The Trinity and Creation in Augustine

An Ecological Analysis

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Introduction

From whence does our help come? More and more, people agree that environmental devastation is a serious matter and that steps must be taken to slow such devastation down and, one hopes reverse the frightening trend. And yet, it seems, the help offered in many solutions do not seem readily achievable. In fact, even the choice of solutions is open to much disagreement. Disputes over the economic and technological impacts of solutions easily derail plans and proposals to address the problem. There is no doubt that technological knowledge and economic considerations will be key in the actual solutions. However, the disputes related to competing environmental solutions are rooted in more fundamental issues such as how we understand our lifestyles as a determinative basis for making choices and why we even should care about long-term solutions for the environment. In other words, economic and other technological solutions are not the starting point for help in addressing our environmental problems. There are more basic points of departure that pertain to our view of the value of reality and how we relate to it.

Behind the competing solutions put forward for solving our environmental problems are sets of assumptions and beliefs about reality that are often referred to as worldviews. Many worldviews are embodied through religious perspectives. We can safely assume that religious views of the world will affect at least some significant percentage of a population's evaluation of the varieties of technological solutions, as well as providing a moral basis for how they ought to act because of their perspective on reality. Not surprisingly, then, we find that discussions of ecology and environmental ethics are happening within religious communities, and that scholars also have taken an interest in studying religious views of the world—offering analyses of how religion and the environment are related.

This book is concerned with how a significant Christian thinker in the later patristic period understood the relationship between God and the creation. Augustine of Hippo exercised an enormous influence on the Christian tradition in the Western world. However, modern

assessments have been mixed concerning the ways in which his influence ought to be evaluated. It would seem that a large contingent of modern scholars have tended to see that influence in a negative light, owing to both Augustine's conception of God and his view of the world. To many scholars, Augustine's conception of God is one that became detached from the spirit of the Nicene discussion about God's triunity and moved to a more Platonic and monistic conception of a God who rules over a world that—because of its material composition—is bad. Such a God, of pure will and power, has nothing positive to do with a fallen, material world. As Colin Gunton puts it, "[I]n Augustine's theology of creation . . . the Christological element plays little substantive role, and the pneumatological even less. The result is that the way is laid open for a conception of creation as the outcome of arbitrary will [of the Father]. . . ."[1]

Not surprisingly, such a view of God and the world can lead to a worldview in which one finds creation to be unworthy of too much attention, and where God's greatness is to be emulated so that human vocation is oriented to using the world as merely a tool. One need not worry about the world anyway, since humans ought to seek the God who is outside of it. It would make sense that such a view of God and the world, if put forward by an influential historical figure, could form part of the foundation for subsequent developments that eventually have led to modern worldviews and to modern environmental problems. And so, current portrayals of Augustine often are dismal, especially when viewed with an eye to how Christianity in the modern West developed its views of nature.

Does such a reading of Augustine's conception of God and the world do justice to what he actually thought and wrote? I would contend that such a reading is severely deficient. If one undertakes a close reading of several of Augustine's key writings about the Trinity and his commentaries on Genesis 1–2, one finds instead a rich vision of God and how God is related to the world. Augustine's defense of the goodness of all creation is undertaken precisely because of his understanding of God as Trinity. In fact, even if one takes up Augustine with very specific questions in mind arising from modern, scientific knowledge rooted in ecology, there are positive ideas and attitudes to be discovered and perhaps used in modern discussions.

The obvious problem that faces the attempt to find a bridge between contemporary questions about the environment and Augustine is that he did not think in ecological categories, nor do we think as people in fifth-century North Africa thought. How can one attempt to find ecological significance from a theologian so far removed from the ecological knowledge and problems that must be confronted today? This is a serious

question, but one that can be answered. It must be acknowledged that if ecological and religious critiques of classical theology can attribute, at least in indirect ways, the undesirable effects of doctrines that subsequently influenced social, political, technological, and scientific developments, then there also should be the possibility of learning positive lessons from classical thought. By uncovering or questioning influential worldviews and beliefs, one makes a case for the possibility of the retrieval and use of classical sources in modern thought, not only their dismissal.

In any case, the problem of anachronism must be avoided. Modern ecological interests in ideas such as interrelationality (which we shall take up in a few pages) arise from scientific knowledge as well as from modern religious and philosophical thought. Whatever might be meant by ecological interrelationality and its ethical implications, one does not simply turn to the Bible or the creeds for ready-made definitions and applications, since interrelationality was not a term that was in use in those periods. Similarly, religious thinkers who turn to historical theological developments to find terminological guidance must adapt traditional terms to the nuances of contemporary religious dialogue. For example, "perichoresis" is used quite often as a theological equivalent for interrelationality, though the term has no natural connection to modern social, political, or ecological ideas about interrelationality. It has to be filtered, typically through social Trinitarianism, in order to be freighted with its new meaning.[2]

Likewise, in this book, we cannot merely "lift" Augustine's understanding of the world and dominion from his time and put it into ours. There is no one-to-one correlation of ideas. We will examine how Augustine understood certain key themes that are of importance in the modern theological dialogue with ecology. However, we will consider these themes through a close, detailed analysis of his major writings about the Trinity and creation. Our first aim will be to read him and understand what he has to say about God and creation. Similarly, while we will use the resources of Augustine scholars to aid our reading of Augustine, we will not engage the debates within Augustine scholarship in detail. Our first priority is to let him speak for himself. Only after we have sorted through his own words will we be in a position to offer some concluding remarks on how the main themes of his understanding of God and creation relate to modern religious thinking about God, the world, and ecology.

The book is divided into two parts; the first is concerned with Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity, and the second with his trinitarian understanding of creation. The conclusion will discuss the themes that arise from the analysis of Augustine in terms of the modern interest

in interrelatedness, hierarchy, and stewardship (these concepts will be discussed more fully at the end of this introduction as a way of setting the context for our reading of Augustine).

In chapter 1 we will examine in more detail the form of the modern theological critique of Augustine's conceptions of Trinity and creation. Chapter 1 will provide not only a critique of Augustine, but also offer a preliminary evaluation of how Augustine approached the questions of God and creation. We will be concerned with his articulation of the basic doctrine of the Trinity in chapters 2–3. We will focus on how he explained the doctrine, including how he developed his explanation using the themes of love and equality to talk about the divine persons in their substance and relations. We also will show how he developed his doctrine in light of God's economy of salvation, and the importance of the Christian's experience of salvation as a basis for knowledge of God.

Having set out a detailed explanation of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity, we will then turn to his doctrine of creation in part 2. He wrote much about creation, and we will be concerned chiefly with his interpretation of the first two chapters of Genesis. In chapter 4, we will seek to understand precisely how he understood the structure of God's creative work, and the significance that the doctrine of the Trinity played in his explanation. In chapter 5 we will turn to his description of the relationship that exists between God and creatures in his understanding of providence and the moral implications that he identified in his description of divine providence—again we will do so by drawing out the centrality of the Trinity for his explanation. This will lead to the key analysis of how Augustine conceived of dominion in chapter 6. As we have noted, Augustine, like his contemporaries, did not think of dominion in the ecological sense that guides contemporary theological reflection. We will try to understand what human dominion means to him, its relationship to a hierarchical view of the world, and also how Augustine's definition of dominion fits within the context of divine providence.

