



Jared Ortiz, *"You Made Us For Yourself": Creation in St. Augustine's Confessions*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016. xxvi + 256 pages. \$79.00.

Despite the prominence of Augustine's *Confessions*, its structure, meaning, and unity remain heavily disputed. Especially in the wake of the criticism of Henri Marrou in 1938, twentieth-century interpreters came to a general consensus that it bears no literary unity. The upshot in contemporary scholarship is a prevailing "agnosticism" among scholars who dismiss the possibility of an interpretive solution (xviii). In addition, there is a minority view(s) that attributes psychological unity to the *Confessions*, yet these scholars also abandon its structural coherence. In *"You Made Us For Yourself,"* Jared Ortiz makes an ambitious and compelling argument that Augustine's theology of creation is the foundation of—and therefore the interpretive horizon for—his *Confessions*. Ortiz refuses to identify his proposal as a "solution" to the *Confessions*, however, for he sees the problem not with the text, but with its modern interpretation.

Ortiz interprets Augustine's notion of creation to refer principally to the distinction between the transcendent Creator and his creation. This distinction entails a God-world relation, which leads to a "radical transformation in human understanding" that fundamentally changes Augustine's view of reality (xxiv). The central thesis of the book, then, is that coming to understand just how fundamental this creational theology is to Augustine's writing of the *Confessions* will clarify its structural coherence, for creation "determines and can account for the composition of *Confessions*" (xxiv). Ortiz makes his case in an introduction, five main chapters, and a brief conclusion.

In the first chapter Ortiz offers a systematic account of Augustine's theology of creation at the time of writing the *Confessions*, which he describes as "the foundation and a kind of grammar for the rest of the inquiry" (xxvi). It is worth summarizing Augustine's central theological claims about creation, which are most important to Ortiz's main argument. For Augustine, the triune God who transcends creation creates all things freely in a threefold non-temporal act—*creatio*, *conversio*, *formatio*—which he appropriates to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, respectively. The Father gives being from nothing (*creatio*), the Son calls the unformed matter of creation back to God (*revocatio*), creation responds by becoming like God (*conversio*), and the Holy Spirit gives the creature "its final end, its dynamism toward the Father" (*formatio*; 11–12). This understanding of the Creator entails creation *ex nihilo*. Creation itself is a harmonious whole, a hierarchy of creatures created in purposive motion toward God. Creatures exist only by participating in Being, which God is. Thus, movement toward God is necessary because created being is

inherently participatory. This dynamic orientation toward God, which is the product of God's creative *conversio*, Ortiz calls "conversion torque" (14).

After discussing some related features of Augustine's theology of creation, Ortiz explains some of Augustine's most important beliefs about the created world, sin, and re-creation. Augustine interprets *caelum* and *terram* in Genesis 1:1 as the spiritual heaven (which is most like God) and unformed matter (which is least like God, "an unformed almost nothing"), respectively (25). Ortiz then sketches Augustine's understanding of the division of creation into sensible and intelligible things, God's ordering (*providentia*) of all things in harmony with themselves (vertical) and all other things (horizontal), and the non-competitive causality of God and creation. For Augustine, the Son is the Image of God, creatures are either created toward (rational creatures) or not toward (irrational creatures) the Image, and the rational creatures can by clinging and adhering to God obtain likeness to God only by grace, not nature. Ortiz's description of Augustine's view of sin has as its main point that to sin is to love a creature more than the Creator. The three root sins are pride (*ambitio saeculi*), lust (*concupiscentia carnis*), and curiosity (*concupiscentia oculorum*), each of which is *aversio* from God, the reverse of *conversio*. Thus, to sin is to unmake oneself, for it is to act contrary to one's very nature, which was created to become like God. Ortiz finishes his summary by exploring the structural similarities of creation and recreation: both are forms of grace; Augustine uses the same vocabulary to describes each process (*creatio, revocatio, conversio, formatio*); grace remakes the sinner who has unmade himself through *aversio* from God; and this process continues until creatures are transformed into God.

The second chapter contains Ortiz's account of creation as the framework for understanding Augustine's autobiographical description of his development from birth to before his conversion à la *conf.* 7.14.20. Ortiz suggests that each stage represents Augustine "coming to terms with creation," a phrase which he uses deliberately for its ambiguity, to refer to "both intellectual and moral development" (42). The main assertion in this chapter is that Augustine's life and thought are completely intertwined such that the doctrine of creation is an external reality to be understood, to bear moral weight in how Augustine lives, and to shed light on how he interprets his life. As he describes Augustine's development leading up to his conversion to Christianity in the garden at Milan (386), Ortiz argues contrary to common interpretations of Augustine's putative Christianization of Platonism that it is Platonism itself, as it came down to him in the *libri Platoniorum*, that provided the horizon of his imagination for salvation as deification (94–96), the insubstantiality of evil (97–98), and the "sacramentality" of creation (98). In other words, it was Augustine's reading of the Platonists that demonstrated the core in-

sight of creation—the distinction and relation between God and the world—which restructured his view of reality. This new perspective on God and the world, Ortiz submits, forms the “new context” from which he is able to reconsider the faith of his mother once more.

