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THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF GOD THE TRINITY: A STUDY OF ST. AUGUSTINE'S *DE TRINITATE*

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Abstract

The Christian doctrine of God, a hair-splitting concern of the post-Apostolic and Patristic Church, received its glariest elaboration in the De Trinitate, the theological Opus Magnum of St Augustine of Hippo. In this one single piece, St Augustine, the great pillar of Western Christianity, a pride of the African Church, scored the three-fold goals of defense of the Christian form of monotheism against those who denied the divinity of Christ, the attainment of the unity of faith among believers in Christ, and the clarification of this Christian mystery of faith in the early Church. The centrality of Augustine's De Trinitate in the development of the western doctrine of God deserves a careful exposé for the many who may find it quite difficult to grasp. This paper is intended as an aid to reading St Augustine's De Trinitate. It is limited to systematic study of the book, De Trinitate, itself

INTRODUCTION

There is no one particular article of the Christian doctrine that remains as much contested or criticized as the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. The problem is nearly cotemporaneous with the history of Christianity itself. However, it was in the fourth and fifth centuries AD that polemical teachings necessitated an articulation of the various faith Symbols and a streamlining of the core content of the church's beliefs and teachings as her doctrines of faith. From thence rose various treatises, many of which addressed the various contentious and perceived erroneous teachings and interpretations of the inherited faith and experience of God in Jesus Christ and the teaching of the Apostles. St Augustine's *De Trinitate*, one of such treatises (cf. Gioia, 2009; Gioia, 2013), came to assume the central stage in the debate and the architect of the dichotomy between the Western and the Eastern Trinitarian theological traditions.

A shift from the Trinity as the central focus of Christian thought occurred in the course of the history of this doctrine of faith. The period that lay between the 15th century Council of Florence's definition of relative opposition in the Trinitarian relations and appendix in Schleiermacher' s restriction of the Trinity to the appendix in his publication, The Christian Faith (see Jason M. Smith, 2008) caused consequent dearth of further developments in Trinitarian theology. Renewed interest Trinitarian theology surfaced in the 20th century, beginning with Karl Birth and Karl Rahner (see Nwachukwu, 2007). As for the 21st century, Ted Johnson, et al (2008) observes that "there are hundreds of Trinitarian, Christ-centred theologians scattered among many denominations". To explain this, and give a rational explanation for the much progress in Eastern Trinitarian thought, especially in the integration of lessons from Trinitarian thought into practical life, Collin E. Gunton accused Augustine of being responsible for the eclipse of Trinitarian thought in the West (Gunton, 1997). With the resurgence of interest in Trinitarian theology, St Augustine's De Trinit ate has returned to the central pedestal in Trinitarian debates. This can be ascertained by the number of studies carried out on this singular book. As a point of fact, no singular publication in Trinitarian theology is as much read as thisbook by the Doctor of Grace. Sadly enough, the most part of the authors and commentators sing discordant tones when it comes to explanations and interpretations of much of Augustine's thought on the trinity. A given instance is the disagreement over the dating or even the division of the De Trinitate. Much of these disagreements are attributed, perhaps, to influences froth many of the polemical issues Augustine addressed, both in the De Trinitate, and in his other writings, and the result of his intellectual sojourn before his conversion to Christianity. These combine to give Augustine De Trinitate such a blend and complexity that makes readership both attractive and complex. Thus, this study focuses attention on this singular book that is said to have shaped Western Trinitarian thoughts, and at the same time responsible for distinguishing between the theologies of the East and the West, the estrangement of Trinitarian thought from practical living, and the eclipse of such thoughts in Western theology. It uses library resources and the Internet for its sources. The goal is to get a piece that would offer as much help as possible to a contemporary scholar in earnest search for understanding and contribution to the ongoing debate on Trinitarian theology.

The *De Trinitate* is a major theological publication of the Bishop, St Augustine of Hippo. The focus of the book is the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. In a précis, this doctrine teaches that there are three persons in one God. Christianity's doctrine of the Trinity developed within a context of conflicts which were caused both internally and externally. Whereas it arose as a result of interpretations of the Christian monotheistic faith (at the internal level), there were oppositions from both Jewish religious tradition which maintained a strict monotheistic stance and the Greco-roman intellectual climate into which the nascent church found herself at the time. The Christian idea of a triune God was therefore a very contentious issue which had the possibility of setting the society to which peace had scarcely returned into chaos once again, hence the Council of Nicaea (convoked by Emperor Constantine in 325 AD). While it would be true to say that the Council helped the church to articulate what she teaches, as we find in the Creed of Nicaea or the QuicumqueViae of St Athanasius who was the leading theologian in the Council, the problem was far from being resolved. This is confirmed from the many contentious interpretations of the Christian understanding of the being and nature of God which began soon after the Council of 325 AD. St Augustine's *De Trinitate* was written, first, to meet with the intellectual yearnings of the learned of the time, his confidants, such as Aurelius, who anticipated the publication of this "long and laborious task", provide answers to the contending doctrinal questions in the attacks from both Jewish religion and Greek philosophy (see Nwachukwu, 2018), and yet clarify the faith of the Christians which had been labelled idolatrous by the Jews since both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are equally worshipped as God. This is St Augustine's DeTrinitate.

