

# INTERIORITY AND EXTROVERSION IN BIBLICAL TRINITARIAN FAITH IN AUGUSTINE'S DE TRINITATE<sup>1</sup>

~: Khaled Anatolios ~:

## Introduction

Perhaps one of the main fault-lines in the landscape of modern theology lies between two radically different interpretations of the notion of "faith." On the one side, "faith" is understood to be primarily an experience in the domain of individual interiority and is characterized in terms of transcendental subjectivity, such as in Schleiermacher's *Abhängigkeitsgefühl* (the feeling of absolute dependence) or Tillich's "ultimate concern."<sup>2</sup> In this model, doctrine (or, the *fides quae*) as well as the biblical word, which is its basis, tend to be relegated to a secondary status, as derivative objectifications and symbolizations of the original experience, inevitably amounting to a dilution of that experience.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, this putative original ex-

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Academy of Catholic Theology meeting on May 26, 2011. I would like to thank my colleagues Boyd Coolman and Robert Imbelli for their comments on an earlier draft.
- 2 On the notion of "absolute dependence," see Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, from 2<sup>nd</sup> German ed. [1830] (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1968), 12–18. In this work, absolute dependence is equated with "God-consciousness (*Gottesbewußtsein*)," "piety (*Frömmigkeit*)," and "faith (*Glauben*)". In §14 he speaks of "faith in God, which [is] nothing but the certainty concerning the feeling of absolute dependence..." (idem, 68). The experience of a "state of absolute facility and constancy" in the feeling of absolute dependence as caused by Christ is the content of "faith in Christ" (idem., 68). Paul Tillich defines faith as "ultimate concern" in Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), 1–4. In his earlier *Systematic Theology*, he had acknowledged that "Schleiermacher's 'feeling of absolute dependence' was rather near to what is called in the present system 'ultimate concern' about the ground and meaning of our being." (Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-1963), 1:42. On the other hand, Tillich criticizes Schleiermacher for his over-reliance on the experience of religious consciousness: "The event on which Christianity is based...is not derived from experience; it is *given* in history." (idem., 1:42).
- 3 Thus, Roger Haight (*Dynamics of Theology* [New York: Paulist Press, 1990]), who relies explicitly on Tillich's conception of faith as "ultimate concern," defines faith as "a universal human phenomenon" that can be gleaned through "a transcendental analysis" (idem., 5) and distinguishes between "faith" and "beliefs": "Faith is not reducible to belief; faith is more than believing; rather beliefs may be considered expressions of faith that are distinct from faith itself" (idem, 26). Beliefs are "imaginative portrayals" of the object of faith, "interpretations of it, conceptualizations and propositions characterizing transcendent reality or interpreting the finite world in the light or on the basis of transcendence." (idem, 27). Faith, as transcendental interior experience, has a clear priority over such symbolic objectifications: "In other words, within the phenomenon of faith coupled with beliefs the significance of beliefs emerges out of what is deeper than beliefs, namely, the experience of, and the surrender and commitment of, loyalty in faith to transcendence." (idem, 27).

perience functions as a foundational criterion by which the adequacy of doctrinal objectifications may be judged. In this way, Schleiermacher consistently subjects traditional doctrinal formulations to the test of whether they adequately express the feeling of absolute dependence.

On the other side, "faith" is understood as an assent to external words and happenings, a response to God's acting out a "theo-drama" on the stage of human history, to use the language of Hans Urs von Balthasar.<sup>4</sup> A large part of the impact of George Lindbeck's work is due to his identification and critique of the first model, which he calls the "experiential-expressivist" model, even if not all practitioners of the second model would fit neatly into the exact specifications of his own proposed alternative of the "cultural-linguistic" model.<sup>5</sup>

It is tempting but ultimately misleading to characterize the essential difference between these two approaches in terms of the presence and absence or extent of the element of human subjectivity in the act of faith. Rather, at stake are distinct *characterizations* of the subject of the act of faith or, more precisely, distinct emphases on the particular aspect of subjectivity that is implicated in the act of faith. One stresses the aspect of wordless interiority as the point of correspondence between divine revelation and the human subject of faith, while the other identifies the subject of faith as radically extroverted toward the external manifestations of revelation and *thus* interiorly informed by that act of extroversion.<sup>6</sup>

These tensions between what we can call "interior" and "exterior" conceptions of faith correlate in interesting and sometimes subtle ways with modern treatments of Trinitarian doctrine. An enduring signpost remains Schleiermacher's claim that the interior feeling of absolute dependence, which posits a transcendent unitary "whence" of the manifold experiences of creaturely dependence, does not require, but rather mitigates against, the conception of a Triune God.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the insistence that the doctrine of the immanent Trinity must be anchored in the Trinitarian economy of salvation can be seen as an effort to externalize Trinitarian doctrine. This insistence is primarily associated with Karl Rahner and his celebrated, but also controverted dictum, "The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity, and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity."<sup>8</sup> Rahner's own exposition of Trinitarian doctrine balances interior and exterior orientations in a

4 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, 5 vols., trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989-1998).

5 See his comparison of the two approaches in George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 30-45.

6 Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 36.

7 See Schleiermacher's exposition of the claim that Trinitarian doctrine, "as ecclesiastically framed, is not an immediate utterance concerning the Christian self-consciousness" in *The Christian Faith*, §170, 738-742.

