

“In His Light See Light”: The Influence of Augustine on Ratzinger’s Perspective on Creation

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In “Creation: Belief in Creation and the Theory of Evolution,” a chapter in his 1973 book *Dogma und Verkündigung*,¹ Joseph Ratzinger takes up the question of whether the views of evolution and creation are compatible. In light of scientific findings that make it difficult to reject evolutionary theory, what are the faithful to believe about creation? In particular, how are the faithful to understand the world as meaningful, the human person as a special creation, and the spirit as more than an incidental by-product of evolutionary forces? Ratzinger draws on the disciplines of history, science, philosophy, and theology to answer these and related questions, thereby leading believers to a deeper understanding of their faith, of the human person, and of the divine creative act.

The topic of creation also figures in Augustine’s writings, including *The Confessions*, Augustine’s prayer to God about his conversion. In books XI, XII, and XIII of that work, the bishop of Hippo reflects on the origins of the universe as described in Genesis 1; the relationship between the Trinitarian Godhead and the created world; and the conversion, spiritual ascent, and desired destiny of those whom God calls “before ever you made the firmament.”² Considered by many to be one of the greatest minds in Western civilization and certainly within the Christian tradition, Augustine offers insights that resonate as strongly with believers today as they did with the faithful of the late fourth and early fifth centuries.

This paper will explore whether traces of Augustine’s thinking can be detected in Ratzinger’s essay. Having preceded Darwin by more than 1,450 years, Augustine would not have conceived of the nineteenth-century scientist’s shattering discoveries. Nonetheless, one may be able to find evidence in *Confessions* to suggest that, were Augustine alive today, he would reach conclusions similar to those of Ratzinger. This paper first lays out Ratzinger’s argument and then turns to the last three books of *Confessions* to find parallel ideas, or the embryonic beginnings of such ideas. The presence of these connections are useful in that they highlight the dynamism, vibrancy, and depth of a tradition of faith that interacts with, but is not confined by, the world view of one particular era (40). It also demonstrates that fruitful dialogue can take place not only across centuries, as new generations of theologians seek to understand the mysteries of God, in whom

¹ The chapter is included in Joseph Ratzinger, *Credo for Today: What Christians Believe* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), the source used in this paper. Hereafter, page references to this source will be included in parentheses in text.

² Augustine, *The Confessions*, ed. John Rotelle, O.S.A. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), XIII,23,33. Hereafter, book-paragraph references will be included in parentheses in text.

“are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (XI,2,4), but also contemporarily between faith and science.

Though Ratzinger does not cite Augustine in his essay, speculation about a link between these two distinguished theologians is reasonable. Along with Bonaventure, Romano Guardini, and Hans Urs von Balthasar, Augustine greatly influenced Ratzinger’s theological formation.³ As a doctoral student at the University of Munich, Ratzinger focused his dissertation on *Volk und haus Gottes in Augustins lehre von der kirche (The People and the House of God in Augustine’s Doctrine of the Church)*.⁴

In his book *Great Christian Thinkers*, Ratzinger devotes the longest chapter to the bishop of Hippo, offering his own summary of and perspective on Augustine’s intellectual and spiritual journey. Ratzinger affirms what a vital force this Church Father has been in his life, describing him as a friend whose faith is no less compelling or relevant today than it was in the fourth century.⁵ This affinity is so strong that in 2007 Ratzinger, as pontiff, made a pilgrimage to Augustine’s tomb in Pavia not only “to express to him the homage of the entire Catholic Church but also to manifest my personal devotion and gratitude in regard to a figure to whom I feel very linked for the role he has had in my life as a theologian, priest, and pastor.”⁶ Thus, Ratzinger acknowledges that Augustine has profoundly affected his spiritual development and that he is an important voice for contemporary believers around the world.