The Christian Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity

Christians, of all denominations, orthodox or not, confess that God is one *(credo in unum Deum)* who is Three in Persons. When put in a creedal symbol, this faith reads: "We believe in one God... the Father ... the Son ... the Holy Spirit" (The Roman Missal). The confession of this faith professes the nature of God as Trinitarian. The post-Apostolic church went through the recesses of positive revelation to assert affirmatively this belief of the church as celebrated in her liturgies, for example, especially in the baptismal catechesis and celebrations of the early Church. Magisterial and the theological traditions have lent

themselves to its proof, elaboration and defence against the various challenges that confronted the church on account of its novel teaching of plurality in God.

St Augustine, among many others of his time, laboured to preserve the symbol of faith of the Christians by giving it an authentic interpretation that has remained across the ages, a distinctive trait of Christian theology in the West. It is along this background that we are going to study Augustine's *De Trinitate*. Augustine, as both theologian and member of the church hierarchy, stands a strategic ground, to teach us on the being of God and what it has for us. We shall first have a glance at the theological tradition of Augustine so as to appreciate more the problem Augustine sets himself to handle.

This doctrine of God is uniquely, distinctively and essentially Christian. Its briefest expression says: "there are three Persons in One God". Though natural theology could argue for the existence and attributes of the one God, the knowledge of God's nature as Trinitarian can only be known through revelation, of which Scripture and Tradition are the greatest sources. The two sources attest to One God, in whom there are Three co-equal, co-eternal and equally almighty divine Persons. Indications of these truths abound in scripture, which, sadly enough, contains no explicit mention of the word "Trinity" (Nwachukwu, 2018). Many magisterial and teaching of the Fathers have articulated these intimations into comprehensive faith symbols, hence the various Christian creeds.

Elements of this truth of faith revolve around scriptural witnessing, the summary of which states:
(1)   The oneness of God – with explicit teachings in both the OT and the NT (examples, Gen 1: 26; Exodus 20:2-3, and the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4)
(2)   The Three-personed God – with strong indications in the OT but more explicitly taught in the NT (God speaks of Himself as plural (Gen 1:26; etc.); plural nouns (Elohim and Adonai) are used of Him to indicate plurality in God, hence, "His Three-ness".
(3)   The Three-in-Oneness of God – only strong indications in both OT and NT, but articulated by Tradition from truths revealed from the Scriptures. The strongest indications of distinctness and, yet unity,

comes in the NT where, in about 40 passages, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are spoken of together. Examples are the baptismal formula of Matthew 28: 19-20, and the Pauline benediction formula in 2 Corinthians 13:14. Yet each has his distinctive properties and roles in their personal relationships (Horrell, citing A. W. Wainwright, The Trinity in the New Testament (London: SPCK, 1962).

St Augustine of Hippo

St Augustine was born Aurelius Augustinus to a pagan father, Patricius, and a Christian mother, St Monica in 354 AD at Thagaste, in the Roman Province of Numibia, in present day Algeria. His father was a moderate pagan, and his mother, St Monica, a devout Christian, who raised him in the faith. He was a professor of rhetoric and travelled widely in search of inner peace which he found only in Christianity. He rose to become the Bishop of Hippo, led a saintly life and distinguished himself as a scholar of great repute, for which Mohler (Dogmatik, 351) says: "For the depth of feeling and power of conception nothing written on the Church since St Paul's time, is comparable to the works of St Augustine" (Eugene Portalie, 2019). James O'Donnell corroborates this by naming him the most significant Christian writer after St Paul (James O'Donnell, 2019).

Augustine proved himself a veritable ecclesiastic and strove to elucidate the Christian faith. He distinguished himself in the doctrines of creation, original sin and grace, freedom and determinism, but his most outstanding theological contribution is on the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. He published several works in which he addressed a number of contending issues of histime such as Pelagianism, the Donatist controversy and versions of Arianism. Notable among hiscountless works are his City of God (which contained his philosophical-theological outlook), his Confessions (which is his spiritual autobiography in which he narrated his tarrying as a young man and his eventual new found joy of conversion), and the De Trinitate, a compendium of his articulation of the Christian doctrine of God. His biographers remark that mixture in the various schools of thought added to the depth of his insights. To this Mohier bore the testimony above. His reputation was high among scholars, even till the present age. Specht (1892) sys that he deserves the title Doctor of the Church and Doctor of Grace; Mohier attests to the depth and clarity of his thought, Portalie says that he corrected, perfected and even excelled the beautiful

pages of Cyprian, while his protestant critics, Dorner, Bindermann, Bohringer, and Reuter loudly proclaim his role while Harnack (in History of Dogma II,c.iii) attests that he affirmed and strengthened the catholic idea (see Eugene Portalie, 2109).

