

The Function of "Mediator" in St. Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, Book IX

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St. Augustine acknowledges that "the books of the Platonists" played an important role in teaching him "to seek for truth beyond corporeal forms."¹ Elsewhere Augustine exhorts Christians not to fear philosophers who have said anything that is true and agreeable to the faith, "the Platonists above all."² That Augustine was influenced in some way by Neoplatonist thought is therefore incontrovertible. Nevertheless, scholars continue to keep busy with attempts to define the exact nature of the relationship between Augustine and Neoplatonism.³ In light of this John O'Meara is surely right when he says, "there is no simple statement adequate to describe Augustine's use of the Neoplatonists".⁴ This article will seek to demonstrate how Augustine was able simultane-

ously to appropriate and criticise aspects of Neoplatonist thought in the development of his own mature theology.⁵

Unfortunately, providing a theory that can account for the complexity of the relationship between Augustine's thought and that of the "Platonists" is difficult, especially since the relationship itself seems to have dynamically changed throughout Augustine's life. This article, therefore, will focus upon Augustine's mature doctrine of incarnation vis-à-vis his concept of "mediator" as used in Book IX of *De civitate Dei*.⁶ Here it will be argued that Augustine seeks to provide a *discerning response* to what he saw as certain inadequacies of Neoplatonist thought, even while continuing to uphold other key Neoplatonist assumptions. As the evidence will show, "mediator" for Augustine serves both a rhetorical and theological function. Rhetorically, "mediator" functions for Augustine as an apologetic "point of contact" with Neoplatonism and in particular, Neoplatonist demonology. Theologically, however, "mediator" simultaneously functions as a thorough critique of Neoplatonist ontology and soteriology and as the foundation of a truly Christian ontology and soteriology. In short, Augustine certainly makes use of Neoplatonist thought, but as James McEvoy has put it so well, "The parting of the ways between Platonism and Christianity is the Incarnation of the Word and the doctrine of the mediation of Christ" (McEvoy 167).

The Structure and Content of Book IX

Reading through Book IX, one must not forget that Augustine writes not only as a theologian, but also as a master of rhetoric.⁷ Thus, it is just as important to heed any rhetorical clues that the struc-

¹ *Confessions* 7.9.13; 7.20.26. Citation from Augustine, *The Confessions*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Maria Boulding. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997. It is clear that Augustine read the "Platonist books" in a Latin translation and it is commonly understood that the translator was Marius Victorinus. For a helpful article exploring the theological and philosophical influence of Victorinus upon Augustine, see Mary T. Clark, "Augustine the Christian Thinker," *From Augustine to Eriugena: Essays on Neoplatonism and Christianity in Honor of John O'Meara*, ed. F.X. Martin and J.A. Richmond. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991: 56-65.

² *Teaching Christianity* 2.40.60. Citation from Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996. For an examination of Augustine's own view of the Platonists, see Dennis House, "St. Augustine's Account of the Relation of Platonism to Christianity in *De civitate Dei*," *Dionysius* 8 (December 1983): 43-48.

³ Though by no means an exhaustive list, the following works are representative of the type of work being done to understand the influence of Neoplatonism upon Augustine. See Dominic J. O'Meara, ed. *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982; Chris Humphrey, "There the Father Is, and There Is Everything": Elements of Plotinian Pantheism in Augustine's Thought, Montreal: McGill University, 1986; F.X. Martin and J.A. Richmond, eds. *From Augustine to Eriugena: Essays on Neoplatonism and Christianity in Honor of John O'Meara*, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991; Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey, eds. *The Relationship Between Neoplatonism and Christianity*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1992. Though not exclusively limited to the influence of Neoplatonism upon Augustine, see also the chapter entitled, "The Influence of Neoplatonism," in R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, London: Duckworth, 1972.

⁴ John J. O'Meara, "The Neoplatonism of Saint Augustine," *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. Dominic J. O'Meara. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982: 41.

