

## **SAPIENTIA AND THE TRINITY**

### **REFLECTIONS ON THE *DE TRINITATE***

“The West ... identified the being, the ontological principle, of God with His substance rather than with the person of the Father”<sup>1</sup>). ‘The subsequent developments of trinitarian theology, especially in the West with Augustine and the scholastics, have led us to see the term *ousia*, not *hypostasis*, as the expression of the ultimate character and the causal principle (ἀρχή) in God’s being’<sup>2</sup>). ‘In the West, especially since the time of Augustine, the unity of the divine being served as the starting point of Trinitarian theology’<sup>3</sup>). Such statements could be multiplied by even the most cursory reading of twentieth century Eastern Orthodox writers, and a good many contemporary Western theologians have been inclined to take such judgments on trust, and to conclude that we have relatively little to learn from Augustine in the task of constructing a properly ‘relational’ model of God’s trinitarian life. Augustine’s concern with the self-relatedness of the divine essence (on the analogy of the self-perception and self-assent of the human subject) is seen as one of the primary sources of that pervasive Western European obsession with the individual’s sense of him- or herself which has led, in the wake of Kant, to the fundamental illusion of modernity, the notion that the private self is the arbiter and source of value in the world. Augustine stands accused of collaborating in the construction of the modern consciousness that has wrought such havoc in the North Atlantic cultural world, and is busy exporting its sickness to the rest of the globe, while occluding the vision of the whole planet’s future in its delusions of technocratic mastery — a hugely inflated self-regard, fed by the history of introspection<sup>4</sup>).

Leaving aside these more global cultural judgments, I believe that the connection made between Augustine and the consciousness of ‘modernity’ is a serious error, resting on a superficial reading of his

<sup>1</sup>) John ZIZIOULAS, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church*, London, 1985, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup>) Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>3</sup>) John MEYENDORFF, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, Fordham, 1974, London, 1975.

<sup>4</sup>) Apart from Zizioulas’ book, the recent work of Colin GUNTON should be mentioned in this connection; see *Enlightenment and Alienation*, Basingstoke, 1985.



work — especially the *De trin.* In what follows, my aim will be to show how, above all in the last two books of that work, Augustine's reflection on the trinitarian being of God opens up theological possibilities very different from the proto-Cartesian or proto-Kantian tendencies with which he has been charged. As always, the reader of Augustine must allow for the difficulties caused by his diffuse exposition and reluctance to settle on a single technical vocabulary, as also for the undeniable fact that his rhetoric remains Platonic and dualistic even when the substance of his thought is moving in a quite other direction<sup>5</sup>); but, this being said, it is still possible to follow through in the *De trin.* a single many-layered process of exploration that remains tantalisingly suggestive. It is not, of course, possible to present a comprehensive reading of this large and subtle text in the compass of a short essay, but I hope that, if nothing else, these pages may help to draw attention to the striking absence in recent Augustinian scholarship of any sustained hermeneutical treatment of the conclusions of the *De trin.*<sup>6</sup>), and perhaps prompt a fuller and better study.

<sup>5</sup>) For some comments on this, see chapter 4 of Joseph O'LEARY, *Questioning Back. The Overcoming of Metaphysics in Christian Tradition*, Minneapolis, 1985. The argument of the present paper accords with O'Leary's in insisting that we see Augustine as *dismantling* a metaphysic of timeless spirit, rather than simply reproducing the 'ontotheology' of a Plotinus or Porphyry.

<sup>6</sup>) This is not to overlook the classical monographs on the subject and the many more recent shorter treatments in general surveys of trinitarian theology. Nothing has yet quite replaced M. Schmaus' standard work, *Die psychologische Trinitätslehre des hl. Augustinus*, Münster, 1927; and J.E. SULLIVAN, *The Image of God. The Doctrine of St Augustine and its Influence*, Dubuque, 1963, remains an important survey. Many recent works tend still to overemphasize Augustine's concern with the divine unity, and to accept the conventional wisdom as to the difference between Augustine and the Greek Fathers. O. Du Roy, *L'intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon s. Augustin. Genèse de sa théologie trinitaire jusqu'en 391*, Paris, 1966, is a richly documented argument for treating Augustine's trinitarian thought as monist and essentialist, a scheme in which the economy of salvation plays relatively little part. F. Bourassa has provided a decisive response to this in two articles, 'Théologie trinitaire chez s. Augustin', *Gregorianum* 58 (1977), pp. 675-725, and 'L'intelligence de la foi', *ibid.* 59 (1978), pp. 375-432. Bernd Jochen HILBERATH, *Der Personbegriff der Trinitätstheologie in Rückfrage von Karl Rahner zu Tertullians «Adversus Praxean»*, Innsbruck, 1988, however, still tends to follow the usual tradition of interpretation; but his discussions of Augustine rely very heavily on secondary literature and do not tackle the concluding books of *De trin.* (see pp. 97-104). Pp. 48-49 offer a useful survey of recent treatments: A. Schindler's article in the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (Bd 4, pp. 645-698) has obviously influenced Hilberath's presentation of the issues. Two writers who have not simply accepted the prevailing account are Yves Congar and Bertrand de Margerie. Congar, in *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, London, 1983, does far more justice to the pluralism of Augustine: vol. I, p. 78, sets aside the idea of Augustine taking the divine unity as his starting point, and vol. III, pp. 80-95, are full of insights, especially on the overlap between Augustine and the Eastern tradition. De Margerie, *La Trinité chrétienne dans l'histoire*, Paris, 1975, pp. 159-



