

Augustine's Theology of the Trinity: Its Relevance

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We are here discussing Augustine's understanding of his faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as one God, accepted on the authority of Christ speaking through the Scriptures and Tradition as preserved by the Catholic Church. After a vain search for truth in Manicheism and a liberation from Manichee dualism by Stoicism, Augustine's period of disillusion regarding the possibility of truth and his consequent skepticism was followed by attention to Ambrose as he interpreted the Bible spiritually. Ambrose's sermons freed Augustine from those misunderstandings that his early reading of scripture and the biased Manichean critiques of the Old Testament had given him. These sermons prepared him to read Plotinus' description of the emanations of the second Hypostasis (*Nous*) from the One and of the third Hypostasis Soul from *Nous*.

It is important to note his statement prior to his reading of the Platonic books that he already believed certain truths. While trying to understand the nature of God and the nature of evil, he declared:

Yet with all the ebb and flow of my thought you did not let me be carried away from the faith by which I believed that You were, and that Your Substance was unchangeable, and that You cared for us and would judge us, and that in Christ your Son, our Lord, and in the Holy Scriptures which the authority of Your Catholic Church acknowledges You had established the way of our salvation unto that life which is to be after death.¹

In one sense, Augustine, who was quite early an "informal" Catholic catechumen, was converted from being a lukewarm and skeptical unbaptized Christian to one who surrendered to radical reformation by openness to Christ and assimilation to Him in baptism. There had been, however, a long preparation for this receptivity.

The Platonic books gave Augustine some understanding of how generation takes place among spirits. He found there, he says, that the Word, God, was born of God. This helped him to understand the doctrine of the Trinity and led him later to seek the image of the Trinity in the acts of the human mind (remembering, understanding, loving). Augustine interpreted the Neoplatonic triad by

1. Augustine, *Confessions* VII.7.1

the Trinity he already knew from Scripture and liturgical practice. His immediate response to these books was to turn inward where he ever so briefly experienced the Light of Truth, superior to him as the Creator is superior to the created. This experience whether or not it was a mystical one was a liberating one. It liberated him from the vain hope of experiencing God in any permanent way without humility, manifested by faith in Christ as mediator. Pride was keeping Augustine from full Christianity; faith purifies from pride of mind.² And these books liberated him by associating truth with existence rather than with material substance, for we hear him asking: "Is truth then nothing at all since it is not extended either through finite or infinite spaces?" And God cried to him from afar: "I am Who Am." "And I hear Thee," Augustine said, "as one hears in the heart; and there was from that moment no ground for doubt in me: I would more easily have doubted my own life than have doubted that truth is: which is clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made."³

This restoration of confidence in truth's existence bears its fruit during the Cassiciacum period where Augustine writes 4 philosophic investigations. These writings contain, nevertheless, many Christian elements and convictions. The writings of Cassiciacum, Milan, Rome show that by that time he held completely orthodox views concerning the reality of the Incarnation and the divinity of Christ and the distinction and equality of Father, Son, and Spirit. The first triad he mentions is found in the *Contra Academicos* and the *De ordine*,⁴ namely, Principle, Intellect, Reason, corresponding to Plotinus' One, *Nous*, and Soul. He speaks of reason as ordering the world and enlightening human beings. We note here his early identification of the Holy Spirit with Reason. (This is what Victorinus does; Augustine stops this in his later work). In his earliest Trinitarian theology he speaks of the Spirit as a ray emanating from the sun to illuminate souls.