⁵ It is unfortunate that certain theologians who are critical of Augustine have oversimplified this relationship in favour of Neoplatonism. British theologian Colin Gunton, for example, argues that it was "platonist" philosophy which lead Augustine to be "suspicious of the material world." This leads Gunton to characterize Augustine's thought as an "anti-incarnational platonism." See Colin Gunton, "Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43, no. 1 (1990): 36-7. To be fair, it must be noted that Gunton's article is primarily focused upon Augustine's Neoplatonism as evidenced in *De Trinitate*. But as appropriate as it is to focus in on one particular work of Augustine's, what is surprising is how Gunton makes such sweeping generalizations about Augustine's theology of incarnation without reference to Augustine's discussion of the topic outside of *De Trinitate*, e.g., *De civitate Dei*. As a result, Gunton's indictment of Augustine's doctrine of the incarnation fails to take into account evidence contrary to his thesis.

⁶ Translations taken from St. Augustine, [*De civitate Dei*] *The City of God Against the Pagans*, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*. Edited and translated by R. W. Dyson. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Citations hereafter will indicate book and chapter.

⁷ See Joanne McWilliam, Ed. *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992. The title of this otherwise excellent collection of essays, even if not intended to say as much, seems to imply that Augustine moved away from his early career in rhetoric to more overtly theological concerns. Unfortunately, the intended sense of the title of the book is not explained in either the "Introduction" nor in any subsequent essays. However, the "Introduction" explains that the overriding theme of the conference which gave rise to the essays contained in the book was "Conversion." This is all the more unfortunate because one is left with the impression that Augustine was "converted" from rhetor to theologian. No matter which side one takes on the current debate on Augustine's relationship to Cicero's theory of rhetoric, it is difficult to argue that Augustine ever ceases to be a rhetorician, even if it can be argued that he moves significantly away from his earlier rhetorical commitments. For a succinct description of Augustine's rhetorical theory, see George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition From Ancient to Modern Times*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980: 150ff.

ture of the book may provide as it is to pay attention to the content of what Augustine actually says. In true Augustinian fashion, content and form (or, to use his own related terms, *res* and *signa*) should not be considered separately.⁸

Book IX contains 23 chapters. Augustine's fondness for structural symmetry in such books as *De Trinitate* (which is written in 15 books divided into two seven-book halves with Book VIII holding the halves together (Charry 120)), suggests that Book IX, though obviously not replicating the structure of *De Trinitate*, nevertheless reveals a quite deliberate structure. In one analysis, Book IX consists of three main sections of seven chapters each, with a single climactic chapter (chapter 15) separating the second and third sections, and concluding with a single chapter (chapter 23). The following outline can help visualize this structure:

- I. An examination of the "psychology" of demons (chaps. 1-7)
- II. An examination of the "ontology" of demons (chaps. 8-14)
- III. The superiority of the One Mediator, the Man Jesus Christ (chap. 15)
- IV. The problem of contamination (chaps. 16-22)
- V. Conclusion: Demons are inadequate to the task of mediation (chap. 23)

Before analysing his use of "mediator," a broad overview of the content of Book IX will be undertaken to demonstrate the flow of Augustine's argument from beginning to end.

In chapters 1-7, Augustine delves into what will here be called the "psychology" of demons. Augustine succinctly encapsulates the key point of departure in Book IX when he says, "[The Platonists] believe also that, because no god has dealings with men, . . . demons are appointed as mediators between men and the gods, to carry our prayers to them and to bring their answers back" (*De civ. D.* 9.1). This early mention of the concept of "mediation" undoubtedly points to the important role it will play throughout the book.

In order to address this belief in "demonic mediation," Augustine suggests in chapter 2 that it is necessary to examine the distinction, "whether held by Platonists or anyone else," made between the demons themselves (*De civ. D.* 9.2). At this point, Augustine does not reject this distinction outright, but instead allows the hypothesis of two species of demons to stand. But before engaging in an extended examination of the validity of this distinction, Augustine turns in chapter 3 to the teachings of the Platonist philosopher Apuleius, particularly his belief that demons, whether good or bad, are subject to the "irrational passions of the soul" and are thus "agitated by storms and tempests" (*De civ. D.* 9.3). As if anticipating those who would object to saying that demons are indeed subject to passion, Augustine turns to a discussion of the concept of "passion" itself, especially in the philosophy of the Peripatetic and Stoic philosophers (chapter 4), both of whom apparently disagree on whether such passions can disturb the truly wise man. But in the end, Augustine concludes that the difference of opinion is only a matter of "verbal controversy" and is not a substantial dis-

