THE LITURGICAL SENSE

THE TRINITY, SCRIPTURE AND POPULAR PIETY IN SAINT AUGUSTINE'S DE TRINITATE

By

Derek Axelson

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J. Patout Burns

Paul DeHart

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style as well as clarity and rigor. I have used both writers as benchmarks for my own writing in this essay.

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This paper is for everyone I mentioned.

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CHAPTER I

THE MOODS OF DE TRINITATE: AUGUSTINE AND HIS READERS

"Treat the Scriptures of God as the face of God; melt in its presence."[1]

Augustine's *De Trinitate* is known as his most speculative and conceptually difficult treatise. Indeed, in the opinion of some, the ponderous and labyrinthine structure of the treatise makes it one of his most difficult pieces.[2] The oft recounted legend of the work's fraught production, i.e., its protracted gestation, the piracy of the unfinished drafts which led Augustine to halt work on the project out of disgust, and his reluctance to take it up once more to finish it, reinforces the reputation. Augustine, furthermore, himself seemed to have agreed. Tired of being harried by suitors eager for him to finish it, Augustine the bishop once cautioned a particularly persistent correspondent over his eagerness to acquire a copy that "If Christ had died only for those who could with certainty apprehend these matters, we are virtually wasting our time in the Church."[3] Remarks like this seem to betray his doubt over whether the abstract and largely philosophically charged arguments required to treat adequately the doctrine of the Trinity carried sufficient pastoral utility for the Christians who came to hear him preach and eat of the Lord 's Table in worship. Nevertheless, it is of no small importance that

[1] Saint Augustine, "Sermon 22", in *Sermons II (20-50) on the Old Testament.* The Works of Saint Augustine: A translation for the 21st century III.2. ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1990), 46

[2] As a result, contemporary interpretations of the piece are many and varied. Lewis Ayres offers a helpful introduction to the temper and orientation of current attitudes and interpretations of his work in *Nicaea and its Legacy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 362-363. The following sample contains variations on the trends he notes: Anne Hunt, *Trinity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005); Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology Volume 1: The Triune God*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 110-113; Catherine LaCugna, *God For Us*, (New York: HarperOne, 1993), 81-111; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, vol. 1*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans publishing Company, 1988), 283-284.

[3] Ep. 169, i, 4 quoted in Peter Brown. *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 355. Complete English translation of the letter is in *Letters (Epistulae) 156-210*. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century II.3, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Roland Teske, S.J. (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2004), 106-114

Augustine's ecclesiastical colleague, Pope Aurelius, was of firmer mind on the project's worth and entreated him to finish it even though the piracy of the drafts severely compromised the project.[4] And so Augustine complied: he completed it, published it, and rarely ever spoke of it again, moving on to matters ecclesiastical and intellectual that pressed on him with more urgency.

These brief reflections on Augustine's attitude to *De Trinitate* reveal that he did not always see how his vocation as a theologian aligned with his vocation as a pastor, even when supporters like Pope Aurelius saw no disjunction. But I think Augustine's doubt was warranted. The kind of highly learned approach to scripture Augustine took to address the topic of the Trinity drew on hermeneutical skills he acquired through his education in the liberal arts; this education was reserved for only the most intellectually gifted and politically well-connected.[5] Most of the people in Augustine's congregation of Hippo would not be of this ilk. Nevertheless, the work presupposes the validity and preeminence of these uses of scripture throughout because it is a staunchly Christian project that seeks to speak rightly of the God Christians worship. In order to display the coherency of the church's belief in a Triune God, he had to rely on methods of scriptural interpretation alien to the pastoral and popular uses of scripture in the church. Even if he could prove the Trinity from scripture, is the portrait of God such exegesis rendered an image God of the people would recognize in the prayers, liturgy and good works

[4] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, trans. and ed. Edmund Hill, O.P. (New York: New City Press, 1991), preface. Throughout the rest of this paper, I abbreviate *De Trinitate* as *De Trin.* And cite it by book and paragraph.
[5] See Lewis Ayres' helpful treatment on the influence of Augustine's education in the liberal arts in De Trinitate in *Augustine and the Trinity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) esp. 128-142

comprising their common life? Would they have to recognize God in such a way to live faithfully? This question, I think, may lie behind Augustine's anxiety over his work.[6]

In this paper I want to argue that the work has roots in the popular piety characterized in the common life of the church. Facets of his complex argument have pastoral utility, namely, in the kind of liturgical experience Augustine's Trinitarian reflection opens up to the faithful Christian, an experience, furthermore, impossible to establish in a theological or philosophical reserve derived from a non-Trinitarian doctrine of God. The goal of the paper is to locate and describe a point where Augustine's speculative arguments for the Trinity contact the popular economy of Christian worship derivative of the church's liturgy, and that this point of contact places the reserves of his philosophical theology and his pastoral responsibility in a mutually enriching relation. My hypothesis is that this point of contact is the public reading and hearing of scripture in the church's liturgy.

I argue that Augustine develops a Christology upon the edifice of the Trinity that legitimizes and activates a mediatorial role in scripture when it is read and heard in the liturgy of a church meeting. I make this argument in the following four steps. First, I show that Augustine's decision to treat the Trinity as a problem for contemplation requires him to assign scripture the role of helping the faithful overcome an error he calls

[6] Nevertheless, at least in the case of *De Trinitate*, scholars have traditionally agreed with Aurelius, if obliquely, and justly identified the primary pastoral value of the treatise with its apologetic force: a primary animus that motivated Augustine to write the treatise after all was the need to refute Arian doctrines of God and thereby help stem the spread it social influence over the Christian culture of the Roman Empire. To this end Augustine's labors extended to political ends beyond the niceties of rarified theological speculation. This view carries definite value, but scholars tend to stop there. And thus such construals tend to restrict –if unintentionally- the work's pastoral value to a kind of global influence the work would have in defining Christian orthodoxy, and thus as a normative reserve to assist the church's effort to identify and nullify threats to the church's common life, social and doctrinal. As far as I know, scholars have rarely focused the pastoral value of the work on Augustine's responsibility to the needs of his parishioners.

"materialism." Second, I argue that his exegetical defense of the Trinity issues in a proto-Chalcedonian Christology that doubles 1) as a scriptural warrant for the Trinity and 2) the doctrinal locus that reveals how Christians overcome materialism. Third, I show how this proto-Chalcedonian Christology construes faith as a special kind of knowledge that helps believers avoid materialism and arrive at true knowledge of God. Fourth and finally, I argue that Scripture is the surrogate for Christ's presence, a function most truly manifest in the public reading of scripture.

CHAPTER II

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM: TRIUNE GOD, CONTEMPLATION AND "MATERIALISM"

De Trinitate is a book of philosophical theology that proposes to teach its reader, who Augustine assumes has the requisite intellectual, philosophical and theological resources to follow his arguments, how to understand God truly. The "quest" for this understanding, to use a word Edmund Hill, Augustine's translator and commentator uses, entails two distinguishable yet interlocking tasks. First, God must be conceptualized accurately. Second, one must seek to understand the relationship between the God so conceptualized and "all that is not God" -primarily human beings- so as to comport oneself fittingly in this relationship.[7] The tasks are distinguishable in the following way: the first seeks to understand God, while the second seeks to understand the human being in light of God. The tasks are interlocking because knowing the distinction between God and "all that is not God" is essential to successfully completing the primary task - as I will show shortly -, while the success of the derivative attempt to understand oneself in light of God depends on the success of the first.

One of the central organizing principles Augustine uses to focus his discussion of these two tasks is "contemplation." Contemplation is the task that human beings undertake to comport themselves fittingly to a true knowledge of God. It is an intellectual vision of God's simple, unchanging substance. Through this vision, human beings share uninhibitedly in the perfections of God: "eternal, immortal, incorruptible, unchangeable,

[7] I borrow the phrase "all that is not God" from David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence,* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009)

living, wise, powerful, beautiful, just, good, happy, spirit."[8] God does not possess these perfections in distinction to God's substance, such that they are independent qualities of their own substantial existence that modify another substance when they "coalesce" or mash together; rather these perfections are predicates that each describe directly the simple substance of God; since each of these predicates is identical to God's simple substance, each is identical to the others. Therefore, when one speaks of *true* eternity, immortality, incorruptibility, unchangingness, life, wisdom, power, beauty, justice, goodness, or happiness, one is also talking about God. God shares some of these predicates with human nature, i.e. that of beauty, justice, goodness, or happiness. But when these same predicates are applied to human nature they are predicated of them by way of accidents that inflect an ontologically distinct human substance. By implication the human being is not simple as God is, but compound. What is compound is subject to change. Therefore, human beings are necessarily volatile and intrinsically unstable because they can lose their beauty, justice, goodness, or happiness. In contemplation, a human being stabilizes itself by resting in the perfections of God's unchanging simplicity, the fruit of which is an eternally happy life.[9] Now, Augustine believes that although human beings have the necessary noetic equipment to contemplate God and become happy, they do not naturally or automatically contemplate God; rather, they must be taught to do it properly. Augustine undertakes the twin tasks of knowing God and knowing self in order to discover the sure and trustworthy path that leads to contemplation.

[8] De *Trin.* XV. 8. On the last point, Augustine reminds his readers that "Whatever appears to be predicated of it qualitatively is to be understood as signifying substance or being."
[9] For Augustine's discussion of the happy life, see De *Trin.* XIII, 6-12.

This brief sketch anticipates a number of themes I will discuss in more detail below, but what is important to note at present is that in focusing his discussion of God and self upon the theme of contemplation, Augustine entered a crowded field. A number of Pagan philosophers and theologians of various belief advanced views of God incommensurable to each other's. They thus proposed different ways to illuminate the path that leads to the contemplation of God.[10] A social pluralism corresponded to this intellectual pluralism, which in turn reflected a manifest epistemological ambiguity about the nature of God, and what contemplation of this nature actually entailed. Nevertheless, Augustine firmly believed that the Christian faith offered the only resources capable of helping human beings conceive of God truly, and that the social context of the church thus provided the only salutary "regimen" capable of leading them to the contemplation of God.[11] Therefore a defense of the Christian faith necessary included a defense of its corresponding way of life over and against other forms. But it had to begin at the root of the issue: the epistemological ambiguity. Augustine sets up the problem of the whole work to address this problem.

The concise prefatory argument in the opening paragraphs of *De Trinitate* accomplishes two tasks. First, it aims to identify a common syndrome called "materialism" ailing competing approaches to knowledge of God that advocate or imply alternative purifying regimens to what the church offers. He assumes that where other quests fail in their quest to apprehend God truly, the church succeeds. Second, he

[10] Henceforth, I refer to the catholic church simply as the church

[11] *De Trin.* 1.4. For a brief discussion of contemporary attempts to understand Augustine's relationship to his philosophical and intellectual context, see also Travis E. Ables, "A Pneumatology of Christian Knowledge: The Holy Spirit and the Performance of the Mystery of God in Augustine and Barth" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2010), 54-55, esp. n. 26, where Ables discusses Pierre Hadot's treatment of Augustine's *De Trinitate* in his *Philosophy as a Way of Life* trans. M. Chase (Oxford & Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995)

examines the catholic faith's vulnerability to "materialism", and the corresponding tasks that must be undertaken to overcome it. I discuss each problem in turn.