There are two major points to be borne in mind as we read the last books of *De trin.*, points which are often grasped with insufficient clarity because they emerge into full light only at a rather advanced stage of the argument. Both affect the interpretation of the 'psychological image', the parallel between the threefold structure of the mind's self-relatedness and the threefold pattern of divine life. The first has been lucidly treated by several scholars, notably by Sullivan in his study of 1963<sup>7</sup>). The *image* of God in us (as opposed to the mere *vestigia* of triadic structures in the mind) is realised when the three moments of our mental agency all have God for their object. The image, in other words, is *not* the mind's self-relatedness. It helps us to discover that we do, in fact, think about our own thinking as both united and irreducibly differentiated<sup>8</sup>): we are enabled thereby to overcome to some extent the logical aporiai of Books V to VII of *De trin.* But we are not thereby given any significant access to what the *imago* is: the image is preserved only when it exists *ad ipsum* (following the better reading here, instead of the banal alternative *ab ipso*) *a quo imprimitur* (XII.xi.16). It is perfectly conceivable that the mind may remember, understand and love itself, according to its nature, and yet be without *sapientia*, the knowledge of divine matters (XIV.i.3): it will in fact, in such a case, not know or love itself *truthfully* if it is a self-contained object to itself. Augustine's argument, as he summarizes it in the early chapters of *De trin.* XIV, has a paradoxical and teasing character. Take away from the mind its awareness of itself as activated by outer sensations or even by inner images, its awareness of itself as acting truthfully or virtuously, all those circumstances in which we can say *cognoscibilia cognitionem gignunt* (XIV.x.13); what is left? Apparently (so we should expect) the mind's awareness of its own 'pure' activity, that which is not *adventicia sibi*; but, having said that this is the *imago quam quaerimus* (ibid.), Augustine almost immediately *denies* that the image is constituted by self-awareness in the usual sense at all (xi.14). We are not able to know or love ourselves 'accurately'

172, is also a balanced discussion, which, like Congar's, emphasizes the links between Augustine's trinitarian theology and his ecclesiology.

<sup>7</sup>) As referred to in the preceding note.

<sup>8</sup>) This, rather than any rigid doctrine of the 'faculties' of the soul, is what is in question in Augustine's argument; which means that criticism of the particular tripartition of the thinking self which Augustine prefers does not necessarily touch the main point at issue. Augustine is not resting his case on an unexamined model of a mind that has three clearly delimitable capacities, but on the problems and paradoxes of a mental activity that can be an object to itself.



unless we know and love ourselves as known and loved by God; so that, for our minds to be re-formed in *sapientia*, their prime object must be God as intelligent and loving, God as creator of beings who are able to share in his wisdom: *colat deum non factum cuius ab eo capax facta est et cuius esse particeps potest* (xii.15). Thus the mind comes to share in the *justitia* and *sapientia* of God — not by having characteristics in common with God, as if God and the mind both shared in righteousness and wisdom, both offered instances of these things, but by receiving the just and wise activity whereby God communicates to creatures (ibid.). For the mind to acquire *sapientia* is for the mind to see itself sustained and embraced by this self-communicating action of God; to see itself as being directly formed by this relation to God's wisdom, not given an identity by its relation to 'lower', transient objects (xiv.20). Its knowing and loving of God in this context is also a knowing of its proper place in creation's hierarchy, its freedom from temporal and material conditioning in its deepest orientation. It is possible for human minds to be free for God, because there is nothing in the order of creation that intrudes between the mind and God's self-communication.