There was a correction of this identification as early as the Roman writings where he speaks of the invisible missions of the Holy Spirit and the Son. In *De moribus I* he says that charity, inspired

2. *On the Agony of Christ* 17;22; *Sermon* 92

3. *Conf.* V.10

4. *On Divine Providence* II.5.16: "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, — Itself without beginning, and how great an Intellect dwells there, and what has proceeded therefrom for our welfare, but without degradation of any kind. Now the venerated mysteries, which liberate people of sincere and firm faith — not indiscriminately, as some say; and not harmfully, as many assert — these mysteries teach that this First Principle is one God omnipotent, and that He is tripotent, Father and Son and Holy Spirit."

by the Spirit, leads to the Son who conforms us to Himself and in Whom we are united to the Father.⁵ This realization was recorded 10 years later in the *Confessions*, Bk. VII, as a triad of Eternity, truth, love. "He who knows the truth knows that Light, and he that knows the Light, knows Eternity. Charity knows it. O eternal truth and true love and beloved eternity."⁶

In the *De libero arbitrio*⁷ of this same Roman period the emphasis is on the Son as wisdom or number having left traces in creation to lead us within. And at the end of the Roman period in the *De quantitate animae*⁸ we read of a metaphysics of creation that is Trinitarian, inspired by Romans XI:36: "All that exists comes from Him; all is by Him, and in Him." This is reaffirmed after the return to Africa in the *Commentary on Genesis against the Manichees* and in the *Literal Commentary on Genesis*. Just prior to these two works Augustine had read and pondered the Book of Wisdom. (Wis. XL.2).

This evidence shows that Scripture rather than the *Enneads* is

5. *On the Morals of the Catholic Church* I.13.23: "It is through love, then, that we are conformed to God, and being so conformed and made like to Him and set apart from the world, we are no longer confounded with those things which should be subject to us. But this is the work of the Holy Spirit. 'Hope,' he says, 'does not confound us because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.' (Ro 5.5) We could not possibly be restored to perfection by the Holy Spirit, however, unless He Himself remained forever perfect and immutable, and this, of course, could not be unless He were of the very nature and substance of God, who alone is eternally immutable and, so to speak, irreversible. It is not I but St. Paul who exclaims: 'For creation was made subject to vanity.' (Ro 8.19) Now what is subject to vanity cannot separate us from vanity and unite us to truth. But this the Holy Spirit does. He is, therefore, not a creature, for everything that exists must be either God or creature."

6. *Conf.* VII.10

7. *On Free Choice* II.16: "Wherever you turn, Wisdom speaks to you through the imprint it has stamped upon its works. When you begin to slip toward outward things, Wisdom calls you back, by means of their very forms, so that when somebody delights you in body and entices you through the bodily senses, you may see that it has number and may ask whence it comes. Thus you reason to yourself. You know that you cannot approve or disapprove of what you touch with the bodily senses, unless you have within you certain laws of beauty to which you refer the beautiful objects that you perceive outside of you." "Look at the sky, the earth, and the sea, and at whatever in them shines from above or crawls, flies, or swims below. These have form because they have number. Take away these forms and there will be nothing. Whence are these except from number? Indeed, they exist only insofar as they have number."

8. *On Greatness of Soul* 34: "He alone is to be worshiped who is Creator of all things that are: 'from whom, by whom, in whom are all things', that is, changeless Source, changeless Wisdom, changeless Love, One true God."

the source of Augustine's growing understanding of the Trinity. His expressions of the Trinity found at the end of the *De ordine* and the *De beata vita* show a non-plotinian way of understanding it; and a linking of the Trinity with creation is present in *De moribus, De libero arbitrio*, I-II, *De quantitate animae* and is clearly asserted in the *Literal Commentary on Genesis*⁹, and in his brief commentary on Genesis in *Confessions* XIII, he says:

See, how, there appears to me "in a glass darkly" the Trinity, which is you, my God, since you, Father, in the Beginning created heaven and earth — in the beginning of our Wisdom, which is your Wisdom, born of you, equal to you and co-eternal, that is, your Son. . . . And now under the name of God, I understood the Father who made these things, and under the name of the Beginning I understood the Son, by whom He made these things, and believing, as I did, my God to be a Trinity, I searched in His holy writings and see, I found your Spirit "moving over the waters". There it is, the Trinity, my God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Creator of all creation.