Ratzinger on Creation

The doctrine of creation is important in the theology of Ratzinger, who laments the way in which modern-day theology has diminished the doctrine’s status or left it bankrupt of meaning.⁷ In the essay that is the subject of this paper, Ratzinger implies that, rather than dismissing belief in creation, theologians and the faithful need to seek to understand it in light of scientific discoveries. Until little more than a century ago, both a literal reading of Genesis and the calculation that the world was 6,000 years old were widely accepted. Thus, Darwin’s evolutionary theory, even more than Copernicus’ heliocentric theory, Ratzinger says, challenged the way in which Christians had viewed themselves and their world for centuries.

Ratzinger is concerned with how this shift affects faith. If until the time of Darwin theologians had insisted on the veracity of the biblical chronology, how could they now be reconciled to its having been proven false without ceding all theological ground (34)? Belief in creation is on shaky ground—if one narrowly and superficially defines it as God’s act in creating

³ John L. Allen, Jr., *Pope Benedict XVI: A Biography of Joseph Ratzinger* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000), 35-43.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵ Benedict XVI, *Great Christian Thinkers: From the Early Church through the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 108.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), xx-xi.

individual species at a particular moment. But this doctrine, says Ratzinger, is not fundamentally about the making of individual creatures. Rather, it answers the question of “why anything exists at all instead of nothing” (34) and probes “the real foundations of reality,” ontological and metaphysical inquiries that lie outside science’s scope and interest (35).

Within this paradigm, Ratzinger turns to the question of how the two “categories of thought” (36), creation and evolution, address each other. Can faith in creation accommodate evolutionary theory? Even if evolution answers questions about variability among species, one still must tackle ultimate questions regarding human existence, which “cannot be reduced to what is scientifically demonstrable” (37). Is spirit, too, the production of evolution? If so, then matter, not spirit, is “the primary thing and the sufficient cause of all the rest” (37), a premise that renders God unnecessary. Because humankind must have a place in the evolutionary chain, evolutionary theory puts the spotlight anew on “the primacy and superiority of spirit,” which is essential to belief in creation (38). To argue that matter is part of evolutionary change and that spirit was created by God is not, says Ratzinger, a viable solution.

What does help, he says, is determining whether one can reconcile the evolutionary notion of *becoming* with the biblically based notion of *being* as derived from “creative meaning” (39). Ratzinger uses this opportunity to explore the relationship between faith and world view, which anyone trying to think scientifically and theologically should bear in mind. Whenever people make the mistake of equating faith with world view, they set themselves up for disaster. If the latter is fundamentally altered, the former is in danger of unraveling (40).

Ratzinger contrasts today’s crisis with the experience of the Church Fathers. They understood that the creation accounts were products of a pre-scientific age, representing large spans of time and reflecting various world views. They did not perceive world views different from their own to be attacks on their beliefs (40). However, the advent of literal exegesis eroded “the sense of the internal breadth of faith” and caused many people to lose “sight of the transcendence of the Word of God” over its individual expressions (41).

To show believers how the doctrine of creation can help them to make sense of their existence as spiritual beings in a post-evolution world, Ratzinger offers several observations. First, he articulates the relationship between being and becoming. “Being *is* time; it does not merely *have* time ... Being is understood dynamically, as being-in-movement, and it is understood as something directed” (42). It is goal-oriented, for it advances and progresses, at least when humans are the point of reference. Next he argues that this being-in-movement has meaning (an assertion that only faith, not science, can make), for it derives from the creative mind that is the Logos and “represents the temporal form of its self-actuation” (43). Creation, then, refers not to what occurred once or at distinct stages. Rather,

temporal being as a whole is encompassed by the one creative act of God, which gives it, in its division, its unity, in which at the same time its meaning consists, a meaning that is unfathomable to us because we do not see the whole. (44)

In other words, all evolution, the entire movement of being, which progresses toward a goal, takes place within the one creative act of God's mind and from which existence derives meaning. Believers should see the emptiness of envisioning the Creator God as an artisan making objects (44). Such a concept has nothing to do with being-in-movement. To believe in creation is "to understand, in faith, the world of becoming revealed by science as a meaningful world that comes from a creative mind" (44).