The discussion of how these various themes in Augustine's trinitarian doctrine of creation may be related to ecological discussion will be undertaken in the concluding chapter. There we will consider how his discussion of the divine, triune nature of love relates to God's concern for the goodness of creatures. As well, we also will consider the importance of nonhuman creatures in Augustine's doctrine of creation, and how this can be related to modern discussions of interrelatedness. Our goal will not be to come up with ethical prescriptions ready-made for today. Rather, we will seek to describe the religious worldview Augustine employed to account for the goodness of creation, and the moral language that he employed. We will do so as a means of showing the practical signifi-

cance of the doctrines of the Trinity and creation in providing Christian belief with a moral framework. We will offer some basic suggestions on how these relate to modern ecological concerns, focusing on the moral significance of a classical Christian worldview.

Prior to entering this presentation about Augustine's doctrine of God and creation, it will be helpful for us to set out some of the ways in which the relationship of religion and ecology has developed in recent scholarship, especially how the moral language of religion has been linked to ecological knowledge. The following sections will spell out, briefly, how concerns about the biblical use of dominion have arisen, and the role the concepts of interrelationality and hierarchy have had in conditioning the modern reading of historical sources. We will reference these ideas throughout the book, but especially when we arrive at our concluding chapter.

The Ecological Problem of Dominion and the Doctrine of God

A substantial amount of attention has been given to whether the biblical doctrine of human dominion over the world can be ecologically sound. This ecological question, focused on the divine command for humans who are created in the divine image to have dominion in Genesis 1:26–28, has been a significant thread in biblical and theological thinking for several decades now. Lynn White's epochal 1967 article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" tried to address how the West's religious roots had contributed to the environmental destruction that faces the world, and indirectly took up the problem of dominion and stewardship.[3] Since his article, many theologians have made claims for how to understand human dominion over the earth.[4] At issue for environmental thinkers is how the claim that humanity is to exercise dominion over creation can be ethically positive (divinely mandated or not), since it would seem to imply a sense of superiority that can only undermine a positive relationship of human beings with the rest of creation.

Now, to be sure, an ecological reading of Genesis 1:26–28 has not dominated the interpretation of this text in the history of Jewish or Christian thought until recently.[5] Nevertheless, ecofeminist theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether[6] and Anne Primavesi[7] have attempted to draw out a correspondence between dominion (and more generally the place of the human being in a theology of creation) and the anthropocentric, androcentric, and patriarchal structures that they argue contribute to a negative understanding of nature.[8] In their estimation,

to attempt to form an environmentally sensitive ethic founded upon traditional concepts such as dominion faces the problem of also having to overcome such negative structures. Because understandings of God often are tied to these oppressive structures of thought and practice, it is argued that revision of traditional understandings of God is required in order to find a way in which Christianity can contribute to the removal of these destructive structures in contemporary society. In this way, it is argued, the Christian doctrine of God is tied to the anthropocentric ideas that have contributed to the ecological crisis about which White wrote. The alternative to this problematic legacy is a theological ethic founded upon ecologically positive ideas.

Augustine's conception of dominion is presented in ways that require a careful discernment of how humanity is related to God and also to other creatures. Central to these relationships will be his emphasis on goodness. By paying attention to his description of the trinitarian structure of creation as well as how divine providence is articulated, we will be in a better position to evaluate his interpretation of dominion in Genesis 1:26–28.

Ecologically Informed Theological Ethics: Interrelatedness in Ecology

The most important ecological idea that has been advocated as a solution to the problematic idea of dominion as anthropocentric is the concept of the interrelationality of all of nature, including humans, within and through overlapping ecosystems.[9] One feature of the interrelatedness of ecosystem components is self-perpetuating development. When something happens within an ecosystem, its effects reverberate throughout the system and condition the whole (and vice versa). For example, just as an organism can respond to the stimuli around it as part of its survival mechanism by developing attributes to protect itself against other organisms, so ecosystem components develop characteristics as they encounter new stimuli. This self-perpetuating development of ecosystem components affects the whole ecosystem. A similar relationship exists between ecosystems, which themselves are nestled within wider systems. This idea of smaller systems nestled within larger ones extends to the description of the planet as an ecosystem made up of numerous smaller ecosystems. In other words, each component of an ecosystem has an effect on other components, the ecosystem itself, and other ecosystems. Obviously, then, human activity has an enormous impact on the world, extending well beyond perceived local boundaries.

The concept of the interrelatedness of ecosystems and their components has come to form part of the basis for normative explanations favoring the development of ethically sound human activities in response to current ecological crises.[10] To this end, some ecological ethicists will describe ecosystems as communities. By doing so, it also is possible to introduce the discussion of justice with respect to ecosystems in ways that are similar to how human communities and individuals are described in law and by social ethicists.[11] In particular, theologians tend to favor this mode of speech for describing ecosystems. The conception of the interrelatedness of ecosystems, which they see not only as a modern scientific description but also as a basic building block for a Christian understanding of the world, entails certain duties to be performed by humankind in relation to the planetary ecosystems. By using the results of scientific research on ecological interrelatedness and linking it to analogous religious perspectives on individual and social interrelatedness, religious thinkers such as Ruether, Leonardo Boff, and James Nash[12] hope to promote a religiously sensitive understanding of nature and ecological virtues.

James Nash puts forward an ecologically informed theological ethic that finds the concept of interrelatedness within and between ecosystems germane to ethical practice. In order to maintain a healthy ecosystem in the face of ecological crises, he describes the moral imperative of ecological integrity:

> Ecological integrity is the "holistic health" of the ecosphere and biosphere, in which biophysical support systems maximally sustain the lives of species and individuals, and, reciprocally, in which the interactions of interdependent life-forms with one another in their ecosystems preserve the life-sustaining qualities of the support systems. The concept is relative and dynamic, since not only do all human actions have ecosystemic effects but "natural" change is also a normal part of the process. The concept also implies moral constraints on human behavior to maintain the dignity of all life to the fullest possible extent.[13]

While others may want to extend or limit what Nash says here, he nonetheless is an example of how a theologian moves from describing the integrity of ecosystems (emphasizing interrelatedness) to a corresponding moral responsibility. He relates this to theology by arguing that creation is unified: "Since God is the source of all in the Christian doctrine of creation, all creatures share in a common relationship."[14] In other words, the coming into existence of the universe from a single source, God's

creativity, is the basis for its ecological unity—namely, the common relationship all creatures share as being from God's creativity.

