linked the appearance of Wisdom within the soul of Romanianus to the Incarnation of wisdom.

The preface to Book II of *Contra Academicos* describes the Incarnation also as the revelation of *truth*. This is the second term to analyze in the direct discourse to Romanianus. In addition to employing Plotinian cosmology to describe conversion as the descent of *wisdom* into the soul as a type of the Incarnation, Augustine also describes the manifestation of *truth* as a type of the Incarnation. After thanking his generous patron for his unflagging support and his ongoing paternal care Augustine writes,

³¹ *Acad. II.1.2 (CCSL 29 19): Ergone non erumpet aliquando ista uirtus et multorum desperantium risus in horrorem stuporemque conuertet et locuta in terris quasi quaedam futurorum signa rursus proiecto totius corporis onere recurreret in caelum?*

[T]he fact that I have escaped from the chains of excessive desires; that I have laid aside the burdens of deadly cares, and am again breathing easily, recovering my senses, and returning to myself; that I am most earnestly engaged in the quest for the truth, and have already begun to find it; and that I am confident of reaching even the ultimate measure; to this you urged me, you drove me, you made it possible. Whose minister you were, however, I have grasped to the present time by faith, more than I have comprehended by reason.³²

I want to note three critical elements in this passage. First, once again we see the Plotinian movements of the image rearticulated as Augustine recounts his own intellectual conversion. The *exitus-reditus* schema by which Augustine is “returning” to himself, is anticipated in the preceding paragraph, in which Augustine relates his own biographical travel itinerary. Planning on “returning to Carthage” Augustine confided his plans to Romanianus, who had hesitations on account of his “innate love of homeland.” Nevertheless, Romanianus acquiesced, furnishing Augustine’s journey for when he “dared to fly” and “sailed away.” Augustine’s biographical travel itinerary mirrors the account in the paragraph under consideration, in which he details the spiritual movements of his soul. Having escaped the chains of desire, Augustine relates to Romanianus how he has returned to himself (*redeo ad me*) and has subsequently found peace; the conversion and contemplation he has experienced entail that his soul has “already begun to find” truth.

³² *Acad. II.2.4 (CCSL 29 20): quod a superfluarum cupiditatum uinculis euolauit, quod depositis oneribus mortuarum curarum respiro respisco redeo ad me, quod quaero intentissimus ueritatem, quod inuenire iam ingredior, quod me ad summum ipsum modum peruenturum esse confido, tu animasti, tu impulisti, tu fecisti. Cuius autem minister fueris, plus adhuc fide concepi quam ratione comprehendi.*

The second point of significance I want to focus on in paragraph *Acad.* II.2.4, is Augustine's confidence "of reaching even the ultimate measure (*summum modum*)" of truth. Forms of the description "ultimate measure" appear a number of times in Augustine's early writings.³³ Of significance is the use in *De beata vita*.³⁴ The discussion in that text considers the consequences of equating happiness with the possession of wisdom. Wisdom is defined as the "measure of the soul, that is, that through which the soul keeps its equilibrium."³⁵ When the soul contemplates wisdom (*sapientiam contemplatur*) and is not misled by the "treachery of images (*simulacrorum*)," then it can be said to possess this measure or wisdom.³⁶ Augustine is explicit that this wisdom is taught by divine authority to be the Son of God who is the Truth. He writes,

The truth, however, receives its being though a supreme measure, from which it emanates and into which it is converted when perfected. (*Veritas autem ut sit, fit per aliquem summum modum, a quo procedit et in quem se perfecta conuertit.*) However, no other measure is imposed upon the supreme measure.... [N]either has truth ever been without measure, nor measure without truth."³⁷

³³ *Acad.* II.2.4 (CCSL 29 20); *beata u.* 4.34; *div. qu.* 6; *nat. b.* 22, 41.

³⁴ See the broader discussion of "ultimate measure" in Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 30-33.

³⁵ *beata u.* 33 (CCSL 29 83). Du Roy suggests that the language of *modus* as connoting a just measure or limit is derived from Cicero. Du Roy, *Intelligence*, p. 152. Courcelle understands the dialogues as a whole to be "essentiellement cicéroniens, pour le fond comme pour la forme." Courcelle, *Recherches*, p. 255.

³⁶ *beata u.* 33 (CCSL 29 83).

³⁷ *beata u.* 34 (CCSL 29 84).

The mutual indwelling of Father and Son from eternity is expressed in the mutual presence of measure and truth. Augustine writes, “Whoever attains the supreme measure, through the truth, is happy. This means to have God within the soul, that is to enjoy God (*perfrui*).”³⁸ The consubstantial union of Father and Son expressed here with the terms “measure” and “truth” is likewise operative in paragraph II.2.4 of *Contra Academicos*; it appears that it is in having found truth in the person of the incarnate Christ that Augustine gains confidence “of reaching even the ultimate measure.”

Du Roy has convincingly demonstrated that Augustine’s description of attaining the supreme measure through truth is of Plotinian provenance. It is *Enneads* V, asserts du Roy, “qu’il a pu s’inspirer pour décrire les relations du Père et du Fils comme celles de la Mesure et de la Vérite.”³⁹ Du Roy is correct in noting that Augustine does not in a servile manner copy Plotinus’s philosophical system but rather assimilates his grand themes into his own theology.⁴⁰ De Roy maintains that the treatise “The Three Primary Hypostases” (V.1) and the treatise “On the Origin and Order of the Beings which Come after the First” (V.2) bear particular importance in

³⁸ *beata u.* 34 (CCSL 29 84).

³⁹ Du Roy, *Intelligence*, p. 157.

⁴⁰ Du Roy’s study is representative of other contemporary French studies of Augustine’s writings that attempt to suggest precise referencing to the *Enneads* from which Augustine was drawing. Similarly, see Aimé Solignac, *Introduction aux Confessions*, pp. 79-80; and Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin*, 2nd ed. (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1968). Nello Cipriani has criticized du Roy’s study as overly eager to find precise correspondences with Plotinus’s *Enneads*. Nello Cipriani, “Le Fonti Cristiane Della Dottrina Trinitaria Nei Primi Dialoghi di S. Agostino,” *Augustinianum* 34 (1994): 269. Cipriani’s criticism of scholarship that uncovers more Plotinian influence than Augustine’s dialogues permit certain valid and pertains equally well, in my estimation, to other contemporary French studies mentioned. Nevertheless, the seamless assimilation of broad philosophical themes into a theology can demonstrate even more influence than the enumeration of precise linguistic parallels, as Robert O’Connell has persuasively argued. Cf. Robert O’Connell, *St. Augustine’s Early Theory of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 15.

Augustine's theological metaphysic. These treatises express the origin of Intellect, which is established as image by gazing back at the One; Intellect proceeds from the One and is converted back to the One. However, lacking in du Roy's analysis, I believe, is the fact that Augustine's primary aim in the *Contra Academicos* is not to describe the relationship between the truth and the ultimate measure, but to describe theologically his *own* conversion to the truth. The first person singular is repeated as Augustine describes his earnest quest for the truth (*quaero intentissimus ueritatem*) toward which he has now begun to advance (*ingredior*). It is Augustine's certainty regarding the possibility of the Incarnation, that is, the possibility of coming face to face with wisdom, knowing eternal truth in the temporal image, that causes him such joy.

The last thing to note in paragraph *Acad. II.2.4* is the manner in which one knows the truth in this life. The importance of faith in this dialogue has rightly been noted.⁴¹ Augustine is still "reaching" (*peruenturum*) for the ultimate measure and strenuously searching for the truth (*quaero intentissimus ueritatem*); he admits grasping God more by faith than by reason (*adhuc fide concepi quam ratione comprehendere*). The return of the soul as image is not yet complete. This is expressed with more clarity in the conclusion to *De beata vita*: "But, as long as we are still seeking, and not yet satiated by the fountain itself – to use our word – by fullness (*plenitudo*) – we must confess that we have not yet reached our measure; therefore, notwithstanding the help of God, we are not yet wise and happy."⁴² And yet, the skepticism of the Academics does not have the final word – wisdom and truth can still

⁴¹ Brian Harding, "Skepticism, Illumination and Christianity in Augustine's *Contra Academicos*," *Augustinian Studies* 34 (2003): 197-212; and David Mosher, "The Argument of St. Augustine's *Contra Academicos*," *Augustinian Studies* 12 (1981): 89-113.

⁴² *beata u.* 35 (CCSL 29 84).

be known, even if they are grasped by faith. *Contra Academicos* underscores that the way of grasping the “image of truth” is by faith.

In the preface to Book II, we see Augustine propose a Christian account of the Incarnation within a Plotinian worldview. The description of wisdom appearing in the soul of Romanianus and of Augustine’s own conversion – the “recovering” of his senses and his “returning” to himself – is at once Christian and Plotinian. Augustine was, in the words of O’Meara, “a Christian of his time who held certain views *that were abhorrent* to Neoplatonism but nevertheless had been much influenced by Neoplatonism in not unimportant ways.”⁴³ *Contra Academicos* is committed to the search for the “perfect man” – the one with “knowledge of divine and human things.” This “quest for the truth” is revealed to be a search for the “perfect man” of wisdom. Knowing this truth – this “perfect man” – through faith, Augustine is “confident of reaching even the ultimate measure.”

The second part of Augustine’s description of his conversion in the preface to Book II (*Acad.* II.2.5) has received much more scholarly attention. Augustine describes “certain plenteous books (*libri quidam pleni*)” that took a hold of him and changed his life. Much scholarship has been devoted to analyzing which “plenteous books” and which philosophy took such a hold of the young Augustine. *Philosophy* is the third term of significance to consider in the direct discourse to Romanianus. Augustine explains the intellectual aspects of his conversion; despite the account’s brevity, it is emotive and gripping, much like the description in *Confessions* VII of his intellectual conversion after reading certain *platoniorum libri*. Much attention has been devoted to analyzing these paragraphs (*Acad.* II.2.5) in light of the *Confessions*,

⁴³ John J. O’Meara, “The Neoplatonism of St. Augustine,” in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. Dominic J. O’Meara (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983), p. 35.

in an attempt to understand what occasioned Augustine to return to the religion of his childhood, and particularly what were the “certain plenteous books (*libri quidam pleni*) that Augustine read, which so moved him. Augustine describes his state after reading these books:

I was fast returning completely back to myself. And, as if at the end of a journey, I looked back – I confess – to that religion which is implanted in us in our boyhood and interwoven in the marrow of our being. Indeed, she was drawing me unknowing to herself. And then, staggering, hastening, hesitating I seized [the writings of] the Apostle Paul. . . . I read through all of it with the greatest attention and care. And then, however small the radiance that before had surrounded the face of philosophy, she now appeared so great that if I was able to show it – I do not say to you, who even when it was unknown to you, still you ever burned with desire for it – to your adversary himself (as for him I do not know whether he is an inspiration or an impediment to you), then even he would cast away and abandon his seaside resort, his lovely gardens, his elegant, sumptuous feasting, his household entourage, and, finally, whatever so fiercely agitates him towards all kinds of pleasures. Gazing, panting, seething as an impassioned and holy lover he would fly towards this beauty [of the face of philosophy].⁴⁴

⁴⁴ *Acad.* II.2.5-6 (CCSL 29 21): *Prorsus totus in me cursim redibam. Respexi tamen, confiteor, quasi de itinere in illam religionem, quae pueris nobis insita est et medullitus implicata; uerum autem ipsa ad se nescientem rapiebat. Itaque titubans*

In this paragraph we once again have the Plotinian language of “returning,” “journeying,” and “flying back,” which suffused also the first half of the preface. Most attention to this paragraph has been given to trying to indentify the *libri quidam pleni* that occasioned this moving conversion. I think this paragraph is better understood, however, when read in light of what precedes in the rest of the preface. I have noted how Augustine describes the image-like quality of truth – how it reveals itself and the ultimate measure while remaining ultimately grasped by faith. This context accounts for Augustine’s repeated use, in the preface to Book II, of the expression “the face of philosophy (*philosophiae facies*).” The triad of wisdom, truth and philosophy are clearly linked in the dialogues. Augustine is, however, giving this triad a personal character – he is searching for its face.⁴⁵ The religion that had been “implanted in us in our boyhood,” I would suggest, is faith in the person of Christ. In the *Confessions*, Augustine writes, “When I was still a boy I heard about eternal life promised to us through the humility of our Lord God, coming down to our pride, and I was already signed with the sign of the cross and seasoned with salt from the time I

properans haesitans arripio apostolum Paulum.... Perlegi totum intentissime atque castissime. Tunc uero quantulocumque iam lumine asperso tanta se mihi philosophiae facies aperuit, ut non dicam tibi, qui eius incognitae fame semper arsisisti, sed si ipsi aduersario tuo, a quo nescio utrum plus exercearis quam inpediaris, eam demonstrare potuissem, ne ille et baias et amoena pomeria et delicata nitida que conuiuia et domesticos histriones, postremo quidquid eum acriter commouet in quascumque delicias abiciens et relinquens ad huius pulchritudinem blandus amator et sanctus mirans anhelans aestuans aduolaret.

⁴⁵ Robert O’Connell has also noted the personal character of the philosophy for which Augustine is searching in the *Contra Academicos*: “Augustine’s imagination pictures *Philosophia*, not as some bland poetical ‘personification,’ but as a vivid hypostatic reality, and an unmistakably personal one at that. Once again, She is Someone who bears a striking resemblance to the feminine *Sapientia* of the *Hortensius* account in the *Confessions*: the *Contra Academicos* depicts her as having ‘breasts’ (1, 4), ‘bosom’ and ‘lap’ (1, 3; 2,7); her “true lovers” come “burning” and “panting” with desire for her (1, 1-4; 2, 4-6).” Robert O’Connell, “The Visage of Philosophy at Cassiciacum,” *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 73.

came from my mother's womb."⁴⁶ It is faith in the humble incarnate Christ to which Augustine "was fast returning ... as if returning from a journey." This incarnational understanding of philosophy, wisdom and truth accounts for the repeated description of the "appearance" of wisdom, its "revelation," and seeing her "face."

Reading *Contra Academicos* through this lens sheds light on the longstanding debate of what the *libri quidam pleni* consist. John O'Meara has argued that these *libri* are Christian books rather than the neo-Platonist books as has been traditionally assumed. He notes the many similarities to Book VIII of the *Confessions* and suggests that the parallels should be looked for not in *Confessions* VII and the *platoniorum libros*, but in *Confessions* VIII and "the writings of St. Paul and perhaps Ambrose and the hearing of the Life of Antony."⁴⁷ George Madec has questioned the accuracy of O'Meara's reading. Madec contends that these *libri quidam pleni* are better understood as neo-Platonic writings. Of course, here Madec stands within a long tradition of interpretation that attempts to posit precise (often Plotinian) texts that Augustine read and can be seen in the dialogues and in the *Confessions*.⁴⁸

I believe *Contra Academicos* II.II.5 is simply not clear on whether we can equate the *libri quidam pleni* with the subsequently mentioned writings of St. Paul. We cannot know of which books Augustine speaks when he says that they "enkindled in me such a conflagration." What we can note is the synthesis of, the by now familiar Plotinian "image" language of conversion and return with Augustine's renewed embrace of the religion of his childhood. Augustine blends these two

⁴⁶ *Conf.* 1.11.17 (CCSL 27 9).

⁴⁷ John O'Meara, "Plotinus and Augustine. Exegesis of *Contra Academicos* II, 5," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 24 (1970): 337.

⁴⁸ Goulven Madec, "Pour l'interprétation de *Contra Academicos* II,II,5," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 17 (1971): 322-328.

narratives of Christian faith in the Incarnation and a Plotinian image metaphysic in *Acad.* II.2.5, so that they reach their consummation in the first line of the following paragraph: “Then, philosophy’s countenance, howsoever dim the light that was cast upon it, revealed itself to me.” Perhaps the “dim light” is the light of faith by which Augustine earlier mentioned that he grasped truth and thereby the ultimate measure. This strengthens the plausibility of the equation of wisdom, truth, and philosophy as representations of the incarnate Christ. Upon seeing the beauty of this face, maintains Augustine, one would abandon all temporal and material beauties: “[T]hen would he forsake and relinquish seashore resorts, the beautiful parks, the delightful and elegant banquets, the private theatrical exhibition.”⁴⁹ He would “fly” to eternal beauty, “the aim of his desire, and the end of his longing.” Fleeting beauties are imitations or seeds (*quasi sementem*) of “true beauty (*ueram pulchritudinem*).” However, material and temporal beauty can make true and eternal beauty visible. Augustine writes, “[T]o the few who peer – insofar as they are permitted – intently and diligently into the dense entanglements, it continues to be plainly visible.”⁵⁰ Philosophy’s countenance is revealed by looking diligently with the dim light of faith – contemplating the reflected beauty of truth.

The incarnate Christ is described in the preface of Book II under the terms of “wisdom,” “truth,” and the “face of philosophy.” The effort to overcome the impasse of Academic skepticism, that is, the despair of ever finding eternal truth in temporal existence, finds resolution in the one who has wisdom – in him who has knowledge of divine and human things. Augustine urges Romanianus to recall his own conversion; Augustine also relates his conversion. In both cases, wisdom has descended into their

⁴⁹ *Acad.* II.2.6 (CCSL 29 21).

⁵⁰ *Acad.* II.2.6 (CCSL 29 21).

hearts. This manifestation of the truth should give Romanianus hope. Eternal truth can be grasped in faith and will lead even to the “ultimate measure.” Finally, while “philosophy’s countenance” is seen through the dim light of faith, it is still seen to have a personal character. Whether or not Augustine’s conversion was occasioned by reading certain neo-Platonic texts in addition to the writings of St. Paul, it is clear that the spiritual writings had a profound impact on him; no temporal, material beauty compared to the splendor of the revealed face of philosophy.

Proteus (*Contra Academicos* III.11-III.13).

The figure of Proteus is first mentioned by Alypius. This is significant because it was Alypius who wanted to keep the name of Christ out of the dialogues in order to retain their philosophical integrity.⁵¹ In the end it is precisely on account of their philosophical integrity that Proteus, the “image of the truth,” is suggested at a critical moment in *Contra Academicos* to overcome the skepticism of the Academics. Alypius takes up the argument on behalf of the Academics and defends the two aphorisms “that nothing is understood” and “that assent is not to be given to anything.” The “truth-like” is represented by the literary figure of Proteus, the “reflected image of truth (*in imaginem veritatis inducitur*),” explains Alypius: “[Proteus] is represented as being usually captured precisely when his capture was to be least expected. In fact, it is said that his pursuers never laid hold on him unless some deity was directing them toward him. Now if that deity be with us, and show us that truth which is of so much anxiety to us, then I shall admit that the Academics are

⁵¹ In the *Confessions* Augustine recounts, “For at first [Alypius] was scornfully critical of inserting Christ’s name in my books. He wanted them to smell of the ‘cedars’ of the schools ‘which the Lord had now felled’ (Ps. 28: 5) rather than of the healthgiving herbs of the Church which are a remedy against serpents.” *Conf.* IX.6.7.

vanquished.”⁵² Augustine seizes the advantage by leaping on the analogy of Proteus. Augustine expresses his agreement with the philosophy of the Academics inasmuch as it refuses to absolutize the material order. Attempting to derive certainty and stability, that is, eternal wisdom and truth, from transitory existence is as futile as attempting to grasp Proteus by the hand, for, like the temporal order, Proteus is always in a state of flux and change.

Alypius uses the analogy of Proteus to demonstrate the incommensurate relation, maintained by the Academics, between the truth and the “truth-like.” For them there could be no real relation between the two orders; knowledge of *both* divine and human things was not possible in this life.⁵³ Nevertheless, the agnosticism of the Academy, which holds “that assent is not to be given to anything,” does not have final sway. Once Proteus, “the image of truth,” is recognized for what he is as an *image*, then the seeker of wisdom and truth will no longer be forced to remain metaphysically ignorant among corporeal delusions of sense. In other words, Augustine turns the analogy of Proteus on its head by emphasizing the *positive* connotations of an image; it need not simply be a deluding and deceptive dissemblance, but can be a participatory *resemblance*. One can, insists Augustine, press through the image to partake of eternal truth. In his various shifting forms, Proteus participates in and images the unchanging truth.

Even more significant, however, is that Augustine takes Alypius’s analogy of Proteus and deploys the mythical figure as an image of the incarnate Christ. I have

⁵² *Acad.* III.5.11 (CCSL 29 41): *suamque imaginem et quasi speculum quoddam in Proteo illo animaduerti oportere, qui traditur eo solere capi, quo minime caperetur, inuestigatoresque eius numquam eundem tenuisse nisi indice alicuius modi numine. Quod si assit et illam nobis ueritatem, quae tantum curae est, demonstrare dignetur! Ego quoque uel ipsis inuitis, quod minime reor.*

⁵³ “[Y]ou will not be wise as long as you are living here below; wisdom is with God, and it cannot reach man.” *Acad.* III.9.20 (CCSL 29 46).

already suggested how in *Contra Academicos* Augustine uses the language of wisdom, truth, and the face of philosophy to refer to the incarnate Christ. In this paragraph (*Acad.* III.5.11), “that truth” pointed out by the deity is seen in the figure of Proteus, who comes unrecognized into the material order as an image of eternal truth. It is at this point, I maintain, that the dialogue reaches its culmination. Augustine exclaims, “That is well said. I desired absolutely nothing more.”⁵⁴ It is Alypius, states Augustine, who has led them to the conclusion regarding who can show human beings truth: “Alike with brevity and piety, you have said that only some kind of deity is able to show a man what truth is. Wherefore, in this discussion of ours, I have heard nothing more pleasing, nothing more weighty, nothing more worthy of approval, and – if, as I trust, that deity be present – nothing more true.”⁵⁵ Augustine accepts as a reality what Alypius has proposed as a hypothetical but necessary condition to grasp truth: that a deity has pointed out Proteus, the image of the truth. Augustine exclaims with elation that the mention of Proteus by Alypius is the “very best kind of philosophy (*optimum philosophiae genus*).” This is because this is the point to which Augustine has been driving the dialogue all along. Proteus is mentioned as “the very best kind of philosophy” and “nothing more true (*nihil uerius*)”⁵⁶ because he is a literary representation of the incarnate wisdom, truth, and philosophy which the dialogue was committed to finding. Augustine writes,

That Proteus – so that you, boys, may see that poets are not to be entirely disregarded in philosophy – is portrayed after the image of the truth. In poems, I say, Proteus portrays and bears the truth, which no one can lay

⁵⁴ *Acad.* III.5.12 (CCSL 29 41): *Bene habet, inquam, prorsus nihil amplius optauit.*

⁵⁵ *Acad.* III.6.13 (CCSL 29 42).