8 Karl Rahner, "The Method and Structure of the Treatise 'On the Triune God,'" trans. Joseph Donceel, reprinted in *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 22.

way typical of his whole theological system and its somewhat Hegelian dialectic of Spirit and history. Thus, the economy of the Word is associated with history while that of the Spirit with interiority and the life of the human being as transcendental spirit.<sup>9</sup> There is perhaps also a complex, if not convoluted tension between interior and exterior orientations in the debate between proponents of the so-called “psychological analogy” and those who favor a social analogy of the Trinity. The latter accuse the former of positing the subject of faith, and human personhood in general, in the domain of Cartesian interiority and propose to relocate them in the realm of outward relationality.<sup>10</sup> Yet, perhaps both tendencies, to the extent that they locate the intelligibility of Trinitarian doctrine primarily in analogical sites rather in the givenness of revelation, are in danger of abstracting from the particular exteriority of the biblically proclaimed economy of salvation.<sup>11</sup>

As these various tensions are played out, the ancient figure of the North African bishop, Augustine of Hippo, is invoked with some regularity. An initially strident wave of critique faulted Augustine and his alleged “psychological analogy” for bypassing the Trinitarian economy and positing the subject of faith as radically individual and introspective.<sup>12</sup> The English theologian, Colin Gunton, can stand in for the chorus of such complaints when he says, “The conclusion is inescapable: *The crucial analogy for Augustine is between the inner structure of the human mind and the inner being of God, because it is in the former that the latter is made known, this side of eternity at any rate, more really than in the ‘outer’ economy of grace.*”<sup>13</sup> But Augustine’s more recent defenders have retrieved the Scriptural basis of his

9 In this way, Rahner (*The Trinity*, 47) sees the Trinity as the ultimate ground of the dialectic of history-transcendence: “[T]he incomprehensible, primordial, and forever mysterious unity of transcendence through history and of history into transcendence holds its ultimate depths and most profound roots in the Trinity, in which the Father is the incomprehensible origin and the original unity, the “Word” his utterance into history, and the “Spirit” the opening up of history into the immediacy of its fatherly origin and end.” Compare his essay, Karl Rahner, “Oneness and Threefoldness of God in Discussion with Islam,” *Theological Investigations* Vol. XVIII, trans., Edward Quinn (New York, Crossroad, 1983), 114–115: “This one and incomprehensible God is unsurpassably close to man historically in Jesus Christ ... [who is] the final and unsurpassable self-promise of this one God in history. And this one and the same God imparts himself to man in the innermost centre of human existence as Holy Spirit for salvation and for the consummation which is God himself. For Christian faith then there are two utterly radical and definitive and unsurpassable factualities, modes of existence of the one God in the world, factualities which are the final salvation freely granted by God to the world, in history and transcendence.”

10 See, for example, Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), especially 30–55.

11 On the over-reliance of modern Trinitarian theology on analogy, see my more extended treatment in Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 6–7.

12 For a survey of modern critiques of Augustine, see especially Michel René Barnes, “Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology,” *Theological Studies* 56:2 (1995): 237–250.

13 Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 45, italics original.

Trinitarian theology, downplayed the significance of the “psychological analogy” and countered the claim that Augustine privileges human individuality and divine unity over personhood actualized in communion.<sup>14</sup>

Presuming and building on these recent defenses of Augustine, my intent in this essay is to look at his classic work, *De Trinitate*, from the perspective of the dialectic of interiority and exteriority in the appropriation of Trinitarian faith—and thus, in Christian faith in general. I hope to show that Augustine offers enduring resources for mediating and transcending this polarity. Concretely, I would like to derive three principles for treating this dialectic on the basis of a reading of *De Trinitate*: first, that the originating moment and enduring content of Christian faith is the inter-section of divine and human *extroversion* which is distinctly configured by the Christocentric-Trinitarian economy of revelation and salvation; second, that a crucial negative moment in the assent of faith is the repudiation of an interiorist foundationalism that allows the subject to judge the contents of faith by reference to the standards of his own interiority; and, thirdly, that Nicene Trinitarian faith views the human person as radically and irreducibly extroverted and defines the life of faith as a Christological reformation of this extroversion. In the form I just presented, these principles are admittedly quite abstract and suspiciously alien to the surface level of the linguistic and conceptual field of *De Trinitate*. My task, then, is to show how they are concretely anchored in Augustine’s classic text itself.

### *I. Christian Faith: The Inter-section of Divine and Human Extroversion*

I proposed that the first principle to be derived from *De Trinitate* is that the originating moment and defining content of Christian faith is the inter-section of divine and human extroversion in a distinctly Christological and Trinitarian mode. While recent defenders of this work have emphasized its Christological framework, which comes to the fore in Books 4 and 13, there has not been adequate attention to how this Christological framework intersects with Augustine’s opening remarks on the fundamental structure of Christian faith and the distinctly Christian con-

14 A representative sample of the more notable recent rebuttals of criticism against Augustine’s Trinitarian theology would include Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 364–383; Michel René Barnes, “Re-Reading Augustine’s Theology of the Trinity,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, eds. S. T. Davis, D. Kendall and G. O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 145–176; John Cavadini, “The Structure and Intention of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*,” *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992): 103–123; Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine’s De Trinitate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Basil Studer, *Augustins De Trinitate: Eine Einführung [Augustine’s On the Trinity: An Introduction]* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005); Rowan Williams, “*Sapientia* and the Trinity. Reflections on *De Trinitate*,” in *Collectanea Augustiniana: Mélanges [Essays on Augustine In Honor of T.J. van Bavel]* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), 317–332; For a fuller exposition of my own interpretation of *De Trinitate*, see Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 241–280.

figuration of reason and revelation.<sup>15</sup> In the very first words of Book 1, Augustine announces that he will part ways with those who reject the “starting point of faith” (*initium fidei*) through a “misguided love of reason” (*perverso rationis amore*).<sup>16</sup> Augustine’s explication of what he means by “reason” anticipates Feuerbach’s objection that all religion is projection.<sup>17</sup> For Augustine, all merely “reasoned” approaches to God are inevitably projections onto God of either creaturely corporeal features or creaturely spiritual features or fanciful ideas about God that apply neither to God nor to creatures.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, the way of faith provides a way out of this impasse not by shunning the application of creaturely categories to God but by God’s co-opting of human self-projection by his own self-symbolization through creaturely signs. Rather than being the inert object of human projection, God thus becomes its active subject, without changing its essential modality:

It was therefore to purify (*purgaretur*) the human spirit of such falsehoods that holy Scripture, adapting (*congruens*) itself to babes, did not shun any words, proper to any kind of thing whatever, that might nourish our understanding and enable it to rise to the sublimities of divine things. Thus it would use words taken from corporeal things to speak about God . . . and from the sphere of created spirit it has transposed many words to signify (*significaret*) what was in fact not like that but had to be expressed like that. . . . The divine Scriptures then are in the habit of making something like children’s toys out of things that occur in creation, by which to entice our sickly gaze and get us step by step to seek as best as we can the things that are above and to forsake the things that are below.<sup>19</sup>

15 A notable exception is Basil Studer’s *Augustins De Trinitate: Eine Einführung* [*Augustine’s On the Trinity: An Introduction*]. Studer discusses the Christological structure of Christian faith as an ascent from the humanity of Jesus Christ to his divinity, focusing especially on Books 1 and 13 (see especially, 219–225). He does not deal with the specific problematic I treat here, namely Augustine’s opening reflections on the inevitability of human projection in signifying the things of God and how that is overcome by the Christological economy of salvation. I have also highlighted the importance of this theme in *De Trinitate* in my “Divine Semiotics and the Way to the Triune God” in *God in Early Christian Thought: Essays in Memory of Lloyd G. Patterson*, eds. Andrew McGowan, Brian E. Daley, and Timothy Gaden (Boston: Brill, 2009), 163–193.

16 *De Trinitate* 1.1.1; English translation after: Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991) [henceforward: Augustine, *The Trinity*], 65.

17 See Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1989).

18 *De Trinitate* 1.1.1

19 *De Trinitate*, 1.1.2; Augustine, *The Trinity*, 66.

It is instructive to compare this passage with the reflections on virtue by the Egyptian Neo-Platonist philosopher, Plotinus, which are woven around a strikingly similar constellation of themes and vocabulary. Plotinus is discussing the ultimate orientation and aspiration of the human being to become “like God.” The way to this likeness is through “virtue” (*aretē*), which can be divided into two kinds, the lower virtue, which constitutes a “purification,” and the higher virtue of direct contemplation. Despite many overlapping motifs shared by the Alexandrian philosopher and the African bishop, the key difference has to do with how “purification” is understood. While for Plotinus purification is strictly a matter of abstraction from the body, for Augustine it consists in God’s communication of his own reality precisely through bodily and creaturely being.<sup>20</sup> Augustine refers to this scriptural mode of revelation as a divine “adaptation” (*congruentia*). For our present purposes, I think it is legitimate to speak of a divine “extroversion” in which God is not manifest merely in the unfathomable interiority of his being-as-mystery but rather by turning towards creatures for the terms of his own self-expression. Augustine’s fundamental insight is that without such an extroversion on God’s part, humanity would be unable to transcend its own self-referencing, the otherwise ineluctable pattern by which we always gesture toward ourselves when we intend to speak of God.

*The Divine Extroversion is Christological and Trinitarian*

Taken together, Books 1-4 of *De Trinitate* collectively demonstrate the pervasively Christological and Trinitarian character of this divine extroversion. After describing the fundamental dialectic of faith in Book 1, as the overcoming of human self-projection by divine adaptation, Augustine goes on in Books 2 and 3 to present the various theophanies of the Old Testament precisely as examples of such divine self-manifestations in creaturely forms. On one level, this presentation has the polemical purpose of countering an anti-Nicene exegesis that sought to identify all the Old Testament theophanies as appearances of the Son and thus as indications of the natural visibility of his inferior divinity.<sup>21</sup> Augustine is seeking to demonstrate that there is no scriptural warrant for attributing these theophanies particularly to the Son; they are merely creaturely symbolizations of divine presence and activity. But on the level of Augustine’s positive account of the epistemology of faith, the

20 Thus, Plotinus: “What then do we mean when we call these other virtues ‘purifications,’ and how are we made really like by being purified? Since the soul is evil when it is thoroughly mixed with the body and shares its experiences and has all the same passions, it will be good and possess virtue when it no longer has the same opinions but acts alone—this is intelligence and wisdom—and does not share the body’s experiences. ... One would not be wrong in calling this state of the soul likeness to God, in which its activity is intellectual, and it is free in this way from bodily affections.” *Enneads* I.2.2; English version: Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library, 440 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 135.

21 See Michel René Barnes, “The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity: Mt. 5.8 in Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology of 400,” *Modern Theology* 19:3 (July 2003): 329–355.

presentation of Old Testament theophanies serves as a prelude to showing how the economy of divine self-symbolization comes to a climax in Jesus Christ.

Prior to the Incarnation of the Word, there is a structural incompleteness or deficiency in the modality by which divine revelation co-opts human self-projection into its own self-symbolization. The problem is that there continues to be a pervasive otherness between the creaturely symbol that signifies divine presence and its referent. Such otherness is depicted by Augustine as a “dissonance” that, apart from Christ, is internal even to the scriptural mode of the *initium fidei*, “the starting point of faith”. In the semiotic vocabulary that Augustine himself uses, the creaturely symbols (*signa, similitudines*) of divine revelation orient faith but are ultimately at variance with the truth of the divine being which they symbolize. This dissonance is only overcome in the perfect symbol of the Incarnate Word, in whose personal unity the otherness between creaturely sign and divine signified is overcome. Only in this way is the project of divine self-symbolization stabilized and consummated:

Now just as the rational mind is meant, once purified, to contemplate eternal things, so it is meant while still needing purification to give faith to temporal things. ... So now we accord faith to the things done in time for our sakes, and are purified by it; in order that when we come to sight and truth succeeds to faith, eternity might likewise succeed to mortality ... Now until this happens and in order that it may happen, and to prevent the faith which we accord with all trust in this mortal life to things “that have originated” from clashing (*dissonaret*) with the truth of contemplating eternal things which we hope for in eternal life, truth itself, co-eternal with the Father, *originated from the earth* (Ps. 85:12) when the Son of God came in order to become the Son of man and to capture our faith and draw it to himself, and by means of it to lead us on to his truth; for he took our mortality in such a way that he did not lose his own eternity. ... So it was proper for us to be purified in such a way that he who remained eternal should become for us “originated”; it would not do for there to be one person for us in faith, another in truth.<sup>22</sup>

In this passage we have a condensed summary of Augustine’s theological epistemology as outlined in the first four books of *De Trinitate*. Human beings are incapable of an unmediated apprehension of the reality of the divine, a fact that Augustine

22 *De Trinitate*, 4.18.24; Augustine, *The Trinity*, 169–170. I have treated elsewhere the centrality of this passage for the Christological structure of *De Trinitate*. See my “Oppositional Pairs and Christological Synthesis: Rereading Augustine’s *De Trinitate*” *Theological Studies* 68:2 (June 2007): 231–253, especially 243–244; also, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 252–255.

ascribes not merely to creaturely finitude but also to the sinfulness of attachment to lower realities. Divine revelation heals this attachment by a purification and adaptation that uses the lower realities with which humans are attached as symbolizations and upward nudges toward the divine. But the difference between the creaturely features of even divine self-symbolizations and their divine referent persists as a dissonance within the dynamic of faith until the divine self-symbolization is consummated in the creature who is God, Jesus Christ. Augustine concludes his account of the economy of divine self-symbolization in Books 1–4 by depicting the mission of the Son precisely as the objective consummation of this economy and the mission of the Spirit as consisting in enabling the human recognition of this consummation.<sup>23</sup>

### *Rahner's Contribution*

The significance of this fundamentally Trinitarian account of the character of Christian faith can be further illumined by comparison to a passage from a very different provenance to which it has no textual connection. I am referring to an article by Karl Rahner, originally published in German in 1978, and hence translated as “Oneness and Threefoldness of God in Discussion with Islam.”<sup>24</sup> Rahner makes no mention of Augustine and there are no traces of Augustinian influence. But this lack of dependence makes all the more intriguing a similarity of argument. Rahner acknowledges that Christian theologians need to give an account to their Jewish and Muslim counterparts of why the doctrine of the Trinity does not amount to tri-theism. Such an account would need to present Trinitarian doctrine as the expression of a radical and “concrete” monotheism. Conversely, it would also offer its own challenge as to “whether these two world religions have not failed to achieve that elucidation and radicalization of monotheism which finds expression precisely in the doctrine of the Trinity.”<sup>25</sup>

The essence of Rahner’s argument is that both Judaism and Islam, indeed all monotheistic religions that assert divine sovereignty over creation, cannot do so without positing created mediations that render access to the divine and express God’s sovereignty in the immanent sphere. Rahner suggests that the integrity of a concrete monotheism hinges on how one negotiates the relation between these created mediations and the God to whom they refer. Either one must demythologize these created mediations “as radically creaturely and finite and lying on this side of the abyss between God and creature,” which then leads to “a merely theoretical,” or abstract monotheism.<sup>26</sup> Or, one can strive for a concrete affirmation of the absolute closeness of the absolute God by accepting these creaturely mediations

23 *De Trinitate* 4.20.29

24 Rahner, “Oneness and Threefoldness of God in Discussion with Islam.”

25 Rahner, “Oneness and Threefoldness of God in Discussion with Islam,” 105.

26 Rahner, “Oneness and Threefoldness of God in Discussion with Islam,” 117.

as themselves divine and end up in implicit polytheism. The only way out of this impasse, concludes Rahner, the only possible form of a *concrete* monotheism, is one in which the creaturely mediation of God is itself divine and thus a form of divine self-communication. Because Trinitarian faith posits precisely this self-mediation of the one God in the Son and the Spirit, it represents a uniquely concrete form of monotheism.<sup>27</sup>

As I said, I find no signs of textual or conceptual dependence of Rahner on Augustine here but the similarity of argument that persists despite very different contexts is mutually illuminating and sheds significant light on our theme of the dialectic of interiority and exteriority in the act of faith. Rahner is engaged in a fundamentally apologetic discourse which seeks to defend Trinitarian faith on the basis of the notion of “concrete monotheism”. While Islam and Judaism can challenge Christianity to explain why its Trinitarian faith is not tri-theism, Christianity poses its own challenge to forms of monotheism in which the concrete mediations of divine sovereignty inevitably de-stabilize precisely the monotheistic character of this faith to the extent that they must either detract from the concrete immediacy of divine sovereignty or acquire an aura of absoluteness alongside the one God. The essential point for our purposes is that Rahner associates the Trinitarian relation of God to the world, which is grounded in the Trinitarian being of God in himself, with a maximally concrete monotheism in which our access to the one God is through God’s own self-mediation through the activity in the world of the Son and Spirit.

