

Augustine and the Origins of North African Anthropomorphism

INTRODUCTION

In his Confessiones (conf.) Augustine tells the reader that one of the principal challenges preventing his embrace of the catholic faith was his perception that catholic Christians believed God to have a human bodily form.¹ While Augustine eventually learnt that this belief was not supported by the church catholic, the anthropomorphic beliefs of his contemporaries in the North African church continued to be a pressing concern throughout his career.² In spite of this, there has been little scholarly investigation into the phenomenon of anthropomorphism in the North African church in its own right. Where scholars have discussed this phenomenon, they have generally been content to reproduce Augustine's characterisation of the anthropomorphism as belonging to the crude understanding of uneducated Christians.³

However, Alexander Golitzin's research into the theological background of the Egyptian anthropomorphite controversy suggests that early Christian anthropomorphism was often a more complex phenomenon than such a characterisation would allow. Golitzin's work shows that certain Egyptian monks tied belief that God has a human bodily form to a tradition of visionary prayer which sought as its end the vision of God's bodily form, and to an anthropomorphic reading of Genesis 1.26.⁴ By comparing his analysis of anthropomorphism in the Egyptian desert fathers with other case studies from Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia, Golitzin has shown that similar theological concerns regarding the content of the visio dei and the nature of the imago dei were recurrent features of early Christian anthropomorphism. Golitzin contends that these parallel features indicate the

influence of an underlying theological substrate, which he traces to ongoing engagement with Jewish apocalyptic literature within early Christian communities.

Golitzin's research into early Christian anthropomorphism invites us to reconsider Augustine's reports of anthropomorphism in the North African church. Indeed, Golitzin himself has suggested that his research may cast light onto Augustine's discussion of theophanies in books II-III of De Trinitate (De Trin.). Michel Barnes has subsequently shown that the target of Augustine's polemic here is a Latin Homoian argument with roots in an anti-Modalist exegetical tradition going back to Novatian.⁵ Barnes's argument provides the theological context for Augustine's polemic in De Trin. II-III. Yet it does not account for Augustine's references to anthropomorphism in other writings, in which the targets of his polemic are Christians within the church catholic.

It is these catholic anthropomorphites who are the subject of this present study. In what follows, I argue that the anthropomorphic faith of Augustine's contemporaries in the North African church was more sophisticated than scholars have previously allowed. My argument is twofold, First, through a close analysis of Augustine's discussions of anthropomorphism I will show that, in the North African church, the belief that God has a human bodily form comprised part of a broader nexus of theological beliefs. Specifically, I will show that Augustine's North African contemporaries grounded their belief that God has a human bodily form in anthropomorphic conceptions of the visio dei and imago dei. Second, drawing upon the work of Golitzin, I will situate these findings in the context of early Christian anthropomorphism more generally. I will show that the anthropomorphic beliefs of Augustine's North African contemporaries closely resemble the forms of anthropomorphism found in a diverse range of geographical locales, including Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia. Following Golitzin, I suggest that this resemblance can best be accounted for if we regard the

anthropomorphic tendencies of the North African church as reflecting the ongoing influence of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions regarding God's bodily form.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM IN THE NORTH AFRICAN CHURCH

At several points in conf. Augustine presents his belief that the catholic church taught that God has a human bodily form as a major factor in his early reluctance to embrace the catholic faith. In conf. 3.7.1, for instance, Augustine says that Manichaean criticism of the claim that God is "limited by a bodily form (forma corporea deus finiretur)" was one of the factors which led him to reject the catholic faith.⁶ The problem of anthropomorphism returns in conf. 5.10.19-20, where Augustine states that he rejected the catholic faith because he associated it with the belief that God has the "shape of human flesh" (figuram... humanae carnis):

For when my soul would attempt to return to the catholic faith, I was driven back, because the catholic faith was not what I had heard it to be. My God, to whom I am making this confession in your mercy, it seemed to me more pious if I were to believe you to be infinite in all parts except one — the mass of evil which opposed you, by which I was are forced to acknowledge your finitude — than if I were to suppose you to be limited in all parts in a human bodily form (corporis humani forma).⁷

From what Augustine says here and later in conf.⁸ it is clear that, prior to encountering the teachings of Ambrose in Milan, Augustine perceived the catholic faith to be anthropomorphic. The cause of this perception, however, is less clear. Some scholars have argued that this perception was merely the result Augustine's personal ignorance of the true content of the catholic faith at the time of his conversion to Manichaeism, rather than from encounters with anthropomorphic beliefs in the North African church.⁹ Kim Paffenroth offers the most thorough articulation of this position in a brief note published in the Harvard Theological Review in 1993.¹⁰ For Paffenroth Augustine's perception of the catholic faith as

anthropomorphic was the result of his personal inability to conceive of God immaterially, combined with Manichaean anti-catholic propaganda, and not something he had learnt from catholic Christians themselves.¹¹ Thus Paffenroth concludes: “It does not appear that anything in Augustine’s writings would allow us to speculate that Christianity in the fourth century taught that God was corporeal.”¹²

Paffenroth’s argument, however, does not offer sufficient challenge to the position Roland Teske set out in a series of three articles, in which he established that Augustine did not derive this perception from Manichaean propaganda alone, but from his encounters with anthropomorphic catholics in his native North Africa.¹³ Teske offered two arguments for this position. First, he argues that the fact that Augustine was unaware of a non-anthropomorphic conception of God within the catholic church prior to his arrival in Milan in 384 suggests that anthropomorphic conceptions of God were prevalent in the North African church.¹⁴ Second, Teske points out that Augustine’s discussions of anthropomorphism in his other writings reveal that many North African catholics were indeed anthropomorphites.¹⁵ For instance, in De Moribus (mor.) Augustine distinguishes between the “children” (pueri) of the church, who believe that God has a human body, and the “elders” (senes), who conceive of God immaterially:

It turns out that there are found among us certain children who think of God in a human form and believe that he is that way. Nothing is more base than that opinion. But there are also found many elders who see by the mind that his majesty, which is not only above the human body but also above that same mind, remains inviolable and immutable. We have already said that these ages are not to be distinguished by time, but by virtue and wisdom.¹⁶

Augustine’s remark that these two groups are found “among us” suggests that he is referring to catholic Christians. A similar distinction is found in Augustine’s Contra Epistulam

Manichaei quam Vocant Fundamenti (Fund.) There, Augustine again distinguishes between two groups, this time the “carnal” (carnalis) and “spiritual” (spiritalis):¹⁷

Do not compare now the spiritual (spiritales) men of the catholic faith (catholicae fidei), in whom the mind, as much as it can in this life, sees that the divine substance and nature is not extended over any areas of space and is not shaped by dimensions of members. Compare instead our carnal and little ones (carnales et parvulos nostros) who often, when they hear of certain members of our body in an allegory, such as when the eyes of God or the ears of God are mentioned, picture God for themselves with the freedom of the imagination in the shape of the human body.¹⁸

Augustine’s use of the first-person plural possessive nostros to refer to the carnales indicates that these “carnal Christians”, like the “spiritual Christians” belong to the catholic faith. In this text then, Augustine acknowledges that, while some catholics – the spiritales – conceive of God spiritually, others – the carnales – believe that God has a human bodily form.

Augustine continues to acknowledge the presence of anthropomorphism in the North African church in his later writings. In in Iohannis euangelium tractatus (Io. eu. tr.) 102.4 Augustine states that the “carnal” (carnales) or “animal” (animales) man “‘whenever he hears about the nature of God... cannot imagine anything other than a body, however exceedingly large and immense, however splendid and spectacular, still a body.’”¹⁹ Both this text and Fund. 23.25 cohere with what Augustine says about “carnal Christians” elsewhere in his writings. For, as Teske has shown, Augustine uses the distinction between carnalis and spiritalis throughout his writings to distinguish between those adherents of the catholic faith who cannot conceive of spiritual substance (and, so, cannot conceive of God incorporeally) and those educated believers capable of conceiving of spiritual substance (and, so, can conceive of God incorporeally).²⁰ Augustine’s remarks in Fund. 23.25 and Io. eu. tr. 102.4,

then, confirm what is suggested in mor. 1.10.17, namely, that certain adherents of the catholic faith in the North African church believed God to have a human bodily form.

