Augustine’s Progress in Interpreting Genesis 1-3
From *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* To *De Genesi ad litteram*
II. Problem

A. Introduction

Augustine had a special interest in the subject of creation. He wrote five commentaries on the opening chapters (1-3) of Genesis over a period of three decades. At first, in 388/389, after his returning to Africa and before his ordination to the priesthood, he composed De Genesi contra Manichaeos, in which he interpreted the creation stories mainly in spiritual and allegorical sense against the Manichees’ ultra literal interpretation. Secondly, between 393-395, he tried to offer a literal interpretation of Genensis 1-3 in De Genesi ad litteram liber unus imperfectus. But, he gave up this literal interpretation “under the weight of so heavy a load” before he finished one book.¹ Thirdly, he presented a figurative interpretation in the last three Books (XI-XIII) of Confessiones (397-401). Fourthly, between 401-416, he wrote De Genesi ad litteram, in which he interpreted the creation stories, “not according to the allegorical significance, but according to historical events proper.”² Finally, he turned again to the opening chapters of Genesis in Book XI of De civitate Dei written around 416/7.³

It is not hard to find out how rich these commentaries are in various doctrines such as theology, anthropology, cosmology and history. Also, these commentaries are important sources for the study of Augustine’s hermeneutic and exegesis, not only because each commentary has its own exegetical features, but also, more importantly, because these commentaries show how significantly Augustine progressed in his exegetical theory and practice.

¹ Augustine, Retractationes I.18, Translation from Mary Inez Bogan in The Fathers of the Church (hereafter, FC) 60.
² Augustine, Retractationes II.50. FC 60, 168-9.
This dissertation examines Augustine’s progress in interpreting the opening chapters of Genesis. More exactly, the dissertation investigates and compares Augustine’s two commentaries: De Genesi contra Manichaeos, his first scriptural exegesis, and De Genesi ad litteram, the final and monumental version in his exploration of the opening chapters of Genesis. The point of this dissertation is to show how his exegesis progressed in these two commentaries in relation to his understanding of literal and figurative interpretation and his concept of history and scripture.

B. Augustine’s own View of his Progress

At the end of the prologue in Retractationes Augustine writes,

Let those, therefore, who are going to read this book not imitate me when I err, but rather when I progress toward the better. For, perhaps, one who reads my works in the order in which they were written will find out how I progressed while writing.\(^4\)

As Augustine himself proclaims, he progressed and developed from his earlier works to his later works in various ways and levels. His exegetical theory and practice are not an exception.

Roland Teske emphasizes the importance of the earlier commentaries, De Genesi contra Manichaeos and De Genesi ad litteram liber unus, as an indicator of Augustine’s progress.\(^5\) In fact, after re-examining it for revision, Augustine decided to keep De Genesi ad litteram liber unus as evidence of his first attempts to explain and search into the divine Scriptures.\(^6\)

Augustine’s own testimony of his progress in interpreting the opening chapters of Genesis is found in De Genesi ad litteram. He writes,

Now at that time it had not yet dawned on me how everything in them could be taken in its proper literal sense; it seemed to me rather that this was scarcely possible, if at all, and anyhow extremely difficult. So in order not to be held back, I explained with what brevity

\(^4\) Augustine, Retractationes, Prologue, 3.
\(^6\) Augustine, Retractationes, I.18.
and clarity I could muster what those things, for which I was not able to find a suitable literal meaning, stood for in a figurative sense. Bearing in mind, however, what I really wanted but could not manage, that everything should first of all be understood in its proper, not its figurative sense, . . .

After recalling what he wrote at the beginning of the second book of De Genesi contra Manichaeos, he continues,

Now, however, it has pleased the Lord that after taking a more thorough and considered look at these matters, I should reckon (and not, I think, idly) that I am able to demonstrate how all these things were written straightforwardly in the proper, not the allegorical mode.

Interpreting the account of Paradise in De Genesi ad litteram, Augustine apologizes and evaluates his former exegesis in De Genesi contra Manichaeos. Here, Augustine admits that he could not offer a literal interpretation though he wanted to in De Genesi contra Manichaeos. But, now he thinks that he is equipped with the ability to interpret the text in a proper and literal sense. He himself views the ability to interpret the creation stories literally as progress.

It is clear that Augustine shows a certain progress in his exegeses of Genesis 1-3. Then what is this progress like? The progress is not simply from the allegorical interpretation in De Genesi contra Manichaeos to the literal and proper interpretation in De Genesi ad litteram. This progress cannot be simply explained or classified, since it is closely related with his other concepts of literal/figurative interpretation, history, and scripture, which are also changed or developed during the period of his writing career.

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7 Augustine, De Genesi ad Litteram, VIII.2.5. Translation from Edmund Hill in WSA.
8 Augustine, De Genesi ad Litteram, VIII.2.5
C. Augustine’s Understanding of Literal/Figurative Interpretation

Augustine’s use of the key terms for hermeneutic and exegesis such as “ad litteram,” “historia,” “similitudo,” “allegoria,” and “figura” is erratic and inconsistent, which causes some difficulty in studying his exegesis. Augustine does not offer a consistent definition of literal and figurative interpretation. Also his view on distinction and relationship between literal and figurative interpretation changes from his earlier to later commentaries.

