Philosophical Assumptions of the Church Fathers

God and Creation

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Resumen

Este artículo trata de mostrar que los primeros Padres de la Iglesia no tomaron las presuposiciones básicas de su teología de las Escrituras sino de la filosofía griega. Además, se muestra que ellos recurrieron a la filosofía griega para justificar este procedimiento. Al seguir este camino, abandonaron la identidad bíblica del cristianismo. Este artículo demuestra esto específicamente mediante un estudio de la doctrina de Dios y de Cristo en los primeros Padres de la Iglesia y de la doctrina de la creación del mundo en San Agustín.

Palabras clave: presuposiciones filosóficas - Padres de la Iglesia - San Agustín - Creación del mundo – atemporalidad - tiempo.

Abstract

This article tries to show that early Church Fathers didn´t take the basic presuppositions of their theology from the Scriptures but from Greek philosophy. Furthermore, it demonstrates that they resorted to Greek philosophy to justify their procedure. In doing so, they abandoned the biblical identity of Christianity. Specifically, this article evinces it through a study of the early Church Father's doctrine of God and Christ, and St. Augustine's doctrine of the creation of the world.

Keywords: philosophical presuppositions - Church Fathers - St. Augustine - Creation of the world – timelessness - time.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to show that in defining many Christian doctrines, the Church Fathers connection with philosophy did not lie in receiving philosophical influences but in the fact that they did interpret method presuppositions philosophically instead of following the biblical interpretation. In other words, it is about showing that the first Christian theologians forsook the biblical identity of Christian theology to adopt a Greek philosophical identity at the level of method presuppositions. This hypothesis relies on an approach about the way human mind functions. Such approach will be explained in order to better understand what the adoption of philosophical interpretation of mind presuppositions by Church Fathers

consisted in. To present our argumentation, it has been divided it into two parts i.e. (a) the doctrines on God and Christ in the fathers before Saint Augustine; and (b) the doctrine on creation in Saint Augustine.

The doctrines on God and Christ in the Fathers before Saint Augustine

Early Church Fathers developed a doctrine of God's nature. Though it was not proposed systematically, statements on divine attributes can be found in their writings that reveal a definite attitude towards God's being.

The Church Fathers' concept of God

This section starts by describing how the Pathers thought about God's being. Aristides (first half of the second century AD) declared that God is a spiritual being, without beginning and end; one, unnamed, incomprehensible, eternal, immutable, perfect, self-sufficient, creator, unmoved mover. God has no need of anything.[1]

Athenagoras (second half of the second century) conceived God as an impassible being, incomprehensible and unlimited.[2] In defending Christian against pagan accusations, Athenagoras resorts to Plato's and Aristotle's idea of God as similar to the Christian idea of God. Athenagoras tries to defend Christians by arguing that, if pagans can freely speak of a God the way they do and Christians believe in a God of the same nature, why is there a law against Christians in force?[3] Tertullian (around the years 169 and 220 AD) defined God as in possession of eternity, which He does not share with any other being (not even with His Son), and by which he is essentially one. That what pertains to God only pertains to Him and must not be attributed to any other being, not even with any another meaning.[4] The divine being pertains exclusively to the Father. God's manifestation in the world is the Son, who is a part of divinity and has a kind of derived existence.[5] For Athenagoras

[1] Aristides, *The Apology of Aristides the Philosopher,* translated from Greek and Syriac by D. M. Kay; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers (ANF)*, 10 vols. (Albany, OR: AGES Software, Version 1.0, 1997), 10: chapter 1.

[2] Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians,* in *ANF,* 2: chapter 10.

[3] Ibíd., chapter 7.

[4] Tertullian, *Against Hermogenes,* in *ANF*, 3: 4, 5.

[5] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, in *ANF,* 3: 9, 14.

and Tertullian, God is the truly real, one, eternal or timeless, ineffable and impassible. Creation is not truly real, because it is corruptible, temporal and perishable.[6]

Justin (around 100-165 AD) stated that God is unnamed because names serve to distinguish one thing from another in the realm of the multiple and diverse, but since God is one and unique, he cannot be named in any way.[7] For Irenaeus (130-200 AD), God is one, immutable, simple; he is a being which lacks nothing and has no need of anything; an immaterial intelligence which is not affected by time. [8]

Clement of Alexandria (145-215 AD) defined God by quoting Parmenides through Plato: "There are many signs of a being that is unengendered and imperishable, complete, unique, immutable and without generation." [9] If it is supposed that biblical texts and Greek sources have similar meaning, Clement described God as invisible, ineffable, inexpressible by human concepts, indivisible, infinite, bearing no figure, time, movement, place or name. As far as God is concerned, it can be learn what He is not instead of what he is (*via negativa*). We think of God as Good, Intelligence, Being, Father, God, Demiurge or Lord, but we do it improperly since mind need to rely on something for support. Following the way in which Neo-Platonism takes the negative way to its logical conclusion, Clement argued that every name we use to refer to God refers to things that are familiar to us, but none of these are worthy of God. All knowledge is based on elements previously known by us, but there is nothing before the Unengendered. According to Clement, this would be the unknown God whom Paul tried to preach to the Athenians (Acts, 17: 22-23.) Despite claiming God to be unknowable, he also stated that God is impassible, immutable and incorporeal inducing him to assert that the biblical references to materiality and passions of God are allegorical and should be interpreted to understand its holy meaning. God has no passions (anger, desires, fears) not because he can beat them, but because his nature cannot run any danger.[10]

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[6] Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, in *ANF,* 2: 10; Tertullian, *Against Hermogenes,* in *ANF,* 3: chapter 4.

[7] Justin, *Hortatory Address to the Greeks*, in *ANF,* 1: 21-25.

[8] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *ANF,* 1: III, 8, 3; II, 13,3, 8; 28, 4-5; IV, 11, 2.

[9] Hermann Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin, Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 2nd edition,1906), vol. I, 18, B 8, 3-4.

[10] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata IV-V: Martirio cristiano e investigación sobre Dios,* Greek-Spanish edition, with introduction, translation and notes by Marcelo Merino Rodríguez (Madrid: Ciudad Nueva, 2003), book V, chapter 11, 12; book IV, chapter 23.

It has been shown that the Church Fathers defined God by means of concepts not found in Scriptures. The terms they used –such us timeless, immutable– are not stemmed on an attempt to convey by some means the way Scriptures conceive the being of God, and his transcendence of the world. Although Scriptures state clearly that God transcends creation, it does not impede God's permanent revelation in the realm of creation's history.