THE THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF NORTH AFRICAN ANTHROPOMOPHISM

While Teske's work shows that North African Christians believed that that God has a bodily form, the broader theological context of this belief has received little scholarly attention. Where scholars have attended to this phenomenon, they have not treated it as something requiring serious explanation, being content instead to reproduce Augustine's straightforward association of anthropomorphism with the simple and unlearned belief of uneducated Christians.²¹ So, for instance, Paulsen describes these anthropomorphic tendencies as the "natural" way of conceiving of God amongst "ordinary, uncultured Christians."²² Similarly, Peter Brown attributes these beliefs to the inherent anti-intellectualism and narrow-minded conservatism of the North African church, which manifested itself in literal interpretations of scripture.²³ And Jason BeDuhn, for his part, views these beliefs as part of the "rustic" and "naïve" faith of North African catholics.²⁴

Once we look beyond Augustine's frequent association of anthropomorphism with the simple faith of the carnales and pueri of the church, however, a more complex picture emerges. Closer analysis of Augustine's remarks on the anthropomorphic beliefs of his North African contemporaries reveals that the belief that God has a human bodily form belonged to a broader nexus of beliefs, according to which this bodily form was the object of the visio dei and the divine form in whose image (following Genesis 1.26) human beings are made. These features suggest that the anthropomorphic conception of God which was prevalent in the North African church possessed a greater degree of sophistication than has previously been recognized. Moreover, as we shall see in the next section of this article, these features connect the anthropomorphic beliefs of North African catholics to other early examples of Christian anthropomorphism.

On several occasions Augustine writes against fellow catholics who believe that the visio dei involves seeing God with the eyes of the body.²⁵ Augustine identifies his opponents in this debate in a passage from his Epistula 147. There, Augustine, responding to the question as to whether it is possible to see God with bodily eyes,²⁶ identifies two groups who believe that God can be seen with the eyes of the body:

There are some who take for granted that God himself is wholly corporeal, and they suppose that whatever is not corporeal is not substance at all (quicquid corpus non est, nullam prorsus esse substantiam). I think these are to be avoided altogether. But there are others who fully agree that God himself is not corporeal, and they think that those who will rise again to eternal life therefore will see God even in the body, since they hope that the spiritual body will be such that even what was flesh before will become spirit.²⁷

In this passage, Augustine distinguishes between those who believe that God is corporeal, and those who believe that the body will be so transformed at the resurrection that the eyes of the body will be capable of seeing spiritual realities. It is the first group which is of concern to us. Augustine states that this group suppose God to be corporeal on the basis that “whatever is not corporeal is not substance at all.” At first glance, Augustine’s summary of the first group’s argument appears to suggest that he is dealing here with a Stoic conception of God as rarefied, spiritual substance, corporeal yet infinitely extended. The claim that “whatever is not corporeal is not substance at all” resembles the Stoic principle that only “that which can be seen or touched” really exists, and so all really existent things are corporeal.²⁸ This principle was known in the North African church, having been deployed by Tertullian to support his contention that both God and the soul are corporeal substances.²⁹ Indeed, Augustine himself appears to have relied on similar reasoning when he briefly adopted a “Stoic” conception of God following his abandonment of Manichaeism and prior to

his encounter with the libri platoniorum. In conf. 7.1.1., Augustine describes how he came to abandon the Manichaean view of God – which regard God as rarefied corporeal substance, yet limited insofar as he is opposed by the eternal principle of Evil or Darkness – in favour of a conception of God as still corporeal, but infinite and without limit. His reason for adopting this conception of God, he tells his readers, was that “it seemed to me that whatever lacked spatial extension was non-existent”.³⁰ Augustine’s mention of similar reasoning in his reference to Christians who believe that God is corporeal in ep.147.49 might seem to suggest that these Christians understand God to be corporeal in this, Stoic sense. Such a view would differentiate the group Augustine is dealing with in this passage from the catholic anthropomorphites he mentions elsewhere in his writings, since the Stoic conception of God does not regard God’s body as having a human form.

However, in his follow-up to ep.147, Epistula 148, Augustine indicates that he has anthropomorphite catholics in mind. In this letter, Augustine writes to Fortunatianus, bishop of the North African diocese of Sicca, in order to address the concerns of an unnamed “brother” who had read Augustine’s ep.147 and taken offense at Augustine’s argument that God cannot be seen with the eyes of the body.³¹ In response, Augustine reiterates his position on the matter, again associating the claim that God can be seen with the eyes of the body with the belief that God is corporeal. Specifically, Augustine associates the claim that God can be seen with the eyes of the body with 1 Corinthians 13.12, which, Augustine says, some interpret as indicating that “God is limited by the parts of a body (membris corporis terminatus sit deus)”.³² This leads Augustine to identify his theological opponents. Augustine states that he is writing against “those who are called anthropomorphites (anthropomorphi)”; that is, those who interpret scripture literally to indicate that God has a human bodily form, and so can be seen with the eyes of the body.³³ Augustine’s remarks in ep.148, therefore, situate the belief that God has a corporeal form which can be seen the eyes of the body in the

context of an anthropomorphic conception of God as possessing a human bodily form, rather than a Stoic conception of God as rarefied, infinitely extended spiritual substance. Of course, this does not rule out the possibility of Stoic influence, direct or indirect. In fact, Augustine's remarks give the impression that certain North African anthropomorphites appealed to the Stoic principle that all really existent things are corporeal in order to support an anthropomorphic conception of God and of the visio dei. If this is the case, this would suggest a more sophisticated form of anthropomorphism than has been traditionally recognized. In either case, Augustine's remarks in epp.147-8 indicate that his anthropomorphite contemporaries associated the claim that God has a human bodily form with an anthropomorphic conception of the visio dei.

Augustine also indicates that his North African contemporaries made use of an anthropomorphic reading of Genesis 1.26 to support their belief that God has a human bodily form. In conf. 3.7.12, Augustine states that his inability to correctly interpret Genesis 1.26 was one of the intellectual challenges which led him to Manichaeism. Augustine does not state here why he found this passage problematic. However, his discussion of this passage in De Genesi contra Manicheos (Gen. Man.) shows that Genesis 1.26 was the subject of Manichaean anti-catholic polemic which tied the claim that human beings are made in God's image to anthropomorphic conceptions of God:

It is this question above all that the Manichees raise with their endless chatter, and they taunt us for believing that man was made to the image and likeness of God. They look at the shape of our body and ask so infelicitously whether God has a nose and teeth and a beard and also inner organs, and also other things we need. However it is ridiculous, even wicked, to believe that there are such things in God, and so they deny that man was made in the image and likeness of God.³⁴

The Manichees attack catholic Christian understandings of Genesis 1.26 and the imago dei on the basis that it implies an anthropomorphic conception of God. Augustine replies that “the spiritual believers in the catholic teaching do not believe that God is limited by a bodily form (forma corporea),” but rather “when man is said to be made in the image of God, these words refer to the interior man, where reason and intellect reside.”³⁵ Augustine’s response, while rejecting anthropomorphic interpretations of Genesis 1.26, suggests that there were catholics who understood the imago dei in this way. We have already seen that Augustine uses the appellation spiritalis to refer to a particular subset of the catholic faithful, namely, those educated believers capable of conceiving God incorporeally.³⁶ In denying that the “spiritual believers” interpret Genesis 1.26 anthropomorphically, then, Augustine is not denying that there are some catholics who interpret Genesis 1.26 in this way. Rather, his claim is more limited: Augustine is arguing that those members of the church capable of conceiving God incorporeally — the “spiritual believers” — don’t interpret Genesis 1.26 this way, even if other catholics do. The absence of a broader denial is telling. We have already seen that Augustine was aware of Manichaean polemic which used anthropomorphic understandings of Genesis 1.26 to attack the catholic faith. In light of this polemic, it is difficult to imagine that Augustine would limit his denial of such an understanding to educated catholics alone if no catholics interpreted this passage anthropomorphically.

Indeed, the anthropomorphic interpretation of Genesis 1.26 appears to have been fairly common in the North African church. Augustine tells us that he was unaware of non-anthropomorphic interpretations of Genesis 1.26 prior to his encounter with Ambrose. He discusses his discovery of Ambrose’s interpretation of this passage at length in conf. 6.3.4. There, he relates how he discovered the error of Manichaean anti-catholic polemic by learning from Ambrose’s preaching the genuine teachings of catholic faith:

Moreover, I learnt that your spiritual sons, whom you have regenerated through grace by their mother the catholic church, do not understand [the claim that] human beings were made in your image such that they believed or thought you to be delineated by a human bodily form. Although I could not discern in even a tenuous or obscure manner that you have spiritual substance, yet still I was both glad and embarrassed, to have raged for so many years not against the catholic faith, but against the figments of carnal imaginations.³⁷

Colin Starnes interprets this passage as indicating that no catholics actually held an anthropomorphic conception of God.³⁸ According to this reading, the phrase spiratilibus filiis tuis refers to all baptised Christians; to all those who have been “regenerated by grace through their mother the catholic church.” Yet this interpretation is untenable in light of Augustine's acknowledgment elsewhere, as we have seen, that some catholics did indeed believe God to have a human bodily form. Once again, Teske provides a preferable interpretation, arguing that the phrase spiratilibus filiis tuis in fact refers to only a subset of the baptized, namely those educated Christians who are capable of conceiving of God incorporeally, an interpretation which fits Augustine's use of this term elsewhere, as we have seen.³⁹

Thus, while Augustine consistently argues that Genesis 1.26 does not imply that God has a human bodily form, he does not deny that some of his contemporaries in the North African church do interpret it this way. Rather, he denies only that this interpretation is held by educated members of the church. This fact, combined with the length of time it took him to learn of an alternative interpretation, indicates that anthropomorphizing interpretations of Genesis 1.26 were common amongst his contemporaries in the North African church. Insofar as this is the case, we may surmise that this line of interpretation served as an exegetical foundation for the widespread belief that God has a human bodily form.

