

The Incarnation in Augustine's Conversion

Since the work of P. Courcelle, as Goulven Madec has pointed out, the sincerity and reality of Augustine's conversion to Christianity (386) has no longer been really in question, but only *how* the Christianity to which he was converted combined with Neoplatonism :

« Depuis la démonstration de P. Courcelle on ne discute plus guère l'authenticité de la conversion chrétienne d'Augustin en 386. Il s'agit maintenant de savoir comment le nouveau converti a combiné la philosophie ' platonicienne ' et le dogme chrétien dans l'intelligence de la foi qu'il a voulu élaborer¹. »

The remark well summarizes a stage to which the long investigations of Augustine's conversion have come. That Augustine was converted to what we would today call simply Neoplatonist philosophy—rather than to Christianity—now appears untenable. Nevertheless, Neoplatonism played a large part in his outlook and understanding. How did these two elements, the Christian and the Neoplatonist, combine at the moment of his famous conversion ?

A critical hinge in Augustine's new-found commitment was the matter of the Incarnation, the Word-made-flesh. One cannot imagine a genuine move into Christianity apart from an appropriate acceptance of this central doctrine and reality. In connection with the doctrine of the Incarnation, then, Madec's question about the conversion as a whole is especially applicable. Did Platonist philosophy and Christian dogma combine in Augustine's avowal and understanding of the Incarnation ?

1. G. MADEC, « Une lecture de *Confessions* VII, IX, 13-XXI, 27 (Notes critiques à propos d'une thèse de R. J. O'Connell) », *Revue des Études augustiniennes*, 16 (1970), p. 79. Cf. P. COURCELLE, *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin* (Paris : de Boccard, 1950), nouvelle édition augmentée et illustrée (1968). Madec notes the statement by O. DU ROY, that « l'intelligence d'Augustin n'est qu'à moitié évangélisée par sa foi », in *L'intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon Augustin : Genèse de sa théologie trinitaire jusqu'en 391* (Paris : Études Augustiniennes, 1966), p. 456, and comments : « C'est dire l'acuité du problème ainsi posé. »

And if so, how ? My purpose here is to give at least a preliminary response to these questions.

I

Much critical opinion of the last three decades has held that Augustine did indeed affirm the Incarnation in 386². But here, Madec's point is applicable : that he affirmed the Incarnation does not tell us what mingling of dogma and Neoplatonist philosophy took place in that affirmation. That he confessed the Incarnation does not tell us *how* he understood it.

Some confusion on these two points, the 'that' and the 'how,' has occurred in scholarly work. One senses that the long-sought demonstration of Augustine's adherence to the Word-made-flesh has sometimes overridden the matter of how doctrine and philosophy combined in his thinking. More particularly, Augustine's admission that he held a 'Plotinian' view of Christ's person as late as the spring or summer, 386 (*Confessions* VII, 19, 25), has sharpened the interest in his avowal of the Incarnation just a few weeks later. His sudden acceptance of the Word-made-flesh has tended to push aside questions of how 'philosophical' his reading of the Incarnation was, or of possible carry-overs from the Plotinian outlook. Thus, J. J. O'Meara has seen the doctrinal acceptance of Incarnation as thorough and sudden, and heavily contrasting to Augustine's previous view :

« The interval of Platonist presumption, when Augustine felt himself one of the few, and rejected Christ as the way of authority for the many, was quickly succeeded by submission to Christ and a lifetime of confession³. »

Courcelle, publishing in the same year as O'Meara, begins by giving more emphasis to the Plotinian episode than O'Meara does. He states that during the latter events of *Confessions* VII Augustine

« ... était loin de partager la conception catholique du Verbe fait chair ... même après la lecture des *libri Platoniorum*, il ne croyait encore pas à la divinité du Christ... Augustin se contentait d'admirer le Christ comme un homme éminent⁴. »

2. E. g., cf. DU ROY, *L'intelligence*, pp. 92-97, where he emphasizes acceptance of the Incarnation as of a lesson in humility by which to attain to a Plotinian-Trinitarian goal. Cf. his pp. 110-112, where he finds Augustine at Cassiciacum submitting to authority, upholding the Incarnation, scandalous though it must appear to a Neoplatonist. Also, cf. Michel PELLEGRINO, *Les Confessions de saint Augustin — guide de lecture* (Paris : Éditions Alsatia, 1960), who indeed has difficulty thinking that Augustine resisted the doctrine of Incarnation at all in 386, since he had begun to accept 'globalement' the Church's instruction (p. 170). For refs. to O'Meara, Courcelle, Solignac, and Van Bavel, see *ius.* below.

3. J. J. O'MEARA, *The Young Augustine : The Growth of St. Augustine's Mind up to His Conversion* (London : Longmans, Green and Co., 1954), p. 155.

4. P. COURCELLE, « Saint Augustin 'Plotinien' à Milan (*Confessions* VII, 19, 25) », *Ricerche di storia religiosa*, 1 (1954), pp. 63, 64, 65.

One might argue with the wording of Courcelle's statement. (Surely Augustine would have had no difficulty with the divinity of Christ, the pre-existent Word, but only with the divine-human Jesus.) In any event, Courcelle is at length primarily impressed by Augustine's confession of faith. He holds that the Incarnation issue, in part, drove Augustine very soon to seek counsel from the aging Catholic, Simplicianus (*Confessions* VIII, 1, 1), who was able

« ... provoquer enfin, par son exégèse du prologue johannique l'adhésion au dogme du Verbe fait chair⁵. »

Eight years later, A. Solignac in his introduction to the *Confessions* finds a precise and climactic move to Incarnation avowal taking place in Augustine's reading of Paul's epistles (*Confessions* VII, 21, 27) :

« ... Il semble que ces lectures aient permis une exacte conception de la divinité du Christ comme Fils et Verbe de Dieu, aidant Augustin à surmonter le ' photinisme ' auquel il avait un moment donné son adhésion ... la lecture de l'Écriture ... lui révèle le Christ comme Puissance et Sagesse de Dieu ; elle l'éclaire sur la signification authentique de la Trinité et de l'Incarnation...⁶ »

One wonders how this fresh reading of Paul, especially as just inspired by the discovery of the Neoplatonist books⁷, would provide Augustine an exact conception of Christ's divinity. He had long read Paul through Manichaean eyes, now evidently through Neoplatonist eyes ; while even the Catholic church after reading Paul for three centuries, had not yet clarified her own conception of the Word-made-flesh !