In *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, Augustine does not give a clear explanation of what he does mean by literal interpretation. He seems to have a very strict definition of literal interpretation. He considers literal interpretation as “tak[ing] everything that is said here absolutely literally.” His understanding of figurative interpretation is quite comprehensive. At first, he seems to regard figurative interpretation as almost synonymous with spiritual interpretation. To interpret the image of God as referring to the internal man where reason and intelligence are found is a spiritual or figurative interpretation, since “in the Catholic school of doctrine the faithful who have a spiritual understanding do not believe that God is circumscribed in a bodily shape.” That is, figurative interpretation includes dealing with spiritual or incorporeal things beyond what the letter sounds like. Figurative interpretation also means to interpret a text as prefiguring something to come. For example, to interpret the seven days of creation as prefiguring the seven ages of human history is a figurative interpretation. Augustine writes,

If, however, no other way is available of reaching an understanding of what is written that is religious and worthy of God, except by supposing that it has all been set before us

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11 Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, II.2.3.
12 For example, *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos*, I.17.28; I.19.30.
13 Augustine, *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos*, I.17.28.
in a figurative sense and in riddles, we have the authority of the apostles for doing this, seeing that they solved so many riddles in the books of the Old Testament in this manner.\textsuperscript{15}

Here Augustine suggests applying figurative interpretation for those passages which cannot be interpreted literally in accordance with the rule of faith.\textsuperscript{16} After suggesting this criterion for figurative interpretation, he interprets the greenery of the field and the fodder in Gen. 2:5 as the invisible creature like the soul, and the spring coming up from the earth in Gen. 2:6 as the flood of truth drenching the soul before sin.\textsuperscript{17}

In *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus*, Augustine writes,

> So about these words, *In the beginning God made heaven and earth*, one may inquire whether they are only to taken in an historical sense, or whether they also have some figurative meaning, and how they agree with the gospel, and what the cause is of this book’s beginning in this way. As regards the historical sense, we ask what in the beginning means; that is, whether it is in the beginning of time, or in the beginning, in the very Wisdom of God, because the Son of God actually called himself the beginning. . .\textsuperscript{18}

At first, this passage shows a change in the relationship between literal and figurative interpretation. The question is whether a text can be interpreted only in a literal sense or in both a literal and figurative sense, rather than whether a text should be interpreted in a literal or figurative sense. It is also clear that Augustine’s notion of literal (or historical) sense is different from that in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, that is, a superficial and verbal understanding of the letter. The meaning of literal interpretation is so broadened that it includes “the metaphysical content of what the Bible is saying.”\textsuperscript{19} In this work, interpreting the image of God, Augustine simply writes, “we are quite right, therefore, to take the words, *let us make man to our image and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Augustine, *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos*, II.2.3.
\item \textsuperscript{16} For Augustine’s criteria for figurative interpretation in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* and *De doctrina Christiana*, see Roland Teske, “Criteria for Figurative Interpretation in St. Augustine,” in *De doctrina christiana: A Classic of Western Culture*, ed. Duane Arnold and Pamela Bright (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 109-122
\item \textsuperscript{17} Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, II.3.4-6.7.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus*, 3.6.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Hill, “Introduction,” 109.
\end{itemize}
likeness, that is, as referring to the mind.” He regards this interpretation as literal, not as spiritual or figurative as in De Genesi contra Manichaeos.

In De Genesi ad litteram, Augustine presents a different view on literal and figurative interpretation. He writes,

So if we take it like this, the making of evening would seem to signify the sin of rational creatures, while the making of morning would mean their restoration. But this is an interpretation on the lines of prophetic allegory, which is not what we have undertaken in this work. We undertook, you see, to talk here about the scriptures according to their proper meaning of what actually happened, not according to their riddling, enigmatic reference to future events.

Here the distinction between literal and figurative interpretation is clearly expressed in terms of history and prophecy. According to Augustine, Genesis is a historical book like 1 and 2 Kings.

Thus to interpret the opening chapters of Genesis in a literal sense is to take the text as history, that is, what actually happened. Stressing the historicity of the account of paradise, he continues,

So then they should pay very close attention to where this assumption of theirs is leading them, and try hard with us to take all these primordial events of the narrative as actually having happened in the way described. Is there anyone, after all, who would not support them as they turned their minds next to working out what lessons these things have for us in their figurative meaning, whether about spiritual natures and experiences or even about events to come in the future?

In this passage, Augustine contends that the literal meaning should be sought first and then the figurative meaning may be drawn. In a similar way, he writes, “What first has to be demonstrated about all the things that are written here is that they actually happened and were actually done, and only after that, if need be, should any lessons be drawn about their further

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20 Augustine, De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus, 16.60.
21 Augustine, De Genesi ad litteram, I.17.33-34.
22 Augustine, De Genesi ad litteram, VIII.1.2.
23 Augustine, De Genesi ad litteram, VIII.1.4.
significance.” What he emphasizes is the order of interpretation, that is, literal interpretation first and then figurative interpretation. In these passages, Augustine means by figurative meanings lessons about spiritual nature or events to come in future.