NORTH AFRICAN ANTHROPOMOPHISM IN THE CONTEXT OF EARLY CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOMORPHISM

The foregoing analysis reveals a more complex picture of the anthropomorphism of Augustine's North African contemporaries than previous scholarship has allowed. The claim that God has a human bodily form belonged to broader nexus of beliefs which sought to support this claim through anthropomorphic understandings of the visio dei and imago dei. Further, as we have seen, Augustine appears to indicate that some of his anthropomorphic contemporaries utilized Stoic materialism to reinforce an anthropomorphic conception of the visio dei.

Given the possibility of Stoic influence, it is tempting to situate the anthropomorphic beliefs of Augustine's North African contemporaries against the background of Tertullian's theology.⁴⁰ As we have already noted, Tertullian endorsed the Stoic principle that only corporeal substances really exist and advocated a corporeal view of God.⁴¹ Further, in Aduersus Praxean 7 Tertullian not only argues that God possesses a body, but also that this divine body has a "form" (effigies), since God is spirit and "spirit is body, of its own kind, in its own form (spiritus enim corpus sui generis in sua effigie).⁴²

Yet, while Tertullian did view God as corporeal and as possessing a bodily form, he does not appear to have regarded God's body in anthropomorphic terms – that is, he does not appear to have believed that God's bodily form resembled that of the human body.⁴³ On the contrary Tertullian goes to great efforts to establish the unlikeness of the divine body and human bodies. In Aduersus Marcionem 2.16, Tertullian seeks to defend the Old Testament picture of God as possessing "emotions" (motus) and "sensations" (sensus) such as "anger" (ira), "envy" (aemulatio) and "rage" (saevitia) by stressing the unlikeness of God's emotions to human emotions.⁴⁴ Tertullian illustrates his argument by analogy to the unlikeness between the divine body and human bodies:

We read of God's right hand, his eyes, his feet: yet these are not to be supposed exactly the same as a man's, just because they partake of the same designation (appellatione). Great is the unlikeness of divine body and human (quanta erit diversitas divini corporis et humani), though their members are identical in name (sub eisdem nominibus membrorum): equally great must be the difference of divine mind and human, though their sensations are referred to in the same terms.⁴⁵

Just as scriptural depictions of God as possessing “hands”, “eyes” or “feet” do not indicate that God possesses a body akin to that of human beings, so too, Tertullian argues, scriptural references to God as angry or jealous do not indicate that God possesses human emotions. Notably, Tertullian’s argument relies on a rejection of anthropomorphic conceptions of God’s body. While the same “designations” (appellatione) are used to speak of God’s body and human bodies, they have different meaning when applied to God, since God’s body is unlike human bodies.⁴⁶

Given that Tertullian stresses the unlikeness between the divine body and human bodies, it is not surprising that Tertullian rejects interpretations of Genesis 1.26 which seek to locate the imago dei in the human body:

I find that man was created by God free (liberum), having his own will (arbitrii) and power (potestatis), and I can see no greater image (imaginem) and likeness (similitudinem) of God in him than this, the form of his status (status formam). For it is not in his face (facie) or in his bodily dimensions (corporalibus lineis), which vary so greatly among the human race, that his likeness to the uniform God is expressed. Rather, it is in that substance (substantia) which he received from God himself – that is his soul (animae), which corresponds to the form of God

(formam dei) – and in his free will (arbitrii sui libertate) and power (potestate),
that this likeness is signified.⁴⁷

For Tertullian, it is the soul which is made after image of God, not the body. Human beings do not resemble God according to their bodily dimensions but in their possession of freedom of will and power.⁴⁸ Thus, while Tertullian offers a North African precedent for a corporeal conception of God, his conception of divine corporeality is significantly different from that which Augustine attributes to his contemporaries in the North African church. As such, the ongoing influence of Tertullian's corporeal conception of God is insufficient to explain the distinctive features of North African anthropomorphism discussed in the previous section of this article.

Rather than situating North African anthropomorphism against the background of Tertullian's thought, I suggest that it is more profitable to read Augustine's references to anthropomorphism in light of Alexander Golitzin's research into early Christian anthropomorphism. Golitzin's research shows that several geographically disparate groups of early Christians associated the belief that God has a human bodily form with anthropomorphic conceptions of the visio dei and imago dei. Further, Golitzin regards these parallels as evidence of a shared underlying theological substrate, which he attributes to the pervasive and an ongoing influence of Jewish (and Christian) apocalyptic traditions regarding God's heavenly form.⁴⁹

Golitzin's work seeks to explain the theological background of the Egyptian Anthropomorphite Controversy of 399. As with Augustine's anthropomorphite contemporaries, the anthropomorphic beliefs of the Egyptian monks at the heart of this controversy have traditionally been dismissed as reflecting the crude conceptions of uneducated Christians.⁵⁰ Georges Florovsky first challenged this interpretation in two studies published in the early 1960s.⁵¹ In those studies, Florovsky argues that the Egyptian monks

were not anthropomorphites in the proper sense, but rather held a particular devotion to Christ's human flesh, which they identified with the imago dei and the vision of which was the goal of contemplative prayer.⁵² More recently, Golitzin has successfully challenged this interpretation by demonstrating the basic accuracy of the charge of anthropomorphism.⁵³ Golitzin nonetheless endorses Florovsky's critical stance towards the traditional characterisation of the Egyptian anthropomorphite monks as simple "rustics", arguing that the anthropomorphite monks involved in the controversy of 399 belonged to a tradition of prayer which sought as its goal the vision of God's bodily form, and that they further defended this anthropomorphic conception of God by appealing to anthropomorphic interpretations of Genesis 1.26.

John Cassian's account of the controversy highlights both of these aspects of anthropomorphite belief. First of all, Cassian indicates that the anthropomorphic beliefs of his monastic contemporaries were connected to spiritual practices which sought the vision of God's bodily form through prayer. As part of his account of the controversy, Cassian relates the tale of an anthropomorphite monk Serapion, who was convinced by a Cappadocian deacon named Photinus that God does not have a bodily form. Cassian reports that later in the day, when Serapion and the other monks were gathered together in prayer, Serapion was unable to pray as he was accustomed.⁵⁴ Cassian explains that this was because "the human image of God (anthropomorphon imaginem deitatis) which he used to draw before him when he prayed was now gone from his heart."⁵⁵

As a number of scholars have noted, Cassian's tale situates the controversy within the context of monastic understandings of prayer.⁵⁶ According to Cassian, the belief that God possesses a bodily form reflects an understanding and practice of prayer which emphasises the role of mental images of God in a human form. Cassian summarises this approach to prayer in words attributed to Abba Isaac:

Nowadays it is thought that the incomprehensible and unspeakable majesty of the true God can be adored amid the limitations of some image (imagine) or other.

