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“The Unity of the Spirit”:
the Trinity, the Church and Love
in Saint Augustine of Hippo

John Paul Hoskins

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Thesis submitted for the
Degree of Master of Letters

Department of Theology and Religion
Durham University

2006



18 APR 2007

Abstract

“The unity of the Spirit”: the Trinity, the Church and love in Saint Augustine of Hippo

Augustine of Hippo spent most of his career contending for the cause of the unity of the Church. His passion for Church unity has frequently been portrayed as a consequence of his north African heritage, but one important theological basis has generally been overlooked. This thesis locates his ecclesiology firmly in the context of his trinitarian theology, particularly his emphasis on the unity of God. Many scholars have considered his theology of the Trinity; others have explored his theology of the Church; but this thesis draws out the connections between the two. Augustine is not the first theologian to discuss the unity of the three persons of the Trinity. However, he is the first to develop the doctrine that the Holy Spirit is the bond of love and unity between the Father and the Son. This principle has important implications for his theology of the Church, since it means that discussions of the Holy Spirit and of love in the context of ecclesiology have an explicitly trinitarian dimension.

The thesis consists of three chapters. In the first, Augustine’s unique doctrine of the Holy Spirit and of love is set out. It is demonstrated that he locates the image of God not so much in the individual human soul, as in human beings in relation with one another. In the second chapter, attention moves to the Church, and it is shown that Augustine sees the fellowship itself as the analogy of God the Trinity. Love is the characteristic mark of the Church, and those who do not have love and the Holy Spirit have excluded themselves from communion with one another and with God. The third and final chapter is a case study of how these ideas were worked out in practice in the controversies with Manicheism, Donatism and Pelagianism.

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Preface

Let us love one another that with one accord we may confess:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, one in essence and undivided.

from the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

This thesis arose from the combination of many years' interest in Saint Augustine of Hippo and an equally longstanding concern for Church unity. My curiosity about Augustine was first sparked as a student of the history of political thought, prompting me to write my undergraduate dissertation on his theory of coercion. Little did I suspect then that I would be returning to look at the Donatists again a decade later. Over the subsequent years, it has often seemed as though I have encountered Augustine at practically every turn. It is impossible to think of any other Christian theologian since the time of the apostles who has had such an influence on the life and thought of the Church.

My interest in Augustine has developed alongside a parallel concern for the unity of the Church. As a member of the Church of England, it has long seemed to me that the Anglican Communion faces two main problems in this area. First of all, there is the external matter of how it relates to other Christian churches. Secondly, there is the internal question of the relationship of Anglicans with one another. This latter problem has become particularly acute during the last couple of years, and its solution (if any) remains to be seen. Augustine would not, I fear, be particularly sympathetic with our plight: much of what he has to say about the unity of the Church makes for rather alarming reading for those of us who are Anglicans.

Many outstanding teachers have contributed to my understanding of Augustine. I was first introduced to him by Dr Robert Dyson in Durham, and Dr Winrich Löhr and Dr Lionel Wickham in Cambridge developed my interest and gave me a solid grounding in patristics. I would particularly like to thank my supervisor, Dr Carol Harrison, for her encouragement and seemingly limitless patience as yet another deadline passed unmet. Her gentle criticisms and suggestions for fruitful avenues to explore have improved my thesis immeasurably. Needless to say, the errors and infelicities that remain are my responsibility alone.

Without the support of many other friends and conversation partners, this thesis would probably never have been begun and would certainly never have been completed. Among these, my thanks go especially to the Revd Kenneth Clark, Beverley Jones, the Revd Ben King, the Revd Frances Mant, the Revd Edmund Newey, the Revd Catherine Pickford and Dr Clare Saunders. I have also been grateful for the good-humoured encouragement of friends and colleagues both at Durham Cathedral and more recently at Ripon College Cuddesdon.

Most of all, I have benefited from the constant support of my family; and foremost amongst these that of my wife, who has incidentally helped me to a deeper appreciation of Augustine's occasional analogies from the worlds of medicine and surgery. I have been studying Augustine for as long as Elizabeth has known me, but she has taught me far more about love and unity than I ever learned even from him: *significat unitatem omnium nostrum subiectam deo futuram in una caelesti ciuitate* [*On the Good of Marriage* 18.21].

Works of Augustine, Editions and Translations

			<i>Latin edition</i>	<i>English translation</i>	
<i>De bono coniugali</i>	<i>b. coniug.</i>	<i>On the Good of Marriage</i>	PL 40	CSEL 41	FC 27 NPNF 3 WSA V9
<i>De baptismo</i>	<i>bapt.</i>	<i>On Baptism</i>	PL 43	CSEL 51	NPNF 4
<i>Breuiulus conlationis cum Donatistis</i>	<i>breuic.</i>	<i>Brief Proceedings of the Meeting with the Donatists</i>	PL 43	CSEL 53	
<i>Contra Adimantum Manichei discipulum</i>	<i>c. Adim.</i>	<i>Against Adimantus the Disciple of Mani</i>	PL 42	CSEL 25	
<i>Contra Donatistas</i>	<i>c. Don.</i>	<i>Against the Donatists</i>	PL 43	CSEL 53	
<i>Contra epistulam Manichaei quam uocant fundamenti</i>	<i>c. ep. Man.</i>	<i>Against the Fundamental Letter of the Manichees</i>	PL 42	CSEL 25	NPNF 4
<i>Contra epistulam Parmeniani</i>	<i>c. ep. Parm.</i>	<i>Against the Letter of Parmenian</i>	PL 43	CSEL 51	
<i>Contra Faustum Manicheum</i>	<i>c. Faust.</i>	<i>Against Faustus the Manichee</i>	PL 42	CSEL 25	NPNF 4
<i>Contra Felicem Manicheum</i>	<i>c. Fel.</i>	<i>Against Felix the Manichee</i>	PL 42	CSEL 25	

				<i>Latin edition</i>		<i>English translation</i>
<i>Acta contra Fortunatum Manicheum</i>	<i>c. Fort.</i>	<i>Debate with Fortunatus the Manichee</i>	PL 42	CSEL 25		NPNF 4
<i>Contra Gaudentium Donatistarum episcoporum</i>	<i>c. Gaud.</i>	<i>Against Gaudentius the Donatist Bishop</i>	PL 43	CSEL 53		
<i>Contra litteras Petilian</i>	<i>c. litt. Pet.</i>	<i>Against the Letters of Petilian</i>	PL 43	CSEL 52		NPNF 4
<i>Contra Secundinam Manicheum</i>	<i>c. Sec.</i>	<i>Against Secundinus the Manichee</i>	PL 42	CSEL 25		
<i>Ad catholicos fratres</i>	<i>cath. fr.</i>	<i>To the Catholic Brothers</i>	PL 43	CSEL 52		
<i>De ciuitate dei</i>	<i>ciu.</i>	<i>On the City of God</i>	PL 41	CSEL 40	FC 8, 14, 24	NPNF 2
<i>Confessionum</i>	<i>conf.</i>	<i>Confessions</i>	PL 32	CSEL 33	FC 21	NPNF 1 WSA I/1
<i>De correctione Donatistarum [= ep. 185]</i>	<i>correct.</i>	<i>On the Correction of the Donatists</i>	PL 33	CSEL 57	FC 30	NPNF 4 WSA II/3
<i>Ad Cresconium grammaticum partis Donati</i>	<i>Cresc.</i>	<i>To Cresconius the Donatist Grammarian</i>	PL 43	CSEL 52		
<i>De doctrina christiana</i>	<i>doctr. chr.</i>	<i>On Christian Teaching</i>	PL 34	CSEL 80	FC 2	NPNF 2 WSA I/11
<i>De duabus animabus</i>	<i>duob. an.</i>	<i>On the Two Souls</i>	PL 42	CSEL 25		NPNF 4

		<i>Latin edition</i>	<i>English translation</i>
<i>Gesta cum Emerito Donatistarum episcopo</i>	<i>Emer.</i>	<i>PL</i> 43	CSEL 53
<i>Enarrationes in Psalmos</i>	<i>en. Ps.</i>	<i>PL</i> 36, 37	NPNF 8 WSA III/15-III/20
<i>De fide spe et caritate</i>	<i>ench.</i>	<i>PL</i> 40	FC 2 NPNF 3
<i>Epistulae</i>	<i>ep.</i>	<i>PL</i> 33	FC 12, 18, 20, 30, 32, 81 NPNF 1 WSA II/1-II/3
<i>In epistulam Iohannis ad Parthos tractatus</i>	<i>ep. Io. tr.</i>	<i>PL</i> 35	FC 92 NPNF 7
<i>Epistulae ad Romanos inchoata expositio</i>	<i>ep. Rm. inch.</i>	<i>PL</i> 35	CSEL 84
<i>De fide et symbolo</i>	<i>f. et symb.</i>	<i>PL</i> 40	FC 27 NPNF 3
<i>De gestis Pelagii</i>	<i>gest. Pel.</i>	<i>PL</i> 44	FC 86 NPNF 5 WSA V/23
<i>De Genesi aduersus Manicheos</i>	<i>Gn. adu. Man.</i>	<i>PL</i> 34	FC 84 CSEL 91 WSA V/13

			<i>Latin edition</i>	<i>English translation</i>	
<i>De gratia Christi et de peccato originali</i>	<i>gr. et pecc. or.</i>	<i>On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin</i>	PL 44	CSEL 42	NPNF 5 WSA V23
<i>In Iohannis euangelium tractatus</i>	<i>Io. eu. tr.</i>	<i>Tracts on the Gospel of John</i>	PL 35		FC 78, 79, 88, 90, 92 NPNF 7
<i>De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manicheorum</i>	<i>mor.</i>	<i>On the Conduct of the Catholic Church and the Conduct of the Manichees</i>	PL 32	CSEL 90	FC 56 NPNF 4
<i>De natura boni</i>	<i>nat. b.</i>	<i>On the Nature of Good</i>	PL 42	CSEL 25	NPNF 4
<i>De natura et gratia</i>	<i>nat. et gr.</i>	<i>On Nature and Grace</i>	PL 44	CSEL 60	FC 86 NPNF 5 WSA V23
<i>De nuptiis et concupiscentia ad Ualerium</i>	<i>nupt. et conc.</i>	<i>On Marriage and Concupiscentice</i>	PL 44	CSEL 42	NPNF 5 WSA V24
<i>De opere monachorum</i>	<i>op. mon.</i>	<i>On the Work of Monks</i>	PL 40	CSEL 41	FC 16 NPNF 3
<i>De patientia</i>	<i>pat.</i>	<i>On Patience</i>	PL 40	CSEL 41	FC 16 NPNF 3
<i>De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo paruulorum ad Marcellinum</i>	<i>pecc. mer.</i>	<i>On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and the Baptism of Infants</i>	PL 44	CSEL 60	NPNF 5 WSA V23

				<i>Latin edition</i>	<i>English translation</i>	
<i>De perfectione iustitiae</i>	<i>perf. iust.</i>	<i>On the Perfection of the Righteous</i>	PL 44	CSEL 42	NPNF 5	WSA I/23
<i>Psalmus contra partem Donati</i>	<i>ps. c. Don.</i>	<i>Psalm against the Donatist Sect</i>	PL 43	CSEL 51		
<i>Regula</i>	<i>reg.</i>	<i>Rule</i>	PL 32			
<i>Retractionum</i>	<i>retr.</i>	<i>Retractions</i>	PL 32	CSEL 36	FC 60	WSA III/1-III/11
<i>Sermones</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>Sermons</i>	PL 38, 39			
<i>Sermo ad Caesariensis ecclesiae plebem</i>	<i>s. Caes. eccl.</i>	<i>Sermon to the People of the Church of Caesarea</i>	PL 43	CSEL 53		
<i>De sermone domini in monte</i>	<i>s. dom. m.</i>	<i>On the Lord's Sermon on the Mount</i>	PL 34		FC 11	NPNF 6
<i>De spiritu et littera ad Marcellinum</i>	<i>spir. et litt.</i>	<i>On the Spirit and the Letter</i>	PL 44	CSEL 60		WSA I/23
<i>De symbolo ad catechumenos</i>	<i>ymb. cat.</i>	<i>On the Creed to the Catechumens</i>	PL 40		FC 27	WSA III/10
<i>De trinitate</i>	<i>trin.</i>	<i>On the Trinity</i>	PL 42		FC 45	WSA I/5
<i>De unico baptismo contra Petilianum ad Constantinum</i>	<i>un. bapt.</i>	<i>On the Only Baptism</i>	PL 43	CSEL 53		

Abbreviations

- ACW* Quasten, J. and Plumpe, J. C. (eds.), *Ancient Christian Writers* (Westminster: Newman, 1946-).
- ANF* *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1864-1897).
- Atti* Grossi, V. (ed.), *Atti del congresso internazionale su S. Agostino nel XVI centenario della conversione, Roma, 15-20 settembre 1986* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1987).
- AugLex* Mayer, C. (ed.), *Augustinus-Lexikon* (Basel: Schwabe, 1986-).
- AugMag* *Augustinus Magister: Congrès International Augustinien, Paris, 21-24 septembre 1954* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1954).
- AugStud* *Augustinian Studies* (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1970-).
- BA* *Bibliothèque Augustinienne* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1949-).
- Battenhouse (1955) Battenhouse, R. W. (ed.), *A companion to the study of St. Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).
- Bright (1999) Bright, P. (ed.), *Augustine and the Bible* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).
- ChHist* *Church History* (Chicago: American Society of Church History, 1932-).
- CCSL* *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954-).

- CollAug* (1993) Lienhard, J. T. *et al.* (eds.), *Collectanea Augustiniana: Augustine: presbyter factus sum* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993).
- CSEL* *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna: Tempsky, 1866-).
- FC* Deferrari, R. J. (ed.), *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University Press, 1947-).
- Fitzgerald (1999) Fitzgerald, A. D. (ed.), *Augustine through the ages: an encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).
- JEH* *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950-).
- JRS* *Journal of Roman Studies* (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 1911-).
- JTS* *Journal of Theological Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950-).
- LeMoine/Kleinhenz (1994) LeMoine, F. and Kleinhenz, C. (eds.), *Saint Augustine the bishop: a book of essays* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994).
- ModTh* *Modern Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984-).
- NPNF* *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1890-1900).
- NRTh* *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* (Tournai: Casterman, 1869-).
- PL* *Patrologia Latina* (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1844-1864).
- RechAug* *Recherches Augustiniennes* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1958-).
- REtAug* *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1955-).
- SC* *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1942-).
- SP* *Studia Patristica* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1957-).
- TS* *Theological Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891-).

WSA

Rotelle, J. E. (ed.), *The Works of Saint Augustine: a Translation for the 21st Century* (New York: New City Press, 1990-).

Introduction

*O luce eterna che sola in te sidi,
sola t'intendi, e da te intelleta
e intendente te ami e arridi!*

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), *Paradiso* XXXIII

As was explained in the Preface above, this thesis arises out of a very longstanding interest in Church unity on the part of its author. “Interest”, however, is not necessarily quite the right word, for this makes it sound too cerebral and not sufficiently heartfelt. Also, there is a sense in which to talk about an “interest” could make it seem that this desire for unity was based on a well thought out and developed theological position. In truth, the desire for unity long predated any sustained intellectual work on the subject on the part of the present writer. The sense, or feeling, was operating at an essentially intuitive level. But this is not to say that the desire was not always a genuine one.

Augustine, too, was passionately concerned for the unity of the Church, long before he was able to articulate precise reasons for what he felt so strongly. Growing up in Roman north Africa in the late fourth century, his childhood was spent in the arms of a Church which was probably the religious home of a small minority of the population. Leaving Africa and travelling to the centre of the empire, he would have taken almost for granted the universal claims of the Catholic Church, since every day he would have been in contact with Christians from all over the civilised world. On his conversion and his return to Africa, it was entirely natural that he should remain within the Church of his childhood and of the majority of the known world; but he would then have become immediately aware of the fact that the Donatists claimed the allegiance of most of his contemporaries.



Augustine, however, was not content to live with the status quo, and this is the question which is so intriguing. What was it in the deepest recesses of his consciousness that so compelled him to seek the unity of the Church? All his life he spent battling against one source of division after another, from Arianism, to Manicheism, Donatism and finally Pelagianism. All of these differed from one another and presented Augustine with unique challenges, but the underlying issue was always for him the same.

There was clearly some reason why Augustine had such a strong sense of the urgency of the cause for unity, since so much of his time was spent in its defence. But the question which occurred to this writer is that very little attention has been paid to the fundamental assumptions which lie behind the usually quoted arguments. What, precisely, was it that drove Augustine onwards with such ferocity to seek the union of all these schismatics and heretics? The first glimmer of an answer came with a throwaway remark by Geoffrey Willis in the course of his discussion of the Donatists:

[T]he belief of Augustine is that the principle of Catholic unity is the Holy Spirit, who is also the bond of the unity of the Godhead in Trinity; and this unity of the Church is organic and not institutional, an unity of faith and hope and charity. Its bond is the *caritas unitatis*, without which no man can please God.¹

What Willis is hinting at is that Augustine's belief in unity may have something to do with his prior belief in the unity of God. So it seemed reasonable to spend some time examining his doctrine of the Trinity to see if there might be any points of contact there with his ecclesiology.

This thesis, then, is an attempt to correlate Augustine's doctrine of God with his doctrine of the Church, something which is essentially a very simple idea but which, as far as we can tell, has largely been overlooked in recent scholarship. The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first is a detailed examination of

¹ Willis (1950), 114.

Augustine's trinitarian theology. Starting with his earliest tentative steps and progressing into his mature works, we will explore the development of his understanding of God the Trinity. It will become clear that the most important feature of this doctrine is his thought concerning the Holy Spirit, who is the bond of love and unity of the Father and the Son.

In the second chapter, our attention will move away from the Trinity towards the Church. We will demonstrate that Augustine saw the Church as an analogy or model of God the Trinity. The fellowship of the Church is bound together by the Holy Spirit, the gift of love; and so it is clear that the Spirit performs a similar role in the Church as he does within the eternal processions of the Godhead. It is because of this function of the Spirit that the Church is the image of God. In this chapter, our attention will also turn to the theme of love, which is at the very heart of the argument. Since the Holy Spirit is the gift and bond of love, those who are outside the Church do not have love, and are guilty of having rejected the Spirit of God.

Thus in the third and final chapter, we will explore how Augustine worked out these ideas in practice, against the Manichees and the Pelagians, but especially against the Donatists. This chapter is therefore a practical study, a test case for the theory which has been put forward in the previous two chapters. In it, the emphasis moves away from the relatively cool tones of Augustine's treatises and sermons, towards the much more heated pamphlets and tracts which were his weapons in his lengthy literary war of attrition. The Donatists, he argues, have demonstrated by their disunity that they lack the love of God; they do not possess the Holy Spirit and do not have effective sacraments. The very attempt by the Donatists to secure their narrow and exclusivist position is what will lead to their eternal condemnation.

This thesis is not a fully developed study of Augustine's ecclesiology, since neither time nor space would have permitted such an endeavour. Nor is it a comprehensive study of his theology of love, since that is a subject which has been thoroughly explored in recent years. Rather, it is an attempt to deal with a specific

question: what is the relationship between Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity and his doctrine of Church unity, and how do the two inform and develop each other?

Augustine's predecessors

Naturally, Augustine was not writing in a vacuum, but in both his theology of the Trinity and his theology of the Church he was building on the work of many illustrious predecessors. "The starting point of the trinitarian doctrine ... of the early Church is the religious experience of Jesus and the early Christian community."² Reflection on the nature of God the Trinity arose out of the life, worship and practice of the first members of the Church. The scriptures taught them their faith and their religious experience confirmed it: to believe in God as their Father, to believe also in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and to believe too in the Holy Spirit as the presence of God among them. Although the word itself is foreign to the scriptures, it was clear to them that the God revealed in the sacred texts was a Trinity. For example, Mt 28.9 explicitly commanded them to go and baptise in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Faith in God the Trinity was also evident in the worshipping life of the Church: to use a related example, the three persons were explicitly invoked in the formula used at baptism. Indeed, initiation into the life of the Church was the context in which the earliest creeds gradually came to be formulated, with their very structure expressing the Church's faith in the triune God. In a similar vein, we might also point to the various threefold blessings and doxologies which also emerged, their roots lying particularly in the examples found in the Pauline epistles, such as 2 Cor 13.13.

Nevertheless, and at risk of generalisation, we may say that until the fourth century, formal trinitarian theology was of less immediate importance than Christology; and in particular pneumatology was very much of an afterthought. Thus

² Studer (1993), 5. There is of course a vast literature on patristic doctrines of the Trinity. For general introduction and surveys of the field, see Kelly (1977), Congar (1983), Young (1983) and Studer (1993).

the letters of Ignatius focus on the birth, death and resurrection of Christ, while Justin is concerned to defend the doctrine of the incarnation of the Logos against its Jewish and pagan critics. Justin is among the first to put forward the idea that the Son proceeds from the Father as a fire is kindled from a flame, an early version of an image which, lightly revised, finds its way into the Nicene Creed.³ The Spirit is present in this teaching, but seems to appear very much as an afterthought, confined mostly to liturgical formulae. It is important to note that in most of these earlier writers, the emphasis is on God the Trinity as he is revealed in the economy of salvation, rather than on speculation into the nature of God as he is *in se*. This frequently results in a tendency towards subordinationism among these “economic theologians”, although this accusation would run the risk of anachronism. By the time we come to Irenaeus, he is most concerned to emphasise the unity of God, to the extent that he explicitly rejects the idea that the Logos proceeds from the Father as light from light.⁴ However, the activity of the three persons in creation and in subsequent human history is clear to him. The Son and the Holy Spirit are the two hands of God, although it is not always apparent how he distinguishes between them.⁵

Although Tertullian was almost certainly a Montanist by the time he wrote *Against Praxeas*, it represents a significant contribution to the development of trinitarian theology.⁶ Like the work of many of his predecessors, it is essentially apologetic in tone, seeking to refute the monarchianism of his adversary. Tertullian begins with the assumption that God is one, but insists that this in no way contradicts the Christian faith that the one God is a Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Indeed, he was the first writer to use the term *trinitas*. The three persons (another term probably coined by him) are of the same substance, a simple and undivided unity, not plural even though they may be clearly be differentiated. The unity of the three rests on the fact that they have their origin in a common source, namely the Father. Tertullian famously puts forward a series of analogies or metaphors in an

³ Justin, *Dialogue* 61.

⁴ Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 2.17.4.

⁵ *Adversus haereses* 5.1.3.

⁶ On Tertullian, see Barnes (1971); Studer (1993), 65-75; and Osborn (1997).

attempt to describe the relationship between the three persons. The Word of God comes forth from God as a shoot from a root, or as a river from its spring, or as a beam from the sun, in such a way that the root, the river or the beam may rightly be described as having a relationship of sonship with its origin. From each of these comes a third term, be it fruit from the shoot, canal from the river, or apex from the beam: but in each case, the three are undivided but distinct, and all having their origins in a common source.⁷ Both Tertullian and his near contemporary Novatian give considerable weight to the evidence provided by the apparent theophanies of God the Trinity in the Old and New Testaments, which suggested an obvious counter-argument to the heresy of modalism. Novatian himself is particularly keen to defend the distinction between the Father and the Son whilst also proclaiming their unity in one communion of substance. Origen, too, writes within the same general framework of ideas, albeit with his customary literary flair.⁸ The Son proceeds from the Father in the same way that will proceeds from mind, and this spiritual distinction is eternal. He also coins a term which will become of paramount importance: the Son is eternally present with the Father, as splendour is present with the light, proceeding from it and of the same substance (*ὁμοούσιος*) as it.⁹ However, for Origen the Son and the Holy Spirit are intermediaries between the Father and his creation, which like many of his forebears lays him open to the accusation of subordinationism.

It was this challenge to orthodox faith which led to the Council of Nicaea. Whereas Arius and other Origenists considered the Logos to be the firstborn of creation, it was clear to others that this denial of the divinity of Christ (and by extension, of the Holy Spirit) was theologically unacceptable. Thus the Nicene bishops agreed that the Son of God is generated, not created: this formula preserves the Father's uniqueness as the source of divinity, but preserves the eternal, equal and consubstantial divinity of the Son. They did not, however, choose to say anything at all about the Holy Spirit apart from the implication that if the Son was fully God,

⁷ Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean* 8.

⁸ On Origen, see Daniélou (1955) and Crouzel (1989).

⁹ Origen, *De principiis* 1.2.6.

then so must the Spirit. The term *ὁμοούσιος* had been selected at the council as the best compromise among the various options available, but this did not prevent a large group preferring their own alternative, *ὁμοιοούσιος*, of “like substance”. Pro-Nicene writers would argue that this term drove a wedge between Father and Son: if the Son was only “like” the Father, then he was not in fact of the same substance of God at all. Thus Athanasius forcefully insists that the Son is God, not a creature, one with the Father in the same substance: he is the radiance of God, “the simple and pure offspring” of the sun, indivisible from its source.¹⁰ The Holy Spirit, too, is one with the Father, although Athanasius is careful to say that the precise relation between the Father and the Spirit must be in some way different from that of the Father and the Son. If the Son were a creature, as the Arians argue, then so must the Spirit; but since the Son is God, so must the Holy Spirit also be God.

Hilary, like Athanasius, is primarily concerned to defend the Nicene faith against the unorthodox attacks of its adversaries.¹¹ His treatise *On the Trinity*, like the Nicene Creed which he sought to uphold, is again very largely a work on Christology, rather than the Trinity. Hilary emphasises the dynamic history of our salvation, in which the key notion is that of glory. The Son eternally participates in the glory of the Father; through the death and resurrection of Christ, we will come to share in the glory of God and in eternal life with him. As we might expect by now, there is very little on the Holy Spirit, but Hilary does refer to the idea that the Spirit is the gift of God.¹² The development of Ambrose’s trinitarian thought, too, took place very much in the context of attacks from Arianising opponents.¹³ He is very careful to express his theology in Nicene terms, and there is deliberately very little room for creative thinking. In his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, he argues that the Spirit is of the same substance as the Father and the Son: since he sanctifies human beings, he must himself be God. Victorinus also set himself the task of writing a

¹⁰ Athanasius, *De synodis* 52; *Contra Arianos* 3.66. On Athanasius, see Meijering (1968) and Pettersen (1995).

¹¹ On Hilary, see Smulders (1944).

¹² Hilary, *De trinitate* 2.1.

¹³ On Ambrose, see McLynn (1994)

defence of the pro-Nicene theology.¹⁴ His work is distinctive for its use of neoplatonic concepts and terminology to provide a metaphysical framework to underpin the doctrine of the Trinity; as such, Victorinus offers something of a bridge between the philosophical and theological traditions of the late fourth century.

The three great Cappadocian fathers predated Augustine by a generation or so, but it is doubtful whether he had access to their works directly; nevertheless, it does seem likely that at least some of their key ideas would have reached Africa by his time.¹⁵ Their theology emphasises the mystery of the Trinity, and is notable for making normative among Greek writers the terminology one *ουσία*, three *ὑπόστασεις* (one being, three hypostases). Basil argues that all three persons share the same uncreated and spiritual nature. Gregory of Nazianzus gives particular prominence to his insistence on the deity of the Holy Spirit. The three persons are consubstantial, and a unity because they all have their origin in the same source, namely the Father. He puts forward similar analogies derived from water and light as does Tertullian; but he is also notable for suggesting that the unity of God is similar to the single mixing of light which comes from three suns.¹⁶ In another place, he suggests that the human mental process offers an analogy for the Trinity: the threefold God is like mind, word and breath.¹⁷ Finally, a distinctive feature of his work is the idea that the distinctions among the persons derive not from differences of essence but from their different relationships with one another.¹⁸ Gregory of Nyssa famously proposes the idea that the three share the same divine nature in the same way that Peter, James and John share the same human nature.¹⁹ Subsequent commentators have tended to reject this argument on the grounds that it comes dangerously close to tritheism, a conclusion Gregory would of course have rejected. He also suggests that one way of thinking about the eternal processions is to say that the Son depends on the Father and that the Holy Spirit depends on the Father through the Son.²⁰ This formulation is

¹⁴ On Victorinus, see Markus (1967), 331-340.

¹⁵ On the Cappadocians, see Meredith (1995).

¹⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 5.14.

¹⁷ *Oration* 12.1.

¹⁸ *Oration* 3.16.

¹⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 227.

²⁰ On "Not Three Gods".

remarkably similar to the *filioque* which came to characterise Latin writing. In general, the Cappadocians give much greater prominence to the Holy Spirit than had been the case previously. For example, Basil argues that the liturgical practice of the Church confirms the Spirit's divinity, since he is included in doxologies along with the Father and the Son.

Although sustained reflection on the nature of the Church is relatively rare in the earlier part of the patristic era, this is not to say that ecclesiology was entirely absent.²¹ From the very beginning, the major focus of writing on the Church concerned the fact of its unity. So Ignatius writes that each local church must have but one bishop, who celebrates one eucharist, since Jesus Christ is one flesh; wherever Jesus is, there the Catholic Church is to be found.²² This is the first use of the term "catholic", which simply means "universal". Again, the *Didache* emphasises the universality of the Church, which fills the whole world. Just as many grains are gathered together to make up the one eucharistic bread, so Christians throughout the world constitute Christ's body, the Church.²³ Justin is notable for his descriptions of the liturgies of the eucharist and of baptism,²⁴ but he is otherwise content merely to pass on the teaching that the Church is a society of the saints founded by the apostles with Christ as its head. Irenaeus sees Jesus Christ as the head of the Church, recapitulating and drawing everything to himself. The only guarantee of the unity of the Church is the faith once handed down by the apostles and preserved by the bishops.²⁵

By the time we come to Origen, a more developed ecclesiology is beginning to emerge. The Church is at once both the fellowship of the faithful and the mystical body of Christ, animated by the indwelling of the Word of God.²⁶ He is the first to describe the Church as the city of God, contrasting it with the secular imperium; outside this Church there can be no salvation. Hippolytus sees the integrity of the

²¹ On ecclesiology in the first three centuries, see Kelly (1977), 189-220.

²² Ignatius, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 7.1, 8.2.

²³ *Didache* 9.4.

²⁴ Justin, *Apology* 1.61; 1.65-1.67.

²⁵ Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.10.2, 3.16.6.

²⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.48.

Church guaranteed by its faithfulness to the apostolic succession. He frequently describes the Church as the bride of Christ; or, in an alternative metaphor, as the ark of the faithful, piloted by Christ and sailing towards heaven.²⁷ Hippolytus tended towards a rather narrow understanding of the composition of the Church, seeing it in highly exclusive terms and having no room for repentant sinners: those who sin have lost the Holy Spirit and are expelled from the fellowship.

With this rather rigorous model in mind, we turn to Augustine's African forebears.²⁸ Tertullian also makes use of the image of the Church as an ark, and so for him the holiness of the Church and of its members is paramount.²⁹ There can be no room for sin among God's holy people. He is also fond of describing the Church as our mother. If we believe in the Father and the Son, so also we must believe in our mother, whose birth from the wound in Jesus' side is prefigured by the creation of Eve from the side of Adam.³⁰ The Church alone is the repository of revelation, and so she alone preserves the apostolic teaching. So as well as being a holy fellowship, Tertullian also lays great emphasis on the necessary unity of the Church, and he is adamant in condemning all forms of disunity and schism.³¹ In the early Tertullian, there is a strong sense in which the Church is guaranteed by its apostolic and hence episcopal order; as time goes on, and he moves in the direction of Montanism, he begins to see the Church more and more in exclusively spiritual terms. Thus his initial belief in the possibility of the forgiveness of sins by the bishop gradually becomes narrower, until eventually he believes that forgiveness can come, if at all, from God alone. Even at his most liberal, the repentant sinner can only be readmitted to the fellowship after the most lengthy process of penance and public confession.³²

²⁷ Hippolytus, *On the antichrist* 59.

²⁸ On African ecclesiology, see especially Evans (1972).

²⁹ On Tertullian, see Evans (1972), 4-35; Rankin (1995); and Osborn (1997), 163-182.

³⁰ Tertullian, *De anima* 43.

³¹ *De praescriptione haereticorum* 5.

³² *De paenitentia* 9.

Something of the same fiercely rigorist tradition can be found in Cyprian, the great martyr bishop of Carthage.³³ However, whereas Tertullian gradually became more inflexible as his thought developed, Cyprian, faced with the aftermath of the Decian persecution, moves in the opposite direction. Under pressure of persecution, many had been forced to offer sacrifices to the pagan gods, or had obtained certificates of exemption from having to engage in such rituals; subsequently, many of these lapsed Christians had been offered forgiveness outside the normal channels of penitential order by persons who would eventually be martyred, the sanctity of such individuals popularly giving them the right to pronounce absolution. Initially, Cyprian refused to recognise the validity of such pardons,³⁴ but he gradually moved from this position, first allowing for the deathbed readmission of the penitent, and finally allowing for the forgiveness of anyone who humbly repented of their sins.³⁵ Famously, Cyprian declares that “there is no salvation outside the Church”.³⁶ It is impossible for a person to have God as their Father unless they also have the Church as their mother.³⁷ Whoever abandons the Church also abandons Christ. The unity of the Church, symbolised by the Christ’s seamless and undivided robe, is guaranteed by the unity of the bishops who are the heirs of the apostles. Whoever is not in communion with their bishop is not a member of the Church.³⁸ Cyprian argues that the members of the Church are one, just as the sun is one light but has many rays, a tree has many branches, or a spring produces many streams. If the ray is separated from the sun, its light fails; if a branch is cut off from the tree, it produces no fruit; if a stream is divided from its spring, it dries up.³⁹ There can be little doubt that Cyprian had in mind here the analogies for the Trinity that Tertullian had put forward earlier and which we referred to above. Even he fails to specify precisely how it should be the case, clearly the unity-in-multiplicity of the Church in some way mirrors the unity-in-Trinity of God.

³³ On Cyprian, see Walker (1968); Evans (1972), 36-64; Daniélou (1977); and Burns (2002).

³⁴ Cyprian, *De lapsis* 17-20.

³⁵ *Epistula* 55.6, 59.16.

³⁶ *Epistula* 73.21: *salus extra ecclesiam non est*.

³⁷ *De unitate* 6.

³⁸ *Epistula* 66.8.

³⁹ *De unitate* 5.

Texts

Before proceeding, we must say something, too, about the main texts under consideration in this thesis. In 393, Augustine was invited to give a reading of the Apostles' Creed to a synod of the north African bishops at Hippo. Still only a priest, this was an exceptional honour for him, an indication of the regard in which he was already held, and he seems to have seized this opportunity with both hands. By popular request, apparently, his address was published shortly afterwards as the treatise *On Faith and the Creed*, the most substantial work on trinitarian theology from this early period.⁴⁰ Within a few lines of its opening, Augustine quotes the Septuagint text of Isa 7.9, and the final sentence of the discourse also refers back to this text. This verse, *nisi credideritis non intelligetis*, “unless you believe you will not understand”, is particularly dear to Augustine. He argues that since the creed is never written down, it is literally committed to heart; by this means, the Catholic faith is defended against the onslaught of heretics, those who do not believe and who are consequently unable ever to understand.⁴¹ Towards the end of the work, Augustine returns to this theme. Those who are having difficulty in understanding, in seeing the truth, must allow their hearts to become pure, for “blessed are the pure in heart, because they will see God [Mt 5.8]”.⁴² We must begin by believing, even if now we see only “in part” and “enigmatically [1 Cor 13.12]”: this is another of Augustine's favourite texts, which he will return to frequently in *On the Trinity* when describing the inadequacy of analogy.⁴³ He concludes the discourse by drawing these threads together. What he has spoken about and written is the faith which is summed up in the creed. Those who believe have been taught this summary of the faith, so that they may live rightly under God, who transforms their hearts in order that “with pure hearts they may understand what they believe”.⁴⁴ Framed as it is in this way with the motto *nisi credideritis non intelligetis*, “unless you believe you will not understand”, we might reasonably think that *On Faith and Understanding* would

⁴⁰ For studies of *f. et symb.*, see Rivière (1947) and especially Meijering (1987).

⁴¹ *f. et symb.* 1.1.

⁴² *f. et symb.* 9.20.

⁴³ For a chronological study of Augustine's use of 1 Cor 13.12, see Van Fleteren (1992).

⁴⁴ *f. et symb.* 10.25.

have been an equally appropriate title for the work.⁴⁵ However, it should not be inferred from this that Augustine has nothing specific to say about the content of the Christian faith in the triune God. Far from it: most of the treatise consists of a commentary which focuses fairly closely on the articles of the creed, with his most interesting remarks coming when he turns to consider the person of the Holy Spirit.

Among all Augustine's works, *On the Trinity* is second in length only to *On the City of God*, and it is every bit as personal a work as *Confessions*; yet it has never received anything like the same degree of scholarly attention as have these two better known works.⁴⁶ It is, however, the single most important text under consideration in the current thesis. *On the Trinity* was a labour of love, written over a considerable period of time. It was begun between about 397 and 400, and reports from 412 and 415 both describe it as a work still in progress.⁴⁷ We also know that a pirate copy of the first twelve books was circulated shortly afterwards, much to Augustine's understandable irritation, and causing him to abandon the project for a time; he only resumed work at the explicit request of Aurelius of Carthage, and probably finished it sometime in the early 420s.⁴⁸ Because of the earlier publication of the first five books and the incomplete twelfth book, Augustine was unable to edit the final text as much as he had intended, which may account for the occasional moment when the argument is not as clear as he or we may have liked.

It is clear, then, that *On the Trinity* was not written in any great haste. During his episcopate, Augustine was forced to engage in lengthy literary disputes with a variety of opponents, especially Donatists and Pelagians. Pagan criticism of Christianity was the occasion for the writing of *On the City of God*, which occupied his spare time for at least a decade (which may also be a contributory factor in

⁴⁵ Meijering (1987), 161 particularly draws attention to this aspect of the treatise.

⁴⁶ Drobner (2000), 19. Most studies of *trin.* tend to concentrate on specific aspects of the work such as its dating or particular theological themes. Among general introductions, Hendrikx (1955), Agaësse (1955) and Richardson (1955) are still useful; more recent studies include Bourassa (1977) and (1978), Daniels (1981), Hill (1985) and (1991), and Clark (2001).

⁴⁷ *retr.* 2.15; *ep.* 143.4, 169.1.

⁴⁸ *ep.* 174. On dating the treatise, see Mellet and Camelot (1955), 557-566, La Bonnardière (1965) and Hill (1985), 75-76.

explaining his slow progress on *On the Trinity*). Even *Confessions* was an urgently written *apologia*, produced in response to a campaign aimed at discrediting its author's ministry. But as such it is a manifesto which describes the movement of ascent into the mystery of God: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you".⁴⁹ As we will see later, in at least some respects *On the Trinity* is also a polemical work, written in part in opposition to Arian and other anti-Nicene tendencies. However, the programme of the work is still remarkably similar to that of *Confessions*, and this is made clear by a text which is quoted at three important points, near the beginning of the first, ninth and final books: "Let the hearts of those who see the Lord rejoice; seek the Lord and be strengthened; seek his face always [Ps 104.3-4]".⁵⁰

This programmatic text helps us to see what might therefore be the underlying structure of the treatise. It is fairly obvious that *On the Trinity* falls more or less neatly into two parts, although we must no longer accept the traditional view that they thereby comprise two separate arguments, one concerning faith and the other concerning understanding.⁵¹ Rather, the two halves mirror one another, the journey outwards in the first half being followed by a similar inward journey in the second.⁵² The first book sets out the Catholic faith in the Trinity; books 2 to 4 investigate its scriptural basis; and books 5 to 7 offer a rational defence of the doctrine against philosophical attacks on it. Book 8 is something of a hinge, signalling a new approach by means of the inward turn. The second half then mirrors the first: books 9 to 11 begin to construct a mental image through rational self-examination; books 12 to 14 investigate the scriptural account of the history of this image; and book 15 summarises the advances in understanding which have been achieved by this journey.

⁴⁹ *conf.* 1.1.

⁵⁰ *trin.* 1.3.5, 9.1.1, 15.2.2.

⁵¹ This is frequently suggested but is clearly incorrect, although for a recent and surprising adherent to this view, see Chadwick (1986), 91. It is apparent from *ep.* 174 that Augustine himself conceived of the work very much as a unity.

⁵² The detailed analysis of Hill (1973); (1985), 80-82; and (1991), 21-27 is most convincing and is the basis for what follows. Cavadini (1992) and Ayres (1998) broadly agree with Hill; Muller (1993a) and (1995) places greater emphasis on christological passages in books 4 and 13, seeing these as the major turning-points of the work.

Modern research on the *Tracts on the Gospel of John* has shown that they were preached over a considerable period of time, and that they consequently reflect a wide variety of different concerns. Dating them has been the major focus of recent scholarship, beginning with the realisation that they fall into at least two distinct groups.⁵³ The first group, *Tracts* 1-54, are strongly anti-Donatist in their tone and were undoubtedly preached by Augustine himself at Hippo; the second, *Tracts* 55-124, are much more succinct and probably originated rather later, not least because of the fact that part of *Tract* 99 is incorporated into *On the Trinity*.⁵⁴ The consensus is that this second group of sermons was probably written by Augustine either to be preached in his absence or to be used as a model for other clergy to follow.⁵⁵ The first sixteen homilies were preached at around the same time as *Explanations of the Psalms* 95 and 119-133;⁵⁶ although it was once thought that they dated from about 414 to 416, it is now more generally accepted that they come from early 407.⁵⁷ *Tracts* 17-19 and 23-54 form a second continuous sequence, originating about a decade later;⁵⁸ the intervening 20-22 are almost certainly an interpolation from a few years later still.⁵⁹ The second major block of sermons, *Tracts* 55-124, are reckoned to be later than most of the first group, dating at least from 416 and probably from about 419 onwards.⁶⁰ For all this complexity, we should not underestimate the considerable thematic unity of the *Tracts*, which are a profoundly spiritual and allegorical reading of the Gospel.⁶¹ God uses signs to speak to his people, and the greatest of these signs is the Incarnation of the Word.⁶² The doctrine of the Incarnation is therefore central to the *Tracts*, which focus on the mystery of

⁵³ For an overview of the problem of dating, see Rettig (1988), 23-31 and Milewski (2002), 65-69.

⁵⁴ Zarb (1933). The text concerned is *Io. eu. tr.* 99.8-99.9, directly quoted at *trin.* 15.27.48: see Berrouard (1993), 45-49.

⁵⁵ Zarb (1933), 105-108; La Bonnardière (1965), 124-125; Berrouard (1993), 25-26.

⁵⁶ Le Landais (1953), especially 88-95.

⁵⁷ For the later date, Le Landais (1953), 11; for the more likely earlier date, La Bonnardière (1965), 46-51 and 61-62, Berrouard (1969), 29-36 and (1971), 107-119, and Poque (1971), 183-187.

⁵⁸ La Bonnardière (1965), 87-117 argues for 418-420, but Berrouard (1971), 140-163 and (1977), 26-41 favours the slightly earlier 413-416.

⁵⁹ Wright (1964) and (1972), 80-106, followed by Berrouard (1971), 119-121 and (1977), 42-46.

⁶⁰ Le Landais (1953) argues for 416; Zarb (1933), 105-108, La Bonnardière (1965), 65-87 and Berrouard (1993), 17-26 all prefer the later date.

⁶¹ Rettig (1988), 10-13.

⁶² Norris (1993), 385.

the unity of Christ.⁶³ But other themes are also considered at length, as we will see: the Holy Spirit, the love of God, the Trinity and the Church.⁶⁴ Augustine was preaching to Catholic Christians, but those outside the Church were never far from his mind, be they pagans, Manichees, Donatists, Pelagians or Arians:⁶⁵ such heresies were an important spur to the development of his theology.

Recent scholarship has given us a degree of certainty on the dating of the ten *Tracts on the Letter of John*. From comments made by Augustine himself, we can be fairly certain that they intervened between the twelfth and thirteenth *Tracts on the Gospel of John*.⁶⁶ It therefore follows that they too date from 407.⁶⁷ Augustine certainly began to preach the homilies during the Easter Octave, so that from what we know of the lectionaries for this season, we can determine with some plausibility on which day each was delivered, beginning at the evening service on Easter Day itself.⁶⁸ Although he had intended to complete his commentary within a week, he ran out of time, as the opening remarks of *Tract 9* make apparent.⁶⁹ So the last two sermons were preached a little later, very possibly (from frequent references to the ascension in the final sermon) on the Saturday and Sunday in Ascensiontide.⁷⁰ The epistle, and Augustine's commentary upon it, is an extended meditation on the revelation that "God is love [1 Jn 4.8, 16]". This was a particularly appropriate subject for those who had recently been baptised at the Easter vigil;⁷¹ but it was also

⁶³ This is the universal conclusion of the commentators: see, for example, Comeau (1930), 252-269; Berrouard (1969), 64-77; Berrouard (1988), 23-41; Rettig (1988), 13-14.

⁶⁴ Comeau (1930), 269 is surely mistaken in asserting that "La théologie du Saint Esprit est, dans les *Tractatus*, infiniment moins riche que celle du Fils". On love, see Pontet (1945), 578: "L'amour est au centre du quatrième évangile et de son commentaire". On the Trinity, see Comeau (1930), 237-252 and 276-290. On the Church, see Comeau (1930), 143-160; Pontet (1945), 555-556; and Norris (1993), 388-390.

⁶⁵ Le Landais (1953), 95; Berrouard (1969), 78-113; Berrouard (1977), 26-46, 60-62; Doyle (1977), 223-225; Rettig (1988), 14-22.

⁶⁶ *ep. lo. tr. prologus*; *lo. eu. tr.* 13.1.1.

⁶⁷ See La Bonnardière (1965), 21-56. Previous commentators assumed a date of about 415, based on the earlier suppositions discussed above: see Le Landais (1953), 93, followed by Comeau (1954), 165, Gallay (1955a), 1 and Agaësse (1961), 9-12.

⁶⁸ For a detailed analysis, see Poque (1964), followed with some reservations by Zwinggi (1970).

⁶⁹ *ep. lo. tr. prologus*; 9.1.1, 9.1.2.

⁷⁰ Thus Zarb (1933), 66-67; Comeau (1954), 166.

⁷¹ Rettig (1995), 97-98.

appropriate in the light of the acute problem of Donatism.⁷² Thus Augustine's exegesis particularly stressed the themes of love and unity.⁷³ God's love is revealed to us in the Son and given to us in the Holy Spirit, the love of the Father and the Son.⁷⁴ Those who have been given the Spirit of love must also love one another, in their actions as well as in their words.⁷⁵ If they love Christ, they should also love the members of Christ's body, for those who are joined to the Son are also joined to the Father through the bond of the Spirit of love.⁷⁶ The Church is made a unity through the mutual love of its members; disunity is caused by those who, hating each other, also hate God, and do not possess the Holy Spirit.⁷⁷

The *Explanations of the Psalms* are a diverse collection, some of which were delivered as sermons, while others originated as written commentaries.⁷⁸ Augustine did not mention them in his *Retractions*, and even their title is a later addition.⁷⁹ It seems likely that they were begun during the concentrated period of scriptural study which followed his ordination to the priesthood in about 391; he then gradually filled in the gaps which remained until the whole psalter had been dealt with, perhaps by around 418.⁸⁰ But he undoubtedly came to see them as a single work, since when he finally came to consider the last remaining psalm which he had hitherto put off discussing, Ps 118, he preceded it with a prologue which strongly implies that he saw the complete collection as a unified whole. Nevertheless, since Augustine did not work through the psalter in a systematic fashion, dating each individual *Explanation* is often a matter of conjecture, although references to external events occasionally allow for greater precision.⁸¹ Again, because they were produced over a long period

⁷² On the anti-Donatist tenor of the homilies, see especially Le Landais (1953), 91-92; Gallay (1955a), 2-6; and Agaësse (1961), 24-28 and 56-62. The Donatists are mentioned specifically only twice, at *ep. Io. tr.* 1.13 and 3.7.2, but they are referred to implicitly on at least seven other occasions.

⁷³ Gallay (1955a), 1 observes that the sermons are "une longue et poignante exhortation à la charité fraternelle"; see also Agaësse (1961), 28-30 and Dideberg (1975b), 35-36.

⁷⁴ Agaësse (1961), 39-47; Dideberg (1975b), 206-236.

⁷⁵ Gallay (1955a), 1-2; Agaësse (1961), 47-53; Dideberg (1975b), 87-106 and 140-166.

⁷⁶ Agaësse (1961), 92-102.

⁷⁷ On unity, see Dideberg (1975b), 107-136; on disunity, see Comeau (1954), 162 and Dideberg (1975b), 73-85.

⁷⁸ Pontet (1945), 82.

⁷⁹ The term *enarratio* was first coined by Erasmus: see Vincent (1990), 10 n. 5.

⁸⁰ Vincent (1990), 20; Fiedrowicz (2000), 14-15.

⁸¹ Pontet (1990), 83-85; Fiedrowicz (2000), 15-16.

of time, the *Explanations* often reflect the various battles of his career, against Manicheism, Donatism, Pelagianism and paganism.⁸² For the most part, Augustine interprets the psalms figuratively, seeking to find spiritual meaning in the many signs, symbols and metaphors found in the texts.⁸³ The most important hermeneutical key, running throughout his commentary, is the notion of the *totus Christus*. We hear the voice of Jesus Christ in the psalms: sometimes this is the voice of Christ the head, and sometimes it is the voice of Christ's body, the Church.⁸⁴ But often it is the "whole Christ" who speaks, head and body bound together in one person.⁸⁵ Behind this exegetical methodology, then, lies an important insight into the Church's essential unity in Christ. It is not surprising, then, that a prominent secondary subject throughout Augustine's *Explanations* is the theme of the love of God.⁸⁶

In addition to these three substantial series of *Tracts* and *Explanations*, we will from time to time have occasion to refer to some of the rest of Augustine's *Sermons*. Over four hundred in number, most of these discourses were preached at the eucharist in Hippo, although a significant number were delivered elsewhere, particularly in Carthage. In most cases, Augustine seems to have preached extempore, his words being recorded by secretaries and occasionally then edited. Despite their large number, only a small proportion of his sermons have actually survived, with those that remain spanning the entire course of his ministry; in many cases, they can be dated more or less precisely because of reference to external events.⁸⁷ Similarly, Augustine's *Letters* often offer the most immediate access into the mind of their author, frequently representing his first thoughts on a subject. They present direct and personal insights into a wide variety of matters of pressing pastoral concern, not the least among these being the Donatist controversy.

⁸² Pontet (1945), 387-388; Vincent (1990), 20-22 and 261-295.

⁸³ Fiedrowicz (2000), 26-37.

⁸⁴ On the *totus Christus*, see Pontet (1945), 400-416; Réveillaud (1968), 67-89; Rondeau (1985), 365-370; Vincent (1990), 33-49; Fiedrowicz (2000), 43-56.

⁸⁵ Réveillaud (1968), 89-94; Rondeau (1985), 370-380; Vincent (1990), 49-56; Fiedrowicz (2000), 56-57.

⁸⁶ On love, see Vincent (1990), 249-260, 305-307 and 447-449.

⁸⁷ For general introduction, see Deferrari (1922), Doyle (1977) and Pellegrino (1990).

Turning to the course of this lengthy and often wearisome battle, Augustine wrote his first polemic against the Donatists as early as 392, and his last piece aimed specifically at them dates from 420: his literary efforts therefore span well over a quarter of a century. Early works include a number of letters, and a populist poem aimed at the illiterate classes. Having succeeded Valerius as bishop, Augustine was able to direct his attention more systematically to the challenge of Donatism. The first result was an initial rebuttal of a letter by Petilian of Cirta, dealing with the charge that the Catholics were *traditores* and persecutors of the Donatists. Three books written *Against the Letter of Parmenian*, itself a response to the brilliant Donatist theologian Tyconius,⁸⁸ were followed by seven volumes *On Baptism*. A prominent theme of these is the role of the human ministers of the sacraments, while the example of Cyprian also looms large in these pages. A more detailed response to Petilian largely consists of allegorical interpretations of the scriptural passages which the Donatists preferred to read literally. A bad-tempered exchange between Petilian and Augustine resulted, in which the latter's exasperation with his opponents is increasingly obvious. The treatise *To the Catholic Brothers*, also known as *On the Unity of the Church*, presents a defence of the Catholic Church as the one universal body of Christ.⁸⁹ A further defence of Petilian by the lay *grammaticus* Cresconius led to four more books by Augustine which emphasise the inconsistency of the Donatists. The important *Letters* 93 and 185, to the Rogatist bishop Vincentius and to the military tribune Boniface respectively, are justifications of coercion and punishment as a means of encouraging conversion. A short treatise *On the Only Baptism* counters the Donatist claim that the sacrament of baptism can only be possessed within the one true Church.

⁸⁸ On Tyconius, see Burkitt (1894); Monceaux (1923), V, 165-219; Bright (1988); Tilley (1997b); Kannengiesser (1999); and Kugler (1999). Despite being excommunicated by Parmenian for teaching that the Christian community must include both good and bad individuals, Tyconius never seems to have joined the Catholic Church; thus Eno (1972), 47: "Tyconius ... found himself in a limbo between the two warring factions".

⁸⁹ The authorship of this treatise has been disputed on the grounds that it is not mentioned in *retr.* (probably because it is epistolary in form), that it includes unusual scriptural references, and that it displays a certain stylistic unevenness: see Monceaux (1923), VII, 105-107. The conclusion of Brown (1963), 301 that it is a "second-rate pamphlet" is certainly unjustified. At the very least, we have here Augustine's own ideas and arguments, although it is possible that an amanuensis had a hand in editing the text, improvising more freely than was usual for one of Augustine's secretaries.

Following a conference in Carthage in 411 which was intended by the imperial authorities to put an end to the schism, Augustine published both a summary of the proceedings and a detailed commentary on the discussions. At the request of Bishop Zosimus of Rome, in 418 Augustine visited the Donatist stronghold of Caesarea, the capital of Mauretania. There, he preached a homily which went out of its way to demonstrate the common ground between the two sides and which appealed to the instincts of his audience to embrace love and unity. A subsequent public debate with the Donatist bishop of the city saw Emeritus unable to offer any coherent response whatsoever. The final essay of the campaign came in opposition to Gaudentius of Thamugadi, who threatened to resist imperial coercion through the mass suicide of himself and his followers. Augustine's reply emphatically denied the Donatist claim that they were being persecuted for a righteous cause, and revisited the example of unity presented by Cyprian.⁹⁰

In addition to all of these many and varied texts, we will also have cause to discuss Augustine's *Rule*, which offers practical instruction on leading the religious life, portraying Christian living as being rooted and grounded in the love and unity of God. Although authorship of the *Rule* has been disputed, the balance of probability is that it was written by Augustine himself, most likely in about 397.⁹¹ Finally, we should mention the *Retractions*, written in around 427, in which the elderly Augustine, having re-read much of his previous work, explained for posterity what he thought was most significant in each and corrected any errors he found. Among other things, the *Retractions* are a useful tool in establishing the chronology of other works.⁹²

Much of Augustine has been translated into English, but there is as yet no single comprehensive edition of his works. My debt to these many previous efforts will be obvious; however, in this thesis, all translations of Augustine and other

⁹⁰ For general introduction to the many anti-Donatist works, see Congar (1963).

⁹¹ Lawless (1987), 45-62 is particularly useful in demonstrating that Augustine drew no sharp distinction between the monastic vocation and the vocation of the wider Church. For other general studies, see also Verheijen (1967) and (1980), Brockwell (1977), Zumkeller (1986) and Van Bavel (1996).

⁹² See Burnaby (1954) and Madec (1996).

patristic writers are my own work. It is my hope that a degree of linguistic and stylistic consistency has thereby been achieved. The modern translator of ancient texts is inevitably alert to the sensitivities of language and gender, but this must be balanced by the need to offer a more or less accurate translation in order to let the reader arrive at his or her own conclusions. In his own time and place, neither Augustine nor his readers and listeners would have been more than marginally concerned by this question. The translation given here is therefore generally speaking no more – nor less – gender-inclusive than the original text. Needless to say, in my own commentary and analysis I have sought to use language which is fully inclusive.

1

Trinity

*o fons amoris, spiritus
o sancte donorum parens,
tuas refugas intimis
accende flammis cordibus.*

*qui caritatis uinculo
cum patre nectis filium,
et nos amoris mutui
artis coapta nexibus.*

Charles Coffin (1676-1749)

In this first chapter, we will set out the main lines of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity. At all times, he goes to great lengths to make it clear that the faith he is expounding is the faith of the Catholic Church. In its broad outline, therefore, Augustine's theology is not strictly speaking at all original: quite rightly, he would have entirely rejected the suggestion that he was inventing doctrine. However, Augustine was able to go much further than anyone before him had done, at least in the Latin-speaking west, in developing sustained and rigorous arguments to explain and elucidate the mystery of faith in God the Trinity. In particular, his reflection on the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's relationship with the Father and the Son is considerably more detailed than anything which had gone before. It is in the detail of these arguments and explanations that Augustine's originality lies; and in some points at least the sheer creativity of his thought is dazzling. We will begin by noting some of the points of continuity between Augustine and the theological tradition of which he was the heir, and then attempt to follow how his thought developed from the earliest works to the extraordinary achievement of *On the Trinity*.

Philosophical background

Before going any further, however, we must begin by saying something about the philosophical tradition in which Augustine was located. Christianity was heir to a long intellectual history in which the unity of God had become more or less taken as read. We should not overlook the Jewish antecedents of this teaching: the related beliefs that there is one God and that God is one are two sides of the same coin, as our difficulties in translating Deut 6.4 might suggest. By the time Jesus quotes the *Shema* at Mk 12.29, there can be no doubt that it is the unity of God, rather than the uniqueness of God, to which he refers. In any case, the forceful emphasis on monotheism in Jewish thought was adopted unconditionally by the earliest Christians (see, for example, Rom 3.30 and Jas 2.19); thus the subsequent struggle to reconcile belief in Father, Son and Holy Spirit with belief in the unity of God may be understood as being built upon a deeply Jewish commitment to monotheism.

However, the Church inherited another well-established intellectual tradition, that of Greek philosophy, which also had at its heart the concept of the One. The followers of Pythagoras had given particular prominence to the number one as the basis of mathematics and thus of the rational universe.¹ Borrowing from them, Plato identified the One and the indefinite dyad, which proceeds from unity and is its opposite, as being jointly the two supreme principles of the universe from which everything else proceeds.² This idea was taken up by later platonists, among them Philo, who sought to find common ground between Plato and the Jewish scriptures. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is also the Monad, the One who is the source of all being but who transcends multiplicity.³ But these ideas were given a more systematic form by Plotinus who, in attempting to explain how a variety of forms

¹ See Stead (1994), 6.

² On Plato, see Merlan (1967), 15-19 and Smith (2004), 25, 58; for a different perspective, Louth (1981), 1-17.

