This classic book, now in a second, expanded edition, is an invitation to think along with major theologians and spiritual authors, men and women from the time of St. Augustine to the end of the 14th century, who profoundly challenge our (post)modern assumptions. Medieval theology was radically theocentric, Trinitarian, scriptural and sacramental, yet it also operated with a rich notion of human understanding. In a postmodern setting, when modern views on “autonomous reason” are increasingly questioned, it is fruitful to reengage with premodern thinkers who did not share our modern and postmodern presuppositions. Their different perspective does not antiquate their thought, as some of the “cultured despisers” of medieval thought might imagine. On the contrary, rather than rendering their views obsolete, it makes them profoundly challenging and enriching for theology today.

Rik van Nieuwenhove is an associate professor of medieval theology at Durham University. He has authored many articles and books on medieval theology and spirituality, including Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation (Oxford University Press, 2021) and Jan van Ruusbroec: Mystical Theologian of the Trinity (University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), and he has coedited The Theology of Thomas Aquinas (University of Notre Dame Press, 2005) and Late Medieval Mysticism of the Low Countries (Paulist Press, 2008).
To my daughters, Anna and Muireann
Intelligere enim est simpliciter veritatem intelligibilem apprehendere. Ratiocinari autem est procedere de uno intellecto ad alium, ad veritatem intelligibilem cognoscendam . . . ratiocinari comparatur ad intelligere sicut moveri ad quiescere, vel acquirere ad habere, quorum unum est perfecti, aliud autem imperfecti.

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a q. 79, a. 8
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Preface to the Second Edition

The first edition of this book was published ten years ago. It filled an obvious gap in the market, and it is fair to say that it was well received by both scholars and general readers interested in medieval thought. I was especially delighted to see it appear on reading lists in a variety of subjects that cover not just medieval theology but also medieval literature (English, French, . . .), philosophy and art.

This second edition has been expanded by more than one quarter, and the text of the first edition has been slightly revised in a number of places. Errors and infelicities throughout the text have been rectified and bibliographies updated.

The first edition operated with the assumption that today’s scholarly categories are often less than helpful when outlining medieval thought. Hence, besides mainstream theologians I included authors whom some would characterize today as mystical or spiritual writers. Similarly, while I included mostly authors writing in Latin, some writing in the vernacular also found a home in the book. Given this approach, it had been an oversight on my part not to include any women authors. In this revised edition, two chapters are therefore dedicated to female theologians: one features Hildegard of Bingen, who wrote in Latin, while the other considers the contribution of two beguines, Mechthild of Magdeburg and Hadewijch of Antwerp, who wrote in the vernacular (originally in Middle Low German and Middle Dutch, respectively). Few in the medieval period spoke so movingly as Hadewijch about the desire for God (a key theme in this book). Of course, many other female authors could have been selected for discussion. For reasons of constraints of space, I reluctantly decided not to deal with Julian of Norwich’s attractive theology, as it is well covered in scholarship, especially in the English-speaking world. Likewise, I had to leave out Catherine of Siena’s Dialogues, which offer a splendid example of how academic theology (such as Thomas Aquinas’s) found an expression in an existentially relevant key in vernacular writings. Medieval theology was
undoubtedly mainly an affair for men, but here too, as in other walks of life, women made a significant contribution, and the new chapters alert the reader to this.

Medieval thought was more plural than it is generally given credit for in another sense also. Latin theology was not only a Europe-wide enterprise, but it was itself in turn deeply indebted to Islamic and (to a lesser extent) Jewish scholarship. This influence occurred especially when the entire corpus of Aristotelian works was being received at the end of the 12th century and the beginning of the 13th. Given the nature of Aristotle’s writings, it made itself most acutely felt in the world of philosophy. Even so, it was of major theological significance, impacting discussions on the nature of the intellect, immortality, the nature of happiness, the eternity of the world and so forth. Although it was not possible to dedicate a chapter to Avicenna and Averroes, Islamic influence now receives some attention in the context of the discussion of the elements that shaped scholastic theology in the 13th century (Chapter 13).

There were other lacunae. Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure – understandably so – received considerable attention in the first edition. What was lacking, however, was an extensive discussion of some of the authors who exerted a major influence upon these two key thinkers. Hence, in this second edition, the reader benefits from a chapter on “Early Franciscan Theology” (Chapter 15) (drafted by my colleague Dr. William Crozier), which contains discussions of Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon and the influential Summa Halensis. A chapter on Albert the Great (Chapter 17) has also been included. He was the teacher of Thomas Aquinas and exerted a profound influence that lasted until the end of the medieval period (both in the school of “Albertism” and on Rhineland spirituality) and beyond.

I remain indebted in a variety of ways to the following colleagues: Lewis Ayres, John Betz, Patrick Connolly, Eamonn Conway, Boyd Taylor Coolman, William Crozier, Jos Decorte (†), Eugene Duffy, Rob Faesen, Russell Friedman, Karen Kilby, Katja Krause, Bernard McGinn, Simon Oliver, Philip L. Reynolds and Joseph Wawrykow.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Beatrice Rehl, senior editor at Cambridge University Press, for enthusiastically and expertly guiding this second edition toward publication.

This edition, as was the first, is an exercise, not in theological nostalgia, but in retrieval for the sake of renewal. In this spirit, I dedicate it to my two beautiful daughters, Anna and Muireann.
Abbreviations

BDW    Book of Divine Works (Hildegard)
Brevil. Breviloquium (Bonaventure)
CDH    Cur Deus Homo (Anselm of Canterbury)
Comm. In Commentary on John
Comm. on Rom Commentary on Romans
Confer. Conferences (John Cassian)
Confess. Confessions (Augustine)
Consol. The Consolation of Philosophy (Boethius)
CT     Compendium of Theology (Thomas Aquinas)
De Civ. Dei De Civitate Dei (Augustine)
De Doctr. Christ. De Doctrina Christiana (Augustine)
De Pot. De Potentia (Thomas Aquinas)
De Prim. Princ. De Primo Principio (Duns Scotus)
De Sacr. De Sacramentis Christiane Fidei (Hugh of St. Victor)
De Trin. De Trinitate
De Ver. De Veritate (Thomas Aquinas)
Dial.   The Dialogues (Gregory the Great)
Didasc. Didascalicon (Hugh of St. Victor)
DTD    De Tribus Diebus (Hugh of St. Victor)
Enarr. in Ps. Enarrationes in Psalms (Augustine)
Enchir. Enchiridion (Augustine)
Hex.    [Collationes in] Hexaemeron
Hom. Ev. Forty Homilies on the Gospels (Gregory the Great)
Hom. Ez. Homilies on Ezekiel (Gregory the Great)
Lect.   Lectura (Duns Scotus)
Mor.    Moralia in Iob (Gregory the Great)
MW     The Major Works – Anselm of Canterbury
### List of Abbreviations

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<td>Sent.</td>
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<td><em>Summa Theologiae</em> (Thomas Aquinas)</td>
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<td>TSB</td>
<td><em>Theologia Summi Boni</em> (Peter Abelard)</td>
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This book is written for anybody who wants to find out more about the ideas of the major theologians of the medieval period from the time of St. Augustine to the end of the 14th century. Rather than offering a survey of a myriad of theologians I focus on a limited number of key thinkers and expound their ideas in some depth. I opt for a text-focused approach – often quoting from primary texts – thus allowing the authors to speak for themselves as much as possible. I also incorporate brief comments on the historical and cultural background of each period, which will assist the reader in contextualizing the authors I discuss.

