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Andrew P. Hillaker
Liberty University, aphillaker@liberty.edu

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SUBSTANCE AND PERSON IN TERTULLIAN AND AUGUSTINE

By Andrew Hillaker, M.Div.

The doctrine of the Trinity has been a focal point of Christian thinking throughout Church history. While the term "Trinity" does not appear in the biblical text, it is still a vital Christian doctrine. The doctrine, however, has not come without controversy. Various understandings of the doctrine have been presented throughout Church history. Tertullian (ca. 160-220 AD) and Augustine (354-430 AD) represent two of the foremost theologians to discuss the issue. Tertullian was one of the first to thoroughly examine the doctrine. He coined the terms "substance" and "person" in his discussion of the doctrine. These terms would come to have a lasting impact on Christian theology. The council of Nicaea would show this commitment to Tertullian's distinctions. Augustine also reflects his debt to Tertullian's ingenuity yet makes significant moves to further develop the doctrine.[1] Both of the theologians wrote in a particular context challenging the heretics of their day. They used biblical argumentation and their own philosophical commitments to present their understanding of the doctrine. This paper examines Tertullian's use of the terms and then compares and contrasts them with Augustine's use in order to show the development of the doctrine from the second to fifth century.

INTRODUCTION

The doctrines of the Trinity and Christology have caused the deaths of many trees over the past two millennia. The Church has battled, inside and out, to try to express how God has revealed Himself in Scripture. One of the earliest Church Fathers to address these doctrines in detail was Tertullian of Carthage (ca. 160-220 AD). Tertullian is recognized as one of the earliest theologians of the Latin Church. He responded to a number of theological issues that arose during his lifetime. He argued against Marcion and other Gnostics. Most importantly for this discussion he presented one of the first extensive defenses of the Trinity in his writings. François Decret praises Tertullian writing, ". . .Tertullian's trinitarian doctrine was a decisive contribution to orthodox theology, as he was the first Latin writer to use the term *trinitas* to refer to the three persons of the godhead."[2] Tertullian's contribution to the development of Trinitarian doctrine went much further than simply the use of the term *trinitas*.

Tertullian's major contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity is his use of the terms "substance" (*substantia*) and "person" (*personae*). He used these terms numerous times throughout his writing in an attempt to explain what he saw as the biblical presentation of the Godhead and the Person of the Son. Tertullian's use of "substance" and "person" had a lasting impact on the language used to define and defend the doctrine of the Trinity. One can clearly see the influence Tertullian had on many authors who wrote after him with an assessment of Tertullian's use of "substance" and "person" compared to later Church writings. Many have suggested that in Tertullian, one can see Tertullian's impact in the Nicene formula of the

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[1] This development has continued to this day, though that is beyond the scope of this paper.

[2] François Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa*, trans. Edward Smither (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009) Kindle. 40.

Trinity.[3] This paper will discuss Tertullian's use of the terms "substance" and "person" and compare and contrast it with the use of the same terms in Augustine in order to show the influence Tertullian had on the development of the Trinitarian doctrine.

TERTULLIAN

In order to understand Tertullian's impact on Trinitarian terminology, it is important to understand his use of the terms "substance" and "person." There is significant overlap in Tertullian's purpose in the terms "substance" and "person." The terms are intertwined because of how Tertullian understand the biblical text's reference to God. Tertullian understood Scripture as referring to a divine Father, Son, and Spirit, yet to one God.[4] For Tertullian, "The Trinity is a dispensation and internal disposition of the divine substance."[5] The Trinity was necessary for God's salvific plan for humanity.

Because of this, the ways Tertullian uses each term relate to each other extensively. The majority of Tertullian's arguments on the Trinity and Christology takes place in his works *Against Marcion*, and *Against Praxeas*.[6] Osborn describes Tertullian's position writing, ". . . that the economy distributes unity into Trinity so that the three are one in quality, substance and power (*status*, *substantia*, *potestas*), but distinct in sequence, aspect and manifestation (*gradus*, *forma*, *species*)."[7] This section will examine how Tertullian used "substance" and "person", setting the foundation for examining future writers.

Substance

The term "substance" is not unique to the doctrine of the Trinity. Tertullian regularly uses the term to refer to non-biblical objects. This allows Tertullian to use non-biblical phrases to express the doctrine of the Trinity in unique ways. Tertullian does not give an exact definition of the term ""substance". Osborn argues that Tertullian's primary use of "substance" is as the material of which something is comprised.[8] It is the foundational element that makes something what it is.[9] Animals had one "substance" or "essence;" Humans had another. These substances made each distinct, though they could share some qualities in common. A rock is made up of a

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[3] Eric F. Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 116.

