

LOVE AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN AUGUSTINE'S

DE TRINITATE

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By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

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MASTER OF ARTS (2009)
(Religious Studies)

McMaster University
Hamilton, ON

TITLE: Love and the Knowledge of God in Augustine's *De Trinitate*

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NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 130

Abstract:

This thesis offers a close reading of Augustine's *De Trinitate* that is aimed at addressing the vexed question of the unity of the work. The most influential 20th century interpretation of *De Trinitate* holds that Augustine moves from a theological examination of the nature of the Trinity based on scripture to a philosophical investigation based on the structure of the human mind. This interpretation has led to the misconceptions that Augustine espouses a form of natural theology and separates theological doctrine from the concerns of the practical life. This thesis shows that *De Trinitate* is unified around the methodological rule that only the mind that loves God is capable of knowing him. This means, first, that Augustine's procedure is improperly characterized as natural theology; and, second, that, in making love a prerequisite for, and means to, knowledge of God, the ethical question of the ordering of love is inseparable from doctrinal concerns. This thesis shows that *De Trinitate* offers a coherent and compelling moral ontology in which the perceived tensions in Augustine's theology of love can be reconciled.

Acknowledgements:

If one may make light of circumstances that have brought hardship for many, it must be said that the bursting of the credit bubble and the ensuing recession of 2008-2009 provided an appropriate backdrop for a project that represents the cashing out of a shamelessly accumulated mass of intellectual debt. Dr. Peter Widdicombe's understanding of Augustine's thought made him an invaluable committee member and resource, and it was his enthusiasm for Augustine's work that convinced an otherwise skeptical first-year M.A. student that perhaps a 5th century bishop still has something to say to today's world. Professor Michael Welker of the University of Heidelberg was an unfailingly gracious host who made a research year in Germany highly rewarding, and it is the penetrating questions that he raised in a seminar on *De Trinitate* that animate much of this thesis. Dr. Travis Kroeker's patience and insight made him an ideal supervisor for this project, and his mature, Augustinian wisdom provides a wonderful standard towards which to strive.

For me, academia would have remained the road not taken without the encouragement and support of my parents. To their love is owed a debt beyond measure. Finally, the joy that is life with my wife, Jenna, kept this project from becoming wholly crazy-making. That well-ordered love is the key to the happy life I learned from her as much as from Augustine.

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Prologue

In the introduction to a recent compilation of essays on Augustine's *De Trinitate*, Johannes Brachtendorf says that the most difficult problem facing research on the work is the question of its unity.¹ In reality, while recent controversies have imparted a fresh urgency to this problem, it is no more than a restatement of an issue that has occupied certain scholars for most of the last century. *De Trinitate* has, traditionally, received less attention than other of the great texts from the patristic period, but it became an object of particular interest in the 1840s, when Ferdinand Christian Baur suggested parallels between the conception of subjectivity presented in its pages and the Hegelianism that dominated the thought of the time. Baur argued that, for Augustine, the nature of the human spirit is identical with that of the divine, and suggested further that Augustine presents the relationship between the divine Father and Son as nothing other than the relationship between the thinking spirit and itself, a relationship of pure, self-referential consciousness.² No major work challenged this interpretation until Michael Schmaus published *Die psychologische Trinitätslehre des heiligen Augustinus* in 1927, a book that remains the most comprehensive and

¹ Johannes Brachtendorf, "Einführung," *Gott und sein Bild: Augustins De Trinitate im Spiegel gegenwärtiger Forschung*, ed. Johannes Brachtendorf (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2000) 8.

² Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Die christliche Lehre von Dreieinigkeit und Menschwerdung Gottes in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung, Erster Teil: Das Dogma der Alten Kirche bis zur Synode von Chalcedon* (Tübingen: L.F. Füs, 1841) 870-77. This Hegelian characterization of Augustine's work is important for our purposes as it is echoed in some of the contemporary critiques of Augustine that I hope to take up in this thesis. Michael Welker, for instance, argues that Augustine participates in a tradition that stretches from Aristotle to Hegel that sees self-referentiality as the basic reality of subjectivity. For Welker, this tradition is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of Trinity and leads to troubling ethical consequences, a point that is basic to Colin Gunton's critique of Augustine. To these two thinkers we shall return later.

influential study of *De Trinitate* to date.³ Schmaus offers a neo-Scholastic interpretation of *De Trinitate* that relies on a sharp distinction between the first, properly theological half of the work, and the second half, in which Augustine engages in “philosophical speculation.” Schmaus thus divides *De Trinitate* into three sections. The first two, comprising Books I-IV and V-VII, remain within the realm of theology, offering scriptural proofs for the doctrine of the Trinity and then its dogmatic formulation. Books VIII-XV, by contrast, consist in a “speculative investigation” of the mystery of the Trinity.⁴ This interpretation of the structure of *De Trinitate* bequeathed the question of its unity to other 20th century interpreters, while also suggesting a means through which it could be resolved. Working within the same conception of the structure of the text, Henri Marrou is representative of a host of interpreters who argue that the second half of *De Trinitate* represents Augustine’s attempt to use reason to come to an understanding of that which is only grasped through faith in the first half of the work.⁵

At the broadest level, the goal of this thesis is to address the question of the unity of *De Trinitate*. I intend to argue that *De Trinitate* is not structured around a division between faith and reason, a distinction that did not have the

³ Indeed, Roland Kany argues that Schmaus’ interpretation of *De Trinitate* was so influential that many of the prominent 20th century criticisms of Augustine’s Trinitarian theology are aimed not at the Augustine of *De Trinitate* but at the Augustine presented in Schmaus’ work. Kany identifies Barth, Rahner, Catherine La Cugna and Colin Gunton as thinkers whose objections seem to fit Schmaus’ characterization of Augustine better than Augustine’s own work. See Kany, “Typen und Tendenzen der *De Trinitate*-Forschung seit Ferdinand Christian Baur,” *Gott und sein Bild*, 17-18.

⁴ Michael Schmaus, *Die psychologische Trinitätslehre des heiligen Augustinus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1927) 5.

⁵ Henri Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris: Edition de Boccard, 1938) 64.

importance for Augustine that it took on during the Scholastic period. This is not to say that we should dismiss this distinction from consideration. Augustine opens *De Trinitate* by asserting the primacy of the “starting-point of faith,”⁶ and at several points in the text he will insist that that which is not yet clearly understood must still be held in faith.⁷ The question, then, is not whether this distinction is in play, but rather the nature of the movement that the distinction necessitates. The early pages of *De Trinitate* not only affirm faith as a starting point but also indicate that the movement that dominates the text is not a linear progression from faith to understanding. Augustine writes that his hope is to provide reasons for belief in Christian truth, i.e., he hopes to demonstrate the veracity of Christian truth to reason, in order that the skeptic “may return to the beginning and right order of faith.”⁸ This suggests that *De Trinitate* is ruled not by a linear development but by an elliptical movement that seeks to arrive back at the point from which it departs, a faith in God that has matured for having followed the investigation through to its end.⁹ Yet, while accurate as a general gloss on the

⁶ Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991) I.1. All citations to *The Trinity* will be given by book and paragraph number.

⁷ See, for instance, *De Trinitate*, VII.12; VIII.1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, I.4.

⁹ If this is indeed the movement through which Augustine passes in *De Trinitate*, it is curious, given the central role that scriptural citations play in his work, that he never cites the Pauline claim that the Christian life is characterized by a movement “from faith to faith” (Romans 1:17). I think, however, that this statement is present implicitly at several key junctures in the text, first, as the pattern for Augustine’s programmatic claim that “Through [Christ] we go straight toward him... without ever turning aside from one and the same Christ” (*De Trinitate*, XIII.24); and, second, in Augustine’s frequent citations of the latter half of Romans 1:17 according to which the “righteous shall live by faith.” On the benefits of following through an investigation whose object is incomprehensible, and which will not, therefore, reach a final conclusion, Augustine says that “you become better and better by looking for so great a good which is both sought in order to be found and found in order to be sought” (*De Trinitate*, XV.2).

text, even this characterization of the movement of the work is too straightforward, for Augustine is interested not only in this circular movement but also in how one begins to take part in the movement at all. The pivotal eighth book of the work makes clear that Augustine is concerned with faith's preconditions. Book VIII is dominated by the question of the source of the content of faith, a question that leads us to a variation on a problem that was much more familiar to the intellectual tradition within which Augustine was working. In Plato's *Meno*, Meno asks how one may search for something unknown in a way that raises the question of the very possibility of acquiring knowledge.¹⁰ Similarly, in *De Trinitate*, Augustine asks how something may become an object of faith in a way that raises the question of the very possibility of theological knowledge. By treating this question regarding the possibility of the knowledge of God as the key to the work, I hope to show that it is an internally consistent text both in terms of content and of method, and that a proper appreciation of the logic of its development points to the shortcomings of several of the criticisms that are leveled at *De Trinitate*.

The question of the unity of *De Trinitate* is important because, as John Cavadini suggests, the structure of the work is key to understanding both its intention and significance.¹¹ Schmaus' influential division of the text into methodologically discrete sections has led to two misconceptions about its content

¹⁰ Plato, "Meno," *Plato: Five Dialogues*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002), 80e.

¹¹ John Cavadini, "The Structure and Intention of Augustine's *De Trinitate*," *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992) 103.

that I hope to address. The first is that Augustine espouses a form of natural theology. This interpretation is founded on the suggestion that, in the second half of *De Trinitate*, Augustine launches an independent inquiry based on the structure of the human mind that is aimed at coming to an understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. In its most subtle form, this argument holds that the possibility of the recognition of the Trinity is based on an analogy between the structure of the Trinity and the human mind.¹² The second misinterpretation that I wish to address is based on the general notion that, in treating scripture and doctrine in one half of the work, and the realities of human life, from the structure of the mind to the universal desire for happiness, in the other, Augustine effectively separates theological doctrine from the concerns of the practical life. The suggestion that *De Trinitate* deals in part with dogmatic exposition and in part with philosophical speculation presents an arid, sterile picture of the text, making it possible for Karl Rahner to write that Augustine is complicit in the doctrine of the Trinity's transformation into an intellectual curiosity,¹³ and for Peter Brown to cite *De Trinitate* as an example proving Augustine's "capacity for speculation" to little practical purpose.¹⁴ In opposition to these two positions, I will argue that Augustine's method cannot be characterized as natural theology because he insists

¹² See Johannes Brachtendorf, *Die Struktur des menschlichen Geistes nach Augustinus: Selbstreflexion und Erkenntnis Gottes in 'De Trinitate'* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2000).

¹³ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2005) 10-1.

¹⁴ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000) 274. Edmund Hill expresses something of the same evaluation in suggesting that the writing of *De Trinitate* was not an undertaking that "Augustine felt to have an urgent public importance," and that "the *De Trinitate* seems to be, so to say, a gratuitous work, undertaken to express the interest that lay nearest the author's heart." See Hill, "Introduction," 20.

on a proper ordering of human love as a precondition to knowledge of God. This epistemological point also provides a forum within which to think about the shortcomings of the argument that *De Trinitate* has little to do with the questions of the practical life. Knowledge of God, for Augustine, is inseparable from the conduct of life, and I will thus argue that *De Trinitate* is a text that is vitally concerned with how Christians should live. The intersection between epistemology and ethics will thus be a central concern of this thesis.

In terms of the method, I intend to structure my thesis around a close reading of Book VIII of *De Trinitate*. This approach is potentially problematic because there is no part of *De Trinitate* that raises more questions regarding its role in the larger work. It is the book that fits least naturally into any schema that can be devised of the structure of the whole. Edmund Hill calls Book VIII the most difficult in the entire work,¹⁵ a judgment borne out by the diverse ways in which its function has been interpreted. Some see it merely as pointing the way to what lies ahead. In this vein, Oliver O'Donovan treats Book VIII as nothing more than an introductory essay to the "decisive road to the knowledge of God" that begins in Book IX;¹⁶ and Brian Stock argues that Book VIII simply introduces the language in which the rest of the investigation will be conducted.¹⁷ Others suggest that Book VIII serves next to no function in Augustine's larger argument. John Burnaby holds that the language of love in Book VIII has only a small part

¹⁵ Hill, *Introduction*, 24.

¹⁶ Oliver O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) 76-7.

¹⁷ Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) 248.

in Augustine's thought,¹⁸ and Olivier du Roy goes so far as to portray Book VIII as a self-contained endeavour independent of the rest of *De Trinitate*.¹⁹ It is not self-evident, then, that a detailed treatment of Book VIII will provide a useful vantage point from which to assess the structure of *De Trinitate*, yet my hope is that the procedure will provide its own justification as we proceed, and that, in focusing our efforts on Book VIII, we will be able to point to a more positive conclusion regarding its role in the work.

The question that will drive this thesis is how Augustine thinks that human beings can come to know God. As we shall see, this question is intimately related to the problem of Augustine's conception of the *imago Dei*. I propose, then, to introduce the interpretive issues presented by Augustine's language concerning the image of God before moving on, in chapter 1, to focus on Augustine's conception of the obstacles that hinder knowledge of God. Chapter 2 will present the conditions that, for Augustine, make knowledge of God possible, and Chapter 3 will outline how the mind actually comes to know God. It is in this last chapter that the question of Augustinian ethics will come most explicitly to the fore. Augustine writes that believers come to knowledge of God by moving "through Christ towards Christ," a statement rich in implications for our understanding of Augustine's conception of the moral context in which believers live. I will engage with Michael Hanby's and Eric Gregory's recent interpretations of this

¹⁸ John Burnaby, ed. and trans., *Augustine: Later Works* (1955), quoted in Rowan Williams, "Sapientia and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*," *Collectanea Augustiniana*, ed. B. Bruning, M. Lamberigts, J. Van Houtem (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990) 323.

¹⁹ Olivier du Roy, "L'expérience de l'amour et l'intelligence de la foi trinitaire selon saint Augustin," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 2 (1962): 417.

context, and will try to show how the methodological considerations from the first two chapters shed light on its proper interpretation.

Introduction

The question with which I propose to begin is how Augustine thinks that human beings can come to know God. This question is the central concern of Book VIII, and I hope to show that it also provides a lens through which the unity of *De Trinitate* becomes clear. Book VIII opens with a brief recapitulation of the understanding of the Trinity gained in Books I-VII. Each of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is God, good, and almighty, and yet there is but one God, one good one, and one almighty one; the distinct names of “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” are used “with reference to each other,” i.e., relationally, and not with reference to substance or modification.²⁰ Augustine then doubles back on himself, as it were, and moves into a general consideration of the problem of knowledge and perception of God. He examines first the question of whether the soul can perceive truth and goodness in themselves, apart from particular instances of true and good things, before introducing the central problem of Book VIII. From where is the knowledge that makes faith possible derived?²¹ It is this question that drives Augustine’s inquiry into the possibility of theology. For all of his affirmation of the “starting-point” of faith, Augustine recognizes that faith is transitive. It requires an object. There must, therefore, be some framework in place that allows the believer to grasp the content of her faith, or else that faith

²⁰ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.1.

²¹ As we shall see, speaking of the precondition of faith as a kind of knowledge is in some ways misleading, yet these are the terms in which Augustine speaks at this point. He asks: “What then do we know, either generically or specifically, about that transcendent trinity, as though there were many such trinities and we had experience of some of them, and thus could believe according to a standard of likeness impressed on us or in terms of specific and generic notions that that trinity is of the same sort” (VIII.8).

will remain objectless. The question, then, is what prior condition allows the Christian believer to have faith in the triune God. The answer offered by many readers of *De Trinitate* is that Augustine points to the image of God in humanity, interpreted as the tri-unity of the mind's natural self-memory, understanding, and love, in order to establish a conceptual background against which the Trinity may be understood.²² Yet this interpretation points to a kind of natural theology that I will argue is wholly out of step with Augustine's procedure in *De Trinitate*. I propose to begin, then, with the question of the *imago Dei* and knowledge of God.²³

In beginning to investigate Augustine's conception of the image of God, it should be conceded, in the context of our investigation of the unity of *De Trinitate*, that his statements regarding the image provide good grounds for thinking that *De Trinitate* is not a unified text. The apparent tension between various parts of Augustine's argument is such that much contemporary scholarship is split between diametrically opposed interpretations of a series of issues that center on the question of the *imago Dei* in humanity. One camp²⁴ takes

²² See, for instance, Schmaus, *Die psychologische Trinitätslehre des heiligen Augustinus*; Brachtendorf, *Die Struktur des menschlichen Geistes nach Augustinus*.

²³ Oliver O'Donovan's analysis of *De Trinitate* is helpful in pointing out the degree to which the question of the *imago Dei* and the question of the knowledge of God are connected. O'Donovan argues that the second half of *De Trinitate* is concerned with establishing a "model for the relationships within the Holy Trinity by analogy from human psychology" and with the "epistemological transition from the model to the original," i.e. a "description of the route to the knowledge of God" (*Problem of Self-Love* 75). For him, Augustine's route to the knowledge of God is synonymous with his movement through the successive psychological trinities of Books IX-XIV.

²⁴ See, for instance, Brachtendorf, "'...prius esse cogitare quam credere': A Natural Understanding of 'Trinity' in St. Augustine?" *Augustinian Studies* 29.2 (1998) 35-45; Wayne J. Hankey, "Beyond and Beyond Augustine and Descartes: More than a Source of the Self,"

as its focal point Augustine's statement that the image of God "must be found in something that will always be."²⁵ For these interpreters, represented by Johannes Brachtendorf, the self-reference of the mind constitutes the image of God in Augustine's account because "only the basic self-awareness that constitutes the human mind bears the immutability that is the criterion of being an image of the divine being."²⁶ This interpretation portrays *De Trinitate* as a work of natural theology since the equation of the mind's self-relatedness with the image of God means that "we do not end up with a misunderstanding when we refer to our implicit self-knowledge in order to understand what is said about God."²⁷ On the other side of the spectrum are scholars who take their cue from Augustine's assertion that the mind "is not the image of God because [it] remembers and understands and loves itself, but because it is also able to remember and understand and love him by whom it was made."²⁸ Rowan Williams argues that the image "is realized when the three moments of our mental agency all have God for their object"; and he insists that it is perfectly conceivable that the mind may relate to itself and yet be without knowledge of the divine.²⁹ For Williams, the self-imparting of the divine is required in order to actualize the *imago Dei*, and revelation is thus the keynote of the work. On the one hand, then, we have an interpretation of *De Trinitate* according to which the mind in its inescapable self-

Augustinian Studies 32.1 (2001) 65-88; Janowski, *Index Augustino-Cartesien: Textes et Commentaire* (Paris: Vrin, 2000).

²⁵ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIV.4.

²⁶ Johannes Brachtendorf, "Natural Understanding of 'Trinity' in St. Augustine?" 44.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁸ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIV.15.

²⁹ Williams, 319.

reference serves as a source of knowledge of God,³⁰ and, on the other hand, a view that maintains that the *imago Dei* is actualized in the mind's reception of God's revelation.³¹ Brachtendorf thus summarizes the question facing scholars by asking whether *De Trinitate* is a thoroughgoing theological tract or whether Augustine finally moves into philosophy.³²

The question of the nature of the *imago Dei* is thus central both to an inquiry into Augustine's theological method and to an investigation of the unity of *De Trinitate*. The most thorough study of this topic, and the most explicit attempt at mediating the apparent conflict between some of Augustine's statements, is John Edward Sullivan's work on Augustine's conception of the image of God. Sullivan argues that the portions of Augustine's text that appear to be in tension are a product of the fact that, in *De Trinitate*, Augustine is attempting to integrate two different projects. On the one hand, in keeping with the practice common amongst patristic authors, Augustine wants to formulate an analogy that expresses the nature and functioning of God's triunity; on the other hand, he wants to offer an account of the image of the Trinity in creation. Sullivan argues that these two

³⁰ This group of interpreters is often characterized as supporting a modernist interpretation of Augustine because they tend to rally around Charles Taylor's claim that Augustine stands on the road to Descartes in the genealogy of the modern conception of the self (see Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 127). For these interpreters, this judgment has more than just historical validity; thus Colin Gunton holds Augustine complicit in modernity's turn into the subject, and Zbigniew Janowski claims that Cartesianism is a legitimate interpretation of Augustine. See Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Janowski, "Index Augustino-Cartesien."

³¹ In addition to Williams, for an exposition of this view see Lewis Ayres, "The Discipline of Self-Knowledge in Augustine's *De Trinitate* Book X," *The Passionate Intellect*, ed. Lewis Ayres (London: Transaction Publishers, 1995); and Edmund Hill, "St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*: The Doctrinal Significance of its Structure," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 19 (1973) 277-86.

³² Brachtendorf, "Einführung," 8.

endeavours pull Augustine in different directions. The best *analogy* that Augustine can find for the Trinity is the relationship between the faculties of the human mind when it is engaged in self-reflection; the best *image* of the Trinity is the mind that is engaged in contemplation of God. There is, for Augustine, a cosmological criterion associated with the language of image that demands that only that which “has no other nature interposed between [God] and itself” can qualify as the image of God.³³ The mind must be actively engaged in the contemplation of eternal wisdom in order to achieve this proximity, while only the self-reflection of the mind is permanent and stable in a way that is analogous to the eternal Trinity. Sullivan thus concludes: “The trinity which [Augustine] finds eventually to be the best analogy is not the best image of the Trinity in man.”³⁴ The difference between the interpretive positions with which we began, then, is, perhaps, that one emphasizes the mind in its function as an analogy for God with self as its object, while the other emphasizes the mind as an image of God with God its object. Sullivan suggests that Augustine tries to synthesize the two by arguing that the self is related to God as his image, and that “it is this relative and subordinate position that the self must assume as the object of the image.”³⁵ The self is thus truly an object of the mind when it is “known and loved precisely as an image of God.”³⁶

³³ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XI.8.

³⁴ John Edward Sullivan, *The Image of God: The doctrine of St. Augustine and its influence* (Dubuque, Iowa: The Priory Press, 1963) 116.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

The interpretation of Augustine's language pertaining to the *imago Dei* is difficult, according to Sullivan, precisely because it was a point of difficulty for Augustine himself, and Sullivan argues that Augustine is not wholly successful in negotiating the tension between the "static, ontological" aspect of the image, i.e., the mind as it is in its analogical function, and its "operational, psychological" aspect, i.e., the mind as the image of God in its dynamic relation to its exemplar.³⁷ I wish to argue for a more positive conclusion regarding Augustine's conception of the *imago Dei*. While Sullivan's interpretation offers a plausible explanation for the tension in Augustine's argument, I think that he errs in separating Augustine's search for an analogy from his exposition of the *imago*. It would, I think, be something of an embarrassment to Augustine if anything other than the image of God proved to be the closest analogy to the Trinity. To separate, even in their conclusions, Augustine's search for an analogy for the Trinity from his examination of the image of God is, I think, problematic. I hope to show the unity

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 50-1. This tension between the image of God in its 'static, ontological' character and the image in dynamic relationship to God is, I think, one that, for Augustine, originates in Biblical texts. In scripture, one is presented, on the one hand, with statements in Genesis that treat the image as a static reality inherent to human being (Gen. 1:26-7); and, on the other, statements from Paul that treat the image of God as something that is renewed in the individual who is growing in knowledge of God through Christ (Col. 3:10). One could take the Barthian approach and argue that the image as a reality inherent to human being is eradicated by sin, leaving only the image in its dynamic sense, but this does not appear to be Augustine's position. Augustine writes that the "image is always there, whether it is so worn away as to be almost nothing, or faint and distorted, or clear and beautiful" (*De Trinitate*, XIV 6). Even so, the way in which Augustine employs these different texts indicates where he thinks the emphasis must lie in speaking of the *imago Dei*. In *De Trinitate*, Augustine only uses the Genesis text to draw conclusions from its use of plural pronouns: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). For Augustine, this demonstrates the equality of the Son with the Father (I.14; VII.12), and also proves that humanity is made to the image of the whole Trinity (XII.6; XIV.25). Outside of these two points, Augustine's references to the image of God in humanity are derived from New Testament texts, and Colossians 3:10 in particular. For him, the image in its dynamic sense takes precedence, and it is this precedence that suggests the centrality of concerns about the comportment, or orientation, of human life in *De Trinitate*.

of Augustine's search for the image of God and for an analogy for the Trinity by shifting the terms of the debate and asking not about the existence of the image of God in humanity but about Augustine's use of the *imago Dei* in the context of his larger investigation into the possibility of theological knowledge. My hope is to show that this is the appropriate question to ask in relation to Augustine's method, and that, considered on these terms, it is clear that the mind can only serve as an analogy for the Trinity when it is ordered in such a way that the *imago Dei* is renewed through God's work in salvation history. Let us turn, then, to the question of the possibility of knowledge of God.

