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The Concept of Providence in St. Augustine's Philosophy of History

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THE CONCEPT OF PROVIDENCE
IN ST. AUGUSTINE'S
PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

by
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VITA

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Introduction

One of the most impressive philosophies of history is that of St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.), the Church Father who influenced to a large extent the thinking of the western world—especially in theology and its related themes—over a period of at least 1400 years.

While his philosophy of history is seen for the most part in his renowned *De Civitate Dei*, it is not confined to it, and many of his basic concepts are to be found throughout his other works as e.g. in *De Trinitate*, *The Confessions*, and his various exegetical works on the *Psalms*, the *Gospels*, as well as his polemical writings.

This thesis attempts to define and expound what we believe to be the central concept of that philosophy, namely Providence, and especially how the history of man would work out in relation thereto; emphasis on the shape of things to come or, as we might put it, the panorama of history.
1. PROVIDENCE: DEFINED AND DISTINGUISHED

(a) Definition of Providence

(b) Distinction between Providence and Government
(a) Definition of Providence

The English word "Providence" comes from the Latin word "providentia" and also from the Greek word Πρόνοια, both usually translated "forethought." But the Greek word is worthy of a closer examination. In the Greek New Testament there are six different words translated into English by some form of the word "provide," e.g. προβλέπω which means literally "to see before." But Πρόνοια (from προνοεῖν) has as its root the word "νοῦς" (the mind) and has much more in it than simply to see; it carries with it the thought of a mental perception and understanding which leads to provision, protection and direction.

When we apply the term Providence to God, we have in mind the concept of a purpose towards which His whole universe is tending. For this purpose or goal God has not only created and does now sustain, but He has formulated plans and purposes for its achievement. Thus, then, in the idea of Divine Providence, there is not only the foreseeing of the future, but definite provision for taking care of what is foreseen.
(b) Distinction between Providence and Government

For the most part we are apt to use the words Providence and Government synonymously, but there is a distinction worth noting; in Providence the emphasis is laid on the fore-seeing and on the pre-arranging; - in Government the emphasis is laid on the actual process or the directing of things to their proper end. St. Thomas says regarding this:

Two things belong to providence: namely, the plan of the order of things foreordained towards an end; and the execution of this order which is called government. As regards the first of these, God has immediate provision over everything, because He has in His intellect the plans of everything, even the smallest; and whatever causes He assigns to certain effects, He gives them the power to produce these effects. Whence, it must be that He has beforehand the plans of these effects in His mind.

So far as we have been able to discover, St. Augustine does not emphasize this distinction, though he was not unaware of it (as we shall show in Chapter IV). He defines Providence as "Order, by which God governs all things that are." ²

1 Summa Theologica, I.q.22.a.3.
2 De Ordine, ch.IV.p.93
Here, both the foreseeing and the governing are brought together. "Order" suggesting the planning and purposeful goals; "governs" the provision and power to bring to successful fruition; i.e. Providence is planned and purposeful government.
II. PROVIDENCE: PHILOSOPHICAL OR THEOLOGICAL?

(a) The Question

(b) The Answer
(a) The Question

Before the reader has gone far in this thesis he will be impressed by the abundance of Scriptural quotations, and it might be suspected thereby that the work belongs in the field of theology rather than that of philosophy. The writer is well aware of this possible criticism and wishes to forestall it by raising the question himself: "Is Providence, as seen in the philosophy of history of St. Augustine, a philosophical or theological concept?"

In the opening chapter of his *Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* Gilson says that many deny the concept of a Christian philosophy as both contradictory and impossible. Of all the various Christian philosophies which come under this criticism, St. Augustine's is not the least. These critics maintain that religion and philosophy are so essentially different that they cannot be brought together in collaboration. They would assign reason exclusively to philosophy and faith and revelation to Christianity. They comment: "I believe in order to understand"—that is the basic principle of all mediaeval

1 *Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, Gilson, ch.1, p.3
speculation - but is it not also a mere confusion of philosophy with theology? This criticism has been applied specifically to St. Augustine's Philosophy of History, so, for instance, one of our modern writers says:

It should be clear that not only does the present essay (of History as a Calculus whose term is Science) deny that history is a science, but also that there may be such a thing as a philosophy of history. The question is altogether different whether there be a theology of history. That is the name by which St. Augustine's famous historical rationale ought to be designated.²

so also, Pattison Pringle:

For this same reason the writer in his Philosophy of History declared: 'Augustine's treatise is far more the exposition of a theological system than what we now understand by a philosophy of history.'³

This is also illustrated by Gilson's appraisal of Hegel:

He twits the Christian idea of providence, in the first place, as essentially theological, as something put forward as a truth of which the proofs do not lie in the rational order.⁴

In the minds of many philosophers a system which impinges upon religion - and especially a revealed religion - is suspect and is at once dismissed as impossible.

²The Modern Schoolman, May 1942 (article by Muller-Thym-p.76-footnote "Of history as a calculus whose term is science.")
³Catholic Philosophy of History, p.75
⁴Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy, p.393
(b) The Answer

We try to answer the criticism by raising the questions:

1. Are there any evidences of a purely rational approach to a philosophy of history on the part of St. Augustine?

2. Must faith and reason be divorced in order to have a rational philosophy of history, or is a synthesis of both possible?

To the first question we reply - that so far as we have read, St. Augustine does not appeal to reason at all for his concept of providence; it is, as we will attempt to show, a Biblical idea, with a Biblical basis, though not contrary to reason. We will muster the evidence to show that the fact of it comes for St. Augustine through revelation; but, in addition, that the details of that concept working out in his philosophy are a product of his reason.

For St. Augustine, the philosopher does not precede the saint, but vice versa, as he suggests: "Now if God be wisdom, as truth and Scripture testify, then a true philosopher is a lover of God." This is not the denial of reason but, as he argues, the true liberation of reason.

\[^{5}\text{City of God, Bk.VII, ch.1, p.33}\]
In another place, discussing the authority of Scripture and reason, he says:

When the obscurity of things perplexes us, we follow a two-fold path: reason, or at least, authority. Philosophy sends forth reason, and it frees scarcely a few. But by itself it compels these not only to spurn those mysteries, but to understand them insofar as they can be understood. The philosophy that is true—the genuine philosophy, so to speak—has no other function than to teach what is the First Principle of all things, ...these mysteries teach that this First Principle is one God omnipotent, and that He is tripotent, Father and Son and Holy Spirit...

(By the mysteries we understand him to mean the Holy Scriptures as only there do we have the record of the revelation of the Trinity.)

For St. Augustine, a philosophy is not possible except as the soul is turned toward God who is the source of illumination, and who must be known if anything is to be intelligible. "God must be considered first in philosophy, since He is before all things and all ideas." And of course he means the God of revelation, not of philosophic argument. The human mind, unaided, cannot solve the great perplexing questions which revolve around the soul and its destiny. That this is St. Augustine's position is unassailable.

Seeing, then, that we were too weak by unaided reason to find out the truth, and for this cause needed the authority of the holy writings, I had now begun to believe that thou wouldst by no

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6 *De Ordine*, ch. V, p. 101
7 selections from *Mediaeval Philosophy*, McKeon, p. 4
means have given such excellence of authority to these Scriptures...had it not been thy will thereby to be believed in, and thereby sought.8

Nothing could be farther from our purpose to suggest that St. Augustine belittled reason as such; we only stress what he himself stresses in the above quotation and the one preceding9 that reason unaided is not sufficient to lead men in general into possession of the concept of Providence.

