Augustine and the Corporeality of God*

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It has been recognized by at least some scholars that many early Christians, and not only the *simpliciores*, believed God to be corporeal (materially embodied) or anthropomorphic (humanlike in form), as some biblical narratives portray him. Likewise certain trajectories of Christian mysticism, under the influence of Jewish *kabod* speculation, maintained that the pinnacle of mystic ascent was the contemplation of the body of God. Among theologians there was also a stoicizing school, prominently represented in Tertullian, who held that God was *corpus*, even if not anthropomorphic. All of this stands in stark contrast with that Christian theology which developed, primarily under the influence of Platonism, a nonanthropomorphic and incorporeal conception of God that has come to dominate all subsequent theology and philosophy. It is difficult for moderns to transcend these subsequent norms and recognize among early Christians some quite different theological conceptions, or to do so without dismissing them as crude and primitive notions and, hence, as isolated aberrations.

This theological blind spot was manifest recently in Kim Paffenroth's response to David Paulsen's claim that Augustine was a "reluctant witness" to early Christian anthropomorphism.[1] "Nowhere," says Paffenroth, "does Augustine say that any Christian taught that God is corporeal. . . . It does not appear that anything in Augustine's writings would allow us to speculate that Christianity in the fourth century taught that God is corporeal."[2] While Paulsen has responded to this

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[1]David L. Paulsen, "Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses," *HTR* 83 (1990) 107–14.

[2]Kim Paffenroth, "Paulsen on Augustine: An Incorporeal or Nonanthropomorphic God?" *HTR* 86 (1993) 234–35.

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briefly,[3] we examine here in much greater detail both the contextual and direct evidence in Augustine that would indicate fourth-century Christians did indeed believe God to be both corporeal and anthropomorphic in bodily form. We conclude that the evidence shows the young Augustine was himself a corporealist and knew Christians who believed God to be anthropomorphic, and that this latter belief was a critical impediment to his acceptance of Christianity.

If it is accurate to say that "primitive Christianity should be regarded as a Jewish heresy or a set of Jewish heresies," one would expect that Jewish conceptions of God would be perpetuated within Christianity.[4] It has been a traditional Jewish belief that God is anthropomorphic (or better, humans theomorphic), and with some notable exceptions, late antique Jews rejected the metaphysic which demanded he be otherwise.[5] God is depicted anthropomorphically in the Hebrew Bible, and this continues in subsequent Jewish apocalyptic, rabbinic, and mystical literature.[6] Likewise Christian apocalyptic, beginning most emphatically with the Apocalypse of John, continues to draw on anthropomorphic imagery, with God sitting on his throne in the midst of his angels and the saints.[7] That Christ "sits on the right hand

[3]David L. Paulsen, "Reply to Kim Paffenroth's Comment," *HTR* 86 (1993) 235–39. See also idem, "The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives," *BYU Studies* 35.4 (1995–96) 6–94, esp. 41–79.

[4]George MacRae, "Nag Hammadi and the New Testament," in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* (ed. Barbara Aland; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978) 150.

[5]We would not wish to minimize the great diversity of Jewish belief. Certainly there have been and are Jewish theologians who are committed incorporealists, but there has never been, in any event, a general and unambiguous rejection of the anthropomorphism which characterizes so much of the Torah and classical Jewish literature. See Edmond LaB. Cherbonnier, "The Logic of Biblical Anthropomorphism," *HTR* 55 (1962) 187–206, and idem, "In Defense of Anthropomorphism," in *Reflections on Mormonism* (ed. Truman Madsen; Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978) 155–73, two very illuminating studies; and Jacob Neusner, *The Incarnation of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

[6]It is argued from time to time that both the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic Judaism came to avoid anthropomorphism more conscientiously, though Neusner argues the opposite—that in the Talmudic literature God becomes for the first time fully "incarnate" as humanity's divine archetype (see *Incarnation of God*, 2–3). On the Hebrew Bible, see "Anthropomorphismes de la Bible," *DB* 1:663–64, and Harry Orlinsky, introduction to *The Septuagint Translation of the Hebrew Terms in Relation to God in the Book of Jeremiah*, by Bernard M. Zlotowitz (New York: KTAV, 1981) xv–xxiv. On Jewish rabbinic and apocalyptic literature, see Arthur Marmorstein, *Essays in Anthropomorphism* (vol. 2 of *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*; London: Oxford University Press, 1937), and Henry J. Wicks, *The Doctrine of God in the Jewish Apocryphal and Apocalyptic Literature* (London: Hunter & Longhurst, 1915; repr., New York: KTAV, 1971), both of which are at once useful for their sources and defective in their conclusions. For further bibliography and a very intelligent discussion, see David H. Aaron, "Shedding Light on God's Body in Rabbinic Midrashim: Reflections on the Theory of a Luminous Adam," *HTR* 90 (1997) 299–314. On mystical literature, see below.

[7]The most common title for God in Revelation is ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ (12 times). See Anton Vögtle, "Der Gott der Apokalypse," in *La notion biblique de Dieu* (ed. Joseph Coppens; BETL 41; Gembloux: J. Duculot; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1976) 379.

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of the Father" is one of the most primitive and basic elements of Christian profession, regularly found in creeds beginning with one of the earliest Pauline credal fragments.[8] In some circumstances anthropomorphic imagery may be reckoned traditional or unavoidable. But apocalyptic and other genres of pseudepigrapha and apocrypha can be painfully explicit in their anthropomorphism and much of this may have been meant literally, as apocryphal writers regularly interpret even explicit biblical metaphors literally. When God tells Job, "Gird up your loins like a man" (Job 38:3), *Testament of Job* 46–47 understands that to mean God actually gave Job "girdles!"[9] The apocalypses and related popular literature went on to exercise considerable influence upon the Christian imagination.[10] As we shall show, Christopher Stead was correct in observing, "The detailed realism of the apocalyptic writers must have passed on to simple people the impression of a God who has 'feet . . . breast . . . head . . . hair . . . eyes' and a 'right hand' like a man."[11]

Anthropomorphism is also evident in some accounts of early Christian visions which presume that the "beatific vision" of the sanctified is a literally visual and physical experience, not merely a perfect intellectual contemplation. In Saturus's vision,

> We came to a place whose walls seemed to be constructed of light. And in front of the gate stood four angels, who entered in and put on white robes. We also entered and we heard the sound of voices in unison chanting endlessly: "Holy, holy, holy!" In the same place we seemed to see an aged man with white hair and a youthful face, though we did not see his feet. On his right and left were four elders, and behind them stood other elders. Surprised, we entered and stood before a throne: four angels lifted us up and we kissed the aged man and he touched our faces with his hand. And the elders said to us: "Let us rise." And we rose and gave the kiss of peace. Then the elders said to us: "Go and play."[12]

[8]Rom 8:34. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (3d ed.; New York: Longman, 1972) 13–23.

[9]For this and numerous other examples, see Anthony Hilhorst, "Biblical Metaphors Taken Literally," in *Text and Testimony* (ed. Tjitze Baarda et al.; Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1988) 123–31.

[10]For a general treatment, see Bernard McGinn, *Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture* (vol. 2 of *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*; New York: Continuum, 1998).

[11]Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 102.

[12]*Pass. Perp.* 11–12. Trans. Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) 121, slightly altered. The heavenly scene borrows from the imagery of Isaiah 6, Daniel 7, and Revelation 4 and 7, all of which describe God upon his throne, and includes from Revelation the 24 elders on their thrones and the angels chanting the *Ter Sanctus* (also in Isaiah 6). The title κύριος/*dominus* is used of God both here and in Rev 4:11, as it is generally in the Hebrew Bible. The obscure phrase *et de manu sua traiecit nobis in faciem* may refer to Rev 7:17, "and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes" (see J. A. Robinson, *The Passion of S. Perpetua* [2d ed.; TS 1.2; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891] 27). See also the remarkable *Vision of Dorotheos* in André Hurst et al., *Papyrus Bodmer XXIX, Vision de Dorothéos* (Cologny-Genève: Fondation Martin Bodmer, 1984).