⁸ For an excellent examination of Augustine's rhetoric vis-à-vis Neoplatonism, see Martin Camargo, "'Non Solum Sibi Sed Aliis Etiam': Neoplatonism and Rhetoric in Saint Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*," *Rhetorica* 16, no. 4 (Autumn 1998): 393-408.

agreement (*De civ. D.* 9.4). Augustine then outlines an alternative Christian perspective on passion (chapter 5). Christians, he says, are indeed subjected to the influence of passions, but they do not allow passions to turn them toward vice, but rather train themselves to direct these passions toward righteous action. This is in stark contrast to the demons, which allow their minds to be "subjugated and oppressed by vicious passions" (*De civ. D.* 9.6).

Having given this rather extended discussion on passion and its effects, Augustine asks, How is it possible to distinguish between the poetic description of "gods," who are said to be separated from passion yet engaging in factional strife, and "demons," who also appear to be subject to these same passions? Apuleius' answer is that it is a "poetic fiction" written under "poetic license" that demons are said to be gods. In reality, he says, it is only demons that exercise such factional strife, and not the gods (*De civ. D.* 9.7). Thus, Augustine concludes, Apuleius "seems to have been at pains to ensure that, when these tales were sung by the poets, they should not be believed of the gods themselves . . . but of the demons who occupy the middle region" (*De civ. D.* 9.7). Though to be examined more fully later in the article, it is interesting to note that even here Augustine simply leaves the explanation of Apuleius standing, even though, as will become clear later in the book, he is certainly not satisfied with the explanation given.

Augustine then shifts his discussion in chapter 8-14 from the "psychology" of the demons to the place of demons in relationship to the gods and to humans. Or to put it another way, Augustine shifts from a discussion of "psychology" to "social ontology." Whereas in the opening section Augustine centres his discussion upon the *character* of the demons, in the second section he focuses more upon the *ontological position* of the demons in the "intermediate" location supposedly held between "gods" and "men."

At the outset of chapter 8, Augustine introduces Apuleius' definition of demons. According to Apuleius, demons are "animal in genus, passive in soul, rational in mind, aerial in body, and eternal in duration" (*De civ. D.* 9.8). However, Augustine is disappointed with this definition because it in no way specifies how "good" demons are to be distinguished from "bad," even though this normative distinction between "good" and "bad" appears to be crucial to certain Platonists. Then, in chapter 9, Augustine extends the argument further and asks, If these demons are truly intermediaries between the gods and men, what kind of mediators are they? Ironically, he says, these beings who are supposedly men's mediators, are "suspended upside down" because they have "an eternal body, like the gods" but, due to the fact (already discovered in chapters 1-7) that demons are agitated by passion, they have "a flawed soul, like that of men" (*De civ. D.* 9.9). Ingeniously, in chapter 10 Augustine appeals to the authority of Plotinus to support his suspicion that the demons are unable to act as men's mediators. For it is Plotinus who says that men are indeed happier than demons; for though men may be miserable in soul, they are mortal in body and therefore can escape the bounds of earthly misery. On the contrary, demons are miserable in soul, but cannot escape their bounds of misery, because they are imprisoned in eternal bodies.

As if to leave no stone unturned in his questioning of the truth of the Platonic belief in demonic mediators, Augustine engages in chapter 11 the opinion of Apuleius who suggests that the souls

of men become either good or bad demons, depending on whether they depart this life deserving well or ill. But Augustine will have none of this and immediately refutes this suggestion, arguing that if this were true, then the souls of wicked men in this life could look forward to being "invoked with sacrifices and divine honours." Surely such a suggestion is a "whirlpool of moral perdition!" (*De civ. D.* 9.11).