This perspective helps believers also to see that being comes not only from a creative mind but from "the *Creator Spiritus*" (44). Thus, spirit is not random or unexpected mutation in a world dominated by matter. Matter is but the preface to the story of spirit (45). Additionally, every human person, encompassed by the whole of the creative act, can relate personally to God. Just as God made God known to Adam and Adam could respond and know God, so, too, can every person, for "the mystery of creation looms over every one of us" (46).

Finally, Ratzinger asserts that human beings are God's special creation in that they alone are willed by God to know God and to "think about him in return" (46). When "the clay" realized that it had this capacity to conceive of God, that was the dawn of anthropogenesis. "The first 'thou' that—however stammeringly—was said by human lips to God marks the moment in which spirit arose in the world" (47). At this profound juncture in the history of spirit, the corporeal being that came to be termed "man" developed to a point that it could respond to its Creator and "be immediately in relation to God" (47). Evolutionary theory cannot deny or confirm when or how spirit emerged, Ratzinger says. But it forces one to pause and consider more reflectively one's own spiritual evolution and, ultimately, "to become increasingly what [one] is: the being who is supposed to say 'thou' to God in eternity" (47). What some may call the crisis of evolution, then, serves to challenge believers to think about what they believe and their relationship to the God who is the source and destiny of all creation, the God whom they hope to adore in eternity.

Augustine's Thoughts in Books XI-XIII of *Confessions*

In his essay, Ratzinger adds to, and draws inspiration from, an ever-expanding tapestry of reflection woven by theologians and philosophers over two millennia. Nonetheless, one can try to identify and slide one's fingers along those strands that thread back to Augustine's musings in *Confessions*—the one volume that, in addition to the Bible, Ratzinger has said he would want to have with him were he stranded on a desert island⁸—to see which passages may have enriched Ratzinger's presentation of what the Church in the modern world believes.

From Nothingness to Being

Ratzinger says that the "intellectual starting point" (35) for a discussion of belief in creation is "the transition of nothingness to being" (36). This statement presupposes an acceptance of the teaching on creation ex nihilo—a teaching to which Augustine devotes much attention. The biblical passage that occasions Augustine's musings on what "creation from nothing" means is the opening verse of the book of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the

⁸ Allen, 35.

earth.”⁹ Because nothing exists that God did not make, God created the heavens and the earth from nothing.

Augustine breaks this notion down by distinguishing between nothingness and formlessness. From nothing God created “almost nothing” (XII,8,8), that is, formless matter. This “primal matter of the whole universe” (XII,29,40) was not of God’s substance, and from it God created the heavens and the earth. Augustine interprets this opening reference to “heaven” to mean not the visible, cosmological sky but “heaven’s heaven” (XII,2,2), the intellectual creation that constitutes God’s household, that is, the realm where spiritual creatures behold unwaveringly God’s glory. Likewise, in the beginning “earth” was not yet terra firma but the dark, formless, undifferentiated abyss, having “no color, no shape, no body, no spirit” (XII,3,3). To this primal matter God gave “form and distinction” (XII,3,3). However, these actions were not temporally successive, as if one followed the other. God created primal matter “formless at the same instant that you gave it form” (XIII,33,48). Thus, Augustine posits what he hopes is a plausible explanation of what the transition from nothingness to being means.

Ratzinger also distinguishes evolutionary theory from belief in creation by explaining that the former asks why one thing rather than another, whereas the latter asks why something rather than nothing. Here Ratzinger picks up on the question with which Augustine opens Book XIII: Why did God create? Augustine tries to imagine of what value creatures, and human beings in particular, are to God to warrant their having been created. Did God fashion humans to supply a need in God’s self? To relieve God of having to do all the work? To enhance God’s power through their worship? Did spiritual and corporeal creation have a prerogative, or “an advance claim” on God, to come into being?