I. The barriers to knowledge of God (VIII.1-3)

As we have already seen, Book VIII of *De Trinitate* begins with a recapitulation of the conclusions reached about the nature of the Trinity in Books I-VII. Augustine asserts the distinct existence and equality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – each is God, good and almighty – and he also insists on the absolute unity of the Trinity.³⁸ Both the equality in diversity of the divine persons and

³⁸ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.1. It is telling of the orientation of Augustine's thought that, in this summary at the beginning of Book VIII, he insists on mentioning both the distinct existence of the three persons within the Godhead and the unity of the three persons in one God. Karl Rahner holds that one of the differences between the Eastern, or Greek, theological tradition, and the Western, Latin approach, is that Eastern thinkers tend to take the distinct existence of the three persons as their starting point and then reason to their unity, while Western theologians have started with the unity of God and then attempted to work their way to the Trinity. According to Rahner, the theological method of the Western tradition, with Augustine identified as a chief culprit, is guilty of paying insufficient attention to salvation history, in which the distinct appearances of the divine persons are manifest and not the unity of the one God. Rahner thus accuses Augustine of divorcing the question of the Trinity from the reality of salvation and the life of the believer (see *Theological Investigations IV*, 83-4). There are two points that should be made in response to this critique. First, we see here, at the beginning of Book VIII, that Augustine is interested both in the diversity and the unity of the Trinity, and, as Edmund Hill points out, Augustine says in the opening pages of Book I that he wishes both "to account for the one and only and true God being a Trinity" – the so-called "Western" approach – "and for the rightness of saying, believing, and understanding that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one and the same substance or essence" – the putative "Eastern" approach (I 4, emphasis mine. Hill highlights this passage in "Karl Rahner's 'Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise *De Trinitate* and St. Augustine,'" 69-70). Both these demonstrations figure prominently in Augustine's work. Indeed, to put a rough gloss on the text, Augustine does exactly what Rahner accuses him of not doing. He treats the theophanies of salvation history in Books II-IV before going on to formulate his dogmatic statement of the nature of the immanent Trinity in Books V-VII, thus placing the work of the divine persons in the economy of salvation before the formulation of the doctrine of their unity. In the same way, in Book I, where Augustine takes pains to establish the equality of the Father and the Son, he is engaged in providing a solution to a problem posed by salvation history. His polemic is aimed at those who try to transfer things that are said about Christ's human form that suggest that he is less than the Father to the divine form of the Son, thus taking the Incarnation as proof that Father and Son are not equal. In addressing the unity of the Father and the Son, Augustine is thus engaged with a problem presented very directly by God's action in the economy of salvation. The second point that should be made in response to Rahner is tied to this polemical interest. If there is a privileging of the unity of the Trinity in *De Trinitate*, it is not because Augustine conceived of this as the methodologically proper approach that should be followed by all future commentators, but rather because it is what his age demanded of him. In demonstrating that *De Trinitate* is more than Augustine's personal intellectual indulgence, recent scholarship has pointed out that, as he was beginning his work on the Trinity, Augustine encountered a strong current of anti-Nicene thought that maintained that the sending of the Son made him less than the

their unity, for Augustine, are predicated on the fact that the divine persons share a common being that is synonymous with all of the divine attributes. Greatness, then, is not an attribute distinct from God's being that could be possessed to varying degrees by different divine persons, thus creating a difference between them; rather, for God, "to be is the same as to be great, to be good, to be wise."³⁹ This simplicity and simultaneity of attributes is crucial, for Augustine, in establishing the ontological alterity of the divine nature from the perspective of created being. God's being is the being of truth in such a way that truth actually signifies the divine substance, while human being, by contrast, "is not the being or essence of truth."⁴⁰ Having identified truth with God, Augustine's next move is to examine the human mind's capacity to perceive the substance of truth. These opening discussions amount, in effect, to a cataloguing of the impediments that confront the mind that wishes to know God. Augustine uses his discussion of the simplicity of the divine substance to demonstrate the enormous difference between divine and human nature, illustrating, first, how great an obstacle must be overcome by the individual who seeks to know God, and pointing, secondly, to the differences that hinder any attempt at analogy between the human soul and God. On the heels of this, the discussion of the mind's relationship to truth

Father (See Barnes, "Exegesis and Polemic in Augustine's *De Trinitate* I"). For Augustine, then, the demonstration that was required of him was of the unity and equality of the Trinity. It seems, in short, that Rahner is guilty of the move that Lewis Ayres opposes in writing that "Augustine is often seen as the source of a western style of Trinitarian theology, and one upshot of this has been that the unsympathetic reading of his thought commonly found among modern theologians tends to foist upon him all the evils that are supposedly characteristic of later Western tradition"

("Fundamental Grammar," 51).

³⁹ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, VIII.3.

establishes the mind's inability to perceive God either directly or through amplification of or extrapolation from its experience of true things. In a few short pages, Augustine shows that neither direct vision, nor abstraction from earthly qualities, nor analogy with created substance provides the knowledge of God that is the object of the soul's desire. This whole discussion is informed by Augustine's conception of the effects of sin, to which we should turn first before examining the precise nature of the obstacles that sin raises to coming to the knowledge of God.

Because Augustine identifies truth with God, he exhorts us to hold truth in our sight so as to perceive God – yet he knows that we cannot. From the barest momentary glimpse of truth, we slide into “familiar and earthly things,” dragged down by the weight of the “birdlime of greed” picked up on our “wayward wanderings.”⁴¹ This formulation is characteristic of Augustine's portrayal of the condition of the soul corrupted by sin. In Book XII, Augustine offers an account of the fall according to which the soul, in its original state, was capable of perceiving the eternal, unchangeable truth that God is. As something independent of the mind, this truth was shared in common by all who perceived it, and it thus offered a point of convergence for a primeval state of unity; yet this public sharing in incorporeal truth did not satisfy the soul's love for its own power.⁴² In pride, the soul was greedy for something that it could possess in private, and it turned its attention from truth into itself, taking its delight in the images of bodily shapes

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, VIII.3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, XII.14.

that it could possess “inside” itself and manipulate on its own terms.⁴³ Thus, while the soul that is of good will aims at “higher things that are not possessed privately but in common by all,” the sinful soul “drags the deceptive semblances of bodily things inside, and plays about with them in idle meditation.”⁴⁴ In shifting its attention from eternal truth to bodily images, the soul “bounced away” from the one God “into the many,” introducing the disharmony by which human beings are split from each other by “clashing wills and desires.”⁴⁵ This point will become important for us when we come to examine the mediation of Christ, who, for Augustine, provides the point on to which the wills of the many can again converge in order to become unified in the one, but for the time being let us attend to Augustine’s portrayal of the effect of this shift into bodily images on the human mind.

The sinful movement from sharing in eternal truth to delight in bodily images is, for Augustine, a case of the misplacement of human enjoyment. The soul was not free from engagement with bodily things during the period of its innocent sharing in divine truth. Though Augustine thinks that the mind should be intent on God, he recognizes that “some of our rational attention... has to be directed to the utilization of changeable and bodily things without which this life cannot be lived.”⁴⁶ Even before its sin, then, a lower part of the soul was “deputed to the task of dealing with and controlling” the “lower matters” of the

⁴³ *Ibid.*, XII.14.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, XII.15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, IV.11-2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, XII.21.

body, while the attention of the mind was focused on divine truth.⁴⁷ The difference between this state and the state of sin is the orientation of the will towards these “lower matters.” Augustine portrays the will as the agent of active attention that directs thought and “couples” the mind with its object.⁴⁸ The will may attach itself to an object either in such a way that the object is loved for the sake of God or in enjoyment of the object for its own sake. The movement of sin is one in which the mind moves from using lower things to bring it to God, who alone is enjoyed, to enjoying lower things⁴⁹ and making of them its proper good.⁵⁰ The sinless mind makes “reasonable use of temporal things with an eye to the acquisition of eternal things, passing by the former on the way, setting our hearts on the latter to the end.”⁵¹ Yet, “rather than staying still” in enjoyment of experiences of the divine, the soul “wants to claim them for itself”⁵² and so turns to find its delight in bodily shapes: a movement that Augustine twice characterizes as reaching for more and coming up with less.⁵³ This shift has serious consequences for the capacities of the mind. Augustine speaks of the love of material objects for their own sake as covetousness, a form of attachment that

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, XII.3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, XI.16.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, XII.15. In *On True Religion*, Augustine writes that the “origin of all impiety” is to enjoy created things rather than truth itself, “which we gather was the sin of the first man, making bad use of free will” (37.68).

⁵⁰ Augustine lays out the parameters for the distinction between use and enjoyment at *De Trinitate* IX.13. As with much in Augustine’s thought, this notion depends on his conception of the ontological hierarchy on which creation is ordered. He argues that a creature “can either be on par with us or lower than us; the lower creature should be used to bring us to God, the creature on a par should be enjoyed, but in God.” Enjoyment, then, should be located in that which is higher than the self in Augustine’s cosmology, which, for the soul, is God.

⁵¹ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XII.21.

⁵² *Ibid.*, X.7.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, XII.14, X.7.

“corrupts you in your enjoyment of it.”⁵⁴ It is this corruption that leads to the mind’s inability to contemplate God. It signifies, first, a weakening of the mind that leaves it incapable of perceiving God directly. Augustine’s favourite metaphor for divine truth is light, and there is a strength of vision that he thinks is required in order to be able to perceive the divine light. This strength can only be maintained by holding fast to God; thus, when it forsook God, the mind became “weak and dark.”⁵⁵ “In its private prodigality it is emptied of strength.”⁵⁶ The mind has thus “squandered” its strength and so, in his discussion of truth in Book VIII, Augustine says that the mind can perceive true things that have been created, but “it cannot gaze upon the truth itself which they were created by.”⁵⁷

This last statement is central to Augustine’s thought. It expresses, on the one hand, Augustine’s conception of the impossibility of the direct vision of God, while also introducing a crucial distinction between true things and truth itself. Augustine holds that the mind can perceive material objects, like gold, that possess truth as an accidental quality, but not the spiritual substance of truth itself, i.e. God. There thus appears to be an ontological difference between the kind of truth with which human beings are familiar and the truth that typifies the divine substance. How are we to conceive of the relationship between these two? Are there simply two different, unrelated kinds, or orders of truth? This interpretation might appear attractive since one could relate the two orders of truth to the

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, IX.13.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, XIV.18.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, XII.15-6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, VIII.2.

distinctions that Augustine makes between different kinds of perception: inner and outer sight;⁵⁸ the light of the eyes and the light of the mind;⁵⁹ physical light and spiritual light.⁶⁰ On this reading, different perceptual apparatuses would correspond to different kinds of truth, and accounting for the mind's capacity to perceive one kind of truth and not another would be a straightforward matter. One apparatus is damaged while the other remains whole. Yet we must take care here. There is, for Augustine, only one kind of truth. This truth is identical with the divine substance, and it is through this substance that true things receive their truth and the human mind can make judgments about true things.⁶¹ The difficulty of Augustine's conception is thus not a matter of correlating different orders of truth but lies instead in the position of the human mind, which is capable of making judgments according to a truth that it cannot perceive. As we have seen,

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, XV.50.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, VIII.3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, VII.4.

⁶¹ Augustine's conception of truth receives its fullest and most systematic exposition in one of his earliest extant works, the *Soliloquies*, and his presentation in *De Trinitate* is largely consistent with that of this early work. The foundational notion in each of these texts is that truth is identical with God. In *Soliloquies*, Augustine writes that "the true seems to be that which is" (II.8). He goes on to distinguish between the truth and true things (I.27), and argues that, at the most general level, true things are made true by the truth (II.31). This leads to what appears to be a rather banal, if not tautological, formulation of what could be called "ontological truth," according to which a stone is a true stone if it is, in fact, a stone. This conception is rescued from banality by the teleology that is fundamental to Augustine's cosmology, and here we do see a difference between Augustine's early and later work. All creation, for Augustine, is ordered on an ontological hierarchy, and, in his early work, he conceives of that which is ontologically lower, i.e. that which is less truly, as striving through imitation to be that which is more truly. Lead, or tin, can thus be spoken of as "false silver" because these metals imitate silver (II.29). In his later work, Augustine comes to recognize the need to affirm the goodness of all that is created and of creation's order, and he thus moves away from the idea that created things strive to be something other than what they are. In place of this conception, he accounts for the teleology of creation through suggesting that each created thing has a proper place of rest and a kind of "weight" that draws it there. Imitation plays a key role in this account of creation's teleology as well, for now, rather than striving to become their ontological betters, created things seek to imitate the divine rest of Genesis 2:2. The centrality of this concept of imitation leads Augustine to conceive of truth in art or in propositions as that which most nearly imitates or conveys the being of its object.

Augustine thinks of divine truth as a light, and, in the same way that the eye perceives bodily things through the light of the sun, so it is in the divine light that the mind perceives the truth of things.⁶² Yet, while Augustine writes that even the sinful mind is touched by this light as the precondition of its capacity to make judgments about truth, he holds that it cannot perceive the light itself.⁶³ The counter-intuitive claim that one may see by a light that cannot itself be perceived is clarified in *Soliloquies*, where Augustine writes that, just as it is one thing for the sun to exist, another for it to shine, and another for it to illuminate, so, with God, there are three things to notice: that He exists, that He is understood, and that He makes all other things to be understood.⁶⁴ There is a corresponding distinction within the self between having eyes, looking at something, and seeing that thing.⁶⁵ There is thus a disjunction between perceiving true things by virtue of the divine light and the perception of the light itself, and Augustine is clear that one cannot ascend to the latter by extrapolation from the former. Augustine uses the sun as a metaphor for the perception of true things in the divine light, i.e., the third aspect

⁶² Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XII.24. The mind sees truth “in a kind of non-bodily light that is *sui generis*, just as our eyes of flesh see all these things that lie around us in this bodily light.”

⁶³ *Ibid.*, XIV.21.

⁶⁴ Augustine, *Soliloquies*, I.15. That this is intended as a Trinitarian distinction is quite clear, with the Father, the fountainhead of all divinity, represented by the existence of the light, the Son, or the Father’s eternal Word, represented by the understanding of the light, and the Holy Spirit represented by that part of the light that brings illumination to others. Understood in these terms, it is clear that, when Augustine speaks of that part of the divine light that goes on touching even the unregenerate, unrepentant mind as the precondition of its capacity to make judgments about truth, he is referring to the work of the Holy Spirit. This interpretation puts the human capacity for truth squarely within the realm of an ongoing dispensation of divine grace, in opposition to Etienne Gilson’s claim that, for Augustine, the illumination of truth is inherent to the human intellect (*The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, 79-80).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, I.12. This division is meant to mirror the functions of human reason, within which the distinctions between the three functions are clearer and neater. It is one thing for reason to exist, another for it to perceive something, and another for it to be able to apprehend that thing.

of the divine light by which it causes other things to be understood, and he says that “if you increase the light of the sun in your imagination as much as you can, whether to make it greater or brighter a thousand times even or to infinity, not even that is God.”⁶⁶ We can see, then, that the mind is impeded in its search for God because there is a distinction between the true things with which it is used to dealing and the perception of truth itself that is required for knowledge of God. Augustine has said that the mind is incapable of the latter, and he now suggests that abstraction from or amplification of human experience of true things cannot lead to God.

We should examine why divine truth so eludes the perception of the mind that can perceive true things. Why is there such a disjunction between true things and truth itself that the perception of the former provides no purchase on the latter? We have, to this point, seen that the distinction between the two is the distinction between a being that is synonymous with truth and a mode of being that can only partake of truth as an attribute, and the opening pages of Book VIII make clear that this amounts to the difference between changeless substance and that which is changeable. Augustine defines truth as that which is, and true being, for him, is changelessness.⁶⁷ Truth, then, is synonymous with changelessness, and it is this characteristic, for Augustine, that a “flesh bound habit of thought cannot grasp.”⁶⁸ In the opening pages of *De Trinitate*, he argues that “it is

⁶⁶ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, V.3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII.2.

difficult to contemplate and have full knowledge of God's substance, which, without any change in itself, makes things that change,"⁶⁹ and he admits later that "changeable though I am, I breathe in [God's] truth the more deeply, the more clearly I perceive there is nothing changeable about it ... For God's essence, by which he is, has absolutely nothing changeable about its eternity or its truth or its will."⁷⁰ In the same way, in the prologue to Book VIII, he writes that we must "beseech God as devoutly and earnestly as we can to open our understandings... so that our minds may be able to perceive the essence or being of truth without any mass, without any changeableness."⁷¹ This emphasis on the perception of changelessness continues on into the discussion of truth in Book VIII, where Augustine writes:

Come, see if you can, *O soul weighed down with the body that decays* (Wis. 9:15) and burdened with many and variable earthly thoughts ... God is truth. ... Not such as these eyes see, but such as the mind sees when it hears "He is truth." Do not ask what truth is; immediately a fog of bodily images and a cloud of fancies will get in your way and disturb the bright fair weather that burst on you the first instant when I said "truth." Come, hold it in that first moment ... But you cannot; you slide back into these familiar and earthly things. And what weight is it, I ask, that drags you back but the birdlime of greed for the dirty junk you have picked up on your wayward wanderings?⁷²

The mind, then, is weighed down and prevented from perceiving eternal truth by the "birdlime of greed," which, as we have seen already, is a quintessentially Augustinian expression for the consequences of sin. Earlier in the passage, Augustine gives more precise expression to the content of this weight. The soul is

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, I.3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, IV.1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, VIII.1.

⁷² *Ibid.*, VIII.3.

“weighed down with the body that decays and burdened with many and variable earthly thoughts.” Augustine thus points to two features that are typical of human thought and that must be omitted from any idea of the divine. “Every bodily conception is to be rejected,” and “anything that is changeable... must not be thought to be God.”⁷³ These are problematic, for Augustine, because they are the antitheses of the truth that is synonymous with the divine substance. The chief reason that the human mind struggles to conceive of the perfect unity in distinction of the divine Trinity is that it struggles to think the non-bodily and the unchangeable. The mind cannot conceive of a Trinity in which “two or three persons are not any greater than one of them alone” because this equality is possible only where greatness, truth, and being all coincide, which, ultimately, is in a mode of being that is bodiless and changeless, and thus wholly other from that with which the human mind is familiar.⁷⁴ There is thus an ontological difference between the content of the mind’s thought and God, and it is because of this alterity of God’s being that knowledge of God through amplification of or extrapolation from the experience of true things is impossible.

To this point, then, we have seen that, because of the effects of sin, the mind can neither perceive God directly nor apprehend him through extrapolation from earthly experiences. Let us turn now to consider the suggestion with which we are concerned in the first part of this thesis. As we have seen, Brachtendorf takes Augustine’s use of the image of God to mean that “we do not end up with a

⁷³ *Ibid.*, VIII.3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII.2.

misunderstanding when we refer to our implicit self-knowledge in order to understand what is said about God.” We should thus examine how the corruption that results from the enjoyment of temporal things challenges the possibility of analogy between the mind and God. We saw a first sense, earlier, in which the corruption of sin signifies the squandering of the mind’s strength of vision, and we come now to a second sense that is rooted in Augustine’s conception of the malleability of the human soul. It is natural, according to Augustine, for the soul to imitate that which it loves; thus, in turning the focus of its love onto bodily images, the soul begins to conform itself to these objects. In a very real sense, for Augustine, the mind is “in things that it thinks about with love”; and he goes on to say that the mind “has got used to loving sensible, that is bodily things” so that it is “unable to be in itself without their images.”⁷⁵ The mind “gets conformed” to bodily images and begins to think of itself as bodily.⁷⁶ Augustine is so convinced of the power of love to conform the lover to her object that he even suggests that the body of the lover can become like the object of desire. He says that the will “exerts such force” in coupling the mind to its object that “if it is violent enough to be called love or covetousness or lust, it will even deeply affect the rest of the living being’s body.”⁷⁷ Jacob’s breeding of piebald lambs by placing parti-colored rods in the drinking troughs of Laban’s ewes serves as proof, for Augustine, of the will’s power even over the shape of the body.⁷⁸ In loving bodily

⁷⁵ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, X.11.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, X.8.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, XI.5.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, III.15, see Genesis 30:29-43.

things, then, the mind becomes unable to think of itself as anything other than a body, and this, for Augustine, is its “shameful mistake.”⁷⁹ In short, human sin is rooted in the soul’s disproportionate love of its own power, a failure of its self-love, and this leads it to shift its enjoyment from God to mutable, bodily things. In attaching itself to bodily images it gets conformed to them and begins to think of itself as bodily, and the failure of the soul’s self-love thus issues in the disorientation of its self-understanding.

The result of sin, then, is a disharmony between the faculties of the human mind, and this, for Augustine, makes the mind wholly unlike the simplicity of the Trinity. Augustine takes up the theme of the simultaneity of the divine attributes again in Book XV, where, as he is drawing his investigation to a close, he takes pains to point out “how great the unlikeness” is between divine and human nature.⁸⁰ He reasserts that, “in that inexpressible and wholly simple nature,” predicates like eternal, wise, beautiful, and good, which seem to signify qualities, can in fact be taken to signify the divine substance, or being.⁸¹ As a result of this, it is as appropriate to provide one adjective to describe God as it is to provide twelve; each one implies all the others because each signifies the same substance.⁸² We have already seen that this simplicity sets God apart from human beings because human being is not synonymous with truth; let us now examine how the simplicity of the divine nature sets it functioning apart from the action of

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, X.11.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, XV.21.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, XV.8.

⁸² *Ibid.*, XV.9.

the human mind. In the same way that, for Augustine, the divine attributes are synonymous and simultaneous, so a perfect simplicity characterizes the relationship between memory, understanding, and will within the Godhead. God's memory implies, or contains, his understanding and love, and each of these also contains the others such that there is perfect transparency and continuity amongst the persons of the Trinity.⁸³ Augustine writes that the human mind, by contrast, is a "chopping and changing" muddle of confusion because of sinful love.⁸⁴ The paradigm of harmony in the mind, for Augustine, is expressed in Christ's exhortation to believers to let their 'yes' be 'yes' and their 'no' be 'no.'⁸⁵ This simplicity and constancy is perfectly characterized in the Father's uttering of himself in his Word, the Son, who is not anything less than what he is.⁸⁶ Within the Trinity, word perfectly matches thought and thought perfectly matches action, with no remainder or loss. There is no wavering or lack of truthfulness, there is no "*Yes and no*, but only *Yes, yes; no, no*."⁸⁷ It is this perfect harmony and efficiency that the human mind is intended to emulate, yet the measure to which it can be achieved is preserved only in the love of spiritual things. In Book IX, Augustine distinguishes between the "conceived" word, which corresponds to loving or desiring, and the "born" word, which corresponds to acting or getting.⁸⁸ The conceived word and the born word are the same, for Augustine, when one

⁸³ *Ibid.*, XV.10-2.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, XV.25.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, XV.20, drawn from Matthew 5:37.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, XV.23.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, XV.24.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, IX.13-4.

loves a spiritual thing. To love justice is to be just “even if no occasion exists for him to do justice externally,” and, in the same way, to love the good or the true is to be good or truthful.⁸⁹ In loving a spiritual thing, then, harmony is maintained between love and action, allowing a measure of resemblance to the “Yes, yes; no, no” of the harmony of the Trinity. In turning in sin to love material things, by contrast, the “conception of a word is one thing and its birth another,” the conception corresponding to the desire for the material thing and the birth corresponding to the getting.⁹⁰ Here there is a lag, or loss, between the two. They are neither continuous nor harmonious. Not only that, but in desiring that which is material, the mind’s desire is separated from its spiritual mode of being, and it cannot rest even when it finds that which it desires because the desire on which it is acting is not a truthful expression of its being. Augustine argues that the will is oriented towards rest in God, thus any attempt at finding satiety in material things simply leaves it thirsty again.⁹¹ The importance of the slippage between the conceived word and the born word, then, is that the will’s actions do not give truthful expression to the mind’s being or desire. The mind’s word does not resemble the divine Word because it does not embody what the mind is. In opposition, then, to the harmony of the Trinity, the sinful mind is characterized by dissonance between its being, desire, and action.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, IX.14.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, IX.14.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, IX.14.