[4] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* Volume 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: CCEL.org, 2010), iBooks II.

[5] Eric F. Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 123.

[6] It is beyond the scope of this paper to argue if Praxeas was an historical figure. For simplicity, this paper will refer to Praxeas using personal pronouns to be consistent with their use for Marcion.

[7] Osborn, *Tertullian*, 121.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul*, iBooks XXXII.

different substance than a hammer, though both are hard. Tertullian explains, "there is softness in wool, and softness in a feather: their natural qualities are alike, (and put them on a par;) their substantial qualities are not alike, (and keep them distinct.)"[10] Sharing external qualities makes objects similar, but that does not equate their sharing of the same substance. Substance is the thing from which something is made.

In *Against Marcion*, Tertullian describes this further. He is arguing against a potential objection from Marcion to his use of the term "God" in reference to Marcion's two deities.[11] Tertullian argues that the name, "God" should not be an issue for Marcion. One's name does not give something it's substance or essence. A human does not become more or less human by being given a name. Tertullian likewise explained that God is God because of what He is rather than what He is called. He wrote:

> That supremacy, then, which we ascribe to God in consideration of His essence, and not because of His name, ought, as we maintain, to be equal in both the beings who consist of that substance for which the name of God is given; because, in as far as they are called gods (i.e. supreme beings, on the strength, of course, of their unbegotten and eternal, and therefore great and supreme essence), in so far the attribute of being the great Supreme cannot be regarded as less or worse in one than in another great Supreme.[12]

The focus here is that Tertullian describes the substance of the being "God" as the attributes which make up the being. He is not concerned with the title God, but with what makes up "God-ness." If something is called "God" it shares in the characteristics which are inherent with the being of God.

Tertullian uses the term "substance" in relation to both Christology and the Trinity extensively. Geoffrey Dunn writes, "The oneness of God is on the level of substance (*substantia*), whereas the distinctions are on the level of degree, form and aspect because the economy of God is a trinity (*trinitas*). . ."[13] One of Tertullian's favorite ways to describe the Godhead is with the use of the term "substance." Of course, his primary purpose in this is arguing that Christians are not Tri-theists. Tertullian explains how he understood Scripture to describe God but countered the argument that it implied tri-theism. Prestige describes Tertullian's Trinitarian argument writing:

> . . .the unity constitutes the triad out of his own inherent nature, not by any process of sub-division, but by reason of a principle of constructive integration which the Godhead

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[10] Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul*, XXXII.

[11] There is not time or space for a fuller discussion of the argument presented against Marcion and then Tertullian's theoretical response on Marcion's behalf. For the purposes of this paper, only Tertullian's response to the potential objection will be discussed.

[12] Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, VII.

[13] Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian*, (London: Routledge, 2004), Accessed July 20, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central, 25.

essentially possesses. In other words, his idea of unity is not mathematical, but philosophical; it is an organic unity, not an abstract, bare point.[14]

Tertullian had to defend his philosophical statement about the Trinity with terms that could be understood. His use of "substance" of something made this possible.

Tertullian argued that all members of the Godhead were all of the same "substance." They all shared in what makes up God-ness. Osborn writes, "While Tertullian may use the term for a particular thing, his more exact use points to the constitutive material of a thing."[15] Tertullian argued that the different persons of the Trinity each were "made up" of the same divine substance. Specifically of the Son, Grillmeier notes Tertullian argues that He "proceeds from this one *substantia* as it is in the Father and thereby receives his own reality, without being separated."[16] The Son and Father share the same substance of being God. However, the Son sharing in the divine substance does not divide God into a plurality. Grillmeier writes the "Son is not a 'part' of the divine substance, but has a 'share' in it."[17] Clearly Tertullian believes there is one substance of God though there are distinct persons. Osborn rightly notes, "Christians say that the word is extended from God, born by projection, so that 'God's son is also called "God" from unity of substance'."[18]

In his Christology, Tertullian used the term "substance" in a similar way. Tertullian used the term "substance" in a similar way in that substance should still be understood as the thing which made up the essence of something. In Christ, there were two substances: the divine and the human. Tertullian anticipated the fourth and fifth century developments of Christology writing, "Thus the nature of the two substances displayed Him as man and God . . ."[19] Regarding the human substance he writes, "All these marks of the earthy origin were in Christ; and it is they which obscured Him as the Son of God, for He was looked on as man, for no other reason whatever than because He existed in the corporeal substance of a man."[20] The very things that made up man were found in Christ. Tertullian explicitly noted several key components that make up the substance of both deity and humanity. He wrote, "in one respect born, in the other unborn; in one respect fleshly, in the other spiritual; in one sense weak, in the other exceeding strong; in one sense dying, in the other living"[21]

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[14] G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, (London, SPCK: 1952), 99.