The above passages are undoubtedly right in pointing to a real and dramatic change in Augustine's religious persuasions. He did come to affirm the Incarnation of the Son of God. But this strong emphasis upon his acceptance of the Incarnation silently implies (unwittingly, if you will) that he construed this central dogma in a fully Catholic, even Chalcedonian manner. At the very least, *how* he did construe it is given no place in the above statements, except that he was no longer Photinian. The resonance of these passages is that he stood in easy communion with what was to become the post-Chalcedonian church, that his precise intellectual concept of the Incarnation in late 386 needs no analysis. The 'that' of confession has overshadowed the 'how' of understanding.

5. COURCELLE, *ibid.*, p. 71.

6. A. SOLIGNAC, « Introduction aux Confessions », *Les Confessions*, livre I-VII, in *Œuvres de saint Augustin*, 13 (Desclée De Brouwer, 1962), 2^e série, *Bibliothèque Augustinienne*, pp. 71, 152.

7. *Confessions* VII, 21, 27 ; *Contra Academicos* II, 2, 5. On the question of the correspondence between these two passages, see J. J. O'MEARA, « Plotinus and Augustine : Exegesis of *Contra Academicos* II, 5 », *Revue internationale de philosophie*, 24 (1970), pp. 321-337, and a response by G. MADEC, « Pour l'interprétation de *Contra Academicos* II, II, 5 », *REA*, 17 (1971), pp. 322-328.

Other instances of derogating the 'how' have been somewhat less intense. For example, it has been argued that even Augustine's 'Photinian' view of Christ—at the time he held it—fit within a generally Christian acceptance of the Incarnation. Surprisingly, a comment by H. I. Marrou (at the International Augustinian Congress) adopts this approach :

« On peut comprendre autrement que M. Courcelle le texte : ' *Ego vero aliud putabam tantumque sentiebam de Domino Christo meo quantum de excellentis sapientiae viro ...* ' Augustin semble bien plutôt donner son adhésion à l'Incarnation, à l'union du Verbe divin à l'humanité, tout en se refusant à l'expliquer. Il affirme sa croyance, encore vague, générale, à l'Incarnation, ne s'étant pas rendu compte de ce que c'était exactement, comme il le dit dans tout ce paragraphe 25 (L. VII, cp. 10). [The reference is actually cp. 19.] Augustin en cela était comme beaucoup de chrétiens de son temps⁸. »

The problem here is that in this very paragraph 25 Augustine *does* give an account of what he exactly did grasp : the immutability of the Word and the mutability of the man Christ Jesus that in their contradiction set an obstacle to the joining of 'Word-made-flesh' :

« ... quid autem sacramenti haberet uerbum caro factum, ne suspicari quidem poteram. Tantum cognoueram, ex his, quae de illo scripta traderentur, quia manducauit et bibit, dormiuit, ambulauit, exhilaratus est, contristatus est, sermocinatus est, non haesisse carnem illam uerbo tuo nisi cum anima et mente humana. nouit hoc omnis, qui nouit incommutabilitatem uerbi tui, quam ego iam noueram, quantum poteram ... quia itaque uera scripta sunt, totum hominem in Christo agnoscebam, non corpus tantum hominis aut cum corpore sine mente animum, sed ipsum hominem, non persona ueritatis, sed magna quadam naturae humanae excellentia et perfectiore participatione sapientiae praeferrī ceteris arbitrabar.⁹ »

The immutable Word declares Christ mutable. Yet the two are declared to be joined as one ! Little wonder that Augustine resorted to Christ's 'participation' in Wisdom, analogous in kind to anyone's though greater in degree—his admitted approximation to Photinus¹⁰. Surely he felt called upon to deal somehow with the dilemma of mutable and immutable merging into unity. Or could the Augustine of *Confessions* VII have

8. *Augustinus Magister : Congrès International Augustinien*, III, 'Actes' (Paris : Études Augustiniennes, 1954), p. 99.

9. *Confessiones* VII, 19, 25 ; *B.A.*, 13, p. 632.

10. « ego autem aliquanto posterius didicisse me fateor, in eo, quod uerbum caro factum est, quomodo catholica ueritas a Photini falsitate dirimatur. » *Ibid.*, p. 634. On his actual likeness and unlikeness to historical Photinianism, cf. R. J. O'CONNELL, *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man, A.D. 386-391* (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 260-268, and the response in MADEC, « *Confessiones* VII », pp. 107-123, 137. Cf. O'CONNELL's further response, « *Confessiones* VII, IX, 13-XXI, 27. Reply to G. Madec », *REA* 19 (1973), pp. 87-100, which seems to leave Madec still in the better position.

ignored the question of rationality within religious authority? If the *Confessions* are at all consistent, then an intellectual block concerning the 'Word-made-flesh' would necessarily trouble Augustine's move towards Catholic commitment, warmly attracted though he was.

Marrou's comment, however, has not been the most severe in challenging the relevance of Augustine's personal Christological understanding. Again at the International Congress Michele Pellegrino commented:

« Au temps de saint Augustin, on pouvait être chrétien, se croire chrétien, passer pour chrétien, tout en se disant photinien et en ne reconnaissant pas la divinité du Christ. Augustin avait accepté l'Écriture comme divinement inspirée et l'autorité de l'Église, ce qui suffisait pour se dire chrétien¹¹. »

Yet the point is not whether one could 'pass for Christian.' As Augustine recalls his own struggle, he would have had very little comfort in 'passing for Christian.' We know that the Photinian issue was a serious matter to Ambrose, and surely to Augustine himself (as the passage just quoted from *Confessions* VII, 19, 25 remembers it)¹². Rather the point of interest, historically and theologically, is not whether Augustine was technically Catholic, but what—as a matter of fact—he did at this point believe.

T. Van Bavel, in his noted work on Augustine's Christology, is an exception to the approaches cited above, for he takes care to assess the early Christological passages and is not content to see them simply as conventional indicators of a full Christian confession¹³. That is, he admits that the early statements are part of an evolution towards 'une pénétration complète de la théologie chrétienne,' and therefore do not reveal Augustine's mature 'attitude personnelle envers le Christ¹⁴.' The 'how' of the confession, with its mingling of philosophical and doctrinal elements, is significant—in the sense that it is undeveloped. Van Bavel's chief aim is consequently to acknowledge and account for the peculiarities in the early formulations:

« ... nous ne nions pas qu'il y ait des aspects plus importants dans le Christianisme, ni même qu'Augustin ne saura que plus tard saisir leur importance. Mais s'il les a passés sous silence, est-ce nécessairement par défaut de Christianisme ou par méconnaissance de la doctrine chrétienne? [Or again:] ... est-ce si mal pour quelqu'un qui vient de se convertir et qui n'est encore qu'un laïc?¹⁵ »

11. *Augustinus Magister*, III, p. 100.