As to the theological method it must be said that Church Fathers were working in the realm of theology in which the theologian is concerned not only with the meaning of the text but first and foremost with the relationship of the text with reality. In this domain, the key question is the truth of the Scriptures sentences and how the theologian words prove true. The specific problem is not only the meaning of the word "God" but what God actually is. The Fathers are interpreting the hermeneutical presuppositions the theologian brings with himself to the task of interpreting the data in order to know the object. The Fathers' interpretation of God and the world in the aforementioned references is particularly expressed as hermeneutical principles. God has been interpreted as timeless and immutable, whereas the world has been interpreted as temporal and mutable or changeable.

Early Church Fathers defined God by means of attributes that are contrary to the temporal, multiple, material and changing world. This way of defining God entailed them a problem as they had to define the nature of Christ. To solve this problem and conciliate God's absolute transcendence regarding the world with the idea of creation and revelation, the Fathers interpret Christ as the first creature of God.[11] In so far as He has had a beginning, the Son can create a world, relate to it, reveal the Word, incarnate itself, undergo humiliation for the sake of man's salvation without compromising the impassivity, incomprehensibility and invisibility of Father's divine essence.[12]

Tertullian argues that to avoid blasphemy against the Father, it is necessary to admit that what suffered and died in Christ was not the divine nature but the human. God cannot suffer and Christ as Son of God cannot suffer either, because God was not separated from the Son since the Son is God. Christ suffered only in so far as he was a man.[13] The arguments here

[11] Justin, *Apology,* in *ANF,* 1: II, 6; *Dialogue With Trypho*, in *ANF,* 1: 60, 61; Tertullian, *Against Hermogenes*, in *ANF*, 3: 3; Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, in *ANF,* 2: 4, 10; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *ANF,* 1: II, 30, 9.

[12] Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, in *ANF,* 3: II, 27; Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, in *ANF,* 3: 9, 14.

[13] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, in *ANF,* 3: 29.

exposed show that the opposition between God and the world, contained in the concept of God borrowed from philosophy, is applied by Tertullian to the relationship between the divine and human nature of the Son. Tertullian feels the divine part of Christ must be saved from suffering thus his claim that it was the flesh which suffered in the Logos.

Tertullian also refused Gnostic separation between attributes worthy of God and attributes that –in Gnostics opinion— are not worthy of God, between the Jesus who underwent suffering and the Christ who was impassible.[14] Despite this, he argued that, since God is immutable, eternal and unable to adopt a form, in Christ the divine and human natures are together but not mixed. The properties of both natures were preserved, so that the Spirit performed the supernatural and miraculous acts while the flesh suffered hunger, thirst, sorrow and finally died on the cross.[15]

Like Tertullian, Irenaeus fought against the opposition the Gnostics established between the creator God and the redeemer God, between God as righteous judge and God as good and merciful.[16] Irenaeus alleged that who suffered was the Son of God. However, the presupposition of the impassivity of God conditioned his thought as he asserts that the Son became passible in the moment of incarnation, which shows that for Irenaeus the Son was impassible before the incarnation.[17] Following a similar path, Hypollitus (died around 237 AD) declared that from one perspective the Son (which apparently is not coeternal with the Father) makes visible the invisible God and that through the flesh the impassible Word of the Father becomes passible. [18]

Another church father who pronounced in the same trend of thought was Clement of Alexandria. According to him, Christ was eternal and completely impassible, free from all passion, affection, appetite, pleasure and pain. Even though he assumed a passible body for our salvation, his body was free from the needs anybody normally has because he was kept safe by a holy power. Christ assumed a flesh subject to passions, but he trained it unto a state of impassibility. However, Clement asserts that Christ

[14] Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, in *ANF,* 3: I, 23ss; II, 11ss, 27; Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, in *ANF,* 3: chapter 27.

[15] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, in *ANF,* 3: 27.

[16] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* in *ANF,* 1: I, 10, 3; III, 11, 1- 8; 12, 12, 15; 15, 3.

[17] Ibíd., 1: III, 18, 1-5.

[18] Hypollitus, *Against The Heresy Of One Noetus*, in *ANF,* 5: 10, 11, 15.

satisfied his needs to prevent people meeting him from thinking he was only appearance, as docetists later claimed.[19]

These ideas about the nature of Christ are the result of a concept of God obtained by opposition to qualities of the temporal world. Scriptures ever reveal God in regard to creation, to temporal world. In Scriptures such relationship is not interpreting the Son as a being who has not the same nature as the Father nor as a being whose divine nature remains impassible and alien to any contact with the temporal and changing world. Where did the Fathers get such conception of God from?

The philosophical conditioning on Church Father's concept of God

The answer to the question posed lies in the method the Fathers implicitly followed leading them to draw the same conclusions despite the different emphasis they put in the same subjects. Beyond the method, what led them to the same conclusions through diverse paths were the principles of interpretation of the data and the interpretations they assumed on the sources of the data.

The basics of interpretation of macrohermeneutical principles are necessary in any method because they set up the basic assumptions which make it possible to think and speak about any subject. The macrohermeneutical principles are the most basic presuppositions the mind needs to be able to function and to get acquainted with reality as such. We have already seen the way the Fathers interpreted God and the world as presuppositions. However, these interpretations in turn assume an interpretation of being. In order to get to know reality and say something about it, our mind needs a previous idea about what reality "is". This is called the ontological presupposition, which is the broadest background the mind needs to interpret in order to work. Regardless of the diversity of things we know, our mind does know it all as things "being", thus mind needs to previously have an idea about what "being" is.

In order to get knowledge and make assertions about God's and world's being, Church Fathers had to presuppose an idea about being at all. The issue to focus here is: What was the interpretation of being the fathers took

[19] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata VI-VIII: Vida intelectual y religiosa del cristiano,* Greek Spanish edition, with introduction, translation and notes by Marcelo Merino Rodríguez (Madrid, Ciudad Nueva, 2005), VI, 9.

for granted and what determined their definition of God's being and their understanding of God's relationship to the world? Since at that time the Fathers could not reflect it on knowledge nor on method, they did not raise the problem of the macrohermeneutical principles they were willing to adopt in order to develop the doctrine on God and on Christ. This lack of reflection impeded them to realize that the Bible has its own interpretation of the macrohermeneutical principles and at the same time, it led them to follow unconsciously but coherently the interpretation prevailing at that time i.e. the philosophical interpretation.

In order to understand the proposition of this article, it is important to keep in mind that there is no single human rationality, but several interpretations of rationality. There is a mythological, a philosophical, a biblical and a modern scientific interpretation of rationality. What makes the difference between them is the interpretation of the macrohermeneutical principles (being in general, God, world, man, knowledge) that reason as such needs in order to work. Therefore, opposing philosophical rationality and biblical rationality, as well as criticizing the former as inadequate to understand the latter, does not mean to discredit the effectiveness of God's creative work in creating human reason. God created man's ability to think, but thinking always implies a specific way of interpreting the basic macrohermeneutical principles and there are different ways to do it.

