

SYMBOLS OF SINFULNESS IN BOOK II OF AUGUSTINE'S "CONFESSIONS" *

IN A previous article I proffered an explanation of Augustine's seemingly bizarre exaggeration of the guilt which he imputes to the pear-theft of his youth, as described in the second book of his *Confessions*.¹ His self-castigation for this youthful peccadillo seems out of all proportion to the magnitude of the actual offence.

The proposed explanation of this enigmatical exaggeration involves what may be termed an arboreal polarization. The drama of Augustine's pilgrimage from sin to salvation as recounted in the *Confessions* would seem to be polarized between two trees—the pear-tree from which the famous theft occurs as recounted in the second book and the fig-tree in the eighth book under which tree Augustine casts himself down as he weeps the tears of repentance which precede his climactic conversion.² Moreover, my proposed explanation claims that this polarization is patterned upon a like polarization present in the Bible, where again there are two Trees—the one associated with the Original Sin (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in Paradise) and the other, the very symbol of Salvation (the Tree of the Cross) upon which the Saviour is crucified.³

To the modern mind, this proposed explanation may seem more far-fetched than the enigma which it is supposed to explain. On the other hand, as I have pointed out in another and more recent article, the mystical tree, or the tree of religious experience, has from time immemorial been a most important symbolic element in the many religions of mankind.⁴

* The author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to the Canada Council and (at a later date) to the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst.

¹ Leo C. Ferrari, "The Pear-Theft in Augustine's *Confessions*", *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 16 (1970) 233-241.

² *Confessions* (hereinafter: *Conf.*) 8.12.28.

³ *Genesis* 2.9: "And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." It is noteworthy that Augustine identifies the tree of life with the cross. (*In Ioannis Evangelium* 1.16 and *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 2.34).

⁴ Leo C. Ferrari, "The Mystical Tree in the Western Christian Tradition," *Communio Viatorum* (1971) 1-12.

More specifically, the mystical tree has played a vital, even if unobtrusive, rôle in the western christian tradition down through the centuries. As regards the Bible, the arboreal polarization has long been appreciated, as is manifested by the following extract from the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas of the thirteenth century:

This manner of death of Christ on the cross was most fitting as a satisfaction for the sin of the first parents, which consisted in this, that contrary to the command of God they took the fruit of the forbidden tree (*pomum ligni vetiti*). So it was fitting that Christ, in making satisfaction for that sin should allow himself to be affixed to wood, as if restoring what Adam had taken away.⁵

It is claimed that the gifted genius of Augustine has constructed his famous *Confessions* upon a like polarization. The enormity of sin makes its entry into this work with the pear-theft of the second book, a deed which corresponds to the Original Sin resulting from the theft of the forbidden fruit in Paradise. The complementary climax of grace in Augustine's great masterpiece occurs in the eighth book when he casts himself down with tearful repentance:

I flung myself down, how, I know not, *under a certain fig-tree*, giving full course to my tears, and the streams of mine eyes gushed out, an acceptable sacrifice unto Thee.⁶

This seemingly insignificant mention of the fig-tree almost belies the importance claimed for its presence. However, in a recent article of remarkable insight and erudition, Vinzenz Buchheit has demonstrated, quite independently of my own researches, the capital importance of the presence of the fig-tree in the conversion-scene.⁷

The object of the present study is to go back to the second book of the *Confessions* and, prompted by the evident importance of the pear-theft in that book, to examine the significance of the various symbolisms of sinfulness which Augustine there uses to prepare his reader for the recount of the theft itself.

In view of the fact that Augustine's conversion occurs in a garden, it is significant that his original fall from grace associated with the pear-tree occurs in a setting of rustic wilderness. Thus, near the opening of the second book, when about to describe the wickedness of his youth, he

⁵ *Summa Theologiae* 3.46.4 (my translation).

⁶ *Conf.* 8.12.28. English citations are from the Pilkington translation. Italics are added in this and other citations.

