

THE TRINITARIAN LIFE OF GOD
AND THE COMMUNAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH
IN AUGUSTINE'S *CONFESSIONS*

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IN AUGUSTINE'S *CONFESSIONS*

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Abstract

In the *Confessions*, Augustine presents a vision of the church which relies heavily upon his understanding of the trinitarian nature of God. The church is the venue where God reveals himself to human beings as Trinity, as the Son and the Spirit work within the community in a saving way, redressing the problem of human sinfulness, nourishing the community's love, and preparing the church to participate in the trinitarian life of God in the eschaton. As he develops his understanding of the relationship between the Trinity and the church, Augustine describes the divine nature as being inherently relational, trinitarian, and he maintains that the activity of the Trinity within the church engenders loving relationships both among human beings and between the community as a whole and God. This analysis of Augustine's understanding of God's trinitarian activity in the church calls into question the validity of criticisms brought against Augustine's theology by commentators such as Jürgen Moltmann, who contends that Augustine introduced deleterious tendencies into Western theology which gave rise to Modalistic conceptions of God and individualistic expressions of the doctrine of human nature. In fact, in the *Confessions*, Augustine delineates a view of the church in which the health of the community is assured through the activity of the God whose life is expressed in terms of an eternal community of three persons.

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Introduction

In the *Confessions*, Augustine presents a subtle and dynamic conception of the relationship between the trinitarian life of God and the communal life of the church. God reveals himself as Trinity both through the scriptural record of his trinitarian activity in the world and through his presence in the church in the persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit. In making himself known to human beings as Trinity, not only does God impart the understanding that his own life consists of the eternal relationships between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but he also engenders new, loving relationships among those who believe in him. This is so because the saving actions of the Son and the Spirit allow members of the church to participate in divine love: in fact, Augustine thinks that the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the hearts of believers, loves through the saints as they love God and one another. By partaking of the love of God, the love of Christians is made to bear fruit in actions which counteract the effects of unjust deeds performed by sinful human beings. One of the ideas that makes Augustine's understanding of the church both positive and hopeful is this notion that God works through those who love him, enabling them to give themselves in love to their fellow human beings in ways that manifest divine justice in the world. The bishop maintains that, as members of the church love God and one another, they are drawn simultaneously into fuller participation in the trinitarian life of God. Ultimately, the church is granted to partake of the dynamic relationality which exists

eternally between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as the Spirit bears up the church which has adhered by its love to the Spirit's charity during its earthly life.

Although Augustine's presentation of his vision of the relationship between God and the church in the *Confessions* is unsystematic, his treatment of this theme is thorough and highly suggestive. Indeed, the theme in question receives the bishop's sustained attention throughout much of this early example of Augustine's theological writing, for the relationship between God and the human soul, and between God and the church, is central to Augustine's concern as he reflects upon Christian doctrine in light of his own conversion. While it is beyond the scope of my study to consider Augustine's conception of the relationship between God and the church in his later work, the *De Trinitate*, on the basis of an article written by Rowan Williams there appears to be significant continuity between Augustine's presentation of this theme in the *Confessions* and the *De Trinitate*.¹ In both works, the interrelation between the Trinity and the Christian community turns upon three premises: first, God reveals himself in the world as Trinity; second, the human soul is such that it cannot fulfill itself, but needs loving relationships with God and other human beings; and third, through the work of the Son and Holy Spirit, God engenders love in the church which issues in the willingness of believers to serve one another and, in the end, brings about the entrance of the church into God's trinitarian life through the Holy Spirit. The continuity in Augustine's thought between the *Confessions* and the *De Trinitate* is

¹ Rowan Williams. "Sapientia and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*." In *Collectanea Augustiniana*. Leuven: Peets, 1990, pp. 317-332.

sufficient to allow me to employ certain insights of Williams as I seek to counter allegations brought against Augustine by his unsympathetic readers.

Augustine's contribution to the church's trinitarian understanding of God is not always recognized as a positive one. In the past century, it has been common for scholars to suggest that the bishop's writing is responsible for the tendency of the Western theological tradition after him to reduce the conception of God's trinitarian nature to an abstract principle of divine unity, and to formulate an understanding of human nature which justifies modern individualism. Jürgen Moltmann is one proponent of the view that Augustine's legacy in subsequent Western theology has been pernicious. For the purpose of this study, I have chosen Moltmann as a representative of this view because in his influential book, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*,² he addresses Augustine's trinitarian thought in a concerted way, recognizing the necessity of treating the bishop's doctrine of God in the course of delineating his own notion of the relationship between God and human beings, and responding in a constructive way to what he perceives as the shortcomings of the bishop's theology. As we shall see, Moltmann's book on the Trinity is also of interest because in it he argues for the superiority of the East's social image of the Trinity over the psychological image favoured by Augustine and the West. Although the main purpose of my thesis is to examine Augustine's understanding of the relationship between God and human beings as it unfolds in the church, I shall also

² Jürgen Moltmann. *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. Trans. Margaret Kohl. SCM Press, Ltd., 1980. The extensive use which Catherine LaCugna makes of this book is a testimony to the influence of Moltmann's trinitarian thought in recent scholarship (See Catherine LaCugna. *God For Us: the Trinity and the Christian Life*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991).

demonstrate that Moltmann's allegations pointing to Augustine's responsibility for many of the ills of Western theology cannot be supported on the basis of a careful analysis of the bishop's own writing.³

As I have said, Williams' article, "*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*," has been helpful in considering the question of the interrelation of the Trinity and the church in Augustine's thought, but, of course, its subject is the *De Trinitate*, and not the *Confessions*. Williams laments the absence of a sustained treatment of the conclusions of the *De Trinitate* in recent scholarship (conclusions which bear directly upon the question of the interrelation between the Trinity and the church).⁴ I have found that the same void exists with respect to the *Confessions*. To the best of my knowledge there exists no sustained examination of my topic in modern scholarship. While works such as Burnaby's *Amor Dei*,⁵ Gilson's *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*,⁶ O'Donovan's *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine*,⁷ and TeSelle's *Augustine the Theologian*⁸ do address Augustine's conceptions of God and the church in the *Confessions* from a doctrinal perspective, all treat the two doctrines separately and do so in a limited way.

³ In Chapter Two, I shall answer to Moltmann's accusation that Augustine undermines the reality of the trinitarian persons by emphasizing the unity of God's nature; in Chapter Three I shall question the validity of Moltmann's allegation that Augustine's use of the psychological Trinity gave rise to modern Western individualism; and in Chapter Four, I shall provide evidence against Moltmann's charge that Augustine's theology destroys the potential for loving human communities.

⁴ Williams. p. 318.

⁵ John Burnaby. *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine*. London: Hodder and Staughton, 1938.

⁶ Etienne Gilson. *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*. Trans. L. E. M. Lynch. London: Victor Gollancz, 1961.

⁷ Oliver O'Donovan. *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.

⁸ TeSelle, Eugene. *Augustine the Theologian*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.

In Chapter One of this study, I shall describe the rationale underlying scholarly efforts to indict Augustine for his role in introducing destructive elements into the theological tradition of the West. Particular attention will be given to the version of these charges put forward by Moltmann, to Moltmann's constructive solution to what he perceives to be the faults of Western theology using the social image of the Trinity, and to the basis for a defense against these charges offered by Williams. In Chapter Two, I shall examine Augustine's presentation of the trinitarian life of God in the *Confessions*, arguing that the bishop's logic implies that he considers God to be inherently relational, and that he considers this relationality to be trinitarian in nature. Chapter Three will consist of an analysis of Augustine's religious anthropology. There I shall present the bishop's contention that human pride is responsible for the individualistic tendencies in human nature, describing his understanding of how God reveals himself in the world through the persons of the Son and the Spirit, and expressing his perception of how human beings apprehend this revelation and respond to God with love. In Chapter Four, I shall examine Augustine's allegory of God's perfection of the church where he describes the generation of loving relationships in the church through the activity of the Holy Spirit, present his understanding of how the church is borne up to God through participation in divine love, and investigate the bishop's notion of how the church partakes of God's trinitarian life as it enters its permanent home in God's eternity.

Chapter One: Recent Assessments of Augustine's Theological Legacy

It is common for contemporary theologians to credit Augustine with having introduced doctrinal formulations into the Western theological tradition which led eventually to the abstract theism and individualistic anthropology that are characteristic of Enlightenment and Modern theology. Augustine stands accused of prioritizing the unity of the divine substance at the expense of the reality of the divine persons in his influential formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Such a view of God, many scholars contend, has had disastrous implications, not only for theology *qua* theology, but also for the establishment of authentic human communities. In the present chapter, I shall describe the charges commonly brought against Augustine, giving particular attention to the work of Jürgen Moltmann, whose treatment of Augustine is representative of those who consider the bishop to be responsible for the ills of Modern Western theology; I shall present the findings of an article by Rowan Williams which cast doubt upon the validity of these indictments against Augustine; and I shall suggest that, in the *Confessions*, Augustine delineates ideas that are similar to those which Moltmann employs in his attempt to redress the theological problems which he accuses Augustine of having created.

The charges against Augustine's trinitarian conception of God

Since at least the end of the nineteenth century, historians of doctrine have commonly distinguished between the general tendencies of Western and Eastern

formulations of the doctrine of God by stating that the Latin tradition emphasizes the unity of the divine substance at the expense of the reality of the divine persons, while the Greek tradition emphasizes the reality of the persons over the unity of God's substance. Théodore de Régnon's book, *Etudes de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité*,¹ has been influential in promoting this view. Indeed, in Yves Congar's estimation, this multi-volume work "gave new impetus to Trinitarian studies."² The following passage summarizes one of De Régnon's enduring contributions:

Latin philosophy considers the nature in itself first and proceeds to the agent; Greek philosophy considers the agent first and passes through it to find the nature. The Latins think of personality as a mode of nature; the Greeks think of nature as the content of the person.³

This summary of the tendencies of Latin and Greek theology has recently been quoted sympathetically by John Meyendorff,⁴ and cited approvingly by Walter Kasper⁵ and Catherine LaCugna.⁶ Also, Colin Gunton⁷ has presented a version of this notion

¹ Théodore de Régnon. *Etudes de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité*. Paris: Retaux, 4 vols. (vols. 1 and 2) 1892, (vols. 3 and 4) 1898.

² Yves M. J. Congar. *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*. Vol. 3. Trans. David Smith. New York: The Seabury Press, 1983, p. xvi.

³ De Régnon. Vol. 1, p. 433. Quoted in John Meyendorff. *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1974, p. 181. Whereas subsequent expressions of De Régnon's idea have tended to view "Greek" and "Latin" theologies as opposite ways of giving expression to the notion of divine tri-unity, it is interesting that De Régnon himself does not see the two traditions as incompatible. "In both cases," writes the French theologian, "the faith and the dogma are the same, but the mystery is presented in two different forms," and "the two theologies express the same truth, just as two symmetrical triangles may be equal, but cannot be placed one on top of the other" (Vol. 1 pp. 433-434, 251-252, quoted in Congar p. xvi).

⁴ John Meyendorff. *Byzantine Theology*. p. 181.

⁵ Walter Kasper. *The God of Jesus Christ*. Trans. Matthew J. O'Connell. London: SCM Press, 1983, p. 379 n. 186.

⁶ Catherine LaCugna. *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991, p. 11.

⁷ Colin Gunton. "Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West." *Scottish Journal of Theology*. 43 (1990) p. 49.

which he quotes from Stephen McKenna.⁸ In addition to adopting De Régnon's view concerning the tendencies of Western and Eastern theology, each of these more recent commentators shares the view that Augustine is ultimately responsible for the West's propensity to ascribe primacy to the unity of God's substance. Indeed, this view seems to have become commonplace in modern scholarship. A survey of recent appraisals of Augustine's theological legacy suggests that this notion of the bishop's influence upon Western theologians after him is often accepted as a given, without the support of a critical analysis of his works.⁹

When it is carried through to its end, the idea that the plurality of persons is logically subordinate to the unity of the divine substance results in a doctrine of God in which Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not afforded permanent and real existence in the Godhead. According to such a scheme, what God is in himself is a single and undivided unity; the distinction of persons occurs at a less fundamental level, and so

⁸ Gunton. "Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West." pp. 34-35. Gunton quotes McKenna's "Introduction" to *Saint Augustine The Trinity*. Washington: Catholic University Press of America, 1963. While McKenna does not himself refer explicitly to De Régnon, the affinity between his evaluation and de Régnon's is clear: the Greeks, McKenna writes, "begin by affirming their belief in the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit according to the Scriptures." while "to Augustine it seemed better to begin with the unity of the divine nature, since this is a truth which is demonstrated by reason" (p. xiv).

⁹ Rowan Williams comments that "a good many contemporary Western theologians have been inclined to take such judgements on trust, and to conclude that we have relatively little to learn from Augustine in the task of constructing a properly 'relational' model of God's trinitarian life" (Rowan Williams. "*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*." In *Collectanea Augustiniana*. Leuven: Peets, 1990, p. 317). I have found Williams to be accurate. See, for instance, Gerald S. Sloyan. *The Three Persons in One God*. Engelwood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964, p. 73; James P. Mackey. *The Christian Experience of God as Trinity*. London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1983, pp. 153-156; Walter Kasper. *The God of Jesus Christ*. pp. 262, 296; David Brown. *The Divine Trinity*. La Salle: Open Court Publishing Company. 1985, pp. 273-274; Catherine Mowry LaCugna. *God for Us*. p. 102; Thomas Marsh. *The Triune God: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Study*. Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994, p. 132; Christoph Schwöbel. "The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology: Reasons, Problems and Tasks." In *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*. Ed. Christoph Schwöbel. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995. p. 5; Colin Gunton. "Relation and Relativity:

plurality does not accurately characterize what God is in the deepest and most basic sense. This view of the Trinity has long been identified as the heresy of Modalism. The charge of Modalism was brought against Augustine by Adolf von Harnack at roughly the same time as De Régnon's treatises were published. In volume 4 of his *History of Dogma*,¹⁰ Harnack pens an unsympathetic evaluation of Augustine's theology wherein he argues that Augustine "sublimate[s] the Trinity into a unity," and so loses the ability to speak coherently about the authentic presence of God in the saving acts of the Son and the Spirit within the economy of creation.¹¹ On the basis of this interpretation of Augustine's trinitarian doctrine, Harnack charges that "Augustine only gets beyond Modalism by the mere assertion that he does not wish to be a Modalist," and that, given his emphasis upon unity of substance as the basis of the Godhead, Augustine is forced to maintain that God expresses himself as a "single personality" rather than as three distinct persons.¹²

Colin Gunton is one contemporary scholar who follows Harnack in bringing the charge of Modalism against Augustine.¹³ Because of Augustine's formative influence, so Gunton's argument goes, the Latin theological tradition tends to imply that God's self-revelation to human beings is of a second order, in that the activity of

The Trinity and the Created World." In *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*. Ed. Christoph Schwöbel. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995, p. 106.

¹⁰ Adolf von Harnack. *History of Dogma*. 3rd Edition. Trans. Neil Buchanan. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1898.

¹¹ *History of Dogma*. Vol. 4. p. 130. Such a view of God could never meet with Harnack's approval, because it necessarily dissolves into speculation, rather than engaging in a full-bodied investigation of the practical, moral implications of God's activity in the created economy in the persons of the Son and the Spirit.

¹² Harnack. *History of Dogma*. Vol. 4. p. 131. Harnack also frames the charge of modalism against Augustine in an earlier work: *Outlines of the History of Dogma*. Trans. Edwin Knox Mitchell. New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1893, p. 272.

¹³ Colin Gunton. "Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West." pp. 35, 45, 58.

the Son and the Spirit in the economy fails to express who God is in himself.¹⁴ Thus, he proposes that Augustine's description of the Trinity consists of

a view of an unknown substance *supporting* the three persons rather than *being constituted* by their relatedness.¹⁵

God's substance remains "unknown" to human beings because the trinitarian persons who make themselves known within the created order do not constitute God's very being. Gunton explains why he thinks Augustine's theology leads to a situation where God cannot be known by human beings, saying,

because the one God is the real God, and known in a different way from the God who is three, God as he is in himself would appear to be, or at least conceivably is, other than the God made known in salvation history.¹⁶

In sum, Gunton charges that Augustine (and Western theologians after him) presents a vision of a God who is removed from his creatures, a deity who is solitary and non-relational.

Catherine LaCugna argues that the anthropological implications of this theological position also offer little hope for the potential for human beings to live together in loving community. That is, when it is assumed that the human mental life unfolds in the likeness of the divine life insofar as human beings are created in the

¹⁴ Gunton. "Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West." p. 56. Gunton (following Karl Rahner) asserts that Augustine has actually driven an ontological wedge between the divine substance and the divine persons. In other words, at the level of substance, God is one, while at another whole level -- *viz.* relationality -- God is three.

¹⁵ Gunton. "Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West." p. 46. (Italics are original.) Here, Gunton is assessing Augustine's trinitarian analogies in particular.

¹⁶ Gunton. "Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West." p. 35. In her book, *God for Us*, LaCugna follows Gunton's assessment of Augustine's theological legacy, stating that "by sundering God's relationship to us in Christ and the Spirit from God's self-relatedness at the level of intradivine being, Augustine's theology opened itself to a variety of readings, including that which became prominent in scholastic theology, namely, that the relationship of God to us in the economy is not constitutive of what God is as Trinity" (p. 86).

divine image,¹⁷ and when God is conceived as a “self-contained relationality,”¹⁸ it follows that the ideal human life will seek to mirror God’s self-enclosed and self-sufficient existence. LaCugna maintains that such a line of reasoning has led to the modern fascination with the “self” as “an individual center of consciousness, a free, intentional subject” whose end is self-fulfillment rather than loving relationships with others.¹⁹ On the basis of his theological formulations, then, Augustine stands accused of being responsible for modern individualism, with all of its harmful effects upon human communities and human freedom.

Moltmann’s critique of Augustine’s doctrine of God

In his book *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*,²⁰ Jürgen Moltmann expresses many of the criticisms surveyed above as his treatment of Augustine’s trinitarian theology unfolds. All of Moltmann’s objections to Augustine’s doctrine of God center around his understanding that the starting point for the bishop’s trinitarian doctrine is the unity of the divine substance and that this point of departure forces Augustine to treat the “threeness” of God as a secondary matter. He charges that this fundamental imbalance ensues from Augustine’s decision to treat the insights of “philosophical logic” as primary, rather than giving priority to “the biblical

¹⁷ As we shall see, Augustine bases his claim that human souls bear the trinitarian image of God upon the account of the creation of human beings in Genesis 1:26-27.

¹⁸ LaCugna. *God for Us*. p. 103.

¹⁹ LaCugna. *God for Us*. p. 250. See also p. 102.

²⁰ Jürgen Moltmann. *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. Trans. Margaret Kohl. London: SCM Press Ltd, 1981.

testimony.”²¹ Thus, from the outset of his book, Moltmann expresses his disapproval of Augustine’s theology on the grounds that

Augustine proceeded from the one God, whose unity he apprehended in the concept of the one divine essence, only after that arriving at the concept of the trinitarian Persons.²²

On the basis of this analysis of Augustinian theology, Moltmann proceeds to charge that Augustine thought of the divine substance as being “one, indivisible, [and] homogeneous,” with the result that any notion of God as Trinity disintegrates into “abstract monotheism.”²³ Having characterized Augustine’s view of the divine substance as “homogeneous,” and having suggested that Augustine was instrumental in popularizing this view of God among subsequent Western theologians, Moltmann feels justified in suggesting that the Latin trinitarian formulations after Augustine’s amount to “Sabellian modalism.”²⁴ In Moltmann’s mind, this accusation (which, as we have seen, is the same charge brought against Augustine by Adolf von Harnack) is particularly applicable to Augustine, whose influence ensured that this view became normative in the Latin tradition.

According to Moltmann’s analysis, there exists a direct relationship between Augustine’s notion of the undivided unity of the divine substance and the analogy the Latin bishop favours to describe the trinitarian existence of God. The “psychological” analogy which Augustine uses to represent the unity and plurality in

²¹ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 149.

²² *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 16. This sentence lends support to my earlier contention that Augustine’s supposed responsibility for the West’s tendency to prioritize divine unity is accepted as a given among contemporary theologians.

²³ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 16. As we shall see, Rowan Williams describes this view of the homogeneity of the divine substance as “abstract theism,” a term more in keeping with the nomenclature of Enlightenment and Modern theologians.

the Godhead itself gives priority to the unity of substance. Augustine believes that the image of God in the human soul consists in its being, knowing, and willing, actions which occur together in the human mind: these three mental activities represent the plurality of divine persons, while the single mind represents the unity of the divine substance.²⁵ According to Moltmann, it becomes evident that this analogy places undue emphasis upon the unity of God when it is compared with the analogy preferred by theologians representing the Eastern tradition. Whereas Augustine's analogy appeals to the life of a single person, the Cappadocian Fathers, and subsequent Orthodox theologians, have appealed to the category of community of persons as the basis of their trinitarian analogies.²⁶

One corollary which follows from the psychological conception of God, Moltmann thinks, is that Augustine is unable to maintain a coherent understanding of the activity of the trinitarian persons within the created economy. "The reduction of the Trinity into a single subject (even if the subject is a threefold one)," Moltmann writes, "does not do justice to the trinitarian history of God."²⁷ By the phrase, "the trinitarian history of God," Moltmann refers to the activity of the second and third persons of the Trinity in history, as recorded in the Christian Bible. In Moltmann's view, by collapsing the plurality of the Godhead into homogeneity, Augustine renders himself incapable of maintaining the real presence of God in the Son and the Holy

²⁴ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 136.

²⁵ Augustine's description of the image of God in the soul, as presented in *Conf.* 13.11.12 and 13.22.32, will be examined below in Chapter Three.

²⁶ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 198-199. Moltmann points out that one of the standard expressions of this communitarian analogy is that of the family: that is, three persons in the unity of one family.

²⁷ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 157.

Spirit as they act in history to bring about the salvation of humankind. For Augustine, Moltmann would argue, the divine persons do not reveal what God is in his most fundamental and irreducible self, for God is fundamentally and irreducibly one. When the implications of the psychological analogy are pursued to their logical end, Moltmann avers, the economy of salvation is relocated from the biblical account of God's saving activity within the created order into the economy of the individual soul. Moltmann thinks that this shift is present in seminal form in Augustine's description of the psychological Trinity:²⁸ since knowledge of God is to be sought introspectively through the likeness of the individual soul to God, salvation takes place as God's image is perfected in the soul, and as the individual is made able to know God through that image.²⁹ The contrast is obvious between this view of soteriology and the view which maintains the centrality of the redemptive suffering of Christ and the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit within the created economy.³⁰

The psychological analogy is dangerous not only for its soteriological implications, but also for the kind of anthropology that results when its implications are carried through to their end. According to Moltmann, the idea that God is to be conceived as a single self-related personality, and that humankind has been created to image this divine personality, has led to "a theological reason and religious

²⁸ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 154.