In his argument against the Manicheans, St. Augustine deliberately lays aside the approach of pure reason and leads them at once to the argument of Scripture, thus:

When we come to divine things, this faculty (reason) turns away; it cannot behold; it pants, and gasps, and burns with desire; it falls back from the light of truth and turns again to its wonted obscurity, not from choice, but from exhaustion...So when we are hasting to retire into darkness, it will be well that by the appointment of adorable Wisdom we should be attracted by the friendly shade of authority, and should be attracted by the wonderful character of its contents, and by the utterances of its pages which, like shadows, typify and temper the truth.10

To the second question, must faith and reason be divorced in order to have a rational philosophy of history, we bring the following considerations:

8Confessions, Philip Schaff Vol.1,p.93, Bk.VI,ch.5
9City of God, p.3
10On the Morals of the Catholic Church, Philip Schaff vol.IV,ch.6,7-p.44
Must we a priori decide that Scripture is out of the realm of facts to be considered in the building of a philosophy of history? On what basis? And has any proof been adduced which shuts the Scriptures out of any metaphysical enquiry? The Scriptures not only give us portions of ancient history - they give us interpretations of history; not only what happened, but why it happened, and that in the light of a teleology, which posits God as a creator, redeemer and consummator. It attempts (to say no more) to bring great portions of history to unity in the light of a first principle - and that is philosophy.

Very clearly it seems to us, St. Augustine has not built his providential philosophy of history on the foundation stone of reason. This does not mean that it is unreasonable. His point of view might be stated in these words from Hoffman:

Strictly speaking, the Catholic Faith is not the philosophy of history, but it gives light to see the meaning of history; it does not reveal or explain the whole structure of the process, but it does point the direction and the end. Without this light man is blind and the historical process, in the last analysis, is an impenetrable mystery; with it, man may see a little way at least into the reason that lies hidden.\[11\]

For St. Augustine, a Christian philosophy cannot be divorced from theology: they are of necessity intermingled, or synthesized.

This view, while it may not be unanimously accepted, has been adopted by a number of Christian philosophers. Some of these are mentioned by the writer of the article in the Catholic Encyclopaedia, entitled "Augustine of Hippo" and he sums the matter up as follows: "There is then a philosophy of St. Augustine, but in him philosophy is so intimately coupled with theology, as to be inseparable from it."¹²

III. PROVIDENCE: POSITED IN HISTORY

(a) The Authority of Scripture for St. Augustine
   (Note on Septuagint)

(b) The Concepts of Providence in History of Old Testament

(c) The Concepts of Providence in History of New Testament

(d) St. Augustine's Scriptural basis for Providence in History.
Providence, for St. Augustine, was placed in history as a foundation is placed for a house: it was central, inherent, and to omit it would make history, for him, a chaotic heap of unrelated facts. The basis of this strong belief was the authority of Scripture. While not under the charge of being a "bibliolater," he gave it much more serious attention than some of our liberal theologians today. And such authority is not to be easily despised, as Warfield says: "If it can be established that God condescending to our weakness, has given us a revelation, then, undoubtedly, that revelation becomes an adequate authority, upon which our faith may securely rest."¹

Here we do not take up the question of revelation, but simply assert St. Augustine's position, that for him the Scriptures were such a revelation and had adequate religious authority. Out of many passages from his writings we have selected three as representative of his point of view:²

¹Studies in Tertullian and St. Augustine, Warfield, p.173
²Reply to Faustus the Manichaean, Bk.XXII, par.19 (Schaff vol.IV
see also
On the Morals of the Catholic Church, Bk.XXIX, ch.29 (Schaff vol.IV)
On the Forgiveness of Sins and Baptism, Bk.II, ch.58
On the Profit of Believing, par.13, Schaff, vol.III
Ibid par.55, " " "
City of God, Bk.XI, p.238, ch.X
Ibid Bk.XIV, p.86, ch.XXIV
In a letter to his contemporary Jerome, he wrote: "The Holy Scriptures have been established upon the supreme and heavenly pinnacle of authority." Again he writes:

This Mediator, having spoken what he judged sufficient first by the prophets, then by his own lips, and afterwards by the apostles, has besides produced the Scripture which is called canonical, which has paramount authority, and to which we yield assent in all matters of what we ought not to be ignorant, and yet cannot know of ourselves.

In his "On the Forgiveness of Sins and Baptism," he says:

Let us...give in and yield our assent to the authority of Holy Scriptures, which knows not how either to be deceived or to deceive...(going on in speaking of infant baptism to say) — for none (i.e. salvation of infants) is promised (without Christ's baptism) in that Holy Scripture which is to be preferred to all human authority and opinion.

For him, Scripture is "established upon the supreme and heavenly pinnacle of authority," and is produced by the Lord Jesus (through the agency of the Holy Spirit) with paramount authority. The sacred book "knows not how...to be deceived or to deceive," and "is to be preferred to all human authority and opinion." It would be difficult to find any flaw in his love for the Book, and it is very evident that for him it was the revelation of God upon which his faith rested.

3Ep.82 (to Jerome)
4City of God, Bk.XI, ch.3, Italics ours
5On the Forgiveness of Sins and Baptism, Bk.I, ch.33 (Schaff vol.V)
Note on the Septuagint

When St. Augustine speaks of the Scriptures he has in mind the Septuagint translation as he clearly states in De Civitate Dei:

There were other translators out of the Hebrew into the Greek, as Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, and that nameless interpreter whose translation is called the fifth edition. But the Church has received that of the Seventy, as if there were no other, as many of the Greek Christians, using this wholly, know not whether there be or no. Our Latin translation is from this also.

Although one Jerome, a learned priest, and a great linguist, has translated the same Scriptures from the Hebrew into Latin, and although the Jews affirm his learned labor to be all truth and avouch the Seventy to have oftentimes erred, yet the Churches of Christ hold no one man to be preferred before so many, especially being selected by the high priest, for this work:...for the same Spirit that spake in the prophets, translated in them.6

He repeats this latter assertion in his exegesis of Psalm LXXXVIII:

But the Septuagint translators, whose authority is such that they may deservedly be said to have interpreted by the inspiration of the Spirit of God owing to their wonderful agreement...7

In one of his letters he speaks of his love for the Septuagint.8

6DeCivitate Dei (Bk.XIV-p.91
7On the Psalms - Psalm LXXXIII
Having established the authority of Scripture for St. Augustine, our next point is to show that in Scripture the concept of Providence in history is clear and explicit. St. Augustine, as a careful student of Scripture, must have been aware of this, and before proceeding to his own unique conception we think it wise to cover briefly a few of the obvious illustrations:

In the Old Testament, the suggestions are many and we have selected our illustrations to cover a wide representative range.

From the patriarchs we have the story of Noah and the flood. Here the direct intervention of God in directing human affairs is clearly announced. With the rainbow in the sky, God said: "This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations."\(^9\)

Again, in the story of Abram we see him leaving his home at the direct instigation of God and hear the providential promise - "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great..."\(^10\)

A final illustration for this section is seen in the life of Joseph. His whole career is a drama of Providence and is summed up in

\(^9\)Genesis 9:17 - (all Scriptural quotations are from American Revised Version)

\(^10\)Genesis 12:2
the striking words he uses to his brethren when he reveals himself to them in the Egyptian court: "And God sent me before you to preserve you a remnant in the earth, and to save you alive by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God."11

Turning to the Psalmists we have statements of Providence both general and particular. Illustrative of the general we suggest these words:

Whatsoever Jehovah hath pleased 
that hath He done,
In heaven and in the earth, in the seas
and in all deeps.12

Illustrative of the particular are the following:

Thy right hand hath holden me up,
And thy gentleness hath made me great.13

and this:

A man's goings are established of Jehovah;
And he delighteth in his way.14

The prophets are full of providential concepts, as from the beginning the family of Jacob is selected as a foundation for the nation Israel which God will later use as His "elect vessel." Again and again God is described as planning her future, holding out blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. One parable of the prophet Isaiah

11Genesis 45:7 (italics ours)
12Psalm 135:6
13Psalm 18:35
14Psalm 37:23
presents God as a vineyard keeper who does everything possible for his
vineyard (i.e. Israel) only to be bitterly disappointed in its harvest:
when He looks for grapes, behold, wild grapes! 15

Amos, speaking to Israel (the northern part of the divided
nation) clearly indicates this special relationship between God and Isra-
el by saying: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth;
therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities." 16

Micah, speaking for God to Judah (the southern remnant of the
divided nation) cries:

O my people, what have I done unto thee? And
wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against
me. For I brought thee up out of the land of
Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of
bondage; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron,
and Miriam. 17

More providential language can hardly be imagined, as God de-
clares His part in the life of Israel, providing, guiding and controling
her destiny. But His providential work is also indicated in the Old
Testament in relation to the heathen world as well as to Israel.e.g. Isai-
ah declares that God is guiding the destiny of the Persian ruler, Cyrus.