⁷ Vinzenz Buchheit, 'Augustinus unter dem Feigenbaum, (zu *Conf.* VIII),' *Vigiliae Christianae* 22 (1968) 257-271.

uses the metaphor of running wild after the manner of neglected cultivation returning once more to the overgrown condition of wild woods. Thus does he describe how he ran wild in his illicit amours: "*silvescere ausus sum variis et umbrosis amoribus.*"⁸

That this is no chance use of the word "*silvescere*" is bountifully evident from other details in the text. First of all, it might be observed somewhat wryly that the woods which he implies with the use of "*silvescere*" seem to cast their shades throughout the text, as is evidenced from the repeated use of words denoting shade and shadows.⁹ Secondly, two examples demonstrate quite specifically just what type of silvan setting Augustine had in mind. Thus, Augustine refers to God's being able to restrain the thorns which are excluded from Paradise: "*potens imponere lenem manum ad temperamentum spinarum a paradiso tuo secluserum.*"¹⁰ Again, in another place of the second book he bemoans the fact that there was no hand ready to tear out the briars of lust which were growing over his head: "*excesserunt caput meum vepres libidinum; et nulla erat eradicans manus.*"¹¹ Both passages not only evidence a purposed consistency with the use of "*silvescere*" but also give a very definite picture of cultivated land which has returned to wilderness by the encroachment of thorns and briars.

Turning to the Bible, Augustine's sacred treasury of inspiration, it is instructive to remark upon the occurrence of the terms "*spinae*" and "*vepres*" in the vulgate text. The former is found no less than forty times, while the latter occurs nine times, often in combination with "*spinae*". Upon examining all of these cases, some nine references are found to be in the precise context required by Augustine's use of "*silvescere*"; namely the returning of cultivated land to wilderness by the encroachment of thorns and briars.¹² Of these, six are found to be in the book of Isaiah. Interestingly enough too, five of these refer to thorns and briars together, which conjunction does not occur with the other four references in the context required by "*silvescere*". A further point of interest is that the book of Isaiah is traditionally divided into two parts and that all references to thorns and briars are to be found in the first part.¹³ Of it Saint

⁸ *Conf.* 2.1.1. All Latin citations, both for the *Confessions* and for the other works of Augustine, are from the Gaume edition of the *Opera Omnia* (Paris 1837-8).

⁹ Thus, "*umbra*" or its variants occurs at least five times in the course of the second book: 1.1, 6.12, 6.13, 6.14 and 7.16.

¹⁰ *Conf.* 2.2.3.

¹¹ *Conf.* 2.3.6.

¹² Job 31.40, Proverbs 15.19, 24.31, and Isaiah 34.13 are four such references to thorns only.

¹³ Isaiah 5.6, 7.23, 7.24, 7.25 and 32.13.

Thomas Aquinas remarked that it is a communication on the divine punishment of sinners: "in prima parte [chapters 1 to 39 of Isaiah] ponitur communicatio divinae justitiae ad excidium peccatorum."¹⁴ Yet this is precisely the implication of the second book of Augustine's *Confessions* and which even finds definite expression in such phrases as "nec evasi flagella tua" and "invaluerat super me ira tua et nesciebam."¹⁵

It would seem therefore that these considerations provide suasive circumstantial evidence for almost the precise biblical source of the thorns and briars to which Augustine makes reference. His broodings in the second book of the *Confessions* seem to owe much to the first part of Isaiah. However, when dealing with a genius of the calibre and complexity of Augustine, it would be an oversimplification to rest contented with one explanatory source of some phenomenon. That this avails in the case of the thorns and briars becomes evident on further exploration.

