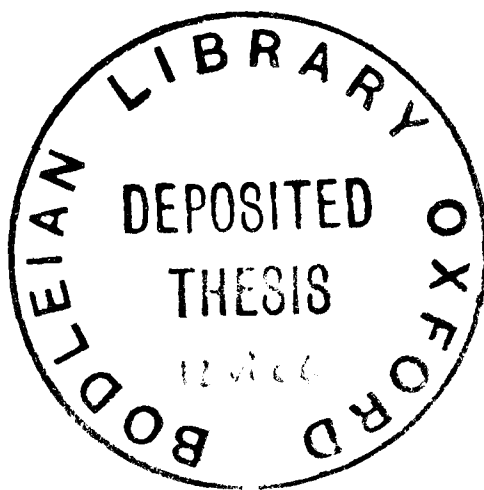


God loved and known
through God
in Augustine's *De Trinitate*

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Michaelmas 2005 *For deposit only*

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D. Phil – Michaelmas 2005

Short abstract

The present dissertation combines sequential and analytical approaches to Augustine's *De Trinitate* to elaborate a description of the treatise based on the presupposition of its unity and its coherence from the structural, rhetorical and theological points of view. The sequential analysis of books 1-7 and 8-15 describes first the *outer layer* of the argument of the treatise: Scripture and the mystery of the Trinity (books 1-4); discussion of 'Arian' logical and ontological categories (books 5-7) and a comparison between self-love/knowledge and formal aspects of the confession of the mystery of the Trinity (books 8-15). However, this outer layer does not adequately account for the unity and the coherence of the treatise. On the contrary, the most comprehensive and satisfactory structural, rhetorical and theological description of the *De Trinitate* results from an *inner layer* which can be detected throughout the treatise around the theme of knowledge of God. Augustine, in the *De Trinitate*, implicitly endorses the threefold classical definition of the purpose of rhetoric: teach, move, delight (explicitly mentioned in the *De Doctrina Christiana*). The outer layer of the *De Trinitate*, especially the so called 'analogical' line, is meant to entice the interest and the curiosity of the reader, to delight him. Other aspects of the outer layer, especially in the first half of the treatise, have a predominant instructive or polemical function. The deepest thrust of the treatise, however, aims at 'moving' the reader, that is leading him to the *visio* and *fruitio* of God the Trinity, in whose image he is created. This mystagogical aspect of the rhetoric of the treatise entails its own distinctive delightfulness and eloquence, unfolded through Christology, soteriology doctrine of the Holy Spirit and doctrine of revelation. At the same time, from the vantage point of *dilectio*, Augustine detects and powerfully describes the epistemological consequences of human sinfulness, thus unmasking the fundamental deficiency of received theories of knowledge. Only *dilectio* restores knowledge and enables philosophers to yield to the injunction which resumes philosophical enterprise as a whole, namely *cognosce te ipsum*.

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Long abstract

The present dissertation combines sequential and analytical approaches to Augustine's *De Trinitate* to elaborate a description of the treatise based on the presupposition of its unity and its coherence from the structural, rhetorical and theological points of view.

This purpose is narrowed-down through a selective analysis of commentators who argue for anagogical or analogical interpretations of the dynamics of the *De Trinitate*. Other commentators are then considered who trace the alleged modalistic bent of Western Trinitarian theology back to Augustine and attribute to him the opposition between the prominence given to the philosophy of the essence in the West *versus* the apophatic or 'communional' approach of the East. Finally, the review of secondary literature examines ways of preventing 'proto-Cartesian' readings of the *De Trinitate* through alternative more accurate examinations of the anthropology and the Christology of the treatise (Chapter I).

The sequential analysis of books 1-7 (Chapter II) and 8-15 (Chapter IX) describes first the *outer layer* of the argument of the treatise: Scripture and the mystery of the Trinity (books 1-4); discussion of 'Arian' logical and ontological categories (books 5-7) and a comparison between self-love/knowledge and formal aspects of the confession of the mystery of the Trinity (books 8-15). However, this outer layer does not adequately account for the unity and the coherence of the treatise. On the contrary, the most comprehensive and satisfactory structural, rhetorical and theological description of the *De Trinitate* results from the analysis of an *inner layer* which can be detected throughout the treatise around the theme of knowledge of God.

Augustine, in the *De Trinitate*, implicitly endorses the threefold classical definition of the purpose of rhetoric: teach, move, delight (explicitly mentioned in the *De Doctrina Christiana*). The outer layer of the *De Trinitate*, especially the so called 'analogical' line, is meant to entice the interest and the curiosity of the reader, to delight him. Other aspects of the outer layer, especially in the first half of the treatise, have a predominant instructive or polemical function. The deepest thrust of the treatise, however, aims at 'moving' the reader, that is leading him to the *visio* and *fruitio* of God the Trinity, in whose image he is created. This mystagogical aspect of the rhetoric of the treatise rests on a distinctive delightfulness and eloquence, unfolded through Christology, soteriology, doctrine of the Holy Spirit and doctrine of revelation.

The Christology of the treatise provides us with three crucial parameters for a proper theological epistemology: the dependence of knowledge of God on the Incarnation; the link

between knowledge of God and soteriology; the eschatological character of the act through which God makes himself known to us in Christ through the Holy Spirit. The first of these parameters starts from a firm denial of any form of Adoptionism and the unambiguous identification of the agent of the Incarnation with the Son of God and goes hand in hand with the rejection of any concession to philosophy when it comes to the access to *sapientia* or *contemplatio* or *beatitudo*, i.e. to what counts as *real* knowledge of God. The second of these parameters, already implied by the first, consists in the link between knowledge of God and soteriology. God reveals himself as he reconciles us to himself in the sacrifice of Christ. This is what Augustine means when he states that illumination depends on the Incarnation *and* on the *mundatio* resulting from the blood of Christ and the humility of God. Only through the overcoming of our *cupiditas* through the Son's *dilectio* for the Father and of our *superbia* through the *humilitas Dei*, is our blindness healed. Finally, the third of these parameters, implied in the previous two, is the eschatological character of the act through which God makes himself known to us in Christ through the Holy Spirit. If, thanks to the incarnation, the object of faith/*scientia* is identical with that of *visio/sapientia/contemplatio*, the modality of the manifestation of this object is different: hidden in the former and fully displayed in the latter (Chapter IV).

The doctrine of revelation of the treatise has a characteristically Trinitarian shape: God's freedom in his act of salvific self-manifestation is formulated through the divine attributes of invisibility (Augustine's equivalent for unknowability) and immutability. This freedom requires that only from his own side can the invisible/unknowable and immutable God make himself known; 'from his own side', of course, means 'in Christ through the Holy Spirit'. On the basis of the divine character of Christ's work of revelation and reconciliation through the Holy Spirit it emerges that God (the Father) can *only* be known and loved through God (the Son and the Holy Spirit) because he is invisible, immutable and free; and that God the Father can *really* be known and loved through the Son and the Holy Spirit because the Three are inseparably and equally one God (Chapter V).

The analysis of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit establishes its Christological and soteriological grounds and compares them with the sections of the treatise where his inner Trinitarian origin, identity and properties are dealt with more systematically. The Holy Spirit is gift. In the case of the Holy Spirit, the notion of gift acquires a crucial connotation: not only it evokes the fact that the Holy Spirit is given, but also that he is *freely* given and at the same time that he freely gives *himself*. If freedom is one of the defining features of a gift, the Holy Spirit fulfils this condition in the highest conceivable degree. Then, the fact that Scripture presents the Holy Spirit as belonging to the Father and to the Son, as being the Spirit *of* the Father and *of* the Son, teaches us that the Holy Spirit is the common charity through which Father and Son love each other. To the question of

how crucial is the doctrine of the *filioque* to Augustine's Trinitarian theology, the answer is: just as crucial as the understanding of inner Trinitarian life as life of *dilectio* (Chapter VI).

A comparison is then made between the understanding of God's inner Trinitarian life presupposed by Christology, soteriology, doctrine of revelation and of the Holy Spirit and the polemical anti-'Arian' approach to the same topic unfolded in books 5-7. The abstract ontological bent to the doctrine of the Trinity usually ascribed to Augustine is thus confuted and a proposal is put forward for a more adequate description of the understanding of the unity and the consubstantiality of the Trinity presupposed by Augustine's Christology and pneumatology (Chapter VII).

The proper way of formulating the epistemological issue which constitutes the inner layer of the *De Trinitate* is the object of the 8th book: *dilectio*, which is at the heart of Christ's incarnation, mediation and sacrifice, the property of the Holy Spirit and the 'content' of inner Trinitarian life, also plays a crucial role in knowledge of God. The Trinity, object of faith, is 'seen' through *dilectio*, i.e. the actual love for God and for our neighbour made possible by Christ's salvation and the gift of his Holy Spirit. From this acknowledgment, Augustine determines that the issue of knowledge of God can only be approached from the viewpoint of its actuality (Chapter VIII).

This knowledge in/through *dilectio* constitutes the inner dynamism of the image of God, the theme Augustine develops on the basis of the book of Genesis and Paul's letters to demonstrate how the drive inscribed in us by creation is based on the incommensurable gap existing between the teleological character of our created nature and the absolutely transcendent, gracious and in the end eschatological nature of this same God-given goal. The image of God corresponds to our dependence on God not only for our existence, but for our possibility to know and love and reach the fulfilment of that for which we were created. We can say that the image is a fundamental threefold dependence of creature on the creator and reaches its fulfilment when this dependence in being, knowledge and love becomes conscious and is converted into *cultus*, i.e. *ac-knowledged*, thankful dependence. At heart, the acknowledgment of this dependence consists in love, in *dilectio*. But love is inseparable from knowledge, and therefore worship coincides with remembering or rather, in being reminded of God and in being given, in Christ through the Holy Spirit, the possibility to know and love God (Chapters XI and XII).

At the same time, from the vantage point of *dilectio*, Augustine detects and powerfully describes the epistemological consequences of human sinfulness, thus unmasking the fundamental deficiency of received theories of knowledge. Any pretension to independent philosophical enterprise - "philosophizing without Christ"- overlooks the crucial condition of knowledge: love. Knowledge is either impaired by covetousness or freed by God's given love. There is no distinction, for Augustine, between natural and supernatural levels of knowledge, no possibility for reason of

carving out a field where it could fulfil its role autonomously. His epistemology rests on the impossibility of neutrality for the will, neither turning itself towards God nor averting itself away from him, but simply ignoring both options. *Caritas* stands in the end as the only condition for an harmonious cognitive life. Only *dilectio* restores knowledge and enables philosophers to yield to the injunction which resumes philosophical enterprise as a whole, namely *cognosce te ipsum* (Chapters III and X).

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Church, together with the chapel at New College, and the congregations and pastors of St. Ebbes first and St. Aldates afterwards, helped me to root academic theological investigation in worship, an essential condition for the understanding of Augustine's Trinitarian theology. I am particularly proud to owe the financial possibility of completing my research to the generosity of the Anglican Church, through the Squire and Marriot Committee. The extension of this scholarship to Christians of all denominations is one aspect among many others of the privileged ecumenical distinctiveness of the Theology Faculty at Oxford I have so deeply benefited from. Fr. Henry Wansborough, Master of St. Benet's Hall, welcomed me in Oxford, decisively supported my application to the University and was always a model of dynamism and optimism, whatever the unavoidable difficulties of cultural and social insertion in a foreign environment may at first prove to be. More than simply teaching me English, Clare Eaglestone awakened in me a love for the beauty of English literature right from my very first acquaintance with this language, when she boldly introduced me to Milton and Orwell, rather than lingering through dull and uninspired manuals for foreigners.

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Luigi Gioia

Christ Church, 9 October 2005

ABBREVIATIONS

For the abbreviations of Augustine's works, we have followed Fitzgerald, A. D. (ed.), *Augustine Through the Ages : an Encyclopedia*, Grand Rapids 1999.

We have omitted the abbreviation of the *De Trinitate* when this work is quoted in the footnotes. In the same way, for the *De Trinitate*, we have given only the page number of the critical edition, without referring each time to the volumes 50 and 50/A of the *Corpus Christianorum Latinorum* in which it can be found.

INTRODUCTION

So much criticism has been heaped on Augustine's *De Trinitate* in recent decades that this work definitely does not need yet another censorious dissection, nor another partial examination of its content, but rather a modest, stubborn and above all sympathetic descriptive analysis thoroughly committed to account for *the whole* of the treatise, on the presupposition of its *unity* and its *coherence*.¹

The unity and the coherence of this work is explicitly claimed by Augustine himself in his letter 174, addressed to the bishop of Carthage Aurelius, and destined to be placed at the beginning of the final editing of the treatise. In this letter, Augustine famously complains about the theft of a copy of the *De Trinitate* at an advanced stage of its writing. Such was his frustration at the discovery of the distribution of the unfinished work that he had decided to give up its completion altogether.² The explanation of the reasons of this degree of annoyance and of the consequent radical decision to lay aside the result of years of painstaking work gives us an invaluable insight into the way Augustine regarded this treatise: “Non enim singillatim sed omnes simul edere ea ratione decreveram quoniam praecedentibus consequentes inquisitione proficiente nectuntur”.³ Despite the length of the *De Trinitate* and a composition spread out over a span of some 20 years,⁴

¹ Hill (1991) is an example of a sympathetic approach to the *De Trinitate*, even though his account needs to be complemented (and sometimes improved) by further theological elaboration. Cf. also Cavadini (1992), 104, who pleads for a reading of the *De Trinitate* which accounts for all its elements, particularly those usually treated as digressions and therefore as irrelevant to the overall argument of the treatise, namely the long discussion on redemption in the 4th and the 13th book; the discussion on contemplation of the 1st book and in the prologues of books 1 to 5; the treatment of original sin and human renewal in the 14th book; the discussion of the theophanies of Genesis and Exodus in the 2nd and the 3rd books.

² *Ep.* 174 (CCL 50, 25). Cf. *retr.* 2.15 (CCL 57, 101)

³ *Ep.* 174 (CCL 50, 25).

⁴ Augustine declares that “De trinitate quae deus summus et uerus est libros iuuenis inchoavi, senex edidi”, *Ep.* 174 (CCL 50, 25). On this basis, three hypotheses have been put forward to determine the year in which Augustine started the writing of the *De Trinitate*: summer 399 [Hendrikx (1955), 558], the beginning of 405 [La Bonnardière (1971-72 and 1972-73), 295] and finally the period going from 400 to 403 [Hombert (2000), 53-56]. For the end, 419 is the most likely date [Hendrikx (1955), 559] even though La Bonnardière (1965), 69 and 166f gives the period 420-426 for the 15th book. It is worth noticing that

Augustine considered it as one single, consistent, tightly woven ‘progressive inquiry’. So carefully had he conceived the progressive and pedagogical character of this *inquisitio*, that access to an unfinished version of it, however sizeable, could have exposed the reader to a dangerous misunderstanding: “Hinc est, quod periculosissimarum quaestionum libros de genesi scilicet, et de trinitate diutius teneo quam vultis et fertis, ut si non potuerint nisi habere aliqua, quae merito reprehendantur, saltem pauciora sint quam esse possent, si praecipiti festinatione inconsultius ederentur”.⁵

On this basis, therefore, we assume the *unity* and the *coherence* of the *De Trinitate* and we shall describe it from the *structural*, *rhetorical* and *theological* points of view. In particular, patient and sustained confrontation with the text itself has persuaded us that the unity and the coherence of this *inquisitio* are best perceived when the treatise is approached from the angle of the *knowledge of God*.

This angle might not be easy to detect from the viewpoint of modern epistemological standards because, of course, Augustine does not embark on an explicit reflection on the conditions of knowledge of God, but aims at introducing his reader into the *practice* of this knowledge and then, only retrospectively, determines its conditions not critically, but theologically. Therefore, the reader will forgive us if we shall refer to ‘theological epistemology’ throughout this dissertation according to Augustine’s approach to knowledge of God and treat epistemological questions as a function of the doctrine of the Trinity. Our understanding of a properly ‘theological epistemology’ is summed up in the title of the dissertation: God can be known and loved only through God, i.e. in Christ through the Holy Spirit. We assume that this is the only approach which deserves to be called ‘theological’, because it is the only which depends on God’s free self-unveiling.

It might be argued that there are anthropological ways of approaching knowledge of the Trinity and that they could claim to draw their inspiration from Augustine himself. This view will be

Hombert (2000) thinks that only the first book was written between 400 and 403, whereas books II-IV were written between 411-414 (56-80). This is particularly significant since it might explain the similarity of books

discussed and tested throughout our dissertation, on the presupposition, however, that it does not result in –or rather from- a properly theological epistemology and that its attribution to Augustine is based on an erroneous interpretation of his thought.

Thus we can turn to the first chapter of our work, devoted to a review of commentators of Augustine's *De Trinitate*. No matter how narrowly defined, any research on aspects of this treatise will always need to strike some compromises to deal with the formidable amount of secondary literature devoted to it. This becomes even more of a challenge with regard to the knowledge of God, because of the complexity and the breadth of Augustine's thought on this point, its philosophical and theological implications and the variety of often contrasting angles from which it can be tackled.

Therefore, the main criterion applied to the review on secondary literature which follows will not be exhaustiveness, but representativeness. Moreover, it will not consist in a list of the different possible approaches to the theme chosen for this dissertation, supposing them all to be equally valid. On the contrary, it will rather take the shape of a selective review of some commentators, gradually focussing the attention on the particular approach imposed by the nature of the subject-matter of our dissertation –and indeed of Augustine's treatise- i.e. the mystery of the Trinity. For this reason, this review starts with some interpreters of Augustine who argue against the theological nature of his epistemology in the *De Trinitate* and gradually move to those who take the opposite stand.

4 with book 13 in the light of the anti-Pelagian controversy.

⁵ *Ep.* 143.4 (CSEL 44, 254).

I. AUGUSTINE AND HIS CRITICS

1. ANAGOGY, CREATIONIST ONTOLOGY AND ANALOGY

Up to this day, Olivier Du Roy's¹ lengthy work on the genesis of Augustine's Trinitarian theology remains the most comprehensive treatment of the subject. The attempt to relate the *De Trinitate* to Augustine's early works up to his ordination in 391 (and, indeed, well beyond this date) is the most enduring –and probably the less noticed- quality of this study. A deeper perception of the complex texture of the *De Trinitate* can be reached only in the light of its wider background and particularly of its roots in the Manichaean and the Pelagian controversies.

Du Roy² rightly points out the chief importance of the epistemological concern triggered by the reading of Cicero's *Hortensius*, which inaugurated a quest for *sapientia* inseparable from that for *beatitudo*. However, he comes to the conclusion that, from very early on and until the end of Augustine's life, knowledge, including knowledge of God the Trinity, remained fundamentally independent from his faith. Du Roy finds a confirmation of this interpretation in the 7th book of the *Confessions* where Augustine claims to have discovered spiritual interiority and divine transcendence not through faith but in the Platonic books. From that time onwards, knowledge of God would have taken the fundamental shape of what du Roy calls an 'anagogy': a conversion to interiority followed by a movement upwards, under the guidance of the light of Truth. At the end of this anagogy, and independently from faith, Augustine assumes the identity of Plotinus' hypostases with the Christian Trinity. However, so dazzling is the light of this Truth –identical with the Trinity- that the soul is incapable of sustaining this vision for very long and no sooner has it

¹ Du Roy (1966).

² Du Roy (1966), 414-420, which we sum up from the French.

reached the climax of this anagogical movement than it is torn away from this light by its own weakness and mutability. Only the frustration resulting from the fleeting nature of the achievement made possible through anagogy persuades Augustine of the necessity to complement it with faith in the Incarnation. Faith provides him with a sure way towards the light perceived autonomously through Plotinian anagogy.

The epistemological role of faith, therefore, consists merely in an authoritative spur to turn towards interiority through moral purification and humility, where the anagogical mode takes over. Knowledge of God the Trinity chiefly results from this superior mode of knowing³ basically independent from faith, also available to philosophers. This whole approach is summed up in the pattern *uia/patria*: (i) '*patria*' is the name given to the aim of human quest –corresponding to *sapientia* or *beatitudo*- which can be perceived, however fleetingly, through anagogy; (ii) even though in principle this *patria* can be known by everyone, only one *uia*, however, makes its attainment actually possible: the purification provided by Christ's Incarnation.⁴

Through the lenses of this interpretation, du Roy embarks upon a lengthy and meticulous analysis of Augustine's early works, starting from the dialogues at Cassiciacum of 386 up to *De Trinitate*. Very schematically, the result of this analysis can be summed up as follows: anagogy remains Augustine's only epistemological tool until the anti-Manichean controversy forces him to confront it with a creationist ontology. This confrontation inaugurates a tension in Augustine's thought between the earlier approach to the mystery of the Trinity through Plotinian anagogy and a new mode based on the doctrine of the image of God:

³ Du Roy (1966), 419, even talks of the "composante gnostique de la théologie augustinienne".

⁴ Madec (1989), 48 and 240, criticises du Roy's interpretation by noticing that the pattern *patria/uia* is constantly enshrined into the context of the opposition between pride and humility, presumptuousness and confession.

- (i) the earlier anagogical approach presupposed the Plotinian philosophy of the One: since production of beings consists in fall into multiplicity and exteriority, return to the One is attained through ascent ('anagogy') from multiplicity to unity and from exteriority to interiority;
- (ii) according to the biblical creationist ontology developed during the anti-Manichaean controversy, production of beings results from free creation *ex nihilo* and implies participation (i.e. likeness to God). In this new context, the doctrine of the image of God acquires an epistemological status insofar as it expresses our total dependence on God both for our existence and for our possibility of coming back to him through knowledge and love. In the light of this doctrine, return to God coincides with growth in his likeness, made possible through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Du Roy argues that this tension between two irreconcilable ontologies is the fundamental cause of what he constantly refers to as the 'failure' of Augustine's Trinitarian epistemology. An impressively detailed –and often very valuable– analysis of Augustine's works up to the *De Trinitate* is meant to substantiate this claim. In the present overview, we shall focus on the consequences of the adoption of this framework for du Roy's interpretation of the structure and the argument of the *De Trinitate*.

To start with, du Roy's attention to the genetic aspect of Augustine's Trinitarian thought leads him to argue against a purely analogical approach to the psychological triads. These triads are to be understood in the light of the tension summed up above between Plotinian anagogy and Trinitarian metaphysics of creation. According to him, the triads of book 8 to 14 emerge from an underlying anagogy characterized by the classical movement of conversion to interiority and transcendence and the passage from exteriority to interiority, from the sensitive world to the spiritual dimension

of reality, from multiplicity to unity. At the same time, in the light of the evolution of Augustine's *intellectus fidei*, these triads also have to be understood within the metaphysical framework of the Trinitarian structure of creation. This means that the psychological triads are instrumental in the discovery of the Trinitarian structure of created being. At least initially, therefore, these triads are not devised with a view to providing an analogy for the Trinitarian mystery. On the contrary, they aim at illustrating the three ontological levels –existence, knowledge and will- corresponding to the threefold dependence of the creature on its creator.⁵

In this portrayal, the *De Trinitate* becomes Augustine's most sustained attempt to resolve the supposed polarization between these two approaches to the knowledge of God. In the initial intention of the treatise, the "*cogito*" enlightened by the Trinity, its creator, would have been the starting point not of a simple analogy of the Trinity, but of an anagogic movement leading up to vision of God the Trinity, in a way somehow akin to Plotinus' ecstatic vision of the One. However, both the triads of love and of self-reflection would have proved unable to sustain this anagogic ascent to the Trinity and led to the 'failure' of both the outcome of the 8th book⁶ and the passage from the 10th to the 11th book.⁷ As a result, Augustine would have tried to obviate this double

⁵ A similar point is made by Crouse (1985), 510, who shows that in Augustine the Trinity revealed by Christ and believed by faith is in fact the '*Principium* of human reflection', the 'foundation of self-conscious life', to the point that "presence to itself and awareness of itself imply awareness of that principle". According to Cochrane (1940), Augustine in the *De Trinitate* undertakes a "phenomenology of the human mind", where the reasoning mind goes from awareness of objects external to itself to awareness of being aware. This awareness of being aware, is awareness of existing, knowing and willing or "awareness of selfhood as a triad of being, intelligence and purpose" [403]. The decisive aspect of this discovery is that it does not lock reason into an illusion of independence, of radical transcendence, not yet of the absence of limitations or again, in a word, in a claim to divinity. On the contrary, it rests on an awareness of self as created, in a "consciousness of selfhood as, in some mysterious sense, forever dependent upon an inexhaustible and unconditioned source of Being, Wisdom and Power in whose 'image' it is made" [407]. God is recognized as the ἀρχή, the *Principium*, of mind's being, thought and purpose. Awareness of being aware results in consciousness of selfhood as a dependent entity not only for its very existence, but also for its possibility of knowing and willing.

⁶ Du Roy (1962) had reached the verdict of 'failure' to describe the outcome of the 8th book of the *De Trinitate* some years before his book on the Trinity appeared, Du Roy (1966).

⁷ Cf. Cavadini (1992), who goes so far as to suggest that "the *De Trinitate* uses the Neoplatonic soteriology of ascent only to impress it into the service of a thoroughgoing critique of its claim to raise the inductee to the contemplation of God, a critique which, more generally, becomes a declaration of the futility of any attempt to come to any saving knowledge of God apart from Christ" [106]. Augustine unfolds "one of the finest examples of what could be called Neoplatonic anagogy that remains from the antique world"

failure through a new strategy which echoes that of his early works and consists in looking for images (or ‘analogies’) of the Trinity at the lower levels of creation.

Rather predictably, according to the interpretation of the pattern *patria/uia* adopted by du Roy where faith only plays a role of purification, the discussion of the 13th book on redemption is explained along the same lines: Incarnation only purifies us; knowledge of the Trinity – which corresponds to *sapientia*- transcends faith; faith itself is assimilated to temporal and therefore provisional *scientia*. The attempt to lead the anagogy based on creationist ontology to its outcome is resumed once again in the 14th book, but, unsurprisingly, ends up in yet another ‘failure’: Augustine does not manage to explain how the presence of God’s image in the soul enables it to remember God.

This last ‘failure’ finally persuades Augustine to leave behind the anagogical mode and to explore the analogical approach to the triadic structure of our dependence on the creative Trinity instead, in the 15th book. This is how he is led to discuss the attribution of memory, knowledge and love to God and to list similarities and differences between the psychological triads and the Trinity.⁸

In a nutshell, du Roy’s builds his version of the logic of Augustine’s practice of knowledge of God along three lines: anagogy, creationist ontology and analogy. The anagogical mode, in tension with creationist ontology, came first. Only the impossibility of reconciling anagogy and creationist ontology led to the final predominance of analogy. In addition to this compromise, the basis for this analogy were static formulas of faith: unity of the three persons in one nature, unity of operations *ad extra* and primacy of the unity of essence. Thus, the final product Augustine hands over to tradition is the analogical image of a God unique in essence, whose life is abstractly represented through relations of self-knowledge and self-love.

only “to break the inevitable impasse of the introspective soteriology of ascent” [105] through a full appreciation of the necessity of saving knowledge of the Trinity through faith in Christ [110].

⁸ Du Roy (1966), 437-446.

On such premises, hardly any of the dead ends even of much later Western theological and philosophical tradition cannot ultimately be traced back to Augustine. “Augustine handed over to the West a dogmatic pattern which tends to cut off the Trinity from the economy of salvation”.⁹ His is the “notion of a divine ‘Self’ as the image of human ‘self’”.¹⁰ “The Augustinian *intellectus fidei* conceals a risk of modalism. He leads to conceive God as [...] a unique God, thinking and loving himself, like a great selfish figure or a ‘great bachelor’. Eighteenth and nineteenth century Deism probably is the ultimate upshot of this *intellectus fidei* of the Trinity, based on a neo-platonic philosophy”.¹¹

In the end, even though du Roy’s impressive effort to ascertain the genesis of Augustine’s Trinitarian doctrine indeed deserves to be taken into account, the same thing cannot be said for his overall interpretations of the evolution of Augustine’s Trinitarian thought.¹² The polarization he postulates between knowledge of God the Trinity and Christology in his interpretation of the pattern *patria/uia* is based on a very superficial acquaintance with the *De Trinitate*. Our dissertation as a whole shall be devoted to disprove du Roy’s conclusion not only with regard to his interpretation of the *De Trinitate*, but also to crucial aspects of his account of the genesis of Augustine’s Trinitarian thought.

2. AUGUSTINE AND WESTERN TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

The task of confronting some of the criticisms of Augustine’s Trinitarian theology prevailing in contemporary theology is a wearisome and unrewarding one we cannot avoid, but which also does not call for a too extensive treatment. Many of these critics evidently have very little first hand knowledge of Augustine himself.¹³ Instead, we shall look at few highly representative critics whose

⁹ Du Roy (1966), 460.

¹⁰ Du Roy (1966), 462: “la conception du ‘Soi’ divin à l’image du ‘moi’ humain”.

¹¹ Du Roy (1966), 463.

¹² Cf. Ayres (2000), 44, n. 11.

¹³ Even the usually careful Pannenberg (1991), I, 323, relies on Jenson (1982), 119f, to take issue with Augustine over his assertion in *Trin.* 7.2 (246f) that if the Son is the wisdom of the Father, then “the Father

versions of what Augustine should have done, however much unintended, do in fact open constructive paths for the determination of what he actually did do.

Du Roy's interpretation of the so-called 'psychological triads' of the second half of the *De Trinitate* establishes that the final outcome of their –tortuous, in his opinion– unfolding is the formulation of an analogy of the Trinity: because we have been created in the image of God, by looking at what constitutes this image of God in us, i.e. our *mens*, we can understand something about the inner life of the Trinity. Karl Barth held a similar view and famously characterised these triads as follows:

“an analogue of the Trinity, of the Trinitarian God of Christian revelation, in some creaturely reality distinct from him, a creaturely reality which is not a form assumed by God in his revelation, but which quite apart from God's revelation manifests in its own structure by creation a certain similarity to the structure of the Trinitarian concept of God, so that it may be regarded as an image of the Trinitarian God himself”.¹⁴

This 'analogical' interpretation of the *De Trinitate* pervades the whole Western theological tradition. Down the centuries, generations of Western theologians have thought that this was Augustine's main contribution to Trinitarian theology, and Eastern theologians have focussed on this issue to deplore Augustine's unfortunate deviation from the traditional approach to the mystery of the Trinity. The present chapter will tackle this interpretation starting from Karl Barth's main concern about the possible drawbacks of the analogical approach to the mystery of the Trinity, summarized, in the passage quoted above, in the expression: “quite apart from revelation”.

Karl Barth is aware of the positive value such an enterprise might assume in a context where the intention is not that of grounding “the possibility of revelation in the world of human reason” – which he calls 'apologetics' – but that of “establishing the actual possibilities of the world of human

does not have wisdom in himself, but only through the Son” and his belief that “this would violate the equal deity of Father and Son”. Pannenberg's comment is: “An important insight of R. W. Jenson is that here Augustine was not simply rejecting an inappropriate formulation of Nicene doctrine but missing one of its points, namely, that the relations between the persons are constitutive not merely for their distinctions but also for their deity”. This point is discussed in this dissertation, 150-156. Ayres (2000), 71, mentions other critics of Augustine, namely C. Lacugna, C. Plantinga, V. Lossky, J. Zizioulas. One of the most striking examples of uninformed and yet influential criticisms of Augustine is also represented by Gunton (1991).

¹⁴ Barth (1975), I.1, 334.

reason as the scene of revelation” – which he calls ‘polemics’.¹⁵ *Vestigium Trinitatis*¹⁶ in the Fathers was “not to be overrated, nor to be used as a proof in the strict sense”.¹⁷ It simply was based on the assumption that “there can be true apprehension of it [the Trinity] only on the presupposition of revelation, *trinitate posita*”.¹⁸ Insofar as the thrust behind the Fathers’ doctrine of *uestigium* is not an apologetical one, Barth is prepared to explore its potential theological significance and does so very insightfully. On the basis of the Fathers’ keen awareness that the Trinity is known to us only by revelation, it is possible to interpret the *uestigium* as the search for a language for the mystery of God. They were persuaded that “revelation, the very revelation correctly and normatively understood in the formulated dogma, could grasp the language, i.e., that on the basis of revelation, enough elements could be found in the familiar language used by all to be able to speak about revelation”.¹⁹ Triads like that of *mens*, *notitia* and *amor* could thus be adopted “not because these things were in and of themselves suitable for the purpose, but because they were adapted to be appropriated”.²⁰ Thus he concludes that “what happened then, is not that they tried to explain the Trinity by the world, but on the contrary that they tried to explain the world by the Trinity in order to be able to speak about the Trinity in this world”.²¹

Therefore, Barth does suggest a sympathetic interpretation of these *uestigia*. If, in the end, he pleads all the same not only for the inadequacy, but for the positive danger inherent to such attempts, it is because of the shift from polemics to apologetics he detects in later theological tradition. This change is yet another expression of the anthropological turn of theological thought

¹⁵ Barth (1975), I.1, 341.

¹⁶ The title *Vestigium Trinitatis* for the section of the *Church Dogmatics* dealing with this issue [I.1, 333-347] is borrowed from the *De Trinitate* and the doctrine implied by this terminology is located especially in the books 9-11 of this treatise, i.e. those devoted to the issue of the so called ‘psychological’ triads. Cf. “Oportet igitur ut creatorem per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspicientes trinitatem intellegamus cuius in creatura quomodo dignum est apparet *uestigium*”, *Trin.* 6.12 (242).

¹⁷ Barth (1975), I.1, 338.

¹⁸ Barth (1975), I.1, 340.

¹⁹ Barth (1975), I.1, 340.

²⁰ Barth (1975), I.1, 340.

²¹ Barth (1975), I.1, 341.

in modernity: the *uestigium* ceases to be a way of using human realities to talk about God and becomes the use of aspects of theology to talk about man.

Then, even if he is prepared to acknowledge the good intention of the Fathers and to attribute the bad use of *uestigium* to a change of motives, he argues that this was somehow foreseeable and inevitable once theology had trespassed the boundaries of humble and faithful ‘interpretation’ of revelation and had ventured itself into its ‘illustration’. Such a move he deems reprehensible for two reasons: because it springs from lack of trust in the self-evidential force of revelation and because an illustration, being “closer to man than revelation, because it is in the end its own being and nature, it inevitably becomes a threat to his attention to revelation, a limitation of the seriousness with which he takes it”.²² In the end, probably the most cogent criticism of all Barth directs against *uestigium* is that which he utters almost incidentally in the following sentence: “This is the obvious reason for the impression of trifling and even frivolity one obviously gets when pondering this theologumenon, no matter how pleasing and credible it seems at first”.²³

This remark touches the heart of the issue of the *uestigia*. Our assumption in this dissertation is that, insofar as scattered and occasional analogies between the process of knowledge and inner Trinitarian life can indeed be detected in the *De Trinitate*, they can be ascribed not so much to a systematic design as to the rhetorical character of this work and to Augustine’s habitual way of doing theology. Augustine does not simply teach. He also tries to delight and move his reader.²⁴ There is a thin line, sometimes, between rhetoric and ‘frivolity’, especially when elements conceived to be part of a whole pedagogical project and for a certain type of audience are taken out of their context and given independent weight and life.

The consequences of this analogical approach of the *De Trinitate* Barth (rightly) dreaded so much are exactly those du Roy attributes to Augustine’s posterity, when, as we have seen, he states

²² Barth (1975), I.1, 345.

²³ Barth (1975), I.1, 344.

²⁴ Cf. *doc. Chr.* 4.xii.27 (CCL 32, 135) : “Dixit enim quidam eloquens, ut uerum dixit, ita dicere debere eloquentem, ut doceat, ut delectet, ut flectat. Deinde addidit: ‘Docere necessitatis est, delectare suauitatis, flectere uictoriae’” (quotation from Cicero, *Orator* 21.69).

that “Augustine handed over to the West a dogmatic pattern which tends to cut off the Trinity from the economy of salvation”²⁵ and attributes to him a “notion of a divine ‘Self’ as the image of human ‘self’”.²⁶ Hence on the one hand the antagonism, often taken for granted, of the shape Augustine would have imprinted to Latin Trinitarian theology over against the ‘Greek’ doctrine of the Trinity, and, on the other hand, the trite question of the ‘starting point’ of Eastern and Western Trinitarian theologies: a non-issue which has become a commonplace owing to the unwillingness of generations of theologians to engage with the real sophistication of patristic Trinitarian thought.

For Karl Rahner, such an anthropological reduction of the Trinitarian mystery is at the sources of “Western conception of the Trinity [...] [in which], in contrast to the Greeks, one begins with the one single nature of God as a totality and only considers him *after that* as constituted by three persons – though this involves a constant (and necessary) effort to avoid positing the *essentia* as a ‘fourth element’ previous to the three persons”. As a result, the treatment of the doctrine becomes very philosophical and abstract, with very little concrete reference to the history of salvation and shaped by necessary metaphysical attributes of God.²⁷ In this context, Augustine is even charged with a “magnanimity which would cause scandal nowadays” for having ascribed some knowledge of the Trinity to philosophers.²⁸

According to this polarization, Greek Fathers expound the Trinitarian dogma in conformity to its shape in Scripture and in the baptismal formula which mention Father, Son and Holy Spirit.²⁹ The principle of unity in the Trinity is the Father and the distinction between οὐσία and ὑπόστασις devised by the Cappadocian Fathers is a key conceptual breakthrough in the history of theology; in this context, ὑπόστασις would have acquired not only the meaning of ‘individual’ but that of ‘person’ in the modern sense of the word.³⁰ In this approach, inner Trinitarian life starts from the

²⁵ Du Roy (1966), 460.

²⁶ Du Roy (1966), 462.

²⁷ Rahner (1966), 84.

²⁸ Rahner (1966), 86.

²⁹ Rahner (1966), 55.

³⁰ Cf. Lossky (1952), 52 and Zizioulas (1985), 41. The views of these authors have been effectively criticised by Halleux (1986) and Cross (2002) and (2003).

person/ὑπόστασις of the Father and not from impersonal divinity or divine substance. Therefore, intra-Trinitarian relations are defined by the *origin* of Son and Holy Spirit from the Father and the distinction between generation and procession is enough to ground the difference between Son and Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, the introduction of the *Filioque* in Western Trinitarian theology, in the wake of Augustine's *De Trinitate*, would denote the opposite tendency: the 'starting point' is in one divine substance and posits "a system of relations within the unique essence, something which logically comes after the essence. [...] Instead of being characteristics of the hypostaseis, relations are identified with them".³¹ Relations are then mutual –and not of origin- and the only way of distinguishing the Son from the Holy Spirit is that of devising a further relation between them.³² Thus, the *Filioque* would be the result of a logical necessity: it would be the only way of establishing the distinction between the Son and the Holy Spirit in relation to the Father, according to the following pattern: (i) the Father alone relates and is not related; (ii) the Son both relates and is related; (iii) the Holy Spirit alone is related but does not actively relate. Without the *Filioque*, the Son would formally be in exactly the same situation as the Holy Spirit, that is to say related without actively relating.³³

As a result, in Western theology, the principle of unity of ἀρχή is either compromised by the assertion of two principles –Father and Son- or it has to be located not in the Father, but in the substance, thus generating a Trinitarian theology tending towards Modalism. The other consequence of this location of the ἀρχή in the substance and not in the Father is a more impersonal notion of God. Whereas Eastern Fathers see the one divine nature as the content of the persons, Western theologians see the three persons as 'modes' of a unique nature and tend to qualify them through impersonal imagery. The image of the faculties of one mind could then be

³¹ Rahner (1966), 56.

³² Cf. Brown (1985), 282.

³³ Brown (1985), 282.

considered the clearest example of this impersonal notion of the Trinity³⁴ as also could be the fact that the Holy Spirit tends to be conceived as a ‘link’ between the Father and the Son, i.e. more in functional than personal terms.³⁵

The main consequence of the flaws of Western/Augustinian form of Trinitarian theology just enumerated would be a formalized doctrine of the Trinity a step (or even more than one) removed from Scripture. Rahner states that “efforts are undoubtedly made, in an Augustinian ‘psychological’ theology of the Trinity, to fill out the contents of the formal concepts of *processio, communicatio diuinae essentiae, relatio, subsistentia relatiua*”. In an attempt to characterize this approach by opposing it to that generically labelled as ‘Greek’, he argues that, whereas the formal portion of the theology of the Trinity –that which deals with issues of unity and plurality, consubstantiality etc...- played only a marginal role in ‘Greek’ theology, the West “made it the (whole) doctrine of the Trinity”. This would explain why “Western theologians were forced –in contrast to the Greeks- to fill out this almost mathematical and formalistic theology by giving it more substance and content from the ‘psychological’ doctrine of the Trinity as developed by Augustine”.³⁶

Augustine’s notorious reluctance to endorse the use of the notion of *persona* in Trinitarian theology, for these critics, is the consequence of a shift from the interpersonal imagery of the New Testament to that of life of the mind. The distinction of divine persons in the economy would not correspond to their intra-Trinitarian identity any more and, according to K. Rahner, within the Augustinian Trinitarian framework, each of the divine persons could become man and therefore “the Incarnation of the second person in particular throws no light on the special character of *this* person within the divine nature”.³⁷

³⁴ Lossky (1952), 57 and 78, quoting De Regnon (1892-1898), I, 433.

³⁵ Lossky (1952), 61.

³⁶ Rahner (1966), 85.

³⁷ Rahner (1966), 80 and 91. This position has been argued more recently by Louth (2002), 15: “[...] we are well on the way to a kind of mythological notion of the Trinity, which will cause the problems Augustine is already somewhat at a loss to answer, such as whether any other ‘members’ of the Trinity could have become incarnate”.

This would be yet another cause of a modalist bent from which Western Trinitarian theology has never really recovered and which, in epistemological terms, generates an opposition between the prominence given to the philosophy of the essence in Augustine and the West in general *versus* the apophatic or ‘communional’ approach of the East.

3. AUGUSTINE AND MODERNITY

Suspicion of Augustine in many contemporary theological circles partly arises from their struggle to overcome the epistemological dead-end in which theology is claimed to have been forced by Modernity (even though such dead-end is rather the result of a failure of theology to tackle Modernity theologically). Augustine’s so called ‘psychological analogies’, though only remotely, would have opened the way to the anthropological turn of theology: talk about the Trinity becomes a pretext for the exploration of the self, for which Augustine would have nurtured an interest bordering on the fascination. Augustine thus anticipates Kant, in the sense that he turns to the subject to look for the source of knowledge and values, and is even more specifically the forerunner of Descartes’ ‘*cogito*’. Such connection is established on the basis of the striking parallelism between the latter and some of Augustine’s statements about the certitude of self-knowledge in the 10th book:

“Viuerē se tamen et meminisse et intellegere et uelle et cogitare et scire et iudicare quis dubitet? Quandoquidem etiam si dubitat, uiuit; si dubitat, unde dubitet meminit; si dubitat, dubitare se intellegit; si dubitat, certus esse uult; si dubitat, cogitat; si dubitat, scit se nescire; si dubitat, iudicat non se temere consentire oportere. Quisquis igitur alicunde dubitat de his omnibus dubitare non debet quae si non essent, de ulla re dubitare non posset”.³⁸

A real dubito, ergo sum!

A way of preventing proto-Cartesian readings of the *De Trinitate* is offered by Rowan Williams’ rendering of the overall aim of the treatise: the elaboration of a theological anthropology which would be the exact opposite of the infliction of an anthropological bent to theology.³⁹ “More than

³⁸ *Trin* 10.14 (327f).

³⁹ Williams (1990), (1993) and (1999).

simply a meditation on a particular doctrine”, the *De Trinitate* is “an integral theological anthropology, a structure in which diverse doctrinal themes are woven together in an account of how human acting, desiring and thinking come to participate in the action of God”⁴⁰ or, as he says elsewhere, “the analysis of how the structures of being human speak to us of the life of God even in their very difference from the divine life”.⁴¹

This reading of the *De Trinitate* starts from the way Williams establishes the structure of the treatise

In the section of books 1 to 4, devoted to reviewing in an anti-subordinationist way the exegesis of biblical texts traditionally used for the doctrine of the Trinity, the absolute equality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is applied to the doctrine of the missions. The fact that the Son is sent and the Holy Spirit given –as distinct from the Father for whom Scripture never makes use of vocabulary of mission- does not imply any ontological inferiority. As we shall see below, the role of the Son in the economy as ‘sent’ and of the Holy Spirit as ‘given’ are the reflection of the ‘irreversible’ aspect of their relation to the Father in the immanent Trinity: just as the Son is from the Father, and the Father is not from the Son, so, in the economy, only the Son is sent and not the Father. Williams comments on this point by saying that “to speak of the Son’s or the Spirit’s ‘mission’ is simply to designate the process whereby *we* come to recognize that Son and Spirit are from the Father”.⁴² In fact, on the one hand missions are that through which we receive the revelation and the gift of divine life; on the other hand, this revelation and this gift are the result of what Son and Holy Spirit are in the inner life of the Trinity. This is why the act through which we are saved coincides with recognition of the life of the immanent Trinity and in particular of the relation of Son and Holy Spirit to the Father.

In the second half of the treatise, which starts with the 8th book, Augustine relies on the “concrete relation to God that we actually live by to inform a gradual process of growing

⁴⁰ Williams (1999), 846.

⁴¹ Williams (1993), 122.

illumination as to what God is”.⁴³ This insight comes very close to the main argument of this dissertation, although Williams’ approach is slightly different from ours. His similarity with us lies in the fact that knowledge of the Trinity is not envisaged from the viewpoint of the possibility of a relation with God but of its actuality. Thanks to the missions, we are established in a ‘concrete relation to God’ which is the starting point of any talk about what we are and what God the Trinity is and becomes for us.

Williams singles out two main principles in the 8th book, which will shape Augustine’s argument all through the second half of the treatise: (i) “to love is to desire, and desire is always of what I do not possess” and (ii) “I can be said to ‘know’ what I desire to the extent that I know myself as moving in a certain direction, drawn by certain goals”.⁴⁴

The self Augustine has in mind is not a “timeless spiritual identity”, but “a self in movement” who knows “its own temporal incompleteness and its motivation by desire”.⁴⁵ The triads are not meant to describe “a model of mind that has three clearly delimitable capacities”, but “a mental activity that can be an object to itself”.⁴⁶ From this viewpoint, we discover that the self is characterised by a series of paradoxes. First, mind discovers two fundamental limitations: (i) “it cannot contemplate eternal truth as an object in itself” and (ii) “self-reflection, likewise, cannot be the perception of the mind itself as object”.⁴⁷ What mind becomes aware of, as we have said above, is its activity, i.e. its desire and its incompleteness.

Desire enables Augustine to link our mental activity to the theme of the image of God. The issue is formulated as follows: “how does the structure of our finite loving [i.e. desiring] minds correspond to that of the infinite loving agency of God?”.⁴⁸ In his unfolding of the activity of mind, Augustine shows that “behind all knowing lies intention and appetite, hopeful wanting

⁴² Williams (1999), 846. *Italic in the text.*

⁴³ Williams (1999), 848.

⁴⁴ Williams (1999), 848.

⁴⁵ Williams (1999), 849.

⁴⁶ Williams (1990), 319.

⁴⁷ Williams (1993), 122.

⁴⁸ Williams (1993), 126.

directed towards what is strange and other”.⁴⁹ The epistemological issue is a matter either of *caritas* or of *cupiditas*. The way we love determines the way we know, including the case of self-knowledge. We are not intelligible to ourselves unless we have the right kind of love. If we are captives of *cupiditas*, we cannot even think ourselves [*se cogitare*] because of the diversion from our inner life [*se nosse*] towards lower objects of love external to ourselves. Only *dilectio*, i.e. the right kind of love, love which comes from God and is directed towards God and the neighbour, enables us to think ourselves properly [*se cogitare*] and discover the real nature of our self [*se nosse*]. Williams notes that Augustine “so defines self-knowing and self-loving as to make each unintelligible without the other and his means of doing this is the reiterated pointing to the radical incompleteness and other-directedness of created self-hood”. As a result, “mind as independent individuality cannot image God”,⁵⁰ but it must apprehend itself “as acted upon by God”, i.e. as known and loved by God or, with a specific link to the issue of missions, as the object of “the self-imparting activity of God the creator [and] giver or the *iustitia* and *sapientia* by which we come to share in divine life” resulting from the actualisation of “the divine act in our own temporal and finite context”.⁵¹

This is the paradox of our self: “nothing can be said of the mind’s relation to itself without the mediation of the revelation of God as its creator and lover”.⁵² For this reason, “the movement into our createdness”, consisting in the exploration of what it means for us to be in the image of God, coincides with “a movement into God’s own life as turned ‘outwards’”.⁵³ When Augustine states that the reality of our being in the image of God only becomes clear when we remember, know and love God, he does not simply mean that our image consists in having God as the formal object of our mental activity. On the contrary, “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”

⁴⁹ Williams (1993), 126f.

⁵⁰ Williams (1990), 320.

⁵¹ Williams (1990), 320.

⁵² Williams (1990), 323.

⁵³ Williams (1990), 321.

which corresponds to “recognition of our created distance from God”, of our “very difference from God”.⁵⁴

This approach to the *De Trinitate* leads Williams to two main conclusions.

The first one is that “the image of God in us, properly so called, is not ‘the mind’ in and to itself [...], but the mind of the saint – the awareness of someone reflectively living out the life of justice and charity”.⁵⁵ Thus, “the realizing of the image is inseparable from the whole process of sanctification” and the treatise as a whole can be interpreted as “a teasing out of what is to be converted and to come to live in Christ”.⁵⁶

The second is that far from being responsible for a move towards “individualism in anthropology and abstract theism in theology”, the “introspective method of the *De Trinitate* is designed to ‘demythologize’ 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”.⁵⁷

4. THE *EXERCITATIO* OF THE INCARNATION

In the wake of Rowan Williams’ ground-breaking approach to the *De Trinitate*, some scholars have devoted considerable effort to react against mainstream dismissal of Augustine’s Trinitarian theology and challenged the received views on this subject in contemporary systematic theology.⁵⁸ Lewis Ayres has been one of the most prolific of these scholars and has produced a series of detailed and often imaginative articles.⁵⁹ To complete this review of commentators, we shall focus on Ayres’ version of the place of Christ in Augustine’s Trinitarian theology.

⁵⁴ Williams (1990), 326.

⁵⁵ Williams (1993), 131.

⁵⁶ Williams (1999), 850.

⁵⁷ Williams (1990), 331.

⁵⁸ Especially Barnes (see bibliography) and Hanby (2003).

⁵⁹ Ayres (1992), (1995), (1998), “Remember” (2000), “The fundamental grammar” (2000).

As we have seen, interpreters of the second half of the *De Trinitate* often assume that Augustine simply reproduces the Plotinian anagogical method of ascent to God through an *exercitatio mentis*. The following characteristics are ascribed to this *exercitatio*: “a training in modes of thinking increasingly interior, and increasingly free from images, a gradual intellectual movement from the material to the immaterial”, ‘fundamentally Neoplatonic in character’.⁶⁰ Ayres first challenges the very expression *exercitatio mentis*, which, he argues, is rare in Augustine’s corpus and only recurs twice in the *De Trinitate*, “on both occasions to explain that a more ‘exercised’ mind may see better how and how far material analogies fall short of the Trinity itself’.⁶¹

However, this does not mean that Augustine’s purpose in the *De Trinitate* does not have anything to do with some kind of *exercitatio*. The point Ayres wants to make is that this word has Plotinian or even Porphyrian overtones and its uncritical use implies the assumption of a similarity of aims or methods between Augustine and these philosophers. On the contrary, a closer reading of the *De Trinitate*, especially with an eye also on the *De Ciuitate Dei*, shows that Augustine is reacting against precisely these philosophers and especially against Porphyry’s theurgy -a sort of *exercitatio* which pretended to be able to lead the soul to God. In the *De Ciuitate Dei* Augustine offers the alternative Christian way of purification centred on the role of grace and of the one Mediator Jesus Christ. “One spiritual exercise [...] is opposed to another”.⁶²

In Ayres’ version of Augustine’s argument, we need an *exercitatio*, a re-education because of “our incapacity to perceive the truth about eternal things”, because “we cannot any longer perceive God through those things which were made ‘in the Word’”.⁶³ This incapacity is behind the distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia* and calls for God’s action through Christ. Ayres suggests that the 4th and even more so the 13th book of the *De Trinitate* are the key to the understanding of the *exercitatio* carried out in the treatise. Augustine unfolds a ‘theological’ *exercitatio* through Christology: “fallen

⁶⁰ Ayres (1998), 114, referring to Cavadini (1992).

⁶¹ Ayres (1998), 114, quoting *Trin* 9.17 (308) and 13.26 (418ff).

⁶² Ayres (1998), 117.

⁶³ Ayres (1998), 125.

humanity needs to undergo a certain *exercitatio* [...] and such *exercitatio* is provided by the Incarnation”.⁶⁴

The *exercitatio* mainly consists in the transferral of our affections “from the things of this world to God”;⁶⁵ it is “both moral and intellectual and is presented as that which will enable us to progress from our obsession with the material to greater contemplation of the presence of the creator”.⁶⁶ It is made possible by the union of *scientia* with *sapientia* or, better, it results from “the sort of *scientia* that is necessary to faith and which draws us on to *sapientia*”.⁶⁷ Ayres draws our attention to the parallel Augustine establishes between *scientia/sapientia* and the two natures of Christ in the 13th book: this parallel, he argues, “is not best understood as an extrinsic analogy, as a purely formal analogical structure, but needs to be understood as a parallel possible *because* of the nature of the Incarnation, and operating here within our participation in Christ (and the specific theme of the *corpus Christi*)”.⁶⁸

Through this *exercitatio* we start by becoming aware that we are not, so to speak, in a position of neutrality with regard to the truth. On the one hand, we are in the position of incapacity just mentioned. On the other hand, the process through which we overcome this incapacity does not start with us. We are caught up in it and its recognition is retrospective: it only happens once we have become the object of God’s action in Christ already. Ayres expresses this point through the following circumlocutions: the “location of the *exercitatio* within the life” of the body of Christ⁶⁹ and the “dramatic account of the *dispensatio* of the Incarnation”.⁷⁰

With reference to the “dramatic account of the *dispensatio* of the Incarnation”,⁷¹ to be in Christ means for us to discover that we are situated at a precise stage of the unfolding of the economy of salvation: “This stage of the redemptive drama is marked by Christ’s absence in the flesh and yet

⁶⁴ Ayres (1998), 125.

⁶⁵ Ayres (1998), 128.

⁶⁶ Ayres (1998), 131.

⁶⁷ Ayres (1998), 118.

⁶⁸ Ayres (1998), 121.

⁶⁹ Ayres (1998), 126.

⁷⁰ Ayres (1998), 131.

presence as Word, a structure of presence and absence designed so that we may be drawn towards the Father and overcome our obsession with the material”.⁷² This refers to Augustine’s presentation of Christ as *sacramentum* of our inner resurrection and *exemplum* of the our bodily resurrection at the end of times in the 4th book. “Only by grasping that Christ’s resurrection and ascension have already occurred and that we now live in a time of growth towards our better following Christ [...] one has a sense of the purpose and structure or story of the *dispensatio* as a whole and of our place at a particular stage in that story”.⁷³

But our character of knowing subjects and the *exercitatio* we undergo in the *dispensatio* just mentioned also include our location in the body of Christ: “Augustine views the Incarnation as integrally involving an account of the community of those who are being purified so that they may join the ‘first fruits’ of the resurrection of the dead”.⁷⁴ Thus, to the ‘dramatic’ character of the *dispensatio* corresponds the ‘dynamic’ character of our union with Christ: “The union now is *for the purpose of* a future fulfilment, the head drawing the body. The body as it now is, is in the process of being transformed to become the body as it is intended to be”.⁷⁵

What are then the consequences of this understanding of the *exercitatio* carried out by the *De Trinitate* on knowledge of God?

Virtually no commentator of the *De Trinitate* ignores the critical role played in Augustine’s argument by the inseparability between knowledge and love and the impossibility of dissociating the process of understanding from ethical progress. The same thing, however, cannot be said for Ayres’ insightful remarks concerning the ‘Christological location’ of the pedagogy unfolded in the treatise. The core of his argument is that the 4th and the 13th books (those which deal with Christology) are the keys to the understanding of the structure and the purpose of the whole treatise. The 13th book in particular finally unveils the theological context which was presupposed

⁷¹ Ayres (1998), 131.

⁷² Ayres (1998), 133.

⁷³ Ayres (1998), 123.

⁷⁴ Ayres (1998), 124.

⁷⁵ Ayres (1998), 126, italics in the original text.

by the second half of the *De Trinitate*, since it “draws the attention to the central importance of Augustine’s Christology and theological anthropology for understanding the investigations of books 8 to 12” and prepares “the culmination of the work in books 14 and 15”.⁷⁶

Knowledge of God the Trinity does not simply depend on Christ’s message, but on his person and more particularly on the transformation of our relation with God and of the meaning of history resulting from his Incarnation. This is the key insight we draw from Ayres’ understanding of the *exercitatio* Augustine unfolds in his treatise. As for the setting forth of the consequences of this insight with regard to the structure and purpose of the *De Trinitate* and to its theological meaning, we must acknowledge that Ayres’ dense prose does not always help to understand what he means and how he reaches his conclusions. One way to obviate this drawback would have been a more rigorous textual analysis and greater patience in the unravelling of the many strands of thought Augustine constantly weaves together. This is what we shall try to do in the section of this dissertation devoted to Christology where, following Ayres’ insights, we shall look for the basis of Augustine’s theological epistemology in the 4th and the 13th books of the *De Trinitate*.

5. CONCLUSION

The observations of Rowan Williams and Lewis Ayres concerning the Christological foundation and character of Augustine’s soteriology and of his approach to knowledge of God shall become the starting point of our journey into the *De Trinitate*. These two authors make clear that theological epistemology is a function of soteriology. As a result, we are faced with the paradox of self-knowledge –to use Williams’ way of rendering this point–: at the very heart of our identity we discover our dependence on God and the impossibility of becoming ourselves [*se nosse*] without the mediation of the revelation and the salvific love of God.

At the same time, we should avoid the anachronistic temptation of framing Augustine’s argument in apologetic or existential terms, as if we came to acknowledge our need for God by

⁷⁶ Ayres (1998), 136.

becoming aware of our incompleteness and of our inability to know ourselves. In Augustine's view, such acknowledgment is only retrospective. Only from the viewpoint gained by reconciliation and salvation we are able to discover the radical dependence of our being on God. The whole of Augustine's pedagogy for the exploration of the self does not aim at establishing a 'human possibility' addressed by God's salvation. On the contrary, the starting point of his whole pedagogy is the *actuality* of God's salvation. This is why the perception of the continuity between the 8th book of the *De Trinitate* and those which follow is crucial, as we will argue at length. Only when and because we discover that we are caught in the act of loving God and our neighbour, we can become aware of the paradox of self-knowledge.

Finally, this review of secondary literature as a whole warns us that the uttermost care is necessary in articulating the relation between soteriology and the inner life of the Trinity. Theological epistemology is 'Trinitarian' because knowledge of the Father is possible only through Christ and the Spirit of the Father and the Son. In other words, God can be known only through God or, better, God can be known only through the love for God, and this 'loving knowledge' coincides with salvation. This does not entail, however, the indiscriminate possibility of inferring the life of the immanent Trinity from the structure of salvation. Augustine's own way of expressing this truth is that we do not reach *sapientia* in the sense that God the Trinity becomes the formal object of our knowledge. Rather, we reach *sapientia* in the sense that, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, we are reconciled with the Father and we can worship him, we become a sacrifice acceptable to him, we are united to him in *dilectio*.

Having narrowed down the scope of our investigation with the help of this review of secondary literature, we can embark upon the exploration of the treatise.

II. STRUCTURE AND ARGUMENT OF BOOKS 1-7

The complexity of Augustine's thought makes any attempt to render it analytically a considerable challenge. The main difficulty consists in disentangling the many lines of inquiry he pursues simultaneously, without losing sight of the greater picture into which they are tightly intertwined. For this reason, the most suitable method of investigation is a combination between a sequential account of the way the overall argument unfolds from one book to the next, together with an analytical account of each line of inquiry.

The present chapter is devoted to the sequential analysis of the books 1 to 7 of the *De Trinitate*. Most commentators treat the section going from books 1 to 4 separately from the section of books 5 to 7 and consider them as discrete, independent unities.¹ On the contrary, the treatment of the section of books 1 to 7 as a single unity is crucially important for the correct interpretation of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity. Two main layers can be detected in the argument of this section of the *De Trinitate*. The first and the most evident, somehow the 'outer' layer, is the exposition of the mystery of the Trinity; below it, however, an 'inner' layer makes its appearance and becomes increasingly dominant, namely the question of the knowledge of God.

1. SCRIPTURE AND THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY (BOOKS 1 TO 3)

The outer layer of the exposition on the mystery of the Trinity starts with a rule of faith, inspired by credal formulas. Augustine does not quote any creed directly. He only lays out the key terms of Trinitarian faith: Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God because of their inseparability, their equality and their consubstantiality. At the same time, the Father is different from the Son and

¹ Hendrikx (1955), 20f; Hill (1991), 23 and 186; Trapé (2002), xvi, xxii-xxviii; Matthews (2002), xxxiii.

from the Holy Spirit and so are the Son from the Father and the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. The scriptural foundation of both claims is that the New Testament ascribes specific acts to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit even though, as they are inseparable, they act inseparably.²

The mystery of the Trinity, therefore, is approached first of all in terms of divine action: the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in one God requires them to act inseparably. At the same time, Scripture attributes specific and differentiated acts to each: how, therefore, do Father, Son and Holy Spirit act inseparably even when Scripture only refers to one divine person?³

Before he can investigate this question, however, Augustine needs to deal with the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit. He presupposes, of course, that the Son and the Holy Spirit are God just as the Father is God. If they are God like him, they share in his invisibility⁴ and immutability.⁵ They are equal to the Father and inseparable from him because of their unity in one substance. Thus, the divinity of the three persons is envisaged in terms of invisibility and immutability; their unity is seen under the viewpoint of equality, inseparability and consubstantiality.

Augustine's fundamental standpoint is that there cannot be any intermediate being between God and his creatures: "Omnis enim substantia quae deus non est creatura est, et quae creatura non est deus est".⁶ Hence, the Son and Holy Spirit are either creatures or they are God. A whole set of scriptural passages which suggest the inferiority of the Son or of the Holy Spirit with respects to the Father had become the classical basis for the discussion of this issue during the Trinitarian controversy. Augustine, therefore, starts his treatise by reviewing these passages. Those from the New Testament are dealt with in book 1 and in the first half of the book 2; those from the Old Testament in the second half of the book 2 and in book 3.

² 1.7 (35).

³ 1.8 (36f).

⁴ cf. 1.11 (40).

⁵ 2.14 (98f), quoting Wisdom 7.27 for immutability and 1 Timothy 1.17f and 6.15f for invisibility. See also 2.9 (92); 2.25 (114); 3.21 (150).

⁶ 1.9 (38).

For the interpretation of passages from the New Testament, he starts by applying an hermeneutical rule inspired from the Christological hymn of Philippians 2, which had become traditional against the ‘Arians’:⁷ in his *forma dei*, Christ was equal to the Father; in his *forma serui*, he was inferior to the Father.⁸ When, therefore, Scripture seems to affirm the inferiority of Christ, this means that it refers to the humanity of Christ [*forma serui*], whereas when the equality between the Son and the Father are clearly stated, this means that Scripture is talking about his divinity [*forma dei*].

This rule, however, plays a role in the first book only. In fact, Augustine becomes increasingly aware that the relation between the humanity and the divinity in Christ is more than a simple question of the attribution of his actions to each of his two natures. A far more sophisticated notion of the union of the Son of God with human nature is required to account for the daring assertions of *deus crucifixus*⁹ and of the *humilitas dei*.¹⁰

The way leading to this greater Christological sophistication goes through the elaboration of another hermeneutical rule, formulated at the beginning of the book 2, which we can label the rule ‘*deus de deo*’. Augustine has noticed that there are passages of Scripture which, although referring to the divinity of the Son, nevertheless seem to imply some sort of subordination with respect to the Father – not to talk about the Holy Spirit who seems dependent on both Father and Son. The rule

⁷ While Hill (1991), 49, vaguely assumes that these ‘Arians’ are “Arian metaphysicians of the fourth century, the chief of them being Eunomius”, Barnes (1993), 189 identifies them with Latin Homoians Augustine would have known during the 380s in Milan: “Augustine’s time in Milan corresponded with the peak of Homoian strength”; “in 385 Justina and the pro-Homoian court in Milan made the faith of Rimini and Constantinople 360 legal in their city”. Thus, Barnes does not agree with the hypothesis of Augustine’s “intellectual distance from the Arian controversy” (193) and finds that the arguments refuted in books 5-7 can be those of Palladius and Maximinus (190). He also notices that the doctrines ascribed to Arius in book VI “are all doctrines to be found in the three Western anti-Arian texts [...] Augustine knew: Hilary’s *De Trinitate*, Victorinus’ *Adversus Arianum* and Ambrose’s *De Fide*” (185). We are inclined to agree with Barnes as to the really polemical (and not just literary or instrumental) nature of the controversy against ‘Arians’ in the *De Trinitate* and think that Augustine would not have lingered as long as he did in the discussion of their logical and ontological categories had this not been necessary to determine the best way of confuting them. On the other hand, we prefer to quote Arians in inverted commas because for Augustine, as for his predecessors, this term had become the label for virtually any position at variance with what in the end became the mainstream orthodox confession of the mystery of the Trinity.

⁸ 1.14 (44ff), summed up again in 2.2 (81).

⁹ 1.28 (69).

¹⁰ 4.4 (164).

for the interpretation of these passages, inspired by the Creed of Nicaea, is that, although equal to the Father, the Son is *deus de deo* and *lumen de lumine*.¹¹ In the same way, the Holy Spirit is *deus* but *a patre procedit*.¹² What appears to be subordination, therefore, only means ‘direction’, so to speak, in the relation between the divine persons: only the Father is *deus* without qualification. The Son is *de deo*. The Holy Spirit is *a deo* or *ex deo*. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, however, are equally *deus*.

The Scriptural foundation of this rule is not immediately discernable. In fact, it results not only from some passages in particular, but from the whole scriptural material concerning the issue of *missiones*, which can be summed up as follows: in the New Testament the sending [*missio*, from *mittere*, ‘send’] of the Son takes place in the Incarnation, whereas the sending of the Holy Spirit is said to have happened at Pentecost.¹³ As for the Father, he is never said to have been sent. This scriptural material raises some questions:

- (i) why is the sending of the Son and of the Holy Spirit said to have occurred only at the Incarnation and at Pentecost, when Scripture refers to their manifestation in the economy of salvation even before these events (cf., for example, for the Holy Spirit, his role in the Incarnation of Jesus, his manifestation at Jesus’ baptism etc...)?¹⁴
- (ii) why is the Father never said to have been sent, when he also manifested himself personally in the history of salvation (cf., for example, the baptism of Jesus and the transfiguration)?¹⁵

¹¹ 2.2 (82).

¹² 2.5 (86).

¹³ 2.11 (95).

¹⁴ 3.3 (129f).

¹⁵ 1.7f (35-37); 2.18 (103ff).

- (iii) is the relation of sender to sent –of *mittens* to *missi*- which exists between the Father on one side and the Son and the Holy Spirit on the other side, the sign of the superiority of the Father and the inferiority of Son and Holy Spirit and hence of the fact that the latter are not God in exactly the same sense as the Father is God?¹⁶

Before he answers these questions, however, Augustine needs to deal with the issue of the revelation of the Trinity in the Old Testament. This question is occasioned by the anti-‘Arian’ polemical context of these books. Scripture reveals the immutability of God (Wisdom 7.27) and his invisibility (1 Timothy 1.17f and 6.15f).¹⁷ Some unspecified ‘Arians’, however, referred these attributes only to the Father on the pretext that whenever God manifested himself in the theophanies of the Old Testament it was through the Son. According to them, the Son is ‘uisibilis per se ipsum’ because even before the Incarnation he could appear to mortal eyes¹⁸ and, as a result, is not God in exactly the same sense as the Father is God. Against this view, Augustine embarks upon a detailed analysis of the accounts of theophanies in the Old Testament, with the aim of answering these two questions:

- (i) who did appear in the theophanies of the Old Testament: the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit?
- (ii) how did theophanies of the Old Testament happen?¹⁹

His answer to the first question is that if we adhere closely to what Scripture says, it is often impossible to attribute God’s theophanies to any of the three persons in particular.²⁰ Sometimes, hints are given which, on the basis of the *proprietary* of each divine person revealed in the New Testament, allow the reader to conjecture that not only the Son, but also the Father or the Holy

¹⁶ 3.3 (128f).

¹⁷ 2.14 (99).

¹⁸ 2.16 (101).

¹⁹ 2.13 (97f) and 3.3-5 (128-131).

²⁰ 2.18 (103ff).

Spirit did appear. For example, the story of God strolling in the garden of Eden and talking to Adam and Eve could be taken as a manifestation of the Father, since the voice from heaven in the New Testament (cf. Jesus' baptism and transfiguration) is attributed to the Father.²¹ Or, just to give another example, when it is said that the tablets of the Law on mount Sinai were written by the finger of God, why should this not be attributed to the Holy Spirit who is called the finger of God in the New Testament (reference to Luke 11.20 and Matthew 12.28)?²²

Augustine's view that attribution of divine action to one person more than to another in the Old Testament can only be object of conjecture, has led some commentators to argue that in his understanding of the inseparability of divine action, the role played by one divine person in the economy of salvation could equally have been played by another. This would be the mark of the modalistic tendency of his Trinitarian thought.²³ The superficiality of such allegations is bewildering.

In reality, Augustine is simply saying that revelation of the Trinity only occurred with the Incarnation and Pentecost. Whatever hints we might discover in the Old Testament, these can only be interpreted in the light of the New Testament and are often insufficient to attribute these manifestations to one of the divine persons in particular. Moreover, there is a fundamental difference between God's self-manifestation in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, highlighted through the second line of inquiry into this issue, namely that which tries to determine how the theophanies in the Old Testament happened. Theophanies happened "per subiectam creaturam".²⁴ Augustine wonders whether it was through creatures created solely for that particular manifestation, or through angels who made use of existing creaturely realities or finally through

²¹ 2.18 (103).

²² 2.26 (114f).

²³ Cf. Rahner (1966), 80ff and Gunton (1991), 42. The latter also attributes Augustine's treatment of the Old Testament theophanies to "anti-Incarnational Platonism" [34] and to "a spiritualising tendency" which "by losing the mediatorship of the Word at once distances God from the creation and flattens out the distinctions between the persons of the Trinity".

²⁴ Cf. 2.35 (126) and *passim*.

angels using their own ‘bodies’ which they can transform at will.²⁵ This point is discussed throughout the third book and in the end Augustine thinks that we should not pry too closely into the way angels use creaturely reality for the purpose of serving God’s self-manifestation in these theophanies.²⁶ The only important conclusion to be retained is that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equally invisible²⁷ and that the crucial difference between God’s self-revelation in the two testaments is that “tunc autem per angelos, nunc per filium sermo factus est”²⁸ and that the whole Old Testament is a prophecy of God’s full self-manifestation in Christ through the Holy Spirit.²⁹

2. THE INNER LAYER OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE *DE TRINITATE*

i. Knowledge of God

The exposition of the mystery of the Trinity is, we have said, the ‘outer layer’ of Augustine’s argument in this initial section of the *De Trinitate*. We have outlined the way this outer layer is unfolded through the first three books and to fully appreciate the complexity of its outcome in the fourth book, we need to highlight a less explicit, but deeper and more fundamental layer of the argument of the treatise. This ‘inner layer’ is less explicit because it is introduced almost casually in the course of the exegesis of the passages from the New Testament in book 1, with the sole apparent aim of upholding the divinity of the Son. In reality, book 4 will show that this topic launched so offhandedly is crucial for the exposition of the mystery of the Trinity. This inner layer deals with the way we know God. We will attempt an analytical examination of this inner layer shortly. For the present sequential account, a simple outline of Augustine’s line of reasoning will be enough.

²⁵ 3.4 (130).

²⁶ 3.21 (149f).

²⁷ 3.21f (150).

²⁸ 3.22 (151).

²⁹ 3.26 (156f).

The sentence of 1 Corinthians 15.28 “*Cum autem ei omnia subiecta fuerint, tunc et ipse filius subiectus erit ei qui illi subiecit omnia*” is among the apparently subordinationist passages of the New Testament which have been used to deny the Son’s full divinity. Just as he does with the other passages, Augustine suggests an alternative interpretation which, in this particular case, seems slightly far-fetched at first: Christ’s handing over of the kingdom to the Father means that Christ will lead the just who now live through faith to the contemplation –or *uisio*– of God face to face.³⁰ This explanation is not occasional, but is developed and restated through the whole final section of the first book, over several pages.³¹ The relation between faith and *uisio* introduced here does in fact allow Augustine to define the terms of the issue of knowledge of God. How do we know God the Trinity? Right from the first formulation of this question, Augustine already points to the answer which he will fully unfold later on, that is Christ.

Thus, even as he embarks upon an apparently detached exposition of the Trinitarian mystery resorting to the categories of equality, inseparability, consubstantiality, invisibility and immutability, Augustine already prepares his reader for the necessary change of perspective needed when the object of this ‘exposition’, the object of knowledge, is God himself. He does so in several ways. Added to the relation between faith and *uisio* just mentioned, there is the role played by invisibility in the argument of the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit. By arguing that invisibility is an essential attribute of God, Augustine is already asking a fundamental question of theological epistemology: how can the essentially invisible i.e. unknowable God make himself known to us? How does God preserve his invisibility and immutability, that is his freedom, as he makes himself visible and enters into mutable history?

Then, the same epistemological issue underlies the discussion on theophanies: even when Augustine seems only intent on upholding the divinity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, his real concern is the way in which God revealed himself in the Old Testament. What is the difference

³⁰ 1.16 (49).

³¹ 1.15-18 (46-55), 20-21 (56-59), 28-31 (69-79).

between his Old Testament theophanies and the Incarnation? How does God make himself known?

On the epistemological side of the issue of theophanies, it is also worth noticing something else: Augustine does not think that in the Old Testament God makes himself known through creation because creation has an intrinsic capacity to signify him.³² His point is rather that, being the Lord of creation, God has the power to use creation to reveal his will to creatures, as we will see more in detail later on. It should never be forgotten that Augustine is talking about '*theo*-phanies', i.e. God's self-manifestation, and that these theophanies are miracles.³³

ii. The inseparability of soteriology and revelation (book 4)

Only in the fourth book, do the apparently detached and neutral exposition of the Trinitarian mystery (what we have called the 'outer layer' of the argument) and the issue of knowledge of God (the 'inner layer') meet together and is their inseparability fully disclosed. Even setting aside for one moment the prologue of the fourth book added at the time of the final editing,³⁴ the change of tone, pace, intensity in the argument is striking. Detachment and neutrality disappear in the sudden and dramatic confrontation with a question which could be rendered as follows: 'Anyway, why did God want to make himself known in the first place?'

