

**CHOOSING A PATH: A STUDY OF THE THEORIES OF CHRISTIAN
CONVERSION AND CHRISTIAN NURTURE IN THE *CONFESSIONS* OF
ST. AUGUSTINE AND IN *CHRISTIAN NURTURE* BY HORACE BUSHNELL**

BY

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Clark G. Armstrong**

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DEDICATION PAGE

I dedicate this to my mother.

Ramona A. (Curtis) Armstrong

January 26, 1932 – March 14, 1989

I feel about my mother just as Augustine felt about his mother, Monica, and as

Bushnell felt about his mother, Dotha, and his grandmother, Molly.*

* Augustine wrote this when his mother died,

Little by little, I regained my former thoughts about your handmaid, about the devout life she led in you, about her sweet and holy care for us, of which I was so suddenly deprived. I took comfort in weeping in your sight over her and for her, over myself and for myself. I gave way to the tears that I had held back, so that they poured forth as much as they wished. I spread them beneath my heart, and it rested upon them, for at my heart were placed your ears, not the ears of a mere man, who would interpret with scorn my weeping. Now, Lord, I confess to you in writing. Let him read it who wants to, let him interpret it as he wants. If he finds a sin in it, that I wept for my mother for a small part of an hour, for that mother now dead to my eyes who for so many years had wept for me so that I might live in your eyes, let him not laugh me to scorn. (*Confessions*, Book 9:12:33).

Bushnell wrote a brief two page autobiography as an introduction to his short book *Women's Suffrage; Reform Against Nature* (New York, Charles Scribner and Company, 1869). In this introduction, he wrote this about his mother:

My mother tutored me in life itself from start to finish, training me in correct habits, helping me with my studies, maintaining a religious atmosphere at home, and holding herself as a great example of dignity and perseverance in a harsh world. She refused to be broken by the drudgery of farmwifery, and looked at the world, even in its darkest moments, with great fondness and hope for the future. My grandmother, a converted and confirmed Methodist, was no less the optimist. It was in this environment that I learned to love God's creation.

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW

There is a path for everyone. That is certain. Rousseau was concerned with it. Dewey was as well. Moses was and Freire is. John Locke and Jonathan Edwards were also. It was everything for Lao Tzu and the Taoists. It was very important for Confucius and for Horace Mann, too. But how each person chooses or finds his or her path has been a matter of much study and of many theories from Plato to the thinkers of the present.

Education has always been at the heart of the matter of choosing a path. The two thinkers compared in this study are Augustine (Aurelius Augustinus 354–430)¹ and Horace Bushnell (1802–1876). They both come from different eras in church history and have both offered much to the educational frameworks of their times; so they have much to offer the field of religious education. In fact, Horace Bushnell is viewed by many as the father of the modern-day academic discipline of religious education. Both of these thinkers are situated within the field of Christian religious education. Since they lived in very different times, an analysis of their discrete cultural milieus is an initial part of this comparative study.

At the heart of this comparison between Augustine’s idea of Christian conversion in the *Confessions* and Bushnell’s concept of Christian nurture (from his book by that title) is the question, in one sense, as to how or when a person “becomes” a Christian. For Augustine, the choosing of a path (internal locus of

¹ All dates in this paper are C.E. unless specifically designated B.C.E.

control) is integrally intertwined with the alternate idea of the path choosing us (external locus of control). Overtones of pre-determinism (i.e., predestination) are woven together with those of free will, at times inconsistently. At the core of Augustine's thought is the need to find in God a path. In the language of Christianity, Augustine argues that individuals need to experience a personal conversion to God. *Conversion* means to "find" God and then to follow God's plan for one's life. In contrast, Bushnell emphasizes education primarily in the home to guide each individual in the path that he or she should go. This applies to personal morals, to religious training, and to formal education as well. There is no need for a "conversion" moment in any child's development if he or she receives the proper nurture along the way. Individuals do not have to ever go astray at any point if they receive the proper nurture (so as to have to return to God or to the right path). Bushnell taught that the child is a child of God by creation from the child's earliest existence and by covenant when he or she is born into a Christian family, with infant baptism the rite that represents that reality. Augustine, on the other hand, viewed the child as born in sin and in need of salvation. Infant baptism provided salvation in childhood for this "original" sin.

In the age-old discussion of nature versus nurture, then, Bushnell would clearly be on the side of nurture and Augustine on the side of nature. It is important for us to recognize, however, that neither had a knowledge of contemporary research in genetics, heredity, or human behavior. Their discussion of human nature therefore

refers only to views as to whether the child begins life with a good, bad, or neutral inclination.

It is also important to note that they did not have today's understanding of developmental psychology or physiological stages. Bushnell shows great insight in these areas, however, and may have influenced these fields in the twentieth century, if only in an intangible way. Looking back to Bushnell's writings, one can see latent ideas of Dewey, Gesell, Piaget, Erikson, Maslow, Bruner, Kohlberg, Fowler, and even Gardner. It is possible to see Freud in Augustine (for instance, his reference to original sin as *concupiscence*) along with several formative ideas of others.

In summary, both Augustine and Bushnell approach life spiritually. One was a bishop and one was a preacher; therefore, much of this discussion focuses on theological approaches to choosing one's path (the *religious* part of religious education). Their teachings are as rooted in matters of faith and epistemology as in education, if not more so. For both thinkers, the ways in which each person relates to God and, in a real sense, how God relates to the individual, was preeminent in choosing a path.

I turn now to a brief overview of this text and of the two theorists, Augustine and Bushnell. This dissertation compares Augustine's idea of conversion and Horace Bushnell's concept of Christian nurture. Augustine was an early Christian theologian and Bishop of Hippo in North Africa who lived around 400. He is very important in Christian history because he played a critical role in the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church when the Western Church was beginning to separate from the

Eastern Church.² He also was instrumental in establishing which Christian doctrine is orthodox and which is heretical. He lived at a key time in church history when many of the early church councils determined the creeds that confirmed the official Christian beliefs. Finally, he was important as a founder of monasticism and its “orders.”³ However, it was never his intention to draw apart from the real world and to live only in monasteries, as many have done.

Horace Bushnell was a Christian minister from New England and a founder of the College of California, now known as the University of California, during the middle of the nineteenth century. He was the pastor of only one church, North Congregational Church in Hartford. Poor health plagued him throughout his pastoral career and led to his early retirement. He gave himself then to writing, which became his legacy. Bushnell was as important in his time as Augustine was in his era. He is a significant figure in the split of Protestant Evangelicals (the Revivalists of his time) and Protestant Non-Evangelicals. He is therefore seen by many as the American father of Protestant Liberalism. Bushnell helped replace the promotion of an evangelical gospel with what became identified by Walter Rauschenbusch in the early

²The East–West Schism, sometimes known as the Great Schism, divided medieval Christianity into Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) branches, which later became known as the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, respectively. The split between the Church of Rome and the Orthodox Churches has been conveniently dated to 1054 (though the reality is more complex). The Eastern churches' differences from Western Christianity have as much, if not more, to do with culture, language, and politics, as theology. A definitive date for the commencement of the schism cannot usually be given. The Church of the East declared independence from the churches of the Roman Empire at its general council in 424, which was before the Council of Ephesus in 431, and so had nothing to do with the theology of the Western Church declared at that Council.

³ Out of this influence, many see Augustine as the first source for much of the Catholic educational system as well.

twentieth century as “the social gospel.” Finally, as previously mentioned, Bushnell is important as the father of religious education as an academic discipline.

In the discussion to follow, the two works comparatively studied are Augustine’s *Confessions* (written during the years of 397–400) and Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture* (published in 1847 and republished in 1861 in its complete form). In the *Confessions*, Augustine is writing to God as his audience. These are not confessions made to the world. It is the story of Augustine’s journey far from God (much like the Prodigal Son in the Bible [Luke 15]), of his return, and of the subsequent relationship he enjoys with God. Therefore, it is addressed to God. Bushnell’s book is definitely written, on the other hand, to a human audience. The genre of writing is different and the two cannot be compared from a stylistic standpoint. Whereas Augustine’s *Confessions* is written in an autobiographical format, the style of Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture* is that of a handbook for Christian child rearing, especially to be used by parents.

Bushnell spends the first part of his text establishing the doctrine of what Christian nurture is and what it is not. The last part of the book is extrapolation concerning the mode of Christian nurture and is very practical in covering ages, stages, and settings related to the application and practice of Christian nurture. Although it is more subtle, there is also a philosophy of nurture in *Confessions* and a concept of conversion in *Christian Nurture*. A careful exploration of *Christian Nurture* does reveal a unique concept of conversion that a superficial reading, focusing only on Bushnell’s disdain for traditional conversion, would overlook.

Bushnell's conversion concept varies significantly from Augustine's. Conversely, the *Confessions* also presents Augustine's idea of nurture in addition to his thoughts on conversion. For Augustine, the primary repository for Christian nurture is God and the church, whereas for Bushnell it is the home and parents. In that regard, *Christian Nurture* may be seen by some as the manifesto for the modern home-school movement.

It should be noted that both Bushnell and Augustine lived in times and places where the opinions of the clergy carried far more influence than in contemporary culture. Since religious doctrines and "right" teaching about God was very important, the voices and teachings of those in authority were more likely to be labeled as *orthodox* or *heretical*. A point of interest is that Augustine was among those viewed as orthodox during his time, but Bushnell was not. Regardless of whether Augustine's teachings were logical or even based on the Bible, he was one of those *doing the labeling*. On the other hand, Bushnell made some claims that resulted in his *being labeled* as a heretic, and thus he found himself outside a large segment of nineteenth-century American Christianity.⁴

Finally, one other common element in the Christian worldviews in which both of these thinkers lived was that all of life was seen as sacred. On at least eight occasions in Augustine's writings he makes reference in some form to his belief that

⁴ To teach Bushnell's theories in the last 25 years still may result in an accusation of heresy, though the vote may go more favorably. See the case of G. Temp Sparkman at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary as reported in the New York Times article of October 14, 1986, "Riverside Pastor Elected President of Baptist School; Scholar Cleared" by John Dart, Times Religion Writer.

“all truth is God’s truth.”⁵ Whether they were studying astronomy, biology, literature, agriculture, history, mathematics, medicine, music, or science, it was all in a basic sense theology—a study of God. There was not a fear of learning or a resistance to it in any realm (for the most part); like the fathers of modern science (e.g., Bacon, Galileo, and Newton), Augustine and Bushnell viewed themselves as discovering where God had already walked. A comprehensive philosophy of education with this worldview was put forth by the British mathematician and educator, Alfred North Whitehead, in the twentieth century. He writes in *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, “The essence of education is that it be religious. . . . A religious education is an education which inculcates duty and reverence.”⁶ He also writes, “There is only one subject-matter for education, and that is Life in all its

⁵ These can be verified at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/>. Scroll to “Augustine of Hippo” and select the appropriate phrase.

- Tractates of the Gospel of John – # 96 (on John 16:13; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1701096.htm>).
- City of God, Book XI (on John 16:13; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120111.htm>)
- Of the Good of Widowhood (13:11; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1311.htm>)
- Of Faith and the Creed (on John 16:13; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1304.htm>)
- On the Trinity, Book 1 (15; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130101.htm>)
- Sermon 8 on the New Testament (on the Lord’s Prayer; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/160308.htm>)
- City of God, Book VIII (<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120108.htm>)
- City of God, Book VII (<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120107.htm>)

A discussion of this can also be found in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* under “Scholasticism” or under “Metaphysics.” Online at <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/>. Catholic Encyclopedia. Robert Appleton Company New York, NY. Volume 1: 1907; Volume 2: 1907; Volume 3: 1908; Volume 4: 1908; Volume 5: 1909; Volume 6: 1909; Volume 7: 1910; Volume 8: 1910; Volume 9: 1910; Volume 10: 1911; Volume 11: - 1911; Volume 12: - 1911; Volume 13: - 1912; Volume 14: 1912; Volume 15: 1912.

⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: The Free Press, 1957), p. 14.

manifestations.”⁷ For this reason, moral training is inevitably a part of *all* education and cannot be avoided.⁸ In Emerson E. White’s 1886 textbook for teachers, he wrote:

The most dangerous transition in a youth’s life is that which carries him from the authoritative control of the family and the school to the responsibility of untried liberty. The shores of this perilous strait of human life are strewn with wrecked manhood. The home-life and the school-life of the child should prepare him for this transition to freedom by effective training in self-control and self-guidance, and, to this end, the will must be disciplined by an increasing use of motives that quicken the sense of right and make the conscience regal in conduct. It is not enough that the teacher secures diligence in study, good order, and proper behavior in school. The vital question is, *To what motives does he appeal in gaining these ends?* If these be low and selfish, the results, however fair in appearance, will be like the apples of Sodom in the life. No temporary interest in study, no external propriety of conduct, can compensate for the habitual subjection of the will to the dominancy of the lower motives. The pregnant truth is that no training of the will can stand the test of conduct that does not put its acts in harmony with the *imperative OUGHT*—the last word in the vocabulary of reason and duty.⁹

But by the middle twentieth century, a great schism of knowledge between that considered sacred and that viewed as secular had come into existence. The worldview of the twenty-first century has gone nearly full circle, so that we enter the study of this subject from a skepticism borne of declining postmodernism that carries with it a worldview that none of life is sacred. From this platform, we must consciously gather ourselves to purposefully reenter the past worldview of much of Christianity that gave Augustine a sense of hope in the face of the fall of the Roman Empire during his lifetime (410) and gave Bushnell the sense of optimism to publish *Christian Nurture* during the Civil War of the United States (1861). Bushnell was

⁷ Ibid., p. 6–7.

⁸ In the very act of trying to avoid it, the null curriculum will teach in the stead of anything purposeful.

⁹ Emerson E. White, *The Elements of Pedagogy* (Cincinnati, OH: American Book Company-The Eclectic Press, 1886), pp. 319–320. He is referring to the “categorical imperative” of Immanuel Kant as the call that makes such training unavoidable.

one of the leaders of Modernism; its ideas purported to impel the forward progress of humankind and society toward an ideal or perfect world (much like Augustine's classic work *The City of God*, written after the fall of Rome).¹⁰ There is a cry today for hope in education. For example, one recent book by Stephen M. Fishman and Lucille McCarthy (2007) reaches back to Dewey and the time of Classic Modernism in education to show practical images of hope in Dewey's theories that mesh with the contemporary movement of the "positive psychology" of hope represented by writers like C. R. Snyder, Gabriel Marcel, and Paulo Freire.¹¹ An examination of Augustine's and Bushnell's theories of education can provide a perspective of hope in Christian education.

Statement of the Problem

There is a basic difference between Augustine's and Bushnell's guiding theories of human nature. Bushnell wrote that a person who is born in a Christian family should never grow up knowing himself or herself as anything other than a Christian. But Augustine felt that each person needed to have an individual moment of conversion when that person becomes a Christian. Part of the problem, as has been stated, was Augustine taught that we are born sinners, which is why we each need to be "saved"

¹⁰ The schism of sacred and secular was well underway in Bushnell's era (e.g., see works by Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, Kafka, and many others), even though it did not become full-blown until the mid-twentieth century.

¹¹ Stephen M. Fishman and Lucille McCarthy, *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

or converted.¹² But Bushnell, in reaction to Jonathan Edwards in the preceding century and the revivalists of his own time, believed that we were born essentially good and not evil, and with the proper nurture we could be instructed, educated, or guided at each point of development to go in the right direction. Another difference is that the philosophy of nurture for Augustine is primarily tied to God, who seeks lost humankind in the *Confessions*, and to the church as an instructional agency for religious education on earth in other writings. Meanwhile, in Bushnell's theory of nurture, his main repository for all education including anything religious is the home; everything else is seen as assisting the parents. Augustine's and Bushnell's perspectives on human nature are more intricate than is presented here. A deeper analysis of this component of their beliefs is investigated later in this work.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the claim of Horace Bushnell when he said there is no reason why a child who is raised in a Christian home should ever grow up knowing himself (or herself) as anything other than a Christian.¹³ This presumption will be compared with Augustine's perspective. Augustine started his autobiography with the statement, "You (God) have made us for yourself, and our

¹² St. Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 49 where in referring to Job 25:4 he states, "For in your sight, no man is clean of sin, not even the infant who has lived but a day upon earth." All citations of the *Confessions* by St. Augustine refer to the complete and unabridged translation with an Introduction and Notes by John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960). Also reference St. Augustine in *Enchiridion*, XLVI, p. 56: after discussing Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 5:9, and Ezekiel 18:12, Augustine states, "Here lies the necessity that each man should be born again, that he might be freed from the sin in which he was born." *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*. Shaw, J. F. Trans. (Chicago, Illinois: Gateway Editions, 1961).

¹³ Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 4. Bushnell was writing in reaction to the American Revival Movement of the middle-nineteenth century.

heart is restless until it rests in you.”¹⁴ That statement makes an assumption different than Bushnell’s, as we shall see.

In the field of the Foundations of Education, it is understood that the beliefs of an educator as well as that of a student shape what is taught, how it is taught and how it is received or processed by the learner. It was Augustine who said, “I believe in order that I may know” (*credo ut intelligam*).¹⁵ Epistemology—what we believe—precedes education—what we can be taught or can learn. Since matters of personal faith often precede those of learning and they are foundational to matters of understanding, this subject should be of concern to all educators. Personal faith and the grounds that we have for faith are a part of education. This study is not just a theoretical or philosophical integration of these two theories of conversion and nurture. It is also a practical matter of concern. This project is titled *Choosing a Path* because it considers the question of how children grow up in the Christian faith and arrive at a personal faith commitment similar to or different from that of their upbringing. Learning and observations in this area help educators to understand how students learn and make commitments to knowledge, truth, and belief systems of various kinds. Some traditions have conducted important studies related to “conversion.”¹⁶ Many theorists have also addressed the nature-versus-nurture

¹⁴ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 43. Monsignor Ryan (the translator) argues that this statement “sums up Augustine’s whole teaching on man’s relation to God. It is perhaps the most quoted line in the *Confessions*.” (p. 371).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Book 1, Chapter 1, Section (1), p. 4. (This can be transcribed to be *Confessions*, 1:1:1, p. 4.) St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) revised and greatly popularized Augustine’s direct quote.

¹⁶ Some of the earliest studies, from the 1980s, are listed here. A good deal more that has been done in the twenty years since. See Bromley (1988), Dudley (1983), Hadaway and Roof (1988), Albrecht, Cornwall and Cunningham (1988), Hoge (1988), Barker (1988), Nelson and Bromley (1988).

question. Much of the research about conversion has focused on those who have “left the faith.”¹⁷ Augustine was a self-proclaimed prodigal who returned to the faith of his upbringing.¹⁸ Attention has been given to understanding why people left their faith. A major motivation for these studies appears to be primarily to prevent such occurrences. Another long-term goal may have been to convince “lost” members to return to the faith of the author.¹⁹ Little, if any, research has isolated and studied those who have “stayed.” Horace Bushnell is an example of a person who stayed in the faith of his upbringing and followed in his parents’ footsteps, even so much so as to become a Christian minister. He then taught and wrote in *Christian Nurture* about how everyone might enjoy that experience with the proper nurture.²⁰ Although this is a study of *Christian* nurture and *Christian* conversion, it also has a broader application. A modern field of study known as *Faith Development* has risen since 1974.²¹ The research from this field has identified and documented stages of faith that are common to a large community of non-Christian sample groups. So the principles from this study should be applicable in most faiths or settings,²² although Christian educators in schools (parochial or private), home school families, parents,

¹⁷ One slight exception may be Ross Campbell, *Kids Who Follow, Kids Who Don't* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989). Note that Campbell's book does have some research findings, whereas this dissertation is not a research-oriented project *per se*, but rather is a qualitative analysis.

¹⁸ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 2:10:18, pp. 75–76.

¹⁹ The following books are examples of the various approaches toward this issue: Bisset (1992), Huggins and Landrum (1994) and Parrott III (1993).

²⁰ Throughout this text, citations from *Christian Nurture* refer to the Yale University Press edition, 1967, with an introduction by Luther A. Weigle, Sterling Professor of Religious Education at Yale.

²¹ The seminal work in this area is attributed to Dr. James W. Fowler III (1940–) who is the C. H. Candler Professor of Theology and Human Development at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.

²² See James Dobson, *The Strong-Willed Child* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1978).

caretakers of children, and workers in churches and other Christian education settings will find this study especially helpful and pertinent.

This inquiry can indirectly be extended as follows: How do children who have grown up in a Christian tradition develop a *personal* faith similar to or different from that of their upbringing? Stated in another way, what is the relationship of conversion and nurture in this development? There may be many different sides to this question. This study contributes to an understanding of how children learn matters of faith and make choices related to faith that shape their belief systems. It will help educators to better assist in religious education with regard to conversion and nurture. As early as 1956, this question was specifically addressed. Respected Christian educator and professor Findley B. Edge summed up the issues in a piece titled *Christian Nurture and Conversion*:

To lead individuals into right relations with God and to develop them in the Christian life is the supreme task of the church. The question is, how does one come into right relationship with God?

Since 1850 two answers, basically, have been given to this question and consequently two approaches to religious education have developed. There were those who emphasized conversion as the only means of entering the Kingdom of God. Others emphasized nurture as the normal means of becoming a part of the Christian fellowship. During the major portion of the last century those who held to the necessity of the conversion experience magnified the doctrine of original sin and the depravity of man to the point that religious instruction of the young was almost wholly neglected. A person was saved only after a period of deep conviction of sin, an intense struggle, and a more or less cataclysmic conversion experience—and this during a revival meeting. Horace Bushnell and others reacted against this “revivalistic emphasis.” Bushnell felt that the current emphasis which demanded that the individual have this kind of experience was neither psychologically nor theologically sound. He wrote a book stating his thesis, “that the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise.” In his view the grace of God was mediated to the child through the organic unity of the

family, so that the child of Christian parents might truly grow up as a Christian.²³

This formulation pits the Augustinian concept of original sin of humankind against Bushnell's concept of the organic unity of the family. By advancing the title *Choosing a Path*, the component of choice or consent is also introduced into the analysis presented herein. Professor Edge, a Southern Baptist writer, goes on to precisely state what he calls "an incisive question" that is very similar to the question this dissertation seeks to answer:

Our theology of conversion and our program of religious education for children are inconsistent. For example, they are saying, "You Southern Baptists are doing an unusually effective piece of work in the area of religious education for the small child. From infancy and through earliest childhood you teach the child that Jesus is his best Friend. You teach him that God is his loving Father; you teach him to pray to God, and teach him to sing, 'Jesus loves me.'" This teaching goes on throughout his early years. But then somewhere around the age of ten (or perhaps a year or two before or after), you take the child and thrust him out of the Kingdom and say to him, "You are lost; you need to be saved!" The child is confused, puzzled, perplexed. He says, "What do you mean, I'm lost? What do you mean I need to be saved?" You say to him, "You must love Jesus, You must trust Jesus," But the child says, "I do love Jesus. I do trust Jesus. I always have." What will you say to the child then? You are not following the normal experience of the child. Rather are you not molding the experience of the child to fit your preconceived theology? This is an incisive question which we cannot ignore. What shall we say?²⁴

The problem itself could not be expressed in more practical terms.

Roots and Cultural Milieu

²³ Findley B. Edge, "Christian Nurture and Conversion," *Review and Expositor* vol. 53, no. 2, 1956, p. 187.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 188–189.

There are four main traditions within the Christian faith, and they each have various branches. Studies would probably be different between the Roman Catholics (Western Church), the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the Protestant Non-Evangelicals, and the Protestant Evangelicals. The two theorists in our study lived at very different times, but both eras were exceptionally significant periods in church history. Augustine lived during the fourth century and its political, theological, and educational roots relate to Augustine (and the time of his mother, Monica). He represents the time when the church in the western part of the empire was being established as separate from the church in the eastern part.²⁵ So he brings influences from both sides of that period. Both branches consider him a patron saint. Also, because of his transparent and detailed account about his struggles with sin and his wanderings from the faith of his mother and from the church he was raised in, as recorded in the *Confessions*, a strong philosophy of conversion was borne of his teachings and experience from that time forward.

Second and equally important veins are the influences from the nineteenth century relating to the field of religious education. The roots of this study's precipitating question in this field begin, or at least mark a significant turning point, with Horace Bushnell in the 1800s.²⁶ The first Reformation, which gave rise to the

²⁵ For a concise treatment of the Eastern and Western views and teachings on the problems of anthropology and soteriology and concerning the sacraments, see Otto W. Heick, *A History of Christian Thought* Volume 1 (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1965), pp. 191–238.

²⁶ The fact that there were many others who were influential toward this question of inquiry during this pivotal century is accepted, but the work showing that he stands out among them as more significant for six reasons has already been established by Barbara Cross in *Horace Bushnell: Minister to a Changing America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). It is supported by Robert L.

Protestants (protesters who broke away from the Catholic Church), occurred during the late 1500s at the time of Martin Luther, who is considered the Reformation's key instigator.²⁷ In the 1700s, the English revivals influenced by George Whitefield and John Wesley, and America's "Great Awakening" influenced by Jonathan Edwards²⁸ gave birth to an American revival movement in the 1800s. This movement was also fueled by Calvinistic²⁹ theology and preaching; revivals in New England were led by people like Charles G. Finney and Lyman Beecher and had a strong emphasis on the need for a personal conversion experience after reaching the age of accountability. The revivalists' view of conversion had many specific characteristics that went well beyond Augustine's general idea that each person needs to find his or her rest in God. Bushnell's reaction was against the prescribed idea of conversion strongly encouraged by the revivalists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Bushnell created controversy when he claimed:

In other words, the aim, the effort, and expectation should be, not, as is commonly assumed, that the child is to grow up in sin, to be converted after he comes to a mature age; but that he is to open on the world as one that is spiritually renewed, not remembering the time when he went through a technical experience, but seeming rather to have loved what is good from his earliest years.³⁰

Edwards in *Of Singular Genius, Of Singular Grace: A Biography of Horace Bushnell* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1992).

²⁷ See Lorri Brown, "Martin Luther and the Reformation," March 29, 2007. Retrieved July 5, 2010, from http://weuropeanhistory.suite101.com/article.cfm/martin_luther_and_the_reformation.

²⁸ Edwards (1703–1758) most famous sermon was probably "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," which was delivered in 1741 at his church in Northampton, Massachusetts, during the second wave of what was called in America the *Great Awakening*.

²⁹ The teachings of Swiss reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) predominantly emphasized doctrines such as the total depravity of humankind (original sin), the absolute sovereignty of God, predestination, and the perseverance of the saints. Calvin, as a reformer, is seen as reintroducing St. Augustine's teachings back to the Christian Church.

³⁰ Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 4.

This went beyond the age-old question of “nature versus nurture” and turned it into a “conversion-versus-nurture” question that was being brought to center on the discipline of religious education and specifically on the spiritual development of children. Heated debate about *Christian Nurture* occurs in the field of religious education to this very day. One question raised by Bushnell’s text is whether Christianity, and all learning for that matter, is “caught” or “taught” (or whether it is both and not try to analyze which is the more predominant, to what degree, in what situations, and so on). That is at the very crux of this study on the relationship between conversion and nurture in choosing one’s path. Bushnell became a very important, if not the central figure, in the discussion on this subject that persists between Protestant Evangelicals (those that press upon everyone a need for a personal experience of conversion) and Non-Evangelicals (those who do not see a need for personal conversion).

Constantine and Augustine

Several political factors affected the cultural milieu of the fourth century that led to the placing of the theological roots of the conversion-versus-nurture question with Augustine around 400. The greatest of these was a major change in Christianity that occurred in 326 when Constantine was emperor of the Roman Empire.³¹ In that year, Constantine “converted” to Christianity. He had already put an end to the persecution

³¹ Information in this section was gathered from Hans A. Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine* (Routledge, London, 1996). The motives and actions of Constantine have been thoroughly analyzed by others, but do not fall within the scope of this dissertation. For one balanced and well-informed view on that subject, refer to Pohlsander.

of Christians in 324. He moved the Roman capital to Constantinople (formerly Byzantium) and declared Christianity to be the official (or at least a “tolerated”) religion of the kingdom in 326. Thus, this was when the question of personal faith was first raised on a practical level. Before 324, anyone who claimed to be a Christian did so based on a serious personal commitment that had “life or death” consequences. Between 30 and 324, some people did “defect” from Christianity after they had converted. In fact, those who had defected in the generation before Constantine’s declaration were called the *lapsi*, and, after Constantine’s declaration of Christianity as the “official” faith, there was a formal discussion of how the *lapsi* should be handled by the church in the light of his edict. Furthermore, many children had been born into Christian homes and “taught into” the faith over those three centuries. Nevertheless, because of the persecution of Christians, each child eventually had to make a decision about his or her personal faith, and it inevitably forced its issue upon each individual often sooner rather than later. In 326 there were thousands of people in the Roman Empire who became “Christians” in name only. And with the legalization of Christianity, for the first time a person could be a Christian without any call to personal faith or commitment. Simply by being a citizen of the Roman Empire or by virtue of being raised in a “Christian” home, individuals could say they were “Christian.” The phenomenon of Christianity as a “religion” rather than a “faith” was thrust to the forefront. Some historians have recorded that Constantine “converted” because of the political power that could be obtained when

Christianity was harnessed as a religion. But it is also believed that he had his own children “instructed with a Christian education.”

After the legalization of Christianity and before the invasion of the Visigoths in 430, Augustine (354–430) lived in a peaceful part of the Roman Empire in North Africa where there were Christian Churches in each territory (called a *see*); and some schools were in each territory available for those who could afford to send their children. He was very important in the Christian Church for many reasons. Some say he was the greatest theologian of all. Augustine is relevant to this study because he was a part of the first generation born after the legalization of Christianity that knew nothing of what it meant to be persecuted for one’s faith. Furthermore, he took the issues that he and his generation grappled with theologically and documented them in his autobiography, which is simply titled *Confessions*. His own story of being raised by a godly mother, rejecting the “faith,” and then returning with a much stronger commitment could be the story of many young people 1,600 years later. Figure 2 in the Appendix is a chart titled “Constantine to Augustine: A Generational Trend of Religious Change,” which shows how the church changed in four generations from emphasizing a personal relationship with Christ into a formal and organized religion with formal rules, rituals, and official beliefs. It is supported by the accounts given in the *Confessions*. The practical results of Constantine’s actions led to the theological roots that we see in Augustine and his generation.

Horace Bushnell and Revivalism

Horace Bushnell provided a significant change in religious education. He was born and raised in the antebellum United States. He had an Ivy League education and multiple degrees. It was the century of the British Empire's reign and it was a time of exploration and expansion around the world, including the gold rush in the United States. Medical and scientific progress was being made; inventions were increasing; new theories were expressed through literature, politics, and philosophy, as well as in the field of religion. Bushnell ministered in the pre-Civil War United States, but he wrote mostly during and after the war. The Industrial Revolution was well under way by the end of his life. Bushnell was writing before Horace Mann's educational reform made public education commonplace. Bushnell himself was an American Congregationalist minister in Connecticut for most of his career. But his written works were very controversial for his time and remain his legacy. Bushnell (1802–1876) was one of the early “modernists.”³² At the time, they were also interchangeably referred to as *liberals*. The religious modernists held the following theological beliefs:

1. The individual's own intuitive knowledge of God is the core of true religion. (The partially innate and latent aspects of intuitive knowledge represented a radically new idea inserted on the landscape of Christian theology.)
2. The upward and forward “progress” of civilization. (This was built on the idea that things were getting better and better, every day in every way.)
3. The adoption of religious ideas to modern culture. (This included skepticism about miracles in the light of “scientific” explanations and discoveries like Darwinism.)

³² These comments are taken from a sermon in the *American Church History* series on “The Modernists,” summarizing the points made in the Hutchison book mentioned in the next footnote. It was delivered by Tim McIntosh at University Church in Athens, Georgia. He did an exceptional job of discussing Bushnell's “charge away from Augustinianism.” This section reflects McIntosh's summary.

4. The Social Gospel. (This was composed of the belief that society needed to be reformed, as much or more than the individual. Adherents sought reconstruction of the social order. In part, this was a reaction and rejection of the revivalists like Dwight L. Moody. Men like Washington Gladden and then Walter Rauschenbusch took up the torch of the Social Gospel for the next two generations after Bushnell and made it a countermovement in the church until after World War I.)³³

In addition to being one of the early theological modernists and one of the most well-read figures of his time, Bushnell made two other significant contributions. They fit in perfectly with what Harry Emerson Fosdick said was the central aim of liberal theology, which was for a man “to be both an intelligent modern and a serious Christian.” First, Bushnell rejected the main points of Augustinian theology, especially original sin and predestination.³⁴ Since most church historians say the Reformation of the Christian church in the 1500s in Europe was a return to the tenets of Augustine’s theology, Bushnell was also rejecting some major components of the Protestant Reformation. The values of the creeds, church traditions, beliefs, and even the scriptures became secondary to one’s personal experience (personal experience is viewed as being different than personal faith in this persuasion). Good works were valued over professions or confessions of faith, individually or collectively. Bushnell saw the idea of original sin to be in conflict with the concept of “progress.”

Second, before the late nineteenth century, most ministers in the United States held strongly to ideas like the innate depravity of humankind. Bushnell promoted the

³³ William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1976).

³⁴ He also differed with Augustine in other matters of theology concerning things such as free will, human responsibility, and culpability. I hope to show that the perspectives of the early Augustine and the mature Bushnell are closer than a cursory examination of their teachings apparently reveals.

opposing idea that humankind was essentially good³⁵ by nature, which even went beyond John Locke's "blank tablet" concept. Bushnell did not abandon all ideas of original sin, however. Daniel Walker Howe states that Bushnell's position "represented a synthesis of competing views on human nature circulating during his lifetime" in which he blended the Reformation view of original sin, the Lockean view emphasizing the power of nurture to shape the personality; and the romantic view that respected the human dignity of children and acknowledged their inherent potential for "religious sensibility" to develop if it is properly cultivated. Howe describes this philosophy as a "social science theory" in which Bushnell emphasized the influence of "organic communities" (i.e., a culturally transmitted value system). He concludes that "a person is not even conscious of the extent to which his socialization has determined his outlook, so subtly and thoroughly have social values been internalized."³⁶

In addition, Bushnell made the brash claim that children could be nurtured into the faith, more properly "in" the faith, from birth onward through a series of stages. He is arguably the first to make that claim regarding the theology of religious development. The revivalists and evangelicals in general were left to ask if there was any need for "conversion" of a child who is born into a Christian home and "nurtured" properly. Bushnell would argue that a young person who is raised in such

³⁵ He claimed that people are already children of God when they are born and do not need to become children of God later.

³⁶ Daniel Walker Howe, "The Social Science of Horace Bushnell," *The Journal of American History*, vol. 70, no. 2, 1983, pp. 305–322—specifically pp. 315–316. Howe shows how similar Bushnell's view is to that of Emile Durkheim, who would follow him later in that century.

a home but who then leaves the faith has not been nurtured properly.³⁷ Furthermore, he did not see “personal faith” as an end goal of nurturing because, according to Bushnell, children nurtured in the faith had always been “Christian.”

Although Bushnell has not been viewed by all as the father or founder of religious education, he is seen as important in the establishment of this discipline. Some Protestants point to Robert Rakes, who started the Sunday School movement in 1780 in England. Others nominate John Wesley for his emphasis on the importance of the class meetings in the church; some mention the influence of Wesley’s godly mother, Susanna Wesley, and her rules for instruction in the Christian home. Martin Luther is mentioned by some and the Catholics often give that honor to Thomas Aquinas. If the focus is on religious education and not merely Christianity *per se*, the Jews give that distinction to Moses the Law Giver (c. 1350 B.C.E.), and some may also accent the influence of Moses Maimonides (1100s).³⁸ As a religious educator, Bushnell emphasized children in an era when they had become more forgotten.³⁹ He also emphasized a process of development over and above a “crisis” event⁴⁰ such as “conversion.” Some phrase the ensuing discussion as one of *crisis versus process* and the challenge is to understand which was the greater in importance. Bushnell wrote

³⁷ Bushnell had an interesting concept of what he called “The Ostrich Nurture” which included this and other forms of negative education that had undesirable results, hence the allusion to the ostrich with its head in the sand to bury its eggs, and then leaving them unattended to develop.

³⁸ This is a summation of the overview by J. Edward Hakes in *An Introduction to Evangelical Christian Education* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964). See also Marc B. Shapiro, *Studies in Maimonides and His Interpreters* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2008).

³⁹ Robert Bruce Mullin, *The Puritan as Yankee: A Life of Horace Bushnell* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), Chapter 5 “Rescuing the Children and Reuniting the Puritans,” pp. 99-126.

⁴⁰ *Crisis* is used here only in its reference to experiences that appear to happen suddenly or in a moment in time versus ones that are indiscernible over a period of time. These may or may not include any of the other definitions for the word *crisis*.

long before Benjamin Spock, David Elkind, or even Arnold Gesell and his predecessors; his thinking was extraordinarily radical for his time.⁴¹

Comparative Studies

No work specifically comparing these two thinkers or their writings has yet been done, although a few educational thinkers have come close. I have found the work of Dr. Temp Sparkman to be especially pertinent to this subject. He studied Bushnell and three other thinkers of the nineteenth century in the United States. Two of those thinkers were distinctively Calvinistic⁴² in their theology (Jonathan Edwards and Timothy Dwight) and the other (George Albert Coe) had an interesting concept of multiple small conversions that may be useful in preparing a synthesis for this paper, albeit indirect.⁴³ Coe is also considered a pioneer in ideas related to religious education.⁴⁴ Dr. Sparkman's later book is also related to the two ideas studied in this dissertation.⁴⁵ In his dissertation, Dr. Sparkman correctly identifies Augustine as "the major proponent of the doctrine that Adam, in sinning, fell from a state of original

⁴¹ Theorists and practitioners in child raising or child development: Benjamin M. Spock, *Baby and Child Care* (New York: Dutton, 1976); David Elkind, *The Hurried Child* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 2001); Arnold L. Gesell, Louise B. Ames, and Frances L. Ilg, *Infant and Child in the Culture of Today* (New York: Harper & Row, 1943).

⁴² For our purposes, it is sufficient to understand that Calvinism reflects the teachings of John Calvin (1509–1564) and his followers after the Reformation in the sixteenth century. These teachings are a renewal of Augustinian theology concerning the doctrines of predestination and original sin, which we have previously discussed.

⁴³ Grady Temp Sparkman, *The Influence of Two Theological Concepts—'The Image of God in Man' and 'Fallen Man'—on the Thought of Selected American Protestant Religious Education Theorists*, unpublished dissertation, University of Kansas, 1980.

⁴⁴ G. A. Coe, *A Social Theory of Religious Education* (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1917). For more information, see Helen Allan Archibald, "George A. Coe." Retrieved July 5, 2010, from http://www2.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/view.cfm?n=george_coe.

⁴⁵ Dr. Sparkman's book is *The Salvation and Nurture of the Child of God* (Judson Press, 1983).

righteousness. This sin, in Augustine's thought, was essentially concupiscence, primarily expressed in sexual pleasure."⁴⁶ Dr. Sparkman's balanced treatment of all of Bushnell's works presents a healthy optimism regarding God's grace in spite of mankind's sin rather than the imbalanced impressions of those who have only discussed Bushnell's famous claim that a child could grow up never knowing himself of herself as anything other than a Christian. One dissertation similar to Dr. Sparkman's had been completed in 1954, and there are also forty or fifty other dissertations that relate more generally to this subject. Some of them are on Augustine, some on Bushnell; some are related to the *Confessions*, some to *Christian Nurture*; some are on one or the other of the two key ideas studied here. But none is really a comparison, nor are they analyses that are historical in nature, as is this study. Thomas Thigpen with Paul Thigpen compiled a book of spiritual readings from Augustine's writings, primarily from the *Confessions*,⁴⁷ but their book on Bushnell did not concern *Christian Nurture*.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, their treatment of these two thinkers is worthy of note.

The work of Randolph Crump Miller, who held the Horace Bushnell Chair of Christian Nurture at Yale University from 1952 through 1982, argued that Bushnell's emphasis on the home as the repository for Christian nurture should be shifted to the church. Miller states, "The way to become a Christian is to enter the Church."⁴⁹ R.

⁴⁶ Sparkman, *The Influence of Two Theological Concepts*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Augustine, *Restless Till We Rest In You: 60 Reflections from the Writings of St. Augustine*, T. P. Thigpen & P. Thigpen, Comps. (Ann Arbor, MI: Charis Books, 1998).

⁴⁸ T. P. Thigpen, "On the Origin of Theses: An Exploration of Horace Bushnell's Rejection of Darwinism," *Church History*, vol. 57, no. 4, December 1988, pp. 499–513.

⁴⁹ R. C. Miller, *Christian Nurture and the Church* (New York, Scribner's Sons, 1961).

C. Miller was the long-time editor of the professional journal, *Religious Education*, and he is commonly acknowledged as the elder statesmen of the twentieth century in this field. He declared that someone needs to make Dewey a Christian (referring to the need for the application of John Dewey's ideas of social education to the praxis of Christian nurture).⁵⁰ Daniel Walker Howe saw shades of that social theory of Christian education in Bushnell fifty years before Dewey.⁵¹ Miller taught an empirical theology of Christian education that is useful for this comparative study on Augustine and Bushnell. This is why, for Miller, the church is more central than the home to Christian education:

I have used the term *nurture* as a broader term to describe the involvement of the pupil in the atmosphere and relationships of a community including knowledge about it as a means toward loyalty to it. Christian education is the nurture of the total person in all the relationships of life seen from the perspective of membership in the Christian community. This is a program "from womb to tomb." The Christian family performs this function on an impermanent basis while children are in the home, but only the Church can do it for children or adults on a permanent basis. A close relationship between parents and the parish is essential if the family and Church are to cooperate in the major project of incorporating members into the body.⁵²

Expected Outcomes for the Researcher

The intent of the researcher in conducting this study was to identify elements of socialization or education (human development broadly conceived) in the conversion process. This was viewed as important because as people progress toward establishing a personal faith, the roles of conversion and nurture are usually both

⁵⁰ R. C. Miller, *The Clue of Christian Education* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 15.

⁵¹ "The Social Science of Horace Bushnell," Howe, p. 306.

⁵² Miller, *Christian Nurture and the Church*, p. vii–viii.

significant. The relationship of the two is important to understand for educators who try to synthesize developmental theories with transitions or stages of growth. Certain theories, such as the Gestalt and experiential theories of learning, have views of learning that are related the ideas of conversion and nurture.⁵³ Consequently, it was projected that understanding concepts of Christian conversion and of Christian nurture may prove to be helpful in explaining the changes needed for individual growth and for societal health as well. An understanding of these two concepts can certainly be helpful in fostering growth and development in learners. The point was to examine the relationship between Christian conversion and Christian nurture and the role of choice in the development of foundational beliefs and values. This can help advance our ability to improve religious education in the schools, homes, churches and in the community in general.

A gap in knowledge was found because a research project comparing these two works had never been done in the field of the foundations of Christian education. The expected outcome was to inductively review and compare these two works and the two authors that wrote them concerning the topics of Christian conversion and Christian nurture. Innumerable books, dissertations, and articles have been written about Augustine, Bushnell and these two books. There are also many works that compare conversion and nurture, more than a few of which have been stellar. However, for some reason no one has ever gone back to the sources of the theoretical

⁵³ I was thinking of the “insight” theories of Kohler, Wertheimer, Koffka and Lewin, the problem-solving theories of John Dewey and others, Piaget and the constructivists which followed him, Vigotsky’s “imitation” or Bandura’s “modeling” theories. These theories are surveyed in D. C. Philips and Jonas F. Soltis *Perspectives on Learning*. New York: Teacher’s College Press, 2004.

origins of these two topics and compared these two works. In the event that modern theorizing has become disconnected from its roots or could arrive at greater synthesis concerning this topic through a study like this, then this research was seen to potentially be both profitable and justified. A further desire was that this study would somehow be useful for praxis as well as for theory.

The Purpose for Christian Education

Horace Bushnell writes,

It is to be expected that Christian education will radically differ from that which is not Christian. Now it is the very character and mark of all unchristian education, that it brings up the child for future conversion. No effort is made, save to form a habit of outward virtue, and, if God please to convert the family to something higher and better, after they come to the age of maturity, it is well. Is then Christian education, or the nurture of the Lord, no way different from this? Or is it rather to be supposed that it will have a higher aim and a more sacred character.⁵⁴

There has to be a purpose in education, especially in Christian education, that carries merit in and of itself outside of its simple ability to lead to conversion. Bushnell discusses a concept that he calls “the ostrich nurture,”⁵⁵ a description he applies to practices and theories of church life and conversion that make true Christian parenting practices virtually impossible. Bushnell discovers the danger of “negative education,” which includes no religious or moral training at all. This practice is viewed as “negative” education rather than “neutral” because it devalues what should be of the highest value.

⁵⁴ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 10.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, part III, pp. 52–73.

This comparative historiography begins with an overview of these two thinkers and their writings. Chapter 2 focuses on Augustine and the *Confessions* and Chapter 3 focuses on Bushnell and *Christian Nurture*. Finally, Chapter 4 presents a synthesis. As we study these theorists in Chapters 2 and 3, we will discover that several issues are addressed by both Augustine and Bushnell. They both address such questions as the atonement of Christ; the Word of God or the scriptures; catechism and training; the love of God; and the influence of the world, the church, and the home. One area of common ground for Augustine and Bushnell lies in their theories of infant baptism. They each approach this subject from very different angles, and for different reasons, but there is a common thread in that they both see infant baptism as necessary and not as an optional sacrament. Augustine stresses its necessity because of original sin: If an infant or child dies before Christian baptism occurs, the child who has already been baptized as an infant may still go to heaven. Bushnell teaches that infant baptism is important as a covenantal moment of welcoming the newborn child into the family of God. For Bushnell, baptism is a symbol of the organic unity of the Christian family. Another common thread lies in the area of sanctification or growth in holiness of character and life for the Christian. Once again, Augustine and Bushnell have very different approaches, but Augustine's concept of the *summum bonum* (motivation for the highest good) has some similarities with Bushnell's idea of the one Holy Principle that is presumed to be at work within the Christian.

Confessions and *Christian Nurture* are not written in the same style and it is sometimes hard to compare their principal points. One is a personal story designed to

make confession to God in which Augustine addresses in great detail the struggles of his lust, the flesh, and sensual matters. The other is more of a handbook and rationale for how to raise Christian children to adulthood. However, Horace Bushnell does not leave out a discussion of the physical nurture needed as a means of grace to overcome the struggles in this body that we experience. And the *Confessions* is not just the story of Augustine, himself. There is enough detail about his mother; his friend, Alypius; and his own son, Adeodatus; as well as about his godly “pastor,” Ambrose, to provide many comparisons with the teachings of Bushnell.

Reference must be made to the comparable philosophical foundations of these two writings. Augustine lived in a time when the church was trying to establish sound doctrine and to distinguish that from what it saw as heresy. Two heresies that distinctly affected Augustine’s life and the *Confessions* were Manichaeism and Pelagianism. Many of his other writings address these two heresies or a schism that happened within the church itself called *Donatism*.⁵⁶ Augustine actually became a member of the Manichaeans during his wayward years because their teachings allowed for all the sensual enjoyments in which a person may wish to participate. Augustine came to his radical conversion as a consequence of a disillusioning discussion with one of the leaders of this group during which Augustine realized that the Manichaeans did not have any real answers to life; he was also influenced by the neo-Platonists’ writings, especially those of Plotinus. Many platonic beliefs are evident throughout his writing and even his conception of “original sin” can be

⁵⁶ A *schism* is not the same as a *heresy*. It is a division within the group that makes up the church.

interpreted in that light. On the other hand, Bushnell's paradigm is very practical. Bushnell is somewhat Pelagian for the very reason that Augustine reacted against it as a heresy; the Pelagians taught complete free will. Augustine taught that our will has been ruined by the fall of Adam and it is marred by the effects of original sin, so that we are incapable of turning to God or obeying without the assistance of grace. Furthermore, the later beliefs and writings of Augustine reacted against extreme Pelagianism. This resulted in the intensification of his teachings about predestination and, in his later years, the development of a stronger concept of total depravity of all humankind. Augustine's beliefs became the accepted beliefs of the Catholic Church and it is especially the later beliefs for which he is most known.⁵⁷

Definitions of Conversion and Nurture

Augustine and Bushnell each have their own definitions of *conversion* and *nurture*. As a starting point, a general definition of these words is shared in order to have a reasonable base with which to compare their thoughts.⁵⁸

Conversion

One definition of *conversion* common to dictionaries is "to leave one religious attachment or none for another."⁵⁹ But Christian conversion has a deeper meaning.

⁵⁷ See Book 8:9:1 of the *Confessions* on page 196, which is subtitled "The Two Wills" for Augustine's theological perspective at the time that he wrote the *Confessions*. See also Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), p. 171.

⁵⁸ Another way to determine what something *is* to identify what it *is not* or to state it in negative terms. This was a common practice of Moses Maimonides, the twelfth-century Jewish educator mentioned earlier.

Conversion in the Koine⁶⁰ Greek text of the New Testament is *metanoia*. It has a similar root to that from which we get the word *metamorphosis* in English. It has the meaning of *turning around, repentance, change of mind, or transformation*. The idea of conversion has a “turning” by the consent of the individual at the core.

Furthermore:

Metanoia in the context of theological discussion, where it is used often, is usually interpreted to mean repentance. However, some people argue that the word should be interpreted more literally to denote changing one's mind, in the sense of embracing thoughts beyond its present limitations or thought patterns (an interpretation which is compatible with the denotative meaning of *repentance* but replaces its negative connotation with a positive one, focusing on the superior state being approached rather than the inferior prior state being departed from).⁶¹

This appears to be the sense most compatible with Christian education, or any education for that matter. It may be a dramatic and sudden turning or it may be a series of smaller and slower changes that happen along the developmental scale. In the root meaning of the word *metanoia* and in a dynamic view of human development, it would seem that all of humankind, not unlike nature, is continually involved in a series of “conversions.” It should not be astounding that at some point

⁵⁹ See Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Thesaurus and Encyclopedia, Copyright 2007-2008. Merriam-Webster Incorporated. Available online at www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary. Or see The Free Dictionary by Farlex, Copyright 2008 Farlex, Inc. Available online at www.thefreedictionary.com.

⁶⁰ The word means *common*. It was the language of the common person in the Roman Empire at the time of New Testament writers. It is compared in different eras to the more classical Greek that endured from the time of the philosophers. The difference is somewhat similar to the proper, formal use of the English language in Shakespeare's time and the usage today.

⁶¹ Geoffrey W. Bromley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985). The complete study of *metanoia* (convert, repent, change one's mind) in Bromley's dictionary is handled on pages 589-590, 636, 639-644. They also have entries for *paideia* (instruction, discipline, pedagogy, teaching) at pp. 753-758, *nouthesia* (admonition, correction, reminding) at pp. 645-646. They do not have an entry for *ektrephete* which is “nurture” per se.

the caterpillar is utterly and completely transformed into a butterfly. The mysterious parts are how the synergistic operations of the grace of God and the will of humankind work together in the choosing of a personal path or a new path.

Nurture

There is a Bible verse that tells parents to “provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”⁶² A web search for definitions of the word *nurture* brought four definitions from the 1913 Webster’s Dictionary and several other variations shown in the chart in Figure 1 in the Appendix.⁶³ The definition of the noun form as provided by WordNet, “helping someone grow up to be an accepted member of the community,” is very similar to Horace Bushnell’s understanding of *nurture*. The difference is that Bushnell sees the baptized infant as already being a member of the church or faith community from the child’s earliest days in this world. Nevertheless, the verb form, “to help develop, to help grow,” is definitely why he is providing a handbook of instructions on Christian nurture.

If we put together these two concepts of conversion and nurture, it is possible to conceive of a theory of conversion that happens in a climate of nurture and a theory of nurture that allows for the possibility of a single or multiple conversion experiences in our Christian growth. As Augustine prayed, “Holy Spirit, my inner Teacher, open to me the wisdom of those around me so that I may never cease

⁶² Ephesians 6:4 (King James Version).

⁶³ Retrieved from <http://onlinedictionary.datasegment.com/word/nurture>.

learning your lessons.”⁶⁴ The *magister interior* or “inward teacher” is an important concept in the *Confessions* as well.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Third Homily on the First Letter of St. John (13) in St. Augustine, *Restless Till We Rest In You* compiled by Paul Thigpen, p. 111.

⁶⁵ It can be found in 4:1:1 and in 11:8:10.

CHAPTER TWO

AUGUSTINE

Chapter 2 contains five parts. First, we examine a biographical sketch of his life and then we investigate the structure of the *Confessions*, itself. Then, after making some theological observations, we study his view of conversion in that book and finish with his thoughts on nurture.

Biographical Sketch

Augustine lived during a “pivot point” in history. The world he came into was not the same by the time he left it. He played a significant part in its dramatic turn. One could say that history itself experienced a “conversion” of its own because of Augustine’s influence. To understand this transformation, one must understand Augustine’s story. The life of Augustine can be divided into three periods, and each of those segments can be subdivided into smaller sections for insight as well. Eugene Portalie⁶⁶ has labeled those eras as follows:

1. From His Birth to His Conversion (354–386)—the young wanderer’s gradual return to faith;
2. From His Conversion to His Episcopate (386–395)—the doctrinal development of the Christian philosopher to the time of his episcopate;
3. As Bishop of Hippo (396–430)—the full development of his activities upon the Episcopal throne of Hippo.

Portalie shows that during each of these periods, there was a major heresy or schism within the church that concerned and affected Augustine. In the first period, it was the Manichaean controversy and the “Problem of Evil.” In the second period, it

⁶⁶ Eugene Portalie, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. II (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), p. 9.

was the Donatist controversy and the “Theory of the Church.” In the latter years of his life, he confronted the Pelagian controversy and the “Doctrine of Grace.” In fact, Augustine comes to be called “The Doctor of Grace,” a noble moniker. In his closing years, Augustine also became involved in another controversy that related to the struggles against Arianism.

The first division of his life (354–386) took him from his birth to his “new birth in Christ” at the age of 31. This division of the first thirty-two years of his life can be generally subdivided into three parts: “Reaching the Age of Accountability” (354–369), “Coming of Age as a Man” (369–377), and “His Years as a Manichaean (377–386).”⁶⁷

The first period includes his infancy and his first studies (354–365), and his formal studies in a nearby town called Madauras. Augustine was born on November 13, 354, in Thagaste, Numidia, of North Africa, which was a significant area in the Roman Empire. Phillip Cary says that it was most like our Midwest, and could have been likened to the Bible Belt and to the Corn Belt (it was a very fertile and productive area at that time) of the Roman Empire.⁶⁸ Thagaste is now a small Arabic town known as *Souk-Ahras* in modern-day Algeria, about halfway between Morocco and Egypt. His parents were Patricius and Monica. His given name was Aurelius Augustinus.⁶⁹ Patricius was a man of small means, but he was the town “councillor,”

⁶⁷ Portalie, “Life of St. Augustine of Hippo.”

⁶⁸ Philip Cary, “Lecture 3, *Confessions: The Search for Wisdom*,” in *The Great Courses: Philosophy and Intellectual History—Augustine: Philosopher and Saint* (Chantilly, VA: The Teaching Company, 1997), p. 13.

⁶⁹ He came to be known as *Augustine*. His name can be phonetically pronounced either ‘**A**w-guh-steen’ or ‘Uh-**guhs**-tin’.

which was a position of influence and respect, even though it had some unpleasant responsibilities. He was not a Christian and lived a “loose” lifestyle at times—drinking, partying, carousing, and occasionally beating his wife. Monica was a godly woman of Berber descent.⁷⁰ She remained faithful to her husband and raised her children in the church with proper instruction and guidance. Augustine had one brother, Navigius, and at least one (probably several) sisters. Latin was the official language of the western part of the Roman Empire, of which North Africa was a part, while the East remained Greek-speaking. Punic was the native language of Augustine’s family. Augustine performed well in Latin grammar and in rhetoric classes early in his studies.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine writes about his participation in “the pear tree incident.”⁷¹ Augustine participated, with some ill-behaved boys, in the robbing of a pear tree, not to eat the fruit, but to purposefully take a poor man’s livelihood and to throw it to the pigs. Augustine carried the memory, and it seems the remorse, for his lifetime. The concept of “the age of accountability” is believed to have originated with Augustine’s retelling of this incident in the *Confessions*. The story as it is written bears strong allusions to the “forbidden fruit” story in Genesis 3, which likewise occurs in a garden, the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve were said to live in a paradisiacal setting.

⁷⁰ Andrew Knowles and Pachomios Penkett, *Augustine and His World*, (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp. 17, 26, 29, 30, 108.

