TRINITY AND APOLOGETICS IN THE THEOLOGY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

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Part I

This article aspires to make a modest contribution to the study of the De Trinitate of St. Augustine, by way of suggestion, though in a somewhat curious way. I hope to clarify some of the issues of intention and character of the De Trinitate largely by studying not that work, but another of Augustine’s major works, the City of God. Because the largest concentration of patristic theology on the Trinity is in works directed against heretical Christians, such as Tertullian’s Adversus Praxeam, Athanasius’s Orations or Hilary’s De Fide, and indeed, in part, Augustine’s De Trinitate, we have come to think of the Trinity as a subject mainly for intra-Christian theological conversation. We can forget that the Trinity was also a subject taken up in ancient apologetics. One need only recall Justin Martyr’s exposition and development of his Logos theology in his First and Second Apology as one of the most brilliant illustrations of how true this is. Justin, on the one hand, wants to show how faith in Christ is, with the philosophers and against pagan mythology, on the side of “reason” or logos, and yet he also wants to show, against pagan philosophy, how the doctrine of “Reason” Incarnate does not leave one with a “religion within the limits of pure reason alone,” as though “Reason” itself could be fully known apart from Christ. Rather, the Incarnation of the Logos reveals the philosophical reasoning of even someone as great as Socrates as merely a “seed” of something whose full stature cannot be imagined apart from Christian faith that “Reason” became Incarnate in Christ, suffered and died for us.¹

¹ See for example Second Apology 10, for a summary statement of the Logos Incarnate, His superiority to all human teaching and the merely partial grasp of Him even in someone like Socrates. His relation to God is discussed in Second Apology 6. Plato had a doctrine of the Trinity that was a deficient imitation of biblical teaching (First Apology 59–60), which is given earlier in
Faith in Christ permits a new form of worship, fully rational and demythologized, replacing the sacrificial cults of the gods of the myths, but not reducible to any pagan philosophic practice either, because it involves a true sacrifice of narrower forms of reason, in gratitude for Reason fully revealed as divine self-offering. It is in order to explain this new form of worship, to disprove the charge of atheism, that Justin is ultimately required to explain who, exactly, the Logos is—and that means Trinitarian theology—en route to describing the new form of worship which is identical with the Eucharist.

This is no less true as we move forward to the third century, with Origen’s *Contra Celsum*, or indeed to the fifth, with Augustine’s *City of God*. These, the two most magnificent works of Christian apologetics left to us from the patristic period, both feature significant discussion of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and within the confines that Justin had already laid out. Origen, for example, needs to show how Christian teaching about the Logos gives Christianity a natural affinity with philosophical wisdom of the past, and yet how Christian belief in the Incarnation of the Logos distinguishes it irrevocably both from pagan mythologies of divine generation, and from any philosophy that does not recognize the divine philanthropia revealed in Christ. The same double movement observable in Justin is evident here, and we will find that in Augustine’s *City of God* the case is no different. An exposition of Trinitarian theology is required to distinguish Christian teaching from myth, and thus align it with the best instincts of philosophic culture, and yet, at the same time, to show that it cannot be derived from the teaching of the pagan philosophers, but rather requires a revision in philosophical thinking and practice. Of course the detail regarding the Trinity offered in the text (13, 22–23, 32–33), and reviewed later (63). Myths are a demonic distortion of the doctrine of the Logos, the Son of God (54) and of the Trinity (64).

2 Baptism fulfills the prophecies of Isaiah 1:16–20 (*First Apology* 61), and so exposes as distortion and myth the sprinklings of pagan ritual (62) and the mythology that distorts the Trinity (64). Only those “illuminated” by Baptism (61) can see the truth of the Eucharist, which presupposes the Incarnation of the Logos and is truly His body and blood (66). After initiation in baptism and Eucharist, life is such that “for all that we receive we praise the Creator of all through His Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit” (67). The Mithraic sacrificial rites are a contemporary re-mythologization of worship (66), a demonic disfigurement of the Eucharist.


4 For example, see *Contra Celsum* 6.63–72. Origen corrects mistaken notions that Celsus has about the Logos-Son and the Spirit, clarifying notions of Incarnation by distinguishing it from the mythological ideas Celsus imagines Christians to believe, and also clarifying the nature of true worship. The same concern about true worship is evident at *Contra Celsum* 8.12–14, which takes up the relation between the Father and the Son, each considered an “hypostasis.” At *Contra Celsum* 5.39 Origen is distinguishing the way in which Christians call the Logos a “second God” from the mythological worship of polytheism. See also *ibid.*., 2.9 and 2.31.
these apologetic discussions is not at the level we would expect in a work that features a treatment of the mystery of the Trinity as its central subject. Still, discussions of the mystery of the Trinity in apologetic contexts are not irrelevant for helping us to understand something of what is at stake for each author in the more focused polemical or systematic treatments where there is shared material, logic or argument. I believe this is the case both for Origen’s Trinitarian teaching and for Augustine’s, but here of course I will be concentrating on Augustine.

It is especially useful in the present context to remember that the works of the ancient apologists almost always had a mixed audience in mind. The ancient apologies were directed especially at those along the borders of Christian faith, either pagans who had made inquiries or who were regarded as potential prospects for conversion, or Christians who found themselves tempted by the arguments of pagan critics. In such a context, it is probably better to talk about strategies of persuasion, of the use of shared rhetorical convention and philosophical wisdom, to help leverage and secure Christian commitment, rather than to think in terms of the contrast between “natural” and “revealed” theology that has more of a place in later systematic or scholastic theology. Such a contrast belongs to a period when there was no longer an independent and influential pagan culture whose criticisms needed to be answered by leveraging common ground—without at the same time reducing Christian faith to the results of argument or to non-Christian philosophical wisdom. It may surprise us to think that the ancient apologist could have expected to generate some kind of understanding of the Trinity among non-Christians, or that some of the same strategies of persuasion could be addressed both to Christians and non-Christians on such a central Christian dogma as the Trinity. But it may be that our readiness to use such categories as “natural knowledge of God” anachronistically has blinded us to the genius of these ancient strategies of persuasion and clarification, and kept us from learning as much as we can from them.

5 With regard to Origen: by the time Origen writes, Celsus is long dead and Origen explicitly writes, at the request of his patron Ambrose, in case there are believers whose faith might “be shaken and disturbed by the writings of Celsus” (Contra Celsum P.4), and he intends it “either for those entirely without experience of faith in Christ, or for those whom the apostle calls weak in faith, for he says this, Him that is weak in faith receive ye (Rom. 14.1).” That is, it is intended for (somewhat sympathetic?) non-Christians and for those whose faith might be troubled by such cultured despisers of Christianity as Celsus. See Michael Frede, “Origen’s Treatise Against Celsus” in Apologetics in the Roman Empire, Mark Edwards et al. (eds), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 131–155. With regard to Augustine, see especially Johannes van Oort, Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study into Augustine’s City of God and the Sources of His Doctrine of the Two Cities (Leiden: Brill, 1991), pp. 165–175 especially; and also Gerard O’Daly, Augustine’s City of God: A Reader’s Guide (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 36–38. Both apologetic treatises have a critical dimension and a constructive dimension. In Augustine this is a structural feature of the text, with City of God books 1–10 the critical and 11–22 the constructive. In Origen the two are not separated structurally, but Origen calls attention to them in a lengthy comment as he begins Book 4 of the Contra Celsum (4.1).
In any event, I believe something can be gained from looking again at some of the most prominent themes in Augustine’s De Trinitate from the perspective afforded of a review of those themes as they are present in the City of God, not principally because the texts from the City of God give us more information about what Augustine thought about the Trinity, but because we may learn something from seeing these themes in an overtly apologetic context intended for a mixed audience of those along either side of the border of Christian faith.

Augustine provides an especially likely case for such a study because one finds a considerable amount of overlapping material between the De Trinitate and the City of God. There is an extensive discussion of the Trinity itself in Book 11 of the City of God with significant follow-up in Book 12 and preparation in Book 10. Both the De Trinitate and the City of God have important discussions of mediators, true and false, of the economy of theophany, angelic miracle and demonic prodigy, of prophecy, of true and false worship of God, and of the image of the Trinity in human beings and its “footprints” in all of creation. Augustine himself connects the two treatises by cross reference of the City of God in the De Trinitate (13.12).

However, these discussions, in the respective treatises, are something like inverse images of each other. In the City of God, the focus is on polemic against polytheistic worship and the Platonic inconsistency in recognizing the true God but nevertheless supporting the public cults. Discussions of what the true worship of God is, and of biblical teaching on Creation, as well as theophany and miracle, are also featured. These contextualize the discussions of the Trinity and of human beings as created in the (specifically) Trinitarian image of God. In the De Trinitate, the situation is reversed. Here, the focus is on the Trinity and on the Trinitarian image of God in human beings, which is the context in which discussion of the other themes comes up. But it is interesting to notice that, though the relative proportion of the treatment topics is vastly different, these topics are present in roughly the same sequence or order in both treatises. There is no reason to think that

6 The overall movement is from a consideration of the economy of redemption to a consideration of the Trinity in itself, especially in its contrast with created being. In both texts the two discussions are not independent, they are mutually implicated; the latter has roots in and arises out of the former. City of God 10 (completing the argument begun in Books 8–9) provides a discussion of the economy of salvation which is at the same time a discussion and clarification of the doctrine of the Trinity, just as in Books 2–4 of De Trinitate. City of God 11 takes up, in the context of discussing the act of creation, the utter uniqueness of the nature of God the Creator, a Trinity of Persons which is nevertheless wholly simple and undivided. De Trinitate 5–7 takes up the same topic, though in inverse proportions, with the discussion of the uniqueness and simplicity of God’s nature front and center, with some discussion of the act of creation (e.g. De Trinitate 7.12, 6.11–12, 5.12–17 [in the discussion of the senses of “origin”]) in that context. The Trinity is simplex and so Father and Son, together with the Holy Spirit, are one God, in such a way that each is God in himself but all three are not three Gods or three Omnipotents, but one God (City of God 11.10, 11.24, cf. De Trinitate 5.9 giving rise to the long discussion concluding at the end of De Trinitate 7.6). The plural is to be used of the word “person” (City of God 11.10 with
the logic governing the sequence present in the *City of God* has been rendered inoperative in the *De Trinitate*, even as some of its potentiality, undeveloped in the *City of God*, has emerged and developed more fully in the *De Trinitate* in conversation with other Christians, heretical and Nicene. Studying this logic of exposition in the *City of God* can, I believe, enable us to use what are “minor” themes in the *De Trinitate*, but “major” themes in the *City of God*, to help us understand better the intention and scope of the *De Trinitate*. These themes, because they are in the minor key as it were, have sometimes seemed to be digressive or difficult to relate to the larger whole, and sometimes, even when it is understood they are not digressions, the account offered of their integration seems artificial or stilted.