Augustine's analysis of the syndrome he calls "materialism" takes the form of a three part typology. The first approach attempts to "transfer what they have observed about bodily things to incorporeal and spiritual things, which they would measure by the standard of what they experience through the sense of the body."[12] This definition would cover the anthropomorphite theology of Coptic monastics living in Egypt in the 4th century. They unashamedly conceived of God in explicitly materialist terms, i.e. God was shaped like a man and the Spirit had a physical presence like light.[13]This approach reads the nature of God's immaterial unchanging substance off of material, changing things. The second approach is a species of the first. It "ascribes to [God] the nature and moods of the human spirit."[14] Since this is a variation on the first approach, Augustine likely has the same anthropomorphite theologians in view. This approach reads God's nature off the spiritual substance of the soul instead material bodies; it does not distinguish the ontological difference between God's unchanging spiritual substance and the changing spiritual substance of created souls. [15] His critique might have certain Gnostic beliefs in mind. The final approach attempts to avoid the mistake of the first two approaches by ascending "above the created universe, so ineluctably subject to change, and raise their regard to the unchanging substance which is God." This definition would cover the approach of Neo-Platonists such as Plotinus. Rather than envision God in materialist

[12] De *Trin.* I, 1
[13] Thomas M. Gannon, S.J. and George W. Traub, S.J. *The Desert and the City* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1969), 37; Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos Chapters on Prayer*, trans and ed. John Eudes Bamberger, OCSO (Spencer: Cistercian Publications, 1970), xlviii
[14] De *Trin.* I.1
[15] *De Trin.* II. 14

terms, they err by believing they can discipline their noetic faculties sufficiently enough to transcend the world of change all together and rise to God's being; this error entails misconceptions about the natural capacities of human nature in the clutch of mortality. Consequently their concepts of God are false by virtue of their anthropological error, a falsity that arises from false conceptions of bodylines, that is, materialism. By charging each philosophical and theological opponent with the same error of "materialism", Augustine's critique is of a philosophical nature and not one advanced from the conceptual space of revealed Christianity. Therefore, it should be framed primarily as a philosophical problem with an epistemological bent: "materialism" is a failure to respect the ineluctable epistemological limit established by the categorical ontological distinction between divine simplicity and creaturely complexity by conceptualizing one side of the relation (God or world) in terms of the other such that the ontological integrities of each side is compromised, and the corresponding epistemological advance toward God fails.[16]

Augustine maintains that attempts to understand God truly succeed only when they are assisted by God's grace. A pursuit that assumes divine assistance takes faith rather than reason as the starting point. Quoting Isaiah 7:9, he says, "Unless you believe,

[16] *De Trin.*1.1 The brunt of Augustine's attack on materialistic ways of conceptualizing God takes place in book 5. Materialism is a term that describes the effort to conceptualize a substance by the accidental qualifiers that modify it. There he argues that God is not a substance capable of being modified because God's substance has no accidental qualities. He writes "There is at least no doubt that God is substance, or perhaps a better word would be being; at any rate what the Greeks call *ousia*. Just as we get the word "wisdom" from "wise," and knowledge from "know," so we have the word "being" from "be." And who can more be than that he that said to his servant, I am who I am, and, tell the sons of Israel, He who is sent me to you (Ex 3:14)? Now other things that we call beings or substances admit of modifications, by which they are modified and changed to a great or small extent. But God cannot be modified in any way, and therefore the substance or being which is God is alone unchangeable, and therefore it pertains to it most truly and supremely to be, from which comes the name "being." Anything that changes does not keep its being, and anything that can change even though it does not, is able to not be what it was; and thus only that which not only does not but also absolutely cannot change deserves without qualification to be said really and truly to be." Thus, Cavidini writes "that 'knowledge' or 'understanding of that which is uncreated and eternal consists in a sort of intellectual 'seeing' or 'vision' of it, one which involved a mode of thinking completely free of images or of any mental construct applicable to the creature.' John Cavidini, "The Structure and Intention of Augustine's De Trinitate," in *Augustine Studies,* 23 (1992): 104

you will not understand."[17] Thus, Augustine establishes the "starting-point of faith" rather than a bald reason as the reserve that adequately funds the quest for divine knowledge. He writes,

> "And the right intent is one that sets out from faith. The certitude of faith at least initiates knowledge; but the certitude of knowledge will not be completed until after this life when we see face to face (1 Cor. 13:12)."[18]

By asserting the primacy of faith over reason, Augustine does not annul the problem of materialism; rather, he rearticulates it in categories drawn from resources of the Christian faith. Augustine identifies two interlocking theological points most keenly impacted by the force of the epistemological problem: scripture and the doctrine of the Trinity. If Christian faith is not guilty of "materialism" and overcomes it, it must be shown and done on these two fronts.

First is scripture. For Augustine, the book of scripture numbers among the graces God provides us to assist our quest to know God truly. In a crucial passage integral to the coherency of the book's argument, Augustine provides a clue to how he thinks scripture helps us overcome the problem of materialism:

> "It was therefore to purify the human spirit of such falsehoods that holy scripture, adapting itself to babes, did not shun words, proper to any kind of thing whatever, that might nourish our understanding and enable it to rise up to the sublimities of divine things…The divine scriptures then are in the habit of making something like children's toys out of things that occur in creation, by which to entice our sickly gaze and get us step by step to seek as best we can the things that are above and forsake the things that are below."[19]

Rather than shun the material world all together, scripture adapts the substance of "divine things" to the economy of the material order in order to wean our natural powers of apprehension off their dependency upon created things and prepare us to see God without

[17] *De Trin.* 7.12
[18] *De Trin.* 9. 1
[19] *De Trin.* 1.2

them. Yet this assertion introduces another problem: "Things, however, that are peculiar to God and do not occur in nature are rarely mentioned by sacred scripture."[20] When it does mention them, it either speaks in a riddled, vexed way, e.g. Ex 3:14: "I am who I am"; or, it predicates an attribute general to creation uniquely to God in order to frustrate comparison between God and creatures, e.g. without denying immortality to creatures, 1 Tim 6:16 teaches that God "*alone* has immortality. Therefore, at this stage of his argument, the claim that scripture is a sure and trustworthy guide to the face of God is at once an assertion of faith *and* a philosophical problem. It is a philosophical problem because it uses materialistic images to describe God. Therefore, it must be shown *how* it overcomes materialism.

The second theological problem is the confession that God's simple substance truly is the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, an affirmation which complicates the first problem even further. For Augustine, catholic Christian faith is the Nicene faith, which "accounts for the one and only and true God being a trinity, and for the rightness of saying, believing, understanding that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one and the same substance or essence."[21] This problem has two aspects, the second of which I address in this paper. But briefly, the first problem is that the confession is philosophically vexed, e.g. the affirmation that the three are one substance is an apparent violation of the concept of divine simplicity. The argument Augustine advances for the coherency of the Trinity with divine simplicity is in bks. 5-7; it lies outside the scope of

[20] Ibid.
[21] *De Trin.* 1.4. On Augustine's indebtedness and contribution to pro-Nice Latin theology see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea*, 364-384; Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 11-93; Robert L. Calhoun, *Scripture, Creed and Theology: Lectures on the History of Christian Doctrine in the First Centuries* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), 270-278; J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (New York: Continuum Press, 1977), 270-279.

this paper, and so I will not address it. For my purposes here, it is important to note that the Trinitarian confession arises in the first place because of scriptural engagement, not philosophical speculation. But *how* scripture portrays God as such is the second aspect of the theological problem. Among the scant references to God's substance in scripture, it nowhere directly identifies God's substance as the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Moreover, scripture seems to suggest the opposite, that the three are not the same substance: in narratives it mentions one of the three acting in isolation from the others, or when it refers to God's substance through a predicate it usually refers the attribute to one of the three persons of the Trinity in isolation from the others, or to "God" in general, but never the Father, Son and Holy Spirit together as such. Arian Christians, or those whom Augustine calls Homoians in the work, recognized this and openly contested the accuracy of the Nicene faith. The basis of their protest was exegetical: scripture teaches that the Father alone is divine and the Son is an inferior being. In other words, they do not share the same substance. Though heredicated at Nicaea, this protest carried enduring formidable theological and social weight in Augustine's day; thus Arian Christians posed one of the most formidable political fronts against Nicene catholicity. Between scripture's reticence to speak openly of God's triunity and the enduring Arian assault on Nicene orthodoxy, Augustine recognized that a defense of the Nicene position was necessary. He seeks to "establish by the authority of scripture that the faith is in fact like that," or, that scripture bears witness to the one God as Triune.[22]

By demonstrating the Nicene confession's faithfulness to scripture, Augustine hopes to persuade his readers that the regimen the Church prescribes those who desire to contemplate God's substance is reliable, "whereby the due observance of piety makes the

[22] *De Trin.* 1.4

ailing mind well for the perception of unchanging truth."[23] This piety is derivative of faith in the Trinity. Ultimately, then, Augustine seeks to convince his readers that the Trinitarian *piety* the church prescribes for contemplation is ultimately based on an understanding of the God to whom scripture bears witness as properly Triune.

Augustine dedicates the rest of book one to the task of demonstrating from scripture the accuracy of the tradition's Trinitarian belief. Ultimately, he has to demonstrate this 1) to show how scripture bears witness to the immaterial and simple reality of God without falling to the materialist error, and 2) its witness to God as Triune is the concept that protects scripture from this trap. Ultimately, it is the Trinitarian witness of scripture that renders it fit to guide human beings to the face of God. To an analysis of this exegesis I now turn.

[23] Ibid.

CHAPTER III

TRINITARIAN EXEGESIS AND THE CHRISTOLOGICAL RESULT

In the following analysis of Augustine's exegesis, I argue that he distills scripture's Trinitarian portrait of God indirectly by way of Christology: he uses the doctrine of the Trinity attested to by Nicaea as a rule or interpretive grid that coordinates diverse ways scripture speaks of God into a coherent Trinitarian Christology. The Christology that emerges from his exegetical defense of the Trinity, I argue, is a proto-Chalcedonian construction: Jesus Christ is consubstantial with the Father and the Spirit as the Word, consubstantial with us according to his humanity as Jesus of Nazareth, and the two natures are united though unconfused in his person.[24] This Christology in turn functions as the doctrine that helps Augustine overcome the problem of materialism. A preliminary analysis of his exegetical method will helpfully frame the analysis of his exegesis.

Augustine translates the Nicaean confession of the Trinity into an interpretive rule of faith to coordinate the beliefs of the catholic tradition with the authority of scripture.[25] The rule takes the literary form of a terse, summary statement of a Christian doctrine. Lewis Ayres helpfully points out that these rules take the form of terse summary

[24] For the obvious reason that the writing of *De Trinitate* predates the first council of Chalcedon by more than 30 years, Augustine's Chalcedonianism is unintended. Nevertheless, it is faithful to the Christological rules that later council would establish, as my analysis of his exegesis will show. I attach the suffix "proto" to "Chalcedonian" only to signal the historical gap that separates Augustine from the council, and not to suggest that his "Chalcedonianism" is a conceptually primitive anticipation of the mature theological expression forged there.

[25] The use of rules of faith was common among orthodox theologians, particularly in their debates with theologians espousing heterodox construals of Christian doctrines. Cf. Robert M. Grant with David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of The Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984), 73-82. Shortly before writing on *De Trinitate* began, Augustine wrote a shorter book called *On Christian Doctrine* that outlines the principles of scriptural interpretation. There he advocated the use of rules of faith in the interpretation of scripture, particularly in the interpretation of difficult passages. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* ed. and trans. Rev. Professor J.F. Shaw (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2009) bk. 3.5

statements that function as principles in need of explanation rather than analogies or explanations of scripture itself.[26]

In effect, the rule reorganizes scripture into an alternative pattern than the one given in its literary and canonical presentation in scripture. This new pattern lifts out a network of meaning determined primarily by the doctrinal context expressed in the rule rather than the meaning given in its original literary context. To be sure, the "doctrinal sense" the interpretive rule reveals in scripture does not violate the "literary sense" it receives from its literary context (i.e. Psalmic poetry or Lukan narrative). If it did, then this would force Augustine to say that scripture contradicts itself, which would shipwreck the Christian witness all together. Thus, each pattern of meaning must be accountable to an irreducible and therefore normative structure in scripture, or, what has been termed throughout the history of Christian thought the "literal sense."[27] For Augustine, the literal sense is the grammatical sense. In liberal arts education in Roman Africa, grammar "meant analysis of the parts of speech, of syntax and metrics, and of pronunciation and articulation."[28] He uses this analytic frame in different ways. In practice, sometimes his

[26]Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 106.