12. On Ambrose's concern, cf. COURCELLE, *Recherches*, pp. 213-214.

13. *Recherches sur la Christologie de Saint Augustin: l'humain et le divin dans le Christ d'après saint Augustin* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1954), chap. I, pp. 5-12.

14. *Recherches*, p. 5.

15. *Recherches*, pp. 9, 12.

Thus Van Bavel is finally not helpful for analyzing and evaluating the young convert's particular combination of doctrine and platonizing thought. Rather, his interest is simply in defending Augustine as being within the Catholic faith, despite his inchoate Christological formulations. The platonizing is of no interest in itself, but is only a source of possible embarrassment that Van Bavel feels justified in excusing the young catechumen. The point, however, is not to argue that the 'how' of his understanding can be classified 'Christian' (a point Madec declares laid to rest), but to ask via Christian theological criteria what the 'shape' of his understanding actually was. Within what broadly may be called a Christian conversion, numerous variations are possible of attitude, conceptual structure, and intent. Those variations are highly important for indicating the growth of the convert and also for shedding light upon the notion of 'Christian,' within which the variations occur.

Probably the most critical evidence for the 'shape' of the recent convert's Incarnational understanding occurs in the dialogues at Cassiciacum, which must now be reviewed.

II

Much scholarly attention has already been paid three particular passages from Cassiciacum, referring obviously to the Incarnation. In the first of these, Augustine has just been lauding the Platonic tradition in philosophy, now seen to include the wisdom of Aristotle as pertains to the soul.

« ... Non enim est ista huius mundi philosophia, quam sacra nostra meritissime detestantur, sed alterius intelligibilis, cui animas multiformibus erroris tenebris caecatas, et altissimis a corpore sordibus oblitas, nunquam ista ratio subtilissima revocaret, nisi summus Deus populari quadam clementia divini intellectus auctoritatem usque ad ipsum corpus humanum declinaret, atque submitteret, cuius non solum praeceptis, sed etiam factis excitatae animae redire in semetipsas et respicere patriam, etiam sine disputationum concertatione potuissent¹⁶. »

In the second passage, Augustine has just made reference again to the accord between 'true' philosophy and the authoritative 'mysteries', with authority enabling us to know the philosophic First Principle specifically as God-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He then goes on :

« ... Quantum autem illud sit, quod hoc etiam nostri generis corpus tantum propter nos Deus assumere atque agere dignatus est, quanto videtur vilius, tanto est clementia plenius et a quadam ingeniosorum superbia longe lateque remotius¹⁷. »

16. *Contra Academicos* III, 19, 42 ; *B.A.*, 4, p. 198.

17. *De Ordine* II, 5, 16 ; *B.A.*, 4, p. 390. Solignac and O'Meara hold that a previous phrase in this passage, speaking of the First Principle and the intellect that

In the third passage, Augustine is concerned to distinguish the false 'divine' authority of divinations and sensuous magic from the true divine authority. He states :

« ... Illa ergo auctoritas divina dicenda est, quae non solum in sensibilibus signis transcendit omnem humanam facultatem, sed et ipsum hominem agens ostendit ei quousque se propter ipsum depresserit et non teneri sensibus, quibus videntur illa miranda, sed ad intellectum jubet evolare, simul demonstrans et quanta hic possit et cur haec faciat et quam parvi pendat. Doceat enim oportet et factis potestatem suam et humilitate clementiam et praeceptione naturam ...¹⁸ »

These passages have been commented upon not only by Van Bavel but also (among others) by R. J. O'Connell, and by G. Madec in response to O'Connell¹⁹. Oddly, O'Connell finds the passages at Cassiciacum continuing the same line of thought as Augustine's previous 'Photinianism', described by him in *Confessions* VII, 19, 25 (as mentioned above). Also O'Connell identifies this 'Photinianism' with the Christological tradition of Antioch :

« ... One senses ... Augustine's own discomfort before a too intimate union of the divine and human in Christ, a discomfort relieved to some extent by the availability of that Antiochean *logos-anthrôpos* framework which stressed, along with the fullness of Jesus' humanity, a much less intimate union of divine and human than was proclaimed by the Alexandrians ... To this point, therefore, there is every reason for thinking that while at Cassiciacum Augustine's thought on the Incarnation was still substantially of the Antiochean sort he later indicts in the *Confessions*.²⁰ »

dwells therein (... quod sit omnium rerum principium sine principio quantusque in eo maneat intellectus quidve inde in nostram salutem sine ulla degeneratione manaverit, quem unum Deum omnipotentem eumque tripotentem, Patrem et Filium et Spiritum sanctum, docent veneranda mysteria ...) refers by the 'manaverit' to the Incarnation. But it would seem more natural that it refers to Neoplatonist illumination as an analogue of the Holy Spirit's proceeding, since the whole segment is then united in a Trinitarian image. Cf. SOLIGNAC, « Introduction », p. 78. Solignac's other supporting reference (*De Beata Vita* IV, 35) would seem even more clearly a philosophical analogue to the third person, not the second. Cf. O'MEARA, *Young Augustine*, p. 149, his translation of this passage, where his parenthetical insertion of 'Christ' to identify the subject of the previous clause seems forced.

18. *De Ordine* II, 9, 27 ; *B.A.*, 4, p. 410.

19. T. VAN BAVEL, *Recherches*, p. 6. O'CONNELL, *Early Theory*, pp. 265-266. MADEC, « *Confessions* VII », pp. 124-128. Besides the refs. above (n. 17) to Solignac and O'Meara, cf. SOLIGNAC, « Introduction », p. 695 ; O'MEARA, trans., *St. Augustine : Against the Academics* (Westminster : The Newman Press, 1950) in the *Ancient Christian Writers* series, No. 12, pp. 193-197, n. 61. Also, cf. DU ROY, *L'intelligence*, pp. 114-130.

20. *Early Theory*, pp. 265-266.

