

Augustine as an Apologist: Is *Confessions* Apologetic in Nature?

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Abstract:

This article explores the apologetic nature of Augustine's *Confessions*. It first takes a brief look at Augustine's complicated view between the relationship of faith and reason, in order to provide a background to his employment of apologetic elements throughout *Confessions*. Both positive and negative apologetic elements are examined throughout the paper. Some positive apologetic elements include Augustine's presentations of the implied ontological argument, the cosmological argument, the teleological argument, the argument from the experience of beauty, the demonstration of the coherency of the Christian conception of God (with his explorations with time and creation). Some of the negative apologetic elements include dealing with detractors from the Christian faith such as the Manichees and their objections. Although studies in recent years have focussed on the autobiographical and religious experiential dimensions of *Confessions*, this paper seeks to demonstrate that the apologetic dimension is also foundational to Augustine's text. It is important to realize that the apologetic nature of *Confessions* does not detract from its other natures (autobiographical, religious experience) since objects, ideas and persons can have more than one nature – as is true with the person of Christ and a number line. It is the hope of this paper to revive perhaps a forgotten aspect of *Confessions* which is also pertinent to the Church today.

1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of this paper concerns Saint Augustine's role as a Christian apologist, particularly as is found in his *Confessions*. This paper seeks to examine the book of *Confessions* as an apologetic text for the Christian faith. To achieve such a task it is necessary to tease apart the various apologetic elements found in his *Confessions*. Prior to this it will be essential to ascertain Augustine's view of the relationship between both faith and reason in order to understand the Christian apologetics he employs throughout his *Confessions*. Once the view taken by Augustine on faith and reason is examined, particularly how he tends to employ it throughout *Confessions*, then we can proceed by defining the two terms of apologetics and apologist, in the context relevant to *Confessions*. Moreover, it will be essential to provide some pertinent examples that Augustine utilizes in his apologetics throughout *Confessions*. Through these examples I seek to demonstrate that the work of *Confessions* is apologetic in nature. However, this is not to say that, the nature of a person or an object (whether abstract or concrete), in this case a text, possesses solely one nature. For instance, a number line possesses a dual nature, both a geometric and an algebraic nature. In traditional Christian theology, Christ also possesses a dual nature, that of divine and human. This is all to indicate that because *Confessions* may be apologetic in nature, it does not follow that it is not autobiographical and a recounting of Augustine's religious experience of praising God. It seems to possess more than solely one nature. I will provide a deductive argument to tie the threads of this paper in the conclusion.

2. DELIMITATION

This paper seeks to focus on the apologetic nature of *Confessions* and not to enter into debates over whether Augustine was a philosopher or a theologian since such debates remain unresolved to this present day. Apologetics today, concerns a wide variety of fields including

history, science, philosophy, mathematics and theology. It is evident that Augustine utilized both the philosophy and theology that was available to him at the time. This is true of his apologetics as well. Although it can be said that the philosophy and theology practiced then was much different from how it is practiced today. Today both philosophy and theology encompass a large number of sub-disciplines that were not evident back then. Scholars of the past were able to master a variety of subjects and fields of knowledge whereas today typically scholars focus on a very specific set of sub-discipline(s) of a particular field. For instance, a philosopher may have a specific area of competence such as philosophy of physics or a biologist might be an expert in genetics. Knowledge has dramatically increased in so many fields, especially in the past 100 years. So, it is very difficult for one scholar to possess knowledge in a large number of fields such as thinkers like Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas. However, that is not to say that some scholars, in our present day, do not have a large breadth of knowledge and competence in several academic disciplines, indeed some do.

3. AUGUSTINE'S VIEW OF FAITH AND REASON

Undoubtedly, the apologetics found in Augustine's writings are directly related to Augustine's views upon the relation between faith and reason. A Christian apologist's view on faith and reason are inextricably linked to their apologetic methodology. This shapes their very epistemology of how they come to understand and reason through issues revolving around the defense of the Christian faith. For Augustine, this relationship seems quite ambiguous and complex throughout his writings particularly because his views of their relation changed over the years.¹ There is an extensive literature surrounding Augustine's views pertaining to faith and

¹ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Apologetics and Truth* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2008), 30.

reason. Many Augustinian authors have treated this subject and controversy still revolves around it.² The purpose of delving into this aspect of Augustine's thought is to help situate his apologetic strategy in *Confessions*.

Augustine followed the methodology of *crede ut intelligas*: I believe so that I may understand. By affirming this methodology he demonstrated his opposition to Manichaeism since they despised belief. This methodology implies that there is a necessary trust that must be in place before one is to gain reliable knowledge. Augustine believed in the authority of Scripture over that of the writings of the early church fathers and apocryphal texts.³ It is a matter of dispute whether Augustine held Scripture over tradition and that of the teaching authority of the Church. The dispute itself seems to revolve around the presuppositions brought forth by either Catholic or Protestant scholars on the relationship of Scripture and the Church. Discerning which presuppositions if any are warranted is beyond the scope of this paper. More will be said on Augustine's position regarding the interactions of authority placed on Scripture and reason. Nonetheless, it should be noted, that the popular and unreflective position that Augustine gives unqualified precedence to faith above reason⁴ is an oversimplification and is not an accurate depiction of Augustine's thought.

It is important to realize that the relationship between faith and reason has many dimensions. There are a large number of faiths with different outlooks and there are also a large number of different ways of knowing and understanding. There has been a large confusion, past and present, even in the time of Augustine, over the distinction between knowledge and belief.⁵

² Frederick E. Van Fleteren, "Authority and Reason, Faith and Understanding in the Thought of St. Augustine," *Journal of Augustinian Studies*, Vol. 4, (1973): 33.

³ Eugene Portalie, S.J. *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Westport: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1960), 119.

⁴ J. Roland E. Ramirez, "The Priority of Reason over Faith in Augustine," *Journal of Augustinian Studies*, vol. 13, (1982): 123.

⁵ Ramirez, "The Priority of Reason over Faith in Augustine," 123.

Much confusion has also surrounded the distinction between faith and reason. There is an ambiguity between all of these terms because of how they are commonly used.⁶ Augustine felt it important to make a distinction between the terms of wisdom (*sapientia*) and knowledge (*scientia*). The distinction of these terms is found in the twelfth book of *De Trinitate*. Wisdom is defined as being the intellectualization of things that are eternal whereas knowledge is defined as being the conceptualization of temporal things.⁷ Although not much time will be spent exploring some of these issues; these distinctions do play a pivotal role in understanding some of the issues related to the dilemma of faith and reason. These elements are clearly outlined by Gordon Lewis, in his dissertation, *Faith and Reason in the Thought of St. Augustine*, where he lists the following:

nature of eternal truth and Divine illumination, the autonomy of man's use of intellectual vision in the attainment of immediate wisdom, the autonomy of rational cognition in the realm of the mutable, the nature of faith, and the relation of faith to mediated knowledge, the nature of mediated wisdom, its relation to faith and the nature of resultant immediate wisdom.⁸

In Augustine's time we can witness a misunderstanding of the role of belief. For instance the Manichees thought of themselves as being purely rational. This sort of position is even carried forth to this day, with some forms of naturalistic beliefs. The Manichees had disdain towards belief yet they failed in realizing to what extent they were believers themselves. The view held by the Manichees is foreign to what it is to be human. Human experience is permeated with many beliefs that cannot be proven including, for example, belief in the external world, our own minds, other minds, and that the past was not suddenly created with the

⁶ Ramirez, "The Priority of Reason over Faith in Augustine," 123.