[27] The concept of the "literal sense" of scripture has been hotly contested throughout the history of Christian theology. For a helpful survey of the basic contours of the discussion see Brevard S. Childs "The Sensus Literalis of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem", in *Beiträge zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie. Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag* ed. H. Donner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 80-93.

[28] This approach reflects Augustine's liberal arts education in Roman Africa. For a narratival account of Augustine's education, see Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 23-29; for an account of the influence of the liberal arts upon the argument of *De Trinitate* see Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 121-144. Paul J. Griffiths gives the following concise account of what grammatical training entailed in Roman African liberal arts education: "At the higher levels of education, grammar and rhetoric were studied. Grammar meant analysis of the parts of speech, of syntax and metrics, and of pronunciation and articulation. Students were meant to develop the ability to do these things themselves, and so they were also expected to know what was necessary in order to do so. A fairly standard pattern of instruction was followed in order to develop all these skills. At the end of the day, a passage from one of the poets or historians would be set for memorization; students would begin their work in class the next day by reciting the passage from memory (it would have been learned between the end of school one day and its beginning the next morning); the teacher would then offer comments on the formal features in each sentence, as well as syntactical features of the passage as a whole. Comments would be offered by the teacher on student pronunciation and

engagement with grammatical sense is not always explicit; in these cases so long as the rule does not transgress the grammatical integrity of the text, it is a permissible interpretation; other times he'll exploit syntactical plasticity of a verse by interpreting in light of another, a move which expands the syntactical meaning of the former. In every case, the grammatical sense functions as the normative measure for faithful interpretation. This method preserves the authority of scripture over the rule of faith, while enabling him to establish the derivative authority of the rule from its compatibility with scripture.

However, aligning the rule's faithfulness to scripture via its preservation of its grammatical sense does not solve the problem of contradiction. Because of the sprawling scope and the diversity of ways scripture talks about God, Augustine often finds as many passages in scripture that prove the rule as passages that contradict it. In the case that he judges that he has marshaled an ample number of passages to establish the rule's faithfulness, Augustine then generates derivative rules to explain and harmonize remaining contradicting passages under the jurisdiction of the original rule. In bk. 1 of *De Trinitate* he does this twice, appending two derivative Christological rules to the original Trinitarian rule that prompts the endeavor. As a result, even when he is proving the aptness of a derivative rule, the validity of the original Trinitarian rule is likewise reinforced. The key difference between the first statement and the subsequent statements is that the first is an *established doctrine* that derives its relative authoritative force from the Nicaean tradition with which Augustine aligns and its primary authoritative force

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articulation." Paul J. Griffiths. *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 153. Augustine would have readers of similar educational background to evaluate his argument according to its faithfulness to the grammatical integrity of the text as well its doctrinal fidelity and conceptual coherency.

from scripture; the following two Christological rules are theologumena- proposals of a scriptural Christology erected upon the touchstone of Nicaean doctrine of God. They are theologumena because they lack any authoritative force of their own; their validity depends upon the faithfulness with which they harmonize passages of scripture that deal with apparently unrelated themes to the original rule.[29]

In sum not only does this procedure aim to square the Nicaean tradition's Trinitarian confession and practice with the authority of scripture, it also aims to discover the latent harmony in the diversity of scripture. Though Augustine summons a massive number of passages in his defense of the Trinity, an analysis of the lynchpins in his argument will sufficiently display his method.[30]

The rule of faith that launches Augustine's exegesis is the Nicene confession of the Trinity. It runs:

> "According to the scriptures Father and Son and Holy Spirit in the inseparable equality of the one substance present a divine unity; and therefore there are not three gods but one God; although indeed the Father has begotten the Son, and therefore he who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son is begotten by the Father, and therefore he who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, himself coequal to the Father and the Son, and belonging to the threefold unity."[31]

The rule can be parsed into three principles: 1) the real substantial unity of the three; 2) the inseparability of their action (which is an implication of the first principle); 3) the real distinction of each from the others. Passages that appear to contradict this summary are

[29] Only after the Council of Chalcedon acquired the stamp of Nicaean orthodoxy would this Christology acquire the status of established doctrine.

[30]The reader deserves to know that I intentionally omit his proofs of the Holy Spirit's divinity in this analysis. In book 1 Augustine's proofs of the Holy Spirit's divinity duplicate his arguments for the Son's; thus his treatment of the Holy Spirit at this stage of his argument adds little additional insight into the nature of the Trinity. Therefore, I omit his exegetical treatment of the Spirit from this section. But it is important to note that Augustine's recourse to properly *Christological* rules of faith for the divinity of the Holy Spirit plays a major role in the emergence of the pneumatological aporia that arises explicitly in book 15. Augustine's inability to resolve this aporia, namely the distinction between the Spirit's "procession" and the Son's "begetting", has led many theologians to consider Augustine's pneumatology to be the Achilles ' heel of the work.

[31] *De Trin.* 1.7

those that depict one of the three persons acting apart from the others, and thus only affirm the 3) the real distinction at the cost dissolving 2) the inseparability of their action. For example, only the Spirit descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove at his baptism (Mark 1:10); only the Son is incarnate, dies, rises again and ascends to the Father; and only the Father expresses his pleasure in the Son at his baptism (Mark 1:11) and during the transfiguration (Matt 17:5).[32] Yet by challenging the inseparability of the Trinity's action, these passages challenge the truthfulness of the first principle: the substantial unity of the three. In sum, aspects of these passages contradict the faithfulness of the entire rule.

In the statement's defense, Augustine marches out the opening verses of John's prologue as a corroborative proof-text of the rule. Vv. 1-3 say:

> "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. This was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was made nothing."[33]

The first sentence of v. 1 affirms 1) the substantial unity of the Father and the Word (who is the Son), without collapsing them into a single person, thus preserving the principle of 3) their real distinction and 2) the inseparability of their action.[34] Augustine establishes this passage as his proof-text of the Nicene statement's validity. Augustine deploys it as a control to shift the focus of the problem off a contradiction between scripture and the tradition to a potential intra-textual contradiction in the supposed unitary witness of scripture itself, namely, between John's prologue and the aforementioned passages in the Synoptics.

[32]Ibid.
[33]*De Trin* 1.9. Where possible, I use the translations Augustine includes in his text. Where impossible, I use the NRSV.
[34] He includes 1 Jn 5:20, Sir 24:5 and Jn 5:19 as parallel passages that likewise reinforce the rule.

With the Trinitarian rule still in view, he enters into Christological territory to solve the problem. The John passage says further that the selfsame Word, who was with God and was God, becomes flesh (Jn 1:14) *without* forfeiting His consubstantial identity with God. Therefore, Augustine argues that the Word retains His equality and unity with God while taking on a reality of complete dissimilarity to the divine in the incarnation.[35] Having found a passage of scripture that demonstrates that the Word's incarnation does not jeopardize the principle of consubstantiality, Augustine returns to the puzzle of how the incarnation of the Word alone does not sunder the inseparability of the Trinity's activity with this scripture in tow.

Augustine addresses the question through exploiting the implied soteriological and eschatological valences the consubstantiality of the Three opens up in a Christology based upon the prologue of John. The Son's consubstantiality with the Father and the Spirit ensures that we acquire eternal life through "knowing the true one, and being in the true one, in his Son Jesus Christ." (1st Jn 5:20). He points out that eternal life, or immortality, is a property that belongs to God alone according to 1st Tm 6:16. Therefore, we become immortal by partaking in the immortality that God is.[36] Augustine points out that when 1st Tm 6:16 is read against the backdrop of 1st Jn 5:20, it seems as though the only divine person whose immortality we need is the Son's, since 1st John only seems to refer to Jesus Christ as the "true one." But when 1st John is understood in the expanded context of 1st Timothy 6:14-16, the fullness of the Triune Godhead comes into view:

> "That you keep the commandment untarnished and irreproachable until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom in his own proper times he has manifested who is the blessed and only mighty one, King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and

[35] *De Trin.* I. 9
[36] Ibid.

> dwells in light inaccessible, whom no man has ever seen or can see, to whom is honor and glory for ever and ever."[37]

Augustine reasons that since Timothy refrains from identifying any one person of the Trinity as the "One" Jesus manifests, identifying this "One" instead with honorary titles, e.g. King of kings, Lord of lords, etc., the "One" includes the Father and the Holy Spirit with the Son.[38] Thus, to know and be in the "true one" through Jesus is to know and be in the Trinity. This interpretative move enables Augustine to demonstrate the inseparability of the Triune God's activity in the economy of salvation: the Trinity, rather than the Son alone, confers immortality upon humanity eschatologically. Nevertheless, both 1st John and Timothy identify Christ as the mediator of immortality. Yet, by identifying the function of the incarnation with the soteriological aim of conferring immortality upon humanity, and locating the event of this conferment eschatologically, the 1st Timothy passage shows that the entire economy of salvation is knit together by the inseparability of the Triune God's action, even when one person is manifested apart from the others during certain punctual instances in the narrated depiction of the plan (as in the relevant Synoptic passages that spawned this inquiry). Thus, Augustine squares the final principle of inseparable action of the Trinity with scripture in the Christological register wherein the doctrines of soteriology and eschatology cohere, and with it he satisfies the criterion of demonstrating the congruency of the Nicene rule of faith with the authority of scripture.

Augustine's proposal for a second rule of faith arises once he notices a loose end in the 1st Timothy passage that threatens to shipwreck the Christological defense of the

[37] *De Trin.* 1. 10

[38] This exegesis is a particularly vivid example of the kind plasticity Augustine finds in the grammar of certain passages.

Trinity he has thus far mounted. 1st Timothy 6:16b refers to God as the one "whom no man has ever seen or can see." This passage problematizes the Christological proof offered in support of the first rule because it contests that anything created e.g. Jesus of Nazareth, can manifest the uncreated and invisible God. On a bald reading, even if the Word did take on flesh, the flesh of Jesus irremediably conceals the divine Word from our sight, thus occluding any apprehension of God in Jesus. Or worse, the passage implicitly questions the divinity of the Word incarnated in Jesus. The strength of the later possibility gathers force with the inclusion of other texts that appear subordinate the Son to the Father, e.g. Jn 14:28, where Jesus confesses, "The Father is greater than I*",* and 1st Corinthians 15:28, which says, "But when all things are made subject to him, then shall the Son himself also be made subject to the one who subjected all things to him."[39] This accumulation of subordinationist passages renews the question of whether the first principle stating the Trinitarian Nicaean rule of faith, which affirms the coequality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is congruent with scripture.

In order to defend the consubstantiality of the Word and the Father, Augustine refines his emerging Trinitarian Christology further by qualifying it with a new rule of faith that pushes his Christology in a Chalcedonian direction:

> "Scripture says both; that the Son is equal to the Father and that the Father is greater than the Son. The one is to be understood in virtue of the form of God, the other in virtue of the form of a servant, without any confusion."[40]

Like the first Trinitarian rule, this rule can be divided into three principles that Augustine intends to reinforce the principle of divine simplicity advanced in the first rule: 1) the Son's real equality with the Father by virtue of the form of the Word, 2) the Son's real

[39] These two passages are not the only instances of the kind of problem Augustine identifies. For instance, he cites Gal 4:4; Jn 6:38; Mt 26:38; Phil 2:8; Jn 7:16 as other passages depicting the Son as inferior to the Father. *De Trin.* 1.22

[40] *De Trin.* I. 14

inequality to God by virtue of his servant-form and 3) their real and unconfused unity in Christ's single subject. Augustine cites the Christ hymn of Philippians 2:6-7 as his first proof: "Who being in the form of God thought it no robbery to be equal to God, yet he emptied himself taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, in condition found as a man."[41] The passage clearly indicates that the person of Christ contains two resonances- one proper to his divine-form and the other proper to his servant-form.