⁵⁶ *Acad.* III.6.13 (CCSL 29 42).

hold on, if he is deceived by false images, and loosens or loses his hold on the nodes of understanding. For even when the truth is being grasped and, as it were, held in our hands, those images strive in the usual manner of corporeal things – to deceive and delude us through the very senses which we use for the needs of this life.⁵⁷

At this point it becomes quite clear that Augustine is identifying Proteus with the incarnate Christ. Proteus, explains Augustine, both “portrays and bears the truth (*ostentat sustinetque ueritatis*).” Proteus and Christ are linked in their character as image. Despite them showing their face – in their appearance as the image of truth – their character of truth is not immediately perceived. Although they both “show forth and bear the truth,” their corporeal existence “deceives and deludes.” Proteus escapes the very moment he is thought to be captured and “held in our hands” because then he is grasped only according to his temporal and material condition; he is, then, not perceived as an image translucent to eternal truth (what Augustine terms “grasping more by faith”). Proteus as “image of the truth” poetically attests to the possibility of the Incarnation – that eternal truth can be temporally revealed and embodied. As an image, he does not remain in his material manifestation, for this would be “in the usual manner of corporeal things” to become a “false image.” No, the “image of the truth” shows itself only for a time; it is revelatory of the truth, bears the truth, and is

⁵⁷ *Acad. III.6.13 (CCSL 29 42): Proteus enim ille, ut uos adulescentes non penitus poetas a philosophia contemnendos esse uideatis, in imaginem ueritatis inducitur; ueritatis, inquam, Proteus in carminibus ostentat sustinetque personam, quam obtinere nemo potest, si falsis imaginibus deceptus comprehensionis nodos uel laxauerit uel dimiserit. Sunt enim istae imagines, quae consuetudine rerum corporalium per istos, quibus ad necessaria huius uitae utimur, sensus nos, etiam cum ueritas tenetur et quasi habetur in manibus, decipere atque inludere moliuntur.*

then destined to “hasten back to heaven when the burden of the entire body will have been cast off.”⁵⁸

It is Alypius who has suggested the figure of Proteus as an “image of the truth.” Augustine exclaims with thanks that his most “intimate friend” is not only in agreement with him on human affairs, “but also on religion itself (*religione concordat*).”⁵⁹ Alypius had initially expressed his desire to keep the name of Christ from the dialogues, yet in mentioning the character Proteus, the image of the truth, Alypius effects in Augustine such exultation precisely because Alypius, to Augustine’s mind, references the incarnate Christ, thereby providing an escape from the skepticism of the Academics. Eternal, immaterial truth can show itself in the temporal, changing material world as an image of itself. Thus, in relation to his now affirmed common bond with Alypius, Augustine again quotes Cicero’s definition of friendship at the close of this paragraph: “[A] friendly affectionate agreement on human things and on divine (*rerum humanarum et diuinarum*).”⁶⁰

Throughout the dialogue, it was held that the wise person is one who has knowledge of human and divine things. The Academics deny that possibility outright. Proteus as a reflected image of the truth is, I have argued, a philosophical representation of the incarnate Christ who, having knowledge of both divine and human things, comes to share his wisdom, truth, and face of philosophy. This is the “very best kind of philosophy,” than which there is “nothing more true,” because this image of truth both “bears and shows forth” the truth allowing Alypius and Augustine to participate in eternal wisdom as the common bond of friendship. Sharing in the

⁵⁸ *Acad.* II.1.2 (CCSL 29 19).

⁵⁹ *Acad.* III.6.13 (CCSL 29 42).

⁶⁰ *Acad.* III.6.13 (CCSL 29 42).

wisdom of him who is both human and divine, they now have the highest bond of friendship, suggests Augustine: an agreement on religion itself.

In *De ordine*, Augustine refers back to this discussion of Proteus as image of the truth. Here, Augustine writes that there is a certain unity or numerical proportion in all the various branches of study that are perceived by reason through “reflection and contemplation.”⁶¹ In the temporal and material order, unity is not immediately perceived; the senses understand through “shadows and vestiges.”⁶² But as the soul contemplates, it approaches the number of unity and truth. Approaching eternal truth through material existence is like the search for Proteus, “of whom Alypius made mention when we were treating of the Skeptics.”⁶³ In the finite order, truth is grasped by one seeking “as if Proteus were in his hands,” but truth, like Proteus, quickly eludes the searcher, who cannot contemplate beyond truth’s material expression.⁶⁴ Augustine writes, “But, false images of the things which we number drift away from that most hidden something by which we enumerate, snatch our attention to themselves, and frequently make that hidden something slip away even when it has been already in our grasp.”⁶⁵ The image becomes false, like Proteus, the moment it obscures and pulls away from us the truth we thought it contained. A false image hides the form so that it slips away, “even when it has been already in our grasp.” The image is only true, for Augustine – standing firmly within the Platonic tradition –

⁶¹ *ord.* 2.15.43.

⁶² *ord.* 2.15.43.

⁶³ *ord.* 2.15.43.

⁶⁴ *ord.* 2.15.43.

⁶⁵ *ord.* II.15.43.

when it is constituted in relation to eternal truth.⁶⁶ Only when Proteus is “handed over by a god” does he become an “image of truth.”

Proteus is an image of the incarnate Christ because as a “reflected image of truth” he gives himself only to those who see beyond his material and temporal constitution the immaterial eternal reality in which they participate. In clinging only to Proteus’s material existence, one is deceived; one ought rather to perceive in his materiality the truth that he both “bears and shows forth.” In the face of Academic skepticism, Alypius’s mention of the mythical figure Proteus gives Augustine great hope. Proteus is a pledge that the infinite can be contemplated through the finite and that truth can be perceived in the temporal order if it “is handed over by a god.”

The Platonic Image and the Incarnation (*Contra Academicos* III.17-III.20)

The conclusion to *Contra Academicos* is the last text I want to interact with in detail. I want to demonstrate that the conclusion of this dialogue weaves together in explicit fashion a Plotinian metaphysic with a Christian theology of the Incarnation. In describing the “descent of the Divine Intellect,” Augustine draws together the two aspects of his early thought that I have thus far considered (the intimation of a theology of the Incarnation in the search for wisdom, truth, and the face of philosophy and the discussion surrounding the literary figure of Proteus as an analogy of the incarnate Christ). The conclusion is initiated by Augustine recapitulating the history

⁶⁶ From various angles, the dialogues present a unified understanding of the nature of images. Material images are no longer false when one sees in their multiplicity and fragmentation the “simple, true, and certain unity” of being (*ord.* II.16.44); then Proteus is grasped not by the hands, but through contemplation. When one is no longer a slave to passions, greedy for material goods, and begins to understand immaterial being and the nature of eternity, then “he can search after things divine – not merely as truths to be believed, but also as matters to be contemplated, understood and retained.” *ord.* II.16.44.

of the Academics and, particularly, how they had arrived at the position that true wisdom cannot accrue to any person in this life. The Academics were attempting to preserve the theory proposed by Plato. “I have saved this to the last,” explains Augustine, “so that I might explain – if I can – what seems to have been the sole purpose of the Academics.”⁶⁷ It turns out that their intention as the inheritors of the Platonic tradition was to preserve, in some way, the “two worlds” metaphysic of Plato. Indeed, this is the very philosophy of participation that constitutes the backdrop to Augustine’s early account of image – namely, that the image is a derived participation in the eternal form which it serves to reveal. Augustine writes,

For my present purpose, it is sufficient that Plato held the following theories: that there are two worlds – an intelligible world in which the truth itself resides, and this sensible world which it is manifest that we perceive by sight and touch; that consequently the former is a true world, and the present world is truth-like – made unto the image of the other.⁶⁸

Where the reception of Plato had gone astray among the Academics, explains Augustine, is in severing the image from the form and unhinging the participatory relationship between them. For the Academics, this had the corollary effect that moral action turned out to be at best an approximation of what should be done based

⁶⁷ *Acad.* III.17.37 (CCSL 29 57).

⁶⁸ *Acad.* III.17.37 (CCSL 29 57). Cf. Matthias Smalbrugge, “La Notion de la participation chez Augustin: quelques observations sur le rapport christianisme-platonisme,” *Augustiniana* 40 (1990): 333-347. Isabelle Bochet, “Le Statut de l’image dans la pensée augustinienne,” *Archives de Philosophie* 72 (2009): 249-269.

on the “truth-like” or the probable.⁶⁹ However, all was not lost; it was Philo who began to “lead the Academy and its principles back to the authority of Plato.”⁷⁰ Then, finally when all “the persistent sophistry was dead,” “Plato’s countenance – which is the cleanest and brightest in philosophy – suddenly appeared, especially in Plotinus.”⁷¹ It is Plotinus who was so much like Plato that “they would seem to have lived together, but there is such a long interval of time between them that Plato is to be regarded as having relived in Plotinus.”⁷² According to Augustine, it is the participatory philosophy of image – lost in Academic skepticism – that is restored in Plotinus’s philosophy.

In the dialogues, image is placed within the framework of a Plotinian participatory ontology.⁷³ The two worlds are causally related. The world of the forms is prior to and generates its own image in the sensible world. This “truth-like” image of the material order, maintains the *Soliloquia*, remains in some sense false. Moving from the temporal and fleeting to the eternal is like trying to grasp Proteus by the hand. And so, the skepticism of the Academics seems initially insurmountable: “[Y]ou will not be wise as long as you are living here below; wisdom is with God and it cannot reach man.”⁷⁴ However, the lack of participation between the two orders in the thought of the Academics is a departure from Plato’s vision, maintains Augustine.

Augustine’s Plotinian patrimony, with its two-world metaphysic, entails that he takes seriously the arguments of the Academics that there can be no real

⁶⁹ Carneads “denominated as *truth-like* whatever he would follow in his action in this world.” *Acad.* III.18.40 (CCSL 29 59).

⁷⁰ *Acad.* III.18.41 (CCSL 29 59).

⁷¹ *Acad.* III.18.41 (CCSL 29 59-60).

⁷² *Acad.* III.18.41 (CCSL 29 60).

⁷³ Cf. Henri-Irénée Marrou, “Saint Augustin en images,” *Journal des Savants* (1971): 5-14.

⁷⁴ *Acad.* III.9.20 (CCSL 29 46).

correspondence between the truth in the eternal form world and the truth-like in the temporal order in flux. Ultimately, however, Augustine's Christian theological commitments, particularly the doctrine of the Incarnation, vanquishes the skepticism of the Academics. The central place that the figure of Proteus plays in *Contra Academicos*, I have argued, demonstrates the possibility, in Augustine's mind, of the Incarnation. The dialogue reaches its consummation when Alypius suggests Proteus as an image of the truth. Proteus, as a literary representation of the elusive character of truth, is employed by Augustine to demonstrate the possibility of the eternal form of truth embodying and showing forth the truth.

The conclusion to *Contra Academicos* is, perhaps, the most explicit reference to the incarnate Christ, and it is, once again, couched in Plotinian language.

Augustine writes,

Human reason would never lead such souls to that intelligible world if the most high God had not vouchsafed – through clemency toward the whole human race – to send the authority of the divine intellect down even to a human body, and caused it to dwell therein, so that souls would be aroused not only by divine precepts but also by divine acts, and would be thus enabled to reflect on themselves and to gaze upon their fatherland without any disputatious wrangling.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ *Acad.* III.19.42 (CCSL 29 60): *numquam ista ratio subtilissima reuocaret, nisi summus deus populari quadam clementia diuini intellectus auctoritatem usque ad ipsum corpus humanum declinaret atque summitteret, cuius non solum praeceptis sed etiam factis excitatae animae redire in semet ipsas et resipiscere patriam etiam sine disputationum concertatione potuissent.*

This quotation should be read in two complementary ways. First, a Plotinian metaphysic is obviously operative. The divine Intellect endows reason and soul so that soul comes from the intelligible world to the sensible world; this constitutes the fall of the soul into the body. After this, the soul returns to the fatherland (*resipiscere patriam*) through contemplation and reflecting on itself and its divine origin. This entire movement comports with a Plotinian cosmogony and its understanding of the soul as image.

The second way in which I believe this text should be read is as a description of the Incarnation. It is the mercy of God that comes to span the abyss between the two worlds. The clemency of God towards the whole human race is not a particularly Plotinian theme and is, of course, the *ratio* of the Incarnation. The phrase “authority of the divine intellect (*diuini intellectus auctoritatem*)” anticipates the use of *auctoritas* in the next paragraph, when Augustine writes, “[W]e are impelled toward knowledge by a twofold force: the force of authority and the force of reason. And I am resolved never to deviate in the least from the authority of Christ (*Christi auctoritate*), for I find none more powerful.”⁷⁶ The sending of the “authority of the divine intellect” anticipates the authority of the incarnate Christ come “down even to a human body.” It is the Incarnation that allows souls to return to God, having been taught by divine precepts and restored by divine actions.

It is significant that Augustine notes that the authority of the divine intellect comes not only with divine precepts but also with divine actions (*non solum praeceptis sed etiam factis*). Throughout *Contra Academicos*, it is alleged that the tenets of skepticism particular to the Academics lead to moral uncertainty; without knowledge as to what “is” one can never derive an “ought.” “The Academics were of

⁷⁶ *Acad.* III.20.43 (CCSL 29 60-61).

the opinion,” explains Augustine, “that certain knowledge (*scientia*) cannot accrue to a man with respect to those things precisely which pertain to philosophy.”⁷⁷ In an attempt to extricate themselves from the charge that by accepting nothing as true they were relegated to a life of inactivity and the eschewal of all responsibilities, the Academics proposed that for moral action they would follow what was “probable” or “truth-like.”⁷⁸ Augustine pointed out that surely this position is absurd: as one cannot allege that a person resembles another whom he has never seen, so too one who has never seen the truth cannot make a judgment as to what is “truth-like.” And yet, *Contra Academicos* is emphatic that knowing the truth is vital to doing the truth. Augustine writes,

The present question concerns our life, our morals, and the soul, which – destined to return to heaven when rendered more secure, now returning, as it were, to the region of its origin – presumes that it will overcome the opposition of all deceptive appearances; that, when it will have comprehended the truth, it will subdue inordinate desires; and that, when it will have thus become wedded, as it were to temperance, it will exercise sovereign power.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Acad.* II.5.11 (CCSL 29 24).

⁷⁸ *Acad.* II.5.12 (CCSL 29 24-25): “Now, bringing forward a certain kind of probability, which they termed ‘truth-like,’ they maintained that a wise man is by no means neglectful of duties, since he has something to guide him, although the truth lies hidden, buried, or confused either on account of a certain natural obscurity or on account of the similarity of things. (*hic illi inducto quodam probabili, quod etiam ueri simile nominabant, nullo modo cessare sapientem ab officiis asserebant, cum haberet quid sequeretur, ueritas autem siue propter naturae tenebras quasdam siue propter similitudinem rerum uel obruta uel confusa latitaret.*)”

⁷⁹ *Acad.* II.9.22 (CCSL 29 30): *De uita nostra de moribus de animo res agitur, qui se superaturum inimicitias omnium fallaciarum et ueritate comprehensa quasi in regionem suae originis rediens triumphaturum de libidinibus atque ita temperantia uelut coniuge accepta regnaturum esse praesumit securior rediturus in caelum.*

Augustine is adamant that knowing the truth is fundamental to the *katharsis* requisite to the return of the soul. If the Academics are correct that knowledge constitutes at best an approximation of the “truth-like” with no real relation to the truth itself, then one is condemned to be overcome by “deceptive appearances (*fallaciarum*)”⁸⁰ never reaching the end of the soul’s longings. The rub lies in the epistemic challenge of coming to know the immaterial and changeless truth while living in a state of change and flux. The Academics deny this possibility outright. Augustine agrees that eternal truth is not located in the transitory material order. Further, he concedes to the Skeptics that corporeal existence mocks those who attempt to grasp eternal truth therein, as Proteus disappears the moment he is thought to be grasped by the hand. And yet there must be some real relation between the material, temporal order and the immaterial and eternal order. “This is an important controversy,” insists Augustine “it is not one of mere words; it deals with realities.”⁸¹

The Incarnation, a manifestation of the clemency of the most high God, offers a bridge to true knowledge and moral action, so that having knowledge of human and divine things, that is, by participating in wisdom, truth and philosophy one can live according to eternal precepts while dwelling in a state of flux. The “authority of the divine intellect” comes down to dwell even in a human body, maintains Augustine, and it thereby models in action the truth it teaches with divine precepts (*non solum praeceptis sed etiam factis*). It is thus the Incarnation that ultimately overcomes both the intellectual and the moral skepticism of the Academics.

The conclusion to *Contra Academicos* is more explicit than the rest of the dialogue. The difficulty of the Academics, namely, that truth cannot be known in this

⁸⁰ *Acad.* II.9.22 (CCSL 29 30).

⁸¹ *Acad.* II.10.24 (CCSL 29 31).

life because no relation exists between immaterial truth and material existence, is overcome by Augustine's theology of the Incarnation. In Plotinus's restoration of Plato's two-world metaphysic, Augustine finds philosophical warrant for the descent of the divine Intellect, which allows for the return of the soul to participate in the higher, more stable realm. Augustine seamlessly weaves together the two traditions of the soul's descent from and ascent back to the divine Intellect in Plotinian cosmogony and the Christian account of the Incarnation. As such, divine authority lives the truth in a human body, thereby linking the truth and the "truth-like," allowing for moral certainty in a state of flux.

Chapter VI: The Analogical and Embodied *Imago Dei*

The preceding two chapters have proposed a theology of image operative in the Cassiciacum dialogues. In the *Soliloquies*, Augustine is particularly attentive to the dual nature of an image: on the one hand, an image serves to reflect that from which it is derived, but on the other hand, it is deceptive; it simulates and imitates, claiming to be a substance when it is in fact a lack of substance. *Contra Academicos*, however, suggests that this negative evaluation of image is, ultimately, incorrect. In this dialogue, Augustine is intent to assert, against the skepticism of the New Academy, that a participatory relation obtains between the image and its source. The fundamental nature of an image is to participate in and show forth that of which it is an image. *Contra Academicos* is committed to defending the proposition that the Skeptic position is not unassailable; that truth can be known in the finite order, albeit through an image. Certainly, the temporal, material image remains deceptive when its nature as an *image* is forgotten, that is to say, when the image is absolutized as existing apart from its source. Augustine is explicit that this participatory understanding of an image is consonant with the Platonic tradition, finding its best expression in Plotinus. It is this participatory, Plotinian philosophy of image, developed in the Cassiciacum dialogues, that serves as the groundwork for Augustine's early theology of the human *imago dei*.

In the first three chapters, I considered three key pro-Nicene theologies of image with which Augustine was familiar. For Hilary, Victorinus, and Ambrose the *imago dei* was primarily a Christological referent but, nevertheless, had implications for their anthropology, as the created image mirrors the eternal image. How does Augustine understand the relation between Christ as image of God and the human

person as image of God? For the preceding pro-Nicene tradition “image” language principally identified the unity of substance between Father and Son; “image” expressed equality. As such, Hilary, Victorinus and Ambrose had difficulty affirming outright that the human person was constituted in the *imago dei*. In this chapter I will argue that Augustine breaks with this pro-Nicene tradition in a significant way. Rather than positing a contrast between Christ the image and the human person as likeness Augustine broadens the language of “image” to include both Christ and the human person. In doing so, he builds on the philosophy of image operative at Cassiciacum, by insisting that there are varying ways in which an image can participate in its source.

Augustine is somewhat removed from the fires of controversy that forged the theologies of image of his immediate Latin progenitors, and his early theology already departs from simply equating the Son’s “image” with identity of substance. In his interaction with the concept of “image” in *Diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* and in *De quantitate animae* Augustine offers a nascent theology of “analogy,” which enables him to affirm that there are various ways in which an image can participate in its source. As such, he offers a different answer to the common question of how the *imago dei* pertains both to Christ and to the human person. His account of image is exegetically nuanced, while at the same time he regards both the Son and the human person as image of God in a way that eluded his predecessors. Thus, the first part of this chapter will demonstrate that, for Augustine, images do not imply equality. As such, Augustine can deploy “image” language to bespeak both Christ and the human person in a manner that his pro-Nicene forbearers were simply not able to envision.

The second half of this chapter will build on Augustine’s understanding of the human person as image. If the human person can, unequivocally, be termed the

imago dei, what does this mean for his embodied state? Engaging especially Augustine's first commentary on Genesis, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, I will argue that despite locating the *imago dei* in the human person's immaterial, intellectual faculties, Augustine does preserve an integrated account of the body-soul relation. Thus, while the African theologian does distinguish between body and soul, his early theology, nevertheless, is careful to avoid any dualistic conclusions about the image of God in the human person.

Analogia, Aequalitas, and the Imago

I outlined in chapter one how Hilary builds on the anti-Monarchian theology of Tertullian and Novatian to present an account of image that affirms the equality of Father and Son. Christ's nature as image does not lessen his status in relation to the Father. Attempting to educate Latin bishops about the Eastern theology of the *homoousion*, Hilary uses the language of "image" to identify the relationship between Father and Son. "Image" expresses ontological identity between the image and its source. For Hilary, the "image of God" necessarily shares the *properties* of the Father. Image, then, denotes equality of nature. Hilary marshals Colossians 1:15 to demonstrate the shared creative power of image and source. Likewise, this verse demonstrates the *invisible* nature that the image shares with the Father.

Unsurprisingly, the Christological identification of image as denoting co-equality and unity of divine substance entails that Hilary cannot refer to the human person as "image" in the same sense. Hilary's exegesis of Genesis 1:26 refers to the human

person as created *ad imaginem dei* (towards the image of God).¹ *Ad imaginem* preserves the ontological distinction between Christ, who is unequivocally the *imago dei* (because he partakes of the divine substance), and the human person, who has the character of the image of God. In short, in chapter one I argued that the Nicene debate informed Hilary's exegesis of Colossians 1:15 and Genesis 1:26 and committed him to interpreting "image of God" as coequality with God, so that *imago dei* was a Christological rather than an anthropological term.

In many ways, Victorinus's theology follows that of Hilary. Writing contemporaneously with Hilary in the first half of the fourth century, Marius Victorinus came to similar conclusions in his exegesis of Colossians 1:15 and Genesis 1:26. While material images are derivative and secondary, Christ as image of God is utterly simple and as image shares everything with his divine source. Victorinus is intent on defending the *homoousion* with recourse to image theology. Just as Hilary, so too Victorinus defends the theology of Christ as the consubstantial image of the Father by appealing to the unity of operations manifest in the creation account, which Victorinus describes in his exegesis of Colossians 1:15-16. I suggested in chapter two that the Nicene Trinitarianism that Victorinus defends is evident also in his exegesis of Genesis 1:26. He, therefore, quite simply asserts that the human person is not made in the image of God, and is instead made *secundum imaginem*. Victorinus's strict identification of image and substance entails that, because the human person is radically dissimilar in substance from God, he can only be said to be created *secundum imaginem*. Thus, for Victorinus, the term *homoiousios* (similar or like with

¹ Hilary, *Psal.* 118. iod, 7 (CCSL 61A, 92): *Non Dei imago, quia imago Dei est primogenitus omnis creaturae; sed ad imaginem, id est secundum imaginis et similitudinis speciem.*

respect to being) expresses the relation of the human soul to God rather than the relation of eternal Son to the Father.

Finally, in chapter three I considered Ambrose's theology of image. As with other pro-Nicenes, so with Ambrose, Christology drives his theology of the *imago dei*. Christ is principally the image of God – with all the Nicene implications regarding unity of substance that accompany that claim. However, in significant ways, Ambrose's theology anticipates that of Augustine. Ambrose devotes considerable attention to the nature of embodied existence in relation to the image of God in the human person. I suggested that “body” is understood in two ways in Ambrose. There is in the first place an insistence on the integral, composite nature of body and soul, which Ambrose describes as a harmoniously constituted unity. However, there is also a Pauline understanding of the body as a body of death that wars against the soul. It is in connection with this latter, negative sense of “body” that Ambrose draws on the Plotinian tradition, suggesting that the soul ought to “escape” the body.

Before considering how Augustine develops theology of the image of God consonant with that of Ambrose with respect to the understanding of the body-soul composite, I want to pose the same question to Augustine's early theology that I considered in Hilary, Victorinus, and Ambrose: how is the human person to be understood as the *imago dei*, given that this term is loaded with Nicene Christological implications? As heir to a Nicene legacy that associates image with unity of divine substance, how is Augustine able to retain the language of the *imago dei* to bespeak the human person? The pro-Nicenes I considered in the first three chapters described the human person as fashioned *secundum imaginem* or *ad imaginem*. Augustine is clearly familiar with this tradition. In *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 51.4 Augustine interacts with the position of those who maintain a distinction between *ad*

imaginem dei and *imago dei*. While Augustine recognizes the possibility of retaining this neat partition in a fashion similar to Hilary, Victorinus, and Ambrose, he ultimately is explicit in refusing to travel down that road.² As if to underscore this sentiment, Augustine notes in the *Retractationes* that although he had distinguished in *De diversis quaestionibus* 51.4 between the image of God *simpliciter* and being made according to the image of God (*ad imaginem dei*), nonetheless both descriptions apply to the human person, since Scripture asserts both that the human person *is* the image and glory of God (1 Corinthians 11:7) and that he is made according to (*ad*) the image of God. Quoting his early work, *De diversis quaestionibus* 51.4, Augustine writes in the *Retractationes*,

I also said, ‘Neither is this distinction useless – that the image and likeness of God is one thing, and being *in* the image and likeness of God, as we understand that man was made, is another.’ This must not be understood as though man is not called the image of God (*non dicatur imago dei*), since the Apostle says, *A man should certainly not cover his head, because he is the image and the glory of God* (1 Cor 11:7). But he is also said to be *in* the image of God (*ad imaginem dei*), which is not the case with the Only-Begotten, who is only the image and not *in* in the image (*tantummodo imago est non ad imaginem*).³

² *Quaest.* 51.4 (CCSL 44A 81): *Neque inscite distinguitur, quod aliud sit imago et similitudo dei, qui etiam filius dicitur, aliud ad imaginem et similitudinem dei, sicut hominem factum accipimus.*

³ *Retrat.* I.26 (CCSL 57 81).