³ Chadwick (1967), 141; Louth (1981), 19; Stead (1994), 56-58. It was a fond conceit of the Christians and Jews of late antiquity that Plato must have been familiar with the words of Moses: see Justin, *Apology* 1.59-1.60. Augustine, apparently borrowing from Ambrose, even put forward the theory that Plato had actually met Jeremiah in Egypt (*doctr. chr.* 2.28.43), but he later realised that this notion was untenable on chronological grounds (*ciu.* 8.11, *retr.* 2.4.2).

could have developed from an original unity, put forward a theory based on three hypostases or principles.⁴ All creation emanates from the One which, although it is the cause of being, itself transcends being and is unknowable and inexpressible. Since the One is perfect, through its external activity it produces Intellect (*νοῦς*), which proceeds from the One and simultaneously returns to the One in eternal contemplation. Similarly, Soul (*ψυχή*) proceeds from and returns to Intellect, and is in turn the cause of physical existence in time and space. There is therefore a hierarchy of being and reality, in which movement away from the One involves a descent into increasing multiplicity. Later neoplatonists, such as Plotinus' disciple Porphyry, posited a series of intermediate hypostases, at once increasing the distance between humanity and the One; and yet paradoxically also blurring the distinction between them, since the rungs on the ladder of the resulting "great chain of being" thereby become nearer to one another. This period also saw an increased interest in the religious aspects of neoplatonism, especially in a growing emphasis on ritual and theurgy.⁵ It is therefore unsurprising that neoplatonic ideas were adopted by a number of Christian writers, among them Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Victorinus, all of whom identified the transcendent One with God the Father.⁶ In the hierarchies of the philosophers, the second and third hypostases were inferior to the One: post-Nicene orthodoxy required considerable caution to be exercised by those Christian writers who employed neoplatonic ideas in their theologies of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Of course, it is impossible in just a few words to do justice to 800 years of metaphysical speculations, but this survey has highlighted at least two important themes. The first of these is the emphasis on contemplation of the One. The reflections of the neoplatonists about the nature of the One, the Intellect and the Soul had their origin in their prior reflections about the nature of what it is to be human. If existence itself is the consequence of descent and departure from unity to multiplicity, then union with God is to be achieved through ascent and return through

⁴ On Plotinus, see Armstrong (1967), 193-263; Louth (1981), 36-51; and Smith (2004), 3-73.

⁵ On Porphyry, see Lloyd (1967), 272-293 and Smith (2004), 78-83.

⁶ For the use of Plotinus by Origen, see Louth (1981), 73-74; by Gregory of Nyssa, see Sheldon-Williams (1967), 447-456; and by Victorinus, see Markus (1967), 331-340.

the inverse process of contemplation and purification. As we will see, this philosophical background is strikingly echoed in Augustine's thought, both in his analogies between the human mind and the divine Trinity, as well as in the way in which human beings are transformed through the vision of God. Secondly and even more significantly, however, is the platonic emphasis on the transcendent One as the supreme principle of the universe, a notion which was a fundamental element of the intellectual milieu. The idea of the unity of God was therefore already firmly embedded in the Greek philosophical tradition which the Church inherited; and this only served to reinforce the Church's scriptural, Jewish inheritance, so that belief in the unity of God was not only inevitable but also, to the orthodox, unquestionable.

Early forays into trinitarian theology

On retreat at Cassiciacum from late 386 to early 387, Augustine and his companions were particularly conscious of the debt they owed to neoplatonism. Much has been written about the precise nature of the intellectual and spiritual journey which had led him to the eve of his baptism: in particular, scholars have debated at length the question of whether Augustine had been "converted" at this point to Christianity or only to neoplatonism.⁷ The detail of these debates need not detain us here. It is clear from the Cassiciacum dialogues, as well as from Augustine's later reflections on this period of his life (notably *Confessions*, books 7 to 9), that even if his previous "conversion" had been to the religion of the philosophers, by now he was a convinced Catholic. This is not to say, of course, either that he had mastered every detail and appreciated every nuance of his new faith; nor that he had thereby determined to abandon everything that he had learned from philosophy.

There are several passages in the works of this period in which Augustine explicitly makes connections between the neoplatonic ideas we have discussed above

⁷ For the best recent summary of this perennial discussion, see Madec (1994), 51-69.

and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. In *On the Blessed Life*, Augustine and his friends were discussing what makes for human happiness, concluding that we need to possess God in order to be truly happy. We possess God if we possess the wisdom which unites us to God. But we learn from the scriptures that this wisdom and truth is himself none other than the Son of God.⁸ Not only this, but there is also a third hypostasis who leads us towards truth. Illumination is therefore a trinitarian event: the ray of truth inspires us to seek the assistance of the truth in attaining the truth. Blessedness consists of unity with the three persons, who are nevertheless one substance and one God.⁹ At this point, Augustine's mother is reminded of one of Ambrose's hymns: "Keep safe, O Trinity, those who pray".¹⁰ In these dialogues, Monnica often stands figuratively for the Church. For those who have faith, the triad of the neoplatonists echoes the triune God of Catholic doctrine. Again, in the dialogue *On Order*, which is mostly to do with the problem of evil, Augustine observes that the philosophers believe in a triad: the one who is the *principium*, a second who is understanding proceeding from the first, and a third who proceeds from both.¹¹ This conception of reality is not dissimilar to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. However, pride prevents the philosophers from making the leap necessary to believe in the incarnation of the second person of this Trinity.¹² A third text from this period also demonstrates Augustine's debt to neoplatonism. At the beginning of his *Soliloquies*, Augustine prays to God for three things: that he might rightly ask, worthily be heard, and be set free; he then adds a long list of invocations to the God who is the creator of all things.¹³ God is the Father of truth; of wisdom; of life; of blessedness; of goodness and beauty; of light; of illumination; and of the pledge who calls us back to God. It has been argued that the first six of these categories relate to God the Son, while the last two relate to God the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

⁸ *beata u.* 4.34.

⁹ *beata u.* 4.35: *unamque substantiae*. Du Roy (1966), 341 n. 2 observes that this is the first time Augustine uses the term *substantia* to express the unity of God.

¹⁰ *ibid.*: *foue, precantes, trinitas*. The line comes from Ambrose, *Hymnus* 5: see Du Roy (1962), 162. Cipriani (1994), 268-286 discerns many echoes of Plotinus in this passage, as well as parallels with Ambrose and Victorinus.

¹¹ *ord.* 2.5.16.

¹² Du Roy (1962), 125-126; and compare with *conf.* 7.9.13-7.9.14.

¹³ *sol.* 1.1.2.

¹⁴ Du Roy (1962), 196-206.

However, this is far from self-evident, and nowhere are the Son or the Spirit mentioned by name.¹⁵ On the other hand, the metaphysical formulations clearly display neoplatonic influences;¹⁶ and both Augustine's emphasis on the unity of God and his terminology for the Spirit betray a familiarity with ideas which are also present in Ambrose and Victorinus.¹⁷

The first significant development in Augustine's trinitarian thought occurs within a year or so of these earliest works. Having returned to Rome after his baptism by Ambrose, he began writing an attack on Manicheism, contrasting the falsehoods of his former religion with the truth of his new faith. We will examine the resulting treatise *On the Conduct of the Catholic Church and the Conduct of the Manichees* in more detail in a later chapter.¹⁸ But one important evolution in his thought can already be seen to have taken place by this time. The aim of human existence is *beatitudo*, the blessedness or happiness which comes from union with God. This belief is inherited from the philosophical tradition Augustine inherited, and is a prominent theme of the Cassiciacum dialogues. The significant development here is that for the first time he talks specifically about love as the means of union between the human soul and God; previously, the emphasis had been more on knowledge, truth and wisdom, with love being discussed mostly in close conjunction with faith and hope. This shift in vocabulary came about because of Augustine's new interest in the scriptures, where he discovered that both Old and New Testaments teach that we must love God "with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind [Dt 6.5, Mt 22.37]."¹⁹ This being so, we possess blessedness if we love God and are joined to God in love. But it is through Jesus Christ the Son and through the Holy Spirit that we come to God.²⁰ Therefore "we must love God the

¹⁵ Studer (1997), 89 points out that, even if we believe that the prayer is trinitarian in structure, Augustine only ever prays to God the Father. The prayer at *sol.* 1.15.30 which closes the book is addressed to the "Lord", without any kind of distinction between the persons.

¹⁶ Du Roy (1962), 199.

¹⁷ For the former, Cipriani (1994), 288-289 points especially to the anti-Arian arguments of Ambrose, *De fide* 4.11.140-4.11-141 and Victorinus, *Adversus Arium*; and for the latter to Ambrose, *De spiritu sancto*, 2.5.33-2.5.35.

¹⁸ For a detailed study of the work, see Coyle (1978).

¹⁹ *mor.* 1.8.13, 1.9.14.

²⁰ *mor.* 1.13.22-1.13.23.

Trinity in unity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit”.²¹ Particularly noteworthy is the fact that, in support of his argument, Augustine twice cites Rom 5.5: “the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us”.²² We come to Christ through love, and this love is nothing less than the Holy Spirit, God himself perfecting us in his image. What is significant here is that, even at this early stage, Augustine has settled on love as his central metaphysical category; and that, in consequence, his scriptural exploration of the virtue of love has had immediate implications for the development of this trinitarian thought. We will see later in this chapter just how closely intertwined these two themes become.

First, however, we must explore with Augustine several other themes which emerge in his early writings. Foremost among these is one of the most important aspects of his initial engagement with Catholic teaching: the emphasis on the inseparability of operation of the three persons of the Trinity. This seemingly arcane doctrine was in fact of the utmost importance, since it was a key corollary of faith in the unity and equality of God, very much still a live theological issue even at the end of the fourth century. For the “pro-Nicene” theologians of a generation or so before Augustine, the belief that the three persons acted inseparably was the point of departure for their discussions of divine unity and simplicity, and thus for arguments against the threat posed by the various groups of Homoians.²³ In particular, we might point to the discussions of Ambrose and Hilary; and it is also worth noting that the theme is also found in Gregory of Nyssa, thus demonstrating that in no way could it be said to have been a peculiarly Latin preoccupation.²⁴ If the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit work together, then they share the same substance and nature. The inseparability of operation of the three both reveals and is a consequence of the unity of God.

²¹ *mor.* 1.14.24.

²² *mor.* 1.13.23, 1.16.29: *caritas dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per spiritum sanctum qui datus est nobis*. These are the first citations by Augustine of this crucial text: see La Bonnardière (1954), 662; more generally, on this key development, see Du Roy (1962), 219-220 and 226-227.

²³ For studies of the doctrine of inseparable operation, highlighting especially both the continuity of Augustine with his predecessors and the anti-Homoian context of their arguments, see Barnes (1999b), and Ayres (2000a) and (2000b).

²⁴ For example, see Ambrose, *De spiritu sancto* 1.12.131, 2.10.101; Hilary, *De trinitate* 7.17-7.18; Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Trinity*.

The issue is addressed by Augustine in about 389 in the course of correspondence with one of his friends. Nebridius had asked why it was the Son who became incarnate, rather than the Father: the question is for him a matter of christology, but Augustine also sees the trinitarian implications, observing at the outset that Nebridius ought also to have asked why it was not the Holy Spirit who was incarnated.²⁵ Nevertheless, the starting-point for any discussion of the problem must be the fact that

according to the Catholic faith, the Trinity is commended and believed (and by a few holy and blessed people understood!) to be so inseparable, that whatever is done by it must be judged to be done simultaneously by the Father, and by the Son, and by the Holy Spirit. The Father does not do anything that the Son and the Spirit do not also do; the Holy Spirit does not do anything that the Father and the Son do not also do; the Son does not do anything that the Father and the Holy Spirit do not also do.²⁶

It therefore follows that the question is not so much why it was the Son and not the Father or the Spirit who was incarnate, as why it was not all three acting together. Briefly, Augustine proposes an analogy from nature: things exist, they exist as specific things, and they continue to exist.²⁷ The fact that the same nature or substance can be considered under this triad of distinct but inseparable categories is, he suggests, an analogy of the distinct but nevertheless inseparable persons of the Trinity. Human frailty requires that we be trained in understanding, and this seems to Augustine to correspond most closely to the second of his three categories.²⁸ It is for this reason that, although the three persons work inseparably, it was the Son who became incarnate in order to reveal to us the Trinity. Having come to know what God is, we then also know simultaneously that God is, and that he continues to be, so completing the triad of categories just outlined. Thus

²⁵ *ep.* 11.2. On the interconnection of the doctrines of the incarnation and of the Trinity, see Ayres (1998) and (2000a).

²⁶ *ibid.* Barnes (1999b), 154 n. 17 points out that this is Augustine's first ever use of the word *trinitas*.

²⁷ *ep.* 11.3. For discussion of possible sources for this argument, see Du Roy (1966), 391-401.

²⁸ *ep.* 11.4.

from the Father, that is, from the one principle from whom everything is, there proceeds both understanding through the Son; and also a certain inward and ineffable sweetness and delight in remaining in that understanding (and condemning all mortal things), which gift and offering is properly attributed to the Holy Spirit.²⁹

Understanding and delight are the inseparable work of all three persons, but they come to us separately as a concession to our weakness.³⁰ This is, we should note, a dynamic model, since Augustine is concerned here with what later theologians would call the “economic Trinity”. What interests him is not so much the nature of God *in se*, but the economy of human salvation effected through the missions of the Son and of the Spirit.

It does not really matter whether or not we find this particular argument compelling. What is significant is the fact that for Augustine, recently converted and still only a layman, there can be no other starting-point for his trinitarian thought than the theology of his immediate forebears: specifically, the doctrine of the inseparable operation of the three persons. He does not attempt to offer arguments to support this doctrine, but treats it as self-evident. Because the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit act as one, so they must also be one. We can see the early Augustine here engaging vigorously with the Catholic tradition, both with issues raised through the reading of the scriptures, and also with the arguments of his Nicene – and, by extension, anti-Nicene – predecessors. His *Letter* 11 does not only look backwards, however, for the ideas tentatively proffered at this stage are presented with increasing confidence again and again in his later writings. Augustine continues his conversation with Nebridius in *Letter* 14, where he concludes that the best illustration of inseparability in the created order of things lies in the realm of mental, not physical activity.³¹ As we trace the development of his trinitarian theology through the remainder of this chapter, we will see how the theme of inseparability recurs frequently. The question Nebridius originally asked about the incarnation of

²⁹ *ibid.* On the Father as *principium*, see Ayres (2000a), 53 n.30. The Spirit is described here as both *donum* and *munus*, on which see below.

³⁰ Thus Muller (1995), 78-79, in a lucid summary of Augustine’s rather cryptic argument.

³¹ *ep.* 14.2. See Barnes (1999b), 159-161.

the Son is returned to again by Augustine near the beginning of *On the Trinity*,³² and while the doctrine of inseparability is not a major theme, it is there in the background throughout most of the discussions in that work. It is also significant that Augustine has already settled on a psychological triad as offering the closest possible model of the life of the triune Godhead. As outlined in *Letter 11*, the second and third terms of this analogy are *cognitio* and *dulcedo*, knowledge and delight. This model will evolve somewhat before reaching its final form twenty or thirty years later. However, the direction in which Augustine's thoughts will turn has already become apparent. It should be noted, too, that the later psychological triads he puts forward are explicitly framed within the context of arguments about inseparability, as is made clear by comments both in *Sermon 52* and *On the Trinity*.³³ A final point to note about *Letter 11* is that Augustine has firmly associated the Holy Spirit with the idea of gift, an important theological linkage which becomes extremely significant later.

A couple of years later, in about 391, the recently ordained Augustine preached his first sermon on the Apostles' Creed.³⁴ It was traditional that the creed was "handed over" during Lent to those catechumens who were awaiting their baptism at Easter, and so this custom occasioned a number of similar sermons from Augustine which, by the nature of their subject matter, offer useful snapshots of his theology. After discussing divine omnipotence, he turns to consider the relationship among the three persons. The Father is God, the Son is "God from God", of the same substance as the Father; making use of a familiar Nicene exegetical rule, Augustine explains that Jesus Christ is equal to the Father in his divine nature, but less than the Father in his human nature.³⁵ This rule is important when Augustine comes to discuss the mission of the Son in the first books of *On the Trinity*. Like the Son, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, but the Spirit is not the Son; rather, he is "the Spirit of the Father and the Son", not a creature but the creator, "God

³² *trin.* 1.5.8.

³³ *s.* 52.17, 52.18; *trin.* 4.21.30, 9.5.8, 15.23.43.

³⁴ *s.* 214. It is clear from the opening sentences that this is an early sermon, but the stage directions at the end of *s.* 214.1 may suggest that it was edited at a later date.

³⁵ *s.* 214.5, 214.6. Compare with, for example, Ambrose, *De fide* 2.8-59-2.8.73.

himself".³⁶ Augustine draws these observations together with a summary of the Catholic faith:

In this Trinity there is nothing greater and nothing less, no separation of works, no dissimilarity of substance. The Father is one God, the Son is one God, the Holy Spirit is one God. However, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not three gods, but one God; so that he who is the Son is not the Father, nor he who is the Father the Son, nor he who is the Holy Spirit either the Father or the Son. But the Father is the Father of the Son; and the Son is the Son of the Father; and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son; and each of these is one God, and the Trinity itself is one God. Let this faith saturate your hearts and direct your confession. Hearing this, believe so that you might understand, so that in making progress you might understand what you believe [reference to Isa 7.9].³⁷

Thus the Trinity is one God. The three persons are distinct, but equal and inseparable, something in any case implicit in Augustine's previous remark about the Holy Spirit's involvement in the activity of creation.

A definition such as this is almost scholastic in its precision, but what do such formulae actually achieve? In the quotation given above, Augustine immediately answers this question. The faith we profess, he says, is transformative, filling our hearts and working within us so that we might come to a deeper understanding of what we profess to believe. The reference here is to the Septuagint text of Isa 7.9: *nisi credideritis non intelligetis*, "unless you believe you will not understand".³⁸ As faith purifies our hearts and purges our sinful natures, we move from seeing things visible to things invisible. In *On the Trinity*, this transformation is described in terms of the move from *scientia* to *sapientia* as we are conformed more and more closely to the image of God; and we will see later on that the programme suggested by Isa 7.9 serves as a very good summary of what Augustine is trying to do in that work.

³⁶ s. 214.10.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.* On Isa 7.9, see especially the discussion in Hill (1994), who rightly sees it as practically a working definition of Augustine's theology and spiritual pilgrimage; also Studer (1997b) on the relationship between faith and the history or economy of salvation; and Hoitenga (1993) on understanding as the vision of God. Augustine seems to have quoted the text for the first time in 388, at *lib. arb.* 1.2.4, and with increasing frequency thereafter.

Believing and understanding: On Faith and the Creed

The most substantial work on trinitarian theology from this early period, however, *On Faith and the Creed*, comes from a couple of years earlier. It will repay particular attention because it represents Augustine's most significant thought to date. We have already noted that Isa 7.9 explicitly frames what he wants to say here. Faith necessarily comes prior to understanding: we who now see only in part (1 Cor 13.12) will see God if we allow God to make our hearts pure (Mt 5.8). After his opening remarks, most of the first half of the work deals with the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. All things are created from nothing by God through his divine Word, Jesus Christ, the Son of God; but the Word himself was not created.³⁹ The Son is therefore eternal with the Father, equal to the Father, and not inferior to the Father; yet he is not the same as the Father. Thus Augustine finds here a middle way between the heresies of Arianism and modalism.⁴⁰ The Son is, indeed, "of the same substance as the Father ... God from God, light from light": here Augustine quotes from the lengthier Nicene Creed to support his argument.⁴¹ Later, he will add that the key distinction between the Father and the Son is that the Father begets and the Son is begotten, or to put it another way, the Son receives his being from the Father, but the Father receives his being from nobody.⁴²

Although the divine Son of God is therefore eternal and unchangeable, he took upon himself temporal and changeable human nature, being born of Mary "by the gift of God, that is, by the Holy Spirit".⁴³ Much the most interesting material in this treatise concerns the Spirit. Augustine notes that relatively little attention has been paid hitherto to the third person of the Trinity, and in a few key paragraphs he proposes the beginnings of a wholly new approach to pneumatology. Augustine points out that his predecessors have struggled to find anything distinctive to say about the Holy Spirit other than, of course, the fact that he is not the Father or the

³⁹ *f. et symb.* 2.2-3.3.

⁴⁰ *f. et symb.* 4.5. See Meijering (1987), 53.

⁴¹ *f. et symb.* 4.6.

⁴² *f. et symb.* 9.18.

⁴³ *f. et symb.* 4.8: *dono enim dei, hoc est, sancto spiritu.*

Son. In reviewing the work of these “learned commentators on the scriptures”, the only thing he can find is the suggestion that the Spirit might be aptly called “the gift of God”; and he has already alluded to this in the passage just quoted above.⁴⁴ For “God does not a gift less than himself”: the Holy Spirit is the gift of God, and is God. The unnamed predecessors to whom Augustine refers were careful, he adds, to say that the Holy Spirit is not a second son of the Father, nor is he the son of the Son (and therefore the grandson of the Father). Rather, the Spirit has his origin in the Father alone, but proceeds in a manner different from that by which the Son proceeds. Augustine is here countering a familiar Arian argument which sought to subordinate the Spirit to both the Father and the Son. He acknowledges the difficulty in distinguishing between the procession of the Son and the Spirit from the Father, but insists that this is a requirement of the Catholic faith.

“Nevertheless”, Augustine goes on, “some have dared to believe that the Holy Spirit is the actual communion and, as it were, the Godhead (what the Greeks call *θεότηα* of the Father and the Son”).⁴⁵ We should note the extreme caution with which Augustine makes this statement. At first sight, it might seem that “dared to believe” implies that he thinks this is a dangerously unorthodox suggestion. But in fact he wants to endorse this conclusion, with one key reservation. The reason he hesitates is that he wants to make a distinction between assertions which belong to the realm of faith, and those which are attempts at understanding. This point is spelled out in the next section, when Augustine reiterates a traditional but somewhat minimal expression of orthodox Nicene faith in the Trinity; he then warns that “we should not carelessly affirm anything about what is invisible”, since we can only know for certain such things as can be derived unequivocally from the revelation of God in scripture.⁴⁶ In other words, Augustine is not saying that these previous writers are incorrect, but he is not yet sufficiently sure of his ground to endorse their conclusions as faith, rather than merely speculation.

⁴⁴ *f. et symb.* 9.19, and compare 4.8.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*: *ipsam communionem ... atque ... deitatem*. On the translation of *θεότης* as *deitas*, rather than the more usual Latin word *diuinitas*, see Augustine’s discussion of these two terms at *ciu.* 7.1 and 10.1.

⁴⁶ *f. et symb.* 9.20.

Augustine then outlines why the Holy Spirit can be described as the Godhead. He has already said that the gift of God is nothing less than himself, and it is through this gift that we are reconciled to God and become his children. After all, “the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us [Rom 5.5].” Now what he is arguing here is that since we are reconciled to God through love, and since it is the Holy Spirit that we are reconciled, the Spirit must be the love of God. In characteristic fashion, Augustine proves this point by means of a series of scriptural references. It is love which makes us children of God (1 Jn 3.1), and it is the Spirit who causes us to call God our Father (Rom 8.15); and a further citation proves conclusive: “God is love [1 Jn 4.8, 16]”, the first time Augustine quotes this significant text.⁴⁷

We should spend a moment trying to identify these “learned commentators on the scriptures”, Augustine’s predecessors who have helped plant the seed of this pneumatology in his head. The sources are complex and impossible to ascertain with any certainty. He would undoubtedly have been familiar with the work of Ambrose on the Holy Spirit, and may also have at least known of the treatise by Basil on the same subject. Whether or not he knew of the work of Didymus on the Spirit is very doubtful, however, since it was only translated into Latin by Jerome in 390. Specific references are hard to pin down. Augustine certainly knew Hilary’s treatise *On the Trinity* because, as we will see later, he quotes from it in his own work of that name. So Hilary is probably the immediate source for the idea that the Holy Spirit is the “gift” of God.⁴⁸ It is curious nevertheless that, unlike Augustine, Hilary does not refer to Rom 5.5 in this context. On the use of the term “Godhead” we are on less reliable ground. Ambrose uses the word *deitas* to describe the Spirit, but he does this only to assert that the Holy Spirit is God, in opposition to the Arians.⁴⁹ The theology of Victorinus is undoubtedly there in the background, too, but it is difficult to find specific references. Victorinus frequently calls the Spirit the *copula* or bond of Father and Son, but this is not the same thing as describing him as the Godhead of

⁴⁷ Dideberg (1975b), 143 n. 20.

⁴⁸ Hilary, *De trinitate* 2.1, where he describes the Holy Spirit as *munus*: see Meijering (1987), 119.

⁴⁹ Ambrose, *De spiritu sancto* 3.10.59.

each.⁵⁰ Augustine does, however, say that the Holy Spirit is the one through whom the Father and the Son are bound together, using the term as a verb rather than as a noun. Perhaps this alternative use, not quite wanting yet to describe the Holy Spirit in this way, is indicative of his hesitation at this early stage in being too dogmatic, especially when we recall that he was addressing a conference of his superiors.⁵¹

If Augustine's discussion of the Holy Spirit in *On Faith and the Creed* is relatively innovative, his more general comments about the Trinity are much more cautious, reflecting a standard line which seeks to find a middle and orthodox way between the subordinationist over-emphasis and the modalist blurring of the distinction between the three persons. He finds in Rom 11.36 a helpful aide-mémoire: "for from him, and through him, and in him, are all things"; and to this he later adds a gloss identifying each of these terms with a particular person: "'from him', as from the one who owes to nobody that he is, 'through him', as through the mediator, 'in him', as in the one who holds together, that is, who joins in a bond".⁵² Here at last we may see Augustine using the word *copula*, derived from Victorinus. The Father, the Son and the Spirit are eternally three, yet always one substance and one God; and he even cites Dt 6.4, with which we opened this chapter, to support this final point.⁵³

As we will see later, Augustine cuts through an otherwise troublesome theological problem by arguing that the word *substantia* is simply the term used in Latin theology to describe the being and nature of God; it is thus synonymous with

⁵⁰ For example, Victorinus, *Hymnus* 3.1.

⁵¹ For attempts to discern detailed sources, see Du Roy (1966), 486-487; Meijering (1987), 118-131; Cipriani (1997b), 435-436; Ayres (2000b), 57 and 74 n. 20; and Cipriani (2002), 268-271.

⁵² *f. et symb.* 9.16, 9.19: *quoniam ex ipso et per ipsum et in ipso sunt omnia*. The same reference is found again a couple of years later at *doctr. chr.* 1.5.5. In this passage, Augustine goes on to ascribe unity to the Father, equality to the Son, and both unity and equality to the Holy Spirit: therefore "the three are all one because of the Father, all equal because of the Son, all joined together because of the Holy Spirit". He seems to be trying out a new approach, possibly in an attempt to get round the problem of the *principium* of the Father, as discussed above; but the result is bizarre, to say the least, and Augustine never develops this line of argument. We agree with the rather generous conclusion of Hill (1991) 126 n. 6, that this is "a poetically pleasing formula, but lacking in theological rigour".

⁵³ *f. et symb.* 9.16, 9.20.

essentia, which is merely a translation of the preferred Greek word *οὐσία*.⁵⁴ Augustine here uses *substantia* to express the unity of the Trinity. Thus the three persons are variously described as “consubstantial”, as “one substance”, and as “of the same substance”.⁵⁵ In order to illustrate how the three might also be one, Augustine borrows from some familiar images from Tertullian.⁵⁶ He proposes two analogies: the first, of a fountain, a river and a drink, three distinct things which are nevertheless all water; the second, of roots, trunk and branches, all wooden but nevertheless not three woods but one wood. By his own admission, both of these analogies are imperfect, since the water changes from fountain to river to drink, which could be given a Sabellian interpretation, while the differences between the various types of wood could imply Arianism. In order to try to avoid the dangers inherent in concrete images, the later Augustine tends more and more to prefer analogies taken from the human mind. We have already referred to the first drafts of such an analogy in *Letters* 11 and 14. A further sketch is put forward in book 13 of the *Confessions*, where Augustine urges those who seek the Trinity to look “within themselves”. He proposes a triad of being, knowledge and will, emphasising the inseparability of these three categories, but also stressing the distance between this model and the reality of God.⁵⁷ All such attempts at analogies of the Trinity taken from creation are ultimately inadequate, but if nothing else, at least they help us to see that perhaps our most immediate objections to trinitarian doctrine can be answered.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ *trin.* 5.8.10.

⁵⁵ *f. et symb.* 9.16: *consubstantialis*; 9.17: *unamque substantiam*; 9.18 and 9.20: *eiusdem substantiae*. In each case Augustine is referring to all three persons, except at 9.18 where the reference is to Father and Son only. See Du Roy (1966), 341 n. 2. Meijering (1987), 102-103 also notes that *consubstantialis* is a literal translation of the familiar Nicene term *ὁμοούσιος*.

⁵⁶ *f. et symb.* 9.17, and compare with Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 8. Tertullian’s analogies were widely known and consequently much borrowed, as for example in Athanasius, *Exposition of the Faith* 2 and Victorinus, *Hymnus* 3.30: see Rivière (1947), 50 n. 1 and Meijering (1987), 107.

⁵⁷ *conf.* 13.11.12: *esse, nosse, uelle*. On these categories, see Du Roy (1966), 432-434. This is the only mention in Augustine of this particular triad: see O’Donnell (1992), 361.

⁵⁸ Meijering (1987), 106-110.

On the Trinity, books 1 to 4

We saw earlier that *On the Trinity* is governed by the programmatic text from Ps 104: “Seek the Lord’s face always”, and that in this respect it is, with *Confessions*, the most personal and intimate of all Augustine’s works. None of this, however, should be taken to mean that it is not a polemical work.⁵⁹ Augustine opens with an explanation of his method and purpose in writing.⁶⁰ His aim, he says, is to oppose those who reject the proper “beginning of faith” and who prefer instead to trust in their own capacity for rational thought, consequently falling into all kinds of errors about God. The reason for such error is that human beings are sinful, weak, and need milk before they can cope with solid food (1 Cor 3.1-2); yet it is precisely because of their weakness that so many do not even realise their own inability to discern the truth. “It is difficult to contemplate or fully to know the substance of God ... That is why it is necessary for our minds to be purified, in order ineffably to be able to see what is ineffable.”⁶¹ Sustained by faith, we are to be led along the way by scripture, which is more suited to our limited capabilities. Faith precedes understanding, as we have already seen; and in order to have any possibility of advancing in understanding, we must hold to the correct belief about God.

For this reason, with the help of our Lord God, we will attempt, as far as we can, to offer the rational account which they demand, that the one and only and true God is a Trinity; and for saying, believing and understanding that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit share one and the same substance or essence ... But first it must be shown from the authority of the holy scriptures if this is in fact the faith.⁶²

There can be no objection in principle to the use of reason and argument, but only if they do not take the place of the proper *initium fidei*, which is the doctrine proclaimed by the Church and distilled from the scriptures.

⁵⁹ On reading the first books of *trin.* as polemic, see especially Cavadini (1992) and Barnes (1999a).

⁶⁰ *trin.* 1.1.1-1.3.6. It is possible that this introduction may have been written after the rest of the work was completed, thus coming from a rather later date than what immediately follows it. But if this is so, it only serves to strengthen the argument that Augustine had a clear and consistent purpose in mind when he wrote these books.

⁶¹ *trin.* 1.1.3.

⁶² *trin.* 1.2.4.

The first four books of *On the Trinity*, then, which were probably completed by about 402, are a thorough attempt by Augustine to immerse himself in the biblical revelation of God. His purpose is to demonstrate that the Catholic faith in the Trinity is correct, that is, that it is the faith attested to by the scriptures; at the very least, he seeks to demonstrate that a number of objections to this doctrine, put forward by opponents of the Catholic Church, are themselves incorrect and inconsistent with scripture. As will become clear, the adversaries Augustine has in mind in the first half of the treatise, those who prefer their own argumentative words instead of the Word of God, are those who espouse the various shades of Arianism. The main issue addressed in the first four books in particular is that of the equality of the Son with the Father; and this doctrine is defended at such length precisely because it is the point of disagreement with the Arian heretics.

Of Arius himself we know very little; and what we do know of his life and thought comes largely from works written in opposition to him.⁶³ Arianism can perhaps best be understood as a consequence of the collision between the proclamation of the Church and the philosophical tradition. If the being of God is absolute simplicity, and if it is God the Father who is the ultimate principle of supreme being, then it is difficult to reconcile this with the belief that the Son is also God in the same way that the Father is God. Arius and his followers dealt with this problem by arguing that the Son is in fact not God, but the first of all God's creatures, and that the substance or being of the Father and the Son is therefore different. This standpoint was anathematised by the Council of Nicaea in 325, which coined a new technical term, describing the Son as *ὁμοουσίος*, "of the same substance" as the Father. But this neologism was itself open to interpretation. What came to be the orthodox position was that the Father and the Son are one and the same substance and thus one and the same God. Other "semi-Arians" feared that this blurred the distinction between Father and Son; they are sometimes known as "Homoians" from their suggested term *ὁμοιονούσιος*, "of like substance". A later faction, the followers of Eunomius, rejected even this attempted compromise, and

⁶³ On Arius and his successors, see especially Hanson (1988), D. H. Williams (1995) and R. D. Williams (2001). For Augustine's encounter with Arianism, see Barnes (1993) and (1999a).

have subsequently been called “Anomoians” from their insistence that the Son is *ανόμοιος*, “unlike” the Father.

The need to combat the arguments of these various groups of Arians explains why Augustine is so keen to begin with the scriptural revelation, and only then to turn to more abstract argument, firmly placing the two in their proper order. This was no merely intellectual exercise: we have noted that, at least from the time of *Letter 11*, he was actively engaging with the pro-Nicene theology of his predecessors. For the most part, admittedly, Arianism was in retreat after the decisive blow struck in favour of Nicene orthodoxy at the Council of Constantinople in 381. However, the Goths who were to sack Rome in 410 were Homoians, and the succeeding years would see the rapid spread of Arian heresy throughout southern Europe and Africa once more, not least among the Vandals who laid siege to Hippo while its bishop lay on his deathbed. Eunomius himself had died only two or three years before Augustine began writing: he and his followers were explicitly condemned by name later on in the treatise.⁶⁴

After his opening comments on methodology, Augustine begins his argument proper by setting out what he believes about God the Trinity; or to be precise, what the whole Church believes, since this is not the faith of one individual (even if that one individual happens to be a bishop) but the faith of the universal Church. The statement is worth quoting in full:

All the Catholic commentators on the Old and New Testaments whom I have been able to read, who have written before me on the Trinity who is God, have intended to teach that according to the scriptures, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit suggest a divine unity in an inseparable equality of one substance, so that there are not three gods but one God. Nevertheless, the Father has begotten the Son, so he who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son is begotten by the Father, so he who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and the Son, himself coequal to the Father and the Son and pertaining to the unity of the Trinity. Their teaching continues, however, that it was not this same Trinity that was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified

⁶⁴ *trin.* 15.20.38.

under Pontius Pilate, buried, rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven: but only the Son. Nor was it the same Trinity that descended on Jesus at his baptism in the form of a dove, or descended on the day of Pentecost after the ascension of the Lord with a noise from heaven like a rushing mighty wind and with divided tongues of fire: but only the Holy Spirit. Nor was it the same Trinity that spoke from heaven, “You are my Son”, either when he was baptised by John or when the three disciples were with him on the mountain, nor when the voice sounded, saying “I have glorified it and will glorify it again”: but it was the voice of the Father alone spoken to the Son. For just as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are inseparable, so do they work inseparably. This is also my faith, just as it is the Catholic faith.⁶⁵

This statement can be divided into two sections.⁶⁶ The first part is a summary of the Nicene articulation of the faith, treating the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as they relate to one another eternally as one equal Godhead. The second part (from “their teaching continues ...”) deals with the economy of salvation, with the manifestation of the three persons in history.

By way of comparison, the doctrine Augustine puts forward here in *On the Trinity* is very similar to that which we find elsewhere, for example in his *Tracts on the Gospel of John*, where considerations about the nature of the Trinity arise naturally in the context of the exegesis of scripture. As we will see later, the final book of *On the Trinity* will actually include a long quotation from one of his *Tracts*. Thus Augustine argues in these and other sermons that God is a Trinity, but that God is also a unity. God is three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as revealed for example in Christ’s baptism: “The Trinity appears very clearly, the Father in the voice, the Son in the man, the Spirit in the dove [Mk 1.10-11]”.⁶⁷ But these three are one,⁶⁸ equal,⁶⁹ indivisible,⁷⁰ and inseparable in all their activity,⁷¹ including the work

⁶⁵ *trin.* 1.4.7. It is interesting to note certain similarities of cadence and terminology, not so much with Nicene forms, but with the later so-called Athanasian Creed. It is generally accepted that this creed was written in Latin in about 500, probably in southern Gaul, and very possibly by Caesarius of Arles, who was an enthusiastic advocate of Augustine’s work. See Kelly (1964), 109-124.

⁶⁶ Hill (1985), 65-66.

⁶⁷ *Io. eu. tr.* 6.5.1: *apparet manifestissima trinitas, pater in uoce, filius in homine, spiritus in columba.*

⁶⁸ *Io. eu. tr.* 6.2.1.

⁶⁹ *Io. eu. tr.* 18.4.2.

⁷⁰ *Io. eu. tr.* 94.5.2.

⁷¹ *Io. eu. tr.* 20.3.2, 20.5.1-20.7.1; 110.3.2-110.3.3.

of creation and of new creation or resurrection.⁷² The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, and the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son. The Father is neither born nor proceeds, whereas the Son is born from the Father and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.⁷³ However, the fact that Christ breathes on his disciples to give them the Spirit (Jn 20.22) clearly demonstrates that the Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as the Father.⁷⁴

But this is to jump ahead of ourselves. In *On the Trinity*, Augustine refers to the “Catholic commentators” who have preceded him in considering the doctrine of the Trinity, and we can group these predecessors into two distinct categories. The first were those “economic” theologians whose starting-point was the saving activity of God in history. By arguing that the appearances of God in the Old Testament were manifestations of the Son, Justin explains that Christ is pre-existent before the Incarnation, and is therefore God begotten from God.⁷⁵ Irenaeus makes the related point, arguing for the unity of the whole of scripture, that the incarnate Son of the New Testament was also visible in the Old.⁷⁶ Augustine almost certainly knew the work of Irenaeus, and was at least familiar with the ideas of Justin if not the works themselves. There is no doubt, however, that he knew the writings of Tertullian, who proposes that the eternal distinctions between the persons of the Trinity are actually themselves a consequence of the *οικονομία* of the three, and that of the three, the Son is inherently visible;⁷⁷ and also of Novatian, who agrees with Tertullian about the visibility of the Son, and who argues that the clear meaning of Phil 2.6 is that the Son is not equal to the Father.⁷⁸ We should note, however, that in the quotation above Augustine is not referring to either of these last two authors, since he would have regarded neither of them as truly Catholic. It will be seen that, on the one hand, the merit of this economic approach to trinitarian theology is that it

⁷² *Io. eu. tr.* 20.9.2; 21.10.2. The example Augustine uses is the raising of Lazarus: Comeau (1930), 278.

⁷³ *Io. eu. tr.* 100.4.1.

⁷⁴ *Io. eu. tr.* 121.4.

⁷⁵ Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 48, 56, 61.

⁷⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.10.1.

⁷⁷ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 3, 7.

⁷⁸ Novatian, *De trinitate* 18, 22.

is rooted firmly in the correct *initium fidei*, the revelation of God found in the scriptures; on the other hand, this scriptural methodology seemed inevitably to result in subordinationist tendencies coming to the fore, and thus in turn to the heresy of Arianism. In response, most of the later writers to whom we have already referred in this chapter – among them Ambrose, Hilary and Victorinus – adopted the opposite method in their reflections, concentrating on the “transcendent” or “immanent” Trinity. But the problem with this approach is that its protagonists could appear to be more concerned with newly-minted technical vocabulary than with the clear witness of the scriptures. How, then, could Augustine square this particular circle, paying due attention to biblical formulations about God, whilst remaining true to the faith of Nicaea and denying the inferiority and inequality of the Son to the Father?

This problem occupies him for the rest of these first four books of *On the Trinity*. The first thing Augustine does is to remind his readers of those texts which offer an unequivocal reply to those who deny that Christ is “true God”, “the one and only God with the Father” and “truly immortal”: these specific errors are precisely those condemned by Nicaea.⁷⁹ From Jn 1.1-2, he deduces that the Son is truly God, not a creature, and the same substance as the Father. From 1 Jn 5.20 he maintains that the Son is eternal life; and this must mean that the words of 1 Tim 6.16, “who alone has immortality”, must refer not only to the Father, but to all three persons, who are one God.⁸⁰ The divinity of the Holy Spirit is also proved from scripture in a similar fashion. Paul condemns those who “serve a creature rather than the creator [Rom 1.23]”, but also commands us “to serve the Spirit of God [Phil 3.3]”. It therefore follows that he must have regarded the Holy Spirit as God. In the same way, if our bodies are temples of the Spirit (1 Cor 6.19) and members of Christ (1 Cor 6.15), it can make no sense for the members of Christ to be temples of one who is inferior to Christ.⁸¹ Thus the unity and equality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be demonstrated from scripture.

⁷⁹ *trin.* 1.6.9: see Barnes (1999a), 44-46.

⁸⁰ *trin.* 1.6.10.

⁸¹ *trin.* 1.6.13. See Cavallera (1930), 377-378 and Bourassa (1977), 697-698.

But the exegetical arguments were, as Augustine well knew, rather more complicated than that. He next proceeds to examine some of the scriptural passages which have been at the centre of the debate about subordination, finding ways of reinterpreting them in a manner which avoids violating the principle of the equality of the triune persons, especially that of the Father and the Son. Foremost among these difficult texts, at the centre of the debate with the Homoians, were Jn 14.28: “the Father is greater than I”; and 1 Cor 15.28: “when all things are subjected to him, then the Son will also be subjected to him who made everything subject to him”. The solution Augustine puts forward is suggested to him by the very verses Novatian had used before to deny the equality of the Son, Phil 2.6-7: “who being in the form of God did not judge it to be robbery to be equal to God, yet emptied himself, accepting the form of a servant, being made in human likeness”.⁸² As he points out, this text means that far from the Son being merely less than the Father, he became “less than himself”. In fact, it highlights the distinction we must draw between the divine nature and human nature. There is therefore what Augustine will later describe as a “canonical rule”, and what with the benefit of hindsight we might describe as a Chalcedonian rule, for the correct interpretation of scripture:⁸³ that Christ is equal to the Father in the form of God, but inferior to God in the form of a servant, that is, in human form. At a stroke, this removes an apparent contradiction and eliminates a whole series of problem texts, all of which Augustine gleefully deals with in quick succession. The Bible can speak of the Son either as equal to the Father or less than the Father; all we have to do is to realise that in the first case, it is Christ’s divine nature which is being referred to, and in the second, his human nature.

However, the rule just outlined does not help us deal with those passages that describe the sending of the Son or the Holy Spirit by the Father. It certainly cannot help us with the Spirit; but even the Son was not eternally sent in human form, since he only took human nature at the Incarnation. In any case, to be sent surely means to be inferior to the one who sends: this was the universal assumption of the economic

⁸² *trin.* 1.7.14.

⁸³ *trin.* 2.1.2: *canonica regula*, on which see Mellet and Camelot (1955), 574-575, 577; and Bourassa (1977), 706-708.

theologians. Augustine denies that this is a necessary conclusion. God fills both heaven and earth (Jer 23.24), and so this means that the Son and the Spirit are sent to where they are already present.⁸⁴ As the Son of the Father, the Son is therefore already in the world, so for him to be sent – literally, his mission – means for him to be born of Mary and manifested in the world: “the one who appeared in the flesh may aptly be described as having been sent, and the one who did not as having done the sending”.⁸⁵ Broadly speaking, the same principle holds true for the Holy Spirit, who also appeared visibly, both as a dove and then as tongues of fire.⁸⁶ To be sent, then, means to be made manifest in the world. The Son and the Spirit are sent from the Father: all this means is that they are the persons who are sent, while the Father is the person doing the sending. No superiority or inferiority is implied by the terminology of mission; the distinction must be taken only at face value and without having qualifications read into it.

We must say more than this, however, for scripture has something else very specific to say about these missions. “When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, made of a woman [Gal 4.4]”; and only at this point in time, not before.⁸⁷ The mission of the Son (and by extension, that of the Spirit) is only to be identified with this visible manifestation alone. This rules out all the many previous theophanies, recounted in the Old Testament. Augustine spends the rest of books 2 and 3 dealing with this question. The point here is that he is countering another basic tenet of his subordinationist opponents, that the Son is always the visible person of the Trinity; or, to put it the other way round, that theophanies are always the work of the Son. We have already noted that both Tertullian and Novatian held to this principle, but it also seems to have been maintained by contemporary Homoians.⁸⁸ Augustine recalls that both 1 Tim 1.17 and 6.15 refer to the only God, who is immortal and invisible. He has already shown in relation to immortality that this refers to God as Trinity, not just God the Father. It therefore follows that the Son

⁸⁴ *trin.* 2.5.7. See Bourassa (1977), 708.

⁸⁵ *trin.* 2.5.8, 2.5.9.

⁸⁶ *trin.* 2.5.10.

⁸⁷ *trin.* 2.5.8, 2.7.12.

⁸⁸ Barnes (1999a), 48.

and the Spirit are also invisible, according to scripture, for the very substance of God is invisible.⁸⁹ To prove the point, Augustine systematically examines all the theophanies of the Old Testament to show that, contrary to the arguments of his predecessors, none of them can be shown conclusively to be manifestations of the Son.⁹⁰ To be precise, “we may not say which person of the Trinity appeared to whichever of the patriarchs or prophets in some body or likeness of body, unless the text gives us some probable indications”: but the text does not give any such clues, so that the most we can say is that such theophanies are manifestations of the Father, the Son and the Spirit together.⁹¹ In fact, in book 3 Augustine refines this argument to show that they were not even theophanies of God, strictly speaking, but signs from the created order pointing towards God, performed by the patriarchs, the prophets or even by angels, but not directly by God himself.⁹² To recapitulate: what Augustine has achieved in this long argument is to show that the Old Testament theophanies were not manifestations of the Son; there is therefore no reason to make the mistake of arguing for the intrinsic invisibility of the Father but the intrinsic visibility of the Son; and so finally therefore, there is no reason to deny the full and coequal divinity of the Son on the erroneous grounds of his supposed visibility.⁹³

This has the effect, as it were, of clearing the decks for the conclusion to which Augustine has been heading throughout these four books. There are no direct appearances of the Son or the Holy Spirit until the missions of the New Testament; these New Testament missions are special and unique. Book 4 discusses these missions and finally defines what it means for the Son and the Spirit to have been sent. In our fallen condition, we are reliant upon God to save us, and this is why the Son was delivered up on our behalf.⁹⁴ Most of this book is an extended study in christology, which at face value seems to be something of a digression from the main argument. However, what Augustine is doing here is to remind us once more of the

⁸⁹ *trin.* 2.8.14-2.9.16.

⁹⁰ *trin.* 2.10.17-2.17.31.

⁹¹ *trin.* 2.18.35.

⁹² *trin.* 3.11.26.

⁹³ On this general point, see especially Maier (1960), 103-110 and Kloos (2005); also Hendrikx (1955), 30-32; Bourassa (1977), 708-709; and Hill (1985), 84-87.

⁹⁴ *trin.* 4.1.1-4.2.4.

proper *initium fidei*, the saving work of Christ. It is perhaps not even going too far to see Augustine in these chapters “rhetorically stopping and celebrating the Eucharist”.⁹⁵ The death of Christ atones for our sin and death; his mediating love draws us together as one, that we may be one as the Father and the Son are one (Jn 17.22), in the equality of one substance and nature.⁹⁶ This is extremely important: we will discuss in the next chapter precisely how and to what extent the unity of the Church mirrors the unity of the Trinity, but for now it is enough to see that there is an explicit connection to be made between the two.

It now becomes clear why Augustine has spent so long discussing the work of Christ. “Behold why the Son of God was sent; in fact, behold what it is for the Son of God to have been sent!”⁹⁷ The reason why the Son was sent was for him to mediate between God and his creation; or to put it another way around, it was in becoming this mediator that the Son was sent.

But in the same way as the begetter and the begotten, so too are the sender and the sent one; so also the Holy Spirit is one with them because “these three are one [1 Jn 5.7]”. For just as being born is for the Son to be from the Father, so being sent is for the Son to be known to be from him. And in the same way, as the Holy Spirit being the gift of God is to proceed from the Father, so being sent is to be known to proceed from him.⁹⁸

Just as the mission of the Son reveals that he is from the Father, so the mission of the Holy Spirit demonstrates that he too proceeds from the Father. Since he is the Spirit of both the Father and the Son, clearly he proceeds from the Son, too: but in elaborating this double procession of the Holy Spirit, Augustine is careful to say that it is the Father who is the *principium* of all deity. We will return to this point later. What Augustine has shown here is that the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit

⁹⁵ Muller (1993a), 359; and see also Muller (1993b) and (1995), 71-72. As we have already noted above, Muller sees in the christological passages of *trin.* the key to the interpretation of the work as a whole; he is right to draw attention to the importance of this theme, but by placing it in the foreground his overall reading of the treatise is somewhat unbalanced.

⁹⁶ *trin.* 4.7.11-4.9.12.

⁹⁷ *trin.* 4.19.25.

⁹⁸ *trin.* 4.20.29. Note Augustine’s use of the “Johannine Comma”, a very late interpolation into Latin manuscripts which first appeared around this time.

reveal their eternal processions within the mystery of the triune Godhead.⁹⁹ This is why it was so important for Augustine to eliminate from consideration the theophanies of the Old Testament, since this would have caused confusion about the nature of the missions and thus led to confusion about the Trinity itself. But since the missions reveal the processions, Augustine has shown how the economy of salvation itself makes known the eternal and transcendent nature of God.

A final observation on these four books: in the statement of the Catholic faith with which we opened this section, Augustine referred several times to the inseparability of working of the Trinity.¹⁰⁰ We have already seen how his Nicene predecessors took this axiom as their starting-point for discussion about the unity of the three persons, and that it had a similar role in his own earliest writings on the subject. The question Nebridius had asked Augustine about why it was only the Son who became incarnate is alluded to by him near the beginning of book 1, where he also asks how the Father can speak without the Son, and why only the Spirit took the form of a dove.¹⁰¹ The answer he immediately gives to his own rhetorical question is that these three things happen through the work of all three persons together. This also means, of course, that there is a sense in which the Son caused himself to become human, since the eternal Trinity inseparably caused the incarnation of the Son in a particular time and place.¹⁰² The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit act inseparably, and worked together to produce the Father's voice, the Son's human body and the Spirit's dove; but the necessity of their acting together does not mean that they have to be manifested together. Because of our temporal and spatial existence, the three words "Father", "Son" and "Spirit" cannot be named simultaneously, even though they are a unity; and Augustine reinforces this point by putting forward the analogy of memory, understanding and will, distinct but

⁹⁹ See Bourassa (1977), 709-710; Hill (1985), 68, 87-88.

¹⁰⁰ *trin.* 1.4.7.

¹⁰¹ *trin.* 1.5.8.

¹⁰² *trin.* 2.5.9. See Muller (1995), 80; and for similar statements, *s.* 213.7 and *ench.* 12.38.

operating together.¹⁰³ We will return to this particular analogy a little later in the treatise.

On the Trinity, books 5 to 7

Having demonstrated that the Catholic faith is firmly rooted in the scriptures, Augustine can now fulfil his earlier promise to put forward reasonable arguments to back up this doctrine. We begin to move, therefore, from faith to understanding. Whereas the earlier arguments are mostly tied closely to the interpretation of scripture, in books 5 to 7 Augustine shows his Arian opponents that he can beat them on their preferred battlefield of Aristotelian logic and reason.¹⁰⁴ Much of the discussion found here is either explicitly or implicitly about language: the appropriate terminology to use when talking about God, and the limitations of our human vocabulary to grasp such an ineffable mystery. These three books were probably completed by about 405 or 406.

Augustine begins by noting the point of similarity with his antagonists. “There is no doubt that God is a substance, or if it would be a better term, an essence”.¹⁰⁵ The words used here are *substantia* and *essentia*, and Augustine is here alluding to the different terminology used by Greek and Latin writers. We will see how he resolves this difference later in this section. For now, all that need concern us is the fact that both he and his opponents agree with the fundamental notion that God is by definition simple and immutable. Nothing can be said of God that predicates change to his substance. But if the divine substance cannot be subject to change, how then can we describe the Father as “unbegotten” and the Son as “begotten”, for such language seems to suggest that the Father is one substance, the Son another. If God’s substance is simple and immutable, and cannot be subject to

¹⁰³ *trin.* 4.21.30. On inseparability in *trin.*, see Hendrikx (1955), 27-30; and Mellet and Camelot (1955), 573-574.

¹⁰⁴ Barnes (1993) concludes that these “Arian” opponents were almost certainly Homoians, rather than followers of Eunomius, thus placing the argument of *trin.* 5-7 firmly in the Latin pro-Nicene tradition.

¹⁰⁵ *trin.* 5.2.3.

accidents, this makes it difficult to see how the distinction between Father and Son can be maintained without denying their consubstantiality.

The solution Augustine finds is to put forward a third way of talking about God, differentiating among the persons whilst nevertheless avoiding having to predicate accidents to the divine substance.¹⁰⁶ Whereas in the realm of created things mutability is an inevitable consequence of temporality, for God all distinctions between the persons are eternal. The Father is always the Father, the Son is always the Son, and the Holy Spirit is always the Holy Spirit. There is no change and therefore no accidents in God. On this point, Augustine and his opponents are in agreement. However, to refer to Father or Son is not to refer to the divine substance, since the Father is only so-called with reference to the Son, and the Son is only so-called with reference to the Father.

For which reason, although to be the Father and to be the Son are different, nevertheless their substance is not different, because they are not spoken of according to substance but according to relationship, which relationship however is not an accident because it is not changeable.¹⁰⁷

So when we predicate relationships to God, the fact that such relationships are eternal means that they are not accidents. It follows that when talking about God the Trinity, we are using predicates of substance, but that when we are talking about one of the three persons, we are using predicates of relationship. The differences between the persons do not imply multiplicity within the simple substance of God: “whatever is said about God in respect of himself is both said three times of each person, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and is said together singularly and not plurally of the Trinity itself”.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Clark (2001), 95 helpfully expresses this as a middle way between substantial and accidental predication.

¹⁰⁷ *trin.* 5.5.6.

¹⁰⁸ *trin.* 5.8.9.

It is clear that terms such as Father and Son are predicates of relationship of the type we have just described. The Father is eternally the Father of the Son, and the Son is eternally the Son of the Father. Augustine also demonstrates that other terminology, such as unbegotten and begotten, should also be treated in the same way, because to be unbegotten implies relationship with one who is begotten and vice versa.¹⁰⁹ In short, he proposes that there are two possible ways of referring to God: the first, in which we talk about God the Trinity as one in substance or essence; the second, in which we talk about the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit, three persons distinct from one another because of their relationships. It is crucial here to grasp a fact of which Augustine is quite insistent, that is, that the relationships of Father, Son and Spirit are eternal. There is no prior essence of Godhead which precedes the three persons. The substance of God truly is the substance of the three persons in relationship, and nothing more nor less than this. It is therefore quite erroneous to think that Augustine prioritises the unity of God over the three persons, as so much theological literature seems to assume. Certainly, to talk about the Trinity is to enter the realms of the ineffable, as we will see shortly. But the reason for this is that we must hold together as simultaneous the two ideas of God as one and God as three, and this is a point on which Augustine is quite clear. Augustine was not in fact the first to refer to predicates of relationship, since Gregory of Nazianzen had put forward a similar suggestion a few years previously.¹¹⁰ However, the notion is dealt with fleetingly in Gregory; it was Augustine who was the first to develop the argument fully and convincingly.

Augustine spends a considerable part of books 6 and 7 tackling a problem raised by the Pauline text “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God [1 Cor 1.24]”. The issue with this verse is that it could be used by Arian theologians to undermine the distinction between the terminology of substance and relationships. For if Christ is the power or wisdom of God, as the scripture says, at face value this seems to suggest that in himself God the Father is neither power nor wisdom. Can it be that the Father is only wise or powerful because of the Son, to whom these

¹⁰⁹ *trin.* 5.6.7, 5.7.8.

¹¹⁰ Compare Gregory of Nazianzen, *Orationes* 29.16.

characteristics are attributed by Paul? To put the problem at its most extreme, is the Son the source of the Father's power and wisdom; indeed, is the Son the source of the Father's divinity? Clearly this cannot be the case: but how then to interpret the text correctly?

We need not follow the course of the argument closely, but Augustine reaches the solution to this problem in two stages. In book 6, he provisionally suggests that the language of substance can only be predicated of God, rather than the three persons individually. "Whatever they are called with reference to themselves, neither is so called without the other, so that whatever they are called to manifest their substance [the Father and the Son] are both called together."¹¹¹ But this might suggest that all language about God is ultimately relational, which leads us into another problem. If the Father is wise only through the Wisdom he has begotten, then this would tend to suggest that language such as "God" or even "substance" is itself relationship language, which at best blurs the distinction between substance and relationship, and at worst is downright meaningless. So Augustine makes a further proposal, which is to say that substance words such as "power" or "wisdom" ought only to be predicated of God as God. It is however possible to speak, as the scriptures frequently do, of the Father or the Son or the Spirit individually as "wise", "good" or "great", because the persons are not distinct from the substance of God. Indeed, as the Nicene formulae make it clear, the Son is wisdom from wisdom, just as he is light from light: the two are one wisdom and one light, one being and one God.¹¹² "Word" and "Son" are terms of relationship, but "wisdom", "goodness" and "greatness" are terms of substance. Scripture often attributes qualities to one or another person, just as here Paul attributes wisdom to the Son, but more properly they should be referred to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is not strictly speaking improper to make a specific attribution to one person in this way; but we do need to be aware of what we are doing. Again, the key thing Augustine is trying to argue here, in opposition to the Arians, is that texts such as

¹¹¹ *trin.* 6.2.3. On this, see Hendrikx (1955), 44-45, and Cipriani (2002), 278-285.