Chapters 12 to 14 are crucial to Augustine's argument and therefore worthy of more careful analysis, for it is here that he most explicitly explores the possibility of demons being mediators between the gods and men. Apuleius concludes that there is no means of direct communication between gods and men because of a great gulf separating them. This is because of the gods' "sublimity of location, everlastingness of life and perfection of nature." Naturally, Augustine concludes, men must be the opposite of the gods and therefore have the attributes of "lowliness of station, mortality, and misery" (*De civ. D.* 9.12). This being the case, demons, as intermediary beings, must reside "in the middle." This is without controversy, Augustine concedes, because it is reasonable that demons, having aerial bodies, reside between the sublime position of the gods and lowly station of men. But the problem is that to be truly intermediate beings, in the full ontological sense of the term, they must then share one remaining attribute each with the gods and with men, lest "they either rise upwards or fall downwards, as the case might be" (*De civ. D.* 9.13). This means there are only two options if Apuleius' characterization is correct: demons either share immortality with the gods and miserable souls with men, or they share mortal bodies with men and blessed souls with the gods. For if they share immortal bodies and blessed souls with the gods, then they fail to be intermediate beings and are closer to gods than to men. But if they share mortal bodies and miserable souls with men, then they cannot in any way give aid to men since they would be closer to men than to the gods. In light of this dilemma, Augustine finally and soundly indicts the Platonist position: "The Platonists will labour in vain to show how the good demons, if they are immortal and blessed, can rightly be placed midway between the immortal and blessed gods and mortal and miserable men." Therefore, he concludes, "when we search for a being intermediate between the blessed immortals and miserable mortals, we should look for one which is either mortal and blessed or immortal and miserable" (*De civ. D.* 9.13).

In his search for a true "mediator," Augustine briefly considers in chapter 14 the possibility that certain wise men, though mortal, may actually succeed in obtaining blessedness of soul in this life. If so, then such men could apparently function as mediators between the gods and men. But Augustine takes a "humbler view of mankind's condition" (*De civ. D.* 9.14) and posits, at the beginning of his climactic chapter 15, that a more credible and probable view is that "all men must necessarily be miserable while they are mortal." Consequently, the only solution is to "seek a Mediator Who is not only man, but also God: Who, by the intervention of His blessed immortality, may lead men out of their mortal misery to a blessed immortality, and Who must neither fail to become mortal nor remain mortal" (*De civ. D.* 9.15).

It is in chapter 15, the pinnacle of Book IX's argument, that Augustine explains why there can only be one mediator between God and man. As if to give the platonic system one last chance,

Augustine grants that demons, even if given ontological status as mediators, are finally, without doubt, *evil* mediators. And the nature of an evil mediator is necessarily to "interpose himself in order to prevent us from passing to a blessed immortality, for that which impedes our passage, namely misery itself, persists in him." Indeed, Augustine acknowledges, "there is, then, an evil mediator, who separates loved ones" and "there are many mediators who separate." But before one despairs, there is also "a good Mediator Who reconciles enemies." Who is this Mediator? For Augustine the answer is clear: "the uncreated Word of God, through Whom all things were made, and by participating in Whom we are blessed" (*De civ. D.* 9.15).

Of crucial importance, however, to Augustine's introduction of the One Mediator is his insistence that Christ is Mediator on the basis of his *humanity*, not on the basis of his divinity, even though Augustine here obviously upholds both aspects to be true.⁹ Augustine is more than clear in this point and is worth quoting at length:

He is not, however, the Mediator because He is the Word; for as the Word, supremely immortal and supremely blessed, He is far removed from miserable mortals. Rather, He is the Mediator because he is Man; and by His manhood He shows us that, in order to obtain that good which is not only blessed but bliss-bestowing, we need not seek other mediators by whose aid, as we might suppose, we are gradually to strive towards it. We have no need because a God Who is blessed and bliss-bestowing has become a sharer in our humanity, and so has furnished us with all that we need to share in His divinity. For in redeeming us from our morality and misery, He does not lead us to the immortal and blessed angels so that, by participating in them, we may ourselves also become immortal and blessed. Rather, He leads us to that Trinity by participating in Whom the angels themselves are blessed. Therefore, when He chose to take the form of a servant, lower than the angels, so that He might be our Mediator, He remained above the angels in the form of God, being Himself both the Way of life on earth, and life itself in Heaven (*De civ. D.* 9.15).

It may seem odd that Augustine, having come to such a grand conclusion to the problem of mediation posed by platonic demonology, would not simply complete the book in triumphant doxology! But, as if not satisfied that the full import of the One Mediator has sunk in, Augustine indefatigably carries on in chapter 16 to 22 to explore further problems posed by the platonic demonology. It is as if Augustine deliberately refrains from dealing the platonic system a final death blow and prefers to continue to work, as it were, respectfully though cautiously, from within. But from chapter 15 on, his work is aided with a new tool in hand: the theology of the Incarnate Mediator.