People believe they are holding on to nothing at all if they do not have some image in front of them, an image to be prayed to, an image to be carried around in the mind, an image which is always there to be looked at.⁵⁷

Cassian's view that the image of God's bodily form in prayer is merely an "image to be carried around in the mind" appears to reflect his own account of the role of mental images in prayer (learnt from Evagrius)⁵⁸ more than it does the self-understanding of the anthropomorphic monks. Rather, as Golitzin observes, the fundamental issue at dispute here in the tale of Serapion is the nature of the visio dei sought in prayer.⁵⁹ This is evident in the discussion which follows Cassian's telling of this story, in which Cassian proceeds to contrast Serapion's attempts to gain a vision of God's bodily form in prayer with his own account of the visio dei as consisting in the vision of Christ's divinity apart from all mental images of material forms.⁶⁰

Cassian's account of the controversy, then, locates the anthropomorphic beliefs of his monastic contemporaries in the context of a strand of monastic thought which understood the visio dei as consisting in a vision of God's bodily form.⁶¹ A number of other early monastic texts also bear witness to this strand of thought. For instance, the Bohairic Life of Pachomius contains accounts of two visions had by Pachomius and his disciple Theodore, in which Pachomius and Theodore receive the vision of God's bodily form.⁶² In the first, Pachomius, along with several other monks, has a vision of God during prayer during synaxis: "While they were praying they saw appearing above them as high as a tower a great throne on which the Lord was seated under the form in which he chose to be seen by them."⁶³ The second passage describes a vision received by Pachomius's disciple Theodore:

When he [Theodore] came to the doorway of the church he looked in and saw an apparition. Where his feet were, there appeared to him something like sparkling sapphire (c.f. Exodus 24.10) and he was unable to look at his face because of the great light which unceasingly flashed forth from him.⁶⁴

Each of these passages presents the vision of God's bodily form as the goal of the monastic life of prayer. Further, both passages indicate that this bodily form is understood in anthropomorphic terms, with the first passage describing God as seated upon a throne, and the second describing him as possessing feet and a face. The presence of this strand of thought in early Egyptian monasticism is further substantiated by the large number of monastic texts which argue against this sort of vision. So, for instance, the Historia monachorum in Aegypto contains a cautionary tale against anthropomorphic visions, in which demons attempt to trick Abba Or into believing he has received a vision of God in human form.⁶⁵ The Historia Lausiaca contains a similar tale regarding the monk Valens who, having been tricked by the demons, proceeds to worship the false vision.⁶⁶ Likewise, Evagrius warns against demons who attack the monk during prayer by presenting them "the glory of God (δόξαν Θεοῦ) in a certain shape (σχηματισμόν) associated with the senses" in order to make the monk believe that they have "perfectly achieved the goal of prayer."⁶⁷ The ubiquity of these and similar remarks in a variety of sources suggests that anthropomorphic understandings of the visio dei were common in Egyptian monastic circles.⁶⁸

Returning to Cassian's account of the anthropomorphic controversy, Cassian also indicates that the belief that God has a bodily form was also grounded in an exegetical tradition focussed on Genesis 1.26. In collat. 10.2 Cassian reports that many Egyptian monks reacted violently to Theophilus's denunciation of anthropomorphism because they understood this denunciation as going against the scriptural claim that humans are made in

God's image.⁶⁹ Cassian proceeds to explain the exegetical logic behind the anthropomorphic position in collat. 10.5:

Among those untouched by pagan superstition the error arises under the influence of that declaration "Let us make man in our own image and likeness" (Gen 1.26) and it arises too out of ignorance and simplicity. It is from this abominable interpretation that there is really born the heresy of the anthropomorphites, the heresy which obstinately and perversely claims that the infinite and divine substance is enclosed in what characterizes us and that it is of human shape (humana figuratione).⁷⁰

In this passage, Cassian states that the belief that God has a human bodily form is grounded in an interpretation of Genesis 1.26 which understands the imago dei as located in the shape of the human body. On this view, since human beings are made in the image of God's bodily form, God must possess a bodily form that is the same shape as the human body. According to Cassian, it is this exegetical tradition which provided the scriptural impulse for the anthropomorphic beliefs which became the subject to dispute in the controversy of 399.

As Golitzin has shown, the twin themes of an anthropomorphic understanding of the visio dei and an anthropomorphizing interpretation of Genesis 1.26 connects the anthropomorphites of Egypt to several other accounts of early Christian anthropomorphism from across the Mediterranean. To take one example, Epiphanius's account of the so-called "Audian" sect in his Panaerion (Pan.) reveals a similar connection between anthropomorphism and concerns regarding the nature of the visio dei and imago dei. According to Epiphanius, the Audians were a schismatic group who took their name from a Syrian ascetic called Audius, and whose adherents could be found in Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine. Epiphanius reports that the cause of this schism was not primarily doctrinal but calendrical: the Audians were Quartodecimans.⁷¹ On matters of doctrine, Epiphanius relates

that the Audians were in agreement with the catholic faith in all respects, with the exception that they held anthropomorphic conceptions of God.⁷² According to Epiphanius, the basis for such a belief was twofold. First of all, the Audians believed that the theophanies of the Old Testament as consisted in the vision of God's bodily form. Second, Epiphanius tells us that the Audians subscribed to an anthropomorphic conception of the imago dei.⁷³

These twin themes recur once more in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies, which in their present form most likely date to the early 4th-century and reflect a Syrian provenance.⁷⁴ Unlike most of our other sources for Christian anthropomorphism in this period, the Homilies are sympathetic to anthropomorphism, with the seventeenth Homily defending of the claim that God has a bodily form:

For He [God] has form (μορφήν), and He has every limb (μέλη) primarily and solely for beauty's sake, and not for use. For He has not eyes that He may see with them; for He sees on every side, since He is incomparably more brilliant in His body (σῶμα) than the visual spirit which is in us, and He is more splendid than everything, so that in comparison with Him the light of the sun may be reckoned as darkness. Nor has He ears that He may hear; for He hears, perceives, moves, energizes, acts on every side. But He has the most beautiful form (καλλίστην μορφήν) on account of man, that the pure in heart may be able to see Him, that they may rejoice because they suffered. For He moulded man in His own form (μορφῇ) as in the grandest seal, in order that he may be the ruler and lord of all, and that all may be subject to him. Wherefore, judging that He is the universe, and that man is His image (εἰκόνα) (for He is Himself invisible, but His image man

is visible), the man who wishes to worship Him honours His visible image, which is man.⁷⁵

According to the author of this text, God has a body (σῶμα), limbs (μέλη), and form (μορφὴν) not because he needs these things, but in order that he may be seen by human beings. The scriptural text underlying this claim is Mt.5.8: if the “pure in heart” will see God, God must have a bodily form which is capable of being seen. This form is also the basis for the imago dei: God moulded human beings “in his own form (μορφῇ)” such that the human being is God’s “image” (εἰκόνα).

Augustine’s anthropomorphic contemporaries, then, were not alone in appealing to anthropomorphic conceptions of the visio dei and imago dei as grounds for the belief that God has a human bodily form. To the contrary, these twin concerns are prevalent features of early Christian anthropomorphism. According to Golitzin, the frequent recurrence of these twin themes is best explained by viewing these geographically dispersed cases of early Christian anthropomorphism as belonging to “a larger, underlying tradition, or complex of traditions, a kind of substratum which appears to have been practically coterminous with the geographical spread of Christianity itself by the late-fourth and early fifth centuries.”⁷⁶ I find Golitzin’s argument persuasive, and I believe his “substrate” hypothesis best accounts for the picture of North African anthropomorphism which emerges from Augustine’s writings. That is to say, it seems to me that Augustine’s anthropomorphic contemporaries are drawing upon the same complex of traditions that Golitzin identifies in the cases of the Egyptian anthropomorphic controversy, the Audian sect, and the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies (amongst others). Of course, this does not mean that the anthropomorphic beliefs involved in the above cases were alike in every respect. As Lewis Ayres observes:

“One of the great strengths of his [Golitzin's] argument is that it does not attempt to establish the existence of a distinct

theological grouping with a self-conscious identity. Rather, Golitzin argues for the presence of an inter-related network of themes and patterns of exegesis in a variety of contexts and groups: he establishes the presence of a flexible 'substrate' within fourth- and fifth-century Christianity. To use a linguistic metaphor, Golitzin has established the presence of a particular dialect within Christian discourse, one that may be spoken more or less exclusively and prominently depending on context and local tradition".⁷⁷

As Ayres's remarks indicate, the suggestion that various instances of early Christian anthropomorphism draw upon the same complex of traditions still allows for local variation in the way these traditions are engaged and developed. We have already noted that the anthropomorphites of the North African church may have made use of Stoic metaphysics in support of their belief that God has a bodily form. In Egypt, it seems, the expectation that the visio dei consists in a vision of God's bodily form had developed into a spiritual practice in which monks sought this vision through prayer. The Pseudo-Clementine Homilies, for their part, present various elaborate arguments in defence of the claim that God has a bodily form, including a response to the argument that an anthropomorphic God would be "less than" the space which surrounds him, since the latter would circumscribe God.⁷⁸ Thus, even if we grant the presence of a shared theological "substrate" underlying early Christian anthropomorphism, it is nevertheless the case that this substrate developed into more and less sophisticated forms of anthropomorphism. To put it another way, the anthropomorphic conception of God intersected with philosophical thought and spiritual practice in different ways in different contexts, with the result that by the 4th century we see different forms of Christian anthropomorphism each possessing varying degrees of sophistication, yet nevertheless all

rooted in the same twin concerns regarding the content of the visio dei and the nature of the imago dei.

