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Augustine's Contribution To Star Wars

In 1977, the movie *Star Wars* hit the big screen and was an instant sensation; despite the fact that it was not very realistic. It was well known to the general public that an exploding spacecraft would neither burn nor produce any noise in space. Not that it mattered; people loved it anyway.

If one takes a close look at the movie while *Tora! Tora! Tora!* is playing on another channel and flips back between the two very rapidly, a startling coincidence becomes readily apparent (I'm not making this up, try it sometime): both are actually World War II movies. The aerial dogfights, the kid hero, and the fairy tale good guys vs. bad guys scenario, all are quite similar to many more obvious World War II movies.

But the main difference is quite apparent: *Star Wars* is not a part of a distantly remembered past — the stock war plot was remolded and made to fit today's culture. Exactly the same thing was done sixteen hundred years ago by St. Augustine.

His *Confessions* was written as a cultural reshaping machine, taking us on a journey from light to darkness and back

toward the perfect light of God. The journey begins for Augustine with the search for truth. He abandons the faith of his mother (and, eventually, of his father, too) and immerses himself in all the options his culture has to offer. Each option he encounters he finds fault with and abandons. His search for truth is a journey through the intellectual possibilities of the life of his culture with each successive possibility as a movement toward something else. Every step he takes is part of a circle that will eventually lead him back to the Catholic faith for a final truth.

As Augustine manipulates the intellectual Logos within himself, the Bible changes with him. It changes from a symbol of a dead religion to an object of scholarly interest, an ideological interest and, eventually, a source of truth. Finally, Augustine can stand on a hilltop and use all his learning and knowledge to reinterpret the Bible as a philosophical and spiritual text. It becomes a living Bible as he becomes a living soul.

It is this new vision of the Scriptures that determines the structure of the *Confessions*. Each major section of the text reflects a step toward, and a definition of, a new way of looking at the Bible.

The first nine books are a historical narrative written in a distinctly Biblical style, as is reflected by the use of point of view and praise. God is referred to throughout the text as "you," employing the same "prayerish" tone as many of the Psalms. Also reminiscent of Psalms is the devotion of whole segments to praise of God. The nine books take on the sound and feel of a new collection of psalms.

The next two books of *Confessions* back off and assume a wider scope. The subject matter shifts from the physical world into the world of thought and philosophy. No longer stemming from a corporeal being, these reflections are the product of a mind reflecting on its existence

But this consciousness is completely lacking in the last two books. Here we find only pure thought. Augustine is gone; his thoughts are gone; now we have only abstract ideas narrated impersonally by an unknown entity.

It is in these last two books that Augustine attempts his explication of the first chapter of Genesis. By revealing spiritual meaning behind what seems to be a fairly straightforward account of the creation of the world, not only does he find personal

meaning in the most impersonal of passages, but he also defends the Bible against those who would condemn it as simple and poorly written.

Augustine goes to great, and sometimes confusing, lengths to present the Bible as something more than a collection of bad poetry — it is not only simple enough to attract the attention of the common man, but it can also be read by the more learned on a subtler level. It is an intellectual work in disguise.

The *Confessions* almost seems as if written as an appendix to this great intellectual work. It functions to bind the Scriptures together and to round them out.

Throughout the text, Augustine has placed selected quotes and expanded on them, filling in the holes while using them to fill in his own. In the same way, he expands on and elucidates several concepts (such as the concept of sinning against God and problems of marriage). He is not making the Scriptures infallible by infusing them with his own ideas, he is only reiterating the truths he finds to be self-evident.

In going beyond the literal meaning of several passages, Augustine abandons the Biblical conventions of simple praise and proclamation of faith. What he presents is an emotional, personal experience that compels the reader to actually relive it. In this way, Augustine personally involves his audience in the Bible and in a journey toward it.

This journey gradually expands to encompass more than just the Bible. The intellectual approach is applied to the whole religion as well. We find a Neoplatonic consciousness transplanted into the Scriptures, as though Christianity were an offshoot of Neoplatonic philosophy. One by one, he eliminates all the possibilities on the path to truth as intellectually unpalatable until only the Catholic faith remains.

By using such an argument, Augustine has rewritten the Bible and, indeed, the whole faith with a fourth century pen. The New Bible that Augustine creates is a product of his culture, his time, just as Star Wars is of ours. His own life of sin and conversion is related merely as a device to heighten the effect he was seeking to create — the infusion of a thoroughly foreign faith into the mainstream line of thought of Roman society.

Works Cited

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