Madec has already spoken well to the point in responding to these lines. He rightly insists Augustine did *not* later indict in the *Confessions* an Antiochean Christology, in indicting his own former view. Rather he indicted 'la méconnaissance du mystère du Verbe incarné, la réduction de la personnalité du Christ à sa dimension humaine'²¹. Also, Madec finds the three crucial passages cited above hardly consistent in summoning up an Antiochean *logos-anthropos* outlook :

« ... Si l'on tient à cataloguer les textes de cette façon, le premier d'entre eux présenterait plutôt une formule du type alexandrin du *Logos-sarx* :

... nisi summus Deus populari quadam clementia diuini Intellectus auctoritatem usque ad ipsum corpus humanum declinaret, atque summitteret ...

De même, le second texte parle de l'assomption d'un corps par Dieu, sans mentionner l'âme ou l'esprit humain : ... quod hoc etiam nostri generis corpus tantus propter nos Deus adsumere atque agere dignatus est ...

En devrions-nous conclure qu'Augustin est maintenant apollinariste avant de redevenir photinien quelques heures plus tard ?

Illa ergo auctoritas diuina ... ipsum hominem agens ostendit ei, quousque se propter ipsum depresserit.

On peut estimer avec A. Grillmeier que les premières formules christologiques d'Augustin sont tellement insatisfaisantes qu'un esprit mal disposé pourrait trouver dans ses écrits des erreurs totalement opposées.²² »

Madec has shown without question that O'Connell has wrongly molded these three passages into a single 'Antiochean' view. How they could be seen as coinciding with *Confessions* VII, 19, 25, is indeed difficult to fathom. In addition, we may sympathize with the comment included above from Grillmeier and with the observation by Van Bavel, which Madec quotes :

« ... Il ne serait pas non plus bien difficile d'interpréter plusieurs de ces termes [i.e., hominem suscipere, hominem agere, corpus agere, etc.] dans un sens hétérodoxe ! Contentons-nous donc de constater qu'il n'est pas question ici d'hétérodoxie ...²³ »

On the other hand, it is not necessary for Madec to combine with his criticism the implication that the three passages are Christologically formless and offer no doctrinal consistency at all. The inapplicability of refined standards of orthodoxy does not mean we are at a loss for a Christological profile in these passages. The initial question is not one of orthodoxy, but asking in a much simpler and more elementary fashion the form and imagery by which the view of Christ is expressed. If the sentence summarizing Augustine's 'Photinianism' is recalled

21. « *Confessions* VII », p. 126.

22. « *Confessions* VII », pp. 125-126. Cf. A. GRILLMEIER, S. J., *Christ in Christian Tradition*, trans. by J. S. Bowden (London : A. R. Mowbray, 1965), p. 321.

23. *Recherches*, p. 7.

for a moment, the contrast with the Cassiciacum material will better appear :

« ... quia itaque uera scripta sunt, totum hominem in Christo agnoscebam, non corpus tantum hominis aut cum corpore sine mente animum, sed ipsum hominem, non persona ueritatis, sed magna quadam naturae humanae excellentia et perfectiore participatione sapientiae praeferri ceteris arbitrabar²⁴. »

‘ ... by a certain great excellence of human nature and a more nearly perfect participation in wisdom, to be preferred... ’ If in this *Confessions* passage Augustine accurately recalls his unwitting ‘ Photinian ’ error, then we have a pre-conversion view to contrast with the post-conversion expressions at Cassiciacum²⁵. Evidently the key term in the ‘ Photinian ’ passage above is ‘ participatione, ’ (‘ by participation, ’ ‘ by sharing in ’). The excellence of this real human being, this *whole* human being, is by ‘ participatione ’ in wisdom, i.e., in ultimate, divine truth. As Solignac has put it :

« ... Augustin ne voyait pas dans le Christ *la Vérité par essence*, la ‘ personne de la Vérité, ’ c’est-à-dire la Vérité devenue accessible aux hommes par l’Incarnation du Verbe, mais seulement un *sage par participation*, encore que le mode de cette participation fut éminent.²⁶ »

If with this ‘ participatione ’ in mind the three Incarnational passages from Cassiciacum are once again considered, it is clear that the form and agency of participation have been exactly reversed from the ‘ Photinian ’ passage. (‘ ... unless the most High God should bring down and submit the authority of the divine intellect all the way to a human body itself... ’ ‘ ... that so great a God for our sakes counted it worthy to assume and activate even this body of our kind... ’ ‘ ... that authority is said to be divine which ... activating a true man, shows him to what extent it has brought itself low for his sake... ’) Here the picture is not of a man rousing himself to excellence by participating in divine authority, but rather the opposite : God is acting to participate downward in bodily human life. The agency or ‘ act-or ’, and thereby presumably the initiative, has completely shifted round. This shift in agency from the man participating ‘ upward ’ to God participating ‘ downward ’ is

24. *Les Confessions* VII, 19, 25 ; *B.A.*, 13, p. 632.

25. I am assuming that the ‘ aliquanto posterius ’ of *Confessions* VII, 19, 25, referring to the time that elapsed before his Photinian error was identified to him, does not carry past the time of the garden conversion, and probably not past the conversation(s) with Simplicianus. Cf. COURCELLE, ‘ Saint Augustin ‘ Photinien ’ », p. 71, his view of the Simplicianus conversation. Also, cf. references to Courcelle, du Roy, and Mandouze in MADEC, ‘ *Confessions* VII », p. 107, n. 137, in his response (pp. 107-108) to O’CONNELL, *Early Theory*, pp. 261-267, on the ‘ aliquanto posterius ’.

26. In ‘ La christologie d’Augustin au temps de sa conversion », Note complémentaire, *Les Confessions*, *B.A.*, 13, pp. 697-698. Cf. MADEC, ‘ *Confessions* VII », p. 109.

quite enough to say that a cornerstone of thought has changed for Augustine. A unique 'downward' initiative of singular divine agency could not emerge within Augustine's strictly philosophical milieu. Undoubtedly, these passages are evidence that Augustine has affirmed the essential outline of 'verbum caro factum est,' the Catholic biblical teaching on the Incarnation²⁷.