²⁹ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 14. Moltmann's charge to the effect that Augustine's use of the psychological image collapses the knowledge of God and human self-knowledge will be taken up at the beginning of Chapter Three.

³⁰ As we saw at the beginning of this section, Moltmann characterizes this contrast by suggesting that Augustine prioritizes "philosophical logic" over "the biblical testimony" (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 149).

justification for the modern bourgeois world's cultivation of the individual . . ."³¹ In short, Moltmann traces modern individualism with its deleterious effects upon human freedom and the potential for authentic human community back to Augustine's use of the image of God in the human soul as an analogy for the inner life of the Trinity. "Possessive individualism"³² is the term Moltmann assigns to the social phenomenon that results from the emphasis upon the single person which he thinks derived ultimately from Augustine's theology. In practical terms, this kind of individualism leads to the following situation:

everyone is supposed to fulfill 'himself' but who fulfills the community? It is a typically Western bias to suppose that social relationships and society are less 'primal' than the person.³³

As we shall see, in *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* Moltmann endeavours to redress some of the damage done in the West by the implications of the psychological trinity, in part by adopting the Eastern practice of speaking of God as a family or a society rather than as a self-related individual. When the divine persons are conceived as existing as an eternal, loving society, it follows that the ideal human existence -- *i.e.* the life which conforms to the image of God -- is lived out as a member of a generous and free society, and not as a possessive and competitive, solitary individual.³⁴

³¹ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 155. Moltmann explains this idea at length, saying, "every individual must be able to develop himself into a many-sided personality. He only has to observe the equal rights of every other person to life, liberty and happiness. The other person is the only thing that limits the development of one's own personality and the realization of one's own self."

³² *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 199.

³³ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 199.

³⁴ See, for example, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 156. More will be said about Moltmann's understanding of the implications of the social Trinity for human communal life later in this Chapter.

Rowan Williams' defense of Augustine's theology

In his article, "*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*,"³⁵ Rowan Williams contests the view of Augustine's theological legacy held by Moltmann and the commentators surveyed thus far. He argues that Augustine "cannot be held responsible for a move towards individualism in anthropology and abstract theism in theology."³⁶ In support of this claim, Williams uses the last two Books of Augustine's *De Trinitate* to demonstrate that the African bishop's use of the psychological analogy yields, on the one hand, a theology in which there can be "no question of any subordination of trinitarian plurality to a unity of essence," and, on the other, an anthropology that envisions human beings finding fulfillment only as they open themselves to loving relationships with the Trinity and with their fellow human beings.³⁷ While Williams bases his presentation of Augustine's trinitarian thought upon the *De Trinitate*, many of his insights are readily applicable to my own study of the *Confessions*, for many of the same ideas are discernible in this earlier work.³⁸

Williams credits Augustine with delineating a doctrine of God in which the trinitarian relations are primary and in no sense subordinate to any separate unitary essence or principle of unity. "So far from separating the divine substance from the

³⁵ Rowan Williams. "*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*." In *Collectanea Augustiniana*. Leuven: Peets, 1990 pp. 317-332.

³⁶ Williams. p. 331.

³⁷ Williams. p. 330.

³⁸ The *De Trinitate* was begun in the same year that the *Confessions* were completed, in 400 C.E.. However, the latter work was not published in its final form until some nineteen years later (see Henry

life of the divine persons,” argues Williams, Augustine “defines that substance in such a way that God cannot be other than relational, trinitarian.”³⁹ Augustine conceives of love as the basis of the relationality in God, love which is inherently desirous of giving the divine life,⁴⁰ a desire which issues in the Father eternally begetting the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit. There is, then, according to Augustine, “no ‘divinity’ not constituted by the act of *caritas*, and thus no divinity that can adequately be conceived apart from the trinity of persons.”⁴¹

Similarly, regarding Augustine’s religious anthropology, Williams proposes that, far from leading unavoidably to the modern, Western obsession with the individual, the saint actually succeeds in “demythologising” the notion of the solitary ego by envisioning the authentic life of the mind as existing in relation to God who gives his wisdom (his *sapientia*) as the basis of that life.⁴² The first and most significant step toward this recognition is to observe that, for Augustine, the image of God “is *not* the mind’s self-relatedness.” Human beings are not self-enclosed and self-sufficient. Rather, the image of God is realized in the soul when “the three moments of our mental agency all have God for their object.”⁴³ In other words, “the mind as independent individuality cannot image God:”⁴⁴ the image exists only in

Chadwick. “Dates.” In *Saint Augustine. Confessions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. xxiv).

³⁹ Williams. p. 325.

⁴⁰ Williams. p. 325.

⁴¹ Williams. p. 325. Williams summarizes his view of Augustine’s accomplishment by saying that the African bishop achieves “the transformation of a concept of the one divine nature as the content of the three divine subsistents (a concept which can suggest a rather static picture of that nature) into the vision of the divine nature as an activity (sapiental love) that cannot but exist in trinitarian relation. This is hardly monism or ‘abstract theism’” (p. 331).

⁴² Williams. p. 331.

⁴³ Williams. p. 319, (Italics are original).

⁴⁴ Williams. p. 320.

relation to God, when the soul simultaneously remembers, understands, and loves God. Williams even suggests that the mind images God because of its “very *difference* from God.”⁴⁵ Before one can fully image the Trinity, one must recognize that the mind’s existence within temporal successiveness, and that “the fragmentary and rather insecure life of memory, understanding and will” indicate one’s need for grace, that is, one’s need to stand in relation to God in order to be fully and authentically human.⁴⁶

Moltmann’s attempt to mitigate the harmful tendencies of the West’s theological legacy

As I have said, unlike many contemporary theologians, Moltmann attempts to redress what he perceives to be the destructive elements of the West’s trinitarian doctrine by basing his conception of the divine life and God’s relationship to human beings upon the notion of the social Trinity described, in particular, by the Cappadocian Fathers. In using the social Trinity as the basis of his own formulation of the doctrine of God, Moltmann is concerned to maintain the following basic premises concerning the relationship between the Trinity and human beings: First, when God reveals himself as Trinity in salvation history, he reveals who he is in himself. Moltmann envisions a dynamic relationship between the immanent and economic trinities whereby Christ’s suffering reveals the sacrificial love that exists eternally in God at the same time as bringing worldly suffering into the immanent Trinity as the Father loses his only Son. Second, the divine nature is inherently

⁴⁵ Williams, p. 326.

relational. Self-giving love is the basis of the society constituted by the eternal relationships between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and love cannot be conceived apart from relationality. This self-giving love is manifest in history most clearly in Christ's passion. Third, Christ saves human beings by making them able to love one another in a way that corresponds to his own self-giving love; by expressing this love for one another within their communities, human beings image the social Trinity. Fourth, at the end of history, God will enable human beings to have a share in his eternal trinitarian society through the Holy Spirit.

The present section of this chapter consists of an overview of Moltmann's constructive use of the social Trinity in *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, illustrating the role he assigns to these four premises in delineating his doctrine of God. This overview is important because, as I will demonstrate through the course of my study, ideas similar to those upon which Moltmann depends to avoid what he thinks of as the flawed tendencies of the Western tradition are employed by Augustine in the *Confessions*, albeit in slightly different form.

According to Moltmann, then, through his activity in history, God reveals himself as a society consisting of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He believes that when the Gospels are read aright, God's revelation of himself through Jesus Christ will be "understood in a trinitarian sense." This is so because the content of this revelation consists in Christ's proclamation of his Father's kingdom (and the manifestation of

⁴⁶ Williams. p. 326.

his own divine sonship), and this proclamation is delivered in the power of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷ Thus, writes Moltmann,

the ‘Abba’ revelation of God’s nature dominated [Christ’s] own relation to God as well as his proclamation of God to men and women. His preaching of the kingdom and the effect he had were founded on his relationship to his Father.⁴⁸

He rounds out the trinitarian view of Christ’s ministry by stating that

the baptism, call, proclamation and ministry of Jesus takes [*sic*] place through the Spirit and in the Spirit.⁴⁹

Moltmann believes that by starting from the biblical accounts of Christ’s life and ministry, he is able to maintain a sufficiently robust notion of the plurality of the divine persons and avoid what he perceives to be the folly of classical formulations that overemphasize the divine unity because they start from the principles of philosophical logic. God, the Trinity, gives himself to be known and loved by human beings when the Father sends the Son who reveals the Father in the power of the Spirit.⁵⁰

For Moltmann, then, the sending of the Son constitutes the core of God’s revelation of himself as Trinity. Specifically, it is Christ’s passion that is at the center of “the theological proclamation of the Christian tradition.”⁵¹ Given that Christ’s passion is the climax of God’s self-revelation, Moltmann reasons that it is

⁴⁷ Richard Bauckham writes that, for Moltmann, “the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity is the history of Jesus Christ, which the New Testament tells as a narrative of relationships between three divine Persons. So the non-negotiable starting-point for trinitarian doctrine is that three divine subjects relate to each other in salvation-history” (Richard Bauckham. *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995, p. 173).

⁴⁸ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* p. 74.

⁴⁹ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* p. 74.

⁵⁰ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* p. 75.

⁵¹ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* p. 21.

contradictory to suggest that God himself is absent from the suffering of Christ:⁵² after all, how could God be absent from the most crucial moment of his self-revelation to his creatures?⁵³ On the contrary, in Moltmann's estimation, God is intimately involved in the circumstances of the creatures whom he loves. He is truly affected by his life within the economy of creation and he is truly open for a relationship with humankind, attributes which theological formulations tending toward Modalism are hard pressed to maintain. The cross of Christ reveals that the eternal relationships among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are characterized by the suffering that accompanies sacrificial and self-giving love: just as Christ gave himself on the cross, so the trinitarian persons eternally and lovingly give themselves to one another. The suffering of God's self-sacrificing love flows from the immanent life of the Trinity into the economy in the form of Christ's suffering, and the suffering incurred in Christ's self-sacrificing love flows from the economy back into God's immanence.⁵⁴ By positing this dynamic relationship between the suffering love expressed by the immanent and economic trinities, Moltmann attempts to ensure that

⁵² "If God is incapable of suffering," writes Moltmann, "then -- if we are to be consistent -- Christ's passion can only be viewed as a human tragedy" (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 22). Christian theologians must choose: either God reveals himself in Christ, and so, is capable of suffering, or Christ was merely a man and God must be thought of as radically transcending the created order.

⁵³ According to Moltmann's interpretation of the history of Christian doctrine, what he calls the "apathy axiom" that is so important to the Greek philosophical conceptions of God "has left a deeper impress on the basic concept of the doctrine of God than has the history of Christ's passion" (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 22). Moltmann seeks to redress this imbalance by abandoning the "apathetic" conception of the divine nature.

⁵⁴ Moltmann presents the following exegesis of Christ's words of dereliction in support of his notion of the dynamic interrelatedness between the immanence and economy of God: "The Son suffers death in this forsakenness. The Father suffers the death of the Son. So the pain of the Father corresponds to the death of the Son. And when in this descent into hell the Son loses the Father, then in this judgment the Father also loses the Son. Here the innermost life of the Trinity is at stake. Here the communicating love of the Father turns into infinite pain over the sacrifice of the Son. Here the responding love of the Son becomes infinite suffering over his repulsion and rejection by the Father.

human beings have access to God himself. God's suffering is for Moltmann the guarantee that God is truly engaged in relating with his creatures.⁵⁵

According to Moltmann's interpretation, then, Christ's passion reveals the self-giving love⁵⁶ that is shared eternally by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Indeed, it reveals that the most basic thing that can be said about God is that he is love.⁵⁷ If God is love, Moltmann reasons, by definition a plurality of persons must also exist in the Godhead, for

love cannot be consummated by a solitary subject. An individuality cannot communicate itself: individuality is ineffable, unutterable. If God is love he is at once the lover, the beloved and the love itself.⁵⁸

Logic confirms what the Gospels reveal, viz. that God is Trinity, for if God is love he must not be solitary: there must be in God "the lover, the beloved, and the love itself." There must be relationality, or otherness in God so that his love can be "consummated." In Moltmann's estimation, self-giving love forms the basis of the eternal relationships which make up the social Trinity.

What happens on Golgotha reaches into the innermost depths of the Godhead, putting its impress on the trinitarian life in eternity" (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 81).

⁵⁵ Moltmann's charge that Augustine's theology does not do justice to the reality of God's trinitarian relationality may well stem from Moltmann's rejection of the bishop's strong assertion of what Moltmann calls the "apathy axiom" (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 22). I will comment further on this disagreement between Augustine and Moltmann in Chapter Three and in my Conclusion.

⁵⁶ Self-giving is another way of expressing the notion of self-communication referred to in the passage quoted just below from *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 57. Both are equally fundamental to the expression of love by God for, elsewhere, Moltmann asserts that "God is love. That means that God is self-giving" (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 83).

⁵⁷ See for instance, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. pp. 57 and 82, where Moltmann quotes I John 4:16, "God is love."

⁵⁸ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 57.

One corollary of Moltmann's conception of love as the basis of the trinitarian relationships is the idea that God's self-love is necessary, not free. Moltmann explains as follows:

God is love means in *trinitarian* terms: in eternity and out of the very necessity of his being the Father loves the only begotten Son. He loves him with the love that both engenders and brings forth. In eternity and out of the very necessity of his being the Son responds to the Father's love through his obedience and his surrender to the Father.⁵⁹

Father and Son love one another "out of the very necessity of [their] being," that is, they cannot fail to love one another because what it is to be God is to love. Moltmann calls God's necessary love "the love of like for like" because, while the Son is "other than the Father," he is not "other in essence." The love of like for like in God is insufficiently full to be a source of bliss for God. In short, "like is not enough for like."⁶⁰ In order for God to find bliss, he must love freely, and he must receive a free response to his love. For this reason, God goes out of himself to create human beings so there can be an other that is different from his own nature to receive his free love and to love him freely in return. Creation exists, Moltmann avers, "because the eternal love seeks fellowship and desires response in freedom."⁶¹ Moltmann is forced to concede that God needs his creation and is dependent upon it to be who he is, *viz.* the God whose love receives both a necessary and a free response.⁶² "In this sense," writes Moltmann.

⁵⁹ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 58. (Italics are supplied by Moltmann.)

⁶⁰ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 58.

⁶¹ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 59.

⁶² Thus, Moltmann asserts that "God is love. That means he is responsive love, both in essence *and* freely" (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 58; italics are original).

God 'needs' the world and man. If God is love, then he neither will nor can be without the one who is beloved.⁶³

Like the assertion of divine passibility described earlier in the present section, Moltmann intends that the idea that God is dependent upon his creatures should affirm the reality of God's engagement with the created realm. God himself needs his creatures; God himself enters the created order to reveal himself there; and, as we shall see, God himself ultimately brings his creatures into his own trinitarian life so that he (and they) might achieve bliss as they respond perfectly and freely to his freely given love.

I have said that the Son enters the created order to reveal God's trinitarian life to humankind through Christ. The Son's activities within the economy of creation also bring about the salvation of humankind as he makes humans able to conform their lives to the image of God. According to Moltmann, Christ saves human beings, restoring in them the image of the Trinity, by allowing them to participate in his own self-giving love: people are able to share his suffering as they love one another, and by so doing, they are able to image the divine Trinity in their relationships.

Moltmann explains this as follows:

It is in fellowship and in the correspondence to the Son's responding, self-giving love for the Father that creation arrives at its truth and God's image on earth achieves freedom.⁶⁴

⁶³ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 58. Moltmann describes the necessity of God's creative act elsewhere in *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* as being linked to the "necessity" of God's being: "God emptied himself by virtue of his love, out of the necessity of his being, going out to 'his Other', the world, and only came fully to himself by virtue of that Other's response to his love" (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. pp. 106-107).

⁶⁴ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* p. 113.

In order to become God's image on earth, human beings must give themselves to one another in selfless love, just as Christ gave himself for humankind, and just as the trinitarian persons eternally give themselves to one another. Such acts of loving self-sacrifice "correspond" to the love with which the Son loves the Father. As a result of this correspondence, the loving "fellowship" of human beings comes to image the fellowship shared by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their inner-trinitarian relationships. This is why Moltmann refers to his approach as the "social" image of the Trinity (as opposed to the "psychological" image preferred by Augustine), for a solitary individual cannot image God; rather, those who live in loving fellowship with one another express the trinitarian image of God.⁶⁵ Those participating in a community that images the fellowship of the trinitarian persons "achieve freedom" because their community is characterized by self-sacrificial love rather than power struggles and domination.⁶⁶

The freedom of those participating in the community which images the Trinity is dramatically different from the relative bondage of those whose lives do not yet correspond to the love of Christ. The latter group of people, Moltmann thinks, remain in their sin, because sin is expressed through actions which eschew self-giving in the context of loving relationships: sinfulness leaves human beings "unfree, closed,

⁶⁵ Thus, Moltmann writes, "a person is only God's image in fellowship with other people: 'In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them' (Gen. 1.27)" (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, p. 155).

⁶⁶ Richard Bauckham summarizes this idea, saying that "in place of the concept of God as divine monarch providing the prototype for human domination, at the expense of freedom, the social Trinity provides a model for human community in which people are free for each other and find freedom with each other" (*The Theology of Jurgen Moltmann*, p. 176-177).

introverted.”⁶⁷ Indeed, human “closed-in-ness” is a morbid condition, described by Moltmann as a “deadly withdrawal” into oneself,⁶⁸ deadly because he thinks that life is available only by receiving God’s love and by being made to participate through that love in the divine life.

The freedom experienced in the human community in the present time, however, is provisional when compared with the freedom that will belong to the human community in the eschaton. Moltmann envisions the history of the relationship between God and his creation as a series of three provisional stages of liberty which bring humankind progressively closer to the ultimate freedom that will be enjoyed by all human beings when they are made able to participate directly in the trinitarian life of God at the end of history. Each of the three stages, the “kingdom of the Father,”⁶⁹ the “kingdom of the Son,”⁷⁰ and the “kingdom of the Spirit,”⁷¹ is named

⁶⁷ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 211.

⁶⁸ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 213.

⁶⁹ The Father gives the freedom of servitude. Moltmann explains this apparent contradiction by saying that, “in the Kingdom of the Father, God is the Creator and the lord of those he has created. Men and women are his created beings and are hence his property as well. In their naked existence human beings are completely and utterly dependent on their Creator and preserver. They can contribute nothing to what God creates, for they owe everything they are to God’s creative activity. If God takes them into his service, becoming their master and lord, this is their exaltation and their mark of distinction. To be ‘the servant of God’ raises men and women above all the rest of God’s creatures. To be used and needed by God the Lord, and therefore not to be useless and superfluous, gives their lives meaning (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* p. 219).

⁷⁰ In the kingdom of the Son, “the servants of the Lord become the children of the Father. In the fellowship of the Son people enter into a new relationship with God.” This new relationship consists in a “personal and intimate relationship to the Father (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* p. 220).”

⁷¹ In the kingdom of the Spirit, the freedom of servitude (from the kingdom of the Father) and the freedom of childhood (from the kingdom of the Son) are both preserved, but the dimension of the freedom of friendship between humankind and God is added, according to Jesus’ promise in John’s Gospel: “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you (John 15:15, quoted in *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* p. 220).” Moltmann explains that the new liberty of friendship is significant because those who are indwelt by the Spirit are made able to know God directly: “by virtue of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, people enter into this new ‘direct’ relationship with God. The freedom of God’s friends does not evolve out of the freedom of God’s

for the person of the Trinity who is uniquely responsible for making the freedom available to humankind. The final, eschatological state of freedom is termed the “kingdom of glory.” At some future time, God will bring all of creation to himself, and he will perfect it by making it like himself, that is, by deifying it.⁷² The deification of humankind, Moltmann thinks, is accomplished by the activity of the Holy Spirit. Having been so deified, human beings will be able to enter into the divine society that exists between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as they participate in the Spirit’s love for the Father and the Son. This is ultimate freedom, for they will receive God’s love directly and perfectly return that love. Moltmann explains the entry of human beings into the trinitarian life of God, saying that

it is the powers and energies of the Holy Spirit that bridge the difference between Creator and creature, the actor and the act, the master and the work -- a difference which otherwise seems to be unbridged by any relation at all. This certainly does not make creation divine, but it is nevertheless brought into the sphere of the Spirit’s power, and acquires a share in the inner life of the Trinity itself.⁷³

There is no direct relation between God and his creatures unless the Spirit bridges the differences between human beings and God.⁷⁴ God’s suffering will become bliss when he is finally able to enjoy his image, and the image will finally experience true

children. It only becomes possible when people know themselves in God and God in them. That is the light of the Holy Spirit (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 220).”

⁷² Moltmann uses the term “deified” to describe the final state of the creation once it has been “gathered into the eternal life of the triune God” (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 213). Evidently, he does not think that this deification makes the creation divine, as the following quotation suggests. Rather, his use of “deification” appears to connote the process of making the creation enough like God for it to participate in God’s eternal life.

⁷³ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 113.

⁷⁴ Richard Bauckham adds some clarity to the question of how the Spirit enables the human community to participate directly in the trinitarian life of God in the kingdom of glory: The life of the Trinity, Bauckham writes, “is open to us and can include us because one of the three, the Spirit, relates to the Father and the Son in such a way as to be able to be our relationship to the Father and the Son.

freedom as it participates in the perfect self-giving love that characterizes the relationships in the social Trinity.

Correspondence between Augustine's theology and Moltmann's constructive agenda

As I have already indicated, it appears that the key notions which Moltmann proposes as necessary amendments to what he perceives as the flaws inherent in the Western theological tradition actually correspond to ideas which inform Augustine's doctrinal statements in the *Confessions*. For instance, in Chapter Two of my study, I shall attempt to demonstrate that the trinitarian activity of God in creation is a revelation of who God is in himself, for Augustine consistently uses terms that can be understood as implying relationality in God's immanent life. The idea that God cannot be conceived apart from relationality is consistent with the first two of Moltmann's premises, listed at the beginning of the previous section, which state that God reveals his trinitarian nature in salvation history, and that love is the basis of the eternal relationships between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁷⁵ In addition, part of Chapter Three will be devoted to the question of how human beings come to know God through the activity of the Son and the Spirit in the world, a theme in keeping with Moltmann's second premise. Finally, in Chapter Four I shall demonstrate that the activity of the Son and the Holy Spirit within the church heals human pride, which Augustine thinks is destructive of community, and enables human beings to conform

The Spirit is God's ability to be an open fellowship in which his creation can be included, just as the Son is God's ability to be incarnate as a human person" (*The Theology of Jurgen Moltmann*, p. 164).