Then saith Jehovah thy Redeemer, and he that
formed thee from the womb: I am Jehovah, that
maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the
heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the
earth; that frustrateth the signs of the
boasters and maketh their knowledge foolish;

15Isaiah 5:1–7
16Amos 3:2
17Micah 6:3, 4
that confirmeth the word of his servant
and performeth the counsel of his mes-
sengers... that saith of Cyrus, He is my
shepherd, and shall perform all my plea-
sure.18

Again, in the prophecy of Daniel there is the striking dream of
Nebuchadnezzar - one of the great image of a man with a head of gold,
breast and arms of silver, belly and thigh of brass, legs of iron, feet
part iron, part clay. Then the stone cut without hands which smites the
image on the feet, bringing it down in ruins. Daniel interprets the dream
image as indicating the course of the great empires - the head of gold
being the Babylonian, and from there one inferior nation after another.
From our knowledge of secular history we would fill in the silver as
Medo-Persia, the brass as Greece, iron as Roman, etc. As there have been
only four World-Empires from Nebuchadnezzar's time, until our own, the
interpretation of a section of world history and God's hand upon it, seems
fairly evident.19

In the prophecy of Amos, God is represented as asking, "Have
not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines
from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kei?"20 These suffice to show the
trend of many passages which indicate that the prophets in these and other
instances believed in a Providential concept of history.21

18 Isaiah 44:24-28 American Revised Version
19 Daniel, ch.2
20 Amos 9:7
21 See also Deuteronomy 2:26-37
Joshua 23:1-10
1 Kings 9:1-9
In the New Testament there are also hints of a philosophy of history which is providential in nature. This is seen in the life and words of Jesus and also in the apostles. Here also, as in the treatment of the Old Testament, we give simply an indication and not an exhaustive study of this field.

Beginning with the life of our Lord, there are the incidents connected with His birth which are clearly providential; repeatedly we have the angelic messengers turning the tide of events. e.g. through the Providential guidance of God the infant Jesus was spared the Massacre of the Innocents. Again, when the Holy Family returns to Palestine it is not to Bethlehem, but thru Divine guidance, to Nazareth, which is significant for his whole later ministry.

Turning to the direct teaching of Christ we select three illustrations: first, He said that God took care of His whole creation:

\[\text{Matthew } 2:13-18\]

Second: He said that God would take care of his witnesses, providing even the right words before antagonistic men: "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be

\[\text{Matthew } 6:26 \& \text{ ff. See also Matt.10:29}\]
given you in that same hour what ye shall speak."\(^{25}\)

Third: He said that God had planned a climax to history. After telling the parable of the tares planted among the wheat, he announced that "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."\(^{26}\)

As a third phase of Providence in connection with Jesus, we turn to His death and resurrection. Repeatedly He reveals the foreknowledge of these and warns His disciples of them.

Behold we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him: and the third day He shall rise again.\(^{27}\)

In the garden of Gethsemane He clearly submits to the control of Providence; again and again He prays, "Thy will be done."\(^{28}\) These few suggestions are indicative of many that show the Providential

\(^{25}\)Matt. 10:19
\(^{26}\)Ibid 13:24-43
\(^{27}\)see also
\(^{28}\)Ibid 16:27
\(^{29}\)24:29-51
\(^{27}\)20:18,19
\(^{30}\)see also
\(^{28}\)21:33-46
\(^{29}\)17:22,23
\(^{30}\)26:36-44
character of the teachings of Jesus about God and His own career in relation thereto.

The Providential note is continued by the apostle James; in his epistle we read: "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?"29 Speaking of men making their own plans for life, James writes in rebuke: "For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."30 Also, clearly believing in the Providential climax to history announced by Jesus, he writes: "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord."31

In the writings of Peter also we see similar intimations. Speaking of the Christian believers, he regards them as those "who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."32 In another place he speaks of Christians as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."33 Here surely is a definite foreseeing of the future and the ruling of events towards some Divine goal. The very sufferings of the saints are (for him) no accident:

29James 2:5  
30Ibid 4:15  
31 " 5:7  
321 Peter 1:5  
33Ibid 2:9
Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.\textsuperscript{34}

Even the trials and difficulties of life are within His plan.

In one of Peter's sermons reported by Luke, we have this striking commentary on the death of Christ:

\begin{quote}
Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

And a more Providential statement of history it would be hard to find.

When Jude writes his short epistle he recounts a brief portion of Israel's history in such a fashion as to show the Providence of God. He says:

\begin{quote}
I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not,
\end{quote}

and he continues to tell of God's dealings with angels and the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.\textsuperscript{36}

The climax of his letter is a doxology and here, too, the Providential note is strong:

\begin{quote}
Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before His presence of his glory with exceeding joy...\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

The apostle John in the book of Revelation continues the same theme. We do not propose to analyze the whole book, but simply indicate

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} I Peter 4:19
\item \textsuperscript{35} Acts 2:23
\item \textsuperscript{36} Jude 1:7
\item \textsuperscript{37} ibid 1:24
\end{itemize}
the outline which is given in the first chapter: "Write the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." Chapter One of the Revelation refers to the past; Chapter Two and Three to the present and, beginning at Chapter Four we have the future: "After this, I looked, and behold a door was opened in heaven; and the first voice... said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter." The remainder of the book is written from the prophetic angle of Providence, and of course in the language of symbolism.

Turning from the writings of the apostles, we conclude with the evidence of Paul who claimed to be an apostle "born out of due time." In one writing after another he clearly holds to the Providential course of history. Writing to the Ephesians he outlines the cosmic scope of Christianity:

He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world... that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ... according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

And again Luke, quoting Paul's sermon to the philosophers on Mars Hill, writes:

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshiped with men's hands, as tho he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath

38 Revelation 1:19
39 Ibid 4:1
40 Ephesians 1:4-11
and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation... in him we live and move and have our being.  

Writing to the Church at Rome, Paul said:

For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

In these three excerpts it is very clear that Paul looked upon all of life as under the Providence of God.

To a keen student of the Scripture, like St. Augustine, these and other suggestions surely did not pass unnoticed. But as we shall show, he did not use any of these; he struck out his own Scriptural providential scheme from a source which, to modern eyes, seems very unlikely.