⁷¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 2:4.

During the period that Portalie identifies as “Coming of Age as a Man” between 369 and 377, this “first” sin led to many more and he became a wanderer away from home, the church, and God. He spent the year 369–370 (age 15) in idleness at home. Then, thanks to the sponsorship of a rich “uncle” named Romanianus, he traveled to Carthage in the fall of 370 to study rhetoric.⁷² In Carthage, Augustine took a concubine to live with him and they had a son out of wedlock in 372 named Adeodatus. Augustine truly cared for this unnamed sexual companion and he lived with her for almost fifteen years.⁷³ He did not lay aside the satisfactions of all of his lusts during this time, however. When he was 19, in 373, Augustine read Cicero’s *Hortentius* and fell in love. After all his lust and lasciviousness, it was not a woman with whom he fell in love; it was with philosophy.⁷⁴

That period ended as Augustine joined with some friends who were members of the heretical group call the Manichaeans.⁷⁵ For nine years, he lived as a Manichaean, which was exceptionally compatible with his lifestyle. They were materialistic dualists who taught the eternal nature of light and dark, God and matter, good and evil. They were materialists who believed the body and the physical realm were part of the evil, lower world. Ronald Nash⁷⁶ writes,

⁷² Ironically, Augustine’s parents arranged his move to Carthage to avoid the pagan Roman “public” schools. But it is in Carthage that he wanders far into sin.

⁷³ Knowles and Penkett, *Augustine and His World*, p. 45. He had one son by her named Adeodatus. He did not want or love the boy at first though, but he apparently grew fond of him as he grew older.

⁷⁴ Cary, *Augustine: Philosopher and Saint*, p. 13.

⁷⁵ Portalie, *Life of St. Augustine of Hippo*.

⁷⁶ Ronald H. Nash, *Great Leaders of the Christian Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), p. 86.

Manichaeism appealed to Augustine intellectually because it appeared to offer a superior answer to the problem of evil than he could find in his mother's Christianity. Augustine was also drawn to Manichaeism because it made fewer moral demands than Christianity. He could be a good Manichaean and continue to live as he pleased.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine leads us to believe that he took every advantage to sin during those years. Meanwhile, as he moved away from God, his mother's patience, prayers, and efforts toward the salvation of Patricius were rewarded. Augustine's father converted to Christianity and was baptized the same year that Adeodatus was born. Shortly thereafter, Patricius died. Monica spoke of this as a miracle of God and turned her attention more ardently than ever toward the reclamation of her lost son. Her ardent pleas for her son with a certain priest resulted in him declaring, "Go away from me now. As you live, it is impossible that the son of such tears should perish." She took this as if it had sounded forth from heaven.⁷⁷

Williston Walker writes, "If the sensuous Augustine was thus early aroused, the truth-seeking Augustine was speedily awakened."⁷⁸ Augustine declares that his exposure to Cicero's writings had "changed my affections, and turned my prayers to Thyself, O Lord."⁷⁹ The seeking of wisdom and truth became his entire axiology at that time in his life. During this time he conducted a school at Thagaste (373–375),⁸⁰ became an auditor in the Manichaean sect (373–384), returned to Carthage to open a school (376), and won a coveted poetry award (377). He wrote "De pulchro et apto"

⁷⁷ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 3:12:21, p. 92.

⁷⁸ Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p. 160.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 4:4. This story is recounted and its affect upon Augustine is analyzed well in Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967). It was during this time that an unnamed friend of his died. This affected Augustine very deeply.

(“On the Beautiful and the Fitting”), which was his first published work (380),⁸¹ and he experienced advancement within his profession as an instructor in rhetoric. By this time Augustine had developed many questions related to the teachings of the Manichees. When Faustus, one of their leading apologists, came to Carthage he met with him. He discovered that Faustus did not know much beyond knowledge of a “conventional kind,”⁸² but he respects him for “not being ashamed to confess it.”⁸³ “From this point Augustine’s enthusiasm for Manichaeism began to fade.”⁸⁴ He was gravely disappointed in this Gnostic sect, which had promised great wisdom to its followers.⁸⁵

His career took a very favorable turn when some rich Manichee friends encouraged him to move to Rome. This was timely because he was finding the students in North Africa to be very unruly. But Rome also proved disappointing because the students in Rome were apathetic and did not pay their bills, which Augustine disdained). Augustine’s talents caught the eye of a Roman official, however, who recommended Augustine for the position of public orator for the imperial city of Milan. There is an incident in Milan in which his mother pleads with him to take her with him to Rome or to come back home to Thagaste. He tells her that the ship does not sail until the next day, so she leaves to visit a shrine. Augustine

⁸¹ John Ryan, Timeline, in *Confessions*, p. 39.

⁸² *Confessions*, 5:6:11–12.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Knowles and Penkett, *Augustine and His World*, p. 58.

⁸⁵ Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003), p. 117.

then secretly ditches her and boards the ship, which sets off for Rome.⁸⁶ The year after he opened a school of rhetoric in Rome, he moved to Milan in 384 to accept an appointment to what was arguably the most prestigious chair in the entire Roman Empire as a professor of rhetoric, one of the most admired professions of his day.

Several things occurred while Augustine was in Italy that proved providential for his conversion. He encountered the skepticism of the New Academy Movement in philosophy; he heard the Bishop St. Ambrose preach; and under his influence, Augustine discovered the Neo-Platonist writers like Plotinus and possibly Porphyry. His mother eventually followed him to Milan. She convinced Augustine to put aside his concubine and to prepare himself for a proper marriage. Augustine agreed to the arranged “society” marriage. But while he waited the two years for his fiancé to come of age, he took up with another woman. It was at that time that he uttered his famous prayer for the Lord to “Give me chastity and continence, but not yet!”⁸⁷

The first stage of Augustine’s life (354–386) ends with the immediate events surrounding his conversion, which is the launching pad for the second stage (386–395). The study of his actual conversion is the topic of analysis in the fourth section of this chapter. The exact account of his conversion, reprinted from *Confessions*, can be read in the Appendix.⁸⁸ During the decade between 386 and 395, Augustine transitioned from convert to bishop. It can be studied in two halves: “The Convert becomes a Priest” (386–391) and “The Priest becomes a Bishop” (391–395).⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Paul Strathern, *St. Augustine in 90 Minutes* (Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1997), p. 18.

⁸⁷ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 8:7:17.

⁸⁸ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 8:12:28-30, Book 9:1:1.

⁸⁹ Portalie, *Life of St. Augustine of Hippo*.

Sometime around August 3, 386, Augustine experienced a now-famous encounter with God in the Garden of Milan, near a fig tree.⁹⁰ He heard a voice saying, “Tolle Lege” (“take up and read [the Bible]”). The words sounded as if a child was playing or singing, but there was no one nearby. So he picked up the Bible. The very first passage it fell open to was Romans 13:13–14.

¹³Let us walk honestly, as in the day: not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy. ¹⁴But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ: and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences.⁹¹

The detailed account of Augustine’s spiritual journey is analyzed shortly. His friend, Alypius, was with him in the garden and he also “took up faith” at that moment. The precise events that led up to Augustine’s conversion and that resulted thereafter on his road from convert to priest follow:

1. Augustine read an account of St. Anthony of the Desert during the summer before his conversion, which deeply affected him. Anthony had sold all he had, given it to the poor, went to live as a hermit in the desert, and devoted himself wholly to serving the Lord.
2. Augustine was growing extremely displeased with the waywardness of his sins, their failure to satisfy his inner search for peace, and his inability to overcome them in his own strength.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 8:12:28-30.

⁹¹ Retrieved from <http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=1&b=6&c=13>. The Bible that Augustine opened likely was a Latin translation of the scriptures similar to the Vulgate translation that St. Jerome was commissioned to translate in 382 by Pope Damasus.

3. Augustine was influenced by Bishop Ambrose's love, preaching, and guidance. The bishop made himself available for conversation and gave much time to Augustine and other seekers of truth.
4. Augustine found in the Neo-Platonists answers that the Manichees did not have. Many say that he had already decided to convert to Catholic Christianity before the "Tolle Lege" encounter. Others say that he had merely committed philosophically to be a Christian Platonist.⁹²
5. Very soon after his conversion, Augustine determined to abandon his career in rhetoric, quit his teaching position in Milan, give up any ideas of marriage, and devote himself entirely to serving God and the practices of the priesthood, which for him included a commitment to celibacy.
6. Augustine became a catechumenate shortly after his conversion and was baptized on Easter Weekend of the next year (April 23–24, 387) by Bishop Ambrose in Milan, along with his friend, Alypius, and his son, Adeodatus.
7. Augustine spent the winter before his baptism in a cloistered setting in Cassiciacum, reading and discussing Christianity.
8. After his baptism, Augustine returned to Africa. During the trip, his group of family and friends were delayed in Ostia, a coastal city, where Monica became sick and died. Mother and son shared an interesting heavenly vision together.

⁹² For discussion of this topic, see John O'Meara, *Young Augustine: The Growth of St. Augustine's Mind up to His Conversion* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1965).

9. Augustine returned to Thagaste in 388, where he sold everything and gave the money to the poor, excepting the family home, which he turned into a small monastery.
10. Adeodatus died in 389 or 390 at the age of 16 or 17, leaving Augustine with no living immediate family members.
11. Augustine went to Hippo Regius to see about setting up a monastery there, and was forced into the priesthood. Against his will, he was ordained as a presbyter (i.e., priest) in 391. What happens is that Augustine is “passing through Hippo and he is sort of snared to become their bishop because their bishop is about to retire and, after all, Augustine is sort of a famous guy. So, he ends up in a community where he is essentially a stranger known by reputation, but not really known personally by anyone. The people pressure him to become their priest and though he does not have a desire to do it nor a sign from God to do it, he takes their pressure as being part of the irresistible providences of God. This adds to his growing sense of predestination and soon thereafter the bishop who had agreed to remain in that role becomes very ill and he is naturally elevated into that position, even more confirming his beliefs.”⁹³
12. Augustine began his career as a writer during these years. He called one of his early books the *Soliloquies*, a word he claimed to have made up; it was published in 386.

⁹³ William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman, *The Great Course: St. Augustine's Confessions*, Part 2 of 2 (Chantilly, VA: The Teaching Company, 2004), p. 95.

For the next 35 to 40 years, Augustine served in Hippo preaching, celebrating mass, resolving local disputes, and ministering to his congregation.

His road from priest to bishop was an accelerated one. During the years between 391 and 395, the Bishop Valerius, who was the overseer of that “See” (jurisdiction), became very ill and frail. He was unable to continue in that role and handed over the reins of the See to Augustine. In 396, Augustine was made coadjutor with Bishop Valerius and basically administered that See from that time. The years before Augustine was made bishop were spent addressing the Donatist controversy, which became very charged at that time. The question concerned the purity and holiness of the church. In part, intense debate was devoted to the issue of whether the sacraments administered by clergy who had active sin in their lives could be considered legitimate.

The third period of Augustine’s life consisted of the thirty-four years that he was the Bishop of Hippo. It is also split into two parts by a major event. In 410, Rome fell to the barbarians (Visigoths). This was as catastrophic for the Roman Empire as it would be for us if the United States were to come to an end in our lifetime. In the years before the fall of Rome (395–410), the Donatist controversy was still in full swing, and Augustine as a bishop had to be even more involved than he had been as a priest. It was also during those years that he wrote the *Confessions* (397–400) and several other classic works, such as *On Christian Doctrine* (397–426) and *On the Trinity* (400–416). The Synod of Arles (314) had formally condemned the heresy of Donatism and rejected their view on the sacraments. Heick has noted,

“The Catholics established the position that the validity of the sacraments does not depend upon the moral condition of the one who administers them.”⁹⁴ Augustine did start his official monastery there during those years and established his *Regula* (monastic rule). He was hence known as the patron Saint of Clergy.⁹⁵ After the catastrophic collapse of the Roman Empire, many irrational claims were made that purported to explain why the Empire collapsed. One of these was that the Empire collapsed because of the legalization of Christianity. Many people also felt that it was the end of the world. In an attempt to address the first issue and to assuage the fears of the second, Augustine wrote his masterpiece, *The City of God*. It took him fifteen years to complete all twenty-two books that compose this work (412–426).

About the time of the fall of Rome, another controversy arose known as *Pelagianism*. Pelagius was a British monk who taught that “If I ought, I can.”⁹⁶ The discussion came about because of Augustine’s plea to God in the *Confessions*, “Grant what you command and command what you will.”⁹⁷ Pelagius was horrified that Augustine would teach such apparent human helplessness as such a statement seemed to imply, “If human beings were incapable of being good, then what use was free will?”⁹⁸ Their debates covered matters of original sin, predestination, free will, and grace. Augustine presented the argument that won and Pelagius was officially

⁹⁴ Otto W. Heick, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), p. 136.

⁹⁵ He is also the patron saint of brewers, printers, and those with sore eyes. He is venerated in most Christian groups (Western and Eastern) around the world.

⁹⁶ Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p. 168.

⁹⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 10:29:40. For simple (handbook type) discussion, consult Knowles and Penkett, *Augustine and His World*, p. 119 ff. or Portalie, *Life of St. Augustine of Hippo*.

⁹⁸ For a thorough treatment of Augustine’s theology concerning Pelagianism as well as each of these controversies, see Gerald Bonner *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies*, revised edition (Norwich: Canterbury, 1986).

condemned by the second council in Carthage in 416 and sent into exile. Pelagius died shortly thereafter, but one of his disciples, Coelestius, continued teaching Pelagianism within Augustine's jurisdiction; so the controversy continued for another decade (it is not resolved even today). Augustine also carried on long-distance debates via letters with thinkers like Julian of Eclanum; many of these letters have been preserved and are available today.

In 421, Augustine wrote the *Enchiridion*, a handbook on faith, hope, and love for a young disciple who had pressed him with many questions about what was most important in the Christian faith. One of his last published works (427) was the *Retractions*, wherein he set out to correct things he had written in the past and bring his various teachings into consistency. In 429, North Africa was invaded by the Vandals from Europe. They were at the gates of the city of Hippo when Augustine died on August 28, 430, at the age of 75. His remains have been moved twice and now rest at Pavia in Italy within the "St. Peter at the Gates of Heaven" shrine. He has over 350 sermons and tractates that are published, hundreds of letters, apologetic or polemic pieces, and numerous commentaries (most notably on Genesis, Psalms, and Paul's Letter to the Romans), in addition to his host of classic works. The order of Augustinians established in Hippo in his lifetime not only persists, but is spread around the world today.

Overview of the Book *Confessions*

Unity and Integrity of the *Confessions*

The unity and integrity of the *Confessions* has been called into question by some writers. An investigation into the unity and the integrity of the book asks questions like (1) whether it is actually an autobiography (or whether all of it is); (2) whether there is any one unifying theme to the book; and (3) how the chosen means of writing communicates more, less, or exactly what is intended. We also need to analyze the author's purpose of writing in order to evaluate the unity and integrity of his work. The question of integrity goes beyond form criticism to redaction criticism and asks whether the transmission and translation of the text as we have it can be trusted. Fortunately, this part of the analysis is made easier because much has been written in those areas. Some of the experts can give the various viewpoints for us on this subject. Ronald H. Nash writes,

[I]t would be a mistake to view [the *Confessions*] as an autobiography. Augustine was less interested that readers know the specifics of his life than that they understood the moral, intellectual and spiritual struggles he went through in his search for the truth about God and himself. Augustine used the word confession in two senses: to acknowledge his many sins but, more important, to glorify the God who had delivered him from his sins.⁹⁹

But not everyone has the same opinions. Carl G. Vaught writes,

On more than one occasion, Augustine says that he is not telling the story of his life to inform God about it, but to speak to other men and women in God's presence (5.13), (8.1.1), (10.1.1–10.4.6). Though he could scarcely have foreseen the impact that his book would make on future generations, in addressing "that small part of the human race who may come upon these writings," he makes it clear that he wants to bring his readers into the vertical relationship between God and the soul from which he speaks (2.3.5). Augustine's deepest wish for the *Confessions* is that those who read it may

⁹⁹ Nash, *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*, p. 88.

understand “what depths there are from which we are to cry unto thee” (2.3.5).¹⁰⁰

In Vaught’s opinion, then, the *Confessions* is a testimonial for the purpose of converting others; in other words, it uses an evangelistic motif. If the *Confessions* is viewed as autobiographical in nature, then consideration must be given to the limits of autobiography and how it might be interpreted as literature.¹⁰¹ James Siebach says that “the structure of *Confessions*, Book I shows that the guiding principle of St. Augustine’s autobiographical narrative is not simply a temporal sequence of events but rather the stages of a proof for God’s existence.”¹⁰²

Monsignor Ryan has written an excellent assessment of the purpose and character of Augustine’s intentions in writing. He says,

The title of St. Augustine’s autobiographical work indicates its chief purpose and character: it is a statement of what he has done and of what he addresses directly to almighty God. When he attaches this term to his work, we immediately think of it as being a confession of sins. So it is, and so its author meant it to be. . . . Yet if the confession of sins is a principal thing in Augustine’s work, it is not the only principal thing. His work is rightly called *Confessions*, in the plural. He does not merely make confession of sin in general; he makes confessions of particular, separate sins. Again, he makes not only confessions of sins; but confessions of other kinds as well. Augustine’s book, in fact, is a threefold confession. It is a confession of sins, a confession of faith, and a confession of praise.¹⁰³

Ryan explains that Augustine confesses far more than merely his offenses against God’s commandment not to commit adultery.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, he states,

¹⁰⁰ Carl G. Vaught, *The Journey Toward God in Augustine’s Confessions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Three journal articles of this nature are Vance (1984), Bakan (1965), and Rothfield (1981).

¹⁰² James Siebach, “Rhetorical Strategies in Book One of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Augustinian Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 93–108, 1995.

¹⁰³ Ryan, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, pp. 28–29.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[B]ecause it is such a threefold confession, St. Augustine's book is a unique description of the threefold way that makes up the spiritual life. It is a case history, without parallel in the library of psychology, of a soul as it travels the purgative way, illuminative way, and the unitive way . . . and Augustine's conversion is in one sense a twofold conversion: it is a conversion of the intellect and it is a conversion of the will. In another sense, it is a threefold conversion: philosophical, moral and religious. It is a purgation of sins against supernatural truth, the truth revealed by God in his Church, a purgation of sins against natural truths, as found in valid philosophy, and a purgation of sins in the moral order.¹⁰⁵

Conversion is seen as a unifying theme of the whole work. An excellent defense of that unity can be found in *The Logic of Conversion and the Structure of the Argument of St. Augustine's Confessions*, a Master's thesis presented by Brian John Spence to the University of St. Michael's College, Canada, in the spring of 1993. Spence establishes a theological as well as logical basis through which "conversion" can be understood as the unifying theme of the *Confessions*. Spence states, "[T]he logic in question should, thus, be characterized as that of conversion. It is personal and existential, rooted in the life of the historical individual at precisely the point where God communicates Himself to that individual. It is from this perspective that the *Confessions* is written."¹⁰⁶ He shows, "how Augustine unifies the argument of

Such sins are only the most gross and obvious of the wrongs that he has done. They include his long years of concubinage with the mother of Adeodatus, a shorter such association with another unnamed woman, and whatever other offenses he was guilty of due to the concupiscence of the flesh. In addition to such things, he confesses sins of pride and ambition, of frivolity and vanity, of ingratitude and damage to others, of conceit and deceit, of lying and dishonesty . . . Along with his sins and errors, Augustine confesses temptations that assail him. If he is able to resist them, it is because of God's grace and not of any strength of his own. If he has not been the victim of certain vices and errors, it is not due to his own virtue or merit. Thus with regard to the misuse of liquor: it is just as truly God's work that he has been kept safe from alcoholism as it is God's work that others have been rescued from it.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰⁶ Brian John Spence, "M. A. Thesis" *The Logic of Conversion and the Structure of the Argument of St. Augustine's Confessions*, University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, Canada, Spring 1993, pp. 6-7.

the *Confessions* by understanding the relation of the human person to the Trinity through the revelation of the Trinity in the person of Christ and in the Christian community”.¹⁰⁷

Spence does not ignore the fact that the integrity of the *Confessions* as literature has been called into question. He refers readers to an article by C. J. Starnes titled “The Unity of the *Confessions*” in *Studia Patristica*.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, Starnes’s complete body of work is one of the best sources of addressing issues of integrity. Spence later states,

While I am not seeking to enter the debate as to how historically accurate Augustine’s autobiography is, I am suggesting that he understands his personal history to have acquired through God’s providential [sic] and salvific grace a certain theological significance. In other words, the *Confessions* may not be history in the strict sense in which modern historians understand it but . . . Augustine genuinely sees “theological strains” running through his personal history.¹⁰⁹

The question of integrity is very real. Many other researchers, theologians, and writers have wondered if the book was a true account of Augustine’s conversion,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 7. Concerning “in the person of Christ,” Spence further writes,

It could be said that the whole of the *Confessions*, including the autobiographical section, is, in a certain sense, written from the perspective of Christ. What is meant by this is that Augustine is conscious throughout the work of the central role played in the life of the Christian by Christ Himself . . . Augustine’s experience leads to the conclusion that if there is to be a mediation, it must come from God Himself. The author understands faith to mean a real incorporation into the life of Christ. From the standpoint of God’s inner life, the world looks differently for the Christian than for the unbeliever. This is the whole source of the distinction between Christian and Platonic Wisdom.

And further, concerning “in the Christian community,” Spence later writes on page 20:

[T]he Ninth Book of the *Confessions* . . . is Augustine’s account of his actual entry into the Catholic Church and his discourse on the life and death of his mother. . . To be a Christian is, for Augustine, to be a member of the Christian community; it is to share the common life of faith and charity which Augustine describes in Book Nine.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., footnote 8, p. 8.

confessions, or testimony. Garry Wills cites the long list of respected scholars who have questioned the credibility of Augustine's garden story conversion:

Just as the Damascus story is not told by Paul but only later by Luke, so the garden story is not told by Augustine in any of the discussions of his conversion written at the time, but only later in *The Testimony*. That has been enough to raise doubts about its literal truth. A long line of scholars denied the garden story's veracity—Boissier (1888), Harnack (1888), Loofs (1897), Gourdon (1900), Becker (1908), Thimme (1908), Alfaric (1918.). But it was not till 1950, when Pierre Courcelle published his assault on the literal reading of Book Eight (among other things), that the debate became widespread and impassioned. O'Donnell says that Courcelle's book "worked a Copernican revolution in Augustine scholarship" (O i.xxi). He thinks that the emotional resistance to Courcelle's book resembled the previous century's struggle over "higher criticism" of the Bible. "The controversy replicated the earlier battles occasioned by application of scholarly instruments and criteria to biblical texts: literal narrative seemed threatened, and with literal narrative faith itself seemed threatened." (O i.xxv).¹¹⁰

Wills artfully addresses the doubters of the garden conversion story who emphasize the contrast between Augustine's earlier works, which do not reference the account of his "dramatic" conversion and the testimony he gives in Book VIII of the *Confessions*. Most of the critics fall in this category, but a few have expressed general concern about:

[The] artificial presentation of the tale, the pat way conversion narratives surge up opportunely and converge on the dramatic climax to Book Eight. Even the highly wrought rhetorical presentation makes some uneasy about the sincerity of the account. Book Eight does not give us a spontaneous account, but a calculated one. Augustine relishes his storytelling gifts—the heightened alliteration, for instance: *volvens et versans me in vinculo* (churning and chafing in my chains). Or the epigrammatic paradoxes: "crazed to be sane...dying to be alive." Or the patterns of antithesis: "aware of how bad things were with me, unaware of how good. . . ." But if rhetoric of itself precludes truthfulness, then we had better give up on Augustine entirely. He cannot speak at all without using his inmost language which is rhetoric. The idea that calculation cannot go with sincerity is naïve . . . He could describe

¹¹⁰ Garry Wills, *Saint Augustine's Conversion* (New York: Viking, 2004), p. 31.

the soul's interior only through convolutions of language he had mastered as a tool for knowledge, not a mere exercise in ornament. The rhetorical presentation of his own turmoil is no different from his highly rhetorical presentation of the life and suffering of Jesus. He is entirely serious and sincere in both.¹¹¹

Wills finishes that line of apology by asking whether Augustine's fig tree in the garden story is to be taken literally or figuratively. That is a very good question. What meaning did the fig tree have in relationship to Augustine's heart? It could have referred to tradition, as Courcelle believed. Israel was often likened to a fig tree in the scriptures. It could be a reference to when Jesus saw the disciple Nathaniel under a fig tree (John 1:47–48) or to the fig tree that Jesus cursed for not bearing fruit in season (Matthew 21:19–21). It also could mean the fig tree in the Garden of Eden from which Adam and Eve took leaves with which to cover their nakedness (Genesis 2:7). O'Donnell says it is all of these.¹¹² The important point is that, whether the fig tree is seen as real or metaphorical, it held meaning for Augustine and his spiritual formation.¹¹³ Colin Starnes is a significant voice in this discussion. He has done a verse-by-verse commentary on the *Confessions*. Concerning the figurative interpretation of Augustine's conversion in the Garden of Milan, Starnes skillfully refutes its proponents and definitively shows that there is something very real to be

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 32.

¹¹² James O'Donnell, *Augustine* (Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1985), Chapter Five.

¹¹³ See Marjorie Suchocki, "The Symbolic Structure of Augustine's *Confessions*." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 50, no. 3, September 1982, pp. 365–378; Danuta Shanzer, "Latent Patterns, Allegorical Choices and Literacy Unity in Augustine's *Confessions*." *Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. 46, no. 1, March 1992, pp. 40–56; Lynn M. Poland, "Augustine, Allegory and Conversion," *Literature and Theology*, vol. 2, no. 1, March 1988, pp. 37–48.

dealt with when a hopelessly lascivious and promiscuous man takes a vow of celibacy and then lives it out for the next forty-six years.¹¹⁴

Development of Thought in the Book

Monsignor Ryan remained convinced that in the *Confessions*, “Augustine adopted the form of a prolonged meditation, or prayer addressed directly to God,”¹¹⁵ while most writers have accepted the fact that the *Confessions* is at least in good part autobiographical in nature, even if it does not fit the precise definition of *autobiography* as contemporary literature defines the genre. Even Monsignor Ryan allows for an autobiographical element in the *Confessions*. When discussing Augustine’s writing styles, he says,

The reader cannot help noting the many subsidiary styles within the *Confessions*. Augustine is engaged in an effort to recall events long past and to make a detailed examination of conscience . . . A notable instance of this is his description of his last interior struggles before accepting the evangelical counsel of chastity; another is his comparison of himself to a man half asleep and drowsily saying that he will get up in a moment.¹¹⁶

How one views the purpose and theme of a piece of literature dictates the structure of the progression of thought presented. Ryan further reveals his concession to the autobiographical nature of the *Confessions* as he speaks its structure. His is

¹¹⁴ Colin Starnes, *Augustine’s Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I–IX* (Waterloo, ONT: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1990), pp. 241–242, footnote 100.

¹¹⁵ Ryan, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, p. 33. The rest of Monsignor Ryan’s thought in its context is as follows:

For his *Confessions* Augustine adopted the form of a prolonged meditation, or prayer addressed directly to God. Obviously, this is a most difficult kind of writing to sustain at length, but Augustine never departs from it, beginning with the memorable invocation at the start and continuing to the words with which it closes. Between these two there are interspersed many formal prayers of petition, praise, and thanksgiving.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

clearly the concession of a “both/and” position rather than that of an “either/or,” however.

The structure of the *Confessions* is simple. In Books 1–9 Augustine tells the story of his life from infancy up to his conversion and the death of his mother on their return journey to Africa, the period covering the first thirty-three years of his life. Book 10 describes his state of mind at the time he was writing these reminiscences of events that had ended ten years previously. It is a further examination of conscience, but with emphasis upon present difficulties rather than upon past failures. Because he has completed the prodigious feat of memory that finds expression in Books 1–9, Augustine is naturally concerned with the character and operation of this power within him. He takes up also the psychological problem of man’s desire for happiness.

Books 11, 12 and 13 are an elaborate exegesis of the opening verses in the book of Genesis. Being concerned with his own existence, nature and destiny as a finite being, and wishing above all to know himself and to know God, it is inevitable that St. Augustine should take up the subjects of time and eternity and of God’s creation of all things.¹¹⁷

Colin Starnes has a similar perspective on the structure of the *Confessions*, but he has a slightly different view of the latter chapters. Both scholars divide the *Confessions* into three sections: Books I–IX, Book X, and Books XI–XIII. But Starnes sees the entire text, even Books X–XIII, as autobiographical in nature. Starnes says,

Although the first nine books are often called the “autobiographical” part of the *Confessions*, the same can be said with equal justice about Book X and Books XI–XIII. In the second part he writes about the condition of his inner

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 32–33. Many others, myself included, have seen both of these purposes in the *Confessions*. The remainder of that passage gives insight as well:

Objections are sometimes made to the effect that because of these last three books the work lacks unity and organization, but they are not well founded. Augustine intended neither to give a complete account of his life nor to give only an account of his life. He did not intend even to give a detailed account of the years leading up to his conversion. What he provides by way of autobiography in Books 1–9 is essentially spiritual biography; it is primarily an account of his interior life rather than of his outward deeds. This spiritual account is brought up to date, so to speak, in Book 10. But in Books 11, 12, and 13, as in Book 10 and in Books 1–9, Augustine continually keeps in view his threefold confession, of sins, of faith, and of praise, and his threefold way, of purgation, of light, and of union with God.

life in the present, and in the third, about his knowledge of the spiritual sense of Scripture. In all three he is writing about different aspects of his life and in this sense all three parts, taken as a whole, constitute his complete autobiography.¹¹⁸

Professor Starnes also sees a very interesting concept of the trinity encased in the fabric of each part of this book. He writes,

The tripartite division is indicated by Augustine at X,ii,2 and XI,ii,2 where he tells us that his confession takes on a new form and object. His first confession is therefore contained in Books I–IX, the second in Book X, and the third in Books XI–XIII. . . . I may briefly summarize my position as follows. Each part is addressed to God and man but each is directed, in a special sense, to a particular person of the Trinity and to a particular human audience. The first is directed to God considered as creator—i.e. to God the Father, and on the human side to any reader whatsoever. The second is directed on the divine side to the Son—that is to Christ the Mediator—and on the human side to Augustine’s fellow Christians. The third is directed to the Holy Spirit and to the Christian philosopher. The whole trinitarian structure reappears again within each of these major divisions.¹¹⁹

Like Ryan and Starnes, Carl G. Vaught also divides the *Confessions* into three sections: “Books I–VI, The Journey toward God”; “Books VII–IX, Encounters with God”; and “Books X–XIII, Access to God.” He has written a three-volume set of books titled *The Journey toward God in Augustine’s Confessions*, *Encounters with God in Augustine’s Confessions*, and *Access to God in Augustine’s Confessions*. Vaught has an interesting division of the development of Augustine’s thought in the *Confessions*, which he calls a “three-dimensional framework.”¹²⁰ Vaught demonstrates great insight and presents it with humility and aplomb:

¹¹⁸ Starnes, “The Place and Purpose of the Tenth Book of the *Confessions*,” in *Augustine’s Conversion*, p. xv.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, footnote 1, pp. xiv–xv.

¹²⁰ Carl G. Vaught, *The Journey toward God in Augustine’s Confessions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 4.

Augustine's *Confessions* develops within a three-dimensional framework: the first is temporal, the second spatial, and the third eternal. These dimensions generate three axes along which it moves, and each axis exhibits two orientations that point in opposite directions. . . . The two orientations of Augustine's temporal development are important because they allow him to embrace the future and to recover the past. . . . The spatial side of Augustine's life also points in two directions, not only moving outward toward the cosmos, but also moving inward toward the soul. . . . The external axis along which Augustine moves makes the interplay between the soul and the ground of its existence possible, pointing upward toward God and pointing downward to his fruitless attempts to flee from God's presence. . . . In approaching Augustine's narrative as an intersection of temporal, spatial, and eternal dimensions, we can make the temporal aspect of his story accessible by reflecting on the psychological structure that it exhibits. This is possible because Augustine builds the account of his life around an explicit conception of human development, distinguishing six stages in the life of a typical individual: infancy, childhood, adolescence, youthful maturity, adulthood and old age. Augustine moves through the first three stages of this sequence in Books I–VI of the text; and since he writes the book between the ages of forty-three and forty-seven, what he says about these stages is formulated from the perspective of adulthood.¹²¹

Phillip Cary shows a similar way to organize the continuity of the book within three thematic angles as well. They are as follows: (1) the intellectual angle: the mind's search for truth (the theme is the philosophical love for, or at least search for, wisdom); (2) the emotional angle: the heart's love and loss (the theme is the diagnosis of human grief as a symptom of the soul's wandering far from God); and (3) the religious angle: the soul's road home (the theme is focusing on how the soul returns to God).¹²² Cary says that the last angle requires the reader to hone his or her focus in "on the role of Christ incarnate (the end of Book 7), the indispensability of the Church (Book 8), the shape of the Christian life (Book 10), the meaning and

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 4–5.

¹²² Cary, *Augustine: Philosopher and Saint*, p. 12, 16, 20.

interpretation of the Scriptures (Book 12), and what Christians really mean by ‘going to heaven’ (Book 13).”¹²³

As has been demonstrated here, the unifying theme of the *Confessions* is “conversion,” which encompasses “the relation of the human person to the Trinity through the revelation of the Trinity in the person of Christ and in the Christian community.”¹²⁴ Without detracting from any other purposes of the *Confessions*, such as devotional or evangelistic, its integrity as an authentic autobiography of Augustine has been demonstrated as well. Multiple scholars cited here demonstrate Augustine’s progression of thought such that the consistency of the theme of conversion is maintained.

Theological Observations

Augustine was a remarkable philosopher and theologian. The purpose of this section is to identify him within the context of his era and to make some observations about a few of his philosophical or theological beliefs that relate to our topic concerning conversion and nurture.

Augustine was one of the last of the Church Fathers in the Late Antiquity period of Christian history (30–430) and he was one of the first in the ecumenical Catholic age (325–787) in the medieval period.¹²⁵ The Church Fathers were those significant leaders who helped establish the Christian Church from the time of the

¹²³ Ibid., p. 20.

¹²⁴ Spence, *The Logic of Conversion*, p. 7.

¹²⁵ Heick, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1, p. 130.

Apostles through Constantine and Augustine. There was only one church for the first three hundred years of Christianity and it was referred to as the *Catholic Church*¹²⁶ during that time. Some writers date the end of the era of the Church Fathers to the first of the ecumenical councils (324), others to the “legalization” of Christianity by Constantine (326) or to the fall of Rome (410). But most scholars date the era of the Church Fathers through the time of the controversy between Pelagius and Augustine.¹²⁷ There was some overlap into the next era of the Christian Church, which was the ecumenical Catholic age (325–787). This was the time between the first and last of the ecumenical councils. These councils were general assemblies of the leaders and theologians of the church convened (1) to resolve Trinitarian, Christological, soteriological, and other theological problems; (2) to complete the official organization of the episcopacy and hierarchy; and (3) to help with the maturation of the two branches of Christianity. There were three schools of thought at the time of Augustine; these were centered in Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome.¹²⁸ By 450, these had organized into the two main branches. Augustine was a part of the Occidental (Roman) school of thought. “He was to be the father of much of that which was most characteristic in medieval Roman Catholicism. He was to be the spiritual ancestor, no less, of much of the Reformation.”¹²⁹

¹²⁶ In the general sense of the word *catholic*, meaning “universal.”

¹²⁷ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition 100–600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), Volume 1 of *The Christian Tradition*. Also see Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974). It was at that time that the Eastern Orthodox Church (Greek speaking in Constantinople) began to become separated from the Western Catholic Church (Latin speaking in Rome).

¹²⁸ Heick, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1, p. 130.

¹²⁹ Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p. 160.

Augustine was as significant in the development of philosophy as he was in theology.¹³⁰ He is often listed in chronologies of significant philosophical dates. The year 400, the date of the *Confessions*, is noted in philosophy books as the date that philosophy was absorbed into Christian theology.¹³¹ (Of course this neglects Paul's influence on Christian philosophy.) Figure 3 shows many of the theological and philosophical issues that he addressed. It is titled "'Fig'-ure 3: Augustine's Philosophical and Doctrinal 'Pears'" and can be reviewed in the Appendix of this paper. These "pairs" are listed in logical sets to show connections. For our purposes, I have listed the philosophical and theological issues together.¹³² Observations are made on some of the topics that are particularly germane to this study. It should be noted that much of the material reviewed here constitutes common knowledge among scholars of Augustine's beliefs. Only a few of the more intricate discussions of these topics are addressed, and the rest are left for other settings and studies.

On Reason and Faith

Augustine understood that there were some things that a person could know through reason, but that there were others that could only be known by revelation or through the eyes of faith. Both of these ideas were abstract philosophical concepts before

¹³⁰ For a grasp of Augustine as a philosopher, see Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*, L.E.M. Lynch, trans. (New York: Random House, 1960) or Robert O'Connell, "Introduction," in *St. Augustine's Confessions*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989).

¹³¹ Strathern, *St. Augustine in 90 Minutes*, p. 68.

¹³² These are allusions to Augustine's first sin which awoke his conscience, that of stealing the pears, and to his conversion story of hearing the voice as of a child by the fig tree, hence the "'Fig'-ure and 'Pears'" for Pairs puns. Much of this material was derived from the reading of Henry Chadwick, *Augustine* (New York: Oxford, 1986). Reprinted as part 3 of Chadwick, et. al. *Founders of Thought: Plato, Aristotle, Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). It is a relatively short overview (considering the subject) of Augustine's philosophical and theological ideas.

they became theological realities in his life. In the *Soliloquies*, one of Augustine's early works, he conducts a "conversation" with Reason. The following conversation demonstrates that the concepts of reason and revelation are intertwined:

AUGUSTINE: You who wish to know, do you know that you exist?

REASON: I do.

A: How do you know this?

R: I do not know.

A: Do you feel yourself to be simple or complex?

R: I do not know.

A: Do you feel that you are self-moved?

R: I do not know.

A: Do you know that you think?

R: I do.

—*Soliloquies*, Book II, Chap. I¹³³

"The authority of the church has furnished Augustine the soul-contents of his faith, but philosophy gave him the form."¹³⁴ Augustine took the position that authority must precede the operation of reason: *crede ut intelligas* ("Believe that you may know"). But knowledge is necessary for the perfecting of faith.¹³⁵ "Augustine was never concerned with demonstrating the truth of the Christian religion entirely on the basis of principles accessible to the unaided human reason. As 'Christian Doctrine' makes clear, divine revelation, that is to say, intervention in human affairs by a power anterior to all human reasoning, is the necessary condition of Christian theology."¹³⁶ Authority and reason were tied to faith and understanding in the

¹³³ Quoted in Strathern, *St. Augustine in 90 Minutes*, p. 60. Although *Soliloquies* was one of Augustine's first books, this line of thinking is also supported in his later writings, for example in *City of God* (Book XI, Chapter 26, see Strathern, pp. 60–61). His first books were published almost 1,300 years before the philosopher Descartes arrived at his conclusion, "I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am" in the seventeenth century.

¹³⁴ Heick, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1, p. 133.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), p. 16.

thought of Augustine.¹³⁷ In fact, there has been a renewal of Augustine's idea of "Reasoning Faith" in our times through the work of H. Richard Niebuhr. "Niebuhr's post-Kantian epistemology enables him to overcome the dualistic and absolutistic biases introduced into Augustine's work by his reliance on the Platonic theory of knowledge."¹³⁸

On Time

Augustine wrote much on the subject of time. He was not sure what it measured or if it was real. He did acknowledge that God had created time.¹³⁹ The subject of time is very important to theology and to philosophy. Many studies have been conducted of Augustine's view of (1) the past, present, and future; (2) God as "the eternal now"; and (3) his dynamic and even illusionary view of time.¹⁴⁰ Augustine addresses this subject at length in the *Confessions*, mostly in Book XI. He circles around a definition of *time* as the measure of bodily movement (present) or as a mnemonic marker of history (past) and/or of prophecy (future). But then he circles back to wondering if time is "real" at all.

Augustine does admit that time is recorded in the human mind and that its purpose is tied to the memory (which he discussed at length in Book X, immediately

¹³⁷ Frederick E. Van Fleteren, *Authority and Reason, Faith and Understanding in the Thought of St. Augustine*, *Augustinian Studies*, vol. 4, pp. 33–71, 1973. This article examines Book VII of the *Confessions*.

¹³⁸ Diane Marcia Yeager, *Reasoning Faith: H. Richard Niebuhr's Renewal of the Theology of St. Augustine*, unpublished dissertation, Duke University, 1981.

¹³⁹ *Confessions*, 11:14:17 and 11:13:16.

¹⁴⁰ *Confessions*, 11:13:16. Literally, "With you, today is eternity."

preceding his discussion of time).¹⁴¹ Even as he approaches the end of his thinking on this subject, Augustine declares,

I confess to you, O Lord, that I do not yet know what time is, and again I confess to you, O Lord, that I know that I say these things in time, and that I have now spoken at length of time, and that that very length of time is not long except by a period of time. How, then, do I know this, when I do not know what time is? Or perhaps I do not know how to express what I know? Woe is me, who do not even know what I do not know!¹⁴²

Augustine stated his dilemma:

“It is now plain and clear that neither past nor future are existent, and that it is not properly stated that there are three times, past, present, and future. But perhaps it might properly be said that there are three times, the present of things past, the present of things present, and the present of things future. These three are in the soul, but elsewhere I do not see them: the present of things past is in memory; the present of things present is in intuition; the present of things future is in expectation.¹⁴³

In his perplexity he asks,

[W]hat do I measure, I beseech you, my God, when I say either indefinitely, “This time is longer than that,” or even definitely, “This time is twice as long as that?” I measure time, I know. Yet I do not measure the future, because it does not yet exist; I do not measure the present, because it is not extended in space; I do not measure the past, because it no longer exists. What, then, do I measure?¹⁴⁴

An examination of Augustine’s work and of others’ who have written on this subject results in the conclusion that time measures change. Augustine’s view of time is the forgotten element in studies interpreting many of Augustine’s other doctrines

¹⁴¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, “Book Review: Henry Chadwick, *The Mystery of Continuity: Time, History, Memory and Eternity in the Thought of St. Augustine*,” *Church History*, vol. 57, no. 4. pp. 525–527, December 1988; Chien-hsin Hsu, “On Augustine’s Theory of Time: A Study of His *Confessions*, XI,” *Taiwan Journal of Theology*, no. 7, 1985, pp. 19–40; R. W. Dyson, “St. Augustine’s Remarks on Time,” *Downside Review*, vol. 100, no. 340, 1982, pp. 221–230; Patrick Grant, “Redeeming the Time: The *Confessions* of St. Augustine,” in David L. Jeffrey, *By Things Seen* (Ottawa, Canada: University of Ottawa Press, 1979), pp. 21–32.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 11:25:32.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 11:20:26.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 11:26:33.

and philosophies. It certainly must be kept in mind as matters of predestination, original sin, and especially conversion and nurture are addressed.

On Good and Evil

Although Augustine was a dualist for nine years as an auditor in the sect of the Manichaeans, he became disillusioned with their teachings. He did not find a real solution to the problem of evil in the ideas of an eternally good and an equally evil realm. In the writings of the Neo-Platonists, however, he found ideas that he could integrate with the Christian upbringing he had received from his mother and from the church. After he converted, he worked twice as hard to refute the Manichaeans since he had been a member of that group.

In his new philosophy, he is able to accept all things as good and God as the highest good (*summum bonum*).¹⁴⁵ Augustine wrote, “There has never been, nor will there be, a soul able to conceive anything better than you, who are the supreme and best good.”¹⁴⁶ To Augustine, “evil was no positive existence, as with the Manichaeans. It was negative, a lack of good, an alienation of the will from God.”¹⁴⁷

James O’Donnell describes it this way:

Evil lies in the absence of good, in the willful separation from God that is the act of created beings. The natural tendency of created beings is to return to unity with God, to full goodness. Evil is merely the name given to the turning away from God of those beings. Properly speaking, evil inheres only in the wills of free, rational creatures. The other things men call evil (the violent deaths of innocent people in natural catastrophes, for example) are only

¹⁴⁵ Kam-Lun Edwin Lee, *Augustine, Manichaeism and the Good*, unpublished dissertation, University of Ottawa, Canada, 1996.

¹⁴⁶ *Confessions*, 7:4:6.

¹⁴⁷ Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p. 161.

manifestations of a divine providence that men, with an incomplete view of reality, cannot fathom. Suffering is punishment or trial for creatures, but is intrinsically good in itself insofar as it succeeds in reforming or purifying them. If it fails the failure is that of the creatures, not of God. . . . This principle would eventually smooth the way to Augustine’s doctrine of original sin, an awesome doctrine, bearable only because it brings with it (for the believer) the hope the whole burden of evil does not stay with man, but has been assumed again voluntarily by God, in the redeeming sacrifice of the cross.¹⁴⁸

Augustine himself best sums up this perspective in Chapter XI of the *Enchiridion*, which is titled “What is Called Evil in the Universe Is But the Absence of Good”:

And in the universe, even that which is called evil, when it is regulated and put in its own place, only enhances our admiration of the good; for we enjoy and value the good more when we compare it with the evil. For the Almighty God, who, as even the heathen acknowledge, has supreme power over all things, being Himself supremely good, would never permit the existence of anything evil among His works, if He were not so omnipotent and good that He can bring good even out of evil. For what is that which we call evil but the absence of good?¹⁴⁹

On Free Will and Predestination

In an important article from the November 1996 issue of *Modern Schoolman*, “The Development of Augustine’s View of Free Will (386–397),” Gregory Ganssle tracked three stages of development in Augustine’s position: (1) Before ordination; (2) After ordination and before his episcopacy; (3) During his years as bishop.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ O’Donnell, Augustine, p. 97.

¹⁴⁹ St. Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, Henry Paulucci, ed. (Chicago; Regnery Gateway, 1961), XI, p. 57.

¹⁵⁰ Gregory E. Ganssle, “The Development of Augustine’s View of the Freedom of the Will (386–397),” *Modern Schoolman: A Quarterly Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 74, no. 1, pp. 1–18, November 1996.

It was not until his latter years that Augustine developed strong views on predestination and original sin. The *Confessions* was written near the end of the second stage and the beginning of the third:

Before his ordination, he held that it is possible for an individual to turn to God or to refuse to turn regardless of divine intervention. During this period, Augustine was an incompatibilist. After his ordination and before his episcopacy, Augustine recognized to a much greater degree the struggle in the human will. During his early years as bishop, Augustine held that it is impossible for an individual to turn to God without divine intervention and it is impossible to refuse to turn, if such intervention is granted. At this point, Augustine adopted a compatibilist position.¹⁵¹

Near the end of Augustine's life, his rigid views on predestination and original sin were formed as a result of his reaction and defense against Pelagianism. At the time that he wrote the *Confessions*, he held that free will was compatible and not in conflict with what scripture taught about predestination and election. Ganssle writes,

Throughout this development, Augustine maintained the position that people have sufficient freedom for moral responsibility. An agent was morally responsible for his acts if and only if these acts were voluntary. The term "voluntary," however, is used differently by Augustine throughout these phases. As an incompatibilist, Augustine held that a choice is voluntary if it is one in which a person has the freedom of indifference. This means that at least two options must be within the power of the individual.

As a compatibilist, Augustine also insisted that a choice is voluntary. By "voluntary," however, he meant that the choice is in accordance with the person's will. On this construal, an act can be necessary (in that there was only one option within the power of the agent) and it can be voluntary (in accordance with the will) at the same time.¹⁵²

James O'Donnell shows that Augustine was willing to live with the paradox of free will and of predestination:

¹⁵¹ Ibid., Abstract.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 1. This is supported in the *Confessions*, VII,3, "Free Will and the Problem of Evil" and in VIII, 9, "The Two Wills."

The *Confessions* capture and analyze the two-mindedness Augustine found in himself, conscious of two conflicting wills working within him simultaneously. His whole intellectual search had been an effort to reach a placid and measured conclusion on the basis of which to effect a rational reorganization of his life, but faith, that essential turning of the will toward God; is finally mysterious to the very people who live with it.

In later years Augustine would resist all efforts to resolve the paradoxes of grace and will. He had good intellectual and spiritual basis for that resistance but the emotional hardihood that kept him to his position in the face of all the pressures either to abandon his definitions or to explain them in a facile way (and thus lapse either into Pelagianism or Calvinism) came from his own experience. He could not account for the turning of his own will, much less for those of anyone else, He knew that it was his will, that his decisions were free and voluntary, but he also felt that those decisions were fundamentally impotent ones. Another power had been working at another level of his soul, and in the presence of that power the ditherings of his own paltry liberty of choice were insignificant.¹⁵³

The modern-day problem in Protestantism is that many theologians want so much to make Augustine into a Calvinist that they cannot accept that for most of his life, he was as connected to the doctrine of the free moral agency of humankind as he was committed to the ideas of predestination and election that he is known for endorsing.¹⁵⁴ At the time that Augustine wrote the *Confessions*, he also published his classic work titled *On Free Choice of the Will* in which he says, “Everyone who does evil is the cause of his own evildoing. . . . Evil deeds are punished by the justice of

¹⁵³ O’Donnell, *Augustine*, p. 99.

¹⁵⁴ James Wetzel, “The Recovery of Free Agency in the Theology of St. Augustine,” *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 80, no. 1, January 1987, pp. 101–125 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press and Harvard Divinity School, 1987) Compare Dan D. Crawford, “Intellect and Will in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Religious Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3, September 1988, pp. 291–302. For an example, see Mark E. Vanderschaef, “Predestination and Certainty of Salvation in Augustine and Calvin,” *Reformed Review*, vol. 30, no. 1, Autumn 1976, pp. 1–8.

God. They would not be punished justly if they had not been performed voluntarily.”¹⁵⁵ Speaking to a friend named Evodius, Augustine says,

AUGUSTINE: Surely this is the problem that is disturbing and puzzling you. How is it that these two propositions are not contradictory and inconsistent: (1) God has foreknowledge of everything in the future; and (2) We sin by the will, not by necessity? For, you say, if God foreknows that someone is going to sin, then it is necessary that he sin. But if it is necessary, the will has no choice about whether to sin; there is an inescapable and fixed necessity. And so you fear that this argument forces us into one of two positions: either we draw the heretical conclusion that God does not foreknow everything in the future; or, if we cannot accept this conclusion, we must admit that his happens by necessity and not by will. Isn't that what is bothering you?

EVODIUS: That's it exactly.

AUGUSTINE: So you think that anything that God foreknows happens by necessity and not by will.

EVODIUS: Precisely.¹⁵⁶

It is also helpful to realize that, to Augustine, *predestination* is not the same as *determinism* or *foreknowledge*. Phillip Cary says that, to Augustine, *predestination* can be defined as “God’s eternal plan to give grace to some and not to others.”¹⁵⁷ For Augustine, Jacob and Esau were examples of predestination in action. *Grace* is sometimes defined as divine favor. God chose to give it to Jacob and not to Esau.¹⁵⁸ The descendants of Jacob became the Jews, God’s “chosen” people. In Augustine’s

¹⁵⁵ Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, Thomas Williams, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 1:1, p. 1. It is also in this work by St. Augustine that he has his discussion on the four possible “origins of souls” in Book Three, Chapter 21. He shows in that discussion also the willingness to live with ambiguity in areas that he does not yet fully understand. Concerning the four choices, he states,

I[It] would be rash to affirm any of these. For the Catholic [here used in the sense of the word *universal*] commentators on scripture have not solved or shed light on this obscure and perplexing question; or if they have, I have not yet come across any such writing. What matters is that we have the faith to believe nothing false or unworthy about the nature of the Creator (p. 111).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 3:3, p. 74.

¹⁵⁷ Cary, *Augustine: Philosopher and Saint*, Lecture 8, p. 33.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* The scripture says, “Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated.” (Romans 9:13). Augustine did not endorse double predestination, the notion that God predestines some to salvation but others to damnation. Cary says that Augustine does answer yes to that question once, but it is not documented.

mind, this idea of election was inequitable, but not unfair, because neither Jacob nor Esau deserved grace.”¹⁵⁹

On Trinity and Incarnation

Many of the early ecumenical councils dealt with the nature of God. It was difficult to establish the doctrine of the Trinity. The church was trying to grasp how God could be three persons, yet one God in essence and being. Augustine had one of the best explanations for the Trinity and he was 1,600 years ahead of his time. He argued that humankind has within itself three components, yet one essence and being as a person. The logical conclusion is that it isn't hard to fathom a God like that who created us in his image. God is revealed to us as one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but not contained within a corporeal body as we are, nor even contained in the whole universe of all created things. Of this John Ryan writes,

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is that there is but one God in three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, yet there is but one God. Augustine offers an analogy based on a man's nature; there are in man three actualities; he is; he knows; and he wills. He is at once a really existent, a knowing, and a willing being. Is there a Trinity of Persons in God, because God is self-existent (Father), self-knowing (the Son), self-willed (the Spirit)? Or is the Father self-existent, self-known, and self-willed, so also the Son, and so also the Holy Spirit? Or is each Person such, and at the same time the one God such? Since the Trinity is a mystery, the supreme mystery, Augustine indicates that it can neither be grasped by our minds nor expressed in words.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ John Ryan, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, p. 417–418. The primary source of Augustine for this comment can be found in 13:11:12.

The councils established creeds like the Nicene Creed (324), which clearly stated the nature of the Trinity and also resolved the debates about the incarnation. The controversies and heresies about the incarnation revolved around the issue of whether Jesus Christ was God or man. Some heresies claimed that he merely appeared to be one or the other. The Creeds settled the issue in that, for weighty doctrinal cases like these two that could never be fully understood, the official church affirmation would be that both facts were true, although it remained a mystery as to how. So it was accepted that God is revealed to humankind as three persons yet is one God, and that Jesus was both fully God and fully human at all times after he became flesh and entered into our world.

On Grace and Perseverance

For Augustine, grace resolved the dialectical tension between free will and predestination. He saw that God could choose whomever he wanted to bless and not choose whomever he so desired, as well. His rejoicing expressed in Books X–XIII of the *Confessions* is for a God who, in sending Christ as his son, has now selected everyone (Jews and Gentiles) to bless.¹⁶¹ The only question is who will select him (God) by participation in his grace. In other words, after Christ the Mediator had come, matters of predestination or election no longer had to be debated; they needed

¹⁶¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 7:9:15. See Clark H. Pinnock, *The Grace of God, The Will of Man: A Case of Arminianism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989). Pinnock comes from the Calvinist tradition, so for him to write a book about “a case for Arminianism,” this book carries great weight to students on both sides of the argument. He came to these insights, in part through the study of Augustine and his inability to read all of Calvin back into him. When Augustine was left to stand alone, Pinnock believed that he made more of a case for Arminianism than for Calvinism.

only to be celebrated as he saw Paul doing in Romans 8–11, Ephesians 1, and the Pastoral letters.¹⁶² Peter gives specific instructions how to make one’s calling and election sure (II Peter 1:10).

However, for Augustine, the power to choose grace was not as simple as it sounds because the power to choose is tainted greatly by “original sin.” Even though the free choice of one’s will was involved, all salvation would never happen apart from Christ and his grace. He saw prevenient grace—grace granted to all people—at work in drawing a person to Christ or back to God. He mentions this in Book XII.¹⁶³ As incongruent as it sounds, Augustine believed that prevenient grace was irresistible. Walker writes, “He believed that he had been saved by irresistible divine grace from sins which he could never have overcome by his own strength.”¹⁶⁴

Augustine had a very high view of what Christ had done for him, but his theory of the atonement (how Christ had done that) has been difficult to define. It was a theory of satisfaction, but could not be identified with others in church history.¹⁶⁵ It was a theory of substitution, but it was not exactly a penal theory. His theory of redemption centers on the influence of Christ upon the sinner. Augustine did speak of Christ’s death as a satisfaction offered to God. Heick says,

¹⁶² The conclusion of Romans chapters 8–11 is found in 10:12–13:

¹²For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

¹⁶³ Cary, *Augustine: Philosopher and Saint*, Lecture 7. Also see *Confessions*, 7:8:12. “Prevenient” is a two part word, “pre” (before) and “venient” (coming), that refers to the grace of God at work in our lives that “comes before” our conversion or salvation.

¹⁶⁴ Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p. 169.

¹⁶⁵ Heick, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1, p. 135.