Augustine's Trinitarian Theology

The importance of St Augustine's Trinitarian theology is in the overwhelming influence it has on Western theology and on Western thought in general. He is said to have given the Western theological tradition its mature and final expression (Fortman, 1982). This is largely on account of his work "On the Trinity" *(De Trinitate)* to which he had committed much time: "All his life as a Christian he was meditating the problem of Trinity, explaining the Church's doctrine to inquire and defend it against attack...." (J.N.D. Kelly, 2004). He drew largely from his wealth of philosophical knowledge and the fruit of experiences and from the benefices of a long period of arduous training, mixture in the values of the world and from his long quest for truth which he exhilaratingly found in the ineffable God. The mystery of this ineffable God becomes the subject matter of his long and elaborate discussion, the *De Trinitate* (Kelly, 2004).

Our concern at this stage is the exegesis of this work so as to prepare a ground for discussing it theologically. This will lead us to probe into why it was written and the influence of the work on the development of Trinitarian theology in the church today.

De Trinitate, Augustine's Magna Carta on the Trinity

St. Augustine of Hippo's *opusmagnus* is the *De Trinitate* (On the Holy Trinity). It is reputed to be perhaps the most strictly theological of the works of St Augustine. The circumstances of its composition, being that such were dictated by no pressing occasion of the controversy or pastoral need, even though Augustine expounded in it the Christian doctrine and defended the faith against the Sabellian Modalism and the heterodox beliefs of the Arians, in the serene intellectual concern with the Mystery of the Trinity, whose centrality and fundamental status had been imprinted on the minds of the believers by the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, make it very unique among all the other writings of St. Augustine. Joseph S. O'Leary says that it is second in eminence among theological works to the Summa of St. Thomas Aquinas (Joseph S. O'Leary, 2009).

Its main concern, as already indicated above, is the articulation of this faith in a style that blends personal experience and the teaching of the Church and the rules of reason (mediated in Neo platonic lens). Augustine wrote from the bosom of the church armed with the deposits of faith (De Trin 1.4. 7) and with philosophical tools, such that the work is, at once, ecclesial, theological and philosophical in outlook. The doctrinal theological highpoint of is the affirmation of the Blessed Trinity as "believed, taught and confessed by the Catholic Church which is the orthodox faith" and which Augustine has not hesitated to profess openly (cf*De Trinitate* 1.4.7). The uniqueness of the work lies in the manner and style in which the faith of the church, as taughtfrom the earliest times of Christianity and bequeathed to the faithful of Christ from the Apostles, is taught and presented by Augustine to his audience in response to the questions it set to address *ab initio*.

Definition of *De Trinitate*

The *De Trinitate* obviously presents itself as this convergence tool by which all the different traditions would be synthesized into a tool of faith. This synthetic nature dresses it with such a finesse and beauty that stand unsurpassed in the history of Western thought. This finesse makes the book is a "Must Read" on issues regarding the Blessed Trinity.

Characteristically, as Yves Congar observes, Augustine's *De Trinitate* is less dominated by immediate polemics than the writings of Athanasius and the Cappadocians against the fourth century heretics. His adversaries were the same as theirs — the Arians and Eunomius. Arianism still had its followers and was at times favoured by those in authority. Augustine had this consciously in mind (Yves Congar, 2016; Augustine. *De Trin.* 5. 3. 4; 6.7; 6. 1. 1; see also *Contra sermonemarianorum (418-419 Collatio cum Maximino and Contra Maximinum)*.

The specific features of Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine can be found in a number of his other works. But the De Trinitate stands out in its whole emphasis on bringing to synthesis of the Christian faith on the Trinity. He devoted ample time to addressing the issues arising out of this doctrine. This entails affirmation of the ineffable nature of Trinitarian God. E. J. Fortman classed the work as a product of a much more contemplative as a theologian, at once thoroughly traditional and intensely personal (Fortman, 1982). It becomes therefore expedient to undertake an exposé of the work by taking a look at its purpose,

language, structure and presentation as well as its receptivity by its intended audience. We will begin with its dating.

