The Metaphysical Bases of the Doctrine of God in Aquinas and Augustine

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THE METAPHYSICAL BASES OF THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

IN AQUINAS AND AUGUSTINE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There are several possible approaches to the task of comparing the thought of two thinkers. One is the grammatical method. In this method the conceived task is to lift out from the writings of each of the two men the conclusions which they reach on the general problem and on subsidiary problems. For example, Thomas says: "It is impossible to attain to the knowledge of the Trinity by natural reason."[1] Augustine, on the other hand, enjoins us to "seek the Trinity which is God, in the things themselves that are eternal, incorporeal, and unchangeable."[2] We might conclude from these two passages that there is a basic and irreconcilable difference in the two men and that our investigations have taught us something regarding the beliefs of the two men. But we shall be mistaken, for a more careful analysis will reveal that the opposition is much more complicated, for the two men mean something different by "knowledge," "attain to," and by "reason." With these materials, then, there is no basis for adequate criticism.

A second type of investigation is the historical-psychological type, in which the doctrines held by each are seen as consequents of historical

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[1] _Summa Theologica_, Q. 32, Art. 1, I _Answer_. I shall make all my references to Thomas to the section of the article in which it is found. Unless otherwise indicated, the reference will be to I, I of the _Summa_.

[2] _De Trinitate_, Book 15, Ch. 4, Par. 6. I shall make all references to this book in this fashion. Unless otherwise stated, the reference will be to _De Trinitate_.

or psychological conditioning. In this type, too, the doctrine of the
two men are not evaluated by principles internal to the statements of
the doctrines, but by a historical principle, implied by a philosophy of
history, or by a psychological principle (or principles), implied by a
theory of psychology. That such investigations are possible and valuable
I concede, but only as illustrative or perhaps partial proof of the
principles used in their interpretation, not as proving the correctness
or error of the doctrines. Such an investigation might see the Summa
as the product of stolid monkishness and the De Trinitate the result of
a repentant reprobate. Or one might see the De Trinitate as the last
great product of Neo-Platonism and the Summa as the logical extension of
arrogant rationalism, soon to give way to a reaction.

The third type of approach--that attempted in this thesis--is in
terms of the structure of thought in each man. An assumption is made
that notions of being and of knowledge and the peculiarity of the formu-
lation of the problem are determinative of the statement of the theo-
logical doctrine. If so, then any investigation which is interested
primarily in the content of the doctrines must investigate these three
determinants. This thesis will be concerned with the philosophical
determinants of the statement of the doctrine of God in Aquinas and
Augustine. The comparison is then not between differing conclusions
regarding similar problems, nor between different men, but between the
documents themselves and the structure of thought within each.

Most basically this thesis is concerned with the problem of schism.
It attempts to discover the nature of the opposition between two theolo-
gies. Schisms based on statements interpreted grammatically are

tragically naive, on personalities idolatrous. It is theology and the practical consequences of theology which alone can justify schism. And to discover the opposition between theologies requires an analysis of the basis of the statement of that theology.

I have chosen Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine because from the point of view which I have taken they represent the primary divergence in philosophical statement of theology. What I mean by this should become clear in Chapter Two. At this point let me say simply that they are as opposite as theologies can become.

CHAPTER II

THE METAPHYSICS OF THEOLOGY

Before I can discuss the metaphysics of the doctrines of God in Augustine and Aquinas I must state the relation between metaphysics and theology. This will involve a definition of metaphysics, and this definition will fix what I mean by the term "metaphysical basis." My problem is to discover the metaphysical bases in the statements of the doctrine of God. Once discovered, I will seek to formulate the relations between these metaphysical bases, which will take the form of propositions. My thesis is that these two metaphysical bases do not contradict each other, but rather that they are neutral and equally possible ways of stating the same "truth." What I mean by this should become clear as I demonstrate the thesis.

Two procedures are possible, the analytic and the synthetic. I could have started with the doctrines of God, then elicited the metaphysics from each one, then compared them. This, because of its vague similarity to the so-called modern scientific method, might be regarded as preferable. But there is a second possible procedure which has the advantage of clarity, precision, and brevity, and which I shall therefore choose. From propositions which cannot be questioned I shall show a priori the possible courses which metaphysics can take, then show in which the doctrines of God in Augustine and Aquinas are set. I shall then discuss the relations between the two doctrines of God.

Metaphysics is the study of existence and essence. This is the

definition I choose to give to it. The definition does co-incide with all the primary works labeled "metaphysics" that I have read. It also applies to large sections of the books and essays ordinarily regarded as epistemology. It further includes sections in books on mathematics (Russell, Principles of Mathematics), theology (Tillich, Paul, Systematic Theology I), political philosophy (Hobbes, Leviathan), ethics (Moore, G. E., Principia Ethica), physics (Whitehead, Science and the Modern World), and many others. The definition is equivalent to such other common definitions as "the basic principles of reality," since all basic principles of reality must involve both existence and essence, "the elemental structure of the universe," "being qua being," etc.