What emerges from this important section of Augustine's argument is that the mind as independent individuality cannot image God; when it reaches the point at which it can apprehend its activity apart from activity in relation to this or that object or stimulus in the world, it either apprehends itself as *acted upon* by God, or it generates the fantasy of being a self-subsistent agent, an abstract individuality beyond all relations. For it to see itself as acted upon by God is to know that it is known and loved by God; and in this knowledge it acquires *sapientia*, the knowledge of what is eternal. And what is eternal is the self-imparting activity of God as creator, as giver of the *justitia* and *sapientia* by which we come to share in divine life, to actualise the divine act in our own temporal and finite context. The image of God, in short, is realised when we come to be in conscious relation to the divine act that establishes the possibility of relation; when we see ourselves as acting out the self-imparting of God by consciously yielding ourselves to be known and loved by God. Since that being known and loved by God is the foundation of our reality in the first place, since we exist because God desires to impart his love, knowing ourselves as loved creatures is the only way of knowing ourselves truthfully. And if we exist because God desires to impart his life, we exist as sharers in knowledge and love, as beings whose self-



awareness and self-relatedness is possible in virtue of relatedness to limitless knowledge and love. Even the dimmest human self-awareness, far short of *sapientia*, acts out of a buried and inarticulate connectedness with eternal knowledge and love; the re-formation that grace effects is the activation of this forgotten link which unregenerate consciousness can never uncover of itself (XIV.xv.21). We find our nature as loved creatures through the experience of being redeemed creatures. That we can be saved only by sheer gift is the revelation that gives us access to the unknown but always presupposed ground of all our distinctively human activity, the ground in gift, in the turning of God to what is not God in uncaused love.

Growing into the image of God, then, is not a matter of perfecting our possession of certain qualities held in common with God, nor even simply — as a rapid reading of *De trin.* XIV might suggest — coming to have God as the formal object of our mental activity. It is for us to be at home with our created selves (our selves as produced, derived), and so to be at home with the action of a creator. We come to 'image' God by grasping that our reality exists solely within his activity of imparting wisdom and justice, and thus letting that prior gift form our conscious reflection and decision-making — which of course is not done by our effort but by the receiving of the grace of Christ which reconnects us with our vocation to be God's created image. The image of God in us might be said to entail a movement into our createdness, because that is a movement into God's own life as turned 'outwards'. What this practically involves is something to which Augustine returns in *De trin.* XV, when he discusses the nature of the life given to us in the *donum* of the Holy Spirit, the life of corporate charity (see XV.xxxii.18 in particular). But it should be clear enough from XIV that Augustine's view of the image is, to say the least, very imperfectly characterised as 'monist' or individualist. Not only does it insist upon the fulfilment of the image being a matter of *relation* to God (and of charity realised in us by the Holy Spirit), it also depends upon the belief that the God who is imaged himself wills relation by imparting his own life. And this latter point throws some light on the complex arguments of Book XV, and on what might be meant by Augustine's denial that the mental trinity in us could in any sense *correspond* to the trinity that is God's life.

Augustine, in XV.iii.5, refers back to earlier discussions in the work (notably VII.iii.5) where he has cautioned against supposing that, when we call the Son power or wisdom, or the Holy Spirit love, we are identifying the person with the quality in such a way as to imply that



the Father has his wisdom only through the Son. What is said of God adjectivally, what is said about the sort of life that must be God's, is said of the whole trinity together and of each of the persons equally: these predicates belong *et universae trinitati ... et personis singulis* (XV.v.7). We can, Augustine suggests, reduce these predicates to three, eternity, wisdom, blessedness, three fundamental 'clusters' of rules for the appropriate use of the word 'God'. To be divine, a life must be without limit, possessed of intelligence and order, and content with itself (v.8) - a rather striking echo of the classical Indian definition of the divinity as *saccidananda*, being, consciousness and bliss. This reduction of divine predicates is achieved by recognising that there is in God no distinction between substance and quality, no set of things *happening* to be true of God as opposed to the things *constituting* God as God. This is why, although the three 'clusters' identified here have a certain usefulness in spelling out the diverse kinds of things we need to say in order to clarify what we mean by 'God', they do not themselves represent a real trinity in God: their reference is one and the same (vi.9). We could quite properly select only one as implying all three — *sapientia*, for instance; and the task would then be to show how this predicate itself entailed a trinitarian life.