Thus, only Christ is not *ad imaginem*, but simply the *imago*; nevertheless, the human person can without qualification also be called *imago*.⁴

The Nicene debate committed Hilary, Victorinus, and Ambrose to understanding *imago* in reference to the eternal Son of God in light of Colossians 1:15. They were, therefore, compelled to strictly identify *imago* and *aequalitas*. Within the context of the Nicene debate, the human person could not be referred to as a created *imago*, but only as created *ad imaginem*. Augustine recognized the scriptural and theological conundrum that this position created: first, it could not be aligned with the Pauline description of the human person as *imago* (I Cor. 11:7) and, second, it vitiated the very doctrine that image theology was meant to preserve, namely, the close relationship between the human person and God, that is to say, between the image and its source. In *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* (388-396), Augustine attempts to resolve the problem in such a way that he can both refer to the human person as *imago dei* and preserve the unique nature of the Nicene Christological referent of *imago dei*. This work is a series of 83 questions, some of which originated in conversations between Augustine and his confreres at Cassiciacum. A number of the questions interact with the theology of image, and it was clearly a source of frequent conversation during Augustine's time of contemplative leisure.⁵ In question 74, Augustine introduces a philosophical

⁴ *Retrat.* I.26 (CCSL 57 81): *quod non ita est intellegendum, quasi homo non dicatur imago dei, cum dicat apostolus: uir quidem non debet uelare caput, cum sit imago et gloria dei, sed dicitur etiam ad imaginem dei, quod unigenitus non dicitur, qui tantummodo imago est non ad imaginem.*

⁵ The historicity of the dialogues has obvious import for the historicity of the questions "discussed" in *De diversis quaestionibus*. In *Retractationes* I.26 Augustine does not indicate how the questions were discussed, in what order, or how they were recorded. Cf. Goulven Madec, "L'Historicité des Dialogues de Cassiciacum," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 32 (1986): 207-231; John O'Meara, "The Historicity of the Early Dialogues of Saint Augustine," *Vigiliae christianae* 5 (1951): 150-178. While

distinction predicated on the term *aequalitas*; he insists that not all images are equal to their source. Augustine writes, “Where there is an image there is necessarily a likeness but not necessarily equality.... But when ‘not necessary’ is said, it means that is can sometimes exist.”⁶ Ostensibly, one instance in which an image is equal is that of Christ.

Not all commentators agree that *aequalitas* functions in such a significant manner in Augustine’s early theology of the *imago dei*. Robert Markus has suggested that Augustine’s early writings follow the conventional distinction articulated by Hilary, Victorinus, and Ambrose. Markus maintains that just as his predecessors, so Augustine in his early writings preserves *imago* for Christ and employs *ad imaginem* for the human person.⁷ This traditional Nicene distinction Markus sees as “belonging to a comparably primitive stage in the development of Augustine’s thought.”⁸ It is in *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 51.4 and *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus* 16.58 (393-394) that Markus suggests one can see the proximity of

admitting that some elements regarding the setting of the dialogue and the people involved may be historically accurate, O’Meara concludes that on the whole the dialogues are “emphatically not reliable,” but are rather imitations of Ciceronian models. O’Meara, “Historicity of the Early Dialogues,” 178.

⁶ *Quaest.* 74 (CCSL 44A 213).

⁷ In a very impressive recent study Luigi Gioia follows Robert Markus’s reading of *De diversis quaestionibus* 51.4: “Only the Son is ‘the image and the likeness’ of God; we are ‘to the image and to the likeness of God.’” *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine’s De Trinitate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 235. Augustine does mention this distinction: “Neither is this distinction useless – that the image and likeness of God (*imago et similitudinem*) which is called the Son, is one thing, and being in the image and likeness of God (*ad imaginem et similitudinem dei*), as we understand that humankind was made, is another.” *Quaest.* 51.4 (CCSL 44A 81). While Augustine knows the previous Latin tradition that distinguishes between *ad imaginem* and *imago*, and even describes the distinction as “not useless,” I believe that he also wants to affirm that the human person is the *imago dei*. In other words, he does not use *ad imaginem dei* as the preceding Latin tradition did, namely as a term for human beings in contrast to the Christological title; instead, for Augustine, both terms can be applied to the human person.

⁸ Robert Markus, “‘Imago’ and ‘similitudo’ in Augustine,” *Revue des études augustiniennes* 10 (1964): 133.

Augustine's early thought to that of his Nicene predecessors. For Markus, it is only in Augustine's more mature works, starting with *De diversis quaestionibus* 74, that he describes the human person, without qualification, as *imago dei*.

Augustine's discussion of the distinction between *imago* and *ad imaginem* in *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 51.4 is evidence, for Markus, of Augustine's early adherence to the pro-Nicene distinction of these terms. Further, in *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus* Augustine inquires why the human person is said to be created in the image *and* likeness. Would not one term have sufficed? The tentative answer he gives is that perhaps Scripture intends to teach "that what was called the image is not like God as though participating in any likeness, but is the very likeness in which all things participate which are said to be like."⁹ I do not think that these two passages demonstrate that Augustine is marching in step with the pro-Nicene distinction between the Christological *imago dei* and the anthropological *ad imaginem dei*. Rather, when Augustine distinguishes in *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus* between participating being and the being in which all participate he articulates a typically Platonic participatory ontology, arguing that all created being – particularly in this case the human person – is created in and exists through the Son.¹⁰ I believe, therefore, that one can still take at face value Augustine's remarks in *Retractationes* I.26 that he did not intend the distinction between *ad imaginem* and *imago* in *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 51.4 to imply that only the first applies to the human person. Thus, while in these two earlier works, we can see Augustine affirming the Nicene anthropological term of *ad imaginem*, this does not imply that Augustine disqualifies the use of *imago dei* to bespeak the human person.

⁹ *Gen. imp.* 16.58 (CSEL 28 498-99).

¹⁰ *Gen. imp.* 16.60 (CSEL 28 500): *Rationalis itaque substantia et per ipsam facta est et ad ipsam.*

The significance of Augustine's early use of *aequalitas* in the discussion of the *imago dei* has not received the attention it deserves. I want to suggest that it is precisely Augustine's early use of *aequalitas* that affords him a nascent doctrine of analogy with all of its accompanying theological leverage. Augustine's Latin predecessors do not use the term with the same theological significance; Augustine maintains that both Christ and the human person can be described as *imago dei* because not all images are equal to their source. Augustine's unique use of *aequalitas* in his early works becomes clear in *De quantitate animae* and *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, and Augustine's unique use of *aequalitas* is evident particularly in light of Victorinus's use of the term.

At the beginning of the dialogue on the soul, *De quantitate animae*, Evodius demands to know about the soul's nature, particularly how it is *like* God who made it, as Augustine had just asserted (*uidetur mihi esse deo similis*).¹¹ Augustine responds that a relation must exist between Creator and creation as is the case with human creations, which are *like* their original. Evodius notes that surely the vast ontological void between mortal and immortal renders any likeness naught. On the contrary, a true connection still exists, insists Augustine: "Just as the image of your body is not able to do what your body can do, so it is not surprising if the soul does not possess the same power as He in whose likeness it has been made."¹² Augustine uses the analogy of a human image in a mirror or in a picture, which is vastly different in nature and power from an actual person, in order to explain that despite the

¹¹ *Quant. an.* 2.3 (CSEL 89 133). That the soul as image is "like" God entails a dynamic movement of return, so that image theology is woven into Augustine's early theology of ascent. Cf. "*De Quantitate Animae*" in *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, vol. 2, eds. P. Allen, W. Mayer and L. Cross (Brisbane: Australian Catholic University Press, 1999), pp. 197-215.

¹² *Quant. an.* 2.3 (CSEL 89 134).

metaphysical distance there is a real participation of the human soul in the God whom it images. *De quantitate animae* is the first instance in Augustine's writings on "image" in which he employs a doctrine of analogy to speak of human participation in the image in God. Analogy, therefore, becomes the fulcrum for Augustine's attempt to explain the relation between the image and its source.¹³

A thing can be like God in many ways, writes Augustine in Question 51 of *De diversis quaestionibus: Multis enim modis dici res possunt similes deo*.¹⁴ Because God made all things very good and He himself is the supreme good, there are varying degrees of participation in God's goodness and being. Only a few creatures are endowed with wisdom and virtue, participating in God's "uncreated virtue and wisdom."¹⁵ Other creatures are not endowed with reason and will, but share in his life

¹³ I speak of "analogy" in Augustine in a broad theological sense and with awareness that Augustine himself was not fond of the term. The theological precision that accompanies the term in later Scholastic discourse is clearly unknown to Augustine, and Lewis Ayres's warning is salubrious: "[Scholars] have been somewhat careless and imprecise by the very use of the word 'analogy' to describe the 'likenesses' that Augustine explores." Lewis Ayres, "Remember That You are Catholic (Serm. 52.2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000): 59. Scholarship on Augustine's use of "analogy" is rightly described as imprecise precisely because Augustine does not use the term except in *De musica* with respect to a harmonious relation and in *serm.* 52.5 to explicitly *reject* the concept of an "analogy" between God and the creature. In that sermon Augustine writes, "I do not say that these three things are in any way to be equated with the Holy Trinity, as if arranged according to an analogy (*analogia*), or according to a ratio of comparison (*ratio comparationis*). This I do not say." *serm.* 52.23 (PL 38:364): *Non dico ista illi Trinitati velut aequanda, quasi ad analogiam, id est, ad rationem quamdam comparationis dirigenda: non hoc dico*. Thus, Ayres's suggested caution is predicated on a perspicacious observation: "Simply put, Augustine *never* directly uses *analogia* or *proportio* to describe the relationship between God and any aspect of the creation." Ayres, "Remember That You are Catholic," 61. What Augustine is objecting to in *serm.* 52.5 is what later will be termed an analogy of proper proportionality. At the same time, all theological discourse is, in the final analysis, "analogical." It is this broader sense of "theology as analogy" that underwrites Augustine's question proposed in *De quantitate animae*: how is the soul *like* God who made it?

¹⁴ *Quaest.* 51.2 (CCSL 44A 79).

¹⁵ *Quaest.* 51.2 (CCSL 44A 79).

“because he is most excellently and primordially alive.”¹⁶ Still other creatures only exist and have being; this they too have by sharing in him who exists most properly. All these ways of being have a “likeness” to God. Analogical predication of the *imago dei* is not simply a logical construct or a case of verbal semantics, but bespeaks a genuine participated relationship. God is the supreme good from whom all good proceeds. Creatures who share in the wisdom of God are so near to his likeness that no other creatures share this proximity: “Hence when someone can partake of wisdom according to the inner person, he is to such a degree in accordance with his image (*secundum ipsum ita est ad imaginem*) that no nature may be placed between them, and so there is nothing that is more united to God.”¹⁷ Being and goodness exist in many ways, suggests Augustine, because there are many modes of participation in God’s being and goodness. The human person who shares in the wisdom of God is “so close to that likeness that among creatures there is nothing closer.”¹⁸ It is necessary that the higher contains the lower, and so creatures that share in the wisdom of God necessarily share in his existence and life, maintains Augustine in *De diversis quaestionibus* 51. The outer man participates in God as likeness inasmuch as it exists and is alive; the inner man, however, participates in God as image in the highest way possible for the creature: by sharing in divine wisdom.

¹⁶ *Quaest.* 51.2 (CCSL 44A 79).

¹⁷ *Quaest.* 51.2 (CCSL 44A 80): *Quare cum homo possit particeps esse sapientiae secundum interiorem hominem, secundum ipsum ita est ad imaginem, ut nulla natura interposita formetur, et ideo nihil sit deo coniunctius.* The various degrees of participation in God’s goodness is a perennial theme in Augustine’s corpus. Cf. *Trin.* VIII.5: “And thus it is that there would be no changeable good thing unless there were an unchangeable good. So when you hear a good this and a good that which can at other times also be called not good, if without these things, that are good by participation in the good, you can perceive good itself by participating in which these other things are good – and you understand it together with them when you hear a good this or that – if then you can put them aside and perceive good itself, you will perceive God.”

¹⁸ *Quaest.* 51.2 (CCSL 44A 80).

The notion of various modes of participation in God outlined in *De diversis quaestionibus* 51 is unabashedly Plotinian. As one moves farther from the pure light of the One, obscurity dims the rays that shine so clearly near the One; nevertheless, they are never completely eradicated – a trace of the Divine remains in all being.¹⁹ Augustine writes, “And so the things that only exist and yet are not alive are not wise (*sapiunt*) and are not perfectly but tenuously in his likeness, because they are good in their own rank, whereas he is good above all things, and from him their goodness comes.”²⁰ Augustine, therefore, places his theology of the image and likeness of God within the framework of a participatory emanation philosophy.

While Augustine affirms that the *vestigia dei* radiate from all being and life, so that all of creation bears a “likeness” to God, human beings are able by the inner man to participate in a unique way in the wisdom of God and are the only creatures created in the *imago dei*.²¹ Augustine thus introduces in Question 51 of *De diversis quaestionibus* a distinction between *similitudo* and *imago* based on an account of analogy and, on this score, affirms that the human person can be termed *imago*

¹⁹ Paul Aubin has noted the Plotinian influence in Augustine’s theology of image. He writes, “C’est dans l’instantané, une dégradation de la réalité suprême, un peu comme un éparpillement centrifuge, une dispersion lumineuse.” Paul Aubin, “‘L’Image’ dans l’oeuvre de Plotin,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 41 (1953): 347-79.

²⁰ *Quaest.* 51.2 (CCSL 44A 79).

²¹ In *Quaest.* 67.4 (CCSL 44A 167) Augustine remarks that after the Fall “the mark of the image was lost because of sin and the creature alone remained.” However, he goes on to say that this is not a cause for despair, because creation itself shall be liberated, as the Apostle Paul teaches in Romans. The creature shall be transformed into a son of God. Much later, in his *Retractationes*, Augustine asserts that he did not intend to say that the *imago dei* was lost entirely; rather, the call to conversion was a call to the restoration of the *imago*, a call that would have been futile if the image had been completely lost: *dixi: Et ipsa creatura, id est ipse homo, cum iam signaculo imaginis propter peccatum amisso remansit tantummodo creatura. Quod non ita est accipiendum, quasi totum amiserit homo quod habebat imagines dei. Nam si omnino non amisisset, non esset propter quod diceretur: Reformamini in nouitate mentis uestrae. Retrat.* I.26 (CCSL 57 84-5).

because *imago* does not necessarily imply *aequalitas*, while there are also varying degrees of likeness of participation in God. Question 51 concludes with an analysis of this distinction between “image” and “likeness.” Because analogy bespeaks a real relation of passive participation, Augustine wants to distance himself from those who sever the two terms “image” and “likeness.” He is, therefore, unique from the pro-Nicenes considered in the first three chapters, Hilary, Victorinus, and Ambrose, who understand “likeness” as a predicate of dissimilarity. In the Nicene context “likeness” is the language of the *homoiousion*; similitude of being is by definition differentiation of nature. *Similitudo* was for them reserved for the human person and was to be held in contrast with *imago* – the term reserved for Christ, who is *homoousios* with the Father. *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 51.4 indicates that Augustine has a different understanding of these two terms. He writes, “[E]very image is in fact a likeness (*quia omnis quidem imago similis est*).”²² Augustine is intent on preserving the union between image and likeness.

It is essential to look at one last text, also from *De diversis quaestionibus*. In Question 74 Augustine offers a rigorous and clear delineation of the terms *imago*, *similitudo* and *aequalitas*. For my purposes it is necessary to quote the passage in full:

²² *Quaest.* 51.4 (CCSL 44A 82). Robert Markus has pointed out the uniqueness of Augustine’s position within both the Greek and the Latin traditions. As far back as Irenaeus, the “image” was constituted in creation, and the “likeness” was something that the human person matured towards and which awaited its fulfillment in the eschaton. Augustine, however, allows a considerable amount of overlap between the terms. Markus, “‘Imago’ and ‘similitudo’ in Augustine.” Cf. Pierre Hadot, “L’Image de la Trinité dans l’âme chez Victorinus et chez saint Augustin,” *Studia Patristica* 6 (1962): 409-42.

Image and equality and likeness must be differentiated, because where there is an image there is necessarily a likeness but not necessarily equality; where there is equality there is necessarily a likeness but not necessarily an image; where there is a likeness there is not necessarily an image and not necessarily equality, as in a person's image in a mirror: because it is a reflection of him it must also be a likeness, but there is no equality because many things are lacking to the image that are in the thing whose reflection it is. Where there is equality there is necessarily a likeness but not necessarily an image, as in the case of two of the same eggs: because there is equality there is also a likeness, for whatever properties one of them has the other has as well, but there is no image because neither of them is a reflection of the other. Where there is a likeness there is not necessarily an image and not necessarily equality; to be sure, every egg is like every other egg inasmuch as it is an egg, but a partridge egg, although it is like a chicken egg inasmuch as it is an egg, is nonetheless not its image because it is not a reflection of it, nor is it its equal because it is smaller and contains another kind of animal.²³

A summary of Augustine's explanation yields the following:

Image implies likeness but not necessarily equality. Example: a mirror.

Equality implies likeness but not necessarily image. Example: two eggs.

Likeness does not not necessarily imply either an image or equality. Example: partridge egg and chicken egg.

²³ *Quaest.* 74 (CCSL 44A 213-14).

Image expresses a relationship of origin, but the relationship to the originating source can either be or not be one of equality as the example of the mirror illustrates. The anticipated theological implication is that the begotten Son of God is an image that has perfect *aequalitas*, while created sons of God are images that do not possess *aequalitas*. Equality, on the other hand, while it implies likeness, does not necessarily imply image, as the example of the two similar eggs illustrates. They look alike, but they do not reflect each other. Likeness, lastly, necessitates neither an image nor equality, as the example of the two eggs from different birds illustrates. Augustine goes on to write that “not necessarily” means that at times an image may include equality. Thus, the Son of God is both the image of the Father by derivation and his equal by way of divinity, while he is also the Father’s very likeness.

The introduction of the term *aequalitas* in the discussion of image and likeness offers Augustine a new avenue through which to approach the issue that had been problematic in *De diversis quaestionibus* 51, namely the various ways in which something can be “like” God: *multis enim modis dici res possunt similes deo*.²⁴ Various types of being participate in God in different ways, seeing that all being shares in his likeness. Augustine wants to reserve *imago* for the human person, who participates in “wisdom according to the inner person.” *Aequalitas* provides a further distinction necessary under the category of *imago*, as it helps to explain how it is that both the Son of God and created human beings are called “image of God.” The traditional distinction employed by the Nicenes reserved *imago* for the Son and *ad imaginem* for created human beings. Augustine suggests that this distinction falters in

²⁴ *Quaest.* 51.2 (CCSL 44A 79).

the face of St. Paul's description of both the human person as *imago* (I Cor. 11:7) and Christ as *imago* (Col. 1:15).²⁵ However, positing that *imago* may or may not involve *aequalitas* allows Augustine to affirm what he thinks is the clear meaning of Scripture, namely that the human person is created in the image of God, while still retaining the unique character of Christ as the *imago* who alone is equal to God. As a result, there are different ways to be the image of God, one of which is equal to its source (the Son), others of which are not (human persons).

Aequalitas serves in Augustine's vocabulary as a way to refine the understanding of *imago*. It is *aequalitas* that allows Augustine to speak of the human person as *imago* in an unequal *likeness* and of Christ as *imago* in equal *likeness*. A painting, a mirror, created sons of God, and the eternal Son of God can all justly be termed "images." However, they do not all have *aequalitas* because the term "image" does not imply this by necessity. Thus, *aequalitas* as a term allows for the analogical predication of *imago*. The introduction of the term *aequalitas* also allows Augustine to preserve the close proximity between "image" and "likeness" that he proposed in *De diversis quaestionibus* 51 and reiterates in question 74. He does not want to follow that part of the Latin Nicene tradition that distinguished sharply between image and likeness. Question 51.4 and question 74 of *De diversis quaestionibus* can, therefore, be read in conjunction. Contrary to Markus, I do not see a *volte-face* in the two questions. In fact, the exact same phrase found in question 74 is also used in the earlier question: "[E]very image is in fact a likeness, but not everything that is alike is also an image."²⁶ Thus, Augustine's early understanding of image is consonant with

²⁵ *Quaest.* 74 (CCSL 44A 213-14).

²⁶ *Quaest.* 51.4 (CCSL 44A 81): *quia omnis quidem imago similis est, not autem omne quod simile est etiam imago proprie.*

his later thought on the matter: the varying degrees of likeness imply that there are various degrees of passive participation in Christ as the image of God.

***Aequalitas* in Victorinus and Augustine**

Augustine's early use of the term *aequalitas* implies a marked departure from earlier pro-Nicene understandings of the *imago dei*. This contrast becomes clear when

Augustine's thought is compared with that of Victorinus. The theologies of image operative in both African theologians are sustained by a Platonic worldview.

However, the introduction of the term *aequalitas* in Augustine's discussion of image allows him to go beyond the simple delineation of substance as being and image as non-being – the categories to which Victorinus was beholden – and allows Augustine to affirm that *both* the human person and Christ are the *imago dei*. In other words, for Augustine not all images imply equality or identity of substance.

Both Victorinus and Augustine understand “image” in the context of a participatory ontology. As for Victorinus, so too for Augustine, the presence of God who pervades all things and gives life and intelligibility to creation is a perennial theme.²⁷ For Victorinus, this participatory understanding of material existence entails a demarcation between substance and non-substance; all material, temporal existence is non-substantial; it exists as an image in relation to its source. Created “images” are understood in the *Adversus Arium* to lack their own substance, and they exist only to reflect the life of their source. Augustine's early works, however, suggest that an

²⁷ The omnipresence of God is a pervasive theme in Augustine's writings. See, Fulbert Cayré, *Dieu présent dans la vie de l'esprit* (Paris: Desclée, De Brouwer, 1951); and Stanislaus J. Grabowski, *The All-Present God* (St. Louis: Herder, 1954). This motif is played out in the *Confessions* and may have its impetus in Plotinus' twin treatise “On Omnipresence,” *Ennead* VI, 4-5 as O'Connell argues. Robert J. O'Connell, *Augustine's Early Theory of Man* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard Press, 1968), pp. 35-40.

image can, quite properly, be said to have its own substance. While its existence is derived and participatory, it still has substance, existence, and life proper to it as an image. The independent integrity with which Augustine endows “image” situates image theology within a broader spectrum than the simple demarcation found in Victorinus between substance (form) and lack of substance (image). Ultimately, this broader definition of image allows Augustine to speak of both the human person and Christ as “image” in a way that eluded Victorinus.

“Substance” in the *Adversus Arium* is unambiguously defined in relation to *esse* and provides philosophical backing for Victorinus’s defence of the *homoousion*. Pierre Hadot notes that the reason Victorinus reacted so strenuously against the term *homoiousian* (of like being) is that he found it meaningless as a Christological term. Likeness, according to Aristotle’s categories, is predicated of a quality rather than of a substance and so it is a contradiction in terms to speak of a “like substance”; something either is or is not of the same substance, and according to Victorinus, to speak of like-being (*homoiousian*) amounts to nothing more than to resort to fatuous Arian evasions. I suggested in chapter two that, given the Nicene conflict, “image” and “likeness” became, in Victorinus’s mind, mutually exclusive.²⁸ Categorically, Victorinus states, “Therefore it is one thing to be ‘according to the image’, which indeed is substance, but another thing to be ‘according to the likeness’ which is not a substance but the name of a quality manifest in substance.”²⁹ “Image” was then a Christological referent, and “likeness” was an anthropological referent.