The “chopping and changing” of the human mind is thus rooted in its love of material things, and, as we have seen, the transfer of love from the spiritual to the material is rooted in a disproportionate love of self. This, in turn, causes the mind to understand itself improperly, thinking of itself as a body, and the instability of the mind combined with the lack of harmony between self-love and self-understanding means that, in contrast to the divine, the mind is not transparent to itself.⁹² Human beings struggle to perceive their own thoughts,⁹³ and their knowledge is lost and acquired because it is not synonymous with their being.⁹⁴ The simplicity and constancy of the divine being thus illustrates the enormous difference between God and the human mind, and it is noteworthy that this contrast is emphasized at the beginning of Book VIII and again as the substance of Book XV: the beginning and end points of Augustine’s search for the image of God in humanity. Augustine does point to memory, understanding, and will as an analogy for the Trinity, but we should beware of an overly easy analogy between the mind and God. Augustine is quite clear that the inconstancy of the faculties of the fallen mind is no approximation for the mutuality, continuity, and transparency of the divine Trinity.

If we examine the cosmology that Augustine introduces in his discussion of the movement of sin, we will see that it presents a further challenge to the assertion that the self-reference of the mind serves as an analogy for God. In

⁹² *Ibid.*, IX.4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, XV.16.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, XV.22-3.

speaking of the soul's "bouncing away" from God, Augustine says that, from the shared realm in which the incorporeal light of truth is held in common by all, the soul "tumbles down at a nod from himself into himself as though down to a middle level," and is then "thrust down as a punishment from his own half-way level to the bottom, to the things in which the beasts find their pleasure." Augustine writes that the soul could only travel this long way from top to bottom "through the half-way level of self." We are thus introduced to a three-tiered cosmology. The highest level of this cosmology is the realm of shared, incorporeal truth, while the lowest level is the mind consumed with the bodily images that even animals enjoy. In between these two is a middle level that is labeled "self," produced by a move "from himself into himself."⁹⁵ This middle level represents the private sphere of the mind's self-reflection, and we can see, then, that tied to Augustine's cosmology is a hierarchically ordered epistemology. The lowest level of truth is the knowledge produced from bodily images, for Augustine recognizes that this kind of knowledge is vulnerable to the attacks of skeptics who question all knowledge gained through the senses of the body.⁹⁶ Above knowledge of bodies ranks the knowledge produced through the reflections of consciousness on itself. Self-reflection can produce unquestionable knowledge, such as the awareness of one's own existence and desire for happiness, yet Augustine is attuned to the limitations of this kind of knowledge.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, XII.16.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, XV.21. Augustine himself says, "Far be it from us to doubt the truth of things we have learnt through the senses of the body," and he references three of his own works in which he claims to have countered the Academic arguments against the possibility of truth; yet he does not appear to have any firm rebuttal to those who question the deliveries of the senses.

He recognizes, first, that “if this is the only kind of thing that really pertains to human knowledge, then there are extremely few instances of it,”⁹⁷ and he is also aware that self-reflective knowledge has no purchase on the wider world. In opposition to the Cartesian program, then, the certainty of self-referentiality does not provide a foundation on which to build a wider body of knowledge that reaches to truth itself. Augustine speaks of philosophers who, “established as they were at [the] lowest level of things,” i.e., caught in the contemplation of bodily things, “could not but look for some middle level things, by which to reach the topmost things,” i.e., turned to self-reflection in the hopes of using it as a springboard to the contemplation of truth itself; yet Augustine says that this amounts to the construction of idols and the entrapment of the philosophers by fraudulent demons.⁹⁸ There remains, then, a distinction between the certainty produced in self-reflection, which remains a private phenomenon, and the eternal truth that is shared by all. Truths of self-reflection, which “anybody can see in himself, which someone else he tells it to can believe but not see,” are of a different order from what one “sees in truth itself, which someone else can also gaze upon.”⁹⁹ We should thus be dubious of the claim that the self-referential mind is a source of knowledge of God, since the private sphere of the mind’s self-reflection is a product of the movement of sin, and because of the subsequent distinction between certainty within the mind and truth itself. In summary, then,

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, XV.21

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, XIII.24.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, IX.9.

any attempt at analogy between the mind and God must overcome both the enormous dissimilarity that Augustine perceives between the instability of the sinful mind and the simplicity of the divine Trinity, and the epistemological and ontological barriers between the truth of self-reflection, a true thing, and truth itself.

In beginning to draw our examination of the effects of sin on the mind to a close, let us return to the point from which we began in order to give a more precise account of the content of the weight that drags the mind away from the perception of truth. There are two senses in which Augustine thinks of this weight, one static and the other dynamic. The first, static sense, corresponds to the impurity of sin and to the mass of the collection of changing, bodily images that the mind has acquired, and to which its mode of thought has become accustomed. This load drags the mind away from the perception of unchanging truth. Augustine writes that we are “incapable of grasping eternal things” because we are “weighed down by the accumulated dirt of our sins, which we had collected by our love of temporal things, and which had become almost a natural growth on our mortal stock.”¹⁰⁰ The description of the dirt of sin as a “growth” is expressive of the weight that has accumulated on the soul, yet alone this would not constitute an insurmountable barrier to the perception of God. Why can the mind not lift off this weight? Augustine’s reference to this growth as something “natural” introduces the second, dynamic sense in which he thinks of the weight

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, IV.24.

of sin. This second sense is the general orientation of the will that, through the force of habit, holds the mind in conformity to bodily images. That the growth of bodily images has become “natural” for the soul captures the sense in which the mind’s fascination with bodies has become its default orientation. As we saw earlier, the mind has attached itself to images in such a way that it cannot but think in images, it “drags them along with itself even when it returns after a fashion to thinking about itself” and so is confused even about its own nature.¹⁰¹

Augustine writes that:

we have grown so used to bodies, and our interest slips back and throws itself out into them in such a strangely persistent manner, that when it is withdrawn from the uncertainties of bodies to be fixed with a much more assured and stable knowledge on things of the spirit, it runs away again to those things and seeks to take its ease in the place where it caught its disease.¹⁰²

In *Confessions*, Augustine uses the language of habit to express the persistence with which the sinful will slips back to the place where it caught its disease. He speaks of his sinful will as a chain that holds him in the “harsh bondage” of a necessity that results from the force of long habit.¹⁰³ It is appropriate to speak of this force of habit as part of the weight of sin because of the way in which

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, X.7-8.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, XI.1.

¹⁰³ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 8.5.10. This language of bondage through habit will be important for us when we come to consider the way in which Augustine presents the believer’s capacity to know and love God as a gift given by God. Augustine’s insistence on the primacy of grace raises real questions about the sense in which humans can be said to possess something like a free will. In thinking about this question it is important to recall that Augustine does not think that humans have anything like a free will outside of God’s gift of grace. In their sinful condition, human beings are the possessors of wills that are already programmed, as it were, through the force of habit. As we shall see, then, rather than impinging on human freedom, the breaking of the bonds of habit is a necessary prerequisite to anything like the free exercise of the will.

Augustine uses the term “weight” to signify the orientation of the will. All of creation, for Augustine, is ordered on an ontological hierarchy that ranges from the perfect immutability of God to inert matter. It is an expression of the harmony of creation that all that is created has a proper place, or position of rest, and a kind of weight, or desire, that draws it to its natural resting place.¹⁰⁴ Even amongst bodies, then, stones move down while flame moves up, and oil and water naturally separate, the former rising to the top and the latter settling underneath.¹⁰⁵ Augustine refers to the principle by which these things are moved as their weight, and he points to the will as the weight that moves the human soul.¹⁰⁶ The perversion of the human will is exhibited in the fact that, while all else in creation tends towards its natural resting place, the weight of the human will draws the soul away from its point of rest.¹⁰⁷ While the attention and delight of the will is intended to be oriented upwards, such that the soul may rest in God, the sinful will, as we have seen, takes its delight in lower, bodily things, to which the soul then becomes conformed. The weight, then, that prevents the soul from perceiving God is not simply the accumulation of bodily images but the will in its misguided orientation downwards: an orientation made necessary through habit. Augustine’s conception of the weight of sin is thus drawn from a complex psychology of mimesis and habit that forms the backbone of his conception of the mind’s inability to return to God. The mind imitates that which it loves until it

¹⁰⁴ St. Augustine, *City of God*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) XI.28.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, XI.28.

¹⁰⁶ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XI.18.

¹⁰⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 13.9.10.

becomes wholly conformed to it and cannot think in other terms. The conclusion to which Augustine comes in *Confessions* is that divine grace is required in order to break the bonds of habit, and a similar conception is present in *De Trinitate*. The force of habit means that the antidote to sin is not so simple as the mind turning once again to find its enjoyment in God. As we have seen, the mind has lost the strength of vision required to perceive God, and God has thus become inaccessible to the sinful mind. Having “squandered” its strength, Augustine writes that the mind can only “go back up again” to God through the “grace of its maker.”¹⁰⁸ Weighed down by habit and lacking strength, the soul has no capacity to shrug off the weight of sin.

In summary, then, the origins of sin lie in a misguided will’s love of its own power, and the improper orientation of the will remains the source of the mind’s inability to perceive truth. In loving improperly, the mind has become conformed to bodily images, and its understanding is distorted, unable to conceive of that which is not bodily. God is thus unavailable to the mind either by direct sight or by extrapolation from its experience of changeable things, and, in thinking of itself as bodily, the mind has compounded the disharmony between its own faculties that challenges any attempt at analogy between itself and God. A covetous love of lower matters has thus thoroughly corrupted the mind, and it should be clear that the obstacles to knowledge of God are not purely noetic, requiring only better teaching or deeper modes of thought, but are rather rooted

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, XII.15-6.

more broadly in the perversion of a disordered life. The recurring theme of *De Trinitate* is thus the need for purification as a prerequisite to knowledge of God, a point to which we shall return in due time.

II. The possibility of the knowledge of God (VIII.4-8)

From his initial discussion of the mind's relationship to truth, Augustine moves on in Book VIII to take up a second examination of similar form. In relation to truth, Augustine writes, "come see it if you can – God is truth," and he now encourages the soul to "come, see if you can. You certainly only love what is good ... This is good and that is good. Take away this and that and see good itself if you can. In this way you will see God."¹⁰⁹ In shifting the discussion, then, to the good, Augustine immediately confronts the problem of a mind cluttered by bodily images, proposing a process of abstraction through which the mind should turn from good things to focus on the good itself. On the heels of its failure to perceive the truth, it might seem that the mind has but little hope of shifting its focus to the good, particularly since we have seen that the force of habit confines the mind to thinking in bodily images. Yet Augustine is undeterred. His hope is grounded in the fact that human beings must have some notion of the good "impressed" upon them as the precondition of their capacity to make judgments about good things.¹¹⁰ He argues that if the soul "becomes not good by the very fact of turning away from the good" – our position after sin – "it will have nowhere to turn again if it wishes to reform unless that good which it

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, VIII.4.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, VIII.4. Though he will now go on to push it farther, we have, of course, encountered this line of thought already in relation to the truth, where Augustine argues that the mind can make judgments about true things only because the mind is still touched by the light of truth itself. Augustine makes the same move in *Confessions*, asking what justification he has for giving judgment on the beauty of mutable things, and he concludes that it is through the "unchangeable and authentic eternity of truth" that transcends the mind (7.17.23).

has turned away from remains in itself.”¹¹¹ The suggestion that a remnant of the good remains in the self is programmatic for *De Trinitate* as a whole. Augustine recognizes that we cannot think notions that have no conceptual correlate in our “general memory” through which we can grasp their content. The words of one who tells us of a mountain that has been stripped of its woods and planted with olive trees are intelligible to us only because we remember what woods, olive trees, and mountains look like. In the same way, it is impossible for one to think about a colour that one has never seen, or a flavour that one has never tasted. Augustine thus concludes that “the limits of thinking are set by the memory.”¹¹² It is, therefore, only because some trace of the good is stored in memory that we can employ the concept of the good, and, in the broader argument of the work, we see that some trace of the divine must also be contained within us if we are to think about God. Here, then, we come to the condition that makes theological knowledge possible. The question is whence comes the framework of general notions that allows human beings to comprehend the eternal Trinity.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, VIII.4. This notion of a return to a source plays a central role in Augustine’s thought. Basil Studer argues that the frequency with which the terms *quaestio* – investigation, or inquiry – and *quaerere* – to search for, or seek – appear in *De Trinitate* expresses the fact that the work is, on the one hand, a scientific investigation, yet he argues that Augustine’s use of *quaerere* in particular suggests that the work is also much more than this. He points out that Augustine’s search is, very precisely, for something once possessed that has been lost, and that, as such, *quaerere* takes on an existential, and perhaps even religious, signification (*De Trinitate: Eine Einführung*, 60). Augustine’s preferred metaphor for the soul’s search for a return to its point of origin is the biblical story of the prodigal son who returns home after squandering all the good that his father had given him. Invoking language from this parable, Augustine speaks, for instance, of his search for God as “struggling to return from this *far country*” (*De Trinitate*, IV 1). This notion of a return to one’s proper homeland, or source, will be important for us later.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, XI.14.

The assertion that some trace of the divine must be found in the soul if humans are to think about God might well appear to provide the rationale for Augustine's search for the image of God in humanity. Following this line of thought, Brachtendorf argues that the *imago Dei* is the precondition of knowledge of God. For him, the basic conceptual grasp of statements about the divine Trinity is founded on the trinity of memory, understanding, and will in the human mind. A certain process of self-examination is thus a prerequisite to faith in the triune God.¹¹³ Brachtendorf points out that, for Augustine, there is always an implicit Trinity of self-understanding underlying all acts of thought, and he argues that, if this implicit self-knowledge can be made an explicit object of thought, then the soul can perceive the nature of the divine Trinity in itself and make the Trinity the object of its faith.¹¹⁴ Against this interpretation stands, first of all, the witness of the text itself. In examining possible sources of humanity's pre-faith familiarity with the concept of trinity, Augustine asks if we "could believe according to a standard of likeness impressed on us or in terms of specific and generic notions that that trinity is of the same sort"; he concludes that "this of course is simply not

¹¹³ In beginning to examine the problems with Brachtendorf's interpretation, we might wonder if he thinks that only the philosopher who can follow Augustine through the mental exercises required to uncover the mind's implicit understanding of itself is capable of having faith in God. This is not a problem of which Brachtendorf is unaware. He argues that one of the strengths of his interpretation is that, in pointing to the mind's perpetual self-understanding as the source of knowledge of the Trinity, he makes it possible to explain how even simple believers can grasp the Trinity. This is, however, a point on which his argument is rather unclear, since he insists that this implicit understanding must be made explicit in order to comprehend the Trinity, and, if Augustine's text is any indication, this is no small feat. See Brachtendorf, "Natural Understanding of 'Trinity'", 41-2.

¹¹⁴ Brachtendorf, *Struktur des menschlichen Geistes*, 80.

so.”¹¹⁵ For Augustine, we seek an understanding of the transcendent Trinity that no earthly example of threeness, or even triunity, can provide. It is not God’s three-in-oneness that is loved but his divinity, and “we have never seen or known another God, because God is one, he alone is God.”¹¹⁶ To privilege the *imago Dei* as the source of humanity’s pre-faith understanding of God because it is that in creation that is ontologically closest to God is misguided, then, because even the *imago* remains on the creaturely side of the divide between creator and creation. In emphasizing that it is the transcendent divinity of God that must be apprehended, Augustine is driving home the point that we encountered in our examination of the consequences of sin. When we strive to think about God it is not extrapolation from earthly modes of thought that is required but rather a mode of thought that crosses over the ontological divide between true things and truth itself. That Brachtendorf does not recognize this need for a wholly new kind of thought is a function of his misinterpretation of the reason for the mind’s inability to perceive God in the truth. He argues that this failure is not a product of the noetic effects of sin but rather a result of the fact that truth is merely a characteristic of God, and, as such, is neither plural nor relational in a way that allows the Trinity to be seen.¹¹⁷ In opposition to this interpretation, we have already seen that truth designates not an attribute but the very substance of God, and that, as a result of Augustine’s distinction between true things and truth itself,

¹¹⁵ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.8.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, VIII.8.

¹¹⁷ Brachtendorf, *Struktur des menschlichen Geistes* 79.

there is a triune structure to truth in its existence, its understanding of itself, and its function in making true things to be understood. Indeed, Augustine goes on in Book XV to argue that, because they are synonymous with God's substance, all of the attributes of God exhibit a Trinitarian structure. He asks how we can understand wisdom, for instance, as a triad, and answers that, in order to be perfect and changeless, wisdom must know itself and love itself.¹¹⁸ "So there we have a trinity, namely wisdom and its knowledge of itself and its love of itself."¹¹⁹ There is, then, always a relational structure even amongst God's attributes. In effect, in misunderstanding Augustine in this way, Brachtendorf presents the mind's inability to see God in truth as a philosophical problem. For him, truth does not possess the characteristics required to usher the mind through to vision of God. He thus overlooks the manner in which Augustine's discussion of the mind's attempt to perceive truth is informed by his conception of sin. For Augustine, the result of sin is that the mind functions in a realm that is ontologically other from the truth of God, and, as we have seen, it cannot ascend to perception of God by way of created objects. We cannot, therefore, take Brachtendorf's route in seeing faith in God as grounded in a kind of conceptual framework derived from the image of God in the mind. Though ontologically closest to God, its being remains of a different kind from the divinity in which the mind is to believe.

¹¹⁸ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV.9-10.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, XV.10.

Equipped with this understanding of the shortcomings of Brachtendorf's argument, we should return to the question of the *imago Dei* and natural theology. As we saw earlier, there is tension between those interpreters of *De Trinitate* who argue that the image of God must be found in the implicit trinity of self-understanding that is always present in the mind, and those who argue that the *imago* is found only in the mind that is receptive of God's giving of himself. Brachtendorf supports the former interpretation and argues that the mind in its native state is a source of information about the Trinity. Is he wrong, then, in pointing to the *imago* as something that endures in the mind, or in thinking that its existence translates into its serving as a source of theological data? Let us consider, for a moment, one instance of Augustine's language on the question of the *imago Dei*. In Book XIV, Augustine writes that the image is "always there, whether it is so worn away as to be almost nothing, or faint and distorted, or clear and beautiful ... distortion cannot stop its being the image."¹²⁰ Augustine's claim that the image of God is always there would seem to support Brachtendorf's reading of the text, yet we should attend to the fact that the image can be something other than a *good* image. Augustine's usual language regarding the image is a sliding scale terminology of deformed and reformed, not a binary of destroyed and recreated, and this should suggest that the appropriate question with regard to Augustine's theological method is not whether the image exists, but whether it is fit to serve as a source of theological data. The bare existence of the

¹²⁰ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIV.6.

image, in other words, should not automatically translate into an invitation to natural theology. I propose that there is a critical distinction to be made between *perception* of the image and *participation* in the image's exemplar.¹²¹ The former is possible regardless of the state of the image but it does not allow the perceiver to apprehend the nature of God, while the latter reforms the image and makes it possible to perceive something of God's nature in it.

Traces of this distinction first emerge in the discussion of the good in Book VIII. Here Augustine writes that, if we do in fact succeed in abstracting particular things from the good, we will "perceive" good itself and thus "perceive" God. He then says that "if you cling to him in love you will straightaway enter into bliss."¹²² Augustine thus suggests a distinction between an epistemic relation, in which the good is merely perceived, and a relationship in which the individual attaches herself to God in love. He goes on to say that we should love God not as the good that we can "hover over in judgment" – a purely epistemic relationship – but as the good we "can cleave to in love."¹²³ Perception of the good is required in making judgments about good things, but Augustine tells us that we should treat the good as more than an epistemological datum. In order to be good, the soul must not only perceive the good but turn towards it,

¹²¹ Language of participation will be central to our investigation, but it will not be until near the end of this thesis that we will be in a position to give a full account of its meaning. The distinction between perception and participation will thus become clearer as we proceed; for the time being, we can understand it as a distinction between a purely noetic relationship to an object and a disposition in which one loves the object and allows one's being to be formed by it. As we have seen, Augustine thinks that human beings become conformed to the objects that they love, and, as we shall see, his conception of participation is tied to his conception of love.

¹²² *Ibid.*, VIII.5

¹²³ *Ibid.*, VIII.4

cleaving to it in love, and we are thus presented with a distinction between perception and participation that is maintained through the rest of the work.¹²⁴ It appears again in a discussion of justice, where Augustine writes that people become just “by cleaving to that same form which they behold... now no longer merely perceiving... but themselves now living justly... and how is one to cleave to that form except by loving it.”¹²⁵ In the same way, in his comments regarding the image of God in Book XIV, Augustine says:

the mind must be considered in itself, and God’s image discovered in it before it participates in him. For we have said that even when it has lost its participation in him it still remains the image of God, even though worn and distorted. It is his image insofar as it is capable of him and can participate in him; indeed, it cannot achieve so great a good except by being his image.¹²⁶

We should attend, here, both to the assertion that the image remains regardless of its condition and to the language of participation. Though Augustine points to the existence of the image as a precondition of participation in God, they are not synonymous, and it is participation in God, and not perception of his image in humanity, that, for Augustine, yields a theologically fruitful perspective on the divine.

¹²⁴ As Oliver O’Donovan points out, this disjunction between love of good things and love of God, the one good through whom good things receive their goodness, is necessary to protect Christian theology “from a complete surrender to philosophical continualism.” O’Donovan writes that Augustine maintains this disjunction by distinguishing an “*act of will*, whereby the soul is converted to loving God, from the *natural love* which draws it to the multiplicity of good things” (78). It is this act of will, the turning to love of God, that distinguishes the soul that merely *perceives* the good from the soul that *participates* in the good.

¹²⁵ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.9

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, XIV.11.

It is fair to ask, however, how one could possibly avoid obtaining some understanding of God if one perceives his image. What, in other words, would it mean to have a “bad” image? The answer is rooted in the conception of human thought that we encountered in our examination of the sinful mind. There we touched on the fact that, for Augustine, the working of the mind involves the interplay of memory, understanding, and will, these three functioning in harmony when functioning correctly. For Augustine, there is thus no ideal of rational cognition detached from volition. Memory, without understanding, is as useless as a book with no reader, a sheer repository of data; and understanding without memory is as hopeless as a reader who attempts to read a foreign language, lacking utterly the framework required for comprehension. These two are mutually dependent and Augustine tells us that it is will that joins them.¹²⁷ To pick up, then, on a theme that we have already encountered, Augustine says that our thoughts may be conceived with a will that is ordered either in covetousness or in charity, either a healthy love of God or a corrupted love of self.¹²⁸ Augustine goes on to tell us that thought produced with a “straight” will that is ordered towards love of God is “a ladder for those who would climb to happiness,” while a “skein of bent and twisted wishes or wills” is enough to have one “cast into outer darkness.”¹²⁹ We can see, therefore, that more than just a perception of the image is required in order to achieve some understanding of

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, IX.13.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, IX.13-4.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, XI.10.

God, because a perceptive act generated by a twisted will, even if it has the image of God as its object, leads not towards God but towards darkness. Augustine's inclusion of a volitional element in thought means that it is not just the object of the perceptive act that counts but also the mode of the perceiving mind, and we thus find ourselves directed once again to a distinction between perception and participation. Only thoughts formed with a will ordered towards love of God can lead us to him, and here we have come around to the definition of participation. Augustine's language of participation, clinging, or cleaving, comes always in conjunction with the concept of love; we cleave to and participate in God, the good, or the just, by loving them, and we see now that the concept of participation is not an abstract formulation but signifies having one's very thought ordered by love of the thing. There is, to sum up, another threefold division present in Augustine's epistemology in addition to the one that we encountered earlier in conjunction with Augustine's three-tiered cosmology.¹³⁰ There are those who, caught up in bodily images, cannot perceive the good at all; those who can perceive the good but whose thought is ordered to a love of self and thus does not lead to God; and those who perceive the good and enter into it, clinging to it in rightly ordered love of God and so entering into bliss. We can now understand the distinction between a clear and a distorted image of God. Augustine says that, "when the mind loves God... it loves itself with a straight, not a twisted love... for sharing in him results not merely in its being that image, but in its being made

¹³⁰ Earlier we saw that there is a level of knowledge of bodily things, a level of certain knowledge produced through self-reflection, and the level of truth itself.

new and fresh and happy after being old and worn and miserable.”¹³¹ Loving God produces the kinds of mental acts required to perceive God while also renewing God’s image, while love of self both tarnishes the image and produces thoughts that cannot lead to God.