¹¹² *trin.* 7.1.2.

these in no way mean that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are unequal, or that any distinction other than relationship can be made between them.¹¹³

Apart from a few scattered references, the Holy Spirit is considered only in passing in the first four books of *On the Trinity*, since most of the discussion there of trinitarian missions concerns the sending of the Son. However, the person of the Spirit occupies a much more significant place in these next three books. The main issue Augustine is concerned to tackle is the problem of how relationship language refers to the Holy Spirit. It is immediately apparent how predicates of relationship work when we talk about the Father or the Son, since these terms are clearly relational with respect to each other. However, it is much less obvious how the rules outlined above apply to the third person of the Trinity. In a sense, the Trinity as a whole, or even the Father or the Son individually, may reasonably be described as “holy” or as “spirit”, since “God is spirit [Jn 4.24]”.¹¹⁴ Certainly, each of these terms look suspiciously like predicates of substance, rather as do “power” and “wisdom” even when attributed to the Son. But even more than this, the question remains of how it is that we are using relationship language when we address the Holy Spirit directly, in particular, what such language has to say about the relationship between the Spirit and the other two persons of the Godhead.

In order to begin to solve this problem, Augustine borrows an idea from Hilary who, in his own, earlier work on the Trinity, describes the three persons as “eternity in the Father, likeness in the image, enjoyment in the gift”.¹¹⁵ We have already seen that Hilary was probably the source for the similar idea found in *On Faith and the Creed*. Following Hilary’s suggestion, Augustine proposes the title *donum dei* for the Holy Spirit, the term “gift of God” being derived from Acts 8.20 and Jn 4.10. The word Hilary used was *munus*, but Augustine prefers the slightly less poetic term, probably because this is the word used in the scriptures. However,

¹¹³ On Augustine’s interpretation of 1 Cor 1.24, see Ayres (2000b), 64-67.

¹¹⁴ *trin.* 5.11.12.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.* The quotation is from Hilary, *De trinitate* 2.1: *aeternitas in patre, species in imagine, usus in munere*. Augustine was clearly familiar with this treatise, because he quotes the same text again in book 6. On Augustine’s use of Hilary in *On the Trinity*, see Mellet and Camelot (1955), 588-589; and on the Spirit as *donum*, see Cavallera (1930), 367-370.

the two are more or less synonyms. The Spirit is the gift both of the Father and of the Son, proceeding from the Father, as Jn 15.26 makes clear; and being also the Spirit of Christ, as we discover from Rom 8.9. This allows Augustine to reach a highly significant conclusion. Since the Spirit is the gift of both the Father and the Son, in their act of giving he binds them together, becoming “a certain ineffable communion of the Father and the Son”.¹¹⁶ The trinitarian relationships involved Augustine describes, therefore, as “the gift of the giver and the giver of the gift”. Indeed, this explains why it is so appropriate that the Holy Spirit should be so named, because since both the Father and the Son can generally be described as “holy” and as “spirit”, and since the third person of the Trinity is the gift of each, it is therefore apt that he should be known by a name which is common to both.

For he himself is particularly called that which they are called in common, because both the Father is spirit and the Son is spirit, and the Father is holy and the Son is holy. Therefore, so that the communion of both may be signified by a name which is common to both, the gift of both is called the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁷

Note that we can talk about “the Spirit of the Father” or “the Spirit of the Son”, but not “the Father of the Spirit” or “the Son of the Spirit”, because that would ascribe fatherhood or sonship to the Spirit.¹¹⁸ For though the Spirit comes from the Father, he is not a second Son. Whereas the Son proceeds from the Father alone, the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. It is possible that one reason why Augustine elaborates a doctrine of the double procession of the Holy Spirit is that he otherwise found it difficult to explain how the Son and the Spirit could be distinguished. Of course, whereas the Son was *natus*, the Spirit was *datus*: the manner of their visible manifestations was very different.¹¹⁹ That the Son was born refers to the fact that he was eternally begotten by the Father; but the gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of the Father and the Son together to the world. The Spirit is not the

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*: *ineffabilis quaedam patris filiique communio.*

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*; and compare with the very similar argument at *Io. eu. tr.* 99.7.1.

¹¹⁸ *trin.* 5.12.13. See Cipriani (1997), 275-277.

¹¹⁹ *trin.* 5.14.15.

gift of the Father to the Son, but the gift of both the Father and the Son to a third party, namely ourselves.

This presents Augustine with an important question, which it is essential that he clears up immediately. If the Holy Spirit is called the gift of God because he is given to the world, such a description seems to be referring to the economy of salvation. Does this tell us anything, then, about the Trinity as it is eternally, before the creation of the world and particularly before the events of Pentecost? The problem is “whether he was, before he was given, but was not yet a gift; or whether perhaps even before he was given, he was a gift because he was going to be given by God”.¹²⁰ The way Augustine phrases this question hints at the answer he will find, which he reaches by means of a distinction between *donum* and *datum* (or *donatum*), a gift and a thing that is given (or a “donation”). Something or someone may be a gift before it is given, but it can only be a donation once it has been given. Although the Holy Spirit is not eternally given, since he is given only at Pentecost (as Augustine established in the first four books), he is nonetheless eternally a gift. A human analogy may help clarify what is going on here. If Tom and Dick together buy something for Harry’s birthday, that something is already a gift, even if Harry’s birthday is still a week in the future and the gift has not yet been given to Harry at his birthday party. Thus the Holy Spirit is eternally, not just temporally, the gift of the Father and of the Son; and to describe the Spirit as the gift of God is both to say something fundamental about the nature of the Holy Spirit, and to demonstrate that the Trinity is eternally a relationship of mutual love and giving.¹²¹

So the Holy Spirit unites the Father and the Son through their mutual act of giving to the created order. In book 6, Augustine summarises his findings about the Holy Spirit, especially as he relates to the Father and the Son. The Spirit is the unity, holiness and love of the other two persons. He is therefore not the Father or the Son, but is to be distinguished from them: to be distinguished, in fact, because he is the

¹²⁰ *trin.* 5.15.16.

¹²¹ The theological concept of “giving” is extremely fruitful, and is a major theme in the work of, among others, Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank, both of whom have been strongly influenced by Augustine: see especially Marion (1991) and Milbank (1995).

one by whom the Father and the Son are joined together. The Spirit is the one by whom the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father.¹²² Casting around for a verse of scripture to put this succinctly, Augustine's eye falls on Eph 4.3: the Father and the Son "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace".¹²³ The Father and the Son are joined together by the Holy Spirit, who is the one by whom the begetter and the begotten love each other. The Spirit is what is common to the Father and the Son, their consubstantial and coeternal communion, friendship and love. Note that Augustine is no longer using the somewhat awkward language of *deitas* or Godhead which characterised the earlier discussion in *On Faith and the Creed*. To describe the Holy Spirit as the mutual love of Father and Son might seem rather impersonal. Not so, comments Augustine, since if God is *substantia* and God is love (from 1 Jn 4.8, 16), then the Spirit of love must also be a substance. To put it another way, if love is not substantial, how can God be love?

The use of Eph 4.3 here is rather intriguing, not least because the original writer of this epistle was clearly referring to the members of the Church rather than the persons of the Trinity.¹²⁴ As we will see, the reason Augustine is able to make this move is because his mind moves rapidly and naturally between the Trinity and the Church, the intra-trinitarian relationships being echoed and patterned in the Christian fellowship. It is also important that he is here beginning to use the language of love in a sustained way. If God is love, then we must love God. Augustine has already borrowed from Hilary the idea that the Spirit is the gift of God, and he refers to the same quotation again for a second time: "eternity in the Father, likeness in the image, enjoyment in the gift".¹²⁵ Augustine dislikes Hilary's inference that only the Father is eternal, but otherwise approves of the earlier writer's work. He is particularly appreciative of the insight that the Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity most associated with our *usus* of God, a word implying not just "use" but also intimacy and enjoyment. The Spirit is the "ineffable embrace" of the Father

¹²² *trin.* 6.5.7.

¹²³ *ibid.*: *seruantes unitatem spiritus in uinculo pacis*.

¹²⁴ Hill (1991), 215 n.8 rightly but understatedly describes this as a "very bold application of the text"!

¹²⁵ *trin.* 6.10.11: *aeternitas in patre, species in imagine, usus in munere*. The reference is to Hilary, *De trinitate* 2.1, although in fact Augustine misquotes him, or had an alternative reading in front of him. The original first clause was *infinitas in aeterno*.

and the Son, an embrace of love and joy which overflows from the begetter and the begotten into the whole of creation. Concluding his remarks about the Holy Spirit in book 7, Augustine exhorts his readers: “let us therefore love him and hold onto him with the love that has been ‘poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us [Rom 5.5]’”.¹²⁶ This text will become one of the most familiar and most frequently quoted of all his favourite scriptures. The Holy Spirit is none other than the love of God, given to us, and this insight is central to Augustine’s trinitarian theology.

We began this discussion of books 5 to 7 by observing that in them Augustine is trying to refine the language and terminology we use when talking about God the Trinity. At the outset he declares that God is substance or essence; he uses the word *substantia*, and immediately says that this is the same as the word *ουσία*, used by Greek-speaking theologians.¹²⁷ He later notes that the terminology the Greeks use when referring to the Trinity is *μίαν ουσίαν, τρεις ύποστάσεις*, “one substance and three hypostases”, and admits that he cannot really understand why they need to distinguish between *ουσία* and *ύπόστασιν*.¹²⁸ The most natural translation of this terminology into Latin would be *una essentia, tres substantiae*; but the problem with this, Augustine explains, is that in Latin *essentia* and *substantia* have come to mean the same thing. Etymologically, of course, the Greek *ύπόστασιν* and the Latin *substantia* are identical. To avoid confusion, this is why Latin writers tend to prefer to talk about *una essentia uel substantia, tres personae* (“one essence or substance, three persons”).¹²⁹ The point Augustine is trying to make is that it does not really

¹²⁶ *trin.* 7.3.5: *caritate diffusa in cordibus nostris per spiritum sanctum qui datus est nobis*. Comeau (1930), 352 observes: “Augustin a pour ce texte paulinien une véritable prédilection”. On Augustine’s use of Rom 5.5, see especially La Bonnardière (1954).

¹²⁷ *trin.* 5.2.3.

¹²⁸ *trin.* 5.8.10. On the different Latin and Greek terminology, see Hendrikx (1955), 33-36.

¹²⁹ *trin.* 7.4.7. The fact that Greek and Latin writers use the same term to mean two different things has been the cause of considerable confusion, from the patristic era right through to our own. It is surely not going to far to suggest that it might be at the root of the long-held but misguided notion that eastern theologians emphasise the threefold nature of God, while western writers emphasise the divine unity. For a surprising recent endorsement of this mistaken opinion by an eminent commentator, see Zizioulas (1995), 46: “the West began with the unity of God and then moved to the Trinity, while the East followed the opposite course”. Augustine is well aware of the dangers inherent in these kinds of arguments: at *trin.* 7.4.9 he makes the point that whatever terminology we use for the persons of God,

matter which words we use, since we know that God is ultimately a mystery and that we are only ever able to speak “enigmatically”: the reference here is to 1 Cor 13.12. The only reason for attempting to find appropriate language is so that we are not silent when confronted with the question “three what ...?”¹³⁰ We might compare this conclusion with Wittgenstein’s famous dictum, “whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”.¹³¹ If for Wittgenstein, philosophy is unable to make meaningful comment about the metaphysical, Augustine has shown that at the limits of philosophy we must rely on faith. Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, Augustine is hinting here that his is, after all, a profoundly apophatic theology.¹³²

Towards the end of book 7, a new theme is introduced. Since it is through the Son that the Father is revealed, we must follow the example of this image, since we are also the made in the image of God.¹³³ This new idea, that of the *imago dei*, will provide a jumping-off point for the rest of the work. In the first seven books, Augustine has demonstrated the validity of the Catholic faith in the equality, unity and consubstantiality of the three divine persons, and he has also offered reasoned and logical support to justify this statement of faith. But he has also concluded that this achievement is of limited value, the technical vocabulary and precision of argument he has presented only being of use insofar as they prevent us from falling into complete silence when confronted with the awesome mystery of God.

we must be clear that we are neither talking about singularity or diversity, but both unity and Trinity simultaneously.

¹³⁰ Augustine repeats this point for emphasis: *trin.* 5.8.10 and 7.4.7. See also *doctr. chr.* 1.6.6, in which he explains that God is inexpressible, even if he accepts our faltering human attempts to praise him. On Augustine as an apophatic theologian, see Van Bavel (1993).

¹³¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 7: *Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen*: see Kerr (1997), 166-167. Perhaps we might compare this in turn with Augustine’s own *en. Ps.* 32[1].2.8: “If they cannot express words, but must nevertheless speak of him, what else do they have but joy, that joy inexpressible of the heart, that joy without measure that transcends the limitations of words?”

¹³² Bonner (1960), 55: “Augustine’s doctrine is as fully apophatic as that of the Greek Fathers”.

¹³³ *trin.* 7.3.4-7.3.5.

On the Trinity, books 8 to 14

Book 8 is the hinge on which *On the Trinity* turns, marking something of a change of direction from what has gone before. It seems plausible to suggest that Augustine was writing this book in about the year 407. In the first seven books, he has achieved greater precision in stating the terms of the doctrine of the Trinity, but this has not yet led us into significantly greater understanding of the mystery of God. As one commentator puts it,

De Trinitate uses the Neoplatonic soteriology of ascent only to impress it into the service of a thoroughgoing critique of its claim to raise the inductee to the contemplation of God, a critique which, more generally, becomes a declaration of the futility of any attempt to come to any saving knowledge of God apart from Christ.¹³⁴

Our attempts to achieve the contemplation of God in this life are bound to fail, unless they are based on the faith in God which comes through the activity of the one who mediates between God and ourselves, namely the Son. This conclusion was borne out by Augustine's own experience of neoplatonic contemplation, able to see that there was something to be seen, but quite unable actually to see it.¹³⁵ Now in book 8, he will observe that the mind's eye is too weak to be able to fix on the truth which is God.¹³⁶ Although we can say with confidence that "God is truth", we are only able to perceive the truth directly in the most fleeting of moments. Everything that we can say about God is therefore the result of faith alone. Book 8 therefore marks the beginning of a new approach, in which Augustine chooses to proceed by means of "a more interior manner" than has gone before.¹³⁷

At the end of book 7, Augustine had begun to talk about the fact that human beings are made in the image of God. The key text here is from Genesis: "let us make human beings in our image and our likeness [Gen 1.26]"; and he observes that

¹³⁴ Cavadini (1992), 106.

¹³⁵ *conf.* 7.10.

¹³⁶ *trin.* 8.2.3.

¹³⁷ *trin.* 8.1.1. On this inward turn in *trin.* 8, see Bourassa (1978), 377-383 and Hill (1991), 237-240.

the language here is plural, because God is a Trinity.¹³⁸ The fact that we are made in the divine image is what makes possible the arguments employed in the second half of *On the Trinity*. While Augustine will not deny that understanding of God can only come through faith, what he will do here is to explore the possibility of indirect knowledge of God prior to faith. Because human beings are the image of God, perhaps we can learn something about the Trinity by examining ourselves. Since God is identical with his attributes, as Augustine has established in books 5 to 7, notions such as justice, truth and goodness are “forms” (in the platonic sense) which can be identified with God. Since we are made in the divine image, there is an ontological analogy between our mental perception of these attributes in ourselves and each other, and the prior transcendent reality of the forms in the being of God.

Augustine considers this argument in relation to a number of abstract concepts. For example, we can know that a person is just because we know in advance what justice, whether or not we are ourselves just. We perceive justice as an inner reality in ourselves, and through this perception we love justice.¹³⁹ This suggests to Augustine that perhaps we should proceed by examining the nature of love itself. For “if someone loves their neighbour, it follows that they also love love itself. But ‘God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God [1 Jn 4.16]’. So it follows that above all else they love God”.¹⁴⁰ God and love are therefore to be identified with one another, as the Johannine text suggests.

Let nobody say, “I do not know what to love”. Let that person love his brother, and he or she will love the same love; for they know the love with which they love more than the brother whom they love. So now they know God more than they know their brother, clearly more known because more present, more known because more within, more known because more certain. Embrace the love of God and embrace God with love. It is love itself which binds together all the good angels and all the servants of God in a holy bond, joining both us and them together and us with love itself.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ *trin.* 7.6.12.

¹³⁹ *trin.* 8.6.9.

¹⁴⁰ *trin.* 8.7.10.

¹⁴¹ *trin.* 8.8.12.

Recalling the two great commandments, Augustine makes it plain that the love of God and the love of our neighbour are the same thing, intimately associated and indeed impossible to disassociate. Our love of God and our love of one another is the same thing, the love which is itself God. “If you see love, truly you see the Trinity.” For the grammar of love is itself trinitarian in structure. If we are in love with love, this is so precisely because love is loving. “Now love means someone loving and something loved by love. Behold then that there are three, one that loves, and one that is loved and one that is love.”¹⁴² The dynamics of love are triune; the love which we find by looking at our own experience, *interiore modo*, is at the very least a kind of trinity, and this provides a starting-point which can be refined in the course of the subsequent discussions.

At this point, it will be useful to make a brief excursus to examine another key text, *Sermon 52*, which dates from around 410, and in which Augustine rehearses a set of arguments which will be developed at greater length in the latter part of *On the Trinity*. He begins, however, by considering the familiar question of the inseparability of operation of the three persons. At Jesus’ baptism, described in Mt 3.16-17, the three seem to have been performing different roles, separated both temporally and spatially: the Father speaks from heaven, the Son is baptised, while the Spirit descends in the form of a dove.¹⁴³ Now, it is true that the Father does nothing without the Son: for example, creation is the work of both. But it would be a grave error to conclude from this that the Father as well as the Son was born of Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was raised and ascended into heaven! Rather, it was the Son who was born, suffered, rose and ascended, even though it was the Father and the Son (and the Spirit) who worked together to do all these things. In summary, the persons themselves may be distinguished, but their operation remains inseparable.¹⁴⁴ But Augustine is aware that this distinction may be difficult to grasp, so he announces that he will try to find an analogy which will help his congregation

¹⁴² *trin.* 8.10.14.

¹⁴³ *s.* 52.1: on this sermon, see especially Ayres (2000a), 55-64. By contrast, at *Jo. eu. tr.* 6.5.1, which dates from a couple of years earlier in 407, Augustine sees the Trinity appearing at Jesus’ baptism “very clearly”, but does not consider the question of inseparability at all.

¹⁴⁴ *s.* 52.8-52.14.

to understand. He is not yet looking for anything as specific as an actual analogy for the Trinity; rather, at this stage he is only concerned to demonstrate that it is not illogical to believe that three separate entities can operate inseparably. The place to find such an analogy, Augustine argues, is within ourselves, since human beings are made in the image of God. For example, the human mind has memory, understanding and will, three distinct aspects which nevertheless operate inseparably.¹⁴⁵ The fact that Augustine puts forward these three terms, which possibly derive from a formulation by Cicero,¹⁴⁶ strongly suggests that he has been thinking for a while about the argument which will shortly be developed in *On the Trinity*; and indeed we might reasonably expect that at least the germ of this argument had been present in his mind for some years, since the deliberate structure of the work suggests that it had been planned carefully right from the outset. However, we should note that he also adds in the sermon that he “does not dare” to identify memory with the Father, understanding with the Son, and will with the Holy Spirit,¹⁴⁷ something he certainly does a few years later.

Returning to *On the Trinity*, it will be recalled that Augustine was writing book 12 when he was interrupted, in about 416; the project was then temporarily abandoned before finally being finished in the early 420s. Although the argument of the next few books is complex, for our purposes it can be summarised fairly briefly. He considers first what happens when the human mind loves itself. The reason for this is that we are attempting to find in the human image of God an analogy with the immanent Trinity. If we were to examine what is going on when we love someone else, the best we could hope for would be to find an analogy with the economic Trinity. “The mind cannot love itself unless it also knows itself”; and with this initial conclusion we find that we have discerned three distinct things: the mind (*mens*), its knowledge (*notitia*) and its love (*amor*).¹⁴⁸ These three are equal, consubstantial, inseparable but unconfused, and mutually related. The mind’s self-knowledge is “a word begotten within”, while the mind’s self-love proceeds from the mind and from

¹⁴⁵ s. 52.19-52.21.

¹⁴⁶ Ayres (1995), 289-293.

¹⁴⁷ s. 52.23.

¹⁴⁸ *trin.* 9.3.3, 9.4.4. See Sullivan (1963), 117-124.

self-knowledge, joining the mind and its knowledge of itself in mutual love. The mind's self-knowledge is therefore the image of the Word of God, the Son, proceeding from the Father; while its self-love is the image of the Holy Spirit, proceeding from Father and Son, and joining Father and Son in a bond of love.

However, this first sketch is capable of revision. Augustine recalls the Delphic command, "Know thyself!" He interprets this as a reminder that the mind has forgotten itself, or rather that it is easily diverted from proper attention to itself. Instead of being ruled by God, it turns away and tries to enjoy its own actions and its own pleasures.¹⁴⁹ So Augustine introduces a dynamic element into his model, taking account of the implications of the Fall for the image of human mental processes. The mind knows many things, but above all it knows itself as present to itself. It knows that it remembers and knows that it wills. So Augustine sets out a modified account of the mental trinity, consisting of the mind's self-remembering (*memoria sui*), its self-understanding (*intelligentia sui*) and its self-loving or self-willing (*uoluntas sui*); "not three lives but one life, not three minds but one mind".¹⁵⁰ What he has achieved by this revision of the model is to set out a scheme which is based more closely on relationships, in accordance with the trinitarian theology set out in books 5 to 7. The earlier draft of *mens*, *notitia sui* and *amor sui* included a purely absolute term, "mind", which corresponded more closely with "God" than with "Father". This second draft, however, replaces the absolute and substantial term with one which is relative, "(self-)memory", memory present to itself, thus allowing Augustine to discern in the human mind an image which is purely relational and is consequently a more accurate likeness of the divine Trinity.

Book 11 marks something of a digression, in which Augustine checks the plausibility of what has just been said by identifying other triads in human activity and mental processes, turning from the "inner" or "higher" human being to the

¹⁴⁹ *trin.* 10.5.7. The reference is to the text inscribed over the shrine at Delphi, although Augustine probably has in mind the gloss provided by Cicero, his favourite classical author, in the *Tusculanae quaestiones* 1.22.52: "When he [Apollo] says 'know yourself', he says this: 'know your soul'". On the mind's self-knowledge, see Williams (1993) and Ayres (1995).

¹⁵⁰ *trin.* 10.11.18. See Sullivan (1963), 124-130.

“outer” or “lower”. He is here making use of a distinction found in Paul, at 2 Cor 4.16.¹⁵¹ There is a kind of trinity in the act of seeing: the object we see, the form of the object impressed upon us when we see, and the conscious act of sight. There is also a corresponding trinity in the “mind’s eye” when we engage in the act of remembering something: the memory of the object, the internal sight of the object, and the will which joins them.¹⁵² However, there are limitations with both of these models. The first involves three elements which are different both in substance and in nature, while the second requires us to fix our attention on “lower” things rather than God. So while these trinities do not correspond very closely to the image of God, they do provide some evidence to support the validity of the argument so far. In each case there is a relationship between the first of the two elements (what Augustine rather awkwardly calls “quasi-parent” and “quasi-child”) which corresponds approximately to that of the Father and the Son; also, since the third element does not proceed in the same way as does the second, there is some grounds for believing that it corresponds roughly to the Holy Spirit.

All the triads put forward in book 11 are in the “outer human”, and so Augustine now returns to the “inner” to try to find the image of God. The task of the next three books is to develop what has hitherto been a rather static presentation into a dynamic model, taking account of human sin and the brokenness of the image, and bringing it under the consideration of the salvation history which had been outlined in books 2 to 4.¹⁵³ The previous discussions were concerned with the sensory perceptions of the “outer human”; nevertheless, “only in that part of the mind which pertains to the contemplation of eternal things may be found not only a trinity but also the image of God”.¹⁵⁴ It is through the Fall and through our sinful pride that we have become distracted by bodily things so that we lose sight of God and that the

¹⁵¹ Clark (2001), 97. On book 11 generally, see Sullivan (1963), 94-100.

¹⁵² *trin.* 11.2.2; 11.3.6.

¹⁵³ On books 12 to 14, see Sullivan (1963), 100-105. It will be recalled that the two halves of the work mirror each other. Just as the discussions of sin and redemption in books 12 to 14 echo the earlier discussions of books 2 to 4, so the explorations of mental processes in books 9 to 11 balance the logical investigations of books 5 to 7. Might Augustine’s arrangement of his material into twelve books, in four groups of three, itself be a subtle but deliberate reference to the construction of trinitarian patterns?

¹⁵⁴ *trin.* 12.4.4.

image of God is broken, but it is by being redirected back towards God that the image may gradually be restored, “when we live according to God, with our mind intent on his invisible things”.¹⁵⁵

At this point, Augustine draws a distinction between wisdom (*sapientia*) and knowledge (*scientia*). In order to be built up in the Christian life, we need to direct our love towards eternal and unchanging *sapientia* rather than being led astray through the *scientia* of transitory and changeable things.¹⁵⁶ *Scientia* is the knowledge of temporal things, while *sapientia* is the wisdom that is concerned with eternal things. Obviously, in focusing our attention on God, we are dealing primarily with *sapientia* rather than the subordinate *scientia*. Jn 1.1-14 offers a useful illustration of this point: the first five verses refer to eternal things, the understanding of which leads to greater wisdom; but subsequent references to John the Baptist, who witnesses to the truth, refer to temporal things and are therefore received by us as knowledge.¹⁵⁷ The human soul achieves blessedness only when through faith its attention is fixed on God, since God is the only possible source of human happiness in a life “full of errors and calamities”.¹⁵⁸ Faith comes through the grace of Jesus Christ and works through the love which is the gift of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁹ The incarnation of Christ demonstrates that human nature can be joined to the divine nature, affording us an illustration of what God intends for all his children. Since our salvation concerns the eternal Word of God, it is the subject of *sapientia*; but since it comes about through the temporal events of the Word-made-flesh, it is also the subject of *scientia*. The incarnate Christ offers us both “the faith about temporal things” and “the truth about eternal things”.¹⁶⁰ When, through the operation of our human will, we hold in our memory the recollection of this faith, believing it to be true and loving what we know in it should be loved, “the will joins together that

¹⁵⁵ *trin.* 12.13.21.

¹⁵⁶ *trin.* 12.11.16. On this distinction, see Williams (1990) and Ayres (1998), 118-122.

¹⁵⁷ *trin.* 13.1.2.

¹⁵⁸ *trin.* 13.7.10.

¹⁵⁹ *trin.* 13.10.14.

¹⁶⁰ *trin.* 13.19.24. See Ayres (1998), 120-121.

which is held in the memory and that which is imprinted on the thinking mind”.¹⁶¹ Thus in loving and remembering God a kind of “inner” Trinity is to be found.

With this, Augustine is on the verge of locating the trinitarian image in ourselves, but he still has one or two refinements to make. Book 14 therefore marks the high point of Augustine’s thought.¹⁶² The problem is that faith will pass away, being no longer necessary, once we come to see God directly. Faith is that which, nourished by *scientia*, leads us towards blessedness; but *sapientia* is the final stage that corresponds to our eternal worship in the beatific vision. God is eternal, but faith is temporal: therefore it is not in faith as such that we find the image of the Trinity.¹⁶³ So Augustine needs to look further inwards. He recalls that in book 10 it was demonstrated that there is a kind of trinity in the mind’s remembering, understanding and willing itself. Now, the mind can only be “in view of itself” when it thinks about itself, so it is only through the active process of thought, in bringing memories to mind and remembering, understanding and loving, that the image of God can thereby be found.¹⁶⁴ We can compare this trinity with the other outer and inner trinities that have been proposed earlier. The trinities in the “outer human” arise from things outside the body which arise before the mind engages them. On the other hand, triads based on the activity of faith will pass away once we come face to face with God. But the mind does not come from outside itself, and nor is it anything other than concurrent with its own existence. God, too, is self-sufficient and coeternal with himself, so perhaps here at last Augustine has identified the image which he has so assiduously been seeking.

The final qualification Augustine needs to make to this model will allow him to announce that he has located the human image of the Trinity. For the mental trinity “is not the image of God because the mind remembers and understands and loves itself, but rather because it can also remember and understand and love him by

¹⁶¹ *trin.* 13.20.26.

¹⁶² Williams (1990), 323: book 14 is “the culmination of this venture”; Marrocco (2002), 154: “a climax of Augustine’s work”.

¹⁶³ *trin.* 14.3.4.

¹⁶⁴ *trin.* 14.7.10.

whom it was made".¹⁶⁵ It is when we remember, understand and love God, by whom and for whom we were created, that the image is fully restored in us. As Augustine explains, the human mind is made in the image of God, and the image is present when the mind remembers, understands and loves itself. But to remember, understand and love oneself fully is to remember, understand and love God. In this way the image is perfected once more, when we participate in God, loving God and loving our neighbour because we now know properly how to love ourselves.¹⁶⁶ In turning to God, the divine image which is the human mind is formed anew, just as it was God that originally created it. But this is a gradual process, begun in baptism but continued from day to day as, through the saving work of Christ and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, our allegiance is slowly changed from temporal things to eternal things. The restoration of the image is a process, not an event, which is completed only at our death when we are finally made perfect when we receive the full vision of God. Then, we will no longer see "through a mirror enigmatically", but will see God "face to face": the references here are to 1 Cor 13.12.¹⁶⁷

So Augustine has arrived at his model of the image of God in the perfected and reoriented human mind. It should be recalled that his project in *On the Trinity* may be very well summed up by the famous statement at the beginning of the *Confessions*: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you". Perhaps another quotation from the earlier work will stand equally well as an indicator of what Augustine has achieved by the end of book 14: "Late have I loved you, O beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved you. And behold, you were within me".¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ *trin.* 14.12.15.

¹⁶⁶ *trin.* 14.14.18: see Williams (1990), 320. On the participation of the soul in God, see Marrocco (2002), 154-167, who notes the strong similarities between Augustine's doctrine of participation and the Greek concept of *θέωσις* or deification.

¹⁶⁷ *trin.* 14.19.25.

¹⁶⁸ *conf.* 10.27.38. Of course, in this quotation Augustine is lamenting the fact that he failed to realise this truth early enough, but the point is still valid.

On the Trinity, book 15

In book 15, Augustine takes stock of what has been achieved in the foregoing arguments. “There is a trinity in the image of God which is the human being in respect of the mind, which ‘is being renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of him who created [Col 3.10]’ the human to his own image.”¹⁶⁹ It has been necessary to proceed indirectly, as “through a mirror enigmatically”: this mirror is of course the human image of God, although seeing God in such an image is enigmatic precisely because it is difficult (as Augustine has himself demonstrated through the lengthy process by which he arrives at this conclusion). We do not yet see God “face to face”; and in passing it will be seen that much of the argument of book 15 is underpinned by the dynamics of transformation inherent in this text from 1 Cor 13.12.¹⁷⁰ Firstly, whereas God’s *scientia* is identical with his *sapientia*, and indeed with his very substance, human knowledge is not the same as human wisdom, let alone with what it is to be human. Our knowledge and thoughts are fleeting, but God’s Word is eternal.¹⁷¹ So the human image of the procession of understanding from memory is therefore inadequate as an expression of the procession of the Son from the Father. Secondly, there are limitations with what this model has to say about the Holy Spirit. In the human mind, *memoria*, *intelligentia* and *uoluntas* are three distinct aspects of the one mind, but we cannot read off from this model that it is the Father who remembers, the Son who understands and the Spirit who loves, since all three activities are identical with the one substance of God.

This presents Augustine with a problem which he grapples with in the second half of book 15; and this discussion, based on what has gone before, marks the summit of his attempts to present a trinitarian pneumatology. We get the impression that he has been dissatisfied with what he achieved on this subject in the first seven books, and wants to revisit the subject again in an attempt to achieve clarity. We know that love is a *substantia*, because “God is love [1 Jn 4.8, 16]”. If this is so,

¹⁶⁹ *trin.* 15.3.5.

¹⁷⁰ On the many references in *trin.* 15 to 1 Cor 13.12, see Van Fleteren (1992), 87-89.

¹⁷¹ *trin.* 15.14.24.

then it must follow that God the Trinity is love, and also that the Father is love and the Son is love, since we have already concluded that all terms which apply to the substance of God apply equally to the three persons together and to the three persons individually.¹⁷² How then can we particularly call the Holy Spirit the love of God?

Of course, a provisional answer is that it is legitimate to call the Spirit “love” in just the same way that we can appropriately call the Son “wisdom”, just as long as we do not mean to deny that the Father and the Spirit are also wisdom.¹⁷³ But in any case, we can find a more specific warrant if we juxtapose 1 Jn 4.8 with its previous verse: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God [1 Jn 4.7]”. What this clearly demonstrates is that love both is God and is from God. In other words, “love is God from God”. Now, this must refer to either the Son or the Holy Spirit, since only these two persons, and not the Father, can be spoken of as being “from God”. It is the Spirit who enables us to live in love and thus to live in God: “we live in him and he in us, because he has given us his Spirit [1 Jn 4.13]”. Surely, Augustine argues, it is love that achieves this mutual indwelling? Thus it is the Holy Spirit who is the love of God: he is the one who proceeds from God, who is the gift of love and who enables us to love one another and to love God. For we have “no possibility of loving God except from God”. We love because God loved us first (1 Jn 4.19); we love because the love of God has been given to us by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5.5). Without love, nothing else is of any use (1 Cor 13.1-3); love alone is what marks out the children of God (a conclusion which will come to the fore in the next two chapters), because through the gift of love God himself lives in us.¹⁷⁴

Augustine adds a considerable weight of further scriptural evidence to support his case: the Holy Spirit is a gift of living water (Jn 4.10), the gift of Christ to us (Eph 4.7), the gift referred to many times in the Acts of the Apostles.¹⁷⁵ The argument here is to do with the economy of salvation, the gift of the Holy Spirit to us. The phrase “gift of the Holy Spirit” is strictly speaking a tautology, Augustine

¹⁷² *trin.* 15.17.28.

¹⁷³ *trin.* 15.17.31.

¹⁷⁴ *trin.* 15.18.32; see Bourassa (1978), 394-395.

¹⁷⁵ *trin.* 15.19.33-15.19.36.

points out, since the gift of the Spirit is nothing but the Spirit himself. But he has already argued in book 5 that the Holy Spirit is eternally a gift; this means that what he is saying here concerning temporal things is also true eternally. Just as the Son is both *scientia* (participating in the temporal order of knowledge) and *sapientia* (participating in the divine order of wisdom), so the Spirit is both the love which characterises human relationships and the love which is of God and which is God.

He is the love which is both God and from God; and if the love by which the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father ineffably demonstrates the communion of them both, what could be more appropriate than that the one who is the common Spirit of both should be particularly called love?¹⁷⁶

The Holy Spirit is called both “holy” and “spirit”, even though both the Father and the Son are also more generally both holy and spirit. It is appropriate for him to have this name because he is the gift of each and so is common to each. It is also therefore appropriate for him to be called “love”, since he is the love of both the Father and the Son.

In his *Tracts on the Gospel of John*, Augustine draws a very similar conclusion which is in complete accord with that presented here. Since the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God, they have one will. If the Father and the Son will something to happen, then the Holy Spirit also wills it. In fact, more specifically, the Spirit is “the substance of the will of both”, the common will of the Father and the Son.¹⁷⁷ That Augustine uses the term *uoluntas* in this regard is interesting. It will have been noted from the foregoing discussion of *On the Trinity* that he is inconsistent in his choice of vocabulary for the third term of his mental triad. Although the final version refers to the mind remembering, understanding and willing itself, earlier drafts of this analogy referred to love as the third term. In any case, the whole discussion arose out of his reflections in book 8 on the dynamics of love. The point is that for Augustine, “to will” something means “actively to love”

¹⁷⁶ *trin.* 15.19.37: Bourassa (1978), 396; Wilken (2000), 12-13.

¹⁷⁷ *Io. eu. tr.* 22.15.1; 111.1.4.

it, and so the two terms are practically synonymous. If the Holy Spirit is the substance of the will of the Father and the Son, then to all intents and purposes this is the same thing as saying that he is the love of both. We will have more to say about Augustine's terminology for love in the next chapter. Thus the Spirit is the mutual love of the Father and the Son, binding the three together as one God, the holy Trinity.¹⁷⁸

Going back to the discussions in *On the Trinity*, Augustine makes one final point in this connection. The Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, and this procession is eternal, just as the Son's procession from the Father is also eternal.¹⁷⁹ The manner of the processions of the Son and of the Spirit is clearly different, which is why we say that the Son is begotten or born, but is why we do not use this terminology when we talk about the Spirit.¹⁸⁰ For the Holy Spirit is not the son of both the Father and the Son, or else we would have to talk about there being two Fathers; and nor is the Spirit a kind of grandson. As Augustine puts it, "the Son is born of the Father; and the Holy Spirit proceeds principally from the Father and, by the timeless gift of the Father, from them both together". The key word here is *principaliter*: the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, but "principally" from the Father; and the fact that Augustine feels both able and obliged to draw this distinction has generally been forgotten in all the subsequent debate about the so-called *filioque* clause.¹⁸¹ We noted in the Introduction to this thesis that Gregory of Nyssa actually says something very similar to Augustine. However, it is still very difficult to say what is actually different about the eternal processions of the Son and the Spirit insofar as they both proceed from the Father. Augustine refers to one of his own *Tracts on the Gospel of John*: all that we can say is that the Holy Spirit proceeds simultaneously from both Father and Son, even though the eternal initiative in this gift comes from the Father.¹⁸² It is important to note that in all these

¹⁷⁸ *Io. eu. tr.* 20.3.2.

¹⁷⁹ *trin.* 15.25.45.

¹⁸⁰ *trin.* 15.26.47.

¹⁸¹ On Augustine on the *filioque*, see especially Bonner (1960), 58-66; also Hill (1985), 108-111.

¹⁸² *trin.* 15.27.48, quoting from *Io. eu. tr.* 99.8-99.9. Congar (1983), III, 86 summarises this as procession from the Father alone, through the Son (in his words, *a patre ... per filium*): whether or not we agree will depend on what we think we mean by "by" and "from". However, even if this

discussions of the Spirit in book 15, Augustine has been at pains to point out that he will argue on the basis of the scriptural evidence, *secundum scripturas sanctas*.¹⁸³ His discussion of the Holy Spirit is almost entirely exegetical, unlike the parallel discussions of the Son which, while scripturally based, engage more vigorously with the philosophical tradition.

It is probably worth concluding this survey by recalling that the starting point for all of Augustine's discussions of trinitarian theology was the doctrine of the inseparability of operation of the three persons. He returns to this concept in other works time and time again throughout the period when he was writing *On the Trinity*. For example, we have already seen that it is the main theme of *Sermon 52*; but there are also significant discussions in *Sermon 213*, in the *Tracts on the Gospel of John*, as well as in *Letters 120* and *169*.¹⁸⁴ We are probably not surprised to find that inseparability, such a significant area of contention for Augustine's immediate predecessors, occupied a major part of his reflection in the earlier years; but it is perhaps more surprising that he should have continued to write about it over such a long period. The reason for this is perhaps that this was such a familiar question that it provided a convenient way in to his more general reflections on how the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit can be three persons but one God. The analogy of memory, understanding and will, first proposed only to demonstrate that inseparability is not illogical, gradually evolved into the argument about the image of God once Augustine realised the potential it offered as a basis for his considered thoughts about the divine Trinity.

distinction does not get us very much nearer understanding the difference, at least it reminds us that a difference there clearly is.

¹⁸³ *trin.* 15.17.27, 15.20.39. See Wilken (2000), especially 4-5 and 14-18.

¹⁸⁴ *s.* 213.7; *Io. eu. tr.* 20.13.3, 21.10.2, 110.3.3; *ep.* 120.17, 169.6. The last of these references also contains another brief allusion to the triad of *memoria*, *intelligentia* and *uoluntas*.

Conclusion

The doctrine of inseparability is the thread running through all Augustine's writings on the Trinity. If he could demonstrate that it is not illogical to hold that three separate persons can act inseparably, then it would be but a step to show that it is reasonable to hold to the unity-in-Trinity which is the object of the Catholic faith. The Christian God is of course ultimately a mystery, and Augustine is not afraid to say when he believes that human reason can get us no further into penetrating this mystery. Yet he also believes passionately that faith is capable of achieving at least partial understanding. Indeed, it is in the search for the face of the invisible God that we ourselves achieve salvation. From a relatively early stage, Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity was closely connected to his understanding of the image of God in human beings, and so it is through his exploration of the nature of that image that he comes to the fullest expression of his trinitarian thought. But the starting-point for his reflections is always the revelation of God in scripture. He concludes that the visible missions of the Son and of the Holy Spirit reveal their invisible and eternal processions from the Father. Delving further into the most appropriate language to use, Augustine is able to reflect further on the nature of the trinitarian relationships. Most strikingly, he concludes that the Holy Spirit is the love of God, the bond, the communion and the unity of the Father and the Son. The reason for this is that the Spirit is eternally given; he is the gift of the Father and the Son to the Church. So it is to the Church that we must now turn.

2

Church

*ubi caritas et amor, deus ibi est.
congregavit nos in unum Christi amor.
exultemus, et in ipso iucundemur.
timeamus, et amemus deum uiuum.
et ex corde diligamus nos sincero.*

antiphon for Holy Thursday

In this chapter, we will turn our attention away from the Trinity and towards the image of God, the Church. If the Church is modelled on the triune God, we will be led firstly into a more detailed consideration of the place of the Holy Spirit in this theological scheme; secondly, into an examination of the way in which the love of God is at the centre of Augustine's understanding of the Christian life. An excursus explores what he has to say about those who do not have love and unity: they are antichrists, guilty of blasphemy against the Spirit of God. The final sections of this chapter look more explicitly at how these themes are developed in Augustine's teaching about the Church, which is the body of Christ, given life by the Holy Spirit.

The Church as the image of God

In the previous chapter, we presented Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity. God is both three and one, the persons of the Trinity being equal and inseparable. In particular, the Holy Spirit is the gift of God, the love of the Father and the Son. Our love for God and for each other is the gift of the Spirit dwelling within us; now, we will see that in loving one another, we are trained in the love of God, and so the Christian fellowship becomes the image and likeness of the triune God. Augustine concluded at the end of the fourth book of *On the Trinity* that God's love is

manifested through the sending of the Son and the Spirit, such that their respective missions reveal their eternal trinitarian processions.¹

In this is love. In this the love of God was manifested in us, because God has sent his only-begotten Son into this world, in order that we may live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved, but that he has loved us.²

If God has shown his love for us, Augustine immediately adds, then we must love one another, as Peter was instructed to feed Christ's flock. For those who receive the Holy Spirit receive love, and so are made a unity by the love of the Spirit: an important theme to which we will return shortly.³ Referring elsewhere to 1 Jn 4.10, Augustine argues that we are able to love because we were loved first: "In a nutshell, to love God is a gift of God".⁴ More specifically,

the Father loves us because we love the Son, when from the Father and the Son we have received that we might love both the Father and the Son. For the Spirit of both pours love into our hearts [Rom 5.5]; through that Spirit we love both the Father and the Son; and that Spirit we love with the Father and the Son.⁵

The Holy Spirit, the love of the Father and the Son, is given to us in order that we might in our turn love God, the Father, the Son and the Spirit. We come to know God through the mission of the Son; but we come to love God through the mission of the Spirit, since it would be of no benefit to know God unless we also love God.⁶ So our love for God and for one another illustrates our participation in the life of the Trinity.

It is abundantly clear, then, that salvation is to be found in the love of God. We must not love the world, or love the things of the world, for this prevents us from

¹ *trin.* 4.19.25, 4.20.29.

² *ep. Io. tr.* 7.9, an approximate quotation of 1 Jn 4.9-10. It is important to remember that the initiative is God's. We can have love only because God has loved us first: see Dideberg (1975b), 206-214.

³ *Io. eu. tr.* 39.5.1.

⁴ *Io. eu. tr.* 102.5.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *s.* 71.18. On the progression from knowledge to love of God, see Agaësse (1961), 49-53.

being filled with the love of God. Early in his reflections on John's epistle, Augustine compares the two possible objects of our love. Even if the world is good, since it has been made by God, we must not be tempted to love the creation instead of its Creator.⁷ We must not be tempted by worldly desires and ambitions, but hold fast to the love of God in order to come to share in his eternity.⁸ Neatly summarising his well-known distinction between *uti* and *frui*, he adds: "do not love for enjoyment those things that you ought to have [merely] for use".⁹ Spiritual growth is therefore a matter of urgency, in order that we may learn to discern God and not be led astray by other distractions. For "it is the last hour":¹⁰ we must consequently seek spiritual milk from our mother the Church, the milk which is the knowledge of Christ which prepares us for the solid food of the Son, who in turn leads us back to our Father. Notice that Augustine is here hinting at the same distinction between temporal *scientia* and eternal *sapientia* which is also such a prominent theme in *On the Trinity* 12-14. Whoever recognises Christ's divinity, that is, his equality with the Father, is able as it were to reach out spiritually to touch him, for "whoever sees me also sees the Father [Jn 14.9]".¹¹ This reference to "seeing" salvation is significant. It is through the mediation of Christ that we will come to see God directly;¹² and in thus seeing, we will see God the Trinity, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹³ The members of the city of God, the body of Christ, who are the children of God, will see God as God is: they will enjoy the vision of the eternal God.¹⁴ Even more than that, in their vision of God, they will be like God: "we will be like him, because we see him as he is [1 Jn 3.2]".¹⁵ What precisely is meant by being "like" God, and the important qualification that must be attached to this statement, will be considered at the end of this section.

⁷ *ep. Io. tr.* 2.11.1.

⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 2.14.2-2.14.5.

⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 2.12.

¹⁰ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.1.

¹¹ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.2.

¹² *Io. eu. tr.* 110.4.3.

¹³ *en. Ps.* 84.9.

¹⁴ *ep. Io. tr.* 4.5, 4.8.

¹⁵ *ep. Io. tr.* 4.6.1.

If we want to see God, first of all we need to look for God. Nowhere does Augustine spell this out more clearly than in his commentary on Ps 49.7:

“I am God, I am your God.” What more do you want? Are you looking for a reward from God, that God might give you something, that what he has given might be yours? Look: God himself, who will give, is yours. What is richer than him? You were looking for gifts: you have the giver himself.¹⁶

It is God himself who gives to us, and what he gives is nothing less than himself. From what we have already learned, it will quickly be realised that what is referred to implicitly here is the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is God from God. Augustine reminds us that we seek the Lord’s face if we love God; that it is through love that we must seek God.¹⁷ But it is the Holy Spirit of God who is love.

If nothing in praise of love was said through all the pages of this epistle, if nothing whatever through the pages of the scriptures, and yet we heard only this one thing from the voice of the Spirit of God, that “God is love”, we should seek nothing more.¹⁸

This brings *On the Trinity* to mind yet again, with its guiding principle and repeated injunction to its readers to seek the face of the Lord.¹⁹ Augustine spells out here precisely what it is that we are searching for when we see out God. If we are looking for God, we must seek him through love; in other words, we must have the Holy Spirit, who is the love of God.

If we are going to become like God through seeking him, finding him and seeing him, this implies that we must be transformed and perfected. Augustine describes this process of our transformation into the perfect image of God in the later books of *On the Trinity*, and it is a theme he alludes to on several occasions in his various sermons. We become the image of God through our desire for him: “the whole life of the good Christian is a holy desire; ... this is our life, to be exercised by

¹⁶ *en. Ps.* 49.14.

¹⁷ *en. Ps.* 26[2].16: see Vincent (1990), 255, 257.

¹⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 7.4: see Dideberg (1975b), 145.

¹⁹ *trin.* 1.3.5, 9.1.1 and 15.2.2, quoting Ps 104.3-4.

desire”.²⁰ It is through patience and persistence in faith that our desire is trained, so that we are transformed by our sure hope in God’s promise. Desire for the vision of God makes us pure and clean, not that we purify ourselves, but that God acts within us through the joining of our free wills to the divine will.

Who but God makes us clean? But God does not cleanse you if you are unwilling. So because you join your will to God, you cleanse yourself. You cleanse yourself not by yourself, but by the one who comes to live in you. However because you act there somehow by will, consequently something is also attributed to you.²¹

This quotation illuminates something of what Augustine means in this context about “desire”. The noun *desiderium* and the verb *desidero* suggest something rather stronger than can be translated by the English word. To desire someone or something is to will it: desire is the total orientation of the self towards an end, the active longing and extension of the will. If we further recall that the will is the active expression of love, it can be demonstrated that what Augustine is talking about here in the language of divine and human desire is nothing other than love. Our love or will joins us to the love of God; but we are thus transformed not by our own efforts, but by the indwelling of God’s love, the Holy Spirit, within us. Yet the indwelling of the Spirit effects a real transformation in us. Notice incidentally that this argument already offers a solution to the problem which will be raised later on by the Pelagians. “If you say, ‘Be my helper [Ps 26.9]’, you do something, for if you do nothing, how does he help?”²² We do not save ourselves, but nevertheless we are involved in the process of salvation by allowing our wills to be aligned with God’s transformative and restorative will.

Thus our wills are conformed to God’s will through the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. We love because God has loved us first: because God has loved us,

²⁰ *ep. Io. tr.* 4.6.2. On longing for God, see Burnaby (1938), 96-98.

²¹ *ep. Io. tr.* 4.7.

²² *ibid.* Compare this with *en. Ps.* 26[2].17. Burnaby (1955), 291 sees in this argument evidence for a later date and anti-Pelagian context for the *tractates*, but this is unlikely.

we are granted the capacity to love God.²³ In loving, we become beautiful. Although God is beautiful, our sin has deformed us and made us ugly. Nevertheless, because beauty himself loves us even in our ugliness, we are transformed. “How shall we become beautiful? By loving the one who is always beautiful. As love increases in you, so beauty increases, for love itself is the soul’s beauty.”²⁴ Christ, who in his divine nature is beauty itself, died to save sinners who were hitherto disfigured by sin, emptying himself of his beauty so that we might be made beautiful through his love. For Christ is none other than the “the loving of love, so that loving you may run, running you may love”.²⁵ We wait on God, run to God and seek God, loving because he has first loved us. But to describe Christ in his divine nature, God the Son, as “the loving of love” may remind us of something else. For God is not merely love, but love in relationship with love. In introducing a dynamic and relational element into his description here, Augustine is recalling the connection between trinitarian theology and love. Thus in being transformed by the love of Christ, we enter into the eternal vision of God. Eternal life is to know and to be present with God the Trinity, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.²⁶ For in eternity we will know the Father; we will know the Son, sent from the Father; and we will know the Spirit who is the love of the Father and the Son.²⁷

Augustine imagines God calling to us: “Love itself makes me present to you”,²⁸ a statement which is both an unmistakable reference to the identification of the Holy Spirit with love, as well as a reminder that love is itself a trinitarian event. Augustine is a true mystic, whose attention is always fixed on his final destiny and that of the congregation committed to his charge. This goal is that of union with God in the final perfection of divine love: “This is love, the consummation of all our

²³ *ep. Io. tr.* 9.9.1.

²⁴ *ibid.* See Burnaby (1938), 157-158.

²⁵ *ep. Io. tr.* 9.9.2. Augustine uses all three words for “love” in the same sentence: *dilectionem caritas; ut amans curras, currens ames*. The reference to running may suggest that he had in mind Song 1.3-4, which reads in the Vulgate: *trahe me post te, curremus. introduxit me rex in cellaria sua; exultabimus et laetabimur in te; memores uberum tuorum super uinum: recti diligunt te* (“Lead me after you: let us run. The King has brought me into his chamber: let us exult and rejoice in you, praising your love more than wine. Rightly do they love you”).

²⁶ *Io. eu. tr.* 111.3.2.

²⁷ *Io. eu. tr.* 105.3.1.

²⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.4. See Agaësse (1961), 100-102; Canning (1993), 70.

works. There is the end: we run because of it; we run towards it; we will rest when we come to it”.²⁹ He quotes the psalmist: “I have seen the end of all consummation [Ps 118.96]”.³⁰ By “end”, he explains, should be understood our fulfilment and completion, as when the apostle describes love as the “end” of the commandment (1 Tim 1.5) and love as the fulfilment of the Law (Rom 13.10). Such an end, of course, is to be found only in the love of the triune God, revealed in the Son and given in the Holy Spirit: we have not yet attained it, but are still on the way towards our perfection in it.³¹ We draw closer to God the more we love him, and our image is restored more nearly to his the more we are ourselves transformed by love.³²

God desires only one kind of sacrifice from us: the fire of divine love which sets us wholly on fire for him.³³ Twice in *On the Trinity*, the Holy Spirit is represented by fire. In particular, there are two passages in that treatise which speak of God uniting his people “in one will by a certain spiritual fire of love” and of them being made “into one spirit by the fire of love”.³⁴ Preaching on 1 Jn, Augustine’s thoughts are running on similar lines:

This love holds itself altogether like this: just as the love itself is composed as one, so all who hang from it are made one, and like a fire it forges them together. It is gold, the mass is forged and becomes one thing; but unless the fervour of love blazes, there cannot be forged one from the many.³⁵

Our participation in the fire of the Spirit unites us in the love of the Father and the Son; but Augustine proceeds to argue from this that as we are all caught up together in the blazing trinitarian love, so too will we grow in love for each other. “Because we love God, so we know that we love the children of God.”³⁶ As we saw a moment ago, Augustine refers to Ps 118.96: “I have seen the end of all consummation”, by

²⁹ *ibid.*: see Agaësse (1961), 77. Augustine is unconsciously echoing his famous words at *conf.* 1.1: “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you”.

³⁰ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.5.1.

³¹ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.6.1.

³² *en. Ps.* 94.1.

³³ *en. Ps.* 49.15.

³⁴ *trin.* 3.4.9, 4.9.12

³⁵ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.3.3.

³⁶ *ibid.*

which the psalmist means that our fulfilment is found in the love of God. Almost immediately, he then completes the quotation: “Your commandment is very broad”.³⁷ But what is this commandment, if not the double command that we must love God and also love one another? Love has no limits, either in this world or in the world to come. “You love God, you love your brothers and sisters, you love the law of God, you love the Church of God. This [love] will be forever.”³⁸ We love God if we keep his commandments, which are to love God and, crucially, to love one another.³⁹

So it is that in seeking God, our wills are united with his and our broken image is restored through transforming love. But how does love of our fellow human beings relate to love of God; how do the two sides of the great commandment fit together? As we saw earlier, the Christian life is one in which we are being trained in love, through our spiritual exercise being transformed into the likeness of God. It is this need for training in love which gives us the answer to the problem:

Now you see with faith, then you will see with a direct view. For if we love when we do not see, how we will embrace it when we do see! But where ought we to train ourselves? In brotherly love. You can say to me, “I have not seen God”; but surely you cannot say to me, “I have not seen a human being”? Love your brother. For if you love the brother whom you do see, at the same time you will also see God, because you will see love itself, and God lives within.⁴⁰

This is very similar to an important passage in book 8 of *On the Trinity*. There, Augustine was examining the threefold nature of love and trying to determine what love is. The person who loves their neighbour knows what love is, because they love love itself. But “God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God [1 Jn 4.16]”. God and love may be identified one with another.

³⁷ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.6.2, again quoting Ps 118.96.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.7.1. Canning (1993) presents an exhaustive analysis of Augustine’s teaching on the double commandment.

⁴⁰ *ep. Io. tr.* 5.7.2. Compare the idea of training in love with the closely related notion at *ep. Io. tr.* 4.5-4.7 of training the desire of the will. On love as the vision of God, see Dideberg (1975b), 154-166 and Canning (1993), 283-284.

Let nobody say, "I do not know what to love". Let that person love his brother, and he or she will love the same love; for they know the love with which they love more than the brother whom they love. So now they know God more than they know their brother, clearly more known because more present, more known because more within, more known because more certain. Embrace the love of God and embrace God with love. It is love itself which binds together all the good angels and all the servants of God in a holy bond, joining both us and them together and us with love itself. Therefore the more we are healed of the swelling of pride, so much we are fuller of love; and with what is someone full, when he is full of love, unless of God?⁴¹

Our love for God and our love for one another are the same love. God is love, and therefore love is God. When we love our brothers and our sisters we are joined with them in the bond of the Holy Spirit, who is "love itself" and who "lives within". So we train ourselves in love of God through our love for our neighbours; but in so loving we actually enter into the life of the Trinity.

Therefore through that which is common to the Father and the Son, they wanted us to have communion both with them and with one another; and through that gift which they both have as one, to gather us together in one, that is, through the Holy Spirit who is God and who is the gift of God.⁴²

In this mutual gift of love we will find our rest in God together. "We will all be one, in one, to the One":⁴³ one in Christ, through the unity of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Trinity-in-unity.

In an interesting sequence, Augustine further discusses the way in which love is manifested. As John points out, nobody has ever seen God (1 Jn 4.12): in the present, if not in eternity, God must be sought with the heart, not with the eyes. Augustine quotes Mt 5.8 in support of this point: "Blessed are those who have pure hearts, for they will see God".⁴⁴ But if we look for God in this way, what would we

⁴¹ *trin.* 8.8.12.

⁴² *s.* 71.18.

⁴³ *en. Ps.* 147.28: *omnes unus in uno ad unum erimus.* Van Bavel (1996), 45: "the shortest summary Augustine ever gave of his ideal".

⁴⁴ *ep. Io. tr.* 7.10.1. On this passage, see Canning (1993), 291-292.

see? Certainly, we would not see some kind of enormous and more powerful version of ourselves, nor still less an old man sitting on the clouds! Rather, we would see love itself, for “God is love [1 Jn 4.8]”.⁴⁵ Now, we do not know what love looks like directly, but we can see it indirectly. We know that love has a face, and that it has hands and feet: for Augustine points out that it is the hands of love which give to the poor, its feet who bear people to the Church; its eyes acknowledge the plight of the needy, and its ears understand what they hear.⁴⁶ In this passage, Augustine has slipped neatly from describing God to describing the Church, a body with many members. In talking about love, he has been able to move naturally and seamlessly from one to the other.

The members are not separated by their places; but the one who has love sees the whole at one time through understanding. Inhabit [love] and you will be inhabited by [love]; dwell and you will be indwelt.⁴⁷

There is a tension in Augustine between, on the one hand, discerning the image of God in the individual, and on the other hand, locating the image in the Christian fellowship as a whole. The thrust of *On the Trinity* seems to be in the direction of the former, with its psychological trinities located within the human *mens*. Augustine occasionally reinforces this impression in the course of these various sermons:

But you, brothers and sisters, see yourselves to be human beings made in the image and likeness of God. The image of God is within you: it is not in your body, not in these ears you can see, or eyes or nostrils or palate or hands or feet. But it is created nevertheless where the understanding is, where the mind is, where the reason is with its capacity for seeking the truth, where faith is, where your hope is, your love. There God has his image.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ It is intriguing that Augustine refers to popular misunderstandings about the Christian doctrine of God that are still widespread today. His account of how he escaped both of these errors may be found at *conf.* 7.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *en. Ps.* 48.2.11.