Augustine shared the prevalent view of his day and regarded Christ's death as the price paid for man's release from the rightful claims of the devil. It will not be possible to reduce all of Augustine's statements on the subject of redemption to a consistent theory. The following points are most prominent: Augustine's piety never lost the deep sense of guilt. This conviction of guilt led him to a grateful appreciation of the remission of sins in baptism. In this state of mind he placed a high estimate on the cross of Christ. While stressing the significance of Christ as our King, Augustine never tired of praising him as the Savior of sinners.¹⁶⁶

In his discussions of his theory of redemption or atonement in the *Confessions*, Augustine himself referred to Jesus as "Christ the Mediator."¹⁶⁷ When the *Confessions* were written, Augustine's theory of salvation could not properly be called *monergistic* (dependent on God alone) because he believed that humans bear some responsibility, but neither could it be referred to as fully synergistic (a 50–50 proposition). It could actually be called a theory of "operative" rather than "cooperative" grace.¹⁶⁸

Keep in mind that the Augustinian theology narrowly defined in this dissertation is an effort to determine Augustine's theological stance at the time the *Confessions* were written. I have tried to research what he wrote before or concurrently with the *Confessions*. He was not the Calvinistic Augustine known to popular history; nor was he yet the Augustine of latter life, during which his theological perspective was very similar to Jonathan Edwards. However, he did not change any of the vital points herein stated when he came out with his *Retractions* at

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 12:42–43.

¹⁶⁸ J. Patout Burns, "Review: Bernard McGinn, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace*," *Church History*, vol. 52, no. 1, March 1983, pp. 81–82. McGinn is correct and in keeping with the meaning of Augustine's celebrated dictum: "He who made you without your cooperation will not save you without it."

the end of his life. He did affirm other statements that were incompatible with what he wrote in 400 and earlier. It is the final statements that he would want to be known by, but many may say that it is the Augustine of the *Confessions* that brings all Christian theologies together in one.¹⁶⁹

Between the years 397 and 400, Augustine did teach that the number of each class—the elect and the non-elect—is “fixed,” but that no one can be sure of salvation in this life.¹⁷⁰ He said that each person “may have grace now, but, unless God adds the gift of perseverance, he will not maintain it to the end.”¹⁷¹ This perspective diverges from Calvin’s conceptions of both election and of the perseverance of the saints.¹⁷²

On Original Sin and Culpable Sin

The real way to know what someone believes about conversion or salvation is to find out what he or she believes about sin.¹⁷³ Augustine truly believed that humankind

¹⁶⁹ Pinnock, *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*. See also his earlier work Clark H. Pinnock, *Grace Unlimited* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1975). Pinnock is a compatibilist as defined by Ganssle (the position that both predestination and free will are compatible beliefs to hold together). Pinnock definitively showed Augustine to be a compatibilist at the time of his writing of the *Confessions*.

¹⁷⁰ Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p. 165.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. Quote is from Augustine’s *On the Gift of Perseverance*, 1(I).

¹⁷² Ibid. Augustine said in *On the Gift of Perseverance*, 1(I), essentially that a person would not know for sure that he or she was one of the elect until that person found himself or herself in heaven. For he was quite certain even to his last days that Scripture taught in many ways that a person must endure to the end (persevere) in order to be saved. Calvin, on the other hand, taught that you could know that you were one of the elect when you were saved and that once you were saved, you would be always saved no matter what sins you committed after that.

(Retrieved from <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/15122.htm>.)

¹⁷³ Richard S. Taylor, *A Right Conception of Sin* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1945), p. 5.

was affected by the first man's (Adam) sin.¹⁷⁴ He also believed that we participate in the guilt of our own parents' sins.¹⁷⁵ He distinguished between this type of "infection," which he called *original sin*, and actual sin, which we may each commit. Augustine believed that a person who dies without receiving Christian baptism, even if but one day old, will perish and not make it into heaven. Infant baptism was very important to Augustine to guard against the original sin of each child. Augustine himself was not baptized as an infant because of circumstances that prevented the rite from being conducted. This was of great concern to his mother and later to Augustine as well. Augustine may be the theologian responsible for distinctly forming the doctrines of original sin and culpable sin: Although one would perish if not baptized to expiate original sin, it was one's own sins for which the individual was culpable. So "sin" was distinguished from "sins." And culpable sins were divided into two categories as well.¹⁷⁶ The first kind were later called *mortal* sins and the second *venial* sins. The mortal sins consisted in acts like the breaking of the Ten Commandments; these acts would send a person to hell if they remained unconfessed and unforgiven at the time of death. Hence, they were called *mortal*. The venial sins were of less gravity or magnitude in their consequences and included in this category then were actually mistakes, infirmities, and sins of ignorance. These were venial sins because they did not fall fully into the category of culpability, except in that

¹⁷⁴ Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p. 165. Much of the summary I make in this section is taken from Walker and from Eugene Portalie, *A Guide to the Thought of St. Augustine* (Chicago: Regnery, 1960).

¹⁷⁵ *Enchiridion*, XLVI; p. 56. After discussing Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 5:9 and Ezekiel 18:12, Augustine makes this statement: "Here lies the necessity that each man should be born again, that he might be freed from the sin in which he was born."

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

failure to confess them and rectify them upon becoming aware of them converted them to culpable sins. All sins fell into the sixth phrase of the Lord's Prayer ("forgive us our trespasses") and needed the atonement of Christ to cover them.¹⁷⁷

Using selections from Augustine's *Confessions*, *On Rebuke and Grace*, *City of God*, *On Nature and Grace*, *Enchiridion*, *On Forgiveness of Sins*, *On Marriage*, *On Original Sin*, and *On Perseverance of the Saints*, Walker pieces together this excellent summary:

Man, according to Augustine, was created good and upright, possessed of free will, endowed with the possibility of not sinning and of immortality. . . . From this state Adam fell by sin, the essence of which was pride. Its consequence was the loss of good. God's grace was forfeited, the soul died, since it was forsaken of God. The body, no longer controlled by the soul, came under the dominion of "concupiscence", of which the worst and most characteristic manifestation is lust. Adam fell into a state of total and hopeless ruin, of which the proper ending is eternal death. . . . The result is that the whole human race, even to the youngest infant, is a "mass of perdition," and as such deserves the wrath of God. From this hopeless state of original sin "no one, no, not one, has been delivered, or is being delivered, or ever will be delivered, except by the grace of the Redeemer." Salvation comes by God's grace, which is wholly undeserved, and wholly free. . . . The effect of this saving grace is twofold. Faith is instilled, and sins, both original and personal, are forgiven at baptism: "The faith by which we are Christians is the gift of God." As such it is immediate justification. But grace does much more . . . it is the infusion of love by the Holy Spirit. It frees the enslaved will to choose that which is pleasing to God, not only in order that they may know, by the manifestation of that grace, what should be done, but moreover in order that, by its enabling, they may do with love what they know. It is a gradual transformation of nature, sanctification. Through us, God does good works, which He rewards as if they were men's own and to which He ascribes merit.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ "Nature of Sin," retrieved from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm>, states:

Mortal sin is defined by St. Augustine (*Reply to Faustus* XXII.27) as "Dictum vel factum vel concupitum contra legem æternam", i.e. something said, done or desired contrary to the eternal law, or a thought, word, or deed contrary to the eternal law. This is a definition of sin as it is a voluntary act. As it is a defect or privation it may be defined as an aversion from God, our true last end, by reason of the preference given to some mutable good.

¹⁷⁸ Walker, pp. 164–165. Scripture reference within the quote is Romans 5:12.

Augustine expressed these perspectives centuries before Freud and his theories of psychoanalysis.

Augustine's View on Conversion

This section investigates Augustine's view of conversion in the *Confessions*. The writings of four scholars are reviewed and then the text itself is analyzed. The four writers examined each represent different ways of looking at the topic of conversion: (1) Robert O'Connell, *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine's Confessions*; (2) Garry Wills, *St. Augustine's Conversion*; (3) Colin Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX*; and (4) Carl G. Vaught, *Journey toward God in Augustine's Confessions: Books I-XI; Encounters with God in Augustine's Confessions: Books VII-IX*; and *Access to God in Augustine's Confessions: Books X-XIII*.

As we look at the *Confessions* and Augustine's view of conversion, it is important to remember that, when the text was written, Augustine was bishop and was approximately 45 years old. His love and devotion for God are very evident. His wisdom and depth of perspective are beginning to shine. The young, sinner Augustine is often portrayed as wild and promiscuous and is in many ways not at all like the older Augustine who is doing the writing. It is also about the seeker Augustine who searches for wisdom (mind) and who, through much love and tears

(heart), finds the road back home to God (soul).¹⁷⁹ Phillip Cary points out that the *Confessions* is the story of a single wayward soul, but it is meant to be a story of all our souls.¹⁸⁰

The story of Augustine's conversion is often narrowed to the recitation of his "Tolle Lege" encounter with God in the Garden of Milan, and it is made to sound as dramatic and sudden as the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus described in the book of Acts in the Bible.¹⁸¹ But in-depth Bible study leads to the discovery that even Paul's conversion, as dramatic as it was, was a part of a longer process filled with influences and events that prepared him for that moment of transformation. As we study Augustine's conversion and his subsequent testimony in the *Confessions*, we also see the process of transformation that unfolded in his change from son to sinner to seeker to saint. There were many factors that led up to Augustine's conversion. It did not happen as instantaneously as it may appear or as the result of a single influence. Specifically, there were five main factors that led up to his conversion, along with the ongoing factor of his mother's influence as an exemplary Christian. These were: (1) the reading of *Hortensius* by Cicero; (2) his rejection of Manichaeism; (3) his meeting with St. Ambrose; (4) his reading of Neo-platonist works; and (5) Augustine's vision.

¹⁷⁹ Cary, *Augustine: Philosopher and Saint*, Lecture 3, p. 12.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Acts 9:1–19. See also "Conversion of St. Augustine," Augustinians of the Midwest. Retrieved July 7, 2010, from http://www.midwestaugustinians.org/saints/s_augconversion.html. Do not fault the source for making the conversion experience sound so dramatic and sudden. Few understand process, journey, or pilgrimage in one's spiritual formation as well as they do. The example I showed was actually just condensed for brevity at that link.

Robert O'Connell

Upon first discovering a book with a title like *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine's Confessions*, by a leading scholar of Augustine such as Robert O'Connell, one might sense that he or she had come across a gold mine. Indeed, the book has a great deal to offer once it is realized that its purposes are not wholly in line with what the title conveys. For the purpose of this study, O'Connell's text is important in that he identifies three conversions of Augustine revealed in the *Confessions*, and not just one: (1) Conversion to Manichaeism; (2) Conversion to Platonism (as a consequence of his exposure to the Neo-Platonist's writings, especially those of Plotinus);¹⁸² (3) Conversion to Christ. These are recounted in Books III, VII, and VIII of the *Confessions*. Others have shown that these three major conversions in Augustine represented pivotal episodes in his life. But O'Connell makes some significant connections. He shows that his first conversion,

. . . which was triggered by the reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* and, after a brief disappointing exploration of the Scriptures, led Augustine to turn for some nine years to Manicheism, actually had positive results, even in the eyes of Augustine the bishop. For it set him upon his search for intellectual certainties and freed him from the sort of blind submission to authority that he found demanded in the African Church.¹⁸³

O'Connell refers to the first conversion as "The *Hortensius*: A Conversion Unconsummated." He states,

¹⁸² It is because of this interpretation and O'Connell's many efforts to see the influence of Plotinus in many of the images of "conversion" that his analysis is considered controversial. See the review of his book by William S. Babcock in *Church History*, vol. 67, no. 1, March 1998, pp. 124–126.

¹⁸³ Ronald J. Teske, "Book Review: Robert J. O'Connell, *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine's Confessions*," *Theological Studies*, vol. 58, March 1997, pp. 160–161. Teske is a bit harsh in his critique of O'Connell. We should expect a coal miner who brings up from his mining great treasure to also carry along with it some undesirable elements because he has been in one shaft for so long.

The *Hortensius* experience did, therefore, truly represent a “first conversion” for Augustine. But it must be reckoned, in the first place, as a companion experience to the idealistic dream his dawning sexuality awakened in him. Not only did Augustine find Cicero encouraging a brave venture toward understanding, but he read that encouragement as also suggesting that sexual passion would attain sublimated fulfillment in an erotically charged quest for a beatifying vision; the supernal Wisdom promised by the *Hortensius* served to clarify the lineaments of the “love” he had fallen in love with. To Augustine’s erotic intellectualism, Wisdom and Love had to be one and the same. But both those stimuli must be viewed in tandem with the kindred promises held out by Manichaeism: for Augustine viewed his entry into that group as an equally positive, progressive step. Far from being an “aversion,” it must be coupled with the *Hortensius* incident as an integral moment in a genuine “conversion.”¹⁸⁴

Augustine’s second conversion followed his contact with the books of the Platonists and led to his baptism at the Easter vigil of 387. When he came to Milan, Augustine came under the preaching and influence of Bishop Ambrose. He was a very good expositor of the Scriptures and also a godly man. At first, Augustine went to hear him out of curiosity stemming from his reputation; then he returned because Ambrose was very kind to him.¹⁸⁵ There is evidence that Ambrose is the one who pointed Augustine to read the Neo-Platonist writings along with the Scriptures. Augustine did both. O’Connell identifies Augustine’s intent to be baptized, a conclusion he arrives at before the “Tolle Lege” incident, to be connected to this second conversion (the philosophical one).¹⁸⁶ It was a conversion to return to the faith of his upbringing. O’Connell shows how the earlier writings of Augustine, written during the time of the Cassiciacum dialogues in Milan (386–387), compare to the *Confessions* (397–400) in this regard.

¹⁸⁴ Robert J. O’Connell, *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine’s Confessions* (New York: Fordham University, 1996), p. 77.

¹⁸⁵ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 5:13:23.

¹⁸⁶ O’Connell, Ch. IV, p. 24 ff.

Concerning his third conversion, O'Connell does not leave us without an answer as to what Augustine was converted from or converted to as a result of the encounter that he had that day in the Garden of Milan near a fig tree. There are many images of conversion that O'Connell presents in his book. One of them is the "Voice of Continence" who has been calling to Augustine as a lover for years, enticing him to leave his many sexual lusts and lovers and come to embrace "her." Augustine prays, "Give me chastity and continence, but not yet!"¹⁸⁷ He says that Continence, who initially appears in Book VIII to be the "bride" of Christ, eventually disappears into identity with Christ himself.¹⁸⁸ Combining that imagery of conversion with several pictures taken from Paul in Romans that Augustine uses in the *Confessions*, such as "being clothed with Christ" or "wearing the armor of a Christian soldier," O'Connell describes what Augustine was converted to:

Finally, I suggest that this way of reading Book 8 of the *Confessions* makes it clear how Augustine thought of his "conversion," or, if you will, the successive phases of his lifetime process of conversion: the entire process aimed at, and reached temporal fulfillment in, his total surrender to God's call that he "put on Christ," in the precise sense that he enlist and serve in the *militia Christi*.¹⁸⁹

The emphasis is on his total surrender to God and his call. The outward expression became celibacy, monasticism, and lifelong service as a priest and bishop. But the crucial change was inward. It was his moment of "falling in love" with God by being overwhelmed by his grace. He had seen the depth of his sin as concupiscence and his struggle against "the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes and

¹⁸⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 8:7:17.

¹⁸⁸ O'Connell, p. 250.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

the pride of life”¹⁹⁰ as impossible to overcome. You might say that the passage that he read hit him “right square between the eyes.” The emphasis of Romans 13:13–14 was upon turning away from those things and “putting on Christ;” it also said “to make no provision” for those things. Augustine presents another image that O’Connell brings out, that of trusting in God’s providence for all his needs.¹⁹¹

O’Connell says that his conversion was to a life of contemplation, but it is not “paganism” that he is converted from; it is the far country of one of the images in the book, that of the Prodigal Son. O’Connell has a beautiful conclusion to his discussion on this topic at the end of his Chapter 3:

Augustine’s story, then, the Prodigal’s story, is also Everyman’s: we must all “rise up” (*surgere*) and journey back to our Father’s House. Augustine means it: we must literally “return” (*redire*) to the Eternal Day of that Heavenly Jerusalem we originally inhabited, before that primal *aversion* which sent us straying off into this “far country,” this nocturnal region of unlikeness.¹⁹²

There are many other images of conversion that O’Connell shows us, but the most important ones are those that he discovered from the *capitulum* (surrounding text and context) of the verses in Romans 13 that came to him that day in the garden. These include “image-elements” found in the passage: night and day, sleeping and waking, and sobriety and drunkenness, as well as the “taking off and putting on” metaphor.¹⁹³ Augustine even uses metaphors from Greek mythology such as the story of Odysseus and the images of incarnation in Book VII, in which he is presented

¹⁹⁰ I John 2:15–17.

¹⁹¹ O’Connell, p. 245.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 252–253.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 222.

as the *cibus*, “food mixed with flesh” that we are to eat.¹⁹⁴ But for O’Connell, all the images of conversion in the *Confessions* are masterfully guided in Augustine to the idea of *aversio* (aversion). He says,

But if his conversion was *to* the life of contemplation, Augustine’s penchant for artistic symmetry was strong enough to suggest that his original “aversion” must have been *from* that same kind of life. That same circularity is insinuated by the models of aversion-conversion to which he refers repeatedly: whether Prodigal Son, Odysseus, or the lost sheep, return is always to the point of original departure.¹⁹⁵

Garry Wills

Garry Wills splits his book, *St. Augustine’s Conversion*, into three parts. Much of the logic of the book is that it methodically shows the gradual processes involved in conversion and transformation. It emphasizes the choosing of one’s own path over the idea of the path, or God, choosing us. He strategically debunks all of the myths of the “suddenness” of conversion in the first part of his book. The middle part takes from the heart of the book (*Confessions*) and he shares the eight conversion stories found in Book VIII, *The Testimony*: Victorinus, Sergius Paul, Pontician’s friends and their wives (four persons), Anthony, and Augustine. The story of Augustine’s conversion also includes the conversion of his friend, Alypius, which makes nine conversions in all in that chapter. The final part is commentary on each of the testimonies shared in part two of Wills’s book.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 208. One year after Augustine’s death in 431, the church held a council to document that the bread of the Sacrament of Communion was literally Christ’s flesh at the time of consumption (transubstantiation) because of Augustine’s mystical teaching. If they wanted to venerate him, they should have declared both free will and predestination as coexisting truths, though a *mysterion*. That would have helped Christianity more.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 251.

If the logic is in showing the process of conversion over the “suddenness,” the genius is in showing that all these testimonies “fit into a larger testimony that celebrates the word of God more than the life of Augustine.”¹⁹⁶ Wills does not accept the *Confessions* as an autobiography per se, but he does see the stories as real events. He believes that, as bishop, Augustine is writing the book with a theological purpose as “a preparation for reading of Scripture, for an entry into God’s mysteries which God must himself make possible.”¹⁹⁷

The myths that he deals with are the myth of Monica; the myth of Ambrose; and the myths of suddenness as presented by William James, Paul, and Augustine. In the chapter on Monica, he attempts to show that she was not the strong positive influence for Augustine’s conversion that writers often make her out to be. Wills writes of Augustine, “Monnica did not lead him to baptism. Baptism led him to Monnica.”¹⁹⁸ He also minimizes the role that Ambrose played. One of the best sections in part one concerns William James. He shows James’s role in instilling the notion that conversion is a sudden and once-for-all-time phenomenon.¹⁹⁹ He quotes James as saying, “if the change be a religious one, we call it a conversion, especially if it be by crisis, or sudden.”²⁰⁰ He does tell about James’s two types of conversion, those of “volition” and those of “self-surrender,” and shows research on conversion that documents most conversion testimonies (data goes back only to 1897) occur

¹⁹⁶ Gary Wills, *Saint Augustine's Conversion* (New York: The Penguin Group, 2004), p. 41.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9. Wills consistently uses the alternate spelling of Monica’s name.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁰⁰ William James, *The Variety of Religious Experience in Writings, 1902–1910* (New York: The Library of America, 1987), p. 183.

somewhere in the age span between ten and nineteen years old.²⁰¹ One study found the average age of females at conversion was 13.8 and of males was 15.7. Another researcher combined the findings of five major studies of conversion and pinpointed the average to be 15.2.²⁰²

So Augustine was not the norm²⁰³ in many ways, according to Wills. Wills analyzes each of the following incidents in Augustine's life as shared in the *Confessions* and shows how they each affected his spiritual formation and led to or flowed out of the "garden scene" moment that we call his "conversion": a) the public baths story in Book II, b) the pear theft story also in Book II, c) the friend's death in Book IV, d) the mystical vision with his mother of heaven in Book IX, and e) the Gethsemane grief scene in Book VIII. Wills's barely believes in conversion at all, but his voice is one that needs to be heard for the purpose of this study.

Colin Starnes

In much the same way that commentaries on the Bible are written to give chapter-by-chapter and verse-by-verse insight into the meaning of each section, so Colin Starnes has provided a commentary on the *Confessions* Books I–IX. This gives us an

²⁰¹ Wills, p. 16.

²⁰² Ibid., Wills's further assessment of James's influence on our contemporary thinking is summed up as follows:

James admits the existence of more gradual, conscious, and self-governing conversion, which he calls the "volitional" change of the "once-born." But he prefers the sudden, semi-conscious, and self-surrendering type of the "twice-born," because it is more radical and more "interesting". He thinks it is more authentic because less consciously controlled: "self surrender has been and always must be regarded as the vital turning point of the religious life."

²⁰³ For a discussion of norms other than age, see Hugo Anthony Meynell, "Augustine and the Norms of Authentic Conversion," in *Grace, Politics and Desire* (Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary Press, 1990), pp. 3–15.

opportunity to tap the perspective of one of the great teachers on Augustine for his interpretations of words, phrases, and accounts within the narrative.²⁰⁴

For the purpose of this study, we examine only his direct commentary of the main “Tolle Lege” conversion story in 8:12:28–30 of the *Confessions*. The sections immediately before it are labeled by Starnes as “One Soul, Many Wills” (8:10:22–24) and as “Empty Nothings and the Vision of Contenance” (8:11:25–27). He simply titles this section “Augustine’s Conversion.” It is the last story of Book VIII, but 9:1:1 is an important part of the context as well because it is “The Song of a Soul Set Free.”

The story itself is simple enough.²⁰⁵ Augustine and his younger friend, Alypius, are in the garden in Milan. It is the garden of a host who is letting them stay in the home there. A fig tree is nearby and there is a table in the garden. Augustine has been reading some of the letters of Paul, but he is exceptionally grieved over his inability to get rid of his sins and their guilt. There are some young children playing at a house nearby. Augustine leaves his friend and the Scriptures at the table and goes to where the fig tree is located. There he cries out to God in anguish because he is unable to help himself. Out of his contrition, he weeps and pleads with God, asking “How long?” before God will set him free. At that time, he hears the voice of a child saying in an almost singsong voice “tolle lege, tolle lege” (“pick it up and read it, pick it up and read it”). He cannot recall such a musical chant. He stops his tears

²⁰⁴ See Anne Wilson’s review of Starnes’s book in the *Classical Review*, vol. 44, no. 2.2, 1994, pp. 286–287.

²⁰⁵ Please refer to Appendix for the complete account of Augustine’s conversion.

and takes it as a command to pick up the book and to read the first thing that comes to his attention. As he hurries back to Alypius and the Scriptures, he remembers a similar account in the life of Anthony that he has read about and how Anthony was converted by taking the verse that he found (Matthew 19:21) as the word of the Lord and then how he sold all to follow God. He takes the volume and reads Romans 13:13–14, and the entire chapter, in silence. Instantly and with certainty upon reading these verses, the light of peace replaces the dark of doubt in his heart. With calmness on his face then, he marks the place in the book, closes it, and shares what has just happened with his friend. Alypius opens the book and sees that the next verse says, “Now him that is weak in the faith take unto you.” He takes it to apply to himself and shares that interpretation with Augustine. By his own consent and choice, he joins Augustine in his resolve to trust and follow God completely. They go straightaway to tell Augustine’s mother, who blesses the Lord with praises of joy and victory.

Starnes has many insights into this account. Several are pertinent to this study:

- It was an objective fact obvious to Augustine that there was nothing he could do about his sinful nature or his sins. The solution could only lie in divine grace. On the subjective side, only one thing remained to complete Augustine’s liberation from nature: he had to cease being moved by it or to act according to it (p. 232).
- The wrong or thoughtless choices of a lifetime had bound him to habits he could not break (p. 233).

- When Augustine speaks in Biblical language of “the law of sin” (Romans 7:23) or the “sin which dwelt in me” (Romans 7:17), it is not the body that he considers sinful, but rather a lifelong habituation to the satisfaction of ends that were a confusion of reason and irrational desire (p. 233).
- His deliberation is not primarily about whether to follow a celibate way of life. Many had done that without any intention to follow Christ. It was not celibacy itself that would make Augustine a Christian; it was a dedication to Christ (p. 233).
- The sense of the “Tolle Lege” incident is that because he had acknowledged the impossibility of healing the division in his soul by himself he was at last open to a restoration and cure that would be effected by divine agency—by grace (p. 235).
- Presented as a divine command as it was in Romans 13:13–14, Augustine had either to obey or disobey. In so doing, Augustine is very clear in saying that God did the converting and he repeats this in 9:1:1 (pp. 235, 245).²⁰⁶
- Surprisingly, Augustine’s sexual appetites never again troubled him at a conscious level. The continence that had been impossible so long as he tried to achieve it by his own power had become actual in the moment that he placed his whole confidence in Christ (pp. 235–236).

²⁰⁶ Yet we see here the mixture of his choice in the matter.

- Alypius was converted at the same time and the text says that he was converted in the way that was “according to his own particular nature” as a follower. He found it easy to do the good once he knew what it was and he was content to follow Augustine, trusting that he could safely follow if his friend had concluded that this was the true and proper course (p. 236).
- Over and over again, Augustine insists on the necessity of tears, humility, and a broken heart if one is to become a Christian (p. 245).

Carl G. Vaught

The strength of Carl Vaught’s three-volume set is its blend of the ideas of *journey* and *encounter* in Books I–IX of the *Confessions*. Those two concepts are very close to the concepts of *nurture* and *conversion* which we are investigating in this paper. On the surface, one might say that a weakness in his line of thought might be the delineation of “journey” (process) into Books I–VI and “encounter” (crisis) into Books VII–IX. But a deeper look into Vaught’s concepts, as he represents them to be “dimensions,” shows that he tracks the strains of each one well as they appear in the other dimensions. The third volume on access to God (Books X–XIII) should not be seen as unrelated. Vaught clearly demonstrates the connections of the eternal dimension (volume 3) to the temporal (volume 1) and the spatial (volume 2) dimensions.

In Vaught's point of view, the only official conversions are recorded in the middle books of the *Confessions* (Books VII–IX). Everything before that was preparatory, but important as a journey toward God. But some writers see the journey as the destination.²⁰⁷ The idea of pilgrimage *with* God can be seen as different from the journey toward God. Augustine devoted a chapter to “The Pilgrim Way” (7:21) and he also titled a chapter “The Soul a Pilgrim” (12:11). Vaught does not call Augustine's experience of becoming a Manichaean (Book III), as a result of reading *Hortensius*, a conversion. He does call it a “turn,” however. In keeping with his idea of the journey toward God in Books I–VI, Vaught includes it as one of seven stages of experimental and reflective development.²⁰⁸

Our main attention in Vaught then is upon volume two, *Encounters with God in Augustine's Confessions; Books VII–IX*. There is one “encounter” shared for each of these three chapters. Vaught writes,

This book is a detailed analysis of Books VII–IX of Augustine's *Confessions*, and it comes to focus on three pivotal encounters between God and the Soul. The first is his philosophical conversion, the second is his conversion to Christianity, and the third is the mystical experience he shares with his mother a few days before her death in Ostia . . . they are fundamental stages of Augustine's existential and reflective transformation, but also . . . they are archetypal expressions of the human spirit. This is true when Augustine calls our attention to these experiences in the *Confessions*; and it is still the case today.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Thomas R. Eckenrode, “The Notion of Journey in Augustine of Hippo's Quest for Peace.” *Saint Luke's Journal of Theology*, vol. 27, no. 4, S 1984, pp. 245–264.

²⁰⁸ Vaught, vol. 1, p. 79.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 1.

Not atypical to many readers and students of the *Confessions*, Vaught sees the book as a mirror. As readers look more deeply into it, they see their own reflections.

And that is not a bad thing. Vaught continues,

What draws me to Augustine's *Confessions* is that I see myself on almost every page. As the Renaissance poet, Petrarch, is the first to notice, the *Confessions* is not only Augustine's story, but also the story of Adam and Eve, and hence the story of us all. It is a microscopic expression of a macroscopic theme: in a single life the relation between God and the soul unfolds as sustained encounters between an individual and the ground of its existence, where the experiences that emerge from these encounters demand the richest . . . responses of which we are capable.²¹⁰

Professor Vaught tracks the events in Genesis and in God's salvation history as exemplar patterns in Augustine's conversion story and the way that he wants all his readers to understand what he is sharing. As the mature bishop, Augustine tells the story of young Augustine with the mastery and rhetorical skill of one who has preached, taught, told, and pondered that story for 10 to 15 years, and also with the heart of someone who has walked with God that long. In his introduction, Carl Vaught brings these points out excellently:

Augustine's account of his three encounters with God presupposes a metanarrative of creation, fall, conversion, and fulfillment in the light of which he believes that the lives of all his readers can be understood. However, this does not mean that each of us moves through every stage Augustine traverses, that all of us do so in the same way, or that the particularity of our unique situations can simply be subsumed within a universal pattern. Augustine is convinced that the pattern is there, and one of his most important tasks is to call our attention to it. However, the author of the *Confessions* not only addresses us as tokens of a type, but also as unique individuals.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 2.

Much like Paul in Romans 7 of the Bible, Augustine in Book VII of the *Confessions* shares about his struggles. Vaught does a very good job explaining his philosophical conversion that is being recounted in that book. Not many have handled the Neo-Platonic vision of 7:10:16–7:17:23 as well. He says that “the Neo-Platonic Vision is not only an important part of Augustine’s intellectual conversion, but also a crucial element in his response to the problem of evil.”²¹² Vaught’s contribution toward this study lies in establishing the fact that an intellectual conversion happened in Augustine before a conversion of the soul could occur. This is seen as a pattern for all conversions and can be universalized for all persons and faiths.

The Text of the *Confessions*

The content of the *Confessions* in a book-by-book assessment as it concerns the idea of conversion looks like this:

Book I: Augustine’s Childhood

Contains the famous quote “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (1:1:1) as well as his prayer for God to come into his heart (1:5:5–6).²¹³ Includes the account of his infant baptism being deferred (1:11:17–18) and speaks of sin and confession. He finds his early discipline at school repulsive (1:9).

Book II: Early Adolescence

²¹² Ibid., p. 44.

²¹³ This is possibly the first time in history when someone asked God to come into his heart.

Augustine is growing up. The problem of lust enters his quest to love and be loved (2:2:2–4). The public baths incident (2:3:6) and the “shame” he felt. The story of the pear tree theft (2:4:9) and its effects. The influence of peer pressure (2:8:16). On God’s forgiveness and grace (2:7:15).

Book III: Later Youth

The journey begins. He goes to Carthage as a student, where he attends the “shows” (theater) and where he encounters gang activities (the “wreckers”) (3:1–3). Cicero’s influence (3:4) versus that of the Scriptures (3:5). The choice to join the Manichees (3:6). Monica’s “Wooden Rule” dream wherein the young man of her dream tells her “where you are, there also is he” (3:11:19–20). A bishop prophesies that “it is impossible that the son of such tears should perish” (3:12:21).

Book IV: Augustine as a Manichaeon

High point is the death of a beloved friend (4:4:7–9) and the bittersweet sorrow Augustine experienced for having led him in the way of the Manichaeans (4:5:10), but the friend’s unusual baptism and conversion to Christianity before the end. Image of the teacher as “seducer” (4:1:1). He takes an unnamed woman companion (4:2:2). Sayings: “No man loses you except one who forsakes you” (4:9:14); “Convert us and show us your face, O God of hosts, and we shall be

saved (Psalm 80:19). For whatever way the soul of man turns, it is fixed upon sorrows any place except in you, even though it is fixed upon beautiful things that are outside of you and outside itself” (4:10:15); “Hear you: the Word himself cries out for you to return, and with him there is a place of quiet that can never be disturbed, where your love cannot be forsaken, if itself does not forsake that place” (4:11:16). Augustine’s continued pursuit of truth (4:15) and his identification of some false conceptions of God (4:16). Book finishes with “because we have turned away from you, we have become perverted. Now let us return, O Lord, so that we may not be overturned” (4:16:31).

Book V: From Carthage to Rome and Milan

His meeting with Faustus (5:6:10–11) and disillusionment with Manichaeism. Problems with students at Carthage (5:8:14) and at Rome (5:12:22). Plea for the wicked to be converted for “you have not forsaken your creation, as they have forsaken you . . . and behold, you are there within their hearts, within the hearts of those who confess to you” (5:2:2). Lied to and ditched his mother when he sailed to Rome (5:8:15). Sickness at Rome; Augustine knows not where he would have spent eternity if he should have died (5:9:16). Advancement professionally to Milan (5:13) and the influence of Ambrose and his preaching (5:13–14).

Book VI: Years of Struggle

Monica, now a widow, comes to Rome and finds her son (6:1:1). The turning from error begins (6:4:5–6) and belief in the authority of the Scriptures grows (6:5:7–8). The corrupting of an innocent friend, Alypius (6:7–10) with another close friend named Nebridius. The concubine and mother of his son, Adeodatus (6:15:25), returns to Africa and is replaced with another lover, while Augustine waits for an “arranged” (3:13:23) marriage to transpire. The Garden of Epicurus (6:16:26).

Book VII: The Mind’s Path Home

Early Manhood finds a break with the Manichees (7:1–2). Battle of the internal wills and the problem of evil (7:3). Neo-Platonism (7:9) and truth. Faith and Reason (7:20:26), God as the Summum Bonum (7:4:6, 7:12, 7:13), Highest Good. “By inner goads you have aroused me, so that I did not rest until you stood plain in my sight . . . and (by the secret hand of your “medicine”) day by day my mind’s afflicted and darkened eyes grow sounder under the healing salve of sorrow” (7:8:12). His search for God leads him to the Humble and Incarnate Christ (7:14–19). Augustine chooses “The Pilgrim Way” as his path over the Platonists (7:21:27).

Book VIII: Converging Conversions

Hesitation to follow Christ (and be a eunuch?) (8:1:2), Conversion of Victorinus (8:2:3), and of Ponticianus with his companions, and the testimony of Anthony, an Egyptian Monk (8:6:13–15). One nature, two wills at war inside (8:9–10). The voice of Contenance (8:11:25–27), which he desires with chastity, “but not yet!” (8:7:17). A look at “the naked self” (8:7:18) launches “great struggle in my inner house” (8:8:19). The voice as of a child in the Garden of Milan by the fig tree, which says “tolle lege,” pick it up and read (8:12:28–30), Augustine’s subsequent conversion with the conversion of Alypius and their report to Monica.

Book IX: Beginnings of a New Man

Starts with the “Song of a Soul Set Free” (9:1:1). End of his worldly career (9:2:2–4). Instrumentality in two others (Verecundus and Nebridius) finding peace with God shortly before their deaths (9:3:5–6). Months at Cassiciacum where far from the “madding”²¹⁴ world we found rest in “you” (9:3–4), discussing Christian Scriptures and doctrines with friends. Baptism by Ambrose on Easter of 387 (9:6:14). Commemoration of two martyrs of the Second Century (9:7:15–16). Eulogy for Monica (9:8–13), her “Youth,” “Marriage,” “Life,” “Death,” and “Augustine’s Grief.” The “Mother and Son Vision of Heaven” at Ostia (9:10:23–26).

²¹⁴ Confessions, p. 208. Augustine uses “madding” rather than “maddening.”

Book X: Bishop Augustine's Philosophy of Memory

On "Sensation and Memory" (10:7). A "Higher" memory (10:9). "Learning as Remembrance" (10:10:17). "The Problem of Forgetting" (10:16:24-25). Quotes: "This is the happy life, to rejoice over you, to you, and because of you: this it is, and there is no other" (10:22:32). "Your best servant is he who looks not so much to hear from you what he wants to hear, but rather to want what he hears from you" (10:26:37). "Too late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new, too late have I loved you! Behold you were within me, while I was outside: it was there that I sought you. . . . You were with me, but I was not with you" (The Everlasting Love, 10:27:38). "What man wants trouble and hardship? You command that they be endured, not that they be liked" (10:28:30). "Give what you command, and command what you will" (10:29:40). The One True Mediator (10:42-43).

Book XI: Augustine on Time and Eternity

God's voice and the "interior" ear (11:6:8). "Christ Our Teacher" (11:8:10). "Past, Present, and Future" (11:11:13). God as the "Eternal Now" (11:13:16). "What Time Is" (11:14, 20, 23-27).

Book XII: Augustine on Scripture

“The Two Heavens” (12:2:2). “The City of God” (12:16:23). “The Figurative Interpretation of Scripture” (12:18:27). “A Changing World that is Dependable” (12:8:8), “*constat et non constat.*”

Book XIII: Augustine on Creation

“Prevenient Grace”—“for before I called upon you, you went ahead and helped me” (13:1:1). “Let There Be Light” (13:3:4). “The Trinity in Creation” (13:5–6). “The Psychological Explanation of the Trinity” (13:11:12). “The Body of Christ” (13:12:13). “The Living Soul” (13:21:29–31). “In His Image” (13:22:32). “Predestination” (13:35:49). “Peace of God, Everlasting Sabbath and Eternal Rest” (13:35–38), heaven compared to the seventh day of creation.

The *Confessions* is a story filled with gardens and trees where significant spiritual events occur. In the pear tree incident, Augustine describes how he and some of his friends steal the fruit from a neighbor’s orchard not to eat, but simply to destroy a poor man’s livelihood. He admits that there were better pears to eat in their own gardens. Conscience is awakened and his lament in later years is that he cannot erase that episode from his memory (“The Problem of Forgetting” – Book X), although the sin is forgiven.²¹⁵ The metanarrative takes our thought to the Garden of Eden. And Augustine makes the first observation of a phenomenon that we have come to know as “peer pressure.” He says,

²¹⁵ Lyell Aster, “The Dangerous Fruit of Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 66, no. 2, Summer 1998, pp. 227–255.

By myself I would not have committed that theft in which what pleased me was not what I stole but the fact that I stole. This would have pleased me not at all if I had done it alone; nor by myself would I have done it at all. O friendship too unfriendly! Unfathomable seducer of the mind, greed to do harm for fun and sport, desire for another's injury, arising not from desire for my own gain or for vengeance, but merely when someone says, "Let's go! Let's do it!" and it is shameful not to be shameless!²¹⁶

He also shows in Book II how the lust for the pears that were not his own led to greater lusts that corrupted his soul (2:4:9, 2:5:10–11, 2:6:12–14). This is seen in his visit to the Garden of Epicurus (6:16:26). Augustine's "Tolle Lege" conversion story also happens under a fig tree in a garden of Milan (8:12:28–30) in 386. And, they spend the months from October through Easter of 387 and his (their) baptism in a beautiful, peaceful, and pastoral setting in Cassiciacum (9:4:7). Finally in Book IX, Augustine is looking out of a window over a garden in Ostia when he and his mother share a vision of heaven. The garden imagery has carried him throughout his soul's journey.

It is also a book of dreams and visions. The vision at Ostia happened just before Monica died. It gave her the contentment to say that she did not care whether her body was taken back to Thagaste in North Africa, which had apparently been her desire all along. She saw that all that had mattered was that she had lived to see Augustine return to God and she further declared that in the resurrection, God would know where her body was. The imagery demonstrates that, spiritually, one's home is with God and that it is ultimately heaven. An earlier dream of Monica's was her "Wooden Rule" dream in which a young man came to her and told her concerning her

²¹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, 2:9:17.

son Augustine, “where you are, there also is he” (3:11:19). Augustine told her that it meant she would join him and become a Manichaean, which he was at the time. But she pointed out the precise wording and indicated that it meant that she would one day live to see him join her in the Catholic Church. And so that happened, Bishop Augustine is careful to recount.

Then, it is a story of deaths and new life. The two most significant deaths are that of an unnamed friend in Book IV and that of Monica in Book IX. There is also the remarkable story of two men who find “new life” in Christ just before death. Augustine is comforted by the assurance that these two men, Verecundus and Nebridius, have found eternal life with God in heaven. His own story is a role play of the Pauline theme: “once I was dead in my trespasses and sins, but now I am made alive unto God.” (Ephesians 2:1–5). The death of the unnamed friend affected him so much because he had led the friend into heresy. Later, when the friend was in a coma and on his death bed, someone had a priest come and baptize him as a Christian.²¹⁷ The unnamed friend awakened for a time some days later and Augustine spoke to him of what had happened as if it were a joke. The friend rebuked him and told him in as many words, “I am a Christian now.” He did not fully recover from his illness and he died shortly thereafter.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ This episode may document the beginning of the sacrament of last rites, but it is more pertinent in this paper because it tied the doctrine of predestination directly in Augustine’s mind to conversion (if a person could be saved even while in a coma).

²¹⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, 4:4:7–9. Augustine took the incident as a sign of predestination, but he did not account for the fact that the friend accepted what had been done for him and could have as easily rejected it. Later he taught that it was acceptable to even “compel them to come in” (Luke 14:23) if necessary to be saved.

It is a book filled with various themes of conversion as well. A predominant conversion theme is what could be called the “romantic theme.” When Augustine acknowledged that he was on a quest “to love and be loved” (2:2:2), he was writing more than 1,500 years before Eric Fromm or Viktor Frankl.²¹⁹ In the *Confessions*, we trace maternal love, filial love, companion love, many loves that are the product of lust, and even self-love until Augustine shows us that he found his one true love in God, more specifically in Christ. There is a very moving passage at the end of the book in which he exults in his canticle of love to God (“The Everlasting Love” – 10:27:38). When you put Augustine’s concept of the teacher as seducer (4:1:1) together with his view that Christ is the teacher (11:8:10), it adds to many other overtones in the book about a constantly “wooing” God who overwhelms us with his love and grace.²²⁰

Without any doubt, the predominant conversion theme running throughout the *Confessions* is the idea of the “Restless Heart,” which never finds its rest until it rests in God.²²¹ It is the key idea of the first paragraph in the first chapter of the first book; it carries throughout every story in Books I–IX,²²² and it constitutes the closing thoughts of this classic work as he speaks of the peace of God, the everlasting Sabbath, and the eternal rest in its last four chapters of the last book (13:35–38).

²¹⁹ These two writers emphasized the primacy of loving and being loved in the human drives and motivations.

²²⁰ Jose Oroz-Reta, “The Role of Divine Attraction in Conversion According to St. Augustine,” in *From Augustine to Eriugena* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1991), pp. 155–167.

²²¹ Ignatius Puthiadam, “Search for and Rest in God: Augustine and Madhva Spirituality,” in *Prayer and Contemplation* (Bangalore, India: Asirvanam Benedictine Monastery, 1980), pp. 349–382.

²²² For a sample, see 5:1:1.

Augustine's View on Nurture

In Augustine's *Confessions*, there are influences of nurture weaved in everywhere.²²³

The predominant spiritual influence in the home is his mother. But the father makes a connection using his "mayoral" influence with a wealthy sponsor to help pay for Augustine to go to a better school in Carthage. Romanianus is not really a relative, but he benevolently partners with the family for Augustine's education. The father was not a Christian, although the mother was. Nurture, of the kind that we will see in Bushnell's ideal, is greatly compromised in Augustine's home when the parents are not cooperative. *Confessions* does not leave out the less-desirable characteristics or faults of either parent. The paternal harshness and waywardness are evident. The father's penchants for wine, and even Monica's temptations toward it, are revealed. The father mishandles an episode when he observes the adolescent Augustine unclothed at the public baths. All these things would be put in the category of "poor nurture."

Augustine apparently holds his mother responsible for the deferment of his infant baptism. Circumstances may have been out of her control, but she had him signed with the sign of the cross and salted as a catechumen instead.²²⁴ These were the symbols of the sacrament conducted at the end of childhood (about 12 years of age) when the child became an official member in the Catholic Church and were not associated in any way with covering the child for salvation from birth through

²²³ Margaret R. Miles, "Infancy, Parenting, and Nourishment in Augustine's *Confessions*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 50, no. 3, S 1982, pp. 349–364.

²²⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, 1:11:17.

childhood. Augustine's sincere beliefs regarding original sin and culpable sin led him to write in so many words, "How could you do that?" He was particularly disturbed at Monica's failure to have him baptized as an infant in light of his serious illness and near-death as an infant.²²⁵ Despite Monica's failures, including the tendency to be domineering or the "smother" instinct that was sometimes displayed (revealing that she may have wanted him not to grow up or to have his own identity), Augustine felt that he would never have found his way back to God apart from her love, tears, persistence, and prayers. The tribute he gives to her in Book IX at the time of her death indicates that she was the single greatest nurturing influence in his life.²²⁶

The schools of Thagaste were also not a good nurturing influence in Augustine's life. The peer groups were negative, the discipline was horrible and he was not challenged. However, he excelled at rhetoric and grammar, so they must have been doing some things right. He felt that the gift of literacy was the greatest gift that they had given him and, in the end, it was instrumental to his conversion (Tolle Lege – "pick it up and read"). Nurture must begin early to be the most effective; and Augustine did receive some of that early nurturance from the church as well.²²⁷ Without doubt, the church was a predominant influence for the positive nurturance of Augustine.²²⁸ Regardless, the churches of his area also failed the young Augustine in certain ways in his early nurturance. They had a "salted" catechumen at

²²⁵ Ibid., 1.11.17–18.

²²⁶ *Confessions*, 9:33.

²²⁷ Thomas M. Finn, "Ritual and Conversion: the Case of Augustine," in *Nova and Vetera* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), pp. 148–161.

²²⁸ Mark A. Noll, "Augustine on the Church: Its Nature, Authority and Role in Salvation," *Trinity Journal*, vol. 5, Spring 1976, pp. 47–66.

birth and never guided him into the instruction along the way. They never challenged his intellectual mind and he was therefore ripe to turn to the Manichees. But, whatever ill is said of their nurturing influence, Augustine retained a respect for God and a love for the church even when he went far away. The cooperation of his mother and the church had also given him the knowledge of right from wrong that eventually helped God to draw him back.

About the time that Augustine wrote the *Confessions*, he also penned *On Christian Doctrine*. Rev. Eugene Kevane has studied the *paideia* and *anti-paideia* in that work.²²⁹ He demonstrates that Augustine had a grasp on what should and should not be a part of a sound doctrinal program and method of instruction. He shows the very respectful view that Augustine held of the Scriptures.²³⁰ He says, “The Word of God depends upon human teachers and human teaching, and does not dispense with the hallowed practices and exercises and diligent labor of the [church] schools.”²³¹ Augustine spoke of the Scriptures as the spiritual food that is mixed with the Christ-flesh (Incarnate Word), which is what serves as nourishment in love for growth from the milk of infancy to full-grown maturity in Christ (7:18:24). In *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine taught the importance of signs and symbols to go along with the scriptures in the nurture of believers as well. “It is a law of human communication, established by God, that we humans depend on each other in coming to the

²²⁹ Eugene Kevane, “Paideia and Anti-Paideia: The Prooemium of St. Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*,” *Augustinian Studies*, vol. 1, 1970, pp. 154–180.

²³⁰ Also see the work of Brian John Spence detailed earlier in this chapter.

²³¹ Kevane, p. 165.

knowledge of the truth,” says Kevane.²³² He further says that “Augustine, now a bishop of the Catholic Church, is writing out of his unmatched grasp of this *paideia*, this tradition or heritage of humanism, education and culture.”²³³ So, as in his home and school, there was also in his church upbringing both some bad and some good nurturance operative to make Augustine the person that he was and that he became. We have knowledge of how Augustine himself handled the *paideia* and nurture of catechumens while he was the Bishop of Hippo.²³⁴ His emphasis on the message of the grace of God was filled with nurturance, and “his instructions to teachers to provide comfort to their students and to treat them with respect is admirable.”²³⁵ It was probably patterned after what Ambrose did and how he did it in Milan at the time that Augustine finally was instructed and baptized as an adult. Early in his career, Augustine co-authored a book with his son, Adeodatus titled *On Teaching* in which he made this profound statement, “...to be a good teacher you need two things: you need to love students and you need to love your subject.”²³⁶ This showed exceptional insight into the interweaving of instruction and nurturance, *paideia* and *anti-paideia*.

Augustine is said to have declared that there is no salvation apart from the church. Scholars argue that his later beliefs and practices indicate that he saw the

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid., p. 175.

²³⁴ John William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate: A Catechetical Perspective*, unpublished dissertation, Boston College, 1990.

²³⁵ Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson, *Exploring the History & Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003), p. 118.

²³⁶ Quoted in William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman, *St. Augustine's Confessions: Part 1 & 2* (Chantilly, VA: The Teaching Company, 2004), p. 67, Part 2, Lecture 17.

church as the repository for Christian nurture.²³⁷ This is only partially accurate. The *Confessions* demonstrate that Augustine saw God as the real source for Christian nurture, and the church as his body on earth.²³⁸ His view of Christ as the teacher, as well as all of the conversion themes weaved into the *Confessions*, lead to the conclusion that Augustine felt that the one great dependable source of nurturance in his life was God. Michael J. Anthony says,

The individual thinker does not make truth, he finds it; he is able to do so because Christ, the revealing Word of God; is the *magister interior*, the “inward teacher,” who enables him to see the truth as she listens to it. As an educational thinker, Augustine transcended his generation. He combined deep respect for the cultivation of reason with a passionate concern for heart feelings stirred by God. A human being’s ability to reason was what set him apart from other animals. But sensitivity to “the light within” was necessary for true wisdom.²³⁹

Conclusion

We have seen that Augustine taught in this book that a person is not converted as a result of his or her own choosing alone. Conversion, for Augustine, also involves the gracious purposes of God. In the *Confessions*, he demonstrates both that the soul is acting and that it is responding to the actions of God when conversion occurs. It is the will of God that is the most crucial for salvation. To put Augustine’s view in a modern parable for illustration, one might think of a drowning man who suddenly realizes that he is perishing. Until that point, he has been swept hopelessly toward destruction; he is perilously close to going over the falls. He realizes his need to be

²³⁷ Noll, *Augustine and the Church*, p. 47. See also Spence, “The Logic of Conversion and the Structure of the Argument of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*,” p. 7.

²³⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, 1:11:17.

²³⁹ Anthony and Benson, *Exploring the History & Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21st Century*, p. 118.

saved in his mind rather quickly, and almost immediately he both wants to be saved and wills (decides) it instantaneously as well. His arms start flailing, his legs start kicking, his lungs and larynx start yelling frantically over the roar of the water. But someone who has been watching that man ever since he went into the water has summoned help. A helicopter flies down directly over him and lets down a ladder. The drowning man gets hold of the ladder and makes it into the helicopter. The helicopter flies to safety. The reporters are gathered as they come out of the chopper. What should the drowning man's statement be concerning when and how he was saved? To Augustine in the *Confessions*, such a person has not been saved because he willed it. He was saved because of the action of the person on the bank. So, too, is humanity saved by the will and purposes of a seeking God.

The *Confessions* is a relational book. It is more than a salvation story. It is a love story of many kinds. The illustration needs other people, lots of them in it: perhaps travelers with him, helpers on the side, and hinderers there as well. Most of all, it needs the omniscient, caring helper in the helicopter to send his only son down the ladder and into the water to effect the rescue, out of sacrificial love. It needs the drowning man and the helper to become best friends. It is a "salvation," but it happens in community.²⁴⁰ It happens to a traveler on a journey through life to heaven. It is a return from waters we ought not to have been in. In Augustine's

²⁴⁰ Reid Blackmer Locklin, *A First Course in Salvation: Sankara, Augustine and the Ongoing Creation of Religious Community*, unpublished dissertation, Boston College, 2003. Also see the work of Brian John Spence detailed in footnote 44 of this chapter.

mind, it is a crisis, but it is also a process.²⁴¹ There is a free will to be exercised, but the conversion is, in another sense, of God alone. It is “caught” as well as “taught.” It is the choosing of the path; it is the path choosing us. It is resting in God as the *Summum Bonum* of one’s life. And, in that regard, it might appear to reflect the reaching of level six of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development or of Fowler’s faith development (the highest levels). But actually it is probably a starting point or a turning point on the journey there.²⁴² It is the “way of the pilgrim.” It is embracing the path. Augustine’s path was a way of ministry and service, a lifetime of continence and celibacy motivated by devotion to God. Augustine has become a model for many.

O’Donnell quoted Augustine’s famous statement, “I would know myself, I would know you (God),” taken from one of his earliest works (*Soliloquies*, 2:1:1). It sounds like he made Socrates (“know thyself”) a believer. O’Donnell then states,

The *Confessions* depict in the end the Augustine with which the work began, but do so with an authority that was lacking at the outset. What sets this pilgrimage apart is that it makes the results a living possibility for every reader. The conclusion—knowledge of God leading to knowledge of self—is one that is accessible to all.²⁴³

To the very end of his life, Augustine preached to get persons converted. In Sermon 5 preached on January 21, 419, he took the story of “Jacob Wrestling with the Angel” from Genesis 32:22–32 and pleaded with his congregation, saying,

²⁴¹ Karla Poewe, “Charismatic Conversion in the Light of Augustine’s *Confessions*,” in *Religious Conversion* (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 191–206.

²⁴² James W. Earl, “The Typology of Spiritual Growth in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Notre Dame English Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2, Spr. 1981, pp. 13–28.

²⁴³ O’Donnell, *Augustine*, p. 122.

There are many people here, and now is indeed the time for them to hurry in the name of God and receive the grace of baptism, believing that they are forgiven all the sins they have committed up till now, absolutely all of them, and that they come out from there owing the Lord nothing at all—like that servant who handed in his account to his lord and found he owed him 10 billion dollars, and yet he went off owing nothing, not because he himself really did not owe anything, but because the other was merciful and canceled it all and discharged the debtor.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Sermons I (1-19) on the Old Testament*, Edmund Hill, trans. and notes, John E. Rotelle, ed. (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990), pp. 216–217.

CHAPTER THREE

HORACE BUSHNELL

Chapter 3 on Bushnell²⁴⁵ contains five parts. First, we look at a biographical sketch of his life and then we investigate the structure of the book *Christian Nurture* itself. After making some theological observations, we study his view of nurture in that book and finish with his thoughts on conversion.

Biographical Sketch

Horace Bushnell was born in New England on April 14, 1802, in a little town called Bantam in Connecticut near Litchfield. He died on February 17, 1876, in Hartford. A grave is there in Old North Cemetery with a monument in his honor. Bushnell doesn't seem to have been the type of man who would have made much difference outside of his own community. But nothing could be further from the truth. *Encyclopedia Britannica* describes him as a "Congregational minister and controversial theologian, sometimes called 'the father of American religious liberalism.'"²⁴⁶ He grew up in the rural surroundings of New Preston, Connecticut, joined the Congregational Church in 1821, worked for a while in a wool carding factory, and in 1823 entered Yale with plans to become a minister. After his graduation in 1827, however, he taught school briefly, took a job in journalism, and then as a tutor before entering divinity school.

²⁴⁵ A picture of Bushnell was taken by S. A. Schoff Eng and documented as authentic by Mary Bushnell Cheney in 1880 in her book *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*.

²⁴⁶ "Horace Bushnell," *Britannica Online Encyclopedia*. Retrieved July 9, 2010, from <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9018275/Horace-Bushnell>.

His life divides into three categories chronologically. There are also three developmental tasks that were going on during these three time frames. In the first stage, Bushnell found his path; in the second part, he developed his voice; and in the last one, he left his legacy. The first part had to do with his own personal formation, whereas the other two were about his involvement in the formation of others' lives: in the second phase through the ministry primarily and in the third phase mainly through his writings. In the middle of it all is his story of "transformation" in 1848. He was plagued with very poor health from approximately 1839 on until his death in 1876. This is one of the challenges that is not written about as much, except for the notation of it as a fact; but Bushnell was on a lifelong personal quest for health.²⁴⁷ Here are the stages of his life listed chronologically: Part 1: From the cradle to the pulpit (1802–1833)—Finding his path; Bushnell's own personal formation; Part 2: Years in the pastorate (1833–1859)—Developing his voice; Bushnell shapes other's lives through the ministry; Part 3: Theologian and writer (1859–1876)—Leaving a legacy; Bushnell affects the world through his life and writings.