⁷⁵ As we shall see, the correspondence between Augustine's theological ideas and Moltmann's second premise must be affirmed more tentatively on the basis of the evidence available in the

to the image of God as they give themselves in love to God and to one another. As the church's love is perfected, Augustine thinks that the Holy Spirit exalts the church, making it able to participate in the trinitarian life of God. The correspondence between the material I present in Chapter Four and Moltmann's third and fourth premise should be relatively clear, for Moltmann maintains that Christ makes human beings able to foster loving relationships in the context of community, and that the Spirit will enable human beings to partake of God's trinitarian life in the eschaton. As we shall see, in spite of the compatibility which exists in a general way between the theological aims of Augustine and those of Moltmann, it appears that, in the end, Moltmann objects to Augustine's theology because Augustine refuses to admit the possibility of divine mutability into his doctrine of God.

Confessions because Augustine does not refer explicitly to love as the basis of the immanent trinitarian relations.

Chapter Two: The Trinitarian Life of God

In presenting his vision of the trinitarian life of God in the *Confessions*, Augustine chooses not to delineate a formal and systematic doctrine of the Trinity. He rarely sustains a discussion of God's trinitarian life for more than a few sentences, and technical precision is lacking from the language he uses to describe the relationships between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There are only traces in the *Confessions* of the logic that Augustine would later employ in the *De Trinitate* where he maintained that God must be relational because God is by nature love, and because love cannot be conceived apart from relation. Yet, even without a formal conceptual structure at the forefront of his discussion of God as Trinity, I believe the kind of logic which requires that "God cannot be other than relational, trinitarian"¹ is readily to be found in this earlier work. Indeed, I will contend that the evidence available to us from the *Confessions* casts doubt upon the validity of Moltmann's claim that Augustine's theology prioritizes the unity of the divine substance over the plurality, and so reduces the Trinity to "abstract monotheism."²

In this chapter, then, I will attempt to demonstrate that the God of the *Confessions* is neither static nor unitary. From Augustine's description of God's creative act, I will show that God's goodness is expressed outwardly by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as God creates from the fullness of his goodness, and that the same goodness, when expressed in God himself, is described in explicitly relational

¹ Williams. "*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*." p. 325.

terms. I will go on to suggest that Augustine may well have thought that the same love which is expressed by God within the created order is also expressed in the eternal trinitarian relationships which characterize the divine nature itself. In short, I will maintain that Augustine does not conceive of the divine nature apart from relationality, and that he envisions this relationality being expressed as well in the economic Trinity as in the immanent Trinity.

The relationship between God and creation in Book 13

Augustine's most extended consideration of the trinitarian life of God in the *Confessions* is embedded within his discussion of God's role as creator in Book 13. This final Book consists of a wide-ranging and eclectic meditation upon the way that God relates to his creatures as he made them in the beginning, and as he remakes and perfects those who fall away from him in the course of time. Throughout this meditation, it is clear that one of the most fundamental things Augustine wishes to say about how God creates, and by extension about how he relates to what he has made, is that the creative act springs from the "fullness of [God's] goodness."³ As we shall see, Augustine makes extensive use of this idea of the generative nature of God's goodness in his conception of the divine nature.

² *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 16. Moltmann's critique of Augustine's doctrine of God is summarized in Chapter One of this study.

³ See *Conf.* 13.2.2 and 13.4.5.

Near the beginning of the passage in question, Augustine asserts that all things in creation, whether spiritual or physical, formed or unformed, depend upon the Word of God⁴ for their existence. He then makes the following confession to God:

From you, the One, the supreme Good, they have being and are all ‘very good’ (Gen. 1:31). What merit had these things before you even to receive a formless existence when, but for you, they would not exist at all?⁵

Not only is there goodness in God from which he creates, but God’s own nature is goodness itself, for God is the one “supreme Good.”⁶ Any other good thing that is not God must be a part of the totality of creation that God made to be “very good.” As such, it must derive its goodness and its existence from him, for, as the bishop says here, apart from God it “would not exist at all.” God did not grant existence to the creation because it had some merit of its own before it was made, for it simply did not exist before he made it. Nor did he create because there was a paucity of goodness in his being that had to be filled by some good thing other than himself, for he is goodness itself. Instead, the fact that the whole of God’s creation is “very good”⁷ appears to suggest that the act of creation must itself be an act of goodness, since the act has a good result. The passage quoted here implies that, for Augustine, God creates because of the goodness which he is himself, because the act of creating is good, and because the creation itself, taken as a whole, is very good.

⁴ That is, the Son, the second person of the Trinity.

⁵ *Conf.* 13.2.2.

⁶ It is common for Augustine to refer to God as the highest Good, or the Good itself in the *Confessions*. In addition to 13.2.2 quoted above, see also 2.6.12, 2.10.18, 7.3.5, and 13.38.53.

⁷ Augustine alludes to Genesis 1:31, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good,” in *Conf.* 13.2.2, quoted above. He also cites this passage to the same effect at 7.12.18, 10.34.51, and 13.34.49.

Augustine's comments concerning the nature of his own existence as a particular part of God's creation provide further insight into the bishop's view of why God creates and how he relates to what he has made. "Before I existed you were," he says to God,

and I had no being to which you could grant existence. Nevertheless here I am as a result of your goodness, which goes before all that you made me to be and all out of which you made me. You had no need of me. I do not possess such goodness as to give you help, my Lord and my God. It is not as if I could so serve you as to prevent you becoming weary in your work, or that your power is diminished if it lacks my homage. Nor do I cultivate you like land, in the sense that you would have no one to worship you if I were not doing so. But I serve and worship you so that from you good may come to me.⁸

This quotation is significant for its contention that God creates for the benefit of his creatures and not for the purpose of gaining from them anything that he did not have before he created. Augustine serves and worships God, not because God would be somehow diminished without Augustine's devotion, but so that he can receive goodness from God. God does not need anything outside of himself in order for him to be God.⁹ Augustine, like the rest of creation, exists simply as a result of God's goodness. And, like the rest of creation, nothing about the saint compelled God to create him: his own goodness is insufficient to help God in any way, and what goodness he does possess is the result of God's prior goodness. The relationship between God and creation is one-way insofar as every creature depends upon God for its goodness and for its very being, while God needs nothing outside himself. Yet, precisely because of God's goodness, he cares for what he has made and does not turn

⁸ *Conf.* 13.1.1.

from his creatures, even when they turn from him.¹⁰ It appears that God does want Augustine's service and worship, not because God needs them for their own sake, but because the bishop needs the good that comes to him from God as a result of these actions.¹¹ What is emerging from our discussion of God's relationship to his creation is that God's goodness is such that it gives goodness: from the "fullness" of his goodness he makes creation "very good," and he continues to give good things to those creatures who seek him. As we shall see, the self-giving nature of God's goodness is an important feature of the bishop's understanding of the divine life.

Divine self-sufficiency and Augustine's trinitarian logic

The bishop's characterization of the relationship between God and creation, then, amounts to an assertion of creation's absolute dependence upon God and God's utter self-sufficiency.¹² The ability of God to fulfill himself is a topic that Augustine addresses in several different ways. For example, in various parts of the *Confessions*,

⁹ This is in marked contrast to the system of Jürgen Moltmann, surveyed above in Chapter One, where we saw that he thinks God was compelled to create because he needed an object for his love outside of himself (see *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, pp. 58-59).

¹⁰ In a similar vein, Augustine confesses that God seeks his creatures even when they are not seeking him in *Conf* 11.2.4, and God did not forget him even when he forgot God in *Conf* 13.1.1. Although God does not need his creatures, that is, although the existence or non-existence of creation does not effect God's inner being, still, Augustine thinks that God desires a relationship with those whom he has made. This runs contrary to Moltmann's contention that no real relationship exists between God and humankind unless creatures are able to effect change in God's inner being through suffering.

¹¹ Indeed, at the beginning of the *Confessions*, Augustine phrases a similar idea in terms of the command that human beings should love him: "What am I to you," he asks God, "that you command me to love you, and that, if I fail to love you, you are angry with me and threaten me with vast miseries?" (1.5.5). This question appears in a context where Augustine notes that God does not need humankind but desires that they should love him for their own good, so they might avoid the "vast miseries" entailed in being without this loving relationship with their creator.

¹² Augustine states that God's being is "sufficient to itself" in *Conf* 13.11.12.

he asserts that God is for himself his own goodness,¹³ his own blessedness,¹⁴ his own joy,¹⁵ and his own rest.¹⁶ In each of these instances, the language which the bishop uses to describe God's self-sufficiency suggests that he is making God's ability to fulfill himself turn upon the idea that the divine life is characterized by self-reflexivity and self-relatedness. The logic appears to be that God is self-sufficient and self-fulfilling because he provides for himself all that he needs to be fulfilled from the bounty and goodness of his own life. The following passage repeats the idea seen above, that God does not need his creation, and it explains this is so because God is his own goodness. Addressing God in the second person, Augustine says,

even if the creation had either never come into existence or remained formless, nothing could be lacking to the good which you are to yourself. You made it not because you needed it, but from the fullness of your goodness . . . but not as if the result brought you fulfillment of delight.¹⁷

The reflexive language which the bishop uses to describe God's self-sufficiency is evident in the second line of this quotation. Here, God is described as being a source of goodness to himself. This reflexive language indicates that Augustine thinks there is a kind of self-relatedness in God, and it appears that this self-relatedness in God is presented by Augustine as the reason why nothing would be lacking in God if creation did not exist. In addition, the last line of this passage seems to imply that God is for himself his own "fulfillment of delight": he does not need created reality to supply him with delight precisely because he fulfills himself through his own self-

¹³ *Conf.* 13.4.5. The idea that God is his own source of goodness will be examined in some detail later in this paragraph.

¹⁴ *Conf.* 13.3.4.

¹⁵ *Conf.* 8.3.8.

¹⁶ *Conf.* 13.37.52.

¹⁷ *Conf.* 13.4.5.

relatedness. Knowing that God's abundant goodness is generative (for it is responsible for bringing creation into existence), and knowing that this goodness accounts for a kind of relationality in God, one might well think on the basis of this passage that the divine life generates its own relationality so that it might delight in imparting and receiving its own goodness.

It would appear that Augustine is describing God as being inherently self-relational, although, according to the passage quoted above, this relationality is not presented in explicitly trinitarian terms. However, indications are already present in the opening of Book 13 that Augustine understands the reflexivity of the divine life in terms of a trinitarian relationality. For instance, he has described the Son and the Spirit as having been involved in God's act of creation. As we have seen, the Word of God (*i.e.* the Son) granted existence and form to created substances.¹⁸ Elsewhere, the Spirit is said to have been borne above the waters during the act of creation.¹⁹ That Augustine considers God's self-relatedness to be trinitarian in nature becomes apparent in a passage which follows immediately upon the text from 13.4.5 examined in the preceding paragraph. Here, Augustine continues his consideration of the relationship between God and his creation, this time from the perspective of the account of the creation in Genesis 1. The following is the bishop's summary of the "enigmatic image" of the Trinity which he finds in the biblical creation narrative: "where the name of God occurs," he writes,

¹⁸ *Conf.* 13.2.2.

¹⁹ *Conf.* 13.4.5. This description from Genesis 1:2 of the Spirit being "borne above the waters" during the creation is one that Augustine finds particularly difficult to interpret with any precision. As

I have come to see the Father who made these things; where the 'Beginning' is mentioned, I see the Son by whom he made these things. Believing that my God is Trinity, in accordance with my belief I searched in God's holy oracles and found your Spirit to be borne above the waters. There is the Trinity, my God -- Father and Son and Holy Spirit, Creator of the entire creation.²⁰

The same God who is described a few sentences earlier as creating "from the fullness of his goodness," who does not need creation because of the fullness of delight he derives from his own self-relationality, is here described as Trinity. That is, the creative act which expresses the "fullness of God's goodness" is carried out through the trinitarian activity of God. If God's goodness is in fact given outward expression by God's action as Trinity, it seems reasonable to expect that the inward expression of God's goodness, wherein nothing is lacking to the good which God is to himself,²¹ is also expressed in a trinitarian manner. Granted, Augustine does not draw an explicit connection here between God's self-sufficiency and his trinitarian life. However, it is both plausible and likely that the self-reflexivity accompanying the bishop's descriptions of God's self-sufficiency is actually trinitarian relationality. In other words, I am suggesting that Augustine thinks God needs no other source of goodness or delight outside himself because he is perfectly fulfilled as the Father delights in the Son and the Spirit, and as the Son delights in the Father and the Spirit, and as the Spirit delights in the Father and the Son.²²

we shall see, the conclusions he is able to reach from his painstaking exegesis of this passage are crucial for the understanding of his doctrine of God that I am endeavouring to present in this chapter.

²⁰ *Conf.* 13.5.6.

²¹ *Conf.* 13.4.5.

²² Such a vision of the relationality inherent in the Godhead is consistent with Moltmann's second premise, described in Chapter One, which states that the divine nature is inherently relational.

The place of love in Augustine's trinitarian logic

From the bishop's inquiry into a phrase from Genesis 1:2 which records that "the Spirit was borne above the waters" during the act of creation, it is possible to gain further insight into his understanding of the nature of the relationships that exist between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He begins this rather involved piece of exegesis by addressing the following question to God:

what was the reason why your scripture mentioned your Spirit only after it had mentioned heaven and earth 'invisible and unorganized' and 'darkness above the abyss'?²³

He poses the question because he is certain that scriptural language which appears to speak of God in terms of physical substance (other than texts referring to Christ) must not be thought of as referring to a literal body of God.²⁴ He is concerned here to understand the phrase from Genesis in a way that does not imply that the Spirit needed material things so there would be something over which he could be borne up. He concludes that there must be some other reason why it was "inappropriate to introduce the Spirit except with the words that he was 'borne above'."²⁵

The answer, Augustine thinks, is that the Spirit transcends created reality because it is, by nature, divine charity. The "able reader," he says, will recognize that there is a connection between the Pentateuchal saying that the Spirit was "borne above" and the apostolic teaching "that 'love is diffused in your hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us' (Rom. 5:5)."²⁶ The bishop appeals to a second pauline text

²³ *Conf.* 13.6.7.

²⁴ Upon leaving the Manichees, Augustine was relieved to learn from Ambrose's preaching that the Church did not teach that God was composed of physical matter (*Conf.* 6.4.5).

²⁵ *Conf.* 13.6.7.

²⁶ *Conf.* 13.7.8.

to fill out the meaning he thinks the passages from Romans and Genesis are meant to convey:

Teaching us concerning the things of the Spirit he [Paul] demonstrates that the way of charity is 'supereminent' (1 Cor. 12.1).²⁷

To be divine charity, then, is to be "supereminent." We have already seen that Augustine thinks of the divine nature as being the "highest" or the "supreme" Good. As the Good itself, God transcends all other instances of goodness because he himself is the most perfect instance of goodness. So it is with love. The Spirit is said to transcend all created existence -- after all, Augustine's term "supereminent" appears to carry with it the notion of transcendence, since it implies being exalted in a superlative way²⁸ -- because of the perfection of his nature, a nature which the apostle (and the Christian community generally) knows to be loving because the Spirit has been diffused in his heart.²⁹ The Spirit, who is "supereminent from the beginning,"³⁰ is said to be borne above created reality because of the superiority of its nature, relative to created natures.

But the Holy Spirit is not the only supereminent one mentioned in this passage, and the Spirit is not the only supereminent one who is said to be loving. The bishop continues his brief survey of the writings of Paul, saying that the apostle

bows the knee for us to you [God] that we may know 'the supereminent knowledge of the love of Christ' (Eph. 3:14, 19).³¹

²⁷ *Conf.* 13.7.8.

²⁸ A little later, in *Conf.* 13.9.10, Augustine attributes to the nature which Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share the "transcendence of immutable divinity."

²⁹ Romans 5:5, cited earlier in this paragraph.

³⁰ *Conf.* 13.6.7.

³¹ *Conf.* 13.7.8. The idea that Paul bows the knee for us that we may know Christ is consistent with Augustine's teaching that one must become humble before one can know God through Christ. The saint recalls that he had become "puffed up with knowledge (1 Cor. 8:1)" during the time he spent

The bishop does not precisely say that Christ is supereminent; what he says is that the knowledge of Christ's love is supereminent. However, it seems unlikely that Augustine would say that the knowledge of Christ's love was supereminent if the loving agent were not himself supereminent. Indeed, elsewhere in the *Confessions*, he asserts that Christ has been raised "on high," where he is seated at God's right hand.³² Whereas the Spirit's love is poured out into our hearts, Christ's love was revealed when the Word took flesh and dwelt among us.³³ Of the love of Christ, Augustine writes,

how you have loved us, good Father: you did not 'spare your only Son but delivered him up for us sinners' (Rom 8:32). How you have loved us, for whose sake 'he did not think it a usurpation to be equal to you and was made subject to the death of the cross' (Phil. 2:6, 8).³⁴

The Son's willingness to be "delivered up" for sinners in Christ and to be "made subject to the death of the cross," even though he was "equal" to the Father, is a tangible expression of God's love for his creatures. Not only does Christ love the creation, as Augustine says in 13.7.8, but here, the bishop indicates that the Father loves through Christ. From the texts we have been considering, then, it appears that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love what they have made, and that two divine persons -- the Son and the Spirit -- reveal God's love within the economy of creation.

studying the books of the Platonists (*Conf.* 7.20.26), and he confesses that this pride kept him from knowing Christ: "to possess my God, my humble Jesus," he says, "I was not yet humble enough. I did not know what his weakness was meant to teach" (*Conf.* 7.18.24). More will be said below in Chapter Three about the effects of pride in the soul and the need to share in Christ's humility before it is possible to know God.

³² *Conf.* 9.4.9.

³³ The bishop quotes John 1:14 at *Conf.* 7.9.14, 7.18.24, and 10.43.69.

³⁴ *Conf.* 10.43.69.

It does not seem to be too great a leap from the recognition that each of the trinitarian persons loves the creation to the idea that the same persons relate to one another in love in God's immanent life. While this idea is never articulated in a formal way in the *Confessions*, still, it seems consistent with Augustine's logic of divine self-relationality. For instance, Augustine's description of the joy which God derives from his own relational nature is cast in terms which are similar to the way that Augustine would later speak of divine self-love in the *De Trinitate*. The bishop envisions God's eternal joy as unwavering in its fullness and perfection, in contrast to the temporal joys available to humankind, joys which are bound to be preceded and followed by pain and hostility precisely because they are experienced within the flux of time. Addressing God in the second person, Augustine writes,

you are eternal to yourself, you are your own joy; and beings round you continually rejoice in your society.³⁵

Even though the persons of the Trinity are not explicitly named in the sentence quoted here, there are indications that Augustine intends his reader to understand that the vision of the Trinity is the cause of the jubilation of the celestial beings. The phrases "you are eternal to yourself" and, especially, "you are your own joy" imply that God's self-relatedness allows him to be for himself a source of joy. Indeed, the conception of God's self-relatedness presented here is formally identical to the idea of God being his own goodness and his own delight, examined earlier in this chapter. It is a short conceptual step from saying that God is for himself a source of joy to declaring that God loves himself, for the kind of relationality implied by enjoyment is

³⁵ *Conf.* 8.3.8.

also implied when we say that God loves himself: just as when God enjoys himself we understand that there is one who enjoys, one who is enjoyed, and the delight that binds the one enjoying to the one who is enjoyed, so when God loves himself we understand that there is a lover (the Father), a beloved (the Son), and the love which flows between them (the Holy Spirit). This notion of the relational nature of love is worked out at some length in the *De Trinitate*.³⁶ However, given the elements I have drawn together here, it does not seem anachronistic to suggest that such an understanding of the divine relationality could be functioning tacitly in the *Confessions*.

Regardless of the soundness of my suggestions to the effect that the love expressed in the economy by the Son and the Spirit is actually an outward expression of the love that characterizes the immanent trinitarian relations, I think that my findings concerning the nature of divine goodness are sufficient to show that the charges levelled against Augustine's doctrine of God by Moltmann are not borne out by the evidence from the *Confessions*. It is clear enough that God acts in goodness towards his creation, for the creation itself is from the overflow of God's goodness; it is certain that Augustine considers the expression of goodness within God himself to have a relational character, because God is his own source of goodness; and it is likely that the expressions of divine goodness both in the economy and in God himself are trinitarian in nature. While my proposal regarding the role of love in Augustine's understanding of God's trinitarian life is admittedly less certain than my conclusions concerning the role of goodness, I think that the implications are the

³⁶ See for example, *De Trin* 8, 12 and 9, 2.

same. That is, the Son and the Spirit bestow the eternal love they share in the immanent Trinity (and not some other, lower kind of love) within the economy of creation. As we shall see in Chapter Four, Augustine's conception of the activity of God within the church lends support to this view, for he indicates that the love poured into human hearts by the Holy Spirit engenders loving relationships both between human beings and between the church and God. Since I have demonstrated that God reveals his very nature in the Son and the Spirit, and since God's activity in the economy generates relationality in the church, it is reasonable to suggest that divine love also generates and sustains the eternal relationships in the immanent Trinity.

As we shall see, just as the revelation of God's goodness and love in creation are not of a second order but are outward expressions of the goodness and love which occur in God himself, so also the Son and the Spirit reveal who God is in himself through their activity in the world.³⁷ Thus, in Chapter Three, I shall examine Augustine's understanding of how God makes himself known in the second and third persons of the Trinity. But it is in Chapter Four where the dynamic relationship between the immanent and economic trinities becomes most apparent. There, I shall inquire into the trinitarian activity of God in the church, where God recreates fallen human beings through the saving activity of the Son and the Spirit, and where God prepares a community of human beings to participate in his own eternal, trinitarian life.

³⁷ Once again, the convergence of the general aims of Augustine and Moltmann is evident here, as Augustine expresses an idea similar to Moltmann's contention that God reveals who he is in himself when he makes himself known as Trinity.

Chapter Three: Knowledge of Self and Knowledge of God

In modern times, Moltmann thinks, a shift has occurred from a theocentric view of the universe to an anthropocentric view.¹ In the broadest terms, Moltmann's understanding of this "transition" can be expressed in the following way: where human beings once sought the meaning of reality by seeking to know the transcendent orderer of the created world, the source of all truth, they now consider the responsibility for appropriating and ordering reality to be their own. Moltmann calls this latter view of humankind's relationship to the world "modern European subjectivity," and he expresses its claims as follows:

The centre of this world and its point of reference is the human subject, not a supreme substance. There is no higher reality encompassing man, the sphere of his experience and the realm of his awareness. It is *he himself* who opens up reality and makes it accessible. So the unity of what is real is determined anthropologically, no longer cosmologically and theocentrically.²

The heart of this subjectivity, as Moltmann describes it here, is the recognition that human beings are superior to the world, superior to the rest of reality which exists so

¹ The section of *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* from which I derive the quotations and ideas that I am using in this paragraph is actually intended by Moltmann to illustrate the unfeasibility of cosmological proofs for God's existence. It is impractical to turn to the evidence of the created order when talking about God in the modern age because, for the most part, modern philosophy does not allow for any direct access to God other than through the mind. (Perhaps Moltmann's idea is that, for these philosophers, God *is* the mind in some sense, although he does not say this in so many words.) The cosmological proofs themselves do not concern me here. Rather, I think that the reason for Moltmann's decision to abandon them is important, for he considers these proofs to have lost their currency because of the rise of modern individualism and, as we shall see, he suggests that Augustine's theology laid the groundwork for this view of the primacy of the individual.