Why not let Augustine’s own logic provide the connections? My thesis is that his logic is more visible in the apologetic treatise, where the doctrine of the Trinity is included as part of a critical effort to distinguish Christian belief and worship from pagan belief and worship, even as it is also part of an appeal to the seeds of reason present in pagan culture (to use Justin’s phrase) that can provide some sort of access for critics or inquirers to what Christians actually believe. In the *City of God*, the doctrine of the Trinity requires and in turn underwrites a cosmology and anthropology that, despite major points of contact or access, are ultimately incommensurate with any of the accounts on offer in pagan imperial culture, because all of these accounts, be they philosophical, political or mythological, endorse or at least countenance polytheistic worship. The anthropology that is expressed in the doctrine of human beings as bearers of the Trinitarian image of God, and its relation to the doctrine of the Trinity itself, is especially clear in the polemical context of the *City of God “Against the Pagans.”* There is no reason to suppose that this relation changes in any significant way in the treatise on the Trinity, which

contrast to Sabellius; 11.24; *De Trinitate* 5.10 with contrast to Sabellians; 7.7–11). Properties of the persons are mentioned briefly at *City of God* 11.24, more extensively at *De Trinitate* 6.11, with discussions of the Holy Spirit as the holiness of both Father and Son (*City of God* 11.24, *De Trinitate* 6.7). God’s simplicity involves an absolute contrast to creatures, for in creatures qualities inher in substance or nature, whereas in God to be good, wise, great, God, etc., is the same as to be (*City of God* 11.10, expanded throughout *De Trinitate* from 5.3–5 [no accidents in God] to 7.2 and 7.10 with the constant refrain that to be X is the same as to be, for God, *De Trinitate* 5.11, 6.5–8, 6.11, 7.1 etc.). God is immutable in the act of creation since it was not created in time (*City of God* 11.6, 11.21, *De Trinitate* 5.17; note the coincident point about God’s knowledge and creation at the end of *City of God* 11.10 and *De Trinitate* 6.11), and the co-eternity of the Son and Holy Spirit guarantee that the relations of origin do not involve change either (*City of God* 11.10, 11.24, *De Trinitate* 5.6 etc., including in both texts the distinction between what is said of a Person ad se and what is said relative or ad alteram). In both texts the uniqueness of God’s being is compared and contrasted throughout to the likenesses and unlikenesses to God that can be seen in creation, and this applies to all creatures (*De Trinitate* 6.11–12; *City of God* 11.24–25, 27) and in a special way to the image of God that is in human beings (*De Trinitate* 7.5, 12; *City of God* 11.26, 28). Both texts emphasize the need for the renewal or regeneration of the image. If the *City of God* enjoins us to consider all of creation, and in particular, to gaze at the image in ourselves, with the benefit of knowledge about it given by revelation (11.28), the *De Trinitate* takes up this exhortation in 7.5 and 7.12, then expanded into the extended discussion of books 8–10, 14–15.
developed in roughly the same long time period. There is also no reason to suppose that the same strategies of persuasion associated with the Trinitarian material in the City of God cannot shed light on Augustine’s intention in the De Trinitate, or that the mixed audience effect has been so left behind that it does not function at all in the latter text.

In fact, it is notoriously difficult to say who the intended audience of the De Trinitate may be. To whom is the treatise directed? It certainly sends mixed messages. Among others, we encounter the “brethren” who ask questions and demand answers from the one whose office as bishop makes him their servant. But Augustine also says he is writing to people, on the other hand “who do not hunger and thirst for justice (Mt. 5.6) but are well fed and have more than enough,” who do not seek God beyond the corporeal imaginings [phantasma] of their minds. Who are these people? It could be a description of Augustine himself taken from passages in the Confessions describing him before his conversion. And, though he has been “roused by the Holy Spirit” and sees his own deficiencies in the “light of God,” he is still prey to such imaginings.

Among other people Augustine explicitly intends to address are unspecified persons who “have contempt for the starting point of faith.” Who are they? Could they be, to some extent, anyone who picks up the treatise? From a non-Christian who had perhaps begun to inquire into the faith but left it behind, to a professed believer who may underestimate the “contempt” for simple faith in his or her own heart? Who is it who needs a course of reasoning [rationem] to show them how unfit they are to see God, and so persuade them to “return” to the starting point of faith? Further, is the

9 There are many possible examples to offer, but see the summary description at Conf. 7.1.1 of Augustine’s struggle against the phantasmata of corporeal images (Sancti Augustini Confessionum Libri XIII, Lucas Verheijen, O.S.A. [ed], 2nd edition [Turnhout: Brepols, 1990] = CCSL 27, p. 92, lines 1–27, “phantasmata” at line 15).
11 “fidei contemnentes initium,” De Trinitate 1.1, CCSL 50, p. 27, line 3. They are “deceived by an immature and perverse love of reason,” “immaturo et perverso ratione amore falluntur,” (ibid., lines 3–4).
12 Augustine sums up his intentions with regard to such people: “... with the help of the Lord our God, we shall undertake to the best of our ability to give them the reasons they clamor for, and to account for [eam insam quam flagitan t... reddere rationem] the one and only and true God being a trinity... In this way... they may actually come to realize [reipsa experiantur] that that supreme goodness does exist [esse illud summum bonum] which only the most purified minds can gaze upon, and also that they are themselves unable to gaze upon it and grasp it for the good

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audience made up of those who have yet to be persuaded of how much God loves us? Or those who are so persuaded? And who would belong to either group? Could Augustine even have in mind anyone who thinks “they can purify themselves for contemplating God and cleaving to him by their own power” (4.20)? And if so, would these only be pagan philosophers, people like Porphyry, or could this be a tendency hidden in even some of the most zealous Christian seekers? Unspecified “Arians” are mentioned (5.4, 6.1 along with Arius himself, 6.10) and “Eunomius” and his followers (15.38); are these also addressed? If so, it cannot be taken as any kind of determinative description of the audience for whom this is intended. The sheer brilliance and hard work required to clarify, after centuries of study, some of the polemical contexts out of which portions of the argument arise show, in a way, how much the treatise is rhetorically constructed to elude a precise designation of the addressee, to be, in effect, one step removed from the particular contexts which may have given rise to strands of its thought.

All in all, Augustine’s studied reticence to declare a particular, specific audience as his addressee has the effect of highlighting all us “readers” as a reason that the human mind with its weak eyesight cannot concentrate on so overwhelming a light, unless it has been nursed back to full vigor on the justice of faith (Rom. 4.13). . . . We shall go on to accommodate these garrulous rationalizers who have more conceit than capacity . . . We shall do them such a service, perhaps, that they are able to discover reasons they can have no doubt about [ut inveniant aliquid unde dubitare non possint], and so . . . they will sooner find fault with their own minds than with the truth itself or our arguments. In this way . . . they may return to the beginning and right order of faith [atque ita . . . ad initium fidei et ordinem redeant], realizing at least what a wholesome regimen is provided for the faithful in holy Church . . .” (De Trinitate 1.4, CCSL 50, p. 31, lines 1–3, 6, 7–11, 13, 14, 15–18, 19, 20–21). That is where Augustine locates himself, “in familia Christi tui, . . . inter pauperes” who are seeking in praying, himself as bishop begging for bread that he might serve others, all too conscious of his own susceptibility to error given the difficulty of the quest and the weakness caused by sin. This is where Augustine would like all of his readers to be, seeking by begging for bread in familia Christi (De Trinitate 4.1, CCSL 50, pp. 159–160, lines 22–23).

13 De Trinitate 4.2; cf. 13.13.
15 The very first word of the text refers to the one about to read it (“Lecturus haec quae de trinitate disserimus,” De Trinitate 1.1, CCSL 50, p. 27, line 1, my emphasis). Such emphatic notice directly to an unnamed reader is rare in Augustine. The audience constructed as “the reader” retains a prominent presence throughout. The whole of De Trinitate 1.5–6 is addressed to “Quisquis haec legit” (CCSL 50, p. 32, line 1, insistently repeated at CCSL 50, p. 32, line 11, “quisquis . . . Legit”; pp. 32–33, lines 17–18, [lector] ponat librum meum vel etiam . . . abiciat”; p. 33, line 32, “Quivero haec legens”) in the context of forming a collaborative pact with the reader in the face of the grave difficulty of the subject at hand, “for nowhere else is a mistake more dangerous, or the search more laborious, or discovery more advantageous” (“quia nec pericu-
collection of people who share in common the need for conversion of some sort, loosely speaking, on either side of the border of Christian faith in the face of the “difficulty” of the task of seeking God. We are all dwarfed by this difficulty—and I say “we” advisedly because Augustine writes intentionally with future readers\textsuperscript{16} in mind who may be seeking God and yet know nothing of the specific contexts in which some of the arguments were generated.

Could this indeterminacy of address be a more significant dimension of the treatise than hitherto realized? In its own way it is a function of the greatness of the mystery of God which Augustine has allowed to pervade the text. The indeterminacy of address in a way represents the purity of the “light of God” in which we are all to learn to see ourselves better. Before the difficulty of the mystery of God, it is the great need for “conversion” that any of us has, on either side of the border of Christian faith, that is emphasized. This discourages triumphalism even as it does not relativize the Christian proclamation which defines the very greatness and uniqueness of the mystery of God in the first place. No reader is allowed to think that the treatise points to someone else, some audience well-defined by Augustine, and not him or herself, believer or non-believer.

Perhaps the reader will indulge a somewhat arresting analogy. In “The \textit{Iliad} or The Poem of Force,” Simone Weil suggests that the greatness of the \textit{Iliad} is to be found in the “extraordinary sense of equity which breathes through the \textit{Iliad},” and makes it difficult to know which side, if any, is favored, Greek or Trojan. There is no triumphalism. “Nothing precious is scorned, whether or

\footnotesize{\textit{Iliad} or The Poem of Force}, p. 34, line 49) even using such mentions to mark strategic, structural decisions, made out of consideration for them (at \textit{De Trinitate} 10.19, on behalf of the tardioribus, the turn to the “outer man” is made, and Book 11 is straightforward begun almost as a sort of detour, CCSL 50, p. 332, line 18; cf. \textit{De Trinitate} 14.10, “legentium . . . tarditatem,” CCSL 50A, p. 435, lines 59–60; cf. \textit{De Trinitate} 14.20, \textit{ibid.}, p. 448, line 78). By the time Augustine recounts this “detour” in Book 15, it is made simply on behalf of the “reader” unqualified (\textit{De Trinitate} 15.5, CCSL 50A, p. 466, line 84). The “slower reader” has become almost a sacrament of the “slowness and weakness of the human mind” (\textit{De Trinitate} 15.49, CCSL 50A, p. 530, line 44) before the difficulty of the search. Even to “careful and intelligent readers” (“illis qui haec diligenter atque intelligenter legent,” \textit{De Trinitate} 15.45, CCSL 50A, p. 524, lines 22–23), what is most apparent is the extreme difficulty of seeing the Trinity with any clarity, in this case why the Holy Spirit is not a son, though he proceeds from the Father. Throughout, the “reader” is the audience as a shadow cast from the perspective of the severe difficulty of the search for God.

\textsuperscript{16} At \textit{De Trinitate} 1.5, Augustine envisages a situation where a reader may have a criticism but he, Augustine, may not be alive (“si in hac vita maneo,” CCSL 50, p. 33 line 35).
not death is its destiny; everyone’s unhappiness is laid bare without dissimulation or disdain; no man is set above or below the condition common to all men.” What accomplishes this is a “note of incurable bitterness that continually makes itself heard, though often only a single word marks its presence,” a bitterness “that proceeds from tenderness and that spreads over the whole human race, impartial as sunlight.” This marks the greatness and the uniqueness of the Iliad: “Such is the spirit of the only true epic the Occident possesses.” Edmund Hill, O. P., one of the persons of our time most intimately and most affectionately acquainted with Augustine’s De Trinitate, makes a similar judgment when he comes to identify its successors: “[Augustine] did not, unfortunately, have any real successors” despite the dependence that many later and wonderfully brilliant theologians had on his text. Could this be related to the “light” of God’s greatness and truth that the author allows to “spread” over the whole treatise, “impartial as sunlight,” gently revealing the need for conversion, for seeking, indeed for begging, in all of us, the author included? The work indeed “scorns nothing precious,” using it, instead, to leverage an awareness of the greatness of the mystery of God, and yet never letting any such awareness pass as a settled achievement that can stand up and call attention to itself in the light of that mystery? Before that mystery we are all cast simply as “human beings who seek God” (2.1). However we answer this question, and whatever we think of this analogy, we have perhaps done enough to justify the approach taken, in an experimental fashion, in the present article.