The only category which could be higher than these is being, if being is defined as the totality of existence and essence. But once we have said that it is this totality, we have finished with it, and must now turn our attention to existence and essence. Now there are two possible relations that existence and essence can have to each other. Either essence precedes existence, or existence precedes essence. By "precedes" I mean that either existence is reified essence, or essence is abstracted from existence. There are several other ways of stating this same thought which may help elucidate. Essence is being is possibility is form is rest. Existence is becoming is actuality is matter is motion. This is only generally true. It is true for some philosophers, but not for all. One may say that becoming includes being with Whitehead or that being includes becoming with Plato. Or that possibility includes actuality with Leibniz or that within actuality we find the possible with Hume. Or that we find form in matter with Aristotle or

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that form precedes matter with Kant. Or that all things in motion seek fulfillment in rest as in Aquinas, or that rest is change of motion, as in modern physics. All of these are analogous ways of stating the same problem. They are the basic metaphysical questions, and philosophers may be divided according to which of the positions they take. Within each decision there are other decisions and within those decisions new decisions, which accounts for the multiplicity of approaches to the basic metaphysical problems. With each decision, however, (and this is important for the thesis), the possibilities are delimited. And the metaphysics becomes set. Content poured into the metaphysics, such as doctrines of God, hardens into a definite mold. The problem as to whether there is a distinction between content and form, or whether one merges into the other, is itself dependent upon a basic metaphysical decision.

Now my basic assertion is: either essence precedes existence or existence precedes essence. This proposition is tautological, therefore a priori and therefore true. The only other possibility is that they be contemporaneous. But no possible meaning can be found if they be regarded as contemporaneous; such a supposition is therefore absurd.

How can one decide between them? There are two possible ways. One can negate one side of the disjunction, proving that the other is true. But this would necessitate an extraneous principle, which would be somehow prior to this proposition. But our proposition is the most basic proposition, and therefore no prior principle can be found. This way is therefore fruitless. The other way is to discover a principle which will affirm one side of the disjunction. But for the same reason no such principle can be found. Therefore this way too is unsound; and therefore

this is no solution to the problem. There is no apriori choice.

My solution is this. The "or" is an inclusive "or," which means that both sides could be true. But they can be true under only one condition, that their truth is in terms of their capability for serving as a metaphysical description of the universe rather than having some specially favored touch with reality. If they are judged according to their capability, this means that they must be judged a posteriori. What will it mean to justify them a posteriori? It means that we judge them in two ways. We judge them, first, as a mathematical system, in terms of the consistency of their consequences. They must not involve themselves in absurdities. They must not be self-contradictory, nor must they have consequences which obviously do not accord with reality. The second justification is in terms of comprehensiveness. Their consequences must involve all of reality. If a part of reality is omitted, and this becomes plain, then the principle lacks comprehensiveness and must not be asserted as the basic principle of the universe.

Now it is possible that one side of the disjunction will stand the test and not the other. But it is also possible that both sides of the disjunction will stand it. One can discover this only by a thorough study of metaphysical systems. To justify it completely would require an eternity. But my reading up to this time is a partial justification of the thesis to me. This thesis itself will serve as part of the proof. I contend that unless one or the other side of the proposition can be proved apodictally false or self-contradictory, that we must assume that the two are both adequate descriptions of reality, equally consistent and comprehensive, differing only in the ways they slice the universe.

This means that they will appear different in their formulation.

At this point I could proceed by showing the adequacy of both in dealing with the same problems. But such demonstration would be infinite. I will therefore attempt to use this principle in reference to the problem of the doctrines of God. My contention is that Aquinas and Augustine take opposite sides on this metaphysical question, that Aquinas believes existence precedes essence and Augustine essence to precede existence. I shall attempt to show how the decision in each affects their doctrines of God. Before I go directly into the doctrines of God I find it necessary to describe some of the secondary metaphysical decisions of the two men.

Existence precedes essence in Thomas. He says in his essay On Being and Essence that form is the 'actuality' of matter. Matter is potential. From the potential the actual follows.[1] But there are different possible ways of conceiving essence. Philosophers as widely different as Aristotle and Whitehead accept this principle. Essences are either definitions or relations. They are either determinate things or determinate relations between things. No third kind of essence is conceivable. These exhaust the possibilities. Thomas finds his essences in definitions of things. In Being and Essence he says: "Essence is what is signified by the definition of the things."[2] Every particular thing has an essence, which has a definition in terms of a genus and a differentia. E.g., Socrates is a man. Man is defined as a rational

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[1]Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, De Ente et Essentia (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1937), p. 8.

[2]Ibid., p. 7.

and its meaning will be further clarified as we find it developed in section 5. Essences are in terms of relations rather than in definitions of things. This is evident in Augustine's discussion of the analogies between number and truth, which are always discussions of relations. Such discussions are exhibited both in On the Free Will and in On the Trinity.

Aquinas does not neglect relations, however. No philosopher could, since the relations of time and space, among others, are too obvious a part of our experience to neglect. And so essence is attached not only to the genus of substance, but to the genera of quantity, quality, and the other seven.[5] But the last nine genera are posterior to the genus of substance. One speaks of these genera only in relation to substance. They are a part of a substance. They are attached to substance as a genus (man is an animal), as a property (man is grammatical, i.e., uses language), as an accident (man has five fingers on each hand).

In Augustine, on the other hand, there is no distinction between substance and the other genera. The relations are primary, and substances become congeries of relations. This can be found reflected in many parts of Augustine. The essay On the Free Will is one of Augustine's attempts to find the primary relations of the universe; and in this essay we discover number, truth, beauty, the good.

This latter distinction, the third that I have made, also affects the doctrine of God. Just in what way I shall discuss later in the thesis.

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[5] Cf. Aquinas, De Ente et Essentia, p. 4.