Examining the metaphor implicit in the word "silvescere" reveals that Augustine pictures himself as a cultivated field, which like the garden of Paradise had been under God's care. By sinning he had rejected the care of the divine Gardener and consequently became overrun with thorns and briars. That this is the metaphor which Augustine had in mind is abundantly clear from the text. First, with regard to the garden of Paradise, he refers to God's being able to restrain the thorns of lust, and these are the very thorns which were excluded from the garden of Paradise: "Domine . . . potens imponere lenem manum ad temperamentum spinarum a paradiso tuo secluserum."¹⁶ Secondly, Augustine brings the metaphor quite explicitly to the reader's attention when he refers to God as the Gardener of his heart: "desertus potius a cultura tua, Deus, qui es unus verus et bonus Dominus agri tui cordis mei."¹⁷ Again, it is noteworthy that the metaphor of the nonproductive field is repeated in the very last lines of the second book, when (to use a term made famous in the English by T. S. Eliot) Augustine refers to himself as becoming a wasteland: "et factus sum mihi regio egestatis."¹⁸ Finally, it is significant that Augustine employs the metaphor of just such a neglected field, and uses it in a very personal context, in the fourth book of the *Confessions*:

For Thou hadst commanded, and it was done in me, that the earth should bring forth briars and thorns to me.¹⁹

¹⁴ *In Isai.* 1.2.

¹⁵ *Conf.* 2.2.4. and 2.2.2. respectively.

¹⁶ *Conf.* 2.2.3.

¹⁷ *Conf.* 2.3.5.

¹⁸ *Conf.* 2.10.18.

¹⁹ *Conf.* 4.16.29.

Yet another biblical context which relates thorns and the activity of cultivation is to be found in the parable of the sower who went out to sow.²⁰ Relevant here are those seeds which fell among the thorns. These grew up and choked them: "ceciderunt in spinas; et creverunt spinae, et suffocaverunt ea."²¹ Very reminiscent of this text is that passage of the second book of the *Confessions* wherein Augustine refers to the briars of lust which grew over his head: "excesserunt caput meum vepres libidinum."²² That he had in mind the parable of the sower and the seeds which fell among the thorns is also suggested by another reference earlier in the text, when he writes of himself wandering into more and more sterile seeds (*semina*) of sorrow: "et ego ibam porro longe a te in plura et plura sterilia semina dolorum."²³ On the whole however, the theme of the sower would appear to be complementary to the more dominant metaphor of the barren field overrun with thorns and briars.

Despite the evident presence of the thorns and briars in the second book of the *Confessions*, a still more important parable for Augustine's purposes is that of the prodigal son.²⁴ This, the younger of two sons, asked and obtained his inheritance from the father, whereupon he went abroad and wasted it on harlots and high living. When famine came upon that land he was reduced to feeding swine as a farm-labourer in order to survive.²⁵ It is to be observed also, that Augustine by his wild living is brought so low as to feed the stolen pears to the very swine.²⁶ Moreover, the biblical episode of the swine-feeding is charged with powerful symbolism for Augustine. On at least four different occasions in other works, he interprets it as catering to demons,²⁷ an interpretation encouraged no doubt by Christ's act of banishing some demons into a herd of swine.²⁸ In the light of these facts, there can be little doubt that the throwing of the stolen pears to the swine in the second book of the *Confessions* possesses a similar signification. Such an interpretation would be further recom-

²⁰ Matthew 13.3-20 and Luke 8.5-8, as well as Mark 4.3-9.

²¹ Matthew 13.7.

²² *Conf.* 2.3.6.

²³ *Conf.* 2.2.2.

²⁴ Luke 15.11-32.

²⁵ Luke 15.15.

²⁶ *Conf.* 2.4.9.

²⁷ *Quaestionum evangeliorum* 2.33, *Enarratio in psalmum* 18, 2.3, *Enarratio in psalmum* 95, 5 and *Sermo de tempore barbarico* 8. For other interpretations of the prodigal son's swine-feeding, see Bernhard Blumenkranz's "Siliquae Porcorum (cf. Luc, XV, 16); L'exégèse médiévale et les sciences profanes," pp. 11-17 in *Mélanges d'histoire du moyen âge dédiés à la mémoire de Louis Halphen*, Paris, 1951.