Although I would like to think this book is written in a clear style and explains complex issues in a lucid manner, this is not a textbook that offers a “standard” survey of key medieval thinkers, and this is for two reasons. First, one of the joys of writing this book was the opportunity it offered me to debunk “popular” accounts of medieval thought readers still come across in systematic textbooks, to which especially Augustine, Anselm and even Thomas Aquinas have fallen victim. Second, rather than offering disparate chapters on key figures I try throughout this book to make a sustained argument that contrasts (post)modern understandings of the nature of theology and human rationality with medieval ones. My overall aim, therefore, is to extend an invitation to think along with medieval authors. In a postmodern climate in which modern views on “autonomous reason” are increasingly questioned, it may prove fruitful to reengage with premodern thinkers who obviously did not share our modern and postmodern presuppositions. Their different perspective does not antiquate their thought, as some of the “cultured despisers” of medieval thought might imagine. On the contrary, rather than rendering their views obsolete it makes them profoundly challenging and enriching, perhaps more so than any postmodern critique of modernity could possibly be. For the postmodern, as a mirror image of the modern, is still determined by key assumptions of the modern.
Indeed, it could be plausibly argued that the postmodern critique is part and parcel of the history of modernity itself.

Medieval theology is radically theocentric, and God, for medieval theologians, is of course the Trinitarian God. This may not sound particularly surprising, but it is fundamentally different from those theologians who operate in the shadow of Schleiermacher (and his “anthropological turn” in theology), as well as from those who react against this anthropological turn by espousing a radical bibliocentric approach. This radical theocentric focus is both strengthened and exemplified by how medieval theologians conceived of human rationality. For them, human intelligence encompassed much more than reason. It also involved intellect. If reason is to be rational it has to have an openness toward that which transcends reason, and reason transcends itself by becoming intellect. This is a key theme to which I allude throughout this book.

Medieval theologians were desirous for God. Their whole thinking reached out toward the divine. There is a profound thrust toward the transcendent in medieval theology. In order to illustrate this I pay particular attention to how they conceived of the Christian life, especially their understanding of faith and love, two of the theological virtues. I also hope to show that the theocentric focus at the heart of medieval theology introduces an element of gratuitity in the medieval mindset that is rather at odds with modern notions of instrumentalization and functionalization. From Augustine’s invitation to “enjoy God solely” (frui Deo) to Meister Eckhart’s notion of detachment, the medieval period contains rich resources to critique modern utilitarian and instrumentalizing perspectives on the world.

Thomas Aquinas wrote that there are two central mysteries in the Christian faith: the mystery of the Trinity and the Incarnation. The doctrine of the Trinity is at the heart of medieval theology, and broad-sweeping and often repeated claims about the alleged emphasis upon the divine unity in Latin theology at the expense of a true Trinitarian understanding of God are to be discarded as scholarly untenable. Indeed, the mystery of the Trinity shapes every aspect of the theology and spirituality of most of the figures I discuss.

While the patristic period witnessed major debates on the nature of the Person of Christ, medieval theology was drawn more toward soteriological questions. Here Anselm’s analysis, often caricatured in modern scholarship, looms large. It is another aspect that retains my attention.

Discussions of the nature of the relation between faith and reason, the mystery of the Trinity, soteriology, Christian love and the transcendent
thrust of medieval thought run like a thread throughout my examination of the authors I have selected. I hope focusing on these themes will provide this book with a measure of cohesion and unity.

Any selection of authors to be included is somewhat arbitrary. The first major author is St. Augustine. It is hardly an exaggeration to describe medieval theology as a footnote to Augustine. In line with the overall aims of this book, other patristic authors such as Boethius, John Cassian and Pseudo-Dionysius receive a more cursory treatment.

It is probably true to say that Gregory the Great’s ideas were not all that original. Of course, and revealing, medieval authors did not consider originality a virtue in its own right. They were rather concerned with discovering truth. Gregory merits inclusion for the specific way he appropriates Augustinian views and adapts them for a more monastic setting. With Augustine, he shaped monastic theology well until the 11th century and beyond.

The Carolingian renaissance witnessed renewed theological activity in the West, and it is mostly remembered for the so-called Eucharistic controversy between Radbertus and Ratramnus. One theologian stood out amongst his peers, if only because he devised a daring synthesis of Augustinian and Greek theology. An engagement with the thought of John Scotus Eriugena is therefore well justified even if his influence on later medieval thought was admittedly somewhat limited.

Undoubtedly one of the towering figures of medieval theology is St. Anselm. His Proslogion (and its famous “ontological argument”), as well as his soteriology, are addressed at some length.

The 12th century is one of the most creative eras in the cultural history of the West. This is the time of Abelard and Heloise, the Cistercian revolution (Bernard of Clairvaux) and the School of St. Victor in Paris. The theology of Peter Abelard, Hugh and Richard of St. Victor is discussed, as well one of the most influential works of the medieval period: the Sentences by Peter Lombard. On one hand Peter Lombard’s synthesis looked back by incorporating the Augustinian legacy into his Sentences. Its more systematic approach was, however, forward-looking and explains why it became the key text in the theology faculties of the universities founded throughout the 13th century. In contrast, Hildegard of Bingen’s oeuvre is squarely set in the monastic culture of the 12th century. Defying categorization, it echoes Old Testament prophecy and vision.

Peter Lombard paved the way for scholastic theology, which flowered in the 13th century. This is the time of the rise of the universities, mendicant orders and, of course, the reception of the entire Aristotelian corpus,
facilitated by Islamic scholarship. The inclusion of Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus does not need justification. Their achievements, however, are incomprehensible without some knowledge of their immediate predecessors such as Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, Albert the Great and the highly influential Summa Halensis. Vernacular theology also came to its own, especially (initially) in the writings of women authors. In the 13th century their theology often took its lead from the Cistercian sources with which it was often closely associated. I discuss two examples – namely, Mechthild of Magdeburg and Hadewijch.

The Condemnations of 1277 are often seen as a caesura (perhaps more symptomatic than a causal factor) in the history of scholastic theology. While the impact of Duns Scotus’s contribution to early modern developments is a matter for debate, most scholars agree that William of Ockham’s thought originated in an intellectual climate very different from that of the 13th century. As I hope to explain, the most remarkable change is the more analytical and less intellective notion of theological reason.

