

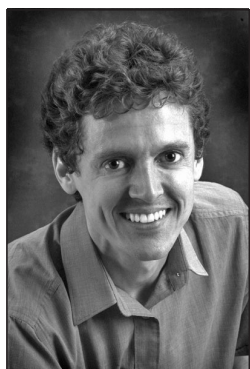


Student and Early Career Scientists Corner

The Relevance of Augustine's View of Creation Re-evaluated

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Andrew J. Brown



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Davis Young's 1988 article, "The Contemporary Relevance of Augustine's View of Creation," contributed to the debate over the interpretation of the days of creation in Genesis 1 by drawing on Augustine's most significant work on this biblical text, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. The task left undone at that time was to more fully explore the basic interpretive approach of Augustine as a way of providing a context for his specific outcomes. This article confirms that Augustine is a figure worth studying among church thinkers, surveys his position on the days of creation, then attempts to more carefully analyze the interpretive factors that drove Augustine to his conclusions. Six categories of factors are identified: exegetical constraints, theological factors, pastoral concern, apologetic motives, philosophical influences and operating presuppositions. Without grasping these various influences on his interpretation, Augustine's conclusions may be cited for and against modern interpretive positions with little real understanding of his reasoning or its validity. Augustine's thinking, once understood, is indeed relevant for contemporary study of creation in Genesis. It prompts us to consider the influence of world view presuppositions on our own interpretation, encourages us to notice and be deliberate about the role of our theological framework in our interpretation, heightens our awareness of the apologetic ramifications of our positions, assists our reconciliation of knowledge from biblical and natural sources, and reminds us of the ultimately pastoral purpose of biblical interpretation.

The quest to understand the Bible, including Genesis, and reconcile that understanding with information from outside the Bible can be greatly assisted by reference to our Christian exegetical heritage. This article takes up the unfinished task of painting a fuller picture of Augustine's hermeneutic in order to thoroughly understand how he arrived at his unique and influential interpretation of the seven days of creation in Gen. 1:1-2:3.

Davis Young's 1988 article, "The Contemporary Relevance of Augustine's View of Creation," sought to contribute to the debate

over the interpretation of the days of creation in Genesis 1 by drawing on Augustine's important work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis (De Genesi ad litteram)*.¹ Young endeavored to debunk the claim that the days of creation had only been interpreted literally throughout church history until the pressures of modern science had their interpretive impact. In the course of his analysis, Young made one telling comment: "There is no doubt that Augustine's view is strange and difficult to absorb."²

This difficulty, however, has not prevented other writers from making such sweeping claims as, "Irenaeus, Origen, Basil, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, to name a few, argued that the days of creation were long periods of time."³ Admittedly, more thorough attempts to understand the thinking of Augustine and other church fathers have appeared since Young's article.⁴ The increased reference to our exegetical heri-

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tage is positive, yet the problem of misleading use of the church fathers for polemical purposes still exists.⁵ If the authority of the Church fathers is to be enlisted,⁶ their thinking needs to be more clearly and fully understood. Three specific things are needed.

1. We need a deeper appreciation of our spiritual and exegetical heritage in the church fathers as well as medieval and subsequent commentators. The modern sense (myth?) of absolute progress sometimes causes us to undervalue this heritage.

2. We must more closely scrutinize sources to properly understand them on their own terms. We are at risk of mining these thinkers' writings for short statements that support our opinion without being genuinely interested in their governing thought systems that give sense to those statements.

3. The insights achieved through such scrutiny demand wider exposure. Few people combine thorough knowledge of science and religion issues with broad exposure to the history of biblical exegesis.⁷ Those engaged in science/religion discussions might gain fuller access to the riches of ancient biblical exegesis through interdisciplinary dialogue.

In pursuing a more sophisticated understanding of Augustine's interpretation of the days of creation, let us first establish why Augustine's work in particular warrants such attention.

The Peculiar Relevance of Augustine's Views

Augustine is perhaps the most important thinker amongst church fathers on creation in Genesis. No other patristic figure left such a store of writings on Genesis. His first work of biblical commentary, which followed shortly after his return to North Africa after his conversion, was *De Genesi contra Manichaeos (DGnM)*⁸ in about 389.⁹ He worked on the abortive *De Genesi Ad Litteram liber imperfectibus*¹⁰ around 393–394, by which time he was a priest at Hippo. Chapters 11–13 of his *Confessions* (written 397–400) and chapter 11 of *De Civitate Dei*¹¹ (dating from about 417–418) also concern Genesis.¹² But between 401 and 415, Augustine completed one of his major exegetical works, *De Genesi ad litteram*,¹³ our best source for his mature thinking about the early chapters of Genesis.¹⁴

Augustine commands widespread respect as one of the pre-eminent minds of the patristic church.¹⁵ Jerome surpassed him for philological expertise, and perhaps Origen for intellectual ability, but Augustine was an able philosophical thinker and theological synthesist.¹⁶

Augustine's thought was highly influential on Christian theology throughout the medieval period and contin-



St. Augustine (354–430 AD)

ued to prompt debate in the time of the Reformation.¹⁷ Calvin's rebuttal of instantaneous creation in his discussion of Gen. 1:5 is witness to the durability of Augustine's ideas.¹⁸

Augustine's "literal" commentaries on Genesis feature what might appear to us to be a nonliteral interpretation of the days. This sets his approach in contrast to both the overtly allegorical version of the days in Origen and Clement of the Alexandrian school¹⁹ and his own work in *DGnM* and *Confessions*, and to a more obviously literal line such as Basil's or, later, Calvin's.

Augustine's hermeneutic is self-conscious and candid. "Augustine is often remarkably explicit about the principles determining his exegesis."²⁰ This assists the modern reader to understand, critique and, where appropriate, utilize his approach. *De Doctrina Christiana*²¹ is Augustine's most direct treatment on biblical hermeneutics, but he also comments on hermeneutical issues throughout his Genesis commentaries.

Augustine is indeed a pivotal thinker where the history of interpretation of the days of creation is concerned. Before analyzing the factors that influence his interpretation, we must revisit his approach to the days.



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Augustine's Understanding of the Days of Creation

Augustine's exegesis developed throughout his life, trending from a primarily allegorical approach toward one that he regarded as literal. Allegorical interpretation dominates the early presentation of the days of creation in *DGnM*. Augustine seeks to bypass Manichean objections to the literal sense of Genesis 1²² by presenting the seven days with their creative details as an allegory of human history laid out in seven stages.²³ To expound the prophetic significance of the Genesis text in this way is only appropriate, since "words can in no sense express how God made and created heaven and earth and every creature ..." ²⁴ *DGnM* I.25 goes on to utilize the seven days as an allegory of the Christian's spiritual journey, given as a call to moral excellence and progress in spiritual understanding.²⁵ The *Confessions*, Book XIII, written about ten years later than *DGnM*, contain a similar treatment of Gen. 1:1-2:3, yet with a new defensiveness; Augustine protests that it would be "unthinkable" for a particular statement of Genesis to "have no special meaning."²⁶ Allegory for Augustine unlocks a richness of meaning that God wants to communicate through the text, transcending literal reference.

