

Secundum Substantiam and Relativum in Augustine's De Trinitate: Getting the Trinity Right Then and Now

By James J. Cassidy

I. Introduction

It is assumed that Augustine influenced trinitarian orthodoxy in the early and medieval church. However, it is often overlooked how influential his doctrine of the Trinity has been for Protestant theology. In light of this year's 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and especially in light of the recent debate over the doctrine of the Trinity in evangelical circles, it seems like a good time to go back to Augustine and see what we can learn from him for the sake of a new Reformation in the doctrine of the Trinity. While this essay will not focus on the Reformers' use of Augustine's doctrine, it will explore a very narrow aspect of his doctrine with a view toward learning lessons for the present. Once again, the catholic doctrine of the Trinity is being challenged, and once again we need to go back, *ad fontes*, to the great overseer of Hippo for his wisdom.

To that end, we will survey the current state of scholarly discussion on Augustine's trinitarian theology, especially with regard to the question of the relation between the divine essence and the three persons. Is Augustine guilty of favoring the one essence over the three persons? If not, what "mechanism," if any, can be identified in his thought to ensure the integrity of the persons as real, distinct, and living persons which constitute the godhead? This is the question we will seek to unpack here, and as we do so seek to gain insight to address current issues.

II. The Current Discussion¹

Commenting on Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity, Colin Gunton declares the inadequacy of the Bishop of Hippo's understanding of personhood when he says:

... the distinctive *personae* of Father, Son, and Spirit in the being of the one God fall short of adequate identification, so that the drive is to treat God *unipersonally*, with his personhood located in his oneness, not his threeness.²

This, for Gunton, is putatively grounded in Augustine's lack of understanding the trinitarian theology of his predecessors in both the East and West, along with his enslavement to neoplatonic thought.³ Both of these factors explain why Augustine—and after him western

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1. For a brief discussion of the current debate, see Roger E Olson, *The Trinity*, Guides to theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 43–46. Olson and Hall, however, only address a few of the authors involved. One of the more significant contributors they cite is Phillip Cary, "Historical Perspectives on Trinitarian Doctrine," available at <http://eastern.academia.edu/PhillipCary/Papers/101981/Historical-Perspectives-on-Trinitarian-Doctrine> (accessed May 23, 2017). Also, more up-to-date, see Robert Letham's fine chapter on Augustine in, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R, 2004), 184–185.

2. Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 4.

3. *Ibid.*, 39. The idea that Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity was developed in isolation from and in ignorance of his eastern counterparts is thoroughly debunked now in, for instance, Dennis W Jowers, "Divine Unity and the Economy of Salvation in the De Trinitate of Augustine," *Reformed Theological Review* 60 (2001): 69–72; and more recently, Richard Cross, "Quid Tres? On What Precisely Augustine Professes Not to Understand in De Trinitate 5 and 7," *Harvard Theological Review* 100 (2007): 215–6.

theology as a whole—falls short of presenting us with a thoroughly trinitarian doctrine of God. He, at best, presents us with a God who is only one person.

However, given both Augustine's commitment to Scripture and his strong emphasis on the persons in the economy of salvation, is it accurate to say that he had a "drive to treat God unipersonally"? That is to say, is it correct to read Augustine's work on the doctrine of the Trinity as falling into the error of modalism?⁴ It will be the contention of this essay that—from a fresh reading of Book V of *De Trinitate*⁵—Augustine does not fall into this trap. While it may be readily admitted

4. For the charge of modalism, see *Ibid.*, 42; Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 17–19; Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 96–101; Thomas A Marsh, *The Triune God: A Biblical, Historical & Theological Study* (Dublin: Columba Press, 1994), 132–33; also the literature cited in Rowan Williams, "Sapientia and the Trinity: Reflections on De Trinitate," in *Collectanea Augustiniana* (Louvain: Leuven Univ Pr, 1990), 317–8.

5. Hereafter abbreviated as *trin*.

6. As to whether or not those opponents were Homoian or Eunomian/Anomoean, see Edmund Hill's introduction to *De Trinitate*; also his *Mystery of the Trinity*, *Introducing Catholic theology 4* (London: G. Chapman, 1985), 58–59; and—for an opposing opinion—see Michel R Barnes, "The Arians of Book V, and the Genre of De Trinitate," *Journal of Theological Studies* 44, no. 1 (1993): 185–195. The former argues for Eunomian Arians, the latter Homoian Arians.

7. An exception is Rowan Williams, "De Trinitate," 847.

8. Ellen T. Charry, "The Soteriological Importance of the Divine Perfections," in *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice*, Beeson Divinity Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 131.

9. Michael R Barnes, "Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," *Theological Studies* 56, no. 2 (1995): 238. This piece is significant for our discussion here, not because he addresses the issue of modalism (which he does not), but because of the "hermeneutic" he exposes among Augustine's interpreters over the last one hundred years. Barnes' contention is that moderns have applied a historiographical grid over Augustine which mirrors their own theological ideology. That ideology is identified by Barnes as German idealism. In other words, modern systematicians have begun as idealists, have understood the development of historical theology in an idealist way, and have read their subjects in light of this idealism. In this way, Augustine's trinitarian theology is seen as one polar extreme to which the Eastern theologians serve as his opposite. In this way, neat—though artificial—categories are formed in which the Cappadocians are portrayed as being dynamic, doctrinal, and focused on God's persons. Augustine, however, is seen as focusing on static categories, was unduly influenced by philosophy, and emphasized God's unity to the neglect of his persons. Barnes' calling into question this paradigm paves the way, in part, for what we seek to do here in defending Augustine against the charge of unipersonalism. See also Phillip Cary, "Historical Perspectives," 5: "... the contrast between West and East has often been overdrawn.... [Augustine] does not depart from the Cappadocian theology, except in the sense that he builds on it and asks the appropriate questions for someone who has understood its point."

that there are infelicities with reference to some of Augustine's expressions, at heart he maintains an adequate doctrine of the tri-personality of God.

We will seek to prove this thesis by explicating Augustine's use of the two technical terms *secundum substantiam* and *secundum relatiuum*, as we find them in Book V. Over against his Arian opponents, Augustine is concerned to provide language which helps to account for both God's unity as well as his interpersonal relations as seen in the Gospel narratives.⁶ In other words, when the Bible speaks about God in his nature as one, it speaks *secundum substantiam*, or "substance-wise." When it speaks about the persons in a way such that one of the persons seems to be inferior to the other(s) then it speaks *secundum relatiuum*, or "relation-wise." This is an aspect of Augustine's vast doctrine of the Trinity which is often missed in current discussions. And where it is present, it is glossed over quickly.⁷ Thus, a deeper penetration of this notion is justified here.