⁷ Gordon Russell Lewis, *Faith and Reason in the Thought of St. Augustine* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: OMI Dissertation Services, 2002, c1959), 1.

⁸ Lewis, *Faith and Reason in the Thought of St. Augustine*, iv. Numbers and chapter delineations were omitted from this quote. The purpose of this excerpt is to give a very brief into the complexity of the interrelations between wisdom, reason, belief and faith which can help to better understand how Augustine viewed the overall relationship between faith and reason.

appearance of age. These types of beliefs have been deemed by some Christian philosophers, such as Alvin Plantinga and William Aston, as self-evident axioms, known as properly basic beliefs. Belief in God is also included in such a type of belief. So, belief (particularly in the aforementioned examples) itself is intrinsic to humans since humans are finite beings and therefore incapable of absolute knowledge. Similarly, Augustine agrees that belief is intrinsic to the human person and necessary to societal existence.⁹ That is to say, there are certain things we must believe and take upon faith. Augustine provides a number of examples of these beliefs including that of the inner reflections of men with respect to notions such as love which cannot be directly examined by the five senses and remain invisible to others much like one's own mind. Even though ideas and emotions such as love are invisible – we are convinced of their reality.¹⁰ They must be believed by lovers, friends, parents and children without direct verification. This is not to say, that one cannot gauge a consistency between the actions and declarations of love but such a thing could not be logically proven or disproven, nonetheless it is something that is to be believed, according to Augustine. Moreover, not is it only something that should be believed but it is perfectly rational to do so. Augustine encapsulates much of these sentiments in *Confessions*, book VI, chapter 5, where he brings forth the irrationality of the Manichees which was masked with an air of arrogance supposing pure and infallible knowledge, when he iterates:

From this time, then, being led to prefer Catholic doctrine, I felt that the Church acted more modestly and honestly when she required things to be believed which could not be proved – whether they could be proved only to some people, or could not be proved at all – whereas, among the Manicheans, our credulity was mocked by a promise of sure knowledge, and then so many of the most fantastic and absurd things were forced on us to be believed because they could not be proven.¹¹

⁹ Ramirez, “The Priority of Reason over Faith in Augustine,” 125-6.

¹⁰ Ramirez, “The Priority of Reason over Faith in Augustine,” 126.

¹¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, VI, 5, 7.

The demarcations between belief and knowledge and faith and reason are not always obvious nor clearly delineated. These terms have also a tendency to overlap which adds to the complexity of their interrelations. Augustine at times gives the inkling that one must believe before one can understand or know, indeed he does iterate this assertion in *De libero arbitrio*. Here Augustine seems to recognize that man while relying solely on his own cognitional capacities is inadequate and requires belief first to pursue truth since there must be a trust placed on either revealed biblical knowledge of divine notions or even in every day experience (trusting others, learning at school regardless of age/time) as he states: “We must believe that these things are seen and grasped more clearly and perfectly by better men even while they dwell in this world, and certainly by all good and devout men after this life.”¹² Augustine also has a tendency to frequently quote Isaiah 7:9 which states that “If you will not believe, you will not understand.” Augustine repeatedly quotes this passage for the purpose of providing reason for faith in Christ as an indispensable requirement to having access to Wisdom.¹³ Yet, Augustine viewed both faith and reason in cooperation with one another since the act of having faith comes from a human with rational capacities.¹⁴ Important to understanding Augustine’s thought on faith and reason is also realizing the role of biblical authority. Augustine held biblical authority in high esteem, so much so that if an error would be traced within the Scriptures it would demolish the basis for possessing such authority.¹⁵ Despite having said this, his authoritarian view of Scripture was not unwarranted but actually grounded through reason. William Lane Craig elucidates this relationship between authority of Scripture and reason:

¹² Augustine, *On Free Will*, II.2.6

¹³ Lewis, *Faith and Reason in the Thought of St. Augustine*, 187.

¹⁴ Van Fleteren, “*Authority and Reason, Faith and Understanding in the Thought of St. Augustine*,” 68.

¹⁵ William Lane Craig, *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus During the Deist Controversy*, (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 53.

Authority demands belief and prepares man for reason, and reason in turn leads to understanding and knowledge. But at the same time, reason is not entirely absent from authority, for a person has to consider whom to believe, and the highest authority belongs to clearly known truth; that is to say, the truth, when it is clearly known, has the highest claim to authority because it demands our assent. According to Augustine, it is our duty to consider what men or what books we ought to believe in order to worship God rightly.¹⁶

So, although Augustine accepted the validity and authority of Scripture it was not done so without good reasons outside of Scripture itself. Humankind must use their rational capacities to determine which authority is trustworthy. The Scriptures were granted authority by means of miracles and prophecies which seemed to vindicate them over other spiritual texts that offered salvation as well. The acceptance of the authority of Scripture on the basis of this line of reasoning seems to suggest that Augustine views the precedence of reason over belief or authority. Yet, the apparent dilemma or contradiction is resolved through understanding the concept of authority held by medieval thinkers. It is important to realize that for Augustine, history, that is, knowledge of the past was part of the reality of authority.¹⁷ So, that for Augustine the validity of past events or even future events must be believed and cannot be known directly through the intellect. Furthermore, to accept the miracles was to accept another layering of authority. Therefore, the Scriptures were accepted on the authority and belief in the miracles that give authority to the Scriptures themselves. Augustine believed in the inerrancy of Scripture but he did not have access to the same tools and methods available to historians and biblical scholars today. Today, history is not accepted by means of authority but through particular methodologies and criteria. Augustine placed the gospel writers in authority because they were part of history not because they wrote Scripture.¹⁸ Hence, because the miracles and

¹⁶ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 31.

¹⁷ Craig, *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 57.