[15] Eric F. Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997),

[16] Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition Volume One: From the Apostolic age to Chalcedon (451)*, (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1975), 119.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Osborn, *Tertullian*, 122.

[19] Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, V, V.

[20] Ibid., V, IX.

[21] Ibid., V, V.

<center>Person</center>

Since, as noted above, Tertullian's development of the doctrine of the Trinity was primarily in relation to heretical arguments, his argument broadens as he moves through his writings. Early in his writings, Tertullian spoke of only the Father and the Son. They were still discussed as distinct from each other, but he did not use the terminology that developed later in his writings. In his later writings, ". . .Tertullian would use the word person (*persona*) to describe the level on which Father and Son (Against Praxeas 7.9) and Spirit (Against Praxeas 11.7, 10) were distinct but not separate."[22]

Tertullian spoke of the personhood of the members of the Trinity in several ways. First, Tertullian argued that it was biblically necessary to speak of the Godhead in three Persons. Osborn notes, "Whenever he wants to indicate this entity in the biblical revelation, which is where he finds the distinction, he uses persona." This is especially important given the attempts by both Marcion and Praxeas to show the biblical text to speak of God as two Gods (Marcion) or as one Person and one substance (Praxeas).

In *Against Praxeas* he argued that the modalist position required the singularity of God because they sought to preserve the unity of God.[23] However, Tertullian argued that the notion that the Son was a distinct person did not require there to be two Gods. He wrote, "his not by severance of their substance, but from the dispensation wherein we declare the Son to be undivided and inseparable from the Father, —distinct in degree, not in state. And although, when named apart, He is called God, He does not thereby constitute two Gods, but one . . ."[24] Tertullian argued that God could exist as two distinct persons in one substance. He wrote of John 10:30, "When He says, "I and my Father are one" in essence—*Unum*—He shows that there are Two, whom He puts on an equality and unites in one." There are clearly two persons being spoken of in this text. Jesus uses the two terms "I" and "my Father" to designate that there is some distinction between the Godhead. Praxeas' attempt to unify the persons, Tertullian argues, is misguided due to a lack of understanding of the language. He noted in his argument that the term *Unum* connotes "thing or essence" rather than "personhood." If it would have been *unus*, this would have implied the very personhood that Praxeas wished to demonstrate.[25] However, this is not what the biblical text says. The biblical text supports Tertullian's position over against Praxeas.

Tertullian also saw the personal relationship to be necessary between the Father and the Son. If the Father was to be a father, he had to have a son since they are substantially related (i.e. related in their very essence). Osborn explained Tertullian's argument well. He wrote, "When they are reflexive (father-father, son-son), the members cease to exist. Since, for Praxeas, monarchy makes father identical with son, and son identical with father, both father and son are no more."[26] God could have overcome this obstacle using the Scriptures to clearly state that He functioned in this way. Tertullian, however, says that God explicitly removes this as an option by

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[22] Dunn, *Tertullian*, 25.

[23] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, XIX.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, XXII.

[26] Osborn, *Tertullian*, 127.

stating the opposite clearly. Tertullian argues that if God wanted to reveal that He had overcome this argument against His essential triunity, He could not have said what He does in Psalm 2:7 (ESV), "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." To follow Praxeas' argument, Tertullian writes, God would have had to say, "I am my Son, today I have begotten me." In doing so, He could have claimed that he operated in this paradox and Christians would have to submit. However, he does not do this. He uses the terminology specifically showing the divine personhood of the Father and the Son.[27]

Tertullian also used analogies to help describe the substance of the Trinity. While many may object to the use of analogy because of the inherent issue of comparing something that has no comparison, analogies can be helpful in achieving a base understanding of a topic. These analogies also show how he understood substance in the Godhead. One analogy that Tertullian used was that of the sun. This analogy was commonly used in ancient Christianity, but Tertullian set the foundation for its use. He wrote that the substance of something is not necessarily divided by there being persons which proceed from it. In the *Apology* he wrote, "Even when the ray is shot from the sun, it is still part of the parent mass; the sun will still be in the ray, because it is a ray of the sun—there is no division of substance, but merely an extension."[28] The substance of God is not changed when Personhood is granted to one member of the Trinity. Tertullian continued arguing that substance does not depend on what comes from it because the ones that proceed from the substance are still partakers of the substance. In an analogy which compared the Trinity to a tree, he wrote, "The material matrix remains entire and unimpaired, though you derive from it any number of shoots possessed of its qualities; so, too, that which has come forth out of God is at once God and the Son of God, and the two are one."[29] Since each Person of the Trinity still shares in the divine substance, Tertullian argued that each is God and there is still just one God.