Part One: From the Cradle to the Pulpit (1802–1833)

As we look at the first phase of Bushnell's life, we examine the positive home environment in which he grew up, his choice made independently of his parents to join the Congregational Church, and his time as a student and in the professions that

²⁴⁷ Mary A. Bushnell Cheney, *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishing, 1880), p. 45. Reprint edition (New York: Arno Press, 1969), part of the Religion in America series. Bushnell's classmate, N. P. Willis, wrote, "We have seen him but once since those days, and then we chanced to meet him . . . in the year of 1845, we think—both of us voyagers for health."

helped him in finding his path into the ministry. Horace Bushnell was the oldest of six children born into the home of Ensign Bushnell and Datha (Bishop) Bushnell. His father's religious background was Methodist and his mother belonged to the Episcopal Church. From the very start of his life, Horace was covered and guided with the warmth of love. In his own words he says,

My mother's loving instinct was from God, and God was in love to me first therefore; which love was deeper than hers, and more protracted. Long years ago she vanished, but God stays by me still, embracing me, in my gray hairs, as tenderly and carefully as she did in my infancy, and giving to me as my joy and the principal glory of my life, that he lets me know him, and helps me, with real confidence, to call him my Father. Would that I could simply tell his method with me and show its significance.²⁴⁸

The home that he grew up in was ideal, but not idyllic. It was no fantasy world, but it was as ideal a situation as could be created in the real world. There is no finer description of such a place and time and family in real-life literature than is recounted by Bushnell's daughter, Mary A. Bushnell Cheney, in the early chapters of *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*. It is a story of love and kindness, industry and hard work, New England grit and savvy, farms and lakes, laughter and play, religious values and practical faith. Cheney's description of Litchfield County at the conclusion of the Revolutionary War is depicted as almost picture perfect:

To have been born then and there was the best of omens. At the beginning of this century the national struggle for life was over, and even the exhaustion and impoverishment which war had left behind were disappearing. . . . The people were enterprising. They built good turnpike roads; opened schools and academies; started manufactures; and made their law-school, founded some years earlier, a prominent seat of constitutional training whence came some of the best lawyers of the country. They also joined in the movements for missionary work and temperance reform . . . There could be no fresher,

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

wholesomer, more vigorous atmosphere, moral and physical, to be drawn in with the first breath of life than that of Litchfield at the date of Horace Bushnell's birth.²⁴⁹

The father was as significant an influence in the home as the mother. His effect is described in its context here. The eldest son mentioned is Horace:

In this home grew up a lively family of boys and girls—four of the former, two of the latter. Reared in the simplest habits; taught from childhood to work and contribute, each his share, to the plain family living; ignorant of the world, but not of God, they grew undisturbed as flowers do in the wild recesses of a mountain, straight up, and keeping each an aroma all its own. The father of the household was a sturdy and spirited man, pleasant in his ways to child or neighbor, full of New England grit, resolute in work, and of a steady cheerfulness in all the ups and downs of life. He did not by constant chiding worry his children; but if he punished, it was thoroughly done. His eldest so once told one of his own children that his father “never whipped him but once, and then he *flogged* him”; and also said to a friend that he remembered this tremendous discipline as one of the best things that ever happened to him. In one of his books, doubtless with the same event in mind, he wrote, “There is many a grown-up man who will remember such an hour of discipline as the time when the ploughshare of God’s truth went into his soul like redemption itself. That was the shock that woke him up to the stanch realities of principle; and he will recollect that father as God’s minister typified to all dearest, holiest reverence by the pungent indignations of that time.”²⁵⁰

The grandparents were also a very positive influence. Abraham and Molly (Ensign) Bushnell had twelve children. Abraham was the sixth-generation descendant of Francis Bushnell who had settled that part of Connecticut and was the third signer of its covenant.²⁵¹ Horace’s father was given his mother’s maiden name. They lived some distance away in Canaan Falls, Connecticut. Horace tells how the

²⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 3–4.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 4. That made Horace the eighth generation of the original settlers.

grandparents happened to become Methodists and Arminian.²⁵² He tells a story also of how his grandmother took a young man in their town under their wing and through having him read the sermons publicly to their little church, which was without a pastor at the time, led him both to the Lord and into the ministry.²⁵³

The religion of Horace's childhood home was a composite from the father's heritage and the mother's Episcopalian background. Neither parent had much use for the predominantly staunch Calvinism of the only church (a Congregational one) in New Preston after they moved there in 1805. They did not care for the "tough predestinationism or the rather over-total depravity" doctrines or the sermons that had a person dangling over the brink of hell each Sunday.²⁵⁴ Horace's parents preferred to lead by example. Their moods and behaviors constantly pointed the children toward God and toward right. Their philosophy of child-rearing is described by Bushnell as "habit-discipline."²⁵⁵ Through guiding the children to develop the right habits and to sustain them, the children were instilled with values such as industry,

²⁵² See "What is Arminianism?" Retrieved July 9, 2010, from <http://www.bible-researcher.com/arminianism.html>.

The fundamental principle in Arminianism is the rejection of predestination, and a corresponding affirmation of the freedom of the human will. . . . [F]ive articles of doctrine [include] (1) that the divine decree of predestination is conditional, not absolute; (2) that the Atonement is in intention universal; (3) that man cannot of himself exercise a saving faith, but requires God's help to attain this faith; (4) that though the grace of God is a necessary condition of human effort it does not act irresistibly in man; (5) that believers are able to resist sin but are not beyond the possibility of falling from grace. In essence, the Arminians maintained that God gives indispensable *help* in salvation, but that ultimately it is the free will of man which decides the issue.

²⁵³ Cheney, *Life and Letters*, p. 24–26. That young man turned out to be Bishop Elijah Hedding.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

order, punctuality and time management, fidelity, reverence, neatness, truth, intelligence, and prayer.²⁵⁶

In many other ways was the child the father of the man. He not only loved nature and suffered it to kindle his imagination, but he explored it for its meanings and mapped it out for its uses. He was a born engineer, always laying out roads and building parks, and finding the best paths for railways among the hills. . . . Prophetic also were his early religious experiences. Heaven lay very close about him in his early years. The freshness of the morning moved him to prayer. His religious impressions came along the path of nature,—in the fields and pastures,—and so coming they were without fear or sense of wrong, but full of the divine beauty and majesty. Deeper experiences springing from the same source were to follow. Nature became a permanent factor in his thought as a revelation of divine things.²⁵⁷

The religious atmosphere in the Bushnell home was described best by Horace's younger brother, the Reverend George Bushnell:

He was born in a household where religion was no occasional and nominal thing, no irksome restraint nor unwelcome visitor, but a constant atmosphere, a commanding but genial presence. In our father it was characterized by eminent evenness, fairness, and conscientiousness; in our mother it was felt as an intense life of love, utterly unselfish and untiring in its devotion, yet thoughtful, sagacious, and wise, always stimulating and ennobling, and in special crises leaping out in tender and almost awful fire. If ever there was a child of Christian nurture, he was one; nurtured, I will not say, in the formulas of theology as sternly as some; for though he had to learn the Westminster Catechism, its formulas were not held as of equal or superior authority to that of the Scriptures; not nurtured in what might be called the emotional elements of religion as fervently as some, but nurtured in the facts and principles of the Christian faith in their bearing upon the life and character; and if ever a man was true to the fundamental principles and the customs which prevailed in his early home, even to his latest years, he was.²⁵⁸

There are several biographies of Horace Bushnell that contain fascinating and endearing details as well as the pain of his struggles. *Life and Letters of Horace*

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁵⁷ Theodore T. Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1899), p. 13.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

Bushnell (1880) by his daughter, Mary A. Bushnell Cheney, provides a first-hand account of Bushnell's life. A family friend, Theodore T. Munger, also wrote a biography titled *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian* (1899). It contains a great deal more about Bushnell's works and their immediate effects. A half-century later, Barbara M. Cross came out with a short biography titled *Horace Bushnell: Minister to a Changing America* (1958). By then the world was understanding the long-term effect of Bushnell's life. In the past 20 years, two biographies of note have been published: *Of Singular Genius, Of Singular Grace: A Biography of Horace Bushnell* (1992) by Robert L. Edwards and *The Puritan as Yankee: A Life of Horace Bushnell* by Robert B. Mullin (2002). There are many other books on Bushnell, but these books can be consulted for a more thorough summation of his life and works.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the events of the first phase of his life are detailed as follows: Bushnell worked in the wool carding and clothes dressing factories as well as on the family farm through 1820; he joined the New Preston Congregational Church of his own accord in 1821; he went to Yale in 1823 and graduated in 1827 and tried his hand at several professions such as teaching, journalism, law, and tutoring, none of which fit him. Even though he had graduated in 1830 from Yale with an M.A. in law, it was not the profession for him. So shortly thereafter, he enrolled once again in 1831 at Yale, but this time in theological studies and when he graduated in 1833, he was placed (or, more probably, accepted the offer) to be the pastor of the North Congregational Church in Hartford, a port city and a capitol. He was installed on May 22, 1833, and continued there as pastor, with

several sabbaticals for health reasons, until July 3, 1859. It was the only pastorate of his ministry. Several other events are pertinent to this period in his life for the purposes of this dissertation. One relates to the circumstances of his joining the Congregational Church in New Preston when he was nineteen years of age. A second has to do with his reluctance to become a minister since his mother had so guided him in that direction during his childhood years.

The Great Awakening swept America in the 1700s led by renowned preachers like Jonathan Edwards. Edwards's grandson, Timothy Dwight, was the President of Yale when Bushnell matriculated. The Revivalism movement was in full swing in America in the early 1800s. It was led by men like Lyman Beecher and Charles Grandison Finney, both of whom were from Litchfield as well.²⁵⁹ The predominant theology in New England was Calvinism of the hard-core variety.²⁶⁰ The Congregational Church in New Preston was reflective of the times and its religious values. Bushnell sincerely wanted to have a testimony of a conversion experience to share. If he was supposed to be "converted," he wanted to be. But, in reality, he had never gone astray from God as far as he could remember. He had loved God from his earliest memory.

As he expressed the desire to join the church, it was required of him that he memorize the Westminster Catechism and agree to the main tenets of Calvinism in addition to having a distinct testimony to being "converted" at a certain point in time.

²⁵⁹ W. B. Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*. (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1833).

²⁶⁰ The strongest proponents adhere to all five of the distinctives of this doctrine (TULIP): Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace and the Perseverance of the saints.

Even as he had done anything wrong in his life, he had been taught and had made it a practice to seek God's forgiveness at that moment. He wrote a short paper during this time in which he works his way through the orthodox doctrinal points of Calvinism and appears to be in agreement with them. Another account gives insight also to his sincerity of heart and mind to comply with the religious teachings of his day. There certainly were no rebellious tendencies in him even in late adolescence.

Another short paper, kept with the one already mentioned, bears the following superscription, written in later life: "Saved as a record of dates. Not wonderful that a Christian life begun in such crudity—if, indeed, it was begun, which was afterwards doubted—required many turns of loss and recovery to ripen it." The original date was March 3, 1822. "A year since," he says, "the Lord, in his tender mercy, led me to Jesus. Four months since, in the presence of God and angels and men, I vowed to be the Lord's, in an everlasting covenant never to be broken. But alas, alas, O my God: how often in the past year, or even in the last four months, have I dishonored thy cause and lost sight of my Redeemer. . . . If I should never sin again, it would not atone for what is past. What can I do? . . . Lord, here I am, a sinner. Take me. Take all that I have and shall have; all that I am and shall be; and do with me as seemeth good. If thou hast anything for me to do; if thou hast anything for me to suffer in the cause of that Saviour on whom I rest my all, I am ready to labor, to suffer, or to die. I am ready to do anything or be anything for thee." After he had joined the church, he engaged for a time enthusiastically in religious work.²⁶¹

Bushnell called this his first "profession" of religion.²⁶²

As he prepared to go to college, Horace was aware that his mother had sensed from childhood that he would be a minister:

It was not strange that such a mother should have special pleasure in such a son, watching and recognizing his unfolding genius with a mother's quick insight. She had, besides, secret hopes, nourished silently in her own heart for years, and reaching back even to the time before his birth, when she had, in the enthusiasm of that new experience, made an offering of her unborn to

²⁶¹ Cheney, *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, p. 21.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

God, dedicating him forever to his service and ministry. From this hidden purpose she never swerved, and when he went into the study of law, after leaving college, she said, "If he is not a minister, I shall not know what to think of it." In childhood he was her constant companion. He followed her in her domestic occupations, and saw and shared, as a child might, her patient toil for children and home. His sunny and affectionate temper helped to lighten her burdens; and when he was a man, no longer at her side, her simple testimony was that "he had always been a good son to her." Intimacy and companionship with this good mother was his education, interweaving its influences with the very fibres of his being, and preparing him by its inspirations for the work before him.²⁶³

It made it very hard, I am sure, for such a young man to find his path and know that it was his own at the age of twenty-one. Interestingly, his fellow students at Yale were not remarkably impressed with his religious life, although much else about him did catch their eye. The Reverend Dr. Robert McEwen, a classmate and lifelong friend, wrote,

Though he came to college a church member, he never had, through the whole four years, nor for two years after, anything positively or distinctively Christian about him, save his observance of communion services. My impression is that his consuming love of study and his high ambition, aided by a growing spirit of doubt and difficulty as to religious doctrine, was the secret here. Yet no word of this escaped him. He undermined the faith of no man. He would have held back any boy of us all from any recreancy whatever. His conscientiousness was scrupulous, his integrity of the sternest kind, his honor the truest and noblest. Let one incident tell what Horace Bushnell, the confessor of Christ without the power of Christ, for seven years, was in conscientious care of his influence over others.²⁶⁴

It is a wonderful testimony to the character of the man, but it begs the question as to the character of his previous testimony. It leaves one to wonder about the experience that he had at the time that he officially joined the church: what he was

²⁶³ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 38.

“saved” from, what he was “saved” to, and why he had specifically noted “saved as a *record of dates*” in his journal entry.

Bushnell continued through his undergraduate degree and tried his hand at teaching for a couple of years, which he did not like at all. As a result of a piece he had done for his commencement, he was offered a job in journalism. Finding news was as hard then as now, so he returned from New York after a year to New Haven and set about studying law while tutoring for income. All the while, he had in the back of his mind the idea that he should be a minister. He was also beset with doubts concerning his faith and the logic of the grounds for its base as he saw it being currently practiced through the revivals. The winter after his graduation, a great revival came to the area. For the reaction to this revival, so far as it concerned Bushnell, we have the report of Dr. McEwen:

What, then, in this great revival was this man to do, and what was to become of him? Here he was in the glow of his ambition for the future, tasting keenly of a new success—his fine passage at arms in the editorial chair of a New York daily, ready to be admitted to the bar, successful and popular as a college instructor; but all at sea in doubt, and default religiously. That baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire compassed him all about. When the work was at its height, he and his division of students, who fairly worshipped him, stood unmoved apparently when all beside were in a glow. The band of tutors had established a daily meeting of their own, and all were now united in it but Bushnell. What days of travail and wondering those were over him!²⁶⁵

It bothered him that these young men were following his lead. So he had a meeting with them to be sure that they understood that any doubts he had about the revivals or about doctrines were in his head, but not in his heart. He used the doctrine of the Trinity as an example in his conversation. He said,

²⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 55-56.

O men! what shall I do with these arrant doubts I have been nursing for years? When the preacher touches the Trinity and when logic shatters it all to pieces, I am all at the four winds. But I am glad I have a heart as well as a head. My heart wants the Father; my heart wants the Son; my heart wants the Holy Ghost—and one just as much as the other. My heart says the Bible has a Trinity for me, and I mean to hold by my heart. I am glad a man can do it when there is no other mooring, and so I answer my own question—what shall I do? But that is all I can do yet.²⁶⁶

Such was the outward story of the most important crisis in his life. If we study its points, we find him not carried away by the superficial excitement of a revival, but moved rather by the sense of his own aloofness, and by the great responsibility for others that his influence over his pupils had given him. Beginning at the plain standpoint of conscience and duty, to which, in darkest hours of doubt, he had ever stood faithful, he asks himself this test question (which he afterwards gave to others as a guide):

Have I ever consented to be, and am I really now, in the right, as in principle and supreme law; to live for it; to make any sacrifice it will cost me; to believe everything that it will bring me to see; to be a confessor of Christ as soon as it appears to be enjoined upon me; to go on a mission to the world's end if due conviction sends me; to change my occupation for good conscience sake; to repair whatever wrong I have done to another; to be humbled, if I should, before my worst enemy; to do complete justice to God, and, if I could, to all worlds—in a word, to be in wholly right intent, and have no mind but this forever?"²⁶⁷

This, the simple desire to be and do right, was the first step. By the side of the moral question intellectual doubts appeared unimportant, and were deferred.

He settled the matter alone in his dorm room. Of that experience, he said, "There is a story lodged in the little bedroom of one of those dormitories, which I pray God

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 56.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 57–58.

his recording angel may note, allowing it never to be lost.”²⁶⁸ Speaking in the third person about himself, he describes what happened in his sermon “On the Dissolving of Doubts,” which was first delivered in the Yale Chapel:

It is an awfully dark prayer, in the look of it; but the truest and best he can make . . . and the prayer and the vow are so profoundly meant that his soul is borne up into God’s help, as it were, by some unseen Christ, and permitted to see the opening of heaven even sooner than he opens his eyes. He rises, and it is as he if had gotten wings. The whole sky is luminous about him. It is the morning, as it were, of a new eternity. After this all troublesome doubt of God’s reality is gone, for he has found him! A being so profoundly felt must inevitably be.²⁶⁹

He looked at this, too, as a conversion of sorts. He spoke of that in the same sermon, saying,

Now, this conversion, calling it by that name as we properly should, may seem, in the apprehension of some, to be a conversion *for* the Gospel, and not *in* it or *by* it—a conversion by the want of truth more than by the power of truth. But that will be a judgment more superficial than the facts permit. No, it is exactly this: it is seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness—exactly that, and nothing less. And the dimly groping cry for help, what is that but a feeling after God, if, haply, it may find him, and actually finding him not far off? And what is the help obtained but exactly the true Christ-help? And the result, what also, is that but the kingdom of God within, righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost?²⁷⁰

Bushnell understood that this conversion was not one *from* anything; it was a conversion *for* something. The fact that he took it as a “call” into the ministry is made obvious by his subsequent actions. He did not enter the field of law that he had so aptly prepared for, but enrolled in 1831 to go to school once again. This time he

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 59.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 58–59.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 59.

received a Bachelor of Divinity in theology, graduating in 1833. He then accepted the offer to pastor the North Congregational Church on May 22, 1833.

The first phase of Bushnell's life was thirty-one years in length. It took him from the cradle to the pulpit. These two wooden vessels were symbols for nurture and conversion, but a conversion different than Augustine's. Horace found his path in life and embraced it as his own even though the church (a Christian one) and the vocation (the ministry) rose directly out of his cradle of nurture.

Part Two: Bushnell's Years in the Pastorate (1833–1859)

The second phase of Bushnell's life covers the years of his pastorate at North Church in Hartford (1833–1859). The first phase had been primarily about his own spiritual formation; that did not come to an end as his life continued. But at this point his involvement in the formation of others' lives, which had begun to grow during the first phase, begins to take over preeminence. The means of his influence upon others in this chapter of his life is primarily through the ministry, and in this way he has found his "voice"²⁷¹ and begun to develop it. As the second phase unfolded, his writings increased also and that means of affecting others became preeminent in the last stage of his life after he retired from North Church. The main events of this part of his life had to do also with home life as well as church life. Another major circumstance during this time in his life was a change in his health for the worse and the many trips that he took to seek solutions. As the writings increased, so did

²⁷¹ Stephen R. Covey, *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness* (New York: Free Press, 2004), p. 25–63.

controversy over some of his doctrines and teachings. The two primary works that brought controversy were the *Discourses on Christian Nurture and God in Christ*. The *Discourses* brought controversy for its antirevival-, antitraditional-type conversion slant and for its claim that there wasn't any reason that a child born into a Christian home should ever know themselves as anything other than a Christian. The controversy over *God in Christ* focused on his views on the doctrine of the Trinity which were taken by many to be Unitarian, a movement, controversial at that time, which rejects the doctrine of the Trinity.

Not only did he take on the cares of a new parish ministry in 1833, but he also married Mary Apthorpe, a young lady from New Haven who had been a part of a Bible class of ladies that Horace led while he was still a theological student at Yale. They were married on September 13 and in December they moved into a new home he had built himself. It had a wonderful garden with an open view of the beautiful countryside. Over the course of their years in the ministry in Hartford, they lived in the family home and raised their children there. They had five children over the years, and also experienced great sorrow. Their infant daughter, Lily, died in 1837 and their only son, named Horace for his father, died in 1843 at the age of four, possibly of "brain disease." Their deaths strained Bushnell's heart tremendously, but that sorrow made him a better preacher. Their children were Francis Louisa Bushnell (6/27/1834–7/24/1899) who never married,²⁷² Elizabeth "Lily" (1836–1837), Horace Jr. (Sept. 1838–10/9/1842), Mary A. Bushnell Cheney (9/25/1840–6/22/1917), and

²⁷² See http://members.tripod.com/~Davenport_Genealogy/DavGen/d0/i0002976.htm.

Dotha Bushnell Hillyer (9/24/1843–1932). Horace and his wife did an excellent job in re-creating the caring environment for their children that Bushnell had known when growing up in New Preston. His daughter, Mary, gives us a window to look in on their home:

Looking back upon the long course of events, now linked in the chain of history, a throng of those undefined impressions, slight, significant facts and tender recollections which belong to the sacred circle of home, come crowding in, claiming their place among the worthy belonging of the life.²⁷³

Mary then gives many illustrations of the healthy, warm and loving home that she grew up in. I have chosen one story about play and one about prayers to share.

First among my recollections of my father are the daily, after-dinner romps, not lasting long, but most vigorous and hearty at the moment. No summit has ever seemed so commanding as his shoulder, where we rode proudly, though sometimes carried about at what seemed a dangerous pace. Thanksgiving-day was always a day of special and rare frolic. After the sermon had been given, and the turkey and pumpkin-pie were disposed of, father and children joined in a unique and joyous celebration, whose main feature was the grand dance, in the course of which my father would occasionally electrify the children by taking a flying leap over their heads. Those who had wrestled with the knotty heads of the morning's discourse, to the subsequent detriment of their dinner, would have been amazed could they have seen the joyful antics by which the minister promoted digestion. The frolic sometimes reached a mad pitch, but in it my father never seemed less dignified than in the pulpit, and we always realized that it was an honor to have him play with us. A playful use of the faculties seemed ever to present its ideal side to him, and it was thus that he joined with his children "in the free self-impulsion of play, which is to foreshadow the glorious liberty of the soul's ripe order and attainment in good." Thus he made of our childhood "a paradise of nature, the recollection of which behind us might image to us the paradise of grace before us."²⁷⁴

There are stories shared of his honesty, his kindness, his work ethic, his preaching, his courage in the face of illness or criticism, and his calm assurance to

²⁷³ Cheney, *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, pp. 452.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 452–453.

stand by what he believed was right even when standing basically alone upon many occasions. As a girl, Mary recalls the following description of typical mornings in her childhood years at home:

That was the season of corn planting, and all the delights of laying out the garden where he worked most industriously on spring days, as well as in the early mornings of summer. It was then his habit to rise very early, and to work for an hour or two in his garden before breakfast, barefooted and roughly dressed. Work done, he took a heroic shower-bath, made a neat toilet, and appeared in the shady breakfast room with smooth locks (they were usually, at other times, the reverse of smooth), and with a cheerful, composed mien, as he conducted the family prayers. I have the most peaceful and sacred recollections of those prayers on sunny summer mornings, when all was still and clean in the well-ordered room, and no sound broke upon the praying voice but the song of birds. Sometimes we sung at family prayer, and I can almost hear now the deep tones of the bass voice in Heber or some other favorite tune.²⁷⁵

Almost immediately, as the Reverend Bushnell began his ministry, he began to print his sermons and to write for publication. One of his first papers was “Barbarism the First Danger.” It was influential in the founding of Christian colleges in the West. Because it was received very positively, he became known in New England and beyond. Then two of his articles, “Spiritual Economy of Revivals of Religion” in *Christian Spectator* (1835) and “The Kingdom of Heaven as a Grain of Mustard Seed” in the *New Englander* (1844), were incorporated into a book called *Discourses on Christian Nurture* (1847). As these two came out, controversy began to build. He attracted opposition for his sermons against the staunch Calvinism of that era. It became obvious that he opposed the very popular Revivalism movement, which was in full swing at that time. He was still much respected because of his

²⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 454–455.

Puritan preaching and lifestyle. But when *Discourses* came out, it seemed that he was teaching that a person could be saved through Christian nurture and did not need to be converted. The positive side of that was that he became a champion for children.²⁷⁶

It must be noted that it was the custom to print sermons in that day. It was also a time and place where clergy were highly respected and where discussing what the minister had said was not criticism as much as another way to learn. The printed word and the spoken word carried great authority in the years well before technology, radio, television, computers, media, entertainment venues, and ease of travel. Robert L. Edwards provides insight into the significance of the year following the *Discourses on Christian Nurture* in his chapter titled “Pivotal 1848.” He cites the significance of that year in Western history, which was more of an epoch than a year: the effect of the 1847 *Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels; the discovery of gold in California; the end of the Mexican War, which resulted in a trans-continental nation for the first time; the expansion of the unsettled territories; and the escalating slavery question and the debates that started that year over free and slave states:

For Bushnell in Hartford, 1848 was the same kind of watershed year. In the course of it he underwent an experience of spiritual enlightenment that heightened the urgency of all his preaching and writing. He poured out a wealth of theological statements from prominent platforms, considerably extending his public exposure. And beyond anything he sought, expected, or could have foreseen, he laid the groundwork for a bitter doctrinal conflict that far exceeded the hostile reaction to *Christian Nurture*. The clash of viewpoints came perilously close to costing him his professional career.

In the sense of momentous change, his year opened not so much in January as in February. One dark morning during an unusually snowy month, he awoke and told his wife that the light he had long waited for in his inner

²⁷⁶ Robert L. Edwards, *Of Singular Genius, Of Singular Grace* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1992), p. 83–94.

seeking had dawned. “What have you seen?” she asked. His brief but joyful reply was simply, “The Gospel.”²⁷⁷

Bushnell’s explanation of this experience, and his subsequent references to it over the remainder of his life, lead one to believe that this was the “truest” conversion moment in his life. Edwards continues his commentary:

What more he may have shared with her at that hour we cannot tell. By his own subsequent account, however, there was in that moment an important element of intellectual illumination. Much as Martin Luther had groped and agonized before he came upon his answer of justification by faith, or as Albert Schweitzer, laboring upstream on an errand of medical mercy in Africa, suddenly was given “reverence for life,” a concept “unforeseen and unsought,” so Bushnell had been probing for a key to unlock a truer Christianity than prevailing New England orthodoxy seemed to offer. His flash of enlightenment climaxed a period of “protracted suspense, or mental conflict” during which he had been trying strenuously to bring “into one theologic view” the complexities of the Cross. Working and waiting for what “could only be cleared by light,” he received his reward at daybreak that bleak morning.

With it came a powerfully moving mystical encounter. This, too, affected the rest of Bushnell’s life, and he often referred to it in conversations with his family and close friends. “I was set upon by the personal discovery of Christ, and of God represented in him,” he stated once in a letter. As late as 1871, when he and Mary were alone together one evening, conversation led back to the same subject. “I seemed to pass a boundary,” he mused. “I had never been very legal in my Christian life, but now I passed from those partial seeings, glimpses and doubts, into a clearer knowledge of God, and into his inspirations, which I have never wholly lost. The change was into faith—a sense of the freeness of God and the ease of approach to him.”²⁷⁸

The most important element of this story is Bushnell’s own description of this mystical encounter: “The change was *into* faith.” He had been influenced by the

²⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 95–97. The full account of his testimony can be read in the Appendix.

²⁷⁸ Ibid. Edwards also said,

Any such gift of grace is a mystery, but there were ways in which Bushnell had prepared for it. The previous five years had brought unsettling emotional setbacks. The loss of his one son, the adverse reception accorded his discourses on Christian nurture, and recurring spells of bad health—all these had moved him to reach for deeper foundations. “I swung, for a time towards quietism,” he confessed and more than was his wont, he took to reading pietistic literature.

poems and writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge to believe in the power of divine forces that were flowing around and through human beings. He searched for ways to express his theology that reflected his semi-mystic leanings. For that reason, Bushnell probably felt that his opus was *Nature and the Supernatural*, which synthesized his thoughts and beliefs into a theory of romantic sensibility.²⁷⁹

Without any doubt, Bushnell's most controversial book was *God in Christ* (1849), which came out the year after his mystical encounter with God. His critics claimed either that he did not believe in the Trinity or that he did not teach the divinity of Christ. He was labeled as an Arian, a Unitarian, or both. An attempt was made to bring formal charges against him, but his church voted to withdraw from the "consociation" in 1852, effectively eliminating any action that could have been brought. *Christ in Theology* (1851) was his response to the criticism.

Bushnell continued his pattern of lifelong learning during this period in his life. He achieved both the Doctor of Divinity degree from Wesleyan University (1842) in Middletown, Connecticut, and the Doctor of Systematic Theology degree from Harvard (1852). He was offered the presidency of Middlebury College in Vermont (1840) and had a difficult time knowing what God's will was in the matter. Since his wife did not want to move, he took that as evidence that he should decline the offer. It was about this time that his health began to fail; first he experienced throat troubles, which later also became severe lung problems. He spent much of the rest of his life seeking solutions. Two notable things happened while on these trips.

²⁷⁹ Barbara M. Cross, *Horace Bushnell: Minister to a Changing America* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 21–30.

The first was the writing of a letter to the Pope while he was in Europe (1846). The letter was labeled as heretical by the Vatican and not to be read by Catholics, but that was primarily because he was not a member of the Catholic faith.²⁸⁰ The second was his involvement in helping to establish the College of California at Oakland (1856) while he was there. He was offered the presidency there as well, but he declined. The college was merged to become the University of California in 1869. On account of his long-continued ill health and the fact that he had been reduced to near-invalid status, Dr. Bushnell was forced to resign his pastorate on July 3, 1859, and thus ended that chapter of his life.

Part Three: Theologian and Writer (1859–1876)

The third phase of Bushnell's life was mainly spent writing and extending his influence. His legacy was enhanced by the establishment of the very first public park, which was named in his honor, just before he died.²⁸¹ This part of his life split into three sections: the Civil War years (1859–1865), the middle retirement years (1865–1870), and the final years (1871–1876).

It was during the Civil War years that he came out with *The Character of Jesus, forbidding his possible Classification with Men* (1860–1861), which was the tenth chapter from his book *Nature and the Supernatural*. He showed therein that he did not deny the divinity of Christ. During these years, he also published *Christian*

²⁸⁰ Cheney, pp. 171–172. Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian*, p. 62. Dr. Munger argues that the label of “heretic” was unimportant.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 562–563. The account Cheney shares of the key leaders of Hartford bringing this announcement to his home two days before his death and his joy on learning of it is very moving, indeed.

Nurture in its final form (1861). In 1864, he came out with *Christ and Salvation* and an excellent book called *Work and Play* that was a precursor of Maria Montessori and John Dewey of the next century, for its integrative philosophy of those two concepts.

In the middle years, Bushnell published a book on his “moral influence” theory of the atonement, called *The Vicarious Sacrifice* (1866). He also came out with *Moral Uses of Dark Things* (1868) and *Women’s Suffrage: A Reform Against Nature* (1869). Doctrinal matters and his criticism of revivalism techniques were not the only arenas of controversy for Bushnell because, in addition to those two arenas, he became increasingly vocal about political issues such as slavery and abolition during the twenty years before the Civil War. Since he had also had developed a voice at that time related to the issues surrounding woman’s suffrage, women’s roles, and women’s rights, he found himself now speaking in pulpits and writing about African-Americans and women. His opinions were less than liberating by today’s standards, but they anticipated change. Horace Bushnell was among those who led the way from at least the 1840s onward in bringing their plight to the attention of the white- and male-dominated world of New England.²⁸²

As Bushnell entered the final years, he received yet one more degree (his third doctorate); but this time it was an honorary Doctorate in Law from Yale (1871). In 1872, he compiled his *Sermons on Living Subjects*. His last full-length book was *Forgiveness and Law* (1874). Rev. Bushnell was promoted to Glory on February 17,

²⁸² Edwards, op. cit., p. 255–268. Edwards’ presentation throughout the book shows a real Bushnell tainted with some prejudices who wrestles with his inward beliefs and outwardly with the best ways that the problem should be solved in society on both the issues of slavery and suffrage.

1876, at the age of 73. Near the end, he wrote to a friend, C. A. Bartol, “Well, my dear brother, I will only say, God bless you, and farewell. We shall touch bottom here shortly, and that, I hope, in righteousness.”²⁸³ He assessed his own life as follows:

My figure in the world has not been great, but I have had a great experience. I have never been a great agitator, never pulled a wire to get the will of men, never did a politic thing. It was not for this reason, but because I was looked upon as a singularity—not exactly sane, perhaps, in many things—that I was almost never a president or vice-president of any society, and almost never on a committee. Take the report of my doings on the platform of the world’s business, and it is caught. I have fulfilled no place at all. But still it has been a great thing even for me to live. In my separate and merely personal kind of life, I have had a greater epic transacted than was ever written, or could be. The little turns of my way have turned great changes,—what I am now as distinguished from the merely mollusk and pulpy state of infancy; the drawing-out of my powers, the correcting of my errors, the winnowing of my faults, the washing of my sins; that which has given me principles, opinions, and, more than all, a faith, and, as the fruit of this, an abiding in the sense and free partaking of the life of God. Oh that I could trace the subtle art of my Teacher and show the shifting scenes of the drama which he has kept me acting! What a history—of redemption and more! I will try, as I best can, to show it. Help me, O my God! Refresh my memory. Quicken my insight. Exalt my conceptions of thy meanings, and give me to see just how thou hast led me, that I may quicken others to look for thy mercy, and see that thou hast also as great, and greater, things to do for them.²⁸⁴

“The little turns of my way have turned great changes”—little did he know.

The subtle art of your Teacher, the shifting scenes of the drama—ah, yes! It is there that we find the mysteries of God. God bless every teacher who labors in the model of the Great Teacher who instructed Horace. I pray with you (teachers) “exalt my conceptions of thy meanings,” but like Bushnell, I pray not for myself (or you) alone

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 560. Bartol was a Unitarian.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

only “that I may quicken others to look for thy mercy.” What insight, indeed.

Among Horace Bushnell’s very last words came these:

One night, waking suddenly from sleep, he exclaimed, “Oh, God is a wonderful Being!” And when his daughter, sitting by his side, replied, “Yes, is he with you?” he answered, slowly, “Yes, in a certain sense he is with me, and”—then came a pause—“and I have no doubt he is with me in a sense which I do not imagine. I account it one of the greatest felicities to have a nature capable of such changes,”—meaning, probably, such movements of God in it. Soon after this he said, still more slowly, and with pauses intermingled, for he was very weak,—“Well, now, we are all going home together; and I say, the Lord be with you—and in grace—and peace—and love—and that is the way I have come along home.” It was his dying benediction, spoken out of the almost sleep and exhaustion of his mind.²⁸⁵

The Reverend Dr. Burton concluded his funeral service by saying:

What a mind his must be to enter heaven, and start out upon its broad-winged ranges, its meditations and discoveries, its transfigurations of thought and feeling, its eternal enkindlings of joy as the mysteries of redemption unfold! I look forward with immense expectation to a meeting again with this man in his resurrection life. I want to see Horace Bushnell in his glorified, immortal body, and note the movements of that mighty genius and that manful and most Christian soul when thus clothed upon and unhindered.

Meanwhile, and until then, farewell, O master in Israel, O man beloved! God give thee light on thy dark questions now! God give thee rest from thy tired body! God bring us to thee when the eternal morning breaks!²⁸⁶

The Legacy (1876–1930)

Each of Bushnell’s daughters and his wife found fitting ways to honor their husband and father and add to his legacy after he was gone. First of all, 1876–1881: An edition of Bushnell’s works came out in eleven volumes; one further volume titled *The Spirit in Man*, which had been gathered from his unpublished papers, came out in 1903; new editions of *Nature and the Supernatural*, *Sermons for the New Life*, and

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 562.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 565.

Work and Play also came out in 1903. Secondly, 1880: Daughter Mary Bushnell Cheney (1840–1917) published *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*. Third, 1899: Theodore T. Munger published a biography, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian*, with the help of Mrs. Horace (Mary) Bushnell (1805—1906) and daughter Francis Louisa Bushnell (1834–1899) shortly before Francis passed away. Fourthly and finally, 1930: Philanthropist daughter Dotha Bushnell Hillyer (1843–1932), established the Horace Bushnell Chair for Christian Education at the Yale Divinity School (his alma mater) in 1916,²⁸⁷ and just before her death she saw the dedication of The Horace Bushnell Memorial Hall in Hartford for the promotion of music, arts, science, and other benevolent activities in honor of her father.

The legacy continues and in this last generation, we have seen a “revival” of interest in his works. The *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell* assembled by his daughter, Mary A. Bushnell Cheney, most closely equaled the kind of information that was found in Augustine’s *Confessions*, so this study has leaned on it heavily in the biographic portion of this paper. In this manner, some comparisons and some differences have been revealed that should prove useful for this study. Attention now turns more specifically to the immediate book of study, Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture*.

²⁸⁷ Luther Allan Weigle became the first Horace Bushnell Professor of Christian Nurture at Yale Divinity School (YDS) in 1916. This chair had been endowed by Dotha Bushnell Hillyer, a daughter of Horace Bushnell, who had written the first part of his classic book, *Christian Nurture*, in 1847. Upon his appointment, Weigle prepared Bushnell’s book for republication with a biographical essay by the YDS professor of church history, Williston Walker. Weigle also spoke at the laying of the cornerstone of Bushnell Hall in Hartford in 1928. See introduction to *Christian Nurture* (Weigle, 1967), p. xxxix. Also reference the biography of Luther A. Weigle at http://www.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/view.cfm?n=luther_weigle, retrieved June 20, 2008.

Overview of the Book *Christian Nurture*

Christian Nurture is not altogether a handbook for proper child raising. It is a philosophical, theological, and pedagogical justification for Bushnell's reactions to the beliefs and practices of his times. This study is not as singularly concerned with his practical suggestions because it is also focused on his philosophy of education and evangelism contained within it. A new edition of the book was published under the sponsorship of his daughter, Dotha Bushnell Hillyer, in 1916 at the time of her establishment of the Horace Bushnell Professor of Christian Nurture Chair at Yale. Dotha was married to millionaire Appleton Hillyer and was very active in social and civic affairs. She was able to do many things like this in memory of both her parents. The renowned church historian, Williston Walker, wrote the introduction to the 1916 edition. He finishes his remarks by stating that Dr. Bushnell, in *Christian Nurture* is striving to correct the one-sided emphasis on adult conversion and he is striving "to vindicate for Christian childhood its normal place in the kingdom of God."²⁸⁸ Walker states,

In so doing he adopted positions consonant with the great historic experience of the church, however little in agreement with the local American outlook of his time. That the work was met with denunciation was to be expected under the circumstances; but no treatise of Doctor Bushnell's has so commended itself to the American Christian public or has been more influential in modifying American religious thought.²⁸⁹

How the book itself came about is a matter of record. Luther Weigle says, "a lifetime of experience and study went into the writing and re-writing of *Christian*

²⁸⁸ Weigle, Introduction to *Christian Nurture* by Horace Bushnell, p. xxix.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. xxix-xxx.

Nurture. As a young pastor and father, he began early in his ministry to face the problem with which it deals.”²⁹⁰ Temp Sparkman gives an excellent summation of its origin. I share it, with the footnotes in the quote also being his.²⁹¹

The seed thought for the book came from Bushnell’s pen in two important articles—“Spiritual Economy of Revivals of Religion,” published in the *Christian Spectator* in 1838,²⁹² and “The Kingdom of Heaven as a Grain of Mustard Seed,” published in the *New Englander* in 1844.²⁹³ It was this later article which prompted the Hartford Central Association to invite Bushnell, in 1846, to speak on his educational views. From that speech came the request that his thought be published. Bushnell returned to his study and developed two sermons on nurture, both of which were published in 1847 in a single, small book entitled, *Discourses on Christian Nurture*. The publication received immediate and intense criticism and the publisher withdrew the book, whereupon Bushnell published the discourses himself. He added to the two discourses a section entitled, “Arguments for Discourses on Christian Nurture,” and the two articles referred to above, plus two sermons, “The Organic Unity of the Family,” and “The Scene of the Pentecost, and a Christian Parish,” all under the title, *Views of Christian Nurture, and of Subjects Adjacent Thereto*.²⁹⁴ The final version, (*Christian Nurture*, 1861) contains the two original discourses, and two seed articles, the sermon of the family, plus chapters that further develop Bushnell’s thought.”²⁹⁵

The earliest statement about the philosophy and purpose of Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture* is the rationale as to why it was written given by his daughter, Mary Bushnell Cheney, in 1899. She wrote,

²⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. xxxi-xxxii.

²⁹¹ Sparkman, *The Influence of Two Theological Concepts*, p. 112. Footnotes on p. 134.

²⁹² Ibid. Printed as Sparkman's footnote #80, taken as printed on p. 134 of Sparkman's paper: “This article is placed by some writers in 1836, but none of these writers gives a source for the information. The writers who place the article in 1838 invariably give the source of the article. Also, *Views of Christian Nurture* . . . documents the article.”

²⁹³ Ibid. Printed as Sparkman's footnote #81, taken as printed on p. 134 of Sparkman's dissertation: “This article appears later under the title, ‘Growth, Not Conquest, the True Method of Christian Progress.’ Some authors use one or the other title without noting the fact that its title has been changed. Even the 1847 *Views* . . . , which contains the article, does not note its original title.”

²⁹⁴ Ibid. Printed as Sparkman's footnote #82, printed on p. 134 of Sparkman's dissertation: “This scenario is dependent mainly on two of H. Shelton Smith’s books, *Changing Conceptions of Original Sin* and *Horace Bushnell*, both noted in the bibliography.”

²⁹⁵ Ibid. Printed as Sparkman's footnote #83, as printed on p. 134 of Sparkman's dissertation: “The ‘Arguments . . .’ are missing from this work.”

The important work of this year, 1846, both as regards its ultimate usefulness, and with respect to the discussion and controversy which followed its publication, was his little book on “Christian Nurture.” Its spirit and general tenor are so well known that it is unnecessary here to repeat its affectionate plea, that the religious life of childhood should be fostered by and adopted into the great household of faith, the organic Christian family of the Church. So much progress has been made in this direction that it is difficult for us now to realize the prevalence at that day of very different teachings. The Church of New England recognized no gradual growth into Christianity. None could be admitted to Christian fellowship save those who had been technically converted, passing through the prescribed stages of “conviction of sin and acceptance of salvation.” Hence children had no participation in the religious life of the parents, and no rights in the Church as a home. The philosophy which underlies “Christian Nurture” is likely to be lost sight of in the greater attraction of its practical lessons. It is opposed to the *individualism* of the then prevalent theology, and recognizes and emphasizes the *organic* life of the family, the Church and society at large, wherein no soul lives or acts alone as a unit, but all as parts of a living organism, interdependent and mutually helpful.²⁹⁶

Bushnell’s premise was that efforts should not be focused on converting adults (since that view would see them as growing up “in sin”), but rather that children should be spiritually renewed from the beginning. He said that they should never remember a particular time or experience that they began a spiritual life, but that they should have the perception that they loved God and everything good from their earliest recollection. Weigle comments on this and expands further upon Mary Bushnell Cheney’s observations:

He defended this thesis with a wealth of argument which rests ultimately upon two propositions: that the nature of the family as a social group is such that the spirit and character of the parents inevitably influence the life and character of the children; and that the life of the family may thus be a means of grace, in that it affords an instrument which God may use for the fulfillment of His promises and constitutes a natural channel for the power of the Holy Spirit.

²⁹⁶ Cheney, *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, p. 178.

The first of these propositions is psychological. The essential truth of Bushnell's position on this point, which he terms "the organic unity of the family," is abundantly confirmed by modern psychological and sociological investigations of group behavior, of child development, and of the factors contributing to nervous disorganization, mental disease, and moral delinquency.

The second of Bushnell's propositions is theological. It asserts a relation between the natural and the super-natural to the study of which he devoted a whole volume before he wrote the final edition of this book. That his position is better and truer theology than the arbitrary supernaturalism which it displaced, is today generally agreed. The laws of nature are not recalcitrant. They belong to God, not to evil.²⁹⁷

Weigle also wrote,

The book reflects the experience of a father as well as the convictions of a Christian minister. It is as concrete as the better books of today on child training; and it has more body and substance than many of them, because its counsels are underlaid by a consistent philosophy of life and of religion, instead of being a mere collection of devices that have chanced to work.²⁹⁸

Bushnell carried the Christian torch for Focus on the Family²⁹⁹ in the middle 1800s, except that his defense was not against perceived threats outside the Church as much as unhealthy influences within its rank and file.

The book itself, in its final form, contains two parts. The first part covers the "doctrine" of Christian nurture and the second part the "mode." There are actually three parts to the book because part one, which constitutes more than half of the book in length, can itself be split fairly evenly in half. The first half of part one is the material that covers what Christian nurture is, what it is not, and the central idea of

²⁹⁷ Weigle, pp. xxxiv–xxxv.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxxvi.

²⁹⁹ Focus on the Family is an organization founded by Dr. James Dobson and located in Colorado Springs, Colorado. It is an example of the type of organization that has come into existence at present with a purpose to protect and preserve families and children and protect their welfare.

the organic unity of the family. The rest of part one concerns the child's relation to the church through infant baptism, membership, and birthright covenant.³⁰⁰

The message of *Christian Nurture* is constructive and positive rather than merely critical; and much of the message shared in it is timelessly true. Dr. Munger says,

The full purpose of the treatise was to discuss the divine constitution of the family as the means of securing Christian character. It maintained that the unit of the church as well as of society is the family, and that in both it is organic; that character can be transmitted, and thus Christianity can be organized into the race and the trend of nature be made to act in that direction. The presumption should be that children may be trained into piety, and that it is not necessary that conversion should be awaited and secured under a system of revivalism that is without order as to time and cause."³⁰¹

Theological Observations

When it comes to the investigation of Bushnell's theology, it is difficult to say that he was a real pioneer because of all the groundwork laid before him. The best assessment is probably that he was a theological "tinkerer" who was a conservative, but an innovative, thinker.³⁰² He "sought to modify New England theological orthodoxy to meet the needs of Americans living in his generation Ultimately, Bushnell's innovative theology was driven by his staunch fidelity to upholding the worldview of the homespun New England 'Yankee' culture that had reared him—a

³⁰⁰ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, pp. vii–xxi.

³⁰¹ Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian*, p. 77.

³⁰² Robert Bruce Mullin, *The Puritan as Yankee: A Life of Horace Bushnell* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

culture rapidly disappearing during his lifetime.”³⁰³ There are paradoxes in his thought concerning Naturalism and Romanticism, Revivalism and Mysticism, nature and nurture, Calvinism and Arminianism, the Trinity and the incarnation, women’s suffrage and the abolition of slavery, Puritanism and Liberalism. To understand Bushnell’s theology, it is important to look at his dissertation on language and thought, and his views on infant baptism and on the atonement.

On Original Sin

In a 1954 dissertation by John Arthur Boorman on the theory of human nature as expressed by Horace Bushnell and compared with that of Jonathan Edwards and William Adams Brown, the writer points out that Bushnell rejected Calvinism and its idea of total depravity³⁰⁴:

But unlike the Unitarians, with whose views of human nature his own bear some resemblance, he remained within the Congregational Church. Impressed by Coleridge’s idealism, and reflecting a popular emphasis upon the rights and dignity of man, his theory of human nature is more optimistic and moralistic than Edwards. Bushnell’s distinctive tenet about man was that man is a ‘being supernatural’, who is superior to natural laws of causation, and who recognized analogies between the natural realm of things and the supernatural realm of powers. Moreover, he regarded morality and religion as coincidental, and particularly in his early writing, stressed the gradual development of Christian character in place of conversion.³⁰⁵

In discussing Bushnell’s view of freedom and responsibility, Boorman says that it is a cornerstone of his belief that humankind is “above the law of cause and

³⁰³ Christopher H. Evans, “‘Theological Tinkering’: A Book Review of *The Puritan as Yankee: A Life of Horace Bushnell* by Robert B. Mullin,” *Christian Century*, Vol. 119, No. 11, Nov. 6, 2002.

³⁰⁴ John Arthur Boorman, *A Comparative Study of the Theory of Human Nature as Expressed by Jonathan Edwards, Horace Bushnell and William Adams Brown: Representative American Protestant Thinkers of the Past Three Centuries*, unpublished dissertation, Columbia University, 1954, p. i.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. i–ii.

effect and is capable of initiating actively in the world of nature as well as upon the natural elements of their own person.”³⁰⁶ He says that Bushnell had no doubt about the fact that mankind possesses freedom of the will. He can will as a power of his very nature apart from the rest of creation and he has the power not to do (to refuse).³⁰⁷ Boorman feels that Bushnell was of the opinion that mankind can resist God’s grace, but does attribute to him or her the power not to sin without God’s help. We can *will* what we want, but we cannot do everything that we *will*. And we can do what we *will*, but not all that we *will*. There are human limitations. He quotes Bushnell in *Nature and the Supernatural* that “the power of the will lies in its freedom to offer itself to God . . . but we have no ability, of any kind, to regenerate our own state, or restore our own disorders.”³⁰⁸ Bushnell argued from experience that we are self-determining and so we are responsible. Boorman’s conclusion is, however, that “in any case, there is no doubt that Bushnell desired to establish man’s individual responsibility for his own actions by insisting on the complete freedom of the will as a volitional function.”³⁰⁹

This has been the traditional view of Bushnell’s position among scholars, but most of them qualify it with a special “take” on Bushnell’s view of the fall of man, the image of God in mankind (*Imago Dei*), and the nature of original sin (if they say that Bushnell believed in it, that is). Boorman’s view of “sin” in Bushnell’s thought can be traced in the following quote.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³⁰⁷ This is a Pelagian position as previously discussed in “On Free Will and Predestination” on Augustine, earlier in this dissertation. But it is qualified in Bushnell by the comments to follow.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

According to this view of freedom, there can be no ultimate cause of sin, in the sense of an efficient agency, outside man himself. “If there were any natural necessity for sin, it would not be sin. It would be an oversimplification of Bushnell's view, however, to say that he considered every sin to have its specific origin in the will of man. On the contrary, his theory of inheritance and of man's organic unity, gave him a basis for acceptance of the doctrine of universal participation in the original sin and fall of Adam. To his Unitarian friend, Dr. Bartol, Bushnell wrote: “I wish you could . . . enter into a more thorough, out-and-out conviction of the fall of man. You acknowledge sin, but not a fall.” In his interpretation of the fall, Bushnell was not concerned with its establishment as a literal, historical fact; but he saw in the Biblical story a myth which is indicative of a truth about each person. Through the violation of the eternal law of duty, man brought upon himself death and the curse of sin—the natural and inevitable consequences of disobedience.³¹⁰

Dr. Boorman shows, using *Vicarious Sacrifice*, *Christian Nurture*, and *Nature and the Supernatural*, that Bushnell believed that the first sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, known as the “Fall of Man,” had lasting effects upon their progeny. “Bushnell held that acquired traits of character may be transmitted through the process of generation.”³¹¹ The most interesting discussion and proof of this belief in Bushnell's thought is his teaching of what he called “a condition privative” that involves their certain lapse into evil.³¹²

But, according to Bushnell, this “condition privative” is caused by the organic unity of the family more than the federal headship concept of the transmission of original sin. This can be seen in this quote from *Christian Nurture*:

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 99. This is apparently the first dissertation to deal with this topic, *per se*. There are two others that came later which will be mentioned shortly.

³¹¹ Ibid., p. 100. An April 1955 article by Edward Clinton Gardner, “Horace Bushnell's Doctrine of Depravity,” *Theology Today*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 10–26, may have been a response to this dissertation.

³¹² Ibid., pp. 101–102. This phrase can be found in *Nature and the Supernatural*, p. 109.

Boorman says,

“This illustration exemplifies the central thought of *Christian Nurture*, viz., the development of character through training and experience. Although Bushnell placed much more emphasis upon regeneration in *Nature and the Supernatural* and other works, he did not abandon this principle of growth.”

The question of original or imputed sin has been much debated in modern times, and the effort has been to vindicate the personal responsibility of each individual, as a moral agent. Nor is any thing more clear, in first principles, than that no man is responsible for any sin but his own. The sin of no person can be transmitted as a sin, or charged to the account of another. But it does not therefore follow, that there are no moral connections between individuals, by which one becomes a corrupter of others. If we are units, so also are we a race, and the race is one—one family, one organic whole . . . I am well aware that those who have advocated, in former times, the church dogma of original sin, as well as those who adhere to it now, speak only of a taint derived by natural or physical propagation, and do not include the taint derived afterwards, under the law of family infection.³¹³

Boorman summarizes Bushnell's view of sin by saying that "it is essentially personal, although it is, in part, a product of hereditary and social influences."³¹⁴ Bushnell also teaches that sin can also be incited and reinforced by evil spirits. Boorman sees the image of God in mankind as a unique combination of two realms, the natural and the supernatural, whose will is the element of his or her nature that gives him or her supernatural power. In Bushnell, reason is separated from understanding and these are superior, in fact they are almost a "divine faculty."³¹⁵ So, Dr. Boorman describes Bushnell's view of man as having a "moral nature." It must be kept in mind that this is not exactly the same as any of three traditional descriptions for the nature of man: Augustine's "concupiscence," Rousseau's inherently good nature, or John Locke's blank tablet. It brings elements of all three together in one. But, after all, Bushnell said that "men, instead of being born sinners may just as truly be born saints."³¹⁶

³¹³ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, pp. 83-84.

³¹⁴ Boorman, *A Comparative Study*, p. 109.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

³¹⁶ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 167.

Nature versus Nurture

Bushnell has a rather lengthy discussion on the issue of nature versus nurture in *Christian Nurture* on pages 165–167. This is the passage, in fact, in which he says that a person may just as well be born a saint as a sinner. In this chapter of his book, he explains that there are two ways essentially to grow the church: by conversion and also by propagation. He does not primarily prove any of his points by using Scriptures, but Charles Hodge’s later work supplements that line of support.³¹⁷ One Scripture that Bushnell does use is Malachi 2:15 in which God is speaking of why the covenant of marriage is important for his people and says of the husband and wife, “Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. . . .” (New International Version).

The thrust of Bushnell’s argument is that nurture and nature work together with the unfolding choices of the child to determine his or her path. He does not come out directly to indicate that the effectiveness of this cooperation of forces can determine how much “original sin” each person has as they mature. In fact, everything he says is biblically and experientially true and he stops short of going, in this regard, where he ought not. Here are Bushnell’s own words:

This individual capacity of will and choice is one that matures at no particular tick of the clock, but comes along out of incipencies, grows by imperceptible increments, and takes on a character, in good or evil, or a mixed character in both, so imperceptibly and gradually, that it seems to be, in some sense, prefashioned by what the birth and nurture have communicated. We may fitly

³¹⁷ See Clark D. Stull, *Education at Home and at School: The Views of Horace Bushnell, Charles Hodge, and Robert Dabney*, unpublished dissertation, Westminster School of Theology, p. 43.

enough call this character a propagated quality—in strictest metaphysical definition, it is not; in sturdiest fact of history, or practical life, it is.³¹⁸

Bushnell's paradigm then is not platonic, but instead it is very practical.

In his *Christian Nurture*, Bushnell maintained that man may grow up a saint rather than a sinner through the proper Christian nurture. In the first place, godly parents may transmit to their children inherent tendencies toward righteousness. And they can supply the experiences which are the means of imparting God's immanent grace through which sin can be avoided. Such a view was far from Jonathan Edwards' position that although "means" must be used, they will be ineffective. For both men "experience" was basic. But the kind of experience Edwards made imperative was a direct experience of immediate, supernatural grace, which therefore required that before a man could become a Christian he must have a critical conversion. Bushnell did not deny that divine grace was needed to assist man to overcome sin; but he believed that what Edwards regarded as "common grace," that is, the ordinary environmental influences of family, church and society may be effectual in producing Christian character. Instead of Edwards' sharp, black-and-white distinction between the damned and the elect, Bushnell saw the possibility of a gradual transformation from black through shades of grey to something approaching white.³¹⁹

In 1976, James L. Prest submitted a dissertation on Horace Bushnell's theology of original sin from a Thomist perspective.³²⁰ The advantage of that particular study for this dissertation is that it connects Bushnell to the tradition that followed down from Augustine. Prest had as a purpose to show how Bushnell's position was in opposition to the Catholic position as formulated in the Council of Trent (1564), and thusly to show how the teachings of Bushnell resemble those of Pelagius and have subverted, in his opinion, the truths of scripture and of tradition. He also contrasted Bushnell with the Calvinism of the Reformation and especially of

³¹⁸ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 167.