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This *Passio* went on to be very popular among the *simpliciores*. Augustine reminded his readers that it was *not* scripture[13] and on several occasions refuted the notion that the vision of the blessed would involve literally seeing a divine figure.[14]

One also finds elements of anthropomorphism or corporeality in the confluence of Jewish and Christian mysticism. In the Jewish apocalyptic-Merkabah tradition, the visionary is swept up to heaven and beholds the divine Glory (*kabod*), which vision transforms the mystic into the likeness of the divine Image.[15] Such speculation gave rise at times to vivid anthropomorphism, such as in the (fragmentary) *Shi'ur Qomah* ("Measurement of the [Divine] Stature"), which gives, on the basis of Cant 5:11–16, the gigantic measurements[16] of a divine figure called "the Holy One," generally understood to be God.[17] Under the influence of such traditions, there developed a strain of Christian mysticism in which the goal was not the union of the *nous* with the incorporeal essence of God, but rather the literal, transformational vision of God, or more precisely, of God's form.[18] In fact, says Ps. Clement,

> [God] has the most beautiful form (*morphē*) for the sake of humanity, so that the pure in heart may be able to see him. . . . What affection are we therefore able to conceive if we gaze with our mind upon his fair form. It is impossible to do so otherwise. For it is not possible that there be beauty apart from form, nor can one be drawn to his love, or even think to see God, if he has no form (*eidos*).[19]

[13]*An. orig.* 1.10.12 (CSEL 60:312).

[14]See n. 76 and discussion below.

[15]Gilles Quispel sees an echo of this even in the New Testament, where 1 John 3:2 may be read, "And yet we know for sure, when the Messiah shall manifest himself, we shall be like him, because we shall behold him in his divine essence" ("Transformation through Vision in Jewish Gnosticism and the Cologne Mani Codex," *VC* 49 [1995] 191).

[16]E.g., he is 100,000,000,000 parasangs tall (1 parasang = ca. 5.5 km).

[17]Stroumsa argues, expanding on a suggestion of Scholem, that the Holy One in the *Shi'ur Qomah* is a hypostatic expression of God as Creator and Demiurge, which conception goes back *in nuce* to first-century Palestine, and which same conception also found expression in Gnosticism. See Gedaliahu Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on the Metatron and Christ," *HTR* 76 (1983) 269–88, esp. 277–79; also Gerschom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (2d ed.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965) 36–42; idem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (New York: Schocken Books, 1991) 20–37; and more generally on the topic of corporeality in Jewish mysticism, Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994). For an introduction to and English translation of the *Shi'ur Qomah*, see Pieter W. van der Horst, "The Measurement of the Body, A Chapter of Ancient Jewish Mysticism," in *Essays on the Jewish World of Early Christianity* (NTOA 14; Freiburg [Switzerland]: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1990) 125–31.

[18]Hence Gilles Quispel terms the two traditions *Seinmystik* and *Gestaltmystik*, the latter of which was evidenced, e.g., among the Messalians ("Sein und Gestalt," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gerschom G. Scholem* [ed. Efraim E. Urbach et al.; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967] 191–95).

[19]Ps. Clement, *Hom.* 17.7.4, 17.10.5 (GCS 42:232, 235). This complex work is broadly considered "Jewish-Christian" in origin and the parallels here to Jewish mystical literature are

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One must also mention here the related phenomenon of what might be called Christian corporealism, or materialism.[20] Stoicism as an independent school of philosophy was on the wane in the second century, but it contributed significantly to the philosophical koine of late antiquity. Its main contribution may have been in ethics, but certain elements of Stoic physics strongly influenced some Christian thinkers.[21] In contrast to Platonism, the Stoics taught that all reality presupposes matter. While they might distinguish conceptually between passive matter and its directing power (*logos*), the two comprised a single cosmic principle from which all that truly exists necessarily derives. Under the influence of Stoicism, some Christian theologians would maintain that everything which exists substantially has *corpus*/*sōma*, and they argued explicitly against the incorporeality of God. Hence Tertullian:

> How can he be nothing without whom no thing was made, so that one void should have wrought solid things, and one empty full things, and one incorporal corporal things? . . . For who will deny that God is body (*Deum corpus esse*), although *God is a spirit*? For spirit is body, of its own kind, in its own form.[22]

Origen is the first Christian author to argue at length against such conceptions of God, and his polemic is aimed at two parties.[23] The first is the stoicizing corporealists just mentioned, "who will try to maintain that even according to our

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unmistakable. See Alon Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," *HTR* 87 (1994) 171–95, and the response and critique of Aaron, "Shedding Light." As Aaron suggests, the prudent will approach such texts with a certain "intellectual wariness" (314) in divining their meaning, but the "form" of God here may in fact be purely intellectual. See also F. Stanley Jones, "The Pseudo-Clementines: A History of Research, Part 1," *SecCent* 2 (1982) 8–14, and Shlomo Pines, *Points of Similarity between the Exposition of the Doctrine of the* Sefirot *in the* Sefer Yezira *and a Text of the Pseudo-Clementine* Homilies*—The Implications of This Resemblance* (PIASH 7.3; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1989) 57–70.

[20]The term "corporealism" is more precise. See Gedaliahu Stroumsa, "The Incorporeality of God: Context and Implications of Origen's Position," *Religion* 13 (1983) 355 n. 10. Unlike the "form-mysticism" just described, *corporealism* as we shall use that term denotes the belief that God is in some sense spatially circumscribed.

[21]See the surveys of Michel Spanneut, *Le stoïcisme des Pères de l'Église* (rev. ed.; Paris: Le seuil, 1957); Marcia Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1985); and the still admirable study of Gérard Verbeke, *L'évolution de la doctrine du pneuma, du stoïcisme à s. Augustin* (Paris: Desclée, 1945).

[22]*Prax.* 7.7–8 (CCSL 2:1166–67). Trans. Ernest Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise against Praxeas* (London: SPCK, 1948) 138. Tertullian's conceptions of *corpus* and *substantia* are explained with great precision by Christopher Stead, "Divine Substance in Tertullian," *JTS* 14 (1963) 46–66.

[23]In general, see Paulsen, "Early Christian Belief," 107–14, and Stroumsa, "Incorporeality of God," 345–58. Aside from the formal refutations noted here, barbed comments on corporealism/anthropomorphism are generously scattered throughout Origen's works. Says Hal Koch, "Die

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scriptures God is (a) body (*deum corpus esse*)" and whom Origen refutes at length in the first chapter of *De principiis*.[24] As his arguments reveal, Origen's philosophical assumptions were thoroughly Platonic.[25] Platonists believed, unlike the Stoics, that there were intellectual principles which existed independently from matter. In the hierarchy of being these "ideas" were superior to their material instances, and above them all was the One, or God, who was necessarily incorporeal and, as their source, beyond intellect and matter. The fundaments of Platonic physics and metaphysics came to be regarded by most educated people in Late Antiquity as self-evident, which is why so many Christian and pagan philosophers alike found utterly unintelligible the suggestion that God was corporeal or material.[26]

Origen also disowns the views of nonphilosophical anthropomorphists, of whom he names specifically "Melito [of Sardis], who has left writings concerning God being embodied."[27] These Christians "collect a thousand references where the limbs

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Polemik gegen eine solche Auffassung ist sozusagen auf jeder Seite zu finden" (*Pronoia und Paideusis* [Arbeiten zu Kirchengeschichte 22; Berlin: Gruyter, 1932] 21 n. 1). With good reason Rufinus would later proudly recollect Origen's battles against the *anthropomorfitae* (*Apol. Hier.* 1.17 [CCSL 20:50]).

[24]*Princ.* 1.1.1 (SC 252:90). In *Comm. Joh.* 13.21–22 (SC 222:94–100), Origen attacks both anthropomorphists and stoicizing Christians together.