However, Augustine’s literal interpretation in *De Genesi ad litteram* is not limited in understanding of literal interpretation in terms of history. Interpreting the phrase “who founded the earth on water” of Psalm 136:6 in relation with Gen. 1:6-8, Augustine writes,

> One acceptable way of taking that verse of the psalm is to treat it as said figuratively; so since by the names of “heaven” and “earth” it is often the spiritual and the fleshly-minded members of the Church respectively that are signified, . . . Or else, if someone obliges you to take the verse literally, it can be applied not unreasonably to the height of the earth, whether on continents or islands, which soar up above the waters, or to the roofs of those caves which overhang the waters with rock-like solidity. Accordingly, nobody may understand the literal sense of the words, “who founded the earth on the water” in such a way as to conclude that the weight of the waters was placed under the weight of the earth to support it as if that were natural order of things.

In this passage, Augustine gives both figurative and literal interpretation of the verse. But the order of interpretation is opposite. He gives figurative interpretation first, partly because Psalm is not a historical record. He consults with common sense or reason for its literal meaning. In another place, he regards literal interpretation as something “obvious to anyone of sense.”

The passages quoted here are just a few examples to show how comprehensive Augustine’s notion of literal and figurative interpretation. Though it is not easy to generalize the change in Augustine’s notion of literal and figurative interpretation, it is certain that there is a change or progress in his understanding. And a research for this change or progress may offer a clue to understand Augustine’s progress in interpreting the opening chapters of Genesis.

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24 Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, IV.10.20.
25 For the meaning of literal interpretation in *De Genesi ad litteram*, see Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Ad litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the “Plain Sense” of Genesis 1-3* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 32-48.
26 Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, II.1.4.
27 Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, II.9.22.
D. Augustine’s Notion of History in relation with Exegesis

As seen above, Augustine explains literal interpretation in terms of history in *De Genesis ad litteram*. However, *De Genesi ad litteram* is not the first work that Augustine relates history with his exegetical method. In fact, as early as *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* Augustine distinguishes history from prophecy, though ambiguous. He writes, “So then, this whole text must first be discussed in terms of history, and then in terms of prophecy.”28 However, he does not discuss the text in terms of history in this commentary. After stating his plan to interpret figuratively the text whenever he cannot interpret literally in accordance with the rule of faith, he adds, “let us in fact unravel all these figurative statements in accordance with Catholic faith, whether they are statements of history or of prophecy.”29 At this point, for Augustine, not only prophecy but also history can be figurative statements. In this commentary Augustine gives an ambiguous definition of history as deeds and events which are being related.

In a similar way, in *De utilitate credendi*, which was written in 391/392, Augustine writes,

> The whole Old Testament Scripture, to those who diligently desire to know it, is handed down with a four-fold sense—historical, aetiological, analogical, allegorical. . . In Scripture, according to the historical sense, we are told what has been written or done. Sometimes the historical fact is simply that such and such a thing was written.30

In this passage, Augustine explains historical facts in relation with the historical sense as one of the four senses of Scripture. His explanation of the historical sense or fact is still ambiguous. History includes what has been written as well as what has been done. That is, historicity does not matter in defining history.

28 Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, II.2.3.
29 Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, II.2.3.
In *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine presents a different notion of history from his earlier ambiguous ones. He defines history as “the account of events that actually happened.” What Augustine stresses again and again throughout this commentary is the historicity of the Genesis story. He distinguishes what is written from what is actually done, that is, a parable from a historical record, both of which belonged to history in the earlier works. He writes,

> He [Christ] himself is the sheep which is sacrificed at the Passover; and yet that represented him not just by the telling, but also by actually happening. It is not, after all, the case that sheep was not a sheep; clearly it was a sheep, and it was killed and eaten; and yet by that very fact something else was also being signified. It was not like that fatted calf, which was killed to make a feast on the younger son’s return; here the whole story is figurative, not a story of things actually done with a figurative significance.

Augustine’s notion of history is closely related with his exegetical method, especially with literal interpretation. In Book II of *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, Augustine, contrary to his original plan, skips discussing the Paradise story as history. He might interpret this story only figuratively because he could not interpret the story literally, which is, in fact, what he admits in *De Genesi ad litteram* and *Retractationes*. In addition, his ambiguous notion of history allows him to deal with the text only figuratively since history includes even what was just written as if it were done. At this point, Augustine’s notion of history does *not necessarily* require literal interpretation.

However, in *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine classifies Genesis as a historical book which tells of things that actually happened. And this new notion of history *does* require literal interpretation first before dealing with figurative meaning. Augustine’s change in the notion of

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31 Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, VIII.1.2.
33 Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, VIII.4.8.
34 Teske, “Introduction,” 27.
history can offer a solution to understand some aspects of his progress in interpreting the creation stories, since his notion of history is interwoven with his literal interpretation.