¹⁸ Craig, *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 59.

the prophecies are in the past, is what makes it based on authority. So, how does Augustine in fact avoid this seemingly inescapable tautology? That is to say, that he cannot appeal to the Scriptures for the credibility of the miracles and prophecies nor can he appeal to credibility of the miracles and prophecies through that of Scriptures since he is attempting to provide the basis of the authority in Scripture through the miracles and prophecies. He admits that anyone can deny or refuse to believe ancient documents supporting the story of Christ. So then he searches to demonstrate the credibility of Scripture from an outside source. Augustine points to the miracle of the existence of the Catholic Church as an evidence or reason to trust the authority of Scripture. Note that he is not using circular reasoning since he is not pointing towards Scripture itself to validate it but from something outside of Scripture. It is an argument that points to a present experience that seeks to in a sense authenticate the past events of Scripture. The very being of the Church, to Augustine, pointed towards the truth and divine origin of Scripture.¹⁹ Furthermore, Augustine points to the whole world (he takes this to mean the known world that has proximity to him) coming to have faith in Christianity without having direct access or experience of the Gospel miracles. This is what Augustine iterates in *City of God*, book XXII, chapter 5, as he states: “Nevertheless, if they do not even believe that those miracles were effected through Christ’s apostles, to ensure belief in their proclamation of Christ’s resurrection and ascension, then this one overpowering miracle is enough for us – that the whole world has come to believe in it without any miracles at all!”²⁰ By this line of reasoning Augustine demonstrates that there is reasonableness in accepting the authority of Scripture. This sign or reason was not to be found in history but in the present where it could be known.

¹⁹ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 32.

²⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, XXII, 5.

So, as aforementioned, it is a misconception to think that Augustine gave faith an unqualified precedence over reason, it should be clear that Augustine was not a fideist.²¹ Augustine was indeed a strong supporter of faith but not to the extent of comprising reason. At times, we can witness faith having priority over reason and at other moments we can see reason in certain instances having priority over that of faith. Faith typically enjoys precedence over the multitude where reason is often not as accessible. Yet, as it is put by J. Roland E. Ramirez, often enough particularly those that are mature in thought, namely those of education, who can think for themselves:

reason has a certain chronological priority over belief. For belief involves reasoning or thinking; since no one believes anything unless he has first thought about it as something to be believed – unless, in other words, he first judges it reasonable to believe. This means that everything which is believed is believed only after thought has preceded; because belief itself is nothing else than to think with assent. Furthermore, not everyone who thinks believes, since many think in order not to believe. But everyone who believes, thinks.²²

Much more can be said with respect to Augustine's view of the relationship between faith and reason. Indeed a vast and mountainous literature exists in this domain. However, through our brief exploration we can, even if somewhat tentatively, conclude that Augustine saw an intimate relationship between both faith and reason. The following quote of Augustine summarizes his position in a beautiful fashion that is found in his eighteenth sermon on Psalm 118: "For although no one can believe in God unless he understands something, he is nevertheless enabled to understand more by the very faith with which he believes. For there are some things which we do not believe unless we understand and some other which we do not

²¹ Ramirez, "The Priority of Reason over Faith in Augustine", 128.

²² Ramirez, "The Priority of Reason over Faith in Augustine", 129.

understand unless we believe.”²³ Thus, although the relationship between faith and reason is highly complex we can see a bidirectional influence from one to the other.

By the time Augustine began writing *Confessions* in 397 (which was completed by the year 400 or 401) the fundamental principles to his philosophical thinking were moulded.²⁴ He did not come across any new thinkers or significantly new ideas.²⁵ He just spent his time refining his thinking on his already formed notions. Moreover, this fact seems to suggest that his views on the relationship of faith and reason were also formed. This indicates that this view inevitably came to bare influence on the apologetics found in the *Confessions*. Let us now say a brief word on apologetics, in order to contextually situate Augustine in the wide ranging ideas throughout history concerning apologetics.

4. THE MEANING OF APOLOGETICS

In order to study Augustine as an apologist, one must understand what apologetics means and what being an apologist entails. There seems to be a widespread misunderstanding, amongst laypeople, over the meaning of apologetics because of the common application of the root word apology in the English language. Typically in English, the word apology has been used for the admitting of one’s guilt and seeking forgiveness from the person that was wronged.²⁶ However, in New Testament Greek, the word *apologia* refers to providing a defence of the Christian faith which could be done through speech or writing.²⁷ The classical example of this is found in Peter 3:15, which directs one to “sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an

²³ Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 118, sermon 18, especially n. 3 (37, 1552); Also used on p. 118 of Eugene Portalie’s *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine*.

²⁴ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1970), 234.

²⁵ Gerard O’Daly, “Augustine” in *The Routledge History of Philosophy Vol. II: From Aristotle to Augustine*, ed. David Furley (London: Routledge, 2005), 391.

²⁶ Russ L. Bush, *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academic Books, 1983), ix.

²⁷ Bush, *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics*, ix.

answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” As is seen through this passage, one is instructed to be prepared to respond to someone who questions why one possesses the Christian hope. The Christian hope revolves around the message of the gospel – the death and resurrection of God’s son, Jesus. This demonstrates that Christian apologetics contains the notion of hopefulness at its core.²⁸ Hence, one can consider the bible itself a work of apologetics particularly that of the New Testament. Each gospel has an apologetic strategy whereby there is an intention to convince unbelievers and edify the beliefs of those with doubts.²⁹ However, it is radically different from modern apologetics which involves persistent argumentation.

1 Corinthians 15, Paul presents arguments in favour of the Christian faith.³⁰ Not only does the New Testament instruct believers to respond to those who question the reason for their hope but it also provides instruction to be respectful and temperate, as 1 Peter 3:16 demonstrates: “Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.” Unfortunately, for a number of years, particularly in recent years, the whole endeavour of apologetics has been looked upon with contempt. This could be in part because, at times, Christian apologists have become consumed by winning debates or arguments as opposed to focussing on the message of the gospel which entails providing justification for their hope in a gentle fashion. Instead of focussing on the message of good news of the gospel, some have become engulfed by their desires to just gain high numbers of believers for Christianity or to even uphold their intellectual vanity. Others have even taken unethical approaches that are intellectually dishonest sometimes misquoting

²⁸ Campbell Campbell-Jack and Gavin J McGrath, Preface, in *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, eds. Campbell Campbell-Jack et al. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2006), vii.

²⁹ Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (San Francisco: Saint Ignatius Press, 2005), 16.

³⁰ Bush, *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics*, ix.

their opponents and presenting misrepresentations of other thinkers in order to convince a large volume of people of the truth of Christianity. Such approaches, if anything, hurt the Christian cause and credibility since they are based on misinformation. Needless to say many people have grown suspicious of the apologist particularly when employing aggressive and ruthless strategies that shamefully can include the “lying for Christ” methodology to gain followers to the Christian church. Avery Dulles in his book titled *A History of Apologetics* explains that many charges made against Christian apologists including that of “neglect of grace, of prayer, and of the life-giving power of the word of God; its tendency to oversimplify and syllogize the approach to faith; its dilution of the scandal of the Christian message”³¹ are at times warranted but that the charges are typically made against apologists of the lowest level. He suggests that the critics should investigate apologetics to where it shines which would historically include the works of Clement, Origin, Augustine, Aquinas, Pascal, Butler, Blondel and many other great thinkers.³² Dulles iterates that the aforementioned men were great men of faith, talent and eloquence who wrote intellectual works of apologetics of the highest order throughout the ages.³³ Particularly central to this study, Augustine and his apologetics as is found in the *Confessions*, is a work of sincerity, comprising deep introspection into the human condition through the lens of Christian understanding.