² *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 13. (Italics are original.) This intellectual position appears to be very nearly identical to the one which Williams describes as the "pervasive Western European obsession with the individual's sense of him- or herself which has led, in the wake of Kant, to the fundamental illusion of modernity, the notion that the private self is the arbiter and source of value in the world" ("*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*." p. 317).

that it can be known by the human mind. This does not mean that God no longer has any importance for human knowing. On the contrary, God is seen as an absolute subjectivity that has the same goals as human subjects, *viz.* to produce from all real phenomena a unified picture of the meaning of reality.³ As such, God comes to be viewed as the “infinite, absolute and perfect subjectivity which lends [humankind’s] own subjectivity bearings, thus sustaining and giving it permanence.”⁴

Moltmann thinks that, ultimately, this view of human subjectivity has its roots in Augustine’s understanding of how the trinitarian image of God in the human soul “mirrors” the divine Trinity. In his opinion, Augustine has aligned human self-knowledge with the knowledge of God rather than with the knowledge of the world: whereas the world is God’s work, human beings are God’s image.⁵ That is, when one knows oneself, what one knows is much closer to the knowledge of God than to the knowledge of what God has made. What this means, according to Moltmann, is that “every human being finds in himself the mirror in which he can perceive God.”⁶ Moltmann credits Augustine’s notion of the image of the Trinity in the human mind with popularizing the view that “knowledge of the self is no longer part of the knowledge of the world, but is related exclusively to knowledge of God.”⁷ When human beings view themselves as having the potential to be on par with God in terms

³ Moltmann reasons as follows: “If man can no longer understand himself in the light of the world and its cohesions, but has to comprehend the world and its cohesions in the light of his own plans for its domination, then it would seem the obvious course for him to look for the mirror in which knowledge of God is to be found in his own subjectivity” (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 14). In other words, the only conceivable thing that could be superior to humankind is simply a divine version of the human mind.

⁴ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 14.

⁵ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 14.

⁶ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 14.

of their ability to know, it is only logical for them to consider themselves able to “open up reality and make it accessible.”⁸ Such a view leads human beings to act as self-contained and self-sufficient arbiters of truth and value, for this understanding of themselves as being in the image of God has led them to conclude that they need nothing outside themselves in order to determine what is true and what is good.

In this chapter, I will seek to demonstrate that the case for linking Augustine’s understanding of human psychology to the rise of the modern subjectivity and individualism is more dubious than Moltmann’s presentation allows. As he presents it in the *Confessions*, Augustine’s insight that human beings bear the trinitarian image of God in their souls does not automatically mean that the knowledge of self and the knowledge of God are collapsed into one. On the contrary, as we shall see, Augustine maintains that when one contemplates the image of God in one’s soul, one learns how different that image is from its immutable and transcendent prototype. When one discovers the trinitarian image of God in one’s soul, what one finds, Augustine avers, is the mark of one’s creaturehood, the very indication that one has been made by the God who is Trinity. The bishop suggests that, when one perceives this image in one’s mind, one inevitably also discovers the limitations of the finite, time-bound mind that bears the image. Having encountered these limitations, Augustine thinks it will become clear to his reader that human beings need a source of spiritual enlightenment from outside themselves before they can be wise. This is not to be found immediately

⁷ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 14.

⁸ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 13, quoted above.

in the mind, through self-analysis, but rather as God reveals himself in the economy of creation in the persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Augustine does in fact recognize a problem which bears resemblance to the modern subjectivity, or individualism, described by Moltmann. However, this problem does not stem from his understanding of the nature and function of the trinitarian image of God in the soul as God created it to be. Rather, as we shall see, Augustine finds that in humankind's fallen condition, pride is responsible for the illusion that the human being is in need of no other source of wisdom apart from his or her own mind. It is because of pride that one considers oneself to be a self-sufficient arbiter of truth, for pride causes one to make false assessments of the nature of one's own existence and of one's need (or lack of need) for God. In short, Augustine traces the origin of the problems associated with individualism to human sinfulness, for sin causes the image to become disordered and distorted. The account of the conversions of Victorinus and Augustine is illustrative of the way that God redresses the destructive effects of pride in the soul, enabling human beings to image the Trinity as they draw their life from God, know God, and love God.

The trinitarian image of God in the soul

Augustine's rationale for asserting that the human soul bears the image of God is derived from the opening chapter of Genesis, where God is said to have created human beings by uttering the words,

let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and . . . God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.⁹

The bishop's belief that God is Trinity predisposes him to think that God's image in the human soul must be trinitarian in nature. He finds support for this understanding of the image as trinitarian from his exegesis of the text quoted here, for he notes that both plural and singular pronouns are used for God in reference to God's act of creating human beings in his image. Thus, the bishop notes that "the plural is used 'Let us make man,' and then the singular follows 'and God made man'. The plural occurs for the first phrase 'in our image', but the singular is used for 'in the image of God'."¹⁰ The pronouns used for God, then, indicate both plurality and unity in God, and so, plurality and unity in the *imago dei*.

The clearest presentation of Augustine's understanding of the nature of this trinitarian image of God in the soul or mind¹¹ occurs in a setting where he scorns those who debate and quarrel about how the "omnipotent Trinity" is to be understood. He recommends that instead of arguing, those who wish to know God would be better served to "reflect upon the triad within their own selves." The three aspects of the soul which people ought to contemplate, Augustine explains,

are being, knowing, willing. For I am and I know and I will. Knowing and willing I am. I know that I am and I will. I will to be and to know.¹²

In these five short sentences, the bishop explains that there is a kind of threefold unity in the human soul. The soul's being, knowing, and willing must be thought of as

⁹ Genesis 1:26-27, NRSV.

¹⁰ *Conf* 13.22.32.

¹¹ Augustine uses the terms "mind" and "soul" interchangeably when speaking about the locus of the image of God in the human being.

inseparable, since they combine to form a single life and a single activity in every human being.¹³ Yet, even within the unity of the life and activity of the soul, the three aspects in question are still distinct, for Augustine thinks it is possible to distinguish between the essence of a given individual and the operations of his or her understanding and will. The image in the soul is trinitarian, then, because its three activities form a single life; in its tri-unity it bears a resemblance to God who himself is Trinity by virtue of being the God who is “one in three and three in one.”¹⁴

However, having informed his readers of what they should expect to find as they engage in the self-analysis which he recommends, the bishop warns that one who has discovered this image in his or her own mind has not discovered the Trinity itself. Indeed, he declares that the investigator who has learned about the trinitarian nature of the soul

should not suppose that he discovered the immutable that transcends them -- that which immutably is, immutably knows, and immutably wills.¹⁵

The self-knowledge gained through introspection is not the same as the knowledge of God. On the contrary, Augustine recommends that those who “debate and quarrel” about the Trinity should examine their own souls because, in so doing, they will see how far their own minds, and the ideas that they are able to conceive, fall short of the reality of the divine life. Thus, the bishop writes,

¹² *Conf.* 13.11.12.

¹³ Without being, one could neither know nor will; without knowing, one might still be, but one would not be human, for humans are characterized by their ability to know; without willing, one could neither choose to be or to know. While they are distinct, these three activities of the human soul constitute a single life.

¹⁴ *Conf.* 12.7.7. For a similar trinitarian formula, see *Conf.* 13.22.32.

¹⁵ *Conf.* 13.11.12.

I wish that human disputants would reflect upon the triad within their own selves. These three aspects of the self are very different from the Trinity, but I may make the observation that on this triad they could well exercise their minds and examine the problem, thereby becoming aware how far distant they are from it.¹⁶

Introspection will end unnecessary theological quarrels, not because human beings automatically know the Trinity as soon as they comprehend the nature of their own souls, but because they will become aware of the disparity between their own human existence and that of the divine Trinity. The observation that the triad in the human mind is “very different from the Trinity,” Augustine thinks, will issue in the recognition that the human mind is “far distant” from the Trinity. In short, those who perform the exercise that Augustine suggests will see that the human mind is insufficient to know the Trinity because the divine nature transcends the finite mind’s capacity for understanding.¹⁷

Correct self-knowledge

Augustine, then, does not believe that human self-knowledge is adequate to bring human beings to the knowledge of God. The bishop never wavers from his contention that God is other than his creatures in the sense that the sublime goodness and perfection of his being transcend the nature of created reality.¹⁸ Even the celestial beings who see God’s face, angels whose minds are not conditioned by time and

¹⁶ *Conf.* 13.11.12.

¹⁷ That human beings cannot understand the Trinity appears to be the overall message of *Conf.* 13.11.12, for the passage begins with the question, “Who can understand the omnipotent Trinity?” and, after having attempted to describe the nature of the eternal relationality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the bishop closes by asking, “Who can find a way to give expression to that? Who would venture in any way whatever to make a rash pronouncement on the subject?” Moreover, the bishop asserts that the manner of divine existence is beyond the “finite understanding” of human beings.

space, do not possess a full and complete knowledge of the Trinity, although their knowledge of God is vastly superior to that which God reveals to human beings during their earthly life.¹⁹ Indeed, Augustine maintains that the nature of the human mind is such that it cannot illuminate itself and must receive from God such light as will allow it to attain even a limited knowledge of the Trinity.²⁰ Thus, concerning the limitations of his own mind, Augustine confesses to God that

my soul is 'like waterless land before you' (Ps. 142:6). Just as it has no power to illuminate itself, so it cannot satisfy itself. For 'with you is the fountain of life', and so also it is 'in your light' that 'we shall see light' (Ps. 35:10).²¹

The recognition of his soul's inability to illuminate itself leads Augustine to confess that he is a "waterless land" without God. He is unable to satisfy himself from the resources of his own soul. Augustine (together with every other human being) needs to be "in [God's] light" in order to be illumined, and he cannot be satisfied -- that is, he cannot enjoy the rest²² which accompanies freedom from every kind of need --

¹⁸ Augustine's notion of divine transcendence is a subject already addressed in Chapter Two.

¹⁹ *Conf.* 13.15.18 - 13.16.19.

²⁰ Elsewhere in the *Confessions*, spiritual light is strongly associated with divine wisdom and truth. Perhaps most notable in this respect is Augustine's allegorical identification between the gift of the "word of wisdom," given by the Holy Spirit, and the light of day, which Augustine identifies as the "light of truth." "'To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom'," writes the bishop, "like 'a greater light' (Gen. 1:16) for the sake of those who delight in the light of truth as for 'the rule of the day'" (*Conf.* 13.18.23). In this part of the allegory presented in Book 13 of the *Confessions*, Augustine makes a connection between light and the gifts given to the church by the Holy Spirit. The gift of wisdom is associated with the "great light" of the day, the light of truth. This is the light, Augustine says, seen by Tobit, Isaac, and Jacob, even when their powers of physical vision were gone, light which allowed them to bless and instruct their sons with wisdom and insight available only from God himself (*Conf.* 10.34.52).

²¹ *Conf.* 13.16.19.

²² The "satisfaction" of which Augustine speaks here is almost certainly related to the state of "resting" in God which Augustine believes is the goal of human existence. The following sentence illustrates the idea that this rest is characterized by complete absence of need, as God satisfies from himself any need that humankind could have: "In you is repose which forgets all toil because there is none beside you, nor are we to look for the multiplicity of other things which are not what you are" (*Conf.* 9.4.11). There is no need to look to the multiplicity of the things which pass away because

unless he drinks from the “fountain of life” that is with God. It appears that human beings are utterly dependent upon God for the “light” that can satisfy their souls.

Elsewhere, Augustine presents a similar idea, *viz.* that human beings cannot provide rest and contentment for themselves, but he suggests here that the inability to fulfill one’s own needs is a characteristic of created existence. Thus, writes the bishop,

whatever is less than you [God] can never be sufficient to provide itself with the rest of contentment, and for this reason it is not even a source of contentment to itself. For you, our God ‘will lighten our darkness’ (Ps. 17:29).²³

When Augustine speaks of that which is less than God, he means all of created reality for, as we saw in Chapter Two, creatures are by definition less than God because they depend upon him for their existence and their goodness. As in the text quoted above, Augustine here maintains that any creature “can never be sufficient to provide for itself the rest of contentment.” The bishop takes the phrase quoted from the Psalms as a promise that God himself will provide for the needs of his creatures, giving them the light which they cannot supply for themselves. Augustine quotes the same psalmic text in another passage where he describes his confidence that God will give light to human beings. The bishop addresses God, saying,

you will light my lamp, O Lord. My God you will lighten my darkness (Ps. 17:29), and of your fullness we have all received (John 1:16). You are the true light who illuminates every man coming into this world (John 1:9), because in you there is no change nor shadow caused by turning (Jas. 1:17).²⁴

humankind will be made able to partake of the stable multiplicity of the God who is both three and one. Elsewhere, Augustine says of this rest in God, that, in it, “we want nothing but to stay there for ever” (*Conf.* 13.9.10).

²³ *Conf.* 13.8.9.

²⁴ *Conf.* 4.15.25.

Since these sentences contain direct allusions to the opening of John's Gospel, where the incarnation of the Word is described, it appears that Augustine is suggesting that God provides illumination to the minds of human beings through the Word. As we shall see, Augustine thinks that human beings are made able to know God as he reveals himself in the economy of creation through Christ, as well as through the Holy Spirit.

Correct human self-knowledge, then, must include the recognition of one's creaturehood. That is, one does not possess authentic knowledge of one's own being unless one recognizes that one depends upon God for the light of wisdom, for fulfillment, and for rest. Augustine approaches God at the opening of the *Confessions* with this recognition clearly in mind as he pens his famous prayer:

Man, a little piece of your creation, desires to praise you, a human being 'bearing his mortality with him' (2 Cor. 4:10), carrying with him the witness of his sin and the witness that you 'resist the proud' (1 Pet. 5:5). Nevertheless, to praise you is the desire of man, a little piece of your creation. You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.²⁵

The bishop is mindful of approaching God as a "little piece of [his] creation," a status which Augustine obviously considers significant, for he repeats the phrase twice in the three sentences quoted here. Also significant is the bishop's desire to praise his creator,²⁶ a longing which he says is inspired in him by God. On the basis of this passage, Augustine appears to indicate that human beings are "stirred" to praise God because the act of offering praise brings them closer to God, and so, closer to the

²⁵ *Conf.* 1.1.1.

²⁶ This desire is mentioned once in each of the three sentences quoted here.

fulfillment which they cannot provide for themselves.²⁷ After all, it is because God has made us for himself that he stirs us to take pleasure in praising him. Praise, in part, flows from the recognition of the greatness of God's wisdom and power,²⁸ from the observation of the good things that he does for human beings,²⁹ and, as the text quoted here appears to indicate, from the grateful anticipation of the rest and fulfillment that God will provide for his creatures.

The effects of pride in the soul

Correct self-knowledge for a human being, then, consists in the recognition of one's creaturehood, that is, one's dependence upon God for one's life and one's goodness. Augustine thinks that pride distorts one's ability to arrive at this correct assessment of one's own nature. Indeed, this is Augustine's own experience, for he recalls that while he was a Manichee, his pride led him to believe that his own soul was part of the divine nature. Recalling the state of his soul at that time, he writes,

I tried to approach you [God], but you pushed me away so that I should taste of death (Matt. 16:28); for you resist the proud (2 Peter 5:5). What could be worse arrogance than the amazing madness with which I asserted myself to be by nature what you are? I was changeable and this was evident to me from the fact that I wanted to be wise and to pass from worse to better. Yet I preferred to think you mutable rather than hold that I was not what you are. That is why I was pushed away, and why you resisted my inflated pride.³⁰

²⁷ A few sentences below the lines quoted here, Augustine says the following about those who praise God: "'They will praise the Lord who seek for him' (Ps. 21:27). In seeking him they find him, and in finding they will praise him" (*Conf.* 1.1.1). Augustine expresses a high degree of confidence that those who praise God and who seek after him will find him. Indeed, he offers scriptural authority for thinking that this is so. It appears as though God wishes to be found by human beings, for he has made us for himself, and has ordained that he will be found through praise.

²⁸ The first sentence in the *Confessions* reads, "'You are great, Lord, and highly to be praised (Ps. 47:2): great is your power and your wisdom is immeasurable' (Ps. 146:5)" (1.1.1).

²⁹ Augustine recalls that praise followed miraculous healings (*Conf.* 9.4.12, and 9.7.16), as well as the miracle of conversion (*Conf.* 8.1.1, and 9.1.1).

³⁰ *Conf.* 4.15.26.

Far from being mindful of his creaturehood as he approached God, Augustine recalls that his pride allowed him to think that he was equal to God. Because of this opinion, God pushed the young Augustine away, for as the bishop says (twice) in this passage, God resists the proud. He calls it “amazing madness” that he could have considered himself to be “the supreme and unchangeable good”³¹ when he possessed irrefutable evidence that his own soul was mutable, for he knew that he wished to become wise and good.³² Augustine’s pride caused him to arrive at an inflated assessment of his position in the cosmos as he aspired to be and to possess more than was available to him as a creature and as a human being. It is true that Augustine was kept from approaching God because of his proud opinions of himself, for, in fact, the god that he was attempting to call upon did not exist: the young Augustine was attempting to call upon a god who was mutable like himself rather than the immutable and transcendent Trinity.³³

The bishop appears to think that pride causes the “reasoning mind” to become “flawed,” which, in turn, leads to such “errors and false opinions” as the error described in the foregoing paragraph.³⁴ During his youthful engagement with the

³¹ *Conf.* 4.15.24.

³² *Conf.* 4.15.26.

³³ Earlier in Book 4, Augustine recalls his experience of attempting to call upon the god in whom he believed when he was a Manichee. “When I thought of you,” he confesses to God, “my mental image was not of anything solid and firm: it was not you but a vain phantom. My error was my god. If I attempted to find rest there for my soul, it slipped through a void and came falling back upon me” (*Conf.* 4.7.12). He was not calling upon anything real when he attempted to approach the “vain phantom” he (and the Manichees) had created. All there was to call upon was a “void.” When he sought to entrust his soul to this god, he found that he was alone with himself, for his soul would slip through the void and fall back upon himself.

³⁴ In the sentences which immediately precede the quotation from *Conf.* 4.15.26, Augustine says that “errors and false opinions contaminate life if the reasoning mind is flawed. That was my condition at that time [*sc.* when he was a Manichee]. For I did not know that the soul needs to be

Manichees, Augustine's reason was effected by his pride for, while he recognized that his soul could not be the supreme substance (because he had to admit that he was not the supreme instance of wisdom and goodness), still he insisted upon maintaining that his soul was divine.³⁵ Colin Starnes thinks that, given the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity in Augustine's theology, it is to be expected that pride has direct implications for the trinitarian nature of the human soul. Augustine's thinking, argues Starnes,

is so thoroughly imbued with the orthodox trinitarian understanding that, for him, the only complete discussion is the one which treats of every position in its relation to the Trinity. As the Trinity is both the beginning and end of all creation, all human error is, in some form or other, a perverted imitation of that Trinity.³⁶

Starnes' proposal is already confirmed by my analysis of the passage quoted in the foregoing paragraph, for it appears there that Augustine's pride leads him to attempt to imitate God: in that text, he recalls that he considered his own soul to be a part of the divine nature. The trinitarian image of God in the soul is distorted by pride, in

enlightened by light from outside itself, so that it can participate in truth, because it is not itself the nature of truth" (*Conf.* 4.15.25). While pride is not mentioned as the explicit cause of his flawed self-knowledge, it is plausible that this is what Augustine has in mind, for the error described here -- considering that his own soul was by nature truth itself -- is another way of saying that he thought his soul was the nature of divinity. In the passage quoted above from *Conf.* 4.15.26, we saw that pride was responsible for this latter error.

³⁵ Indeed, Augustine explains that his pride and the erroneous opinions he held caused him to be dissociated from himself. He confesses to God, saying, "You were there before me, but I had departed from myself. I could not even find myself much less you" (*Conf.* 5.2.2). Augustine is separated from himself because he has cut himself off from the goal and destiny of his existence, *viz.* finding rest and delight in God (see *Conf.* 1.1.1, quoted above). Because of pride, he has systematically overlooked the nature of his own mind, its needs and desires. To be able to find either God or oneself, one must alienate oneself from oneself by constructing an intellectual world in which to live that has different properties from the actual world which God created for human beings to inhabit. Of course this is exactly what Augustine did as a Manichee, considering himself and his friends equal to God.

³⁶ Colin Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confession I-IX*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1990, p. 152.

part, because of the disastrous effects of pride upon one's ability to know oneself and others correctly.³⁷

The proud soul, then, does not know itself correctly because it considers its status and abilities to be superior to what they are in reality. However, pride distorts not only one's self-knowledge, but also one's knowledge of that which is other than oneself, for the proud soul will tend to evaluate other beings as less than they really are by virtue of a comparison with its inflated view of itself. As a result, such a soul does not accurately assess the nature of its relationships either with its fellow human beings or with God. For instance, in their relations with other people, the Manichees considered themselves superior to those who were incapable of recognizing the truth which they claimed to possess.³⁸ In their teachings concerning God, not only did the Manichees believe their own souls to be equal to God, but they taught that nothing exists apart from physical reality: God himself was considered to be a physical substance by the heretical sect.³⁹ Starnes suggests that the Manichean evaluation of God's substance as being corporeal in nature actually serves the inclination of the proud soul to make the claim of being or possessing "truth" in a way that makes it

³⁷ As this section unfolds, we will see that Augustine also believes that pride distorts and degrades the soul's capacity to be and to will.

³⁸ In *Conf.* 4.15.26 and 4.16.31 Augustine describes instances when, as a Manichee, he debated Christians whom he considered to be inferior to himself.