E. Augustine’s View of Scripture

Right after his ordination to the priesthood in 391, Augustine makes a formal request for time to study the Scriptures in his letter to Valerius, the Bishop of Milan. He writes,

If He did this, not as a punishment, but out of mercy—which I earnestly hope, now I know my weakness—then I ought to study all His remedies in the Scriptures, and by praying and reading, so to act that strength sufficient for such perilous duties may be granted to my soul. I did not do this before, because I did not have time, but, as soon as I was ordained, I planned to use all my leisure time in studying the Sacred Scriptures, and I tried to arrange to have leisure for this duty.\(^{35}\)

In this letter, Augustine confesses that he had no time to study the Scriptures before his ordination, and that now after ordination he feels the necessity to study the Scriptures. However, it does not mean that Augustine was not familiar with the Scriptures at that time. Even before his returning to Africa, Augustine learned how to read the Scriptures, how to interpret the Old Testament spiritually and in relation with the New. Thus it is not surprising that he composed \textit{De Genesi contra Manichaeos} shortly after his settling in Africa.\(^{36}\)

What Augustine wanted to gain might be a deeper and comprehensive understanding of the Scriptures.\(^{37}\) As a result of his intensive study of the Scriptures during the period of his priesthood (391-396), Augustine wrote massive works on the biblical texts: commentaries on Psalms, Genesis, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Pauline Epistles. Also his study of the

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\(^{35}\) Augustine, \textit{Epistulae} XXI. Translation from Wilfrid Parsons, FC 12.

\(^{36}\) For Augustine’s earlier knowledge of the Bible, see Anne-Marie La Bonnardière, “Augustine’s Biblical Initiation,” in \textit{Augustine and the Bible}, ed. and tr. Pamela Bright (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 5-25.

Scriptures during this period might help him to develop his exegetical method. Thus, a study of
development in Augustine’s notion and knowledge of the Scripture can offer a clue to understand
his progress in interpreting the opening chapters of Genesis.

A way to see his development in understanding of the Scriptures is to compare his inter-
textual interpretations in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* and *De Genesi ad litteram*. Comparing
with the former, generally speaking, in the latter Augustine shows the mature ability to
harmonize the creation stories with other canonical texts of both the Old and New Testament and
to interpret ambiguous passages in light of other clearer passages.

One of the distinctive and prominent features in the later commentaries on Genesis 1-3 is
his stress on the truthfulness of the Scriptures. In fact, the truthfulness of all the Scriptures is a
recurring theme throughout his writing career. In *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, Augustine
shows that, against Manichees’ false criticism of the Scriptures, the seeming problems in the
creation stories are actually problems of faulty interpretation, that is, Manichees’ ultra literal
interpretation. At the beginning of this commentary, he writes,

> There is no part of scripture, I mean to say, which it is not the easiest thing in the world to
find fault with, to the dismay of those who do not understand it. But that is precisely why
divine providence permits so many heretics to come along with various errors; it’s so that
when they taunt us and shower us with questions we do not know the answers to, we may
at least in this way be shaken out of our mental sloth and start longing to become
acquainted with the divine scriptures. . . If they are people of sound faith, they do not
give in to the heretics, but earnestly start inquiring what answer they can make to them.
God, of course, does not abandon them; and so when they ask they receive, and when
they seek they find, and when they knock the door is opened to them.

In this commentary, Augustine tries to show how the texts with which Manichees find fault can
be interpreted as teaching the truth spiritually and figuratively.

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38 This dissertation defines inter-textual interpretation as interpreting one biblical verse with the help of other verses.
39 Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, I.1.2.
In *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine’s notion of the truthfulness of the Scriptures is expressed in a different way. In this commentary, Augustine interprets every word and every phrase as meaningful and significant. In several places, he seeks meticulously for the meaning of a slight difference in the order of words, a repetition, or an omission. It is partly due to his understanding of the Scripture. Augustine believes that the Scriptures contain no superfluous or extraneous details. Every word in the Scriptures should be interpreted as an inspired word with its meaning. This notion of the Scriptures combined together with his concept of history leads him to interpret the creation stories in a historical-literal sense in *De Genesi ad litteram*.

F. Conclusion

As seen above, it is certain that Augustine makes a significant progress in his interpretations of the opening chapters of Genesis. This progress, however, defies a simple generalization like one from allegorical to literal interpretation, since his progress is closely related with other parameters. The other parameters include his notion of key terminologies for exegesis, history, and the Scriptures, which are also changed or progressed during the period of his composing these commentaries. *This dissertation aims to show how Augustine’s exegesis of Genesis 1-3 progressed from De Genesi contra Manichaeos to De Genesi ad litteram in relation to his understanding and usage of key exegetical terms like “ad litteram” and “figura,” and his notion of history and the Scriptures. In doing so, this dissertation suggests that changes in Augustine’s notion of history and historicity of Scriptures led the change in his exegesis of the creation stories. Augustine’s new understanding of history as a record of*

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40 Also according to Marrou, it is partly due to his education in rhetoric, which taught him to study a text word by word rather than sentence by sentence. See Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1938), 480.
things that actually happened helped him to make progress in interpreting Genesis 1-3
more literally as the beginning of human history.

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IV. Review of Related Literature

A. Introductory Works

Augustine’s hermeneutic and exegesis has drawn attention from many scholars. A great amount of the secondary literature on Augustine’s biblical interpretation focuses upon general principles and theories found in De doctrina Christiana like his theory of sign and figurative interpretation, the rule of faith and love, and his theory of frui and uti. It is true that De doctrina Christiana is Augustine’s prominent work on hermeneutic and exegesis. But, this work is not the only place where Augustine’s exegesis is to be explored. Frederick van Fleteren rightly indicates that Augustine’s axioms of biblical interpretation are scattered throughout his work. Also Van
Fleteren warns, “Without study of Augustine’s hermeneutic and exegetical practice, *De doctrina Christiana* alone could be misleading.” Compared with writings on *De doctrina Christiana*, there are not many works on Augustine’s exegetical practice seen in his commentaries and sermons. Works on his Genesis commentaries are not an exception. In fact, there is no work comparing Augustine’s commentaries on the opening chapters of Genesis in terms of progress.