The Dating of the Work

There is agreement among scholars that the drafting of the book took a long time, though there no consensus about the exact date of the writing of *De Trinitate*. Augustine himself bore testimony to this in his Letter to Aurelius, Bishop of Carthage (416). There he attests thus: "I began as a very young man, and have published in my old age, some books concerning the Trinity, who is the supreme and true God" *(De Trinitate)*. He did the same in his Letters – to Dioscorus and Aurelius – where he expresses his original intention of publishing them all at once but the known complete books was hurriedly published, first under the urge of his brethren and above all to prevent the surreptitious circulation of the incomplete text (Augustine, Letter to Aurelius, Parsons,). However some people locate other reasons for the delay also in the Donatist controversy which, they say, distracted his attention for too long (cf Stan Anyanwu, 2006).

The actual date he began the writing is equally under dispute. Joseph S. O'Leary's study affirms that authors are really disagreed about that. He discusses this in his *Methods and Structures* in Augustine's *De Trinitate: Introduction*, the finding of which reveals that Augustine began the work about the time of the completion of the *Confessions*. Stephen Mckenna opines that it took Augustine at least 16 (sixteen) years, beginning around AD 400 and finished it in AD 416.[10] Gustave Bardy (Saint Augustin, 1946) and Schindler favour 399-400, but François Glorié in 'Augustinus, De Trinitate', *Sacris Erudiri* 16 [1965]:203-55) suggests 397. E. Hendrickx ('La date de composition du *De Trinitate, 'L'annéethéologiqueaugustinienne* 11[1952]:305-16) suggests that a first draft was completed by 406. Glorié deduces from the phrase *quindecimper aliquot annos (Retr.* II 15.1) that a first draft was completed by 411. But these are rather speculative datings: a study of Letter 120 which dates from 410 suggests that Augustine had notthen embarked on the path followed in *De Trinitate* IX ff. And in Letter 169, dating from 415, he bemoans his slow progress at the work. In any case, although Glorié claims that the final versionof *De Trinitate* was published in 413 and Bardy suggests 416, Hendrickx (in *La Trinité*, Paris, 1955) along with Schindler and others favour a later dating — about 4 19-20. The quotation of *Civ. Dei*

XII 12 in *De Trinitate* XIII 12 shows the latter is at least as late as 417. The most probable dating for the edition of *De Trinitate* to which Letter 174 is the Dedicatory Epistle is 420. This is late enough for the new themes which Anne-Marie La Bormardière noted in Books II and IV in her *Recherchesde chronologieaugustinienne* (1965). She connects those two Books (II and IV) with the debate against the Arians recorded in such works as *Contra Serinonem Arianorum* (Joseph O'Leary, 1976).

According to Lewis Ayres, La Bonanardière has the dating of Augustine's De Trinitate split into the following:
1. After 404 beginning of the work
2. 411 - 414 the bulk of *De Trinitate*2- 4 as a literary unity, except the prefaces and later additions which she identifies;
3. 416 – 417 Augustine wrote or redacted *De Trinitate* 5 – 7 (at the same time as civ. 11) after he acquired some knowledge of Eunomian doctrine;
4. 417 – 418 Augustine compiled *De Trinitate* 8 – 12a (ending at 12.14.23);
5. In a final period beginning in 419 Augustine finished the work, ending sometime between420 and 425.

To this Hombert made a supplement to Bonnardière's work concerning the first four books:
1. 400 – 403˙   *DeTrinitate* 1;
2. 411 – 413   *DeTrinitate*2-3
3. 414 – 415   *De Trinitate* 4 (Lewis Ayres, 2010).

Whichever is the case, these disagreements only show the extent of the complexity of the work and the developments in Augustine's Trinitarian thoughts as shown in the work. It is conclusive to hold that Augustine's De Trinitate was a fruit of long years of meditation. The number of years it took to write and the intermittent interventions and breaks, all, add to its unique beauty.

The Background and Writing of *De Trinitate*

Ever since discovering this mystery of the Christian religion which was far beyond the illusory excitements he got in the various thought-camps he had tarried, thoughts on the Trinity became a subject of Augustine's life-time meditation. So *De Trinitate* was neither his first or last work to discuss the Trinity. Fortman notes that Augustine's *Enchiridion ad Laurentium, De Fide et Symbolo, De Doctrina* Christiana, and his anti-Manichaean and Arian polemics are all concerned with the Trinity. His

De fide et Symbolo, for example, is an expression of the Apostle's and the Nicene creed. It is very explicit in its elaborations on the Trinity as believed and taught and coded in the faith Symbol of Nicaea. These contain full expressions of his faith in the Trinity. In these works, among many others, Augustine showed the Trinity to be at the very centre and heart of the Christian faith. However, *De Trinitate* is different both in style and intent though it contains some polemics. Fortman remarks that in this work, "Augustine is not so much a controversialist as a theologian and contemplative..." (Fortman, 1982). So, Oshitelu calls Augustine's *DeTrinitate* "an exposition rather than an attempt at proof" (Oshitelu, 2004). True to Oshitelu's observation, it is Augustine's commitment to expound the Trinitarian faith whichhad been drawn from the Bible, inherited form the Apostles and handed down by Tradition and the teaching of the Fathers *(Augustine, De Trin. 1.1.1).*