Part II

The doctrine of the Trinity is discussed explicitly and most fully in City of God Book 11, but Book 10 provides a thorough preparation for this discussion in its explanation of the person of the Mediator. In a way this is already a full blown discussion of the Trinity, since Augustine has to make it clear that the true Mediator is, in the form of God, one God with the Father, in order to differentiate him from the various kinds of angelic or daimonic mediators claimed by polytheist cults that are endorsed even by the Platonist philosophers. The various prodigies and theophanies revealed in Scripture are part of an angelic economy of mediation that points to and is fulfilled in the

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18 Hill, p. 56.

19 See for example at City of God 10.20, “Unde verus ille mediator, in quantum formam servi accipiens mediator effectus est Dei et hominum, homo Christus Iesus, cum in forma Dei sacrificium cum Patre sumat, cum quo et unus Deus est, tamen in forma servi sacrificium maluit esse quam sumere, ne vel hac occasione quisquam existimaret cuilibet sacrificandum esse creaturae,” CCSL 47, p. 294, lines 1–6.
revelation and true worship of the one Mediator the angels themselves worship. As already noted, it is interesting that this is roughly the same structure that we find in the *De Trinitate*, where, before the main discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity in itself and the proper language to use in expressing the Trinitarian relations in Books 5–7, there is an extensive discussion of theophany and mediation. As in the *City of God*, this discussion already is, in effect, a discussion of the Trinity because of the need to differentiate the true and final Mediation from both earlier anticipations and false mediation of the demons, supported by philosophers under the guise of theurgy. Discussion of the economy of salvation is in both texts already Trinitarian, and precedes any discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity in itself.

Book 10 is the culmination of the first “half” of the *City of God*, in which Augustine undertakes to demonstrate that the gods of the pagan pantheon are not to be worshipped either for temporal benefits (Books 1–5) or for spiritual or eternal benefits (Books 6–10). Book 10 is the conclusion more particularly of a discussion begun in Book 8, where Augustine first takes up what he always regarded as the most glaring inconsistency in Platonic theology, namely, that, although they knew the one true God, they nevertheless defended the polytheistic practice of worshipping many gods, a concern that goes all the way back to Justin and ultimately to St. Paul. Exposition of this inconsistency is very frequently accomplished with the help of Rom. 1:19–22, as at *City of God* 8.10. Because they teach that there is one God who made

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20 The economy of miracle, prodigy and theophany is discussed beginning at *City of God* 10.7 and continues through 10.18, with a summary comment in 10.32. *City of God* 10 seems to assume the results of the discussions at *De Trinitate* 2–3 regarding the theophanies and other Old Testament prodigies. *City of God* 10.8, for example, assumes the results of the inquiry in *De Trinitate* 2.10.19–12.22 and 3.11.26–27, namely that it was angels who appeared to Abraham and to Lot and to the other patriarchs, a point made also at *City of God* 10.13, extending the point to include all the patriarchs and Moses too, as well as the prodigies before the whole people on Mt. Sinai. As Augustine concludes in *De Trinitate* at 2.17.32 and 3.11.22–27, these were worked through angels or other creatures “serving the Creator.” In both texts (see *De Trinitate* 2.16.27), the request of Moses to see God face to face (Exod. 33:13) is interpreted as a realization on Moses’s part that he had never seen God in His essence, but only as represented by a creature.

21 See the passage cited from Isabelle Bochet, below at n. 74. The reader may wish especially to compare the discussions on purification or purgation of the soul in *City of God* 10.28–29 with that at *De Trinitate* 4.1.3–2.4, where purification of the soul cannot even be explained without explaining who the Word of God is who becomes Incarnate to purify us. In both texts it is the humility of the Word of God that is emphasized as cleansing, but this humility cannot be understood unless one understands just who the Word is, and what His status is as God. The polemic in the *De Trinitate* against theurgy at *De Trinitate* 4.8.12–10.13 entails an explanation of the true sacrifice of the true Mediator, and how that Mediator is equal to the Father. This discussion is comparable to the more extensive critique of theurgy in *City of God* 10.

22 See, for example, *City of God* 10.32, at CCSL 47, p. 314, lines 180–184.

23 After an extensive discussion, from *City of God* 8.1 to 8.10, emphasizing the Platonist philosophers as those who have come the closest to Christian doctrine in natural and moral philosophy and logic, Augustine in *City of God* 8.10 sums up this agreement using Rom. 1:19–20 and reiterates it forcefully, but he also uses Rom. 1:21–22 to state their error: “Novit [homo Christianus] sane etiam ipsos [Platonicos philosophos], in quibus errant, cavere; ubi enim dictum est, quod per ea, quoa facta sunt, Deus illis manifestavit intellectu conspicienda invisibilita
heaven and earth, the Platonists are the philosophers with whom Augustine has chosen to discuss the question of the second five books of the first part of the treatise, namely, “whether, for the sake of happiness which is to come after death, sacred rites are to be performed for the one God or for many.” They are targeted for discussion because they “have held, concerning the true God, that He is the author of all created things, the light by which things are known, and the good for the sake of which things are done,” corresponding to the triune character of philosophy in physics, logic and ethics, which Plato brought together for the first time, because he had discovered, either from reading Scripture (see section 8.11), or being understood from the things which are made (Rom. 1:20), God as the “First Principle of things [rerum pricipium], which was not itself made and by which all things were made,” the light of our minds, by which we learn all things, and the true and highest good: “But Plato says that the true and highest good is God, and he therefore wishes the philosopher to be a lover of God; for philosophy aims at the happy life, and he who loves God is happy in the enjoyment of God.” After naming all those, from Aristotle to Plotinus, Iamblichus, Porphyry and Apuleius, who can assent to these ideas, he notes, “Yet all these, and others who were of the same school, and, indeed Plato himself, held that sacred rites should be performed in honor of many gods.” As he proceeds with his analysis of Platonic discussions of theurgy and the polytheistic cult, he is aware that there are various degrees of endorsement of these practices, but what is most

sua; ibi etiam dictum est non illos ipsum Deum recte coluisse, quia et aliiis rebus, quibus non oportebat, divinos honores illi uni tantum debitos detulerunt: Quoniam congoscentes Deum non sicut Deum glorificaverunt aut gratias egerunt . . . ,” City of God 8.10, CCSL 47, p. 226, lines 19–25, with the quotation of Rom. 1:20 continuing to line 30.


25 “utrum propter felicitatem, quae post mortem futura est, uni Deo an pluribus sacra facere oporteat,” ibid., lines 9–10, translation modified slightly from St. Augustine, The City of God Against the Pagans, trans. by R. W. Dyson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). In general, I have used Dyson’s translation, supplemented by consultation with Henry Bettenson (St. Augustine, Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans [London: Penguin Classics, 1984]) and, infrequently, my own renderings. I have not noted these adjustments unless it seemed necessary to call attention to an issue of interpretation affecting my argument.

26 “de Deo summo et vero ista senserunt, quod et rerum creatarum sit effector et lumen cognoscedarum et bonum agendarum,” CCSL 47, p. 225, lines 1–3. At City of God 8.5 God is called “rerum auctorem” (CCSL 47, p. 221, line 39), and only later in 8.5 (ibid., p. 222, line 71) “creator,” when Augustine is speaking in his own person of his own teaching.

27 City of God 8.4, CCSL 47, p. 220, lines 24–33.

28 City of God 8.6, CCSL 47, p. 224, lines 47–48, 49–51.

29 City of God 8.7, “lumen autem mentium esse dixerunt ad discenda omnia eundem ipsum Deum, a quo fa ta sunt omnia,” CCSL 47, p. 224, lines 18–20.

30 City of God 8.8, “Ipsum autem verum ac summum bonum Plato dicit Deum, unde vult esse philosophos amatorum Dei, ut, quoniam philosophia ad beatam vitam tendit, fruens Deo sit beatus qui Deum amaverit,” CCSL 47, p. 225, lines 46–49.

glaring to Augustine is the fundamental inconsistency that seems to cleave Platonic thinking in two, as a kind of late antique version of what Sartre was later to call “bad faith.”

Augustine’s most sophisticated opponent, as he sees it, is Porphyry, whose position Augustine begins to engage at *City of God* 10.9, and who continues to occupy Augustine’s attention for the rest of Book 10. Porphyry does endorse theurgic sacrifice, but in a hesitating, tentative way, according to Augustine, as helpful in purifying the “spiritual” part of the soul, by which images of corporeal things can be seen, though not for purifying the higher, “intellectual” part of the soul. Theurgy thus enables the soul to see the gods of light, but not to make the last stage of the return to the one God.\(^{32}\) Porphyry seemed to have believed that philosophers need not engage in theurgy, because they do not have need of the purification it can offer. To lesser souls theurgy can offer a purification which is beneficial, even if not the ultimate purification afforded by the practice of philosophy. Not even sacrifices offered to the sun and the moon, conceived of as high and good gods, can afford that, and so human beings are not ultimately purified by sacrifices offered to any of the gods, since the sun and the moon would be the highest.\(^ {33}\) They are purified, instead, by the *principia*, or principles. “And,” says Augustine, “we know what he, as a Platonist, means by the *principia*. For he here refers us to God the Father and God the Son, Whom he calls in Greek the Intellect or Mind of the Father.”\(^ {34}\) The Platonists seem to have some kind of natural knowledge, as we might call it, of the Trinity, that includes even the Holy Spirit in some way: “Of the Holy Spirit, however, he says nothing, or nothing clearly; for I do not understand what he means when he speaks of some other being holding an intermediate place between these two [quem alium dicat horum mediumi].” He thinks Plotinus’s teaching is clearer: “For if, like Plotinus, when the latter is discussing the three principal substances [de tribus principalibus substantiis], Porphyry had wished us to understand this third as being the soul of nature [*animae naturam*], he surely would not have given it a place intermediate between these two: that is, between the Father and the Son. . . . No doubt he spoke as he was able or as he wished. We, however, say that the Holy Spirit

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\(^{33}\) *City of God* 10.23, “Dicit etiam Porphyrius divinis oraculis fuisse responsum nos non purgari lunae teletis atque solis,” CCSL 47, p. 296, lines 1–2, with relevant information from lines 3–5 and 6–8.


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is the spirit not of the Father only, nor of the Son only, but of both.”

Augustine goes on to note that the philosophers can use words as they please, “but we are obliged by religious duty to speak according to a fixed rule, lest verbal licence beget impious opinions concerning the matters which our words signify.”

Augustine next introduces the proper precision to be observed when speaking of the Trinity, in a passage reminiscent of the De Trinitate:

When we speak of God, therefore, we do not say that there are two or three principia; nor are we at liberty to say that there are two or three gods. Speaking of each—of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—we confess that each individually is God; but we do not say, as the heretical followers of Sabellius say, that the Father is the same as the Son, and that the Holy Spirit is the same as the Father and the Son. Rather, we say that the Father is the Father of the Son, and that the Son is the Son of the Father, and that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of both the Father and the Son, but is neither Father nor Son. It was then truly said that only by a principium can a man be cleansed; but the Platonists are incorrect in speaking of principia in the plural [pluraliter].

But this is not a merely technical or an innocent mistake. It is a distortion that proceeds from the endorsement of polytheistic worship:

Porphyry, however, was in subjection to envious powers. He was ashamed of them, but he was too much in awe of them to speak freely against them. And so he refused to understand that the Lord Christ is the Principium by Whose incarnation we are cleansed. Indeed, Porphyry held Him in contempt because of the flesh He took in order to become a sacrifice for our cleansing. It was because of his pride that Porphyry did not understand this great mystery [magnum . . . sacramentum].