³¹⁹ Boorman, *A Comparative Study*, pp. 162–163.

³²⁰ There are many branches of Roman Catholicism. The Thomists are one of the strongest traditions in Christian Education and they follow the theological interpretations of St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–March 7, 1274).

Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening of the 1700s in America.³²¹ On the other hand, he contrasted Bushnell also with the teachings of Nathaniel Taylor and the Unitarian controversy.

Boorman's dissertation had been done in New York in 1954. But James Prest arrives at some of the same conclusions in Italy in 1976 and he comes from a different tradition.³²² However, Prest feels that Bushnell, in the end, "has no real theology of original sin, and therefore, no real theology of Redemption, or grace either."³²³ Prest and Sparkman would disagree with each other. They all agree, however, about the optimism in Bushnell's theology, that it portrays a real hope for humanity's future. Prest feels that Bushnell departed "from orthodox teaching on three counts: Adam was not created in original righteousness, man is not depraved, nor does he inherit Adam's sin."³²⁴

These are fair conclusions for someone from a Thomist perspective who has read and studied Bushnell. A "moral influence" theory of the atonement, as Bushnell presented in *Vicarious Sacrifice*, would be seen as not a theory of atonement at all. Christ was far more and exceptionally different than simply a moral example to humankind upon the cross. Prest was also rejecting the idea that he believed was prominent in Bushnell's theology that "depravity" could be corrected through

³²¹ James L. Prest, *The Theology of Original Sin according to Horace Bushnell*, unpublished dissertation, Rome: Providence College, Pontificia Studiorum Universitas A. S. Thoma in Urbe, 1976).

³²² We have an added advantage in cases like this in which Boorman did his dissertation in 1954, Prest in 1976, and Sparkman in 1980, all on basically the same subject, to compare their findings and glean the common denominators. In this case, there is great consistency in each case, but each one brings out a unique perspective.

³²³ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

Christian education “or nurture.”³²⁵ My critique of Prest is not that he disagrees—indeed he should from his point of view—but that he does not show a deep enough understanding of the organic unity of the family idea within Bushnell’s total theology, as both Boorman and Sparkman do. An exceptional strength, for the purposes of this study, found in Prest’s work is his critique of the Augustinian position of “concupiscence” in relation to a proper concept of original sin.³²⁶ In depicting Augustine and Bushnell as extremes of a pendulum, he has ably articulated the way that they are indeed perceived in the marketplace discussions of theology. And he has given good evidence for this portrayal.

The nuances of Bushnell’s thought are brought out much more fully in the dissertation of Temp Sparkman.³²⁷ His is the more mature work of the three, especially for the purposes of forming a foundation for this study. He brings in the ramifications for religious education of Bushnell’s views of the “Image of God in Man” and of “Fallen Man.” The corrective that Sparkman brings can be seen in this paragraph:

All of this leads to the point that Bushnell was understood by his contemporaries and is commonly understood today as having an overly optimistic view of human goodness and of the natural progress of man toward God. The understanding is, however, far from the truth. Of course, the early critics had only the discourses by which to judge Bushnell. Today we have much more, including sermons, articles and books.³²⁸

³²⁵ Ibid., p. 146.

³²⁶ Ibid., pp. 175–180 in the context of his discussion of the Council of Trent (1545–1563),

³²⁷ Sparkman’s dissertation has already been cited in this paper; he aptly presents a traditional assessment of Augustine’s view as a part of his introductory and background material on page 9. Augustine is not one of the four theorists that he was comparing, but this does give us a flower bed in which we can see how the ideas of Bushnell grew.

³²⁸ Ibid., p. 100.

But Dr. Sparkman does not leave us to think that there are no positive influences in Bushnell's theory. Rather, he shows these to be latently present:

There is a contradiction in Bushnell, for though he did not hold to radical human goodness or salvation by development, his works are more hopeful that man is going to make it after all, not in his own power, but by God's grace and the help of home and church. If Bushnell was not overly optimistic about man's natural goodness, at least one comes from sitting at his feet feeling more optimistic. It is that effect which doubtless threatened his contemporaries, separates Bushnell from other famous New England sons such as Edwards, Dwight, Tyler and Taylor, and which caused later appraisers to link him with the Boston liberals such as Chauncy and Channing.³²⁹

He defines the "condition privative" with Bushnell's own words as "the acting of a soul, or power, against the constituent frame of nature and its internal harmony."³³⁰ He shows that Bushnell set himself over against Naturalism and Romanticism by holding that sin will not be overcome by progress, development, and reform.³³¹ Sparkman says, "Throughout Bushnell's writings on evil and sin one finds the threads of hope for man, not in himself, but in the intervention of God's mercy."³³² That would not be consistent with Prest's conclusion.

Sparkman further showed that the theology and the educational theory of *Nature and the Supernatural* and of *Christian Nurture* are inseparable. Both the natural and the supernatural are to be understood as one true system of God according to Bushnell, and he believed that God could work through either aspect in the education of the child. This idea is a blend of Christianity as both "caught and taught." Regarding the debate on nature versus nurture, Bushnell writes, "depravity

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid., p. 106. Quoting Bushnell from *Nature and the Supernatural*, p. 379.

³³¹ Ibid., p. 108.

³³² Ibid.

is best rectified when it is weakest, and before it is stiffened into habit.”³³³ Sparkman also points out that Bushnell’s emphasis on the organic unity of family was a major contribution to turning Calvinism from individualism back to an older covenant theology.³³⁴

As it concerns the discussion of “nature versus nurture,” there is one other passage that is referred to in Bushnell directly from the book *Christian Nurture*. It is called the “plastic nature” passage.³³⁵ In this passage, when speaking about the nurture of the very young, he twice identifies them as being of the “impressional and plastic age of a soul.” It is this passage, in fact, that is brought as evidence that he believed and taught that a person could be saved through nurture or education, especially when done properly at the most formative stage of the “plastic” nature of the soul. When reading this passage, it almost seems that the accusations against him on this point are fairly leveled.

A New Theory of Salvation

There were two things that were distinctively new with Bushnell that did not just represent “theological tinkering” designed to improve what he found before him. These two things were truly innovative and are still misunderstood. They are his

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid., p. 123.

³³⁵ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, pp. 202–203. It is also printed in the Appendix of this paper. He does not use this word in the sense of our rubber-derivative products nor as “hypocritical,” or any other negative connotations that this word may have today. Yet it means to him something more than simply “pliable” or “moldable.” The imagery that he is using consistently in this passage is that of a farm or a garden. Words like *plant*, *seed*, and *seminal* dominate this passage in addition to the verbs like *mold* and *shape*.

statement that a child should grow up never knowing himself or herself as anything other than a Christian and his “Moral Influence” theory of the atonement. Both lead Christians to ask how we are to be saved, or if we even need to be. For Bushnell, the answer is not deeply rooted in the predestined purposes of God such as the Calvinists were teaching. Nor did he mean to align with the Unitarians who essentially:

rejected not only these hard and perhaps harsh inflections of Christian doctrine but also essential elements of orthodox Christian belief. Then there were evangelicals, Baptists and Methodists mainly, whose doctrines could be Calvinist or Arminian, but who were mainly distinguished by their emphasis on the “conversion experience,” the dramatic emotional moment when the sinner becomes a Christian. Finally, there was a renewed interest in Anglicanism, renamed Episcopalianism, which was becoming fashionable among the upward-bound.³³⁶

Bushnell wore the flag of none of these, especially after his congregation withdrew from the Congregationalist consociation.

The method to understanding Bushnell’s answer to these questions begins with understanding his “Dissertation on Language in Relation to Thought,”³³⁷ which was published along with *God in Christ*, the book that received great criticism for its doctrinal question marks over the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ. It was supposed to help the reader of that book by having it included in the publication. Bushnell’s dissertation has four main concepts: (1) that God can be known directly, (2) that words are vehicles and not exact representations, (3) that a literal language in religion cannot be assumed, and (4) that paradox or contradiction may be the most adequate expression of the truth of religion. His method was that of rationalism, but

³³⁶ George McKenna, “Book Review of *The Puritan as Yankee: A Life of Horace Bushnell* by Robert B. Mullin (2002),” *First Things: A Journal of Religion, Culture, and Public Life*, February 2003, p. 1.

³³⁷ R. C. Miller, “Horace Bushnell: Prophet to America’s Children; God’s Gift to the Imagination; A State Renewed in Righteousness,” *Perkins Journal*, vol. 32, no. 3, Spring 1979, p. II:14.

his means were not always reflective of that. His hermeneutics rejected the interpretation of the Bible as a set of propositions and instead emphasized its poetical and inspirational elements,³³⁸ which H. Shelton Smith says that he refers to as “divine in-breathings.”³³⁹ Smith sets forth the view that Bushnell’s theory of the atonement (how we are saved) is given a kind of objectivity in the “altar forms” of revelational history, and, secondly, it also built greater objectivity through an insight he had that any real forgiveness must be so costly as to be self-propitiating for him who does the forgiving.³⁴⁰

David L. Smith broke down Bushnell’s theory of the atonement into four categories: (1) objective atonement and subjective “at-one-ment,” (2) justice and mercy, (3) the moral power of love, and (4) symbolism and growth.³⁴¹ He sees Bushnell’s theory of the atonement as his unifying theme and he ties it to his theory of interpersonal communication. This also connects it with his view of symbols and with the idea of growth in Bushnell. He says his “theory of communication” gave Bushnell a way to interpret the Christian redemptive economy and an educative scheme embracing both tradition and personal freedom.”³⁴² It is what Randolph Crump Miller calls “The Language of the Heart.”³⁴³ Miller said that,

³³⁸ James W. Stines, “Language Theory and Hermeneutics in the Thought of Horace Bushnell,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, Sum. 1980, pp. 134–150.

³³⁹ H. Shelton Smith, *Horace Bushnell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 103.

³⁴⁰ Donald A. Crosby, “Review of H. Shelton Smith, *Bushnell*,” *Theology Today*, Apr. 1966, p. 2.

³⁴¹ David L. Smith, *Symbolism and Growth: The Religious Thought of Horace Bushnell* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), pp. 139–166. This source was originally written as a dissertation submitted to the University of Pennsylvania in 1979.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 165.

³⁴³ Randolph Crump Miller, *The Language Gap and God: Religious Language and Christian Education* (Philadelphia/Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1970), chapter 6.

Our text from Bushnell is this: “Any proper and true justification is a state renewed in righteousness—that and nothing else,” said Horace Bushnell. The atonement is to be understood in terms of righteousness and not justice, thus eliminating all transactional theories in favor of a theory that protects the morality of both God and humanity; a trusting relationship with Christ is the basis for being made righteous.

Bushnell utilized his theory of language in distinguishing between the legal and penal meaning of justice and the moral implications of righteousness. We are to ‘hunger and thirst after righteousness’ (Matthew 5:6).³⁴⁴

Bushnell believed that knowing about God is not enough, for it is too impersonal and distant. There is “knowing God within, even as we know ourselves.”³⁴⁵ In one sense, everything that Bushnell wrote or preached after he made his famous declaration (that the essence of a Christian education was that a child should grow up Christian) had, at least in part, a motivation to defend, support or justify that promise. His new theory of salvation was a concept of first initiation on the part of God and then response on our part. It was also a doctrine that included both “ability” and “inability” on our part, the inability requiring the help of God.³⁴⁶

Even Bushnell’s moral influence theory of the atonement was seen in the light of being an initiation of response to God’s love. It wasn’t meant to take away from Christ’s suffering or sacrifice, but it was seen as vicarious.³⁴⁷ God was demonstrating

³⁴⁴ R. C. Miller, “Horace Bushnell: Prophet to America’s Children,” p. III:17. He takes the Bushnell quote from H. Shelton Smith, *Horace Bushnell*.

³⁴⁵ Miller, *The Language Gap and God*, 6:1. He is quoting from Bushnell’s *Sermons on Living Subjects* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), p. 119.

³⁴⁶ Edward Clinton Gardner, “Horace Bushnell’s Concept of Response: A Fresh Approach to the Doctrine of Ability and Inability,” *Religion in Life*, vol. 27, no. 1, Winter 1957–1958, pp. 119–131. Bushnell would come short of being semi-Pelagian or a Wesleyan-Arminian in that they recognize the enabling grace or help of God for even those things that are in the “ability” distinction. He should not be put altogether with Pelagius, however, in that he allowed for an “inability” category that would definitely be in need of those things on the part of God for salvation.

³⁴⁷ Horace Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice, Grounded in Principles of Universal Obligation* (New York: Charles Scribner and Co., 1868).

his love to us in such a way that it would illicit a response from anyone³⁴⁸ who would reflect upon Christ's life and his death upon the cross. It brings together his theory of the "moral nature" of man and his idea of the "plastic-age nurture" of the soul into his view of the atonement and salvation. To Bushnell, the cross had the power to transform anyone who would respond to God's love in much the same way that the parent, by moral example and influence, could transform the youngest and most impressionable child. Actually, the analogy, to be portrayed best in Bushnellian theology, would be reversed. It was, in fact, because of Christ's work in the cross and his view of the atonement that Bushnell believed that the parent could vicariously³⁴⁹ influence the children born into the home in such a way as to free them from "sin" from the start and enable them to grow up as a Christian. The work of Christ is the power of God to transform lives. Munger adds, "but it is *moral* power, not penal nor expository; the natural sympathy of one being with another by reason of love."³⁵⁰ This nineteenth century doctrine presented a new nurture which lovingly moved the young person toward acceptance and ownership of their faith by consent.

Gender Questions

³⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 32. That is why it was grounded in principles of universal moral obligation: on God's part to initiate or offer it to everyone and on "man's" part that anyone could have the chance to respond. This was strongly opposed in theology to the Edwardian Calvinism that was prevalent in Bushnell's world. It wilted almost the entire "TULIP."

³⁴⁹ Bushnell, *Vicarious Sacrifice*, p. 230. Bushnell was not using the word *vicariously* to present another "substitutionary" theory of the atonement. The word *vicarious* can also mean "to learn or to participate by another's experience, as in "Child A learned vicariously not to touch the hot oven by watching Child B." Even more deeply, Bushnell is tapping the root meanings of the word *vicarious*, which are "to turn, change, exchange, to bend or wind." Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2001. Retrieved from www.etymonline.com.

³⁵⁰ Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian*, p. 249.

It is important to note that a discussion of gender questions surrounds the writings and purposes of Horace Bushnell. In *Christian Nurture*, he criticizes the presumption predominate in Revivalism that each person must experience an “adult” conversion. Writers say that Bushnell felt that the “conversion” entrance into the kingdom and that the Revivalism approach in general was a male-oriented or favored praxis.³⁵¹ The approach of nurture was seen by Bushnell to be more inclusive of females in how they respond to God. As soon as that truth is acknowledged, the fingers start to point accusing Bushnell of saying that the only proper place for the woman is in the home: an accusation that is probably justifiable in part. Michiyo Morita, however, argues that Bushnell’s Christian nurture scheme, which emphasized the power of a godly domestic environment in bringing about a child’s conversion, did not negate the role of the fathers.³⁵² In fact it was a clarion call for Christian nurture to not be merely a women’s responsibility. “Bushnell did not, as some historians have suggested, [con]cede over the family to women, nor was he an agent of religious sentimentality and feminization. Christian nurture emphasized the ‘organic’ nature of the family and required both mothers and fathers to be successful.”³⁵³ Just as he has been criticized for being prejudiced while he promoted the abolition of slavery,³⁵⁴ so is he

³⁵¹ Candy Gunther Brown, “Domestic Nature versus Clerical Crisis: the Gender Dimension in Horace Bushnell’s and Elizabeth Prentiss’s Critiques of Revivalism,” in *Embodying the Spirit* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), pp. 67–83, 294–296.

³⁵² Michiyo Morita, *Horace Bushnell on Women in Nineteenth-Century America* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004).

³⁵³ Margaret Bendroth, “Book Review of *Horace Bushnell on Women in Nineteenth-Century America* by Michiyo Morita,” *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 86, January 2006, pp. 125–126.

³⁵⁴ Howard A. Barnes in *Horace Bushnell and the Virtuous Republic* (Metuchen, NJ and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1991), chapter IV. Also Robert L. Edwards, *Of Singular Genius, Of Singular Grace: A Biography of Horace Bushnell*, chapter 20.

criticized for being “chauvinistic” toward women even as he spoke of their rights.³⁵⁵

The target of criticism is often his book on women’s suffrage. Bushnell writes,

Now the right of suffrage as demanded for women, is itself a function of government. Besides, it contemplates also, as an integral part of the proposed reform, that women should be eligible to office. For if this were not conceded, we know perfectly beforehand, that the women voters would so wield their balance of power as to conquer the right of office in a very short time. All office must, of course, be open to them, as certainly as the polls are open. Indeed they sometimes take the jubilant mood even now, in their anticipation of the day, when they will have their seat in Congress, on the bench of justice, in the President’s cabinet, and why not in the chair of the Presidency itself? when the missions abroad, the collectorships, the marshal and police functions, will be theirs, and finally, the heroic capabilities of women so far discovered, as to allow them a place in the command of fleets and armies.³⁵⁶

But in the introduction to the book he included the following concerning Isabella Hooker, a long-time friend of Bushnell’s and his family.

Yet, now I find I have offended another member of that illustrious clan, Mrs. Isabella Beecher Hooker. In 1869 I published *Women’s Suffrage: the Reform against Nature*, in which I argued that giving women the vote was altogether unsuitable, and that woman had a calling far higher and more significant than participation in politics. There are many women who agree with me, and, in fact, the most significant woman in my life is a perfect example of what I was speaking about. Mrs. Hooker, however, has cast her lot with the radical woman reformers who, in the name of dear “equality” hope to bring women into every dreary and rough department of life now occupied by men. Alas,

³⁵⁵ Ibid., R. L. Edwards or H. A. Barnes, p. 36. Some, like Barnes, do not see nurture as Bushnell’s unifying theme but have as their premise that he was party to the move of the nineteenth century by a socioeconomic elitist group of primarily Anglo-Saxon males to create what he labels as a *Virtuous Republic* and by which he means, among a number of other things, a perpetuated male-dominated but benevolent patriarchal society. Mark Edwards gives us an example in “My God and My Good Mother: The Irony of Horace Bushnell’s Gendered Republic,” *Religion and American Culture*, vol. 13, no. 1, Winter 2003, pp. 111–137.

³⁵⁶ Horace Bushnell, *Women’s Suffrage: Reform Against Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1869), p. 55.

poor women! These reformers have such a romantic vision of the base existence of our half of the species.³⁵⁷

The fact is clear that Bushnell tried to avoid the extremes in *social* stands which was not at all like his *theological* positioning. He promoted progress and anticipated change but he was a realist who also reflected the systemic patterns of thought in his time. Margaret Bendroth reviewed Morita's book about Bushnell's views on women and concluded,

Finally, Morita suggests that the common view of Bushnell as an ardent foe of women's suffrage, drawn from his oft-cited book, *The Reform against Nature*, does not take full account of the complexity of his views. Bushnell opposed suffrage, but he granted women a significant role in the moral aspects of nation building. He believed that the waste places of the western United States were in great need of "Christianization" and that through their role within the family, women could play an important part in establishing civilized culture.³⁵⁸

Bushnell's View on Nurture

It is our intention in this section to gain a perspective on Bushnell's view of Christian nurture. We shall first look at his teachings about infant baptism. Then we will review the work of four sample writers who have studied this topic at different

³⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 2. This book with its introduction can be electronically accessed at the Connecticut History website www.connhistory.org. The criticism of Howard A. Barnes (Virtuous Republic) about this book by Bushnell is too harsh and misrepresents his position:

"Revealing the gentleman as partisan in his best argumentative form, it is based on a typical nineteenth-century double standard that men and women are different in kind; men are by nature suited to the 'outdoors' and women to the 'indoors' (although, with Saint Paul, men have the final say indoors, too.)"

St. Paul, too, in Ephesians 5:22–33 is accepting and reflective of his existing culture toward women, but he is calling men to a much higher standard of behavior toward women and suggests a much less systemically demeaning approach toward their place in the culture. Bushnell here shows an attitude that is both decisive yet concessive.

³⁵⁸ Bendroth, "Book Review," p. 126.

periods. The first is Theodore T. Munger (1899), then Randolph Crump Miller (1952), then Grady Temp Sparkman (1980), and finally, the recent dissertation of Clark D. Stull (2005). We will finish this section with a look into Bushnell's text, *Christian Nurture*.

Infant Baptism

Bushnell's view on infant baptism could be considered as our last theological observation from the section preceding. But since it is at the heart of his philosophy on nurture and at the center of his book, therefore it is also logically the first item to be considered in this section. According to Findley Edge, there are four theological and practical positions on the Christian baptism of infants.³⁵⁹ These positions are:

1. Total Depravity. Augustine, Roman Catholics, and all Protestants who hold to this strong view on original sin see children as being outside of the Kingdom of God and "lost" until they are baptized.
2. In the Kingdom. Most people who hold this view do not believe in original sin in any sense that is in need of correction, if they believe in it at all, and they do not see the need for the sacrament of infant baptism. They see the child as being born in the Kingdom by virtue of simply being born into the world; the child would need to do something to forfeit this relationship (commit sin) in order to cause any break in the initial innocent relationship that they already have with God.
3. Covenant Relationship. It is believed, in this point of view, that the child is received into Christian fellowship through infant baptism on the basis of covenant relationship in, with, and through the parent's faith. "Those who hold this view use Christian nurture as the basis of their program of religious education and say that a conversion, experience, as such, is not necessary."³⁶⁰ Some of those that hold this position say that infant baptism has instrumental significance as well

³⁵⁹ Findley B. Edge, "Christian Nurture and Conversion," *Review and Expositor*, vol. 53, no. 2, 1956, pp. 187-199.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

as symbolic meaning. Those who hold that it has actual instrumental significance in salvation often practice the rite of Confirmation in late childhood or early adolescence, wherein it is believed that the individual ratifies the rite of infant baptism. In this way, these proponents respond to the critics who say that they believe that Christianity can be inherited biologically or received by proxy.³⁶¹ They are able to say that the instrumental value of the sacrament of infant baptism does bring an efficacy of God's grace, but it is not irresponsive of the child's conscious response.

4. The Child is "Safe." In this view, the children are "safe" until they becomes responsible before God, whether they are born to Christian or non-Christian parents. One of the distinctive doctrines of the Wesleyan emphasis has been upon "prevenient grace."³⁶² The word *prevenient* means "to go or come before"³⁶³ and is used to mean the grace that leads one to salvation, covers one's life for salvation, and anticipates saving grace. Salvation is not a human achievement, but it is seen as a gift of God. It is by the grace of God that any person would be saved. It is prevenient grace that keeps children "safe" if they should happen to die during the years of innocence. The nurture of the home or church is seen as another significant part of God's prevenient grace: "This view insists upon a realistic program of religious education which recognizes the reality of sin, the fact of individual responsibility, individual freedom, and the centrality of the conversion experience based on free, conscious, individual choice."³⁶⁴ Another distinctive emphasis in this belief is upon the emphasis of Jesus on repentance for salvation. This demand of Jesus (Matthew 4:17) presumes that the individual must repent in order to enter the Kingdom. Repent is also the word *metanoia*, which means "to turn, change or convert." In this way, those who take this view teach that both nurture and conversion are at work together to bring about salvation.

³⁶¹ Ibid., p. 195.

³⁶² William M. Greathouse and H. Ray Dunning, *An Introduction to Wesleyan Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1982), p. 67. Also see Albert C. Outler (editor), *John Wesley* (London, Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 273. Wesley did not originate the doctrine of prevenient grace, but in strongly emphasizing it, this doctrine came to be known as one of the "distinctives" of his movement.

³⁶³ www.dictionary.com. Other definitions include "antecedent, preceding, expectant, anticipatory, and in some instances preventive."

³⁶⁴ Edge, *Christian Nurture and Conversion*, p. 196.

The second half of Part One of *Christian Nurture* is devoted to the subject of infant baptism and the membership of children in the Christian Church through their organic identification with their Christian parents. Bushnell says, “Augustine himself also testifies—‘The whole church of Christ has constantly held that infants were baptized. Infant baptism the whole church practices. It was not instituted by councils, but was ever in use.’”³⁶⁵ Unlike Augustine’s reasons for supporting this rite, Bushnell’s position very closely approximates the third position, which Findley Edge has shared. Bushnell writes:

It is a matter, too, of great consequence to parents, as respects their own fidelity in their office, that their children are not put away, by the Saviour, to hold rank with heathens outside of the fold, but are brought in with them, to be heirs together with them in the grace of life. . . . How refreshing the contrast, when the children, given to God in baptism, are accounted members of the church with them, as being included in their faith, and having the seal of it upon them. They look upon it now as their privilege to be parents in the Lord. Their prayers, they understand, are to keep heaven open upon their house. Their aims are to be Christian. Their tastes and manners to be flavored by the Christian hope in which they live. There is to be a quickening element in the atmosphere they make. They will set all things upon a Christian footing for their children's sake; and their children, growing up in such nurture of the Lord, will, how certainly, unfold what their nurture itself has quickened.³⁶⁶

Christian education for Bushnell then is a process “in” salvation that happens within the nurture of a Christian home and family and it is not “for” salvation as Jonathan Edwards had taught.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 134.

³⁶⁶ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, pp. 145–146. Bushnell took pains to make sure that he would not be misunderstood though to be teaching a doctrine of the baptismal regeneration of infants.

³⁶⁷ James W. Hillisheim and George D. Merrill, *Theory and Practice in the History of American Education, A Book of Readings* (Pacific Palisades, CA: Goodyear Publishing Company, Inc., 1971), p. 74.

Theodore T. Munger

Before the nineteenth century was over, an assessment of Bushnell's view of Christian nurture was published as Chapter V of Theodore T. Munger's biography, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian*. He showed that Bushnell's simple statement shook all of New England theology to its foundations.³⁶⁸ He draws attention to how it challenged the extreme individualism into which the churches had lapsed; and it recalled them to the organic relations between parents and children.³⁶⁹ It was actually a return to the belief of the historic church before Edwards. But his simple statement at that point and place in history set off about twelve years of intense opposition and the last five years before he resigned were nothing short of bitter. Munger said, "The fact that his thesis coincided with an older orthodoxy was a matter of chance; in reality it sprang out of the heart of nature. Christian experience had become non-natural. Bushnell, without excluding the agency of divine grace, brought it within the play of the natural relations of the family."³⁷⁰ Bushnell's theory rose out of his view of Christianity as a matter of relationships (with God and others). It wasn't just a matter of one's so-called standing with God.

Hence, it was with half surprise that he found himself unfolding a more ancient orthodoxy. The fact became convenient as a defense against criticism, but it had slight weight in the elaboration of his thesis. The book was a criticism of revivalism, and incidentally of the prevalent theology which gave rise to it. Bushnell seldom attacked this theology as a whole, but only in detail and as it came in his way. He wrote as a pastor in conflict with a system which hindered him in his work. He could not correlate the teaching

³⁶⁸ Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian*, p. 67.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

of his pulpit with the prevailing method of propagating the life of the church.³⁷¹

It was Dr. Munger who first showed that Bushnell believed that “consistent Calvinism allows no place in the church for children.”³⁷² The child filled a passive part in the system; the adult was both passive and active.³⁷³ Bushnell was in tune with nature and the natural ways of development and operation in the world, in humans, in relationships, and so also, in spiritual matters. It bothered him that the revivalism emphasis diminished or made nothing of the family, and the church, and the organic powers God has constituted as vehicles of grace.³⁷⁴ T. T. Munger sums up Bushnell’s philosophy of nurture in this way:

The full purpose of the treatise was to discuss the divine constitution of the family as the means of securing Christian character. It maintained that the unit of the church as well as of society is the family, and that in both it is organic; that character can be transmitted, and thus Christianity can be organized into the race and the trend of nature be made to set in that direction. The presumption should be that children may be trained into piety, and that it is not necessary that conversion should be awaited and secured under a system of revivalism that is without order as to time and cause.³⁷⁵

In discussing the doctrine and mode of Christian nurture, Dr. Munger brought out several other aspects to Bushnell’s view of nurture. First, there was what Bushnell called “the seeds of holy principle” at work within the individuals, parents as well as children, and within the process itself of nurture. Bushnell describes it this way:

³⁷¹ Ibid., p. 69.

³⁷² Ibid., p. 73.

³⁷³ Ibid., p. 74.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 76.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

If you look upon a seed of wheat, it contains, in itself, presumptively, a thousand generations of wheat, though by reason of some fault in the cultivation, or some speck of diseased matter in itself, it may, in fact, never reproduce at all. So the Christian parent has, in his character, a germ, which has power, presumptively, to produce its like in his children, though by reason of some bad fault in itself, or possibly some outward hindrance in the Church, or some providence of death, it may fail to do so. Thus it is that infant baptism becomes an appropriate rite. It sees the child in the parent, counts him presumptively a believer and a Christian, and, with the parent, baptizes him also.³⁷⁶

Secondly, Bushnell held that all of society is organic in nature—the church, the state, the school, the family. “There is a spirit in each of those organisms, peculiar to itself, and more or less hostile, more or less favorable to religious character, and to some extent, at least, sovereign over the individual man. . . . The child is only more within the power of organic laws than we are.”³⁷⁷ In Bushnell, then, are the roots of the study of systemic influences upon children in society and especially in education.

As it concerned Bushnell’s discussion of “The Ostrich Nurture,” Munger gleaned a number of things that proper nurture would be opposed to according to Bushnell:

1. The claim that children should be left to grow up in a spontaneous way and generate their own principles.
2. An overemphasis on free moral agency that blurs the distinction between childhood and manhood.
3. Notions of conversion that are mechanical and not natural.
4. Drilling children with all the constraints of religion apart from its hopes and liberties.
5. Any nurture of despair that becomes a fixed aversion to religion.
6. Bringing up children in expectation of revival seasons.

³⁷⁶ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 30.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

7. A mere ethical nurture that neglects the God-ward side.³⁷⁸

Proper nurture should move the child in a natural manner through a process of socialization toward consent at each stage. It should be a nurture that at all times has “a tender vindication of the claim that as Christ is the Saviour of children, they have an inherent right to a place in his church.”³⁷⁹

Bushnell claims for the family a power that is more than just influence. Munger points out that Bushnell was aware of the theory of evolution, like that of Charles Darwin. But Bushnell took the good parts of what he was learning and applied them to his theories of heredity and of development. He did not seem either to be threatened by what others called “the bad parts.”³⁸⁰

This may have added to Bushnell’s ideas in the second part of the book where he is more practical in providing an instruction manual for child-raising in Christian nurture. The most interesting thing in this part of Bushnell’s book may be his theory that the child could be and likely actually was learning before it is even born into this world. Keep in mind that he was publishing this in 1861. In his chapter, “When and Where Genuine Nurture Should Begin,” Bushnell calls this “a kind of ante-natal nurture,” and he asserts that “the nurture of the soul and character is to begin just where the nurture of the body begins.”³⁸¹ He then makes the distinction, “now so predominant in pedagogic studies” (Munger’s phrase in 1899) between “the age of

³⁷⁸ Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian*, p. 81.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

³⁸¹ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 198.

impressions and the age of tutorial influences.”³⁸² These are similarly associated with “the age of existence in the will of the parent, and the age of will and personal choice in the child.”³⁸³

Much of this was not new to the world. Theorists had seen it coming upon the scene and this theory was fairly well articulated in the likes of Jean Jacques Rousseau and others. What is innovative in Bushnell is the jumping of a fence to its application in the field of religion and religious education. Bushnell concludes by saying that “more is done, or lost by neglect of doing, on a child’s immortality in the first three years of his life than in all his years of discipline after-ward.”³⁸⁴ The nurture begun in those earliest years and incorporated into the child through the organic unity of the family is still expected to grow in the years thereafter. And Munger is yet careful to portray Bushnell as believing that the transition later on in childhood, of the developing child taking responsibility for his or her own religious life, is also a critical transition as well. Munger finishes by sharing a letter that Horace Bushnell sent to one of his daughters:

You have been religiously educated, and you are come now to an age when you must begin to be more responsible to yourself. Our prayer for you is, every day, that God would impart his grace to you and draw you on to a full choice of himself, and perform the good work which we trust he has begun in you. This would complete our happiness in you. I would recommend to you now that you set before you, as a distinct object, the preparing yourself to make a profession of the Saviour. Make this a distinct object of thought and of prayer every day. And do not inquire so much what you are, whether truly a Christian in heart or not, as how you may come into the full Christian spirit, to become unselfish, to have a distinct and abiding love to Christ. Unite yourself

³⁸² Ibid., p. 199. The Munger phrase is on p. 85 of his book.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 212.

to Christ for life, and try to receive his beautiful and loving spirit. You will find much darkness in you, but Christ will give you light. Your sins will trouble you, but Christ will take away your sins and give you peace. Pray God, also, to give you his spirit, and do not doubt that his spirit will help you through all difficulties. In all your duties and studies, endeavor to do them for God and so as to please him. Make this, too, your pleasure, for assuredly it will be the highest pleasure. It may not so appear at first, but it will be so very soon. Nothing, you will see in a moment, can yield so sweet a pleasure as the love and pursuit of excellence, especially that excellence which consists in a good and right heart before God. And you will be more likely to love this work and have success in it, if you set before you some fixed object, such as I have proposed.

We gave you to God in your childhood, and now it belongs to you to thank God for the good we have sought to do for you, and try to fulfill our kindness by assuming for yourself what we promised for you.³⁸⁵

This letter carefully shows the Reverend Bushnell's view of how Christian nurture was to blend together from the start of a child's life until they would be on their own spiritually speaking.

Randolph Crump Miller

Thirty-six years after Dotha Bushnell Hillyer first endowed a chair for Christian Nurture at Yale University, Randolph Crump Miller was installed in that position. He held that professorship with distinction for twenty-nine years (1952–1981). He wrote proficiently and became perhaps the leading Christian Education theorist of the

³⁸⁵ Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian*, p. 86–87. Apparently, of all Bushnell's biographers, only Munger had access to this letter. It was not in Mary Bushnell Cheney's *Life and Letters* or in the Yale library collection of his official papers. This letter was probably written to Frances or to Dotha, but most likely to Frances. Whereas Dotha was outgoing and would likely have shared the letter, Frances, who with her mother helped Munger with his book, was by all accounts the shyest of Bushnell's daughters. Therefore, the absence of a name on the letter has led to speculation that it was addressed to Frances; of all the sisters, it seems probable that she most likely would've insisted that her name be removed as a requirement for publication. Frances never married, which also evidences this temperament. If Bushnell felt compelled to write this letter to Frances, if indeed it was Frances, then it is more firmly established that he felt this way of all children, but may not have had the need to correspond in this manner with a child who was less reticent.

twentieth century. Miller did not actually write a book about Bushnell, but he did reflect his philosophies, advance them, and give much insight into them. He also came into the chair at a significant time in Christian education in America, just as the postwar, Baby Boom wave of children was hitting the scene and all venues of education were in need of guidance.

One of Miller's very first writings was about Bushnell.³⁸⁶ The abstract of that article reads as follows:

Horace Bushnell was a product of Yale, who spent his entire career as pastor of a church in Hartford. Reacting against the dominant theology which treated children as lost, Bushnell asserted that a child should grow up a Christian and as baptized into the church. He cited parental roles for this nurturing. He saw the gospel as "God's gift to the imagination" and was concerned with the nature of religious language, writing an essay with many original insights into the metaphorical nature of language with its lack of exactness. Theologically, he struggled with the problem of the atonement, seeing justification as "a state renewed in righteousness". Bushnell left an important legacy derived from his theory of "Christian comprehensiveness". He was a great thinker but not a systematic one.

The assessment of Bushnell's theory of Christian nurture was a new description as a theory of "Christian comprehensiveness." Indeed, it was a holistic theory and that is a good description for it. The fact that Miller had been greatly affected by Bushnell's theory of Christian nurture was evident by the emphases that he stressed in his own thought.³⁸⁷ Sara Little, a Yale disciple of Miller's, capsulated his "recurring themes"

³⁸⁶ Originally published as Randolph Crump Miller, "Liberalism: Method or Creed?" *The Churchman*, June 15, 1936, pp. 16–31. In 1976, about ten pages were added to the article, it was separated into three articles, and it was reprinted as "Horace Bushnell: Prophet to America's Children; God's Gift to the Imagination; a State Renewed in Righteousness," *Perkins Journal*, vol. 32, no. 3, Spring 1976, pp. 1–25. This is the abstract of the 1979 article.

³⁸⁷ I am quoting in this section from a summation on Christian Education done for Talbot School of Theology. James Riley Estep Jr., "Randolph Crump Miller" (LaMirada, CA: Biola University, 1998–

in educational theology and theory in her treatment of his life. She identifies four themes:

- The primacy of relationships, which Miller himself admits that his “work in Christian education has led me to emphasize what has been called a ‘theology of relationships.’”
- Experience and its interpretation; noting that “relationships are experienced.” God’s continuing activity in the processes of history is experienced. For Miller, interpreted experience “is education.”
- The drama of redemption; which was the theme of *Biblical Theology and Christian Education*.
- Christian nurture and the fellowship of the Church; as Miller says, “The way to become a Christian is to enter the Church.”³⁸⁸

So Miller’s was a theology of relationships. It was a process and an empirical theology. It was a Biblical theology emphasizing the biblical whole over the practice of “proof texting.” These all represent maturations of seed thoughts that were in Horace Bushnell. And it was also a theology of Christian nurture. Most feel it was a maturation of Bushnell’s thought to move the repository for Christian nurture back to the church being primary. But a careful look into both Bushnell and Miller results in the observation that, for both of them, the family is the most important unit that constitutes the church.³⁸⁹ This shift was the key factor in selecting Miller as the theorist from the middle of the twentieth century³⁹⁰ to be reviewed for this study.

2007). It can be accessed online at http://www.philosophy-religion.org/handouts/pdfs/randolph_miller.pdf.

³⁸⁸ Sara Little, “Randolph Crump Miller: Theologian-Educator,” *Religious Education* (Special Edition) September–October 1976, pp. 567–577.

³⁸⁹ Estep, *Randolph Crump Miller*, p. 3.

The significance of Miller must be understood within his historical context. Preceding Miller’s teaching and writing career, leaders in Christian religious education spanned the spectrum from Calvinistic to neo-orthodox Barthians to classical liberal. Three significant informative individuals in Miller’s approach to Christian education were Horace Bushnell, George Albert Coe, and H. Shelton Smith.

³⁹⁰ As opposed to H. Shelton Smith’s *Faith and Nurture* (New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941); H. C. Munro’s *Protestant Nurture: An Introduction to Christian Education* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ:

In 1943 Miller wrote in *Christianity and the Contemporary Scene*, “Someone has to make a Christian out of John Dewey” (Boys, 1989, p. 71). Hence, he embarked on a mission to create a system of Christian education focused more on process, and less on content, more on community, less on the individual. His approach attempts to wed Whitehead’s process theology with Deweyan process education.³⁹¹

Miller’s cornerstone book on nurture came out in 1961.³⁹² It expanded on Bushnell’s idea of the organic relation of the family to a broader context of the church fellowship.³⁹³ Miller said,

I have used the term nurture as a broader term to describe the involvement of the pupil in the atmosphere and relationships of a community including knowledge about it as a means toward loyalty to it. Christian education is the nurture of the total person in all the relationships of life seen from the perspective of membership in the Christian community. This is a program “from womb to tomb.” The Christian family performs this function on an impermanent basis while children are in the home, but only the Church can do it for children or adults on a permanent basis. A close relationship between parents and the parish is essential if the family and Church are to cooperate in the major project of incorporating members into the body.³⁹⁴

Christian Nurture and the Church details how the church is the permanent institution and context for Christian nurture, with attention given to other institutions that have profound influence on Christian nurture (e.g., school, and community):

Prentice Hall, 1956); William R. Adamson’s, *Bushnell Rediscovered* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1966); Warren Archibald’s, *Horace Bushnell* (Hartford: Edwin Valentine Mitchell, 1930); or some of the other significant writers on Bushnell or nurture.

³⁹¹ Estep, *Randolph Crump Miller*, p. 3.

³⁹² Randolph Crump Miller, *Christian Nurture and the Church* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1961). It was a Religious Book Club selection and has been translated into Korean and Japanese. Many have commented about Miller’s book on Christian nurture being published on the 100th anniversary of Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture*.

³⁹³ In a review done by Wesner Fallaw in the *Journal of Bible and Religion* (vol. 30, no. 1, Jan. 1962, pp. 78–80), the Fallaw identifies the theme of Miller’s book *Christian Nurture and the Church*:

“[T]he Church is the people of God and the body of Christ, a community in which the Holy Spirit is at work” (p. vii); his thesis is that “genuine Christian education takes place within a Christian community” (p. 183).

³⁹⁴ Miller, *Christian Nurture and the Church*, pp. vii–viii.

We have said that one becomes a Christian within a Christian community. Education takes place in community. This means that we need to take the idea of *koinonia* very seriously if we are to educate people to be the Church, for the people to be educated must be brought into that “atmosphere in which grace flourishes.” The problem becomes clearer. Unless the local congregation becomes aware of what it means to be the Church, we cannot expect genuine Christian nurture to take place.³⁹⁵

Miller’s article, “Bushnell, the Family and Children” (1979), was essentially a review of *Christian Nurture*. Many points that he lifted as salient components to Bushnell’s theory of Christian nurture were similar to those noted by Dr. Munger. Miller uniquely highlighted several. For example, he wrote,

He [Bushnell] anticipated in many ways what we have learned from other sources about the significance of parental care of young children, the development of religious faith in children, and the importance of a Christian understanding of education or nurture . . . he did not believe that children grow up in sin and need to be converted at a later age, although he saw clearly that there would be less dramatic crises of faith throughout their lives.³⁹⁶

At the heart of Bushnell’s theory was a psychological and theological understanding of the family.

In relation to the organic law that is at work in children who are growing up in a Christian home, Miller showed how Bushnell believed that there is also a proper individualism that children grow into, but that they do not begin at that point. Before he continues to discuss that “proper individualism,” Miller speaks of the organic

³⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 17. *Koinonia* is the Greek word used in the New Testament for fellowship in the sense of sharing things in common.

³⁹⁶ Randolph Crump Miller, “Bushnell, the Family and Children,” *Religious Education*, vol. 74, no. 3, May–June 1979, pp. 254–262.

“absolute force” that starts with the immediately newborn infant and then works his way to that point of individualism.³⁹⁷ Miller described the process this way:

The spirit of the family is incarnated in family life and pervades everything the child touches. This family spirit may work for good or ill, it may or may not influence deeply the family members, but it embraces everyone in the family, even if individuals may choose to withdraw or to oppose it.

The grace of God is given to and through the family. Family relationships are bound together by grace, which works through *what parents are* rather than through what parents say or intend.³⁹⁸

He also points out that Bushnell believed that irreparable damage can be done by the improper introduction of a baby sitter (or nanny) to substitute for the parent, especially for the mother because Bushnell says that the heart of Christian nurture turns on the person of “the mothering one.” The bottom line is that Bushnell did not see any “cheap” way of raising one’s children as Christians on the part of either parent. The cost in terms of love is built into Bushnell’s theology of vicarious sacrifice.³⁹⁹

At that point, Miller turns to a lengthy discussion of parental shortcomings (pp. 257–260) that he gleans from Bushnell’s section on “The Ostrich Nurture” and various other parts of his book. The following are some of Bushnell’s perspectives on the many wrong ways to perform “parenting nurture” as interpreted by Miller. In perusing this list of problems that Bushnell addresses, it becomes obvious to us that

³⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 256. This is the same as what Bushnell referred to as the power that cannot properly be called just influence. Speaking of the power of this organic “force,” Miller wrote in *Language Gap and God* (6): “Even before a child can use words, the Gospel ‘beams out’ from the Christian parent. . . . This development of the child, growing up as a Christian, is no automatic process. . . . There is an organic relationship between parents and children, which, when properly structured and supported by love, becomes the means of grace whereby God works within the group.” *Language Gap and God* is Miller’s equivalent to Bushnell’s *Dissertation on Language in Relation to Thought*.

³⁹⁸ Miller, “Bushnell, the Family and Children,” p. 256.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 257.

nearly every parent will fall short of the ideal or will be unable to sustain it over the course of the child's development. That represents an even greater problem than the items themselves, but it must be remembered that Bushnell is presenting the ideal as possible and he is not concerning himself with whether it is probable.

- The problem of parents with no training who follow their own instincts, which leads to disastrous results for the children
- Christian parents who unwittingly accept the view that children are to be converted, understood as mechanical and manipulative, when they grow up
- Parents who rely on revivals as the basis of conversion
- Nurture that is purely ethical and stops short of religion
- Having no place in the lives of most congregations for children⁴⁰⁰
- Parents and teachers who have become “dull of hearing” and need to go back to the “ABCs” of God's revelation; They themselves are in need of milk, not strong meat (Hebrews 5:11–12).
- Relying on natural affection alone and not availing themselves of training
- Parents who are not at peace with each other
- Homes that are run by “contrivance, artifice, or sometimes cunning,” so that scheming is needed in order to survive
- Prayer that is used only to get something from God
- Pretense, affectation, and untruth as a basis for living
- The vices directly related to the Christian life:
 - Sanctimoniousness, which is an overblown piety that takes away the child's need to play
 - Moves toward what is fanatical
 - A negative type of censoriousness, which kills creativity and joy
 - Parental uncertainty about authority, not being sure about the administration of God's authority or their own
 - An “anxiousness” or lack of faith⁴⁰¹

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 258. Bushnell goes so far as to admit children to full participation in the church's worship, including reception of Holy Communion.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

Bushnell sees all these difficulties, and is aware of the family with parents divided on religious training, or where there is only one parent or only one parent with faith. But he asserts that God will connect himself with the party which has faith, so that he or she will be assisted in the work of a parent. “The only true method here is the method of faith: to be more perfectly and wholly trusted to God, more singly, simply Christian.” (Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 230)

- Strong parents, especially fathers, who provoke their children to wrath
- Providing too many prohibitions
- Governing in a hard, unfeeling way
- Being unreasonably difficult to please
- Withholding love and expressing displeasure long after an act has happened
- False accusations rather than making a careful investigation of the facts
- Immaturity, which can express itself in many ways such as worry, fear, lack of faith, deprecating whining, questioning, protesting, nervousness and anxiety, and the “super-cautionary keeping” of a mother⁴⁰²

Miller then discusses what Bushnell means by “The Strong Meat of Parenthood.” This is the part of *Christian Nurture* in which Bushnell speaks of the ages and stages of development and the “proper individualism” that the child will eventually realize. As the potential parental disqualifications are removed, they become ready to take the “solid food” of accepting parenthood as a vocation. It begins with what Dr. Bushnell refers to as “the true conception of family government.”⁴⁰³

The first component that makes up a proper family government is the biblical authority imparted to the family by God. The family is to operate according to certain laws of relationships toward God, parents, and children. The parents’ power in early childhood is almost as strong as life or death. They are to use this power to fill “an office strictly religious; personating God to the child’s feeling and conscience, and bending it, thus, to what, without any misnomer, we call a filial piety.”⁴⁰⁴ As they do

⁴⁰² Ibid., p. 260.

⁴⁰³ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, pp. 270–271.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 272.

this well, children will move in time from faith in their parents (as gods in a sense) to faith in their parents' God, and finally to a faith that is their own.

Next, this family government must have a balance of love and law extended from the parents. A dependable environment must be created by the rules that limit freedoms. Discipline and insight must be blended together in harmony with compassion. That must be done in such a way as to foster a proper obedience that will lead the child to a genuine piety. The child must learn to do right simply because it is right and not for some external reason; whether it is to avoid a punishment, to receive a reward, or for appearance's sake.

There is another part to proper family government: "The expectation, or the ideal, is that the parents will be Christian and 'living in the Spirit.' Without sham or sanctimony, the parents' lives will point to the reality of God. This means not only in the parental relation to the children will God's love be manifest but in the relation between husband and wife."⁴⁰⁵ If there is a defect at that point, all the authority of the home will be undermined. In a home environment like this the time will eventually come to gradually release the child from dependency to more autonomy as the parents observe the child's development. But that is a process that should open slowly and almost imperceptibly as the child begins to grow up.

To Bushnell, Miller says, nurture, relationships and atmosphere are not complete without good teaching, which should include the right use of Scriptures. Bushnell describes such use: "the words are simple, the facts are vital, the varieties of

⁴⁰⁵ Miller, "Bushnell, the Family and Children," *Religious Education*, vol. 74, no. 3, May-June 1979, p. 260.

locality, dialogue, incident, character, and topic, endless.”⁴⁰⁶ Some other things that should be included with good scriptural teaching are fruitful creeds (catechisms should be avoided); assent and worship, which are to be preferred over forced acceptance of beliefs; and the Ten Commandments, Lord’s Prayer, and some simple hymns, which are all helpful in the context of normal conversation adapted to each child. The most important element always comes back to the godly example of the father, mother, or teacher.⁴⁰⁷

And Bushnell reminds us all of the key to religious teaching: “No truth is really taught by words, or interpreted by intellectual and logical method; truth must be lived into meaning, before it can be truly known. Examples are the only sufficient commentaries; living epistles the only fit exponents of written epistles.”⁴⁰⁸ Such teaching is to feed the person’s growth, not to stir a revolution, and yet they “will be passing little conversion-like crises all the time.”⁴⁰⁹ The family will be a child’s church, and there will be prayer before the hearth, and grace at meals, and godly conversations.⁴¹⁰

Bushnell, in this manner, has presented an interesting answer to the question of whether conversion results from crisis or process. The ingredients we are to look for in the child growing up as a Christian are a feeding of the child’s growth, not the stirring of any climactic event, but the passages of many little “conversion-like crises” all the time.

The great complaint registered by Bushnell’s readers in his own time did not differ that much different from what was registered by us earlier. They said that it

⁴⁰⁶ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 317.

⁴⁰⁷ Miller, “Bushnell, the Family and Children,” p. 261.

⁴⁰⁸ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 318.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

⁴¹⁰ Miller, “Bushnell, the Family and Children,” *Religious Education*, vol. 74, no. 3, May–June 1979, p. 261.

was an ideal image that could not be achieved in the real world. It was a too fast-paced world to be able to achieve such an ideal in their opinion. They didn't have the strength to sustain this ideal for years. Many homes showed cracks in the list of defective character traits. Some homes even had open hostility. There were broken homes; and also in those days it was very likely that at least one of the two parents would not live to see all of the children out of the home, so these single-parent families faced the task of nurturing the children alone while holding body and soul together. Naturally, there were not as many women in the work world as well. Bushnell is sensitive to all of these issues. In fact, he has a very interesting story of the weary laborer coming home in his carriage to a weary homemaker and the date of that story is 1860.⁴¹¹ Miller brings his article to a close by referring to Bushnell's theory of nurture as "the once-born tradition"⁴¹² and then gives us what he refers to as Miller's proverb: "Bring the children up in the way they should go, and when they grow up they will depart more or less therefrom."⁴¹³ He says that is the promise and it is also the risk of having children in the first place.

Grady Temp Sparkman

⁴¹¹ Weigle, *Introduction to Christian Nurture*, p. xxxviii.

⁴¹² Miller, "Bushnell, the Family and Children," p. 262. Following is the quote in which he refers to Bushnell's theory as "the once-born tradition." It is a phrase that contrasts the concept of conversion being a second birth experience, primarily taken from Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:1-8.

Bushnell was worried about the damage done to children where the emphasis was on sin, damnation, and sudden conversion. Not all children then were fortunate enough to be in the once-born tradition, and the goal of Bushnell's writing in the fields of education and theology was to provide an understanding and experience of the grace of God made available through the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

⁴¹³ Ibid. The scripture reference that he is quoting is Proverbs 22:6, slightly revised.

Dr. Sparkman can empathize with the opposition Horace Bushnell experienced from the promotion of a wholesome idea such as Christian nurture. As cited in Chapter 1, Dr. Sparkman faced possible expulsion from the seminary where he was a professor and from teaching in his denomination for his gentle promotion of Horace Bushnell's theory of Christian nurture. The descriptions of Bushnell's intense opposition (while he tried to continue going about his work as a pastor, his caring role as a father in raising his children, and also his physical struggles to find health) lead one to the conclusion that he believed very strongly in what he taught and that he kept his head in most circumstances.⁴¹⁴ If Bushnell's "Argument," in which he responded to his accusers who brought charge against what he had written primarily in "God in Christ," is any example, then he was firm but polite in his response. He ends that treatise with this paragraph:

Brethren, whether you will believe it or not, a new day has come. If we will, we can make it a better day; but it demands a furniture of thought and feeling such as we must stretch ourselves in a degree to realize. We must be firm for the truth, and, for that very reason, ready to detect our own errors. We must accept the legacy left us by our manly fathers—a legacy of labor, and duty, and progress; and taking our stand for sound doctrine, we must refuse to think any doctrine sound which does not help us to grow, or any growth a reality which does not include a growth to wisdom, and breadth, and Christian dignity.⁴¹⁵

Sparkman's dissertation studied four theorists, one of whom was Bushnell.

Dr. Sparkman primarily studied the influence of two theological concepts upon their thought, those of "The Image of God" and of "Fallen Man." His findings are

⁴¹⁴ R. L. Edwards, *Of Singular Genius, Of Singular Grace*, Chapters 11–13. Munger, *Horace Bushnell; Preacher and Theologian*, Chapter IX.

⁴¹⁵ Cheney, *Life and Letters*, pp. 180–181.

addressed in the section on theological observations. But after each theorist's positions are shared, Sparkman has a section for each of their theories of religious education. In this section, Bushnell's *Christian Nurture* is given special attention.⁴¹⁶ Sparkman takes a different slant on several aspects of Bushnell's theory. First, Sparkman does a little more investigation into the idea of "the holy principle." He shows that this phrase is actually a carryover from Bushnell's 1844 "mustard seed" article.⁴¹⁷ In that article Bushnell discusses how the children that are included in the faith of their parents are brought into relationship with God as partakers with them in the covenant, of which infant baptism is the seal. He states,

They are to grow up as Christians, or spiritually renewed persons. As to the precise time or manner in which they are to receive the germ of holy principle, nothing is affirmed. Only it is understood, that God includes their infant age in the womb of parental culture, and pledges himself to them and their parents, in such a way, as to offer the presumption, that they may grow up in love with all goodness, and remember no definite time when they became subjects of Christian principle. Christian education is then to conform to this view, and nothing is to be called Christian education which does not.⁴¹⁸

Sparkman does not try to define nor to answer the speculation about the time and manner that this "germ of holy principle" is received, any more than Bushnell does. He only concludes with Bushnell that, "Holy virtue is the aim of every plan that God adapts"⁴¹⁹ and that any education that does not instill this holy principle from the beginning should be called "unchristian education" rather than Christian education.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁶ Sparkman, *The Influence of Two Theological Concepts*, pp. 111–131.

⁴¹⁷ Bushnell, *View of Christian Nurture and of Subjects Adjacent Thereto* (Hartford: Edwin Hunt, 1847), p. 165.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁹ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 26.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Dr. Sparkman emphasizes the concept of the organic unity of the family. He relates it to Bushnell's concept of humankind "in" Adam at the time of the Fall. Sparkman also emphasizes that Bushnell's theory of religious education perceives the family as a means of grace, even a "converting" tool of God.⁴²¹ He quotes Bushnell,

The children are all converted by the converting element of grace they live in. And so it is proved that there is a conversion for children, proper and possible to their age. They are not excluded, walled away from Christ by a mechanical enforcement of modes proper only and possible to adults. The house itself is a converting ordinance.⁴²²

Three years after his dissertation, Dr. Sparkman published *The Salvation and Nurture of the Child of God*.⁴²³ In this book, the reader follows the main character, a child named Emma, as she goes through all the stages of growing up.⁴²⁴ Sparkman skillfully blends all the concepts of Bushnell's nurture to Emma's own affirmation of faith and beyond, even into adulthood. He shows how Bushnell's concept of nurture should work when Emma is an adolescent:

Emma's affirmation is radical, but not cataclysmic. Complete 180-degree turnabouts are for people who are going in the wrong direction. Emma's nurture, from birth, has set her in the right direction: thus her affirmation does not come out of having rejected God and all that is holy. She has not lived a long life of sin which has shaped her for pity but has known and loved God since her earliest years. Having never completely turned her back on God, she does not have to turn toward God. Because of her upbringing she is already facing in God's direction, already bent toward God, as a tree straightened at each critical stage of growth.⁴²⁵

⁴²¹ Sparkman, *The Influence of Two Theological Concepts*, pp. 115–116.

