

AUGUSTINE IN CONTEMPORARY TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

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ALTHOUGH IT has been some time since Augustine's trinitarian theology was studied in depth,¹ the last decade has seen a significant and widely expressed interest on the part of systematic theologians in the implications of Augustine's theology for the development of trinitarian doctrine. For example, a consensus among systematicians on the existence and character of an early "economic" understanding of God has led, among other things, to the not uncommon judgment that Augustine's trinitarian theology sacrificed this sense of *oconomia*, with unfortunate consequences for later theology. This sacrifice is frequently contrasted not only with primitive Christianity's experience of God but with the emphasis on relationship in the trinitarian theologies of the Cappadocians.² My purpose in this article is to examine many of these recent theological works for what they reveal about the methodological presuppositions operative, more or less, in most systematic treatments of Augustine today, and to critique those presuppositions from the point of view of a historical theologian whose speciality is patristic trinitarian theology. After thus providing what could be called a general phenomenology of contemporary systematic appropriations of Augustine's trinitarian theology, it will be possible to show how these presuppositions have figured in readings of Augustine by systematic theologians, in their methods, and, particularly, in their conclusions.³

Most accounts of patristic trinitarian doctrine divide this theology into two fundamental categories: Greek and Latin. By this account, Greek theology begins with the reality of the distinct persons while Latin theology begins with the reality of the unity of the divine nature. That this schema is true cannot be assumed; as I will show, the effect

¹ One exception is Johannes Arnold's "Begriff und heilsökonomische Bedeutung der göttlichen Sendungen in Augustinus *De Trinitate*," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 25 (1991) 3–69. Arnold's work is of particular interest because he analyzes Augustine's trinitarian theology specifically from the perspective of testing out its economic content.

² An influential account of the opposition between Cappadocian and Augustinian trinitarian theologies precisely in terms of a relational and economic theology versus a theology lacking both these dimensions is given in T. R. Martland, "A Study of Cappadocian and Augustinian Trinitarian Methodology," *Anglican Theological Review* 47 (1965) 252–63.

³ The scope of this article is limited to a critical analysis of works in contemporary systematics, and so my own proposal for a substantial alternative account of the economy and Augustine's trinitarian theology will have to wait.

of assuming this schema has been to conceal as least as much as it revealed. But setting aside whether the schema is true, that is to say, whether it accurately describes the doctrines it purports to describe, what is certain is that only theologians of the last one hundred years have ever thought that it was true. A belief in the existence of this Greek/Latin paradigm is a unique property of modern trinitarian theology. This belief, and the associated diagrams that one finds in de Margerie⁴ and LaCugna,⁵ or the “plurality-model/unity-model” jargon that one finds in Brown,⁶ all derive from a book written about 100 years ago, namely Théodore de Régnon’s studies on the Trinity.⁷ For it is de Régnon who invented the Greek/Latin paradigm, geometrical diagrams and all.⁸ De Régnon’s paradigm has become the *sine qua non* for framing the contemporary understanding of Augustine’s theology. To this extent, works as otherwise diverse as LaCugna’s and Brown’s both exhibit a scholastic modernism, since they both take as an obvious given a point of view that is coextensive with the 20th century. So do Mackey⁹ and O’Donnell.¹⁰

All of these works organize patristic trinitarian theology according to de Régnon’s paradigm. None of them shows any awareness that the paradigm needs to be demonstrated, or that it has a history. LaCugna and Brown need the paradigm to ground the specific problem they diagnose; although both Mackey and O’Donnell are frustrated by the strictures of the paradigm, neither of them notes that it is a creature of late-19th-century scholarship, an observation that would have given them a way out of their frustrations. At times Moltmann seems to avoid de Régnon’s paradigm,¹¹ but in fact he only transforms it into its mirror image, namely that Augustine’s unity paradigm may be distinguished from the Greek social paradigm through his use of a psychological analogy—an argument which has been popular among French Augustinians for some time. Moltmann is wrong, however, for the psychological analogy of the Trinity based on the idea, as he puts it, of a “soul that controls the body,”¹² can be found in Eusebius of Caesarea

⁴ Bertrand de Margerie, *La Trinité chrétienne dans l’histoire* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1975) 227.

⁵ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991) 96.

⁶ David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (La Salle: Open Court, 1985).

⁷ Théodore de Régnon, S.J., *Études de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité*, four volumes bound as three (Paris: Victor Retaux, 1892/1898).

⁸ *Ibid.* 1.339.

⁹ James P. Mackey, *The Christian Experience of God as Trinity*, (London: SCM, 1983) 142–63.

¹⁰ John J. O’Donnell, *Trinity and Temporality: The Christian Doctrine of God in the Light of Process Theology and the Theology of Hope* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1983) 40–52.

¹¹ Jurgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God* (London: SCM, 1991).