Just as scholars are tentative to classify or pigeonhole Augustine through modern delineations as to whether he was a philosopher or a theologian. The same tentativeness I believe should be applied to Augustine’s apologetics, in terms as to how we should classify his apologetic approach. Although one may see some similarities with the methods employed by

³¹ Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*, xix.

³² Dulles, *Apologetics*, xix.

³³ Dulles, *Apologetics*, xix.

Augustine in his apologetics, they would be radically different from the modern approaches available to us today. There are a number of subclasses of Christian apologetics that exist today. All of which share or at least should share in common, the centrality of the message of salvation through Christ and the hope that accompanies that reality as Peter 3:15 expounds. Aside from this central commonality there seems to be disagreements in terms of approaches and argumentation. I'll briefly sketch out some of the approaches that have been utilized in the past and ones that are still present today.

5. THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF APOLOGETICS

According to the *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* there are three distinct eras that belong to apologetics. The first of which belongs to the beginnings of the Christian Church where it spread throughout the Roman Empire and further into the world, the second from when Christendom was established which ran from medieval period to that of the modern period which would include Augustine and the third period is that of the modern period, which we are still situated in today.³⁴ These delineations are very broad. It's worth noting that also the boundaries between certain eras are not always agreed upon by all historians since there may be overlapping.

The first era deals with the early church, responding to persecution and the challenges of heresy. The second within Christendom commencing with the Edict of Milan which provided Christians with the freedom to worship and subsequently permitted the flourishing and development of Christian apologetics. During this period, a more rigorous development of theistic proofs arose with Anselm of Canterbury and his ontological argument. It is worth noting that Augustine develops an implied ontological argument prior to that of Anselm which will be

³⁴ Campbell, *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, 3.

looked at further into this paper. This era also sees the development of scholasticism where apologists such as St. Thomas Aquinas utilize Greek philosophy particularly that of Aristotle alongside Scripture and previous thinkers such as Augustine and the Church Fathers.³⁵ In the late medieval period we have the reformation with thinkers such as Luther and Calvin who were not philosophical apologists but they played a large influence on subsequent Christian apologetics through their reformed epistemology concerning *sola scriptura*.³⁶ The rise of modernity gave way to a number of distinct approaches to Christian apologetics including evidentialism with Willam Paley, the theodicy approach of Leibniz, transcendental apologetics including the presuppositionalism of Cornelius Van Til, imaginative apologetics expounded by C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, apologetic theology as practiced by Jurgen Moltmann who suggests that all theology should be apologetic, to philosophical apologetics with great Catholic thinkers defending the faith such as Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan to more recent thinkers such as Alvin Plantinga, J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig where there has been a recent revival of arguments for God's existence with rigorous defences.³⁷

6. AUGUSTINE'S APOLOGETICS IN *CONFESSIONS*

Augustine is often revered as the greatest theologian the Church had witnessed since that of Paul of Tarsus.³⁸ He is widely considered to be the first apologist from Western Christianity to reach a high level of distinction as a theologian.³⁹ Augustine defended the faith from pagan critics and sceptics.

³⁵ Campbell, *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, 5.

³⁶ Campbell, *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, 6.

³⁷ Campbell, *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, 6-13.

³⁸ Bush, *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics*, xv.

³⁹ Dulles, *Apologetics*, 73.

City of God is popularly considered to be a work of apologetics⁴⁰ over that of *Confessions* which is recognized as being more autobiographical and mystical because of Augustine's recounting of his spiritual experience. Despite this, it is my contention, that *Confessions* has a strong apologetic concern while still remaining autobiographical.

So, the question inevitably arises. What is the type of apologetics that Augustine employs in *Confessions*? How can they be classified? Augustinian apologetics can be classified within two kinds.⁴¹ The two kinds of apologetics include that of negative and positive apologetics.⁴² Although Augustine did not explicitly classify his apologetics in this way, it is basic and useful to delineate it as such since it seems to be able to accommodate into these categories. It is worth noting that within these two categories there is room for much disagreement over what would constitute negative or positive apologetics since at times the lines can be blurred. This would be dependent on the delineations of what positive and negative apologetics constitute. Before delving directly into this approach it will be helpful to outline a strategy that seems to be utilized by Augustine whether it involves positive or negative apologetics and that is the appeal to emotion which can function as a strong and persuasive rhetorical device.

Typically apologetic works are of an intellectual nature. However, they at times, can appeal to emotion and help incite spiritual experience in order to persuade one of Christian truth.

⁴⁰ Gerard O'Daly, "Augustine's Theology", in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, eds. Erwin Fahlbusch et al. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 161.

⁴¹ Alvin Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy" *Monist* 75, no. 3 (1991): 291.

⁴² Although Augustine never made such a distinction in his arguments defending the Christian faith it seems that Augustine's apologetic elements particularly within *Confessions* fit nicely into such a category. Alvin Plantinga in the cited article "Augustinian Christian Philosophy", explicates that he is not a historian and he does not wish to suggest that Augustine thought of his philosophy (and by implication his apologetics) in such a fashion. He is merely setting a programmatic sketch of Christian philosophy that is originally derived from Augustinian thought. I utilized his delineations of negative and positive apologetics which can be applied broadly to Christian apologetics ever since Augustine. Thus, it is not a historical prescription but rather a methodological one, one that seems to fit well. However, it must be realized that at times the lines between negative and positive argumentation with respect to apologetics can be blurred and can have the tendency to overlap.

Throughout *Confessions* we can witness an intellectual core but also an appeal to emotion that can stir up the reader. This appeal to emotion seems to be present from time to time in *Confessions* when Augustine describes the depths of his consciousness. Indeed we see the appeal to emotion at work when in the first chapter of *Confessions*, Augustine states “our hearts are restless until they rest in you”⁴³ and “The house of my soul is narrow; enlarge it, that you may enter in. It is in ruins! Repair it! It has in it that which must offend your eyes. I confess and know it. But who shall cleanse it, or to whom shall I cry, but to you?”⁴⁴ These statements seem to possess the power to invoke or provoke one that is seriously considering Christian conversion to succumb to its power, especially in light of one’s own experiences that incite thirst that is not being quenched by current decisions and beliefs.