²⁸ Robert Markus has also noted that it was Victorinus’s unwavering commitment to the Aristotelian definition of substance that meant that the Latin philosopher had to take the unique position that “image” and “likeness” are mutually exclusive terms. Markus, “‘Imago’ and ‘similitudo’ in Augustine,” 128-30.

²⁹ *Adv. Ar.* I 20.

Perhaps being more removed from the fierce polemics surrounding Nicaea, Augustine was able to avoid the “either / or” account of *imago* and *similitudo*. I have suggested that he did so by introducing the term *aequalitas* into the discussion. An image, maintained Augustine in his early writings, is not by necessity equal to its source. In this way, Augustine differentiated his account of “image” from the strict separation between substance (Christ as image) and non-substance (the human person as likeness), which marked Victorinus’s understanding. Even before his lucid delineation of *imago*, *similitudo*, and *aequalitas* in relation to each other in question 74 of *De diversis quaestionibus*, Augustine had introduced the term *aequalitas* in the *Soliloquies*. This dialogue demonstrates Augustine’s familiarity with a definition of “image” similar to that asserted by Victorinus against the *homoiousians*; the *Soliloquies* attests to the fact that in his early theology, Augustine already finds the Nicene understanding of image as proposed by Victorinus insufficient.

In the *Soliloquies*, Augustine initially proposes an account of image exactly like that advanced by Victorinus: Reason points out that some images are *equal*, such as a twin or the imprint of a signet ring, others are *unequal*, such as one’s image in a mirror. Images in the mirror lack the substance of the original; therefore, they should not technically be termed “images,” but “false images.”³⁰ Images that are said to be equal, on the other hand, are those that have their own life and substance. Thus, Augustine’s provisional suggestion in the dialogue is that nature both *produces* equal images, such as the offspring of parents that have their own life and substance, and *reflects* inferior “false” images, such as the image in a mirror.³¹

³⁰ *sol.* II.VI.10 (CSEL 89 57-58).

³¹ *sol.* II.VI.11 (CSEL 89 58-60).

As Augustine continues to dialogue with Reason, however, the neat demarcation between a true image with its own substance and a false image, such as that in a mirror, begins to falter. Reason suggests that more nuance needs to be introduced in the discussion: can an image be more or less similar to its source?³² In fact, is there not in the nature of all images a desire to be like that in whose image they are made? While there might be varying degrees of success in achieving this goal, an image is not a strict identity, but permits various levels of likeness.³³ In the *Soliloquies*, therefore, Augustine demonstrates his familiarity with an account of image similar to that suggested by Victorinus, which neatly demarcates between substance and non-substance, but as the *Soliloquies* draws to a conclusion, Augustine ultimately rejects this position as insufficiently subtle to account for the various gradations of likeness. Participation in the source of the image is said in many ways.

There is a broadness and diversity evident already in Augustine's early understanding of "image," which is not found in Victorinus's account, which is predicated simply on substance or the lack thereof. Already in his correspondence with Nebridius (A.D. 389), Augustine is keen to expand the role of images to include memories of people passed away, the city of Carthage in his mind, eternity, and even those things that are the figment of the imagination.³⁴ Such a Platonic account of image can function only if one admits, as Augustine does, of various levels of participation. Equality serves to indicate how alike an image is to its source. In the *Adversus Arium*, Victorinus's use of *aequalitas* serves only to reiterate the ontological identity between image and source, that is, between Christ and the Father. That Christ

³² *sol.* II.VII.13 (CSEL 89 62-63).

³³ *sol.* II.IX.17 (CSEL 89 66-67).

³⁴ *ep.* 7.

is “equal to God” demonstrates the insufficiency of the *homoiousion* claim.³⁵ For Augustine, on the other hand, *aequalitas* is the register of image demarcating various types of images farther from and nearer to the originating source.

How Victorinus and Augustine exegete Colossians 1:15 is perhaps most revealing. In chapter two I indicated that Victorinus understands Paul’s statement that Christ is the “image of the invisible God” as an affirmation of the *homoousion*. As Father and Son are of one substance, only the Son can image the Father.³⁶ Victorinus writes, “If Jesus is the image of God, he is *homoousios* (consubstantial). For the image is substance with the substance from which and in which it is image.”³⁷ While “image” is contrasted with “likeness” in Victorinus, Augustine allows for considerable overlap between the terms image and likeness. Indeed, the sustained discussion in question 74 of *De diversis quaestionibus* indicates that although Christ is the “image of God,” the human person is also the “image of God.” “Image,” as *De diversis quaestionibus* 74 makes clear, denotes origin, but does not necessitate equality. Question 74, which is, in fact, titled as a reflection on Colossians 1:15, concludes by differentiating between the image in a mirror, which is both a likeness and an image but lacks equality, and the image of a child, who is equal in being with his parents and shares an image and likeness with them while being of a *different* substance. That something could be equal as image and likeness but of a different substance, as in Augustine’s example of a child, would be inconceivable under the terms of Victorinus’s definition of “image,” as for him an image has no substance or existence apart from its participation in a substantial source. However, for Augustine the

³⁵ *Adv. Ar.* I 22.

³⁶ *Adv. Ar.* I 24.

³⁷ *Adv. Ar.* I 24 (SC 68 254): *Si imago dei Iesus, ὁμοούσιος est. Imago enim substantia cum substantia cuius est et in qua est imago.*

difference between a child and the image in a mirror perfectly demonstrates that there are different kinds of images and that not every image is of necessity equal to its source.

Avoiding the strict distinction between substance (image) and non-substance (likeness) that characterized Victorinus's account, Augustine is able to find a theologically compelling answer to the issue of how the *imago dei* can be both a Christological and an anthropological referent. By insisting in question 74 of *De diversis quaestionibus* that there does not have to be equality for there to be an image, Augustine underscores the analogical predication suggested in question 51: *multis enim modis dici res possunt similes Deo*. Thus, while Victorinus must conclude that Christ alone is the image of God, for only the Son is of the substance as the Father, Augustine's insertion of *aequalitas* in the discussion allows for the differentiation of images; one is equal, namely the Son of God, and others are not, such as the human person.

The uniqueness of Augustine's early theology of image is especially apparent in comparison to that of Victorinus. Both African theologians operate within a Platonic framework, in which created images reflect their substantial source. Images are derived, secondary expressions of what is ontologically prior and without which they are unintelligible. It is within this participatory ontology that Victorinus must create a unique theological category for Christ as *imago dei*. Only in Christ are image and substance one. The human person is an image in a derived and created sense – *secundum imaginem*. Victorinus insists, “The substance of man is one thing, the substance of God another.”³⁸ “Image” is so identified with “substance” in

³⁸ *Adv. Ar.* I 22.

Victorinus's Christology that likeness is rejected as Christologically incoherent. Christ cannot be like God (*homoiousios*) because a "like God" is a different God; only when "image" language is identified with "substance" does one do justice to the unity and simplicity of God while remaining faithful to the scriptural articulation of the Son as *imago dei*.

The Body and the *Imago Dei*

The Nicene controversy reserved for Hilary, Victorinus, and Ambrose the title *imago dei* for the shared, creative and invisible divine nature of the image with its source (Colossians 1:15). Augustine, however, insists that the *imago dei* can also unequivocally be predicated of the created human person. It is precisely Augustine's robust participatory theology expressed through the analogical predication of *aequalitas* that allows the human person, "according to the inner person," to be (albeit in an unequal manner) in the *imago dei*. This raises a particular question that looms more ominously over Augustine than over his predecessors: How can the human person in his created, temporal, material, and embodied state be the *imago dei*, which is, by definition, an immaterial, invisible reality?

Here I will interact particularly with *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* to consider how Augustine's theology of the soul as *imago dei* relates to the body. How does Augustine view the relation of the soul-body composite in his early writings? Does the body also participate in the *imago dei*? In this second part of the chapter I will argue that while Augustine does distinguish between body and soul, his early theology is ultimately non-dualistic and attempts to offer an integrated presentation of the relationship between body and soul. Augustine's first commentary on Genesis reveals an attempt to wrestle with the materiality and corporeality of the creation narrative

and with its implications for a theology of the *imago dei*. I will argue that, ultimately, Augustine offers an anthropology of an integrated body-soul composite with the *imago dei* remaining an intellectual reality that is hierarchically constituted in relation to the body. Augustine understands the material description of creation as anthropomorphic, that is, as drawn up with literary metaphors of the spiritual reality of the *imago dei*. Thus, for Augustine, the first chapter of Genesis speaks corporeally of a spiritual reality. The distinguishing characteristic of the human person is his rational nature by which he is constituted as the *imago dei*. Nevertheless, Augustine's understanding of the relation between the original couple demonstrates his commitment to the unity of body and soul. The distinction and unity of soul and body that Augustine sees symbolized in the relation of Adam and Eve is developed with reference to the Pauline distinction of the inner and outer man; a distinction, however, that is situated within an all-encompassing unity.

It should not be surprising that in considering Augustine's account of the body-soul relation vis-à-vis the *imago dei*, we turn first to his *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*. As the title suggests, Augustine's first interpretation of Genesis 1:26 takes the form of a refutation of the Manicheans. Augustine's former co-religionists were in the habit of ridiculing Catholics precisely because of this verse regarding the human person's creation according to the image and likeness of God. Augustine explains, "What they have in mind, you see, is the shape of our bodies and they are misguided enough to ask whether God has nostrils and teeth and a beard."³⁹ Augustine considers such taunts utterly ridiculous, not to say impious. All such descriptions of God having ears, lips, and feet, or of Jesus speaking of the finger of God casting out demons ought to be spiritually understood. Scripture frequently

³⁹ *Gen. Man.* I.17.27.

employs anthropomorphisms to relate immaterial truth. In a similar manner, insists Augustine, an account of the *imago dei* is to be understood spiritually: “[W]hen man is said to have been made to the image of God, it is said with reference to the interior man, where reason is to be found and intelligence.”⁴⁰ Thus, the first line of defence against Manichean literalism is to suggest that the embodied language of Genesis 1:26 is anthropomorphic and that the *imago dei* is a spiritual constituent of the human person – the “inner man.”

The second creation account describes God fashioning “man from the mud of the earth” (Gen. 2:7). The Manicheans find this text equally appalling. They ask why God would create the human person from the mud. “Did he not have anything better, celestial material for example, from which to make man?”⁴¹ Again, the Manicheans understand materially what ought to be interpreted spiritually. The “enemies” of the Old Testament interpret everything “in a fleshly, literal-minded way.”⁴² Here too,

⁴⁰ *Gen. Man.* I.17.28.

⁴¹ *Gen. Man.* II.7.8.

⁴² *Gen. Man.* II.7.8. Augustine’s insistence that Genesis 1:26 is speaking anthropomorphically is in keeping with the Alexandrian tradition he receives through Ambrose. The influence of Origen via Ambrose on Augustine’s early theology of the image of God has been noted by György Heidl, *Origen’s Influence on the Young Augustine: A Chapter in the History of Origenism* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2003), pp. 111-24. Origen’s criticisms of the literalism of Melito of Sardis finds an echo in Augustine’s criticism of Manichaean literalism. Other similarities to Augustine’s anti-Manichaean commentary are found in Ambrose’s *Hexameron*. Ambrose maintains that surely the *imago dei* cannot refer to flesh, for then God would be subject to the same contingencies as human existence. God does not see with his eyes or hear with his ears; rather, these are anthropomorphic expressions, which is how “the image and likeness of God” spoken of in Genesis 1:26 is to be understood. Ambrose, *Hex.* VI.8.44. In broad strokes, Herman Somers divides Augustine’s exegesis of the creation narrative into three distinct periods. The first is that of the composition of *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* in 388. The second period is during the composition of *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus* in 393. And the last period is during the composition of *De Genesi ad litteram* in 401-414. Somers notes the ubiquity of Alexandrian exegesis in all three periods. However, he maintains that only in the first period is there evidence that Augustine receives this tradition through Ambrose. Later, maintains Somers, Augustine himself read more directly from the

Augustine chides the Manicheans for failing to be sufficiently subtle in their interpretation. It is the intellectual capacity of the human person that separates him from the animals and constitutes him as the image of God. Thus, immediately after fashioning the human person in the image and likeness of God, explains Augustine, the Creator gives him “authority over the fish of the sea and the flying things of heaven.”⁴³ Scripture is delineated in such an order “to make us understand that it was with reference not to the body that man was made to God’s image, but to the power by which he surpasses all cattle, all animals.”⁴⁴ Augustine is unequivocal that the *imago dei* resides in the human person’s intellectual nature.

The anti-Manichean intention of Augustine’s first commentary on Genesis ensures that Augustine does not denigrate the body. The entire thrust of the commentary emphasizes the created goodness of the universe and the human body in particular, against the Manichean denigration thereof. Like all of creation, the human body is a reflection (*vestigium*) of God. Though this alone does not constitute the person as an “image of God,” the physicality of his body has, nevertheless, a signatory value, pointing to his spiritual nature whereby he does image God. Augustine writes that while all other creatures are bent towards the earth, the upright posture of the human person “signifies that our spirit also ought to be held upright, turned to the things above it, that is, to eternal, spiritual realities.”⁴⁵ This description

Alexandrian tradition. Herman Somers, “Image de Dieu: Les sources de l’exégèse augustiniennne,” *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 7 (1961): 105-125. See also Berthold Altaner, who has argued that Augustine himself read Philo by 398 and Origen by 401: “Augustinus und Philo von Alexandrien,” *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 65 (1941): 81-90; idem, “Augustinus und Origenes,” *Historisches Jahrbuch* 70 (1951): 15-41.

⁴³ *Gen. Man.* I.17.28.

⁴⁴ *Gen. Man.* I.17.28.

⁴⁵ *Gen. Man.* I.17.28 (CSEL 91 96): *Omnium enim animalium corpora, siue quae in aquis, siue quae in terra uiuunt, siue quae in aere uolitant, inclinata sunt ad terram,*

is symptomatic of the theological precision that Augustine displays throughout his corpus in distinguishing something in the human person that signifies (*quo significatur*) and reflects God and something that properly “images” God. The posture of the body, standing upright, corporeally, signifies that “it is above all as regards the spirit that man was made to the image and likeness of God.”⁴⁶ The goodness of the body is such that it has a revelatory and signatory value – it points to the human spirit wherein he images God.

In the narrative of the naming the animals, maintains Augustine, we are shown that Adam is different from the beasts “in virtue of his rationality.”⁴⁷ In distinguishing and differentiating between the animals, Adam demonstrates his rational capacity by rendering a judgment about them. Judgment is a critical component of Augustine’s understanding of reason, and so judgment is demonstrative of the *imago dei*. In the naming of the animals, we see the principle that it is the nature of the higher to judge the lower; this is a pronounced theme also in Augustine’s other early works, such as the Cassiciacum dialogues and *De vera religione*.⁴⁸ The mind judges what the eyes see, thereby indicating the hierarchy of the mind in relation to the senses. The mind renders a judgment on the data of sense perception based on its participatory knowledge of the eternal form. In *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, Augustine argues that in naming the animals Adam reveals his intellectual nature, which renders judgments based on his rational capacity, whereby he participates in God and is constituted as *imago dei*. The dominion of human beings over the rest of

et non sunt erecta sicut hominis corpus; quo significatur etiam animum nostrum in superna sua, id est in aeterna spiritualia, erectum esse debere.

⁴⁶ *Gen. Man.* I.17.28.

⁴⁷ *Gen. Man.* II.11.16 (CSEL 91 137): *Ex hoc enim apparet ipsa ratione hominem meliorem esse quam pecora.*

⁴⁸ Cf. Chapter 7 regarding Augustine’s understanding of the role of judgment in the human person.

creation on account of their rational nature, which is signified by their upright stature, is present already in much of the earlier philosophical tradition⁴⁹ and is, in turn, taken up in Christian understandings of the *imago dei*.⁵⁰ Again, it is probably most directly from Ambrose's sermons on the creation narrative that Augustine receives his understanding of human dominion over creation on account of man's rational nature.

Augustine's first commentary on Genesis underscores that the *imago dei* is principally to be understood as a spiritual constituent of the human person. Of course, the creation narrative itself is explicit about the embodied nature of the human person. Augustine is more sensitive to this reality than some of the previous Nicene exegesis had been. Augustine is familiar with a line of interpretation adopted by Victorinus. In this understanding, the second creation narrative (Genesis 2:7), in which Adam is described as fashioned from mud, indicates the creation of solely the human body – the earthly man. This material creation is contrasted with the spiritual creation of the human person in Genesis 1:26.⁵¹ This tradition of contrasting the initial creation narrative of the *imago dei* with the second creation of the body came to Victorinus from the Eastern Fathers, most notably Clement and Origen.⁵² Augustine indicates his awareness that some have read Genesis 1:26 as distinct from Genesis 2:7.⁵³

⁴⁹ Cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 90 A-B; Aristotle, *De Partibus Animalium*, II, 10; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, 84; Cicero, *De Natura deorum*, 140.

⁵⁰ Lactancius, *De opificio Dei* II, V and *Divinae institutiones*, II, 1, 15; Ambrose, *Hexameron*, VI, 7, 40; Basil., *Hom.*, IX in *Gen.*, 2; *Sermo III in Gen.*; *Theodore*, I, 24-27.

⁵¹ *Adv. Ar.* I.62.

⁵² In the Alexandrian tradition, Philo first posited a sharp contrast between the immaterial creation of the human person in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) and the material creation of the body (Genesis 2:7). Cf. *de opif. mundi* 134-135 and *leg. All.* I.31. Origen adopts this distinction (*in Genes. Homilia* I 13), and it is also found in Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* VI.16.136.1; VII.12.79.6).

⁵³ *Gen. Man.* II.7.9: "That, you see, is how I have heard that some of our people understand the text. They say that the reason it didn't add 'to his image and likeness,' after saying *God fashioned the man from the mud of the earth*, is that now it is only

However, he is explicit in not wanting to follow this schema. Augustine wants to hold the two creation accounts together in order to preserve the body-soul unity, which he understands to be expressed in both creation narratives.

The “mud” from which Adam was made (Gen. 2:7), explains Augustine, is comprised of a mixture of water and earth. These two elements signify the harmony of body and soul. Thus, the second narrative is a further unfolding of the composite nature of the human person mentioned in Genesis 1:26. Augustine describes the water mixing itself in and giving shape to the earth, thereby creating mud, as an analogue of the soul animating the material of the body, thereby constituting the form of the human person: “Just as water, you see, collects earth and sticks and holds it together when mud is made by mixing it in, so too the soul by animating the material of the body shapes it into a harmonious unity, and does not permit it to fall apart into its constituent elements (*sic anima corporis materiam vivificando in unitatem concordem conformat et non permittit labi et resolvi.*)”⁵⁴ A thoroughgoing dualism does not fit with this description. Carol Harrison accurately notes, “Human nature for Augustine from the beginning of his works, consists of body and soul inseparably – it is a *animal rationale mortale*.”⁵⁵ Augustine explicitly rejects the Alexandrian understanding of the two creation accounts as representing two different aspects of the human person, the first of the soul and the second of the body, and prefers to see both

talking about the formation of the body, while the moment when the interior man was being referred to was when it said: *God made man to the image and likeness of God* (Gn 1:27).”

⁵⁴ *Gen. Man.* II.7.9 (CSEL 91 128). Augustine anticipates Thomas Aquinas’s teaching of the soul as the form of the body. St. Thomas’s understanding of the composite nature of the human person was also taught at the Council of Vienna and the Fifth Lateran Council, which defined the human soul as *forma substantialis corporis*.

⁵⁵ Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Augustine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 152.

accounts as teaching the same reality regarding the composite nature of the human person. The soul, which is principally the image of God, is the form of the body – which together constitute a “harmonious unity.”⁵⁶

It is clear to Augustine that the *imago dei* is a spiritual constituent of the human person. The emphasis on gender in the creation account then presents Augustine with a challenge. How can he relate the immaterial nature of the *imago dei* with the immediate reference to embodied gender? (“God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”⁵⁷) The clear reference to gender in the second part of the verse challenges a “spiritualist” reading of the *imago dei*. Somehow, for Augustine, “male and female” must be predicated of an *immaterial* image of God. In chapter two, I discussed Victorinus’s exegetical struggles with this verse. He proposed that this verse distinguishes the inner man from the outer man. The interior man is an image of the “Triad on high” because in his consubstantial unity of *esse*, *vivere*, and *intelligere* he images the union of the Holy Trinity. “Male and female he created them,” on the other hand, expresses the bodily nature of the exterior man and anticipates the androgynous state of the exterior *Logos* become flesh.⁵⁸ Augustine, I suggested, is intent on holding the two creation narratives together. Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 2:7 express the same reality: the human person is a composite of body and soul, and while the *imago dei* is properly predicated of the soul, the body somehow participates in the life of the soul.

Augustine, therefore, does not follow Victorinus’s interpretation of “male and female He created them.” Somehow, for Augustine, this second part of the verse also has to be understood in light of the first: “In the image of God he created them.”

⁵⁶ *Gn. c. man.* II.7.9.

⁵⁷ Genesis 1:27

⁵⁸ Cf. Chapter 2.

Augustine interprets “male and female He created them” as an allegorical or symbolic description of the one body-soul unity of the human person. Augustine suggests that the male-female partnership in the garden be interpreted as “a single person” working in harmony.⁵⁹ As the soul or reason ought to govern the body, so, for Augustine, the natural order makes the woman subject to the man.⁶⁰ The harmonious relation that Adam and Eve enjoyed prior to the Fall symbolizes reason’s governance over the passions and appetites. Augustine’s explicit intention to avoid Manichean dualism propels his intellectualist account of the *imago dei*, which is ordered according to a typically Platonic and Stoic anthropology, in which the soul ought to govern the body. Peter Brown remarks, “Augustine refused to believe that Adam and Eve had fallen from an angelic into a physical state. He did not see human beings as essentially spiritual creatures, to whom physical, sexual and social needs had once been irrelevant. Adam and Eve had originally enjoyed a harmonious unity of body and soul. Their bodies had followed the dictates of their wills.”⁶¹ Brown recognizes in Augustine’s commentary on Genesis an affirmation of the goodness of the body in union and concord with the soul. Adam and Eve represent symbolically the right ordering of the soul’s appetites and desires according to reason. The *communio personarum* that Adam and Eve enjoy in the state of original bliss is not in and of itself the *imago dei* but is, nevertheless, symbolic thereof, as their rightly-ordered nuptial relation is expressive of the right ordering of the body to the soul.

⁵⁹ *Gen. Man.* II.11.15 (CSEL 91 136): *Ad huius rei exemplum femina facta est, quam rerum ordo subiugat viro, ut, quod in duobus hominibus evidentius apparet, id est in masculo et femina, etiam in uno homine considerari possit.*

⁶⁰ *Gen. Man.* II.11.15.

⁶¹ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 405.