Just as important, Phil 2:6-7 unfolds the logic connecting the real distinction and unity of Christ's two natures in the dramatic action of the incarnation.[42] In an important and subtle passage he writes, "Because the form of God took on the form of a servant, each is God and each is man, *but each is God because of God taking on, and each is man because of man taken on.*"[43] The Son is equal to the Father *by nature*, but becomes unequal to God on account of his *decision* to take the form of human flesh as an act of service. His inequality before the Father, then, refers to the inequality of the flesh he took on to the incorporeal substance God is. Since he did not cease to be the divine Son even as the enfleshed Word, the passages referring to Christ's inequality do not imply any

[41] The language of Philippians is so close to the summary statement that it is likely Augustine drafted the rule straight from it. Michel Barnes argues that this passage from Philippians is one of three passages that provide the axis upon which Augustine coordinates his Christology, soteriology and epistemology that guides bks 2-4, 12-15. The other two passages are Mt. 5-8 and 1st Corinthians 15:24-28. Michel René Barnes, "The Visible Christ And The Invisible Trinity: Mt. 5:8 in Augustine's Trinitarian Theology of 400" in Modern Theology 19:3 (July 2003), 331-32. Ayres gives a strong endorsement of Barnes' thesis; he uses it as the basis for his own construal of Augustine's Christological pneumatology. *Augustine and the Trinity*, 144-45

[42] Lewis Ayres, "The Christological Context of Augustine's De Trinitate XIII", *Augustine Studies,* 29 (1998), 133. Though Ayres' analysis of the Christological theme treats the bks. 8-13 in the *De Trinitate,* Augustine introduces the themes of faith and contemplation he treats there in bk. 1. Indeed, there is a case to be made that the Christology he crafts within his discussion of the missions in bks. 2-4 exploits different aspects of the Trinitarian Christology he establishes through the exegesis he performs in bk. 1 than does bk. 13.

[43] *De Trin.* 1.14 (emphasis mine). The final terse clause of this statement anticipates the Christological meditations in bk. 13.

change in his substance from his divinity in the incarnation. Therefore scripture does indeed speak of Jesus Christ in two distinct ways appropriate to the divinity and humanity proper to Christ: by the divine nature proper to his identity as the Son of God and by the human nature proper to his identity with humanity, the form of the Servant. This logic eliminates the apparent contradiction between the two ways scripture speaks about Christ, i.e., Jesus' assertion in Jn. 14:28 that "The Father is greater than I" refers to the superiority of the Father's divinity over his humanity, while his confession in Jn. 10:30 that he "and the Father are one," refers to his equality with the Father in the form of God.[44] Since the same subject is speaking in both resonances, it is impossible to disconnect completely the two and attribute them to different subjects.

The final rule of faith arises from a concomitant danger that arises on account of the union of the two natures in the person of Christ. The third rule runs: "because of the unity of person in Jesus Christ, things are said of him in one nature which are proper to him in virtue of the other." Indeed, certain passages speak of Christ as a compound subject without clearly differentiating in which resonance - his humanity or his divinity- Christ is speaking. Augustine takes Jn. 12:47-48 as the prime example:

> "If anyone does not listen to my words, it is not I that will judge him; for I did not come, says he, to judge the world but to save the world. Whoever spurns me and does not accept my words has one to judge him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day."[45]

Augustine uses the prior two rules of faith first to analyze the problem the text poses and then offer a corresponding solution to prove the validity of the third rule. The major threat Augustine thinks the text poses is that it sunders the inseparability of divine

[44] *De Trin.* 1.15. For a list of further applications, see *De Trin.* 1.22-24.
[45]He points out again that Jn. 7:16, which says "My doctrine is not mine" and Jn. 12:44, which says "he who believes in me does not believe in me", are of a similar kind of ambiguity. *De Trin.* 1.27

action in two possible ways. First, Christ denies himself the authority to judge those who do not heed his words (v.47b). This implies that the Father alone is the one who does (v.48b). This would delegate the work of salvation exclusively to the Son and the work of judgment exclusively to the Father, a plain violation of the inseparability of the Trinity's work. Second, it is possible to read the final clause of v.48 as a reversal of the roles of Father and Son, though to the same doctrinal effect: it attributes judgment to the word Christ alone speaks and thus apparently releases the Father from the role of judge. In light of both options the passage not only threatens to compromise the doctrine of the Trinity, but displays a contradiction in scripture. Augustine falls back on the first two rules to resolve the ambiguity of this passage. Tackling the latter problem first, he places vv. 47-48 in the context of vv. 49-50, where Christ explains, "All that I speak, I speak just as the Father told me." The word the Father speaks, Augustine reasons, is none other than the Son himself, since the Son is the Word of the Father, who is consubstantial. This move clearly relies on the first and second principles (the substantial unity of the Father and the Son and the inseparability of their action) of the first rule of faith on the Trinity. It shows that v. 48c does not exclude the Father from the role of judge. Second, Augustine deploys the first two principles which assert that Christ possesses two distinct natures, human and divine, of the second rule of to explain the phrase "it is not I that will judge him" in the first half of v. 47a. Christ will not judge the human race on the human authority of his flesh but on the divine authority he possesses as the Father's Word.[46] Therefore, the Son and the Father will judge together on account of their unity in substance. This move occludes the possibility of concluding that the passage delegates separate tasks to the Father and Son. Augustine applies this rule in much the same way to similar passages,

[46] *De Trin.* 1.27

enlisting rules established in the previous two summaries to resolve ambiguous passages.[47] Note that this third summary adds no new doctrinal insight to the Trinitarian Christology Augustine has developed; instead, it secures the congruency of the second rule with the first one, and thereby safeguards the abiding congruency of the prior two Trinitarian and Christological Rules of faith with scripture.

With the application of this final rule, Augustine finds no more outlying patterns of scripture that challenge in any significant way the harmony of the Trinitarian faith and the authority of scripture.[48] As a result, he demonstrates "by the authority of scripture that the faith is in fact like that," that is, that Nicene catholicity is scriptural. He proves this harmony by distilling and isolating a proto- Chalcedonian Christological pattern among the diverse ways scripture identifies Jesus Christ in relation to the Father. As a result he defends the Trinity via Christology. This turn provides the requisite doctrinal starting point and scriptural reserve that funds his quest to understand how the Christian faith overcomes the epistemological problem of materialism and provides a trustworthy path to the face of God. Indeed, whatever answer he finds to this primary problem will derive on the incarnation of the Word of God, for in the incarnation, the immaterial God is present and revealed in the material world of change without any declension in the divine being itself. To Augustine's response to this question, I now turn.

[47] *De Trin.* 1.31

[48] In his discussion of the missions in books II-IV Augustine's occupation with polemical exegesis continues. None of these arguments apply the same rules he establishes in book 1.

CHAPTER IV

PUTTING THE RESULT TO WORK: CHRISTOLOGICAL METAPHYSICS

"So it is that the Word made flesh, which is Christ Jesus has treasures both of wisdom and of knowledge."[49]

The question "how does scripture mediate knowledge of God that is true?" can also be put in the following way: how is it possible to start with the materialistic imagery Scripture uses to speak of God to contemplate the immaterial reality of God directly without following into the trap of materialism? Though this epistemological question arises from the context of the materialist problematic, Augustine draws on theological resources his exegesis of scripture yields to solve the problem. In this section, I argue that Augustine uses the proto-Chalcedonian Christological pattern sifted out from scripture's complex portraiture of God as an epistemological point of mediation that avoids the trap of materialism and successfully sets human beings on the path that ends in contemplation. Indeed, successfully deployed conceptually, the incarnation bridges the ontological gap between creatures and God while respecting the irreducible distinction.

The mediatorial role the incarnation plays depends upon the singular metaphysical relation it establishes between God and the world. Augustine explains the singularity of this metaphysical relation in his discussion of the divine missions. A "divine mission" is a theophany, or, an act of divine self-disclosure in the created realm of time and space. Augustine's discussion of the Word's mission in the incarnation is part of a broader discussion of the role of various Old and New Testament theophanies in scripture. A basic scriptural problem animating his discussion is Christological: if God has appeared before human beings prior to the Word's incarnation, i.e. before Abraham at the Oaks of

[49] *De Trin.* XIII. 24

Mamre (Gen 18) or before Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 33:17-22), then it needs to be explained why Christians focus on the incarnation as the divine mission through which God definitively discloses the divine substance to the world. His answer is as follows. In every theophany prior to and after the incarnation, God acted through some created means, whether by the work of angels (the Oaks of Mamre and burning bush theophanies) or other created means (the Spirit's assumption in the form of dove [Lk. 3:22] and fire [Acts 2:1-4]), and "not his own proper substance."[50] Therefore these theophanies do not disclose the divine substance in the created world of time and space and the ontological barrier dividing humans and God remains unbridged. In the incarnation, however,

> "The son of man was not assumed simply in order to have the Word of God, like other saints and wise men only more so, above his fellows (s. 45:8); not in order to have a more ample share in the Word of God and so excel the rest in wisdom, *but quite simply to be the Word of God*. *The Word in flesh is one thing, the Word being flesh another*…"[51]

By abiding in the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Word bridges the ontological barrier to reveal the divine substance in the world through the same flesh.[52] In sum, "the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily (Col 2.9)" in Jesus Christ and displayed in him in a wholly unique

[50] *De Trin.* III. 26

[51] *De Trin*. II.11 (emphasis mine). Here, Augustine describes the union between Jesus and the Word more nearly in the hypostatic terms Chalcedon would later use. This passage, then, adds an important qualifier to my analysis of Augustine's earlier portrayal of the union in the dramatic terms embedded in the eschatological passages of 1.15-17

[52] The *sole* "mission" or aim God sought to accomplish in each theophany distinguishes the incarnation from the others. In the incarnation, the Father sends the Word into the world to save it and lead believers to contemplation (Jn. 16:28); every other theophany in the Old and New Testaments has two aims: one relative to its place in its immediate narratival context (See for instance, Augustine's treatment of the relative and ultimate meanings of Jacob's stone and the serpents made by Pharaoh's serpents [*De Trin.* III. 19-20]), and the ultimate aim of pointing to the incarnation as the central and preeminent mission that accomplishes the goal of our salvation. The ranking of the theophanies in this way also provides a tacit framework for understanding the canonical structure of the Bible: the incarnation is the event that bestows ultimate meaning on the contents as a whole, and by bestowing meaning on the whole, it unifies scripture into a single narrative guided by the accomplishment of this one aim: the appearance and Lordship of Christ. See Augustine's meditation on Christ's cosmic power that incorporates all relative meanings displayed in scripture and the created order of time and space at large and turns them into symbols of his preeminent status. *De Trin.* IV. 7-12. On the concept of "unifying narrative" see David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence,* 458-478

way that trumps the other theophanies.[53] The metaphysical uniqueness Augustine sees in the incarnation is a result of his argument that Christological texts describing the incarnation of the Word do not compromise the consubstantiality of the Word and Father. They teach instead why the Word became incarnate: the Father sent the Word into the world to save it (Jn. 14:26), that is, the Word comes to serve (Phil 2:6-7).[54] Augustine is firmly convinced that the sum of scriptural teaching concerning Christ explains that God had to disclose the goodness, wisdom, beauty, etc. of the divine substance to us precisely as a saving event and no other.