The proximate cause and strength behind Augustine's embarking upon this "laborious" task may be attributed to the challenges of the faith as Augustine pointed out in the text cited already- at the beginning of the work. His work, however, rather than a polemic, clarifies by expounding the mystery whose reality lies beyond full human comprehension. Most importantly, we have the Arians (book five is very particular here) and those who use philosophical language and reasoning *(cf Civ. 10.29; D Trin. 13.19.24).* So in the writing, Augustine pursues a mission: to present the Trinity as a mystery of faith and to bring illustrations that can help us come to a grasp of this mystery of faith. This is manifest even in his work split into the attempt to interpret the scripture and seek a formulation of the faith and secondly the search through analogies for an understanding of the mystery. There are equally the influences from the very many controversies that menaced the Church at the time – the Donatists and the Pelagians which added and affected the strong language of the *De Trinitate* in a manner different from the simple style of his Confessions and D *Civitate Dei.*

In all these, Augustine combined his faith, his contemplative experience, pastoral zeal, diverse philosophical traditions of his training –scepticism, stoicism and neo-Platonism, his rhetoric, as much as his active involvement in his youth with concupiscent lifestyle and its fancies and his experience with Manichaeism. All the traditions and

factors that shaped his mind and above all, his contact with the work of the Fathers, all as one, provided him with a foundation for his thought and all these in one way or the other reflect on his *De Trinitate* (Chadwick, 1986).

Augustine felt that Anti-Arian arguments had been less effective and forceful. He therefore comes up with illustrations through his analogies to show (against Arians and to lead forth to a yonder point the work of orthodox theologians) that God is truly one in Three Persons yet without confusion. Thus Chadwick says: "Augustine showed effortlessly that the concept of being both one and three is so far from being gobbled gook that simple reflection on the nature of human personality offers an immediate example" (Chadwick, 1986).

The background to Augustine *De Trinitate* cannot therefore be pinned to any particular event or development but it is rather to be seen along the historical development of the work itself as much as his varied formation trend. In all, the *sitz in leben* is the Church. Augustine wrote as a bishop, a contemplative and a philosopher, teacher and rhetorician. The combination of these factors blended by the *sensusfidei* result to the richness and complexity of the work that many consider too dry to understanding.

The Aim of the Book

The intent of *De Trinitate* is indicated loud and clear in the introduction to the first book. The caption of the first chapter of this book, according to the *New Advant online CatholicEncyclopedia*, reads: This work is written against those who sophistically assail the faith of the Trinity either thorough misuse of reason, or those who through dispute error form a threefold cause (ct Book 1.1.1-3). Commentaries on this work, like Mckenna's, hold that Augustine's main reason for writing this work was probably to strengthen the faith of his fellow Christians (his brethren) on the greatest of the mysteries, and to spur love among his followers/audience and to love God (Mckenna, 1963). Though he tended to give answer to the faith's assailants by making use of their own arguments, his main concern was merely a clarification, a fact that can be seen in the major division into two — the actual exposition of the doctrine and speculative reasoning (the second part).

Audience and Reception of the Book

A sentence in the Letter to Aurelius indicates that the books were anticipated by Augustine's confidants and particularly by Aurelius himself. He wrote: "compelled, however, by the eager demands of many of my brethren, and above all by your command, I have taken the pains, by God's help, to complete the work, laborioias as it is....,, The Letter brings to our knowledge Augustine's targeted audience: "to be heard, copied, and read by every one that pleases". Since, it was anticipated, it must have met with very wide acceptance that it became the compendium for Trinitarian discussions across many generations in the West. Stephen Mckenna remarks that, though it is not as famous as Augustine's *Confessions* and his *City of God,* yet about 233 manuscript of this work alone had been found between the ninth and the fifteenth century. By 1350 already, a Greek translation was made in a manner that was, as recorded by Mckenna, rare of a Latin writer then. The book is still a "must read" in theological quarters.

The Style and Method of the *De Trinitate*

St Augustine had set before himself the orthodox faith and followed it in style by what has been tagged his 'unique contribution' to Trinitarian thought: the psychological analogies. The book itself is, at the same time, dialectical and argumentative. It displays unique traits of coordinated reason, style and ordered faith, though there is equally a manifest discontinuity and disconnection due largely to his voluble use of language which is itself a probable influence from his training in Rhetoric. These join together to bring a single corpus that articulates in the loudest form possible, the mystery of the Triune God in a style that remains to be beaten after a millennium.