However, elsewhere Augustine is equally clear that it is the Church itself which is being restored as the divine image. Since the Father and the Son (from Jn 14.23) and the Holy Spirit (Jn 14.17) dwell in the people of God, “from this we understood that God the Trinity abides together in the holy people as in his temple”.⁴⁹ Augustine was here summarising the points he had made in the previous *tractatus*, that “love ... makes those of one mind to love in a house [Ps 67.7],⁵⁰ a house made by the Father and the Son.⁵¹ It follows implicitly from this, incidentally, that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, and also that God the Trinity is manifested in the love that binds the Church together as one. Therefore the Church, the holy people of God, is a dwelling for God.⁵² If the Church is a dwelling for God, it is entirely appropriate that in describing God we should also find ourselves describing what the Church is like, and vice versa, just as we saw above at *Tracts on the Letter of John* 7.10.1. So it would surely be legitimate to conclude that the Church is itself the image of God. The apparent tension can be resolved, however. In Augustine’s commentary on Ps 48, quoted above, human beings (in the plural) are referred to as the (singular) image of God. Furthermore, the verse from Ps 67 also quoted above refers to the fact that those who live together in the house of God are of one mind. The point is that, in the Church, many members are gathered together to make one body, united in Christ by the Holy Spirit. The Church is at once many and also one. It is therefore the image of God the Trinity-in-unity.

We said earlier that there was an important qualification to be made in drawing an analogy between God and the Church of God. Augustine refers to this in commenting on the text “Whoever does justice is just, as he also is just [1 Jn 3.7]:⁵³

Therefore we also have the image of God, but not what the Son has, equal to the Father; however, if we too, in our measure, are not to be like him, we would in no part be called like. So he purifies us as he also is pure; but he is eternally pure, we are purified by faith. We are just as he also is just, but is just in his perpetual changelessness itself, we by believing in

⁴⁹ *Io. eu. tr.* 77.1.1.

⁵⁰ *Io. eu. tr.* 76.2.1.

⁵¹ *Io. eu. tr.* 76.2.2.

⁵² *Io. eu. tr.* 76.4.1.

⁵³ *ep. Io. tr.* 4.9.1.

whom we do not see, in order that we may sometime see. And when our justice is made perfect, when we shall be made equal to the angels, even then there will not be equality with him. So how far from him is it now, when even then it will not be?⁵⁴

As we noted at the beginning of this section, the Son is eternally equal to the Father. He is the Son of God from eternity, we are children of God only by adoption. Therefore we can become like God, but we can never be equal to God.⁵⁵ Augustine returns to this point later when commenting on Jn 17.11:

“That they ... may be one as we also are [one].” He does not say: “that they may be one with us”, or “that they and we may be one, as we are one”. But he says: “that they may be one as we also are [one]”. They, of course, may be one in their nature, as we also are one in ours.⁵⁶

The unity of the Church is qualitatively something different from the unity of God, even though the two are analogous. Our unity is like the unity of the Father and the Son, but we are not precisely one with the Father and the Son.

The Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father, so that they are one because they are of one substance. We can certainly be in them, but we cannot be one with them, because we and they are not of one substance, insofar as the Son is God with the Father. (But, insofar as he is human, he is of the same substance as we also are!)⁵⁷

We do not share in the same substance as God, nor do we share in the same nature. “And so they are in us, or we in them, such that they are one in their nature, we one in ours. Certainly they are in us as God in his temple, but we are in them as a creature in its Creator.”⁵⁸ Augustine is warning us here about the limits of human participation or sharing in divinity, and cautioning us to remember our place and not get carried away. We need to be careful in our enthusiasm not to blur the ontological

⁵⁴ *ep. Io. tr.* 4.9.2.

⁵⁵ *ep. Io. tr.* 4.9.1. Augustine gives the example of a scale model of the basilica at Hippo, built on the same proportions but not the same size as the original. We might draw an equivalent analogy from geometry: two triangles may be similar, but not congruent. Of course, these illustrations are themselves imperfect, since they refer only to degree, whereas the difference between us and God is ontological.

⁵⁶ *Io. eu. tr.* 107.5; see Comeau (1930), 267.

⁵⁷ *Io. eu. tr.* 110.1.1.

⁵⁸ *Io. eu. tr.* 110.1.2.

distinction: he is God, we are the image of God. But even being the image of God is something wonderful. As the Father glorifies the Son, so the Son in turn glorifies us.⁵⁹ Just as the Father, the Son and the Spirit are one God, so Christians are formed into one Church, and the fact that the Church's unity is only a model of the unity of God is not something to be scorned lightly.

If, coming near to God, through love many souls are one soul, and many hearts one heart [Acts 4.32], what does the fountain of love itself effect in the Father and the Son? Surely there the Trinity is even more one God? For love comes to us from there, from the Holy Spirit himself, as the apostle says, "The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us [Rom 5.5]". If therefore the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us, making many souls one soul, and making many hearts one heart, how much more does it make the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit one God, one light, and one beginning?⁶⁰

The Holy Spirit in the life of the Church

In the previous section, we considered a number of aspects of Augustine's theology of God the Trinity. We now need to say a little more specifically about the Holy Spirit, exploring both who the Spirit is and what he does. He is the gift of the Father and the Son, the pledge and guarantee of the love of God. He is a teacher and intercessor, living water, purifying fire, and a dove of peace. Most important of all, the Holy Spirit sustains those to whom he is given through the indwelling of love in their hearts.

As we have already noted on a number of occasions, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of both the Father and the Son, who are united by their mutual act of giving.⁶¹ Therefore the Spirit is the one who is referred to at Jn 4.10: "the gift of God is the

⁵⁹ *Io. eu. tr.* 110.3.1.

⁶⁰ *Io. eu. tr.* 39.5.2. On the parallel between the unity of the Church and the divine unity, see Berrouard (1987b) and (1988), 480-483, which draw particular attention to the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in this regard.

⁶¹ See especially *trin.* 5.11.12 and 15.18.32-15.19.35.

Holy Spirit”.⁶² For the Holy Spirit is both God himself and the gift of God, given to us and filling our hearts with the love of God:

John himself says this: “that he has given us of his Spirit [1 Jn 4.13]”. How do we know “that he has given us of his Spirit”? This very thing, “that he has given us of his Spirit”, how do we know this? Ask your heart: if it is full of love, you have the Spirit of God. How do we know that by this you know that the Spirit of God lives in you? Ask Paul the Apostle: “because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us [Rom 5.5]”.⁶³

Jesus Christ himself promised that he would send the Spirit as a life-giving gift (Jn 4.14).⁶⁴ It is he who, together with the Father, gives the members of his body the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is therefore the Spirit of both the Father and the Son.⁶⁵ The Spirit cannot be bought or sold, as we learn from the narrative about Simon Magus in Acts 8;⁶⁶ on the contrary, the love he offers is a free gift, available to anyone who desires it.⁶⁷ This gift of love enlarges our hearts and gives us the hope to wait patiently for our salvation.⁶⁸ The fact that the Spirit is a gift means that it is through grace that the members of the Church live together in unity, “not by their merits, but by his gift”.⁶⁹ Indeed, from this gift of the Spirit come all the other gifts which build up the body of Christ (1 Cor 12.8-11): since these all follow from the one gift, the Spirit is therefore the source of the Church’s unity.⁷⁰

If he has been given to us already, then an important aspect of the person of the Holy Spirit is that he is a pledge of God’s love for us, a sign of what will be given

⁶² *Io. eu. tr.* 15.12.2.

⁶³ *ep. Io. tr.* 8.12. See Dideberg (1975a), 243; (1975b), 232. Comeau (1930), 352 comments: “Augustin a pour ce texte paulinien une véritable prédilection. Quel est celui de ses sermons sur la charité, sur l’unité, où il ne le cite point?” For a detailed study of Augustine’s use of Rom 5.5, see La Bonnardière (1954).

⁶⁴ *Io. eu. tr.* 15.17.1.

⁶⁵ *en. Ps.* 67.25.

⁶⁶ *en. Ps.* 30[2].2.14.

⁶⁷ *ep. Io. tr.* 7.10.2. Augustine’s congregation seems to have become rather excited at this point, shouting out their appreciation of what he is saying to them.

⁶⁸ *en. Ps.* 118.14.4, 118.24.4.

⁶⁹ *en. Ps.* 132.10.

⁷⁰ *en. Ps.* 143.3.

more fully later on.⁷¹ As such, we are able to have a foretaste now of what we will one day know face to face (1 Cor 13.12).⁷² For this reason, Paul was able to put his hope in God despite many trials and sufferings, because in the Spirit he had received the promise of the love of God.⁷³ As a pledge of God's love, the Holy Spirit inflames us with love;⁷⁴ sent by Christ, he is a gift who symbolises the reciprocal love between the bridegroom and his bride.⁷⁵

Augustine makes extensive use of the traditional biblical imagery in portraying the Holy Spirit. If the Christian life can be compared with that of the Israelites wandering in the desert, then in order to avoid dying of thirst, we like them must drink of love, "the fount which the Lord wanted to set before us here in order that we might not fail on the way".⁷⁶ Since the Spirit is identified at Jn 7.37-39 as "living water", then the love from which we must drink is undoubtedly to be understood here as a reference to the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit of love who resources us on our pilgrimage through this world. He alone is the life-giving fountain; we must refrain from other water and other spirits, for "this is the Spirit of God, whom heretics and those who cut themselves off from the Church cannot have".⁷⁷ He is living water: the water of baptism washes the body, but only he can cleanse the soul. When we are thirsty, God gives us the Holy Spirit, a spring of water who gives eternal life,⁷⁸ slaking our thirst and transforming us into the likeness of Christ.⁷⁹ In short, just as a river gives life to a human city, it is the Spirit alone who sanctifies and gives life to the Church, the city of God.⁸⁰ In addition to images of life-giving water, Augustine also refers to the Holy Spirit as a refining fire. The Spirit is the fire of love with which Christ sets fire to the earth (Lk 12.49), burning up all those who are his enemies, but purifying the precious gold which is those who

⁷¹ *Io. eu. tr.* 32.5.2.

⁷² *Io. eu. tr.* 96.4.3.

⁷³ *en. Ps.* 36.2.9.

⁷⁴ *Io. eu. tr.* 104.1.2.

⁷⁵ *en. Ps.* 90.2.13.

⁷⁶ *ep. Io. tr.* 7.1.1. See also *Io. eu. tr.* 5.1. On the Spirit as living water, see Lamirande (1969), 111-114.

⁷⁷ *ep. Io. tr.* 6.11.2.

⁷⁸ *en. Ps.* 62.8.

⁷⁹ *en. Ps.* 142.12.

⁸⁰ *en. Ps.* 45.8. On the theme of the city of God in the psalms, see Fiedrowicz (2000), 49-50.

believe in him.⁸¹ He sets Christians on fire with love: “Begin to burn with love through the word you hear, and see what the fire that is God’s minister has done in you. ‘He makes spirits his angels, and blazing fires his ministers [Ps 103.4]’”⁸²

So far we have considered who the Holy Spirit is; now, we must examine what he does, bearing in mind, as of course Augustine does, that the two are inseparable. The Spirit anoints the members of Christ’s body, bringing them knowledge of the truth,⁸³ and teaching them spiritual things which they did not hitherto know.⁸⁴ The invisible anointing of the Spirit teaches them everything,⁸⁵ for the teacher who speaks to them inwardly through the power of the Spirit is none other than Christ himself.⁸⁶ Thus the teaching function of the Holy Spirit reveals the triune God: sent by the Father, the Spirit teaches in the name of the Son.⁸⁷ Christ’s teaching through the anointing of the Spirit reveals God the Trinity. “For he, that is, God, who gives growth, teaches you about everything by his anointing.”⁸⁸ It is God alone who teaches through the anointing of the Holy Spirit; not Augustine, nor the biblical authors, but “he who created you, and redeemed you, and called you, living in you through faith and his Spirit”.⁸⁹ Crucially, however, Augustine adds that it is through love poured into our hearts (Rom 5.5) that the Holy Spirit anoints and teaches us.⁹⁰ It is also through love that the Spirit prays within us. If we keep the commandments, that is, if we have the love which is the indwelling of the Spirit, then John tells us that we will receive from God whatever we ask (1 Jn 3.22). However, even Paul, who clearly had received the Spirit, was not granted his desire to have the thorn in his flesh taken from him (2 Cor 12.7-9).⁹¹ Augustine notes that the righteous are heard by God, and are answered according to their need for salvation, not

⁸¹ *en. Ps.* 96.7. On the Spirit as refining fire, see Lamirande (1969), 114-116.

⁸² *en. Ps.* 103.1.16. Augustine explains that “spirits” means here “spiritual people”, that is, those who have received the Holy Spirit.

⁸³ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.5.3.

⁸⁴ *Io. eu. tr.* 96.4.1; Maier (1960), 164-165.

⁸⁵ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.13.1.

⁸⁶ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.13.2.

⁸⁷ *Io. eu. tr.* 104.1.3.

⁸⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.13.3.

⁸⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 4.1: this also reminds us that the activity of creating, redeeming and calling is the work of Father, Son and Spirit together, inseparably one God.

⁹⁰ *Io. eu. tr.* 96.5.2.

⁹¹ *ep. Io. tr.* 6.5.1, 6.6.

necessarily according to their wishes. We ask for our desires to be granted, but the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf, asking instead for what we actually need. “Love itself groans, love itself prays: against it, he who gave it cannot close his ears.”⁹²

Perhaps, then, one of the most important functions of the Holy Spirit is that the love he offers gives us the inward strength through which we can glory in suffering.⁹³ Augustine offers a lengthy and somewhat contorted exegesis of Ps 59.10, of the imagery of Moab as a boiling pot. Even if the cooking pot symbolises tribulation (from Jer 1.13-14), so it also points to the hope of salvation.

“[Moab is] the pot of my hope [Ps 59.10]”, not of my destruction. See how the pot [symbolises] hope in tribulations; hear the apostle: “But we glorify even in tribulations”, he says, ... “knowing that tribulation produces patience, and patience approval, and approval hope [Rom 5.3-4]” ... But hope does not disappoint. How? Can you match the heat of the pot? Clearly you can, because “the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us [Rom 5.5]”.⁹⁴

Even if we endure suffering, the gift of the Spirit guarantees that we will prevail, because the fire of divine love will certainly overcome the heat of human troubles. Therefore the Holy Spirit gives us the promise of new life, a fact demonstrated symbolically in that it was the newly resurrected Christ who sent us the Spirit.⁹⁵

All these characteristics and functions of the Holy Spirit may be summed up in the simple statement that the Spirit is love. We have been anointed by “that love”, who is none other than the Holy Spirit.⁹⁶ Through the indwelling of the Spirit, God lives within us, and therefore we have love.

⁹² *ep. Io. tr.* 6.8.2.

⁹³ *en. Ps.* 138.20.

⁹⁴ *en. Ps.* 59.10.

⁹⁵ *Io. eu. tr.* 32.9.1.

⁹⁶ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.12.2.

“Nobody has ever seen God.” See, my most beloved people: “If we love one another, God remains in us, and his love will be perfected in us [1 Jn 4.12]”. Begin to love, and you will be made perfect. Have you begun to love? God has begun to live in you: love him who has begun to live in you so that by living within you more perfectly he may make you more perfect. “In this we know that we remain in him, and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit [1 Jn 4.13].”⁹⁷

We have not seen God, but God lives in us and is perfecting us in love. We know that he lives in us because we know that he has given us his Spirit; and we know that he has given us the Holy Spirit because of the love which fills our hearts. But this may lead us to ask which comes first, love or the Spirit? Augustine is alert to this question. Jn 14.15-16 says that if we love the Son, the Father and the Son will send us the Holy Spirit (or Paraclete); on the other hand, Rom 5.5 implies that love is the gift of the Spirit.⁹⁸ The answer to this question is therefore that the Spirit and love are absolutely to be identified with one another. Nobody can love without having the Spirit, but a person can have more or less of the Spirit according to the degree to which they love. “Whoever loves has the Holy Spirit, and having deserves to have more, and having more to love more.”⁹⁹

So the gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of love to those who receive him. The Spirit enables those in whom he dwells to keep the commandment of God: to believe in Jesus Christ and to love one another. Those who keep the commandment live in God, and God lives in them through the indwelling of the Spirit.

Surely it is obvious that the Holy Spirit effects this in human beings, that there might be all kinds of love in them? Surely it is obvious that, as the apostle Paul said, “the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us [Rom 5.5]”?¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ *ep. Io. tr.* 8.12. See Agaësse (1961), 76 and Dideberg (1975b), 166-171.

⁹⁸ *Io. eu. tr.* 74.1.2.

⁹⁹ *Io. eu. tr.* 74.2.1. See Maier (1960), 172.

¹⁰⁰ *ep. Io. tr.* 6.9: my slightly awkward phrase “all kinds of love” is an attempt to translate Augustine’s formula *dilectio et caritas*.

Indeed so, “for if you have found that you have love, you have the Spirit of God”.¹⁰¹ Love enables Christians to keep the commandments of God, and thus to fulfil the demands of the Law (Rom 13.10).¹⁰² The fruit of the Spirit is love (from Gal 5.22), with which we love God and love one another, which is the double commandment of Christ.¹⁰³ This, then, is how we can discern the one true Spirit amid all the false spirits and deceitful prophets abroad in the world. Augustine notes the existence of many who confess their faith in Christ, listing among them Arians, Eunomians, Macedonians, Cataphrygians and Novatians, all of whom the Church counted as heretics.¹⁰⁴ “Well, brothers, let us attend to their works, not to the tongue’s racket!”¹⁰⁵ These heretics confess their faith in Christ by their words, but deny him by their actions. We will see later in this chapter that Augustine employs the same argument with particularly devastating effect against the Donatists. Christ came to die for us, teaching us to love, laying down his life for his friends. Augustine addresses the heretics and schismatics thus:

See if they sound whole, see if love is there. You take yourselves away from the unity of the whole world, you divide the Church through schisms, you tear apart the body of Christ. He came in the flesh to bring together, you shout out just so as to scatter. Therefore this is the Spirit of God, who says that Jesus came in the flesh, who says it not with the tongue but with actions, who says it not by sounding but by loving.¹⁰⁶

It is necessary for us to test the spirits in order to discern the Spirit. We may know the Holy Spirit, who is love, by the love which is present only if he himself is present. Whoever has the Spirit has love, and love is manifested not only by confessing Christ with words but also in our actions, chiefly in love for one another. This was the love which the apostles displayed, who “burn with the Spirit of love”.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² *Io. eu. tr.* 17.6.2.

¹⁰³ *Io. eu. tr.* 87.1.2.

¹⁰⁴ *ep. Io. tr.* 6.12.

¹⁰⁵ *ep. Io. tr.* 6.13.2.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Io. eu. tr.* 23.3.2.

Those who retain the Holy Spirit will surely also hold love, because the gift of the Spirit is himself the gift of love within our hearts.¹⁰⁸

Augustine observes that the love of the world is in direct opposition to the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁹ This is because worldly love is not from God: it is *cupiditas* rather than *caritas*. This is why John says that the world cannot receive the Holy Spirit (Jn 14.17), because the invisible Spirit cannot be seen except by those who recognise that God is love. Nevertheless, while the Holy Spirit is unknown to the world (in the Johannine sense of that term: those who, in contrast with Christians, have not received him), he also fills the whole world. We have already referred to the fact that Augustine describes the Spirit as a pledge of the bridegroom's love for his bride, the Church. In the same place, he goes on to say that the fragrance of the bridegroom's ointment originates in heaven but fills the world.¹¹⁰ Even though Augustine does not explicitly unfold what he means by this remark, in the context its significance is clear enough, not least because he has just been talking about the pledge of the Son's love. The Holy Spirit is the one who anoints Christ and who anoints his Church. Sent by the Father and the Son, he inspires the Church which, as Augustine is adamant and as we will discuss in more detail later, is spread throughout the entire world.

Earlier in this section, we briefly examined Augustine's use of some of the biblical imagery of the Holy Spirit, such as the metaphors of living water and of refining fire. On a number of occasions, he also comments and improvises upon the imagery of the Spirit as a dove (from Mk 1.9). Augustine comments on the fact that Christ drove the moneychangers and sellers of doves out of the Temple (Jn 2.15-16).¹¹¹ This supports the point we made above in the context of Simon Magus, that the Spirit cannot be bought or sold. A favourite passage of his is the account of the dove bringing an olive branch back to Noah in the ark (Gn 8.11), which becomes for Augustine an icon, as it were, of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the

¹⁰⁸ *en. Ps.* 96.20.

¹⁰⁹ *Io. eu. tr.* 74.4; see Maier (1960), 163.

¹¹⁰ *en. Ps.* 90.2.13.

¹¹¹ *en. Ps.* 130.5.

Church. If the dove represents the Holy Spirit, so the ark depicts the Church, a common theme of patristic exegesis. But Augustine notes that the dove brings back an olive to the ark, signifying love.¹¹² This symbolism derives from the fact that love is “more excellent [1 Cor 12.31]”, just as olive oil floats on the top of other liquids.¹¹³ Therefore it is through love that the Holy Spirit brings those outside the Church into its fellowship. Elsewhere, Augustine adds to this narrative by observing that the return of the dove to the ark symbolises the unity of the Church: since mention of the Spirit reminds us of baptism, the dove’s return to the ark symbolises the fact that baptism belongs to the Church and is only valid within the Church’s unity.¹¹⁴ This is an unobvious reference to the Donatists, whom we will consider fully in the next chapter. Augustine sometimes extends the ornithological analogy to those who are opposed to the Holy Spirit. “Those who scatter the Church are not doves; they are hawks, they are kites.”¹¹⁵ On the other hand, the dove will show anger when necessary, fighting for its nest; unlike a raven, however, it will never display bitterness. So love can be angry, which is why admonition and correction are appropriate for Christians, but disunity can never be acceptable.¹¹⁶ It is the Holy Spirit who makes the members of the Church to be a unity;¹¹⁷ those who do not have love do not have the Spirit:

Interrogate your heart: if there is brotherly love there, be reassured. It is not possible to have love without the Spirit of God, for Paul exclaims, “The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us [Rom 5.5]”.¹¹⁸

We will examine Augustine’s understanding of love in more detail in the next section.

¹¹² *Io. eu. tr.* 7.3.2-7.3.3.

¹¹³ *Io. eu. tr.* 6.20: *supereminentiorem*. Although Augustine does not make this point, olive oil might also recall the role of the Spirit of love in anointing. As so often with Augustine, we need not be convinced by every last detail of his exegesis to appreciate the general point he is making.

¹¹⁴ *en. Ps.* 127.13.

¹¹⁵ *Io. eu. tr.* 5.12.1.

¹¹⁶ *ep. Io. tr.* 7.11.1, 7.11.2.

¹¹⁷ *en. Ps.* 54.11.

¹¹⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 6.10.2. On the certainty which comes from the gift of the Spirit, see Gallay (1955a), 13-16; Agaësse (1961), 85-87; and Dideberg (1975b), 105-106.

Love

So far in this chapter, we have considered Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity, noting in particular that the unity of the Church is the image of the unity of God. We then saw how the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Father and the Son, is the love which gives the Church its unity. We now need to examine Augustine's theology of love in more detail, and this will be an opportune moment to deal with one potentially very confusing issue to do with terminology. We saw in the previous chapter that when he was discussing the psychological triads in the second half of *On the Trinity*, he moved without any apparently good reason between talking about "loving" and "willing". In his first draft, the third term of his model is *amor*, but it then becomes *uoluntas*. We concluded that there was little or no difference implied in this change of vocabulary: the main reason for it was probably that he felt that "to will" made plain the active nature of the process. Unfortunately, the situation is more complicated even than this, since there are three basic Latin words for love available to Augustine, together with their cognates: *caritas*, *dilectio* and *amor*.

The main thing to note is that, since so much of Augustine's argument consists of commentary on scriptural passages, he normally uses the same word as appears in the text under discussion at that particular moment. Thus, since the *uetus Latina* scriptures with which he was familiar were themselves inconsistent in their use of vocabulary to translate the biblical languages, Augustine's own use is equally indiscriminate. In consequence, the three words are used more or less interchangeably, occasionally all three appearing in the same sentence! This makes translation into English very difficult, since we only have the one word "love" to cover all these options. On occasion, we have had to use the now somewhat archaic term "charity" alongside "love" in order to highlight what Augustine is doing; but in general, we have preferred to avoid this as far as possible. Augustine does in fact say that he sees no particular distinction between the three terms; and he explicitly rejects

the suggestion that *amor* is sometimes treated negatively but that *caritas* and *dilectio* are positive or Christian forms of love.¹¹⁹

Love is a theme, then, which is at the very heart of all Augustine's theology. He discusses love frequently, but his sermons on 1 Jn particularly focus on love, for "even if [the letter] seems to speak about other things, it returns to [love], and it wants to refer everything of which it speaks to love itself".¹²⁰ "Therefore we commend love; this epistle commends love."¹²¹ Love is the great pearl of Mt 13.45-46, which is so valuable that it is worth giving up everything else in order to obtain it.¹²² Love is "a sweet word but a sweeter act",¹²³ a simple phrase which sums up everything Augustine is trying to say in the ten homilies. He returns elsewhere to this notion of the sweetness of love: "So sweet it is, so sweet is the love which makes brothers to live in unity [Ps 132.1]."¹²⁴ Running out of time at the end of his eighth sermon on 1 Jn, he makes this impassioned remark:

The more freely I speak of love, the less I want this epistle to end. Nothing is more ardent in commending love. Nothing sweeter is preached to you; nothing healthier is drunk, unless by living well you strengthen in you the gift of God;¹²⁵

and it will of course be recalled that "the gift of God", who causes us to live well (that is, to live in God) is none other than the Holy Spirit, the love of God. In the rest of this section, we will consider a number of different aspects of Augustine's thought. The Christian life is a life characterised by love. We are commanded to love God and to love our neighbours, and this love makes us like God. We must love our enemies, and we must love those who sin against us, because through love our

¹¹⁹ *ciu.* 14.7. Despite the apparent clarity this passage from *ciu.* brings to the issue, this question has in the past been a source of considerable scholarly debate, at least since the publication of Nygren (1953). For discussion, see, for example, O'Donovan (1980) and Canning (1993).

¹²⁰ *ep. Io. tr.* 5.7.1.

¹²¹ *ep. Io. tr.* 5.4.1.

¹²² *ep. Io. tr.* 5.7.2: see Agaësse (1961), 76. At *conf.* 8.1.2, Augustine describes his situation immediately prior to his conversion, in which he had found this pearl, but still held back from possessing it for himself.

¹²³ *ep. Io. tr.* 8.1.

¹²⁴ *en. Ps.* 132.1.

¹²⁵ *ep. Io. tr.* 8.14.2.

sins are forgiven. Without love, we can have no unity in Christ; and without unity, we self-evidently lack the love that is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The defining characteristic of the Christian is love, the love which has been given to them by God. “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called and should be the sons of God.”¹²⁶ The followers of Christ are therefore distinguished from everyone else above all by their love for one another.¹²⁷ All who run the race which is the Christian life love one another, and indeed the race itself is nothing other than love.¹²⁸ So the only thing which makes a human life to be a Christian life is love. In a series of images taken from the psalms, Augustine describes the results of this mutual love. Those who have love in their hearts become the throne of God;¹²⁹ they are the inheritance of God, brought into being through love;¹³⁰ they are the temple of God, its living stones joined by love;¹³¹ they are the new Zion, not constricted but surrounded by love, and which nothing can defeat.¹³² Above all, the members of the Church are members of the city of God, one of Augustine’s favourite ideas:

When people love each other, and love their God who lives in them, they make a city for God. For the city is held together by a particular law, and the law of this city is love. And God himself is love, as scripture says clearly, ‘God is love [1 Jn 4.8]’. So whoever is full of love is full of God, and when many people are full of love, they make a city for God.¹³³

As citizens of this city of God, Christians are inspired by the Holy Spirit to sing a new song of love,¹³⁴ a song of peace, love and unity which resounds throughout the whole world:¹³⁵ an important point to which we will return later. Their hearts are

¹²⁶ *ep. Io. tr.* 4.4.

¹²⁷ *Io. eu. tr.* 65.3.1.

¹²⁸ *en. Ps.* 39.11.

¹²⁹ *en. Ps.* 98.3.

¹³⁰ *en. Ps.* 81.7.

¹³¹ *en. Ps.* 44.31. For commentary on this sermon, see Lamirande (1969), 24-27.

¹³² *en. Ps.* 47.12, 47.13.

¹³³ *en. Ps.* 98.4. On the God of love and the city of God, see Dideberg (1975a), 244; and more generally, Dyson (2001).

¹³⁴ *en. Ps.* 66.6, 86.1, 143.16: on the new song of love, see Berrouard (1993), 429-430.

¹³⁵ *en. Ps.* 149.1-3.

altars on which they offer sacrifices to God, burnt-offerings of divine love.¹³⁶ “Of the fire of good love the Lord says: ‘I have come to set fire to the world [Lk 12.49]’, with which fire may the fervent in spirit burn, those who are aflame with the love of God and neighbour.”¹³⁷ This is the fiery love without which, even if we hand over our mortal bodies to be burned, we gain nothing (1 Cor 13.3); it is the inward root from which all our actions must spring, since outward appearances are irrelevant.¹³⁸ We must examine our own consciences to see if our actions result from love, knowing that we are under judgement from the God who will nevertheless be our refuge as long as we keep his commandments of love.¹³⁹

Augustine frequently refers to the double commandment: the divine imperative of love for God and for our neighbours (Mk 12.29-31).¹⁴⁰ In keeping with his fondness for numerological exegesis, any scriptural references to the number two are interpreted as being about this double commandment: for example, the flock giving birth to twins (Song 4.2) is an allegory of the Church’s love of God and of neighbour.¹⁴¹ Elsewhere he somewhat poetically suggests that earthly pilgrims can fly to their heavenly city on “the two wings of love”.¹⁴² The double commandment is the basic rule which underpins any subsequent regulations for Christian living.¹⁴³ The twofold love of God and of each other is the means by which the Law itself is fulfilled, as we will see a little later;¹⁴⁴ and this fulfilment is the gift of the Spirit, in whom we are able to love God and one another.¹⁴⁵ The love of God is perfected in us if we keep the word of God, of which not the least important commandments is that we love one another:

¹³⁶ *en. Ps.* 64.4, 137.2.

¹³⁷ *en. Ps.* 79.13. “Fervent in spirit” is undoubtedly what Augustine says here, but “fervent in the [Holy] Spirit” should probably be understood implicitly.

¹³⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 8.9.2. *Radix* here refers back to an earlier metaphor at *ep. Io. tr.* 7.8.

¹³⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 6.2-6.4: see Agaësse (1961), 81-84 and Dideberg (1975b), 99-106.

¹⁴⁰ For example, and referring only to the more systematic works, *doctr. chr.* 1.36.40; *trin.* 8.7.10, 15.17.30; and *ench.* 32.121. On the double commandment, see especially O’Donovan (1980) and Canning (1993).

¹⁴¹ *en. Ps.* 77.44, 94.11.

¹⁴² *en. Ps.* 149.5.

¹⁴³ *reg.* 2.1.

¹⁴⁴ *en. Ps.* 140.2.

¹⁴⁵ *en. Ps.* 118.14.2.

“But he who keeps his word, truly is perfected in him the love of God [1 Jn 2.5].” Attend to the Gospel, if it does not have this commandment: “A new commandment I give to you”, he says, “that you love one another [Jn 13.34]”.¹⁴⁶

If we keep the commandments, then we will have love; in fact, love comes first, since if we live in God we are given the grace which enables us to keep the commandments.¹⁴⁷ The two commandments are intimately connected, as we have already seen, since we demonstrate our love for the invisible God by love for our visible neighbours, and we can only truly love each other if we have the love of God. Whoever loves their neighbour loves God, since God is love and love is God.¹⁴⁸ Of course, the point is that the love common to each relationship is itself the Spirit of God.

For whoever loves God cannot be contemptuous of his commandment that they should love their neighbour; and whoever loves their neighbour in a holy and spiritual way, what do they love in them unless it is God?¹⁴⁹

Note the reference here to “holy and spiritual”: we love one another only through the gift of the Holy Spirit. If we claim to love God but do not love our brothers and sisters, we are obviously lying; but if we love one another, then we love God.

What then? Whoever loves his brother also loves God. One must of necessity love God, one must of necessity love love itself. Can one love his brother and not love love? One must of necessity love love. What then? Because one loves love, therefore does one love God? Certainly: loving love, one loves God. Or have you forgotten that you said a little while before: “God is love [1 Jn 4.8, 16]”? If God is love, whoever loves love, loves God. Therefore love your brother.¹⁵⁰

God is love, so when we love, we love through love itself; we are caught up in the trinitarian dynamics of love in love with love.

¹⁴⁶ *ep. Io. tr.* 1.9.1. On the “new commandment”, see Dideberg (1975b), 61-67 and Berrouard (1993), 428-429.

¹⁴⁷ *Io. eu. tr.* 82.3.1.

¹⁴⁸ *Io. eu. tr.* 83.3.2.

¹⁴⁹ *Io. eu. tr.* 65.2.1: see Canning (1993), 275-276.

¹⁵⁰ *ep. Io. tr.* 9.10. See Dideberg (1975b), 147-148; Van Bavel (1986), 176 = Van Bavel (1987), 74.

Near the beginning of his ninth homily on 1 Jn, Augustine exclaims three times that “God is love [1 Jn 4.8, 16]”, describing this as a very brief statement but also a very important one.¹⁵¹ A few years later, he observed that anyone who argues that a person can have love without having God is mad, since God cannot be had without God.¹⁵² God is love, and love is God and love is only from God. God is eternal, and therefore love is also eternal, never beginning nor ending, which is why it is written “let brotherly love remain [Heb 13.1]”.¹⁵³ To love is to see God, since those who see God are those who love him and who love one another.¹⁵⁴ For now, we see God in our mutual love, but in the future we will see him face to face. Christians are therefore called to be patient, but this is a patience based on faith, hope, and above all love. “For there are people who die with patience, but there are certain perfect ones who live with patience.”¹⁵⁵ A “perfect one” such as these does not merely die patiently, but wills “to be dissolved and to be with Christ [Phil 1.23]”; the person in whom the love of God has been perfected “lives patiently and dies delightedly”.¹⁵⁶ Such a person has faith in the face of the judgement which is to come, because they possess the perfect and sincere love of God. We will have more to say about patience a little later. This love joins us inextricably to God, a bond which is indissoluble since it is itself nothing less than God.

“My soul is glued behind you [Ps 62.9].” Where is this glue? This glue is love. Have love, which will glue your soul behind God. Not with God, but behind God, so that he goes before and you follow afterwards.¹⁵⁷

We must hold onto love and hold onto the Spirit of love. Augustine closes his ninth homily thus:

¹⁵¹ *ep. Io. tr. 9.1.2: deus caritas est ... deus dilectio est ... deus dilectio est.* There does not seem to be any significance here in Augustine’s varying terminology.

¹⁵² *pat. 18.15.*

¹⁵³ *ep. Io. tr. 8.3.*

¹⁵⁴ *en. Ps. 149.4; Dideberg (1975b), 163.*

¹⁵⁵ *ep. Io. tr. 9.2.2.*

¹⁵⁶ *ep. Io. tr. 9.2.3: see Bochet (1982), 287 n. 4.*

¹⁵⁷ *en. Ps. 62.17.* Lienhard (1993) offers a fascinating survey of Augustine’s use of *adglutinare* and its cognates.

Let us not retreat from the way; let us hold to the unity of the Church, let us hold to Christ, let us hold to love. Let us not be torn from the members of his bride, let us not be torn from faith, so that we may glory in his presence: and we will remain secure in him, now through faith, then through sight, of whom we have so great a guarantee, the gift of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁸

Notice how Augustine again explicitly relates Church unity to mutual love, and how this unity in love is guaranteed by the gift of the Spirit, who is love. Nobody can have love without having God the Holy Spirit; but nobody can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and fail to have love, for he is the love of God.

In one of his characteristic lyrical digressions, Augustine describes his desire to speak about love. He is like a cow lovingly feeding her calves: just as through love the cow offers her milk to her young, so it is because of his love for his gathered congregation that Augustine is offering them his words on the subject of love.¹⁵⁹ But even if he has a particular pastoral responsibility for his brothers and sisters, Augustine's love for them is nothing more nor less than that which all Christians are commanded to live by. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us this love for the Church and for one another.

We also receive the Holy Spirit, therefore, if we love the Church, if we are joined together by love, if we rejoice in the name and faith of the Catholic [Church]. Let us believe, brothers, that as much as a person loves the Church of Christ, so much does that person have the Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁰

In order to prove that love is given by the Spirit, Augustine presents an interesting exegesis of several texts, the first of which is "He covers the higher parts [of the sky] with waters [Ps 103.3]".¹⁶¹ Since 1 Cor 12.31 tells us that love is the more excellent way, it follows that the higher parts of the sky are love. Therefore love is covered with water; and after all we know from Rom 5.5 that love is poured into our hearts, rather like water. Water of course brings to mind the sacrament of baptism; and so

¹⁵⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 9.11.2.

¹⁵⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 9.1.1.

¹⁶⁰ *Io. eu. tr.* 32.8.1: see Comeau (1930), 352-353.

¹⁶¹ *en. Ps.* 103.1.9.



love is the higher way, conferred with baptism and the other sacraments. Now, Rom 5.5 also says that it is the Holy Spirit who pours love into our hearts; and the Spirit is the living water of Jn 7.37-39. Not only that, but the Spirit was given only after Jesus had ascended to the higher parts of the sky. This conclusively demonstrates that love is the gift of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶²

Those who have received the Spirit are filled with love, which manifests itself in the love of Christians for one another. “Lord, I have loved the beauty of your house [Ps 25.8]”:¹⁶³ the Lord’s house is the Church, and so we are to love the members of the Church, who are rightly described as the beauty of the house of the Lord. If we love God our Father, so we must also love the Church as our mother (and in this Augustine is following his great African predecessor Cyprian): “Let us love the Lord our God, let us love his Church: him as our Father, her as our mother; him as our Lord, her as his handmaid, because we are his handmaid’s children.”¹⁶⁴ The key thing here is that, as the sons and daughters of God and of his Church, we are also brothers and sisters one with another. “But this marriage is compacted by great love”;¹⁶⁵ and it is therefore with the same love that the members of the Church are bound together in one great household and fellowship. Those who remain outside the house do not have this love – they lack both their mother and their Father, as Cyprian would have put it – and so they must be wounded with love (Song 2.5) in order that they might be incorporated into the body of Christ.¹⁶⁶ For without love nobody can be saved. A reflective Augustine does on at least one occasion concede that schismatic Christians might suffer a lesser punishment than others who utterly deny Christ, but without love there is still no possibility for them of salvation. The best gift of the Spirit of love goes only to the heirs of God, but this does not mean

¹⁶² *en. Ps.* 103.1.10. The key point here is the juxtaposition of the New Testament texts; the somewhat strained exegesis of the psalm merely provides Augustine with a vehicle for one of his more entertaining demonstrations of interpretative virtuosity. We should not be too critical, but enjoy them for what they are: if nothing else, they point to the essential unity of the scriptures.

¹⁶³ *en. Ps.* 25[2].12.

¹⁶⁴ *en. Ps.* 88.2.14; compare with Cyprian, *De unitate* 6.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *en. Ps.* 143.13.

that others are left entirely bereft, even if what they are given has no power to save.¹⁶⁷

As we just noted, all the members of the Church share a common inheritance as the children of God, and we must therefore love one another without exception as brothers and sisters.¹⁶⁸ Those who hate their brothers are in darkness, a cause of scandal; but those who love their brothers walk in the light.¹⁶⁹ “So how is there no scandal in the person who loves their brother? Because whoever loves their brother bears everything for the sake of unity, for in the unity of love is brotherly love.”¹⁷⁰ Augustine observes that 1 Jn is mostly concerned with the double commandment of the love of God and the love of one another; but he then recalls that we are also clearly commanded to love our enemies and those who hate us (for example, Mt 5.44). John is silent on this subject: why is this?¹⁷¹ The answer is that we should love our enemies in the hope that they might become our brothers and sisters. “For you do not love in them what they are, but what you want them to become.”¹⁷² God gives us an example of perfect love, desiring eternal life and fellowship with those who were his enemies, loving those who were enemies of love.¹⁷³ God loves sinners, not because of their sin, but because he wants to forgive them their sins and transform them. In imitation of this example, we must remember that our enemy is not the person who hates us, but rather the sinfulness which is in them; we must not return evil for evil, but love our enemies and urgently desire their transformation into our brothers and sisters, the children of God.¹⁷⁴ This is the way which Christ walked, the way of perfect love, the way of the cross;¹⁷⁵ and even on his cross he prayed for forgiveness for those who were persecuting him (Lk 23.34).¹⁷⁶ Implicit here is the

¹⁶⁷ *pat.* 26.23, 28.25. It is interesting that these words were written after the Donatists had largely been defeated. In victory, Augustine was perhaps able to offer crumbs of comfort to those with whom the exigencies of conflict had hitherto required ruthlessness.

¹⁶⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.7.3.

¹⁶⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 1.11.1, 1.12.1: Dideberg (1975b), 82.

¹⁷⁰ *ep. Io. tr.* 1.12.3.

¹⁷¹ *ep. Io. tr.* 8.4. On love of enemies, see Dideberg (1975b), 67-73 and Canning (1993), 198-215.

¹⁷² *ep. Io. tr.* 8.10.1.

¹⁷³ *ep. Io. tr.* 9.3.2.

¹⁷⁴ *ep. Io. tr.* 8.10.2, 8.11.

¹⁷⁵ *ep. Io. tr.* 1.9.1: see Canning (1993), 73.

¹⁷⁶ *ep. Io. tr.* 8.10.3.

recollection of our own sinfulness, that all who have been saved were once enemies of God. We must imitate God, who is good even to those who hate him.¹⁷⁷ We must love our enemies and those who hate us, hating only their sins but loving the sinners,¹⁷⁸ because we want them to cease being our enemies and to become united with us as our brothers and sisters in the unity of the Church.¹⁷⁹

For this reason, true love can never be feeble or sentimental, since the obligations of love for sinners will often require us to seek the correction of their sins. “Love of love itself does not permit you to overlook anyone who is undisciplined”.¹⁸⁰ In order to avoid the destruction of those whom we love, we must be willing to apply loving discipline in order to chasten sin. This explains why Augustine gradually came around to a reluctant support as a last resort of the coercion of the Church’s enemies, as we will see in the next chapter: “[the Church] persecutes for the sake of love.”¹⁸¹ It is also why he has sometimes been portrayed as having initiated sixteen hundred years’ worth of ecclesiastical abuse of power, from the Crusades to the Inquisition and beyond. Such a conclusion is a serious misreading of Augustine’s intentions. In the context of his own monastic community, he set down some general principles for how this loving discipline should be applied in practice. The emphasis is clearly on mutual encouragement and, where necessary, protection for the weaker members of the community, rather than harsh ecclesiastical legalism. If someone observes a sin in another, they should discuss it immediately in order to prevent it developing, only reporting it to superiors if the sin is repeated.¹⁸² Only if the sinner remains recalcitrant should he be punished by being expelled from the community, and this only to avoid leading others astray; even this penalty, it should be noted, is merely that of expulsion from the monastery, not permanent excommunication from the Church itself.¹⁸³ Always, the motivation

¹⁷⁷ *en. Ps.* 54.4.

¹⁷⁸ *en. Ps.* 138.27-28. On hatred of sins rather than sinners, see Fiedrowicz (2000), 34.

¹⁷⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.7.3.

¹⁸⁰ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.7.2.

¹⁸¹ *correct.* 2.11.

¹⁸² *reg.* 3.4.7-3.4.8.

¹⁸³ *reg.* 3.4.9. This distinction is very important. The monastic calling is a freely undertaken ideal, but it is not necessary to be a monk in order to be saved. Therefore the monastery has an obligation to protect itself against obstinate sinners; but the Church as a whole must tolerate its sinful members,

must be the desire to correct sin, and these rules are about “love for the person and hate for the fault”.¹⁸⁴ Augustine acknowledges that the discipline of the young might appear harsh, but he reminds his monks that they are themselves under the judgement of God, who knows that such correction springs only from generous love.¹⁸⁵ In any case, Augustine introduces all these regulations with the comment that he loves those to whom he is writing, and that he is loath to visit them because he knows that he would then have no alternative but to punish some of them¹⁸⁶ – the words of a very reluctant disciplinarian indeed!

The perfection of our love for one another is when we are willing even to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters, as Jesus himself did for us and as Peter was instructed to do (Jn 21.17).¹⁸⁷ But if love is perfected in dying for one another, it begins in a life of loving service:

If you are not yet prepared to die for a brother, be prepared to give to him from your abundance. Let love stir in your belly so that you do not act ostentatiously but from the inner marrow of mercy, so that you consider the one who is in need. For if you are not able to give to your brother from your superabundance, nor can you lay down your life for him ... “But he who has worldly possessions and sees his brother in need, and closes his belly from him: how can the love of God endure in him [1 Jn 3.17]?”¹⁸⁸

The perfection of love is to lay down our lives for our friends (Jn 15.13). But since love has to begin somewhere, we must start by giving to those in need.

From here is the beginning of love. Begun in this way, if you nourish it with the word of God and the hope of the future life, you will come to that perfection, that you may be ready to lay down your life for your brothers.¹⁸⁹

seeking their loving correction but ultimately trusting in the judgement of God. See Van Bavel (1996), 79-80.

¹⁸⁴ *reg.* 3.4.10. See Canning (1993), 214, 243.

¹⁸⁵ *reg.* 3.6.3.

¹⁸⁶ *reg.* 1.1.

¹⁸⁷ *ep. Io. tr.* 5.11. Augustine reminds his listeners that his threefold declaration of love culminated in Peter’s death being foretold by Christ.

¹⁸⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 5.12.2. On charitable works, see Dideberg (1975b), 97-98 and Canning (1993), 179-181.

¹⁸⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 6.1.2: see Agaësse (1961), 66-68.

Care for the less fortunate (what we might call charity) is thus an important element of Christian love. We must help carry one another's burdens in order to fulfil Christ's law of love, "'bearing', [Paul] says, 'each other in love, trying to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace [Eph 4.2-3]'"¹⁹⁰ But this immediately suggests another way in which we must bear with one another. For among our many needs is the necessity for forgiveness for our many transgressions. We must therefore bear the burden of one another's sinful misdemeanours in order to fulfil the law of love, forgiving each other in the hope that our own sins may be forgiven through love.¹⁹¹ The love which comes through the gift of the Holy Spirit enables us to practise mutual forgiveness and to live in unity as one body;¹⁹² equally, the true patience which is the mark of those who are members of the body is only found in those who have received the Spirit of love.¹⁹³

Love obliges us to remain with those who are a trial to us.¹⁹⁴ Anger at sin must not develop into hatred for sinful brothers and sisters: good people must not fall into the trap of themselves becoming bad because they stop loving one another.¹⁹⁵

Let us be in concord here, let us love our neighbour as ourselves. Love your brother and sister as you love yourself, and have peace with them. It is, nevertheless, impossible for quarrels not to arise, such as have arisen between brothers and between the saints, between Barnabas and Paul; but not such as destroy concord, not such as to murder love.¹⁹⁶

From his pastoral experience as a bishop, Augustine is realistic about human relationships. It is inevitable that disagreements will arise within the fellowship, but the crucial thing is that these should not lead to outright hostility and disunity. What is good for the whole community is always more important than the good of the individual. For this reason we must grow in love for one another, in order to be built

¹⁹⁰ *Io. eu. tr.* 17.9.2: see Canning (1993), 20, 23.

¹⁹¹ *en. Ps.* 129.4-5.

¹⁹² *en. Ps.* 143.7.

¹⁹³ *pat.* 23.20. On patience as the expression of love, see Borgomeo (1972), 378-386.

¹⁹⁴ *en. Ps.* 54.9.

¹⁹⁵ *en. Ps.* 30[2].2.4, 30[2].3.2.

¹⁹⁶ *en. Ps.* 33.2.19.

up into one body.¹⁹⁷ There is a certain natural ordering of love, which tends towards equality: we look forward to a time when there will be no more need for works of love because all are at last equal under God.¹⁹⁸ God has given us stewardship of his creation, so we should not seek any more than we have already been given: “everything will be subject to us, if we are subject to God”.¹⁹⁹ We should not glory over anybody else, but live by the radical ethic of loving our neighbours as ourselves. Consequently, those who have been called to positions of authority must exercise their leadership through self-giving service, seeking to be loved rather than feared; those under them should offer loving obedience, having compassion for the responsibilities of their offices.²⁰⁰ In any case, all Augustine’s rules about the Christian community can be summed up by the need for mutual love.²⁰¹

It is essential, then that we are deeply rooted in love (Eph 3.17); indeed, since love is the defining characteristic of the Christian, as we have seen, it follows that anyone who is a member of the fellowship is by definition established in love.²⁰² There are those who live apparently good lives, giving to the poor or even dying for one another, without necessarily having the brotherly love which Augustine advocates. Members of heresies and schisms in particular come in for his condemnation, for they have divided the fellowship of the Church. Others are motivated not by the hope of eternal life but by the desire for a good reputation in this world. But they gain nothing from such misguided endeavours if they do not have love.²⁰³ For love is the more excellent way, without which we have nothing (1 Cor 12.31, 13.3).²⁰⁴ Whether or not our actions spring from love is the only question which is of any importance, because without love nothing else is of any benefit to

¹⁹⁷ *reg.* 3.5.2.

¹⁹⁸ *ep. lo. tr.* 8.5.2.

¹⁹⁹ *ep. lo. tr.* 8.7.2.

²⁰⁰ *reg.* 3.7.3-3.7.4. Augustine’s rule that Christian leaders should seek to be loved rather than feared may be compared with Machiavelli’s conclusion that it is better for secular princes to be feared than loved, clearly illustrating the contrast between the *ciuitas dei* and the *ciuitas terrena*: see *Il principe* 17.

²⁰¹ *reg.* 3.8.1.

²⁰² *en. Ps.* 51.12.

²⁰³ *ep. lo. tr.* 6.2.1.

²⁰⁴ *en. Ps.* 146.10.

us.²⁰⁵ If we possess the Holy Spirit of love, we are able to endure patiently whatever may befall us in this life, in order that we may attain salvation in the eternal life which is to come.²⁰⁶ Love is the fulfilment of the Law (Rom 13.10), and the law of God cannot therefore be fulfilled other than with the help of God, because love is the Spirit of God.²⁰⁷ It is through love, the gift of the Holy Spirit, that the Law is perfected in us, in other words, that we are made righteous and are saved.²⁰⁸ This is another way of saying that we are saved not by our own efforts but by grace, since this love is a gift from God.²⁰⁹ In a vivid description, Augustine describes the how the Spirit of love thereby prevents our feet from stumbling against the stone (Ps 90.12) on which the Law is written.²¹⁰ We are commanded to have love, because love leads to confession of our sins, and confession leads to forgiveness and fellowship with God and with one another. For “love covers a multitude of sins [1 Pet 4.8]”.²¹¹

The love which saves is a gift of grace, unknown except to those who have received it. The world does not know it, and does not recognise where it comes from, because the world does not know its God. The human race is divided into those who love God with the love that has been given to them, and those who do not, preferring instead the things of the world.²¹² This statement echoes Augustine’s doctrine of the two cities, for the citizens of these two cities are divided only by the different objects of their love. A recurring theme in his interpretation of the psalms is to identify Jerusalem and Babylon as the types of the city of God and the earthly city, their names actually meaning “peace” and “confusion” respectively. These inhabitants of these cities remain mixed until the end of the age, so we must determine for ourselves to which we belong by examining what it is that we love. “Two loves make those cities: love of God makes Jerusalem, love of the world

²⁰⁵ *Io. eu. tr.* 32.8.2.

²⁰⁶ *pat.* 29.26.

²⁰⁷ *Io. eu. tr.* 26.1.3.

²⁰⁸ *en. Ps.* 67.11, 143.2.

²⁰⁹ *en. Ps.* 71.15.

²¹⁰ *en. Ps.* 90.2.8.

²¹¹ *ep. Io. tr.* 1.6.1, 5.3.3.

²¹² *ep. Io. tr.* 4.4.

makes Babylon. So everyone must ask themselves what they love, and thereby find to which city they belong.”²¹³ These two objects of human love, God and the world, are incompatible with each other. The difference is that only one of these is true *caritas*, while the other is destructive *cupiditas*. “Love of God and love of neighbour are [both] called love; but love of the world and love of the things of the world are called greed. Greed must be held back, love must be awakened.”²¹⁴ We must therefore take heed of what it is that we love, for either we love God, or we do not. “Let the love of the world retreat, and let that of God live in you; let the better love take its place ... Whoever loves the world does not have the Father’s love in them.”²¹⁵ Those who are consumed by worldly love do not therefore have the love of God, which is why they hate each other. They are like Cain, who murdered his brother, rejected by God because his heart was full not of love but of envy.²¹⁶ Anybody who hears this should examine their conscience and, if necessary, seek to be transformed through the gift of love, for otherwise they are guilty of the terrifying charge of defying God.²¹⁷ A person can attend church, be baptised, prophesy, even receive the sacraments; but unless they have love, they are evil, and cannot be deemed to be members of the city of God.²¹⁸ They are therefore in the terrifying darkness which is the absence of love and the absence of God,²¹⁹ since there can be no fellowship or communion between darkness and the God of light.²²⁰

Love is being made perfect in those to whom the Spirit has been given, so that they need have nothing to fear on the day of judgement.²²¹ There are, of course, those who do not fear judgement because they do not believe that it will come.

²¹³ *en. Ps.* 64.2. Compare with the very similar observation that opens *ciu.* 14.28: members of the earthly city love themselves and are contemptuous of God, but the members of the heavenly city love their God and are therefore contemptuous of themselves. See Studer (1997a), 59.

²¹⁴ *en. Ps.* 31[2].5. See Pontet (1945), 541.

²¹⁵ *ep. Io. tr.* 2.8.2. On worldly love, see Dideberg (1975b), 175-189.

²¹⁶ *ep. Io. tr.* 5.8, 5.9.

²¹⁷ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.10, 7.5.

²¹⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 7.6.

²¹⁹ *Io. eu. tr.* 25.5.3-25.5.4. Augustine refers to the fear of the disciples in the boat at night (Jn 6.16-20), equating the darkness of the night to the darkness of the absence of love (1 Jn 2.11). This darkness places the ship in danger, and since this recalls the image of the Church as an ark, Augustine is warning of the danger if members of the Church fail to love and be at unity with one another.

²²⁰ *ep. Io. tr.* 1.4-1.5.3.

²²¹ *ep. Io. tr.* 9.2.1. On the proper relationship between fear and perfect love, see Burnaby (1938), 214-216, Agaësse (1961), 68-75, Dideberg (1975b), 190-201 and Berrouard (1988), 519-522.

Augustine is not talking to about them. But there are many who are afraid of what they know to be their impending judgement: to them, he says that they should allow God to begin to correct and renew them, so that instead of fearing God they should begin to desire him and to love him.²²² This is the love, the gift of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5.5), which grants us the courage to proclaim Christ, since “perfect love casts out fear [1 Jn 4.18]”.²²³ Augustine gives Peter as an example, who had previously denied Christ, but later became a principal witness to him after having received the Pentecostal Spirit. There is no place for fear in perfect love, since as love increases, so fear decreases; but it is “as if fear prepares a place for love”.²²⁴ Fear is like a surgical scalpel which cuts us open in order to allow the surgeon to heal us. “So let fear occupy your heart, that it may lead love in”.²²⁵ But so great is our heavenly Physician that the surgery which lets love into our hearts does not even result in scars. In short, the fear of God is the necessary preliminary for God’s love, but “fear is the medicine, love is health”.²²⁶ It occurs to Augustine that the text from 1 Jn 4.18, quoted above, seems to be contradicted by another text: “the fear of the Lord is pure, remaining for ever and ever [Ps 18.10]”.²²⁷ How can the fear of the Lord remain, if fear is cast out by perfect love? He solves this problem by distinguishing between impure fear and pure fear. Initially we are afraid of being punished by God, but this fear is eliminated as we are perfected in the love of God; we then come more and more to have what Augustine describes as a pure fear, which is to desire God and to wish fervently not to be abandoned by God.²²⁸ Although this explanation is somewhat contorted, it is valid as a description of the two different conditions of the human soul, although it is perhaps unfortunate that they can both be described by using the same word. Imperfect, impure fear is therefore our state prior to receiving the Spirit, rightly afraid of condemnation; perfect, pure fear is our state after having received the love of God, no longer anxious about punishment, but “holy, on fire

²²² *ep. Io. tr. 9.2.2.*

²²³ *Io. eu. tr. 92.2.2.*

²²⁴ *ep. Io. tr. 9.4.1.*

²²⁵ *ep. Io. tr. 9.4.2.*

²²⁶ *ibid.*

²²⁷ *ep. Io. tr. 9.5.1.*

²²⁸ *ep. Io. tr. 9.5.2.*

with longing for the kingdom of God”.²²⁹ We can then perhaps more usefully describe this second state as “holy fear”. The Holy Spirit imparts the fear of the Lord, but those who receive him are not afraid of being judged or punished, but only of being separated from the love of God.²³⁰

For Augustine, the supreme revelation and example of God’s love is of course to be found in the person of Jesus Christ. Those who have the holy fear which we have just outlined are those who walk in the ways of the Lord (Ps 127.1), and in addition to their pure fear they also have pure love.²³¹ Augustine gives the example of two women, one faithful, the other an adulterer, both of whom fear their absent husbands: the first is fearful lest he should not return, but the second is fearful lest he should indeed come back! “Absent is a certain person to whom we are pledged, absent is he who gave us the Holy Spirit as a pledge, absent is he who redeemed us by his blood.”²³² But if Christ is absent, what is it, then, that we love about Christ, if not the fact that he has loved us first? “When we hear that he died for us, what do we love? Love is loved. He loved us, so that we might love him in return; and so that we can love him in return, he has sent us his Spirit.”²³³ Christ loved us, and because we have been given the Holy Spirit, we are able to return his love. Through love, we love God because God has loved us first: he is the bridegroom, and we are his one chaste and holy bride. Despite being ugly and sinful, the bride is loved by the bridegroom, in order that through transforming love she might become beautiful and sinless.²³⁴

“Your arrows are sharp and very powerful [Ps 44.6]”: words that pierce the heart, that arouse love, which is why in the Song of Songs she says, “I am wounded by love [Song 2.5]”. For she says that she is wounded by love, that is, she says that she is in love, she says that she

²²⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 9.8.1: a phrase itself reminding us that this condition is brought about by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the fire of Pentecost.

²³⁰ *en. Ps.* 18[2].10: see Vincent (1990), 259.

²³¹ *en. Ps.* 127.8.