[25]"Origen's debt to [his pagan teacher] Ammonius and to the Platonism he mediated appears on every level of Origen's thought, from the language and style he employed to express himself to the deepest convictions he had about the way we can come to share in the being of God. . . . He became convinced that false doctrine was bad philosophy, that true doctrine is good philosophy, and that good philosophy is Platonism" (Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983] 70, 74).

[26]This incorporealist view of deity became problematic with regard to the incarnation, which a long series of Christian writers was pressed to defend before pagan critics and which defense was perhaps made more difficult by their shared assumptions. But we might observe here that the notion of the "humanity of God" being expressed in the mystery of the incarnation is not raised in early Christian discussions of anthropomorphism. It is rather a perspective articulated by some modern theologians. As Ulrich Mauser expresses it, "The New Testament is entirely dominated by the conviction that in Jesus Christ God has come, lived, and acted as a man. It is, therefore, true to say that the New Testament presents God's act radically and fully as a human act: In Christ, God has acted anthropomorphically. Far from being the document of the highest peak of spiritualization with regard to the concept of God, the New Testament is the unsurpassable testimony to the anthropomorphous nature of God" ("Image of God and Incarnation," *Int* 24 [1970] 343). See also Mauser's longer study, *Gottesbild und Menschenwerdung* (BHT 43; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Siebeck, 1971).

[27]*Sel. Gen.* 25 (PG 12:93A). Even though it is not apparent in any of Melito's extant writings, the charge against him of anthropomorphism persisted in the heresiological literature. See Gennadius, *Dog. eccl.* 24.2 (Cuthbert H. Turner, "The *Liber Ecclesiasticorum Dogmatum* Attributed to Gennadius," *JTS* 7 [1906] 90). It is possible that Origen's assertion about Melito's συγγράμματα περὶ τοῦ ἐνσώματον εἶναι τὸν Θεόν actually refers to Melito's lost ὁ περὶ ἐνσωμάτου θεοῦ λόγος (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.2). If so, Origen was probably acquainted with the title only and has misunderstood what was certainly a treatise on the incarnation to be a treatise on the corporeal/anthropomorphic nature of God.

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of God are named" as evidence for their view and ask, "How was God seen by Abraham, and Moses, and the saints unless he has a form?"[28] Celsus was very familiar with this latter group, since he "quotes at length statements about God which we do not make, as though they were a fair representation of our views, to the effect that *He is corporeal by nature and has a body like a human form*."[29] In saying "statements . . . which *we* do not make," Origen apparently means "*we who are educated*," since he goes on to say that if Celsus did not invent these statements himself, "he derived [them] from simple and naïve folk who do not know the meaning of the Bible."[30] That these simple folk included clergy is elsewhere evident,[31] and their numbers seem to have been quite substantial.[32]

From Origen to Augustine, in East and West, there is a procession of textual witnesses that attest to the persistence of anthropomorphic beliefs. Notably one finds homiletic diatribe against this view, as when Basil rebukes his flock for imagining that God has a form "in the manner of the Jews": "If we have been created in the image of God, some say, God must have the same form as we. . . . Do not circumscribe God with corporeal concepts, do not confine him with your mind."[33] Popular anthropomorphism nearly became a point of schism in Egypt when, in 399 C.E., Theophilus of Alexandria, who was sympathetic with Origenist monks, took occasion in his Paschal letter to condemn "at great length" those who believed that God was like a man in form.[34] This met with a furious response from the greater part of the monks, who stormed Alexandria and threatened to put the impious bishop to death.

[28]*Sel. Gen.* 25 (PG 12:93B–96A). See also *Hom. Gen.* 1.13 (SC 7bis:56–64) and *Comm. Rom.* 1.22(19).105–8 (Caroline P. Hammond Bammel, *Der Römerbriefkommentar des Origenes, Buch 1–3* [Freiburg: Herder, 1990] 96–97).

[29]Origen, *Cels.* 7.27 (GCS 2:178). Trans. Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953) 416, translator's emphasis (i.e., this is assumed to be a quotation from Celsus). Cf. *Cels.* 6.62–64.

[30]Origen, *Cels.* 7.27 (GCS 2:178). M. Hirschberg maintains that the principal theological difference between Origen and the *simpliciores* was their views on anthropomorphism, but the reservations of Hällström may be noted (see Gunnar af Hällström, Fides Simpliciorum *According to Origen of Alexandria* [Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 76; Helsinki: Societas Scientarum Fennica, 1984] 64–65).

[31]See Origen, *Dial.* 10.16–24.20, esp. 12.4–14 (SC 67:76–106). Note Origen's long apology softening his clerical audience up for his denial that the human body is the image of God. It seems that he exercised some restraint lest his assertions be poorly received by the clergy he was addressing. His antagonist Methodius also appears to have been an anthropomorphist, and Origen's teachings on the spiritual resurrection, to which Methodius objected, may have been directed in part against anthropomorphists like him. See Henri Crouzel, "La doctrine origénienne du corps ressuscité," *BLE* 81 (1980) 177–79.

[32]So Henri Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1956) 257 (they are "nombreux").

[33]*Or. hom.* 1.5 (SC 160:176).

[34]Cassian, *Conl.* 10.2 (CSEL 13:286–7). Cf. Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 6.7 and Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 8.12.

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He recanted and condemned the Origenists.[35] His successor Cyril condemned anthropomorphism again, and at considerable length, but to what effect is unknown.[36]

With this background, some *prima facie* skepticism might be permitted when Paffenroth concludes, "It does not appear that anything in Augustine's writings would allow us to speculate that Christianity in the fourth century taught that God is corporeal."[37] In the context of the times, and given the scope of Augustine's writings, such a circumstance would be very surprising, and conversely, any evidence for Christian anthropomorphism/corporealism would be quite intelligible. In fact, the evidence for anthropomorphism/corporealism in Augustine confirms to a great extent that which we have been describing.

Let us begin with Augustine himself. The evolution of his personal views is referred to obliquely in a passage from the *Confessions*:

> I did not conceive of you, God, in the shape of a human body, once I began to learn something of your wisdom. I shunned this continually and was glad when I found the same in the faith of our spiritual mother, your Catholic Church. (*Conf.* 7.1.1)[38]

From this we may deduce that 1) there was a time when Augustine conceived of God anthropomorphically, before he "began to learn something of your wisdom," which was apparently contemporaneous with conversion to Manichaeism,[39] and 2) although raised a Christian, he had not known Christians to believe otherwise until a later date. That date was Holy Week of 386 C.E. when Augustine heard Ambrose's sermons on the *Hexaemeron* and learned what catholics "really" believed on this score.[40] Previously, he says,

[35]See Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 43–84; Georges Florovsky, "The Anthropomorphites in the Egyptian Desert" and "Theophilus of Alexandria and Apa Aphou of Pemdje," in *Aspects of Church History* (Belmont, Mass.: Norland, 1975) 89–129.

[36]See Cyril of Alexandria, *Answers to Tiberius and His Companions*, *Doctrinal Questions and Answers*, and *Letter to Calosirius*, in Lionel R. Wickham, *Cyril of Alexandria, Select Letters* (OECT; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) 132–221.

[37]Paffenroth, "Paulsen on Augustine," 235.

[38]Trans. Henry Chadwick, *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), ad loc., slightly altered. This translation is used throughout; Latin text cited from CCSL 27.

[39]He says that at the time of his conversion to Manichaeism, "I had not realized that God is a Spirit, not a figure whose limbs have length and breadth and who has a mass" (*Conf.* 3.12.12). The Manichaeans conceived of God as a being of light, corporeal in the Stoic sense, but not a "figure" with "limbs." On Manichaean doctrine, see Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey* (2d ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Siebeck, 1992), and François Decret, *L'Afrique manichéenne, IVe–Ve siècles: étude historique et doctrinale* (2 vols.; Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1978).

[40]To be discussed below. On the dating of the sermons and their connection to the following passage, see Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les* Confessions *de saint Augustin* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1950) 98–102.