The reason it had to be saving emerges out of an apparent contradiction in scripture's teaching on the incarnation. On the one hand, scripture speaks of the Son as sent into the world by the Father: John 16:28 cites the incarnate Word as saying, "I went forth from the Father, and came into this world," while John 1:11 affirms that "He [the Word] came into his own [the world]." On the other hand, scripture also teaches that the Word has *always* been in the world: for example, in the same breath as John 1:11, John 1:10 says, "He [the Word] was in the world, and the world was made through him," while Jeremiah 23:24 confirms, "Heaven and earth do I [the Word] fill."[55] The contradictions between the two sets of text force the reader to ask why the Father would send the Son into the world where the Son already is and thus to whom He is already present (cf. Acts 17:21).[56] Augustine frames the soteriological solution to this puzzle in epistemological terms: sin had darkened human minds to the abiding presence of the Word in the world;

[53] Amazingly enough, Augustine never cites this rich passage anywhere in his Christological treatment of the Trinity.
[54] *De Trin.* 1.18
[55] *De Trin.* II. 7. Just as in the first section, I only cite select passages Augustine uses to illustrate this contradiction.
[56] Ibid. The Acts passage is one of Augustine's favorite passages to show the cosmic scope of the Word's power and operation, and thus the cosmic power focused in the flesh of Jesus Christ in the incarnation.

and the Word became incarnate to overcome sin and thereby restore the light to the mind, which is the selfsame abiding presence of God.[57] Augustine translates this doctrinal scheme into categories of Platonic metaphysics to explain how sin is responsible for the mind's fall into ignorance of God and the incarnation the cause of its rise to enlightenment.

The first set of texts which bear witness to the Word's abiding presence in the World can be explained in terms of the Platonic theory of ideal forms. In book 8, Augustine examines how it is one can know with certainty what justice is when its sensible manifestations in the created world are diverse, instable, and transitory perforce the mutability of created world.[58] In what I think is his most Platonistic moment of the whole treatise, Augustine argues that human beings know what justice is not from its various sensible manifestations, but from the *form* of justice directly present to the mind; the mind apprehends this form by an act of pure intellect unreliant upon data derived from bodily senses. Since the form can be apprehended in this interior way, its substance is distinct from its sensible manifestations, i.e. in an individual human being or a human collective.[59] The substance of this ideal form is immaterial, unchanging, eternal and perfect; its manifestations in the world are material, instable, temporal and therefore imperfect. The sensible world manifests justice through participation in the ontologically distinct, ideal form of justice, which Augustine calls "the good of every good."[60] The "good of every good" is identical to the substance of the Triune God. The ideal forms of

[57] To anticipate some, Augustine advances an argument for the appropriateness of the incarnation *in its narrative whole* (birth, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension) in book 13, especially, 19-26.
[58] This paragraph is an analysis of bk. VIII, 9. This section, perhaps more than any other in the treatise, reflects Augustine's indebtedness to Platonic metaphysics in his own epistemology and metaphysics. The most extensive exploration of the problem the phenomenon of modification and change poses to the apprehension of a sensible thing's substance lies in bks 5-7, mainly 5.
[59] *De Trin.* VIII. 9:
[60] *De Trin.* VIII. 4

justice, goodness, life, etc. are identical by virtue of the identity of God's simple substance with each:

> So because there is but one Word of God, *through which all things were made* (Jn 1:1-6), which is unchanging truth, in which all things are primordially and unchangingly together, not only things that are in the whole of this creation, but things that have and will be; but there it is not a question of "have been" and "will be," there they simply are; and all things there are life and all are one, and indeed there is there but "one" and one life.[61]

A human mind is capable of knowing what justice is because God's substance, the true source of human justice, is present to it.[62] This, I think, is the corresponding metaphysical claim to the set of scriptural passages which affirm the Son's abiding presence in the world prior to His being sent by the Father: those passages provide scriptural warrant for affirming the presence of ideal forms, inasmuch as these forms are understood as predicates of the simple substance God is.[63]

All things derive their life from God by participation. Human beings participate in God in a unique way. By identifying the mind as the point of contact that focuses the metaphysical relation between God and the humanity, Augustine establishes a conceptual base upon which to elaborate a concept of human participation, which in turn functions as the key to his theological anthropology.[64] Augustine defines the mind in the context of human nature as such:

> "We could also define man like this and say, "Man is a rational substance consisting of soul and body." In this case there is no doubt that man has a soul which is not body and a body which is not soul. Thus here too those three things are not man but something of

[61] *De Trin.* IV.3

[62] "For when I say, and say with full knowledge, "That mind is just which knowingly and deliberately, in life and in conduct, gives each man what is his own," I am not recalling something absent like Carthage, or fabricating it as best I can like Alexandria, whether it is like my fabrication or not like it; *but I am perceiving something that is present to me, and it is present to me even if I am not what I perceiv*e, and many will agree with me when they hear me." *De Trin.* VIII, 5 (emphasis mine).

[63] Henceforth, when I use the term "ideal forms" I imply God's substance; divine substance is also synonymous with the ideal forms.

[64] For a wonderful Augustinian meditation on the concept of participation, see Paul Griffiths' chapter of the same name in his *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 75-92

> man's or in man. Leave the body aside and think only about the soul, and mind is something that belongs to it, like its head or its eye or its face- but you must not think of these comparisons in a material way. So it is not the soul but what is pre-eminent in the soul that is called mind."[65]

The human being is hierarchically ordered as body and soul: the soul is the source of life for the body and therefore superior to it; the immaterial mind is the best part of the soul because it apprehends God and thereby enables the soul to participate in God and derive its life from therefrom.[66] For this reason, Augustine identifies the image of God in the human being with its mind precisely because the mind's immateriality is the part of human nature that most closely resembles the immateriality of God.[67] Human beings participate in God when they "cling" to God's substance with their minds. What "clinging" means must be understood in terms of the mind's function and its capacities. The mind is the seat of the soul's rationality, or, the power of deliberation and choice. Unlike animal or plant life, the human being must deliberately choose to participate in God's presence to receive the life it needs, hence, Augustine's use of the word "cling", which denotes an intended act of intimacy:

> "But in order to be a good soul I see that it must deliberately choose to do something. Not of course that simply being a soul is not something good- how else could it be said, and very truly said to be better than the body? But the reason it is not yet called a good soul is that it still remains for it to act by deliberate choice in order to acquire excellence."[68]

Human souls are free to respond to God's inner presence to the mind as they desire: they may participate or abstain. The natural knowledge of God which the ideal forms make possible, then, does not guarantee the soul's participation; rather, presence is the necessary condition of participation's possibility.

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[65] *De Trin.* XV. 11
[66] *De Trin.* IV. 3
[67] *De Trin.* XV.11
[68] *De Trin.* VIII. 4. To be sure, Augustine affirms that for the soul to exist at all is an intrinsic good to human life independent of the good attained by choice. But the telos of human beings transcends mere existence, and it is possible to deny one's telos. Such a denial throws the rebellious soul against the grain of their existence. And to live cross-grain to this goodness is hell.

Augustine's decision to make choice an ineluctable ingredient in the nature of human participation issues in a noetic structure unique to the kind of rational mind human beings possess. Unlike angels, who are also rational beings, human beings are embodied minds. [69] As I mentioned, the human mind has the capacity to apprehend the immaterial and eternal forms directly by means of a pure intellectual operation independent of bodily senses; but as the mind of an embodied soul designed to inhabit a material and temporal world, the same mind apprehends and understands the material things they encounter there by the senses of the body. Augustine calls the former capacity of the mind "wisdom" and the second one "knowledge."[70] Both are useful. By the operation of wisdom, the mind apprehends and clings to the eternal, divine substance directly; by that of knowledge the mind manages the affairs of its temporal, embodied existence. Augustine expresses the distinction between these two operations in anthropological terms, calling the operation of wisdom the reserve of the "inner man" –or spiritual life- and that of knowledge the "outer man" –or embodied life.[71] The same mind is at work in acquiring wisdom and knowledge; and thus the "inner man" and "outer man" are each ingredient in every single human subject. The fundamental choice every human being must make is to decide which kind of good to love more: the goods of the inner man or the goods of the outer man. Thus, the love of the heart, which Augustine also calls the will, is basic to both; love is the appetite driving the mind's acquisition for wisdom and knowledge.[72]

[69] For Augustine's treatment of the doctrine of Angels, see *City of God*, ed. and trans. by Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003) II.XI. 9
[70] *De Trin.* XII. 25
[71] *De Trin.* VIII. 3; XIII. 2
[72] *De Trin.* VIII.5

Because the choices of the mind's love are ingredient to the functioning of its noetic faculties, the human being ineluctably and intrinsically vulnerable; this is what makes its decisions of what good to love matter: the human being is "progressively formed" by whatever good it chooses to love most; the mind must love well.[73] God designed human beings to grow into the likeness of the divine image they possess as mind; thus they must put their love to the accomplishment of this end. For Augustine, wisdom is superior to knowledge because it yields truer understanding of God. By wisdom the mind gains understanding of God's eternal and unchanging substance *directly*. Knowledge of God's perfections refracted through temporal and changeable things is *indirect*: at best it yields a wholly instable and relative apprehension of them that changes when the mediating material thing changes; at worst such knowledge will be mistaken all together and deceive the mind into loving something creaturely as God. To participate in God truly the mind must love the goods of wisdom more than the goods of knowledge; or, in other words, it must love God more than the world. Hence, Augustine calls wisdom worship (or, contemplation); and knowledge action oriented toward abstinence from evil, or false worship.[74] Thus to worship well, the mind must direct all of its activity (knowledge) toward the telos of fostering wisdom.[75] When it does this, the whole human being –body and soul, inner- and outer man- enjoy the life giving goodnesses of God: the soul grows wise and happy and the body receives immortality.[76]

[73] It is also what makes neutrality an absurd ideal in understanding because understanding is an appetite for one of these two types of goods.
[74] *De Trin.* XII. 22; XIV. 1
[75] *De Trin.* XII. 21
[76] The love of wisdom improves the mind's ability to manage its temporal affairs wisely by subordinating the relative teloi proper to the goods of the outer man to the ultimate telos of acquiring eternal goods of God that nurture the inner man. Doing this nourishes the outer man. Thus the outer man participates indirectly through the inner man's transformation.

This is how human beings should have lived, but they sinned, a choice that did severe damage to their noetic equipment, thereby cutting them off from participation in God and destroying their total being. This interloping factor precipitates the Father's sending of the Son. A brief account is thus necessary.

In Augustine's scheme, sin is basically the mind's choice to love the goods of knowledge more than goods of wisdom, the world more than God. The mind makes this decision out of a distorted desire to be like God, that is, a desire to accomplish the telos God designed it to seek for the wrong motive.[77] This motive is pride rather than love.[78] Pride tempts the soul to love the power it privately possesses more than the power of God in which it participates. Augustine identifies the "private power" of the soul with the capacities that rest completely in the body. By the body's power the human being acquires food, sex and shelter, goods possible to acquire without recourse to participation in the divine perfections of ideal forms, i.e. justice, goodness, and life. Therefore, it is private because it operates independently of the mind's participation in the power of God. Because the mind acquires the goods of the inner man, by contrast, by participation in God's substance, the mind must depend upon the power of God to enjoy these goods, and thus rely on a power it does not privately possess. Pride, then, is the desire to have power that functions autonomously from God; and this desire is funded by the mistaken belief that possession of such power would make a soul more God-like than dependence. At the nub of the matter, pride is a decision to identify the image of God elsewhere in the human than the mind.