In book VIII, Augustine, writes about the appeal of the Catholic Church with respect to the great works of monks, such as Anthony the Egyptian, who devoted his efforts and life to God, particularly through living a chaste and humble life. Augustine introspects and identifies with their selfless acts and sees that if they can lead such lives than perhaps if he embraces Christianity, he can for once abandon his lustful desires and vanity. These are not so much arguments defending the faith but they are appeals to our emotions and our inner conscience which can propel one as well to confess or incite one towards a profound conversion. The appeal to emotion is used over and over again through Augustine’s *Confessions*. Book III where he addresses Manichean criticisms seems to be permeated with this type of appeal. Now let us take a closer look at the negative apologetic approach Augustine utilizes.

⁴³ Augustine, *Confessions*, I, 1, 1.

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, I, 5, 6.

7. NEGATIVE APOLOGETICS

For the sake of simplicity we can say that this type of apologetics is geared towards replying to the criticisms and attacks of Christian detractors. It is a more defensive approach to apologetics. It has been in operation since the inception and early developments of Christianity. In using this approach it is essential to keep in mind the audience one is addressing.⁴⁵ The arguments proposed to defend the Christian faith can be taught and expounded to Christian themselves. In this sense, the apologetic strategy would be for the purposes of edification of one's faith. However, more often than not, these arguments offered as a defense, are directed towards those who are lying at the perimeters of the Christian faith, completely outside of it or even outlying sceptics, so knowing the audience one is addressing is vital. With respect to the apologetics found in Augustine's *Confessions*, we can see Augustine directing some of these arguments towards the Manicheans.

In Book III (particularly from chapter 6 to 10) of *Confessions* exists arguably one of or if not the most anti-Manichaeic passage throughout the book of *Confessions*. Augustine here provides a recounting of his joining of the Manichees. Augustine uses a protreptic strategy in Book III.⁴⁶ That is to say, that Augustine employs a method of persuasion through the demonstration of inconsistencies and fallacies that exist within the belief system he's addressing. Indeed, it is widely agreed that Augustine employs this technique or method throughout the whole of *Confessions*⁴⁷ which clearly demonstrates the apologetic strategy that permeates the *Confessions*. Moreover, it suggests a negative apologetic approach since such a strategy would involve responding to criticisms of detractors. Annemare Kotze suggests that not only does

⁴⁵ Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy", 292.

⁴⁶ Annemare Kotze, "The 'Anti-Manichaeic' Passage in *Confessions* 3 and its 'Manichaeic Audience' " *Vigilae Christianae* 62 (2008): 187.

⁴⁷ Kotze, "The 'Anti-Manichaeic' Passage in *Confessions* 3," 189.

Augustine employ a protreptic approach (which could be for addressing issues either raised by Manichees and Neo-Platonists) but also utilizes a paranetic approach which is for the sake of edifying the belief and maintaining those that are part of the group within the group – which also functions as part of an apologetic strategy.⁴⁸ This method would be particularly useful since during Augustine’s time period there would be ongoing discourses between Donatists, Catholics, Manichees, Neo-Platonists, pagan faiths and also that of Pelagius’ views (which Augustine addresses in his three books on merits and sins).

In, book III, chapter 6 Augustine situates the Manichees as talking of Christ but lacking Christ in their heart suggesting the emptiness of their words. This passage seems to be enough to incite much offence for a Manichean. Yet, perhaps that pronouncement is too haste since we must fully consider who it is Augustine is addressing particularly in this passage. In a general sense it could be to anyone that is in or outside of the Christian faith but there is more of a specific intention here. Kotze argues that Augustine is addressing a specific implied reader, in book III chapter 6 to chapter 10, who is a young man who is a “marginal” Manichee (that may have had a Catholic or Donatist family background). Moreover, this young man was similar to himself years earlier.⁴⁹ So, the anti-Manichaeon tone of this text would not necessarily designed to offend a young man who is very marginal in his Manichaeon beliefs hence having a protreptic effect on such a reader.⁵⁰ Another reader where this passage could have extreme relevance would be for someone that is part of Augustine’s congregation who will be equipped to defend the faith from Manichaeon defenders. Especially from Manichees who may try to deceive one of his followers who does not have extensive philosophical and scriptural training.

⁴⁸ Kotze, “The ‘Anti-Manichaeon’ Passage in *Confessions* 3,” 189.

⁴⁹ Kotze, “The ‘Anti-Manichaeon’ Passage in *Confessions* 3,” 192.

⁵⁰ Kotze, “The ‘Anti-Manichaeon’ Passage in *Confessions* 3,” 193.

Further into book III, chapter 6, Augustine derides the Manichaeian belief that the sun and moon possess some sort of divine nature. This Manichaeian belief encompasses a dualism suggestive of some type of co-eternality between the material world and God. Interestingly enough, as was aforementioned in my comments regarding beliefs, the Manichees seem to be betraying reason and expounding irrational beliefs with such proclamations. Not only does Augustine point this out but there is also persistence with an innate dissatisfaction in the absence of truth (this again appeals to emotion because of the human sense of incompleteness in absence of being at peace with God) with respect to ideas attempting to substitute the true God, as he states: “But I hungered and thirsted, not even after those first works, but for you yourself, the Truth, in whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”⁵¹ The pointing out of one’s need for nourishment of an adequate faith and the demonstration of the fallacies involved with Manichaeian theology and cosmology found in Book III chapter 6 forms a highly effective apologetic strategy to turn away a marginal Manichee away from Manichaeism.

According to Kotze, that when Augustine was writing *Confessions*, it was very well plausible that he had close friends that were still being influenced by Manichaeism and Augustine’s response demonstrates his feeling of responsibility to free those friends from the shackles of such mistaken beliefs.⁵² Thus, we have Augustine acting out the apologetic motto of Peter 3:15, by attempting to provide his friends with reasons for the hope that lied within him.

Chapter VII, of Book 3, begins with a negative depiction of the Manichees, through referring to them as foolish deceivers. Then the chapter proceeds with the Manichaeian objections in the form of questions including: “From what source does evil come? Is God limited by bodily shape and does he have hair and nails? Are we to consider those righteous who had many wives

⁵¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 6, 10.

⁵² Kotze, “The ‘Anti-Manichaeian’ Passage in *Confessions* 3,” 199.

at once, and killed men, and sacrificed animals?”⁵³ Here we witness a probing of the problem of evil, criticism of an anthropomorphic God and of the patriarchs of the Old Testament with respect to their polygamy. In the remainder of chapter VII, Augustine provides a response to the first two questions. He provides a more thorough answer in Books IV to VII. The most important of these responses is to the problem of evil since such a question is extremely significant to apologetics today. So much so, that atheist philosopher Michael Tooley, in recent years, has provided the most sophisticated argument concerning the problem of evil⁵⁴ in a book titled *Knowledge of God* which comprises a written debate between Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley. Yet, before we immerse ourselves into Augustine’s response to the Manichaeian proposition of the problem of evil, it would be helpful to understand the role of Platonic philosophy in Augustine’s apologetics.