The role of this creative Trinity is specified in *De vera religione*: God creates beings by His wisdom and conserves them by His goodness. Things therefore have three dimensions: existence, species, and value.

For every existing thing there is something responsible for its existing, something responsible for its distinguishing marks, and something responsible for its coherence [value]¹⁰

9. The Literal Meaning of Genesis I.2: "For the Word of God, true God in the bosom of God and the only Son of God, is co-eternal with the Father; and yet through the utterance of God in the eternal Word, creation has been brought about in time." I.6: "Hence in the very beginning of creation in its inchoate state, which has been called heaven and earth because of what was to be produced from it, it is the Blessed Trinity that is represented as creating. For, when Scripture says, 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth, by the name of 'God' we understand the Father, and by the name of 'Beginning', the Son, who is the Beginning, not for the Father, but first and foremost for the spiritual beings He has created and then also for all creatures; and when Scripture says, 'And the Spirit of God was stirring above the water, we recognize a complete enumeration of the Trinity. So in the conversion and in the perfecting of creatures by which their species are separated in due order, the Blessed Trinity is likewise represented: the Word and the Father of the Word as indicated in the statement 'God said', and then the Divine Goodness, by which God finds pleasure in all the limited perfection of His creatures which please Him, as indicated by the words, 'God saw that it was good.'"

Intimations of the Trinity in the creation narrative are also discussed by Augustine in I. 39. 53; II. 6.10-II.7.15; III.19-29

10. *On True Religion* VII.13 "In following this religion [the Catholic Religion] our chief concern is with the prophetic history of the dispensation

Therefore every created thing

requires a threefold cause: that by which it exists, that by which it is this particular thing, that by which it is internally consistent. But the cause, i.e. the author of every created thing we call God. Therefore it is fitting that He be a trinity. . . .

For this reason also, in the search for truth, there can be no more than 3 kinds of questions: Does a thing exist at all? Is it this particular thing or something else? Should it be approved or disapproved?¹¹

He is already looking for traces of the Trinity in the created order.

Augustine not only gained from Scripture insight into this Creative Trinity, but insight likewise into the salvific Trinity. In a small work possibly written in the Tagastan period, we read:

One should investigate with great attentiveness the following sayings of the Lord Jesus: 'No one comes to me except the Father draw him.' (Jn 6.44) 'No one comes to the Father except through me.' (Jn 14.6) and 'He Himself will lead you into all truth.' (Jn 16.13).¹²

Augustine's early strong desire for an experience of God accounts for his interest in the Trinitarian economy of our union with God. His mediator in that union, Christ, was recognized as more than a model of life and humility, more than a teacher of the existence of a Triune God. He was the Way, the Truth and the Life. And in Confessions XIII.2 in declaring ". . .in your only Son we become Thy righteousness (justice), he makes clear the ontological role of the Son in our salvation. He is very aware that

of divine providence in time — what God has done for the salvation of the human race, renewing and restoring it unto eternal life. When once this is believed, a way of life agreeable to the divine commands will cleanse the mind and make it fit to perceive spiritual things which are neither past nor future but abide ever the same, liable to no change. There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When this Trinity is known as far as it can be in this life, it is perceived without the slightest doubt that every creature — intellectual, animal, and corporeal — derives such existence as it has from that same creative Trinity, has its own form and is subject to the most perfect order. It is not as if the Father were understood to have made one part of creation, the Son another, and the Holy Spirit another, but the Father through the Son in the gift of the Holy Spirit together made all things and every particular thing. For everything — essence or nature or whatever better word there may be — possesses at once these three qualities: it is a particular thing; it is distinguished from other kinds of things by its own proper form; and it does not transgress the order of nature."

11. Q.18 of 83 Questions.

12. Q. 38 of 83 Questions.

what God is, is not irrelevant to our reality. Reflecting on Wisdom XI, 2 he finds in created things measure, number and weight.