However, Augustine's earlier *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectibus* already reveals a growing desire to uncover the literal sense, although he later reflected, "my inexperience collapsed under the weight of so heavy a load,"²⁷ explaining why he abandoned the work at Gen. 1:26. One of the aspects of the literal sense of Genesis that created this heavy interpretive load was the difficulty of reading the days straightforwardly, for reasons explored below. Passing years brought greater confidence in interpreting Scripture, so that Augustine later returned to the task of a literal exposition of the early chapters of Genesis in *De Genesi ad litteram* and completed it to his satisfaction.

In the latter two works, Augustine flirts with a literal understanding of the days as we might consider it—creation in six of the days we are used to.²⁸ He considers the possibility of the production of the first three days of creation in the sun's absence by means of an intermittent or orbiting light

source.²⁹ The difficulties that remove this straightforwardly literal option are the same in both works.

First, he finds it *rationaly implausible*: "As for material light, it is not clear by what circular motion or going forth and returning it could have produced the succession of day and night before the making of the heaven called firmament, in which the heavenly bodies were made."³⁰ "I find no way that [days and nights] could be before the lights of the heaven were made."³¹

Second, he meets *exegetical* difficulties. In Augustine's Old Latin version, Sirach 18:1 reads: "He who remains for eternity created all things at once."³² And Ps. 32:9³³ and Gen. 2:4ff together raise the problem that God's creative command could not be said to be fulfilled suddenly if the vegetation had arisen according to normal processes, for which even the third day would not have been sufficient.³⁴ As Lavalley points out, Augustine's exegetical challenges here are amplified by the Old Latin translation of Gen. 2:4, which states: "When day was made, God made heaven and earth and every green thing of the field before it appeared above the earth ..." ³⁵

Third, he has *theological* difficulty with the suggestion that God in his perfection and power might require time to create anything.³⁶ Regarding the creation of light, he protests: "It would be strange if this could have taken as much time to be done by God as it takes us to say it."³⁷ Most importantly, God's rest on Day Seven must not be taken too literally. Augustine writes:

Whatever evening and morning were in those days of creation, it is quite impossible to suppose that on the morning following the evening of the sixth day God's rest began. We cannot be so foolish or rash as to imagine that any such temporal good would accrue to the Eternal and Unchangeable.³⁸

The seventh day has no evening, because God's rest (or the rest he gives to creatures) is unending.³⁹

Seeking an alternative but still literal understanding of the days of creation, Augustine in *DGnM* and initially in *De Genesi ad litteram* interprets the evening-morning pattern to represent first matter awaiting form and then having received

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form.⁴⁰ This might be termed a metaphysical explanation, and although Augustine abandons it,⁴¹ it could be the ancestor to his final metaphysical solution, which runs as follows.

To arrive at an instantaneous creation,⁴² which he sees as necessary for the three reasons listed above, he argues that in reality the days were divided differently than solar days and really constitute the one day recurring seven times.⁴³ The chronological aspect of the sequence fades away to leave a rational or ideal or what Augustine calls a "causal connection."⁴⁴

These seven days of our time, although like the seven days of creation in name and in numbering, follow one another in succession and mark off the division of time, but those first six days occurred in a form unfamiliar to us as intrinsic principles within things created. Hence evening and morning ... did not produce the changes that they do for us with the motion of the sun. This we are certainly forced to admit with regard to the first three days, which are recorded and numbered before the creation of the heavenly bodies.⁴⁵

To be consistent we must apply this implication to all seven days.⁴⁶

As a rational sequence, Augustine locates the seven days within angelic intellect(s). This seems inscrutable to the modern reader when angels are not even mentioned in Genesis 1-2. But in Augustine's Neo-Platonically influenced thinking, angels occupy the highest levels in the intellectual and metaphysical hierarchy and could not possibly be omitted from the Genesis account, "as if they were not among the works of God." By a process of elimination Augustine concludes that the angels "are that light which was called, 'Day.'"⁴⁷ The six days of creation embrace the angels' own formation, under the name "Light" or "Day," along with their comprehension of all of God's (instantaneous) works of creation. He explains:

The minds of angels, united to the Word of God in pure charity, created before the other works of creation, first saw in the Word of God those works to be made before they were actually made; and thus those works were first made in the angels' knowledge when God decreed that they should come into being, before they were made in their own proper natures. The angels also knew those works in their own natures as things already made, with a knowledge admittedly of a lower order called evening.⁴⁸

The angels' knowledge of created things "in the Word of God"⁴⁹ (= "morning") and "in themselves"⁵⁰ (= "evening") might roughly equate to our "rational" and "empirical" epistemological categories respectively. This fits the Platonic cast of Augustine's mind, for whom innate knowledge, especially as including divine revelation, is superior to but does not exclude knowledge gained through the

senses.⁵¹ God's intended creation was innately comprehended by the angels, provoking their praise to him, (logically) before it was produced as material reality.⁵²

The seven-day scheme provided in the Bible pertains not to creation's performance so much as to its revelation to humans.

So creation actually occurred instantaneously, more as a series of events in the rational world rather than the material world, although it produced material creation. The seven-day scheme provided in the Bible pertains not to creation's *performance* so much as to its *revelation* to humans. The scheme is heuristic, an example of accommodation in divine communication. "Why, then, was there any need for six distinct days to be set forth in the narrative ...? The reason is that those who cannot understand the meaning of the text, *He created all things together*,⁵³ cannot arrive at the meaning of Scripture unless the narrative proceeds slowly step by step."⁵⁴ The "framework of the six days of creation," seeming "to imply intervals of time," is an instance of the customary way in which Scripture speaks "with the limitations of human language in addressing men of limited understanding, while at the same time teaching a lesson to be understood by the reader who is able."⁵⁵ Our solar days "indeed recall the days of creation, but without in any way being really similar to them."⁵⁶ The sophistication and unfamiliarity of this treatment of the days of creation should prompt us to more thoroughly examine Augustine's interpretive principles.

Interpretive Principles at Work in Augustine's Understanding

It is little use knowing what Augustine made of the days of creation if we do not grasp why he interpreted Genesis in this way.⁵⁷ Recent hermeneutical theory has made us more aware that there are other factors in a person's interpretation of a text besides grammatical content. I list the contributing factors in Augustine's exegesis of the creation days in order of their relationship to the biblical text, moving from immediate internal (exegetical) constraints to the theological constraints, then constraints rising from Christian spirituality (pastoral and apologetic factors), and finally completely external (philosophical) constraints, along with methodological factors.