We can thus see that the central question in considering the possibility of a natural theology in *De Trinitate* is not the question of the existence of the image but rather of rightly ordered love. We saw, in our examination of the effects of sin, that it is thought ordered to love of self that leads the mind away from God, and we now see that if the mind fails to love God the question of the image is moot at least as far as its serving as a source of theological data is concerned. Yet we should be clear that we have not yet shut the door on natural theology. The assertion that thought conceived in love of God is a ladder to God would hardly seem to leave God out of reach, particularly given that Augustine appears to connect our natural self love with love of God. For him, the human mind “is so constructed that it never... does not love itself,” and he goes on to assert that “the man who knows how to love himself loves God.”¹³² Can the mind, then, move to love of God from its natural love? We should proceed here with caution. We have just seen, after all, that there is a twisted kind of self love that cannot but steer the mind away from God; and Augustine also appears to reverse the direction of the connecting line that we have just seen drawn from love of self to love of God by making love of God prior to love of self. “The man who does not

¹³¹ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIV.18.

¹³² *Ibid.*, XIV.18.

love God, even though he loves himself, which is innate in him by nature, can still be said quite reasonably to hate himself.”¹³³ Let us turn, therefore, to an examination of the question of love, which occupies the bulk of Book VIII.

Augustine concludes his discussion of the relationship of the soul to the good by affirming that we “have to stand by and cling to this good in love”; but then he asks: “who can love what he does not know?” Here we encounter a problem in relation to our love of God. In examining the interdependence of the faculties of the mind, we have emphasized the dependence of knowledge on love, yet Augustine repeats in several places that we have no ability to love that which we do not know.¹³⁴ There is no content in the unknown to which love can attach itself, and we can see, therefore, that memory sets the limits of our love no less than the limits of our thought. We thus find ourselves in a paradox in which, as we have already seen, love of God is a prerequisite for knowing him, and yet some knowledge of him is a prerequisite of love. Augustine points to three possible solutions to this problem in the rest of Book VIII. The first alternative is that love may find an object in the content of our belief, yet this possibility is quickly discarded since, without a framework of prior knowledge with which to make sense out of the content of that belief, love will again find itself objectless.¹³⁵ Augustine then suggests that we may draw content for our love from the impression of God left on our memory,¹³⁶ yet to attempt to take this road

¹³³ *Ibid.*, XIV.18.

¹³⁴ See, for example, *Ibid.*, X.1; XIII.7; XIV.18.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII.6-8.

¹³⁶ See the discussion of the just, *Ibid.*, VIII.9.

out is simply to move back to the other horn of the paradox: as we saw earlier, to put the image of God to work in developing an understanding of God requires that we love him.

We should attend more carefully to Augustine's final suggestion according to which we may learn to love God through loving our neighbour. In a discussion of the nature of true love, Augustine unites the twin biblical injunctions to love God and love neighbour through proposing that anyone who loves must first love love itself, and, since God is love, it turns out that, if we love our neighbour, we must love God.¹³⁷ Yet, according to this line of thinking, love of neighbour is embedded in a prior love of God, and it is the possibility of loving God that we set out to establish. This same point demonstrates the direction in which we should see the connection working between love of self and love of God. The kind of true love in which Augustine suggests that God may be perceived is found only in a love that is embedded in a proper love of love, that is, a love of God. While Augustine needs to point to a natural self-love in order to maintain an implicit trinity in the mind, he points in fact to the mind's capacity to be loveable to itself as that which is always present,¹³⁸ and, as we have seen, he is careful to qualify that love of God must be prior to any true love of self. Thus, as Oliver O'Donovan puts it, we can see that Augustine has "defended himself with remarkable thoroughness against a possible charge of glib continualism" between

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, VIII.10-2.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, IX.17.

any natural love and love of God.¹³⁹ Only true love affords a view of the divine, and true love loves love itself; but, since God is love, true love must be embedded in love of God. We cannot, therefore, derive love of God from amplification of our earthly love. At this point, then, it should be clear that Augustine suffers from no lack of vigilance in guarding against natural theology. It is true that he deploys his guardsmen in a different formation than Karl Barth, for instance, who criticizes what he perceives as Augustine's surrender to natural theology, but this does not mean that Augustine's guards are any less at the ready. Where Barth defends against natural theology by judiciously governing the kind of source that will qualify as theologically appropriate, Augustine is willing to admit a wider range of theological stimuli while insisting that they are fruitful only so long as they are viewed through eyes of faith that are ordered to love of God.¹⁴⁰ For Augustine, creation naturally bears the stamp of the God by whom it was made,¹⁴¹ but, as we have seen, no object contemplated apart from a love of God leads one through to him. The result of this approach, as we shall see momentarily in

¹³⁹ O'Donovan, 81.

¹⁴⁰ It falls well outside the scope of this project to adjudicate between Barth and Augustine on this question, but in passing at least let us note that Augustine's approach seems to correspond better to Paul's claim that the invisible nature of God has been perceived through things that have been made, but that this witness is lost on those of darkened minds whose wickedness suppresses the truth (see Romans 1:18-21).

¹⁴¹ "Is there anything, after all, that does not bear a likeness to God after its own fashion, seeing that God made all things very good for no other reason than that he himself is supremely good?" (*De Trinitate*, XI.8). Perhaps Augustine's favourite means of accounting for the likeness of God in creation is to quote Wisdom 11:20 according to which God "arranged all things according to measure and number and weight." Measure, number, and weight, for Augustine, correspond to the persons of the Trinity, and, as a result, he thinks of all of creation as ordered according to Trinity and suffused with its likeness (see *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 2.5.11). Having shown how measure, number, and weight correspond to the faculties of the mind, Augustine adds a personal aside that expresses his delight in the Trinitarian order of creation. "I must confess that I like to taste the pleasure of observing these three, *measure, number, and weight*, in all other matters as well" (*De Trinitate*, XI.18).

considering the mediation of Christ and of scripture, is that the chief problematic involved in coming to know God is a problem of vision. How can the soul come to perceive the divinity that is veiled in all parts of creation? The answer, it would appear, is not by any means that lie within the power of the sinful human being. Proper love holds the key, and the force of habit holds the orientation of the will in sinful bondage.

Augustine's insistence on the interdependence of the faculties of the mind has thus left us in a bind. We must know God in order to love him, we must love him before knowing him, and Augustine has sealed off the backdoors through which we might try to slip love of God. We are thus back at the question of the precondition that makes knowledge and love of God possible. In opposition to Brachtendorf's suggestion, which we have already examined, Basil Studer argues that faith in salvation history is determinative of knowledge of God on every level, from the content of the prior framework that is required in order to understand claims about God, to historical knowledge, and even to philosophical, or contemplative, wisdom. This is, ultimately, the correct answer to the problem, yet Studer pushes the point too far in proposing that even the framework of "general notions" that is required to understand the content of faith is derived from scripture.¹⁴² To take this approach is to ignore the manner in which even the knowledge of God's action in salvation history, gained through scripture, has to overcome a recognition problem. The witness of scripture is not so

¹⁴² Basil Studer, "History and Faith in *De Trinitate*," *Augustinian Studies* 28.1 (1997) 26-8.

straightforward, for Augustine, that, in reading about God or the incarnation, one can read off the content of these concepts from the witness. For Augustine, scripture accommodates itself to human beings, employing “no manner of speaking that is not in common human usage”¹⁴³ to the point that, for the sake of expression, scripture describes things as they are not.¹⁴⁴ Thus, rather than presenting God as he is in his full divinity, which the mind could not grasp, scripture makes “children’s toys out of things that occur in creation, by which to entice our sickly gaze and get us step by step to seek as best we can the things that are above and forsake the things that are below.”¹⁴⁵ Similarly, in speaking of Christ, Augustine says that the apostle “presents him not in the divine strength in which he is equal to the Father, but in the human weakness through which he was crucified.”¹⁴⁶ There is a parallel between the functioning of the mediation of scripture and the mediation of Christ.¹⁴⁷ Christ “appeared outwardly in created bodily form,” yet his “uncreated spiritual form” remained always hidden from mortal eyes.¹⁴⁸ Christ’s divinity remained invisible in the incarnation and he was not recognized by those who put him to death;¹⁴⁹ yet, to those who view him

¹⁴³ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, I.23.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I.2. To establish this point, Augustine cites passages that attribute changing emotions to God, like, “I am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:5), or “I am sorry I made man” (Genesis 6:7), and passages that speak of God as bodily, like, “Shelter me under the shadow of your wings” (Psalm 17:8).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I.2.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I.3.

¹⁴⁷ Carol Harrison writes: “Scripture is a revelation of Christ in a unique way, in that it shares His functions; it too is a Word of God, it too provides a veil to truth which would otherwise blind man, an eyesalve to heal his damaged sight” (*Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine*, 211).

¹⁴⁸ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, II.10.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I.11.

through the eyes of faith, his appearance in time directs their gaze to the “hidden presence of his eternity sublime.”¹⁵⁰ There is, then, a certain veiling that is characteristic of the mediation of both scripture and the incarnation. Neither the Biblical text nor the historical person of Jesus give a clear presentation of the divinity of God; instead, each appears as nonsense to the unbeliever, while each directs the eyes of faith to God.¹⁵¹ Faith, then, is required in order to recognize divinity in scripture; thus, in opposition to Studer’s suggestion, scripture alone is not enough to initiate us into faith in God.

The structure of *De Trinitate*, beginning, as it does, with four books on the work of God in salvation history, suggests that it is through God’s revelation that knowledge of him is acquired; yet, as we have seen in examining Studer’s

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, II.10. This last statement is made about the Holy Spirit but can be taken as true of the incarnation of Christ as well, since at this point Augustine is examining what it means for the Son and Holy Spirit to be sent.

¹⁵¹ This point is developed nicely in Phillip Cary’s account of Augustine’s theory of signs. Cary argues that because signs are sensible and external they cannot adequately represent inner truth, and so he concludes that we do not learn things from signs but rather we come to understand the significance of a sign only after we know the thing it signifies. This accords with the account that we have offered of the way in which memory limits knowledge, and Cary argues that, in relation to scripture, this means that the proper interpreter of scripture is one who “already knows the spiritual things it signifies and therefore is not captive to a literal reading of its signs” (*Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self*, 143). Augustine himself makes an explicit connection between a theory of signs and the appearances of the divine persons in salvation history. He writes that if the apostle Paul “could use meaningful signs to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ,” then we should not be surprised if God “produces visible and sensible effects as he pleases... to signify and show himself as he knows best, without the very substance of his being every appearing immediately manifest” (*De Trinitate*, III.10). In the same way, Michel René Barnes emphasizes that, in Jesus, the divinity of the Son remains invisible, and he adds that “one could hardly have a firmer or more emphatic doctrine of the necessarily invisible character of divinity than Augustine does” (“The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity,” 335). This “doctrine of the necessarily invisible character of divinity” is so strong, in fact, that Augustine holds that even at the final judgment, when all appear before Christ, the wicked will only be able to see Christ’s human form. “The form of God, however, in which he is equal to the Father, this the wicked will undoubtedly not see” (*De Trinitate*, I.28). Given this conception of the necessity of divine invisibility, we cannot, in the first instance, take the witness of salvation history as the source of the believer’s pre-faith familiarity with God.

interpretation, some inner movement is required in order to initiate belief in this history. The example that Augustine offers in Book VIII, then, as a kind of test case of the possibility of human love, is not particularly illuminating in terms of coming to an understanding of the possibility of love of God. Perplexed by the question of the origins of love, Augustine asks why he loves the apostle Paul, and goes on to show that this love is the result of the harmony between his belief in Paul's historical life and the form of the just in which he perceives this life's worth.¹⁵² This example might suggest the veracity of Studer's interpretation of a knowledge derived from salvation history, for it is precisely the justice of Christ, for Augustine, that makes his mediation efficacious in setting the sinner free.¹⁵³ Can the solution to the problem of the recognition of Christ, then, be rooted in the correspondence between his life and the form of the just with which the mind is familiar? How can it be, when, in the first place at least, the believer's faith is not in Christ as a just man but rather in Christ as the Son of God?¹⁵⁴ That which must be recognized in Christ in order for him to serve as the just object of human faith is not that he is just, but rather the divinity that makes Christ's triumph over the

¹⁵² Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.13.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, XIII.17-8.

¹⁵⁴ As we shall see later, Barnes is right to say that, for Augustine, the human incarnation of Christ is the *occasion* of human faith ("Visible Christ," 335), but we must be clear that it is Christ in his divinity that is the *object* of faith. Augustine explains Christ's statement that, "He who believes in me does not believe in me, but in him who sent me" (John 12:44) by saying that what Christ means is, "He who believes in me does not believe in what he sees,' or our hope would in that case be in something created, but he believes in him who took a created form in which to appear to human eyes" i.e. the divine Son (*De Trin.*, I.27).

devil by means of justice possible. We have seen that this divinity is outside the possibility of human recognition.¹⁵⁵

Let us return, then, to the root of the question with which we are engaged. The problem that Augustine has posed is that memory sets the limits on both our love and our knowledge, and, in the same way that some impression of the good must exist in the human mind as a precondition of the mind's making judgements about good things, so some conception of God must remain as a precondition of faith, knowledge, and love of God. Let us see, then, if Augustine offers any indication of the origins of this pre-conception. This is, in fact, a crucial question in an examination concerned with natural theology, for Barth accuses Augustine of employing a Platonic conception of *anamnesis*, and of thus marginalizing revelation insofar as knowledge of God comes not from outside the self but from

¹⁵⁵ The hiddenness of the divine in Christ is a point of which Michael Hanby takes no account in his interpretation of *De Trinitate*. Hanby writes: "Christ in his unity must be beautiful to evoke the delight of our attention; otherwise he makes no claim on us. Hence Christ as *exemplum* is the visible manifestation of the beauty of the God" ("Augustine and Descartes," 459). He anticipates our conclusion in making brief mention of the anterior gift of the Holy Spirit ("Augustine and Descartes," 460; *Augustine and Modernity*, 67-8), but this is not because he acknowledges the hiddenness of Christ's beauty. Indeed, he goes on to argue that this beauty is "crucial to the enticement" of the love of the Holy Spirit (*Augustine and Modernity*, 45). The problem of the hiddenness of Christ's divinity is thus marginalized.

In his account of the power of the beauty of Christ to evoke love, Hanby draws from Carol Harrison's work on aesthetics in Augustine, and Harrison provides a more satisfying account of the hiddenness of Christ's beauty. She writes that Augustine "seems to turn aesthetics on its head in teaching that Christ Himself became ugly and deformed in order to reform and restore man's beauty" (*Beauty and Revelation*, 233). She continues: "Though He possessed the supreme beauty and form of God, Christ, the Bridegroom, assumed the form of His beloved, the form of her mortality and sinfulness in order to reveal to her His love and restore her beauty by evoking her confession of sin and love ... The deformity of Christ therefore evokes a love in the beholder which is not so much directed towards His physical beauty, for that has been destroyed, but towards His 'inner beauty' which, as we saw above, dwells in His love" (236-7). This language of the "evoking" of love by Christ's beauty might suggest that this is a natural movement accomplished by sinful humanity, yet Harrison is quick to clarify that "even man's responsive love is a gift of God, for it is by the gift of His Holy Spirit, who is love, that man is able to love God and be reformed to His beauty" (235).

within.¹⁵⁶ Much thus hinges on Augustine's account of the impression of the good on the mind, and at this point in his argument he does not give a clear account of its origins. It is "wonderfully surprising," he says, that the mind perceives in itself "what it has seen nowhere else" and what it is not itself;¹⁵⁷ yet, by way of elucidation, he says no more than that the good "*is not far from anyone of us; for in it we live and move and are.*"¹⁵⁸ This last statement is drawn from Acts 17:27-8, and we should attend both to the relationship of dependence that this verse suggests and to its other occurrences in the text, for it has a central place in two other discussions of memory. In Book XIV, Augustine associates this verse with the mind's being in God, and he then asks, "What can things that live live in and things that move move in but in him in whom they are?" He goes on to connect this verse explicitly with humanity's ontological dependence on God, writing that sinful man is in the paradoxical position of having turned away from him "without whom he cannot be."¹⁵⁹ Yet, even in this turning away, Augustine maintains the existence of a memory of God in human being, and he uses Acts 17:27-8 to distinguish his position from a doctrine of recollection. He says that the mind does not remember God "because it knew him in Adam." It fell "by its own willful doing" and so "does not remember its happiness." And yet "the mind

¹⁵⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I.1: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, ed. G.W. Bromiley, T.F. Torrance, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1975) 99-101.

¹⁵⁷ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.9.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII.5. I have followed the translator in using italics to show where Augustine is quoting from scripture.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, XIV.16. Augustine writes that in sin we were not so cut off from God that we stopped seeking eternity, truth, and happiness, and the memory of the Trinity that is contained in the desire for these three reminds us that we must "turn back from the things around us to where our whole being springs from" (IV.2). Here again we see an allusion to the idea of a return to a source that will be important for us later.

does remember its God ... he is all of him everywhere, and therefore the mind *lives and moves and is in him*, and for this reason is able to remember him.”¹⁶⁰ It would appear, then, that rather than offering a Platonic account of the memory of God, Augustine traces the origins of the imprint of the divine on the soul to the soul’s dependence on God, its living, moving, and having being in him.

Confirmation of this interpretation is found if we return to the language of light that we encountered earlier in our discussion of truth. There we saw that, in sin, the mind is “stripped naked of the enlightenment of truth” and “the light of [the] eyes is no longer with [it],” that is, the mind has lost the strength of vision required to perceive the divine light.¹⁶¹ Yet Augustine holds that the mind “went on being touched” by the divine light, even after it had turned away from God, as the precondition of its capacity to make judgments about true things.¹⁶² How does Augustine account for the possibility that divine light still touches the “darkness [that] is the foolish minds of men”? He says that “*in it we live and move and are*.”¹⁶³ Augustine’s use of this verse makes clear that our capacity to remember God is a product of the fact that both our thought and our being depend on him. In response to Barth,¹⁶⁴ then, we can see that the impression of God on the mind is

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, XIV.21.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, XII.13.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, XIV.21, see also IV.20.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, IV.3.

¹⁶⁴ In fairness it should be noted that Barth builds his case for a Platonic reminiscence in Augustine largely from *Confessions*, and Robert Miner has shown that there is at least some grounds for thinking that Augustine employs a kind of Platonic conception in his earliest work (see Miner, “Augustinian Recollection,” *Augustinian Studies* 38.2 [2007] 435-450). With that being said, James Wetzel has, I think, shown that the most plausible reading of the memory of God that Augustine presents in *Confessions* X functions in a way that is similar to the dynamic of

not the product of a memory of a past state.¹⁶⁵ The impossibility of the mind's forgetting of God is grounded in the fact that its memory of him is its awareness of his presence even now at the root of its being. This conception of memory as an awareness of something present is affirmed in Augustine's discussion of justice. Augustine says that, in thinking about justice, a notion that he has "seen nowhere else," he is not "recalling something absent like Carthage" that he has seen once and has stored in his memory; rather, he is "perceiving something that is present."¹⁶⁶ While it might seem inappropriate to speak of this kind of present awareness as memory, Augustine cites Virgil, who wrote that Ulysses did not "forget himself in that momentous hazard," to show that it is appropriate to speak of a memory of things that are present.¹⁶⁷ That the mind's memory of God is rooted in its present dependence upon God means that the appropriate movement

dependence that we have explored in *De Trinitate* (see Wetzel, "The Force of Memory," *Augustinian Studies* 38.3 [2007] 147-159).

¹⁶⁵ That Augustine uses Acts 17:27-8 to establish this mode of remembering is an interesting point in relation to Barth. Barth charges Augustine with employing a Platonic conception of remembrance in the first volume of his *Church Dogmatics*, yet, in his earlier *Epistle to the Romans*, Barth uses Acts 17:27-8 in virtually the same way that Augustine does. Barth speaks of a memory of God that "accompanies us always as problem and as warning" against the pretensions of religion, and he argues that the invisibility and transcendent eternity of God can be established by "calm, veritable, unprejudiced religious contemplation" (46). Whence this memory and capacity to apprehend the invisibility of God? Barth writes: "God is not far from each one of us: *for in him we live and move and have our being*" (47). The gospel, then, is given that humanity "may seek him who is not far from each one of us, in whom we live and move and have our being" (94), and it is because God is "all in all," for Barth, that the creature can love the Creator (158). The parallels with Augustine's work are striking here, though, as a theologian in the Reformed tradition, it is quite possible that Barth is influenced by Calvin rather than Augustine in his use of Acts 17:27-8. In the opening of the *Institutes*, Calvin writes that knowledge of God and knowledge of self are "joined by many bonds," and that "no one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God, *in whom he 'lives and moves'*" (1.1.1, emphasis added). For Calvin, each one "undoubtedly feels within the heavenly grace that quickens him" and so God ought not to be sought afar off (1.5.3), for God "dwells by his very present power in each of us (1.5.9).

¹⁶⁶ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.9.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, XIV.14.

for theology is not a turn inward as if the self alone were a sufficient source of knowledge of God; instead, for Augustine, the turn inward to memory leads one to redirect one's attention away from the self in search of the being upon whom one depends. Augustine's cosmology dictates that that upon which one depends must be greater than the self; thus Charles Taylor writes that, for Augustine, "by going inward, I am drawn upward."¹⁶⁸

Augustine's use of Acts 17:27-8 shows that it is the presence of God to the mind that provides the rationale for his repeated assertion of the value of self-examination and self-knowledge. It is not, at least in the first place, that, as Brachtendorf suggests, in studying ourselves, we obtain the framework necessary for understanding the Trinity. Instead, Augustine says that the mind is commanded to know itself in order that it "should think about itself and live according to its nature, that is it should want to be placed according to its nature, under him it should be subject to and over all that it should be in control of."¹⁶⁹ In opposition to the self-aggrandizing movement of sin that takes the soul away from its proper resting place, Augustine suggests that self-examination should lead to the humbling recognition of the soul's lack of self-sufficiency. In studying its thinking activity, the mind should realize that it judges truth and goodness

¹⁶⁸ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 134. Taylor draws from Gilson, who writes that Augustine's path leads "from the exterior to the interior and from the interior to the superior" (20). Phillip Cary argues that this insistence on the double movement of first inward and then upward demonstrates the way in which Augustine has broken away from Plotinus, for whom, in encountering the inner space of the soul, one had already encountered the divine (38).

¹⁶⁹ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, X.7.

according to a light that transcends the mind.¹⁷⁰ In the same way, in thinking about the universal *a priori* that is its desire for happiness, the soul should realize that this desire implies an immortality that it does not itself possess. Augustine argues that all wish to be happy, and that true happiness exists only where one is assured that happiness will not come to an end. The desire for eternal life is thus concomitant with the desire for true happiness, and the universal desire for happiness thus serves as further proof of the soul's lack of self-sufficiency, for it desires what it cannot itself obtain.¹⁷¹ Self-examination should lead, then, to the soul's recognition of its dependence upon something eternal and transcendent, a

¹⁷⁰ Charles Matthewes writes that, for Augustine, epistemic justification “does take place within the autonomous space of subjectivity, but such justification proceeds only by affirming that an irreducible otherness stands at the heart of subjectivity – the otherness of God. Augustine anchors his realism in the inwardness of our minds discerning God. Objectivity, that is, is realized through subjectivity, only because subjectivity holds, at its heart, an objective reality” (198).