³⁹ Indeed, after leaving the Manichees, when Augustine tried to change his patterns of thought and to conceive of God using the category of spiritual substance, he found it very difficult to escape from his habit of thinking in terms of material images. When he attempted to analyze his own habit of thinking exclusively by means of these physical images, he confesses that the very images "attacked me on all sides in massive heaps. As I thought about them, the very images of physical objects formed an obstacle to my return, as if saying, 'Where are you going to, unworthy, soiled man?' This grew out of my wound, for 'you have humbled the proud like a wounded man' (Ps. 88:11)" (*Conf.* 7.7.11). The habit of thinking of God in terms of physical images, learned from the Manichees, made it extremely difficult to think of God as a spiritual being.

superior to those who cannot make such a claim. Starnes' perceptive argument runs as follows:

So long as [Augustine] refused to relinquish the arrogant aim of grasping the truth immediately and directly so that he could put it to the service of his private ends, he was bound to conceive of God as a corporeal substance. The truth would thus be something to which his mind was superior and which he could consequently manipulate and dominate while at the same time he would be free from any subordination or service owed to it.⁴⁰

The opinion that the divine nature is corporeal allowed the young Augustine to live in the illusion that he was for himself the only source of truth he needed. This opinion allowed him to engage in any kind of vicious excess that happened to please him, because he could justify his actions on the basis of the truth which he himself possessed,⁴¹ quite apart from any divine oracle that might forbid his actions.⁴²

As I have said, the mind's knowing is not the only aspect of the trinitarian image that is distorted by pride. The activity of the will is also skewed by the chaotic effects of pride in the soul. Augustine recalls that he himself suffered the ill effects of having borne a disordered love for a fellow human being, that is, he loved a man as if that person could provide him with the kind of stable permanence that is available only when God is the object of one's love. In light of Augustine's assertion that the

⁴⁰ Colin Starnes. *Augustine's Conversion. A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX*. p. 181.

⁴¹ Augustine thinks that any individual who claims to be truth, or to have access to truth that is unavailable to others, is bound to be in error. For instance, he pens the following warning: "Lord, 'your judgments are to be feared' (Ps. 118:120); for your truth does not belong to me nor to anyone else, but to us all whom you call to share it as a public possession. With terrifying words you warn against regarding it as a private possession, or we may lose it (Matt. 25:14-30). Anyone who claims for his own property what you offer for all to enjoy, and wishes to have exclusive rights to what belongs to everyone, is driven from the common truth to his own private ideas, that is from truth to a lie. For 'he who speaks a lie' speaks 'from his own' (John 8:44)" (*Conf* 12.25.34).

⁴² For instance, Augustine recalls that his greed led him to sell the eloquence that could free a guilty man, and he saw fit to gratify his sexual desires with a woman who was not his wife (*Conf*. 4.2.2).

mind's knowing and willing⁴³ constitute the single, indivisible life of the human soul, it is not surprising to find that there is a complex relationship between these mental activities. It appears that, because Manichean doctrine had taught Augustine to think that he and his anonymous Thagastian friend had pieces of the divine in their souls, Augustine thought that this friend could provide him with a stable source of love and fulfillment. In this case, I cast the relationship between the knowing and willing in terms of the former affecting the latter only because Augustine places such a strong emphasis in Book 4 upon the disastrous effects of the Manichean error.⁴⁴ However, it is equally plausible that Augustine's disordered love, that is, the activity of his distorted will, predisposed him to give his intellectual assent to the Manichees' erroneous teaching. The distinction is minor, and it is not one that Augustine cares to make in an overt way. More important is the fact that there is an intimate relationship between the mind's knowing and willing, and that both activities are distorted by pride.

Augustine thinks his soul was miserable because his love for his friend was disordered, that is, because he loved a creature in place of God. However, it was not until that friend died that Augustine became acutely aware of the misery that had been

⁴³ Of course the soul's being is also involved; the effects of pride upon the soul's existence will be examined below. Lest my practice of considering these three mental activities in succession should give the impression that Augustine has a rigid and schematic conception of how they relate to one another, I should say that Augustine himself describes the three activities together rather than sequentially. I present them one at a time only for the purpose of examining the unique way that each is distorted by pride.

⁴⁴ Throughout Book 4 Augustine speaks disdainfully about Manichean teaching and practice. The opening sentences of the Book set the tone, for there he describes Manicheism as deceptive, false, superstitious, vain, shameful, twisted, and mistaken (*Conf* 4.1.1).

in his soul for as long as he had directed the love that he should have had for God toward a creature who was bound to die.⁴⁵ Thus, he writes,

I was in misery, and misery is the state of every soul overcome by friendship with mortal things and lacerated when they are lost. Then the soul becomes aware of the misery which is its actual condition even before it loses them.⁴⁶

Augustine observes that everyone is more or less miserable who is not loving God, the only source of rest and stability in the midst of the flux of the human condition.⁴⁷

As we have seen, God created human beings for himself and ordained that they should not find rest except in him.⁴⁸ The soul which attaches itself through love to anything less than God himself is miserable because it cannot be at rest; it remains tossed about by the movement and successiveness of its “mortal” objects of delight; it is miserable because it does not have what it desires even though it strongly desires what it has. Conversely, one who is brought into direct relationship with God is at rest because the tendency of finite creatures always to be moving out of existence is counteracted when the soul of the individual is made able to participate in God’s pure existence which does not abate.

The contrast between the stability of God as an object for one’s love and the impermanence of a created (mortal) object suggests that the expression of pride

⁴⁵ Augustine confesses that grief penetrated him so deeply after his friend died because he “had poured out [his] soul on to the sand by loving a person sure to die as if he should never die” (*Conf* 4.8.13). Elsewhere, Augustine asserts that “wherever the human soul turns itself, other than to you [God], it is fixed in sorrows, even if it is fixed upon beautiful things external to you and external to itself, which would nevertheless be nothing if they did not have their being from you” (*Conf* 4.10.15).

⁴⁶ *Conf* 4.6.11.

⁴⁷ In *Conf* 4.10.15 Augustine describes the law of the existence of finite things in the following manner: “Things rise and set: in their emerging they begin as it were to be, and grow to perfection; having reached perfection, they grow old and die. Not everything grows old but everything dies. So when things rise and emerge into existence, the faster they grow to be, the quicker they rush towards non-being.”

⁴⁸ See *Conf* 1.1.1, quoted above

through one's disordered love has a destructive effect upon the soul's being.

Augustine admonishes his own soul concerning the way that finite things are to be loved, saying,

If physical objects give you pleasure, praise God for them and return love to their Maker lest, in the things that please you, you displease him. If souls please you, they are being loved in God; for they also are mutable and acquire stability by being established in him. Otherwise they go their way and perish.⁴⁹

Souls that do not find stability by being "established" in God, he says, will "go their way and perish." Finite souls flee toward death, toward non-existence, unless they are able to participate in God's stable permanence. When one loves a creature, Augustine maintains, one must refer one's love to God as well as to that creature, otherwise the soul of the lover has no way to acquire the stability it desires. Thus, Augustine pens the following warning to the person who seeks happiness among mutable natures:

There is no rest where you seek for it. Seek for what you seek, but it is not where you are looking for it. You seek the happy life in the region of death; it is not there. How can there be a happy life where there is not even life?⁵⁰

Disordered love, that is, love that is not referred to God as well as to the creature, draws one away from the happy life. One who loves incorrectly necessarily remains in the "region of death." What is emerging, then, is a vision of the degradation of the life of the soul because of the deleterious effects of pride upon the soul's being, knowing, and willing. In the end, Augustine thinks that the soul is excluded from the happy life in God because its distorted knowledge and love cause it to immerse itself in created things without heed to its inherent desire for God.

Christ's role as mediator between God and humankind

I have said that Augustine thinks human beings are made able to know God as he reveals himself in the economy of creation through Christ and through the Holy Spirit. This runs contrary to Moltmann's claim that Augustine was responsible for popularizing the idea that the knowledge of God is to be gained through self-analysis rather than through God's activity in the world. Indeed, Augustine thinks that the only way for the "finite understanding"⁵¹ of human beings to attain to the knowledge of the transcendent God in any sense is as God reveals himself through the persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit. For instance, in the following text, Augustine describes how God makes himself known to human beings through the mediation of Christ's humanity. Here, he compares his need to know God with the human need for physical nourishment. Just as infants cannot eat solid food because of their weakness, he says, so the weakness of the human mind keeps it from knowing God in his transcendent perfection. "The food which I was too weak to accept," writes the bishop,

he [God] mingled with flesh, in that 'The Word was made flesh' (John 1:14), so that our infant condition might come to suck milk from your wisdom by which you created all things.⁵²

"The Word was made flesh" so that God might be accessible to be known (and loved) by human minds from within the human condition, that is, from within the

⁴⁹ *Conf.* 4.12.18.

⁵⁰ *Conf.* 4.12.18.

⁵¹ *Conf.* 13.11.12.

⁵² *Conf.* 7.18.24.

limitations of time and space. This passage appears in the context of Augustine's account of his experimentation with Neo-platonism during the period of two or three years before his conversion to Christianity. At that time, he sought wisdom and truth through the study of such platonic works as were available to him in Latin translation. Prior to the text quoted above, he describes his attempts to grasp eternal wisdom through the exercise of his own rational powers, recalling that his mind did actually "attain to that which is," but only in the "flash of a trembling glance."⁵³ As keen and as able as his intelligence was,⁵⁴ he could not sustain this vision of the light of immutable wisdom because his mind was too weak to bear it.⁵⁵ In the passage quoted here, the authorial Augustine is saying that, had he been willing to accept the Church's teaching that God reveals himself in Christ, he would have found that wisdom was available to him through Christ, presented in a form which his weak mind could readily grasp.⁵⁶

Augustine does not intend that the language he uses to describe the incarnation - - the idea that the Word was "mingled with flesh," or "was made flesh"⁵⁷ -- should imply that the Word was somehow changed with respect to his divinity when he became incarnate. On the contrary, Augustine affirms that the full reality of the Word is revealed in Christ. Indeed, in another passage in which he undertakes to describe Christ's role as mediator, the bishop asserts that

⁵³ *Conf.* 7.17.23.

⁵⁴ Augustine is willing to confess that his mental abilities were considerable in comparison to those of his colleagues and his mentors (see, for instance, *Conf.* 4.16.28).

⁵⁵ *Conf.* 7.17.23.

⁵⁶ "I sought a way to obtain strength enough to enjoy you;" Augustine confesses, "but I did not find it until I embraced 'the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Tim. 2.5)" (*Conf.* 7.18.24).

it is as a man that he [Christ] is mediator. He is not midway as Word; for the Word is equal to God and 'God with God' (John 1:1), and at the same time there is but one God.⁵⁸

Augustine maintains that the divinity and humanity in Christ remain distinct and distinguishable from one another. Christ is not mediator by virtue of the Word's divinity, for the "Word is equal to God" and, as such, he transcends the human condition. Augustine's assertion that the Word cannot be considered "midway" between God and humankind is an assurance that he thinks God is really present in Christ. Rather, Christ's humanity allows him to be mediator, for the Word inhabits the limited existence of humanity that he might be known by human beings within that humanity. At this point, it is evident that Augustine's and Moltmann's constructive agendas converge to a degree, for, as we have seen, they are both aware of the need to maintain that God reveals the full reality of his nature within the economy of creation. Even so, as we have seen, Augustine and Moltmann disagree as to whether the Word undergoes change with respect to his divinity when he becomes incarnate: whereas Augustine thinks that the Word himself does not suffer change as he reveals God's love within the created order, Moltmann contends that the Word's suffering is the guarantee that God is fully engaged in relating with his creatures.

Christ's humanity, then, provides the all-important point of contact between God's transcendence and humankind's mundane existence. In another description of how Christ mediates a knowledge of God to humankind, Augustine draws upon the

⁵⁷ These phrases are from *Conf* 7.18.24, quoted above.

⁵⁸ *Conf* 10.43.68.

erotic and sensual language of the Song of Songs to indicate the effect that Christ's appearance as a man has upon those who love him:

‘He [the Son] looked through the lattice’ of our flesh and caressed us and set us on fire; and we run after his perfume (Cant. 2:9; 1:3, 11).⁵⁹

There is a sense in which God woos humanity in Christ. Augustine seemingly wishes the context of the Song of Songs -- *viz.* a passionate love story between a lover and his beloved -- to suggest that Christ is presenting God's love to human beings in the hope that they will return his love. Indeed, directly before quoting the Song of Songs, he refers to humanity as being “beloved of your [God's] Son.” The Son, then, becomes like his creatures in order to present his love for them in a tangible way.⁶⁰ According to the terms of this analogy from the Song of Songs, then, God makes himself attractive to his creation by presenting himself as a man, since he receives little interest or affection from human beings so long as he remains transcendent and inaccessible. Having caught humankind's attention, he proceeds to draw people to himself, as it were, by the intoxicating scent of exotic perfume. People are attracted by what they see “through the lattice” and they wish to see God directly without the barrier of Christ's flesh. Christ “caresses” human beings and “sets [them] on fire.” which is to say that they experience his love and know that it is good and desirable.

⁵⁹ *Conf.* 13.15.18.

⁶⁰ How is God's love made known in Christ? As we saw in Chapter Two, the event in which Christ is most clearly associated with divine love in the *Confessions* is the crucifixion. Augustine writes, “how you have loved us, good Father: you did not ‘spare your only Son but delivered him up for us sinners’ (Rom. 8:32). How you have loved us, for whose sake ‘he did not think it a [*sic.*] usurpation to be equal to you and was made subject to the death of the cross’ (Phil 2:6, 8)” (*Conf.* 10.43.69). Christ reveals God's love by dying for sinful human beings so that they might be lifted from their fallen state to participate in God's eternal life. Thus, Augustine continues, by his death, Christ secured for human beings the status of adopted children, heirs to the kingdom of God. for “before you [Father] he makes us sons instead of servants by being born of you and being servant to us” (*Conf.* 10.43.69).

Having witnessed the expression of God's love in Christ, "we run after him,"

Augustine says, for want of more of his love.

Victorinus' baptism and Augustine's conversion

A story which was recounted by the aged Simplicianus to Augustine shortly before Augustine's conversion illustrates how human beings apprehend and respond to the knowledge that God reveals himself in Christ.⁶¹ As we shall see, in the sacrament of baptism, people are given opportunity to engage in a public act in which their knowing and willing simultaneously give assent to the church's faith in Christ.⁶²

⁶¹ Augustine had visited Simplicianus in Milan, apparently seeking advice as to how he could advance toward maturity in the Christian faith. It appears that Ambrose would have been his first choice for spiritual advice, but since the Milanese bishop seemed too busy to receive Augustine (see, for instance, *Conf.* 6.3.4), Augustine went to Simplicianus, whom he felt he could trust, since he was "father to the then bishop Ambrose in the receiving of grace," and since Ambrose "truly loved him as one loves a father" (*Conf.* 8.2.3).

⁶² According to Augustine's understanding, "the church's faith in Christ" amounts to a knowledge of God's revelation of himself in Christ which is accepted on the basis of the following authorities: the scripture, the church's teaching, and personal experience. In Book 6 of the *Confessions*, Augustine recalls the period of his life when, as a philosophical skeptic, he believed certain knowledge of truth was unavailable to human beings. Attempting to act upon the tenets of academic skepticism (summarized in *Conf.* 5.10.19), the young Augustine "suspended judgement" in all matters of truth, wishing to avoid committing himself to an erroneous conception of truth (*Conf.* 6.4.6). Gradually, however, he came to see the flaws in the skeptical position. Observing that Augustine ends up criticizing the skeptics for their contention that human beings cannot comprehend any truth with certainty, Gerald Schlabach notes that Augustine does not argue to the contrary "that human beings *could* comprehend or grasp the truth on their own, rather, his argument was that through the authoritative instruction of scripture and the Church they could comprehend" (Gerald W. Schlabach, "'Love is the Hand of the Soul': The Grammar of Contenance in Augustine's Doctrine of Christian Love." *Journal of Early Christian Studies*. 6 (1998) 75-76, (italics are original).) In a sense Augustine agrees with the skeptics, in that one cannot arrive at a knowledge of God through the exercise of reason alone. However, he accepts a solution to the epistemological problem which the skeptics reject, *viz.*, that one needs the guidance of authority in order to avoid error. Fallen humanity needs an intermediate step between its unfulfilled desire for God and the unmediated vision of the Trinity, and this step is provided by the church's proclamation of the scriptures and its tradition of teaching and prayer. Augustine begins to emerge from his attempt to live according to the precepts of academic skepticism when he realizes that belief is a kind of knowledge used routinely by human beings as the basis for decision making and as premises supporting statements which people consider to be certain. For instance, we believe descriptions of places and events we have never seen and we believe that those who claim to be our parents actually are without feeling the need to verify what we have heard from others. "Unless we believed what we were told," he concludes, "we would do

For both Victorinus and Augustine, conversion to Christianity occurred prior to baptism in a moment when each man acknowledged the truth of the Christian teaching and humbly submitted his will to the pattern of life which Christ commanded. Augustine is under no illusion that all who are baptized have experienced such a conversion. But for those who have, he thinks that the sacrament is an opportunity to give public expression to their faith in Christ, and to the love they bear for God through Christ. What is important here is that the knowledge alone, or the love alone, do not suffice: the whole soul must be engaged in adhering to God through Christ's mediation.

Victorinus was a learned man, a famous rhetorician in Rome, "a worshipper of idols" who "took part in sacrilegious rites," and a vigorous defender of Roman cultic worship.⁶³ When he was advanced in years, he began to study the Christian scriptures until finally he confided in Simplicianus that he had given intellectual assent to the teachings of the church, and that he considered himself to have become a Christian. Simplicianus, knowing that Victorinus did not wish to make this confession public for fear of the censure of his friends and colleagues who would have considered him foolish,⁶⁴ informed Victorinus that he would not believe that he was a Christian until

nothing at all in this life" (*Conf.* 6.5.7). Since one cannot function in the world without recourse to unverified (or not readily verifiable) belief, the question which must be answered is which source of belief can be considered trustworthy. The answer inherent in the argument and structure of the *Confessions* is the assertion that the church is an appropriate authority for belief on the basis of the claim that God reveals himself in the church. Augustine believes that his own experience of coming to the knowledge of God through the ministry of the church testifies to the veracity of this claim.

⁶³ *Conf.* 8.2.3.

⁶⁴ According to Simplicianus' account of the story to Augustine, Victorinus "was afraid to offend his friends, proud devil-worshippers. He thought that from the height of Babylonish dignity, as if from the cedars of Lebanon which the Lord had not yet broken (Ps. 28:5), the full weight of their hostility would land on him" (*Conf.* 8.2.4).

he saw him in the church.⁶⁵ Victorinus' faith in Christ had not taken hold in his will, and his faith had not issued in action; until he was ready to affirm his faith publicly, even at the risk of being considered a fool by his friends, he would not be a Christian. Gradually, Victorinus began to see for himself that his intellectual assent needed to be expressed outwardly before he could be assured that he had apprehended the salvation available to him in Christ. By Simplicianus' account, Victorinus

was afraid he would be 'denied' by Christ 'before the holy angels' (Luke 12:9). He would have felt guilty of a grave crime if he were ashamed of the mysteries of the humility of [God's] Word and were not ashamed of the sacrilegious [*sic*] rites of proud demons, whose pride he imitated when he accepted their ceremonies. He became ashamed of the emptiness of those rites and felt respect for the truth. Suddenly and unexpectedly he said to Simplicianus (as he told me): 'Let us go to the Church; I want to become a Christian.'⁶⁶

Victorinus realized that intellectual assent alone was not enough to make him a Christian. As long as he acted publicly in ways that showed that he was ashamed of the Word's humble presence in Christ, the danger existed that Christ would be ashamed of him. The solution, as Victorinus came to see, was to be baptized and to become a member of the church. Victorinus obviously understood the importance of engaging his knowledge and will simultaneously in assenting to the church's teaching concerning Christ for, although he could have made his confession privately, he chose to recite his beliefs before the whole congregation.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Conf.* 8.2.4.

⁶⁶ *Conf.* 8.2.4.

⁶⁷ "Simplicianus used to say that the presbyters offered him the opportunity of affirming the creed in private, as was their custom to offer to people who felt embarrassed and afraid. But he preferred to make profession of his salvation before the holy congregation. For there was no salvation in the rhetoric which he had taught; yet his profession of that had been public. How much less should he be afraid in proclaiming your word, when he used to feel no fear in using his own words before crowds of frenzied pagans" (*Conf.* 8.2.5).

Augustine makes confession to God, saying,

as soon as your servant Simplicianus told me this story about Victorinus, I was ardent to follow his example. He had indeed told it to me with this object in view.⁶⁸

Simplicianus knew when he recounted Victorinus' story that Augustine was in a similar position to Victorinus, for Augustine was becoming a famous rhetor, having held this post in Rome and Milan, and he knew that Augustine had given intellectual assent to the church's faith in Christ, but he had not given his will to living according to Christ's commandments. Augustine learned from Victorinus' story that the Christian life begins when one combines one's intellectual assent to the truth revealed in Christ with the act of rejecting one's own will and embracing God's will. In the account of his famous conversion scene in the Milanese garden, Augustine records that his sinful habits had made him unable to engage his will wholly and with all his strength in choosing to follow Christ.⁶⁹ As we have seen, pride causes the will to become disordered so that it loves lesser things in place of God. In the paragraphs leading up to the account of his conversion, Augustine describes the condition of the distorted will in terms of being divided between its love for created things and its love for God. "We are dealing with a morbid condition of the mind," he writes,

which, when it is lifted up by the truth, does not unreservedly rise to it but is weighed down by habit. So there are two wills. Neither of them is complete, and what is present in one is lacking in the other.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ *Conf.* 8.5.10.

⁶⁹ To arrive at his goal of giving himself wholly to Christ, Augustine maintains, "the one necessary condition, which meant not only going but at once arriving there, was to have the will to go -- provided only that the will was strong and unqualified, not the turning and twisting first this way, then that, of a will half-wounded, struggling with one part rising up and the other part falling down" (*Conf.* 8.8.19).

⁷⁰ *Conf.* 8.9.21.

This was Augustine's problem: he desired to follow Christ, to love him, and to live according to the truth revealed in his commandments, but he did not wish to forsake his sinful habits. Since his will was thus divided, he could not engage his whole will in choosing to follow Christ.⁷¹

Just as, in the end, Victorinus was able to conform his will to Christ's by responding to a scriptural injunction aimed specifically at the particular problem which kept him from following Christ -- viz. the shame he felt in publicly confessing his faith⁷² --, so Augustine was converted as he engaged his will to obey a biblical command that he should make no provision for his fleshly desires. At a point when Augustine was reduced to weeping in despair of ever accomplishing the act of will required for conversion, so the story goes, he heard the voice of a child calling "pick up and read." The bishop recalls that he "interpreted it solely as a divine command to me to open the book and read the first chapter I might find."⁷³ This is what happened when Augustine picked up a book containing the Letters of Paul in response to the command he had heard:

I seized it, opened it and in silence read the first passage on which my eyes lit: 'Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts' (Rom. 13:13-14). I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled.⁷⁴

⁷¹ This is so, because "the strength of the command lies in the strength of the will, and the degree to which the command is not performed lies in the degree to which the will is not engaged" (*Conf.* 8.9.21).