In the fourth book Augustine makes clear that the dependence of the doctrine of the Trinity on God's self-manifestation is the consequence of a fundamental soteriological point, namely the identity between God's self-revelation and the reconciliation accomplished through Christ in the Holy Spirit. As a result, the exposition of the Trinitarian mystery needs to take into account

³² Hanby (2003), 32. He refers to Lewis Ayres' argument that "because we cannot any longer perceive God through those things which were made in the Word, the heavens and the earth, the Incarnate Christ provides 'smaller' signs and testimonies which will enable us to move to the bigger signs and testimonies (the structure of the Incarnation)", Ayres (1998), 125, quoted in Hanby (2003), 205, n. 171.

³³ Cf. 3.19 (146): "Sed his ut dicere coeperam exceptis, alia sunt illa quae quamvis ex eadem materia corporali ad aliquid tamen diuinitus annuntiandum nostris sensibus admouentur, quae proprie *miracula* et signa dicuntur, nec in omnibus quae nobis a domino deo annuntiantur ipsius dei persona suscipitur".

³⁴ The limits of this prologue are difficult to detect precisely, but should on the whole correspond to 4.1 (159f). Cf. this dissertation, 44f.

Incarnation and soteriology, needs to talk about sin, Christ's sacrifice, faith and *dilectio*. In its simplest terms, the argument goes as follows: if God made himself known to us, it was because we were unable to know him by ourselves. Our inability to know God is the consequence of our separation from him and from the *beatitudo* and truth which can only be found in him.³⁵ This sinful situation is variously described as *superbia*, *desperatio*,³⁶ *cupiditas*³⁷ and blindness.³⁸ Through his self-manifestation God wanted to persuade us of *quales* he loved us, i.e. of our sinful condition and our need for his love, and of *quantum* he loves us, so as to heal simultaneously our pride and our desperation.³⁹ At heart, this is what Augustine has in mind even when he seems to be pursuing only an apparently 'uncommitted' exposition of the Trinitarian mystery. The exposition of Trinitarian doctrine can only be an echo of God's own 'self-exposition' and cannot even for a moment, even provisionally make abstraction from the consequences of our sinfulness on knowledge of God. In other terms, without Christ's soteriological and epistemological mediation –in the Holy Spirit- no knowledge of God, no union with God, no 'exposition' of the Trinitarian mystery is conceivable. Hence the polemic of a good portion of the fourth book against any form of soteriological or epistemological mediation other than Christ's⁴⁰ and even more vehemently against the pretension of those who thought they did not need any mediation at all.⁴¹

In this context, Augustine brings the discussion on *missiones* to its resolution. Their nature can only be grasped in the light of their purpose. The sinfulness which prevented us from knowing God is summed up by Augustine in the *cupiditas* which weighs us down or turns us outside ourselves in an immoderate love for sensible and mutable realities, which he calls *temporalia*.

³⁵ 4.2 (161).

³⁶ 4.2 (161).

³⁷ 4.4 (163) and 4.12 (177).

³⁸ 4.4 (163).

³⁹ 4.2 (161).

⁴⁰ The theme of Christ mediator between faith and *visio* outlined in book 1 comes again to the surface in 4.11 (175f).

⁴¹ Argument against purification through *τελετάς* in 4.13-19 (178-187) and against the auto-purification of philosophers in 4.20-24 (187-193).

Therefore, God decided to purify us through these same *temporalia* which had become the occasion of our sin, in the Incarnation of Christ.⁴²

Hence the issue of *missiones*. First of all, the only real *missio* is the Incarnation. Only in the Incarnation does God make himself known to us and thus bridge from his side the abyss between his immutability and our mutability.⁴³

The *missio* of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is entirely linked to that of the Son at the Incarnation. In fact, since the humanity of Christ is not revelatory as such, God makes himself known through *dilectio* i.e. through the action of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴

Finally, Augustine also begins to answer the other questions raised by the issue of *missiones*. In the first question he was asking why is the sending [*missio*] of the Son and of the Holy Spirit said to have occurred only at the Incarnation and at Pentecost, when Scripture refers to their manifestation in the economy of salvation even before these events (cf., for example, for the Holy Spirit, his role in the Incarnation of Jesus, his manifestation at Jesus' baptism etc...)?⁴⁵ The answer is that only with the Incarnation, with Christ's sacrifice on the cross, his resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit, do we have a revelation of inner-Trinitarian life. Only then, does the way God acts correspond to what he is in the deepest possible way. This is what Augustine means when he says that 'to be sent' means 'to be known', 'to be perceived'⁴⁶ and that "Sicut enim natum esse est filio a patre esse, ita mitti est filio cognosci quod ab illo sit. Et sicut spiritui sancto donum dei esse est a patre procedere, ita mitti est cognosci quod ab illo procedat".⁴⁷

This also answers the third question, concerning the relation of sender to sent –of *mittens* to *missi*– which exists between the Father on one side and the Son and the Holy Spirit on the other side: is this relation the sign of the superiority of the Father and of the inferiority of Son and Holy Spirit and hence of the fact that the latter are not God in exactly the same sense as the Father is

⁴² 4.24 (191ff).

⁴³ 4.25 (193f).

⁴⁴ 4.29 (199ff).

⁴⁵ 3.3 (129).

⁴⁶ 4.28 (198).

God?⁴⁸ The answer simply is that *missio* is the consequence of the rule *deus de deo* we summed up above: the Son and the Holy Spirit can be sent because they are respectively *de deo* and *a deo* and that their role in the economy corresponds to their identity in the inner life of the Trinity.

This also is the answer to the second question, namely why is the Father never said to have been sent, when he too manifested himself personally in the history of salvation (cf., for example, the baptism of Jesus and the transfiguration)?⁴⁹ Again according to the rule *deus de deo*, the Father is never said to have been sent because he alone is *deus* and not *de deo* or *a deo* in the inner life of the Trinity.

3. DISCUSSION OF THE ARIANS' ONTOLOGICAL CATEGORIES (BOOKS 5-7)

The sequential link between the section going from book 1 to 4 and the following section of books 5 to 7 is their anti-'Arian' polemic. Books 1 to 4 as a whole are the discussion of the Scriptural passages which had been used to deny the divinity of the Son. Their correct interpretation required not only the procedure which had become classical in the Trinitarian controversy, i.e. providing an alternative orthodox explanation of these passages; it also called for the elaboration of some fundamental rules of theological hermeneutics based on Christology and soteriology.

'Arians' however, especially those belonging to the second-generation (sometimes called 'Eunomians'), had developed another set of polemical arguments to support their interpretation of Scripture. This other set of polemical arguments was based on logical and ontological categories and designed to disprove the *homoousios* which had slowly become the watchword of 'Nicene' orthodoxy. Therefore, having dealt with the controversial passages from Scripture in books 1 to 4, Augustine embarks upon the discussion of this other set of arguments.

⁴⁷ 4.29 (199).

⁴⁸ 3.3 (129).

⁴⁹ 1.7f (35); 2.18 (103ff).

This explains why, with this new section, we have the impression that Augustine goes back to the outer layer of his argument, that of a ‘detached’ and apparently ‘uncommitted’ exposition of the Trinitarian mystery, leaving behind the issue of knowledge of God and its soteriological connotations. The argument of these books seems confined to the discussion on the correct application of logical and ontological categories to Trinitarian doctrine and of the right terminology for the designation of ‘what is one’ and ‘what is three’ in God.

From the outset, however, some considerations might help us to perceive the other concerns hidden behind the polemic against ‘Arians’.

We have seen that the revelation of the identity, divinity and properties of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is linked to the issue of *missiones*, i.e. fundamentally to soteriology. Revelation and soteriology are linked to each other for two fundamental reasons: first of all because sin does not allow us to know God, and secondly because the way God saves us is the enactment of his own identity. Therefore, our sequential analysis of this new section going from book 5 to 7 has to pay attention to the relation between the account of consubstantiality which emerges from it and the account of consubstantiality which was presupposed by the link between soteriology and revelation of the Trinity established in the previous book. To re-formulate this issue the other way round, we have to examine the extent to which the understanding of the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit presupposed by the economy of salvation corresponds to the polemical approach to the issue of consubstantiality.

The main line of these three books is the discussion of the formula elaborated during the Trinitarian controversy: “μία οὐσία τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις, quod est latine, unam essentiam tres substantias”.⁵⁰ Thus, the first half of the 5th book discusses the use of οὐσία,⁵¹ and the second half that of ὑπόστασις or *persona*.⁵² This Trinitarian formula seems then to disappear, but in reality it

⁵⁰ 5.10 (217).

⁵¹ 5.3-9 (207-216).

⁵² 5.10-17 (216-227).

remains in the background of the discussion and comes to the surface again in the middle of the 7th book to be discussed until the end of the same book.⁵³

The discussion on substance can be summed up as follows.

First of all, the topic is set in an anti-‘Arian’ polemical framework. Ontological vocabulary of substance, accidents and the distinction between what is said *ad se* and what is said *ad aliquid* of God comes from the ‘Arians’ and forces those who want to fight them to argue along the same lines.⁵⁴ They use these categories to argue for the diversity of substance between Father and Son. Therefore, Augustine has to determine which is the proper way of using vocabulary of substance and accidents and the distinction *ad se/ad aliquid* to God.⁵⁵

Then, in most of the 6th book, starting from the subordinationist interpretation of the sentence from 1 Corinthians 1.24, “*Christum dei uirtutem et dei sapientiam*”, Augustine establishes how attributes must be applied to God and discusses the equality and consubstantiality of the Father and the Son.⁵⁶ This is applied to the Holy Spirit as well, but with a significant change of perspective which will be discussed in detail in our analytical examination of the issue of consubstantiality.⁵⁷

Finally, the issue of consubstantiality is taken up again at the beginning of the 7th book on the basis of the question left open in the 6th book: is *deus* to be predicated of each person or of the whole Trinity instead?⁵⁸ The outcome of the argument is that each person is the ‘substance’ –i.e. God-⁵⁹ and that the three together are ‘the one substance’, i.e. the one God. Yet within the unity of this substance there is a ‘direction’ [*de deo*]. This whole point is made through the attribute of *sapientia*. In virtue of God’s simplicity, everything we say about substance is true about any of his

⁵³ 7.7-12 (255-267).

⁵⁴ ‘Arian’ positions are quoted 3 times in 5.4 (208f) and 5.7 (211f).

⁵⁵ 5.3-9 (207-216).

⁵⁶ 6.1-6 (228-235).

⁵⁷ 6.7 (235f).

⁵⁸ 7.1 (244): “*¶* Iam nunc quaeramus diligentius quantum dat deus quod paulo ante distulimus...”, referring to 6.6 (234), “... quod diligentius discutiendum est”.

⁵⁹ Cf. Tertullian, *Aduersus Praxean* 7.9 (*Fontes Christiani*, Freiburg 2001, 128) where the *substantia filii* is his *persona*: “*¶* Quaecumque ergo substantia sermonis fuit, illam dico personam et illi nomen filii uindico et, dum filio agnosco, secundum a patre defendo”.

attributes, including that of *sapientia*. Thus each person is *sapientia* and yet the three together are one *sapientia*, but with a direction [i.e. the Son is *sapientia de sapientia*].⁶⁰

The discussion of *persona* –or ὑπόστασις- is also unfolded in the same wave-like form. In the 5th book, once he has discussed the issue of οὐσία, Augustine takes up that of ὑπόστασις,⁶¹ quickly replaced by what had become its Latin equivalent, *persona*. Augustine does not hide his deep reluctance to resort to an ontological category to encompass what is common to Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He famously declares that “dictum est tamen tres personae non ut illud diceretur sed ne taceretur”⁶² and spends most of the rest of the section devoted to *persona*, trying to determine the content of this term. The driving question is ‘*Quid tres?*’.

The determination of the content of the notion of person calls for the discussion of the *proprietas* of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Since the determination of the *proprium* of the Holy Spirit is the most problematic, a large section of the 5th book deals with it.⁶³ The issue of the *proprium* or *proprietas* of each person is taken up again in the 6th book, with a quotation of Hilary of Poitiers and Augustine’s discussion of it.⁶⁴ Finally, Augustine resumes the question in the middle of the 7th book and proceeds to a relentless criticism of the application of some metaphysical categories to the mystery of the Trinity, especially that of *persona*.⁶⁵

Before we bring to an end this sequential account of the first seven books of the *De Trinitate*, we need to highlight some more lines which go through the whole section and attest its unity.

First of all, we have seen that the equality and the inseparability of Father, Son and Holy Spirit resulting from their unity of substance were formulated right from the outset in the first book⁶⁶ and remain visibly present behind the discussion of other topics in books 1 to 3. They then become the central topic of the section going from books 5 to 7. Ought we hastily suppose that

⁶⁰ 7.1-3 (244-250).

⁶¹ 5.10 (217).

⁶² 5.10 (217).

⁶³ 5.12-17 (218-227).

⁶⁴ 6.11-12 (241ff).

⁶⁵ 7.7-12 (255-267).

⁶⁶ 1.7 (35).

this line disappears in the 4th book? In reality, it does remain at the centre of the 4th book as well, even though from a different viewpoint. The fourth book is wholly centred around Christ as *unum* and contains a reference to Father and Son's unity of will and unity of substance. This point will play a crucial role in our analytical account of Augustine's notion of consubstantiality and of his pneumatology.⁶⁷ An echo of this conception of unity of the Trinity as unity of will comes to the surface again in the middle of the 6th book.⁶⁸

The second thread cutting across books 1 to 7 concerns the issue of *missiones*. An echo of it appears in the middle of the discussion of the divine attribute of *sapientia* in the 7th book.⁶⁹ In this passage, Augustine explains that, through the Incarnation, the Son, *sapientia de sapientia*, becomes for us *sapientia a deo*. That which he becomes for us, *sapientia a deo*, is identical to that which constitutes his relation with the Father, namely to be *sapientia de sapientia*.

4. CONCLUSION

This sequential account of the first seven books of the *De Trinitate* illustrates the heuristic concern which presides over the order Augustine follows in the unfolding of the Trinitarian mystery. The reader is constantly appealed to⁷⁰ and Augustine does not set out all the aims he pursues explicitly: he only declares some of them, leaving the others, often those which most matter to him, gradually to emerge in the course of the exposition, sometimes, as we have seen, in a surprisingly casual way.⁷¹ The *De Trinitate* is shaped by this heuristic concern to such an extent that the reader will find it very difficult, if not impossible, to draw any real benefit from the treatise unless he actively plays the role imparted to him. Otherwise, he might see the interest of some of

⁶⁷ 4.12 (176ff). Cf. this dissertation, 127-148.

⁶⁸ 6.7 (235f).

⁶⁹ 7.4f (251f).

⁷⁰ Cf. for example several times in 1.1-5 (27-34); 3.1 (127f) etc...

⁷¹ Cf. what we have seen concerning the 'inner layer' of the first half of the *De Trinitate* with regard to the passage of 1.17 (50ff); the same thing we shall see in 7.12 (265ff) for the theme of the image of God, cf. this dissertation, 32-37 and 203ff.

its sections, say for example for philosophical purposes, but he will be unable to grasp the overall architecture of the work.

This explains the difficulty we face as we bring this sequential account to a close in order to embark upon a more analytical approach to the *De Trinitate*. The attempt to restate Augustine's argument analytically can be compared to the rendering of a poem into prose: something is gained in terms of clarity, but at the cost of sacrificing poetic style. Unable to summon the same range of aesthetic experiences, prose leads the reader right to the outcome –or rather one or some of the possible outcomes- intended by the poem and does not exert on him the same arresting and converting power. The version in prose only gives to the reader something to be understood, whereas poetry intended to offer him something to enjoy, Augustine would say 'frui': "Hoc est enim plenum gaudium nostrum quo amplius non est, frui trinitate deo ad cuius imaginem facti sumus".⁷² Having said that, some methodological precautions should allow us to pursue this attempt all the same and to reduce its disadvantages.

First of all, any analytical approach to a treatise as complex as the *De Trinitate* cannot confine itself to disentangling each line of inquiry and exhibiting them in a more linear form. In reality, choices about the order to be followed in the exposition of these lines of inquiry, more or less consciously, betray an interpretation concerning their hierarchy. Starting, for example, by determining Augustine's notion of consubstantiality from the books 5 to 7 and then proceeding from there to Christology, soteriology and pneumatology, could lead us to interpret the latter in the light of the former, so subjecting Augustine's exegesis of scriptural passages to ontological categories which were probably not intended for that purpose. Therefore, since an order in the analytical approach is both inevitable and potentially misleading, it is necessary to single out the most appropriate one for our purpose and to justify its suitability.

The sequential account of books 1 to 7 has revealed the crucial role of the fourth book, where the doctrine of the Trinity –the 'outer' layer of the argument- and the issue of the knowledge of

God –the ‘inner’ layer- converge into the identification between reconciliation and revelation. In this book Christ appears as the only Mediator of this reconciliation/revelation and the real presupposition of Augustine’s argument up to that point. The same topic, although from a slightly different viewpoint, is resumed in an exactly parallel way in the middle of the second half of the treatise, in the 13th book. This leads us to postulate the centrality of Christology and soteriology in Augustine’s approach to knowledge of God, to be established through a close analysis of books 4 and 13. Before this, however, we shall take up another important topic discussed in these two books, again in a striking parallel way, namely the polemic against philosophers, i.e. those who think they can reach or know God without the Mediator. The first chapter of our analytical approach to the first half of the *De Trinitate*, therefore, shall be devoted to Augustine’s relation to philosophers (Chapter III), whereas the following chapter will take up the relation of Christology and soteriology to knowledge of God (Chapter IV).

The following step of our analysis will determine the way Augustine elaborates his doctrine of the inner life of the Trinity. This shall be the object of a chapter on his doctrine of revelation, that is of divine action in revelation (Chapter V).

Once Augustine’s way of envisaging the transition between economic and immanent Trinity has been established, we shall be equipped to tackle Augustine’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit from the whole treatise (and not just the first half of the *De Trinitate*) and, inseparably, his doctrine of the inner life of the Trinity (Chapter VI).

On the basis of Christology, soteriology, doctrine of revelation and doctrine of the Holy Spirit, we shall be able to examine Augustine’s use of ontological categories in his doctrine of the Trinity (Chapter VII) and then embark upon the second half of the treatise, where we shall follow exactly the same method as in the first half, combining again sequential and analytical investigations.

⁷² 1.18 (52).

III. AUGUSTINE AND PHILOSOPHERS

1. THE *SCIENTIA* OF OUR *INFIRMITAS*

The preamble added to the fourth book of the *De Trinitate* at the time of the final editing of the treatise,¹ is one of these passages where Augustine leaves behind for a moment the distance which suits his pedagogical and carefully progressive method of exposition and opens his heart to his reader. We immediately guess that he is about to unveil some of the keys of his thought.

He opposes two *scientiae*: the first, described in slightly sarcastic terms, deals “with earthly and celestial things”, “explores the course of stars”, “the foundations of the earth and the pinnacles of the sky” and is “highly prized by the human race”; the other, despised by those who devote themselves to the first type of *scientia*, is the knowledge of ourselves, *nosse semetipsos*, which is identified with knowledge of our *infirmitas*.

The need for conversion is suggested when Augustine states that we have to value the latter kind of knowledge above the former, *praeponere scientiam scientiae*, and describes this process in terms of love: awoken by the warmth of the Holy Spirit, in the love for God and in the light which comes from God, we find out about our *aegritudo*, our sickness. He is not referring to theological science in particular. His criticism of philosophers -which includes all kind of academic or scientific activity, even those we would consider more objective or neutral today, like, for example, natural sciences - makes clear that he is aiming at ‘scientific’ method and attitude as such. Those who boast in the first kind of *scientia* underestimate one of the critical marks of our condition of knowing subjects in this life: our *infirmitas*, our *aegritudo*, betrayed by the very fact that this kind of science *inflat*, ‘puffs up’. It is only too easy to predict the condescending smile of a scientist or a philosopher hearing

Augustine's own idea of what a proper 'scientific' attitude should be: "find relief in weeping and imploring God over and over again to take pity and pull us altogether out of our pitiful condition", "pray with all confidence, on the basis of the free gratuitous pledge of health received through the one and only saviour and enlightener granted to us by God".² Tears, repentance, prayer, trust in Jesus Christ: these are the conditions of a science which does not yield pride, but stems from the charity which builds up, *hunc ita egentem ac dolentem scientia non inflat quia caritas aedificat*.³

Augustine's striking ambition is not just to explore the way God makes himself known, but to shake the foundations of the common received epistemology altogether. He knows that all scientific endeavour is susceptible to vanity and the constant temptation of preferring vain images –*phantasmata*– and fictions –*figmenta*– to the truth.

2. PHILOSOPHERS ON HAPPINESS

Augustine does not confine himself to general assertions about the *infirmetas*, the *prauitas*⁴ and the *aversio*⁵ of the human heart and about their consequences on the knowledge of God. He also delights in proving it in frequently ironical sections devoted to philosophers. The point Augustine tries to make through criticism of philosophers is not only that our *infirmetas* does not allow us to reach blessedness and truth, but that any unaided human attempt to reach them or still yet pretending to have reached them, if anything, make the situation worse, because to *infirmetas* it adds pride and self-delusion. This is developed in two parallel sections of the books devoted to Christology, the 4th and the 13th. We start with the section devoted to the views of philosophers on *beatitudo* of the 13th book,⁶ where Augustine uses methods and procedures very similar to those of

¹ *Ep.* 174 (CCL 50, 26).

² 4.1 (159).

³ 4.1 (159). Cf the statement in 4.31 (204): "Quod si difficile intellegitur, mens fide purgetur magis magisque abstinendo a peccatis et bene operando et orando cum gemitu desideriorum sanctorum ut per diuinum adiutorium proficendo et intellegat et amet".

⁴ 13.9 (393).

⁵ 13.2 (382).

⁶ 13.10-12 (394-399).

the *De Ciuitate Dei*, explicitly referred to.⁷ He aims in particular at Stoic philosophers and piles up quotations from Cicero and Terence to state his case against them.

First of all, these philosophers, each in their own way, constructed their own notion of happy life. It was a fiction, more a name than a reality: “Sed qualiscumque beatitudo quae potius uocetur quam sit in hac uita quaeritur, immo uero fingitur, dum immortalitas desperatur sine qua uera beatitudo esse non potest.”⁸ The Stoic ideal of *beatitudo* was a lie and Augustine lays stress on its character as suffering. The philosopher, having accepted that evil and sufferings are inevitable in this life, bears them patiently. Is this a happy life, wonders Augustine? Who would bear any suffering if he had the possibility of avoiding pain altogether or doing whatever he wants? Can anyone be called *beatus* who, even if he is not happy, tries at least to be bravely unhappy, “paratus excipere et aequo ferre animo quidquid aduersitatis acciderit”?⁹ Since he cannot have what he wants, he bends his will to want that which happens to him. This attitude, for Augustine, is not heroic, but proud: “Haec est tota, utrum ridenda an potius miseranda, superbiorum beatitudo mortalium gloriantium se uiuere ut uolunt quia uolentes patienter ferunt quae accidere sibi nolunt”.¹⁰

In Augustine’s eyes, however, the clearest sign of the artificiality and the failure of this ethical model is the absence of love. If to be *beatus* consists in not wanting nor fearing anything, and only in trying to be equally prepared to welcome whatever might happen, this means that we have to be neutral with regard to *beatitudo* itself and neither wish nor shun it. But how can a way of life be considered *beata* if it is not desired, if it is not the object of *amor*? Absence of *amor* makes ethical life unintelligible:

⁷ 13.12 (398), quotation of *ciu. Dei* 12.20 (CCL 48, 376).

⁸ 13.11 (396).

⁹ 13.10 (395).

¹⁰ 13.10 (395).

“Sed nec ista beata est uita quae talis est ut quem beatum facit amore eius indigna sit. Quomodo enim est beata uita quam non amat beatus? Aut quomodo amatur quod utrum uigeat an pereat indifferenter accipitur? Nisi forte uirtutes quas propter solam beatitudinem sic amamus persuadere nobis audent ut ipsam beatitudinem non amemus. Quod si faciunt, etiam ipsas utique amare desistimus quando illam propter quam solam istas amauimus non amamus”.¹¹

This criticism encapsulates one of the most important themes of the *De Trinitate*: without love, it is not possible to explain any human activity. This is as valid for ethics as it is for epistemology, which are inseparable in Augustine’s mind. We only act out of love and the character of this love determines the moral value of our actions. Therefore, a philosophical system like that of Stoicism which keeps love out of the equation ends up by making human action absurd.

The other element of the *beatitudo* of philosophers Augustine criticizes is related to the inherent condition of what makes a life happy, that is to say the fact that it has to be without end. Any attempt to locate *beatitudo* in our present mortal condition amounts to self-delusion.¹² Some philosophers have indeed guessed the immortality of the soul, but even this insight Augustine is not prepared to concede to them without some ironical comments: “People have tried to work these things out by human reasoning, but it is the immortality of the soul alone that they have succeeded in getting to some notion of, and then only a few of them and with difficulty, and only if they have had plenty of brains and plenty of leisure and plenty of education in abstruse learning”.¹³ Augustine’s verdict on these attempts is peremptory: “Cui tamen animae beatam uitam non inuenerunt stabilem, id est ueram”.¹⁴ Very significantly, the essential element for a true blessed life is the presence of the body, a truth only faith can make known to us: “Fides autem ista totum hominem immortalem futurum, qui utique constat ex anima et corpore, et ob hoc uere beatum non argumentatione humana sed diuina auctoritate promittit”.¹⁵

¹¹ 13.11 (397).

¹² 13.10f (394-398).

¹³ 13.12 (398).

¹⁴ 13.12 (398).

¹⁵ 13.12 (398f).

3. PHILOSOPHERS ON KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

An even more compelling criticism of philosophers can be found in the 4th book, where it fulfils exactly the same role as in the 13th book. The main theme of the 4th book, as we shall see more in detail soon, concerns Christ's mediation, which Augustine opposes to its two main parodies, the first enacted by demons and the second by philosophers. After the section on demons, broadly organized around the idea of pagan worship and its inability to purify,¹⁶ a new section is devoted to philosophers, i.e. those who think that they can purify themselves and that they do not need any mediator at all.¹⁷ The main charge against them is their pride, *superbia*. Just as, in the 13th book, the reproach against them was that they relied in their own *uirtus*: "Nunc uero fecerunt quidem sibi philosophi sicut eorum cuique placuit uitas beatas suas ut quasi *propria uirtute* possent quod communi mortalium conditione non poterant, sic scilicet uiuere ut uellent";¹⁸ so, in the 4th book, they are guilty of the same proud self-sufficiency: "Sunt autem quidam qui se putant ad contemplandum deum et inhaerendum deo *uirtute propria* posse purgari, quos ipsa *superbia* maxime maculat".¹⁹ In both cases, this attitude is sinful, since it runs right against the confession that Christ is the only and necessary Mediator with regard to both *beatitudo* and *contemplatio*. The theme of *contemplatio* is one of those which, in the *De Trinitate*, designates the issue of the knowledge of God. The impossibility of reaching the contemplation or the sight [*uisio*] of God *uirtute propria* means that no real knowledge of God is possible without Christ..

Indeed, Augustine is fond of quoting Romans 1.21 to say that philosophers, *per ea quae facta sunt* have had some sort of 'knowledge' of God. On the basis, however, of his strong sense of the inseparability of knowledge and love, such knowledge does not count as *real* knowledge, as real *scientia*. In fact, our *infirmetas* cannot be healed by simply trying to relate the objects of our *scientia* to

¹⁶ 4.13-19 (178-187).

¹⁷ 4.20-24 (187-193).

¹⁸ 13.10 (394).

¹⁹ 4.20 (187).

God: this is not possible to us any more. In our present condition of *infirmitas* and *prauitas*, truth is taken captive by *iniquitas*:

“Illi autem praecipui gentium philosophi qui *inuisibilia dei per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspicere potuerunt*, tamen quia sine mediatore, id est sine homine Christo philosophati sunt, quem nec uenturum prophetis nec uenisse apostolis crediderunt, *ueritatem detinuerunt* sicut de illis dictum est *in iniquitate*”.²⁰

Without Christ, even if in theory it is possible to know God because he is the creator and as such he is objectively immanent in his creation, we do not recognize him as the Lord and instead of being led to God through created realities, we transform them into idols:

“Non potuerunt enim in his rebus infirmis constituti nisi quaerere aliqua media per quae ad illa quae intellexerant sublimia peruenirent, atque ita in deceptores daemones inciderunt per quos factum est *ut immutarent gloriam incorruptibilis dei in similitudinem imaginis corruptibilis hominis et uolucrum et quadrupedum et serpentium*. In talibus enim formis etiam idola instituerunt siue coluerunt”.²¹

This passage is the best introduction to one aspect of the section on philosophers of the 4th book, in which, at first, Augustine seems to make generous concessions to the philosophers’ knowledge: they have indeed been able “to direct the *acies mentis* beyond everything created and to attain, in however small a measure, the light of the immutable truth –“*lux incommutabilis ueritatis*”²² or the “*praecelsa incommutabilis substantia*”²³ or even the “*creatoris aeternitas*”, through the things he has created.²⁴ However, a closer analysis of these assertions reveals that, in Augustine’s eyes, this does not count as real *scientia* because it is severed from *sapientia*. Again, this amounts to saying that it is not a real knowledge of God.

Philosophers have indeed been right to argue that all temporal realities have been made in *aeternae rationes*, but this does not mean that they were able to know in these *rationes*.²⁵ This is a way of restating the argument already mentioned above: philosophers do not possess real *scientia* because they do not know *in ipsa sapientia*, they do not really know even what seems to be within

²⁰ 13.24 (416).

²¹ 13.24 (416).

²² 4.20 (187).

²³ 4.21 (188).

²⁴ 4.23 (190).

²⁵ 4.21 (188).

their reach in the mutable and temporal realm of senses because they cannot contemplate the *aeternae rationes* of these things in God himself, in *ipsa sapientia*. Of course, some sort of *scientia* can indeed be attributed to philosophers. However, it is the result of the study of natural history or the accumulation of empirical experience: “Nonne ista omnia non per illam incommutabilem sapientiam sed per locorum ac temporum historiam quaesierunt et ab aliis experta atque conscripta crediderunt?”²⁶ No surprise, therefore, if philosophers find fault with Christians for their belief in the resurrection of the flesh and in a *beatitudo* which is for the after-life: their proud and idolatrous minds are neither capable –*idonei*– to know in *ipsa sapientia*, nor, like the prophets of the Old Testament, to welcome these things through revelations.²⁷

Again, the assertion that the Word is the “unum uerbum dei” in whom everything was created and that he is the life and light in whom we all live, move and have our being²⁸ must not be isolated from the trenchant sentence which follows, encapsulating all the main terms Augustine uses to label epistemological sinfulness, i.e. *prauitas*, *cupiditas*, *infidelitas* and blindness: “Sed *lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt*. Tenebrae autem sunt stultae mentes hominum praua cupiditate atque infidelitate caecatae”.²⁹ The very Augustinian theme of *illuminatio* needs to be handled cautiously.³⁰ In the same passage just quoted, it depends on the Incarnation and on the *mundatio* resulting from the blood of Christ and the humility of God:

“Inluminatio quippe nostra participatio uerbi est, illius scilicet uitae quae lux est hominum. Huic autem participationi prorsus inhabiles et minus idonei eramus propter immunditiam peccatorum; mundandi ergo eramus. Porro iniquorum et superbiorum una mundatio est sanguis iusti et humilitas dei, ut ad contemplandum deum quod natura non sumus per eum mundaremur factum quod natura sumus et quod peccato non sumus”.³¹

Because of the inseparability between knowledge and love, our sinfulness is as damaging with regard to *beatitudo* as it is to the possibility of knowing God, i.e. to reach what really counts as knowledge of God. The sentence just quoted anticipates the next step of our analysis of

²⁶ 4.21 (188).

²⁷ 4.23 (190).

²⁸ 4.3 (162f).

²⁹ 4.4 (163).

³⁰ Cf. this dissertation, 210-216.

Augustine's argument: only in Christ is our sinfulness healed and the possibility of the knowledge of God, i.e. of acknowledgment of God as the Lord, restored.

* * * *

Before going further, however, a little pause in our analysis of the *De Trinitate* is needed, to submit our findings to some indispensable verification. Our assumption that only a straightforward theological reading of this treatise can grasp its unity, through the many variations introduced in the unfolding of the main argument, might have led us to over-emphasize Augustine's critical attitude towards philosophy, particularly with regard to knowledge of God.

What do we make, then, of the rather optimistic stance towards philosophy in some of Augustine's other works? Is not Augustine even thought to have attributed knowledge of Trinity to philosophers, contrary to what has emerged from our inquiry into the *De Trinitate*?³²

4. PHILOSOPHY IN AUGUSTINE'S THOUGHT

Let us try, then, to trace briefly the evolution of Augustine's attitude towards philosophy, throughout his writings and his life, focussing especially on the aspects of this issue related to our findings in the *De Trinitate*. For this purpose, it is preferable to leave aside those philosophers Augustine openly and sternly criticised because of their hedonism, their materialism or their atheism, like the Cynics, Epicureans and to a certain extent even the Stoics.³³ We shall concentrate on those he labelled 'Platonists'³⁴ or whom he related to Plato, *the* philosopher of the antiquity,³⁵ in general terms.

³¹ 4.4 (163f).

³² Rahner (1966), 86.

³³ Cf., for example, *ciu. Dei* 5.20 (CCL 47, 156) and 14.2 (CCL 48, 414) for Epicureans; 14.20 (CCL 48, 442) for Cynics *Trin* 10.8 (322).

³⁴ *conf.* 7.9.13 (CCL 27, 101).

³⁵ Van Fleteren (1999), 651. He observes that "Plato and its cognates occur 252 times in Augustine's works".

His praises of Plato and Plotinus right from his oldest extant writing, the *Contra academicos* [386] up to the *De ciuitate dei*, completed some forty years afterwards, are well known and we shall look at them closely in a moment.³⁶ In apologetic writings like the *De uera religione*, he could go as far as to state:

“Itaque si hanc uitam illi uiri nobiscum rursum agere potuissent uiderent profecto cuius auctoritate facilius consuleretur hominibus, et paucis mutatis uerbis atque sententiis Christiani fierent, sicut plerique recentiorum nostrorumque temporum Platonici fecerunt”.³⁷

In the same way, in his letter to the enlightened pagan Volusianus –someone he was evidently keen to win over to Christianity and whose honesty he valued³⁸ he is prepared to acknowledge preparations to Christ’s *magisterium* not only in the writings of the prophets, but also in those of philosophers and poets:

“Magisterium quidem ut ea quae hic ante dicta sunt utiliter uera, non solum a prophetis sanctis, qui omnia uera dixerunt, uerum etiam a philosophis atque ipsis poetis, et cuiuscemodi auctoribus litterarum quos multa uera falsis miscuisse quis ambigat?”.³⁹

Even at the height of the censorious mood of his late years, while regretting his praise of Plato, of Platonic philosophers and of Academics,⁴⁰ he is still prepared to acknowledge where Plato was right: “Nec quidem Plato in hoc errauit, quia esse mundum intelligibilem dixit, si non uocabulum, quod ecclesiasticae consuetudini in re illa inusitatum est, sed ipsam rem uelimus attendere”.⁴¹

The role ‘Platonism’ played in Augustine’s life to extricate him from scepticism and Manichean materialism is one of the main reasons of such a positive evaluation. To illustrate this role, we shall concentrate on Augustine’s struggle against scepticism.

³⁶ *c. Acad.* 3.xvii.37-xviii.41 (CCL 29, 57-60); *ciu. Dei* 8 (CCL 47, 216-249).

³⁷ *uera rel.* 4.7 (CCL 32, 192), echoed in *ep.* 118.21 (CSEL 34/2, 685), to Dioscorus: “paucis mutatis quae christiana improbat disciplina”, Madec (1989), 71.

³⁸ Lancel (1999), 445.

³⁹ *ep.* 137.12 (CSEL 44, 112).

⁴⁰ *retr.* 1.ii.3 (CCL 57, 13ff).

⁴¹ *retr.* 1.iii.2 (CCL 57, 12).

i. The struggle against Scepticism

Too rigid an approach to Augustine's intellectual life in terms of 'conversions' from one philosophical system to the other can lead to the neglect of fundamental factors of continuity. The most pervasive of these factors, his belief in Christ, will be the object of a detailed analysis later on. For the time being, due attention is to be paid to his keenness to relate –with the necessary demarcations- the different stages of his intellectual evolution to his earliest and foundational discovery of philosophy, through the reading of Cicero's *Hortensius*, in 372-373. Beside the well-known description of this experience in the *Confessions*⁴² [397-401], this discovery is already mentioned in the *De beata uita*⁴³ [386-387] and much later in the *De Trinitate* [probably after 420 for book 14].⁴⁴ The scepticism of the *Academia* did not take hold of him only at the time of the crisis of his Manichaean infatuation [early 380s], but had already been instilled into his mind through his first contact with Cicero and did not leave him until he firmly grappled with it after his conversion in 386. In the *De beata uita*, for example, he regrets the time he fell under the spell of the Manichaean superstition, but he acknowledges that even then “non adsentiebar”.⁴⁵

When Augustine is finally able to shake this intellectual poison off, we discover how more deeply ingrained in his thought it had been than even Manichaean materialism, and the extent to which this liberation sets free fundamental epistemological concerns which will guide his research for the rest of his life.

From the 14th book of the *De Trinitate*, we learn that the *Hortensius* taught Augustine to look for the aim of his life in the *inuestigatio ueritatis*⁴⁶ which, as the *Contra academicos* confirms, would be a sufficient ground for happiness, whether *ueritas* could actually be found or not. If Augustine's first concern after his conversion is that of writing a *Contra academicos*, it is because such a narrow understanding of *beatitudo* and *sapientia* based on scepticism and ἐποχή is the only remaining

⁴² *conf.* 3.iv.7-8 (CCL 27, 29f).

⁴³ *b. uita* 1.4 (CCL 29, 66f).

⁴⁴ *Trin.* 14.26 (457ff). This passage is analysed in this dissertation, 247-252.

⁴⁵ *b. uita* 1.4 (CCL 29, 67).

intellectual obstacle to one of the main perspectives his conversion had opened up for him, namely that of the availability of truth and of the possibility of knowledge. With faith, comes the persuasion that knowledge and truth are not to be despaired of;⁴⁷ this is of momentous significance for his life because, as he explains, *comprehensio ueritatis* is not just a matter of academic achievement, but “de uita nostra, de moribus, de animo res agitur”;⁴⁸ “iam non de gloria, quod leue ac puerile est, sed de ipsa uita, et de aliqua spe animi beati, quantum inter nos possumus, disseramus”.⁴⁹

Whether we are convinced or not by the appeal to esoteric teaching to detect ‘Platonic’ philosophy behind the Academic affectation of scepticism –this is the theory Augustine puts forward at the end of the *Contra academicos*– this treatise establishes two enduring guidelines for his intellectual and theological research, namely trust in Christ’s *auctoritas* and the hope to find truth in Plato: “Quae sit autem ista [ueritas], deus uiderit; eam tamen arbitror Platonis fuisse. [...] Mihi certum est nusquam prorsus a Christi auctoritate discedere: non enim reperio ualentiorum. [...] Apud Platonicos me interim quod sacris nostris non repugnet reperturum esse confido”.⁵⁰

Declarations of this kind, together with the generous praises of Plato and ‘Platonism’ we have quoted above, can easily lead one to cast doubts on the integrity of Augustine’s theological enterprise. For a fair assessment of their significance, however, we should start by taking Augustine’s rhetorical versatility into account: surprising concessions to Platonism recur especially when he is dealing with ‘enlightened’ pagans he is eager to convert to Christianity, as in the case of Volusianus mentioned above⁵¹ or with those he addresses through the *De ciuitate dei*, a work for the most part contemporary to the Pelagian controversy and to the writing of the *De Trinitate*, in which, however, “the person of Christ does not appear almost at all”.⁵²

⁴⁶ *Trin.* 14.26 (457ff).

⁴⁷ “...nec cognitionem desperandam”, *c. Acad.* 2.iii.9 (CCL 29, 23); “[ueritas] non me arbitror desperare” *c. Acad.* 3.xx.43 (CCL 29, 60).

⁴⁸ *c. Acad.* 2.ix.22 (CCL 29, 30).

⁴⁹ *c. Acad.* 3.ix.18 (CCL 29, 45).

⁵⁰ *c. Acad.* 3.xx.43 (CCL 29, 60f).

⁵¹ *ep.* 137 (CSEL 44, 96-125).

⁵² Van Bavel (1954), 8.

Then, any evaluation of these declarations should not be severed from two essential qualifying factors: the nature of what is called 'Platonism' and the actual impact of this 'Platonism' on his theology.

ii. The nature of Augustine's 'Platonism'

"Augustine knew Plato exclusively through secondary sources. Almost certainly he read Plato's *Timaeus*⁵³ in Cicero's Latin translation. Likewise, he knew *Phaedo*,⁵⁴ *Phaedrus* and *Republic* through encyclopedias, doxographies or other authors".⁵⁵ The identification of the *quosdam libros Platoniorum* translated into Latin by Marius Victorinus⁵⁶ he comes across before his conversion has proved notoriously controversial. Were they books by Plotinus,⁵⁷ Plato *redinius*,⁵⁸ or the *Philosophy from Oracles* by Porphyry, "the real 'mediator' or 'conveyer' of Neoplatonic philosophy from Plotinus to Augustine", not named in the *Confessions* simply because he was "too imbued with elements of anti-Christian polemics"?⁵⁹ Whoever the authors of these books might be, the 'Platonism' they conveyed reached Augustine through people like Manlius Theodorus, "le pendant chrétien de [...] Symmache et de Nicomaque Flavien [...], un fervent disciple de Plotin [qu'] Augustine crédite, au même titre d'Ambroise, de propos édifiants dont il avait bénéficié sur Dieu et sur la nature de l'âme";⁶⁰ through Simplicianus, former disciple of Marius Victorinus,⁶¹ and even through the bishop Ambrose.⁶² It was "a kind of Neo-Platonism already mingled with Christianity and which already established parallels [between Platonism and John's Gospel] and taught them to Augustine".⁶³ As it is possible to see in the *Confessions*,⁶⁴ the main result of this encounter with

⁵³ *cons. Eu.* 1.35.53 (CSEL 43, 59).

⁵⁴ *ciu. Dei* 1.22 (CCL 47, 23f).

⁵⁵ Van Fleteren (1999), 651.

⁵⁶ *conf.* 8.2.3 (CCL 27, 114).

⁵⁷ As in Solignac (1962), 110-111 and du Roy (1966) 69f, who gives a list of the treatises Augustine knew or quoted.

⁵⁸ *c. Acad.* 3.xvii.41 (CCL 29, 59f).

⁵⁹ Beatrice (1989), 259f.

⁶⁰ Lancel (1999), 124.

⁶¹ Lancel (1999), 124.

⁶² *b. uita* 1.4 (CCL 29, 67).

⁶³ Chadwick (1991), 134, n. 3.

‘Christianised’ Platonism was that of lifting Augustine’s last philosophical reservations against Christianity, especially the materialism inherited from Manichaeism and the scepticism towards the possibility of reaching knowledge and truth contracted from Cicero. An overview of this ‘Platonism’ throughout some of Augustine’s major works easily reveals its deeply religious and ethical nature, which sees the representative figures of Plato and Pythagoras as theologians just as well as philosophers.

The first characteristic of this ‘Platonism’ is that Plato is credited with the elaboration of a perfect philosophy,⁶⁵ which does not differ from Aristotle’s. As a result, this ‘Platonism’ is not ‘Plato’s philosophy’ any more, but the only true philosophy, a sort of *philosophia perennis* in no real need of any further improvement:

“Quod autem ad eruditionem doctrinamque attinet, et mores quibus consulitur animae, quia non defuerunt acutissimi et solertissimi uiri, qui docerent disputationibus suis Aristotelem ac Platonem ita sibi concinere, ut imperitis minusque attentis dissentire uideantur; multis quidem saeculis multisque contentionibus, sed tamen eliquata est, ut opinor, una uerissimae philosophiae disciplina”.⁶⁶

This *una* and *uerissima* philosophy is so akin to Christian faith because of its deep religious character. God is no more an unmoved ‘First mover’ as in Aristotle⁶⁷ nor a Demiurge as in Plato⁶⁸ and, despite similarity of vocabulary, not even the highest source of unity and being, with no determinate properties itself,⁶⁹ as in Plotinus. As a matter of fact, Augustine’s ontology in 390-391 does indeed identify being with that which *manet* insofar as it is *unum*; it does see unity as the form of beauty⁷⁰ and it does distinguish three levels of being accordingly: the highest (God), the lowest (the body) and the intermediate level (the soul) which can either reach happiness through conversion to the higher level or become wretched through turning to what is below its nature. More than the actual threefold representation of reality, however, this rather simplistic ontological

⁶⁴ *conf.* 7 (CCL 27, 92-112).

⁶⁵ “perfectam dicitur composuisse philosophiae disciplinam”, *c. Acad.* 3.xvii.37 (CCL 29, 57).

⁶⁶ *c. Acad.* 3.xix.42 (CCL 29, 60).

⁶⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Λ.

⁶⁸ Plato, *Timaeus*, 28a-30.

⁶⁹ Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.9, cf. Edwards (1999), 588.

outline betrays one of the main aspects of late ‘Platonism’, namely *its dynamic understanding of the destiny of the soul and of the ethical implications of the latter’s ‘location’*.

In the same 18th letter where this ontology is outlined, without the slightest attempt to make any transition, Augustine directly translates this ontology in terms of faith, of *dilectio* and of *superbia*: “Qui Christo credit, non diligit infimum, non superbit in medio atque in summo inhaerere fit idoneus: et hoc est totum quod agere iubemur, monemur, accendimur”.⁷¹ In the same way, in the *De civitate dei* the philosopher is he who imitates, knows and loves God and thus participates in God’s life and reaches happiness. No surprise, then, if these ‘Platonists’ come out rather positively: “Nulli nobis quam isti propius accesserunt”.⁷²

A very good example of integration of Platonic elements precisely to overcome Plato’s representation of the ‘divine’ is offered by Augustine’s question *De ideis*.⁷³ A careful reading of this *questio* proves just how misleading an interpretation of Augustine’s use of ‘Platonic’ elements can be if it neglects the context in which it occurs. Is Augustine’s *De ideis* just aiming at ascribing what could be seen as one of Plato’s portrayal of the ‘divine’ -namely the eternity, the immutability and the universal exemplary role of ideas- to the Christian God? The drawbacks caused by too material an interpretation of this *questio* throughout its phenomenal intellectual posterity are well illustrated by the medieval tangle of five interpretations of this text ranging from the literal assertion of a plurality of really distinct ideas to the flat denial of any idea at all in the mind of God.⁷⁴ Little notice has been paid, in the interpretation of this text, to the philological shift from the literal Latin translation of *ideas* into *formas* or *species* to what Augustine himself acknowledges to be a less literal translation of the same word: *rationes*.⁷⁵ As soon as the main characteristics of these *rationes* have

⁷⁰ *ep.* 18.2 (CSEL 34/1, 45): “cum autem omne quod esse dicimus, in quantum manet dicamus, et in quantum unum est, omnis porro pulchritudinis forma unitatis sit [...]”.

⁷¹ *ep.* 18.2 (CSEL 34/1, 45).

⁷² *civ. Dei* 8.5 (CCL 47, 221).

⁷³ *diu. qu.* 46 (CCL 44A, 70-73).

⁷⁴ Putallaz (2003), 412.

⁷⁵ Augustine states that “*Ideas* igitur Latine possumus vel *formas* vel *species* dicere, ut verbum e verbo transferre videamur. Si autem *rationes* eas vocemus, ab interpretandi quidem proprietate discedimus;

been summed up, Augustine appeals to the *anima sancta et pura*, to the *religiosus et uera religione imbutus* to argue that everything was created according to particular *rationes*. The real climax of the passage is reached when Augustine asks “Quo constituto atque concesso, quis audeat dicere Deum irrationabiliter omnia condidisse? Quod si recte dici vel credi non potest, restat ut omnia ratione sint condita. Nec eadem ratione homo, qua equus: hoc enim absurdum est existimare. Singula igitur propriis sunt creata rationibus.”

Behind this passage, there is the Christian doctrine of creation and of God. The attribution of the characteristics of eternity, immutability and especially of universal exemplar causality of Plato’s ideas to God aims at excluding the identification of Plato’s Demiurge with the Christian creator: “Non enim extra se [deus] quidquam positum intuebatur, ut secundum id constitueret quod constituebat: nam hoc opinari sacrilegum est”. Because he is aware of the mythical character of Plato’s explanations of the relation between the Demiurge and the Paradigms in the *Timaeus*, Augustine is not so much interested in determining whether distinct ideas can really be postulated in the ‘mind’ of God or not. On the contrary, he is once again driven by his usual ethical thrust: the dependence of the intelligibility of the cosmos on God the creator (both objectively and subjectively, that is both with regard to the fact that “omnia ratione sunt condita” and that “anima negatur eas intueri posse nisi rationalis”) means that progress in the understanding of this ‘rational’ structure of reality must coincide with progress in union with God. Thus, as early as in 388-391, the date of composition of this *questio*, *lux* and *caritas* already are inextricably bound to each other in this progress:

“Sed anima rationalis inter eas res quae sunt a deo conditae, omnia superat; et deo proxima est, quando pura est; eique in quantum caritate cohaeserit, in tantum ab eo lumine illo intelligibili perfusa quodammodo et inlustrata cernit, non per corporeos oculos, sed per ipsius sui principale, quo excellit, id est per intellegentiam suam, istas rationes, quarum uisione fit beatissima”.⁷⁶

rationes enim Graece λόγοι appellantur, non *ideae*: sed tamen quisquis hoc vocabulo uti voluerit, a re ipsa non abhorrebit”, *diu. qu.* 46.2 (CCL 44A, 71).

⁷⁶ *diu. qu.* 46.2 (CCL 44A, 73).

The *De uera religione* represents another significant testimony of Augustine's high regard for the ethical and religious aspects of the 'Platonism' he encountered in Milan in the 380s. At its simplest, the tenets of 'Platonism' he relates to Christianity are (i) the purification of soul through virtue, (ii) the conversion from *cupiditas* of temporal or sensible goods to the hope of eternal life, (iii) the enjoyment of spiritual and intelligible reality and (iv) surrender to God.⁷⁷ This same passage, however, clearly represents a censure of paganism and theurgy, since Augustine harshly reproaches the 'Platonists' of his time for the contradiction existing between the refined religious and ethical character of their philosophy and their disconcerting religious practice.⁷⁸ This explains why the issue of worship figures so prominently at the heart of the long section of the *De ciuitate dei* where he discusses the *theologia physica*⁷⁹ as well as in the 4th book of the *De Trinitate*.⁸⁰

This leads us to the most complex aspect of this issue, that is the extent to which what counts as *real* knowledge of God can be attributed to 'Platonist' philosophers. We do not pretend to offer an exhaustive inquiry into this issue here, but we would like to explore some few examples which illustrate the difficulty of interpretation of the texts usually quoted to prove that Augustine did ascribe knowledge of the Trinity to philosophers.

At times, awareness of the temptation to be over-optimistic about the agreement between 'Plato' and Scripture is betrayed by Augustine's timid attempt to invoke the classical apologetical argument that Plato knew Scripture.⁸¹ In the *De Ciuitate dei*, though acknowledging that this argument is unlikely for chronological reasons,⁸² he is inclined to view it with sympathy for two reasons. The first reason echoes what we have seen so far concerning the striking religious and ethical dimension of the kind of 'Platonism' he was initiated to in Milan, i.e. "Plato dicit amatorem dei esse philosophum: nihil sic illis sacris litteris flagrat".⁸³

⁷⁷ *uera rel.* 4.6 (CCL 32, 192).

⁷⁸ *uera rel.* 4.8 (CCL 32, 193).

⁷⁹ *ciu. Dei* books 8-11, especially the 10th book.

⁸⁰ *Trin* 4.13.19 (178- 187), concerning purification through τελετάς.

⁸¹ Cf. Justin, *First Apology*, 43 and Clement, *Stromateis*, 6.42.3.

⁸² *ciu. Dei* 8.11 (CCL 47, 227f).

⁸³ *ciu. Dei* 8.11 (CCL 47, 228).

The other reason consists in the relation Augustine sees between God's name in the book of Exodus and Plato's ontology:

"et maxime illud (quod et me plurimum adducit, ut paene assentiar Platonem illorum librorum expertem non fuisse), quod, cum ad sanctum Moysen ita uerba dei per angelum perferantur, ut quaerenti quod sit nomen eius, qui eum pergere praecipiebat ad populum Hebraeum ex Aegypto liberandum, respondeatur: *Ego sum qui sum, et dices filiis Israel: qui est, misit me ad uos*, tamquam in eius comparatione, qui uere est quia incommutabilis est, ea quae mutabilia facta sunt non sint, uehementer hoc Plato tenuit et diligentissime commendauit. Et nescio utrum hoc uspiam reperiatur in libris eorum, qui ante Platonem fuerunt, nisi ubi dictum est: *Ego sum qui sum, et dices eis: qui est, misit me ad uos*".⁸⁴

Let us compare this text of the *De ciuitate Dei* with a sermon delivered few years before where Augustine details the theological implications of the correspondence he sees between Exodus 3 and 'Platonist' ontology. In his 6th sermon [408-411?], where he is not concerned with looking for parallels between Scripture and philosophers, he sets side by side the two names of God revealed in Scripture. Under Moses' request, God begins by giving him his 'name of *esse*' – "*Ego sum qui sum*" – for the following reason:

"Quia maneo in aeternum, quia mutari non possum. Ea enim quae mutantur, non sunt, quia non permanent. Quod enim est, manet. Quod autem mutatur, fuit aliquid, et aliquid erit: non tamen est, quia mutabile est. Ergo incommutabilitas dei isto uocabulo se dignata est intimare, *Ego sum qui sum*".⁸⁵

However, this 'name of *esse*' cannot be isolated from the second name God gives immediately afterwards, the 'name of *miserordia*':

"Quid est ergo, quod postea iterum aliud nomen sibi dixit, cum diceretur: *Et dixit dominus ad Moysen: Ego sum deus Abraham, et deus Isaac, et deus Iacob; hoc mihi nomen est in sempiternum?* Quomodo illac hoc uocor, quia sum; et ecce hac aliud nomen, *Ego sum deus Abraham, et deus Isaac, et deus Iacob?* Quia quomodo est deus incommutabilis, fecit omnia per misericordiam, et dignatus est ipse filius dei mutabilem carnem suscipiendo, manens id quod uerbum dei est, uenire et subuenire homini. Induit ergo se carne mortali ille qui est, ut dici posset, *Ego sum deus Abraham, et deus Isaac, et deus Iacob*".⁸⁶

The correspondence between 'Platonic' ontology and God's 'name of *esse*' coincides with a stark contrast to the same Platonic ontology when this first name is coupled with its inseparable counterpart, the 'name of *miserordia*': "quomodo est Deus incommutabilis, fecit omnia per

⁸⁴ *ciu. Dei* 8.11 (CCL 47, 228).

⁸⁵ *s. 6.4* (CCL 41, 64).

misericordia”, says Augustine. God’s immutability becomes the background which reveals the real nature of his implication in history, in the becoming, in the realm of *mutabilia*. Because God is by nature immutable, his involvement in *mutabilia* is an act of *misericordia*. Because, as Augustine continues, the Son of God remains the Word of God while taking up mutable flesh, it is really God that comes to help humanity. In other words, *immutability* –and its ontological corollaries of incorporeality and simplicity-⁸⁷ becomes a synonym for God’s freedom and is a way of re-stating the truth that that grace indeed is *grace*.

* * * *

This overview of the nature of Augustine’s ‘Platonism’, therefore, can be summed up as follows:

- that which Augustine refers to as ‘Platonism’ is the result of an already long-standing conscious effort by Christian thinkers – also followed by preachers like Ambrose- to elaborate a *philosophia una et uera* starting from various philosophical tenets, in the light of Christian beliefs;
- it is a fact that this Christianised version of philosophy was instrumental in Augustine’s intellectual reconciliation to Christianity, since it helped him to overcome scepticism and materialism;
- Augustine valued this *philosophia una et uera* especially because of its ethical potential and its pronounced religious character, enhanced by the undeniable influence of Christian faith on it; this accounts for Augustine’s shock at the absurdity of philosophers’ religious practice in the light of the high ethical and religious standards he credited them with;

⁸⁶ Cf. Exodus 3, 15. Sermo 6.5 (CCL 41, 64). Cf. Gilson (1947) et Vannier (1997), 101, n. 66. Cf. also *uera rel.* 8.14 (CCL 32, 197).

⁸⁷ cf. *ciu. Dei* 8.6 (CCL 47, 223).

- at the same time, a critical stance towards ‘Platonism’ is illustrated by the freedom with which ‘Platonic’ philosophical tenets are used to criticise Plato’s own representation of the divine or to develop an ontology which does not escape the conversion required by the revelation of God’s identity in the Incarnation.⁸⁸

Having said that, the evaluation of Augustine’s attitude towards philosophy also needs to assess the *actual impact* of his optimistic declarations about ‘Platonism’ on his theology. For this, we shall select the case most relevant both in itself and for the topic of our dissertation, namely Trinitarian theology, and look at some texts usually quoted to argue that Augustine does ascribe knowledge of the Trinity to philosophers. The present dissertation, as a whole, aims to unravel this question on the basis of the *De Trinitate*. Here, we shall simply resort to a passage from the *De ordine* [386-387] and to another from the *De ciuitate dei*, to gauge the difficulty of interpretation of texts dealing with this issue and to set up some useful landmarks for our inquiry in the *De Trinitate*.

iii. Do philosophers know the Trinity?

A passage from the *De ordine* and the contrasting interpretations given to it, best represents the complexity of the texts relating philosophical views to knowledge of the Trinity:

“Nullumque aliud habet negotium, quae uera, et, ut ita dicam, germana philosophia est, quam ut doceat quod sit omnium rerum principium sine principio, quantusque in eo maneat intellectus, quidue inde in nostram salutem sine ulla degeneratione manauerit: quem [i.e. this principium] unum deum omnipotentem eumque tripotentem, patrem, et filium, et spiritum sanctum, docent ueneranda mysteria, quae fide sincera et inconcussa populos liberant; nec confuse, ut quidam; nec contumeliose, ut multi praedicant”.⁸⁹

The assumption that Augustine discovered the Christian Trinity in Plotinus,⁹⁰ can lead to seeing Plotinian triads everywhere in the former’s writings. Thus, in the passage of the *De Ordine* just quoted, the ‘Neo-Platonic’ triad of *principium*, *intellectus* and *emanatio* would be a good example of the

⁸⁸ Cf. the conclusion of Vannier (1997), 96: “[Augustine] utilise le Platonisme pour dégager l’apport du Christianisme. C’est pour lui une méthode de réflexion”.

⁸⁹ *De ordine* 2.v.16 (CCL 29, 116).

philosophical rendering of the Christian Trinity which is supposed to have shaped Augustine's understanding of this mystery.⁹¹

However, the contrast between the present tense of *sit* and *maneant* and the past of *manauerit* in this text invites us to be more cautious in its interpretations. The sentence “quidue inde in nostram salutem sine ulla degeneratione manaverit” could be interpreted as referring to the Incarnation, in opposition to the eternity of the *principium* and of divine *intellectus*.⁹² Even this interpretation, however, is rather problematic, since it would mean that philosophy can teach the mystery of the Incarnation, something explicitly ruled out in the same paragraph of the *De Ordine*.⁹³ Thus, it is better to acknowledge the difficulty in the interpretation of this text – since the past tense of *manauerit* does not authorise us to adopt the first interpretation either. In any case, the assertion of a relation between the findings of philosophy and the confession of faith does not entail that Augustine reads the latter into the former. There is an unbridgeable difference between the understanding that there is a *principium* and the confession of Father, Son and Holy Spirit through faith [*ueneranda mysteria*].

The *De ciuitate dei* provides us with one of Augustine's most explicit statements concerning the relation between philosophy and knowledge of the Trinity. We can start by a key sentence from the 9th book:

“Illa diligentia rationis est, non praesumptionis audacia, ut in operibus dei secreto quodam loquendi modo, quo nostra exerceatur intentio, eadem nobis insinuata intellegatur trinitas”.⁹⁴

A few lines down, we are told that “uniuersa nobis trinitas in suis operibus intimatur”.

⁹⁰ « ... cette succession chronologique qui lui [Augustine] a fait découvrir l'intelligence de la Trinité chrétienne dans Plotin... », Du Roy (1966), 97.

⁹¹ Du Roy (1966), 125f: « La philosophie enseigne la même Trinité que la foi chrétienne. [...] Aussi, avant de la traduire dans le langage clair et assuré de ‘nos mystères’, la désigne-t-il d'abord en termes néo-platoniciens : le Principe, l'Intellect et l'Émanation. Le Principe est le Père, l'Intellect est le Fils [...]. Donc il faut conclure que l'Émanation désigne l'Esprit ».

⁹² Cf. Madec (1989), 79f and Solignac (1962), BA 13, 78.

⁹³ “Quantum autem illud sit, quod hoc etiam nostri generis corpus, tantus propter nos deus adsumere atque agere dignatus est, quanto uidetur uilius, tanto est clementia plenius, et a quadam ingeniosorum superbia longe lateque remotius.”, *De ordine* 2.v.16 (CCL 29, 116).

⁹⁴ *ciu. Dei* 11.24 (CCL 48, 343).

The wider context of these statements is the praise of ‘Platonism’, one of the main threads of the section of the *De ciuitate Dei* going from the 8th to the 11th book. Just as in the *Contra academicos*, the elaboration of a perfect and all-encompassing philosophy is traced back to Plato, even though Augustine is significantly aware of the difficulty of establishing Plato’s own philosophy with certainty: “factum est ut etiam ipsius Platonis de rebus magnis sententiae non facile perspicere possint”.⁹⁵ In the 8th book, the section devoted to Plato is entirely built on triadic formulas, which it would be tedious to quote here in full.⁹⁶ A threefold classification of philosophy is attributed to Plato: physics, logics and ethics.

- (i) In his account of *physics*, Augustine argues that ‘Platonists’ have found the incorporeality, the immutability and the simplicity of God and have seen God as the origin of everything which has *esse*.⁹⁷
- (ii) Concerning *logic* –which corresponds to epistemology-⁹⁸ he credits ‘Platonists’ with the view that “Lumen autem mentium [...] ad discenda omnia eundem ipsum deum, a quo facta sunt omnia”.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ *ciu. Dei* 8.4 (CCL 47, 220).

⁹⁶ *ciu. Dei* 8.4 (CCL 47, 220): *pars moralis/pars naturalis/pars rationalis* of philosophy; *causa/lux/finis*; *causa/ratio/ordo*; *natura/doctrina/usus*; *ciu. Dei* 8.5 (CCL 47, 221): *imitatorem/cognitorem/amatorem*, *auctor/illustrator/largitor*; *ciu. Dei* 8.6 (CCL 47, 223): *esse/uiuere/intelligere* etc...

⁹⁷ *ciu. Dei* 8.6 (CCL 47, 223).

⁹⁸ Cf. *ciu. Dei* 8.10 (CCL 47, 227): “et rationalem siue logicam, in qua quaeritur quonam modo ueritas percipi possit”.

⁹⁹ *ciu. Dei* 8.7 (CCL 47, 224).

(iii) Finally, with regard to *ethics*, he identifies Plato's *summum bonum* with God; God is the *bonum* we desire for itself –*propter se ipsum*– and not with reference to something else, according to the usual distinction between *uti* and *frui* Augustine is fond of. Two key factors need to be highlighted here. First of all, God is to be 'enjoyed' in the way the eye enjoys light: this suggests a relation between the unitive role of love and the ability/possibility of contemplating God which plays a crucial role in Augustine's theory of knowledge. Then, love is not enough for *beatitudo*. Happiness, i.e. 'fulfilment', is only reached through *fruitio*, which entails possibility of reaching the highest good. Under the viewpoint of the relation *amare/frui*, Augustine repeats what he had argued against Academic philosophers: *inquisitio ueritatis* is not enough for fulfilment, but we need to know that we can actually reach and enjoy truth.¹⁰⁰

Throughout this exploration of the threefold classification of philosophy ascribed to Plato, Augustine does not mention the Trinity at all. He rather focuses on the *causa subsistendi*, the *ratio intellegendi* and the *ordo uiuendi* of everything according to the philosophy he ascribes to 'Platonists'¹⁰¹ and he finds that their answer corresponds to that which Christians know even without the study of Plato's three branches of philosophy.¹⁰² The correspondence strikes him to the point that he wonders whether Plato knew Scripture –a point we mentioned above.¹⁰³

When he resumes the same issue in the 11th book, however, he pushes the *diligentia rationis* further on and openly mentions the Trinity. It should be noted, however, that a profession of Christian faith on the mystery of the Trinity opens the discussion.¹⁰⁴ In this profession of faith, the section devoted to the Holy Spirit is noteworthy. In the *Confessions*, Augustine stated that he had

¹⁰⁰ *ciu. Dei* 8.8 (CCL 47, 224f); cf. *c. Acad.* 1.iii.9 (29, 8f) and 2.ix.22 (CCL 29, 28f).

¹⁰¹ *ciu. Dei* 8.4 (CCL 47, 220).

¹⁰² *ciu. Dei* 8.10 (CCL 47, 226f).

¹⁰³ *ciu. Dei* 8.11 (CCL 47, 227f).

found God and his *uerbum* in the ‘Platonists’¹⁰⁵ - the establishment of a parallel with the Prologue of St. John was one of the traits of the ‘Platonism’ Simplicianus might have inherited from Marius Victorinus and transmitted to Augustine.¹⁰⁶ Here, he is trying to see whether there might be some aspects of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as well that he could read into ‘Platonic’ philosophy. Very interestingly, only with the benefit of some caution does he venture an hypothesis concerning the determination of the property of the Holy Spirit:¹⁰⁷ *sanctitas* is the more usual property, but *bonitas* could also be attributed to him.

Thus, it is possible to detect in creation not only the properties of the Father who creates and of the *uerbum* through whom everything is created, but also the property of *bonitas* of the Holy Spirit:

“in eo uero quod dicitur: *Vidit deus, quia bonum est*, satis significatur deum nulla necessitate, nulla suae cuiusquam utilitatis indigentia, sed sola bonitate fecisse quod factum est, id est, quia bonum est; quod ideo postea quam factum est dicitur, ut res, quae facta est, congruere bonitati, propter quam facta est, indicetur. Quae bonitas si spiritus sanctus recte intellegitur, uniuersa nobis trinitas in suis operibus intimatur”.¹⁰⁸

Thus, there seems to be a correspondence between the mystery of the Trinity and Plato’s threefold classification of philosophy -and of reality- in physics, logics and ethics, corresponding to *origo*, the *informatio* and the *beatitudo* of everything or, put otherwise, the “unde sit: deus eam condidit”, the “unde sit sapiens: a deo illuminatur” and finally the “unde sit felix: deo fruitur” of the *cinitas sancta*.¹⁰⁹

Very significantly, however, Augustine balances this declaration first of all with the statement that Plato did not invent this threefold classification but discovered it: “neque enim ipsi instituerunt ut ita esset, sed ita esse potius *inuenerunt*”.¹¹⁰ Then, in a crucial declaration, this parallel between one possible way of detecting some of the properties of the persons of the Trinity in creation and

¹⁰⁴ *ciu. Dei* 11.24 (CCL 48, 343).

¹⁰⁵ *conf.* 7.ix.13f (CCL 27, 101f).

¹⁰⁶ Chadwick (1991), 134, n. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. the expressions “non audeo temerariam praecipitare sententiam”; “facilius ausus fuero”; “ad hoc enim me probabilius ducit”, *ciu. Dei* 11.24 (CCL 48, 343).

¹⁰⁸ *ciu. Dei* 11.24 (CCL 48, 343f).

¹⁰⁹ *ciu. Dei* 11.24 (CCL 48, 343f).

¹¹⁰ *ciu. Dei* 11.25 (CCL 48, 344).

‘Platonist’ philosophy ends with the most unambiguous disavowal of the attribution of knowledge of the Trinity to philosophers:

Quantum intellegi datur, hinc philosophi sapientiae disciplinam tripertitam esse uoluerunt, immo tripertitam esse animaduertere potuerunt (neque enim ipsi instituerunt ut ita esset, sed ita esse potius inuenerunt), cuius una pars appellaretur physica, altera logica, tertia ethica [...] non quo sit consequens ut isti in his tribus aliquid secundum deum de trinitate...cogitauerint, quamuis Plato primus istam distributionem repperisse et commendasse dicatur, cui neque naturarum omnium auctor nisi deus uisus est neque intellegentiae dator neque amoris, quo bene beateque uiuitur, inspirator”.¹¹¹

The presence of a declaration of this kind in an apologetical work like the *De ciuitate dei* is of great significance. We have seen already that, when writing to ‘Platonists’ he admires,¹¹² Augustine is usually keener to stress the correspondence between Christians belief and their tenets –with the evident exclusion of the Incarnation- than he is inclined to do in more ‘theological’ works like the *De Trinitate*. For this reason, this explicit refusal to ascribe knowledge of the Trinity to ‘Platonists’ in the *De ciuitate dei* is crucial. Any finding whatsoever about the threefold dynamism of our being; any classification of reality in patterns like ‘origin, beauty and order’ or ‘existence, intelligence and love’ or whatever else might be declined in this threefold way; the fact that our fulfilment can somehow be expressed as going back to our origin, recovering our beauty and adhering to it: all this does not mean that philosophers knew the Trinity nor does it say anything about God the Trinity to those who do not know him.

In fact, the parallel between the confession of faith in the mystery of the Trinity and the threefold classification of reality discovered by philosophers does not seem to be intended as an apologetical or speculative tool to argue for the Trinitarian nature of God. The aim of this parallel should rather be looked for elsewhere and the sentence from the 11th book quoted at the beginning of this paragraph gives us a very useful lead into it: trying to find hints of the Trinity in creation aims at *exercere intentionem*.¹¹³ Indeed, the way such ‘exercise’ is carried through is related to the Trinity. However, just as we have seen with regard to Augustine’s use of ‘Platonic’ ontology, so this

¹¹¹ *ciu. Dei* 11.25 (CCL 48, 344).

¹¹² Cf. the case of Volusianus quoted above, *ep.* 137.12 (CSEL 44. 111-114), Lancel (1999), 445.

¹¹³ *ciu. Dei* 11.24 (CCL 48, 343f).

‘exercise’ is driven by ethical concerns. It is not to be understood as a means for the knowledge of immanent Trinitarian identity and life, alternative or complementary to revelation, but rather as instrumental to the identification of God’s image in us, with a view to its *reformatio*. Since this issue is developed at length in the *De Trinitate* and will be the object of the final section of this dissertation, for the moment we will confine ourselves to outline just some of its aspects.

Augustine resorts to ‘Platonic’ philosophy to spell out the threefold nature of our dependence on God with precise epistemological and ethical applications in mind. Just as God is at the origin not only of our existence but also of our very possibility of knowing and loving, so the fulfilment of our existence, of our quest for truth and of our desire for happiness rests on him. From the threefold structure of creation’s dependence on God, Augustine shifts towards the specific form this dependence takes for us from the viewpoint of our being in the *image of God*. Already in the *De ciuitate dei*, Augustine develops the main lines of the topic which will occupy him throughout most of the second half of the *De Trinitate*, from book 8 to 15. Resorting to his pervasive polemic against Scepticism, Augustine argues from certitude of our being, from knowledge of our being and from love of both our knowledge and our being, and leads his reader towards the identification of the threefold pattern of the image of God precisely in these three elements: being, knowledge and love.¹¹⁴

However, certitude about these three dimensions of our being is entirely instrumental to the discovery of the depth of our dependence on God, who is not only at the root of our being, but also of our very possibility of knowing and loving:

“Si ergo (i) natura nostra esset a nobis, (ii) profecto et nostram nos genuissemus sapientiam nec eam doctrina, id est aliunde discendo, percipere curaremus; (iii) et noster amor a nobis profectus et ad nos relatus et ad beate uiuendum sufficeret nec bono alio quo frueremur ullo indigeret; nunc uero (i) quia natura nostra, ut esset, deum habet auctorem, (ii) procul dubio ut uera sapiamus ipsum debemus habere doctorem, (iii) ipsum etiam ut beati simus suauitatis intimae largitorem”.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ *ciu. Dei* 10.26-28 (CCL 48, 345-349).

¹¹⁵ *ciu. Dei* 11.25 (CCL 48, 345).

The *exercitatio intentionis* mentioned above consists in the ‘collection’ of traces and hints of this threefold dependence of creation and more particularly of our being, knowledge and love on God.

“[...] tamquam per omnia, quae fecit mirabili stabilitate, currentes quasi quaedam eius alibi magis, alibi minus impressa uestigia colligamus; in nobis autem ipsis eius imaginem contuentes tamquam minor ille euangelicus filius ad nosmet ipsos reuersi surgamus et ad illum redeamus, a quo peccando recesseramus. Ibi (i) esse nostrum non habebit mortem, (ii) ibi nosse nostrum non habebit errorem, (iii) ibi amare nostrum non habebit offensionem”.¹¹⁶

This last text clearly shows that, for Augustine, this *exercitatio intentionis* is not a purely intellectual process, but does correspond to the process of conversion towards God. The reference to the parable of the Prodigal son¹¹⁷ and to our sinful condition gives full theological meaning to the three stages of this process of conversion, as Augustine sees it, namely the *contuitio imaginis*, the *reuersio ad nosmetipsos* and the act of going back to God. Luke’s gospel says about the Prodigal Son that “in se autem reversus dixit ‘ quanti mercennarii patris mei abundant panibus ego autem hic fame pereor’”; this is what Augustine calls the *reuersio ad semetipsos*, but which can also be seen as the discovery of our radical dependence on God, corresponding to the *contuitio imaginis*. Then, just as the Prodigal son “surgens venit ad patrem suum”, so Augustine says “surgamus et ad illum redeamus, a quo peccando recesseramus”.

5. CONCLUSION

Thus, the actual impact of Augustine’s optimistic declarations about ‘Platonism’ on a major theological topic, namely that of knowledge of the Trinity, confirms what we saw above when trying to determine the nature of this ‘Platonism’. That which Augustine mostly values in it is its ethical potential, mainly (though not always) with an apologetical view in mind. Resorting to philosophy is part of an ‘exercise’ in which faith has the upper hand. And even with regard to ontology, the Incarnation plays a crucial critical role and remains the stumbling block against which

¹¹⁶ *ciu. Dei* 11.28 (CCL 48, 348).

¹¹⁷ Luke 15.11-32.

philosophy's only destiny is to be judged and to undergo a 'conversion' which puts it at the service of our renewal in the image of God.

On this basis, we can now go back to the *De Trinitate*. So far, the evidence we have collected on the issue of knowledge of philosophers has been mainly negative: the delimitation of the pretention to independent philosophical inquiry stems from the epistemological consequences of our *prauitas* and our *auersio* from truth. Because of the inseparability between knowledge and love, our sinfulness is as damaging with regard to *beatitudo* as it is to the possibility of knowing God, i.e. of reaching what counts as *real* knowledge of God.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that this pessimistic attitude towards philosophy is the consequence of a disillusion. On the contrary, Augustine seems to have been always unable to suppress an overpowering tendency towards a more positive *practical* attitude towards philosophy than his declarations, for example in the *De Trinitate*, might lead to think. The fundamental reason for this apparent ambivalence (betrayed by many of the texts quoted above) is that his critical attitude towards philosophy was above all the consequence of positive theological truths, namely the Incarnation, the unicity of Christ's Mediation and above all his death on the cross. Flowing from belief in Christ, sinfulness is a matter of faith before being a matter of experience and becomes a matter of experience only insofar as faith in Christ grows deeper.