¹² *Ibid.* 60–62.

and Gregory of Nyssa, both Greeks.¹³ All the above works thus illustrate in vivid fashion the degree to which modern reconstructions are captive to modern interpretative categories. To be fair, however, nothing is more common in contemporary systematics than the inability to read Augustine outside of de Régnon's paradigm.¹⁴

Such modern appropriations of Augustine thus depend upon broad, general characterizations of Augustine's theology; these broad general characterizations themselves depend upon turn-of-the-century continental histories of dogma, of which, as I will show, de Régnon's paradigm is but the most obvious. Similarly, these contemporary appropriations share the same two presuppositions: the first is that characterizations based on polar contrasts¹⁵ are borne out in the details that are revealed clearly and distinctly through the contrasts; and the second is that the same process of presenting doctrines in terms of opposition yields a synthesizing account of the development of doctrine.¹⁶ In short, there is a penchant among systematic theologians for categories of polar opposition, grounded in the belief that ideas "out there" in the past really existed in polarities, and that polar oppositions accurately describe the contents and relationships of these ideas. Why these categories would be so valued by late-19th- and 20th-century readers of dogma is a question I leave for specialists in those eras, although, as will become clear, I believe that this penchant for polar categories reveals something about methodological choices systematians have made in this century. Whatever the origins of this emphasis on polar categories may be, there are severe limitations in the histories pro-

¹³ See Eusebius of Caesarea's *Demonstration of the Gospel* 4.5, ed. Ivar Heikel, GCS 6. 156.18–26. A similar argument to this effect, written for polemical purposes, may also be found in Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Making of Man* (Migne, PG 44.137d–140c).

¹⁴ Some time ago Edmund Hill criticized Rahner's implicit dependence on de Régnon; see his "Karl Rahner's 'Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise De Trinitate and St. Augustine,'" *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971) 67–80.

¹⁵ Such as the oppositions between "Greek" and "Latin," or between "economic" and "immanent," or, in more general applications, "Jewish" versus "Hellenistic."

¹⁶ Although all the oppositions noted in the preceding note could, theoretically, be used to describe static relationships, in practice these oppositions have been used to describe movement from one doctrinal form to another, whether it is progressive or regressive movement. The typical use of such an opposition to describe doctrinal progression can be found, e.g., in de Margerie, *La Trinité chrétienne dans l'histoire* 223, 226, and in Frederick E. Crowe, *Doctrine of the Holy Trinity* (Willowdale: Regis College, 1965/66) 110. I quote de Margerie to illustrate: "[L]es Grecs et les Latins ont constitué deux branches différentes au sein de l'unique grande tradition chrétienne. On n'a peut-être pas assez remarqué que la spéculation grecque représente un premier stade d'élaboration et d'évolution du dogme trinitaire, auquel la réflexion latine succède comme un stade postérieur" (*La Trinité* 223). By contrast, although Greek thought from pre-Socratic through to Hellenistic remained consistently dependent upon categories of polar opposition, such categories were often used to describe static or even eternal relationships. I suggest that it is the exclusive use of polar opposites to characterize development which constitutes an "idealistic" use of categories of polar opposition.

duced by this polarizing hermeneutic of doctrine, and contemporary systematic theologians seem to have accepted these limitations as foundational.¹⁷

To take just one of these limitations, the standard division of trinitarian theologies into the Greek tradition, paradigmatically expressed by the Cappadocians, and its opposite, the Latin tradition, paradigmatically expressed by Augustine, ignores the close affiliation that flourished between Alexandrian ("Greek") and Roman ("Latin") theologies a generation earlier. The more one tends to speak of a real division between Greek and Latin trinitarian theologies in the late-fourth and early-fifth centuries, the more one must acknowledge and explain a fundamental shift away from the mid-fourth-century synthetic theology of Alexandria and Rome. The more one postulates a turn-of-the-century opposition between Greek and Latin theologies, the more one implicitly claims the loss of the prior consensus, and a dominant consensus at that, found in the theologies of Rome and Alexandria, a consensus that was above all "Nicene."¹⁸

A few historians of dogma have bravely followed their own logic and admitted the loss of a "Rome/Alexandria" consensus. Harnack did so. The era we recognize, through de Régnon, as the era of the paradigmatic expression of Greek and Latin theologies was, in Harnack's account, the era in which the Rome/Alexandria trinitarian consensus was betrayed. Harnack was so critical of the new theology of the Cappadocians and Constantinople, in 381, that he described it as "semi-Arian" and a subversion of Nicaea.¹⁹ On the other hand, we have a very different opinion from French Augustinians like Paissac and Malet,²⁰ who are of particular significance for Catholic theology since they have provided so much of the conceptual idiom which is the repertory of modern Catholic systematic theologians. French scholastic Augustinians have rejoiced that, as they saw it, Augustine left behind the inhibiting concepts of Nicaea, in particular the constraints imposed by the watchword *homoousia*. For these scholars, the develop-

¹⁷ An article similar to this one could be written analyzing the debt that contemporary reflections on "oeconomia" owe to the emphasis laid on this category of theology by 19th-century theologians at Tübingen and by John Henry Newman in his *The Arians of the Fourth Century* 1.1.3. Practically speaking, such scholars as these discovered the division between "economy" and "theology" and invented its modern significance. One might explore for ways in which contemporary systematic theology needs this division.