In the opening books of *De Trinitate*, Augustine is also engaged in a fundamental apologetic discourse, against both “Arians” who apply creaturely categories to God (thus, for example, interpreting the derivation of the Son from the Father as inferiority) and Platonists who attempt to abstract from creaturely reality but end up saying things that are true neither of God nor creation but rather products

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27 Rahner’s argument is vulnerable to one objection that evokes an interesting comparison with Augustine’s approach. Rahner seems to treat the “mediations” of the Son and Spirit equivalently, as two modes of concrete divine self-communication which constitute a *self*-communication because they are integral to the divine being. What distinguished Christian Trinitarian faith from Judaism and Islam is that divine self-communication achieves a maximally concrete form inasmuch as this self-communication takes place in the form of a *creaturely* mediation. But the complete coincidence of divine self-communication and creaturely mediation happens only in the hypostatic union of the Word/Son with the humanity of Jesus. No such coincidence happens in the case of the Spirit, who does not become a creature. Thus, Rahner’s own argument would seem to require a more Christocentric Pneumatology than the one he presents, at least in this essay. The presentation of the Spirit as a divine self-communication whose concreteness is parallel and as it were equivalent to that of the Incarnation is perhaps symptomatic of Rahner’s tendency to parallel in too symmetrical a fashion the categorical/objective/exterior and transcendental/subjective/interior dimensions of Christian faith rather than make the former the *concrete* reference for the latter. By contrast, Augustine presents the mission of the Son as providing the co-incidence of creaturely mediation and divine self-communication and the mission of the Spirit not as a parallel “concrete” mediation but as enabling the recognition of the Christological revelation.

of their own fancy. Augustine's fundamental point is that the biblical style of revelation, what he calls the "*initium fidei*," is one in which God is able to make use of creaturely realities to genuinely represent himself, a project that achieves consummation in the creaturehood of the Son who is consubstantial with the Father, and in the witness of the Spirit to this consummation. As Rahner sought to challenge Jewish and Moslem monotheisms on the basis of the criterion of "concrete monotheism," Augustine's approach can challenge modern interiorist conceptions of faith on the basis of the analogous criterion of the concrete sovereignty of divine revelation. If the scriptural witness of God's "acting out" in human history, with its attendant network of symbols, concepts and doctrinal interpretation, is relegated to the level of a merely human interpretation and objectification of a transcendental experience, then it would seem that the concrete sovereignty of divine revelation is radically undermined. Furthermore, no genuine extroversion occurs in the divine-human encounter of faith so conceived. On the one hand, God does not get to act out in a genuinely self-communicative way but is still abstractly enclosed in his mystery and, on the other, humanity cannot get beyond its own self-projection.

By contrast, Augustine's Christological-Trinitarian conception of biblical faith, while not denying the ineluctably human element in divine revelation, nevertheless affirms that God is pervasively active within that human element and is able to signify himself effectively through it, a self-symbolization that achieves its consummation through the Incarnation of the Son and the witness of the Spirit. For Augustine, the authentic content of faith is found not in merely human objectifications and symbolizations of an inward experience but rather in the biblically proclaimed economy of divine self-symbolization and self-expression through creaturely means. God's self-expression can certainly take place through human "inward experiences" but the outward expression of these experiences is still under the provenance of the sovereignty of God's agency; in Christ and the Spirit, God is always the sovereign agent of his own self-symbolization. The starting point of biblical faith, the *initium fidei*, consists precisely in the adherence to this program of divine self-symbolization which is ultimately encompassed in the ascent from the symbolic humanity of Jesus to the divinity signified by that humanity. In this way, the integrity of both divine and human extroversion, which constitutes the act of faith, is actualized in the Trinitarian economy witnessed to by the Scriptures.

## ***II. The Repudiation of An Interiorist Foundationalism in the Ascent of Faith***

The second principle I propose on the basis of a reading of Augustine's *De Trinitate* in the framework of the dialectic of interiority and exteriority is that a crucial negative moment in the assent of faith is the repudiation of an interiorist foundationalism that allows the subject to act as judge over the contents of faith by reference to the standards of his own interiority. This principle can be derived from Augustine's work by an attentiveness to the structural importance of the language

of certainty and doubt in the argument of *De Trinitate*, an aspect that I believe to have received insufficient attention in modern interpretations of this work.<sup>28</sup> In Book 1, Augustine announces that he will try to respond to those “garrulous rationalizers (*istis garrulis ratiocinatoribus*) who are skeptical of Nicene Trinitarian faith by helping them to “discover reasons they can have no doubt about.”<sup>29</sup> What are these invincible reasons that Augustine provides on behalf of Trinitarian faith? Indeed, is there not something fundamentally self-contradictory about the project of responding to “rationalizers” by providing invincible *reasons* for faith?

But, from the outset, Augustine’s promise of providing invincible reasons comes with a strange twist. He promises to provide reasons that will demonstrate both the aptness of the claims of faith and the inadequacy of the human mind to apprehend that aptness. A strangely paradoxical endeavor! Augustine is in fact promising to provide reasons that will demonstrate the incapacity of reason to judge the contents of Trinitarian faith, reasons that will show the light of Trinitarian faith as superior to but also as nurturing of the light of reason:

That is why with the help of the Lord our God, we shall undertake to the best of our ability to give them the reasons they clamor for, and to account for the one and only and true God being a trinity, and for the rightness of saying, believing, and understanding that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one and same substance or essence. In this way, instead of feeling that they have been mocked by my excuses, they may actually come to realize that that supreme goodness does exist which only the most purified minds can gaze upon and also that they are themselves unable to gaze upon it and grasp it for the good reason that the human mind with its weak eyesight cannot concentrate on so overwhelming a light, unless it has been nursed back to full vigor on the justice of faith.<sup>30</sup>

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28 For a fuller exposition of this theme, see my *Retrieving Nicaea*, 262–280. Augustine’s preoccupation with the categorical doubt of skepticism runs throughout his writing career, starting with one of his earliest extant writings, the *Contra Academicos* (English version: Augustine, *Against the Academics*, trans. John J. O’Meara, Ancient Christian Writers: the Works of the Fathers in Translation, 12 (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1950). Note his account of his own struggles with skepticism on the way to his Christian conversion in his *Confessiones*; English version: *Confessions in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series I, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 5.19–24; 6.6. In *De Trinitate*, he deals explicitly with skepticism in 15.12.21. For an overview of Augustine’s pervasive concern with skepticism, see John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 41–91.

29 *De Trinitate* 1.2.4; Augustine, *The Trinity*, 67, translation amended.

30 *De Trinitate*, 1.2.4. Translation amended.