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Exegetical Constraints

The literal meaning of the Genesis text remains a significant factor in Augustine's interpretation. Kathryn Greene-McCreight is aware of the recent hermeneutical perspective that locates meaning largely in the reader/reading community,⁵⁸ but her in-depth study of Augustine's hermeneutic found that in his Genesis work "the verbal sense ... wields its own impact on interpretation and ... places limits on the text's polysemy."⁵⁹ The text's meaning is not limitless or purely subjective; Augustine clearly deals with the lexical, grammatical, and syntactical features of the text. For instance, he finds confirmation of his instantaneous creation position in Gen. 2:4, whose syntax and punctuation he analyses closely, arriving at the arrangement, "When day was made, God made heaven and earth and every green thing of the field." He states: "Hence, I do not now appeal to another book of Holy Scripture to prove that God *created all things together*."⁶⁰

Furthermore, the theological principle of inspiration causes Augustine to accept the whole of Scripture as the Word of God, meaning that it should speak with one voice.⁶¹ Therefore texts from elsewhere in Scripture (i.e. New Testament and Apocrypha) help to establish the meaning of a given text. Greene-McCreight cites Augustine's interpretation of the days of creation as a specific instance of this practice, the influence of Sir. 18:1 being evident despite his claim that he does not need to appeal to it.⁶² Augustine must attempt to reconcile all biblical statements regarding creation, including Sir. 18:1, Ps. 32:9 and even John 5:17.⁶³

Theological Factors

The prime controlling interpretive factor here is the "Rule of Faith." Karla Pollmann explains that clear biblical statements provide the "extrapolated core of the biblical message," which "forms the normative horizon to which all attempts to interpret the Bible must refer."⁶⁴ The Church's teaching is assumed to coincide with that of Scripture as a whole, and in turn a traditional systematic theology sets the parameters for the message a given text may be understood to contain.⁶⁵

Augustine explicitly employs this principle by laying out the Apostles' Creed as his interpretive boundary as he begins his

exegesis in *De Genesi Ad Litteram liber imperfectibus*.⁶⁶ Notice also the theological pressure in Augustine's difficulty with the concept that God could require rest on the seventh day.⁶⁷ The "Rule of Faith" operates in a kind of tension with the verbal meaning, not indicating the right interpretation of a text, but prohibiting wrong ones, thus defining "an array of allowable interpretations."⁶⁸ Belief in inspiration is an aspect of this "Ruled reading" and meant that in every biblical text Augustine sought the true voice of God.⁶⁹

Pastoral Concern

Augustine may have been a reluctant recruit to the priesthood in 391 AD,⁷⁰ but "care for souls" came to be a prime motivation for his exegetical work.⁷¹ Alongside the "Rule of Faith" operated a "Rule of Charity" that asked of each proposed interpretation what its spiritual benefit would be for those who would be taught; would it lead to love for God and neighbor?⁷² The goal of edification could be met even where different readers deduced a different meaning from the same text; any interpretation that yielded truth and profit and did not depart from the "Rule of Faith" was permissible.⁷³ Augustine writes:

From the words of Moses ... there gush clear streams of truth from which each of us ... may derive a true explanation of the creation as best he is able, some choosing one and some another interpretation.⁷⁴

In fact, God had designed Scripture to address its readers according to their differing abilities, according to the much discussed principle of "accommodation."⁷⁵ A person who cannot understand that the six days were repeated "without lapse of time," should leave that higher understanding to those equipped to grasp it, knowing that "Scripture does not abandon you in your infirmity, but with a mother's love accompanies you in your slower steps."⁷⁶ Such statements sound condescending, but they also preserve every believer's right and ability to derive some degree of truth from Scripture, no matter what the person's intellectual level. Scripture is meant for the believer's "progress."⁷⁷

When facing the findings of natural philosophy, Augustine thinks first of the welfare of those within the Church who in

their weakness are easily swayed by outside criticism of Scripture. He attacks the critics for the damage they do to these souls, and then reproves the weak believers for paying too much attention to such opponents and so allow the benefits of Scripture to be denied to them as they cease to respect it.⁷⁸

Apologetic Motives

Augustine considers the reputation of Christianity in the eyes of its doubters and detractors. When he refers to aspects of astronomy or cosmology, he does not seem primarily interested in them for their own sake.⁷⁹ He states:

What concern is it of mine whether heaven is like a sphere and the earth is enclosed by it and suspended in the middle of the universe, or whether heaven like a disk above the earth covers it over on one side? But the credibility of Scripture is at stake ...⁸⁰

Both Young and Lavalley place too much weight on Augustine's regard for "science,"⁸¹ Young because he seeks support for taking notice of science, Lavalley because he is nervous about this very thing.⁸² Augustine's concern here is again for the spiritual welfare of hearers, in this case those outside the faith.⁸³ He writes:

It is disgraceful and dangerous for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics, ... [exposing the writers of Scripture to derision] ... to the great loss of those for whose salvation we toil.⁸⁴

It was important to him to demonstrate in every instance the consistency of Scripture with external facts established by "proofs that cannot be denied."⁸⁵ If the heavens were spherical, he would have to show that Ps. 104:2⁸⁶ did not contradict this.⁸⁷ If anything thought to be a teaching of Scripture is plainly disproved, "this teaching was never in Holy Scripture!"⁸⁸

However, Augustine does interpret according to what is rationally plausible to him. As we saw above, he cannot conceive of literal days preceding the sun. This is more an issue of personal reasoning than of empirical data, and may recall an objection he had to the Christian Bible while a Manichean adherent. Even while he recognizes that legitimate and true conclusions can arise from observing the natural world, his own view of the world seems much more theologically and intuitively than empirically or experientially produced.⁸⁹

Philosophical Influences

The influence of Augustine's metaphysical inheritance is clear. In the time leading up to his conversion in Italy, Augustine came under the influence of Christian Neo-Platonists, and Chadwick sees Augustine's conversion as a marrying of Neo-Platonism and Christianity, the latter transforming elements of the former, such as its a-temporality, replacing the quest for God with his self-revelation, re-personalizing God, and incorporating

salvation.⁹⁰ Augustine will speak of the world's order and beauty witnessing to its Creator, but quickly moves on to heavenly things.⁹¹ The physical world is good, but in a rather derivative way.

Augustine's account of creation elevates the angelic/transcendent realm, impacting his exegesis of the six days of creation.