An extra-Neoplatonist factor is thereby most clear in Augustine's imagery of the unique divine initiative. In this regard, the three christological passages harmonize usefully with the description in *Confessions* VII, 21, 27, of Augustine's reading the scriptures in contrast to the Neoplatonist books, and finding there the added element of 'grace':

« Itaque audissime arripui uenerabilem stilum spiritus tui et prae ceteris apostolum Paulum ... et inueni, quidquid illac uerum legeram, hac cum commendatione gratiae tuae dici, ut qui uidet non sic gloriatur, quasi non acceperit — quid enim habet quod non accepit ? ... quis eum liberabit de corpore mortis huius nisi gratia tua per Iesum Christum dominum nostrum, quem genuisti coaeternum et creasti in principio uiarum tuarum, in quo princeps huius mundi non inuenit quicquam morte dignum, et occidit eum ... ? hoc illae litterae non habent²⁸. »

It is of considerable interest whether 'illae litterae,' the Neoplatonist books that did not 'have' grace in them, included some of the work of Porphyry, or only of Plotinus. Acceptance of the self-humbling Incarnation as a departure from, or supplement to, Plotinus is clear. That is, Plotinus' view of the 'fall' and 'return' of the soul hardly included a self-abasement of the divine to make the return possible. If Augustine were reacting also to Porphyry, elements very similar to Christian belief could have come into play, even if only to be refuted. Porphyry's concern for a *via universalis* for the purification and liberation of the souls of the masses is well known, and much discussion has ensued as to whether Augustine was familiar with this Porphyrean notion prior to his baptism²⁹. Courcelle argues it was the influence of Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles* that suggested to Augustine his unconsciously 'Photinian' notion of Christ in *Confessions* VII, 19, 25. Were this the case, then

27. The question may be raised as to whether the three passages offer a proper outline of Augustine's views on the Incarnation at Cassiciacum — a question of both their brevity and their place in the dialogues. Are they merely a conventional addition ? Or, to the contrary, are they an understatement of something strongly held ? Everything argues the latter, since we know that because of the nature and purpose of the dialogues, Alypius pressed for exclusion of the name of Christ in them altogether (cf. *Les Confessions* IX, 4, 7 ; *B.A.*, 14, pp. 82-84). Whatever Augustine permitted to stand there would be probably the minimum of his view rather than a conventional overstatement.

28. *Les Confessions* VII, 21, 27 ; *B.A.* 13, pp. 638-640.

29. Initial guidance to the literature on the subject appears in SOLIGNAC, « Introduction », pp. 109-112, and in E. TESSELLE, « Porphyry and Augustine », *Augustinian Studies*, 5 (1974), p. 113, n. 1.

the anti-Neoplatonist (i.e., anti-Porphyrean) nature of the three passages in the Dialogues would be striking, via their opposition to the 'Photinian' view³⁰. In any event, whether both Plotinus and Porphyry were involved, or Plotinus only, the Cassiciacum assertion of divine self-abasement in assuming a human body sharply diverges from Augustine's strictly Neoplatonist reading. From his position as a 'Photinian,' Augustine has come to avow the essential outline of the 'verbum caro factum est,' contrary to his state of mind in *Confessions* VII, 19, 25, where he 'could not conceive' what was meant by this teaching.

The implication is that by the time of Cassiciacum he did, in some sense, 'conceive' what the Incarnation meant; his block to understanding had been eased, though full understanding of the content of the Christian faith was still lacking:

« ... Mihi autem certum est nusquam prorsus a Christi auctoritate discedere ... Quod autem subtilissima ratione persequendum est (ita enim jam sum affectus, ut quid sit verum, non credendo solum, sed etiam intelligendo apprehendere impatienter desiderem) apud Platonicos me interim quod sacris nostris non repugnet repertum esse confido³¹. »

'I want ... to grasp what is true, not only by believing, but also by understanding' — which goal he has not yet achieved. The doctrine of the Incarnate Christ, which he has recently come to accept, comprehends much that is not yet elucidated. Nevertheless, Augustine even now understands *enough* such that 'I am confident ... I am going to find with the Platonists what does not contradict our sacred mysteries.' The Incarnation markedly distinguishes Christianity, but is not simply opaque to reason: He sees sufficient light in the Word-made-flesh to feel confident that that special philosophy, Platonism, will not finally contradict his Christian views. Indeed, he is inspired to seek understanding of what he now believes on authority, an understanding surely cast along Neoplatonist lines.

He has not only accepted the Incarnation *beyond* the Neoplatonist philosophers, he has also made some sense of that doctrine — a sense that promises not to contradict Neoplatonist theory! How is this possible? Evidently, he is distinguishing between the Neoplatonist teachers, with their omission of Christian grace and Incarnation, and the fundamentals of their thought, which he in principle accepts — as

30. Courcelle's case is found in « Saint Augustin 'Photinien' », pp. 63-71. A specific philological link is offered between Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles* and Augustine's opening statements in the *Confessions* passage (pp. 68-69). The philological method bears its own limitations, however; it may be noted in this case that though several terms are the same, the two sentences make two quite divergent statements: « ... un sage qui a mérité, par faveur divine, de gagner l'immortalité » (... « *prae adipiscenda immortalitate, divina pro nobis cura tantam auctoritatem magisterii meruisse* »), (p. 69).

31. *Contra Academicos* III, 20, 43; *B.A.*, 4, p. 200.

far as they go. One is reminded of the ambivalent and evasive comment in the *Soliloquia*, also at Cassiciacum, that if the statements of Plato and Plotinus concerning God are true, it does not necessarily follow that they really knew those things³². And his own pressing motivation is precisely to know God (and the soul). The implication is that essential Neoplatonist principles coincide with certain Catholic biblical teachings, but that the full scope of the latter will transcend the former, will offer rich content over and above the views that the Neoplatonists and the Catholics share.

How then does his grasp of the Incarnation indeed invite platonist-like reflection, despite the doctrine's extra-Neoplatonist role ? For one thing, the context of the first of the three passages above (*Contra Academicos* III, 19, 42) so indicates. There, just prior to the Incarnation reference, Augustine alludes to the happy issue of certain new and discerning discussions of philosophy :

« ... eliquata est, ut opinor, una verissimae philosophiae disciplina. Non enim est ista huius mundi philosophia ... sed alterius intelligibilis, cui animas multiformibus erroris tenebris caecatas, et altissimis a corpore sordibus oblitās, nunquam ista ratio subtilissima revocaret ... »

That is, the most subtle reasoning would never have recalled blinded souls to that one true philosophy (of the intelligible world) *had not*, as we have seen, the most high God submitted the authority of the divine intellect to the human body. The Incarnation thereby serves as God's gracious self-humbling means to an end that is Neoplatonist — or better, an end on whose general nature Neoplatonist principles and Christianity do not contradict. In fact, the Incarnation is the manifestation on earth, in a human body, of the Neoplatonic *noûs*, i.e., 'the authority of the divine intellect.' In an illuminating study of this entire passage, R. Holte concludes :

« A propos des diverses définitions du *télos*, ce texte atteste directement qu'Augustin, à la suite d'une longue tradition patristique, a identifié le *νοῦς-intellectus* néo-platonicien avec le Christ, qui est également considéré comme porteur du *mundus intelligibilis*³³. »

In later writings Augustine will continue, as is well known, to see in the Christian faith an authoritative means to a philosophical-Christian end through the divine intellect self-humbled and incarnate³⁴.