This is why, the fundamental theological presupposition of Augustine's attitude towards philosophy is his Christology and this explains why his most scathing criticisms of philosophers in the *De Trinitate* occur precisely in the books devoted to Christology, the 4th and the 13th, to analysis of which we now turn.

IV. CHRISTOLOGY, SOTERIOLOGY AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

1. THE INCARNATION

i. Christ

Our findings so far have been that our way to both happiness and truth -i.e. to *fruitio* and *contemplatio* of God- is barred by our sinfulness and the mortal condition which stems from it. However confusedly, *aeternitas*, *ueritas* and *beatitudo* or *caritas* do not cease to be the object of our deepest desires, even though our sinfulness prevents us from union with them. It would be a mistake, however, to think that sinfulness –linked to our *mutabilitas*, that is to our contingency- is equated with temporal and bodily reality. Augustine is never tired of repeating that the problem lies in our will, in our love: “ad aeterna capessenda idonei non eramus sordesque peccatorum nos prae-grauabant temporalium rerum amore contractae”.¹ This means that the remedy to this *infirmity*, far from consisting in a flight away from *temporalia*, will find in these very *temporalia* the necessary ground for the conversion of our love from *cupiditas* to *dilectio*: “Purgari autem ut contemperaremur aeternis non nisi per temporalia possemus qualibus iam contemperati tenebamur”.²

Nevertheless, this conversion is not within our own power nor can *temporalia* play any mediating role with regard to the contemplation of eternal realities. We have seen how Augustine’s main complaint against philosophers was precisely their pretension to be able to be purified *propria uirtute*. Faith is the only remedy. He praises Plato for a sentence *profecto uera* from the *Timaeus*:

¹ 4.24 (191).

² 4.24 (191).

“Quantum ad id quod ortum est aeternitas ualet, tantum ad fidem ueritas”.³ The faith Augustine has in mind, of course, is of a completely different order as compared to the Platonic πίστις which, although truthful, lacks a proper foundation both because it is not knowledge of the universal and because its object is constantly in becoming. For Augustine, both the *aeternitas* which *ualet ad id quod ortum est* and the *ueritas* which *ualet ad fidem* are to be identified with Christ. The epistemological hiatus between what is temporal and what is eternal, between what is the object of faith and what is the object of contemplation, is overcome only in and by Christ. This is what Augustine states with regard to *beatitudo* in the following passage: “Quia enim homo ad beatitudinem sequi non debebat nisi deum et sentire non poterat deum, sequendo deum hominem factum sequeretur simul et quem sentire poterat et quem sequi debebat”.⁴ In the Incarnation, some *temporalia* are given to us which allow us to “perceive” (*sentire*) God, while continuing to demand faith. The balance between these two elements –the mediatory role of *temporalia* in Christ and faith- is crucial to the understanding of Augustine’s approach to the knowledge of God. He is not concerned with epistemology as such, but with sin and reconciliation. Christ does not become an epistemological ‘function’ destined to solve a Platonic aporia between time and eternity, realm of senses and realm of ideas, πίστις and νόσις.⁵ If, in Christ, what pertains to his humanity becomes for us the way (*uia*) to *beatitudo* and vision of God, it is through faith, that is to say through constant adhesion to the person of the only Mediator between God and us, the Word made flesh.

To grasp this point, we must explore the tight connexion Augustine establishes between Incarnation and knowledge of God.

ii. Incarnation and knowledge of God

The pre-Chalcedonian Christology of the *De Trinitate*, is remarkably consistent and precise even though the vocabulary is not yet fixed. For example, the use of the word *persona* seems slightly

³ 4.24 (191), quoting Plato, *Timaeus*, 29C.

⁴ 7.5 (253).

⁵ Cf. Gilson (1947), 25-39

ambivalent: sometimes it designates the result of the union, sometimes the person of the Son uniting human nature to himself. Thus, one way of talking about the Incarnation resorts to the vocabulary of *copulatio* and *commixtio* not of two natures, but of the man with the Word of God, resulting in the unity of *one person*: “Verbo dei ad unitatem personae copulatus, et quodam modo commixtus est homo”.⁶ Despite this way of using the word *persona* to designate the result of the union which seems to anticipate the formula of Chalcedon, Augustine does not favour the symmetrical approach to the two natures of Christ we find later in both Chalcedon and Leo’s *Tomus ad Flavianum*. His approach is more akin to that of Cyril of Alexandria, simply because it is moulded from the Prologue of the Gospel of John and from the Christological hymn of Philippians. If Augustine is capable of statements like the following: “hoc totum et deus dicatur propter deum et homo propter hominem,” it is only after he has stressed the personal action of the Word of God as the agent of the Incarnation: “Si autem quaeritur ipsa incarnatio quomodo facta sit, ipsum dei uerbum dico carnem factum, id est hominem factum, non tamen in hoc quod factum est conuersum atque mutatum, ita sane factum ut ibi sit non tantum uerbum dei et hominis caro sed etiam rationalis hominis anima”.⁷ This is echoed in the vocabulary of *susceptio* and *assumptio* of either *humanitas* or *homo/caro* (*homo* and *caro* are for him synonymous).⁸ The subject, however, of this action is always the Word of God himself: “ipse filius dei, uerbum dei et idem ipse mediator dei et hominum filius hominis, aequalis patri per diuinitatis unitatem et particeps noster per humanitatis susceptionem”.⁹

⁶ 4.30 (201).

⁷ 4.31 (203f).

⁸ 2.11 (94).

⁹ 4.12 (176). Van Bavel (1954), 178 attributes to Augustine the introduction of the word *persona* for Christology, in the Latin tradition at least, as the result of “efforts personnels et laborieux” rather than from Greek influence. In this process, Van Bavel highlights 3 stages: “(a) le Christ homme porte la personne de la Sagesse; (b) la personne du Verbe assume une nature humaine dans l’unité de sa personne; (c) le Christ une seule personne en deux natures”. Cf. also Grillmeier (1965), 408: “for Augustine the unity of person in Christ was not merely the result of a synthesis of two natures. It is rather the pre-existent person of the Word who is the focal point of this unity and who ‘takes up’ the human nature ‘into the unity of his person’ (*in unitatem personae suae...*)”.

The personal agency of the Son of God in the Incarnation is highlighted through the Trinitarian meaning of *persona* which this time designates not the result of the *assumptio*, but its agent: “Ideo autem nusquam scriptum est quod deus pater maior sit spiritu sancto, uel spiritus sanctus minor deo patre, quia non sic est assumpta creatura in qua appareret spiritus sanctus sicut assumptus est filius hominis in qua forma ipsius uerbi dei persona praesentaretur”.¹⁰ The very person of the Word of God presents himself in the form of a son of man.

The vocabulary of *assumptio* and *susceptio* did not have the Nestorian overtones it was to acquire only later and, anyway, it regularly alternates with that of *factum* but not *conuersum atque mutatum*.¹¹ the person of the Word unites the man/flesh to himself, but is not changed into this same man/flesh.

Crucial, however, both for his Christology and the theological epistemology which depends on it, is Augustine’s careful understanding of the relation between the man and the *Verbum* which not only explicitly counters any Ebionite drift, and this for soteriological reasons, but also clearly shows a firm doctrine of the hypostatic union even without the vocabulary formulated by theological reflection some centuries later.¹²

¹⁰ 2.11 (93f).

¹¹ 1.14 (46); 4.31 (203).

¹² Only progressively did Augustine become aware of the epistemological implications of the different ways of approaching the mystery of the Incarnation. An evolution in his Christological thought is acknowledged by Van Bavel (1954), 63 : “Nous croyons qu’on peut même constater une légère évolution chez saint Augustin en ce sens qu’au fil des années, la communication des idiomes prend le dessus sur la distinction des natures”. A noteworthy evolution in this respect can be detected in a passage from the *De agone christiano* [396], owing to the marked anti-adoptionist stance of this catechetical writing. The crucial difference between Christ and any other holy man depends on their opposite relation to the Son as *sapientia*. Christ is not only a wise man, he is *sapientia* itself. He does not only become wise through God’s wisdom but he “bears the very person of God’s Wisdom” (“sustinere personam sapientiae dei” or, some lines down, “personam gerit”): “Et propterea sapientia dei, et uerbum in principio per quod facta sunt omnia, non sic assumpsit illum hominem ut ceteros sanctos; sed multo excellentius, multoque sublimius: quomodo ipsum solum adsumi oportuit, in quo sapientia hominibus appareret, sicut eam uisibiliter decebat ostendi” (*agon* xx.22, CSEL 41, 123) and “unus mediator dei et hominum homo Christus Iesus, qui sapientiae ipsius, per quam sapientes fiunt quicumque homines, non solum beneficium habet, sed etiam personam gerit” (*agon* xx.22, CSEL 41, 123). Adoptionism comes to the fore again during the Pelagian controversy: Pelagius’ heresy, as Augustine interprets it, depends on an Adoptionist form of Christology, cf. Van Bavel (1954), 39 : “On se croirait parfois en pleine controverse adoptioniste!”. Since “ideo necessarium esse Christi nomen, ut per eius euangelium discamus quemadmodum uiuere debeamus, non etiam ut eius adiuuemur gratia, quo bene uiuamus” [*nat. et gr.* 40.47, CSEL 60, 267f], so it is not surprising that Augustine uses Paul’s assertions in Galatians 2.21 and 5.11 to protest that if this is the case, “*Christus gratis mortuus est*” and that through this

Already in the passage quoted above, Augustine draws a sharp distinction between Christ and any other holy or wise man:

“Ideo autem nusquam scriptum est quod deus pater maior sit spiritu sancto, uel spiritus sanctus minor deo patre, quia non sic est assumpta creatura in qua appareret spiritus sanctus sicut assumptus est filius hominis in qua forma ipsius uerbi dei persona praesentaretur; non ut haberet uerbum dei sicut alii sancti sapientes, sed prae participibus suis; non utique quod amplius habebat uerbum ut esset quam ceteri excellentiore sapientia, sed quod ipsum uerbum erat. Aliud est enim uerbum in carne, aliud uerbum caro; id est aliud est uerbum in homine, aliud uerbum homo”.¹³

The soteriological connotations of this distinction between Christ and any other holy or wise man are made more explicit in the 13th book, where Augustine develops the reasons of the *congruitas* of the Incarnation, i.e. its fittingness, a key idea in his soteriology, as we shall see shortly. The Incarnation teaches us that we are saved by grace, without any previous merits on our part:¹⁴

“Deinde ut gratia dei nobis sine ullis praecedentibus meritis in homine Christo commendaretur quia nec ipse ut tanta unitate uero deo coniunctus una cum illo persona filius dei fieret ullis est praecedentibus meritis assecutus, sed ex quo esse homo coepit, ex illo est et deus, unde dictum est: *Verbum caro factum est*”.¹⁵

In an unusual way, here the union is envisaged from the ‘ascendent’ viewpoint of Christ and not within the ‘descendent’ trajectory of the Word of God. *Persona* designates the result of the union, the *coniunctio*, of Christ with the Son of God. Such an approach could easily slip into the assertion

form of *sapientia carnis* “euacuatur crux Christi” [*nat. et gr.* 40.47, CSEL 60, 268]. If Christ’s salvation is reduced to his teaching, both the mystery of his Incarnation and his death on the cross are made redundant. Cf. also *pecc. mer.* 2.xvii.27 (CSEL 60, 90f) and *praes. Dei (ep.* 187) 13.40 (CSEL 57, 117) “Singularis ergo est illa susceptio, nec cum hominibus aliquibus sanctis quantalibet sapientia et sanctitate praestantibus, ullo modo potest esse communis. Ubi diuinae gratiae satis perspicuum clarumque documentum est”.

¹³ 2.11 (93f).

¹⁴ We have here an echo of the Pelagian controversy, cf. Van Bavel (1954), 37: “La controverse pélagienne donna à saint Augustin l’occasion d’approfondir sa christologie; obligé qu’il fut de chercher un exemple absolu de la grâce, sa pensée se porta vers le Christ comme prototype de toute grâce”. Dodaro (1991) argues that “the link between the perichoresis involved in religious knowledge and Christology (both of which are present in *sacramentum*) underwent considerable development during the Pelagian controversy” [280]. The latter’s article is insightful and offers a very valuable list of texts on this issue. At the same time, Dodaro’s attempt to read Rahnerian epistemology into Augustine’s thought [274] puts some strain on the texts. On the influence of the Pelagian controversy on the *De Trinitate*, Plagnieux (1954) opts for an early composition of most of the *De Trinitate* and sees traces of the anti-Pelagian controversy only in the additions Augustine mentions in his *Ep.* 174 (CCL 50, 26) [819]. However, he himself sees traces of the anti-Pelagian soteriological doctrine throughout the 4th book, well beyond the Prologue added at the time of the final editing. This militates in favour of the idea that the 4th book as a whole was written at the time (or after) the Pelagian controversy, cf. Hombert (2000), 56-80, cf. this dissertation, 1f, note 4. At the same time, however, Plagnieux wisely warns that Augustine “n’a pas attendu Pélage pour sentir sa misère et pour implorer la grâce de l’unique sauveur” [825].

of two subjects in Christ, the man and the Logos, as for example in Theodore of Mopsuestia.¹⁶ Instead we have a remarkably clear statement of what sounds very much like the later doctrine of the ‘anhypostatic’ character of the humanity of Christ:¹⁷ as soon as the man comes into existence, he is God. There is no autonomous existence of Christ’s humanity: in Christ we have to do with God himself.¹⁸ What immediately follows confirms this interpretation: what is at stake in the Incarnation and the cross is not the humility of the man Jesus, but the *humilitas dei*, “Est etiam illud ut superbia hominis quae maximo impedimento est ne inhaereatur deo per tantam dei humilitatem redargui posset atque sanari”.¹⁹ Just in the same way, the obedience of Christ on the cross *is* the obedience of God the Son to God the Father: “Quod autem maius obedientiae nobis praeberetur

¹⁵ 13.22 (412f) . Cf. *ench.* 11.36 (CCL 46, 69f) and *Trin* 2.8 (89): “Eo ipso missum filium quo factus est ex muliere”.

¹⁶ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *On the Incarnation VII*, Ed. Swete H. B. *Minor Epistles of St. Paul*, Cambridge 1880-2, II, 293-7.

¹⁷ The word ‘anhypostatic’ is used here in the technical sense it has assumed in theology since the 16th century, cf. Daley (1998), 50f, and in Karl Barth, well summed-up by Webster (1998): “To assert that the humanity of Christ is anhypostatic is to state in negative terms that God is subject and agent in the human career of Jesus” [95] and “even in the humanity of Christ, the content of revelation as well as the subject is God alone” [94]. Webster (2001) adds that Christ’s “humanity is thus not self-existent, but comes to exist in the event of the Word’s ‘procession’. In effect, this reinforces what is secured by speaking of the Word’s *assumption* of humanity, namely that –against adoptionism- Jesus Christ is not merely a human being who pre-exists the action of the Word and is subsequently exalted to union with him; rather, he is himself the sheerly creative life-act of the Word or Son of God” [138]. Lang (1998) upholds the patristic roots of this doctrine, even though he does not trace it back to Leontius of Byzantium, but to John of Damascus, “who achieved an original synthesis in which the Chalcedonian Christology of two natures in one *ὑπόστασις* was combined with the radical asymmetry of the hypostatic union of the divine and the human nature in the *ὑπόστασις* of the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity” [657].

¹⁸ In the *Enchiridion* [421-422], belonging to the period of the Pelagian controversy, together with the idea that the mystery of Incarnation exemplifies grace (*ench.* 11.36, CCL 46, 69), we also are offered a clear instance of the same assertion of hypostatic union as in the *De Trinitate*: “Nempe ex quo esse homo coepit, non aliud coepit esse quam dei filius; et hoc unicus, et propter deum uerbum, quod illo suscepto caro factum est, utique deus: ut quemadmodum est una persona quilibet homo, anima scilicet rationalis et caro, ita sit Christus una persona, uerbum et homo” [*ench.* 11.36 (CCL 46, 69); cf. the list of similar passages given by Van Bavel (1954), 39: *enchir.* 12.40 (CCL 46, 72); *corrupt.* 11.30 (PL 44, 934); *praed. sanct.* 15.30f (PL 44, 981ff); c. *Iul. imp.* 1.138; 4.84 (CSEL 85/1, 153f)]. This is a feature of Augustine’s Christology very well-documented: “Dès le premier instant de son existence, la nature humaine du Christ était unie personnellement au Verbe. Celle-ci ne commençait même à exister que par sa susception en la personne du Verbe. Une nature humaine et le Verbe formèrent donc une seule personne, dès que le Verbe devint homme. Il n’y eut pas un instant où il fut purement homme sans être en même temps Fils unique de Dieu, car c’est vraiment le Fils de Dieu que la Vierge a conçu et mis au monde”, Van Bavel (1954), 39 and also 22 and 26. Cf. also Madec (1989), 273. This text from the *Enchiridion* is also important because such a clear grasp on Christology goes together with one of the most explicit assertions of the fact that through Christ’s human nature, and thus in faith, *ueritas* makes itself available to us: “Veritas quippe ipsa, unigenitus dei filius, non gratia, sed natura, gratia suscepit hominem tanta unitate personae, ut idem ipse esset etiam hominis filius” (*ench.* 11.36, CCL 46, 70).

exemplum qui per inobedientiam perieramus quam deo patri deus filius obediens usque ad mortem crucis?”.²⁰ Thus, the victory of Christ over sin and death is such that man has nothing to boast about: it is God’s victory. In Augustine’s own words: “qui autem uicit et homo et deus erat, et ideo sic uicit natus ex uirgine quia deus humiliter, non quomodo alios sanctos regebat illum hominem, sed gerebat”.²¹ Jesus is not the human expression of God’s humility and obedience. Rather, in Christ, we encounter God himself in his humility and in his obedience.

This last statement comes at the end of the 13th book of the *De Trinitate*. It is the climax of the long Christological argument explicitly developed in the first four books and then in the 13th –and also underlying the rest of the treatise– and it constitutes the theological presupposition for the point Augustine is about to make about the relation between *scientia* and *sapientia*.²² The formulation of hypostatic union we have just seen entails that indeed God makes himself known in Christ through temporal and bodily realities. If the humility of Christ is the humility of God, this means that our *scientia* is connected with *sapientia* once again, thus overcoming the consequences of our sinfulness and *mutabilitas* for our knowledge of God. This however does not mean that these *temporalia* give us a purchase on God. Christ’s humanity is not revelatory as such, but only through faith. This point we must now elucidate.

The meaning of Augustine’s views on the relation between *fides* and *ueritas* in the 4th book²³ can be fully appreciated only against the background of the understanding of hypostatic union we have just analysed. In an exceptionally dense passage, he begins by stating that just as disorderly love for *temporalia* was the expression of our sinful condition, so these same *temporalia* are necessary to the healing process: there are *utilia temporalia* which “suscipiunt sanandos et traiciunt ad aeterna sanatos”. At this stage (we are in the 4th book), he has not yet formulated the distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia*, the former concerning the rational role of the mind in temporal matters –

¹⁹ 13.22 (412f). Cf. also 1.28 (69) “recte dicitur et deus crucifixus”.

²⁰ 13.22 (413).

²¹ 13.23 (414).

²² 13.24–26 (415–420).

²³ 4.24 (191ff).

dealing with both *cognitio* and *actio*- the latter concerning the superior function of the same rational mind engaged in the contemplation of eternal things, and the necessity of both for Christian life.²⁴ Yet this distinction can be sensed behind the statement that “*Mens autem rationalis sicut purgata contemplationem debet rebus aeternis, sic purganda temporalibus fidem. [...] Nunc ergo adhibemus fidem rebus temporaliter gestis propter nos et per ipsam mundamur ut cum ad speciem uenerimus quemadmodum succedit fidei ueritas ita mortalitati succedat aeternitas*”.²⁵ The way *ueritas* will take over from *fides* however is not exactly like the replacement of one thing by another. They both have the same object, even though each perceives this same object in a different way. This is explained by the hypostatic union :

“Quod donec fiat et ut fiat [...] *ipsa ueritas patri coaeterna de terra orta est cum filius dei sic uenit ut fieret filius hominis et ipse in se exciperet fidem nostram qua nos perduceret ad ueritatem suam* qui sic suscepit mortalitatem nostram ut non amitteret aeternitatem suam. [...] Ita ergo nos purgari oportebat ut ille nobis fieret ortus qui maneret aeternus *ne alter nobis esset in fide, alter in ueritate*; nec ab eo quod orti sumus ad aeterna transire possemus nisi aeterno per ortum nostrum nobis sociato ad aeternitatem ipsius traiceremur”.²⁶

We notice again the descending approach of the Incarnation: the Word of God, *ipsa ueritas patri coeterna*, became incarnate in such a way as to remain eternal, which is another way of saying that in Christ we have to do with God himself. The aim was that *ne alter nobis esset in fide, alter in ueritate*, i.e. that God might become the very object of our faith just as truly as he will become the object of our vision when we will contemplate him as *ueritas*. If he can ‘capture’ –*excipere*– our faith in himself to lead us to his truth, it is because he really makes himself known in this same faith. Thus, Augustine can say that “*Nunc illuc quodam modo secuta est fides nostra quo ascendit in quem credidimus*”.²⁷ The passage from faith to vision will not consist in a change of the object of our knowledge, but in a different mode of perception of the same object which gives himself to us already now, *nunc*.

²⁴ 13.1 (381).

²⁵ 4.24 (191).

²⁶ 4.24 (192).

²⁷ 4.24 (192).

Finally, let us notice that Augustine is talking about *faith*: the fact that in Christ we have to do with God himself is not a self-evident truth. Nor can we say that in Christ we have a ‘grasp’ on God. It is rather the contrary: in Christ God *can* truly make himself known to us, through the conversion of our love he himself operates in us through the same Christ. In Christ, through the Holy Spirit, we go from *cupiditas scientiae* to *caritas sapientiae*, not however through discarding *scientia*, but through *caritas scientiae* as well, since Christ is both our *scientia* and our *sapientia*.²⁸

iii. The sending (*missio*) of the Son and the theme of *scientia* and *sapientia*

We are now able to perceive the meaning and the depth of a sentence taken from the 4th book which constitutes the outcome of the long discussion on missions of the first four books of the *De Trinitate*:

“Ecce ad quod missus est filius dei; immo uero ecce quod est missum esse filium dei. Quaecumque propter faciendam fidem qua mundaremur ad contemplandam ueritatem in rebus ortis ab aeternitate prolatis et ad aeternitatem relatis temporaliter gesta sunt aut testimonia missionis huius fuerunt aut ipsa missio filii dei. Sed testimonia quaedam uenturum praenuntiauerunt; quaedam uenisse testata sunt”.²⁹

Everything which is performed in the temporal realm and has its origin and its aim in eternity is either a *missio* or a testimony to it. The abstract terms of this definition of *missio* refer to a theological issue: this term covers the theophanies or manifestations of God in the Old Testament (as testimonies to *missiones*), the Incarnation and the sending of the Holy Spirit in the New

²⁸ Cf. the section of this dissertation on the Holy Spirit, 127-148. Cf. 7.5 (253) where Augustine invites to adhere to Christ through the *caritas* poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

²⁹ 4.25 (193). Cf. *cons. Eu.* 1.xxxv.53 (CSEL 43, 58ff) [404-405?], a text astonishingly similar to *Trin.* 4.24 (191), included the same quotation of Plato’s *Timaeus* “Quantum ad id quod ortum est aeternitas ualeat, tantum ad fidem ueritas”. In Christ, *ueritas* and *fides*, eternity and time, are no more opposed to each other, with a devaluation of the latter to the advantage of the former. Well in advance on the *ἐνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν* of Chalcedon, the reiteration of *ipse* already appears to be the simplest and the most effective stylistic device for an orthodox confession of the mystery of the Incarnation: “cum sit *ipse* Christus sapientia dei ...” and “ut eadem *ipsa* dei sapientia ad unitatem personae suae homine assumpto...” etc... The identity between Christ and *sapientia dei* entails that the object of faith through temporal realities is the very truth of eternal realities, with the only difference of the modality of knowledge. Through faith, *ueritas* really makes itself available to us. In Christ, “eadem ipsa dei sapientia, ad unitatem personae suae homine adsumpto, in quo temporaliter nasceretur, uiueret, moreretur, resurgeret”, makes us *sapientes*. Finally, the Trinitarian dynamic of access to wisdom is also suggested in this text through the mention of the role of the Holy Spirit: “Quapropter, cum sit ipse Christus sapientia dei, per quam creata sunt omnia, cumque nullae mentes rationales sive angelorum sive hominum, nisi participatione ipsius sapientes fiant, *cui per spiritum sanctum*,

Testament (the *missiones* properly speaking). The meaning of the definition, therefore, is that despite the hiatus established by sin between our *scientia* and *sapientia*, between on the one hand our knowledge and use of temporal realities and, on the other hand, the knowledge and the *fruitio* of God, a new possibility of overcoming this disjunction has been inaugurated in the Old Testament and completed in the New Testament from God's side.

Therefore, applied to Christ, this definition of *missio* can be paraphrased as follows: the Incarnation of Christ -his *missio*- brings about a series of temporal realities -those things which *temporaliter gesta sunt*, i.e. Christ's human nature, his deeds and his words- which have their ὑπόστασις in the Son of God himself. As a result, they have no existence, and therefore *meaning*, other than that which is given to them by their existence in the Son of God, i.e. the Word of God, the only and most perfect expression of the Father because of his equality with the Father – i.e. they are *ab aeternitate prolata*. This is why these same actions which *temporaliter gesta sunt* become a way to the Father and lead us to the contemplation of *ueritas*, i.e. they are *ad aeternitatem relata*.

This, however, only happens through faith, *propter faciendam fidem*, which is both the result of this process in us and the mode of our participation in it in this life. This point is crucial. Just as the Son could not be seen in the Old Testament and theophanies and manifestations only happened through angels or through material realities, so in the Incarnation itself, even in the hypostatic union, even after having been 'sent' -*missus*- as equal to the Father, the Son cannot be seen: "Quomodo ergo ante istam plenitudinem temporis qua eum mitti oportebat priusquam missus esset uideri a patribus potuit cum eis angelica quaedam uisa demonstrarentur, quando nec iam missus sicut aequalis est patri uidebatur?"³⁰ It is only as object of faith through *dilectio* that Christ's humanity and his deeds allow us to see (i.e. know) the Father. Is this not the meaning of what Jesus says to Philip –we are still quoting Augustine-: "Vnde enim dicit Philippo a quo utique sicut a ceteris et ab ipsis a quibus crucifixus est in carne uidebatur: *Tanto tempore uobiscum sum et non*

per quem caritas in cordibus nostris diffunditur, inhaeremus, quae trinitas unus deus est [...]", *cons. Eu.* 1.xxxv.53 (CSEL 43, 58f).

cognouistis me? Philippe, qui me uidit uidit et patrem, nisi quia uidebatur et non uidebatur?”.³¹ The humanity which the *Verbum* took in the Incarnation was offered to our faith: “carnem quod uerbum in plenitudine temporis factum erat suscipiendae nostrae fidei porrigebat”; his divinity will be object of contemplation only in the afterlife: “ipsum autem *uerbum per quod omnia facta erant purgatae per fidem menti contemplandum in aeternitate seruabat*”.³²

Therefore, *missio* does not only coincide with a temporal reality ‘captured’ by God to be used as a means of self-manifestation, but also coincides with the grace which allows us to know God through this same temporal reality: “Non ergo eo ipso quo de patre natus est missus dicitur filius, sed (i) uel eo quod apparuit huic mundo uerbum caro factum unde dicit: *A patre exii et ueni in hunc mundum*, (ii) uel eo quod ex tempore cuiusquam mente percipitur”.³³ This idea is again conveyed by another sentence of the same passage where Augustine explains that when someone, in the course of his spiritual progress in time, comes to the knowledge of God -obviously through faith- we also talk about *missio*, but we do not say that this *missio* is *in hunc mundum* as Scripture does with the visible manifestation of the Son of God in Christ. In fact, to the extent that what we know really is God, we ourselves are no more *in hoc mundo*. This means that knowledge of God is a grace. Temporal realities, even those which God himself uses for the purpose of making himself known, do not put knowledge of God at our disposal. This knowledge remains a matter of faith and *dilectio*. This is stated again in the following sentence: “Et tunc unicuique mittitur cum a quoquam cognoscitur atque percipitur quantum cognosci et percipi potest pro captu uel proficientis in deum uel perfectae in deo animae rationalis”.³⁴ The whole argument of the *De Trinitate*, as we shall see, explains that the progress of the rational soul in God is the result of faith and *dilectio* or, rather, of the faith which works through *dilectio*. It is a matter of conversion of our love from *cupiditas* to *dilectio*. This point we shall develop in our section on the Holy Spirit.

³⁰ 4.26 (194f).

³¹ 4.26 (195).

³² 4.26 (195).

³³ 4.28 (198).

³⁴ 4.28 (198).

On this basis, we can understand what Augustine means by distinguishing between *scientia* and *sapientia* in the 13th book while identifying them both with Christ. First of all, he states that “omnia quae pro nobis uerbum caro factum temporaliter et localiter fecit et pertulit secundum distinctionem quam demonstrare suscepimus ad scientiam pertinent non ad sapientiam. Quod autem uerbum est sine tempore et sine loco est patri coaeternum et ubique totum, de quo si quisquam potest quantum potest ueracem proferre sermonem, sermo erit ille sapientiae”.³⁵ It is evident that this distinction restates what we have seen above, i.e. that knowledge of what the Word did in his flesh [*scientia*] does not necessarily and, one would say, ‘automatically’ constitute knowledge of the Word himself and, through him, of the Father; the latter is the object of *sapientia*.

Augustine is fond of quoting a sentence from Colossians where Paul states that in “Christo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae absconditi”.³⁶ This is a way of expressing the relation between hypostatic union and knowledge of God according to what we have seen so far. It is here that we find the well-known, albeit often misinterpreted³⁷ sentence which follows: “Scientia ergo nostra Christus est, sapientia quoque nostra idem Christus est. Ipse nobis fidem de rebus temporalibus inserit; ipse de sempiternis exhibet ueritatem. Per ipsum pergimus ad ipsum, tendimus per scientiam ad sapientiam; ab uno tamen eodemque Christo non recedimus *in quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae absconditi*. Sed nunc de scientia loquimur, post de sapientia quantum ipse donauerit locuturi”.³⁸ The object of both *scientia* and *sapientia* is the same, even though now it is available through faith only, whereas in the afterlife it will be object of *contemplatio*.

This also explains the slightly puzzling end of the 13th book, where Augustine states that the triad of faith, although pertaining to the inner man, is not yet *the* image of God he is looking for. Talk about triads and the image of God –as we shall see– is a rhetorical device to ‘delight’ the reader while at the same time persuading him of the necessity of the conversion of our love if we want to see (know) God the Trinity. What Augustine means is that, although *the object* of faith

³⁵ 13.24 (415).

³⁶ Colossians 2.3. Notice the *absconditi*, ‘hidden’.

coincides with the object of *contemplatio* or *sapientia*, the mode through which it is perceived (faith) still is hidden –we still see in *per speculum in aenigmate*, until the day we shall know *facie ad faciem*.³⁹

Faith does not only consist in the words heard, nor yet in those kept in our memory: these still belong to the outer man, says Augustine, i.e. they are not a matter of real knowledge and love. Faith is lived out according to the ‘inner man’, i.e. ‘authentically’, when what is kept and remembered –i.e. what we hear in preaching, what is commanded and what is promised- becomes object of *dilectio*: “Si autem quod uerba illa significant teneat et recolat, iam quidem aliquid interioris hominis agit, sed nondum dicendus uel putandus est uiuere secundum interioris hominis trinitatem si ea non diligit quae ibi praedicantur, praecipiuntur, promittuntur”.⁴⁰ Our faith is authentic only when that which is proclaimed, commanded and promised to us is believed as true and becomes object of love: “Cum autem uera esse creduntur et quae ibi diligenda sunt diliguntur, iam secundum trinitatem interioris hominis uiuitur; secundum hoc enim uiuit quisque quod diligit”.⁴¹ Authentic faith works through love, as Augustine is fond of repeating through combining Romans and Galatians: “*iustus ex fide uiuit, quae fides per dilectionem operatur*”.⁴²

To make this point clearer, we have briefly to anticipate the 14th book, where Augustine finally unveils the real triad which is image of God, i.e. the triad of *sapientia* which consists in memory, knowledge and love of God. Our image of God does not simply consist in the fact that we are memory, knowledge and love, but in the fact that God becomes the object of our memory, knowledge and love –something possible only thanks to his self-manifestation and self-giving in Christ and the Holy Spirit. Now, the triad of faith/*scientia* of the 13th book has exactly the same object: God. What makes it a less perfect triad is the fact that God is remembered and known through faith, which works through *dilectio*. Insofar as, through God’s ever-free self-unveiling act in Christ through the Holy Spirit, we really know God, faith is real knowledge of God and therefore it

³⁷ Cf. Du Roy’s interpretation of the pattern *uia/patria*, this dissertation, 5.

³⁸ 13.24 (416f).

³⁹ 1 Corinthians 13.12, constantly quoted by Augustine to this effect, cf. for example 14.23 (455).

⁴⁰ 13.26 (419).

⁴¹ 13.26 (419).

belongs to the 'inner man'. Insofar, however, as it is not yet the vision face-to-face, it is not yet what can be properly called *the* image of God in us i.e. the triad of *sapientia* of the 14th book.

Thus, the articulation between faith and *uisio* [or *contemplatio* or *sapientia*] in relation to the Incarnation or hypostatic union of Christ that we have explored so far can be summed up as follows: even though the *modality* of faith and of *uisio* are different, the *object* is the same, i.e. God revealing himself in Christ through the Holy Spirit. The identity of the object of both faith and *uisio* is grounded in the hypostatic union: Christ is our *scientia* and our *sapientia*.

This conclusion implies that knowledge of God is characterized by an inherent eschatological dimension: God has made himself known once for all in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. In this side of the eschaton, through faith, we already are granted this objective knowledge of God through faith even though this same knowledge of God will acquire the character of a *uisio* or a *contemplatio* only in the other side of the eschatology. Before looking at Augustine's construal of this eschatological dimension of knowledge of God, however, we still have to consider the other fundamental aspect of Augustine's epistemology, i.e. the conversion of our love from *cupiditas* to *dilectio*.

2. CHRIST'S SACRIFICE AND HIS MEDIATORY ROLE

i. The conversion of love

When dealing with Augustine's powerfully integrated thought, distinctions can be envisaged only provisionally and with a keen awareness of their artificial character. This is particularly true with regard to the articulation between knowledge and love: in Augustinian terms, each is utterly unintelligible without the other.

This premise is required at the junction between the aspect of the Christology of the *De Trinitate* we have explored so far, concerning the issue of the Incarnation and of knowledge (under the

⁴² 13.26 (419) quoting Romans 1.17 and Galatians 3.11.

aspect of the articulation between *scientia* and *sapientia*), and the other aspect concerning the issue of the conversion of our will from *cupiditas* to *dilectio* in connection with redemption. Indeed, we have seen already how tightly these two issues are intertwined: behind the hiatus between *scientia* and *sapientia*, there is our sinfulness, usually expressed in terms of *cupiditas*, i.e. as a failure of our will.⁴³ Conversion consists in the passage from *concupiscentia scientiae* to the *caritas sapientiae*.⁴⁴ Then, while proper knowledge of God depends on *caritas* or *dilectio*, i.e. on the right kind of love, the conversion of love is the result of the renewal of man *in agnitione Dei*: “In agnitione igitur dei iustitiaeque et sanctitate ueritatis qui de die in diem proficiendo renouatur transfert amorem a temporalibus ad aeterna, a uisibilibus ad intellegibilia, a carnalibus ad spiritalia, atque ab istis cupiditatem frenare atque minuere illisque se caritate alligare diligenter insistit”.⁴⁵ The conversion of our love is described here as a process which depends on knowledge of the justice and the holiness of truth. Once again, such abstract terms refer to theological realities and more precisely to the justice and the holiness of Christ, particularly in his redeeming activity. Therefore, if, on the one hand, knowledge and love cannot be separated and are reformed simultaneously both in the Incarnation and in the death of Christ on the cross, on the other hand, while reformation of knowledge is more associated with the Incarnation, conversion of love is more associated with Christ’s *sacrificium*.

ii. The devil’s rights

As we tackle this crucial aspect of Augustine’s Christology, we must resist the temptation to eschew one of its prominent features –at least materially- which we could provisionally label ‘the issue of the devil’s rights’. Augustine considers the devil a spiritual creature, the first to have rebelled against God. He then deceived the human race and carried it away in his own fall.⁴⁶ At the same time, this insistence on the role of the devil does not downplay our moral responsibility with

⁴³ 4.24 (191).

⁴⁴ cf. 4.12 (177) and 12.16 (370).

⁴⁵ 14.23 (454f). We quote this passage from the 14th book of *Trin.* because it sums up ideas which pervade the whole treatise.

⁴⁶ *Jo. eu. tr.* 52.7 (CCL 36, 448) and *cat. rud.* 26.52 (CCL 46, 175).

regard to sin. The devil brought about our fall through persuasion, so that our consent was free and our sin inexcusable: “ille [diabolus] elatus cecidit et deiecit consentientem”;⁴⁷ his spiritual nature and his ability to cause physical phenomena which have the appearance of miracles allows him to deceive us;⁴⁸ he is the “mediator mortis”, the “persuasor peccati”⁴⁹ and the real object of worship of pagan rites.⁵⁰ Statements of this kind recur endlessly in these books, together with the assertion that, because of our free agreement to his seduction, he has acquired a “ius dominandi” over us,⁵¹ he possesses us “iure integro”⁵² and *merito* he keeps us liable to death because of our sins.⁵³

Before proceeding further, a set of questions must be formulated to guide us through the exploration of the real theological meaning of these assertions and of their consequences. What kind of *institia*, of *ius* is Augustine referring to? Is he taking for granted a general notion of justice and, wittingly or unwittingly, applying it to soteriology? To give an example, is he implying that there is a ‘justice’ which would somehow be above God and would force him to give way to the devil for having been more persuasive than him in winning man’s trust? Is this kind of ‘justice’ implacably retributive, so that it can be satisfied only by the expiation of the penalty? In this case, who are the actors of this retribution? In other words, to whom is the price of the penalty paid? To the devil? To the Father?

A couple of significant hints will help us to make our way through Augustine’s treatment of these issues. Far from deducing his soteriology from a general and supposedly universally known or knowable notion of justice, Augustine suggests the mysterious nature of the divine justice at work in the atonement: that Christ should save us through a death he did not deserve, is the result of an

⁴⁷ 4.13 (178).

⁴⁸ 4.14 (179).

⁴⁹ 4.15 (180f).

⁵⁰ 4.18 (184).

⁵¹ 4.20 (187).

⁵² 4.17 (183).

⁵³ 13.19 (408).

“occulta et nimis arcana ordinatione diuinae altaeque iustitiae”.⁵⁴ Moreover, just as he introduces the topic of the ‘devil’s right’ in the 13th book, he talks about “quadam iustitia”, implying by the *quadam* that the very use of the notion of ‘right’ when dealing with the devil is inadequate. In the same way, in the 4th book, Augustine talks about “tamquam iure integro”, again implying –by the *tamquam*- the metaphorical use of *iure* when applied to the devil. The strains on the notion of ‘devil’s *iure*’ become apparent when the correspondent idea of a ‘price’ –*pretium*- applied to Christ’s blood is annulled by the fact that this ‘price’ does not make the devil richer, but ties him instead: “In hac redemptione tamquam pretium pro nobis datus est sanguis Christi, quo accepto diabolus non ditatus est sed ligatus”.⁵⁵

In reality, there is a fully-fledged theological notion of justice at work in Augustine’s soteriology, to which, as we shall see, the issue we have improperly called ‘the devil’s rights’ is in the end rather tangential. To the investigation of this theological notion of justice we now turn.

iii. The rhetoric of salvation

Augustine clearly favours what could be labelled a ‘rhetorical’ approach to salvation, an approach, that is to say, which presents God’s action with the characters of rhetorical activity: to teach, delight, move. He finds that God’s atoning work has an ‘eloquence’⁵⁶ of its own which aims at ‘persuading’ us. This rhetorical presentation of salvation is built around two main and often recurring notions: *congruitas* and *persuasio*.

According to the soteriological notion of *congruitas*, the way we have been saved, through the Incarnation, Christ’s death on the cross and resurrection, was ‘devised’ by God so as to ‘fit’ our human condition,⁵⁷ our double death, i.e. not only our physical death but also our *impietas*,⁵⁸ our

⁵⁴ 4.15 (181).

⁵⁵ 13.19 (408).

⁵⁶ Cf. 4.11 (175) “ut omnis creatura factis quodam modo loqueretur unum futurum”.

⁵⁷ 4.4 (164): “congruit homini homo”.

⁵⁸ 4.4 (164): “simplum eius congruit duplo nostro. Haec enim congruentia (siue conuenientia uel concinentia uel consonantia commodius dicitur quod est unum ad duo), in omni compaginatione uel si

illness.⁵⁹ Expressed with the term of *conuenientia*, this same ‘fittingness’ or ‘correspondence’ again refers to our sinfulness: “sanandae nostrae miseriae conuenientioremodum alium non fuisse nec esse oportuisse”.⁶⁰

However, this should not lead us to attribute to Augustine an anthropological approach to Christology and soteriology, i.e. this does not mean that we can infer or grasp the nature of God’s action from reflection on our human condition. Because of our sinfulness and particularly of its aspect of *superbia*, the very perception of this *congruitas* or *conuenientia* is the result of the conversion brought about by grace and is therefore knowable only because it is revealed and given, without any contribution [‘merits’] on our part. Only the inconceivable character of the Incarnation and even more so the scandal of the cross compel us to acknowledge the extent of our sinfulness and of our distance from God: “Discit homo quam longe recesserit a deo, quod illi ualeat ad medicinalem dolorem, quando per talem mediatorem redit qui hominibus et deus diuinitate subuenit et homo infirmitate conuenit”.⁶¹ In fact, we must not forget that one of the main characters of our fallen state is blindness with regard to our very sinfulness: “lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt: tenebrae autem sunt stultae mentes hominum praua cupiditate atque infidelitate caecatae”.⁶²

Further evidence for this is given by the other aspect of the divine rhetoric of salvation, i.e. the *persuasio*. The object and means of this divine persuasion enacted in Incarnation and salvation is love, *dilectio*. The extent and the character of this love overcome our blindness and reveal the extent and the character of our sinfulness, summed up under the headings of *desperatio* and *superbia*: “Persuadendum ergo erat homini quantum nos dilexerit deus et quales dilexerit: quantum ne

melius dicitur coaptatione creaturae ualet plurimum”; 4.5 (165): “simplum domini et saluatoris nostri Iesu Christi duplo nostro congruat et quodam modo concinat ad salutem”.

⁵⁹ 4.24 (191): “Sanitas enim a morbo plurimum distat, sed media curatio nisi morbo congruat non perducit ad sanitatem”.

⁶⁰ 13.13 (399).

⁶¹ 13.22 (413).

⁶² 4.4 (163).

desperaremus, quales ne superbiremus”.⁶³ By persuading us of “quantum nos dilexit” [*extent* of God’s love], God reveals, meets and heals our *desperatio*: “Quid enim tam necessarium fuit ad erigendam spem nostram mentesque mortalium conditione ipsius mortalitatis abiectas ab immortalitatis desperatione liberandas quam ut demonstraretur nobis quanti nos penderet deus quantumque diligeret?”⁶⁴ In order that the very strength granted to us by grace should not become a new occasion of pride and of fall, we also needed to be persuaded of “quales nos dilexit” [*character* of God’s love], i.e. that we are loved as enemies of God⁶⁵ and that no merits whatsoever on our part earn salvation. We need to be made weak and humiliated by the revelation of our sinfulness so that we can be healed first and only then led through the path of perfection: “per eandem fidem etiam ipsi humiliati infirmarentur et infirmati perficerentur”.⁶⁶

Through these introductory remarks, we begin to realize that the kind of ‘justice’ which determines the *congruitas* of God’s act of salvation in Christ –and the Holy Spirit- coincides with God’s inner Trinitarian life of love –*dilectio*- and more particularly with its highest expression, the *humilitas dei*, corresponding to the *exinanitio* and the obedience of Phil. 2. In other words, the rhetorical power [*persuasio*] of God’s action of salvation depends on its ‘correspondence’ [*congruitas*] to God’s Trinitarian identity.

This appears in particular in the flat rejection of any understanding of atonement based on vicarious punishment, where the Father would exact the death of his Son to soothe his anger or to satisfy the implacable requirements of an inflexible retributive ‘justice’. This –Augustine argues- is meaningless in Trinitarian terms and goes against Scripture. Basing his argument especially on Romans 5 and 8, Augustine asks whether the Father would have handed over his Son for us, had he not already been *placatus* towards us. If in Romans 5.10, Paul states that we are reconciled with the Father through the death of the Son, in 8.31 it is said that it was the Father who first loved us and for this reason did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us. Nor did the Son gave

⁶³ 4.2 (161).

⁶⁴ 13.13 (400).

himself for us unwillingly. On the contrary, just like the Father, he did what he did out of *dilectio* for us. Any explanation of atonement which drives a wedge between the Father and the Son must be excluded: “Omnia ergo simul et pater et filius et amborum spiritus pariter et concorditer operantur”, says Augustine to seal this argument.⁶⁷

Therefore, far from being the result of any transaction or ‘disjunction’ within the unity of the triune God, salvation is God’s self-giving, i.e. the enactment in Jesus Christ, and particularly in his death on the cross, of the immanent Trinitarian life of love, humility and obedience.⁶⁸ This understanding of salvation is unfolded through the notions of mediation and sacrifice.

iv. Christ the *Mediator*

The mediation of Christ has a Trinitarian dimension because the Incarnation is not simply the union of divine nature and human nature, but the action through which the Son of the Father unites human nature to himself. He is mediator not simply because he is God and man, but because he is the Son and the Logos of the Father who has become man. As a result, he can intercede for us to the Father as man and his prayer has the guarantee of being heard because, as the Son, -and this is the crucial point- he is *unum* with the Father. This is what Augustine reads into a passage taken from the Gospel of John, where Jesus says “*Non pro his autem rogo, inquit, tantum sed et pro eis qui credituri sunt per uerbum eorum in me ut omnes unum sint (i) sicut tu pater in me et ego in te, (ii) ut et ipsi in nobis unum sint, ut mundus credat quia tu me misisti. Et ego claritatem quam dedisti mihi dedi illis (ii) ut sint unum sicut (i) et nos unum sumus*”.⁶⁹

What Jesus is asking in this prayer is that we might be *unum* in him just as he is *unum* with the Father as the Son consubstantial with him.

⁶⁵ 4.2 (161).

⁶⁶ 4.2 (162).

⁶⁷ 13.15 (402). Cf. 2.9 (90), where Augustine quotes Galatians 2.20, the *traditio* of Christ by the Father, and Romans 8.32, the *traditio* of Christ himself, to argue for their inseparability; then he observes: “una uoluntas est patris et filii and inseparabilis operatio”.

⁶⁸ Cf. 8.7 (276): “pro nobis deum factum ad humilitatis exemplum et ad demonstrandam erga nos dilectionem dei”.

If we are not *unum*, it is because we are *dissociati* from each other as a result of our *cupiditas* and – Augustine explains- we become *unum* by being “fused somehow into one spirit in the furnace of charity”.⁷⁰ There seems to be nothing new in such an assertion: *cupiditas* brings about division; unity is the result of *caritas*. The Trinitarian notion of mediation however unveils a new aspect of this assertion, which is expressed in the following sentence:

“Ad hoc enim ualet quod ait: *Vt sint unum sicut et nos unum sumus*, ut quemadmodum pater et filius (i) non tantum aequalitate substantiae (ii) sed etiam uoluntate unum sunt, ita et hi inter quos et deum mediator est filius (i) non tantum per id quod eiusdem naturae sunt (ii) sed etiam per eandem dilectionis societatem unum sint. Deinde idipsum quod mediator est per quem reconciliamur deo sic indicat: *Ego, inquit, in eis et tu in me ut sint consummati in unum*”.⁷¹

The Son and the Father are united (i) not only through the equality of substance, but (ii) they are *unum* by their unity of will, their mutual love which is the Holy Spirit (although the identification of unity of will between Father and Son with love and with the Holy Spirit is not explicitly made here).⁷² In the same way, the unity of Christians with each other is (ii) a unity of *dilectio* and not simply (i) a unity of nature. Christians become *unum* through *dilectio* in Christ the Mediator, “uult esse suos unum sed in ipso quia in se ipsis non possent”.⁷³ Of course, although it is only implicitly stated here, our unity with each other through *dilectio* coincides with unity with the Father, i.e. with reconciliation, and results from it. This is what the sentence which immediately follows the passage just quoted explains: “Haec [i.e. the *dilectio* of the Father and the Son given to us in Christ] est vera pax et cum creatore nostro nobis firma conexio purgatis et reconciliatis per mediatorem uitae sicut maculati et alienati ab eo recesseramus per mediatorem mortis”.⁷⁴

Therefore, Christ’s mediation associates us to his unity of will with the Father or, better, unites us –through reconciliation- with the Father and consequently between us, through the same *dilectio* which constitutes his unity with the Father. This, we might argue, is the result of Christ’s atoning

⁶⁹ 4.12 (177), quoting John 17.20-22.

⁷⁰ 4.12 (177).

⁷¹ 4.12 (177f).

⁷² Cf. 6.7 (235).

⁷³ 4.12 (177).

⁷⁴ 4.13 (178).

work, but it is not an explanation of how this result was brought about. Such does not seem to be Augustine's own view. For him, Christ's mediatorial work coincides with the reconciliation resulting from redemption, i.e. with Christ's sacrifice.

v. The sacrifice of Christ

Augustine's well known definition of *sacrificium* of the 4th book of the *De Trinitate* clearly refers to the Son's identity of Mediator and implies that the his *dilectio* towards the Father in Christ is the essential feature of the nature and the effectiveness of his sacrifice:

“Vt quoniam quattuor considerantur in omni sacrificio: cui offeratur, a quo offeratur, quid offeratur, pro quibus offeratur; idem ipse unus uerusque mediator per sacrificium pacis reconcilians nos deo unum cum illo maneret cui offerebat, unum in se faceret pro quibus offerebat, unus ipse esset qui offerebat e t quod offerebat”.⁷⁵

As we have seen above, he who offers the sacrifice –i.e. the *filius homo*- is *unum* with him to whom the sacrifice is offered –i.e. the Father- not only through the unity of nature, but also –and decisively- through *dilectio* [“unum cum illo maneret cui offerebat”]. Christ's sacrifice is acceptable to the Father because in Christ, the Son unites human nature to himself [“unum in se faceret pro quibus offerebat”] and therefore grants to human nature the grace of sharing with him the same *dilectio* which unites him to the Father. Only because of *dilectio* is a sacrifice acceptable to God. Only *dilectio* ‘sacrum facit’, i.e. ‘makes holy’, unites with God and thus overcomes the division and the rebellion of sin and *cupiditas*.

Dilectio is therefore the defining feature of *sacrificium*, it explains how *sacrificium* saves us, i.e. by operating our reconciliation with the Father. In fact, Christ is not mediator only -nor primordially- because of the hypostatic union, i.e. because of the ontological union between human and divine nature realized in the Son's Incarnation. On the contrary, Christ's role of mediation, as we have seen above, consists in the fact that the union of will between the Son and the Father ‘becomes’ – thanks to both the descendent movement of the Incarnation and the ascending movement of the

⁷⁵ 4.19 (186f).

sacrifice- the union of will of Christ with the Father and, in Christ, of the whole *redempta ciuitas*, the Church, i.e. the community of believers and partakers of the Eucharist which become the Body of Christ. Of course, what is generically labelled ‘union of will’ here consists in *dilectio*; and this unity of Christ with *the Father* is not (like the union of Christ with *the Son*) just ‘ontological’, but results from the effective personal *dilectio* of the Son determining the whole life of Jesus Christ through humility and obedience *usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis*, i.e. through his *sacrificium*.

The decisive role played by the notion of sacrifice in Augustine’s soteriology, requires us to depart for once from the method we have tried to follow so far, that is to say try to explore Augustine’s Christology only from the *De Trinitate*. In this case, it is evident that Augustine simply presupposes the theology of *sacrificium* unfolded in the well-known passage of the 10th book of the *De ciuitate dei*. In turn, the Christology of the *De Trinitate*, unveils the soteriological potential of the theology of *sacrificium* of the *De ciuitate dei*.

The 10th book of the *De ciuitate dei* has much in common with the Christological books of the *De Trinitate* we are scrutinizing. Its argument is unfolded within the framework of the theme of *beatitudo* and of a polemical rebuttal of the *superbia* of philosophers –Porphyry in particular- for having dismissed the mediatory role of Christ because of his humility: the same themes we found in the *De Trinitate* earlier on. The difference, however, between the 10th book of the *De ciuitate dei* and the 4th book of the *De Trinitate* is in their treatment of the notion of sacrifice: the *De ciuitate dei* does not aim primarily at explaining how Christ’s sacrifice saved us, but at elaborating a systematic account of the defining features of the sacrifice of the Christians as opposed to pagan sacrifices.⁷⁶ What happens, then, if we look at Christ’s sacrifice in the light of this account?

The passage of the *De ciuitate dei* starts by the biblical foundation of this theology of sacrifice. Countless texts from the Old Testament openly state that God does not need anything, neither the things we offer to him nor even man’s justice. Sacrifices, therefore, do not benefit God, but us:

⁷⁶ See the recapitulating conclusion of *ciu. Dei* 10.6 (CCL 47, 279) “Hoc est sacrificium christianorum [...]”.

“totum quod recte colitur deus homini prodesse, non deo”.⁷⁷ Still from the Old Testament, Augustine establishes that the visible sacrifice is the *sacramentum* i.e. the *sacrum signum*, the ‘sacred sign’ of the invisible sacrifice. This simply means that the killing and the shedding of the blood of an animal deserves the qualification of sacrifice only if it is the sign of an attitude of the heart which is described as a “cor contritum et humiliatum” and “facere iudicium et diligere misericordiam et paratum esse ire cum domino deo tuo”.⁷⁸ Sacrifices of animals in the Old Testament gave way to the sacrifice of the New Testament precisely to bring the signified aspect to the fore and fully identify it with charity: “Quaecumque igitur in ministerio tabernaculi siue templi multis modis de sacrificiis leguntur diuinitus esse praecepta, ad dilectionem dei et proximi significando referuntur. In his enim duobus praeceptis, ut scriptum est, *tota lex pendet et prophetae*”.⁷⁹

The Christological applications, or better, the Christological foundations of this theology of sacrifice are easy to discern. First of all, Christ’s death on the cross and the shedding of his blood cannot be said to have benefited God in any way. They cannot be considered as a price paid to him, as we have seen above. Augustine is as far from any form of satisfaction-theory of redemption as it is possible to be.

Then, the death of Christ is a *sacrificium* insofar as it is the *signum* of his ‘invisible sacrifice’ that is to say, in the light of the theology of Mediation we have explored above, of the unity of will of the Son with the Father. Whereas the sacrifices of the Old Testament were hopeless human attempts to *inhaerere deo*, Christ’s sacrifice –because of the hypostatic union- coincides with the union of will which from all eternity exists between the Son and the Father. The same thing can be said of the humility and the obedience of Christ shown in his life, passion and death: they are the humility and the obedience of the Son vis-à-vis the Father; they are the expression of the union of *dilectio* between the Son and the Father.

⁷⁷ *ciu. Dei* 10.5 (CCL 47, 276).

⁷⁸ *ciu. Dei* 10.5 (CCL 47, 277).

⁷⁹ *ciu. Dei* 10.5 (CCL 47, 278).

vi. A theological notion of justice

This exploration of Augustine's notions of mediation and *sacrificium*, therefore, makes clear that the *iustitia* at work in the salvation God realized in Christ coincides with the *dilectio* which unites the Son to the Father and which was displayed in Christ's humility and obedience *usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis*. On this basis, we can go back to the issue of the 'devil's rights' and try to understand what role it plays in Augustine's soteriology.

Right from the introduction of this topic in the 4th book, the aim of setting the devil's action in contrast with Christ's salvation is precisely to stress that the *iustitia* through which God saved us in Christ is the *humilitas dei* (which in its turn, as we have seen, is the manifestation of the *dilectio* which unites the Son to the Father). The devil led us to death by deceiving us into proud rebellion against God; the humble Christ leads us back to life through obedience and raises up those who believe in him through his humiliation.⁸⁰

Setting the devil in contrast with Christ in this way is a rhetorical device. When Augustine attributes a mediatory role both to the devil and to Christ, or presents them in a parallel way with regard to the issues of sacrifice, of *potentia* and of justice, this does not mean that he puts Christ and the devil on the same level. A closer analysis of this rhetorical parallelism will prove this point.

First of all, the devil only becomes 'mediator' of sin and death because we freely sin and become *superbi*: "diabolus superbus hominem superbientem perduxit ad mortem";⁸¹ only the *superbi* are seduced by his attempts to present himself as the mediator of happiness through false sacrifices;⁸² no other vice hands us over to the power of the devil like pride: "Nullum enim uitium [...] in quod maius accipiat dominandi ius ille superbissimus spiritus ad ima mediator, ad summa interclusor",⁸³ or again: "Sic hominem per elationis typhum potentiae quam iustitiae cupidiorum [...]" [the devil]

⁸⁰ 4.13 (178f).

⁸¹ 4.13 (178).

⁸² 4.17, 18 (182-186).

⁸³ 4.20 (187).

subditum tenet pollicens [...]”.⁸⁴ At the same time, the devil can only cause us to sin, and therefore to die, with our agreement: “ille elatus cecidit et deiecit consentientem”;⁸⁵ he can only persuade, but not force us;⁸⁶ we are under his power only by our agreement: “Ita diabolus hominem quem per consensionem seductum tamquam iure integro possidebat [...]”.⁸⁷

For this reason, the devil is in reality a “falsus mediator”⁸⁸ and his *potestas* over us is the result of God’s permission and does not mean that we are not under the *potestas* of the *omnipotens deus* any more: the devil himself is under God’s power.⁸⁹ It is important to notice that the instrumental role of the devil with regard to our sin is mentioned in the *De Trinitate* only when Augustine talks about the way in which we have been saved by Christ. There are no mentions of the devil in the sections of the treatise where Augustine describes our sinfulness. At the same time, there is a parallel between the sections of the treatise devoted to sin and those devoted to the devil: the *ius dominandi* of the devil means that there was no possibility we could free ourselves from his hold on us without Christ. In the same way, our sinful condition described in terms of *superbia*, *prauitas*, *iniquitas*, *infirmetas* etc... only leads to *desperatio* because it is irreparable and irreversible, unless Christ comes to heal us through the *dilectio* of his sacrifice. Whether we resort to the devil or not, the irreparable character of the sinful condition of humanity is the same and so are its causes: *superbia* and *cupiditas*, inherited through the transmission of original sin.⁹⁰

In contrast to the devil, Christ is the real Mediator, first of all because he saved us without our contribution and even against us. We were not in the position of agreeing to his salvation. Had his salvation been a mere *exemplum*,⁹¹ we would not have been able to give any *consensio* to it. Christ’s salvation is based on an indispensable objective act on God’s part, an act, that is, with no merits on

⁸⁴ 4.13 (178).

⁸⁵ 4.13 (178).

⁸⁶ 4.14, 15 (179ff).

⁸⁷ 4.17 (183).

⁸⁸ 4.15 (180).

⁸⁹ 13.16 (403).

⁹⁰ 13.21, 23 (410-414).

⁹¹ Not in Augustine’s sense of ‘effective sign’ (cf. this dissertation, 100f), but in the generic sense of exemplary cause.

our part. This objective dimension is expressed through a variety of images which naturally depend on Scripture: remission of sins compared to the remission of a debt is one of them.⁹² Another is the payment of a price for this debt through the blood of Christ, although this price is never said to have been paid to the Father; once it is said to have been paid to the devil in a way, however, which instead of enriching him actually tied him.⁹³ The redemption from the power of the devil fulfils the same role: it is yet another way of stating the objective aspect of the way we have been saved: we were totally unable to free ourselves from the devil's *ius dominandi*. However, we have noticed already that the improper use of the notion of *ius* with regard to the devil is suggested by expression like “*tamquam iure integro*” or “*uelut equo iure*”.⁹⁴

The aim of these images is more that of stating the objectivity of Christ's mediatory role and of his salvation than to explain how Christ actually saves us. Augustine's favourite way of explaining how we have been saved is that which we saw above under the heading of *sacrificium*, formulated in a different way in the following sentence:

“Et hoc [salvation] ita gestum est ut homo non extollatur, sed *qui gloriatur in domino gloriatur*. Qui enim uictus est homo tantum erat, et ideo uictus est quia superbe deus esse cupiebat; qui autem uicit et homo et deus erat, et ideo sic uicit natus ex uirgine quia deus humiliter, non quomodo alios sanctos regebat illum hominem, sed gerebat”.⁹⁵

Christ *uicit* because he was man and God, but *sic uicit* because in Christ, God was ‘wearing’ the man [*gerens*] and not governing a man [*regens*]. We shall not repeat here what was said above concerning the link between hypostatic union and soteriology. Let us only notice what this means with regard to the objectivity of redemption: not only we have been saved without contribution or merit on our part, but what saved us was the *humilitas dei*, i.e., as we have seen, the *dilectio* which unites the Son of God to the Father and explains both why he is a Mediator and why his sacrifice is acceptable to God.

⁹² 13.18 (406f), 19 (407f), 21 (410ff).

⁹³ 13.19 (408).

⁹⁴ 4.17 (183f).

⁹⁵ 13.23 (414).

It is in the *humilitas dei*, i.e. in the *iustitia* which makes us *iusti*, therefore, that we have to look to for the explanation of the way we have been saved.

Augustine argues that the devil was overthrown by Christ not through the *potentia dei* but through the *iustitia dei*.⁹⁶ Here we have the clearest hint to the real nature of the *iustitia* through which we were saved. It is not, we have seen, a general notion of cold and implacably retributive justice on which God would be as much dependent as we are. The *iustitia* through which we were saved is the justice of Christ: “Quae est igitur iustitia qua uictus est diabolus? Quae nisi iustitia Iesu Christi?”.⁹⁷

The main reason why the death of Christ saved us is that, whereas we die because of our sin, he died because of his *iustitia*, i.e. because of the *humilitas* which coincides with the obedience and the *dilectio* of the Son vis-à-vis the Father: “Nos enim ad mortem per peccatum uenimus, ille per iustitiam; et ideo cum sit mors nostra poena peccati, mors illius facta est hostia pro peccato”.⁹⁸

This is the real justice which Augustine opposes to the appearance of justice through which the devil held us under his power:

“ut ab iniquo uelut aequo iure aduersus nos agente ipse occisus innocens eum iure aequissimo superaret [atque ita captiuitatem propter peccatum factam captiuaret] nosque liberaret a captiuitate propter peccatum iusta suo iusto sanguine iniuste fuso mortis chirographum delens et iustificandos redimens peccatores”.⁹⁹

The *ius* of the devil is here qualified through a *uelut* and pales into insignificance under the overwhelming weight of the *aequissimum ius* of the *iusta morte* and the *iustus sanguis* which *iustificat* sinners.

What makes Christ's death and blood *iusti* is the fact that he did not have to die. He did not have to die not only, nor mainly, because as a man he was without sin. If, as a man, he was without sin, it was because this man was the Son of God¹⁰⁰ and his *iustitia* was the *iustitia* of the Son of God who, as God, was free, omnipotent (i.e. he had *omnis potestas*) and therefore only died because he

⁹⁶ 13.17 (404ff).

⁹⁷ 13.18 (406).

⁹⁸ 4.15 (181).

⁹⁹ 4.17 (184).

freely decided to do so out of love for the Father and for us. Christ's freedom or, rather, the freedom of the Son of God in Christ becomes the essential feature of the redeeming effectiveness of Christ's *iustitia*. This is what makes his death a sacrifice:

“Neque enim cuiusquam iure potestatis exutus est carne, sed ipse se exuit. Nam qui posset non mori si nollet, procul dubio quia uoluit mortuus est, et ideo *principatus et potestates exemplauit fiducialiter triumphans eas in semetipso*. Morte sua quippe uno uerissimo sacrificio pro nobis oblato quidquid culparum erat unde nos principatus et potestates ad luenda supplicia iure detinebant purgauit, aboleuit, exstinxit, et sua resurrectione in nouam uitam nos *praedestinos uocauit, uocatos iustificauit, iustificatos glorificauit*”.¹⁰¹

The same idea is restated in the following passage: “Ideo gravior facta est in humilitate iustitia quia posset si nolisset humilitatem non perpeti tanta in diuinitate potentia, ac sic a moriente tam potente nobis mortalibus impotentibus et commendata est iustitia et promissa potentia [...] Quid enim iustius quam usque ad mortem crucis pro iustitia peruenire?”.¹⁰²

3. SOTERIOLOGY AND ESCHATOLOGY: THE SUBJECTIVE SIDE OF SALVATION

i. Christ *sacramentum* and *exemplum*

Through the themes of hypostatic union, mediation and sacrifice explored so far, we have established part of the objective aspects and ground of Augustine's approach to the knowledge of God –the other, to be treated in a separate chapter, being pneumatology. God makes himself knowable and known through Christ. All the obstacles to knowledge of God –mainly identified with *superbia* and *cupiditas*- are simultaneously made known and overcome through the act by which the Son of God became man and reconciled us to the Father through the same *dilectio* which unites the Son to the Father in the Holy Spirit, also presented as the *iustitia* of Christ or the *humilitas dei*.

We now have to explore the way in which Augustine presents the subjective side of this process with regard to Christology. We shall see that the knowledge of God is not something handed over to us which somehow becomes our ‘property’. On the contrary, the same identity between

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *c. s. Ar.* 7 (PL 42, 688).

¹⁰¹ 4.17 (183). The freedom of the Son of God in Christ is constantly restated in these two books: see 4.16 (181f), 18 (184ff) and 13.18 (406f), 22-23 (412ff).

revelation and reconciliation which characterizes the objective side of the knowledge of God shapes its subjective side as well, simply because these two sides coincide in Christ: God makes himself known in the act through which, in Christ, the Son reconciles us to the Father in the Holy Spirit. It is God's action and as such it is accomplished once for all. From the subjective side of its manifestation in us, however, it has an eschatological connotation: it is already accomplished in and for us in this side of the eschatology and yet it still moves towards its full manifestation in the other side of the eschatology, i.e. the coming back of Christ in glory and the handing over of his kingdom to the Father.¹⁰³

This eschatological dimension of the manifestation of God's revelation and reconciliation in us can be seen at work in all the pairs around which Augustine structures the subjective side of soteriology: *scientia/sapientia*, faith/truth, *sacramentum/exemplum*, victory over the devil through *iustitia* now, reserving the victory through *potentia* for the second Coming. The first element of each pair is given to us in this side of the eschatology, the second is reserved for the end of times. And yet, already *sapientia* is given in *scientia*, truth in faith, *iustitia* is an act of *potentia* etc... because, as we have seen, in Christ we really have to do with God himself.

This is particularly evident in the Christological pair of *sacramentum/exemplum* which needs to be carefully unpacked. Its interpretation in Augustine's works is notoriously difficult, due to the frequent shifts of the meaning of his vocabulary.¹⁰⁴ However, as far as the *De Trinitate* is concerned, the meaning of this pair is crystal-clear. *Sacramentum* is used in the sense of 'effective sign' and designates what Christ has realized in us already, even if it is not yet visible. *Exemplum* also means 'effective sign', but it refers to what Christ will manifest in us visibly at the end of time. Augustine

¹⁰² 13.18 (407).

¹⁰³ Cf. 1.15-18 (46-55), 20-21 (56-59), 28-31 (69-79). O'Donovan (1980), 79, observes that "It is characteristic of the mature Augustine that he will not, as once he might have done, evade the implications of eschatology. Instead, he attempts to develop a theory of knowledge-by-faith which has room for it, showing a continuity between what may be known and loved now and what may only be known and loved then". Further on, he stresses the same point with regard to self-knowledge "Yet by a dramatic Christianization of all Platonism, the true self-knowledge of *cogitatio* is attainable only eschatologically".

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Dodaro (1991), 274: "It [*sacramentum*] remains one of the most elusive notions in his theological vocabulary".

combines this pair with that of inner/outer man, so that what happened for Christ once for all, i.e. his resurrection, is the *exemplum* of the resurrection of our body at the end of time and is the *sacramentum* of the resurrection of the inner man already now.¹⁰⁵

This need for a double resurrection arises out of a double death. The death of the body, our *mortalitas*, only is a sign and a consequence of the real death, which afflicts our soul and, as we have seen, has an epistemological connotation: the death of the soul is the *impietas* through which we are made *insipientes* (the contrary of *sapientes*): “Mors autem animae impietas est [...] unde illa [anima] fit insipiens”.¹⁰⁶

Very significantly, Augustine describes the way in which Christ heals the death of our soul - *impietas* and *insipientia*- through a *renouatio* or conversion expressed in terms which echo the object of the real *scientia*, that is the *se nosse* of the beginning of the 4th book: knowledge of our *infirmitas*, tears and *dolor*, trust in the pledge of salvation granted to us in Christ the saviour and the *illuminator*.¹⁰⁷ Thus, Christ is the sacrament of the *renouatio* of the soul first of all in his crucifixion, which is the sign and the cause (i.e. the ‘effective sign’) of our repentance and conversion.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, he is the sacrament of our *renouatio* in his resurrection as well: “Resuscitatur ergo anima per poenitentiam, et in corpore adhuc mortali renouatio uitae inchoatur a fide qua creditur *in eum qui iustificat impium*, bonisque moribus augetur et roboratur *de die in diem* cum magis magisque *renouatur interior homo*”.¹⁰⁹

Therefore, the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ are (i) the *sacramentum* of our ‘inner’ death and resurrection, because of the repentance and the *renouatio* from the *impietas/insipientia* which is the death of the soul, and are (ii) the *exemplum* of the final resurrection of our body.

This ‘inner’ crucifixion and resurrection has direct consequences on the knowledge of God, already suggested in the sentences quoted above, but made even more evident in the overcoming

¹⁰⁵ 4.5f (165-169).

¹⁰⁶ 4.5 (165).

¹⁰⁷ 4.1 (159).

¹⁰⁸ 4.6 (166-169).

of the main obstacle to *contemplatio*, i.e. our *superbia*: “iniquorum et superbiorum una mundatio est sanguis iusti et humilitas dei, ut ad contemplandum deum quod natura non sumus per eum mundaremur factum quod natura sumus et quod peccato non sumus”.¹¹⁰

ii. The healing of *superbia*, *cupiditas* and *desperatio*

We have seen how Augustine characterizes sin especially under the headings of *superbia*, *cupiditas* and *desperatio*. The sacrifice of the *filius homo* overcomes them all through *dilectio*, i.e. –to resort again to the *De ciuitate dei*- through replacing the “amor sui usque ad contemptum dei” with the “amor dei usque ad contemptum sui”,¹¹¹ i.e. *usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis*. We also have seen the aspect of *congruitas* which characterizes redemption: the same *dilectio*, which is the essence of Christ’s sacrifice, takes different forms, each corresponding to the main aspects of our sinfulness. Thus Christ overcomes *superbia* through his humility, which is the *humilitas dei*; he overcomes the scattering effects and the dissipation resulting from *cupiditas* through the unification of our whole being and desire within his unity of will with the Father;¹¹² he overcomes our *desperatio* through the display of the character and extent of his love – the *quales* and *quantum dilexit nos*- in his sacrifice: “*Maiolem dilectionem nemo habet quam ut animam suam ponat pro amicis suis*”.¹¹³

Let us look at this dynamic in more detail. When considering the objective side of redemption, we have seen that we are saved through the unique sacrifice of Christ. To see how this unique sacrifice of Christ, accomplished once for all, transforms us all in a universal sacrifice acceptable to God -through the Son’s own *dilectio* for the Father in the Holy Spirit- we can resort to the pair of *sacramentum* and *exemplum*. Christ’s unique *sacrificium*, is

¹⁰⁹ 4.5 (165) quoting 2 Corinthians 4.16. Cf also 4.17 (183): “sua resurrectione in nouam uitam nos praedestinos uocauit, uocatos iustificauit, iustificatos glorificauit”.

¹¹⁰ 4.4 (163f).

¹¹¹ *ciu. Dei* 14.28 (CCL 48, 451).

¹¹² 4.11 (175f).

¹¹³ 4.2 (161) and 4.17 (184) quoting John 15.13.

- (i) *sacramentum* because it is the efficacious sign of that which Christ has realized in us already, even if it is not yet visible: we ourselves have become sacrifices acceptable to God, thanks to the *dilectio* poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit Christ has given to us. This *dilectio* enables us to love God “usque ad contemptum sui”, i.e. to offer our bodies and souls in sacrifices acceptable to him and thus heals our *cupiditas*. This is the effect of Christ’s *sacrificium* in this side of the eschatology;
- (ii) *exemplum* of what corresponds to the other side of the eschatological realization of our becoming a sacrifice acceptable to God, i.e. of our definitive union with God, the handing over of the kingdom by Christ to the Father, which Augustine explicitly identifies with *contemplatio* of the Father¹¹⁴ and which is the result of the union of *dilectio* with God.¹¹⁵

In other words, Christ’s *sacrificium* is manifested in us in the fact that it makes us acceptable to God, i.e. it unites/reconciles us to God through *dilectio*. Christ gives this *dilectio* to us through the Holy Spirit handed over at his resurrection, while at the same time calling it forth from within us through the persuasive power of the “quantum and quales dilexit nos” of the cross. In the following passage, Augustine unambiguously identifies the result of Christ’s resurrection in us with *dilectio*: “*Vt enim fides per dilectionem operetur, caritas dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per spiritum sanctum qui datus est nobis. Tunc est autem datus quando est Iesus resurrectione clarificatus*”.¹¹⁶ Yet at the same time, the fact that *dilectio* is commended to us through the rhetoric of the *quantum* and *quales dilexit nos* of the cross, -according to the often quoted passage from Rom. 5- appears in the following

¹¹⁴ 1.16 (49).

¹¹⁵ 1.30 (74f).

¹¹⁶ 13.14 (400).

passage: “*Commendat autem, inquit apostolus, caritatem suam deus in nobis quoniam cum adhuc peccatores essemus, Christus pro nobis mortuus est*”.¹¹⁷

Thus, Christ’s sacrifice both reveals and heals our *cupiditas* by converting it into *dilectio* and our *desperatio* by persuading us of *quales* and *quantum* he loved us.