Augustine's account of creation elevates the angelic/transcendent realm, impacting his exegesis of the six days of creation.⁹² Timeless ideals are prized, being for the Christian Platonist connected to the eternal "Word of God," and the universe consists of an ontological hierarchy. Thus an instantaneous creation pivoting on angelic reason and conceptualized in terms of the weekly cycle, along with Augustine's profound interest in the number six, begins to make sense.⁹³ Exegetical and theological factors may have forced Augustine to look for a more sophisticated interpretation of the days of creation, but his Neo-Platonist metaphysic provides the basis for his particular solution.

Methodological Presuppositions

Plurality of Meaning: We saw previously that Augustine allows for plurality of meaning in the biblical text, even though Scripture as God's Word communicates coherently.⁹⁴ This plurality operates firstly on the level of the reader. In the *Confessions*, Augustine seems frustrated by the diversity of interpretations of Genesis 1, but responds: "How can it harm me that it should be possible to interpret these words in several ways, all of which may yet be true?" Moses' intended meaning is the quest of every reader of Genesis, Augustine says, but with so many interpretations and no way to verify "what Moses had in mind," the reader should accept whatever he believes to be the true meaning, whether or not it is the intended one.⁹⁵ In *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine outlines a three-stage hermeneutical process when reading "the inspired books":⁹⁶

1. In the light of "Catholic belief," choose the meaning "which appears as certainly the meaning intended by the author." This remains the ideal for Augustine.⁹⁷
2. "If this is not clear, then at least we should choose an interpretation in keeping with the context of Scripture and in harmony with our faith."
3. If the context is no help, "at least we should choose only that which our faith demands."



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In Augustine's metaphysic, the immaterial was not less real than the material but more real. But though he takes "day" as (in effect, but not by admission) a metaphor, this for Augustine remains literal exegesis. ... The narrated creation events really occurred, though figurative expressions occur in the telling, and some events took place on a transcendent plane.

So a reading which abandons certainty about author intention or even textual meaning is permissible if it satisfies the "Rule of Faith."⁹⁸ Augustine even countenances plurality in author intention, stating that Moses was aware of the various meanings that could be drawn from the words he communicated, and immediately speculating⁹⁹ that if he was not, the Holy Spirit certainly was aware of all the true meanings that were embodied in the given words. Ultimately it is this inspired status that makes possible an abundance of meanings in the text, extending beyond the human author's conscious intention. Greene-McCreight explains: "Multiple interpretations are allowable if they are all supported in the context of the passage's plain sense as a whole, for the ultimate authorship of the text is Divine."¹⁰⁰

Literal v. Allegorical Meaning: While Augustine defends the place of allegorical meaning,¹⁰¹ he decides at the beginning of *De Genesi ad litteram* that he will attempt to explain Genesis 1-3 as "a faithful record of what happened," since this is the more challenging task for this text.¹⁰² When he catches himself offering "an allegorical and prophetic interpretation," he returns to his purpose of discussing "Sacred Scripture according to the plain meaning of the historical facts, not according to future events which they foreshadow."¹⁰³ Later he opposes the belief that actual history begins with Gen. 4:1, confirming the historicity of events narrated in Genesis 1-3, which he labels historical narrative.¹⁰⁴

How can we reconcile his location of the creation days within angelic intelligence with this claim? Augustine himself answers this potential objection by distinguishing literal light from material light, and defending the angelic comprehension of created things and their resulting praise of the Creator as "a truer evening and a truer morning."¹⁰⁵ In Augustine's metaphysic, the immaterial was not less real than the material but more real. But though he takes "day" as (in effect, but not by admission) a metaphor, this for Augustine remains literal exegesis. "He is reading the creation story as a creation story," rather than as the story of the Church or the individual believer's experience, explains Williams.¹⁰⁶ Lewis's claim that Augustine allegorizes the days of Genesis misses this point.¹⁰⁷ The narrated creation

events really occurred, though figurative expressions occur in the telling, and some events took place on a transcendent plane.

However, literal meaning does overflow the bounds of verbal meaning in Augustine's usage.¹⁰⁸ Augustine betrays some doubts about the literality of his own treatment in moments of defensiveness.¹⁰⁹ While the product of the six creative days is the visible universe we know,¹¹⁰ yet as a sequence in angelic awareness they move away from historical reality. For Augustine, the days exist as a moment on the boundary of the Ideal (God's intention to create and perfect knowledge of how he will) and the Corporeal, the material world we see.

Tentativeness in Exegesis: Augustine advocates humility and tentativeness about one's interpretations.¹¹¹ Following his defense of his treatment of the days as being genuinely literal, he continues:

Whoever, then, does not accept the meaning that my limited powers have been able to discover or conjecture but seeks in the enumeration of the days of creation a different meaning, which might be understood not in a prophetic or figurative sense, but literally and more aptly ... let him search and find a solution with God's help.¹¹²

Augustine's cautious and questioning style of writing in his commentaries maintains the impression. In the *Confessions*, he castigates those who are dogmatic about understanding Moses' intended meaning:

They have no knowledge of the thoughts in his mind, but they are in love with their own opinions ... Even if their explanation is the right one, the arbitrary assurance with which they insist upon it springs from presumption, not from knowledge.¹¹³

Any alternatives that do not violate the "Rule of Faith" are permissible: "If our conclusions seem impossible to anyone, let him seek another by which he can show the truth of Scripture."¹¹⁴

His tentative attitude allows him room for progress in interpretation. His commentaries reveal interpretive mobility as he considers an interpretive option for a time before eventually abandoning it, for exam-

ple, the possibility that “day” might refer “to the form of a thing created” while “night” would refer “to the privation ... of this form.”¹¹⁵ Thus Augustine remains conscious of the limited capacity of humans to receive God’s truth and the resulting diversity of interpretive opinion, while retaining his faith in the interpretive quest for that truth.

Perhaps we can now better understand why Augustine interpreted Genesis 1 as he did, but how much weight should we give his interpretation, eccentric as it still seems compared to the approaches of some of his contemporaries¹¹⁶ and from our modern standpoint?

The Authority and Value of Augustine’s Legacy

His Authority

Young underlines the importance of “the views of Augustine, the church’s greatest theologian between Paul and Aquinas,” feeling his own position vindicated by Augustine’s, while Lavalée warns that this “illustrious” figure presents a flawed example of exegesis.¹¹⁷ The Protestant community has probably under-recognized the importance of pre-Reformation tradition and failed to access its riches, fearful of human authorities displacing “Christ alone.” Yet figures such as Augustine are validated by the acknowledgment of the whole church spectrum and have stood the test of centuries of Christian scrutiny, a test that modern Christian teachers and commentators have yet to face. That all sides of the debate over the days of creation in Genesis appeal to Augustine and other church fathers constitutes a common acknowledgment of their authority. As a leader in historical Christian theology and exegesis, then, Augustine’s ideas warrant the effort required to properly understand them.