32. « ... si ea quae de Deo dixerunt Plato et Plotinus vera sunt, satisne tibi est ita Deum scire, ut illi sciebant ? Non continuo, si ea quae dixerunt, vera sunt, etiam scisse illos ea necesse est. Nam multi copiose dicunt quae nesciunt ... » *Soliloquia* I, 4, 9 ; *B.A.*, 5, p. 42.

33. In *Beatitude et Sagesse — Saint Augustin et le problème de la fin de l'homme dans la philosophie ancienne* (Paris : Études Augustiniennes, 1962), p. 95.

34. E.g., *De vera religione* VIII, 14 ; X, 19 ; XVI, 30. *De fide et symbolo* IV, 10 ; IX, 20 ; X, 25. *De libero arbitrio* III, 10, 30. *De doctrina Christiana* I, 10-11.

Still, a problem remains for careful reflection. The self-abasing Incarnation means a mercy of God that is outgoing and involving of itself in temporal, human affairs. The Incarnation of God thus suggests the mutability of God. Yet the Augustine of 386 is committed with heavy priority to God's *immutability*³⁵. How is it possible for the perfect, immutable deity to incarnate himself on earth in response to the needs of the masses? Here surely is a violation of the canons of philosophy as Augustine had learned them. What pathway to an illumined 'understanding' of such a teaching can there be?

A response to the question may be possible if the 'perfection' of God can be approached through stateable 'perfections' or attributes. If the Augustine of Cassiciacum was willing to characterize God in his attributes — and evidently he was — then the characteristic of tending to lower himself could be considered a *perfection* of God and therefore reconcilable at an unexpected level with divine immutability. Consider once again elements from the three passages:

« ... summus Deus populari quadam clementia divini intellectus auctoritatem ... declinaret³⁶. »

Here the very highest, 'summus,' is associated with an eternal characteristic, 'mercy' ('clementia'), that accounts for the lowering to earth of the divine *Intellectus* and its authority. This authority can then require of one's intelligence a proper response to the Incarnation ('... ad intellectum iubet [hominem] evolare ...'), even demonstrating ('... demonstrans ...') the Incarnation's nature and purpose. For it is 'necessary' that this authority should teach

« ... factis potestatem suam et humilitate clementiam et praeceptione naturam...³⁷ »

Therefore, the high and perfect nature of God is such that an actual and active humility can alone articulate that perfection for the understanding. Thus an Incarnation of the *Intellectus*,

« ... quanto videtur vilis, tanto est clementia plenius et a quadam ingeniosorum superbia longe lateque remotius³⁸. »

Not only is there offered here the characteristic Augustinian polarity of *superbia* and *humilitas*. Also, the young convert comes close to

35. At least he clearly so recalls in *Confessiones* VII, 1, 1 (*B.A.*, 13, pp. 576-578); cf. VII, 2, 3 and VII, 19, 25 (the immutability of the Word). This is confirmed for late, or post-conversion 386 in *De beata vita* II, 11, and *Soliloquia* I, 4. And his fresh zeal for Neoplatonism in 386 would underscore divine immutability.

36. *Contra Academicos* III, 19, 42; *B.A.*, 4, p. 198.

37. *De ordine* II, 9, 27; *B.A.*, 4, p. 410.

38. *De ordine* II, 5, 16; *B.A.*, 4, p. 390.

asserting humility as an attribute of God — or more precisely, states that God's perfection in 'clementia' is grasped only in an act of 'humilitas'. In such a manner the self-lowering of God does not violate, but reinforces for the intellect the divine immutable perfection. That is, God is immutable in being ever merciful, and the Incarnation seals that fact. The point anticipates, and to that slender degree, is confirmed by Trinitarian reflection on Augustine's part much later. Thus we find him in the fourth book of *De Trinitate* declaring that the Word of God is unchangeable, while affirming that the Word-made-flesh is 'the humility of God'³⁹.

By fresh insight into the divine immutability, bringing together the teaching on Incarnation with newly acquired platonist principles of thought, Augustine finds intellectual room to breathe within the church's central dogma. At the same time, historic Neoplatonist teachings (i.e., the scope of Plotinus' and Porphyry's works) are transcended. As regards this resolution of authority and reason for the new convert, the young Augustine does not experience, even for a brief time, a sense of *sacrificium intellectus* in professing Catholic teaching and preparing for baptism. He did not 'stop thinking', but rather saw fresh potential for platonizing reflection, even in the scandal of the 'Word-made-flesh'.

Let us pause a moment to consider the implications of the above few pages: In the first place, much of the late 19th- to 20th-century debate on 'the early Augustine, Catholic or Neoplatonist?' has evidently been misplaced. Courcelle has already suggested that Augustine's own day did not see the opposition in the same terms as does ours⁴⁰. The tendency today has been to raise the question, Neopla-

39. « ... unum Verbum Dei est ... quod est incommutabilis veritas ... Verbum caro factum est. Illuminatio quippe nostra participatio Verbi est ... Mundandi ergo eramus. Porro iniquorum et superbiorum una mundatio est sanguis iusti, et humilitas Dei. » *De Trinitate* IV, 1, 3-2, 4; *B.A.*, 15, pp. 342-344. The context of this segment is a treatment of God's love; thus unchangeable truth, because of its character as love, is self-humbled in the saving Incarnate act. Cf. II, 17, 32, God as that « substantia summa summeque divina et incommutabili, ubi et Pater et Filius et Spiritus sanctus unus et solus Deus est », yet II, 5, 9, where one should understand « illam incarnationem et ex Virgine nativitatem, in qua Filius intelligitur missus, una eademque operatione Patris et Filii inseparabiliter esse factam, non utique inde separato Spiritu sancto ... » (*B.A.*, 15, p. 262, p. 200) Cf. I, 12, 27, that the Son will both judge and not judge: IV, 19, 26, the one sent is made less, yet the one sent is equal to the sender; also, I, 7, 14, and II, 22; IV, 20, 27; VIII, 9, 13. In these passages in differing ways the matter is examined of relating God's immutability to his divine Incarnation; response is made through Trinitarian relations, and through God's nature as love, mercy, and humility. Cf. VI, 4, 6; *B.A.*, 15, pp. 480-482: « Deo autem hoc est esse quod est fortem esse, aut justum esse, aut sapientem esse, et si quid de illa simplici multiplicitate, vel multiplici simplicitate dixeris, quo substantia ejus significetur [including, may we not add, to be merciful]. »