But in the sense that measure places a limit on everything, number gives everything form, and weight draws each thing to a state of repose and stability, God is identified with these three in a fundamental, true, and unique sense. He limits everything, forms everything, and orders everything. Hence, insofar as this matter can be grasped by the heart of man, and expressed by his tongue, we must understand that number and weight mean nothing else than "Thou hast ordered all things in Thyself."¹³

Each thing realizes these dimensions on its own level. And so Augustine thinks that in the answers to the questions: Who made it? By what means? Why? the whole Trinity is intimated. And heaven will consist in our subsisting in God, contemplating God, and taking joy in that contemplation.

Augustine spoke of the Neoplatonists as silent about the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ As early as the *De moribus* and *De quantitate animae* he himself spoke of the Spirit in terms of *caritas* which unites us to God. Book VIII of the *De Trinitate* where this concept is elaborated may well be prior to *Confessions* XIII and *De fide et symbolo* (9.20) where this position is affirmed. This indicates that Augustine is already reflecting on the inner Trinity in their mutual relations and finds the Holy Spirit to be constituted in His very substance by interpersonal relations. In the 8th book he also finds a reflection of the Trinity in neighborly love. The triad of *sum, cogito, volo* in *Confessions* XIII seems to be the fruit of such reflection.

Not until his specialized work *On the Trinity* does Augustine try to understand how Father, Son, and Spirit, i.e. the immanent Trinity, are related to one another within the Godhead. The *De trinitate* opens, however, with an emphasis upon the unity of the three persons in one nature. This is probably in response to the semi-Arian position of the Eunomians. But we should recall that all that he has written regarding the Trinity prior to this has pertained to the economic Trinity, i.e., the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in relation to us, i.e. relevant to us either by creation or by salvation. This puts in doubt the very prevalent opinion that the western Fathers began with the nature of God while the eastern Fathers began with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In Augustine's economic Trinity we have seen the Father as the Principle who creates by the Son and orders in the Spirit. And by the Son we return to the Father and are united to Him in the Spirit.

13. *Literal Meaning of Genesis* IV.7.3

14. *City of God*. X. 29.

In the *De trinitate* after beginning with the Catholic faith in the Trinity as revealed by the Son and after using reason as far as possible to defend the doctrine, Augustine focuses on the unity of the 3 persons in one nature by insisting on the unity of their operations *ad extra*.¹⁵ Books V to VII, however, return to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and offer a theology of personal relations.¹⁶

In Book VIII we have the triad of loving, beloved, and love as the first of many images of the mutual relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All analogies limp, but some limp less than others. Most of the early triads advanced by Augustine achieve the distinctness but not the substantial unity. He is only satisfied when he arrives at the triad of remembering, understanding, and loving God.¹⁷ Since "in Him we live and move and have our being" God is never absent from us although we can be unmindful of Him. Remembering God is a conversion toward Him who dwells in the memory. Conversion forms the mind and unites it to its object. "Willing" unites the remembering and the understanding, making us conscious of the latent presence of God. The interior human being becomes more and more the image of the Trinity by letting himself or herself be formed by Eternity, Truth, and Charity. This is the statement which introduces Augustine's spirituality of the image.

This spiritual formation reveals the dynamism of the image, a fact well brought out by this later paragraph from the *De Trinitate*:

. . . . it is obvious that when we live according to God, our mind, intent on His invisible things, must be formed continuously by His eternity, truth, and love; yet a part of our reasonable attention, that is, a part of this same mind, must be

15. *On the Trinity* I.12.25; Sermon 52.

16. *Ibid.* V.14.15: "For that which was born of the Father is related only to the Father when he is called the Son. Therefore, He is said to be the Son of the Father and not ours also. But that which has been given [the H.S.] bears a relation both to those who gave as well as to those to whom He was given. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is not only called the Spirit of the Father and the Son who gave Him, but ours as well, since we received Him."