THE ORIGINS OF NORTH AFRICAN ANTHROPOMORPHISM

Golitzin's argument for the existence of a shared theological substrate underlying various instances of early Christian anthropomorphism is grounded not only in the parallels between geographically dispersed cases of anthropomorphic belief discussed above, but also in the presence of similar themes in late-antique Jewish literature. The notion that the vision of God consists in a vision of God's bodily form can be traced back to the scriptural account of Ezekiel's vision in Ezekiel 1, in which the content of the vision is described as a figure having the appearance of a man.⁷⁹ This notion subsequently emerged as a prevalent theme in early Jewish accounts of the visio dei, with accounts of the vision of God's bodily form playing a central role in several apocalyptic texts as well as in the Merkabah visions of Hekhalot literature.⁸⁰ Similarly, following on the work of Arthur Marmorstein in 1937, several scholars have noted the prevalence of anthropomorphic interpretations of Genesis 1.26 in early rabbinic thought.⁸¹ Based on these similarities, Golitzin suggests that the prevalence of these themes in early Christian anthropomorphism is at least in part due to the Jewish theological inheritance of nascent Christianity. This suggestion is reinforced by the parallels Golitzin observes between the anthropomorphic visions recorded in the literature of the desert fathers and the visions recorded in both apocalyptic ascension narratives and in the Merkabah tradition.⁸² On the basis of these parallels, Golitzin argues that Jewish and Christian apocalyptic ascent literature provides the fertile theological ground out of which the parallel traditions of Jewish Merkabah mysticism and Christian anthropomorphism developed.

I believe there is some evidence to suggest a connection between North African anthropomorphism and Jewish traditions regarding God's bodily form. To be clear, I do not think that Augustine himself was aware of any connection between the anthropomorphism of

his contemporaries in the North African church and Jewish traditions. Augustine is not a sympathetic observer of North African anthropomorphism and I see no reason to suppose he would have had any awareness of or interest in the origins of such beliefs. At the same time, Augustine's engagement with Manichaean criticisms of the anthropomorphic beliefs of North African catholics reveals some intriguing parallels between North African anthropomorphism and Jewish traditions regarding God's bodily form found in apocalyptic and Hekhalot literature.

Specifically, the Manichaean criticisms of anthropomorphic catholics preserved in Augustine's writings suggest that North African anthropomorphism included a speculative dimension which extrapolated on the claim that God has a bodily form in order to attribute to God various human features that are not attributed to God by scripture. For instance, in Gen. Man. 1.17.27 Augustine reports that the Manichees accused catholics of believing that God has a "nose" (nares), "teeth" (dentes), and "beard" (barbam) on the basis of Genesis 1.26.⁸³ Augustine responds to this accusation by denying that those who "understand the Scriptures spiritually" believe God to have a nose, teeth, and beard, instead claiming that this belief is held by the "little ones" (parvulis) of the church.⁸⁴ As we have already seen, throughout his writings Augustine differentiates between the "elders" (senes)/"spiritual" (spiritalis) members of the church and the "children" (pueri)/"carnal" (carnalis) members of the church in order to distinguish between those members of the catholic faith who are capable of conceiving of God incorporeally and those who are not.⁸⁵ It seems, then, that Augustine was happy to acknowledge that some members of the catholic church did indeed believe that God has these features – namely, the parvulis or pueri whom he elsewhere describes as believing that God has a human bodily form. Augustine claims that the parvulis derive these beliefs from passages of scripture which depict God in terms. Yet, no passage of scripture depicts God as having a beard and teeth, while the notion that God has a nose is at best only implicitly suggested by the

description of God flaring his nostrils in Psalm 18.8. Therefore, the claim that God has a nose, teeth, and beard cannot be attributed to anthropomorphic passages of scripture alone.

We find evidence of similar speculation regarding God's bodily features in Augustine's report of Manichaean criticisms of catholic Christianity in conf. 3.7.12. There, Augustine records a series of anti-catholic questions addressed to him by the Manicheans: "They asked me: 'Where does evil come from? And is God limited by a bodily form? Does he have hair (capillos) and nails (ungues)? And how can they who had multiple wives at the same time, who killed people, and who sacrificed animals, be considered righteous?'"⁸⁶ While the description of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7.9 provides some grounds for the belief that God has hair, nowhere in scripture is God said to have nails. Augustine's reports of Manichaean anti-catholic polemic in Gen. Man. 1.17.27 and conf. 3.7.12, then, hint at a speculative tradition which ascribes to God various human features which are not attributed to God by scripture.

While the features described in these two passages are not attributed to God in scripture, they resonate strongly with traditions regarding the bodily form of God in Jewish apocalyptic and Hekhalot literature. The view that God has a beard and nose is found in the Shi'ur Qomah, a text which claims to report a vision of God's bodily form attributed to the second century teacher Rabbi Ishmael.⁸⁷ The report includes an account of the size and the secret names of the various limbs of God. Having given an account of God's feet, legs, torso, head and ears, Rabbi Ishmael then provides two descriptions of God's face. Each of these includes an account of the dimension and secret name of God's nose and beard.⁸⁸ While teeth are not mentioned in either passage, the author does pay a great deal of attention to other features of God's mouth, such as his lips and tongue. Notably, both passages present this description of God's face in the context of the visio dei. Given the lack of scriptural support for depictions of God that include such features, these parallels suggest a connection between North African anthropomorphism and Jewish traditions regarding God's bodily form.

This connection is further suggested by the reference to God's hair in conf. 3.7.12. Although, as I already noted, Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Days provides scriptural grounds for conceiving God as having hair, descriptions of God's hair are also an important part of the later extracanonical traditions concerning God's bodily form. For instance, God's hair is also described in the visions of 1 Enoch 46.1 and 71.10, and descriptions of God's hair also feature in the Merkabah visions of later Hekhalot literature.⁸⁹ Whether the reference to God's hair in conf. 3.7.12 draws on Daniel or extracanonical Jewish tradition, the attribution of hair to God connects North African Christianity with Jewish apocalyptic thought.

This connection is strengthened by the pairing of this belief with a reference to God's nails. Whereas scripture nowhere describes God as possessing nails, at least one early Jewish text bears witness to a tradition which attributes this feature to God. The Midrash on Proverbs preserves a saying again attributed to Rabbi Ishmael, in which Rabbi Ishmael exhorts the one who has studied the Talmud to seek the vision of God and the divine chariot:

If there comes before him one who is learned in the Talmud, the Holy One, praise be to Him, says to him: "My son, since you have studied the Talmud, why have you not also studied the Merkabah and perceived my splendour? For none of the pleasures I have in my creation is equal to that which is given to me in the hour when scholars sit and study the Torah and, looking beyond it, see and behold and meditate these questions: How the throne of my glory stands...even greater than all this: how I stand from the nails of my feet to the parting of my hair; how great is the measure of my palm, and what is the measure of my toes."⁹⁰

In this passage, Rabbi Ishmael depicts God himself as saying that he has a human bodily form which includes nails. It is particularly striking that this passage pairs this claim with a reference to God's hair. Here, the pairing of these two features serves the function of indicating the comprehensive vision of God, who is seen in his totality, from the hair of his

head to the nails on his feet. The existence of a Jewish tradition which pairs these two features in order to indicate a comprehensive vision of God helps account for their pairing in conf. 3.7.12, inasmuch as this feature can be accounted for if we regard early Christian anthropomorphism as related to Jewish traditions regarding God's bodily form.

The preceding discussion suggests a connection between North African anthropomorphism and Jewish traditions regarding God's bodily form. The presence of such a connection would help explain the parallels between North African anthropomorphism and other instances of early Christian anthropomorphism, given that Golitzin regards Jewish traditions regarding God's bodily form – and in particular, traditions of ascent to and vision of God's bodily form found in Jewish (and early Christian) apocalyptic literature – as integral to the “complex of traditions” which shaped early Christian anthropomorphism. Nor is it surprising that we should find evidence of contact with these traditions within the North African church if we consider that the literature of pre-Nicene Latin-speaking Christianity, as Jean Daniélou observes, is replete with themes derived from the Jewish apocalyptic tradition.⁹¹ Here I wish to draw attention to one text in particular — the vision of Saturus in the pass. Perp. — which exhibits engagement with precisely the sort of Jewish traditions regarding God's bodily form that Golitzin regards as underlying early Christian anthropomorphism. In this vision, Saturus ascends to heaven with the assistance of angelic guides, where he sees God in the form of an elderly man:

And we came near to a place, the walls of which were such as if they were built of light; and before the gate of that place stood four angels, who clothed those who entered with white robes. And being clothed, we entered and saw the boundless light, and heard the united voice of some who said without ceasing, “Holy! Holy! Holy!” And in the midst of that place we saw as it were an old man sitting, having snow-white hair, and with a youthful countenance; and his feet we

saw not. And on his right hand and on his left were four-and-twenty elders, and behind them a great many others were standing. We entered with great wonder, and stood before the throne; and the four angels raised us up, and we kissed Him, and He passed His hand over our face.⁹²