¹⁸ We may note that in 380 (leading up to the Council of Constantinople in 381) the normative expression of the imperially approved doctrine of the Trinity was the pro-Nicene doctrine(s) of Rome and Alexandria, as article 16.2 of the *Theodosian Code* makes clear.

¹⁹ Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, repr. as 7 books in 4 vols. (New York: Dover, 1960) 4.84–88.

²⁰ Henri Paissac, *Théologie du Verbe: Saint Augustin et Saint Thomas* (Paris: Cerf, 1951); André Malet, *Personne et Amour dans la théologie trinitaire de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1956); also M. J. Le Guillou, "Réflexions sur la théologie trinitaire," *Istina* 17 (1972) 457–64.

ment of the doctrinal era described by de Régnon in his Latin, i.e. his Augustinian and protoscholastic paradigm is the development of a happy separation from the earlier orthodox consensus.²¹ Their frank separation of Augustine from Nicene theology well dramatizes the issues a Cappadocian/Augustinian opposition presupposes. Of the texts under discussion here, only LaCugna brings the French positioning of Augustine over against a Nicene consensus into the body of her discussion, though without any illumination; Congar refers to it in his notes.²²

The overwhelming presence in systematic discussions of Augustine of a watered-down version of de Régnon's paradigm, coupled with an ignorance of the origin of the paradigm, reveals the systematic penchant for using grand, broad-stroked, narrative forms. Like turn-of-the-century historians, contemporary systematicians seem to be distinguished by the confidence with which they will deploy such grand, architectonic narrative forms. This confidence springs, I think, from two attitudes. First, the confidence reflects a positive sense of all the new things that we have learned as moderns through the mechanism of "paradigm shifts"; not the least of what we have learned is the existence of such paradigms themselves. Secondly, the confidence to speak in architectonic narrative forms reflects a general sense that details matter less than perspective, that historical facts are only epiphenomena of an architectonic paradigm or hermeneutic, so that a sufficient knowledge of "facts" can be acquired solely through the practice of a hermeneutical or an ideological critique in itself, since any "fact" can itself be reduced to an expression or the symptom of a hermeneutic or ideology. One can imagine that either or both of these attitudes would make historical judgments or characterizations more tentative and rare, but I think it is fair to conclude that this has not been the case.

The idea that historical facts are only epiphenomena of a hermeneutic is now implicit in left-wing histories of doctrine just as it has been implicit in right-wing histories of doctrine. It will be remembered that many of the accomplishments in Catholic historical theology (and Catholic theology generally) in the first half of this century were driven by a desire to escape the tendency of the right to regard the actual reading of historical sources as superfluous if not subversive in virtue of official interpretations (such as those of Thomas Aquinas). A striking illustration of a similar tendency on the left may be seen in a

²¹ See Paissac, *Théologie du Verbe* 30–31; Malet, *Personne et Amour* 21; Guillou, "Réflexions" 459; also Louis Legrand, *La Notion philosophique de la Trinité chez Saint Augustin* (Paris: Oeuvre d'auteuil, 1931) 133.

²² Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 3 (New York: Seabury, 1983). Congar shows an awareness of the French scholastics Malet, Le Guillou, and Lafont (92, n. 16), as well as making the influence of de Régnon explicit (83); for more on de Régnon, see 92, nn. 10–11.

recent article by Thistlethwaite,²³ who is able to characterize the sense of trinitarian language in all the Apostolic Fathers, the Apologists, and Tertullian without ever citing a single specific text or even a mediating secondary source.²⁴ Her argument pivots on a characterization of Gregory of Nyssa's trinitarian theology that appears all but manufactured to support her own position.²⁵ The idiosyncratic nature of Thistlethwaite's judgment that Gregory held a Logos-centered theology is telegraphed by the fact that she cannot provide a single primary source in support of this position and that she can only draw upon a secondary source that is 100 years old to get as far as impugning Gregory by association with Origen.²⁶ Thistlethwaite thus provides a painful illustration of a grand narrative which is based upon something other than a knowledge of the texts being narrated, indeed a narrative which is positively based on conceptually bypassing the need, simply put, to read the texts being narrated. The texts have no content(s) apart from the grand narrative, and thus no integrity that would demand a direct encounter.