Introductory notes in English translations of his Genesis commentaries are good sources to begin the research for Augustine’s exegesis on the creation stories. Roland Teske is the first English translator of Augustine’s earlier Genesis commentaries: *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* and *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus*. He provides a helpful introduction to Augustine’s earlier commentaries. In his introduction to the translations, he deals with the audiences, context, and exegetical methods of the two commentaries. His analysis of the contents and structure of the two commentaries is also very helpful. The most valuable contribution of this introduction is Teske’s argument for the significance of the two works. Indicating that fact that these two commentaries have been quite neglected, he lists “two reasons that account for an interest in these early works of Augustine.” One reason has to do with the present biblical studies which is opened toward the exegesis of early church Fathers. The other has to do with the state of Augustinian studies which has shown the change in Augustine’s thought on significant philosophical and theological matters. The latter reason provides a starting point of this dissertation. Teske summarizes the significance of the two works as follows,

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42 One of the best works which need to be mentioned here at first is the introductory notes of P. Agaësse and A. Solignac, in *La genèse au sens littéral en douze livre*. Bibliothèque augustinienne 48 and 49 (Paris: Declée de Brouwer, 1972). Most of works on Augustine’s exegesis of Genesis heavily rely on and quote this writing. These two volumes are still on the way. Probably these volumes will be very useful for this dissertation.


44 Ibid., 37.
Regardless of the solution one might entertain, these two expositions of Genesis reveal the brilliance of Augustine in dealing with one of the crucial texts of Scripture for our understanding of God and man and the abiding value of his approach to the word of God, and at the same time show us the progress he made in his thought.\textsuperscript{45}

Teske does not articulate what progress Augustine made in interpreting the opening chapters of Genesis. But he rightly indicates that Augustine’s understanding of some key terms such as literal interpretation may have changed from his earliest to his later writings.\textsuperscript{46}

Edmund Hill is another translator of Augustine’s Genesis commentaries: \textit{De Genesi contra Manichaeos}, \textit{De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus}, and \textit{De Genesi ad litteram}. In his recently published translations, he also presents valuable introductions and notes on the background of the three commentaries. Like Teske, Hill mentions the importance of Augustine’s earlier works as an indicator of his progress. He writes,

\begin{quote}
Anyone wishing to study the development of Augustine’s theology, cosmology, and conception of history will find in this work many anticipations of his later views. At the same time, the beginning stage represented by \textit{On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees} makes it possible to measure the progress which Augustine made over the years in his exegetical method, theological terminology, and thinking about God, the world, and humanity.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

Though both Teske and Hill present their valuable observations on Augustine’s Genesis commentaries, one may not expect to find a comprehensive discussion of Augustine’s exegetical methods in these introductions. Thus the contribution of Teske and Hill to this dissertation is found in their presentations of general background of the commentaries and more importantly in their suggestions for further research on Augustine’s exegeses of the creation stories in terms of progress.

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\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 39.  
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 17.  
\textsuperscript{47} Edmund Hill, “Introduction,” 35.
B. Works on Augustine’s Exegesis of Genesis 1-3

Though not many, there are still some insightful works dealing with Augustine’s exegesis of Genesis 1-3. One of the most contributive works for this dissertation is Robert Bernard’s dissertation. In his dissertation, “In Figura: Terminology Pertaining to Figurative Exegesis in the Works of Augustine of Hippo,” Bernard analyzes the use of figura in Augustine’s figurative exegesis of the Scriptures. Most relevant to this dissertation is chapter III. In this chapter, after comparing Augustine’s use of the terms for figurative interpretation in De Genesi contra Manichaeos and De Genesi ad litteram, he contends that Augustine replaces allegoria with figura as a central term in non-literal exegesis in his later commentary. According to Bernard, Augustine composed De Genesi ad litteram as a corrective to the earlier and less successful attempts, particularly De Genesi contra Manichaeos, especially in the area of defense of the literal text of Genesis against the Meanichees.

Though there are some aspects on which I cannot agree, Bernard’s dissertation presents a plausible argumentation on the relationship between Augustine’s literal interpretation and concept of history. Bernard claims, “To take Genesis 2-3 figuratively is to take Adam figuratively as well. To do that is to bring confusion into the historicity of the narrative.”

Another work dealing with the relationship between literal interpretation and concept of history is Susan Schreiner’s essay, “Eve, the Mother of History: Reaching for the Reality of History in Augustine’s Later Exegesis of Genesis.” In this essay, Schreiner tries to show that Augustine’s central concern in De Genesi ad litteram is to defend exegetically the opening chapters of Genesis as the beginning of God’s providential historical plan. She contends that Augustine’s concern with the reality of history lies at the heart of De Genesi ad litteram,

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49 Ibid., 131.
explains its exegetical method, ties its diverse subjects together, and determines his interpretation of Adam and Eve. By presenting the reality of history as a central theme, she offers a way of reading De Genesi ad litteram. Her contribution to this dissertation is also found in her view on the causal reasons. Schreiner interprets Augustine’s doctrine of the causal reasons in terms of his exegesis. According to her, the causal reasons mediate exegetically between the two creation stories.