It is inaccurate to claim that scholasticism came to an end with the arrival of nominalism. It is, however, fair to say that the theological scene in the 14th and 15th centuries is more pluralist and divided and less systematic or encompassing than before. The nature of reason (ratio) changes, and hence also its relation with faith. Metaphysics and theology and even theology and spirituality are increasingly considered separate and not just distinct from one another. Two important authors of this period (Meister Eckhart and Ruusbroec) are discussed so as to illustrate the ongoing vibrancy of medieval spirituality.
PART I

The Legacy of the Fathers
Augustine of Hippo

Life and Sources

Augustine was born in AD 354 in Thagasta (in what is now Algeria), North Africa, the son of a Christian mother and a pagan father. He studied rhetoric in Carthage, acquiring a profound knowledge of classical Latin literature, especially Cicero and Virgil. He became a gifted teacher of literature in Carthage, Rome and Milan. From 373 onward, Augustine, “living outside of himself,” alienated from God – who was “more inward than his most inward part,” as he recalled later in his Confessions (Confess. iii.6 [11]) – was drawn into the circles of Manichaeism. The term Manichaeism is derived from Mani (AD 216–76), the Persian who founded this Gnostic religion. It was an extremely dualistic worldview with a very negative evaluation of matter, body and sexuality. The followers of the Manichean religion were divided into two classes: the elect, who had to remain celibate, and the auditors (or hearers), who were allowed sexual intercourse as long as it did not lead to offspring (for procreation contributed to the imprisonment of souls in the physical world). Augustine became an auditor in the Manichean religion, much to the heartbreak of his mother. After nine years, Augustine grew disillusioned with Manicheanism. In 383, he traveled to Rome, and it was there, at the age of thirty, that he gradually abandoned Manichean views, lapsing into a period of skepticism (Confess. v.10 [19]).

While in Milan, Augustine was to encounter a person who left an indelible mark on him: St. Ambrose, the local bishop. It was Ambrose who was to draw Augustine closer to the Catholic faith. Of particular significance, Augustine informs us, was the ways in which Ambrose interpreted the Scriptures. Once Ambrose demonstrated that difficult passages from the Old Testament could be legitimately interpreted figuratively, one of the main objections Augustine had long harbored against the Catholic faith vanished. He then decided to become a catechumen in the Catholic Church. It was at this time that Augustine, still searching for truth,
discovered Neoplatonic philosophy. This too was to have a major formative impact on Augustine’s intellectual outlook.

Neoplatonism is a philosophy that revived Platonist tendencies in philosophy from the 3rd to 6th centuries AD. The major figures are the school’s founder, Plotinus (ca. 205–70), Porphyry (ca. 232–301) and Proclus (410–85). Augustine must have read (in translation) some extracts from Plotinus’s main work, The Enneads, and a number of works from Porphyry. In Neoplatonism we discern the following characteristics. First, there is a strong emphasis on the One – the Absolute or the Good from which all things emanate through a hierarchy. This Absolute principle is beyond being and thought. Within the divine realm is a hierarchy; the One is absolute and transcendent; it is supreme goodness. Somewhat lower is Mind or Nous. Finally, there is Soul, which has the power to produce matter. The emphasis upon hierarchy within the Godhead distinguishes the Neoplatonic understanding of the divinity from the Christian view of God as three equal Persons in one Godhead. From the divine realm the material world flows or emanates. In the process of emanation there is gradual loss, for every effect is slightly inferior to its cause (the higher level is the cause of whatever is immediately lower). Again, this is different from a Christian understanding, in which God directly creates all things out of nothing rather than through an elaborate hierarchy. Human beings have to transcend the multiplicity of the material world in order to achieve union with the One. This entails a practice of purification and introversion. This union with the One is being achieved in transient ecstasy (e.g., Enneads 6.9.9).

Plotinus’s mysticism is private and individual. It is also fairly intellectual. Christians will correct this view by emphasizing the role of grace and community. Despite the important differences between Neoplatonic philosophy and Christianity (above all Christianity’s emphasis upon the reality of the Incarnation), Neoplatonism was to exert a lasting influence upon Augustine. A number of aspects need to be mentioned.

First, the emphasis upon the utter transcendence of the One was to strengthen further apophatic approaches to the Christian understanding of God (itself heir to the Hebrew emphasis upon the unknowability of God). Second, it contributed to an exemplarist metaphysics. This warrants some clarification. Plato, the father of Western philosophy, had struggled with the problem of how we can attain certain knowledge in a changeable and material world. As is well known, the Greeks had made significant progress in the area of mathematics and geometry. Taking his cue from the certainty we can attain in the immaterial, theoretical world of mathematics, Plato had argued that all things (a tree, a dog, a woman, the legal system)
participate in a transcendent, ideal world of spiritual forms. Our material world is therefore a mere reflection of this perfect world of forms. (Incidentally, Aristotle accepted the notion of forms, but he claimed that these forms only exist in material things, rather than in a transcendent realm—a view Thomas Aquinas would later adopt.) The spiritual forms or Ideas (the perfect, spiritual archetypes, models or exemplars of things) inform the world: a dog is a dog, and not a tree, because its matter is “informed” by the Idea of “caninehood.” These forms shape all things in the world and are the foundation of our certain knowledge of them.

Plotinus claimed that these divine ideas are found in the Nous, or the divine Mind, the second hypostasis within the Divinity. For Augustine, the divine ideas, models or exemplars (aeternae rationes) of all created things are contained in the Word, the second person of the Trinity. “There is but one Word of God, through which all things were made (John 1:1–6), which is unchanging truth, in which all things are primordially and unchangingly together, not only things that are in the whole of this creation, but things that have been and will be” (De Trin. iv. 3).

This doctrine of exemplarism allowed later theologians to connect the theology of the Trinity (especially the generation of the Word from the Father) with the theology of creation. It assisted them in seeing the whole of creation as a marvelous reflection of the beauty of the divine Word.

Another important view Augustine inherited from the “Platonists” (Neoplatonism is, of course, a modern scholarly term) is the notion that evil is absence of goodness. Evil is a defect of being and goodness in the same way that natural evil (e.g., blindness) is an absence of goodness (e.g., sight) (cf. Confess. vii.12.18 and De Civ. Dei xi.9 and 22: “evil’ is merely a name for the privation of good”). Given the fact that everything God created is something (good), God is not directly responsible for the evil in this world. Augustine was to use this doctrine to explain how evil that occurs in this world is not caused by God. This proved important for his departure from Manichaicism. Finally, there is a strong sense of longing for the immaterial, transcendent realm and for fulfillment beyond the material world—a longing that strongly appealed to Augustine.

During this time, Augustine also submerged himself in the Scriptures. One day, while sitting in the garden of his house in Milan, he heard a child singing Tolle et lege, “Pick up and read.” Augustine opened St. Paul’s letters and his eyes fell on Rom. 13:13–14, in which St. Paul admonishes his readers to abandon their orgies and drunkenness, requesting them to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. At that very moment all the shadows of doubts were dispelled (Confess. vii.12 [29]). He gave up his worldly career and started
writing his first works, including the *Soliloquies*. Sometime later, during the Easter Vigil of 387, Augustine was baptized by Ambrose. He returned to North Africa, where he was ordained in 391. Five years later, he became the bishop of Hippo, a position he held until his death in 430. Apart from the *Confessions* his most important works are *The City of God* (*De Civitate Dei*), *The Trinity* (*De Trinitate*), *On Christian Doctrine* (*De Doctrina Christiana*), *Faith, Hope and Charity* (*Enchiridion*), sermons, a range of anti-Pelagian, anti-Manichaeist and anti-Donatist writings, and commentaries on the Scriptures, including on St. John, Genesis and the Psalms — that is, *Expositions of the Psalms* (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*).