But not to understand this great sacramentum is also, then, not to understand the Trinity. By refusing to recognize Christ “as the Principium,” Porphyry misapprehends the Trinity.

Later, using a Greek expression, Augustine repeats the claim that Porphyry recognizes ultimate purification can come only from what he calls the “patri-

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37 City of God 10.24, see at CCSL 47, p. 297, lines 1–11. Note the mention of Sabellius (cf. De Trinitate 7.4.9). The Trinitarian discussion is meant to be heard both by Christians and by pagans. On language about the principium, compare De Trinitate 5.13.14–5.14.15, CCSL 50, pp. 220–223, which argue at length for the same point, namely, that principium is to be used in the singular when speaking of the Trinity.  
38 City of God 10.25.
kos nous”, that is, Augustine adds, “the mind or intellect of the Father, which is conscious of the Father’s will.” But Porphyry misunderstands the Trinity because he “does not believe this is Christ.” The reason, again, is pride: “you despise Him because of the body that He received from a woman, and because of the shame of the Cross. Your exalted wisdom [excelsam sapientiam] rejects such lowly and abject things, and looks to higher regions [de superioribus].”

Passages such as this one are sometimes read as though Porphyry’s mistake is merely that he did not see the Incarnation, that is, that the Son was Incarnate in Christ—as though he had an accurate understanding of the Trinity, but just did not see the economy. Clearly this is an incorrect interpretation of the passage. He can “see” the Son, the patrikos nous, but he just cannot accept that He/It would become Incarnate. But, to the contrary, not “believing” that this Mind or Intellect is Christ, is not to “see” this Mind correctly. It is to see something, true, but only in a distant and shadowy way:

You proclaim the Father and His Son, Whom you call the intellect or mind of the Father, and between these two you place a third, by Whom we take it that you mean the Holy Spirit; and, as is your custom [more vestro], you call these three gods [tres deos]. Thus far, though your use of words is incorrect, you do to some extent see as it were a kind of shadowy image of what we should strive towards [qualitercumque et quasi per quaedam tenuis imaginatioinis umbracula, quo nitendum sit]. You do not, however, wish to acknowledge [agnoscere] the incarnation of the immutable Son of God, by which we are saved and through which we are able to come to the things we believe or in some small way understand. You see after a fashion [utcumque], although at a distance, and with clouded vision, [etsi de longinquo, etsi acie caligante] the country in which we should abide; but you do not hold fast to the way that leads to it.

There is perhaps no more familiar comparison in the Augustinian analysis of Platonic theology than that the Platonists see the fatherland at a distance and yet do not embrace the way to get there. Here this is specifically applied to the Trinity. Passages like this are sometimes interpreted to mean that Platonists have a kind of natural knowledge of the Trinity, as I’ve already noted, and that all they really lack is acceptance of the way there. But, while partially correct in that the Platonists indeed do see the “fatherland” but do

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39 City of God 10.28, “Ignorantium certe et propter eam multa vitia per nullas teletas purgari dics, sed per solum patrikon noun, id est paternam mentem sive intellectum, qui paternae est conscius voluntatis,” CCSL 47, p. 303, lines 18–21.

40 City of God 10.28, CCSL 47, p. 303, lines 21–23, “Hunc autem Christum esse non credis; contemnis enim eum propter corpus ex femina acceptum et propter crucis opprobrium, excelsam videlicet sapientiam spretis atque abiectis infimis de superioribus carpere,” with Dyson’s translation slightly adjusted.

41 City of God 10.29, CCSL 47, p. 304, lines 1–11.
not hold to the way there, this view does not fully take into account Augustine’s claim that, when it comes to the Trinity, what the Platonists see is distorted.42 How could it be anything different? If they do not contemplate in faith “the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord, and that incarnation of His, by which He took on the soul and body of a man! . . . the supreme example of grace,” if they do not see that “the only Son of God, remaining immutable in Himself, put on humanity and bestowed upon mankind the Spirit of His Love through the mediation of a Man,”43 then they do not see the Trinity. If one rejects the Mediation, one is rejecting the true Trinity and cannot see the kind of God the real God is. The most essential features of God’s gracious action in mercy are rejected, and so are the most essential features of God as Trinity which make such a Mediation possible. From such a “distance” as they are observing, pridefully refusing the nearness of God in the Incarnation, the Platonists see a plurality of principia without evident, precise relation. They see “gods,” not “God,” “substances” and not the one substance of the irreducible Three. There is indeed some kind of knowledge of the Trinity available to the philosophers, though it is difficult to know if it should be called natural knowledge or some kind of awareness through grace,44 yet it is corrupted and distorted by pride. Far from serving any kind of salvific purpose, it configures the philosophers to the condemnation issued by Paul in Rom. 1:19–21.

Further, the Platonist rejection of the humility of God in the Incarnation means not simply the rejection of a “way” that is somehow separate or separable from God, but a rejection of God Himself, a rejection of the Trinity, one of whose consubstantial and equal persons, defined by immutable relation to the Father, is the way. Rejecting the way is rejecting God, refusing to worship Him, the true Trinity. Rejecting the Mediator is rejecting, not one principium out of three, but the Principium, God Himself. Thus their distant and distorted vision is not the result of a neutral misfortune, as though these virtuous and noble philosophical observers just happen by bad luck to be a little too far away to both see and possess what they see. The distant and

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42 Thus, here I find myself reluctantly disagreeing with the view of Johannes Brachtendorf, and those whose views he invokes as precedent, in his erudite study, *Die Struktur des menschlichen Geistes nach Augustinus. Selbstreflexion und Erkenntnis Gottes in De Trinitate* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2000), when he comes to treat the relevant passages in the *City of God* 10.23 and 29—see especially pp. 8–13.


44 On this point, the reflections of Goulven Madec seem on point, for one thing, noting that whatever of the Trinity Porphyry has seen, it’s due to the grace of Christ, whether Porphyry likes it or not, all the while cautioning us not to read back into *De Trinitate* the difference between “philosophy” and “theology,” especially insofar as that is thematized by the parallel scholastic distinction between “natural” and “supernatural.” See his “Inquisitione proficiente,” especially at pp. 69–73, 78. For an intriguing attempt to negotiate this problem of natural knowledge of the Trinity in Augustine, with special reference to the *De Trinitate*, using the idea of “implicit knowledge,” see Johannes Brachtendorf, “‘. . . prius esse cogitare quam credere’: A Natural Understanding of ‘Trinity’ in St. Augustine?” *Augustinian Studies*, 29 (1998), pp. 35–45.
distorted image represents a vested interest in distance and so in distortion, the vested interest which Augustine always calls “pride.” (There is really no seeing past this “pride” to speculate what may or may not have been “naturally” visible without it, since such speculation is itself subject to prideful distortion.)

For Augustine, the case of Porphyry is perhaps the clearest and most poignant case, for, as Augustine analyzes it, Porphyry does see the need for grace. One could imagine that awareness of distance could take the form of an awareness of a need for something that one cannot supply oneself. Porphyry loved the truth enough to correct Plato where he thought Plato was in error (10.30), and he loved it enough to try to correct the errors of some of the theurgists (Anebo, 10.11). If Porphyry has “natural knowledge” of anything that is accurate and true, it is natural knowledge of the lack and the need implied in awareness of something you want that is distant. Porphyry seems to see that this distance requires assistance:

You confess that there is such a thing as grace, however; for you say that it has been granted only to a few to reach God by the power of their intelligence. You do not say, ‘It has pleased only a few,’ or ‘Only a few have wished,’ but ‘It has been granted only to a few.’ Beyond doubt, then, you acknowledge the grace of God, not the sufficiency of man (10.29).

And yet Porphyry rejects the grace when it is offered because it conflicts with his own Platonic teaching about bodies, which makes the Word’s humble acceptance of a body appear too humiliating for philosophical wisdom to accept (10.29). It reveals the prideful, vested interest of the philosophers in wanting to be “wise and strong in themselves” (10.28), rejecting such “lowly and abject things” as the Cross, that is, rejecting the nearness of God that grace actually offers. Invested in the distance of God from themselves, a distance which represents the attainment they have yet to achieve, they are coarsened by this refusal, made insensitive to the gratitude they owe to God for the grace even of this distant knowledge. This refusal enables them to continue to claim to be “wise” instead of glorifying God and giving thanks, instead, that is, of worshipping God. By refusing to accept the “medicine” that the simple Christian does not “blush” to accept, refusing to build on the “gift” that God has given them and the indications they should have had of Him from philosophy itself (10.29), the Platonist philosophers “are not healed; rather, they fall into a still more grievous affliction,”45 and that seems to be the inability even to imagine that the true God can be worshipped, that there could be some kind of cult of this God, and one available to everyone. Porphyry bemoans the lack of a “universal” way for salvation, insensitive to the love and mercy that is being lavished on the world from the Cross,

dividing salvation up between those who can purify themselves, and those who must resort to the deceptive consolations of the demons through theurgy. Philosophy corrupted by pride believes it can purify itself by its own strength; “worship” is for those who are not strong enough to purify themselves, and must have recourse to whatever ambiguous help the “gods” can offer by way of theurgy.

And at issue, as noted, is indeed the refusal to worship God. What, then, exactly is worship? Augustine began to argue early in Book 10 that what uniquely characterizes worship is sacrifice.46 The only way to worship God is through sacrifice, and for a rational creature, even the unfallen angels, who, together with holy men and women, are “the one City of God, which is His living sacrifice and His living temple,”47 that means not simply offering sacrifices, but being a sacrifice.48 If the philosophical rejection of the Mediator entails the rejection of the true worship of God, then, for the philosopher himself, this also entails a refusal to offer himself as a sacrifice. The philosopher can have his cleansing on his own, so sacrifice is not necessary for him. His philosophical achievement in the knowledge that there is only one true God also, if he is honest as Porphyry, leads him to understand that the mythological gods are only demons, and that sacrifices to them are ineffectual for salvation, and any benefit they may confer is at best dubious, given the source. Yet the desire to be called “wise” as an end in itself nevertheless coarsens one with *curiositas* so that one can learn and then seem to be an “expert” in the theurgic arts, pleasing those who have the same vice of *curiositas* or hoping to arouse it in others.49 The class of those who cannot purify themselves by philosophy are thus established by the pride and *curiositas* of the philosophers as a lower class of people, encouraged to indulge in theurgy, to render sacrifice to beings whom the philosophers know are not truly divine and who actually accept sacrifice only because they are prideful and know it is due to the one true God alone:

46 *City of God* 10.4.
47 *City of God* 12.10.
48 *City of God* 10.25 notes that the holy angels “do not wish that we would sacrifice to them, but that we might be [sinus] with them a sacrifice to God,” my translation and emphasis, *CCSL* 47, p. 300, lines 73–74, 75–76. *City of God* 10.6 points out that this applies both to the body, which, according to Rom. 12:1, is to be a “living sacrifice,” as well as the soul, to which is directed Rom. 12:2, so that “the soul itself may become a sacrifice [sacrificium] when it directs itself to God in order that, inflamed with the fire of his love, it may receive His beauty and be pleasing to Him, losing the form of worldly desire and being reformed immutably by its submission to him,” see *CCSL* 47, p. 278, lines 18–24. Romans 12:2 is also used to describe the transformation of the image of God from deformity in *De trinitate* 14, where the idea of the gradual renewal of the image is discussed, a renewal to be enjoyed by those who are “holding fast to the faith of the Mediator” in the worship of God (see *De Trinitate* 14.16.22, *CCSL* 50A, pp. 451–454, lines 1–66; *De Trinitate* 14.17.23, *ibid.*, pp. 454–455, lines 1–37).