Every other argument and method of approach is set in this perspective. Even the logic of the *DeTrinitate* follows after this fashion. Augustine was conscious of the approach of the Cappadocian Fathers and obviously of his immediate predecessors from the West and particularly, Hilary of Poitiers, on the Trinity. He preoccupied himself with the intention of underscoring the unity in the Godhead. Moving in the opposite direction from his predecessors then, he proceeded from the major premise of what God is and moved deductively down to the Persons. Perhaps he may have undertaken this approach not to undermine the efforts of his predecessors to whom he owned much reverence, but largely because of the problem he had with the language

of Persons (cf. Bk 5. 9.10; Bk 7.4; 6). This, for him, is in consonance with the biblical tradition which in no way spoke of one God in Three Persons, but rather spoke of God who through his works and in the testimony of the Word, reveals Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (the Trinity). He felt then that the most appropriate way to begin the talk about God is to begin with the divine nature itself, which our unaided reason cannot of itself access (*De Trin.* 1.3). This simple, indivisible nature is the Trinity (cf. *De Civitate Dei*, 11, 10; Letters 120. 17).

Augustine's numerous short-scale methods and structures — his techniques of argumentation and the rhetorical features of his writing — betray his capacious methods of composition. This allows him to absorb elements from both philosophy and theology, without forcing them into union. Yet he created a personal synthesis by setting these elements in characteristically 'Augustinian' structures — an instance is the hierarchical arrangements of Books XI-XIV or in the sequence from metaphysical themes to faith and charity in Book VIII. This is the generative mechanism with which he operated and which will be employed all through the book in his arguments.

Presentation

De Trinitate as presented in its final draft is broken into Fifteen books. Each book is split into a number of chapters, the total number of which is Two Hundred and Twenty-One. Each chapter is in turn divided into paragraphs. The total number of paragraphs in the *De Trinitate* is Three Hundred and Sixty-One. Regarding the content, Augustine often abandons an issue intending to return to it at a more opportune moment. An instance is his revisit in Book Fourteen to the analogy of memory, understanding and will (love) which he left in Book 10. John Edward Sullivan argues that his presentation of the analogies is in staccato form respecting no logical ordering. He illustrates this with the breakdown of Augustine's analogies of Augustine into images and vestiges. With this, he shows how Augustine's *De Trinitate* begins with vestiges in Books 9, moves to the images in Book 10 only to return to the vestiges again in Book 11, and further plunges the down slope into the lowest grade of the vestiges in Book 12. Yet, he makes a final to return to the images again in Book 14. To Sullivan, Augustine rigmaroles seeming not clear where he goes all lost in his vociferousity.

Content and Structure of *De Trinitate*

A search into the content and presentation of Augustine's argument in the work reveals, as many authors have intimated, that the book can be split into two major parts. The first (1-7) establishes the doctrine of the Triune God according to Sacred Scripture, the teaching of the Fathers and answers to objections to the doctrine. On the other hand, the second part, Books 8 — 15, constitute the "Book of Analogies" (Fortman, 1982). John 0' Meara and Thomas Ayres make a further division of the first part into two: Books 1-4 which elucidate the scriptural teachings on the unity and equality of the Persons, their manifestations and functions and 5-7, discuses rationally the technical terms involved (O' Meara, 1973). O'Meara, Robert Letham (Letham, 2004) and Ayres agree that in the second part, Augustine sought in humans some analogy of the triune God.

The breakdown of the book by O'Leary is more appealing and easier to grasp. He breaks the *De Trinitate* into six parts and explains each thus:

> *We see the book as consisting in six discrete but sequential stages and as moving from level to level as various aspects of the Mystery present themselves to be thought. Books I-IV offers a relatively straightforward dogmatic and biblical approach. Books V-VII move into the realm of abstract logic. As a path to knowledge of God this realm of discourse soon proves itself to be a cul-de-sac. The frontal, metaphysical and contemplative approaches of Book VIII also lead to a theological dead-end, but for different reasons: where Books V-Vu show that 'concepts without intuition are empty', Book VIII shows that intuition (into the divine nature) is blind to the mystery of the Trinity without some analogical foothold in human concepts. Books IX-X attain the desired unity of concept and intuition in their study of the human inens, whose nature is known by a combination of logical and introspective methods. Books XI-XIV then set the triad thus brought to light in its embodied and historical contexts, describing the salvific relationship between the divine image in man and its heavenly Archetype. Finally Book XV again attempts a speculative approach to the Trinity, using the analogy of the mental triad. The partial and qualified success of this venture sends us back to the beginning, to faith in the*

Church's dogma and to a renewal of the quest for theological intellectus (O'Leary, 2009).