Augustine had at one point found much appeal in Platonism or as it was come to be known in more modern times, as Neo-Platonism. Yet, despite recognizing its fruitfulness he also recognized its insufficiency from his study of Scripture. He developed sufficient insight through revelation to see that Neo-Platonism on its own without being used in light of Christian truth was unequivocally incomplete. That is to say, the realization that man’s sinful predicament cannot be rescued from a pure rationalization of the problem. Augustine realized that the fallen human condition could only be rescued by the salvific offer of Christ and God’s grace.⁵⁵ Unlike the Platonists, Augustine realized that reason alone will not bring you to Christ, only a conversion of the heart can do such a thing but the Platonists believed they can achieve a higher state without grace. *Confessions* 7.17 illustrates this point when Augustine states: “Thus with the flash of one

⁵³ Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 7, 12.

⁵⁴ Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley, *Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

⁵⁵ Bush, *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics*, xvi.

trembling glance, it arrived at That Which Is. And then I saw that your invisible nature is clearly perceived in the things that are made. But I could not steady my gaze on this revelation.”⁵⁶

Moreover, Augustine had two other main dissatisfactions with Neo-Platonism which included: the One or God that Plato referred to was not a personal God (in contrast to the Christian Trinitarian God) and that of the Platonic idea of emanation was quite distinct from that of the Christian conception of Creation.⁵⁷ Augustine reflects in Book VII of how he viewed God from Platonic philosophy, as being completely transcendent from Creation without involvement including the realization that he himself was separate and different from God, when he writes: “I realized I was far away from you. I was in the land when all is different from You, and I heard Your voice calling.”⁵⁸ If anything, Augustine used Neo-Platonism as a tool to understand theological notions and help develop his apologetic argumentation. In a sense, this could be seen as a prototypic philosophical theology where Augustine could apply Neo-Platonism’s methodology or resources to better understand theological constructs that are found in or derived from Scripture. It is important to note that Augustine was quite confident that if Socrates and Plato were living throughout his time period they would have become Christians, as he points that out in his work, *Of True Religion* 4.6.⁵⁹ This seems to suggest that Augustine viewed Greek philosophy as being directed by a yearning for truth but falling short because of the absence of the knowledge of Christ.

Essential to understanding Augustine’s response to the problem of evil is to understand the Neo-Platonism that influenced his response. The conception of Truth found in Neo-Platonism

⁵⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 17, 23.

⁵⁷ Alfred Warren Matthews. *The Development of St. Augustine from Neoplatonism to Christianity*. (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1980), 160-61.

⁵⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 10, 16.

⁵⁹ Dulles, *Apologetics*, 76.

helped Augustine move beyond the Manichean dualism. The unchangeable, transcendent yet immanent, immaterial and non-spatial conception of God provided by Neo-Platonism allowed for Augustine to perceive God as being omnipresent.⁶⁰ Moreover, it permitted Augustine to reject Manichaeism's dualism where good and evil are of equal power and replace it with One powerful and good being that is immaterial but that could also be immanent in the world. This dualism once had resolved the problem of evil in Augustine's mind since both powers were equal and eternal therefore an explanation existed as to why evil was so prominent.

Furthermore, it also formed the basis for Augustine to cower away from responsibility for his actions since such an explanation for the existence of co-equal power of evil with that of the good removed the existence of human free will in his mind. Yet, ironically such explanations in the face of the superiority of neo-platonic philosophy became vacuous lacking explanatory power. What Augustine does, is he adopts the concept of the privation of good in Plotinus and Neo-Platonism and develops it further from a Christian standpoint. Gerald Bonner explains this relationship:

Augustine has taken from the Neoplatonists a certain conception of evil which he has modified and developed in the light of Christian dogma in order to provide an effective weapon for demolishing the arguments of the Manichees. Created things are good; there can be a hierarchy of created things, some more and some less good, without necessarily involving any existence of Evil. Evil arises from the corruption of a nature which is essentially good; if it were not corrupted, it would be wholly good; but even when it is corrupted, it is good in so far as it remains a natural thing, and bad only insofar as it is corrupted.⁶¹

So, as is evident from the quote, Augustine is influenced by neo-platonic conceptions of the problem of evil but does not just merely plug it into a Christian framework, he develops it

⁶⁰ J. Patout Burns. "Augustine on the Origin and Progress of Evil." in *The Ethics of St. Augustine*, ed. William S. Babcock. (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1991), 69.

⁶¹ Gerald Bonner. *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies*. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1986), 204.

further. Augustine's response to the problem of evil is found in *Confessions* 7.12-16. This is where Augustine expounds that evil is not a substance on its own but of a privation of the good. Evil constitutes a lacking or corruption of good rather than an entity on its own. The whole of creation contains flaws and non-harmonious elements within it but it is good overall. So, as Augustine states:

To you evil is nothing whatsoever; yes, not only to you, but also to your creation as a whole, because there is nothing outside it which could break in and mar that order which you have appointed for it. But in the parts of it, some things, because they are not in harmony with others, are considered evil. Yet, those same things harmonize with others and are good, and in themselves are good. All these things which do not harmonize together, still harmonize with the lower part of creation which we call the earth, which has its own cloudy and windy sky harmonizing with it.⁶²

Let us now turn to Augustine's positive apologetics.

8. POSITIVE APOLOGETICS

The intended audience or groups that are addressed are the same as those of negative apologetics⁶³ – people outside of the faith, those within it with questions and/or doubts and those lying at the perimeters of it that are not wholly convinced such as the previously discussed, “marginal” Manichean. It is important to note that when Augustine utilizes certain arguments in favour of God's existence (which are also referred as proofs depending on the thinker exploring them) he is not only demonstrating the existence of the Christian God or at least showing a coherency in the conception but he is also inevitably demonstrating inconsistencies with other theologies. This is true, for example, in the instances where the Manichees attempt to equate God with certain aspects of nature.

⁶² Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 13, 19.

⁶³ Plantinga, “Augustinian Christian Philosophy”, 293.

The purpose of positive Christian apologetics is to formulate theistic proofs or arguments for God's existence.⁶⁴ Augustine provides four of such arguments within *Confessions* including the ontological argument (although it is more implied than an actual formulation, resembling more of a prototype), the teleological argument, the cosmological argument⁶⁵ and the argument from beauty. As was iterated earlier, the three classical arguments and the argument from the experience of beauty, for God's existence that Augustine develops are used to demonstrate the incoherence of Manichaeism's dualistic beliefs because they lack evidence. Additional to the four arguments for God's existence, Augustine also demonstrates the coherency of theism. Augustine does this through his speculations into God's relationship to time and creation – a very brief look will be taken into this aspect of Augustine's positive apologetics as well. Lastly, the very structure of *Confessions* reveals an apologetic strategy.