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> I had not the least notion or even an obscure suspicion how there could be a spiritual substance, yet I was glad, if also ashamed, to discover that I had been barking for years not against the Catholic faith but against mental figments of physical images. My rashness and impiety lay in the fact that what I ought to have verified by investigation I had simply asserted as an accusation. You who are most high and most near, most secret and most present, have no bodily members, some larger, others smaller, but are everywhere a whole and never limited by space. You are certainly not our physical shape (*Conf.* 6.3.4).

At times scholars have read this and similar passages rather naively, expressing surprise at how Augustine, schooled in and so otherwise perceptive of Christian teaching from his youth, could have been ignorant of such fundamental doctrines as the incorporeality of God and the soul.[41] Simply put, in the West they were not fundamental doctrines before Augustine, although they became fundamental largely because of him.[42] Verbeke's lengthy study indicates that the notion of God's substance being spiritual in the sense of incorporeal, while long maintained in the East, was not articulated in the West until Augustine.[43] While there were some Western theologians literate in Eastern traditions who presupposed an incorporealist pneumatology (e.g., Hilary of Poitiers, Marius Victorinus, Ambrose), Tertullian and Lactantius articulated explicitly corporealist theologies.[44] Verbeke sees "spiritualisme" (incorporealism) as "latent de la pneumatologie judéo-chrétienne" of the Bible, with Platonism serving merely to detach and sharpen it,[45] but this seems hermeneutically naïve. Tertullian, Lactantius, and other corporealist Christians were reading the same Bible as the Platonists while coming to quite opposite conclusions, with both parties equally caught in their respective hermeneutic circles. Masai has seen more clearly the genesis of Western incorporealism in Victorinus and the Milanese Platonists: "En Occident, les débuts du spiritualisme remontent donc à la traduction de Plotin par Marius Victorinus et à la conversion de ce néo-platonicien au christianisme. Ses disciples milanais continuèrent son œuvre et surent gagner au catholicisme, ainsi renouvelé philosophiquement, le génie (i.e., Augustine) qui devait lui assurer la victoire définitive."[46]

[41]So Maurice Testard, *Saint Augustin et Cicéron* (vol. 1; Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1958) 110, though he is certain Augustine *must* have been taught it ("nul doute cependant qu'il les reçut").

[42]We here follow and are indebted in many particulars to the studies of Roland J. Teske, especially "The Aim of Augustine's Proof That God Truly Is," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1986) 253–68, and "Divine Immutability in Saint Augustine," *The Modern Schoolman* 63 (1986) 233–49. See also Goulven Madec, "Deus," in *Augustinus-Lexikon* (ed. Cornelius Mayer; vol. 2; Basel: Schwabe, 1996) 323–26.

[43]Verbeke, *L'évolution*, 387–544.

[44]Ibid., 440–51, 469–85.

[45]Ibid., 543.

[46]François Masai, "Les conversions de Saint Augustin et les débuts du spiritualisme en Occident," *Le Moyen Age* 67 (1961) 29. Teske has confirmed Masai's conclusions repeatedly (see n. 42 above).

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Augustine himself was an uneasy materialist prior to his conversion to Platonism.

> Although you were not in the shape of a human body, I nevertheless felt forced to imagine something physical occupying space diffused either in the world or even through the infinite space outside the world. . . . I thought simply non-existent anything not extended in space or diffused or concentrated or expanding, which does not possess, or is incapable of possessing, such qualities (*Conf*. 7.1.1–2).

Augustine refutes such a notion in the *Confessions*, in language close to that of Plotinus,[47] but it has been suggested that one of his earliest works attacks the issue when it was still a fresh concern. R. J. Teske has argued that *On Free Will*, book two, is more than simply an argument for the existence of God, if it is one at all.[48] Rather it is a proof that "God is and is truly and sovereignly," which for Augustine means immutable, eternal, and hence incorporeal, since those are not qualities of *corpus* but rather of incorporeal *esse*.[49] Teske forwards several arguments, but to whatever degree Augustine's work was intended to be *primarily* an argument against corporealism, it plainly presents such an argument. The main contention is: the mind is not the body, but it exists and is higher than *corpus*; and if something is shown to be higher than the mind, then this is God. God is thus necessarily incorporeal.[50]

While in other works he argues explicitly against Manichaean corporealism, here Augustine assigns no real antagonist to the opposing view (Evodius is obviously a rhetorical fiction). Supposing there is an antagonist external to himself and the source of his own error, one is led to ask if he is addressing, not simply (non-Christian) Stoic or Manichaean corporealism, but that Christian corporealism of which we have made mention. Tertullian had said, "Nothing is incorporeal except that which is nothing,"[51] and this very belief was for the young Augustine "the principal and almost sole cause of my error."[52] It may be that Tertullian's views on corporeality were prevalent among African Christians.[53] If Teske and others are correct, they were prevalent not just among

[47]*Enn*. 6.4–5 has been regarded as playing a major role in Augustine's refutation of materialism. See Robert J. O'Connell, "*Ennead* VI, 4 and 5 in the Works of Saint Augustine," *REAug* 9 (1963) 1–39, though we disagree strongly with his interpretation of *Conf*. 5.10.19 (p. 2 and passim).

[48]Teske, "Augustine's Proof," 253–68.

[49]*Lib. arb*. 2.15.39.154 (CCSL 29:264).

[50]See *Lib. arb*. 2.6.14.54–57 (CCSL 29:246–47). As indicated above, this line of reasoning is quintessentially Platonic.

[51]"Nihil est incorporale nisi quod non est" (*Carn. Chr*. 11.4 [CCSL 2:895]).

[52]"Et quoniam cum de deo meo cogitare uellem, cogitare nisi moles corporum non noueram—neque enim uidebatur mihi esse quidquam, quod tale non esset—ea maxima et prope sola causa erat ineuitabilis erroris mei" (*Conf*. 5.10.19).

[53]So Giuseppe Capello, *S. Aurelii Augustini Confessionum Libri XIII* (Torino: Marietti, 1948) 151 n. 13.

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Africans but Western Christians in general, for "there simply was no spiritual concept of God or of the soul in the Western Church" at this time outside of a small group of *platonici*.[54]

This is not to say that the materialism of the young Augustine was not at all conceived under the influence of Manichaeism or Stoic philosophy. The Manichaean influence is a given, and clearly he was influenced by classical Stoicism as well, especially in his earliest works.[55] Yet Augustine elsewhere corrects stoicizing Christians who think as Tertullian and Lactantius. He says in an epistle to Paulina, "There are some who take for granted that God Himself is wholly corporeal, and they suppose that whatever is not corporeal is not substance at all. I think these are to be avoided altogether."[56] In his *On Genesis Literally Interpreted*, Augustine chastened Christian traducianists for thinking the soul was *corpus*, as this led them to believe that

> God should be thought of as a body. . . . Thus, constantly immersed in the corporeal and living the life of the senses, people are unwilling to think that the soul is anything other than a body, for they fear that if it is not a body it may be nothing. Consequently, they are all the more afraid to think that God is not a body in proportion as they fear to think that God is nothing.[57]

He recognizes that such an authority as Tertullian "also was unable to think of God in any but material terms, but since he was intelligent, he sometimes saw the truth and rose above his ordinary way of thinking."[58] Augustine also notes, "I have spoken on this matter at length elsewhere; and, God willing, I shall speak of it again when necessary,"[59] but Taylor observes that there is only one other possible

[54]Teske, "Augustine's Proof," 259 n. 19.

[55]Much has been written about the influence of Manichaeism on Augustine's thought. See the survey of literature in Julien Ries, *Les études manichéennes* (Louvain: Centre d'histoire des religions, 1988) 167–174, to which should be added Elizabeth A. Clark, "Vitiated Seeds in Holy Vessels: Augustine's Manichean Past," in *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith* (Lewiston/Queenston: Mellon, 1986) 291–349. James J. O'Donnell observes, "Augustine's idea of God in his Manichean days was itself an eclectic mixture, guided and directed by the Manichees to be sure, but containing contributions from his reading" (*Augustine,* Confessions*: II. Commentary on Books 1–7* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992] 392). Augustine read Cicero and Pliny, who held Stoic views, and classical Stoicism has been recognized as a source for his materialism quite apart from Manichaeism. See C. Baguette, "Une période stoïcienne dans l'évolution de la pensée de saint Augustin," *REAug* 16 (1970) 47–77.