The preferred narrative form among systematic theologians is, as I have already called it, the architectonic, by which I mean two things:

²³ Susan B. Thistlethwaite, "On the Trinity," *Interpretation* 45 (1991) 159–71. Thistlethwaite's readings are produced by, and in support of, a feminist hermeneutic, but her specific purpose in recounting early Christian trinitarian theologies follows from a larger hermeneutical project which is neither limited to, nor intrinsically a feature of, feminist theology, namely, the reduction of early Christian trinitarian theologies to episodes in a Logos theology. (Here the rise of an imperialistic Logos theology is the architectonic narrative.) My position remains, however, that the more tightly controlled a reading is by an ideological end the more damaged is the historical sensitivity. Such ideologies limit systematic theology's appropriation of the subject of historical theology (i.e. the Christian tradition) to an exploitation of this subject through the usual mechanism of cultural exploitation, namely a transformation of the material for the sake of consumption.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 163.

²⁵ Thistlethwaite is attempting to refute the position that "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" are the proper names of God. To do that she contests the significance of Gregory as an authoritative witness of an early "proper name" theology. In particular, Gregory's authority is questioned: "[Nyssa] is not widely regarded to be the theologian his teacher and master, Basil of Caesarea, was" (*ibid.* 166). There is no indication by Thistlethwaite of specifically who it is that widely lacks this regard for Gregory, a point which is not moot, given that the normal scholarly evaluation of Gregory is precisely that he was *more* a theologian than Basil was. E.g., Johannes Quasten says, "If we compare Gregory of Nyssa as a theologian with the two other Cappadocians . . . we recognize his superiority immediately" (*Patrology*, 4th ed. [Utrecht: Spectrum, 1975] 3.283). More recently, R. P. C. Hanson offered that "Gregory of Nyssa is to be sharply distinguished from the other two Cappadocian theologians in that he devised a doctrinal, indeed a philosophical, system more coherent and more elaborate than any the other two ever produced" (*The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* [Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1988] 719). Such evaluations of Gregory's eminence could be multiplied indefinitely (this side of Harnack). Moreover, the question of Basil's preeminence is relevant only if Basil and Gregory disagreed on the issue of the character of divine names (which they do not).

²⁶ *Ibid.* 166. Thistlethwaite's authority for Gregory's relationship to the theology of his day (given in her nn. 17 and 18) is the introduction to the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* volume on Gregory (1892).

first, an account that is open-endedly comprehensive; and second, a description of the development of doctrine in terms of the internal logic of an idea. What seems to me to be distinctive about the systematians' quest for comprehensiveness is the way in which it is tied to understanding change in a cultural form, that is to say in a doctrine, in terms of the logic of an idea. Yannaras' recent account of the influence of Augustine on Western civilization provides a conspicuous example of this kind of idealizing account of doctrine.²⁷ Yannaras argues that the rise of "logocentrism" in the culture of Western Christendom (as opposed to the culture of Eastern Christendom) is due to Augustine's influence as the theological paradigm of the West. Yannaras takes the same description of Augustine as the theologian of the *logos par excellence* that one finds in the French Augustinians mentioned earlier and applies the logic of idealism to Augustine's influence: each historical epoch is defined by Yannaras by the way it purifies and enlarges as an idea the scope of what was originally a doctrinal insight by Augustine. This method of describing the development of doctrine in terms of conceptual purification and expansion appears in a number of treatments of doctrine in general and Augustine's doctrine in particular; LaCugna's and Jenson's²⁸ works, especially, follow this pattern.

Yannaras's own work with Martin Heidegger makes it impossible to deny his debt to German idealism, and he would not want to deny it. Let me offer the thesis that (1) the fascination with conceptual categories of polar opposition, (2) the use of the logic of ideas to describe cultural forms, and (3) the claim to comprehensiveness on the basis of polar categories and ideal logic all suggest that the influence of German idealism among systematic theologians is not limited to Yannaras. There has been a decision by systematians to prefer an architectonic and idealistic style of writing; this decision has been objectified, for no one can remember making it. Aside from amnesia, the problem with the influence of idealism in systematic appropriations of patristic theology is not that philosophy in general has no place in theology, or even that idealism in particular has no place in theology. Rather the problem is that, unacknowledged, idealism draws to itself bad history: the integrity of the discipline of historical studies is ruptured by the need to find a "historical" account which is already cast in idealistic terms.²⁹ History is then treated as the material enstructuring of those themes which are constitutive of contemporary systematics. The dialogue between systematic theology and historical theology

²⁷ Christos Yannaras, *Philosophie sans rupture* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1986).