The First book which serves as the introduction to the whole edifice is captioned: "The unity and the equality of that highest Trinity is shown" (Augustine, *Dc Trinitate*, in New Advent Online Catholic Encyclopaedia). Here he nearly runs a commentary on the profession of faith in the Trinity in a fashion that he had composed. Books 2-4 discuss the same subject, but from a different perspective. Here he proves the equal dignity of the Holy Spirit and the Son with Father. The question of the equality is deepened in the Fifth book where he answers the detractors of the faith, confronting their pretensions with the appeal to their relation of origin. He employs the concept of begetting and unbegottenness with regard, for instance, to the Father and the Son, there is implied no diversity of substances between the two. Augustine employs the Categories of Aristotle — subject and predicate in speaking about the trinity. He argues here that not everything predicated is predicted according to substance, in the case of Father and the Son, the predication is done relatively, hence the Father is called father in respect to the Son and Lord in respect to creatures. -

Whereas the Sixth Book, a continuation of Book 5, probes the Scriptural text of Paul that Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), the Seventh concerns itself with the theological terms and concepts employed to safeguard the unity of the divine nature without diminishing the distinction between the Three Persons (Mckenna, 1963). These constitute the concern of the first part of the *De Trinitate*, that is, an outline of Augustine teachings on the Trinitarian God in accordance with the preceding theological tradition before him.

The rest of the work (Books 8-15) as we have already said, centre on how best we can reflect in the trinity, how best we can explain it and what illustration can be found within the human person. These contain Augustine's psychological models/analogies in which he looks at the mind as the most perfect created image of the Blessed trinity. Book Eight uses an interpersonal analogy of lover, beloved and the love which he later dislodged because of its lack of consubstantiality among the three. Book Nine the mind, its knowledge of itself, its love of itself the tenth Book focuses on memory, understanding, and love. He even introduces the senses (particularly the sense of sight) into the analogies

(the Eleventh Book). Book Twelve seems to be a revisit to the study of the mind as a reflector of the Trinitarian being whereas in book thirteen, the appeals to the testimony of scripture for insight. The last two books, fourteen and fifteen go back to the investigation of the Trinity through the windows of memory, understanding and love. He however warns as he did in the beginning of the Eighth Book, that analogy is not identity just as likeness does not mean the same as exact similarity. In this brief, Augustine laboured for about 20 years, amidst interruptions as bishop and scholar to emphasize the nature of unity that one finds in God. He began with the unity of the divine nature, a contrary view from the point of departure taken by the Cappadocians in the East and the Western writers before him in the Persons of Hilary of Poitiers and St Ambrose.

The Language of De Trinitate in Explaining the Mystery of the Triune God

We have indicated that the greatest tool in the hands of the Patristic for the development of theology is the invention or development of theological language. It was the greatest contribution of Tertullian in the West for the development of Trinitarian theology. Much later in the West, Augustine harnessing the legacy of such Fathers as Irenaeus, Tertullian and Hilary of Poitiers (some of the "commentators and theologians") to his advantage in his Trinitarian clarifications (in the De Trinitate), takes this to a nexus point that would remain effective and nearly unchallenged for several centuries, till the time of Thomas Aquinas and even beyond. Thus but language, we are trying to take a look at the concepts either coined or adopted or interpreted in a new light of St. Augustine in the De Trinitate for his clarifications or responses and answers to the "assailants" of the faith. John O'Meara had located these concepts in the second subjection ofthe first part of St. Augustine De Trinitate. Such are identified as relations, trinitas, triplex, predicables (O'Meara, 1973). His use of "begetting", "being begotten", "generating" and "being generated", "gift" and "communion", derive special attention since they remain greatly influential to the development of Trinitarian theology in subsequent epochs.

He considers these languages: "substance", "person", or even their Greek equivalents of "ousia" (essence, substance), "hypostasis" (substance, person) and 'prosopon" (person), for ease of expression. *De Trinitate* reads: "Both modes of expression arise from the necessities of speech, that we might have an answer to give when asked what three,

while truly confessing that there are three, viz. The Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (St Augustine, *De Trin.Bk 7*). Of particular importance is his affirmation of the paucity of human language in expressing the mystery of the ineffable God as exemplified in the language "persona". This perplexity was noted early enough by Augustine himself who had complained thus:

> For in truth since the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father, and the Holy Spirit, who is called the gift of God, is neither the Father nor the Son, then certainly there are three. Therefore, it was said in the plural number: "I and the Father are one".... but when it is asked three what, then the great poverty from which our language suffers becomes apparent (De Trin, 5.9.10).

Augustine would add rather "Persons" simply to say something rather than remaining silent. He contends that the expression "three Persons" does not give a compete explanation of the reality it is referring. He would most willingly wish to replace it with "relations", of which he found three within the Godhead (Oshitelu, 2004).

In the remainder of the book, Augustine, under the guise of analogies, tries to uncover the meaning inherent in these concepts ("substance", "persona") and use same in explaining the mystery of God — "putting into words that which they understood without words" — and then help in understanding the unity of the Three Persons in the Godhead. It is within this understanding that Augustine wishes his work to be understood.