Tertullian, therefore, presented a reasonably clear picture of the terms "substance" (i.e. that which made something that thing and not something else) and "person" (i.e. that which makes an individual distinct). He used these terms to explain the Godhead as three Persons against Praxeas' modalistic Monarchianism while still maintaining the unity of the Godhead. With this in mind, this paper will now turn to the similarities and differences between Tertullian's use of the terms and that of Augustine.

AUGUSTINIAN CONVERGENCE

Tertullian's influence can be seen in many Church Fathers who wrote on the Trinity. Augustine is a prime example of the influence Tertullian had. While the authors wrote nearly two hundred years apart, there is still significant overlap in their terminology. Augustine and Tertullian shared several similarities in their use of "substance" and "person." This section will examine the similarities of consistent terminology, and biblical evidence used by both Tertullian and Augustine in their formation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Consistent Terminology

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[27] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, X.

[28] Tertullian, *Apology*, XXI.

[29] Ibid., XXI.

First, Tertullian had a significant impact on the pre-Nicene fathers and their use of the terminology at all. Novatian, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose, and many others all draw on the terminology that Tertullian originated. This language became the traditional language of the Latin church.

Augustine fell in line with this tradition. While there are points at which he appears to nuance the terminology more than earlier sources, Augustine still uses similar phrases. Regarding the term "substance," Augustine writes, "that the Trinity is the one and only and true God, and also how the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are rightly said, believed, understood, to be of one and the same substance or essence."[30] Augustine is clearly drawing on the terminology of Tertullian as had the council of Nicaea. Augustine does not here differentiate between the traditional understanding of "substance" from any further development of the terminology. He will discuss this further in a different section, but he here understands that there are key terms that the Church has used to speak of God and this terminology must be respected, though it can be enhanced through further development of thinking.

At the Council of Hippo in 393 A.D., Augustine presented a defense of the "pro-Nicene" terminology. Lewis Ayres writes that he ". . .openly and extensively invokes terminologies and themes typical of Latin pro-Nicene theology."[31] This terminology was present in much of the writing between Tertullian and Augustine. Ayres notes, of course, that the terms "substance" and "person" had been part of the Latin trinitarian language since the time of Tertullian. This terminology had become ingrained in the Latin thinking. So much so, in fact, that though Augustine may not have been overly pleased with some of terms, he used them because of his desire to maintain consistency within the tradition.[32] Augustine does use some modified terminology in *On the Trinity*, as will be discussed later, but he consistently applies the traditional terms "substance" and "person" as part of his trinitarian vocabulary.

Logical and Biblical Connection

In addition to using consistent terminology, Augustine argued with Tertullian that the Son necessarily must be of the same substance as the Father because of the logical connection with the biblical data. Augustine and Tertullian both used John 1 to advance their argument. John 1:1-3 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God. The Word was with God in the beginning. All things were created by him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created."[33] Tertullian argued that the person of the Son was of the same substance with the Father from this passage because of a logical necessity. He writes, "Now if He too is God, according to John, (who says,) "The Word was God," then you have two Beings—One that commands that the thing be made, and the Other that

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[30] Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity; Doctrinal Treatises; Moral Treatises*, in NPNF1-03 trans. Philip Schaff, iBooks ccel.org 2010, Book I, chapter 2.

[31] Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) Accessed July 22, 2018, ProQuest Ebook Central, 72

[32] Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 82.

[33] All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the NET Bible 1996-2016 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C.

executes the order and creates. In what sense, however, you ought to understand Him to be another, I have already explained, on the ground of Personality, not of Substance—in the way of distinction, not of division."[34] Tertullian wanted to show both the distinction of the "persons" with the unification of the "substance" because the Scriptures insist that this be the case. If John the Apostle says that the Word is God and the text distinguishes the Word as God from the Father as God, then you cannot deny the necessity of there being more than one person in the Godhead. Tertullian argues that you cannot simply say that God took on different roles in this situation. The text explicitly states, "He who issues a command is different from Him who executes it,"[35] thus, there must be some distinction between the Father, Son, and Spirit in more than mere title.

Augustine argued similarly. He wrote that there was a logical connection to be made. Augustine argues that this requires a "substantial" unification between the Father and Son. The Father and the Son must be of the same "substance" because of the biblical text. Regarding John 1:3 he writes, "if the Son is not of the same substance with the Father, then He is a substance that was made: and if He is a substance that was made, then all things were not made by Him; but "all things were made by Him," therefore He is of one and the same substance with the Father."[36] Augustine understood the biblical text to say that the Son must be of the same "substance" with the Father because He was the Creator. If He was not of the same "substance" as the Father, then He is a created being. If He is a created being, He cannot be Creator as the text says He was. Thus, the Son must be of the same "substance" as the Father. If this is denied, then the text of Scripture fails logical consistency.