41 Acts 17:24-28 - italics ours
42 Romans 9:17
43 See also
  Hebrews 11:40
  Ephesians 4:11-13
  1 Thess. 5:9
St. Augustine's Scriptural Basis for Providence in History

The unlikely source referred to in the preceding section was Genesis 1 to Genesis 2:3, which treats of the various creative works of God in 6 days, concluding with the 7th day - the day of rest. St. Augustine sees in these seven days a very definite outline of the history of the world, an outline tied in (as we shall show) with his concept of Providence. Out of many references we select one as typical of his position.44

In his On the Catechising of the Uninstructed - discussing the "rest" of God, he says:

Now on the subject of this rest, Scripture is significant and refrains not to speak, when it tells us how at the beginning of the world, and at the time when God made heaven and earth and all things which are in them. He worked six days, and rested on the seventh day. For it was in the power of the Almighty to make all things even in one moment of time. He had not labored in the view that he might enjoy (a needful) rest, since indeed, 'He spake, and they were made; He commanded and they were created.' (Gen.2:1-3) But that he might signify how, after six ages of this world, in a seventh age, as on the seventh day, He will rest in His saints...even in times of old, and in the opening pages, the depth of this mystery ceases not to be pre-figured and prophetically announced.45

In this one quotation alone we have almost a complete summary of St. Augustine's position in this matter of a philosophy of history. Notice

44 See also
Reply to Faustus the Manichaean, vol.IV, p.185 Schaff
On the Psalms XCIII, Schaff vol.VIII
Chapter III of this thesis
45 On the Catechising of the Uninstructed (italics ours) vol.III
these two topics which he stresses:

1. The significance of Scripture – using the word significance in its original sense, of conveying more than meets the eye. And this he clearly states of the first chapter of Genesis "in the opening pages the depth of this mystery ceases not to be pre-figured and prophetically announced."

2. The problem of Omnipotence taking six days to creation rather than a moment of time or even more than six days; why this number rather than any other? Here he gives a brief but sufficient answer – "For it was in the power of the Almighty to make all things even in one moment of time," but the six days were used "that he might signify" the six ages of world history which will climax in the rest of His saints.

This of course is an allegorical use of the creation story and we do not deny the charge: on the contrary, it will be only accurate exposition to show that St. Augustine so used it, intentionally, and makes his own defense.

In his On the Profit of Believing he writes:

All that Scripture...which is called the Old Testament, is handed down fourfold to them who desire to know it, according to history, according to aetiology, according to analogy, according to allegory...Thus e.g. it is handed down according to history, when there is taught what has been written, or what hath been done; what not done, but only written as though it had been done. According to aetiology, when it is shown for what cause anything hath been done or said. According to
analogy, when it is shown that the two Testaments, the Old and the New, are not contrary the one to the other. According to allegory, when it is taught that certain things which have been written are not to be taken in the letter, but are to be understood in a figure. 46

He continues in this place to give examples of each of these things in Scripture—history, aetiology, analogy, and allegory.

Taking up this last he proceeds to show that this method of interpreting Scripture is valid and was used by both Jesus and Paul. e.g. in the story of Jonah and the whale, where Jesus used it allegorically of his own death and resurrection. 47 Again, when Paul used the rabbinical legend of the rock in the wilderness and used it as an allegory of Christ 48; again, turning to Paul he recalls for us the Old Testament story of Hagar and Ishmael, where Paul distinctly states: "which things are an allegory." 49

As an indication of the respect St. Augustine had for this mode of interpretation we add this quotation from his On the Profit of Believing:

And yet in these precepts and commands of the Law, which now it is not allowed Christians to use, such as either the Sabbath, or Circumcision, or Sacrifices, and if there be anything of this kind, so great mysteries are contained, as that every pious person may understand, there is nothing more dead-

46 On the Profit of Believing, par. 5; Schaff vol. III
47 Matthew XII:39, 40
48 I Cor. X:1-11
49 Galatians 4:22-26
ly than that whatever is there be under-
stood to the letter, that is to the word,
and nothing more healthful than that it
be unveiled in the Spirit. Hence it is:
'The letter killeth, but the Spirit quick-
eneth.'

In the same passage he argues that the Old Testament, or the
Law, shall not be taken away but rather in the New Testament the veil
which covered it is taken away.

Not therefore thru the grace of the Lord,
as though useless things were there hidden,
have they been taken away, but rather the
covering whereby useful things were cov-
ered. In this manner all they are dealt
with, who earnestly and piously, not dis-
orderly and shamelessly, seek the sense of
those Scriptures, and they are carefully
shown both the order of events, and the
causes of deeds and words, and so great
agreement of the Old Testament with the
New, that there is left no jot that agrees
not; and so great secret of figures, that
all the things that are drawn forth by in-
terpretation force them to confess that
they are wretched, who will to condemn
these before they learn them.

But it should be carefully noted that the above illustrations
of St. Augustine regarding the Biblical use of allegory do not cover nor
give authority to his own allegorical use of the seven days of creation.
In the case of Jonah and the whale, the rock in the wilderness, the story
of Hagar and Ishmael, the allegorical interpretations are given the au-
thority of Jesus and Paul in the New Testament writings. No such case can
be presented for St. Augustine's seven days of creation as an allegory of
history. So far as we are aware, there is no place in the New Testament

50 On the Profit of Believing, Schaff
51 Ibid, vol. III, par. 9- (Italics ours)
which confirms St. Augustine's use of this Genesis narrative in this fashion.

We are willing to hazard an opinion as to how he built it up and conjecture that he saw its adaptibility in allegorical fashion according to the homiletical fashions of his day, and his own belief in a four-fold interpretation of all Scripture for those who were introduced to the deeper mysteries of truth.

It was evident (in our opinion) to St. Augustine, as to many Biblical scholars since, that God has dealt with men in different ways in different periods; add to that the historical crises clearly described in Scripture and the basis for his seven periods can be seen.

While there is no definite statement in the New Testament as to the division of world history, it is quite possible that St. Augustine began with the genealogy of Christ as recorded by St. Matthew in his chapter of his Gospel. At any rate, he makes much of this and three of his historical divisions are here found, as he says:

From Abraham to the Advent of Christ there are, as the evangelist Matthew calculates, three periods, in each of which there are fourteen generations, one period from Abraham to David, a second from David to the captivity; a third from the captivity to the birth of Christ in the flesh.52

Turning back to the Old Testament from Abraham he sees one great crisis of historical division, namely the flood. Here, then, appears a logical division of history in five periods from Adam to the Advent of Christ.

52City of God, Bk.XXII, ch.30
From there it is a step to inaugurate the sixth period as beginning with the Advent of Christ, and to surmise that the seventh will be ushered in by the Day of Rest.

In offering this hypothesis we add for its support that the Church Fathers were given to allegorizing Scripture and used it extensively in their preaching. e.g. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the many details were allegorized after this fashion: Chrysostom said that the wine was the blood of the Passion, the oil the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Many exercised a pious imagination to its fullest extent in this direction.

But St. Augustine's hypothesis of fitting the seven days of Genesis to the historical periods suggested above had more than allegorical imagination for its credibility. The important argument for him was the philosophic one: "Why six days to creation rather than one?" as he suggests - "For it was in the power of the Almighty to make all things even in one moment of time." God did not require six days, neither needed rest. St. Augustine's answer is that they were so arranged to signify the seven periods of history.

His plan of the ages, from this point of view, is a logical answer to any query respecting the need of six days for creation rather than one. In this exposition of his concept of Providence we are not defending his position, for positive proof is not available for this alle-

53 In the Catechising of the Uninstructed - Schaff vol. III, pg. 307
54 Ibid ch. 17, par. 28, p. 301
gorical basis; but his position has many attractive points in it, not the least this one of the creative day and the reason for six of them. 55

55 See *Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, Gilson, p.153
IV. PROVIDENCE: PLANNED IN HISTORY

(a) Providence in the Panorama of History

(b) Providence in the periods of History

(1) The Sixth Day

(2) The Seventh Day

(3) The Eighth Day

Note on Chronology

Note on Numerology
(a) Providence in the Panorama of History

In the preceding section we discussed St. Augustine's basis for his providential scheme of history; the emphasis there was on the Genesis narrative of the seven creative days. Here we examine related references with the emphasis on the working out of that history.