[77] *De Trin.* XII. 16
[78] *De Trin.* XII. 14

The mind's rejection of participation in God is the basic concept grounding Augustine's account of sin. This rejection inflicts a miasma, ineluctable and unforeseen, upon the soul that plagues it with fatal epistemological and ontological symptoms and which shoot through the entire hierarchically arranged noetic and ontological structure of human being.

First, the epistemological symptoms. In sin, the mind gives captaincy to knowledge with the consent of its wisdom; in such a way the *whole* mind falls, not just a part.[79] By loving the private goods of knowledge more than the common good of God, the mind

> "drags the deceptive semblances of bodily things inside, and plays about with them in idle meditation until it cannot even think of anything divine except as being such, and so in its private avarice it is loaded with error and in its private prodigality it is emptied of strength."[80]

The bodily things proper to the outer man that the mind clings to in its memory contaminate the inner man such that it destroys the mind's capacity to seek wisdom, to worship. Without wisdom it cannot apprehend the ideal forms clearly and it forgets God.

Ontological symptoms follow upon the failure of wisdom. The mind's forgetfulness induces the soul's love for God to grow cold, a cooling that enervates the strength of the mind's will. With this enervation of the will, the mind slumps into a mire of its own private power which paradoxically renders the soul powerless to participate in God. With the cessation of participation, the soul loses its capacity to nourish the body with life it receives from God; this results in the body's decay and eventual death.[81] Sin

[79] *De Trin.* XII. 13.
[80] *De Trin.* XII. 15
[81] *De Trin*. IV. 15 cf. J. Patout Burns, "How Christ Saves: Augustine's Multiple Explanations", 2-3. The paper quoted here is an early draft of an article published by the same title in *Tradition & the Rule of Faith in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Joseph T. Lienhard, S. J.* ed. Ronnie J. Rombs and Alexander J. Hwang, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2010)

reveals its total power over the complex of mind, soul and body with the body's death; with death the soul realizes its ultimate powerlessness of its "private power." But the revelation of its powerlessness throws the soul into anxiety over its ineluctable doom, an anxiety that confirms and exacerbates its disordered love for the body: anxiety over the body's death induces the soul to pour all its power into acquiring bodily goods to somehow prevent it. This flurry kicks up more sparks of disordered love for the body and binds it ever more firmly to the mire of its pride.[82] Thus, sin renders the sinful soul utterly powerless to return to God. Instead, it must be turned and restored to health by a power from without. This is what God accomplishes in the incarnation.

Having laid out the metaphysical context of the scriptural texts which affirm the abiding presence of the Word in the world and mapped out the corresponding decay the human being suffers once sin blinds it to this presence, it is now time to complete this train of thought by providing the peculiar metaphysical solution the incarnation offers ailing minds. But first it is important to note that Augustine's account of sin provides the clue to his relentless broadside against materialism. On the surface materialistic ways of picturing God appear as mere errant conceptual schemes that simply need to be corrected by better ones; but in truth they signal a forgetfulness of God, forgetfulness engendered by sin. Thus, attempts to conceive of God materially ignore the problem of forgetfulness altogether and set up idols unaware that in doing so, these ideas actually reinforce sin's stranglehold on the mind and mire it deeper and deeper into the despairing pride of its rebellion. Augustine's account of the incarnation reflects a keen awareness of this danger.

Earlier in the discussion of the divine missions I pointed out that God enters into a *sui generis* metaphysical relation with the world in the incarnation. Its "singularity"

[82] *De Trin.* XII.14

distinguished it and elevated it above all other theophanies at the cost of sowing the seeds of contradiction in scripture's teaching on the mode of divine presence in the world, namely between passages affirming the abiding presence of the Word as the ideal forms of justice, goodness, etc. and the Father's sending of the Word in the flesh of Jesus. The contradiction, Augustine insists, is only apparent: continuity unites the unique metaphysics of both types of presence, a continuity the prologue of John presents in the dramatic unity of the Word's incarnation. With the advent of sin

> *"the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend It* [John 1:4]… what he means by darkness of course is the hearts of mortal men turned away from this sort of light and unfit to look upon it."[83]

The same light which shines in the darkness (john 1:4)–which is a metaphor for the ideal forms and thus the selfsame Word- "became flesh" and" dwelt among us" to show us "His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Thus, the interloping presence of sin warped the human epistemic structure dramatically enough to require an alternative mode of divine presence to accommodate the divine presence to the warp.

My attempt to square the metaphysics God's abiding presence and the singular metaphysics of the Word's "sending" take its departure from the divine action God takes in response to sin, that is, the incarnation. The Word took up abode in the flesh of Jesus to restore unto damaged minds bereft of wisdom the possibility of participation in God. In a late letter likely written during the same period of the drafting of *De Trinitate*, Augustine describes the Father's sending of the Word in the grammar of participation:

> "Therefore, he descended that we might ascend: remaining in his nature he became a participant in ours, so that we, remaining in our nature, might become participants in his.

[83] *De Trin.* XIII. 2

> It was not, however, that participation in our nature made him worse; but participation in his nature makes us better."[84]

God's participation in human nature is the lynchpin that leads Augustine to assert that God's relation to the world in the incarnation establishes a new and singular metaphysical relationship with it distinct from the metaphysical relationship of the ideal forms. In *De Trinitate* Augustine uses the proto-Chalcedonian Christology he sifted out of scripture to display the incarnation's metaphysical singularity. Augustine writes,

> "It [incarnation] advertises the grace of God toward us without any previous deserts on our part, as not even he [Jesus] won the privilege of being joined to the true God in such a unity that with him he would be one person, Son of God, by any previous merits of his own; how could he, since from the very moment he began to be man he was also God, which is why it was said that the Word became flesh? (Jn. 1:14)"[85]

The person of Jesus is truly the union of two substances, one human and one divine.[86] The union Jesus shares with the Word in the incarnation is not the reward for any merits Jesus earned, but rather the consequence of God's free decision –or, election- to participate in Jesus' flesh for our sake. The reason God participates in Jesus is to show the love of God to the human race in grace. The grace of God replaces the appetite of the mind as the initiatory act setting human beings on the path to participation in God; indeed God descends in the flesh to know humanity that it might know God.[87] God reconstitutes the participatory union God calls all human beings to enjoy upon the grace God's

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[84] Epistola 140.4.10, quoted in Griffiths, *The Intellectual Appetite*, 75. A complete English translation of the letter where the quote is found is in "Letter 140", in *Letters (Epistulae) 100-155.* The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century II.2. ed. Boniface Ramsey and trans. Roland Teske, S.J. (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2003), 242-289

[85] *De Trin.* XIII. 22. The final citation of John links this passage to Augustine's earlier remarks on the distinction of the divine mission of the Son from other theophanies that the Son came, "quite simply to be the Word of God. The Word in flesh is one thing, the Word being flesh another…"*De Trin.* II. 11. The value of linking these passages is that it demonstrates that the union of the Word and Jesus is not a voluntary union but an ontological one. The passage in bk. II where Augustine prefers "is" to "in" to describe the kind of relation the Word has with the flesh.

[86] Ibid.

[87] One cannot help but notice an echo of 1st Cor. 12:13, one of Paul's most wistful meditations on the promises of God.

decision to reveal God's love for humanity in Christ.[88] The incarnation changes the relationship God shares with humanity in the following way: human beings participate in God's substance through participation in Christ.

Therefore, God establishes the singular metaphysical relation of the incarnation as a new point of mediation in which the original metaphysical relation of the ideal forms can obtain once more. This is how Augustine establishes the continuity between the Word's two modes of presence. The continuity hinges on the affirmation that the same Word who is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and who thereby possesses the divine perfections substantially, is incarnate in Jesus without ceasing to be what God already is for the world: the good of every good. Put epistemologically, with the advent of Christ, the Word is present to the mind as 1) the ideal forms and 2) in the flesh of Jesus Christ, that is, truly present immaterially and materially, the subject to wisdom *and* knowledge. Each metaphysical relation occurs concurrently. This is critical because the eternal perfections of God must retain their transcendence (as secured by their immateriality and eternity) in their relation to the world, even in the Word's incarnation as Jesus Christ, for the flesh of Jesus to reveal the divine perfections, and thus the divine substance, truly. If this is accurate, then it must not be understood that the incarnation *circumscribes* the operation of the Word in the world in the flesh of Jesus. In such a case, the Word is shorn of divine transcendent while the Father and the Holy Spirit retain theirs. This would result in two cardinal sins of Trinitarian thought: 1) it would separate the activity of the Word from the Father and the Holy Spirit, thus sundering the inseparability of divine action the Trinity performs in every act of God and disintegrate the simplicity making them one; 2) it would compromise the Word's divinity completely,

[88] Recall the constitutive role decision plays in the structure of Augustine's theological anthropology.

for true God cannot be circumscribed. Instead, the Word must continue to be transcendent God with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the incarnation. Thereby the Word remains un-circumscribed and continues to be "the good of every good" and not just the good of Jesus of Nazareth; because Christ remains the Word, the works of Jesus can extend to the whole world. Therefore, it must be understood that Christ uniquely focuses the transcendent divine substance in the locus of his flesh for the sake of revealing the ideal forms to fallen human beings and enabling them to participate intellectually in these forms once more.[89] Indeed, only then, could Christ restore wisdom to humanity once more. This affirmation enables Augustine to confidently affirm that "Christ Jesus has treasures both of wisdom and of knowledge," which Christ offers by grace and we receive by participation in him.[90] The singular metaphysics secured by the Proto-Chalcedonian Christology lies in the back of the ensuing analysis of participation in Christ.

Augustine's explanation of participation in Christ unfolds on the fulcrum that the action of God precedes and initiates each step of the human's restoration. Since a discrete act of grace grounds each step the sinner takes along the path to healing, God's elective grace logically orders the whole process. Christ initiates the process in the atonement, which is the first grace, and which Augustine describes as follows.[91] When human beings

[89] Or, to say it in a more provocative, albeit, complicated way: Augustine advances the apparently paradoxical thesis that human beings participate in the ideal forms via the interior intellectual path through participating in the exterior locus of Christ's flesh. This way of saying it intimates the cooperation of wisdom and knowledge required to participate in Christ's two-natures, and thus God.
[90] *De Trin.* XIII. 24, note the proto-Chalcedonian pattern tacitly buttressing this poetic construction.
[91] Scholars have sometimes noted that Augustine's two accounts of the atonement in bks 4. And 13 are very different. Nonetheless, Augustine insists that despite the difference in aims, the account in bk. 13 largely duplicates the account in bk. 4. "All this I have discussed for some time in this book as best I could, although I had already said much on the subject in the fourth book of this work. But there it was for a different reason from here: there it was to show why and how Christ was sent in the fullness of time by the Father, because of those people who say that the one who did the sending and the one who was sent cannot

fell to the sin of pride, God permitted the devil bring them into captivity under his lordship, a lordship he enforces with the keys of death he keeps.[92] God permits the devil to lord over them with death as a just penalty for sin. But like fallen human beings, the devil loves power untempered by justice, and thus wields it indiscriminately.[93] Christ exploits this weakness by conquering him in the weakness of his justice. Though Christ is both sinless and in possession of divine power that exceeds the devil's, he allowed himself to be ensnared by the devil and crucified out of obedience to God. The humility induces the devil, who does not recognize the justice of Christ's humility or the divine power hidden within his humanity, to wield the power of death against him unjustly. This unjust exercise of power gives Christ the right to take the keys of death from the devil and thereby strip him of his lordship over fallen human beings. By the divine power Christ possesses by virtue of being the Word, he executes this judgment at the resurrection, where he rises from the dead and thereby spells the end of the devil's reign.