Augustine dismisses all such motives. He concludes that the created world came to exist through, and because of, God’s supreme, abundant goodness, “for you did not want so good a thing to be missing” (XIII,2,2). Creation expresses God’s gratuitousness and love. Moreover, out of goodness God endows spiritual and corporeal creatures with the capacity to be converted to and illumined by God, not so that they somehow will perfect God but so that they will please the One who is perfection.

Being and Becoming

Ratzinger describes the static view of creation that reigned well into the nineteenth century: God had created every species in the beginning, and these species were invariable. With evolution, humankind came to be seen as just one of the links in a chain of endless changes. How can belief in creation respond to this attitude? Ratzinger reconciles the “being” of the biblical view and the “becoming” of the evolutionary view by arguing that being is dynamic. It “*is time*” (42).

⁹ *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version, 2nd Catholic Ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006). All subsequent Bible verses are from this version.

Augustine's reflections on mutability and time may have provided the groundwork for Ratzinger's insights. Throughout the final books of *Confessions*, Augustine reminds his readers that immutability and permanence belong to God. God exists but was not made and is therefore unchanging. There is nothing in God that was not always there; God is "Being-Itself" (XII,7,7). On the other hand, changeability, variation, and impermanence are defining characteristics inherent in the created world. Augustine links the mutability of each creature with the original state of formlessness, "whereby that creature can receive form, or can be changed and transformed into something else" (XII,19,28). While this potential of primal matter to receive form helps to explain how God imparted form to the countless specific beings that "fill us humans with wonder" (XII,8,8)—a decidedly non-evolutionary view in that it points to the creation of individual species—Augustine's thinking, in theory at least, admits the possibility of Darwinian claims. His clever terms for this formlessness, "nothing-something" and "an is-that-is-not" (XII,6,6), are pregnant with evolutionary expectation.

The property of mutability allows human beings to have a notion of time, foreshadowing Ratzinger's assertion that (created) being is time. Drawing upon natural phenomena, Augustine comments on how interdependent time and change are. The changeable world "makes possible our awareness and demarcation of passing times, because this is what the rolling seasons are—the changes that occur in creatures as various forms proliferate and develop" (XII,8,8). It is worth noting the terms with which Augustine describes change. "Proliferation" recalls the biblical summons to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:22), while "development" is a trait the modern world associates with evolution. Augustine argues that time, which was created by God, did not exist before God imparted form to matter. Only because the created world has form and undergoes change do human beings have a sense of time passing. If the present "never slipped away into the past, it would not be time at all; it would be eternity" (XI,14,17).

Augustine exquisitely illustrates this point during his discussion of believers who are no longer hampered by a "carnal outlook" (XII,27,37) when it comes to interpreting Genesis 1. These more mature believers understand that the created world is subject to time, whereas God transcends it. They exult that all creatures, having been made in and formed through God's image, "would become exceedingly good, whether they remain closely grouped about you or, arrayed in ever-widening circles through time and space, they bring about changes or themselves beautifully *evolve*" (XII,28,38; emphasis added). Mutability is an outcome of the divine creative act and does not diminish the essential goodness of a creature. In sum, Augustine's observations that the created world is inherently changeable and that time is a function of change could serve as precursors to Ratzinger's statement that created existence is being-in-movement, a movement that is temporal and transformative.

Existence Derived from Creative Mind

As noted above, Ratzinger asserts that the plausibility of evolutionary theory does not undermine belief in creation. This belief, rooted in Scripture, expresses the conviction that the becoming world derives from the Logos and is therefore meaningful and that the divine creative

act encompasses all temporal being-in-movement. Once again, Augustine seems to provide theological material for Ratzinger's argument.