17. *Ibid.* X.11.18: "Since these three, the memory, the understanding and the will are therefore not three lives but one life, not three minds, but one mind, it follows that they are certainly not three substances, but one substance. For when we speak of memory as life, mind, and substance, we speak of it in respect to itself; but when we speak of it simply as memory, we speak of it in relation to something else. We may also say the same of the understanding and will; for they are called understanding and will with relation to something else. Yet each in respect to itself is life, mind, and essence. . . . And whatever they are called in respect to themselves they are called together, not in the plural but in the singular." IX.5.8: ". . . the terms themselves express a mutual relationship. . ."

directed to the use of changeable and corporeal things, without which this life does not continue, not in order that we may be conformed to this world by placing our final end in such goods and in directing our desire for happiness towards them, but that whatever we do in the use of temporal things under the guidance of reason, we do it with our gaze fixed on the eternal things which we are to obtain, passing quickly by the former, but clinging to the latter.¹⁸

We are thereupon directed in Book XIII to the most important of temporal realities — the redemptive actions of Christ. By faith in this Christ we are purified to understand the Trinity, and He will lead us to the Father when the Holy Spirit given by Father and Son brings love into our hearts. Only through Christ and the Holy Spirit can the mind remember, know and love God; and since this is the life of the Trinity, this is our participation in eternal life, a wisdom that is happiness.¹⁹

Moreover, because we are from Him, by Him, and in Him, to come to awareness of Him is a necessary step in authentic self-knowledge. In that sense even the remembering, understanding and loving of self is allowable as a certain image of God. The image in us, however obscured it becomes, can be reformed by the one who formed us.

The three aspects of the human image — remembering, understanding, loving — are found all together in each person of the Trinity. They are not split up as representing each person of the Trinity. What they image is the divine processions.²⁰ There are, however, some personal actions of the Three. In the first books of the *De Trinitate* he speaks of actions proper to Father or Son or Holy Spirit, such as the sending of the Son by the Father, the incarnation of the Son Himself, the being sent of the Holy Spirit as the dove or as tongues of fire. These were the visible missions. But in Book XV he introduces his theology of appropriation whereby attributes or actions common to all Three are attributed or appropriated to one or the other.

18. Ibid. XII.13.21

19. Ibid. XIV. 12.15: "Now this trinity of the mind is the image of God, not because the mind remembers, understands, and loves itself, but because it also has the power to remember, understand, and love its Maker. And in doing this it attains wisdom. . . .let it worship the uncreated God who created it with the capacity for Himself, and in Whom it can be made partaker."

20. Ibid. V.14.15: "However in their relations to each other in the Trinity, if the begetter is the Principle of the begotten, then the Father is the Principle of the Son since He begot Him. . . . For the Holy Spirit came forth not as one born but as one given. . . ." XV.21.39: the image in man is more dissimilar to the Trinity than similar.

In approaching the Trinity as he did through the economy of creation and salvation, Augustine had to take seriously and speak primarily of the distinctness of persons in the Trinity, implicitly accepting their equal divinity. His own effort with regard to experiencing God convinced him of the need for Christ as Mediator. From Paul he learned of the need for the Holy Spirit within the Church with whom the Spirit was united on Pentecost, a union in which the Christian begins to share by baptism.

By reflection upon love as a necessity for entering into the life of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and by the realization that the Holy Spirit is the love of Father and Son — offered to human persons in the invisible mission, Augustine became convinced of the necessity of grace — the gift of the Holy Spirit within, the gift of love by which one enters into Trinitarian life or life everlasting.²¹

He expressed this in *De moribus* I.17.31: "The simple and pure charity of God inspired by the Holy Spirit, leads to the Son, i.e. to the Wisdom of God, through whom the Father Himself is known." If creation is through the Son as Form by which we participate in being, conversion is in the Holy Spirit as the order of love by which we return to the Father. It is by the Spirit of Love that one knows the Truth, and as Christ said: "The Truth shall make you free." A freedom submitted to truth is a better freedom than a neutral free choice open to falsehood.