⁴²² Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 62.

⁴²³ G. Temp Sparkman, *The Salvation and Nurture of the Child of God* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1983).

⁴²⁴ Findley B. Edge, "Book Review of *The Salvation and Nurture of the Child of God* by G. Temp Sparkman," *Review and Expositor* (Berne), vol. 80, no. 4, 1983, pp. 645–646.

To make his treatment more realistic and personal he follows the pattern of Rousseau and Pestalozzi, using Emma, "a representative person," who moves through salvation and nurture from infancy to adulthood.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

One of the strengths of Sparkman's book is the presentation of Bushnell's nurture in the light of developmental stages. The reader is able to follow the unfolding of Erickson's psychosocial development, Piaget's cognitive development, Kohlberg's moral reasoning, and Fowler's stages of faith development in Emma's life. The story is shared in four segments and each one is appropriately named:

Emma as a Young Child—A Child of God by Creation
Emma as a Middle Child—A Child of Promise
Emma as Adolescent—An Affirmed Believer
Emma as Adult—A Creative Trustee⁴²⁶

In a concise explanation of Bushnell's concept of Christian education,⁴²⁷

Sparkman explains,

What Bushnell was teaching is that God can work in a supernatural way through the organic unity of the family so that the child will grow up knowing the Christian way and choosing it over the sinful way. There is no conceivable way that education can be termed Christian education unless it is ordered along this central process: it is, otherwise, to be termed un-Christian education, for it educates the child to the belief that one must grow up in sin and then turn from that sin at a mature age, then, but not before, to be called a Christian.⁴²⁸

One other strength is the insight Sparkman has into the meaning of the rite of infant baptism to Bushnell's theory. Sparkman's view advances Bushnell's and encourages the use of other appropriate rites to give natural points of response for each of the major stages of development. He even includes many suggestions and ceremonies along with a brief history of the practice of infant baptism.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁶ Ibid., pp. 32–36.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., pp. 189–191, Appendix II.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., p. 190.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., Appendix I (p. 181ff.) is "Baptism – A Theological Question." Appendix V is "The Celebrative Rites" (p. 205f.) with a separate appendix for "The Lord's Table"—Appendix VIII (p.

Sparkman's book also includes a history and overview of educational theory since 1940.⁴³⁰ These theorists (between thirty and forty are discussed), their students, their teachers, and their colleagues have all been drawn to the study of Christian nurture and education. Like Bushnell and like Sparkman, they bear a similar portfolio that includes an interest in development and growth; a deep concern for people of all ages and stages, which usually manifests itself in being a voice for children as well as youth and adults; and a sincere desire for the proper teaching methods to help everyone to grow. As Christian educators, most of them usually have a testimony to a meaningful relationship by faith with God. All of these elements bring the study of Sparkman and Bushnell compared with thirty or forty major theorists in this field to the question as to where and how opposition to the nurture thesis arises.⁴³¹

Clark D. Stull

The recent dissertation of Clark D. Stull represents one more angle from which to look at Bushnell's theory of Christian nurture.⁴³² Stull has studied the ties between education at home and education at school during the middle decades of the

239ff.). In the light of our study of Augustine, it is interesting to see that one of the Celebrative Rites mentioned for use in a Protestant Church is what Sparkman calls "the Salt Commissioning" (p. 219). It is not the same as the "Salt of the Catechumen" in Augustine's time, however. The commissioning ceremony has to do with ministry, whereas the catechumenate ceremony had to do with membership.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., Appendix IV, p. 197ff.

⁴³¹ George L. Prentiss, "Infant Salvation and its Theological Bearings," *Presbyterian Review*, July 1883, pp. 91–97. Professor Dr. Prentiss wrote (pp. 93–95).

⁴³² Clark D. Stull, *Education at Home and at School: The Views of Horace Bushnell, Charles Hodge, and Robert Dabney*, unpublished dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2005.

nineteenth century, which represents the beginning of the development of the public educational system in America.

Stull studied three prominent Christian theologians who sought to address this issue. One of them was Horace Bushnell. It is Stull's observation that this book was written at the precise time that the philosophy and practice of education underwent a cultural shift from that of familial agency to one of political and civic responsibility.⁴³³ In his findings, all three theologians held that the most important principle of Christian nurture was the influence of the parent upon the child. Church and school each had their role to a lesser degree. Interestingly enough, Stull likened what was happening in that century to a reflection of the Augustinian metaphor of the tension in the world between the city of God and the city of man.⁴³⁴ The "city of God" was expanding as the Second Great Awakening gained momentum and at the same time, "the city of man" was expanding as well, due in large part to the currents of the Enlightenment and its heightened valuation of humanity and of the material world. According to Stull, the home was the main repository and the church was secondary at that period in early American education. Even where there were local schools, they were under the control of parents. Bushnell attended the district school at New Preston, and he commented that their means of discipline was that of social influence.⁴³⁵ Bushnell also had a fond endearment to the little church over the hill from the family farm, although some of the things he learned there we would place

⁴³³ Ibid., Abstract, p. ii. This truth is graphically portrayed in works like that of Howard A. Barnes's, *Horace Bushnell and the Virtuous Republic*.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴³⁵ Cheney, *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, pp. 9–16.

within the null curriculum.⁴³⁶ Whether at home or school or church, intentional education was usually religious, and distinctively Christian at that, until the arrival of Horace Mann's public school system.⁴³⁷ But it wasn't Mann's system that brought the shift away from religious education; the common school idea was a good one. The philosophical changes that came from influential leaders like Herbert Spencer turned the tide of religious education toward the secular.⁴³⁸

With this background in mind, we turn to Stull's insights into the views of Horace Bushnell in *Christian Nurture*. There are three parts to Stull's analysis.⁴³⁹ The first is Bushnell's view of the family as a vehicle of God's grace. The second is the special status of the "Covenant Child." This is most apparent in Stull's discussion of infant baptism, but it is weaved throughout the book. The third part is the power of parental influence. He says that "the basic plea of the book was the assertion that the religious life of children should be fostered by parents both within the home and the church in such a way that some precise adult-style conversion experience need not be the pattern for admission into the church."⁴⁴⁰ Stull shows how Bushnell challenged the existing cultural climate of New England at the time. Rev. Bushnell felt that the parental role was neglected and that children were devalued. One of the strengths of Stull's analysis lies in how he shows that Bushnell's first-hand experiences from his own upbringing, especially the nurture of his mother, affected his view of the vital role of parental instruction. Bushnell had also been able to reasonably recreate this

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 19–21.

⁴³⁷ Stull, *Education at Home and at School*, p. 18.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., p. 17–18.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., p. 34.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

ideal in his own family and with his own children, so his reality was that it was not merely an “ideal.”

Stull effectively presents Bushnell’s view of the family as a means of grace. The passage in which Bushnell speaks of the family in this way is in the heart of the chapter on the organic unity of the family.⁴⁴¹ The importance to Bushnell of creating a Christian atmosphere in the home is brought forth by Stull along with the much practical guidance that Bushnell provides toward Christian nurture. Stull says that “some modern commentators like William Adamson have seen Bushnell as ahead of his time in this respect, a child psychologist so to speak.”⁴⁴² About Bushnell’s claim, cited earlier, that the parents have done more than half of what they will ever do to shape a child’s character in the first three years of the child’s life, Stull comments, “Furthermore, Bushnell had he been alive today would have expressed concern over the practice of sending very young children to daycare. He would say that a child in the years from birth to three needs his mother for the purpose of healthy psychological development.”⁴⁴³ Stull shows how Bushnell emphasized the importance of the parent’s example. Stull says, “Everything the child sees and hears is building an impression or shaping an attitude. This can even have implications for

⁴⁴¹ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 91–94.

⁴⁴² Stull, *Education at Home and at School*, p. 38. Adamson wrote in *Bushnell Rediscovered* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1966), p. 25:

Bushnell stated that more is done for the shaping of the child’s first three years of life than in all the training and teaching that follows. This indeed was a most startling statement in his day.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

the child's own relationship with God."⁴⁴⁴ He also said, "Bushnell cautioned the parent to be mindful of how children absorb both the good and bad points of their parents, and there was no substitute in terms of the spiritual training of the children for being a Christian oneself."⁴⁴⁵ What Bushnell literally said was, "Have it first in yourselves, then teach it as you live it, for you can do it in no other manner."⁴⁴⁶

As Stull draws conclusions that can be generalized, he writes the following summary on the influence of the parents:

Studies done among parents today continue to show that many feel at an utter loss when attempting to raise their children. This has become particularly acute among single women raising boys. Today's parents who often come from fractured homes do not have the example of an earlier generation to follow in providing a model for parenting. Bushnell understood the importance of having someone who is a living example in order for the child to receive truth.⁴⁴⁷

One final point that can be gleaned from Stull relates to the doctrine of the children of Christian parents being in the covenant. He stated that "the prevailing individualism, however, meant that children of Christian parents were treated much like children born to the general population."⁴⁴⁸ In reaction, Bushnell wrote, "There could not be a worse or more baleful implication given to a child, than that he is to reject God and all holy principle, till he has come to a mature age."⁴⁴⁹ Stull points out that this is why Bushnell delineated between positive and negative forms of Christian education.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid. Bushnell wrote, "Anything which puts the child aloof from the parent, or takes away the confidence of love and sympathy, will as certainly be a wall to shut him away from God." (p. 298 of *Christian Nurture*).

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Bushnell's quote is from page 87 of *Christian Nurture*.

⁴⁴⁷ Stull, *Education at Home and at School*, p. 39. To support his claim about the studies among parents, especially the loss felt by single women in raising boys, Stull cites Dr. James Dobson's book *Bringing Up Boys* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001).

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

⁴⁴⁹ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 15.

It turned on what really nurtured the soul as far as softening the heart toward God or hardening it.⁴⁵⁰

The Text of *Christian Nurture*

This study has provided a guide through most of the key passages and concepts related to nurture within the text of *Christian Nurture*. This section briefly reviews those key points and then examines a few in more depth. First, we have seen that Bushnell does not totally abandon the concept of original sin. The phrase *condition privative*, from *Nature and the Supernatural*,⁴⁵¹ describes Bushnell's view of original sin. This study has reviewed Bushnell's statement on nature versus nurture.⁴⁵² His view on nature was not that it was bad, good, or neutral. He called his view "moral nature."⁴⁵³ He talked about the "seeds of holy principle"⁴⁵⁴ that are at work in the child, in the parents, and in the process. Because of this, Bushnell felt a child could "just as likely be born a saint as be born a sinner."⁴⁵⁵ The child has both a condition privative and seeds of holy principle at work as he or she enters the world; which way the child's moral nature develops is largely dependent upon the parents. The parents have the ability to exercise "the power that is more than influence"⁴⁵⁶ upon "the plastic nature"⁴⁵⁷ of the newborn child through proper Christian nurture. When it is

⁴⁵⁰ Stull, *Education at Home and at School*, p. 41.

⁴⁵¹ Bushnell, *Nature and the Supernatural*, p. 129.

⁴⁵² Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, pp. 165–167. Partially reprinted in the Appendix of this paper.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 201–204.

done successfully, the child can grow up never knowing himself or herself as anything other than a Christian.⁴⁵⁸

It is never too early to begin Christian nurture. As early as 1847, Bushnell taught about the potential to influence a preborn child.⁴⁵⁹ The antenatal years up to age three are the “impressionable years” when more than half of the character and moral development of the child occurs.⁴⁶⁰ It takes involvement of both the father and mother to achieve optimum results, but God gives grace to help the single parent or the parent who is the only Christian in a home if that is the case.⁴⁶¹ During the first three years of the child’s life, the parents have absolute control.⁴⁶² These years give way to the years of “tuitional influences”⁴⁶³ on the part of the child and parents. The importance of language increases.

One of the concepts most important to an understanding of Bushnell’s philosophy of nurture is “the organic unity of the family.”⁴⁶⁴ The individualism of the Revivalists (and also of our twenty-first century Western civilization) is challenged to be able to comprehend this concept. Several other concepts are tied very closely to this idea in Bushnell. One is that the family is seen as a means of grace.⁴⁶⁵ As such, it is a “vehicle of virtue” that God uses to develop “filial piety” in

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 197.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 194–198.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., p. 129–130, 148–150, 163, 228.

⁴⁶² Ibid., p. 206.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 199.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 74, Part I, Chapter IV.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 92.

the child.⁴⁶⁶ An early step in this process is the rite of infant baptism. Infant baptism is not to be seen as baptismal regeneration, but it does have instrumental and not merely symbolic significance.⁴⁶⁷ The instrumental value lies in the covenantal membership of the child in God's church when he or she is born into a Christian family.⁴⁶⁸ This is what Miller called "the once-born tradition."⁴⁶⁹ The instrumental value of infant baptism, however, is presumptive for Bushnell and is "sealed" later in life when the person accepts it.⁴⁷⁰ Growing up Christian is not automatic. Having Christian parents, or at least one Christian parent, is a start. But the parents must not practice "Ostrich Nurture" in any of its forms or their nurture will not be Christian education.⁴⁷¹ It will accomplish the exact opposite, so Bushnell refers to it as "un-Christian education."⁴⁷² The litmus test as to whether any education is Christian or unchristian for Bushnell turned upon what really nurtured the soul as far as softening the heart toward God or hardening it.⁴⁷³ The example of the parents is the most crucial factor; it is "who they are" more than what they say or do.⁴⁷⁴ The more closely that they meet the necessary parental qualifications, the greater the chance for

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 91–92, 272.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 35–36, 121–122. See Reuel Howe, *Man's Need and God's Action* (Greenwich: The Seabury Press, 1953), pp. 53–54.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 140, 162.

⁴⁶⁹ Miller, "Bushnell, the Family and Children", p. 262.

⁴⁷⁰ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, pp. 35–36, 130, 162.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., Part I Chapter III, pp. 52–73.

⁴⁷² Ibid., pp. 10–11, 60.

⁴⁷³ Stull, *Education at Home and at School*, p. 41.

⁴⁷⁴ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, pp. 70–73, 97.

success in the process and the practice of Christian nurture.⁴⁷⁵ Even the relationship between the two spouses is crucial in this venture.⁴⁷⁶

The thrust of Bushnell's argument is that nurture and nature work together with the unfolding choices of the child to determine his or her path. There is a blending of the child's free moral agency and assumption of personal responsibility with his or her growth as the child matures. In late childhood or early adolescence, the child will reach a moment naturally when he or she will "own" faith. If it unfolds within the realm of proper Christian nurture, it will likely not be a cataclysmic event such as the Revivalists encouraged. It may be a quiet but significant transition. Bushnell wrote, "The individual capacity of will and choice is one that matures at no particular tick of the clock, but comes along out of incipencies, [and] grows by imperceptible increments."⁴⁷⁷ So he wrote to his daughter,

You have been religiously educated, and you are come now to an age when you must begin to be more responsible to yourself. Our prayer for you is, every day, that God would impart his grace to you and draw you on to a full choice of himself, and perform the good work which we trust he has begun in you. This would complete our happiness in you.⁴⁷⁸

The physiological and psychological growth was viewed as a process that developed in small increments. So the spiritual maturation is anticipated to be the same. In an interesting explanation of "crisis" versus "process," Bushnell writes, "There is for the little ones, a mere quiet way of induction. Show them how to be good, and then, when they fail, how God will help them if they ask him and trust in

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 216 ff.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 44, 220–222, 276.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 167.

⁴⁷⁸ Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian*, p. 212.

him for help. In this manner they will be passing little conversion-like crises all the time.”⁴⁷⁹ For Bushnell, the home and the family are the means that God primarily uses to nurture “children *in the Lord*.”⁴⁸⁰ He said, “The house itself is a converting ordinance.”⁴⁸¹

The proper “family government”⁴⁸² is needed in the home for it to operate as a “converting ordinance.” Law and order must be established during the years of absolute control. This must be done with a careful balance of “gentleness and firmness” and it will foster a healthy self-control in the developing child.⁴⁸³ Nurses or attendants should not be utilized, especially in the earliest and most impressionable years.⁴⁸⁴ Bushnell discusses many other matters of practical guidance for the nurturance of the child. Luther Weigle sums up some of them:

Bushnell opposed what was called “indoctrination,” which consisted chiefly in the memorization of dogmatic catechisms, and favored a larger emphasis upon the understanding of Scripture; he advocated the grading of methods and materials of instruction in Christian truth; he recommended greater freedom in conversation with respect to the objects of religious belief, and more sincerity in answering children’s questions and in dealing with adolescent doubts; he believed that the play of children, instead of being a symptom of original sin, is a “divine appointment,” of educative value; he conceived the goal of education in terms of what he called the “emancipation of the child.”⁴⁸⁵

Furthermore, Bushnell instructed the parents and teachers to watch for the child’s “times of interest” and not to force upon them subjects when they are not

⁴⁷⁹ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 329.

⁴⁸⁰ “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Ephesians 6:4 (King James Version).

⁴⁸¹ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 62.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, Part II Chapter V, p. 269 ff.

⁴⁸³ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 279.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁴⁸⁵ Weigle, Introduction to *Christian Nurture*, p. xxxvii.

ready to learn.⁴⁸⁶ The content and the process should both be carefully monitored. This can be achieved by paying attention to the atmosphere and environment that is being created in the home for learning and growth. It was a holistic theory, which was described by one theorist as a theory of “Christian comprehensiveness.”⁴⁸⁷ It requires sacrificial love on the part of the parents like that of Jesus, who is the example as the “Vicarious Sacrifice” for our atonement. In much the same manner as he is a moral influence upon the parent, the parent is a moral influence upon the children in the home.

We now want to look more in-depth at a few of Bushnell’s concepts from the text. The first is his original claim that a child could grow up never knowing himself or herself as anything other than a Christian. The worst charge made by his critics was that “he makes the worse into the stronger argument, and he teaches these same things to others,”⁴⁸⁸ the same charge leveled against Socrates for which he was forced to drink the poison. George Prentiss wrote in 1883, “I do not see how we can rest content with any conception of the system of Providence which does not take in the case of young children. . . . A theodicy that shall meet the claims of Christian thought, and satisfy the cravings of the Christian heart, or charm to silence its doubts and fears, must vindicate the way of Providence toward little children as well as toward

⁴⁸⁶ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 325.

⁴⁸⁷ Miller, “Horace Bushnell: Prophet to America’s Children,” pp. 1–25. In regard to this point, Bushnell’s views are a seminal form of those of Larry Richards. See Perry G. Downs, “Christian Nurture: A Comparison of Horace Bushnell and Lawrence D. Richards,” *Christian Education Journal*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1983, pp. 90–102.

⁴⁸⁸ Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1975), Apology 18:b, 19:b, pp. 22–23.

the full-grown men and women.”⁴⁸⁹ He declared that “it is strange that a book so bathed in household love, a very cradle-song of Christian faith, should have become the occasion of a theological controversy of the proverbial bitterness. . . . Few people in New England would now hesitate to say that it is wise to train children into the Christian life very much as Bushnell suggests; and the greater part would wonder where the theological difficulties came in.”⁴⁹⁰ It should be noted that Bushnell’s brave and astounding proposition came right at the outset with this disclaimer, “I do not affirm that every child may, if fact and without exception, be so trained that he certainly will grow up a Christian.”⁴⁹¹ But Bushnell said that the reader should withhold judgment that they may have based on their own prejudice or their own experience with a child that has “gone astray” after being raised in a seemingly perfect home.⁴⁹² The child after many struggles may return to the faith later because of the roots given to him or her, so the reader is asked to suspend judgment and listen to the argument presented.⁴⁹³ It is also important to note that from the start, Bushnell was addressing the church as well as parents. He wrote to the parents primarily, but speaking to them he said, “For it is not for you alone to realize all that is included in the idea of Christian education. It belongs to the church of God, according to the degree of its social power over you and in you and around your children, to bear a part of the responsibility with you.”⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁸⁹ Prentiss, *Infant Salvation and its Theological Bearings*, p. 91.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴⁹¹ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 4.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

In fact to anyone and everyone who would read his book, he draws this obvious inference:

Meantime, wherein would it be less incongruous for you to teach your child that he is to lie and steal, and go the whole round of the vices, and then, after he comes to mature age, reform his conduct by the rules of virtue? Perhaps you do not give your child to expect that he is to grow up in sin; you only expect that he will yourself. That is scarcely better: for that which is your expectation, will assuredly be his; and what is more, any attempt to maintain a discipline at war with your own secret expectations, will only make a hollow and worthless figment of that which should be an open earnest reality. You will never practically aim at what you practically despair of, and if you do not practically aim to unite your child to God, you will aim at something less; that is, something unchristian, wrong, sinful.⁴⁹⁵

In essence, for Bushnell, unchristian education consists in having the wrong idea of depravity, wrong expectations of behavior and possible outcomes, or wrong goals in nurture and education. These lead to wrong actions in the part of the teacher or parent, which in turn can be programmatic.⁴⁹⁶ If you start with an assumption that the lessons taught will not produce their fruit until the child reaches a mature age, Bushnell says that you are actually enforcing the practical rejection of all of the lessons that are being taught to the children or students.⁴⁹⁷ Bushnell rejects the idea of the radical “corruption of human nature”⁴⁹⁸ and he also rejects the idea of “the radical goodness of human nature.”⁴⁹⁹ He admits the struggles of good and evil that

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 8–9.

⁴⁹⁶ Sara Little, “Review of Horace Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture*,” *American Presbyterians*, vol. 66, no. 4, Winter 1988, pp. 245–250. Also see James O. Duke, “Review of Horace Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture*,” *Modern Churchman*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1984, pp. 40–44.

⁴⁹⁷ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 11. I personally think that he does not address adequately “the law as schoolmaster” logic of St. Paul (*paidagogos* – Gal. 3:24), adhered to by the philosophy of many parents and educators at this point. Thus, he too easily dismisses his opponents’ point of view saying, “Christian education has, in this view, no such eminent advantages over that which is unchristian, as to raise any broad and dignified distinction between them” (p. 11).

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

go on as the soul becomes established in holy virtue. He sees the efforts of the nurturing parents also being affected by a fallen world and the effect that this may have upon the child as he or she develops. He says that until a child is really born, he or she cannot be said to have received “a separate and properly individual nature.”⁵⁰⁰ He claims that children are not really born in a technical sense until they emerge from the infantile state, which leaves a question of “*punctum temporis*” that he does not attempt to answer.⁵⁰¹ The fact that Bushnell does believe in “an age of accountability” is obvious. He says,

We have much to say about the beginning of moral agency, and we seem to fancy that there is some definite moment when a child becomes a moral agent, passing out a condition where he is a moral nullity, and where no moral agency touches his being. Whereas he is rather to be regarded, at the first, as lying within the moral agency of the parent, and passing out, by degrees, through a course of mixed agency, to a proper independency and self-possession.⁵⁰²

That is why the very idea of Christian education for Bushnell begins with cultivation-type nurture that has the expressed purpose of guiding the child through the moral and generational transition successfully by means of a long and careful process of character development. So Bushnell draws the following conclusion,

For this is all that is implied in a Christian state. The Christian is one who has simply *begun* to love what is good for its own sake, and why should it be thought impossible for a child to have this love begotten in him? Take any scheme of depravity you please, there is yet nothing in it to forbid the possibility that a child should be led, in his first moral act, to cleave unto what is good and right, any more than in the first of his twentieth year.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Ibid., p. 21.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., p. 9.

Bushnell further writes, “It is the only true idea of Christian education that the child is to grow up in the life on the parent and be a Christian in principle from his earliest years.”⁵⁰⁴

The next aspect of Bushnell’s view of nurture that requires a deeper examination is his concept of the organic unity of the family. His idea of “organic” touches not just the family, but the church, state, and school as well. And we never grow out of reach of organic laws that touch our character at any certain age. Yet, in his theory, we each remain responsible persons when we grow up. It is the best rendition of “no man is an island, entire of itself,”⁵⁰⁵ applied to Christian education. Bushnell wrote,

A very great share of the power in what is called a revival of religion is organic power; nor is it any the less divine on that account. The child is only more within the power of organic laws than we all are. We possess only a mixed individuality all our life long. A pure, separate, individual man, living *wholly* within and from himself, is a mere fiction. No such person ever existed or ever can.⁵⁰⁶

It is in his discussion of the organic working of a family that he draws some practical conclusions about its power for nurturance. In his view, the organic unity of the family was designed by God to be the vehicle not of depravity, but of virtue.⁵⁰⁷ It is the duty of Christianity to make these organic laws the instruments of a regenerative purpose. In much the same sense that the sacraments such as communion or baptism or the traditional Christian disciplines such as prayer, worship, or Scripture reading can be seen as means of God’s grace flowing into a

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵⁰⁵ John Donne (1572–1631), *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation XVII*.

⁵⁰⁶ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 22.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 91.

person's life, so in Bushnell's views is the family seen as a means of grace.⁵⁰⁸

Bushnell wrote,

That an engine of so great power should be passed by, when every other law and object in the universe is appropriated and wielded as an instrument of grace, and that in a movement for the redemption of the race, is inconceivable. The conclusion thus reached does not carry us, indeed, to the certain inference that the organic unity of the family will avail to set forth every child of Christian parents, in a Christian life. But if we consider the tremendous power it has as an instrument of evil, how far short of such an opinion does it leave us, when computing the reach of its power as an instrument of grace?⁵⁰⁹

He even said that parents should be very careful not to make their children “inmates” in an irreligious environment of the home.⁵¹⁰ They should also be extremely cautious when the child enters the atmosphere of another house and use every opportunity for good if a child of an irreligious family comes into their own. Children do not learn only by verbal instruction and since the family is seen as not only a means of grace in Bushnell's view, but also as a cradle of theology,⁵¹¹ the importance of this guidance is magnified.

This brings us to some further comments on “ostrich nurture.” Bushnell strongly rejects the parenting philosophy that, concerning religion, spirituality, or moral instruction, says that the true principle of training for children is no training at

⁵⁰⁸ Janet Forsythe Fishburn, “The Family as a Means of Grace in American Theology,” *Religious Education*, vol. 78, no. 1, Winter 1983, pp. 90–102. For a discussion of the sacraments as a means of grace, see Rob L. Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1991) and his bibliography. For a discussion of the classic spiritual disciplines as a means of grace, see Richard J. Foster's *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, HarperOne; 25th Anniversary Edition, October 1, 1998).

⁵⁰⁹ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 92.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁵¹¹ Richard L. Hester, “The Family as the Cradle of Theology,” *Faith and Mission*, vol. 6, no.1, Fall 1988, pp. 3–14.

all.⁵¹² Bushnell demonstrates that giving children options and leaving them to choose their own way is a theory of negative Christian education. His image of the ostrich is actually not chosen because it puts its head in the sand, but rather because she deposits her eggs in the sand and leaves them there, thinking that her role as a mother has ended. In reality, that is far from the case for baby ostriches and even further from the case for human babies. Bushnell says,

But with men, as creatures of reason, it is far otherwise. They are creators, all, for them that are to come after. What they can discover, build, produce, acquire, learn, think, enjoy, they are to transmit; giving it to them that come after to begin at the point where they cease, and have the full advantage of their opinions, works, and character. One of their first duties, therefore, is to educate and train their offspring, transmitting to them what they have known, believed, and proved by their experience.

And for Rev. Bushnell, education is centered in the home and echoes out in concentric circles of influence from there.⁵¹³ But it always comes back to the parent's responsibility to interpret what has been seen or taught in other circles. Christian nurture and character development are constantly weaved together in Bushnell's thought.⁵¹⁴ That is why Bushnell says, "Therefore it is vain, let all parents so understand, to imagine that you can really fulfill the true fatherhood and motherhood, unless you are true Christians yourselves. . . . Be Christians yourselves, and then it will not be difficult for you to do your true duties to your children. Until

⁵¹² Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 53.

⁵¹³ David L. Birch. "Home-centered Christian Education," *Christian Education Journal*, vol. 3 no. 2, 1982, pp. 30–38.

⁵¹⁴ Peter Tze-Ming Ng, "Christian Nurture and Character Development—Reflections from the Educational and Developmental Theories of the West," *Hill Road*, vol. 1 no. 1, 1998, pp. 45–65.

then it is really impossible.”⁵¹⁵ Then church growth can truly be by both conversion or by propagation and subsequent nurture.

In Bushnell’s view of nurture, even the physical nurture is seen to be a means of grace. There is a direct connection in his thinking between the relation of the body and the soul. He gives several examples related to wrong feeding and proper feeding of children. He argues that the creation of artificial appetites of the body can lead to sensuality.⁵¹⁶ Food should not be used as a reward. Right feeding should be done in condition of simplicity, with regulation of times, and not too much being made of pleasures at the table. Good manners should be taught and the blessing of the food should be observed before partaking. Bushnell also makes connections between personal neatness or modesty in dress and the relation to the spiritual habits of the soul in the religious life.

Habits are very important in Bushnell’s view of Christian nurture.⁵¹⁷ The proper ideas of discipline for Bushnell are more positive and center on things like the teaching of proper habits that prevent negative behaviors in the first place. Discipline of the children begins with discipline in the parents. In the healthy family government, penalty or punishment “should be threatened as seldom as possible, and next as seldom executed as possible. . . . [W]here the management is right in other respects, punishment will be very seldom needed.”⁵¹⁸ Concerning necessary punishment, Bushnell writes,

⁵¹⁵ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 71.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 232-238.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 284.

Punishments should be severe enough to serve their purpose; and gentle enough to show, if possible, a tenderness that is averse from the infliction. There is no abuse more shocking, than when they are administered by sheer impatience, or in a fit of passion. Nor is the case at all softened, when they are administered without feeling, in a manner of uncaring hardness. Whenever the sad necessity arrives, there should be time enough taken, after the wrong or detection, to produce a calm and thoughtful revision; and a just concern for the wrong, as evinced by the parent, should be awakened, if possible, in the child.⁵¹⁹

Thinking back to his own childhood home, Bushnell writes, “No hamper was ever put on our liberty of thought or choice.”⁵²⁰ He said there was restriction in the family discipline as there ought to be, but it was not too stringent or closely restrictive. He concludes,

Closely related is the conviction to be firmly held, that family discipline, rightly administered, is to secure, and may secure, a style of obedience in the child that amounts to a real piety. If we speak of conversion, family government should be a converting ordinance, as truly as preaching. For observe and make due account of this single fact, that when a child is brought to do any one thing from a truly right motive, and in a genuinely right spirit, there is implied in that kind of obedience, the acceptance of all best and holiest principle. I do not mean, of course, that children are to be made Christians by the rod, or by any summary process of requirement. . . . This latter—that which makes a Christian—is the aim of all true government, and should never be out of sight for an hour. Let the child be brought to do right because it is right, and not because it is unsafe, or appears badly, to do wrong.⁵²¹

Probably one of Bushnell’s most progressive concepts is his view of play. The concept of “play as a child’s work” or play as therapy is common. One source that these ideas come from is Bushnell.⁵²² His daughter, Mary, said that “it was while

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., p. 285.

⁵²⁰ Cheney, *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, p. 7.

⁵²¹ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, pp. 273–274.

⁵²² David L. Jensen, “Playful Fathering: The Burden and Promise of Horace Bushnell’s Christian Nurture,” *Fathering*, June 2003, pp. 1–7.

he was watching the play of his own children with a graceful kitten he conceived the idea which animates his work and play; and in the same manner he drew from his own home experience the child-loving chapter on “Plays and Pastimes,” in his *Christian Nurture*.⁵²³ In this chapter he states that a child’s play can be “a divine appointment” for Christian education.⁵²⁴ He ties his philosophy of play to the love of nature, to the proper observance of the Sabbath, and to the purposeful use of holidays.

He says that play is the symbol and interpreter of Christian liberty. He also sees it as the forerunner of religion. He was reading the prophet Zechariah who said, “And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof” (Zechariah 8:5, King James Version) and he concluded “that religion loves too much the plays and pleasures of childhood, to limit or suppress them by any kind of needless austerity.”⁵²⁵

But his philosophy of play and nurture is balanced by a strong pre-Erikson view of industry being a primary task of middle childhood. He wrote,

Thus far we speak for the side of play, showing how far off it is from the purpose of religion to take away, or suppress, the innocent plays of childhood; how ready it is, on the other hand, to foster them and give them sympathy. But it is not the whole of life, even to a child, to be indulged in play. There is such a thing as order, no less than such a thing as liberty; and the process of adjustment between these two contending powers, begins at a very early date. Under the law of the house, of the school, and of God, the mere play impulse begins very soon to be tempered and moderated by duty. . . . When he is old enough, he is set to works of industry, it may be, that he may contribute something to the general benefit.⁵²⁶

⁵²³ Cheney, *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, p. 453.

⁵²⁴ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, pp. 292–314.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 291–292.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 298–299.

Bushnell's book concludes in a very practical yet sacred manner. He turns the attention to the subject of family prayers. This subject includes times of family worship. For Bushnell, all teaching and practice in the home turns the child's eyes to Jesus. He writes, "Observe also, at just this point, the immense advantage that a Christian parent has in Jesus Christ, as regards the religious teaching of his children. I speak here of the fact that all truth finds in him the concrete form"⁵²⁷ and further, "And of this you will be the more certain if you teach Christ not by words only, but by so living as to make your own life the interpreter of his."⁵²⁸ His conclusion focuses upon harmony of example, beliefs, teachings, and practice of religion in the home. He says,

Here then, my brethren, is the great lesson of family religion; it is that religion, being the supreme end and law of life, is to have every thing put in the largest possible harmony with it. And this is to be done by no superlative fervors, or heats of piety and prayer, but by the sober, honest, practical arrangement of life and its plans. . . . Let us stop here now, in our closing, and contemplate the dignity and power of a genuine family religion, thus maintained. Consistency and solid reality, we have seen, are its great distinction—the whole ordering of the house is worshipful, and faithfully chimes with the prayers. The very table is sanctified with, as well as by, the blessing invoked upon it.

Some have seen the images of nurture that Bushnell purported as "little churches" in the homes. I do not think that he would disagree. He did call the parents "priests" in one passage, although it was not clear if he meant the father as head of the home, the mother as primary nurturer, or both. He has even been accused of creating a view of the home as "the antithesis of the work place, a private spot

⁵²⁷ Ibid., p. 326.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., p. 327.

where middle-class Victorians sought rest and leisure.”⁵²⁹ But his views cannot simply be set aside as a “domestic theology.” Bushnell reiterates his aim:

Parents therefore, in the religious teaching of their children, are not to have it as a point of fidelity to press them into some crisis of high experience, called conversion. Their teaching is to be that which feeds a growth, not that which stirs a revolution. It is to be nurture, presuming on a grace already and always given, and, for just that reason, jealously careful to raise no thought of some high climax to be passed. For precisely here is the special advantage of a true sacramental nurture in the promise, that it does not put the child on passing a crisis, where he is thrown out of balance not unlikely, and becomes artificially conscious of himself, but it leaves him to be always increasing his faith, and reaching forward, in the simplest and most dutiful manner, to become what God is helping him to be.⁵³⁰

Bushnell’s View on Conversion

This section examines Bushnell’s view of conversion. Much of what he believed or taught about conversion was tied to and thus covered in his view of nurture. So the analysis here is an isolation of those points and a summation. The analysis first examines his milieu and then his personal experience. Third, the passages about conversion are examined, although there are few. This section concludes with a review of one of Bushnell’s sermons.

Bushnell’s milieu was the Second Great Awakening, but he was generally unimpressed with the methods of revivalism.⁵³¹ He found them useful only for those who had not received Christian nurture from birth. The mourner’s bench, the altar “calls,” the glorification of the dramatic change exhibited by the converted sinner, the

⁵²⁹ Margaret Bendroth, *Horace Bushnell’s Christian Nurture in The Child in Christian Thought*, Marcia Bunge, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 350–364.

⁵³⁰ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 328.

⁵³¹ John H. Krahn, “Nurture vs. revival: Horace Bushnell on Religious Education,” *Religious Education*, vol. 70, no. 4, July–August 1975, pp. 375–382.

pressure on everyone including children to repent in tears and “come back” to God, as well as the theology of revivalism did not seem healthy to Bushnell. He did not dismiss in *Christian Nurture* the value of this kind of preaching to help some people to find the Lord. But it is obvious that he writes in reaction against the milieu in which he finds himself. There is always a pendulum swing in every generation that rises to bring balance to the extremes that may be overemphasized. He probably emphasized the process of conversion too much in his reaction. But, in part because of his response to the growing imbalance of his times, he stressed religious education from birth that came very close to teaching that a person could be saved through Christian nurture and virtually apart from any certain stormy conversion. If Christian families followed his plan, he believed that a whole new wave of children could grow up never knowing themselves as anything other than Christian. He made an exceptionally optimistic and noteworthy comment when he wrote,

Then, also, the piety of the coming age will be deeper, and more akin to habit than ours, because it began earlier. It will have more of an air of naturalness and be less a work of will. A generation will come forward, who will have been educated to all good undertakings and enterprises—ardent without fanaticism, powerful without machinery. Not born, so generally, in a storm, and brought to Christ by an abrupt transition, the latter portion of life will not have an unequal war to maintain with the beginning, but life will be more nearly one and in harmony with itself. Is not this a result to be desired? Could we tell our American churches, at this moment, what they want, should we not tell them this?⁵³²

Bushnell’s personal experience shaped his view of conversion. His experience can be divided into two parts: his home experiences and his heart experiences related to conversion. His home experience was very similar to what he

⁵³² Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 49.

eventually presented as his theory of Christian nurture. His parents and his grandparents raised him in such a way that he never really thought of himself as anything other than a Christian. An early friend, Henry Day, described him as “free from little vices, of irreproachable morals in a very moral family and community, truthful and every way trustworthy.”⁵³³ Furthermore, Bushnell had been able to reproduce his family of origin in his nuclear family. His daughter, Mary, wrote,

Of my father’s paternal tenderness, shown daily in little ways, and sometimes, in rare moments, finding exquisite expression, this is not the place to speak openly. It may be guessed what warmth he radiated, if we recall that luminous revelation of himself when he said. “It is the strongest want of my being, to love.” Nor can we reveal the gentle, fatherly counsels, and the attractive personal religious talks, all the more prized because of their rarity. In such conversations it was always the winning, never the compelling side of religious experience, which he presented to us. In the light of such sacred revelations of himself, the life which he had been living before us day by day, year after year, was known by us to have its source, not in his own will merely, however high and fixed its purpose, but mainly in such inspirations as come from God himself.⁵³⁴

The experiences of his home life surely provided the laboratory for the verification of his theories both of nurture as well as of conversion.

Like Augustine, Bushnell had three “heart experiences” related to conversion.

These are carefully compared in Chapter 4, but they are briefly reviewed here. In his own testimony, Bushnell writes,

I never saw so distinctly as now what it is to be a disciple, or what the keynote is of all most Christly experience. I think, too, that I have made my last discovery in this mine. First, I was led along into initial experience of God, socially and by force of the blind religious instinct in my nature; second, I was advanced into the clear moral light of Christ and of God, as related to the principle of rectitude; next, or third, I was set on by the inward personal

⁵³³ Cheney, *Life and Letters*, p. 17.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

discovery of Christ, and of God as represented in him; now, fourth, I lay hold of and appropriate the general culminating fact of God's vicarious character in goodness, and of mine to be accomplished in Christ as a follower.⁵³⁵

Dr. Theodore T. Munger was a longtime family friend of the Bushnells.

When he wrote his biography of Dr. Bushnell, he penned this commentary concerning the previously cited testimony:

The stages to which he refers are, first, his early conversion in youthhood; second, his experience while a tutor, described in a sermon on "The Dissolving of Doubts;" third, that revelation of the meaning of the gospel which led to his writing "God in Christ;" fourth, the conceptions of sacrifice and forgiveness which were to ripen into the present volume. There seems to be an evolution almost scientific in the order and accuracy with which one thing led to another, but it was evolution under an environment as well as through an inner force.⁵³⁶

So Bushnell had a conversion by religion and instinct when he joined the New Preston Congregational Church at nineteen years of age. This was the experience he recorded as "Saved as a record of dates." The second experience came when he was twenty-eight, in 1830, as he was finishing his law degree at Yale. Although he said that it was a conversion in a moral light of rectitude that was related to his responsibilities to those who were following him as an example, it did "dissolve his doubts" and it was a true conversion in the meaning of that word. His daughter wrote,

However irregular the forms of this conversion according to some theological standards, there can be no doubt of its reality as a *conversion* in the original sense of that word. It was a complete *turning-about* of the life. It changed not only the outward purpose (for he gave up the law for the Gospel), but the very fibre and tissue of his being. No, it did not change, but, rather, breathed into his moral frame the breath of an immortal life and vigor, vitalized and inspired

⁵³⁵ Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian*, p. 238.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*

his intellect, gave luminous insight in place of “desolating doubts,” and set him free. The effect was not to neutralize, but to heighten, his individuality. If he was before Horace Bushnell, he was doubly Bushnell now.⁵³⁷

It was the third experience that Bushnell described as his own personal discovery of Christ. In this experience he declared to his wife that he had seen “The Gospel.”⁵³⁸ Actually, he had not discovered the Son as much as the Son had risen upon him. Boorman cites Bushnell’s second experience and then summarizes the third and fourth. In the second,

God came close to him “in good thoughts.” Sixteen years later, in February, 1848 (age 46), he had an experience which seemed to him “a personal discovery of Christ, and of God as represented in Him.” He then believed that he had passed beyond a religion of duty to a religion of faith. His last “discovery” was of “God’s vicarious character in goodness, and of mine to be accomplished in Christ as a follower.”⁵³⁹

It was the “I Have Seen the Gospel” experience (the third), according to Miller, that “was the controlling mystical experience that determined his Christ-centered theology in the remainder of his writings.”⁵⁴⁰

Within the book *Christian Nurture*, there are two primary passages that relate to Bushnell’s view of conversion. The first, discussed previously, fit the idea of conversion within the natural maturation of a child and argued that one could expect that the child “will be passing little conversion-like crises all the time.”⁵⁴¹ In this context, crises mean something more like stages or steps. Although they may be turns of a sort, they would be ever so slight, more like a maximum of 5 degrees and

⁵³⁷ Cheney, *Life and Letter of Horace Bushnell*, p. 59.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-194. The account of this experience is included in the Appendix.

⁵³⁹ Boorman, *A Comparative Study of the Theory of Human Nature*, p. 113.

⁵⁴⁰ Miller, “Horace Bushnell: Prophet to America’s Children,” p. 2.

⁵⁴¹ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 329.

not 180 degrees. These involve the consent and choice of the child, but in a series of smaller responses rather than a major or dramatic one. They would be conversion-like; and over the course of time in the child's development, enough small turns put together could actually represent a significant transformation or change of direction. This is one of the best pictures into Bushnell's view of conversion.

In another major passage Bushnell contrasts the type of conversions expected by the Revivalists and the absurdity of the same being expected of children. He refers to these as "notions of conversion that are mechanical, and proper only to the adult age."⁵⁴² He says that these notions have one fixed response in mind and they are "not perceiving under what varieties of form that change may be wrought."⁵⁴³ He shows how children are incapable of responding in such drastic ways as would only be appropriate with adults. It is in the context of this passage that Bushnell says,

And so it is proved that there is a conversion for children, proper and possible to their age. They are not excluded, walled away from Christ by a mechanical enforcement of modes proper only and possible to adults.⁵⁴⁴

Bushnell explains how it works:

How different the kind of life that is necessary to bring them up in conversion and beget them anew in the spirit of a loving obedience to God, at a point even prior to all definite recollection. This is Christian nurture, because it nurtures Christians and because it makes an element of Christian grace in the house. It invites, it nourishes hope, it breathes in love, it forms the new life as a holy, though beautiful prejudice in the soul, before its opening and full flowering of intelligence arrives.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴² Ibid., p. 58.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., p. 59.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 62.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

The closest Bushnell comes to his own definition of conversion is when he says, “Truth, purity, firmness, love to Jesus, all that belongs to a formal conversion and more, is centralized thus in the soul, as a kind of ingrown habit.”⁵⁴⁶

Finally, one of Bushnell’s sermons is examined, as we did with Augustine, to see how he preached this concept. Augustine’s life and conversion centered around the verses found in Romans 13:13-14. Bushnell gave a sermon using verse 14 as his text; that sermon is still accessible. It is titled “Christ and the Salvation 20—The Putting on of Christ.”⁵⁴⁷ It is undated. It seems from the language to have been delivered after his “I Have Seen the Gospel” encounter and the sermon “Christ the Form of the Soul,”⁵⁴⁸ which he designed and preached immediately thereafter. It uses some of the same phrases and also the idea of “Until Christ be formed in you” is evident through most of the sermon. The sermon consistently uses the picture of being “clothed” with Christ, but he is definitely not preaching about an external manifestation of salvation. From start to finish, it has to do with the character of the soul. He says,

All the figures of dress or clothing are used up, in this manner, by the scriptures, to represent the forms of disgrace and filthiness, or of beauty and glory, into which the inner man of the soul may be fashioned—wearing heaven’s livery or that of sin. As character is the soul’s dress, and dress analogical to character, whatever has power to produce a character when received, is represented as a dress to be put on.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 62.

⁵⁴⁷ Horace Bushnell, “Christ and the Salvation 20—The Putting on of Christ, Romans 13:14.” Available at <http://articles.christiansunite.com/article10776.shtml>.

⁵⁴⁸ Yale University Library, Divinity Library Special Collections, Horace Bushnell Papers (Record Group No. 39), compiled by Martha Land Smalley, copyright March 1977. Accessed by student on November 23, 2007.

It is a sermon that is built like a mountain; one must climb to the top to see the view and then go down the other side to see what is there as well. The mountain peak, if you will, is the main point of the sermon:

In this manner, for this, in brief, is the gospel, we are to be new characterized, by the putting on of Christ; not by some imitation or copying of Christ that we practice, item by item, in a way of self-culture—the Christian idea is not that—but that Christ is to be a complete wardrobe for us himself, and that by simply receiving his person, we are to have the holy texture of his life upon us, and live in the infolding of his character. . . . for this exactly is the difference between a Christian and a merely humanly virtuous person, that one draws on Christ for everything, and the other on himself—on his will, his works, his self-criticism, shaping all his amendments himself. Or, reversing the order of comparison, one manufactures a suit for himself, in patches of character gotten together and laid upon the ground of his sin, and the other takes a whole robe of life, graciously fitted and freely tendered, in the humanly divine excellence of Christ his Saviour—who is thus made unto him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.⁵⁴⁹

From my reference point, we would refer to that as a “holiness” sermon because it doesn’t only make an appeal for a conversion. It encourages holiness of heart that translates into holiness of life and it points to the fact that the only way to live at this level is in and through Christ. There is one point in Bushnell’s sermon, however, in which he does sound very much like the revivalists and he does seem to be calling for an old-fashioned “conversion,” if you will. He speaks of a “full and hearty renunciation of your past life.” That is the “putting off” part of the imagery of changing clothes. And he speaks about coming to God by faith alone, “shivering in the cold shame of its [the soul’s] sin and giving itself over to him to be loved,

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 3–4. Bushnell included some of this sermon from Romans 13:14 in *Christian Nurture* (p. 230), using it to show how being clothed in Christ makes the parent the best possible parent.

protected and covered by his gracious life and passion.”⁵⁵⁰ It is in the second half of the sermon and it is a small part. Considering Dr. Bushnell’s beliefs about both conversion and about nurture, it seems likely that there were some adults in his audience that day that needed to be “converted,” so he appropriately appealed to them as one of “the many forms of the gospel.” But he kept it proportional and did not make it the whole sermon or the centerpiece.

Conclusion

To understand Bushnell’s theories, we could imagine two boys, neighbors; they go to the same church. Soon they will go to the same school, but now they are only five. Their fathers both work at the same place and their mothers both stay at home. Samuel’s family raises him according to Rev. Bushnell’s advice. But Peter’s family doesn’t. One day while playing together, they may fabricate tales of their great adventures and present them as having really happened. Pete’s family labels him as a liar and sees his behavior as an “obvious” sign of original sin. Pete gets spanked. Pete’s mom tells him that she is praying for him to be saved as soon as he can. Samuel’s family uses the incident as an opportunity for education about the power of imagination and the importance of truth-telling. Sam’s mother prays with him and thanks God for her son and for all the things they have learned this day. The story can evolve in many ways. A lot depends on the parents’ and teachers’ views of nurture and of conversion. Bushnell experienced a world in which almost every

⁵⁵⁰ Bushnell, “Christ and the Salvation 20 – The Putting on of Christ” p. 4.

child's home was like Pete's. But his home was like Sam's, so he knew it could be different. He told everyone. But only a few believed him at first. He showed them, but only a few more were "converted" to his point of view. Lots of people didn't like what he said because it didn't fit with what they thought they knew. He got sick, but he kept being positive, kind, and loving, and telling everyone that it could be better. Horace Bushnell died, but his ideas did not. Later research began to prove that his theories made a lot of sense. His family and his faithful believers also passed on, but somehow the baton has been handed down each generation. Now we are on the scene. We are here by love (nurture) and we are here by grace. We are God's children by creation, by salvation and by genuine choice.

CHAPTER FOUR

SYNTHESIS

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to summarize the results of the historical and comparative research in the study of the theories of Christian conversion and Christian nurture in the *Confessions* of Augustine and in *Christian Nurture* by Horace Bushnell. This section first compares the views of conversion in these two classic works and then compares their views on nurture. After an overall comparison, educational theories related to these results are examined. The chapter concludes with some commentary for further consideration.

Comparison of Views on Conversion

In terms of personal experience, we have seen that both of these men had three conversion-like events in their lives and at least one other mysterious encounter with God as well. This is confirmed by many expert analyses from various angles. Augustine left the faith of his upbringing and later returned. Bushnell, however, did not ever really leave faith. This section compares their experiences as well as their concepts, images, and themes of conversion that compose their views. Similarities and differences are compared. Common modalities that may exist where there are differences are noted. Figure 4 in the Appendix of this paper shows these “conversions” side by side.

The thorough documentation of both Augustine’s and Bushnell’s experiences makes a careful comparison possible. In terms of age, Augustine was seventeen or

eighteen when he converted to Manichaeism after reading Cicero's *Hortensius*; Bushnell was nineteen when he had the experience that led him to write that he was "saved as a record of dates" when joining the New Preston Congregational Church. We can say that these experiences occurred in late adolescence. Augustine was thirty-one when he converted to Platonism after reading the Neo-Platonist writings of Plotinus; Bushnell was twenty-eight or twenty-nine of his "dissolving of doubts" conversion when he had felt pressed by the power of his influence during the time of a revival in New Haven at Yale. Augustine's experience in the Garden of Milan, the "Tolle Lege" experience during which he was inspired by Romans 13:13-14 to accept Jesus as the Christ, came no more than a year later, but Bushnell's "I Have Seen the Gospel" experience came for him at age forty-six (about seventeen or eighteen years later) and was shared alone with his wife after the death of his son. Augustine's heavenly vision in Ostia came about a year to a year and a half at the most after his conversion in the Garden of Milan and probably less than a year after his baptism by Ambrose. He was around thirty-three years of age at the time that he shared this vision with his mother days before her death. We do not know the time of Bushnell's insightful moment that he termed "Laying Hold of God's Vicarious Character," but a few scholars have indicated that it was very close in time to the "I Have Seen the Gospel" conversion. Some even interpret those experiences to be two in essence, but one temporally. Bushnell recorded them as distinct and Munger believed that he was referring to the insights that led him to write "The Vicarious Sacrifice," which came

out in 1866, eighteen years after his “I Have Seen the Gospel” moment.⁵⁵¹ That would put him at age sixty-four; around the same age as Augustine was when he was writing *City of God*. Essentially, it is merely coincidence that the two thinkers had a similar number of experiences and that those experiences somehow paralleled each other in type. The significant finding is simply that both had multiple conversion-like experiences across a lifespan of spiritual movement toward God. For these seminal thinkers, a series of many “crises” along the process would be their personal experience of reality.

Another pertinent observation is that neither thinker experienced a childhood conversion-like experience, although some childhood and adolescent experiences are notable. Augustine’s pear stealing episode happened during early adolescence. Bushnell was only “whipped” once when he was growing up, and we are not told what that was for, only that his father did a thorough job of it.⁵⁵² In Augustine’s pear stealing incident, we see more his awakening of conscience and his need for conversion. Carl Vaught says,

[T]he pear-stealing episode in the orchard and the conversion in the garden are mirror images of one another. The first moves from finitude to fallenness, while the second moves from fallenness to existential transformation. As Augustine moves along the first path, he infinitizes himself. As he moves along the second, he becomes a finite-infinite reflection of God by putting a new garment called Jesus the Christ. In the theft, the community of adolescent companions splits apart into a collection of individuals; in the conversion, a community of individuals related to God is re-established.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵¹ Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian*, p. 238.

⁵⁵² Cheney, *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, p. 7.

⁵⁵³ Carl G. Vaught, “Theft and Conversion: Two Augustinian Confessions” in *The Recovery of Philosophy in America: Essays in Honor of John Edwin Smith*, Thomas P. Kesalis, ed. (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997), pp. 217–249.

In both men's various encounters with God, the social dimension narrowed as they matured and as the encounter went deeper into the inner self.⁵⁵⁴ The first and second experiences of both men are in fact socially centered in their manifestations, even though these experiences were also internal in their motivations. Augustine is first converted to the Manicheans and secondly he turns away from them to enjoin the Neo-Platonists. Bushnell's first experience was socially driven in the sense that it was a desire to experience what was expected of him in his world when he joined the church of his own accord; and his second experience rose from a reflection about his peer influence on those at Yale who viewed him as a leader. Augustine is also moved toward God by the contemplation of his influence when he led his formerly gentle friend, Alypius into an addiction to the gladiatorial violence.⁵⁵⁵ The third experience for both men relationally happened with just one significant person. In the case of Augustine, the story of his "Tolle Lege" conversion was with this friend, Alypius in the garden of Milan, although they go immediately to tell Monica, his mother. During Bushnell's "I Have Seen the Gospel" experience, only his wife, Mary, was present. Bushnell's fourth experience (not a conversion by definition) was his deep insight into the vicarious sacrifice of Christ and it happened while he was alone; and Augustine's heavenly vision at Ostia (also not technically a conversion) occurred when he was alone with his mother a few days before her death. The third and fourth experiences are the ones that became increasingly mystical, personal, and internal for

⁵⁵⁴ Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). This book argues that Augustine invented or created the concept of self as an inner space—as space into which one can enter and in which one can find God.

⁵⁵⁵ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 144-145. It is a moving story of the change that happened in an innocent young man and the guilt that Augustine felt for having corrupted the young man.

both men. These findings by comparison should also not be overly pandered, although they may point to the fact that growth in finding one's path may move increasingly away from the social motivations to the interior ones.

Both of these men held to an empirical mysticism that for Augustine was a balance of faith and reason and that for Bushnell was a blend of reason and of understanding. These two men were philosophers as well as theologians. But, most importantly, they were both fully human, experiencing life practically, mentally, relationally, and spiritually, with all of its mysteries as a whole. Augustine experienced a "herky-jerky," bumpy road with these key turning points along the way before his life settled into a unity that he described as being "at rest with God." Bushnell experienced a smoother, more natural unfolding of the developmental tasks, with these capstones appearing as significant markers on his path. One commonality in both men's writings is their view of life, and particularly their spiritual life, as a journey. It is interesting that they each shared "three" conversions and one other life-changing encounter rather than just one, as the Revivalists of Bushnell's time sought in their evangelistic efforts and in their version of Calvinism.⁵⁵⁶ It was probably during Jonathan Edwards's time in the early 1700s, but not just because of Edwards (and not just in America), that the belief arose that there was to be only one morally aware "conversion" experience for everyone that would make them right with God, and that once it was "secured," it would be sufficient for eternity. Bushnell reacted against this for many reasons: it was not relational, it focused too much on a crisis, it

⁵⁵⁶ Glenn A. Hewitt, *Regeneration and Morality: A Study of Charles Finney, Charles Hodge, John W. Nevin, and Horace Bushnell* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1991), p. 15.

left children out, it was not theologically sound as he saw it, and it was unnatural. Augustine's teachings laid the very groundwork for the later Calvinism, but Augustine's personal journey and his conversion experiences as shared in the *Confessions* are consistent in spirit with Bushnell's reaction.