Augustine argued for personhood in much the same way, though he spent much less space discussing "person" than "substance." He argued that since Scripture speaks clearly of three distinct persons (as Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in the Godhead, but requires them to be one divine being, Christians can use this terminology. He answers the objection that they should be called three Gods if there are three persons by saying that Scripture denies speaking of God as "three Gods." In contrast, however, Scripture does not object to the distinction of "persons."[37] By this he seeks to maintain a consistently biblical argument. The Scriptures clearly object to speaking of three Gods. He notes that this is clear in passages such as the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4. God is singular. There are not multiple gods, but there is one God. In this passage, and others, this denies a Christian the ability to say that there are three gods. It does not limit the term "person" in relation to the Godhead.

Both Tertullian and Augustine consistently use this line of argumentation. They each cite a vast array of biblical passages that support the Scripture's understanding of God in this way. This is to be commended by contemporary Christians given that they place such an emphasis on what Scripture says about the subject. Christians must always remember, as Tertullian and Augustine, that Scripture is what informs our views of who God is. God is the only one who defines God.

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[34] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, XII.

[35] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, XII.

[36] Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XI, chapter 10.

[37] Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, Book VII, chapter 4.

AUGUSTINIAN DIVERGENCE

While Tertullian shares much in common with Augustine, there are also several key areas where they differ. In each, the differences are significant. As noted above, the intellectual context of an author's writing cannot be set aside. One cannot expect an author to consider every possible conclusion of their position. At first glance, one might think Augustine ended the discussion when he wrote of the similarity of essence and substance.[38] As noted above this appears to be a direct equivocation of terms. However, there is much more that he discusses on the issue. There are several differences between Tertullian's use of "substance" and "person" and Augustine's.

Philosophical Differences

The first point of difference between Tertullian and Augustine is that their philosophical systems differ meaning their use of terms is different. Osborn argues Tertullian was a Stoic philosopher, though Tertullian may have disagreed with the label.[39] His use of the term "substance" points "points to the constitutive material of a thing" which was a clearly Stoic description.[40] Tertullian used the term "substance" as a rather physical or mathematical term. This is clear from Tertullian's analogies in his defense of the Trinity. He uses very concrete objects rather than relational ones. As noted above, Tertullian used physical objects as analogies. He used the sun and its rays, a tree and roots. . In fact, Prestige notes, "He acknowledges that he would call God and His Word two *objects*, but only as the root and the tree are two distinct *objects* . . ."[41] In addition, Osborn notes that Tertullian speaks of the divine as being physical enough to distinguish personhood.[42] For Tertullian, God has a body, but it is a spiritual body. This body is the substance of which God is made.

A clear example of this mathematical or material thinking in Tertullian comes from the opening chapters of *Against Praxeas*. He writes that the Trinity is one, yet three "however, not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in aspect; yet of one substance, and of one condition, and of one power, inasmuch as He is one God, from whom these degrees and forms and aspects are reckoned"[43] The language of "form" and "aspect" are clearly material and physical terms. Augustine shows a striking divergence from this philosophical thought.

Augustine would object to the connection of the divine with a corporeal body outside of the incarnate Christ. This may be because of Augustine's neo-Platonic philosophical background

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[38] Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, Book VII, chapter 4.

[39] Osborn, *Tertullian*, 27.

[40] Ibid., 131.

[41] Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 104. Emphasis mine.

[42] Osborn, *Tertullian*, 132.

[43] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, II.

as well as his time in Manicheanism.[44] Augustine himself makes this point in his *Confessions*. He writes:

> But then, having read those books of the Platonists, where I was admonished to seek incorporeal truth, I beheld your "invisible things understood through the things that are made" (Rom 1:20); and driven back, I perceived that, . . .I was certain that you are infinite, yet not in the sense of being diffused throughout finite or infinite space, that you truly are, and are always the same, varying in no part and by no motion, and indeed that all other things are from you, because of this one very strong evidence, that they exist.[45]

Thom argues that Augustine's position is a modified form of Aristotelian thinking. He writes, ". . .Augustine concludes that God can at best be called a substance only improperly. But God can be called a Substance improperly, in the precise sense that, like all substances, He is not in any subject."[46] This is consistent with the neo-Platonic influences on Augustine's thinking. Each of these philosophical systems show a propensity to discourage a "concrete" connection between God and nature.