⁷² See *Conf.* 8.2.4, quoted above, where Luke 12:9 is said to have played a role in Victorinus' conversion.

⁷³ *Conf.* 8.12.29.

⁷⁴ *Conf.* 8.12.29.

Augustine had given his assent to a particular command. He had chosen to leave his sinful habits and to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” With his whole will, he gave assent to what he knew to be true. The “relief from all anxiety” that he experiences as he finally chooses to follow Christ serves as proof to him that he has not been deceived in thinking that the church’s teaching about Christ is true: only after committing himself wholly and completely are the shadows of doubt completely dispelled. That is, he is able to know the truth only when he chooses to follow it wholeheartedly.

The Spirit enables humankind to know God

Those who have fully engaged their wills in accepting Christ’s teachings, and have entered into the communal life of the church, Augustine maintains, are given the gift of the Holy Spirit. Augustine teaches that the Holy Spirit, who indwells human beings as he is “diffused in our hearts,”⁷⁵ is present to the soul of the believer in such a way that the act of divine self-knowing can be shared by the person whom he inhabits. In the following sentence Augustine describes the likeness between the way the Spirit works in the human being⁷⁶ -- in this case, speaking through those facing persecution because of their love for Christ⁷⁷ -- and the way the Spirit makes people able to know God:

⁷⁵ Romans 5:5 is quoted later in *Conf.* 13.31.46. Augustine’s use of this pauline text is examined in Chapter Two of this study.

⁷⁶ In *Conf.* 13.37.52, Augustine speaks of God performing works through human beings. See also *Conf.* 13.18.23, where Augustine describes the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁷ See Matthew 10:17-22.

Just as ‘it is not you that speak’ (Matt. 10:20) is rightly said to those who are speaking by the Spirit of God, so also the words ‘it is not you that know’ may rightly be said to those whose knowing is by the Spirit of God.⁷⁸

The Spirit knows himself as he is in the hearts of those whom he indwells, and so the act of knowing God occurs in the human soul. It is not the human being who knows, but the Spirit who knows in him or her. Yet the act of knowing God has occurred in that person’s soul, making him or her able to know God.⁷⁹

The same principle applies when human beings who possess the Holy Spirit seek to observe the goodness of creation:⁸⁰ whatever such people “see to be good by the Spirit of God,” writes the bishop, “it is not they but God who is seeing the good.”⁸¹ The perception of this goodness, in which the Holy Spirit allows the human soul to share, is markedly different from the perception available to the soul that does not receive divine aid. In *Conf.* 13.31.46, Augustine identifies two errors that result when human beings contemplate the creation apart from the perceptions revealed by the Spirit. The first error is that of the Manichees who are “displeased” with God’s works⁸² and who, as a result, “think what is evil is good.”⁸³ The second is committed by those who see the creation as being good and are pleased by it, but who “nevertheless are displeased with [God] in it. These latter people wish to find their

⁷⁸ *Conf.* 13.31.46.

⁷⁹ Once again, we see that similar premises lie behind Augustine’s and Moltmann’s theological formulations. For, as I suggested in Chapter one, both authors maintain that God reveals who he is in himself when he makes himself known in the world.

⁸⁰ In Chapter Two we saw that God created all things from the fullness of his goodness. Individual things are good, and the whole creation, taken together, is very good.

⁸¹ *Conf.* 13.31.46.

⁸² *Conf.* 13.30.45.

⁸³ *Conf.* 13.31.46.

enjoyment in the creation rather than in” God.⁸⁴ Both errors are ultimately the result of the disorder wrought in the soul by pride, for both entail loving creatures instead of God: in the first instance, false doctrine is the object of love, while in the second, the creatures themselves are loved. The perception of goodness which comes through the help of the Holy Spirit does not end with the perception itself; rather, it ends with the recognition of God who is the source of the goodness. The Spirit enables the activities of the soul to be carried out in an orderly fashion, for God is recognized and loved as the source of the goodness for the creatures that are perceived by the senses.

Thus, continues the bishop,

it is yet a further matter to say that when a man sees something which is good, God in him sees that it is good. That is, God is loved in that which he has made, and he is not loved except through the Spirit which he has given. For ‘the love of God is diffused in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us’ (Rom. 5:5).⁸⁵

To see the goodness of God through what he has made with the help of the Holy Spirit, Augustine says, is to love God in what he has made, rather than simply loving the creation for its own sake.⁸⁶ The Holy Spirit, who is divine charity, enables the souls which it indwells to love the creation correctly, by directing their love beyond the creation itself to God, who is the source of its goodness. Not only does the Holy Spirit enable human beings to know God, but it also aids them in loving God.⁸⁷ As

⁸⁴ *Conf.* 13.31.46.

⁸⁵ *Conf.* 13.31.46.

⁸⁶ Elsewhere in the *Confessions*, Augustine asks God to make him able to love creation in a particular way. He petitions God, saying, “Let these transient things be the ground on which my soul praises you (Ps. 145:2), ‘God creator of all’. But let it not become stuck in them and glued to them with love through the physical senses” (*Conf.* 4.10.15). The passage quoted here from *Conf.* 13.31.46 appears to suggest that such a love is available only by participating in the love given by the Holy Spirit.

⁸⁷ Human participation in the love of the Holy Spirit is an important topic of consideration below in Chapter Four.

we shall see in the next chapter, Augustine maintains that the Spirit restores to order the knowing and the willing of humankind as he works through members of the Christian community.

Chapter Four: The Trinity and the Communal Life of the Church

As we saw in Chapter One, Moltmann characterizes the general tendencies of Greek and Latin theology according to the image each tradition uses to represent the trinitarian life of God. Whereas the Eastern Fathers looked to human communal structures for analogies to the eternal relationships between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Western Fathers appealed to the trinitarian structure of the individual human mind.¹ Moltmann is particularly critical of the Latin approach because of the negative implications he thinks it holds for the ability of human beings to live together in community. The psychological approach to the Trinity, Moltmann avers, ultimately gives rise to individualism in the realm of human relationships, for the ideal human life is thought to image the divine life, and the divine life is seen as self-contained and self-fulfilling. By contrast, he maintains that the appeal of the Greek Fathers to a society or a family for understanding divine relationality issues in the recognition that “the image of God must not merely be sought for in human individuality; we must look for it with equal earnestness in human sociality.”² Given the notion that God created human beings in his own image, it follows that, whereas the goal of human existence implied by the Latin understanding of God is to image the Trinity who is a single, self-sustaining individual, the goal implied by the Greek

¹ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 198.

² *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 199.

conception of the divine life is to become a generous and loving member of society.

In fact, Moltmann claims that

the disappearance of the social doctrine of the Trinity has made room for the development of individualism, and especially 'possessive individualism', in the Western world: everyone is supposed to fulfil 'himself' but who fulfils the community? It is a typically Western bias to suppose that social relationships and society are less 'primal' than the person.³

Augustine's psychological analogy for the trinitarian life of God has been so influential in Latin theology that Moltmann blames him for having been responsible for the shift away from the social conception of the Trinity in the West.⁴ From the passage quoted here, we see that Moltmann considers this shift to have had a disastrous effect upon human communal life, for he claims it has led to the view that the needs of the individual are more important than those of the community. The Western view of God sets up a situation where people find it necessary to compete⁵ with one another to possess the goods or the status which they feel will enable them to attain to the goal of their existence as human beings, *viz.* to be self-fulfilling individuals.

Once again, I think the charge which Moltmann brings against Augustine here cannot be substantiated from the evidence available to us in the *Confessions*. In particular, Augustine's view of the church illustrates that his use of the psychological image of the Trinity does not result in the destruction of human community. In other words, the "disappearance" of the social image of the Trinity from Augustine's theology does not lead him to adopt an impoverished conception of the communal life

³ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 199

⁴ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 198.

of the church. On the contrary, the bishop envisions the church as the assembly of people through whom God engenders loving relationships, both among members of the community and between the community and God himself, as he pours his love into the hearts of his people through the Holy Spirit. As we shall see, this is particularly evident in his allegorical treatment of the life of the church in Book 13. There he describes with particular clarity the effects of the Holy Spirit's activity in the church as the Spirit enables the church to participate in divine love. This participation issues in selfless acts of mercy and the willingness to suffer injustice while advocating for those who are wrongly treated, acts which bear no resemblance to the "possessive individualism" that Moltmann observes in "the Western world."⁶ Moreover, participation in the Spirit's love allows the church to be exalted in the end and to enter into God's own eternal trinitarian life as it shares in the Spirit's eternal love for the Father and the Son. The conclusion which I had to state tentatively in Chapter Two, concerning love as the basis of the eternal relationships between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, receives further support here by the observation that the expression of God's love within the church generates new and loving relationships. That is, since divine love engenders relationality as the Spirit works in the economy, it seems reasonable to suggest that the same divine love is also given expression in the immanent relationships between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Since Moltmann charges that Augustine's psychological analogy for the Trinity is ultimately responsible for the degradation of human community in the modern age,

⁵ Moltmann refers explicitly to the competitive aspects of modern individualism on page 215 of *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*.

it is important to note that, far from leading to “possessive individualism,” the bishop’s understanding of the psychological Trinity entails important and positive implications for the communal life of the church. As we shall see, on the authority of Romans 12:2,⁷ Augustine proposes that the “renewing of the mind” occurs when God re-orders the trinitarian image in the human soul through his activity within the church. To borrow a sentence from Rowan Williams, “the *image* of God in us . . . is realised when the three moments of our mental agency all have God for their object.”⁸ When human beings draw their life from God, know God, and love God, the trinitarian image in their souls is correctly ordered. Human beings who relate to God in this way do not treat one another unjustly, for their love is ordered in such a way that they need not treat other human beings as mere objects from whom gain is to be sought. They are fulfilled by their relationship with God and they have no need to seek worldly advancement for themselves at the expense of others. In a sense, as we shall see, they love their fellow human beings as the Holy Spirit loves through them, and divine love does not admit injustice and mistreatment.

⁶ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 199, quoted above.

⁷ “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God -- what is good and acceptable and perfect” (NRSV). As we shall see, Augustine’s discussion of this text in *Conf* 13.22.32 is of particular importance for the understanding of community that I am describing in this paragraph.

⁸ Rowan Williams. “*Sapientia* and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*.” p. 319 (italics are original).

The Trinity and the church: the six days of “re-creation” in Genesis 1

In Chapter Two of this study, I observed that Augustine finds the Trinity to be active in bringing creation into existence. There, I quoted a passage from *Conf.* 13.5.6 where the bishop discerns the Trinity in an “enigmatic image (1 Cor. 13:12)” as he reads the first two verses of the book of Genesis. Taking the phrase, “In the beginning when God created . . .,”⁹ the bishop considers the name “God” to stand for the Father and the word “beginning” to stand for the Son. He finds the Holy Spirit in the next verse, where the Spirit is said to be borne above the waters. This exegesis of Genesis 1:1-2, which amounts to a statement of the trinitarian action of God in creation, is actually part of the introduction to the lengthy and detailed allegory of “recreation” presented by Augustine in Book 13 of the *Confessions*. In this allegory, the bishop uses the Pentateuchal description of the progress of the creation over six days as the basis of his own narrative wherein the fallen creation is “remade” by God as he reveals himself in a saving way through the church.¹⁰ As we shall see, particular elements of the creation are identified figuratively with aspects of the life of the church, and these aspects of the church’s communal life are said to be brought about by the recreative activity of the Son and the Spirit within the church.

⁹ Genesis 1:1, NRSV.

¹⁰ My choice of the term “remake” (and “recreate” which appears below) is influenced by the language of the following sentence: “How can salvation be obtained.” Augustine asks God, “except through your hand remaking what you once made?” (*Conf.* 5.7 13). I think that it is fairly clear that these are the terms in which Augustine phrases his allegory in *Conf.* 13, *viz.* as God’s act of recreation, following the pattern of his original creative act.

Day one

In his allegorical treatment of the events of the first day of creation, when Genesis records that God made the heaven and the earth, Augustine presents the following interpretation:

In your name we are baptized, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19); in your name we baptize, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Among us also in his Christ God has made a heaven and an earth, meaning the spiritual and carnal members of his Church. Moreover, before our earth received form, imparted by doctrine, it was ‘invisible and unorganized’ (Gen. 1:2), and we were covered by the darkness of ignorance.¹¹

The beginning of God’s act of recreation, as defined by the terms of Augustine’s allegory, is also the beginning of the Christian life, *viz.* the rite of initiation. The name of the Trinity is invoked as “we” are baptized into Christ, and we in turn baptize others in the name of the “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”¹² Just as God made “heaven and earth” in the beginning, so, through baptism, both “spiritual and carnal” people are brought into the church.¹³ It is worth noting that the language used to describe the church here is reminiscent of the biblical image of the church as Christ’s body. Not only does God “make” the spiritual and carnal people “in his Christ,” but they are also

¹¹ *Conf.* 13.12.13.

¹² Augustine thinks that the name of the Trinity is significant in baptism not only because Christ commands that the name should be invoked (Matthew 28:19; on the combination of scriptural words and sacramental acts, see *Conf.* 13.20.27), but also because the claim that God reveals himself as Trinity is a uniquely Christian claim. One who is baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is embracing (and is embraced by) the church’s teaching, and, as we shall see, its communal life, which one enters after baptism, is envisioned by Augustine as a participation in the trinitarian life of God.

¹³ Augustine indicates the difference between the spiritual and the carnal members of Christ in the sentences which follow those quoted above. He uses 1 Corinthians 3:1 to distinguish between the “spiritual” who are able to comprehend the things of God, and those who cannot because they are “carnal,” that is, immersed in the things of the finite world (*Conf.* 13.13.14). The spiritual, who are said to correspond to “heaven,” are able to receive the light of truth, while those designated as “earthly” are in the darkness of ignorance until they receive instruction in Christian doctrine (*Conf.* 13.12.13).

referred to as “members” of Christ’s church.¹⁴ The terms of this image are not worked out in any detail in the *Confessions*, but the image is one that implies that the “members” of the body are joined to their head, the Word of God.¹⁵ Even if the body imagery is only latent in this passage, at the very least, the reference to the members of the church being “in Christ” testifies to the fact that Augustine thinks the second person of the Trinity is present in the church. In fact, as we shall see, Augustine believes that the Son is present in the church as the “fount of eternal life (John 4:14),”¹⁶ from which human beings can receive the life that overcomes their own mortality.¹⁷ Although this idea is not immediately evident from the text which I quoted above, one might well think that the baptismal font around which the rite of initiation is celebrated symbolizes the access which baptized believers have to the divine, life-giving “fount” through the Son’s presence in the church.

As the opening lines of Augustine’s allegory proceed, we see that the Holy Spirit is also involved in the beginning of the recreation of humankind. God’s judgment upon human “iniquity” had left human beings far from God in their fallen state, that is, in the darkness and chaos symbolized by the primordial waters.¹⁸ “But because your ‘Spirit was borne above the waters’,” writes the bishop,

¹⁴ The church is referred to explicitly as Christ’s body in *Conf.* 6.4.5 and 13.34.49.

¹⁵ See, especially, *Conf.* 13.34.49.

¹⁶ *Conf.* 13.21.31.

¹⁷ In *Conf.* 4.12.19, Augustine asserts that Christ slew death “by the abundance of his life.”

¹⁸ Augustine appears to make a figurative identification between those living in a fallen state and the earth which is “‘invisible and unorganized’ (Gen. 1:2), and . . . covered by the darkness” (*Conf.* 13.12.13). Not only does he go on to say that the Spirit was borne above the darkened waters (in the passage I quote in this paragraph), but, as we shall see in my discussion of the third day of recreation he speaks of fallen humanity as a restless and unstable sea that flows from Adam’s loins (*Conf.* 13.20.28).

your mercy did not abandon our misery, and you said: 'Let there be light' (Gen. 1:3). 'Do penitence, for the kingdom of God has drawn near' (Matt. 3:2).. . . We were converted to you (Ps. 50:15), light was created, and suddenly we 'who were once darkness are now light in the Lord' (Eph. 5:8).¹⁹

God did not abandon those who made themselves miserable when they fell from him. Rather, just as God converted darkness to light by his command in the beginning, so he is present in the church to fallen creatures in the person of the Holy Spirit, ready to grant them mercy as they respond to the message of his kingdom and the call to repent of their sinful ways. It is the Spirit who gives light to human beings so that, emerging from their darkness, they can be "light in the Lord." In particular, Augustine associates the spiritual gifts imparted by the Spirit to members of the church with light, gifts that are given for the good of those who already "delight in the light of truth," as well as for those to whom God's "most judicious servant [Paul] could not speak as if to spiritual persons but as to carnal."²⁰ The Holy Spirit, then, is present to members of the church, mercifully receiving them as he converts them from their darkness, and working in them and through them by the gifts he gives.²¹

¹⁹ *Conf.* 13.12.13.

²⁰ *Conf.* 13.18.23. The connection between the Holy Spirit and light is drawn with particular clarity when the bishop writes, "It is as if God says 'Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven', and 'suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as if a vehement wind blew, and tongues were seen split, like fire which sat on each of them' (Acts 2:2-3). And the lights, made in the firmament of heaven, have the word of life (Phil. 2:15-16). Run everywhere, holy fires, fires of beauty. Do not be under a bushel (Matt. 5:14-15)" (*Conf.* 13.19.25). The Holy Spirit gives light by which followers of Jesus are to illumine those who do not know their Lord.

²¹ The idea of God "working through" members of the church is expressed clearly in *Conf.* 13.37.52. More will be said about the gifts of the Spirit in my discussion of the fourth day of recreation.

Day two

Above the figurative “heaven and earth” which God creates in Christ, God places “a solid firmament of authority” when, on the second day of recreation, he gives to the church the “divine scripture.” Augustine thinks that a likeness between the Bible and the firmament of the sky is suggested by the following scriptural texts: “‘the heaven will fold up like a book’ (Isa. 34:4), and now ‘like a skin it is stretched out’ above us (Ps. 103:2).”²² Apart from these references to the figurative likeness between the physical book and the sky which is above the earth, the scripture is also exalted because God has given it “supreme authority,” rendering every other utterance inferior.²³ Elsewhere in the *Confessions*, Augustine explains that the authority of the scripture was intended by God to compensate for the weakness of the human mind. Thus, he writes,

since we were too weak to discover the truth by pure reasoning and therefore needed the authority of the sacred writings, I now began to believe that you [God] would never have conferred such preeminent authority on the scripture, now diffused through all lands, unless you had willed that it would be a means of coming to faith in you and a means of seeking to know you.²⁴

The first part of this sentence repeats a point that we examined at length in Chapter Three, *viz.* that human minds are insufficient to arrive at the knowledge of God through their own rational powers. The Bible receives “preeminent authority” from God because, when it is accepted as being of divine origin, it is a “means” through which human beings can come to faith and seek to know God. For instance, it is the church’s source of knowledge of God’s revelation of himself in Christ, which is, as

²² *Conf.* 13.15.16.

²³ *Conf.* 13.15.16.

we saw in Chapter Three, an all-important medium for God's self-revelation because Christ's humanity mediates between the transcendent Word and the weakness of human minds.

Augustine considers the scripture to be "so destructive of pride"²⁵ because, in order to accept its authority, one must cease to place confidence in one's own abilities and accept the aid extended by God through the scripture. Because "we were too weak to discover the truth" without God's aid, God gave the scripture so that we might seek to know him through it.²⁶ The language of the Bible, Augustine thinks, directs our minds to the knowledge of God. Near the end of Augustine's treatment of the events of the second day, it becomes apparent that this is knowledge of God as Trinity. He comments that the knowledge available to celestial creatures is superior to that of human beings for, whereas the angels are made able to see God directly,²⁷ human beings are too weak to sustain this vision.²⁸ Yet, even the knowledge of the angels is imperfect compared to God's own self-knowledge. Thus, Augustine confesses that

To know you as you are in an absolute sense is for you alone. You are immutably, you know immutably, you will immutably. Your essence knows and wills immutably. Your knowledge is and knows immutably. Your will is and knows immutably.²⁹

²⁴ *Conf* 6.5.8.

²⁵ *Conf* 13.15.17. In *Conf* 4.5.8, Augustine observes that the bible draws "crowds to the bosom of its holy humility."

²⁶ *Conf* 6.5.8, quoted above.

²⁷ "They have no need to look up to this firmament and to read so as to know your [God's] word. They ever 'see your face' (Matt. 18:10) and there, without syllables requiring time to pronounce, they read what your eternal will intends. They read, they choose, they love" (*Conf* 13.15.18).

²⁸ "Now," writes the bishop, "your word appears to us in the 'enigmatic obscurity' of clouds and through the 'mirror' of heaven (1 Cor. 13:12), not as it really is," that is, through the language of the scripture (*Conf* 13.15.18).

²⁹ *Conf* 13.16.19.

This is the knowledge sought by celestial and terrestrial creatures alike: the knowledge of God as Trinity. As we have seen, the trinitarian image of God in the human soul consists in the soul's being, knowing, and willing. In the passage quoted here, God is depicted as the divine prototype of this image, for his trinitarian life unfolds as he immutably is, immutably knows and immutably wills. Although Augustine does not draw an explicit connection between God's trinitarian self-knowledge and the knowledge to which the language of the Bible directs our minds, he does appear to consider the knowledge of him who is immutably, knows immutably, and wills immutably to be the reality which is signified by means of "enigmatic images" in the scripture.³⁰

Day three

On the third day, God distinguishes between the society of those who share the common end of "temporal and earthly felicity" and those who wish to reject such pleasures in favour of seeking God himself. In Augustine's mind, the distinction between these two groups is as clear as the contrast between the chaos of the seas and the relative order and calmness of the dry land. Thus, Augustine asks,

who, Lord, but you told the waters to gather into one assembly, and caused to appear the dry land, 'which thirsts after you' (Ps. 62:2-3). For 'the sea is yours and you made it, and the dry land your hands have formed' (Ps. 95:5).³¹

Later in Book 13, the bishop equates the "waters," which are here said to be gathered into "one assembly" -- that is, into a "sea" --, with those who remain in the fallen state

³⁰ Augustine speaks of the "enigmatic obscurity" of scriptural language in *Conf.* 13.15.18.

of original sin. Those who make up the sea are “restlessly unstable”³² because they love finite things that pass away. In the following passage, Augustine makes an explicit connection between membership in the assembly of those who are figuratively identified with the sea and participation in fallen human nature: “if Adam had not fallen from you,” he confesses to God,

there would not have flowed from his loins that salty sea-water the human race -- deeply inquisitive, like a sea in a stormy swell, restlessly unstable.³³

Those in whom the “chain of original sin”³⁴ is not broken by the forgiveness available in baptism³⁵ are left in a situation where “the innumerable variety of their anxieties makes them fluctuate from one thing to another.”³⁶ By contrast, those who make up the dry land find stability as they seek after the Lord, for there is neither fluctuation nor turning in God’s stable permanence.³⁷

Augustine is distinguishing between the two “assemblies” of people indicated in *Conf.* 13.17.20 on the basis of the kind of love which each expresses: the “love of anxieties” resembles the bishop’s description of cupidity, while love for God is aligned with charity.³⁸ Through the former kind of love people attach themselves to temporal things because of the chaotic effects of pride in their souls, and anxiety

³¹ *Conf.* 13.17.20.