What is usually called "natural reason" is a human (mythological, philosophical, scientific) interpretation of these basic assumptions. In the Bible, God revealed a way of interpreting the basic macrohermeneutical principles, i.e. a rationality that consists of a series of basic interpretations (God, world, man, knowledge) and a number of ideas the human mind needs to grasp in order to be able to understand the divine revelation and the work of salvation undertaken by God for the sake of man. Here it is not possible to go into details about that rationality, but in an intent to synthetically express what it encompasses, it can be said that it includes God's analogical temporality and His permanent work both in the infinite dimension of divine time and in the finite dimension of created time, the creation of the world in time, the unity of man, the absence of human's soul unconditional immortality, the great controversy between God and the devil and the historical conception of biblical knowledge that creates meaning through biblical typological central historical facts such as the covenant and the sanctuary. If human reason wants to understand divine revelation it has to adopt these basic assumptions. The question is not whether the "natural

reason" may or may not know even one part of the truth, but whether human reason is ready to abandon the mythological, philosophical or scientific interpretations of the basic macrohermeneutical presuppositions and to assume the interpretations God has revealed in Scripture in order to be able to understand the message that He has revealed to man, and not the message man would want to understand.

Although not all Greek philosophers thought the same way, all shared the idea that the being or true reality is timeless. It might be said that the Greeks interpreted their gods as being involved in the time of man and world. But this would mean to ignore the fact that Greek philosophy reacted against Greek myths and anthropomorphisms. This reaction led Greek philosophers to conceive the being or true reality as timeless and unchanging. Philosophy defined the true reality as something completely opposite to time. And this philosophical stance no longer allows the understanding that God can act in time. So there is something specific to the biblical God. In Scripture, all elements of biblical rationality operate under the assumption that God is analogically temporal and that there is no dimension of divinity outside time. Since Greek philosophy stems from a fundamental assumption considered being opposite to the biblical one, everything taken from it would distort the understanding of biblical revelation.

Due to the scope of this article, it is not possible to demonstrate that some scholars claim that Church Fathers interpreted the reality of God from a non-Greek viewpoint. However, as it is to be shown in this article, Church Fathers failed to grasp the specifics of biblical interpretation of the reality of God as an analogically temporal being, and departed instead from the Greek philosophical assumption that the true reality is timeless. For this reason they always tried to save God's immutability and impassibility, as it will be shown. The problem of Patristic time scholars is that they failed to question the macrohermeneutical assumptions the mind needs to interpret in order to function. They particularly failed to examine the unquestioned assumption that God is timeless and that His temporal action must be understood symbolically or metaphorically. Many scholars, either Jews or Catholics and Protestants think it is unlikely not to find anything in Greek philosophy useful for Christianity. But it is useless to raise this desire if in examining Church Fathers' texts it is possible to see –as it is done in this article– that the philosophical notion of God's timelessness is incompatible with the biblical notion of God as an analogically temporal being. It might be considered that the timelessness-time contraposition is

not enough to oppose Greek philosophy to biblical revelation. However, as this contraposition belongs to the most basic level of thought –the level of the assumption about "being in general"–, it systematically affects everything the mind thinks, whether it is or not aware of this conditioning. It is necessary to choose between the idea of the timelessness of true reality and the idea of the analogical temporality of God. It is not possible to have a bit of both, because this leads to a contradiction at the most basic level of thought. A possible objection should be discussed before dealing with the philosophical interpretation of being that conditioned the concept of God in the early Fathers. Based on the well-known fact that many Fathers refused the use of philosophy in Christianity, the statement regarding their adoption of a philosophical interpretation of being could be objected. Nevertheless, the adoption of philosophical macrohermeneutical principles took place independently of the attitude of the Fathers toward the use of philosophy in Christianity. The aim of this article is to prove this claim by showing that both the fathers who rejected philosophy and those who accepted it, adopted the same principles, and that precisely these principles shaped the Father's understanding of the doctrine of God and Christ.

Some of the Fathers known for their opposition to the use of philosophy were Tertullian, Tatian, and Irenaeus. Tertullian considered that faith is not rationally comprehensible and that its credibility lies there. According to Tertullian, Scriptures are completely self-sufficient and without the need of any philosophical reasoning to become comprehensible.[20] The rejection of philosophy becomes disdain.[21] "I believe because it (to believe) is absurd"[22] became one of Tertullian's most famous watchwords. This attitude undermines philosophical interpretation of reason. Therefore, according to Tertullian, what remains apart from Greek philosophy is to recognize that Christian faith is irrational. Like Church Fathers, Tertullian did not ask if Scriptures could have its own interpretation of basic presuppositions of reason thus it is "rational" in its own way. Despite his opposition to philosophy, Tertullian adopted philosophical ideas when, for example, he adopted stoic materialism, which led him to affirm that God, like everything,

[20] Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics,* in *ANF,* 3: chapter 25.

[21] Ibíd., 3: 7.

[22] "…mortuus est Dei Filius; prorsus credibile est, quia ineptum est: et sepultus, resurrexit; certum est, quia impossibile" (…the Son of God died, it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd. And He was buried and rise again; this fact is certain because it is impossible) (Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, chapter V, en Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 2 [Turnholti, Belgium: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontifici, 1844], 761a; Tertullian, *On The Flesh Of Christ,* in *ANF,* 3: 944).

must have some kind of corporality.[23] He also adopted Greek dualism in affirming that the similarity between God and man lies in spirituality.

Tatian was converted to Christianity after studying Greek philosophy. As a Christian, he opposed to use philosophy in Christianity, which he considered a higher knowledge than all Greek schools of philosophy. Nevertheless, the platonic influence is striking in him as he explains for example that created man possessed every perfection, but due to sin, the soul falls to earth, separates itself from the divine spirit and dies. Furthermore, he asserted that the soul is able not to die if it works together with the divine spirit and ascends to a place where the spirit leads its. In a completely platonic inspiration, Tatian affirmed that one has to look after the union of the soul with God's spirit, so that it becomes one with Him.[24]

Irenaeus shared with other fathers the rejection of philosophy and the idea of self-sufficiency of Scriptures. He advocated their integrity against the Gnostic split between true and false parts.[25] However, in the best Gnostic style, he interpreted allegorically the Old Testament and searched for a spiritual meaning for many facts and numbers of the New Testament.[26] Allegorical interpretation is tightly linked to platonic and neoplatonic dualism. Such interpretation was the weak and non biblical link that many Fathers did establish between the Old and the New Testament. Regrettably, the Church Fathers did not realize that the true nexus is the interpretation of the basic presuppositions of mind that binds both Testaments.