From a religious perspective, this theocentric understanding of creation in Christian doctrine has moral implications, since the Bible affirms the goodness of all that God creates. The intrinsic goodness of all creation requires action that promotes that goodness which God has bestowed and continues to intend for the whole creation. Thus, for Nash, upholding the health and integrity of ecosystems is simply a modern, scientific way of describing such moral activity. Nash's method moves from modern, scientific "facts" to moral imperatives (developed as a list of ecological virtues)[15] and then finally to a study of whether "Christian theology and ethics support and nurture these ecological virtues."[16] He appeals to the contextual nature of ecological ethics as a contemporary phenomenon rooted in ecological science, but also relates the implications of traditional Christian theology and ethics to this context. He presents the contribution of theology to ecological ethics by locating implicit ideas and background assumptions about the intrinsic goodness of creation and the interrelatedness of people and nature found within traditional doctrines,[17] in order that those implicit assumptions may be applied to ecological concerns.[18] The adoption of ideas from ecology, especially about interrelatedness, is a key part of the foundation for such theological reflections in recent thought.

Augustine likewise saw creation as consisting of a unity of creatures whose unifying source is the triune God of scripture. We will see how the moral basis of his religious worldview springs from the fact that creation is the product of a good God creating good creatures. Such an emphasis on goodness in Augustine's thought provides a means for him to see how the diversity of creatures are interrelated in the creative activity of God. As well, such interrelatedness is underscored by the fact that creation is drawn to move toward God—a dynamic relationship between God and creation that is manifest also in creaturely interrelationships, which are possible through divine providence.

The Problem of Hierarchy in Modern Theology

While the theme of interrelatedness found in ecological science aids in certain types of Christian responses to ecological problems, it also can be used to justify the negative assessment of an ecological moral theory that is founded upon Christian stewardship (dominion) as a unique and positive human activity. One may cite as an example the criticism leveled against Douglas John Hall's retrieval of a theology of stewardship that

has strong environmental overtones.[19] By advocating a biblical model of stewardship over against the domination approach to the world that Lynn White criticized, Hall has met with the criticism that he simply has watered down what is still a domination theology because he sees the human being as having a special place in the care of nonhuman creation. For example, Catherine Roach asks how humanity, which is clearly part of the world and dependent upon it, can be stewards over it, especially in light of the negative impact of human activity in recent centuries.[20] She argues that the stewardship model advocated by Hall gives human beings a special status as caretakers, which implies an unhealthy hierarchy of humanity over the rest of creation. Such a hierarchy, she says, contradicts an ecosystem approach to ethics that recognizes the interrelatedness of all creatures.

From a theological perspective, Jürgen Moltmann suggests that Augustine understood dominion and the image of God to be precisely about the rule of dominating power.[21] This is based on Moltmann's reading of Augustine's discussion of the superiority of the male, who is created in the image of God, over the female: "The soul . . . which dominates the body, and the man who dominates the woman, correspond, and in actual fact constitute the human being's likeness to God. *Imago Dei* is then on the one hand a pure analogy of domination, and on the other . . . a patriarchal analogy to God the Father."[22] This judgment of Augustine is meant to show that in the end Augustine has developed a doctrine of the Trinity that is not so much trinitarian as it is monotheistic, giving pride of place to the Father, and interpreting the Father in terms of patriarchal and dominating power. Such a hierarchy, where God the Father is at the top of a pyramid of power relations that are essentially about the domination of those below him in the hierarchy, is about exercising one's superiority through control.[23] Furthermore, Augustine's treatment of the image of God is one where the body is rejected as not having any value, and instead a psychological explanation is given of the image of God. This low view of the body, of course, corresponds to a low view of nature.[24]

In contradistinction to this hierarchical, anthropocentric view of reality and the human claim to power attributed to classical theology, ecological science is interpreted by many to support a different view of relations between humans and the rest of the world/universe that gives priority to interdependence and egalitarian relations. We shall see that while Augustine does view the world hierarchically, there is also room given for the equality of creatures under God. Moreover, the Augustinian understanding of love is important for correctly interpreting hierarchy. The basis of creation's goodness and equality in divine love, for example,

is spelled out in terms of how humanity may use and enjoy the world. It also creates a basis for understanding dominion as stewardship.

The problem that has been raised in modern ecological and religious discussions is whether the gulf between traditional theological doctrines and modern ecological knowledge is ultimately incommensurable, because traditional thought did not appreciate the interrelationality of ecosystems and, in particular, human well-being as integral to ecosystems. However, to answer this question requires us to pay close attention to the context in which such ideas were developed. Traditional theological categories of the Trinity and creation, in the ways that Augustine developed and employed them, can be of benefit to modern theological discussions of ecology. God's relationship to the creation as creator and redeemer is central to Augustine's view of the goodness of all creatures, and also to his understanding of dominion. As well, he brings to his reading of Genesis a creativity that values the integration of doctrines, so that he looks beyond the mere appearance of the world to seek an understanding of the spiritual unity that binds creation to God and creatures to one another. When we develop a careful reading of Augustine, we will see how his trinitarian understanding of God and creation can be related to contemporary moral questions about environmental problems and their solutions. Such doctrinal building blocks can have significant value in the articulation of an ecologically positive worldview.

Part I

Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity is foundational to understanding how he conceived of God and how he understood God in other doctrines, such as creation. The reception of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity has largely been negative, though. In the opening chapter, we will look at the contemporary critique of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity by focusing on Colin Gunton's assessment of Augustine. We will show how his critique finds its justification within a broader understanding of the history of theology that identifies Augustine with a Western method that is unduly abstract and philosophical in thinking about the Trinity, and negative in its attitude toward the body in its theology of creation. Then, after setting out the critique, we will consider Augustine's own understanding of his method for understanding the doctrine of the Trinity.

In chapters 2 and 3 we turn to Augustine's argument for the doctrine of the Trinity, and whether the contemporary critiques of his approach do justice to his model of trinitarian relations. The primary text we will consult will be *The Trinity*, as well as some of his later anti-Arian writings, particularly the *Debate with Maximus the Arian*, *Answer to Maximus the Arian*, and *Answer to the Arian Sermon*. We will deal with how Augustine explains the doctrine of the Trinity according to the economic work of God as revealed in scripture and also according to his understanding of the simplicity of divine being. We will focus on Augustine's explanation of the doctrine with an emphasis on how the Son and the Holy Spirit are from the Father, who is the beginning of the Godhead, which is typically associated with the Nicene tradition but not with Augustine's doctrine. We will also consider the nature of the Son's and Holy Spirit's relations of origin from the Father, and how they relate to Augustine's discussion of divine substance and love. This understanding of the Son and Holy Spirit as originating from the Father is often rejected by social trinitarian thinkers, who argue that relations of origin lead to a hierarchical conception of the Father over the Son and Holy Spirit, and of oneness over plurality. We will argue that, for Augustine, relations of origin indicate the logical ordering of the persons based on the revelation of that order

in the divine economy described in scripture. Furthermore, their origin from the Father confirms the eternal equality of substance of the persons, without denying their individual identity.

By analyzing Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity in light of modern critiques of the classical tradition, we are setting out the context from which we can then explore the question of the general ecological implications that arise from Augustine's theology of creation in part 2. In the introduction to part 2, we will be able to assess the nature and importance of the relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in his doctrine of the Trinity, which relate to modern concerns about taking seriously interrelationality. The implications will only be indirect at this point, since we are taking account of his foundational conception of God, in order that we may more fully appreciate the importance that the Trinity plays in his explanation of the doctrine of creation.