For example, in dismissing any concept of God as artisan, Ratzinger echoes Augustine's aversion to this simile. Augustine points out that, unlike human craftsmen, who work with existing matter, acquired skills, and intellectually perceived images, God had no existing materials or workshop with which to work in creating heaven and earth, as nothing existed that God did not make. Instead, God created through the spoken Word ("speaking" is not to be taken in a literal, temporal sense, Augustine cautions).

Here, however, one must shift to present tense, for God speaks in eternity, outside of time, untouched by change. God did not speak discrete words, one following the other. "No, all things are uttered simultaneously in one eternal speaking" (XI,7,9). Augustine additionally refers to this Word that is uttered eternally as Wisdom, Logos, Son, Power, the Beginning, eternal Reason, and Truth, all of which convey the Word's divine identity and encompass Ratzinger's description of the Logos as creative mind from which creation is derived and thus endowed with meaning.

In arguing that creation is neither a long-gone moment of launch nor a series of periodic spurts of intervention but one divine act that comprises "temporal being as a whole" (44), Ratzinger is likely indebted to his patristic mentor. Augustine painstakingly distinguishes the existence of creatures, who operate within the boundaries of time and space, from the generative activity of the Creator, for whom there is no beginning or end and to whom no temporal terminology, such as "never" or "then," is applicable. "The whole of both past and future flows forth from him who is always present, and is by him created" (XI,11,13). In other words, God speaks, and therefore creates, in eternity, yet created beings themselves occur within time and succeed one another.

Augustine and Ratzinger arrive at these insights because both appreciate the value of moving beyond a literal reading of creation accounts. As his exegesis demonstrates, Augustine delights in mining the riches of Scripture, including Genesis, the human authorship of which Augustine, as a man of his times, attributes to Moses. Not without tenderness does he address those sincere but spiritually immature persons who entertain childish, worldly, literal notions of how God created the universe and how God speaks. Augustine acknowledges that, while the faith of such people is being edified because ultimately they do believe that God made all things, it is more satisfying to be like those who "espy hidden fruit; they fly to and fro joyfully, chattering as they search it out, and plucking it" (XII,28,38).

Augustine demonstrates that he is adept at spying, searching, and plucking. He nimbly offers a sampling of viable opinions people may have regarding the meaning of Genesis. If one presumes the human authors of Scripture to be truthful and if one is sincere in one's search for what meaning the author intended, then "what harm," Augustine asks God, "is there if a reader holds an opinion which you, the light of all truthful minds, shows to be true, even though it is not what was intended by the author?" (XII,18,27). His approach, an excellent riposte to those who think they have a corner on truth or who argue for a single, literal reading of Scripture, testifies to the multivalent character of God's Word, which yields new insights to

seekers of every age and encourages them always to be in conversation with Scripture. Indeed, Ratzinger likely sees Augustine as a sterling example of one who appreciates, as Ratzinger does, “the transcendence of the Word of God” (41).

Man as God’s Special Creation

According to Ratzinger, believers may harbor fears that evolutionary theory challenges the fundamental understanding that human beings are God’s special creation. If everything is material, then perhaps spirit is, at best, incidental, superfluous, or external, and human existence meaningless. Ratzinger instead argues that “recognition of the world of becoming as the self-actuation of a creative thought includes also its derivation from the creativity of the spirit” (44). Humankind is a special creation, moreover, in that God wills humankind to know God and to think about God in return. Thus, human beings are created to live in a meaningful world and to be in relationship with God, a relationship that God initiates and to which human beings freely respond. Augustine has much to say on these crucial topics in *Confessions*, and one can appreciate how his accounts of his personal experiences may have strengthened Ratzinger’s argument.