His Interpretation of the Days of Creation

Augustine’s instantaneous creation may appeal to some as the right way to understand creation, although it is a minority position.¹¹⁸ Even medieval interpreters who were influenced by Augustine’s work showed a tendency to revert to a more concrete and literal understanding of the Genesis days.¹¹⁹ Recourse to the Hebrew bypasses many of the textual issues Augustine struggled with (notably the Old Latin of Sir. 18:1 and Gen. 2:4–5) and in any case sidelines the Sirach reference,¹²⁰ reducing the exegetical pressure to interpret the days instantaneously, although reconciling Gen. 1:3–2:3 and 2:4–25 continues to offer challenges.¹²¹ Pressure against a “plain sense” or “literal” understanding of the days of creation now comes primarily from a different, scientific quarter—geology, paleontology and astronomy—offering evidence of the earth’s great age.¹²² Augustine’s interpretation is significant in that it sets an example of interpretive innovation that is both reverent toward Scripture and satisfies the requirements of Christian theology.

The centrality of angels or angelic knowledge and the metaphysic underlying it is quite foreign to the modern Western mind, so that close adherence to Augustine’s proposal about the days of creation must now be very rare. Yet Augustine’s mitigated Platonism finds some commonality with the metaphysical dualism in Christian thinking, which commonly distinguishes heavenly and earthly spheres. The “two-register cosmogony” explanation of Genesis 1–2 by Meredith Kline is a striking partial resurrection of an Augustinian viewpoint, particularly as it pertains to Gen. 1:1–2.¹²³ In any case, Augustine’s Neo-Platonic solution helps us to be aware of our own inevitable but usually unconscious integration of biblical and prevailing cultural world-pictures.

Augustine’s Neo-Platonic solution helps us to be aware of our own inevitable but usually unconscious integration of biblical and prevailing cultural world-pictures.

Augustine’s definition of the genre of Genesis 1–3 as history did not deny that figurative or metaphorical elements, e.g., the expression “their eyes were opened,” could be embedded within a historical text.¹²⁴ He certainly understands anthropomorphic statements as embedded metaphor in this sense¹²⁵ providing a precedent for a position like Collins’s, who treats the seven days of creation themselves as one of the text’s anthropomorphisms.¹²⁶ Augustine’s statement, “God made everything together, although the subsequent framework of the six days of creation might seem to imply intervals of time,” also seems to justify the claim by modern day Framework Hypothesis advocates of a “historic precedent” for their position in Augustine.¹²⁷ Perhaps it was Calvin, though, who applied more consistently than Augustine himself the implications of the assertion that Genesis 1–3 is history. Free of many of Augustine’s exegetical constraints, Calvin arrived at an outcome much more amenable to literal interpreters of the Genesis days.¹²⁸

His Interpretive Approach

I agree with Young in advocating Augustine’s caution and humility in exegesis. It is always possible that “a rival interpretation which might possibly be better” than our own exists out there.¹²⁹ Claiming or behaving otherwise



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The Relevance of Augustine's View of Creation Re-evaluated

Augustine reminds us of the pastoral factor in interpretation. ... [It] is as much a moral and spiritual enterprise as an intellectual one. The desired outcome of biblical interpretation is ... that interpreters might "direct to the praise of their Creator the gift of their creation."

risks presumption and may betray a love for one's own opinion rather than for the truth, which one might not yet have fully discovered.¹³⁰ Yet Augustine's "generosity towards other interpretations" only applies to views that satisfy the "Rule of Faith."¹³¹

Defenders of some modern positions argue passionately about the creation days because they see opposing views as falling outside of Christian orthodoxy. Perhaps the fact that Augustine is particularly careful not to transgress the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy should alert us to the relative breadth of those boundaries where the days of creation are concerned.

We do well to admit that the "Rule of Faith" is a real and, within limits, legitimate constraint on our interpretation. Greene-McCreight effectively shows how verbal meaning and the framework of Christian doctrine interact to produce Augustine's interpretation of Genesis,¹³² and adopts this duality herself. She writes: "Within our trajectory, it is the very substance of the gospel and the identity of the God who created and redeemed the world which directs and guides reading the Scriptures according to the plain sense."¹³³ Augustine displays no fear that "Ruled Reading" will distort the verbal sense of the text at hand, since for him the text expresses a part of the message of which established Christian teaching defines the whole.¹³⁴ Scripture is the vehicle for God's truth, "an instrument of God's self-revelation."¹³⁵ Greene-McCreight sees this as the primary consideration in Augustine's exegesis of Genesis.¹³⁶ Augustine's confidence in the "Rule of Faith" is cast in doubt by the subsequent course of church history, but that element of it that seeks God's message in every biblical text is vital to the coherence and viability of contemporary Christianity.

Is there then any other legitimate source of truth besides Scripture? We saw that for Augustine, data about the natural world may be well enough established that it may modify biblical interpretation. He states: "When they [opponents of the faith] are able, from reliable evidence, to prove some fact of physical science, we shall show that it is not contrary to our Scripture." However,

any external claim that cannot be reconciled with Scriptural teaching or Catholic faith must be either proven false or at least assumed to be so.¹³⁷ The "Book of Scripture" and the "Book of Nature" have one author, and so cannot contradict one another.¹³⁸

Augustine's example would leave room for the scientific enterprise and even permit scientific knowledge to alter interpretation of Scripture in certain circumstances. Young celebrates this while Lavalley finds it a dangerous loophole for illegitimate harmonization.¹³⁹ I think that, like Augustine, most of us—for reasons either of apologetic accountability or personal worldview integrity—must take some notice of the information derived from human experience and attempt to reconcile it with the biblical story.¹⁴⁰

Augustine reminds us of the pastoral factor in interpretation. Scripture was given for human benefit, and so the interpreter of Scripture has to consider the impact of his or her efforts on their potential recipients. Whether carried out for one's own benefit or for the benefit of others, interpretation is as much a moral and spiritual enterprise as an intellectual one. The desired outcome of biblical interpretation is the same as the desired outcome of the angels' contemplation of the works of God in creation in Augustine's scheme of the creation days: that interpreters might "direct to the praise of their Creator the gift of their creation."¹⁴¹

Conclusion

If we take the time to thoroughly investigate the hermeneutical perspective of rightly recognized ancient Christian thinkers like Augustine, or at least consult those who have, we may avoid superficial mining of their statements for polemical ammunition or other purposes, and begin to access the insights of time-tested approaches to Genesis and other texts. Their findings and their interpretive reasoning will not always win or even deserve our emulation, but they certainly warrant our consideration and can only deepen our own exegesis of biblical texts. Augustine's view of creation is relevant today, but it takes effort to access, otherwise we simply make him say what we wish to hear. ✠