For Augustine, the use of the term "substance" in relation to the unity of the Trinity could lead to the understanding that the Trinity is not unified. Ayres writes that Augustine rejects the substance/species connection because ". . .a species is always divisible into individuals and the divine essence should not be understood to be divisible in this way."[47] There must be caution when using "substance" in relation to the Godhead because of potential issues related to God's "simplicity."

Augustine's preference to use the term "essence" in the place of "substance" helps to showcase this caution. For Augustine, the term "substance" was derived from "*subsistere*" In contrast, essence was derived from "*esse.*" [48] This distinction is critical because, Augustine argued, if something "subsists," it cannot be "simple." God would be made up of parts rather than being a simple being.[49] He wrote as an example, "For body subsists, and so is substance; but those things are in the body, which subsists and is their subject, and they are not substances, but are in a substance."[50] What makes up the subject is not the subject. The subject is the sum of its parts rather than actually being it in itself. This, for Augustine, was a major problem with the use of the term "substance."

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[44] Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 16.

[45] Augustine of Hippo, *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings*, ed. John Farina, trans. Mary T. Clark, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984), 77.

[46] Paul Thom, *The Logic of the Trinity: Augustine to Ockham*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), accessed August 1, 2018, ProQuest Ebook Central 26.

[47] Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 219.

[48] Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 201.

[49] Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, Book VII, chapter 5.

[50] Ibid., Book VII, chapter 5.

If God has substance, there are things inside him which exist in relation to God being God. Augustine used God's goodness as an example. He wrote, "But it is an impiety to say that God subsists, and is a subject in relation to His own goodness, and that this goodness is not a substance or rather essence, and that God Himself is not His own goodness, but that it is in Him as in a subject."[51] Goodness, in this case, would exist in a substance and not be a necessary part of that substance. If God's goodness were merely "in a substance" and it ceased to exist, it would not impact the God-ness of God. However, this is contrary to who God is. Augustine notes that God is rightly called ""great, omnipotent, good, and whatever of this kind . . ."[52] These are essential to who God is. These attributes cannot disappear without God ceasing to be God. Augustine, thus, is arguing that God alone should be called "essence" rather than "substance" because substance implies the potential for God to no longer be God. In the *City of God* Augustine wrote, "those things which are essentially and truly divine are called simple, because in them quality and substance are identical, and because they are divine, or wise, or blessed in themselves, and without extraneous supplement."[53] Here he asserts that essence and substance must be linked in order to properly understand the Godhead. He sees this as a logical necessity given the language available.

Augustine makes further connection between "essence" and his trinitarian thought in Book VIII of *On the Trinity*. He provides a clear articulation of his preference of the term "essence" writing:

> For they are thus spoken of according to essence, since in them to be is the same as to be great, as to be good, as to be wise, and whatever else is said of each person individually therein, or of the Trinity itself, in respect to themselves. And that therefore they are called three persons, or three substances, not in order that any difference of essence may be understood, but that we may be able to answer by some one word, should any one ask what three, or what three things?[54]

Here, one can clearly see the Nicene and Greek influences on Augustine's thought. This development will be discussed more fully later in the paper, but it is important to note that Augustine connected the use of "substance" in Greek with "essence" in Latin. This distinction in terminology is important given Augustine's commitment to traditional language.

Augustine consistently argued that the material or physical discussions of God's substance must be carefully guarded to ensure as much accuracy as possible. He knew that humans would not be perfect in their explanation of the Godhead, but that God would still be able to work through imperfect human language. Augustine would not have objected to the use of analogies. Augustine knew that no human language would be able to provide a clear picture of the Godhead. He wrote, "human language labors altogether under great poverty of speech. The answer, however, is given, three "persons," not that it might be [completely] spoken, but that it

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Augustine, *The City of God,* Book XI, chapter 10.

[54] Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, Book VIII, chapter 1.

might not be left [wholly] unspoken."[55] But this is not to say that he completely rejected the attempt to express who God was in terms of "substance," (or as we have shown, "essence") and "person." Augustine simply wanted to safeguard the Christian from delving too far into the mystery of the Godhead and end up in heresy.

<div align="center">Relational Trinitarianism</div>

In addition to the difference in basic philosophy, there is also a difference in the relational language used by Tertullian and Augustine. There is a slight connection in Tertullian of the necessity of the relationship between the persons of the Trinity and their sharing the divine substance. Osborn writes of Tertullian that the "Trinity is a matter of substantial relations, which require distinctness and mutual necessity between the three members of the divine economy."[56] The three persons of the Trinity were mutually dependent on each other for their distinct personhood. The Father could not be the Father without the Son being the Son and these two Persons functioned through the Spirit which was sent by both the Father and the Son. This relationship, however, is still more material than how Augustine expresses the trinitarian relationship.