Chapter One

The Contemporary Critique of Augustine

In the introduction we described in a general way how aspects of classical Christian theology are suspected of cultivating tendencies that have led to a less than adequate understanding of creation and the human place in it. Often, it is argued, this traditional way of understanding creation was justified because of the way that the church understood the biblical portrayal of the immaterial, omnipotent God in relation to the creation and, more specifically, to human beings who bear God's image of power and dominion. Furthermore, the idea of God has a crucial effect upon the idea of creation for Christians, since the ascription of the image of God to human beings suggests that human beings are able to act within and toward the creation in a manner proportional to how God acts toward the creation. The conception of God as omnipotent and outside of the physical creation is one of power over the creation, and human beings share in that type of power by being able to exercise dominion over the creation. The several problems listed in the introduction, such as anthropocentrism and androcentrism, a sense of human detachment from and superiority over a passive creation because human beings occupy a higher place on the created hierarchy, and domineering conceptions of power—all can be traced back to conceptions of God as separate from and disinterested in the creation that is now under the control of humanity. The basis for projecting this relationship between belief and human attitudes toward nature lies in the actual experience of the human exercise of power against the creation.

Many ecological and theological critiques of the Christian doctrines of God and creation are based on stories of the history of Christian thought that employ a schema dividing Eastern from Western forms of Christianity based on their reliance upon scriptural or philosophical foundations. Augustine especially has been targeted for criticism because of his trinitarian understanding of God and the corresponding deficit that it creates in his understanding of creation. This scrutiny is due, in

part, to his authoritative stature in the history of Christian thought. In this chapter, in order to set up our discussion of Augustine in subsequent chapters, we will trace in more detail the modern schema that divides Eastern and Western thought, noting how this would imply a certain interpretation of Augustine according to his place in Western Christianity and the trinitarian problem of a modalist conception of God. Then we will turn to more specific critiques of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity and the way in which his understanding of the Trinity apparently affected his understanding of creation. We will closely trace Colin Gunton's critique of Augustine in particular. Gunton understands the important relationship between conceptions of God and how one understands God's creation. His critique of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity has led him to note the ways that he thinks Augustine's doctrine of creation is lacking. Among them, he says, is the way Augustine fails to appreciate how God's involvement in creation through the trinitarian economy promotes a positive understanding of material being. According to Gunton, Augustine favored, instead, a distant God of overpowering will who wants nothing to do with materiality.

The Forms of Eastern and Western Trinitarian Thought

The idea that a distinction between an Eastern and Western form of Christianity can be used to trace the development of two forms of the doctrine of the Trinity is a widely held assumption today.[1] To get at an understanding of how this distinction typically is described, we shall concentrate our attention upon Leonardo Boff's interpretation of the way that the doctrine of the Trinity developed in its Eastern and Western forms, and some of the pitfalls that each distinction could lead to. We also will explore some of Boff's concerns about the classical understanding of God that he believes led to the overall problems that he sees in both Eastern and Western models of the Trinity—namely, the incorporation of ideas that are not consonant with the strands of biblical material with which he does agree.

Boff suggests that the form of trinitarian doctrine found primarily in the Eastern churches begins with an emphasis on the Father as the fount of divinity. Patristic references to the Father's place in the Trinity as fount of the Son and the Holy Spirit are rooted in scripture, such as when God is named as "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" in Matthew 28:19. The idea that the Son and the Spirit proceed from the Father is known as relations of origin, since the Son and the Spirit are understood in terms of their relationship to the Father who is their origin. Thus, one

could speak of the Father's monarchy, because the Father was the first (*monas*) principle (*archē*) of the Son and Holy Spirit.[2] Monarchy was a key concept that lay behind the Nicene tradition.[3] The term *monarchia* was first employed by early patristic writers, particularly the economic trinitarians, who detected in the dispensations of the divine economy a relational pattern (*taxis*) between the divine persons in which the Father was the origin of the Son and the Holy Spirit.[4] The phrase continues to be used in modern theology as a means of expressing the conception of the Father as the source of divine unity.[5]

However, in describing the logic of scriptural statements about the Son and Holy Spirit in their relationship to the Father, other problems arise for the Eastern form of the doctrine of the Trinity. Below the surface of the language of monarchy and relations of origin, Boff contends, lingers the problem of subordinationism. The reason is that when one conceives of the Son and the Spirit existing from a common origin (the Father), it is like calling the Son or the Spirit an effect of the Father's will, whereby they are reduced to the status of creatures, rather than being coequals of God.[6] This diminishes the Son's and Holy Spirit's status, because they are under the Father in terms of priority of being.[7]

If an ontological hierarchy of the Father over the Son and Holy Spirit remained a constant and potential threat in the trinitarian ruminations of the Eastern churches, Boff points out that it was despite the scriptural example of an egalitarian Trinity. In fact, in the scriptural presentation, the divine persons are an example for the church, which is to "live the ideal of union proposed by Christ himself: 'that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us' (John 17:21)."[8] Boff's concern is that an emphasis on relations of origin does not adequately account for the equal emphasis that scripture teaches concerning the oneness of Father and Son in their economic activity together, which also brings the church into the same divine fellowship.[9] Instead, relations of origin focus upon the numerical oneness of the three as a single substance, where priority is given to the Father. If the scriptural understanding of unity as equality is lost, then the potential for a hierarchy that stresses the one over the many can arise, through an appeal to the Father's basic priority in the Godhead. This ordering also could easily reinforce the tendency toward patriarchalism in the church, where one person who acts as the earthly head (just as the Father is the first in the Trinity) dominates the many members of the body of believers.[10] An explanation of divine unity that is based on the ordering of the persons of the Godhead from one person is clearly not egalitarian and leads to subordinationism of the Son and Holy Spirit, even though the conceptual model of relations of origin was not intended to lead in that direction.[11]

For Boff, the second form of trinitarian doctrine, found primarily in the Western tradition, especially from the time of Augustine, started from an emphasis on the one "divine, spiritual nature." This nature was conceived of in two ways: God either as absolute Spirit[12] or as the highest good.[13] From this one nature (or substance), Western theologians then reasoned their way to an explanation of the three persons.[14] Unity is basic to God's nature, and the relations of the persons are the triune logic of that unity. Such a starting point for the doctrine of the Trinity has a tendency to favor a static metaphysics inherited from Greek thought, where truths about God are derived from deductive reasoning that conceives of God as unchanging, indivisible, and without direct relationship to an ever-changing created reality.[15] In other words, God is necessarily conceived as an immutable first principle whose threeness (derived from scripture) must be reconciled and explained to maintain the divine unity.