[56]*Ep*. 147.49 (CSEL 44:324). Trans. Wilfred Parsons, *Letters, Volume 3* (FC 20; New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953) 217–18.

[57]*Gen. litt*. 10.24 (CSEL 28.1:327). Trans. John H. Taylor, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (ACW 42; New York: Newman Press, 1989) 128.

[58]*Gen. litt*. 10.25 (28.1:328). Trans. Taylor, 129.

[59]*Gen. litt*. 10.24 (28.1:328). Trans. Taylor, 128.

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treatment of any great length—book two of *On Free Will*.[60] We would ask, then, is *On Free Will* here addressing an inner-Christian concern? Did Augustine's own materialism derive, to a greater or lesser degree, from his Christian environment?

Augustine himself clarifies what he means by anthropomorphism/corporealism not being catholic doctrine: "The Catholic faith does not teach what we thought and we were mistaken in criticizing it. The Church's *educated men* (*docti*) think it is wrong to believe that God is bounded by the shape of a human body" (*Conf.* 6.11.18). This is what Augustine learned in Milan—the teaching of educated Christian Platonists. From Cassiciacum he wrote to Manlius Theodorus, who also was "particularly fond . . . of Plato": "I have noticed frequently in the sermons of our priest (Ambrose), and sometimes in yours, that, when speaking of God, no one should think of him as something corporeal."[61] We should not wonder that such admonitions were "frequent." If Augustine believed up to this time that the catholics held an anthropomorphic view of God, it must have been common in the African church and elsewhere.[62]

Just how common is reflected in Augustine's conversion to Manichaeism. When Augustine came to Carthage as a student he first encountered the Manichaeans, who attacked the faith of his childhood on several points. Three of these he notes in particular: the problem of the origin of evil, the anthropomorphism of God, and the righteousness of the patriarchs (*Conf.* 3.7.12). These were hinge issues that "persuad[ed] me to consent to the stupid deceivers," even though Augustine had been an observant catholic up to that time.[63] The Manichaeans mocked, "Is God confined within a corporeal form? Has he hair and nails?" (see *Conf.* 3.7.12).[64] This was preached publicly by them, and not just to rustics. But as far as we can learn from Augustine, no one disputed this charge, even among the Christian *intelligentsia* at the university where Augustine heard them. This is telling but not surprising. "The African church," says Brown, "was exceptionally narrow and conservative: many of its institutions and practices may have stemmed directly from the Jewish synagogue; it was easy to regard the religion of its congregations as a half-hearted compromise

[60]*Lib. arb.* 2.3.7–2.6.14 (CCSL 29:239–47). See Taylor, *Literal Meaning*, 285 n. 100.

[61]*Beat.* 1.4 (CCSL 29:67). Trans. Ludwig Schopp, *The Happy Life* (FC 5; New York: CIMA, 1948) 47–48.

[62]So Teske, "Augustine's Proof," 256–57.

[63]See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) 41–42.

[64]Paffenroth ("Paulsen on Augustine," 234) understands this to be a reference to the incarnation, but more likely it refers to belief in an anthropomorphic deity (see O'Donnell, *Augustine*, 184–86). W. H. C. Frend says of this event, "When Augustine's Manichee friends pointed out that the Catholic Church taught the existence of an anthropomorphic god and argued the impossibility of reconciling the rules enjoined by the Old Testament with the New, the basis of Augustine's childhood faith was sapped" ("The Gnostic-Manichaean Tradition in Roman North Africa," *JEH* 4 [1953] 23).

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with the Old Testament."[65] We have already noted, as is well known, that both the Old Testament and segments of rabbinic Judaism are explicitly anthropomorphist, and that the Bible, when read literally, naturally suggests this view.

When Augustine returned to Africa and received his ordination, it does not appear the situation was any different. But even before then, during his stay in Rome (388 C.E.), he wrote his first work against the Manichaeans in which he addressed their charge that catholics believed God to be anthropomorphic. He frankly confesses that some do believe this, but they are children in their understanding.

> Do some investigating, wretched men that you are, for we condemn, even more thoroughly and vigorously than you, a faith which attributes to God anything unbefitting his nature. And as for those who suppose these texts [of the Bible] to be meant literally, we set their error straight and show how ridiculous their obstinacy is. And in many ways which you cannot appreciate, Catholic teaching prevents credulity in those who have advanced, not necessarily in years but in knowledge and understanding, beyond a certain childishness of mind toward the wisdom of age. . . . Admittedly, there are to be found among us some children who picture God in human form and suppose Him to be actually that way. Nothing is more abject than this notion. But there are also many mature individuals who perceive that His majesty remains inviolable and unchangeable, not only above the human body, but even above the mind itself. In these two cases, age is not determined by years, but by virtue and wisdom, as we have already said.[66]

Still, even catholics who conceive of God anthropomorphically are superior to the Manichaeans, inasmuch as they are educable:

> There may not be anyone among you who represents the divine in the form of a human body, but neither is there anyone who sets Him apart from the taint of human error. As for those who, like whimpering babes, are nursed at the breast of the Catholic Church, unless they be carried off by heretics, they are nourished according to the strength and capacity of each, so that they come, each in his own way, first, to the fullness of manhood and, then, to the maturity and grey hairs of wisdom, thus achieving in the measure in which they desire it a life of perfect happiness.[67]

In 396 C.E. he says much the same in another anti-Manichaean work, but there he compares favorably the anthropomorphism of the babes among the faithful with the heresy of Mani:

[65]Brown, *Augustine*, 42.

[66]*Mor. eccl.* 10.17 (CSEL 90:20–21). Trans. Donald A. Gallagher and Idella J. Gallagher, *The Catholic and Manichaean Ways of Life* (FC 56; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1956) 16.

[67]*Mor. eccl.* 10.17 (CSEL 90:21). Trans. Gallagher and Gallagher, 17.

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> Now compare not the spiritual members of the catholic faith, whose minds, as far as possible in this life, perceive that the divine substance and nature extends to no spatial location, and do not depict it with measurable lineaments, but rather compare our carnal and childish members, who when they hear certain parts of our body mentioned allegorically (as when the eyes or ears of God are spoken of), being free to fantasize, are accustomed to depict God for themselves in the form of the human body. Compare these with those Manicheans who customarily describe their nonsense to eager and curious men as if it were a great secret, and consider who entertain the most permissible and respectable ideas of God—whether it is those who think of him as being in human form, which form is the most excellent of its kind, or those who think of him as spread out with an infinite bulk. . . . If I were unable to attain higher notions, nor turn my thoughts from false imaginings, which I fix in my memory through corporeal sensations, into the freedom and purity of a spiritual nature, how much better would it be that I think of God in human form than to fasten that black wedge to his lower edge (etc.).[68]

"Carnal and childish" Christians err concerning anthropomorphic language in scripture, understanding it literally instead of allegorically. The root of the problem, he would imply, is a flawed hermeneutic.

The interplay here between theology and hermeneutics is crucial. Because of contemporary distinctions between biblical exegesis and theology, often taught by separate faculties in modern universities, we may find it difficult to appreciate how tightly the two were bound together throughout most of the history of the church. They were scarcely separable and each nourished the other in a vital symbiosis. It is overly facile to say that precritical exegesis was a slave to theology, but it is true that certain theological principles inevitably lay at its foundations. Augustine himself articulates these principles in *De doctrina christiana*, a handbook for biblical exegesis and preaching.

Ultimately, says Augustine, "the fulfillment and the end of the law and of all the divine scriptures is love," and any interpretation that does not build up the twin love of God and neighbor is flawed.[69] He goes on to distinguish between literal and figurative expressions in scripture and gives clear criteria for distinguishing between them. "Anything in the divine writings that cannot be referred either to good, honest morals or to the truth of the faith, you must know is said figuratively."[70] This is

[68]*Fund.* 23 (CSEL 25:219–21).