These examples show that opposing to philosophy does not guarantee to get rid of it or to be able to think without assuming, at least unconsciously, some philosophical interpretations. That is one of the greater problems persisting today in Christianity —of affirming that faith is not rationally comprehensible or that it is beyond reason. The problem is to keep thinking and speaking after asserting that. Then, as unconsciously reason has been identified with the philosophical interpretation of reason, the result is that philosophy is kept in use.

Justin and Clement of Alexandria, considered philosophy as a useful tool to define, convey and systematize Christian dogmatics. As they lived in the booming of syncretism and eclecticism, many of the fathers used the

[23] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, in *ANF,* 3: 7; Tertullian, *On The Flesh Of Christ*, in *ANF,* 3: 11.

[24] Tatian, *Address to the Greeks,* in *ANF,* 2: chapters 12, 13, 15, 20.

[25] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* III, chapter 14, 2, 4; chapter 15, 1.

[26] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *ANF,* 1: IV, 21, 3; III, 17, 3; IV, 22, 1.

resources that served their apologetic purposes. In this way, they gradually adopted ideas from philosophy and tried to purge them from what they believed contrary to Christian faith. However, inasmuch as it is impossible to think without assuming an interpretation of the basic mind presuppositions, in fact, what Fathers unconsciously adopted were the macrohermeneutical principles of interpretation of revealed data. So beyond rejection or acceptance of philosophy, Church Fathers failed to carry out their intentions to keep faithful to Scriptures in the realm of the interpretation of basic presuppositions.

Slow and imperceptibly, they began to read biblical texts and to define doctrines from the philosophical interpretation of these presuppositions. As there was a lack of reflections about method and its components, the Fathers did not become aware of the decisive role played by macrohermeneutical principles of interpretation. As a consequence, many of them resorted explicitly to Plato and Aristotle to obtain support for the revealed idea of divinity.[27] What determines the definition of God's being and Christ's being is the philosophical interpretation of being, that is, the chief macrohermeneutical principle of interpretation of the revealed data. The idea of being at all was underlying the idea of God the Fathers borrowed from philosophy.

Philosophers defined being as one, immutable, imperishable, unengendered, eternal, timeless, impassible, self-sufficient, without contact with the world. They get this interpretation of being by denying attributes of things, that are multiple, mutable, perishable, engendered, temporal, subject to passions, dependent and related to other things. This interpretation of being or true reality was applied and enforced by philosophers to define what they regarded as the perfect being or God. Thus, the philosophical interpretation of being determined and conditioned the philosophical interpretation of God.

The Church Fathers sought the support of philosophical interpretation of God to face pagan's criticism, according to which the biblical revelation of God contains a concept that contradicts what was then considered to be the rational interpretation of reality: the philosophical interpretation. Pagans identified the interpretation of God in general with the philosophical interpretation of God and being. Starting from this identification they criticized the biblical concept of a God who reveals itself in time, acts in

[27] Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, in *ANF,* 2: 6.

time, becomes incarnate, dies, resurrects and continues to work in a temporal celestial realm. To defend themselves against this criticism, the Church Fathers tried to show that the revealed concept of God does not contradict philosophical interpretation of God and, therefore, it is not irrational.

In addition to adopting philosophy to defend themselves against the criticism of pagans, Church Fathers got convinced that Scriptures interpret being and God in the same way that Greek philosophy. The expression of this belief can be found in Clement of Alexandria. His interpretation of being did not come from Scriptures, since, according to him, "barbarous philosophy (that is, Biblical-Christian faith) distinguished (like Plato) the intelligible and sensible world, being the first the archetype and the second the image of what is called paradigm."[28] The uncritical acceptance and constant implementation of platonic division of reality into two worlds shows that Clement considers the philosophical interpretation of being both timeless and immutable.

This conviction went beyond the conscious stance that each of them had about the compatibility of certain specific philosophical doctrines with biblical revelation. It was such a deep-rooted conviction that they were not aware of the role that philosophical interpretation of God and being played as macrohermeneutical principles of the theological method they implemented. How did this belief arise and on what grounds did it rest?

Church Fathers philosophically justified the need to use philosophy and to found theology in other sources besides Scripture

Although on a conscious level they knew the differences between the Bible and philosophy, the unconscious adoption of macrohermeneutical principles of philosophy gave them a reason to take for granted that Scriptures interpret being and God in the same way that Greek philosophy. That reason was provided by Stoic and Neo-Platonist idea of the Logos. This interpretation was adopted by quite a few Church Fathers, especially Justin and it supplied them with at least four important conceptions. In the first place, a justification for the adoption of philosophy; secondly, a harmonization of philosophy with the Bible, which also allowed them to explain differences as part of that harmony; thirdly, a theory to be able to relate God, interpreted as timeless and immutable, to the world, interpreted

[28] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata IV-V*, V, 14, 93, 4.

as temporal and mutable; and lastly, the foundation for the idea that theology must be based on reason, besides Scriptures.

Analyzing the justification for the adoption of philosophy, we shall see that in Stoicism, the Logos is a kind of impersonal divinity that permeates and arranges the whole universe; in Neo-Platonism, the Logos is an intermediate being that emanated from the One and which enlightens souls to find the way back to him. Although Justin did not accept all the teachings of Stoicism and Neo-Platonism, he assumed that their ideas about the logos match the Logos or Word of the Gospel of John. The Logos first illuminated Hebrew prophets, but then it would also have enlightened the Greek philosophers; therefore, whatever is true and good in Greek philosophers, it is Christian because it comes from the illumination of the Logos, which is Christ. The fact that Stoics and Neoplatonists knew the existence of the Logos and talked about Him would be –according to Justin– a manifestation of the light they have received from the Logos. Consequently, if the Logos also illuminated philosophers, the use of philosophy in Christianity gets justified. Although Justin recognizes that demons misled the Greeks,[29] he thinks these errors are in other areas, not in the idea of God's nature and his relationship with the world. Despite maintaining that, Christian doctrines are more sublime than all human philosophy, Justin stated that "the teachings of Plato are (not) different from those of Christ, but (…) they are not in all respects similar, as neither are those of the others, Stoics, and poets, and historians".[30] Being a little more specific, Justin argued that, to the extent that Christianity holds that the world was produced and arranged by God, it seems to be expressing the doctrine of Plato; insofar as it announces that all things will be consumed by fire it seems to share the doctrine of the Stoics; and, insofar as it holds that the souls of the wicked will be punished and that the soul of the goods will be exempted from punishment, it seems to be saying the same things that philosophers and poets.[31] Justin was so convinced that the Bible and philosophy agree that, to explain this agreement, he resorted to the idea of an intellectual loan allegedly taken by Greek philosophers from Moses and the Jewish prophets,[32] an idea that had already been held by Jewish thinkers as Aristobulus (around 150 BC) and Filo of Alexandria (around 20 BC-40

[29] Justin, *Apology,* in *ANF,* 1: I, 5, 54.