CHAPTER III

THE PROBLEM OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Aquinas presents proofs for the existence of God. The history of the proofs for the existence of God, whether they are valid and how they are valid, is a metaphysical problem, for upon basic metaphysical decisions depend the validity of the proofs, as well as the meaning of truth and knowledge. The proofs in Aquinas depend upon his first decision that existence precedes essence. If existence precedes essence, then it is the knowledge of existent things that precedes knowledge of essences. Human epistemology begins with a noetical grasp of the essences of the universe and then reasons from these. The search for the knowledge of God must, as everything else, begin with the first essences intuited by the mind. "Therefore I say that this proposition, God exists, of itself is self-evident, for the predicate is the same as the subject, because God is His own existence....Now because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition is not self-evident to us, but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known to us, though less known in their nature--namely, by His effects."[1]

Therefore Thomas's proofs are proofs which proceed from the effects to the cause of these effects. All of Thomas's arguments are basically arguments from the effect to the cause, although they take five different forms, the argument from motion, from efficient cause, from possibility,

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[1] The Basic Writings of Thomas Aquinas, Anton Pegis, editor (New York: Random House, 1944), Q. 3, Art. 1, I answer.

from the gradation of qualities, and from the final cause.[2] All of them depend upon the arguments from cause which is found in the essay On Being and Essence.

Since existence precedes essence, existence is separate from essences. Since existence precedes essence, an essence cannot achieve existence through itself, but must achieve it from another. But this would lead to an infinite regress, and therefore there must be something which is self-caused. And only a being in which existence does not precede essence can be self-caused. Therefore there must be a being whose existence is his essence. And this being we call God.[3]

Now the other proofs can be reduced to the above proof. All effects are motions, and no motions are not effects. Therefore there must be a self-moved mover. Similarly all possibles are possibles as effects, and all effects were once possibles. The gradation of qualities is simply a particular kind of effect. So also final causes are effects of efficient causes.

Therefore all of the proofs are variants of one, and that one proof depends upon the first two metaphysical decisions. Once Aquinas has made these decisions, a certain kind of proof for the existence of God becomes possible. This constitutes the description of the metaphysical basis for this segment of the doctrine of God.

The proof for the existence of God in Augustine takes a different

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[2]Ibid., Q. 2, Art. 3, I answer.

[3]St. Thomas Aquinas, De Ente et Essentia (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1937) pp. 24 f.

form. It is a proof which received its classic treatment in DesCartes with some differences and is found repeated, with variations, in platonizing philosophers throughout the history of thought. Augustine was committed to this proof as soon as he made the metaphysical decision that essence precedes existence. For if essence precedes existence, then there must be some essence which precedes all of existence here on earth and upon which all of existence depends. All created things depend upon him for their existence, all true statements depend upon his truth, all beautiful things upon his beauty, all good things upon his goodness. Everything upon earth reflects the existence of God, and therefore it is only the fool which denies him.[4]

It is only with extreme patience that Augustine proceeds to prove what is most manifest in the universe, the existence of God. This task, which is the task of book 2 of the _Essay on Free Will_ proceeds from the vaguest kind of existence, sense-impression, up a dialectical ladder of essences, which proceeds upwards to number, then to beauty and wisdom, and finally to God. And the fact of the existence of God can now by no means be doubted.

This constitutes the description of the metaphysical background of Augustine's proof for the existence of God. Each is determined by their two basic metaphysical decisions. Both proofs are in a particular sense valid. Yet both proofs differ because of the differing metaphysical decisions upon which they rest.

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[4]_Selections from Medieval Philosophers_, Richard P. McKeon, editor (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), I, 15.

CHAPTER IV

ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE IN AQUINAS

The shape of the definition of God in Aquinas and Augustine is determined by the three metaphysical decisions each made. In Aquinas the three are: (1) existence precedes essence, (2) the essence of anything is its definition, (3) the other kinds of being, relations, exist only in reference to substance, and they exist in Thomas as genus, property, or accident. This will exhaust the metaphysical equipment which I will use to show the shape of the doctrine of God in Aquinas.

We began with the proof for the existence of God. Now that we know that God exists, we must discover His essence. But how do we discover an essence? As I said in section 3 we do so by means of an intuition which in a simple, undivided act confronts this existent thing. We grasp the essence of a dog when we see a dog. But we never do see God in the same way that we see a dog. We do not see Him as a self-moved mover, as a first cause. We know Him only insofar as He can be known in His effects. As essence can be known only when the knower directly confronts the existent. Our confrontation of God is indirect. Therefore our knowledge of God is indirect. Therefore we cannot know the essence of God. "Therefore, a created intellect cannot see the essence of God unless God by His grace unites Himself to the created intellect, as an object made intelligible to it."[1] Thomas's first question will then be

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[1] *The Basic Writings of Thomas Aquinas*, Anton Pegis, editor (New York: Random House, 1944), Q. 12, Art. 4, *I answer*.

to consider how He is not. He will have a disjunctive syllogism. God is A or B. The world is A. God is different from the world. Therefore God is B. To know God we can look at the existent things we have and deduce from them what we can know of God, but it will be a kind of negative knowledge.

Now Aquinas distinguished between what is known and what can be known. God is not known on earth, but He is careful to supply an epistemological apparatus in which we can say that in heaven the blessed can see God. Thomas argues that if a created intellect could not see God, it could never attain to beatitude. But this is opposed to faith, for the ultimate natural goal of the human intellect is to see God.[2]

But God provides the apparatus for knowing Him. If existence precedes essence, and essence is a definition, then in order to know, there must be a faculty in man capable of appropriating essences. But essences are formal. Hence the faculty which appropriates the essences must be formal also, since nothing which is material can appropriate a formal, since knowledge is of forms. This is what Thomas means when, with Aristotle, he says that the mind can in a sense become all things. It has no substantiality of its own. It is neutral, blank. Its totality is exhausted in the essences which it contains. Now since God is pure form (we need not justify this at this point), he cannot be appropriated by the material. Therefore a formal faculty has the potentiality of seeing God. Thomas elaborates this point in Q. 12, Art. 2: The essence of God cannot be seen through a likeness. Art. 3: The essence of God

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[2]Ibid., Q. 12, Art. 1, I answer.

cannot be seen with the bodily eye. Art. 4: The created intellect cannot by its natural powers see the divine essence. But only the blessed see God, since only the blessed are directly confronted by God and receive light from God.[3] Thomas's theology is written for men on earth, however, and not for the departed blessed. And His doctrine of God must be written from the point of view of a pilgrim on earth, since it is written by a pilgrim on earth; although Thomas was called <u>doctor angelicus</u>, he was not blessed until after his theology was written.