[69]*Doctr. chr.* 1.35.39–1.36.40 (CCSL 32:28–29). Trans. Edmund Hill, *Teaching Christianity* (vol. 1, bk. 11 of The Works of Saint Augustine; Hyde Park: New City Press, 1996) 123.

[70]*Doctr. chr.* 3.10.14 (CCSL 32:86). Trans. Hill, 176. See also *Doctr. chr.* 3.2.2 (CCSL 32:77–78), where Augustine advises that one should solve scriptural ambiguities *first* through reference to the rule of faith; and if multiple possibilities exist which accord with the rule of faith, *then* one may refer to the broader context of the passage.

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precisely the case with scriptural anthropomorphisms, since from Augustine's (incorporealist) perspective a literal reading of them contradicts the truth. As we have seen, he calls "carnal spirits" those in the church who are unable to distinguish between the literal and the figurative in scripture. Enslaved to the letter, they need to be broken in under its yoke before they can discern the true meaning of scriptural signs.[71] The "spiritual" are those who fully enjoy Christian liberty, free from the yoke of the letter, for "by explaining the signs to which they were subjected, this liberty raised them up to the substantive realities, the things they were signs of, and so set them free."[72]

Augustine himself had chafed at the yoke of scriptural anthropomorphism and finally experienced liberation from the letter only at Milan, as we shall discuss. The barbs of the Manichaeans had doubtless made his bondage all the more sore and encouraged his defense before them of the church's "little ones," those still enslaved to literalism. The scriptures include carnal images for their sake, as stepping stones to higher conceptions of God. From another early anti-Manichaean work (ca. 389 C.E.):

> We answer them that the Scriptures generally mention these members [of the body] in presenting God to an audience of the little ones, and this is true, not only of the books of the Old Testament, but also of the New Testament. . . . All who understand the Scriptures spiritually have learned to understand by those terms, not bodily members, but spiritual powers, as they do in the case of helmets and shield and sword and many other things.[73]

The principle at work here is common to the whole of precritical exegesis—any passage of scripture which, literally understood, is not worthy of God (*theoprepes*/*deo dignum*) must be understood figuratively.[74]

[71]*Doctr. chr.* 3.8.12–3.9.13 (CCSL 32:85–86); also 3.5.9–3.7.11 (CCSL 32:82–84).

[72]*Doctr. chr.* 3.8.12 (CCSL 32:85). Trans. Hill, 175. See Roland Teske, "Spirituals and Spiritual Interpretation in Augustine," *AugStud* 15 (1984) 65–81.

[73]*Gen. Man.* 17.27 (CSEL 91:94–95). Trans. Roland J. Teske, *On Genesis* (FC 84; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1991) 75.

[74]The term θεοπρεπές and associated concepts derive from the allegorical exegesis of the Greeks, by means of which they sought to justify the mythical depiction of all-too-human gods. The principle was then adopted by Hellenistic Jews who similarly wrestled with biblical anthropomorphisms, of which we find evidence as early as the fragments of Aristobulus (second century B.C.E.) (see Folker Siegert, "Early Jewish Interpretation in a Hellenistic Style," in *Antiquity* [vol. 1, bk. 1 of *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*; ed. Magne Saebo; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996] 154–62). Christians followed suit in their exegesis of the Old Testament, as we see here in Augustine, and also in their exegesis of the New Testament. Both Antiochenes and Alexandrians, so often contrary, would adhere to the same two-nature exegesis in permitting only certain suitable actions to be attributed to the divine nature in Christ, rendering their interpretations more similar than one might expect (see Maurice F. Wiles, *The Spiritual Gospel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960] 131–33 and passim).

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Augustine's distinction between the "spiritual" and "carnal" in the church endures in his later works. In his *Tractates on the Gospel of John* (ca. 414 C.E.) he observes,

> The natural man so hears whatever he hears about the nature of God that he cannot imagine anything other than a body, however exceedingly large and immense, however splendid and spectacular, still a body . . . from vanity or weakness of mind, do they imagine the Father, as it were, in one place, the Son standing in another in front of the Father and entreating for us, the massive (physical) bulk of both occupying their own individual places.

Echoing his own struggles with these notions, he continues, "For whatever such thing occurs to spiritual men, thinking about God from their everyday experience with their bodies, by denying it and casting it out, like bothersome flies, they drive it from their inner eyes."[75]

This simile appears also in an epistle to Paulina (in 413 C.E.), who asked Augustine concerning the beatific vision, whether the blessed would actually see God with their eyes or not. As noted previously, it was popularly thought that the vision of God would be literal and evidently this was Paulina's understanding.[76] Augustine argues long against this view, declaring rather that it will be a noetic vision, and counsels Paulina on how to suppress the corporeal images of God she imagines and which naturally arise in us. He braces himself too with the battle cry, "Let flesh, drunk with carnal thoughts hear this: God is spirit,"[77] and counsels, "If you are unable to clear the eye of your mind entirely of this seeming cloud of corporeal images, examine them carefully within yourself. . . . Give judgement, then, against yourself, in your own favor, if you are unable to drive from the eye of your mind these manifold fanciful images of corporeal qualities, and win the victory from your own defeat."[78]

We do not know how Paulina received this epistle, but it was apparently read as well by an unnamed fellow bishop who maintained that the vision of God was literal and held correlatively anthropomorphic conceptions of God. This bishop took great

[75]*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 102.4 (CCSL 36:596–97). Trans. John W. Rettig, *Tractates on the Gospel of John, 55–111* (FC 90; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994) 244–45. Cf. *Conf.* 7.1.1: "My heart vehemently protested against all the physical images in my mind, and by this single blow I attempted to expel from my mind's eye the swarm of unpurified notions flying about there."

[76]In his *Retractiones* (2.41) Augustine reflected that Paulina's was "a very difficult question" and one he adequately resolved only, and at long last, in *The City of God* (22.29). Apparently numerous Catholics believed, as Paulina, that the vision of God would be literal, eliciting from Augustine several refutations. See also *Ep.* 92, 148, 162 and *Serm.* 277.

[77]Cf. *Ep.* 92.5 (CSEL 34:441).

[78]*Ep.* 147.42–43 (CSEL 44:317–18). Trans. Parsons, 210–11.

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offense both at Augustine's position on the beatific vision and at his nonliteral interpretation of Scripture. Augustine tried to make amends, but of course did not retreat from his position—he just took up a different attack. In a memorandum on the subject sent to Fortunatian, bishop of Sicca and informal mediator in the dispute, he cites from authors such as Athanasius and Jerome who also repudiated the literal understanding of biblical anthropomorphisms. Augustine says summarily, "I think [scriptural anthropomorphism] is to be understood in a spiritual sense, and I am not the only one or the first one to think so, but all who are endowed with any kind of spiritual understanding do so as they oppose those called anthropomorphists (*anthropomorphi*)."[79] It is noteworthy that he has to argue and prove to a fellow bishop, at considerable length, that he is not "the only one or the first one to think" this way.

Augustine cites here a passage from Jerome which polemicizes the *anthropomorphi* (or *anthropomorphitae*),[80] a term commonly applied to those Egyptian monks whose ire Theophilus provoked by saying what Augustine is saying. Augustine himself had no contact with them, it seems, and he may be using the term much more broadly.[81] Apparently the only other place he mentions *anthropomorphi* by that name is in *De haeresibus*, where he associates them with the Syrian Audians: "Those whom Epiphanius calls Audians and whom he prefers to regard as schismatics, not heretics, others call anthropomorphites, because they picture for themselves in their carnal thinking God in the likeness of a corruptible human being."[82] The designation of the Audians as anthropomorphites first occurs here, though Augustine does claim this comes from others. Epiphanius, on whom Augustine depends, discusses the anthropomorphic beliefs of the Audians, but he does not call them anthropomorphites.[83] Theodoret's discussion of the Audians is restricted almost exclusively to their anthropomorphism, but he also does not call them by this name.[84] Due to the influence of *De haeresibus*, this conflation of two separate groups of schismatics continued in the heresiological catalogs.[85]

[79]*Ep*. 148.13 (CSEL 44:343). Trans. Parsons, 234.