In order to get there, we will proceed as follows. First, we will map out and survey the current discussion in studies about Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity, with a particular focus upon those who have charged Augustine with modalism. Second, we will conduct a close and fresh reading of Book V of *trin* and show how he uses *secundum substantiam* and *secundum relatiuum* as technical terms denoting two distinct—though not separate—*equally ultimate* realities. Third, we will draw some practical and pastoral implications of our findings followed by a brief summary and conclusion.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Ellen T. Charry traces the criticisms of Augustine's trinitarian theology to Adolph Harnack in his *History of Dogma*.⁸ Michel R. Barnes identifies the origins of the derogations to the work of Theodore de Régnon, the French Jesuit, who devised the West (unity) versus East (plurality) paradigm in his *Études de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité*.⁹ However, Harnack's work is earlier and may very well have been the inspiration for de Régnon. In any case, Harnack takes the Bishop of Hippo to task for a speculative doctrine of God. The charge, since Harnack and de Régnon, has been that Augustine depersonalizes God, turning him into a static and transcendent substance which is irrelevant for today. Of course, given nineteenth century liberalism's emphasis on the immanence of God, this critique makes some sense. But the question still remains: *from the text of the writings of Augustine*, is this criticism justified?

THE DISCUSSION

Stanley Grenz, in his 2004 book *The Triune God: Rediscovering the Trinity in Contemporary Theology*, has set the scene for how Trinitarian theology is generally perceived by many. As his story develops, it becomes at once clear that he believes the doctrine of the Trinity was lost because of how it was developed in the West—particularly by Augustine and Aquinas. In fact, according to Grenz, “the Middle Ages, ironically, precipitated [the Trinity’s] decline.” The reason? Because “medieval trinitarian thought was simply too complex to relate easily to popular piety or religious experience.”¹⁰ The rest of the book details how—from the period of the Reformation onward—the doctrine of the Trinity was increasingly marginalized until the contemporary period when it was recovered by the likes of Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, and Catherine LaCugna.

There seems to be merit to Grenz’s theory. In fact, it may be argued that in the twentieth century the so-called recovery of the doctrine of the Trinity can be attributed to Karl Barth. However, given the Basel professor’s difficult prose and quirky way of speaking, his thought begged for further development and explication. It was Karl Rahner who accomplished this task and to whom many in the late twentieth century have looked for guidance with regard to formulating a truly modern trinitarian theology. However, Rahner recapitulated many of Harnack’s sentiments about Augustine’s articulations of the Trinity. For instance, the Catholic theologian explains that “the Augustinian-Western conception of the Trinity . . . begins with the one God, the one divine essence as a whole, and only afterwards does it see God as three in persons.”¹¹ As if reading Augustine through the lenses of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologia*, Rahner takes issue with the African bishop for setting forth a doctrine of the one God quite independent of and prior to the three persons (as did Thomas).¹² However, the question remains: does a reading of Augustine on his own terms yield a different picture of the situation? Can the weaknesses found in Aquinas’ doctrine of God be fairly laid at the feet of the Bishop of Hippo?

In answer to that question, subsequent theology followed the general train of inquiry set by Rahner. For instance, Catherine LaCugna in her magisterial work, *God for Us*, advanced Rahner’s thesis and did so in the context of criticism of Augustine’s doctrine: “Certainly Augustine stated that his point of departure is the unity of God,” which is indicative of a “modalist direction” in his thought.¹³ For LaCugna, Augustine gives a priority to the unity of the divine substance such that the multiplicity of persons in God receives short shrift. This

criticism, of course, sets the stage for the development of her Hegelian doctrine of the Trinity, in which God’s being is actualized by his economic works *pro nobis* and *ad extra*.¹⁴

Marsh, in his 1994 study on the Trinity, advances LaCugna’s concerns and toes the Guntonian line with reference to Augustine. He states:

Augustine’s starting-point is the unity of the one divine substance. To speak of the one God for Augustine is to speak of the one divine nature. In giving primacy here to the concept of substance or nature as against that of person, Augustine has removed the concept of *taxis* or order from its central place in the traditional understanding of the Triad. In doing so, he has separated the concepts of substance and person and in giving primacy to the former he has, unwittingly to be sure, introduced an *impersonal* concept of God.¹⁵

10. Stanley J Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 13.

11. Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, 2nd ed., 17. See also, in support of Rahner’s view, William C. Placher, *The Triune God: An Essay in Post-liberal Theology*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 120. Giving somewhat of an oversimplified caricature of Augustine’s position, Placher says “the substance, God, exists, and as a result the three (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) exist” (Placher, *The Triune God*, 140).

12. It is true that when one reads Thomas one is left with the impression that somehow God may be understood properly without consideration of the fact that he is a Trinity. The structure of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologia* lends itself to this impression as it deals first with “The Unity of God” in question 11 of part 1 long before it deals with “The Procession of the Divine Persons” in question 27. This factor, coupled with Thomas’ “five ways” for proving the existence of God in 1.2.3, can come off as if what is being discussed is a “god” in the abstract. Before question 27, Aquinas’ “god” appears to be quite different from the Christian God who is tri-personal.

However, for the differences between Augustine and Thomas see Ellen T. Charry, “The Soteriological Importance of the Divine Perfections,” in *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice*, ed. Timothy George. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 129–147. She says, “The confusion comes from reading Augustine through Thomas Aquinas, or at least considering Augustine’s supposed modalism in his *De Trinitate* and Thomas’ presentation of the doctrine of God in his *Summa theologia* to be two examples of the same problem: overemphasis on the oneness of God. They are not.” (134). In other words, while Thomas speaks about the one God prior to and apart from his three persons, Augustine does not.

13. Catherine M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 97–98.

14. For an insightful critique of LaCugna’s Hegelian theology, see Lane G. Tipton, “The Triune Personal God: Trinitarian Theology in the Thought of Cornelius Van Til” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2004), 127–42.