*Is Certainty Possible?*

Augustine's announcement of his paradoxical project in Book 1 should alert us to track the language of certainty and indubitability in Augustine's account of the triadic structure of human consciousness. If we do this, we discover that Augustine's "inward turn" in the second half of *De Trinitate*, in light of his whole project of providing indubitable reasons for faith, is in fact intended to be a turn toward certainty:

So let us put aside all consideration of things we know outwardly through the senses of the body, and concentrate our attention on what we have stated that all minds know for certain about themselves. . . . Nobody surely doubts, however, that he lives and remembers and understands and wills and thinks and knows and judges. At least, even if he doubts, he lives; if he doubts, he remembers why he is doubting; if he doubts, he understands he is doubting; if he doubts, he has a will to be certain; if he doubts, he thinks; if he doubts, he knows he does not know; if he doubts, he judges he ought not to give a hasty assent. You may have your doubt about anything else, but you should have no doubts about these; if they were not certain, you would not be able to doubt anything.<sup>31</sup>

Augustine's resolution of the analysis of consciousness into the triad of memory, intellect, and will retains this initial emphasis on the quest for certainty: "Now let us put aside for the moment the other things which the mind is certain about as regards itself, and just discuss these three, memory (*memoria*), understanding (*intellegentia*), and will (*voluntas*). . . ."<sup>32</sup> Augustine's crucial move here is that, instead of subjecting Trinitarian faith to the standards of rational certainty, he redefines rational certainty in Trinitarian terms. The ultimate foundation for certainty itself is the triadic self-presencing of human consciousness as memory, intellect, and will. It is only because of this innate certainty of the mind's own triadic self-presencing that we can be certain of anything else.

But has Augustine now proved" Trinitarian faith by recourse to a so-called "psychological analogy"? We can only come to that conclusion if we ignore as an essentially pointless digression Augustine's prolonged meditations in Book 10 on what Rowan Williams has called "the paradoxes of self-knowledge" in Augustine's phenomenology of human consciousness.<sup>33</sup> After demonstrating that the structure

31 *De Trinitate* 10.10.14; Augustine, *The Trinity*, 296–297.

32 *De Trinitate* 10.11.17; Augustine, *The Trinity*, 298.

33 Rowan Williams, "The Paradoxes of Self-Knowledge in the *De Trinitate*," in *Augustine: Presbyter Factus Sum, Collectanea Augustiniana*, [Augustine: I was made a Priest: Essays on Augustine], eds. Joseph T. Lienhard, et al. (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 121–134.

of human certainty is radically constituted by the mind's triadic self-presencing in the inner processions of self-knowing and self-loving, Augustine spends much time probing the mysterious reality that we tend *not* to know ourselves, and the mind needs to be literally *re-minded* to do that which it cannot but do in order to be itself.<sup>34</sup>

The logical resolution to this conundrum is provided by making a distinction between self-knowledge and self-awareness (*se nosse - se cogitare*). The mind cannot but know itself and love itself and yet the mind can be estranged from itself such that it is not consciously aware of its self-knowledge. But this distinction simply describes the paradox rather than resolving it. And Augustine's point does not at all depend on resolving the paradox but precisely in letting it stand as a demonstration that human certainty is structurally broken.

That in fact is his paradoxical reply to the rationalizers of Book 1 and their imperious demands for reasons they can have no doubt about. On the one hand, the very structure of human certainty is triadic in a way that suggests the aptness of Trinitarian faith; on the other hand, our access to Trinitarian faith cannot depend on human certainty since human certainty itself is existentially broken.

At the beginning of Book 4, wherein Augustine brings his depiction of the scriptural economy of salvation to its Christological climax, he offers both a self-portrait and an account of the essential standpoint of the Christian theologian. Such a person has come to value self-knowledge above the "knowledge of earthly and celestial things."<sup>35</sup> Stirred by the Holy Spirit and awakened unto God, this person comes to know himself "in God's light" and discovers the real disproportion between his own sickness and God's purity. For this person, self-knowledge is primarily a knowledge of one's own weakness and one's situation of exile from the homeland of divine life. And this person is Augustine himself: "As one of this sort of men, O Lord my God, I sigh among your poor ones in the family of your Christ...I am struggling to return from this *far country* (Luke 15:13) by the road he has made in the humanity of the divinity of his only Son."<sup>36</sup> As Luigi Gioia has suggested, such an account of self-knowledge is in fact the best characterization of the real intent and significance of Augustine's "inward turn" in the second half of *De Trinitate*.<sup>37</sup> Designed to respond to those who want to judge Nicene Trinitarian faith by the standards of human certainty, it tries to demonstrate both the inherent weakness of the human capacity for certainty as well as the Trinitarian imprint

34 It is because of this radical post-lapsarian incapacity of the mind that the Platonic ascent is doomed to failure on its own terms. For an acute analysis of this aspect of Augustine's argument, see John Cavadini, "The Structure and Intention of Augustine's *De trinitate*" in *Christianity in Relation to Jews, Greeks, and Romans*, Recent Studies in Early Christianity 2, ed. E. Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1999), 231–252.

35 *De Trinitate* 4.Pref.1.

36 *De Trinitate* 4.Pref.1; Augustine, *The Trinity*, 152–153, italics original.

37 Gioia, *Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate*, 220.

in what endures of that capacity. True self-knowledge issues in a self-assessment which eschews the standpoint of rationality standing in judgment over faith in favor of rationality coming to terms with its own exile status, guided by faith to discern the imprint in itself both of its divine homeland and its estrangement from that homeland.