Bushnell's view of human nature (a "moral nature" theory), however, was very different than Augustine's view of total depravity (original sin as "concupiscence" in each person). Bushnell did not negate the effects of the Fall on humankind. He said, "The growth of Christian virtue is no vegetable process, no mere onward development. It involves a struggle with evil, a fall and a rescue."⁵⁵⁷ So in each of these great thinkers' minds, infant baptism was important, but the reasons to perform the rite were very different. For Augustine, infant baptism is mandatory for salvation because of his view of original sin. But for Bushnell, the struggle could be "won" through the positive power of the organic unity of the Christian family.⁵⁵⁸ His emphasis is upon the relation of infant baptism to his view of Christian nurture.⁵⁵⁹ Baptism involves regeneration, but it:

is not actual, but only presumptive, and every thing depends upon the organic law of character pertaining between the parent and the child, the church and the child, thus upon duty and holy living and gracious example. The child is too young to choose the rite for himself, but the parent, having him as it were in his own life, is allowed the confidence that his own faith and character will be reproduced in the child, and grow up in his growth, and that thus the propriety of the rite as a seal of faith will not be violated.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁷ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 15.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Miller, "Bushnell, the Family and Children," p. 5.

⁵⁶⁰ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, pp. 35–36.

The child is seen as a member by covenantal identification with Christ through the faith and choice of the parents. Bushnell explains this by using the illustration of citizenship and describes the child as being like a citizen who cannot vote yet.⁵⁶¹

In a comparison of Augustine's and Bushnell's first experiences, we see that the early conversion of Bushnell was connected to the affirmation of the faith of his childhood upbringing. It was tied to his willingness to be personally identified in membership with a local representation of Christ's church. But it was more than just a mental assent; he made a religious commitment appropriate to this identification. He writes, "I vowed to be the Lord's, in an everlasting covenant never to be broken."⁵⁶² His prayer was,

"Lord, here I am, a sinner. Take me. Take all that I have and shall have; all that I am and shall be; and do with me as seemeth good. If thou hast anything for me to do; if thou hast anything for me to suffer in the cause of that Saviour on whom I rest my all, I am ready to labor, to suffer, or to die. I am ready to do anything or be anything for thee." After he had joined the church, he engaged for a time enthusiastically in religious work.⁵⁶³

But when he went to college at Yale two years later, his zeal had waned and doubts had begun to plague his mind. His journal entry of this first conversion was simply "saved as a record of dates."⁵⁶⁴

On March 3, 1822, he wrote, "Not wonderful that a Christian life begun in such crudity—if, indeed, it was begun, which was afterwards doubted—required many turns of loss and recovery to ripen it."⁵⁶⁵ The question was to whether it truly

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., p. 141.

⁵⁶² Cheney, *Life and Letter of Horace Bushnell*, p. 21.

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

was a “conversion.” This is also a fair question to ask of Augustine’s first experience. Vaught was not willing to call Augustine’s joining of the Manichees, as a result of the reading of *Hortensius*, to be a true conversion.⁵⁶⁶ His phrase for conversion was *pivotal encounter*; he would only call this experience a *turn*. But he saw the vision with Monica to be an “encounter.” The philosophical turn that began with *Hortensius* and the Manichees resulted in his philosophical conversion depicted in the second experience, Vaught says; then the third experience is his conversion to Christianity and the fourth is his experience with the culmination of his journey in mysticism.⁵⁶⁷

There are those that follow the thinking of Wittgenstein and see Augustine’s conversions or conversion as “a change of aspect”⁵⁶⁸ or “a reassessment of insight.”⁵⁶⁹ This perspective is helpful from a cognitive or a philosophical standpoint. Some have looked at it from the affective dimension and defined his encounters in terms of “erotic ascents.”⁵⁷⁰ Ferrari looked at it all spiritually and found “Tell-Tale”

⁵⁶⁶ Vaught, *The Journey toward God in Augustine’s Confessions*, p. 67.

⁵⁶⁷ Vaught, *Encounters with God in Augustine’s Confessions*, p. 1.

⁵⁶⁸ Erin M. Cline, “Augustine’s Change of Aspect,” *Heythrop Journal: A Quarterly Review of Philosophy and Theology*, vol. 46, no. 2, April 2005, pp. 135–148. Cline sees the last three books of the *Confessions* not only as theoretical books, but also as experiential books with Book XII (on Form and Matter) as a description of his conversion in terms of the ideas of aspect-blindness, the dawning of an aspect, the possibility of producing a change of aspect in another person, and seeing as. My Note: this explanation probably only makes sense to the few percent of people who actually experience conversion as “a change of aspect,” but for them, it is likely perfectly clear.

⁵⁶⁹ Thomas Kadankavil, “Conversion: A Reassessment of Insight,” *Journal of Dharma*, vol. 28, no. 1, Jan–Mar 2003, pp. 9–22. Kadankavil studies how people who are polarized on mutually opposing intellectual positions could undergo change from one position to another after having subscribed to them for a long time religiously and intellectually. The life of Augustine is one of those examined. He concludes “that conversion from a religious or philosophical position takes place where the basic data of intelligibility change with an irresistible force of emotion and insight.”

⁵⁷⁰ Susan Kinz, “Augustine’s Erotic Ascent,” *Contemporary Philosophy*, vol. 15, no. 1, Jan–Feb 1993, pp. 11–15. Kinz looks at three ascents of Augustine—his Neoplatonic ascent of Book VII, his

details in both descriptions that indicate Augustine's conversion (8:12) is based on that of Saint Paul (Acts 9:1-19).⁵⁷¹ O'Meara combines these approaches and then tracks in Augustine "both his preoccupation with 'return,' 'conversion' and 'mystical ascent' and the source of these ideas in the parable of the Prodigal Son and especially in Plotinus' *Ennead* 1:6."⁵⁷² This was the same assessment that O'Connell made as to a common theme (*aversio-conversio*) in Augustine's view of conversion, discussed previously.⁵⁷³

So the task here is still to establish whether either Augustine's or Bushnell's first conversion experiences were truly conversions at all. O'Connell believes that Augustine's was a true conversion because "it set him upon his search for intellectual certainties and freed him from the sort of blind submission to authority that he found demanded in the African Church."⁵⁷⁴ Somerville interprets this, however, to represent only one of the many influences that led to his conversion in the Garden of Milan.⁵⁷⁵ This study has used three means to establish what has been identified officially as a conversion: the theological meaning of the biblical word *metanoia* for conversion, the testimony of the person, and the conversion analysis of the experts. Three conversions were identified for each in this manner. The fourth experience in

conversion in the Garden in Book VIII, and the dialogical ascent with Monica in Book IX—through the perspective of the three ascents of Plato's *Eros*.

⁵⁷¹ Leo C. Ferrari, "Saint Augustine on the Road to Damascus," *Augustinian Studies*, vol. 13, 1982, pp. 151–170.

⁵⁷² John O'Meara, "Plotinus and Augustine: Exegesis of *Contra Academicos* II Point 5," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, vol. 24, 1970, pp. 321–337.

⁵⁷³ See the discussion of Robert J. O'Connell in Chapter 2 of this paper. Reference is made here in brief because we are summarizing our findings.

⁵⁷⁴ O'Connell, *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine's Confessions*. This is Teske's summation of O'Connell's position. See the quote in Chapter 2 of this paper.

⁵⁷⁵ James. M. Somerville, "The Preludes to Conversion in the Philosophy of St. Augustine," *Modern Schoolman: A Quarterly Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 21, May 1944, pp. 191–203.

each case did not represent a conversion by these criteria but was determined to be a significant “mystical” experience with God that came about later and stood apart from all other experiences in the person’s life using these criteria.

The theological definition that emphasized a turn-around, a change of mind, repentance, and a transformation of the person’s life from the inside out is not that different from dictionary definitions.⁵⁷⁶ Augustine’s first experience meets those criteria. It is not only a conversion when one changes *to* Christianity. One can be converted to Buddhism or to Judaism or to Islam or to “nothing,” in a sense. In this case, he was converted to Manichaeism and it did change and transform who he had been previously very dramatically. This might be considered an “aversion” path. The person must first be “converted” away from the faith of his or her upbringing in order to one day return. This leads to Bushnell’s premise that the individual may have been a Christian in the first place and that the person can only return to God if he or she first chooses to leave. When it is true conversion away from Christianity, it will meet the test of two criteria: it will change behaviors and it will endure for more than a short period.⁵⁷⁷ If the person then chooses to return, that can be seen as an act of God. O’Donnell has written,

So the history of human salvation is the history of human will and effort leading to sin and error counterbalanced by divine will overmastering human powers and leading people back to knowledge and holiness. Because the process affects the very foundations of knowing and willing, it is impossible to represent it fairly in human language. Those who have known the experience can never fully or adequately represent it to those who have not. Augustine’s example shows us that even the most sensitive of converts finds it

⁵⁷⁶ This is demonstrated in the Bromley definition of conversion in the Appendix of this paper.

⁵⁷⁷ Kadankavil, “Conversion: A Reassessment of Insight,” pp. 9–22.

difficult to reconstruct the situation in which it was possible not to be a believer, and this only makes it harder for the outsider to find the picture credible. Rational argument may go on, and the hidden workings of grace may use those arguments as instruments, but the main business of Christianity is not subject to human control or management.⁵⁷⁸

An analysis of Bushnell's first experience seems to reveal that it does not fit the more dramatic requirements of the definitions. However, first he did have a significant change appropriate to his personality; and second, the course of the other option (turning away from God) was averted. For our findings, this is an important distinction that is pertinent to those who may stay in the faith all along the journey. In this case, Bushnell cannot be compared with Augustine. Rather, a comparison of Bushnell's conversion with Augustine's friend, Alypius, in the Garden of Milan is helpful. Augustine wrote about his friend, "by a good resolution and purpose, which were entirely in keeping with his character, wherein both for a long time and for the better he had differed from me, he joined me without any painful hesitation."⁵⁷⁹ They were both very different personalities in how they responded to God, but it was allowed that both experiences were "conversions."

Furthermore, the researcher should not underestimate the importance of or the nature of Bushnell's change when he joined the New Preston Church, although it may appear subtle. He was identifying with the Christian faith as his own and making his own personal vow with God. It was the culmination of nineteen years of Christian nurture. His doubts as to whether that was where his life in Christ began become clear from his philosophy of conversion, more clearly articulated later in life, which

⁵⁷⁸ O'Donnell, *Augustine*, p. 100.

⁵⁷⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 10:1:1, p. 229.

arose from his developing philosophy of Christian nurture. It was in fact, in this sense, an ending of a long-term conversion that began when he was born. The caterpillar that had resided in the “cocoon” of the organic unity of his family was making the final, natural step in the change to a butterfly that could take off on its own. This type of conversion must be kept in mind when working with those who have grown up in the church and faith and have never left it. In terms of aversion, it could be said that Bushnell was saved from as much as Augustine. Bushnell was saved from aversion before it ever happened, whereas Augustine was eventually saved from it in its actualized sense along with all of the degradation it had brought into his life.

This comparison reveals that what happens in the interior self when the individual chooses their path by consciously accepting what was selected for them by their parents is also a conversion. Others may never see a change on the outside. If Bushnell did not first assess the option of leaving in his mind and examine some of its possibilities, there would have been no choice made nor vow needed. It could be said Bushnell was able to learn vicariously, whereas Augustine did not. A vicarious conversion is a real conversion. Not every child who stays in the church or faith does so for these reasons, as was demonstrated in Chapter 1.⁵⁸⁰ But this criterion can potentially determine who “owns” his or her faith versus who does not.

R. C. Miller reviews Bushnell’s journey. He does not put as much effort into verification of Bushnell’s first experience, although his comments are accurate. But

⁵⁸⁰ Chapter 1 of this paper, footnotes 16–22.

he does provide very good analysis into the other conversions experiences and the overall meaning of each:

[H]e did not join the church until he was nineteen. He did not come by his Christian faith easily, and often he had periods of severe doubt. He had a mild conversion in 1821, which soon cooled. He was a tutor at Yale in 1831 and was planning to go into law as a profession when he was caught up finally in a revival; his sense of responsibility for his students and a new commitment to the principle of right were behind this experience, which led to his decision for the ministry and the abandonment of law as a career. But as he confessed to his congregation many years later, "I had many and great difficulties on my hands, in respect to the gospel truths. . . . I was coming into religion on the side of reason or philosophy, and, of course had small conception of it as a faith and a supernatural gift to the race. . . . I confess with some mortification, so deep was I in the beggarly elements of the school, that I did not really expect to remain in the ministry long."

There was another conversion in 1848 which his wife described as "the central point in the life of Horace Bushnell." There was much study involved, along with the experience of the death of his little boy, prior to the coming of the light. As his wife awoke one morning, she asked, "What have you seen?" And he replied, "The Gospel!" This was the controlling mystical experience that determined his Christ-centered theology in the remainder of his writings. It led to a faith which he described as "the trusting of one's being to a *being*, there to be rested, kept, guided, moulded, governed, and possessed forever."

This experience was a fulfillment of the many influences in him, pressing him toward an intuitive, immediate knowledge that was superior to understanding or reason, and yet was ultimately reasonable. It was no rational, ontological argument for God but a sense of God's presence, an experience which certifies one's conviction of the reality of the object rather than one's concepts or propositions.⁵⁸¹

Bushnell's description of the third conversion experience used words that were almost identical to Augustine's similar experience: trusting and resting. For both, the third experience was when God broke through, or in, on them. They were both seekers at that point, but both of their encounters were definitely cases of "caught and not taught." In Book X, on the philosophy of memory, Augustine

⁵⁸¹ Miller, "Bushnell, the Family and Children," pp. 1-2.

proclaimed, “I shall know you, my knower, I shall know you, ‘even as I am known.’”⁵⁸² Spence says, “the conversion experience itself was, according to his telling of the story, an historical event, the account in Book Ten is viewed from the standpoint of the soul’s interiority.”⁵⁸³ Vaught dismisses the ideas that the account of his garden conversion in Milan was fabricated or embellished and says that “Augustine himself understands the episode as a divine interjection that transforms his fragmented heart into a center of certainty and serenity.”⁵⁸⁴

For reasons that are more or less obvious, the second conversions are very dissimilar. Each thinker had traveled a much different path. Bushnell’s conversion rose out of a sense of moral responsibility and concern for the influence that his doubts were having upon those who looked to him as a model or leader. His doubts are an intermingling of real doubts about his personal experience with God and doubts related to the methods and message of the Revivalists. His personal doubts were very real on the level that he hungered to have more than an intellectual knowledge of God. He was drawn to the mystery of God and wanted a personal encounter on a mystical-personal level with God. He did not receive that until his “I Have Seen the Gospel” moment, but God did something significant in a little dorm room at Yale that converted him to do right, regardless of feelings. He would point others toward God for the rest of his life. The evidence of the genuineness of this conversion was demonstrated by a complete change in the direction of his career. He

⁵⁸² Augustine, *Confessions*, 10:1:1, p. 229.

⁵⁸³ Spence, *The Logic of Conversion*, p. 17.

⁵⁸⁴ Vaught, *Encounter with God*, p. ix. The rhetorical construction is so remarkable that it may seem embellished. Others, such as Siebach in “Rhetorical Strategies in Book One of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*,” have seen a built-in polemic of the stages of proof for God’s existence in Book I.

laid down his law degree without ever utilizing it and enrolled in divinity school to become a minister. The “call” was now his and not merely what his mother had wanted for him. This prepared him for the third encounter, which Bushnell had in common with Augustine’s second experience in that both thinkers left their original career paths to embrace the ministry.⁵⁸⁵

Augustine’s second experience was different from Bushnell’s in almost every other way. His first conversion experience was not working. He was disillusioned with the Manichees and their philosophies, which had no real answer to the problem of evil. He was weary of the pleasures of the world and the lusts that had a grip on his life. Furthermore, he could not find rest even in the successes of his career. He made a decision to return to the Catholic Church of his mother and of Ambrose. In the Neo-Platonist writings, he found integration for his questions and Christianity. This conversion was concurrent with his choice to sign up in 386 to be in Ambrose’s group of catechumens to be baptized on Easter of 387. Several members spent the winter together in preparation at Cassiciacum. It was this conversion that prepared him for the conversion experience in the Garden of Milan where God intervened in his life and “converted” Augustine to God. The second experience had to do with the mind’s integration and the return to the church. The third experience had to do with God himself and resulted in the priesthood and a vow of celibacy.

⁵⁸⁵ Furthermore, the career path that Augustine left (rhetoric) had similarities with Bushnell’s career in law. The change for Augustine seems more all-encompassing, however, in that his break with his past life of licentiousness included a radical commitment to celibacy for the rest of his life as a part of his commitment to the Lord and to the ministry. It can be argued, however, that the truest test of conversion in terms of concupiscence is not to become a celibate priest set apart from sexuality altogether, but to live out a faithful marriage covenant in the context of ordinate relations, as Bushnell did.

Self-integration is a theme in H. Richard Niebuhr. His triad of natural faith, faith in God, and God as absolute center of value correspond to an Augustinian triad of existence, self-knowledge, and *Summum Bonum*.⁵⁸⁶ Niebuhr's triad can be seen in both Augustine's and Bushnell's journeys. Relation between God and the soul becomes a theme with both of them. After the third conversion in the Garden of Milan, "Augustine is a Christian who subordinated Neo-Platonism to his purposes rather than a Neo-Platonist who disguises himself as a Christian."⁵⁸⁷ His vision at Ostia with his mother is an important encounter that demonstrates that his relationship with God was more important to him than mysticism for mysticism's sake, a struggle that Augustine documented in Book VII. Bushnell's fourth experience also rises out of the relationship he had found with God during his third conversion experience. It also demonstrates that relationship with God in Christ has become his central theme.

From Augustine's teachings about conversion in the *Confessions*, we can learn much. Although Augustine had *aversio-conversio* as his major view of conversion, he had many other images of conversion that rose out of the context of Romans 13:13–14 and other writings of Paul. He also wove themes of conversion throughout the *Confessions* such as the theme represented by gardens and trees, a "dreams and visions" theme, a romantic-love theme, a teacher-student theme, a death–new life theme, and the predominant restless heart theme. Augustine was the first to refer to "inviting Jesus to come into my heart."⁵⁸⁸ Each of the aversion

⁵⁸⁶ Karen Leslie Spear, "Self-integration in Saint Augustine and H. Richard Niebuhr: A Comparison of Christian Moral Philosophies," unpublished dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1994.

⁵⁸⁷ Vaught, *Encounters with God*, p. 9.

⁵⁸⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, 1:5:L5–6, pp. 45–46.

images such as sleeping-waking, sobriety-drunkenness, and night-day, as well as the “taking off–putting on” metaphor are graphic. Like the images of the Prodigal Son, Odysseus, or the lost sheep, they speak of a crisis moment of change or return. The study of Christian conversion should lead one to learn much from the many images or methods of conversion depicted in scripture and likewise reflected in personal experiences described in the *Confessions*. One reason that the church or individual persons do not identify conversion accurately is possibly because only one model, the *aversio-conversio* or the Prodigal Son model, is presented. This model does not adequately reflect the many kinds of conversion encounters and experiences that likely occur within a nurturing process all the time.⁵⁸⁹

Much can be learned from Bushnell’s view of conversion, as well. Bushnell’s view of conversion contains three parts: the “not that” part, the natural acceptance part (consent), and the “little conversion-like crises” part. He also gives a brief explanation of what should make up a natural acceptance–type conversion. Bushnell was reacting to much of the Revivalist movement, so much of his commentary on conversion in *Christian Nurture* falls into the “not that” category. According to Bushnell, conversion was not to be, in many ways, the very things that Augustine had set in motion by his doctrines of original sin and predestination, especially as these were later taken to an extreme in the TULIP Calvinists like Edwards. Bushnell was also opposed to the “aversion” images and paradigms because he did not believe that

⁵⁸⁹ There are some who experience spirituality primarily from a cerebral approach and whose “conversion” will only closely identify with the “change of aspect” idea favored in Books X-XIII of the *Confessions*.

a child needed to ever go astray in the first place. Bushnell did not deny the usefulness of Revivalist preaching or the practices for effecting adult conversions when needed. The world they lived in, however, consisted of predominantly Christian families and even the “converts” were largely backsliders and not new converts altogether. His ideas regarding conversion did not anticipate a mainly non-Christian, a-Christian, or even anti-Christian culture as the future would hold (and also as the one in which Augustine lived).

No one knew and understood better the “winning” of children to the Lord who were born into Christian families than Horace Bushnell. In these homes, they should be baptized as infants and treated as full members in God’s family, and then, as their will became separated from the organic unity of the parents in later childhood or early adolescence, the child should naturally accept what had been chosen for him or her by the parents from birth. Children should exhibit “Truth, purity, firmness, love to Jesus, all that belongs to a formal conversion and more, is centralized thus in the soul, as a kind of ingrown habit.”⁵⁹⁰ So he explains that the children are all converted by the converting grace of the home that they live in and the house itself becomes the “converting ordinance.”⁵⁹¹

In this environment, change is small and in little increments in keeping with the age and development of the child. It is not a melodramatic account of change like the *Confessions* of Augustine or like the Revivalists prescribed. Bushnell says,

⁵⁹⁰ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 62.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*

It is a delicate matter for children to navigate in this rough sea of conversional tossings, where the stormy wind lifteth up the waves, and they go up to the heaven, and go down again to the depth, and their soul is melted because of trouble. There is, for the little ones, a more quiet way of induction. Show them how to be good, and then, when they fail, how God will help them if they ask him and trust in him for help. In this manner they will be passing little conversion- like crises all the time.⁵⁹²

A generation after Bushnell came George Albert Coe, professor of Christian Education. Coe was a liberal theorist. His theory purported that we all educationally and spiritually grow through multiple small conversions. His inaugural address at Union Theological seminary was titled “Can Religion Be Taught?” He originated the “caught versus taught”⁵⁹³ concept. Dr. Bushnell was the forerunner of these ideas. We know what Bushnell’s answer to Coe’s inaugural address would be: There is nothing that needs to be caught if it is properly taught, but religion certainly can and must be taught in order for it to be caught.

Comparison of Views on Nurture

Bushnell’s view of Christian nurture permeates his book, whereas Augustine’s view on nurture is not as explicit. Bushnell’s view is expressed in his initial premise:

What is the true idea of Christian education?—I answer in the following proposition, which it will be the aim of my argument to establish, viz. *That the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise.* In other words, the aim, effort, and expectation should be, not, as is commonly assumed, that the child is to grow up in sin, to be converted after he comes to a mature age; but that he is to open on the world as one that is spiritually renewed, not remembering the time when he went through a

⁵⁹² Ibid., p. 329.

⁵⁹³ Coe, G. A., *Can religion be taught? The Inauguration of George Albert Coe, Ph.D., LL.D., as Skinner and McAlpine Professor of Practical Theology* (New York, NY: Union Theological Seminary).

technical experience, but seeming rather to have loved what is good from his earliest years.⁵⁹⁴

His proposition presumes a Christian home with Christian parents (both if possible) who create a Christian environment for the child. The grace of God works in and through this plan to save the child according to Bushnell.

Jerry McCant writes, “The status of children in the economy of God’s grace was not a question for Bushnell. A child is in the state of grace even when he has not been ‘converted’; the state of grace must be nurtured.”⁵⁹⁵ Bushnell carefully lays out instructions and rationale for nurturing the child through the crucial first three years called “the impressionable years” in which he says more than half of the parent’s success lies⁵⁹⁶; then through “the tutorial years” of childhood⁵⁹⁷; and also through the adolescent years when the child’s own will begins to emerge from the organic unity of the family, parents, and home.⁵⁹⁸ The delineation and naming of these stages in Christian nurture was an early theory of child development and marks Bushnell as a significant child development theorist. For Bushnell, development as a Christian happens purposefully but very gradually in small, almost imperceptible stages. He writes,

The true, and only true answer is, that the nurture of the soul and character is to begin just when the nurture of the body begins. It is first to be infantile nurture—as such, Christian; then to be a child’s nurture; then to be a youth’s

⁵⁹⁴ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 4.

⁵⁹⁵ Jerry W. McCant, “Nurture is Not the Problem,” *Christian Education Journal*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1984, p. 58.

⁵⁹⁶ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 211–212.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

nurture—advancing by imperceptible gradations, if possible, according to the gradations and stages of the growth, or progress toward maturity.⁵⁹⁹

Bushnell says that the child will thus move from faith in parents (as gods in a sense) to faith in their parent’s God, and finally to a faith that is their own.⁶⁰⁰ Bushnell encouraged a graded curriculum for guiding children in their religious thinking and development. They could move from concepts such as light to love and then to God.⁶⁰¹ Miller sums up Bushnell’s view on nurture:

God is at work in the processes of nurture. God desires that children will grow up in piety and makes available whatever grace is necessary to accomplish this goal. Because of the organic relationships in the family, the Holy Spirit works through parental ministries to the child. The promise is to the parents and their children. Thus, children are not to be educated into sin and future conversion but into “holy virtue.” The scriptures are clear. We are to “train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). “Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). If we are successful in this kind of nurture, it will support the hope that society may be permeated with Christian virtue, whereas, if sin is the expected result of nurture, at best we can hope for a world divided between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. Thus we have confidence in the organic law whereby parents pass on their faith to their children, as described in II Timothy: “The unfeigned faith, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and, I am persuaded, in thee also” (II Tim. 1:5).⁶⁰²

Bushnell believed that the home he had grown up in was a reflection of this. His wife and he had successfully created such a home for their children as well. He identified what he called “ostrich nurture,” which was not effective Christian education; it could, in fact, accomplish the exact opposite. He also listed all the parental qualifications for success in nurturing children “in” the Lord. He said,

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 198.

⁶⁰⁰ Miller, “Bushnell, the Family and Children,” p. 260.

⁶⁰¹ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 204.

⁶⁰² Miller, “Horace Bushnell: Prophet to America’s Children,” p. 260.

[T]his is the very idea of Christian education, that it begins with nurture or cultivation. And the intention is that the Christian life and spirit of the parents, which are in and by the Spirit of God, shall flow into the mind of the child, to blend with his incipient and half-formed exercises; that they shall thus beget their own good within him—their thoughts, opinions, faith, and love, which are to become a little more, and yet a little more, his own separate exercise, but still the same in character.⁶⁰³

The home that Augustine grew up in, on the other hand, would have failed Bushnell's criteria in many ways. Church, school, and home were all defective in nurturance; yet each had some redeeming qualities, as has been observed. He went away from the Lord and the church. He moved away from his roots and abandoned his mother, the greatest symbol of his nurturance at the time. Yet he shared how she sought him on a whole different continent. Behind his writing is the message that God is the one who sought him, found him, and “won” him back by love. Many have said that Augustine's repository for Christian nurture was the church; this is more obvious in his later writings, especially after the “state” had failed. He was instrumental in establishing the forerunner of the parochial school system.⁶⁰⁴ Kevane identified Augustine's philosophy of nurture through the *paideia* and *anti-paideia* (instruction and nurture) of the Christian church.⁶⁰⁵ His emphasis was on correct doctrine in order to establish the faith of the child. He was concerned especially about the catechumenate; but he addressed all ages, including adults who may be in that category. A comparison of Bushnell with Augustine at that point reveals that, for Bushnell,

⁶⁰³ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 21.

⁶⁰⁴ John Charles Maloney, “The Underlying Principles of the Educational Philosophy of Saint Augustine Applied to the Augustinian Educational Institutions of the United States of America,” unpublished dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1968, p. 31.

⁶⁰⁵ Kevane, “Paideia and Anti-Paideia.”

[T]he nurturing process in family and church includes teaching, but the emphasis should be on feeling rather than doctrine. All teaching should be suitable to the age of the child. . . . He saw clearly that catechisms led to apathy as well as to premature opinions. What is important is that children be reinforced in what has been learned from their parents, for children only slowly grow beyond the authority of their parents.⁶⁰⁶

These two viewpoints may seem to be opposites, but Larry Richards identifies the element that ties it all together for home, church, or school.

If we accept socialization as more appropriate than “education” for communicating Christian faith as life, we are immediately forced to look to the home when we consider Christian education of children. There is no question that parents still are the primary socialization agents for young children. This does not mean that they are [or should be] the *sole* socializing agents. Other adults can be significant in a child’s life, including a Christian teacher. At the same time, the role of parents is *primary*.⁶⁰⁷

Augustine viewed the church as the main repository of Christian nurture, but that describes only one aspect of Augustine’s theory of nurture. The *Confessions* demonstrate that he saw God as the real source for Christian nurture; the church functions as God’s body on earth (1:11:17). His view of Christ as the teacher, as well as the conversion themes, lead to the conclusion that Augustine believed that the one great dependable source of nurturance in his life was God. Bushnell also saw God as superintending over all nurture. He said, “it must suffice to say generally, that there can be no such thing as a genuine Christian nurture that is out of peace with God’s Providence—in any respect.”⁶⁰⁸ Some believe that the school has become by default the repository for any nurture that happens for many children in our times. But whether it is home, church, or school that is seen as the primary source of education

⁶⁰⁶ Miller, “Horace Bushnell: Prophet to America’s Children,” p. 5.

⁶⁰⁷ Lawrence O. Richards, *Christian Education: Seeking to Become Like Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 194.

⁶⁰⁸ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 221.

and nurture, for Augustine and for Bushnell, God is the Superintendent. Nurture is not the problem, as Jerry McCant says.⁶⁰⁹

The extreme differences in Bushnell's and Augustine's perspectives on nurture and conversion are grounded in their basic presumptions: "After all, there are but two assumptions that one can make about children's salvation. Either they will grow up as believers, or they will not."⁶¹⁰ George Albert Coe went to the far extreme of teaching "salvation by education."⁶¹¹ And on the other extreme were men like Jonathan Edwards and Revivalists such as Charles Grandison Finney who taught the once-for-all conversion moment with an accompanying prescribed pattern of adult-level repentance.⁶¹² Both Augustine and Bushnell, while leaning in opposite directions, had a view of nurture that fell within the range of what we would call "spiritual formation."⁶¹³

Overall Comparison

This section takes a big-picture look at Bushnell's and Augustine's philosophies and lives. "Spiritual formation" is a theme that describes their journeys for many reasons. In both cases, their spiritual development was not completed in a one-time experience and it was not reserved to their lives before eighteen years of age. In fact, most of the

⁶⁰⁹ McCant, "Nurture is Not the Problem," p. 66.

⁶¹⁰ Susan D. Finley, *Belonging Before Conversion* (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2001), p. 17.

⁶¹¹ Sparkman, "The Salvation and Nurture of the Child of God," pp. 193–196.

⁶¹² Hewitt, "Regeneration and Morality."

⁶¹³ Ronald Edward Staley, "The Integration of Contemplation and Action: A Portfolio Approach to Spiritual Formation in the Seminary," unpublished dissertation, Boston University School of Theology, 1995.

significant spiritual events in their lives happened after they grew up and left home. Their philosophies of conversion and of nurture were formed by their life experiences until they were sixty-four and older. In their thought on these two concepts (conversion and nurture), they each had a concept of “an age of accountability.” We saw that as young Augustine grew up, his conscience gradually awakened. As bishop, Augustine was very much in tune with “memory” (Book X). He shares the subtle concerns that gradually awoke his conscience until the distinct moment, the pear stealing episode when he was about fifteen (2:4), when he knew right from wrong independently from any other source of moral guidance.

The factors that “formed” him toward the understanding of the theft of the pears as a “sin,” for which he viewed himself as personally responsible, started in early childhood. His deferred baptism and his developing awareness of what that meant in the light of original sin (1:11) is one example. Another is his attraction to “the shows”; he says that his sin in that case was in “going against the commands of my parent and of those teachers. . . . I was disobedient, not out of desire for better things, but out of love for play.”⁶¹⁴ Referring to those teachers, he says “yet we sinned by writing, reading and thinking over our lessons less than was required of us.”⁶¹⁵ He follows along a course of conscience that takes him to confess the guilt of actual activities such as the reading of immoral literature (1:16), acts of malice (1:18) toward others, lies to his parents (1:19:30), and thefts from their cellar or table (1:19:30). But these he attributes not to boyish innocence but to some kind of

⁶¹⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, 1:10:16.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:9:15.

“symbol of humility found in the child’s estate that you, our King, approved when you said, ‘of such is the kingdom of heaven.’”⁶¹⁶ These are the things that led him to replace proper loves with lusts (2:2:2) and to the incident of the stolen fruit (2:4:9). This was his first act of full accountability, and he analyzes it from every angle as such, not even allowing himself “off the hook” for succumbing to peer pressure.

For both Augustine and Bushnell, much hinges on this concept of the age of accountability. For Bushnell, however, the child is within the scope of the will of the parents in the organic unity of the family. Only gradually does the child’s own will evolve and over the course of a long time. In the early, impressionable years, the child has “no responsible will” of his or her own.⁶¹⁷ For Bushnell, the child born into a Christian home is definitely already in the kingdom of God.⁶¹⁸ The task of the parents is not to break the child’s will, “but to bend rather, to draw the will down, or away from self-assertion toward self-devotion, to teach it the way of submitting to wise limitations, and raise it into the great and glorious liberties of a state of loyalty to God.”⁶¹⁹ The child will eventually be emancipated when he or she leaves “the age of existence in the will of the parent, and the age of will and personal choice in the child” comes.⁶²⁰ When a child such as Augustine goes astray, Bushnell presents a rather hard but realistic explanation.

Thus we have a way of wondering that the children of this or that family should turn out so poorly, but the real fact is, probably, if we knew it, that

⁶¹⁶ Ibid, 1:19:30.

⁶¹⁷ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 207.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., p. 210.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., p. 208.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., p. 199.

what we call their turning out, is only their growing out, in just that which was first grown in, by the mismanagement of their infancy and childhood.⁶²¹

And, indeed, in some ways that is a fair assessment of the home that Augustine grew up in. Findley Edge understands and resolves this issue:

The difficulty arises in trying to make the matter of accountability a particular point or a certain observable age. We must recognize the difficulty if not the impossibility of doing this. However, when we take the long look, we have to agree there is a time in the individual's life before which he is not responsible. On the other hand there is a time in the individual's life after which he is responsible. The fact that we are not able to pin-point and describe when and how this change takes place does not nullify the validity of the change.⁶²²

Furthermore, it seems that a fair criticism we may offer to this is that we must have an answer that is universal on this issue. It cannot apply only to children born in Christian homes.

One of the things emphasized in both theories, however, is the importance of the parents in nurture and for "conversion." Both of their mothers were primary influencers upon their lives. But it's not just the mother that is important; according to Bushnell, the father plays an equal part. Jerry McCant writes,

Life is marked by stages, crises, and passages. The conflicts which Erikson called to our attention are never finally resolved. Adults continue to have conflicts and they continue trying to resolve the identity crisis. We are always becoming, but we never arrive. Adults are growing and developing and religious education should prepare to meet the challenge. Such a view of adult religious education indicates the need for male and female nurturers. Research shows that children do need their fathers and that fathers are fully capable of nurturing children.⁶²³

⁶²¹ Ibid., p. 210.

⁶²² Edge, "Christian Nurture and Conversion," p. 190.

⁶²³ McCant, "Nurture is Not the Problem," p. 65.

This is not the time to abandon Bushnell's model. Myriads of churches such as the one that I serve in an urban area touch the lives of many children from unchurched homes. There is no religious education at all for these children if the church is not willing to get involved. The model that Bushnell provided for us isn't perfect, but it can be useful. It fit his time and culture, but ours is different. We cannot simply adopt his model for religious education. McCant contends that it must be enlarged. He says, "Since all the research indicates that children need nurture, and that in fact all persons still require a form of nurture, a modified 'Christian nurture' model is both valid and necessary. It must be enlarged to include both men and women as nurturers and all ages as the ones being nurtured, but the model can still be used."⁶²⁴ I would add that it needs to be adjusted from an ideal picture centered on a loving, caring two-parent (father-mother) home and family to a reality-based theory for praxis in our present-day world.

If nurture is not the problem, but is in fact a part of the solution, it is fair to ask whether conversion is still needed when nurture is performed correctly. Both of these two books demonstrate that conversion is still a legitimate need for persons who do not come under the umbrella of proper Christian nurture. Bushnell's life and theories showed that the concept and experience of conversion were still very important. Bushnell may not have experienced such a cataclysmic event in life-change conversion as did Augustine, but it was just as real to him. Both men's theories demonstrate that conversion can be a natural part of a person's spiritual

⁶²⁴ Ibid., p. 66.

development, maybe even more so than when it occurs only once in a person's lifetime. Although the concept of conversion has to do with "being saved" theologically, it has a relational and developmental meaning both vertically (toward God) as well as horizontally.

Findley Edge says, "To insist on the necessity for a conversion experience does not mean for the child that Jesus does not still love him or is not still the child's best friend."⁶²⁵ He says that "teaching the child in his earliest years, in the home and in the church that God loves him and that Jesus is his best friend is not mere conditioning the child for some future experience. . . . No! It simply means that the child is conditioned in a different direction. Conditioning, that is, teaching a basic attitude toward life, God, and religion is inevitable."⁶²⁶ All the experiences and relationships of the home the child lives in most the time will both consciously and especially unconsciously form the attitudes of that child. It's not so much a question of whether the parents or significant others in the home, church, or school influence them, but *how* their teaching will consciously and unconsciously mold the child's true understanding of God and Christ in relation to our best understanding and insight. The conversion experience for a child who develops through nurture the right attitudes still holds value in that it is an important time or moment when "the child's religion is transformed from a second-hand to a first-hand experience. . . . Religion, to be experiential, must be self-chosen. . . . The individual must be left free to make his

⁶²⁵ Edge, "Christian Nurture and Conversion," p. 196.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

decision at whatever time he feels impelled to make it.”⁶²⁷ It is inevitable that a path be chosen, whether it is identical to the one the traveler is on or a different one. Edge says,

[T]he child is subject to the influence and the teaching of the Christian fellowship. This nurture is not to be minimized for it will be one factor (though not the only one) influencing the child’s future, personal decision. The same is true regarding the family. The family is a powerful force influencing the child but the family cannot make the child’s decision for him. After the church, the family, and all other influences have done all they can for the child, the child’s relationship with God in Christ is sealed—and must be—by his own free, conscious, voluntary choice. This is the conversion experience.⁶²⁸

A significant element of this study is Christianity’s development into a fully organized religion because of the actions of Constantine and Augustine. In just three short generations, Christianity passed from being primarily an living organism that centered on a personal relationship with God through following Jesus to being primarily an organization with the final codification of its doctrines, polity, and ceremonies. Augustine played a very large part in the final phase of that transition. The issues that Augustine and Bushnell wrestled with are all questions that are magnified when Christianity is viewed as a religion instead of simply a relationship.⁶²⁹ In this change, the church went from testimony and narrative of personal relationships with God and Jesus gradually to an increased concern for correct doctrines and creeds. The fourth century, after Constantine “legalized” Christianity, was an apex in Christian history for Councils that established orthodox

⁶²⁷ Ibid., pp. 197–198.

⁶²⁸ Ibid. p. 199.

⁶²⁹ Figure 2 in the Appendix demonstrates this change and trend.

creeds. The next developmental stage led to an increasing interest in the organization of Christianity's sacraments and ceremonies. Finally, it established its polity and its *regula* or "rule." Each of these factors was at work at all times in the early church. But they remained more in the right priorities and the dynamic dimensions. We can see that in the time from Constantine to Augustine (three generations), the evidence of what took preeminence and what fell more in the background shifted visibly, so that the "relationship" aspect became less important with each generation. As it did, the lower-level aspects each moved to the top one generation at a time until the lowest became the highest.⁶³⁰ It is possible, and it was seen, that in later generations of the Catholic Church, such as during the Middle Ages, the relationship aspect disappeared almost completely. In such a view, the *Confessions* could be seen as a clarion call not just for individuals to experience "conversion," but also for the whole organization to turn back to a love relationship with God through Christ.

In the *Confessions* is a story of the Christian church developing and becoming more fully "organized" as a religion, while it is intended to first most be a relationship with God. But it is also somewhat the story of any new convert and what can happen in the second, third, and subsequent generations of their spiritual heritage. It becomes a challenge to lead each new generation into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as the first generation has experienced it and not have it just become a "religion." In

⁶³⁰ This represents both a generalization and a trend only. It is an observation that is not substantiated except through research into the lives of these two theorists (especially that of Augustine). The point here is that the lives and teachings of Augustine and Horace Bushnell, demonstrate that there are ways both through nurture and conversion that the trend away from a personal relationship with God can be avoided and the individual does not have to be a part of this potentially negative change. However, we have also seen that without proper nurture and conversion, the Christian faith might be only a few generations from losing its vital personal connection with God.

the church realm as in the personal dimension, periodic revivals or times of renewal are needed to recapture a person, generation, or era in church or personal history from the natural pattern that can occur even with the best nurture. Bushnell lived at such a time, as exemplified by the Revivalist movement of his era. Overall, that movement was good because it renewed spirituality, but Bushnell reacted against its imbalances. The Catholic Church too, has seen many waves of renewal across the years to bring the emphasis of a vital personal relationship with God back to the foremost importance it deserves.

On a personal level, all Christian parents using the best nurture of which they may be capable still face a challenge in leading their children into a personal “heart knowledge” or experience with God. Monica did. She found herself living in that real-life transitional phase. The testimony of her own childhood nurture is recorded as follows:

Monica had been reared in a godly home. Her father was a faithful Christian and an active member of his church. But her parents, for whatever reasons, turned over to others the major responsibility of rearing Monica and her sisters. Their greatest training came from a devoted household servant, who lovingly cared for all the children with unusual wisdom and discipline.⁶³¹

So the upbringing was not “according to Hoyle” as Bushnell would present the ideal. Perhaps because of the attention of the godly caretaker that helped to raise her, Monica came to a strong faith in the Lord and an intimate personal relationship with God that would carry her through many trials and troubles over the course of her life. At least in her family of origin, the “relationship over religion” had carried to the

⁶³¹ George W. Rice, *Monica: A Prodigal's Praying Mother* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1989), p. 9.

next generation in spite of the strong tide away from that. The tide was even stronger in the next generation and it took all that she had to see that it had happened with her son Augustine. This she did see in her dying days and then she could rest in peace.

The exact same dynamics were at work in Bushnell in spite of a much better overall nurturance. He struggled with doubts and with finding his own personalized experiences in his faith journey. He says,

[W]hen the question was to be decided whether I should begin the preparation of theology, I was thrown upon a most painful struggle by the very evident, quite incontestable fact that my religious life was utterly gone down. And the pain it cost me was miserably enhanced by the disappointment I must bring on my noble Christian mother by withdrawing myself from the ministry. I had run to no dissipation; I had been a church-going, thoughtful man. My very difficulty was that I was too thoughtful, substituting thought for everything else, and expecting so intently to dig out a religion by my head that I was pushing it all the while practically away. Unbelief, in fact, had come to be my element. My mother felt the disappointment bitterly, but spoke never a word of complaint or upbraiding. Indeed, I have sometimes doubted whether God did not help her to think that she knew better than I did what my becoming was to be.⁶³²

The blending of conversion and nurture in these two thinkers and their lives is not linear. It must be viewed as more of a matrix. A conversion is not a dot on a line, or two or three marker events on the road of their lives. Neither is nurturance a straight-line process. It is not even a set of tasks that, when performed adequately, produce the required results. Spiritual growth is dynamic, fluid, and interconnected on many dimensions, with many motivations and with many interconnected relationships internally, externally, and supernaturally.

⁶³² Cheney, *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, p. 32.

What appears to be a very dramatic conversion may, when studied, prove to have been an extremely predictable outcome. What appears to be a very slight change–type conversion that more naturally unfolds may, when likewise studied, produce more dramatic undercurrents that were in play than one could readily observe on the surface. This may potentially, in some ways, be the end result of this study. We know that Revivalism has led to much social reform.⁶³³ We also know that a renewed emphasis on Christian nurture can give birth to a Social Gospel that helps the poor and needy members of a society.⁶³⁴

The lives of Augustine and of Horace Bushnell only intersected once, and then just barely. On October 18, 1845, Bushnell came to Milan, Italy, where Ambrose had pastored and where Augustine’s famous conversion had occurred in the Garden.⁶³⁵ He came in search of health; what he found was a Cathedral that so exceeded in beauty and majesty anything that he could describe that he declared it may have been the work of angels. There, in a way, he met Ambrose, Augustine, and God. His letter to his wife said,

You are not willing to look away from the whole to scan the parts. You do not wish to take notes and catalogue the particulars of any kind; and yet, if you can bring yourself to do it, you are still more amazed and bewildered. So many statues, all in the highest style of art; so many bass-reliefs; such richness of coloring and skill of distribution in the vault, which hangs like a third heaven above; the windows so richly colored, and deepening their tints of light from yellow to purple as you pass towards the altar. . . . And, more than all, if you will proceed to what is higher, you may ask what relation such a structure has to the simple doctrine of Jesus and the uses of a Christian

⁶³³ Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957).

⁶³⁴ Shalier Matthews, *The Faith of Modernism* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1924). Refer also to the discussion of Rausenbusch in chapter 1 of this paper.

⁶³⁵ Cheney, *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, pp. 147–149.

assembly. Still, the effect is so great that criticism, too, is overpowered, and you prefer to feel.⁶³⁶

The lives of both of these men have continued to affect others centuries later. Bushnell was a lover of nature ever since he had been a young farm boy and preferred to say his personal prayers to God by a gray boulder where he would watch the sun rise or by a certain haystack in the fields more than in the church or in his home.⁶³⁷ He spent his adult life trying to get the leaders of the community, state, and nation to establish a public park system. He was a prophet in that he foresaw the modern problems of pollution and the need to preserve nature. In 1858, he wrote that “it is not absurd to imagine the human race, at some future time, when the population and the works of industry are vastly increased, kindling so many fires, by putting wood and coal in contact with fire, as to burn up or finally vitiate the world’s atmosphere.”⁶³⁸ In 1861, ill health forced Bushnell to retire from the ministry, but he remained active in the intellectual and civic life of Hartford. Even as he lay dying, he led a drive to transform the town dump into the park that now commemorates him. It is indeed appropriate that his most enduring monument should be a park in the middle of a busy city, for he believed that man should search for God not mainly in books, but in nature and in human activity.⁶³⁹ Two days before his passing, the city’s leaders came to his home with the paperwork to show him that they had approved the nation’s first public park and that it would be named after him. Similarly, when the

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶³⁸ Horace Bushnell, *Nature and the Supernatural* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1858), p. 45.

⁶³⁹ James P. Walsh, *Horace Bushnell* (Connecticut Heritage Gateway, 2003 CT Heritage). Retrieved September 26, 2007, from http://www.ctheritage.org/encyclopedia/ct1818_1865/bushnell.htm.

Spanish explorers initially came to North America and established the first official city on this continent, they chose to honor St. Augustine and name it after him. He was the greatest Saint that they could think of. St. Augustine, Florida, today has six public parks! Bushnell Park in Hartford, Connecticut, still does not contain a monument or statue of Bushnell, yet the legacy of both of these men have continued to this very day.⁶⁴⁰

Educational Theories

This section compares the experiences and views of Augustine and Bushnell with some contemporary educational theories related to religious development. We have seen that Bushnell's insights into the nurture of children anticipated later research in several ways. "Against the background of revivals, of treatment of children as sinners in need of conversion and unable to do anything about it until a later age, and a theology of predestination and repression, Bushnell was a prophet to and for America's children. He called for an emancipation from fear and for an atmosphere in which children could grow up as Christians, within the organic union of the family and the church."⁶⁴¹ This section examines his theories of development through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood from the perspective of later educational

⁶⁴⁰ "Park History," retrieved July 11, 2010, from http://www.bushnellpark.org/Content/Park_History.asp:

Andrew Jackson Downing (1815–1852) was the primary influence in the creation of a national park system in the United States. By 1848, he was advocating the creation of urban parks financed by private funds for the enjoyment of select groups of people. But he never advocated publicly financed parks. . . . [R]ecognizing the need for open space in Hartford, CT, the Reverend Horace Bushnell presented an idea that had not been suggested in any other American city—the creation of a public park, financed by public funds.

⁶⁴¹ Miller, "Horace Bushnell: Prophet to America's Children," pp. 6–7.

theories. Augustine and Bushnell are used as case studies in that their experiences are related to the theories. Only concepts of conversion and nurture are examined; a comprehensive comparison is beyond the scope of this study.

The theory of Erik Erikson is exceptionally applicable to this study: “As the contemporary psychologist Erik Erikson has suggested, each of the significant stages of a person’s life is not only temporal and spatial, but also poses an existential crisis that demands a resolution.”⁶⁴² Furthermore, Vaught writes,

This crisis mentality is appropriate to Augustine, for he understands his life as a series of conflicts that he must resolve to become who he is. The crises that define Augustine’s development are important, not simply as episodes, but because they allow him to understand and to embrace the meaning of his life. It is here that the stages of his life and the crises to which they point have a bearing on the vertical dimension of his experience.⁶⁴³

Bushnell’s writings often relate to Erikson’s theory of eight psychosocial crises that constitute the developmental outcomes for the stages of life. Miller wrote that Bushnell:

anticipated in many ways what we have learned from other sources about the significance of parental care of young children, the development of religious faith in children, and the importance of a Christian understanding of education and nurture. . . . [H]e did not believe that children grow up in sin and need to be converted at a later age, although he saw clearly that there would be less dramatic crises of faith throughout their lives. . . . At the heart of his theory was a psychological and theological understanding of the family.⁶⁴⁴

Bushnell recognized an organic law that is a work in the development of children. It was primarily from the parents in the home; and, to a lesser degree in his observation, it was also at work in the church, school, and society. But, especially in

⁶⁴² Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1980), p. 52.

⁶⁴³ Vaught, *The Journey toward God*, p. 6.

⁶⁴⁴ Miller, “Bushnell, the Family and Children,” p. 254.

the first three years of the child's life, the parent holds a power over the child's character development, which he described as greater than just "influence."⁶⁴⁵ He writes that there is a proper individualism that we grow into, but he observed that children do not begin at that point. There are clear parallels between Bushnell's theories on young children and Erikson's first two stages of development: trust versus mistrust (birth to eighteen months) and autonomy versus shame (eighteen months to three years). Bushnell wrote, "Let every Christian father and mother understand, when their child is three years old, that they have done more than half of all they will ever do for his character."⁶⁴⁶

As Bushnell lays out his theory of development in children, he explains that the early years (the age of impressions) gives way to a time of "tutitional influences" in which the child is "between the age of existence in the will of the parent, and the age of the will and personal choice in the child."⁶⁴⁷ This is similar to Erikson's third stage, initiative versus guilt (three to five years). Erikson refers to this as the *play age*; Bushnell also taught the importance of play in children, especially in this age. Bushnell says that this stage of play alone for play's sake gradually advances to a balance of play and productive work in middle childhood.⁶⁴⁸ This is comparable to Erikson's fourth stage, identified as industry versus inferiority (six to twelve years).

⁶⁴⁵ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 76.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 211–212.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 298–299. Bushnell says, "But it is not the whole of life; even to a child, to be indulged in play. There is such a thing as order, no less than such a thing as liberty; and the process of adjustment between those two contending powers, begins at a very early date. Under the law of the house, the school, and of God, the mere play impulse begins very soon to be tempered and moderated by duty . . . when he is old enough, he is set to works of industry."

Our picture of Augustine during these years was as a student who began to excel in Latin grammar and in rhetoric. Our picture of Bushnell is as a hard worker on the farm and in his father's factories, and also as a good student who not only did well at his studies, but also liked them.

Bushnell's later theories of religious education include the instruction that "teaching should be in terms of feeling rather than doctrine. The modern emphasis on affective learning would have appealed to Bushnell."⁶⁴⁹ As Bushnell talked about teaching religious concepts to children in these years, he stressed the importance of keeping the stories about Jesus "concrete" and not making them too abstract.⁶⁵⁰ There is, of course, a very close parallel here with the discoveries of Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget, whose theory shows cognitive development to move from the sensorimotor stage (birth to two years) to the preoperational stage (two to seven years), when sensory knowledge advances to the utilization of "symbols."⁶⁵¹ Both Augustine and Bushnell were very particular in their works to show the importance of language development (symbols) to the development of religious thinking. Piaget's next stage was, in fact, that of concrete operations (seven to eleven years). This is the time when children begin to think logically and even morally in terms of concepts such as justice. But their moral thought is along the lines of "equality" rather than "equity" because the capacity to do abstract manipulation is not achieved until the

⁶⁴⁹ Miller, "Horace Bushnell: Prophet to America's Children," p. 8. For understanding of "affective learning," see Benjamin S. Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1984).

⁶⁵⁰ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 326.

⁶⁵¹ Jean Piaget, *The Essential Piaget*, Howard E. Gruber and J. Jacques Vonèche, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

formal operational stage (age eleven and beyond). Because this information was not fully researched and established in his time, Bushnell must have intuitively known these facts. Many other thinkers seem to have anticipated the knowledge of Erikson and Piaget, but Bushnell seems to have had special insight in these areas.

When Bushnell speaks of sensory concepts such as light leading to an understanding of affective concepts like love and then more abstract concepts like “God,” he is in tune with what we know about the development of religious thinking today.⁶⁵² He did not think that parents should wait to introduce these concepts, but that they should simply understand which ones are grasped earliest. He indicates that the same stories and religious ideas need to be reintroduced at each level to be understood more fully. Jerome Bruner has argued for what Bushnell supported: a graded curriculum or even a spiral theory of curriculum.⁶⁵³ Bushnell said of the child, “His times of thought and appetite must be watched”⁶⁵⁴; he also referred to “points of readiness” for learning as well as affective matters, atmosphere, and stage development that are appropriate for a given lesson or learner. This also is consistent with Bruner and others like Dewey who preceded him in these thoughts.

Research has shown that children develop in their religious thinking through identification with religious practices (Elkind), and meaning making through the content of biblical stories (Fowler). Church education and children’s worship forms

⁶⁵² Ibid., p. 204.

⁶⁵³ Jerome S. Bruner, *The Process of Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 13. “A curriculum as it develops should revisit this basic ideas repeatedly, building upon them until the student has grasped the full formal apparatus that goes with them.”

⁶⁵⁴ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 325.

have been identified and created for age-graded levels⁶⁵⁵ and the faith community (home and church) bears a responsibility to the children and their religious development to utilize the appropriate forms for each age. It is at this point that traditions such those Augustine was a part of as well as those of which Bushnell was a part may need more rites or ways to respond for the various ages and stages of childhood and adolescent development. This had been suggested and creatively facilitated by Sparkman and others.⁶⁵⁶ It is proven that as children cognitively mature, there are changes in the structure of their narratives about God;⁶⁵⁷ and so they need appropriate formal and informal ways to affirm, express, and develop at each level. The Catholic Church of Augustine's childhood could have done a lot more with Augustine as a young catechumenate that may have helped him to avoid a swing away from the faith of his childhood upbringing.

It may be observed that Augustine is or was a classic example of Erikson's "identity crisis." Erikson's psychosocial stage of adolescence is identity versus role confusion (twelve to eighteen years). This "crisis" can extend into young adulthood as the young person begins to settle the tension of intimacy and solidarity versus isolation (eighteen to thirty-five years). The issues of late adolescence do become intermingled in Augustine's case as he settles issues of devotion and fidelity,

⁶⁵⁵ James Russell Moore, *Children's Religious Thinking, Worship Forms, and Church Responsibility: Perception of Children's Worship Leaders*, unpublished dissertation, Deerfield, IL: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1995.

⁶⁵⁶ Sparkman, *The Salvation and Nurture of the Child of God*, pp. 205–221, 239–247.

⁶⁵⁷ Wendy Gay Smoliak, "Thinking About God through Childhood and Adolescence," unpublished dissertation, University of British Columbia (Canada), 1998. This interdisciplinary study examined children's and adolescents' (six to sixteen years) thoughts about God that reflected the child's religious context and related to the child's cognitive maturity and gender.

affiliation and love. He establishes his own philosophy of life in keeping with the *Hortensius* and identifies with the Manicheans. He also at the same time enters into a long-term relationship with a concubine who bears him a son and he begins to care for his little family. As Augustine closes out the young adulthood stage, he makes both a break with the mother of his child and leaves the Manicheans. He finds a new philosophy, Neo-Platonism, and reconnects with the church and with God. He enters the stage of middle adulthood—generativity versus self-absorption or stagnation (thirty-five to fifty-five or sixty-five years). Having chosen celibacy as the final resolution of his intimacy crisis, he devotes his issues of production and care to the Lord, the church, and the monastic order. Augustine is even a magnificent model of wisdom in his late adulthood task of integrity versus despair (fifty-five to sixty-five to death). Books X–XIII of the *Confessions* are exceptionally deep, as are all his later writings, and yet they relate on a practical level to the real world as well.

Bushnell follows a more naturally patterned development through these stages. He has some difficulty finding his own identity because it is in keeping with his mother's "insight" for his life. But once that is resolved, he moves through adulthood in very healthy familial connections on the intimacy issues, pastorally on the generativity issues, and with his writings on the integrity issues. He also leaves a legacy through the establishment of the public park. It is no surprise in the light of James Loder's and James Fowler's models of the elements of conversion in faith development that both of these men did not experience their first conversion until it

was essentially concurrent with the settling of the identity crisis stage.⁶⁵⁸ This is consistent with Loder's transformational theory and with Fowler's structural-developmental theory. In both of these theories, one or two later "conversion"-type moments are expected that would represent the resolution of later stages of development (if a person continued to develop).