²⁸ Matthew 8.28-32, Mark 5.1-17 and Luke 8.26-37.

mended by the uncovering of more evidence for Augustine's use of the metaphor of the prodigal son in the context of his pear-theft.

Such evidence is not hard to obtain. Perhaps most strongly reminiscent of the parable of the prodigal son is the passage in which Augustine bemoans the length of his exile from the delights of God's house: "*quam longe exsulabam a deliciis domus tuae.*"²⁹ The adverb "*longe*" here has some interesting implications. For one thing, it reminds one of a description elsewhere in Augustine's works where his account of the prodigal son is reminiscent not only of the second book, but of the *Confessions* as a whole:

The younger son set out for a distant land (in *regionem longinquam*) to squander his inheritance. In that he deserted his father due to an inordinate desire to enjoy a created good, likewise is the Creator abandoned.³⁰

For another thing, the second book is remarkable for its repeated use of phrases with "*longe*" or its equivalent. "*Ego ibam porro longe a te*" and "*cum irem abs te longius*" are but two examples of at least half a dozen such expressions.³¹ Not only is this reminiscent of the parable of the prodigal son, but its signification in the same context is made clear when Augustine explains that the distant land symbolizes forgetfulness of God: "*Regio itaque longinqua oblivio Dei est.*"³² This too is its meaning in the context of the second book of the *Confessions*, where the phrases with "*longe*" or its variations are seen to signify the same disregard of God: "*perverse te imitantur omnes qui longe se a te faciunt.*"³³

The second book of the *Confessions* also contains uses of the term "*viae*", as in "*vias distortas in quibus ambulant,*" and "*vias meas nequissimas.*"³⁴ While these may be vaguely suggestive of the wanderings of the prodigal son, it could be objected that such an interpretation is scarcely justified. It is to be observed however that Augustine makes just that association himself when commenting on the following lines of psalm 138:

Intellexisti cogitationes meas de longe; *semitam* meam et funiculum meum investigasti;
et *omnes vias meas* praevidisti, quia non est sermo
in lingua mea.³⁵

²⁹ *Conf.* 2.2.4.

³⁰ *Quaestionum evangeliorum* 2.33 (my translation).

³¹ In book two, such references are: 2.2 (twice), 2.3, 2.4, 3.7 and 6.14. Italics in the citation are added.

³² *Quaestionum evangeliorum* 2.33. Italics are added.

³³ *Conf.* 2.6.14. Italics are added.

³⁴ *Conf.* 2.3.6. and 2.1.1. respectively. Italics are added.

³⁵ *Psalms* 138.2-4.

The psalmist is praising God who knows even from afar, his thoughts, his pathways and his travels and even the very words that he is about to speak. In commenting upon the psalm Augustine himself uses the parable of the prodigal son, in which the father signifies God. Though the wayward son had removed himself to a foreign land, nevertheless the father's thoughts and influences were still upon him, signifying as it were, God's omniscience and omnipotence. Likewise in the second book of the *Confessions*—even though we may be far from God, nevertheless God is never far from us: "non enim longe est a nobis omnipotentia tua, etiam cum longe sumus a te."³⁶ Even in the midst of Augustine's wildest fornications, God remained silent: "et jactabar, et effundebam, et diffuebam, et ebulliebam per fornicationes meas, et tacebas."³⁷ Yet God was ever present to him and mercifully angry: "nam tu semper aderas misericorditer saeviens."³⁸

An interesting detail offers strong evidence of just how closely Augustine patterned such expressions upon the lesson of the prodigal son. Using this parable to explain the lines of psalm 138 previously cited, Augustine recounts how the son went far away, as if to conceal his evil deeds from the punishing eyes (*ab oculis vindicantis*) of the father. Even so, the father was able, through the son's privations, to scourge him from afar, that he might come back closer to him: "pater vellet flagellare longinquum ut reciperet propinquum."³⁹ Interestingly enough, one finds precisely the same conjunction in the second book of the *Confessions*—attempted escape from God's supervision, yet failure to escape God's scourging: "relicto te; et excessi omnia legitima tua, nec evasi flagella tua."⁴⁰ It is to be observed also that both cited passages are similar even to the repetition of "flagellare" and "flagella."