The healing of *cupiditas* is also expressed in another passage where the role of Christ as sacrament of our salvation, inaugurating the reformation of the image of God in us through knowledge of God,¹¹⁸ is linked to hypostatic union and opposed to the character of our sinfulness as *cupiditas*. In this passage, Christ is the *unum* because through his single death and resurrection he has become both the sacrament of our inner resurrection, i.e. our justification and sanctification, and the *exemplum* of the resurrection of our body at the end of time. He is the *unum* also because in him the Word through whom everything was created and the man are the same (in Christ). Our *cupiditas*, on the other hand, had fractured both our unity with God, the unity of our knowledge and that of our will (i.e. our memory, knowledge and love of God): “*Quia ab uno deo summo et uero per impietatis iniquitatem resilientes et dissonantes defluxeramus et euanueramus in multa discissi per multa et inhaerentes in multis [...]*”.¹¹⁹

The unity of Christ, and of the salvation he has realized, is the most fitting remedy to the scattering effect and the dissipation of *cupiditas*: faith already is adhesion to the One we will contemplate *per speciem* in the future, as Augustine explains in a sentence which deserves to be quoted in full:

¹¹⁷ 13.14 (400).

¹¹⁸ Cf. 4.7 (170).

¹¹⁹ 4.11 (175f). Same idea expressed in 4.12 (177).

“oportebat nutu et imperio dei miserantis ut ipsa multa uenturum conclamarent unum, et a multis conclamatus ueniret unus, et multa contestarentur uenisse unum, et a multis exonerati ueniremus ad unum, et multis peccatis in anima mortui et propter peccatum in carne morituri amarem sine peccato mortuum in carne pro nobis unum, et in resuscitatum credentes et cum illo per fidem spiritu resurgentes iustificaremur in uno iusto facti unum, nec in ipsa carne nos resurrecturos desperarem”¹²⁰ cum multa membra intueremur praecessisse nos caput unum in quo nunc per fidem mundati et tunc per speciem redintegrati et per mediatorem deo reconciliati haereamus uni, fruamur uno, permaneamus unum”.¹²¹

It was necessary that we should be brought *to love* the One Christ and *to believe* in him through faith. Through this faith, our soul is raised up and we are purified so that we can be *redintegrati*, ‘made completely whole’, *per speciem*, i.e. through the contemplation of God face-to-face in the life to come.

Finally, there is the *congruitas* of Christ’s redeeming activity with regard to *superbia*. We have seen the extent to which pride (*superbia*), together with the corruption of our love, sums up our sinfulness in general and our epistemological sinfulness in particular. The death and resurrection of Christ heal this *superbia* as well, because they are the enactment of the saving *humilitas dei* and because they make this same humility possible for us. The constant background of Augustine’s Christology is the hymn of Philippians, built around God’s humility manifested in Christ. Not only the *exinanitio* of Christ, but also his very exaltation manifest this humility: just as Christ did not consider his equality with God something to be grasped, so he waited for God to exalt him in his obedience *usque ad mortem crucis*. Thus, in a passage of the 8th book of the *De Trinitate*, *sacramentum* does not refer to the death or the resurrection of Christ, but is plainly identified with *humilitas*, the humility through which God became incarnate, died on the cross and waited until God himself decided to exalt him: “Hoc enim nobis prodest credere et firmum atque inconcussum corde retinere, humilitatem qua natus est deus ex femina et a mortalibus per tantas contumelias perductus ad mortem summum esse medicamentum quo superbiae nostrae sanaretur tumor et altum sacramentum quo peccati uinculum solueretur”.¹²² God’s humility in Christ is the efficacious sign

¹²⁰ Notice the aspect of healing from *desperatio* at the same time.

¹²¹ 4.11 (175f).

¹²² 8.7 (276).

of the humility which salvation creates in us, thus healing our *superbia*, included its consequences on knowledge of God.

These epistemological consequences of the sacrament of the humility, the cross and the resurrection of Christ are beautifully summed up in this sentence:

“Resurrectio uero corporis domini ad sacramentum interioris resurrectionis nostrae pertinere ostenditur ubi postquam resurrexit ait mulieri: *Noli me tangere; nondum enim ascendi ad patrem meum*. Cui mysterio congruit apostolus dicens: *Si autem resurrexistis cum Christo, quae sursum sunt quaerite ubi Christus est in dextera dei sedens; quae sursum sunt sapite*. Hoc est enim Christum non tangere nisi cum ascenderit ad patrem, non de Christo carnaliter sapere”.¹²³

Once again, this implies the dialectic between the simultaneously revealing and hiding character of the humanity of Christ: knowledge of Christ *carnaliter* is not yet *sapientia* [cf. the verb *sapere* in this passage]. Knowledge of Christ becomes *sapientia* [i.e. real knowledge of God] only through the process of conversion in which (i) the humility of God manifested in Christ heals our pride and (ii) the *dilectio* of the same risen Christ poured in our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit heals our *cupiditas*. In this way we are enabled to believe in God and to love him through those *utilia temporalia* which, thanks to the Incarnation, have become the way God makes himself known to us.

4. CONCLUSION

On the basis of the presupposition we have chosen as the starting point of our inquiry, namely that of the theological, i.e. Trinitarian, character of Augustine’s approach to knowledge of God, we can sketch a summary of our findings in the analysis of the Christology of the *De Trinitate*. Augustine’s Christology entails three fundamental parameters for a proper ‘theological’ approach to epistemology.

The first of these parameters consists in the dependence of the knowledge of God on the Incarnation: the firm denial of any form of adoptionism and the unambiguous identification of the agent of the Incarnation with the Son of God –which amounts to the doctrine of anhypostatic union- goes hand in hand with the rejection of any concession to philosophy when it comes to the

access to *sapientia*, *contemplatio* or *beatitudo*, i.e. to what counts as *real* knowledge of God. Everything Christ did for us is God's action –cf. for example Augustine's bold appeal to the *humilitas dei*- and nothing can be attributed to human merit. The very first result of God's saving action is the revelation of our *infirmetas*, variously described in terms of *prauitas*, *auersio*, *desperatio*, *superbia*, *cupiditas* etc... and of our need for a true Mediator and a true Sacrifice. This revelation is the starting point of the real *scientia* described at the beginning of the 4th book. Finally, the main epistemological consequence of this unambiguous identification of the agent of the Incarnation with the Son of God is that in Christ we have to do with God himself; the *utilia temporalia*¹²⁴ God assumed have no existence apart from the personal existence and the reconciling action of the Son of God; knowledge of these *utilia temporalia* – i.e. *scientia*- can indeed become knowledge of God, i.e. *sapientia*; the object of *faith* is the same as the object of the *contemplatio* or *uisio* of the after life; only the modality is different.

The second of these parameters, already implied by the first, consists in the link between the knowledge of God and soteriology. God reveals himself as he reconciles us to himself in the sacrifice of Christ. This is what Augustine means when he states that illumination depends on the Incarnation *and* on the *mundatio* resulting from the blood of Christ and the humility of God.¹²⁵ Only through the overcoming of our *cupiditas* through the Son's *dilectio* for the Father –which, as we have seen, is the essence of Christ's sacrifice- and of our *superbia* through the *humilitas dei*, is our blindness healed. Our analysis of the second half of the *De Trinitate* will show the extent to which *cupiditas* is the main obstacle to the *se nosse*, i.e. to the acknowledgment of our dependence on God. This identity between God's revelation and reconciliation also means that even the *utilia temporalia* assumed by God are not reveler as such. God *can* make himself known in these *utilia temporalia* by the Holy Spirit, the gift through which the risen Christ pours *dilectio* in our hearts.

¹²³ 4.6 (168).

¹²⁴ 13.1 (381).

¹²⁵ 4.4 (163f).

Finally, the third of these parameters, implied in the previous two, is the eschatological character of the act through which God makes himself known to us in Christ through the Holy Spirit. If, thanks to the Incarnation, the object of faith/*scientia* is identical with that of *uisio/sapientia/contemplatio*, the modality of the manifestation of this object is different: hidden in the former and fully displayed in the latter. It is very important to keep this element in mind when tackling the 15th book of the *De Trinitate* in particular, to avoid the temptation of jumping to verdicts of ‘failure’ too easily, as some scholars are fond of doing. Augustine’s keen awareness of the eschatological nature of the manifestation of God’s revealing and reconciling act does not allow him to entertain any illusion in his reader’s mind: he subscribes to Paul’s declaration that “*Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem*”, combined with the promise that “*cum ergo hac transformatione ad perfectum fuerit haec imago renovata, similes deo erimus, quoniam videbimus eum, non per speculum, sed sicuti est*”.¹²⁶

These three parameters, therefore, leave no doubt about the impossibility of understanding the epistemology of the *De Trinitate* apart from its Christology. This is confirmed by the structure of the treatise as well, in which the two books on Christology occupy pivotal places.

The issue of the books 1 to 4, occasioned by the theophanies of the Old Testament, can be rendered as follows: can we see –i.e. know– God? The answer is given in book 4, which explains that God both makes himself visible –i.e. knowable– in Christ, while at the same time remaining invisible, i.e. unknowable because even in the Incarnation he remains God, i.e. the Lord.

The issue of the second half of the *De Trinitate* is inaugurated in the 8th book with a similar question: how do we love the Trinity we do not see, but we believe in? ‘Seeing’ and ‘believing’ in this question already point to the eschatological articulation between *fides* and *uisio* or *scientia* and *sapientia* we have met above. This will be the object of books 9 to 15, but the key to the final answer is given in the 13th book, where *scientia* and *sapientia* are identified with Christ.

¹²⁶ 15.14 (479-482) and 21 (490-493), quoting 1 Corinthians 13.12 and 1 John 3.2.

V. THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION AND THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY

1. THE TRINITARIAN FORM OF REVELATION

In our sequential account of the first four books of the *De Trinitate*, we have drawn the attention on Augustine's treatment of a verse of 1 Cor 15.28 "*Cum autem ei omnia subiecta fuerint, tunc et ipse filius subiectus erit ei qui illi subiecit omnia*", one of these passages of the New Testament which seem to imply inferiority of the Son to the Father and hence deny his full divinity. We have seen how Augustine interprets it: the handing over of the kingdom by Christ to the Father means that Christ will lead the just who now live through faith to the contemplation –or *visio*– of God face to face.¹ The interest of this exegesis is that it gives a Trinitarian account of knowledge of God exactly parallel to the Trinitarian account of soteriology we have seen in the chapter of this dissertation on Christology: the Son's mediatory role and sacrifice introduce us into his unity of *dilectio* with his Father; the Father is the end of the movement; salvation ultimately means to be united to him, in the Son, through the Holy Spirit, i.e. through love.

In the same way, knowledge of God is explained as follows:

“De hac contemplatione intellego dictum: *Cum tradiderit regnum deo et patri*, id est cum perduxerit iustos quibus nunc ex fide uiuentibus regnat *mediator dei et hominum homo Christus Iesus* ad contemplationem dei et patris”.²

The knowledge of God we have through faith is the result of Christ's mediatory role and its fulfilment and end will be the contemplation of God the Father in the life-to-come. This point is

¹ 1.16 (49f).

² 1.17 (50).

constantly restated in this section: the goal and the end of the knowledge of God is the Father.³ Of course, knowledge of God the Father means at the same time knowledge of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: the Father does not manifest himself without the Son;⁴ as he leads to the contemplation of the Father, the Son manifests himself as well;⁵ this also includes the Holy Spirit.⁶ This does not mean, however, that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the object of salvific knowledge in an undifferentiated way. Knowledge of the Trinity means that God can only be known in a Trinitarian way. Knowledge of God the Trinity, means knowledge *of* the Father *in* the Son *through* the Holy Spirit. In other terms, it means that, united to the Son through *dilectio*, we are introduced into the *dilectio* and the knowledge of the Son in relation to the Father. We should never lose sight of this notion of the Trinitarian shape of our relation with God, even when it is not explicitly stated.

The exegetical passages we are focussing on have their own way of stating the key role of *dilectio* in this Trinitarian shape of knowledge of God. Augustine argues that even after our death, when we will be raised from the dead for the final judgment, not everyone will see Christ in his divinity. The evil ones will only see him in his 'human form', but certainly not in the 'form of God' through which he is equal to the Father.⁷ This exegesis echoes what we have seen concerning the fact that the humanity of Christ is not revelatory as such. Even in the Incarnation God *can* make himself known in Christ, but his knowledge is not handed over to us, does not become our possession. Another way of rendering the same point consists in saying that faith only works through love, i.e. that knowledge of Christ in his humanity and of his deeds and words only becomes a means to knowledge of God through the Holy Spirit, i.e. through *dilectio*. This is why, in this passage,

³ Cf. for example 1.16 (49f), 18 (54), 21 (57ff).

⁴ 1.17 (52).

⁵ 1.18 (55).

⁶ 1.21 (59).

⁷ 1.28 (70f).

Augustine reminds us that even after our death, vision of God is reserved only to those who love him.⁸

2. GOD'S INVISIBILITY/UNKNOWABILITY AND HIS FREEDOM IN REVELATION

Another important topic of the first books of the *De Trinitate* where Augustine highlights the Trinitarian structure of revelation is the discussion on the theophanies of the Old Testament in relation to God's invisibility. To appreciate the crucial role of the discussion of this divine attribute, let us bear in mind that invisibility is Augustine's way of talking about God's unknowability. Moreover, the prominence of this divine attribute in this discussion depends on its paradigmatic role with regard to God's freedom, as we shall see.

The main Scriptural reference for God's invisibility, or at least the most explicit, is to be found in Timothy's first letter: "*Regi autem saeculorum immortalis, invisibili, soli deo honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum*" and "*Beatus et solus potens, rex regum et dominus dominantium, qui solus habet immortalitatem et lucem habitat inaccessibilem; quem nemo hominum vidit nec videre potest*".⁹ 'Arians' applied these sentences to the Father alone and argued that the Son is "visibilis per se ipsum" and therefore is not God in the same sense as the Father is God.¹⁰ For the same reason, they also attribute the theophanies of the Old Testament to the Son because of what they see as his inferiority with regard to the Father.

Augustine's main counter-argument is that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God and therefore equally invisible. Even in the Incarnation, the divinity of Christ is not visible: the Jews crucified Christ because they could not see him in his divinity, even though they saw him in the flesh.¹¹ This point is constantly restated and plays a crucial role in Augustine's theological

⁸ 1.28 (71) and 1.30 (74f). The same point is made in the exegesis of Exodus 33.11ff in 2.28 (119), where vision of God results from faith and *dilectio*.

⁹ 1 Timothy 1.17 and 6.15f quoted in 2.14 (99).

¹⁰ 2.15 (101).

¹¹ 1.11 (40).

epistemology: the humanity of Christ allows us to know God only through the faith which works through *dilectio*, i.e. through the action of the Holy Spirit.¹²

To fight the ‘Arian’ interpretation of the theophanies of the Old Testament, Augustine undertakes a long and detailed exegesis of the scriptural passages reporting them. He aims at proving that most of the time Scripture does not give us any clue as to whether it was the Father who manifested himself in the Old Testament, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit or the whole Trinity. Other times, in the light of the New Testament, we can venture to attribute some theophanies to one of the divine persons, but even in these cases it is sometimes to the Father, sometimes to the Son and sometimes to the Holy Spirit, and each time only tentatively.

In any case, it cannot possibly be argued that God himself had been heard or seen in these theophanies. Each time, God manifested himself either through creatures created just for the purpose of that particular manifestation, or through angels who made use of existing creaturely realities or finally through angels using their own ‘bodies’ which they can transform at will.¹³ This point is discussed throughout the third book and in the end Augustine thinks that we should not pry too much into the way angels use creaturely reality for the purpose of serving God’s self-manifestation in these theophanies. The only thing we need to know is that God is the Lord of creation and can make use of it for the purpose of making his will known to his people. Before we carry on with our review of Trinitarian aspects of Augustine’s doctrine of revelation, we need to pause a little to stress the importance of this statement for his approach to knowledge of God.

The fact that God used created reality to manifest himself does not mean that creation is endowed by itself with a capacity to signify God¹⁴ – just as, even in the Incarnation, the humanity of Christ is not revelatory as such. Let us remember that theophanies happen “per *subjectam creaturam*”.¹⁵ Augustine insists on the miraculous character of these events: “*proprie miracula et*

¹² Cf. 4.26 (195).

¹³ 3.4 (130f).

¹⁴ Contrary to Hanby (2003), 32f.

¹⁵ 2.25 (114); 2.35 (126) and *passim*.

signa dicuntur”.¹⁶ The relation between these miracles and God’s action is formulated as follows: God’s providential government of creation already is a miracle, a sign of his almightiness and lordship; this miraculous character of his government of creation, however, because of its regularity does not arouse the same astonishment as theophanies do.¹⁷ Is there anything surprising, therefore, if he who is the Lord of creation can make use of it for the purpose of revealing his will to his creatures?¹⁸ This is why revelation through created intermediaries in the Old Testament is to be attributed to God’s lordship over his creation and not to any intrinsic ability of creation itself to signify God.

Resuming the analysis of the way God makes himself known, we notice that there is a fundamental difference between on the one hand the theophanies of the Old Testament and, on the other hand, the *missiones* of the New Testament, that is the Incarnation and the sending of the Holy Spirit by the risen Christ. Between theophanies and *missiones* there is a *qualitative* difference summed up as follows: ‘tunc per angelos nunc autem per filium’.¹⁹ In the Old Testament God manifests himself through created intermediaries. In the New Testament, we are faced with the paradox that, while remaining invisible, the Son of God, i.e. God himself, appears in the flesh. Such a paradox requires a Trinitarian understanding of the doctrine of revelation:

“Quapropter pater inuisibilis una cum filio secum inuisibili eundem filium uisibilem faciendo misisse eum dictus est; qui si eo modo uisibilis fieret ut cum patre inuisibilis esse desisteret, id est si substantia inuisibilis uerbi in creaturam uisibilem mutata et transiens uerteretur, ita missus a patre intellexeretur filius ut tantum missus non etiam cum patre mittens inueniretur. Cum uero sic accepta est forma serui ut maneret incommutabilis forma dei, manifestum est quod a patre et filio non apparentibus factum sit quod appareret in filio, id est ab inuisibili patre cum inuisibili filio idem ipse filius uisibilis mitteretur”.²⁰

The simple attribution of invisibility to the ‘divinity’ is unable to account for the way God makes himself known to us in Christ. We need to talk about this divine attribute in terms of the relation between the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. The attribute of invisibility

¹⁶ 3.19 (146).

¹⁷ 3.11 (138).

¹⁸ 3.10 (137). Cf. also 3.18 (144f).

¹⁹ 3.22 (151).

²⁰ 2.9 (92).

(which in fact here corresponds to God's freedom) applies to the Son insofar as he is *una cum* the Father, i.e. it belongs properly to the Father. The Son becomes 'visible', in such a way however as to remain invisible (that is 'free') with the Father. We do not need to repeat here what we have said in our chapter on Christology to explain how this paradox depends on the mystery of the Incarnation and of hypostatic union.

Let us remember the passage from the fourth book on the sentence of the Gospel of John where Jesus says to the apostle Philip: "*Tanto tempore uobiscum sum et non cognouistis me? Philippe, qui me uidit uidit et patrem*". This, says Augustine, means that the Son of God "*uidebatur et non uidebatur*" in Christ: "*Videbatur sicut missus factus erat; non uidebatur sicut per eum omnia facta erant. Aut unde etiam illud dicit: Qui habet mandata mea et seruat ea ipse est qui me diligit, et qui me diligit diligitur a patre meo, et ego diligam eum et manifestabo ei me ipsum* cum esset manifestus ante oculos hominum, nisi quia carnem quod uerbum in plenitudine temporis factum erat suscipiendae nostrae fidei porrigebat; ipsum autem uerbum per quod omnia facta erant purgatae per fidem menti contemplandum in aeternitate seruabat?"²¹ In the Incarnation, the Son of God truly is both visible and invisible and, through him, truly the Father makes himself visible, i.e. known while remaining invisible. Just as we can talk of "humilitas dei"²² and of "deus crucifixus",²³ so the Father makes himself visible i.e. knowable in the Son through the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, Augustine unfolds his doctrine of revelation in tight connection to reconciliation and has a Trinitarian understanding of both, an understanding, that is, which envisages both in the light of God's freedom. The foundations of his doctrine of the immanent Trinity lie here, even though the transition from a Trinitarian account of reconciliation and of revelation to the doctrine of the inner life of God is carefully and progressively spelt out through his discussion of the *missiones* and the elaboration of an hermeneutical rule which we shall here call the *deus de deo* rule.

²¹ 4.26 (195).

²² 4.4 (164).

²³ 1.28 (69).

3. *MISSIONES* AND THE TRANSITION BETWEEN THE ECONOMIC AND THE IMMANENT

TRINITY

When outlining the issue of *missiones*, in the sequential account of books 1 to 7, we have detected its core in the assertion of the New Testament that the sending [*missio*, from *mittere*, ‘send’] of the Son takes place in the Incarnation, whereas the sending of the Holy Spirit is said to have happened at Pentecost.²⁴ As for the Father, he is never said to have been sent. The issue is introduced in the framework of the exposition of the Trinitarian mystery to fight the argument that ‘he who is sent’ is inferior to ‘the one who sends him’ and that therefore the Son is inferior to the Father and that the Holy Spirit is inferior to both the Father and the Son. Augustine’s construal of the sending of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, however, transforms this anti-‘Arian’ polemical argument into the critical point of transition between the economic and the immanent Trinity.

First of all, the discussion on *missio* refines the Trinitarian portrayal of God’s invisibility we mentioned earlier: the invisibility of the Father is linked to the fact that he is never said to have been sent and he is ‘the one who sends’. The Son is sent because he appeared in the flesh, even though he remained invisible with the Father.²⁵ The Holy Spirit is also said to have been sent because he was manifested visibly through bodily appearances at Pentecost.²⁶ Therefore, the Son and the Holy Spirit are said to have been ‘sent’ when they appeared to us: “ut hoc eis fuerit mitti, ad aspectum mortalium in aliqua forma corporea de spiritali secreto procedere”.²⁷

However, this equation between ‘to be sent’ and ‘to be seen’ raises the question of the difference between *missiones* and the theophanies of the Old Testament. Setting aside for one moment the Incarnation, in which the unicity of the way God appears is easier to grasp, what difference is there between the apparitions of the Holy Spirit through created intermediaries in the Old Testament and his sending at Pentecost? In fact, even when he was sent by the risen Christ at

²⁴ 2.11 (93-96).

²⁵ 2.9 (92).

²⁶ 2.10 (93).

²⁷ 3.3 (129).

Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was not united to the dove or to the tongues of fire which signified his coming in the same way as the Son took flesh in Christ.²⁸ Even when he was ‘sent’ at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit manifested himself through created intermediaries, in exactly the same way as in the theophanies of the Old Testament.

The same question applies to the Father, even though in the opposite way. In his investigation of the theophanies of the Old Testament, Augustine had determined that some of them could be attributed to the Father.²⁹ Of course, this could be done only tentatively for the Old Testament, but the New Testament openly attributes to the Father the voice which was heard both at Jesus’ baptism et at the Transfiguration.³⁰ Why, therefore, is the Father not said to have been sent “*si per illas species corporales quae oculis antiquorum apparuerunt ipse demonstrabatur*”?³¹

Augustine’s solution to this dilemma is set out by progressive degrees.

First of all, he notices that the Son is said to be ‘sent’ not only because he appeared (*apparuit*) in the Incarnation, but also because *he made himself known* to us: “*tunc unicuique mittitur cum a quoquam cognoscitur atque percipitur quantum cognosci et percipi potest pro captu uel proficientis in deum uel perfectae in deo animae rationalis*” and “*eo quod ex tempore cuiusquam mente percipitur sicut dictum est: Mitte illam ut tecum sit et tecum laboret. [...] Quod autem mittitur ex tempore a quoquam cognoscitur*”.³² These sentences suggest that God makes himself known to us not only by presenting himself objectively to us, but also by overcoming our opposition to his self-revelation. This is why revelation and reconciliation are inseparable, as we have seen in the section on soteriology.³³ The obstacle represented by our sinfulness and our blindness with regard to the knowledge of God is restated here, just after the sentence quoted above: “*Quia enim in sapientia dei non poterat mundus cognoscere per sapientiam deum quoniam lux lucet in tenebris et tenebrae eam*

²⁸ 2.10f (93-96).

²⁹ For example 2.17 (102).

³⁰ 1.7f (34-37); 2.18 (104).

³¹ 3.3 (129).

³² 4.28 (198).

³³ Cf. this dissertation, 34-37 and chapter IV.

non comprehenderunt, placuit deo per stultitiam praedicationis saluos facere credentes ut uerbum caro fieret et habitaret in nobis".³⁴

Then, with regard to the Father, Augustine states that, even though he is never said to have been sent,³⁵ he too is known 'ex tempore'. This implies that just as the Son and the Holy Spirit are known as those who are sent, the Father is known precisely as the one who sends but is not seen. The simple equation between 'to be sent' and 'to be known' breaks down here. *The Father is known precisely as the one who cannot be seen or the one who, although he cannot be seen, makes himself knowable in the Incarnation of the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit.* Again, knowledge of God is not simply knowledge of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but knowledge of the Father, in the Son through the Holy Spirit.

Thus we reach the final transition between the economy of salvation and the inner life of the Trinity and we are given an answer to the question as to why only the Son and the Holy Spirit are said to have been sent and not the Father. A key sentence of the fourth book says: "non secundum imparem potestatem uel substantiam uel aliquid quod in eo patri non sit aequale missus est [filius], sed secundum id quod filius a patre est, non pater a filio".³⁶ Or again "secundum hoc missus a patre filius dicitur quia ille pater est, ille filius".³⁷ Here we discover the ultimate distinction between the *missiones* and the theophanies of the Old Testament and it is explained why, even though the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit had already made themselves known in the Old Testament, the Father is never said to have been sent and the Son and the Holy Spirit are only said to have been sent at the Incarnation and at Pentecost.

With the Incarnation and the sending of the Holy Spirit by the risen Christ (i.e. the *missiones*),³⁸ the form and content of revelation –and of reconciliation– are the expression of the identity of the

³⁴ 4.28 (198f).

³⁵ 2.8 (89); 2.22 (109); 4.28 (199).

³⁶ 4.27 (196).

³⁷ 4.27 (195).

³⁸ The *missiones* of the Son and the Holy Spirit are therefore *that through which God saves us, that through which he makes himself known to us, that through which he leads us from faith to beatitudo/uisio/fruitio* of the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit.

revealer. The Son is said to have been sent only at the time of the Incarnation because only then he unites human nature to himself in a personal -i.e. hypostatic- union to lead us to union with his Father. Only then, the Son appears and makes himself known as he is, i.e. as the Son coming from the Father. This is why the sentence quoted above identifies the mission of the Son and his divine filiation: “missus est [filius] secundum id quod filius a patre est”.

The same thing is declared even more openly with regard to the Holy Spirit: “Sicut enim ‘natum esse’ est filio ‘a patre esse’, ita ‘mitti’ est filio ‘cognosci quod ab illo sit’. Et sicut spiritui sancto ‘donum dei esse’ est ‘a patre procedere’, ita ‘mitti’ est ‘cognosci quod ab illo procedat’”.³⁹ The Holy Spirit is said to have been ‘sent’ –*missus*– only when he makes known to us (*cognosci*) his own inner-Trinitarian identity, namely his being ‘he who proceeds from the Father’. The following passage explains this point more in detail:

“Quomodo ergo *spiritus nondum erat datus quia Iesus nondum erat clarificatus* nisi quia illa datio uel donatio uel missio spiritus sancti habitura erat quandam proprietatem suam in ipso aduentu qualis antea numquam fuit?”.

The Gospel of John explains that the Holy Spirit is said to be *datus* or *sent* only after his resurrection, because only then that gift [*datio*, *donatio*: here is the origin of the notion of Holy Spirit as *donum*] or *missio* was going to have a new characteristic, a new *proprietas*, which is described as follows:

“Nusquam enim legimus linguis quas non nouerant homines locutos ueniente in se spiritu sancto sicut tunc factum est cum oporteret eius aduentum signis sensibilibus demonstrari ut ostenderetur totum orbem terrarum atque omnes gentes in linguis uariis constitutas credituras in Christum per donum spiritus sancti”⁴⁰

This *proprietas* of the *datio/donatio* of the Holy Spirit which corresponds to his inner-Trinitarian identity is that he constitutes us believers in Christ, i.e. he creates in us that faith which works through love, *fides per dilectionem*, through which we adhere to Christ.⁴¹ This is restated even more incisively in another passage: “*Vt enim fides per dilectionem operetur, caritas dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris*

³⁹ 4.29 (199).

⁴⁰ 4.29 (201).

⁴¹ 13.5 (386); 13.14 (400); 13.26 (419).

per spiritum sanctum qui datus est nobis. Tunc est autem datus quando est Iesus resurrectione clarificatus".⁴²

Therefore, the role of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation through the Incarnation, Christ's sacrifice and the gift of the Holy Spirit by the risen Christ are the revelations of the inner life of God. In other words, because salvation is really divine, the way God saves us is a revelation of his identity. At the same time, (i) because of the identity between revelation and reconciliation; (ii) because the Father is known precisely as he who cannot be seen/known (the invisible, the unknowable); and finally (iii) because the subjective aspect of knowledge of God is the work of the Holy Spirit: for all these reasons, God remains invisible, unknowable, that is *free* even in his self-revelation.⁴³

4. *SAPIENTIA* AND THE IDENTITY BETWEEN REVEALER AND REVELATION

In our sequential account of the first seven books of the *De Trinitate*, we have seen that the 7th book tries to answer the question of whether each person of the Trinity is God individually or the Trinity is God as a whole.⁴⁴ The outcome of the argument is that each person is God and that the three together are the one God. Yet within the unity of God there is a 'direction' [*deus de deo*]. This whole point is elaborated through the discussion of the way the attribute of *sapientia* must be predicated of God. In virtue of God's simplicity, everything we say about God as substance is true

⁴² 13.14 (400).

⁴³ Compared, therefore, with Rahner's axiom "the Trinity of the economy of salvation *is* the immanent Trinity and vice versa" [Rahner (1966), 87], Augustine's version does maintain that the economic Trinity allows us to know the immanent Trinity since the defining factor of *missiones* is that they correspond to Father, Son and Holy Spirit' inner Trinitarian identity. However, he does not identify the *missiones* with the inner Trinitarian identity of Son and Holy Spirit (i.e. the economic Trinity with the immanent Trinity) to the point that Christ's humanity becomes revealer as such, i.e. that knowledge of God becomes something at our disposal. Because he holds a clear anhypostatic approach to the Incarnation (see Chapter IV), because faith only becomes operative through *dilectio* and because the Holy Spirit is given in such a way that he gives himself as God (see Chapter VI below), the immanent Trinity remains free in in his self-revelation and revelation remains a grace. *God's involvement in history is always God's free decision to be involved*, without him ever becoming dependent on history or his inner Trinitarian identity ever needing history to become what it is.

⁴⁴ 6.6 (234f) quoted in 7.1 (244).

of any of his attributes, included that of *sapientia*. This means that each person is *sapientia* and yet the three together are one *sapientia*, but with a ‘direction’ [i.e. the Son is *sapientia de sapientia*].⁴⁵

However, Augustine is aware of the fact that Scripture never ascribes *sapientia* to the Father. This he acknowledges when he says that “in scripturis nusquam fere de sapientia quidquam dicitur nisi ut ostendatur a deo genita uel creata”.⁴⁶ He is aware that in Scripture *sapientia* is *genita* and that it refers to the action of the Son, through whom everything was created.⁴⁷ He did not simply remember this point once he had established on a purely theoretical ground that *sapientia* must be equally predicated of the three persons of the Trinity. He already had copiously illustrated this point in the exegetical analysis of the first four books of the *De Trinitate*, where *sapientia* was consistently identified with the Son.⁴⁸ It was already clear that, like the *uerbum* of the beginning of John’s gospel, *sapientia* is that through which everything was created.⁴⁹

On what grounds, therefore, has Augustine established that *sapientia* must be attributed to the Father as well as to the Son? How does this move relate to the scriptural material from which he was so consciously trying to argue?

The real presupposition behind the attribution of *sapientia* to the Father as well as to the Son is, of course, the same necessary identity between the form/content of revelation and the revealer we have highlighted in his account of *missiones*. This is declared in the second half of a sentence already quoted in part, which we give now in its entirety:

“Cur ergo in scripturis nusquam fere de sapientia quidquam dicitur nisi ut ostendatur a deo genita uel creata? Genita scilicet per quam facta sunt omnia; creata uero uel facta sicut in hominibus cum ad eam quae non creata et facta sed genita est conuertuntur et inlustrantur; in ipsis enim fit aliquid quod uocetur eorum sapientia”.⁵⁰

Sapientia here designates not only that through which everything was created [*sapientia genita*], but also something which becomes ours in the act through which we are converted to the *sapientia*

⁴⁵ 7.1-3 (244-250).

⁴⁶ 7.4 (251f).

⁴⁷ 7.4 (251): “Genita [sapientia] scilicet per quam facta sunt omnia”.

⁴⁸ 2.14 (99). The whole of the second book of the *De Trinitate* tends to interpret the Old Testament references to *sapientia* as applying to the Son, cf. 2.25 (113f) and 2.28 (118).

⁴⁹ 2.14 (99); 2.28 (118); 3.15 (142f).

which is the Son and enlightened by him [*sapientia creata*]. Our ‘enlightenment’ or conversion is then described as follows:

“Pater enim eam [*sapientiam*] dicit ut uerbum eius sit, [...] et inluminando, [*this same sapientia/verbum*] dicit nobis et de se et de patre quod dicendum est hominibus”.⁵¹

For the purpose of clarity we call ‘repetition’ the act through which we are made *sapientes* described in this sentence, a ‘repetition’ in the strongest and deepest possible sense of the word. Let us notice the parallelism of *dicit*: (i) just as the Father *dicit* his *Sapientia* and this is what constitutes the Son as *uerbum*; (ii) so the Son/*uerbum* *dicit* to us “et de se et de Patre” and in this act we are enlightened.

Augustine had already determined the right connexion between the Son’s denomination as *uerbum* and the way in which the divine attribute of *sapientia* must be ascribed to him: “id accipiamus cum dicitur uerbum sapientia ac si dicatur ‘nata sapientia’”.⁵² The Son is *uerbum* as he is ‘nata sapientia’ or *sapientia de sapientia* and it is precisely this feature of his very being which grounds his revelatory and salvific enlightening role towards us: “uerbum dei [...] ita ostendit patrem sicuti est pater, quia et ipsum ita est, et hoc est quod pater secundum quod sapientia est et essentia”.⁵³ The Son of God reveals that which the Father is *ad se*, i.e. the Father’s *sapientia* and *essentia*, because of his consubstantiality with the Father *secundum sapientiam et essentiam*. If we reverse this statement from our viewpoint, the act through which we are made *sapientes* (that is the act through which we are converted and enlightened)⁵⁴ somehow is a ‘repetition’ of the relation between Father and Son and happens through the Son precisely because he is the Father’s ‘word’.

This point is so crucial in Augustine’s Trinitarian doctrine, that he restates it again under the viewpoint of *lumen*, which makes it even clearer. Precisely because the Son is *lumen de lumine* and *fons uitae* he can become the *lumen quod illuminat omnes homines*. Again from our viewpoint this means that

⁵⁰ 7.4 (251).

⁵¹ 7.4 (251).

⁵² 7.3 (250).

⁵³ 7.4 (251).

⁵⁴ For an explanation of the meaning of *conuersio* in Augustine see this dissertation, 261-271.

our *illuminatio* depends on what the Son is as *lumen de lumine*, i.e. on his inner Trinitarian relation to the Father.⁵⁵

The presupposition for this link between the identity of the Son and his role in revelation and reconciliation can be found in the doctrine of *missiones* examined above. In the passage from the seventh book on which we are focussing our investigation, there are two explicit references to this issue. The Son, *sapientia de sapientia*, makes us *sapientes* by enlightening us, because *factus est nobis sapientia a deo* through a temporal dispensation in time in which Augustine identifies two moments: (i) the time of the Incarnation: “ex quodam tempore uerbum caro factum est et habitauit in nobis”⁵⁶ and (ii) the time of our conversion: “temporaliter nos ad illum conuertimur, id est ex aliquo tempore, ut cum illo maneamus in aeternum”⁵⁷ and “Nos autem nitentes imitatur manentem et sequimur stantem et in ipso ambulantes tendimus ad ipsum quia factus est nobis uia temporalis per humilitatem quae mansio nobis aeterna est per diuinitatem”.⁵⁸

The echo between these passages and the definition of *missiones* given in the fourth book is unmistakable, where we have seen that ‘to be sent’ means ‘to be known’, which requires our conversion to and reconciliation with the Father, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. The whole thrust of the fourth book was precisely to establish that *missio* does not imply the inferiority of the Son –and the Holy Spirit– who is sent, vis-à-vis the Father who sends, precisely because *missiones* correspond to the inner Trinitarian identity of the divine persons. The Son becomes for us *sapientia a deo* because in the Trinity he is *sapientia de deo* or *sapientia de sapientia*. This is yet another way of restating that the act through which, *temporaliter*, the Son becomes our *uia* to eternity and *beatitudo* corresponds to his eternal being.

⁵⁵ 7.4 (252).

⁵⁶ 7.4 (252).

⁵⁷ 7.4 (252).

⁵⁸ 7.5 (253).

5. THE RULE *DEUS DE DEO* AND THE REVELATORY ROLE OF SON AND HOLY SPIRIT

Everything we have said so far concerning the doctrine of *missiones* and more generally the Trinitarian shape of Augustine's doctrine of revelation and reconciliation is the ground of the key exegetical and doctrinal move he makes in the second book of the *De Trinitate*. In this book, he surprises his reader by criticising the rule for the interpretation of the passages of Scripture apparently implying the inferiority of the Son he had formulated in his first book. In the first book, he had applied the classical interpretation which consisted in attributing all the passages denoting inferiority with regard to the Father to the humanity of Christ, and attributing all those which present Christ as equal to the Father to his divinity. At the outset of second book, however, he acknowledges that some passages do not fit into this traditional twofold classification. Some texts of the New Testament, although unambiguously referring to Christ in his divinity, suggest some sort of 'subordination' with regard to the Father:

“Sunt quaedam in diuinis eloquiis ita posita ut ambiguum sit ad quam potius regulam referantur, utrum ad eam qua intellegimus minorem filium in assumpta creatura, an ad eam qua intellegimus non quidem minorem esse filium sed aequalem patri, tamen ab illo hunc esse deum de deo, lumen de lumine. Filium quippe dicimus deum de deo; patrem autem deum tantum, non 'de deo'”.⁵⁹

These scriptural passages do not insinuate inferiority, nor subordination, but rather a 'direction', so to speak: the Son is equal to the Father and yet he is 'from the Father', he is God, but God from God. Augustine does not offer any scriptural justification for this rule, but from everything we have seen so far, it is evident that this hermeneutical principle is grounded in the doctrine of *missiones* (even though, sequentially, the issue of *missiones* is examined in the *De Trinitate* after the rule *deus de deo*).

The application of this doctrinal principle to the exegesis of some passages of the New Testament offers some very illuminating insights into the transition between the economic and the immanent Trinity. This is the case, in particular, with the passage from the gospel of John where

⁵⁹ 2.2 (81f). Cf. also 1.26 (65f), where Augustine comments on John 12.47 and even though he has not yet formulated his rule *deus de deo*, he already applies it to the explanation of this passage.

Jesus says: “*Mea doctrina non est mea sed eius qui me misit*”. This passage, Augustine explains “et ex forma serui potest accipi sicut iam in libro superiore tractauimus, et ex forma dei in qua sic aequalis est patri ut tamen de patre sit”.⁶⁰ Then he adds:

“In dei quippe forma sicut non est aliud filius, aliud uita eius, sed ipsa uita filius est; ita non est aliud filius, aliud doctrina eius, sed ipsa doctrina filius est. Ac per hoc sicut id quod dictum est: *Dedit filio uitam*, non aliud intellegitur quam: 'Genuit filium qui est uita,' sic etiam cum dicitur: 'Dedit filio doctrinam,' bene intellegitur: 'Genuit filium qui est doctrina'; ut quod dictum est: *Mea doctrina non est mea sed eius qui me misit*, sic intellegatur ac si dictum sit: 'Ego non sum a me ipso sed ab illo qui me misit'”.⁶¹

The key claim of this interpretation of John 7.16 is that the Son is *doctrina* as he is *filius*, which means that he reveals the Father because he is the Son and ‘to be Son’ means to be equal to God (the Father) and yet ‘God from God’. Revelation is bound up with the inner life of the Trinity in a typically Johannine fashion. The form/content of revelation and the identity of the revealer cannot be dissociated. That which is revealed and the way it is revealed are not different from what happens in the inner life of the Trinity. If God really makes himself known, the way he does so corresponds to what he is.

The interest of this interpretation becomes even more striking when Augustine applies it to the Holy Spirit as well. Suggestively, he sets two texts from the Gospel of S. John side by side: John 7.16, “*Mea doctrina non est mea sed eius qui me misit*” and John 16.13-15, where Jesus says about the Holy Spirit: “*Non enim loquetur a semetipso, sed quaecumque audiet loquetur, et quae uentura sunt annuntiabit uobis. Ille me clarificabit quia de meo accipiet et annuntiabit uobis. Omnia quaecumque habet pater mea sunt; propterea dixi: Quia de meo accipiet et annuntiabit uobis*”.

Both passages could be interpreted in a subordinationist way with regard to revelation: the former denotes inferiority of the Son to the Father and the latter inferiority of the Holy Spirit both with regard to the Father and to the Son. However, the Son is *doctrina* as he is *filius*; he reveals the Father not because he is inferior to him, but precisely because he is equal to the Father and yet from the Father, he is *deus* and yet *deus de deo*.

⁶⁰ 2.4 (84).

⁶¹ John 7.16, quoted in 2.4 (84f).

Identically, the way the Holy Spirit is involved in the revelatory work of the Son depends on his inner-Trinitarian relation to the Father and the Son. If Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will speak –i.e. reveal- from what is his, this means that the Holy Spirit comes from the Father and the Son, even though the Son himself receives this ‘ability’ to give the Holy Spirit from the Father. The difference between the Son and the Holy Spirit is expressed through the Johannine terminology of ‘procession’:

“restat ut intellegatur etiam spiritus sanctus de patris habere sicut et filius. Quomodo nisi secundum id quod supra diximus: *Cum autem uenerit paracletus quem ego mittam uobis a patre, spiritum ueritatis qui a patre procedit, ille testimonium perhibebit de me? Procedendo itaque a patre dicitur non loqui a semetipso*”.⁶²

The interest of this quotation is that it is exactly parallel to that concerning the way in which the Son is revelation: the Son is *doctrina* as he is *filius*,⁶³ for the Holy Spirit, ‘not to speak of himself’ coincides with his procession from the Father through the Son, “*Procedendo itaque a patre dicitur non loqui a semetipso*”.⁶⁴ The revelatory role of the Holy Spirit with relation to the Son and the Father corresponds to his identity in the inner Trinity and to his procession from the Father and the Son, as we will see shortly in our chapter on pneumatology.

6. CONCLUSION

The examination of Augustine’s doctrine of revelation does not leave any doubt as to where the roots of his doctrine of the inner life of the Trinity have to be looked for. The assertion that these roots are in Scripture is correct, but insufficient. The transition from Scripture to the doctrine of the immanent Trinity needs an intermediary link represented by soteriology and the doctrine of revelation or, more fundamentally, by divine action.

In revelation we are in the presence of God’s act of self-manifestation. With soteriology, we look at the way God’s self-manifestation actually saves us. Scripture reveals the characteristics of

⁶² 2.5 (86).

⁶³ 2.4 (84f). The same idea is expressed in the fact that he teaches from the Father *natiuitas ostenditur*, i.e. it shows that he is from the Father, 2.3 (84).

God's act of salvific self-manifestation, especially its freedom, which Augustine envisages from the viewpoint of the divine attributes of invisibility and immutability. The Trinitarian shape of the doctrine of revelation is the consequence of this freedom, which requires that only from his own side can the invisible/unknowable and immutable God make himself known; 'from his own side', of course, means 'in Christ through the Holy Spirit'.

In the same way, the unity, equality and inseparability of Father, Son and Holy Spirit are required by the divine character of revelation and reconciliation. The invisible Father does not cease to be invisible or, to say the same thing, he does not cease to be the Lord in the act through which he makes himself known. This freedom and lordship in revelation explain why the revelatory role of the Son is not a function of his inferiority, nor yet of his difference from the Father, but precisely of his unity, inseparability and equality with him: he is revelation –or *doctrina*– as he is Son, i.e. *deus de deo*. What shields Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine from any theistic understanding of divine attributes –invisibility, immutability, simplicity, unity, equality, inseparability– is that these are postulated not on the basis of an abstract notion of divinity, but on the basis of the very nature of revelation and reconciliation. Augustine does not start from a unitary notion of divine nature characterised by these attributes and then tries to see how it can be understood in a Trinitarian way. On the contrary, he starts from the divine character of Christ's work of revelation and reconciliation through the Holy Spirit: God (the Father) can *only* be known and loved through God (the Son and the Holy Spirit) because he is invisible, immutable and free; the Father can *really* be known and loved through the Son and the Holy Spirit because the Three are inseparably and equally one God.

⁶⁴ 2.5 (86). Although not explicitly stated here, the *Filioque* is implied.

VI. THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE INNER LIFE OF THE TRINITY

Our previous chapters have shown the extent to which reconciliation and revelation are the foundations of Augustine's doctrine of the immanent Trinity. Augustine's doctrine of the Holy Spirit is going to provide us with a further confirmation of this finding, especially if we pay attention to the links between Augustine's pneumatology and his Christology and soteriology. This link does not stand out above all in the sections of the *De Trinitate* in which the questions of the divinity, the *proprietas* and the origin of the Holy Spirit are treated *ex professo*.¹ The real doctrinal foundations of the divinity, the *proprietas* and the origin of the Holy Spirit are laid out in the very sections of the *De Trinitate* we have analysed so far, where Augustine sets out the dynamic of salvation. Therefore, the best introduction to the topic of this chapter will be a survey of the section of this dissertation devoted to Christology and soteriology with an eye to the points of intersection with pneumatology outlined there.

1. CHRISTOLOGICAL AND SOTERIOLOGICAL GROUNDS OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Cupiditas, we have seen, is Augustine's main name for human sinfulness. He stresses in particular its disintegrating effects for the individual moral agent, for his relation with God and for his relation with his neighbour.² Christ alone is the *unum* who can heal the scattering effects of

¹ 1.13 (42ff); 1.24-25 (62-65); 2.5 (85f); 2.7-8 (87-90); 4.29 (199ff); 5.12-17 (218-227); 6.7 (235f); 6.11-12 (241ff); 7.5-6 (252ff); 15.27-39 (501-517); 15.46-48 (525-530).

² 4.11f (175ff).

sinfulness. A sentence from the fourth book we have quoted in full already,³ sees the unity of Christ's identity and of the salvation he has realized as the most fitting remedy to the results of *cupiditas*: through love and faith we adhere to the *unum* Christ, the mediator through whom we are reconciled with God, and are able to cling to the One, enjoy the One and remain for ever one, "per mediatorem deo reconciliati, haereamus uni, fruamur uno, permaneamus unum".⁴

The three key features of Augustine's Christology –hypostatic union, mediatory role and sacrifice- are unfolded in such a way as to highlight precisely this saving unity of reconciliation.

To start with, hypostatic union. The unity of the Son with human nature in the Incarnation is such that Christ's humility is the very *humilitas dei*;⁵ in virtue of this unique kind of union, in Christ we have some *temporalia* –Christ's humanity, his deeds, his words- which have no existence or meaning other than that which is given to them by their existence in the Son of God.⁶ As a result, knowledge [*scientia*] of these *temporalia*, becomes a way to knowledge of God [*sapientia*]. Through these *temporalia*, objects of faith, God *can* make himself known. The first and fundamental remedy to the epistemological impasse caused by sin is the special kind of unity between the Son of God and human nature realized in the Incarnation.

Then, with regard to Christ's mediatorial role and his sacrifice, we have seen that the Incarnation is not simply the union of divine and human nature, but the act through which the Son of God unites human nature to himself and leads it to participate in his personal unity *of will* with the Father. We reach here an aspect of Augustine's Christology and soteriology which has a decisive bearing on his doctrine of the Holy Spirit and of the inner life of the Trinity. We have analysed the daring passage from the fourth book where Augustine argues that just as the Father and the Son are *unum* not only through the equality of substance, but in virtue of their unity of will, so the unity of Christians with each other is a unity of *dilectio* and not simply a unity of nature.⁷ The

³ Cf. this dissertation, 105.

⁴ 4.11 (176).

⁵ 13.22 (412f).

⁶ Cf. this dissertation, 80.

⁷ 4.12 (177f). Cf. this dissertation, 91f.

significance of this move should not be underestimated. The Trinitarian ground of his Christology and soteriology is the union *of will* between the Father and the Son. Provisionally, we can render this point as follows: just as the Father and the Son are united through *dilectio*-Holy Spirit, so Christians are reconciled -become *unum*- with the Father through the *dilectio* of Christ's sacrifice (let us remember that *dilectio* is the essence of sacrifice) and become *unum* with each other through the same *dilectio* poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us at Christ's resurrection.

Against this background, we become immediately aware of the inseparability between Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine, his Christology and his soteriology on the one hand and his pneumatology on the other.

Christ's mediatory and reconciliatory role consists in the act through which the Son extends his personal unity of *dilectio* with the Father to human nature through the Holy Spirit. The 'simple' –so to speak- unity between divine and human natures in the Incarnation is only one side of the salvation realized by Christ, just as the assertion of the ontological unity of divine persons is not enough to account for the unity of the Trinity, but needs to be complemented with the affirmation of a unity of will, of *dilectio*, between the Father and the Son. Only through Christ's sacrifice, the personal unity of love between the Father and the Son existing from all eternity brings to the full accomplishment the unity of love of Christ with the Father, his *amor Dei usque ad contemptum sui*, his obedience *usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis*. This is the justice of Christ through which we have been saved.⁸ The very nature of the unity between the Father and the Son, consisting in their mutual eternal love, the Holy Spirit, dictates a Christological and soteriological 'translation' which cannot confine itself to the ontological unity of natures in the Incarnation, but has to be carried through historically in the life of Christ and sealed on the cross. This dynamic approach is required by Augustine's fundamental scriptural basis for this whole topic, namely Philippians 2.

Our examination of the pair *sacramentum/exemplum* has shown how Augustine spells out the subjective aspect of soteriology. Christ's sacrifice is *sacramentum* in the sense that it is the 'effective

sign' of that which the whole *redempta civitas* becomes in the present side of the eschatology: a sacrifice acceptable to God, in virtue of the same *dilectio* enacted in Christ's sacrifice, which reconciles human nature to the Father. At the same time, Christ's sacrifice is the *exemplum*, that is to say the 'effective sign' of our 'completed' union with God in the other side of the eschatology, in which *beatitudo* will be granted to us in the *contemplatio* of the Father resulting from the union of *dilectio* with him.

Dilectio, therefore, is the key defining feature of each of these three facets of soteriology: *dilectio* unites the Son to the Father eternally in the inner life of the Trinity; through the *dilectio* enacted in Christ's Incarnation and especially in his sacrifice, the union of love between the Son with Father becomes Christ's union with the Father and, through him, ours.

Thus, the whole treatment of Christology and soteriology is already pregnant with the doctrine of the identity, the *proprietas* and the origin of the Holy Spirit. The first illustration of this claim can be found in a passage of the seventh book:

“Quia enim homo ad beatitudinem sequi non debebat nisi deum et sentire non poterat deum, sequendo deum hominem factum sequeretur simul et quem sentire poterat et quem sequi debebat. Amemus ergo eum et inhaereamus illi caritate diffusa in cordibus nostris per spiritum sanctum qui datus est nobis”.⁹

It is through the *caritas* poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that we adhere to Christ and that the soteriological –and inseparably epistemological- benefits of the Incarnation become, so to speak, operative for us. The cause and effect of our inability to know God lies in our will and especially in its disorderly relation to temporal realities: “nos pergrauabant temporalium rerum amore contractae”.¹⁰ Hence the necessity of the Incarnation in which some *utilia temporalia* are given to our faith for the knowledge of God. However, even faith in these *utilia temporalia* does not lead to knowledge of God unless this same faith ‘works through *dilectio*’. It is only as object of faith through *dilectio* that Christ's humanity and his deeds allow us to see the Father. This is what

⁸ Cf. this dissertation, 95-99.

⁹ 7.5 (253).

¹⁰ 4.24 (191).

Augustine means when he talks of the necessity of the conversion from the *cupiditas scientiae* to the *caritas sapientiae*.¹¹

We start to catch a glimpse, here, of the theological foundation of one of the key ideas which runs through the whole of the *De Trinitate*, namely the inseparability between knowledge and love. This inseparability stems from the unity between the saving work of Christ and the role of the Holy Spirit in it. This, on its turn, reflects the intra-Trinitarian relations of the Holy Spirit with the Son and the Father.

We have seen that, when Augustine determines the *proprietas* of the *datio/missio* of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, i.e. that which corresponds to his role and identity in the inner life of the Trinity, he declares that the Holy Spirit constitutes us believers in Christ, i.e. he creates in us that faith which works through love, *fides per dilectionem*, through which we adhere to Christ.¹² This is restated even more incisively in another passage: “*Vt enim fides per dilectionem operetur, caritas dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per spiritum sanctum qui datus est nobis. Tunc est autem datus quando est Iesus resurrectione clarificatus*”.¹³ In our chapter on Christology we have seen that ‘faith’ corresponds to *scientia*, i.e. to knowledge, and that, thanks to Christ who is both our *scientia* and our *sapientia*, the content of the knowledge given by faith –i.e. *scientia*– is exactly the same as the content of the *visio/contemplatio* of the life to come –i.e. *sapientia*–; only the modality is different. With pneumatology, we find that the knowledge given by faith only becomes real knowledge of God through *dilectio*, i.e. in the Holy Spirit. This is why knowledge and love are inseparable. We know God in Christ only if we love him through the Holy Spirit.

At the same time, the objective reconciliation with the Father realized in Christ’s sacrifice becomes ours only through the *dilectio* poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, precisely because *dilectio* is what unites the Son to the Father from all eternity and *dilectio* is that which enables Christ’s sacrifice to reconcile humanity to the Father.

¹¹ 4.12 (177) and 12.16 (370).

¹² 4.29 (201).

The transition between the history of salvation and the inner life of the Trinity has to be located precisely at this junction. To the equation between reconciliation and revelation we have established in our chapter on Christology, we have to add the equation between the form/content of revelation/reconciliation and the identity of the revealer/saviour, already outlined in Christology and in the doctrine of revelation, but fully described only when the work of Christ is seen in its inseparability with that of the Holy Spirit.

2. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE UNITY OF THE IMMANENT TRINITY

We saw earlier that the assertion of the ontological unity of the divine persons is not enough to account for the unity of the Trinity, but needs to be complemented with the affirmation of a unity of will, of *dilectio*, between the Father and the Son. This is required by the nature of salvation. Salvation can be encompassed under the heading of *unitas* because this *unitas* coincides with *dilectio*.

Among the scriptural bases of Augustine's pneumatology, it is worth noticing his use of Ephesians 4.3 in the sixth book of the *De Trinitate*. Ephesians 4 is often quoted in Augustine's treatment of the Holy Spirit:

*“Obsecro itaque vos ego vinctus in Domino ut digne ambuletis vocatione qua vocati estis cum omni humilitate et mansuetudine cum patientia subportantes invicem in caritate solliciti servare unitatem spiritus in vinculo pacis, unum corpus et unus spiritus sicut vocati estis in una spe vocationis vestrae, unus Dominus una fides unum baptisma, unus Deus et Pater omnium qui super omnes et per omnia et in omnibus nobis”.*¹⁴

The unity of Christians with each other is the result of the *gift* of the Holy Spirit given by the risen Christ after his ascension: “But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: ‘When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.’ (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly

¹³ 13.14 (400).

¹⁴ Ephesians 4. 1-6.

regions?)”.¹⁵ Unity therefore, identified with *dilectio*, can be seen as the *proprietas* of the Holy Spirit in this crucial passage from the sixth book which quotes Ephesians 4.3:

“manifestum est quod non aliquis duorum est quo uterque coniungitur, quo genitus a gignente diligatur generatoremque suum diligat, sintque non participatione sed essentia sua neque dono superioris a licuius sed suo proprio *seruantes unitatem spiritus in uinculo pacis*”.¹⁶

Through the Holy Spirit the Father and the Son are united to each other; through the Holy Spirit the Father [*gignens*] loves the Son [*genitus*] and the Son loves the Father, thus fulfilling their unity *essentia sua*, by virtue of their *essentia* (Augustine’s word for *substantia*), i.e. of what they are. This means that unity of *dilectio* in the Holy Spirit provides the *content* of the metaphysical notion of unity of essence [or *consubstantialitas*]:

“Spiritus ergo sanctus commune aliquid est patris et filii, quidquid illud est, aut ipsa communio consubstantialis et coaeterna; quae si amicitia conuenienter dici potest, dicatur, sed aptius dicitur caritas; et haec quoque substantia quia deus substantia et deus caritas sicut scriptum est”.¹⁷

The combination of ontological vocabulary with terms evoking unity of will such as *communio* and *caritas* and even that of ‘friendship’ –put forward rather tentatively- should not be overlooked. In the section going from the 5th to the 7th book, where Augustine tries to come to terms with the notion of consubstantiality developed for the sake of the polemic against Arianism during the Trinitarian controversy, he often betrays his uneasiness with it, because of the limitations of such abstract tools. Unfortunately, the Arian controversy had cast a suspicion over the language of unity of will for the persons of the Trinity: unity of will had been opposed to unity of nature and used as an expedient to deny the equality between the Father and the Son.

An echo of this controversy can be found in the 15th book, right at the end of the discussion on the Holy Spirit. The ‘Arian’ argument –attributed to Eunomius- is that “non naturae uel substantiae siue essentiae dixit esse filium sed filium uoluntatis dei, accidentem scilicet deo”.¹⁸ Augustine replies, of course, by pointing out that this implies an anthropomorphic conception of will, which

¹⁵ Ephesians 4.7-9 -quoted in 15.34, (509ff).

¹⁶ 6.7 (235).

¹⁷ 6.7 (235).

¹⁸ 15.38 (515).

indeed in our case is mutable and somehow accidental to our substance. In God's case, Scripture testifies that "*consilium autem domini manet in aeternum*, [...] ut intellegamus siue credamus sicut aeternum deum, ita aeternum eius esse consilium, ac per hoc immutabile sicut ipse est."¹⁹ We must not fail to notice the identification between the metaphysical divine attribute of immutability and the biblical notion of God's faithfulness: as usual, Augustine's abstract terms [like for example here that of 'immutability'] have a theological content. The argument is sealed by a quotation of Gregory of Nazianzus arguing that nature and will cannot be opposed in God:

"Acute sane quidam respondit haeretico uersutissime interroganti utrum deus filium uolens an nolens genuerit, ut si diceretur, 'nolens,' absurdissima dei miseria sequeretur; si autem, 'uolens,' continuo quod intendebat uelut inuicta ratione concluderet non naturae esse filium sed uoluntatis. At ille uigilantissime uicissim quaesiuit ab eo utrum deus pater uolens an nolens sit deus, ut si responderet, 'nolens,' sequeretur illa miseria quam de deo credere magna insania est; si autem diceret, 'uolens,' responderetur ei: 'Ergo et ipse uoluntate sua deus est non natura'".²⁰

Hence the extension to *uoluntas* of the rule of simplicity Augustine associates to consubstantiality:

"Quidam ne filium consilii uel uoluntatis dei dicerent unigenitum uerbum, ipsum consilium seu uoluntatem patris idem uerbum esse dixerunt. Sed melius quantum existimo dicitur consilium de consilio et uoluntas de uoluntate sicut substantia de substantia, sapientia de sapientia, ne absurditate illa quam iam refellimus filius patrem dicatur facere sapientem uel uolentem si non habet pater in substantia sua consilium uel uoluntatem".²¹

It is vital to understand this slightly puzzling passage correctly. Simplicity does not mean that talk of will, wisdom or of any other attribute becomes meaningless when applied to God, since 'to be' and 'to be something' are identical in him. It does not mean that when we talk about his wisdom we are not saying anything different than when we talk about his will. Rather, it means that God is substance as he is wisdom or is wisdom as he is substance; he is substance as he is *dilectio* or he is *dilectio* as he is substance. With regard to the line of investigation we are following in this paragraph, it amounts to saying that unity of the Trinity *is a substantial unity as a unity of dilectio*.

Dilectio defines what each person is *ad se*, i.e. substantially:

¹⁹ 15.38 (515).

²⁰ 15.38 (516). Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 29.6 (PG 36, 80f).

²¹ 15.38 (515).

“Caritas quippe patris quae in natura eius est ineffabiliter simplici nihil est aliud quam eius ipsa natura atque substantia ut saepe iam diximus et saepe iterare non piget. Ac per hoc filius caritatis eius nullus est alius quam qui de substantia eius est genitus”.²²

At the same time, *dilectio* belongs properly to the Holy Spirit: “uoluntas dei si et proprie dicenda est aliqua in trinitate persona, magis hoc nomen spiritui sancto competit sicut caritas. Nam quid est aliud caritas quam uoluntas?”.²³ Set side by side with the conclusion of the passage from the 6th book we were analysing above, these sentences give us a deeper insight into Augustine’s understanding of the inner life of the Trinity:

“Et ideo non amplius quam tria sunt: unus diligens eum qui de illo est, et unus diligens eum de quo est, et ipsa dilectio. Quae si nihil est, quomodo *deus dilectio est*? Si non est substantia, quomodo deus substantia est?”.²⁴

Just like any other attribute, *dilectio* must be understood in a Trinitarian way and so confirms that Augustine conceives the substantial unity of the Trinity not primarily in terms of unity of ‘divine nature’, but as a unity of *dilectio*. Father and Son are united in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is “summa caritas utrumque [the Father and the Son] coniungens nosque subiungens, quod ideo non indigne dicitur quia scriptum est: *Deus caritas est*”.²⁵

These verbs *con-iungere* and *sub-iungere*, in this sentence, suggest another facet of the *proprietas* of the Holy Spirit Augustine infers from his role in the economy of salvation. His uniting role includes the idea or ‘order’ [*ordo*], of causing everything to be at its proper place. To this aspect we now turn.

3. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE ‘ORDER’ OF THE IMMANENT TRINITY

At the end of the sixth book of the *De Trinitate*, in his attempt to bring some clarity to the issue of the *proprietas* of the three persons of the Trinity, Augustine resorts to the authority of Hilary of Poitiers. As a matter of fact, he betrays some difficulties in the understanding of what Hilary really

²² 15.37 (514).

²³ 15.38 (516).

²⁴ 6.7 (236).

²⁵ 7.6 (254).

meant.²⁶ In the end, he interprets Hilary in the light of his own Trinitarian theology, particularly with regard to the Holy Spirit.

Augustine describes the relation between the Father and the Son as an ‘embrace’ [*complexus*] which entails *perfruitio*, *caritas*, *gaudium*. This, he explains, must be the meaning of the name given by Hilary to the Holy Spirit, i.e. *usus*, which can be translated into English as ‘enjoyment of a property belonging to another’ –cf. *ususfructus*– or, applied to persons, ‘familiarity, intimacy’. In the relation between the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is that through which they ‘enjoy’ each other, he is somehow their reciprocal ‘familiarity’ – he is their *dilectio*, *delectatio*, *felicitas*, *beatitudo*.

At the same time, he is the *suauitas* of the Father and the Son and he “pervades all creatures according to their capacity with its vast generosity and fruitfulness, that they might all keep their right order and rest in their right places”.²⁷ Through the action of the Holy Spirit, creation “ordinem aliquem petit aut tenet, sicut sunt pondera vel conlocationes corporum atque amores aut delectationes animarum”.²⁸

The association between ‘order’ and ‘weight’ [*pondus*] outlined here is a familiar theme in Augustine’s early works, which will be discussed more in detail in the section of this dissertation devoted to the theme of the image of God.²⁹ Augustine infers the attribution of the image of *pondus* to the Holy Spirit from the book of Wisdom 11.21: “omnia mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti”. As we shall see, weight (*pondus*) is not only that through which things tend to go downwards, but that through which they tend towards their intended location, thereby setting all things in their right order, *ordo*. The *pondus* of fire, for example, is upwards.

Therefore, by establishing a parallel between *pondus* and *amor* or *delectatio*, the passage of the end of the book 6 quoted above can be interpreted as follows: that through which everything tends to

²⁶ 6. 11 (241): “horum uerborum [...] abditam scrutatus intellegentiam quantum ualeo”.

²⁷ 6.11 (242).

²⁸ 6.12 (242).

²⁹ Cf. this dissertation, 268.

the place where it will find rest (or *beatitudo*) is a kind of attraction, a sort of love. Irresistibly we are reminded of the suggestive aphorism: “Pondus meum, amor meus”.³⁰

The meaning of this aphorism will become clearer if we call to mind Augustine’s criticism of the Stoic ethical model of indifference or neutrality we encountered earlier.³¹ Augustine’s main reproach to it is the absence of love, which we can translate now into absence of ‘weight’. If being *beatus* consists in not wanting nor fearing anything, but only in trying to be equally prepared to welcome whatever might happen, this means that we have to be neutral with regard to *beatitudo* itself and neither wish nor shun it. But how can a way of life be considered *beata* if it is not desired, if it is not the object of *amor*? And how can it be reached if it is not wished nor desired, if no ‘weight’ draws us towards it? In short, absence of *amor* makes ethical life unintelligible.³²

Thus, our fundamental *pondus* is constituted by our longing for *felicitas* or *beatitudo*, which can only be found in God himself. This *pondus* is attributed to the Holy Spirit because, by uniting us to Christ through the faith which works through *dilectio*, he re-establishes the right *ordo* in our relation with God (cf. the term *con-iungere* and *sub-iungere* mentioned above). He *sub-iungit* us to the Father through the reconciliatory work of Christ in the same way as he *con-iungit* Father and Son. Just as the *ordo* resulting from salvation is determined by love, so love also presides over the inner-Trinitarian *ordo* between the divine persons. Through the *pondus* of the Holy Spirit, i.e. *dilectio*, Father and Son find their *delectatio*, their *beatitudo* in one another.

4. THE IDENTITY AND THE *PROPRIETAS* OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Towards the end of the 15th book of the *De Trinitate*, Augustine embarks upon a more comprehensive and sustained account of the divinity, property and origin of the Holy Spirit, which presupposes or reworks the occasional references to the Holy Spirit of the previous books we have analysed so far. In particular, he feels the need to establish more firmly the scriptural foundation of

³⁰ *conf.* 13.10 (246).

³¹ Cf. this dissertation, 47.

the identification between *dilectio* and the Holy Spirit, despite the fact that virtually everything he had said in the previous books concerning the Holy Spirit, presupposed this identification already.

As a matter of fact, a closer look at the passages where Augustine links the Holy Spirit with charity, reveals that Augustine *constantly nuances his assertions concerning the identification between the two*. He suggests this through the use of *siue... siue*: “Siue enim sit unitas amborum siue sanctitas siue caritas, siue ideo unitas quia caritas et ideo caritas, quia sanctitas [...]”;³² the attribution of *caritas* to the Holy Spirit is *aptius*, more fitting;³³ the *siue... siue* appears again in the 7th book: “Spiritus quoque sanctus siue sit summa caritas [...] siue alio modo essentia [...]”.³⁴ How should we interpret this caution?

The main explanation for this caution is not the lack of clarity of Scripture on this matter but that, even though love is a *proprietas* of the Holy Spirit in particular, it constitutes the life of the Trinity as a whole and belongs to the Father and the Son as well. In an understanding of the Trinity where consubstantiality basically means unity of *dilectio*, the way in which love can be attributed to the Holy Spirit in particular must be carefully established.

For this, Augustine goes back to his main source of inspiration for this topic, namely John’s first epistle. In the fourth chapter of this epistle, he finds the crucial declaration concerning the association of *dilectio* with the Holy Spirit:

“*In hoc, inquit, cognoscimus quia in ipso manemus et ipse in nobis quia de spiritu suo dedit nobis. [1 John 4.13] Sanctus itaque spiritus de quo dedit nobis facit nos in deo manere et ipsum in nobis. Hoc autem facit dilectio. Ipse est igitur deus dilectio. Denique paulo post cum hoc ipsum repetisset atque dixisset: Deus dilectio est, [1 John 4.16] continuo subiecit: Et qui manet in dilectione in deo manet, et deus in eo manet, [1 John 4.16] unde supra dixerat: In hoc cognoscimus quia in ipso manemus et ipse in nobis quia de spiritu suo dedit nobis [1 John 4.13]*”.³⁵

Everything we have seen above, in our section on “Christological and soteriological grounds of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” concerning the role of *dilectio* and of the Holy Spirit under the heading of *unitas*, comes together here in the assertion that God dwells in us and we in God. John’s

³² 13.11 (397).

³³ 6.7 (235).

³⁴ 6.7 (235).

³⁵ 7.6 (254).

First Epistle ascribes this mutual indwelling identically to *dilectio* and to the Holy Spirit, thus implying that *dilectio* is indeed the *proprietas* of the Holy Spirit and allowing Augustine to conclude: “Deus igitur spiritus sanctus qui procedit ex deo cum datus fuerit homini accendit eum in dilectionem dei et proximi, et ipse dilectio est”.³⁷ And “Dilectio igitur quae ex deo est et deus est proprie spiritus sanctus est per quem diffunditur in cordibus nostris dei caritas per quam nos tota inhabitet trinitas”.³⁸

Augustine unfolds his notion of the Holy Spirit as gift, *donum* from this basis. A fair appreciation of the real theological momentum of the notion of *donum* for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit depends on the right grasp of the way it is introduced into pneumatology. A misleading way of looking at the identification of the Holy Spirit with *donum* consists in starting from the speculative stage of the exposition of the mystery of the Trinity, where Augustine tries to determine how the Holy Spirit is *ad aliquid* as compared with the relation between the Father and the Son. In this context, the designation *donum* would recommend itself because it can be construed relatively. *Donum* therefore would have been resorted to first of all for the purpose of Augustine’s conceptual options and only then fleshed out through an array of more or less obvious scriptural quotations.

The way the Holy Spirit as *donum* emerges in the section we are examining disproves this interpretation. In John’s First Epistle, Augustine singles out the fundamental assertion that *dilectio* is God and that it comes from God, it is *ex deo*.³⁹ The slight twist on the johannine text consisting in the inversion of the declaration ‘God is love’ into ‘love is God’, impossible in the original Greek text, does not play a determining role in Augustine’s argument and therefore will not concern us here (also because it is only alluded to in the book 15).⁴⁰

Augustine notices that ‘dilectio ex deo est’, comes *from* God. The outcome of his lengthy treatment of the issue of the sending of the Son and of the Holy Spirit [*missiones*] of books 1 to 4 is

³⁶ 15.31 (506).

³⁷ 15.31 (506).

³⁸ 15.32 (508).

³⁹ 1 John 4.7-8 in 15.31 (506).

that everything which ‘comes from God’ [*ex Deo*] for our salvation is God’s own very presence through the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore this applies to the case of *dilectio* as well: “Pater enim solus ita deus est ut non sit *ex deo*, ac per hoc dilectio quae ita deus est ut *ex deo* sit aut filius est aut spiritus sanctus”.⁴¹ Of course, *dilectio* is the *proprietas* of the Holy Spirit. The fact that it is *ex deo*, however, denotes somethings even more important: “Non enim habet homo unde deum diligat nisi *ex deo*. Propter quod paulo post dicit: *Nos diligamus quia ipse prior dilexit nos* [1 John 4.7]. Apostolus quoque Paulus: *Dilectio, inquit, dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per spiritum sanctum qui datus est nobis* [Rom 5.5]”.⁴² On the basis of the Christology and the soteriology of Augustine we have already examined, this assertion hardly needs any additional comment. Here, however, a new aspect of the issue comes to the fore which acquires a special prominence in the context of the Pelagian controversy:

“Nullum est isto dei dono excellentius. Solum est quod diuidit inter filios regni aeterni et filios perditionis aeternae. Dantur et alia per spiritum munera, sed sine caritate nihil prosunt. Nisi ergo tantum impertiatur cuique spiritus sanctus ut eum dei et proximi faciat amatorem, a sinistra non transfertur ad dextram [...]. Quocirca rectissime spiritus sanctus, cum sit deus, uocatur etiam donum dei. Quod donum proprie quid nisi caritas intellegenda est quae perducit ad deum et sine qua quodlibet aliud dei donum non perducit ad deum?”⁴³

Donum dei means here the gift which only God can give, and since *dilectio* also is the condition *sine qua non* for the union with God, without it we are not saved. The fact that *dilectio*-Holy Spirit is a gift from God means that we are saved by grace; it means that salvation is truly divine, that only God’s very self-giving can save us.⁴⁴ Even faith does not benefit us without *dilectio*, as he is never tired of repeating through a sentence drawn from Galatians: *fides quae per dilectionem operatur*.⁴⁵ In his review of the scriptural *loca* where the Holy Spirit is called *donum*, the book of the Acts of the Apostles occupies a special place, where the Holy Spirit is the *donum* par excellence because he is

⁴⁰ Cf. 15.27 (502): “Neque enim dicturi sumus non propterea deum dictam esse caritatem quod ipsa caritas sit ulla substantia quae dei digna sit nomine [...]”. Cf. Dideberg (1975), 142.

⁴¹ 15.31 (506).

⁴² 15.31 (506f).

⁴³ 15.32 (507f).

⁴⁴ Cf. 5.12 (219), where the definition of the Holy Spirit as *donum* is supported by Romans 8.9: “*Qui spiritum Christi non habet hic non est eius*”.

⁴⁵ 15.32 (507) quoting Galatians 5.6.

given to sinners without any merit on their part and who did not even ask for it.⁴⁶ At the same time, he is a gift because he is given to those who through it –and through it alone– love God, “Et multa alia sunt testimonia scripturarum quae concorditer attestantur donum dei esse spiritum sanctum in quantum datur eis qui per eum diligunt deum”.⁴⁷

However, Augustine adds a crucial qualification to the appellation *donum* of the Holy Spirit. If he is called in this way for the reasons we have explained so far, this name –just like any other name applied to God, including ‘father’ and ‘son’– should not take in the determination of the identity of the Holy Spirit. Its use must be rigorously regulated by Scripture and the dynamic of salvation, bearing in mind that the Holy Spirit is God:

“[...] donum spiritus sancti nihil aliud est quam spiritus sanctus. In tantum ergo donum dei est in quantum datur eis quibus datur. Apud se autem deus est etsi nemini detur quia deus erat patri et filio coaeternus antequam cuiquam daretur. Nec quia illi dant, ipse datur, ideo minor est illis. Ita enim datur sicut dei donum ut etiam se ipsum det sicut deus”.⁴⁸

The Holy Spirit is given in such a way that he gives himself as God, just as the Son was given over by the Father [*traditio*] in such a way that he gave himself over [*tradidit semetipsum*], because of the unity of will of the three persons.⁴⁹ In the case of the Holy Spirit, the notion of gift acquires a crucial connotation: it evokes the fact not only that the Holy Spirit is given, but also that he is *freely* given and at the same time that he freely gives *himself* and that *he remains free* in his self-gift. If freedom is one of the defining features of a gift, the Holy Spirit fulfils this condition in the highest conceivable degree: “Non enim dici potest non esse suae potestatis de quo dictum est: *Spiritus ubi uult spirat*, et apud apostolum quod iam supra commemoravi: *Omnia autem haec operatur unus atque idem spiritus diuidens propria unicuique prout uult*”.⁵⁰ This implies, of course, that gift means presence of the giver, i.e. of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Son truly became flesh and made his dwelling among us [John 1.14], so the Holy Spirit truly comes to dwell in us and through him we dwell in God.