[30] Ibíd., 1: II, chapter 13.

[31] Ibíd., 1: I, 20.

[32] Justin, *Apology,* in *ANF,* 1: I, 44, 59, 60; Justin, *Hortatory Address to the Greeks*, in *ANF,* 1: chapter 14. Tatian and Theophilus (2nd century) thought that Greek philosophers copied from Hebrew writings, although supposedly distorting and mixed them with false ideas

AD). In the same vein, Justin argued that Plato would have taken the idea of creation from Moses.[33] But in addition to appealing to this "intellectual loan", Justin philosophically justified the coincidences between Christian faith and philosophy through the Stoic and Neo-Platonist idea of the seeds of Logos that have been implanted by nature in all men.[34]

The appeal to Logos illumination allowed Justin to explain the differences between philosophy and biblical revelation as part of the harmony between both. Indeed, the idea of a common illumination by Logos led him to assert a difference only in form but *not in content* between philosophy and biblical revelation: Old Testament biblical faith is superior to philosophy only because it received the truth earlier and in a supernatural-miraculous way,[35] while the Greek philosophers received it later and in a natural way. But regarding the content, biblical faith agrees with reason.[36] The revelation of the Logos through the incarnation of Christ does not add new content to truth; it only fulfills the prophecies miraculously, makes the truth understandable and unmixed with error to all people and ensures victory over evil. Justin asserted that the Christ who appeared for our sake was the fullness of reason. In other words, for him there is only a difference of degree between biblical revelation and philosophy, the first being greater than the second, but not opposed to it.[37] Differences occur on the ground of a basic harmony. With this approach, Justin took for granted that the way philosophers conceived God was the same revealed in the Old and New Testament. Justin is not concerned about the possibility of understanding the biblical concept of God from an interpretation of being that is different from Greek philosophy; he did not wonder either if eternity, immutability and perfection of God really mean the same to the Greek philosophers and in the biblical revelation. He did not pose those questions because he

(Tatian , *Address to the Greeks,* in *ANF,* 2: chapter 40; Theophilus of Antioch, *Theophilus To Autolycus,* in *ANF,* 2: I, 14; II, 8, 12, 37).

[33] Justin, *Apology,* in *ANF,* 1: I, 20, 59. Justin argues that Plato wrote the Timaeus in exact correspondence with what Moses had said about God, but did not recognize the Biblical source but presented the ideas as their own. To explain the differences between creation in Moses and Plato, Justin goes on to say that Plato learned from the Moses' writings when he was in Egypt, but in returning to Athens he had to hide it so that the Athenians did not accuse him of not believing in the Greek gods, as they had done with Socrates (*Hortatory Address to the Greeks*, in *ANF,* 1: 20, 22, 25).

[34] Justin, *Apology,* in *ANF,* 1: I, 5, 44; II, 8, 10, 13.

[35] Tatian, *Address to the Greeks,* in *ANF,* 2: 31.

[36] Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, in *ANF,* 1: Chapter 1.

[37] According to Justin, Christian doctrines are more sublime than all human philosophy (Justin, *Apology* in *ANF,* 1: II, chapters 10, 15).

assumed that the meaning is the same, since philosophers were naturally illuminated by the same Logos that supernaturally revealed the truth to Moses and to the Hebrew prophets. Justin recognized that with Christian faith human philosophy had been overcome by a perfect revelation of the Logos. Human philosophy had come to an end. However, although he was not aware of it, he put an end to philosophy only in the level of explicit expressions of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, etc., but not in the level of the implicit assumptions in these formulations, which kept operating in his thinking and determining his understanding of the Scriptures.

Stoical and Neo-Platonist idea of the Logos was adopted by Christian apologist Fathers not only to justify the coincidence of Christian revelation with Greek philosophy and, therefore, to justify the use of philosophy, but also to interpret the relationship between God interpreted as timeless and the world interpreted as temporal. We have already seen how the concept of God as an immutable and timeless being determined the interpretation of the nature of Christ. This is a manifestation of the more general problem Christians had to solve due to the concept of God borrowed from philosophy i.e. the problem of the relationship between God and the world. The Bible distinguishes between God and the world but not by establishing an opposition that prevents the relationship of both. Nevertheless, as Church Fathers defined God as opposed to the temporal world, they thought they should base the possibility of a relationship of God with the world. To solve this problem created by philosophy they also resorted to it. Consequently, the stoic and neoplatonic idea of the Logos was the tool that Church Fathers used to explain the relationship between God and the world within the idea of God they had borrowed from philosophy. God relates to the world through the Logos, who is the creator and revelator. The idea of Logos as an intermediate being, allowed them to connect God with the world without compromising the timelessness and immutability of God.

As regards the foundation for the idea that theology must be based on reason besides Scriptures, such idea had another consequence on the level of macrohermeneutical principles, particularly in the realm of the knowledge of God and of the sources of theology. This consequence was the idea that there is a natural revelation of the Logos that enlightens the reason of all men and a supernatural revelation given to many men and recorded in the Bible. Both revelations are independent of one another but harmonic. Therefore, the sources of theological knowledge are both the Bible and human reason. In defining the being of God, in fact Church Fathers were

already implementing this idea. The acceptance of reason as a source of theological knowledge was not limited to the Church Fathers who explicitly accepted philosophy or to those who adopted the stoic and neoplatonic idea of the illumination by the Logos. Indeed, in defining the being of God, Irenaeus was based on Scripture but he also thought it is possible to have a full knowledge of God and of everything necessary for salvation from the consciousness, from man's natural knowledge of the world and from God's providential government over creation. Supernatural revelation agrees with this natural knowledge. In other words, Irenaeus affirmed that reason, from nature and history, has the capacity to know the creator.[38] Therefore, in his biblical interpretation he introduced a rational definition of God using the "negative path", and, thus, the interpretation of being as timeless, from which the concept of God is obtained as an immutable being unaffected by time.[39] With these ideas, Irenaeus, who has been considered the more reluctant theologian to give way to the influence of Greek philosophy,[40] admitted that theology has several sources as the supernatural revelation and reason.

With the appearance of plurality of sources in theology as an idea, Christian thought legitimized the hermeneutical method in use. Hence, this reasoning introduced in Christianity much more than the idea that theology has several sources. What was being incorporated was not the reason but the philosophical interpretation of reason. This means that the first Church Fathers took for granted that the way of knowing and the principles of understanding are provided by philosophy, not by Scripture. Therefore, the two sources, reason and Scripture, were not seen as being on the same level, but it turned out that reason —identified with philosophical interpretation of principles of knowledge— ended up determining the meaning of Scripture. So the incorporation to Christianity was a theological method by which the Bible and reason are sources of data, but philosophy provides the principles of interpretation of the data. This can be seen in the Augustinian interpretation of biblical creation history.