Influence of *De Trinitate* in the Trinitarian Theology of Subsequent Epochs

Augustine left such a large land mark in the theology of the Blessed Trinity such that after him, subsequent Trinitarian theologians were more or less commentators in the arena. Schwane commented that Augustine's *De Trinitate* "synthesizes and adds the finishing touches to the most profound and exact statements which had been made about this great mystery, especially in harmonising the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit — never afterward to be questioned — with the unity of the divine being" (cf. Fortman, 1968)

The traits of Augustine which now characterize the Latin Christianity have been articulated by Fortman in these three-fold points: the concept

of nature before the Persons; the insistence on attributing all divine operations ad extra to the entire Trinity; and the psychological explanation of the Trinity. These characterize the Latin way of conceiving the Triune God. This is very remarkable as subsequent generations in the West would be moulded by the Scholastics would use this Augustinian frame to direct the thought of all the Western theologies (Fortman, 1968; see also Fortman, 1982). Augustine's doctrinal influence remained generally dominant in the West (Fortman, 1982). The Council of Florence' Decrees show pervasive influence of Augustine while Pius XI bore testimony to the pervasive influence of Augustine over subsequent Magisterial teachings on the Blessed Trinity (Pius XI, 1930. no. 23). GaraldO'Collins' remark is that for over a century after Augustine's death, theology enjoyed a significant development towards a little more precision in the language of "Persons" (O'Collins, 1999). Otherwise, the works of Boethius, Thomas Aquinas, Richard of St. Victor and Bonaventure could best be described as commentaries or footnotes to Augustine's *De Trinitate*.

The particular area where Augustine trinity wielded much influence is in the area of the analogies which dominated the Trinitarian reflection and development of the Medieval and Scholastic periods only to be rejected in the contemporary times beginning by Karl Barth and Karl Rabner (John J. O'Donnell, 2001); Rahner accuses such theological methodologies as robbing the Trinity from being a central concern of life and relegating such principal and all important doctrines to mere text book journals as it was in his days.

Generally, even his critics agree, Augustine made a greatly pervasive influence in the West. The greatest of this is this use of analogies in explains the Trinity. His Trinitarian doctrine, especially on the loving unity among the Persons and the mutual correspondence among the Father, Son and Spirit (distinct Persons) is our impetus for discussing the trinity as a model of community in the world.

A Synopsis of St Augustine's *DeTrinitate*
The main concern of *De Trinitate*, as already indicated above, is the articulation of his faith in a style that blends his personal experience of this faith and the teaching of the church and the rules of reasoning (mediated in Neo-platonic lends). Its doctrinal theological highpoint is the unity of the Three Divine Persons as believed, taught and confessed

by the Catholic Church, which is the orthodox faith, which Augustine has not hesitated to profess openly (cf*De Trinitate*1.4.7).

A resumé of Augustine's *De Trinitate* could be seen in the precise presentation of the Christian faith in the Seventh paragraph of the Fourth chapter of Book One of the *De Trinitate*. The text reads:

> *All those Catholic expounders of the divine Scriptures, both Old and New, whom I have been able to read, who have written before me concerning the Trinity, who is God, have purpose to teach, according to the Scriptures, this doctrine, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit intimate a divine unity of one and the same substance in an indivisible equality; and therefore that they are not three Gods; out one God: although the Father has begotten the Son, and so He who is the Father is not the Son, and the Son is begotten by the Father, and so He is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, Himself also co-equal with the Father and the Son, and pertaining to the unity of the Holy Trinity. Yet not that this Trinity was born of the Virgin Mary... but only the Son. Nor, again that this Trinity descended in the form of a dove upon Jesus when he was baptized; nor that, on the day of Pentecost. . . .but only the Holy Spirit. Nor yet that this Trinity said from heaven, you are my Son .... But it was a word of the Father only, spoken to the Son; although the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as they are indivisible, so work indivisibly. This is also my faith, since it is the catholic faith (De Trin 1.4.7).*

This early confession of Augustine faith (1.4.7), in a flash, serves as summary both to Augustine twenty years of intellectual excurses in the work as well as a pointer to Augustine's orthodoxy of faith. This is all about the orthodox faith of the Church, drawn from the Bible taught from the earliest times of Christian history and bequeathed to the faithful of Christ from the Apostles. In the above cited article, the author lays bare the core issue or the matter of which the rest part of the book are mere elaborations and expatiations. It contains the cell, the kernel and the tiny egg that will harsh into the whole chicken. The elaborations would be the concern of the entire *DeTrinitate* and will distinguish the authentic Christian faith from other religions and belief

systems. And yet Augustine was aware that this talk is very dicey and the projectile to misunderstandings, misrepresentations and errors and hence he first submitted himself to the coverage of the Church under the protection of God and the Christian charity of this accidence because "... in no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or discovery of truth more profitable" (De Trin. 1.3.5).

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