Against the dualism of the Manicheans, Augustine is keen to affirm the close proximity between soul and body that is signified in the intimacy and union of the male and female pair. The “relationality” of the original pair is important to Augustine, even if it is not definitive of the *imago*, but only symbolic thereof. Thus, as the woman came from the man’s rib “to signify their being joined together,” so too, there is to be a union, guidance, and priority of the soul over the body.⁶² Augustine writes that everyone ought to “exercise a proper lordship or mastery over this part of ourselves, and become a kind of wedded couple in the very self (*fiat quasi coniugalis in seipso*), with the flesh not warring against the spirit with its desires but submitting to it, that is, the desire of the flesh not opposing reason but rather complying with it.”⁶³ The “embodied” state of Adam and Eve symbolizes for Augustine the “wedded couple in the very self,” in which reason governs the body. Thus, all of this “was said in a figurative way ... pointing to mysteries and sacraments.”⁶⁴ Likewise, Adam’s exclamation, “This now is bone out of my bones, and flesh from my flesh” (Gen. 2:23) is a figurative expression of the two cardinal virtues of the soul that order the appetites of the body: the strength of the bones refers to fortitude and the flesh corresponds to the temperance that ought to govern the flesh.⁶⁵

⁶² Later, as a bishop in 401, Augustine wrote *De bono coniugali*. In this work Augustine demonstrates that not only does he understand the *communio personarum* of the original couple as symbolic of the right ordering of the passions to reason, but he also affirms the literal meaning of the *communio personarum*. He writes, “The first natural bond of human society is man and wife. Nor did God create these each by himself, and join them together as alien by birth: but He created the one out of the other, setting a sign also of the power of the union in the side, whence she was drawn and formed. For they are joined one to another side by side, who walk together, and look together whither they walk.” *De bono conjugali* I.1.

⁶³ *Gen. Man.* II.12.16 (CSEL 91 138).

⁶⁴ *Gen. Man.* II.12.17.

⁶⁵ *Gen. Man.* II.13.18.

The opposite side of the same coin is presented in Augustine's description of the Fall: reason gives way to the passions, and the body takes precedence over the soul. Man, that is to say, the soul, ceased "to work and guard" paradise (the is the *communio personarum* of the body-soul composit), and was enticed by the woman's wiles, that is, he succumbed to his carnal desires and allowed himself to be led by them. Reason, Augustine writes, "can only be brought down to consenting to sin, when pleasurable anticipation is roused in that part of the spirit which ought to take its lead from reason, as from its husband and guide."⁶⁶ Eve, offering the fruit to Adam, symbolizes the desires of the flesh warring against the spirit and enticing reason to consent through suggestion by thought and sense. When reason no longer "guards" paradise but consents to let in the enemy, that is, when Adam takes the fruit and eats, the harmonious "wedded couple in the very self" is rent asunder.

The dualism between body and soul is, for Augustine, a post-lapsarian condition in which the original union and right subjection of the passions to reason – the body to the soul – becomes disordered.⁶⁷ Augustine's "theology of the body," then, highlights the union of Adam and Eve before the Fall as symbolizing the "harmonious unity in the very self." In like manner, the inconsonance of Adam and Eve's accusatory discourse after the Fall is demonstrative of the flesh warring against the spirit. However, this struggle itself implies that there is still hope after the Fall: it is possible that after the passions have been aroused (i.e., after the woman has tasted the fruit), the suggestions of the senses will still be resisted by reason. Augustine

⁶⁶ *Gen. Man.* II.14.20.

⁶⁷ Carol Harrison notes that the body-soul unity that underwrites Augustine's theology of creation is preserved in his eschatology: "It is therefore clear to Augustine that when Paul speaks of a risen 'spiritual body' he does not mean that the body will actually be changed into spirit, but that it will properly serve and be subject to the spirit." Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation*, p. 160.

writes, “But sometimes the reason valiantly puts the brake on greed even when it has been roused, and brings it to a halt. When this happens, we don’t slide into sin, but win the prize with a certain amount of struggle.”⁶⁸ Thus, the union of the original pair is, for Augustine, “said in a figurative way ... pointing to mysteries and sacraments,” so as to express the composite nature of the restored person according to the image of the new Adam.⁶⁹ Thus, Scripture describes the union of the original pair for the same reason that it relates the narrative of the naming of the animals: both stories indicate the governance of the rational faculties over the animal faculties.⁷⁰

In his theology of the *imago dei* developed in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, Augustine maintains the primacy of the soul as the *locus* of the *imago dei*. Nevertheless, he is attentive to the embodied nature of the human person, which he sees symbolized in the union of the sexes who are an allegory of the “wedded couple in the very self.” In this same commentary, Augustine develops his understanding of this union with recourse to St. Paul’s distinction between the inner and outer man.

⁶⁸ *Gen. Man.* II.14.21. Following this leitmotif, Augustine explains that the curse of the woman after the Fall is not so much a curse as it is a command. When God says that “in pain shall you bring forth children and your turning round shall be towards your man, and he will lord it over you,” this is, in fact, a counsel to advert to reason. The Lord is commanding people to direct their bodies according to the lordship of their soul; to find freedom from vice and bad habit by submitting to reason (*Gen. Man.* 19.29). Augustine sees in a disordered home run by a defiant woman the disorder of the body-soul relation, not structured according to the hierarchy of nature. As “a topsy turvy and miserable household” is one governed by the wife, so too a body not governed by the soul brings misery to all (*Gen. Man.* 11.15 and *Gen. Man.* 19.29).

⁶⁹ *Gen. Man.* II.12.17. Augustine’s understanding of the distinction and unity of the sexes in the garden symbolizing the original harmony of body and soul is a motif likewise attested to in the Alexandrian exegesis of the creation narrative. Gregory of Nyssa and Athanasius develop this exegesis initially received from Philo. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, 17; Athanasius, *in ps.*, 50; Philo, *De mundi opificio*, 46.

⁷⁰ *Gen. Man.* II.11.16 (CSEL 91 137): *Sed haec facilis <conside> ratio est; cito enim homo intelligit se meliorem esse pecoribus: illa est difficilis, qua intelligit in seipso aliud esse rationale quod regit, aliud animale quod regitur.*

Augustine insists that the *imago dei* is said of the inner man: “[T]he moment when the interior man was being referred to was when it said: *God made the man to the image and likeness of God.*”⁷¹ Nevertheless, Augustine quickly adds that the mixture of mud signifies the composite nature of the human person.⁷² This two-step movement of maintaining the spiritual nature of the *imago* while quickly adding that the soul is not separate from the body is ubiquitous in Augustine’s early discussion of the *imago dei*.

St. Paul’s distinction between the inner and outer man is frequently used in Augustine’s theology of the *imago dei*.⁷³ He deploys the Apostle’s texts already very early in his writings, long before he has done a thorough study of the Pauline letters after his ordination. This anthropological distinction of a Pauline trope is likewise of Alexandrian provenance.⁷⁴ The Pauline charge to be refashioned according to the new man, to which Augustine constantly refers in his mature works on the *imago dei*, has currency already in his thinking at Cassiciacum, as is evident in *De diversis quaestionibus*.

In addition to *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, *De diversis quaestionibus* also builds on Paul’s trope of the inner and outer man in relation to the image of God.

⁷¹ *Gen. Man.* II.7.9 (CSEL 91 128): *tunc autem homo interior significabatur, quando dictum est: fecit Deus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem dei.*

⁷² *Gen. Man.* II.7.9 (CSEL 91 128): *hominem hoc loco ex corpore et anima factum intelligamus, non absurde ipsa commixtione limi nomen accepit.*

⁷³ *De quantitate animae* frames St. Paul’s injunction to become a new man by putting off the old around themes of knowing oneself and becoming a friend of God. Augustine writes, “This is an achievement that is utterly impossible unless we remake ourselves in His image, the image he committed to our care as something most precious and dear, when he gave us to ourselves so constituted that nothing can take precedence to us save He Himself.” *Quant. an.* 28.55.

⁷⁴ Origen in his commentary on Genesis maintains that the image of God is not said in reference to the body, for which reason Scripture teaches that the body is formed from the dust of the earth, whereas the image of God is referred to as the “inner man”: *[I]s autem, qui ad imaginem Dei factus est et ad similitudinem, interior homo noster est, invisibilis et incorporealis et incorruptus atque immortalis.* Origen, *In Gen. hom.*, I, 13. Cf. Philo, *de mundi opif.*, 46, 134; *Quaest. in Gen.*, I, 4; *Leg. Alleg.*, I, 12, 31.

Augustine initiates the discussion of the “image” and “likeness” of God in Question 51, which I considered at the beginning of this chapter, with a quotation from St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, distinguishing between the decaying outer man and the inner man who is being renewed from day to day (2 Corinthians 4:16). Outer and inner man are the same man, for they both refer to Adam, explains Augustine. The inner man is spiritual, while the outer man is carnal. Is the outer man, the body, then also created in the image and likeness of God? Here Augustine – even more explicitly than in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* – answers yes. For the outer man who is being corrupted day by day will be renewed in the resurrection and be reintegrated with the inner man – the soul; the death that reigns in his mortal body will be conquered, and his bodily integrity will be restored.⁷⁵ Unlike his former co-religionists, the Manicheans, Augustine is keen to avoid a body-soul dualism, and this is reflected in his exegesis of Paul. The created goodness of the body is a pervasive theme in his

⁷⁵ Gareth Matthews also notes the ubiquity of Augustine’s *homo interior*, but he finds this developed Pauline theme in Augustine philosophically and psychologically untenable. Matthews argues that biblical personification of body parts (“The ear of the wise seeks knowledge” in Proverbs 18:5 or “Everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” in Matthew 5:28) is in Augustine predicated on a rigorous theological and psychological dualism built on a Platonic edifice. Because the human person is comprised of a soul and a body, which are distinguished in Augustine’s writing by the operations of the “inner man” and operations of the “outer man” (inner speaking, inner smiling, inner almsgiving, inner seeing), Augustine, according to Matthews, commits himself to a thoroughgoing dualism, in which the relation between the body and the mind is completely contingent. Matthews writes, “[O]nly a metaphysical dualist could allow himself the use of the inner-outer locutions without being inconsistent.” Gareth B. Matthews, “The Inner Man” in *Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Markus (New York: Anchor Books, 1972), p. 178. It is my contention in this chapter that while the inner and outer man are distinguished by Augustine, his theology does not, in fact, become mired in an intractable dualism, but, in fact, Augustine wants to affirm that the *imago dei* also remotely participates in the life of the “outer man.”

theology of creation and likewise does the heavy lifting in question 51, which despite distinguishing between the inner and outer man wants to hold them together.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Although Augustine's work as a whole makes clear that properly speaking the seat of the image of God remains the soul, he follows Ambrose in suggesting that the upright posture in which the human person was created reflects the image of God that resides in the soul. Thus, although the image does not reside in the body *per se*, the upright body aptly symbolizes the order of the soul to God. The "soul" is a somewhat fluid concept in Augustine's thought, bespeaking the locus of intellect and will – the rational principle in human beings. Cf. Robert O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); idem, *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine's Later Works* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987). The soul was created before the body, when God initially created everything simultaneously in the *rationes seminales*. After some time, when the body had become fully formed, the soul came to animate the body. O'Toole writes, "The soul is thus created before the body and lies hidden in the works of God (*creata lateret in operibus Dei*) until the Creator unites it with a human body." Christopher O'Toole, *The Philosophy of Creation in the Writings of St. Augustine* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1944), p. 90. O'Toole notes three things with respect to the creation of the soul in the thought of Augustine. First, the soul is not an emanation or generation from God, but is his creation; the soul is, therefore, not a divine substance. Second, Augustine is intent to emphasize the spiritual nature of the soul – it is not corporeal. Lastly, the soul was created in time and *ex nihilo*, and yet is immortal.

In his mature thought, Augustine is unequivocal that the *imago dei* resides in the soul: "After all, the authority of the apostle as well as plain reason assures us that man was not made to the image of God as regards the shape of his body, but as regards his rational mind" (*Trin.* XII.12). Therefore, Augustine continues, "It is an idle and base kind of thinking which supposes that God is confined within the limits of a body with features and limbs. And does not the blessed apostle say, *Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, the one who was created according to God* (Eph 4:23); and even more clearly elsewhere, *Putting off the old man, he says, with his actions, put on the new who is being renewed for the recognition of God according to the image of him who created him* (Col 3:9)? If then we are being renewed in the spirit of our mind, and if it is this new man who is being renewed for the recognition of God according to the image of him who created him, there can be no doubt that man was not made to the image of him who created him as regards his body or any old part of his consciousness, but as regards the rational mind, which is capable of recognizing God" (*Trin.* XII.12). This identification of the *imago dei* with the "inner man" is representative of Augustine's mature writings. Cf. *Gen. imp.* XVI.55; *Faust.* XXIV.2; *Gen. litt.* VI.27; *Conf.* XIII.22; *Spir. et litt.* 28-48; *Tract. eu. Io.* III.4; *Ciu.* XI.2; *Retract.* I.26. Nevertheless, in his mature thought Augustine still affirms that the body also remotely participates in the image of God for the same reason given in question 51 of *De diversis quaestionibus*, namely the inseparability of the body-soul unity. Thus, St. Paul's distinction between the "inner man" and the "outer man," who together are one man, continues to do the heavy lifting in Augustine's anthropology. In his work against Faustus the Manichaeon ,

Question 12 of *De diversis quaestionibus* provides the contours for the discussion of image in question 51 and underscores Augustine's insistence on the union of body and soul. Question 12 consists of two quotations of a "certain wise man."⁷⁷ The first quotation warns of the many ways that the Devil pollutes the mind of mortals. The Devil's ingenuity and adaptability in exploiting the various senses is described with great relish. He enters the soul through the senses: "[H]e assumes different shapes, adapts himself to colors, clings to sounds, lies concealed in anger and in false speech, hides in odors, pour himself into flavors, and by his turbulent and filthy activity casts the senses into the gloom of dark emotions."⁷⁸ The Devil comes through these various pathways of the senses in order to poison the intellect, the "light of reason," and "the mind's ray."⁷⁹ The tension that existed between the original couple after the Fall, which Augustine understood to signify the body warring against the soul, is reiterated in *De diversis quaestionibus* question 12 with great gusto. The body, which ought to be led and governed by the soul, is deceived by the Devil's sensual enticements. He is, however, not content to abuse the senses, but moves through them to dismantle the intellect since there he finds "a mirror of the divine presence."⁸⁰ It is not enough for the Devil to attack the body; rather, by infiltrating the body he intends to undo the soul – the seat of the *imago dei*. For Augustine, therefore, it is ultimately the Serpent who desires to affect a dualism between body

Augustine writes, "God then did not make one man to his image and another man not to his image; but because the inner and outer man is together one man, he made this one man to his image, not in regard to the body and corporeal life, but in regard to the rational mind" (*Faust.* XXIV.3).

⁷⁷ *Retractationes* 26 indicates that the quotations of the wise man are from a work by Fonteius of Carthage, entitled, *On Purifying the Mind in Order to See God*.

⁷⁸ *Quaest.* 12.

⁷⁹ *Quaest.* 12.

⁸⁰ *Quaest.* 12 (CCSL 44A 19): *speculum diuinae praesentiae*.

and soul.⁸¹ Question 12 of *De diversis quaestionibus* reiterates the theme articulated in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*: Augustine suggests that the Devil employs a “divide and conquer” strategy to drive a wedge between the union of the original couple, who now come to signify the warring of soul and body. In question 12 Augustine again reiterates that the dualism of body and soul is a post-lapsarian condition that undid the original integrity of the *imago dei*.

Conclusion

The language of *aequalitas* is rarely absent from Augustine’s discussions of image theology. For the preceding Nicene tradition, image theology was strictly associated with equality and unity of the divine substance for which Colossians 1:15 was the preeminent proof text available. I have suggested that Augustine’s early thought already breaks with this Nicene tradition in significant ways. Where his predecessors were keen to note the difference between Christ as the *imago dei* and the human person created *secundum imaginem*, Augustine wants instead to affirm the continuity of image theology in relation to Christ and to the human person. I have argued that it is Augustine’s participatory ontology that affords him the latitude to affirm this continuity.

⁸¹ Peter Brown is right to comment that Augustine has a much more positive appraisal of intimate relations in the pre-lapsarian state than his predecessors both Greek and Latin. Brown notes that Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, and Jerome would have found sexuality, marriage, and the family before the Fall to be inconceivable. Augustine, on the other hand, is much less reticent to affirm the goods of the integrated composite of body and soul and the place of sexual relations in the flourishing of society: “Augustine invariably wrote of Adam and Eve as physical human beings, endowed with the same bodies and sexual characteristics as ourselves. God had created them for the joys of society. He had implanted in them both ‘the further attractive power of friendship.’ They had been set in Paradise to found a *populus*; and to found a *populus* implied more than the disembodied meeting of like-minded souls.” Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 400.

The Apostle Paul is clear that the human person is also the image of God (1 Corinthians 11:7), and so Augustine cannot follow the Latin tradition that reserved *imago dei* to Christology. Nevertheless, the Nicene controversy had wedded the language of *imago* to that of *aequalitas*; both terms were employed strictly to affirm the unity of divine substance between Father and Son. In *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, Augustine proposes a solution to the issue by insisting that the term “image” does not necessitate equality; a burgeoning theological account of analogy allows him to affirm that both created human beings and the begotten Son are *imago dei*, but with the caveat that only the Son has *aequalitas* with the Father. Augustine suggests in *De quantitate animae* that something can be “like God” in many ways. Whether a creature shares in being, life, or (as an intellectual creature) shares in wisdom, there are varying degrees of passive participation in God.

The earlier Nicene tradition tended to distinguish between “image” and “likeness”; image suggested unity of substance, while likeness described a quality of a different substance. Augustine, however, wants to hold these two terms together, understanding them in relation to each other and representative of different levels of participation. This contrast is clear when Augustine’s understanding of *aequalitas* is compared to that of Victorinus. In Victorinus’s theology *imago dei* functions in exactly the same fashion as does the term *aequalitas*: it serves to highlight the unity between the Father and Son; but as such, *imago dei* is, like the term *aequalitas*, exclusive to the relation of Father and Son. Augustine suggests a broader and more robust account of *imago dei*; he considers this term in relation both to *aequalitas* and *similitudo*. Augustine can now speak of *imago* in different ways; the human person as *imago* is an unequal likeness while Christ as *imago* is equal in likeness. Participation affords Augustine a nascent account of analogy – of being able to affirm that image is

said in many ways: *multis enim modis dici res possunt similes Deo*.⁸² Fundamentally, I have argued that participation serves in Augustine's thought to define various degrees of similitude proper to an image; this allows Augustine to affirm the *imago dei* both of the human person and of Christ.

According to the "interior man," the soul is an image of God. The rational character of the *imago dei* necessarily entails a distinction in Augustine's thought between the spiritual and corporeal elements of the human person. This distinction, however, does not evolve into a thoroughgoing dualism. Rather, in Augustine's early works the body always remotely participates in the life of the soul. Thus, for Augustine, Genesis 1:26 relays in anthropomorphic terms the rational nature of the *imago dei*. Rejecting the crude materialistic reading of the Manicheans, Augustine suggest that "image" in *both* Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 2:7 bespeaks a spiritual reality. Thus, he does not follow Victorinus and others stemming from the Alexandrian exegetical tradition who understand the second creation account – the fashioning of Adam out of mud – as a description of bodily creation. Rather, the mingling of the mud signifies the same reality that is expressed in Genesis 1:26, namely that body and soul are created as an integrated unity.

The *imago dei*, then, remains principally a spiritual reality, but Augustine's understanding of the creation narrative insists that the body participates in the life of the soul and, therefore, remotely also in the image of God. In the harmonious order of pre-lapsarian existence, the body was docile to the guidance of the soul. This tranquil relation, Augustine understands to be symbolically represented in the original relationship of Adam and Eve. It is within this rightly ordered relation of body and

⁸² *Quaest.* 51.2.

soul that Augustine develops St. Paul's distinction between the outer and inner man; while distinguished these two remain an integrated composite. In Augustine's first commentary on the Fall in Genesis 3 and in his description in question 12 of *De diversis quaestionibus* of the Devil's continuous attempts to deceive the human race, Augustine suggests that it is the Devil who attempts to attack the inner *imago* through the outer senses and thereby to drive a wedge between the integrated composite of the image of God. Despite the Platonic import in Augustine's understanding of the image of God, his commitment to the integrated nature of the body-soul composite expressed in the creation narrative entails that, ultimately, Augustine's early theology of the *imago dei* holds to the unity of body and soul.

Chapter VII: The Ascent of the Image in *De vera religione*

De vera religione is the high-water mark of Augustine's early theology prior to his ordination in 391.¹ In many ways, this book expresses his early exuberance regarding the place of Platonic philosophy, particularly its notion of ascent, within the Christian faith. Among Augustine's early works, it is *De vera religione* that most clearly demonstrates how, as a young theologian, Augustine envisioned the relationship of the Catholic faith to Platonic philosophy. His theological presentation of the soul's participation in Christ is built on the Platonic edifice of the soul's return and ascent to God.

This final chapter, then, serves as a capstone to the overall thesis. I have argued that Augustine's early theology of the *imago dei* is a significant advancement from Latin pro-Nicene theologies only a generation before. It is his thoroughgoing appropriation of a Plotinian metaphysic – evident already in his earliest writings – that offers Augustine the insight that there are different ways of affirming the image of God. The human image is also *imago dei*, but an image unequal to its source. Christ alone is *imago dei* in equal likeness to his source. Augustine's theological reflection on the Platonic conception of the world, according to which finite images are both true and false – that is to say, they are both a resemblance and a dissemblance – finds clearest expression in *De vera religione*. I have suggested that this dual perception of an image is pervasive throughout Augustine's early writings. In the Cassiciacum dialogues, Augustine introduces the critical concept of "judgment" in relation to

¹ Frederick Van Fleteren considers *De vera religione* to be "a kind of capstone to Augustine's philosophical and theological speculation during 386-391." Frederick Van Fleteren, *Background and Commentary on Augustine's "De Vera Religione," De Utilitate Credendi," "De Fide Rerum Quae Non Videntur,"* in *Lectio Augustini* 10 (Pavia: Lectio Augustini, 1994), p. 34.

images. An image becomes a *simulacrum* when one judges temporal, material images to be self-contained, that is, when the finite order is absolutized. On the other hand, an image is “true” inasmuch as its nature as *image* is recognized. Finite goods, suggests Augustine, are not to be understood as independent or standing alone, but ought to be recognized as participating in and showing forth eternal, immaterial truth. This recurring Platonic theme of judgment finds clear expression in *De vera religione*.

If *De vera religione* represents Augustine’s most developed *neo-Platonic* conception of image in his early writings, it is also the most developed and mature *Christian* writing of this period. Augustine develops key components of Ambrose’s image theology expressed in the Bishop of Milan’s preaching, particularly the sustained ethical theology of imitation that issues from Ambrose’s understanding of the human person created in the image of God. Like Ambrose’s preaching, *De vera religione* speaks repeatedly about the refashioning and reshaping of the intellect and the will to reflect more accurately the image God. Although the language of ascent and return to God is unabashedly Plotinian, this ascent is achieved not so much with a Plotinian method of *katharis* and *theōria* as it is received as gift. Thus, a rich theology of grace undergirds the ascent and return of the image; the ascent is predicated on the prior descent of Christ, the divine image.

I have argued that already in the Cassiciacum dialogues, a theology of image supports Augustine’s theology of the Incarnation. Through the trope of the literary figure of Proteus, who both “manifests and bears the person of truth,” Augustine affirms against the Skeptics that eternal truth can be known in the image of the temporal order. Much more explicitly than in the Cassiciacum dialogues, however, does a theology of the Incarnation come to the fore in *De vera religione*. As such, this work is the clearest example of Augustine’s early synthesis of Plotinian and Nicene

conceptions of image philosophy. Whereas previous Latin pro-Nicene theology had been hesitant to link an anthropology of the image of God to its Christology of the image of God, Augustine unites these two within a neo-Platonic philosophy of image constituted by the movements of *exitus* and *reditus*. *De vera religione* contends that the fulfillment of the created image in its ascent and return is predicated on the prior descent of the divine image, which takes up the created image in its own return. Augustine uses neo-Platonic image theology to express the Apostle Paul's vision of participatory union with Christ – “If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). Through the grace of the Incarnation, asserts *De vera religione*, the created image participates in the ascent of the divine image.