### III: Nicene Trinitarian Faith: Radically and Irreducibly Extroverted

The third principle which I propose can be derived from Augustine's *De Trinitate* is that Nicene Trinitarian faith leads to a view of the human person as radically and irreducibly extroverted and to a conception of the life of faith as a Christological reformation of this extroversion. Modern critics of Augustine, beginning with Olivier du Roy's strident critique in *L'Intelligence de la Foi*, have typically characterized his attempts to find a Trinitarian likeness in the human *mens* as solipsistic and modalist.<sup>38</sup> His modern defenders emphasize Augustine's clarification in Book 14 that the Trinitarian image in the human person is not actualized through the mind's remembering, understanding, and loving itself but rather through its remembering, understanding, and loving its Creator.<sup>39</sup> However, in order to appreciate that this qualification is not a mere afterthought or a notional *deus ex machina*, it is helpful to trace the route by which Augustine's creative contemplation of the givenness of Nicene Trinitarian faith leads him to this conception of the human person as constituted by a triadic extroversion toward the Trinitarian God. The key hermeneutical principle to which we must adhere is that Augustine's analysis of human consciousness as memory, intellect, and will should not be read in a static and reified way as simply an objective map of what human consciousness looks like, on the inside, as it were. Rather, it is crucial to see how this analysis functions within the overarching program announced in Book 1 of *De Trinitate*, that of travelling along the way of faith by adhering to the divine economy of self-symbolization.

We have already seen that one important function of this analysis is to confront the demand for rational certainty about Nicene Trinitarian faith by showing how this faith uncovers both the triadic structure of the self-presencing that is foundational to certainty and its existential faltering. But Augustine implicitly concedes that the triadic analysis of the mind as memory, intellect, and will is not the only way to analyze the mind's self-presence as the foundation of its innate capacity for certainty: "Now let us put aside for the moment *the other things*

38 Olivier du Roy, *L'intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon s. Augustin: genèse de sa théologie trinitaire jusqu'en 391* [The Understanding of Faith in the Trinity according to St. Augustine: The Genesis of his Trinitarian Faith up to 391] (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1966), 462–463.

39 *De Trinitate* 14.12.15. See the magisterial essay of Rowan Williams, "Sapientia and the Trinity: Reflections on *De Trinitate*," 317–332. Williams (*Sapientia* and the Trinity, 321) argues that the inward turn of the latter half of *De Trinitate* is in fact "a movement into God's own life as turned outwards."

which the mind is certain about as regards itself, and just discuss these three, memory, understanding, and will.”<sup>40</sup> We can ask, “Why just those three?” Why not, for example, the Neoplatonic triad of being-life-mind/thought which Augustine uses elsewhere?<sup>41</sup> After all, one can say that the mind is certain of itself as existing, as living, and as knowing. But the principal reason why the latter triad would not suit Augustine’s purposes is precisely that he is deliberately looking for relational categories, whereas “being,” “life,” and “mind” delineate substances rather than relations.

Augustine does in fact use the triad of being/life/thought but he applies these terms to the unity of the self as a whole, not to the relational distinctions within that whole: “These three then, memory, understanding, and will, are not three lives but one life, nor three minds but one mind. So it follows of course that they are not three beings but one being.”<sup>42</sup> In Book 5 of *De Trinitate*, Augustine had organized the grammar of Nicene Trinitarian faith into language that speaks of the divine being with reference to itself, *ad se*, by way of substance, and language that speaks of the divine being by reference to another, *ad alterum*, by way of the mutuality of relation.<sup>43</sup> Because Augustine is carefully applying this Nicene grammar, which itself represents a way of reading Scripture, to his analysis of the human *mens*, he is led to posit alterity and relatedness within human interiority. Within this framework, there is a clear path from the scriptural designations of the Son as *Logos* and Wisdom and the Spirit as the love of God poured into our hearts<sup>44</sup> to the analysis of the interior alterity and relatedness of the human person in terms of knowledge and love.

Of course, to say that the human person is comprised of a dynamic inter-relatedness does not of itself rebut the charge of solipsism. It seems rather to devalue the notion of relation from the milieu of persons-in-relation to that of a merely structural inter-relatedness of an individual person. That, of course, is a common objection made by proponents of the “social analogy” against Augustine. But the appropriate rejoinder to this charge is to note the continuity in Augustine’s theological anthropology in *De Trinitate* between what we can call exterior (*ad extra*) relationality and interior (*ad intra*) relationality, a continuity which arguably posits a more integral vision of being-as-communion than that proposed by

40 *De Trinitate* 10.11.17; Augustine, *The Trinity*, 298, italics added.

41 On the Neoplatonic triad of being-life-mind/thought, see Pierre Hadot, “Être, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin” [Being, Life, Thought in Plotinus and Before Plotinus] in *Les Sources de Plotin* [Plotinus’s Sources], ed. E.R. Dodds, *Entretiens sur l’Antiquité Classique V* (Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1960), 107–157.

42 *De Trinitate* 10.11.18; Augustine, *The Trinity*, 298, translation amended; see also *Confessiones* 13.11, where Augustine speaks of the triad of being/knowing/willing as “one life, one mind, one being (*una vita et una mens et una essentia*).”

43 *De Trinitate* 5.2.9.

44 See Rom 5:5.

those who only see relationality as occurring between persons in a way that does not determine the interiority of individual persons. If relationality only occurs between persons without any foundations in the subjectivity belonging to the person as such, personhood would only pertain to the collectivity or state and would not be a feature *intrinsic* to particular persons. This is a key point neglected by “personalist” readings of the anthropological implications of Trinitarian doctrine, but fully acknowledged in the Christian personalist philosophy from which such an anthropology derives.<sup>45</sup>

A full account of Augustine’s presentation of the continuity between inward and outward aspects of relationality would be beyond the scope of this essay. For our present purposes, it is sufficient to note well the order of presentation in Books 8 to 10.