15. Thomas A. Marsh, *The Triune God: A Biblical, Historical & Theological Study* (Dublin: Columba Press, 1994), 132.

What needs to be underscored here is Marsh's emphasis on *prioritization*. For Marsh, Augustine so prioritizes the substance or nature of God that the notion of *taxis* is removed from his trinitarian theology. This allegedly renders his conception of God thoroughly impersonal. So, according to Marsh, for Augustine the nature and persons of God are no wise equally ultimate. Rather, nature and person are prioritized in such a way that substance receives the emphasis while the persons are conceptually marginalized.

More recently, even a traditional theologian such as Robert Letham has contributed to the discussion with his concerns about Augustine's doctrine. Again, following the Guntonian interpretation, Letham argues that Augustine places the priority with God's unity. This is not a trite concern, but a real problem:

[T]his modalistic tendency poses the most immediate threat. Augustine's dominant impact looms large. In the

16. Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Pub, 2004), 3–41 emphasis mine.

17. *Ibid.*, 7. The use of the term "shackles" here strikes us as particularly pejorative. Yet, Letham can go on and qualify himself after a close reading of *trin* and say, "In view of arguments like this, Gunton's strictures are surprising. It hardly appears that Augustine has little interest in the distinctions of the persons, or that he was averse to the full import of the Incarnation" (195).

Some others who have followed this line of critique are Allan Coppedge, *The God Who Is Triune: Revisioning the Christian Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 102–3: "Augustine's focus on the the unity of God makes it difficult to distinguish the three persons.... Because he begins with the unity of the Trinity, Augustine's method of distinguishing the three tends to minimize the persons within the Trinity." Here Coppedge takes Augustine to task for downplaying the use of the term "person" for the three. He sees this as a weakness.

However, in response, two points should be made. First, Augustine downplays the term "person" not because he had an undue emphasis on the unity of the Godhead, but because he had a high view of the incomprehensibility of God. He realizes that all our words to describe God ultimately fall short of their reality. For Augustine, what was the greater concern was the concept of the threeness of the Godhead rather than the merely human words we employ. His struggle over the exact language—far from being indicative of his downplaying God's threeness—actually reflects a high concern for the divine majesty in all of its multiformity.

Second, it ought to be noted that Coppedge takes the typical approach of dividing approaches to the doctrine of the Trinity into two camps. The first camp is the one in which theologians begin with the unity of God (this is the "western" camp, from Augustine to Barth). The second camp consists of those who begin with the threeness of God (this is the "eastern" camp). It then becomes an East versus West debate. However, as Jowers, Cross, and Barnes have shown, the East versus West paradigm has been overdone.

18. Rowan Williams, "Sapientia and the Trinity: Reflections on De Trinitate," *Collectanea Augustiniana* (Louvain: Leuven University Press 1990), 325.

second half of *De Trinitate*, Augustine hesitantly introduces some analogies for the Trinity, fully aware of their limitations. However, these analogies have had a great impact over the years. *They are based on the primacy of the essence of God over the three persons, for the unity of God is his starting point.* He looks for reflections of the Trinity in the human mind. On this basis, *Augustine finds it difficult to do full justice to the personal distinctions of the three.* For example, he describes the Trinity in terms of a lover (Father), the beloved (Son), and the love that exists between them (Spirit). Does Augustine here impersonalize the Spirit? After all, love is a quality, not a person.¹⁶

Familiar chords are being played here. Again, Augustine is accused of prioritizing the unity-nature of God over against the plurality of persons. Because of this, supposedly, Augustine fails to "do justice" to the distinctions in the Godhead. Flowing from this alleged weakness are long-standing implications such that "Western Trinitarianism has found it difficult to break the shackles imposed by Augustine."¹⁷

However, this approach to Augustine's trinitarian theology has not gone unanswered. As early as 1990 Rowan Williams provided a helpful counter-perspective. For instance Williams states:

What should be particularly noted is that Augustine, so far from separating the divine substance from the life of the divine persons, defines that substance in such a way that God cannot be other than relational, trinitarian ... there is no 'divinity' not constituted by the act of *caritas*, and thus no divinity that can adequately be conceived apart from the trinity of persons.¹⁸

And later on he concludes:

Augustine is absolutely clear that 'the Persons [of the trinity] are not faculties or functions of a divine Ego'.... There can therefore be no question of any subordination or trinitarian plurality to a unity of essence.... The persons of the trinity are not three phases of one ego, but neither are they three quasi-independent agents in serial conjunction (Williams, 330).

Williams provides us here with a picture of the situation that appears to be the direct opposite of that painted by historians from Harnack to Gunton.

However, what of the question—as we saw raised by Letham and those before him—of Augustine's doctrine of the Holy Spirit? Does Augustine so de-personalize

God such that the Holy Spirit is more of a *thing* than a person? Again, Williams provides some helpful insight:

So far, then, from Augustine's trinitarian theology dealing inadequately with the Holy Spirit, it succeeds, for the first time in the history of Christian doctrine, in giving some account of how and why the Spirit is intrinsic to the trinitarian life—a task which not even the most sophisticated pages of Gregory of Nyssa manage with any great clarity (Williams, 329).

The contrast with an older scholarship, and with what is anticipated in the work of Colin Gunton, could not be more striking. The impression we are left with—given the older liberal and now the newer Barthian scholarship—is that Augustine makes God in general, and the Holy Spirit in particular, out to be a “what” as opposed to a “who.” However, that scholarship is now being seriously called into questions today, as we shall see in greater detail below.

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

The discussion surveyed above serves the purpose of understanding Augustine's theology as well as the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. However, we believe that the responses offered to the charge of modalism or unipersonalism/a-personalism in Augustine fall short in some ways. Their arguments can be shored up by a close reading of Book V of *trin* which will bring into sharp relief Augustine's doctrine of the *equal ultimacy* of the single substance and the three persons of the godhead. And it is here that Augustine's discussion of the relation between *secundum substantiam* and *secundum relativum* is absolutely indispensable.

III. Augustine Speaks

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Augustine's idea of the relation between *secundum substantiam* and *secundum relativum* bequeathed to the church long-lasting theological categories.¹⁹ The importance of this technical language for the history of Christian dogma cannot be underestimated. Yet the use of this terminology is rarely discussed and never implemented as a source for defending Augustine's tripersonal doctrine of God in the current literature.²⁰ In this section we will closely examine Book V of *trin* and explain how Augustine relates the *persons* and the *substance* of God in his trinitarian theology.