Notes

- ¹Davis A. Young, "The Contemporary Relevance of Augustine's View of Creation," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 40, no. 1 (1988): 42-5.
- ²Ibid.
- ³Dick Fischer, "The Days of Creation: Hours or Eons?" *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 42 (1990): 15-6. He cites only an unpublished paper of Hugh Ross for support. Ross himself has done more research, e.g. Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1994), 16-24. Yet he still claims that the Ante-Nicene fathers generally "accepted that *yôm* could mean "a long time period," in David Hagopian, ed., *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation* (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux, 2001), 125.
- ⁴Louis Lavallee, "Augustine on the Creation Days," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32 (1989): 457-64; Robert Letham, "In the Space of Six Days: The Days of Creation from Origen to the Westminster Assembly," *Westminster Theological Journal* 61, no. 2 (1999): 149-74; Jack P. Lewis, "The Days of Creation: An Historical Survey of Interpretation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32 (1989): 433-55. Compare C. J. Collins, "How Old Is the Earth? Anthropomorphic Days in Genesis 1:1-2:3," *Presbyterion* 20 (1994): 124-5; and Douglas F. Kelly, *Creation and Change: Genesis 1.1-2.4 in the Light of Changing Scientific Paradigms* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 1997), 126-9.
- ⁵Duncan and Hall quote Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* 4.33.52 (despite citing a different reference in their endnotes) as denying that creation took place slowly or that the ages were established "at the plodding pace at which they now pass." This intended refutation of the day-age view fails to acknowledge that in that context Augustine is denying that any time was involved, and that Augustine explicitly discounts a literal interpretation of the days nearby, stating that "those creatures that shoot forth roots and clothe the earth would need not one day but many to germinate ... and ... to come forth," in Hagopian, ed., *The Genesis Debate*, 175-6. Karla Pollmann regards it as characteristic of reception of Augustine historically that "rather than the whole theory of Augustine's hermeneutics, parts of it are quoted out of context" to justify readers' own positions. Karla Pollmann, "Hermeneutical Presuppositions," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A. (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999), 429.
- ⁶Augustine's name alone appears on forty-two out of the 307 pages of *The Genesis Debate*, counting endnotes, and the exponents of each of the three positions represented ("the 24-hour view," "the day-age view," and "the framework view") are keen either to claim his authority or to deny it to their opponents. The major statements concerning Augustine occur on pp. 47-8, 69, 90, 110-1, 171, 175-6, 205, 219-20, 224, 266, and 291.
- ⁷Two individuals who have combined theological and science/religion specializations are Alister McGrath and Thomas Torrance, but well-qualified biblical exegetes or analysts of historical exegesis who are competent in science/religion are rarer.
- ⁸I am using the abbreviation used in Teske's introduction, Saint Augustine, *On Genesis: Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees and on the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, trans. S. J. Roland J. Teske, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 84 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991).
- ⁹Henry Chadwick, *Augustine*, ed. Keith Thomas, *Past Masters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 27; and C. Kannengiesser, "Augustine of Hippo," in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove, IN: InterVarsity, 1998), 22.
- ¹⁰Augustine, *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis: An Incomplete Book*.
- ¹¹Augustine, *The City of God*.
- ¹²Roland J. Teske, "The Genesis Accounts of Creation," in *Augustine through the Ages*, 381.
- ¹³Augustine, *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis*.
- ¹⁴For summaries of these works, *Augustine through the Ages*.
- ¹⁵Henry Chadwick, "Augustine," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (Philadelphia: Trinity International Press, 1990), 65.
- ¹⁶G. Bonner, "Augustine as Biblical Scholar," in *From the Beginnings to Jerome*, ed. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, *Cambridge History of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 561.
- ¹⁷F. Robbins, *The Hexaemeral Literature: A Study of the Greek and Latin Commentaries in Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1912; reprint, 1988), 64, 66, 78, and 81.
- ¹⁸J. Calvin, *Genesis, The Geneva Series of Commentaries* (London: Banner of Truth, 1965), 78.
- ¹⁹Letham, "In the Space of Six Days," 150-1; Lewis, "The Days of Creation," 437-40.
- ²⁰David F. Wright, "Augustine: His Exegesis and Hermeneutics," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, ed. Magna Saebø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 716.
- ²¹*On Christian Teaching*. See the summary of Pollmann, "Hermeneutical Presuppositions," 426-9.
- ²²Augustine, *On Genesis ... An Unfinished Book*, I.14.20 (p. 68). Page numbers are added to citations from this combined edition to assist location.
- ²³Ibid., I.23 (pp. 82-8).
- ²⁴Ibid., I.23.41 (p. 88).
- ²⁵The Hexaemera of Ambrose and Basil, while literal in approach rather than allegorical, also display this hortatory motivation. Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, trans. John J. Savage, *Fathers of the Church* 42 (New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1961; reprint, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1997); Basil, "Hexameron," in *Basil, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989).
- ²⁶Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin, *Penguin Classics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 13.24 (p. 335).
- ²⁷Augustine, *On Genesis ... An Unfinished Book*, 42.
- ²⁸His later treatment of the days of creation in *The City of God* (XI.7) is virtually a synopsis of the much longer *De Genesi ad litteram*: Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 2, *A Select Library of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1887).
- ²⁹Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, 2 vols. (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 1.16.31, 4.21.38.
- ³⁰Ibid., 4.21.29. See also 1.12.24-5, 1.16.31, 2.14.28, the latter reading: "No one could conceive how the three days passed by before the beginning of the time that is reported as commencing on the fourth day."
- ³¹Augustine, *On Genesis ... An Unfinished Book*, 6.27 (p. 162).
- ³²Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 4.33.52; Augustine, *On Genesis ... An Unfinished Book*, 7.28 (p. 164). Augustine accepted the Septuagint behind the Old Latin as inspired, and therefore accepted the apocryphal books as Scripture. See Bonner, "Augustine as Biblical Scholar," 544-6; Wright, "Augustine: His Exegesis and Hermeneutics," 719.
- ³³Ps. 33:9 (Latin; English). In the NRSV, this verse reads: "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm." Version chosen not critical.
- ³⁴Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 4.33.52. The particular problem in Gen. 2:4-5 is that Augustine's Latin version suggests that vegetation was made by God before it appeared above the earth. When this is put alongside Gen 1:11-13, it seems impossible to Augustine to fit the creation of vegetation in seed form and its growth to maturity into the space of one creation day.
- ³⁵Ibid., 5.4.8; and Lavallee, "Augustine on the Creation Days," 459.
- ³⁶Augustine, *On Genesis ... An Unfinished Book*, 11.34 (p. 170). Cf. 7.28 (p. 164).
- ³⁷Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 1.10.19.
- ³⁸Ibid., 4.18.34.
- ³⁹Ibid., 4.18.31.