Starting in chapter 16 Augustine turns his attention to the problem of "contamination." Again, assuming the Platonists are right, then gods can have no contact with men, lest they become con-

⁹ Harrison's observation is certainly apropos: "The rationally ungraspable contradictoriness and paradoxality of the doctrine of the Incarnation-of God become man-means for Augustine (as for any theologian) that two groups of terminology are held together and treated together in order to speak of it; one with human referents, one with divine referents; one comprehensible, the other incomprehensible." Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992: 192-3.

taminated in some way. But if this is so, Augustine argues, then how can the demons, who supposedly mediate between men and gods, not also be contaminated? For if the gods are separated so as to avoid contamination, how indeed are demons, as lesser beings, able to avoid contamination? In frustration, Augustine asks, "Who could believe such things, unless the most deceitful demons had practised their deceit on him?" (*De civ. D.* 9.16).

Once again, Augustine allows the platonic assumption to stand: "things below, which are mortal and impure, cannot approach the immortal purity which is above." Therefore, "to remedy this condition of separation from God, a mediator is indeed needed." But unlike the demonic mediators, who share in the situation of men in having a "diseased soul," humans "need a Mediator Who is united with us in our lowest estate by bodily mortality, yet Who, by virtue of the immortal righteousness of His spirit, always remains on high." Who is this? None less than that one which Holy Scripture proclaims: "the 'Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.'"¹⁰

Finally, in chapters 18 to 22, Augustine begins to wrap up his examination of the platonic demonology, pointing out its theological weaknesses along the way. Augustine concludes in chapter 18 that contaminated demons fail to "furnish us with a path to God; rather, they prevent us from keeping to the path" (*De civ. D.* 9.18). Paradoxically, they are mediators who fail to mediate! With this in mind, Augustine then pushes the argument thus pursued to the logical end in the final chapters. This ontological category of spiritual beings-demons is said to consist of both good and bad, but such a categorization goes against common usage and, Augustine quips, "hardly any literate and educated man would venture to say, in praising his slave, 'You have a demon'" (*De civ. D.* 9.19).

Yet does not the word "demon" itself suggest something worthy of consideration? Alluding to Plato's *Cratylus*, Augustine admits that the word "demon" signifies "knowledge." In response, Augustine says, Yes, demons do have knowledge, but it is a knowledge without charity (*De civ. D.* 9.20). Unlike the angels, who dwell in the presence of God's "immutable light," the demons are only exposed to enough light to "terrify those whose tyranny He was about to redeem the predestined of His kingdom" (*De civ. D.* 9.21). As a result, when speaking about these beings, whether angels or demons, the distinction is not to be made between good and bad demons, but between angels, who "enjoy participation in [God] and contemplation of Him endlessly" and demons, all of whom "do not contemplate in the wisdom of God" (*De civ. D.* 9.22).

By now, Augustine has reached the limits of his argument, and thus, in one final chapter, brings a conclusion to his explorations. That the Platonists may wish to call "the angels gods rather than demons . . . let them say this if they wish." For Scripture testifies that God truly is God over all the gods. But let us not, Augustine exhorts, allow evil spirit beings to be spoken of as gods, but let us rightly distinguish between the immortal, blessed creatures which are God's holy angels, and the miserable beings who "deserve their misery because of their malice." But most importantly of all, he concludes, let us not assume that these beings, whether good or bad, or specified as angels, gods,

¹⁰ *De civ. D.* 9.17. Cf. 1 Timothy 2:5.

or demons, are able to mediate solely by their ontological status as intermediary beings. Rather, the sign of a good intermediary versus a bad intermediary is that the good one will "desire that religious worship be offered only to the one God by whom they were created" while the bad intermediaries, simply stated, will not.

The Function of "Mediator": An Analysis

Having outlined the flow and logic of Augustine's argument in Book IX, noting especially the strategic role of chapter 15 in the argument, it is now possible to analyze how Augustine uses the concept of "mediator" throughout the book. This analysis will suggest that "mediator" plays both a rhetorical and theological role throughout the book.