³² *Conf.* 13.20.28, quoted below.

³³ *Conf.* 13.20.28.

³⁴ *Conf.* 5.9.16. Henry Chadwick notes that the earliest occurrence of the term “original sin,” used in the sense of sin inherited from our first human parents, occurs in the *Confessions* (Chadwick, p. 82 n. 13). See *Conf.* 5.9.16, 8.10.22, and 10.10.29.

³⁵ On the forgiveness of sin which occurs at baptism, see *Conf.* 9.2.4, and 9.4.12.

³⁶ *Conf.* 13.17.20.

³⁷ God, argues the saint, is superior to earthly objects of love which “lack permanence” (*Conf.* 4.10.15) because “he does not pass away; nothing succeeds him” (*Conf.* 4.11.17).

³⁸ As we shall see later in this chapter, cupidity -- the lust to possess inferior goods and to have them as ready sources of pleasure -- keeps human beings immersed in the pursuit of “earthly and

results because the things they love are sure to pass away; the latter kind of love is correctly ordered because through it, people seek to be lifted out of the anxieties of temporal existence to live eternally with God. It would appear that the behaviour of those who inhabit the “sea” is similar to the actions of those who live according to the principles of what Moltmann calls “possessive individualism.”³⁹ For instance, immediately following the account of his conversion to Christianity, Augustine lists the kinds of anxiety that he leaves behind as he moves from life in the midst of the salty sea to life on the dry land. Even while still a catechumen, he confesses that already his mind

was free of ‘the biting cares’ of place-seeking, of desire for gain, of wallowing in self-indulgence, of scratching the itch of lust.⁴⁰

The ideas of place-seeking and desiring gain imply conflict between the young Augustine and those who hampered the attainment of his objectives; his admission of self-indulgent and lustful actions indicates that he used lesser goods (including other people) as means of satisfying his own desires. In working toward his goal of earthly felicity in the midst of the sea of human sinfulness, Augustine’s conduct may well have resembled those of the person acting according to the following tenet of Moltmann’s “possessive individualism”:

temporal felicity,” while charity directs the soul to God “in a love of freedom from anxiety” (*Conf.* 13.7.8).

³⁹ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 199.

⁴⁰ *Conf.* 9.1.1. Augustine describes the possessive element of the lust for earthly pleasures in the following assessment of the condition of his youthful soul, immersed as it was in the love of temporal delights: “My hunger was internal, deprived of inward food, that is of you yourself, my God. But that was not the kind of hunger I felt. I was without any desire for incorruptible nourishment, not because I was replete with it, but the emptier I was, the more unappetizing such food became. So my soul was in rotten health. In an ulcerous condition it thrust itself to outward things, miserably avid to be scratched by contact with the world of the senses. Yet physical things had no soul. Love lay outside their range.

the other person is the only thing that limits the development of one's own personality and the realization of one's own self.⁴¹

It appears that in Augustine's sea of human cupidity and Moltmann's possessive individualism, the possibility of a loving community coming into existence is severely jeopardized. In both cases, the goal of human life is self-fulfillment, and fellow human beings are seen as objects that either hinder or aid in the attainment of this goal. Even if the similarities between these two modes of conduct are merely formal, the fact remains that Augustine is aware of patterns of behaviour that destroy communal life, and, as we shall see, he is at pains to oppose them when he presents his vision of a Christian community in which God actively counteracts the individualistic tendencies of human nature. Accordingly, it is difficult to see how Moltmann's charge, that Augustine introduces individualist tendencies into the Western theological tradition, can be sustained.

By contrast, according to the bishop's positive teaching concerning the Christian community, those whom he identifies with "the dry land," who thirst for the knowledge of the trinitarian God, selflessly love both those who are inside and those outside their own community. In fact, the dry land produces "fruit" (Genesis 1:12) as members of the church respond to God's command that they should love their neighbours as themselves.⁴² This love is manifested as the church assists those in

To me it was sweet to love and to be loved, the more so if I could also enjoy the body of the beloved" (*Conf.* 3.1.1).

⁴¹ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God.* p. 155. In saying this, I am aware that the young Augustine could not have had in mind the philosophical assumptions which accompany the modern individualism described by Moltmann. Rather, I am saying that the behaviour of the soul which Augustine describes as cupidinous may well resemble the behaviour of the person who Moltmann observes acting in response to the individualistic tendencies in modern philosophy.

⁴² *Conf.* 13.17.21.

distress “not only in easy ways,” but also in ways that require self-sacrifice and a deep personal investment:

this means such kindness as rescuing a person suffering injustice from the hand of the powerful and providing the shelter of protection by the mighty force of just judgement.⁴³

The fact that Augustine indicates that this is not “easy” implies that those expressing love through acts of justice will likely suffer injustice themselves as they seek to shelter and protect those who are abused by “the powerful.” The ends of personal gain and self-fulfillment at the expense of others are specifically targeted as unacceptable in the vision of community that Augustine presents. In short, the expression of charity in response to God’s command that the dry land should bear fruit issues in conduct which counteracts the self-serving and unjust tendencies of those inhabiting the sea of human sinfulness by restoring justice in human relationships.

Day four

According to Augustine, not only does God command that those who love him should serve others instead of seeking personal gain, but God is also actively involved in bringing about good works through members of the church. Referring to the pauline teaching that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to the church,⁴⁴ the bishop proposes that God distributes to his people the ability and the inclination to speak with supernatural insight and to perform good deeds for others, all as the Spirit dwells in

⁴³ *Conf.* 13.17.21.

⁴⁴ In the passage in question, *Conf.* 13.18.23, Augustine quotes 1 Corinthians 12:7-11.

the hearts of those who love him. These works shine in the world like the lights which God commanded to shine in the firmament on the fourth day of creation (Genesis 1:14), making God's goodness known in the midst of the darkness of ignorance.⁴⁵ For instance, the bishop associates the gift of the "word of wisdom" with the light of the sun, the "word of knowledge" with the moon, and the following gifts with the stars: faith, the gift of healings, miraculous powers, prophecy, the discernment of authentic spirits, and a diversity of tongues.⁴⁶ People utter words of wisdom and knowledge, heal the sick, perform miracles, and so on, as the Holy Spirit works through them.⁴⁷ Thus, Augustine quotes the apostle, saying, "all these are the work of one and the same Spirit, dividing appropriate gifts to each person as he wills."⁴⁸

Augustine does not think that the members of the assembly of the "dry land" are the only people who benefit from the gifts of the Holy Spirit; those who are still in the chaotic seas may also witness the light which is manifested as those in the church give expression to the gifts they are given. Indeed, this is why Augustine likens the gifts to the lights of the heavens, for through the gifts of the Spirit, God demonstrates his goodness and his love to the "darkness of those who are infants but not without hope."⁴⁹ Thus, the bishop bids those through whom the Spirit is working to make known the light they have received, saying,

⁴⁵ *Conf.* 13.18.22.

⁴⁶ *Conf.* 13.18.23.

⁴⁷ Augustine speaks of God working in human beings in *Conf.* 13.37.52.

⁴⁸ *Conf.* 13.18.23, quoting 1 Corinthians 12:11.

⁴⁹ *Conf.* 13.19.25. In fact, the Spirit gives lesser gifts, those identified with the stars, for those who are in the darkness and whose eyesight will not permit them to gaze upon lights of higher intensity. Thus, writes Augustine, "The natural man is as an 'infant in Christ' and a drinker of milk, until he is

run everywhere, holy fires, fires of beauty. Do not be under a bushel (Matt. 5:14-15). He to whom you have adhered is exalted, and he has exalted you. Run and make it known to all nations (Ps. 78:10).⁵⁰

God wishes all people to receive his goodness, that all should come to know him and to love him. He sends those who love him into the world, giving them the light through which his holiness and his beauty are reflected. As they are expressed among the nations who do not know God, these gifts are intended to reveal that God is “exalted” -- perhaps in the sense that he is the “highest Good,”⁵¹ or in the sense that his charity is supereminent⁵² --, and that he exalts those who “adhere” to him in love. As we shall see, human beings “adhere” to God by loving him, and it is through this love that they can be exalted to their “supereminent resting-place,”⁵³ to their eternal home in God.⁵⁴

Although he does not say so explicitly in the passage under consideration here, *Conf.* 13.18.22 - 13.19.25, one may well think that Augustine understands the Spirit to be at work in human beings in the same way that he knows himself in them. As we saw in Chapter Three, human beings are made able to perceive God’s goodness in creation and, subsequently, to know and love God, as the Spirit knows and loves himself within the human heart.⁵⁵ The gifts corresponding respectively to the light of the sun and moon, for example, the words of wisdom and knowledge, to be sure, are uttered by the person who has been given these gifts by the Spirit. Yet, these people

strengthened for ‘solid food’ (1 Cor. 3:1-2; 2:14; Heb. 5:12-14), and acquires eyesight strong enough to face the sun” (*Conf.* 13.18.22). The sun, of course, is figuratively identified with divine wisdom.

⁵⁰ *Conf.* 13.19.25.

⁵¹ *Conf.* 2.6.12, 2.10.18, 7.3.5, 13.2.2, 13.38.53.

⁵² *Conf.* 13.7.8.

⁵³ *Conf.* 13.7.8.

⁵⁴ *Conf.* 4.16.31.

give utterance as the Spirit speaks in them, according to the Spirit's own grasp of eternal truth, that is, the knowledge which is "fixed and determined without evolving with the generations" of human beings.⁵⁶ The same is true of the gifts corresponding to the light of the stars: the faith, healings, miraculous powers, prophecy, discernment of authentic spirits, and tongues are accomplished outwardly by a given person as the Spirit works in and through that person.

What is emerging is a vision of a community in which God inspires people to speak and to act for the good of others. The exercise of charity in the church, charity which is both commanded by God⁵⁷ and given in the person of the Holy Spirit, who is divine charity,⁵⁸ results in a community whose members give generously of themselves to one another. The members of the church give generously and God gives generously as he works in them. Moltmann's charge that Augustine's theology leads to an individualistic anthropology cannot be accepted because, in fact, Augustine believes that the operation of divine love through members of the church generates relationships within the Christian community which exclude self-indulgent behaviour. The relationships are such that the emphasis is upon giving rather than acquiring and possessing, for gifts are administered by the Holy Spirit, not only for the good of the one receiving the gift, but for the benefit of all people.⁵⁹ As I have indicated, the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of believers appears to be the source of the generosity expressed by members of the church as the Spirit generates self-

⁵⁵ See *Conf* 13.31-46.

⁵⁶ *Conf*. 13.20.27.

⁵⁷ See, for instance, *Conf* 1.5.5, 12.18.27, 12.25.35.

⁵⁸ See comments in Chapter Two of this study concerning Augustine's exegesis of Romans 5:5.

giving relationships within the community.⁶⁰ Since the Spirit is routinely identified with divine love by the bishop,⁶¹ it seems reasonable to suggest that divine love tends to give rise to relationality as it works within the economy of creation. In Chapter Two, I established that Augustine does not consider the trinitarian relationships in God to be secondary to a separate and more fundamental principle of divine unity. In other words, God's revelation of himself as Trinity in the economy of creation is an authentic expression of the immanent divine life. Knowing that Augustine does not consider God's revelation of himself to be of a second order, and knowing that God's love is generative of relationships in the church, I feel that I can restate one of my conclusions from Chapter Two with slightly more confidence, *viz.* that love is the basis of the trinitarian relationships in God. This understanding of the divine life will be of particular importance when I consider the manner in which Augustine conceives of the entrance of the church into the trinitarian life of God through participation in the love of the Spirit.

⁵⁹ *Conf* 13.20.23.

⁶⁰ This statement corresponds in a loose way to the third premise upon which Moltmann predicated his understanding of the relationship between God and humankind in *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, for we see that both authors are maintaining that God brings about the relationships which given the Christian community, even if Augustine speaks of the Spirit loving through believers, and Moltmann refers to Christ making human beings able to imitate his own sacrificial love.

⁶¹ Once again, I refer to the discussion of Augustine's use of Romans 5:5 in identifying the Holy Spirit with divine love, to be found in Chapter Two.

Day five

Having identified the sea with the chaos of human sinfulness, and having drawn a connection between sinfulness and the death of the soul,⁶² Augustine affirms that those who are living in the midst of the waters are not without hope of receiving the mercy from God which will allow them to move to the dry land and find happiness in loving God.⁶³ The sign of this hope, Augustine thinks, is that God creates life in the seas as well as on land. Thus, the bishop addresses God, saying,

let the sea also conceive and bring forth your works. 'Let the waters produce reptiles of living souls' (Gen. 1:20).⁶⁴

The “works” of God which are likened here to the “reptiles of living souls,” creatures made by God’s command on the fifth day, are the sacraments celebrated by the church in the midst of the nations. The sacraments serve as points of intersection between the physical and spiritual realms. They form a base upon which willing souls can climb as they seek God, that is, as they move from the sea on to the dry land. They are referred to as God’s “works” because, as we shall see, he works through the corporeal signs to direct the minds of human beings who receive the sacraments toward his eternal truth, that is, toward the knowledge of himself as Trinity.

The particular rite that Augustine has in mind in connection to the works God performs in the sea is baptism. Thus, he writes,

⁶² In Chapter Three, we saw that disordered love introduces corruption into the trinitarian image of the soul (that is, into the soul’s being). Elsewhere, in *Conf* 10.42.67, Augustine makes a similar connection on the authority of the Letter to the Romans: “because ‘the wages of sin is death’ (Rom. 6:23),” writes the bishop, “he [Satan] in common with mankind is condemned to death.”

⁶³ As we have seen, the bishop describes the situation of those who do not yet know God as “the darkness of those who are infants but not without hope” (*Conf* 13.19.25).

through the works of your holy people, God, your mysteries have crept through the midst of the waters of the world's temptations to imbue the nations with your name through baptism.⁶⁵

God's name is made known as the church baptizes in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In this way, the nations are "imbued" with the trinitarian name of God which they had not received before God's "holy people" were sent out to perform God's works in their midst.⁶⁶ The combination of the symbolic washing and the words which solemnize the rite makes a physical and temporal sign which a willing soul can use as a basis for coming to know God, for the sign symbolizes and embodies a spiritual reality. Thus, writes Augustine,

these physical things have been produced to meet the needs of peoples estranged from your eternal truth, but only in your gospel . . .⁶⁷

The "physical things" (*i.e.* the baptismal water and the ritual actions) and the words added from the "gospel" (*i.e.* the liturgy based upon Christ's words⁶⁸) "meet the needs" of the people who are "estranged" from God's "eternal truth" by their sinful orientation toward earthly things.⁶⁹ In a mysterious⁷⁰ way, baptism presents that truth so that it can be grasped by the limited human mind. God works through the physical

⁶⁴ *Conf.* 13.20.26.

⁶⁵ *Conf.* 13.20.26.

⁶⁶ I say "sent out" recalling the commission which I quoted in the last section, where the holy fires, the gifts of the Spirit, are sent out to make God known among the nations (*Conf.* 13.19.25).

⁶⁷ *Conf.* 13.20.27.

⁶⁸ In the case of baptism, as we have seen, Matthew 28:19.

⁶⁹ In the paragraph which follows that from which this quotation from *Conf.* 13.20.27 is taken, Augustine explains that the sacraments are necessary because of the sin which all humankind inherited from Adam: this is the passage in which he describes Adam's offspring flowing from his loins, producing a salty-sea of sinful humanity (*Conf.* 13.20.28).

⁷⁰ If Adam had not fallen from God, Augustine explains in *Conf.* 13.20.28, "there would have been no need for [God's] ministers to resort to *mystic* actions and words in the realm of the bodily senses (*emphasis added*).

signs, ensuring that they have a “causitive effect upon the soul,”⁷¹ an effect which serves to lift the mind of the initiate out of the confines of the corporeal realm and direct that mind in search of God. Baptism, in particular, gives human beings entrance into the community where God reveals himself as Trinity. The minds of believers must not dwell on the physical aspects of the signs themselves,

for human beings after instruction, initiation, and subjection to corporeal sacraments do not make further progress unless in the spiritual realm their soul comes to live on another level and, subsequent to the words of initiation, looks towards their perfection (Heb. 6:1).⁷²

Through the sacrament, human beings are made ready to “live on another level,” and to seek the truth that exists in the spiritual realm. They do not progress toward finding this truth, a truth which is, ultimately, God himself, until they look beyond their bodily existence seeking the perfection of their souls. As we shall see, the “perfection” mentioned here by Augustine occurs as human beings cease to be conformed to this world and are renewed in their minds, as they learn to love God through the things he has made and as the Holy Spirit makes them able to love God more fully.

Day six

In general, the bishop understands the notion of “living on another level” in terms of a change in the way that one’s love is ordered. Human beings remain engrossed in earthly pursuits as long as they attach themselves to lesser things by loving them and seeking to derive fulfillment from them. As we have seen, such

⁷¹ *Conf* 13.21.29.

people embrace anxiety as they immerse themselves in worldly loves.⁷³ People are able to emerge from the sea of cupidity when they restrain their love for lesser things: the Spirit is borne above the waters, converting from darkness to light those who are willing to repent of their sinful ways.⁷⁴ That is, the Spirit, who is love, receives those who come up from the sea and begins to re-order their love so that they seek fulfillment by loving God, rather than by loving inferior goods. Those whom the Spirit so receives, he remakes into “‘a living soul’ (Gen 1:24),”⁷⁵ living because their appetite for the temporal pleasures which lead to the death of the soul is replaced by an appetite for divine love which brings life. Thus, Augustine enjoins his readers, saying,

‘Seek God and your soul shall live’ (Ps. 68:33), so that the earth may ‘produce a living soul’. ‘Be not conformed to this world’ (Rom. 12:2). Restrain yourselves from it. By avoiding this world the soul lives; by seeking it the soul dies. Restrain yourselves from the savage cruelty of arrogance, from the indolent pleasure of self-indulgence, and from ‘knowledge falsely so called’ (1 Tim. 6:20). Then the wild animals are quiet and the beasts are tamed and the serpents are rendered harmless: in allegory they signify the affections of the soul.⁷⁶

One embraces death by conforming oneself to the world. One is conformed to the world when one acts toward created things with untamed affections, that is, with disorderly love.⁷⁷ The soul seeking to fulfill itself by loving temporal pleasures

⁷² *Conf.* 13.20.28.

⁷³ *Conf.* 13.7.8.

⁷⁴ *Conf.* 13.12.13.

⁷⁵ *Conf.* 13.21.29.

⁷⁶ *Conf.* 13.21.30.

⁷⁷ Augustine does not think that love for lesser goods should be abandoned altogether. The problem is disorderly love rather than love for finite things *per se*. We have seen that he refers to the passions with which the soul attaches itself to temporal things as “beasts.” These beasts do not have to remain wild; they can be restrained as order is reintroduced into the soul. Thus, he states that “in the ‘living soul’ there will be beasts that have become good by gentleness of their behaviour. . . . There will be good ‘cattle’, experiencing neither excess if they eat nor want if they do not eat. There will be

moves towards death because it attaches itself to things which are themselves moving toward death.⁷⁸ Such a soul does not instantly die, for

the soul's death does not end all movement. Its 'death' comes about as it departs from the fount of life, so that it is absorbed by the transitory world and conformed to it.⁷⁹

The soul dies without the stable life it receives from God's "fount," and it departs from this source of life by allowing itself to be "absorbed by the transitory world" as it loves temporal things. By contrast, the soul which avoids worldly things, seeking rest in God's stable permanence will live because, by its love for God, it attaches itself to the divine life which does not abate.⁸⁰

In the foregoing paragraph, we saw that Augustine draws a connection between the restraint of disorderly love, which causes people to be conformed to the world, and the appearance of the "living soul."⁸¹ According to the bishop, God's act of re-creating those who make up the "living soul" corresponds figuratively to Paul's notion of the renewing of the human mind:

There was fulfilled the word which you [God] spoke through your apostle: 'Be not conformed to this world'. Then followed that which you immediately went on to say 'But be renewed by the newness of your mind' (Rom. 12:2). That is not a making 'according to kind', as if renewal were achieved by imitating a neighbour's example or by living under the authority of a human superior. For you did not say 'Let man be made according to his

'serpents' that are good, not harmful and dangerous but astute in their caution (Matt. 10:16) . . . For these animals serve reason when they are restrained from their deathly ways. Then they live and are good" (*Conf* 13.21.31).

⁷⁸ As we saw in Chapter Three, the young Augustine learned through the death of his anonymous friend that misery and death result in the soul that loves finite things for their own sake and not for the sake of God who created them (see *Conf* 4.6.11 and 4.8.13).

⁷⁹ *Conf*. 13.21.30.

⁸⁰ Augustine refers to God's "stable permanence" in *Conf*. 12.28.38.

⁸¹ The bishop repeats this idea in *Conf* 12.22.32, where he writes. "See, Lord our God, our Creator: when our affections were restrained from loving the world by which we were dying, through living an evil life, then there began to come into being a 'living soul'."

kind', but 'Let us make man according to our image and likeness' (Gen. 1:26).⁸²

The movement out of the sea of human sinfulness, the movement which gives rise to the "living soul," is here phrased in terms of the renewing of the image of God in the mind. This renewal is not accomplished by merely human means: it is not a matter of imitating the conduct of a fellow human being, or of submitting to the authority of another person. Human beings are not renewed in their own image (*i.e.* they are not conformed to this world), but in the image of God (*i.e.* their minds are renewed according to God's image and likeness). In other words, as Augustine conceives it, the renewal of the human mind consists in restoring the fallen soul's ability to bear the image of God. Although Augustine does not use these terms in the immediate context of the passage quoted here, it seems reasonable to refer back to his conception of the image of God in the soul as the soul's being, knowing, and willing. Since it appears that he considers the "renewing of the mind" to occur as the chaotic effects of sin in the soul are redressed by God, it seems reasonable to suggest that he may well think of the mind's renewal in terms of the restoration of the soul's being, knowing, and willing to order.