Kathryn Greene-McCreight examines and compares the literal interpretation of Genesis 1-3 of Augustine, Calvin, and Barth, in her book Ad litteram. In the second chapter, she deals with Augustine’s understanding of the literal sense of the Scriptures in De Genesi ad litteram. Though her discussion is not profound, she presents her careful observation on Augustine’s literal interpretation of the creation stories. Especially, her observation on the function of the rules of faith and charity is helpful to understand Augustine’s hermeneutical principles in De doctrina Christiana in his actual exegetical setting.

In her essay, “Heresy, Asceticism, Adam, and Eve: Interpretations of Genesis 1-3 in the Later Latin Fathers,” Elizabeth Clark examines the interpretations of Genesis 1-3 of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine in relation with Jovinian’s attack against their asceticism. Questioning the opinion that the Pelagian controversy was the decisive factor prompting Augustine to develop a more fleshly reading of Adam and Eve, she contends that Augustine developed an earthier and more literal reading of 1-3 in De Genesi ad litteram in refuting Jovinian’s accusation that Catholic asceticism was Manichean. Though her contention is profound and plausible, without mentioning Augustine’s earlier plan or wish for the literal interpretation, she seems to

50 Schreiner, “Eve, the Mother of History,” 136.
51 Kathryn Greene-McCreight, Ad litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the “Plain Sense” of Genesis 1-3 (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).
emphasize too much only on the outer factors of Augustine’s change in his exegesis Gen. 1:28. However, it is certain that she places Augustine’s literal exegesis of the creation stories in its historical and ecclesial setting.

Roland Teske has written not only his translations but also several articles and essays on Augustine’s exegesis of Genesis. Here, two essays among them will be mentioned. First, in his essay, “Spirituals and spiritual interpretation in Augustine,” Teske claims that by the spirituals Augustine meant “those who can conceive of a spiritual substance” and by a spiritual understanding of the Scriptures, an understanding of incorporeal and spiritual reality in the Scriptures. Furthermore he suggests that, for Augustine, the spirituals were men such as Ambrose, Simplicianus, Theodorus and Victorinus who exemplified the man of good intellect and the spiritual man and whose way of thinking God has been reformed by Neoplatonism. In his follow-up essay, “Homo spiritualis in St. Augustine’s De Genesi contra Manichaeos,” Teske examines the identity of the spirituals in comparison with the animal or carnal men seen in De Genesi contra Manichaeos. He presents some more evidences to support his hypothesis about what Augustine meant when he spoke of the spirituals in the Church and the spiritual interpretation of the Scriptures. Teske’s discussion of the spirituals and spiritual interpretation helps to understand Augustine’s figurative or spiritual interpretation in De Genesi contra Manichaeos.


54 Teske, “Spirituals and Spiritual Interpretation in Augustine,” 75.
Another essay of Teske to be mentioned is “Criteria for Figurative Interpretation in St. Augustine.” In this essay, Teske examines Augustine’s criteria for figurative interpretation seen in De Genesi contra Manichaeos and De doctrina Christiana. Augustine’s criterion looks different in these two works. In De Genesi contra Manichaeos, the professed grounds for resorting to figurative interpretation lie in his inability to interpret the text literally in accordance with the rule of faith. But, in De doctrina Christiana, Augustine teaches that any passage of the Scriptures that do not refer to either a matter of faith or of morals is to be interpreted figuratively. Teske explains the seemingly different two criteria as a single criterion with two functions or emphasis for different audiences.

Also, there is some secondary literature which, though not dealing with Augustine’s Genesis commentaries, serves as backgrounds for the study of Augustine’s exegesis of the creation stories. At first, Bertrand de Margerie’s work should be mentioned. In his book, An Introduction to the History of Exegesis III. Saint Augustine, de Margerie explores Augustine’s scriptural interpretation focusing on the commandment of dual charity as the key to exegesis, on a plurality of literal senses of the Scriptures, and on the origin of Augustine’s pneumatology. This book, especially chapter II, is informative for this dissertation. In chapter II, de Margerie tries to answer to the question “Does Augustine’s Moses stand for multiplicity in unity?” His argumentation for “unipluralism” of the literal meaning provides a good background to understand Augustine’s literal interpretation of the creation stories.

In his book, The Word of God According to St. Augustine, Polmann examines Augustine’s view of the Word of God with a Calvinist viewpoint. In his first chapter, he

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indicates the two stages in Augustine’s view of the Word of God, though which cannot be sharply divided. In the earlier, Augustine, under the influence of Neoplatonism, saw Christ mainly as the eternal Word and regards the Scriptures as a starting point. But in the later stage, he stresses the role of Christ as the Saviour and the Scriptures as a sure guide and strong support. Though not without problem, Polmann’s explanation offers an angle to look at the difference between Augustine’s earlier and later commentaries.