The implied ontological argument is found in book VII, chapter 4. It seems in a sense to be a prototype of the argument that St. Anselm of Canterbury famously developed in his work, *Proslogion*, in the 11th century where he attempts to demonstrate that God is “that than which nothing greater can be conceived.” Similarly Augustine says that: “For no one ever was nor ever shall be able to conceive of anything better than you, who are the highest and best Good.”⁶⁶ However, Augustine's argument is distinct to Anselm's though. The difference lies in the fact that Augustine is not necessarily concluding God's existence from a conception of God.⁶⁷ Instead, Augustine is deducing attributes of truth that cannot be explained unless there is an

⁶⁴ Plantinga, “Augustinian Christian Philosophy”, 293.

⁶⁵ A book edited by Norman Geisler, *What Augustine Says*, contains a compilation of Augustine's sayings on a variety of topics including God, reason, sin, man, ethics, and salvation which are organized systematically. This work can be helpful to situate some of Augustine's arguments concerning Christian apologetics since much of them are distributed throughout numerous pages found in Augustine's works.

⁶⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 4, 6.

⁶⁷ Eugene Portalie, *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975), 126-7.

eternal and immutable truth which acts as the grounding for immutable truth.⁶⁸ As Augustine writes:

But it would be greater if you yourself were greater than yourself. For the will and power of God is God himself. And what can be unforeseen by you, who know all things? Nor is there any sort of nature that you do not know. And why should we give any more reasons why the substance which is God cannot be corruptible, since if it were so, it could not be God?⁶⁹

The cosmological argument in *Confessions* is found in book XI, chapter 4. This argument is an argument made *a posteriori* but seems a bit difficult to classify the type of cosmological argument that Augustine is expounding. Typically there are three distinct types of cosmological arguments including arguments based on principle of determination such as the *Kalam* arguments, arguments based on principle of causality such as the Thomist arguments and finally arguments based on the principle of sufficient reason such as the Leibnizian argument.⁷⁰ Augustine's argument as presented in *Confessions* seems to combine principle of determination and the principles of causality. It reflects the metaphysical intuition that because of the mere fact things undergo change then their existence is most likely not eternal especially not in that current flux state. This seems to point to events prior to the existence of particular things within creation - that is to say within the universe, until you reach a point of inception. This seems to be the line of thought Augustine is suggesting since as we will see later he also supports the theological notion of *creation ex-nihilo*. God since he is transcendent and immanent at the moment of creation becomes a plausible candidate to bring the universe into being from non-being.

⁶⁸ Portalie, *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine*, 127.

⁶⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, VI, 4, 6.

⁷⁰ William Lane Craig, *The Cosmological Argument: From Plato to Leibniz* (Eugene, Orgeon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1980), 283.

Augustine undoubtedly invokes the notion that all created things require a cause for their existence because they are in flux, as he indicates:

“Behold, the heavens and the earth are. They proclaim that they were made, for they change and vary. On the other hand, whatever is, but has not been created, has nothing in it now which was not there before. This is what it is to change and vary, that something is there that was not there before. They also proclaim that they did not make themselves.⁷¹

Furthermore, there seems to be a distinction in place here between eternal and temporal things – a distinction that Aquinas further develops and expands with respect to necessary and contingent things. All of the creation, that is the universe and all of the things within it are deemed to be contingent (non-necessary) while God is a necessary being that must exist, that is who’s non-existence is impossible. Moreover, this leads to the notion that things that are in a process of change cannot change itself but must be changed by something other than itself, which ultimately leads to the concept of a first cause that must be necessary and unchanging. As Augustine’s aforementioned quotes clearly indicates. It is unclear as to whether Augustine is invoking an unmoved mover as Aquinas makes reference to through Aristotle’s cosmological argument or whether he is indicating there is an initial point of inception since he later supports the concept of creation *ex-nihilo*. The lines do not seem very clear, rather they seem to represent a vague combination of the two. Moreover, it should be noted that, all three forms in some mode may rely upon the third delineated form, that of the principle of sufficient reason (the Leibnizian form of the argument).⁷² Nonetheless, Augustine’s cosmological argument points to a transcendent reality beyond the physical universe.

Augustine in the proceeding chapter develops his version of the teleological argument. Here Augustine reflects upon how God created all things. He explains that human builders or

⁷¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 11, 4, 6.

⁷² William L. Rowe, *The Cosmological Argument* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 6-9.

designers rely on pre-created things such as clay, stone and wood to form these into other things. Moreover, the workers rely upon their bodies and minds to be able to design clay, stone and wood into any useful structures but without God they would not have their bodies or their minds. Augustine asks how God created without the pre-existence of matter that composes the things he is inquiring about that God created. Augustine states: “But how did you make them? How, O God, did you make heaven and earth? Truly, neither in heaven nor in the earth did you make heaven and earth, nor in the air, nor waters, since these also belong to the heaven and the earth; nor did you make the whole world in the whole world, because there was no place where it could be made before it was made.”⁷³ Augustine concludes that God’s word created everything which inevitably arises from God’s mind.

A lesser known argument that Augustine presents in *Confessions* is that of Augustine’s proof for God’s existence from the experience of beauty found in book X, chapter 6. It runs contrary to any pantheistic type belief that equates nature with God when Augustine writes: “I asked the moving air; and the whole air with its inhabitants answered, ‘Anaximenes was deceived; I am not God.’ I asked the heavens, sun, moon, stars. ‘No’, they say, ‘we are not God whom you seek.’”⁷⁴ Creation cries to Augustine to have come into being from a prior cause. The argument from the experience of beauty much like the cosmological argument is made *a posteriori*. It is one made from causality where we make deductions from effects to causes whether we commence with data on motion, being or beauty.⁷⁵ The way Augustine presents this argument is not done so in a standard method of philosophical argumentation utilizing syllogisms but through the observation of beauty. Beauty on its own provides a sufficient

⁷³ Augustine, *Confessions*, 11, 5, 7.

⁷⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 6, 9.

⁷⁵ Roland E. Ramirez, “Augustine’s Proof for God’s Existence from the Experience of Beauty: *Confessions*, X, 6,” *Augustinian Studies* 19 (1988): 121.

answer and itself points to the majesty of God, as he states: “My questioning of them was my thoughts about them, and their form of beauty gave the answer.”⁷⁶ The conclusion of beauty provides a stopping place without further questions. The beauty of an object, according to Augustine, screams for a response to the origin of its beauty, to what endowed the objects with their beauty. Augustine thought that through the experience of beauty since it’s so ordinary and universal to humans it is ultimately inexcusable to not conclude God as the cause of the beauty. This is seen through his allusions to Romans 1:20 and Wisdom 13:1-10 which make a similar point. This is because the experience of beauty and wonder of its explication is an ordinary experience for all rational humans. It is important to note that, there is a downside to the experience of beauty since the observer of beauty can become obsessed with the beauty of the particular object that demands its admiration while losing sight of the one who brought the beauty into existence. So, for Augustine it is not only the recognition of the beauty but as Ramirez points out “the clarity of his vision in the experience of beauty, but also the certitude of his love elicited by that experience, that gives cogency to the conclusion that God exists, for God alone can adequately explain the experience.”⁷⁷

A component of Augustine’s positive apologetics involves his demonstration that the Christian conception of God is coherent. In book XII, chapter 7, Augustine makes a distinction between created and uncreated, where he demonstrates God’s transcendence to the material world. Moreover, that the world requires a creation out nothingness, that is *creatio ex-nihilo*, Augustine iterates: “Therefore, out of nothing you created the heaven and the earth, a great thing and a small – for you are almighty and good, and made all things good, both great heaven and the small earth. You were, and there was nothing else. Out of nothing you created heaven and

⁷⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 6, 9.