First, Augustine defends the primacy of spirit, which Ratzinger says is fundamental to viewing man as God’s special creation. Augustine describes in great detail his perception of what he calls the intellectual, or spiritual, creation, which has the capacity to change but never does change, for it exists in perfect bliss as it clings in loving constancy to God and thus shares in eternity without being coeternal with God. Even in its primal state, the spiritual order, this “pure mind” (XII,11,12), ranks higher than corporeal creation, be the latter formed or unformed, because its knowledge of the Truth, which is the goal of all inquiry, is consummate. “It is the prerogative of intelligence to know all at once, not partially, nor in riddles, nor as reflected in a mirror” (XII,13,16). Augustine can think of nothing more satisfying than to be a creature so blessed. Experiencing the transcendent joy of God’s household is the destiny for which every prodigal soul yearns.

Second, Augustine emphasizes that all creation has its origins in the Creator Spirit hovering over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2), for nothing exists that did not come from the Trinitarian God. Spiritual creation never knew darkness because the Spirit immediately illumined and transformed it. The Spirit “raised it up without the least delay, from the moment it was made, and summoned it with the words, *Let there be light*” (XIII,10,11). Augustine extends this metaphor of the brooding Creator Spirit to symbolize the immutable God transcending the changeability and vicissitudes of time-bound existence. The Spirit, in particular, is ever-present, lifting up and enlightening each soul, torn as it is, Augustine says, between holy and unholy loves; and causing it to rest in the Spirit’s peace. The waywardness of human beings—who likewise are spiritual creatures “in respect of our souls” (XIII,2,3)—can have a positive outcome, for it reminds the errant soul of its true birthplace and home. “When spirits slide away from you ... their unhappy restlessness amply proves to us how noble is each rational creature you have made, for nothing less than yourself can suffice to give it any measure of blessed rest” (XIII,8,9).

Thus, not only does humankind derive from the Creator Spirit; it also is led by the Spirit, finds fulfillment in the Spirit, and is one with the Spirit, to the point that the believer sees, knows, and loves creation through God's Spirit—and God's Spirit sees and loves creation through the believer. "All these things we see to be exceedingly good, because you see them in us, you who have given us the Spirit to enable us to see them, and in them to love you" (XIII,34,49).

Third, Augustine is conscious that, as God's special creation, he is on the receiving end of God's gracious invitation to relationship. True, God is in relationship with all of creation, which has been given form in and through God, but it is the human heart alone to which God speaks and wherein God prepares to dwell "by the desire you inspire in it" (XIII,1,1); and it is the human heart that responds in freedom, love, and humility, and that returns to the Creator.

Mediating this relationship is the Son, the eternally uttered Word. Augustine the teacher recognizes that the Word is the true and perfect teacher, instructing disciples and sustaining them in the maelstrom of life. Humans must pause, listen, and surrender. "It is by acknowledging the truth that we turn back, and he it is who teaches us to acknowledge it, because he is the Beginning who speaks to us" (XI,8,10). Augustine contrasts God's unfathomable love for each and every person with the shallow, wayward, hard-hearted attitude of God's children. Though humans forget their origins, God is constant. Through Christ, "you sought us that we might begin to seek you. He is the Word through whom you made all things, and me among them" (XI,2,4).

Fourth, to emphasize the unique relationship that God's special creation enjoys with the Creator Spirit, Augustine speculates about what it means to be made in God's image and likeness. He draws an intellectual connection. Because human beings derive from the mind of God, they are to be reformed by renewing their minds. This renewal allows each believer to understand the truth, discern God's will, contemplate the Trinity, and become "a Spirit-filled person, fit to judge of any matters that call for judgment" (XIII,22,32). Thus, Augustine emphasizes, as Ratzinger does, the capacity of rational, intellectual beings, made in God's image, to know God, ponder fruitfully the deepest mysteries pertaining to existence and faith, and to desire only what God wills, by virtue of their being God's special creation. Having come from creative mind, the human mind, renewed in Christ, serves only God and benefits from spiritual insight. "Were this not the case, human beings, for all their high dignity, would not understand; they would be on a level with senseless beasts and become like them" (XIII,23,33).

