# The Procession of the Spirit and the Image of God in Augustine's Theology

## The Contemporary Situation

The second half of the twentieth century was a substantial era for the doctrine of the Trinity. building on the theology of Karl Barth, Protestant theologians of the stature of Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg articulated powerful accounts of the Trinity. Employing the comparably foundational work of Karl Rahner, Catholic theologians such as Catherine LaCugna fashioned attractive accounts of the Trinity.

Of particular importance in this development was the revival of social analogies of the Trinity. The social analogy portrays the Trinity as a community of persons, in contrast to the dominant Western model of the Trinity, which portrays the Trinity as a mind with three elements. In the late twentieth century, theologians such as Moltmann and John Zizioulas used the doctrine of the Trinity to expound their vision of human community as a place of equal persons, each constituted by his or her relations to other persons.

The revival of the social analogy reminds us that there is a close connection between the doctrine of the Trinity and theological anthropology. This is because of the systematic nature of Christian theology, in which every doctrine is organically related to every other doctrine. But it is also because of the important role played in Christian thought by the idea of the image of God. Although variously understood, the idea of the image of God asserts that there is some correspondence between human being and God; if God is a trinity, then something of this Trinitarian nature must, it seems reasonable to conclude, pass over into the creature.

In the late twentieth century, with the revival of the social analogy, the focus of attention fell on humankind's *social* being. This emphasis was consistent with the distinctive emphases of the second half of the twentieth century: liberation, social ethics, ecclesiology and so on. However, it should be noted that for most of Christian history the emphasis fell on interpreting the image of

God in terms of the soul and its constitutive elements. Of course, we are not forced to decide between the two interpretations of the image of God. If human nature is grounded in the being of God the creator, then every aspect of our being finds some correspondence in God. Different interpretations will receive more or less emphasis depending on the focus on theological discourse in any given era.

So, without denying the importance of the revival of the social analogy and its usefulness in thinking about humankind's social being and human community, it may useful as well to attend to the traditional connection between the image of God and the nature of the soul. Such attention is warranted by the fact that, within the past few decades, science and technology have proposed accounts of human selfhood that demand theological response. If the theological community is to respond adequately to these scientific accounts, it must do so from a base of knowledge informed by both scientific knowledge and familiarity with the Christian tradition.

## The Idea of the Image of God in the Christian Tradition

Although the idea of the image of God creates a systematic connection between the concept of the soul and the Trinity, this connection barely existed in Christian thought before Augustine. Prior to Augustine and often after Augustine, the idea of the image of God was systematically connected, not to the Trinity but to God conceived as a rational being. The image, in other words, has often, perhaps usually, been interpreted in the light of human rationality. We are made in the image of God because we possess rationality. This interpretation of the image has at least the merit of understanding the image in terms of something distinctive to human beings. However, it fails to provide much theological insight into either human nature or God. We don't need revelation or theological reflection to tell us that humans are rational and portraying God principally as a rational being has limited theological usefulness, at least in comparison with portraying God as a Trinity.

Why did we come to interpret the image of God in terms of rationality? The reasons reach back to classical philosophy. For both Plato and Aristotle, the divine could be conceived only as mind (nous), possessing reason (logos) and engaging eternally in nondiscursive knowledge (theoria). Within the human soul lay three functions: reason (logos), emotion (thumos) and desire (epithumia). The latter two functions are not essential to human being; they appear in the soul only because of its association with the body. In its essential nature, the soul is rational and thus shares in the divine life. Plato and Aristotle both clearly and emphatically asserted that reason is the highest part of the soul, the most divine part of the soul and therefore the most truly human part of the soul. The other functions (thumos and epithumia) are not only not essential functions but are shared with the animals.

*Athanasius*

Early Christian writers were attracted to this anthropology and theology. We can accordingly see in Athanasius' work *On the Incarnation* (**verify**) the notion that human beings participate in the divine logos. Although Athanasius was working from a solidly trinitarian theology, when it came to thinking about the correspondence between God and the human soul, he was thinking within traditional, rationalist lines. It is by virtue of possessing the logos that human have some affinity with God.

> [God] did not barely create man, as He did all the irrational creatures on the earth, but made them after His own image, giving them a portion even of the power of His own Word; so that having as it were a kind of reflexion of the Word, and being made rational, they might be able to abide ever in blessedness (On the Incarnation, 3.3).

Here Athanasius carefully linked creation in the image of God with our participation in the divine logos and the consequent rationality (being made logikos). The following passage offers commentary on this idea:

> For God has not only made us out of nothing; but he gave us freely, by the Grace [sic] of the Word, a life in correspondence with God. But men, having rejected things eternal, and, by the counsel of the devil, turned to the things of corruption, became the cause of their

> own corruption in death, being . . . by nature corruptible, but destined, by the grace following from partaking of the Words, to have escaped their natural state, had they remained good. For because of the Word dwelling with them, even their natural corruption did not come near them (On the Incarnation, 5.1-2).

In this text we see that, we participating in the logos, we have a life according to God (*kata theon*). It was God's intention that, by participating (*metousia*) in the word we would escape a corruptible life according to nature (*kata phusin*)–the indwelling (*sunonton*) logos would prevent natural corruption from approaching us.