As several scholars have observed, the account of Saturus's vision in this passage shows clear dependence on images and motifs taken from Jewish and Jewish-Christian apocalyptic.⁹³ The role of angels as guides for the righteous individual's ascent to heaven is a common feature of early Jewish and Christian apocalypses.⁹⁴ The description of the wall surrounding the heavenly city as being "such as if they were built of light" echoes the description of the heavenly walls in 1 Enoch.⁹⁵ The ceremony in which Saturus is clothed in white robes by the angels reflects the theme of heavenly investiture, a theme seen in several apocalypses.⁹⁶ Finally, as we have already noted, the description of God as an old man with white hair originates from Daniel 7.9 and is found in numerous Jewish and Christian apocalypses, including 1 Enoch 46.1-2 and Revelation 1.14.⁹⁷

The vision of Saturus in pass. Perp. 12.1-5 offers insight into the anthropomorphic beliefs of Augustine's contemporaries in the North African church, inasmuch as this Christian text of North African provenance depicts God as possessing a human bodily form which is the object of the visio dei. Indeed, the Carthaginian origins of the text make it a good candidate to be considered a direct witness of the anthropomorphic theology of Augustine's contemporaries. We know that this text was popular in the North African church when Augustine was writing, since Augustine himself alerts us to its popularity in his De anima et eius origine, where he reveals that some of his contemporaries hold the pass. Perp. in such high regard that he has to assert its non-canonical status.⁹⁸ Minimally, then, the vision of Saturus in pass. Perp. 12.1-5 confirms that Augustine's contemporaries had access to Jewish apocalyptic traditions which depict God and the visio dei in anthropomorphic terms.

Maximally, it is a concrete instance of precisely the sort of Christian engagement with these traditions that accounts for Augustine's references to anthropomorphism in the North African church. In either case, the presence of Jewish apocalyptic themes in pass. Perp. 12.1-5 gives us good reason to suppose that the anthropomorphic beliefs of Augustine's contemporaries in the North African church are at least partially influenced by Jewish apocalyptic traditions regarding God's bodily form. Given this, it seems to me that the parallels between North African anthropomorphism and the forms of Christian anthropomorphism found in other geographical locales such as Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia are best accounted for using Golitzin's "substrate" hypothesis, which regards the similarities between these geographically dispersed cases of early Christian anthropomorphism as drawing upon a shared complex of traditions which includes Jewish traditions (and in particular Jewish apocalyptic traditions) regarding God's bodily form.

CONCLUSION

The preceding investigation has indicated that the anthropomorphism of Augustine's contemporaries in the North African church was more a sophisticated phenomenon than previous scholars – and, indeed, Augustine himself – have allowed. Within the North African church, the belief that God has a human bodily form belonged to a broader nexus of beliefs which regarded the visio dei as comprising a vision of God's bodily form, which supported this claim through an anthropomorphic reading of Genesis 1.26, and which may have utilized Stoic metaphysics to reinforce the claim that God has a body. This nexus of beliefs connects North African anthropomorphism with other early Christian instances of anthropomorphism, in which similar concerns regarding the nature of the visio dei and imago dei likewise play an important role in establishing the claim that God has a human bodily form. These similarities can best be accounted for by situating North African anthropomorphism in the context of

Jewish traditions regarding God's bodily form, in particular as found within the apocalyptic ascent tradition.

¹ This is a major theme throughout books 3-7 of the conf. See Augustine, conf. 3.7.12 (CCSL 27:33), 5.10.19-20 (CCSL 27:68), 6.3.4 (CCSL 27:76) and 7.1.1 (CCSL 27:92).

² For instance, see Augustine, mor. 1.10.17 (CSEL 90:20-21); Gen. Man. 1.17.27-28 (CSEL 91:94-96); Fund. 23.25 (CSEL 25/1:219-21); Gen. litt. 5.19 (CSEL 28/1:471); Tract. Io. 102.4 (CCSL 36:596-97) ep.147 (CSEL 44:274-331), ep.148 (CSEL 44:332-47).

³ See, for instance, Adolf von Harnack, History of Dogma, 3rd edition, trans. N. Buchanan vol. 2 (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1897), 179 n.3, 255 n.5; Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo: A Biography, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 42; David L Paulsen, "Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses," HThR 83.2 (1990): 105-16, 106; Paul Copan, "Augustine and the Scandal of the North African Catholic Mind," JETS 41.2 (1998): 287-95; Jason BeDuhn, Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma 1: Conversion and Apostasy, 373-388 C.E., Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 28, 73.

⁴ Alexander Golitzin, "The Form of God and Vision of the Glory: Some Thoughts on the Anthropomorphite Controversy of 399 AD," published in Romanian translation by I. Ica Jr. in Golitzin Mistagogia: Experientia lui Dumnezeu in Orthodoxie (Sibiu: Deisis, 1998): 184-267, English version available online at: <<http://www.marquette.edu/maqom/morphe.html>>; Golitzin, "'The Demons Suggest an Illusion of God's Glory in a Form': Controversy over the Divine Body and Vision of Glory in Some Late Fourth, Early Fifth Century Monastic Literature," Studia Monastica 44.1 (2002): 13-42; Golitzin, "The Vision of God and the Form of Glory: More Reflections on the Anthropomorphite Controversy of AD 399," in Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West: Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia eds. John Behr, Andrew Louth and

Dmitri Conomos (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003): 273–97. For a recent study of the anthropomorphite controversy that builds on Golitzin's research, see Paul A. Patterson, Visions of Christ: The Anthropomorphite Controversy of 399 CE, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 68 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

⁵ Michel René Barnes, "The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity: Mt. 5:8 in Augustine's Trinitarian Theology of 400," Modern Theology 19.3 (2003): 329–55.

⁶ Augustine, conf. 3.7.12 (CCSL 27:33). All translations from the conf. are my own.

⁷ Augustine, conf. 5.10.20 (CCSL 27:68). The reference to God having the "shape of human flesh" occurs a few lines earlier, in conf. 5.10.19 (CCSL 27:68): "In particular, I gave up hope of being able to find the truth in your church, Lord of Heaven and Earth, creator of all things, visible and invisible; whence they [the Manichees] had turned me away. Most of all it seemed to me disgraceful to believe that you have the shape of human flesh (figuram te habere humanae carnis) and are bounded by the bodily outline of our limbs (membra nostrorum liniamentis corporalibus)."

⁸ Augustine, conf. 6.3.4-4.6 (CCSL 27:76-77).

⁹ For instance, see Gerald Bonner, St Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1986), 186; Robert J. O'Connell St Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 61; Colin Starnes Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1990), 147, 169; Kim Paffenroth, "Paulsen on Augustine: An Incorporeal of Non-anthropomorphic God?," HThR 86.2 (1993): 233-35.

¹⁰ Paffenroth, "Paulsen on Augustine".

¹¹ Paffenroth, "Paulsen on Augustine," 234–35. But note Paulsen's reply in David Paulsen, "Reply to Kim Paffenroth's Comment," HThR 86.2 (1993): 235–39.

¹² Paffenroth, "Paulsen on Augustine," 235.

¹³ Roland J. Teske, “Spirituals and Spiritual Interpretation in Augustine,” AugSt 15 (1984): 65–81; Teske, “The Aim of Augustine’s Proof That God Truly Is,” International Philosophical Quarterly 26.3 (1986): 253–68; Teske, “Origen and St Augustine’s First Commentary on Genesis,” in Origeniana Quinta: historica, text and method, biblica, philosophica, theologica, Origenism and later developments. Papers of the 5th International Origen Congress, Boston College, 14-18 August 1989, ed. R. J. Daly (Leuven: Peeters, 1992): 179–85. David Paulsen and Carl Griffin argue for the same position as Teske along similar lines: Paulsen, “Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity”; Carl Griffin and David Paulsen, “Augustine and the Corporeality of God” HThR 95.1 (2002): 97-118. A number of other scholars have assumed this position without arguing for it. For instance, see von Harnack, History of Dogma, 179 n.3, 255 n. 5; Herman Somers, “Image de Dieu. Les sources de l’exégèse Augustinienne,” Revue D’études Augustiniennes et Patristiques 7.2 (1961): 105–26; Brown, Augustine of Hippo, 42; James O’Donnell, Augustine Confessions, volume 2: Commentary: Books 1-7 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 348; Copan, “Scandal of the North African Catholic Mind”; BeDuhn, Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma 1, 28, 73.