⁴⁶ Cf. the quotation from Acts 2.38 in 15.35 (512f).

⁴⁷ 15.35 (512).

⁴⁸ 15.36 (513).

⁴⁹ Cf. 2.9 (90), quoting Romans 8.32 and Galatians 2.20.

⁵⁰ 15.36 (513).

5. THE INNER-TRINITARIAN ORIGIN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The time has come to see how the issue of the *Filioque*⁵¹ comes into Augustine's notion of inner Trinitarian life and of the role of the Holy Spirit in it.

At the beginning of the section on the Holy Spirit of the 15th book, Augustine sums up his findings up to that moment as follows:

“Qui spiritus sanctus secundum scripturas sanctas nec patris est solius nec filii solius sed amborum, et ideo communem qua inuicem se diligunt pater et filius nobis insinuat caritatem”.⁵²

The fact that Scripture presents the Holy Spirit as belonging to the Father and to the Son, as being the Spirit *of* the Father and *of* the Son, teaches us that the Holy Spirit is the common charity through which Father and Son love each other.⁵³ To the question of how crucial is the doctrine of the *filioque* to Augustine's Trinitarian theology, the answer is: just as crucial as the understanding of inner Trinitarian life as life of *dilectio*. We have seen that, for him, the substantial unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is indeed a unity of *dilectio*.⁵⁴ In the treatment of the Holy Spirit in book 15, the idea that God is substance as he is *dilectio*⁵⁵ is considered as something firmly established which does not need any supplementary proof.

The *Filioque* is simply another way of stating the same truth. Trinitarian life is a life of *dilectio*. Through the Holy Spirit, identified with *dilectio*, the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father in return: “tria sunt: unus diligens eum qui de illo est, et unus diligens eum de quo est, et

⁵¹ Cf. 1.25 (64f); 2.5-7 (85-89); 4.29 (199ff); 5.15 (222ff); 15.29 (503f); 15.45-48 (523-530).

⁵² 15.27 (501). See also 4.29 (199), where the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son as well as from the Father is also a consequence of the fact that he belongs to both the Father and the Son: “Nec possumus dicere quod spiritus sanctus et a filio non procedat; neque enim frustra idem spiritus et patris et filii spiritus dicitur”.

⁵³ *Insinuat* here does not simply mean ‘suggest’, but has the connotation of ‘introducing into something else’, hence ‘explain’, ‘teach’, cf. Augustine *s.* 341.3 “alium modum insinuandi Christum”; [and *conf.* 8.3 (CCL 27, 114); 12.28 (CCL 27, 230)].

⁵⁴ Cf. 6.7 (235).

⁵⁵ Cf. the fact that the rule of consubstantiality is restated just in the following paragraph, 15.28 (502f). There it becomes evident that when Augustine argued that the whole is substance and each person is substance, he had not said all. This notion of consubstantiality only makes sense when substance is replaced by *dilectio*: the Holy Spirit Trinity is *dilectio* precisely because each person is love and loves, although in a different way.

ipsa dilectio”,⁵⁶ and “si caritas qua pater diligit filium et patrem diligit filius ineffabiliter communionem demonstrat amborum, quid conuenientius quam ut ille proprie dicatur caritas qui spiritus est communis ambobus?”.⁵⁷ *Dilectio* comes from the Father to the Son and backwards from the Son to the Father, i.e. it proceeds from both, even though it has its source from the Father *principaliter*.

Therefore Augustine declares that :

“Non frustra in hac trinitate non dicitur uerbum dei nisi filius, nec donum dei nisi spiritus sanctus, nec de quo genitum est uerbum et de quo procedit principaliter spiritus sanctus nisi deus pater. Ideo autem addidi, *principaliter*, quia et de filio spiritus sanctus procedere reperitur. Sed hoc quoque illi pater dedit (non iam existenti et nondum habenti), sed quidquid unigenito uerbo dedit gignendo dedit. Sic ergo eum genuit ut etiam de illo donum commune procederet et spiritus sanctus spiritus esset amborum”.⁵⁸

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *principaliter* as the common gift of the Father and the Son. Everything the Father gives to the Son is given in the very act of generation. Therefore, in the very act which constitutes him as the Son, the Son receives from the Father the gift of the Holy Spirit as their common gift, i.e. as that which can be received and given, that which proceeds from the Father and from the Son in return. Of course, the use of the notions of ‘procession’ and ‘generation’ leads to a very abstract description of this mystery. Only when inner Trinitarian life is seen under its proper light, i.e. as life of *dilectio*, and the Holy Spirit is seen in his *proprium* of *dilectio*, do these very abstract explanations reveal their real theological meaning.

Thus, the passage just quoted is followed by a reminder that God the Trinity is substance as he is *caritas* and that the Holy Spirit is called *caritas proprie*: “Vt scilicet in illa simplici summaque natura non sit aliud substantia et aliud caritas, sed substantia ipsa sit caritas et caritas ipsa substantia siue in patre siue in filio siue in spiritu sancto, et tamen proprie spiritus sanctus caritas nuncupetur”.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ 6.7 (236).

⁵⁷ 15.37 (513).

⁵⁸ 15.29 (503f).

⁵⁹ 15.29 (504).

If Augustine professes the doctrine of the *filioque*, therefore, it is because, as he says himself in this passage, this is the result of his findings: “et de filio spiritus sanctus procedere reperitur”.⁶⁰ This refers of course to some scriptural passages which indeed talk about the sending of the Holy Spirit by the risen Christ. It is evident that, for Augustine, the fact that the risen Christ gives the Holy Spirit to us is a demonstration of the *filioque*: “Nec uideo quid aliud significare uoluerit cum sufflans ait: *Accipite spiritum sanctum* [John 20.22]. Neque enim flatus ille corporeus cum sensu corporaliter tangendi procedens ex corpore substantia spiritus sancti fuit sed demonstratio per congruam significationem non tantum a patre sed et a filio procedere spiritum sanctum”.⁶¹ Other Scriptural passages declare that the Holy Spirit is sent by the Son and by the Father: “de quo item dicit ipse filius: *Quem ego mitto uobis a patre*, [John 15.26] et alio loco: *Quem mittet pater in nomine meo* [John 14.25-26]” or that he proceeds or ‘is breathed’ by both Father and Son: “De utroque autem procedere sic docetur quia ipse filius ait: *De patre procedit* [John 15.26] et cum resurrexisset a mortuis et apparuisset discipulis suis, insufflauit et ait: *Accipite spiritum sanctum* [John 20.22] ut eum etiam de se procedere ostenderet, et ipsa est uirtus quae de illo exibat sicut legitur in euangelio, et sanabat omnes. [Luc 6.19]”.⁶²

Of course, Scripture needs to be interpreted and we know well that Eastern theologians usually have refused to infer the doctrine of the *filioque* from these statements concerning the sending or the ‘breathing’ of the Holy Spirit for our salvation by the risen Christ. On what basis, therefore, does Augustine feel entitled to establish this link?

The answer is provided by the identification between the *form/content* of revelation and the *identity* of the ‘revealer’ developed through the theology of *missiones* and which constitutes the foundation of Augustine’s Trinitarian theology. We have seen in particular how, in the course of the second book, during the discussion on the interpretation of scriptural texts which seem to denote a subordinationist notion of the role and the identity of Son and Holy Spirit, Augustine

⁶⁰ 15.29 (503).

⁶¹ 4.29 (199f).

focuses on John 16.13-15. Just as the Son could be seen as subordinate to the Father because of the sentence: *Mea doctrina non est mea sed eius qui me misit*, so the Holy Spirit could be seen as subordinate to the Son because it is said of him that “*Non enim loquetur a semetipso, sed quaecumque audiet loquetur*, et: *Quia de meo accipiet et annuntiabit uobis*”.

Augustine’s exegesis of the former text is –as we have seen- that the Son is revelation as he is *filius* and *deus de deo*, which means that revelation is not a function of his inferiority from the Father, but of his unity and equality with him. In the same way, argues Augustine, if the Holy Spirit reveals ‘from the Son’ –according to the latter text- this could be taken as meaning that “*ita natus de Christo spiritus sanctus quemadmodum ille de patre*”.⁶³ The principle of the identification between the *form* of revelation and the *identity* of the ‘revealer’ would require this. Of course, Jesus, in the same sentence, makes clear that if the Holy Spirit “*de meo accipiet*”, it is because “*Omnia quaecumque habet pater mea sunt* [John 16.15]; propterea dixi: *Quia de meo accipiet* [John 16.14]”. Thus Augustine can state “*restat ut intellegatur etiam spiritus sanctus de patris habere sicut et filius*”.⁶⁴ A conclusion which paradoxically is not that of the *filioque*, but of the ‘*patreque*’!

This is confirmed by the declaration that “‘Procedendo’ itaque a patre dicitur ‘*non loqui a semetipso*’” and “*Non enim loquetur a semetipso, sed quaecumque audiet loquetur*, secundum hoc enim dictum est quod de patre procedit”.⁶⁵ The sending of the Holy Spirit, we have seen, entails knowledge/revelation of both the Son and the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶ The Holy Spirit was present and active in the history of salvation and in that of Jesus in particular well before he was sent at Pentecost. Why then was he said to have been ‘sent’ only then? Because the difference between *missio* and any other action of the Holy Spirit in the history of salvation is that *the form of the missio and the role he plays in it corresponds to his identity in the highest possible degree, owing to the divine nature of*

⁶² 15.45 (525).

⁶³ 2.5 (85).

⁶⁴ 2.5 (86).

⁶⁵ 2.5 (86).

⁶⁶ 4.29(199ff).

salvation.⁶⁷ This is why, then, scriptural passages concerning the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Son can be so confidently interpreted as revelatory of the inner life of the Trinity and that the *filioque* is so self-evident to Augustine.

6. THE FATHER, *PRINCIPIUM* OF THE INNER LIFE OF THE TRINITY

Of course, Augustine above all maintains the monarchy of the Father, even though he does not use this vocabulary. The designation of the Father as *principium* of the life of the Trinity is not a marginal aspect of his Trinitarian theology because it flows from the same theological presuppositions which preside over the determination of the identity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The fact that the Father is the *principium* of both the Son and the Holy Spirit is stated several times: “Quia etiam cum dixisset: *Quem mittet pater*, addidit *in nomine meo*, non tamen dixit, ‘Quem mittet pater a me,’ quemadmodum dixit, *Quem ego mittam vobis a patre*, uidelicet ostendens quod totius diuinitatis uel si melius dicitur deitatis principium pater est. Qui ergo ex patre procedit et filio ad eum refertur a quo natus est filius”.⁶⁸ On one occasion, Augustine declares that, with respect to the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son are not two principles, but one unique principle: “Si ergo et quod datur principium habet eum a quo datur quia non aliunde accepit illud quod ab ipso procedit, fatendum est patrem et filium principium esse spiritus sancti, non duo principia, sed [...] sic relative ad spiritum sanctum unum principium”.⁶⁹ We should avoid, however, inferring too much from this declaration since it must be read in dependence on the assertion that it is indeed from the Father that the Holy Spirit “procedit principaliter”.⁷⁰

The relation between the Father and the Son in the procession of the Holy Spirit is explained in a more nuanced way in another passage. Reading into the Johannine declaration “*Sicut habet pater*

⁶⁷ 4.29 (199ff).

⁶⁸ 4.29 (200).

⁶⁹ 5.15 (223).

⁷⁰ 15.29 (503).

uitam in semetipso sic dedit filio uitam habere in semetipso” [John 5.26] a description of inner-Trinitarian life, Augustine applies to the procession of the Holy Spirit what the passages says about *uita*: “sicut habet pater in semetipso ut et de illo procedat spiritus sanctus sic dedisse filio ut de illo procedat idem spiritus sanctus”.⁷¹ Everything the Father has, he gives to the Son, except what defines him in relation to the Son, namely the fact of being Father. Therefore, the Son also receives from the Father that the the Holy Spirit should proceed from him as well: “ita dictum spiritum sanctum de patre procedere ut intellegatur quod etiam procedit de filio, de patre esse filio. Si enim quidquid habet de patre habet filius, de patre habet utique ut et de illo procedat spiritus sanctus”.⁷² Once again, however, only when, from the abstract categories of generation, procession etc... we go back to the real ‘substance’ of divine life, i.e. *dilectio*, these assertions acquire their proper theological intelligibility.

Then, just as with the Son and the Holy Spirit, the theological foundation of the identification of the *proprietas* of the Father with *principium* depends on the theology of *missiones*. In the discussion on *missiones*, we have highlighted the repeated assertion that, whereas Scripture talks about the sending –*missio*– of the Son and the Holy Spirit, “pater solus nusquam legitur missus”.⁷³ The Father indeed manifests himself in the New Testament for example at the Baptism and the Transfiguration. However, we have seen that Scripture only talks about *missio* for the Incarnation and for the sending of the Holy Spirit by the risen and glorified Son at Pentecost precisely because only then the *form* and the *content* of their manifestation (or ‘revelation’) are the expression of their inner-Trinitarian identity.⁷⁴

According to this principle, if the Father is never said to have been sent, this must reveal something of his inner Trinitarian identity, i.e. his *proprietas*.

The first aspect of the Father’s identity revealed through the theology of *missiones* is, as we have seen already, his invisibility or unknowability. The proper Trinitarian construal of the divine

⁷¹ 15.47 (528) and 15.48 (529f).

⁷² 15.47 (528).

attribute of invisibility consists in attributing it properly to the Father, as is implied in a passage we have encountered already:

“Quapropter pater inuisibilis una cum filio secum inuisibili eundem filium uisibilem faciendo misisse eum dictus est; qui si eo modo uisibilis fieret ut cum patre inuisibilis esse desisteret, id est si substantia inuisibilis uerbi in creaturam uisibilem mutata et transiens uerteretur, ita missus a patre intellexeretur filius ut tantum missus non etiam cum patre mittens inueniretur”.⁷⁵

Invisibility belongs properly to the Father and it belongs to the Son insofar as he is *deus de deo* or, to use the expression of this passage, insofar as he is *una cum* the Father. Sending the Son, the Father makes him visible in such a way that the former does not cease to remain invisible *una cum* him. We have sufficiently dwelt on this paradox of theological epistemology. The result of this paradox is that, even though he is not sent, the Father is indeed known as ‘Father’, i.e. as ‘the One who is not sent’, ‘the One who is invisible’: “pater cum ex tempore a quoquam cognoscitur, non dicitur missus; non enim habet de quo sit aut ex quo procedat. Sapientia quippe dicit: *Ego ex ore altissimi prodini*, et de spiritu sancto: *A patre procedit*, pater uero a nullo”.⁷⁶

Knowledge of the invisible/unknowable Father is precisely the aim of the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The *proprietas* of the Father is to be the *principium* of divine life and the *goal* of the revelatory and reconciliatory work of the Son and the Holy Spirit. His *proprietas* is the *inuisibilitas* or unknowability which are simply synonyms of his freedom: he is the source –*principium*– of God’s decision to make himself known and to overcome the impossibility of knowing him from our side through the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

⁷³ 2.8 (89); 2.22 (109); 4.28 (199).

⁷⁴ Cf. 3.3 (128ff) and 2.12 (96f).

⁷⁵ 2.9 (92).

⁷⁶ 4.28 (199).

VII. TRINITY AND ONTOLOGY

The section of books 5 to 7 of the *De Trinitate* is often considered as the place where Augustine sets out the systematic account of the doctrine of the immanent Trinity which governs his interpretation of Scripture, his Christology, pneumatology, soteriology and doctrine of revelation and provides the formal criteria for the elaboration of analogies of the Trinitarian mystery.¹

It will have become evident by now how thoroughly misleading such an approach to Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity would be. The alleged systematic character of this section is in fact only apparent and Augustine himself, at the beginning of the 8th book, provides us with the proper way to approach it:

“Dicta sunt haec, et si saepius uersando repetantur, familiarius quidem innotescunt; sed et modus aliquis adhibendus est deoque supplicandum deuotissima pietate ut intellectum aperiat et studium contentionis absumat quo possit mente cerni essentia ueritatis sine ulla mole, sine ulla mutabilitate”.²

The aim and the scope of books 5 to 7 is summed up under the heading of *contentio*, of polemics. Therefore, it is from this viewpoint we are now going to analyse this section.

¹ Hill (1991), 54. Cf. also Crouse (1985), 508 who argues that in books 5-7 Augustine only indirectly focuses on terminology and logical categories necessary for the formulation of the mystery of the Trinity. In reality, “as the mind examines its own categories, the primary forms of its own understanding in relation to the concept of the Trinity” it is examining its own activity and its thinking about God. The result of this examination is the discovery of the mind as the image of the Trinity” at the end of the 7th book. Thus, the aim of the section of books 5 to 7 would be the same as that of the section of books 8 to 14, with the difference that the former follows a “rational, or one might say, ‘verbal’ method” so that “reason in relation to faith [brings] the mind to the recognition of itself as image of the Trinity”, whereas the latter follows a “spiritual method according to which mind is to be illuminated by its illuminating source [...] to grasp in inward vision the Trinitarian Principle of its own conscious life”.

² 8.1 (268)

1. THE PROPER USE OF ONTOLOGICAL CATEGORIES IN TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

“[Deus] est tamen sine dubitatione substantia uel si melius hoc appellatur essentia, quam graeci οὐσίαν uocant”.³ The ontological category of οὐσία became accepted in Trinitarian theology through the controversy of the 4th century and was enshrined in the formula which has summed up orthodox faith ever since: “μία οὐσίαν τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις, quod est latine, unam essentiam tres substantias”.⁴ Inquiry into the Trinitarian meaning of οὐσία should never lose sight of the controversy in which this term was introduced and in which its necessity for the confession of the right faith was established and agreed upon (not without tremendous upheavals) through the Church’s authorised deliberation. This should prevent theologians from ascribing an autonomous referential content -determined on the basis of the philosophy of their time, or choice- to the Trinitarian use of οὐσία and of any other ontological category in theology, and shape their doctrine accordingly.

In this respect, Augustine’s discussion of οὐσία betrays his clear awareness of both its necessity in Trinitarian theology and its polemical origin. Three explicit quotations from unidentified ‘Arians’ open the discussion on this issue. Their content can be summed up as follows: whatever is predicated of God is predicated according to the substance, since no accidents can be attributed to him;⁵ with regard to that which can be predicated of the Father and the Son, we must distinguish what is predicated ‘ad aliquid’ and what is predicated ‘ad se’. Everything which is predicated ‘ad se’ refers to the substance.⁶

The introduction of these distinctions under the form of explicit quotations of ‘Arian’ authors is worth noticing.⁷ Before the 5th book, if Augustine had indeed made abundant use of the word

³ 5.3 (207).

⁴ 5.10 (217). We have seen how the first half of the 5th book discusses the use of οὐσία [5.1-9 (206-216)] and the second half that of ὑπόστασις or *persona* [5.10-17 (216-227)]. This Trinitarian formula seems then to disappear, but in reality it remains very much in the background of the discussion and comes again to the surface in the middle of the 7th book to be discussed until the end of the book. [7.7-12 (255-267)].

⁵ 5.4 (208f).

⁶ 5.7 (211f).

⁷ Cf. this dissertation, 28, note 7.

substantia, he had not felt any need to bring in the distinction between substance and accidents, nor that existing between what is predicated *ad se* and what is predicated *ad aliquid* to refine his Trinitarian doctrine. As a matter of fact, ‘Arians’ themselves did not introduce these distinctions in Trinitarian theology to refine this doctrine, but to deny it! As such, they are taken on by Augustine in books 5-7: not as better tools of inquiry into the mystery of the Trinity, but as tools which, having been used to deny the mystery of the Trinity, had to be criticised and, where possible, rescued. In other words, we can legitimately wonder to what extent Augustine would have ventured into this discussion, had not the polemical anti-‘Arian’ context forced him to do so.

This is not to say that ontology is not necessary for the proper articulation of Trinitarian theology. Augustine, for example in the 6th sermon we met earlier on,⁸ combines the ‘name of *esse*’ and the ‘name of *miser cordia*’ to assert that ‘quomodo deus est incommutabilis, fecit omnia per misericordiam’.⁹ The ontological assertion that God is by nature immutable is necessary to appreciate the extent to which his involvement in *mutabilia* is indeed an act of *miser cordia*. In other words, ontological categories such as immutability and its corollaries of incorporeality and simplicity¹⁰ are synonyms for God’s freedom and are a way of re-stating the truth that grace indeed is *grace*.

Having said that, it is one thing to acknowledge the necessity, in theology, of a minimal and non-descriptive use of ontology, often fostered by a polemical context; quite another thing is to attribute to philosophical ontology the critical role of solving issues raised by Scripture. With regard, therefore, to the logical and ontological categories resorted to in the section of books 5-7 of the *De Trinitate*, we shall assume that had not the ‘Arians’ introduced these distinctions in the Trinitarian controversy, Augustine would not have felt the need to dwell on them to the same extent.

⁸ Cf. this dissertation, 60f.

⁹ *s.* 6.5 (CCL 41, 64).

¹⁰ cf. *ciu. Dei* 8.6 (CCL 47, 221ff).

‘Arians’ too, of course, did not rely on philosophical or logical presuppositions of this kind for their confession of the divinity of the Father and of the inferiority of the Son. Whether their concern was a soteriological or a doxological one or simply narrow-minded faithfulness to third-century subordinationism, they were already committed to the inferiority of the Son to the Father and resorted to these ontological categories for polemical purposes. Therefore, Augustine’s aim is to deprive them of the possibility of using these logical and ontological distinctions for the purpose of denying the full divinity of the Son. At the same time, he is aware that the wrong kind of counter-argument can endanger the integrity of Trinitarian doctrine. For this reason, counter-arguments have to be rigorously regulated by soteriology and strictly confined to the polemical context in which they arose.

First of all, therefore, we need to examine the ‘Arians’ use of these ontological categories and Augustine’s views on this point.

The ‘Arian’ argument is quite simple. Even granted the fact that Father and Son are relative terms (*ad aliquid*) implying each other and therefore denoting unity, if there is anything which can be said substantially (*ad se*) of the Father which cannot be said substantially of the Son, then Father and Son cannot be said ‘of the same substance’ or consubstantial. Now, the Father alone is *ingenitus*. On the contrary, the Son is *genitus*. These two opposite attributes are not relative to each other and therefore define that which Father and Son are *ad se* in a different way. Therefore Father and Son are not consubstantial.¹¹

Augustine’s polemical stance is betrayed straight away by the *ad hominem* answer which inaugurates his counter-argument. If the ‘Arians’ presupposition that whatever is predicated of God is predicated according to the substance is true, this has to be applied to the two texts of the New Testament which attribute unity and equality to the Father and to the Son, namely “*Ego et pater unum sumus*” and “*Non rapinam arbitratus est esse se aequalem deo*”.¹² Then, he cannot but agree on

¹¹ 5.4 (208f) and 5.7 (211f).

¹² John 10.30 and Phil. 2.6 quoted in 5.4 (208f).

the impossibility of predicating any accident of God, because of his immutability.¹³ However, on the very basis of the distinctions introduced by the ‘Arians’ between relative and substantial predication (distinction *ad aliquid/ad se*), he argues that, even though, in the case of mutable or contingent beings, ‘relation’ is an accident, in God’s case it loses its ‘accidental’ character, so to speak: “Dicitur enim ‘ad aliquid’ sicut pater ad filium et filius ad patrem, quod non est accidens quia et ille semper pater et ille semper filius”.¹⁴ In other terms, Augustine shows that philosophical categories break when they are applied to the mystery of God. In God, something which is indeed predicated relatively –i.e. to be Father and to be Son- and which should be an ‘accident’, in fact cannot be predicated ‘secundum accidens, quia et quod dicitur pater et quod dicitur filius aeternum atque incommutabile est eis’.¹⁵

Having determined two modes of attribution which can be used when talking of God, however improperly from a philosophical viewpoint, it becomes easy for him to refute the second of the ‘Arians’ claims. Whenever anything is predicated of God, we must start by determining whether it is predicated substantially or relatively. If something is predicated substantially, it refers to what the Father and the Son have in common, namely what makes them *aequales* and *unum*. If it is predicated relatively, it applies to what distinguishes them as eternally Father and eternally Son, eternally related to each other and therefore eternally *unum*. The term *ingenitus*, in this case, applies to what is common to Father and Son, i.e. the fact that they are God, and therefore applies to both. The term *genitus*, is simply a synonym for *filius* and therefore is predicated relatively; its equivalent, in the case of the Father, is not *ingenitus*, but *genitor*.¹⁶

The conclusion of the argument explains how, within the polemical use of these ontological categories, the issue of the unity and of the equality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit needs to be formulated. With regard to each divine person, we must begin by determining what is predicated substantially and what relatively. Everything predicated relatively denotes distinction, whereas

¹³ 5.5 (209f) and 5.8 (212ff).

¹⁴ 5.6 (210).

everything predicated substantially denotes unity and identity. Thus the Father can be called God *ad se*, and so can the Son and the Holy Spirit. The result, however, is not the confession of three gods, but of one God: “Quidquid ergo ad se ipsum dicitur deus et de singulis personis ter dicitur patre et filio et spiritu sancto, et simul de ipsa trinitate non pluraliter sed singulariter dicitur”.¹⁷

The drawbacks of improper use of ontological categories become even more apparent when they can be detected in the writings of the very people who try to uphold orthodox Trinitarian faith against ‘Arianism’. In the books 6 and 7, Augustine deals with the exegesis of a passage from the 1 Corinthians, where Christ is called the wisdom and the power of God, “Christum dei uirtutem et dei sapientiam”.¹⁸ Since the Son is the power and the wisdom of God –i.e. the Father- and since the Father cannot ever have existed without his wisdom and his power, the Son must be coeternal with the Father.¹⁹

An attentive examination of this argument, however, immediately ascertains that the coeternity of the Son is stated at the expense of the identity of the Father. If the Son is the wisdom of the Father, this means that the Father is not himself wise.²⁰ In virtue of God’s simplicity -i.e. of the identity, in him, of attributes and essence- what is said with regard to the attributes of wisdom applies to essence, i.e. to divinity, as well: the Son becomes the divinity of the Father and the Father is no more God in himself. Some people might argue that this is indeed how the consubstantiality between the Father and the Son should be understood. In other terms, consubstantiality should be understood relatively: the Son is the deity of the Father. The Father is not God without the Son.²¹

Even though this way of approaching the issue of consubstantiality seems plausible for the purpose of polemics, Augustine finds that it endangers fundamental principles dictated by

¹⁵ 5.6 (210f).

¹⁶ 5.7 (211).

¹⁷ 5.9 (216).

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 1.24 quoted in 6.1 (228) and *passim*.

¹⁹ 6.2 (229).

²⁰ 6.2 (229).

²¹ 7.2 (245-249). Cf. Jenson’s criticism taken up by Pannenberg, this dissertation, 9f, note 13.

Christology and soteriology, above all the rule *deus de deo*, we met above. Let us remember that this rule was formulated on the basis of the theology of *missiones*, that is of soteriology and of the doctrine of revelation. The Son reveals the Father and he reconciles us with the Father because he comes *from the* Father, because he is the *imago* of the Father, equal to the Father. Therefore, everything the Son is, comes from the Father. The Son becomes for us *sapientia a deo* because he is *sapientia de sapientia*, just as he is *deus de deo*.²² Apart from being Father and being Son, everything which is said substantially of the former must be said substantially of the latter as well, while preserving the relation of origin of the Son from the Father. The result is that an understanding of consubstantiality rooted in soteriology cannot support the argument that the unity between Father and Son is a function of the relativity of the Father to the Son, which would indeed be the case if the Son were the *sapientia* of the Father.

It is also worth noticing that the discussion of substance at the beginning of each of these three books only concerns the relation of the Father and the Son. Of course, Augustine extends the principle of consubstantiality to the Holy Spirit as well in the fifth book,²³ but he significantly omits to do so at the end of the discussion on substance in the 6th and in the 7th book. This does not mean that he is not prepared to acknowledge the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit as well, or his equality with the Son and the Father. *Rather, it confirms the fact that Augustine is not driven here by a systematic ambition, but is only answering some objections.* If anything, the way he deals with these categories might rather be interpreted as *a reluctance to apply them in a systematic way.*

The similarities in the structure of each of these books corroborates this view.

In the 6th book, after the discussion on equality and consubstantiality between the Father and the Son summarized above, Augustine devotes a paragraph to the Holy Spirit.²⁴ The change of perspective is surprising. The inadequacy of the vocabulary of *substantia* and of the distinction between what is said *ad se* and *ad aliquid* appears more vividly as soon as the issue of the *proprietas* of

²² Cf. 7.4 (251), 6.2 (229) and 6.6 (234).

²³ 5.9 (216).

the Holy Spirit is evoked. Augustine becomes hesitant, the vocabulary more tentative and, above all, the issue is approached from a different perspective altogether, namely in terms of will and love. In the 7th book, again the discussion of consubstantiality does not mention the Holy Spirit at all.²⁵ It is followed by a discussion which can be placed under the heading of the doctrine of revelation, parallel to that on *missiones*, and only then, towards the end, the Holy Spirit is again brought into the discussion in a remarkable way. First of all, the *sine... sine* which inaugurates this passage is typical of Augustine's modest way of discussing the Holy Spirit. He is aware of the fact that scriptural material on the Holy Spirit resists attempts to reach a too clear-cut definition of his *proprietas* and even more so systematic approaches based on ontological categories. His argument here is that the only thing we are sure of about the Holy Spirit is his divinity:

“Deum autem esse spiritum sanctum scriptura clamat apud apostolum qui dicit: *Nescitis quia templum dei estis?* Statimque subiecit: *et spiritus dei habitat in uobis*. [1 Cor 3.16] *Deus enim habitat in templo suo* [Ps 10.5]. Non enim tamquam minister habitat spiritus dei in templo dei cum alio loco euidenter dicat: *Nescitis quia corpora uestra templum in uobis est spiritus sancti quem habetis a deo et non estis uestri? Empti enim estis pretio magno. Glorificate ergo deum in corpore uestro* [1 Cor 6.19f]”.²⁶

If he is God, the Holy Spirit is *lumen* and *sapientia* just like the Father and the Son, and he is one God, one *lumen*, one *sapientia*, one *essentia* with the Father and the Son. Instead of being given an explanation, we are confronted with a further straining of the logical and ontological categories introduced by the ‘Arians’. Their use, already problematic in the case of the relation between the Father and the Son, becomes virtually meaningless for the Holy Spirit. Augustine does not explain how these categories can work, nor does he claim that this can or should be done. He simply restates the paradox entailed by revelation: Father, Son and Holy Spirit are God. Each of them is God and yet there only is one God. Son and Holy Spirit come from the Father as their *principium* and the way they differ from each other is more presented as a fact than really explained by Scripture.

²⁴ The section on consubstantiality goes from 6.1 to 6.6 (228-235); Holy Spirit in 6.7 (235f).

²⁵ 7.1-3 (244-250).

²⁶ 7.6 (254).

2. CRITICISM OF *SUBSTANTIA* AND *PERSONA*

The most sustained and severe criticism of the indiscriminate application of ontological categories to the mystery of the Trinity is conducted at the end of the 7th book.²⁷ Augustine goes back to the Trinitarian formula of ‘una essentia, tres substantiae/personae’ or ‘una substantia, tres personae’ and endeavours to assess the suitability of each of these terms –*essentia*, *substantia*, *persona*– to express the relation between ‘what is one’ and ‘what is three’ in God.

It is well-known that the Latin word *substantia* is etymologically the exact equivalent of the Greek ὑπόστασις, i.e. the word used to designate ‘that which is three’ in God. However, it had also been used to translate the Greek word οὐσία, i.e. the word designating ‘that which is one’ in God. To designate ‘that which is one’ in God, Augustine prefers to translate the Greek οὐσία with *essentia*, rather than *substantia*, for a very simple reason. A substance is that which *sub-sistit*, i.e. ‘keeps its ground in being’, ‘carries on existing as it was’ even when accidental aspects of a mutable being change or disappear: a man *sub-sistit* even when his hair turn grey or falls out altogether. Therefore, properly speaking, *substantia* is predicated of mutable beings or of beings which are not simple; its role is to designate the essence of a being insofar as it remains the same through all changes.²⁸ This is why Augustine prefers the word *essentia*, which is the exact Latin translation for οὐσία.²⁹ He likes to relate it to the name of God given to Moses: “Est enim uere solus quia incommutabilis est, idque suum nomen famulo suo Moysi enuntiauit cum ait: *Ego sum qui sum*, et: *Dices ad eos: Qui est misit me ad uos* [Ex 3.14]”.³⁰ In the end, however, provided that one is aware of the disadvantages of the word *substantia*, he is not against its use and he himself treats *substantia* and *essentia* as synonyms most of the time: “Sed tamen siue *essentia* dicatur quod proprie dicitur, siue *substantia* quod

²⁷ 7.7-12 (255-267).

²⁸ 7.10 (260f).

²⁹ Cf. Cross (2003), 476, note 29.

³⁰ 7.10 (261).

abusivae, utrumque ad se dicitur, non relative ad aliquid. Vnde hoc est deo esse quod subsistere, et ideo si una essentia trinitas, una etiam substantia”.³¹

With regard to the use of the terms ὑπόστασις or *persona* to designate ‘what is three’ in God, the reservations are greater. Augustine’s stance on this matter is well-known: “Dictum est tamen tres personae non ut illud diceretur sed ne taceretur”;³² “ita dici ut diceretur aliquid cum quaereretur quid tria sint”;³³ only “propter disputandi necessitatem [...] ut uno nomine respondeatur cum quaeritur quid tria” we talk about “tres substantias siue personas”.³⁴ For *persona* more than for any other ontological category, we see the extent to which Augustine’s criticism draws its principles from Scripture. He reviews very carefully the way Scripture talks about unity and plurality in God. Sometimes Scripture stresses the paradox of the mystery of divine life by combining the singular and the plural, as in the case of the *unum* and the *sumus* of Augustine’s main Trinitarian texts, John 10:30: “*Ego et pater unum sumus*”. Sometimes Scripture only uses the plural, either openly, as in declarations such as “*Veniemus ad eum et habitabimus apud eum*” [John 14.23], or in disguise, as in the texts from Genesis: “*Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*” [Gen. 1.26]. Crucially, whenever Scripture resorts to the plural openly, it uses or implies relative names, like Father and Son. What Scripture never does is to use one common name –like person or ὑπόστασις– to designate ‘what is three’ in God.³⁵

The absence in Scripture of any category to encompass ‘that which is three’ in God is the main reason of Augustine’s criticism of the notion of person. The main limitation of this notion is that, unlike the names ‘father’ and ‘son’, it is not a relative name, i.e. it cannot be predicated *ad aliquid*. When applied to the Father, it does not imply his unity and relation with the Son. This criticism of the notion of person is valid irrespectively of the definition of the term one is working with. The notion of person proves inadequate in Trinitarian theology not positively, i.e. on the basis of a

³¹ 7.10 (261).

³² 5.10 (217).

³³ 7.7 (255).

³⁴ 7.12 (267).

³⁵ 7.12 (266). Cf. also 7.8 (258).

given definition of this term, but negatively, that is for the simple fact that it is not a relative term and that any non-relative way of designating ‘what is three’ in God is not warranted by Scripture.³⁶ Moreover, on the basis of what he had determined concerning the two different modes of predication applicable to God, anything which cannot be predicated relatively can only be predicated substantially, just as in the case of *deus*, or *essentia*, or *sapientia* or any other attribute. This means that whatever is predicated of any of the persons *ad se*, in virtue of the unity of divinity in God –of, if we prefer, of his unity of essence- must be predicated *ad se* of the other divine persons and singularly of the whole Trinity. Therefore, if the term *persona* is predicated *ad se* of the Father, this means that in God we have three persons and that God is one person, which is not orthodox:

“Cur ergo non haec tria simul unam personam dicimus sicut unam essentiam et unum deum, sed dicimus tres personas, cum tres deos aut tres essentias non dicamus, nisi quia uolumus uel unum aliquod uocabulum seruire huic significationi qua intellegitur trinitas ne omnino taceremus interrogati quid tres, cum tres esse fateremur?”³⁷

The difficulties caused by the use of ontological categories increase exponentially when we face the inevitable question of the relation between ‘what is one’ and ‘what is three’ in the Trinity. Augustine examines this question on the basis of the relation between *genus*, *species* and *individuum*, and considers the following possibilities:³⁸ (i) person designates the *species* with relation to the *genus* which is the *essentia* (just as the horse is a *species* of the *genus* animal); (ii) person designates an individual, just as in the case of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Then, he turns to the one *essentia* of God and tests out the following possibilities:³⁹ (i) *essentia* is a *genus*-word; (ii) *essentia* is a *species*-word; (iii) *essentia* designates the one nature common to different individuals. In the examination of this possibility, he considers the case of a material analogy: is the relation between ‘what is three’ and ‘what is one’ in God similar to the relation between the matter of gold and three statues made out of it?

³⁶ 7.11 (261-265). These considerations, combined with Augustine’s treatment of the Holy Spirit, leads us to think he would have endorsed Rahner’s view that “the unbridgeable difference between the way each divine person is a person [...] is so great that only the loosest of analogies allows us to apply the same notion of person to all three”, Rahner (1966), 91.

³⁷ 7.11 (262).

³⁸ 7.11 (263-265).

It would be tedious to report the detail of the complex discussion of these possibilities here. Its predictable outcome is that none of these distinctions can work when applied to the triunity of God. The main cause of the failure of these ontological categories is that God's unity of essence is not simply 'generic', nor even 'specific', but *numerical*: God is numerically one. Therefore, the application of the category *genus/species* to the relation between *essentia* and *personae* cannot work: in God's case, it could only be rendered as 'one *genus* and three *species*', which goes against the proper use of the categories *genus/species*. In fact, in the application of the distinction *genus/species* to the example of the distinction between the kind 'animal' and the species 'horse', when we have three horses, we have three animals (and not one animal). In the same way, three individuals –Abraham, Isaac and Jacob– are three men, not one man. As for the category of *natura*, Augustine easily pins down its materialistic implications which make it the least adequate solution of all.

To sum up the reasons of the inadequacy of these ontological categories with respect to the mystery of the Trinity, the two main obstacles are the numerical unity of God's essence and the unsuitability of resorting to anything other than relational names to designate 'what is three' in him, for two main reasons: first of all because this is not warranted by the usage of Scripture and secondly because everything which is not predicated relatively in God, can only be predicated essentially, thereby having to be identified with *essentia* and considered numerically one.

3. THE ALLEGED ONTOLOGICAL BENT OF AUGUSTINE'S DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

The time has come to collect the various analytic strands of this section on consubstantiality and try to acquire a synthetic view of Augustine's position on this topic. The main finding of our analysis of the books 5 to 7 of the *De Trinitate* is that they do not aim to provide a systematic account of the doctrine of the Trinity with the help of ontological categories. This finding is at variance with the view commonly expressed by many commentators, who argue that Augustine is

³⁹ Cf. Cross (2002), 282ff.

at the origin of the speculative shift of Trinitarian theology which has become –they say– the characteristic of the Western doctrine of the Trinity ever since. In this version, he started from a formal account of Trinitarian faith a step removed from the economy of salvation, he replaced the soteriological roots of Trinitarian doctrine with ontological categories and tried to elaborate a systematic account of inner-Trinitarian life from these categories.⁴⁰

Indeed, the formula of faith Augustine places at the beginning of his argument in the first book might confirm this version

“Omnes quos legere potui qui ante me scripserunt de trinitate quae deus est, diuinorum librorum ueterum et nouorum catholici tractatores, hoc intenderunt secundum scripturas docere, quod pater et filius et spiritus sanctus unius substantiae inseparabili aequalitate diuinam insinuent unitatem, ideoque non sint tres dii sed unus”.⁴¹

The faith of the Church in the Trinity is summed up in the ontological categories of *unitas substantiae*, *aequalitas*, *inseparabilitas*, and the Trinity as a whole is called *deus*. *Inseparabilitas* in particular, seems to become the governing notion for the articulation between the immanent Trinity and the economy of salvation.⁴² Even though the Incarnation can only be attributed to the Son, the tongues of fire only to the Holy Spirit and the voice from heaven only to the Father, since the Three are inseparable, they must act inseparably as well, “quamuis pater et filius et spiritus sanctus sicut inseparabiles sunt, ita inseparabiliter operentur”.⁴³ *Inseparabilitas* is a real leitmotiv of most of the *De Trinitate*. Because Father, Son and Holy Spirit are of one substance, the Trinity acts inseparably,⁴⁴ and it is not infrequent to find in the treatise expressions such as: “trinitas simul operata est et uocem patris et carnem filii et columbam spiritus sancti cum ad personas singulas

⁴⁰ Rahner (1966), 84ff; Lossky (1957), 54-61, especially 57 where he quotes De Regnon (1892-1898), I, 433. The defence of Augustine against these generalizations is brilliantly undertaken by Cross (2002) and (2003). Cf. also De Halleux (1986).

⁴¹ 1.7 (34f).

⁴² According to Corbin (1997), 93, the consequence of *inseparabilitas* is that “disparaît toute différence entre les Trois. Il ne se distinguent pas, en effet, par leur relation au temps, mais ‘oeuvrent inséparablement’, usent de signes, d’effets créés par leur essence une [...] le Christ devient le simple *signe* et non le *signe et la réalité* de Dieu toujours plus haut”. This criticism, however, does not take the Christology of the *De Trinitate* into account nor the difference between theophanies and missions.

⁴³ 1.7 (36).

⁴⁴ 1.24f (62-65).

haec singula referantur”.⁴⁵ The inseparability is such that when one person is named, the others are implied.⁴⁶ This is the necessary counterpart of the equality of the divine persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equal but consubstantial and therefore they can only act inseparably.

This would be the background against which Augustine refines his understanding of consubstantiality in books 5 to 7 and reaches the following conclusion: God’s *essentia* or *substantia* is numerically one; at the same time, each divine person is equally God; therefore, God’s *essentia* can be predicated of each person individually and, at the same time, of the whole Trinity singularly. The fact that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God does not result in three gods, but in the one God.⁴⁷

This way of approaching consubstantiality would be based on the absolute equality between the divine persons, described through relative predication: the very name Father entails relation to the Son and viceversa, and the name *donum* for the Holy Spirit displays his relation to both the Father and the Son. Some commentators have even attributed to Augustine a notion of ‘opposite relation’ fundamentally different from the traditional ‘relation of origin’ of the Eastern Fathers of the Church. Thus, for example, the necessity of the *filioque* is attributed to a relational model where the difference between the persons is determined not by their origin, but by opposition, so that the Father alone relates and is not related, the Son both relates and is related, the Holy Spirit alone is related but does not actively relate. In other terms, without the *filioque* there would be no way of establishing a formal distinction between the Holy Spirit and the Son (since without the *filioque*, the Son also would be related but not actively relating).⁴⁸

This re-construction of Augustine’s doctrine of the Trinity from a purely ontological viewpoint, would also have to include the crucial role played by the attributes of *immutabilitas* and *inuisibilitas*. Their place in Augustine’s Trinitarian theology would be the sign of the governing function attributed to ontological categories over scriptural material in the elaboration of the doctrine of the

⁴⁵ 4.30 (203).

⁴⁶ 1.17 (52).

immanent Trinity. For example, does he not deny in principle the possibility of self-manifestation of God in the theophanies of the Old Testament on the basis of the divine attribute of invisibility? Does he not resort, in the first book, to a strict distribution of scriptural material concerning the Son to his human nature on one side and to his divine nature on the other, on the basis of a theistic notion of God's immutability?

We do not need to go further in the description of this version of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity. On the basis of what has been argued in this dissertation up to this point, the flaws of this portrayal of the *De Trinitate* are easily detected. Above all, this approach fails to perceive that the use of ontological categories in the *De Trinitate* is not dictated by speculative or systematic goals, but belongs to a delimited polemical context and cannot easily (or safely) be extrapolated from it. Even granted the legitimacy of the systematic association of these categories with a view to establishing the understanding of the immanent Trinity they presuppose, this still needs to undergo a critical verification. This critical verification has to set this portrayal of the immanent Trinity allegedly indebted to philosophical ontology, against the doctrine of the inner-life of the Trinity presupposed by Augustine's Christology, soteriology and doctrine of the Holy Spirit and see whether they really coincide or not. To this verification we now turn, which will also give us the opportunity to recapitulate our findings concerning Augustine's real understanding of the inner life of the Trinity.

4. AUGUSTINE'S REAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE INNER LIFE OF THE TRINITY

Far from being a theistic divine attribute imported into Trinitarian theology, the inseparability of the Father and the Son is based on revelation. The main scriptural texts Augustine refers to are taken from John's Gospel: "*Quaecumque enim pater facit, haec eadem et filius facit similiter*" and "*Sicut pater*

⁴⁷ 6.9 (238).

⁴⁸ Brown (1985), 282.

suscitat mortuos et uiuificat, sic et filius quos uult uiuificat'.⁴⁹ However, he also notices that Scripture ascribes the same actions sometimes to the Father and sometimes to the Son, as in the cases of sanctification and of Christ's *traditio*:

"[...] quomodo eum pater sanctificauit si se ipse sanctificauit? Vtrumque enim idem dominus ait: *Quem pater, inquit, sanctificauit et misit in hunc mundum, uos dicitis quia blasphematis quoniam dixi: Filius dei sum* [John 10.36]; alio autem loco ait: *Et pro eis sanctifico me ipsum* [John 17.19]. Item quaero quomodo eum pater tradidit si ipse se tradidit. Vtrumque enim dicit apostolus Paulus: *Qui filio, inquit, proprio non pepercit, sed pro nobis omnibus tradidit eum* [Rom 8.32]. Alibi autem de ipso saluatore ait: *Qui me dilexit et tradidit se ipsum pro me* [Gal 2.20]. Credo respondebit si haec probe sapit quia una uoluntas est patris et filii et inseparabilis operatio".⁵⁰

In the same way, using Old Testament vocabulary, he asks "[...] ubi esse potuit [pater] sine uerbo suo et sine sapientia sua quae *pertendit a fine usque ad finem fortiter et disponit omnia suauiter*? Sed neque sine spiritu suo usquam esse potuit. Itaque si ubique est deus, ubique est etiam spiritus eius".⁵¹ From Scripture he also draws a key factor we have constantly highlighted in our account of his soteriology and of his doctrine of revelation: *inseparabilitas* –and, for that matter, *aequalitas*– does not mean interchangeability. Augustine adopts the Pauline way of articulating divine action:

"Item dicit idem apostolus: *Nobis unus deus pater ex quo omnia, et nos in ipso; et unus dominus Iesus Christus per quem omnia, et nos per ipsum* [1 Cor. 8.6]. Quis dubitet eum omnia 'quae creata sunt' dicere, sicut Iohannes: *Omnia per ipsum facta sunt*? Quaero itaque de quo dicit alio loco: *Quoniam ex ipso et per ipsum et in ipso sunt omnia; ipsi gloria in saecula saeculorum* [Rom 11.34-3]. Si enim de patre et filio et spiritu sancto ut singulis personis singula tribuantur, ex ipso, ex patre, per ipsum, per filium, in ipso, in spiritu sancto; manifestum quod pater et filius et spiritus sanctus unus deus est quando singula riter intulit: *Ipsi gloria in saecula saeculorum*".⁵²

Divine action has to be attributed inseparably to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but not as if it was carried out through the distribution of tasks to three equal sources of action. *In reality, the unique divine action has its source in the Father and is performed through the Son, in the Holy Spirit*. It is worth noticing that after this assertion, Augustine declares that "deum proprie patrem appellans",⁵³ thus

⁴⁹ John 5.19, 21 quoted in 1.11 (40).

⁵⁰ 2.9 (90).

⁵¹ 2.7 (88).

⁵² 1.12 (41).

⁵³ 1.12 (42), commenting on Philippians 2.6.

correcting the appellation *deus trinitas* and inviting a more cautious evaluation of this association between *deus* and *trinitas* which some commentators might find infelicitous.⁵⁴

On this basis, Augustine establishes the Trinitarian form of the divine attribute of inseparability which we have mentioned already, but which needs to be briefly called to mind again here. Passages like “*Sicut pater suscitavit mortuos et vivificavit, sic et filius quos vult vivificavit*”⁵⁵ cannot be interpreted as meaning that the Father actually performs the actions which are attributed to the Son. On the contrary:

“Restat ergo ut haec ideo dicta sint quia incommutabilis est vita filii sicut patris, et tamen de patre est; et inseparabilis est operatio patris et filii, sed tamen ita operari filio de illo est de quo ipse est, id est de patre; et ita videt filius patrem ut quo eum videt hoc ipso sit filius. Non enim aliud illi est esse de patre, id est nasci de patre, quam videre patrem, aut aliud videre operantem quam pariter operari; sed ideo non a se quia non est a se, et ideo quod viderit patrem quia de patre est. Neque enim alia similiter, sicut pictor alias tabulas pingit quemadmodum alias ab alio pictas vidit; nec eadem dissimiliter, sicut corpus easdem litteras exprimit quas animus cogitavit; sed: *Quaecumque, inquit, pater facit, haec eadem et filius facit similiter*. Et haec eadem dixit et similiter, *ac per hoc inseparabilis et par operatio est patri et filio, sed a patre est filio*. Ideo non potest filius a se facere quidquam nisi quod viderit patrem facientem”.⁵⁶

In other terms, *inseparabilitas* follows the rule *deus de deo* we have examined at length, which has to be traced back to the theology of the sending of the Son and of the Holy Spirit [*missiones*] and, further back, to the Trinitarian nature of reconciliation and revelation.

With regard to the Trinitarian form of reconciliation, let us remember the nature of the mediatory role of the Son: introducing us into his unity of *dilectio* with the Father. We are not reconciled through the union with an indistinct divinity, but we are reconciled with the Father through union with the Son in the *dilectio*/Holy Spirit. In the same way, the knowledge of God we have through faith is the result of Christ's mediatory role and its fulfilment and term will be the contemplation of God *the Father* in the life-to-come. This point is crucial: *the goal and the end of the knowledge of God is the Father*.⁵⁷ In other words, it is not as if the Trinity were the object of salvific knowledge in an undifferentiated way. Knowledge of the Trinity means that *God can only be known in*

⁵⁴ Corbin (1997), 101.

⁵⁵ John 5.21 quoted in 1.11 (40).

⁵⁶ 2.3 (83f).

a *Trinitarian way*, i.e. under the form of knowledge *of* the Father *through* the Son *in* the Holy Spirit. Thanks to our union to the Son through *dilectio*, we are introduced into the Son's own *dilectio* and knowledge of the Father.

The same thing applies to the doctrine of revelation and calls for a clarification. We have seen above that even though the Incarnation can only be attributed to the Son, the tongues of fire only to the Holy Spirit and the voice from heaven only to the Father, since the Three are inseparable, they must act inseparably as well. Indeed, Augustine attributes to the tongues of fire and to the voice heard from heaven at Baptism and Transfiguration only the role of 'signs' of the Holy Spirit and of the Father. Does this mean that the immanent inseparability and the unity of substance between the three persons is such that the differentiation in their manifestation of their respective role in the economy is only 'apparent'? In this case, Augustine's view would be that the *proprietaes* manifested by Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the economy are only provisional; they would depend on the necessity of spatio/temporal revelation, but in fact they would not correspond to the inner life of the Trinity, where the unity of substance requires a unity of action understood as *indifferentiated* and *interchangeable*. In a word, Augustine would be a Modalist in disguise.

However, such a version fails to take into account the defining role played by the doctrines of Incarnation and of revelation. Christ's human nature, his words and his deeds are not simply the *signs* of a purely economic action of the Son which, in the immanent life of the Trinity, would be indistinguishable from Trinitarian action considered as a whole. In virtue of the clear doctrine of hypostatic union operative in Augustine's understanding of the Incarnation, we have constantly pointed out that Christ's human nature, his words and his deeds are the manifestation of the Son to such an extent that they have no meaning nor existence other than that which is given to them by their existence in the Son of God. In Christ, Augustine talks about *humilitas dei* and of *crucifixus deus* properly, not figuratively.

⁵⁷ Cf. for example 1.16 (49), 18 (54), 21 (57f).

If the action of the Father and of the Holy Spirit is signified through created means as in the case of the tongues of fire and the voice heard from heaven, this does not mean that they do not really reveal themselves, but simply that revelation of the Trinity does not mean revelation of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, but revelation of the invisible Father, in the Son who has made himself visible in the flesh through the charity poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

This leads us to the issue of the unity of the Trinity and of consubstantiality. Augustine does not consider the term *consubstantialis* self-referential or self-explanatory, as though it enshrined the solution of the paradox we face in Scripture or could lead the theologian further into the understanding of the mystery of the Trinity than Christology, soteriology and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. With regard to the relation between the Father and the Son, the content of this term is the equivalent of two fundamental scriptural quotations, namely John 10.30: “*Ego et pater unum sumus*” and Phil. 2.6: “*Non rapinam arbitratus est esse aequalis deo*”: “Quaedam itaque ita ponuntur in scripturis de patre et filio ut indicent unitatem aequalitatemque substantiae, sicuti est: *Ego et pater unum sumus*, et: *Cum in forma dei esset, non rapinam arbitratus est esse aequalis deo*, et quaecumque talia sunt”.⁵⁸ Then, consubstantiality is applied to the Holy Spirit as well, but in such a way that this appears more the result of an ‘extension’, than something which could be said entirely properly and meaningfully.⁵⁹

More or less intentionally, it is especially through his doctrine of the Holy Spirit that Augustine betrays his real concerns, that is a ‘knowledge’ which does not aim at systematisation, but coincides with the desire to *frui*, enjoy the gift of divine life revealed through the mystery of the Trinity. Any account of the inner life of the Trinity which yields to the temptation of systematisation for its own sake, is doomed to fail under the strain put on it by the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. With all the due insistence on his equality to the Father and the Son, his very name of ‘holy’ and ‘spirit’, points to the peculiarity of his identity and of his *proprietas*. The attempt to

⁵⁸ 2.3 (82). Cf. also 4.12 (177); 5.4 (208); 6.3 (229ff) and 7.12 (265ff).

⁵⁹ Cf. 7.6 (254).

highlight his relational nature through his qualification *donum*, however legitimate, also helps only up to a certain point. We have seen that Augustine acknowledges that whereas a gift is an object of exchange between two persons, the Holy Spirit is himself God and gives himself as God.⁶⁰

Above all, it is the identification between the Holy Spirit and *dilectio* required by Scripture –in the light of soteriology and of the doctrine of revelation- which leads further into his mysterious nature and into the understanding of the inner life of the Trinity, while challenging any attempt to find a common category to designate ‘what is three’ in God and explaining Augustine’s extreme reluctance to resort to the category of *persona* in Trinitarian theology. We have seen that John’s First Epistle ascribes the indwelling of Father and Son in us identically to *dilectio* and to the Holy Spirit, thus implying that *dilectio* is indeed the *proprietas* of the Holy Spirit.⁶¹ We have also seen that Augustine unfolds his notion of the Holy Spirit as gift, *donum* from this basis. *Donum* is a synonym for *dilectio*. Thus, *dilectio* does not have anything to do with the alleged explanatory role of an ontological category, but draws its epistemological unique role from its wholly theological nature.

The ‘wholly theological nature’ of *dilectio* is a function of the divine nature of our salvation: Christ saved us by reconciling us to the Father, i.e. introducing us into the union of *dilectio* which belongs to the relation between the Son and the Father from all eternity and which *is* the Holy Spirit. Christ’s reconciliation becomes ours through the *dilectio* poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us. To be saved corresponds to the indwelling of the Father and the Son in us, made possible by *dilectio*, which, with regard to the life of the immanent Trinity, can only be expressed as follows: in the Son, we take part to the mutual indwelling between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.

We have seen the crucial passage from the book 4 where Augustine highlights the soteriological centrality of the unity of will between the Father and the Son over the unity of substance:

⁶⁰ 15.36 (512f).

⁶¹ 15.31f (505-508).

“Ad hoc enim ualet quod ait: *Vt sint unum sicut et nos unum sumus*, ut quemadmodum pater et filius non tantum aequalitate substantiae sed etiam uoluntate unum sunt, ita et hi inter quos et deum mediator est filius non tantum per id quod eiusdem naturae sunt sed etiam per eandem dilectionis societatem unum sint”.⁶²

When Augustine is forced to think along the lines set out by the Trinitarian controversy of the century before his own [i.e. polemically], he is quite capable of confining himself to language of substance and essence, despite a reluctance betrayed virtually on every page of the sections of the *De Trinitate* devoted to this approach. When, however, he has to establish the Trinitarian ground of his Christology and soteriology, what matters to him most is the union *of will* between the Father and the Son: just as the Father and the Son are united through *dilectio*-Holy Spirit, so Christians are reconciled [become *unum*] with the Father through the *dilectio* of Christ’s sacrifice [let us remember that *dilectio* is the essence of sacrifice] and become *unum* with each other through the same *dilectio* poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us at Christ’s resurrection.

Just in the same way, we must remember that, in the 6th book, once Augustine has led his discussion of the consubstantiality between the Father to a neat conclusion, as he turns to the Holy Spirit, his tone suddenly changes and leaves behind the abstract consideration of God’s *essentia* to spell out the inner-life of the Trinity in terms of *dilectio*:

“Et ideo non amplius quam tria sunt: unus diligens eum qui de illo est, et unus diligens eum de quo est, et ipsa dilectio. Quae si nihil est, quomodo deus dilectio est? Si non est substantia, quomodo deus substantia est?”.⁶³

All this leads us to the conclusion that Augustine sees the substantial unity of the Trinity as a unity of *dilectio*. Metaphysical categories like those of *unitas*, *consubstantialitas*, *aequalitas*, *inseparabilitas* and *simplicitas* are not explanations of the inner life of the Trinity, they are not the solution or the answer to the question “Who is God?”. They are not descriptive. Rather, they are a reformulation of the question “Who *this* God revealed by Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit is?”; they are a way of stating more precisely where exactly the paradox of revelation concerning the mystery of the

⁶² 4.12 (177f).

⁶³ 6.7 (236).

Trinity lies.⁶⁴ To say that God's unity is 'substantial' and oppose it to a unity of love is a fallacious move. The unity of the Trinity is consubstantial as unity of *dilectio*. The Father and the Son are united in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is "summa caritas utrumque [the Father and the Son] coniungens nosque subiungens, quod ideo non indigne dicitur quia scriptum est: *Deus caritas est*".⁶⁵

Finally, we must say a word on the alleged notion of 'opposite relation' fundamentally different from the traditional 'relation of origin' of the Eastern Fathers of the Church, usually attributed to Augustine. The main contention of this section of our dissertation is that the root of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity is in the theology of *missiones* formulated in books 2 to 4 and restated with regard to *sapientia* in the 7th book. According to this theology of *missiones*, the Father is the *principium* of the inner life of the Trinity because he is never said to have been sent but only sends. The Son is *deus de deo* because he is *filius* as he is *missus* and, in the same way, the Holy Spirit is *deus a/ex deo* because he is sent by the Father and by the risen Christ, and his role in the economy is to lead us to adhere to Christ through *dilectio* and thus reach union with the Father. This is why he is sent from the Father *principaliter*, but from the Son as well, since he is the common spirit, the unity, the *dilectio* of the Father and the Son. Are we in the presence of anything other than a straightforward model of inner-Trinitarian life based on relations of origin? Whatever we might think of the *filioque* doctrine, it is highly misleading to deduce Augustine's understanding of inner-Trinitarian relations from the identification of the Holy Spirit with *donum* in books 5 to 7. In this section, indeed, Augustine can give the impression of trying to determine how the Holy Spirit is *ad aliquid* by comparison with the relation between the Father and the Son. However, only by isolating the treatment of the Holy Spirit in this section from what it is said about him in these same books and then throughout the rest of the treatise, is it possible to uphold an notion of relation which departs from the traditional view that the Father is indeed the *principium* of divine life and that the

⁶⁴ Cf. Mackinnon (1972), 290.

⁶⁵ 7.6 (254).

difference between the Son and the Holy Spirit is determined by their different relation to this same origin.

VIII. THE 8TH BOOK OF *DE TRINITATE: DILECTIO* AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

As we approach the second half of the *De Trinitate*, for the purpose of clarity, we could start by a summary of its structure and content as we did for books 1 to 7. Instead, we prefer to espouse Augustine's pedagogy and dwell on the elaborate prelude he composed for this new section to unveil at last the heart of his rhetorical enterprise. The object of this book can be summarized as follows: the utterly unique nature and character of the object of knowledge –God the Trinity– imposes not only greater logical or theological rigour and subtlety than any other object of inquiry, but more crucially a *conversion* of the knowing subject. Paradoxically, the knowing subject, in the case of God the Trinity, is confronted to an 'object' who is in fact a 'subject' whose freedom Augustine had spelled out through his treatment of divine attributes -especially invisibility- and his doctrine of revelation. What does the process of knowledge become as a result, both with regard to God himself (8th book) and to any other object of knowledge (from the 9th book onwards)?

For this reason, a careful analysis of this book will allow us to appreciate better the peculiarity of Augustine's way of doing theology, as far removed as it is possible to be from the neutral and detached tone one might normally associate to a 'treatise'.

Finally, because of the often surprising complexity and density of the argument of this book and because of its crucial bearing on the whole work, our interpretation of its content and purpose needs to be meticulously established and justified, since most of the argument of our dissertation depends on it.

1. *VISIO DEI*, FAITH AND LOVE

The 8th book starts with an attempt to formulate the issue of knowledge of God with the help of metaphysical categories.¹ After a short summary of the content of the books 5 to 7, concerning the distinction between what can be said relatively and what can be said absolutely with regard to God, Augustine declares that he wants to bring the *contentio* –i.e. the polemical attitude of the first 7 books- to an end and concentrate on his real interest: *mente cernere essentiam ueritatis*.²

Compared with the theological approach of knowledge of God we have highlighted in our sections on the Christology and the pneumatology of the *De Trinitate*, this way of expressing the same issue in the general metaphysical terms of ‘quest for the essence of truth’ is rather surprising. However, our description of God’s attributes of immutability, invisibility, equality and inseparability has shown that even when Augustine uses metaphysical categories, he does not lose sight of their distinctive Trinitarian meaning.³ This also applies to this passage, in which he seems to adopt a purely metaphysical viewpoint to argue that God can be known as *ueritas* only insofar as he is also approached as *summum bonum*, i.e. that knowledge of the highest reality involves the inseparability of intelligence and will, knowledge and love.

i. Knowledge of *ueritas* and love of *ipsum bonum*

The way the topic is introduced is, it must be acknowledged, very convoluted. Augustine sums up the result of the *contentio* of books 5 to 7 in the principle that, in the Trinity, two or three persons are not greater than each one of them. This is the *ueritas* about God. God is an intelligible, immutable and especially a simple reality which cannot be grasped by our *consuetudo carnalis*, nor by our *animus* which, though intelligible, is neither immutable nor simple.⁴ If, on the one hand, man can perceive the *uera* of creation to a certain extent, *ueritas* on the other hand is beyond his grasp:

¹ 8.1-5 (268-274).

² Cf. 8.1 (268).

³ Cf. this dissertation, 111-114.

⁴ 8.2f (269f).

“ueritatem autem ipsam qua creata sunt non potest intueri”.⁵ Hence Augustine’s injunction: “noli quaerere quid sit ueritas”.⁶

At the same time, through the succession of a double rhetorical *Ecce uide si potes*, he explains what he really means:

- (i) “Ecce uide si potes, deus ueritas est. Hoc enim scriptum est: *Quoniam deus lux est*, non quomodo isti oculi uident, sed quomodo uidet cor cum audit, ueritas est”.⁷ Familiarity with Augustine’s thought easily detects here his favourite theme of *illuminatio*, which plays a major role in the *De Trinitate*. God is *ueritas* as he is *lux*, in the sense that he is at the very root of our ability to know, he is the light in which we perceive everything and we judge the truthfulness of everything.⁸ The main implication of this point is that God is not a truth which can be an object of our knowledge in the same way as any other truth.
- (ii) Such an ‘object’ of knowledge implies a different epistemology altogether, suggested by the fact that the passage just quoted locates the place where God’s light is perceived in the *cor*, thus introducing the theme of *amor* through the second rhetorical *Ecce uide si potes*: “Ecce iterum uide si potes. Non amas certe nisi bonum”.⁹ From this point onwards, Augustine establishes the inseparability between *uisio* and *amor*. *God is ueritas as he is ipsum bonum, which means that he can be known or seen only insofar as he is loved*: “Sic amandus est deus, non hoc et illud bonum, sed ipsum bonum; quaerendum enim bonum animae, non cui superuolitet iudicando, sed cui haereat amando, et quid hoc nisi deus?”.¹⁰

⁵ 8.2 (269).

⁶ 8.3 (271).

⁷ 8.3 (271).

⁸ Cf. this dissertation, 210-215.

⁹ 8.4 (271f).

¹⁰ 8.4 (272).

This last sentence implies that the right way of approaching God is not a proud, self-deluding ‘neutral’ approach: *superuolitare indicando*. God is approached only through love and love for the *summum bonum* necessarily entails adhesion to this good, that is an effort to become *boni* in our turn. This can only result from an act of will, *actio uoluntatis*, and a *conuersio*: “Quo se autem conuertit ut fiat bonus animus nisi ad bonum, cum hoc amat et appetit et adipiscitur?”¹¹ This is what Augustine meant by saying that God can be seen/known “non quomodo isti oculi uident, sed quomodo uidet cor cum audit, ueritas est”.¹²

ii. Ontological goodness of *animus* and conversion of will

Reference to God as *bonum* echoes Augustine’s anti-Manichean line of thought and enables him to restate the ontological goodness of creation, to explain evil as the act of choosing a lesser good instead of *ipsum bonum* -i.e. that which is the cause of the goodness of all that exists- and finally to introduce the role of *amor*.

Then, Augustine suggests here a difference and a correlation between the ontological goodness of being *animus*, that is of existence as such, and the ethical goodness acquired through conversion of will. This announces the theological development of the theme of the image of God of books 12 to 14, which is the red line running through the second half of the *De Trinitate*.¹³ Our *animus* is good both because of the *ars in qua factus est*, i.e. the *ueritas* and *bonum* of God, and because it entails a God-given dynamism towards the *summum bonum* and towards becoming *boni* in our turn through *conuersio* (which always means *being converted*): this is the image of God in us. Therefore:

“Ad hoc se igitur *animus conuertit* ut bonus sit a quo habet ut *animus sit*. Tunc ergo *uoluntas naturae congruit ut perficiatur in bono animus cum illud bonum diligitur conuersione uoluntatis unde est et illud quod non amittitur nec auersione uoluntatis*”.¹⁴

¹¹ 8.4 (273).

¹² 8.3 (271).

¹³ Augustine likes to anticipate important themes in a hidden way. It is remarkable that the theme of the image of God is treated just at the end of the 7th book [7.12 (265ff)] and at the beginning of the 9th book [9.2 (294)], but that it does not occur explicitly in the 8th book, even though it underlies the passages we are analysing.

¹⁴ 8.5 (274).

The slip of the tongue consisting in the use of the verb *diligere* in this sentence must not go unnoticed. Augustine, of course, is not always consistent in the use of his vocabulary and, in the analysis of his thought, terms should never be taken in isolation from the constantly expanding meaning he imaginatively breathes into them. However, within single works or sections of his major works, it is often possible to discern theological connotations to some of his choices in the use or shifts of vocabulary. This is certainly the case for the distinction *amor/dilectio* in the *De Trinitate* and it will become increasingly clear that *dilectio* is the term Augustine tends to favour when he talks about divine love.¹⁵ Therefore, the introduction of *dilectio* at this stage of his argument in the 8th book already announces the transition from this (apparent) philosophical formulation of the inseparability of knowledge and love to the openly theological stance adopted from the following paragraph onwards.

The treatment of the relation between knowledge and love of *bona* and *ipsum bonum* ends with a quotation from the book of Acts Augustine is particularly fond of: “Hoc ergo bonum *non longe positum est ab unoquoque nostrum: In illo enim uiuimus et mouemur et sumus*”.¹⁶ In the 14th book of the *De Trinitate*, commenting on this same sentence, Augustine describes the dynamic process of our relation of dependence on God through the distinction between being *in illo* and being *cum illo*. To be *in illo* means to receive life, movement and being from God, and refers not only to the body,

¹⁵ Concerning the difference of meaning between *caritas*, *dilectio* and *amor*, the *De Trinitate* broadly falls into the clear summary given by O'Donovan (1980), 11: “*Dilectio* and *caritas* are words more suited than *amor* to express a love directed to worthy objects, a love which may be approved and encouraged. [...] The rule about *caritas* is consistently observed: there is no *caritas* of evil or wordly things, but only *cupiditas*. [...] Between *dilectio* and *amor*, however, Augustine shows no very clear resolve to distinguish”. A similar opinion is held by Gilson (1943), 177, note 2. In the *De Trinitate*, *amor* is predominantly used to encompass all forms of love and acquires a more discriminating ethical connotation when combined with the couple *uti/frui*: “Ergo aut cupiditate aut caritate, non quo non sit amanda creatura, sed si ad creatorem refertur ille amor, non iam cupiditas sed caritas erit. Tunc enim est cupiditas cum propter se amatur creatura. Tunc non utentem adiuuat sed corrumpit fruentem” [9.13 (304)]. Thus, it is extensively used in books 9-11 to describe the dynamics of self-love/knowledge. *Cupiditas* consistently designates the corrupted relation between *uti* and *frui*. *Dilectio*, on the contrary, despite occasional instances in which it simply is used as a synonymous with *amor* [for example 14.10 (435) and 15.41 (518)], tends to designate God's own love both in his inner-Trinitarian life and in his gift, which enables us to love ‘out of’ this same God-given love. Its use is predominant in book 8 and in the section of the 15th book devoted to the Holy Spirit, 15.27-39 (501-517). The most significant quotations concerning the identification of inner-Trinitarian life with *dilectio* are 6.7 (235f) and 15.27 (501).

¹⁶ Acts 17.27-28 in 8.5 (274).

but, in a more excellent way, to the mind created in God's image. To be *cum illo* is the fulfilment of this relation: "Magna itaque hominis miseria est cum illo non esse sine quo non potest esse". Needless to say, to be *cum illo* is the result of knowing and loving God.¹⁷

In the 8th book too the quotation from Acts enshrining the *in illo* is immediately followed by the equivalent of the *cum illo* (i.e. the fulfilment of our relation with God) through *dilectio* and faith: "Sed dilectione standum est ad illud et inhaerendum illi ut praesente perfruamur a quo sumus, quo absente nec esse possemus. Cum enim per fidem adhuc ambulamus non per speciem, nondum utique uidemus deum sicut idem ait *facie ad faciem*. Quem tamen nisi iam nunc diligamus, numquam videbimus".¹⁸

iii. The relation between *uisio*, faith and love

Previous remarks concerning the priority of love start to reveal their significance here. In our relation with God we are called to love him without seeing him, through faith. *Visio*, it has already been noticed, is treated in this book and for the rest of the *De Trinitate* as the synonym of knowledge. Faith is a form of knowledge as well. This was one of the main findings of our section on Christology: Christ is our *scientia* and our *sapientia*, which means that faith in him -through the *utilia temporalia* of the Incarnation- indeed is real knowledge of God (through the Holy Spirit, of course). Thus faith and *uisio* have the same object and are both a real form of knowledge of God; the only difference between the two is in the modality of this knowledge, which, according to Paul's sentence, in faith is "*per speculum, in aenigmate*" and in *uisio* is "*facie ad faciem*".¹⁹

This is why Christian life consists in *credendo diligere*, that is 'loving God through believing in him'. Book 8 deals precisely with the paradox represented by the form of knowledge constituted by faith with regard to love. In faith we do not see God. Therefore, how is it possible to love what we do not see? Or, better, how is it that we discover ourselves enabled to be in a relation of love of God through faith even if we do not yet see him?

¹⁷ 14.16 (444).

¹⁸ 8.6 (274f). Again, the introduction of *dilectio* in this passage is worth noticing for the same reasons mentioned above.

The apparently ‘merely metaphysical’ approach of the beginning of the 8th book, therefore, unveils its full theological presuppositions. *Visio*, i.e. knowledge of God as *ueritas*, is eschatological. The way to this *uisio* in this life is love, which goes hand in hand with that particular form of knowledge constituted by faith and is made possible by the mediation of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

iv. An outline of the argument of the 8th book

To sum up what we have established so far and make our way through the slightly intricate argument of the rest of the 8th book, let us start by listing its main steps:

- (i) the way towards the intended *cernere essentiam ueritatis*²⁰ –as we have seen- is suggested through a double “Ecce vide si potes”: by the first one we are invited to recognize the identification between God and *ueritas/lux*; by the second, the introduction of what will become the governing line of this book and indeed of the whole second half of the *De Trinitate*: love;²¹
- (ii) the role of love [*amor*] in the process of knowledge is developed with reference to *bona* and *ipsum bonum*. After a description of the way *bona* and *ipsum bonum* are known, the function of *amor* is defined as that which enables us to adhere to the good known and to become good in our turn;²²

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 13.12 is often quoted by Augustine, see for example 15.14 (479f).

²⁰ 8.1 (269).

²¹ 8.3 (271) and 8.4 (271ff).

²² 8.4-5 (271-274).

- (iii) this general principle is then tested in the case of things which are not known directly, but are objects of belief. The leading line, however, still is that of love [*dilectio*], as it appears from the way the question is constantly stated: how do we *credendo diligimus* that which we do not know or see [knowledge and sight are treated as equivalent throughout the book]?²³
- (iv) the issue is narrowed further and applied to the Trinity very much in the same terms: 'How do we *credendo diligimus* God the Trinity whom we do not see?' (i.e. 'How do we love God?'). This is illustrated through the example, resumed a few paragraphs later, of the love for the apostle Paul on the basis of belief in what Scripture says about him, and this example acts as bookends²⁴ for the real core of the argument, namely love [*dilectio*] for the Trinity;²⁵
- (v) finally, the book ends with yet another change of perspective which opens up to the following theme of the triadic form of love [*amor* again] and of its application to the life of our mind.²⁶

We have examined so far points (i) and (ii). The remaining points shall be the object of the following paragraphs.

2. HOW DO WE LOVE WHAT WE DO NOT SEE?

Let us start, therefore from the question: "How do we *credendo diligimus* that which we do not know or see?". The way Augustine looks for an answer to this question becomes rather complex here and will need a patient unravelling. Here are the different angles from which he unfolds the

²³ 8.6-7 (274-277).

²⁴ The bookends are 8.9 (279-284) and 8.13 (289f), although the theme is already hinted at in 8.7 (275) and 8.8 (278).