¹⁷¹ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIII.10. In *City of God*, Augustine argues that we should not look for the origins of a sinful will because sin is a privative turn towards non-being, and so there is no efficient, but instead only a deficient, cause of sin (XII.6-7). Here, in *De Trinitate*, by contrast, he does at least allude to a possible source of the will's turn from God. Humanity is united, he argues, in that all desire to be happy, and he suggests further that true happiness requires immortality. This leads to a distinction between those who maintain belief in the grace of God, and so strive to live justly in order to receive eternal life, and those who, despairing of eternal life, strive to achieve happiness in this life on their own terms. Augustine writes: “As long as they despair of immortality, without which true happiness is impossible, they will look for, or rather make up, any kind of thing that may be called, rather than really be, happiness in this life” (*De Trinitate*, XIII.11). There is a sense, then, in which the sinful will can be traced back to despair over the possibility of immortality. This, in turn, helps to make sense of why Augustine thinks that one of the chief functions of the incarnation is to persuade us that God loves us, i.e., that the grace of God through which immortality is achieved is still available, “in case out of sheer despair we lacked the courage to reach up to him” (*De Trinitate*, IV.2). The incarnation, then, provides an antidote to the despair that grounds sin.

The point with which we are concerned here regarding the soul's desire for that which it cannot itself obtain is used by Augustine elsewhere as a further stimulus for the soul's memory of God. He writes that, in sin, we were exiled from unchanging joy, “yet not so broken and cut off from it that we stopped seeking eternity, truth, and happiness even in this changeable and time-bound situation of ours – for we do not want, after all, to die or to be deceived or to be afflicted” (*De Trinitate*, IV.2). These natural desires to avoid death, deceit, and affliction, correspond to our desire for eternity, truth, and happiness, triumvirates that are meant to mirror the divine Trinity. For Augustine, then, our natural desires reflect a memory of the eternity of the Father, the truth of the Son, and the happiness of the Spirit.

recognition that should chasten its self-love and lead the soul to return to its proper place in creation's order and begin to live according to its nature.¹⁷² As Rowan Williams puts it, when the mind reaches the point at which it understands its functioning, "it either apprehends itself as *acted upon* by God, or it generates the fantasy of being a self-subsistent agent."¹⁷³ In coming to understand itself, the soul can thus choose between enacting once again the sinful movement of pride, or accepting in humility that it depends upon him in whom it lives, moves, and has its being.

The question with which we are faced, then, is how far down the road to knowledge of God the recognition of the soul's dependence upon God can lead. There are two reasons for caution in attributing too much to the capacities of the sin-bound mind. In the first place, while Augustine does say that proper self-knowledge should lead to the soul returning to live according to its nature, he offers no suggestion that this movement of self-recognition can lead to the renewed strength of vision that is required in order to perceive God. As we saw earlier, the consequence of the weakness of the mind is that purification is required in order to perceive God, and Augustine warns against those who suppose themselves capable of a "do-it-yourself" purification.¹⁷⁴ In turning inward the mind's gaze is directed upward, but we must beware the suggestion of

¹⁷² Augustine writes of one who has achieved true self-knowledge that he is no longer "puffed up by knowledge because he is built up by charity ... he has put knowledge of his own weakness above knowledge of the walls of the world, the foundations of the earth and the pinnacles of the sky; and by bringing in this knowledge he has brought in sorrow, the sorrow of the exile stirred by a longing for his true country and its founder, his blissful God" (*De Trinitate*, IV.1).

¹⁷³ Williams, "*Sapientia* and the Trinity," 320.

¹⁷⁴ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IV.20.

an unproblematic continualism in the double movement of inward and then upward. The movement of self-reflection can lead to a recognition of the soul's dependence upon the transcendent, but it cannot equip the mind to perceive God's "inexpressible and wholly simple nature." The second reason for hesitation in moving too quickly from self-knowledge to knowledge of God is that Augustine introduces an element of discontinuity from natural human thought even at the root of self-knowledge. He speaks of the one who has come to recognize her lack of self-sufficiency as having been "roused by the warmth of the Holy Spirit."¹⁷⁵ In addition, we have seen that the value of self-knowledge lies in the memory of God that is inherent in the soul, and Augustine says that the mind truly recalls its Lord "after receiving his Spirit."¹⁷⁶ Both knowledge of self and memory of God thus hinge on the action of the Holy Spirit. This conclusion should not surprise us, for we saw earlier that the perception of the light of divine truth that is foundational to Augustine's account of memory is also rooted in the Spirit's work.¹⁷⁷ In trying to follow memory to the knowledge of God we are thus led to the work of the Holy Spirit. I hope to show that this is a timely addition to our investigation by demonstrating that the work of the Holy Spirit is the element that was missing from the earlier discussion of the historical mediation of Christ as a means to knowledge of God. Let us turn, then, to examine the way in which the Holy Spirit brings us through Christ to knowledge of God.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, IV.1.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, XIV.21.

¹⁷⁷ See p. 18, n. 64.

III. The achievement of the knowledge of God (VIII 9-14)

To recall, the problem to which we were led in the last chapter is that the soul must love God in order to know him, and yet it must know him before he can be loved. In Book VIII, Augustine discards knowledge gained through faith as a means out of this bind because no ready account could be given of the origins of faith's content. The solution to this problem appears later in *De Trinitate*, where Augustine writes that faith "has been given actual definite content in Christ."¹⁷⁸ Basil Studer is correct, then, in pointing to faith in salvation history as the means out of the paradox of Book VIII; he errs only in failing to take account of the way in which, for Augustine, the movement of the Holy Spirit is required as the condition of the mind's recognition of Christ as the just object of its faith. Studer argues that Augustine was simply not interested in how one comes to recognize Christ,¹⁷⁹ yet the weight of the Augustinian corpus stands in opposition to this proposed indifference towards the question of the origins of faith. In responding to the Pelagians, it became crucial, for Augustine, to show that even the capacity for faith in Christ is a gift from God. Faith thus falls within the scope of the Pauline question that drove Augustine's anti-Pelagian polemic: "What do you have that you did not receive?"¹⁸⁰ Augustine writes: "Assuredly then it is God

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, XIII.25.

¹⁷⁹ Studer, "History and Faith in *De Trinitate*," 29.

¹⁸⁰ I Corinthians 4:7. The frequency with which Augustine cites this verse is proof enough of its importance to his work. Indeed, it is telling of the orientation of his thought that the only citation from Paul that matches I Corinthians 4:7 for frequency of use is another passage that suggests the primacy of the work of God – indeed, of the Holy Spirit in particular – in establishing the relationship between humanity and God. In Romans 5:5, Paul speaks of the "love of God shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." To this passage we will

who brings about in a man the very will to believe, and in all things does his mercy anticipate us.”¹⁸¹ In *De Trinitate*, Augustine argues that the Holy Spirit is the gift of God that ushers the believer into saving faith.¹⁸² The Holy Spirit thus makes possible the memory of God through true knowledge of self, as well as the recognition of Christ as the just object of faith. In failing to acknowledge the role of the Holy Spirit in the recognition of Christ, Studer has, in effect, overlooked the Trinitarian structure of Augustine’s conception of revelation. The divinity that remains always hidden, even in revelation, corresponds to the Father, the mediating object that conveys something of God’s truth corresponds to the Son, and the spiritual vision that allows the believer to perceive truth in revelation corresponds to the Holy Spirit. As Luigi Gioia puts it, then, knowledge of God through revelation “means knowledge of the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸³

We have, to this point, attributed two functions to the work of the Holy Spirit: first, the achievement of the true knowledge of self that brings humility; and, second, the recognition of Christ as the just object of faith. These functions

return shortly. For information regarding Augustine’s use of particular scriptural passages, see James W. Wiles, *A Scripture Index to the Works of St. Augustine in English Translation* (Lanham, New York: University Press of America, 1995).

¹⁸¹ Augustine, “The Spirit and the Letter,” *Augustine: Later Works*, ed. and trans. John Burnaby (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955) 60.34. This account of the origins of faith might appear to lead to the strictest form of determinism, yet this is not what Augustine intends at this point in his thinking. After writing that it is God who brings about the will to believe, he says that it “belongs to our own will” to “consent to the calling of God or to refuse it.” As we suggested earlier, the consequence of the force of habit with which the will is held in bondage means that the only way in which the will can have any semblance of freedom is through the prior action of God. We shall return later to the question of the freedom of the will.

¹⁸² Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV.31-2.

¹⁸³ Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine’s De Trinitate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 107.

work hand in hand in bringing the soul to knowledge of God. Augustine compares the sinful soul to the prodigal son who went to live in a far country, and he writes that God has made a road by which the soul can return to its homeland “in the humanity and divinity of his only Son.”¹⁸⁴ It is crucial, for Augustine, that, in making its return journey, the soul should imitate the Magi, who, having visited the infant Christ, returned to their own country by a different route from the one by which they came.¹⁸⁵ The soul traveled away from God on the road of pride, and Augustine writes that the alternative route home “has been taught us by the humble king.”¹⁸⁶ We must return by God’s route, and not through our own strength, lest we “take pride in our own worth, and so bounce even further away from him and sink even more under our own strength.”¹⁸⁷ Believers are thus to imitate Christ, who humbly submitted to death that justice might triumph over power.¹⁸⁸ The humility that comes with true self-knowledge is thus a necessary companion of the recognition of Christ, for it is only in humility that one can accept to be “led along” the more “endurable route” that, lacking the strength of vision to perceive God directly, the soul must take to knowledge of the Trinity.¹⁸⁹

Let us turn, then, to an examination of the “endurable route” by which believers are led to knowledge of God. Augustine argues that, in claiming to be

¹⁸⁴ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IV.1.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, IV.14.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, IV.14.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, IV.1.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, XIII.17.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, I.3. In *City of God*, Augustine emphasizes that “you need humility if you are to acquiesce” to the truth of Christ (X.29), and his constant criticism of the philosophers is that they lack the humility required in order to achieve the knowledge of God.

“the way and the truth and the light,”¹⁹⁰ Christ identifies himself as the road that leads to God.¹⁹¹ As the truth, the very substance of God, Christ is the end towards which believers move; and, as the way, he provides the means by which they may reach that end.¹⁹² Christ’s status as both goal and means is crucial, for Augustine, in establishing the possibility of knowledge of God. Augustine calls comprehension of things that change with time “knowledge,” and he proposes that apprehension of the eternal should be called “wisdom.”¹⁹³ In our examination of the effects of sin, we saw that the human mind is trapped in a mode of thought characterized by changing bodily images, the antithesis of the changeless substance of God. Thus, in coming to think about God, the mind must pass from the knowledge of temporal things to wisdom, and Augustine argues that this transfer is made possible by the unity of the two natures of Christ. Because the occasion of faith is Christ’s appearance in time,¹⁹⁴ faith belongs properly within

¹⁹⁰ John 14:6.

¹⁹¹ Augustine writes that he is “struggling to return from this *far country* by the road [God] has made in the humanity of the divinity of his only Son” (*De Trinitate*, IV.1).

¹⁹² In response to those who argue that scripture passages like John 14:28, in which Christ says that “the Father is greater than I,” prove that the Son is not equal to the Father, Augustine writes that some things in scripture are said about Christ in the divine form in which he is of one substance with the Father, and others are said about him in the servant form that he took in the incarnation. In applying this rule for scriptural interpretation, Augustine writes that Christ said “*I am the truth* in the form of God, and *I am the way* in the form of a servant; and it is because he, *the firstborn from the dead* blazed a trail to the kingdom of God for his Church... that he was created in the beginning of God’s ways in his work of creation” (*Ibid.*, I.24).

¹⁹³ Augustine writes: “Let us carry on with the consideration we have embarked upon of that part of reason to which knowledge belongs, that is to say, the knowledge of changeable and temporal things that is needed for the conduct of the business of this life,” and then goes on to say that “eternal, unchangeable and spiritual things are understood with the reasoning of wisdom” (*Ibid.*, XII.17).

¹⁹⁴ As was discussed earlier, Christ’s appearance in time is the occasion of faith while the divinity that remains hidden in the incarnation is the object of faith (see p. 44, n. 154).

the sphere of knowledge and not of wisdom.¹⁹⁵ Yet, because Christ is the incarnation of eternal truth, he is also an object of wisdom. Knowledge of the incarnation is thus already a kind of wisdom. Augustine writes:

Our knowledge therefore is Christ, and our wisdom is the same Christ. It is he who plants faith in us about temporal things, he who presents us with the truth about eternal things. Through him we go straight toward him, through knowledge towards wisdom, without ever turning aside from one and the same Christ.¹⁹⁶

That Christ is an object of both knowledge and wisdom is crucial, for Augustine, because it means that there is no tension between the object of our faith and eternal truth. “It would not do,” Augustine writes, “for there to be one person for us in faith, another in truth”; thus the truth became temporal so as to “capture our faith and draw it to himself,” preventing “the faith which we accord with all trust in this mortal life to things ‘that have originated’ from clashing with the truth of contemplating eternal things.”¹⁹⁷

Lewis Ayres has proposed that the movement “through Christ towards Christ” is the key to understanding *De Trinitate* as a whole. He argues that the unity of *De Trinitate* is best understood when we recognize that the *exercitatio mentis* of the latter half of *De Trinitate* takes place within the context of the two natures of Christ.¹⁹⁸ This, for him, shows that the progress towards an understanding of God in the later books of *De Trinitate* can hardly be

¹⁹⁵ See Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIV.2-4.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, XIII.24. Augustine expresses virtually the same idea in Book VII, where he writes of Christ that “by walking in him we move toward him, because for us he became a road, or way in time by his humility, while being for us an eternal abode by his divinity” (VII.5).

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, IV.24.

¹⁹⁸ Lewis Ayres, “The Christological Context of Augustine’s *De Trinitate* XIII: Toward Relocating Books VIII-XV,” *Augustinian Studies* 29:1 (1998) 136.

characterized as the “interior speculation of a proto-Cartesian self,”¹⁹⁹ for it hinges on a movement that is synonymous with participation in the body of Christ.²⁰⁰ According to Ayres, Augustine shows that “the two natured person of Christ does not just enable this progress extrinsically, but rather our progress in faith and contemplation occurs *in* Christ, *within* the natured person.”²⁰¹ For Ayres, then, the movement “through Christ towards Christ” is the movement that defines the space in which Christians live and act. I propose to divert briefly from explicit engagement with the question of the possibility of the knowledge of God in order to examine the dimensions of this moral ontology. I hope to show that, ultimately, this theme is coextensive with the question of the knowledge of God, as both eventually lead to the question of what it means to “participate” in God.

In turning, then, to examine Augustine’s conception of the movement “through Christ towards Christ,” I wish to argue that a proper appreciation of the moral ontology that this movement implies sheds light on the way in which Augustine’s theology of love should be interpreted. Let us begin by considering the way in which the Christological movement has been treated in recent scholarship. Michael Hanby picks up on Ayres’ argument and expands the scope of Ayres’ exposition of the unity of the dual nature of Christ. Ayres argues that it is the unity of Christ’s two natures that allows us to pass from knowledge to wisdom, and Hanby argues that Christ’s actions bring about parallel unions

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 119-20.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

between Christ and the Church and between Creator and creation.²⁰² To treat the proposed union of Creator and creation first, Hanby argues that Christ's function "is one whereby he reincorporates an estranged creation into the Trinitarian life of God."²⁰³ Hanby thus construes the context in which Christians act as a creation restored to harmony with its Creator. "Augustinian 'will' and 'subjectivity' are a function of Augustine's trinitarianism and Christology... situated within Christ's union of creature and Creator."²⁰⁴ Yet Hanby never provides a compelling reason for thinking that a broader unification of Creator and creature is synonymous with the unity of Christ's two natures. He writes that we must understand Augustine "within the ontological context from which he presumed to write, namely, the hypostatic unity of the one Christ, in which the creation unfolded within the love between the Father and the Son is recalled to union with its Creator"; yet, in order to substantiate the claim that the unity of Christ implies a creation recalled to union with its Creator, he does no more than cite Ayres, who, as we shall see shortly, asserts rather the opposite.²⁰⁵ Hanby's argument amounts to the claim that, because Augustine presents the will as uniting parent and offspring, we should understand the good will of Christ as uniting Creator and creation, cosmic parent and cosmic offspring.²⁰⁶ This interpretation can be sustained only on the basis of a casual reading of *De Trinitate* XI. Augustine's language of parent and offspring is intended only to show that the Holy Spirit can be called neither parent

²⁰² Hanby, "Augustine and Descartes," 457.

²⁰³ Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, 28.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 27, see note 1, p. 189.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

nor offspring, and he always qualifies his use of this language because the “form of body,” which the will “unites” with sight, “is not a true parent” any more than sight is a “true offspring.”²⁰⁷ Sight is not “wholly begotten” by the body “since something else is presented to the visible body for sight to be formed out of it, namely the sense of the one who is seeing.”²⁰⁸

Hanby’s case for interpreting Augustine as positing an accomplished unity between Christ and the Church, ecclesial head and body, is no more compelling. He argues that this union is also parallel to the unity of Christ’s two natures, and cites the following as his proof-text:

He did not say, I and they are one thing; although, in that He is the head of the church, which is His Body, He might have said, I and they are, not one thing, but one person, because the head and body is one Christ... since they could not be so in themselves, separated as they are one from another by diverse pleasures and desires and uncleanness of sin; whence they are cleansed through the Mediator, that they may be one in Him... through the same will most harmoniously conspiring to the same blessedness, and fused in some way by the fire of charity in one spirit.²⁰⁹

This again is something of a careless use of Augustine’s argument. The text appears to support the claim of an accomplished unity between ecclesial head and body: “He might have said, I and they are, not one thing, but one person.” Yet Hanby omits with an ellipse the crucial statement that informs this section of Augustine’s text. This is how Hill renders the passage: “he could have said ‘that I and they may be’ not one thing but ‘one person,’ since head and body make the

²⁰⁷ Hill, for instance, is moved to translate Augustine’s language “quasi-parent” and “quasi-offspring,” while McKenna and Haddon both render Augustine’s expression “parent” and “offspring” “as it were” (*De Trinitate*, XI.18, in Hill’s translation of 1991, McKenna’s of 2002, and Haddon’s of 1873).

²⁰⁸ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XI.9.

²⁰⁹ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IV.12, quoted in Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, 41.

one Christ. *But he is declaring his divinity consubstantial with the Father – as he says elsewhere, I and the Father are one.*”²¹⁰ Augustine’s aim, at this point in *De Trinitate*, is to argue that, in the unity amongst its members, the Church should mirror the eternal Son’s unity with the Father. What Augustine writes, then, is that Christ *could have* asserted his unity with the Church, *but instead* insisted upon his unity with the Father. Augustine is clear that it is only eschatologically that the Church will be united with the Father, and, as he is one with the Father, the Church’s unity with Christ must also await an eschatological fulfillment.²¹¹ Thus, Christ “now makes intercession” for his Church, but then “he will attach them to himself there where he is equal to the Father, and will no longer beg the Father for them.”²¹² Ayres thus construes the relationship between Christ and Church correctly when he writes that this relationship is dramatic, the “head drawing the body” for the “purpose of a future fulfillment.”²¹³

It is clear that, for Ayres, the completion of the movement through Christ towards Christ will only be accomplished eschatologically. Indeed, Ayres argues that we misunderstand the nature of this movement unless we recognize that it is operative at a certain stage in the ongoing drama of God’s redemptive action.²¹⁴ In thinking about what it means to move towards Christ by way of Christ, we

²¹⁰ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IV.12. Emphasis mine.

²¹¹ In Book I of *De Trinitate*, Augustine argues that, when Paul wrote that Christ “will hand over the kingdom to God and the Father” (I Cor. 15:24), he did not mean to imply the subordination of the Son but instead that, in the eschaton, Christ will bring believers to vision of God and unite them with the Father. Until that day comes, Augustine writes that Christ, too, is in his place of withdrawal (I.16).

²¹² Augustine, *De Trinitate*, I.21.

²¹³ Ayres, “Christological Context,” 125-6.

²¹⁴ Ayres emphasizes this at several points in his article; see pp. 119-20, 123, 125-27, 131.

must recognize that “Christian life is located within the stage which follows Christ’s ascension and which precedes the final judgment.”²¹⁵ In proposing the unity of creator and creation, Christ and Church, Hanby appears to have lost sight of this eschatological qualifier. Yet he is not alone in this. Eric Gregory offers a similar interpretation that is more important to our examination of Augustine’s moral ontology and his theology of love.

In *Politics and the Order of Love*, Gregory seeks to move past the Augustinian realism that dominated 20th century Christian political ethics in North America.²¹⁶ This tradition, which took its most influential form in the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr, was expressed most clearly in Augustinian studies in Robert Markus’ classic work *Saeculum*. Markus’ interpretation of Augustine’s political theology is informed by a strong conception of the depravity of sin. He argues that Christians are not “at home” in world,²¹⁷ and that faith compels the believer “to await in hope the return of the Lord in glory to gather his faithful from the ends of the earth into his kingdom.”²¹⁸ The “radically revolutionary character” of this eschatological hope keeps believers from aligning themselves with any political ideology in a vain hope for a “Christian” re-orienting of the social order, while also providing an impetus for “innovation, improvement, and advance.”²¹⁹ The recognition that the “working out of God’s purpose” does not “stand and fall

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

²¹⁶ Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008).

²¹⁷ Robert Markus, *Saeculum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 167.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 170-2.

with the fate... of any particular earthly society,”²²⁰ and the subsequent commitment to continually push the existing order without being invested in any alternative vision is, for Markus, the “peculiarly Christian posture in politics.”²²¹

In place of this negative, sin-centered model, Gregory pushes for what he calls a more “ambitious” political ethic that is “open to the possibility of social transformation through attention to virtue.”²²² He proposes to move the discussion away from statecraft and social structures to focus instead on the character of citizens.²²³ The question that drives his inquiry concerns what the habits and values of liberal citizens should be, and he argues for the centrality of an Augustinian account of love in the “motivational structure of an ethics of citizenship.”²²⁴ This is not antithetical to mainstream liberalism, Gregory suggests, because prized liberal values like justice and equality are implicit in Augustine’s theology of love; yet he argues that it is also salutary because an ethic of love, with its implicit notion of care for the neighbour, is more conducive to human flourishing than the minimalist concern for the “creation of a space where we do not kill each other and we do not interfere with conditions of economic exchange.”²²⁵ Gregory is, of course, well aware that the liberal tradition contains

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 170.

²²² Gregory, 8-9.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 56.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9. Gregory wishes to “allow ideal conceptions of human flourishing into the full light of the public square” (10), and he argues that the notion of care supported by many feminist thinkers is crucial to this. He devotes a chapter to showing that Augustine’s conception of the self dovetails nicely with feminist concerns regarding the exclusion of notions of vulnerability and the language of emotion and affectivity from much political discourse. See “A Liberal Ethic of Care: Feminist Political Theory and Christian Social Ethics,” pp. 149-196.

a long history of skepticism regarding the place of love in political ethics, and much of his work is devoted to showing that this skepticism is misplaced. Given his reliance on Augustine, this demonstration is crucial, for Augustine's thought has often been targeted as a poignant example of the way in which love, and religiously motivated love in particular, distorts ethics. I wish to consider the way in which Gregory responds to Anders Nygren's famous claim that Augustine's theology cannot accommodate an agapeic love of the neighbour.

In *Agape and Eros*, Nygren argues that, in his conception of *caritas*, Augustine never succeeded in moving past Platonic *eros*, and that this failure corrupts all of his attempts to work out a properly Christian account of *agape*.²²⁶ For Nygren, erotic love is an appetitive reach towards the eternal and non-bodily, while *agape* is characterized by the divine Son's descent into corporeal particularity. He argues that these two movements are fundamentally antithetical, and that, as a result of his conception of the necessity of love for God, Augustine cannot accommodate a proper love of the neighbour.²²⁷ Central to this interpretation is the claim that, for Augustine, human love is all of one kind. Love, Nygren argues, "is desire and longing, whether it is directed to temporal things or to God."²²⁸ Because of this, "the difference between Caritas and

²²⁶ Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Phillip Watson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953).

²²⁷ Nygren writes that Augustine "wanted to maintain both Eros and Agape at once. He was unaware that they are diametrically opposed to each other and that the relation between them must be an Either-Or; instead he tried to make it a Both-And." As a result, "he never knew Agape in its Christian fullness" (470).