As we do so, we would do well to have before us the

basic content of Book V as it has been helpfully summarized by Letham:

Augustine responds to an Arian argument that aimed to deny the Son's deity, using as ammunition passages that declare the Son to be less than the Father. . . . In response to this, Augustine makes the vital point that not all that is said about God is said about his substance. Some things are said about his *relations*. Whatever is said about God's substance is said about each person and about the Trinity. All other things are said *relatively*, about the persons and their relations with each other.²¹

Augustine is concerned to defend—over against the Arian position—the notion that the persons are not just of like substance, but that they are of the *same* substance.²² Therefore, what he has in view is to deal with the exegesis of his Arian opponents who argue from Scripture that the Son is less than the Father and of *another* substance. In short, what Augustine is doing for us here is providing the conceptual grammar with which we can make sense of the various portions of Scripture, in which it appears as if the Father and the Son are separate in substance. While Scripture occasionally appears to intimate an “asymmetry” between the Father and the Son, such references are to the relations of the persons, and not to their substances. So, again, Letham:

But each person, in relation to the others, differs according to the particular properties of each, entailing

19. So, Rowan Williams, “De Trinitate,” 850.

20. There is precious little scholarship focused specifically on Book V. An exception to that is Richard Cross, “Quid Tres? On What Precisely Augustine Professes Not to Understand in De Trinitate 5 and 7,” *Harvard Theological Review* 100 (2007): 215–232; and Michel R. Barnes, “The Arians of Book V, and the Genre of De Trinitate,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 44, no. 1 (1993): 185–195. Cross's article deals mostly with Book VII and Barnes speaks about the distinction between substance-wise and relation-wise only in passing. The latter's concern is more historical in identifying Augustine's opponents rather than analyzing Augustine's thought per se.

21. Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 191.

22. However, see Barnes, “The Arians of Book V,” for an extended argument which identifies Augustine's opponents as Homoian Arians over against Eunomian Arians. For a study which shows how variegated the so-called “Arian” school was in the fourth and fifth century see Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, Revised. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), esp. 82–91. While Williams warns against the notion of using “Arian” as a designation for the anti-Nicene party, we will retain it here—with full recognition of the weaknesses of generalized labels—for the purpose of expounding Augustine's insights into the Trinity, leaving the question of the exact identification of his opponents to more capable historians.

sending and being sent, begetting and being begotten, and emitting and proceeding. Indeed, no person exists in respect to himself alone—each exists relatively, one to the other. Thus, the Father and the Son are together one essence, but they are not together one Word. There is thus a kind of asymmetry and inequality in the relations of the persons.²³

But before we get too far afield, we must backtrack for a moment and speak about the issue of the use of Augustine's language, particularly as it is borrowed from pagan Greek philosophy.

AUGUSTINE AND ARISTOTLE

It is at once evident that Augustine relies at least to some extent upon Aristotle's *Categories* in this work. However, the question remains: to what extent does he lean upon the pagan philosopher? The scholarship does not seem agreed on this. In fact, the scholarship does not seem to even ask the question concerning extent—it simply assumes dependence and leaves it at that.²⁴

This much, however, is certain with reference to Augustine and Aristotle: there is at least a semantic overlap. In other words, Aristotle does make a clear distinction between substance and relations in chapters five and seven of the *Categories*, respectively. However, it should be underscored that the way in which he defines and uses the terms "substance" and "relations" is not exactly the same as the way Augustine uses those terms. For example, according to Aristotle a substance is divided into two kinds—primary and secondary.²⁵ In the primary sense, substance "is that which is neither said of a subject nor present in a subject."²⁶ In a secondary sense, substance is an individual within the category of the primary. So, "man" is a substance in a primary sense and "Jim"—this individual man—is a particular instance of that substance. It is like the relation between a species and a genus. "Man" has the significance it does because it signifies the same species on all occasions when it is used ... it possesses a

distinctive essence which it cannot lack ... the essence is the fundamental feature which makes the substance what it is, and explains the other properties of the substance."²⁷ In other words, substance is that which makes a thing what it is and which cannot be changed or altered without losing the proper name for that thing. Furthermore, a substance does not admit to a variation in degree, according to Aristotle.²⁸ This means that a substance cannot be more or less of what it is. In other words, a human is a human. A person cannot be sort of a human, or eighty percent human. Either one is all human or not human at all.

As for relations, they are always said of something with respect to another thing. In other words, "relatives are things which, *as such*, are said to be of something else."²⁹ Relatives also—as opposed to substances—may "admit of variations of degree."³⁰ Something which is relative may be said to be of a lesser or greater degree to the original. Further, all relatives have "reciprocal reference" to their original.

In this, however, when we closely compare Augustine's use of the substance/relative distinction with Aristotle's, several significant differences become evident. First, Augustine's use of the idea of relative relations "breaks the rules" set by Aristotle in terms of admitting variations of degree. In other words, the relations of the persons according to Augustine do not admit of any variation in degree but are actually co-substantial and coeval. Second, in Aristotle substances and relations stand in an antithetical relation to one another. That is to say, they are contraries. However, in Augustine, the two are not necessarily contradictory as they hold together in a mutual relation within the Godhead. And third, for Aristotle, substances are almost always material things. However, Augustine radically transforms (converts?) the language to denote immaterial things and even uses the term to denote existence or essence—albeit improperly so (VII.3.10).

Therefore, while the case is solidly established that Augustine does borrow language and even certain aspects of concepts developed by Aristotle, he does not follow the Greek philosopher slavishly. Augustine, after all, only had a limited vocabulary to work with to describe the doctrine of the Trinity and had to borrow that verbiage from somewhere. Aristotle's categories proved helpful for expressing Augustine's conceptualizing of the Trinity as he understood it from Scripture. But there is one thing any reader of Augustine should be at pains to avoid: reading Aristotle's definitions into Augustine's language. Rather, the African bishop ought to be read *on his own terms* and *in his own literary context*.

23. Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 192.

24. Michel R. Barnes, "The Arians of Book V," 192, and the literature cited there.

25. Aristotle, *Aristotle Selected Works*, 3rd ed. (Peripatetic Press, 1991), 31.

26. Aristotle, *Aristotle Selected Works*, 3rd ed. (Peripatetic Press, 1991), 31.

27. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 55.

28. Aristotle, *Aristotle Selected Works*, 34.

29. Aristotle, *Aristotle Selected Works*, 39.

30. Aristotle, *Aristotle Selected Works*, 39.

The words "substance" and "relations," then, ought not be read in an Aristotelian way.