**The Relation Between Philosophy and Theology, Reason and Faith**

In his search for truth, Augustine engaged deeply with the philosophy of antiquity. This was to shape the way he viewed the relation between faith and reason and between theology and philosophy. Philosophy, which to him is a way of life rather than a discipline, is important as a *praeparatio evangelica*, a preparation for the Christian religion. Christianity is, however, the *vera philosophia*, the true philosophy. Again, although reason has its part to play in helping us understand our faith, it is the total relation to the soul that interests Augustine. Thus, it is not possible to separate Augustine’s theology from philosophical considerations and vice versa. The attempt to attain fulfillment by merely relying on an independent philosophy would have struck him as undesirable.

His views on faith and reason have acquired a new relevance in our postmodern times, now that the modern Cartesian understanding of reason in terms of utter autonomy has been questioned. In a short treatise, *Faith in the Unseen*, he criticizes those people “who maintain that the Christian religion should be despised rather than embraced, because what it presents is not something tangible but something that demands faith in matters which lie beyond human vision.” In the treatise, Augustine refutes this positivistic view by pointing out the fiduciary nature of human rationality and the significance of beliefs for human interactions. In *The Advantage of Believing* 12.26, he states that absolutely nothing in society would be safe if we decided not to believe anything that we cannot hold as evident. How can we procure convincing evidence of genuine love or friendship between people? The consequence of a radical positivistic stance would be “that human relationships are thrown into chaos” (*Faith in the Unseen*, 2.4). Radical skepticism is
equally untenable: it is, after all, impossible to doubt everything, for when we doubt we always presuppose something as given. In a passage that may have inspired Descartes’s Meditations, who, however, used it for radically different purposes, Augustine argues:

If you are not sure what I am saying and have doubts about whether it is true, at least be sure that you have no doubts about having doubts about this; and, if it is certain that you do have doubts, ask where this certainty comes from . . . Everyone who understands that he has doubts is understanding something true, and he is certain about this thing that he understands. He is certain therefore about something true. So then, everyone who has doubts whether there is such a thing as truth has something true in himself about which he cannot have any doubts, and there cannot be anything true except with truth. And so, one who has been able to have doubts about anything has no business to have doubts about truth.¹

Augustine developed the same theme in De Civitate Dei x1.26, in language that clearly influenced Descartes (“‘If I am mistaken, I exist.’ A non-existent being cannot be mistaken; therefore I must exist, if I am mistaken.”) For Augustine, radical skepticism and universal doubt are impossible. Every doubt is predicated on accepting something as true. It is intellectually incoherent to claim that we can doubt everything. Similarly, radical positivism, which only accepts those elements to be true that can be empirically shown to be true, is not a viable intellectual or existential option. The two extremes of radical skepticism and positivism have in common that they both deny important fiduciary aspects of the human search for meaning and truth.

In this context it may prove useful to draw attention to a distinction Augustine makes between reason and understanding or intellect (intellectus). It is characteristic of the human being to reason; however, the knowledge acquired by reason, and the glimpse of truth thus gained, is understanding. This distinction between reason and understanding or intellect will prove highly influential in later thinkers.

GRACE AND OUR SEARCH FOR GOD

Augustine was deeply aware of his powerlessness in turning toward God. He felt that only God could (and eventually did) pull him out of the abyss of sin. Sinful human beings, subject to selfishness from the earliest moments of infancy, are the prisoners of habits that become second nature. Only grace can restore authentic freedom. According to Augustine, Adam and Eve

initially enjoyed the divine assistance of grace and justice. However, when they sinned and turned away from God, they lost this divine assistance. Henceforward, human nature becomes “fallen.” It is not utterly corrupt, but it has lost its original focus and justice. Because every member of the human family shares in Adam’s human nature, all of humanity shares in the consequences of this Fall. We are all in need of the aid of divine grace to restore us to our pristine condition, and without this free gift of grace (which has become available in Christ’s saving work), we cannot be redeemed.

Given the fact that some people die as unreconciled sinners, Augustine takes for granted that not all will be saved; only some belong to the elect. Initially, such as in his Propositions on Romans, §60, he taught that God freely bestows his grace upon those who would put it to good use. Given God’s foreknowledge, he elects those whom he foreknew would believe in him. But then Augustine realized that this view effectively made God’s grace dependent on the response of human beings – and this he felt to be unacceptable. So he later revised his teaching and argued that God freely bestows his grace upon some (and thereby will save them) and not upon others, and no reason can be given for this choice. This is the teaching of predestination.

Augustine’s views hardened through his dispute with Pelagius, a British lay theologian who had a more positive understanding of human nature. Pelagianism refers to the doctrine that human beings can achieve their salvation by their own powers. Original sin is no more than Adam’s bad example, which can be nullified if we follow the example of Christ. Original sin refers to the universality of sin, which results in a social habit after Adam had set a bad example. Death, for Pelagius, was a biological necessity, not a punishment from God. Against these views Augustine argued that grace is needed, even just to turn our will away from evil toward God. Original sin refers to an inherited defect that impairs the freedom of the will. Death is a punishment for sin. No pain or loss is undeserved. All of us are guilty of sin, and all of us therefore stand under judgment. In Augustine’s analysis, the issue is not why God fails to save all. Rather, the issue is, why does God bother saving some? The practice of infant baptism, so Augustine contended, illustrates that people are in need of grace even before they commit actual and deliberate sins.

Some readers might perhaps be forgiven for thinking that Pelagius’s views appear at first more attractive, perhaps even more “modern.” They seem to safeguard human freedom more than Augustine’s. Moreover, can it not be argued that Augustine’s God is somewhat arbitrary, electing some and not others?
A number of points need to be made so as to avoid a simplistic interpretation. To appreciate Augustine’s views, it may be useful to remember that Christianity sees the relationship between God and humanity in terms of love. Nobody, however, has, strictly speaking, an entitlement to the love of anybody else. You cannot force the other to love you. Love has to be freely given, and the same applies to God’s grace: it is, quite literally, given gratuitously. As he puts it in De Trin. IV.2, grace is “not paid out as something earned but is given gratis; that is why it is called grace.” Similarly, faith is a gift from God. It is not something we can attain by our own efforts. Moreover, as Luther realized, the notion that we cannot merit God’s favor by our own initiative is not an infringement of human freedom; it is actually liberating. Pelagianism puts a terrible burden on the human person that is impossible to meet. Finally, we need to be careful about what exactly we mean when talking of human freedom. Augustine distinguishes between the freedom of choice (liberum arbitrium) and genuine freedom (libertas). Freedom of choice is not freedom in the full sense of the word. The latter freedom (libertas) refers to our orientation toward God through the enabling operation of divine grace upon our will. This libertas, or God-given freedom, is not a diminishment of our human freedom but a restoration and fulfillment. It was this kind of freedom, not the freedom of choice, that Adam lost in the Garden of Eden and that Christ restored. It can be argued that the problem of a tension between grace and freedom does not exist for Augustine. As he sees it, grace does not diminish human freedom but actually enables it. True freedom for humans is God-given freedom. In comparison, freedom of choice is but a pale privilege. In short, Augustine’s pessimism – or realism? – in relation to the impotence of fallen humanity to effect its own salvation is counterbalanced by a profound sense of God’s powerful grace.