This approach of locating threeness within the logic of the immutable oneness of God falters by removing the dynamism of the economic Trinity in history, effectively shutting out the biblical experience of God for understanding the doctrine of the Trinity.[16] The danger of this is modalism, whereby the persons simply become manifestations of the One.[17] Boff recognizes that this problem may be overcome through an explanation of real and distinct relations between the persons, which both Augustine and Thomas tried to explain.[18] However, subsequent Western tradition still emphasized the One over against the three, and continued to favor a tendency toward reducing the one God to one mind, which then led to the Barthian and Rahnerian mistakes of reading modern theories of subjectivity into the unity rather than into each of the three persons.[19] Furthermore, the same problem arises with the Western model as with the Eastern model: in both oneness becomes such a strong focus that it pervades the social and political aspects of life. The threat of totalitarianism by one (or a few) over the many finds justification in an understanding of the immutable, all-powerful, one God whose plurality is more of a logical problem than a reality.[20]

Boff, then, while setting up this historical distinction between the Eastern and Western forms of the doctrine of the Trinity, based on their starting points of scripture or Greek philosophy, nevertheless is critical of both traditions. The primary emphasis that guided both the Eastern and Western traditions when developing the doctrine of the Trinity was that of monotheism. Maintaining God's unity (oneness) was necessary in order to keep to the monotheistic teaching of scripture. For Boff, monotheism is an aspect of ancient thinking that posed significant difficulties for truly grasping an egalitarian understanding of the trinitarian persons as they

were manifested in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.[21] He argues that monotheism "maintained that God is absolutely whole, without division or multiplication" and was "the matrix from which the doctrine of the Trinity was struck."[22] This monotheistic understanding of God influenced the way people acted by producing a religion of the Father:[23]

> God is presented as Great Father because he created heaven and earth. As such he is the supreme authority of the universe, from whom all other religious and civil authorities derive, in descending orders of hierarchy. As there is only one eternal authority, so the tendency to have only one authority in each sphere of the world is confirmed: a single political leader, a single military chief, a single social leader, a single religious head, a single guardian of truth, and so on. God is presented as the great universal Superego, alone and unique. Much of the atheism of developed societies today is no more than a denial of this sort of authoritarian God and of the patriarchal sort of religion that follows from it and obstructs the development of human freedoms.[24]

The problem is that a monotheistic doctrine of God can be used to justify an oppressive political agenda, because one then has an argument as to why such authoritarianism is justified: it is the way that God wants people to be "God's image" in the world.[25] In history, this has led to totalitarian rule, rooted in unhealthy hierarchies. Boff cites both the rule of the pope over the church and monarchs over states as examples of totalitarianism that have been justified using a monotheistic belief in the "great patriarch, supreme Father and absolute Lord."[26]

In Boff's view, it would have been wiser for the church to reinterpret monotheism to fit the revelation of God's name, "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,"[27] because the unity of God is understood better by recognizing it as the eternal communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The unity of God as one Lord is attested in even the earliest biblical writings (e.g., Deuteronomy 6:4), but is not the sole description of God in scripture. One also must keep in mind that the revelation of God as three began in the New Testament period.[28] In fact, according to Boff, the Trinity became a doctrine of the church because of the church's attempt to understand how the biblical witness to Jesus and his Spirit affected the unity of the Godhead. Boff wishes to maintain the biblical description of the economy as central to the doctrine of the Trinity, since it is the Trinity's relationship to humanity that can help advance the liberation of the poor, whom the Trinity has created and to whom they direct their

eternal love.[29] The doctrinal challenge was, and is, to have an integrated understanding of the three while also avoiding an emphasis on any one person. To have an integrated understanding of three persons, the best conception of unity is one founded on communion rather than on the idea of God as an unchanging, absolute, indivisible whole.[30] Thus, the classical definitions of the Trinity, by holding to monotheism and a metaphysical emphasis on unity, could not "postulate a society that can be the image and likeness of the Trinity."[31] However, a modern understanding of society, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts,[32] can yield a better basis upon which to conceive of the integrated unity of the three.

Boff's description of trinitarian doctrine in two forms, Eastern and Western, is typical of how modern systematic theologians have come to characterize the matter of the development doctrine of the Trinity. Behind this delineation of two different trinitarian models lurks a deeper problematic in Boff's mind. He sees the contrasting appeals to scripture or philosophy in the early church not simply as the attempt to find reasonable explanations of how the divine persons are related to divine oneness, but also as perpetuating a commitment to ideologies that could use those flawed explanations for their own ends. For Boff, the doctrine of the Trinity developed in such a way that it could be used for perpetuating totalitarianism, not only within the church hierarchy or the broader political sphere, but also later in the Enlightenment triumph of society over nature through modern technological science.[33] Boff, then, uses his analysis of the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity to explain problems in theological anthropology and the doctrine of creation. If the doctrine of the Trinity is not well formed, then the other theological topics are affected by its deficiencies. In other words, doctrines not only exist to state formally accepted teachings, but also to orient the way in which one relates to the world.

Augustine's Western Form of the Trinity: Modalism

Colin Gunton also has recognized the relationship between a well-formed doctrine of creation and the conception of God as Trinity. He develops his understanding of trinitarian creation based on the division of East and West in the historical development of doctrine, and he does so with the aim of redressing the lack of a strong doctrine of creation in modern times.[34] For Gunton, one of the challenges that faces a theology of creation in the modern West is to overcome the influence of Augustine, who not only deprived the doctrine of the Trinity of its economic roots and vitality, but also developed a doctrine of creation that was founded

on a dislike of the material order of things in favor of the immaterial mind that is derived from the Platonic forms. The impoverished Trinity that was most fully expressed in Augustine could not help but be cut loose from his doctrine of creation, where he showed a concern less for the particular goodness of creatures than for the abstract notion of God's omnipotent will to create.

Gunton is noted for his critique of Augustine, especially in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity.[35] Gunton concludes that two problems that arose in the Western church, "the problem about the knowledge of God and [the problem] of the relegation to secondary status of the doctrine of the Trinity," can be answered "by enquiring how far responsibility for the state of affairs is to be laid at the door of St. Augustine."[36] The conclusion of his analysis is that Augustine completely misunderstood and misused the doctrine that had been skilfully developed by early theologians such as Irenaeus, and later by the Cappadocians, who explained the doctrine through reflection on the scriptural revelation of God's activity through the Son and the Spirit rather than through reflection on Greek philosophical theology.

In particular, Gunton claims that modalism is the result of Augustine's work on the doctrine of the Trinity: "The only conclusion can be that, in some sense or another, it is divine substance and not the Father that is the basis of the being of God, and therefore, *a fortiori*, of everything else."[37] However, going further than the charge of modalism, Gunton suggests that Augustine simply does not have the "conceptual equipment" to deal with the problems that face the doctrine of the Trinity—namely, the problems of Arianism, Eunomianism, and modalism, all of which his position finally collapses into at one point or another in *The Trinity*.[38] What is the case that Gunton makes?