Some people have talked in general terms about Providence, believing that it is posited in history in some vague, general way, but for St. Augustine it is not vague but clear, not general, but exact. In one passage, commenting on a Psalm, he asks a hypothetical unbeliever: "Perhaps thou sayest, God counteth me not in this great multitude. There follows here a wondrous passage in the Gospel: 'the hairs of your head are all numbered.'"¹

Again, discussing the phrase in another Psalm "he showeth contempt," he says: "What is 'he showeth contempt.' He no longer believeth in Providence, or if he do believe, he thinketh that he has no longer aught to do with it."²

From references like these above we maintain that St. Augustine believed in the utter impossibility of the individual standing outside the scope of Providence. But as we here begin to show and emphasize, Providence extended not only to the individual life but also to the control of

¹On the Psalms - Psa.CXLVI -p.663, Schaff, vol.VIII
²Ibid Psa.CXLIII
large areas of human history: man and his works viewed collectively. To put it plainly: St. Augustine believed that the very outline of history in its epochs and the crises which separated them could be understood on the basis of the Genesis narrative of the seven days of creation.

In his book on **St. Augustine**, W. Montgomery, discussing the seven ages and seven days, says:

"No special value can be attributed to the divisions as such; the significant thing about the analogy is that it is definitely associated with the two great principles of development and education."³

We take issue with this point of view, "that no special value can be attached to the divisions as such" - because we believe the evidence is overwhelming that the divisions are not (for St. Augustine) accidental or incidental. For St. Augustine the days and the analogous epochs constitute a Providential Plan of the Ages.⁴ Out of many possible references we offer one which clearly shows us St. Augustine's point of view:⁵

As therefore God made man in his own image on the sixth day, thus we find that our Lord Jesus Christ came into THE SIXTH AGE, that man might be formed anew after the image of God. For the first period, as the first day, was from Adam until Noah: the

³**St. Augustine**, W. Montgomery, p.231
⁴"Note - Montgomery ignores entirely the Genesis narrative
⁵See also *Reply to Faustus the Manichaean*, vol.IV,p.185
    *On the Gospel of St. John*, vol.VII,p.65
    *Sermons on New Testament Lessons*, ser.LXXV-vol.VI,p.477
second, as the second day, from Noah unto Abraham; the third, as the third day, from Abraham unto David; the fourth, as the fourth day, from David unto the removal to Babylon; the fifth period, as the fifth day, from the removal to Babylon unto the preaching of John. The sixth day beginneth from the preaching of John and lasteth to the end: and after the end of the sixth day, we reach our rest. The sixth day, therefore, is even now passing.

By referring to the chart which we have outlined, these seven epochs of history can be easily followed. (see page )

That these seven ages were not arbitrarily chosen is seen by his careful reasoning. From Adam to the Deluge seems a reasonable epoch, as it closed with an outstanding crisis. From the Flood to Abraham seems also reasonable since there we see the beginning of the nation Israel. Turning to the New Testament he "adopts" the division which St. Matthew gives to the genealogy of Christ. Here, too, there is reason and reasons. From Abraham to David marked the rise and heyday of the nation; from David to the Captivity the picture was completely changed as the nation fell into dissolution, and from the Captivity to the Advent of Christ there was, practically speaking, no nation, but its remnants under foreign yokes.

It should be noted that while the first two epochs could be said to deal with the world as a whole, (Adam to Deluge – Deluge to Abraham) this could not be said of the three which St. Augustine appropriates

6 In other places this is "to the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ" or "to the travail of the Virgin."

7 On the Psalms - Psa.XCII, p.457, Schaff VIII
## St. Augustine's Panorama of History

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<th>Days</th>
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<td>1st</td>
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from St. Matthew, for they have to do with the nation Israel in general, and, in the context, with the life of Christ in particular. They are there to outline "the generations of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the Son of Abraham." But perhaps this was no objection to an allegorical mind like St. Augustine's, or perhaps he had other reasons which we have not discovered.

In another quotation dealing with the same panorama of history he makes a curious slip regarding the number of generations in each period. Thus:

The first age as the first day, extends from Adam to the deluge: the second from the deluge to Abraham, equaling the first, not in length of time, but in the number of generations, there being ten in each. From Abraham to the Advent of Christ there are, as the evangelist Matthew calculates, three periods, in each of which there are fourteen generations, one period from Abraham to David, a second from David to the captivity, a third from the captivity to the birth of Christ in the flesh. There are thus five ages in all. The sixth is now passing, and cannot be measured by any number of generations, as it has been said, 'It is not for you to know the times, which the Father hath put in His own power.'

When he says of the sixth that it cannot be measured by any number of generations, the inference seems clear that he is accepting the fourteen generations of the three periods mentioned as literally the number in each. This, of course, is not accurate. In the second of the three fourteens, St. Matthew has omitted three names—Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah. If these were reckoned the number would be seventeen. In our

8 City of God, Bk.XXII, ch.30, italics ours
9 see I Chron. 5:10
judgment this summation into three nearly equal parts was made primarily to aid the memory and was intended to show the three great stages of Jewish history, and might be thought of as the morning, noonday and evening of its career.
(b) Providence in the Periods of History

St. Augustine was naturally interested in the sixth and seventh days treating of the sixth and seventh periods of history, for he believed he was living in the sixth and looked forward to the seventh. We propose to discuss these as fully as we can because they illustrate very strongly the Providential note:

1. The Sixth Day

With regard to the sixth period: The many passages quoted before (see Note 5) settle beyond controversy the limits of it: i.e. from the birth of Christ to the final judgment.

In the reading of these passages there are some very suggestive phrases. e.g. "the renewing of our mind" and "let us be reformed after the image of God;" also "are created anew." These are clearly aligned with the sixth period and the inference seems clear that for St. Augustine the periods are not only chronological but expository - i.e. the sixth age was designed for the redemption of man.

On the sixth day, in Genesis, man is formed after the image of God; in the sixth period of the world there is the clear discovery of our transformation in the renewing of our mind, according to the image of Him who created us, as the apostle says. 10

Moreover, God made man after His own image on the sixth day, because in this sixth age is manifested the renewing of our mind thru the Gospel, after the image of Him who created us. 11

10 Reply to Faustus the Manichaean, Schaff vol. IV, p.185
11 On the Gospel of St. John " VII, p.65
Speaking of the hidden type of Christ, he says:

Convincing testimony may be obtained from the enumeration of such things as the following: That Enoch, the seventh from Adam, pleased God and was translated, as there is to be a seventh day of rest into which all will be translated who during the sixth day of the world's history, are created anew by the incarnate Word.  

Our study of the Scripture and the testimony of the Christian Church make us agree with St. Augustine that this period is undoubtedly characterized by the word redemption, even if the whole scheme of seven periods is not proven or accepted.

There can be no reasonable doubt that the Scriptures teach that God has ushered in a new dispensation by the Advent of Jesus Christ. The words of the writer to the Hebrews are significant: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son..."

That God providentially planned this to be a "sixth" period we cannot of course prove; but that the coming of this redeemer was planned we can, on the basis of Scriptural testimony. Paul, writing to the Romans, said: "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come." According to this, the

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12 Reply to Faustus the Manichaean, Bk.XII, par.14, vol.IV-(italics ours)
13 Hebrews 1:1,2
14 Romans 5:14 (italics ours)
first Adam was an allegory of the last Adam. And he goes on to say: "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." And the allegory is clear between Adam and the Christ. That such a program for the redemption of man could be planned and carried out was, for St. Augustine (and us) the very essence of Providence.

15 Romans 5:19
The Seventh day also has its representative nature, and if the sixth signifies Redemption in History, then the seventh signifies the Consummation of History. There are many passages to illustrate this point of view for St. Augustine: e.g. In the City of God he quotes the prophet Ezekiel (20:12): "Wherefore also it is said by Ezekiel the prophet, 'And I gave them my Sabaths to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctify them.'" The important word here is "sign." The Hebrew word bears also the meanings "omen" and "token" — with their implications of a prophetic nature.