Augustine addresses *De vera religione* to his generous patron Romanianus, whose son Augustine had educated. The immediate context of the short work is an apologetic appeal of the *intellectus fidei* to Romanianus, who had followed Augustine into the Manichaean sect, to enter into the Catholic faith.² Thus, the treatise is an attempt to save his friend from Manichaean teaching; perhaps Augustine felt a degree of guilt for initially enticing his friend into the Manichaean fold.³ *De vera religione* presents a two-step argument. First, Augustine argues that Manichaean dualism contains a logical fallacy in the order of being. Evil, maintains Augustine, is the ill

² A critical study of the textual reception history and manuscript tradition of *De vera religione* has been presented in a long article by Klaus-Detlef Daur, “Prolegomena zu einer Ausgabe von Augustins *De vera religione*,” *Sacris erudiri* 12 (1961): 313-365. Daur intends this article to be preparatory to his critical edition of *De vera religione* in the *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* 32 (Turnholti: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1962). Daur comments on the state of all the major manuscripts, the textual families, and the Latin editions up to his time.

³ The apologetic character of *De vera religione* has been pointed out by Joseph Pegon: “Peut-être est-ce là que l'on peut le mieux voir la méthode apologétique proprement dite de saint Augustin,” in *La Foi chrétienne. De vera religione. De utilitate credendi. De fide rerum quae non videntur. De fide et operibus*; texte latin de l'éd. bénédictine, ed and trans. Joseph Pegon, Bibliothèque Augustinienne; Oeuvres de saint Augustin, 8 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1951), p. 465.

use of free will – one might do or suffer an evil, but no subsistent reality is an evil.⁴ On the contrary, all being is good inasmuch as it derives from God and is upheld by God. Augustine naturally proceeds to the second step: the nearer the soul is to God, the more it is like God and participates in his life and goodness. In short, *De vera religione* counters Manichaean dualism with a Platonic account of participation and an invitation to ascend in Christ to the God in whom is perfect life and goodness.

I will make clear that *De vera religione* 12.24 is a critical passage in Augustine's early theology of the ascent of the soul as *imago* to participate in the Trinity. This passage has received little scholarly attention, and yet it contains the nucleus of the central themes to be developed throughout *De vera religione*, namely, the ascent from the many corporeal changing things to the one supreme, incorporeal good – the Holy Trinity.⁵ *De vera religione* is an exploration of how the faith and the good will necessary to make the ascent are obstructed by intellectual *falsitas* (33.61-34.67) and moral *cupiditas* (37.68-54.106). It turns out – and this is the main point I will argue in this chapter – that Augustine's enthusiasm regarding Platonism has its limits already in this early work: Platonic *katharsis* proves to be insufficient to overcome the fallen human condition. At this point, Augustine's theology augments and transforms his Platonic proclivities. The grace of God made present through the Incarnation restores the soul to health, so that its innate desire can be fulfilled in union with God – to return from “the many (*a multis*) things that change to the one (*unum*) unchanging good.”⁶ The one good, *De vera religione* 12.24 continues, is participation

⁴ *vera rel.* 20.38-39 (CCSL 32 210-211).

⁵ This passage is quoted by Frederick Van Fleteren's study but he does not develop the themes contained in this passage, except to note the Trinitarian reference. Frederick Van Fleteren, “Augustine's *De vera religione*: A New Approach,” *Augustinianum* 16 (1976): 482.

⁶ *vera rel.* 12.24 (CCSL 32 202).

in the Holy Trinity. Thus, the ascent is “to the One ... through Wisdom ... to enjoy God through the Holy Spirit, who is the gift of God” (*ad unum ... per sapientiam ... fruiturque deo per spiritum sanctum, quod est donum dei*).⁷

My argument regarding the ascent of the soul as image to the Holy Trinity will proceed by way of four steps. First, I will consider the Platonic milieu within which *De vera religione* functions, by focusing on Plotinus’s account of the image’s “return” to its source. Second, I will consider the intellectual and moral obstacles that according to *De vera religione* obstruct the ascent. Third, I will describe Augustine’s theology of grace; it is grace that comes to aid and heal the image for its ascent. Lastly, I will consider the *terminus ad quem* of the ascent by discussing how Augustine speaks of “enjoying” God.⁸ In analyzing Augustine’s theology of ascent in *De vera religione*, I build especially on the scholarship of Frederick Van Fleteren, Olivier du Roy, and Josef Lössl. What I am proposing as new to this discussion, however, is the significance of a Plotinian account of image to Augustine’s theology of ascent. Indeed, proceeding from *De vera religione* 12.24, I will argue that a theology of image is foundational to understanding the theme of ascent in *De vera religione*.⁹

⁷ *vera rel.* 12.24 (CCSL 32 202).

⁸ My argument in this chapter is in line with Frederick Van Fleteren and disagrees with Josef Lössl’s understanding of *De vera religione*: “[T]he term ‘ascent’, he suggested as a guiding concept, is not very prominent in the text and expresses mainly its anagogic dimension leaving the ontological and epistemological parts of its first half uninterpreted.” Josef Lössl, “‘The One’: A guiding concept in Augustine’s *De vera religione*,” *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 40 (1994): 102.

⁹ Image theology is once again an important locus of discussion in Augustine studies. See Lydia Schumacher’s recent publication linking divine illumination with the restoration of the effaced *imago dei*. Lydia Schumacher, *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine’s Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

The Plotinian Metaphysic of Image

Prior to launching into an analysis of the ascent of the *imago* in *De vera religione*, I will recapitulate the central movements of the ascent and the return of the image in the Plotinian metaphysic – the philosophical *Weltanschauung* within which Augustine penned *De vera religione*.¹⁰ Plotinus asks, “What is it, then, which has made the souls forget their father, God, and be ignorant of themselves and him, even though they are parts which come from his higher world and altogether belong to it?”¹¹ Evil, he answers, has its origins in self-will and in “wishing to belong to themselves.”¹² Moving farther and farther away from its origin with the Divine, the soul forgets its own dignity. The first step, then, in the “return” is to become aware of the value of the soul, maintains Plotinus – to understand how near it is to God.

¹⁰ Olivier du Roy devotes a chapter of his *magnum opus*, *L'Intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon saint Augustin* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1966) to *De vera religione*. He is particularly interested in redaction questions regarding the *Enneads*. In addition to the obviously anti-Manichaean context, du Roy contends that there is also an anti-Porphyrrian narrative that runs through *De vera religione*. Du Roy, *L'Intelligence*, pp. 309-88. I am inclined to agree with the assessment of Josef Lössl: “We ... cannot try to tell exactly which texts are Porphyrian. We cannot even properly distinguish anti-Manichaean and anti-Porphyrian sections; for both have similar functions.” Lössl, “The One,” 102. For different divisions of *De vera religione*, see H. Dörries, “Neuplatonischen und Christlichen in Augustins ‘De vera religione,’” *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 2 (1924): 64-102; W. Theiler, “Porphyrios und Augustin,” *Schriften der Königsberger Gelehrten Gesellschaft, Geisteswissenschaft Kl. 10* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1933); P. Rotta, *Agostino, La vera religione*, ed. P. Rotta (Torino: Paravia, 1938); W. Thimme, *Augustinus: Theologische Frühschriften*, ed. W. Thimme (Zürich: Artemis, 1962); W. Desch, “Aufbau und Gliederung von Augustins Schrift ‘De vera religione,’” *Vigiliae christiana* 34 (1980): 263-77. The many different attempts at subdividing *De vera religione* are summarized in an excellent manner by Josef Lössl, who then gives his own understanding of the structure of the text based on the theme of “the One,” which he demonstrates is operative throughout *De vera religione*. Cf. Josef Lössl, “The One,” 79-103.

¹¹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.1.1.

¹² Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.1.1.

By growing in the knowledge of the Divine and by participating in and possessing the “memory” of one’s origin, one matures in the likeness of Intellect.¹³ Plotinus describes the movement of return (*epistrophē*) through this memory as follows:

So we must ascend again to the good, which every soul desires. Anyone who has seen it knows what I mean when I say that it is beautiful. It is desired as good, and the desire for it is directed to good, and the attainment of it is for those who go up to the higher world and are converted and strip off what we put on in our descent; ... until, passing in the ascent all that is alien to the God, one sees with one’s self alone That alone, simple, single and pure, from which all depends and to which all look and are and live and think: for it is cause of life and mind and being.¹⁴

Three items in Plotinus’s injunction to ascend come to the fore also in *De vera religione*. First, there is an innate desire for the ascent. The soul naturally longs to return to its primordial goodness and beauty. Although the *Enneads* warn of the many distractions which, hindering the soul’s ascent, cause it to obsess about terrestrial realities lower than itself, there remains the possibility to divest oneself of “sense perception and desires and passions and all the rest of such fooleries, [which] incline

¹³ Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.3.8.

¹⁴ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.7.

so very much towards the mortal.”¹⁵ A thoroughgoing confidence that the human soul is able to return to God thus underwrites Plotinus’s invitation to ascend.

A second observation is related: the ascent is a *return*. The invitation to ascend is warranted since the soul naturally desires the One, due to the fact that the soul has its origins in that higher place and has a “memory” of it. Plotinus encourages the soul to divest itself of all the material baggage and diversions that hinder it and cloud its vision of contemplation. He uses the analogy of those who go up to celebrate rites of purification and strip themselves naked to receive unencumbered the mysteries of purification. In the same way the soul that desires the “simple, single and pure” must become like the object of its desire; stripped of all material distractions in order to be purified for *theōria*. Only after this purification can one begin the ascent to the realm of light: “What remains of soul is this which we said was an image of Intellect preserving something of its light, like the light of the sun which, beyond its spherical mass, shines around it and from it.”¹⁶ The return, then, is not to something external; rather, after purification the human soul returns to share more perfectly in that which has always existed as its centre and origin. Hence, the return or ascent of the soul is to become more clearly what it already is by turning within.

Lastly, the natural desire to “return” to the “memory” of the soul is desire for the beautiful, which is desired as a good. Thus, elation and *erōs* accompany the ascent: “If anyone sees it, what passion will he feel, what longing in his desire to be united with it, what a shock of delight!”¹⁷ Plotinus insists that despite his sensual language, he is describing a spiritual reality; he writes as a mystic: “[H]e who has seen it glories in its beauty and is full of wonder and delight, enduring a shock which

¹⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.3.9.

¹⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.3.9.

¹⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.7.

causes no hurt, loving with true passion and piercing longing.”¹⁸ Things of spiritual, immaterial beauty are perceived not by sense, “but the soul sees them and speaks of them without instruments.”¹⁹ This contemplation of immaterial beauty remains foreign to one who has not experienced it, just as sight is foreign to one born blind.²⁰ Everyone is born with the ability to turn and gaze at immaterial beauty, but few use it.²¹

How does one arrive at this beauty? It is already present in everyone. “Go back into yourself and look.”²² The soul must be trained and shaped, so that it may become beautiful, and then one can turn to the beautiful within. Hence Plotinus’s celebrated injunction: “[N]ever stop ‘working your statue’ till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you.”²³ When one’s soul is at last made beautiful and fit for introspection and contemplation, one can shut one’s eyes and “wake to another way of seeing.”²⁴ By returning into oneself with the eye of the soul, one can see great beauty: “No eye ever saw the sun without becoming sun-like, nor can a soul see beauty without becoming beautiful. You must become first of all godlike and beautiful if you intend to see God and beauty.”²⁵ By contemplation, the soul makes its ascent, returns to the One, and becomes that which he contemplates.

De vera religione adopts and reworks many of Plotinus’s themes regarding the soul’s ascent. We saw that like Plotinus, Augustine locates evil not in a subsistent

¹⁸ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.7.

¹⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.4.

²⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.4.

²¹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.8.

²² Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.9.

²³ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.9: “[J]ust as someone making a statute which has to be beautiful cuts away here and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another till he has given his statue a beautiful face, so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright.”

²⁴ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.8.

²⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.9.

reality, as did his erstwhile co-religionists the Manicheans, but in the perversity of the will.²⁶ In choosing evil, a good is chosen outside of its proper order; temporal good is preferred to eternal good. But the soul by nature loves the highest good more than the lower goods to which it has fallen. Augustine writes, “The fault in the soul, therefore, is not its nature but against its nature.”²⁷ And so the ascent “is not a matter of indulging idle curiosity ... but of setting up a ladder to things that are immortal.”²⁸ The soul desires eternal goodness and beauty as something proper to it, and so the ascent is, like that of the *Enneads*, properly speaking, a “return.”

The soul fell from its intimacy and union with God, explains Augustine, not in an eternal battle between a good substance and an evil substance.²⁹ Rather, the soul fell on account of its own evil will. And so, life, which is from God and in God, when it turns from him, “tilts towards nothingness.”³⁰ Life becomes “fleshly” and “earthly”; it loves what is less than life and falls away from the source of life. In all this there is a lack, a privation. The expulsion from paradise was not a movement from good to evil (for, as Augustine specifies repeatedly, there is no such thing as a subsistent evil) but a fall “from eternal good to time-bound good, from spiritual good

²⁶ Van Fleteren maintains that the neo-Platonic character of the “Milanese Catholicism,” to which Augustine was beholden during the composition of *De vera religione*, was particularly useful for his rebuttal of Manichaean theology. Van Fleteren, *Background*, p. 45.

²⁷ *vera rel.* 23.44 (CCSL 32 215).

²⁸ *vera rel.* 29.52 (CCSL 32 221).

²⁹ The fall of the soul in Augustine’s early theology is a debated topic. Cf. Robert O’Connell, *Saint Augustine’s Early Theory of Man, A.D. 386-391* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard, 1986), pp. 144-83; idem, “Augustine’s rejection of the Fall of the Soul,” *Augustinian Studies* 4 (1973): 1-32; and idem, “Pre-existence in the Early Augustine,” *Revue Des Études Augustiniennes* 26 (1980): 176-88; Gerald O’Daly, “Did Augustine Ever Believe in the The Soul’s Pre-Existence?” *Augustinian Studies* 5 (1974): 227-35; Richard Penaskovic, “The Fall of the Soul in Saint Augustine: A *Quaestio Disputata*,” *Augustinian Studies* 17 (1986): 135-45. A responses to O’Connell’s thesis is found in Ronnie Rombs, *St. Augustine and the Fall of the Soul: Beyond O’Connell and his Critics* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 2006).

³⁰ *vera rel.* 11.21 (CCSL 32 200).

to flesh-bound good, from intelligible good to sensuous good, from the highest good to the lowest good.”³¹ The relation between goodness and being is what makes Augustine so intent on affirming that the image remains in the human person after the fall. As a rational creature, he is ordered to God – there is a “return” inscribed on his soul.

So far, I have argued that Augustine’s account of the ascent of the *imago* in *De vera religione* is framed within a Plotinian understanding of “return.” It is important to note, however, that, although he does not abandon this Plotinian metaphysic, Augustine gives a distinctly Christian, and indeed a Nicene shape, I will argue, to the injunction to ascend. At this point, therefore, I will dissect *De vera religione* 12.24 and consider each of the constitutive parts of this paragraph in light of the treatise as a whole. The blueprint to *De vera religione*, I want to suggest, is found in 12.24:

If the soul, however, while engaged in the stadium of human life, beats those greedy desires it has been cherishing in itself by mortal enjoyments and believes with mind and good will that it has been assisted in beating them by the grace of God, then without a doubt it will be restored to health and will turn back (*reuertetur*) from the many things that change to the one unchanging good, being reshaped (*reformata*) by the Wisdom that was never shaped but gives its shape to all things, and will come to enjoy God through the Holy Spirit, which is the gift of God.³²

³¹ *vera rel.* 20.38 (CCSL 32 210).

³² *vera rel.* 12.24 (CCSL 32 202): *Si autem, dum in hoc stadio uitae humanae anima degit, uincat eas, quas aduersum se nutriuit, cupiditates fruendo mortalibus et ad eas uincendas gratia dei se adiuuari credat mente illi seruiens et bona uoluntate, sine dubitatione reparabitur et a multis mutabilibus ad unum incommutabile reuertetur*

The soul for Augustine is the primary locus of the *imago dei*. Underlying the *revertetur reformata* of the image's ascent and return is a Plotinian account of *katharsis* of both mind and will. The exercise of "mind and good will" is something we might expect to find in Plotinus, as for example in his injunction already quoted, "[N]ever stop 'working your statue' till the glory of virtue shines."

A considerable portion of *De vera religione* is devoted, however, to an explanation of the condition of human brokenness, particularly the intellectual *falsitas* (*vera rel.* 33.61-34.67) and moral *cupiditas* (*vera rel.* 37.68-54.106), which, quite simply, leave the human soul incapable of making the ascent. Augustine's theology lacks confidence in human nature's ability to reform itself, a confidence that is integral to Plotinian philosophy. Thus, the necessity of grace for human reformation introduces a theological *novum* to what would otherwise be a standard neo-Platonic philosophy of ascent. The grace of God allows for the *revertetur reformata* of the image, so that it can turn from "the many (*a multis*) things that change to the one (*unum*) unchanging good."

Intellectual and Moral Obstacles to the Ascent of the Image

At this point, it is necessary to analyze Augustine's account of the ascent of the image, outlined in *De vera religione* 12.24, in light of the entire treatise, by looking at three elements: first, the intellectual and moral distractions that obstruct "a believing mind and good will"; second, the place of grace in the restoration of the image; and, finally, the Trinitarian terminus of the ascent.

reformata per sapientiam non formatam, sed per quam formantur uniuersa, frueturque deo per spiritum sanctum, quod est donum dei.

Thirteen times variations of the word *imago* occur in *De vera religione*. Augustine uses the word with both a positive and a negative connotation.³³ The positive sense adheres closely to the participatory metaphysic operative in his broadly Platonic worldview that I have argued was operative in the Cassiciacum dialogues. Every image is understood to be derived from and revelatory of the One. Among these images, however, human beings are unique, maintains Augustine, because they are made according to the image of the eternal Son of God; they are made “*through* this form in such a way as also to be *to* it.”³⁴ Because of their rational and intellectual nature, human beings are “rightly said to have been made to the image and likeness of God.”³⁵

De vera religione is clear that the eternal Son of God is different from all other images, including those of a rational and intellectual nature. Here Augustine breaks with the Plotinian metaphysic in which an image is always ontologically inferior to its source because it derives and emanates from that source. In describing the second

³³ For a discussion of the various senses of “image” in Augustine’s theology, see Isabelle Bochet, “Le Statut de l’image dans la pensée augustinienne,” *Archives de Philosophie* 72 (2009): 249-69.

³⁴ Of course, Augustine’s Latin text of Genesis 1:26 states that people are created *to* the image and likeness of God. *vera rel.* 44.82 (CCSL 32 241): *ad ipsam etiam sint.*

³⁵ *vera rel.* 44.82 (CCSL 32 241-242): *Horum alia sic sunt per ipsam, ut ad ipsam etiam sint, ut omnis rationalis et intellectualis creatura, in qua homo rectissime dicitur factus ad imaginem et similitudinem dei.* The Platonically informed participatory metaphysic that sustains this understanding of image as revelatory and derivative of its source – sharing something of its being and life – is likewise present in *vera rel.* 45.85 (CCSL 32 243): *Habet enim hoc animi nostri natura post deum, a quo ad eius imaginem factus est; vera rel.* 46.88 (CCSL 32 244): *si natura nostra in praeceptis et in imagine dei manens; vera rel.* 47.90 (CCSL 32 246): *id est creaturam dei ad eius imaginem factam.* This participatory account of image is also operative in the distinction between the “image of the earthly man (*terreni hominis imaginem*)” and the “image of the new people (*imago noui populi*).” *vera rel.* 27.50 (CCSL 32 219). In describing the ascent of the soul to God in seven stages, Augustine explains that the sixth stage occurs when the soul has been “perfected in the form and shape which was made to the image and likeness of God (*quae facta est ad imaginem et similitudinem dei*).” *vera rel.* 26.49 (CCSL 32 219).

Person of the Trinity, Augustine uses the term *imago* in a distinctly Nicene fashion. He writes, “[T]he Father of Truth is supremely the One, the Father of his own Wisdom, which is called his likeness, in no respect at all unlike him, and his image because it is from him.”³⁶ Augustine uses “image” language here to bespeak both the Son’s derivation from the Father and his ontological equality with the Father. All other images, explains Augustine, are “through him,” and only the Son is said to be “from him.”³⁷

A second, negative, sense of “image” is also operative in *De vera religione*. This sense has the connotation of a “false image” or an idol. *Imago*, in this sense, is often found near its synonym, *simulacrum*.³⁸ It connotes an excessive attachment to corporeal reality. Augustine describes a “cult of images” in which people “worship their own fancies” and their own mind’s “imaginings.”³⁹ In this context, “image” implies a certain element of deceit; this sense is frequently employed when describing material reality deceiving the mind. Augustine speaks reverently of Plato, who taught that the greatest obstacle to contemplation was a life betrayed by such “images.” The chief hindrance to grasping truth, for Plato, was “a life given over to greed and lust

³⁶ *vera rel.* 43.81 (CCSL 32 241): *quia summe unus est pater ueritatis, pater suae sapientiae, quae nulla ex parte dissimilis similitudo eius dicta est et imago, quia de ipso est.*

³⁷ *vera rel.* 43.81 (CCSL 32 241): *Itaque etiam filius recte dicitur ex ipso, cetera per ipsum.*

³⁸ *vera rel.* 37.68 (CCSL 32 232).

³⁹ *vera rel.* 38.69 (CCSL 32 232): *Est enim alius deterior et inferior cultus simulacrorum, quo phantasmata sua colunt, et quidquid animo errante cum superbia uel tumore cogitando imaginati fuerint. Similarly, vera rel.* 55.108 (CCSL 32 256): *cum falsa imaginatur, colere non debemus.*

and the deceitful images of material things, which are stamped on our minds from this material world through the body.”⁴⁰

The problem with this second, negative sense of image is that it absolutizes material, temporal existence. Here, “image” no longer functions in the positive sense, as something revelatory and participatory of its source, which is analogically operative; rather, this image clouds the mind’s ability to contemplate and to see through the material and temporal the immaterial and eternal as an image should. In this case, the created object becomes an image in the negative sense – a false image, an idol. Vision is limited to seeing with the “flesh” the “images of visible things ... circumscribed within definite limits.”⁴¹

To move from a negative account of image to a positive one is to make the ascent that *De vera religione* enjoins. However, this is not easy: “O obstinate souls, give me someone who can see, without imagining any flesh-bound things seen.”⁴² The intellectual and moral *divertissements* that obstruct the ascent are the many material changing goods that claim totality for themselves. *De vera religione* describes them as not translucent to the eternal goodness and beauty that they participate in, but as, instead, immanent to themselves; as images they function by way of dissemblance rather than resemblance. Correct “judgment” regarding the nature of material and temporal existence is requisite to overcoming the intellectual

⁴⁰ *vera rel.* 3.3 (CCSL 32 188-189): *ad quam percipiendam nihil magis impedire quam uitam libidinibus deditam et falsas imagines rerum sensibilibus, quae nobis ab hoc sensibili mundo per corpus impressae uarias opiniones errores que generarent.*

⁴¹ *vera rel.* 20.40 (CCSL 32 212): *usque ad uisibilibus rerum imagines peruenit et lucis huius, quam certis terminis circumscriptam uidet.*

⁴² *vera rel.* 34.64 (CCSL 32 228): *O animae peruicaces, date mihi, qui uideat sine ulla imaginatione uisorum carnalium.*

falsitas and moral *cupiditas* that cloud our vision.⁴³ Correct judgment, explains Augustine, recognizes the participatory and image-like nature of created existence.