²⁸ Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

²⁹ I note that making sense of theological history through German idealism is not limited to Christian theology: see Richard Taylor's review of Ian Newton's *Allah Transcendent* in *The Middle East Journal* 44 (1990) 521–22. Taylor criticizes Newton's depiction of Islamic philosophers as an "almost Hegelian view of the advance of Islamic" thought, in which they are "controlled by their chosen mythologies" and their thoughts are organized as "historical phenomena in an unfolding drama."

is transformed into a conversation between a ventriloquist and her or his prop.

The way in which systematic appropriations of Augustine are based upon "historical" accounts preselected for mirroring the idealizing methods of systematic theology can be seen in two specific properties of such appropriations. First, there is the ubiquitous presence of the work of Olivier du Roy as a mediating authority in the reading of Augustine's theology.³⁰ To discover this presence one sometimes has to pay attention to footnote references, as in the case of Muller,³¹ but LaCugna brings her debt to du Roy into the body of the text, so that what was originally a methodological presupposition in du Roy becomes a theological conclusion in LaCugna. Congar is a rare example of a theologian who has noticed just how "radical" du Roy's perspective is, and how du Roy is driven to it in reaction to the French Augustinians that I mentioned earlier.³²

Du Roy's description of Augustine's trinitarian theology shows significant methodological idiosyncrasies. One important idiosyncrasy is du Roy's description of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity in terms of a fundamental relationship with philosophy, not in terms of a fundamental relationship with doctrine.³³ In this, du Roy fits in with dominant 20th-century systematic presentations of Augustine's trinitarian theology. While there are a number of monographs on Augustine's trinitarian debt to philosophy, sustained discussions of a similar debt to his immediate Christian Latin predecessors are few and far between. Such discussions as there are reduce Augustine to Tertullian, or position this debt in terms of de Régnon's paradigm: e.g., how does Augustine's theory of relations differ from that of Gregory of Nazianzus? We are brought to the odd position that, according to many systematic theologians, the influence of philosophy in religious doctrine is fundamental, while the influence of prior expositions of religious doctrines is not.

Another distinctive feature of du Roy's methodology is that Augustine's trinitarian theology is presented statically or thematically. Although de Roy's apparent perspective is developmental, his operating principle is that Augustine's trinitarian theology consistently reduces

³⁰ Olivier du Roy, *L'intelligence de la foi en la trinité selon saint Augustin* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1966).

³¹ Earl C. Muller, S.J., *Trinity and Marriage in Paul* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990) 468, nn. 167–69.

³² Congar speaks of du Roy's description of Augustine's debt to Neoplatonism as "radical," and knows that du Roy is reacting to authors such as Malet, Le Guillou, and Lafont (*I Believe in the Holy Spirit* 3.92 n. 16).

³³ Rowan Williams recently characterized du Roy's work as one which presents "Augustine's trinitarian thought as monist and essentialist, a scheme in which the economy of salvation plays relatively little part" ("*Sapientia* and the Trinity," *Collectanea Augustiniana: Mélanges T. J. van Bavel* [Leuven: University Press, 1990] 317–332, at 319 n. 6).

to a triadology, although Augustine's preferred terms for the triad change over time, from text to text, or from chapter to chapter (for which one consults du Roy's appendix).³⁴ Such a description leaves no room for the observation that in *De Symbolo ad Catechumenos* Augustine's argument for the unity of the Trinity is indistinguishable from that of his Greek contemporary Evagrius.³⁵ They both argue, "against the Arians," that John 5:19, "the Son can do nothing without the Father," is a declaration of the Son's natural relationship with the Father, since common activities require a common nature and only a common nature can produce common activities. In the form of de Régnon's paradigm typical of the contemporary works discussed in this article, this argument and this language are thought to be "Cappadocian," but in any case exclusively Greek.

Du Roy's account of Augustine's trinitarian theology in which the fundamental source of doctrine is philosophy, articulated in categories that are static or thematic, brings us to a second way in which systematic appropriations of Augustine are based upon "historical" accounts that mirror the idealizing methods of systematic theology. Most systematic treatments of patristic trinitarian theology generally and of Augustine's theology specifically are characterized by an avoidance of texts in the genre of trinitarian polemic, and a failure to take the polemical context of such writing seriously. There is a decided preference among systematicians for patristic trinitarian texts that are not polemical in genre, and a tendency to "read out" polemics when such intentions are likely.³⁶ For example, the most commonly used statement of Gregory of Nyssa's trinitarian theology is his work *On "Not Three Gods"*; I have not yet found a collection of selected primary sources on early Christian trinitarian doctrine that does not showcase this work, although no one can claim that it was, before this century, influential in any way. It is, of course, a very short work, and one which has the obvious appeal to Westerners of showing a Greek worrying about possibly being tritheistic.

De Régnon focused on this work because, as he saw it, it shared the same "nature/operations" language that was so important for scholastic commentaries on Aquinas's trinitarian theology, such as Cajetan's.³⁷

³⁴ It goes almost without saying that du Roy's emphasis on the triadology in Augustine's trinitarian theology is related to the hermeneutical privileging of philosophy as Augustine's "source."