We have already had a glimpse of the authentic pattern of this life, says Augustine (vi.10) in the eighth book of the work (VIII.x.14), where mention was first made of the triad of *amans et quod amatur et amor*. At that stage, the notion was too difficult for us to grasp fully; we needed to go through the long purification of our ideas about self-awareness, with its paradoxical climax, that occupies Books IX to XIV. In Book VIII, the idea of an unchangeable Good drawing our minds to itself in love was discussed (VIII.iii.4-5), leading into a consideration of the problem, 'How can we love what we do not know?' (iv.6). Love, Augustine proposes, arises from *recognition*, recognising in something or someone else a pattern (*forma*) of justice or goodness that we already know within ourselves as the source and norm of our own judgment (vi.9); we begin to understand the trinity as we understand love, love considered as the desire for *justitia* in persons, that desire which can impel us even to self-sacrifice (vii.10). We must be in love with loving, we must desire that there *be* love, in us and in others. This is what it is to want *justitia*, the right and proper relation between things, which is for us human beings right (loving) relation with our maker. It is thus that *caritas* or *dilectio* itself provides a model of the trinity. Love loves love — which means that love characteristically loves the act of love or



the condition of being in love with something further. We can only love love when it is actually loving (obviously); the love that is loved cannot be an abstract or objectless state, enclosed in itself: *caritas* therefore implies, in addition to itself as an act and a relation, a loved object and the love that is in that object to make it worthy of love. There is love, there is what is loved and there is the loving that exists in what is loved. This, I think, is how we should read the statement in VIII.x.14, *amor autem alicuius amantis est, et amore aliquid amatur*: 'love is love for a lover [an objective, not a subjective genitive], and something must be the object of that lover's love'. In simpler terms, there is my love for someone, their love for someone or something, and whatever that someone or something is: these three terms constitute the reality of love as we know it. Any act of *caritas* which is authentic (as opposed to the acquisitive compulsion we sometimes stupidly call love — VIII.vii.10) presupposes such a triad. When I see myself as loving, I know why I love the Good: the Good is no stranger to me to the extent that I know how to love, and in the Good I recognise the norms, the *forma*, of my own inner life. My lovingness, to coin a barbarous term, is a condition that assumes the presence of an other — so that my presence to the Good becomes a sign of the loving nature of that Good, enabling me to grasp the continuity between what I am and what the Good is.

Augustine ends Book VIII by warning that we are not yet at the end of the investigation; leading Burnaby to say, rather oddly<sup>9</sup>), that the analogy of love has only a small place in the saint's thought. The reference back to this section in Book XV tells against such a judgment. The point is that, while the triadic structure of *caritas* or *dilectio* shows us where to look for illumination about the trinity, it is, as it stands, an analogy resting on the relations between a subject and an *external* object. This is why the enormous digression of IX to XIV is necessary: we must discover whether there is anything we can say about the subject relating to itself without the mediation of anything outside itself if we are to try to say anything about *God*; and, as we have seen, Book XIV is the culmination of this venture. There is nothing that can be said of the mind's relation to itself without the mediation of the revelation of God as its creator and lover. At the heart of our self-awareness is the awareness of the self-imparting of God, whereby we perceive the eternal fact underlying our existence. Book XIV ought to

<sup>9</sup>) John BURNABY, ed. and tr., *Augustine: Later Works* (Library of Christian Classics VIII), London and Philadelphia, 1955, p. 54, n. 38.



be moving us back to the fundamental insights of Book VIII: the latter showed us that our recognition of a changeless Good rested upon the possibility of recognising its continuity with our mental life, and the former showed us that this very recognition is the work of God's *sapientia*, a gift from the creator. What we recognise *in* ourselves and *beyond* ourselves is the eternal Good as turned towards us and sharing itself with us. We are ready now to understand that the *sapientia* of God (which, we have been told in XV.vi.9, is identical with his essence) loves the creation which it freely makes; and, if it loves other realities, it cannot be without love for itself or, consequently, knowledge of itself. If it is *eternal* love, it has no need for an object outside itself, and if it is *eternal love*, it must be the kind of threefold *caritas* we are familiar with in our world.

The later books of *De trin.* are so laboured and so diffuse in their structure that it is extremely difficult to see how they form a single argument. Not to see this, however, is to risk disastrous misunderstanding. It may be as well, therefore, before going any further to attempt a summary reconstruction of the argument as I have tried to outline it here.

- (i) We presuppose in all our judgments an unchanging Good, an end of all our desiring (a familiar Augustinian theme; see, e.g. *Confessiones* VII.xvii);
- (ii) If we desire it and utilise it in judgment, we must in some sense 'know' it;
- (iii) The form of our judgment about goodness is a recognition that this which we see is akin to what is present in us already;
- (iv) Our approbation of the Good is inseparable from wanting the Good to come to be in all;
- (v) Thus our presence to or share in the Good is a non-self-directed desire: *caritas*;
- (vi) Thus the Good we love in others also has the form of love;
- (vii) What we love is what is loving; hence the trinitarian form of love;
- (viii) But how can this tell us about God since it presupposes the kind of differences that apply only to the world, not to an eternal and simple and changeless reality?
- (ix) We must strip away from the mind its conditioning by 'adventitious' factors to see if we can understand the notion of an unconditioned self-presence and self-love;
- (x) We conclude that our own presence to ourselves is never other than conditioned by our being the objects of divine knowing and divine loving;
- (xi) Thus the whole process of recognising the Good in us, which is



part of our intellectual and moral self-presence, is the fruit of being loved by God;