Falsitas pertains to the misappraisal of images, which are given totality, eternity, and absoluteness in themselves, failing to admit their character as image. The deception of *falsitas* lies in the fact that their participatory ontology is not recognized. The many material images in the world, restates Augustine, are good insofar as they are. Indeed, inasmuch as they are a passive participation in God they are a shining refulgence of the presence of God, meant to lead the human mind back to the Divine. Thus, the *falsitas* that *De vera religione* contends obstructs the ascent is not the material reality that lies and deceives, but the human mind that wrongly judges the resemblance as the reality and the partial goodness as the ultimate Good: “For it is trying to understand the things of the flesh and see things of the spirit, which cannot be done.”⁴⁴

Rightly judging the nature of material beauty and goodness as a participation in their eternal forms is a theme that runs throughout Augustine’s early works.⁴⁵ In *De vera religione*, he recycles many of the examples used in the *Soliloquies* and in his correspondence with Nebridius, to explain how an image participates in and reflects its form. In *Epistula 7* to Nebridius Augustine explains that the image of the city of Carthage in the mind is not the same as the city in reality, and in the *Soliloquies* he uses the example of an oar that looks bent in the water but in reality is not so. Both of these examples are present in *De vera religione*: the city of Rome, existing in the

⁴³ Joseph Pegon again notes the Platonic subtext to the intellectual and moral *katharsis* necessary to make the ascent: “C’est le rôle que le néoplatonisme assigne à la philosophie et veut réaliser dans la contemplation de la vérité, rendue possible par un certain ascétisme intellectuel et moral.” Joseph Pegon, *Foi Chrétienne*, p. 472.

⁴⁴ *vera rel.* 33.62 (CCSL 32 228).

⁴⁵ Cf. *De Ordine* II and *Confessions* VII.

mind, is a “false image” because it is not the city located on the Italian Peninsula.⁴⁶ Likewise, one wrongly judges an oar to be bent when it looks so in the water.⁴⁷ These examples attest to a dominant motif throughout Augustine’s writings, namely, the place of judgment: the requirement of the mind to judge the truth of what the eyes see.⁴⁸ Material reality is to be judged by something higher – namely the mind – and this judgment must be in accordance with the eternal form that is still higher and more eternal than the mind and is that in which the mind participates. Thus, right judgment of the multiplicity of material being according to the standard of unity that the mind knows through participation is propaedeutic to forming the “mind and good will” enjoined by *De vera religione* 12.24 and to overcoming intellectual *falsitas*.

Falsitas is the intellectual malaise that, for Augustine, prevents the human person from making the ascent through the material to the immaterial and from the temporal to the eternal. *Falsitas* is wrongly judging the lower as higher.⁴⁹ Human beings, maintains Augustine, ought in this life to be able to participate already, to a limited degree, in the unified vision of God. This theme, I suggested, was clearly expressed in response to the Skeptics in *Contra Academicos*. The task of true philosophy then, is to judge all material images in light of this unity. Augustine

⁴⁶ *vera rel.* 34.64 (CCSL 32 229).

⁴⁷ *vera rel.* 33.62 (CCSL 32 228).

⁴⁸ Cf. Jean-Marie Le Blond, *Les Conversions de saint Augustin* (Paris: Aubier, 1950), p. 121 and 209. Bernard Lonergan’s perspicacious work on this aspect of Augustine’s thought is germane. In his great work *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), Lonergan considers human knowing as it moves from experience to understanding, and finally to judgment. By concluding the triad with judgment, Lonergan asserts the power and certainty that human understanding can have about reality.

⁴⁹ *vera rel.* 34.63 (CCSL 32 228): “Let us then not seek the highest things among the lowest, and let us not look askance at the lowest either. Let us make a proper judgment of them, in order not to be judged with them; that is, let us attribute to them only as much as their outermost look deserves, or, while we are seeking the first things among the last, we may find ourselves numbered among the last.”

writes, “That light is true by which you come to realize that these things are not true. It is by this light that you see that One, by which you judge that whatever else you see is one and yet that whatever you see to be mutable is not what that One is.”⁵⁰

Contemplation is the means through which the human mind can participate in the vision of God and rightly judge material being.⁵¹ As Augustine puts it, “We are certainly seeking the One, than which there is nothing more simple. So then, let us seek simplicity of heart. *Be still*, he says, *and acknowledge that I am the Lord* (Ps 46:10) – not with the stillness of sloth but with the stillness of reflection, so that you may be free of places and times. For their swollen and fleeting fancies do not allow us to see the unity that is constant.”⁵² Contemplation, maintains Augustine, is the recognition of the soul that it is constituted in relation to God, that by nature it desires his unity, and that because of the soul’s likeness to him, it inclines towards him. Contemplation is the ability to judge all material reality as lower than the soul that judges and to judge the soul as lower than the standard by which it judges.

Cupiditas is the moral corollary to intellectual *falsitas*. While distinguished in *De vera religione*, *cupiditas* and *falsitas* function nearly synonymously for Augustine; both are an absolutizing of temporal, material existence, failing to recognize the participatory status of created, contingent matter – the erecting of an idol. Thus, in

⁵⁰ *vera rel.* 34.64 (CCSL 32 229). Gerard O’Daly notes that in *De vera religione* the source of *falsitas* “is said to reside neither in the objects themselves nor in the senses ... but in the mind’s mistakes.” Gerard O’Daly, “Error, falsitas,” *AugLex* (Basel/Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1986).

⁵¹ At the time of writing *De vera religione*, Augustine thought that with the help of God’s grace a vision of God can be attained in this life. In the *Retractationes* 1.2 he criticizes himself for this position articulated in *De beata vita* 4.25.

⁵² Augustine continues, “Places offer us things to love, times snatch away things we do love and leave behind in the soul a crowd of jostling fancies to stir up its greed (*cupiditas*) for one thing after another. In this way the spirit is made restless and wretched, as it longs to lay hold of the things it is held by.” *vera rel.* 35.65 (CCSL 32 230).

addition to the *falsitates* that cloud the intellect so that it cannot correctly distinguish the One Good from lesser material goods, there are also the moral *cupiditates* that obstruct the will from carrying out the desire of the intellect. Forms of the word *cupiditas* occur eleven times in *De vera religione*; each time in the context of describing temporal, material, or earthly lust and greed.⁵³

The triad of pleasure, pride, and curiosity, found frequently in Augustine's corpus, are the major obstacle also in *De vera religione*, hindering the soul in its ascent.⁵⁴ Pleasure, pride, and curiosity take what is relatively good and beautiful and endow it with the significance reserved for the ultimate good and beauty; as such, they are a form of idolatry – a false likeness or image claiming to be that which it is not. In each of the *cupiditates* Augustine sees a vice trying to imitate and image a virtue.⁵⁵ Thus, pleasure abuses the virtue of desiring. The soul wrongly judges that which is lower than itself to be higher than itself. It desires in temporal and carnal bodies the

⁵³ To take but one example: "Such is the life of human beings living from the body and wrapped up in greed and longings focused on time-bound things (*cupiditatibus rerum temporalium colligate*)." *vera rel.* 26.48 (CCSL 32 218). Four times forms of the word *cupiditas* are found in *vera rel.* 41.78 (CCSL 32 238-239) in the context of subjugating temporal desires in service of Christ.

⁵⁴ *vera rel.* 38.69 (CCSL 32 232): *Seruiunt enim cupiditati triplici uel uoluptatis uel excellentiae uel spectaculi*. This "three-fold greedy longing," maintains Augustine, is the three vices listed in the first epistle of John: "*uitia ... uel libidine uel superbia uel curiositate*" *vera rel.* 38.70 (CCSL 32 233). Christ conquers this "triple temptation." When tempted by the Devil to change stones into bread, Christ taught "that the lust for pleasure (*cupiditatem uoluptatis*) had to be tamed," Christ trampled on pride (*ita calcata superbia est*), by not bowing to the Devil in exchange for the kingdoms of the world. Lastly, Christ overcame curiosity (*curiositatis*) by not testing God on the temple peak. *vera rel.* 38.71 (CCSL 32 233). Willy Theiler sees in this triad of vice both the influence of Porphyry and the more patent presence of 1 John 2:15-16. *Porphyrios und Augustin* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1933), pp. 37-40.

⁵⁵ Van Fleteren points out that Augustine follows a schema used in Plato's *Republic* to link each virtue with a corollary vice (*Republic* IV.439d-e). Frederick Van Fleteren, "Augustine's '*De vera religione*: A New Approach,'" *Augustinianum* 16 (1976): 491-92. Vice as an imitation of virtue is also a theme in *Confessiones* II, in which vices are seen as perverse imitations of God.

eternal beauty and happiness that cannot be found in the temporal order.⁵⁶ Pride wrongly applies the virtue of courage; it wishes to conquer all things and make them subject to itself. Augustine describes pride as a “kind of appetite for unity and omnipotence.”⁵⁷ However, pride tends towards things of the temporal order, and so the good of freedom and control, which it desires, passes away like a shadow, leaving true freedom unattained. Lastly, curiosity has the corollary virtue of rationality. Rather than using the intellect to see and understand God in and through the material and thereby to ascend to him, curiosity does not move beyond temporal and material knowledge. In summary, *falsitates* are understood by Augustine as erroneous attributions or wrong judgments of eternal good to temporal objects, and thus they constitute epistemological errors, while *cupiditates* are the moral evils involved in these erroneous attributions. In other words, they are not two different evils, but two angles from which to look at the same problem.

Significantly, *cupiditas* also makes an appearance in the passage under consideration (*De vera religione* 12.24). In this paragraph the soul is called to beat “those greedy desires (*cupiditates*) it has been cherishing in itself by mortal enjoyments (*fruendo mortalibus*).” The soul that is “restored to health,” which with “mind and good will” is reformed by grace to overcome *falsitas* and *cupiditas*, “will come to enjoy God (*fruetur deo*).” *Cupiditates* are overcome, explains *De vera religione* 12.24, by rightly judging their material and temporal nature. “In this way,” explains Augustine, “you become spiritual, judging all things, so as to be judged by no one.”⁵⁸ The fascinating use of the verb *frui* in *De vera religione* 12.24 is hardly

⁵⁶ *vera rel.* 45.84 (CCSL 32 243).

⁵⁷ *vera rel.* 45.84 (CCSL 32 243).

⁵⁸ *vera rel.* 12.24 (CCSL 32 202): *Ita fit homo spiritalis omnia iudicans, ut ipse a nemine iudicetur.*

accidental. Indeed, “enjoying” God is at the heart of Augustine’s theology and is important already in this early work. In this section, Augustine uses the verb *frui* twice, and in contrasting ways: it is wrong to “enjoy” mortal goods precisely because they are *mortal* and ought instead to be “used,” so that one may arrive at what is really to be enjoyed: *frui deo*. The important Augustinian distinction between *frui* and *uti* is given shape in *De vera religione*.

Judgment allows one to distinguish rightly what ought to be used and what ought to be enjoyed. For example, Augustine writes that by not “enjoying (*fruebatur*)” God, but wishing instead to “enjoy bodies (*frui corporibus*)” the soul “tilts towards nothingness.”⁵⁹ Wrongly judging the material and temporal nature of created goods leads to evil, sin, and pain: “And what is the pain of the spirit but the lack of those changeable things it used to enjoy or had hoped it would be able to enjoy?”⁶⁰ It is on this account that the Devil fell. Rather than enjoy God’s greatness (*fruuntur maiestate ipsius*), the Devil wanted “to enjoy what was less” – his own pride – and thereby “enjoy his own power more than God’s.”⁶¹ It is not that temporal and material goods are evil; rather, their image-like nature needs to be rightly judged. The good of the body remains a good, explains Augustine, but it is lower than spiritual goods, and so “it is shameful to wallow in the love of this last and lowest of good things when you have been granted the privilege of cleaving to and enjoying the first and highest.”⁶²

⁵⁹ *vera rel.* 11.21 (CCSL 32 200).

⁶⁰ *vera rel.* 12.23 (CCSL 32 202): *Quid autem dolor qui dicitur animi, nisi carere mutabilibus rebus, quibus fruebatur aut frui se posse sperauerat?*

⁶¹ *vera rel.* 13.26 (CCSL 32 203): *quia eo quod minus erat frui uoluit, cum magis uoluit sua potentia frui quam dei.*

⁶² *vera rel.* 45.83 (CCSL 32 242): *cui primis inhaerere fruique concessum est.*

Judging rightly between *frui* and *uti*, then, is essential to the ascent of the image.⁶³ In *De vera religione* 47.91, Augustine considers what we love in another human being.⁶⁴ he makes the initially striking claim that we ought to “use” another human being. Here he follows the eudaemonian ethics of Aristotle and the Stoics, maintaining that there is “correct use” that befits the nature of any thing or person.⁶⁵ When someone is loved *in deo* he is rightly “used.”⁶⁶ The person who loves the image of God in the other, writes Augustine, “makes use of friends for practicing gratitude, makes use of enemies for practicing patience, makes use of whomever he can for showing kindness, makes use of everyone for showing good will.”⁶⁷ Temporal use, for Augustine, finds its right moral ordering in relation to eternal enjoyment of God.

De vera religione thus presents an account of love of God and neighbor that is non-competitive. In loving one’s neighbor as oneself, love is elevated from the

⁶³ Henry Chadwick notes, “In ‘correct use’ there is an implication of reflective detachment, whereas by contrast what is enjoyed is all-absorbing. In Augustine the content of *frui* is love.” Henry Chadwick, “Frui-uti,” *AugLex* (Basel/Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1986). Relevant literature on this subject includes Ragnar Holte, *Béatitude et Sagesse: Saint Augustin et le problème de la fin de l’homme dans la philosophie ancienne* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1962), pp. 200-78; William Riordan O’Connor, “The Uti/Frui Distinction in Augustine’s Ethics,” *Augustinian Studies* 14 (1983): 45-62; Oliver O’Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in Augustine* (New Haven: Yale, 1980); idem, “*Usus* and *Fruitio* in Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* I,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, 33 (1982): 361-397; John Rist, *Augustine. Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 159-168.

⁶⁴ The discussion here follows a trajectory similar to the more developed and well-known presentation in *De doctrina Christiana* 1.3-40.

⁶⁵ Another important touchstone for the discussion is *De diversis questionibus octaginta tribus* 30. There Augustine more explicitly aligns himself with Cicero’s distinction between *honestum*, that which is desired for itself (*propter se petitur*), and *utile*, that which is desired for secondary reasons. Augustine adopts Cicero’s terminology and asserts that *honestum* is the eternal good to be enjoyed and *utile* all temporal and material goods to be used to arrive at the eternal good.

⁶⁶ The phrase *frui in deo* comes from Paul’s letter to Philemon verse 20: “*Ego te fruar in Domino.*”

⁶⁷ *vera rel.* 47.91 (CCSL 32 246-247).

temporal and material to the eternal and so can partake in the “ascent” that *De vera religione* enjoins. Another human being ought not to be loved as a mule or a bath or a peacock, that is, as “some temporal enjoyment or advantage.”⁶⁸ Indeed, Augustine continues, the other should not even be loved on account of personal relation – loved as a brother, sister, or spouse – for even this love is temporal and material; it is to love not what belongs to God but to you, maintains Augustine; such love is “personal and private to you and not what is common to all.”⁶⁹ Rather strikingly, Augustine asserts, “Let us then hate temporal kinships, if we are on fire with love of eternity.”⁷⁰ To love one’s neighbor as oneself is to love what is eternal in him: not loving his possessions or his body but the *imago dei* in him.⁷¹

In short, *De vera religione* suggests many of the issues surrounding the *uti-frui* distinction that Augustine will address shortly afterward, and in more detail, in the first book of *De doctrina christiana*. William O’Connor rightly concludes that Augustine values the human person in light of the *imago dei* and that this is the theology that undergirds the *uti-frui* distinction: “Augustine has consistently maintained that purely temporal relationships, and the temporal aspects of the human being, are not to be enjoyed.”⁷² In not *enjoying* “time-bound things,” the correct *use* of temporal and material reality is discovered – it can function as “a ladder to things that are immortal”⁷³ and so aid one in his ascent to “return” to God.

The Necessity of Grace in the Ascent

⁶⁸ *vera rel.* 46.87 (CCSL 32 244).

⁶⁹ *vera rel.* 46.88 (CCSL 32 245).

⁷⁰ *vera rel.* 46.89 (CCSL 32 245).

⁷¹ *vera rel.* 47.90 (CCSL 32 246).

⁷² William Riordan O’Connor, “The Uti/Frui Distinction in Augustine’s Ethics,” *Augustinian Studies* 14 (1983): 45-62.

⁷³ *vera rel.* 29.52 (CCSL 32 221).

De vera religione 12.24, which I am arguing contains the blueprint to the entire treatise, shows Augustine's deep awareness that a pure "mind and good will" is insufficient for the fallen person to overcome the intellectual *falsitas* and moral *cupiditas* to make the ascent.⁷⁴ Human beings are often unable to judge what is to be used and what is to be enjoyed. In this, Augustine differs sharply from Plotinus. For Augustine, to return and be reformed (*revertetur reformata*) necessitates the grace of God. Grace must assist (*adiuuari*) the intellectual and moral weakness of the human person. Augustine writes in *De vera religione* 12.24 that when the soul overcomes the *cupiditas* of "mortal enjoyments" by the help of "the grace of God, then without a shadow of a doubt it will be restored to health and will turn back."⁷⁵ Augustine's attempt to unpack how the grace of the incarnate Christ serves to aid the ascent of the image makes up a substantial part of the treatise.

Augustine's disillusionment with a Platonic philosophy of ascent is well known. In Book VII of the *Confessions* he remarks on the lack of humility in Platonic narratives of ascent, which despised the humility of the Incarnation and the humility requisite to accept such grace.⁷⁶ These criticisms are suggested already in *De vera religione*. While embracing the participatory metaphysic espoused by Plotinian philosophy, Augustine expresses less optimism with regard to the ability of the human

⁷⁴ Joseph Pegon notes that Augustine's "ascent" mapped in *De vera religione* is much different from that of the Platonic tradition. It is not a goal that one conquers but one that is received. Pegon writes, "Le terminus ad quem du retour chez Augustin prend ainsi un caractère personnel qui ne semble pas exister dans le néoplatonisme." Joseph Pegon, *Foi Chrétienne*, p. 480. Thus, Pegon goes on to explain that the ascent is not solely a human effort. Rather, with mercy Christ comes to span the vast abyss between the human person and God; grace comes by way of descent. Le Blond has also noted the Pauline theology of grace present in Augustine's theology of ascent. Le Blond, *Les Conversions*, p. 46.

⁷⁵ *vera rel.* 12.24 (CCSL 32 202).

⁷⁶ In *Conf.* VII.9.14 Augustine writes, "[T]hat 'the word was made flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1: 13-14), I did not read there."

image to arrive at its goal through a Platonic mode of *katharsis*, because of his awareness of intellectual *falsitas* and moral *cupiditas*. Throughout *De vera religione* there remains an ineluctable tension between a Platonic account of image and its “return,” on the one hand, and the recognition of the danger of self-assured pride in the idea that such a “return” is possible for fallen man, on the other hand.

Some of Augustine’s most effusive praise for Platonic philosophy comes from *De vera religione*. He writes that “with a few changes here and there in their words and assertions, [the Platonists] would have become Christians.”⁷⁷ In the same passage, however, he remains critical of the duplicity inherent in their philosophical system. Why, despite having rival philosophical schools, did the philosophers share common temples? They proclaimed to the people their adherence to the pagan gods and offered sacrifices in public, but privately they disputed among themselves about the nature and even the very existence of the gods. It was out of civic duty rather than doctrinal conviction that they offered their sacrifices.

The philosophy and the religion of the Platonists were at odds, maintains Augustine; their philosophy was not amenable to *hoi polloi*, and as a result the philosophers tolerated lies and myths for the religious lives of their people. Augustine remonstrates, “[T]hey upheld one thing publicly in religion with the people at large and defended quite a different position privately.”⁷⁸ Augustine argues sharply against such bifurcation: “[W]e must repudiate all those who neither philosophize about sacred matters nor attach sacred rites to philosophy.”⁷⁹ In particular, Augustine lambasts the cult of the angels and the superstitious fortune-telling practices and

⁷⁷ *vera rel.* 4.7 (CCSL 32 192): *paucis mutatis verbis atque sententiis Christiani fierent.*

⁷⁸ *vera rel.* 1.1 (CCSL 32 187).

⁷⁹ *vera rel.* 7.12 (CCSL 32 196).

augury promoted by Porphyry.⁸⁰ Thus, neo-Platonic religious praxis is emblematic of the separation of faith and reason: “[T]here is not one thing called philosophy, that is devotion to wisdom, and another called religion.”⁸¹ The dualism in Platonic philosophy between reason and faith as well as between doctrine and cult reserved the “return” of the image to the spiritual élite. In contrast, salvation offered in the Christian faith, while it is an ascent in wisdom, is not divorced from the sacramental practice of every Christian.⁸² To all people, explains Augustine, the Catholic Church “offers the possibility of sharing in the grace of God.”⁸³ The harmony of faith and reason, for Augustine, entails an economy of grace and an ascent in wisdom that is not the preserve of the cultured élite.

In what is perhaps the most rhapsodic part of *De vera religione*, Augustine declares that the Catholic faith supersedes Platonic philosophy. The Christian approach unites religion and philosophy, faith and reason. It offers a universal way of salvation, available to all. Indeed, if the ancient Platonists were alive today and could see ordinary people believing divine mysteries, witness “whole countries enlightened

⁸⁰ Augustine refers to those who “gape open-mouthed over the dregs of yesterday’s drinking bout and scrutinize the entrails of dead beasts for divine oracles.” *vera rel.* 3.5 (CCSL 32 192). This is direct satire of Porphyry’s followers, who were given to such forms of divinization. Porphyry is mentioned by name alongside these practices in *De civitate dei* X.9-11. Likewise, in what du Roy sees as the anti-Porphyrian conclusion to *De vera religione*, Augustine dismisses obsession with placating angels, whether good or bad, for, he argues, the good ones will not be slighted with the honour going to God, nor will the bad ones have power to vent their anger. *vera rel.* 55.111 (CCSL 32 259).

⁸¹ *vera rel.* 7.12 (CCSL 32 196).

⁸² *vera rel.* 5.8 (CCSL 32 193). Augustine contrasts the sacramental discipline of the Catholic Church with the ecumenism of the philosophers who would worship at the same temple as those with whom they disagreed about the nature and existence of the gods. While the Platonists separate philosophy and religion, writes Augustine, “those whose teaching we do not approve of are not even admitted to share the mysteries with us.” *vera rel.* 5.8 (CCSL 32 193).

⁸³ *vera rel.* 6.10 (CCSL 32 194).

by the doctrine of salvation,”⁸⁴ and see that by the blood of the martyrs churches are being erected in previously barbarous nations,⁸⁵ if they could see thousands renouncing marriage for the kingdom, once desolate islands and empty deserts being filled with those “forsaking the riches and honors of this world, [who] wish to dedicate their whole lives to the one supreme God,”⁸⁶ and if they could observe that now throughout the entire world the whole human race says in one voice, “we have lifted up our hearts to the Lord,” then surely they would with the change of a few words become Christians (*paucis mutatis verbis atque sentiis Christiani fierent*).⁸⁷

It is precisely the universality of the Christian faith – its insistence that wisdom descends to the many – that constitutes its apologetic leverage. Salvation, maintains Augustine, is for the entire human race, which is being refashioned and prepared for eternal life.⁸⁸ The soul, which is for Augustine the locus of the image, is so “bundled up in its sins” that it is unable to “return,” to “stride up to a likeness of God from its earthly life.”⁸⁹ Grace must assist the intellectual and moral weakness of the human person. It is grace that makes possible the ascent: “God’s inexplicable mercy comes to the rescue both of individuals and of the whole human race by means of a creature subject to change and yet obedient to divine laws, to remind the soul of its primal and perfect nature.”⁹⁰ This “creature,” is, of course, the Son of God, and the Incarnation signals the economy in which God’s grace is diffused to the many.

⁸⁴ *vera rel.* 3.4 (CCSL 32 190).

⁸⁵ *vera rel.* 3.5 (CCSL 32 191).

⁸⁶ *vera rel.* 3.5 (CCSL 32 191).

⁸⁷ *vera rel.* 4.7 (CCSL 32 192). Cf. Goulven Madec, “Si Plato uiueret... (Augustin, *De uera religione*, 3.3),” in *Néoplatonisme. Mélanges offerts à Jean Trouillard*, ed. Jean Trouillard (Fontenay-aux-Roses: École normale supérieure, 1981), pp. 233-47.