²⁵ The core of the argument is set forth in the crucial paragraph of 8.8 (277ff) and then it is detailed in 8.10-12 (284-289).

issue: (i) he considers the case of generic belief in bodily objects we have never seen but are described to us (for example a town we have never visited);²⁷ (ii) he also looks at some objects of faith properly speaking;²⁸ (iii) finally, he concentrates on the example of our love for someone we do not see and we only know through belief, namely the Apostle Paul.²⁹

In all these cases, even though the object of our love is not seen but only known through belief, we can love it because we are somehow able to represent it to ourselves through *notitiae* which we have “embedded [*infixa*] in us” or which we know “secundum species et genera rerum vel natura insita vel experientia collecta”.³⁰ These *notitiae* are not the actual object of faith, which as such is not seen nor known, but they play an instrumental role: through them we represent to ourselves that which we are called to believe. For example, in the case of the mystery of the Incarnation, we love what we are asked to believe because we know what a virgin is and what it is to be born. In the case of resurrection, we know what it is to die and to live.³¹

However, the example which immediately prepares the issue of love for God the Trinity and which Augustine develops at great length is love for the Apostle Paul - love, that is, for someone *we do not see* and whose knowledge is *only based on belief*.

We have already noticed that there are two occurrences of this example in the 8th book which act as bookends for the real core of the argument, love [*dilectio*] for the Trinity.³² However, as usual in Augustine, the parameters of this example are not exactly the same throughout and when he resumes it after the central passage on *dilectio*, it plays a slightly different role. Comparisons in Augustine have a fluid character which sometimes make attempts to summarize them analytically

²⁶ 8.14 (290f).

²⁷ 8.9 (281).

²⁸ For example miracles, the resurrection, the Incarnation etc..., 8.7 (276f).

²⁹ 8.9 (279-284) and 8.13 (289f), although the theme is already hinted at in 8.7 (275) and 8.8 (278).

³⁰ 8.7 (276f).

³¹ 8.7 (277). Far from Augustine's mind, of course, is the intention of establishing an anthropological basis for the knowledge of the Incarnation or the Resurrection. On the contrary, his point is precisely that if these realities are believed it is because they are not known and that the necessity to represent them to ourselves through a *similitudo* or a *comparatio* with things we already know [*notitiae*] only plays an instrumental role with a view to adhering to the real object of our faith.

³² See this dissertation, 179, notes 24 and 25.

very difficult. The reason for this is very simple: examples for Augustine are not simply illustrations of a point, nor do they aim at grasping an ineffable reality by assimilating it to objects within our grasp. On the contrary, they reflect the constant attitude our mind must adopt in the presence of realities which infinitely surpass it, that is a constant availability to redefine parameters in order to cling as closely as possible to those imposed by the object.

Thus, in the first passage³³ love for the Apostle, is used in general epistemological terms, whereas in the second passage³⁴ it becomes an example of theological love for the neighbour. This example is set out in the following terms: when we read a description of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, we are inflamed by love towards him, despite the fact that we do not know nor see him. This sums up the main issue: ‘when we discover ourselves in the act of loving something we do not know/see on the basis of what we believe about it, what do we love and how is it that we love it at all?’.

In the case of the Apostle, Augustine argues that we love him because we believe that he is an *animus iustus*. We love both these elements -to be *animus* and to be *iustus*- because we recognize them or become aware of the fact that somehow they are in us.

We know what an *animus* is ‘quia et nos habemus’: “Quid enim tam intime scitur seque ipsum esse sentit quam id quo etiam cetera sentiuntur, id est ipse animus?”³⁵

As for justice, we recognize it even if we are not just ourselves, not because we know it from outside, but because we discover it *praesens* within us. This is explained according to Augustine’s epistemological principle of knowledge of *formae in ipsa ueritate* (i.e. what is usually referred to under the name of *illuminatio*, although the term is not used here and will require careful analysis further on). The outcome of the argument is phrased as follows: “Homo ergo qui creditur iustus ex ea

³³ 8.9 (279-284).

³⁴ 8.13 (289f).

³⁵ 8.9 (279).

forma et ueritate diligitur quam cernit et intellegit apud se ille qui diligit; ipsa uero forma et ueritas non est quomodo aliunde diligatur”.³⁶

We *diligimus* a just man even if we are not yet just because we see the *forma* of justice *in ipsa ueritate*. One of Augustine’s crucial epistemological principles is suggested here which must be carefully understood: justice seen in *ipsa ueritate* is called a *forma*. It is not simply an idea or a knowledge which could be envisaged from a uniquely intellectual viewpoint. A *forma* is something with an inherent teleological thrust: its dynamism is not simply fulfilled in the act of making itself known to us, but especially in the act of ‘forming’, *formare*, us:

“Quod unde esse poterunt nisi inhaerendo eidem ipsi formae quam intuentur ut inde formetur et sint iusti animi, non tantum cernentes et dicentes iustum esse animum 'qui scientia atque ratione in uita ac moribus sua quique distribuit', sed etiam ut ipsi iuste vivant iusteque morati sint sua cuique distribuendo ut nemini quidquam debeant nisi ut inuicem diligant?”.³⁷

This is why the starting point of Augustine’s epistemology tends to be love. We discover ourselves within a movement of love or adhesion to a quality which has not yet ‘formed’ us, which does not yet belong to us, which we have not yet become and which we do not see.³⁸ When we inquire into the nature of this movement of love, we become aware of the fact that it rests upon something already present in us.³⁹ Knowledge is seen as intimately related to the process of love. We become aware of a *forma* which we already love; we have discovered it already present in us; we increasingly know or see it insofar as its dynamism reaches its intended end, i.e. that of ‘forming’ us.

In the end the example of the Apostle has established the following points:

- love comes first, triggered in us by belief in what we hear about the Apostle we do not see;

³⁶ 8.9 (283).

³⁷ 8.9 (283).

³⁸ Cf. 9.18 (309f).

³⁹ Cf. 10.1-4 (311-316).

- if we look into the nature of this love we discover that its object is a *forma* already present in us;
- this *forma* is known *in ipsa ueritate*;
- this *forma* entails love because it is something which not only wants to be known, but also wants to form and transform us and does so through love.

All this however amounts to saying that we love and know the Apostle Paul in God and through God. God in fact is (i) the *ueritas* and the *lux* in which we see the *forma* of *iustitia* and (ii) he is the very *dilectio* which enables us to adhere to the *forma* of *iustitia* and to be *informare* by it so as to become *iusti* in our turn.⁴⁰

3. HOW DO WE LOVE THE TRINITY WE DO NOT SEE?

From this basis, Augustine's reader is led into the core of the issue: knowledge of the Trinity. However, the very formulation of this issue needs to be shaped according to the particularity or rather the unicity of the object of knowledge.

Augustine's question is not: 'How do we know the Trinity?'. On the contrary the question is: "Quomodo igitur eam trinitatem quam non nouimus credendo *diligimus*?"⁴¹ The issue of knowledge of God is not dealt with as the condition upon which the possibility of relation with God would rest. The relation with God is a reality already. Augustine's starting point is the fact that we actually discover ourselves in the act of loving God the Trinity through faith, that is to say even if we do yet enjoy his *uisio*. The different ways in which Augustine formulates the epistemological questions in the same paragraph all confirm that he is looking for the object of our *dilectio*:

- do we love the Trinity in whom we believe [*credendo diligere*] according to the same *specialis vel generalis notitia* which explain our love for the apostle Paul?

⁴⁰ 8.13 (289f).

⁴¹ 8.8 (278).

- or again, do we love the Trinity in whom we believe [*credendo diligere*] *ex parilitate rei*, from a likeness of the Trinity, as if there were many such trinities and we had experience of some of them and thus we could believe according to standard of likeness impressed in us [*per regulam similitudinis impressam*] or in terms of specific and generic notions that that Trinity is of the same sort [*uel specialem uel generalem notitiam illam quoque talem esse credamus*]?
- indeed, when we say and believe that there is a Trinity, we know what a Trinity is, because we know what is ‘to be three’: but this is not what we love [*sed hoc non diligimus*].

The climax of this carefully constructed and progressively emphasized stress on the radical difference between *dilectio* for the ‘God-whom-we-do-not-see-though-believing-in-him’ and any other form of knowledge, is finally reached in the following statements:

“An uero diligimus non quod omnis trinitas sed quod trinitas deus? Hoc ergo diligimus in trinitate, quod deus est. Sed deum nullum alium uidimus aut nouimus quia unus est deus, ille solus quem nondum uidimus et credendo diligimus”.⁴²

No surprise if we cannot find any *similitudo*, *comparatio* or *notitiae* to explain why we love the Trinity. In fact, what we love in the Trinity is that he *is God* and we do not see nor know any other god, because *unus est deus*. *Unus* means here unique, unparalleled.⁴³ As a result, Augustine can resolutely narrow down the issue in these terms:

“Quapropter non est praecipue uidendum in hac quaestione quae de trinitate nobis est et de cognoscendo deo nisi quid sit uera dilectio, immo uero quid sit dilectio”.⁴⁴

Dilectio is of course here to be understood in its full theological meaning.

Therefore, on the basis of the example of the love for the apostle which immediately prepares the issue of love for God the Trinity, Augustine’s line of investigation can be reformulated as follows:

⁴² 8.8 (278f).

- we discover ourselves in the act of *diligere* the Trinity we do not see but in whom we believe;
- in the case of the apostle, what we loved was the *forma* of *iustitia* known in *ipsa ueritate*. In the case of God the Trinity this point undergoes two fundamental changes: (i) what we love in the Trinity is that he is God; (ii) this God is not a *forma* we could know *in nos* or *apud nos in ipsa ueritate* because he himself is the *ueritas* and the *lux* in which we see every *forma*;
- finally, the role of *dilectio* also fundamentally changes because, in the knowledge of God the Trinity, *dilectio* is not simply that through which we adhere to what is known, but is *the very thing known*. Augustine can say that “non est praecipue videndum in hac quaestione quae de trinitate nobis est et de cognoscendo deo nisi quid sit uera dilectio, immo uero quid sit dilectio”,⁴⁵ precisely because God is *dilectio* and because that which we *diligimus* when we believe in the Trinity is *dilectio* itself.

Let us look into this argument more in detail.

First of all, Augustine identifies *dilectio* and *ueritas*. Having stated that the issue of knowledge of God is identical to that of *uera dilectio*, he corrects himself by declaring that it is an issue of *dilectio* as such. In fact, either *dilectio* is *uera* or it is not *dilectio* at all, but becomes *cupiditas*.⁴⁶

Augustine is not dealing any more with examples like that of the love for the Apostle which understandably might be seen as slightly artificial. *Dilectio* is used here in its full theological meaning, carefully grounded on the inseparability Scripture establishes between love for God and love for neighbour. In the New Testament the precepts of love of God and love of neighbour are

⁴³ Cf. 9.1 (292): “Trinitatem certe quaerimus, non quamlibet sed illam trinitatem quae deus est, uerusque as summus et solus deus”

⁴⁴ 8.10 (284).

⁴⁵ 8.10 (284).

⁴⁶ 8.10 (284).

inseparable to the point that even when only one of the two is mentioned, the other is necessarily and systematically implied. Augustine's argument is based in particular on some passages from the Epistle of St. John: "*Deus caritas est et qui manet in caritate, in Deo manet*"⁴⁷ and "*Dilectissimi, diligamus inuicem quia dilectio ex deo est, et omnis qui diligit ex deo natus est et cognouit deum. Qui non diligit non cognouit deum quia deus dilectio est*".⁴⁸ The content of these two sentences can be detailed as follows: God is *dilectio* or *caritas*; *dilectio* is from God; the *dilectissimi* – i.e. those who have been very much loved by God, those who participate in God's love- receive the injunction "*diligamus inuicem*". Then, John states as a matter of fact that "*omnis qui diligit, ex deo natus est et cognouit deum*" and that "*qui manet in caritate manet in deo*". This could be understood in two ways. Either as meaning that *if* one loves one is born from God, knows God and remains in God as a consequence. Or –and this is Augustine's understanding of this passage and indeed, we would argue, John's intended meaning - as implying that the very fact – and therefore *the act-* of loving *is* the manifestation and the consequence of being born from God, of knowing God and of remaining in him.

In Augustine's own words,

"Ista contextio [i.e. that of the two passages from 1 John quoted above] satis aperteque declarat eandem ipsam fraternam dilectionem (nam fraterna dilectio est qua diligimus inuicem) non solum ex deo sed etiam deum esse tanta auctoritate praedicari. Cum ergo de dilectione diligimus fratrem, de deo diligimus fratrem; nec fieri potest ut eandem dilectionem non praecipue diligamus qua fratrem diligimus. Vnde colligitur duo illa praecepta non posse sine inuicem. Quoniam quippe deus dilectio est, deum certe diligit qui diligit dilectionem; dilectionem autem necesse est diligit qui diligit fratrem".⁴⁹

We are thus prepared for the answer to the question which underlies the whole book: 'How is it that we discover ourselves able/enabled to love God the Trinity we do not see?'. What do we know which triggers this love? Augustine's answer is that love for God and for the neighbour has

⁴⁷ 1 John 4.16

⁴⁸ 1 John 4.7

⁴⁹ 8.12 (288). Cf. in Jo. eu. tr 17.8 (CCL 36, 175): "Dilige ergo proximum et intueri in te unde diligis proximum; ibi uidebis, ut poteris, deum". This relation between the *dilectio* out of which we love our neighbour and the *dilectio*/Holy Spirit/God is not a straightforward identification, but has to be interpreted in the light of Augustine's doctrine of the Holy Spirit. *Dilectio* never becomes our possession because the Holy Spirit/*dilectio* is given in such a way that *he gives himself as God*. He remains the Lord in his self-gift. Discovery of our ability to love –*diligere*- entails the acknowledgment of our dependence on God. Gift means presence of the Giver. Hence the epistemological value of *dilectio* for the knowledge of God.

no other reason than love itself, nor any other trigger than love itself, since God is *dilectio*. And this *dilectio* is God to the extent that the vocabulary of vision usually reserved to the eschatological aspect of knowledge applies to the act of *dilectio* already now (which obviously is eschatological as well, insofar as what we expect is already given and present now).

Nobody is authorised to say that he does not know God: “Diligat fratrem et diligat eandem dilectionem; magis enim nouit dilectionem qua diligit quam fratrem quem diligit”.⁵⁰ In the example of the Apostle, love for him was based on the *forma* of *iustitia* present in us. In contrast, in the case of love for God and for the neighbour, what is present in us is not only the *forma* of *dilectio* to which we then have to adhere through *dilectio*. Augustine states that: “Ecce iam potest notioem deum habere quam fratrem, plane notioem quia praesentioem, notioem quia interiorem, notioem quia certioem”.⁵¹ God who is *dilectio* is known at the highest possible degree because he is the most interior thing,⁵² he is the most present thing, he is the most certain thing by being the ground of any other certainty. God/*dilectio* is both the *forma* we know, so to speak, and that through which this *forma* transforms and *informat* us: “Amplectere dilectionem deum et dilectione amplectere deum”. Augustine is aware of the counter-intuitive aspect of this explanation and restates it in all the possible ways so as to make it crystal clear. He anticipates a possible objection: “At enim caritatem uideo, et quantum possum eam mente conspicio, et credo scripturae dicenti: *Quoniam deus caritas est, et qui manet in caritate in deo manet*. Sed cum eam uideo non in ea uideo trinitatem”. And then, in the most explicit way he states: “Immo uero uides trinitatem si caritatem uides”.⁵³

This is followed by yet again another formulation of the peculiar way -peculiar at least for our post-enlightenment perspective- in which Augustine approaches the epistemological issue when the Trinity is concerned. He is not trying to establish the *possibility* of knowing God, but he is trying to give an account of the *reality* of our knowledge of God: “Sed commonebo si potero ut uidere te

⁵⁰ 8.12 (286).

⁵¹ 8.12 (286).

⁵² *conf.* 3.11 (CCL 27, 33): “Tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo”.

⁵³ 8.12 (287)

uideas”,⁵⁴ which does not mean “I will show you how you can see God”, but could be rendered as follows: “I will help you to become aware of the fact that you actually already see God”.

4. LOVE OF LOVE ITSELF

A final touch of this argument concerning the nature of *dilectio* must not go unnoticed. Augustine resorts to the example of the word. By its nature, a word always exists in the act of signifying something. In the same way, *dilectio* is by definition always *diligens* something. This can be linked to one of the most puzzling aspects of the treatment of *dilectio* not only here in the *De Trinitate* but also in several other of Augustine’s works: the inseparability of love for God and love for one’s brother implies that, when we love our neighbour, we love *ipsa dilectio*.⁵⁵

On the basis of the identity between God and *dilectio*, this simply means that we love our neighbour and God *propter Deum*. *Propter Deum* does not simply mean here ‘because of’, i.e. in obedience to the precept received by God or in order to please God or to be more deeply united with God. The assertion that we love God and our neighbour *propter Deum* means that we love them ‘out of God’. In fact, the *caritas* poured by the Holy Spirit in our hearts is not simply a capital transferred into our bank account –so to speak- out of which we draw what we need each time we have to perform an act of love. On the contrary, our love for the neighbour constantly flows from the *dilectio* of God, i.e. the *dilectio* which is God, and consequently the *dilectio* of *Dilectio* who is God.

On this basis it is possible to understand Augustine’s conclusion: “Valet ergo fides ad cognitionem et ad dilectionem dei, non tamquam omnino incogniti aut omnino non dilecti, sed quo cognoscatur manifestius et quo firmitus diligatur”.⁵⁶

Only by completely severing this sentence from everything which precedes, could one understand it as meaning that faith is not the only way in which we know God and that it only

⁵⁴ 8.12 (287)

⁵⁵ 8.12 (286).

⁵⁶ 8.13 (290)

improves a knowledge which would be available to us from other means, say philosophy or whatever.

In reality, the sentence sums up the three elements Augustine has been discussing, intertwining, relating to each other: *dilectio*, *fides*, *cognitio* or *visio*.

Faith (or belief) is the starting point in all the examples given throughout the book. Something needs to be the object of belief because it cannot be known nor seen directly. And yet, through faith we do love it even though we do not see it. Or, rather –and this is precisely the hinge of the argument- we love that towards which faith points, that which it signifies, even though we do not know nor see it. As a result, the question arises: how is it that we discover ourselves able/enabled to love something we do not see, but we believe?

In the case of God the Trinity, however, the issue needs to be reformulated in a different way. Since God is *dilectio*, the distinction between the object of our love and the act through which we love it does not apply any more. What we love in the Trinity is that he is God, i.e. that he is *dilectio*. And since *dilectio* either is *ex deo* or is not *dilectio* at all, then we are no more in the condition of those who have to love something they do not yet possess on the basis of a belief which they deem true for whatever reason. On the contrary, we are in the situation of those who already know, already see, already love out of God's *dilectio*, i.e. *propter Deum*, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit.

5. CONCLUSION

Therefore, without ever mentioning the Holy Spirit nor soteriology or Christology, the 8th book presupposes the theological bases we have collected from the whole treatise in the previous chapters of this dissertation and begins to unfold their epistemological implications. This is the main object of the second half of the *De Trinitate*. Of course, contrary to our neat analytical distinctions, Augustine pursues his effort to make explicit the Christological, soteriological and pneumatological nature of *dilectio* in the second half of the *De Trinitate* as well. However, as we are

about to see, he focusses on the epistemological consequences of the priority of *dilectio* in the process of knowledge he has highlighted with regard to the knowledge of God the Trinity and puts them at the service of the *renouatio* of the image of God *in agnitione dei*.

IX. STRUCTURE AND ARGUMENT OF BOOKS 8-15

A summary of our findings in the 8th book is now needed both to establish the relation of this book to the rest of the treatise and to unravel the structure and the argument of the second half of the *De Trinitate*. Before we set forth our views on this matter, however, a short reminder of the mainstream analogical interpretation of the structure of the second half of the treatise is needed.

1. THE OUTER LAYER OF BOOKS 8-15: THE ANALOGICAL LINE

Indeed, in the *De Trinitate*, Augustine does make an attempt to look at the human self in the light of the formal aspects of the confession of the mystery of the Trinity summed up at the beginning of the 9th book, namely the unity of an equal essence and the triad of persons related to each other.¹ We encounter a real unity of essence when the triad of *amans*, *quod amatur et amor* conjured up at the end of the 8th book,² is applied to *mens* (that is to ‘self’): *mens amans* and *amor sui* are “*unus spiritus, nec essentiae duae sed una; et tamen duo [...] relative ad inuicem dicuntur*”.³ However, on the basis of the inseparability between knowledge and love Augustine postulates, nothing can be loved which is not known as well. *Mens* only loves itself because it simultaneously knows itself,⁴ thus producing the following triad: *mens [se amans]*, *notitia sui*, *amor sui*, that is three elements which “*et si relative dicuntur ad invicem, in sua tamen sunt singula quaeque substantia*”.⁵ This triad meets all the ontological requirements of equality, consubstantiality, inseparability

¹ 9.1 (293): “*trinitatem relatarum ad inuicem personarum et unitatem aequalis essentiae*”.

² 8.14 (290f).

³ 9.2 (295).

⁴ 9.3 (295f).

⁵ 9.5 (298). Therefore Augustine does not leave behind the triad of love of the 8th book to replace it with a new one. In reality, we are still in the triad of love, even though, on the basis of the inseparability between knowledge and love, Augustine shows that it necessarily includes self-knowledge as well.

belonging to the orthodox confession of the unity of the Trinity,⁶ even though, whereas *notitia sui* and *amor sui* are relative terms [*ad aliquid*], *mens* is an absolute term [*ad se*].⁷ Thus, in the course of the 10th book, almost incidentally Augustine introduces a new element, *memoria sui* and, by the end of the same book, we discover that it has replaced *mens* to form a new triad: *memoria, intelligentia, uoluntas*.⁸ The elements of this triad are relative to each other in a perfectly symmetrical way.⁹ However, Augustine does not compare the triad of *mens, notitia sui* and *amor sui* with *memoria sui, notitia sui, amor sui* to argue for a greater formal suitability of the latter over against the former as an analogy of the mystery of the Trinity and, in the 15th book, he mentions both triads almost indifferently as if they were in fact equivalent.¹⁰

The analogical line becomes more explicit in the 11th book, where Augustine seems intent on detecting triads in the ‘exterior man’ with a view to making the abstract triad of *mens* more intelligible. Again, the triads of *res, intentio animi et uisio*¹¹ and *memoria, interna uisio et uoluntas*¹² are checked against the formal characteristics of the confession of the Trinitarian mystery and found more or less satisfactory;¹³ in the course of the argument, however, Augustine’s main interest shifts elsewhere and this analogical line becomes increasingly less relevant to the substance of his argument.

In books 12 to 14, the theme of the image of God comes to the fore, but practically loses all analogical connotations. This is a clear confirmation of the marginality of the analogical line of inquiry in the overall architecture of the treatise, which is kept alive only through sometimes awkward summaries at the very end of each of these books.¹⁴ In the 14th book, talk of *memoria,*

⁶ 9.8 (300f).

⁷ In Trinitarian terms, this triad would correspond to ‘God, the Son and the Holy Spirit’.

⁸ 10.17 (329f).

⁹ 10.18 (330f).

¹⁰ 15.12 (475ff).

¹¹ 11.2 (334ff).

¹² 11.7 (341ff).

¹³ 9.5 (297f) and 9.7 (299f).

¹⁴ Cf. 12.25 (379f) and 13.26 (418ff).

intelligentia and *uoluntas* fulfils a role which has nothing to do with the analogical line summed up so far, but is instrumental to the description of our renewal *in agnitione Dei*, as we shall see at length.

Only in the 15th book, does analogical line definitely take the upper hand, in an attempt to combine it with the themes of *sapientia* and *imago Dei*. There is no need to reproduce the detail of Augustine's argument here, but only to sum up its conclusions: since indeed we become *sapientes* through the reformatio of the *imago Dei* in *agnitione Dei*; since indeed, through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to remember, know and love God, then indeed an analogy of the Trinity can be found in the triad of *mens*, *notitia sui* and *amor sui*.¹⁵

“Ecce ergo trinitas, sapientia scilicet et notitia sui et dilectio sui. Sic enim et in homine inuenimus trinitatem, id est mentem et notitiam qua se nouit et dilectionem qua se diligit”.¹⁶

No sooner has this conclusion been reached, however, than Augustine embarks upon its criticism: whereas the triad of *mens*, *notitia sui*, *amor sui* is *in homine*, the Trinity is not in God, but is God.¹⁷ Then, *memoria*, *intelligentia* and *uoluntas* cannot be distributed to the three persons, because each of the persons of the Trinity remembers, knows and loves.¹⁸ Finally, in a virtually apophatic mood, Augustine resorts to God's incomprehensibility to argue for the radical difference between our knowledge [or *sapientia*] and God's *sapientia*, in which everything is present at the same time, in which there is no past, present or future and things are not thought individually.¹⁹

The same fate is met by another important strand of the analogical line of the second half of the *De Trinitate* we have not mentioned yet.

More daringly even than the parallel between the formal aspects of 'unity' and 'threeness' of the confession of faith in the Trinity and our *mens*, is the other experiment Augustine undertakes in the 9th book and pushes further in the 15th book, in a tentative and apologetic tone which clearly betrays his awareness of taking very innovative paths. While pursuing an investigation of the inseparability of knowledge and love which plays a crucial role in the development of his

¹⁵ Williams (1993), 131 and (1999), 850.

¹⁶ 15.10 (474).

¹⁷ 15.11 (475) and 15.42f (519ff).

Trinitarian epistemology, he cannot help observing that knowledge of *aeternae rationes* entails the generation of an inner *uerbum*;²⁰ that *amor* plays an essential role in this generation;²¹ and that this *uerbum* is *par omnino, aequale, identitem* to *mens*.²² A question betrays his interest for the promising analogical potential of this point with a view to the illustration of the intra-Trinitarian generation and procession: ‘Why does *amor sui* not result in the generation of a *uerbum* as well?’²³ The issue of generations of one sort or another pops up in the investigation of triads of senses and memory in the 11th book,²⁴ to disappear until the analogical line is taken up again more methodically in the 15th book. There, it is tested not only for the illustration of the begetting of *uerbum*²⁵ and for the distinction between generation and procession²⁶ but also for a possible analogy of the *filioque* discernible in the *uoluntas procedens de cognitione*,²⁷ and even for the Incarnation.²⁸

The interest of this other analogical line as well, however, is tempered by a keen awareness of its limitations when envisaged under the viewpoint of God’s simplicity and immutability. The Father does not know through his *uerbum*, but both he and the Son know immutably *omnia simul*, even though “*ille gignendo, ille nascendo*”.²⁹ Our possibility of lying or being wrong also betrays a radical difference between our *uerbum* and God’s *uerbum*: the identity in God of *esse* and *nosse*,³⁰ and the fact that God knows everything through his own perfection –i.e. God does not know things which exist, but things exist because God knows them-³¹ means that his *uerbum* is always *uerum*,³² that is “*per omnia patri similis et aequalis, deus de deo, lumen de lumine, sapientia de sapientia,*

¹⁸ 15.12 (475ff).

¹⁹ 15.13 (477ff).

²⁰ 9.9-12 (301-304).

²¹ 9.13-15 (304-307).

²² 9.16 (307f).

²³ 9.17f (308f).

²⁴ 11.3 (336f), 9 (344f), 11 (347f), 12 (348f).

²⁵ 15.15-20 (480-489).

²⁶ 15.48 (529f).

²⁷ 15.50 (531ff).

²⁸ 15.20 (486-489).

²⁹ 15.23 (496f).

³⁰ 15.24 (498).

³¹ 15.22 (495).

³² 15.24 (498).

essentia de essentia”.³³ Thus, in the end, Augustine modestly acknowledges that “quotiescumque in ea creatura quae nos sumus aliquid illi rei simile ostendere uolui, [...] in ipso intellectu conatum me senserim magis habuisse quam effectum”.³⁴

2. THE ‘INNER LAYER’ OF BOOKS 8-15 AND ITS ROOTS IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE *DE TRINITATE*

The assumption we are testing in this dissertation is that this analogical line only represents the ‘outer’ layer of the argument of the second half of the *De Trinitate*. Karl Barth’s notorious allegation of frivolity brought against this analogical approach³⁵ could not have been more justified and indeed somehow would have been endorsed by Augustine the rhetorician as well. Some frivolity can easily and even intentionally slip in when the preacher tries not only to instruct and exhort his reader, but also to delight him. The real topic of the instruction and of the exhortation, therefore, is to be looked for elsewhere, together with its own distinct (and definitely more graceful) delightfulness

Our findings concerning the first half of the *De Trinitate* corroborate this assumption already from a purely stylistic point of view. We have seen that an outer and an inner layer are clearly identifiable in books 1 to 7. The outer layer consists in a refutation of Arian arguments against the divinity of the Son taken from Scripture (books 1 to 4) or based on logical and ontological principles (books 5 to 7). The inner layer can be gathered around the issue of knowledge of God the Trinity and of the inseparability between revelation and reconciliation. The analytical investigations into the Christology, the pneumatology, the doctrine of revelation of the *De Trinitate* have provided us with the theological content and form of knowledge of God the Trinity, which constitutes the focal point of all the other questions raised in the treatise.

³³ 15.23 (496).

³⁴ 15.45 (524).

³⁵ Cf. this dissertation, 12.

In books 8-15, behind the outer layer constituted by the analogical line summed up above, the same inner layer of the first half of the treatise -knowledge of God the Trinity- is expanded and refined in the light of some parameters either freshly established in the 8th book, or anticipated almost incidentally (apparently at least) in two key passages of the 7th book – Augustine’s usual heuristic device to weave together the many strands of his harmoniously multifaceted thought we are familiar with.³⁶ Let us start by the parameters developed in the 8th book.

i. *Dilectio*

The best summary of our findings in the 8th book is enshrined in the following pregnant statement “Immo uero uides trinitatem si caritatem uides”.³⁷ Christology and pneumatology are the proper context of this sentence: God is *dilectio*; *uisio* of God coincides with the attainment of *sapientia* made possible by Christ, who is our *scientia* and our *sapientia*; therefore, the *uisio caritatis* of this sentence first of all refers to Christ’s identity and salvific role. Christ’s identity, deeds, words and death on the cross are ‘eloquent’: they allow us ‘to see’ *quantum* and *quales* God loved us. They are the object of the *scientia* of faith, which through Christ’s Incarnation, mediation and sacrifice is identical –even though still only *per speculum*- to the *sapientia* of *uisio*. Then, of course, the identity between ‘seeing’ the Trinity and ‘seeing’ *caritas* also refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit, the very *dilectio* of the Father and the Son.

Significantly, this *dilectio* corresponding to the knowledge/*uisio* of God the Trinity is presented not as a possibility, but from the viewpoint of its actuality, as something we can see only because it has happened already. This is betrayed especially by the crucial question raised in book 8th, namely

³⁶ Although this inner layer only came to the fore in the 4th book, we noticed how it was almost casually introduced in the course of the exegesis of the passages from the New Testament in the 1st book already. In fact, in the explanation of the sentence from 1 Cor 15.28: “*Cum autem ei omnia subiecta fuerint, tunc et ipse filius subiectus erit ei qui illi subiecit omnia*”, Christ’s handing over of the kingdom to the Father is explained as meaning that Christ, through faith, leads the just to the contemplation –or *uisio*- of God face to face. Cf. this dissertation, 32ff.

³⁷ 8.12 (287).

“How do we *credendo diligimus* that which we do not see?”. Such a puzzling way of framing the issue should not go unnoticed.

To understand it, we are helped by the beginning of the 9th book, where we are given a new version of what Augustine intended to do in the previous book and indeed of what constitutes the ‘inner’ layer of the whole second half of the *De Trinitate*. Indeed, this is another characteristic of the *De Trinitate*: at the beginning of almost every book, the transition to a new topic includes either a summary of the previous book or a slightly different rendering of its content.³⁸ This often represents an invaluable help in detecting the deepest strands of Augustine’s thought.

Through the association of a series of scriptural sentences deeply imbedded in Augustine’s own thought, the prologue of the 9th book restates the proper scriptural and theological setting for the epistemological issue. Paradoxically, it is not a matter of us knowing God but of God knowing us: “*Si quis se putat aliquid scire, nondum scit quemadmodum scire oporteat. Quisquis autem diligit deum, hic cognitus est ab illo*”.³⁹ When Augustine says in the 8th book that “non est praecipue uidendum in hac quaestione quae de trinitate nobis est et de cognoscendo deo nisi quid sit uera dilectio, immo uero quid sit dilectio”⁴⁰ and he ascertains the identity between being *in dilectione* and being *in lumine*,⁴¹ he has in mind this unique kind of knowledge of God which Scripture defines as ‘being known by God’.

This is echoed by the passive form of the verbs indicating God’s action in the 14th book, where Augustine develops the theme of the image of God:⁴² ‘being known’ is inseparably a ‘being reminded, being converted and being reconciled’, or as he says elsewhere, ‘being enlightened’.⁴³ A positive *auersio* on our part needs to be overcome by God’s action. Revelation coincides with reconciliation. The result of this divine action of revelation, conversion and reconciliation is that

³⁸ Cf. 2.2 (81); 3.3 (128); 7.1 (244f); 8.1 (268f); 9.2 (294f); 10.1 (310f); 12.1 (356); 13.1 (381); 15.1 (460).

³⁹ 9.1 (292), quoting 1 Corinthians 8.2-3.

⁴⁰ 8.10 (284).

⁴¹ 8.12 (288).

⁴² See for example the *renouatur, reformatur, beatificatur* of 14.18 (446) and the *commemorari* of 14.21 (450) etc...

⁴³ Cf. 7.5 (253); 14.18 (446) and 14.21 (450).

we believe and we are enabled to love. We discover ourselves in the situation of those who *credendo diligunt* and wonder how: “How do we *credendo diligimus* what we do not see?”.⁴⁴

We are caught in a movement towards God, *ad ipsum*, as we shall see when exploring the image of God.⁴⁵ On the basis of a sentence from Philippians,⁴⁶ Augustine defines this movement, this dynamism as an *extensio*.⁴⁷ “Perfectionem in hac uita dicit non aliud quam ea quae retro sunt obliuisci et in ea quae ante sunt extendi secundum intentionem. Tutissima est enim quaerentis intentio donec apprehendatur illud quo tendimus et quo extendimur”.⁴⁸ We find ourselves in the condition of those who do not master the object of their knowledge (and their love), who cannot treat it as a possession, as something at their disposal. Applied to God, such a notion of knowledge would be “pericolosa praesumptio”.⁴⁹ The answer to the question “How do we *credendo diligimus* what we do not see?” is that we are known, reminded, converted, reconciled, enlightened by God and thus granted the form of knowledge of God belonging to our present condition, that is faith: “Certa enim fides utcumque inchoat cognitionem; cognitio uero certa non perficietur nisi post hanc uitam cum uidebimus facie ad faciem”.⁵⁰ A faith which indeed ‘does not see’ and which, nonetheless, through *dilectio*, is qualified as *uisio*.⁵¹ The answer to the question ‘How is it that we discover ourselves in the act of loving and believing God even though we do not (yet) see him?’ is the identity between *dilectio* and *uisio*: “Immo uero uides trinitatem si caritatem uides”.⁵² This paradox is the only theologically adequate way of setting the epistemological issue.

Thus, the first key for the understanding of the second half of the *De Trinitate* is that *knowledge of God is something we can approach only from the viewpoint of its actuality*. Inquiry into the way God has

⁴⁴ 8.8 (278).

⁴⁵ Cf. this dissertation, 273-277.

⁴⁶ Philippians 3.13, cf. 9.1 (292).

⁴⁷ A word he had used already with regard to the image of God: “De natura humanae mentis diximus quia et si tota contempletur ueritatem, imago dei est, [...]. Et [...] quantumcumque se extenderit in id quod aeternum est tanto magis inde formatur ad imaginem dei” [12.10 (364f)].

⁴⁸ 9.1 (292).

⁴⁹ 9.1 (292).

⁵⁰ 9.1 (292f).

⁵¹ Cf. 8.12 (286).

⁵² 8.12 (287).

revealed himself through reconciling us to himself is only retrospective. Our fundamental threefold dependence on God for our life, knowledge and love both in creation and in reconciliation becomes object of knowledge only as this same dependence is ‘ac-knowleged’ in *cultus*, worship (which is identified with *sapientia*).⁵³

This crucial role attributed to *dilectio* has far-reaching consequences for knowledge as such which Augustine details in most of the second half of the *De Trinitate*. From the vantage point of *dilectio* he can detect the impasse of any pretension to independent philosophical enterprise,⁵⁴ of any attempt to “philosophize without Christ”.⁵⁵ Only *dilectio* restores knowledge and finally enables philosophers to yield to the injunction which resumes philosophical enterprise as a whole, namely *Cognosce te ipsum*.

ii. *Sapientia*

Besides this principle established in the 8th book, two other keys to capture the complexity of the architecture of the second half of the *De Trinitate* are *sapientia* and *imago Dei*. Even though both these themes only come explicitly to the fore from the 12th book onwards, they are in fact announced in the first half of the *De Trinitate* already, especially in the 7th book.

Thus, even when, in the 6th and the 7th book, Augustine’s main concern seems to be the refutation of anti-‘Arian’ logical or ontological arguments for the inferiority of the Son with regard to the Father, his case is built on the divine attribute of *sapientia*. No need to repeat here what we saw in the section of this dissertation dealing with this issue. Let us simply remember that, according to the identity between essence and attribute in God, the discussion of the proper Trinitarian way of predicating attributes to God could have taken any of the divine attributes; it is noteworthy, therefore, that Augustine selected the attribute of *sapientia* for this purpose.⁵⁶

⁵³ 14.15 (442f).

⁵⁴ Cochrane (1940), 406f.

⁵⁵ 13.24 (416) and *conf.* 3.8 (CCL 27, 30).

⁵⁶ On the basis of the quotations from 1 Corinthians 1.24, cf. 7.1 (244).

Let us also remember the result of his demonstration concerning the proper Trinitarian shape of the divine attribute of *sapientia*: the Son cannot be considered the wisdom of the Father, otherwise the Father would not be wise in himself. Therefore, the Father is *sapientia*, just as the Son and the Holy Spirit; the Father and the Son [and the Holy Spirit]⁵⁷ are together *una sapientia* and yet the Son is *sapientia de sapientia* just as he is *essentia de essentia*.⁵⁸ This seemingly abstract formulation of intra-Trinitarian life constitutes the indispensable ontological ground for the divine character of revelation. The revelatory role of the Son –and of the Holy Spirit– is not a function of his inferiority to the Father, but of his equality and consubstantiality with him. Only God can reveal God.

Therefore, the reason why the correlation of the doctrine of revelation with consubstantiality is built around *sapientia* is that this divine attribute concerns precisely God's own self-knowledge or, rather, God's knowledge of God. This point is effectively illustrated by a correlation we have highlighted already, but which it is necessary to quote again: "Pater enim eam [sapientiam] dicit ut uerbum eius sit, [...] et inluminando [sapientia/filius] dicit nobis et de se et de patre quod dicendum est hominibus".⁵⁹ *Sapientia* here designates something which becomes ours in the act through which we are converted to the *sapientia* which is the Son and enlightened by it. The parallelism of *dicit* is particularly telling: just as the 'Father/*sapientia*' *dicit* his *sapientia* and in this 'diction' the Son-*Verbum* has *essentia*, so the 'Son/*sapientia de sapientia*', i.e. the *Verbum* through which the Father *dicit* himself, *dicit et de se et de Patre* to us and in this 'diction' we are enlightened.

Sapientia is not just a way of stating the divine character of revelation, but it has the advantage of encompassing under the same heading also the action of God the Trinity with reference to creation, to Incarnation and for the enlightenment and the conversion of the human soul. In fact, *sapientia* is said:

⁵⁷ For the Holy Spirit see 7.6 (254).

⁵⁸ 7.3 (250).

⁵⁹ 7.4 (251).

“Genita scilicet per quam facta sunt omnia; creata uero uel facta (i) sicut in hominibus cum ad eam quae non creata et facta sed genita est conuertuntur et inlustrantur; in ipsis enim fit aliquid quod uocetur eorum sapientia; (ii) uel illud scripturis praenuntiantibus aut narrantibus quod uerbum caro factum est et habitauit in nobis; hoc modo enim Christus facta sapientia est quia factus est homo”.⁶⁰

This means that *sapientia* enshrines in one term both the objective side of revelation, namely Christ’s Incarnation and reconciling activity, and its subjective side, that is the eschatological action through which we are converted and enlightened.

At this junction, in the same passage of the 7th book, *sapientia* is intertwined with *imago Dei*.⁶¹ Only the Son is *imago Dei*; as for us, we are created (and saved) *ad imaginem Dei*. The *ad* plus the accusative highlights the main difference between us and the Son: the Son is *imago Dei* in the sense that he is equal to the Father, *lumen illuminans, numquam omnino separabilis* from the Father in virtue of their consubstantiality. On the contrary, created by the Father through the Son –“facta [our *imago*] a patre per filium”- we are given the Son/*sapientia/imago Dei* precisely “propter exemplum quod nobis ut reformemur ad imaginem dei [...] vivendo sapienter”.⁶² The kind of ‘imitation’ Augustine has in mind here is formulated in one of the most all-encompassing sentences of the whole treatise:

“Quia enim homo ad beatitudinem sequi non debebat nisi deum et sentire non poterat deum, sequendo deum hominem factum sequeretur simul et quem sentire poterat et quem sequi debebat. Amemus ergo eum et inhaereamus illi caritate *diffusa in cordibus nostris per spiritum sanctum qui datus est nobis*”.⁶³

This quotation is crucial for grasping the connection between our reformation in the image of God and the Christological aspects of the theme of *sapientia*. In particular, it helps us to understand why we find a book devoted to Christology and soteriology (the 13th), in the middle of two books (the 12th and the 14th) predominantly dealing with the image of God and the theme of *scientia* and *sapientia*. The impossibility of ‘sentire Deum’ in the sentence quoted above means that we were cut off from *sapientia* because of sin. Through the Incarnation, Christ re-establishes our possibility of

⁶⁰ 7.4 (251).

⁶¹ 7.5 (252ff).

⁶² 7.5 (253f).

⁶³ 7.5 (253).

reaching *sapientia*, by becoming himself both our *scientia* and our *sapientia* (this is the object of the 13th book).

Scientia, as we have seen, is the branch of human knowledge which deals with temporal matters and also is the most affected by the *cupiditas* which turns us away [*auertit*] from God. In the 4th book Augustine established that purification from this sinful state can only occur through the same temporal realities which are *occasion* of our fall (and not its cause).⁶⁴ This purification is accomplished in Christ and is expressed in terms of the re-unification of *scientia* and *sapientia* in him: only in him we have again some temporal realities which, through faith, re-establish for us the possibility of access to *sapientia*, i.e. to the vision or contemplation of God the Father, which coincides with *beatitudo*. This refers of course to the Incarnation, where some temporal realities – namely Christ’s human nature, his acts and his deeds- are given to us which have no existence or meaning other than that which comes to them by their existence in the Son of God. This is how the Son becomes for us *sapientia a deo*.⁶⁵ This is how he converts and enlightens us.

Moreover, reversing the *auersio*⁶⁶ caused by *cupiditas*, *conuersio* changes our will into *dilectio* both through the persuasion of the *quantum* and *quales* God loved us in Christ and especially in his sacrifice, and through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The 13th book insists on the fact that we can boast of nothing in this *conuersio*, which is given to us with no merit on our part.⁶⁷ The same idea is echoed in the lengthy treatment on the Holy Spirit at the end of the treatise, in the 15th book, where it is clearly stated that “Non enim habet homo unde deum diligat nisi ex deo”⁶⁸ – ‘ex Deo’ being here a synonym for the Holy Spirit- and that the Holy Spirit is called *donum* because he is given to those who through him love God.⁶⁹ No need to rehearse here what we have explained at great length in the sections of our dissertation devoted to Christology and pneumatology. The only thing to be retained is the extent to which Christology and pneumatology are integral to the theme

⁶⁴ 4.24 (191ff).

⁶⁵ 7.4 (252).

⁶⁶ Described in book 13 as well, cf. 13.1-2 (381f).

⁶⁷ 13.22-23 (412ff).

⁶⁸ 15.31 (506).

of *sapientia* and to that of the image of God: enlightened and converted through the action of the Son and the Holy Spirit, the image of God in us is renewed and reformed through knowledge and love.

iii. Image of God

Our overview of *sapientia* already announced the other main thread running through the *De Trinitate*, especially books 8-15, namely the *imago Dei*. This theme is also anticipated in the first half of the treatise, in a sentence in the 1st book and then in another important passage of the 7th book,⁷⁰ once again in the familiar off-hand way.

Very significantly, the first instance of the image of God can be found in the same passage which sets off the inner layer of the first half of the *De Trinitate*,⁷¹ through a sentence which is the most concise rendering of the whole treatise: “Hoc est enim plenum gaudium nostrum quo amplius non est, frui trinitate deo ad cuius imaginem facti sumus”.⁷²

Then, at the end of the 7th book, while pursuing his criticism of logical and ontological categories applied to the Trinity, Augustine focuses on the use of *persona* for the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. His final censure of *persona* is sealed by a review of the way Scripture refers to God’s tri-unity.⁷³ When talking about God, Scripture uses sometimes both singular and plural pronouns and sometimes only plural pronouns. However, if the plural is attested in Scripture in connexion with the relative names like Father and Son, we never find the plural of non-relative names (like *persona*) applied to God, i.e. we never find Father, Son and Holy Spirit designated as three ‘something(s)’ in the way we do when talking about three persons.

⁶⁹ 15.35 (512).

⁷⁰ 7.4-5 (251-254) and 7.12 (265ff).

⁷¹ Cf. this dissertation 3 2ff.

⁷² 1.18 (52).

⁷³ 7.12 (265ff).

Now, among scriptural passages talking about God in the plural, Augustine lists the well-known sentence of Genesis “*Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*”.⁷⁴ Rather unexpectedly, however, instead of simply drawing the attention on the significance of this sentence for Trinitarian vocabulary, he embarks upon a catechesis on the meaning of the image of God which in fact anticipates and very effectively sums up everything he is going to say on the same topic in books 12 to 14 and more generally in the whole second half of the *De Trinitate*.

For Augustine, man is not simply created in the image of the Son, but of the whole Trinity. The reason for this choice is not just the tenuous textual argument that *faciamus* and *nostram* are in the plural, although this point certainly plays a role in his claim.

On the contrary, his refusal to confine the model for the image to the Son alone depends on the same reasons he had put forward to deny the attribution of the theophanies of the Old Testament to the Son alone in the first four books of the *De Trinitate*.⁷⁵ The Son’s equality with the Father means that he is equally invisible by nature and cannot therefore be an ‘image’ properly speaking any more than the Father or the Holy Spirit. For Augustine, Scripture says that we are created in the *image* of God precisely to stress the distinction between simple likeness (*similitudo*) and equality with God. Only the Son is ‘equal to’ [i.e. *imago*] of God; we are only ‘in the image’ [*ad imaginem*] of God.

Furthermore, the main reason for the assertion that we are in the image of the Trinity simply is that God *is* Trinity, “*Deus autem trinitas*”.⁷⁶ Why does Genesis use the plural “*nisi quia trinitatis imago fiebat in homine ut hoc modo esset homo imago unius ueri dei quia ipsa trinitas unus uerus deus est*”?⁷⁷

A curious detail to be noticed is the way the theme of the image of God literally encloses the 8th book, with a mention just before its beginning⁷⁸ and just after its end,⁷⁹ but no mention at all in the

⁷⁴ Genesis 1.26.

⁷⁵ Cf. this dissertation, 111-114.

⁷⁶ 7.12 (266).

⁷⁷ 12.7 (361).

⁷⁸ 7.12 (265ff).

8th book itself, even though its content is unmistakably recognizable in this book as well. It is not a coincidence if Augustine dwells on the issue of knowledge of *animus* and on the way *animus* has access to *iustitia* and can be called *bonus*. Knowledge of *animus* “quia et nos habemus”⁸⁰ announces the finding that *mens* knows itself in the very act of wanting to know itself;⁸¹ the ontological goodness attributed to our *animus* and derived from the *ars in qua factus est* -i.e. the *ueritas* and the *bonum* of God- even before the *animus* becomes *bonus* through *conuersio*, announces the theme of the image of God *capax Dei*⁸² and the anti-Manichean stance on the fundamental goodness of creation it presupposes.⁸³

Finally, when the theme of image of God comes to the surface again at the beginning of the 9th book,⁸⁴ it seems to refer to some sort of formal equivalent in us to the ‘uni-threeness’ of the Trinity. Ambiguities of this kind are dispelled in the 12th book: “In tota natura mentis ita trinitatem reperiri opus est ut [...] in eo solo quod ad contemplationem pertinet aeternorum, non solum trinitas sed etiam imago dei [inveniatur]”.⁸⁵ The aim of the patient and sustained unfolding of triadic structures or patterns in human mind and in its activity of will and knowledge, is not the detection of the most perfect triad from a formal viewpoint, but the recognition of the image of God in us. Not *an* image of God, but *the* image of God.

3. CONCLUSION

The next three chapters will again combine sequential and analytical approaches for a detailed exploration of the lines of inquiry detected in this chapter: *dilectio* (Chapter X), *sapientia* (Chapter XI) and finally the recapitulative theme of the image of God (Chapter XII).

⁷⁹ 9.2 (294).

⁸⁰ 8.9 (279).

⁸¹ 10.5-6 (317-320).

⁸² Cf. 8.5 (273f) and 14.6 (429), 11 (436), 15 (443).

⁸³ Cf. this dissertation, 253-260.

⁸⁴ 9.2 (294).

⁸⁵ 12.4 (358).

Starting with the relation between *dilectio* and epistemology, we shall describe Augustine's theory of knowledge through the analysis of his notion of knowledge from senses, his theory of illumination and his understanding of intellectual knowledge.

X. *DILECTIO* AND THE PROCESS OF KNOWLEDGE

“Mens ergo ipsa sicut corporearum rerum notitias per sensus corporis colligit sic incorporearum per semetipsam”:¹ with this sentence Augustine announces the lengthy discussion on the process of knowledge of the second half of the 9th book.

Although he starts with intellectual knowledge in books 9 and 10 and reserves the description of knowledge from senses to the 11th book, for the purpose of clarity, we prefer to follow the reverse order. The sentence just quoted states that *mens* collects the *notitiae* from empirical knowledge: for this reason, we shall start by a description of knowledge from senses.

Then, the same sentence mentions the *incorporeae res* that the mind knows through itself. Behind this expression, there is Augustine’s theory of *illuminatio* which is not treated *ex professo* in any of the books of the treatise, but recurs in several passages throughout it. For this reason, after the description of knowledge from senses, it will be useful to gather a synthetic overview of the doctrine of *illuminatio* from all these passages. After that, we will be better equipped to tackle Augustine’s description of the process of knowledge and of its relation to the doctrine of the Trinity.

1. KNOWLEDGE FROM SENSES

i. *Visio*

As an example of knowledge from senses, Augustine chooses vision. Indirectly, this provides us with many useful hints for the interpretation of the doctrine of illumination, which Augustine illustrates precisely through resorting to the example of *visio*.²

In vision³ there is a (i) visible external object [*res uisibilis*] which has its own aspect [*forma corporis*], (ii) the vision [*uisio* or *imago corporis impressa*] and (iii) the intention to see [*animi intentio* or *uoluntas animi*].

A crucial distinction has to be made between the visible aspect of the external object [*forma corporis*] and the modification of the sense of sight resulting from the vision [*forma in sensu uidentis*]. The difference between the two is compared to that existing between the form of the seal and the form the seal impresses on the wax when it is pressed against it. As long as the seal touches the wax, the difference between the two *formae* can only be established with the help of reason. And yet, this distinction is very important: it shows that the modification of the sense we call ‘vision’ is the result of an external body; Augustine goes as far as to say that it is ‘begotten’ from the external body.⁴ We are indeed ‘in touch’ with the material world outside us. The word Augustine uses to describe this ‘impression’ is *informatio*: “sensus informatus [est]”; “informatio sensus”.⁵

At the same time, the *sensus* is at the borderline between the body and the soul, so that the *forma* impressed in it by the external body⁶ pertains both to the body of the seeing subject and, through his body, to his soul: “ita pertinet ut et in corpore fiat et per corpus in anima; fit enim in sensu qui neque sine corpore est neque sine anima”.⁷

¹ 9.3 (296).

² 12.24 (378).

³ Described in 11.2-5 (334-339).

⁴ 11.3 (336): “gignit tamen formam uelut similitudinem suam quae fit in sensu cum aliquid uidendo sentimus”.

⁵ 11.3 (336). This recalls the way the *forma* of *iustitia* informs us so that we become *iusti* in our turn, cf. 8.9 (283).

⁶ Even though Augustine shares Plato’s odd theory that sight results from rays spreading out from the eyes, cf. 11.4 (338) and 9.3 (296), and Plato, *Timaeus* 45b-d and other philosophical possible sources of this theory, cf. notes CCL 50, 338. Cf. also 10.10 (324), where it is said “Quapropter sicut ea quae oculis aut ullo alio corporis sensu requiruntur ipsa mens quaerit (ipsa enim etiam sensus carnis intendit, tunc autem inuenit cum in ea quae requiruntur idem sensus uenit)”: in this light, the ray-theory seems to be a way of understanding the activity of the mind in and through knowledge from senses.

⁷ 11.5 (338). Augustine’s treatment of knowledge from senses in the *Trin.* is less concerned with stating the independence and separation of *animus* from the sensation than in earlier works, cf. *Gn. litt.* 3.5 (CSEL 28/1, 67): “sentire non est corporis, sed animae per corpus” and *quant.* 23.41 (CSEL 89, 182): “sensus puto esse non latere animam quod patitur corpus”, inspired from the Plotinian μή λαθεῖν. Instead, in the *Trin.*, the stress lies on the active role of the will.

That which applies the sight to the object seen so that the *forma* of the latter can *informare* the former is the will, *uoluntas*:⁸ “Voluntas autem tantam habet uim copulandi haec duo, ut et sensum formandum admoueat ei rei quae cernitur et in ea formatum teneat”.⁹

Already at this most elementary stage of the process of knowledge, we are warned about the extraordinary power of the will on the knowing subject. If, by its violence, this *intentio* ignites into *cupiditas* or *libido*, it affects not only the senses, but the very body of the knowing subject.¹⁰

ii. *Memoria*

The following stage in the process of knowledge is represented by the act of remembering things previously known from senses and stored in memory.¹¹

Again, we find here a distinction between (i) the likeness of the object known from senses stored in memory [*similitudo in memoria*], then (ii) the sight of the mind which goes back to memory [*acies recordantis animi*] and finally, and crucially, (iii) the role of the will [*uoluntas*] to turn the sight of mind towards memory and to join it to the likeness stored in it. Also in the case of memory, the distinction between the likeness stored in memory and that which is formed in the *acies recordantis animi* can be established through reason.

Most importantly, however, the power of *uoluntas* in this process of remembering is such that it can result in self-deception. The will can turn the *acies* of our mind towards our memory with such cogency that it can become impossible to distinguish that which we remember from the reality surrounding us. This form of alienation worries Augustine so much that he does not hesitate to illustrate it not only through the examples of dreams, seers and mad people, but also with the help of a surprisingly salacious anecdote.¹²

⁸ This is reminiscent of the role of *amor* with regard to *bonum* in 8.9 (283).

⁹ 11.5 (339).

¹⁰ 11.5 (339). This is illustrated through the example of the chameleon and of Jacob's herds.

¹¹ 11.6-7 (339-343).

¹² 11.7 (341f).

The role played by memory with regard to knowledge of eternal realities will be considered later on. As far as bodily realities are concerned, Augustine openly declares that no knowledge of them is possible which is not gathered from external reality through senses and stored in memory.¹³

In the end, the point Augustine stresses the most is the role of the will. Already with regard to knowledge of external and bodily reality, the power of will is enormous, depending on whether it joins [*conciliat, coniungit*] the knowing faculty with the object to be known or it separates them [*disiungit, separat*]. Just as the act of turning the sight to a visible object can be called a *conuersio*, so the failings of knowledge of senses or of memory are the result of an *auersio* which Augustine tends to describe through examples loaded with ethical overtones.¹⁴ If we go wrong, it depends on the will: “cur plerumque falsa cogitamus [...] nisi quia uoluntas illa quam coniunctricem ac separatricem [...] formandam cogitantis aciem per condita memoriae ducit ut libitum est, et ad cogitanda ea quae non meminimus ex eis quae meminimus aliud hinc, aliud inde, ut sumat impellit?”¹⁵ Before we go further in the investigation of the ethical dimension of this stage of knowledge, however, we need to complete our overview of Augustine’s epistemology.

2. ILLUMINATIO

Interpretation of the notoriously complex issue of Augustine’s doctrine of illumination can benefit from one of the main characteristics of this theory, namely the analogy with sight. To start with some general observations, it is certainly not an accident if the description of knowledge from senses in the 11th book focuses on sight.¹⁶ Then, the vocabulary of vision is prominent in the passages of the *De Trinitate* directly or indirectly devoted to *illuminatio*:¹⁷ *intueor*,¹⁸ *cerno*,¹⁹ *conspicio*²⁰ and *uideo*.²¹

¹³ 11.14 (351).

¹⁴ 11.15 (352).

¹⁵ 11.17 (353f).

¹⁶ 11.2-5 (334-339).

¹⁷ The passages we are referring to are 8.7-9 (275-284); 8.13 (289f); 9.9-11 (301ff); 10.2 (312ff); 12.23-24 (376ff) and 14.21 (449ff).

The parallel with sight is explicitly put forward for the main description of illumination, in a well-known passage from the 12th book:

“Sed potius credendum est mentis intellectualis ita conditam esse naturam ut rebus intellegibilibus naturali ordine disponente conditore subiuncta sic ista uideat in quadam luce sui generis incorporea quemadmodum oculus carnis uidet quae in hac corporea luce circumadiacent, cuius lucis capax eique congruens est creatus”.²²

The comparison between sight and illumination, in this passage, introduces an element which was not mentioned in Augustine’s description of *sensibilis uisio* in the 11th book, namely light. In the 11th book,²³ we saw that in vision there is (i) a visible external object [*res uisibilis*] which has its own aspect [*forma corporis*], (ii) the vision [*uisio* or *imago corporis impressa*] and (iii) the intention to see [*animi intentio* or *uoluntas animi*]. We also mentioned Augustine’s odd theory that sight results from rays spreading out from the eyes, which he shares with Plato and other philosophers.²⁴

In the passage just quoted, the stress is on the twofold condition of the very possibility of seeing, namely the surrounding physical light and the ‘capacity’ or ‘congruity’ of the eye with regard to this light. In the same way, for our mind, the stress lays on a ‘kind of light’ –notice the *quadam*-incorporeal and of its own kind –*sui generis*- in which it is possible to see intelligible realities.

The *quadam* and the qualification *sui generis* remind us of the highly metaphorical nature of this theory of illumination. Augustine does not conceive intellectual life as if it really was an act of seeing requiring a kind of light of its own. The aspect of the life of the mind this doctrine is meant to illustrate is rather our ability to define and to judge that which we know from senses. In the *De Trinitate*, the doctrine of illumination concerns almost always actions expressed by the verbs *approbare*,²⁵ *improbare*,²⁶ *reprehendere*,²⁷ *iudicare*.²⁸ It also intervenes in the process of *definitio* of *notitiae generales aut speciales*,²⁹ or in *cogitare*,³⁰ but this will require closer analysis.

¹⁸ 8.9 (283); 9.9 (301); 10.2 (313).

¹⁹ 8.9 (283); 8.13 (290); 9.11 (303); 10.2 (313).

²⁰ 8.13 (290) and 10.2 (313).

²¹ 12.24 (378) and 14.21 (450).

²² 12.24 (378).

²³ 11.2-5 (334-339).

²⁴ Cf. this dissertation, 208 note 6.

²⁵ 8.9 (282); 9.9 (301).

Metaphorical language plays an even more striking role when Augustine refers to the ‘place’ where this illumination occurs. Often, spatial vocabulary simply states that it is a ‘place’ above us: *supra mentem*,³¹ *super aciem mentis*,³² *desuper*,³³ *supra nos*,³⁴ and yet also, through a paradox familiar to him, *apud nos*.³⁵ Once it is said to be *in incorporali natura*.³⁶ Otherwise, truth itself is sometimes described as that which is known,³⁷ other times as the ‘place’ where we are enlightened.³⁸

The meaning of such an extensive use of metaphorical language needs to be elucidated. We have seen how clearly Augustine states that knowledge of bodily realities –which include individual instances of *genera* and *species*, like this man or this *good* man- must be traced back to what we gather from external reality through the senses and the act of *colligere* images stored in memory.³⁹ However, the analysis of the process of knowledge comes up against two main paradoxes which cannot be solved by simply resorting to empirical knowledge.

The first paradox concerns the way the process of knowledge is set off. The *inquisitio* starts when an *appetitus* prompts us to inquire and to find out what we want to know.⁴⁰ However, what does explain the awakening of this *appetitus*? Since “rem prorsus ignotam amare omnino nullus potest”,⁴¹ a kind of ‘knowledge-before-knowledge’ must be at the origin of the *inquisitio*. This is one of the cases in which Augustine resorts to the metaphor of illumination. When we want to find out the meaning of an unknown word, we are incited by the perception of the utility and the beauty of language and of the possibilities it opens to us to establish relations with other people. In this case,

²⁶ 9.10 (302).

²⁷ 14.21 (450).

²⁸ 9.11 (303).

²⁹ 9.9 (301).

³⁰ 8.7 (277); 14.21 (450).

³¹ 9.10 (302).

³² 9.11 (303).

³³ 9.11 (303).

³⁴ 8.13 (290).

³⁵ 8.9 (282).

³⁶ 12.23 (376).

³⁷ 8.9 (283) and 9.9 (301).

³⁸ 8.13 (290); 9.9 (301); 10.2 (313); 12.23 (376).

³⁹ 11.14 (351).

⁴⁰ 9.18 (310).

Augustine will say that such *pulchritudo* and *utilitas* are seen “in luce veritatis”. This is something conceived both in active terms, expressed by the metaphor of seeing, and more passively as the result of something ‘touching’ our soul: “Species namque illa tangit animum quam nouit et cogitat in qua elucet decus consociandorum animorum in uocibus notis audiendis atque reddendis”.⁴²

Another epistemological paradox Augustine felt very acutely has to do with the ability to judge according to, for example, ethical notions like that of justice, even without actually being a just man. This paradox is discussed at length on two occasions in the *De Trinitate*.⁴³ In the 8th book, Augustine argues that the notion of justice, “scientia atque ratione in uita ac moribus sua quique distribuit”, presupposes the presence of the truth inside us, *apud nos*,⁴⁴ or the possibility of seeing the *forma* of *iustitia* “supra nos in ipsa ueritate”.⁴⁵ This *forma* is immutable, eternal, stable. Changes in the way justice is embodied by the individuals we know and love do not affect our ability to judge according to the *forma* of *iustitia*. This case is developed more stringently in the 9th book. The topic is love for an individual person, whose faith we admire and we desire to acquire. The paradox is that even if eventually we discover that the faith of this person was a counterfeit, we do not cease to know what faith is and to be able to judge according to this perception. The form of *ueritas* in which we make this judgment dwells in *imperturbabili aeternitate* and sheds its light on our mind.⁴⁶

This theory of illumination, therefore, could be considered more as a re-formulation of paradoxes than a real attempt to solve them. Augustine is very committed to avoid both Platonic reminiscence-theory and Pythagorean transmigration of souls.⁴⁷ In their stead, whenever he deals with the issue of the principles or laws of our intellectual and indeed ethical judgments, he resorts again to the same heavily metaphorical language which generations of scholars have tried to systematise in vain.

⁴¹ 10.1 (311).

⁴² 10.2 (314).

⁴³ 8.9 (279-284) and 14.21 (450f).

⁴⁴ 8.9 (282).

⁴⁵ 8.13 (290).

⁴⁶ 9.11 (303).

⁴⁷ 12.23f (376-379).

For the purpose of our dissertation, we do not need to solve the conundrums of Augustine's epistemology, but simply to highlight the strands of his theory of knowledge which either throw some light on his understanding of the way we can know God or depend on it.

We have seen that he resorts to vocabulary of illumination to elucidate the mechanism of our judgments according to laws or principles we do not possess and cannot be traced back to empirical knowledge. Another area where the same vocabulary occurs is that of definitions. In this case, the object of knowledge can be a notion like that of 'human mind', which entails knowledge of *species* and *genera*:

“Neque enim oculis corporeis multas mentes uidendo per similitudinem colligimus generalem uel specialem mentis humanae notitiam, sed intuemur inuiolabilem ueritatem ex qua perfecte quantum possumus definiamus non qualis sit uniuscuiusque hominis mens, sed qualis esse sempiternis rationibus debeat”.⁴⁸

This passage is important because it shows that what we see *in ipsa ueritate* is not the notion of 'human mind'. Augustine explains that we gaze upon (*intueor*) indestructible truth and from it (*ex qua*) we see the *rationes* –the 'grounds', the 'reasons'– according to which the definition is made. Thus, illumination does not provide us with notions, but just as it allows us to judge ethical principles, so it enlightens our mind with the *rationes*⁴⁹ or the *regulae*⁵⁰ necessary to reach a definition of the object of our sensible knowledge according to *species* and *genera*.⁵¹ These *rationes* can allow us to judge about the beauty or the utility of something.⁵² When Augustine talks about the *ratio* of a *quadratum corpus*, he refers to that which allows us to perceive the immutable form of a squared body, not the form of the square itself.⁵³ Again, his examples are deliberately vague and defy any attempt to press their meaning too much.

Comparison with knowledge from senses can be useful again when we consider another aspect of illumination. Besides the vocabulary of vision we have listed above, another set of metaphors

⁴⁸ 9.9 (301).

⁴⁹ Cf. 9.11 (303); 10.2 (313); 12.23 (376).

⁵⁰ cf. 8.8-9 (277-284); 14.21 (450).

⁵¹ Cf. 8.7-8 (275-279); 10.2 (313).

⁵² 10.2 (313).

⁵³ 12.23 (377).

assigns a more active role to light or its equivalent terms: concerning the *iudicium ueritatis*, it is said that it *claret desuper*,⁵⁴ the *forma ueritatis* sheds an incorruptible light on the sight of our minds;⁵⁵ the *species* in which the beauty of knowledge of languages *elucet*, is said to touch (*tangere*) our soul;⁵⁶ light again touches (*tangit*) even those who live sinfully, since they also can know eternity and sometimes make right judgments.⁵⁷ In the last example, both the act of knowing eternity and of making ethical judgments is attributed to immutable and eternal rules which cannot obviously be looked for in the nature nor in the attitude of the minds of those *impii*, since “*illae regulae sint iustitiae, mentes uero eorum esse constet iniustas*”.⁵⁸ The alternative explanation runs as follows:

“Vbinam sunt istae regulae scriptae, ubi quid sit iustum et iniustus agnoscit, ubi cernit habendum esse quod ipse non habet? Vbi ergo scriptae sunt, nisi in libro lucis illius quae ueritas dicitur unde omnis lex iusta describitur et in cor hominis qui operatur iustitiam non migrando sed tamquam imprimendo transfertur, sicut imago ex anulo et in ceram transit et anulum non relinquit? Qui uero non operatur et tamen uidet quid operandum sit, ipse est qui ab illa luce auertitur, a qua tamen tangitur”.⁵⁹

The comparison of the seal and the wax had been used in the 11th book to explain the difference between the visible aspect of the external object (*forma corporis*) and the modification of the sense of sight resulting from the vision (*forma in sensu uidentis*). At the same time, it conveyed the idea that the sense undergoes a modification caused by the object known, called an *informatio*.⁶⁰ In the same way, there are passages of the *De Trinitate* where generic or specific knowledge is attributed either to a *regula similitudinis impressa* or to *specialis uel generalis notitia*,⁶¹ i.e. either to the *notitia* formed in our mind in the light of *aeternae rationes* or to the likeness of a *regula* imprinted in our mind (*impressa*) in the same light.

⁵⁴ 9.10 (302).

⁵⁵ 9.11 (303).

⁵⁶ 10.2 (314).

⁵⁷ 14.21 (451).

⁵⁸ 14.21 (450f).

⁵⁹ 14.21 (451).

⁶⁰ 11.3 (336).

⁶¹ 8.8 (278).

Thus, to the *informatio*⁶² caused on our senses by the object seen, corresponds the *informatio* depending on the *forma* seen in *ipsa ueritate*. A crucial difference, however, exists between the two: the *informatio* by a *forma* seen in *ipsa ueritate* results from a real *conuersio* requiring the role of the will. We saw above that we can know what justice is, even if we are not just ourselves. However, knowledge of this *forma* sets off –so to speak– a dynamism which is inherent to the very aim of a *forma*, namely that of *informare*.⁶³

A final example can be given of the extent to which Augustine resorts to sensible vision – external or internal– to exemplify illumination: just as knowledge drawn from senses is stored in memory, so the notions or the judgments we elaborate in the light of the rules, laws or principles seen in *ipsa ueritate*, are entrusted to an intellectual memory; this facilitates future elaborations of the same notions or judgements.⁶⁴

In conclusion, all this confirms the extent to which Augustine resorts to sensible vision – external or internal– to exemplify illumination and therefore the highly metaphorical, rather than explanatory, character of this theory. Added to the vocabulary of vision, the very way in which we judge or define reality is conceived analogically from the way external reality affects our senses. Even the examples which illustrate this process tend to be similar in both empirical knowledge and *illuminatio*.

3. INTELLECTUAL KNOWLEDGE

On the basis of this description of knowledge from senses and *illuminatio*, we can go back to the sentence from the 9th book quoted at the beginning of this chapter which announces the lengthy discussion of intellectual knowledge of the second half of the *De Trinitate* and explore its meaning:

⁶² 11.3 (336).

⁶³ Cf. 8.9 (283).

⁶⁴ 12.23 (377).

“Mens ergo ipsa sicut corporearum rerum notitias per sensus corporis colligit sic incorporearum per semetipsam”.⁶⁵

Empirical knowledge [i.e. knowledge of *corporeae res*] remains the basis of the process of knowledge, originating either directly from the external senses or indirectly from memory and imagination, as it is again made clear in this same 9th book.⁶⁶ ‘Bodily realities’ encompass everything which is an object of our experience, including for example human persons and their virtues.

On the other hand, ‘non-bodily realities’ [*incorporeae res*], which the mind knows through itself, are not an alternative source of knowledge of reality, but the condition for the possibility of performing the most typical rational activity, that is to define reality according to *genera* and *species* and to judge it. In the previous section on illumination we have found that the *regulae* or *rationes*, that is the laws, the principles, the grounds, the proportions according to which we define and judge empirical knowledge, are seen in truth itself or in a kind of incorporeal light⁶⁷ which touches our mind.⁶⁸ This also is restated in the 9th book: the *genera* and the *species* which allow us to define reality, and the principles according to which we judge it, are eternal and immutable; they are common to everyone; they cannot be traced back to empirical knowledge. Therefore, they must originate from an independent source which shares their same characteristics, namely eternity and immutability, and which is common to everyone, at least potentially. To illustrate more than to explain what this independent source must look like, we find the familiar metaphorical vocabulary: *intueri in ipsa ueritate*, “Viget et claret desuper iudicium ueritatis ac sui iuris incorruptissimis regulis firmum est” etc...⁶⁹

This relation between ‘incorporeal’ and ‘corporeal’ realities, that is to say between knowledge through the senses and the *regulae* or *rationes* according to which we judge and define it, is clearly restated in the 9th book. Augustine distinguishes knowledge from the senses or memories from the

⁶⁵ 9.3 (296).

⁶⁶ 9.10 (301f).

⁶⁷ 12.24 (378).

⁶⁸ 10.2 (314) and 14.21 (451).

⁶⁹ 9.10 (302).

faculty to judge this knowledge. Knowledge from the senses is one thing, the faculty of mind that makes aesthetic judgments is another, i.e. “secundum quod mihi opus illud placet, unde etiam si displiceret corrigerem. Itaque de istis [things known from senses] secundum illam iudicamus, et illam cernimus rationalis mentis intuitu”.⁷⁰ Realities known through the senses or represented through memory are one thing, quite another are “rationes artemque ineffabiliter pulchram talium figurarum super aciem mentis simplici intellegentia capientes”.⁷¹

These explanations concerning the relation between the empirical origin of our knowledge and the ‘transcendent’ nature of our principles of judgment, however, are not yet a description of the process of intellectual knowledge as such. For this, we must resort to a crucial passage for Augustine’s theory of knowledge which puts a strain on the compartmentalized analytical lines of inquiry we have adopted so far for the purpose of clarity:

“In illa igitur aeterna ueritate ex qua temporalia facta sunt omnia, formam secundum quam sumus et secundum quam uel in nobis uel in corporibus uera et recta ratione aliquid operamur uisu mentis aspicimus, atque inde conceptam rerum ueracem notitiam tamquam uerbum apud nos habemus et dicendo intus gignimus, nec a nobis nascendo discedit”.⁷²

The act of judging empirical knowledge –and indeed action- in the light of the eternal truth is illustrated through the metaphor of the conception of a *notitia* which in turn is begotten under the form of a *uerbum* (let us notice here the distinction between *concipere* and *gignere* which we shall find later in the distinction between *uerbum conceptum* and *uerbum natum*). This *uerbum*, however, is not generated in the sense that it becomes external to us. It is an internal *uerbum*.

Before we say more about this *uerbum*, however, we must make a few comments on the passage just quoted.

First of all, the theory of illumination we have tried to explore from a ‘purely’ epistemological point of view so far, unveils an unmistakable theological connotation: the truth which provides us

⁷⁰ 9.11 (303).

⁷¹ 9.11 (303).

⁷² 9.12 (303f).

with the principles of our judgements and definitions, is the very origin [*ex qua*] of the objects of our empirical experience [*temporalia*], from which they are created.⁷³

Further, instead of talking of knowledge, as we might have expected in this context, the passage focuses on *operatio* according to *recta ratio*, thus alluding to the *scientia* Augustine will take up in the 12th book, which is the ‘field’ of our rational activity dealing with our action in the temporal realm.

Finally, and most importantly, a clear distinction is established between the illumination and the *notitia* or the *uerbum* which constitute the actual knowledge of something according to *genera* and *species*, i.e. intellectual knowledge. This confirms our interpretation of illumination as relating to the formal conditions of intellectual knowledge rather than to its material content. Intellectual knowledge is not the result of an ‘infusion’ in our mind of a pre-existing reality, but the production of a new reality, a *notitia*, which, for this reason, is compared to the inner begetting of a word.

Coming back to the *uerbum* resulting from the process of intellectual knowledge mentioned above, a short sentence of the 9th book describes it in these terms: “cum amore notitia”.⁷⁴ This means that the production of this new reality in the process of knowledge, conveyed through the metaphor of the inner begetting of a word, entails the inseparability between knowledge and will so characteristic of Augustine’s theory of knowledge.

In intellectual knowledge, *uoluntas* plays a determining role right from the outset by setting off the process of knowledge itself, as an *appetitus inueniendi*, which is a form of love.⁷⁵ It causes the knowing subject to hang (*pendet*), so to speak, until he finds a rest by a *copulatio* with the object known: “appetitus quo inhiatur rei cognoscendae fit amor cognitae dum tenet atque amplectitur

⁷³ A few lines further into the same passage, there is a clear identification between *creator* and *incommutabilis ueritas*, 9.13 (304). Cf. also the end of 10.10 (324).

⁷⁴ 9.15 (307).