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Those deceitful and proud spirits who demand such sacrifice for themselves do so for no other reason than that they know it to be due to the true God. . . . They delight not in the smoke of carcasses, but in deceiving and subjecting to themselves the soul of the suppliant whom they hinder from drawing near to the true God, preventing him from offering himself as a sacrifice to God by inducing him to sacrifice to other gods.50

They are thus prevented from offering themselves as a sacrifice to God, which would, presumably, enable them to see through the whole charade and say, “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? . . . the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:20ff, at 10:28).

For Augustine, the Platonic endorsement of the economy of polytheistic sacrifice, all the while knowing the one true God, amounts to a systemic displacement of sacrifice from one’s person, that of the philosopher and that of the simpler seeker, onto an exterior economy of sacrifice that has nothing to do with offering oneself but rather with refusing to offer oneself. The Psalmist recommends that the goal of human life is to “draw near to God” (Ps. 73:28).51 But the Platonists do not have a cult for the one true God that is other than philosophy itself. For the few there is this way of attainment by one’s own power; for the many, there is an authoritative recommendation, at least, to the economy of sacrifice to the so-called gods (10.27). These so-called gods are actually demons, for no good “angel” or “god” would ever accept sacrifice, which they know is due only to God. Thus, Platonic spirituality, characterized by a fundamental inconsistency, boils down to the delivery of philosophy into an economy of pride, manifested in a sacramental system of deflection of sacrifice from oneself, such that one is never the sacrifice, but rather the master of the economy of sacrifice. Philosophical achievement liberates one from the necessity of sacrifice, and the philosopher is rewarded with vision: you can indeed begin to see a God, one who is enough like the real God to justify arrogating to oneself, for one’s philosophical achievement, the title “wise,” but a “god” who does not relate to sacrifice at all, but to achievement and its reward, glory. This is a God who must remain distant, whose distorted vision is an image of the distortion in the philosopher’s own soul, and whose threeness could be seen itself as a distance to travel and so something to attain, and so the spirituality of attainment is written right into the Godhead. It is a convenient distortion of the real Trinity.52

50 City of God 10.19, CCSL 47, p. 294, lines 24–25, 29–33. The false gods have at least this in common with the true God: it’s not the matter of the sacrifice they seek, but what it signifies and effects in the soul of the worshipper—but the sign and the thing signified are not so easily separated, as implied in the good angels’ refusal to accept either mentioned in City of God 10.26.
51 City of God 10.3, 10.6, 10.18, 10.25, 12.9.
From this perspective, what Christ brings is not simply “faith,” as a kind of stopgap that helps us perform the purification we should have been able to do ourselves, until we can finally get strong enough to do it ourselves, but rather the end of the economy of attainment and displacement. Christ brings true worship. That is his most important work. Instead of displacing sacrifice away from himself, he becomes a sacrifice.

Hence, the true Mediator, the man Jesus Christ, became the Mediator between God and man by taking the form of a servant. In the form of God, He receives sacrifice together with the Father, with Whom He is one God. In the form of a servant, however, He chose to be a sacrifice Himself, rather than to receive it, so that not even in this case might anyone have reason to think that sacrifice is to be offered to a creature, no matter of what kind. Thus, He is both the priest who offers and the sacrifice which is offered.53

Augustine has already thoroughly explained that the true sacrifice, the “interior” sacrifice, or sacrifice of oneself, is not self-destruction but is any “work of mercy” or “act of compassion” when performed for God alone and no ulterior motive, seemingly for nothing.54 Only someone fully equal to God, himself God, however, could have no possible ulterior motive, since God needs nothing to increase His happiness. Thus the sacrifice of the Mediator is the truest possible “work of mercy” or “act of compassion” and hence worship. It makes true worship possible again for everyone through their participation in this one true sacrifice. That participation occurs through sacramental economy by which the Mediator forms the Church, in particular, the Eucharist. Continuing the passage cited above,

And He intended that the daily sacrifice of the Church should be the sacrament of this res [i.e. of Christ’s being both priest and oblation]. For the Church, being the Body of which He is the Head, is taught to offer herself through Him.55

53 City of God 10.20, see at CCSL 47, p. 294, lines 1–7.
54 City of God 10.6.
55 City of God 10.20, “Cuius rei sacramentum cotidianum esse voluit ecclesiae sacrificum, quae cum ipsius capitis corpus sit, se ipsam per ipsum discit offiere,” CCSL 47, p. 294, lines 7–9, taking “cotidianum” with “sacrificium,” disagreeing with Dyson (p. 422), who takes it with “sacramentum.” Dyson’s translation assumes that the Eucharist itself is not a sacrifice, but only the “sign” of one (as he translates “sacramentum”); the sign can be daily, but the sacrifice is ongoing and interior, he seems to indicate. But Augustine is perfectly comfortable using the language of sacrifice in connection with the Mass, as his usage at Confessions 9 shows abundantly (see John C. Cavadini, “Eucharistic Exegesis in Augustine’s Confessions,” Augustinian Studies, 41 [2010], pp. 87–108). Bettenson seems to agree, translating, “the daily sacrifice of the Church” (p. 401).
It would be a mistake to take a sentence like this as offering a fully articulated theory of sacramental causation such as we find in Thomas Aquinas, and yet it is also a mistake to see in the Eucharistic economy simply an exterior sign of something that takes place essentially on the “inside,” with no essential relation to the sign. Again:

This is the sacrifice of Christians: *We, being many, are one body in Christ* (Rom. 12.4). And this also, as the faithful know, is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, by which it is shown to the Church that she herself is offered in the offering that she makes to God.56

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56 *City of God* 10.6, “Hoc est sacrificium Christianorum: *multi unum corpus in Christo* (Rom. 12.5). Quod etiam sacramento altaris fidelibus noto frequentat ecclesia, ubi ei demonstratur, quod in ea re, quam offerit, ipsa offeratur,” *CCL* 47 p. 279, lines 52–55). Other usage in the *City of God* reveals some kind of sacramental causation in Augustine’s thinking, however implicit. For example, at *City of God* 22.17, “For the man’s [Adam’s] sleep was the death of Christ, from Whose side, pierced with a spear as He hung lifeless upon the cross, there flowed forth water and blood, which we know to be the sacraments by which the Church is built up [qua sacra menta esse novimus, quibus aedificatur ecclesia],” *CCL* 48 p. 835–836, lines 19–22. The ablative of agency with the passive voice claims a kind of sacramental efficacy even if it is not specified precisely how it works. Again, at *City of God* 15.26, “And the door which was set in the side of it [the ark] clearly represents the wound made in the side of the Crucified when it was pierced with a spear, which is indeed the way of entrance for those who come to Him, because from that wound there flowed the sacraments in which believers are initiated [quia inde sacramenta manarunt, quibus credentes initiatur],” *CCL* 48, p. 495, lines 23–26. Even with the weaker translation of *quibus*, “in which,” as opposed to a more instrumental translation, “by which,” there is evidently something that happens as a result of the sacraments of initiation. At *City of God* 17.20, Augustine comments on the banquet of Wisdom in Proverbs 9, referring that banquet to the table “furnished with wine and bread,” and he adds that “to become a guest at that table is to begin to have life [participem autem fieri mensae illius, ipsum est incipere habere vitam],” the implication being that participation in the Eucharist is participation in the Wisdom of God. This seems confirmed as Augustine comments on Ecclesiastes 8:15, “There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink.” Augustine applies the comment to the Eucharist, to the “sharing of this table [participationem mensae huius] which the Priest Himself provides, the Mediator of the new covenant according to the order of Melchizedek, the table furnished with His body and blood,” namely, “that sacrifice which has superseded all the sacrifices of the old covenant, which were offered as a foreshadowing of that which was to come . . . for, instead of all those sacrifices and oblations, His body is offered, and served up to the partakers of it [corpus eius offertur et participantes ministratur],” *CCL* 48, p. 588, lines 73–91 (cf. *City of God* 16.22, on the prefiguration of the Eucharist in the sacrifice of Melchizedek). Participation in the sacramental table at which the sacrifice of Christ’s body and blood is offered is efficacious, in some way, in granting life. Finally, to return to Book 10, at *City of God* 10.19, Augustine discusses why visible sacrifice should be offered to God, instead of just offering a “pure mind and a good will” (could this be what the philosophers think?), and why, in sacrificing, we offer the visible sacrifice *only* to the true God (cf. *City of God* 10.26). The visible sacrifice signifies the invisible sacrifice of ourselves, and yet the invisible sacrifice is not enough, and perhaps is not even complete as a sacrifice, without the visible sacrifice which signifies that what is happening invisibly is indeed a sacrifice. If the visible sacrifice were easily dissociable from the invisible sacrifice, there would be no problem offering it to another god. Even here there is an element of efficacious causality implied. Would it be alright to reject the Eucharistic sacrifice in favor of simply an invisible offering? Apparently not.
No theory of sacramental causation is offered, but that does not mean that some kind of causation is not implied here, for example, in the word “in” [in ea re]. The Church is shown that she herself is offered in what she is offering, and in that offering, the unity of the Church is effected. The visible Church is in that sense a sacrament itself, since it is a societas defined by no other demarcation except Christ’s compassion, His mercy, His sacrifice, which can only be present “mysteriously,” “sacramentally,” and not in an individual spiritual achievement, even if that is given the name “faith.” Faith is important, true, but it is important because it enables one to participate in the true sacrifice of Christ by being formed Eucharistically into the unity of the Church, by being formed into one Body, through and in the Eucharist. As Augustine says in Book 4 of the De Trinitate, in a passage which could equally have come from the City of God, the devil has very few followers left nowadays, as more and more people leave behind his sacred rites, and “acknowledge the price paid for them [his just blood unjustly shed, 4.17], and drink it with devout humility, and putting all their trust in it forsake their enemy.”

“Acknowledging the price paid for us” entails “drinking it.” In drinking, one puts all one’s trust [“fiducia”] in this price and leaves the “enemy” behind along with his false economy of achievement and displacement. Being formed ever more perfectly into the compassion of Christ, one is formed ever more fully into unity with all the members of the one Body, reformed away from the world, transformed in the renewing of our mind, presenting ever more completely our bodies and ourselves as a living sacrifice. In the Eucharist, the exterior economy of sacrifice is thus recovered from the “bad faith” of the Platonist split of an interior spiritual economy of attainment from an exterior economy of displacement, and reconnected to the one economy of true worship that permits and actually is true purification or transformation. Not only does this not involve fleeing from the body, it involves the formation of a new Body, the Body of Christ, which will persist into eternity. “Drawing near” or “cleaving” to God is our good, according to the Psalm—and Plato too!—but this means sharing in the love of God through the Holy Spirit, in fellowship with all others who draw near to God, and so, in the practice of true worship, we come to be aware of the Trinitarian economy as an economy of love, gratitude and thanksgiving for the good example of others and for the hand of compassion that was stretched out to us. It is in fulfilling the

57 “agnoscentibus gentibus et pia humilitate bibentibus pretium suum, ejusque fiducia desentibus hostem suum,” with “pretium” referring back to “suo [the Lord’s] justo sanguine,” De Trinitate 4.18, 17, CCSL 50, p. 184, line 76 and p. 185, lines 84–85.
58 City of God 10.6, making use of Rom. 12:1–5 throughout.
59 As explained at City of God 22.18.
60 See City of God 8.27.
61 See City of God 10.24; Augustine speaks simply of the Incarnation as the hand stretched out to us, but this is clearly an image of misericordia.
requirements of true worship from Rom. 1:20, "glorifying God and giving thanks," that we come to know that the true Trinity is beyond the limited vision attained in Platonic practice.