Even when we take into consideration Augustine’s analysis of the gratuity of God’s operation in us as existentially valid, I suspect most readers may still harbor a number of reservations. The key issue is predestination of some and not others:

God almighty, the supreme and supremely good creator of all beings, who assists and rewards good wills, while he abandons and condemns the bad . . . surely did not fail to have a plan whereby he might complete the fixed number of citizens predestined in his wisdom, even out of the condemned human race. He does not now choose them for their merits, seeing that the whole mass of humankind has been condemned as it were in its infected root; . . . each person can recognize that

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2 See Mary T. Clark, Augustine of Hippo (New York: Continuum, 2000), 50, with a reference to Contra duas epistolas Pelagianorum ad Bonifacium Papam, 1.25.
his deliverance from evils is due to an act of kindness freely granted, not owed to him by right, when he is exempted from sharing the final destiny of those whose just punishment he had shared. (De Civ. Dei xiv.26)

All of humankind shares in original sin through Adam, the “infected root.” Therefore, all deserve to remain separated from God. However, God bestows his grace upon some and not others. When we seek to fathom why mercy is given to some, we cannot say. For the gratuitous nature of grace precludes the view that this bestowal is based on any prevenient merit. As Augustine argued in Letter 194, when we seek to know how mercy is deserved, we find no merit because there is none: grace would be made void if it were not freely given but awarded to merit. Of course, only God knows who the chosen few are. In my view, the key problem is not the abolition of human freedom, as is often alleged, but rather Augustine’s view that God’s predestination is not universal. Undoubtedly Augustine did consider this kind of reservation unconvincing: “Who but a fool could think that God is unfair, whether he passes adverse judgment on one who deserves it or shows mercy to one who is unworthy?” (Enchir. 25 [98]).

In scriptural terms, Augustine can appeal to the favoritism Yahweh shows toward some and not others (e.g., Jacob over Esau, cf. Mal. 1:2–3 and Rom. 9:13). In the New Testament too are a number of texts that also seem to support Augustine’s views on predestination, such as Rom. 8:28–30 and Eph. 1:4. On the other hand, at times Augustine has to do violence to the natural meaning of the text in order to maintain his teaching. He interprets 1 Tim. 2:4 (“God wants everyone to be saved”) to mean that “nobody is saved except those whom he wills to be saved” (Enchir. 27 [103]). As we will see, in the 9th century a major controversy broke out over the issue of predestination, with Gottschalk claiming that Augustine had taught a double predestination, one toward heaven and the other toward hell. Calvin too was to radicalize ideas in his theory of double predestination. Augustine’s view also entails that unbaptized babies are condemned because they share in the collective alienation that originated with Adam. This view, considered problematic, forced the Church in the Middle Ages to develop the doctrine of limbo.

Augustine and the Bible

We have already touched on the topic of Augustine’s interpretation of the Scriptures. Some aspects of Augustine’s approach to the Scriptures may strike us as quite modern. For instance, he expresses his annoyance at Christians who mistake what the Scriptures may say about a certain topic
for solid, scientific knowledge. It is “quite disgraceful and disastrous,” he writes, when non-Christians hear Christians talk nonsense about scientific topics, unjustifiably claiming the authority of the Scriptures for their erroneous views. “What is so vexing is not that misguided people should be laughed at, as that our authors should be assumed by outsiders to have held such views, and, to the great detriment of those about whose salvation we are so concerned, should be written off and consigned to the waste paper basket as so many ignoramuses” (The Literal Meaning of Genesis 1.19 [39]). The Scriptures are not manuals on cosmology or science. But there are also ways in which Augustine’s views on the Scriptures are rather different from ours, and this is where they can begin to challenge ours.

For Augustine, the Scriptures are the word of God. They form a coherent whole, and he is not shy about using one passage to throw light on an entirely different passage. He also resists an exclusively literal reading of the Scriptures, happily espousing allegory and typology. In Enarr. in Ps. 103 (Expos. 1.13), he defines allegory as follows: “Something is said to be an allegory when one meaning seems to be conveyed by the words, and a different meaning is symbolised for our minds.” A number of examples clarify this. In his book The Literal Meaning of Genesis 1.6 [12], Augustine comments on the opening verse of Genesis (“In the beginning [In principio] God made heaven and earth . . . And the Spirit of God was being borne over the waters.”). Augustine takes principium (“the beginning” but also “the principle”) to refer to the Word, in whom God the Father creates all things, while the Spirit is, of course, taken as a reference to the third Person of the Trinity. As long as interpretations are in accordance with the Rule of Faith they are legitimate (De Civ. Dei xi.32) and not arbitrary. For Augustine, the Bible is not primarily a historical book, although it does contain a lot of historically accurate accounts. The Scriptures are designed to nourish devout hearts. Just as the created world reveals and points to its Creator, so too the words of the Scripture are deeply symbolic, referring to a more profound reality. As Augustine knew from his own journey, a literalist interpretation of the Scriptures often stands in the way of faith.

In his disputes with the Manicheans, Augustine explains that many of the Old Testament events prefigure Christ and his Church. This is typology. An obvious example is how Adam prefigures Christ and Eve the Church:

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3 All translations by Edmund Hill from Saint Augustine on Genesis (New York: New City Press, 2002).
Adam was a type of the one who was to come, and when Adam slept, Eve was formed from his side. Adam prefigured Christ, and Eve prefigured the Church, which is why she was called the mother of the living (cf. Gen. 3:20). When was Eve fashioned? While Adam slept. And when did the Church’s sacraments flow forth from Christ’s side? While he slept on the Cross. (Enarr. in Ps. 40:9 [10])

As Eve was formed from the side of sleeping Adam (Gen. 2:21), so too the Church was formed from the side of Christ (cf. John 19:34). In a commentary on one of the verses from the Psalms, Augustine draws on Genesis and John’s Gospel to weave an intricate and suggestive tapestry of theological interpretation. Again, this is not an arbitrary move: it is a Christocentric hermeneutic that remains faithful to the Rule of Faith.

**CHRIST, SALVATION AND CHURCH**

Augustine develops a number of soteriological themes. One of these is the release from Satan’s bondage, explored in *De Trin.* xiii.16–18 and elsewhere. Augustine explains that by divine justice the human race was handed over to the power of the devil. Christ’s humility neutralized the pride of sin, and as Christ had not committed any sin and yet was killed, the devil had to release humanity from his captivity. Anselm of Canterbury was to take issue with this account. It is, however, not all that important in Augustine’s understanding of how Christ effected our salvation. Of much greater significance is the way we become incorporated into Christ and emulate his humility.