(xii) We know (*secundum quid*) what God knows because God loves us and imparts to us a share in his life as *sapientia*;

(xiii) God's *sapientia* is thus identified as itself love — a desire for the Good to be in others;

(xiv) As eternal, it must be unconditioned (cf. the remarks on the grammar of God's eternity early in Book XV);

(xv) God is in love with God, and the God whom God loves is the God who loves God: threefold *caritas* with no extraneous conditioning — which the rest of Book XV endeavours to clarify further.

What should be particularly noted is that Augustine, so far from separating the divine substance from the life of the divine persons, defines that substance in such a way that God cannot be other than relational, trinitarian. Because the divine life in its coming-forth to creation can only be grasped as self-imparting, *sapientia* and *caritas* are inseparable; and *caritas* is inconceivable without relatedness. If God is eternal wisdom, he is eternal love. The divine essence is not an abstract principle of unity, nor a 'causal' factor over and above the hypostases: to be God at all is to be desirous of and active in *giving* the divine life. That is the essence, the definition of God for our purposes; there is no 'divinity' not constituted by the act of *caritas*, and thus no divinity that can adequately be conceived apart from the trinity of persons.

This in turn throws some light on what Book XV clearly implies is the nature of the *imago* in the human mind: because the terms of human mental activity do not correspond, except in a rather loose way (xxiii.43), to the persons of the trinity, the mind images, in its ensemble of characteristically mental operations, the trinity *in toto*. It is a trinitarian life appropriate to the created order, as against the trinitarian life appropriate to eternity. As we have seen, the eternity of God involves absolute self-identity. In God there is 'nothing pertaining to the nature of God that does not pertain to this trinitarian life' (vii.11), and nothing that is true of one person which is not true of all — so that (as Book VII had already stated) we should be wrong to say that the Father is wise through the wisdom he begets or loving through the love he sends forth as Spirit (vii.12). Because all are divine in virtue of the one *sapientia* which is theirs, and because that *sapientia* involves all we mean by memory, understanding and love, no one person performs a specialised mental act on behalf of all: the Spirit would not be wisdom *si alius ei meminisset eique alius intellexeret ac tantummodo*



*sibi ipse diligeret* (ibid. and cf. xvii.28). Human beings, on the other hand, are not human in virtue *only* of being capable of a 'sapiential' life: our humanness is not *constituted* by memory, understanding and love, but by other things as well — mortality and animality (vii.11). We only possess what God immutably *is*. Thus we cannot understand the simultaneity and totality of divine *sapientia*: our mental operations are irreducibly time-bound (vii.13). We know partly through self-perception, partly through sense-perception (xii.22); although (xi.20 - xii.22) our own production of a *verbum* and the relation of that *verbum* to action has some serious analogy to the life of God, this dual character of our knowing, self-related and other-related, means that there is an abiding unlikeness (xiii.22). Our knowledge is not like God's — nor will it ever be: it will always and necessarily be a *sapientia* learned or acquired (xv.26), even when it is assured (as it now is not) of a truthful basis (xv.24-26).

The image of God, created *sapientia* in us, has therefore a rather paradoxical character. Our ordinary mental activity is radically unlike God's activity; nothing will actually assimilate us to the absolute self-identity of God's nature as loving wisdom. We image the divine wisdom to the extent that our self-perception is a perception of our own absolute dependence on the self-giving of that wisdom: to the extent that what we see when we look at ourselves is freely generative grace. And this means that we must perceive ourselves as timebound, limited and vulnerable, as being in need of grace, not as self-generating. Our *sapientia* does not terminate in a vision of ourselves as timeless spirit but in the recognition of our created distance from God: only so do we become wise, because only so is God's creative wisdom made the object of our self-knowing. Thus the temporal successiveness, the fragmentary and rather insecure life of memory, understanding and will in us is appropriately the vehicle of the divine image, in its very *difference* from God: self-understanding as a creature (in the fullest sense, involving awareness of a loving creator) is the reflection of God's love, and so of God's sapiential being. It is to become aware of the all-pervasiveness in a human mind, a human life, of the divine *caritas*. The purification of the mind from temporal conditioning described in Books IX to XIV is not designed to lead us away from our knowledge of ourselves in the world, but to show how the most abstract form of self-awareness we can attain confronts us with the love of God irreducibly there beyond or before us. To recall what was said earlier, the image is a 'movement into our createdness'.