[80]See (Ps.) Jerome, *Brev. in Ps. XCIII* (PL 26:1174–75). This work has been regarded as spurious and later in date than both Jerome and Augustine, but Augustine here cites a long passage either from it or its source and attributes it to Jerome (*Ep*. 148.13–14 [CSEL 44:343–44]).

[81]Likewise, also in the West and somewhat previous to Augustine's letter, Gregory of Elvira delivered a homily condemning those who interpret Gen 1:26–27 and biblical anthropomorphisms to mean that God has a body: *Denique haeresis ipsius homines graeco vocabulo Antropomorfiani dicuntur, eo quod deum ad vicem hominis compactum atque formatum adserunt* (*Tract. Orig*. 1.2 [CCSL 69:5]).

[82]*Haer*. 50 (CCSL 46:321). Trans. Roland J. Teske, *Arianism and Other Heresies* (vol. 1, bk. 18 of The Works of Saint Augustine; Hyde Park: New City Press, 1995) 46–67.

[83]See *Pan*. 70 (GCS 37^2:232–49).

[84]Theodoret, *Haer. fab. comp*. 4.10 (PG 83:428–29); cf. Theodoret, *Hist. eccl*. 4.9 (GCS 44:227–29).

[85]E.g., Ps. Jerome (Ps. Isidore), *Indic. haer*. 36 (PL 81:642); Gennadius, *Dog. eccl*. 24.2 (Turner, 90); Isidore of Seville, *Chron*. 100 (PL 83:1049).

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We have deferred until now the discussion of the image of God in humanity (Gen 1:26–27). This was arguably the most important concept in early Christian anthropology, and there is scarcely any major theologian who does not discuss it in the East or the West. There are numerous and lengthy studies of Augustine's exegesis of the image, but here we will address just the aspect of it that touches on our topic—namely how it pertains to anthropomorphic conceptions of God.[86]

Modern scholars who have discussed the patristic exegesis of Gen 1:26–27, humanity's creation in the image of God (*kat' eikona*), have paid little attention to what was apparently the popular understanding of this passage. In historical-critical terms, the image and likeness was almost certainly thought originally to pertain to the whole person,[87] and the traditional Jewish understanding was that the image was found specifically in the human body.[88] One finds this implicit in some of the earliest Christian writings, where *plassein* and *plasma* are used respectively for creation in the image and what is created *kat' eikona*.[89] This reflects an understanding of creation *kat' eikona* as a physical creation, since Gen 1:26–27

[86]The more important and recent include John E. Sullivan, *The Image of God* (Dubuque: Priory Press, 1961); Robert A. Markus, "<Imago> and <similitudo> in Augustine," *REAug* 10 (1964) 125–34; Herman Somers, "L'image comme sagesse: la genèse de la notion trinitaire de la sagesse," Hommage au R. P. Fulbert Cayré (Recherches augustiniennes 2; Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1962) 403–14; idem, "Image de Dieu et illumination divine," *Augustinus Magister* 11 (1954) 451–62; idem, "Image de Dieu: les sources de l'exégèse augustinienne," *REAug* 7 (1961) 105–25; John O'Meara, *The Creation of Man in St. Augustine's* De Genesi ad Litteram (n.p.: Villanova University Press, 1980); G. Bonner, "Augustine's Doctrine of Man: Image of God and Sinner," *Aug* 24 (1984) 495–514, repr. in *God's Decree and Man's Destiny* (London: Variorum, 1987) 495–514; Roland Teske, "The Image and Likeness of God in St. Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus*," *Aug* 30 (1990) 441–51.

[87]See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (trans. John S. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984) 147–58: "There can now be a basic agreement that when Gen 1:26 talks of the image and likeness of God, it envisages the whole person, not just the corporeal or spiritual side" (150).

[88]"I suggest that the bodily meaning is the only meaning of [*ṣelem*] in rabbinic literature. That suggestion is borne out in all tannaitic and amoraic sources. . . . The physical and bodily understanding of the image of God is nowhere refuted and emerges as the only rabbinic understanding of the image of God" (Gottstein, "Body as Image," 184, 195) (though to be noted are the caveats of Aaron, "Shedding Light"). See also Morton Smith, "On the Shape of God and the Humanity of the Gentiles," in *Religions in Antiquity* (ed. Jacob Neusner; SHR 14; Leiden: Brill, 1970) 315–26. Philo's interpretation of the image varies, but he at no time identifies the image of God with the human body. In fact, he argues precisely against this view and seems to have directly influenced the Christian Alexandrian theologians (cf. *Opif.* 134 and Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 1.3). Philo's identification of the image and likeness with the human mind (*nous*) was likewise influential (*Opif.* 69). See also *Leg.* 3.96; *Conf.* 97, 147; and Jean Giblet, "L'homme image de Dieu dans les commentaires littéraires de Philon d'Alexandrie," in *Studia Hellenistica* (ed. L. Cerfaux and W. Peremans; Studia Hellenistica 5; Louvain: Bibliotheca Universitatis, 1948) 99–118.

[89]*1 Clem.* 33.4–5; *Barn.* 4.9, 6.11–14; *Diogn.* 10.2.

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and 2:7 are clearly understood to be the same event.[90] This is explicitly stated in what may be the earliest exegesis of the *kat' eikona*, in Ps. Justin, *On the Resurrection*.[91] Arguing against those who would deny a literal resurrection of the flesh, the author states,

> Does not scripture say, "Let us make man in our image and likeness?" Of what sort? Clearly it is speaking of a man of flesh. For scripture says, "And God took dust from the earth and formed (*eplase*) man." It is therefore clear that the man formed (*plasomenos*) in the image of God was of flesh. How then is it not foolish to say that the flesh formed by God in his own image is despicable and worthless?[92]

The anthropomorphism implicit in this passage has led some modern authors down strange interpretive paths, lest such a naïve notion be attributed to the earliest Christians.[93] But Origen attests that an anthropomorphic/theomorphic interpretation of the *kat' eikona* was the explicit understanding of certain authors, and he refutes the notion soundly, declaring it to be the height of impiety (*manifestissime impium*).[94] He says that in Rom 1:23, Paul was not only speaking of idolaters, "but also he must be understood to refute the Anthropomorphites, those in the church who say that the corporeal image of man *is* the image of God, ignorant of the fact that it is written in Genesis that man was created *according to* the image of God."[95]

In opposition to this, Origen enunciated a theology of the *kat' eikona* which removed it from the body entirely and placed it in the soul alone, removing any implication of anthropomorphism.[96] Origen's interpretation did not win a total victory over the traditional understanding among the simple, as subsequent refutations

[90]"And God formed (ἔπλασεν) man from the dust of the earth" (Gen 2:7 LXX). Gen 1:26 LXX uses ποιεῖν.

[91]Andre Wartelle affirms traditional authorship ("Saint Justin, philosophe et martyr: De la Résurrection," *BAGB* [March 1993]: 70–71), but this runs contrary to the received opinion (see Walter Delius, "Ps. Justin: 'Über die Auferstehung,'" *ThViat* 4 [1952] 181–204). All other issues aside, Justin was clearly *not* an anthropomorphist (see *Dial.* 114), as the author of this tractate was.

[92]Ps. Justin, *Res.* 7 (PG 6:1584).

[93]See Arnold Struker, *Die Gottebenbildlichkeit des Menschen in der christlichen Literatur der ersten zwei Jahrhunderte* (Münster i. W.: Aschendorff, 1913) 19–20, who insists that by σάρξ Ps. Justin can't *really* be referring to the flesh, but more generally to "der empirische Mensch." Obviously he misses the point of the whole argument, which is precisely for the resurrection of the *flesh*, not of some nebulous "empirical person."

[94]*Hom. Gen.* 1.13 (SC 7:58 bis).