Directional and Goal-Oriented Spirit

The culmination of Ratzinger's argument is that science can never ascertain the rise of spirit in the world, the moment of anthropogenesis when the clay was able to conceive of God and thus "be immediately in relation to God" (47). However, science does challenge faith to go deeper and grow deeper, and to help man "to become increasingly what he is: the being who is supposed to say 'thou' to God in eternity" (47). Throughout the chapter, Ratzinger uses terms that show that this process of becoming is directional: it advances, ascends, develops, and has a goal and destiny. The final books of *Confessions* indicate that Augustine, too, understands that spirit advances and ascends toward its goal; that one's becoming involves conversion and the re-

creation of the soul; and that one's spiritual pilgrimage leads one home, to the source of life and the place of eternal rest and joy.

Augustine answers this question of how one becomes increasingly what one is by acknowledging that conversion is an ongoing process leading to spiritual transformation and eternal rest in God. Commenting on the blessed fortune of intellectual creation—which, had it not been immediately summoned, illuminated, and transformed by God's Spirit, would have remained in darkness and chaos—Augustine recognizes that humankind has had a different, temporal experience of conversion because, in a special way, it has been redeemed by Christ. "In our case there are distinct periods of time, for we were darkness once, and then we became light" (XIII,10,11).

Yet even in the wake of this salvific act, conversion is needed. The struggle is not over. Human beings go astray. They forget God. Unlike the creatures in God's heavenly household, they turn away from the Light, slipping "back into the old life, dark and abysmal" (XIII,2,3). This tension between chaos and conversion marks the human condition. "Even now we labor in our residual gloom, until in your only Son we become your righteousness" (XII,2,3). An example of such labor is Augustine's passionate commitment to unlocking the mysteries of Scripture through meditation on God's law. Unlike the angels, humans do not see clearly and fully but instead gain knowledge only in a piecemeal fashion. Using language evocative of Genesis, Augustine says that he wants to tell God "what I know and what I still find baffling, your dawning light in me and the residual darkness that will linger until my weakness is swallowed up by your strength" (XI,2,2). Such passages reveal that Augustine has no illusions about conversion being a once-and-done event. Until a soul comes to rest eternally in God, its transformation is not complete.

Fortunately, the unchanging Spirit of God figuratively hovers above the chaos of every human life, bearing it up so that it may be conformed more and more to God's likeness. Through God's spirit, human beings are reformed and reshaped, thus undergoing a new Genesis. Just as creation is critical to the history of the spirit, so is conversion. It serves as a second, or new, creation. And just as creation *ex nihilo* involved the imposition of form in God's image, so does re-creation involve *reformation* in God's Spirit, with Christ as mediator. Augustine sums up this re-creation in generative terms: "Once our heart had conceived by your Spirit we made a fresh start and began to act well" (XIII,38,53).

This process of conversion, of spiritual re-creation, is akin to a pilgrimage to one's eternal home. In reflecting on this pilgrimage, Augustine is that person Ratzinger describes: one who increasingly understands what it means to say "thou" to God in eternity. Augustine prays for the Good Shepherd to transport him back to his origins, the homeland his spirit remembers, so that he may live in beatitude in God's household, where God's glory dwells. "My pilgrim-soul sighs for you," he says of heaven's heaven, "and I pray him who made you to claim me also as his own within you, for he made me too" (XII,15,21). There, in the new Jerusalem, "where are lodged the first-fruits of my spirit" (XII,16,23), the divinely wrought reformation of Augustine's still disintegrated self will be complete, if only he can stay the course through God's mercy.

Augustine describes this pilgrimage, this journey of conversion, not only in personal terms, at the level of the individual soul, but also in collective terms. As his allegorical interpretation of the days of creation in Book XIII demonstrates, the Church travels the same path. As the Body of Christ, the faithful participate in this history of the spirit. The Spirit of God continues to speak to God's people, especially through the apostles and other witnesses God raises up. The journey can be blessed with ascent and derailed by setback. The dark can still tinge the day. Nonetheless, the faithful do not travel alone, for the in-dwelling of the Creator Spirit proves that "we have received, even on our pilgrim way, the pledge that we are children of the light" (XIII,14,15).