The essays on Augustine’s hermeneutics and exegesis found in the book *Augustine and the Bible* contribute to this dissertation by providing good insights for a study of Augustine’s exegesis. This book consists of four parts: Augustine’s biblical initiation, his encounter with the hermeneutics of his native province, that is, Tyconius, his exegesis and polemics against heretics, and his ministry of the Word. Though each essay is not mentioned here, the essays in this book are proved to be helpful in various ways to this dissertation.

C. Works on Augustine’s Doctrine of Creation

Studies of Augustine’s doctrine of creation broaden understanding of his exegesis of the opening chapters of Genesis. There are some good works on his doctrine of creation to be mentioned in this review. The first one is Marie-Anne Vannier’s book, ‘*Creatio,*’ ‘*Conversio,*’ ‘*Formatio* chez S. Augustin.’ In this book, Vannier explores Augustine’s doctrine of creation in relation with his view on conversion and formation. For Augustine, creation is inseparable from the process of freely willed conversion toward the Creator and progressive formation to Him. Vannier examines the factors for Augustine’s reflections on creation, conversion, and formation: his own experience, reflections on the Scriptures, anti-Manichean polemic, Neoplatonism, and

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57 Pamela Bright, tr. and ed. *Augustine and the Bible* (Notre dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).
58 Marie-Anne Vannier, ‘*Creatio,*’ ‘*Conversio,*’ ‘*Formatio* chez S. Augustin’ (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1997).
other fathers including Origen and Basil. Her discussion is mainly from Augustine’s five commentaries on the opening chapters of Genesis, which is her contribution to this dissertation. Her discussion and demonstration is helpful to understand Augustine’s commentaries in a doctrinal context, which is finally closely related with his exegesis.

William Christian, in his article “Augustine on the Creation of the World,” examines Augustine’s doctrine of creation in relation with his view of revelation and Neoplatonism. Dealing with four themes—“in the beginning,” “heaven and earth,” “out of nothing,” and “And behold, it was very good”—Christian demonstrates that the new truth Augustine found in the Scriptures was that God is the Creator of all things in heave and earth. This new truth both fulfilled the promise of Neoplatonism and superceded it. According to Christian, unresolved tensions, unsolved problems, and constant confession of mystery found in Augustine’s dealing with the subject of creation are due to his thought that the creation of the world amounts a searching and persistent exploration. Augustine, contends Christian, kept exploring the subject of creation as a philosopher as well as a Christian.

John O’Meara, in his book, The Creation of Man in St. Augustine’s De Genesi ad litteram, examines Augustine’s thought on creation of man in the three chapters: Augustine’s interpretation of Genesis on creation, the creation of man and woman, and man and woman in Paradise. In the first chapter, O’Meara deals with Augustine’s literal interpretation and his attitude and use of science in this later commentary. In the second, he tries to show that Augustine took an enlightened, favorable, and sympathetic view of woman, who was created in the image of God in the first aspect of creation and produced by God’s creative causality. In the

60 John J. O’Meara, The Creation of Man in St. Augustine’s De Genesi ad litteram (Villanova, PA: Augustinian Institute, Villanova University, 1980)
third chapter, by examining the life of Adam and Eve in their earthly Paradise, O’Meara demonstrates Augustine’s respect for reality, including the reality of human beings’ nature.

Finally, Robert O’Connell’s works should be mentioned here. O’Connell provides a good insight for the study of Augustine’s genesis commentaries in his two books, by showing the influence of Neoplatonism, especially of Plotinus, on Augustine’s thought on man and his soul. In the book, *St. Augustine’s Early Theory of Man, A.D. 386-391*, drawing the parallels between the Enneads and Augustine’s earlier works, O’Connell demonstrates the influence of Plotinus’ Enneads on Augustine’s earlier works including *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*. According to O’Connell, the Enneads not only brought together earlier philosophical and religious influences on Augustine, they also continued to nourish and predominantly form his subsequent intellectual development. In the book, *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine’s Later Works*, he keeps his exploration of Augustine’s anthropology focusing on his later works. Most relevant to this dissertation is the chapter on “The soul in the De Genesi ad litteram,” in which he examines and analyzes Augustine’s thought on the soul. His books are helpful not only in that these provide an insightful observation and interpretation on Augustine’s doctrine of man, but also in that these show the development in Augustine’s thought.

D. Conclusion

All of the works mentioned above are helpful to this dissertation in various ways. But there are some works to help to elucidate the thesis of this dissertation. At first, though they do not articulate or explore what the progress is like, Roland Teske and Edmund Hill indicates

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Augustine’s progress in his exegesis of the creation stories, which forms the beginning point of this dissertation. The works on Augustine’s exegesis of Genesis 1-3 such as Susan Schreiner and Elizabeth Clark help to examine each exegesis especially *De Genesi ad litteram*. However, there is no comparative work on Augustine’s exegeses of Genesis 1-3. Comparing *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* and *De Genesi ad litteram*, this dissertation focuses on Augustine’s progress in his exegesis of the creation stories. The secondary literature on Augustine’s exegesis helps to look at each tree rather than the wood.