He argues that the key to understanding Augustine's failure lies in his doubts concerning the goodness of materiality and his belief that true knowledge cannot be found in creation. These make it impossible for him to take seriously the Incarnation as a basis for knowledge about the Son and the Son's relationship to God.[39] His attempts to explain the doctrine of the Trinity are not grounded in the humanity of Jesus, but rather in the divine Son. This means that the perspective of God as related to the incarnate Jesus, which protects the doctrine of the Trinity from becoming merely an abstract, rational triad, fails in Augustine.[40] The reason for this is Augustine's Neoplatonist philosophical position, which also leads him to embarrassment over the tradition that the Old Testament theophanies were associated with God. Augustine instead opts to associate the theophanies with angels.[41] If he can dismiss God's direct involvement through theophanies, then it only stands to reason that he

also can cut loose the importance of the mediatorship of the Word of God. When the Word is no longer uniquely identified as the mediator, the relationship of the Word to the Father and the Holy Spirit becomes abstract and "flattened out," so that the trinitarian relations become meaningless over against the oneness of God's substance.

In other words, Augustine no longer follows the tradition of Irenaeus and Tertullian, whereby the Father relates to the world through his Word and Spirit.[42] This is why Augustine will not look in the material world for analogies of the Trinity, but instead turns to the rational nature of the immaterial soul. Rather than develop the doctrine out of God's redemptive work in Jesus's life, death, and resurrection and the Holy Spirit's outpouring on the first Christians, Augustine looks to the Platonic doctrine of knowledge as recollection, assuming that God is some sort of "supermind."[43] Not surprisingly, given this concern to promote a Greek emphasis on the importance of the rational over the physical, the Trinity becomes reduced to a process of the mind, and those analogies of the Trinity are favored that investigate the human mind. Of course, this also means that Augustine falls into a real trap of reducing the three divine persons to the overarching mind of which they are merely processes.[44]

Augustine's decision to minimize the place given to the economic activity of God through the Son and Holy Spirit shows his commitment to Platonist philosophy over against the scriptural portrayal of God at work in the world. Gunton then goes on to contrast him with the Cappadocians, whose Eastern Trinitarianism represents the best tradition of post-Nicene thought about the Trinity. According to the Cappadocians, the three persons (hypostases) did not refer to three individuals, but rather to how the three are "concrete particulars in relation to one another."[45] The three together constitute one substance or nature (*ousia*). Following Zizioulas, Gunton describes *ousia* as "being in communion."[46] Though the hypostases are conceptually distinct from the divine *ousia*, the two also are mutually related in trinitarian thought, so that the communal nature of the Godhead is reflected in the idea that *ousia* is the relationship of the hypostases to one another.[47] Augustine simply could not grasp this conceptual understanding of the hypostases and *ousia* as both distinct and mutually integrative.[48] According to Gunton, Augustine viewed this move as merely a "linguistic usage" without grounding in reality.[49] From this point of view, the root of Augustine's thinking is that persons cannot be easily integrated into an *ousia* in the way that the Cappadocians argue (by appealing to a dynamic understanding of *ousia* as three hypostases in communion), because to do so would contradict basic "Aristotelian subject-predicate logic."[50] What Augustine is doing, in Gunton's view, is placing Greek philosophy, which favors a static (i.e., unchanging) conception of

ousia, ahead of the Cappadocians' conception of God's *ousia* (which they derived from their attention to the dynamic relationships of the three persons described in scripture). Augustine's reliance on this "dualistic ontology," whereby divine *ousia* is more basic than hypostasis because changelessness is a more fundamental category than dynamism, does not allow him to use hypostasis as an ontological predicate but only as a logical predicate. The mutual exclusion of these two ideas exists because *ousia* must remain without any accidents, which hypostasis represents in Augustine's subject-predicate logic. Thus, the three hypostases "disappear into the all-embracing oneness of God."[51] A conception of substance, then, is that from which the Son and Holy Spirit are derived, not the Father.[52] Gunton's conclusion is that Augustine is a modalist.[53]

Gunton's critique of Augustine follows the standard modern theological method of dividing classical theology into Eastern and Western forms, and correspondingly, it locates Augustine within the Western and modalist tradition of understanding the Trinity. Gunton's approach is thus consonant with Boff's reading of the history of doctrine. Where they depart is that Gunton favors Eastern Trinitarianism and argues that the Cappadocians represent the high-water mark of the doctrine. Boff's skepticism concerning both traditions, based on the inadequacy of the scriptural accounts for giving an accurate reflection of God as an egalitarian Trinity, is largely ignored by Gunton, who resolves the historical trinitarian drama by favoring the East over the West. Gunton's account of the rise of the doctrine is not limited to the specific questions of the development of trinitarian logic, nor is his criticism of Augustine merely that he was a modalist who severely crippled the doctrine's place in the Western church. He recognizes that the ramifications of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity were far-reaching. Indeed, Gunton sees the question of how Christian views of creation (as good, evil, or neutral) hinge in large part on how one conceives of God, because God's creative work either will lead to the praise of God for the goodness of creation in its plurality and particularity, or to a lower view of creation in favor of the omnipotent, invisible, immaterial divine will that creates by command. Thus, as we will now see, Gunton also criticizes Augustine in his examination of the history of Christian thinking about God's creative work, drawing out the consequences of his Western, Greek, Neoplatonic understanding of the Trinity.

The Trinity and the Doctrine of Creation: Cause and Effect

For Gunton, Christian views of the world as God's creation largely can be divided into two major camps. On the one hand, there is the

"straightforwardly trinitarian construction of the act of divine creation"[54] that was developed by such early Christian thinkers as Irenaeus, who famously described God's economy as accomplished by his two hands in the world—namely, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The will of God in Irenaeus's theology is a "particularizing will" that gives rise to the existence of creatures and guides their "directedness to [their] perfection" through the Son and the Holy Spirit. Such an understanding of divine will is open to, and supportive of, the particularity of embodied creatures within the world.[55] On the other hand, there are the "more sophisticated but also more Platonizing approaches" of thinkers such as Origen and Augustine, who take God's creation of forms as they received it through Greek philosophy and thus find the importance of God's work in the conceptual forms that God employs rather than in the actual world of particular beings. The particularity of creatures is disdained as leading the mind away from contemplation of the immaterial and immutable One.[56]

In Gunton's reading of Augustine, the creation is not one creation by God, but rather a twofold creation. There is a creation of the Platonic "intellectual" world of forms and then the physical world "in imitation of the (created) eternal forms."[57] This goes against the grain of scriptural teaching about the goodness of creation by setting up a hierarchical understanding of creation, where the immaterial is higher than, and to be favored over, the material creation, which is less good than the immaterial creation. This Platonic approach also had the undesirable effect of linking material creatures to timeless and unchanging forms, thus making subsequent Western theology unable to deal with theories of evolution, which are based on the observation of change.[58] Resistance to evolutionary theory was the result of devaluing things that are subject to change.