²³² *ibid.*

²³³ *ibid.*

²³⁴ *en. Ps.* 44.3.

burns with love, that she sighs for the bridegroom from whom she received the arrow of the Word.²³⁵

Notice that this is another passage which has an underlying trinitarian structure. Christ the Son sends the Holy Spirit as an arrow of love.

Given that our bridegroom is away from us, as in the illustration above, Augustine asks whether his bride has kept herself chaste: does she want him to return, or not? She is only chaste and holy if she has love, which is apparent from whether or not her members love one another.²³⁶ The love Christ displayed on his cross is the love the members of the Church must have for one another. Christ asked Peter three times if he loved him, for it was too important a thing to ask only once.²³⁷ We must give God's love back to him, as an offering of thanks for what we have received from him. Jesus Christ died in atonement for all; Stephen prayed that his murderers might be forgiven; and Paul, who had been among Stephen's persecutors, then spent his life in the service of the Church.²³⁸ Thus the love of God is passed on through Christian love for one another. If we love one another, we share in the love of Christ. Peter was asked three times if he loved Jesus (Jn 21.15-17):

What could Peter, who loved him, give back to him? Hear what! "Feed my sheep", that is, do for your brothers what I did for you. I have redeemed everyone by my blood: do not waver from dying for the confession of the truth, so that the others may imitate you.²³⁹

If we are conspicuous for our love of God and one another, then we take our part in God's mission to the world, since our love will draw others into the love of God. So the members of the Christian fellowship must overflow with love, desiring others to have this love as well:

²³⁵ *en. Ps.* 44.16.

²³⁶ *en. Ps.* 127.8.

²³⁷ *ep. Io. tr.* 5.4.1.

²³⁸ *ibid.* See Acts 7.60 and 2 Cor 12.15; Dideberg (1975b), 90-91.

²³⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 5.5. On the example of Peter as shepherd of the flock, see Canning (1993), 277-281.

If you love God, hurry all those who are joined to you to the love of God, as well as all those who are in your household. If the body of Christ, that is, the unity of the Church, is loved by you, hurry them along to enjoy it!²⁴⁰

Christians have knowledge of God: they acknowledge the truth of what they have heard; but this knowledge must result in love, for otherwise it is worthless. “If we know, let us love, for knowledge without love does not save.”²⁴¹ Many people acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, but Augustine reminds his listeners of the maxim that faith is dead without accompanying works (Jas 2.17).²⁴² So what, then, does it mean to believe in Jesus Christ? Faith must lead to works in order to save, and pre-eminent among the works of faith is love. So to believe in Christ is to believe in him in our actions and in our whole lives, not just in our words.²⁴³

By your actions you show yourself to be a Christian. For if the actions do not show you to be a Christian, though everyone should call you Christian, what does the name profit you when the reality is not found? ... ‘Little children, let us love not only in word and tongue, but in works and in truth [1 Jn 3.18]’.²⁴⁴

Of course, this love is itself a gift of grace, not a reward for being good. The capacity to do good works follows from grace and love, not the other way around.²⁴⁵ But the essential point is this: love is not passive but active, inflaming a person into action.²⁴⁶ Love is the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit of love, who prompts us to undertake the good works which result from love. Sometimes we are bidden to speak, at others to be silent; sometimes to eat, at other times to fast; we are prompted to feed and clothe the needy, to visit the sick, to resolve disagreements, and to bury

²⁴⁰ *en. Ps.* 33.2.6. Borgomeo (1972), 244 points out that Augustine here treats the terms “body of Christ” and “unity of the Church” as synonyms.

²⁴¹ *ep. Io. tr.* 2.8.1. Although the terminology is different, this argument finds a parallel in *trin.* 13.19.24, where Augustine distinguishes between *scientia* and *sapientia*, the knowledge of God being only the necessary preliminary for wisdom and the loving contemplation of God.

²⁴² *ep. Io. tr.* 10.1.1. See Bochet (1982), 275.

²⁴³ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.1.2-10.1.3. On this subject, see particularly Gallay (1955a).

²⁴⁴ *ep. Io. tr.* 5.12.2.

²⁴⁵ *pat.* 19.16, 20.17.

²⁴⁶ *ep. Io. tr.* 7.11.1.

the dead.²⁴⁷ Through the Spirit within us, it is God himself who is at work when we act through love.

Augustine observes that the same action can be prompted by love or by its absence. For example, Jesus Christ was “handed over” by the Father (Rom 8.32) and by the Son himself (Gal 2.20); he was also “handed over” by Judas Iscariot. But what distinguishes between these actions is the love or lack of it with which they were carried out. Undoubtedly, from Judas’ action a great thing resulted, but “it is not what a person does that ought to be considered, but with what spirit and will he does it”.²⁴⁸ Again, the demands of love might cause a father to beat his son, while the same boy might at another time be caressed by a wicked slave-trader. It is not what a person does that counts, but whether or not the motivation is love. Only good can result if love is at the root of our actions. Augustine sums up this point with a notorious phrase: “so once and for all a short maxim is presented to you: love and do what you will”.²⁴⁹ The important thing to remember about this soundbite is that the second part (“... do what you will”) is subordinate to the first (“love ...”). A few years later, Augustine preached on the Lord’s Prayer, urging forgiveness for one’s enemies:

I tell you to get rid of hatred from your heart, not discipline. What if one who seeks a pardon ought to be chastised by me? Do what you will, for I believe that you love your child even when you beat him.²⁵⁰

Love is incompatible with hatred, but punishment is not necessarily incompatible with love. We need to recall the context in which the injunction “love and do what you will” is found. If a person has love, then they have the Holy Spirit and are in the process of being formed into the more perfect image of God. Above all, what is being commanded here is to act at all times from love, and the perfect example of

²⁴⁷ *ep. Io. tr.* 8.1-8.3.

²⁴⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 7.7. Dideberg (1975b), 218-219 discusses the contrast between the “handing over” of the Son by the Father and by Judas.

²⁴⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 7.8: *dilige, et quod uis fac.* For discussion, see especially Gallay (1955); also Agaësse (1961), 80-81 and Lancel (2002), 293.

²⁵⁰ *s.* 56.17.

“greater love [Jn 15.13]” is the “handing over” of Christ to death. Nevertheless, perhaps this is one of those places where Augustine’s fondness for a memorable phrase got the better of him.

Jesus Christ was handed over to death in order that the sins of the world may be forgiven. It is in Christ’s name that sins are forgiven, not in the names of Augustine or Donatus, or even of Peter or Paul.²⁵¹ Consequently, all divisions in the Church are to be abhorred. What is required is not love for any faction, but love for Christ and his body as a whole. Salvation is thus intimately connected with the unity of the Church. But we come to take our place in this salvation only if we become ourselves members of Christ, and this can only be if we are joined in his one body. This is the gift of the Holy Spirit, the love of God poured into our hearts (Rom 5.5).²⁵² It is the Spirit who gives life (Jn 6.63), but he can only give life to a person who is a member of the body which is itself enlivened by the Spirit.

These things are said so that we might love unity and fear separation. For a Christian should be frightened of nothing so much as to be separated from the body of Christ. For if they are separated from the body of Christ, they are not his members; if they are not his members, they are not given life by his Spirit.²⁵³

This is the predicament of those who are not bound together in the unity of the Church. As we saw earlier, the pure fear is the fear of separation of God. Those who are divided from the Church’s unity have fallen into this state, and should therefore be gripped by the lesser, impure fear that Augustine described, the fear of judgement and damnation. Without unity, there is no love; without love, there is no Spirit; and without the Holy Spirit, there can be no hope of life.

But to those who love God and who love one another, Augustine paints an altogether rosier picture. If those who do not have love cause trouble for the

²⁵¹ *ep. Io. tr. 2.4.*

²⁵² *Io. eu. tr. 27.6.1.* On the Spirit as the Church’s life-giver, see Comeau (1930), 351-353, Borgomeo (1972), 242-243 and Berrouard (1977), 829.

²⁵³ *Io. eu. tr. 27.6.2:* see Lamirande (1969), 106; Borgomeo (1972), 249.

fellowship, breaking apart the bonds of unity, then those in whom love has been perfected live together in perfect unity, having “one soul and one heart in God [Acts 4.32]”.²⁵⁴ God prepares a place for himself among his people, who share one common heart bound together by mutual love.²⁵⁵

But just as “the mountains surround [Jerusalem], so the Lord also surrounds his people, from this time and until the end of the age [Ps 124.2]. If therefore “the mountains surround Jerusalem, and the Lord surrounds his people”, the Lord binds his people in one bond of love and peace, so that whoever trusts in the Lord, like Mount Zion, may forever not be moved.²⁵⁶

The Church, prefigured by Jerusalem, is composed of “mountains”, the saints who are great in faith and love. Just as the Church is surrounded by the saints, so God in turn embraces it with the Holy Spirit, a bond of love which unites his people as one for ever and ever. “So great is the joint of love that, although many living stones come together in the building of the temple of God, one stone is made from the many.”²⁵⁷ The individual stones are made into one edifice, constructed on the solid foundation of Christ the cornerstone. God’s house is a unity, built up by love.

The apostle ... says, “Bearing one another in love, trying to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace [Eph 4.2-3]”. Where there is the unity of the Spirit there is one stone, but it is the one stone made from many. How is one made from many? By bearing one another in love.²⁵⁸

The Holy Spirit is given to those who bear one another’s burdens for the sake of unity. Sin and iniquity divide those who do not love one another, but those who have love remain united with their brothers and sisters.²⁵⁹ Some parts of the Church may undergo afflictions, while other parts are at peace; but the whole Church suffers because of the sufferings of some, and the whole Church rejoices because of the joy

²⁵⁴ *en. Ps.* 132.12.

²⁵⁵ *en. Ps.* 131.4.

²⁵⁶ *en. Ps.* 124.6.

²⁵⁷ *en. Ps.* 39.1.

²⁵⁸ *en. Ps.* 95.2. See Pontet (1945), 416.

²⁵⁹ *en. Ps.* 18[2].6.

of others. The fellowship of Christians throughout the world is united by the Spirit and by their mutual love.

The tribulation of one [congregation] saddens the other, while the peace of one consoles the other. So the body is one, so that it is not cut apart; nothing makes cuts apart from discord. But love makes a close connection, these connections embrace unity, unity serves love, and love attains to glory.²⁶⁰

The bonds that unite members of the Church are a sign of their love for God and for one another, and those who have love will be saved. So the psalmist is quite right: “Behold how good and pleasant it is for brothers to live in unity! [Ps 132.1]”.²⁶¹ Those who have the Spirit of love and unity will be saved, but those who do not will be lost. We will see precisely why this should be in the next section.

The unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit

We have now looked at some of the elements of Augustine’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit and of love. In this section, we will see how he draws these together in his discussion of the unforgivable sin or blasphemy against the Spirit. We will also see how this intriguing argument is also paralleled in his discussion of those who are antichrists. Those who cause disunity do not have the love of God; they reject the Holy Spirit and therefore cannot be forgiven. They are antichrists, opposed to God and opposed to his Church; they cannot be reckoned among the children of God.

Towards the end of the first book of his commentary *On the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount*, Augustine had reached Mt 5.43-48, which commands Christians not only to love their neighbours, but also to love and to pray for their enemies and those who persecute them.²⁶² It is relatively easy to love those close to us, but someone who loves their enemies may rightly be said to have had the love of God perfected in

²⁶⁰ *en. Ps.* 30[2].2.1.

²⁶¹ *en. Ps.* 132.1.

²⁶² *s. dom. m.* 1.21.69-1.21.72. On praying for enemies, see Vincent (1990), 125-154.

them, Augustine observes. It is interesting to notice how important the theme of perfection in love is even at this very early stage in the development of his thought. A number of seemingly contradictory texts are dealt with fairly easily, but then Augustine turns to consider 1 Jn 5.16, which says that although we must pray for sinners, we should not pray for a brother or sister who has committed “a sin that leads to death”, or mortal sin.²⁶³ This poses a problem, since we are clearly instructed by Christ to pray for our enemies. There must therefore, he concludes, be a particular sin which, when committed by a Christian, is worse even than the most serious misdeeds of a non-Christian. Augustine notes from 1 Cor 7.14-15 that a non-believing husband is said to be made holy by his believing wife, and vice versa; but that if the non-believer departs, the bond between them is considered to have been broken. Perhaps, he reflects, the same applies to other Christian relationships as well. So a sin is said to be mortal “when, after having acknowledged God through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, someone attacks the brotherhood, and is stirred up by jealousy against that grace by which they are reconciled to God”.²⁶⁴ So this mortal sin is what Christians commit if they are guilty of hating one another, resisting the grace and love which is the gift of God. Augustine draws this conclusion:

Perhaps this is the sin against the Holy Spirit, which is through malice and jealousy to fight against brotherly love after having received the Holy Spirit, a sin which the Lord says will be forgiven neither in this world nor in the world to come [Mt 12.32].²⁶⁵

In 393, then, Augustine has already made the important connection between Church disunity and the failure of brothers and sisters to love one another. But even more crucially, this failure to love is understood to be a sin against the Holy Spirit, and so it is but a short leap from here to realise that this might also be the unforgivable blasphemy against the Spirit to which we have just referred.

²⁶³ *s. dom. m.* 1.22.73: *peccatum ... ad mortem*. We should recall, incidentally, that Augustine never got beyond 1 Jn 5.3 in his later homilies on the epistle.

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *s. dom. m.* 1.22.74.

Augustine returns to this subject on six other occasions, on four of which he makes only the briefest of remarks. We noted in the previous chapter a fleeting reference to Mt 12.32 in *On the Trinity*: but this is only to observe that the fact that sin against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable, whereas that against the Son of Man can be forgiven, demonstrates that Christ in his human form is less than God.²⁶⁶ In late 401, replying to Petilian, he merely comments that the Donatist has no idea of what the unforgivable sin might be, without answering the question himself.²⁶⁷ In 417, also against the Donatists, he asserts that this sin is “the hardness of heart even to the end of this life, through which a person refuses to accept forgiveness of sins in the unity of the body of Christ, to which the Holy Spirit gives life”;²⁶⁸ but he offers no explanation of how he reaches this conclusion. Again, a couple of years later Augustine makes a similar fleeting reference, again without further explanation:

Truly, whoever does not believe that sins are forgiven in the Church, who despises so great and generous a divine gift, and ends their last day in this obstinate mind, is guilty of the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit in whom Christ forgives sins.²⁶⁹

He does, however, add that he has discussed this issue elsewhere in a book dedicated specifically to it. This may be a reference either to his *Unfinished Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* of 394 or 395, or more likely to *Sermon 71*, dating from between 417 and 420. Both of these contain a much more substantial treatment of the question, and to them we will turn in a moment. First, however, it is worth noting that a number of common themes have already emerged from the discussion. The sin against the Holy Spirit is the obstinate refusal to accept the forgiveness of all other sins. It is the rejection of the grace which reconciles us to God. It takes the form of the blasphemous denial of love; it is therefore an attack on the Christian fellowship and on the unity of the Church.

²⁶⁶ *trin.* 1.11.22.

²⁶⁷ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.62.140.

²⁶⁸ *correct.* 11.49.

²⁶⁹ *ench.* 22.83.

Augustine notices that Paul opens his letter to the Romans with a greeting in the name of the Father and the Son (Rom 1.7). Even though he is not referred to explicitly, the Holy Spirit is implicit in the references to grace and peace in this greeting, since these are the gifts of the one who is himself “the gift of God”.²⁷⁰ If Paul mentions the Father and the Son directly, then he also mentions the Spirit indirectly. God the Trinity is therefore acknowledged. Augustine then searches the rest of the New Testament for similar implicit references to the Holy Spirit; and in the course of his investigation is reminded of the text about the unforgivable sin:

A person sins against the Holy Spirit, who despairing, ridiculing and despising the proclamation of the grace through which sins are washed away, and the peace through which we are reconciled to God, refuses to become penitent for their sins ... For the Lord said that someone would be forgiven if they spoke a word against the Son of Man; but that if they spoke against the Holy Spirit, they would be forgiven neither in this world nor in the world to come [Mt 12.32].²⁷¹

But what is this blasphemy against the Spirit? Clearly, this is a difficult question, as Augustine observes over twenty years later in an entire sermon devoted to the subject.²⁷² The way he answers this question is methodically to eliminate all possible solutions until only one is left. For Jesus did not say that no sin against the Holy Spirit could be forgiven, but rather that there is one particular sin, “a word” against him, which is unforgivable.²⁷³

The Church is clear that all previous sins are remitted by baptism. Pagans, Jews and heretics all sin against the Spirit of God, but all are welcomed into the fellowship of the Catholic Church if they convert.²⁷⁴ Penitent Christians can also be forgiven any sins that they have committed after their baptism;²⁷⁵ this must be the

²⁷⁰ *ep. Rm. inch.* 11.1.

²⁷¹ *ep. Rm. inch.* 14.1-14.2.

²⁷² *s.* 71.3.5.

²⁷³ *s.* 71.5.9-71.6.10.

²⁷⁴ On pagans, see *ep. Rm. inch.* 15.1-15.4; on the Jews, *ep. Rm. inch.* 15.5-15.9; and on heretics, *ep. Rm. inch.* 15.10-15.16; and see *s.* 71.3.5-71.3.6 for a summary of the same argument.

²⁷⁵ *ep. Rm. inch.* 16.1-8; *s.* 71.5.8.

case, since the sacrament of baptism cannot be repeated.²⁷⁶ Forgiveness is available both for sins of ignorance²⁷⁷ and for deliberate sins.²⁷⁸ Even those who indisputably sin against the Holy Spirit can obtain forgiveness.²⁷⁹ Nobody is ever denied baptism because of anything they may have done in the past, and nobody who has lapsed after having received baptism is ever denied forgiveness if they repent. The Church explicitly accepts that there is the opportunity for forgiveness in each of these situations.²⁸⁰

From this Augustine concludes that only one possibility remains. Since we can be forgiven anything if we repent, the one sin which cannot be forgiven is unrepentance itself. As he puts it in his commentary,

the sin against the Holy Spirit, which the Lord says is forgiven neither in this world nor in the world to come, is to be understood as nothing other than perseverance in iniquity and malice, despairing of the mercy of God.²⁸¹

He adds that this sin of despair is committed by someone who resists the gift of grace and peace, and it will be recalled that he had already concluded that these two gifts implicitly refer to the Spirit himself. So one who refuses the offer of forgiveness blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, since there can be no forgiveness for one who will not accept it.²⁸² Augustine spells this out rather more clearly in his later sermon. The first benefit conferred by the Spirit on new believers is the forgiveness of sins.²⁸³ Repentance obtains forgiveness in this age for the age to come; it follows that

²⁷⁶ *ep. Rm. inch.* 19.1-11.

²⁷⁷ *ep. Rm. inch.* 14.3-14.7.

²⁷⁸ *ep. Rm. inch.* 17.1-18.15.

²⁷⁹ *ep. Rm. inch.* 20.1-21.7.

²⁸⁰ *s.* 71.4.7.

²⁸¹ *ep. Rm. inch.* 22.3.

²⁸² Landes (1982), xii argues that this implies a position on human freedom which Augustine repudiated two years later when writing to Simplicianus. Harrison (2000) offers an important corrective to what had hitherto been a commonplace among scholars, suggesting that any theological shift was more one of emphasis than of actual substance. In any case, the later insistence on grace rather than merit still leaves room for a free human response to unmerited grace: see Harrison (1993), 299-300. This response to grace is precisely what Augustine is talking about even in this relatively early text.

²⁸³ *s.* 71.12.19.

unrepentance is the refusal of grace and forgiveness.²⁸⁴ Since forgiveness can only follow repentance, the sin of impenitence prevents all other sins from being forgiven.²⁸⁵ If impenitence is the refusal of forgiveness, then permanent impenitence is the permanent refusal of forgiveness.²⁸⁶ Those who obstinately refuse to repent of their sins are therefore guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, since they are rejecting grace and peace, the free gifts of reconciliation and fellowship with God. It is not that a person who is unrepentant will not, but as the consequence of their own actions they cannot, be forgiven.

Augustine is clear that the only context in which sins can be forgiven is the Catholic Church. It is of no use anyone outside the Church repenting of their sins if they do not also repent of the sin which divides them from the Church. The Holy Spirit binds the members of the Church together in unity:

Anyone who is held in the bond of the peace of the Church, which is spread throughout all the world, knows that they have received the Holy Spirit. Thus the apostle says: “trying to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace [Eph 4.3]”.²⁸⁷

It is particularly appropriate that it should be the Holy Spirit who draws us into communion with God the Trinity, since it is he who is common to the Father and the Son, pouring their love into our hearts (Rom 5.5).²⁸⁸ The Spirit who is the fellowship of the Father and the Son is also the one who binds us into the unity of the Church’s fellowship.²⁸⁹ If the first gift of the Holy Spirit is the forgiveness of sins, as we have already noted, so the final gift of the Spirit is the perfection of love.²⁹⁰ Those who are cut off from the Church do not have this love, because they do not have the Holy Spirit: they are those who are described in the text: “Who separate themselves, being

²⁸⁴ s. 71.12.20.

²⁸⁵ s. 71.13.23.

²⁸⁶ s. 71.21.34.

²⁸⁷ s. 71.17.28. See Lamirande (1969), 106.

²⁸⁸ s. 71.18.29.

²⁸⁹ s. 71.20.33.

²⁹⁰ s. 71.12.19. Augustine makes a number of references in this context to the Holy Spirit as the fire of burning love.

carnal, not having the Spirit [Jude 19]”.²⁹¹ They may have the outward forms of religion, but they do not have the inward realities of life in Christ. Indeed, sects such as these are aptly called not “congregations”, but “segregations”.²⁹² Forgiveness of sins is only possible for a person who is within the Church, since forgiveness is only possible through the Holy Spirit, who is present only in the one Church which is his temple.²⁹³ Therefore the person who resists unity also resists forgiveness for their sins: this is the unforgivable sin, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.²⁹⁴

Therefore there is one refuge from committing the unforgivable blasphemy: beware of an unrepentant heart; and do not believe that repentance is profitable other than by holding onto the Church, where remission of sins is given, and the fellowship of the Spirit in the bond of peace is guarded.²⁹⁵

Taking his lead from the text in front of him, on a number of occasions in his *Tracts on the Letter of John* Augustine discusses the theme of those who are antichrists. Spiritual growth – and we might gloss this to mean growing perfection in the love which is the gift of the Holy Spirit – is a matter of urgency. The last hour is upon us, and we know that this is the case because of the appearance of many who are antichrists.²⁹⁶ These antichrists, Augustine explains, are those who have departed from the Church. They were, in fact, never members of the body even before their departure, since if they had been members, they would have been in harmony with it and remained within it.²⁹⁷ The true members of the body of Christ live in peace and love with one another: antichrists are, by definition, those who are opposed to Christ and who are opposed to this mutual harmony.²⁹⁸ Nevertheless, even if they are not actually members of the body, these antichrists were present among the body before they left it; and this must mean that there are still some who are present alongside the

²⁹¹ s. 71.18.30. It is surprising that Augustine did not make more use of this text: the only other occasion on which he refers to it is at *correct.* 11.50.

²⁹² s. 71.19.32.

²⁹³ s. 71.20.33.

²⁹⁴ s. 71.22.36.

²⁹⁵ s. 71.23.37. On disunity as the sin against the Holy Spirit, see Borgomeo (1972), 266-269.

²⁹⁶ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.3. On the relation of antichrists to the body of Christ, see Grabowski (1957a), 565-567.

²⁹⁷ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.4.1, 3.5.1.

²⁹⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.4.2.

Church without truly being members of the Christian fellowship.²⁹⁹ Even if they receive the sacraments together with the members of the body, they are not themselves members; and if they remain for the time being, they will be winnowed out on the threshing floor of the day of judgement (Mt 3.12).³⁰⁰ Elsewhere, Augustine offers the example of Judas Iscariot as someone who was physically present with the disciples, but spiritually absent from them: “joined in the flesh, not in the fellowship of the unity of the heart”.³⁰¹ Those who depart from the unity of the body, who abandon the unity of the Church, go out in order that the distinction between those who are true Christians and those who are not might be made apparent.³⁰² Clearly this argument appears to have the smack of McCarthyism about it, but Augustine is here referring to his doctrine of the mixed Church. The visible Church contains both good and evil people, and although the departure of some of the latter is to be expected, by and large the wheat and the chaff will remain side by side until the eschatological judgement. We will come back to this point later in the chapter, and will explore it more fully in the next chapter in the context of the Donatist controversy. For now, though, “everyone ought to examine their own conscience as to whether they might be an antichrist”:³⁰³ do they love the unity of the Church or not?

So those who leave the Church “are all surely antichrists, who go out from the Church, and are cut off from the unity of the Church”.³⁰⁴ But antichrists are also those who deny the truth that Jesus is the Christ, since Jesus Christ is himself the truth.³⁰⁵ Completing the syllogism, then, it presumably follows that those who have departed from the unity of the Church are antichrists who deny Jesus Christ. This, however, poses a problem, since not even the heretics deny this truth. Augustine probably had in mind here those who, like the adherents to various forms of Arianism, held to unorthodox doctrines about the person of the Son of God without

²⁹⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.4.1.

³⁰⁰ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.5.1.

³⁰¹ *Io. eu. tr.* 61.2.1. See Borgomeo (1972), 288.

³⁰² *ep. Io. tr.* 3.5.2.

³⁰³ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.4.2.

³⁰⁴ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.7.1.

³⁰⁵ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.6.1.

wishing to deny that he was the Christ. But he also mentions the Donatists in the next breath: they too are heretics and antichrists, even though they recite the same creeds and make the same public confessions of faith as do Catholic Christians. How can this be?³⁰⁶ The answer comes if we broaden our understanding of what it means to confess or to deny Christ. We need to take account not only of our words, but also of our actions. The scriptures describe “many antichrists who profess Christ with their mouths but dissent from Christ by their practices”.³⁰⁷ These are those who are in turn condemned by Jesus as hypocrites:

For every individual tree is known by its fruit [Mt 7.16]. The antichrist who professes by their mouth that Jesus is the Christ and denies it by their actions is the greater liar: a liar, therefore, because they say one thing, but do another.³⁰⁸

Those who say one thing but do another are antichrists. This distinction is easily demonstrated by the example of the demons, to which Augustine refers near the end of his series of homilies. They, after all, also confess that Jesus is the Son of God (Mt 8.29): the public proclamation of heretics is comparable in every way. “I have particularly put forward the example of the demons, not so that you may have joy in the believing words, but that you may look into the living actions.”³⁰⁹ What matters is not so much what a person says, but how they behave. But what determines how they behave? The crucial factor is whether or not they have love. For someone may have the sacraments, but without love (1 Cor 13.2) they are no better off than the demons.³¹⁰

God knows the secrets of our hearts. Those who do not have love cannot be true martyrs for Christ, as some of the Donatists claimed to be, even if they confess him with their lips.³¹¹ For almost everybody blesses God with their words, but God

³⁰⁶ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.8.1.

³⁰⁷ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.8.2.

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*

³⁰⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.1.4. See Dideberg (1975b), 135-136.

³¹⁰ *Io. eu. tr.* 6.21.2.

³¹¹ *en. Ps.* 43.21. This is an ironic remark aimed squarely at the Donatist *circumcelliones*, who sought martyrdom at the hands of the Catholic authorities, and who were known for their battle-cry of *Deo laudes!* (“Praise be to God!”).

must also be blessed by actions. Anyone who proclaims God in what they say, but demonstrates by the rest of their life that they do not have love, is inconsistent and guilty of blasphemy.³¹² It is obvious that anyone who claims to be a Catholic but commits idolatry offends God the Father; it should be equally obvious that anyone who blasphemes against their mother Church by being divided from it cannot be any less offensive.³¹³ Those who cause disunity in the Church do not have the Holy Spirit and do not have love. Rather, they have divisive spirits, or demons, which “dissolve Christ” and do not come from God.³¹⁴ Thus they deny Christ and are themselves antichrists, belonging to the world and not God, acting “against love”.³¹⁵ It is through the love manifested on the cross by the Son and given to those who believe that sin is forgiven, but the world does not recognise this love, rejecting the Father and the Son who gave it and the Spirit who is himself love. Those who reject God are therefore antichrists, since they do not allow their sinfulness to be transformed by love.³¹⁶

Those who commit sin, then, imitate the devil and are children of the devil; but those who are freed from sin through Christ are born again and are the children of God.³¹⁷ This leaves Augustine with a problem, for on the one hand, “if we say that we do not have sin, we betray ourselves [1 Jn 1.8]”; but on the other hand, “whoever is born of God does not sin [1 Jn 3.9]”.³¹⁸ John appears to contradict himself. How can these two verses be reconciled? “Perhaps he said ‘does not sin’ referring to a particular sin, not referring to all sins.”³¹⁹ In other words, the problem is solved if we see that, notwithstanding the fact that we are all prone to sin, there is

³¹² *en. Ps.* 25[2].14.

³¹³ *en. Ps.* 88.2.14.

³¹⁴ *ep. Io. tr.* 6.14.1: *soluit Christum*. See Bochet (1982), 275-276. Augustine is referring to 1 Jn 4.3. Most of the Greek texts here read *μὴ ὁμολογῆι* (“do not confess”); but a few have instead *λῶει* (“loose”), which is the origin of the Latin reading of *soluit*: see *FC* 92, 215 n. 65. Augustine was surely aware of these textual variants, but found that *soluit* particularly reinforced his argument against those who “dissolve” the unity of the Church: see *SC* 75, 310 n. 1. In any case, the more likely original reading, “do not confess”, also supports the argument, since it is by actions and not words that faith in Christ is confessed.

³¹⁵ *ep. Io. tr.* 7.3.

³¹⁶ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.9.

³¹⁷ *ep. Io. tr.* 4.10, 4.11.

³¹⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 4.12. On this apparent contradiction, see Le Landais (1953), 55-58 and Dideberg (1975b), 110-126.

³¹⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 5.2.3.

one specific sin which is impossible for those who have been born again. “And this sin is such that if anyone commits it, they reinforce the others, but if they do not commit it, they unbind the others.”³²⁰ There is only one particular sin that can be of such paramount importance, and that is the sin of breaking the commandment to love another. “Pay attention! This commandment of Christ is called love: through this love sins are unbound. If it is not maintained, it is both a serious sin and also the root of all sins.”³²¹ But we already know that a person can only have love if they have received the Spirit of God, since “the true love of God is not in anyone who is ungrateful for his Holy Spirit, through whom his love is poured into our hearts [Rom 5.5]”.³²² Those who are the children of God cannot break the commandment of love; it follows that those who do not have love are not the children of God. But unlike these antichrists, we who are Catholic Christians “are from God [1 Jn 4.6]”; whoever has the Holy Spirit knows that “love is from God [1 Jn 4.7]” and that “God is love [1 Jn 4.8]”.³²³

We can see that these two sets of arguments, the first concerning the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit, and the second concerning antichrists, closely parallel one another. The unforgivable or mortal sin against the Spirit is the refusal to accept grace and forgiveness, the particular sin of obstinate unrepentance which is rightly described as blasphemy. It is committed by those who refuse to accept the Holy Spirit and who therefore do not have love. Since they deny the love of God, they also deny the need for unity; and because of their separation from the Church, they cannot possibly be saved. Similarly, those who reject the forgiveness of God and commit the particular sin of not having love are also guilty of the same blasphemy. They do not love unity, they depart from the Church, denying Christ by their actions. They are opposed to the body of Christ and therefore they are antichrists. Augustine is here describing the same thing. Unity with the Church is a prerequisite for forgiveness, reconciliation with God and eternal salvation. Anyone who remains outside the Church’s unity has rejected love and has therefore also

³²⁰ *ibid.*

³²¹ *ibid.*

³²² *en. Ps. 71.3.*

³²³ *ep. Io. tr. 7.4.*

rejected God. In the final section of this chapter we will examine in more detail what Augustine has to say about the unity of the Church itself.

The body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit

In the final section of this chapter, we will see how the theme of love is developed in Augustine's teaching about the Church. The people of God have Jesus Christ as their head: they are therefore the body of Christ, animated by the Holy Spirit. Filling the whole world, the Church is a mixed body made up of both the good and the wicked together. It is one family, the children of the one Father, co-heirs with the one Son, brothers and sisters bound together by the one Spirit. Living together in mutual love and unity, the Church is sustained by God through the sacraments, so that those who reject the sacraments of the Church also reject the gift of the Holy Spirit, and cannot therefore be saved.

The place to begin any consideration of the doctrine of the Church is with the event of the Incarnation. Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and his creation,³²⁴ the pre-existent Word having been made flesh in order that human beings might be healed.³²⁵ It will be recalled from the previous chapter that Augustine draws attention to the distinction between Christ's two natures. In his divine nature, the Son is equal to the Father, but the Father is greater than Christ in his human nature.³²⁶ The Son participates in mortality in order that we might participate in divinity: "he who promised to communicate his goodness to you, first communicated with you in your wickedness; he who promised you divinity, showed you love".³²⁷ The Father loves the Son in his divinity as an equal; he loves the Son in his humanity for the sake of his divinity; he loves us as members of the Son.³²⁸ In fact, God has loved us from the beginning, not just from the moment when we were reconciled to

³²⁴ *Io. eu. tr.* 110.4.1.

³²⁵ *ep. Io. tr.* 1.1.

³²⁶ *Io. eu. tr.* 78.3.1.

³²⁷ *en. Ps.* 52.6. See Fiedrowicz (2000), 51.

³²⁸ *Io. eu. tr.* 110.5.

him, since we were going to become members of his Son.³²⁹ For our destiny is to be with the Son of God in heaven. In his divinity, the Son was always present there with the Father, but in his humanity, he was raised to be with the Father in heaven.³³⁰ The Incarnation took place, then, in order that we might through faith have fellowship, love and unity with God and with one another.³³¹ In Christ, the temporal and the eternal are united in one person.³³² In him, the Word and the flesh are married as bridegroom and bride.³³³ This is one of Augustine's favourite scriptural analogies: here he is describing how the two natures are united in the one person of Jesus Christ, but he more frequently uses it to describe the union of Christ with the Church, as he does here, immediately going on to say that "the whole Church is joined to that flesh, and there becomes the whole Christ, head and body".³³⁴ The Father loves the Son, and he loves us as members of the Son, "because we are his members and are loved in him, since he is loved as a whole, that is, as head and body".³³⁵

This theme is central to Augustine's exegesis of the psalms, and recurs again and again throughout the *Explanations of the Psalms*.³³⁶ The key point is essentially a simple one, that the whole Christ, or *totus Christus*, is one person with one head and one body joined in a single organic unity. The head of Christ is the saviour, the body of Christ those who are saved.³³⁷ As the Son of God, in his divine nature Christ is equal to the Father, but in his human nature he is the head of the body.³³⁸ "The Son of God is also the Son of Man, one God with the Father, one human being with us."³³⁹ The whole Christ, then, is Jesus Christ together with his Church. The head of

³²⁹ *Io. eu. tr.* 110.6.1: see Burnaby (1938), 170.

³³⁰ *Io. eu. tr.* 111.2.3.

³³¹ *ep. Io. tr.* 1.3.

³³² *ep. Io. tr.* 2.10.2.

³³³ *ep. Io. tr.* 1.2.2. On the imagery of bridegroom and bride, see Van Bavel (1954), 79-85.

³³⁴ *ibid.* See Agaësse (1961), 89.

³³⁵ *Io. eu. tr.* 111.6.1.

³³⁶ Among many other references see, for example, *en. Ps.* 68.1.1, 142.3. For commentary, see Vincent (1990), especially 33-41 and 49-56. The doctrine of the Church as the body of Christ is discussed extremely comprehensively in Grabowski (1957a) and somewhat more succinctly in Borgomeo (1972), 191-234.

³³⁷ *en. Ps.* 37.6.

³³⁸ *en. Ps.* 85.4.

³³⁹ *en. Ps.* 85.1.

the Church is also its mediator: as God he created us, as a human being he has re-created us.³⁴⁰ Christ took human form in order that we might take divine form: “For without him, we are nothing; but in him, we also are truly Christ. Why? Because the whole Christ is the head and the body”.³⁴¹ He is “a single unity” of head and body, bridegroom and bride: “In Christ the Church speaks, and in the Church Christ speaks”.³⁴² There is, however, an important qualification which must be made:

Christ and the Church together are one person, but the Word and the flesh together are not one thing. The Father and the Word together are one thing, Christ and the Church together are one person, one certain perfect human in the form of his fullness.³⁴³

The distinction here, difficult to draw out in translation, is between *unus* and *unum*. The Father and the Son are *unum*, one thing, sharing one nature; Christ’s head and Christ’s body are however *unus*, one person. Therefore the unity between Christ and the Church may rightly be said to reflect the unity of the Father and the Son, but it is not the same as the unity of God, since it is not a unity of nature, substance or equality.

Christ the head is in heaven, while his body the Church remains here on earth.³⁴⁴ “The head is our saviour himself, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, who having risen from the dead now sits at the right hand of the Father.”³⁴⁵ But because the head and the body are together the one Christ, there is no separation between the two.³⁴⁶ Because the head has been with us on earth, his body will be with him in heaven.³⁴⁷ Christ is our foundation, but also our head: the Church is, in effect, upside-down, with its foundations not on earth but in heaven, where the Son sits at the right hand of the Father.³⁴⁸ If the head has risen and ascended, so will the rest of

³⁴⁰ *en. Ps.* 90.2.1.

³⁴¹ *en. Ps.* 30[2].1.3.

³⁴² *en. Ps.* 30[2].1.4. See Pontet (1945), 407 n. 98.

³⁴³ *en. Ps.* 101.1.2. See Comeau (1930), 340 and Borgomeo (1972), 242 n. 41. The unity of Christ and the Church does not imply human equality with God: see Borgomeo (1972), 218-224.

³⁴⁴ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.9.1; *en. Ps.* 62.2, 127.3.

³⁴⁵ *en. Ps.* 56.1.

³⁴⁶ *en. Ps.* 123.1.

³⁴⁷ *en. Ps.* 26[2].11.

³⁴⁸ *en. Ps.* 29[2].10.

the body also be raised to heaven, since head and body cannot be separated.³⁴⁹ “The head is the one who is the saviour of the body, who has already ascended into heaven; but the body is the Church which labours on earth.”³⁵⁰ Therefore since Christ’s head cannot be divided from his body, it follows that if the head is to be glorified forever, so must the body also be destined for eternal glory. We can be confident of the promises of God!³⁵¹ If the whole Christ, head and body, is one, then the body itself must also be one. The Church is one body because it has one head; the members of the body are one because Christ is himself one.³⁵² Jesus Christ is himself the peace of the Church (Eph 2.14): in him, the body finds its peace and its unity.³⁵³ Christ prays for the Church, “that they also may be one in us ... that the world may believe [Jn 17.21]”.³⁵⁴ Augustine notes in passing that this text does not mean that faith is a consequence of the Church’s unity: Christ prays that all may be one, that they may be one in the Father and the Son, and that the world may believe. In fact, of course, the Church is one because of its common faith in Christ, not the other way around.³⁵⁵ However, the fact is that our unity is grounded in the prior unity of the Godhead. “[God] is one, the Church is a unity. Nobody can respond to the one except for the unity.”³⁵⁶ The Church, like God the Trinity, is one, all its members forming a single unity in Christ. As Christ’s body, the Church, we therefore relate to God on what is literally a one-to-one basis.

The members of Christ’s body are bound together by faith, hope, and above all love; it is also through faith, hope and love that they are joined to their head.³⁵⁷ In faith we believe that we are joined to Christ, and in hope we look forward to being with him in heaven; but it is in love that the whole Christ is present here and now.

³⁴⁹ *en. Ps.* 29[2].14.

³⁵⁰ *en. Ps.* 30[2].1.3.

³⁵¹ *en. Ps.* 88.1.5.

³⁵² *en. Ps.* 83.5, 123.1.

³⁵³ *en. Ps.* 124.10.

³⁵⁴ *Io. eu. tr.* 110.2.1.

³⁵⁵ *Io. eu. tr.* 110.2.5.

³⁵⁶ *en. Ps.* 101.2.8.

³⁵⁷ *en. Ps.* 37.6. Pontet (1945), 416 n. 140: “il mentionne les trois vertus théologiques”. Compare *en. Ps.* 100.3; on faith, hope and love see Grabowski (1957a), 317-394.

“Through hope we are with him in heaven, through love he is with us on earth.”³⁵⁸ Augustine bids his congregation to participate in this love: “Let us cling to [Christ] through love”.³⁵⁹ It is love that binds us to him, and it is love that unites the head and the body: “Love shouts to Christ about us; love shouts out about Christ for us”.³⁶⁰ He who loved us so much that he died for us also commands us to love one another as fellow members of his body.³⁶¹ Now whoever loves God also loves whatever God tells us to do: we cannot claim to love God if we do not love each other.³⁶² To love the body is, as it were, Christ’s last will and testament to us. If we honour the will of anyone else, far more should we honour the final wishes of one who suffered for us and who is now seated at the right hand of his Father in heaven.³⁶³ For the Father loves the Son, and his loving mercy has not been withheld from him; if the Father loves Christ the head, so he must also love Christ’s body.³⁶⁴ This overflowing and certain love of the Father is the reason for our confidence that, if the Son has been raised and glorified, we will also be raised and glorified with him. It is the love of God which binds the Father to the Son in one Godhead; it is the love of God which binds the head and the body together in one Christ; and it is the love of God which binds the members of the body together in one Church. Those who love Christ must love one another, for in loving one another they also show their love for their head.³⁶⁵ “So [Christ’s] members are many, bound together by the bond of love and peace under one head, our saviour himself.”³⁶⁶ If we love one another and love the unity of Christ, we become his body and thus become also the temple of God.³⁶⁷

Augustine’s description of the body of Christ as a temple helps us to see where all this discussion about unity and love is leading. For what is the love of God if not the Holy Spirit? In what we have said so far about the *totus Christus*, there has

³⁵⁸ *en. Ps.* 54.3. See Réveillaud (1968), 90.

³⁵⁹ *en. Ps.* 30[2].1.10. See Pontet (1945), 413-414; also *en. Ps.* 127.4.

³⁶⁰ *en. Ps.* 140.3.

³⁶¹ *en. Ps.* 56.1: Pontet (1945), 416; Dideberg (1975b), 93.

³⁶² *ep. Io. tr.* 10.3.3: Agaësse (1961), 93-97.

³⁶³ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.9.3.

³⁶⁴ *en. Ps.* 88.2.3.

³⁶⁵ *Io. eu. tr.* 13.18.1.

³⁶⁶ *en. Ps.* 69.1.

³⁶⁷ *en. Ps.* 130.1.

been much about the Father and the Son, but nothing as yet directly about the Spirit. But in fact the Spirit has been implicit in everything that has been described already. For example, take this description of the inter-relatedness of love:

By loving, a person also becomes himself a member, and through love becomes part of the composition of the body of Christ; and there will be one Christ, loving himself, for when the members love one another, the body loves itself.³⁶⁸

Augustine adds that when we love one another, we love Christ in his body; and that when we love Christ the Son, we also love the Father. “Therefore love cannot be separated”.³⁶⁹ it is impossible to love the Father but not the Son; it is impossible to love the Father and the Son and not love one another. Now, it is true that the Holy Spirit is not mentioned by name anywhere in this discussion. But the whole point of this homily is to demonstrate that the love of the Father and the Son is also the love which is at work among Christians in the fellowship of the Church. So it is worth reminding ourselves that the love of the Father and the Son is none other than the Holy Spirit, who is also the Spirit of the Church. He himself is the love who joins Christians to their head in the unity of Christ, just as he is also the love who joins the Father and the Son in the one communion of the Trinity. This argument of Augustine’s is thus profoundly trinitarian in its fundamental structure.

It is therefore the Holy Spirit who gives unity to the body of Christ. Indeed, it is the Spirit who animates and gives life to the body which has Christ at its head.³⁷⁰ It is of the utmost importance that we become members of Christ’s body, for this is the only means by which we can share in the life of the Spirit: “Let them become the body of Christ, if they want to live by the Spirit of Christ. Nothing lives by the Spirit of Christ except the body of Christ.”³⁷¹ Again, the Holy Spirit is implicit in descriptions of God’s power in anointing Christ, whose name means literally “anointed one”. Since Christ our head has been anointed, we, who are his body, have

³⁶⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.3.2. On Christ’s body loving itself, see Grabowski (1957a), 386-387, Borgomeo (1972), 215, Dideberg (1975b), 242 Canning (1993), 259 and Studer (1997a), 58.

³⁶⁹ *ibid.*

³⁷⁰ *en. Ps.* 18[2].10, 64.7.

³⁷¹ *Io. eu. tr.* 26.13.1. See Grabowski (1957a), 235; Borgomeo (1972), 247.

also been anointed in the sacraments.³⁷² By this, Augustine is referring of course both to the outward sign of chrismation which accompanied the sacrament of baptism, and to the inward reality of the gift of the Spirit to those who become members of the body of Christ.

But from this it is clear that we are the body of Christ, because we are all anointed; and in him we are all both of Christ and also are Christ, because in some way the whole Christ is head and body. This anointing will perfect us spiritually in that life which is promised for us.³⁷³

Anointing is the gift of the Spirit, so even though Augustine once again does not mention him by name, the passage is implicitly trinitarian, since the gift of the Spirit makes us the body of Christ and is conforming us “spiritually” to become the image of God. A similar and more extended argument is put forward when Augustine is commenting on Ps 132.2, with its reference to “the ointment on the head, which ran down the beard, the beard of Aaron; which ran down to the fringe of his vestment”.³⁷⁴ Christ, the head of the Church, signified by the priest Aaron, is anointed first; and from him comes the anointing of the Church: thus the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son. The Spirit is given first to the apostles, those with beards in Augustine’s typology; then to the martyrs and finally to the whole Church, signified by the fringes of Aaron’s vestments.³⁷⁵ The Church, then, is holy because it has received holiness from God, in union with Christ and through the gift of the Spirit.³⁷⁶ “God could bestow no greater gift to human beings than to make his Word, through whom he created everything, to be their head, and to join them to him as his members.”³⁷⁷ It is through God’s gift that Christ is joined to the Church and that we are joined to God; and the gift of God is nothing less than the Holy Spirit of love.

³⁷² *en. Ps.* 26[2].2: see Philips (1954), 809; Lamirande (1969), 45; Studer (1997a), 15.

³⁷³ *ibid.*

³⁷⁴ *en. Ps.* 132.7: see Verheijen (1980), 48-51 and 291-292.

³⁷⁵ *en. Ps.* 132.8-132.9.

³⁷⁶ *en. Ps.* 85.4: see Grabowski (1957a), 452.

³⁷⁷ *en. Ps.* 85.1.

Church unity

Since Jesus Christ our head suffered on our behalf, it is not surprising that his body the Church continues to undergo persecution; indeed the whole Christ, head and body, continues to suffer because of the trials endured by Christians on earth.³⁷⁸ It is because of the bonds of love that join the head and the body that Christ rebuked Saul from heaven, “Why are you persecuting me [Acts 9.4]?”³⁷⁹ To hurt the members is to hurt the head, Augustine adds: if someone’s foot is stamped upon, it is the head that cries out. But to continue this analogy, if we divide the body of Christ, we also do injury to the head. If we are cut off from the body, any faith we may profess is nothing but blasphemy: it is as if we were to shower Christ’s head with kisses all the while stamping on his feet with hobnailed boots.³⁸⁰ Whoever hates unity hates the head as well as hating the members of the body, and they are guilty of sacrilege against the temple of God:

Whoever violates unity violates the temple of God. For they do not hold onto the head, from which the whole body is joined and compacted through all mutual service, according to the operation in its measure of every part, making the body to increase, building itself up in love [Eph 4.16 and Col 2.19]. The Lord is in this, his holy temple, which consists of his many members, each carrying out their own functions, built together into one structure by love: whoever for the sake of their own cause separates themselves from the catholic fellowship, violates it.³⁸¹

In short, united with Christ as our head, then we are Christ, but without Christ, we are nothing.³⁸² Whoever wants to be in Christ must be a member of the body of Christ, and whoever wants to be a member of the body of Christ must be a member of his Church.³⁸³

³⁷⁸ *en. Ps.* 34.2.8, 52.1, 61.4.

³⁷⁹ *en. Ps.* 30[2].1.3: Borgomeo (1972), 211 describes this as “la preuve la plus éclatante” of the union of Christ with his members.

³⁸⁰ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.8.2. Augustine’s imagery here is particularly dramatic.

³⁸¹ *en. Ps.* 10.7.

³⁸² *en. Ps.* 30[2].1.4.

³⁸³ *ep. Io. tr.* 1.12.1.

The Church is a unity, catholic and apostolic, filling the whole world.³⁸⁴ God is praised throughout the world, and God reigns over the whole world.³⁸⁵ Christ himself, who was foretold in the scriptures and who helps us to understand them, suffered for our sins; the scriptures teach us that the Church which proclaims forgiveness of sins in his name will be spread throughout all the earth.³⁸⁶ Since Christ forgives the sins of all the world, so the Church must fill the whole world.³⁸⁷ Therefore Augustine repeatedly insists that the Church, the body of Christ, can have no spatial limits artificially placed upon it.³⁸⁸ If the Church is spread over all the world, those who are cut off from it, especially those who have deliberately abandoned it, are to be pitied.³⁸⁹ Heretics who are divided from the unity of the Church must be mad, since the Church rejoices in the glory of Christ which fills the world.³⁹⁰ As we have just seen, Christ's body throughout the world is afflicted and persecuted:³⁹¹ Augustine rebukes those who are tearing the unity of this worldwide body, since Christ paid such a high price for his people that he must have purchased the entire world.³⁹² Christ's body is not to be identified with any sect or faction, but with the one Church which is truly Catholic, universal throughout time and space:

But his body is the Church, not this one or that one, but the [Church] which fills the whole world. It is not only made up of those who are living in the present; but those who went before us also belong to it, and those who will be after, even to the end of the age.³⁹³

The Church is one, made up of many members and many local congregations, all bound together as the one worldwide body of Christ.

That which is "the way" is also "the ways", just as "the Church" is also "the churches" and "heaven" also "the heavens". They are spoken of in the plural, and they are also spoken of in

³⁸⁴ *en. Ps.* 44.32. On the universality of the Church of love, see Agaësse (1961), 56-62.

³⁸⁵ *en. Ps.* 21[2].24, 21[2].29.

³⁸⁶ *ep. Io. tr.* 2.1.3-2.2.2.

³⁸⁷ *ep. Io. tr.* 1.8.2.

³⁸⁸ *en. Ps.* 47.10, 54.17, 60.2.

³⁸⁹ *en. Ps.* 65.2, 98.14.

³⁹⁰ *en. Ps.* 56.13.

³⁹¹ *en. Ps.* 3.9.

³⁹² *en. Ps.* 97.3.

³⁹³ *en. Ps.* 56.1.

the singular. Because of the Church's unity, it is one Church: "My dove is one, the only one of her mother [Song 6.8]".³⁹⁴

The fact that the Church is simultaneously one and many is surely a consequence of its being the image of the triune God. In any case, the one "way" of Christ is love, "the more excellent way" of 1 Cor 12.31.³⁹⁵

This love is of course the gift of the Holy Spirit. The "dove" just referred to always stands in Augustine's exegesis for the Spirit-filled Church. This dove is given to all the world, to all nations and to speakers of all languages: where humanity is divided by many different nations and languages, there it is united by the gift of the one Holy Spirit.³⁹⁶ If a person loves the brothers and the sisters who are scattered throughout the world, they have the Spirit of unity and love:

Let him interrogate his own heart: if he loves his brother, the Spirit of God endures within him. Let him see, let him test himself before the eyes of God, let him see if there is in himself the love of peace and unity, the love of the Church diffused throughout the whole world.³⁹⁷

The life of the Spirit is demonstrated by the brotherly love which unites the whole universal Church. Our love must extend to Christians throughout the world; those whose attention is focused solely on their immediate neighbours, cut off from the worldwide fellowship, do not share in the love which is the gift of the Holy Spirit. For whoever is not in this Catholic Church does not receive the Spirit.³⁹⁸ If they claim to love Christ, they must also love Jerusalem, the city he loved and in which the Church began. It was at Pentecost in Jerusalem that the Holy Spirit caused all the languages of the world to be heard and understood, a sign of the universality of the

³⁹⁴ *en. Ps.* 141.7.

³⁹⁵ *ibid.*

³⁹⁶ *Io. eu. tr.* 6.10.1: Pontet (1945), 427-429; Berrouard (1969), 111. On the dove as a sign of the Church, see Comeau (1930), 156-160 and Grabowski (1957a), 510-513; and on the universality which is the gift of the Spirit, see Lamirande (1969), 81-106.

³⁹⁷ *ep. Io. tr.* 6.10.2.

³⁹⁸ *Io. eu. tr.* 32.7.3: Maier (1960), 167.

Church.³⁹⁹ The body of Christ therefore speaks in all the languages of the world, a comprehensive unity of love and peace.⁴⁰⁰ But Jerusalem also stands for the heavenly city of God: the heretics do not have the peace of Jerusalem (Ps 121.6), for they divide the unity of the worldwide Church.⁴⁰¹

In condemning those who divide the Church, Augustine has the Donatists primarily in mind. They will be the subject of most of the next chapter, but since they cast a shadow over many of the texts under consideration in this chapter, it is worth making a brief reference to them here. For the Donatists deny the gift of the Holy Spirit to the whole world.⁴⁰² They erroneously believe that the Church is restricted to Africa alone.⁴⁰³ Paul describes the Church, saying that “we are the good fragrance of Christ in every place [cf 2 Cor 2.14-15]”; but the Donatists dare to contradict him: “Only Africa smells good: the whole world stinks!”⁴⁰⁴ They seem to think that God reigns only in Africa, but they should know that he summons not just them, but also the whole earth.⁴⁰⁵ In any case, the rest of the world knows nothing of the petty disputes of the Donatists.⁴⁰⁶ The Catholic Church is universal, but the Donatists are confined to Africa alone; inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Catholic Church proclaims the word of God throughout the world, but the Donatists prefer separation to unity.⁴⁰⁷ Anyone who loves Christ must love both his head and his body, and this means loving the whole body, not just that part which is in Africa. “If you love [only] a part, you are divided; if you are divided, you are not in the body; if you are not in the body, you are not under the head.”⁴⁰⁸ They are like the moneychangers in the temple, trying to sell doves (that is, falsely claiming to have

³⁹⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 2.3.1; *Io. eu. tr.* 32.7.2.

⁴⁰⁰ *Io. eu. tr.* 32.7.4.

⁴⁰¹ *en. Ps.* 121.13. Augustine always translates “Jerusalem” as meaning “city of peace”, although unfortunately contemporary Hebrew scholars have generally abandoned this evocative interpretation: see, for example, *en. Ps.* 9.12.

⁴⁰² *en. Ps.* 147.19.

⁴⁰³ *en. Ps.* 21[2].1; *Io. eu. tr.* 6.10.1.

⁴⁰⁴ *en. Ps.* 21[2].2. Compare with *Io. eu. tr.* 50.8 and Berrouard (1989), 473-474.

⁴⁰⁵ *Io. eu. tr.* 13.3.1; *en. Ps.* 49.3.

⁴⁰⁶ *en. Ps.* 10.5.

⁴⁰⁷ *en. Ps.* 18[2].5, 36.3.19.

⁴⁰⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.8.1.

the Holy Spirit) from their own separate stalls (Jn 2.14-17).⁴⁰⁹ There is no excuse for separation from the worldwide Church, and it is the Donatists who must take the blame for this reprehensible disunity:

See, they went out from us and became Donatists: if we ask them whether Jesus is the Christ, they at once confess that Jesus is Christ. So if the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ is an antichrist, they cannot call us antichrists, nor we them, since both we and they confess. So if neither they call us, nor we them, then they have not gone out from us, nor we from them. And so if we have not gone out from one another, we are in unity: if we are in unity, what are two altars doing in this city? what are divided houses doing, divided marriages? what is a common bed doing, but a divided Christ? He [John] warns us, he wants us to declare the truth. Either they have gone out from us, or we from them. But let it not be us from them: for we have the testament of the inheritance of the Lord; we recite it and we find there: "I shall give you all the nations as your inheritance, and the ends of the world as your possession" [Psalm 2.8]. Let us hold onto the inheritance of Christ. They do not hold it; they are not in communion with the whole world, not in communion with the universal [Church] redeemed by the blood of the Lord. We have the Lord himself, rising from the dead, who showed himself to be touched by the hands of the doubting disciples. And when they still doubted, he said to them: "It was necessary for Christ to suffer, and to rise again on the third day, and for penitence and the remission of sins to be preached in his name". Where? How? For whom? "Through all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" [Luke 24.46-47]. We are secure in the unity of the inheritance. Whoever is not in communion with this inheritance has gone out.⁴¹⁰

The Donatists are cut off from the worldwide Church, and whoever is cut off must accept the inevitable punishment for rejecting the promises of Christ.

This worldwide and united Church is not, however, a fellowship entirely made up of the elect. It is a mixed Church,⁴¹¹ including saints and sinners, citizens of both the kingdom of heaven and the earthly kingdoms mingled together.⁴¹² Both

⁴⁰⁹ *Io. eu. tr.* 10.6.4: see Berrouard (1969), 89.

⁴¹⁰ *ep. Io. tr.* 3.7.2. Note Augustine's dramatic repetition of the phrase "so if ..." (*si ergo*) in the first half of this passage, as he inexorably unfolds this argument. Dideberg (1975b), 55 points out that Augustine viewed the schism as a consequence of Donatist hatred.

⁴¹¹ *en. Ps.* 47.8, 99.12. On the mixed Church, see Lamirande (1963), 25-27.

⁴¹² *en. Ps.* 7.7, 51.4.

good and wicked people are bound together in the Church,⁴¹³ which consequently includes some who remain enemies of Christ, hating him even though he loves them.⁴¹⁴ Augustine frequently makes use of three parables to describe this mixed Church: the parables of the wheat and the chaff (Mt 3.11-12), the wheat and the weeds (Mt 13.24-30, 36-43) and the good and the bad fish (Mt 13.47-50).⁴¹⁵ If the Church contains chaff, so it also contains much good wheat too;⁴¹⁶ the wheat is numerous, even if the chaff is even more numerous.⁴¹⁷ True Christians, those who love Christ and possess the Holy Spirit, are the good seed, the wheat in the midst of the weeds.⁴¹⁸ If we let love, the gift of the Spirit, grow within us, we become wheat and cease to be chaff;⁴¹⁹ keeping God's commandments of love, our souls are spiritually separated from the weeds and the chaff, even while our bodies remain physically among them.⁴²⁰

Thus the Church includes many who love the world rather than God. But God knows the secrets of our hearts and will judge us all accordingly.⁴²¹ Sinners and heretics will be judged by God,⁴²² and because the one who judges sees everything, there is no need for the grain to be anxious about being hidden amidst the chaff.⁴²³ But this judgement will come at the end of the age, not yet, as the parables referred to above make clear. Therefore the good wheat must grow together with the weeds, groaning because of its trials, but enduring and waiting for the harvest.⁴²⁴ The Church remains mixed until the day of judgement, and it is only at the end of the age that the eschatological separation of the good and the wicked will take place, people then being judged according to whether they love God or love the world.⁴²⁵ The

⁴¹³ *en. Ps.* 8.13, 36.2.1, 54.8.