What then can we know of God, if we cannot know his essence? Through the effects which depend upon a first cause we "can be led from them so far as to know of God that He exists, and to know of Him what must necessarily belong to Him, as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by Him. Hence we know His relationship with creatures, that is, He is the cause of all things; also that creatures differ from Him, inasmuch as He is not in any way caused by them; and that His effects are removed from Him, not by reason of any defect on His part, but because He superexceeds them all."[4] This constitutes in summary all that can be known of God by natural reason. It is, in comparison, with natural theology in general, a pessimistic outlook on man's ability to know God. Thomas therefore says that "it was necessary for man's salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God, besides the philosophical sciences revealed by human reason."[5] Therefore divine revelation is

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[3]<u>Ibid</u>., Q. 12, Art 5, <u>I answer</u>.

[4]<u>Ibid</u>., Q. 12, Art. 12, <u>I answer</u>.

[5]<u>Ibid</u>., Q. 1, Art. 1, <u>I answer</u>.

necessary to make known further truths. For man's salvation depends upon the truths about God. Note here again that Aquinas speaks of truths rather than truth. He speaks in this fashion because there is not a single truth in heaven in which all earthly truth participates, but rather that truth is the adequation of thought to thing, i.e., a verbal statement which agrees with the facts.[6] It is obvious here that there are many truths. It is obvious that faith means something specific. In this context faith means for Aquinas simply assent to truths about God not known by reason. For other theologians faith includes a large element of trust and reliance. Thomas has other terms to describe these elements.

Revelation supplements the truths of reason by supplying additional truths in order to complete our knowledge about God. This constitutes the epistemological background of the doctrine of God in Thomas. Note that I reversed the order of discussion in Thomas, putting how we know before what we know, which is the modern way of philosophizing. Thomas's epistemology has as a consequence that we can best know the character and strength of the mind by examining what it has given us in its best moments. Therefore the what comes before the how. Ontology precedes epistemology. In this case Thomas says what would sound ridiculous to modern ears: "As hitherto we have considered God as He is in Himself, we now go on to consider how He is in our knowledge, that is, how He is known by creatures."[7] A mind whose totality is exhausted by its formal contents and has no material part can be known only by seeking what it does know. I accept

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[6]Ibid., Q. 16, Art. 1, I answer.

[7]Ibid., Q. 12, Art. 1, I answer.

this as a valid way. To show how it applies precisely in the field of epistemology would require the scope of another thesis. I therefore leave the question at this point.

Since we, the inhabitants of the earth, cannot know the essence of God, we proceed by seeking what does not befit the essence of God.[8]

Aquinas goes on in a series of questions to show that God is simple, since a first cause cannot be composite. Therefore He is not a body.[9] Nor is He composed of matter and form.[10] And now, having established that God is a pure form, we describe the uniqueness with which we deal with the notion of God as pure form. In body there is a distinction between essence and suppositum. E.g., Socrates, the individuated being, is a suppositum. The essence of Socrates is man. In God there is no distinction between suppositum and essence. They are identified. The essence of God is the same as His existence, since He is first cause. If they were different, God would be caused. In this respect also he differs from bodies. Again, he is not contained in a genus, since there is but one God. Nor are there accidents, since accidents occur only in something in which essence and suppositum are different. Therefore knowledge about God differs from knowledge about composite things in that (1) we do not seek to place God in a genus, (2) we do not seek accidents, (3) we cannot know his essence or definition. What is left? There are four kinds of knowledge about a thing? We can know the genus, the property,

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[8] *Ibid.*, Q. 3, *Introduction*.

[9] *Ibid.*, Q. 3, Art. 1, *I answer*.

[10] *Ibid.*, Q. 3, Art. 2, *I answer*.

the accident, the differentia. We have seen that there are no accidents in God. There is no genus, since there is one God, and for that reason also there is no differentia. That leaves property alone.

But here a large problem arises. Properties in composite things are deduced from the essence of that thing. But we cannot know the essence of God. And therefore the properties of God, if they are to be known, must be known in different ways. There are three ways that they can be applied to God. The first are names that are applied to him negatively, as not composite, or simple. Second are the names which describe his relation to his creatures, as first cause. What about names applied to God affirmatively, such as good? This problem Thomas takes up in Q. 13. Some have tried to reduce the positive terms to negative and relative, saying that good, for example, means the absence of evil in God, or that it refers to God as the cause of good things in us. Thomas says that we means more than this by good. And so good is predicated directly of God, but it is predicated of God only insofar as man can see the good that is in God. But this goodness is seen only in effects. And so Thomas says that "the aforesaid names signify the divine substance, but in an imperfect manner, even as creatures represent it imperfectly," so in the case of good we mean "whatever good we attribute to creatures pre-exists in God, and in a higher way."[11] Such positive qualities, Aquinas says, apply to man and God analogically, not univocally, since the good in man and in God are different, not again equivocally, since God is the source of the good in man. Therefore the good in man is analogous to the good of

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[11]Ibid., Q. 13, Art. 2, I answer.

God. Since we know God only through His effects, we know His goodness only through His creatures.