If we are ontologically incapable of being *sapientia* as God is, our task is to let the process of our mortal existence be transformed by the self-knowledge of grace which is our proper wisdom. It is thus very much in order when Book XV turns to a consideration of the Holy Spirit as agent of our transformation and of our participation in the life of God. The Spirit is called *caritas* or *dilectio*, not because the Spirit alone *is* love, but because the effect of the Spirit's work is the effect of love, as far as we are concerned — i.e. the Spirit *facit nos in deo manere et ipsum in nobis* (xvii.31; cf. xix.37). Likewise, the Spirit is *donum* (xviii.32 - xix.38) as the agency making love present in us to be the formal cause of our salvation. It does not matter that *dona* may also be used of the Spirit, since the way in which the one saving *dilectio* is appropriated to the needs and callings of diverse human beings in the one Body of Christ involves a plurality of relations between the Spirit and us (xix.34). The title of *donum* does not mean that the Spirit's divine status depends on the relation of God to the world; the Spirit is God eternally. Nor does it mean that the Spirit is, as gift, inferior to the Father and the Son as givers; God gives God, having nothing else to give: *se ipsum det sicut deus* (xix.36). The Spirit, as God, cannot be passive, an object to be passed on by the agency of Father and Son: *non est illic conditio dati et dominatio dantium sed concordia dati et dantium* (ibid.). In other words, the Spirit's godhead is precisely that of Father and Son: the loving wisdom of self-giving. But we may say of the Spirit in particular what is true of divinity in general (*dilectio*, *donum*) because it is through the Spirit that the life of love and gift which is God is lovingly given in the specific history of our salvation and to concrete and diverse individuals. It is because of the Spirit that we have access as redeemed creatures to *sapientia*, because of the Spirit that we may be taken up into the life of self-impartment which we recognise as the ground of our very relation to ourselves.

The Spirit is 'common' to Father and Son (xix.37, xxvi.47, xxvii.27) not as a quality characterising them equally, an impersonal attribute, but as that active divine giving, not simply identical with the person of the Father, which the Father communicates to the Son to give in his turn (xxvi.47 - xxvii.48). This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of Augustine's thought in Book XV. The Spirit's 'identity' in the eternal life of God has to be defined mostly by negations. As we have seen, the Spirit is not passive or impersonal, but a subject who gives (that is what it means to be divine): the Father, in eternally giving (divine) life to the Son, gives that life as itself a 'giving' agency, for



there is no abstract, pre-personal or sub-personal divinity; he gives the Son the capacity to give that same giving life — which, in our history, is the giver to us of the relation of gift that exists between Father and Son. *Se ipsum det sicut deus*: the Spirit as God gives God, gives the reality of self-sharing *sapientia* that exists eternally as the Father's generation of the Word. The Spirit's act of giving is not that of the Father begetting the Son, nor is it that of the Son 'releasing' the Spirit into the world by his gift of himself to the Father; but it is the act of God giving, and so is no less a 'person' than Father and Son. The Spirit proceeds *principaliter* from the Father (xvii.29, cf. xxvi.47 - xxvii.48 — a perfectly clear indication that Augustine did not teach a procession of the Spirit *tanquam ab uno principio* in the scholastic sense): but the context makes it plain that we are not therefore to conceive of the Father as a primary 'self-positing subject' out of whose indeterminate plenitude flow the Son and the Spirit<sup>10</sup>). Augustine insists in precisely these passages (xxvi.47 - xxvii.48) on the absolute simultaneity of the trinitarian relations, in a way which makes it impossible to accept any crude account of the Father's priority, or even any model of the trinity in which the Father as prime 'possessor' of the divine essence distributes it to others (we have noted that the divine persons do not 'possess' the divine essence, but are what it is)<sup>11</sup>). *Sapientia* exists by generating an other, it has its being as lover by being actively for another: the Father is Father, and so is concretely and actively God, by being *for* the Son. *Sapientia* exists by being eternally loved, eternally contemplated, it has its being as what receives and responds to such everlasting love: the Son is Son, and so is concretely and actually God, by being *from* the Father. And *sapientia* exists by being, quite simply, love in search of an object, it has its being as the act of everlasting love which is given form but not exhausted by the mutual gift of Father and Son: the Spirit is concretely and actually God by being *from* or *through* the Father and the Son, in the sense of being the agency that constitutes their relation itself active or productive. In eternity, that productive love is — we must suppose — 'satisfied' in turning everlastingly to the exchange of generating and generated wisdom as its perfect object. In the economy of salvation, the contemplative vision of Father and Son

<sup>10</sup>) See John MILBANK, 'The Second Difference: For a Trinitarianism without Reserve', *Modern Theology*, vol. 2, n° 3, 1986, pp. 213-234, esp. pp. 220-225.