Augustine views the interrelatedness of the persons of the Trinity in a similar, yet more focused way than Tertullian. He does certainly argue that the relationship exists between the Father, Son, and Spirit in an eternal sense. Speaking of the Father and Son's relationship, Augustine writes:

> . . .because the Father is not called the Father except in that He has a Son, and the Son is not called Son except in that He has a Father, these things are not said according to substance; because each of them is not so called in relation to Himself, but the terms are used reciprocally and in relation each to the other; nor yet according to accident, because both the being called the Father, and the being called the Son, is eternal and unchangeable to them.

There is a logical connection of the relationship of the Father and Son. They are not "substantially" different. They share in the same divine substance. They differ in their relationship to one another. The Father cannot be called "Father" unless He has a son. The Son cannot be the "Son" without a father. Their relationship, Augustine argues, is eternal. The Father has always had the Son and the Son has always existed as part of the "substance" of the Father. This largely agrees with Tertullian's use of the terms.

However, the distinction of relation in Augustine's treatment of the Trinity compared to Tertullian's has more to do with his use of analogy. Tertullian, as noted above, used very physical and material analogies to describe the trinitarian relationships of "substance" and "person." Augustine took a much different approach.

One of Augustine's preferred analogies for the Trinity is love. Some of this preference for this kind of analogy comes from Scripture. In his *Homily on First John*, Augustine writes, "For God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: the Son, God from God; the Holy Spirit, God from

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[55] Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, Book V, chapter 9.

[56] Osborn, *Tertullian*, 125.

God; and the three are only one God, not three Gods."[57] He suggests that how we love ourselves is an analogy of the Trinity. He writes of love that there are "three things" present when we love anything, "myself, and that which I love, and love itself."[58] Augustine connects this to the Trinity by arguing that, while there is distinction between these three things, they are unified. Augustine specifically draws on the love of self as proving his point. He writes, "he who loves and that which is loved are the same when any one loves himself."[59] Here he shows when one loves himself, there are two distinct "spirits," the one loving and the one loved, but these two share in the same essence. There is also a third component, the love itself. Augustine writes that these three must be of the same essence because "if we subtract him that loves, then there is no love; and if we subtract love, then there is no one that loves."[60] Augustine clearly wants to move forward from the material and mathematical language of Tertullian and does so with this analogy rather than one from nature.

<center>Linguistic Development</center>

Linguistically, Augustine moved forward from Tertullian. He sought to connect the Greek understanding of the Trinity with the Latin understanding. He wrote, "For that which must be understood of persons according to our usage, this is to be understood of substances according to the Greek usage; for they say three substances, one essence, in the same way as we say three persons, one essence or substance."[61] It appears that Augustine had at least a basic understanding of the terms "substance" and "person" to be equivalent to the terms used by the Nicene Creed, though later he admits to not fully understanding this distinction. In fact, he wrote, "essence usually means nothing else than substance in our language, that is, in Latin."[62] He later nuances this more to explain his enhancements to the meaning of "substance", but he did not object to the traditional understanding of the term "substance."

Augustine did not use the same language regarding the Trinity that Tertullian did because the Latin language did not fully allow for the definitions that Augustine wanted to use. Prestige argues, "Neither the Latin language, nor the ordinary Latin intellect, was capable of the subtlety of the conception which approved itself to the Greek theologians."[63] Augustine clearly desires to be careful in how he is interpreted. He argues that any discussion of the Trinity is done with the understanding that the "super-eminence of the Godhead surpasses the power of customary speech."[64]

Tertullian used the language available to him at the time of his writing. He did not have the benefit of several centuries of development of Christian thinking on the use of these terms.

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[57] Augustine of Hippo, *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings*, ed. John Farina, trans. Mary T. Clark, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984), 302.

[58] Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, Book IX, chapter 2.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, Book IX, chapter 2.

[61] Ibid., Book VII, chapter 4.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 235.

[64] Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, Book VII, chapter 4.

As all are, Tertullian's language was a product of his time. Ayres rightly notes that "Latin Trinitarian theology was born in the anti-Monarchian conflicts of the late second and third centuries and Latin theologians of the fourth century continued to write in a theological dialect shaped by those conflicts."[65] The language Tertullian used was formed through challenges present in defending the Trinity against modalistic Monarchianism as Tertullian needed with Praxeas. Against Praxeas, Tertullian needed to show how the Father, Son, and Spirit were distinct but unified. His arguments connected the unity of the Godhead with the tri-personality in that direction. Praxeas argued that God was at times the Father, at times the Son, and at other times the Spirit. Tertullian's response to this is what caused him to utilize the new terminology in relation to the Trinity.