⁷⁷ Ramirez, “Augustine’s Proof for God’s Existence,” 129.

earth.”⁷⁸ The explication of creation ex-nihilo serves to refute the dualistic view of the Manichees of the universe and God’s co-eternality while at the same time demonstrating the coherence of God’s relationship to his creation.

Directly related to creation ex-nihilo is Augustine’s conception of time and God’s relationship to it. Augustine devotes some time to exploring God’s relationship to time. Augustine inquires into the nature of time, since it seems to be a mystery, he muses: “What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; but if I wish to explain it to one who asks, I know not.”⁷⁹ This in a sense captures the difficulty behind the concept of time – we all experience it but then to explain what it is because of its abstract nature becomes a great obstacle within our limitations of language. Augustine pines over the problem of the present where time is equated to just an instant where there is no past or future, so then the present becomes equivalent to zero but leads to absurdities about the nature of time and reality.⁸⁰

What Augustine makes sure of is that, time, is not co-eternal with God, he states that: “At no time, then, had you not made anything, because you made time itself. And no times are co-eternal with you, because you remain forever, but if times remained they would not be times.”⁸¹ The distinction laid out between eternality and temporality is evident which is related between God’s uncreated eternal nature and creation’s temporal nature.

Augustine also poses the question “What did God do before he made heaven and earth?”⁸² He responds that God did not create anything before time existed: “I boldly say that before God made heaven and earth, he did not make anything.”⁸³ Augustine suggests that nothing was made

⁷⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, XII, 7, 7.

⁷⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 14, 17.

⁸⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, IX, 15-28.

⁸¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 14, 17.

⁸² Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 12, 14.

⁸³ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 12, 14.

before time existed since that marks the inception of creation. Augustine's response seems to be pre-emptive of future discoveries in physics and cosmology that only arise over 1500 years later. The discoveries of big bang cosmology that time and material existence had a beginning roughly 13.7 billion years ago according to most recent estimations. Interestingly enough, modern cosmology has corroborated what Augustine long suspected through his theological notions and intuitions.

The totality of *Confessions* even if while functioning as an autobiographical text that exposes a profound religious experience contains many rhetorical devices that persuade one of what Augustine deems to be Christian truth. There seems to be a disjunction between the first nine books of *Confessions* with the last four books. However, Henry Chadwick points out that:

After nine books of autobiography culminating in a deeply touching description of his mother's death and requiem, it baffles the uninitiated that he goes on to speak of memory, time and creation. The last four books actually carry the clue to the whole. Augustine understood his own story as a microcosm of the entire story of the creation, the fall into the abyss of chaos and formlessness, the 'conversion' of the creaturely order to the love of God as it experiences gripping pains of homesickness. What the first nine books illustrate in his personal exploration of the experience of the prodigal son is given its cosmic dimension in the concluding parts of the work. The autobiographical sections are related as an accidental exemplification of the wandering homelessness of a man's soul in 'the religion of dissimilarity'.⁸⁴

Here we can witness that the very structure of *Confessions* can be argued to have an apologetic intention. The recounting of Augustine's life serves as an example of testifying to the Christian truth in an intellectual manner. What greater apologetic could there be for a Christian than the example set by one's life and communicated in such rich and engaging language appealing to those interested in truth. Moreover, how one is rescued in a sense by the Grace of God and can recount the story of one's life in light of this event and realization.

⁸⁴ Henry Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 70-1.

9. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to provide evidences that indicate that *Confessions* is apologetic in nature.⁸⁵ Having taken into consideration, many of the apologetic components found in the *Confessions*, we are warranted to conclude that it is indeed apologetic in nature. One can be confident in this conclusion because Augustine presents a number of positive and negative apologetic arguments throughout his work.

All the explicit elements that have been examined throughout this paper provide evidence for the apologetic nature of *Confessions*. Moreover, the whole text of *Confessions* can be argued as an apologetic text since it functions to persuade those outside of the faith and to edify the belief of those within it. It is a testament of Augustine's life of searching for the truth which culminates in an intimate relationship with a God who is worthy of praise; the Christian God who can be known by the workings of both faith and reason. It is a great example of providing the reasons for the hope that lies within oneself, of the Christian truth, as Peter 3:15 demands.

I believe that the argument presented in this paper is exceedingly relevant to our present day. The Christian Church it seems is in an age of *intellectual* crisis particularly within Western civilization. For many years there has been a large focus on the experiential dimension of the faith while neglecting the intellectual aspect of the Christian faith. Undoubtedly, the experiential elements of the faith are indispensable but so are the intellectual components which help ground the experience of Christianity within reason. This neglect has left many Christians (especially those who have not engaged intellectually with their faith) vulnerable to attacks from those

⁸⁵ It is worth pointing out, as a side note, that all of Augustine's apologetic arguments have counter arguments and that not necessarily all Christians would be in agreement with all of them. Debates ensue over the validity of certain methods of argumentations. In the 18th century, Immanuel Kant undermined the potency of arguments for God's existence while still being a Christian. Today we have a revival in apologetics that demonstrate that perhaps Kant's criticisms overlooked some crucial elements and missed the mark especially in relation to some modern scientific findings.

outside of Christianity. Likewise perhaps because of this trend there may have been an influence by some Augustinian scholars to focus on the religious experiential dimensions and autobiographical components of *Confessions* as opposed to the strong apologetic dimension of *Confessions*. It is my hope that this paper will stimulate further debates upon the nature of *Confessions* since it remains one of the most read Christian texts aside from the New Testament. Let us end with an argument that gives grounds to the contention of *Confessions* being apologetic in nature, as was argued throughout the paper:

1. If Augustine, had no apologetic elements in his *Confessions* then *Confessions* would not be apologetic in nature.
2. There are autobiographical components and a recounting of Augustine's religious experience and conversion but these do not deter from the apologetic nature of the text – they support it, since apologetic elements exist throughout such components.
3. There are both positive and negative apologetics at work as was explicated throughout this paper, within Augustine's *Confessions*.
4. Both these types of apologetics serve to aid conversion from those outside of Christianity and to edify the faith of those within the Christian faith.
5. The very structure of *Confessions* itself serves an apologetic intention, as suggested within the paper.
6. Therefore, *Confessions* is apologetic in nature.