Part III

Moving into Book 11 of the City of God, the first book of the second part of the treatise, we encounter a sustained treatment of the doctrine of creation based on the account given in the first chapter of Genesis, en route to explaining the "origin, progress and merited end of the two cities."⁶² In the City of God, as elsewhere in Augustine, the seventh day of God’s rest is interpreted as indicating the purpose of creation, and in particular that of human beings. God’s “rest” is the attainment of creation to its ultimate end; we human beings “become” God’s rest in an eternal Sabbath of praise, that is, of worship.⁶³ It is only from the perspective of true worship now, then, that we can truly see the purpose and character of creation.

Augustine reminds us right at the outset of Book 11 that the main issue at stake in the difference between the two cities is in fact the issue of the true worship of God:

The citizens of the earthly city prefer their own gods to the Founder of this holy city, for they do not know that he is the God of gods. Not of false gods, however . . . who seek divine honors from their misguided subjects. Rather, He is the God of pious and holy gods, who take delight rather in submitting themselves to One than in subjecting many to themselves, and in worshipping God than in being worshipped in place of God.⁶⁴

In terms of the argument at this point in the City of God, Augustine has established that we can see the true Trinity only from the perspective of true worship. Since this Trinity is the One Creator, it is also only from that perspective of true worship that we can understand creation. We can understand that true creative activity is an act of the Trinity and has a Trinitarian structure. We can see that all of creation bears some trace of its origin in the Trinitarian creative act, and we can see that we ourselves, human beings, in particular, have been created in the image of the Trinity. This cannot be fully known apart from revelation, or fully seen apart from the perspective of true worship in which the image is reformed and we are gradually transformed.

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⁶² City of God 11.1. O’Daly notes that, despite the plan of the work indicating a new section here, “the continuity between this new section of the work and what went before is greater than Augustine’s scheme suggests,” indicating a continuous sequence of thought (Augustine’s City of God, p. 135).
⁶³ City of God 22.30 treats the eternal Sabbath rest and praise of God.
⁶⁴ City of God 11.1, see CCSL 48, p. 321, lines 16–19, 23–25.
into God’s “rest.” Such is the logic that we find reproduced in the De Trinitate, though here in the City of God it is very compressed, as it is in service of the larger project of discussion of the origin and ends of the two cities. Still, one moves from a consideration of the economy of salvation, as a series of theophanies and signs pointing to the coming of the Mediator, with concomitant clarification of Trinitarian doctrine, and then to the establishment of true worship in the sacrifice of the true Mediator. The discussion moves on to a more technical articulation of the Trinity in itself. It is the Eucharistic awareness of God, already implicit in the act of giving glory and thanks that is Eucharistic worship, which enables and requires this technical precision, and grows into a concomitant awareness of oneself as a creature and, indeed, image. From the perspective of revelation and true worship, we are now able truly to glorify God (Rom. 1:21) and so to see Him as Creator, and ourselves as creatures, in a way that leaves behind all the strategies of alienation and displacement of sacrifice represented at their most sophisticated by Platonism and, on a lower level, by the pagan cults underwritten by the philosophers.

What begins to emerge from the perspective of true worship is that Platonism by contrast has, or at least underwrites, a “cloudy vision” not only of God the Creator, but of His act of creation. We have already noted above that in Book 8 Augustine invokes a considerable degree of common ground with the Platonists, in which the doctrine of creation is especially featured. In Book 11, where Augustine is discussing the creation of the angels, he is able to use that common ground effectively to argue that all created natures are good, against the position of the Manichees. But as the discussion is continued into Book 12, where the creation specifically of human beings is the subject, questions arise. The discussion of creation concludes amidst remarks such as the following:

There are, however, those who believe, with their master Plato, that all mortal creatures—among whom man holds the pre-eminent place, akin to the gods themselves—were created not by that supreme God by Whom the world was made, but by other, lesser gods, created by Him and acting with His permission or at His command [see Timaeus 41c]. If these persons could only be rid of the superstition which causes them to seek to justify the offering of rites and sacrifices to such gods as though they were their creators, they would also easily shake off the error of this opinion.

The primary error is cultic and in the order of worship. The truth is that these “gods,” or angels, themselves “gratefully ascribe their own existence to the

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65 See above, n. 6.
same God”67 and this means desiring not our worship, but to be formed with us into a living sacrifice of praise.68 This means also refusing to agree that an angel, instead of God, is the creator of our bodies, such that the body becomes not truly part of God’s intention for human beings, but a kind of “prison,” and these so-called creators actually “jailors,” “forgers of shackles and chains.” Here is the compromise with myth that philosophy, devoid of true worship, is willing to make.

Let the Platonists therefore either desist from threatening us with our bodies as the punishment of our souls, or cease from preaching that we are to worship as gods those whose work upon us they exhort us to flee and evade by all means in our power.69

The Platonic ambivalence about the body translates into a disfigurement of the soul as it is encouraged to engage in worship almost as an act of hatred of ourselves as embodied creatures, since the body is the most obvious impediment to the technology of spiritual attainment.

But the order of creation as it came from the hand of God is not an order of unfreedom or shackling, but an order of freedom, that has its origin in the absolutely mysterious freedom of God, who creates not out of necessity or through any non-divine intermediary, but in his Word, co-equal to Himself. This is the same extraordinary and unimaginable freedom we see in the choice of the Word to empty himself and become, himself, a sacrifice. In true worship, we see the world from the perspective of this freedom, unconstrained and acting only out of goodness. Augustine pictures us asking, of any created reality, “Who made it? By what means did He make it? And, Why did He make it?”—With the answer,

It is the Father of the Word Who said, Let it be. And that which was made when He spoke was beyond doubt made by means of the Word. Again, when it is said, “God saw that it was good,” it is thereby sufficiently signified that God made what He made not from any necessity, not because He had need of any benefit, but simply from His own goodness: that is, so that it might be good. . . . And if this goodness is rightly understood to be the Holy Spirit, then the whole Trinity is revealed to us in the works of God.70

We see the world, the whole world including physical reality, marked by the sign of this mysterious freedom beyond which one cannot find a cause or a rationale.

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70 (As narrated in Scripture, we must add.) City of God 11.24.
As we run over all the works which He has established in a wonderful stability, let us consider His footprints [vestigia], as it were, more deeply impressed in one place and more lightly in another, but distinct even in those things which are below us.\(^\text{71}\)

Even physical, inanimate reality bears the “footprints” of its creation in freedom and for freedom, for in their measure, number and weight there is something that is truly itself and not something else, truly something, and, in its weight, a kind of love that is a complete self-expression for this kind of thing. Though not an “image” of God, it is still marked by the “big bang” of its origin in the loving freedom of the Trinity.

So much the more the human being, made, Scripture says, in God’s image. The image is an image because it is the lineaments of a truly created freedom, free not by analogy but actually, in its ability to exist, to understand, and to love, and yet it is still an image, not equal to God. It has existence, but is not self-existent or the author of its own nature.

If we were the authors of our own nature [natura], we should have generated our own wisdom [sapientiam] also, and should not require to reach it by teaching [doctrina]; that is, by learning it from elsewhere. Our love [amor], too, going forth from ourselves and returning to ourselves, would be enough to make our lives blessed, and would need to enjoy no other good. But now, since our nature has God as the author [auctorem] of its being, we must beyond doubt have Him as our teacher [doctorem], that we may be truly wise; and Him also to bestow spiritual sweetness [suavitatis intimae] upon us, that we may be blessed indeed.\(^\text{72}\)

Only a Trinitarian account of God generates an irreducible account of human freedom, one that does not fragment into pre-philosophic or extra-philosophic myth on the one hand, or into philosophical cloudiness on the other. The image is a sort of needy correspondence, a freedom whose freedom is an “image” of an unimaginably greater freedom and love that guarantees it as free and only in relation to which (really, to Whom!) is this freedom actually available and actualized. This is created rather than uncreated freedom, the soul requiring God to be free as God is, and the rest of creation bears the marks of this “need,” of the dependence of created freedom on the uncreated. The soul, as “image,”

is not equal to God; indeed it is very far removed from Him; for it is neither co-eternal with Him, nor to express the whole matter briefly, is it of the same substance as God. It is, however, nearer to God in nature than


\(^{72}\) City of God 11.25, CCSL 48, p. 345, lines 39–47.
anything else made by Him, even though it still requires to be reformed and perfected in order to be a still closer likeness.\textsuperscript{73}

We have already seen that this re-formation is accomplished in true worship, in the participation in the greatest free act imaginable, the compassionate choice of the Word to be made flesh and to justify us by His blood as members of the one Body. The human being becomes more and more “like” God, the more it is formed and renewed in the compassion and mercy of the Redeemer, that is, in His sacrifice, and this is to become freer and freer. The image perfected is the “just man” whose justice is a function not of narrow human devising but of the mercy of God revealed in Christ.

Part IV

As noted, we can see in this sequence of books 8–12 in the \textit{City of God} roughly the same progression of topics as in the \textit{De Trinitate}, from the examination of the economy of theophany and mediation in \textit{De Trinitate} Books 1–4, itself already a clarification of Trinitarian language, but leading to an even more precise focus on the clarification of Trinitarian language in light of this economy in Books 5–7, to the contemplation of the Trinity as Creator and the creation as stamped by the irreducible mystery of freedom that is the Trinity, including most especially the image of God which is in human beings. If the \textit{De Trinitate} re-balances the detail and the focus, still, the logical interconnection, and even, in a rough way, the sequence of the same topics in the \textit{City of God}, is not jettisoned.\textsuperscript{74} The basic logic is that the doctrine of the Trinity properly articulated makes possible a complete doctrine of creation. This includes a doctrine of the human creature that emphasizes freedom in mercy

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{City of God} 11.26, CCSL 48, p. 345, lines 1–7, “Et nos quidem in nobis, tametsi non aequalen, immo valde longeque distanter, neque coaeternam et, quo brevius totum dicitur, non eiusdem substantiae, cuius Deus est, tamen qua Deo nihil sit in rebus ab eo factis natura propinquius, imaginem Dei, hoc est illius: summae trinitatis, agnoscimus, adhuc reformatione perficiendam, ut sit etiam similitudine proxima.” The progression of thought here, though very compact, is similar to the progression of thought in the summary at \textit{De Trinitate} 15.10 (we really are an image), 11–13 (but the dissimilarity is very great), 14 (not only intrinsically but because it is in need of reformation).

\textsuperscript{74} This point is made, in a somewhat different way, by Isabelle Bochet, with regard to Book 3 of the \textit{De Trinitate}: “Face aux ariens, il fallait établir que, dans les théophanies, ce n’est pas le Fils qui s’est rendu visible dans son essence divine: le Créateur a utilisé des anges pour signifier aux hommes un message; le Fils n’est donc pas inférieur au Père. Mais le rôle ainsi conféré aux anges risquait alors d’en faire des intermédiaires nécessaires à la création et au salut et de cautionner par là même les thèses des platoniciens: Augustin se devait donc de discuter directement Porphyre et les platoniciens afin de lever tout ambiguïté. Cela s’imposait d’autant plus qu’Augustin n’hésite pas à utiliser certains éléments de leur philosophie; il importait donc de montrer en même temps qu’il récuse leur religion.” (“La puissance de Dieu à l’oeuvre dans le monde: Le livre III du \textit{De Trinitate} d’Augustin,” in Emmanuel Bermon, \textit{Le De Trinitate de saint Augustin: exégèse, logique et noétique}, forthcoming).
and compassion, and a necessary course of growth and renewal in mercy and compassion that is our growth in freedom. This occurs in true worship, which binds us into the communion of the one Body. The Eucharistic sacrifice is, in fact, ordered toward communion with other human beings, such that growth in freedom is growth in communion and growth in communion is growth in freedom.