In the last chapter of The City of God he speaks of the eternal felicity of the city of God, and the perpetual Sabbath. There we shall rest forever: "Because there shall be the most great Sabbath having no evening, which the Lord commended unto us in the first works of the world, where it is read, 'And God rested the seventh day...'." There can be no doubt in St. Augustine's mind as to the meaning of the seventh day of the Genesis creation story. Take for illustration this passage:

16 City of God, Bk.XXII, ch.30 (italics ours)
17 ibid XVIII, p.265
When it is said that God rested on the seventh day from all His works, and hallowed it, we are not to conceive of this in a childish fashion, as if work were a toil to God, who 'spake and it was done,' — spake by the spiritual and eternal, not audible and transitory word. But God's rest signifies the rest of those who rest in God, as the joy of a house means the joy of those in the house who rejoice, though not the house, but something else, causes the joy...Most appropriately, therefore, the sacred narrative states that God rested, meaning thereby that those rest who are in Him, and whom He makes to rest. And this the prophetic narrative promises also to the man to whom it speaks, and for whom it was written, that they themselves, after those good works which God does in and by them, if they have managed by faith to get near to God in this life, shall enjoy in Him eternal rest. This was pre-figured to the ancient people by the rest enjoined in their sabbath law, of which in its own place, I shall speak more at large.18

Again and again the seventh day of the Genesis week is accepted as an allegory of the seventh period of history and is best described by the word "Consummation."19

3. The Eighth Day

Strictly speaking, our exposition should not mention an eighth day since the seven days constitute the complete allegory of human history; but we think it is of interest to point out this further thought from St.

18City of God, Bk.XI, ch.8
19See further refs. on this day:
   City of God, Bk.XII, ch.30
   Confessions, Bk.XIII, ch.XXXVI, p.51
Augustine intimately connected with what has gone before. In the City of God he introduces the subject thus:

But there is not now space to treat of these ages; sufficient to say that the seventh shall be our Sabbath, which shall be brought to a close, not by an evening, but by the Lord's Day, as an eighth and eternal day, consecrated by the resurrection of Christ, and prefiguring the eternal repose not only of the spirit, but also of the body. There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end. For what other end do we propose to ourselves than to attain to the kingdom of which there is no end? 20

The inference is clear that the seventh day prefigures the rest or repose of the spirit but not the body. The eighth day will usher in "the eternal repose not only of the spirit, but also of the body." It seems clear also that St. Augustine is very much impressed with the change of the calendar from the Jewish seventh day to the Christian first day of the week - the Lord's day. To him the resurrection typified the beginning of another dispensation - not of historical time, but of eternity. 21 This "first" day of the Christian week is therefore the "eighth" day of this passage before us.

In another place treating the same theme, he introduces what seems to be a conflict and we will try to offer an explanation towards harmonizing it. Discussing the title of the sixth Psalm, in his commentary On the Psalms, he writes:

20 *City of God*, Bk.XXII, ch.30, italics ours
21 See also *Letters of St. Augustine*, Schaff, vol.1, ch.17, p.308
Of the eighth, seems here obscure. For the rest of this title is more clear. Now it has seemed to some to intimate the day of judgment, that is, the time of the coming of our Lord, when He will come to judge the quick and the dead. Which coming, it is believed, is to be, after reckoning the years from Adam, seven thousand years; so as that seven thousand years should pass as seven days, and afterwards that time arrive as it were the eighth day...

The day of judgment may indeed, even without any rash computation of years, be understood by the eighth, for that immediately after the end of this world, life eternal being attained, the souls of the righteous will not then be subject unto times; and since all times have their revolution in a repetition of those seven days, that peradventure is called the eighth day, which will not have this variety.  

In this quotation he agrees that the eighth day will be ushered in by judgment; but in another place he has already said that the seventh day will begin with judgment: "The sixth is now in progress, and will end in the coming of the exalted Savior to judgment." The problem faces us of two judgments!

Our solution is not to regard these as contradictory but as complementary, i.e. both correct in their proper dispensations. St. Augustine believed that the sixth age was that of the Christian era; he also believed in what is termed Christ's Second Advent. The Scriptures are quite explicit that with this advent there will also be judgment.

22 On the Psalms, Psa. VI, Schaff, vol.VIII, p.15
23 Reply to Faustus the Manichaean, Schaff vol.IV, p.185
Treating this in the broadest terms, we believe that Scripture teaches that all men will be judged, Christian and non-Christian, but not all on the same basis and for the same purpose. On such a basis one type of judgment could well climax the sixth period (The Christian Era) and be identified with the Christians in particular. A possible reference to this is found in Paul's words to the Corinthian Christians, "We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." This we believe is a type of judgment which has to do with the Christian's stewardship of life and not his salvation; the judgment for sin for the Christian falling upon Christ on Calvary as his substitute. This of which Paul speaks is the Judgment of the Saints for reward.

On the same basis another type of judgment could climax the seventh period. (The Millennial reign of the Saints) A possible reference to this is found in the Revelation:

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works...and whosoever was not found in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

This we believe is not a judgment of Christians. These are rejected because their names are not in the book of life. In our estimation this is a judgment of those who have rejected Christ.

24 II Cor. 5:10
25 Rev. 20:11-15
We do not pursue these thoughts further as they are more theological than philosophical, and have followed them only enough to supplement the suggested solution of the problem of the two judgments.
Note on Chronology:

In contrast to some modern dispensationalists, St. Augustine is very sane with regard to the chronology of his philosophy of history. He believed that man was created around 6000 B.C. as he clearly states: "Whereas the Holy Scripture gives us not account full six thousand years since man was made."26 And again: "For seeing it is not yet six thousand years from the first man Adam, how ridiculous are they that overrun the truth such a multitude of years!"27

But when he comes to the present epoch (the sixth) he speaks in very general terms and is not to be classified among glib "date-setters." The following quotations show his position very adequately. His favorite term is "the last hour."

'Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour cometh and now is'...this hour, however, is still passing. For the hour of which the Lord spoke will not be an hour of the twelve hours of the day. From the time when he spoke even to the present, and even to the end of the world, the same hour is passing; of which hour John saith in his epistle, 'Little children, it is the last hour.'28 Therefore is now.29

Also,

For the whole of that space over which the present dispensation extends, is but a little while;

26 "Augustine here follows the chronology of Eusebius who reckoned 5611 years from the creation to the taking of Rome by the Goths, adopting the Septuagint version of the Patriarchal ages."
(Philip Schaff - City of God, bk.XII, ch.10)
27 Ibid
28 1 John 2:18
and hence this same evangelist says in his epistle, 'it is the last hour.'

His position might be labeled Expectancy-Tension where the Christian looks forward to the end of the age, expectant and tense with longing. When he expounds the parable of the Ten Virgins, he makes it clear that he has no date for the end of the epoch.

"Lo, at midnight there was a cry made." What is 'at midnight?' When there is no expectation, no belief at all of it. Night is put for ignorance. A man makes as it were a calculation with himself: 'Lo, so many years are being completed, and then immediately according to the computation of certain expositors, the Day of Judgment will come;' yet these calculations come and pass away, and still the coming of the Bridegroom is delayed.

This passing of the age seems long to some Christians and he counsels patience by words such as these:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise: a little while, and we shall see Him, where we shall have no more any requests to make, any questions to put; for nothing shall remain to be desired, nothing lie hid to be enquired about. This little while appears long to us, because it is still in continuance; when it is over, we shall then feel what a little while it was.

31 Ibid vol.XLIII, p.8
32 " tractate C.1 par.6, vol.VII
And these:

But he said, 'A little while,' because that which appears tedious to men is very brief in the sight of God: for of this same 'little while,' our evangelist John, himself says, 'Little children, it is the last time.'

Such "Expectancy-Tension" has ethical possibilities and he is faithful in his preaching to point this out.