THE EARLY AUGUSTINE

At this point, we would do well to consider something of Augustine's trinitarian theology before he finished *trin* in the 420's. From several sources we will see that his understanding of substance and relations as equally ultimate realities was not an afterthought, nor something which he made up *de novo*. Whatever the difficulties there are in the differences of language between the Greek Trinitarians and the Latins, we see the ideas remain in fundamental continuity.

For example, already in 390 Augustine wrote:

Wherefore it befits us to keep and to worship the Gift of God, equally unchangeable with the Father and the Son, in a Trinity of one substance.³¹

In context, "the Gift" is a reference to the Holy Spirit as the *bonum* of the Godhead. But for our purposes here what is important is to highlight the way in which Augustine opens his discussion with the persons rather than the single nature of God. He is concerned with the person of the Holy Spirit, and only then speaks about the "one substance" (*unum substantia*) which is the Trinity. This is not to conclude that Augustine gave a greater priority to the persons over against the oneness of God. However, it does provide an interesting counterexample to the claim of Gunton, et al.: that Augustine gave undue priority to the unity of God at the expense of his persons.

Secondly, in *De Fide et Symbolo* of 393, Augustine gives a brief defense of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed. After defending the creed against those who would deny that God created *ex nihilo*, he defends the doctrine of the Holy Spirit who is "consubstantial and co-eternal" with the Father and the Son. He goes on:

That Trinity is one God. Not that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are identically the same. But the Father is Father, the Son is Son and the Holy Spirit is Holy Spirit, and this Trinity is one God. (ix.16)

Even here, already in 393, Augustine is expressing himself in such a way as not to be mistaken for some kind of an unipersonalist, or monist, who holds to a single God with no differentiation. He says it here clearly in his qualification of the Trinity's oneness, that the persons are not "identically the same." That is, while they are all God and not three gods, yet they are differentiated identities.³²

Thirdly, in his famous *Confessions* of the late 390's he states that

... the Trinity appears unto me in a glass darkly, which is Thou my God, because Thou, *O Father*, in Him Who is the Beginning of our wisdom, Which is Thy Wisdom, born of Thyself, equal unto Thee and coeternal, that is, in *Thy Son*, createdst heaven and earth.... And under the name of God, I now held the Father, who made these things, and under the name of Beginning, the Son, in whom He made these things; and believing, as I did, My God as the Trinity, I searched further in His holy words, and lo, *Thy Spirit* moved upon the waters. Behold, the Trinity, my God, Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost, Creator of all creation.³³

In this passage we see that for Augustine the threeness of God plays a prominent role in his theology. In fact the headings of the doxological statements themselves reflect a threefold structure: "O Father ...", "Thy Son ...", and "Thy Spirit ..."

Therefore, Joanne McWilliams is correct to argue—*pace du Roy*—that from very early on Augustine refuses to speak about the unity of God at the expense of his tri-personhood. In the passage just quoted, this commitment is evident in three ways. First, notice that he leads with the three. It is not some abstract divine essence that appears to him as "in a glass darkly." No, rather, it is the triune God, "the Trinity." Second, notice that he immediately proceeds to speak of the persons—Father and Son. To be sure, he speaks here of the persons as being "coeternal" so as to cut off any Homoian argument. Third, after speaking of the one "name of God" (and here is the unity), he goes on again to speak about the individual persons (and here he mentions the Spirit, whom he did not mention at the beginning of the section). Thus he opens and closes this section with the persons, leaving the unity of God in the middle. To put it another way, the persons form an *inclusio* of which the one substance serves as the center. This is a literary device used by Augustine in order to "package" his understanding of the Trinity into a cohesive whole. In this way the threeness and oneness of God are held as equally ultimate realities. If anything, one can say that

31. "On True Religion," in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. J.H.S. Burleigh (London: SCM Press, 1953), 282.

32. Rowan Williams gives a helpful summary of Augustine's view: "Son and Father are *unum*, though not *unus*—one kind of being, not one individual." See his, "De Trinitate," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 847.

33. 13.V.6. The emphasis is mine.

the plurality of the persons is given the greater weight. Perhaps Augustine and the Cappadocians were not that different after all!

THE AUGUSTINE OF TRIN

Moving on then to *trin*, we see that Augustine maintains the same fundamental theological convictions as in his former days. In fact, his earlier reflections on the Trinity and those found in *trin* flow together seamlessly. Granted, there is a great deal of development and explanation, but the train of thought is the same. This is at once seen in the opening pages of Book V.

While a thorough treatment of the structure of *trin* may help to set Augustine's trinitarian theology in its literary context, we will not pursue it here, given the many other adequate treatments of the subject that are available.³⁴ Rather, we will devote some brief comments to the layout and structure of Book V before looking more closely at the sections which concern our topic. We say this recognizing that our thesis may be supported from other sections of *trin*, though space constraints limit us here to only Book V.³⁵

For starters, we can note that Book V—as Hill has subdivided it—consists of a prologue and four chapters, all in seventeen sub-subsections.³⁶ The book opens with a discussion of what we might call the incomprehensibility of God and ends with the question of the relation

between God's immutable nature and his works *ad extra*. We can underscore, then, the fundamental nature of Augustine's inquiry in this book: how do we understand the relationship that exists between God and his creation as that relationship is portrayed in Scripture? In sum, the book is about the relation between God's nature and that of the created order and how we speak about that relation. Or, to put it yet another way, how does a simple and immutable being relate to a complex and mutable being? These two types of being seem so contrary to one another; is it possible for them to interact at all?

We see this concern at once in the prologue to Book V. Here it is explained that God is incomprehensible, though not unknowable. God can be known truly, just not exhaustively. As per 1 Corinthians 13:12, he is known only as a "reflection in a mirror." In other words, we can only know God truly by way of revelation and through faith, not through earthly wisdom or reason. While it is true that God is a substance, yet he is a being of a different sort than we usually think of.³⁷ We usually think of substances that are mutable. But God alone has an immutable substance. So God is therefore perfect existence and essence. Only that which cannot change can be said to truly and really *be*.

Now that the metaphysical scene has been set, Augustine introduces the reader to his critics, the Arians (V.1.4). The Arians argue that whatever Scripture says about God, it says *secundum substantiam* (hereafter, *s-s*), but not *secundum accidens* (hereafter, *s-a*). This, it may be noted, is a brilliant move by the Arians. They set the terms of the debate by giving only two metaphysical options for speaking about all things—whether divine or created. For them, there are only two metaphysical options for speaking about God: *substantiam* or *accidens*. That is to say, things about which we speak are either substances or accidents.³⁸ And when we say that the Father is unbegotten we must be saying something about him *s-s*. Further, when we say that the Son is unbegotten that must also be said *s-s* because—if the Son were God—we could not say this about him *s-a*. Therefore, we are speaking about two different substances (one unbegotten and one begotten).³⁹ There is no third way—at least not until Augustine introduces one.