Chapter 3 elucidates how the incarnation “completes” and “radicalizes” Augustine’s new understanding of things, what exactly the new context for his thought is, and how coming to terms with creation modifies Augustine’s thinking (102). The core insight of the incarnation that radicalizes Augustine’s perspective is what is (in later terminology) called the hypostatic union, for if God unites himself to creation in such a radical way his transcendence must be at least as radical. This deepened, personal union represents a reversal of Platonic participation, for it is downward: rather than creation participating in God, God participates in creation. This Christian view of participation teaches Augustine the notion of mediation, the work of God’s transforming grace in Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection rather than merely his example. We begin to embrace this mediation by participating in the sacraments; it is completed in us when we see God face-to-face. Ortiz then shows how through both the content and grammar of *conf.* 1.1.1, Augustine affirms the distinction and relation between the Creator and human beings (*portio creaturae*). Human persons desire to praise God because God created them. Creatures will not enjoy peace until they rest in God, when they praise him eternally and participate in him fully. This is the context within which Augustine sets his own personal narrative.

Augustine’s new context alters his view of language, memory, and time. The new language Augustine derives is *confessio*, which refers primarily to praise and thanksgiving and less often to sin (126). Confession is an activity of the human person in which God is speaking to God, such that the person and God act simultaneously in a non-competitive, complementary way. This *confessio*, then, imitates Augustine’s understanding of the Psalms, which are authored by the whole Christ. It also transforms Augustine’s view of public and private life, for God becomes the public of Augustine’s interior and exterior life. God knows all and makes people known to themselves, enabling them to reveal themselves in *confessio* both to God and to one another. Thus, *confessio* produces “a community of love in truth or, in other words, the church” (137). Confession requires memory—the “proper context” of which is “in the Eucharist.” Memory represents who a person is, legitimates confession, and through faith opens “humans . . . to the truth about their lives” (138). Because God is not part of the world, God must reveal himself to creatures and he often does this through memory. In the first nine books of the *Confessions*, Augustine remembers and interprets his personal journey in the light of faith so that he is able to see God working in his life. Memory, the foundation of this narrative, is the subject of the

tenth book and has a Eucharistic character because it reminds Augustine of God's mercy, it "reforms the image of God" in him, and "informs" his interpretation of his experience (142–143). Augustine then discusses time in book eleven because just as memory undergirds *confessio*, time underwrites memory. Ortiz addresses the questions "how can humans come to terms with their own ephemerality?" and "how can a temporal creature be united with an eternal God?" (145). Time, while fleeting, is redeemed for human persons because through Christ it affords the opportunity for reform, an opportunity "rooted in the presence of memory" (146). The human condition of being distended in temporal multiplicity (*distentio*) is displaced in Christ when God extends the human soul "by making its desires intent on him" so that they "yearn toward the End, God himself" (*extensio*; 148).

In the fourth chapter, Ortiz contends that for Augustine, God implanted in creation a dynamic orientation toward the church through which it reaches its fulfillment by being transformed into God. Ortiz begins by contrasting Augustine's "ecclesial ascent" with his earlier ascent in book seven. The chief difference between the two ascents is the "salvific character" of the ascent with Monica. Describing the *Confessions* as "a liturgical response to the gift of creation" (158), Ortiz claims that Augustine is taking all of his good deeds—gifts of God's transforming grace—and offering them back to God as praise in the hope that he will gather his readers, the church, together "into a unified sacrifice" (167). To the final three books Ortiz attributes an "ecclesial hermeneutic," that is "a vision of the church wherein exegesis is transformed into communal confession" (167–168). For Augustine, there are many true interpretations. Rather than determining the author's intention, interpreters should follow the "*regula caritatis*" and form a "communal confession" in which the interpreters accept each other's true interpretations, "praising God together (171–172). Contending that the *Confessions* is an *exercitio animi*, Ortiz describes the thirteenth and final book as "the magisterial summary which concludes the dialogue of the *Confessions*" (177). Finally, Ortiz claims that the thirteenth book demonstrates that the church is the "goal of creation" (177). There are two main supporting arguments for this conclusion. First, Augustine identifies "the converted and reformed Christian" as a "new creation," which is the only means for us to understand "the original creation event" (186). Second, Augustine ends the *Confessions* with a discussion of the Sabbath as rest in eternal life with God, which can only be reached through God's transforming grace administered through the church (188).