One further point here. Talking about God, and therefore a doctrine of God, is always from the standpoint of man. God is simple and pure. That we apply different names to God and can make affirmative propositions about Him is due to man's partial way of looking at Him. The properties that we know of God we know then, in three ways, negatively, through His relation to us, and analogically.

The first section on the doctrine of God treats him negatively. At this point we could almost predict in broad outline what Thomas will say about God. Questions 3 to 11 deal with the properties of God as they exist in God Himself. Such are the negative properties, simplicity or absence of composition, i. e., of body and of matter; then perfection, or pure actuality, or absence of potentiality; then goodness, which is positive, in that every being is good, but God alone is pure goodness; then infinity, since God is not finite; then immutability, since God does not change; then eternity, because God is timeless.

Following this come the properties of God which belong to Him because of His relation to His creatures. Thomas expresses this first of all in terms of God in His unity, previous to His discussion of the Trinity. First comes (in question 14) a discussion of God's knowledge. God has knowledge because He is immaterial. Knowledge, which Thomas defines in consistency with his epistemology, which follows from His metaphysics, is the appropriation of the essences of things. One's capability increases as his immaterial part, the soul, enlarges and his material part, the body, does not obstruct him. God's knowledge is per-

fect, since He is purely immaterial. God therefore knows all. This is also the answer to the problem of the relation of the life of God to the life of the creatures, for in God to live is to know, and since He knows all things, all things live in God.

God has will also, since will follows upon intellect. The intellect exists insofar as it knows, for it has no component outside of its possessed knowledge. When it does not know, it tends toward something. This tendency Thomas calls will. It is always a will toward good, for all things tend toward the fulfillment of their own natures, which is a good. But God wills good to His creatures also,[12] for natural things have a natural inclination to diffuse their good as far as possible. And so God wills Himself to be and other things to be; but Himself as to the end, and other things as ordained to that end.

There is, furthermore, love in God, says Thomas, quoting 1 John 1:16: God is love,[13] for "love is the first movement of the will and of every appetitive power. This love is directed to every existing thing, since He made it, and it is therefore good.

God's creation is called just, calling attention to His willing that all things have what is proper to the condition of each.[14] Therefore justice has been called truth, for truth is for Thomas the equation of the intellect to the thing; and in God the conception of how things

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[12]Ibid., Q. 19, Art. 2, I answer.

[13]Ibid., Q. 20, Art 1, I answer.

[14]Ibid., Q. 21, Art. 1, I answer.

should be in accord with the way they are. God is also power, since power
is actuality, and God is pure act.[15]

I will conclude the discussion of the essence and attributes of God
in Aquinas here and proceed to a comparison of the same problem in
Augustine.

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[15]Ibid., Q. 25, Art. 1, I answer.

CHAPTER V

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN AUGUSTINE

As in the case of Thomas I wish to solve this problem in Augustine by showing that his doctrine of God, in its formal aspect, proceeds as a recognizable consequence of three metaphysical decisions of varying priority. The first is that essence precedes existence. The second is that an essence is a formal relation. The third is that a person is a congeries of relations.

How on this basis will Augustine solve the same problems that Thomas sets before himself, and what form will the doctrine of God take in Augustine?

First, we do not see God as the cause of the effects which we see, for we do not see essence from existence. We see existence through essence. We see the world through the illumination of the essence of God. But what is the essence of God, and how do we come to know it? In Augustine the epistemological problem is primary. In Thomas we learn about epistemology by examining the best samples of what we know. Why was explained previously. Not so for Augustine. It is not possible to look at a set and finished product of the mind for Augustine, for there is no such thing as a determinate essence. There are infinite relations, which the mind in a constant dialectical process attempts to discover. "Reason itself is surely shown to be mutable, since it sometimes attempts to arrive at truth and sometimes does not attempt to, and sometimes arrives

and sometimes does not."[1] There is no point along this path which we can take as determinate. To discover the nature of mind, we do not look at its product then, but rather at its function. And this function is described in the dialectical search for knowledge. The parallel to Thomas's careful reasoning about the nature of God is the dialectical search for God, as exemplified in the Confessions and in the dialogues On the Free Will, among other.

Augustine does not reason from concepts and principles to their consequences, as does Aquinas. He begins with the consequences and discovers the principles upon which they depend, scaling a ladder of hierarchical relations until the mind of the Christian finds the essence upon which the whole world depends. Here there is no complete separation of faith and reason, for they play a polar part in the dialectic. Reason is the rational procedure, faith the emotional attachment to God, the feeling for the personal consequences of the rational knowledge. Each affects the other. Knowledge of the wisdom of God becomes personal in faith's trust in it, which in turn points the mind to seek further instances of the wisdom of God.

Actually all of the Christian emotions and all of the various parts of thinking play a part in this dialectic. The highest emotional elements are faith, hope, and love, which constitute a kind of trinity. It would be a mistake to assume that Augustine uses these words consistently in the same way, for in a dialectical process of reasoning terms are being

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[1]Selections from Medieval Philosophers, Richard P. McKeon, editor (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), I, 29.

constantly transformed. However, he does reach one illuminating level
in paragraph 13, book 1, of the Soliloquys, where he defines reason as
the mind's act of looking. Reason plus vision, which is a right and per-
fect act of looking, is virtue. Faith is the belief in the thing the mind
turns to see, which being seen gives blessedness. Hope is the judgment of
the mind that it will see if it but looks. Charity, or love, is the de-
sire to see.[2]

Revelation and reason also are in dialectical tension. A Scripture
passage informs, then becomes more meaningful in the personal and reli-
gious part of experience, which experience in turn provides a fund of
truth which will illuminate other Scripture.