<sup>11</sup>) Note, in XV. xiv.23 and xxi.40, the language of the Father 'speaking', 'uttering', what he is in the Word, rather than *giving* what he *has* to another.



that is the work and the identity of Spirit (God's love loving the love of God) is worked, realised, in creatures, as they are drawn out of their distance from divine love to share the relation between Father and Son, and so themselves to live in the bond of *caritas* with each other — the bond of love which is the life of the Church, the *communio sancti spiritus* (Augustine's favourite theme in his anti-Donatist writings)<sup>12</sup>).

The notion of the Spirit as love in search of an object may seem a slightly odd one; but xxi.40-41, though densely and obscurely expressed, casts a little light. Here Augustine, while granting the inadequacy of the created analogy of mind in his usual way, invites the reader to reflect, nonetheless, on the role of love in understanding, of understanding in love, and of memory in both, so as to discover an inadequate but quite authentic intuition of the inseparability and mutual conditionedness of the divine persons. *Nisi reminiscendo non redit ad aliquid, et nisi amando redire non curat nostrae cogitationis intuitus*; thought involves 'interest', a desirous intent, a kind of *eros*, which sends us into the memory in search of the image, the *visio*, which we need in order to complete our thinking, in order for our thinking to be recognition, i.e. to be continuous and coherent. This love, this *eros* of thinking and interpreting, unites the history of our perceiving with the present experience of perceiving, establishing the former as 'parent' of the latter. *Ita dilectio quae visionem in memoria constitutam et visionem cogitationis inde formatam quasi parentem prolemque coniungit* (xxi.41). The *dilectio* of thought is what makes thinking a coherent activity, an act from which we can rationally *go on*. Thus, turning from image to archetype, we can say that it is in the love of the Spirit that the entire process (to use a hopelessly inept temporal term) of the sapiential love which is God finds its completeness, its inner 'conjoinedness', and so exists as a reality capable of action *ad extra*, even though it is in need of nothing *ab extra*.

So far, then, from Augustine's trinitarian theology dealing inadequately with the Holy Spirit, it succeeds, for the first time in the history of Christian doctrine, in giving some account of how and why the Spirit is intrinsic to the trinitarian life — a task which not even the most sophisticated pages of Gregory of Nyssa manage with any great clarity<sup>13</sup>). Like the Cappadocians, Augustine remains unsure how best

<sup>12</sup>) Especially De baptismo III-V, and Ep. 185.x.43.

<sup>13</sup>) David BROWN, *The Divine Trinity*, London, 1985 (esp. ch. 7), believes that the Cappadocian theology of the trinity is preferable to Augustine's in its greater fundamental clarity about the distinctness of the persons; but Brown is not able to show how a



to distinguish the generation of the Son from the 'breathing-out' of the Spirit in any but these highly metaphorical terms (xxvii.48); but he is not unduly worried by this, and I believe he is right not to be worried. He has established a way of talking about the pattern of divine relation, complex but not at all incoherent, which can manage perfectly well without anything but provisional and heuristic terms to draw a distinction whose significance is made plain in the whole analysis of the movement of eternal loving wisdom. Is the price of all this an insupportably 'monist' picture of God? As Burnaby points out<sup>14</sup>), Augustine is absolutely clear that 'the Persons [of the trinity] are not faculties or functions of a divine Ego': there is no self of which the movement of *sapientia* is a part, as mental life is a part of human life, and the conscious life of mind a part of mental life overall, and the sapiential life of grace a part (until we get to heaven) of conscious life. There can therefore be no question of any subordination of trinitarian plurality to a unity of essence. Thus there is no simple answer to the question of whether Augustine thought in terms of one divine 'consciousness' or three. The persons of the trinity are not three phases of one ego, but neither are they three quasi-independent agents in serial conjunction. The one life of *sapientia* which is God's life is by definition a conscious, intelligent, knowing life; it is also, as we have observed, a life that is (again by definition, once we are clear what *sapientia* really means) a life that generates relations of love and so generates otherness, difference. The divine wisdom exists only *as* something like a relation between subjects. Yet the 'content' of what these subjects are conscious of is formally identical, differentiated only by the locus of this or that subject within the overall pattern of relation or interdependence. Hence, in XV.xiv.23, Augustine's observations on the knowledge of Father and Son: the Father knows all things both 'in himself' and 'in the Son' — that is, he knows himself as ultimate initiator of all, and he knows *in* this act of knowing how this initiating act is realised in, 'uttered' in and