⁷⁵ At the same time Augustine explains that, since “rem prorsus ignotam amare omnino nullus potest”, a ‘knowledge-before-knowledge’ of some sort must be postulated, which he explains in the following way: (i) either we know and we love the *genus* and we yearn to acquire the knowledge of one individual instance of it; (ii) or we see it *in specie sempiternae rationis*, according to the theory of illumination we have seen already; (iii) or we love something we know which spurs us to look for something else we do not know; (iv) or finally we love *ipsum scire*, knowledge itself [10.4 (315f)].

placitam prolem, id est notitiam gignentique coniungit”.⁷⁶ The metaphor of the begetting of a word here is loaded with definite sexual overtones: *appetitus*, *amplexus*, *copulatio*, *requies*, begetting of a *proles*.⁷⁷ This vocabulary and these metaphors give a picture of intellectual operations as anything but a cold, detached, controlled activity. Intellectual activity severed from desires, yearning, sense of lack, movement, is an abstraction which does not interest Augustine. The complexity, the unresolved tensions, the paradoxes of his epistemology and the impossibility of systematising it might well result from its close adherence to life, rather than from a lack of *esprit de système*.

Just as it plays a determining role at the origin of the process of knowledge, so *uoluntas* leads this process to completion or rest. The metaphor of the begetting is further refined through the distinction between the conception and the actual birth, the *uerbum conceptum* and the *uerbum natum*, already hinted at in the passage quoted above. The intellectual activity of defining something according to *genera* and *species* or to judge, for example, an act of justice, is intertwined with the activity of the will. We would not look for the definition of something –i.e. to know it– nor bother to evaluate its beauty or utility, unless an *appetitus* was driving our interest. The same *appetitus* could not possibly be satisfied with a simple representation or *notitia*: its inner dynamism only reaches its end, its *requies*, in the actual *copulatio* between the knowing subject and the object craved for.

However, a distinction in the completion of this act of knowledge exists in our dealings with bodily realities on the one hand and with intellectual realities on the other.

In the case of knowledge of temporal or bodily realities, the process might be described as follows: something is recorded by our sensorial activity; this sensation awakens in us a desire to know its cause and to appreciate its value; this desire drives us to turn the sight of our mind to the *rationes* and *regulae* so that they might enable us to define and to evaluate the object known; at this point, if this definition or evaluation pleases us to the point of converting our initial eagerness into full-blown love, we conceive a *uerbum* [*cum amore notitia*]; this love, however, will not be satisfied

⁷⁶ 9.18 (310).

⁷⁷ All these terms recur in 9.18 (309f).

until it is united to the thing known or possesses it [*copulatio*]: only then the *uerbum* is not only ‘conceived’, but really ‘born’. This is explained in the following sentence:

“In amore autem carnalium temporaliumque rerum [...] alius est conceptus uerbi, alius partus. Illic enim quod cupiendo concipitur adipiscendo nascitur, quoniam non sufficit auaritia nosse et amare aurum nisi et habeat, neque nosse et amare uesci aut concumbere nisi etiam id agat, neque nosse et amare honores et imperia nisi proueniant”.⁷⁸

Before we go further, we must draw attention to the extent of the inseparability between knowledge and love presupposed by this theory. There is no *inquisitio* which is not driven by a form of eagerness or desire. Then, knowledge of something does not only consist in the definition or the judgement we elaborate about it according to rational standards, but entails union or rather *copulatio*. This approach to knowledge immediately betrays a strong affinity with that of the Old Testament, where the verb ‘to know’ is used to indicate both epistemological and sexual activity.⁷⁹ The remarks we have made above concerning the sexual overtones of Augustine’s vocabulary of knowledge go in exactly the same direction.

On the basis of what we have seen in the case of knowledge of bodily and temporal realities, we must now turn to knowledge of ‘spiritual’ realities [*spiritualia*]. In this case, there is identity between the *uerbum conceptum* and the *uerbum natum*. Here, the *notitia* is not only a representation of something which remains outside ourselves and which, once known, still needs to be reached and possessed. With spiritual realities, the *notitia* is the object not only of love –*cum amore notitia*– but also of the *requies* of the will:

“Conceptum autem uerbum et natum idipsum est cum uoluntas in ipsa notitia conquiescit, quod fit in amore spiritualium. Qui enim uerbi gratia perfecte nouit perfecteque amat iustitiam, iam iustus est etiamsi nulla exsistat secundum eam forinsecus per membra corporis operandi necessitas”.⁸⁰

By loving the notion of justice conceived in the light of truth itself, we already are just, even before we actually perform deeds of justice. The other way round, if we perform acts of justice, it is because we already love justice, we are already ‘informed’ by it so as to be able to act justly.

⁷⁸ 9.14 (305).

⁷⁹ Cf. Genesis 4.1.

⁸⁰ 9.14 (305).

An adequate interpretation of this last assertion needs to take into account examples of love for just men in the 8th and the 9th books. Socratic ethical intellectualism is alien to Augustine: for him, simply knowing what justice is does not automatically entail that we are just. In the 8th book, he explicitly declares that “nouit quid sit iustus etiam qui nondum est” and, while looking for the origin of this notion of justice, he states: “Cum enim dico et sciens dico: ‘Iustus est animus qui scientia atque ratione in uita ac moribus sua cuique distribuit’, non aliquam rem absentem cogito sicut Carthaginem aut fingo ut possum sicut Alexandriam, siue ita sit siue non ita; sed praesens quiddam cerno et cerno apud me etsi non sum ipse quod cerno, et multi si audiant, approbabunt”.⁸¹

To become *iusti* in our turn, we need to be ‘shaped’, ‘informed’ [*informari*] by the *forma* seen in the light of truth itself. Augustine declares that “omnis secundum speciem notitia similes est ei rei quam nouit”.⁸² However, the ‘assimilating’ power of this *notitia* depends on love. This is stated several times. In the case of knowledge of God, though of course remaining inferior to him, we are made similar to him :

“cum deum nouimus, quamuis meliores efficiamur quam eramus antequam nossemus maximeque cum eadem notitia etiam placita digneque amata uerbum est fitque aliqua dei similitudo illa notitia, tamen inferior est quia in inferiore natura est”.⁸³

It is by loving the *notitia* that a *uerbum* [i.e. *cum amore notitia*], a new reality, a similarity with God, is born in us.

In another example, even though the notion of *bonum* is imprinted in us,⁸⁴ we only become *boni* through will and action: “Vt autem sit bonus animus uideo agendum esse uoluntate” and “nondum dicitur bonus animus quia restat ei actio uoluntatis qua sit praestantior. Quam si neglexerit, iure

⁸¹ 8.9 (282).

⁸² 9.16 (307).

⁸³ 9.16 (307).

⁸⁴ Cf. 8.4 (272): “[...] nisi esset nobis impressa notio ipsius boni secundum quod et probaremus aliquid et aliud alii praeponeremus”.

culpatur recteque dicitur non bonus animus; [...] Cum uero agit hoc studio et fit bonus animus, nisi se ad aliquid conuertat quod ipse non est non potest hoc assequi”.⁸⁵

Finally, the same conclusion can be drawn from a detailed description of this process of ‘informatio’ in the 8th book. Conceiving a notion of justice in the light of the *forma* seen in truth itself is not enough to fulfil its dynamism: a *forma* is known only when it has ‘informed’ us, that is ‘shaped’ us: “Quod unde [*insti*] esse poterunt nisi inhaerendo eidem ipsi formae quam intuentur ut inde formentur et sint iusti animi, non tantum cernentes et dicentes iustum esse animum 'qui scientia atque ratione in uita ac moribus sua quique distribuit', sed etiam ut ipsi juste vivant justeque morati sint sua cuique distribuendo ut nemini quidquam debeant nisi ut inuicem diligant?”. And, of course, the ‘shaping’ factor is love: “Et unde inhaeretur illi formae nisi amando?”.⁸⁶

All these examples, therefore, unequivocally discharge Augustine from any suspicion of ethical intellectualism.

Coming back to the declaration concerning the identity between *uerbum conceptum* and *uerbum natum* in the knowledge of spiritual realities, we should notice the word *perfecte* in the sentence quoted above: “Qui enim uerbi gratia perfecte nouit perfecteque amat iustitiam, iam iustus est etiamsi nulla existat secundum eam forinsecus per membra corporis operandi necessitas”.⁸⁷ Even though justice can be attributed to someone already on the basis of his love for this virtue alone, if this love is real, it necessarily entails the performance of acts of justice. In short, knowledge of spiritual reality does not depend on *copulatio* with external realities, as in the case of knowledge of temporal realities. The completion of the process of knowledge does not depend on a movement outwards, but on a movement inwards and upwards. The likeness we are ‘shaped’ or ‘informed’ by is not drawn from outside, but from above. Yet, the very dynamism of this *forma* shapes our behaviour accordingly.

⁸⁵ 8.4 (272f).

⁸⁶ 8.9 (283).

⁸⁷ 9.14 (305).

i. *Mens*

So far, our analysis of intellectual knowledge has deliberately omitted to take up the role of the key player in it, namely the knowing subject. The crucial importance of this role is hinted at in the pregnant sentence quoted at the outset of this chapter which has become our guide: “*Mens ergo ipsa sicut corporearum rerum notitias per sensus corporis colligit sic incorporearum per semetipsam. Ergo et se ipsam per se ipsam nouit quoniam est incorporea. Nam si non se nouit, non se amat*”.⁸⁸ Incorporeal realities are known through mind itself, which entails that self-knowledge and self-love are the indispensable presupposition of the process of knowledge. This is stated in another sentence of the 14th book: “*Quid enim scimus si quod est in nostra mente nescimus cum omnia quae scimus non nisi mente scire possimus?*”.⁸⁹

The meaning of these sentences, however, is not immediately evident. Is it really true that the condition for the possibility of knowing is self-knowledge and self-love? And, anyway, what do self-knowledge and self-love mean in the first place? To answer these questions and to find an explanation to this crucial aspect of Augustine’s epistemology, we must not forget the inseparability between knowledge and love which characterizes it.

First of all, through an extensive and minute demonstration, Augustine establishes that *mens* does not know itself in the way every other object is known, i.e. either through empirical knowledge⁹⁰ or in the light of the eternal *rationes*.⁹¹ It is even inadequate to say that *mens* knows itself through itself, as if the two could be separated, i.e. as if the mind could be considered even for one moment in abstraction from self-knowing. In reality, *mens* is *se nosse*. This is stated with the greatest clarity in the following sentence:

⁸⁸ 9.3 (296).

⁸⁹ 14.8 (430). Cf. also 10.16 (328): “*Nullo modo autem recte dicitur sciri aliqua res dum eius ignoratur substantia*”.

⁹⁰ Cf. 9.9 (301).

⁹¹ 10.5 (317).

“Cum dicitur menti: ‘Cognosce te ipsam’, eo ictu quo intellegit quod dictum est ‘Te ipsam’, cognoscit se ipsam, nec ob aliud quam eo quod sibi praesens est. Si autem quod dictum est non intellegit, non utique facit. Hoc igitur ei praecipitur ut faciat quod cum praeceptum ipsum intellegit facit”.⁹²

This point is restated several times, under different forms. Even when the mind tries to know itself, it knows itself in the act of making this attempt; paradoxically, even when the mind thinks it ignores itself or doubts about itself or about anything else, it knows itself in the act of ignoring or of doubting.⁹³ The *eo ictu* of the sentence just quoted echoes the *eo ipso* of the following passage: “Quapropter eo ipso quo se quaerit magis se sibi notam quam ignotam esse conuincitur. Nouit enim se quaerentem atque nescientem dum se quaerit ut nouerit”.⁹⁴ Added to the inescapability of self-knowledge, there is the impossibility for the mind to know itself only partially: it can only know itself entirely, *tota*.⁹⁵

Such statements, endlessly rehearsed in every possible form, make sense only if *se nosse* is understood not simply as an activity of the mind, but as its own life: “Sicut ergo mens tota mens est, sic tota uiuit”.⁹⁶ *Mens* and *se nosse* coincide to the point that the suppression of either of the two entails the disappearance of the other: “Notitia qua se mens nouit si esse desinat, simul et illa nosse se desinet”.⁹⁷ The very substance of the mind is *se nosse*: “Quapropter dum se mens nouit substantiam suam nouit, et cum de se certa est de substantia sua certa est”.⁹⁸

This finding reveals a paradox of the life of the mind expressed in a question Augustine formulates in the middle of the 10th book: “Vtquid ergo ei [menti] praeceptum est ut se ipsa cognoscat?”.⁹⁹ The *praeceptum* he is referring to, of course, is the well-known Delphic oracle, γνῶθι

⁹² 10.12 (326).

⁹³ 10.5 (318) and 10.14 (327f).

⁹⁴ 10.5 (318).

⁹⁵ 10.6 (318f).

⁹⁶ 10.6 (319).

⁹⁷ 9.6 (298).

⁹⁸ 10.16 (328).

⁹⁹ 10.7 (320).

σεαυτόν, famously echoed by Socrates and often quoted by Cicero.¹⁰⁰ This *praeceptum* appears no less than 10 times in the 10th book.¹⁰¹

Its first role here is that of formulating the most puzzling paradox in the life of the mind: on the one hand our *mens* is *se nosse*; on the other, this does not seem to be a self-evident truth, to the point that it has to become the object of a command.

However, the Delphic Oracle is resorted to also because of its paradigmatic nature with regard to philosophical activity as a whole. Any dysfunctional aspect related to the *se nosse* reverberates within philosophy, as Augustine's treatment of this topic will reveal.

Before we embark upon the analysis of this paradox and of its causes, some preliminary reminders concerning Augustine's epistemology are necessary, together with some remarks concerning the role of love in the process of knowledge.

ii. Love's misleading power

At all stages of the cognitive process, we have discovered the essential role played by the will and have been warned about its potentially highly misleading power.

Already at the level of knowledge from senses, the *intentio* can lead to such a modification of the sensorial faculty in its adhesion to the external object perceived, that this can have a repercussion on the whole body. When the *intentio* reaches such a degree of intensity, Augustine calls it *libido* or *cupiditas*.¹⁰²

At the level of memory and imagination, the stress was laid upon the deceiving power of will because of its ability to turn the *acies* of our mind towards memories with such cogency that it can become impossible to distinguish that which we remember from the reality surrounding us.¹⁰³ We do not need to repeat here the results of our inquiry into these topics, but the time has come to add

¹⁰⁰ Cf. for example Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, 3.22.73 and the list of other passages quoted in CCL 50, 316, note 32.

¹⁰¹ Cf. in particular the section 10.11-13 (324-327).

¹⁰² 11.5 (339). Cf. the examples of the chamaleon and of Jacob's herds.

¹⁰³ 11.7 (341ff).

some more elements concerning the ethical implications of these findings which already made themselves felt at the level of empirical knowledge.

In our dealings with empirical knowledge, the difference between a *laudabilis uoluntas* and a *turpis cupiditas* depends on whether this knowledge is referred to something useful, “ad utile aliquid referat”.¹⁰⁴ The opposite attitude, graphically described as *inhaerere*, *accommodare*, *uolutare*, *immergere*, *inquinari* etc...¹⁰⁵ in bodily realities (or in their representations in us), treats these realities as ends in themselves and enjoys them as such. The role of *uoluntas*, on the contrary, should be that of ordering all dealings with bodily realities to the truer and better life,¹⁰⁶ that is to beatitude. There is a *conexio* between all the separate acts of will which lead our activity of knowledge. This *conexio* consists in the subordination of all these acts to the rest [*requies*] sought by the will:

“Rectae autem sunt uoluntates et omnes sibimet religatae si bona est illa quo cunctae referuntur; si autem praua est, prauae sunt omnes. Et ideo rectarum uoluntatum conexio iter est quoddam ascendentium ad beatitudinem quod certis uelut passibus agitur; prauarum autem atque distortarum uoluntatum implicatio uinculum est quo alligabitur qui hoc agit ut proiciatur in tenebras exteriores”.¹⁰⁷

Our activity of knowledge should be ordered towards *beatitudo* and we should not place our *delectatio* or look for our *requies* in the things known. Behind these injunctions, we can already guess the main theme running through the issue of self-knowledge, that is the distinction *uti/frui*, defined as follows:

“uoluntas autem adest per quam fruamur eis uel utamur. Fruimur enim cognitis in quibus uoluntas ipsis propter se ipsa delectata conquiescit; utimur uero eis quae ad aliud referimus quo fruendum est. Nec est alia uita hominum uitiosa atque culpabilis quam male utens et male fruens”.¹⁰⁸

The role of love in the process of intellectual or rational knowledge is even more pervasive and crucial than in knowledge from senses. The generation of an inner *uerbum* -Augustine’s favourite metaphor to exemplify a completed act of knowledge- consists in the ‘modification’ or ‘*informatio*’

¹⁰⁴ 11.6 (339).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. in particular, 12.14 (368f).

¹⁰⁶ 11.8 (343f).

¹⁰⁷ 11.10 (346f).

¹⁰⁸ 10.13 (327).

undergone by the knowing subject as a result of his love for the object of knowledge, the *notitia*. The definition of a *uerbum* is “*cum amore notitia*”.¹⁰⁹

But love does not start playing a role only in view of the completion of the act of knowledge. On the contrary, we have seen that, right from the outset of the process of knowledge, a sort of pre-knowledge¹¹⁰ must awake an *appetitus* in us which, although not yet *amor*, is of the same kind: “*quamuis amor esse non uideatur quo id quod notum est amatur (hoc enim adhuc ut cognoscatur agitur), tamen ex eodem genere quiddam est*”.¹¹¹

Then, according to the object of knowledge, that is whether it concerns spiritual or bodily realities, we have seen that the completion of the act of knowledge, respectively, can either be situated within the spiritual sphere or can require us to go outside ourselves. Everything depends on where the will’s intended *requies* lies.¹¹²

All these reminders, therefore, show the decisive role played by the *will* in the process of knowledge, starting from sensations up to the completed act of knowledge which consists in a sort of assimilation of –or to– the object known. This finding inevitably raises the issue of the ethical dimension of the act of knowledge, which Augustine tackles from the angle of his well-known pair *uti/frui*. The example of the love for someone because of his faith is the best introduction into his mature thought on this point.¹¹³

The first striking feature of this example is that the articulation between *uti* and *frui* is not that of an either/or: Augustine is really enflamed with *ardor fraterni amoris* for a man because of the beauty and the steadfastness of his faith.

Indeed, the ultimate *requies* of this love [the *fruitio*] is in the spiritual reality, i.e. in faith. Faith is the *notitia* known in the light of truth itself and loved; love for this *notitia* sets off a dynamism which assimilates the knowing subject to the object known [*copulatio*] or moulds him in the likeness of the

¹⁰⁹ 9.15 (307).

¹¹⁰ Cf. 10.4 (315f).

¹¹¹ 9.18 (310).

¹¹² 9.14 (305).

¹¹³ 9.11 (302f).

object known. The production of the inner *uerbum* -that is to say the completed act of knowledge- results from the fact that the *forma* of faith has been loved to the point that it has reached the fulfilment of its dynamism, that it to say *informare* the knowing subject. Faith is no longer something simply yearned for or known in the light of *ipsa ueritas*, it has become an attribute of the knowing subject. In this example, therefore, the object of *frui* is the *forma* of faith, i.e. a spiritual reality.

However, what role does the love for the person who was the occasion for the discovering of faith play in this process? Is it a purely instrumental role? Is the person just ‘used’ for the purpose of reaching faith? Such a conclusion could be easily assumed when we read that, whether or not the person really exemplifies this faith (in the case discussed in the 9th book, in the end he does not), love for faith remains unscathed. The Augustine of the *De doctrina christiana* would have maintained such a clear-cut instrumental approach in the love for people just as in the love for inanimate realities.¹¹⁴ In the *De Trinitate*, however, the articulation between *uti* and *frui* in the love for our neighbour and for God (or for spiritual realities) is far more sophisticated.

First of all -and here we reach a key declaration which has a critical bearing on the whole of Augustine’s epistemology- from empirical knowledge up to the knowledge of intellectual realities in the light of truth itself, *the will is never neutral*. Will, for Augustine, means desire, love, longing for. It can never be envisaged as a mechanical force, duly regulated by a reason which could apply it to the pursuing of its aims so to speak ‘at will’. If Augustine consistently presupposes the principle that there is no love without knowledge and that even the *appetitus* which sets off the process of knowledge relies on some form of ‘pre-knowledge’, he also consistently betrays his bewilderment at will’s idiosyncrasies and relentlessly investigates its possible causes. The key declaration on the role of the will in the process of knowledge, and particularly of the role of will in the completion of this process by the begetting of an inner *uerbum*, runs as follows: “Quod uerbum amore concipitur siue creaturae siue creatoris, id est aut naturae mutabilis aut incommutabilis ueritatis”.¹¹⁵ Had this

¹¹⁴ *doc. Chr.* 1.22.20; 1.31.34; 1.32.35 (CCL 32, 16f; 25f; 26). Cf. O’Donovan (1980), 24-29.

¹¹⁵ 9.13 (304).

statement not been clear enough, he immediately qualifies the alternative: “... aut cupiditate aut caritate”.¹¹⁶ The will which presides over, runs through or is breathed into the whole process of knowledge, thus conferring to it its peculiar living, moving and elusive character, is never a neutral force – it is either a form of covetousness or God’s given love; it either inverts the right order between *uti* and *frui* or respects their hierarchy. *Cupiditas* consists in enjoying [*frui*] that which should only play an instrumental role [*uti*] and finding one’s rest in it. In this way, *cupiditas* not only compromises the possibility of attaining the happiness we are made for, but also inverts the fundamental dynamism of our moral and cognitive life –corresponding to the right articulation between *uti* and *frui*- which become deeply dysfunctional as a result.

There is no distinction, for Augustine, between natural and supernatural levels of knowledge, which would grant to the former an independent field in which it could fulfil its role autonomously. In his theory of knowledge, this would require a possibility of neutrality for the will, neither turning itself towards God nor averting itself from him, but simply ignoring both options. Wittingly or unwittingly, we always are either acting out of *cupiditas* or of *caritas* or, rather, we can either wittingly or unwittingly act out of *cupiditas* or be given the grace of consciously letting *caritas* restore the right order between *uti* and *frui* which is the condition for an harmonious moral and cognitive life. All this is admirably summed up in the passage we have begun to quote above and which we reproduce now in full:

“Quod uerbum amore concipitur siue creaturae siue creatoris, id est aut naturae mutabilis aut incommutabilis ueritatis. Ergo aut cupiditate aut caritate, non quo non sit amanda creatura, sed si ad creatorem refertur ille amor, non iam cupiditas sed caritas erit. Tunc enim est cupiditas cum propter se amatur creatura. Tunc non utentem adiuuat sed corrumpit fruentem. Cum ergo aut par nobis aut inferior creatura sit, inferiore utendum est ad deum, pari autem fruendum sed in deo. Sicut enim te ipso non in te ipso frui debes sed in eo qui fecit te, sic etiam illo quem diligis tamquam te ipsum. Et nobis ergo et fratribus in domino fruamur, et inde nos nec ad nosmetipsos remittere et quasi relaxare deorsum uersus audeamus. Nascitur autem uerbum cum excogitatum placet aut ad peccandum aut ad recte faciendum. Verbum ergo nostrum et mentem de qua gignitur quasi medius amor coniungit seque cum eis tertium complexu incorporeo sine ulla confusione constringit”.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ 9.13 (304).

¹¹⁷ 9.13 (304f).

To start with, this passage solves the issue of the articulation between *uti* and *frui* in the love for our neighbour and for God. Other people do not simply play an instrumental role [*uti*] in view of a delight [*frui*] we are only permitted to find in God. On the contrary, there already is a rest, a joy, a delight in fraternal charity. Fraternal charity is not simply a means to an end, it is an end in itself inseparable from the final end of love for God. To say that the brother has to be ‘enjoyed’ not ‘for’ God but ‘in’ God, means that we love him ‘out of’ God. In other words, the articulation between *uti* and *frui* in this passage is a translation of Augustine’s theology of charity developed in the 8th book: “Ista contextio¹¹⁸ satis aperteque declarat ipsam fraternam dilectionem [...] non solum ex deo sed etiam deum esse tanta auctoritate praedicari. Cum ergo de dilectione diligimus fratrem, de deo diligimus fratrem”.¹¹⁹

Further, this passage shows that self-love obeys to exactly the same relation between *uti* and *frui* at work in love for our neighbour: “Sicut enim te ipso non in te ipso frui debes sed in eo qui fecit te, sic etiam illo quem diligis tamquam te ipsum. Et nobis ergo et fratribus in domino fruamur”.¹²⁰ We must love ourselves ‘out of’ God’s given *dilectio* just in the same way as we love our brothers. There is *a right kind of rest, delight, enjoyment in oneself* which not only does not turn us away from God, but already is an anticipation of the rest, delight and enjoyment we will find in God himself in the life to come.

Finally, this passage makes an important transition between the issue of charity which permeates Augustine’s Christology, pneumatology and doctrine of the immanent Trinity, and the topic of most of the second half of the *De Trinitate*, namely self-love. Whereas charity was the main topic of the eight book, the beginning of the 9th book is often interpreted as an awkward way of brushing the issue aside and turning towards some other more effective anagogical or analogical way of climbing to the mystery of the Trinity.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ That is the quotations from the 1 John, cf. this dissertation, 186.

¹¹⁹ 8.12 (288).

¹²⁰ 9.13 (304).

¹²¹ Cf. this dissertation, 7f and 270f.

The reality is that the issue of charity permeates not only the 8th book, but the whole of the second half of the *De Trinitate*, according to exactly the same comparison between love for our neighbour and love for ourselves we find in the passage we are examining. This means that the transition from love for neighbour ‘out of’ God to self-love (still ‘out of’ God) remains within the sphere of charity, even though the focus shifts to the relation between charity and epistemology. The key passage from the 9th book we are examining marvellously illustrates this transition, which can be summed up as follows: first of all, the integrity or the corruption of the process of knowledge depend on the unavoidable option between *cupiditas* and *caritas*; secondly, knowledge of any reality, whether empirical or spiritual, depends on self-knowledge; thirdly, according to the fundamental rule of the inseparability between knowledge and love, the integrity or the corruption of self-knowledge also depends on whether we truly love ourselves ‘in’ God [i.e. out of *charity*] or we give ourselves over to *cupiditas* thus in fact hating ourselves. As a result, *self-knowledge, and epistemology as a whole rest on the crucial issue of self-love*. In other words, we only know properly if we love ourselves properly. Charity is brought to the heart of epistemology as such and becomes the condition of the integrity of the process of knowledge. To the exploration of this intertwining between self-charity and epistemology we now turn.

iii. Self-charity and epistemology

The perfect equality between mind, its self-knowledge and its self-love we find at the beginning of the 9th book, is not simply dictated by the need to find an analogy for the mystery of the Trinity. Augustine is very capable of leading a rigorous philosophical and theological inquiry into epistemology while at the same time cultivating his fondness for parallelisms, rhetorical correlations, word-plays, very elaborate metaphors and anything which might contribute to the pleasantness of a sustained piece of writing like the *De Trinitate* and helps to recapture the reader’s interest.

In reality, behind the idea of the perfect equality between the elements of this triad, a fundamental principle is at stake: everything must be known and loved or, rather, lovingly known in accordance with the teleological nature of our will and in obedience to the right ordering between *uti* and *frui*.

Just as there is a proper way for the mind to know itself, so there is a proper way of loving itself. Or, rather, since the completed process of knowledge is the production of a *uerbum* which is “cum amore notitia”, then proper self-knowledge depends on right self-loving. Indeed, the metaphor of the production of a *uerbum* is applied to self-knowledge as well. A *notitia* known *secundum speciem* – that is in the light of truth itself- is a resemblance of the thing known. This resemblance of the thing known, this *forma*, under the effect of love, tends to ‘inform’ us, that is to make us similar to the thing known. This applies both to empirical knowledge and to knowledge of God, with the difference, of course, that in the former case, if this assimilation goes too far, we undergo a ‘deformation’- whereas in the latter we are ‘re-formed’ in God’s image for the better. In any case, however far the deformation or the reformation might go, there is never going to be an absolute equality between our *mens* and either bodily realities or God, because we are of a nature different from both. Equality and identity between reality, *notitia* and *uerbum* occur only between the mind, his self-knowledge and its self-love:

“Cum deum nouimus, quamuis meliores efficiamur quam eramus antequam nossemus maximeque cum eadem notitia etiam placita digneque amata uerbum est fitque aliqua dei similitudo illa notitia, tamen inferior est quia in inferiore natura est; creatura quippe animus, creator autem deus. Ex quo colligitur quia cum se mens ipsa nouit atque approbat sic est eadem notitia uerbum eius ut ei sit par omnino et aequale atque identidem quia neque inferioris essentiae notitia est sicut corporis neque superioris sicut dei”.¹²²

The meaning of this passage becomes clearer when it is compared with another declaration from the 9th book, where Augustine explains that *mens* acts sinfully [*peccat*] both if it loves itself less than it should, for example as much as the human body, and if it loves itself more than it should, that is in the way God alone should be loved.¹²³ As we have seen above, *mens* should love (*frui*)

¹²² 9.16 (307).

¹²³ 9.4 (297).

itself ‘in God’ or ‘out of God’, that is to say out of ‘charity’. In the case of the self there is no option other than *cupiditas* or *caritas*. Either we love ourselves out of charity, in which case we can talk about self-love, or *cupiditas* takes the upper hand and leads us to effectively hate ourselves by alienating us from ourselves and enslaving us to temporal and bodily realities.

A first, crucial conclusion can be drawn from this finding with regard to the structure of the argument in the transition between the 8th and the 9th book and especially on whether Augustine (i) leaves behind charity to concentrate on the self as a way of constructing an analogy or an anagogy towards the mystery of the Trinity; or also on whether (ii) he leaves behind the triad of self-love to concentrate on that of self-knowing.

Such interpretations completely miss the point of Augustine’s argument. From beginning to end in the last 8 books of the *De Trinitate*, his whole epistemology is governed by charity, as we have already argued at the end of the previous paragraph. From beginning to end, his whole inquiry deals with self-love (or, rather, self-charity), precisely because of the decisive role charity plays in any form of proper knowledge; of the decisive role self-knowledge plays in the process of knowledge of anything else; of the decisive role self-charity plays in the process of self-knowledge. The other way round, the right form of self-love, i.e. self-charity, is the condition for the right form of self-knowledge, which in turn is the ground for any other form of what counts as *real* knowledge.

In the light of what we have ascertained so far, we can throw some more light on a puzzling aspect of Augustine’s conception of love we have already touched upon in our exploration of the 8th book, namely the fact that to love ourselves we must love *amor*¹²⁴ itself. This point recurs in the 9th book as well:

“Ecce ego qui hoc quaero cum aliquid amo tria sunt, ego et quod amo et ipse amor. Non enim amo amorem nisi amantem amem, nam non est amor ubi nihil amatur. [...] Non enim quisquis se amat amor est nisi cum amatur ipse amor. Aliud est autem amare se, aliud amare amorem suum. Non enim amatur amor nisi iam aliquid amans quia ubi nihil amatur, nullus est amor”.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Here *amor* is used without ethical connotations and stands for *dilectio* or *charity*.

¹²⁵ 9.2 (294).

We have seen that *uoluntas* never exists as a neutral dynamism. Either it is a form of *cupiditas* or, by grace, it has been transformed into charity. Under the form of *cupiditas*, our will does not love *amor* itself, but is captured by realities inferior to itself and becomes their prisoner. Only a ‘re-formation’ of the will made possible by Christ’s salvation and the action of the Holy Spirit frees it from this alienation and gives it the right orientation, which then permeates every other activity, starting from knowledge. The complex demonstration of the 8th book established that charity is not known as any other reality either through empirical experience nor even in the light of truth itself. It is something we know in the act of being filled by it through the Holy Spirit given to us and of being ‘empowered’, so to speak, to love accordingly: *dilectio* only exists *diligens*.¹²⁶ In the same way, that which must be loved not instrumentally [*uti*], but for itself [*frui*], namely the neighbour and ourselves, must be loved ‘in God’ or, as we have seen, ‘out of’ God. This means that, at the heart of any proper act of love -any act of love that is, which is not a form of *cupiditas*- there is love for God, love for Love. Self-charity and charity for our neighbour are the other side of the coin of charity for God. This is the meaning of the love for Love itself which Augustine identifies as the condition for the love of anything.

iv. The genesis of self-alienation

On the basis of these reminders, we are now able to appreciate the significance of the question we came up against earlier: why is it that the ‘Know thyself’ has become an injunction, a command, despite the fact that *se nosse* constitutes the very substance of our *mens*? This paradox is chosen to illustrate the consequences of *cupiditas* on self-knowledge and, through self-knowledge, on the whole process of knowledge and becomes the starting point for Augustine’s demonstration of the only way epistemology can be restored, namely through the *dilectio* re-established and exemplified by Christ and poured in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us. Or, to use the theme of the image of God, to demonstrate how the image is renewed or reformed in the *agnitio Dei*.

¹²⁶ 8.12 (287): “Quia cum diligimus caritatem, aliquid diligentem diligimus propter hoc ipsum quia diligit

How is it possible, then, that such a fundamental epistemological given has become unavailable to us? The whole section between the 9th and the 14th book can be seen as an attempt to solve this mystery. Augustine himself openly declares in the 14th book that his intention all along had been that of leading his reader to the acknowledgement that *scire se nescit*, that he ignores the most fundamental thing about himself, i.e. that he is *se nosse*.¹²⁷ His own effort of clarification does not overcome his perplexity altogether: “Quomodo autem quando se non cogitat [mens] in conspectu suo non sit cum sine se ipsa numquam esse possit quasi aliud sit ipsa, aliud conspectus eius, inuenire non possum”.¹²⁸

In an attempt to explain this anomaly, he unfolds a sort of genesis of the alienation of the self which is one of the most powerful and suggestive passages of the whole treatise and requires close analysis.¹²⁹

The definite culprit responsible for this disastrous *obliuio sui* is *cupiditas*. Its defining character is, as we have seen, a disordered relation between *uti* and *frui*. In this passage, the right relation between the two is pushed a further step away from the way it was presented in the *De doctrina christiana*. In fact, in this passage we are told that not only God or our neighbours or the self can be enjoyed, *frui*, but also the *notitiae* seen in the light of truth itself –here Augustine calls them the *pulchra* seen in *prestantiori natura quae est Deus*. The perversion of our will is attributed here to pride: we attribute these gifts to ourselves in an attitude which amounts to a refusal to acknowledge our dependence on God, to an *auersio*: “Et cum stare debeat ut eis fruatur, uolens ea sibi tribuere et non ex illo similis illius sed ex se ipsa esse quod ille est auertitur ab eo”.¹³⁰

The first result of this *auersio* is the creation of a situation of permanent dissatisfaction, since only God can ‘satisfy’ us. Hence, an increasingly anxious focus on our actions and on the delights drawn from knowledge of external realities, *quae foris sunt*. The fleeting nature of these realities causes a

aliquid”.

¹²⁷ 14.9 (432ff).

¹²⁸ 14.8 (431).

¹²⁹ 10.7 (320f).

¹³⁰ 10.7 (320).

permanent sense of insecurity which contributes to the obsessive character of our involvement with them. The combined influence of this anxiety and this insecurity confers such a power to covetousness' ability to join us with the object known, that we become progressively incapable of discriminating between that which we know and ourselves. We somehow confer to the object coveted something of our own essence, which means that we become unaware of our spiritual nature and lose all distance from our actions, from the things we desire, from the objects we possess: "Errat autem mens cum se istis imaginibus tanto amore coniungit ut etiam se esse aliquid huiusmodi existimet. [...] Cum itaque se tale aliquid putat, corpus esse se putat".¹³¹

The genesis of our epistemological fall can therefore be summed up as follows: covetousness and pride, anxious attempts to find our satisfaction elsewhere than in God alone, increasing dependence on that which is exterior to us to the point of forgetting ourselves [*oblivio sui*] and becoming unable to think ourselves separately from the external realities to which we so desperately cling. The *oblivio sui*, i.e. the loss of our natural ability to know ourselves, results from the wrong articulation between *uti* and *frui*, i.e. from a dysfunctional self-love. We lose the ability to think ourselves [*se cogitare*], to desire or to love according to our own nature: "sub eo scilicet cui subdenda est, supra ea quibus praeponenda est; sub illo a quo regi debet, supra ea quae regere debet".¹³²

This loss not only results in an ethical failure, that is the total upsetting of the right order of love, but has far-reaching consequences for knowledge as such which lurk behind philosophical errors. Just after the passage we have summed up so far, Augustine establishes a link between this *oblivio sui* which clouds our self-knowledge and a series of philosophical errors concerning the nature of the soul. The causes of the errors of Physicists, Atomists, Stoics etc... who identified the nature of the soul with one bodily reality or another are traced back to the loss of our ability to know ourselves. All these philosophers have not understood that *mens* is a non-corporeal substance

¹³¹ 10.8 (320ff).

¹³² 10.7 (320).

and the cause of this mistake is not that mind is not knowable in its spiritual nature, but that we add bodily images to it.¹³³ In fact,

“quia in his est quae cum amore cogitat, sensibilibus autem, id est corporalibus, cum amore assuefacta est, non ualet sine imaginibus eorum esse in semetipsa. Hinc ei oboritur erroris dedecus dum rerum sensarum imagines discernere a se non potest ut se solam uideat; cohaeserunt enim mirabiliter glutino amoris. Et haec est eis immunditia quoniam dum se solam nititur cogitare hoc se putat esse sine quo se non potest cogitare”.¹³⁴

This example illustrates the paradigmatic nature of *se nosse* with regard to philosophical activity as a whole and displays the connection between the lengthy discussion on self-knowledge of books 9 to 11 –which is resumed in book 14- and the criticism of philosophers of books 4 and 13 we have analysed earlier on in this dissertation. This criticism of philosophy reaches its climax in the section going from book 12 to 14, through the discussion of *scientia* and *sapientia*, the object of our next chapter.

¹³³ 10.9f (322ff).

¹³⁴ 10.11 (324).

XI. *SAPIENTIA* OR AUGUSTINE'S IDEAL OF PHILOSOPHY

By this stage of our exploration of the *De Trinitate*, it will have become clear that Augustine's recurrent criticism of philosophers in this treatise goes beyond disagreement over some of their conclusions or even on all of them, but challenges the very possibility of philosophising without Christ. It is no accident that the main polemical sections against philosophers are to be found in the Christological books of the treatise, namely books 4 and 13. Following Augustine's own way of dealing with this issue, we analysed these polemical sections against philosophers in connection with Christology. It will be useful to recall our conclusions here.

In books 4 and 13 Augustine tackled the issue from the angle of the common human desire for happiness and from that of mediation. Philosophers' attempt to deal with *beatitudo* by either restricting it to this mortal life or trying to ignore it through a neutral attitude which neither wishes nor shuns it, exemplifies not only ethical but also epistemological *prauitas* and *auersio* of sinful humanity. *Prauitas* qualifies the corruption of our desire for happiness, so that we want to be happy, but we do not want what is good, we do not want happiness *recte*. Our hearts are fixed in an *auersio* from light and truth. Added to our mortality, *prauitas* and *auersio* give a full picture of our *infirmetas*: we are made for eternity, truth and love but we find ourselves prisoners of death, error and unhappiness. Philosophers share the worst destiny of all because to this *infirmetas* they add pride and self-delusion. They behave as if human *infirmetas* had not had any bearings on their ability or possibility of knowing. They try to reach blessedness and truth by their own efforts; they rely on their own *uirtus*, thinking they do not need any mediation and thus falling below even those who resort to demons for this mediation.

From these polemical passages against philosophers it appeared that Augustine was not simply criticising some of their views but questioning the foundations of received epistemology altogether. We saw how, in the suggestive opening passage of the 4th book, he opposed two kinds of *scientia*: one which yields pride and is severed from *sapientia* and the other which proceeds from charity and which ‘builds up’.¹ We know from Augustine himself that this introduction to the 4th book was added at the time of the final editing of the treatise.² By that stage, books 9 to 14 had been written already and the discussion of *se nosse* had proved to be the most apt to illustrate the epistemological deadlock of the pretention to philosophize without Christ. This is why, in this introduction to the 4th book, the object of the real *scientia* was *nosse semetipsos* and was identified with the knowledge of our *infirmity*. In the end, this short prologue to the 4th book proves to be one of the best summaries of the sections of books 9 to 14 of the *De Trinitate*.

This is what our own analysis of the second half of the treatise and in particular of books 9 to 11 has established so far. The paradox of self-knowledge, or rather of self-forgetting –*oblivio sui*– is highlighted by Augustine because it is paradigmatic of philosophical activity as a whole. Apart from books 4 and 13, the other main polemical section against philosophers is to be found in book 10, as we have seen, where errors of philosophers concerning the nature of the soul –especially the materialist views of the Physicists– are attributed to dysfunctional self-knowledge. Under the heading of “Augustine’s genesis of self-alienation”, we explored the relation he establishes between *oblivio sui* –the contrary of *se nosse*– and *cupiditas*, that is the distortion of the right order between *uti* and *frui*. *Oblivio sui* results not only from the *cupiditas* which enjoys that which should simply be used, but also from the pride which refuses to enjoy that which indeed should be enjoyed, but in God, in dependence on God.

Thus, the lengthy treatment on self-love and self-knowledge of books 9 to 11 echoes the prologue to the 4th book: from the vantage point of the restoration of our ability to know God

¹ 4.1 (159), quoting 1 Corinthians 8.1.

² *Ep.* 174 (CCL 50, 26).

made possible through the *dilectio* mediated through Christ in the Holy Spirit, Augustine throws a theological light onto epistemology as such. Sin impaired not only our ability to know God, but our ability to know altogether, as the examples of *beatitudo* and of *se nosse* prove. *Cupiditas* and *pride* are the causes of this situation and therefore they are that which *dilectio* and the *humilitas dei* have come to heal. If books 4 and 13 establish that it is impossible to philosophise without Christ, the second half of the *De Trinitate* as a whole is meant to refine this assertion by stating that the integrity of our ability to know ourselves and therefore God and everything else depends on *dilectio*.

The discussion of *scientia* and *sapientia* Augustine undertakes from book 12th onwards can therefore be approached as his own version of what a restored epistemology should look like. The analysis of this version shall occupy us in this chapter.

1. THE TWO *OFFICIA* OF *MENS*

The prologue of the 4th book we have mentioned few times already, opposed two *scientiae*. In contrast to the *scientia* of our *infirmetas* stemming from the charity which builds up, Augustine criticised the proud *scientia* which indeed “deals with earthly and celestial things” but *inflat*, ‘puffs up’.³ This proud *scientia*, which in fact coincides with philosophy without the Mediator,⁴ does not count as real *scientia* for Augustine, because it is severed from *sapientia*. We saw how, in the 4th book, despite apparent generous concessions to what philosophers relying on their own *uirtus* can know, Augustine denies them knowledge *in ipsa sapientia*: the fact that philosophers have been right in arguing that all temporal realities have been made in *aeternae rationes*, does not mean that they were able to know *in* these *rationes*.⁵ As a result, paradoxically, philosophers do not really know even that which seems to be within their reach in the mutable and temporal realm of empirical

³ 4.1 (159) and this dissertation, 44f.

⁴ 14.26 (459).

⁵ 4.21 (188).

experience because they cannot contemplate the *aeternae rationes* of these things in God himself, *in ipsa sapientia*.⁶

In the fourth book, this demonstration was driven by the theological presupposition of the Incarnation of Christ and of his mediatory role with regard to *uisio* or *contemplatio* of the Father: weighed down by the consequences of our *cupiditas* and pride in our dealings with temporal things, we had become unable to grasp eternal things and were therefore in need of purification. This purification had to be performed through the same reality which had become not the *cause* but the *occasion* of our fall, namely *temporalia*— the *causes* are *cupiditas* and *superbia*. From this standpoint Augustine developed his treatment of the *conuenientia* of the Incarnation not only with regard to the possibility of knowing God, but to the restoration of our ability to know as such. Only in Christ the object of faith —through the intermediary of temporal realities- is the same as the future object of *uisio*, even though the modality of knowledge is different. Only in Christ *scientia* and *sapientia* are finally re-connected and the light shed by the latter restores the former by freeing it from the slavery of *cupiditas* and *superbia*.⁷

Exactly the same pattern presides over the structure of books 12 to 14, but with a deeper analysis of these motifs and the addition of the theme of the image of God. The 12th book is devoted to the discussion of *scientia* and *sapientia* with an emphasis on the consequences of sin on the former; book 13 again presents Christ and especially the *dilectio* mediated through his reconciling activity in the Holy Spirit as the restoring factor of the right relation between *scientia* and *sapientia*; finally, book 14 dwells on *sapientia* and applies the identity between revelation and reconciliation to the reformation and renewal of man *in agnitione Dei* through Christ in the Holy Spirit, through the theme of the image of God.

Very interestingly, the main scriptural framework for the establishment of the distinction and of the relation between *scientia* and *sapientia* in book 12 is the account of the fall in the first book of

⁶ 4.21 (188).

⁷ 4.24ff (191-195).

Genesis. The first reason for this choice is, of course, the introduction of the theme of the image of God which anticipates the discussion of the 14th book. But the inseparability between the ethical and the epistemological consequences of the fall is just as crucial to the intention presiding over this choice. Of course, the temptation to resort to allegorical explanations of the account of the fall to reduce it to a myth cannot be attributed to Augustine. In reality, Augustine's purpose behind the close association of the dynamics of the first sin with the dysfunctional relation between *scientia* and *sapientia* flows from the theological presupposition consisting in the identification between reconciliation and revelation. The causes of separation from God and of the impossibility of knowing him –and to know everything else through something which can count as *real* knowledge– are the same: *superbia* and *cupiditas*.

Thus, the lengthiest account of the consequences of sin on knowledge can be found precisely in the 12th book, devoted to the definition of *scientia* and *sapientia* and of their relation with each other.

Augustine is a realist. Added to what we have seen concerning the place of knowledge from senses in the process of knowledge, he maintains that “before we come to the *cognitio* of intelligible things that are supreme and everlasting, we meet the rational *cognitio* of temporal things”.⁸ Even negatively, if sensible, mutable and temporal realities can have such a baneful influence on us, it is because of their unavoidable place both on the epistemological and the ethical level. The right kind of dealings with these realities is necessary for the development of the virtues through which we can live rightly and reach happiness.⁹ Thus, the necessary inter-relation between *scientia* and *sapientia* goes both ways, that is *scientia* is just as necessary to *sapientia* as *sapientia* is to *scientia*. Augustine sees them as the two *officia* of the unique *mens*.¹⁰ The *officium* of *scientia* is the “*actio qua bene utimur temporalibus rebus*”, whereas the *officium* of *sapientia* is the “*aeternorum contemplatio*”.¹¹ The ‘function’ of *sapientia* very much echoes what we have seen concerning *illuminatio*:

⁸ 12.25 (379).

⁹ 12.21 (374f).

¹⁰ 12.3f (357f).

¹¹ 12.22 (375).

“sublimioris rationis est iudicare de istis corporalibus secundum rationes incorporeales et sempiternas quae nisi supra mentem humanam essent, incommutabiles profecto non essent, atque his nisi subiungeretur aliquid nostrum, non secundum eas possemus de corporalibus iudicare. Iudicamus autem de corporalibus ex ratione dimensionum atque figurarum quam incommutabiliter manere mens nouit”.¹²

Thus *sapientia* fulfils a discriminating role in our dealings with temporal things which, properly speaking, are the object of the other *officium* of human mind, namely *scientia*:

“Illud uero nostrum quod in actione corporalium atque temporalium tractandorum ita uersatur ut non sit nobis commune cum pecore, rationale est quidem, sed ex illa rationali nostrae mentis substantia qua subhaeremus intellegibili atque incommutabili ueritati tamquam ductum et inferioribus tractandis gubernandisque deputatum est”.¹³

In Augustine’s treatment of the relation between *scientia* and *sapientia*, it is very difficult to distinguish that which applies to epistemology as such and that which specifically applies to knowledge of God, undoubtedly because he himself was unwilling to draw such a distinction. Thus, the description of the *officium* of *sapientia* at the end of the 12th book,¹⁴ contains the criticism of Platonic reminiscence theories and of the Pythagorean theory of transmigration of souls and one of the most well-known texts concerning the metaphor of *illuminatio* which we have analysed already¹⁵ and which seems to concern general epistemology, irrespective of our sinful condition. When Augustine says that intelligible realities are available to the human mind – “praesto sunt mentis aspectibus”-¹⁶ he also adds: “Ad quas mentis acie peruenire paucorum est, et cum peruenitur quantum fieri potest, non in eis manet ipse peruentor, sed ueluti acies ipsa reuerberata repellitur et fit rei non transitoriae transitoria cogitatio”.¹⁷ It is not clear here whether this difficulty to reach the contemplation of intelligible realities depends on the nature of these realities or on our sinful condition. Only by combining such declarations with the scathing criticism of philosophers of the 4th book, where knowledge *in ipsa sapientia* or of *aeternae rationes* is denied to them precisely *because of their pride*, it is possible to argue that, for Augustine, reconciliation with the Father in

¹² 12.2 (357).

¹³ 12.3 (357).

¹⁴ 12.22-24 (375-379).

¹⁵ Cf. this dissertation, 210-216.

¹⁶ 12.23 (376).

¹⁷ 12.23 (376).

Christ through the Holy Spirit is integral to the restoration of the mutual dependence between *sapientia* and *scientia*. Once again, Augustine is prepared to acknowledge some sort of knowledge to philosophers and to resort to the very metaphor of illumination to talk of a positive action of light reaching –or rather, ‘touching’- even sinners.¹⁸ But these are concessions.

The character of *real* and *proper* knowledge cannot be attributed to a fleeting and uncertain perception of intelligible realities somehow entrusted to memory for both the discernment necessary to the definition and the judgement integral to the process of knowledge.¹⁹ The integrity of this process of knowledge is restored only when *mens* is *totally* devoted to the contemplation of truth,²⁰ according to the following description:

“cum secundum deum uiuimus, mentem nostram in inuisibilia eius intentam ex eius aeternitate, ueritate, caritate proficienter debere formari, quiddam uero rationalis intentionis nostrae, hoc est eiusdem mentis, in usum mutabilium corporaliumque rerum sine quo haec uita non agitur dirigendum, non ut conformetur huic saeculo finem constituendo in bonis talibus et in ea detorquendo beatitudinis appetitum, sed ut quidquid in usu temporalium rationabiliter facimus aeternorum adipiscendorum contemplatione faciamus per ista transeuntes, illis inhaerentes”.²¹

The epistemological integrity thus described works both ways. On the one hand, contemplation of truth –which relies on *illuminatio*- is needed for the definition and the judgment necessary for proper intellectual knowledge. On the other hand, it is not possible to govern our life properly if our *mens* does not devote itself to the right dealings with temporal realities –through the right hierarchy between *uti* and *frui*- to reach the truth which *is not just object of knowledge, but also and more importantly object of love and desire*. The inseparability between knowledge and love should never be forgotten when reading Augustine. The process of knowledge is set off by desire for the object to be known and is completed only through the union with the object known through love.

However, it is above all the lengthy discussion on the epistemological consequences of sin which militates in favour of a reading of the relation between *scientia* and *sapientia* inseparable from

¹⁸ 14.21 (451).

¹⁹ 12.23 (376f).

²⁰ 12.10 (365).

²¹ 12.21 (374).

Christ's mediatory and reconciliatory role. This section²² is built around the heading of *cupiditas* and *superbia* we have seen as work each time Augustine talks about sin.

Cupiditas takes over when the *officium* of the mind which is delegated to the administration of temporal realities lets itself to be caught by external realities to the point of escaping from the supervision of the superior part of the mind, thus losing the *illustratio ueritatis*.²³ As usual when dealing with this topic, Augustine indulges in graphic descriptions of this decadence, evoking for example the *phantastica fornicatio* through which "turpiter inquinatur omnia officia" of the mind.²⁴ Just as it was the case for each stage of the process of knowledge we explored earlier on, even for the relation between *scientia* and *sapientia*, the main consequence of *cupiditas* is the perversion of the right order between *uti* and *frui*: "Cum uero [mens] propter adipiscenda ea quae per corpus sentiuntur propter experiendi uel excellendi uel contrectandi cupiditatem ut in his finem boni sui ponat aliquid agit, quidquid agit turpiter agit".²⁵ *Temporalia* in themselves are neutral. They become occasions for sin only when we try to enjoy them as if they could suffice for our happiness instead of referring them to the end represented by the highest good:

"Rationi autem scientiae appetitus uicinus est quandoquidem de ipsis corporalibus quae sensu corporis sentiuntur ratiocinatur ea quae scientia dicitur actionis; si bene ut eam notitiam referat ad finem summi boni; si autem male ut eis fruatur tamquam bonis talibus in quibus falsa beatitudine conquiescat".²⁶

At the same time, *temporalia* become objects of sin also through pride, *superbia*. Loving its own power more than God, *mens* tries to govern itself according to its own whims rather than following the harmonious guidance of God's laws.²⁷ Our pretension to act as if we were *sub nullo* leads us to the degrading slavery to covetousness.²⁸ This pride results in the *scientia* which *inflat* censured in the prologue of the 4th book. The quotation from 1 Corinthians 8.1 around which the prologue of the

²² Which goes from 12.13 to 12.20 (367-374).

²³ 12.13 (368).

²⁴ 12.14 (369).

²⁵ 12.15 (369).

²⁶ 12.17 (371).

²⁷ 12.14 (368).

²⁸ 12.16 (370f).

4th book was built –“*scientia inflat, caritas uero aedificat*”- recurs twice in the 12th book, each time in key-sentences summing up the core of Augustine’s argument:

“Cum enim neglecta caritate sapientiae quae semper eodem modo manet concupiscitur scientia ex mutabilium temporaliumque experimento, inflat non aedificat; ita prae-grauatus animus quasi pondere suo a beatitudine expellitur, [...] nec redire potest effusis ac perditis uiribus nisi gratia conditoris sui ad poenitentiam uocantis et peccata donantis. *Quis enim infelicem animam liberabit a corpore mortis huius nisi gratia dei per Iesum Christum dominum nostrum?*”;²⁹ and “Habet enim et scientia modum suum bonum si quod in ea inflat uel inflare assolet aeternorum caritate uincatur, quae non inflat sed, ut scimus, aedificat. Sine scientia quippe nec uirtutes ipsae quibus recte uiuitur possunt haberi per quas haec uita misera sic gubernetur ut ad illam quae uere beata est perueniatur aeternam”.³⁰

Therefore, the same pride and covetousness responsible for separation from God compromise the whole process of knowledge. Restoration of this relation and of the possibility of knowing can only be granted through Christ’s grace, that is the *caritas* or *dilectio* poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. The description of this restoration, however, is unfolded through the theme of the image of God which also summarizes the whole project Augustine was pursuing through the treatise and which we shall reserve for the next chapter.

2. PHILOSOPHY AS WORSHIP

It would be totally erroneous of course, to deduce from what we have seen so far that the doctrine of the Trinity is only instrumental to other aims. On the contrary, is it precisely the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity or, rather, of what God the Trinity *is* -his life, his light, his love- that, once discovered, forces Augustine to reconsider anthropology, epistemology and philosophy from this new perspective. We have looked already at epistemology and we shall explore anthropology in the chapter concerning the image of God. In the present chapter, we take up the way Augustine’s ideal of philosophy was re-shaped in the light of the Trinity.

It will have become evident by now that, from this viewpoint, the *De Trinitate* is of enormous significance. It can be seen as the mature outcome of one of the most encompassing factors in

²⁹ 12.16 (370f). The end of this passage reads: “De qua gratia suo loco quando ipse praestiterit disseremus” and refers to the development on Christology and reconciliation of the 13th book.

Augustine's long life, namely his love for wisdom. The 14th book starts by discussing the possibility of attributing the title of 'wise man', *sapiens*, to oneself. Unusually, Augustine appeals to the authority of a philosopher, Pythagoras, without any of the precautions or slight ironical hints he usually resorts to whenever he quotes a philosopher (cf., for example, the *philosophaster* applied to Cicero in the *De ciuitate dei*).³¹ Imitating Pythagoras, Augustine does not dare to call himself 'wise', *sapiens*, but only 'wisdom-lover', *philosophus*.

Sapientia is indeed the most pervasive theme of the *De Trinitate* and even though, in the course of the treatise, sometimes it plays an instrumental role and other times seems to disappear, in the whole final section going from the 12th to the 15th book, it becomes the focus of the argument. '*Sapientia*' is Augustine's chosen term to designate the specific character of proper knowledge of God and of the result of God's redeeming action on our ability to know as such. God the Trinity himself is *Sapientia* and his reconciling and revelatory action on us makes us *sapientes*. Insofar as 'philosophy' is love for *sapientia*, the Trinity -i.e. Christ's reconciling action with the Father through the Holy Spirit- becomes the condition for its possibility. Thus, the *De Trinitate* is not only a treatise of theology; it is inseparably a treatise of philosophy as well. It can be considered as the outcome of Augustine's life-long criticism of those who pretend to be able to philosophize without Christ. Two passages, one from the *Confessions* and the other from the *De Trinitate*, constitute excellent demonstrations of this point. They could be seen as the book-ends holding together a life-long concern and revealing the extraordinary continuity, the stubborn and relentless determination Augustine devoted to claim the monopoly of what properly deserves the name of philosophical activity for Christians alone.

The first text from the *Confessions* is the well-known discovery of Cicero's *Hortensius*:

³⁰ 12.21 (374f).

³¹ *ciu. Dei* 2.27 (CCL 47, 62).

“Following the usual curriculum, I had come across a book by a certain Cicero, whose language (but not his heart) almost everyone admires. That book of his contains an exhortation to study philosophy and is entitled *Hortensius*. The book changed my feelings. It altered my prayers, Lord, to be towards you yourself. It gave me different values and priorities. Suddenly every vain hope became empty to me, and I longed for the immortality of wisdom with an incredible ardour in my heart. I began to rise up to return to you. [...] For with you is wisdom. ‘Love of wisdom’ is the meaning of the Greek word *philosophia*. [...] The one thing that delighted me in Cicero’s exhortation was the advice ‘not to study one particular sect but to love and seek and pursue and hold fast and strongly embrace wisdom itself, wherever found’. One thing alone put a break on my intense enthusiasm – that the name of Christ was not contained in the book”.³²

The second text is a long extract from Cicero’s *Hortensius*, quoted at the end of the 14th book, which is the book where Augustine sets out his mature version of what real *sapientia* is.³³ This quotation is characterised by the deferential tone one reserves to an authority he is indebted to and yet, at the same time, by a clear demarcation which echoes the final sentence of the parallel passage from the *Confessions* just quoted. Our life must be devoted to philosophy, that is “in ratione et inuestigandi cupiditate”. In this activity “magna spes est” because it makes “faciliorem ascensum et reditum in caelum”.³⁴ This expresses Augustine’s own love for wisdom, this is his own notion of philosophy. And yet, Cicero is irremediably wrong on several points.

To begin with, Augustine deplores the proud Stoic detachment which dissociates the value of our activity from its end. Cicero thinks that philosophy is a value in itself whether there is life after death or not. This denotes a crucial epistemological fault which goes against the fundamental Augustinian standpoint concerning the inseparability between knowledge and love. Stoic indifference for the end denotes lack of love. *Inuestigatio ueritatis* is not enough. An understanding of philosophy as “quae contemplatione ueritatis beatos facit” cannot be accounted for without a desire for *beatitudo*, a topic Augustine developed in the 13th book. This is why, a real philosopher leads his life *both* “in amore atque investigatione ueritatis”.³⁵

Then, that which, already at the time of the *Confessions*, had simply “put a brake” on Augustine’s “intense enthusiasm” for the *Hortensius*, by the time of the *De Trinitate* had developed

³² *conf.* 3.7f (CCL 27, 29f).

³³ 14.26 (457ff).

³⁴ 14.26 (458).

into a full-blown and uncompromising persuasion of the impossibility of philosophising without Christ:

“Sed iste cursus qui constituitur in amore atque inuestigatione ueritatis non sufficit miseris, id est omnibus cum ista sola ratione mortalibus ~~sine fide mediatoris~~, quod in libris superioribus huius operis, maxime in quarto et tertio decimo quantum potui demonstrare curauit”.³⁶

Reference to books 4 and 13 in this definition of proper philosophy confirms our claim as to the crucial role played by Christology not only with regard to knowledge of God, but also for the redefinition of the parameters of epistemology as such. No *scientia* or at least nothing which count as *real scientia* is possible without *sapientia* and *sapientia* which is only restored in Christ’ Incarnation, in his sacrifice, in his gift of the Holy Spirit and in his mediatory role with regard to the *uisio* or *contemplatio* of the Father.

This is what is implied in the definition of *sapientia* as *Dei cultus*, ‘worship of God’. The tenuous Scriptural basis for this definition is a sentence from a Latin version of the book of Job Augustine found after assiduous scrutinizing of many translations of Scripture: “Ecce pietas est sapientia”.³⁷ He knew what he was looking for and did not hesitate even to subject this sentence to some philological strain to reach his aim.³⁸

In reality, however, this notion of *sapientia* as “uerus ac praecipuus cultus Dei”³⁹ encapsulates the theological epistemology resulting from the doctrine of revelation, Christology and doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This is summed up in the following sentence:

“Et quis cultus eius nisi amor eius quo nunc desideramus eum uidere credimusque et speramus nos esse uisuros, et quantum proficimus *uidemus nunc per speculum in aenigmate*, tunc autem ‘in manifestatione’? Hoc est enim quod ait apostolus Paulus, *facie ad faciem*; hoc etiam quod Iohannes: *Dilectissimi, nunc filii dei sumus, et nondum apparuit quod erimus. Scimus quia cum apparuerit, similes ei erimus quoniam uidebimus eum sicuti est*”.⁴⁰

³⁵ 14.26 (459).

³⁶ 14.26 (459).

³⁷ “Scripturarum sanctarum multiplicem copiam scrutatus”, 12.22 (375), cf. Job 28.28.

³⁸ Cf. 12.22 (375) and 14.1 (421), where he argues that, in the sentence “Ecce pietas est sapientia”, through the Greek translation of the word *pietas* as θεοσέβεια, it is possible to interpret *pietas* as meaning *Dei cultus*.

³⁹ 14.1 (421).

⁴⁰ 12.22 (375) quoting 1 Corinthians 13.12 and 1 John 3.2.

Despite the use of the word *amor* here, the *cultus dei* Augustine is referring to consists, of course, in *dilectio*, that is God's love and love for God. Anticipating a little on the theme of the image of God, we can already quote another key sentence which states this point very clearly: "Meminerit itaque dei sui ad cuius imaginem facta est eumque intellegat atque diligat. Quod ut breuius dicam, colat deum non factum cuius ab eo capax facta est et cuius esse particeps potest; propter quod scriptum est: *Ecce dei cultus est sapientia*".⁴¹ This identification between *sapientia* and worship through the intermediary of *dilectio* is the outcome of the whole argument of the *De Trinitate*.

Finally, let us observe that, even though the Augustinian theology of sacrifice is not explicitly resorted to, it evidently is in the background of this identification, especially on the basis of the central role of *dilectio*, of Christology and of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in this definition of *sapientia*. In our exploration of the doctrine of sacrifice, we saw that the visible sacrifice is the *sacramentum*, i.e. the *sacrum signum*, of the invisible sacrifice constituted by a "cor contritum et humiliatum" and, more deeply, by *dilectio*.⁴² In the New Covenant, only love confers value and meaning to our *sacrificia* or *cultus*. More exactly, in the New Covenant, there is only one *sacrificium* and only one *cultus* acceptable to God and making us acceptable to God, that is the love through which Christ gave himself over to death on the cross. This is why *sapientia* is in fact identified with *dilectio*, i.e. love of God and love for God and our neighbour, as we have seen above in the sentence from the 12th books: "quis cultus eius nisi amor eius?"⁴³ and then in the identification of *diligere* and *colere* of the sentence from the 14th book: "[...] eumque diligat. Quod ut breuius dicam, colat deum [...]".⁴⁴

⁴¹ 14.15 (443).

⁴² Cf. this dissertation, 92-95.

⁴³ 12.22 (375).

⁴⁴ 14.15 (443).

Thus, 'philosophizing *with Christ*' restores *dilectio* and heals *superbia*. The 'Wisdom-lover' acknowledges his dependence on God at the very root of his ability and possibility of knowing. His philosophy becomes worship.

XII. THE DOCTRINE OF THE IMAGE OF GOD

1. THE *DE VERA RELIGIONE*

Before embarking on an analysis of the theme of the image of God in the *De Trinitate*, a look back into the genesis of this theme, through some of Augustine's earlier works, will prove highly illuminating. The theme of the image of God is related to the doctrine of creation which, from very early on, Augustine tries to spell out on the basis of Trinitarian theology. The earliest most interesting work in this respect is the *De uera religione* [390-391], written just before Augustine's ordination. This is "the last work where Neoplatonism is a strong influence" and is mainly directed against the Manichees,¹ with the intention of weaning "Romanianus² from Manicheism toward a contemplative mode of Catholic Christianity".³ In this writing we also find the first explicit mention of *Trinitas creatrix*⁴ together with a shift from Augustine's waning 'Platonic' over-optimism to the increasingly self-conscious development of an ontology and an anthropology dependent on the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.

The anti-Manichean stance of this work leads Augustine to emphasize the goodness of creation:

"Cur ea fecit? Ut essent. ~~Ipsum enim quantumcumque esse, bonum est; quia summum bonum est summe esse.~~ Unde fecit? Ex nihilo. Quoniam quidquid est, quantulumcumque specie sit necesse est. Ita etsi minimum bonum, tamen bonum erit, et ex deo erit. Nam quoniam summa species summum bonum est, minima species minimum bonum est".⁵

Insofar as something exists, it is good. This goodness, however, is not confined to mere existence, but is refracted into a threefold ontological constitution of reality, usually named as

¹ *retr.* 1.xiii.1 (CCL 57, 36).

² Friend and benefactor of Augustine at Thagaste, cf. *conf.* 6.24 (CCL 27, 89).

³ Van Fleteren (1999), 864.

⁴ *uera rel.* 7.13 (CCL 32, 196), cf. Du Roy (1966), 382.

⁵ *uera rel.* 18.35 (CCL 32, 208f). Cf. also *uera rel.* 21 (CCL 32, 201): "in quantum est quidquid est, bonum est".

follows: (i) *esse*; (ii) *forma*; (iii) *ordo/salus/integritas/pax/concordia* etc. Whatever the ‘Neo-Platonic’ or specifically Plotinian background of this distinction might be (to enter into this discussion would exceed the aim of the present overview),⁶ Augustine intends to shape it anew in the light of the mystery of the Trinity:

“qua trinitate quantum in hac uita datum est cognita, omnis intellectualis et animalis et corporalis creatura, ab eadem trinitate creatrice (i) *esse* in quantum est, (ii) et *speciem* suam habere, (iii) et *ordinatissime* administrari, sine ulla dubitatione perspicitur. [...] Omnis enim res, uel substantia, uel essentia, uel natura, uel si quo alio uerbo melius enuntiatur, simul habet haec tria; ut (i) et unum aliquid sit, (ii) et specie propria discernatur a ceteris, (iii) et rerum ordinem non excedat”.⁷

Such an insistence on the unity of the creative principle –against Manichean dualism and ‘Platonic’ eternity of matter– goes hand in hand with (i) a stress on the goodness even of matter and body and (ii) the elaboration of an account of evil which progressively allows him to overcome the deadlock, from a Christian viewpoint, of a cosmological approach of this issue.

The goodness of *corpus* is explained with the help of the threefold pattern just highlighted. Like everything else which has existence, the body also “habet aliquam *concordiam* partium suarum, sine qua omnino esse non posset [...], quamdam *pacem* suae formae, sine qua prorsus nihil esset [...], aliquam *speciem*, sine qua corpus non est corpus”.⁸

⁶ On this issue, cf. Vannier (1997), 125ff: “Sans doute la dialectique des degrés à laquelle il a recours pour expliciter la création rappelle-t-elle celle du *Banquet* (210a-212c) et de la *République* (VI, 510a-511e). Elle n’est pas sans analogie non plus avec Plotin (*Enn.* VI.4 (22), 11-5 (23), 2-10). Mais à la différence de ses prédécesseurs, Augustin ne présente pas la dialectique comme une remontée anagogique vers le monde des Idées ou vers l’Un. Il y voit plutôt le moyen de percevoir le rôle du créateur”. Despite his tendency to emphasize Augustine’s dependence on ‘Neo-Platonic’ sources du Roy (1966) ends up stressing the originality of Augustine’s doctrine of creation. First of all, he acknowledges the possible dependence of the triadic ontological structure of creation on the ‘three kind of questions’ of Cicero, Quintilianus or Martianus Capella (cf. *conf.* 10.17 (CCL 27, 163): “Tria genera esse questionum, an sit, quid sit, quale sit”) (385), but he believes that this source is purely literary. He thinks that Augustine uses it only as the framework for the unfolding of a content elaborated under the influence of ‘Neo-Platonism’ (386). He then discusses the theory which traces the triad *esse*, *species*, *ordo* back to Porphyry (387), but he believes that Plotinus is a more likely source (407). Having said that, however, he carries on stressing the “radical transformation” this triad undergoes in Augustine’s writings and shows that the ‘Neo-Platonic’ pattern is inverted: “Il s’agit pour lui [Augustine] de montrer que la chute de la créature ne pouvait atteindre au néant, mais qu’englobée par la providence divine dans son mouvement d’éloignement, elle était convertie par Dieu et stabilisée en lui. Ce cycle est d’abord indistinctement celui de la chute et de la création, puis il se différencie peu à peu en une création, dont la chute ne peut dénouer entièrement le processus et dont le salut reprend le mouvement pour l’achever” (408f).

⁷ *uera rel.* 7.13 (CCL 32, 196f).

⁸ *uera rel.* 11.21 (CCL 32, 200f).

Then, in the *De uera religione*, Augustine elaborates further his characteristic account of evil and sin, well summarized in sentences of this kind: “Nulla uita est quae non sit ex deo, quia deus utique summa uita est et ipse fons uitae, nec aliqua uita in quantum uita est, malum est, sed in quantum uergit ad mortem”.⁹ Or, the other way round,

“Et ideo ex deo non est mors. Non enim deus mortem fecit, nec laetatur in perditione uiuorum: quoniam summa essentia esse facit omne quod est, unde et essentia dicitur. Mors autem non esse cogit quidquid moritur, in quantum moritur. Nam si ea quae moriuntur, penitus morerentur, ad nihilum sine dubio peruenirent; sed tantum moriuntur, quantum minus essentiae participant: quod breuius ita dici potest: tanto magis moriuntur, quanto minus sunt”.¹⁰

Not only everything which is created is good insofar as it is created, but it cannot go back into nothingness either. Rather than negatively, therefore, it would be more accurate to say that evil is defined in comparative terms, *minus essentia*, or in terms of a tendency to move away from the source of goodness and being, *in quantum uergit ad mortem*, without ever actually returning to nothingness.

The boldest expression of this understanding of evil is given in the section of the *De uera religione* dealing with the three passions [*uoluptas, superbia, curiositas*].¹¹ Such is the fundamental goodness of everything which exists that even lust would not hold its sway over us unless it retained a form of *conuenientia*. “Quaere in corporis uoluptate quid teneat, nihil aliud inuenies quam conuenientiam: nam si resistentia pariant dolorem, conuenientia pariunt uoluptatem”.¹² Even though the Platonic influence can be detected in the anagogic role attributed to beauty,¹³ the doctrine of creation gives a proper theological content to the assertion of goodness of creation through the role of *sapientia* and God’s lordship over his creation:

⁹ *uera rel.* 11.21 (CCL 32, 200).

¹⁰ *uera rel.* 11.22 (CCL 32, 201).

¹¹ *uera rel.* 37.68-54.106 (CCL 32, 231-255).

¹² *uera rel.* 39.72 (CCL 32, 234).

¹³ A Platonic reminiscence can also be detected in the absence of jealousy, cf. *Timaeus* 30, cf. the *inuidit* of the sentence from the *uera rel.* which follows.

“*Ita enim sapientia dei pertendit usque in finem fortiter.*¹⁴ Ita per hanc summus ille artifex opera sua in unum finem decoris ordinata contexuit. Ita illa bonitas a summo usque ad extremum nulli pulchritudini, quae ab ipso solo esse posset, inuidit; ut nemo ab ipsa ueritate deiciatur, qui non excipiat ab aliqua effigie ueritatis”.¹⁵

A decisive transition takes place in the *De uera religione*: leaving behind a ‘Platonic’-inspired anagogy from earthly –and even depraved- beauty to real Beauty or Truth, Augustine forges another form of anagogy which will pervade his thought from now on and provides us with a crucial insight into the theme of the image of God in the *De Trinitate* in particular. In the text just quoted, the reason why the *effigies ueritatis* or some kind of *conuenientia* can be found in everything which exists, even in bodies and in vices, is traced back to divine action, especially his wisdom and his goodness. In this same passage, the typical Augustinian indissoluble sequence of interiority and transcendence leads from created *conuenientia* up to *summa conuenientia*:

“Quaere in corporis uoluptate quid teneat, nihil aliud inuenies quam conuenientiam [...]. Recognosce igitur quae sit summa conuenientia. Noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat ueritas; et si tuam naturam mutabilem inueneris, transcende et teipsum [...]. Vide ibi conuenientiam qua superior esse non possit, et ipse conueni cum ea”.¹⁶

This anagogical movement, however, undergoes a fundamental change which appears in the conclusion of the *De uera religione*, a passage we must quote in full:

“Religet ergo nos religio uni omnipotenti deo; quia inter mentem nostram qua illum intelligimus patrem, et ueritatem, id est lucem interiorem per quam illum intelligimus, nulla interposita creatura est. Quare ipsam quoque ueritatem nulla ex parte dissimilem in ipso, et cum ipso ueneremur, quae forma est omnium, quae ab uno facta sunt, et ad unum nituntur. Unde apparet spiritalibus animis, per hanc formam esse facta omnia, quae sola implet quod appetunt omnia. Quae tamen omnia neque fierent a patre per filium, neque suis finibus salua essent, nisi deus summe bonus esset: qui et nulli naturae, quae ab ipso bona esse posset, inuidit; et in bono ipso alia quantum uellent, alia quantum possent, ut manerent dedit. Quare ipsum donum dei cum patre et filio aequae incommutabile colere et tenere nos conuenit:

unius substantiae trinitatem, unum deum (i) a quo sumus, (ii) per quem sumus, (iii) in quo sumus; (i) a quo discessimus, (ii) cui dissimiles facti sumus, (iii) a quo perire non permissi sumus; (i) principium ad quod recurrimus, (ii) et formam quam sequimur, (iii) et gratiam qua reconciliamur;

unum [deum] (i) quo auctore conditi sumus, (ii) et similitudinem ejus per quam ad unitatem formamur, (iii) et pacem qua unitati adhaeremus; (i) deum qui dixit, ‘Fiat’ (ii) et uerbum per quod factum est omne quod substantialiter et naturaliter factum est; (iii) et donum benignitatis ejus, quo placuit et conciliatum est auctori suo, ut non interiret quidquid ab eo per uerbum factum est;

¹⁴ Wisdom 8.1.

¹⁵ *uera rel.* 39.72 (CCL 32, 234).