What does this say for the interpretation of the De Trinitate? For example, what of the detailed, lengthy examination of the interior “image” of God that we find discussed in Books 8–10 and 14–15? Is this a solipsistic, ultra-interiorized monadic spirituality that eschews the economy and seeks, in a way, to rise above it? It is rather an attempt to show the reader “something they can’t deny,” something they can become aware of independent of their own possible assent to Christian faith, namely, themselves remembering, understanding and loving, the indelible mark of the Trinitarian creator on all of us, and, in a different way, even on our bodies and the “outer man.” But this is only to put the reader, in effect, into the place where Augustine’s rhetorical artistry in the City of God puts Porphyry, on the verge, so to speak, of conversion, and held back only by his pride. It is to rhetorically position the reader that way, to help him or her find him or herself a “dark enigma” that cannot be interpreted apart from Scripture, and cannot be clarified except through true worship. In the words of the City of God:

Contemplating His image in ourselves [in nobis autem ipsis eius imaginem contuentes], therefore, let us, like that younger son of the Gospel, come to ourselves, and arise and return to Him Whom we had forsaken by our sin (Lk. 15.11–12). In him, our being [esse] will have no death, our knowledge [nosse] will have no error, and our love [amare] will know no check. In our

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75 Catherine Mowry LaCugna’s critique, for example: see her God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1991), p. 103. LaCugna’s critique is a more measured and qualified version (with even some positive appreciation, e.g. pp. 367, 323) of the critique of Colin Gunton, “Augustine, the Trinity, and the Theological Crisis of the West,” The Scottish Journal of Theology, 43 (1990), pp. 33–58, with both ultimately reflecting the critique of O. du Roy, L’intelligence de la foi en la Trinité chez saint Augustin (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1966).

76 See n. 12 above. The language of discovering something about which one cannot doubt is echoed most closely in the De Trinitate at 10.14 with regard to “living, remembering, understanding, willing, thinking, knowing, judging,” and, from these, in 10.17 are selected the triad of remembering, understanding, willing.

77 The “vestigia” or footprints of the Trinity in sensible things are treated in Book 11 of the De Trinitate, just as in Book 11 of the City of God, as antecedent to a consideration of the “image” within. De Trinitate 11.1 introduces the discussion of the vestigia (CCSL 50, pp. 333–334, lines 1–35) in the “outer man” as propaedeutic to a consideration of the inner image, comparable to the movement from City of God 11.27 to the passages I have cited from City of God 11.28 (corresponding to notes 57, which in the text of Augustine immediately precedes that in note 64). De Trinitate 11.8 evokes very beautifully the way in which there is nothing at all created that does not bear some likeness to God, and, just as in City of God 11.24, 27–28, this is linked to the reason for creation, namely, the supreme goodness of God (CCSL 50, pp. 343–344, lines 51–55, 1–41).
present state, we believe that we possess these three not on the testimony
of others, but because we ourselves are aware of their presence, and
because we discern them with our own most truthful inner vision [intei-
riore . . . aspectu]. We cannot, however, know of ourselves how long they
will continue, or whether they will ever cease, and what will be the
outcome of their good or bad use. Hence, we seek the testimony of
others, if we do not already have it.78

“Inner vision” can’t be denied, but it isn’t enough. In fact, under the
guidance of the apologist, it only poses the question. More precisely, the focus
of the inner vision to which the reader is invited is conjured by the apologist
from the perspective of revelation.79 Only from the perspective of revelation
can one be invited to see one’s own mind, which one cannot in itself doubt,
for the “image” and the “enigma” it is.80 What one “cannot doubt” is then
used by the apologist to leverage also this very awareness in the reader,
namely, in order to show that awareness of that very thing, which we cannot
doubt, is in fact awareness of oneself, as, without revelation, an unanswerable
question, uninterpretable, like an obscure text. For the pagan inquirer or
critic, this could be enough to provide the occasion of conversion. For the
Christian reader, this provides a kind of “understanding” of Christian teach-
ing which enables him or her to be able to confidently answer the pagan critic
with the truth. And yet the Christian reader is not him or herself immune
from the need for conversion, broadly speaking, conversion not just to a
deeper intellectual assent to the truths of faith, but to the awareness of their
own pride, their own temptation to accounts of the world and human being
which are just Christianized versions of the triumphalist complacency of late

78 City of God 11.28, adjusting Dyson’s translation (p. 488) slightly; CCSL 48, p. 348, lines 39–50.
79 Edmund Hill notes, “[B]y the end of Book X Augustine has completed his construction of
the trinitarian image in man, which is so designed that it does throw light on the processions
which constitute the trinity in God. I say ‘construct’ advisedly, first because he is clearly being
selective in his use of psychological activities, and is tailoring his selection to meet the require-
ments of the linguistic standards set in Books V-VII . . .” (Hill, p. 54). Also see the note complé-
mentaire of P. Agaësse, “Il n’y a donc qu’une image de Dieu: inchoative dans la création, pervertie
dans le péché, rénovée dans la justification, achevée dans la vision. Mais ces différents états ne
s’expliquent que par leur relation mutuelle. L’image inchoative ne se comprend que par son
ordination à l’image parfaite, comme l’image pervertie ne se comprend que par ce qui subsiste en
elle de l’image primitive. Nous sommes dans une perspective qui se réfère au point de vue de
Dieu sur l’homme et toutes les expériences humaines ne sont interprétées qu’à la lumière de la
Révélation” (Bibliothèque Augustiniens, Oeuvres de Saint Augustin vol. 16, La Trinité, Livres
VIII-XV [Paris: Institut D’Études Augustiniennes, 1997 = 2nd reprinting with additions and
corrections of the original 1955 edition], p. 632.). Lewis Ayres in his recent book seems to align
himself with these positions, e.g. when noting that “. . . the language of Trinitarian faith is a guide
for the exploration of the mind,” with reference to Book 9. See his Augustine and the Trinity
80 On this point see De Trinitate 15.44; in more detail, see Cavadini, “The Darkest Enigma,”
especially at p. 126.
antique imperial culture.\textsuperscript{81} If any of us, pagan or Christian, while being exercised in this inner vision, with the help of grace, \textit{come to ourselves}, we will “arise and return to Him Whom we had forsaken by our sin,” we will embark upon, or persevere more strongly in, the course of healing humility that is the Eucharistic life.

Interior vision, at that point, becomes the awareness of oneself worshiping God, that is, awareness of oneself as sacramentally bound in a \textit{societas} defined by no other qualification, cultural status or accomplishment which might serve the glory of \textit{emporium}, but rather by Christ’s sacrifice alone. It is awareness of oneself as a kind of question continually being posed, and continually being answered in the immolation of self that is one’s sacramentally conferred identity as incorporated into the one sacrifice of Christ. Perhaps it is a little like the alternating “evening knowledge” and “morning knowledge” of the unfallen angels throughout the six days of creation.\textsuperscript{82} It is the awareness of oneself continually as a temptation to pride, and the continuing immolation of self in refusing to accept the temptation by clinging to the blood of Christ, the price of our redemption. For we have our “morning knowledge” only in our true worship in and of Christ. This is the awareness of oneself that is truly the awareness of the image \textit{as} an image, that Book 14 of the \textit{De Trinitate} presents, the “worship”\textsuperscript{83} that is true wisdom, ever more deeply clinging to the blood of Christ, the “price of our redemption,” which means ever more deeply aware of one’s sacramentally conferred identity as a member of the one Body, and one’s whole life as Eucharistic. We are always directed back to the economy of salvation.\textsuperscript{84}

The apologetic double effect of the \textit{City of God} is alive and well in the \textit{De Trinitate}, not only in the early books, but even more forcefully, perhaps, in the

\textsuperscript{81} As an example, see especially \textit{City of God} 5.18, where the \textit{exempla} of the pagan heroes are addressed to Christians, warning them not to use their own ascetic or spiritual gifts as though they were accomplishments undertaken for the purpose of seeking praise or glory. On this point see John C. Cavadini, “Ideology and Solidarity in Augustine’s \textit{City of God},” forthcoming in James Wetzel (ed), \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Augustine’s \textit{City of God}}.

\textsuperscript{82} See \textit{City of God} 11.7, where Augustine discusses the character of a creature’s self-knowledge: “In comparison with the Creator’s knowledge, the knowledge of the creature is like a kind of evening light [\textit{vesperascit}] But when our knowledge is directed to the praise and love of the Creator, it dawns and is made morning [\textit{lucscit et mane fit}]; and night never falls while the Creator is not forsaken by the creature’s love. Accordingly, when Scripture enumerates those days in order, it never includes the word ‘night.’ It never says, ‘There was night,’ but, \textit{The evening [vespera] and the morning were the first day}; and so too with the second, and so on. And, indeed, 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. Therefore, it can be called \textit{evening} more suitably than ‘night’ [\textit{nox}]. Yet, as I have said, morning returns when the creature returns to the praise and love of the Creator. When it does so in the knowledge of itself, that is the first day” (CCSL 48, p. 327, lines 18–31). See also \textit{City of God} 11.29, CCSL 48, p. 349, lines 10–13, 30–32.


very books which have been supposed to be most pertinent to the converted Christian. Besides the indications of a “mixed” audience already mentioned above, large sections of Books 13 and 14 have the apologetic feel to them that we can recognize from our examination of the City of God. Almost the whole first half of Book 13 is taken up with demonstrating that, from the point of view of revelation, the pagan philosophical quest for happiness is self-defeating because “human argumentation” [humanis argumentationibus]\(^85\) can succeed only in getting to some notion of the immortality of the soul, only to stumble on the problem of the soul’s relation to the body. If one does not have the proper faith and the concomitant worship of God the Creator, one will not be able to find a stable immortality for the soul because the “shackling” that the body is will always threaten it, as Augustine explained in City of God 12. It is exactly this issue of the status of the body that Augustine identifies as his only explicit point of contact between the two treatises.\(^86\) Augustine the “apologist” has in both texts leveraged an account of shared wisdom about happiness into a persuasive strategy for accepting what faith proclaims about the resurrection of the body: “This faith of ours, however, promises on the strength of divine authority, not of human argument, that the whole man, who consists of course of soul and body too, is going to be immortal, and therefore truly happy.” Lest we despair of this, the Word became flesh:

For surely if the Son of God by nature became son of man by mercy for the sake of the sons of men . . . how much easier it is to believe that the sons of men by nature can become sons of God by grace and dwell in God; for it is in him alone and thanks to him alone that they can be happy, by sharing in his immortality; it was to persuade us of this [propter quod persuadendum] that the Son of God came to share in our mortality.\(^87\)

Who needs this persuasion? Any pagan inquirer or critic, just as in the City of God; and yet what Christian can believe he or she is persuaded enough? Is there any Christian not tempted by pride to find a spiritual immortality that nature alone can attain? That does not require such a complete sacrifice of self to grace? In other words, to the sacramental worship of the Church, the societas or familia that is defined not by nationality or sex or spiritual awareness or accomplishment but mysteriously—“sacramentally”—by Christ’s love? Those who “philosophized without the Mediator” inevitably fell into false worship (13.24, with the citation of Rom. 1:20, 23). Augustine presents an argument for the “faith that purifies the heart” (13.25). In reviewing this argument in Book 14, Augustine says that his aim in Book 13 was to

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85 De Trinitate 13.12, CCSL 50A, p. 398, line 1.
86 Ibid., lines 11–12.
“commend faith itself.”88 To whom? There is no need to be a Christian to receive this argument as intelligible, and to be persuaded of the need for faith. Christians, on the other hand, receiving it “understand” that their own faith is the answer to centuries of spiritual quest, which that quest could not produce or imagine on its own terms, and that it is this faith, and not an independent “understanding,” that is the answer. We all need to be turned back to the “initium fidei” in some way.89 Book 14 ends by citing the Hortensius of Cicero, to show the inadequacies of mortals, desiring immortality, relying upon reason alone without faith in the Mediator.90

And thus in Book 14 we find that the image of God is most especially located not simply in the triad of memory, understanding and love, but in remembering, understanding and loving God, that is, in true worship:

This trinity of the mind is not really the image of God because the mind remembers and understands and loves itself, but because it is also able to remember and understand and love him by whom it was made. And when it does this it becomes wise. If it does not do it, then even though it remembers and understands and loves itself, it is foolish. Let it then remember its God to whose image it was made, and understand and love him. To put it in a word, let it worship [colat] the uncreated God.91

This is to cling to God92 which we know from City of God requires sacrifice; let it not be conformed to the world, but reformed in the newness of mind (14.22 citing Rom. 12:2, the passage associated with the Eucharist in City of God 10.6). Let it cease to cling to any “understanding” or “knowledge” as spiritual accomplishment. If not a believer, let it become a believer; if a believer, let this “understanding” be ever more purified by the sacrifice of true worship instead of becoming a substitute for it.