Having explained the lines of the psalm by the aid of the parable of the prodigal son, Augustine goes on to elucidate the meanings of "my path" (*semitam meam*) and "all my ways" (*omnes vias meas*). Again with the same parable very much in the background, the same idea of God's omniscience and omnipotence is emphasized. Finally, contrasting the ways of God and the ways of man, Augustine observes to God: "thou hast permitted me to follow my ways (*vias meas*) in suffering, so that if I did not wish to suffer I might return to Thy ways (*vias tuas*)."⁴¹ In the

³⁶ *Conf.* 2.2.3.

³⁷ *Conf.* 2.2.2.

³⁸ *Conf.* 2.2.4.

³⁹ *Enarratio in psalmum* (hereinafter *Enarr.*) 138 5.

⁴⁰ *Conf.* 2.2.4.

⁴¹ *Enarr.* 138 6.

light of these discoveries, it would hardly be an arbitrary connection to impute the "viae" of the second book to the theme of the prodigal son.

Considerations so far have established the importance of this parable to that same book of the *Confessions*, which is also the setting for the famous pear-theft. Yet further investigations reveal the central importance of the parable of the prodigal son, not merely for the second book of the *Confessions*, but for the work as a whole. In particular the theme recurs in the first four books where Augustine is fleeing from the grace of God: "Ecce est ille servus fugiens Dominum suum, et consecutus umbram."⁴²

As early as the first book, Augustine makes quite explicit the comparison of himself to the prodigal son:

For I was far from Thy face, through my darkened affections. For it is not by our feet, not by change of place, that we either turn from Thee or return to Thee. Or, indeed, did that younger son look out for horses, or chariots, or ships, or fly away with visible wings, or journey by the motion of his limbs, that he might, in a far country, prodigally waste all that Thou gavest him when he set out?⁴³

The symbol of the prodigal son finds expression twice in the course of the third book. The first occasion is the memorable discovery of the *Hortensius* of Cicero, a book which awakens in the young Augustine a strong, but vague yearning for the pursuit of "philosophy."⁴⁴ This event he marks as the first stirrings of grace and the beginning of a return to God:

With an incredible warmth of heart, I yearned for an immortality of wisdom and began now to arise that I might return to Thee.⁴⁵

However, the stirrings of grace are short-lived as there follows a period of about nine years when Augustine falls under the influence of the errors of the Manichaeans. Again he uses the metaphor of the prodigal son to picture his condition:

Where, then, wert Thou then to me, and how far from me? Far, indeed, was I wandering away from Thee, being even shut out from the very husks of the swine, whom with husks I fed.⁴⁶

⁴² *Conf.* 2.6.14.

⁴³ *Conf.* 1.18.28.

⁴⁴ *Conf.* 3.4.7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Conf.* 3.6.11.

Even in the magnitude of his mind and the vigour of his intellect he was unable to escape from the omniscient and omnipotent God. Thus, even though he understood with ease the difficult categories of Aristotle, it profited him nothing:

So, then, it served not to my use, but rather to my destruction, since I went about to get so good a portion of my substance into my own power; and I kept not my strength for Thee, but went away from Thee into a far country, to waste it upon harlotries.⁴⁷

It is noteworthy that these first four books of the *Confessions* wherein Augustine is fleeing from God, bear a great affinity to the mood of Francis Thompson's memorable masterpiece, *The Hound of Heaven*; a similarity which is apparent even in the opening lines:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running Laughter.
Up vistaed hopes, I sped;
And shot, precipitated
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.