³⁵ See "Basil's" (i.e. Evagrius's) *Letter* 8.9.

³⁶ A nascent sensitivity to Gregory's polemical context may be due to the new role Hanson's *The Search for the Christian Doctrine* is beginning to play as a resource for systematicians. Continued dependence on the utility of Lebon and Prestige, on the other hand, is puzzling.

³⁷ *Études sur la Sainte Trinité* 1.391 and 394. De Régnon emphasizes "nature" and "operations" language in his account of Cappadocian theology as part of his argument that the difference between patristic and scholastic trinitarian theologies is a difference of organizing paradigms rather than a difference of substance. De Régnon will argue

The passages de Régnon emphasized for this reason are the same passages that show up later in Gonzalez's article on exterior operations in Gregory's theology, in Quasten's summary of Gregory's trinitarian theology, and in Bettenson's selection of extracts from Gregory.³⁸ Moreover, de Régnon's idiosyncratic abstraction of the "nature/operations" language of Gregory's *Ep.* 189 continues in the assumption of "essence/energy" language evident in a host of theologians and scholars.³⁹ In practice, the observation that *On "Not Three Gods"* is not a polemical work supports the understanding that the description Gregory develops in this text functions as a conceptually generalized form of his theology, once his terminology has been related to the universal translator of Aristotelianism. The apparent lack in *On "Not Three Gods"* of a specific doctrinal opponent, and the fact that Gregory's language there is susceptible to an Aristotelian reading, allows the text to be read simply for its thematic emphasis.

Yet it is interpretations of Augustine's trinitarian theology that show even more the systematic avoidance of polemical readings, and a widespread failure to consider Augustine's trinitarian theology in a

that the appearance of nature and operation language in both patristic and scholastic trinitarian theologies is evidence of the common doctrinal substance, while the different senses attached to the terms is evidence of the different theological paradigms within which the language is interpreted.

³⁸ Namely "*Ad Eustathium*," the pseudo-Basilian *Ep.* 189.6 (Yves Courtonne, ed. trans. and comm., *Saint Basile Lettres*, 3 vols. [Paris: Société d'Éditions "Les Belles Lettres, 1957, 1961, 1966] 2.138.12–139.26), treated at *Études* 1.391, and *Ep.* 189.7 (Courtonne 2.140.29–33) treated at *Études* 1.392; *On "Not Three Gods," Greg. Nyss. opera* (GNO) IIIa 46.20–48.8 treated at *Études* 1.396–7; and 48.20–51.5 treated at *Études* 1.397–98. For the treatment of these passages by the authors cited, see Severino Gonzalez, S.J., "La identidad de operacion en las obras exteriores y la unidad de la naturaleza divina en la teologia trinitaria de S. Gregoria de Nisa," *Gregorianum* 19 (1938) 280–301, where Gonzalez cites the same passages from *On the Holy Trinity* as de Régnon; Quasten's *Patrology* 3.286–88, where, following de Régnon, he cites *On "Not Three Gods,"* GNO IIIa 47.17–48.2 and 48.20–49.7; and Henry Bettenson, ed. and trans., *The Later Christian Fathers* (London: Oxford University, 1970) 154, who cites GNO IIIa 46.16–18, as de Régnon did at *Études* 1.396–97.

³⁹ See, for example, LaCugna, *God For Us* 72. Typically, the idea that the Cappadocians used essence/energy language generally to speak of the Trinity comes through some neo-Palamite mediation, as is the case with Christopher Stead's statement that "[Cappadocian] theology therefore uses the term *energeia* to stand for operations which are distinct from, and even contrasted with, the substance or essential nature from which they proceed . . . the divine energies are regarded as eternal and unvariant manifestations of God's power . . . This distinction between the intelligible divine energies and the inexpressible substance from which they proceed became an authoritative portion of later Eastern orthodoxy" (*Divine Substance* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1977] 279), a statement which shows a massive debt to neo-Palamite scholarship. That the neo-Palamite emphasis on an "essence/energy" distinction owes heavily to de Régnon is clear from a careful reading of Vladimir Lossky's *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'église d'orient* (Paris: Aubier, 1944) 43–64, although the signs of de Régnon's influence have been taken out of the English translation, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, repr. (Cambridge and London: James Clark, 1973). See my article "De Régnon Reconsidered," forthcoming in *Augustinian Studies*.

polemical context. Trinitarian works by Augustine that are incontrovertably polemical are no longer read, and works that can bear a polemical reading are consistently not read that way.⁴⁰ If the judgment that the *de Trinitate* lacks polemical intention were not so automatic it would be infamous; the ideological need for *de Trinitate* to be free of polemical intent means that the well is poisoned on that judgment, even if it is true we cannot say that we know it to be so. I can illustrate the significance of this point with an example.