The doctrine of creation in Saint Augustine

[38] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *ANF,* 1: II, 6, 1-9; 9, 1; 27, 2; III, 25, 1.

[39] Ibíd., 1: III, 8,3; II, 13,3, 8; 28, 4-5; IV, 11, 2.

[40] Oscar Cullmann, *Cristo y el tiempo* (Barcelona: Estela, 1968), 44.

In the biblical history of creation, God is involved in temporal actions. This record makes it clear that God is essentially related to time. First, I will show how Augustine interpreted the biblical record of creation and, secondly, what are the assumptions this interpretation takes for granted.

The Augustinian interpretation of creation history

As for the creation of the universe, Augustine maintained that God first created what the Bible calls "heaven of heavens", which he understood as an intellectual heaven, without space and time, in which the truth is known simultaneously. This heaven participates of the eternity and immutability of God but it is not co-eternal with God because it is created.[41] Then, according to Augustine, God would have created what the Bible calls "the heavens and the earth" and Augustine understood the heaven as being visible to the senses and the earth.[42] In other words, God first created a timeless and immutable heaven, and then the temporal and mutable world we see through the senses.

Regarding the creation of the Earth, Augustine distinguished, first, the invisible, formless and chaotic earth that is not related to the creation days but referred to in the phrase "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". This earth, being formless and chaotic, does not pertain to the spatial and temporal order of creation. Second, Augustine distinguished the earth God arranged ordering the chaos according to the temporal order of the six days of creation.[43] Augustine conceived that the "heaven and earth" from the creation history relates to the universal, disordered and mixed matter, which was created out of nothing and was ready to receive the forms from the creator, in order to give birth to the "world" consisting of separate and distinct things.[44] The biblical history informs that the earth was without form, void and dark because –so Augustine– it lacked form,

[41] Saint Augustine, *Confesiones,* Spanish translation by Ángel Custodio Vega en *Obras de San Agustín*, vol. II, (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 7th ed., 1979), C, XII, 9-11, 13; XII, 15, 19-20.

[42] Saint Augustine, *Confesiones*, XII, 12, 15.

[43] Ibíd.

[44] Ibíd., XII, 3, 3; Saint Augustine, *Del Génesis a la letra, incomplete* (henceforth *GLI*), Spanish translation by Balbino Martín en *Obras de San Agustín*, vol. XV (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1957), 3, 10; 4, 13-14.

which is the essence of things. Darkness is lack of light; it is the non-being or the absence of being.[45]

God first created a formless matter –which, in Augustine own words, the Greeks called "chaos" – and then things arose: "First, the matter was made confused and formless, so that later it should be made all things that today are separated and formed."[46] This means that, for Augustine, God did not create things during six days but He placed in the matter the seed of things, which arose later:

> If we take the seed of a tree we say that there are the roots, trunk, branches, fruit and leaves, not because they appear already there, but because from there they have to be born: thus, it was said, "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth", as if it were the semen of heaven and earth, being still confused the matter of heaven and earth. It has been called heaven and earth to that stuff because it was sure that from there had to proceed the heaven and earth we now see.[47]

In other words, God created and placed the form of things (the species of beings) on the matter, but in potentiality, so that they could be in actuality later.[48] Creation is interpreted, then, as the temporal development of an instantaneous action performed by God outside of time (the creation of forms or species).

In the previous description, Augustine makes an implicit distinction between an intellectual operation and a corporeal operation. When the Genesis tells "and it was so", Augustine interprets this to mean that

[45] Saint Augustine, *GLI,* 5, 25; Saint Augustine, *Del Génesis contra los maniqueos* (henceforth *GCM*), trad. de Balbino Martín, *Obras de San Agustín*, vol. XV (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores cristianos, 1957), I, 7, 11; I, 4, 7. Augustine explains that the creation of this matter without form does not mean that God created the lack of being that belongs to nothing (*GLI*, 5, 25; *GCM*, I, 4, 7). Augustine argues that the spiritual without form was created first, what is symbolized by the "sky," and then the formless matter of all bodies, symbolized by the "earth." This creation occurred outside time (Saint Augustine, *Confesiones*, 12, 12, 15). Here, in addition to the concepts of matter and form, Augustine is applying the spirit-matter contrast. The spiritual was created first because it is more worthy than the material (Saint Augustine, *GLI*, I, 1, 1).

[46] Saint Augustine, *GCM*, I, 5, 9; I, 6, 10. The distinction between the creation of a formless part and of another part with form is applied by Augustine to each day of creation. So he interprets that "when it is said 'was made the afternoon' the formless matter is referred to, and when it is said 'was made the morning' it indicates the form imprinted in the matter in the same work of God, because in the morning, once concluded the work, the day is done." (*GLI*, 15, 51).

[47] Saint Augustine, *GCM*, I, 7, 11; see also *GLI*, 10, 32.

[48] Saint Augustine, *GLI*, IV, 33, 51; VIII, 3, 6; IX, 17, 32; Saint Augustine, *Tratado de la Santísima Trinidad* (henceforth *TST*), Spanish translation by Luis Arias; *Obras de San Agustín*, vol. V (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1956), III, 9, 16.

something was created "in the nature of intellectual reasons", then, when the history tells, for example, that "the water was gathered unto one place and the dry land appeared" it means that the operation was performed corporeally. In the reasons of the intellectual nature, all things were made at the same time, but in the corporeal nature they emerged over time.[49] It is the intellectual operation which creates simultaneously and timelessly the forms of things; it is the corporeal operation which, over time, gets these forms become separate and individual things, each one with its own form and matter.

This interpretation is evidenced clearly when Augustine argued that human soul was created, along with the angels,[50] before the body, since this was created only in the sense that God put in the matter the seeds thereof, whereas the soul, being spiritual, was created on the first day of creation[51] and later it "tended willingly to rule the body".[52] However, such interpretation does not fit the biblical record but submit itself to certain principles of interpretation that determine the meaning of biblical expressions. These principles of interpretation consist especially of the Augustinian conception of the being of God and of His relationship to time.

The philosophical assumptions that condition the Augustinian interpretation of biblical creation

Augustine thought that in the revelation of the being of God of Exodus 3:14 ("I am who I am (…) say unto the children of Israel: I Am hath sent me unto you") was the idea that God is properly speaking an immutable essence, without change.[53] Only God, "I", is real because He has no accidents, namely, properties that He could lose or acquire in a moment.