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 494.

Cupiditas is not one of *kind*, but of *object*.”²²⁹ Proper and sinful loving are thus set apart only by the objects towards which each is directed. For Nygren, then, it is the objective pole that determines love’s moral standing.

In opposition to Nygren, Gregory argues that too much attention has been paid to the objects that Augustine thinks are worthy of love. According to Gregory, “Augustine is not engaged in an abstract metaphysical speculation on *what* one can safely consider to be appropriate objects of love”;²³⁰ thus, in accordance with his intention to offer an account of the motivational structure of citizens, he proposes a “shift in perspective from the prevalence of static metaphysical categories to a more dynamic theological account of moral psychology.”²³¹ This amounts, he argues, to turning nouns into verbs, “the order of love (the ‘what’) into the ordering of love (the ‘how’).”²³² This is a helpful move, and I will try to show later why, in approaching Augustine’s thought, this shift from focusing on the objective pole of love to the subjective is correct. For now, however, I wish to argue that Gregory errs in the way in which he effects this shift in perspective from the object of love to the lover.

Gregory argues that it is Augustine’s conception of the goodness of creation that allows one to concentrate on the disposition of the lover. For Augustine, all that is created is good and thus deserving of love, so it is not a

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 494.

²³⁰ Gregory, 41.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

²³² *Ibid.*, 40.

question of what is to be loved but how.²³³ Gregory's answer to the question of how objects are to be loved is to say that, for Augustine, created things are to be loved "in God."²³⁴ Creation exists in and through God; thus Gregory writes that "to love God is to love the whole of creation existing in God."²³⁵ He posits an "ontological relation between God and the world," what he goes on to call a "'this-worldly' supernaturalism" and a "'supernaturalizing' of the natural."²³⁶ It appears, in other words, that Gregory reconciles the tension between love of created things and love for the creator by taking steps to elide the distinction between the two. He attempts to justify this construal of the relationship between God and creation Christologically. For him, Christology "determines" Augustine's approach to the dual love command,²³⁷ for it is Christ who "becomes the neighbour of humanity... and brings it about that God may be all in all."²³⁸ Relying on the notion that God is "all in all" in order to reconcile love of God and love of neighbour is problematic. Gregory points to Christ's continuing presence in the world, and in the neighbour, in particular, as the grounds of neighbour love. He is quick to clarify that he is not proposing a "univocal identification" of Christ and neighbour, yet he goes on to argue that the neighbour is loved because she is a sacramental presence, a temporal instance of the eternal presence of Christ in the

²³³ *Ibid.*, 41.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 323.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 323-4.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 256.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 327. As we shall see later, the problem with Gregory's account is that he presumes an eschatological fulfillment that has yet to take place. We can see a first indication of this here, in Gregory's claim that Christ brings it about that God is all in all, for Augustine writes that it is only in the eschatological contemplation of God that God will be all in all (*De Trinitate*, I.20).

world.²³⁹ On this account, the critic's fear of a neighbour love that gets lost in love of God seems justified. It is not the neighbour in her particularity that is loved but rather the neighbour as a representation of Christ. The neighbour is not loved for herself but for the eternal.

The problem with Gregory's account is that he tries to do the work required to shift the focus from the objective pole to the disposition of the lover on the objective pole itself. He offers a conception of creation and redemption that allows him to identify love of created things with love of God, an identification that is made possible, he argues, because the world is "always already suspended in God."²⁴⁰ Thus, despite his desire to focus on the habits and motivations of citizens, he too ends up in a position in which the moral context that defines human love remains on the objective side. Love of the neighbour, or of the goods of creation, is appropriate not because of the subject's disposition but because they amount to love of God. Thus, in the same way that, for Hanby, Augustine's Christology means that Augustinian will is defined by functioning within a creation restored to union with the creator, so, for Gregory, Augustine's Christology means that Augustinian love is defined by an "ontological relationship" between its object and God. Both Hanby and Gregory thus interpret Augustine's Christology as implying an objectivist moral ontology in which external context defines the believer's love. This, I hope to show, is not how Augustine construes the matter. In opposition to Gregory's claim that Christology

²³⁹ Gregory, 349.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

determines Augustine's approach to the dual love command, I hope to show that love of God and love of neighbour are reconciled because, as Oliver O'Donovan writes, they share the same ontological ground on the subjective pole: the love of the Holy Spirit.²⁴¹ I wish to argue that it is participation in this pneumatological love, and not habitation in a creation Christologically "suspended in God," that defines Augustine's moral ontology.

Lewis Ayres is right to argue that the Christian life is located "in" Christ, and the question that is at stake in this examination of moral ontology is what it means, for Augustine, to say that the Christian life is defined by the movement "through Christ towards Christ." I hope to show that pneumatology is implicit in this movement. Let us begin, then, by asking what it means to move "through Christ." As we have seen, Christ became a road for us by taking a body in time so that he could be apprehended by our minds, which were consumed with temporal, bodily things. The "flesh which the Word had been made" was thus offered "as the object to receive our faith,"²⁴² "capturing" it in order to "lead us on" from fascination with bodily things to truth itself.²⁴³ To move "through Christ," then, is to move through knowledge of his appearance in time; yet, as we saw earlier, Augustine builds in an element of discontinuity here from the capacities of sinful human beings. Christ's divinity is veiled and believers recognize him as the just object of faith only through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The movement "through

²⁴¹ O'Donovan, 13.

²⁴² Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IV.26.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, IV.24.

Christ” thus hinges on the action of the Holy Spirit, for it corresponds to the acquisition of faith in the incarnation, brought about by the Spirit’s work.

The movement “towards Christ” is also pneumatologically driven. We move through Christ by faith in Christ’s appearance in time, and Augustine writes that all that has taken place in time “has been designed to elicit the faith we must be purified by in order to contemplate the truth” in eternity.²⁴⁴ There is an eschatological deferral present in Augustine’s conception of the movement “towards Christ.” Augustine holds that we will not perceive Christ in his eternal Sonship until we have passed over from mortality to eternity; thus we now “accord faith to the things done in time for our sakes, and are purified by it; in order that when we come to sight and truth succeeds faith, eternity might likewise succeed mortality.”²⁴⁵ In opposition, then, to the way in which Gregory uses Christology to effect a “‘supernaturalizing’ of the natural,” and Hanby uses it to assert a restored creation’s participation in divine beauty, Augustine writes that Christ “is in his place of withdrawal,”²⁴⁶ and that we continue to inhabit an “economy of similitude.”²⁴⁷ It is crucial, for Augustine, that “the form of a servant” in which Christ appeared “be removed from [humanity’s] sight, since as long as they could observe it they would think that Christ was this only which

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, IV.25.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, IV.24.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I.16.

²⁴⁷ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, trans. Arthur Haddon (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1873) I.16. I have cited the Haddon translation here because I think his phrasing conveys Augustine’s point more poignantly than Hill’s rendering of *dispensatio similitudinum* as “regime of symbols.”

they had before their eyes.”²⁴⁸ Christ “did not want this heart, so eagerly reaching out to him, to stop at thinking that he was only what could be seen and touched,”²⁴⁹ and so he ascended to the Father in order that our faith might “in some sense follow him in whom we have believed to where he has ascended.”²⁵⁰ Christ came forth as a bridegroom from his chamber,²⁵¹ and, having wedded creation to himself,²⁵² he returned to the Father and waits as a king in his bed-chamber for his bride to join him.²⁵³ Because Christ has ascended to the bosom of the Father,²⁵⁴ we inhabit an economy in which we put our faith in his temporal appearance in order to be purified to join him as his bride in eternity. To move “towards Christ,” then, is to pass through the process of purification by which we are made fit to be with God in eternity. Let us turn, then, to Augustine’s account of this process of purification, and the way in which it too directs our attention to the work of the Holy Spirit.

In considering the process of purification that the Christian undergoes, let us recall that, in our examination of the obstacles to knowledge of God, we saw

²⁴⁸ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, trans. Hill, I.18.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I.18.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, IV.24.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, I.24.

²⁵² Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.12.19. This passage from *Confessions* is a wonderful example of the logic of Augustine’s Christology, his command of scripture, and his skill as a writer. “He who for us is life itself descended here and endured our death and slew it by the abundance of his life. In a thunderous voice he called us to return to him, at that secret place where he came forth to us. First he came into the Virgin’s womb where the human creation was married to him, so that mortal flesh should not for ever be mortal. Coming forth from thence ‘as a bridegroom from his marriage bed, he bounded like a giant to run his course’ (Ps. 18:6). He did not delay, but ran crying out loud by his words, deeds, death, life, descent, ascent – calling us to return to him. And he has gone from our sight that we should ‘return to our heart’ (Isa. 46:8) and find him there. He went away and behold, here he is.”

²⁵³ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, I.16-17.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, III.3.

that Augustine thinks that the mind is dragged away from perception of God by a weight that, in its static sense, consists in the accumulated dirt of sin, and, in its dynamic sense, refers to the orientation of the will that holds the mind in bondage to love of material things. Augustine also characterizes the dirt of sin as an illness of the soul, and he writes that Christ took flesh “for the sake of restoring us to health.”²⁵⁵ For him, the logic of the Incarnation lies in the fact that any remedy for humanity’s corruption must be halfway between human illness and divine health.²⁵⁶ Thus the Son of God was sent, who is “at once the Word of God and the mediator between God and men... equal to the Father by oneness of divinity and our fellow by taking of humanity.”²⁵⁷ There is, for Augustine, a double function to Christ’s mediation that heals both the “natural growth” of the weight of sin and the disorder of the will. As divine, Christ serves as a sacrament through which the chains of sin are broken and the tumour of pride is healed,²⁵⁸ and, as human, he is an exemplar from whom believers learn to order their loves aright.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I.14.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, IV.24.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, IV.12.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII.7.

²⁵⁹ This dual function as sacrament and example is foundational to Augustine’s Christology. It receives its fullest exposition in Book IV, where Augustine argues that sin has subjected humanity both to a death of the soul, which is godlessness, and a death of the body that comes as a punishment for the death of the soul (IV.5). He goes on to write that Christ’s death took place in order to “balance this double death of ours,” his single death presented “by way of sacrament and by way of model” (IV.6). As sacrament, Christ’s death erases the necessity of the death of the soul, and, as model, his resurrection offers hope that believers too will overcome the death of the body. The distinction between sacrament and example thus applies primarily to humanity’s double death; yet, as I hope to show, it is a distinction that applies to the process of the purification from sin as well. Before proceeding, we should acknowledge that Studer is correct in pointing out that any attempt to delineate a precise application of the distinction between sacrament and example is likely to be frustrated by the inconsistency with which Augustine applies the terms. On this point Studer could, in fact, have built his case more strongly. He points out that Augustine speaks sometimes of the sacrament of Christ’s death and resurrection and other times of the

In turning, first, to treat the sacramental function in which Christ sets the believer free from the bondage of sin, we should note that there are several senses in which Augustine uses the term sacrament. At the broadest level, he conceives of sacraments as temporal signs of eternal realities.²⁶⁰ In this sense, the breaking of the bonds of sin experienced by the believer is a sacrament of the way in which human beings cease to be under the jurisdiction of the devil because of the sacrifice of Christ. Augustine argues that, in yielding to the devil's "seduction" and abandoning God, human beings made it just for the devil to claim "full property rights" over them.²⁶¹ The devil is thus well within his rights to "thrust down into death"²⁶² the sinners who, in turning from eternal truth to the bodily images that they can control on their own terms, participate in the devil's "determined preference for power over justice."²⁶³ It is important, then, that God overcome the devil by justice and not by power. "It pleased God to deliver man

example of Christ's death and resurrection ("Sacramentum et exemplum' chez saint Augustin," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 10 [1975] 103), yet this does not necessarily prove his point. For Augustine, Christ's death and resurrection are both a sacrament and an example, for it is through them that the bonds of sin are broken and also through them that the believer is encouraged in her hope that she may follow Christ's example in conquering death. One event can serve both functions, thus Augustine can still keep sacrament and example separate as functions even while referring them to the same event. Despite this, Studer's point remains correct because Augustine will blur the line between sacrament and example in terms of function as well. In Book IV, Augustine speaks of Christ in his sacramental function as that which restores the soul to health, while, in Book VII, he speaks of Christ as a "model for the sick to get better by" (VII.5).

²⁶⁰ Emmanuel Cutrone puts it well: "Augustine operates within a Platonic worldview which understands the material, visible world to be a manifestation of a deeper inner reality. What is seen and experienced are reflections of a truer world, in such a way that material reality becomes a sign which both reveals and veils the inner world" ("Sacraments," *Augustine through the Ages*, 741). It is on this level that Augustine understands the words of scripture as sacraments.

²⁶¹ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IV.17.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, IV.17.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, IV.13. According to Augustine, this perverse preference for power over justice marks human behaviour even today. In discussing happiness, he writes that people much prefer to get what they want rather than to want only what they ought to have (XIII.9).

from the devil's authority by beating him at the justice game, not the power game."²⁶⁴ Augustine argues that the devil was defeated in the justice game when "he also drove to his death with a savage follow-through the redeemer who came down of his own accord."²⁶⁵ In being "slain in his innocence by the wicked one," Christ "won the case against him with the justest of all rights."²⁶⁶ The devil overstepped the bounds of his authority in asserting his power against a sinless one; thus it became "perfectly just that [the devil] should let the debtors he held go free, who believe in the one whom he killed without his being in debt."²⁶⁷ It is through faith, then, that Christ's victory over the devil is made efficacious in the temporal life of the believer. For sinful human beings, faith in the God who is present in the justice of Christ is the only just response.²⁶⁸ Through the justice of responding in faith, the believer moves from participating in the devil's love for power to taking part in the justice of Christ. Christ thus casts the "mediator of

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, XIII.17.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, IV.17.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, IV.17.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII.18.

²⁶⁸ Augustine makes repeated reference to Paul's invocation of the "justice of faith" as the backbone of his soteriology (see Romans 4:13), and it is a failure to acknowledge the central role that justice plays in *De Trinitate* that is perhaps the most puzzling aspect of Hanby's work on Augustine. Hanby gives aesthetics the central place in his interpretation of Augustine's soteriology, and, while there is unquestionably an aesthetic element to Augustine's conception of justice, this privileging of aesthetics serves to mask the ethical thrust of Augustine's soteriology. Hanby writes that "Augustine conceives of salvation as a restoration of the 'aesthetic' harmony of creation" (*Augustine and Modernity*, 55), an interpretation that causes him to reduce Christ's role as exemplar to the "manifestation of the beauty of God" (61) and a believer's obligation to the apprehension and reflection of this beauty (41). Christ's exemplarity is thus emptied of the ethical significance in which Augustine presents him as a model to be followed particularly at that point at which his beauty is most hidden: his death on the cross. According to Augustine, Christ as exemplar is to teach us to live justly through a true love that, in accordance with the dual love command, "will be ready and able even to die for the good of our brethren, as the Lord Jesus Christ taught by his example" (*De Trinitate*, VIII.10).

death out of the spirits of those who believe in him,”²⁶⁹ and applies “the similarity of his humanity” in order to remove the “dissimilarity” between humanity’s prideful iniquity and his justice.²⁷⁰ Augustine concludes that “the godly soul which had been godless is said to have returned to life from death and to live, thanks to the *justice of faith*.”²⁷¹

At the broadest level, then, through his triumph over the devil, Christ in his sacramental function sets free those who believe in him.²⁷² Yet Augustine does not think of sacraments only as temporal manifestations of eternal truth. There is a more particular level on which he will speak of the mediation of Christ as becoming effective in the life of the believer through the sacramental practices of the Church. It is through baptism, Augustine writes, that we begin “being renewed in the spirit of our mind... for the recognition of God according to the image of him who created [the new man].”²⁷³ The process of purification that makes possible the mind’s growth in the knowledge of God thus begins with baptism,²⁷⁴ which brings “renewal by the forgiveness of all sins [that] happens in

²⁶⁹ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IV.17.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, IV.4.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, IV.5.

²⁷² This broadest level is important for Augustine because, in making faith the only prerequisite to participation in Christ’s victory, he is able to show that Christ’s mediation saves even “those wise and holy men who were born of women before he was born of the virgin” (IV.27). He argues, then, that “all the sacred and mysterious things that were shown to our fathers by angelic miracles” were “likenesses” of the sacrament of Christ (IV.11), so that through them godly men and women of old might come to “believe, hope, and love” so as to gain salvation (IV.27).

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, XII.12.

²⁷⁴ It is perhaps for this reason that Augustine is so insistent that the Church provides the context from which God is to be sought. It is in holy Church, he writes, that a “wholesome regimen” is provided by which one may return to the “right order of faith” (I.4). Augustine interprets the rock upon which Moses was placed in order to view God’s passing as a symbol of the Church, the only safe and secure location from which to view God (II.28-30).

a moment, so that not even one tiny sin remains unforgiven.”²⁷⁵ The “dirt of our sins” that corresponds to the static aspect of the weight of sin is thus removed through the sacramental function of Christ that is made efficacious through baptism.

As sacrament, then, Christ rescues the believer from the death of the soul, and, through baptism, he brings purification from the dirt of sin. Yet the soul is weighed down not only by the mass of sin but also by a will that is conditioned to slip back to the place where it caught its disease.²⁷⁶ Augustine thus writes that the mind’s renewal “does not happen in one moment of conversion... it is one thing to throw off a fever, another to recover from the weakness which the fever leaves behind it.”²⁷⁷ The double content of the weight of sin means that there is a two stage process involved in purifying the mind for the perception of God. The first is removing “the cause of the debility, and this is done by the pardoning of sin” through the purification of baptism; the second is curing the debility itself, and this “is done gradually by making steady progress in the renewal of the image.”²⁷⁸ This gradual renewal is the process of re-orienting the believer’s will, re-training it to be drawn towards its proper resting place in God. Augustine thus writes that one who is “being renewed in the recognition of God” is “transferring his love from temporal things to eternal, from visible to intelligible, from carnal to spiritual; he is industriously applying himself to checking and lessening his greed

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, XIV.23.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, XI.1.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, XIV.23.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, XIV.23.

for the one sort and binding himself with charity to the other.”²⁷⁹ The renewal of the mind thus takes place through a reversal of the movement of sin, now no longer greedily attaching itself to temporal things in place of eternal – a substitution that, as we have seen, destabilizes the mind – but cleaving to the eternal in place of the temporal. The second stage in the process of renewal is thus a question of the ethical conduct of one’s life. Augustine writes that “the renewal of life takes its start from faith... and it grows and is strengthened by good behaviour from *day to day*.”²⁸⁰ In this second stage, the believer follows the model of Christ’s incarnate life, which offers an example from which the believer learns to order her love correctly. Augustine writes: “Let us copy the example of this divine image, the Son, and not draw away from God ... By walking in him we move toward him, because for us he became a road or way in time by his humility.”²⁸¹ It is the justice and humility of Christ’s life that, for Augustine, must be emphasized, in contrast to the sinful preference for power and pride. In following Christ’s example, believers’ values are thus reordered away from those modeled by the mediator of death, and they come to be renewed through transferring their love from the temporal to the eternal.

In speaking, here, of the renewal of the human mind through imitating the example of Christ, Augustine points us once again to the work of the Holy Spirit. Because of the persistence of habit, the mind “cannot reform itself as it was able

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, XIV.23.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, IV.5.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, VII.5.

to deform itself,” and believers’ success in transferring their love from temporal things to the eternal thus “depends on divine assistance.”²⁸² Augustine presents the Holy Spirit as love that is God and is from God, and he argues that we have no capacity to love God outside of this gift.²⁸³ The Holy Spirit is thus the gift that “brings us through to God,” causing us to “abide in God and him in us.”²⁸⁴ In effecting the purification of the mind through the transfer of love, and in bringing us “through to God,” we can see that the movement towards Christ, the latter half of the movement “through Christ towards Christ,” is also marked by the action of the Spirit. To move through Christ is to acquire faith in the Incarnation through the gift of the Holy Spirit, and to move towards Christ is to be purified for the perception of Christ in eternity through the Holy Spirit’s reordering of human love. The movement through the two natures of Christ thus appears to be marked, not by a unity of God and creation, but by the Holy Spirit’s drawing of a Christian’s love towards a hidden truth.

If, then, progress in the Christian life takes place “within” the two natures of Christ, we can see that the space created by Christ is defined by the presence of the Spirit as the believer continues to move towards an eschatological union with the eternal Son. For Augustine, this presence of the Holy Spirit is definitive of the believer’s moral ontology, for it is the Holy Spirit that, in Augustine’s view, shapes the believer’s agency and actions, and defines her obligations. As we have

²⁸² *Ibid.*, XIV.22-3.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, XV.31-2.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, XV.31-2.

seen, Augustine presents himself, in *Confessions*, as held in subjection to sinful love by the force of habit,²⁸⁵ and he says that it is only by the “lifting up of love given by the Holy Spirit” that the bonds of habit are broken and a different form of love is possible.²⁸⁶ In *City of God*, Augustine writes that God “assists the good wills of created spirits,” while sinful wills have no origin in God.²⁸⁷ In thus assisting the wills of the good, lifting them up in love, the Holy Spirit reshapes the agency of those who believe. On the one hand, the unbeliever’s will is fundamentally rootless, while Augustine speaks of God’s will as the will that “God produces in the hearts of those who obey his commandments.”²⁸⁸ Augustine goes on to say that, for those whose wills are empowered by God, God’s will is law.²⁸⁹ In opposition, then, to an objectivist moral ontology, he points to an internal reality as that which defines the believer’s agency and obligations, and the same is true of the merit of her actions. Augustine argues that the same action has a fundamentally different form in believers and unbelievers. While the suppression of vice is good, it is an action that is only “less vile” in those who, lacking the Holy Spirit, do so because of desire for human praise, while there is already a holiness with those who do so out of “love of intelligible beauty given by the Holy Spirit.”²⁹⁰ We can see, then, that participation in the

²⁸⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.5.10.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.7.8.

²⁸⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, V.9.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, XXII.2.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, II.19.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, V.13.

Holy Spirit reshapes the believer's moral life, for it roots her will in the love of God in a way that gives a different form to her actions.

Let us return, at this point, to the question of love of neighbour, and Nygren's claim that, because he orients all love towards God, Augustine cannot accommodate a proper love of the neighbour. If we take Augustine's conception of the Holy Spirit as definitive of his moral ontology, there are two fronts on which we can see the shortcomings of Nygren's critique. The first concerns the question of whether or not Augustine thinks that there are different kinds of love. Nygren argues that the objective pole is definitive for Augustine's theology of love because, for Augustine, human love is all of one kind, and the only difference between proper and sinful love is in the object towards which each is directed.²⁹¹ A proper appreciation of Augustine's pneumatology should, I think, show that this is not case. Augustine would not be prepared to say that the love of the Holy Spirit, through which the believer is enabled to love God, is of a kind with sinful love.²⁹² As we saw earlier, Augustine presents the "lifting up of love given by the Holy Spirit" as a radically interruptive love that breaks the habit of

²⁹¹ Nygren, 494.

²⁹² The claim that the love brought by the Holy Spirit is of a different kind than humanity's sinful love is so intuitively plausible that it would hardly seem to require further substantiation; yet it departs from the view of many Augustine scholars. In responding to Nygren, O'Donovan writes that Augustine did not work with a range of different loves in view, "each with its own psychological structure" (12). He argues that, because one could not possibly love God with the wrong kind of love, "when we find ourselves distinguishing different strands of thought about love-of-God and love-of-neighbour, it is not that there are several different loves, immanently distinguished, but that the loving subject stands in a complex and variable relation to the reality which his love confronts. Pluriformity is imposed upon his love from outside by the pluriform structure of reality" (12-13). For O'Donovan, then, like Nygren, there are not different kinds of love. In the same way, Eric Gregory writes that "there is a fundamental continuity between all loves and desires, whether or not they are distinguished as 'natural' or 'supernatural'" (22).

sinful willing. We should be prepared, then, to distinguish in kind between humanity's sinful love, and the gift of love through which believers are enabled to love God.