Only in the fifth book of the *Confessions*, with Augustine's arrival in Milan and the impact of meeting the holy Ambrose, does Augustine's flight begin to fail him. Thereafter he comes increasingly under the influence of grace, a development which climaxes in his conversion as described in the eighth book. Along with this development in sanctity, the metaphor of the prodigal son becomes increasingly inconspicuous.

So much then for the importance of the symbol of the prodigal son in the *Confessions*, a symbolism whose focus would be located in the second book of that work. The most obvious questions raised to date concern the relation of this symbolism to that of the sower, and more fundamentally to the symbol of the briar-ridden field.

At first sight, it would seem incongruous to combine the parable of the sower and the seed which fell among briars, with the parable of the prodigal son. The two would seem rather to be mutually exclusive. The former concerns a stationary field, the latter deals with the wanderings of

⁴⁷ *Conf.* 4.16.30.

a wayward son. Yet Augustine has brought both of them together in the second book of his *Confessions*.

Looking beyond first impressions, there are found to be some interesting correspondences between the two parables. As has been remarked, the final words of the second book concern Augustine's reduction to spiritual impoverishment: "et factus sum mihi regio egestatis."⁴⁸ It has already been observed that this is aptly said of the briar-patch—it is indeed a "regio egestatis." Yet the notion of "egestas" applies with equal justification to the final condition of the prodigal son, when he is reduced to feeding swine. There is ample evidence that Augustine too is conscious of this apt application. Indeed, on more than one occasion he points up the importance of "egestas" in the humiliation of the prodigal son. Need (*egestas*) is the last of the adversities which finally turns his thoughts to returning to his father: "post laborem, et trituram, et tribulationem et *egestatem*, venit in mente pater, et voluit redire."⁴⁹ Again, in the same place, Augustine points out how the son was worn out by his need: "in illa *egestate* contereretur."⁵⁰ In yet another recount of the parable, Augustine again points out the important rôle of "egestas": "[filius minor] agnoscit gloriam Dei, sed *egestate* constrictus."⁵¹

Again, the two parables would seem to be connected by means of an inner implication. The father in the parable of the prodigal son had also an older son who did not wander abroad and squander his inheritance, but remained at home tilling the fields for his father. Augustine well appreciated the symbolism which this implied. This son signified those holy people who remain within the Law fulfilling its precepts: "major non longie ierat, sed in agro operabatur et significat sanctos in Lege facientes opera et praeceptas Legis."⁵² The interesting implication here is that if the elder son had not remained at home tilling the fields, then they would have become overrun with thorns and briars. Seeds sown on such land would fall among briars, as described in the other parable used in the second book of the *Confessions*.

Yet another reason for the conjunction of the two parables in the text would be that they applied to different phases of Augustine's life. That this is so in the case of the prodigal son is quite patent from previous considerations on the importance of this theme in the *Confessions*. But it is a question here of more than a general application to the events of

⁴⁸ *Conf.* 2.10.18.

⁴⁹ *Enarr.* 138 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Enarr.* 18 2.3.

⁵² *Enarr.* 138 5.

Augustine's life. In his use of the parable of the prodigal son, evidence indicates that Augustine is thinking primarily of his own flight abroad in search of fame at Carthage, Rome and Milan. Thus, in describing the prodigal son, he remarks on how he wasted his inheritance on harlots and high living: "dissipavit eam (suam substantiam) vivens prodige cum meretricibus."⁵³ In the case of Augustine, the pages of his *Confessions* testify how he entered into a unholy love upon migrating to Carthage: "Amare et amari dulce mihi erat, magis si et amantis corpore fruerer."⁵⁴ The parable of the prodigal son therefore applies to him in a very personal manner; a fact which he acknowledges when he describes himself as not keeping his strength for God's service, but rather setting out for a far distant country where he wasted his resources on harlotries: "et fortitudinem meam non ad te custodiebam; sed profectus sum abs te in longinquam regionem ut eam dissiparem in meretrices cupiditates."⁵⁵