In the first place, it is noteworthy that in the first two sections of Book IX (chapters 1-7 and chapters 8-14), Augustine engages the neoplatonic demonology, as it were, from within its own structural logic. And the point of departure in his engagement is the Platonist belief that "demons are appointed as mediators between men and the gods" (*De civ. D.* 9.1). Though conceivably Augustine could have immediately countered this assumption through appeal to Scripture or Christian tradition, he instead allows the assumption to stand. In fact, it is noteworthy that Augustine, within the first fourteen chapters, repeatedly allows Platonist doctrines to stand, without a point-by-point refutation. This is confirmed through a quick look at the apparatus in Dyson's text which reveals that there is not a single citation or allusion to Scripture in chapters 1 to 14. Contrast this with chapters 15 to 23 in which there are at least 18 Scriptural allusions. What is the significance of this? Russell's observations are helpful here:

In defending the true and unique mediatorship of Christ against the Porphyrians of his time, Augustine was compelled to confront them on the common ground of the Platonic tradition which they claimed to represent. Recourse to the authority of the Gospels would have been futile since, as Augustine noted in his review of an earlier work, *De consensu Evangelistarum*, many of these had accused Christ's followers of having been led into error concerning the divinity of Christ himself. Besides . . . Porphyry's severe indictment of the moral integrity of the disciple [sic] was enough to strip their testimony of any credibility. (Russell 408).

From a rhetorical standpoint, it is reasonable to conclude that Augustine is concerned that his audience will "hear him out." So, rather than engaging in an immediate polemical tirade against his opponents, complete with Scriptural support, he carefully and patiently exposit the Platonist position with generous appropriation of one of their own prized philosophers, in the case of Book IX, Apuleius. In this way, Augustine's concern here is not so much to provide an alternative system of thought for intellectual consideration (i.e., Scriptural Christianity) as much as he is concerned to expose the internal incoherence and weaknesses of the system so espoused.

But more significantly, the core of Augustine's exposition of the Platonist doctrine centres in on the question of "mediation." True, Augustine is disturbed by the psychology of the demons and their agitated passions and spends a good portion of the first section of Book IX dealing with this issue. However, he does not allow this aspect to sidetrack him from dealing with the question at

hand: How can these demonic beings, so agitated in their souls by passion and vice, be mediators? Through allowing the Platonists themselves to speak about these passions experienced by the demons, Augustine, by implication, calls the worthiness of the demons as mediators into question. However, this is *not* to say that Augustine calls into question the *need* for mediation. On the contrary, he upholds the Platonist principle of "mediation" as necessitated by the gap between the divine and the human.

But Augustine does not stop there. In fact, he goes one step further and accepts the Platonist criterion of what would qualify as a successful mediator: a mediator would ideally share equally in the attributes of the divine and the human. Again, he appeals to Apuleius' definition and distills the attributes down to the three pairs of opposites: location (high or low), status of soul (blessed or miserable), and status of body (mortal or immortal.)

But when he proceeds to examine the demons as candidates for being mediators, he finds they fall short, even by Platonist expectations. Not only have the demons already failed from the standpoint of their psychological constitution, being suspect to the agitations and tempests of passion, but they also fail in that they share the miserable soul of men and therefore are rendered incapable of mediation. Though ontologically they are intermediary beings, that is, "half-way" between gods and men by virtue of their "aerial bodies," this virtue alone is in no way adequate to represent men before the gods.

The foregoing analysis has shown that throughout the opening section of Book IX, Augustine makes use of the concept of "mediator" as a rhetorical, or, as it were, apologetic point of contact with the Platonist philosophers. But Augustine's use of "mediator," however, is not restricted to the rhetorical. In addition, Augustine uses the "mediator" concept in a uniquely *theological* way. And it is precisely in his theological use of "mediator" that the complexity of the relationship between Neoplatonist and uniquely Christian categories are illustrated. In fact, Augustine's theological use of "mediator" provides evidence to show that Augustine's use of neoplatonic categories is highly nuanced. Though Augustine is willing to accept the necessity of "mediator" in neoplatonic terms, it is in his simultaneous commitment to the necessity of *incarnation*, that Augustine demonstrates his willingness to part ways with *Platonist* doctrine, when necessary, in favour of genuinely *Christian* conclusions. Or as Robert Russell concludes, "As an apologist . . . it was incumbent upon Augustine to show, not where Platonism had *succeeded*, but where it had *failed*" (Russell 410). Four lines of evidence to demonstrate this conclusion can be cited.