[95]*Comm. Rom.* 1.22(19).105–8 (Hammond Bammel, 96–97). The reference to *anthropomorfitae* reflects Rufinus's context and almost certainly translates a circumlocution. This word probably gained currency as a term of reproach only during the late fourth century. See Basil Studer, "Anthropomorphism," *EECh* 1:46.

[96]See Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image*, 153–60, 257–60, where he deals specifically with anthropomorphism and the image.

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of the latter attest,[97] but among the educated Origen's theology of the image was greatly influential. It was followed by Basil of Caesarea in his *Hexaemeron*, and Basil influenced Ambrose greatly in his homonymous work,[98] which leads us back to Augustine.

One of the proof-texts adduced by the Manichaeans for Christian anthropomorphism was Gen 1:26–27. Augustine associates it vaguely with the Carthaginian Manichaeans in his *Confessions* (3.7.12), but in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* he says more precisely,

> It is this question above all that the Manichees raise with their endless chatter, and they taunt us for believing that man was made to the image and likeness of God. They look at the shape of our body and ask so infelicitously whether God has a nose and teeth and a beard and also inner organs and the other things we need. . . . Let them know, nonetheless, that the *spiritual believers* in the Catholic teaching do not believe that God is limited by a bodily shape. When man is said to have been made to the image of God, these words refer to the interior man, where reason and intellect reside.[99]

Augustine does not wish to admit that this is a Christian belief—it is the Manichaeans' folly—but nevertheless he states that it is those alone who "understand the scriptures spiritually" who have "learned to understand by those terms, not bodily members, but spiritual powers."[100] We are dealing with a theological

[97]See, e.g., Basil of Caesarea, *Or. hom.* 1.5 (SC 160:176); John Chrysostom, *Exp. Ps. VII* 11 (PG 56:97–99); Isidore of Pelusium, *Ep.* 3.95 (PG 78:800–801); and Severian of Gabala, *Cosm.* 5.3–4 (PG 56:474–75). In the West, before Ambrose, we find reference to Origen's interpretation only in Hilary of Poitiers (*In Ps. CXXIX* 4 [CSEL 22:650–51]), who draws on Origen directly, but other nonanthropomorphic interpretations of the *kat' eikona* were found among theologians. Marius Victorinus, for example, proposed that humans were created in the image of God corporeally, but the divine form on which they were modeled was that of the incarnate Son (see Arie Vanderjagt, "*Mysterium Magnum*: Marius Victorinus on Man's Corporeal Relationship with God," in *Papers Presented at the Eleventh International Conference on Patristic Studies* [ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone; StPatr 28; (Leuven: Peeters, 1993) 130–34]). Filaster of Brescia denominates as heretics all those who interpret Gen 1:26–27 to mean that the body is *kat' eikona* (*Div. haer.* 97 [CCSL 9:262–63]).

[98]Ambrose's dependence on Basil is at times even verbal, but as Jerome tells us (*Ep.* 84.7), he drew directly on Origen and Hippolytus as well. See Stanis-Edmund Szydzik, "Die geistigen Ursprünge der Imago-Dei-Lehre bei Ambrosius von Mailand," *TGl* 53 (1963) 171–72. Other influences include Cyprian (Yves-Marie Duval, "Sur une page de saint Cyprien chez saint Ambroise," *REAug* 16 [1970] 25–34), and the Neoplatonist Macrobius (Pierre Courcelle, "Nouveaux aspects du platonisme chez saint Ambroise," *Revue des études latines* 34 [1956] 232–39).

[99]*Gen. Man.* 1.17.27–28 (CSEL 91:94–95). Trans. Teske, 74–76, emphasis added.

[100]*Gen. Man.* 1.17.27 (CSEL 91:95). Trans. Teske, 75. Given the interpretive difficulty here, it is not surprising that Augustine gives the "correct" interpretation of this passage in his exegetical handbook (*Doctr. chr.* 1.22.20 [CCSL 32:16]).

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elite. What Augustine portrays as Manichaean belief is what the Manichaeans understood to be Christian belief, at the very least in Carthage.[101]

The corporealist interpretation of Gen 1:26–27 was, in fact, Augustine's understanding of the *kat' eikona* until he came to Milan, where

> I also learnt that your sons, whom you have regenerated by grace through their mother Catholic church, understood the text concerning man being made in your image not to mean that they believed and thought you to be bounded by the form of a human body. . . . And I was glad, my God, that your one Church . . . did not hold infantile follies nor in her sound doctrine maintain that you, the Creator of all things . . . are bounded by the shape of a human body. (*Conf.* 6.3.4–6.4.5)

The corrective came in both a general and specific form. Generally speaking, Augustine was introduced via Ambrose to "spiritual" (allegorical/typological) exegesis, which in one stroke removed his difficulties with the Bible.

> I was delighted to hear Ambrose in his sermons to the people saying, as if he were most carefully enunciating a principle of exegesis: "The letter kills, the spirit gives life" (2 Cor 3:6).[102] Those texts which, taken literally, seemed to contain perverse teaching he would expound spiritually, removing the mystical veil. (*Conf.* 6.4.6)

Note that this is said in close connection with his statements on the image of God. More specifically, it has been held by several scholars that Ambrose delivered his sermons on the *Hexaemeron* at Easter of 386 C.E., wherein he discussed this issue in particular, and that this is the specific source of Augustine's enlightenment.[103]

> Let us define more accurately the meaning of the phrase, "to the image and likeness of God." Is it true that the flesh is made "to the image of God?" In that case, is there earth in God, since flesh is of earth? Is God corporeal, that is to say, weak and subject like the flesh to passions? . . . The flesh, therefore, cannot be made to the image of God. This is true, however, of our souls.[104]

Gerald A. McCool has shown that Ambrose's exegesis of the *kat' eikona* here was important to Augustine in works as early as *De beata vita*.[105]

Other than in addressing the Manichaeans, Augustine does not devote much attention to the corporealist understanding of the image, though there are a number

[101]See *Conf.* 3.7.12.

[102]Cf. *Doctr. chr.* 3.5.9 (CCSL 32:82–83).

[103]See n. 40 above; also, Gerald A. McCool, "The Ambrosian Origin of St. Augustine's Theology of the Image of God in Man," *TS* 20 (1959) 62–81, and Somers, "Image de Dieu," 108.

[104]Ambrose, *Exam.* 6.8.44–45 (CSEL 32.1:235). Trans. John J. Savage, *Hexameron* (FC 42; New York: Fathers of the Church, 1961) 256–57.

[105]*Beat.* 1.4 (CCSL 29:67). See McCool, "Ambrosian Origin," 72–74.

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of passages where Joseph Heijke sees the issue touched upon.[106] However that may be, the passages here noted are consonant with the corporealist interpretation of Gen 1:26–27 evidenced in the early church.

At this point we would reassess Paffenroth's contention:

> It does not appear that anything in Augustine's writings would allow us to speculate that Christianity in the fourth century taught that God is corporeal. Rather, Augustine was unable at this point to conceive of a completely incorporeal, spiritual being and therefore found the corporeal but nonanthropomorphic God [*sic*] of the Manichaeans quite attractive.[107]

His first assertion is vague, but we believe we have adduced credible evidence from Augustine to support the conclusions of scholars that the doctrine of incorporeality was not broadly known in his environs outside of a small circle of Christian *platonici* in Italy, and that the conception of an anthropomorphic/corporeal deity was the only theology Augustine had known, in or outside of Christianity, before Milan. True, Augustine was unable as a youth to accept the idea of an incorporeal being, but that is because he was not *taught* it and would not find it articulated until he became acquainted with Christian Platonists. Paulsen was correct—Augustine *is* a reluctant witness.

[106]See Joseph Heijke, *St. Augustine's Comments on* imago Dei (CFSup 3; Worcester, Mass.: [Holy Cross College], 1960) 1, where he gives a list of passages in his anthology. We have cited the only passages we feel pertain without question to this topic.

[107]Paffenroth, "Paulsen on Augustine," 235.

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