Some scholars like Bernard and Schreiner indicates the relationship between Augustine’s concept of history and his exegesis. Bernard briefly mentions the relationship dealing with the terms, *allegoria* and *figura*. He relates the term *figura* with history. Since his dissertation is to show the place and meaning of the term *figura* in Augustine’s figurative exegesis, however, his observation of the relationship, though it seems to be right, is not fully developed. In her essay, “Eve, the mother of history,” Schreiner analyzes the role of Augustine’s notion of history in *De Genesi ad litteram*. Her analysis is helpful to understand the relationship between the notion of history and exegesis seen in *De Genesi ad litteram*. However, her discussion does not include Augustine’s former exegeses of Genesis 1-3. Though not comprehensive, these works helps this dissertation to explore how Augustine’s notion of history developed and how his changed notion of history influenced his exegesis.

*V. The Procedure*

This dissertation will be a historical and theological analysis of Augustine’s exegeses of Genesis 1-3. Main focus will be on Augustine’s two commentaries on Genesis: *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* and *De Genesi ad litteram*. Though the central discussion will be regarding these
two commentaries, the dissertation will employ other commentaries on Genesis, that is, *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus*, *Confessiones XI-XIII*, and *De civitate Dei XI*, whenever these commentaries provides stepping stones to understand his progress seen in the main two commentaries. Other works of Augustine including pastoral, dogmatic, apologetic, and exegetical writings will be used only when they offer the historical and theological context necessary to understand the two main commentaries.

This dissertation considers historical as well as theological aspects for understanding Augustine’s progress in exegetical theory and practice. There is an interval of thirteen to twenty six years between the two Genesis commentaries. It is an important part of this dissertation to investigate what happened to Augustine during this interval, since his progress in exegesis is intermingled with his other changing views.

Regarding the primary source, this dissertation will refer to available English translations. There are two English translations for both *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* and *De Genesi ad litteram*. Reference will be also made to the Latin critical editions. The both commentaries are in *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum*. This dissertation will investigate and consult mainly the primary source.

Also this dissertation will engage in dialogue with modern scholarship on Augustinian studies. This dissertation will not hesitate to employ some insightful secondary literature to support and crystallize the major points of the study. Arguing for the thesis, if necessary, this dissertation will offer critical evaluation of modern scholarship.
VI. The Probable Contents

I. Introduction
A. Principles of Augustine’s Hermeneutic
B. Augustine’s Repeated Efforts to Interpret Gen 1-3
C. The Scope of the Study

II. Literal and Figurative Interpretation
A. Literal and Figurative Interpretation in *De doctrina Christiana*
B. Progress in Augustine’s Understanding of Literal Interpretation
C. Relationship between Literal and Figurative Interpretation

III. History and Literal Interpretation
A. Augustine’s View of History
B. Augustine’s View of Historicity of Genesis 1-3
C. Relationship between History and Literal Interpretation

IV. Inter-textual Interpretation
A. Augustine’s View of the Scriptures
B. Augustine’s Use of the Scriptures
C. Progress in Augustine’s Intertextual Interpretation

V. Augustine’s Interpretation of the Two Creation Stories in *De Genesi ad Litteram*
A. The Simultaneous Creation in Gen. 1: 1 – 2: 4a
B. The Temporal Development in Gen. 2: 4b – 3: 24
C. Causal Reasons and Literal Interpretation

VI. Conclusion

Chapter I as the introduction, first of all, examines Augustine’s hermeneutics expressed in *De doctrina Christiana* where he presents his hermeneutical principles and exegetical methods. This section will present the background against which Augustine’s exegetical practice is investigated. Then this chapter deals with Augustine’s repeated efforts in interpreting the opening chapters of Genesis. This section will provide a brief introduction to each commentary.

Chapter II deals with Augustine’s understanding of literal and figurative interpretation. At first, this chapter will show Augustine’s different notions of literal interpretation seen in the two Genesis commentaries. Then his different notions will be explained in terms of progress.
Finally, this chapter explores Augustine’s thought on relationship between literal and figurative interpretation. It will be shown how his thought on this relationship changed according to the progress in his notion of literal interpretation.

Chapter III studies Augustine’s concept of history and its relation with literal interpretation. At first, this chapter will show the development in Augustine’s concept of history. Then it will explore the influence of his developed concept of history on his view of the creation stories and furthermore on his exegetical practice of the opening chapters of Genesis.

Chapter IV analyzes Augustine’s inter-textual interpretation in the Genesis commentaries. After reviewing his notion of the Scriptures, this chapter will compare Augustine’s inter-textual interpretation in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* and *De Genesi ad litteram*. In doing so, it will show the progress in Augustine’s inter-textual interpretation.

Chapter V, as a sort of excursus, examines Augustine’s interpretation of the two creation stories (Gen. 1:1-2:4a and Gen. 2:4b-3:24) in *De Genesi ad litteram*. This chapter will place Augustine’s theory of causal reasons against the background of his mature exegetical stage. In doing so, it will try to explain why Augustine employed the theory of causal reason in this commentary and how this theory of causal reasons is related with his mature literal interpretation of the creation stories.

Chapter VI is the conclusion of this dissertation. This chapter will summarize and integrate the argumentations of the previous chapters. In doing so, it will restate the relationship between Augustine’s notion of history and historicity of scriptures and his exegesis of the creation stories. And it will show Augustine’s progress in his exegesis of Genesis 1-3 in an integrative way.