¹⁶ *uera rel.* 39.72 (CCL 32, 234).

unum deum (i) quo creatore uiuimus, (ii) per quem reformati sapienter uiuimus, (iii) quem diligentes et quo fruente beate uiuimus;
unum deum (i) ex quo omnia, (ii) per quem omnia, (iii) in quo omnia. Ipsi gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen".¹⁷

The first half of this text is significant because the Truth discovered at the end of the anagogic movement is identical to the *forma* which not only has an exemplary role in creation, but an instrumental role as well: "per hanc formam esse facta omnia". However many Plotinian reminiscences might be detected in this text,¹⁸ the framework is provided by the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and of creation: the Father creates through the Son, Truth and *forma* of everything,¹⁹ and preserves the existence of everything out of his goodness, as a gift, a *donum*. Then, the declared aim Augustine fixes to the reader is expressed with the verbs *uenerare* et *colere*, that is an act of worship of the one God, Father, Son and *Donum Dei*. Worship flows from the acknowledgement of our radical threefold dependence on God both for creation and for salvation, lavishly declined in the rigorous threefold pattern of the second half of the text.

From this moment onwards, this becomes the aim of the anagogical movement of introspection and transcendence in Augustine's thought: *to explore the forms and the depths of our dependence on God, to increase our awareness of God's gift and thus open the floodgates of worship, of confessio*.²⁰ As we start unveiling

¹⁷ *uera rel.* 55.113 (CCL 32, 259f).

¹⁸ Du Roy (1966), (418) goes so far as to declare that "Les dernières pages du *De uera religione* font coïncider pleinement le schème de la création trinitaire avec celui du cycle [plotinien] de l'émanation et du retour".

¹⁹ Cf. Vannier (1997), p. 149 notices that, although borrowed from Plato, the concept of *forma*, insofar as it expresses both the Son's consubstantiality with the Father and his role in creation, can be found in Colossians 1.15, "*qui est imago Dei inuisibilis primogenitus omnis creaturae*"; Hebrews 1.3, "*qui cum sit splendor gloriae et figura substantiae eius*" and 1 John 1.2, "*et uita manifestata est et uidimus et testamur et adnuntiamus uobis uitam aeternam quae erat apud Patrem et apparuit nobis*".

²⁰ On the distinction between Augustine and Plotinus on this point cf. J. Pépin, "Le problème de la communication des consciences chez Plotin et S. Augustin", *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 55 (1950), p. 145-147, quoted par Vannier (1997), p. 136: "En premier lieu l'appel à la transcendance intériorisée, qui caractérise l'une et l'autre doctrine, est pour S. Augustin une *conversion à une personne*, un recours à la *présence dans l'âme du Dieu tripersonnel*, spécialement du Verbe. Or, rien de tel chez Plotin. L'Un manque de la détermination minima indispensable à toute personne [...]. L'appel à la transcendance apparaît en deuxième lieu, chez Augustin, comme une *conversion à une personne aimante*. [...] Rien de tel chez l'Alexandrin, pour qui l'Un ne connaît pas le monde émané de lui par nécessité. Enfin, chez S. Augustin, la conversion à une personne est aussi la *conversion d'une personne*; l'âme, dans son recours unifiant à Dieu, Maître intérieur, conserve sa personnalité distincte; elle n'y oublie jamais qu'elle n'est pas une partie de la substance divine [...]. Pour Plotin, au contraire, le contact de l'Un volatilise la personnalité, au point que le voyant y perd toute notion de soi-même". Cf. also A. Solignac, (1962), BA 14, 615.

this fundamental stream of Augustine's thought, we must rule out one of the most recurrent misunderstandings of this form of anagogy straight away. On the basis of our findings on the inseparability of divine action, even though some actions can be attributed to one of the persons in particular, this can only be the result of a retrospective movement in the light of the revealed action of Christ and of the Holy Spirit and can be applied to divine action in creation only with the greatest caution. Augustine, of course, tends to attribute particular roles to each of the three persons, and yet he does so only tentatively, often in disguise, and always balancing this tendency with a proper Trinitarian framing of divine action. The passage we have just quoted is a model in this respect. Whereas Truth seems to be more openly identified with the Son, the role of stabilisation, of allowing things to *manere*, is attributed to the *donum dei*. The identification of the *donum dei* with the Holy Spirit is, of course, only too legitimate in the light of Augustine's own theology.²¹ However, on several occasions we have pointed out that this characteristically tentative way of introducing the Holy Spirit is deliberate and signals the mysterious nature of his action and the difficulty entailed by its delimitation. In the same way, particularly in an early work like the *De uera religione*, the ambivalence of the expression *donum dei* should not be overlooked too easily at the profit of its hasty identification with the Holy Spirit.

Then, and more fundamentally, the second half of the passage quoted above, built on the assertion of the unity of the Trinity –cf. the recurrent *unus deus*– reminds us of the only proper way of construing divine action, through the 'theological' prepositions *a quo*, *per quem*, *in quo* or *ex quo*, *per quem*, *in quo* etc... This is clearly stated at the beginning of the *De uera religione*, where the creative action of the Trinity is differentiated into *esse*, *species* and *ordo*, but with an essential proviso:

²¹ Even in the *uera rel.* 7.13 (CCL 32, 196), we find the expression "in dono spiritus sancti" and in 12.24 (CCL 32, 202) it is said "frueturque deo per spiritum sanctum, quod est donum dei", although not in the context of creation, but of *reformatio*. According to du Roy (1966), 320, *uera rel.* 12.24 is the first instance of the identification of the Holy Spirit with *donum Dei*, and the Holy Spirit becomes the gift through which we enjoy the Good, i.e. God. Du Roy also argues that this is a considerable change in Augustine's Trinitarian theology. Before the *uera rel.*, for example in the *b. uita* 4.34 (CCL 29, 84), the Holy Spirit introduces to *Veritas*, but then the soul is united to the *summum Modum* through *Veritas* (that is the Son and not the Holy Spirit). However, the clear attribution of the triads of Augustine's early works to each of the divine persons is not as clear as du Roy would like us to believe, cf. Madec (1989), 78ff and this dissertation, 63.

“...omnis intellectualis et animalis et corporalis creatura, ab eadem trinitate creatrice esse in quantum est, et speciem suam habere, et ordinatissime administrari, sine ulla dubitatione perspicitur; non ut aliam partem totius creaturae fecisse intelligatur pater, et aliam filius, et aliam spiritus sanctus, sed et simul omnia et unamquamque naturam patrem fecisse per filium in dono spiritus sancti”.²²

Therefore, the aim of the anagogy based on creation is the acknowledgment of our threefold – i.e. ‘radical’- dependence on God.²³ The persistent *ex Deo* is meant to convey this truth: “Omne autem bonum, aut deus, aut *ex deo* est”;²⁴ any kind of *forma* which qualifies matter, “quamuis exiguum, quamuis inchoatum, nondum est nihil, ac per hoc id quoque in quantum est, non est nisi *ex deo*”;²⁵ “salus igitur omnis *ex deo*”²⁶ etc... And, of course, the *cultus* which is meant to result from this acknowledgment – which is identical to the condition for this acknowledgment to happen – is the overcoming of *cupiditas* through *dilectio*. Already in such an early work, we have the inseparable corollary and the aim of the anagogy described so far, namely *reformatio*. The relation between the anagogy from saved created being and its corollary on *reformatio* needs to be seen from two viewpoints at the same time, which we could name the ‘theological’ and the ‘anagogical’ perspectives. According to a theological perspective, Trinitarian action in *reformatio* (that is salvation in the Son through the Holy Spirit) comes first and throws a light on the Trinitarian structure of our createdness or dependence on God. When he adopts the ‘anagogical’ perspective, Augustine delights his reader through the exploration of the threefold pattern of our saved created nature as a means to illustrate his distinctive dynamic understanding of salvation.²⁷

Before leaving a writing of such decisive significance, it is worthwhile collecting an embryonic stage of a theme which we are going to take up in the *Confessions* and the *De genesi ad litteram*, namely

²² *uera rel.* 7.13 (CCL 32, 196).

²³ Cf. Du Roy (1966), p. 328 “Toute existence corporelle et spirituelle est suspendue à cette triple gratuité du don divin : l’être encore informe, sa formation par conversion vers son principe et l’adhésion à son bien qui lui donne béatitude et stabilité”.

²⁴ *uera rel.* 18.35 (32, 209).

²⁵ *uera rel.* 18.35 (32, 209).

²⁶ *uera rel.* 18.36 (32, 209).

²⁷ In the *uera rel.* this appears for example in 12.24 (CCL 32, 202). Cf. also, in the conclusion of the treatise quoted above (*uera rel.* 55.113, CCL 32, 260), the intertwining of the aspects of creation and salvation, for example in the following sentence: “unum deum quo creatore uiuimus, per quem reformati sapienter uiuimus, quem diligentes et quo fruenter beate uiuimus”.

the structure of *creatio*, *conuersio*, *formatio*. Underlying the ethical explanation of evil as *uoluntarius defectus*, there is an ontological explanation of the possibility of this failure, namely the mutability of created being:

“Sed dicis mihi: Quare deficiunt? Quia mutabilia sunt. Quare mutabilia sunt? Quia non summe sunt. Quare non summe sunt? Quia inferiora sunt eo a quo facta sunt. Quis ea fecit? Qui summe est. Quis hic est? Deus incommutabilis trinitas, quoniam et per summam sapientiam ea fecit, et summa benignitate conseruat”.²⁸

In other words, a narrow understanding of creation simply as ‘coming into being’ is unsatisfactory. The consequence of our mutability is that the gift of existence needs to be ‘kept’, ‘preserved’ (*conseruare*) as well. This point –added to the consequence of the doctrine of God’s simplicity we shall see shortly- leads Augustine to elaborate a (logical) distinction between ‘*creatio*’ and ‘*formatio*’:

“Quapropter etiam si de aliqua informi materia factus est mundus, haec ipsa facta est de omnino nihilo. Nam et quod nondum formatum est, tamen aliquo modo ut formari possit inchoatum est, dei beneficio formabile est: bonum est enim esse formatum. Nonnullum ergo bonum est et capacitas formae: et ideo bonorum omnium auctor, qui praestitit formam, ipse fecit etiam posse formari. Ita omne quod est, in quantum est; et omne quod nondum est, in quantum esse potest, ex deo habet. Quod alio modo sic dicitur: omne formatum, in quantum formatum est; et omne quod nondum formatum est, in quantum formari potest, ex deo habet. Nulla autem res obtinet integritatem naturae suae, nisi in suo genere salua sit. Ab eo autem est omnis salus, a quo est omne bonum; et omne bonum ex deo: salus igitur omnis ex deo”.²⁹

The same aim highlighted above, i.e. the assertion of the radical goodness of creation, together with the necessity of contingent created reality to be kept in being and with Augustine’s dynamic approach to creation, leads him to stress God’s gift [*ex deo habet*] down to the very *capacitas formae*, and then up to the attainment of the *integritas formae*.³⁰ To the development of this idea in the *Confessions* and the *De genesi ad litteram* we now turn.³¹

²⁸ *uera rel.* 18.35 (CCL 32, 208).

²⁹ *uera rel.* 18.36 (CCL 32, 209).

³⁰ A good summary of the genesis of this idea in Augustine’s thought can be found in du Roy (1966), 328f.

³¹ We must criticise here du Roy’s interpretation of the pattern *creatio*, *conuersio*, *formatio* which he attributes to Augustine’s confusion between Christian creation and the ‘Neo-Platonic’ idea of fall. In his view, the distinction between *creatio* and *conuersio* would betray an initial understanding of creation as a ‘fall’ (because unformed created matter *tendit ad nihilum*, cf. *Gn. litt.* 1.4, CSEL28/1, 7), somehow ‘rectified’ through the process of *formatio*: “Ce cycle est d’abord indistinctement celui de la chute et de la création, puis il se différencie peu à peu en une création, dont la chute ne peut dénouer entièrement le processus et dont le

2. THE *CONFESSIONS* AND THE *DE GENESI AD LITTERAM*

The first book of the *De genesi ad litteram* –a work written between 401 and 415– is roughly contemporary with the 13th book of the *Confessions* [about 401] and clearly expands some of its contents. With an analytical purpose in mind, we shall start from the *De genesi ad litteram*, since it helps to understand what happens in the 13th book of the *Confessions*.

A key passage of the 1st book,³² even though it does not mention the theme of the image of God, refers to the apparently odd notion of *imitatio uerbi*, not only with regard to spiritual or rational beings, but to bodily reality as well, even at the stage of unformed matter [*informitas*]. A careful reading of the passage reveals that the *forma uerbi* to be imitated is qualified three times as follows: *semper [atque incommutabiliter] patri cohaerens*. That which is to be imitated is the ‘immutable movement of adhesion’, so to speak, of the Son towards the Father (which is a way of defining the identity of the Son not only as he who comes from the Father, but also as he who is eternally turned towards the Father). Unformed matter, left to itself, not only does not follow this movement, but even *tendit ad nihilum*, goes the opposite direction, *auersa a creatore*.

Therefore, integral to the act of creation, there is a *reuocatio*, a *conuersio* and a *formatio*: through his Word, God summons the contingency of created reality into a movement of conversion, or adhesion towards God. This is summed up in the final sentence of the passage: “per id autem quod uerbum est, insinuet perfectionem creaturae reuocatae ad eum, ut formaretur inhaerendo creatori, et pro suo genere imitando formam sempiternae atque incommutabiliter inhaerentem patri, a quo statim hoc est quod ille”.³³

salut reprend le mouvement pour l’achever” (409). However, the texts from *Gn. litt.* we have analysed tell a different story. The distinction between *creatio* and *formatio* is required by our contingency and mutability over against the immutable and necessary being of God. *Only for God do being and attributes, esse and exsistere necessarily coincide*. In the very definition of contingent mutable beings these two elements are dissociated [not so much chronologically as ontologically, cf. Vannier (1997), p. 151f: “La création s’effectue *tota simul*, mais pour son intelligibilité, la distinction entre *informitas* et *formatio* est utile” and she quotes *Gn. litt.* 5.5 (CSEL 28/1, 146): “non temporali, sed causali ordine prius facta est informis formabilisque materies”]. Cf. *Gn. litt.* 1.5 (CSEL 28/1, 8f)..

³² *Gn. litt.* 1.4 (CSEL 28/1, 7f).

³³ *Gn. litt.* 1.4 (CSEL 28/1, 8).

Applied to spiritual and rational creatures,³⁴ this principle immediately takes an ethical connotation. Even so, however, we shall see that it should be understood as a *metaphysical* ethical connotation, in the sense that it describes not so much the result of human action as the ontological dynamism undergoing the situation of the moral agent.³⁵ Even spiritual and rational creatures, although nearer to the *uerbum*, can have a formless life, not primarily as a result of their sin or failure, but because of their mutability, “quia non sicut hoc est ei esse quod uiuere, ita hoc uiuere quod sapienter ac beate uiuere”. In other words, essential to the ontological integrity of a mutable creature there is the teleological necessity of a *conuersio* and a *formatio* to attain wisdom and *beatitudo*:

“Auersa enim a sapientia incommutabili, stulte ac misere uiuit, quae informitas eius est. Formatur autem ~~conuersa~~ ad incommutabile lumen sapientiae, uerbum dei. A quo enim extitit ut sit utcumque ac uiuat, ~~ad illum conuertitur ut sapienter ac beate uiuat~~”.³⁶

Even so, the most interesting feature of this understanding of creation is still ahead, detailed in the following text:

“~~Principium~~³⁷ quippe creaturae intellectualis est aeterna sapientia; quod principium manens in se incommutabiliter, nullo modo cessaret ~~occulta inspiratione uocationis loqui ei creaturae cui principium est, ut conuerteretur ad id ex quo esset, quod aliter formata ac perfecta esse non posset~~. Ideoque interrogatus quis esset, respondit: *Principium, quia et loquor uobis*”³⁸

The combination of the present tense of the quotation from the Gospel of John³⁹ and of the past tense of the “*Dixit deus: fiat*” of Genesis (and, incidentally, the fact that the latter is attributed

³⁴ *Gn. litt.* 1.5 (CSEL 28/1, 8f).

³⁵ A word must be said here on the following baffling interpretation of the pattern *creatio-conuersio* for human creatures by A. Solignac (1962), 616f: “La formation implique la *liberté* [...] une décision de la personne libre. Paradoxalement, dans cette perspective, il dépend de l’esprit créé qu’il se constitue lui-même comme esprit au moment même où il consent à recevoir de Dieu la lumière qui le constitue tel. La *conuersio* est ainsi une réplique de la *creatio* : elle est une auto-crédation, ou du moins cette auto-crédation est-elle un moment essentiel et nécessaire de la dialectique du rapport de l’homme à Dieu”. Our investigation of the pattern *creatio-conuersio-formatio* reaches exactly the opposite conclusion: we are just as dependent on God’s initiative and action for our *conuersio* and *formatio* (and indeed *perfectio*) as we are for our *creatio*. Cf. Hassel (1962), 384: “These two moments [i.e. *creatio* and *conuersio*], being one creative act, involve no free decision on the part of the creature; briefly, they are the creature’s initial, substantial orientation to God”. Hassel introduces freedom in the third stage of the creative act, namely the growth in *perfectio* (385).

³⁶ *Gn. litt.* 1.5 (CSEL 28/1, 9).

³⁷ Not only in the sense of ‘origin’, but as the ‘In the beginning’, from Genesis 1.1

³⁸ *Gn. litt.* 1.5 (CSEL 28/1, 9).

³⁹ John 8.25.

to the eternal Word, whereas the former is pronounced by the incarnate Word) reveals an understanding of creation as *creatio continua*, not only in the sense that our being is constantly received from God, but also, and crucially, that the *uocatio*, the *conuersio* and the *formatio* are continual as well. Creatures of the Creator revealed in the incarnate Christ and in his Holy Spirit, we are summoned through a constant call into a God-ward bound existence.⁴⁰ The pattern *creatio/conuersio/formatio* means that we are not only continuously called to existence, but also, and crucially, continuously called to fulfil this existence through adhesion to God the Father, through God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, as we shall see.

The 13th book of the Confessions exhibits exactly the same pattern of *creatio/conuersio/formatio* and stresses its significance for our relation to God the Trinity. We are not simply offered an explanation of a theory, but a brilliant piece of rhetoric. Augustine turns towards created reality and challenges it to lay any claim whatsoever to merit from God for its existence and its qualities: “Dicant, quid te promeruerunt spiritalis corporalisque natura, quas fecisti in sapientia tua?”⁴¹ Thus, the elaborate description of creation as *creatio/conuersio/formatio* becomes the most compelling demonstration of the extent of our dependence on God. To begin with, God’s gift starts from the simple fact of coming into existence: “Quid te promeruit materies corporalis, ut esset saltem *inuisibilis et incomposita*, quia neque hoc esset, nisi quia fecisti? Ideoque te, quia non erat, promereri ut esset non poterat”.⁴² Then, it presides over the becoming of created reality as well:

“Dicant, quid te promeruerunt spiritalis corporalisque natura, quas fecisti in sapientia tua, ut inde [from *sapientia*] penderent etiam inchoata et informia quaeque in genere suo uel spiritali uel corporali euntia in immoderationem et in longinquam dissimilitudinem tuam, spiritale informe praestantius, quam si formatum corpus esset, corporale autem informe praestantius, quam si omnino nihil esset, atque ita penderent in tuo uerbo informia, nisi per idem uerbum reuocarentur ad unitatem tuam et formarentur et essent ab uno te summo bono uniuersa bona ualde. Quid te promeruerant, ut essent saltem informia, quae neque hoc essent nisi ex te?”⁴³

⁴⁰ Cf. Vannier (1997), 135 and 166. Cf. also *Gn. litt.* 4.12 (CSEL 28/1, 109f).

⁴¹ *conf.* 13.2 (CCL 27, 242). In this paragraph, the verb *promereo* is a real leit-motif.

⁴² *conf.* 13.3 (CCL 27, 243).

⁴³ *conf.* 13.2 (CCL 27, 242).

Even at its most embryonic level, amorphous and drawn towards dissimilarity from God, created reality still depends on God. In this way, Augustine not only excludes any notion of an independent formless matter but establishes the extent to which dependence on God is rooted at the innermost imaginable level of our being. We find again the terminology of *reuocatio* and *formatio* of the *De genesi ad litteram*, further expanded in the following passage: “Aut quid te promeruit inchoatio creaturae spiritalis, ut saltem tenebrosa fluitaret similis abyssu, tui dissimilis, nisi per idem uerbum conuerteretur ad idem, a quo facta est, atque ab eo illuminata lux fieret, quamuis non aequaliter tamen conformis formae aequali tibi?”⁴⁴ The *reuocatio* sets off a *conuersio* which is identified here with the key Augustinian motif of *illuminatio*:

“Quod autem in primis conditionibus dixisti: *Fiat lux, et facta est lux*, non incongruenter hoc intellego in creatura spiritali, quia erat iam qualiscumque uita, quam illuminares. Sed sicut non te promeruerat, ut esset talis uita, quae illuminari posset, ita nec cum iam esset promeruit te, ut illuminaretur. Neque enim eius informitas placeret tibi, si non lux fieret non existendo, sed intuendo illuminantem lucem eique cohaerendo, ut et quod utcumque uiuit et quod beate uiuit, non deberet nisi gratiae tuae, conuersa per commutationem meliorem ad id, quod neque in melius neque in deterius mutari potest; quod tu solus es, quia solus simpliciter es, cui non est aliud uiuere, aliud beate uiuere, quia tua beatitudo es”.⁴⁵

The pattern *creatio/conuersio/formatio* is reformulated here in terms of *illuminatio*, according to the inseparability between epistemology and ontology never to be forgotten when dealing with Augustine. *Conuersio* not only results from a *uocatio*, but also from the *intuitio* of an ‘enlightening light’ and from the same movement of ‘adhesion to God’ –*cohaerendo*– highlighted above in the *De genesi ad litteram*.⁴⁶

The extent to which our being and its intended dynamism is constituted by God’s self-giving, however, does not end with the *conuersio* and the *formatio* or *illuminatio*. Once the *formatio* is set off, it still needs to be led to its completion and to be somehow preserved, to be given stability,⁴⁷ by yet another ‘aspect’, so to speak, of God’s gracious action, thereby revealing yet another ‘aspect’ of our dependence on him:

⁴⁴ *conf.* 13.3 (CCL 27, 243).

⁴⁵ *conf.* 13.4 (CCL 27, 243f).

⁴⁶ Cf. Hassel (1962), 386: “the word *conuertere* is used to refer to the creational process whereby men are created through their conversion to, and consequent illumination by, uncreated Wisdom or the Verbum”.

“Perfecto enim tibi displicet eorum imperfectio, ut ex te perficiantur et tibi placeant, non autem imperfecto, tamquam et tu eorum perfectione perficiendus sis. *Spiritus enim tuus bonus superferebatur super aquas*, non ferebatur ab eis, tamquam in eis requiesceret. In quibus enim requiescere dicitur spiritus tuus, hos in se requiescere facit. Sed superferebatur incorruptibilis et incommutabilis uoluntas tua, ipsa in se sibi sufficiens, super eam quam feceras uitam; cui non hoc est uiuere, quod beate uiuere, quia uiuit etiam fluitans in obscuritate sua; cui restat conuertere ad eum, a quo facta est, et magis magisque uiuere apud fontem uitae et in lumine eius uidere lumen, et perfici et illustrari et beari”.⁴⁸

Even though the act of leading creation to its *perfectio* is ascribed to the Holy Spirit somehow cautiously (mainly through reference to God’s ‘Spirit’ and to God’s *bonitas* in Genesis),⁴⁹ Augustine suggests both in the *Confessions* and in the *De genesi ad litteram* an affinity between the *reuocatio/conuersio/illuminatio/formatio* and the *uerbum* on the one hand, and between *perfectio* and the Holy Spirit on the other hand. However, notice must be taken again of Augustine’s care to rule out any straightforward distribution of tasks between the persons of the Trinity. The *De genesi ad litteram* argues that, in the book of Genesis, “Trinitas insinuatur creatoris” not through attributing *creatio* to the Father, *conuersio* to the Son and *perfectio* to the Holy Spirit, but ascribing simultaneously to the three persons of the Trinity each of these aspects of creation:

creatio: “[...] nam dicente scriptura, *In principio fecit deus caelum et terram*, intellegimus patrem in dei nomine, et filium in principii nomine, qui non patri, sed per se ipsum creatae primitus ac potissimum spiritali creaturae, et consequenter etiam uniuersae creaturae principium est: dicente autem scriptura, *Et spiritus dei superferebatur super aquam*, completam commemorationem trinitatis agnoscimus”;

conuersio-perfectio: “ita et in conuersione atque perfectione creaturae, ut rerum species digerantur, eadem trinitas insinuetur: uerbum dei scilicet, et uerbi generator, cum dicitur, *Dixit deus*; et sancta bonitas, in qua deo placet quidquid ei pro suae naturae modulo perfectum placet, cum dicitur, *Vidit deus quia bonum est*”.⁵⁰

Father, Son and Holy Spirit are inseparably at work in creation and again the three together are mentioned with regard to the *conuersio* and *perfectio* of created reality.⁵¹ In the same way, in the *Confessions*, Augustine resorts to his usual way of articulating the inseparability of the Trinity with

⁴⁷ Cf. *Gn. litt.* 1.8 (CSEL 28/1, 11).

⁴⁸ *conf.* 13.iv.5 (CCL 27, 244).

⁴⁹ Cf. *Gn. litt.* 1.8 (CSEL 28/1, 11).

⁵⁰ *Gn. litt.* 1.6 (CSEL 28/1, 10).

⁵¹ Cf. Vannier (1997), 119: “Le schème *creatio, conuersio, formatio* [...] devient l’écho de l’action de chaque personne de la Trinité : le Père crée, le Fils donne aux êtres humains la possibilité de se retourner vers leur créateur et l’Esprit parachève la création. Cependant, nous ne voudrions pas systématiser l’action de chaque hypostase, car la Trinité agit de manière indissociable dans la création”.

divine action, namely the preposition *in quo, per quem* etc...⁵² This point is essential to identify Augustine's fundamental aim in the book 13th of the *Confessions* which, in turn, represents an invaluable insight into the aim of the theme of the image of God in the *De Trinitate*.

The mainstream reading of the *De Trinitate*, which focusses on the devising of created analogies for the mystery of the Trinity or on a grandiose 'Neo-Platonic' anagogy from created reality to their uncreated Author,⁵³ mistakes marginal aspects of this work for its main purpose. Equally misleading would be a reading of the 13th book of the *Confessions* which took the following passage out of its context:

"Trinitatem omnipotentem quis intellet? Et quis non loquitur eam, si tamen eam? Rara anima, quaecumque de illa loquitur, scit quod loquitur. Et contendunt et dimicant, et nemo sine pace uidet istam uisionem. Vellem, ut haec tria cogitarent homines in se ipsis. Longe aliud sunt ista tria quam illa trinitas, sed dico, ubi se exerceant et probent et sentiant, quam longe sunt. Dico autem haec tria: esse, nosse, uelle. Sum enim et scio et uolo: sum sciens et uolens et scio esse me et uelle et uolo esse et scire. In his igitur tribus quam sit inseparabilis uita et una uita et una mens et una essentia, quam denique inseparabilis distinctio et tamen distinctio, uideat qui potest. Certe coram se est; attendat in se et uideat et dicat mihi".⁵⁴

Can the upshot of the exquisite theological model of *creatio/conuersio/perfectio* possibly be shrunk into a plain threefold pattern in our created nature [*esse, nosse, uelle*] purely instrumental to devising an analogy of the Trinity? The patent inadequacy of such an unsophisticated explanation to account for the complexity of the argument Augustine unfolds in the 13th book of the *Confessions* represents the best possible introduction to the theme of the image of God in the *De Trinitate* and the best shield against one-dimensional readings of the latter treatise as a quest for 'psychological analogies' of the Trinity.

The thrust underlying the brilliant exposition on creation of the 13th book of the *Confessions* is enshrined in the verbs *promereo* and *pendo*: once we become aware of the extent of our dependence on God, not only for our existence, but also for the dynamism which constitutes our identity and determines our destiny, what merit can we possibly attribute to ourselves in our relation to God the Trinity? Just as in the *De uera religione*, the intended outcome of this acknowledgment is by no

⁵² *conf.* 13.6 (CCL 27, 244).

⁵³ Cf. this dissertation, 4-9.

means ‘mere’ knowledge of God –a meaningless thing in Augustinian terms- but the presupposition for worship represented by knowledge of ourselves in the light of God, in dependence on God. A God to whom we are so profoundly bound both with regard to our existence and to our destiny cannot be an object of knowledge like everything else. The outcome of the only proper way of knowing this God, as we have seen in the *De Trinitate*, is better expressed in terms of *fruitio* or, as we are now going to see in the *Confessions*, in terms of *requies*.

The pattern *creatio/conuersio-formatio-illuminatio/perfectio* applies, *pro modo suo*, to each level of created reality and not only explains the origin of creation and its ontological dynamism, but also reveals where this dynamism is directed to and finds its fulfilment. In the *Confessions* in particular, it is only too evident that the account of creation is entirely instrumental to its application to this fulfilment. It increases our awareness of our dependence on God not only for what we are, but especially for what we are called to be. Just as our existence results from God the Trinity’s continuous action of creation, call, conversion and of illumination, so it finds its fulfilment –its *perfectio*, its *requies*- in and through God alone.

This point is introduced through the exegesis of the book of Genesis, where it is said that “*Spiritus tuus bonus superferebatur super aquas*”.⁵⁴ In his usual way, Augustine introduces the theme of *requies* almost casually, through the following remark: “*Spiritus enim tuus bonus superferebatur super aquas, non ferebatur ab eis, tamquam in eis requiesceret. In quibus enim requiescere dicitur spiritus tuus, hos in se requiescere facit*”.⁵⁵ That which only seems to be a point of exegesis, slowly reveals its overarching role in the structure of the *Confessions* as a whole through echoing the beginning of this work. The *Confessions* start with the well-known declaration “*fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te*”⁵⁶ and ends with the passage on *requies* we are analysing. The role fulfilled by *beatitudo* in most of Augustine’s other works, namely in the *De Trinitate*, is attributed

⁵⁴ *conf.* 13.12 (CCL 27, 247).

⁵⁵ Genesis 1.2.

⁵⁶ *conf.* 13.5 (CCL 27, 244).

⁵⁷ *conf.* 1.1 (CCL 27, 1).

here to *requies*: *requies* embodies the deepest thing we long for and which can be achieved only as a result of God's action and gift.⁵⁸

Requies goes together with the notion of *pondus*, defined not as 'that which leads us downwards', but that rather 'that which leads us towards our intended place [*locus*]':

"Corpus pondere suo nititur ad locum suum. Pondus non ad ima tantum est, sed ad locum suum. Ignis sursum tendit, deorsum lapis. Ponderibus suis aguntur, loca sua petunt. Oleum infra aquam fustum super aquam attollitur, aqua supra oleum fusa, infra oleum demergitur; ponderibus suis aguntur, loca sua petunt".⁵⁹

It is here that Augustine erupts in one of his most well-known ejaculations: "Pondus meum amor meus; eo feror, quocumque feror".⁶⁰ Love is the weight which leads us to our intended place, the place where we look for *requies*. The antinomy between *cupiditas* and *dilectio/caritas* we have seen at work throughout the *De Trinitate* also plays a role in relation to *requies* and *pondus*:

"Cui dicam, quomodo dicam de pondere cupiditatis in abruptam abyssum et de subleuatione caritatis per spiritum tuum, qui superferebatur super aquas? Cui dicam? Quomodo dicam? Neque enim loca sunt, quibus mergimur et emergimus. Quid similis et quid dissimilis? Affectus sunt, amores sunt, immunditia spiritus nostri defluens inferius amore curarum et sanctitas tui attollens nos superius amore securitatis, ut sursum cor habeamus ad te, ubi spiritus tuus superfertur super aquas, et ueniamus ad supereminentem requiem, cum pertransierit a nima nostra aquas, quae sunt sine substantia".⁶¹

The final answer to the *cor inquietum* comes from God only, from his gift, his *donum*:

"Nam et in ipsa misera inquietudine defluentium spirituum et indicantium tenebras suas nudatas ueste luminis tui satis ostendis, quam magnam rationalem creaturam feceris, cui nullo modo sufficit ad beatam requiem, quidquid te minus est, ac per hoc nec ipsa sibi. [...] In dono tuo requiescimus: ibi te fruimur. Requies nostra locus noster. [...] Minus ordinata inquieta sunt: ordinantur et quiescunt. Pondus meum amor meus; eo feror, quocumque feror. dono tuo accendimur et sursum ferimur; inardescimus et imus. Ascendimus ascensiones in corde et cantamus canticum graduum. Igne tuo, igne tuo bono inardescimus et imus, quoniam sursum imus ad pacem Hierusalem, quoniam incundatus sum in his, qui dixerunt mihi: In domum Domini ibimus. Ibi nos conlocabit uoluntas bona, ut nihil uelimus aliud quam permanere illic in aeternum".⁶²

⁵⁸ Cf. Vannier (1997), 164, note 61: "Augustin ouvre les *Confessions* par l'*inquietum cor* et les termine par le sabbat éternel, par le *quies in Deo* [...] Dans le *De Genesi ad litteram* IV.8.16 il note également 'Le poids du désir nous entraîne là où, une fois parvenus, nous trouverons notre repos sans plus avoir rien à chercher'. Cf. Vannier's whole analysis of the theme of *quies*, 164-172.

⁵⁹ *conf.* 13.10 (CCL 27, 246).

⁶⁰ *conf.* 13.10 (CCL 27, 246f).

⁶¹ *conf.* 13.8 (CCL 27, 245).

⁶² *conf.* 13.9-10 (CCL 27, 246f).

Against this background, the threefold structure of our dependence on God, i.e. the threefold dynamism which constitutes our being and our goodness and underlies our ability and possibility of reaching our fulfilment, our *requies*, our *beatitudo*, is translated into the different realms of creation. The generic triad of being, beauty and order of the *De uera religione* [often expressed through the quotation from Sap. 11.21 *mensura, numerus, pondus*]⁶³ is translated into the different realms of creation and becomes life/sensation/desire in the animal realms and existence/knowledge/love in rational beings, in the *Confessions*.⁶⁴ An important text from the *De ciuitate Dei* provides us with the best summary of this declension of “les trois dimensions ontologiques de la créature qui la situent dans une triple dépendance par rapport à son Créateur”:⁶⁵

“Deus itaque summus et uerus cum uerbo suo et spiritu Sancto, quae tria unum sunt, deus unus omnipotens, creator et factor omnis animae atque omnis corporis, [...] a quo est (i) omnis modus (ii) omnis species (iii) omnis ordo; a quo est (i) mensura (ii) numerus (iii) pondus; a quo est (i) quidquid naturaliter est, (ii) cuiuscumque generis est, (iii) cuiuslibet aestimationis est; a quo sunt (i) semina formarum (ii) formae seminum (iii) motus seminum atque formarum; qui dedit et carni (i) originem (ii) pulchritudinem (iii) ualetudinem, (i) propagationis fecunditatem, (ii) membrorum dispositionem, (iii) salutem concordiae; qui et animae irrationali dedit (i) memoriam (ii) sensum (iii) adpetitum, rationali autem insuper (i) mentem, (ii) intellegentiam, (iii) uoluntatem; qui non solum caelum et terram, nec solum angelum et hominem, sed nec exigui et contemptibilis animantis uiscera nec auis pinnulam, nec herbae flosculum nec arboris folium sine suarum partium conuenientia et quadam ueluti pace dereliquit: nullo modo est credendus regna hominum eorumque dominationes et seruitutes a suae prouidentiae legibus alienas esse uoluisse”.⁶⁶

How then was the transition made between this Trinitarian understanding of creation and the doctrine of the image of God?

Emphasis on the influence of Neoplatonism on Augustine’s Trinitarian thought and his doctrine of creation leads to the following account of this transition. The *De uera religione* would be

⁶³ Cf., par exemple, *Gn. adu. Man.* 1.xvi.26 (PL 34, 186), *Gn. litt.* 4.5 (CSEL 28/1, 101) and many other texts quoted and analysed by du Roy (1966), 279-297. This triad is described by Vannier (1997), 128 as follows: “Par *mesure*, il désigne la détermination de l’être, son *modus* qu’il a reçu au moment de sa création et qui contient une certaine perfection. Par *nombre*, il renvoie à sa forme, au sens de l’*eidos* platonicien ou de la *species* augustinienne, forme qui est donnée par le Verbe à l’être humain, après sa conversion. Par *poids*, il dépeint la *formatio*, le lieu propre de chaque être, son *ordo* auquel il accède, en son accomplissement”. Du Roy (1966) also observes that “à partir de 406-407, Augustin n’explicite plus guère la citation de Sap 11.21 par la création Trinitaire, sinon dans le livre 5 du *De ciuitate Dei*”, quoted below.

⁶⁴ *conf.* 13.12 (CCL 27, 247).

⁶⁵ Du Roy (1966), 422, who also quotes the text from the *ciu. Dei* below.

⁶⁶ *ciu. Dei* 5.11 (CCL 47, 141f).

an attempt to combine Plotinian anagogy with Trinitarian ontology of creation.⁶⁷ However, this attempt fails, because these two approaches are irreconcilable:

“Essayant de trouver Dieu, comme Plotin, par une réflexion du regard et un recueillement intérieur, il [Augustine] ne parvient pas à opérer le passage d’une structure triadique du créé à la Trinité divine. [...] Il ne parvient pas à passer de l’un à l’autre”.⁶⁸

This failure would explain the appearance of an ‘analogical’ approach to the mystery of the Trinity starting from the created triadic structure of our mind.⁶⁹ Therefore, a distinction should be made between the Trinitarian ontology of creation we have seen so far on the one hand, and the ‘*cogito*’ and the doctrine of the image of God of the *De Trinitate*, on the other hand. The triad *esse/ uiuere/ intelligere*⁷⁰ and its cognates are replaced by the ‘*cogito*’ of *esse/ nosse/ uelle*.⁷¹

“Ce *cogito* de l’être, de la *connaissance* et de la *volonté* me paraît être tout simplement un remaniement de celui de l’être, de la *vie* et de la *connaissance*, permettant de faire coïncider avec les trois dimensions ontologiques de la créature ou les trois moments de l’illumination. [...] Ce *cogito*, tout en apparaissant dans le prolongement de cette métaphysique et de cette illumination Trinitaire, marque cependant un changement de méthode [...] : il s’agit de ‘trois choses en nous’ qui peuvent nous aider à comprendre ces ‘trois choses en Dieu’ [...] en le projetant à l’infini, dépouillée de tout changement”.⁷²

The doctrine of the image of God would therefore be the upshot of this development: “Dans le *De Trinitate*, Augustin cherchera donc en la structure même de l’esprit humain l’image de la Trinité” through his “théorie psychologique”.⁷³ At the same time, the *De Trinitate* would leave behind an economic approach to the mystery of the Trinity, in favour of the static présentation of the unity of the three persons in one nature.⁷⁴ The analogy provided by the ‘*cogito*’ would then be enough to illustrate such a formalized version of the doctrine of the Trinity.

⁶⁷ Du Roy (1966), 418f and 421, where he declares “Je crois que l’insistance sur le caractère ontologique de sa pensée Trinitaire doit être accompagnée d’une insistance non moins grande sur la démarche anagogique qui y donne accès et qui, de plus en plus personnalisée, de plus en plus existentielle, si l’on veut, fera d’Augustin le précurseur de la pensée réflexive occidentale”; cf. also 419: “Cette démarche reste fondamentalement une reprise de l’anagogie plotinienne, personnalisée toutefois en une rencontre et une soumission de l’âme à la Vérité”.

⁶⁸ Du Roy (1966), 177.

⁶⁹ Du Roy (1966), 421.

⁷⁰ Du Roy (1966), 174-177, quoting *sol.* 2.1.1.

⁷¹ *conf.* 13.12 (CCL 27, 247). According to du Roy (1966), this transition was foreshadowed in a text of 392 already, *duab. an.* 13f (CSEL 25/1, 68ff), cf. note 3, p. 432.

⁷² Du Roy (1966), 432f.

⁷³ Du Roy (1966), 435.

⁷⁴ Du Roy (1966), 436.

* * *

Such an interpretation of the transition between Augustine's Trinitarian ontology and his doctrine of the image of God is based on an astonishingly superficial reading of the *De Trinitate*, which our dissertation as a whole is intended to disprove. In particular, despite occasional comparisons between the threefold pattern of created reality and the formal concept of the Trinity, these triads are not meant to be analogies or illustrations of the Trinitarian concept of God. Nor can they be interpreted along a "Neoplatonically conceived soteriology of ascent"⁷⁵ even just with the aim of using this "Neoplatonic soteriology of ascent only to impress it into the service of a thoroughgoing critique of its claims to raise the inductee to the contemplation of God".⁷⁶ It is not even enough simply to acknowledge that "à la différence de ses prédécesseurs [i.e. Platon et Plotin], Augustine ne présente pas la dialectique comme une remontée anagogique vers le monde des Idées ou vers l'Un. Il y voit plutôt le moyen de percevoir le rôle du créateur".⁷⁷

More deeply, as we have seen, reflection on the triadic structure of our created being is an exploration of our threefold dependence on the triune God both for our existence and for the fulfilment of our longing towards *beatitudo*, both for *formatio* and for *reformatio*. This is what is encompassed, in the *De Trinitate*, under the heading of 'image of God', with a significant stress on the epistemological consequences of this truth: just as he is at the roots of our being, so God the Trinity is at the very root of our ability/possibility of knowing and of loving and especially of knowing, loving and enjoying *-frui-* Him.

This is what is now left to bring our investigation into the Trinitarian epistemology of the *De Trinitate* to its conclusion.

⁷⁵ Cavadini (1992), 105.

⁷⁶ Cavadini (1992), 106.

⁷⁷ Vannier (1997), 126.

3. THE IMAGE OF GOD IN THE *DE TRINITATE*

Augustine delights in dotting his work with all-encompassing sentences which are of great help in uncovering the fundamental lines of his thought. Thus, for example, at the beginning of the 9th book he states: “Trinitatem certe quaerimus, non quamlibet sed illam trinitatem quae deus est, uerusque ac summus et solus deus”.⁷⁸ This echoes a sentence we met in the 8th book where the object of our *dilectio* is God the Trinity and not triads of any kind: “Hoc ergo diligimus in trinitate, quod deus est”.⁷⁹

God the Trinity cannot be the object of a purely intellectual investigation. Nothing meaningful can be said concerning the Trinity unless we are aware that we are looking *for God*, *quaerere deum*, and we are moved by love for God, *diligere deum*. And the God we are looking for and whom we love, is the God who first loved us and looked for us in Christ through the Holy Spirit. He is the Lord, *solus deus*. ‘Knowledge’ of the Trinity, therefore, cannot simply correspond to the elaboration of a conceptually satisfying account of this mystery. For Augustine, knowledge of the Trinity is not synonymous with ‘understanding’ but with *beatitudo*, with *uisio*, with *contemplatio*, with *fruitio* of the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. The *De Trinitate* is hopelessly misunderstood when it is approached as a ‘treatise’ and not as an echo of God’s own initiative to lead us to share in his own life.

This is enshrined in a programmatic sentence of the first book we have quoted already and which is the best summary of the whole *De Trinitate*: “Hoc est enim plenum gaudium nostrum quo amplius non est, frui trinitate deo ad cuius imaginem facti sumus”.⁸⁰

The uniqueness of knowledge of God results from God’s own uniqueness -his lordship- and from the uniqueness of the relation he has established between himself and us through *creatio*, *formatio/conuersio* and *perfectio*, that is through our being ‘in the image of God’, through our

⁷⁸ 9.1 (292).

⁷⁹ 8.8 (279).

⁸⁰ 1.18 (52).

fundamental threefold dependence on God. We shall soon discover the real meaning of this sentence, where the ‘image of God’ designates the ‘mode’ of our relation with God determined by what God is: we are called to enjoy –or, if we want, ‘to know’- the Lord *according to* the radical threefold dependence of our being on him.

Even though this motif is hinted at throughout the whole treatise, it reaches its climax in the 14th book. Augustine kept it in store for the end because, in the architecture of the *De Trinitate*, it was destined to play the role of an all-embracing conclusion for all the strands of the lengthy discussion on theological epistemology which constitutes –as we have seen- the inner and fundamental layer of the argument of the treatise.

i. The dynamism of the image of God

The key feature of the image of the Trinity in us is summed up by this assertion: “ita imago est ut ad imaginem sit”.⁸¹ We are in the presence of a fundamentally dynamic notion of the image of God (which Latin language very effectively conveys through the *ad* plus the accusative), regardless of the necessary renewal or reformation entailed by the reality of sin. Even though the theme of *creatio/conuersio-formatio/perfectio* is not explicitly taken up here, it is easily recognizable in this dynamism breathed into human nature in the very act of creation; the image is not something equal to God in us which can be calmly possessed and enjoyed, but rather something which sets us in motion:

“propter imparem [...] similitudinem dictus est homo ad imaginem, et ideo *nostram* ut imago trinitatis esset homo, non trinitati aequalis sicut filius patri, sed accedens ut dictum est quadam similitudine sicut in distantibus significatur quaedam uicinitas non loci sed cuiusdam imitationis”.⁸²

The link between this passage and the 1st book of the *De genesi ad litteram* we have seen above is unmistakable: we are in the image of God insofar as we ‘enter upon’ [*accedens*] likeness with God through *imitatio*, that is the very same movement of adhesion to God of the Word both from all

⁸¹ 7.12 (266).

⁸² 7.12 (267).

eternity and in his Incarnation, his mediatory role and his sacrifice (“ut formaretur inhaerendo Creatori”).⁸³ We have seen how God, through his Word, summons created reality into a movement of conversion, of adhesion to God and how this summons is continual and continually constitutive of our being. This is precisely what the *De Trinitate* expresses through its dynamic approach to the image of God: creatures of the Creator revealed in the incarnate Christ and in his Holy Spirit, we are constituted by a threefold fundamental dependence on him and we are continuously called to fulfil our existence through adhesion to God the Father, through God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Compared with his previous reflection on this dynamic understanding of our relation with God, Augustine, in the *De Trinitate*, chooses to investigate the way the image of God stretches towards its intended aim. This way is constituted by *knowledge* and *love*, in their fundamental inseparability.

Thus, Augustine states that: “De natura humanae mentis diximus quia et si tota contempletur ueritatem, imago dei est [...]. Et [...] quantumcumque se extenderit in id quod aeternum est tanto magis inde formatur ad imaginem dei”. Here we have an echo of the *formatio* we have seen in Augustine’s earlier works, applied to the image of God. The formation of the image results from an *extensio* towards the *contemplatio* of ‘that which is eternal’.⁸⁴ Once again, we must remember that Augustine often deliberately uses abstract terms to talk about theological realities: the ‘eternal realities’ evoked here are nothing other than the *uisio dei*, as we shall see.

The same dynamism of the image of God is formulated in terms of love a few paragraphs later: “Honor enim hominis uerus est imago et similitudo dei quae non custoditur nisi ad ipsum a quo imprimitur. Tanto magis itaque inhaeretur deo quanto minus diligitur proprium”.⁸⁵ Again here, just as in the threefold dependence on God spelt out in Augustine’s earlier works, the dynamic nature of the image is not only located in its growth, in its fulfilment or in its *renouatio*, but already in its preservation [*non custoditur*]. The very existence of the image of God is constituted by a movement

⁸³ *Gn. litt.* 1.4 (CSEL 28/1, 8).

⁸⁴ 12.10 (364f). The same idea of *extensio* can be found in 9.1 (292f).

going from the creative act of God to the vision of God: *ad ipsum a quo imprimitur*. This movement is constituted by love, as it will become increasingly clear: it is a question of *dilectio* and, because of the consequences of sin, it requires the overcoming of *cupiditas*.

Thus, both ontologically and ethically, we are in the image of God, that is, we are inscribed in a dynamic relation with the Lord who constantly keeps us in being and calls us both to fulfil our nature (ontological level) and to overcome the consequences of our sinful state through becoming himself the object of our knowledge and love (ethical level). The same Lord who rescues us from the tendency towards nothingness resulting from our contingent created nature, also rescues us from our *cupiditas* resulting from our sinful condition.

This renewal/reformation (and preservation) of the image of God through knowledge and love - *in agnitione dei* - is based on some key New Testament passages,⁸⁶ especially Colossians: “*nolite mentiri inuicem expoliantes uos ueterem hominem cum actibus eius et induentes nouum eum qui renouatur in agnitionem secundum imaginem eius qui creauit eum*”⁸⁷ and Ephesians: “*deponere uos secundum pristinam conuersationem ueterem hominem qui corrumpitur secundum desideria erroris renouamini autem spiritu mentis uestrae et induite nouum hominem qui secundum Deum creatus est in iustitia et sanctitate ueritatis*”⁸⁸ *Renouatio* and *reformatio* are located in the *mens* in the passage from Ephesians just quoted and in Romans: “*et nolite conformari huic saeculo sed reformamini in nouitate mentis uestrae ut probetis quae sit uoluntas dei bona et placens et perfecta*”.⁸⁹

It is significant that, in the New Testament, the *renouatio* or *reformatio* resulting from Christ's reconciliation to the Father in the Holy Spirit is realized *in agnitione* and *spiritu mentis*, *secundum imaginem dei*. This corresponds to our findings in the exploration of the relation between *scientia* and *sapientia* and of the Christology of the treatise, namely the identity between reconciliation and

⁸⁵ 12.16 (370). Cf. Williams (1990), 319: “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*”.

⁸⁶ Cf. 12.12-16 (366-371) and 14.21-25 (449-457).

⁸⁷ Colossians 3.9f.

⁸⁸ Ephesians 4.22ff. Colossians 3.9f and Ephesians 4.24 are quoted for example in 14.22 (453) and 12.12 (366f).

⁸⁹ Romans 12.2 and Ephesians 4.23f quoted for example in 14.22 (451).

revelation. *Agnitio dei*, in this context, is the subjective appropriation of this revelation through knowledge and love, which includes two more aspects.

First, this *renouatio* of the image in *agnitione dei* does not happen in one moment, but gradually. Augustine distinguishes it from the remission of sins, which happens in baptism, and grounds his assertion on another sentence from the New Testament: “*Et si exterior homo noster corrumpitur, sed interior renouatur de die in diem*”.⁹⁰ The dynamic nature of the image of God and the role of love in its renewal is stated in the following sentence:

“In agnitione igitur dei iustitiaque et sanctitate ueritatis qui de die in diem proficiendo renouatur transfert amorem a temporalibus ad aeterna, a uisibilibus ad intellegibilia, a carnalibus ad spiritalia, atque ab istis cupiditatem frenare atque minuere illisque se caritate alligare diligenter insistit”.⁹¹

Then, the relation between growth in likeness with God and knowledge needs to be understood correctly. The eschatological fulfilment in the *uisio* or *contemplatio* of God –corresponding to *beatitudo*– is not the function of a likeness previously acquired. The relation between likeness and knowledge is exactly the opposite: it is knowledge, inseparable from love, that transforms us and makes us like God. Two more New Testament quotations support this assertion: “*Nos autem reuelata facie gloriam domini speculantes in eandem imaginem transformamur de gloria in gloriam tamquam a domini spiritu*”⁹² and especially “*Dilectissimi, nunc filii dei sumus, et nondum apparuit quod erimus. Scimus quia cum apparuerit similes ei erimus quoniam uidebimus eum sicuti est*”.⁹³ Augustine’s commentary is revealing: “*Hinc apparet tunc in ista imagine dei fieri eius plenam similitudinem quando eius plenam perceperit uisionem*”.⁹⁴

Finally, and very significantly, the inner layer of both halves of the *De Trinitate* reaches its apex here with one of the same scriptural quotations it had inaugurated with in the 1st book: “*Propter cuius perfectionem dictum intellegendum est: Similes ei erimus quoniam uidebimus eum sicuti est. Hoc*

⁹⁰ 14.23 (454) quoting 2 Corinthians 4.16.

⁹¹ 14.23 (454f).

⁹² 2 Corinthians 3.18 quoted in 14.23 (455) and in 15.14 (479).

⁹³ 1 John 3.2.

⁹⁴ 14.24 (455). A similar statement occurs in the previous paragraph: “*In hac quippe imagine tunc perfecta erit dei similitudo quando dei perfecta erit uisio*”, 14.23 (455).

enim donum tunc nobis dabitur cum dictum fuerit: *Venite, benedicti patris mei, possidete paratum uobis regnum*”.⁹⁵ We remember Augustine’s exegesis of this passage, combined with 1 Corinthians 15.28: Christ’s handing over of the kingdom to the Father means that Christ, through faith, leads the just to the contemplation –or *uisio*– of God face to face.⁹⁶ In exegetical terms, this represents an inclusion. Whether it is intentional or not, it confirms our detection of an inner layer running ‘underground’ throughout the whole *De Trinitate*, which aims at a theological account of knowledge of God.

ii. *Capax Dei*

The right interpretation of the doctrine of the image of God in the 14th book and of the way all the other strands of the treatise converge into it, stands or falls by the dynamism we have just established and started to describe as the movement going from the creative act of God to the vision of God –*ad ipsum a quo imprimitur*.

Let us start by summing the conclusions of our analysis of the theme of *sapientia*, in the previous chapter: the Father is *sapientia*; the Son is *sapientia de sapientia*. In the Son as *sapientia genita* we are created; in the Incarnation he becomes for us *sapientia a Deo* through his reconciliatory and revelatory role. Thus, the dynamism through which we are summoned back (cf. the vocabulary or *reuocatio*, *conuersio*, *formatio*, *renouatio* etc...) to the God who created us coincides with Christ’s revelation and reconciliation: Christ, our *sapientia*, enlightens us and converts us to the Father; he makes us *sapientes*; he enables us to offer the real *cultus*, the sacrifice acceptable to God constituted by *dilectio* and mediated through Christ’s Incarnation and his sacrifice and through the *donum* of the Holy Spirit.

Through the combination of these two themes, image of God and *sapientia*, in the 14th book, we learn that the fulfilment of the dynamism of the image of God consists precisely in becoming *sapientes*, for example in the following sentence : “secundum hoc facta est ad imaginem dei quod uti

⁹⁵ 14.25 (457), quoting Matthew 25.34.

ratione atque intellectu ad intellegendum et conspiciendum deum potest; [...] quia summae naturae capax est et esse particeps potest, magna natura est”.⁹⁷ The nature of this ‘possibility’ –*potest*- and of this ‘capacity’ –*capax*- needs to be carefully investigated, since it is a recurrent theme in the *De Trinitate*.

Indeed, in this life already our *mens* is *capax* to be “intenta in ueritatem”.⁹⁸ In the unfolding of the metaphor of *illuminatio*, it is said that our *mens* is created in such a way as to be “capax lucis”.⁹⁹ Human nature has a good will and is *capax* of good things.¹⁰⁰ Finally, it is *capax Dei*, a bold statement recurring three times in the 14th book, significantly coupled, however, with its intended fulfilment, namely that of becoming *particeps Dei*: “capax est et particeps esse potest”.¹⁰¹

Then, we find a helpful description of this ‘capacity’ through a parallel between the immortality and the rationality of the soul, before and after the fall. The immortality of the image is located in the rational or intellectual soul¹⁰² and is said to be *insita* in the immortality of the creator.¹⁰³ As a result, because of the fall, a similar doom befalls both immortality and rationality of the soul. With regard to immortality, the result of the fall is that indeed the soul incurs death, i.e. it loses the only true life -the *beata uita*- even though it still remains immortal, since it does not cease to live altogether. In the same way, with regard to rationality, the human soul does not cease to be rational and intellectual after the fall, even though original sin and its consequences throw *ratio* or *intellectus* into a state of numbness.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, even after the fall, the image of God is not obliterated: however impaired and diminished, its immortality and its rationality are preserved as a result of God’s faithfulness.

⁹⁶ 1.31 (78).

⁹⁷ 14.6 (428f).

⁹⁸ 1.20 (56).

⁹⁹ 12.24 (378).

¹⁰⁰ 13.9 (393).

¹⁰¹ 14.6 (429), 11 (436) and 15 (443).

¹⁰² But not exclusively. Cf. 14.24 (455f) in which Augustine argues that the image of the Trinity in us is fulfilled into the image of the Son, since he is the only one who has a body in the Trinity.

¹⁰³ 14.6 (428).

¹⁰⁴ 14.6 (428).

However, it would be wrong to deduce from these assertions a sort of distinction between natural and supernatural order or a two-level anthropology, in which the first level –*capax*– established by creation, would be conceivable in isolation from the second –*particeps*– established by grace, and which would read the section going from books 9 to 11 of the *De Trinitate* as a description of the first level of this anthropology, i.e. that which we are by creation.

This interpretation would run right against the dynamic nature of the image of God [or *mens* or *humana natura*, expressions often used as synonyms] we have highlighted above: the image of God – or *mens* or *humana natura*– either stretches itself –*se extendit*– towards God through *dilectio* or it turns away from him –*aversio*– through *cupiditas* and *superbia*. There is no neutral standpoint. If we are not, through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, caught in the movement of conversion, we sink into aversion, corruption, deformity etc...¹⁰⁵ After the fall, *mens* is not in a state of independence or neutrality, but of irremediable decline towards nothingness (even though the hypothetical *reductio ad nihilum* remains in God's power) and of numbness; it is *obsoleta* and *deformis*,¹⁰⁶ or even, to resort to the effective imagery of the 4th book, at the devil's mercy! We have seen at length the epistemological consequences of this fundamental dynamic notion of the image of God: if we do not remember, know and love the Father through Christ and in the *dilectio* poured in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, *cupiditas* compromises our very ability to know everything else. The point of books 9 to 11 was this and not the description of an independent anthropological or natural level of our being.

iii. God, the free defining 'factor'

The correct interpretation of this *capax/particeps* dynamism¹⁰⁷ is given in the definitive picture of the image of God set out in the middle of the 14th book.¹⁰⁸ In the section enclosed between the

¹⁰⁵ Cf. 8.5 (274).

¹⁰⁶ 14.11 (436).

¹⁰⁷ 14.6 (429).

¹⁰⁸ 14.15 (443), where the couple *capax/particeps* recurs again and acts as a bookend with 14.6.

outline of the image of God and its full picture,¹⁰⁹ Augustine re-captures the whole argument unfolded in books 9 to 11 and finally unveils its intended aim, that is what we have called the inner layer of the argument of the *De Trinitate*. In this recapitulation, self-knowledge (and self-love) are firmly situated within the dynamism of *capax/particeps*:

“Quamuis enim mens humana non sit eius naturae cuius est deus, imago tamen naturae illius qua natura melior nulla est ibi quaerenda et inuenienda est in nobis quo etiam natura nostra nihil habet melius. Sed prius mens in se ipsa consideranda est antequam sit particeps dei et in ea reperienda est imago eius. Diximus enim eam etsi amissa dei participatione obsoletam atque deformem dei tamen imaginem permanere. Eo quippe ipso imago eius est quo eius capax est eiusque esse particeps potest, quod tam magnum bonum nisi per hoc quod imago eius est non potest”.¹¹⁰

This description of the way the image *permanet* in the mind even when it is separated from God cannot possibly be interpreted as the condition for the possibility of knowing God. Deprived of *dilectio*, *mens* cannot even know itself,¹¹¹ how much less, then, is it ‘capable’ of knowing God. The only condition for the possibility of knowing God is Christ’s reconciling action and of the gift of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, this summary of the argument of books 9 to 11 refers to the paradox of *obliuio sui*. Augustine’s maieutic purpose in these books was precisely to bring it to the fore: how is it possible that we have become incapable of self-knowledge [*se nosse*], which constitutes the very life of the mind and the condition of the possibility of knowing everything else?

The only possible explanation for this incongruity is that “magna caecitate cordis tenebris ignorantiae demersus est altius, et mirabiliore diuina ope indiget ut possit ad ueram sapientiam peruenire”.¹¹² We have seen that the cause of this *magna caecitas*, of this *deformitas*, are *cupiditas* and *superbia*, a point recalled in the 14th book through the example of the child: “An etiam ipsa [mens] se nosse credenda est, sed intenta nimis in eas res quas per corporis sensus tanto maiore quanto

¹⁰⁹ In the section which goes from the end of 14.6 -a paragraph containing an explicite cross-reference to book 10 (429)- to 14.14 (427-442).

¹¹⁰ 14.11 (436).

¹¹¹ 14.8f (430-434).

¹¹² 14.9 (434).

nouiore coepit delectatione sentire, non ignorare se potest sed cogitare se non potest?”¹¹³ The absurdity of *obliuio sui* not only offers a striking instance of the reversal [*auersio*] of the dynamism inherent in the image of God, but also highlights its consequences for our ability to know: “Quid enim scimus si quod est in nostra mente nescimus cum omnia quae scimus non nisi mente scire possimus?”¹¹⁴

This fatal distortion of the constitutive dynamism of the *mens/imago* results from the separation from God caused by sin. From the moment we do not *diligimus* God any more, we stop loving [*fru*] ourselves as well: “Qui ergo se diligere nouit deum diligit; qui uero non diligit deum etiam si se diligit, quod ei naturaliter inditum est, tamen non inconuenienter odisse se dicitur”.¹¹⁵ The image of God, therefore, consists in the dependence of the possibility of loving ourselves –and inseparably knowing ourselves- on love for God:

“Cum autem deum diligit mens et sicut dictum est consequenter eius meminit eumque intellegit, recte illi de proximo suo praecipitur ut eum sicut se diligit. Iam enim se non peruerse sed recte diligit cum deum diligit cuius participatione imago illa non solum est, uerum etiam ex uetustate renouatur, ex deformitate reformatur, ex infelicitate beatificatur”.¹¹⁶

The final sentence of this quotation must not go unnoticed: the image of God ‘non solum est’, but ‘renouatur’, ‘reformatur’, ‘beatificatur’. Again we find it is not a state, but a movement; it *is* insofar as it *becomes*, under the effect of divine action (as shown by the passive mode of these verbs). The motif of *creatio/conuersio-formatio/perfectio* is again the background indispensable to grasp all the resonances of this statement.

On this basis, we can go back to the full picture of the image of God we have mentioned above which beautifully blends in one single sentence the many strands of the inner layer of the whole treatise:

¹¹³ 14.7 (429).

¹¹⁴ 14.8 (430).

¹¹⁵ 14.18 (445f).

¹¹⁶ 14.18 (445f).

“Haec igitur trinitas mentis non propterea dei est imago quia sui meminit mens et intellegit ac diligit se, sed quia potest etiam meminisse et intellegere et amare a quo facta est. Quod cum facit sapiens ipsa fit. Si autem non facit, etiam cum sui meminit seque intellegit ac diligit, stulta est. Meminerit itaque dei sui ad cuius imaginem facta est eumque intellegat atque diligit. Quod ut breuius dicam, colat deum non factum cuius ab eo capax facta est et cuius esse particeps potest; propter quod scriptum est: *Ecce dei cultus est sapientia*, et non sua luce sed summae illius lucis participatione sapiens erit, atque ubi aeterna, ibi beata regnabit”.¹¹⁷

Characterizing the human being not simply as a ‘rational being capable of love’, but as ‘a creature in the image of God the Trinity’, makes God the Trinity its essential and indispensable defining ‘factor’, so to speak. In Augustinian terms, just as it is impossible to envisage anthropology and epistemology apart from God, so it is impossible to define our identity without God or to consider the image of God as a property handed over to us which could be, even simply in principle, managed in isolation from its source

Thus, we reach the final and real meaning of the *potest* –or the *capax Dei*– we have been so keen to put under the right light. The *potest* here is not a proviso destined to preserve an independent, if reduced, space for human initiative, but a necessary clause to state that however defining a ‘factor’ God might be in the definition of what we are, he is so as the Lord, that is freely, graciously. For this reason, rather than image ‘of God’, it would be more appropriate to talk of image ‘from (and obviously ‘towards’) God’.

Through the theme of the image ‘from/towards God’, Augustine demonstrates how the dynamism inscribed in us by creation is based precisely on the incommensurable gap existing between the teleological character of our created nature and the absolutely transcendent, gracious and in the end eschatological nature of this same God-given goal. This very ‘capacity’ corresponds to our dependence on God not only for our existence, but for the possibility of our knowing and loving and reaching the fulfilment of that for which we were created. We can say that the image is a fundamental threefold dependence of creature on the creator [this is its ‘capacity’] and reaches its fulfilment when this dependence in being, knowledge and love becomes conscious and is converted into *cultus*, i.e. *ac-knowledged*, thankful dependence. At heart, the acknowledgment of this

¹¹⁷ 14.15 (442f).

dependence consists in love, in *dilectio*. But love is inseparable from knowledge, and therefore worship coincides with remembering or rather, in being reminded of God and in being given, in Christ through the Holy Spirit, the possibility of knowing and loving God.

In a nutshell, the theme of the image of God allows Augustine to place the too narrow and potentially misleading epistemological question into a proper theological framework, that is a framework where the unique character of the 'object' known and of the ontological dependence of the knowing subject on this 'object' are fully taken into account, together with the actual condition of the knowing subject, which is not a condition of neutrality, or integrity, or objectivity, or of self-possession, but, to use just a couple of Augustine's favourite analogies, is a condition of *infirmetas* and of deep self-alienation.

CONCLUSION:

LOVE FIRST

"Dicta sunt haec, et si saepius uersando repetantur, familiarius quidem innotescunt".¹ This aspect of Augustine's pedagogy could not but have an effect on our combination of sequential and analytical renderings not only of the content and purpose of the *De Trinitate* but also of something at least of its distinctive rhetorical ambition not only to *teach*, but also *delight* and *persuade* the reader.

"Sed et modus aliquis adhibendus est", Augustine adds, not however to put an end to his treatise, but to get to the heart of the matter: *cernere essentiam ueritatis*.² This declaration, located in the exact middle of the treatise, captures its deepest aspiration, what we have labelled its 'inner layer', namely knowledge of God (Chapters II and IX). *Cernere essentiam ueritatis*: once again, the abstract formulation should not lead us astray. A trait of Augustine's style we have become familiar with is that abstract terms always hide a theological meaning. In this case, we are reminded of the identity between knowledge and *uisio* Augustine presupposes. *Veritas*, God the Trinity, is the object of 'sight' (*cernere*), as it is explicitly declared later on in the same book, this time in straightforward theological terms: "Immo vero vides Trinitatem si caritatem vides".³ Hence the decisive role of love in *uisio*, i.e. in knowledge of God, and the explanation for the title of our dissertation: "God loved and known through God". *Love comes first*: this is the conclusion of our investigation.

Love comes first because the inner life of the Trinity is a life of *dilectio* and the substantial unity of the Trinity is a unity of *dilectio*. Through the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son dwell in each other. This primacy of love in the understanding of inner Trinitarian life is the 'starting point' theologians

¹ 8.1 (268)

² 8.1 (268)

³ 8.12 (287)

have been so anxious to identify in Augustine's *De Trinitate* and the real explanation of the *Filioque*: because he is the common charity through which Father and Son love each other and are united to each other, although proceeding *principaliter from the Father*, the Holy Spirit derivatively proceeds from the Son as well (Chapters VI and VII).

Love comes first in Christology and soteriology: the Incarnation is not simply a union between divine and human natures. It is rather the act through which the Son extends his personal union of *dilectio* with the Father in the Holy Spirit to the human nature he assumes (*assumptio, susceptio*). Love only exists in loving, as Augustine establishes in the 8th book (Chapter VIII). Therefore, the *dilectio* which unites the Son to the Father from all eternity becomes Christ's love by actually informing his whole life, by being 'translated', so to speak, in all his deeds, words and in his obedience *usque ad mortem crucis*. Just as it is the essence of his mediation, so *dilectio* is at the heart of his sacrifice. Christ's death on the cross is acceptable to his Father because it is the ultimate seal of his *iustitia*, i.e. of his love for the Father in the Holy Spirit, and restores for humanity the possibility of becoming again, in Christ, a sacrifice acceptable to the Father, again in the Holy Spirit (Chapter IV).

The Son's Spirit becomes Christ's Spirit and, after his resurrection, he is sent to constitute us believers in Christ. This corresponds to the Spirit's inner Trinitarian identity. Just as he unites the Father and the Son, so he joins us to Christ and to each other, through a unity of *dilectio*. Faith in Christ only becomes operative through *dilectio*: a leitmotiv throughout the treatise. That which is heard, promised and commanded must become an object of love if we are to live according to the inner man. Only through love, does knowledge of Christ's humanity become knowledge of God. Only to the *dilector*, is *uisio* of the Father granted in the life to come. The eloquence of the Incarnation and of Christ's sacrifice –the *quantum* and *quales* of his loving- heals our *superbia* and our *desperatio* through converting our love from *cupiditas* into *caritas*. This means that this eloquence 'speaks' to us only as love actually transforms us (Chapter IV). Finally, *dilectio* proves to be the highest expression of God's freedom: either it is *ex Deo, donum Dei*, or is not *dilectio* at all. Passages

of the 8th book where Augustine identifies the *dilectio* out of which we love our neighbour with the *dilectio*/Holy Spirit need to be read in the light of this fundamental freedom of the Holy Spirit and of his action. *Dilectio* is free because the Holy Spirit is given in such a way that he gives himself *as God*. *Dilectio* never becomes our possession. The Holy Spirit remains the Lord in his self-gift. Discovery of our ability to love –*diligere*– entails the acknowledgment of our dependence on God. Gift means presence of the Giver (Chapters V and VI).

No surprise, therefore, if *love comes first* from the epistemological point of view as well. Since the will is never neutral, we are either moving away from God or we discover that we have been snatched away from this *aversio*, from the devil's power, from the blindness of our *cupiditas* and *superbia*, from the bleakness of our *desperatio* and granted the grace of *conuersio*, of moving towards God, *ad ipsum a quo facti sumus*, through the *caritas* poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us. The novelty, the 'strangeness', the freedom of this love is such that it becomes the most eloquent indication of the *renouatio* brought about by Christ's salvation and of its Trinitarian character. The apparently odd theme of 'love for love' is to be understood in this context: since *dilectio* is *ex Deo*, we only love 'out of God'; we only love in the *dilectio*/Holy Spirit through which the Father and the Son love each other, *frui* each other. Here Augustine sets forth his mature version of the relation between *uti* and *frui*: neighbour and even the self can be 'enjoyed' in God – *frui in Deo*–, insofar as they are loved *out of* God. This also explains how love opens the door to knowledge of God the Trinity. Love itself is known to us more certainly than the very object of our love, "magis enim nouit dilectionem qua diligit quam fratrem quem diligit". Hence the boldest of his assertions concerning knowledge of God: "Ecce iam potest notioem deum habere quam fratrem, plane notioem quia praesentioem, notioem quia interioem, notioem quia certioem". God-*dilectio* is known at the highest possible degree because he is the most interior thing, he is the most present thing, he is the most certain thing. God-*dilectio* is both the *forma* we know –so to

speaking- and that through which this *forma* transforms and *informat* us: “Amplectere dilectionem deum et dilectione amplectere deum”.⁴

Love comes first to the point that such talk makes sense only once it has become a *reality* already. Augustine’s *De Trinitate* is not destined to people who need to be converted, to be persuaded to love God. His reader has to be someone who already knows, already sees, already loves out of God’s *dilectio*, i.e. *propter Deum*, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. “Commonebo si potero ut uideretis uideas”:⁵ ‘I will help you to become aware of the fact that you actually already see God’.

Seeing *dilectio*, seeing God, does not only mean, of course, becoming aware of the novelty of the brotherly love we have become capable of by grace. The *uisio caritatis* refers above all to Christ’s identity and salvific role. Christ’s identity, deeds, words and death on the cross are ‘eloquent’: they allow us ‘to see’ *quantum* and *quales* God loved us. They are the object of the *scientia* of faith, which through Christ’s Incarnation, mediation and sacrifice is identical –even though still only *per speculum*- to the *sapientia* of *uisio*. Then, of course, the identity between ‘seeing’ the Trinity and ‘seeing’ *caritas* also refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit, the very *dilectio* of the Father and the Son. This is the meaning of “Immo uero uides trinitatem si caritatem uides”.⁶

Then, *love comes first* because, from the vantage point of *dilectio*, Augustine detects and powerfully describes the epistemological consequences of human sinfulness, thus unmasking the fundamental deficiency of received theories of knowledge. Any pretension to independent philosophical enterprise –“philosophizing without Christ”-⁷ overlooks the crucial condition of knowledge: love. Knowledge is either impaired by covetousness or freed by God’s given love. There is no distinction, for Augustine, between natural and supernatural levels of knowledge, no possibility for reason of carving out a field where it could fulfil its role autonomously. His epistemology rests on the impossibility of neutrality for the will, neither turning itself towards God nor averting itself away from him, but simply ignoring both options. *Caritas* stands in the end as the only condition

⁴ 8.12 (286).

⁵ 8.12 (287).

for an harmonious cognitive life. Only *dilectio* restores knowledge and enables philosophers to yield to the injunction which resumes philosophical enterprise as a whole, namely *cognosce te ipsum* (Chapters III and X).

Finally, *love comes first* in Augustine's dynamic approach to the image of God: creatures of the Creator revealed in the incarnate Christ and in his Holy Spirit, we are constituted by a threefold fundamental dependence on him and we are continuously called to fulfil our existence through adhesion to God the Father, through God the Son in God the Holy Spirit, i.e. through the knowledge –the *agnitio Dei*– made possible by *dilectio*.

This dynamism, therefore, coincides with *dilectio*. The image -i.e. our fundamental threefold dependence on our creator- reaches its fulfilment when this dependence in being, knowledge and love becomes conscious and is converted into *cultus*, i.e. *ac-knowledged*, thankful dependence. At heart, the acknowledgment of this dependence consists in love, in *dilectio*. But love is inseparable from knowledge, and therefore worship can be described as remembering or rather, as being reminded of God and being given, in Christ through the Holy Spirit, the possibility of loving and knowing God, though faith in this side of the eschatology and finally through *visio* and *fruitio* in the life to come (Chapter XI and XII).

* * *

A lesson should be drawn from this conclusion as to the way Augustine in general and the *De Trinitate* in particular should be read. The principle of unity and coherence of works dealing with Christian doctrine should always be looked for in the *conexio mysteriorum* first. Anthropology or epistemology can fulfil the role of organizing principles for the analysis of a doctrinal treatise such as the *De Trinitate* only if they are approached in a distinctive Christian way. The Christian approach to anthropology or epistemology starts by looking away from ourselves and concentrating on Christ's salvation, his Holy Spirit and the Father's invisibility, their equal divinity

⁶ 8.12 (287).

and their consubstantiality, i.e. the doctrine of the Trinity and its corollary represented by the doctrine of revelation. On the contrary, we are always guaranteed to misunderstand patristic literature when we take the opposite stand, selecting only the aspects of doctrine we find more congenial to anthropological and epistemological concerns determined in an independent way. Our analysis of the *De Trinitate* has avoided ‘analogical’, ‘anagogical’, ‘psychological’ reductive readings of the treatise –while not failing to list some of its analogical, anagogical and psychological aspects– because it has tried to adhere as faithfully as possible to its subject-matter, God the Trinity in the way Augustine summarizes it:

“Cum ergo dicimus et credimus esse trinitatem, nouimus quid sit trinitas quia nouimus quid sint tria; sed hoc non diligimus. [...] Hoc ergo diligimus in trinitate, quod deus est. Sed deum nullum alium uidimus aut nouimus quia unus est deus, ille solus quem nondum uidimus et credendo diligimus”.⁸

⁷ 13.24 (416).

⁸ 8.8 (278f).

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