Augustine begins with a contemplation of the ineluctable presence of God to the human mind as Truth, Justice, and Goodness and from there proceeds to an analysis of what happens when we love a just person, such as the apostle Paul, on the basis of knowing the form of justice which he exhibits in his person, to a parsing of human consciousness as the inter-relationality of knowledge and love. So we start with the innate transitive relatedness of the mind to the divine presence through knowledge of God’s Truth and Justice and love of his Goodness; and from there proceed to the mind’s relatedness to another human person through love and knowledge; and finally to the mind’s innate self-knowledge and self-love. Thus, even on a surface literary level, the mind’s self-relatedness is not presented by Augustine in abstraction from external relatedness but is in fact derived from this external relatedness.

Far from intimating that there is any level of human existence that is hermetically sealed by the activity of remembering, understanding, and loving oneself, Augustine presents the self-relatedness of *mens* as both foundational to and determined by the mind’s *ad extra* relatedness. In this way, Augustine describes human interiority as radically extroverted and as oriented toward outward relation through its innate dynamism of knowledge and love. In the last analysis, we can say that Augustine’s description of *mens* as memory, understanding, and love is really an account of the triadic structure of human extroversion.<sup>46</sup>

To say that *De Trinitate* presents the human person as radically extroverted—and indeed radically extroverted unto God—might seem to align Augustine with the approach that sees the foundations of faith in humanity’s radical and transcendental openness to the Absolute. Indeed, I would contend that such an anthropological foundationalism for faith is not absent from Augustine’s vision.

45 See, for example, Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. John J. Fitzgerald (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1946).

46 For a similar assessment, see John Milbank, “Sacred Triads: Augustine and the Indo-European Soul,” in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, eds. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 91.

But it is balanced by a dialectical reading of this openness. Augustine is quite clear that the radical exteriority of the human person is existentially manifest in two opposed outward orientations: covetousness and love.<sup>47</sup> The former, *cupiditas*, manifests the irreducible extroversion of the human person in a way that inverts the hierarchy of being between creatures and Creator, while the latter manifests this extroversion in harmony with this hierarchy.

The idolatrous extroversion of concupiscence distorts the mind's own internal relatedness such that it loses hold of its own self-presencing and becomes radically uncertain and incapable of perceiving the analogy between its own self-presencing and the self-disclosure of the Triune God. On the other hand, the extroversion of *caritas* illumines the mind's own internal relatedness and actualizes it as a triadic extroversion unto the divine Trinity: remembering, understanding, and loving its Triune Creator. Thus, the Christological reprise in Book 13, which follows Augustine's account of the triadic structure of the human subject, makes the crucial point that what determines the direction of human extroversion ultimately is not good will or dialectical exercises of any kind but the Christological economy, "the blood of the just man" that heals human concupiscence and the outpouring of the love of God in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.<sup>48</sup> Augustine's sketch of the trinitarian image in humanity is only completed in Book 13, wherein he depicts the healing of human knowing through adherence to the *scientia* of the Christological economy and the healing of human willing through receiving the Holy Spirit.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

The unfortunate tendency to reduce *De trinitate* to the "psychological analogy" as a description of how individual interiority is like the Trinity has largely hidden from view its genuine and enduring contribution to the exposition of the Nicene interpretation of biblical Trinitarian doctrine as determinative to the life of faith, globally considered. Largely abstracting from issues of external influence and development, I have focused on a synchronic reading of *De Trinitate* for the sake of presenting three principles that can be derived from such a reading for contemplat-

47 *De Trinitate* 9.7.13.

48 See Rom 5:5.

49 An excellent account of this process as one of "cultural transformation" in which the "inner word" is healed by the Incarnation and enabled to become a transformative power within the outwardness of cultural engagement is found in John Cavadini, "The Quest for Truth in Augustine's *De Trinitate*," *Theological Studies* 58:3 (September 1997): 429–440. Cavadini (*De Trinitate*, 339–340) comments, "This is not in the first place an exhortation to look within but to look without, for paradoxically that is how the inner image becomes healed and transformed... God's entry into the realm of signs and signification does not mean that we leave it behind... but rather that in our use of cultural forms (at least those not classified as hopelessly demonic), they become more and more transparent to the justice the divine *doctrina* is teaching us to love, themselves ever more able to participate in imaging God."

ing the distinctiveness of Nicene biblical faith, especially in light of the dialectic of interiority and exteriority.<sup>50</sup>

First, if we consider faith as most basically an encounter between the human person and the living God, a primary question is how that encounter can take place given humanity's inescapable tendency to project its own features onto God. How can humanity truly go outside of itself in order to authentically encounter God? Augustine's response is that the human tendency to merely see itself even when it attempts to see God is only overcome when it is in fact co-opted by the biblical Christological economy of divine self-projection through creaturely symbols. Only in the humanity of the one who shares the substance of the Father can the extroversion of faith be actualized beyond the otherwise inescapable self-referencing of human religiosity.

Second, faith is inevitably challenged by the demand to justify itself before the tribunal of reason. Augustine's response to this challenge is to allow Nicene Trinitarian faith to probe the fragility of reason, its existential incapacity for self-authentication, as well as to let Nicene faith illuminate the mysteriously triadic self-relatedness of the mind, which is the foundation of its capacity for certainty.

Third, Nicene Trinitarian faith lights up a path that proceeds from the innate relatedness of the human person to God and the interior relatedness of the Triune God to the interior self-relatedness of the human person, which is the foundation for relationship to other creatures through knowing and loving.

But Christian faith also discloses the pervasively conflicted nature of humanity's innate extroversion. Only the scripturally proclaimed Christological and Pneumatological economy of salvation heals human extroversion unto knowing and loving oneself and other creatures through knowing and loving the Triune God. The most fitting expression of this healed extroversion is the worship of God, which is simultaneously the summit of human wisdom: "For God himself is supreme wisdom, while the worship of God is human wisdom."<sup>51</sup>

50 For a thorough treatment of issues of external influence and development in Augustine's Trinitarian theology, see now Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

51 *De Trinitate* 14.1.1; see also 14.12.15.