⁴¹⁴ *en. Ps.* 24.19.

⁴¹⁵ Augustine's use of these parables is discussed in Grabowski (1957a), 481-484, Borgomeo (1972), 307-322 and R. F. Evans (1972), 83.

⁴¹⁶ *en. Ps.* 99.13.

⁴¹⁷ *en. Ps.* 93.20.

⁴¹⁸ *en. Ps.* 42.2.

⁴¹⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 5.13.

⁴²⁰ *en. Ps.* 6.9.

⁴²¹ *en. Ps.* 7.9.

⁴²² *en. Ps.* 138.26.

⁴²³ *en. Ps.* 49.13.

⁴²⁴ *en. Ps.* 30[2].2.2, 69.9, 147.20.

⁴²⁵ *en. Ps.* 6.10, 8.1.

crucial thing to note in this regard is that this separation of good and evil can only be carried out by God.⁴²⁶ Only God knows our inward hearts; we cannot make this judgement, since we are not able to see ourselves as God can see us. It is therefore impossible for human beings to distinguish with any certainty between good people and bad people. No monastery, for example, can admit only good men or women as members, since the goodness or wickedness of a person can only begin to be ascertained through the process of living in community.⁴²⁷ If this is true of small groups within the fellowship, how much more so it is of the Church itself, which must necessarily remain a mixed body!

For this reason, while they remain together, the good must endure the wicked within the Church: there can be no humanly created divisions between them.⁴²⁸ Since the winnowing has not yet taken place, the wheat must put up with the chaff, without being anxious about its presence. Those who separate themselves to avoid evil people are themselves evil, since they do not have love.⁴²⁹ Augustine reminds the good members of the Church that there was a time when they had not yet been saved by God: they should tolerate the wicked, since they were once wicked themselves.⁴³⁰ The good must love the wicked in the hope that they too might be saved.⁴³¹ In his treatise *On Patience*, Augustine compares human and divine patience. God of course cannot suffer, but he is patient (the two words share the common root *patior*, “to suffer” or “to endure”); we however can suffer and can be patient in our suffering, if “we endure evil things with an even-tempered spirit” in order to attain better things.⁴³² But it follows from this that we only have true patience if we are suffering in a good cause, since if our motives are not good, we will not attain to goodness.⁴³³ Augustine concludes that enduring evil people within the mixed body of the Church is such a good cause.⁴³⁴ True patience and endurance

⁴²⁶ *en. Ps.* 8.13.

⁴²⁷ *en. Ps.* 99.11.

⁴²⁸ *en. Ps.* 51.6, 138.31.

⁴²⁹ *en. Ps.* 25[2].5-25[2].6.

⁴³⁰ *en. Ps.* 55.20.

⁴³¹ *en. Ps.* 36.2.1.

⁴³² *pat.* 1.1, 2.2.

⁴³³ *pat.* 6.5.

⁴³⁴ *pat.* 9.8.

therefore come from God, and are the consequence of having been given the Spirit of love.⁴³⁵ Jesus Christ is our example of patience amid suffering, betrayed by one of his own disciples; the Church should not therefore lose heart because of wicked people in its midst.⁴³⁶ The body of Christ endures like wheat surrounded by chaff, but it continues to live through the power of the Holy Spirit.⁴³⁷ It endures because it is built upon love, and without love it is nothing. Unity is thus not to be divided, since love demands that the bad are tolerated along with the good. “Love peace, love unity ... Love peace, love Christ”.⁴³⁸ The unity of the Church is the unity of the body of Christ: those who love Christ must also love unity.

By contrast, those who do not love unity and do not love the universal body of Christ hate their brothers and sisters.⁴³⁹ This suggests another set of images and analogies important to Augustine: that of the Church as a family united by its mutual love. Christ’s followers loved him when he was on earth, offering him hospitality directly; now that he is in heaven, we show our love for him in loving our brothers and sisters.⁴⁴⁰ In particular, this extended family includes many members whom we do not even know and who do not know us: it is crucial that we love the brothers and sisters whom we do not see, as well as those who are close at hand, for we are nonetheless joined with them by the bond of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴¹ It is precisely because the Spirit fills us with love for even these distant brothers and sisters that we know with certainty that we are all the children of God.⁴⁴² For it is the Holy Spirit who makes us to be God’s children.⁴⁴³ Only love can distinguish between those who are the children of God and those who are not:

Let everyone sign themselves with the sign of the cross of Christ; let everyone reply “Amen”;
let everyone sing “Alleluia”; let everyone be baptised, enter the churches, build the walls of

⁴³⁵ *pat.* 17.14.

⁴³⁶ *en. Ps.* 34.1.10.

⁴³⁷ *en. Ps.* 30[2]2.3.

⁴³⁸ *en. Ps.* 119.9.

⁴³⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 2.3.2.

⁴⁴⁰ *ep. Io. tr.* 5.5.

⁴⁴¹ *ep. Io. tr.* 6.10.2.

⁴⁴² *ep. Io. tr.* 8.13.

⁴⁴³ *en. Ps.* 52.5.

the basilicas: [nevertheless] the sons of God are not differentiated from the sons of the devil except by love. Whoever has love has been born of God, whoever does not has not been born of God. A great sign and a great difference!⁴⁴⁴

This is no lyrical hymn of thanksgiving, but rather a deeply ironic warning. Anyone can build a church or say a prayer, but only those who have love are the children of God.

If we act with love, God will live in us and we will live in God.⁴⁴⁵ God does not strictly speaking need us, even though we need him; but notwithstanding this, Augustine makes an extraordinary claim, that although God had an only Son, he did not want him to remain alone but wanted him to have brothers and sisters to share in eternal life with him.⁴⁴⁶ We are therefore co-heirs, adopted children of God, sharing the same Father as does the Son of God. Although this arises not of necessity on the part of God, it is a consequence of the abundance of the divine love. The Father loves the Son, and the Father therefore also loves his adopted children, the members of Christ's body through the bond of the Spirit.⁴⁴⁷ Equally, everyone who loves the Father and who therefore also loves the Son is a child of God; but the children of God must demonstrate their love by loving one another too.⁴⁴⁸

[John] said "sons of God", who a little while before was saying "Son of God", because the sons of God are the body of the only Son of God; and when he is the head and we are the members, the Son of God is one. Therefore whoever loves the sons of God, loves the Son of God; and whoever loves the Son of God, loves the Father. Nobody can love the Father unless they love the Son, and whoever loves the Son also loves the sons of God.⁴⁴⁹

Adopted by grace, which makes up for the fact that we are not born of the same substance as God, the children of God "come to him through generosity, and become heirs together with Christ. For so great is the love of him the heir, that he wanted to

⁴⁴⁴ *ep. Io. tr.* 5.7.1.

⁴⁴⁵ *ep. Io. tr.* 8.14.1: see Dideberg (1975a), 244.

⁴⁴⁶ *ep. Io. tr.* 8.14.2.

⁴⁴⁷ *Io. eu. tr.* 110.5.

⁴⁴⁸ *ep. Iô. tr.* 10.2.

⁴⁴⁹ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.3.1. See Dideberg (1975b), 150-152.

have co-heirs”.⁴⁵⁰ This generosity of grace undoubtedly recalls the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through that Spirit, God’s children are born anew from their loving mother, the Church: in that family of love, the children are blessed because of their love, peace and unity.⁴⁵¹

The fellowship of the Church, then, is the family of God, united through the Spirit of love in the one Son under the one Father. The members of this family are blessed; and because they are focused on eternal things rather than the things of this world, they live together without thought of schisms and heresies.⁴⁵² Living together in unity is not an optional extra, because Christ is one and cannot be divided.⁴⁵³ God has promised unity, and disunity is always a result of human sinfulness.⁴⁵⁴ Those who refuse to live together in unity are unrepentant sinners who cannot be forgiven as long as they remain cut off from the rest.⁴⁵⁵ They divide the unity of the Church, and do have the Spirit of love and peace: “for if peace was in their spirit, surely they would love peace and abandon their dissension?”⁴⁵⁶

In his discussion of the love and unity of the Church, Augustine makes use of several scriptural images which are worth discussing briefly here. The first of these concerns the person of Peter. Given primacy of place among the apostles, Peter represents the universal, worldwide Church; but this communion is built not so much on Peter as on Christ himself, who is the rock (1 Cor 10.4) from whom Peter receives his name as a representative of the Church.⁴⁵⁷ Specifically, it is built upon Peter’s confession of faith in Jesus as the Christ (Mt 16.16-18), which may be contrasted with the confession of the demons (Mt 8.29), the difference being that, unlike them, Peter desired to embrace Christ with love.⁴⁵⁸ That Peter is the one who received the power of binding and loosing (Mt 16.19) symbolises the unity of the apostles and

⁴⁵⁰ *en. Ps.* 49.2.

⁴⁵¹ *en. Ps.* 147.14-147.15.

⁴⁵² *en. Ps.* 105.3.5.

⁴⁵³ *en. Ps.* 33.2.7.

⁴⁵⁴ *en. Ps.* 47.7.

⁴⁵⁵ *ep. Io. tr.* 1.8.2.

⁴⁵⁶ *en. Ps.* 124.10.

⁴⁵⁷ *Io. eu. tr.* 124.5.

⁴⁵⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.1.3.

thus of the whole Church.⁴⁵⁹ In a different image, Augustine returns to the parable of the good and the bad fish. Whereas previously Christ had described a net which caught both sorts of fish together (Mt 13.47), he symbolically foretells the eschatological situation in which the Church contains only good fish (Jn 21.6); similarly, whereas previously the disciples had caught so many fish that their nets were broken (Lk 5.6), now their nets are not torn by the catch (Jn 21.11), a sign of the true Church's unity and freedom from schism.⁴⁶⁰

Those who have love hold onto Christ and hold onto his Church; those who do not have love cause a scandal.⁴⁶¹ The psalmist describes those who are burned by the sun or by the moon (Ps 120.6); and these are the fates of those who abandon Christ or his Church respectively, the Church reflecting the light of Christ so that those who abandon the moon are also guilty of the scandal of rejecting the sun itself.⁴⁶² Because they have refused the light of God, they stumble in the darkness of sin, blinded by their failure to love God and to love their brothers and sisters for his sake.⁴⁶³ To change to a different set of imagery, they do not have the robe of love which is the prerequisite for anyone who wishes to come to the wedding banquet (Mt 22.11-13).⁴⁶⁴ Christ's seamless coat symbolises the unity of the Church through the bond of love (Jn 19.23): it is woven from the top to symbolise the love which comes from heaven, "the more excellent way" of 1 Cor 12.31.⁴⁶⁵ If Christ's coat symbolises unity, the parting of his garments perhaps foretells the divisions of schism and heresy; but elsewhere Augustine argues that the division of his clothes into four represents the fact that the Church fills the four corners of the world.⁴⁶⁶ Similarly, when the psalmist describes the queen's bridal apparel (Ps 44.10), it should be clear that this is an allegory of the Church, the bride of Christ the king. This robe is rich

⁴⁵⁹ *Io. eu. tr.* 118.4. On Peter, see Grabowski (1957a), 109-165, especially 116-133.

⁴⁶⁰ *Io. eu. tr.* 122.7. Jn 21.1-14 could conceivably be interpreted as being about the Church of this age, which would have rather undermined Augustine and given support to the Donatists; but in Augustine's commentary he explains that, since the passage is about the resurrected Christ, it prefigures the "not yet" Church of the resurrected people of God. See Comeau (1930), 154-155.

⁴⁶¹ *ep. Io. tr.* 1.12.1, 1.12.3: see Dideberg (1975b), 83

⁴⁶² *ep. Io. tr.* 1.12.2; compare with *en. Ps.* 120.12-13.

⁴⁶³ *ep. Io. tr.* 1.13.

⁴⁶⁴ *Io. eu. tr.* 9.13: see Berrouard (1969), 109 n. 10.

⁴⁶⁵ *Io. eu. tr.* 13.13.3, 118.4; *en. Ps.* 21[2].19: see Borgomeo (1972), 256.

⁴⁶⁶ *en. Ps.* 21[2].19; *Io. eu. tr.* 118.4.

and varied, symbolising the many different nations which make up the Church in a harmonious unity.⁴⁶⁷

The supreme sign of the unity of the Church is of course the eucharist. Christ is himself “the living bread who has come down from heaven [Jn 6.51]”.⁴⁶⁸ Whoever does not share in the eucharist cannot therefore have the life of heaven, but those who do share in it become the members of Christ and the holy people of God.⁴⁶⁹ The eucharist is therefore a sacrament of the unity of the body of Christ, the Church.⁴⁷⁰ But if the people of God are one body, members of Christ under the one head, it is the Holy Spirit who makes this to be so. For “the body of Christ cannot live, unless by the Spirit of Christ. It is for this reason that the apostle Paul, expounding on this bread, says to us: ‘We who are many are one bread, one body [1 Cor 10.17]’”.⁴⁷¹ It is the Spirit who makes the body to be one and who gives it life, which is why Augustine immediately goes on to extol both the sacrament and the love of God displayed in it: “O mystery of faith! O sign of unity! O bond of love!”⁴⁷²

The eucharist is not the only sacrament of unity, however: rightly and effectively carried out, baptism confers the gift of the one Holy Spirit and membership of the one body of Christ. We will discuss this in some detail in the next chapter. Suffice to say that the Donatists claim sole possession of baptism and effectively claim that their own ministers are the source of their holiness, not God.⁴⁷³ It is the Spirit who baptises, not human beings, and so the Donatists are robbers, falsely laying claim to the gift of God.⁴⁷⁴ They even insist on rebaptising

⁴⁶⁷ *en. Ps.* 44.24.

⁴⁶⁸ *Io. eu. tr.* 26.13.1.

⁴⁶⁹ *Io. eu. tr.* 26.15.2, 26.17, 26.19.1: see Berrouard (1977), 817-819.

⁴⁷⁰ *Io. eu. tr.* 26.15.3.

⁴⁷¹ *Io. eu. tr.* 26.13.2.

⁴⁷² *Io. eu. tr.* 26.13.3: *o sacramentum pietatis! o signum unitatis! o uinculum caritatis!* For commentary on this threefold formula, see Berrouard (1977), 814-815. On the eucharist as the sacrament of unity, see Borgomeo (1972), 269-271.

⁴⁷³ *Io. eu. tr.* 4.9.2, 4.11.1; *en. Ps.* 10.5. See Berrouard (1969), 87.

⁴⁷⁴ *ep. Io. tr.* 7.11.3.

Catholics,⁴⁷⁵ but they are themselves going to be punished as deserters from the unity of the Church.⁴⁷⁶ For baptism cannot be profitable outside the Church, since those who are outside do not have love and do not have the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷⁷ Faith without love is useless: the Donatists have the sacraments, but their disdain for unity demonstrates that they indeed lack love.⁴⁷⁸

As we observed above when we were thinking about the worldwide Church, the Donatists are constantly in the background in Augustine's Johannine sermons and in his commentaries on the psalms. They have denied Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, preferring to follow the wicked example of Donatus in abandoning unity.⁴⁷⁹ Indeed, because they have betrayed Christ, they and not the Catholics are the real *traditores*.⁴⁸⁰ The Donatists claim Christ's name, but refuse to have anything to do with Christ's fellowship, instead leading people away from him.⁴⁸¹ They are liars, and not martyrs, lacking in love and therefore deserving the persecution which is inflicted upon them.⁴⁸² They have much in common with the Church, but because of their schism and heresy they do not have love, the most important thing of all.⁴⁸³ Their separation is unjustifiable, their cause is unworthy, and they should demonstrate their love of Christ by returning to the Church.⁴⁸⁴ Only thus can the Donatists manifest the love without which salvation is impossible. Similarly, the Pelagians seem to believe that patience and endurance result from the human will, not through the grace of God: they should instead earnestly desire the love which is the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸⁵ Augustine allows that heretics have their uses in the divine plan, if only because they help the Catholic Church to clarify certain points of faith: Arianism forced the Church to develop its trinitarian doctrine, Novatianism forced it to think about penitential discipline, Donatism helped it to work through its

⁴⁷⁵ *en. Ps.* 32[2].2.29.

⁴⁷⁶ *ep. Io. tr.* 5.6.2; *Io. eu. tr.* 6.15.2.

⁴⁷⁷ *Io. eu. tr.* 6.13.1, 6.14.1: see Berrouard (1969), 877-880.

⁴⁷⁸ *ep. Io. tr.* 5.6.2, 10.2; *Io. eu. tr.* 13.16.4.

⁴⁷⁹ *Io. eu. tr.* 13.14.3, 47.4; *en. Ps.* 10.5, 21[2].28.

⁴⁸⁰ *ep. Io. tr.* 10.10.2; *en. Ps.* 10.4, 21[2].30.

⁴⁸¹ *en. Ps.* 10.1, 21[2].31, 147.18.

⁴⁸² *ep. Io. tr.* 10.10.1; *Io. eu. tr.* 6.23.3, 11.13.3.

⁴⁸³ *en. Ps.* 54.19.

⁴⁸⁴ *Io. eu. tr.* 11.15.2; *en. Ps.* 18[2].11, 54.16; *pat.* 13.10.

⁴⁸⁵ *pat.* 15.12, 17.14.

baptismal theology.⁴⁸⁶ But all these heresies are divided from unity and divided among themselves, lacking the peace and love of God; and so they will suffer the divine anger which falls upon all heretics.⁴⁸⁷ “The Church of the saints is the Catholic Church; the Church of the saints is not the church of the heretics”.⁴⁸⁸

We will conclude this chapter with a brief examination of some aspects of Augustine’s monastic *Rule*. In it, he offers a detailed picture of how the Christian fellowship should live together in unity and love. Some of his specific regulations apply to the monastic community rather than to the Church as a whole; but since he draws no sharp distinction between the religious life and that of the rest of the Christian community, we can draw out from the *Rule* general principles for Christians living together.⁴⁸⁹ Augustine prays in particular that those who had hitherto been such a joy to him might not now cause him grief because of their internal disputes and rivalries: the work of the devil can only be defeated by the peace of Christ.⁴⁹⁰ The community must live together in unity, just as the earliest apostles lived in unity and held all their property in common. The key text in this regard is Acts 4.32: “all those who believed were of one heart and one soul ... holding everything in common”.⁴⁹¹ Although Augustine makes relatively little use of this text in his wider commentary on the unity of the Church, it is a fascinating verse: it underpins his understanding of the common monastic life, and privately he always saw the monastic life as the example and ideal of the life of the wider Church community. There should be no distinctions on the grounds of social status, since the object of the common life is to honour God.⁴⁹² Those who are responsible for serving one another food and clothing must do so quickly and without complaint.⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁶ *en. Ps.* 54.22.

⁴⁸⁷ *en. Ps.* 54.21, 106.14, 147.16.

⁴⁸⁸ *en. Ps.* 149.3.

⁴⁸⁹ Lawless (1987), 59: “[Augustine] nowhere proposes a lay spirituality as such or a spirituality for monks: ‘there is one commonwealth for all Christians [*op. mon.* 25.33]’. Holiness is equally incumbent upon everyone. Monastery and home simply offer different approaches to God”. All Christians, clergy, religious and lay together build each other up in the body of Christ.

⁴⁹⁰ *reg.* 1.2-1.4.

⁴⁹¹ *reg.* 2.4, 3.1.3-3.1.4, 3.5.1; *en. Ps.* 132.2: see Van Bavel (1996), 43-44. On Augustine’s use of Acts 4.32, see Verheijen (1980), 75-105.

⁴⁹² 3.1.6-3.1.7.

⁴⁹³ *reg.* 3.5.9, 3.5.11.

Above all, there should be no disputes within the Church: if disagreements do develop, they must be ended speedily so that anger does not develop into hatred, for “whoever hates his brother is a murderer [1 Jn 3.15]”.⁴⁹⁴ Christians must forgive one another, as Jesus himself taught us (Mt 6.12).⁴⁹⁵ Those who are incapable of asking for forgiveness do not have the Holy Spirit and do not have love: the *Rule* is essentially an introduction to the structured outworking of a life together based on this love.⁴⁹⁶ Above all, in this shared life, “the first reason for your having been gathered together in one is so that you should live in one mind in the house [Ps 67.7] and have one soul and one heart [Acts 4.32] in God”.⁴⁹⁷ Monks are so-named, after all, because they live together as one, *μόνος*, in heart and mind: as such, they are a sign to the Church of its trinitarian basis, looking to God the Father, in unity with God the Son, bound together by God the Holy Spirit.⁴⁹⁸ Thus the whole Church must live together as one, without divisions: “reach out for unity, and do not divide the people, but grab them as one and make them one!”⁴⁹⁹

Conclusion

The Church, Augustine has shown, is one, because it is the image of God the Trinity; it is holy, because it is the body of Christ animated by the Holy Spirit; catholic, because it fills the whole world; and apostolic, because it is built on the promise made to Peter and his fellow apostles. The Catholic Church is made a unity by the indwelling of the Spirit of love, which binds up all its members into the one holy fellowship, a unity in heart and in mind. Outside this communion of all the faithful, there is no love and thus no Church: those who reject the gift of communion with their fellow Christians are guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The

⁴⁹⁴ *reg.* 3.6.1, and compare with *ep. Io. tr.* 5.10. On this, see Verheijen (1971) and Van Bavel (1996), 93-95.

⁴⁹⁵ *reg.* 3.6.2.

⁴⁹⁶ Lawless (1987), 22.

⁴⁹⁷ *reg.* 3.1.2. Lawless (1987), 157 points out that this sentence contains no less than four references to unity (*in unum ... ut unianimes ... anima una ... cor unum*).

⁴⁹⁸ *en. Ps.* 132.6: see Brockwell (1977), 95; Lawless (1987), 158; Van Bavel (1996), 44-45.

⁴⁹⁹ *en. Ps.* 72.34.

Donatists are not a parallel congregation: they are, as we shall see, a mere sect, literally cut off from the Church and divided from God the Trinity. In the final chapter, we will consider in more detail Augustine's response to heresy, especially the sin of disunity, and how this in turn helped him formulate his own distinctive trinitarian ecclesiology.

3

Donatism

Though with a scornful wonder
Men see her sore opprest,
By schisms rent asunder,
By heresies distrest,
Yet saints their watch are keeping,
Their cry goes up, 'How long?'
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song.

Samuel Stone (1839-1900)

The issue of what was at stake in Church unity emerged most clearly in the course of Augustine's lengthy controversies with Manicheism, Donatism and Pelagianism. The first and last of these movements radically differed from Catholic Christianity over matters to do with the faith, whereas Donatism ostensibly a dispute about Church order. Consequently, whereas the others are without doubt to be reckoned as heresies, Donatism is often described instead as a schism. But it will have become clear by now that there were very real theological issues at stake; and so in fact Donatism was also a heresy, an "inveterate schism", since the disagreement over ecclesiology had at its heart a real doctrinal difference. Augustine's argument was that since the Donatists were separated from the unity of the Church, they lacked love and they lacked the Holy Spirit. We will examine all three controversies in turn, but will concentrate on Augustine's anti-Donatist works, since that dispute brings the subject of the present thesis into particularly sharp relief.

Manicheism

Manicheism emerged in the third century, spreading quickly from Persia to much of the ancient world.¹ It survived in parts of China almost to the present day, and although Manicheism itself more or less died out in the west by the sixth century, its recurring influence may be traced in a long sequence of Byzantine and medieval heresies. It may perhaps best be characterised as a kind of systematic Christian Gnosticism, in which, for example, Jesus Christ brought not salvation as such but merely *γνωσις* of the truth.² Its central tenet was a radical cosmological dualism, in which salvation is achieved by releasing particles of light from the primal human being to return to their own realm. The “elect” of the Manichees practised a religion of extreme asceticism; they were accompanied by a much larger group of “hearers” who, unburdened by such strict rules, carried out day-to-day tasks and supported the “elect”.

Augustine first encountered the Manichees in Carthage around 372 or 373, spending nine years as a “hearer” until a disappointing encounter with the Manichean bishop Faustus in 383.³ The sermons of Ambrose in Milan, which Augustine heard from 384 onwards, only served to confirm his decision to leave them, but he probably remained at least in theory a Manichee until entering the Catholic catechumenate in 385.⁴ So Augustine had about a decade of direct personal contact with Manicheism, justifying a later remark that he could claim to know them well.⁵ He recognised just how beguiling they could be, because of their ability to answer the kinds of questions which had preoccupied him as a young man. This explains why, almost immediately after his conversion and baptism, Augustine began to

¹ Helpful introduction is found in Coyle (2003). The fullest recent historical study is Lieu (1985); also important are Burkitt (1925), Frend (1953), Tardieu (1965), Brown (1969) and Widengren (1981).

² On the theology of the Manichees, see Puech (1949) and the series of important studies including Decret (1970), (1974), (1978), (1993) and (1995).

³ *mor.* 1.18.34, 2.19.68; *conf.* 3.11.20, 4.1.1, 5.3.3-5.7.13. See Coyle (2003), 10. Although rather dated, a good general introduction to Augustine’s relationship with Manicheism is still Rickaby (1925); also beneficial are Hopper (1955) and Lieu (1985), 117-153.

⁴ This is the argument of Courcelle (1954).

⁵ *mor.* 1.17.30.

attack Manicheism, comparing it unfavourably with the Catholic Church.⁶ The first of two books establishes the supremacy of Catholic virtue, while the second demonstrates the inadequacy of Manichean moral theology: in the course of discussing the nature of the Catholic Church, this first volume contains some of Augustine's earliest published thoughts about love, unity and the Holy Spirit.

In the first part of the first book, Augustine concludes that in order to attain *beatitudo* human beings must love God “with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind [Mt 22.37, Deut 6.5]”.⁷ It is utterly characteristic of Augustine that the discussions quickly home in on the centrality of love, but it is interesting to note that this is true even at this very early stage in the development of this thought. In fact, the rest of the book can be understood very largely as a meditation on the twin aspects of the commandment to love God and one another.⁸ Augustine first puts forward a trinitarian framework for his discussion of *beatitudo*, making it clear that the intended end of human existence is achievable only through love. We, who are created by God, become like God insofar as we subject ourselves to God and are joined to God in love.⁹ But if we come to God through Jesus Christ, we are made holy because “we burn with abounding and renewing love”: such love is nothing less than the Holy Spirit, who is himself the love of God in our hearts (from Rom 5.5). It is no coincidence that Augustine's thoughts about love immediately make him think about its trinitarian context: “Thus we must love God the Trinity in unity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit”.¹⁰ It is only through participation in the triune God that we can achieve blessedness, a conclusion which surely foreshadows the theme of *On the Trinity*. “For what can be the supreme good of

⁶ *retr.* 1.7.1. Coyle (2003), 1 points out that Augustine's first literary blast against the Manicheans was a work on (as he puts it) “Catholic Belief in Practice”. The work was begun in 387 or 388, but was probably finished after *Gn. adu. Man.* had been completed: see *mor.* 1.1.1. Coyle (1978) is a comprehensive study of *mor.* 1; Burnaby (1938), 85-92 and Du Roy (1966), 215-230 draw out the importance of love. Canning (1982), (1983a), (1986), (1987) and (1993) make considerable use of the text in analyses of the love of God and neighbour.

⁷ *mor.* 1.8.13, 1.9.14.

⁸ See Coyle (1978), 81-83.

⁹ *mor.* 1.12.20-1.14.24.

¹⁰ *mor.* 1.14.24. Coyle (1978), 246: “the first instance of an *explicit* treatment of the Trinity by Augustine”. Decret (1993) demonstrates that, despite the prominence of the Paraclete in Manichean religion, he had little to do with the Holy Spirit of Catholic doctrine; still less did it imply assent to any kind of trinitarian theology.

human beings except to cling to that by which they are blessed? But this alone is God, to whom we can cling, it is certain, only by love.”¹¹

The second thing Augustine does is to develop the notion of theological virtue in the context of love, and then to relate this idea of virtue to that of the whole *ecclesia* of all the saints. Love is at the heart of Augustine’s thought on Catholic moral theology, and the four classical virtues are related back to the theme of love. “I hold virtue to be nothing other than the perfect love of God,” he comments.¹² Augustine demonstrates that both Old and New Testaments are in agreement about the need to live in accordance with these virtues. The Son is shown to be the virtue and the wisdom of God; and the Holy Spirit is similarly shown to be the love of God.¹³ In reaching this conclusion, Augustine again quotes Rom 5.5: “the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us”. Understanding of these things, he says, comes from “the love of God ... which, inspired by the Holy Spirit, leads to the Son, that is, the wisdom of God, by which the Father himself is known”.¹⁴ Thus the trinitarian context of love is again underlined: the Father is known through the wisdom of the Son, inspired by the love of the Spirit. Continuing the trinitarian theme, and continuing to refer to Pauline texts, Augustine quotes from Ephesians:

This is why I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... that according to the riches of his glory he would grant you to be strengthened by the Spirit in your inner being, that Christ may live in your hearts by faith; so that rooted and grounded in love, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints the height and length and breadth and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passes all knowledge [Eph 3.14-19].¹⁵

¹¹ *ibid.* In the final phrase, Augustine uses all three synonyms for love in a way which defies translation: *nisi dilectione, amore, caritate*. Coyle (1978), 241-259 argues that *mor.* 1.13.22-1.14.24 is a later addition, but this ignores the fact that such digressions are commonplace in Augustine.

¹² *mor.* 1.15.25. Compare with *ciu.* 15.22: “a short and accurate definition of virtue is that it is the ordering of love”. See Grabowski (1957a), 361.

¹³ *mor.* 1.16.29; see also TeSelle (1970), 116.

¹⁴ *mor.* 1.17.31.

¹⁵ *mor.* 1.18.33.

This passage is trinitarian in structure: we pray to the Father to send us the Son to live in us through the Spirit. There is also a clear parallel in the text between the phrases “strengthened by the Spirit ... that Christ may live in your hearts” and “rooted and grounded in love ... able to comprehend”, a parallel which reinforces the connection between wisdom and the Son on the one hand, and love and the Holy Spirit on the other. Finally, the object of our incorporation into Christ through the Spirit is that we may be united “with all the saints”, that is, with the Catholic Church, in communion at once with God and with all God’s faithful people. The key element here is love: we are “rooted and grounded in love” so that together we may “know the love of Christ”.

Augustine’s use of this passage clearly illustrates his awareness of the inter-relation between the theologies of love, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity and Church unity, a point which he then develops further. Augustine concludes once more that the virtues are commanded by God and can be summarised as love of God.¹⁶ But this has wider implications. If we love God, we also love ourselves; and if we love ourselves, we should also love one another. “Ought there not to be a bond of love among human beings themselves? Indeed there should: for we can think of no more certain step towards the love of God than human love for one another.”¹⁷ Nobody can come to God if they hate their neighbour.¹⁸ Because the Manichees deny this commandment, they separate themselves from the Christian Church and from the rest of humanity. “Christians are given this rule for living, that ‘we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind, and our neighbour as ourselves [Mt 22.37-38]’”.¹⁹ The Manichees deny the force of these commandments; but the Church by contrast is made up of those who are bound

¹⁶ *mor.* 1.25.46.

¹⁷ *mor.* 1.26.48. See Canning (1993), 2-8, 37-38, 43, 60, 71.

¹⁸ *mor.* 1.26.51; Canning (1993), 256 observes that love of neighbour is subordinate to love of God.

¹⁹ *mor.* 1.30.62.

in a religious bond stronger and closer than the ties of blood. While retaining the ties both of nature and of choice, [the Catholic Church] binds with mutual love every relationship of kindred and of affinity.²⁰

This bond of love, transcending all other human bonds, is none other than the Holy Spirit.

This first book *On the Conduct of the Catholic Church*, the opening shot in Augustine's long career as a controversialist, therefore gives us an insight into the beginnings of some of his most important arguments. It is only through love that we are able to attain to the triune God; and indeed love is identified already with the Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. It follows from our love for God that we must also love one another, and this is the basis for our life together as the Church, the communion of love. Although these arguments are fundamental to Augustine's passionate desire for ecclesial unity, it should be noted that none play any part in any subsequent anti-Manichean writings.²¹ The Catholic Church is an ideal against which the Manichees – and other heretics – fall a long way short. The Manichean sect is such a long way from Christian orthodoxy that other issues overshadow the essentially ecclesiological questions with which we are concerned.

Towards the end of the text we have been examining, Augustine concludes that the lives of the Christians offer a good moral example for the Manichees to emulate.²² Nevertheless, the Church should not be criticised because of the presence within it of visible sinners. Even though good and evil people remain together for now, the wheat and the chaff will be separated by the Lord in due time.²³ This particular argument would come to the fore a little later on in Augustine's lengthy controversy with the Donatists, to whom we now turn.

²⁰ *mor.* 1.30.63. Canning (1993), 42, 47.

²¹ The other works of Augustine directed more or less explicitly against the Manichees, with their approximate dates, are *Gn. adu. Man.* (389), *duab. an.* (between 391 and 395), *c. Fort.* (August 392), *c. Adim.* (394), *c. ep. Man.* (397), *c. Faust.* (between 398 and 400), *c. Fel.* (December 404), *nat. b.* (after 404) and *c. Sec.* (also after 404).

²² *mor.* 1.34.74.

²³ *mor.* 1.34.76.

Donatism and Augustine's response

Donatism arose as a by-product of the persecution of the Church under Diocletian from 303 to 305.²⁴ Under threat of imprisonment or worse, some of the African clergy handed over their copies of the scriptures to the imperial authorities, earning themselves the contemptuous label of *traditores* in unfavourable comparison with those who endured suffering or martyrdom. The poisonous atmosphere engendered at this time goes a long way to explain the later intransigence of both parties in the dispute;²⁵ but its immediate consequence was a dispute about the succession to the see of Carthage in 311, from which the Donatist schism was born.²⁶

Despite intense persecution by the imperial powers, acting on behalf of the Catholic Church, it grew and flourished throughout the fourth century, first under the leadership of the Numidian Donatus of Casae Nigrae until his exile in 346 and death in 355, then under Parmenian from 362 until about 391.²⁷ Donatist *circumcelliones* waged an ongoing guerrilla war against the Catholic hierarchy;²⁸ distaste for Circumcellion violence was the major reason for an internal schism within the Donatists of Mauretania in the 360s which gave rise to the relatively moderate strand of Donatism known as Rogatism.²⁹ A later, short-lived schism in the 390s between the followers of Maximianus and the followers of Primianus, Parmenian's successor, demonstrated the fissile nature of schism and the inconsistency of the Donatists in

²⁴ The history of Donatism need not be rehearsed in detail here. The best general survey (invariably less sympathetic to Augustine than to his rivals) is still Frend (1952), although his conclusions about the social, economic and political basis of Donatism have been challenged, particularly by Jones (1959) and Brown (1968b). Frend (1997) summarises and defends his earlier argument. Brisson (1958) similarly emphasises the particular qualities of African Christianity in describing Donatism, but this work is subjected to savage and intemperate criticism by Mandouze (1960). Important historiography is to be found in Brown (1961) and Markus (1972).

²⁵ Crespin (1965), 106-107.

²⁶ Frend (1952), 1-24.

²⁷ Frend (1952), 193-207. Donatist hagiography, revealing something of their self-perception, may be found in Tilley (1996). The most important Catholic opponent of Donatism at this time was Optatus of Milevis, whose arguments strongly influenced Augustine and are the chief source for the early history of the schism: see Batiffol (1920), I, 86-108; Willis (1950), 23-25, 106-110; Eno (1973); Merdinger (1989) and Edwards (1997).

²⁸ Frend (1952), 171-177.

²⁹ Willis (1950), 21, Lancel (2002), 169.

dealing with disagreements.³⁰ The revolt of Gildo in 393 against Rome was supported by many of the Donatist bishops, so that when the rebellion was put down in 398 the imperial rulers were more inclined to act against Donatism.³¹ A series of Edicts of Unity were enacted in 405 by the emperor Honorius which for the first time set the legal framework for the systematic coercion of the Donatists, most importantly by having them legally declared to be heretics because of their practice of rebaptism.³² A judicial council of Catholic and Donatist bishops met in Carthage in 411, which resulted in a formal ruling by its president Flavius Marcellinus that it was the Donatists who were responsible for disunity.³³ This council marked the end of Donatism as a real power in Africa, but although its numbers dwindled, the schism continued at least until the Vandal invasions twenty years later, and probably survived in some form until African Christianity was swept aside by the spread of Islam in the seventh century.³⁴

The theological issues at stake in the schism will become clear as we explore Augustine's detailed response to Donatism.³⁵ The immediate problem for him was the detestable practice of the Donatists of rebaptising converts from Catholicism.³⁶ But this was just the most obvious manifestation of a much more fundamental difference in ecclesiology. For the Donatists, the Church was a pure fellowship of the elect, in which there could be no possible compromise with messy human sinfulness.³⁷ The Catholic position emphasised the universality of the Church made up of saints and sinners together and filling the entire world. Both sides took for granted the basic premise that there could by definition be only one Church. As we

³⁰ Frend (1952), 213-220.

³¹ Frend (1952), 220-226.

³² Frend (1952), 264 points out that the declaration that Donatism was a heresy resulted directly from Augustine's arguments about their violation of the sacraments.

³³ Frend (1952), 275-289, Crespin (1965), 77-92, Lamirande (1972a), Tilley (1991), Shaw (1992).

³⁴ Aspects of the later history of Donatism are considered in Frend (1952), 300-314, Markus (1964) and Markus (1979).

³⁵ On the theological issues at stake, good introductions are Batiffol (1920), Willis (1950), Dillistone (1955) and R. F. Evans (1972), 65-91. Bonner (1963), 237-311 and Lancel (2002), 271-304 offer lucid and perceptive summaries of the differences between the Catholic Church and the *pars Donati*. Eno (1972) points out subtleties in Donatist theology which were ignored both by Augustine and contemporary commentators.

³⁶ Dillistone (1955), 194 observes that the significance of baptism was the "one simple outward test" which more than anything else distinguished the two sides in the controversy.

³⁷ Willis (1950), 1-3; Faul (1966), 406-407.

will see, each of these theological emphases had deep roots in African ecclesiology, and each party was able to look to Cyprian for some precedent in their thought and practice.

At all times, Augustine's campaign against the errors of the Donatists was motivated by love. His first letter in the controversy is addressed "to Maximinus, my well-beloved and honourable lord and brother". Augustine, a Catholic priest at this time, immediately explains why he uses such language in writing to a Donatist bishop. Love is what has compelled him:

Since with this duty of writing to you I am serving you through love, it is not absurd for me to call you "my lord", on account of our one true Lord who commanded us thus. But having written "most beloved", God knows not only that I love you, but that I love you as I love myself, since I am well aware that I wish the good things for you that I wish for myself.³⁸

Augustine makes a similar point a little later in the same letter, adding that we should be united in our love for Christ, and that he himself is writing to Maximinus only because he is motivated by love.³⁹ A similar theme emerges in later letters, such as *ep.* 33 and 43. The first of these is mostly about the virtues of peaceful discussion and Augustine's attempts at organising a dialogue. "But as for my love for you, I owe as much as he commanded us, who loved us so much that he bore the shame of the cross for us."⁴⁰ Or again, in his next letter:

It seems to us that we have fulfilled our duty of love, which the Holy Spirit teaches us to repay not only to our own but to everyone, speaking to us through the apostle: "But the Lord increase you, and make you to overflow in love for one another and for everyone [1 Thess 3.12]".⁴¹

³⁸ *ep.* 23.1. On the use of such conciliatory language, see Batiffol (1920), I, 127-129; Lamirande (1972b), 81-89.

³⁹ *ep.* 23.5.

⁴⁰ *ep.* 33.1.

⁴¹ *ep.* 43.1.1.

In yet another letter, written a decade or so later, Augustine was arguing on very similar lines: “The love of Christ ... does not allow us to remain silent”.⁴² For the love of Christ’s people, Augustine cannot abandon them to the harm they will suffer at the hands of the Donatists. So he understands that Christ himself commanded us to love one another, and that such mutual love is nothing less than our imitation of Christ’s prior love for us.

But why does the love of God require Augustine to reach out to the Donatists? The reason is that he is utterly convinced of the scope of divine mercy. “So we seek you so that we may find you, for we love you in order that you might live, just as much as we hate your error.”⁴³ Because they have separated themselves from the Church, his opponents do not have the Holy Spirit and thus they do not have life: Augustine however wants to restore them to life through their return to the love and unity of the Catholic fold. It is thus a matter of eternal life and death for the Donatists, which explains why Augustine sees the situation as so urgent and why the controversy had such a high priority for such a long time. “Be at peace with us, brothers. We love you, and we want for you that which we want for ourselves”,⁴⁴ that is, salvation and eternal life.

On the other hand, the situation is not just an urgent one for the lost souls among the Donatists. It is also a matter of acute pastoral responsibility for Augustine himself, for Christ’s commandment is that Augustine must love even his enemies.⁴⁵ As the chief pastor of the Christians in Hippo, and with the additional duties of a wider ministry because of his fame as a teacher and controversialist, Augustine was answerable to God for the souls in his care. Indeed, this duty fell to the whole Catholic Church, not just to its bishops. Augustine often uses the analogy of a mother seeking her lost children,⁴⁶ but he occasionally uses other images as well. Referring to the Donatists’ own regard for the Maximianists, he comments wryly: “If

⁴² *ep.* 105.1.1.

⁴³ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.37.89.

⁴⁴ *ep.* 105.4.13. See Lamirande (1972b), 179-181.

⁴⁵ *c. litt. Pet.* 3.13.14.

⁴⁶ For example, *bapt.* 1.16.25; see Lamirande (1972b), 89-93.

a broken branch has sought a twig which has broken off it, with what care should the tree itself seek the branch which has broken away from it?" This image of Church unity is rather reminiscent of Cyprian, and may also remind us of Tertullian's analogies of God the Trinity.⁴⁷

The argumentative, repetitive and sometimes pedantic nature of Augustine's lengthy replies to the Donatists often seems to have been mocked by them in an attempt to seize the moral high ground. So, for example, Augustine includes a long discussion of the place of argument in Christian discourse at the beginning of his reply to Cresconius in order to justify his continued attempts to engage the Donatists in debate. He explains that "we preach to everyone, with the help of the Lord our God, the usefulness, faithfulness and holiness of Christian unity", adding that he will be careful to argue his case in a spirit of "reverent care of love".⁴⁸ However, he later chides Cresconius for his unsophisticated arguments: "Rather, keep the childish things for the children!"⁴⁹ Augustine denies the accusation that he enjoys launching personal attacks on the leaders of the Donatists: he hates not the sinner, but the sin, himself being simply "desirous of peace".⁵⁰ He has no designs on the worldly goods of the Donatists: "But we confess to you that our greed is called love. This is what seeks you on our part, this is what desires to find you, to correct you and to bind you in the unity of Christ".⁵¹ Augustine takes seriously his duties as a bishop, responsibilities which have at their heart love as a moral and pastoral imperative.

Most of the rest of this chapter will be concerned with Augustine's arguments against Donatism. We will look first in more detail at the subject of the love and unity of the Church. We will then turn to the crucial questions surrounding baptism, following this with a brief study of the respective roles of God and of human clergy in administering the sacraments. We next examine the related doctrines of the mixed

⁴⁷ *Emer.* 12. Van der Meer (1961), 125-128 and Crespin (1965) emphasise this pastoral imperative in Augustine's mission to the Donatists. Compare with Cyprian, *De unitate* 5 and Tertullian, *Aduersus Praxean* 8.

⁴⁸ *Cresc.* 1.6.8, 1.7.9.

⁴⁹ *Cresc.* 3.78.89.

⁵⁰ *Cresc.* 4.64.78: see Lamirande (1972b), 181-182.

⁵¹ *c. Gaud.* 1.37.50.

Church and the worldwide Church. We will see how correction and coercion resulted from love. The example of the Maximianists provided Augustine with arguments to use against the Donatists. Finally, we will see how Augustine showed that Cyprian would have supported his position, not that of his opponents.

Love and unity

The opening chapters of the second book *To Cresconius* summarise Augustine's objections to Donatism. After a seemingly inconsequential discussion about whether his opponents should be referred to as *Donatiani* or as *Donatistae*,⁵² the way is prepared for a further discussion about whether the difference between them should best be described as a schism or as a heresy. Augustine quotes Cresconius' own words back at him:

Among us [Catholics and Donatists together], for whom Christ was born, died and rose again, there is one religion, the same sacraments, and no differences in Christian observances. A schism has come about: it is not to be called a heresy, because a heresy is a sect which follows different things, while a schism is surely the separation of those who follow the same [things].⁵³

But it is simply untrue, Augustine argues, that Catholics and Donatists have the same faith, since the latter do not recognise the baptisms of the former. Either the Donatists believe that baptism has nothing to do with the Christian faith, or they think that Catholics are not Christians. In either case, there is a clear theological difference between them, so it follows that the Donatists are heretics.⁵⁴ Cresconius

⁵² *Cresc.* 2.1.2; Lamirande (1967), 66 n.9 and (1972b), 105-106. Shaw (1992), 8-9 draws attention to the fact that the Donatists would, of course, have rejected any such label: in their own eyes, they were the only true *Christiani*. Shaw argues entertainingly that to caricature the position of an opponent is a good first step towards marginalising him.

⁵³ *Cresc.* 2.3.4. See the useful discussion in Grabowski (1944), 464-465 and (1957a), 245; R. F. Evans (1972), 74-75; Lamirande (1972b), 27.

⁵⁴ *Cresc.* 2.4.6; Frend (1952), 264.

suggests that a schism is a “recent disagreement” but that a heresy is an “inveterate schism”;⁵⁵ this does not affect Augustine’s conclusion:

Since the differences followed are nothing, not even anything little, both when you separated from the bond of unity and when you disagreed with us about the repetition of baptism, so it is (following from your own definition which says that “a heresy is a sect which follows different things”) that you are heretics, and that you are also defeated!⁵⁶

Thus the Donatists are heretics, guilty of sacrilege through their separation from unity. Yet despite this Donatist converts to Catholicism are received back without rebaptism. In returning to the Church, they are transformed by the restoration of communion, their wills converted in the instant of their reconciliation. Augustine sums up the inadequacy of the Donatist heresy in a succinct soundbite: “You do not have the Christian Church, and you do not have Christian love!”⁵⁷ So this section will explore the interaction between love and unity. It will be seen that Augustine’s arguments are full of references to the scriptures, which instruct us to bear with one another in love for the sake of unity. Without love, we are nothing, and so love is a prerequisite for salvation: without communion with the Catholic Church, we lack love and we lack the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸ The obligations of love mean that the correction of sinners must stop short of physical separation. The Donatists must take responsibility for schism and disunity, the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit.

Augustine sees the entire scriptural canon as condemning schism and extolling unity. For example, the psalms and the prophets call the people of God to unity with one another.⁵⁹ Paul opposes any division, most notably in the famous passage at 1 Cor 1.1-13 which denounces factionalism.⁶⁰ Augustine frequently

⁵⁵ *Cresc.* 2.7.9: *recens dissensio ... schisma inueteratum*; Batiffol (1920), I, 242.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* Notice Augustine’s glee in the final three words! On the designation of the Donatists as heretics rather than schismatics, see Crespin (1965), 269-272 and Lamirande (1972b), 51-80.

⁵⁷ *Cresc.* 2.10.12.

⁵⁸ Grabowski (1957b), 58-61. On the interrelatedness of love and unity, see Willis (1950), 113-117 and Lamirande (1972b), 38-50.

⁵⁹ *ps. c. Don.* verse E.

⁶⁰ *c. Don.* 21.33.

quotes Eph 4.3 on the Holy Spirit as the bond of unity. Petilian also made reference to this text:

“I, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, brothers, that you should walk worthily of the vocation to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, attempting to keep the unity of the Spirit in the union of peace [Eph 4.1-3, cited by Petilian].”⁶¹

Curiously, Augustine’s reply in this immediate context is very brief, offering only the response that if the Donatists were to take these verses seriously, then they would stop squabbling among themselves for the sake of peace.⁶² Tantalisingly, he gives no hint of the full implications of “the unity of the Spirit” for his trinitarian ecclesiology. It may be that he had not yet realised the importance of this text. The second book against Petilian dates from about 401, and as such probably predates the crucial discussion at *On the Trinity* 6.5.7, though this is not certain, since we can only conjecture the pace at which he wrote the early parts of this later work. However, the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is the bond of communion between the Father and the Son can be found as far back as 393, in *On Faith and the Creed* 9.19; and the identification of the Spirit with the love which unites the Church can be traced at least to *Letter* 43.8.23, from late 396 or early 397: furthermore, it is in this second reference that we find Augustine’s first citation of Eph 4.3 against the Donatists. So we can be absolutely certain that all the pieces of the puzzle were present by this time, even if Augustine had not yet finished putting them together. From the fact that both Augustine and Petilian refer to this text, we can deduce that both sides acknowledged its importance. The differences between them were about the kind of unity envisaged and on which side true love and unity were to be found.

On a number of occasions, especially in *On Baptism*, Augustine refers to a text from Song of Songs which was also a favourite of Cyprian’s: “My dove is one,

⁶¹ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.70.155. It is interesting to note that the text of Eph 4.3 given here by Augustine, himself quoting Petilian, is markedly different from the text he usually cites, illustrating the variety in Latin versions of the scriptures in circulation at this time: *sustinentes inuicem in caritate, sollicite agentes seruare unitatem spiritus in coniunctione pacis.*

⁶² *c. litt. Pet.* 2.70.156.

the only one of her mother [Song 6.9]”.⁶³ Since Mk 1.10 and parallels describe the Holy Spirit taking the form of a dove at Jesus’ baptism, he identifies the dove of Song 6.9 as the Spirit-filled Church:

Because in a symbol of unity the Lord gave Peter the power that whatever he loosed on earth should be loosened, it is clear that unity is also described as the one perfect dove [see Mt 16.19 and Song 6.9].⁶⁴

The one Church has the power to forgive or to retain sins: “For the rock retains, the rock dispenses; the dove retains, the dove dispenses; unity retains, unity dispenses”.⁶⁵ Whoever is outside the unity of the Church is therefore not a member of the dove, not in communion with Christ through the Holy Spirit. Another intriguing text is found at Ps 132:

See how good and pleasant it is when brothers live in unity. It is like the oil upon the head that ran down the beard, the beard of Aaron, that ran down the edge of his garments [Ps 132.1-2].⁶⁶

Like the text from Eph 4.3, Augustine and Petilian agree on the importance of these verses, but differ as to their understanding of the locus of unity.

You say the truth. For that priesthood in the forerunner of the body of Christ had an anointing, and is saved by being joined together in unity. For Christ himself is called after chrism, that is, from anointing ... So to those who are strong in his Church and cling to his face, so that they preach the truth without fear, there descends from Christ himself, as from the head, a holy oil, that is, the sanctification of the Spirit.⁶⁷

⁶³ *bapt.* 1.11.15; Brisson (1958), 139-140. See also *bapt.* 3.17.22, 4.3.4, 4.10.16, 4.20.27, 5.11.13, 5.16.21, 5.18.24, 5.27.38, 6.3.5, 6.29.56, 6.34.65 and 7.50.98; and Cyprian *ep.* 69.2.

⁶⁴ *bapt.* 3.17.22. Grabowski (1957a), 510-513 is a useful summary of Augustine’s theological interpretation of the sign of the dove.

⁶⁵ *bapt.* 3.18.23; Brisson (1958), 159.

⁶⁶ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.105.238, and compare with the opening line of *ps. c. Don.* verse E.

⁶⁷ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.105.239; see Lamirande (1969), 44, 55-56. The *figura corporis Christi* is Israel, the forerunner of the Church.

There are two things to note from this passage. Firstly, it contains christological as well as pneumatological language. There is one body with Christ at its head; but the agent of unity is always the Holy Spirit of love. The oil descending from the head is an icon, as it were, of the procession of the Spirit from the Son: a symbol of the *filioque* and thus of Augustine's mature trinitarian theology. Secondly, we should pay attention to the reference to the face of Christ, which recalls the command to "seek the face of the Lord" so important in *On the Trinity*,⁶⁸ and central to Augustine's understanding of the purpose of Christian living.

Augustine twice refers to the churches portrayed in the opening chapters of Revelation. In the first, the Donatists are compared with the church of Ephesus (Rev 2.1-7). Although the Ephesians are praised for their patience and endurance, they are also criticised for their lack of love, something Augustine explicitly connects with reference to Eph 4.3 as tolerance for the sake of unity.⁶⁹ The second reference is more positive, in which the church of Philadelphia (Rev 3.7-13) is held up as an example to which the Donatists should aspire. Augustine points out that the name of the city means "brotherly love" in Greek: he imagines that apostolic church calling to the Africans for unity.⁷⁰

If the scriptures teach Augustine that love and unity are commanded by God, then what is he to make of texts which seem to command separation? A solution is found through a spiritualising exegesis, opposed to the more literal interpretation propounded by the Donatists. All Church discipline must be seen in the light of the principle of Eph 4.3 that we bear with one another in unity; it is because the Donatists have forgotten this rule that they misinterpret the scriptures.⁷¹ One such misunderstood text is 1 Cor 5.13, to which Augustine offers the following reading: "Let us see if perhaps the apostle had no reason not to say, 'Drive out evil people from your congregation', but rather, 'Drive out evil from among you'".⁷² This

⁶⁸ *trin.* 1.3.5, 9.1.1 and 15.2.2.

⁶⁹ *ep.* 43.8.22, 43.8.23.

⁷⁰ *c. ep. Parm.* 1.7.12.

⁷¹ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.1.1.

⁷² *c. ep. Parm.* 3.1.2. The triple negative used here by Augustine makes translation awkward.

specific suggestion is impossible to sustain on purely textual grounds, since the Greek text reads *τον πονηρον*, which can only be translated as “evil person”. However, the broad argument still holds good, since what Augustine is trying to do here is precisely to get behind the literal and sometimes contradictory meaning of the scriptures to the spiritual and unified reading which lies underneath. Indeed, despite this verse, he finds a number of examples to show that elsewhere Paul is very clear about the importance of tempering ecclesiastical discipline with love.⁷³ The point is that correction is always better than severance of communion – and here may be found another key element of Augustine’s theory of coercion, itself an instrument of loving unity – in order that at all times we should “bear with one another, trying to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace [Eph 4.2-3]”.⁷⁴

For Augustine, then, it is axiomatic that the scriptures command Christians to live together in unity. For the Church is the body of Christ: if we acknowledge Jesus Christ, then we must also recognise his body;⁷⁵ and since Christ’s body cannot be divided, then his Church must also be one.⁷⁶ Indeed, just as there is one Father in heaven, so there is also one mother, the Church on earth.⁷⁷ But such unity is based on mutual love and toleration: “Whoever has the love of Christ cannot hate peace”.⁷⁸ Those who love Christ’s peace must also love unity: “We love the peace of Christ, we rejoice in unity”.⁷⁹ Nothing can count against those who maintain unity with one another, since they possess the Holy Spirit who is love. They have no sin, because through their mutual love they have been sanctified by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit: “God lives in them and walks among them”.⁸⁰

⁷³ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.2.5.

⁷⁴ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.2.16.

⁷⁵ *ep.* 105.5.17. The point is highlighted by Grabowski (1957a), 3-92; Crespin (1965), 157; Studer (1997a), 34.

⁷⁶ *s. Caes. eccl.* 1; Lamirande (1972b), 51-52.

⁷⁷ *s. Caes. eccl.* 5, reminiscent of the famous dictum of Cyprian, *De unitate* 6: *habere non potest deum patrem qui ecclesiam non habet matrem*.

⁷⁸ *ps. c. Don.* verse K.

⁷⁹ *ps. c. Don.* verse N.

⁸⁰ *c. ep. Parm.* 2.18.37.

This, then, is the positive scriptural portrayal of the Church united in mutual love. But the scriptures also illustrate the negative aspect, offering images of those who lack unity and lack love for one another. For example, if the Catholic Church can be depicted as a dove, then those such as the Donatists who remain outside are “hawks”.⁸¹ Notice that whereas the dove is one, the hawks are many, since they are divided from the true unity. Such who remain outside cannot be saved, even by the entreaties of the dove herself. In a sequence of arguments and counter-arguments against Petilian, Augustine describes the Church as Christ’s sheepfold and those who separate themselves from the Church as wolves, attempting unsuccessfully to steal the clothing of the Catholic sheep.⁸² Despite such disguises, the wolves’ teeth cannot be hidden, for although their words are about love and unity, their actions demonstrate hatred and cause division, contrary to the apostolic principle of Eph 4.3.⁸³

It is on the basis of such a clear scriptural picture that Augustine repeatedly appeals to the Donatists to acknowledge the unity of the Church and to abandon their proud divisions. “If you had love, you would not invent a false unity in your lies, but would recognise the unity that is most clearly expressed in the words of the Lord: ‘even in the whole earth [Acts 1.8]’”.⁸⁴ Unity is always the most important of considerations, since it is the visible sign of the love of God:

We ought not to separate ourselves from communion with the Catholic [Church] if anything happens to us against our will, even if we oppose and argue against it, since we have learned tolerance for the sake of peace, as the apostle says: “bearing with one another in love, trying to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace [Eph 4.2-3]”. And we said that [the Donatists] had not maintained that peace and tolerance when they had caused a schism, and yet that they who were the more moderate now tolerated among themselves more serious sinners, lest the fragment should be further broken, while they did not wish to tolerate less serious things for the sake of that unity.⁸⁵

⁸¹ *bapt.* 3.17.22.

⁸² *c. litt. Pet.* 2.76.167, 2.76.168.

⁸³ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.79.174.

⁸⁴ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.100.228.

⁸⁵ *ep.* 44.5.11. This is perhaps an allusion to the Maximianists, who will be discussed below. On mutual tolerance in the Church, see Borgomeo (1972), 357-386.

Disagreements are inevitable, but for the sake of love we must remain united with those with whom we disagree, even if the differences go so far as to cause us harm.