Cappadocian analysis manages the question of the eternal distinctness of the Spirit in any more than a superficial way. Brown's subsequent remarks on the question in his defence of his book, 'Wittgenstein against the «Wittgensteinians»: A Reply to Kenneth Surin on *The Divine Trinity*', *Modern Theology*, vol. 2, n° 3, 1986, pp. 257-276, repeat a number of points about Augustine's supposed interest in the unity of the divine essence which I think to be unsustainable, but also hint at a trinitarian model not in fact all that far from that of the later books of *De trin.* I am grateful to Dr Brown not only for discussion of these questions, but for the opportunity of reading his unpublished paper on 'Trinitarian Personhood and Individuality', which seems to me to be still closer to an Augustinian perspective.

<sup>14</sup>) Op. cit., p. 31.



as the Word. The Father knows the Son because he knows himself as (and only as) the Son's begetter; the Son knows the Father because he knows himself as (and only as) the one generated by the Father (*ille gignendo, ille nascendo*). They do not know different things, nor do they know themselves as independent individuals: they are not independent objects to themselves. We are left with little to say but that *sapientia* is a conscious life whose consciousness of itself exists only in a manifold interrelation of loving acts — or rather, a differentiation and self-reflexivity within one loving movement, which is also more than 'self-reflexivity' in the ordinary sense because it is, though complete in itself, also indeterminately in search of an object to love, and thus both sufficient to itself *and* productive.

I have been arguing that Augustine cannot be held responsible for a move towards individualism in anthropology and abstract theism in theology. The introspective method of *De trin.* is designed to 'demythologise' the solitary human ego by establishing the life of the mind firmly in relation to God — and, what is more, to God understood as self-gift, as movement into otherness and distance in self-imparting love. As the work moves to its conclusion, it turns more and more into a meditation on the imparting of divine *caritas* through the Holy Spirit, and thus a meditation on the human self within the communion of believers. Likewise, the more and more elaborate discussion of the themes of love and gift in Book XV, against the background of earlier and more sketchy remarks, makes it quite plain that the clichés about 'beginning from the divine unity' as determining Augustine's theology are of no use whatever in understanding what is going on in his greatest theological treatise. He is no less concerned than any Greek theologian to secure the unity and simplicity of the divine nature, but, as a *polemical* concern, this appears very rarely in *De trin.* There is certainly no trace at all of a Neoplatonist interest in the One at work here<sup>15</sup>). What Augustine *does* achieve is the transformation of a concept of the one divine nature as the content of the three divine subsistents (a concept which can suggest a rather static picture of that nature) into the vision of the divine nature as an activity (sapiential love) that cannot but exist in trinitarian relation. This is hardly monism or 'abstract theism'. Contemporary theology is increasingly taken up with forms of trinitarian pluralism that threaten to become mythological —

<sup>15</sup>) Pace BROWN, 'Wittgenstein against the «Wittgensteinians»', p. 269, and others, notably DU ROY.



the divine life as interactive drama — and such trends need to be balanced by serious attention to Augustine's account. Modern trinitarian pluralism is often a wholly intelligible reaction to the unhelpfully formal versions of trinitarian orthodoxy current in scholastic textbooks or to the abstract unitarianism to which liberal Protestantism tended. But it is not the only possible way of retrieving this central element in the Christian grammar of God; and if it is content with a highly anthropomorphic plurality of agencies, it will miss the central element in Augustine's analysis — the understanding of the divine *nature* as loving wisdom, as relational, and thus the integration of the doctrine of the trinity with discourse about God *tout court*. A trinitarian theology prepared to stick close to the fundamental Christian perception of being given a share in the unlimited gift and exchange that is the joy of God will have much to learn from the *De trin.*, with its exceptionally nuanced fusion of theology and anthropology. In his work on Augustine, Tarsicius van Bavel has consistently drawn students of the *doctor caritatis* more deeply into this rich interaction between God and the *humanum* in the whole corpus of Augustine's thought. It is therefore appropriate to end this grateful tribute to Fr van Bavel with some words of his on Augustine's anthropology, which might well be taken to summarise what I have here argued to be the main thrust of the *De trin.*:

This vision involves an immense responsibility for those who are believers. We become responsible as a group for the presence of God's love in the world. For our love of man, in the end, is the love of God himself: God loves the world through us<sup>16</sup>).

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<sup>16</sup>) Tarsicius J. van BAVEL, 'The Anthropology of Augustine', *Milltown Studies* (Dublin), 19/20, Spring and Autumn 1987, p. 37.