40. « A supposer même que les modernes fussent d'accord, le critère à quoi ils reconnaîtraient le principal et l'accessoire [i.e., as between Neoplatonism and Christianity] serait-il forcément valable pour un homme de la fin du IV^e siècle? » *Recherches*, p. 11; cf. p. 12.

tonist vs. Catholic, in a current form, and then attempt to make the Augustinian material answer that current question. For example, was the young convert a believing Christian who employed select Neoplatonist concepts in speaking of his faith ? Or was he a Ciceronian-Neoplatonist philosopher who permitted himself certain symbolic, legendary, Christian expressions ? The latter question certainly challenges the integrity of Augustine's conversion to Catholic membership, and the integrity of his nascent theology (not to mention the validity of the account in *Confessions* VII-VIII).

Yet the integrity of theology today, as assumed in the above questions, means its distinction from essentially philosophical, or liberal-cultural modes of thought. The integrity of theology in the late 4th to 5th centuries lay rather in its resistance to a broad, pagan, polytheistic residue, just under the veneer of a Christian baptism of the Empire. The issue for Augustine was not therefore, whether the essence of Neoplatonism would synthesize with Catholic doctrine (with one or the other tending to gain the upper hand)⁴¹. The issue was whether the residual pagan world, or the Catholic world, was going to claim as its own the elements of simple, eternal truth found in the Neoplatonist books. The line of reasoning was of this sort : One single, eternal Truth of God persists forever. A disclosure of that Truth appears in Catholic-biblical teaching ; an important abstraction, or partial-saying, of the same Truth appears in the Neoplatonist writings. Yet the very Neoplatonist authors, especially Porphyry, resisted Christian faith, while allowing theurgic practice and acknowledgement of demons. Will the Truth of God be mingled with pagan practice, by indulgence of its own authors ? Or will the Truth of God be claimed by the biblical-Catholic world, where it rightly belongs ? The gold of God's Truth endures, wherever found, and whether or not abused by 'Egyptians' ; one will therefore claim the gold as one's own, without at the same time succumbing to the 'Egyptian food' associated with it (idoltrous paganism residual in the Empire and in the Neoplatonist thinkers ; cf. *Confessions* VII, 9, 15).

This Augustinian issue of claiming God's single Truth, as contrasted with present-day theological concerns, may be summarized as follows :

1. A primary theological issue for Augustine was the opposition between, on the one hand, polytheism and associated philosophies, and on the other hand, a reasoned Christian faith at once apologetic and confessional.
2. The question of Neoplatonist truth was whether it would be claimed and appropriated by polytheism or by Christian faith (where Augustine thought it belonged).

41. Cf. G. MADRC, « Christus, Scientia et Sapientia Nostra », *Recherches Augustiniennes*, X (1975), p. 78 : « ... on conclut couramment qu'Augustin s'est livré à une entreprise de synthèse entre le néoplatonisme et le christianisme. Or cette formule me paraît doublement ambiguë ... Il s'applique à préciser l'identité et la différence entre les deux doctrines ; il ne s'occupe pas d'en faire le mélange et la synthèse. »

3. A primary modern theological issue has been the opposition between liberal Christian apologetics and, on the other hand, classical and sectarian Christian confession.

4. Thus the modern question of Neoplatonist truth has rested upon its congeniality with the liberal and apologetic view point, and its alienation from the confessional.

5. Therefore, the relation of Neoplatonist and Christian thought in Augustine's view cannot rightly be considered within a modern frame of reference, but only within the ancient.

Notice that the idea of God's single Truth, available in minor and major forms (Neoplatonist writing, Catholic teaching) finds support in Augustine's and Ambrose's primitive *Traditionsgeschichte*, that the platonists must have been grounded in the Hebrew prophets — likely through Jeremiah's sojourn in Egypt⁴². Not only one God, but ultimately one tradition brought us wisdom !

This notion in the young convert of the one Truth, wherever found, anticipates —and therefore perhaps is supported by— his later concept of the *fides aeterna* (as distinct from the more difficult *fides historica*). The eternal faith recounts the things of God that are of himself, and thereby eternal in nature. The core of these things is available to the right sort of philosophers, as well as disclosed in Catholic teaching⁴³. The historical faith, by contrast, recounts those revelatory events that can be believed only by authority (e.g., the call of Abraham, the covenant with Moses, the birth of the Son of God)⁴⁴. If the analysis in the above pages is correct, the young Augustine saw the eternal Truth articulate in both Neoplatonist books and Christian doctrines, even if in different words (*Confessions* VII, 9, 13). But the Catholic stumbling block seemed the Church's insistence on the Incarnation, a piece of *fides historica* apparently not open to illumination, or joining intelligibly with the eternal and philosophical *fides*.

The discovery at the heart of the conversion was that this very stumbling block, that which was beyond the philosophers, turned out to be the climactic joining of the temporal faith with the eternal faith. The Word-made-flesh was a self-humbling Word because God is by essence a self-abasing, merciful God. God's mercy in humility is indeed a divine perfection, not inconsistent with his nature as immutable and eternal. For God forever disposes himself graciously and mercifully

42. COURCELLE, *Recherches*, p. 174.

43. *De vera religione* III, 3, where Augustine has an imagined disciple of Plato recounting to his master elements of philosophical truth later to be essential in Christian teaching, e.g., « ... animae tantum rationali et intellectuali datum est, ut eius [God's] aeternitatis contemplatione perfruatur » (*B.A.*, 8, p. 26).

44. On the *fides historica* and the *fides aeterna*, cf. *De vera religione* I, 99 ; *De fide et symbolo* IV, 6 ; *De libero arbitrio* III, 21, 60. Cf. E. TESELLE, *Augustine the Theologian* (London : Burns & Oates, 1970), pp. 128-131.

towards the world. Thus one may reflect on God in a platonizing manner without contradicting his self-giving nature in the Incarnation. The 'God is One' of the platonizing books fits into the richer, more complex, and typically Augustinian scheme, 'God is Love.'