Augustine's counter-argument comes from John 10:30⁴⁰ and Philippians 2:6.⁴¹ If all things said about God are said *s-s*, then these texts speak about God *s-s*, in which case both the Father and the Son are of one substance. Therefore, the Arians are wrong about the Father and the Son being different substances. Augustine has the Arians in a kind of logical checkmate. If they

34. See most recently Ellen T. Charry, "Educating for Wisdom: Theological Studies as a Spiritual Exercise," *Theology Today* 66 (2009): 295–308 who argues that the structure of *trin* is in the form of a chiasm. See also the helpful notes and introductions found in Edmund Hill's translation.

35. It is worth noting here that it is not insignificant that when Augustine opens his great work speaking about the relation between God's oneness and threeness that he leads with the three persons over against the unity of substance. An example of this is found in I.2.7 where he says that "according to the scriptures Father and Son and Holy Spirit in the inseparable equality of one substance present a divine unity." We do not believe it is too subtle of a point that Augustine begins with the three persons when speaking of God.

36. Of course keeping in mind here that only the book divisions are original to Augustine. The chapter divisions and paragraph divisions are the work of Hill.

37. This is how Augustine exegetes Exodus 3:14.

38. Hill translates *accidens* as "modification." This translation is not as literal as it might be, but it captures an important aspect of the Arians' point. God does not possess anything in his nature which can change or be changed (i.e., God cannot be modified to be something other than what he always was, is, and will be).

39. This citation here is one of those given by those who argue Augustine is countering the Eunomian version of Arianism. See, Barnes, "The Arians of Book V," for an alternate read.

40. "I and the Father are one" (ESV).

41. "Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (ESV).

deny this they surrender their premise that all things said about God are said *s-s*.

In V.1.5 Augustine defines “modification” as that which can be lost by change. In this sense, there is no modification in God. God “remains absolutely unchangeable.” From this, in V.1.6, he reasons that nothing can be said of God *s-a*, because God cannot be modified. Nevertheless, that does not mean that everything said of God is said *s-s*. And it is here—borrowing from Aristotle’s *Categories*—that Augustine introduces a third option for speaking about God. “With God, though, nothing is said modification-wise, because there is nothing changeable with him. And yet not everything that is said of him is said substance-wise.” So, when we speak about the Father or the Son we are not speaking *s-s* nor *s-a*. Rather, we are speaking *secundum relativum* (hereafter, *s-r*). Therefore, when Scripture speaks about any of the persons of the Godhead it is speaking *s-r*, not necessarily *s-s* (and certainly not *s-a!*). So, when we say that the Son is “begotten” or the Father is “unbegotten,” we are speaking about relationship properties and saying nothing about the substance of God. Therefore, the Arians cannot use the Nicene designations “begotten” or “unbegotten” to argue in an anti-Nicene way (i.e., for two different substances). Augustine can conclude that “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; yet this relationship is not a modification, because it is not changeable” (V.1.6).

Augustine then goes on to anticipate an objection by the Arians. They argue that unbegotten does not necessarily entail fatherhood—or vice versa. One can conceive of a father who is not unbegotten just as one can conceive of a person who is unbegotten that is not a father. Therefore, the Arians conclude, “begotten” and “unbegotten” are said with reference to themselves and not necessarily to each other (V.1.7).

Augustine grants this for a moment and moves on to the begotten Son. And here the two terms (i.e., “Son” and “begotten”) *do* entail each other. In other words, all sons are begotten and all begotten persons are sons. Also entailed in the notion of “begotten” is the idea of “begetter.” And here begetter and father entail each other. Augustine works “backwards”—from the Son as begotten to the Father as begetter. But what of the word “unbegotten”? The idea of a begetter does not necessarily entail the idea of unbegotten. So Augustine readily admits that “begetter” and “unbegotten” are indeed “two distinct notions.” And this is enough for the Arians to conclude, then, that the Father and the Son must not

be the same substance. The Father is unbegotten, which is said *s-s* of God. But the Son is begotten, denoting a different substance from the Father.

To this Augustine responds, “the answer to this subtlety is to oblige them to tell us what makes the Son equal to the Father; is it what is said of him with reference to himself, or what is said of him with reference to the Father?” Hill finds this a strange question for Augustine to ask and hypothesizes that Augustine may have the semi-Arians in view in asking this question.⁴² However, such a speculation is unnecessary. When he speaks about the Son being equal to the Father he is referring back to his citation of John 10:30. He is challenging his Arian counterparts to explain what Jesus means when he says “I and the Father are one.” And what makes them equal—or “one”—cannot be what is about them *s-r*, because they are not the same with respect to each other in the way they relate. Therefore, what makes them “one” must be what is said of each *s-s*. Therefore, they are equal *s-s*. He concludes that when we say the Father is unbegotten we are not saying something about what he is, but what he is not. This denial is not said *s-s* because what is affirmed about the relationship between the Father and the Son is affirmed *s-r* and not *s-s*. In other words, the Father is the unbegotten begetter with reference to the Son.

Augustine illustrates this teaching with some examples. He says to be Son is to be begotten. Thus, to say something is unbegotten *is* to say that it is not the Son. Here, Augustine is worth quoting in the Latin, given some of the liberties Hill takes in his translation:

Sec genitus et ingenitus commode dicuntur; filius autem latine dicitur, sed ‘infiliius’ ut dicatur non admittit loquendi consuetudo.

But begotten and unbegotten are said correctly; and while “son” is spoken Latin, yet “unson” may not be said in ordinary language.⁴³

Thus with reference to the Father, it is better to say “not begotten” rather than “unbegotten.” But it all amounts to same thing: it is saying the Father is “not son.” Augustine observes that what we have here is a weakness in our language, which of course has limitations. But the limits of our language ought not to take away from the realities to which it points. In other words, what Augustine is saying here is a not-so-subtle criticism of the Arians for playing language games. The bottom line is that “unbegotten” is a word which communicates—albeit through

42. See Hill’s eleventh footnote in Book V.

43. The translation is mine.

a mirror dimly—something of the reality which is the relational property of the Father vis-à-vis the Son. It is a *relatiuum* term, not a *substantiam* one. Therefore, Augustine closes chapter one by saying: “And what is stated relationship-wise does not designate substance” (V.1.8).