Augustine's treatment of trinitarian economy in *de Trinitate* occurs primarily in Books 2 to 4; it is Book 2 particularly which has served as a scholar's laboratory, as it were, of Augustine's economic theology of the Trinity.⁴¹ Formally, there are three noteworthy features to Augustine's argument in this book. First and foremost, it is a polemically charged argument, designed to combat a false "economy of the Trinity": various clues (e.g., the debate over the exegesis of John 5:19), as well as the evidence of *Collatio cum Maximino* 26 and *Contra Maximum* 2, identify the proponents of this false economy as Latin Homoians ("Arians").⁴² Anti-Nicenes excluded the Father from Old Testament theophanies so as to argue from these appearances the Son's changeability and materiality, and so Augustine must counter this argument. Another interesting feature of Book 2 is that it is cast as a series of exegeses of Scripture (primarily passages from the Old Testament). Probably Augustine's choice of scriptural texts to exegete, and thus to dispute interpretations, is governed by Old Testament passages Homoians have chosen in support of their arguments (as is the case for New Testament passages in Books 5 and 6). Nonetheless, the book remains structured around scriptural exegesis. The final noteworthy aspect of the argument in Book 2 is that while the specific passages disputed are determined in response to Homoian polemic, some scriptural passages cited in support of Augustine's position are used because these have an older history, authority, and role in an economic theology of the Trinity. I am thinking, in particular, of the pivotal appeal to John 1:1–3 at *de Trinitate* 2.2.9, which resembles

⁴⁰ Congar surveys the influence of Latin pro-Nicenes on Augustine, and acknowledges an attenuated polemical context for *de Trinitate* (*I Believe in the Holy Spirit* 3.80); on the same page he declines to describe Augustine "over against" the Greeks. Congar also knows and utilizes Augustine's late polemical works (see 3.91 n. 3).

⁴¹ See de Régnon's work in *Études de Théologie* 1.258–62 on Augustine's interpretation of theophanies in Book 2 of *de Trinitate*. De Régnon claimed that Augustine's exegesis is polemically inspired. See also Jules Lebreton, "Saint Augustin théologien de la trinité: Son exégèse des théophanies," *Studi Agostiniani* 2 (1931) 821–36, and Jaroslav Pelikan, "*Canonica Regula*: The Trinitarian Hermeneutics of Augustine," *Proceedings of the PMR Conference* 12/13 (1987–88) 17–30. Most recently, J. Arnold has emphasized the soteriological content of Augustine's working through of the theophanies ("Begriff und heilsökonomische Bedeutung" 8–12).

⁴² Edmund Hill suggests that Augustine's opponents in Book 2 included Tertullian (*The Trinity* [Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991] 122 n. 7). I cannot agree with that; see my next footnote.

Tertullian's (and Hippolytus's) use of the Johannine prologue (but especially John 1:1) as the paradigmatic expression of the economy of the Trinity.⁴³

Any substantial interpretation of Augustine's argument in Book 2, like any credible characterization of Augustine's argument in *de Trinitate* as a whole, would have to interpret the text in light of these three aspects, for otherwise Augustine's argument would be represented in a false context and thus misunderstood. However, I have not found that readings of *de Trinitate* in light of aspects such as the three just enumerated are common among contemporary theologians. Moreover, given the importance of Book 2 for most modern patristics' accounts of Augustine's economical theology of the Trinity (especially Catholic accounts), it is surprising to find this subject skipped over in, e.g., LaCugna's treatment.⁴⁴

If one compares the number of Augustinian texts consulted in contemporary accounts of his trinitarian theology to the number of Augustinian texts consulted in accounts from 100 years ago, what one finds is that the number has shrunk drastically. Hardly anyone refers to the last trinitarian writings by Augustine anymore, those against Maximinus.⁴⁵ The fact that these texts are not translated from Latin into a modern language means that, practically speaking, they are not being read by systematians, a limitation that was not in place 100 years ago.⁴⁶ Given that systematic reconstructions of Augustine's trinitarian theology are now made on the basis of the single text, *de Trinitate*, or, not uncommonly, a canon of selections from this single text,⁴⁷ we can conclude that the actual reading of Augustine has been made functionally superfluous. The rhetorical voice of such reconstructive

⁴³ The mention of Tertullian allows us to raise the question of the influence of Tertullian's distinctive understanding of the "economy" on Augustine. Unlike the tradition exemplified by Irenaeus and the Cappadocians, Tertullian uses *dispensatio* or *oikonomia* to refer to the reality of the relations in the Trinity (although not in a way which sets the relations over against their manifestations). See especially Robert A. Markus, "Trinitarian Theology and the Economy," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 9 (1958) 89–102. Markus's article is well known to LaCugna, but she shows no interest in developing the potential point contained in it, namely, that there is another "economic Trinity" tradition available in the early Church, i.e. Tertullian's. Moreover, one must at least acknowledge the question of whether Tertullian's idiosyncratic use of economy influenced Augustine's treatment. If there is this specific influence from Tertullian, then Augustine's treatment of the economy will look very different than, e.g., the Cappadocian's treatment.