Student and Early Career Scientists Corner

The Relevance of Augustine's View of Creation Re-evaluated

⁴⁰Augustine, *On Genesis ... An Unfinished Book*, 12.37, 15.51ff (pp. 173, 81). Also 10.32 (p. 169): "We should understand that the corporeal work followed after the rational and incorporeal work." Cf. Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 2.14.28, 4.1.1.

⁴¹Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 4.26.43. See Taylor's comment in endnote #2, p. 247.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 4.33.52, 4.35.56. This is a slight shift from the apparent admission of a chronological element to the days in the *Confessions*, where Augustine sees the material forming of creation occurring in the six days, since only material creation can change and thus show the effects of time. Without change, time does not pass (Augustine, *Confessions*, 12.12, p. 289). Even in *De Genesi ad litteram* 4.31.48, Augustine appears momentarily to concede that the days represent a chronological sequence: "Day, therefore, and evening and morning did not all occur simultaneously at the time of creation, but separately and in the order set forth in Sacred Scripture." However, he shortly follows this by reiterating: "There are no periods of time between the steps in this process" (Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 4.32.50). This is an example of his vacillating way of reaching conclusions — he briefly adopts certain positions only to abandon them later in the commentary.

⁴³Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 4.26.43, 4.33.52, 5.3.6, etc.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 4.33.51.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 4.18.33.

⁴⁶Compare Augustine, *On Genesis ... An Unfinished Book*, 1.12.43 (p. 175), where Augustine allows that days four to six might be our familiar solar days.

⁴⁷Augustine, *The City of God*, XI.9.

⁴⁸Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 4.32.49.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 4.23.40.

⁵¹Augustine treats this knowledge of things in themselves as legitimate, although as inferior as evening is to morning, so long as those who contemplate created things "rise up from a knowledge of a creature to the praise of the Creator" (*Ibid.*, 4.28.45). This seems a worthy principle for Christian scientific study.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 4.26–34. Augustine also shared the contemporary belief that mathematics revealed the inherent order of creation in a very direct way, such that creation had to "occur in six days" because of the perfection of the number six. This claim does not seem to form an integral part of Augustine's scheme of the days as just described, although it is certainly consistent with his Neo-Platonic sympathies (Augustine, *The City of God*, XI.30; Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 4.2–7).

⁵³Here Augustine quotes Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 18:1. Taylor points out that in the Old Latin, *qui vivit in aeternum creavit omnia simul*, "simul ... seems to be a mistranslation of the Greek κοινῆ|, meaning "commonly" or "without exception" (Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 254).

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 4.33.52.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 5.6.19, Augustine, *On Genesis ... An Unfinished Book*, 1.14.20 (p. 69), 3.8 (p. 149), 7.28 (p. 64).

⁵⁶Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 4.27.44.

⁵⁷Davis Young acknowledges this point by reserving a separate section for Augustine's interpretive principles (Young, "The Contemporary Relevance of Augustine's View of Creation," 42–3).

⁵⁸For instance, see Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

⁵⁹K. E. Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1–3*, vol. 5, *Issues in Systematic Theology* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1999), 80. She uses the term "verbal meaning" or "verbal sense" for what we might call the literal meaning, made up of lexical meaning, grammar and syntax, p. 107.

⁶⁰Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 5.3.6. Lavalley, "Augustine on the Creation Days," 460. Lavalley here inadvertently misquotes Augustine as saying: "I do now appeal to another book of Holy Scripture to prove that God 'created all things together.'" So although

Augustine depends on the Sirach quote earlier, he claims here that he does not need to, which partly negates Lavalley's criticism of Augustine for his dependence upon an Apocryphal book as Scripture.

⁶¹Chadwick, "Augustine," 68; Pollmann, "Hermeneutical Presuppositions," 426; and Wright, "Augustine: His Exegesis and Hermeneutics," 726.

⁶²Greene-McCreight, 59. Lavalley shares the Protestant disdain for the Apocrypha and so criticizes Augustine for depending on it. I share this view of canon but recognize that Augustine's practice was in keeping with the Western Church generally on this point.

⁶³Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 4.33.51, 4.11.21. Lavalley shares the Protestant disdain for the Apocrypha and so criticizes Augustine for depending on it. I sympathize with this view of canon but recognize that Augustine's practice was in keeping with the Western Church generally on this point.

⁶⁴Pollmann is discussing Augustine's hermeneutical treatise, *De Doctrina Christiana (On Christian Instruction)* (Pollmann, "Hermeneutical Presuppositions," 427).

⁶⁵Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1–3*, 35–36, 50.

⁶⁶Augustine, *On Genesis ... An Unfinished Book*, 1.2 (pp. 145–6).

⁶⁷Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 4.8.15, etc.

⁶⁸Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1–3*, 36.

⁶⁹Fitzgerald, 426. Belief in inspiration has ramifications for Augustine's hermeneutic, such as his willingness to countenance polyvalence in meaning. See below.

⁷⁰Frederick Copleston, S.J., *Augustine to Scotus*, vol. II, *A History of Philosophy* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1950), 44.

⁷¹The last of four chapters in his hermeneutical work, *De Doctrina Christiana*, covered how the Bible was to be preached to believers.

⁷²Bonner, "Augustine as Biblical Scholar," 557; Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1–3*, 36; Thomas Williams, "Biblical Interpretation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 67–8.

⁷³Augustine, *The City of God*, XI.32; Augustine, *Confessions*, XII.30 (p. 308).

⁷⁴Augustine, *Confessions*, XII.27 (p. 304).

⁷⁵The term itself is used by Augustine in Taylor's translation in *De Genesi ad litteram*, 1.14.28. See also Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1–3*, 60–1.

⁷⁶Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 5.3.6. The following context is also relevant. See also last paragraph under "Augustine's Understanding of the Days of Creation."

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 1.20.40.

⁷⁹Robbins says: "Throughout his Hexaemeral works, Augustine expresses great impatience with physical science and a feeling that it is useless to discuss such questions" (Robbins, *The Hexaemeral Literature*, 69). See also Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1–3*, 76.

⁸⁰Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 2.9.20.

⁸¹Peter Harrison warns that this term is really anachronistic when applied to a time before the nineteenth century (Peter Harrison, "'Science and Religion': Constructing the Boundaries," *Journal of Religion*, forthcoming).

⁸²Lavalley, "Augustine on the Creation Days," 461–4; Young, "The Contemporary Relevance of Augustine's View of Creation," 42–5.

⁸³Wright, "Augustine: His Exegesis and Hermeneutics," 708.

⁸⁴Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 1.19.39.

⁸⁵Williams, "Biblical Interpretation," 60.

⁸⁶Ps. 103:2 (English; Latin).