⁸⁸ *vera rel.* 7.13 (CCSL 32 196).

⁸⁹ *vera rel.* 10.19 (CCSL 32 199).

⁹⁰ *vera rel.* 10.19 (CCSL 32 199).

De vera religione 12.24 makes clear that it is the “grace of God” that assists the soul to overcome moral *cupiditas* and intellectual *falistas* to “return” to the Holy Trinity. Grace, for Augustine, is fundamentally the person of Christ, who diffuses his own goodness. He is presented in *De vera religione* both as eternal Wisdom and as the incarnate Christ. Augustine writes, “[T]he grace of God (*gratiam dei*) ... came through the very Wisdom of God taking to itself the man by whom we have been summoned into freedom.”⁹¹ *De vera religione* 16.30-32 presents a consideration of what is achieved through the Incarnation. Christ’s Incarnation is a moral pedagogy consonant with the student, namely, “the fleshly-minded.”⁹² Christ came in a manner adaptable to human sense, and he taught by the example of his own life. His poverty, chastity, and obedience were the transvaluation of prevailing values: where people were running after riches and pleasures, he chose to be poor; where they chose honor and power, he refused to be crowned a king; where they valued children of the flesh, he scorned marriage. For the sake of truth, he chose to suffer the injustice and pain from which human beings naturally shrink.⁹³ Augustine concludes, “So the whole of his life on earth, then, as lived by the man he had the goodness to take to himself, was a lesson in morals.”⁹⁴

Christ’s life provides the moral example of the ascent precisely in the humility that Augustine finds absent in Platonic accounts of ascent. Self-assured Platonic philosophies of “return” taught that some among the fallen human race could avoid entrapment in the *falistas* and *cupiditas* of their present condition and ascend back to the One. This was not, however, an option available to the masses. This, explains

⁹¹ *vera rel.* 17.33 (CCSL 32 207).

⁹² *vera rel.* 16.30 (CCSL 32 205).

⁹³ *vera rel.* 16.31 (CCSL 32 206).

⁹⁴ *vera rel.* 16.32 (CCSL 32 207).

Augustine, is why they created a bifurcation of reason and faith, of philosophy and cult. *De vera religione* insists that the Incarnation offers a universal way of “return.” The Incarnation is a testament to the humility of Christ, who stoops to take human life upon himself, to teach the “fleshly-minded” the way of ascent. Christ’s entire human life was a divine pedagogy – leading the human person by the hand in his “return.” The soul is set free from corporeal, mortal enjoyments by “the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”⁹⁵ The Incarnation is also a testament to the reality that grace is not something extrinsic to the human person but comes to inhere properly in the human soul and transform his human, embodied existence. As such, the Incarnation does not remain a remote pedagogical life lesson; instead, as we will see, the operation of the Spirit in the life of the Christian allows the ascent to become an experienced reality.

Ascent to the Holy Trinity

The terminus of the “return” is, as *De vera religione* 12.24 states, to be reshaped by Wisdom (*reformata per sapientiam*) to enjoy (*fruetur*) God through the Holy Spirit, who is the gift of God (*donum dei*). For Augustine the Holy Trinity is not only the goal of the ascent but is also the means through which this ascent is made possible. Through Christ, the Wisdom never shaped but giving shape to all things, and the Holy Spirit, the gift of God, the human person is able to ascend once again to him who fulfils human nature. The Trinitarian formula in *De vera religione* 12.24 makes clear how Augustine’s Plotinian proclivities find their fulfillment in Nicene Trinitarianism. At this point, then, I will consider each of these references to the three Persons of the Trinity in turn (*unus, sapientia, and donum dei*).

⁹⁵ *vera rel.* 53.102 (CCSL 32 253).

In the Platonic mindset, multiplicity is a falling away from primordial unity, so that the restoration of the soul is posited as a movement *a multis ad unum*.⁹⁶ The Fall, for Augustine, is the loss of the innocence of paradise; his description, however, is given Platonic dress: the Fall drove “man away in all directions from the unity of God.”⁹⁷ Return to unity, which is the aim of the ascent to God, is the drive of *De vera religione*. This unity is that of the Holy Trinity, but it is the Father who is primarily understood as the “One.” Indeed, the treatise concludes that all things “have been made by the One and direct themselves towards the One.”⁹⁸ The return to unity occurs by the refashioning of the image from the “old man” to the “new man.” To describe this process, Augustine mentions in *De vera religione* 26.49 the same seven stages of restoration that he also discusses in *De quantitate animae*. The steps describe the ascent from changing, temporal, and material loves to unchanging, eternal, and immaterial loves; it is a gradual acclimatization to the things of the Spirit, through what Augustine describes as “setting up a ladder to things that are immortal.”⁹⁹ In the sixth step, the human person is “perfected in the form and shape which was made to the image and likeness of God” for the vision of God.¹⁰⁰ These steps of ascent are the process of exchanging “the image of the earthly man” for “the

⁹⁶ Cf. Miguel Ángel Álvarez Miñambres’s insightful article on the ascent of the human soul to the unity of God in *De vera religione*: “Unidad y Unicidad de Dios en *De vera religione* de San Agustín,” *Religion y Cultura* 50 (2004): 653-86.

⁹⁷ *vera rel.* 21.41 (CCSL 32 212-213).

⁹⁸ *vera rel.* 55.113 (CCSL 32 260). Here Josef Lössl’s analysis regarding the motif of “the One” is particularly germane. He notes that there are over 400 references to *unus* in *De vera religione* and that Augustine successfully aligns biblical monotheism with Platonic philosophy. “The One,” maintains Lössl, is a theme able to make sense of the text as a unit both doctrinally and structurally. Josef Lössl, “‘The One’: A guiding concept in Augustine’s *De vera religione*,” *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 40 (1994): 79-103.

⁹⁹ *vera rel.* 29.52 (CCSL 32 221).

¹⁰⁰ *vera rel.* 26.49 (CCSL 32 219).

image of the new people.”¹⁰¹ All things, maintains Augustine, desire to “return” to their source, of which they are the image. He writes, “All things which seek unity have this rule, or form, or example, or any other word by which it allows itself to be called, because it alone completes the likeness of him from whom it received being.”¹⁰²

Augustine identifies “wisdom” (*sapientia*) with the Son, who recreates the fallen image after his perfect image. “Wisdom” is traditional anti-Arian terminology, which Augustine inherited.¹⁰³ Using explicitly Nicene language, *De vera religione* 12.24 identifies Wisdom as the one who formed creation, while being herself unformed (*non formatam, sed per quam formantur universa*). As the exact *similitudo* of the Father, Wisdom fashions the image according to herself, judging according to the standard she herself is. Augustine thus understands the role of Wisdom by the correlative actions of “judgment” and “formation.”¹⁰⁴ Augustine also attributes the refashioning of the image to Wisdom, after whom the soul was originally fashioned, so that recreation follows the pattern of creation. Here again, Augustine takes up the theme of judgment. It is the mark of the higher to judge the lower according to the standard or measurement that the higher knows. Eternal Wisdom is alone in not being judged, since of her “not even the Father makes judgments, for she is not less than he

¹⁰¹ *vera rel.* 27.50 (CCSL 32 219).

¹⁰² *vera rel.* 31.58 (CCSL 33 225): *Omnia enim, quae appetunt unitatem, hanc habent regulam vel formam vel exemplum vel si quo alio verbo dici se sinit, quoniam sola eius similitudinem, a quo esse accepit, impleuit.*

¹⁰³ The term “Wisdom” for the Son was claimed by both Arians and Nicenes in the context of the Son’s role in creation, the former famously insisting that Proverbs 8:22 favored their case. By associating “Wisdom” with the adjective “unformed” Augustine links himself with the Nicene tradition.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Marie-Anne Vannier, “*Creatio*”, “*conversio*”, “*formatio*” chez S. Augustin (Fribourg: Éditions universitaires, 1997).

is.”¹⁰⁵ Wisdom is the perfect resemblance of the One and is, therefore, in perfect unity with it. The wise soul judges all things by knowledge or participation in eternal Wisdom, who fashioned all things. Judging “the way something ought to be” is the mark of wisdom; it demonstrates the soul’s conformity in judgment to a higher standard; it demonstrates its participation in Wisdom.¹⁰⁶ Eternal Wisdom is not judged but is rather the standard or measure that judges and forms all created existents.¹⁰⁷ In *De vera religione*, Wisdom creates and recreates judging according to its own form or likeness, which it does on account of its perfect union with the One.

Du Roy notes that in Augustine’s corpus, the title *donum dei* for the Holy Spirit makes its debut in *De vera religione*; this is also the first time the Spirit is identified as the means through which God is enjoyed (*fruetur*).¹⁰⁸ Earlier in the same work, while arguing from the unity of operations in the creation narrative to the one nature of God, Augustine also uses the term *donum*: “[E]ach and every nature has been made simultaneously by the Father through the Son in the Gift of the Holy Spirit

¹⁰⁵ *vera rel.* 31.58 (CCSL 32 225).

¹⁰⁶ Augustine explains that judgment is different from knowledge. Knowledge is the ability “to see that something is or is not such-and-such.” Judgment, on the other hand, introduces an “ought”: “[I]t ought to have been such-and-such (*ita esse debuit*).” In judgment, the mind adverts to a higher standard than the object immediately in question; the higher standard is the eternal law in which the wise person participates. *vera rel.* 31.58 (CCSL 32 225). Again, see Bernard Lonergan’s important contribution, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, which is devoted to a study of the relationship between knowledge and judgment.

¹⁰⁷ *vera rel.* 31.57 (CCSL 32 224).

¹⁰⁸ Du Roy, *Intelligence de la foi*, p. 320. Du Roy goes on to explain that the very first Trinitarian schema in Augustine’s corpus occurs in *De beata vita*. In this work, the Spirit introduces one to the Truth. Enjoying this Truth, the soul is united with the Supreme Measure, the Father. In *De moribus* the Spirit comes as Charity to unite the human soul with God. Thus, there is a gradation of precision in language with respect to the role of the Holy Spirit in the early works, culminating in *De vera religione*, where the Spirit is the gift *through whom* we enjoy God.

(*dono spiritus sancti*).”¹⁰⁹ *Epistle 11*, which was penned during the same time period, also uses the term *donum* for the Spirit. Du Roy suggests that Augustine inherits the language of *donum* to describe the Spirit from Hilary of Poitiers’s *De Trinitate* II.1. Thus, Augustine’s use of the term *donum* for the Spirit would indicate that the young theologian was familiar with this treatise already in 391.¹¹⁰ Du Roy’s hypothesis is not beyond the scope of possibility; however, there are few clear indicators that verify it.¹¹¹ The application of Ockham’s razor might lead one to conclude that *donum* as a term for the Spirit was simply common Christian vocabulary inherited from the New Testament and not necessary proof of Augustine’s early knowledge of Hilary.¹¹² Regardless, the growing confidence in Augustine’s early theology that the Holy Trinity is “enjoyed” *through* the Holy Spirit, the gift of God, is expressed with precision in *De vera religione*.

Augustine concludes *De vera religione* by stating, “That is why it is incumbent on us to worship and confess the very Gift of God (*donum dei*), together with the Father and the Son unchanging – a Trinity of one substance, one God from

¹⁰⁹ *vera rel.* 7.13 (CCSL 32 196): *simul omnia et unamquamque naturam patrem fecisse per filium in dono spiritus sancti.*

¹¹⁰ Du Roy, *Intelligence de la foi*, p. 321. There is no doubt that at some early point Augustine read Hilary’s work on the Trinity. Lewis Ayres demonstrates that Augustine’s use of *aeternitas* already in *De moribus* I. 30.62 (CSEL 90 65-66) is evidence of the young African theologian’s knowledge of Hilary, who alone in the Latin tradition describes the Holy Trinity as “infinity in the eternal (*aeternitas*), the form in the image and the use in the gift.” Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 58. The seed of this Trinitarian theology (*aeternitas, imago, donum*) has germinated from its original presentation in *De moribus* to its flowering in *De vera religione*.

¹¹¹ Du Roy notes the use of *aeternitas* in *De vera religione* and *De moribus* to describe the Father, as well as the use of *munus* and *donum* in *De vera religione* to refer to the Spirit. Further, Du Roy points out that *munus* and *donum* as terms referring to the Spirit are present in the contemporaneous *Epistle 11*. Du Roy concludes, “On trouve donc dès l’époque du *De vera religione* les trois titres donnés par Hilaire et rapportés par le *De Trinitate* d’Augustin.” Du Roy, *Intelligence de la foi*, p. 321.

¹¹² Cf. Acts 2:38; Acts 10:44; Romans 5:5.

whom we are, through whom we are, in whom we are, from whom we have departed, whom we have become unlike, by whom we have not been allowed to perish; the Source to which we are retracing our steps.”¹¹³ The Triune terminus of the ascent is emphatically articulated, as Augustine recapitulates the central terminological references to each Person of the Holy Trinity. This quotation is representative of the treatise as a whole. The Father is identified as *unus*, the Son as *forma* and *similitudo*, and the Spirit as *donum dei*. The entire movement is presented in the Platonic philosophical garb of *exitus* and *reditus*; a participatory metaphysic comes to the fore in Augustine’s insistence that all created existence originates from, is held in being by, and returns to its source, so that the image, which has fallen from its likeness (*dissimiles facti sumus*), is refashioned according to its form. Significantly, however, Augustine’s Platonic proclivities are augmented and transformed by means of Christian content: the terminus of the ascent is the enjoyment of the Holy Trinity.

Conclusion

The ascent of the *imago* in Augustine’s early writings finds its most precise and developed presentation in *De vera religione*. Augustine’s injunction to ascend is, in many ways, quite similar to that of Plotinus: Augustine urges an intellectual and moral *katharsis* so that the soul can share in what is proper to it. The ascent is, therefore, properly a “return” – the soul has a “memory” of its origin and an innate desire to return whence it came. Like Plotinus, Augustine understands the ascent to involve a purification of the senses, which consists in the recognition of the “image-

¹¹³ *vera rel.* 55.113 (CCSL 32 260): *Quare ipsum donum dei cum patre et filio aequae incommutabile colere et tenere nos conuenit: unius substantiae trinitatem unum deum, a quo sumus, per quem sumus, in quo sumus, a quo discessimus, cui dissimiles facti sumus, a quo perire non permissi sumus, principium, ad quod recurrimus.*

like” quality of all created objects that are to be passed through to the reality itself. Correct judgment is the *sine qua non* to overcoming the intellectual *falsitas* and moral *cupiditas* that obstruct the image’s return.

I have argued that *De vera religione* 12.24 constitutes the heart of the treatise. Proceeding from this paragraph I have proposed a new reading of *De vera religione*, which takes into account the significance of a Plotinian account of image for Augustine’s theology of ascent. However, in so doing, I have made clear that Augustine’s enthusiasm regarding Platonism has its limits, already in this early work. In this short paragraph of *De vera religione*, Augustine expresses the *terminus ad quem* of the ascent and the requisite steps to arrive at the goal – “setting up a ladder to things that are immortal.”¹¹⁴ Thus, while in some important ways Augustine adopts his Platonic background, he also transforms it significantly. *De vera religione* is a theological account of how Christ’s grace given in the Incarnation serves to properly inhere in the human soul, so that “with mind and good will” turned back “from the many things that change” it can ascend to the one Holy Trinity of which it is an image. Frederick Van Fleteren rightly notes that *De vera religione* 12.24 “places the Trinity in the economy of creation and personal salvation: Through the unformed wisdom of God (Christ) and through the gift of God (the Holy Spirit), man will enjoy (*frui*) God.”¹¹⁵ The theology of ascent in *De vera religione* revolutionizes the philosophy that Augustine had received from the *Enneads*. While it still involves a return *ad unum*, in Augustine’s approach, the return becomes a return to the unity of the Holy Trinity professed at Nicaea. The refashioning of the “new man” is the work of the unformed Wisdom, who refashions the human person according to the standard

¹¹⁴ *vera rel.* 29.52 (CCSL 32 221).

¹¹⁵ Van Fleteren, “Augustine’s ‘*De vera religione*,’” 482.

of her own perfect likeness and unity with the Father. Lastly, the Holy Spirit as *donum dei* allows the human person to “enjoy” God. The verb *frui*, used in precise theological distinction from *uti* in *De vera religione*, expresses the particularly Augustinian insight that all created existence is to be “used” for the ascent to the Trinity. For Augustine, one ought never to rest content “enjoying” material and temporal goods, for this would be to create an idol. The distinction between *uti* and *frui*, then, is integral to Augustine’s theology of return. An ersatz “enjoyment” of temporal goods falls prey to the dissemblance of created goods – claiming totality for them and failing to recognize their participatory character. *De vera religione* proposes the “use” of created existence as a ladder on which to make the ascent or as a transitory image through which one may see a resemblance of the eternal – the *terminus* of the image’s return.

Conclusion

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the theology of the *imago dei* for Augustine's thought. The image of God in the human person grounds the participatory ontology that is foundational to his anthropology. The mystery of the human person, for Augustine, is ultimately intelligible only in relation to God, in whom he lives, moves, and has his being (Acts 17:28). For obvious reasons do students of Augustine turn to *De Trinitate* for an account of his theology of the image of God. There Augustine expresses the triadic movements within one person of understanding, willing, and loving as an image of the unity and threeness of God. Indeed, Augustine's understanding of *imago dei* as outlined in this thesis lies at the basis of his later theological development, both in terms of his anthropology and in other areas of his theology. My thesis has, therefore, turned to Augustine's early thought to analyze what sources influenced and shaped the African Doctor's initial theology of the *imago dei*. By definition, any theology of the *imago dei* is reciprocally constituted: it is in contemplating our own understanding, willing, and loving that we come to know something of who God is; at the same time, the nature of the image is such that by getting to know God, we also come to know more fully what it means to be *human*, precisely because an image is unintelligible apart from the participatory union it has with its source. This reciprocal structure of image theology is the ground of Judeo-Christian theological discourse, and it is Augustine who is perhaps the foremost representative of speculative inquiry into this theology of the *imago dei*.

I have attempted to contextualize Augustine's theology of the image of God by focusing on "input fields" to his early thought. My thesis has been attentive to two

significant sources of influence. First, I have argued that Latin pro-Nicene theology was committed to an articulation of the “image of God” that was aligned with the doctrine of the *homoousion*. Defenders of the Nicene cause considered anathema any expression of “image of God” that suggested that as image Christ was secondary, subordinate, or different from his source in substance. Latin pro-Nicene theology could envision the *imago dei* only as equality with God. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it was difficult for such theology to link the *imago dei* with the notion that the human person was created in the image of God. The second significant source of influence on Augustine’s early theology of the *imago dei* is a neo-Platonic, particularly, Plotinian, philosophical conception of the world. At the heart of Plotinus’s cosmogony and his metaphysics lies a philosophy of image. In this framework an image is derived, revelatory, and ultimately, ordered to return to its primary source. By definition this conception of an image entails subordination.

These two influences result, at first blush, in diametrically opposed conclusions. Either the image is – as the preceding generation of Latin theologians argued – *homoousion* with its source or, as in the philosophy of Plotinus, the image is derived from and of a different substance than its source. To reformulate this problematic: either the *imago dei* is an expression of the unity of the divine substance (here the Latin pro-Nicene party appealed especially to Colossians 1:15) or the *imago dei* is a created reflection of and participation in the divine substance (the traditional interpretation of Genesis 1:26). The theologies of Hilary of Poitiers, Marius Victorinus, and Ambrose of Milan reflect this tension. As Christological controversies were foremost in their mind, theology of the image of God served for them as an expression of the Nicene faith. The “image of the invisible God” was identical with its source: the image also was invisible, eternal, and existing without

any trace of diversity in substance. Hilary, Victorinus, and Ambrose had difficulty, therefore, affirming that the human person was the *imago dei*. They preferred to express this image-like nature with the more guarded phrase *ad imaginem dei* or *secundum imaginem*.

The genius of Augustine's theology, evident already clearly in his early writings, is his synthesis of these two influences. By drawing on Plotinian thought, Augustine articulated a theology of the *imago dei* that had eluded his Latin pro-Nicene predecessors. I have argued that although Augustine's early theology of image builds on that of Hilary of Poitiers, Marius Victorinus, and Ambrose of Milan, Augustine was able to affirm, in ways that his predecessors were not, that both Christ and the human person are the *imago dei*. My thesis suggests that this achievement was on account of Augustine's early deep engagement with Plotinian philosophy. Differing historical-theological contexts allowed Augustine to start from different presuppositions and with different concerns than the preceding generation.

Augustine's primary aim was not to demonstrate that the *imago dei* is *homoousion* with its source; rather, his early dialogues reveal a sustained concern to account for the philosophical nature of an image. What is the relation of an image to its source? Initially, Augustine suggests that an image seems to be false because it falsely represents itself to be something while it is only a shadow or reflection or a memory – not the reality itself. Augustine points to the image of a bent oar in the water or a city in the mind. However, in further discussion, the Cassiciacum dialogues suggest that these images are “false” only because of a false judgment, which fails to take into account their true nature as *images*. “Image,” in Augustine's conception, cannot be univocally predicated, but exists as a participatory expression of its source; it is to be passed through (*uti*) to attain eternal enjoyment (*frui*). In the

final analysis, the dialogues articulate a Platonic vision of an image whose most primordial nature is not falsehood, but truth. An image is recognized as “true” when a finite nature is affirmed – a finitude that participates in and reveals the infinite.

It is this understanding of the nature of an image that Augustine leverages to escape the problematic raised by the Skeptics in *Contra Academicos*. The Skeptics maintained that no correspondence exists between eternal truth and this temporal order in flux. Human temporal and material finitude entails closing the horizon to the possibility of ever knowing eternal truth. Augustine’s positive and Platonic evaluation of the nature of an image that participates in eternal truth and reveals it in the temporal order establishes the grounds for his theology of the Incarnation. In *Contra Academicos*, the literary figure of Proteus both “manifests and bears the person of truth”; he is described as an “image of the truth” and functions, I have argued, as an expression of the Incarnation – he serves to affirm that certainty about eternal truth can be had in the temporal order precisely because he is “handed over by a god.” Thus, a broadly positive philosophy of image as participating in and showing forth eternal truth frames Augustine’s early understanding of the Incarnation.

This understanding of an image in Augustine’s early thought reaches its full expression in *De vera religione*, where Augustine speaks unambiguously of all temporal, material reality as an image which is to be “used” as a ladder to ascend to the eternal and immaterial good to be “enjoyed.” In this work, Augustine also situates his theology of the Incarnation within a broader philosophy of image. However, despite this Plotinian worldview of an image that issues out and returns back to its source, Augustine’s understanding of this movement departs in significant ways from that of Plotinus. Unlike the mechanical cosmogony of Plotinus, the descent of the divine image is not a fall or dissipation from a luminous realm, but a freely chosen

movement of love and grace. In his loving descent the divine image restores the fallen human image within himself, allowing the human image to participate in his return and ascent.

The uniqueness of Augustine's theology, seen in light of the preceding generation of Latin pro-Nicene theologians, is his ability to affirm the *imago dei* of both Christ and the human person. Augustine structures his early theology of image within a Platonic participatory ontology that links image and source, so that the finite image shares in and reveals something of the infinite. It is out of this philosophical context of image that Augustine develops his early theology of the Incarnation expressed both in the dialogues and in *De vera religione*. This Plotinian vantage point allows Augustine to maintain that there can be various ways in which an image participates in and reflects its source.

Finally, this participatory ontology enables Augustine to affirm the *imago dei* of both Christ and the human person. In his earliest theological writings, Augustine underscores the broad scope of his philosophy of image, and here Augustine is insistent that "image," as he puts it, can be said in many ways. Indeed, there are differing degrees of likeness to an image. One particular image (Christ) is to such a degree "like" its source that it is said to be equal to God. Other images also have a "likeness" to God but are unequal images. Augustine's broad articulation of image reveals that he departs from his Latin predecessors in significant ways. It is out of this Plotinian *Weltanschauung* that Augustine is able to affirm that both Christ and the human person are the *imago dei*.

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