> All other substances or essences are subject to accidents, and any mutation, large or small, is carried out with their help; but regarding God, it cannot speak of accidents, and therefore there is only one immutable substance or

[49] Saint Augustine, *GLI*, 10, 32, 35.

[50] Saint Agustine, *La ciudad de Dios* (henceforth *CD*), Spanish translation by José Morán, en *Obras de San Agustín*, vol. XVI (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1958), XI, 9.

[51] Saint Augustine, *GLI*, VII, 24, 35.

[52] Ibíd., VII, 25, 36.

[53] Saint Augustine, *TST*, V, 2, 3; VII, 5, 10.

> essence, that is God ... consequently, only he who doesn't change nor can change is, without doubt, truly the Being.[54]

In the understanding of God's being we must deny –maintained Augustine– everything corporeal and spiritually mutable. With the "Platonists" Augustine agreed that God is absolutely simple and immutable.[55] Whereas all corporeal is mutable, God is immutable.[56] The human soul is not corporeal, but it is mutable, so we have to leave it to define God. So what is denied of God is not only corporality, but also mutability. He only "is" truly the immutable, and God is by nature the only immutable being, the only one not experiencing any kind of change.[57] Confident that Scripture interpret being and God in the same way that philosophy, Augustine believed that perfect immutability of God is expressed in the book of Wisdom that reads: "Staying in itself, makes all things new".[58]

The immutability of God implies His eternity: "He is also true Eternity, as he is immutable, without beginning or end, and therefore incorruptible. To say that God is eternal, immortal, incorruptible and unchangeable is to say the same thing".[59] In other texts Augustine argued inversely that God's eternity implies His immutability: "As God is eternal, his advice is eternal too and, consequently, immutable as He is".[60] This can be understood if we consider that God's eternity is not an infinite temporality, but a lack of time: "nothing temporal may be in God",[61] "God must be conceived as eternal... without time," "within the pale of the sovereign Trinity, who is God, there are no time intervals".[62] God does not precede temporarily to time;

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[54] Saint Augustine, *TST*, V, 2, 3; see also V, 4, 5; V, 5, 6.

[55] Saint Augustine, *CD,* VIII, 6.

[56] Saint Augustine, *De la naturaleza del bien: Contra los maniqueos,* Spanish translation by Mateo Lanseros, en *Obras de San Agustín*, vol. III (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores cristianos, 1963), 1.

[57] Saint Augustine, *De la doctrina cristiana* (henceforth DC), Spanish translation by Balbino Martín, en *Obras de San Agustín*, vol. XV (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1957), I, 8; *TST*, IV, Prol., 1; VIII, 2, 3; XII, 14, 22; V, 16, 17; VII, 3, 5; I, 1, 3; XV, 4, 6; V, 1, 2; *Confesiones*, VII, 7, 11; VII, 11, 17; *Del libre albedrío*, Spanish translation by Evaristo Seijas, en *Obras de San Agustín*, vol. III (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores cristianos, 1963), II, 6, 14.

[58] Saint Augustine, *TST*, II, 8, 14. Augustine quotes Wisdom 7: 27.

[59] Saint Augustine, *TST*, XV, 5, 8. Augustine is based on a text where Paul says that God is the only one who has immortality (Saint Augustine, *TST*, I, 6, 10; II, 9, 16).

[60] Saint Augustine, *TST*, XV, 20, 38. Augustine thinks this position can be derived from the biblical text where it is said that "many are the thoughts in the mind of man, but the counsel of the Lord stands forever" (Proverbs 19: 21).

[61] Saint Augustine, *TST*, V, 16, 17.

[62] Saint Augustine, *TST*, V, 16, 17.

in God there is no temporal succession at all; God is an eternal today, an eternal present without distinction between past, present and future.[63] Since mutability needs time as measure, then the absence of mutability necessarily implies the absence of time. In God there is no time, no change.[64] Augustine emphasized that if there was time and change in God, there would be no true eternity; and that if time remained, it would be no time.[65] Therefore, God's immutability and timelessness imply each other.

When speaking of God's relationship with the temporal and material world, Augustine distinguished tightly between God's being and God's manifestation. As its essence is invisible and immutable, divinity itself can never appear in the temporal and material world; it can only reveal itself through a created being.[66] This bases the possibility of interpreting the biblical text in a way that fits in the philosophical interpretation of God. The biblical language about God as someone undergoing change is only a manner of speaking "for us": "Nothing can be worthily said of God. Nevertheless, for us to nourish ourselves and to understand the things that cannot be expressed by any human language, are expressed by words we can understand".[67] For example, when the Scriptures attribute to God something related to the time, "as in Psalm 90.1, which says: 'Lord, thou hast been our refuge', this indicates no mutation in God, because He always remains the same ..."[68] All that is said of God regarding the relation is no accident, because He is not mutable.[69]

The adoption of the philosophical interpretation of God as a timeless and immutable being inevitably leads to consider biblical expressions referring to God as related to time and change as analogical or metaphorical:

> The accidents of position, habit, time and place can be attributed to God only improperly and as involving transfer or metaphorical sense. So, it is said to be sitting on a cherub, which indicates a certain position; covered by seas as royal mantle, referring to the habit. "Your days are endless", say we in relation to time; and "If I rise to heaven, you are there", referring to the place.[70]

[63] Saint Augustine, *Confesiones*, XI, 13, 16.

[64] Saint Augustine, *CD*, XI, 21.

[65] Saint Augustine, *Confesiones*, 11, 7, 9; 11, 10, 12; 11, 13, 16; 11, 14, 17.

[66] Saint Augustine, *TST*, II, 15, 26; II, 14, 24; II, 18, 35; III, 5, 10.

[67] Saint Agustine, *GCM* I, 8, 14.

[68] Saint Augustine, *TST*, XV, 3, 5.

[69] Ibíd., V, 5, 6.

[70] Saint Augustine, *TST*, V, 8, 9.