⁴⁴ Given that LaCugna accepts so much of the scholastic analysis of Augustine (i.e. de Régnon), it is likewise surprising that she should pass over this Catholic idiom in silence.

⁴⁵ While I do not agree with much of his analysis, some use can be found for William A. Sumruld's *Augustine and the Arians* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University, 1994).

⁴⁶ This omission will find a potential remedy in the forthcoming publication of Roland Teske's English translation of these later polemical works.

⁴⁷ Pelikan, "*Canonica Regula*" 17 gives examples of the influence and authority of such selections of *de Trinitate* passages.

narratives is one of comprehensiveness, but the "historical method" supporting the narrative is in fact reductive. Stories of increasing scope are told on the basis of diminishing experience and evidence.

Given the preference in systematics for accounts framed in conceptual oppositions, the lack of interest in trinitarian polemics is noteworthy and initially even puzzling. If one's rhetoric favors a presentation of one theology as over against another, then why avoid texts in which a doctrine is developed explicitly in opposition to another? The influence of du Roy provides an initial clue: polemics are, explicitly at least, arguments over doctrines, and doctrines are not intrinsically significant or even integral to an idealistic history; ideas are. The project of an idealizing history is to restate doctrines (and all cultural forms) in terms of architectonic ideas, since the history of doctrine is truly understood only as the developing relationship among such ideas. The contemporary lack of attention to the polemical genre results from the need to present a thematic or universalized understanding of the theology at hand; polemical intention continues to be understood as a limit on the thematic application of a theology. For most of this century such an approach has been characteristic of authoritative accounts of both Gregory's and Augustine's theologies.

It will be remembered that for the generation of scholars in the first half of this century who rediscovered Gregory of Nyssa, the initial appeal was the significance of his theology for 20th-century Christianity, particularly for the possibility of a post scholastic Catholicism. The distinctiveness of Gregory's debate with Eunomius was given short shrift by Daniélou (initially) and von Balthasar.⁴⁸ Rather, their accounts of Eunomius's theology served only to introduce issues they eventually found better dramatized in the theology of Arius, who was himself only a transparent mask for the real protagonist, Origen. There is a similar universalizing tendency behind the lack of consideration of the polemical context of Augustine's theology. Any explanation of Augustine's trinitarian theology as a polemical reaction to a problem distinctive to the late-fourth and early-fifth centuries would diminish the claim (such as by those French Augustinians mentioned earlier) that Augustine's trinitarian theology had an intrinsic authority that superseded that of his predecessors (including Nicaea) and that was not simply local (even if "local" is taken to mean "Western").⁴⁹

The elimination of a polemical context to Augustine's trinitarian doctrines has been further supported by a thematic (if not fictive) ac-

⁴⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Présence et pensée: Essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1942) xvii; Jean Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique* (Paris: Aubier, 1944) 7.

⁴⁹ For more on the French Augustinian understanding of the relationship between Augustine's authority and his lack of polemical motivation, see my "The Arians of Book V and the Genre of *de Trinitate*," *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1993) 185–95.

count of the stability of the West in terms of trinitarian theology over against the instability of the East. Such an account implies that Latin trinitarian theology, paradigmatically expressed by Augustine, possesses a generalized form that developed in a polemic-free context, as well as the prerequisite orthodoxy needed to supersede doctrines with more ambivalent ("heterodox") genealogies (such as a *homoousios*-based theology). It should be noted, however, that it is not just Augustine's sympathizers who feel the need for his trinitarian theology to be free of polemical origins so that it might have an ideal application throughout the history of Catholicism (or Western civilization). As I have tried to show, critics of Augustine's trinitarian theology have just as great an investment in conceiving his theology in an ideal, context-free (except for philosophy) fashion, and for the same reason, namely for the sake of arguing for its universal application in later Western theology.

In conclusion, I have argued that contemporary systematic appropriations of Augustine are based upon methods and accounts that are preselected for mirroring a widely held hermeneutic or ideology of systematic theology. These methods and accounts typically include an unconscious dependence on de Régnon, a tendency towards a logic of ideas, including a lust (operative even when unfulfilled) for encyclopedic comprehensiveness at the conceptual level coupled with a reductive use of primary sources, a retreat from the polemical genre, with an emphasis on the philosophical content of doctrine. The popular judgment that Augustine's trinitarian theology sacrificed the *oconomia* is presently too burdened by the unreflective use of such hermeneutical presuppositions to be regarded as established or even likely.

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