Teachers and students have sometimes used Augustine's *Confessions* to help their students reflect on their own intellectual or ethical development. Mark Henninger shows a clear understanding of why students seem to respond to Augustine's life.⁶⁵⁹ Henninger interprets Augustine's development as found in the *Confessions* in the light of the recent work of William G. Perry Jr. on adolescent intellectual and moral development. In their research, Perry and his colleagues found a number of stages that college-age students (ideally) pass through: from dualism to its modification through "multiplicity," to relativism, and finally to a chosen commitment. Henninger shows that Augustine himself went through these positions. He dramatically portrays what goes on in the lives of many adolescents, as the turning points in Augustine's development are pinpointed.⁶⁶⁰

We live in a great time in history to be able to specifically understand the development of children, adolescents, college students, and the passages of adulthood. It is amazing that Augustine was able to identify six stages of

⁶⁵⁸ Aubrey Perry Hancock, "An Investigation of the Element of Conversion in the Faith Development Theories of James Loder and James Fowler with Implications for Adolescent Christian Education," unpublished dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1992.

⁶⁵⁹ Mark G. Henninger, "The Adolescent's Making of Meaning: The Pedagogy of Augustine's *Confessions*," *Journal of Moral Education*, vol. 18, January 1989, pp. 32-44.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

development in the *Confessions*: infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, main adulthood and older adulthood. Bushnell also had rare insight, especially into the characteristics of the stages of childhood and into moral development. McCant writes,

Around the turn of the century, child development theories came into their own. Psychologists talked about *stages* of child development, but for a long time it was assumed that development ceased at about age 18, and adulthood was a static state of existence . . . all of that has drastically changed. Adult developmental psychology has become an exciting area of research and discovery. It is now clear that adulthood has its crises and stages of development and it is not nearly so static as psychologists once thought.⁶⁶¹

The moral reasoning theory of Lawrence Kohlberg and the faith development theory of James Fowler each identify six stages. Bushnell's progression from faith in the parents, to faith in the parent's god, to faith in God can be seen in Fowler's stage 0—"Primal or Undifferentiated" faith (birth to two years), stage 1—"Intuitive-Projected" faith (ages three to seven), and stage 2—"Mythic-Literal" faith (mostly in school children).⁶⁶² In both Kohlberg's stage three (interpersonal accord) and Fowler's stage three ("Synthetic-Conventional" faith), conformity and social roles characterize the typically young adolescent's development. The peer group is very significant and we can see that young Augustine's pear-stealing incident at around age fifteen fits the characteristics of this stage. In his reflection upon his involvement in that activity, Augustine observes that he does not think that he would have done something like that had he been alone.⁶⁶³

⁶⁶¹ McCant, "Nurture is Not the Problem," p. 85.

⁶⁶² James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1995).

⁶⁶³ Augustine, *Confessions*, 2:8:16.

Kohlberg's six stages are grouped into three levels: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional.⁶⁶⁴ Each level has two stages. It would be an exercise in projection to see the three conversions of Augustine and of Bushnell in these three levels, but there are some points of identification. When Augustine makes his decision to join the Manicheans, it is, in part, a venture in Epicurean or possibly even hedonistic philosophy that motivates him. He could possibly be asking, "What's in it for me?" This question represents a self-interest orientation on Kohlberg's stage two of level one, although these events came after the pear-stealing episode. When Bushnell joins the church, it may be a stage four acquiescence to the social-order orientation. Then, years later, when he experiences his conversion at a revival time at Yale, it is definitely beyond level four. He is not making the decision from a law-and-order framework, but is doing so within a social-contract orientation (level three, stage five) due to his influence and his responsibility to his friends who are looking to him as an example or role model.

It seems that the angst and struggle that Fowler associates with his stage 4—"Individuative-Reflective" faith—is being resolved at that moment in Bushnell's dorm room. The same thing happens in Augustine's second conversion. Both of their "doubts" are dissolved at the time of their second conversion experiences.⁶⁶⁵ Fowler's stage 5 ("Conjunctive" faith) has sometimes been associated with what we know as a "mid-life" crisis.⁶⁶⁶ It acknowledges paradox and transcendence relating

⁶⁶⁴ Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development, Vol. 1: The Philosophy of Moral Development* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

⁶⁶⁵ See Figure 4 in the Appendix of this paper.

⁶⁶⁶ James Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), pp. 102–115.

reality behind the symbols of inherited systems. Perhaps some of that is what is behind Bushnell's "I Have Seen the Gospel" conversion.

It seems certain that Augustine's Garden of Milan ("Tolle Lege") conversion ushered him into the ability to function for the rest of his life in what Kohlberg called a universal ethical principle-driven moral reasoning (stage six). This corresponds with Fowler's "Universalizing" faith (stage six), which he says some may call "enlightenment." Augustine had wrestled with issues of free will and predestination. It is at that moment that he reached what Immanuel Kant referred to as his "categorical imperative."⁶⁶⁷ His universal principle from then on is God as his *Summum Bonum* (highest good) and the *magister interior* (inward teacher) is what categorically guides him in an absolute way. He begins to be more and more moved in the direction of predestination as he lives out the rest of his life from this "principle."⁶⁶⁸ Bushnell may also have reached stage six and I think that is what he was expressing by his fourth "encounter," when he states that he has been captured by the view of Christ as the "Vicarious Sacrifice," which he listed in his testimony with his three "conversions." That becomes Bushnell's universalized faith, and as a principle it guides him morally since he described himself living it out as he is identified with and in Christ.

⁶⁶⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1964). "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."

⁶⁶⁸ Spear, "Self-Integration in Saint Augustine and H. Richard Niebuhr." Spear says that Augustine's triad provides a basis for comparison with Niebuhr's process of self-integration: natural faith; faith in God; and God as absolute center of value. These views were also adapted to a theory of moral development by drawing upon the theories of Kohlberg and Fowler.

Kohlberg postulated one transition between stages four and five that had enough characteristics to be unofficially called stage 4½ or 4+.⁶⁶⁹ The description of this transitional phase seems to fit Augustine at a certain point in his life because the theory is that as a person is disassociating from the “law and order” reasoning of stage four and before he or she reaches the “social contract”–driven reasoning of stage five, the transitional phase is demonstrated by a concern over culpability within society or even of a society itself. Augustine did go through that semi-phase. Furthermore, there is a similarity between Kohlberg’s hypothetical stage seven of transcendental morality⁶⁷⁰ and what happened to Augustine as a result of his vision at Ostia with his mother just before she died there. If Kohlberg could revise Maslow’s hierarchy⁶⁷¹ and add self-transcendence at the top of the ladder above self-actualization, he could perhaps point to Augustine after that vision as an historical example. Kohlberg’s work was criticized by Carol Gilligan as being androcentric and overly emphasizing justice to the exclusion of other values.⁶⁷² Her work has formed the basis, in reaction to Kohlberg, for what has become known as the *ethics of care*. Bushnell’s emphasis on nurture was a reaction to a certain idea of “conversion,” which he criticized, in part, for also being too male-oriented in its expected responses toward God. Fowler’s theories have also come under criticism, one complaint being that his structural approach does not do justice to the affective, dynamic, and

⁶⁶⁹ Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development, Vol. 1: The Philosophy of Moral Development* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁷¹ Abraham H. Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” *Psychological Review*, vol. 50, 1943, pp. 370–396.

⁶⁷² Carol A. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

paradoxical features of the Christian faith.⁶⁷³ Both Bushnell and Augustine certainly portray those aspects of development in the two books reviewed for this study.

One idea in Piaget's cognitive theory is reflected in Augustine's late-adolescent moral decisions that carried into his young adulthood. That was the idea of disequilibrium.⁶⁷⁴ Whenever he would hit that part of the pendulum swing of his development, Augustine would attach himself to a person or group as a symbol of "nurture" in his life: the Manicheans, the concubine, the Neo-Platonists, Alypius and Nebridius, Ambrose and the catechumenates, his mother, and later those members of the priesthood and the monastic order.

Observations for Use in Christian Education

As we come to the close of this study, we want to ask what has been learned that is useful for application in Christian Education. This study of the theory of Christian conversion and Christian nurture in Augustine's *Confessions* and in *Christian Nurture* by Horace Bushnell has touched on many topics. Some of these are types and images of conversion, crisis versus process, caught versus taught, liberalism and modernism, what Christian nurture is and what it is not, the nature of truth and the curriculum for education, sacred versus secular, infant baptism and believer baptism, passages of childhood, adolescence and adulthood, the repository for education, the ideal versus

⁶⁷³ Laurie Antero Oikarinen, *Ihmisen Uskon Kehitys: James W. Fowlerin Teorian Konsistenssin Analyysi*, unpublished dissertation, Helsingin Yliopisto (Finland), 1993. Also see Victor Clore, *Faith Development in Adults: Scale of Measurement and Relation to Attachment*, unpublished dissertation for Wayne State University, 1997.

⁶⁷⁴ Steve Fortosis and Ken Garland, "Adolescent Cognitive Development, Piaget's Idea of Disequilibrium, and the Issue of Christian Nurture," *Religious Education*, vol. 85, no. 4, Fall 1990, pp. 631-644.

the real, the rational and the mystical, the church as organism and as organization, and those who leave the faith and those who stay. Without venturing into areas that would be simply projection or speculation, there are still several beneficial generalizations that can be made for the advancement of this topic.

By way of brief review, remember that Augustine and Bushnell both grew up “in the church” or “in the faith.” This study did not discuss those who are outside the faith, although Bushnell did address that group; he argued that the Revivalists’ methods would be best utilized with that demographic. Furthermore, it is important to recall that Augustine grew up in a home in which only one parent was a Christian, whereas both of Bushnell’s parents were Christian. Augustine went away and then returned to the faith, whereas Bushnell never left. Augustine lived in the fourth century (354–430) in the first generations after the “legalization” of Christianity and during the time of the fall of the Roman Empire. Bushnell lived in the nineteenth century (1802–1876) during the time of the Second Great Awakening (Revivalism), the antebellum period, and the Civil War period of the United States. Augustine’s world was very pagan. New England Puritanism reigned supreme in Bushnell’s world.

Augustine’s is the story of one of the most dramatic conversions in history and the *Confessions* has probably lent more to the philosophy of conversion in Christianity (especially in the Western Church) than any other. What Augustine represents to the philosophy of Christian conversion, Bushnell represents to the concept of Christian nurture. Yet most people have not taken the time to read beyond

the initial statement of each of these two books. It is interesting, to say the least, to discover upon investigation into each of these works and the spiritual development of these two men that they each had three conversions that meet the definition of a conversion and at least one additional major mystical experience or life-changing insight. The insight is not that we should expect three conversions and one mystical encounter thereafter, on the part of most persons. Rather, we should simply be open to the fact that there may be more than just one conversion-like experience in the course of normal religious development. Because these conversion encounters in the lives of Augustine and of Bushnell appear to represent conclusions of normal life- and faith-development stages, it is probably more likely than not that a person will experience more than one of these “crisis” resolutions in a lifetime. Furthermore, it is unrealistic in light of both Bushnell’s life and his theory as explained in *Christian Nurture* to expect the individual who, like Bushnell, has never left the faith to have any conversion-like experience at all (because the individual could essentially grow up never knowing him or herself as anything other than a Christian).

Some students might ask if there is any biblical support for the insight of multiple conversions. The most obvious example is Simon Peter in the New Testament. He was asked to leave his family profession as a professional fisherman and to follow the Lord; at once, he left his nets and followed.⁶⁷⁵ That was a definite 180° turn and was his physical conversion. In the middle of Jesus’ ministry, the disciples were accompanying him to the region of Caesarea Philippi when Jesus

⁶⁷⁵ Mark 1:16–18.

asked them who people said that he was. After they answered, Jesus asked them the follow-up question as to who they said that he was. Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”⁶⁷⁶ This was Peter’s confessional conversion and Jesus said that it was the result of a revelational insight. It was on the rock of Peter’s profession of faith that Christ said he would build his church. After Peter had denied the Lord in three separate incidents at the time of his crucifixion, the Risen Lord appeared to Peter and restored him three times as well by asking him if he loved him and when he answered yes, telling him to “feed my sheep.”⁶⁷⁷ This was his aversion-type conversion, actually equal in importance to Augustine’s “Tolle Lege” conversion in the Garden of Milan or Bushnell’s “I Have Seen the Gospel” conversion. The Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 describes Peter’s life-changing, mystical vision-type experience that followed his three conversion experiences.⁶⁷⁸ Other persons in the Bible such as Jacob in the Old Testament have had multiple conversion-like experiences. If the Bible or life is approached expecting to find only one distinct conversion (which was not really the formalized view until the period of the Revivalists), then these events, whether they are seen in Augustine, Bushnell, Peter, Jacob, or oneself are reduced to one experience that is seen as the “actual” conversion and the importance of the others are minimized. The same is true if the expectation is to see “all process and no conversions,” which was the extreme of liberalism in theology. Liberal theorists who base this expectation upon Bushnell’s premise have

⁶⁷⁶ Matthew 16:13–20.

⁶⁷⁷ John 21:15–22.

⁶⁷⁸ Acts 2:1–41.

neither studied his whole theory nor been aware of his testimony. In one sense, all of Bushnell's or Augustine's experiences can be seen as "one" after their life has been lived and the whole thing can also be seen as a "process" of development or growth in Christian maturity. But the crisis moments that serve as capstones to certain phases of development according to the individual are important because they represent the "nailing down" of a resolution and the passage to a new self-orientation. This is a helpful insight for all educators and parents. That is a characteristic of growing people. As one's feet grow, eventually the old shoes do not fit. As the brain develops, new frameworks are adopted to interpret life. As the soul finds its path, there is also a dynamic unfolding of crisis and process. Life is like a spiral ever moving upward.⁶⁷⁹ In the same way that our education uses sets that each build upon each other (1–3 grades, 4–6 grades, 7–9 grades, 10–12 grades), so goes our life development and our spiritual development as well. Bushnell was correct in expecting throughout childhood "the passing of little conversion-like crises all the time" as a part of our natural development.⁶⁸⁰ The spiral probably continues in three-year sets from ages eighteen to twenty-one and from twenty-one to twenty-four, and then expanding in five-year sets throughout adulthood (twenty-four to twenty-nine, twenty-nine to thirty-four, thirty-four to thirty-nine, and so on). More and more is being learned about each of these "passages."⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁹ Harold Kent Straughn, "LifeSpirals." Retrieved from www.lifspirals.com on March 12, 2002.

⁶⁸⁰ Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 329.

⁶⁸¹ Gail Sheehy, *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976). From the time that Sheehy identified many of these passages in 1974 to the present, much more has been learned about them.

As theorists in Christian Education, we should factor in more “process” to religious development across a lifetime; and also we must be much more open-minded to many possible conversion-like crises along the way as a result of this study. Some of these experiences may be less than 180° in their turning, but we can reasonably expect that three or four smaller “turns” when put together may be that much of a directional shift (a full turn) in some aspect of our lives—mentally, relationally, professionally, or spiritually. Sparkman is right in encouraging the development of many more rites and ceremonies in the church to provide natural means of expression that give children, youth, and even adults tangible ways to demonstrate their empirical reality.⁶⁸² Affirmation and confirmation become important parts of a nurtured growth. One of the great points of this study has been that, through proper Christian nurture, everything possible should be done to make it so that the child has no need to ever go astray. In the end, some, like Augustine, will leave the faith, whereas some will stay as Bushnell did. It is good to know that research shows that “sooner or later, many of the people who leave the faith come back,” as Augustine did.⁶⁸³ Tom Bisset gives a five-part plan for leading children to an authentic faith: aim for authenticity, decide to let go, with freedom require responsibility, make room for failure, remember the Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep.⁶⁸⁴ It is Bisset’s emphasis on an authentic faith that is so healthy in the light of

⁶⁸² Sparkman, *The Salvation and Nurture of the Child of God*, p. 205.

⁶⁸³ Bisset, *Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith*, p. 147.

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 113–115.

this study. He stresses the importance of guiding children, but letting them choose their path. He says,

Aim for authenticity. Tell your children you want them to be real people personally, emotionally, and spiritually. Teach and model the faith you believe and the lifestyle you endorse. Then, at the right times and in the right proportions, let your children choose to accept or reject those beliefs and that lifestyle. Teach, promote, declare and invite, but do not force your faith on your children. Instead, wisely encourage them to choose. A chosen faith is internal and real; an imposed faith is external and superficial.⁶⁸⁵

The concept of “the vicarious conversion” and the mystical elements of conversion present in the “caught versus taught” discussion are important to emphasize in a discussion of allowing children to choose their own paths. The study of Bushnell’s life and of *Christian Nurture* demonstrates that the vicarious conversion is a real conversion. Through a covenantal connection with God in the parents, the child can be a part of the family of God. The vicarious conversion happens when the child chooses to accept what has been chosen for him or her. Whether the child expresses that through believer’s baptism, a confirmation ceremony of their earlier infant baptism, or in some other way, the child can choose not to go astray in the first place. In this act, the child averts the aversion and converts the very conversion itself into a positive rather than a negative one. Such a child is “saved from” as much as the one who does go astray by vicariously averting it in advance and thus avoiding the need to ever be “saved from” the negative consequences of going astray from the outset. This is the ideal goal that Bushnell lays out for us.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 113.

There is a mystical element of conversion presented by both thinkers that is altogether outside of the dimensions of “choosing a path.” This is the part known as *grace*. It cannot be taught, it must be caught. Both thinkers view grace as a gift from God. Two things that happened in Augustine’s life led him to muse about the path being chosen for him or him being chosen by God rather than anything that he himself had done to choose the path. The most obvious was the “Tolle Lege” experience. He specifically says twice about that experience that “God converted me.”⁶⁸⁶ Much the same as Bushnell’s “Gospel” experience, God broke in upon him. Both felt that God found them in those experiences more than they found God. The mystical elements continued for each of them with Augustine’s vision of heaven at Ostia and with Bushnell’s “vicarious sacrifice” insight. Augustine sought mystical experiences on purpose, but they were fabrications.⁶⁸⁷ Bushnell had desired something supernatural as well.⁶⁸⁸ The genuine experience came to each of them as a gift and was “caught” as much or more than “sought” as well.

If Augustine had understood the concept of vicarious conversion, he may have remained in a creative tension on the issue of free will versus predestination. Two life incidents persuaded him toward total predestination. One was his reflection on the salvation of his unnamed friend who died while they were a part of the Manichaeans. He thought that God had “saved” the friend completely apart from his will while he was unconscious. Possibly, in part, God had done so. But when the friend awakened, he chose to accept what had been chosen by others vicariously for him while he had been unconscious. In the second life incident, Augustine acquiesced when he believed that the people of Hippo Regius and the Bishop there had installed him as their priest supposedly “against his will” and, as he took it, completely by the providences of God.

⁶⁸⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, 8:12:30 and 9:1:1.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Book 7.

⁶⁸⁸ Bushnell, *Nature and the Supernatural*.

There are many other images of conversion in the *Confessions* besides that of the Prodigal Son. Many are more compatible with a positive unfolding of spiritual formation in a person's life, such as the Romantic theme of a "wooing" God. Also the garden theme, when not taken simply as a metanarrative of the biblical experiences that took place in garden settings, speaks clearly of growth toward maturity with all of its stages from the seed to full bloom. People experience life in many ways. Some factors such as personality types or temperament, multiple intelligences, heredity, exposure to experiences, neglect or abuse, and even environmental influences affect the religious expressions of development as well. Although there are a variety of religious experiences, transformation and growth can be measured over the course of time even when the "crisis" moments may appear as very small blips on the radar or are so imperceptible as not to appear at all. William James wrote, "The unseen region in question is not merely ideal, for it produces effects in this world. When we commune with it . . . we are turned into new men, and consequences in the way of conduct follow in the natural world upon our regenerative change."⁶⁸⁹ In the light of this study, sensitivity should be heightened to the many ways that people experience conversions other than aversion-conversion. One person may enter a time of "cocooning" and come out transformed; another may bloom like a flower from the seed that was planted; still another may approach life very cerebrally and the "change of aspect" may be a genuine conversion. The many images portrayed in the *Confessions* as well as the personal encounters of Bushnell

⁶⁸⁹ James, *The Variety of Religious Experience*, p. 399.

and Augustine have provided us a plethora of mind-opening possibilities as to how life and each person's faith journeys could unfold.

That is the pragmatic part of Augustine's and Bushnell's theories on conversion; the philosophical foundation for their theories of nurture and conversion must also be examined. J. Edward Hakes writes,

Now if truth "happens" by way of revelation, then faith has its vital function in knowing the truth. Augustine put the relation of faith to knowledge thus: "*Nisi crederisti, non intellegisti*" ("Unless you believe, you will not come to know"). Anselm of Canterbury set down the same epistemological principle even more succinctly in these three words, "*Credo ut intelligam*" ("I believe that I might know"). The application to Christian education is plain. If all truth is of God, as indeed it is; if the disclosure of truth has its deep revelational basis, then the Christian teacher and the Christian student, provided they maintain a posture of humble faith, are standing on the very ground where truth may indeed "happen." . . . The application of the principle of "*Credo ut intelligam*" does not for a moment do away with the patient exercise of the mind in the ordinary discipline of learning. But it does mean that as every experienced and discerning teacher knows, there enters into the learning process every now and then the sudden flash of illumination, when something of the truth really breaks through to the student.⁶⁹⁰

Augustine did contend that all truth is God's truth.⁶⁹¹ He further taught that God was truly the inward teacher or *magister interior*.⁶⁹² With this philosophy of the nature of knowledge and of education, then all education unavoidably is in some sense religious education. Whitehead agrees that it is⁶⁹³ and also stresses that "there is only one subject-matter for education, and that is Life in all its manifestations."⁶⁹⁴

According to Augustine and Bushnell, knowledge should not be broken down into

⁶⁹⁰ J. Edward Hakes, ed. *An Introduction to Evangelical Christian Education* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), pp. 44–45.

⁶⁹¹ See Chapter 1 of this paper for the discussion on this subject.

⁶⁹² Augustine, *Confessions*, 11:8:10. Also cross-reference Chapter 2 of this paper and 4:1:1 & 11:9:11 of the *Confessions*.

⁶⁹³ Whitehead, *The Aims of Education*, p. 14.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 6–7.

that which is sacred (doctrine, Bible stories, spiritual formation, ethics, etc.) and that which is secular (math, grammar, science, literature, history, etc.). For Bushnell and for Augustine, all of life was sacred. Augustine said that reading the Platonists led him back to God; this showed that he did not think of those two as in separate unconnected categories.

As we analyze the philosophical foundations for their theories, several elements become apparent. Neither of these thinkers was threatened by philosophy or by the supernatural characteristics related to God that are mysterious and cannot be thoroughly comprehended. They both lived with much incongruence of theology and of the ways of God. Bushnell was not defensive or close-minded as evolutionary theory was coming to light. In fact, the opposite was true. If all truth is God's truth, then new knowledge should be welcomed, especially by Christians, even if it seems to conflict with our preconceived ideas about God or life. But that has not been the case, of course, as we know. How many personal "conversions" have we (civilization) missed out on and how many conversions in or for others have we even stood in the way of because we were not religiously capable of converting the good in Plato or Darwin or Dewey into our mental boxes of "truth"?

Another important element of Christian nurture is God as repository. Augustine said that the church was the main repository for Christian nurture, but, in the truest sense, he revealed in the *Confessions* that he believed strongly that as far as his own personal nurture was concerned, God had been the ultimate repository of his Christian nurture. For Bushnell, there was no doubt that he believed that the main

repository for Christian nurture was the home. But he, too, understood that God was the Superintendent of all of this education.

Bushnell's world was a smaller world. What he presented was an ideal situation. In reality, most parents fail on some of his "qualifications" to begin with, and then it is hard for them to function consistently as is prescribed in the book, 24-7 for eighteen years. They may also be party to some beliefs or practices that are "ostrich nurture" and actually may have the opposite of the desired effect. There is no doubt as well that in many places in the real world today, the schools have by default had to become the primary nurturers for many children. The repository may rest with a teacher, an aid, or a staff person if there is to be any hope at all for certain children. Social workers and foster parents as well as churches that do outreach children's ministries fill many gaps for nurture in the urban area in which I serve. The real world is not a nice and "nurturing" world for many children here at home and definitely not worldwide. Barbara Finkelstein has written,

The practice of violence against children is a time-honored tradition in the United States. Indeed, the roots of violence are planted deeply in the soil of religious beliefs; in the bedrock of public law; and in the disciplinary practices, child-rearing beliefs, and authority structures of families across the social and racial spectrum. Violence against children has been visible in the informal spaces of children's lives in neighborhoods, streets, playgrounds, and schools; in the grounded routines and practices of legally constituted educational institutions; in the deep structures of gender, class, and race relations in the United States; and in the cultural message systems which have been projected through popular literature and the mass media of communication.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹⁵ Barbara Finkelstein, "A Crucible of Contradictions: Historical Roots of Violence against Children in the United States," *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 1. (Spring, 2000), p. 2.

There is a desperate cry for a philosophy and a practice of hope in education today.⁶⁹⁶ There should be; the alternative is despair. For this to happen, this study of Augustine and Bushnell indicates that there must be a cooperation of all possible repositories for the nurture and education of the children. And if nurture and education are seen to be separate things (one Bushnellian and one Augustinian, e.g. *paideia*, if you will), these must be integrated.⁶⁹⁷ These two ideas must be seen as one and the same. In 1942, Wilford Aiken stressed the cooperation of parents, schools, and laymen in the community. He wrote,

If principal, teachers, and students have one concept of education and parents quite another, misunderstanding, conflict, and unhappiness are inevitable. The schools which did not draw patrons into the planning which preceded revision encountered parental misunderstanding. Unwarranted criticism and opposition were the results. In some instances worthy innovations had to be abandoned because of censure. This could have been avoided if these schools had taken pains to secure parental participation in the thinking which led to change in the curriculum. Moreover, these schools did not have the good counsel that many thoughtful laymen can give.⁶⁹⁸

Our challenge is to bridge the liberalism and the multiculturalism in our society.⁶⁹⁹ Rob Reich argues for the idea of “minimalist autonomy” for every individual and says that the capacity for and the exercise of it is entirely consistent with a broad cultural diversity.⁷⁰⁰ This idea of minimalist autonomy is what we have

⁶⁹⁶ Fishman and McCarthy, *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope*, p. 2.

⁶⁹⁷ Norma Cook Everist, ed. *Christian Education as Evangelism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 13. There is a technical difference between education and nurture, which is explained here; but as the author shows, *nurture* is the broader term and whatever education is, it should be wholly contained therein.

⁶⁹⁸ Wilford M. Aiken, “High Schools and the Promise of the Future,” *High School Journal*, 25 (April 1942): 149–155. Reprinted by permission in Hillisheim and Merrill, “Theory and Practice in the History of American Education,” p. 136.

⁶⁹⁹ Rob Reich, *Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

referred to as “choosing a path,” but it includes the basic capital to be able to do that for each individual. It allows for ideas that we have seen in Bushnell emphasizing room for the person to choose a collective life within a community of like-minded people. It is not technically a moral autonomy because it embraces a wider range of cultural diversity. It would educate the person in an environment and in a way that leaves room for an Augustine to choose the path of the Manichees over the Catholic Church of his day and the room to return someday as well. It “accommodates traditional as well as modern forms of life, affirmation of the encumbrances of one’s birth as well as efforts to free oneself from them.”⁷⁰¹

Bushnell saw the end goal of Christian nurture to be the emancipation of the child, but he believed that if the parents had done a good job, then the child would choose to affirm the values in which he or she had been raised. Bushnell showed that it could be done even if it was an ideal. Educators and parents would do well to always remember, and especially remember in times of despair, that it is possible in some places to closely approximate the ideal in Christian nurture. Therefore, it should be striven for regardless of how far one should fall short in the attempt. If the child is born basically “in the will of the parent,” as Bushnell taught, and only gradually grows into the exercise of his or her own free choices, then all environments absolutely must cooperate to help with this process. The concept of “minimalist autonomy” gives the schools a handle on how to do that in a vastly multicultural world. Reich writes,

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

Perhaps the most obvious reason minimalist autonomy is neither hospitable nor neutral to all cultural groups is that people are not born autonomous; they need to be educated to be so. Autonomy, as I argued previously describes a character that must be cultivated. (We might say that while all people are born with the *capacity* to become autonomous, they are not born with the *ability* to exercise autonomy. Our capacity for autonomy must be developed, which implies further that the exercise of autonomy will be exhibited by different people in different degrees.) . . . If minimalist autonomy is good, albeit underdetermined, then the state must not only support background conditions for its exercise, but provide an education for its development. The achievement of minimalist autonomy must be a central aim of education within the liberal and multicultural state. . . . A society that supports autonomy—the ability to choose an occupation, religion, spouse, place to live, and so on—affects . . . the entire system of social values. The autonomous life in a liberal society is not, therefore, simply one among many valuable ways of life, it constitutes the backdrop (or underdetermined good) which permits those multiple ways of life themselves to thrive.⁷⁰²

So this is also a way that the sacred and the secular can once again be brought back together in American education in an appropriate way. For numerous reasons, many families are returning to home schooling; the numbers are staggering.⁷⁰³ *Home schooling* is defined as “the education of children under the supervision of their parents within the home, apart from any campus-based school.”⁷⁰⁴ It represents the realization of complete parental control over the educational setting for their children. The parents who are choosing this option are those who, if made aware of Bushnell’s book, would likely be in complete agreement with it, so much so that they have

⁷⁰² Ibid., pp. 119–120.

⁷⁰³ Ibid., pp. 142–172. A conservative estimate in 2002 was that 1.3 million students in America were being home schooled; this figure was almost double those enrolled in conservative Christian schools and four times as many as were home schooled in 1990. It has been legal in all fifty states since 1993 (p. 145).

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 143–144. The full quote is as follows: “Homeschooling is the education of children under the supervision of their parents within the home, apart from any campus-based school. As such, homeschooling represents the paradigmatic example of the realization of complete parental authority over the educational environment of their children. In no other setting are parents as able to direct in all aspects the education of their children, for in home schools they are responsible not only for determining what their children shall learn, but when, how and with whom they shall learn.”

restructured their lives and environment to try to achieve the desired results. Although some may have left the traditional school setting altogether out of fear for their child's safety due to violence or abuse, or for some other reason such as the child's special needs or a desire for innovation in education, it is probable that a great number have chosen this option as "a rejection of the secular ethos of public schools" also.⁷⁰⁵ Reich states, "Today, it appears that the reason most, but not all, parents choose to educate their children at home is because they believe that their children's moral and spiritual needs will not be met in campus-based schools."⁷⁰⁶ As the school left God out, the parents have eventually left the schools out of the formula for education of their children. We can expect this trend, which is growing, to continue to increase unless a philosophy of minimalist autonomy is aggressively instituted and practiced in the schools. The homes that understand the importance of Christian nurture and the ones that value conversion will not partner for long for the education of their children with institutions that do not.

The schools are at a disadvantage anyway if Horace Bushnell is right in his belief that more than half of a child's character building is accomplished in the first three years. The child who arrives for the first day of kindergarten is already 60% to 70% shaped in his or her path apart from the exercise of their own autonomy as it unfolds. In the light of Bushnell's strong claim about the importance of Christian nurture, we must, as a society, realize the importance of those first three years. This may mean finding ways for at least one of the parents to stay at home with the child

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 146.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

as the primary caretaker and nurturer during the early years. Realistically, there are more single-parent homes than ever in history and in many families both parents must work. Bushnell's claim, if accepted as true, may mean, at the least, that it is imperative that home-based child care be strengthened and that daycares, preschools, and Head Start programs nationwide are fortified to help accomplish the desired results of Christian nurture for as many children as possible. It may also mean that our society needs to find a way around the stigma of providing government monies for well-run, church-based daycares. Bushnell's answer as to when education or Christian nurture begins is as soon as the child is born, if not sooner.

Finally, the generalizations drawn from Figure 2, "From Constantine to Augustine: A Generational Trend of Religious Change with an Account from St. Augustine" must be addressed. In the *Confessions*, Augustine shares the story of the conversion of Victorinus.⁷⁰⁷ In the story, we see the three generations. Simplicianus is sharing the account of the conversion of Victorinus, a famous Roman orator and teacher of senators. Victorinus was of Augustine's grandparent's generation. Simplicianus, who was the spiritual father of Ambrose, then Bishop of Milan, was of Monica's generation. The first generation viewed Christianity as more of a relationship and the church as an organism instead of as a religion and an organization: Victorinus told Simplicianus (of the middle generation) that he should know that he was already a Christian by how he lived; but Simplicianus insisted that he must make a public profession by joining the church officially for it to be real.

⁷⁰⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 8:2:3-5.

Victorinus⁷⁰⁸ laughed and said, “Is it walls, then, that make men Christians?” And this same conversation occurred many times over decades until Victorinus was a very old man. The story goes that one day suddenly and unexpectedly, he said to Simplicianus, “Let us go to the church, I wish to become a Christian.”⁷⁰⁹ Simplicianus could hardly contain himself with joy and went with him to the church where he was granted the initial sacraments and when it came time for him to make his profession (the Apostle’s Creed), a great crowd had gathered. When he arose to speak, they were in such awe that they murmured his name and then exulted with joy before they quieted so that he could proceed. Augustine (the third generation) writes, “He pronounced the true faith with splendid confidence, and they all desired to clasp him to their hearts.”⁷¹⁰ Now, in the wake of postmodernism, the church finds many people leaving its walls in order to find their faith. Experts in the church say that the “world,” the younger generations, and many others are finding the church in its present form in America to be irrelevant. Of those who are leaving the church to find their faith, there is a strong move to grow faith where life happens in an “organic” form of the church.⁷¹¹ It is said that such a church is thriving today and can be observed in many developing countries. The desire is to take the church back to its pre-Constantine, more organic form. What can be learned from the generational trend is that all four of the elements were at work in the pre-Constantinian church as well as the post-Constantinian church. The trend is for these elements to become

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., 8:2:4.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., 8:2:5.

⁷¹¹ Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

imbalanced. The study of Augustine seems to indicate that if the current move away from the organized church does not value the balance of all of the elements, they could leave its nurturing walls but not find their faith at all. This shift happened in Europe seventy-five to one hundred years ago. The great cathedrals and small-town churches are empty now for the most part, but the people have not found a vital faith or organic form of church generally speaking when they abandoned it wholesale. In an organic church, “the structure should not be seen, yet the results of it should be evident throughout the body.”⁷¹²

Jesus gave his followers The Great Commission as his parting words.⁷¹³ He instructed them to go and make disciples, baptizing them (conversion) and teaching them (nurture). The word for *disciples* is *mathetes*, which means “learners” or “followers.” Nothing in the *Confessions*, or in *Christian Nurture* for that matter, militates against pressing for a conversion experience in each person’s life. In the case of a child who is raised in a proper environment of Christian nurture, it may be a vicarious conversion. We should also remember that when one “makes” learners or followers, those who answer “yes” to follow may have more than one significant conversion-type moment on their journey, as did Simon Peter, Augustine, and even

⁷¹² Ibid., p. 125.

⁷¹³ Matthew 28:18–20 (King James Version). “¹⁸And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. ¹⁹Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Horace Bushnell. According to Mary Hess, transformation through both education and evangelism is what we support when we go and make learners.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹⁴ Mary E. Hess, “Go and Make Learners! Supporting Transformation in Education and Evangelism” in Everist, *Christian Education as Evangelism*, pp. 101-111.

Appendix

Definition of Conversion

This definition is taken from Geoffrey W. Bromley, *Theological Dictionary of the Bible: Abridged in One Volume*, Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. (Grand Rapids: MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 642–643. The complete study of *metanoia* (convert, repent, change one’s mind) in Bromley’s dictionary is handled on pages 589–590, 636, 639–644. They also have entries for *paideia* (instruction, discipline, pedagogy, teaching) at pp. 753–758 and *nouthesia* (admonition, correction, reminding) at pp. 645–646. They do not have an entry for *ektrephete*, which is “nurture” per se.

E. *metanoeo* and *metanoia* in the NT.

1. *The Linguistic Understanding.* The two words are the most common in the Synoptics and Acts (the verb 21 times, the noun 14). Paul has the verb only once, and the noun four times. The verb occurs 12 times in Revelation, the noun three times in Hebrews and once in 2 Peter. The popular sense occurs in Lk. 17:3-4 and 2 Cor. 7:9-10 (“regret” or “remorse”). The usual meaning is “change of mind” or “conversion” with the full OT nuance. This nuance is important, for it makes a big difference whether the call of Jesus to repent is a call to total conversion or simply a call to sorrow for sin, a change of mind, or acts of restitution.
2. *The concept of Conversion.*
 - (1) John the Baptist: Conversion is the core of the message of John, who proclaims the imminence of judgment and demands a turning to God as God is turning to us. The summons acquires new urgency inasmuch as it stands in the light of eschatological revelation. This is a once-for-all conversion, an inner change, that is required even of the righteous and must find expression in acts of love. A baptism of conversion signifies that God is at work to change our nature for the new aeon. God himself grants conversion as both gift and task; it is for us to let it be given and to authenticate it as the divine basis of a new being.
 - (2) Jesus. In the teaching of Jesus *metanoete* is the imperative that is implied in the indicative of the message of the kingdom. Conversion is a basic requirement that follows from the reality of the eschatological kingdom as it is present in Jesus’ person. The preaching and miracles are a call to conversion in a final and unconditional decision, in a once-for-all turning to God in total obedience (cf. Mk. 1:15; Mt. 12:39ff.; 11:20ff.; Mt. 4:17). This is the point of Jesus’ teaching even when the terms are not used. Not merely evil, but anything that might be put before God must be renounced

(Mt. 5:29-30; 10:32ff., etc). Conversion applies to all people, demanding a complete commitment that seeks forgiveness in full trust and surrender. Faith is its positive aspect (cf. Mk. 1:15). It is not a human achievement, for it involves becoming small and receptive like a child (Mt. 18:3). It is God's gift, but as such a binding requirement. By the baptism of the Spirit Jesus imparts the divine power that creates those who are subject to the divine rule, i.e., converted people. In all its severity, then, the message is one of joy. *metanoia* is not law, but gospel.

(3) Primitive Christianity.

a. General. In the apostolic kerygma conversion is a total requirement. The disciples preach it in Mk. 6:12 and are directed to summon people to it in Lk. 24:47. *metanoia* is at the heart of their message in Acts (5:31; 8:22; 11:18, etc.). It is a basic article in Heb. 6:1. Peter's sermon connects it with baptism (Acts 2:38). It is a turning from evil to God (8:22; 20:21). It is both a divine gift and a human task (5:31; 2:38). It embraces all life (cf. Acts 3:19, etc.). Its basis is Christ's saving work (5:31). The Spirit effects it (11:18). Faith goes with it (26:18). The imminent end gives urgency to its proclamation (Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:3). The goal is remission of sins (Acts 3:19) and final salvation (11:18).

b. Paul. In Rom. 2:4 *metanoia* in view of the judgment is what God in his goodness seeks for us. It is God's gift (2 Tim. 2:25). It means a radical break with the past (2 Cor. 12:21). Psychologically it involves remorse (2 Cor. 7:9-10), but more deeply it is God's saving work. For Paul, the concept of faith embraces conversion with its implication of death and renewal. This explains his sparing use of the terms.

c. John. In John, too, faith includes conversion. So does the new birth from God. The sharp line drawn between light and darkness etc. means that believing in God necessarily carries with it a turning from evil.

d. The Impossibility of a Second *metanoia* in Hebrews. Hebrews stresses the total seriousness of conversion. We cannot command it at will (12:7). There is no renewal of it for apostates. What is at issue is not daily repentance but the decisive change that is a new creation. Those who are set in the circle of eschatological salvation, if they consciously arrest the movement and turn back to God, are exposed to eschatological judgment. Conversion is a totality, and hence its surrender is a total surrender.

Figure 1: Definitions of Nurture

nurture - Collaborative International Dictionary of English v.0.48 :
<p>Nurture \Nur"ture\, n. [OE. norture, noriture, OF. norriture, norreture, F. nourriture, fr. L. nutritura - a nursing, suckling. See Nourish.]</p> <p>1. The act of nourishing or nursing; tender care; education; training. [1913 Webster] A man neither by nature nor by nurture wise. —Milton. [1913 Webster]</p> <p>2. That which nourishes; food; diet. —Spenser. [1913 Webster]</p> <p>Nurture \Nur"ture\, v. t. [imp. & p. p. Nurtured; p. pr. & vb. n. Nurturing.]</p> <p>1. To feed; to nourish. [1913 Webster]</p> <p>2. To educate; to bring or train up. [1913 Webster] He was nurtured where he had been born. —Sir H. Wotton. [1913 Webster]</p> <p>Syn: To nourish; nurse; cherish; bring up; educate; tend.</p> <p>Usage: To Nurture, Nourish, Cherish. Nourish denotes to supply with food, or cause to grow; as, to nourish a plant, to nourish rebellion. To nurture is to train up with a fostering care, like that of a mother; as, to nurture into strength; to nurture in sound principles. To cherish is to hold and treat as dear; as, to cherish hopes or affections. [1913 Webster]</p>
nurture - WordNet (r) 2.1 (2005) :
<p>Nurture</p> <p>n 1: the properties acquired as a consequence of the way you were treated as a child [syn: raising, rearing, nurture]</p> <p>2: helping someone grow up to be an accepted member of the community; “they debated whether nature or nurture was more important” [syn: breeding, bringing up, fostering, fosterage, nurture, raising, rearing, upbringing]</p> <p>v 1: help develop, help grow; “nurture his talents” [syn: foster, nurture]</p> <p>2: bring up; “raise a family”; “bring up children” [syn: rear, raise, bring up, nurture, parent]</p> <p>3: provide with nourishment; “We sustained ourselves on bread and water”; “ This kind of food is not nourishing for young children” [syn: nourish, nurture, sustain]</p>

Figure 2:

Constantine to Augustine: A Generational Trend of Religious Change

Generations	Christianity	Changes	Spiritual Heritage
Monica’s Parents	Generation when Constantine “recognizes” Christianity— Persecution stops, organization begins	Relationship (Christ) Faith (creed) Ritual (sacraments & ceremonies) Rule (organization)	First-Generation Converts
Monica and her sisters	Generation of transition (First after “legalization”)	Faith Relationship Ritual Rule	Their Children
Augustine	Third generation	Ritual Faith Relationship Rule	Their Grandchildren
Catholic Church/Augustinians	Legacy	Rule Ritual Faith Relationship	Progeny (Religion)

Augustine's Testimony of His "Conversion"

St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 8:12:28–30, Book 9:1:1

The Voice as of a Child

I flung myself down, how I do not know, under a certain fig tree, and gave free rein to my tears. The floods burst from my eyes, an acceptable sacrifice to you. Not indeed in these very words but to this effect I spoke many things to you: "And you, O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord, will you be angry forever? Remember not our past iniquities." For I felt that I was held by them, and I gasped forth these mournful words, "How long, how long? Tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not in this very hour an end to my uncleanness?"

Such words I spoke, and with most bitter contrition I wept within my heart. And lo, I heard from a nearby house, a voice like that of a boy or a girl, I know not which, chanting and repeating over and over, "Take up and read. Take up and read." Instantly, with altered countenance, I began to think most intently whether children made use of any such chant in some kind of game, but I could not recall hearing it anywhere. I checked the flow of my tears and got up, for I interpreted this solely as a command given to me by God to open the book and read the first chapter I should come upon. For I had heard how Anthony had been admonished by a reading from the Gospel at which he chanced to be present, as if the words read were addressed to him: "Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me," and that by such a portent he was immediately converted to you.

So I hurried back to the spot where Alypius was sitting, for I had put there the volume of the apostle when I got up and left him. I snatched it up, opened it, and read in silence the chapter on which my eyes first fell: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in strife and envying; but put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences." No further wished I to read, nor was there need to do so. Instantly, in truth, at the end of this sentence, as if before a peaceful light streaming into my heart, all the dark shadows of doubt fled away.

Then, having inserted my finger, or with some other mark, I closed the book, and, with a countenance now calm, I told it all to Alypius. What had taken place in him, which I did not know about, he then made known to me. He asked to see what I had read: I showed it to him, and he looked also at what came after what I had read for I did not know what followed. It was this that followed: "Now him that is weak in the faith take unto you," which he applied to himself and disclosed to me. By this admonition he was strengthened, and by a good resolution and purpose, which were entirely in

keeping with his character, wherein both for a long time and for the better he had greatly differed from me, he joined me without any painful hesitation.

Thereupon we went in to my mother; we told her the story, and she rejoiced. We related just how it happened. She was filled with exultation and triumph, and she blessed you, “who are able to do above that which we ask or think.” She saw that through me you have given her far more than she had long begged for by her piteous tears and groans. For you had converted me to yourself, so that I would seek neither wife nor ambition in this world, for I would stand on that rule of faith where, so many years before, you had showed me to her. You turned her mourning into a joy far richer than that she had desired, far dearer and purer than that she had sought in grandchildren born of my flesh. . . . But you, O Lord, are good and merciful, and your right hand has had regard for the depth of my death, and from the very bottom of my heart it has emptied out an abyss of corruption. This was the sum of it: not to will what I willed and to will what you willed.

“Fig”-ure 3: Augustine’s Philosophical and Doctrinal “Pears”

REASON	(Epistemology)	FAITH
THE SENSIBLE		THE INTELLIGIBLE
MEMORY		TIME
GOOD	Dualism/Manichaeism	EVIL
NONBODILY FORMS OF BEING		CORPOREAL
THE INNER SOUL/SELF		THE ORIGIN OF SOULS
NATURE OF MAN		NATURE OF GOD
DISTANCE		PRESENCE
DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY	Arianism & other heresies	THE INCARNATION (Christology)
SALVATION/REDEMPTION	(Soteriology)	ATONEMENT
ORIGINAL SIN	(Concupiscence)	CULPABLE SIN (mortal & venial)
FREE WILL	Pelagianism	PREDESTINATION
GRACE		PERSEVERANCE
CONVERSIO	(Metanoia/conversion)	PAIDEIA (teaching/nurture)
PIETY	Monasticism	PRAYER
VIRTUE	(The Enchiridion of Faith, Hope, & Love)	ETHICS
SCRIPTURE		HERMENEUTICS
ORTHODOXY		HERESY
CHURCH	Donatism (baptism, infant baptism, exorcism, marriage, communion, ordination, salt of catechumens)	SACRAMENTS
CITY OF MAN	(The Earthly City)	CITY OF GOD (The Heavenly City)

An Account of When Bushnell Came to Personally “Own” His Faith

James P. Walsh, “Horace Bushnell,” retrieved July 11, 2010, from http://www.ctheritage.org/encyclopedia/ct1818_1865/bushnell.htm, quoting from Barbara M. Cross, *Horace Bushnell: Minister to a Changing America* (University of Chicago Press, 1958).

Bushnell gradually became dissatisfied with the highly intellectual theology he studied at the Yale Divinity School. He was influenced by Romantic poets like Coleridge to believe in the power of divine forces that flowed around and through human beings, and he searched for a theology that reflected his semi-mystic propensities. In 1849, he finally enjoyed the kind of profound “conversion” that he had long desired. It was, he said, as if he had passed through some sort of boundary. He now knew that faith was not an intellectual matter having to do with a set of doctrines, “but in trusting of one’s being to a *being*. . . .”

The actual account as told by his wife is found in Mary A. Bushnell Cheney, *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell* (New York: Arno Press, 1899), pp. 191–194.

“The year 1848 was the central point in the life of Horace Bushnell. It was a year of great experiences, great thoughts, great labors. At its beginning he had reached one of those headlands where new discoveries open to the sight. He had approached it through mental struggles, trials, and practical endeavor, keeping his steadfast way amid all the side-attractions of his ceaseless mental activity. Five years before, God had spoken personally to him in the death of his beloved little boy, drawing his thoughts and affections to the spiritual and unseen, until, by slow advances, the heavenly vision burst upon him. He might well have said, what Edward Irving said of a like sorrow:—‘Glorious exchange! He took my son to his own more fatherly bosom, and revealed in my bosom the sure expectation and faith of his own eternal son.’

“This more personal direction of his thoughts had interested him in a new kind of reading, especially in Upham’s ‘Life of Madame Guyon,’ and the ‘Interior Life,’ and the writings of Fenelon, which attracted his feeling by their devout fervor and unworldly standards.

“‘I believed,’ he afterwards said, ‘from reading, especially the New Testament, and from other testimony, that there is a higher, fuller life that can be lived, and set myself to attain it. I swung, for a time, towards quietism, but soon passed out into a broader, more positive state.’ This phase of feeling, so foreign to his self-reliant, positive nature, served its uses on that very account; but it could not long detain him from the more vigorous faith by which he apprehended Christ as the ‘power of an endless life.’

“In these studies, and in the devout application by which he sought to realize, in his own experience, the great possibilities unfolding to his conception, the New year came in. On an early morning of February, his wife awoke, to hear that the light they had waited for, more than they that watch for the morning, had risen indeed. She asked, ‘What have you seen?’ He replied, ‘The gospel.’ It came to him at last, after all his thought and study, not as something reasoned out, but as an inspiration,—a revelation from the mind of God himself.

“The full meaning of his answer he embodied at once in a sermon on ‘Christ the Form of the Soul,’ from the text, ‘Until Christ be formed in you.’ The very title of this sermon expresses his spiritually illuminated conception of Christ, as the indwelling, formative life of the soul,—the new creating power of righteousness for humanity. And this conception was, soon after, more adequately set forth in his book, ‘God in Christ.’

“That he regarded this as a crisis in his spiritual life is evident from his not infrequent reference to it among his Christian friends. Even as late as 1871, when we were alone one evening, the conversation led back to this familiar subject. In answer to a question, he said,—‘I seemed to pass a boundary. I had never been very legal in my Christian life, but now I passed from those partial seeings, glimpses and doubts, into a clearer knowledge of God and into his inspirations, which I have never wholly lost. The change was into faith,—a sense of the freeness of God and the ease of approach to him.’

“His own statement, made elsewhere, of the nature of faith, gives a deeper insight into his meaning. ‘Christian faith,’ as he says, ‘is the faith of a transaction. It is not the committing of one’s thought in assent to any proposition, but the trusting of one’s being to *a being*, there to be rested, kept, guided, moulded, governed, and possessed forever.’ . . . ‘It gives you God, fills you with God in immediate, experimental knowledge, puts you in possession of all there is in him, and allows you to be invested with his character itself.’

“This, then, was what faith brought to him. Referring, in a letter, to the nature of this divine experience, he wrote, ‘I was set on by the personal discovery of Christ, and of God as represented in him.’ This discovery brought him into closer relations to God as his personal friend,—the relations of confidence and reciprocity, with the warmth and glow of personal friendship. Such an opening of his whole being to the light had, of course, a marked effect upon his preaching. Speaking now from experimental knowledge and perception, it was the special work of his philosophic mind to set the inner experiences of the Christian life in rational forms, to show ‘the reason of faith,’ and the orderly and ‘fixed laws by which God’s most distinctly supernatural works are determined.’

“The greatness of this change and its profound reality made him a new man, or rather the same man with a heavenly investiture. ‘In this divine

panoply, he was sent into the conflict which immediately followed the publication of 'God in Christ,' written the same year; and he was able to meet it with the courage, the poise, and the consciousness of divine support and guidance that at length gave him his victory."

Prepared by this private experience, which, as regards is thought, was not less than an inspiration and revelation, enabling him to "spiritually discern spiritual things," he was about to make ready for an expression of his vision to the world, when unusual opportunities for such expression presented themselves.

This account is real, and because it occurred the year after the Reverend Bushnell published *Discourses on Christian Nurture* in 1847, it is exceptionally interesting indeed. It raises the question why he left everything intact when he came out with the book *Christian Nurture* in its final form in 1861.

Bushnell on "Nature vs. Nurture"

Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 165–167.

There are two principal modes by which the kingdom of God among men may be, and is to be extended. One is by the process of conversion, and the other by that of family propagation; one by gaining over to the side of faith and piety, the other by the populating force of faith and piety themselves. The former is the grand idea that has taken possession of the churches of our times—they are going to convert the world. They have taken hold of the promise, which so many of the prophets have given out, of a time when the reign of Christ shall be universal, extending to all nations and peoples; and the expectation is that, by preaching Christ to all the nations, they will finally convert them and bring them over into the gospel fold. Meantime very much less, or almost nothing, is made of the other method, viz.: that of Christian population. Indeed, we are now looking at religion, or religious character and experience, we can hardly find a place for any such thought as a possible reproduction thus of parent character and grace in children. They must come in by choice, on their own account; they must be converted over from an outside life that has grown to maturity in sin. Are they not individuals, and how are they to be initiated into any thing good by inheritance and before choice? It is as if they were all so many Melchisedecs in their religious nature, only not righteous at all—without father, without mother, without descent. Descent brings them nothing. Born of faith, and bosomed in it, and nurtured by it still, there is yet to be no faith begotten in them, nor so much as a contagion even of faith to be caught in their garments.

What I propose, at the present time, is to restore, if possible, a juster impression of this great subject; to show that conversion over to the church is not the only way to increase; that God ordains a law of population in it as truly as he does in an earthly kingdom, or colony, and by this increase from within, quite as much by conversion from without, designs to give it, finally, the complete dominion promised.

Nor let any one be repelled from this truth, or set against it by the prejudice that piety is and must be a matter of individual choice. The same is true of sin. Many of us have no difficulty in saying that mankind are born sinners. They may just as truly and properly be born saints—it requires the self-active power to be just as far developed to commit sin, as it does to choose obedience. This individual capacity of will and choice is one that matures at no particular tick of the clock, but it comes along out of incipencies, grows by imperceptible increments, and takes on a character, in good or evil, or a mixed character in both, so imperceptibly and gradually, that it seems to be, in some sense, prefashioned by what the birth and nurture have communicated. We may fitly enough call this character a propagated quality – in strictest metaphysical definition, it is not; in sturdiest fact of history, or practical life, it is.

Bushnell's "Plastic Nature" Passage

Speaking primarily of the mother's affect on the newborn child, Bushnell makes these remarks, in *Christian Nurture*, pp. 201–204, in his chapter titled "When and Where the Nurture Begins."

Here springs the secret of her maternity, and its semi-divine proportions. It is the call and equipment of God, for a work on the impressional and plastic age of a soul. Christianized as it should be, and wrought in by the grace of the Spirit, the minuteness of its care, its gentleness, its patience, its almost divine faithfulness, are prepared for the shaping of a soul's immortality. And, to make the work a sure one, the intrusted soul is allowed to have no will as yet of its own, that this motherhood may more certainly plant the angel in the man, uniting him to all heavenly goodness by predispositions from itself, before he is united, as he will be, by choices of his own. Nothing but this explains and measures the wonderful proportions of maternity.

It will be seen at once, and will readily be taken as a confirmation of the transcendent importance of what is done, or possible to be done, for children, in their impressional and plastic age, that whatever is impressed or inserted here, at this early point, must be profoundly seminal, as regards all the future developments of the character. And though it can not, by the supposition, amount to character, in the responsible sense of that term, it may

be the seed, in some very important sense, of all the future character to be unfolded; just as we familiarly think of sin itself, as a character in blame when the will is ripe, though prepared, in still another view, by the seminal damages and misaffections derived from sinning ancestors. So when a child, during the whole period of impressions, or passive recipiencies, previous to the development of his responsible will, lives in the life and feeling of his parents, and they in the molds of the Spirit, they will, of course, be shaping themselves in him, or him in themselves, and the effects wrought in him will be preparations of what he will by-and-by do from himself; seeds, in that manner possibly, even of a regenerate life and character.

FIGURE 4: Comparison of Conversions

Augustine	Bushnell
His conversion to Manichaeism after reading Cicero’s <i>Hortensius</i>	His “Saved as a Record of Dates” conversion when joining the New Preston Congregational Church
His conversion to Platonism after reading the Neo-Platonist writings of Plotinus	His “Dissolving of Doubts” conversion when pressed by the power of his influence at the time of a revival in New Haven (Yale)
His conversion to Christ after reading Romans 13:13–14 in the Garden of Milan (“Tolle Lege”)	His “I Have Seen the Gospel” conversion shared alone with his wife in 1848 after the death of his son
His Heavenly Vision with his mother in Ostia days before her death	His “Laying Hold of God’s Vicarious Character” and his identification with it in Christ as a follower

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