The path to the knowledge of God is thus a single one with polar
elements rather than parts. Here reason and faith, the human and the
divine, are in tension, proceed upward to the knowledge of the essence
and properties of God.

De Trinitate is the most profound and complete statement of the
doctrine of God in Augustine. It itself is written in a dialectic, al-
though not a dialogue; such a procedure is implied by Augustine's episte-
mology.

How do Augustine's metaphysical pre-suppositions affect his state-
ment of the doctrine of God? The statement, first of all, is provisional
and never complete. Augustine does not claim to have finished his dis-
cussion nor to have attained. The dialectical process is an unending one.

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[2]Cf. Soliloquys, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Philip Schaff,
editor (first series; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917). III.
Book 1, paragraph 13.

Man can always only approximate a knowledge of the doctrine of God. In fact, his knowledge shifts and changes from day to day and from hour to hour. For his life is lived in dialectic. Religion is always a matter of knowledge. From knowledge proceeds love, from reason will.

Historians of theology have recognized this and have set this against the theology of Aquinas, whom they assert did attempt a complete and final statement of the doctrine of God. This is a misunderstanding of the philosophic method of Thomas. For Thomas, although in a different way, also believes that the search for the truth about God falls short. The statement why they will fall short differs in Thomas and in Augustine, but the conclusion is the same. The reasons proceed from the metaphysics.

Truth about God is changeless and eternal. Man's truth is relative. Let me quote McKeon on this point.

> The philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, then, considers in turn the relativity of our truths and the changeless eternal truth of which the discovery of even a tentative truth is indicative. We proceed by definitions in which we attempt to express the quiddities of things; then we make judgments by compounding and dividing concepts. Our definitions by genus and difference seek to state the real, yet the real is not constituted of genus and species. From the very beginning of knowledge, therefore, we are doomed to fall short of absolute truth. The hunt for definitions expressing essence (venare quod quid est) is never at an end.[3]

In Augustine ultimate knowledge is achieved when all the relations in the universe are contained in a single perception in a single mind. This is possible only in God. This is a direct consequence of his decision to call relations the essences of the universe. Knowledge is of essences, and essences are of relations. Total knowledge is therefore of

[3]McKeon, op. cit., II, 1152.

all the relations. Dialectic serves to discover these relations. Higher relations will contain lower relations. The law of inertia, for example, contains the expressions of innumerable occurrences within the universe. This leads Augustine to believe that there is an ultimate unity, which contains all relations within it. This is God. Insofar as man attains a knowledge of these he has attained a knowledge of God. The task of knowledge is also the task of conversion and salvation, for man's beatitude is the sight of God. It is clear to see why Augustine says that we "see through a glass darkly."

Now I will use this material to establish a further point in Augustine. If knowledge is of relations, then our knowledge of God must be of relations. Therefore, a discussion of the doctrine of God or De Trinitate in Augustine will be a dialectical attempt to discover the primary relations in God and in the universe.

The lower relations, which are more immediately present to man, depend upon the higher. And all depend upon God. To know the higher we begin with the lower. Our material in the employment of the dialectic will be sense, reason, and Scripture.

The lower relations deal with sensation, the higher with the rational elements, the highest with the ultimate categories of being. The categories themselves are congeries of relations. The procedure in De Trinitate therefore must necessarily be from the lower to the higher.

In actual fact Augustine can begin on a higher level. And so his beginning is on the second level with relations which are high. These are the mathematical relations. In a dialectic which runs through the whole scale, as that in book two of On the Free Will, the mathematical

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relations do not come until two-thirds of the dialogue has been completed.[4]
Even when the highest categories are reached, however, we do not leave the
mathematical relations. Augustine says:

> But when we began to turn about as if upwards, we found that
> numbers also transcend our minds, and that they remain immut-
> able in truth itself....The learned....and the scholarly, the
> more remote they are from earthly blemish, the more they look
> upon both number and wisdom in truth itself and hold both dear.[5]

Now it may seem impious to the folk piety of many with lesser or
greater touches of obscurantism that God should be discussed in mathemati-
cal terms. Mathematics has been the criterion of truth for many philoso-
phers in many ages, because it offered the possibility of attaining pre-
cision and comprehensiveness. And for a theologian who sees the knowledge
or vision of God as the primary end of life, it will be self-understood
that he will seek to employ the most sophisticated apparatus his episte-
mology can employ. That is mathematics for many philosophers. We might
say here that the key to the understanding of the doctrine of God in
Augustine is to learn that it is put into mathematical terms.

Augustine is therefore concerned with the unity of God. He discusses
it in discussing the problem of the incorporeality, the eternality, and
the substance of God. The "unit" is the primary term in the discussion
of God, and his first task is to discover the unitary elements of God.
Therefore, in book 1, chapter 2, he seeks to show that the Trinity =
one God = only God = true God. Following this is a discussion of the
problems regarding the relations of one person in the Trinity to the

[4]Cf. ibid., I, 47.

[5]Ibid., p. 48.

other. The final conclusion will be: the Father $=$ the Son $=$ the Holy Ghost. This will arise after Augustine has reduced terms like "glorify," "sent," "honor," to mathematical terminology. E.g. (book 1, chapter 4). If the Father glorifies the Son, does that mean that the Father is greater than the Son? Or in symbolic terms, is $F > S$? No, for the Holy Ghost also glorifies the Son. Therefore (in symbolic terms):

$$\frac{(F>S) \quad (HG>S)}{\underline{-(HG>S)}} \\ -(F>S)$$

Following this is the problem of Jesus. What is the relation of the servant of the Lord to God the Son? Here again is equality. The servant of God $=$ God the Son. But this becomes clear only with the distinction in chapter seven between fashion and reality. Only in fashion is he less, for he appeared in humble circumstances, although he contained the full reality of his divine nature.