But it is not until we reach the second chapter that we come across what may be dubbed “Augustine’s rule.” The rule is stated succinctly this way:

So whatever God is called with reference to self is both said three times over about each of the persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and at the same time is said in the singular and not the plural about the trinity (V.2.9).

There are at least two things which are striking about this “rule.” We would do well to note the way he keeps both aspects of the Trinity in perfect proportion and harmony. Anything we can say about God in his substance we can say it about each of the persons, yet there is not a plurality of these things in God but only a singularity. Here we can concur with the observations of Anne Hunt when she says:

Augustine begins with a discussion of the unity of God, but this does not mean that Augustine understands the divine essence to be prior to the divine persons ... he argues against the notion that the substance of the Trinity is anything other than the Father, Son, and Spirit.⁴⁴

To put it another way, God’s unity and threeness—or

44. Anne Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus of the Mysteries of Christian Faith*, Theology in global perspective (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 17.

45. So, Joanne McWilliams, “Augustine’s Early Trinitarian Thought,” in *Essays in Medieval Philosophy and Theology in Memory of Walter H. Principe*, CSB: Fortresses and Launching Pads (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005), 12: “A God who is one need not be a monistic God.”

46. V.2.11. It should be underscored at this point that Augustine is not adopting some Neoplatonic notion of “the One” or Plato’s “Form of the Good.” This becomes clear at once given at least two considerations. First, the Neoplatonic notion of “the One” is both impersonal and without attributes or appropriations. It is quite literally a self-contained, undifferentiated monad. However, for Augustine, God is personal and he has attributes. Second, Plato’s notion of the good is itself a transcendent and independent form which illuminates the moral quality of all other things—including God. But for Augustine, greatness or goodness are not higher qualities or ultimate realities to which God must adhere. Rather, God *is* the good and his greatness is coterminous with his being. Because of these considerations we can rightly conclude that Augustine is not capitulating to pagan thought forms here. And, what is more, we can also speculate that what he is in fact doing is seeking to subvert those very thoughts forms. Far from “baptizing” pagan philosophy, he is actually subverting and “converting” it. That is to say, he is changing it from being pagan to becoming thoroughly Christian.

his substance and his persons—are equally ultimate realities. It may even be more helpful to say that Augustine sees—because of the divine simplicity—God’s unity and plurality as *mutually-limiting concepts*. That is to say, due to the fact that God’s being is immutable and contains no *accidens*, the notion of God’s oneness is limited by his threeness. Conversely, the concept of the three persons is limited by the concept of God’s single divine nature. To put it negatively, each aspect is limited by the unfortunate consequences of neglecting the other. For example, if we neglect the concept of the single nature, then the unacceptable result is polytheism. Likewise, if the three persons are neglected the result is an undifferentiated monad as is found in pagan thought. Either of these options is unacceptable in the minds of both the Arians and Augustine.⁴⁵

This, naturally, leads into his discussion on the doctrine of divine simplicity, or the doctrine of the divine appropriations. That is to say, anything which we can say about the three persons *s-s* is said about the single divine substance. So, the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; yet, there are not three Gods but only one. Likewise with any attribute of God. For instance, the Father is great, the Son is great, and the Holy Spirit is great; yet, we do not have three greats but only one. In other words, anything that can be attributed to any of the divine persons can be predicated of the others *without multiplication*. This is because God does not participate in attributes which exist independent of him; rather, he *is* those attributes. Augustine—in a polemical statement against pagan Platonic philosophy—says that God “is not great with a greatness which he is not himself, as though God were to participate in it to be great, otherwise this greatness would be greater than God.”⁴⁶ So, whenever we speak about the persons or the attributes, we understand that we are speaking about the one God.

However, we cannot reduce the Trinity to one of the persons. So, while it is true that in speaking about the Father we speak about the Godhead, this does not work conversely. In other words, when we speak about the Godhead we are not speaking about the Father (except in the sense in which the triune God is our creator) (V.3.12). When we speak about the particular persons and we name Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, we are speaking about the relations of the Trinity—we are speaking *s-r*.

But, now, in what sense can we speak of origins? How is it that we can speak of the respective persons as origins? Here we can speak in a twofold sense. First, we can speak about origins with respect to the relations; and second, with respect to the acts of God *ad extra*.

First, with respect to relations, we say that the Father is the origin of the Son. And—in a move to protect the *filioque* clause—the Father and the Son are origin with reference to the Holy Spirit (V.3.15). Second, with respect to God's acts *ad extra*, we say that all three persons are origin (V.3.14). The Father is creator, the Son is creator, and the Holy Spirit is creator. They are three persons but one creator. This is significant for our discussion here because it highlights how careful Augustine is to maintain a proper balance between God's oneness and his threeness. Here he distinguishes the two aspects without in any way separating them—no less giving one (the unity of God) priority over the other (the plurality of his persons).

The idea of God as originator of creation, however, raises a thorny issue. And here Augustine takes us right back to the beginning of Book V. If God is an immutable substance, than how does he interact with a mutable substance such as we find in the created order? We say God is Lord, but how can God be Lord unless there is something to be mastered (i.e., creation)? Either we must posit an eternal creation (so that God can be an eternal Lord), or we must say that God only became Lord at the creation. While the former is unreasonable, the latter is even more so. If God became Lord at creation, then he is mutable (i.e., he changed from being not-Lord to being Lord). However, answers Augustine, "we should understand that this does not involve anything happening to God's own substance, but only to the created thing to which the relationship predicated of him refers" (V.4.17). Again, here we see the usefulness of Augustine's distinction between *s-s* and *s-r*. Only here the *relativum* is not with reference to the persons, but to creation. Furthermore, Augustine lays the groundwork for a helpful understanding of the relation between the economic and ontological Trinity. On the one hand, he speaks against those who would say his doctrine of God is not relational and "economic" enough. On the other, he provides a way of speaking about God's relatedness to creation without sacrificing his freedom, sovereignty, and aseity. Again, for Augustine, speaking of God *s-s* and *s-r* as equally important realities stands at the center of his trinitarian theology.