The question is how we should typify this difference in kind, and how it affects the question of love of God and love of neighbour. The love enabled by the Holy Spirit is set apart from sinful love because it originates in plenty rather than in poverty. Nygren recognizes that love may issue either from plenitude or from lack, and he argues that, for Augustine, only God loves out of abundance.²⁹³ For him, then, Augustine's conception of human love is stuck within the bounds of an *eros* characterized by "the will to get and possess which depends on want and need."²⁹⁴ In thus characterizing human love as a "thirsty" love, Nygren takes no account of the fact that, through the Holy Spirit, believers may participate in the bountiful love of God. This is the second shortcoming of his interpretation of Augustine. In interpreting the biblical creation account, Augustine characterizes the "spring coming up from the earth" of Genesis 2:6 as an interior spring that continually waters and sustains the human soul.²⁹⁵ Man's sinful "swelling out through pride" has "put a stop to his being watered from that interior spring."²⁹⁶ In *Confessions*, then, Augustine characterizes his restless desire for God as an inner hunger.²⁹⁷ He goes on to use metaphors drawn from the Eucharist to argue

²⁹³ Nygren, 469.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 210.

²⁹⁵ Augustine, "On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees," *On Genesis*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 2002) 2.5.6.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.5.6.

²⁹⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.1.1.

that the soul may grow through feeding on Christ,²⁹⁸ yet he does not go so far as to suggest that Christ brings satiety. This point leads us to a curious contrast in Book XV of *De Trinitate*. In order to emphasize that God must continually be sought, Augustine cites the words of Wisdom from Ecclesiasticus: “*Those who eat me will be hungry still and those who drink me will be thirsty still.*”²⁹⁹ Wisdom, for Augustine, is explicitly identified with the Word that became incarnate in Christ; thus, when Augustine later quotes the words of Christ from the book of John: “*Whoever drinks of the water which I shall give him will not be thirsty ever,*” it might appear that he has cited contradictory passages.³⁰⁰ Yet there is no contradiction here, for Augustine says that the Holy Spirit is the water to which Christ is referring in John. The Holy Spirit is a “river of living water” feeding those who believe.³⁰¹ Augustine thus presents the Spirit as a source in which satiety is found, and this is consistent with his conclusion, in Book XIII of *Confessions*, that rest is found in the gift of the Holy Spirit.³⁰² This rest, he says, is peace, and he identifies peace with a good will.³⁰³ As we saw earlier, Augustine argues that humanity is in bondage to a twisted will that pulls it away from its place of rest, and it is through the action of the Holy Spirit that this bondage is broken and a good will is enabled to come to achieve the peace of rest. Augustine writes that the Spirit pervades “all creatures according to their capacity

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.10.16.

²⁹⁹ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV.2.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, XV.33.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, XV.33.

³⁰² Augustine, *Confessions*, 13.9.10.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 13.9.10.

with its vast generosity and fruitfulness, that they might all keep their right order and rest in their proper places.”³⁰⁴

We can see, then, that, on the one hand, sinful human beings suffer for being cut off from the spring of God’s sustenance, while believers find satiety in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit is a gift of love, and, before his conversion, Augustine portrays his life as defined by the absence of a satisfying love. The “single desire” that motivated his search for delight was simply “to love and to be loved.”³⁰⁵ Indeed, though he was beloved of his mother and seemingly never lacking for friends,³⁰⁶ Augustine characterizes his life as driven by a longing for love.³⁰⁷ This longing led his unreformed love to err in two ways. In the first place, his hunger for love led him to love other things too little, treating them as objects to be manipulated in order to sustain an illusion of power. As we have seen, human sin originates in the soul’s love for its own power, which leads it to turn inward and focus its attention on the images that it can manipulate as it will. Similarly, Augustine presents his thieving, adolescent love as motivated by the same desire for control that motivates a prisoner to do “without punishment what is not permitted, thereby making an assertion of possessing a dim

³⁰⁴ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VI.11.

³⁰⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, 2.2.2.

³⁰⁶ Indeed, Peter Brown notes that “having read the life of this extremely inward-looking man, we suddenly realize, to our surprise, that he has hardly ever been alone. There have always been friends around him” (Brown 174); and Eric Gregory adds that “it is hard to imagine an Augustine without Alypius, Possidius, Nebridius, Evodius, Severus, or Monica” (Gregory 352).

³⁰⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.1.1.

resemblance to omnipotence.”³⁰⁸ On the one hand, then, Augustine suggests that the soul may try to satisfy itself through a manipulative love that values objects less than it should; on the other hand, he argues that the absence of the satiating love of the divine may lead the soul to love objects more than they merit. This, according to Augustine, was his error in his love for the unnamed friend whose death caused him such grief. Lacking the love of the eternal, he loved his friend as if the friend were eternal.³⁰⁹ The soul that is cut off from the inner spring of God’s love thus loves its object improperly; yet Augustine presents the Holy Spirit as bringing a satiety that allows the neighbour to be loved from the abundance of divine love. The Holy Spirit is the love with which God loves us, and it is also, according to Augustine, the love with which we love our neighbour.³¹⁰ Thus, as Augustine writes, true friendship is possible only through the love of the Holy Spirit.³¹¹

There are two related points regarding the action of the Holy Spirit and humanity’s love for God that need to be treated in greater detail here in order for this exposition to be considered in any way complete. In examining Augustine’s epistemology, we saw that knowledge of God hinges not only on the perception of the good, or true, but on participation in God through love; yet we have spoken of participation in only the most general terms. In the same way, in examining

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.6.14. This mode of sinful love, it should be clear, mirrors the movement of original sin through which the soul turns in to the images contained within itself that it can control on its own terms.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.7.12.

³¹⁰ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV.31.

³¹¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.4.7.

Augustine's moral ontology, we have given a central place to the work of the Holy Spirit in reforming the believer's will without a concrete account of how this functions. We should, therefore, examine how the Spirit works in the believer's life, and how this informs Augustine's conception of participation.

Let us approach these questions through the lens of Colin Gunton's influential critique of Augustine. Gunton argues that many of the "grievous intellectual and moral concerns" of modernity are rooted in shortcomings in theological conceptions of creation.³¹² Christian thought has – quite rightly, from Gunton's perspective – emphasized God's freedom in bringing creation into being; yet Gunton argues that Augustine, in particular, misconstrues the nature of this freedom. According to Gunton, Irenaeus presents a God whose will is free, but not rootless or arbitrary, because, for Irenaeus, love is as important as will.³¹³ Irenaeus portrays creation as "realized through a community of love," brought into existence "through the instrumentality of the Son and the Spirit" and held in vital relation to God through the work of these two persons.³¹⁴ Gunton writes that, in Augustine's theology, by contrast, the "theme of love becomes subordinate to that of will," and so, rather than issuing from a "community of love," creation "becomes very much the product of pure, unmotivated and therefore arbitrary will."³¹⁵ Furthermore, because of the Platonic influence on Augustine's thought, Gunton argues that Augustine presents the world as held in

³¹² Gunton, 11.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 120.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 120-1, see also 55-6.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 120-1

relation to God through universal ideas, and not through the work of Christ or the Holy Spirit.³¹⁶ The doctrine of creation is thus severed from the economy of salvation. In short, Gunton sets up a contrast between Irenaeus and Augustine along the following lines. According to Irenaeus, creation issues from the love of the immanent Trinity and is held in relation to God by the Son and Holy Spirit. There is thus a vital link between creation and redemption, and creation is characterized by a teleological directedness to perfection. In Augustine's thought, by contrast, creation is a product of an arbitrary act of divine will, and it relates to God through universal ideas. There is thus no link between creation and redemption, and God's actions in the economy of salvation are rendered as arbitrary as the act of creation.³¹⁷ In place, then, of a genuinely participatory ontology, Augustine offers a stark metaphysical opposition that sets the scene for a "contest of wills" between God's action and human volition, "which appears to achieve independence only in the kind of arbitrary self assertion which appears to be the mark of divinity."³¹⁸

This critique is important for us because of the way in which we have relied on a notion of human love as rooted in the love of the Holy Spirit. Can we speak of this as representing anything other than a capitulation on the part of human agency in a cosmic contest of wills? We have already rejected one means for doing so. Michael Hanby's work amounts to an interpretation of Augustine as

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 57-8.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

offering the kind of participatory ontology that Gunton sees in Irenaeus, yet this led him to propose a union between Creator and creation that does not remain true to Augustine's thought. John Milbank, by contrast, attempts a reconciliation that appears similar in form to the pneumatological suggestions that I have offered. Milbank argues that, in offering our free will to God, we experience neither self-destruction nor division but rather self-fulfillment. The offering of our will is "an offering that is at the same time our reception of the fullness of Being."³¹⁹ This reception of the fullness of being is a participation in God that amounts to the "deification" of the subject,³²⁰ yet we should attend to where Milbank's conception of participation leads. As we saw in our opening examination of the effects of sin, Augustine conceives of God's being in terms of his attributes.³²¹ God is eternity, wisdom, and goodness. In Milbank's article, the conception of the presence of God implied in participation is emptied of any reference to this being. For Milbank, God is never seen, and so, if we ask what God is like, we can only look at the community engendered by his action.³²² The task of theology is thus reduced to the explication of Church practice,³²³ and God's perfection can only be spoken of as most like the "historically obscure" incarnation of Christ.³²⁴ The problem to which we are led, then, is this. How can we speak of creaturely participation in the divine, as our examination of Augustine's epistemology has

³¹⁹ John Milbank, "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism," *Modern Theology* 7.3 (April 1991), 230.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 230.

³²¹ Augustine writes that the Trinity "is called simple because it is what it has" (*City of God*, XI.10).

³²² Milbank, 228.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 228.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 233.

led us to do, in a way that leads neither to a “contest of wills,” on the one side, nor to an account of God’s presence that is devoid of all reference to God’s character, on the other?

Let us treat, first, the question of the contest of wills. In examining how the Holy Spirit works to reform the functioning of the human will, we should attend to the way in which Augustine presents the will as always working from the contents of the mind. In accordance with his Trinitarian analogy, Augustine argues that, just as the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, so the will always works from memory and understanding. Nothing unknown is loved, and no action is taken that is not preceded by a word issuing from memory and understanding.³²⁵ At its most basic, the will is the faculty through which the soul consents to or desires the things put before it by the intellect. By consenting to or desiring a thing, the will moves the soul towards it. The soul’s original sin was misplacing its desire, and we would do well to recall its effect on the mind. As we saw earlier, the result of sin is that the mind is incapable of perceiving God. The sinful mind is thus unable to love God because God is not available to the mind in such a way that the mind can present God to the will for its consent. In one sense, then, the will is locked in a habit of sinful loving because that which the will can love is determined by the mind, and the mind has lost the capacity to perceive God. Here, then, the gratuitous action of the Spirit is crucial. As we have seen, the Holy Spirit allows the soul to recognize its true nature as a creature

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, XV.20.

dependent on its Creator, allows it to remember God through this dependence, and allows it to recognize Christ as the just object of its faith. In thus presenting the mind with its creator, sustainer, and redeemer, the Holy Spirit allows the will the opportunity to desire God as it ought and to move towards him. The soul is thus dependent on the Spirit in order to love God because the Spirit recreates the conditions under which God can be loved. It is not the case that, in bringing the soul to love of God, the Holy Spirit simply over-rides the human will; rather, it restores the will to a position from which it can recognize that it ought to love God.

Given our earlier emphasis on faith and love as interruptive gifts, this might appear to be something of a minimalist interpretation of the action of the Holy Spirit; yet it remains true to Augustine's thought. Faith, Augustine writes, is "simply consenting to what is said," and, as we saw earlier, he argues that it is a gift granted to us by God.³²⁶ He goes on to make clear that it is the speech to which one consents, and not the act of consenting itself, that is the gift of God. "Consent or refusal... is a matter of one's own will;" thus God works for our faith through the "inducement of impressions which we experience."³²⁷ We can see, then, that when Augustine writes that "it is God who brings about in a man the very will to believe, and in all things does his mercy anticipate us," it is through the "inducement or invitation" that is the content of faith that God's mercy anticipates us, while "to consent to the calling of God or to refuse it... belongs to

³²⁶ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter*, 54.31.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.34.

our own will.”³²⁸ As I have argued, then, the gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of a perception of the soul’s relation to God as it really is, granting the soul the opportunity to embrace its dependence on God. Thus, Augustine writes that one who has been “roused by the warmth of the Holy Spirit” is one who has “taken a look at himself in God’s light, and discovered himself, and realized that his own sickness cannot be compounded with God’s cleanness,” that is, he has come to see his true position as one who has turned away from that on which he depends.³²⁹

The question, then, is whether this model of the Spirit’s work requires that we step back from speaking of the love enabled by the Holy Spirit as a radically interruptive love that is of a different kind from sinful love. I do not believe so, for the love enabled by the Spirit is alone the kind of “rational” love that, according to O’Donovan, allows love of God, self, and neighbour, to be reconciled. O’Donovan characterizes rational love as a love whose order “is given by its comprehending conformity to the order of reality,”³³⁰ and this kind of love hinges on the proper perception of the order of reality that the Holy Spirit brings. In place, then, of a simple binary of use and enjoyment, which leaves love of the neighbour precariously positioned, rational love can “accept as complex an order as it discovers to be present in the universe, since love is at the same time an understanding which comprehended the object’s place in the scheme

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.34.

³²⁹ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IV.1. In pointing to illumination by God as a prerequisite to true self-knowledge, Augustine writes that “the knowledge which created things have of themselves is, so to speak, shadowy until they see themselves in the light of God’s wisdom and, as it were, in relation to the art by which they were made” (*City of God*, XI.7).

³³⁰ O’Donovan, 31.

of things.”³³¹ Within the framework of this rationally ordered love, the neighbour can be loved as neighbour, an object entirely deserving of love in accordance with the dual love command; and the possibility of this neighbour love is assured through the fact that it is this rational love that allows the subject to rest in her proper place and thus love out of satiety. As we have seen, Augustine presents the love of the Spirit as “pervading all creatures” so that they “might all keep their right order and rest in their right places.”³³² Everything in creation has a position of rest towards which it is moved by its weight, and the sinful will is anomalous in drawing the human soul away from its point of rest. As creatures of God, we derive our being from God, and, as our account of memory suggests, we depend on God’s continuing grace to sustain our being. We live and move and are in God. The soul’s place of rest is thus in the nearest proximity that it can manage “to where our whole being springs from.”³³³ For Augustine, then, the will “accords with nature” when the soul turns to the good on which it depends.³³⁴ It is not, as Gunton has it, that there is no teleological connection between creation and the perfection of the soul through God’s acts in the economy of salvation. The will is drawn to the source from which it derives its being, and God’s action in salvation history makes it possible for the will to assume this position after it had turned away. In coming to faith through the will’s turning once again to God, the soul comes to rest in the position towards which its nature moves. It remains

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

³³² Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VI.11.

³³³ *Ibid.*, IV.2. O’Donovan writes that “Augustine’s picture of the universe shows us one who is the source and goal of being” (157).

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII.5.

the case, then, that the believer loves out of a peaceful abundance and not, like the sinful soul, out of a lack generated by its situation outside of its place of rest.

We have seen, therefore, that, even in enabling a different kind of love, set apart from humanity's sinful willing by issuing out of plenitude and not out of lack, the Holy Spirit is not functioning in a way that enters into competition with the will, but rather allows it the freedom to realize its natural desire for harmony with the source of its being. It is the sinful soul, for Augustine, that suffers from a lack of freedom, for it has lost the awareness of God that is required in order for it to be able to will well and live according to its nature. As Augustine writes, "by the healing of the soul comes freedom of choice."³³⁵ Milbank is right, then, to speak of the will's love for God as its self-fulfillment and not its self-destruction; yet we should examine more closely the mode of the will's participation in the fountain of being, for we raised concerns earlier about conceptions of participation in God that lose their reference back to his character. In what sense, then, or how far, can human beings participate in the fount of being?

Let us recall two points from earlier in our investigation. The first is the connection between language of cleaving, partaking, and participating, and the concept of love. We participate in something by loving it. One who loves wisdom thus participates in it, and this, for Augustine, has the consequence that

³³⁵ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter*, 52.30. A good deal more would, of course, have to be said in order for this examination of Augustine's conception of freedom to be considered complete. My goal, here, is only to show that Augustine's conception of the relationship between God and the world does not, as Gunton suggests, necessarily lead to a "contest of wills." How the view of freedom presented here might accommodate Augustine's account, in *Confessions*, of the competing wills that he experienced, and of his inability to do that which he wished, is a question that we cannot pursue here.

the lover of wisdom becomes wise.³³⁶ This latter result is a function of a second point that we established earlier, according to which the soul becomes like that which it loves. In our examination of the effects of sin, we saw that Augustine conceives of the soul as malleable, capable of taking on the form of that to which it attaches itself in love. This logic leads Augustine to a surprising conclusion. One comes to participate in God through loving him, and this, for Augustine, means becoming like God. As Gerald Bonner points out, Augustine presses this notion through Christologically, echoing the earlier formulations of Irenaeus and Athanasius. Christ became human that humans might become gods.³³⁷ In *De Trinitate*, Augustine writes that Christ “applied to us the similarity of his humanity to take away the dissimilarity of our iniquity, and becoming a partaker of our mortality he made us partakers of his divinity.”³³⁸ This conception of deification raises questions regarding our earlier construal of the believer’s moral ontology. Is the believer’s state in this life characterized by the Holy Spirit’s drawing of her love towards a hidden truth, or does Augustine point to a union of God and human beings accomplished on this side of the eschaton?

In posing this question, we have returned to the problem of the knowledge of God, for the question of what it means to participate in God is coextensive with the question of how far God may be known in this life. As we saw earlier, knowledge of God hinges on love of, and thus participation in, God. What is

³³⁶ “A soul becomes wise by participating in wisdom” (*De Trinitate*, VII.2).

³³⁷ Gerald Bonner, “Augustine’s Conception of Deification,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 37.2 (October 1986) 367.

³³⁸ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IV.4.

meant, then, by our participation in God? Does God remain a mystery towards which we move, or, in loving him, does he become known to us as we become like him? David Meconi points out that, in trying to give a detailed account of Augustine's language of participation, we are navigating in waters that are largely uncharted.³³⁹ Despite its importance to his thought, Augustinian scholars have, for the most part, presumed that his notion of participation is largely continuous with that which he inherited from the Platonic tradition, and have thus deemed the topic unworthy of extensive treatment.³⁴⁰ This is unfortunate, since, in addition to its centrality to his epistemology, the problem of human participation in God also amounts to a furthering of the question of moral ontology that we encountered earlier. If, for instance, a precise account could be given of the limits of Augustine's conception of deification, then we would perhaps be in a position to give a positive account of the degree to which believers can align themselves with God's purposes on this side of the eschaton.³⁴¹ The questions of the knowledge of God and of the proper conduct of the moral life thus converge on the problem of the believer's participation in God.

Let us begin with the interpretation that Bonner presents. Bonner points out, quite rightly, that deification "is a state which will only be attained in the life to come," and he goes on to characterize this doctrine as "man's participation in

³³⁹ David Vincent Meconi, "St. Augustine's Early Theory of Participation," *Augustinian Studies* 27 (1996) 79.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 80. Indeed, the recently published encyclopedia *Augustine through the Ages* has no entry for participation.

³⁴¹ It is instructive, in connection with this problem, to remember that, for Markus, believers are inhibited from alignment with any particular political ideology because God's purposes in relation to the movements of earthly politics remain unclear.

God through the humanity of Christ, after this earthly life is ended.”³⁴² For the time being, Bonner argues, deification is an “ecclesial process” that “takes place within the communion of the Church,” mediated to the believer through the administration of the sacraments.³⁴³ This ecclesial focus obscures the primacy of the Holy Spirit as the agent through whom believers participate in God. Participation is a movement of love, and the question of love for God puts us squarely within the Holy Spirit’s purview. Indeed, Augustine presents the Church as the community of those bonded together with the love of the Spirit. Human beings are split “from each other by clashing wills and desires,” and they are made one again “by virtue of the same wholly harmonious will reaching out in concert to the same ultimate happiness, and fused somehow into one spirit in the furnace of charity.”³⁴⁴ Those who have accepted Christ as the mediator with God are “bound in the fellowship of the same love.”³⁴⁵ Pneumatology is thus prior to ecclesiology,³⁴⁶ in part because it is through the Spirit that believers maintain unity with the community that is fused “into spirit in the furnace of charity,” and in part because it is through the Spirit that this community is held in relation to God. The Spirit is the all-embracing principle of unity that “conjoins” Father and Son and “subjoins” believers to them.³⁴⁷ “This is the love which unites all the

³⁴² Bonner, 381.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 383.

³⁴⁴ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IV.12.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, IV.12.

³⁴⁶ In pointing to the primacy of the work of the Spirit, Augustine writes that through scripture we “have learned that there is a city of God, whose citizens we long to be because of the love with which its Founder has inspired us” (*City of God*, XI.1).

³⁴⁷ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VII.6.

good angels and all the servants of God in a bond of holiness, conjoins us and them together, and subjoins us to itself.”³⁴⁸ Father and Son are not united by participation but by being, while believers are “subjoined” to God through participation in God’s gift of love.³⁴⁹ How far does this participation maintain its reference to the character of God, such that, as we suggested earlier, participation is the means through which God may be known? Crucially, for Augustine, God himself is love. When we love aright we know God through this love,³⁵⁰ for love “is God from God,” causing us to “abide in God and him in us.”³⁵¹ Creation derives its existence from God’s love, and, in turning from God, human beings turned from the love on which their being depends, and so needed to be reminded of the love that is God.³⁵² For Augustine, the incarnation demonstrates God’s love, and we are reminded of it through the Holy Spirit’s allowing us to see the true character of reality as upheld by the love of God. The Spirit allows us to remember God through the ongoing sustenance of our being; thus we see the Father’s love exhibited in our being. The Spirit makes possible the recognition of Christ as the mediator who allows us to come again to know God; thus we see the Son’s love exhibited in our thinking. Finally, in bringing the action of the God to our attention, the Spirit shows us that we depend on it for our loving, and so the love of the Spirit is exhibited in our willing. We thus recognize the love of the Trinity in our being, thinking, and willing, and, as the ground of each of these, we

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII.12.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, VI.7.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, VIII.12.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, XV.31.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, IV.2.

perceive the necessity of the Trinity's eternity, truth, and goodness.³⁵³ The love through which we come to know God thus teaches us about the Trinity. We learn that, in its perfect constancy, God's love is never without an object; thus God is always the Trinity of lover, beloved, and love itself.³⁵⁴ Our participation in God through love thus has immediate reference to his character because he is love, and because, in our experience of the way in which this love supports our being, thinking, and willing, we learn that he is an eternal, wise, and good Trinity.

What does this knowledge through participation mean for the moral life? Our earlier objection to Gregory's attempt to construct a positive ethic of love amounted to an eschatological warning against a premature reconciliation of God and creation. Does this caution amount, then, to a reassertion of Markus' eschatological ethics, or does our conception of participation in God furnish an alternative? If God is love, then, in coming to know God, we come to know the will of God, for will is synonymous with love. This is not linguistic sleight of hand, for Augustine uses John 17:22 to show that, if we know the Trinity in its character as a perfectly harmonious community of love, then we have come to know God's will for creation. According to John's gospel, Christ said: "I have given them the glory that you have given me, that they may be one as we are one."³⁵⁵ God's will for creation is that it exist as a harmonious unity that mirrors the unity of the Trinity. This is why we cannot speak of Augustine's investigation

³⁵³ In this way, Augustine writes that Plato's followers seem to "have an understanding of God such that they find in Him the cause of existence, the ground of understanding, and the pattern according to which we are to live" (*City of God*, VIII.4).

³⁵⁴ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.11-12.