The challenges were different for Augustine. In Augustine's time, the heresy *du jour* was Arianism. Arianism presented a much different challenge than modalistic Monarchianism. Augustine's arguments against Arianism required an emphasis on the unity of the Trinity. The Arian heresy divided the Godhead into several "substances." The Father was one substance, the Son was another. Augustine was not dealing with modalistic Monarchianism so he had to contextualize the terminology available to him. This contextualization is common among theologians throughout church history.

Augustine drew heavily on the language that was available to him post-Nicaea. Augustine preferred the term "essence" as noted above, because of the influence of the Nicene language available to him. In all of Augustine's writings, it is clear that he has Nicaea in view. He writes, "He is, however, without doubt, a substance, or, if it be better so to call it, an essence, which the Greeks call οὐσία. For as wisdom is so called from the being wise, and knowledge from knowing; so from being comes that which we call essence."[66] There is a clear connection between the Nicene language and Augustine's writings. But this also shows, again, how Augustine differs from Tertullian. He wants to move from the term "substance" to "essence" because of the linguistic developments.

Augustine, however, does not completely follow the Greek use of the terms because of the distinctions he sees as already present in Latin. He notes that the Greeks have a distinction between *hypostasis* and *ousia*. He is not certain what the difference intended is which shows a limited understanding of exactly what the Greek fathers sought to explain between the terms, but he clearly notes that there is development in the terminology.[67] He argues that the Greek terminology may bring some confusion to the Latin speaker, but then offers further clarification. It is clear that he did not always see the Nicene language fitting well with the philosophical terms with which he was acquainted.

He writes, as Ayres notes, "Augustine's use of the noun *essentia* is a clear sign of the extent to which Augustine has developed a dynamic mostly latent in his predecessors. The term is only rarely used before him, often where it seems to be directly translating the Greek *ousia*."[68] Augustine further clarifies the terms typically used of the Godhead by integrating the Greek Fathers' and Nicene thoughts into his writing.

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[65] Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 72.

[66] Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, Book V, chapter 2.

[67] Ibid., Book V, chapter 8.

[68] Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 202.

In addition to alterations regarding substance, some see Augustine as having issue with *persona*. Studer writes "for [Augustine] persona does not entail relationship."[69] For Augustine, Studer argues, persona is an absolute term which is not the desired definition. The definition of persona is adjusted to correspond with "I." In this sense, Studer argues that Augustine's position is that God exists, not as three "Is" but as "three modes of being God."[70] This argument carries some weight given Augustine's critique of substance previously mentioned. There is a careful distinction in Studer's argument that tries to avoid Sabellianism. It seems that Augustine, even though he had great appreciation for traditional terminology, did not view it as something that could not develop with the culture in which it was present.

This is a difference from Tertullian, but not one that Tertullian can be faulted for. As previously noted, the Council of Nicaea and the two centuries that separated Tertullian from Augustine allowed Augustine greater clarity in his argumentation. He was able to draw on the newer terminology available to him thanks to the work done by other theologians and philosophers.

CONCLUSION

Tertullian's use of "substance" and "person" in relation to the Trinity was revolutionary for the early Church. Tertullian's terminology helped to catapult the church to a clearer explanation of the biblical teaching of the Godhead.[71] He argued that there was one "substance" of God revealed in three "persons." His argument was based on biblical text as well as negative apologetic. He was a product of his cultural context which included answering heretical arguments as well as presenting a positive case of the Christian faith to pagan rulers.

His arguments were greatly influential throughout church history. Tertullian's formula had a great impact on the terminology used at the council of Nicaea. This meant that his reach went far beyond Roman North Africa, though it was significant there. The impact of Tertullian's writing is seen in Augustine's own interpretation of the Trinity. It is unclear if Augustine had ever read Tertullian first hand. It certainly is possible given their physical proximity. However, there are significant overlaps in Augustine's defense of the use of "substance" and "person" in relation to the Godhead. Augustine argues with Tertullian that there is a necessary relationship between the persons of the Trinity such that they require distinction of personhood.

While they agree on many points, Tertullian and Augustine would disagree on several others as well. Their philosophical differences would have led them to approach a discussion of the corporeal nature of the spirit differently. This directly tied into their use of the term "substance." In addition, because of the time of each of their writings, they had different influences on their thinking. Tertullian did not have the benefit of the council of Nicaea and other councils which helped to better articulate the terminology Tertullian was using. He may have adapted his terminology much like Augustine did if he had interacted with more eastern Church leaders.

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[69] Studer, Basil. "The Revelation of the Love of the Humble God According to Augustine." *In Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church*. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1993. 183.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 97.

The assessment of these two authors' terminology for the Trinity leaves one asking "who is right?" Which terminology should be used or should either one be abandoned? Both have made significant contributions to the theological concept of the Trinity.

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