By the Pauline theme of creation to the image of the Son who manifested on earth God's love for us, Augustine was inspired to see love as the re-formation of the human person as image of the Son, thereby achieving the return of God. *Exitus* — *reditus*. The *exitus* is the charity in which all is created; the *reditus* is the charity by which all is recreated. This was suggested by Ambrose on Ro. 5.5 and finds expression at the end of the *De quantitate animae*.²² One only understands love by participating in love. The charity given by the Spirit reestablishes the order of love from which humankind originally fell. It is the gift of God — the Holy Spirit: Charity — which renders men and women spiritual. It allows them to love God, neighbor and self spiritually or unselfishly. The body thereby returns to its first stability, for even on earth the body lives by the Son of God.²³

21. *Sermon* 34.6; Ro 5.5.

22. *On Greatness of Soul* 36: "Religion links the soul in this third act and begins to lead it; in the fourth it makes clean; in the fifth it reforms; in the sixth it introduces; in the 7th it is nourished. And this is done at one time all at once, at another by degrees, as each one has the power to do by love. . . ." cf. *On Morals* I; Ro 8.28; *Solil*; Col, III. 9-10.

23. *On True Religion* 12.25.

Our dependence on the Trinity ontologically and spiritually is a call to establish an authentic relation to the Trinity. It is not a topic for mere speculation; it is a reality which orders attitudes, choices, actions. We are called to relate to Father, Son, and Spirit by a life that is dependent, truthful, harmonious; by avoiding pride, a false imitation of the Father; avoiding curiosity, a false imitation of the Son; cupidity, a false imitation of the Spirit.²⁴

Hence for Augustine true religion is the way which leads to knowledge of or union with the Trinity. Seeing every creature dependent on the creative Trinity for its being, its form, its value, the whole Trinity is seen acting in creation. The role of the Son in creation justifies His role in salvation. He became what we are — human. By assuming human nature, he gave us knowledge of the Father, and the Spirit gives us joy in that knowledge.²⁵

Faith prepares for the understanding of the Trinity by purifying the heart, not any kind of faith but faith in God's triune love for us. In the outset of his study, Augustine thought that only a few were capable of ascending to knowledge of the Trinity, (the few were philosophers), and for that reason God sent His Son into the world to recall the others caught in the sensible to the Fatherland by the authority of the Incarnate Wisdom. After reading St. Paul's epistle, however, he realized that Christ's revelation of the Father, Son, and Spirit as a community of love was a necessity for all. The Trinity is involved in spiritual growth. Also necessary for all is the grace to respond to this revelation; the response is faith. We know of the Trinity through Christ; we share in Trinitarian life through the Holy Spirit. Grace as a participation in Divine Life empowers us to participate in the mutual love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The fundamental Christian experience of receiving revelation from God occurred through the distinct actions of the Incarnate Son, identified as divine Son by the Father's voice: "You are my beloved Son. . ." and by the Holy Spirit's appearance as a dove and as tongues of fire. The disciples responded in faith to this Father, Son and Spirit God and were told to baptize in their name. (Mt. 28.19).

Augustine drew his understanding of faith in the Trinity not only from the experience of the disciples of Christ who wrote the gospels but also from his own experience in correlation with the letters of Paul where Christ's role as informing us not only in creation but also in salvation is emphasized. Only this natural Son of God can draw the creature into Sonship to the Father, making us co-heirs with Him. Augustine was very much aware of this

24. *On True Religion* 45, 84; 49, 94, 38, 69-39, 72; cf. *Conf.* 2.6.13; *City of God* 19.12.2; *Lit. Com. Genesis* 8.14.31.