⁸⁷Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 2.9.21.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 1.19.38.

⁸⁹He does, however, accept the popular conception of the four elements seen to constitute the world in his day: earth, water, air and

- fire (Ibid., 2.1-5). He avoids taking Ps. 135:6 (Latin; Ps. 136:6 English) literally when it speaks of the earth being founded on the waters, but affirms with Genesis against the common understanding that there could be waters above the air.
- ⁹⁰Chadwick, *Augustine*, 25, 28-9.
- ⁹¹A. H. Armstrong, "Augustine and Christian Platonism," in *Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. R. A. Markus (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 14.
- ⁹²*City of God* witnesses the importance of "principalities and powers," including angels, in Augustine's thinking (Augustine, *The City of God*, XI.9,19).
- ⁹³Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, pp. 248-9, notes 8 and 9.
- ⁹⁴Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 126; Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*, trans. J. A. Hughes (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 108. Chadwick writes: "Like most ancient writers, Augustine assumes that even matter-of-fact narratives are polyvalent." That is, plurality of meaning is not just present in the literal/allegorical duality but even within the literal sense (Chadwick, "Augustine," 67).
- ⁹⁵Augustine, *Confessions*, XII.18,24.
- ⁹⁶Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 1.21.41.
- ⁹⁷Augustine, *Confessions*, XII.32.
- ⁹⁸This is really a concession rather than a desirable outcome for Augustine, and probably has pastoral care motives in mind.
- ⁹⁹In a rhetorical question expecting a positive answer.
- ¹⁰⁰Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1-3*, 71.
- ¹⁰¹"No Christian will dare say that the narrative must not be taken in a figurative sense" (Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 1.1.1).
- ¹⁰²Ibid. Simonetti points out that for his less technical treatments, Augustine continued to permit himself a more allegorical approach. This might have facilitated more immediate pastoral application. *Confessions* XIII with its allegorical treatment of Genesis 1 might be such an example (Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 107).
- ¹⁰³Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 1.17.34.
- ¹⁰⁴Ibid., 8.1.1-3.
- ¹⁰⁵Ibid., 4.28.45.
- ¹⁰⁶Williams, "Biblical Interpretation," 62.
- ¹⁰⁷Lewis, "The Days of Creation," 443.
- ¹⁰⁸Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 4.28.45; and Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1-3*, 49. See also Collins, "How Old Is the Earth?" 125; Letham, "In the Space of Six Days," 156; and Young, "The Contemporary Relevance of Augustine's View of Creation," 42.
- ¹⁰⁹Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 4.28.45. Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1-3*, 45, refers to "slippage" of the term "literal" in Augustine's usage.
- ¹¹⁰So that they have not been removed to the realm of prophetic symbolism or moral instruction, as in *DGNM* I.23, 25.
- ¹¹¹Young picks up on this, displaying a scientist's commitment to the principle of tentativeness in findings (Young, "The Contemporary Relevance of Augustine's View of Creation," 42, 45).
- ¹¹²Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 4.28.45, also 1.20.40, etc.
- ¹¹³Augustine, *Confessions*, XII.25 (pp. 301-2).
- ¹¹⁴Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 5.9.24.
- ¹¹⁵Ibid., 4.1.1. He takes up this possibility (also found in *DGNM*) as early as 1.17.35 and does not finally abandon it until 4.26.43. See Taylor's note #2 on p. 247.
- ¹¹⁶Such as the tradition of Basil.
- ¹¹⁷Lavallee, "Augustine on the Creation Days," 464; and Young, "The Contemporary Relevance of Augustine's View of Creation," 42.
- ¹¹⁸Patristic precedents do exist for a nonliteral treatment of the days in Origen, but Augustine again is seeking to be true to the literal sense and not fall back on allegory (Letham, "In the Space of Six Days," 150-1).
- ¹¹⁹Robbins, *The Hexaemeral Literature*, 77.
- ¹²⁰Thus I agree with Lavallee that Augustine's exegesis was troubled by his dependence on Old Latin and his use of the Apocrypha (Lavallee, "Augustine on the Creation Days," 459-60).
- ¹²¹See Taylor's explanation, note #67 (Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 252-4). Meredith G. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," *Westminster Theological Journal* 20 (1958): 146-57, is one attempt to offer a solution.
- ¹²²I do not intend to discuss this evidence in the present article, nor to imply its unquestioned validity. But see below on consideration of outside data in the course of interpretation.
- ¹²³Meredith Kline suggests that the "formless and void" earth of Gen. 1:2 is in 1:6-8 itself divided into heavens and earth, making the "heavens" of Gen. 1:1 a different metaphysical plane. This sounds very much like Augustine in *De Genesi ad litteram* 1.9.15 and esp. *Confessions* book XII (Meredith G. Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48, no. 1 [1996]: 2-15).
- ¹²⁴Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 10; and Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1-3*, 47.
- ¹²⁵E.g., God's forming Adam from the dust in Gen. 2:7 (Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 6.12.20).
- ¹²⁶Collins, "How Old Is the Earth?" 120.
- ¹²⁷Hagopian, ed., 291. See also their argument on pp. 219-20.
- ¹²⁸Calvin, *Genesis*, 78.
- ¹²⁹Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 1.20.40.
- ¹³⁰Augustine, *Confessions*, XII.25 (pp. 301-2). Such principles sound like truisms but are not evident in all interpreters' attitudes to their work and to that of others.
- ¹³¹Ibid. The phrase, "generosity towards other interpretations," comes from Williams, "Biblical Interpretation," 63. Note the call for "equal respect for the opinions of others, provided that they were consistent with the truth," by which Augustine means the body of truth established in Christian tradition.
- ¹³²Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1-3*, 54.
- ¹³³Ibid., 250.
- ¹³⁴Many modern commentators do not believe that it is possible to derive a unified message from the Christian Bible, which would make derivation of a "Rule of Faith" from the Bible difficult or impossible.
- ¹³⁵Henry Chadwick, "Augustine," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 86.
- ¹³⁶Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1-3*, 35.
- ¹³⁷Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 1.21.41.
- ¹³⁸Though it is the former book that captures Augustine's interest.
- ¹³⁹Lavallee, "Augustine on the Creation Days," 463-4; and Young, "The Contemporary Relevance of Augustine's View of Creation," 43. Young's case is somewhat hampered by the fact that the particular example he cites of Augustine's use of the knowledge of the natural world of his day, the four elements, is clearly obsolete to the modern reader, lending apparent credibility to Lavallee's assertion that we should "refrain from harmonizing Scripture with transitory scientific theories."
- ¹⁴⁰Collins, "How Old Is the Earth?" p. 114, makes a good case that "Bible writers assume we bring our empirically-gained knowledge with us when we read their works."
- ¹⁴¹Augustine, *Literal Meaning*, 4.22.39.

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