When the Bible speaks of the wrath and vengeance of God, it is expressed metaphorically[71] because God is impassible and immutable. The stories of apparitions of God to the patriarchs of the Old Testament always express symbolically the presence of God through a mutable creature.[72]

The adoption of the philosophical concept of God explains why Augustine interpreted the biblical record of creation in the terms above described. God's timelessness determines, in the first place, the idea of an absolute creation of time. Before the creation of the world there was no time. There can be no time without creatures that change and move.[73] Time could not have coexisted with God before creation because there is no time in God. According to Augustine, the Bible speaks of eternal times, but these are not "eternal" as God, since God exists before time. Time is a thing that God created and that only began to exist since creation. God could not have created the time if He had not existed before time (but "before" not in a temporal sense).[74] Therefore, God created the world not in time but over time.[75] When the Bible says that "in the beginning" God created the heavens and the earth, for Augustine this means "not in the beginning of time, but in Christ".[76]

Secondly, as God is timeless and has neither "before" nor "after", then the world cannot have been created successively, day by day, as told in the book of Genesis. The creation record is presented in a temporal order, not because God really created it that way, but in order that we can understand through the eyes of the flesh, that is, form our temporal perspective. Furthermore, the record presents the divine work temporally because "the temporal nature executed their movements temporally"[77] but "all that is said of God, that begins or ends, in no way is to understand as occurring in the nature of God, but in his creature".[78] For example, "the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" should not be understood as if God moved occupying a place. In any case, it would have to be understood, so

[71] Saint Augustine, *DC*, III, 11; Saint Augustine, *Enquiridión,* Spanish translation by Andrés Centeno, *Obras de San Agustín*, vol. IV (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores cristianos, 1956), 33.

[72] Saint Augustine, *TST*, II, 17, 32.

[73] Saint Augustine, *CD*, 11, 5, 6; C, 11, 30, 40.

[74] Saint Augustine, *Confesiones*, XI, 13, 16.

[75] Saint Augustine, *CD*, 11, 6; *GCM*, I, 2, 3-4; *GLI*, 3, 6.

[76] Saint Augustine, *GCM*, I, 2, 3.

[77] Saint Augustine, *GLI*, 7, 28.

[78] Ibíd., 5, 19.

Augustine, as referring to living creature, in which the visible world was contained, and to which God would have granted the power to perform his works.[79]

The truth is in the permanent and stable, which can be grasped by reason alone:

> And if God needs time to execute something, then how does one understand what is written: "to You is subjected, when you want, the power"? Or is that all things are completed in God, like they are in reason and art, without extension of time, but by the same virtue through which makes things stable, things we contemplate as transient but not as permanent?[80]

Augustine rhetorically kept asking: "Is such that it would mean once and forever that God does not work as men usually do, but that it has been narrated as it could be for men?" [81] Putting aside the fact that the text quoted by Augustine is considered as non canonical, Augustine thought that the statement "to You is subjected, when you want, the power" had to be interpreted as meaning that God did not need to create the world in the way reported by the Scriptures, but instantaneously and timelessly. Augustine was so convinced of God's timelessness and immutability that to him it seemed evident that a text as the one quoted was saying that God does not need time sequence to perform his creative work. From this, in turn, Augustine got the foundation to understand metaphorically other biblical texts that contradicted his convictions stemming from the philosophical interpretation of the nature of God.

Augustine was very clear in saying that the truth is not as presented in the biblical narrative:

> So maybe it was said, "and the evening and the morning were one day", first as reason understands that could or must be done, but not in the way one works in time intervals ... in God's operation there are no time intervals, although these are in the works themselves.[82]

Augustine assumed a clear distinction between the truth "in itself" and the truth "for us." Reason grasps the truth "in itself" that the biblical text presents "for us". According to the philosophical interpretation of being that Augustine followed, on one part it is the order nature has as it is in God

[79] Saint Augustine, *GLI*, 4, 16-17

[80] Ibíd., 7, 28. Agustine quotes Wisdom 12: 18.

[81] Ibíd., 13, 41.

[82] Ibíd., 7, 28; 9, 31.

and on the other part it is the order in which it was created in six days.[83] The Scriptures speak of things temporally created in order to time and to our understanding, but God does not know them temporally; the eternal Word created everything simultaneously.[84] In his Word there is no time, succession or change. God creates all things simultaneously saying them, although they are made successively.[85] Augustine maintained that the Scriptures say that God created everything in six or seven days, but it is also in the Scriptures (Augustine did not identify where) that God created everything at once.[86] Consequently, the biblical text is considered as a pedagogical or illustrative way of transmitting successively and temporarily the creation that in God occurs simultaneously.[87] For Augustine, there was no contradiction, since Scriptures (though he did not identify where it was expressed) present only to carnal eyes something that has not happened exactly as they present to carnal eyes.

For Augustine, God did not create temporal things but its timeless cause (the form). Through the distinction between the intellectual-timeless and the corporeal-temporal, the philosophical interpretation of being conditioned the Augustinian interpretation of the history of creation moving him completely away of the sense that the record has if it is understood from the temporal biblical interpretation of being.

Conclusion

When interpreting the biblical history of creation in a way consistent with the philosophical idea that God is essentially timeless and immutable, Saint Augustine assumed that the source of theology is not only Scripture but reason too. In addition, Augustine assumed that the only possible interpretation of reason is the Greek philosophical one. Thus Saint Augustine took the principles of interpretation of the biblical record of creation not from Scripture but from Greek philosophy. Saint Augustine not only didn't interpret reason from the Scriptures but in the context of the

[83] Saint Augustine, *GLI*, 4, 18, 34.

[84] Expressing his interpretation of Scripture, Augustine puts into the mouth of God the following: "What does my scripture say, that's what I say, but it says it in order to time, while time has nothing to do with my word, which stays with me unchanged in eternity; and so, those things which you see by my Spirit, I see them, and also the things you say by my Spirit, I say them too. But whereas you see and say them temporarily, I don't say them temporarily" (C, 13, 29, 44).

[85] Saint Augustine, *Confesiones*, 11, 7, 9; 11, 10, 12.

[86] Saint Augustine, *GLI*, IV, 33, 52; 34, 53, 55.

[87] Ibíd., VII, 24, 35.

idea that theology has a plurality of sources, put the reason (philosophically interpreted) above Scripture. So, philosophical presuppositions about God and the world ended up determining the meaning that the biblical history of creation had for Augustine.

The Augustinian interpretation of the biblical record of creation reinforced in Christianity the idea that the divine actions in time narrated by Scriptures must be interpreted metaphorically as meaning something else that is consistent with the Greek philosophical idea concerning the timelessness and immutability of God.

There is a widespread idea that Scriptures just use the only language we can understand about God, but that God cannot be like He is portrayed by that language. This idea does not belong to the healthy human understanding nor correspond to the universal truth, but has its origin in Church Fathers' adoption of Greek philosophical interpretation of the nature of God and reason.

Certainly not all in biblical language about God can be taken literally, but this does not allow to adopt the idea of what God really is from outside of Scripture. The whole Scripture as the sole and primary source of theology must provide the interpretation of the nature of God. Only then is possible to distinguish what can and what cannot be taken literally of biblical language about God. Although the biblical record of creation doesn't explain how God did to create the world, it presents the creation as an event in which God acts really in time. There is nothing in the history of creation indicating an intention to convey in an analog or metaphorical way "for us" a divine action that would take place in the divine timelessness and immutability.

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