The theme of the humility of God (*humilitas Dei*, in *De Trin.* iv.4) runs throughout Augustine’s oeuvre. Probably reflecting his own journey, Augustine is very much aware that there is something deeply humbling about having to accept that the transcendent God became human and died for us on the Cross. In this context, Augustine adopts the patristic theme of exchange: “becoming a partaker of our mortality he made us partakers of his divinity” (*De Trin.* iv.4).5 Another theme he develops, and one that resonated with the early Edward Schillebeeckx, is the notion that Christ is the sacrament of our salvation (*De Trin.* iv.6). Christ’s death and resurrection draw us toward a transformation that shares in and is made possible by his saving activity. The death of Christ can refer in a symbolic way to our death to sin – that is, repentance over our sins. Christ’s death can also assist us in approaching our own sufferings and death as a participation in Christ. Similarly, Christ’s resurrection can refer to our inner resurrection –

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that is, our inner spiritual renewal – but it also prefigures and pledges our own bodily resurrection. In *Enchir.* 52, we read: “just as he suffered a true death, in us there is true forgiveness of sins, and just as his resurrection was true, so also is our justification true.” Thus, the life and death of Christ is existentially relevant for us here and now: Christians are called to “live within these mysteries” (*Enchir.* 53).

A particularly fruitful theme – and a very biblical one – in Augustine’s soteriology is that of sacrifice (*De Trin.* iv.15–19 and *De Civ. Dei* x). It is worthwhile to elaborate on this as it also has profound implications for Christian spirituality.

In *De Civ. Dei* x.5, Augustine argues that God does not require sacrifices for his own gratification (“it is man, not God who is benefited by all the worship which is rightly offered to God”). Quoting Ps. 16:2, he contends that it would be foolish to assume that God needs our sacrifices: it is we, not God, who benefit from the worship offered to God. The purpose of past and present offerings is that “we may cleave to God and seek the good of our neighbour for the same end. Thus the visible sacrifice is the sacrament, the sacred sign, of the invisible sacrifice” (*Sacrificium ergo uisibile inuisibilis sacrificii sacramentum id est sacrum signum est*). God does not want the sacrifice of a slaughtered animal but he does desire “the sacrifice of a broken heart” (cf. Ps. 51:17), and this is the invisible, inner sacrifice Augustine has in mind. “Thus,” Augustine writes, “the true sacrifice is offered in every act which is designed to unite us to God in a holy fellowship, every act, that is, which is directed to that final Good which makes possible our true felicity” (*De Civ. Dei* x.6). True sacrifices are “acts of compassion, whether towards ourselves or towards our neighbours, when they are directed towards God.” In offering our sacrifices “we shall be aware that visible sacrifice must be offered only to him, to whom we ourselves ought to be an invisible sacrifice in our hearts.” So what matters is the intention with which we make our offerings. Clearly Augustine has a very broad understanding of the notion of sacrifice: in that sense, our body can be a sacrifice when we discipline it for the sake of God. Even more so, the soul can be an instrument of sacrifice when it offers itself up to God, abandoning worldly desires and becoming transformed in submission to God (*De Civ. Dei* x.6).

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8 *Ibid.,* x.6.  
9 *Ibid.,* x.19.
The true nature of sacrifice can only be properly grasped from the perspective of the Cross and its reenactment in the Eucharist:

The whole redeemed community, that is to say, the congregation and fellowship of the saints, is offered to God as a universal sacrifice through the great Priest who offered himself in his suffering for us – so that we might be the body of so great a head – under the form of a servant. For it was this form he offered, and in this form he was offered, because it is under this form that he is the Mediator, in this form he is the Priest, in this form he is the Sacrifice . . . This is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, a sacrament well-known to the faithful where it is shown to the Church that she herself is offered in the offering which she presents to God. (De Civ. Dei x.6)

This is a dense quotation, as it weaves together Christological, Eucharistic, and ecclesiological themes. A key aspect of the argument is the living link between Christ and his Church. For Augustine, Church refers to the community of the believers. This community is the body of Christ (cf. Rom. 12:3ff.). This intimate union between Christ and his Church is established in and through the Eucharist, which reenacts the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. Thus, on the Cross, Christ is both the priest who makes the offering and the offering itself (oblatio). The daily sacrifice of the Church – the Eucharist – is the sacramental symbol of this (cuius rei sacramentum), and the Church, being the body of Christ, learns to offer itself through him (De Civ. Dei x.20).

It has become clear that Augustine establishes a close link between the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, the Eucharistic sacrifice and the community of the Church. These three themes are connected by the notion of the Body of Christ. This notion can refer to the body of the Incarnate Word, the historical Jesus. It can also refer to the Eucharistic body of Christ. Finally, it can refer to the community of the believers who are vivified by the Holy Spirit. In Sermon 272, preached to newly baptized Christians about to receive the Eucharistic bread for the first time, Augustine put it memorably: “Be then what you see and receive what you are.” Through partaking in the body and blood of Christ we ourselves become the one body of Christ. As Christ addresses Augustine in the Confessions: “you will not change me into you like the food your flesh eats, but you will be changed into me” (Confess. VII.x [16]).

The spiritual implications of this theology are significant, for it allows us to consider our own afflictions as a participation in the redemptive suffering of Christ. Moreover, given the intimate link between Christ and his Church, Augustine makes the radical claim that the risen Christ continues to suffer in his members:
If he is the head, we are the limbs. The whole Church, spread abroad everywhere, is his body, and of that body he is the head ... Accordingly, when we hear his voice, we must hearken to it as coming from both head and body; for whatever he suffered, we too suffered in him, and whatever we suffer, he too suffers in us. Think of an analogy: if your head suffers some injury, can your hand be unaffected? Or if your hand is hurt, can your head be free from pain? ... When any one of your members suffers, all the other members hasten to help the one that is in pain. This solidarity meant that when Christ suffered, we suffered in him; and it follows that now that he has ascended into heaven, and is seated at the Father’s right hand, he still undergoes in the person of his Church whatever it may suffer amid the troubles of this world, whether temptations, or hardship, or oppression. (Enarr. in Ps. 62:2)

In Enarr. in Ps. 61:4, drawing on Col. 1:24, Augustine makes the same point: our own sufferings can be interpreted as contributing to the universal passion of Christ: “He suffered as our head, and he suffers in his members, which means in us.” This theology does not legitimize our sufferings, but it allows us to see them in a different light: as somehow sharing in Christ’s saving activity. These soteriological ideas were to influence many key authors after Augustine such as Anselm, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas.

TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

Augustine’s work De Trinitate, consisting of fifteen books, is his most original and searching contribution to the understanding of the Christian God: “Nowhere else is a mistake more dangerous, or the search more laborious, or discovery more advantageous” (1.5). The work, one of the most genial theological books in history, can be roughly divided into two halves: Books i–vii, and Books ix–xv, with Book viii as an important transitional chapter.10

In De Trin., Augustine propounds many original theses that left a deep imprint on later theological thinking in the West. Indeed, it is fair to say that Trinitarian theology in the West is but a footnote to Augustine’s seminal work. Key questions addressed in the book include: How can we claim that the three Persons are distinct when the Trinity works inseparably in everything God does?11 How can there be distinction between the

10 See Lewis Ayres, Augustine and the Trinity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) for a classic study of Augustine’s Trinitarian theology.