Despite this clear teaching, there are many who, rejecting the unity of the Church, prefer instead the bitterness of ancient divisions.⁸⁶ The Donatists have refused to be in communion with their brothers and sisters and thus demonstrate their lack of love.⁸⁷ Augustine warns his readers not to pay attention to anyone outside the Catholic Church, however impressive they may appear, and even if it was through such individuals that they were themselves converted or baptised:

“Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who gives the increase [1 Cor 3.7].” And “God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God, and God remains in them [1 Jn 4.16]”. Nobody, even those preaching the name of Christ and handling and administering the sacrament of Christ, is to be followed in opposition to the unity of Christ ... For as far as the burdens of mutual love are concerned, “carry one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For whoever thinks of themselves as something when they are nothing, deceives themselves [Gal 6.2-3]”. Therefore let us “bear with one another in love, fairly trying to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace [Eph 4.3]”. For nobody who gathers outside gathers with Christ, but “whoever does not gather with Christ, scatters [Mt 12.30]”.⁸⁸

Or again, as Augustine explains elsewhere, true Christians are those who keep God’s commandment to live in love. Christ came not to abolish the Law but to fulfil it (Mt 5.17), and the fulfilling of the Law is love (Rom 13.10): it therefore follows that those who do not have love may rightly be described as “false Christians and antichrists”, terminology reminiscent of that found in the ten homilies on 1 Jn.⁸⁹

The reason why Augustine is justified in using such strong language is that he is clear about the exclusivity of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the unity of the Christian fellowship:

⁸⁶ *ep.* 105.3.11.

⁸⁷ *c. litt. Pet.* 3.3.4; Bonner (1987), 211: “The great offence of the Donatist schism was the lack of charity which it involved”.

⁸⁸ *c. litt. Pet.* 3.5.6.

⁸⁹ *bapt.* 3.19.26. Compare with *ep. Io. tr.* 3.3-3.9; see also Lamirande (1972b), 97-100.

But when it is said that the Holy Spirit is given only in the Catholic [Church] through the imposition of hands, undoubtedly our forebears wanted us to understand by this what the apostle says, “Because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us [Rom 5.5]”. For this is that love which those who are cut off from the communion of the Catholic Church do not have; and because of this, “if they speak with human and angelic tongues, if they understand all sacraments and all knowledge and have all the prophecy and all the faith to move mountains, and give everything to the poor, and hand over their body to be burned, it gains them nothing [1 Cor 13.1-3]”. But those who do not love the unity of the Church do not have the love of God, and for this reason we understand that it is right to say that the Holy Spirit is not received except in the Catholic [Church].⁹⁰

It is only within the Church that the Holy Spirit can be received, who is the gift of God and the love of God. Therefore those who are separated from the Church are also separated from divine love. Whatever else they may have in their favour, they have nothing which can result in salvation if they do not have the Spirit of God. The love of God is received through true mutual communion and love; those who are not members of that communion evidently do not share in that love; and therefore they do not possess the Holy Spirit and cannot be saved.⁹¹

To reject love and unity is therefore to commit the one unforgivable sin against the Spirit (Mt 12.31-32), as we discussed at length in the previous chapter. “This is the hardness of heart even to the end of this life, through which a person refuses to accept forgiveness of sins in the unity of the body of Christ, to which the Holy Spirit gives life.”⁹² If the Holy Spirit is the love of God (Rm 5.5) and the bond of unity (Eph 4.3), then failure to participate in the unity of love is an unforgivable act of blasphemy against the Spirit of God, since without love we can have nothing and are ourselves nothing (1 Cor 13.3). This explains why Augustine elsewhere concludes that to fail to love one another is the one sin whose consequences are

⁹⁰ *bapt.* 3.16.21. See Grabowski (1957a), 389; Lamirande (1972b), 40-41, 49-50. Lampe (1951), 229 discusses the connection between the gift of *caritas* and the imposition of hands.

⁹¹ *ibid.* See Crespin (1965), 259-261; Burns (1992), 166.

⁹² *correct.* 11.49. Without offering any interpretation, Augustine also refers briefly to the sin against the Holy Spirit at *c. litt. Pet.* 2.62.140; also, as we saw in the previous chapter, there are fuller discussions of Mt 12.32 at (in chronological order) *s. dom. m.* 1.22.74, *ep. Rm. inch.* 14-23 and *s.* 71, as well as a fleeting reference at *ench.* 22.83.

paramount.⁹³ If we do not love, we are in opposition to the Holy Spirit and to God, a sin of such gravity that all other considerations are irrelevant. But if we are not members of the Catholic Church, then we do not have love. Without love we can gain nothing, and so outside the unity of the Church we face nothing but death.⁹⁴

Nevertheless, it is because of love that the Church seeks out those who remain outside, searching for the unrighteous in order that they may become righteous. Donatists who return to communion are not rebaptised because they already possess the sacrament of baptism, as we shall see later. They do however receive “‘the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace [Eph 4.3]’, without which nobody can see God; and love, which (as it is written) ‘covers a multitude of sins [1 Pet 4.8]’”.⁹⁵ Those who return are not therefore restored by baptism as such, but are “cleansed by the love of Catholic unity”.⁹⁶ They are received not as people who are already holy, but as those who are sanctified by the very restoration of love and unity in the fellowship of the Catholic Church. Again, as we will see in the next section, baptisms administered outside the Church are valid but counter-productive; although sins are remitted by such baptisms, the lack of love evidenced by schism is an even more deadly sin, capable of being purged only by restoration to the unity of the Church.⁹⁷ The Donatists can demonstrate that they have baptism and that they have faith, but these things lead only to ruin without love.⁹⁸

Outside the Church it is possible to have everything except salvation: one can have honour, one can have the sacraments, one can sing “Alleluia”, one can respond “Amen”, one can keep the gospel, one can have faith and preach in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; but one can find salvation nowhere except in the Catholic Church.⁹⁹

⁹³ See especially *ep. Io. tr.* 5.2.3.

⁹⁴ *correct.* 10.43.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *c. Gaud.* 1.12.13.

⁹⁷ *bapt.* 3.13.18; Burns (1992), 166.

⁹⁸ *c. ep. Parm.* 2.13.28.

⁹⁹ *s. Caes. eccl.* 6. Batiffol (1920), I, 247-250; Crespin (1965), 258-259; and Lamirande (1972b), 45, 139-149 all emphasise the impossibility of salvation except within the Church’s unity.

Love is to be found only in the unity of the Spirit-filled Catholic Church, and without love, salvation is impossible.

It is the therefore Donatists who must bear the responsibility for disunity, since it is they who have failed to “keep the unity of the Spirit”. It is they who abandoned the Church, not the other way around.¹⁰⁰ They separated themselves on the false pretext that the Catholics were *traditores*, whereas in fact it is the Donatists who have failed to listen to the scriptural demand for unity. Either way, to be in schism is a much worse sin than merely to be an alleged *traditor*, an accusation which is in any case false.¹⁰¹ The true “bond of peace” is to be found only in the Catholic Church, not among the Donatists, ““for [Christ] is our peace, who has made both to be one [Eph 2.14]’, not Donatus, who has made one into two!”¹⁰² Donatism offers not the peace of Christ, but “a warlike peace and a bloody unity” because of its violence against the Catholic Church, the clearest possible example of its adherents’ failure to love.¹⁰³

For this reason, Augustine urgently desires the return of the Donatists to the Catholic fold. He has no wish for communion with those who are heretics; but if those who have fallen into the Donatist heresy were to return to communion with the Church, then in the very moment of unity, through the restoration of the Holy Spirit and love, they would cease to be heretics. “So when you come here from there, you stop being what we hate and start to be what we love.”¹⁰⁴ If Augustine hates the sin of schism and heresy, yet he still loves the sinful schismatic and heretic. He wants the Donatists to be his brothers and sisters, united with him in fellowship through the bond of love and unity. So he appeals to them to be reunited with him, pleading with them not to reject the love of the triune God and the salvation which can be gained only through fellowship with the Spirit-filled Church:

¹⁰⁰ *ps. c. Don. verses D-M.*

¹⁰¹ *ep. 76.1, 76.4.*

¹⁰² *c. litt. Pet. 2.71.158.* Eph 2.14 actually refers to the unity in Christ of Jews and Gentiles, but Augustine’s exegesis here is surely just a logical extension of the same principle.

¹⁰³ *c. Gaud. 1.24.27.*

¹⁰⁴ *c. litt. Pet. 2.96.219.*

Why still flee unity, why still despise love? Why is it necessary for us to be divided by human names? For he who created us is one God, he who redeemed us is one Christ, he who must reunite us is one Spirit.¹⁰⁵

Baptism

The division between Catholics and Donatists was fundamentally about where the Church was to be found and what kind of Church it should be, with the acutest differences being over the issue of baptism, the sacrament of initiation into the Church.¹⁰⁶ The Donatists refused to recognise any baptisms other than their own, whereas the Catholic Church acknowledged the validity of the Donatist rite. It followed that anyone converting to Donatism was rebaptised, a practice abhorrent to the Catholic Church.¹⁰⁷ It also followed that the latter had to explain why, despite accepting Donatist sacraments, she still denied that the Donatists were members of the one Church. We will begin by considering the sense in which baptism can be administered outside the Church. We will then examine Augustine's distinction between possessing and benefiting from baptism, exploring the necessity of both baptism and love in order to be saved. Finally, we will see why Augustine argued that rebaptism was wrong. All these arguments derive from his understanding of the function of the Holy Spirit of love in constituting the Church's unity.

Cresconius referred to the text "one God, one faith, one baptism, one pure and true Catholic Church [from Eph 4.5]".¹⁰⁸ If there is one God and one Church, can we deduce that faith and baptism are found only within the one communion of the faithful? Augustine argues that this does not necessarily follow. Knowledge of God is not confined to members of the Church. Many people outside believe in God or even believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Paul says that the pagans know God

¹⁰⁵ *c. Don.* 35.58. See Grabowski (1957a), 234-235.

¹⁰⁶ For a general overview of Augustine's baptismal theology, see Grabowski (1957a), 178-183.

¹⁰⁷ R. F. Evans (1972), 75: "It is evident that from the beginning the practice of rebaptism was to [Augustine] a profound source of outrage and of grief". See also Bonner (1989), 327-329.

¹⁰⁸ *Cresc.* 1.28.33. The quotation by Cresconius is very imprecise (in particular, the final phrase is not found in the scriptural text), but Augustine does not dwell on this point.

without worshipping him (Rom 1.21), and his speech at the Areopagus implies that the Athenians have faith without being members of the Church (Acts 17.23, 28).¹⁰⁹ Even demons believe in God (Jas 2.19).¹¹⁰ That God may be known outside of the narrow confines of the Church itself is thus an “apostolic rule”.¹¹¹ We may conclude from this that if knowledge of and faith in God are to be found outside the Church, so baptism may also be found outside.¹¹²

The Donatists therefore believe that the sacraments are lost through schism, which is why they practise rebaptism, believing that a baptism carried out other than by themselves is no baptism at all. Augustine however disagrees: “Just as [baptism] is not rightly possessed outside [the Church], and yet is possessed, so it is not rightly given outside, but yet it is given”.¹¹³ The same can also be said of ordination: “Just as the baptised, if they depart from unity, do not lose the sacrament of baptism, so also the ordained, if they depart from unity, do not lose the sacrament of conferring baptism”.¹¹⁴ The Catholics acknowledge truth wherever they find it, which is why they recognise the validity, if not the efficacy, of Donatist baptisms.¹¹⁵ “What they have received while in unity, they could not lose through separation.”¹¹⁶ Those who remain outside the Church are lacking in love; nevertheless they can validly receive and administer the sacrament of baptism.¹¹⁷

So if the Donatists possess the same valid sacrament of baptism as the Catholic Church, does this mean that there is no advantage in being a Catholic over being a Donatist? It begins to look as though Augustine has conceded defeat at the outset. Baptism flows from the body of Christ just as the water flowed from Christ’s side (Jn 19.34). The Donatists argue that their possession of baptism means that they are members of Christ’s body; Augustine points out that this verse only means that

¹⁰⁹ *un. bapt.* 4.5.

¹¹⁰ *Cresc.* 1.29.34.

¹¹¹ *un. bapt.* 4.6.

¹¹² *un. bapt.* 5.8. On this, see Crespin (1965), 261-269 and Lamirande (1972b), 117-119.

¹¹³ *bapt.* 1.1.2: see Lamirande (1972b), 29-38.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*; see Crespin (1965), 263-266.

¹¹⁵ *breuic.* 3.8.12.

¹¹⁶ *bapt.* 1.1.2.

¹¹⁷ *bapt.* 4.17.24.

baptism belongs properly to the Church, of which the Donatists are not members.¹¹⁸ But how can they not be members if they have been baptised? Petilian recalls the incident recounted at Lk 9.50, and argues that whoever is not against Christ and his Church must be for them. Augustine replies that it is true that Christ's name and his sacraments are to be found outside the Church, but then adds that this is not at all the same thing as to say that salvation may be found outside.¹¹⁹ Thus there is a distinction to be made between possession of baptism, which is possible inside and outside the Church alike, and effective possession of baptism, which is possible only for those who are within the communion of the Church. The crucial difference for those within the Church is their participation in "both the most holy bond of unity and the most excellent gift of love".¹²⁰

Rather than arguing about whether or not the Donatists possess the sacrament of baptism, the more important question is whether or not the baptism that they have is beneficial.¹²¹ Baptism is a gift from God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

So when we ask, how is someone to be washed ... what will be your response except to say by Christ or by God (although Christ is indeed God over all, blessed forever!), or by the Holy Spirit (since he is himself also God, because this Trinity is one God)?¹²²

Baptism comes from Christ, because the Spirit proceeds from him; and when the Spirit is received in baptism, he comes unseen and unknown, through grace, the gift of God:

For when we say, "Christ baptises", we do not say that it is by a visible ministry, as Petilian thinks (or wants us to say that he thinks), but by a hidden grace, by a hidden power in the

¹¹⁸ *cath. fr.* 24.68.

¹¹⁹ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.81.178.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ On this, see Willis (1950), 154-157 and Crespín (1965), 257-258.

¹²² *c. litt. Pet.* 3.48.58.

Holy Spirit, just as it is said of him by John the Baptist: “This is he who baptises in the Holy Spirit [Jn 1.33]”.¹²³

Those who are baptised within the Catholic Church receive the gift of the Spirit of love; but those who remain outside lack love, and so their baptism brings them condemnation rather than salvation.

Augustine refers to a whole series of scriptural texts in order to explain why love is necessary in order for baptism to be profitable. He quotes Paul’s famous discussion of love:

If I speak with human and angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am become noisy brass or a tinkling cymbal; and if I have prophecy and understand all sacraments and all knowledge, and if I have all the faith to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing [1 Cor 13.1-2].¹²⁴

Caiaphas (Jn 11.51) and Saul (1 Sam 18.10) had prophetic gifts, and Simon Magus (Acts 8.13) had the sacraments, but all these were condemned.¹²⁵ Simon in particular was baptised but had no part in Christ’s inheritance because of his lack of love.¹²⁶ The Donatists can have all these gifts and do good works and even confess their faith, but as long as they remain outside the unity of the Church which is the gift of the Spirit, not “trying to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace [Eph 4.3]’, not having love, they cannot come to eternal salvation, even with all those things which do not profit them”.¹²⁷ The prayers and good works of Cornelius (Acts 10) were only of benefit to him once he had not only been baptised but had also entered into the unity of communion:

¹²³ *c. litt. Pet.* 3.49.59. Burns (1992), 162: “Christ himself confers the consecration of baptism through the minister who performs the visible sacrament. Through the charity which establishes the unity of the church, the Holy Spirit confers the forgiveness of sins”. See also Crespin (1965), 243.

¹²⁴ *bapt.* 1.9.12. Willis (1950), 115: “unity is the manifestation of charity”.

¹²⁵ *bapt.* 1.10.14.

¹²⁶ *bapt.* 1.11.17.

¹²⁷ *bapt.* 1.9.12.

So also those who, by an injury to love, separate themselves from the fellowship of the rest shatter the bond of unity ... Therefore those whom they baptise they heal from the wound of idolatry and unbelief, but injure more seriously with the wound of schism. For idolaters among the people were put to the sword [Ex 32.27], but schismatics were swallowed up by the ground [Num 16.32]. And the apostle says, "if I have all the faith to move mountains, but I do not have love, I am nothing [1 Cor 13.2]".¹²⁸

It is on the basis of these scriptural references, and particularly 1 Cor 13.2, that Augustine presents his argument. The Donatists are separated from the bond of love. They do possess the gift of baptism, but this gift belongs properly to the Catholic Church.¹²⁹ Indeed, they even have faith in Christ, but without love, they are nothing.¹³⁰ In the absence of love, sins cannot be forgiven; and schism is the strongest possible evidence that love is absent.¹³¹

What therefore does it profit someone that they have either a healthy faith or perhaps health in the sacrament of faith, when the health of their love is ruined by the fatal wound of schism, a ruin through which even the health in them is drawn into death? That this may not be, the mercy of God does not cease to work through the unity of the Church, so that they may come and be healed through the medicine of reconciliation, through the bond of peace.¹³²

It follows, then, that a person who does not have love would be wise to return to the unity of the Church:

For there is one God, one faith, one baptism, one pure Catholic Church: not alone in which the one God is worshipped, but alone in which the one God is worshipped devoutly; nor alone in which the one faith is maintained, but alone in which the one faith is maintained with love; nor alone in which the one baptism is had, but alone in which the one baptism is had for salvation.¹³³

¹²⁸ *bapt.* 1.8.10. See Grabowski (1957a), 251-254.

¹²⁹ *bapt.* 1.10.14.

¹³⁰ *s. Caes. eccl.* 3.

¹³¹ *bapt.* 1.11.16. Willis (1950), 126 comments that persistent schism can only be a consequence of hatred.

¹³² *bapt.* 1.8.11.

¹³³ *Cresc.* 1.29.34: see Lamirande (1972b), 49.

For “if I do not have love, I am nothing [1 Cor 13.2]”.¹³⁴ The sacrament of baptism is holy because Christ himself is holy, as we will see more fully in the next section. What Christ gives in baptism is by definition good, but it can be received in a manner which results either in salvation or in damnation. For “it is not possible to be devout when in a state of schism”.¹³⁵ Any kind of schism is a sacrilege; and although baptism is good, to persist in sacrilege after baptism will result in punishment, not salvation.¹³⁶

It must be emphasised that at no point does Augustine argue that the Donatists do not have a valid sacrament of baptism. Unlike the Donatists, who utterly reject the Catholic sacraments, the Catholic Church acknowledges the baptisms of Donatism. What Augustine argues is that Donatist baptism results not in good, but in harm, since to be baptised into a schismatic and loveless community is a worse sin than any which are remitted through the sacrament of baptism itself. So this raises the question of how something which is good can result in evil consequences. Augustine distinguishes between possession of something good, and deriving benefit from it.¹³⁷ For example, the eucharist is a good gift from God, but 1 Cor 11.27 shows that it can be partaken of unworthily and destructively.¹³⁸ Similarly, the Law can have negative results: the Jews are bad despite the fact that the Law is good, Augustine comments.¹³⁹ The same argument can therefore be applied to baptism, which is good because it comes from God and belongs not to Catholics or Donatists but to Christ.¹⁴⁰

Peter and the demons alike acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ (Mt 16.16, Mk 1.24); and in the same way baptism, which is the same sacrament when administered by Catholics and Donatists, results in salvation for the one and

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Cresc.* 4.21.25: Augustine actually puts these words into his opponent’s mouth, but then adds the word *assentio* (“I agree!”).

¹³⁶ *Cresc.* 4.21.26.

¹³⁷ *Cresc.* 1.23.28.

¹³⁸ *Cresc.* 1.25.30.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*; *un. bapt.* 3.4.

¹⁴⁰ *un. bapt.* 2.3.

condemnation for the other.¹⁴¹ “Those who have caused schisms were not good, even though they were baptised with a good baptism, so it is also clear that not all who have a good baptism are good”.¹⁴² Baptism outside the Church results not in salvation but in damnation for those who receive it, since its consequences are not purification but even more severe judgement.¹⁴³

What is required for salvation, then, is not just the outward sign of baptism, but also the love which comes from an inward conversion of the heart. Both baptism and spiritual conversion are required for salvation,¹⁴⁴ but what is decisive is the spiritual regeneration which comes from incorporation into the body of Christ.

So when the heretics come to be made Catholics they correct their mistake, so as not to violate the sacrament of Christ, and to receive the bond of peace which they did not formerly have without which the baptism which they did have could not profit them. For to obtain the kingdom of God it is necessary to have both baptism and righteousness.¹⁴⁵

Augustine explains that he reaches this conclusion by means of the juxtaposition of Jn 3.4 and Mt 5.20.¹⁴⁶ The water of baptism is not itself enough for salvation, since the gift of the Holy Spirit is also necessary. Nobody can have received the Spirit if they remain outside the bond of love which forms the Catholic Church, and nobody can be righteous if they have not received the Holy Spirit. So Augustine addresses the Donatists: “You lack the righteousness which you cannot have without love and the bond of peace”.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ *un. bapt.* 10.17; *cath. fr.* 21.58, 21.59.

¹⁴² *Cresc.* 1.27.32.

¹⁴³ *un. bapt.* 6.8; Lamirande (1972b), 37-38. Wright (1987) highlights an ambiguity in Augustine’s thought: do those who are baptised in schism have their sins forgiven, only to have them return immediately because of their lack of love; or are their sins not forgiven at all as long as they remain in schism? The point is an interesting one, but the result is the same either way.

¹⁴⁴ At *bapt.* 4.25.32, Augustine expresses the hope that God will be merciful on those who, through no fault of their own, have not both been baptised and undergone spiritual conversion. But in any case this cannot be said of the Donatists, who are wilful in their persistence in schism. See Chadwick (1993), 32.

¹⁴⁵ *cath. fr.* 21.62.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.* The two texts are “If anyone is not born again of water and the Spirit, they will not enter the kingdom of heaven [Jn 3.4]” and “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven [Mt 5.20]”.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

There is therefore a distinction to be drawn between the visible sacrament of water and the invisible gift of the Spirit, “the fountain of ‘the love of God poured into our hearts [Rom 5.5]’”.¹⁴⁸ Sins are washed away, not by the visible water of baptism, as Donatist theology suggests, but by the invisible grace of the Spirit, which is true Catholic doctrine. When the scriptures describe the Church being washed with water, what are referred to in such passages are both baptism and the Holy Spirit together.¹⁴⁹ The Spirit, after all, is the water described by Jesus: “If anyone is thirsty, let them come and drink [Jn 7.37]”.¹⁵⁰ John baptised with water, but the followers of Christ are baptised with the Holy Spirit.¹⁵¹ The Spirit was given to the gathered disciples at Pentecost, but “nobody will receive the Holy Spirit unless they are joined to his unity”.¹⁵² Scriptural prophecies about water (Ps 45.5, Prov 5.17, Song 4.12, 4.15) describe the Spirit himself.¹⁵³

This is the gift of the Holy Spirit, who pours the love of God into our hearts, not to those [others] unless they have agreed to be transformed. Everyone must be transformed, so that they are no longer strangers, but participate in the peace of heaven, associate with the unity of the holy, full of undivided love, and citizens of the angelic city.¹⁵⁴

So when those who have been baptised by the Donatists return to the Catholic Church, they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, which as Donatists they had not yet previously received.

For they receive for the first time the Church, and in her they receive peace, unity and love through the fountain which is hers and which is invisible, the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁸ *cath. fr.* 23.67: Lamirande (1972b), 45.

¹⁴⁹ *bapt.* 4.3.4.

¹⁵⁰ *Cresc.* 2.14.17.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.* Arguing for rebaptism, the Donatists recall that at Acts 19.1-7 Paul baptises some who had previously been baptised by John. The comparison is invalid, Augustine says, because the baptisms of Jesus and of John are two different things, whereas the baptisms of Catholics and Donatists alike are the same sacrament of Christ. See *un. bapt.* 7.9-8.13.

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Cresc.* 2.15.18. Burns (1992), 169: “The society of saints, united by the gift of the Holy Spirit, becomes the city of God”. On the heavenly city, see also Lamirande (1963).

¹⁵⁵ *Cresc.* 2.16.19.

Outside the Catholic Church they may possess the outward signs, but they do not possess the inward realities of the sacraments of unity; outside the body of Christ, they do not receive the Spirit and cannot therefore attain salvation.

Only the Catholic Church is the body of Christ, of which he is the head and the saviour of the body. Outside of this body the Holy Spirit gives life to nobody, because, as the apostle himself says, "The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us [Rom 5.5]"; but whoever is an enemy of unity does not share in the divine love. So those who are outside the Church do not have the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁶

Since the Donatists remain outside the Church, they derive no profit whatsoever from their possession of the sacrament; but the fact that they do not benefit from baptism does not mean that they do not possess it.

It is because the Donatists already possess baptism, albeit unprofitably, that their practice of rebaptism is so abhorrent, as Augustine makes plain in his early *Letter 23*: if Maximianus refrains from such a practice, then he should acknowledge and rejoice in the one baptism wherever it is found, not tearing in pieces the seamless robe of Christ (Jn 19.24).¹⁵⁷ The sacrament of baptism is prefigured in the scriptures in the rite of circumcision, which is manifestly unrepeatable!¹⁵⁸ There are in fact no scriptural instances of rebaptism; nor was there any question of its ever occurring before the time of Donatus.¹⁵⁹ Both scripture and Church tradition thus militate against such a detestable innovation. The Catholic Church does not reject the baptisms of the Donatists, as we have seen, because such baptisms belong in any case not to the Donatists but to the Church.¹⁶⁰ In fact, even this is not strictly accurate, since baptism belongs properly not to the Church but to Christ. Augustine

¹⁵⁶ *correct.* 11.49.

¹⁵⁷ *ep.* 23.2, 23.4. At least since Cyprian, *De unitate* 7, Jn 19.24 has been interpreted as an allegory of the unity of Christ's followers; compare with 1 Kings 11.30-31. It is curious that this is the only occasion in Augustine's anti-Donatist literature that he refers to this text. However, there are brief references at *Io. eu. tr.* 13.13 and s. 218.9, and a fuller discussion at *Io. eu. tr.* 118.4 and s. 159B. The verse echoes Ps 21.19, which at *ep.* 76.1 and *en. Ps.* 21.2.19 are interpreted in the light of a concern for unity. In not accusing Maximianus of administering rebaptisms, Augustine was at this early stage preferring to give his opponents the benefit of the doubt.

¹⁵⁸ *Cresc.* 1.31.36.

¹⁵⁹ *Cresc.* 1.31.37, 1.32.38.

¹⁶⁰ *c. Gaud.* 2.10.11; the point is well made by Lamirande (1972b), 30-31.

develops the analogy of a soldier who, even if he deserts, still bears the mark of the emperor who enlisted him. In the same way, the Donatists bear the mark of Christ, but must take the responsibility for abandoning the Church. But just as a returning deserter is not enlisted anew but resumes his old place, so a person who has once been baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit cannot be rebaptised.¹⁶¹

It is therefore impossible to repeat the sacrament of baptism, but it is also unnecessary:

So also someone who receives Christ's baptism (which those who are separated have not lost) as an enemy of Christ's love and peace in some heresy or schism, while by this sacrilege their sins are not forgiven, when they correct themselves and come to the fellowship and unity of the Church they should not be rebaptised, because by their very reconciliation to peace they benefit in that in unity the sacrament now begins to count for the forgiveness of their sins, which could not benefit them when received in schism.¹⁶²

Lacking in the person guilty of schism is not the sacrament itself, but the benefit which ought to derive from it. Augustine recognises the validity of the baptism, even while attempting to correct the error. The same principle applies both to heretics and to schismatics:

So if I find a heretic disagreeing with something pertaining to the Christian and Catholic faith, or even with the unity of the Trinity, and yet they have been baptised according to the rule of the Gospel and of the Church, I correct the understanding of that person, but I do not do violence to the sacrament of God.¹⁶³

It is interesting that Augustine should here choose to single out for attention heresies about "the unity of the Trinity". Although this might be a reference to Arianism, perhaps it is also a clue that when he thinks about Church unity, his mind naturally moves to think about the Trinity and the significance of the Holy Spirit. Barely

¹⁶¹ *s. Caes. eccl.* 2; Lampe (1951), 242-243; Crespin (1965), 267-269; Evans (1972), 90.

¹⁶² *bapt.* 1.12.18. See Grabowski (1944), 477.

¹⁶³ *un. bapt.* 3.4: see Crespin (1965), 275-276.

beneath the surface here is Augustine's appreciation that a flawed ecclesiology derives from a faulty pneumatology, and ultimately from a defective trinitarian theology.¹⁶⁴

So the Catholic Church does not practise rebaptism. The reason for this is that, unlike her Donatist opponents, she discerns what is going on in the sacrament. "Love covers a multitude of sins [1 Pet 4.8]."¹⁶⁵ But from Rom 5.5, this is the love which has been given to us through the Holy Spirit, from which a clear conclusion can be drawn:

From this it is rightly believed that those who received the Church's baptism outside the Church do not have the Holy Spirit, unless they cling together with those of the Church in the bond of peace through the union of love.¹⁶⁶

It is the Spirit who joins us to the body of the Church and in love wipes away our sinfulness.

For about those who create schisms the same apostle says: "But the carnal person does not receive the things of the Spirit of God [1 Cor 2.14]" ... So baptism is the sacrament of new life and eternal salvation: not using such a good thing well, many people have it not for eternal life but for eternal punishment. But in fact nobody can have holy love, which is the bond of perfection, who is not good: nobody who is a schismatic or a heretic can have it. When someone comes, then, to the unity of the Church, when they are truly joined to its members, they receive the Holy Spirit, through whom love is poured into our hearts; and the same love covers a multitude of sins, so that also the baptism, which first they had for judgement, they now have so as to deserve the reward.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Thus Lamirande (1972b), 64 is wrong to conclude that "Ce n'est donc pas au sujet de la doctrine trinitaire, ni de la christologie, que les donatistes se sont séparés, mais pour des motifs d'ordre ecclésial". For Augustine, the "ordre ecclésial" follows necessarily from "la doctrine trinitaire", and so the two cannot be so easily separated.

¹⁶⁵ *Cresc.* 2.12.15.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*; see Grabowski (1944), 459.

¹⁶⁷ *Cresc.* 2.13.16.

On being readmitted to communion, they embrace the love and fellowship of the Church and receive the gift of “the Holy Spirit of inner and conspicuous love”.¹⁶⁸ Everyone whose sins are forgiven through baptism thus form one body, whether their baptisms were conferred by good ministers or bad, as we will see in the next section. “The same Holy Spirit forgives them, who is given to all the saints who are bound together in love, whether they knew the body or not.”¹⁶⁹ So to all those who as yet do not discern the body, Augustine issues a stern warning and a warm invitation: “Put aside your discordant error; turn back to Catholic truth and peace through the gift which belongs to it, who is the Holy Spirit, through whom love is poured into our hearts [from Rom 5.5]”.¹⁷⁰

God, human beings and holiness

The Donatist schism arose through the belief that sins were contagious. For the Church to be holy, all its members must be holy. Unholy individuals render those in communion with them unholy and invalidate their sacraments.¹⁷¹ Augustine demonstrates the logical conclusion of such erroneous theology. Baptism derives its holiness from God, not from human beings. Imperfect ministers can still administer the sacraments, and the Church is not corrupted by such unholy individuals. Arguments about the sinfulness of particular figures are therefore irrelevant, even if they are sometimes instructive. For Jesus Christ himself redeems us, making us holy through the Holy Spirit within us.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ *bapt.* 6.3.5.

¹⁶⁹ *bapt.* 6.4.6.

¹⁷⁰ *Cresc.* 2.16.20.

¹⁷¹ Beddoe (1993) draws attention to the necessity for the Donatists of avoiding *contagio*: “Significantly, their theology of the ministry was closely linked to that of the Old Testament priesthood with its preoccupation with ritual purity. Concepts of purity and pollution, then, are central to understanding Donatist thought” (231-232). See also Willis (1950), 149-151.

¹⁷² On holiness as a gift of God, see especially Crespín (1965), 225-247; also Willis (1950), 117-118, 157-160; Grabowski (1957a), 447-464; Borgomeo (1972), 224-227; R. F. Evans (1972), 84; Burns (1992), 163; Kreidler (1993), 418-420.

In a disputation recorded by Augustine, Petilian says that Catholic clergy cannot baptise in the name of the Father, since they are *traditores*; nor in the name of the Son, since they do not imitate his sufferings; nor in the name of the Holy Spirit, since the Spirit was given only to the faithful.¹⁷³ Augustine deals with these points very quickly with counter-arguments of his own against the Donatists: to wit, that they have blasphemed against the Father, that they have not suffered on behalf of the Son, and that they have injured Africa through their lack of the Spirit. But the more important point is that baptism takes its holy character not from human ministers, but from God. Petilian is therefore mistaken in his main premise as well as in its details.¹⁷⁴ The sanctity of the sacrament and the power to forgive sins do not derive from the sanctity of a human minister, but from God: “For when something is given that is of God, it is given in holiness, even by an unholy conscience”.¹⁷⁵

This exchange highlights an important aspect of Donatist theology. They believed that a person derived his or her faith or faithlessness from that of the minister of their baptism.¹⁷⁶ Consequently, the validity of the sacraments derives from the perfection or otherwise of human beings, not God. It is obvious why such an error was so offensive to Augustine. Since faith comes from God, he emphatically denies the Donatist claim that the worthiness or unworthiness of a human intermediary can make any difference to the validity of the administration of the sacraments.¹⁷⁷ In effect, the Donatists believe that a person is baptised not by God, but by the “good conscience” of the minister.¹⁷⁸ They would have to claim to know the state of the individual human conscience, which is unseen and known only by God.¹⁷⁹ In practice, they have to rely on reputation alone, which is obviously unsatisfactory, since a person’s reputation may very well be at odds with their actual spiritual state.

¹⁷³ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.33.77.

¹⁷⁴ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.33.78; *Cresc.* 3.5.5. See Crespin (1965), 233-238; Lamirande (1967), 126-127; R. F. Evans (1972), 89; Bonner (1989), 331.

¹⁷⁵ *c. litt. Pet.* 3.8.9.

¹⁷⁶ *c. litt. Pet.* 1.4.5.

¹⁷⁷ *Cresc.* 3.6.6.

¹⁷⁸ *Cresc.* 2.17.21.

¹⁷⁹ *Cresc.* 2.18.22; Willis (1950), 158.

For [the Donatists] are trying to show that the origin, root and head of the baptised is none other than the one by whom they are baptised. So, since it is often uncertain what kind of person the one baptising is, the hope of the baptised (being of uncertain origin, uncertain root and uncertain head) is also totally uncertain.¹⁸⁰

Such arguments display the twisted logic of mere “dialecticians”, Augustine concludes.¹⁸¹ He warns the Donatists about the implications of such a vain delusion:

Do not want to measure the divine sacraments by human character and actions. For they are holy through him whose they are. They bring reward when taken worthily, but judgement when taken unworthily.¹⁸²

The sacraments are holy because they are a gift from God; they are not profaned as a consequence of being administered by human beings, no matter how unworthy. Nevertheless, holiness is a dangerous thing, for although the sacraments bring reward to those who approach them in reverence and love, they bring only condemnation for those who lack such qualities.

Questions about the sanctity or otherwise of individuals occupy a considerable part of the dispute between Augustine and the Donatists, for whom the holiness of the Church is a direct reflection of the holiness of its members. So it was important for the Donatists to demonstrate that they were holy and that the Catholics were not, which explains why the debate often degenerated into mere mudslinging, each side trying to prove that they were saints and the other side sinners. For example, the latter stages of the judicial hearing at Carthage in 411 were dominated by such discussions: the Donatists attempting to highlight the importance of the purity of the Church;¹⁸³ the Catholics responding by outlining the crimes of the Circumcellions;¹⁸⁴ the Donatists retaliating by describing the alleged misdeeds of

¹⁸⁰ *c. litt. Pet.* 1.4.5.

¹⁸¹ *Cresc.* 2.18.23: *dialecticos*, a pointed attack on the profession of Cresconius.

¹⁸² *c. litt. Pet.* 2.37.88.

¹⁸³ *breuic.* 3.8.10.

¹⁸⁴ *breuic.* 3.11.22: on the Circumcellions, see Willis (1950), 11-13.

Caecilianus;¹⁸⁵ and the Catholic bishops in their turn mounting a defence of their predecessor.¹⁸⁶ From Augustine's point of view such arguments were useful for scoring debating points, but were ultimately irrelevant, since the sinfulness of human beings makes no difference to the holiness of the whole Church. They do, however, illustrate his theology of a necessarily mixed Church of good and bad people together.

Discussion by Augustine of various short passages of scripture serves to illustrate this point. The first text is Phil 1.15-18, in which Paul describes how proclamation of Christ is always valid even if resulting from unworthy motives. The same principle holds true for baptism at the hands of sinners.¹⁸⁷ A second discussion is based on texts from the prophet Haggai. The Donatists have referred to Hag 2.10-14, with its description of the uncleanness of the people, to justify separation from the Catholics. But Augustine points them to the preceding verses, Hag 1.12-2.9, which describe the whole people working together to rebuild the Lord's house. God promises the people through the prophet: "My Spirit is present in the middle of you [Hag 2.5]".¹⁸⁸ So taken as a whole, Haggai describes good and bad people together united under one high priest and worshipping at one temple, with the Holy Spirit in their midst.¹⁸⁹ Far from advocating separation, the prophet in fact supports the case for unity. In general, Augustine says, the scriptures tell us that "a good tree makes good fruit, a bad tree makes bad fruit [Mt 7.17]" and that "a good person produces good things from the good stores of their heart, and a bad person offers up bad things from the bad stores of their heart [Mt 12.35]".¹⁹⁰ The Donatists argue that the trees described there refer to good and bad people producing good and bad works. But baptism comes from God, not from ourselves. So the verse about the trees and their fruit has nothing to do with good and bad clergy and their congregations, as the Donatists argue. Rather, the good tree is Christ, whose fruit is always good.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ *breuic.* 3.12.24-3.13.25.

¹⁸⁶ *breuic.* 3.16.28.

¹⁸⁷ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.82.180.

¹⁸⁸ *c. Don.* 20.30.

¹⁸⁹ *c. Don.* 20.31.

¹⁹⁰ *c. litt. Pet.* 1.8.9; see Crespin (1965), 226.

¹⁹¹ *Cresc.* 3.11.14.

Augustine accuses the Donatists of wilfully misreading scripture. They make light to be darkness, good things to be evil, and the righteous to be unrighteous.¹⁹² But worst of all, they prefer Donatus to Jesus Christ, who is God.¹⁹³ For they claim in effect that baptism comes from human hands, and Augustine rightly describes this as heresy. Rather, baptism comes from God through Christ's ministry: "Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her so that she might be made holy, cleansing her in the word with the washing of water [Eph 5.25-26]."¹⁹⁴ Again, Paul makes it clear, at 1 Cor 1.14-15, that baptism is given in Christ's name alone.¹⁹⁵ The Donatist emphasis on human agency can be answered very simply: "My origin is Christ, my root is Christ, my head is Christ".¹⁹⁶

If Jesus Christ is the minister of our baptism, it is the Holy Spirit who acts through baptism to make us holy. Augustine quotes Jn 20.21-23:

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins they are forgiven, and if you retain anyone's sins they are retained".¹⁹⁷

But it is the Spirit, not human beings, who forgives sins: "For it will not be you who speak, but the Holy Spirit who is in you [Mt 10.20]".¹⁹⁸ It is therefore through the ministry of Christ and the work of the Spirit that we are sanctified in the image of God:

¹⁹² *c. ep. Parm.* 2.1.2-2.2.4; Brisson (1958), 205-206.

¹⁹³ *c. ep. Parm.* 2.2.5.

¹⁹⁴ *Cresc.* 2.20.25. See Crespin (1965), 243. In this context, at *Cresc.* 2.21.26, Augustine further differentiates between the visible and invisible elements of baptism, a distinction developed more fully in medieval sacramental theology. The physical act of immersion in water is performed by a human minister, but the spiritual grace of baptism comes from God. See *ep.* 105.3.12; also the brief discussion in Wright (1987), 218, and Bonner (1989), 333.

¹⁹⁵ *Cresc.* 3.11.11.

¹⁹⁶ *c. litt. Pet.* 1.7.8; Crespin (1965), 239-242; Bonner (1978), 453.

¹⁹⁷ *c. ep. Parm.* 2.11.24.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*

“You will be holy because I am holy [Lev 11.45]”, following the semblance of the image, into which we are being changed from glory into glory by the gift of the Spirit of the Lord, who makes us to conform to the image of his Son”.¹⁹⁹

We attain salvation only through the sacrifice of Christ, our sole mediator.²⁰⁰ But in Christ and through the Spirit, all are made one:

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and human beings, the human Christ Jesus [1 Tim 2.5]”. In him we also are one, if we “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace [Eph 4.3]”, and do not abandon the good on account of the evil, but bear with the evil on account of the good.²⁰¹

To summarise: the Donatists are guilty of confusing the respective roles of God and of the servants of God in the administration of the sacraments:

So why do we not say the truth and rightly discern that this grace is always of God, and the sacrament always of God, and that human beings are just the minister. If they are good, they cling to God and work with God; but if they are bad, God works through them the visible form of the sacrament but himself gives the invisible grace. Let everyone understand this, and let there be no schisms among us.²⁰²

Unity is the gift of the triune God who redeems and sanctifies us. There is therefore no reason for us to separate, and there can be no excuse for disunity on account of the presence of sinners.

The mixed Church and eschatological separation

Augustine highlights the differences between Catholic and Donatist ecclesiologies, and demonstrates that the Donatists are in error in their interpretation of scripture. They believed that a holy Church must remain uncontaminated by evil,

¹⁹⁹ *c. ep. Parm.* 2.4.9.

²⁰⁰ *c. ep. Parm.* 2.5.10, 2.8.16; Studer (1997a), 35.

²⁰¹ *c. ep. Parm.* 2.8.16.

²⁰² *ep.* 105.3.12.

the good maintaining their purity by separation from the bad. By contrast, the Catholic teaching was of a mixed Church of good and wicked people together, the latter endured by the former until they are separated by God at the final judgement. Augustine is especially critical of the sinful pride and lack of love by which the Donatists attempted to appropriate the divine prerogative of judgment. In his arguments, he frequently refers to the parables of the wheat and the chaff (Mt 3.11-12), the wheat and the weeds (Mt 13.24-30, 36-43) and the good and bad fish (Mt 13.47-50), all of which portray a mixed Church separated by God only at the end of time.²⁰³

The Donatists accused the Catholics of being *traditores*, sinners through association with sinners:²⁰⁴ this was the reason for the original schism, and it was the reason for the continued separation of the Donatists from those they saw as irretrievably corrupted. Augustine notes that the Donatists cannot back up their accusations about the original *traditores*;²⁰⁵ but in any case, such ancient allegations are irrelevant to the present situation.²⁰⁶ However, it is obvious from the crimes of the Circumcellions and others that the Donatists themselves include a number of sinners among their own company,²⁰⁷ which just goes to show that the visible Church is necessarily a mixed body.²⁰⁸ Augustine cites a number of texts which describe the co-existence of good and evil people in the Church.²⁰⁹ Thus the attempt by the Donatists to set up a sinless communion, in opposition to the allegedly sinful Catholic Church, was doomed to failure. But worse: it ran counter to both the teaching of scripture and the subsequent tradition that the Church is a mixed gathering.²¹⁰

²⁰³ These three parables are discussed at length in Grabowski (1957a), 481-483, Borgomeo (1972), 307-322 and R. F. Evans (1972), 83; see also Alexander (1973) and Straw (1983).

²⁰⁴ *Cresc.* 4.45.54.

²⁰⁵ *Cresc.* 3.30.34; *ep.* 105.5.16.

²⁰⁶ *Cresc.* 3.31.35.

²⁰⁷ *Cresc.* 3.36.40.

²⁰⁸ *Ps. c. Don.* A-C; *breuic.* 3.9.16; *c. Don.* 4.6; on the mixed Church in Augustine, see Batiffol (1920), I, 259-266; Willis (1950), 123-125; Refoulé (1955); Borgomeo (1972), 279-386 and Bélanger (1989). On such arguments at Carthage in 411, see Lamirande (1972a).

²⁰⁹ *cath. fr.* 14.35. The texts cited here are Song 2.2, Ezek 9.4 and Mt 13.30.

²¹⁰ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.3.17. Augustine develops the theme of the mixed Church more fully, of course, in *ciu.*: see, for example, *ciu.* 18.49, 20.9.1. See Lawless (1993), 18: "With firm insistence on the

The presence of the unholy cannot then be said to corrupt God's holy people.²¹¹ We do not become sinners by sharing in the sacraments with them. Rather, they are to be tolerated like weeds among the grain, or straw among the wheat, or bad fish among good fish, until the time of the harvest, or the winnowing, or the landing of the nets.²¹² The evil who are present among the good are "with the Church and yet not in the Church",²¹³ nevertheless, they must be endured for the sake of unity and love until the harvest.²¹⁴ Those whom Augustine can, he corrects; those whom he cannot, he tolerates for unity's sake.²¹⁵ This, he adds, was also Cyprian's example, maintaining unity with the rest of the Church even in the face of profound disagreement.²¹⁶

How then should texts be understood which seem to advocate separation? An example is a verse, quoted by Parmenian: "Depart, depart, go out from there and touch nothing unclean. Go out from the middle of it and be separated, you that carry the vessels of the Lord [Isa 52.11]".²¹⁷ The Donatists have misunderstood such texts, Augustine explains. Good and evil people are distinguished not by their outward associations, but by their inward inclinations. The verse must be understood spiritually, not spatially: have nothing to do with sin, he argues, but condemn it and attempt to correct the sinful without abandoning them and causing disunity. What is required is spiritual not physical separation, purity of heart rather than schism.²¹⁸ However, the fact that the Donatists have separated is providential, for this clearly demonstrates their wickedness. Their schism has not preserved their purity, but cut themselves off from the Church.²¹⁹ "Not only are they themselves the bad fish, but

Church as a *corpus permixtum* (an argument based upon sound theological reflection buttressed by unimpeachable biblical and historical evidence), Augustine almost single-handedly quashed both Donatist separatism and elitism".

²¹¹ *c. Don.* 4.6; Beddoe (1993), 234-235.

²¹² *ep.* 105.5.16. The familiar allusions are to Mt 13.42-43, 3.12 and 13.47-50.

²¹³ *cath. fr.* 25.74.

²¹⁴ *cath. fr.* 20.55. Augustine quotes Eph 4.3 in this context.

²¹⁵ *Cresc.* 3.35.39.

²¹⁶ *Cresc.* 3.36.40.

²¹⁷ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.4.20; Refoulé (1955), 99.

²¹⁸ *breuic.* 3.9.18.

²¹⁹ *c. ep. Parm.* 1.14.21.

they have also torn the net of unity";²²⁰ they are not, as they thought, the wheat, but the weeds.²²¹

The Donatists' wickedness is especially evident in their sinful pride. They argue that since the Church is holy, only perfectly holy individuals can be saved, citing the text "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? [Lk 18.8]".²²² Augustine replies that the following verse undermines the Donatist interpretation: "He said this to some who saw themselves as righteous and spurned the rest [Lk 18.9]".²²³ This exchange is interesting since it reveals a distinctly Pelagian theme in Donatist theology. Whereas Pelagianism aspired to individual perfection in the here and now, Donatism sought such perfection for the pre-eschatological Church. So both errors amounted to a similar reliance on human ability to attain salvation on its own merits, rather than acknowledgement of dependence on the grace and love of God.²²⁴ The Donatists, Augustine says, should beware of their own foolish pride!

So when the Donatists argue that they are the only true Church, winnowed and separated from the unholy, Augustine can describe such a claim as nothing but vain sacrilege, since their schism attempts to usurp the place of God.²²⁵ He ironically describes their successive bishops, Majorinus, Donatus and Parmenian, as the Donatists' *tridens*, the three-pronged pitchfork which was supposed to have already carried out the winnowing.²²⁶ But if this was so, he asks, what was the reason for the subsequent division between Primianus and Maximianus and their followers? If the *tridens* had created a pure and holy Church, then the Maximianists were presumably unholy; but they were subsequently restored to fellowship. This demonstrates the inconsistency of the Donatist claim to be the elect, and the pride of those who prefer

²²⁰ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.3.19.

²²¹ *ep.* 76.2.

²²² *cath. fr.* 15.38.

²²³ *cath. fr.* 15.39.

²²⁴ Beddoe (1993), 236 observes that the sin of the Donatists was to underestimate the power of God's love.

²²⁵ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.3.17; *cath. fr.* 14.35; *c. Gaud.* 2.5.5. See Straw (1983), 133.

²²⁶ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.3.18.

the false unity of Donatus to the true unity of Christ.²²⁷ “Therefore the guarantee of unity is nothing, unless it is the Church declared by the promises of God.”²²⁸ If unity rests on a divine promise, then disunity must be a result of human pride and sinfulness.

God gives a pledge for the future, not a pattern for the present.²²⁹ The Donatists have misunderstood a number of texts which place the fulfilment of the promise in the future. One such comes from Jeremiah: “What has the chaff to do with the wheat? [Jer 23.28]”.²³⁰ Augustine compares this verse with the parable of the sheep and the goats (Mt 25.31-34), and explains that Jeremiah’s prophecy will be fulfilled when the sheep and the goats are similarly separated. So this verse and others like it must be interpreted eschatologically. Our hope is not for the present on earth, but for the future in heaven, as Augustine shows from a series of scriptural references.²³¹ This hope is by definition something for the future: were it to have been already fulfilled, it would not be a hope. In short, the Donatists have failed to understand that the scriptures are clear that good and evil people will be separated only in the final judgement at the end of the age.²³² Augustine describes good and bad people together attending the wedding banquet of the king (Mt 22.1-4), an allegory of the eucharist and of the hoped-for kingdom of God.²³³ The parable narrates how some come to the banquet without the appropriate wedding robe, so that when the king comes in, they are thrown out of the feast. This robe Augustine identifies as “the most faithful love of the bridegroom”,²³⁴ so what distinguishes

²²⁷ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.6.29.

²²⁸ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.5.28; see Brisson (1958), 191.

²²⁹ Refoulé (1955), 90: “L’Eglise d’ici-bas n’est pas purement et simplement la Cité de Dieu, elle n’en est que la partie pérégrinante. Elle est la Cité de Dieu cheminant au milieu de la Cité de la terre. Les deux cités ne poursuivent pas seulement leur route l’une à côté de l’autre, mais mêlées l’une à l’autre”. See also Borgomeo (1972), 359-363; Dyson (2001).

²³⁰ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.3.19.

²³¹ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.5.27. Christians are to be concerned with heavenly, not earthly, matters (Phil 3.20). Sharing in Christ’s resurrection (Col 3.1-3), we hope to sit with him in heaven (Eph 2.6); we wait patiently (Rom 8.24-25), without fear (Prov 1.33), looking forward to the time when God is revealed and we will be like him (1 Jn 3.2).

²³² *c. Don.* 7.10, 8.11.

²³³ *c. Don.* 20.27.

²³⁴ *ibid.*; and see also the similar discussion of the wedding robe at s. 90.5-6. On the theology of the bridegroom, see Grabowski (1957a), 513-514.

good from bad at the final judgement is whether or not they have Christ's love, the gift of the Spirit. Without love, nobody can enter the celestial banquet.

Despite Augustine's scorn, the Donatists see the fact that they are numerically small compared with their rivals as evidence that they must be the true Church. They have misunderstood the parables, not realising that prior to the eschatological separation the visible Church includes many who are not members of the body.²³⁵ The Donatists note that only a few will take the narrow gate leading to salvation (Mt 7.13-14), but Augustine points out that scripture more usually describes the Church as large in number.²³⁶ The saved are only few in relation to the greater number who are not: unlike Origen, for example, Augustine is no advocate of universalism!²³⁷ But this does not mean that the Church is bound to be utterly tiny. Granted that a number of ambiguous, isolated scriptural passages could be cited to support Donatist reasoning, the clear, unambiguous and unequivocal texts all support the Catholic doctrine.²³⁸ Since the world includes good and bad people, and since the Church is drawn from the whole world, so it is inevitably a mixed body.²³⁹ We must heed the voice of the whole canon of scripture,²⁴⁰ which is clear that the Church is mixed, worldwide, and that separation will only be eschatological. "For the field is the whole world, not just Africa; and the harvest will be at the end of the age, not in the time of Donatus".²⁴¹ Until then, good and wicked must exist side by side, the good enduring the bad for the sake of love and unity.

²³⁵ *cath. fr.* 13.34.

²³⁶ *cath. fr.* 14.36.

²³⁷ For the doctrine of *ἀποκατάστασις* in Origen, see *De principiis* 1.6.2, 1.6.3, 3.6.3.

²³⁸ *cath. fr.* 24.69.

²³⁹ *Cresc.* 3.66.74.

²⁴⁰ *cath. fr.* 25.75.

²⁴¹ *c. litt. Pet.* 3.2.3. See Mersch (1936), 48-52; Willis (1950), 119-120; Brisson (1958), 197; R. F. Evans (1972), 83; Kreidler (1993), 422.

The worldwide Church

The differences between Catholics and Donatists can be reduced to a single issue, Augustine explains: which of them is the Church?²⁴² It is axiomatic that there can be only one Church, the body of Christ, outside of which nobody can be saved. So the question of whether it is the Catholics or the Donatists who are the Church is of the utmost importance. The human arguments have failed to resolve the issue, so Augustine suggests that we listen to the word of God. “We look for [the Church], therefore, in the canonical holy scriptures.”²⁴³ These demonstrate that the Church is Christ’s body, filling the whole world. The Donatists have failed to recognise this body, substituting for it their own pale imitation which is confined to Africa alone, founded not on love but on its absence, and cut off from the unity of the worldwide Church.

Examining the scriptural teaching about the Church, Augustine concludes that “The whole Christ is the head and the body. The head is the only-begotten Son of God, and his body is the Church. They are bridegroom and bride, two in one flesh”.²⁴⁴ Just as the scriptures reveal Christ, so they also reveal the worldwide Church which is his body.²⁴⁵ “The members of Christ are bound together through love of unity, and it is that which joins them to their head, who is Christ Jesus.”²⁴⁶ Augustine quotes a sequence of texts which describe the head and then the body. In each case the Donatists have correctly understood the first part of the passage, but failed to understand what follows:

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens ... and let your glory be over all the earth [Ps 107.6].

They have pierced my hands and my feet, they have counted all my bones ... All the ends of the earth will remember and will turn to the Lord: all the families of the nations will worship

²⁴² *cath. fr.* 2.2; Lamirande (1972b), 63; Studer (1997a), 34.

²⁴³ *cath. fr.* 3.6.

²⁴⁴ *cath. fr.* 4.7. Augustine’s doctrine of the *totus Christus* is developed much more fully in the *en. Ps.*: see Mersch (1936), 84-138; Borgomeo (1972), 209-234; Bochet (1982), 382-391.

²⁴⁵ *ep.* 105.4.14-105.4.15.

²⁴⁶ *cath. fr.* 2.2. On Christ as the head of the Church, see Philips (1954).

before his face, because the kingdom is the Lord's and he rules over the nations [Ps 21.16-17, 27-28].

God, give the king your judgement, and your justice to the king's son ... He will rule from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth [Ps 71.1, 8].

My will is not in you, says the Lord omnipotent, and I will not accept sacrifice from your hands ... For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is glorified among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name [Mal 1.10, 11].

Like a lamb he was led to the sacrifice ... Rejoice, O barren one, who has not borne [children]; break forth and cry out, who has not given birth, because the children of the one who was abandoned will be more than those of her who has a husband. For the Lord says: Enlarge the place of your tabernacle and fasten your courts. Do not hold back! Stretch out the length of your ropes and strengthen your stakes; spread out both to the right and to the left. For your descendants will inherit the nations, and you will inhabit cities that were deserted [Isa 53.7, 54.1-3].²⁴⁷

The first part of each of these quotations refers to Christ, the head, while the subsequent text refers to his body, the Church. In every instance, the Church is described as being "over all the earth", constituted from "all the families of the nations", and so on. Thus the Church is a worldwide body, what the Greeks call *καθ' ὅλον*,²⁴⁸ in fact, all the scriptures are agreed in their description of the catholicity of the Church.²⁴⁹

So Augustine proceeds to show that the scriptures portray the body of Christ as a worldwide communion, and that this description is met by the aptly named Catholic Church and not by the Donatists. The defective ecclesiology of Donatism is a consequence of inadequate christology, failing to make the connection between Christ's head and his body:

²⁴⁷ *Cresc.* 3.64.72.

²⁴⁸ *cath. fr.* 2.2.

²⁴⁹ *c. Don.* 2.2.

Oh, the perversity of human madness! You believe you should be praised for believing in Christ whom you do not see, and you do not believe you should be damned for not believing in the Church which you do see. The head is in heaven, but the body is on earth.²⁵⁰

We saw in the previous chapter how important this theme of the *totus Christus* is in Augustinian ecclesiology.

Augustine rummages through both Testaments to present a fully comprehensive picture of the worldwide Church, avoiding the more obscure texts in favour of those whose meaning is clear.²⁵¹ Abraham was promised that all the nations would be blessed by his descendants (Gen 22.16-18), a covenant renewed with Isaac and Jacob and fulfilled in Christ (Gal 3.15-16).²⁵² There are similar promises in Isaiah²⁵³ and the psalms.²⁵⁴ In particular, Ps 71.8 describes the coming rule of Christ:

“He will have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the whole earth.”
From what river, unless the one where he was baptised and where the dove descended on him in a great sign of love and unity?²⁵⁵

Augustine offers an interesting interpretation of this verse. Firstly, it describes the universal scope of the Church, “from sea to sea” and “from the river to the ends of the whole earth”. But secondly, “the river” refers to Jesus’ baptism, the spatial and temporal beginning of the Church, from when and where the Church spreads out to the end of the world. Thirdly, the allusion to the dove reminds us of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is a “sign of love and unity”, and so it follows that the worldwide Church is united in love by the gift of the Spirit.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁰ *Cresc.* 3.64.71.

²⁵¹ *cath. fr.* 5.8.

²⁵² *cath. fr.* 6.11-6.13.

²⁵³ *cath. fr.* 7.15-7.19: see Isa 11.9-10; 27.6; 41.4-5; 42.1-4; 49.5-23; 51.4-5; 52.9-10; 53.11-12; 54.1-4 and 62.1-4.

²⁵⁴ *cath. fr.* 8.20-8.22: see Ps 2.7-9; 18.5; 21.17-19, 28-29; 44.10-12, 17; 49.1-2; 56.5-6 and 71.8-11.

²⁵⁵ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.58.132.

²⁵⁶ See also the similar but less developed interpretation at *cath. fr.* 8.22.

Augustine continues his exploration of the scriptures through a detailed study of Acts. In the Pentecost narrative (Acts 2.1-14, 37-41), the Church in the power of the Spirit includes all the languages of the world.²⁵⁷ The gospel was spread because of the scattering of the apostles from Jerusalem (Acts 8 and 9); and Peter (Acts 10.11-15, 28) and Paul (Acts 13.46-48) both separately realised that the gospel was for the whole world.²⁵⁸ Finally, Augustine cites numerous verses from the epistles in which Christian congregations all over the world are mentioned.²⁵⁹ He concludes that the Catholic Church was prophesied in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament, established by God and filling the earth.²⁶⁰

To this house is said: “Bearing with each other in love, trying to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace [Eph 4.3]”; and “For the temple of God is holy, and you are that [temple] [1 Cor 3.17]”. Indeed, she is made up of the good and the faithful and of the holy servants of God scattered in all the world, and bound together by the unity of the Spirit in the same communion of the sacraments, whether they know each other face to face or not.²⁶¹

The Catholic Church is thus by definition universal, a temple of the Holy Spirit, who unites diverse Christian communities in one worldwide fellowship of love.