If the end of the age were even faintly suspected, human frailty would in many instances accommodate itself accordingly; the Christian's ideal is to be ready at any time to meet the scrutiny of the Master.

The story is told of an old Rabbi who was asked by a youth, "When should one prepare to die?" The old man answered, "The day before you died." "But," stammered the youth, "we cannot know that!" "Then," continued the wise man, "perhaps you had better treat every day as the day before the last!" Something of this is suggested by St. Augustine by this closing word:

Let no one then search out for the last day, when it is to be; but let us watch all by our good lives, lest the last day of any one of us shall find us unprepared.

33 On the Gospel of St. John, tractate C.p.337 vol.VII
34 New Testament Lessons, par.1 vol.VI, p.411, Schaff
See also City of God, Bk.XIV, p.109
Note on Numerology

We raise this subject because St. Augustine gives it a prominent place in his Panorama of History. His attitude towards what he calls "the science of numbers" can be gathered from his numerous references to it in many different works. In the City of God, e.g. he devotes entire chapters to the attractions of the numbers six and seven.

He says of numerology that it is reasonable though sometimes mystical:

As to the reasons, indeed, why these numbers are so put in the Holy Scripture, other people may trace out other reasons... but there is no one surely so foolish or so absurd as to contend that they are so put in the Scriptures for no purpose at all, and that there are no mystical reasons why those numbers are there mentioned.

Numbers have, as he says, a purpose, and one of the chief he finds in linking them to his Providential concept of history and to its outline by epochs. "The Science of numbers," he says, "is found to be of eminent service to the careful interpreter." Unfortunately, but what canons the interpreter is to work he does not say except in the vaguest of terms and by inference. The reasons for the science he has gathered

35De Trinitate, ch.6, p.75
36City of God, bk.XI, ch.30,31
37De Trinitate, ch.6,p.75
38Ibid
...from the authority of the church, according to the tradition of our forefathers, or from the testimony of the divine Scriptures, or from the nature itself of numbers and of similitudes. No sober person will decide against reason, no Christian against the Scriptures, no peaceable person against the Church. 39

He believes that numerology is numbered among the things which show forth the Glory of God, and quotes Wisdom XI, 20, in support of his point: "Thou hast ordered all things in number, and measure and weight."

He is particularly interested in the numbers six and seven.

With regard to six, he writes:

And Holy Scripture commends to us the perfection of this number, especially in this, that God finished His works in six days, and on the sixth day man was made in the image of God. (Gen. 1:27) And the Son of God came and was made the Son of man, that he might re-create us after the image of God, in the sixth age of the human race. 40

Here, as in many other references, we see his linking of the sixth day to the sixth epoch of history; in another place he states that "the perfection of the works (i.e. of creation) was signified by the number six."

With regard to the number seven, he sees in it the idea of completeness, the suggestion of the rest of God, the rest His people find in Him; it suggests also in another place the perfection of the universal Church. 42

39 De Trinitate, ch. 6, p. 75, vol. III
40 ibid, ch. IV, bk. IV, p. 73—Schaff vol. III (italics ours)
41 City of God, bk. XI, ch. 30
42 ibid, bk. XVII, ch. 4
The seventh day of the Genesis story then becomes allegorical of all types of perfection, and he sees the number seven throughout Scripture prophesying the perfection of God's plans. In one instance, regarding the number seven, there is a glint of humor concerning his prolific pen:

Much more might be said about the perfection of the number seven, but this book is already too long, and I fear lest I should seem to catch at an opportunity of airing my little smattering of science more childishly than profitably.\(^{43}\)

So far as we have read, St. Augustine does not say much about the number eight. In a passage previously quoted\(^ {44}\) he mentions the eighth period of one of rest and this is the usual connotation given to the number eight. So e.g. Dr. Scroggie in his chapter, "Dispensations," - "Eight is the number of rest, hence, as there is nothing beyond perfect divine rest, this is the age of the 'fulness of times.'"\(^ {45}\)

\(^{43}\) *City of God*, bk.XI, ch.XXXII  
\(^{44}\) *ibid* bk.XXII, ch.30, see p.40  
\(^{45}\) *Ruling Lines of Progressive Revelation*, W.G.Scroggie, p.67
V. PROVIDENCE: POTENT IN HISTORY

(a) Comprehensive and Controlling

(b) Superior to Natural Law
(a) Comprehensive and Controlling

For St. Augustine, Providence was the potent force in history - comprehensive in its scope. This has been well put by Turner:

In the treatise De Civitate Dei he appears as the exponent of the law of progress which governs the history of humanity, and of which even those who fight against it become instruments in the hands of Providence according to the Divine plan.¹

That this is a fair estimate of St. Augustine's position is evident from his writings - e.g. he says: "God can never be believed to have left the kingdoms of men, their dominations, and servitudes outside the laws of His providence."²

And this not only in the widest sense, but also in regard to details and in relation to individuals. Discussing the Church afflicted and comforted, he speaks of "God's providence managing the whole."³ And in another place he says:

Let us not, because human affairs seem to be in disorder, fancy that there is no governance of human affairs...God knoweth where to place these. Do not think that thou art disturbing the counsel of God, if thou art minded to be disorderly. Doth not He who knew how to create, know how to order thee?⁴

In this latter quotation we have the clue to this comprehensive scope of Providence - the word "create." It is well known that St. Augustine

¹ History of Philosophy, Wm. Turner 1929, Ginn & Co. p.234
² City of God, bk.V, ch.XI
³ ibid "XIV, p.104
⁴ DeOrdine, ch.1,p.7
adopted the Platonic ideas into his total philosophy, but, of course, refused the Platonic conception of them as existing separately and independently. He, to quote Gilson, looked upon them as "generated from all eternity by the fecundity of His being... creative in their turn of everything else." Thus, of course, to create things is to govern them.

Providence then meant not only complete comprehension by God, but also complete control. God controls nations - yes, but also in ways obscure to us, the details of everyday life. One striking illustration St. Augustine gives us with regard to the crucifixion:

Then said the chief priests of the Jews unto Pilate, 'Write not, The King of the Jews, but that He said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.' Oh the ineffable power of the working of God, even in the hearts of the ignorant! Was there not some hidden voice that sounded through Pilate's inner man with a kind, if one may say so, of loud-toned silence, the words that had been prophesied so long before in the very letter of the Psalms, 'Corrupt not the inscription of the title?' (Psalm LII, LVIII.) Here then, you see he corrupted it not; what he has written he has written. But the high priests, who wish it to be corrupted, what did they say? 'Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews.' What is it, madmen, that you say? Why do you oppose the doing of that which you are utterly unable to alter?

One of the great problems in any philosophy of history is that of evil. Here we do not plan to take up the question as a whole, but only insofar as to prove the point that for St. Augustine the potency of Provi-

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5 Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy, Gilson, p.154
dence included evil. He himself raises the question in his DeOrdone:

...there is nothing that these (men) are more desirous of hearing and learning than how it is that God has a care for human affairs, and nevertheless perversity is so serious and widespread that it must seem unattributable not only to God's governance but even to a hireling's management, if indeed such management could be entrusted to a hireling.

This has always been a troublesome question, and St. Augustine's answer rests on the theological attitude, the permissive will of God. He says in one place:

The sins of men and angels do nothing to impede the 'great works of the Lord which accomplish His will.' (Psalm CXI:2) For He who by His providence and omnipotence distributes to every one his own portion, is able to make a good use not only of the good, but also of the wicked...

For who will dare to believe or say that it was not in God's power to prevent both angels and men from sinning? But God preferred to leave this in their power, and thus to show both what evil could be wrought by their pride, and what good by His grace.