First, though Augustine's opening discussion on the "psychology" of demons and their propensity toward passionate vice is clearly meant to indict the demons as flawed in character, Augustine does *not*, however, rule out the proper place of passion, and in particular, *compassion*. Citing Cicero as an eminent authority, Augustine counts compassion itself as a virtue. As he says, "For what is compassion but a kind of fellow feeling in our hearts for the misery of another which compels us to help him if we can?" (*De civ. D.* 9.5). Though Augustine does not explicitly link this definition to the mediator at this point, one can sense, at the very least, a foreshadowing of the compassionate character of a good Mediator. But such a Mediator, in order truly to display such "fellow

feeling" would obviously need to be a "fellow" partaker of the human situation; in contradistinction, demons (or angels, for that matter) cannot experience this kind of genuine compassion for or with humans.

Second, Augustine accepts as a given the great gulf between the divine and human; in this, he is unified with the Platonists. On the other hand, Augustine refuses to accept first, the theory so prevalent among the Platonists, that it is humanity *qua* humanity which contaminates the divine, and second that demons, by virtue of their aerial bodies, are better suited to function as mediators. On the contrary, Augustine argues, "There are two wholesome lessons of no small importance which His incarnation reveals to us at the present time: that true divinity cannot be contaminated by the flesh; and that demons are not to be thought better than ourselves because they do not have flesh." Thus, for Augustine, a true and good Mediator is not one who shuns human flesh. Rather, the good Mediator shares fully "in the humanity with which He clothed Himself" (*De civ. D.* 9.17). The Mediator is *ensarkos Logos*, the Word clothed in flesh.

It is in Augustine's affirmation of the incarnate Mediator that he is able, in the last section of Book IX, to deal with the problem of contamination. For unlike the Platonists who see the problem in terms of bodily contact, Augustine refuses to see this as a problem at all. In contrast, Augustine's "Mediator," by virtue of being human himself, upholds the essential goodness of the created human body while simultaneously rejecting the neoplatonic ontology which requires a mediator to somehow occupy an intermediate locale to bridge the gap between the divine and the human. Instead, Augustine's solution is for the divine to *become* human and thus to solve the problem of mediation while simultaneously ruling out the need for a mediator located in a spatially intermediate location between heaven and earth. In other words, mediation between two "realms" does *not* occur through introducing the necessity of a *third* realm—the realm of the demonic (or angelic). Rather, mediation occurs through the divine being actually entering into the human realm. In this way, Augustine deconstructs the neoplatonic ontology of *three* types of beings (i.e., divine, demonic and human) and maintains the distinctive Christian ontology of *two* types of beings (Uncreated Creator and created creatures).

This ontology is not to be confused with Augustine's distinction, in the rest of *De civitate Dei*, with the twofold distinction between the "City of God" and the "City of Man." For even in the present state of affairs, as history moves forward to its consummation, angels and demons are already associated either with the City of God or as part of the City of this world respectively; their ultimate destiny is already determined. However, humans presently reside, in Markus' terms, in an intermediate "ambivalent" state called the "secular," that is, a realm "capable of being linked either with damnation or with salvation, depending on the ultimate purposes to which it is harnessed" (Markus 85). But this is a realm which, upon completion of history, will cease to exist. According to Augustine, however, created creatures will *always* remain ontologically created beings, though some of these creatures will suffer eternal damnation and separate from the bliss of God's presence (Cf. *De civ. D.* 21) while others will eternally contemplate, in their resurrected bodies, the bliss-bestowing Beauty of the Eternal God. (Cf. *De civ. D.* 22).

Third, Augustine's Mediator *becomes* Mediator on the basis of his humanity more than upon any other factor. This is especially important to emphasize in light of Colin Gunton's assertion that "the doctrine of the divinity of Christ is more important for Augustine than that of the humanity" (Gunton 37). In Book IX, particularly chapter 15, Augustine clearly and resoundingly confutes this description. Not only does Augustine repeatedly quote from 1 Timothy 2:5 ("the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus") but he even goes so far to say that it was precisely in the *humanity* of Christ that mediation was possible.