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be equal in nature; here it has been to distinguish between active knowledge and contemplative wisdom." *De Trin.* XIII. 25

[92] On God's ceding sinful human beings to the jurisdiction of the devil's power, see *De Trin.* XIII. 16. Augustine's discussion of the devil is in bks. 4 and 13 alone in *De Trinitate;* here, the devil only serves as a foil for the work of Christ in the atonement. At first his treatment of the devil seems like an alternative way to account for the relationship between sin and death than the one I adumbrated above. In my account, I argued that death was a natural consequence of the mind's disordered love and abstinence from participation in God, largely relying on evidence from bk. 4. Sin is thus conceived as a choice humans make. In Augustine's treatment of the devil, sin and its cohort death appear as a cosmic power alien to humanity that holds it bondage regardless of its choice. The key to the unity of these two different ways of conceptualizing sin lies in the decision God makes after the initial fall occurred. Once humanity abandoned God, God permitted the devil hold them in bondage. Thus, sin is an initial choice *and* non-chosen bondage; once humanity fell, they could not rise again on their own power. Augustine's account of the devil's jurisdiction functions like a cosmological counterpart to the epistemological failure that occurred first. But this is the extent of his treatment of the devil in *De Trinitate*. As such, Augustine gives no systematic treatment on the devil's origins, rights, and role in the transmission of sin in from Adam and Eve to their progeny in this work.. This is largely because he treats sin in the individuated sense, a treatment that does not require any treatment of corporate guilt. Nevertheless, corporate guilt is assumed throughout. At any rate, my abrupt inclusion of devil in this paper is an inevitable consequence that arises from Augustine's terse and functional treatment of his role in the fall.

[93] He writes: "The essential flaw of the devil's perversion made him a lover of power and a deserter and assailant of justice, which means that men imitate him all the more thoroughly the more they neglect or even detest justice and studiously devote themselves to power, rejoicing at the possession of it or inflamed with the desire for it." *De Trin.* XIII. 17

This event doubles as an act by which God reconciles us to Godself and as an accommodated display of the eternal perfections; the two facets are distinct yet intertwined. As an act of reconciliation, Christ pays the debt of sin; he thus removes the barrier separating sinners and God and releases them from the penalty of death. As an accommodated display of the eternal perfections, Jesus Christ manifests them by *dramatizing* them in the temporal passion-resurrection sequence; he displays the justice of God in his crucifixion and the power of God in the resurrection. Christ reveals God in this fashion to unseat the pride preventing us from returning to God. Christ's assault on our pride begins with the humility of his obedience, an obedience that displays God's love for us: God

> "comes to aid men as God with his divinity and to share with them as man in their infirmity. And what greater example of obedience could be given to us, us who had been ruined by disobedience, than God the Son obey God the Father even to death on the cross (Phil 2:8)? Where could the reward of obedience be shown to better advantage than in the flesh of such a mediator when it rose to eternal life?"[94]

In this way, he adds, "and so by the death of one so powerful we powerless mortals have justice set *before* us and power *promised* us."[95] Christ's presentation of the divine predicates in his flesh teaches human beings the limits and proper use of power. Human power is limited because it cannot achieve the immortality the soul craves, a lack that prevents it from enjoying any desire.[96] Instead, it depends upon God for these things, which is what Christ's death and resurrection teaches: for, Christ depended upon divine power to raise his fleshly body. In this way, God utterly obliterates the prideful soul's aspiration to God-like power. Yet, God promises to share the divine power the soul craves should it use the power proper to its human nature to practice Christ-like

[94] *De Trin.* XIII. 22
[95] Ibid. (emphasis mine)
[96] *De Trin.* XIII. 10, 11.

obedience to God. Thus, the atonement teaches human beings to love justice over power as such by using its power to grow in justice. Thus Human beings participate in Christ by modeling their lives after Christ's flesh; and by participating in the Christ in this way they likewise begin participating in the divine perfections he dramatizes temporally. Christ shares his "treasures" by re-ordering the epistemological steps a damaged mind must take to access the divine perfections through participation in him: the *sui generis* knowledge the incarnation provides the mind to discipline the operation of its knowledge properly and nurse its wisdom back to health, even while the operation of wisdom remains enervated by sin and unable to contribute.

Thus, even while the inner man remains too weak from sin to perform the operation of wisdom, participation in Christ enables the mind to purge its "inner man" of the material obsessions stemming wisdom by the alternative route of Christ's "outer man," that is, by the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet, at this juncture, a paradox arises: a mind only participates in what it loves, and if prideful minds love their own power above all, it does not follow that they will exchange this power for Christ's humility if they do not first desire it. Augustine solves this problem by finding in scripture another discrete act of elective grace God performs directly on the will. This act of grace is Christ's breathing of the Holy Spirit onto the disciples (Jn. 20:22), an act God repeats in each human God elects:[97]

> "For even what we call our deserts or merits are gifts of his. In order that faith might work through love, *the charity of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us* (Rom 5:5). And he was given to us when Jesus was glorified in his resurrection."[98]

[97] *De Trin.* IV.29
[98] *De Trin.* XIII. 14

The operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart purifies its desire (Mt 5.8) prior to any merit of its own, and fills it with love for God prior to any chosen, intellectual participation in God guided by wisdom.[99] Thus, God furnishes the sinner with the requisite love it needs to love Christ's justice and pattern its life after him.[100] The gift of the Holy Spirit is thus a grace God provides that operates in the interior of the soul to complement the grace of divine manifestation happening in Christ exterior to the soul.

Thus, the pattern of Christ which sinners adopt in the outer man extends inwardly into the soul. By both gifts of grace, the sinner appropriates the sui *generis* knowledge of Christ as the purgative pattern for the inner-as well as the outer man. Knowledge of Christ enables sinners to use the knowledge of the outer man properly because it shifts the telos of their knowledge from the "greedy hankering after bodily goods" to the good use of them by which their minds abstain from evil and grow in wisdom.[101] The former gorges the inner man with material images that distort the mind's appetite for God; the latter purges the soul clean of these images so that it may feed on God unladen by the temptations of material things. Through adopting the pattern of Christ with the outer man the mind appropriates the pattern of Christ in the inner man too, an appropriation Augustine calls sacramental appropriation.[102] Lewis Ayres neatly summarizes sacramental appropriation in the following way:

> "The same events [atonement] also reveal the *sacramenta* of the inner man. The crucifixion and death of Christ's body emphasize that we must undergo repentance and 'a certain agony of self-denial' which leads to the death of godlessness, the interior putting away of lying that we might speak truth (Eph. 4.22-5)."[103]

[99] *De Trin.* VIII. 6 (emphasis mine)
[100] *De Trin.* XV. 46
[101] On the greedy use, see *De Trin.* XII. 14, 16; on the proper use see *De Trin.* XII. 21,22
[102] *De Trin.* IV. 10, 11
[103] Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 168

Because the inner man appropriates the atonement sacramentally through repentance and self-denial, it does so through the practice of the same obedience that disciplines the power of the outer man. In such a way, Augustine shows that the justice of Christ obtains in the inner man through exterior works performed in the flesh; and the soul that disciplines its private power by the justice of Christ appropriates his justice sacramentally. Thereby, the mind's desire for God is reordered by the power of the Spirit according to the hierarchy of the mind's noetic structure: as the inner man grows in justice, the mind subordinates the outer man's power to the goods of justice, enlisting its power in the service of fostering justice. The reordering of the mind's love nourishes this love, enabling it to cooperate with the Spirit's love. Thus, God's grace nurses the mind's love for the eternal things of God's substance, even while the mind does not yet fully participate in God through wisdom.

Thus, God as Christ and the Holy Spirit participates in the human being before the human being turns to participate in God, a divine condescension by which God lays hold of the "face" of the soul, its mind, and turns it to gaze upon God's own. Such action nourishes the mind's wisdom to health. God's election to participate in human nature through Christ and the Holy Spirit creates a special kind of knowledge called faith. This faith describes the human response to God's grace. Now, Augustine's reflections on faith are among the most complex and scattered ideas he presents *De Trinitate,* and demand a more attention than the paragraph I devote to it here; but for the purposes of proving my thesis, it is only necessary to show that faith guides sinners beyond the impasse of materialism and issues in true knowledge of God, that is unfettered contemplation.[104]

[104] *De Trin.* XIII, 3

Drawing upon Romans 10:17, Augustine argues that "faith comes to us by hearing" the "one single teaching" concerning the elective grace of God in the works of Christ and the Holy Spirit.[105] Since this teaching is the things the "Word made flesh" did in time, learning it requires an operation of knowledge to understand.[106] Faith becomes knowledge when a believer grasps this teaching with a certitude that extends into his heart.[107] Though I risk repeating myself, a summary of this teaching that attends to how the features that illuminate how it forms faith in the heart is important.

The teaching is the story of Jesus Christ. The Word made flesh dramatizes the divine perfections in the humanity of Jesus. The dramatization of these perfections determines the mode of our participation and gives faith its structure.

Jesus displays God's justice in the obedience of Christ unto death in the crucifixion and God's power in his resurrection; God promises to those who practice the justice of obedience now the divine power to share in Christ's resurrection when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead. To emphasize that the power of resurrection belongs to God alone, Jesus commands sinners to "refrain from touching him" prior to his ascension to the right hand of the Father, a command meant to impress upon minds prone to materialist ways of thinking that Christ's power to raise the dead does not belong to his human flesh but his divinity.[108] The full revelation of his divine identity is given with the exercise of divine power through him to raise the dead and judge them with the Father.[109] The two natures of Christ are the key to the narrative's plot: the human nature accommodates the power of the divine nature to the weakened sight of sinful

[105] *De Trin.* XIII. 5, 13
[106] *De Trin*. XIII. 24
[107] *De Trin.* XIII. 3
[108] *De Trin.* IV. 6
[109] *De Trin* I.17; IV.6

human beings at the cost of concealing it now; the divine power of the Word focused in Jesus' flesh will be seen along with the Father and the Son at the general resurrection, that is, when God judges the world through the flesh of Jesus eschatologically.[110] Thus, scripture teaches that Christ leads believers to contemplation he gives eschatologically.[111] Before Jesus ascends, he sends the Spirit, which provides sinners with the power to participate in the divine justice by modeling in the obedience he displays in his flesh.

The drama of salvation functions as map that locates human beings in it and disciplines their knowledge of God according the order in which the divine perfections are displayed. Human beings of Augustine's day and ours live after the ascension of Christ and before the eschaton. During this period, God participates *fully* in humanity through Christ and the Holy Spirit, while humanity participates only *partially* in God. This paradox obtains in the following way: Christ's injunction to refrain from "touching" his flesh is still in place, while full contemplation of Christ the Word is not yet given. Thus the soul's sacramental appropriation through obedience forms it into the likeness of the love, justice, wisdom, life and beauty of God while remaining unformed by the full power, unchangingness, immortality, incorruptibility and eternity of God, gifts it must wait to possess eschatologically. Without the experience of every one of the divine perfections, the vision of God's substance remains incomplete, an incompleteness that renders their participation in the perfections forming them now, i.e. justice and love, provisional, and likewise incomplete.

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[110] Ayres helpfully points out that Christ's two natures are key to the structuring of the narrative and the coordination of knowledge and wisdom. Lewis Ayres, "The Christological Context of Augustine's De Trinate XIII: Toward Relocating Books VIII-XV," 113

[111] *De Trin.* 1.17-18. This section of the book is basically a capsule of the way he construes the Christological narrative backing his proposals for how to solve the epistemological problems through Christology.

Such is the single teaching of Christ. Augustine asserts that the Spirit impresses it upon each individual heart, an activity identical to the divine love shed abroad there (Rom. 5:5).[112] Thus, the Spirit cultivates faith in the heart of every believer individually through love.[113] Augustine adamantly insists a certainty irreducible to faith stamped on the heart complements it and confirms the teaching's truthfulness. Believers acquire certainty in two intertwining ways.