Ortiz completes his argument in the final chapter by applying Augustine's established doctrine of creation as the interpretive light that illumines the coherent literary structure, unity, and meaning of the *Confessions*. Ortiz first explains some of the "compositional principles" that would attend Augustine's writing of the

Confessions, among which he includes writing on different levels (192), helping himself and others "fulfill the double commandment to love God and neighbor" (193), and that "the rhetoric is in the service of the purpose; the composition should match the meaning" (194). Ortiz, in the remainder of the chapter, shows seven ways that creation structures the *Confessions*. First, he explains an important, but often-misinterpreted passage from *Retractiones* in which Augustine speaks about "two parts" of the *Confessions*: books 1–10 and 11–13. Second, he uses numerology, specifically the significance of the numbers ten and three. Third, he shows that the *Confessions* offers a vestige of the Trinity in that it is divisible into the past (1–9), present (10), and future (11–13). Fourth, it is evident in the *Confessions* how Augustine ascends the hierarchy of being toward the church through which he will be united to God in eternity. Fifth, Ortiz demonstrates how Augustine relates the days of creation to both the history of the world and individual human lives. In the *Confessions*, the first four days are grouped together (1–9), then the fifth day (10), next the sixth day (11–13), and finally the seventh, which is Sabbath rest with God in eternity, the goal of the *Confessions*. Sixth, Augustine builds a hidden providence into his journey by imbedding in the structure of the *Confessions* a chiasm (1–9), where the first book corresponds to the ninth, the second to the eighth, such that the fifth book is the center, the "hinge," which "Augustine uses . . . to show God's providential care for his life" (217). The seventh way creation reveals the structure of the *Confessions* is the liturgical account described in chapter 4 according to which the order is Baptism (1–9), Eucharist (10), and Easter Sermon (11–13). Thus, Ortiz shows how creation illumines "how the *Confessions* could be read as an integral whole, a deliberate and well-structured literary unity, which Augustine wrote in imitation of the dynamic motion of creation for the sake of liturgically taking up his readers into God" (231).

In the conclusion of the book, Ortiz summarizes his argument and draws four conclusions from it. First, creation provides a "coherent account of the *Confessions*" (231). Second, creation is a foundational concept for many other themes in Augustine's writings. Third, this inquiry has exposed a number of lacunae that require further study, the foremost of which he understands to be "the role that deification plays in Augustine's thought and in the *Confessions* in particular" (232–233). Finally, this study shows that Augustine's office as bishop has an important shaping effect on his writing of the *Confessions*.

In this, his debut monograph, Ortiz successfully advances the scholarly conversation concerning the interpretation of Augustine's *Confessions* and his theology. There are so many praiseworthy qualities in this book. First, the clarity and persuasiveness of Ortiz's central argument are enough by themselves to commend the book.

Second, the book is a model for how to practice the work of historical theology. Ortiz demonstrates a keen awareness of the theological and philosophical contours of Augustine's theology while having a good sense of the historical context within which Augustine is living and thinking. Third, Ortiz shows an astute awareness of a wide range of scholarly conversations proper to and outside of Augustine studies. At numerous junctures in his engagement with primary and secondary sources Ortiz shows an exceptional ability to give lucid solutions to apparent interpretive conundrums. I do have a few questions for the author. I wonder if, in his account of Augustine's appropriation of creation, conversion, and formation to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he underplays the Holy Spirit's role in formation in favor of the Word. Also, Ortiz suggests of the divine ideas that the Word both "is" the divine ideas *and* the divine ideas "are contained in" the Word without clarifying how Augustine makes sense of this (17–19). Ortiz also proposes that creation is "the fundamental and comprehensive framework of Augustine's theology" (xxvi) and that creation is the "foundational context" of many other Augustinian themes (231). I wonder how much Ortiz might consider other doctrines in creation's light without letting it become too dominant. Finally, I am interested to find out how the doctrine of deification as a principle of all creation relates to Augustine's anthropology, soteriology, and eschatology.

Not one of my concerns or curiosities detracts from the success of Ortiz's main line of argument concerning Augustine's *Confessions*. I therefore commend this book to specialists working on the *Confessions*, Augustine's theology of creation, or Augustine's theology more broadly. In addition to specialists, careful readers of historical theology would benefit from reading this rich example of historical theological scholarship.

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