In book seven Augustine goes into Christology in more detail. The redemptive activity of Christ too is translated into mathematical termi-nology. Man cannot perceive the truth about God and his condition because of the chaos in his life. This occurs through the immoderate desires of his physical nature. Because of this we face two deaths, the death of the body and the death of the soul. Christ saves us by his one death. This one death of Christ saves us from our two deaths because of the harmony of one to two. This unites the physical and the material, which expresses the basic harmony in the universe and achieves a congruity, suitableness, concord, or consonance. For the soul in man dies when God leaves it, and the body dies when the soul leaves it. But Christ as God with a soul and body dies and is resurrected. This is the ultimate

unity. Man, perceiving this unity, can bring his life into harmony with God, for he sees in Christ these two relations, the dependence of the soul upon God, and the dependence of the body upon the soul. This is the love of God, who wishes good for man, and good for man is the life of harmony. The entire atonement, with a definition of the good, is put into mathematical terms.

The ultimate problem of De Trinitate is to discuss the relation between the three persons of the Trinity. For this the mathematical sections are preparatory. The atonement, for example, is described several more times, each time in more comprehensive terms. In book 7, chapter 4, Augustine distinguishes between substance and essence. The distinction is based on the proposition that it is different for God to be and to subsist. To substance we attribute properties absolutely, to essence those properties which we attribute relatively, i.e. in relation to another something. I.e., we can say that God is good absolutely or in Himself. We can say that His goodness bears relations to others. Substance is the ultimate unity. Under essence exists the highest relationships. This too is a mathematical statement of the doctrine of God. Regarding the substance of God we can say that greatness = wisdom = goodness. However, these three terms, which represent the highest categories of being, may be attributed respectively to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

The search for the essences of the persons of the Trinity is an endless one, for the Trinity is seen in its traces in the universe, which because it is the created effect of a Trinity, reveals trinitarian relations on all levels. The Trinity is seen as these analogies are drawn. One of the first is a mathematical one. The Father is unity. Unity

produces form, and the Son is the form of the Father. A unified form is order, analogized to the Holy Ghost, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.[6] Augustine also uses measure, number, and weight to express the Trinity.[7] He spends much time also in the relations which exist in the human mind, for the human mind is regarded as the acme of the creative activity of God and will therefore be closest to the Trinity. He closes the book, stating the difference between this final analogy and the Trinity with the drawn observance that we see now through a glass darkly.

I have omitted mention of many crucial questions in Augustine which are necessary to understand his conception of God. I believe that what I have said is sufficient, however, to indicate the manner in which Augustine's metaphysical principles have determined his statement of the knowledge of God. I believe, furthermore, that any orthodox Christian, accepting Augustine in his own terms, will find himself in agreement with Augustine, will find himself thrilled by the wealth of meaning flowing out of his thought. But he may first have to stifle his prejudice regarding the form and structure of the presentation. If he wishes to criticize, he must do so in terms of the metaphysical pre-suppositions, showing that there is some fundamental reason why they cannot contain the Christian doctrine of God. I have yet to see such criticism which could be successfully defended.

First, however, before we proceed to a comparison of Thomas and

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[6]Schaff, op cit., book 11, chapter 10, paragraph 17.

[7]Ibid., book 11, chapter 11, paragraph 18.

Augustine, it is necessary to go back to Thomas and to see what he has
to say on the Trinity.

CHAPTER VI

THE PROBLEM OF THE TRINITY IN AQUINAS

The problem of God and the problem of the Trinity are more sharply distinguished in Thomas than they are in Augustine. For Augustine the knowledge of the Trinity necessarily precedes the knowledge of God in the epistemological scale. This is true because knowledge can never be severed from its dialectical context. The reason for this, derived from the metaphysical basis, was given in the last chapter. In Thomas, however, the questions can be divided, for the distinction between the persons of the Trinity and the unity of the divine essence can be made at any time in the discussion. This is in accordance with Thomas's epistemology, as discussed in chapter three. Verbal distinctinctions are primary. Then comes the formulation of the question from words determinately defined. Then comes the solution. In Augustine one begins with the question, then proceeds to terms and distinctions. In Thomas knowledge is a series of true propositions. In Augustine it is the perception of terms and distinctions. That the same "truth" can be contained in both of these forms will, I hope, become clear in the outline of the problem of the Trinity in Thomas.

Thomas therefore begins with terminology. He begins with procession in question 27, which is defined in terms of genus and differentia as an intelligible emanation. Then he defines relation in question 28. Relations exist in reality, not merely in thought. In God relation and essence do not differ in being, for the relations are real. This

too is a definition. Then follows a definition of person, which is an individual rational substance. A person is a subsistence, i.e., exists in itself and not in another. It is a thing of nature, for it underlies a common nature, as a suppositum underlies an essence of genus; it is a hypostasis, for it also underlies accidents. This question concludes with Thomas showing that a divine person is a relation, for relation is the divine essence itself.

With this preparation Thomas can say in question 30 that there are three persons, because an exhaustive enumeration of the possible opposite relations in God yield two. And two relations means three persons. These two are the procession of the Word and of Love. This is prepared for already in question 27.

At this point there enters a short article on the mathematics of the Trinity. Its relative unimportance follows from the fact that number is nothing real for Thomas, as it is for Augustine, but is a species of discrete quantity. As such it belongs to a secondary genus and has no other reality outside of its inherence in a substance. The detailed problems of number in Augustine are solved rather in terms of the relations of persons. Thomas's mathematics follows, it is clear, from his distinction of the category of substances and other categories. The same problems are therefore solved in different terms.