But the Donatists do not recognise this portrayal of the Church. Augustine imagines the rest of the world calling to the Donatists in a plea for unity.²⁶² “Behold, there are the scriptures which I believe: behold, there are the churches with which I am in communion! But where I recite you their names, there you recite me their crimes!”²⁶³ He quotes what Jesus says at Lk 24.44-47:

“These are the words that I spoke to you when I was still with you, that everything must be fulfilled that was written about me in the Law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms.” Then

²⁵⁷ *cath. fr.* 11.29; Lamirande (1967), 88-97.

²⁵⁸ *cath. fr.* 11.30; Lamirande (1967), 97-102.

²⁵⁹ *cath. fr.* 12.31. Augustine quotes Rom 15.15-19; 2 Cor 1.1 and 1 Pet 1.1; he also refers to the lists of churches in Revelation and to the other canonical letters written to different Christian communities.

²⁶⁰ *c. Gaud.* 1.33.42.

²⁶¹ *bapt.* 7.51.99. On the Church as the temple of God, see the discussion in Grabowski (1957a), 514-517.

²⁶² *c. Don.* 4.4.

²⁶³ *cath. fr.* 12.31.

he opened their minds, so that they would understand the scriptures, and said to them: "So it is written that Christ must suffer and rise from the dead on the third day ... and ... that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem".²⁶⁴

What could possibly be clearer? From Christ's own mouth comes the declaration that the Church will fill the whole world.²⁶⁵ The Donatists refuse to accept the evidence of the scriptures:²⁶⁶ they are guilty of rejecting the words of Jesus Christ himself.²⁶⁷

The Donatists dispute both the interpretation and the application of these texts. Most of the second book *Against the Letters of Petilian* consists of passages cited by Petilian in favour of unity, and argument by Augustine that this means unity with the Catholic Church. For example, he lets stand without comment observations by Petilian that baptism is in Christ's name alone and that Christ cannot be divided.²⁶⁸ But when the Catholics are described as "sitting in the seat of the scornful [Ps 1.1],²⁶⁹ Augustine makes an impassioned response:

Even if everyone in the whole world were of the kind you most vainly charge them of being, what has the chair of the Church of Rome done to you, in which Peter sat and in which Anastasius sits today, or that of the Church of Jerusalem in which James sat and in which John sits today, with which we are joined in catholic unity and from which you have separated yourselves by your impious fury?²⁷⁰

Why, on account of local incidents a hundred years ago, do the Donatists cut themselves off from the unity of the Catholic and apostolic inheritance, demonstrating their hatred for the communion of God's faithful people? Gaudentius,

²⁶⁴ *cath. fr.* 10.24.

²⁶⁵ *cath. fr.* 10.25.

²⁶⁶ *breuic.* 3.8.10.

²⁶⁷ *c. ep. Parm.* 1.2.2.

²⁶⁸ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.41.98, 2.42.100.

²⁶⁹ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.51.117.

²⁷⁰ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.51.118.

to take another example, is no martyr, for far from suffering through love of Jesus, he actively opposes the worldwide body of Christ.²⁷¹

The Donatists are therefore guilty of hatred of the rest of the world. They believe that the Church outside Africa has perished. Nobody has accused such Christians of being directly guilty of sin, whatever the charges levelled at African Catholics;²⁷² but their continued intercommunion causes the Donatists to believe that they have become irretrievably corrupted. The Donatists are therefore forced to argue that prophecies about the worldwide Church are yet to be fulfilled, an argument which Augustine describes as utter nonsense.²⁷³ The notion that the Church survives only in Africa, and there only among the Donatists, is completely without scriptural warrant: those who say such things are to be anathematised.²⁷⁴ The Donatists also find themselves having to justify their being a numerically small Church, attempting to develop an analogy between their situation and that of the two faithful tribes of Judah and the ten unfaithful tribes of Israel. Augustine reminds them that Judah was far from being sinless, indeed that Jer 3.11 describes Judah as being more sinful than Israel. He draws this conclusion:

One must never cut off part of the people because of heresy. For God ordered the separation of those tribes, not to divide the religion, but so that the kingdom might be divided and thus that the kingdom of Judah might be punished. But God never commands schism or heresy. For it is not because the world is divided into many kingdoms that Christian unity is also divided, when the Catholic Church is found on both sides.²⁷⁵

There is no direct analogy between the Church and political entities: just because the world is fragmented does not mean that the body of Christ can likewise be divided.²⁷⁶

²⁷¹ *c. Gaud.* 1.20.22.

²⁷² *cath. fr.* 2.3.

²⁷³ *cath. fr.* 9.23.

²⁷⁴ *ep.* 105.1.2; *cath. fr.* 12.32, 13.32. See Evans (1972), 81-82.

²⁷⁵ *cath. fr.* 13.33: see Greenslade (1964), 31-32.

²⁷⁶ Augustine sees the division of the world into different kingdoms as a punishment for sin: see *ciu.* 16.4. The relative unity of the Roman Empire is a result of violence (*ciu.* 19.7), and is therefore a parody of the *ciuitas dei* which is based on *caritas* (*ciu.* 14.28). Studies of “political Augustinianism” are numerous: the classic work is Markus (1970); the most interesting recent foray is by Milbank (1990), especially the comprehensive “re-imagining” of *ciu.* in chapter 12.

Finally, the Donatists argue that, since Africa was the last place to be converted, and since the last will be first (Mt 20.16), this justifies their restriction of the Church to Africa. Augustine points out that this is to misunderstand a text about the Gentiles taking the place of the Jews.²⁷⁷ Related to this is a curious discussion about Song 1.7, describing the flock lying down in the middle of the day. This the Donatists interpret as the middle of the world, that is, Africa; but Augustine offers the alternative interpretation of the full brightness of the wisdom and love which come from the gift of the Holy Spirit.²⁷⁸ In short, the Donatists take their origin not from Jerusalem, but from Carthage; they glorify not God, but Donatus.²⁷⁹ Their schism is restricted to Africa alone.²⁸⁰

Nevertheless, the schism does not have the effect of merely dividing Africans: this would perhaps have allowed the Donatists to claim to be in a numerical majority. It affects the whole Church; and so the Donatists are in a tiny minority worldwide.²⁸¹ They have cut themselves off from the universal Church, which is an extraordinary act of folly. For Christians outside Africa know nothing of Donatism. They cannot judge the rights and wrongs of the case, but will certainly condemn the Donatists for their separation. If the Donatists were truly humble they would prefer love and unity, but because they do not, the whole world denounces them for causing the schism.²⁸² Without love, the tendency towards ever-increasing fragmentation is inevitable: “They perish little by little, divided and cut apart, who prefer the turmoil of their passions to the most holy bond of catholic peace”.²⁸³ Not for nothing does Augustine warn his opponents to “beware of the place in which you stand, and with whose inheritance you are not in communion”.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁷ *cath. fr.* 15.37.

²⁷⁸ *cath. fr.* 16.40, 16.41. Brisson (1958), 208, commenting on the Donatist use of this text, remarks that “il est inutile de souligner la faiblesse de cette citation”!

²⁷⁹ *cath. fr.* 16.42.

²⁸⁰ *c. ep. Parm.* 1.3.4.

²⁸¹ *c. Don.* 28.48.

²⁸² *c. ep. Parm.* 3.4.24.

²⁸³ *c. ep. Parm.* 1.4.9.

²⁸⁴ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.58.132.

Persecution, correction and love

When we considered Augustine's motivation in attacking Donatism, we noted that the policy of coercion became increasingly important as time wore on. In about 407, he tells us that he would have preferred to be at rest, but that his success prompted him to continue.²⁸⁵ This is probably a reference to the persecution which was increasingly inflicted on the Donatists from 405 onwards. Since those separated from the Church could not be saved, coercive measures were warranted, but always as an instrument of love. To abandon souls to their eternal ruin would be a failure of love much more serious than even the most desperate attempts to save them. Christian rulers owe this duty of love to their brothers and sisters. Because the Donatists are guilty of error and the Catholic Church acts through love, the former cannot complain of their treatment by the latter. Persecution may sometimes be the most loving means of challenging the unwillingness of obstinate sinners to face the truth.²⁸⁶

Augustine explains why he went to such lengths in order to effect the conversion of the Donatists. Using the familiar metaphor of the wheat and the chaff (Mt 3.12), he says that there may yet be good grain among them, which justified any efforts to try to save them.²⁸⁷ If truth was on the side of the Catholic Church, and if the failure to recognise truth leads to damnation, then any attempts at correction are not just acceptable but absolutely essential.²⁸⁸ If the Donatists were willing to use violence to force people into error (Augustine has in mind the ever-present danger from Circumcellion extremists), then how much more should the Catholic Church be prepared to use force to save the Donatists from their error?²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ *ep.* 93.1.1. On the coercion of the Donatists, see Brown (1963), Greenslade (1964), 129-141 and Crespin (1965), 161-170; for Augustine's own attitude towards coercion, see Batiffol (1920), II, 331-336, Willis (1950), 127-135, Brown (1964), Greenslade (1964), 145, Markus (1970), 133-153 and Lamirande (1975).

²⁸⁶ *ep.* 89.7.

²⁸⁷ *cath. fr.* 19.52, 20.53.

²⁸⁸ *c. Don.* 17.23.

²⁸⁹ *ep.* 105.2.5.

Petilianus and Cresconius accused the Catholic Church of a grave crime in persecuting fellow Christians.²⁹⁰ Augustine demonstrates from a variety of scriptures that it is only right for the Church to attempt to correct its enemies. Foremost among these is the ominous Lukan text: “Go out into the streets and the hedgerows, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled [Lk 14.23]”.²⁹¹ This verse was central to Augustine’s defence of coercion. “We understand ‘streets’ to mean heresies and ‘hedgerows’ to mean schisms; for ‘streets’ mean in this place diverse opinions, but ‘hedgerows’ mean perverse opinions.”²⁹² God certainly gives the Donatists free will, but they should also expect the consequences that follow from the exercise of that free will.²⁹³

However justified correction may be, it stems not from vindictiveness, but from love. “Whatever we do to you, even if we do it against your will, we do it out of love, so that you may willingly amend yourselves and live an amended life.”²⁹⁴ The imperial powers act out of love, and Augustine and his fellow bishops act out of a pastoral responsibility. “It is better to love with severity than to deceive with lenience.”²⁹⁵ As God loves us and we love and fear him, so we must love our enemies, who may in return love and, if necessary, fear us.

What should Christian love do, especially when those who willingly and furiously threaten their own deaths are few compared with the people who will be freed? What therefore should brotherly love do? If it fears the transitory fires of the furnaces for a few, should it abandon everyone to the eternal fires of hell?²⁹⁶

If some resist persecution, then so be it, even if a few who are determined to perish are thereby lost. But Augustine always urges the civil authorities to avoid capital

²⁹⁰ *c. litt. Pet.* 1.18.20; *Cresc.* 2.22.27.

²⁹¹ *c. Gaud.* 1.25.28. See also *ep.* 93.2.5 and Lamirande (1975), 51-58. Markus (1970), 134: this text “earned Augustine the reputation of being the first theorist of the Inquisition”; but Lancel (2002), 304: “Augustine was not the father of Augustinianisms, nor was he responsible for Torquemada”.

²⁹² *ibid.*

²⁹³ *Cresc.* 3.51.57.

²⁹⁴ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.95.217.

²⁹⁵ *ep.* 93.2.4.

²⁹⁶ *correct.* 3.14. See Kirwan (1989), 215.

punishment and to implement the laws gently.²⁹⁷ The Church must not forget why it acts: “But in every case a method must be maintained which is appropriately humane and compatible with love”.²⁹⁸ The object of coercion is not to destroy through anger, but to save through love. The Donatists have no reason to complain, and can be sure of a loving welcome if and when they return to the Catholic Church.²⁹⁹

Some of the Donatists saw persecution as proof that they were martyrs, suffering for the purity of their faith. Augustine emphatically rejects such a claim. The Donatists are not martyrs, since merely being persecuted does not make a cause righteous, nor does it mean that the Donatists are true Christians.³⁰⁰ They had themselves been guilty of persecuting the innocent Caecilianus, so they, being guilty, may legitimately be persecuted in their turn.³⁰¹ Since they have appealed to the imperial powers, the emperor has the right to act against them.³⁰² Indeed, he serves God, because “Catholic Christian emperors owe you this act of love”.³⁰³ Imperial legislation in the cause of unity is righteous, whereas the cause of the Donatists is unrighteous.³⁰⁴ There is an interesting exchange in this regard between Augustine and the Donatist Gaudentius, who had threatened to kill himself and his congregation if persecution did not cease. Since he was willing to cause so many deaths, Augustine denied that Gaudentius could claim blessedness on account of his suffering.³⁰⁵ In any case, suicide is never a legitimate alternative to suffering: when Gaudentius puts forward the example of Razis as someone praised in the scriptures for the manner of his suicide (2 Macc 14.37-46), Augustine counters that Razis was faithful despite great suffering, and praised not so much for the manner of his death as for his love for his fellow believers!³⁰⁶

²⁹⁷ *s.* 13.8; *ep.* 153.18; *c. ep. Parm.* 1.13.20.

²⁹⁸ *Cresc.* 3.51.57.

²⁹⁹ *cath. fr.* 20.56, 21.57.

³⁰⁰ *c. ep. Parm.* 1.8.13; *c. Don.* 17.21.

³⁰¹ *c. Don.* 16.20; *s. Caes. eccl.* 7, 8.

³⁰² *c. ep. Parm.* 1.9.15, 1.10.16.

³⁰³ *cath. fr.* 20.55.

³⁰⁴ *correct.* 2.8, 2.9; *c. Gaud.* 2.12.13.

³⁰⁵ *c. Gaud.* 1.5.6.

³⁰⁶ *c. Gaud.* 1.28.32, 1.30.34-1.31.37.

Gaudentius and other Donatists are guilty of irrational behaviour, which most of all explains why Augustine came to accept the case for persecution. Most people would prefer an orderly life of peace and unity to the chaos being perpetrated by Donatism.³⁰⁷ What they seem to fear is not so much death, but the life they would receive if they entered into the communion of the Catholic Church and the unity of Christ.³⁰⁸ Originally preferring to use reasonable arguments, Augustine came to see the power of coercion in challenging irrational inertia and sheer force of habit.³⁰⁹ Emeritus is an example of someone who refused to recant, preferring to remain in error, despite all that Augustine had to say about peace, love and unity.³¹⁰ He had even been present as a delegate at Carthage in 411 when the Donatists were comprehensively defeated, but he continued to reject the truth:³¹¹ he should have imitated the example of Christ's own humility, yet still he hesitated.³¹²

Addressing the specific issue of correction, Augustine even says in one place that the argument is not about doctrine, but merely about the obstinacy of the Donatists.³¹³ But he does shortly afterwards point out that the apparent lack of theological disagreement is illusory, since although the Donatists recognise Christ in the scriptures, they have failed to discern his body.³¹⁴ But although some have abandoned their former schism and returned to the unity of the Church, the majority have not. Augustine suggests that this is because they are fearful of the Circumcellions, despite being convinced of their error.³¹⁵ For the sake of love, then, the fear of conversion must be countered with an even greater fear of the consequences of remaining in sin. Paul was punished with blindness before acknowledging the love of Christ.³¹⁶ Persecution can be effective as a means breaking the habit of persistent sin. It is better to be led to God by love than by fear,

³⁰⁷ *c. Gaud.* 1.29.33.

³⁰⁸ *c. Gaud.* 1.32.41.

³⁰⁹ *ep.* 93.5.17; Markus (1970), 141-144 sets coercion in the context of Augustine's notion of *disciplina*.

³¹⁰ *Emer.* 1.

³¹¹ *Emer.* 2-4.

³¹² *Emer.* 6.

³¹³ *correct.* 1.1.

³¹⁴ *correct.* 1.3.

³¹⁵ *correct.* 4.16.

³¹⁶ *correct.* 6.21, 6.22; Van der Meer (1961), 97.

but the two are not mutually exclusive, since fear leads to love, as we saw in the previous chapter.

The example of the Maximianists

Just as the Donatists had split from the Catholic Church, so the *pars Donati* itself had suffered from its own schisms, illustrating the fissile nature of such separatist and reforming movements throughout the ages.³¹⁷ The most recent such split was that of the Maximianists in the 390s which we have referred to already. From Augustine's perspective, this internal controversy within Donatism offered a number of useful lines of argument: the parallel origins of the Donatists themselves and the Maximianists; the inconsistency and lack of principle of the Donatists on questions to do with the sacraments, ecclesial unity and the holiness of Church members; and the legitimacy of coercion in the name of loving correction. In short, the Maximianist schism provided Augustine with a very convenient stick with which to beat his Donatist opponents.³¹⁸ We will consider each of these points in turn.

Augustine often demonstrates the historical parallels between the disagreement of the Maximianists with the Donatists and the much larger and more serious breach between the Donatists themselves and the Catholic Church. The actions of Donatus and Maximianus and their followers closely resembled each other.³¹⁹ Donatus was excommunicated by Caecilianus and went into schism, supported by a majority of local bishops, but opposed by the majority worldwide. So it was with Maximianus, whose small band of supporters were opposed by the majority of Donatists who remained in communion with Primianus. So in each case, a schism attracting narrow support was widely opposed by the rest.

³¹⁷ Greenslade (1964), 192-193.

³¹⁸ On the Maximianist schism and Augustine's use of it in attacking the Donatists, see Crespin (1965), 61-63; R. F. Evans (1972), 72-74; and especially de Veer (1965), who shows how Augustine systematically used the Donatists' treatment of the Maximianists as a precedent for his own arguments against the Donatists.

³¹⁹ *Cresc.* 4.6.7; *Emer.* 9. See de Veer (1965), 228-229.

The parallel between the schisms of the Maximianists and the Donatists allowed Augustine to show the inconsistent attitudes and practice of the latter. He approves of the decision not to rebaptise those who had originally been baptised by the Maximianists, but he condemns the Donatists for not drawing a similar conclusion about the validity of Catholic baptisms.³²⁰ On one occasion, Donatist inconsistency resulted in public humiliation for one of their bishops. Ironically, it was Emeritus who had dictated the sentence of condemnation against Maximianus: “an adversary of the faith, a corrupter of truth, an enemy of the mother Church, a minister of Dathan, Korah and Abiram [a reference to the rebellion narrated in Num 16]”.³²¹ If condemned Maximianists can be readmitted without corrupting the rest of the Donatists, why did Donatus have to break communion with Caecilianus in order to remain pure?³²² Cresconius tried to suggest that in a disagreement it is more likely to be the minority who have the truth; Augustine points out that, on this basis, it would have been the Maximianists, not the rest of the Donatists, who were in the right.³²³

The inconsistency of the Donatists is most immediately apparent over their baptismal theology, a theme particularly prominent in the latter parts of *To Cresconius*. The Donatists insist on rebaptising Catholic, but not Maximianist, converts.³²⁴ More precisely, although they did not recognise Maximianist sacraments when they were in schism, they did once communion was restored.³²⁵ They consider those outside their communion to be spiritually dead and in need of rebaptism;³²⁶ but whereas they condemn the Maximianists who have broken communion, they do not condemn those who have returned from schism.³²⁷ Surely returning Maximianists must previously have been “outside the Church”,³²⁸ also receiving their baptisms “outside”? But they were not rebaptised. So if the Donatists

³²⁰ *Cresc.* 3.57.63, 3.58.64.

³²¹ *Emer.* 10; Brisson (1958), 224 n. 5.

³²² *Cresc.* 3.52.58; *Emer.* 11.

³²³ *Cresc.* 3.66.75, 3.67.76.

³²⁴ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.4.21.

³²⁵ *c. litt. Pet.* 3.40.46.

³²⁶ *Cresc.* 2.26.31.

³²⁷ *c. litt. Pet.* 1.11.12.

³²⁸ *Cresc.* 4.30.37.

recognise the validity of Maximianist baptisms, they ought also to recognise the validity of the sacraments of the Catholic Church.³²⁹

If for the unity of the Donatist party nobody rebaptises those who were baptised in an impious schism, why then do they not acknowledge for the unity of Christ the true and universal law of that inheritance?³³⁰

They recognise baptisms performed among those with whom they had temporarily been in disagreement, but they continue to reject the baptisms carried out throughout the rest of the world.

Thus the Donatists abandoned their practice of rebaptism when it became inconvenient, at the very least demonstrating that it was not a matter of consistent principle.³³¹ The danger for the Donatists of this inconsistency is that it makes their possession of baptism a double-edged sword, for “undoubtedly, without love of Christ’s unity, all the sacraments of Christ are possessed not for salvation but for judgement”.³³² The Maximianists seem to have been forgiven their sins by the mere fact of having returned to communion with the Donatists, “their sins covered by the very bond of fraternal peace and love”.³³³ If this is so for sinners returning to the Donatists, how much more would it be if the Donatists themselves were to return to the Catholic Church?

So what wicked impudence it is not to keep with those in the whole Christian world, baptised in holy unity, what is kept with those whom Praetextatus and Felicianus have baptised in the sacrilege of schism!³³⁴

Nothing can forgive “the wickedness of schism except the holy fire of love ... This will really happen, if you hold to that love in true unity”.³³⁵

³²⁹ *Cresc.* 4.33.40, 4.36.43; *c. Don.* 19.25.

³³⁰ *Cresc.* 3.24.27. Augustine uses almost exactly the same words somewhat earlier, at *c. litt. Pet.* 1.13.14.

³³¹ *Cresc.* 3.18.21.

³³² *c. litt. Pet.* 3.40.46.

³³³ *Cresc.* 4.11.13.

³³⁴ *ibid.*

If the Maximianists were received back without being rebaptised, what did the Donatists think they received in coming back into communion? Augustine answers for them:

That they should not perish in the sacrilege of schism, lest the baptism of Christ be not a reward but a judgement, not for salvation but for damnation ... We have given them grace, we have given them unity, we have given them the fellowship of the Church, so that they are worthy to receive the Holy Spirit, the one through whom love is poured into our hearts [Rom 5.5].³³⁶

But this undermines the Donatist case. For if they convinced the Maximianists to return for the sake of unity, then they themselves should return to the communion of the still larger Catholic Church.³³⁷ It could make sense for the Donatists to remain aloof if the Maximianists were likewise to remain in schism, but none of these now remain, with the possible exception of the occasional “Maximianist in transit”,³³⁸ those who are even now coming home! Baptism may therefore be found outside, but it does not profit those who lack unity. So Augustine asks the rhetorical question: “Which is the Church where baptism is profitable?”³³⁹ The lesson for the Maximianists is clear:

For if all these tiny parts would want to listen, not to human voices, but to the manifest voice of the truth itself, and would subdue the spirit of their perversity, then they would return from their own barren wasteland, not indeed to the majority of the Donatists, a cutting of which they would be themselves mere cuttings, but to the life-giving root of the Catholic [Church] itself.³⁴⁰

The “spirit of their perversity” of course contrasts with the Holy Spirit, just as the mutilated branch of Donatism contrasts with the lively root of the Catholic Church.

³³⁵ *ibid.*

³³⁶ *Cresc.* 4.5.6.

³³⁷ *Cresc.* 4.58.70.

³³⁸ *ibid.*: *Maximianensem ... peregrinantem.*

³³⁹ *Cresc.* 4.62.76.

³⁴⁰ *bapt.* 1.6.8.

If the Donatists are inconsistent over baptism, they are also consistent over unity more generally. If they value their unity with the Maximianists, they should value unity with the Catholic Church even more. They acknowledge the baptism of their own former schismatics, but reject the baptism and peace of the wider Church of Christ.³⁴¹ If, for the sake of unity, the Donatists do not rebaptise those who return from the Maximianists, why then do they not thereby recognise the greater unity of the Catholic Church?³⁴²

Fear God, and do not refuse to be steeped in such a great number of Christian peoples extended so widely through the unity of the Christian world, which is ignorant of Africans and ignorant of any crimes. If for the sake of the peace of Donatus it is good to call back those who are condemned, for the sake of the peace of Christ return to the Church which does not condemn those about whom it does not know.³⁴³

We have already noted that Augustine saw the parallel between the case of Primianus and the Maximianists on the one hand, and Caecilianus and the Donatists on the other. Although a minority believed Primianus to be guilty, the majority disagreed, and those who knew nothing about it sided with the majority. Thus all who thought him guilty, except the Maximianists, decided to bear with him for the sake of the rest of the Donatists.³⁴⁴ Augustine points out a precedent for this wise judgement:

For they held to that opinion of the blessed Cyprian, so full of love and piety, where he says: "For even though the weeds are seen in the Church, neither our faith nor our love ought to be impeded, so that because we see the weeds in the Church we ourselves should leave the Church".³⁴⁵

³⁴¹ *c. litt. Pet.* 1.20.22.

³⁴² *c. litt. Pet.* 1.13.14; *Cresc.* 4.53.63.

³⁴³ *Cresc.* 4.66.83.

³⁴⁴ *Cresc.* 4.56.67.

³⁴⁵ *ibid.*: the reference is to Cyprian, *ep.* 54.3. Augustine discusses this view of Cyprian's more fully elsewhere, especially at *Cresc.* 2.34.43-2.36.45.

We will consider the example of Cyprian in the next section. Augustine wishes that such discretion had ruled earlier in the time of Caecilianus and Donatus, as it has done latterly in the case of the Maximianists.

Cresconius charges Augustine with being a *traditor*, the heir of Caecilianus and a member of a faithless community, for “it was a *traditor* who created you”.³⁴⁶ Augustine wastes little time dealing with this careless remark, for it was God and nobody else who created him, whatever Cresconius may think of the company he keeps. But if the followers of Maximianus did not corrupt the rest of the Donatists with their sins when they were restored to them, how could Caecilianus have tainted the whole Catholic Church through his alleged transgressions?³⁴⁷ This is very important. The Donatists claimed that the Catholics were infected by the contagion of sin, the evil of one person affecting all those in communion with them.³⁴⁸ But on this basis, Augustine can point out that the Donatists must likewise now be diseased by the presence among them of former Maximianists. If this is not the case, then a few *traditores* a long time ago cannot have ruined the whole Catholic Church.³⁴⁹ The eleven disciples were not condemned because of their fellowship with the traitor Judas Iscariot, for the Church is, as we have seen, a mixed body of good and evil.³⁵⁰ The reason for the Church’s existence is that we are all sinners in need of forgiveness: “Forgive us our sins as we also forgive those who sin against us”.³⁵¹ To argue the opposite is a foolish act of pride and impiety.³⁵² Incidentally, this also reinforces the earlier point that the grace conveyed in baptism cannot be dependent on the purity or otherwise of the human minister of the sacrament.

So the inconsistency of the Donatists is clear, Augustine argues. They reject reunion with the Catholic Church through fear of impurity, but readmitted the

³⁴⁶ *Cresc.* 4.45.54.

³⁴⁷ *c. Gaud.* 1.39.50.

³⁴⁸ *Cresc.* 4.26.33.

³⁴⁹ *Cresc.* 4.43.50. De Veer (1965), 225-226 demonstrates how the reinstatement of the Maximianists undermined the Donatist case for separation on the grounds of purity.

³⁵⁰ *Cresc.* 4.26.33.

³⁵¹ *Cresc.* 2.28.35. Kreidler (1993), 421 points out that the Lord’s Prayer would not include this clause if the pre-eschatological Church was sinless.

³⁵² *Cresc.* 4.59.71.

Maximianists and recognised the validity of their sacraments.³⁵³ Recognising the contradiction, the Donatists tried to claim that the two issues were unrelated, but Augustine responds that this just further demonstrated their stubbornness in refusing to acknowledge the truth.³⁵⁴ Donatist obstinacy explains why Augustine gradually came to accept the idea of coercion, with the example of the Maximianists being an important part in this development. For they had been severely persecuted by the Donatists,³⁵⁵ which set a precedent for the similar treatment of the Donatists themselves by the Catholic imperial powers.³⁵⁶ At minimum, it meant that the Donatists were again inconsistent in complaining of their treatment.³⁵⁷ The way in which they treated the Maximianists simply confirmed their vicious nature:

Whoever separates themselves from that unity of the wheat because of the accusations laid against the weeds or the chaff cannot defend themselves against the accusation of murder because of the very evil of dissent and schism, as the scriptures say: "Whoever hates their brother is a murderer [1 Jn 3.15]".³⁵⁸

But the very success of Donatist coercion of the Maximianists shows that it would be the right thing for the Catholics to follow suit.³⁵⁹ The point of persecution is to restore sinners: the Maximianists were partially corrected by returning to the Donatists, but their correction would be complete if the Donatists would in their turn be reunited with the Church.³⁶⁰

And yet you also, who have received the baptism of Christ, ought to be punished, if you do not hold to the unity of the Catholic Church, just as you do not doubt that those baptised in the schism of the Maximianists should be punished if they are not bound to your communion.³⁶¹

³⁵³ *c. Don.* 29.51.

³⁵⁴ *c. Don.* 30.52.

³⁵⁵ *Cresc.* 4.46.55.

³⁵⁶ *c. litt. Pet.* 1.18.20; again de Veer (1965), 223-225 discusses the precedent of the Donatist persecution of the Maximianists.

³⁵⁷ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.20.45; *c. Don.* 3.3.

³⁵⁸ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.20.46.

³⁵⁹ *Cresc.* 3.63.69.

³⁶⁰ *Cresc.* 4.51.61.

³⁶¹ *Cresc.* 4.3.3.

To summarise: the existence of the Maximianist schism and the light this sheds on the character and theology of the Donatists can even be described as providential, if it will enable the Donatists to see the error of their ways and return to the love and unity of the Catholic Church.³⁶²

The example of Cyprian

We have already noted in the introduction to this thesis that the great hero of the African Church was the third century bishop Cyprian of Carthage.³⁶³ From a wealthy background, he became bishop in about 248, temporarily withdrawing from the city during the brief but systematic Decian persecution of 250. Effective Christian leadership fell into the hands of the lay *confessores* who had remained steadfast, whose lenient disciplinary practice was opposed by Cyprian on his return. In *De lapsis*, he warns of divine judgement on those who have apostatised, but he leaves open the possibility of forgiveness for those who truly repent.³⁶⁴ Two swiftly convened councils of African bishops agreed a common position, embodying a compromise acceptable to Cyprian. The *sacrificati* who had actually offered pagan libations could be readmitted to communion only on their deathbeds; the *libellatici* who had managed to obtain certificates to say that they had sacrificed were to be readmitted only after a period of penance.³⁶⁵

The end of the persecution saw the election of Cornelius as bishop in Rome in preference to a rival, Novatian, who opposed the readmission of the lapsed in any circumstances and who allowed the minority to name him as a schismatic bishop. Cyprian strongly supported Cornelius against the Novatianists whose schism, although persistent, never attracted widespread support. This gave rise to the question of when and how schismatics might be received back into communion.

³⁶² *Cresc.* 3.63.69.

³⁶³ The classic English study of Cyprian is Benson (1897); the best modern work is Hinchliff (1974). Also useful are Mersch (1936), 15-32, Wiles (1963), Frend (1965), 415-427, Walker (1968), R. F. Evans (1972), 36-64 and Daniélou (1977).

³⁶⁴ Cyprian, *De lapsis* 36; Hinchliff (1974), 72-75.

³⁶⁵ Cyprian, *ep.* 55.17; Hinchliff (1974), 80-83.

Cyprian believed that those who left the Church did not possess the Holy Spirit: he therefore pursued a policy of rebaptism, backed by two more councils of African bishops.³⁶⁶ In 254, Stephen became bishop of Rome, believing in opposition to the Africans that since baptism belonged properly to Christ and not the Church, any baptisms administered according to the trinitarian formula were valid.³⁶⁷ The disagreement had not been resolved by the time of Stephen's death in 257 and Cyprian's own martyrdom in 258 during the renewal of persecution under Valerian.

Crucially, however, for all the bitterness of the dispute, the differences between Stephen and Cyprian did not cause a schism between Rome and Carthage. In late 251, Cyprian had written an important treatise *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, originally a response to the disagreements in Africa over the lapsed, but achieving even greater relevance in the light of the rivalry in Rome between Cornelius and Novatian. Heresies and schisms are an invention of the devil, who corrupts the truth by dividing the Church.³⁶⁸ Visible unity is ensured by the unity of the bishops, beginning with Peter.³⁶⁹ It therefore follows that a person who breaks the unity of the Church has departed from it and cannot be saved. "Nobody can have God as their Father who does not have the Church as their mother."³⁷⁰ Cyprian emphasises the importance of love in maintaining unity, referring in passing to Eph 4.3.³⁷¹ Sacraments, including ordination and baptism, therefore have no validity outside the unity of the Church.³⁷² An extensive corpus of letters further supports the general shape of Cyprian's arguments.³⁷³

³⁶⁶ Cyprian, *ep.* 59.7; *ep.* 71.1.

³⁶⁷ Cyprian, *ep.* 74.2; Frend (1965), 420-421; Hinchliff (1974), 94-96.

³⁶⁸ Cyprian, *De unitate* 3.

³⁶⁹ Cyprian, *De unitate* 4, 5; Brisson (1958), 62-66. It is well known that two different versions of *De unitate* 4, probably both written by Cyprian, give different emphasis to the role of Peter among the apostles and thus of Rome among the bishops. It seems likely that the second version was written in response to Stephen's use of the first to support his own claims. See Bévenot (1938) and Bévenot (1961). Although the point is of considerable interest, it is not directly relevant to our purposes.

³⁷⁰ Cyprian, *De unitate* 6: *habere non potest deum patrem qui ecclesiam non habet matrem*.

³⁷¹ Cyprian, *De unitate* 8; Hinchliff (1974), 116: "[*De unitate*] is a book about the need to love".

³⁷² Cyprian, *De unitate* 10, 11; Brisson (1958), 79-82.

³⁷³ On Cyprian's sacramental theology, see Lampe (1951), 170-178; Walker (1968), 38-40.

The two conflicting strands in Cyprian's theology, rigorism coupled with an intense belief in unity, therefore led to a paradox in north African ecclesiology, unresolved for fifty years until similar circumstances led to the beginnings of Donatism. Although both the Catholic Church and the Donatists alike saw Cyprian as their spiritual forefather, the first stressed his love of unity, the second his conviction that the sacraments were invalid unless administered by holy people within a holy Church. Donatism was in essence the logical conclusion of Cyprian's baptismal theology, removed from the broader context of his doctrine of the Church.³⁷⁴ Despite the intensity of his disagreement with Stephen, Cyprian in his own time resolved the tension by prioritising unity over purity.³⁷⁵ Augustine was therefore able to show that, despite his own practice of rebaptism, because of his greater love of unity Cyprian would have condemned the schism of the Donatists.³⁷⁶ So in this section, we will see how Augustine demonstrates that Cyprian understood that Church to be both a mixed body and universal. He cannot be cited as a precedent for schism, but as an example of love and unity. If he was wrong to support rebaptism, his authority is not that of the scriptures. Since Cyprian declined to separate himself from those with whom he disagreed, Augustine shows the logical absurdity of the Donatists belief that communion with sinners must cause the Church to perish.

Augustine recalls that Cyprian was a Catholic bishop and martyr who wrote extensively about the universal mission and compass of the Catholic Church, describing it as filling the whole world with its light.³⁷⁷ But the Donatists have ignored this part of his legacy, despite claiming him as their forebear. Augustine shows that the African Donatist assertion that they are the only surviving remnant of the Church is opposed by Cyprian.³⁷⁸ Similarly, he also demonstrates that Cyprian had a doctrine of the mixed Church: in one letter, he welcomed the return of

³⁷⁴ Brisson (1958), 138-153; Crespin (1965), 35-38, 250-253.

³⁷⁵ R. F. Evans (1972), 45 suggests that, over time, Cyprian gradually became less of a rigorist.

³⁷⁶ Walker (1968), 18. On Augustine's discussion of Cyprian in his anti-Donatist writings, see García (1976).

³⁷⁷ *c. Gaud.* 2.2.2, referring to Cyprian, *De unitate* 5. Perler (1954) demonstrates that Augustine was familiar with this treatise, despite making few direct references to it.

³⁷⁸ *Cresc.* 2.38.48.

schismatics with the comment that only God could separate the wheat from the weeds (Mt 13.30). Augustine quotes from this letter:

For even though weeds are seen in the Church, neither our faith nor our love should be impeded, so that because we see the weeds in the Church we ourselves should leave the Church [Cyprian, *ep.* 54.3].³⁷⁹

Cyprian, Augustine argues, says that the presence of weeds in the Church should not discourage either our faith or our love. Presumably, he did not believe that the presence of wicked people could corrupt the good.³⁸⁰ If this is so, then we must trust God to separate the holy from the unholy at the final judgement. Again, this was the view of Cyprian:

“If his children abandon my law and do not walk in my justice, if they profane my judgements and do not follow my precepts, I will visit their crimes with rods and their sins with whips; but I will not remove my mercy from them [Ps 88.31-34, cited by Cyprian at *De lapsis* 6.8].”³⁸¹

Correction must be tempered with mercy, but those who cannot or will not be corrected must be endured with love. So the Donatists are wrong to claim Cyprian as “the author of their divisions”.³⁸² Augustine offers the example of Peter’s correction by Paul (Gal 2.11-14) as an instance of unity triumphing over disagreement.³⁸³ Despite clear differences over rebaptism, Cyprian and Stephen remained in communion.³⁸⁴ Disputes over baptism were not sufficient reason to cause schism.³⁸⁵ Cyprian did not automatically excommunicate those who disagreed with him, unlike

³⁷⁹ *Cresc.* 2.36.45; Brisson (1958), 187-188.

³⁸⁰ *c. Gaud.* 2.3.3, 2.4.4.

³⁸¹ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.2.14. Cyprian’s treatise *De lapsis* was an attempt to persuade fallen members to return, repenting but confident of mercy. Unfortunately, his original reference here to Ps 88 does not include the final line about the mercy of God. But since the broad sweep of the treatise so clearly supports Augustine’s argument, he is perhaps justified in attempting to camouflage this point.

³⁸² *Cresc.* 2.31.39.

³⁸³ *bapt.* 2.4.5.

³⁸⁴ *c. Gaud.* 2.8.8.

³⁸⁵ *un. bapt.* 13.22.

the Donatists.³⁸⁶ Thus the Donatists cannot cite Cyprian's support for their schism; in fact, they are to be condemned for refusing to yield to his authority.³⁸⁷

So, far from advocating separation, Cyprian was in fact a powerful witness of the Church's unity.³⁸⁸ Augustine acknowledges with gratitude the fact that Cyprian and the other African bishops who agreed with him did not cause a schism. They demonstrate "how much Catholic unity should be loved ... Because they did not depart from unity, we rejoice, because we are built with them on the Rock".³⁸⁹ The Donatists should acknowledge Cyprian as the "defender of Catholic unity and peace".³⁹⁰ Rather than selecting from among his arguments the ones which seem most congenial, they should imitate his piety. For because of his most praiseworthy love of the unity and peace of the Catholic [Church], he did not abandon even those of his colleagues with whom he differed".³⁹¹ In this, Augustine adds, he was motivated at all times by the principle of Eph 4.3, to maintain unity and peace with the rest of the Church:³⁹² for "so great was his love of unity".³⁹³ Cyprian loved God and loved the Church; but the Donatists love neither God nor his Church.³⁹⁴

Augustine describes Cyprian's literary output in glowing terms: "How delightful is the brotherly love which breathes from it, how sweet is the love which exudes from it!"³⁹⁵ The context for this remark is a letter of Cyprian to his fellow bishop Jubaianus, in which he denies the validity of Novatianist baptisms, coining the phrase "no salvation outside the Church".³⁹⁶ But he nonetheless closes the letter by noting that the matter is one which must be resolved by all the bishops acting

³⁸⁶ *Cresc.* 3.1.2.

³⁸⁷ *bapt.* 2.6.7; *c. Don.* 29.50.

³⁸⁸ *Cresc.* 2.33.42.

³⁸⁹ *bapt.* 7.54.103. "The Rock" is of course a reference to Peter, the apostolic sign of the Church's unity: see Mt 16.18 and Cyprian, *De unitate* 4.

³⁹⁰ *Cresc.* 2.31.39.

³⁹¹ *ibid.*

³⁹² *bapt.* 6.7.10; *c. Gaud.* 2.9.10.

³⁹³ *Cresc.* 4.26.33.

³⁹⁴ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.5.26.

³⁹⁵ *bapt.* 5.17.22.

³⁹⁶ Cyprian, *ep.* 73.21: *salus extra ecclesiam non est*, more usually quoted as *nulla salus extra ecclesiam*. See Crespin (1965), 252.

together. Until then, Cyprian refuses to cause a schism, insisting that love requires the bishops to bear with one another in their differences.

He sees and feels that even people who think differently can think [their different opinions] with saving love ... so that he would not maim the sacred fellowship of the Church with any blemish of schism.³⁹⁷

Augustine therefore sets Cyprian before the Donatists as an example, not of schism, but of loving unity, and prays that he himself might be found worthy to be united in love with Cyprian.³⁹⁸

For all that Cyprian is a good example of love for the Donatists to follow, Augustine is keen to stress that his writings are not infallible and do not have the authority of scripture.³⁹⁹ The reason why he has to make this point is because, although he thinks that Cyprian is quite right to insist on love and unity, he believes him to be utterly wrong on questions to do with baptism.

He says that “the Church and the Spirit and baptism cannot be separated from one another”, and therefore he also wishes it to be understood that “whoever separates themselves from the Church and the Holy Spirit is separated from baptism”.⁴⁰⁰

Whereas Cyprian believed that baptism is lost in someone who leaves the Church, Augustine believed that valid baptisms may be found outside the Church, even if they are not effective for salvation. Books 3 to 5 of *On Baptism* are particularly concerned with Cyprian’s advocacy of rebaptism. Augustine repeatedly reminds his opponents that Cyprian prized unity above all else. Again, Cresconius observes that, in the letter to Jubaianus referred to above, Cyprian explicitly denies the validity of baptisms administered outside the Church.⁴⁰¹ We have seen how Augustine shows that even then Cyprian was still guided by the obligations of love, not himself

³⁹⁷ *bapt.* 5.17.23.

³⁹⁸ *ibid.* Willis (1950), 122: “Augustine picks on this passionate love of unity as the characteristic mark of Cyprian’s life, and one in which the Donatists would do well to imitate him”.

³⁹⁹ *Cresc.* 2.31.39, 2.32.40.

⁴⁰⁰ *bapt.* 5.23.33. The reference is to Cyprian, *ep.* 74.4.

⁴⁰¹ *Cresc.* 2.32.40; Cyprian, *ep.* 73.1.

admitting recipients of schismatic baptism as members of the Church, but maintaining communion with those who did.⁴⁰² Despite this disagreement with Cyprian, then, Augustine can still demonstrate that he would have supported the Catholic case for unity over and against the Donatist case for disunity.⁴⁰³ If Cyprian was wrong to practice rebaptism, this mistake was more than compensated for by his “remaining in Catholic unity, and by the abundance of his love”.⁴⁰⁴

The Donatists claim to be more pure and more holy than the Church of Cyprian’s day. In that case, why did Cyprian and those with him not separate themselves from sinners? The answer is that he knew that the Church was a mixed body of good and bad people together, and so relied on spiritual rather than physical separation so as to keep the bond of unity and peace.⁴⁰⁵ Since sinfulness is an inevitable aspect of the human condition, we do not avoid it by dividing ourselves from other sinners, but only by allowing God gradually to transform us through the grace of the Holy Spirit. But if communion with sinners causes the Church to perish, as the Donatists maintain, then this would have meant that the Church was dead even in Cyprian’s time, fifty years before the Donatists thought to separate themselves.⁴⁰⁶ But if the Church had not been destroyed, then Cyprian was not contaminated by communion with Stephen, and so the theological basis of Donatism is false.⁴⁰⁷ Either the Church was hopelessly corrupted in the third century, in which case Catholics and Donatists alike are the heirs of sinners; or it was not, in which case neither is the Catholic Church of Augustine’s day affected by alleged crimes of the *traditores*.⁴⁰⁸ So if the Church did not perish because of Cyprian’s love of unity, then why do the Donatists insist on disunity and schism?⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰² *bapt.* 2.10.15.

⁴⁰³ *un. bapt.* 14.23.

⁴⁰⁴ *bapt.* 1.18.28.

⁴⁰⁵ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.2.9, 3.2.15

⁴⁰⁶ *c. ep. Parm.* 3.2.11.

⁴⁰⁷ *bapt.* 2.6.8.

⁴⁰⁸ *un. bapt.* 14.23, 14.24; *c. Don.* 29.50.

⁴⁰⁹ *c. Gaud.* 2.8.8.

Pelagianism

Many of the theological issues of the Donatist controversy also re-emerged in the battle with Pelagianism. The British monk Pelagius led a reforming movement in Rome from about 380, but little concrete is known about him: rather more is known about prominent disciples, such as Rufinus the Syrian, Celestius and later Julian of Eclanum.⁴¹⁰ Popular in aristocratic circles, Pelagianism began as a lay movement opposed to Manichean ideas, promoting the possibility of asceticism through human freedom to choose good. This mutual opposition to Manichean determinism initially met with Augustine's approval, but it soon became clear that insistence on human responsibility came at the expense of an adequate doctrine of grace, and so it was on this point that battle was joined. For a key tenet of Pelagianism was that the sin of Adam affected Adam alone without being transmitted to the rest of the human race. This denial of original sin therefore means that young children are sinless, infant baptism is unnecessary, and it is theoretically possible for men and women to remain sinless without the need for divine grace. Augustine wrote a number of treatises in opposition to Pelagius and Celestius from about 411 until 418, when after a long process of appeal and counter-appeal, they were both finally condemned as heretics by Zosimus of Rome. Their place as the leading advocates of Pelagianism were taken by Julian of Eclanum, who continually harried Augustine with the accusation that his doctrine of original sin stemmed from a residual Manicheism in his theology. We lack the space to explore the later stages of the controversy, which ended only with Augustine's death in 430.

Augustine agrees that Pelagius is right to condemn those who blame human nature for their sin, but argues that he goes too far in praising human righteousness at the expense of the righteousness of God.⁴¹¹ Human nature is not righteous, for although it was created good, it is corrupted by sin.⁴¹² It is therefore impossible for

⁴¹⁰ For a general survey, see Bonner (1963), 312-393; also Bonner (1967), (1972) and (1987). Sympathetic studies are Ferguson (1956), Rees (1988) and TeSelle (1970), 310-338. Also important are Brown (1968a), Burns (1980) and De Bruyn (1993).

⁴¹¹ *nat. et gr.* 1.1

⁴¹² *nat. et gr.* 2.2, 3.3.

us to lead a sinless life without the grace of God which we receive through baptism.⁴¹³ Pelagius believes that we have through grace been created with a nature that is capable of avoiding sin, but this is a long way from what Augustine understands by grace, “which is concerned with the cure, not the composition, of nature”.⁴¹⁴ Rightly praising God for the created human nature, Pelagius omits to offer thanks to God for his mercy in redeeming it.⁴¹⁵ We cannot become righteous except “through the help of the grace of our crucified Saviour Christ and the gift of his Spirit”.⁴¹⁶ If death comes because of sin, eternal life comes through the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit.⁴¹⁷ Because of the original sin of Adam, all are subject to death, and so everyone needs the remission of sins which comes through baptism.⁴¹⁸ An ancient tradition of the Church in Carthage, of which Augustine approves, is to describe the two dominical sacraments of baptism and the eucharist as “salvation” and “life” respectively, since without these two sacraments nobody can be saved.⁴¹⁹ Without spelling it out, here Augustine is saying precisely the same as he argued against the Donatists: salvation requires both baptism and fellowship with the one Church, for by definition only in unity is true communion possible.

The means by which God saves us is through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the love of God, effecting the transformation of the human will. In this context, Augustine quotes Rom 5.5: “the love of God has been poured into our hearts ... through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us”.⁴²⁰ This verse is extremely important in his refutation of Pelagian ecclesiology. The human body is intended to be a temple of the Spirit: in order to be born of God and to belong to God, we must both be born of water and born of the Spirit.⁴²¹ We become like God, not through the

⁴¹³ *nat. et gr.* 4.4, 10.11.

⁴¹⁴ *nat. et gr.* 11.12.

⁴¹⁵ *nat. et gr.* 34.39.

⁴¹⁶ *nat. et gr.* 60.70.

⁴¹⁷ *pecc. mer.* 1.6.6, 1.7.7.

⁴¹⁸ *pecc. mer.* 1.16.21, 1.19.24. For a comprehensive survey of the issue of original sin in Augustine, see Grabowski (1957a), 640-649.

⁴¹⁹ *pecc. mer.* 1.25.34.

⁴²⁰ *spir. et litt.* 3.5.

⁴²¹ *nupt. et conc.* 1.18.20, 1.19.21.

exercise of our free wills, but through the love of God poured into our hearts.⁴²² With love, we are capable of keeping the commandments, for the fulfilment of the commandments is love.⁴²³ The Law makes us aware of the possibility of sin, which is the explanation of 2 Cor 3.6: “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”.⁴²⁴ But these evil desires, which are a paradoxical consequence of awareness of the Law, can only be countered by the Holy Spirit.⁴²⁵ So the Spirit is rightly described as “the finger of God [Lk 11.20]”, since it was God’s finger that inscribed the stone tablets on which the ten commandments were originally written (Ex 31.18).⁴²⁶ In the old covenant, the Law was written on stone, but in the new covenant, God’s law is written on human hearts: God’s law is love, “the Spirit giving life to whoever loves”.⁴²⁷

Pelagius distinguished between the capacity for keeping the commandments, bestowed by God, and the will and action necessary for keeping them, proper to the individual.⁴²⁸ In other words, in Pelagian theology, God teaches us what to do, but does nothing to help us do it. It is therefore a system based on law, not on love.⁴²⁹ It assumes that human beings have independence of free will, and fails to recognise that the good which we do is possible only because of grace. For love is the root of all good things, but love itself is a gift from God, who is himself love.⁴³⁰ Grace precedes anything that we can do: “this the apostle John very clearly says: ‘not that we loved God, but that he loved us [1 Jn 4.10]’; and again, he says, ‘we love him because he loved us first [1 Jn 4.19]’”.⁴³¹ God commands us to love, and the perfect love which casts out fear (1 Jn 4.18) is given to us only through the gift of the Spirit of love.⁴³²

⁴²² *nat. et gr.* 64.77.

⁴²³ *nat. et gr.* 69.83.

⁴²⁴ *spir. et litt.* 4.6.

⁴²⁵ *spir. et litt.* 5.8.

⁴²⁶ *spir. et litt.* 16.28.

⁴²⁷ *spir. et litt.* 17.29.

⁴²⁸ *gr. et pecc. or.* 1.3.4, 1.7.8.

⁴²⁹ *gr. et pecc. or.* 1.8.9, 1.9.10.

⁴³⁰ *gr. et pecc. or.* 1.20.21, 1.21.22.

⁴³¹ *gr. et pecc. or.* 1.26.27.

⁴³² *perf. iust.* 10.21.

This is the gift of the Holy Spirit, by whom love is poured into our hearts, not indeed any sort of love, but love of God “from a pure heart and a good conscience and unfeigned faith [1 Tim 1.5]”. Through it, the righteous living on this pilgrimage are also led, after “the mirror” and “the enigma” and “what is in part”, to the vision, so that they might know “face to face”, just as they are also known [references to 1 Cor 13.12].⁴³³

God is the source of our new love; God is the object of that love; and it is through the gift of God that we are enabled to love.⁴³⁴ It is true that the commandment of love will only be perfectly fulfilled when we see God face to face; until then, we should live in hope, desirous of the promised reward.⁴³⁵

Augustine is clear that Pelagianism is a dangerous novelty. He recalls that at his trial, Pelagius was asked to anathematise those who believed that it was possible to avoid sin without the assistance of grace: this he did, saying clearly, “I anathematise them as stupid, not as heretics”.⁴³⁶ Augustine points out that this is an interesting distinction, for there are many errors which fall into the category of idiocy rather than heresy. Indeed, it is all too easy to make mistakes on points of doctrine, which can and should nevertheless be quickly corrected.

But it matters how much, and for what reason, and whether a person who is warned corrects or stubbornly defends as dogma that which they had carelessly spoken undogmatically. Therefore it follows that while every heretic is a fool, it does not follow that every fool must immediately be called a heretic.⁴³⁷

This is a fascinating observation, because it allows for the fact that human beings are prone to error. What makes an honest mistake become a heresy is for its progenitor to resist correction by the Church and to persist obstinately in holding to error. This argument is reminiscent of the discussion in *Cresc.*, book 2: there Augustine approves of the distinction put forward by Cresconius between schism and heresy,

⁴³³ *spir. et litt.* 28.49.

⁴³⁴ *spir. et litt.* 32.56.

⁴³⁵ *spir. et litt.* 36.64, 36.65.

⁴³⁶ *gest. Pel.* 6.16.

⁴³⁷ *gest. Pel.* 6.18.

defining the one as “recent disagreement” and the other as “inveterate schism”.⁴³⁸ In each case, what makes an original difference become a full-blown heresy is obstinacy in refusing to be corrected. We might also care to recall that such refusal of forgiveness is what Augustine defines as the sin against the Holy Spirit, since stubborn rejection of unity is also a rejection of love, of the Spirit and of God.

Pelagius describes the Church as being “without stain or wrinkle”.⁴³⁹ Augustine notices this point of similarity with the Donatists, who have likewise rejected the doctrine of the mixed Church. Although the two errors of Donatism and Pelagianism look superficially very different, and indeed manifested themselves in rather different ways, beneath the surface was a deep underlying similarity.⁴⁴⁰ Each heresy revealed a failure of love, a failure explicit in Donatism but implicit in Pelagianism. The Donatists sought perfection for the Church; the Pelagians sought perfection for the individual. If Donatism displayed “Pelagian” tendencies, through the assumption that it was possible to create a pure Church of the elect here on earth, then Pelagianism also manifested a “Donatist” streak, insofar as it refused to accept the need for the love of God. Both sought perfection on earth without the assistance of divine grace and love. The “body” with which they both ended up was therefore in each case a wholly human institution. The Catholic Church, by contrast, is the incarnate body of Christ, fully human and fully divine, constituted of fallible human beings, but joined to Christ the Son of God through the unity of the Holy Spirit of love.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored three “case studies” of Augustine’s theology of unity, each of which occupied him for a good deal of time, and each of which

⁴³⁸ *Cresc.* 2.7.9.

⁴³⁹ *gest. Pel.* 12.27.

⁴⁴⁰ Faul (1966), 414; Bonner (1989), 337; Lawless (1993), 19: “Donatism can, conceivably, be viewed, in institutionalized form, as a modified version of Pelagianism”. R. F. Evans (1972), 95-96 suggests that both errors look backwards to an “archaic theology”, the Donatists holding a “Cyprianic”, the Pelagians a “Tertullianic” doctrine of the Church.

generated a wide variety of theological literature. His engagement with Manicheism prompted a detailed consideration of what it means for Christians to love God and to love one another: love is a trinitarian event which unites us with God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and simultaneously unites us with one another. Augustine's protracted battle with Pelagianism allowed him to emphasise the fact that it is only the indwelling of the Spirit that enables us to become sinless. We must be temples of the Holy Spirit, the gift of whom allows us to live according to the new law of the love of God. But it was against the anvil of Donatism above all that Augustine hammered out the implications of his theology of love. Motivated by the demands of love for his separated brothers and sisters, he reluctantly concluded that they were heretics because they lacked love and had rejected the gift of the Spirit. For outside the Church, the Spirit cannot be found. Donatist baptisms were valid but ineffective, bringing condemnation rather than salvation; conversely, Catholic baptisms could not be made invalid through sin. Rather, the imperative of love and unity means that the Church spread throughout the world must necessarily be mixed, until the end of time when God will come in judgement and we see him face to face.

General Conclusion

The dove descending breaks the air
With flame of incandescent terror
Of which the tongues declare
The one discharge from sin and error.
The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre –
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.
We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire.

T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), *Little Gidding IV*

This thesis has been an attempt to explore the relationship between Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity and his evident passion for the unity of the Catholic Church. We have presented a detailed examination of his trinitarian theology, paying particular attention to its development from the earliest stages until the mature reflections of *On the Trinity* and related texts. Although there is continuity with his predecessors, Augustine's thought is highly original and creative. By means of reflection on scripture, philosophy, and even his own mental processes, Augustine is able to find new ways of talking about God. In particular, he concludes that the Holy Spirit is the substance of love and the bond of unity of the Father and the Son. He is the gift of the Father and the Son to the Church, and so his role in the life of the Church is also as the creator of unity and fellowship. The Church is the body of Christ, given life by the Spirit; but most especially it is the image of God the Trinity because its love and unity mirrors the love and unity of God. This is why Augustine was so adamantly opposed to disunity in the Church, such as that of the Donatists. In breaking the bonds of fellowship, the image of God is damaged and those who are outside the Church are also by extension outside of the love of God.

The conclusion we can draw from this is essentially a very straightforward one: that the unity of the Church is not simply a matter of convenience, or of

pragmatism. Rather, it is a theological imperative of the first order, since to deny the Church's unity is to deny something fundamental about the nature of God. Our God is love: if we fail to love one another, we are guilty of heresy.

In Augustine's day, there were no different denominations as such. What would he have made of our very different context? It is surely not stretching the point too far to say that he would be horrified. Do the existence of our contemporary denominations, with their implied entrenched divisions in the Church, mean that Augustine was wrong, and that Church unity is not essential? We are so used to being divided that we have forgotten the seriousness of our predicament. Again, even if we reserve judgement on this, and allow that our context is so different that the exact parallel cannot reasonably be drawn, what would he have to say about disunity within our different denominations? Writing as an ordinand of the Church of England, this question has become particularly acute for this writer during the lifetime of the research project. Again, at the very minimum, Augustine reminds us that we forget about love and unity at our peril.

Surely we who have Augustine's experience and wisdom to draw upon have even less excuse for our continuing fragmentation? If we have already allowed the Church to become broken, the last thing we should be doing is furthering the process of its disintegration. Or does this just demonstrate conclusively that schism breeds further schism? If in our current state we have lost our hold on the Holy Spirit, perhaps we should not be so surprised that our disunity is steadily getting worse.

Augustine offers us an alternative vision, one in which the members of the Church learn from one another more deeply about who God is and what God is like. In living together as one, we learn what love is, we share the life of the Spirit, and so we experience the gift of the Father and the Son. The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us: let us keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

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