He is not, however, the Mediator because He is the Word; for as the Word, supremely immortal and supremely blessed, He is far removed from miserable mortals. Rather, **He is the Mediator because he is Man**; and by His manhood He shows us that, in order to obtain that good which is not only blessed but bliss-bestowing, we need not seek other mediators by whose aid, as we might suppose, we are gradually to strive towards it.¹¹

It is interesting that Augustine opens the door to a human mediator in chapter 14, though, he asks, if there are such wise and blessed humans, "why is it not these same wise men who are appointed as mediators between miserable mortals and the blessed immortals?" (*De civ. D.* 9.14). Of course, in the end the Mediator *is* human and it is precisely *because* he is human that he is enabled to be the best Mediator after all.

Fourth and last, Augustine argues that for a mediator to be effective as a mediator, he or she must in some way "lead" humans to the divine. Yet the demons, so Augustine argues, can hardly be trustworthy in this task. For in the first place, their minds are tossed about by the storms of evil passion. As a result, "they cannot even be compared even to wise men . . . [because] such wise men do not yield to the temptation to approve or do anything which might turn them aside from the path of wisdom" (*De civ. D.* 9.4). Consequently, "they do not furnish with a path to God; rather, they prevent us from keeping to the path" (*De civ. D.* 9.18). And secondly, demons, because they are "suspended upside down" are hardly to be trusted to lead mortals to the divine. Rather, the evil mediator "interposes himself in order to prevent us from passing to a blessed immortality." This is in stark contrast with the good Mediator who "interposes Himself" in order that he may "lead us" to God the Trinity (*De civ. D.* 9.15). In so leading humans to God, the Mediator must have overcome mortality, lest he be rendered incapable of leading other humans once he himself dies. But unless the Mediator was once mortal himself, he would be unable to represent the miserable mortal soul in her or his state. As a result, the Mediator must be one who himself was mortal, as humans, but only in a transient way. Thus, the good Mediator must have "passed through mortality" so that "He might make the dead immortal by the power by which He showed in His own resurrection, and bestow upon the miserable the blessedness which He Himself had never relinquished" (*De civ. D.* 9.15). Thus, for Augustine, the Mediator is not one who sheds the flesh of humanity, but rather the one who, more accurately, sheds the *mortal* flesh. For Augustine, the contrast is between the corruptible and incorruptible, not the soul and the body.

¹¹ *De civ. D.* 9.15. [Emphasis added to text]

Conclusion

Evidence has been given in this paper that Augustine, as a Christian Rhetorician and Bishop, did not simply synthesize Neoplatonist thinking with Christianity in an undiscerning fashion. Though it is true that Augustine made use of neoplatonic categories throughout his life, even in his most mature work, this was usually not without discerning qualification. What has been demonstrated, however, is that Augustine makes use of neoplatonic categories of thinking as the rhetorical starting point of contact with his neoplatonic interlocutors. But it has also been demonstrated that Augustine's starting point is definitely not his ending point. For though the discussion of Mediator is formed upon certain neoplatonic assumptions which Augustine apparently accepts, he is not satisfied until he has gone on to provide a thorough critique of the failure of Neoplatonism to provide that which itself has prescribed. Put another way, Augustine accepts how Neoplatonism specifies the *need* and the *criteria of qualification* for a Mediator between God and humans, but he deconstructs, and ultimately rejects, the Neoplatonist *solution* to mediation, namely the role of the demonic. In its place, he argues for the need for a single, superior Mediator who fulfills all of the neoplatonic expectations while simultaneously showing the inadequacies of the neoplatonic ontology itself. Consequently, Augustine's Mediator is one whom the Neoplatonists stumble over and ultimately, are unable to accept. Thus, Russell is surely right when he says,

Although [Augustine] remained convinced that Platonism, more than other philosophies, had more closely approached the Christian faith, yet any doctrine that proposed a mediatorship apart from that of Christ was of itself sufficient to turn Platonism from a philosophical ally of Christianity into a formidable and dangerous enemy (Russell 407).

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