Within this seemingly useful resolution —a gleam of illumination within the Incarnational teaching— a certain problem remained. That problem concerned the person of Christ and the relation of his two natures, divine and human, within his person. We are already informed by Van Bavel, to be sure, that Augustine had no early grasp of *persona* as a metaphysical concept within Christology, but only as a borrowed image from the theater.

... Au temps du jeune Augustin, le mot *persona* était loin d'avoir atteint la signification fixe d'« individu rationnel subsistant » ... La signification qui s'impose ici est apparentée à l'usage classique de *persona* dans le sens de masque de théâtre...⁴⁵

Augustine therefore did not employ the term 'person' effectively or centrally in his early Christological comments. Van Bavel notes, for example, an instance in which Augustine oddly refers to the Incarnation as the 'bearing [by the Word] of a lower person, i.e., of the human'⁴⁶. Augustine stands prior to the Chalcedonian definition; therefore, it would be inappropriate to judge his relationship to the Catholic faith and church of his day by his approach to *persona*. Van Bavel issues a characteristic warning:

« ... Qu'on ne cherche pas de spéculations sur la manière d'union dans le Christ ! [i.e., in the early Augustine]⁴⁷. »

But Van Bavel closes the door too tightly. Some note of the relation between the two natures is profitable, even at this early stage —though not by seeking careful definitions, but (as has been said above) by considering the force of imagery. Where was Augustine's 'mind's eye' in his first Christological references?

The answer, initially, is that when Augustine writes of the Incarnation in the *Cassiciacum Dialogues*, his 'mind's eye' is on the divine nature of Christ Jesus, not the human nature. As Van Bavel says:

« L'humain paraît être comme une manifestation extérieure, une forme révélatrice de la Sagesse.

45. VAN BAVEL, *Christologie*, p. 7.

46. « ... susceptionem naturae inferioris personae, id est humanae. » *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* II, 24, 37: Migne, *Patrologiae ... Latina* (1887) XXXIV, 215 (erroneously states par. 57). VAN BAVEL, *Christologie*, pp. 6-7.

47. *Christologie*, p. 6.

... Si la Sagesse a assumé une ' personne ' humaine, c'est que l'humanité du Christ est la manifestation extérieure de la Sagesse, Verbe de Dieu ⁴⁸. »

Interestingly, such a preoccupation with the divine nature constitutes a direct reversal of Augustine's pre-conversion state (*Confessions* VII 19, 25), where his mind's eye was on the *man*, Jesus, who ' participated in ' ultimate wisdom. Obviously, at Cassiciacum, the teaching on Incarnation, as a break with the Neoplatonist philosophers, has taken firm hold of his imagination.

In another sense, however, a common element with his former ' Photinian ' view does persist, namely, a certain separateness between the Logos and the human being. In the ' Photinian ' view, focus is upon a man, attended by divine wisdom. In the Cassiciacum view, focus is upon God as Logos, submitted to a human body. In each instance, one element or nature tends to displace the other *in the imagery and the articulation*. Even with the avowal of Incarnation, the old problem—how does the immutable join with the mutable?—persists in shadow, if not in force⁴⁹.

Augustine has affirmed the Incarnation. Yet rather than seeing Christ's person as a simple unity, his intellectual ' eye ' is caught by the divine *noûs* in its self-abasing role; the ' flesh ' that is assumed, the full human being of Jesus, does not find emphasis. His preoccupation is with a ' neoplatonic ' Logos that could humble itself. The role of Christ's *person* in the conversion therefore remains unclear and will have to be sought outside this article by other means than comparing the Cassiciacum passages with his pre-conversion views. Clearly, the church's later assertion of the *persona* of Christ as a ' subsisting, rational individual ' did not intend to introduce a new reality into Christian faith, but to bring to expression a reality implicit in Christian faith from the first. In that case, was there in Augustine's conversion to the Incarnation the *implicit* force of Christ's *persona*, essential to Christian experience ?

48. *Christologie*, pp. 6, 7.

49. O'Connell's analysis of early Augustinian Christology, noting this continued tendency of separation between the two natures, judges that the so-called ' Photinian ' outlook persists through the conversion and early works. (*Early Theory*, chap. x, pp. 263-264, 266, 267-268). But the tendency towards separation is by no means equivalent to continuation of the pre-conversion outlook, (*Confessions* VII, 19, 25), so that O'Connell is not helpful. Rather the shift from philosophy to Incarnation, away from Photinianism, and from the mere human being to the incarnate Word (granted the overtone of separation) is most clear from the Cassiciacum passages. Madec has therefore rightly accused O'Connell of blurring the important Christological boundary line between the pre-conversion VII, 19, 25, and the post-conversion Cassiciacum statements, whether or not it was O'Connell's intention to read Augustine's ' Photinianism ' in an orthodox manner (MADÉC, « *Confessions* VII », pp. 115, 129-131, 134, 137 ; O'CONNELL'S response in « *Reply* », p. 98).

Such an inquiry into the soteriology of the conversion would not assume, to be sure, that Christ's person is constituted by a soteriological function, as if the 'person' were in actuality the 'work.' For the young Augustine, the work of the Incarnation is most clear, aside from the person. Rather, the person must be sought out as the indispensable 'other side' of the work, an essential object within soteriology that sets the horizon of Christ's saving action.

To summarize in conclusion : The conversion of Augustine significantly involved the doctrine of the Incarnation, not only in that he accepted it, but in the manner of his conceiving of it. Furthermore, the most searching question to ask of his concept of the Incarnation is not whether it was adequate to include him within the Catholic church of his day. Rather, one asks in principle the shape and substance of his view and how Catholic teaching and Neoplatonist reflection related to it. Study of the *Cassiciacum* passages in comparison with the Photinian admission of *Confessions* VII shows that he has crossed a genuine boundary of belief in affirming the divine participation 'downward' in human affairs. Such a repudiation of the Neoplatonist philosophers coincidentally gives rise, however, to a new appropriation of platonizing reflection within the framework of the Word-made-flesh ; namely, the immutable perfection of deity is now named as an eternal clemency or mercy, sealed in the self-humbling of Incarnation. Immutability = perfection = perfect goodness = mercy = its actualization in self-abasement.

Augustine thus did not abandon reason in order to accept authority in his conversion, but took hold of a new relation between reason and authority at the very point of the Incarnation doctrine. His reasserted platonizing thought, in the midst of Christian authority, shielded him from a brusque *sacrificium intellectus*. At the same time, he did not see clearly the unity of the two natures in Christ's person. The implicit role of Christ's person in the soteriology of his conversion will have to be further investigated.

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