³⁵⁵ John 17:22, quoted in *De Trinitate*, IV.12 and VI.4.

of the Trinitarian life of God as demonstrating his “capacity for speculation” to little practical purpose.³⁵⁶ For Augustine, in coming to know the Trinity we come to know God’s will for our lives. Thus, as Augustine writes, “nowhere else is a mistake more dangerous, or the search more laborious, or discovery more advantageous,” than in seeking the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.³⁵⁷ If we fail to apprehend this unity, we will fail to grasp the form that our lives should take. For Augustine, then, the ecstatic account of the unity brought by Christ in the “Hymn to the One”³⁵⁸ of *De Trinitate* IV is central to grasping the purpose of Christ’s mediation. In this hymn, Augustine writes that those split by clashing wills are united in “acclaiming together the one who was to come.”³⁵⁹ Some have wondered how Book IV fits into the development of the argument of *De Trinitate*, given the “absence of reference to the Trinity,”³⁶⁰ and the answer is found in Augustine’s use of John 17:22. The unity that Christ brings is meant to mirror the unity of the Trinity, and it is accomplished because those who believe in Christ partake in a common love enabled by the Holy Spirit.³⁶¹ Indeed, this unity is a foretaste of the perfect eschatological union in which Christ will attach believers to himself and God will be all in all. Thus, while Augustine asserts that

³⁵⁶ Brown, 274.

³⁵⁷ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, I.5.

³⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, IV.11-12. Though not original to her, the phrase “Hymn to the One” is taken from Isabelle Bochet, “The Hymn to the One in Augustine’s *De Trinitate* IV,” *Augustinian Studies* 38.1 (2007): 41-60.

³⁵⁹ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IV.11.

³⁶⁰ Bochet, 41.

³⁶¹ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IV.12.

unbelievers have no knowledge of the “rolled up scrolls of the centuries,”³⁶² there appears to be a sense in which God’s will for creation, both now and forever, is made manifest in his existence as a Trinity. If we use the term broadly, then, we can speak of a prophethood of all Christian believers. The Holy Spirit is the revealer of the secrets of history to the prophets of old, and, after Christ’s coming, Augustine argues that there is a dispensation of the Holy Spirit to all believers as had never been before.³⁶³ Through the Spirit, believers recognize Christ as the “turning point of the outward course [of the unfolding of the ages] which carries the human race down like a river, and the return from there to the end that is due to each one.”³⁶⁴ Augustine’s account of the Spirit’s work hinges on the Spirit’s making manifest that which is otherwise hidden from human eyes: the action of God in the economy of salvation that reveals who he is and manifests his will for creation.

What, positively, does this mean for Christian ethics? First, Christians can speak to the issues of their day out of more than the “normal resources of the human mind.”³⁶⁵ In this we are not departing from Markus’ suggestion. Markus is right to argue that, if we take the prophetic to mean “assessing the meaning of any action... in the unfolding history of salvation,” then we cannot speak of it outside of the “limits of the history told in the Bible,” for the “pattern and

³⁶² *Ibid.*, IV.23.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, IV.29.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, IV.21.

³⁶⁵ Markus, 159.

development of the history of salvation” are concluded in its pages.³⁶⁶ Yet Markus allows that the “prophetic charisma will always be active in the Church,” and so believers are enabled to speak to the “acts, events and things with which the Christian community is faced in its own time and place.”³⁶⁷ Here, in practice, we are in agreement; yet Markus gives too limited an account of the scope of the insight facilitated by the Holy Spirit. This insight should not be confined to special charismatic outpourings, for all whose eyes are opened to the order of reality and the nature of the Trinity have come to know God’s unchanging will. Thus, where Markus writes that “obsolescence is built into post-canonical prophecy” in such a way that the prophet “must accept the ‘constitution of silence’” once the circumstances to which he spoke are past,³⁶⁸ I do not think that Augustine would want us to be unduly blinded by the ambiguities of historical particularity. Augustine is certainly sensitive to the significance of the movements of history (judging by the scope of *City of God*, what thinker ever more so!), yet he is acutely aware that our lives take place within the unchanging framework of God’s will and order of truth. This framework ensures that the truth spoken to yesterday’s questions does not become obsolete. We should not flatter ourselves into thinking that, in splitting the atom and walking on the moon, we have created moral quandaries that fall outside of the scope of the tension between

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 158-59.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 159-60.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 160-1.

pride and humility, power and justice.³⁶⁹ For Augustine, God's will to be in an eternal community of love, and his reaching out to creatures that they might "imitate this mutuality by grace," are expression enough of his desire that Christians are in a position to speak to the circumstances of any age.³⁷⁰

The second consequence of the notion of Christians as a prophethood of believers follows from the way in which we have interpreted the first. If believers can speak to the issues of their day out of more than the resources of ordinary human judgment, it is because they have epistemic access to a positive ideology, or set of principles, on which they can act, both ecclesially and socially. This, for Markus, is wholly incompatible with eschatological hope. Where the revolutionary "is a man with a programme or an ideology, which he seeks to realize,... the man whose hope is eschatological has no programme, no ideology, no strategy."³⁷¹ Markus' account leaves no room, first, for an evangelical mission that seeks to draw others into the community bound together by the love of God. For Augustine, by contrast, this attempt to draw the neighbour into the city of God is precisely what love of the neighbour demands of believers. God's will is that humanity become one in the way that God is one, and this provides the basis for a missional programme aimed at drawing all into the orbit of the unifying love of the Holy Spirit.

³⁶⁹ There is, I think, a deep Augustinian truth to Barth's reply when, in responding to the accusation that he offered a *theologia perrennis* rather than speaking to the issues of the day, he said that he offered such a theology precisely in order to be able to speak to the day's issues. See John W. Hart, *Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner: The Formation and Dissolution of a Theological Alliance, 1916-1936* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001) 127-8.

³⁷⁰ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VI.7.

³⁷¹ Markus, 170-1.

The further, more complex question is whether or not the will of God, expressed in his mode of being, has any purchase outside of this evangelical ethic. Augustine proposes a parallel between the structure of the soul and the structure of a community that suggests that it does. The happiness and peace of the soul and the community are the same, for each hinges on a just existence in accordance with the created order.³⁷² In being given insight into the source of happiness, peace, and fulfillment for the individual, the believer is also privileged to perceive the root of a peaceful social order. Indeed, Augustine seems to point to a kind of social memory that mirrors the structure of the individual's memory of God. In the same way that the possibility of the believer's turning to God hinges on a memory of God in the soul, Augustine proposes that the nations "had not so forgotten God" that they could not remember him if reminded.³⁷³ This memory is rooted in the fact that societies, no less than individuals, depend on God for their sustenance. By forgetting God, Augustine writes, "it was as if [the nations] had forgotten their own life," and, when they turn back to God, it is like "their coming to life again by remembering the life they had forgotten."³⁷⁴ For Augustine, peoples, or commonwealths, exist only where there is justice, and justice is a function of being rightly ordered towards worship of God.³⁷⁵ This form of true justice has never been actualized; thus Augustine suggests that no commonwealth

³⁷² Augustine, *City of God*, I.15; III.10; XIX.12.

³⁷³ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIV.17.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, XIV.17.

³⁷⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, II.21; XIX.21.

has ever existed.³⁷⁶ Having forgotten God, every supposed commonwealth in history has passed out of being. For Augustine, then, there is no possibility of an “ordered unity in plurality” outside the city of God,³⁷⁷ for pride and love for power dominate where God is not worshipped, and these leave individuals turned in on themselves, split “from each other by clashing wills.”³⁷⁸ Human societies are thus contingent gatherings of persons; yet, in coming to perceive the nature of justice through the insight into the order of reality granted by the Holy Spirit, believers are also given insight into the true form of community. This insight provides a basis for a political ideology grounded in love and justice. While true communities will never be brought into being outside of the city of God, believers

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, II.21. This conclusion leaves us in a position from which we must weigh in on the meaning of Augustine’s claim that a people is a multitude of rational creatures “united by a common agreement as to what it loves” (*City of God*, XIX.24). In *City of God*, Augustine rejects Scipio’s definition of a people as an “assembly united in fellowship by common agreement as to what is right and by a community of interest” because the notion of right on which this definition depends cannot exist without justice, and true justice has never been (II.21; XIX.21). In place of this definition, then, Augustine suggests that we can think of peoples as bounded together by a common object of love. There is much debate about how this should be interpreted. Phillip Cary argues that this assertion is the answer to the ontological problem of the one and the many. How are many rational beings also one society? By way of love (“United Inwardly by Love: Augustine’s Social Ontology,” *Augustine and Politics*, ed. Doody, et. al. [Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005] 4). Oliver O’Donovan, on the other hand, interprets Augustine’s statement as the answer to a political problem: in what terms can we think of an unjust society as a political community? In terms of love (“Augustine’s *City of God* XIX and Western Political Thought,” *Dionysius* 11 [December 1987] 95). To further muddle the picture, Rowan Williams agrees with O’Donovan about the question that Augustine is addressing, but he disagrees completely about the nature of the answer. While O’Donovan sees Augustine providing a principle with which to distinguish between and morally evaluate earthly nations, Williams argues that Augustine is ironically demonstrating that not even the broadest definition can give distinct shape to pagan communities (“Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the *City of God*,” *Milltown Studies* 19/20 [1987] 59-60). The conception of social memory that we see in *De Trinitate* compels us to agree with Williams. Nations that forget God and thus fail to live justly have “forgotten their own life” and so have passed out of being in the same way that Augustine speaks of the soul that has forgotten God as dead. Thus, as Augustine suggests, there is in fact no distinguishing between Rome, Athens, Egypt, Babylon, and Assyria. They are alike in that they love pride and power and thus fail to obey “God’s command that sacrifice should be offered to none save Him alone” (XIX.24).

³⁷⁷ Williams, “Politics and the Soul,” 60.

³⁷⁸ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IV.12.

can push for social structures and practices that reflect the harmony of divine love, in which each person receives his due.³⁷⁹ In so doing, believers can, to some degree, recall their societies to the justice on which their being is founded. For Augustine, then, it is beneficial “that good men should rule far and wide and long, worshipping the true God and serving Him with true rites and good morals.”³⁸⁰ Indeed, Augustine argues that, this side of the eschaton, “when those who are gifted with true godliness and live good lives also know the art of governing peoples, nothing could be more fortunate for human affairs than that, by the mercy of God, they should also have the power to do so.”³⁸¹ For him, then, the insight into the nature of justice that is granted to the lover of God is insight that is useful in non-ecclesial settings, for the form of justice on which individual and communal fulfillment are grounded is the same.

In proposing that Christians can speak authoritatively to the issues of their day because the Christian vision of justice can be beneficially applied outside of the Church, we are, of course, walking a dangerous line. Any ideology is burdened with the temptation of the will to power, and Augustine is well aware of the danger of those who would invoke the authority of the divine as a means of advancing their own ends.³⁸² Is there any protection, then, against the Augustinian insight that the lust for mastery overcomes those who seek

³⁷⁹ Augustine writes of justice that “mind is just which knowingly and deliberately, in life and in conduct, gives each man what is his own” (*Ibid.*, VIII.9).

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, IV.4.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, V.19.

³⁸² Augustine, *City of God*, XV.7.

mastery?³⁸³ Let us direct our attention once again to Christ's command that we are to love our neighbours. As an end of the law, love of neighbour is a good in and of itself, and Augustine also appears to think that it is a useful measure by which to evaluate one's own love. He writes that, when the mind loves God, and so can be said to remember and understand him, it can rightly be commanded to love its neighbour as itself, "for now it loves itself with a straight love, not a twisted love."³⁸⁴ Whether or not the believer loves the neighbour as herself thus serves as a kind of litmus test of whether or not she loves with a straight love. In pushing, then, for social modes that reflect the love of God, the content of the dual love command continually tests whether the believer has succumbed to power and pride in place of justice and humility. Believers can always inquire of themselves whether they are acting in such a way that they are "ready and able even to die for the good of our brethren, as the Lord Jesus Christ taught us by his example."³⁸⁵

How, then, should we sum up Augustine's notion of participation? We have seen that it is through loving God that we come to know God as an eternal, wise, good, and wholly harmonious community of love; and, in so doing, we are made one with those who share this love. Participation in God thus means, first, loving God through the love enabled by the Holy Spirit, and this translates immediately into the believer being united with all those who share the same love. The believer thus participates in an earthly community that strives to mirror the

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, I.1.

³⁸⁴ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIV.18.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII.10.

harmonious love of the Trinity and that, in coming to know God's being, is also given knowledge of his eternal will for creatures. The community formed by God's love can thus participate in God's work in the economy, serving to remind the nations of the justice that marks the true form of their existence and calling them back to their source in an ongoing gift of love. Thus, while, in loving God, believers move closer to an eschatological union with God's eternal mode of being, even now they can participate in his will, loving others with the same love with which he loves them. Yet this will and love are identical with God's being, and so our participation in his will has immediate reference to his being, with which we are brought into relation. Because it is not our being, however, our participation in it is confined to an actualistic enaction of God's will. For Augustine, God's being "is called simple because it is what it has";³⁸⁶ yet, because this being is love, God's being is also always enacted. It is never love without an object; it is always actively loving.³⁸⁷ For God, being, having, and doing are thus all simultaneous, while we participate in God's being only through doing. Let us turn, in closing, to examine how this participation in God through love brings the image of God back to health, and how this theme of love as the ground of knowledge of God points to the unity of *De Trinitate*.

³⁸⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, XI.10.

³⁸⁷ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.12.

Conclusion: Knowledge through love of God in Book VIII and the unity of *De Trinitate*

In pointing to the love of God as the means to knowledge of God, we have come around to the central thesis of Book VIII of *De Trinitate*. Augustine presents four possible conduits to knowledge of God in Book VIII, and Brachtendorf is right to suggest that Augustine's treatment of love is qualitatively different from his treatment of truth, goodness, and justice.³⁸⁸ Brachtendorf traces this difference back to the fact that truth, goodness, and justice are not relational, and so do not present a view of the Trinity; and he goes on to argue that, because Augustine ultimately opts for memory, understanding, and will as the image of the Trinity, love, too, fails as a mediating concept. Here I think that he is mistaken. Augustine's treatment of love is different from his discussion of truth, goodness, and justice, because love is the original means to knowledge of God and also the prerequisite that renders effective the mediation of the true, good, and just. It is not that love is intended as one potential mediating concept among others; rather it is the key that allows all else, even the triad of memory, understanding, and will, to reflect something of God's truth. As we saw earlier, Augustine does not point to perception of the good, or the just, as the means to knowledge of God, but rather participation in them through love. Having established the centrality of love to the mediation of the good and the just, Augustine makes the surprising statement that "in this question we are occupied with about the trinity and about

³⁸⁸ Brachtendorf, *Struktur des Menschlichen Geistes*, 79.

knowing God, the only thing we really have to see is what true love is.”³⁸⁹ In a statement rich with theological significance, he goes on to say, “True love is that we should live justly by cleaving to the truth.”³⁹⁰ The entire Trinity is present here as well as the core of Augustine’s epistemology and ethics. Implicit in the invocation of true love is the action of the Holy Spirit as the source of the love that unites the believer to God – indeed, Augustine immediately makes reference to the love of God that “*has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.*”³⁹¹ In the same way, the mediation of Christ is implied in the emphasis on living justly, for, as we have seen, Augustine conceives of the just life as the one that, through the justice of faith, partakes in Christ’s triumph over the devil. Again, Augustine moves immediately to make explicit mention of the mediation of Christ, arguing that those who participate in Christ’s justice are to imitate his example. The just “will be ready and able even to die for the good of our brethren, as the Lord Jesus Christ taught us by his example.”³⁹² It is crucial, for Augustine, that the love of God that makes possible the knowledge of God should issue immediately in a love for neighbour in accordance with the content of the two commands on which “*the whole law and the prophets depend*”: love of God and love of neighbour.³⁹³ Each of these commands implies the other, according to Augustine, for it is the same love, “shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy

³⁸⁹ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.10.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, VIII.10.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, VIII.10.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, VIII.10.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, VIII.10.

Spirit,” with which we love either God or our neighbour justly.³⁹⁴ As we have suggested, then, it is on the subjective pole, in the kind of love employed by the lover, that the dual love command is fulfilled; and it is through imitation of Christ’s example that we learn of this demand of justice and become just ourselves. The mediation of Christ too, then, is implied in Augustine’s definition of true love; and, finally, the Father is present in the truth to which the one who lives justly is to cleave. Truth is identical to God, and Augustine speaks of divine truth as a light that is the source of all of our knowledge of truth.³⁹⁵ It is the Father, for Augustine, who is the source from which flows all of the divine light.³⁹⁶

In Book VIII, then, Augustine points to true love as the key to knowledge of God, and his account of true love implies the mediation of the Trinity. In effect, Augustine has turned the question of the preconditions of faith away from the conceptual terms with which Brachtendorf frames the issue. Augustine casts his search for an answer to the paradox that love must precede knowledge, and yet nothing unknown is loved, in terms of a framework of general notions, and the way in which he discusses this initially suggests a conceptual solution to the problem. Our faith in Christ’s virgin birth is possible because we understand “what a virgin is, and what being born is, and what a proper name is.”³⁹⁷ Yet, in

³⁹⁴ O’Donovan writes that, subjectively, love of neighbour “is one thing with love of God, for in either case the ontological ground of love is the Holy Spirit shed abroad in our hearts” (13).

³⁹⁵ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.3.

³⁹⁶ Augustine speaks of the Son’s generation as “like light flowing from light,” for in this case “what flows out and what it flows out from are of one and the same substance” (*Ibid.*, IV.27).

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, VIII.7.

turning to examine our faith in the Trinity, he shifts away from these conceptual terms. “We have never seen or known another God,” thus we cannot believe according to some general notion of divinity.³⁹⁸ If faith hinges on a prior conceptual grasp of its object, then Augustine will either have to posit a natural understanding of the transcendent trinity, which he is unwilling to do, or he will be forced to claim that our faith is not really in God at all, but rather in whatever notion of God we can cobble together from our store of mental contents. Thus, as our distinction between perception and participation suggests, Augustine turns to make the question existential rather than conceptual.³⁹⁹ The question of the knowledge of God hinges on a kind of true love that, ultimately, is a gift from God that allows us to recognize our dependence on him, accept the mediation of Christ, and live justly. God may be understood through this love because God is love, and love, like all of the divine attributes, exhibits the triune structure of the Trinity.

To return, at this point, to the question of the unity of *De Trinitate*, and the place of Book VIII in particular, it should be clear that Book VIII is neither an inquiry that is independent from the rest of *De Trinitate*,⁴⁰⁰ nor a failed attempt at an ascent to knowledge of God.⁴⁰¹ Building on the accounts of God’s action in salvation history from the first part of the work, Augustine uses Book VIII to set

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII.8.

³⁹⁹ Hill writes that Augustine “succeeds in concretizing or existentializing the warp on which his thought is going to move from now on by introducing love, not just as the mind’s response to the value of the good, but as a value in its own right” (“Introductory Essay on Book VIII,” *De Trinitate*, 239).

⁴⁰⁰ du Roy, 417.

⁴⁰¹ O’Donovan, 77.

the rule that governs his theological methodology. Only the soul that lives justly through cleaving to the truth in love can perceive God. Through the first half of *De Trinitate*, where Augustine has not yet given conceptual proof for this rule, he invokes Matthew 5:8 in order to establish that only the pure in heart see God through the veil that God must assume in order to appear in time. Augustine then uses the psychological investigations of Books IX, X, and XI, to demonstrate the validity of this rule. Because the will is the active agent that directs thought, if it is not rightly ordered, God cannot be known. The methodological rule governing *De Trinitate* is thus present in the discussion of “knowledge with love” as the mind’s true word in Book IX, in the discussion of the way in which sin confuses the mind in Book X, and in the distinction between straight and bent thoughts in Book XI. It is given dynamic illustration through the account of the soul’s fall through pride and restoration through the justice of Christ in Books XII and XIII, and, finally, as we shall see, it informs the account of the reformation of the image of God through love of God in Book XIV. To argue, then, that the second half of *De Trinitate* represents a “philosophical” investigation, methodologically distinct from the “theological” investigation of the first half of the work, is to overlook the way in which the *exercitatio mentis* of the latter half of *De Trinitate* hinges on an entirely theological account of love. The entire work is governed by the rule that only the pure in heart may perceive God. As I have argued, then, it is through the question of the possibility of the knowledge of God that the unity of the work is clearest.

By way of confirmation of this interpretation of the text, let us turn in closing to the question that seemed to present the greatest challenge to the unity of *De Trinitate*, and examine the way in which the mind comes to image the Trinity through the re-ordering of love brought by the Holy Spirit. Brachtendorf argues that love fails as a mediating concept because, in Augustine's search for the *imago Dei*, it is superseded by the mental trinity of memory, understanding, and will. Yet I propose that, in addition to providing the spiritual vision required to perceive God in his image, it is love of God that actually causes the mind's functioning to mirror the character of the Trinity. In our investigation of the effects of sin, we saw that the "chopping and changing" of the sinful mind offers only the barest approximation of the harmony, constancy, and simplicity of the divine Trinity. We saw, in particular, that, in turning its love to material things, the mind's word becomes an untruthful expression of its being and desire, and so does not emulate the perfect "Yes, yes; no, no" of the Father's uttering of himself in the Son. For Augustine, this harmony of the mind's word with itself is achieved only in the love of spiritual things, made possible through the gift of the Holy Spirit, for here only does the word conceived in the mind match the word born in action, and the object that the soul obtains match its desire.⁴⁰² As we saw earlier, one who loves justice is already just; thus there is a perfect overlap between being, thought, and love, with no need for love to cast itself about in search of its object. In eliminating the need for desire to seek out its object in the

⁴⁰² Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IX.14.

love of spiritual things, Augustine presents the conditions under which the will can come to rest. In Book IX, Augustine portrays the will as an inquisitiveness that precedes knowledge and turns into love once the thing sought is found.⁴⁰³ This appetite “is left somewhat hanging in the air and does not rest assuaged in the end it is stretching out to, until what is being looked for has been found and is coupled with the inquirer.”⁴⁰⁴ Yet Augustine is not content to speak of the mind that has found the material object of its love as a mind that is at rest. He argues that ultimately the human will “has no other final end but happiness,” a state that can only be truly achieved in eternal life. For Augustine, then, eternal life is the “home country” towards which the will is journeying, and he argues that any other place in which the will finds satisfaction should be thought of a “resting place of the foot in walking, when it is set down in a place from which the other foot can be supported as it takes another step,” or as a night’s lodging for a traveler.⁴⁰⁵ This eschatological qualifier should not be taken to mean that there is no rest to be found in this life. Augustine does not mean to disparage the worth of good lodgings. His point is that the rest afforded by this life is found only by those who are traveling in the direction of the soul’s home country, whose love draws them to their point of rest in creation’s order. Love of material things thus does not provide the rest of even a peaceful night’s sleep because it is a love oriented away from the soul’s homeland. Instead, the will rests, Augustine argues, “in the act

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, IX.18.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, IX.18.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, XI.10.

itself of knowing, which happens in the love of spiritual things,” when the “conceived word and the born word are the same thing.”⁴⁰⁶ This is when, in loving spiritual things, the “act itself of knowing” is enough to give it its object with no need to cast itself about in search of satiety.

This account of the rest of the will might seem troublesome in its self-contained intellectualism, since it appears to present the goal of the will as a detached form of contemplation apart from any need to act justly.⁴⁰⁷ Were we mistaken, then, in pointing to an ethic of active love as that which Augustine commends? Does he instead advocate a peaceful quietism? Let us recall for a moment our earlier discussion of teleology and plenitude, for the hunger metaphors that Augustine uses to express his soul’s native desire for God also provide a lens through which to evaluate the apparent passivity of his language of rest. These metaphors make plain that Augustine’s pursuit of rest is a search for satiety and not for stasis. Detached contemplation of the just apart from the concerns of the active life is not his end; rather, he wishes to sate his inner hunger so that he is free to love others out of abundance, as he ought, and not out of lack. Augustine certainly looks forward to the eternal rest in which “the part that is played in ministering to need will be taken away,” a rest he sees foreshadowed in Mary’s sitting at Christ’s feet, feeding on his words, while Martha busies herself with the tasks that needed to be done. Yet, ultimately, he recognizes that

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, IX.14.

⁴⁰⁷ Augustine writes that, in the soul’s rest in love of spiritual things, “someone who perfectly loves justice is thereby already just *even if no occasion exists for him to do justice externally in bodily activity*” (IX.14, emphasis added).

Martha's work is the "good and useful" share that is proper to this life.⁴⁰⁸ For him, knowledge of God comes with a mandate to love the neighbour in accordance with an ideology that is synonymous with the understanding of the Trinity to which he has led us.

⁴⁰⁸ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, I.20.

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