The philosophical assumption that the Platonic understanding of the world is intellectually most viable corresponds to Augustine's lack of a robust Christological element (and even less of a pneumatological element) in his doctrine of creation. Augustine favors the description of the creator as the one God who creates by arbitrary will. God, in essence, is a divine will abstractly conceived and unknowable.[59] Such a God is absolutely separated from the material creation, while among creatures a higher value is placed upon spiritual and intellectual creatures that are, by definition, closer to God. While God's role as creator is related to will, the actual creative activity takes place through angels, who are intermediaries.[60] The idea of divine providence as a trinitarian work by the Father's Son and Holy Spirit is lost by Augustine, who takes up a Neoplatonic conception of angels as the first created forms, through which all other creatures are made. This is also reflected in Augustine's desire to reconcile the idea of a timeless God with the Genesis account of God's creative work happening

within the constraints of time. To reconcile the two, he ends up demythologizing the text by arguing that all the days of creation are actually made instantaneously, by the eternal Son through the forms.[61]

In fact, creaturely particularity is only a result of the "function" of the divine will, while human will is described, in parallel fashion to Augustine's understanding of God, as "arbitrary self-assertion."[62] Just as the Christological element is less determinative for Augustine's understanding of creation because the Incarnation is less important than the eternal will of God, so the human will is most important in Augustine's understanding of the shape of the creation, while the plurality of other creatures are manifestly less interesting to him. "Material beauty, which the Augustinian tradition regards as of importance only as the route to a higher, immaterial beauty . . . is necessarily linked with plurality, with the manyness of created reality."[63] Similarly, for Augustine temporality itself is falleness and disorder, instead of human sinfulness "whose redemption is the hope of the Christian Gospel."[64]

The relationship of God's redemptive economy is not related to creation as such, but only to those creatures who have minds that can transcend the finite material realm and live in an intellectual world of forms. One sees this play out in Augustine's writings about Genesis in terms of the allegorizing and spiritualizing of the text, rather than taking it as referring to the actual creation of material things that are good in themselves.[65]

For Gunton, this diminished view of creation is seen in the way that Augustine affirms the "only-begotten Son" to be distinct from the creation.[66] In itself, Gunton accepts such a view of the eternal Son as a positive enough step, allowing the Son to be considered creator with the Father. In its most positive sense, Augustine understands creation to be "Christological" in the limited sense that the eternal Son creates with the Father. Nevertheless, this limited sense stands in contrast to that of Irenaeus, who conceived of the Christological nature of creation not in terms of the eternal Son, but in terms of the incarnate Son, because he related the proper understanding of creation to the "Son's becoming material."[67] He insists that Augustine uses the idea of the eternal Son's distinctness from creation to undermine any positive relationship in the distinction between the creation and eternity, because it only refers to the eternal Son rather than the incarnate Son.[68] Theological reflection on the eternal Son always takes precedence over that on the incarnate Son, because the eternal, immaterial God is higher and better than a material and finite creature.

This lack of concern for God's economic work as the basis for theological reflection about the creation corresponds with Augustine's

trinitarian theology. We already have seen how Gunton criticized Augustine's trinitarian theology as minimally noting the importance of the divine economy for understanding who God is as Trinity. Since the redemption of creatures through the work of the incarnate Son and the Holy Spirit is the best means to construct a doctrine of the Trinity, one would expect that the doctrine of creation also should reflect such trinitarian belief, by being concerned with the creation as an object not only of God's will, but also of his personal involvement through the work of the Son and Holy Spirit.[69] In Augustine, however, the link between creation and redemption is "weakened to the point of disappearing."[70] Not surprisingly, given this lack of trinitarian involvement in the creation, the oneness of God is "manifestly elevated over the plurality of the Trinity" through conceiving of the creator as "arbitrary will." And, in logical fashion, the intellectual order also is superior to the sensible world, because the will is the supermind of God. In the end, Gunton sees in Augustine's doctrine of creation the assertion that "unity, but not plurality, is transcendental."[71]

The trajectory of Western theology owes its course to the path chosen by Augustine: "The Western tendency to divorce creation and redemption took its direction from Augustine, whose discussion of creation is, with one exception, virtually abstracted from christology."[72] What is most striking to Gunton is how the doctrine of creation in the West seems to be concerned only with knowing a creator that is sheer will, because Augustine chose to develop his understanding of creation without the trinitarian insights of the church that were grounded in the economy of salvation. Gunton describes the Western emphasis on God's unitary will over the goodness of the creation by linking it to the philosophical speculation of Augustine: "Augustine's interpretation of Genesis 1 in terms of a creation of forms, eternal archetypes, turns that celebration of particularity and variety into something dangerously like its subversion, because the replacing of christology by Platonic universals generates a very different conception of the relation of universal and particular. Not the particularizing will of God, but general conceptual forms come into the centre."[73] In the end, Augustine is not trinitarian in his conception of the doctrine of creation, but monistic.[74]

In subsequent chapters we will consider whether such a portrayal of Augustine as having a severely deficient trinitarian understanding of creation is representative of what he actually wrote about the creation and the doctrine of the Trinity. We will devote a significant amount of attention to a close reading of Augustine, and in doing so, show how his writings are not susceptible to the criticisms we have found Gunton, Boff, and Moltmann. As well, we will also seek to delineate some of the

aspects of his doctrine of creation as they relate to modern concerns about interrelationality.

The Scriptural Basis of Augustine's Trinitarian Doctrine

The question of Augustine's modalistic tendencies with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity, and their effect on his understanding of creation, arises out of the modern assessment of the historical development of the doctrine. The ascription of Augustine's theological indebtedness to a Western reliance on Greek philosophy as central to how to understand God, in contrast to the Eastern reliance upon the biblical presentation of the divine economy, will color how one reads Augustine's arguments. It is important, then, before turning to our actual analysis of his argument in *The Trinity*, that we make clear the basis on which we will proceed with our analysis of Augustine's writings over the next few chapters. In opposition to many modern theological pictures of Augustine, we will take seriously his own stated concern to maintain the biblical and Nicene traditions. What follows is an explanation of why Augustine makes the divine economy revealed in Scripture the central theme on which he then develops his doctrine of the Trinity. Thomas Marsh states a similar position to that we have seen in Gunton when Marsh writes, "But where that [Eastern] tradition would have maintained a strong sense of the divine monarchy . . . Augustine abandons this position and understands the one God to mean the one divine substance or nature which *then* is verified in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."[75] Thus, the *taxis* (order) described in scripture of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is treated as of secondary importance in Augustine's understanding of the Trinity, which orders the divine persons according to an immutable substance. Marsh takes Augustine's statement in the opening book of *The Trinity* as the basic evidence for this: "In this way let us set out along Charity Street together, making for him of whom it is said, *seek his face always* (Ps 105:4). This covenant, both prudent and pious, I would wish to enter into in the sight of the Lord our God with all who read what I write, and with respect to all my writings, especially such as these where we are seeking the unity of the three, of Father and Son and Holy Spirit."[76]

In this passage, according to Marsh, Augustine makes clear that unity is the primary focus of trinitarian doctrine, in distinction from the Eastern approach that stresses the *taxis* of the three persons. He claims that Augustine describes this as a unity of substance a few lines later: "The purpose of all Catholic commentators . . . has been to teach that according to the scriptures Father and Son and Holy Spirit in the

inseparable equality of one substance present a divine unity."[77] The net result of Augustine's Western approach to the Trinity is that the three persons are lost in speculation about substance and unity that will pave the way for the later separation of the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinities, a separation that will render the doctrine irrelevant to Christian piety.[78]