The bishop considers this renewal of the mind to occur as the saving activities of the Son and the Spirit, made available to humankind through the presence of these divine persons in the church, enable human beings to have God as the object of the trinitarian activity of their souls. If this is so, it would mean that the soul's being,

⁸² *Conf* 13.22.32.

knowing, and willing are all directed beyond created reality and towards God.

Augustine writes,

because such a person now has the capacity, you teach him to see the Trinity of the Unity and the Unity of the Trinity.⁸³

The person whose mind has been renewed has the capacity to be taught about the trinitarian life of God because such a person has restrained his or her mind from the desire for earthly things and sought God himself, fulfilling what Paul wrote in Romans 12:2. It is only as people are made able to know and love God through their participation in the recreative activity of God in the church that they can be taught to see “the Trinity of the Unity and the Unity of the Trinity.” This is significant because it shows that the trinitarian action of God within the church results in the knowledge of God as Trinity in those who are the object of God’s activity. Contrary to Moltmann’s charge against Augustine, the bishop does not allow that the image of God in the soul gives human beings license to live as though “social relationships and society are less ‘primal’ than the person.”⁸⁴ Rather, as we have seen, the perfection of this image prepares it for relationships both with fellow human beings and with God himself, as God teaches such a person about his own trinitarian nature.

Love is purified through participation in the communal life of the church

A comment made in passing provides significant insight into Augustine’s view of how God uses the church in the process of overcoming human weakness and preparing humankind to enter into eternal life with God. This comment occurs in the

⁸³ *Conf* 13.22.32

context of Augustine's recollection of the years he spent as a Manichee and trained rhetor trying to dissuade Christians from their faith in Christ and their love for God.

His efforts to make the Christians renounce their faith were of no avail because

in the nest of the Church they could grow like fledgelings in safety and nourish the wings of charity with the food of sound faith (Job 39:26; Ps. 83:4). O Lord our God, under the covering of your wings (Exod. 19:4) we set our hope. Protect us and bear us up. It is you who will carry us; you will bear us up from our infancy until old age (Isa. 46:4).⁸⁵

Although Augustine had cultivated an "agile"⁸⁶ mind, and although the intelligence of God's "little ones" was much slower than his own, Augustine was not able to cause any real damage when he confronted the Christians with Manichean teaching that contradicted the teaching of the scriptures and the doctrines of the church.⁸⁷ Their life in the church kept them safe from his attacks. Those Christians whom the young Augustine challenged were kept safe by God, who protected his "fledgelings" "under the covering of his wings" as a parent bird protects its young in the nest. The love for God which was nourished in them as they participated in the life of the Christian community kept them close⁸⁸ to him.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. p. 199.

⁸⁵ *Conf.* 4.16.31.

⁸⁶ Augustine recalls that, at the age of twenty, he was able to read and understand with perfect clarity the *Ten Categories* of Aristotle, a book which was considered to be of the highest difficulty by "those who were reputed to be learned men" (*Conf.* 4.16.28).

⁸⁷ Elsewhere, Augustine states that even if some people were persuaded on certain points, such as the Manichean beliefs about the significance of eclipses, they would be safe provided that they remained in the church and did not believe anything that was unworthy of the Lord himself. "Such an infirmity in the cradle of faith," Augustine says, "is sustained by mother charity, until the new man 'grows up into a mature man and is no longer carried about by any wind of doctrine' (Eph. 4:13)" (*Conf.* 5.5.9). Both this text and the one quoted from *Conf.* 4.16.31 are noteworthy for their suggestion that the church is a safe place for nurturing the young and bringing them to maturity, since one speaks of the church as a nest for fledgelings, and the other uses the imagery of a cradle for infants.

⁸⁸ Earlier in *Conf.* 4.16.31 Augustine notes that the Christians whose faith he attempted to destroy "did not wander away far" from God.

Members of the church, the bishop avers, are “borne up” by God “from infancy until old age.” The language of being “borne up” is reminiscent of the quotation from Genesis 1 where the Holy Spirit is described as having been “borne above the waters” because the Spirit is divine charity and, as such, he is supereminent.⁹⁰ It appears, then, that Christians are kept safe by God’s love in the church until they reach the maturity of old age. Although he does not say so explicitly in the passage quoted above, it may well be that he thinks the Spirit is responsible for protecting members of the church, since, as we have seen, the bishop identifies the Holy Spirit with divine love elsewhere in the *Confessions*. God protects his “fledgelings” in the “nest” of the church, nurturing his “little ones” until their wings are fully formed and they are prepared to fly. Given that the wings in question are “wings of charity,” and that God’s charity is “borne up,” it does not seem to be outside the terms of the bishop’s imagery to suggest that those who have matured in their love are “borne up” by God and made able to participate in God’s own eternal, “supereminent” love once they leave the bodily life. Those who have reached old age under God’s protection are made able to fly from their temporary (and temporal) home in the nest of the church to the eternal “home” of the church with God. In fact, the church’s eternal “home” is described in the following terms a few lines below the passage in which Augustine

⁸⁹ It is possible that the reference to the love of the church being “nourished by the food of sound faith” is a reference to the eucharist, one of the central acts of Christian worship, in which bread and wine are consecrated to be the body and blood of Christ in a meal that is consumed by the whole community. More will be said about the ability of the sacraments to nurture love in the church as this chapter unfolds.

⁹⁰ Augustine’s exegesis of this text from Genesis is examined at great length in Chapter Two, and later in the present chapter.

presents his image of the church as a “nest.” “Our good life is with you for ever,” he confesses to God,

and because we turned away from that, we became twisted. Let us now return to you that we may not be overturned. Our good is life with you and suffers no deficiency (Ps. 101:28); for you yourself are that good. We have no fear that there is no home to which we may return because we fell from it. During our absence our house suffers no ruin; it is your eternity.⁹¹

The church’s permanent “home” is God’s eternity. This house is ever ready to receive its human inhabitants, for God’s goodness and life can suffer no ruin. A significant point which arises from these sentences is that Augustine thinks of the return of human beings as a communal event. It is “we” who return to God, “our” good life, and “we” who have no fear that there might not be a house to receive us. (Moreover, from the text quoted in the previous paragraph, it is “we” who are protected, carried, and borne up by God.) In the *Confessions*, the bishop almost always speaks of the exaltation of human beings to life in God as occurring in and through a community. Augustine, then, sees the church as a forum through which human beings are brought to maturity and made ready to participate in the divine life through their love, and it is the setting in which they will enter into their “good life” with God.

The same movement from life as part of the earthly church to the eternal life of the church in God is described in slightly different terms near the end of the *Confessions*. Once again, the saint employs plural pronouns exclusively as he describes this movement, and the movement is again described as being accomplished

⁹¹ *Conf* 4.16.31.

as a result of the affinity between human charity and divine Charity expressed in the person of the Holy Spirit. Thus Augustine writes,

to whom can I expound, and with what words can I express, the weight of cupidity pulling us downwards into the precipitous abyss and the lifting up of the love given by your Spirit who was ‘borne above the waters’? . . . The impurity of our spirit flows downwards because of our love of anxieties, and the holiness which is yours draws us upwards in a love of freedom from anxiety.⁹²

It is, then, “our” spirit that is pulled down by cupidity and lifted up by the Spirit and by God’s holiness. Augustine explains that the movements under discussion in this passage do not occur through “literal places,” rather these movements occur according to changes in the quality of “our feelings and our loves.”⁹³ This passage occurs at the end of a paragraph in which Augustine explains that the Holy Spirit was borne above the waters during the creation because of the supereminence of divine charity, whom the Spirit is by nature.⁹⁴ Human cupidity “pulls us downwards” because it is unlike the supereminent love of God. Cupidity is termed “our love of anxieties” in this passage because, as we have seen, it has as its object base things which, unlike God, cause misery because they are unstable and tend to pass out of existence: they make us anxious because they do not completely fulfill us and because we cannot count upon them persisting as stable objects of our love. Conversely, we are lifted upwards to God by the charity we are given in the person of the Holy Spirit: in the text quoted above, the “lifting up” comes from the “love given by your Spirit.” By the Spirit’s love, we are drawn “upwards in a love of freedom from anxiety.” We

⁹² *Conf* 13.7.8.

⁹³ *Conf* 13.7.8.

are free from anxiety when we are given divine charity because such love lifts us to the eternal home that was described above in *Conf.* 4.16.31, a home which can suffer no ruin because of the stable permanence of God's eternity, a home where God himself is our source of goodness.⁹⁵

Any doubt that it is the church that is being lifted up by the love given by the Holy Spirit is dispelled by the sentences which follow those quoted in the previous paragraph. In light of his meditation upon the downward pull of cupidity and the lifting up of the love of the Spirit, Augustine writes:

So we may lift up our heart and hold it to you [God], where your Spirit is 'borne above the waters', and we come to the supereminent resting-place when our soul has passed over 'the waters that are without substance' (Ps. 123:5).⁹⁶

In particular, it is the phrase "lift up our heart" that confirms the notion that the bishop is speaking about the exaltation of the church, for this phrase occurs in a distinctive way in the African eucharistic liturgy, where the single form of "heart" (*cor*) is used with the plural pronoun.⁹⁷ Indeed, in her footnote to a variation of this phrase which occurs in *Conf.* 12.16.23, Maria Boulding remarks that Augustine occasionally uses this phrase as a "shorthand" way of referring to the whole eucharistic liturgy.⁹⁸ It is the church that is lifted up to God, the church represented throughout the passage in question by Augustine's plural pronouns, and here,

⁹⁴ As we have seen, Augustine refers to Romans 5:5, which says "love is diffused in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us," in order to make a firm identification between the person of the Spirit and God's love.

⁹⁵ Augustine and Moltmann are in general agreement on this point, for, as we saw in Chapter One, the fourth premise upon which Moltmann bases his presentation of the relationship between God and humankind states that the Holy Spirit grants human beings entrance into the trinitarian life of God.

⁹⁶ *Conf.* 13.7.8.

⁹⁷ Henry Chadwick. *Augustine Confessions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 277 n. 9.

specifically, by an explicit reference to the worship of the church, where the people lift up their heart in love to God as they receive the sacrament of Christ's body and blood. The church lifts up its heart to God in this way so that it might attain to its "supereminent resting-place," which Augustine describes here as being "where [God's] Spirit is 'borne above the waters'," and which he characterizes elsewhere as the "home" which is in God's eternity.⁹⁹

The indirect reference to Christ through the church's eucharistic celebration is a reminder that there are two divine persons acting within the economy of creation to bring the church to its eternal rest in God: the Spirit and the Son manifest God's love to humankind, the same love which, as Augustine will later say in the *De Trinitate*,¹⁰⁰ flows eternally between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Augustine thinks that the Son is also responsible for lifting the church to God but, whereas the Spirit lifts, as it were, from above where it is borne above the waters, the Son lifts the church from below, where he has humbled himself by taking flesh in Christ for the church's salvation. Thus, Augustine describes what the Word accomplishes in the incarnation:

Your Word, eternal truth, higher than the superior parts of your creation, raises those submissive to him to himself. In the inferior parts he built for himself a humble house of our clay. By this he detaches from themselves those who are willing to be made his subjects and carries them across to himself, healing their swelling and nourishing their love.¹⁰¹

It is through the humility of Christ that the Son "carries" those submissive to him from their position in the "inferior parts" of creation to himself, "raising" them to the

⁹⁸ Maria Boulding. *Augustine. Confessions* Hyde Park: New City Press, 1997, p. 325 n. 61.

⁹⁹ *Conf.* 4.16.31, quoted above.

¹⁰⁰ Although Augustine does not express his understanding of the immanent trinitarian relations in this way in the *Confessions*, as I attempted to show in Chapters Two and Three, such an understanding is consistent with his descriptions of the divine life in this earlier work.

place that we might call “supereminent,” for it is described here as being “eternal” and “higher than the superior parts” of the creation. In an action which manifests the Father’s love for his creatures,¹⁰² the Word built for himself “a humble house of our clay,” meaning that he inhabited human flesh and made himself subject to human limitations. Through the Word’s presence in the humility and weakness of Christ’s humanity, he demonstrated that human beings “are no longer to place confidence in themselves, but rather to become weak,” so that they will submit to his own “divine weakness which rises and lifts them up.”¹⁰³ By responding to Christ’s example of weakness, and by submitting to his divine care, the “swelling” of human pride is “healed,” and human love for God is “nourished.” The idea that Christ nourishes the love of those who submit to him brings us back to the description of the church as a “nest” with which I started this section. The “wings of charity” which are nourished in this nest, as we have seen, are nourished as members of the church receive love from God in the person of the Holy Spirit; but this love is also nourished by Christ as he detaches the saints from themselves by his humility.

The eternal life of the saints

So far in this chapter, we have seen that Augustine uses a variety of images to describe the eternal life which the church will have with God; among these are terms such as “our good,” which is life with God for ever, “our house,” which is God’s

¹⁰¹ *Conf.* 7.18.24.

¹⁰² *Conf.* 10.43.69.

¹⁰³ *Conf.* 7.18.24.

eternity,¹⁰⁴ and “the supereminent resting-place.”¹⁰⁵ However, aside from assuring the reader that the church will have an eternal existence with God following its life within time and space, these phrases are not especially descriptive. One of the most important places in the *Confessions* to look for an expression of the bishop’s understanding of what life will be like for the church once it is lifted up to God is his account of the vision he shared with his mother at Ostia on the Tiber shortly before her death. Augustine and Monica begin their shared contemplation which eventually bears fruit in the vision itself by seeking to know “what quality of life the eternal life of the saints will have,”¹⁰⁶ and what they experience together is a tiny measure¹⁰⁷ of the existence which the glorified church will enjoy.

The recently converted Augustine and his mother began their ascent to this vision by dismissing as unhelpful the data of “the pleasure of the bodily senses,” “all corporeal objects and the heaven itself,” and finally their own minds. These objects did not contain what they sought. They moved beyond the realm of temporal reality, Augustine records,

so as to attain to the region of inexhaustible abundance where you [God] feed Israel eternally with truth for food. There life is the wisdom by which all creatures came into being, both things which were and which will be. But wisdom itself is not brought into being but is as it was and always will be. Furthermore, in this wisdom there is no past and future, but only being, since it is eternal.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ *Conf.* 4.16.31.

¹⁰⁵ *Conf.* 13.7.8.

¹⁰⁶ *Conf.* 9.10.23.

¹⁰⁷ Augustine claims that he and Monica “touched” the eternal life of the saints “in some small degree” at the climax of their shared vision (*Conf.* 9.10.24).

¹⁰⁸ *Conf.* 9.10.24.

Israel, the community of God's chosen people -- for Augustine, the church -- draws its life directly from God's eternal wisdom, that is, from the divine Son, the second person of the Trinity.¹⁰⁹ It is hard to imagine how Augustine could express a closer unity between the glorified church and the Son without blurring the distinction between the two. For the heavenly church, he says, life is eternal wisdom, and the Son himself is that wisdom. This description of how the church receives life from the Son is not incompatible with the notion of the church as Christ's body, a spiritual body made up of many members, all drawing life and truth from its divine head.¹¹⁰

Elsewhere, Augustine suggests that, just as God rested from his labours on the seventh day,¹¹¹ so he will grant the church to rest in him when its work is done. In fact, he interprets the account of God's rest as an assurance to the church that,

after our works which, because they are your gift to us, are very good, we also may rest in you [God] for the sabbath of eternal life.¹¹²

The idea that the eternal life of the saints will consist in resting in God is significant, for Augustine's description of God's rest is one of the instances where the self-reflexive, or self-relational quality of the divine nature becomes apparent: "but you, the Good, in need of no other good, are ever at rest since you yourself are your own rest."¹¹³ This is one of the texts which assisted in my description of Augustine's trinitarian logic above in Chapter Two. In all likelihood, Augustine conceives of the

¹⁰⁹ In *Conf.* 13.5.6 as here, the Son is described as being the eternal wisdom through whom everything was created.

¹¹⁰ Such a vision of the eternal life of the church may well be present in a highly compressed form, not only here in *Conf.* 9.10.24, but also in 13.34.49.

¹¹¹ See Genesis 2:2-3.

¹¹² *Conf.* 13.36.51.

¹¹³ *Conf.* 13.37.53.

life of the heavenly church as a participation in the trinitarian life of God, since the church is entering into rest which God is to himself.

Earlier in Book 13 there is a passage which appears to suggest that Augustine thinks the church is granted to rest in the Holy Spirit, in particular. Having just observed that of the three trinitarian persons, the Spirit is uniquely referred to by the scriptures as “gift,”¹¹⁴ he continues, confessing to God, saying,

in your gift we find our rest. There are you our joy. Our rest is our peace. Love lifts us there, and ‘your good Spirit’ (Ps. 142:10) exalts ‘our humble estate from the gates of death’ (Ps. 9:15).¹¹⁵

The church will be lifted into its rest by the love poured into it by the Holy Spirit and, by this love, the church will find its rest in the Holy Spirit. While such an observation is slightly outside the terms of the passage quoted here, still, given the description of God’s rest in *Conf.* 13.38.53, it seems plausible to suggest that the church experiences the rest which eternally flows between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through the third person of the Trinity.

¹¹⁴ See Acts 2:38.

¹¹⁵ *Conf.* 13.9.10.

Conclusion

On the basis of my analysis in this study, I can state with certainty that Augustine's vision of the communal life of the church is entirely dependent upon his conception of the trinitarian persons inhabiting and perfecting the community. God reveals himself as Trinity through the church's scriptures and through his ongoing activity in the church in the persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit. He draws people into the Christian community through the expression of his love for humankind in salvation history; he loves the world through members of the church as they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who is divine charity; and, as the church departs the earthly life, he exalts it, making it able to enter into his own trinitarian life. Augustine is under no illusion that the church is a community made up of perfect people who flawlessly love God and one another. Rather, because of his belief that God, the Trinity, dwells in the community, he is optimistic concerning the potential for the church to bring about justice in the world through the expression of love and through deeds of mercy, and he is hopeful that it will be granted rest as it partakes of God's eternal life.

Concerning God's immanent trinitarian life I demonstrated that Augustine's logic is such that God is able to be eternally self-sufficient because he is his own goodness,¹ his own blessedness,² his own joy,³ and his own rest.⁴ Although he does

¹ *Conf.* 13.4.5.

² *Conf.* 13.3.4.

³ *Conf.* 8.3.8.

⁴ *Conf.* 13.37.52.

not say so explicitly, I have attempted to show in Chapter Two that the bishop's language strongly implies that the divine life generates its own relationality so that God may delight in imparting and receiving his own goodness, for example. It can be stated with certainty that the bishop understands this relationality to be trinitarian in nature on the basis of his discussion of God's goodness. In Book 13, immediately after indicating that God is his own source of goodness, and after commenting that God creates from the fullness of his goodness, Augustine argues that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are responsible for bringing creation into existence. While it is less certain from the *Confessions* that Augustine conceives of love as the basis of the divine relationships (as he will argue in his later work, the *De Trinitate*), this understanding might well play a tacit role in the bishop's earlier work, for he describes the Son, and especially the Holy Spirit as expressing God's supereminent love in the world. Moreover, as we saw in Chapter Four, the expression of the love of the Son and the Spirit in the church generates loving relationships among members of the Christian community and between the community and God. If it is true that God's love generates relationality through his re-creative acts in the church, then it is both possible and likely that his love generates relationality within his own immanent life. Although parts of my argument in Chapter Two have to be stated tentatively, I think that I provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate the dubiousness of the link which Moltmann attempts to draw between Augustine's theology and Modalism.

As we saw in Chapter Three, in the passage where Augustine speaks with greatest clarity about the mind's being, knowing, and willing, he claims that the person who knows him or herself correctly knows that he or she is very different from

the Trinity. One who discerns the image of God in one's soul has discovered an indication of one's creaturely status, that is, one who understands oneself aright knows that human beings are dependent upon God for wisdom and fulfillment. For Augustine, the image of God in the soul does not make the human being self-contained and self-sufficient in the way that the divine Trinity is sufficient to itself, and its presence in the soul does not make any person an arbiter of truth and value. The illusion to which fallen human beings are subject, *viz.* that their own minds are sufficient to illuminate themselves, does not issue from Augustine's theory of the psychological Trinity as Moltmann contends. Rather, Augustine argues cogently that this illusion results from the chaotic effects of pride in the soul. The bishop consistently maintains that human beings cannot arrive at the knowledge of the Trinity unless that knowledge is revealed to them by the activity of the Son and the Spirit in the world: knowledge of the Trinity cannot be gained through practice of introspection and self-analysis alone.

The implications of the psychological image of the Trinity for human communal structures are the subject of Chapter Four. Whereas Moltmann charges that Augustine's theology undermines the potential for human relationships to be based upon self-giving love because his psychological Trinity has led to the notion that the individual and its needs are more primal than social relationships, in fact, Augustine envisions the church as a community wherein God engenders loving relationships between human beings and between the community as a whole and God. The Son and the Spirit make themselves present in the church where they re-create fallen human beings, restoring to order the trinitarian image in their souls by

redressing the destructive effects of pride, and making them able to know and love the Trinity. The saving activities of the second and third persons of the Trinity in the church enable believers to restrain their love for lesser goods and to direct their love towards God, thereby enabling believers to love creatures not for their own sake but for the sake of God who gives them life. In particular, the activity of the Holy Spirit, working through members of the church as they respond to God's command to love their neighbours as themselves, brings forth gifts of spiritual insight and deeds of mercy which counteract the effect of the unjust deeds of those who seek to fulfill themselves at the expense of others. Christians manifesting the gifts of the Spirit act in self-giving love not only for members of their own community, but for those outside the church as well. In short, Augustine's vision of the communal life of the church does not suffer from the limitations which Moltmann describes as "possessive individualism." Indeed, not only is the self-giving love of the saints active in bringing about justice in the temporal world, but the bishop also understands the exaltation of the church into its permanent home in God's eternity to occur as the church participates in the love of the Holy Spirit.

In the *Confessions*, then, Augustine presents a dynamic vision of divine relationality, both in his conception of the immanent Trinity, and in his understanding of the activity of the trinitarian persons in the church. In the course of my study, I have suggested that Moltmann fails to recognize the emphasis which Augustine places upon relationality in his doctrines of God and the church because, in his opinion, Augustine's conception of divine immutability destroys any notion of authentic relationships among the trinitarian persons, and between the Trinity and

human beings. As we saw in Chapter One, Moltmann insists that the experience of suffering is the only reliable indication that one is fully engaged in relating to another. However, I think that I have demonstrated with sufficient clarity that Augustine's conception of God's trinitarian relationality is in no way impoverished by his insistence upon divine immutability. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to carry out an extended inquiry into Moltmann's trinitarian logic, further study may well reveal that it is Moltmann's view concerning the question of divine mutability which motivates him to critique and to attempt to revise Augustine's (and the West's) doctrinal formulations.

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