Besides the permissive will of God in controlling evil, St. Augustine suggests the prophetical use of evil. Discussing some Old Testament lies he argues that while they are not to be copied they do have value! Thus

7For a full discussion of evil see "Problem of Evil as treated by St. Augustine"- F.D. Whitesell, Loyola U. 1939
8DeOrdone, ch.1, p.7
9City of God, bk.XIV,
see also
On the Question of Evil, ch.100, Schaff vol.III
Ibid "102 " " "
On Continence, par.16, vol.III
...however it may be that from the very things also which they did or said somewhat prophetical may be shapen out, being by His omnipotence afore deposited therein as a seed and predisposed, who knoweth how to turn to good account even the ill-deeds of men, yet as far as regards the persons themselves, without doubt they lied.10

This paragraph just quoted, and the one to follow, can also illustrate the fact that for St. Augustine the control of men by Providence did not reduce them to mechanical robots.

And that which follows concerning birds of the air and lilies of the field, He saith to this end, that no man may think that God careth not for the needs of His servants; when His most wise Providence reacheth unto these in creating and governing those. For it must not be deemed that it is not He that feeds and clothes them also which work with their hands.11

Facing the problem of unpunished sin, he says:

For if all sin were presently punished, there would be nothing to do at the last judgment; and again, if no sin were here openly punished, the divine providence would not be believed.12

To sum up:

Providence uses evil for other goods -
Providence shows evil partly punished, partly permitted -
Providence shows evil used prophetically -
Providence does not exclude the activity of free-agents.

10To Consentius: Against Lying: vol.III, par.29 (italics ours)–Schaff
11On the Work of Monks, par.35, Schaff vol.III
12City of God, bk.1, ch.7, p.16
(b) Superior to Natural Law

In speaking of Providence as potent in history, there is a valid question which might be asked regarding St. Augustine's Providential scheme, namely, Does the acceptance of his view involve the discarding of what men call "Natural Law?" Or, in general, what is the relation of Providence to natural Law? If the world is designed as Deists claim (by an absentee-God, who has wound up the world machine and left it to work out its self-evolution) or if God is left out of the whole scheme of things as held by various thinkers ranging from agnosticism to atheism, then of course the question does not even arise.

Some also argue that conformity to the laws of physics and chemistry constitute a general type of providence working things out to their own ends, but they cannot admit a special providence which on occasion will cut across established fixed laws.

The first objection arises, in our opinion, because many have classified man and beast together; it has been assumed because of certain physical properties held in common that the laws which govern physics are all that are necessary to govern personality. This we do not accept and say with Gilson, that God governs each creation according to its condition and its end:

In the case of natures without knowledge, consequently without freewill, since all individuals of the species act of necessity and infallibly according to the nature of the species, it is sufficient to establish the law of the species, to en-
sure that the individuals that compose
it shall attain their end.\textsuperscript{13}

But, as he goes on to argue well: "...it is otherwise with man, who excels
all other creatures in this world, as much in perfection of nature as in
dignity of end."\textsuperscript{14}

That St. Augustine held this view we do not doubt as e.g. in his
Confessions he writes: "Hadst not Thou created me, and separated me from
the beasts of the field, and fowls of the air?"\textsuperscript{15} For him man was unique
among created things; he alone could share in the divine perfection; there­
fore it is reasonable that God should surround him with a very special
care. Thus Providence subordinates the lower to the higher; he is not at
the mercy of natural law; he is a reasonable being and moves toward a di­
vine end.

While we can see evidences of order and government in the world
of nature through the operation of physical law, we can also see the need
for a higher type of order and government in the moral laws applicable on­
ly to creatures with intelligence, will, and spirit. The laws of physics
fail to explain many problems in both lower and higher forms of life. Even
among the lower forms of life, men are often puzzled at evidences of law
and order mingled with equally striking evidences of seeming chaos and dis­
order; much more in the higher.

It is only when providence is considered that belief in a higher,
harmonizing and more inclusive order is possible. Many wrongs and injus­

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy}, Gilson, p.164
\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid}, p.164
\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Confessions}, Bk.VI, 1, p.94
tices are not corrected in this life and natural law has no answers to many of the tragedies of human hearts. Often the good and the evil seem to be treated in inverse proportion to their just deserts or again, synonymously. St. Augustine points this out clearly:

To the divine providence it has seemed good to prepare in the world to come for the righteous good things which the unrighteous shall not enjoy; and for the wicked evil things, by which the good shall not be tormented. But as for the goods of this life, and its ills, God has willed that these should be common to both; 15 that we might not too eagerly covet the things which wicked men are seen equally to enjoy, not shrink with an unseemly fear from the ills which even good men suffer. 17

The second consideration, the concept of a God who takes care of the generalities of a universe but not its details, can hardly stand the test of examination. Father McCormick says:

If what we deem trifling and unimportant details were of sufficient concern to the divine intelligence to be created, it will not be beneath the dignity of providence to direct them to their ends. 18

Gilson's words in his chapter on Christian Providence state the logic of this position:

If God does not direct each individual towards Himself as towards the universal end of creation, we must suppose either that He does not know this individual, or that He cannot do it, or that He does not will it. Now it cannot be said that God does not know singulars, since he has ideas of them; nor can it be said that God cannot order them to Himself, since His

16 Italics ours
17 De Civitate Dei, 1, 8
18 McCormick, Natural Theology, p. 232
power is infinite, like His being; nor again can it be said that He does not will it, since His will is a will to the totality of good. Therefore all things, whatsoever they are, are ordered towards God by His providence, for just as He is their principle, so is He also their end.\footnote{Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy, Gilson, p.163}

Natural Law is then related to Providence in that it is usable for Divine ends; it is related as the piano keys are related to the pianist; there is both law and spontaneity. Man especially, since he participates in the Divine perfection, can logically look for a special providence. To see that St. Augustine concurred in this point of view one has only to open his Confessions at random to find abundant evidence.
SUMMARY

The central concept of St. Augustine's Philosophy of History is that of Providence, by which we mean "planned and purposeful government." This concept is frankly theological in that it is taken directly from the pages of Scripture, these constituting for him the record of the revelation which God has given to man. Devas says:

...the historian must have something previous to his observations, some previously established general proposition, some theoretical anticipations, some criticism to judge what is relevant or irrelevant, what characteristic or merely exceptional, what is of vital and what of little importance.¹

That general proposition for St. Augustine was the concept of Providence, as seen in the pages of the revealed Word.

From that point on he produces, as an exercise of reason, a carefully worked out Panorama of History, patterning it after the Genesis narrative of the first seven days of creation in which he sees an allegory of the whole historical process. This is not chosen arbitrarily, but as a rational attempt to explain first, why God took six days to creation when one or even less would not have interfered with his attribute of omnipotence; and, second, why various sections of history, so far as St. Augustine knew them, had worked out as they had, and what course would the events of the future take from a Christian point of view. For him "the hypothesis

¹Peter Guilday, quotes Devas, Preface to Day's Translation of The Continuity of Religion
of Providence was the condition of intelligible history."\(^2\)

In this Panorama of History he is especially interested in the sixth and seventh periods; believing himself to be living in the sixth period he characterized it as the time of man's redemption; the seventh he described by the word "rest" and looked forward to that coming age as the consummation of human history.

Providence for St. Augustine was both controlling and comprehensive - even to the extent of utilizing evil within the permissive will of God; for him, too, what men call natural law was subservient to the Providential scheme of the Creator.

A recent writer says, "it is our confident humanism which has dictated our unbelieving philosophy of history."\(^3\) But humanism is beginning to doubt its once confident evolutionary "upward, onward" progress and once again the claims of revelation within the area of philosophy should be heard. Here the work of St. Augustine should make a distinct contribution.

\(^2\)Catholic Philosophy of History - Jos. Schrembs, p.4 - as book for theme
\(^3\)Invitation to Pilgrimage, John Baillie, Scribners' 1942
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