11 Augustine clearly states that “just as Father and Son and Holy Spirit are inseparable, so do they work inseparably” (De Trin. 1.7). This view safeguards monotheism. It does not, however, exclude the three Persons from acting inseparably in distinct ways (as, for instance, in the Incarnation).
three Persons given the oneness of God? How are Son and Holy Spirit distinct from one another? How can there be equality between the three Persons given the fact that the Father is the origin of the other Persons? How can we square texts from the New Testament that seem to suggest the inferiority of Christ with his supposed equality with God the Father – an issue of particular importance given the Arian challenge?

The last question can be relatively easily answered. Appealing to Phil. 2:6, on the self-emptying of the Son, Augustine argues that “in the form of a servant which he took, he [= the Son] is the Father’s inferior; in the form of God in which he existed even before he took this other [form] he is the Father’s equal” (De Trin. 1.14). In short, distinguishing between the human and divine natures of Christ (as the Council of Chalcedon was to do in AD 451), Augustine argues that texts that seem to attribute inferiority to the Son should be understood as referring to the human nature of Christ, not to his divine nature. This takes the sting out of the Arian critique. This allows Augustine to speak, for instance, of “a crucified God” (deus crucifixus), “owing to the weakness of flesh, though, not to the strength of [the] godhead” (De Trin. 1.28).

Books II–IV are mainly concerned with the divine missions, the sendings of Son (Incarnation) and Holy Spirit (such as at Pentecost). This brings us to Augustine’s first, major contribution to later theology of the Trinity. For Augustine, everything we say about the inner nature of the Trinity has to be based on how the triune God reveals himself in the history of salvation – namely, in the sendings of the Son and the Holy Spirit. In Rahner’s terms, the economic Trinity reveals the immanent Trinity. This is why Book IV contains an extended soteriological discussion, which illustrates how the mission of the Son reveals the eternal generation of the Son within the Trinity.

Books V–VII deal with the linguistic difficulties we encounter when speaking of the Trinity. Here we find, for instance, elaborate discussions of the notion of “Personhood.” Augustine puts a distinct emphasis upon divine simplicity. In Aristotelian language, there is no distinction in God between his essence (what he is) and his “accidents.” When we call something “simple,” we are effectively saying that there is no difference between what it is and what it has (cf. De Civ. Dei xi.10). Whereas goodness, wisdom, justice and other attributes do not belong to our essence as human beings – we may have them as attributes – in God they do.

But then a question arises. How can we square divine simplicity with a distinction between the three Persons? Augustine’s answer is to distinguish the Persons from one another in terms of their relationships.
“Although being Father is different from being Son, there is no difference of substance, because they are not called these things substance-wise but relationship-wise” (*non secundum substantiam dicuntur sed secundum relationium*) (*De Trin. v.6*). Although the Cappadocians had developed similar ideas, Augustine was the first in the West to introduce this notion. In this view, God is utterly “simple”; his being is identical with his attributes. Only the relations in which each of the Persons stands to the others are distinct. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God, but the Father is not the Son, and neither of them is the Holy Spirit (*De Civ. Dei* xi.10; *De Trin. v.9*).

The Arian critics had argued that the distinctions within the Godhead were either of substance (which would mean there are three gods) or accidental or nonessential (which would imply that there is no real distinction between Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Against this, Augustine argued that the divine Persons were subsistent relations—that is, Father, Son and Spirit are relations in the sense that whatever each of them is, he is in relation to one or both of the others. “Father” and “Son” are co-relative terms, “opposites” in relational language. Only the mutual relations allow us to distinguish between the Persons within the Godhead: the Father is distinguished as Father because he begets the Son, and the Son is distinguished as Son because he is begotten. The Holy Spirit similarly is distinguished as he is “bestowed” by them; he is their common gift, a kind of communion of Father and Son.

It is clear that neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit is the Father, as there is a distinction between being an originator and being originated from. But how do we distinguish the Son from the Holy Spirit, seeing that the Holy Spirit too comes forth from the Father, as it says in the Gospel (John 15:26) (cf. *De Trin. v.15*)? Augustine’s answer, which was to shape the whole of Latin theology—and cause a rift with the Eastern Orthodox Church—was that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son (*Filioque*). Augustine can undoubtedly appeal to the biblical witness to make this case. His espousal of the *Filioque* follows from his key presupposition that whatever we say about the inner Trinity has to be based on the revelation of the Persons in the history of salvation. Given the fact that scriptural texts indicate that the Son too sends the Holy Spirit, it stands to reason that, within the inner nature of the Trinity, the Son too is involved in the spiration of the Holy Spirit.

In talking about the Persons of the Trinity we need to make an important distinction between those words that are relationship words—and hence can only be said about one of the divine Persons—and words that
can refer to the divine being, the whole Trinity. For instance, only the Second Person of the Trinity can be called “Son” or “Word.” These are what we would call “personal names,” as they are used relationship-wise (relative intelligitur) while other words such as “wisdom” or “goodness,” are said about the divine being (essentialiter) (De Trin. vii.3), although they are associated with one Person in particular. In later terminology we would say that calling the Son “Wisdom” is a case of appropriation. Word and Wisdom are closely related in meaning. Only “Word” is a relationship term – that is, it contains an intrinsic reference to one of the other Persons (the Son is the Word of the Father), while the whole Trinity is “wise” (De Trin. vii.3). As Augustine explains, Father and Son are together one wisdom and one being because of divine simplicity (in which “to be” is the same as “to be wise”); they are not, however, both Word or Son. Only the Second Person is Son, which is a term of relationship (relative dici).

What about the word “Person” itself? It is a special case. “Person” is clearly used for all three within the Trinity. It is therefore not a relationship word. When we call the Father a “Person,” he is so called “with reference to himself, not with reference to the Son or the Holy Spirit” (De Trin. vii.11). In that sense the word “Person” is like the word “God” – another non-relationship word. And yet the word “Person” is used for Father, Son and Holy Spirit each as the only term to denote what the three are in their distinctiveness. Hence we speak of three Persons, not three Gods. Augustine concludes that we retain the word “Person” for each of the divine three, so “as not to be reduced to silence when we are asked three what” (De Trin. vii.11).

The second part (Books ix–xv) treats of the image of the Trinity in the human soul. This too is a major innovation, although it was often misunderstood in the later tradition, such as by Peter Lombard (t Sent. d.3.2), whose interpretation was in turn rectified by Thomas Aquinas (ST 1.93.7 ad 2). Augustine tries in De Trin. “to see him by whom we were made by means of this image which we ourselves are, as through a mirror” (De Trin. xv.14). Thus, he tries to find traces of the Trinity in the human person to assist him in penetrating deeper into the mystery of the triune God. In his search he reviews a number of different analogies. In Book vii he mentions the Trinitarian character of charity: “You do see a trinity if you see charity” (Immo uero uides trinitatem si caritatem uides) (De Trin. vii.12). After all, when we love somebody, we also love the love with which we love. And of course, God is love (1 John 4:8). Hence our love in its threefold dimension (the lover, what is loved and love) discloses something of the mystery of the Trinitarian God (De Trin. vii.12–14). Augustine did not develop this
analogy of love in any greater detail, but his hints proved fruitful inspiration for the Trinitarian theology of Richard of St. Victor.