First, the truth of the faith is buttressed by the renewal of the mind and its apprehension of the ideal forms. A believer acquaints herself with the faith in her heart through awareness of its "fruits", which is the love flowing out of them; for it is of "the nature of faith to produce by *working through love* (Gal 5:6)."[114] For Augustine, the love Galatians speaks of belongs to the believer and God: inasmuch as it is the divine love shed abroad in the heart of the sinner by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5.5), it is God's; and yet, so far that this love guides the believer to seek the justice of Christ through practicing obedience, it is hers. Thus, the believer comes to know the divine love the Spirit gives through the exercise of justice that obedience requires, the obedience of repentance and good works, practices that belong to the operation of knowledge.[115] The justice of obedience purges the inner man of the vices distorting its love, causing the love of wisdom to flower once more within it and restoring the mind's eye the strength it requires to see ideal form of justice present to it. This wisdom, remember, is originally a capacity of the mind that gives humans power to know God naturally, or, rationally; this apprehension relies on capacities quite apart from the operation of faith. Nevertheless,

[112] *De Trin.* XIII. 5
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] *De Trin.* IV. 5

this rational apprehension buttresses the believer's trust in the faith God has given him, providing a kind of rational certainty, because wisdom owes its rehabilitation to faith.

But this first way is insufficient. The wisdom the mind uses to apprehend the form of justice rationally is still weak and will not be fully restored to strength until the eschaton. In the outworking of love, Augustine finds another source of certainty that faith is rooted in divine truth.[116] Augustine argues that "if a man loves God it follows that he does what God has commanded and loves his neighbor too, because God has commanded this."[117] Thus, neighbor love numbers among the obediences the believer must practice to become just. The standard of justice gives love its direction: justice "knowingly and deliberately, in life and in conduct, gives each man what is his own."[118] Thus the first way of certainty outlined in the previous paragraph holds here too. But, here an important difference arises: certainty love of neighbor provides is focused in the mind's knowledge, rather than wisdom. Love of God and love of neighbor are so intertwined for Augustine that they are inseparable:

> "This is because if a man loves his neighbor, it follows that above all he loves love itself. But God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God (1 Jn. 4:16). So it follows that above all he loves God.[119]

The "love" that a believer uses to love a neighbor is none other than God Godself. Therefore when the believer loves her neighbor, God is known to her in the quality of her action done in the outer man:

> "Let no one say "I don't know what to love." Let him love his brother, and love that love; after all he knows the love he loves with better than the brother he loves. There now, he can already have God better known to him than his brother, certainly better known because more present, better known because more inward to him, better known because more sure."[120]

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[116] *De Trin.* VIII. 8
[117] *De Trin.* VIII.10
[118] *De Trin.* VIII.9
[119] *De Trin.* VIII.10
[120] *De Trin.* VIII. 12

The performance of love in the outer man bears witness to the love poured into the heart of the inner man by the Spirit. Here, the believer's love images God's grace, the same grace faith in the story guides the believer to trust. Thus, a second, complementary kind of certainty buttresses the same faith.

This conceptual scheme tacitly lays out a tripartite of faith, hope and love that the believer practices which prevents his knowledge of God from becoming materialistic. When the believer looks for certitude of her faith, she is turned to the love with which she obeys God and loves her neighbor; when she looks for the cause of her love, she is turned to the hope she places in the God's promise to bring her face to face before God; when she looks for the ground of her hope, she is turned to back to the faith in the grace of Christ and the Spirit. The ultimate ground upon which this triumvirate of faith, love, and hope stands strong is no specious claim to direct and complete perception of divine truth, but the grace of God. It thus requires no material perception of God, but trust in the grace of divine participation.

CHAPTER V

THE LITURGICAL SENSE AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD

By the time Augustine took up pastorate in Hippo in the middle of the 4th century, the Christian liturgy had changed dramatically from the first century. Though this is not the place to account for all the changes, or even most of them, it is important to note one pertinent change which transformed the function of public reading of scripture. In the first century of Christianity's infancy, the Christian faith was still closely joined to second temple Judaism, a movement which lasted until the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE.[121] Eric Werner has argued that the synagogue was particularly important to the first Christians, for it was there that they went to learn scripture.[122] The synagogue service was organized by lay persons (not priests), and through reading scripture, singing songs and hearing sermons, they learned about what God had done in their history.[123] Thus, as part of this worship, scripture was understood as history one must learn, and it was presented didactively.[124] At the same time, Christians were breaking bread in their houses in remembrance of Jesus (Acts 2:46).[125] The division between these two services separated the didactic function of scripture from the ritual of remembering of Christ. The disintegration of Jewish-Christian relations coupled with the emergence of distinctly Christian scriptures transformed Christian worship: by the middle of the second century, Christians had merged these two services into one: the didactive

[121] The New Testament, particularly Luke and Acts, tell us that Jesus and the Apostles attended synagogues (i.e. for Jesus' ministry, see: Lk. 4: 14:21, 44; for the Apostle's ministry, particularly Paul [an adopted apostle] see, Acts 9:20; 13:5, 14-15; 15:21) and worshipped in the temple (i.e. Mt. 24.1; Mk. 11:11-18; Lk. 24:6; Acts 3:1-11).
[122] Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge: Liturgical Parallels in Synagogue and Early Church* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970). 2, 50-51
[123] James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 143
[124] Ibid.
[125] White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 144

presentation of scripture was presented with the breaking of bread, or, the pedagogical with the sacramental.[126] The same would have been true at Augustine's congregation. Though it is likely that at some level, that the two rituals retained their functional integrity, the epistemology of faith Augustine draws forth from his Trinitarian Christology enables him to anchor these two functions into one and the same performative act: the reading and hearing of scripture in the liturgy.

The question animating this paper is this one: How does scripture mediate knowledge of God with materialist language without falling into the materialist trap? Augustine advances the following solution: Scripture speaks truly of God because it is a portrait of Christ, and Christ reveals God to us in his two-natured person. As a portrait of Christ, it portrays the dramatic pattern of the divine perfections he initially enacted, and thus can function as a surrogate for His presence while He is removed from the sight of believers. The same caution Christ admonished his readers to exercise when he commanded them not to touch him, that is, not to think of him in a materialist way, applies to their reading of scripture too. Therefore, scripture only leads believers beyond the materialist impasse when it is read with the same eyes of faith required to participate in Christ. Only then can "We certainly say very truly that faith has been impressed from one single teaching on the heart of every single believer who believes the same thing."[127] Therefore, even though Christ, not scripture, is the object of faith, scripture is indispensible to the rise of faith, for it is the portrait of Christ impressed upon the hearts of believers, an impress that opens up real participation in God.

[126] Ibid.
[127] *De Trin.* XIII. 5

It is thus the case that for scripture to be read faithfully, the reader must be undergoing "the purifying regimen" Christ establishes to heal the human being of pride and lead them to God. This purifying regimen provides the material fabric of a social body that is knit by the common love for God and neighbor: just as the faith each individual holds in his heart is one in kind by virtue of common derivation from the portrait of Christ, the will each individual possesses is one in kind by virtue of its common ground and desire, God.

> "For [faith] is not one in number but in kind; and yet because of its likeness and lack of diversity, we call it one rather than many. It is like when we see two men exactly alike; we say in astonishment that the two have one face. In fact, while it is not too difficult to talk about the many single souls of all single individuals whom we read about in the Acts of the Apostles as having one soul, one would scarcely dare to say that there are as many faiths as there are faithful, when the apostle has said one faith (eph. 4:5)…But we talk about one and the same faith of believers in the same way as about one and the same will of people who will; they all want the same thing…"[128]

The faith and its love unite believers to each other, making them one body with one soul, a body and soul Christ unites to himself. Drawing on Jn. 17:22, Augustine argues that the union is a voluntary one that images the love of the Father and the Son.

> This is what he means when he says *That they may be one as we are one* (Jn 17:22)- that just as Father and Son are one not only by equality of substance but also by identity of will, so these men, for whom the Son is mediator with God, might be one not only by being of the same nature, but also by being bound in the fellowship of the same love.[129]

Thus the social context displaying the common will of the church is the image of the Son and the Father's love for each other. It is the instrument Christ uses to draw sinners to himself, reconcile them to God and nurture the broken hearts and weakened minds of each soul back to strength capable of participation in God; God continues to participate in the world through the church. This is why Augustine calls the church the literal Body of

[128] Ibid.
[129] *De Trin.* IV. 12 (emphasis mine)

Christ.[130] In this light, the social reality defined by the voluntary union of believers is more than a vestige that figures the presence of something once there but now departed, like debris strewn along a beach far from the shore line signals a withdrawn tide; it extends the incarnation into the present, a provisional extension that awaits Jesus Christ, its Head, to return once more and finish the work He began.

> "We should be made one in the one just one; and that we should not despair of ourselves rising in the flesh when we observed that we the *many members had been preceded by one head*."[131]

The liturgical reading of Scripture in the church's worship grounds the unity of the Head and its Body. Though the church is indeed the body of Christ, it is "never the object of its own faith: it is necessarily under the judgment of what it points to."[132] In a sermon Augustine preached before his congregation, he said,

> "After all, even the Jews saw Christ. It's not a particularly great thing to see Christ with the eyes of the head, but it's a great thing to believe about Christ with the eyes of the heart. If Christ were to be presented to us now, and stand right here before us, and say nothing, how would we know who he was? And then if he said nothing, what good would that be for us? Isn't it better for him to speak in the gospel, though absent, than to be present and say nothing? And yet he isn't absent, if he's held onto in the heart. Believe in him, and you see him; he isn't in front of your eyes, and he is in possession of your heart."[133]

Believers apprehend Christ speaking to them in the gospel readings when in faith they appropriate the words spoken as the sacramental model for the transformation of their sick and eviscerated souls. This kind of sacramental appropriation does not simply obtain through performing the ritual of listening and hearing, but through learning the pattern of

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[130] *De Trin.* IV.11
[131] Ibid. (emphasis mine)
[132] This phrase, which Rowan Williams uses to summarize a conceptual pillar of his argument in his remarkable book on the resurrection, is just as apt for Augustine's theological assumption that the life of the church is founded upon the grace of the Trinitarian grace. See Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984), 5
[133] Saint Augustine, "Sermon 263", in *Sermons 230-272B: on the Liturgical Seasons*. The Works of Saint Augustine: A translation for the 21st century III/7. ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (New Rochelle: New City Press, 1993), 220

Christ properly. *Thus, the didactive function of scripture in the liturgy is intrinsic to the sacramental appropriation, for Christ is only remembered by means of appropriation.* The unity of the didactic and the sacramental is precisely what displays the unity of Head and Body: the sacramental appropriation of believers is dependent upon the teaching of the didactic lesson. Jesus Christ *is* the didactic lesson and the Body of Christ is the means of appropriation. Believers learn to appropriate this didactive pattern through participating in the Body of Christ, for they cannot believe unless they do not learn to love; membership in this Body is necessary to hear Christ speak with ears of faith.

SECTION VI

CONCLUSION

The heartbeat of Augustine's Trinitarian theology is the worship he led his congregation in each week. Though his tortuous and murky writing on the Trinity sometimes seemed to image the Trinitarian mystery in the labyrinth of its conceptual complexity, it strove to bear witness to the mysterious love and faith the popular piety of Christian worship inspired in people of all strips, learned or not, a mystery grounded in the radical grace of God rather than intellectual gymnastics. The treatise as a whole, in some respect, is an attempt to bear witness to the truthfulness of this experience. For that reason alone, Augustine enlists the help of the metaphysical categories of Neo-Platonism and the reading techniques of his liberal arts education. It is his firm belief that that these skills can display the truthfulness of Trinitarian faith; but that to encounter the Triune God in the soul, one must worship in the Body of Christ.

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