¹⁴ Teske, “Augustine’s Proof,” 256. Paulsen and Griffin make similar arguments: see Paulsen, “Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity”, 114–15; Griffin and Paulsen, “Corporeality of God,” 104, 108. Augustine first mentions the belief that God has a bodily form in conf. 3.7.12, referring to his student years in Carthage from 371 to 375. Yet it is not until book six of the conf., when he travels to Milan in 384, that Augustine learns of catholic Christians who believe God to possess a spiritual nature; conf. 6.3.4 (CCSL 27:76). For the dates of Augustine’s student years in Carthage, and for his subsequent journey to Milan, see Brown Augustine of Hippo, 46-53, 85-86.

¹⁵ Teske, “Augustine’s Proof,” 256-57; Teske, “Spirituals and Spiritual Interpretation”, 71.

¹⁶ Augustine, mor. 1.10.17 (CSEL 90:20). Translation from Augustine: The Manichean Debate, trans. Roland J. Teske, Works of Saint Augustine I/19 (Hyde Park, NY: New York City Press, 2006), 39.

¹⁷ For a fuller discussion of this distinction in Augustine, see Teske, “Spirituals and Spiritual Interpretation”. Teske argues that “spirituals,” for Augustine, are those who are capable of conceiving of God in immaterial terms, while “carnals” are those who can only conceive of God in material terms.

¹⁸ Augustine, Fund. 23.25 (CSEL 25/1:219-20; Teske, *The Manichean Debate*, 250).

¹⁹ Augustine Tract. Io. 102.4.1 (CCSL 36:596). Translation from Augustine: Tractates on the Gospel of John 55-111, trans. John W. Rettig FC 90, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 244.

²⁰ Teske, “Spirituals and Spiritual Interpretation.”

²¹ See, for instance, von Harnack, History of Dogma, 179 n.3 255 n.5; Copan, “Scandal of the North African Catholic Mind”.

²² Paulsen, “Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity,” 106.

²³ Brown, Augustine of Hippo, 42.

²⁴ BeDuhn, Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma 1, 28.

²⁵ Augustine, ep.92 (CCSL 31A:162-165), ep.147 (CSEL 44:274-331), ep.148 (CSEL 44:332-47), ep.162 (CSEL 44:511-20); Serm. Dom. 1.2.8 (CCSL 35:5-6).

²⁶ C.f. Augustine, ep.147.1 (CSEL 44:275).

²⁷ Augustine, ep.147.49 (CSEL 44:324). Translation from Augustine: Letters Volume III (131-64), trans. W. Parsons, FC 20 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 217-18.

²⁸ SVF 2.359: δυσχυρίζονται τοῦτ’ εἶναι μόνον ὅπερ ἔχει προσβολήν καὶ ἐπαφήν, ταῦτόν σῶμα καὶ οὐσίαν ὀρίζόμενοι; c.f. SVF 2.479: σώματα δὲ πάντα ὑπέθεντο.

²⁹ In his De Carne Christi, Tertullian writes that “everything that exists is a body according to its own kind” (omne quod est, corpus est sui generis), and “nothing is incorporeal, except that which does not exist” (nihil est incorporale, nisi quod non est); Tertullian De Carne Christi 11 (SC 216: 258). The same logic is at play in Tertullian’s argument for the corporeality of the Son in Adversus Praxeum 7; c.f. Jean Daniélou A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea: v.3 The Origins of Latin Christianity, trans. David Smith and John Barker (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977), 215-21; Christopher Stead, “Divine Substance in Tertullian,” JTS 14 (1963), 46–66; Marcia L. Colish, The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages Volume 2: Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought Through the Sixth Century (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 22. René Braun, Deus Christianorum: recherches sur le vocabulaire doctrinal de Tertullien (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1977), 188-90.

³⁰ Augustine, conf. 7.1.1 (CCSL 27:92). Scholars have generally acknowledged that Augustine’s reasoning in this passage is indebted to Stoicism, although there is disagreement as to whether Augustine was directly influenced by Stoic thought on this point or whether he encountered this reasoning through the mediation of a Christian author such as Tertullian; see Gérard Verbeke, L’évolution de la doctrine du Pneuma, du stoïcisme à s. Augustin (Paris: Desclée, 1945), 489-508; Charles Baguette, ‘Une période stoïcienne dans l’évolution de la pensée de saint Augustin’ Revue d’études Augustiniennes et Patristiques 16.1 (1970), 47-77; Marcia L. Colish, The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages Volume 2, 146-7; O’Donnell Augustine Confessions, volume 2, 392.

³¹ Augustine, ep.148. 1 (CSEL 44:332).

³² Augustine, ep.148. 1 (CSEL 44:332).

³³ Augustine, ep.148. 13 (CSEL 44:343).

³⁴ Augustine, Gen. Man. 1.17.27 (CSEL 91:94). Translation from Augustine: On Genesis against the Manichees and On the literal interpretation of Genesis, an unfinished book, trans. Teske, FC 85 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of American Press, 1990), 74-75.

³⁵ Augustine, Gen. Man. 1.17.28 (CSEL 91:95; Teske, FC 85, 76).

³⁶ Teske “Spirituals and Spiritual Interpretation.”

³⁷ Augustine, conf. 6.3.4 (CCSL 27:76).

³⁸ Starnes Augustine’s Conversion, 147.

³⁹ Teske “Spirituals and Spiritual Interpretation,” 71. This interpretation also accords with Augustine’s remark in conf. 6.11.18 (CCSL 27:86): *Nefas habent docti eius credere deum figura humani corporis terminatum*.

⁴⁰ I am grateful for an anonymous reviewer from JECS for suggesting I incorporate a discussion of Tertullian’s thought into this article.

⁴¹ Tertullian De Carne Christi 11; Aduersus Praxean 7-8.

⁴² Tertullian Aduersus Praxean 7.8; Latin text and English translation: Ernest Evans, Tertullian’s Treatise Against Praxeas (London: SPCK, 1948): 96/138.

⁴³ That Tertullian rejects anthropomorphism has long been recognised; c.f. Harnack, History of Dogma, 256 n.529; Ernest Evans, Tertullian’s Treatise Against Praxeas (London: SPCK, 1948), 235-6; Joseph Moingt Théologie Trinitaire de Tertullien vol.2 Substantialité et Individualité (Paris: Aubier. 1966), 333-6; Christoph Marksches God’s Body: Jewish, Christian, and Pagan Images of God trans. A. J. Edmonds (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 70.

⁴⁴ Tertullian Aduersus Marcionem 2.16.1; Latin text: Ernest Evans, Tertullian. Adversus Marcionem volume 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972): 128.

⁴⁵ Tertullian Aduersus Marcionem 2.16.4; Latin text and English translation: Ernest Evans, Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem volume 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972): 130/131.

⁴⁶ Tertullian Aduersus Marcionem 2.16.4; Latin text and English translation: Ernest Evans, Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem volume 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972): 130/131.

⁴⁷ Tertullian elsewhere appears to treat God's body as infinitely extended spiritual "stuff", akin to Stoic pneuma, which penetrates the entire created universe like "honey through a honeycomb", further indicating that anthropomorphic conceptions of God's body have no place in his thought; Tertullian Aduersus Hermogenem 44.

⁴⁸ Tertullian Aduersus Marcionem 2.6.3.

⁴⁹ See above, n.4.

⁵⁰ See Golitzin "Demons," 13-14 for a discussion of this traditional characterisation of the anthropomorphite monks.

⁵¹ Georges Florovsky "The Anthropomorphites in the Egyptian Desert" and "Theophilus of Alexandria and Apa Aphou of Pemdje," in The Collected Works of Father Georges Florovsky (Belmont MA: Nordland, 1975), 89-96, 97-129. For an overview of the scholarly literature on the anthropomorphite controversy, see Patterson, Visions of Christ, 2-23.

⁵² Georges Florovsky "The Anthropomorphites in the Egyptian Desert" and "Theophilus of Alexandria and Apa Aphou of Pemdje," in The Collected Works of Father Georges Florovsky (Belmont MA: Nordland, 1975), 89-96, 97-129. A number of scholars endorsed Florovsky's interpretation in the latter half of the twentieth century, most notably Elizabeth Clark and Graham Gould; Elizabeth Clark The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Graham Gould "The Image of the God and the Anthropomorphite Controversy in Fourth

Century Monasticism,” in Origeniana Quinta: 549-57. For an overview of the scholarly literature on the anthropomorphite controversy, see Patterson, Visions of Christ, 2-23.

⁵³ Golitzin, “Form of God and Vision of Glory”; Golitzin, “Demons”; Golitzin “Vision of God and Form of Glory”. Golitzin observes that the arguments of Florovsky, Clark, and Gould are premised on the view that the charge of anthropomorphism was fabricated by Origenists seeking to identify all anti-Origenists as naïve anthropomorphites. As Golitzin points out, this line of argument fails to take into account the numerous references to the anthropomorphite tendencies of the Egyptian monks in anti-Origenist writers such as Epiphanius and Jerome; c.f. Jerome’s report of Epiphanius’s response to John of Jerusalem in his anti-Origenist treatise C. Ioan. 11 (CSEL 79A:20). See also Jerome, Tract. psal. 93 (CCSL 78:145); Am. I.ii.1/3 (CCSL 76:30). Patterson has subsequently affirmed Golitzin’s interpretation in his monograph on the anthropomorphite controversy; Patterson, Visions of Christ, 20-26.