25. Q. 43 of 83 Questions.

onto-logical role of Christ as inserting us into the divine Sonship and so he did not limit Christ's redeeming role to teaching and giving example. He meditated on Galatians 4: 4-7: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are Sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying: 'Abba, Father.' So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir."

The relevance for us of the distinctness of Father, Son, and Spirit was firmly appreciated by the early Church. It explains some of the heat generated by theological argument. Some of those who argued against using the Latin word "persona" to refer to one of the Three were motivated by a desire to retain this distinctness. It seemed to them that the word "persona", laden as it was with ancient overtones of "masque", would give the impression that Son and Spirit were merely representations or functions of the Father. Basil of Ancyra opposed the word "persona" as leading to modalism, i.e. the 3 masks of God. He argued for 3 Hypostases and one *Ousia*. The threat here, as the western Fathers pointed out, was tritheism. Victorinus, spoke of one Substance and 3 Subsistences. If all actions *ad extra* have to be attributed to Father, Son, and Spirit as God, nevertheless the visible and invisible missions of Father, Son, and Spirit differ from one another. What will be the source of the difference? It will have to be located in their "mutual and mutually exclusive relationships which are expressed by the mutually exclusive names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, derived from their origin.

Augustine learned this partially from Gregory of Nazianzen and Didymus the Blind and completed their insight by insisting that the Holy Spirit must proceed as Gift from Father and Son if the Spirit is to be distinguished from the Son as Scripture says in calling the Spirit another Advocate, Counsellor.²⁶

And so we have seen Augustine from the very beginning of his conversion trying to understand his faith in the Trinity as the Christian mystery. Nevertheless his conversion and his faith were founded in Christ the mediator. There could be no understanding of Christ, however, without an understanding of the Trinity. The visible missions of Father, Son, and Spirit promoted his reflection upon creation as Trinitarian and salvation as Trinitarian. These missions also revealed to him the divine processions. If the Son is sent by the Father, he proceeds from the Father; if the Holy Spirit is sent by Father and Son, he proceeds from Father and Son. Meditation on these processions then led him (A.D. 400) to recognize

26. *On the Trinity* II.3.5; cf. Ambrose; Epiphanius of Salamis.

the mutual relationships of Father, Son and Spirit. The use of the name Father implies a Son; the use of the word Gift implies a giving. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son as from one Principle, i.e. by the power of their common nature, and He proceeds as Love uniting the two. Just as the missions reveal the processions, so the relationships and their names express the processions. The relationships are distinct from one another but not from the divine being.

It is important to remember that the missions are proper to the persons sent. Certain terms, i.e. essential names — like wisdom or love — are appropriated to particular persons. When Augustine searched for an image of the Trinity within the human soul he had recourse to these appropriations. This was a suitable move. For neither knowledge nor love is in us a subsistent reality. They both entail relationship, but unlike the word “person”, they do not signify substance. In God they have been appropriated to distinct persons but they belong properly to their common being. Augustine is regarding primarily the mutual implication of remembering, knowing, loving. They denote the Trinity and are a unity. They are closer to the Greek *perichoresis* and the Latin *circumincessio* — the mutual coinherence of the three, each not only in itself but in the other two.²⁷

The acts of the mind are related to one another and form a unity. In this matter Augustine utilizes implicitly Victorinus’ principle of predominance. The mind is not a mind without remembering, understanding, willing, but one of these can predominate at any given moment.

The incarnation of God’s Son was not only crucial to our learning of the Trinity but to our living within it. The visible mission of the Son’s incarnation includes Christ’s intention to restore harmony by drawing us into the divine relationships. By the grace of baptism we are spiritually incorporated into Christ, spiritually drawn into the life of the Trinity. This is accomplished in the sending of the Spirit who forms a Church which makes ever available Christ’s sacrifice, the sacrament of community.