It should be noted, though, that in terms of Augustine's method for understanding the doctrine in *The Trinity*, one also sees in 1.7 a commitment to exploring trinitarian faith using the received tradition of Nicaea, as well as the necessity of grounding such an exploration in the biblical revelation of God's identity. This method is stated succinctly when he describes *The Trinity* as an answer to those who doubt the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity: "[W]e shall undertake . . . to give them the reasons they clamour for. . . . But first we must establish by the authority of the holy scriptures whether the faith is in fact like that [God being a Trinity]. Only then shall we go on, if God so wills and gives his help. . . ."[79] Here he indicates that the understanding of the triune nature of God, known specifically from scripture, is his starting point, as part of the task of establishing a basis on which to give the "reason-mongers" the answer they seek. Rather than making oneness or unity the overarching focus for his work, it is the scriptural basis for threeness.[80] Moreover, Augustine does not appeal *either* to scripture and tradition as his starting point, *or* to the triune nature of God as his primary focus, but rather to *both*—that is, to the scriptural evidence for the triune nature. The foundations provided by biblical faith are at the heart of the answer that Augustine uses in response to those who would seek other rational models and theories to explain God's threeness.

The emphasis that Augustine places upon the scriptural basis for the doctrine of the Trinity is not at the expense of a rational explanation of doctrine, to which he also adhered. The two were inseparable for Augustine. The classical philosopher was committed to living the rational life, but this did not necessitate opposition to theological explanation. Similarly, the explanation of the faith did not preclude reference to philosophical ideas when they could clarify the meaning of biblical faith.[81] Augustine's own background included training in skepticism and Neoplatonism, and his generally Platonic philosophical approach had a profound effect upon his theology, though after his conversion, no philosophical school (such as that of Plotinus or Porphyry) can be said to have pride of place, but all were subjected to the critique of scriptural faith.[82]

In contradistinction to the schema that makes a division between the East and the West in patristic thinking about the Trinity, then, Augustine states a method that will follow the Nicene path of starting

with scripture and recognizing the need to protect the plurality of the Godhead in trinitarian doctrine. Who are the "reason-mongers" that have compromised the correct reading of biblical revelation, and developed misleading, alternative doctrines of the Trinity? According to Michel R. Barnes, Augustine directed *The Trinity* against, in part, Latin, anti-Nicene, "homoean" (subordinationist) theologies. These subordinationist interpretations of the Son's and Holy Spirit's relationship to the Father were based on interpretations of scripture that were developed in ongoing debates in the post-Nicene church.[83] Not only does Augustine place himself within the historical tradition of Nicaea, but he also writes with a polemical edge, in order to defend the orthodoxy he claims to uphold.

Therefore, while Marsh is correct in noting that unity of substance is a concern for Augustine, it is not because he has accepted the primacy of the concept of divine substance over the biblical presentation of God's economy in three persons, or that he wishes to subsume questions of trinitarian relations to a theory of substance.[84] Rather, the plurality of the divine persons is the basis for Augustine's attempt to come to an understanding of the idea of unity of substance that does not dissolve the reality of the three into a prior substance, or reduce the Son and the Holy Spirit to creatures of the Father. Augustine conceives the unity of substance as an issue with regard to two questions: firstly, how the unity of divine substance is related to the Father's begetting the Son and spiration of the Holy Spirit;[85] and secondly, how one can talk of the unity of substance in terms of the three persons' common activity.[86] Rather than conceiving of unity in terms analogous to human nature, where the begetter and begotten can be greater and lesser in relation to each other, Augustine will show how talking about divine unity as eternal, simple Being can shed light on how God could be three and one. He will do this by exploring the scriptural basis for speaking about the Trinity (following the Nicene tradition of the Father as origin of the Son and Holy Spirit), without subordinating the other persons to the Father[87] or making the Father (or some other underlying divine substance) the true God of which the other persons are simply manifestations.[88] In short, Augustine's focus on unity of substance begins and ends with the monarchy of the Father rather than precluding the relations of origin.

In *The Trinity* 1.7, one can detect the methodological premise on which Augustine proceeds. After the quotation we noted above ("The purpose of all Catholic commentators . . . has been to teach that according to the scriptures Father and Son and Holy Spirit in the inseparable equality of one substance present a divine unity"),[89] Augustine continues his explanation of what he understands the "purpose of all the Catholic commentators" to be:

> It was not however this same three . . . that was born of the virgin Mary, crucified and buried under Pontius Pilate, rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven, but the Son alone. Nor was it this same three that came down upon Jesus in the form of a dove at his baptism, or came down on the day of Pentecost after the Lord's ascension, with a roaring sound from heaven as though a violent gust were rushing down, and in divided tongues as of fire, but the Holy Spirit alone. Nor was it this same three that spoke from heaven, *You are my Son*, either at his baptism by John (Mk 1:11), or on the mountain when the three disciples were with him (Mt 17:5), nor when the resounding voice was heard, *I have both glorified it* (my name) *and will glorify it again* (Jn 12:28), but it was the Father's voice alone addressing the Son; although just as Father and Son and Holy Spirit are inseparable, so do they work inseparably. This is also my faith inasmuch as it is the Catholic faith.[90]

Augustine places his understanding of the trinitarian faith within the Nicene tradition by giving direct reference to the creed in the first lines of this quotation ("born of the virgin Mary, crucified and buried under Pontius Pilate, rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven"), with his own explanation of its trinitarian significance.[91] He also cites scriptural events where each of the three divine persons are explicitly associated with the particular action. His use of both scripture and the creed reveal that for Augustine the problem of triune being is not simply about defending the unity of the divine substance, but more specifically about understanding how the threeness of the persons is both particular (i.e., the works of each in the economy) and inseparable. He sees the explanation of the trinitarian nature of God as including the belief that all three persons are indeed the one God of scripture, but not in such a way that the three became incarnate in Jesus. As well, the three were not all manifest in the dove at Jesus's baptism or in the tongues of fire at Pentecost, which belonged to the work of the Holy Spirit; and it was not the three who addressed the Son at his baptism and at the transfiguration, but the Father alone. Nevertheless, the Catholic faith that Augustine also claims as his own faith also understands the three to work inseparably.[92]

Augustine's immersion in the scriptural foundations of the doctrine of the Trinity informs his whole attempt to defend the doctrine against subordinationism in his day. Building on that foundation he will develop a sophisticated account of the trinitarian logic that helps to explain how the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit does not undermine the

church's conception of the unity of the divine substance. The challenge for Augustine is to explain how the three are one substance in a way that also affirms the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit's work as it is portrayed in scripture and summarized in the Nicene Creed. In other words, how can one affirm the unity of God and recognize the threeness of the Godhead, without dividing unity from plurality and plurality from unity? We now are ready to turn to an analysis of his defense of trinitarian doctrine, keeping in mind his method, which begins in the careful explanation of the meaning of scripture and the Nicene tradition.