Thomas then goes on to the individual persons. The Father is principle, the Son Word and Image, the Holy Ghost Love and Gift. It is interesting to note that Thomas uses two names to characterize the Son, Word and Image, while Augustine used words and its variants only.

Thomas's use of word proceeds from his epistemology, too involved a problem to enter at this point. Augustine's epistemology permits "word" to have a more general meaning. Therefore Thomas must find another term, "image," to convey the meaning which Augustine can convey in the one term "word."

Now up to this point Thomas has considered each person absolutely. At this point comes the discussion of the persons in reference to the divine essence. This procedure is just the opposite of that which Augustine followed. Thomas begins with the persons, proceeds to the relations between persons. Such a procedure is necessitated by his metaphysical decisions, which assert that the primary source of knowledge is essence, conceived as a definition, and that relations follow from these definitions. In Augustine, on the other hand, we begin with relations and proceed finally to a general understanding of person, which we perceived as a congeries of essences. This is in accordance with Augustine's basic metaphysical decision also, as outlined in section 2.

Thomas therefore treats of the relation of person and essence in question 39, the relation and person again in 40 (not person and relation as in question 28), then the notional acts, then equality and like. Each is treated differently from the way that they are treated in Augustine, for the treatment is in terms of attributes which can be correctly applied to determinative substantives, whose determinatenesses have been achieved either through definition or reasoning from definition. This is not to exclude the Scriptures. We saw Augustine making voluminous use of the Scriptures, and Thomas says quite explicitly that we cannot discover the truths of the Trinity from natural reason, but must receive

them from the Scriptures. His treatise is an attempt to place the truths
of Scriptures into his metaphysics, an indispensible step to meaning.

It should be clear at this point how Thomas's metaphysical princi-
ples have affected his treatment of the Trinity. The general impression
that we receive is that, generally speaking, Thomas treated of the same
set of problems that Augustine did, but in different terms, and also
that, generally speaking, he came to the same conclusions. But this is
difficult to perceive, since the treatment of the problems in each instance
becomes transformed. To compare the one in the terms of the other, or
to compare them both in a third set of terms would bring distortion. The
only alternative is to permit each to speak in its own terms and to eval-
uate each in those terms.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

I can say in a general way that Augustine and Thomas deal with the same problems and come to the same conclusions, but in such a different way that it is difficult to recognize and to compare them. Actually, however, there is no precise way in which I can determine whether or not they deal with the same problems and, above all, that they express the same "truth." For although truth has both form and content, it is impossible to express truth without form, and therefore the two cannot be separated. It is not possible to take away the shell and get at the kernel. What it would mean to see truth without the form in which it is cast is something I cannot even imagine. But it is nevertheless possible that two formal presentations of the same body of truth may be true, although differing in form. I should not say true, but rather adequate. For truth can be ascertained only within the form within which it is expressed. It is therefore impossible to say that two different forms of the same truth are true. That would imply a higher form to which they comply. And this is certainly an implication I would not accept.

What then is the basis of criticism and comparison? I believe that such can be made after a fashion on the practical and on the theoretical level. If the practical consequences of two theories are the same, we may assume that the theoretical bases are in reality similar, although appearing the same. This may seem like the fallacy of affirming the

consequent. And in most syllogisms it certainly would be. But the case of metaphysics is different. And while two causes within the universe may produce the same effect, no two basic structures of a universe will produce the same result. Two formal presentations of that structure, although appearing different, will express that basic reality if their consequences are the same. The formal presentation of that structure will be the closest that we can come to it. This is expressed by saying that the basic reality is an "I know not what."

This affords a basis for unity in ecclesiastical matters. Although it is unheard of in ecclesiastical circles, it has been strongly and intelligently urged in political controversy. And I believe the analogy between the religious and the political holds in this instance. In the political sphere the practical consequences deal with international law, human rights, and governmental structure. In the church the practical consequences are the purpose of worship, the moral and religious being and activity of the Christian, and the operation of the church itself.

However, practical consequences will differ, and here criticism must be made within a system and in terms of a system. In the case of Thomas we must show where he misunderstood Scripture or where he employs his terms inconsistently. The same may be said of Augustine, but here the task is far more difficult, for everything he says is in the context of a dialectic and therefore provisional.

One may also unite on a theoretical basis, and by this I mean a body of Confessions or a creed, such as the three ecumenical creeds. Since terms are not defined and metaphysics not explicit, the statements

are ambiguous. Then it is upon this very ambiguity that comparison and unity is to be achieved. Both Thomas and Augustine would accept the Nicene Creed. The individual words would mean different things. Yet both would read their own meanings into the Creed and would accept it. Finally their beliefs would not differ to any significant amount.

No system of thought can be discredited because it happens to be cast in an unpopular metaphysics. This is not to say that theological differences do not exist. Little in the universe is more obvious than that they do. But theological differences seem much greater when viewed from the mountain top of a rival metaphysics. The differences acquire their true opposition only when seen within the same metaphysics. If the body of Christ must be divided, it ought at least be divided for religious reasons. We should not permit metaphysical differences to be crucial. Any set of terms, carefully used, may convey truth, just as any language might. It is impossible to decide between the metaphysics which Augustine and Aquinas used through an a priori principle. And there are strong probabilities that both are true. And so we must accept both Thomas and Augustine and listen carefully to what they have to say to us. If the men and women who profess Christ today are truly to see the church as their mother and the saints of all ages as their brothers and sisters, then they must not permit metaphysical prejudices blind them to the words which those who have gone before have to say to them. Dare I end this thesis with the humble suggestion that other Lutherans might benefit much from the wise and pious sayings of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas?

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