In fact, living as children of the light is a key way that human beings become, to use Ratzinger's terms, increasingly what they are. In this new creation, spiritual children, through God's grace, testify to the truth and thus carry out anew the work of the Creator in Genesis. They "shine upon the earth, separate day from night, and mark distinct periods of time" (XIII,18,22). A new chapter in the history of the spirit is being told. However, human persons must continue to grow in the Spirit. Always at peril of slipping back into the abyss, the faithful cannot afford to be complacent. As wayfarers, they must have their hearts set on what is above and advance in knowledge that leads to Truth. Outward commitments do not suffice; spiritual ascent requires interior transformation. Augustine does not gloss over this reality. "Even though people have been baptized and initiated, and have submitted to these material sacraments, they would proceed no further, did their souls not rise to a new level of spiritual life, and move on from elementary doctrine toward maturity" (XIII,20,28).

Empowered by the Spirit, however, God's children will ascend to the "eternal goal" of heaven's heaven, "to that place where I yearn to hear songs of praise and contemplate your delight" (XI,29,39). Here in the presence of God, resting in peace and holiness, souls abide forever. Just as Jesus is the Beginning in that he speaks to humans, so here in his Father's house, where there is no end, souls respond by lifting up their voices in unending praise. Humankind has become what it was destined to be, speaking "thou" in eternity and having "no other desire but to abide there for ever" (XIII,9,10).

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to uncover evidence that Augustine's reflections on creation, as expressed in the last three books of *Confessions*, may have informed Ratzinger's attempt to show how faith addresses and is deepened by challenges posed by the world view of evolution. The nature of this research was speculative, for evolution was not a paradigm in Augustine's time, nor does Ratzinger refer to Augustine in his essay on creation.

Many of the ideas Ratzinger discusses and the premises on which he builds his argument may have originated, or at least resonated, with Augustine. Ratzinger's theological mentor agrees that creation is fundamentally about the transition from nothing and adds that the motive behind the creative act was God's supreme goodness. He seems to be open, in principle, to the definition of creaturely existence as being-in-movement, as his extensive musings about time and the changeable nature of creatures indicate. Furthermore, Augustine appreciates that human beings

are special creations in that God initiates a relationship with them that irrational creatures do not enjoy. Although human beings, bound by time, belong to corporeal creation, they also, by virtue of their having souls, are spiritual creatures. Augustine makes it clear that the spiritual is the highest order of creation and that God's Spirit is the means of human beings' conversion. He affirms the priority of spirit, the role of God's spirit in creation, and the need for ongoing spiritual conversion, made possible by God's grace, to keep pilgrims oriented toward the household of God, where they will rest in the peace and holiness of God.

Beyond the unearthing of these parallels, the most satisfying aspect of this research was observing the way in which each theologian fearlessly engages faith and science in a conversation. From the difference between nothingness and formlessness to the slippery notion of past, present, and future, Augustine tackles challenging topics with painstaking diligence and attention. Ratzinger, for his part, objectively considers and respects the contributions and limitations of scientific inquiry.

Their attitudes are encouraging because all too often faith expressed in the pew and in the public square comes across as narrow-minded, literalistic, ill-prepared to engage in intellectual discourse, and closed to advances in human knowledge. Yet if one believes in God who is Truth, God who is Creator, God who is the "Beginning" and "abidingly the same" (XI,8,10), then one should be open to discoveries and breakthroughs in all fields of human endeavor, allowing them to challenge and stretch and deepen one's faith without having to make a "dishonest compromise" (34). While one can argue only speculatively that a future evolutionist lurked inside Augustine, few would dispute his more enduring legacy, one that Ratzinger has claimed: the sincere and authentic pursuit of truth will always lead to God.

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