If the logical sequence of thought of Books 8–12 of the City of God, present and relatively intact in the De Trinitate, has not lost the apologetic critique offered to pagan philosophical reason from the perspective of faith and true worship, it does not mean that the other emphasis in ancient apologetics is lost, namely, an appeal to shared ground in reason as offering an unbeliever, with the proper guidance, some helpful access to Christian faith, such that the diligent exercise of reason might lead one to see the

89 “To know how the godly are to be assisted . . . and how the attacks of the ungodly upon [faith] are to be met,” the double thrust of apologetic (“scire quemadmodum hoc ipsum et piis opituletur et contra impios defendatur,” De Trinitate 14.3, CCSL 50A, p. 424, lines 65–66).
reasonableness of converting. Surely the *De Trinitate* is not intended primarily for pagans thinking of converting. Yet that does not mean that the apologetic themes we have noticed from the *City of God* cease to function apologetically and that the treatise has no accessibility or useful intelligibility to the non-Christian, even as it offers something useful to Christians by the same “apologetic” strategy.93

For one thing, discourse on the Trinity, present in the *City of God* and with significant similarities to what we find in the *De Trinitate*, seems to Augustine accessible enough to pagans—not, of course, to Porphyry, who, as Augustine notes, is dead, but to non-Christians who admire Porphyry and on that basis have refused to become Christians.94 Like Justin and Origen and others before him, Augustine attempts to leverage what reason can share between Christian and non-Christian as an occasion for conversion and there is no reason to think that these apologetic tonalities have dropped out of the picture. The textual evidence from the *De Trinitate* would argue they have not, and that the double effect we can see from *City of God* is instructive for how the treatise functions for Christians.95 For Christians are poignantly

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93 One may on the one hand agree with the comments of a recent excellent monograph on the *De Trinitate*, and yet at the same time wonder if it edges toward overstatement: “Since the will is never neutral, we are either moving away from God, or discover that we have been snatched away from this aversion, from the devil’s power, from the blindness of our covetousness and pride, from the bleakness of our despair and granted the grace of conversion, of moving towards God through the charity poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us. The novelty, the strangeness, the gracious character of this love is such that it becomes the most eloquent indication of the renewal brought about by Christ’s salvation and of its Trinitarian character. . . . Love comes first to the point that such talk makes sense only once it has become a reality already. Augustine’s *De Trinitate* is not destined for people who need to be converted, to be persuaded to love God. His reader has to be someone who already knows, already sees, already loves out of God’s love.” Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 300.

94 *City of God* 10.29.

95 What I have been calling the double address of the *De Trinitate* is particularly visible in sections 15.48–50 (noted, in somewhat different words, by J. Moingt, *BA* 16, note 66, pp. 660–661). After citing a lengthy section from one of his own *Tractates on the Gospel of John* which attempted to explain why the Holy Spirit is said to “proceed” and not to “be born,” Augustine says, “I have transcribed this from that sermon into this book but of course I am not addressing unbelievers in this passage but believers” (“Haec de illo sermone in hunc librum transtuli, sed fidelibus, non infidelibus loquens”), CCSL 50A, p. 530, lines 36–37. This implies that Augustine believes that here he is speaking, at least in part, to unbelievers. Seeming to recall the preface, where he addressed those who contemned the “initium fidei,” he now asks why they would not “believe” what Scripture says about the Trinity instead of asking for the “most stringent proof” (“liquidissimam reddi sibi rationem,” *ibid.*). He has now shown them their own incapacity, without faith, to see what they would like to see. Thus, “when they have placed their unshakable trust in the holy scriptures as the truest of witnesses, let them pray and seek and live rightly, and in this way take steps to understand.” Let them join Augustine in “that tavern to which that Samaritan brought the man he found half-dead” (*De Trinitate* 15.50, CCSL 50A, p. 532, lines 77–78), let them become members of the “familia Christi” as Augustine is (*De Trinitate* 4.1). As for those who are believers already, Augustine’s soul, addressed in the soliloquy of section 50, stands in for all. Let Augustine’s soul, and all Christians, recognize if they can the difference between begetting of the word and the procession of love in the image which is the mind, and, if with Augustine, they are unable to fix their gaze in stable contemplation, but are troubled by bodily images, let them

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convicted of the need for ongoing conversion if the same arguments that can convince pagans are also useful for providing “understanding” for Christians. Christians should, therefore, not pride themselves, even on their own conversion.

But furthermore, who knows whose will is fixed in love? And who knows who needs to be persuaded to love God? What Christian is there who can claim complete and perfected conversion, or even observe this within him or herself? Our awareness of our own transformation is mediated by, and one might almost say, takes its content from, our being sacramentally incorporated into the one Body and thus from our status as a “member.” But our membership is based on no discernible human achievement: that is the point of leaving behind the Platonist divorce of an interior economy of attainment from an exterior economy of sacrifice. There is no purity of light or love within that is so clearly discernible that it, rather than simple membership in the visible Church, becomes the criterion for belonging. That would still be, in a way, displacing sacrifice from oneself. Participation in the sacrifice of Christ, such that one actually becomes oneself a sacrifice, is mediated only in the sacramental formation of a Body in which one is genuinely mixed in with some who will not be saved, and that may in fact be oneself! It comes with no guarantee. One cannot hold out for any marker that is not sacramental, for that would still be, in a way, displacing the sacrifice of Christ away from oneself, ultimately, in favor of some clearly discernible spiritual attainment of one’s own.

recognize their weakness, and let the understanding they have received prompt them to humility and to prayer. In closing the book with a prayer, Augustine brings both kinds of readers to the point where argument has done all it can do, and now one must beg God for what one is looking for (De Trinitate 15.51): “Let me remember You, let me understand You, let me love You. Increase these things in me until you refashion me entirely” (De Trinitate 15.51, CCSL 50A, p. 534, lines 21–23).

Gioia’s position, just cited in footnote 93 above, if pushed too far, could be taken to imply a state where one can almost verify one’s own status as being renewed, being sanctified, from the quality of love and gratitude that one is aware of in oneself.

I wonder if Gioia’s position, though willing to take over the language of the Church as the “location” of transformation, does not take the mysterious sacraminality of the Church seriously enough. The word “location” is cited by Gioia, Epistemology, p. 21, from Lewis Ayres’s article, “The Christological Context of Augustine’s De Trinitate XIII: Toward Relocating Books VIII-XV,” Augustinian Studies, 29 (1998), pp. 111–139, at p. 126. While Ayres’s article has many attractive features, I wonder if it is adequate to talk about the Church so emphatically as the “location” of purification or transformation without a corresponding and equally emphatic emphasis on its actual, mysterious, instrumentality. Of course, we are not ascending by our own efforts alone; it is the Head who is training the Body by an “exercitatio . . . which will enable us to progress from our obsession with the material to greater contemplation of the presence of the creator,” and this “exercitatio is undergone within the body of Christ” (p. 131). Yet this begs the question as to whether or not this path travelled, the paradigm of spiritual progress, is essentially the same ascent of purification proposed in Neoplatonists, only now the training is made possible by Christ who has also, in his dual structure of two natures, provided a “location” for this training in the Church, so that by faith we might advance from his visible human nature to his invisible divine nature. In Augustine and the Trinity, Ayres refers the reader back to this article (p. 168, n. 87).
Rowan Williams’s justly famous comment that in Augustine’s De Trinitate, “the image of God in us, properly so called, is not ‘the mind’ in and to itself . . . , but the mind of the saint—the awareness of someone reflectively living out the life of justice and charity” \(^{98}\) is beautiful and undoubtedly true, but, perhaps in spite of itself, it can slip almost imperceptibly into underwriting a split between the awareness of an inner process of transformation and renewal in faith, and an exterior economy of membership in the Church. One looks for a “reflective” awareness of love and renewal that is somehow additional to and deeper than one’s simple awareness of oneself as a member of the visible societas of the Church.

But who then is the saint? Whose conversion away from pride is so complete that they are not beset by the temptation that felled Porphyry only in Christian terms, such that one’s voluntary poverty, or one’s willingness to give one’s son or daughter to the life of virginity, or even one’s willingness to die for the faith, offers an occasion for pride and not humility?\(^{99}\) Who is the Christian whose very “understanding” of the mystery of the Trinity is not always in danger of lapsing back into an awareness of an accomplishment in which he or she can take pride? Where is the Christian whose self-awareness is not always in danger of lapsing back from “evening knowledge” into the “night” of the fallen angels? Paradoxically, something so august as awareness of the Trinity is coincident with and can never depart from one’s simple awareness of the flesh of Christ, that is, of one’s own incorporation into the visible Church. Paradoxically, far from cutting oneself off from the world, awareness of oneself as incorporated into the visible Church as incorporation into a “mysterious,” that is, “sacramental” economy of salvation, is the awareness of a mystery at work that transcends and defeats all language of spiritual accomplishment and makes one’s flesh, available, in Christ, as bread for the life of the world.\(^{100}\) Isn’t that, in the end, the only thing that can lend perspec-

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\(^{98}\) This is quoted by Gioia, Epistemology, p. 19 as foundational for his own position. Williams’s text goes on to say, “The saint’s mind images God because its attitude to its own life has become indistinguishable from its commitment to the eternal good; when it looks at itself, it sees the active presence of unreserved charity.” Both texts are from Rowan Williams, “The Paradoxes of Self-Knowledge in the De trinitate,” in Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J. et al (eds), Collectanea Augustiniana: Augustine, Presbyter Factus Sum (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 121–134, at p. 131. It is a very high standard for knowing oneself as the image of God if one must “see,” when one looks at oneself, the presence of “unreserved” charity. This really would seem to describe only Christ—unless you can include those who can know themselves as Christ in the only way, and insofar as, we can know this, namely, by sacramental inclusion as members in one Body.

\(^{99}\) See n. 81 above.

\(^{100}\) E.g., the connection between almsgiving and the Eucharist is evident in Augustine (see e.g. sermo 106.4; En. 3 in Ps. 103:13; etc.). More generally, see Gary Anderson, Sin: A History (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009) at pp. 148–149 (references to Ben Sira and Tobit) and at pp. 165–167 (Irenaeus). A more exhaustive discussion is forthcoming in Charity (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, [2013]). See also “Is Purgatory Biblical?” First Things (November, 2011), pp. 39–44, at p. 44.
tive on, and so challenge, the hegemonic claims that beset the human person from any and all of the kingdoms of this world? Isn’t that, in the end, the best apologetic of all?*

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