The grace of baptism in the name of the Trinity marks the Christian’s mission. Sent by the Trinity into the world, the Christian is called upon to know and love God and thereby reflect the Trinity in the world. Guided as he was by the ancient epistemological principle that “like is known by like,” Augustine’s pastoral activity and his monastic teaching were directed by his understanding

27. Ibid. IX.5.8: “But in these three, when the mind knows itself and loves itself, a trinity remains: the mind, love, and knowledge. . . .all are in all. . . .and so each one is in each two. . . .each two are also in each one. . . inseparable from one another.” Cf. X.11.18.

that human beings are called to realize in themselves the divine image. This image, a mirror for reflecting God, was distorted by a disordered love and can be restored by ordering one's love according to the scale of values: God, first, then images of God, and then vestiges of God. If God's reflection was originally distorted by pride, only the humility of Christ and faith in the crucified and risen Christ can cleanse the mirror so that by the Holy Spirit's gift of Love, the human being can become a true image of the Trinity. (Gal. 5.6.)

This is the practical life of the Christian — signified by the feminine practical intellect or knowledge for the sake of action, and action for the sake of harmony. This is the only road to wisdom (the speculative masculine aspect of mind) which is remembering, understanding, and loving God made possible by Christ-likeness. Christ is the mediator of the invisible missions: the divine Persons entering the soul by grace. We recognize God's intimate presence (Gal. 4.19) and we are conformed to the Son by a knowledge expressing itself in love which conforms us to the Spirit. This state of Grace enables us to perceive through a kind of experiential awareness the presence of Father, Son, and Spirit. Such perception is the gift of Wisdom.

Of this Augustine was assured by St. Paul who said: (Gal. 4.4-7)

When the fullness of time comes for each one of us to be converted, God, always present in our inmost being (the Father) sends his son into our minds to share his Sonship with us by adoption. And because we are now sons, God sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, breaking out into the cry of love — Abba, Father.

In the *Confessions* IX.1.1 Augustine begs us not to forsake our inwardness where God is present more inwardly still and seek for God outside. It was what he did for a very long time.

But this in no way means that God is merely an ideal or a concept. The Christian religion begins not in the mind but in history. The divine missions were historical events. These events revealed the processions in God which Augustine masterfully expressed as divine relationships. These relationships, being proper or, if you will, personal, do not constitute the persons as God. The Son is God, but God is not merely Son. To be God is to be related as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Augustine's indirect investigation of the divine processions through the effort of self-knowledge was an acknowledgement that in faith seeking understanding, all we have at our disposal is an analogical knowledge of God. He explains the divine processions on the analogy of mental acts. This analogy limps in respect

to the individual subsistence of the acts; it does not limp with respect to the mutual implication of the acts — their harmony. The revelation in Genesis of humankind being made to the image of God, interpreted by Augustine as being made to the image of the Trinity, and his relating of the divine missions to the divine processions which established relationships — all this made the doctrine of the Trinity very relevant to the vocation of the Christian.

There is evidence in the *De Trinitate* not only that Augustine defended against the Arians the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit established by a common divine nature but that he was anxious to raise to consciousness their interpersonal unity established by love. It is this unity or harmony that he sees Christians called to mirror. Not only was the love-beloved-love triad one of the first suggested, but he highlighted an intimate connection between the final triad of remembering, understanding, loving God and the love of neighbor — the two loves that in all his writings he insisted upon keeping together. And so we should not be surprised to find him saying: Through the Holy Spirit

both are joined together; through Him the begotten is loved by the begetter, and in turn loves Him who begot Him; in Him they preserve the unity of spirit through the bond of peace. . . . And we are commanded by grace to imitate this unity, both in our relations with God as well as among ourselves. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets. Thus the three are the one, the only, the great, the wise, the holy and the blessed God.

But we are blessed by Him, through Him, and in Him, because by His gift we are one among ourselves. . . .²⁸

In this passage how can one miss the relevance of the Trinity for Christian life?

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28. *Ibid.* VI.5.7.