⁵⁴ John Cassian collat. 10.3 (CSEL 13:289). Translation from John Cassian: Conferences, trans. Colm Lubheid, CWS (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1985), 127.

⁵⁵ John Cassian collat. 10.3. (CSEL 13:289; Lubheid, Conferences, 127).

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Florovsky “Anthropomorphites,” 94; Columba Stewart, Cassian the Monk, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 85-89, Mark DelCogliano, “Situating Sarapion’s Sorrow: The Anthropomorphite Controversy as the Historical and Theological Context of Cassian’s Tenth Conference on Pure Prayer”, Cistercian Studies Quarterly 38.4 (2003): 378-421; Golitzin “Vision of God and Form of Glory”, 286-89.

⁵⁷ Cassian, collat. 10.5 (CSEL 13:290; Lubheid, Conferences, 128).

⁵⁸ See Stewart, Cassian the Monk, 85-89, 97.

⁵⁹ Golitzin, “Form of God and Vision of Glory.”

⁶⁰ Cassian, collat. 10.5-6. (CSEL 13:290-92).

⁶¹ Golitzin, “Vision of God and Form of Glory,” 286f.; c.f Stewart, Cassian the Monk, 85-97.

⁶² C.f. Golitzin, “Demons,” 21-23.

⁶³ vit. Pach. SBo 76 (CSCO 89:81). Translation from Pachomian Koinonia Volume 1: The Life of Saint Pachomius and his Disciples, trans. Armand Veilleux, Cistercian Studies 45 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 99.

⁶⁴ vit. Pach. SBo 184 (CSCO 89:162-164; Veilleux Pachomian Koinonia 1, 219-20).

⁶⁵ h. mon. Or 9 (A.-J. Festugière, Historia monachorum in Aegypto Subsidia Hagiographica 34 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1971): 37-38).

⁶⁶ Palladius, h. Laus. 25 (PG 34:1090-91).

⁶⁷ Evagrius, or. 72 (PG 79:1181, trans. is my own). C.f. or. 67-68 (PG 79:1181).

⁶⁸ On this, see Golitzin, “Demons,” 19-21.

⁶⁹ Cassian, collat. 10.2 (CSEL 13:287; Lubheid, Conferences, 125-26).

⁷⁰ Cassian, collat. 10.5. (CSEL 13:290-91; Lubheid, Conferences, 128).

⁷¹ Epiphanius Anakephalaiosis 6.70 (K. Holl, Epiphanius III:230); Pan. 70.9.2 (K. Holl, Epiphanius III:241).

⁷² Epiphanius Pan. 70.2.4-8 (K. Holl, Epiphanius III:234).

⁷³ Epiphanius Pan. 70.2.4-6 (K. Holl, Epiphanius III:234). Translation from Williams Epiphanius's Panaerion (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 414.

⁷⁴ Nicole Kelley Knowledge and religious authority in the Pseudo-Clementines: situating the Recognitions in fourth-century Syria (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 13-15.

⁷⁵ Pseudo-Clementine Homilies 17. (GCS 42: 233). Translation from The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, The Clementina, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syriac Documents, Remains of the First Ages trans. J Donaldson ANF 8 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1886), 319-20 (alt.).

⁷⁶ Golitzin “Form of God and Vision of Glory”.

⁷⁷ Lewis Ayres, “Shine Jesus Shine: on Locating Apollinarianism,” SP 40 (2006): 143-157, 155.

⁷⁸ Pseudo-Clementine Homilies 17.7 (GCS 42: 232-3). The author of the Homilies responds to this criticism by arguing that space void of body is a vacuum, which has no existence of its own. Thus, the space which “circumscribes” God has no being of its own, and so God is in fact limited by nothing. The argument here may draw upon Stoic discussions of the nature of a vacuum; see Shlomo Pines, “Points of Similarity between the Exposition of the Doctrine of the Sefirot in the Sefer Yezira and a Text of the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies: The Implications of this Resemblance” Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities 7 (1989): 63-142, 73-6.

⁷⁹ Ezekiel 1.26 (NRSV): “And above the dome over their heads there was something like a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was something that seemed like a human form.”

⁸⁰ Hekhalot literature is the name given to the body of Jewish texts dating from roughly the 4th-century onwards, in which a seer is depicted as ascending to the heavenly palace (Hekhal) in order to attain a vision of God seated upon his chariot-throne (Merkabah). For the vision of God’s human bodily form in apocalyptic literature, see, for instance, 1 Enoch 14, 46, 60; 2 Enoch 22; Test. Levi 5. For this type of vision in Hekhalot literature, see, for instance, Hekhalot Rabbati 159; Merkavah Rabbah 688-699. On the development of this tradition, see Peter Schäfer The Origins of Jewish Mysticism (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

⁸¹ Arthur Marmorstein, The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God, vol. 2: Essays in Anthropomorphism (London: Oxford University Press, 1937). See also, Morton Smith, “The Image of God: Notes on the Hellenization of Judaism with Especial Reference to

Goodenough's Work on Jewish Symbols," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 40.2 (1958): 473-512; Morton Smith, "The Shape of God and the Humanity of the Gentiles," in Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1968): 315-26; Alon Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," HThR 87.2 (1994): 171-95; José Costa, "Le corps de Dieu dans le judaïsme rabbinique ancien. Problèmes d'interprétation," Revue de l'histoire des religions 227.3 (2010): 283-316.

⁸² See especially, Golitzin, "Demons," 23, 33-36; "Vision of God and Form of Glory," 276-280.

⁸³ Augustine, Gen. Man 1.17.27 (CSEL 91:94; Teske, FC 85, 74-75).

⁸⁴ Augustine, Gen. Man 1.17.27 (CSEL 91:94; Teske, FC 85, 75).

⁸⁵ See my discussion of mor. 1.10.17 and Fund. 23.25 in the first section of this paper.

⁸⁶ Augustine, conf. 3.7.12 (CCS 27:33).

⁸⁷ For a brief introduction to text and provenance of the Shi'ur Qomah, see Schäfer, Origins of Jewish Mysticism, 306-307.

⁸⁸ Merkabah Rabbah §699 (Peter Schäfer, Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur, Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981), 256. Translation from Hekhalot Literature in Translation: Major Texts of Merkavah Mysticism vol.1, trans. James Davila (Leiden: Brill, 2013): "His nose: is a myriad and a thousand parasangs. PGBG SSYH is its name.... His beard: HDRSSYH is its name"; Merkabah Rabbah §700 (Schäfer, Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur, 256; trans. Davila, Hekhalot Literature): "R. Nathan the disciple of R. Ishmael says: Also he gave me a correct measure of the nose, and so the lip and so the cheeks... His beard is one hundred eighteen myriad and a thousand five hundred parasangs. ZQS YHWQS HDRSSYH is its name".

⁸⁹ See, for instance, Merkabah Rabbah §688 (Schäfer, Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur, 252).

⁹⁰ Midrash on Proverbs §10. Text available in Burton L. Visotsky, Midrash Mishle (מדרש משלי), (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America), 1990). Translation from Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 3rd revised edition (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), 71.

⁹¹ On the presence of Jewish apocalyptic themes in the literature of pre-Nicene Latin-speaking Christianity, see Jean Daniélou A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea: v.3 The Origins of Latin Christianity, trans. David Smith and John Barker (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977), 19-133, esp. 19-31, 59-62.

⁹² pass. Perp. 12.1-5 (SC 417:146-48). Translation from Latin Christianity: its founder Tertullian, trans. R. E. Wallis, ANF 3 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885), 703.

⁹³ C.f. Jean Daniélou, Origins of Latin Christianity, 61-62.

⁹⁴ See, for instance, 3 Baruch 1.8f.; 2 Enoch 1.5f.; Testament of Levi 2.9; Ascension of Isaiah 7.2f.

⁹⁵ 1 Enoch 14.9; for a discussion of this motif, see Christopher Rowland The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity (London: SPCK, 1982), 401.

⁹⁶ See, for instance, 2 Enoch 22 and Testament of Levi 3.14; Ascension of Isaiah 9.9; c.f. Rev 6.11.

⁹⁷ Dan 7.9; 1 Enoch 46.1-2; Rev 1:14.

⁹⁸ Augustine, Anim. 1.10.12 (CSEL 60:312).