SUMMARIZING CONSIDERATIONS

Therefore, both aspects of God—his threeness and oneness—are equally important. Hence, we must never speak of God *s-s* without also speaking of his persons *s-r*, or vice versa. Again, Anne Hunt provides us with language which gives accurate expression to that which we here argue:

He distinguished between substantial and relational categories (categories relating to substance and categories relating to the relations), and this distinction provided a coherent framework within which to accommodate both the distinction among the Three (in terms of relational categories) and the unity of the one God (in terms of substantial categories).⁴⁷

Without this theological innovation of introducing the Aristotelian category of *secundum relativum* into the already established categories of speaking *secundum substantiam* and *secundum accidens*, modern dissenters of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity might have a significant critique. As it stands, however, their disparagements are unfounded. At the risk of making an overstatement, Augustine formulates a perfect balance between God's unified and self-contained substance on the one hand, and his dynamic inner-trinitarian personal relations on the other. For this insight, Western theology remains indebted to the great bishop of Hippo.

IV. PASTORAL REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Brad Green gives us a helpful—if somewhat overstated—summary of Augustine's doctrine of the triune God:

Augustine argues that relationship itself is a reality which is common to the Godhead, and as such, relationship constitutes what it means for God to be. That is, in Augustine's trinitarian theology it is completely legitimate to call 'relationship' a 'substance-word' ... relationship is constitutive of the entire Godhead, and that without relationship to Godhead would simply cease to be ... the Godhead is *fundamentally relational* ... the Godhead is eternally relating.⁴⁸

The idea of Augustine's God as being "fundamentally relational" and "eternally relating" cannot be underscored enough. And herein resides a possible solution to a putative problem of traditional Western theology according to many modern theologians. For many, the West has shown us an abstract, static doctrine of God. In response

47. Hunt, *Trinity*, 18.

48. Brad Green, "The Protomodern Augustine? Colin Gunton and the Failure of Augustine," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9 (2007): 340. Green has leveled a respectful but devastating critique of Gunton's interpretation of Augustine by making two well-substantiated points. First, Augustine did not unduly disconnect creation from redemption. Second, Augustine did not sacrifice the "many" for the "one"—or the relations for the substance—in his ontology.

to this perception, theologians have introduced an actualistic doctrine of God to provide for a more dynamic teaching. This has, in turn, introduced other significant problems into the area of theology proper.

However, the problem is not only in the area of theology proper, but also in the pastoral practice and function of the church. Since the post-metaphysical turn with the philosophy of Kant and then in the area of theology with Hegel, Barth, Rahner, and LaCugna, God has been portrayed as being relational, to be sure. Furthermore, evangelicals—in an attempt to ground authority relations among the genders in the being of God—have “pushed” what is proper to the economy (the act of subordination) into the ontological Trinity. Despite all of evangelicalism’s protest of Barthian theology, their doctrine of the Trinity is no less actualistic. It seems to us that, at the very least, these theologies have emphasized God’s relational being at the expense of his absolute sovereignty and majesty. Not to mention the aseity and simplicity of God.

Indeed, the Son emptied himself (leaving aside for the time being what exactly that means) and took upon himself the form of a servant. But that is not all of the story. However, if that is the only story preached week to week, the church is bound to forget that God really is her

Lord as well as her Savior. If we lose the fact of God’s utter transcendence, we run the risk of making God into our own image. Not only will Feuerbach’s cool smile continue to grin at us, but the church will become impotent and unable to help real people with real problems who need real—and everlasting—hope. Our hope is only as big as our God. And if our god is merely human, we are of all people most miserable and still lost in our sin.

Therefore, rather than jettisoning the older doctrine of the West, perhaps the church would do better to regain it. If, in fact, much of the recent literature on Augustine’s *trin* is correct, then his trinitarian theology already has the resources resident within it to provide for a doctrine of God in which the Lord God is—by nature—dynamic and relational. If we are correct to say that for Augustine the three persons of the Godhead are equally significant to his one nature, then this notion of a truly personal and relational God is established. And it is our contention here that as Augustine developed his new category of *secundum relatiuum*—along with the older category already used by the Arians of *secundum substantiam*—he has bequeathed to the Christian church everywhere the conceptual language necessary for advancing a robust and inherently dynamic doctrine of God. ■

In Brief: Calvin, Augustine, and the Ancients on Trinitarian Theology

With regard to what they pretend as to Ignatius, if they would have it to be of the least importance, let them prove that the apostles enacted laws concerning Lent, and other corruptions. Nothing can be more nauseating than the absurdities which have been published under the name of Ignatius; and therefore, the conduct of those who provide themselves with such masks for deception is the less entitled to toleration.

Moreover, the consent of the ancient fathers clearly appears from this, that in the Council of Nice, no attempt was made by Arius to cloak his heresy by the authority of any approved author; and no Greek or Latin writer apologises as dissenting from his predecessors. It cannot be necessary to observe how carefully Augustine, to whom all these miscreants are most violently opposed, examined all ancient writings, and how reverently he embraced the doctrine taught by them, (*August. lib. de Trinit. &c.*) He is most scrupulous in stating the grounds on which he is forced to differ from them, even in the minutest point. On this subject, too, if he finds any thing ambiguous or obscure in other writers, he does not disguise it. And he assumes it as an acknowledged fact, that the doctrine opposed by the Arians was received without dispute from the earliest antiquity. At the same time, he was not ignorant of what some others had previously taught. This is obvious from a single expression. When he says (*De Doct. Christi. lib.*

i.) that “unity is in the Father,” will they pretend that he then forgot himself? In another passage, he clears away every such charge, when he calls the Father the beginning of the Godhead, as being from none—thus wisely inferring that the name of God is specially ascribed to the Father, because, unless the beginning were from him, the simple unity of essence could not be maintained. I hope the pious reader will admit that I have now disposed of all the calumnies by which Satan has hitherto attempted to pervert or obscure the pure doctrine of faith. The whole substance of the doctrine has, I trust, been faithfully expounded, if my readers will set bounds to their curiosity, and not long more eagerly than they ought for perplexing disputation. I did not undertake to satisfy those who delight in speculative views, but I have not designedly omitted any thing which I thought adverse to me. At the same time, studying the edification of the Church, I have thought it better not to touch on various topics, which could have yielded little profit, while they must have needlessly burdened and fatigued the reader. For instance, what avails it to discuss, as Lombard does at length, (*lib. i. dist. 9.*) Whether or not the Father always generates? This idea of continual generation becomes an absurd fiction from the moment it is seen, that from eternity there were three persons in one God. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Beveridge, I.XIII.29. ■