Further evidence for connecting the prodigal son symbol with Augustine's wanderings abroad in search of fame is to be found in the second book itself of the *Confessions*. Thus, at the beginning of the third chapter he raises the topic of his impending departure for distant Carthage to further his studies for fame and fortune. Again, here as in the cases previously noted in regard to his spiritual journey, the adverb "longe" with its variations again crops up—he was being prepared for a longer trip to Carthage: "*longinquioris* apud Carthaginem peregrinationis sumptus praeparabantur,"⁵⁶ and further along in the text, where he writes of his father overspending to send his son away to study: "quod ultra vires rei familiaris suae impenderet filio quidquid etiam *longe* peregrinanti studiorum causa opus esset."⁵⁷ Finally, in the midst of the description of his impending departure for Carthage, Augustine questions the value of mentioning the venture: "et ut quid hoc? Ut videlicet ego et quisquis haec legit, cogitemus de quam profundo clamandum sit ad te. Et quid propius auribus tuis, si cor confitens et vita ex fide est."⁵⁸ One is reminded yet again of the prodigal son.

If it be conceded therefore that this parable applies primarily to Augustine's wanderings abroad in search of fame and fortune, then the parable of the seeds fallen among the briars would seem to apply most fittingly to his earlier life in Thagaste. Both here and in the metaphor which he uses of the briar-ridden field, it is question of a rural setting in which he would

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Conf.* 3.1.1.

⁵⁵ *Conf.* 4.16.30.

⁵⁶ *Conf.* 2.3.5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

have lived in the small town of Thagaste; and also the parable is concerned with a stationary field, in opposition to the wandering subject of the parable of the prodigal son. Furthermore, as Augustine himself says in the third chapter of the second book, due to lack of funds for furthering his education, he was forced to spend his sixteenth year idling around the home at Thagaste. Moreover, as he expressly recounts, it was at this very age that his father observing him one day at the baths, realized that he was changing into a man. Both his age and the idle circumstances were therefore highly conducive to the youthful licentiousness so often mentioned in the course of the second book:

But while in that sixteenth year of my age, I resided with my parents, having holiday from school for a time (this idleness being imposed upon me by my parents' necessitous circumstances), the thorns of lust grew rank over my head, and there was no hand to pluck them out.⁵⁹

Such therefore was the effect of his year of idleness at home. Its impact upon his moral life is vividly suggested in the most aptly chosen word "silvescere." Moreover, the abandon implied in this metaphor becomes evident in the course of the second book when Augustine reproaches his parents for being totally devoted to his professional development, but relatively unconcerned about his moral growth.⁶⁰ The previous considerations would therefore strongly suggest that Augustine's metaphors of the briar-ridden field and the seeds sown among thorns would both apply principally to his earlier life at Thagaste, particularly during the idleness of his sixteenth year, when he says, the thorns of lust grew over his head.

In conclusion therefore, certain evident symbols of sinfulness which Augustine uses in the second book of the *Confessions* have been shown to be biblical in origin. These symbols have been traced to two principal sources- first, to the barren, briar-ridden field in the parable of the sower; secondly, to the parable of the prodigal son. Augustine's recount of his youthful sinfulness has been shown to be permeated with imagery from both parables, implying just how personally applicable he considered them. This congruity has been substantiated by reference to the relevant details of Augustine's life, as recorded in the *Confessions*.

Leo C. Ferrari
St. Thomas University
University of New Brunswick
Fredericton, New Brunswick
Canada

⁵⁹ *Conf.* 2.3.6.

⁶⁰ Thus: "those about me meanwhile took no care to save me from ruin by marriage, their sole care being that I should learn to make a powerful speech, and become a persuasive orator." (*Conf.* 2.2.4).