Another analogy he develops (De Trin. x. 17–19) is that of memory (memoria), understanding (intellegentia) and will (voluntas). These three form one mind (mens), are equal to one another and therefore suggest a promising avenue to explore the mystery of the Three in One, especially if we construe it in dynamic terms (i.e., as acts rather than as static faculties), thus mirroring the divine processions. For whenever we use our intellectual powers (e.g., when I think about the city walls of Rome), a mental word (verbum mentis) is issued from the storehouse of memoria. The verbum mentis, or inner word, is a “word” before it is spoken aloud. It is even prelinguistic. (The linguistic expression of the inner word of Augustine compares to the Incarnation of the Word [De Trin. xv.20].) As Edmund Hill explains in his outstanding translation of De Trinitate, this mental word is “a mentally visible replica or image of the object of understanding latent in the memory. It can thus be regarded as an off-spring (proles) conceived from the parent memory” (p. 266; cf. De Trin. 1x.12). But it requires an act of will to continue to think about something. Augustine concludes: “And so you have a certain image of the Trinity, the mind itself and its knowledge, which is its offspring and its word about itself, and love as the third element, and these three are one (1 John 5:8) and are one substance” (De Trin. 1x.18).

Thus, Augustine draws a comparison between the inner workings of the mind and the Trinity. As an inner word is generated from memory, and the will rejoices in this knowledge (rather than eliciting it), so too the Word is generated from the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the bond between the Word and the Father.

Now, this may be a useful analogy, but Augustine’s main aim is to disclose how we can participate in the life of the Trinity, become transformed and thus become a real image of the Trinity ourselves (De Trin. xiv.11). The mind is God’s image “insofar as it is capable of him and can participate in him; indeed it cannot achieve so great a good except by being his image” (De Trin. xiv.11). In short, at the heart of De Trinitate is an existential call for renewal, to become more Godlike through faith and love, and in pursuing this call we will develop a better understanding of the Trinitarian God – insofar as this is possible in this life. This is why the second half of this book contains large excursions on sin, faith, salvation and other key theological themes.

Finally, this explains why, for Augustine, the real image of the Trinity in us is not found in the mind remembering, understanding and loving itself (cf. De Trin. xiv.9), but rather in it remembering, understanding and
loving God: “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 . . . Let it then remember its God to whose image it was made, and understand and love him” (De Trin. xiv.15). Actualizing the image-character within us is a lifelong process that will come to full fruition only when we meet God face to face (De Trin. xiv.23–25).

Augustine’s achievement in De Trinitate is outstanding; he clearly argued that the historical missions of the Son and Holy Spirit reveal something of their inner processions within the Trinity; he explained the dogma of the Trinity in terms of subsistent relations; he developed the psychological analogy to the Trinity; he was responsible for the Filioque; and, finally, he developed a beautiful spirituality of the image: the soul reflects and reveals the Trinity best when it knows and loves God. Thomas Aquinas was to develop these ideas in greater detail.

**Augustine’s Spirituality: The Fruition of God**

“It is our great misfortune not to be with him without whom we cannot be” (Magna itaque hominis miseria est cum illo non esse sine quo non potest esse) (De Trin. xiv.16). Our discussion of Augustine’s soteriological and Trinitarian views has revealed that his theology is inextricably interwoven with a profound and multifaceted spirituality. One of the ways in which Augustine tried to express his view that God should be our ultimate concern in all our activities (intellectual or practical) is by his often-misunderstood distinction between enjoyment of God (frui) and use of things (uti).

Augustine illustrates this distinction between enjoyment (frui) and use (uti) by referring to somebody who, while traveling to her homeland, has to make use of different means of transport. She should not abandon her final goal, which is the sole source of her fruition and fulfillment; if she does abandon her goal by treating the means as an end, she will never reach her true destination. Augustine attempts to make clear that only God should be our ultimate concern; no created being should be considered as the ultimate. Having distinguished between things that are to be enjoyed and things that are to be used, Augustine goes on to identify those things that do both the enjoying and using, saying (in De Doctr. Christ. 1.3): “We ourselves, however, both enjoy and use things, and find ourselves in the middle, in a position to choose which to do. So if we wish to enjoy things that are meant to be used, we are impeding our progress, and sometimes are deflected from our course,
because we are thereby delayed in obtaining what we should be enjoying, or
turned back from it altogether.” He then goes on to define “enjoyment.” It
consists “in clinging to something lovingly for its own sake.” “Use” consists in
“referring what has come your way to what your love aims at obtaining,
provided, that is, it deserves to be loved” (De Doctr. Christ. 1.4). Everything
we “use” needs to be referred back to our ultimate concern: God as the object
of our fruition. Other human beings are not really to be enjoyed (as in De
Doctr. Christ.) or, if we are willing to concede that they can be enjoyed, they
should only be enjoyed “in God” (De Trin. 1x.13).

It may seem to modern commentators that the notion that only God is to
be enjoyed necessarily implies an instrumentalization of creation, including
human persons. I would argue with Augustine and the medieval tradition
after him that the opposite is the case: Augustine’s radical theocentric focus –
only God is to be enjoyed – is exactly what keeps us from either idolizing
creation or contemptuously disregarding it. For only when our desire is
immediately focused on God, and only indirectly on created beings, can we
attribute intrinsic meaning to created beings. An analogy with friendship may
clarify this: you can only reap the benefits of friendship (such as mutual
support or consolation) if you do not directly aim for these benefits. If you
target them immediately, you cease to be a friend (you may perhaps become
a “social networker”). Similarly, when our desire is first focused on God, we
can then, indirectly, treat created beings with the reverence that is due to them
without subjecting them to a calculative or instrumentalizing approach. In
other words, “enjoying God only” does not imply, for Augustine, that we
cannot consider created beings as having intrinsic value. In short, the
distinction between frui and uti allows Augustine to make clear how every-
thing we do should be focused on God or have God as its ultimate reference.
This is a key theme that runs throughout medieval theology, as we will see.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The critical edition of key works by St. Augustine has been published in the
Corpus Christianorum series (Turnhout: Brepols).

12 All translations from De Doctr. Christ. are taken from Edmund Hill (trans.), St. Augustine: Teaching
13 For a fuller statement of this argument, see Rik van Nieuwenhove, “The Religious Disposition As
14 This is why he can invite us in Enarr. in Ps. 0(4) no. 11: “Learn not to love, so you may learn to love;
draw back, so that you may turn [to the Lord]; empty yourself, so you may be filled” – a passage
Meister Eckhart was later to quote with approval in his Book of Divine Consolation.