These passages from *On the Incarnation of the Word* show us that, at least for Athanasius, the focus of human participation in God is the logos. Admittedly, Athanasius did occasionally speak of our participation in the Holy Spirit.[1] He did so because his understanding of participation serves a soteriological purpose. Human sharing in the logos is important because we thereby escape the corruption that is integral to natural existence and thus achieve immortality.[2] Participation in the Holy Spirit seems, for Athanasius, to mediate our participation in the logos.[3]

*Gregory of Nyssa*

As noted, Athanasius' theology of participation focuses on the soteriological dimension of

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[1]"The Word was made flesh in order to offer up this body for all, and that we, partaking of His Spirit, might be deified," Defence of the Nicene Definition, §14; "We, apart from the Spirit, are strange and distant from God, and by the participation of the Spirit we are knit into the Godhead; so that our being in the Father is not ours, but is the Spirit's which is in us," (Third Discourse Against the Arians §24).

[2]"For God Maker of all and King of all . . . made, through His own Word our Saviour Jesus Christ, the human race after His own image, and constituted man able to see and know realities by means of this assimilation to Himself, giving him also a conception and knowledge even of His own eternity, in order that, preserving his nature intact, he might not ever either depart from his idea of God, nor recoil from the communion of the holy ones; but having the grace of Him that gave it, having also God's own power from the Word of the Father, he might rejoice and have fellowship with the Deity, living the life of immortality unharmed and truly blessed," *Against the Heathen*, 1.2.2.

[3]The logos "is very God, existing one in essence with the very Father; while other beings . . . had this grace from the Father, only by participation of the Word, through the Spirit," *Second Discourse against the Arians*, 3.9.

the image of God. He did not, however, offer a more comprehensive theological anthropology. For this we can look to later writers such as Gregory of Nyssa.

Gregory expressly declares God to be mind (*nous*) and word (*logos*)–since the logos was in the beginning, God has never been without logos and thus is essentially logos. We see here an emphatic portrayal of God as infinite mind.[4] God is, consequently without passion (*apathos*).[5]

Created in God's image, humans are "not far from" (*porro*) God; we are an imitation (*mimema*) of the divine mind and word.[6] Of course, Gregory knows that there is more to being the image of God than just possessing logos. The image includes our possessing dominion[7] and virtue,[8] for these likewise belong essentially to God. Nonetheless, even the divine properties of dominion and virtue pertain to God's being a mind that is analogous to the human soul.

Because Gregory conceived of the image of God in terms of logos and because God is without passion (*apathos*), our creation as the image of God excluded the nonrational functions of the soul. Using the platonic-aristotelian threefold analysis of the soul, Gregory expressly excluded emotion (*thumos*) and pleasure (*hedone*, standing in for desire [*epithumia*]). Emotion and desire came to reside in the soul only because we have given ourselves over to the animalistic side of our nature.[9] In its essential nature, the soul is not threefold. On the contrary, the true (*alethes*) and perfect (*teleia*) soul is one (*mia*), i.e., it is not a compound. This true and perfect soul, which excludes emotion and desire, is the intellectual (*noera*) soul. It is intrinsically immaterial (*aulos*), although it is capable

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[4]Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, 5.2.

[5]*Making of Man*, 16.4

[6]*Making of Man*, 5.2.

[7]*Making of Man*, 4.1.

[8]*Making of Man*, 5.1.

[9]*Making of Man*, 18.1.

interacting with the material world through the senses.[10]

The human person, therefore, is a mean (*meson*) between two extremes: on one hand divine and incorporeal nature, on the other hand, the a-rational (*alogos*) and animal-like life. With divine nature we share reason (*to logikon*) and understanding (*to dianoetikon*); with the animals we share gender. Humankind's essential being lies with the intellectual element.[11] The other functions of the soul (nutrition and sensation) may share in the name of soul, but they are not truly soul–they are only living energies (*energeiai*) associated with the soul in its bodily condition. That is why the soul's perfection (*to teleion*) pertains to its intellectual and rational element and wh perfection demands that we turn away from the world of sensation.[12]

In summary: Theologians such as Gregory of Nyssa, building on the heritage of classical philosophy and the Christian use of the idea of the divine logos, conceived of God as rational mind and, accordingly, portrayed the image of God in rational terms. Gregory was especially emphatic in asserting that the image of God has nothing to do with the nonrational elements of the soul.

*Augustine*

Augustine's account of the image of God is quite similar to Gregory's in many respects; like Gregory, he employed the idea of the image of God to establish humankind's uniqueness and difference from the animals and he frequently identified the image with human rationality.[13] However, Augustine's theology of the image also marks a considerable advance on Gregory's and on that of every other early Christian theologian because he systematically connected the image of God with the Trinity. Whereas Gregory and most theologians simply identified God with infinite mind

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[10]*Making of Man*, 14.2.

[11]*Making of Man*, 16.9.

[12]*Making of Man*, 15.2.

[13]Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 14.6; *On the City of God*, 12.23.

and interpreted the image of God in terms of rationality, Augustine began with the Trinity. Instead of portraying the image as the soul's rational faculty, Augustine portrayed it as the trinitarian unity of memory, intellect and will. In doing so, Augustine considerably broadened the idea of the image of God beyond the customary frontiers of rationality.

Memory (*memoria*) is Augustine's word for the mind's of reservoir of thoughts, in a kind of pre-conscious state. In the act of intellect, the mind forms a distinct conception from the contents of memory. Augustine did not have to do much original thinking about the trinitarian relation of memory to intellect; the Logos tradition within Christian thought had already mapped out the way in which the Logos emerges from the divine depths by an act of intellectual conception. It was a simple thing for Augustine to apply the trinitarian relation between the Father and the Logos to the relation, within the human mind, between *memoria* and intellect. The mind's *memoria* and intellect thus constitute an image of the Father and the Logos and the relation between them.[14]

One's of Augustine's contributions lay in rethinking the procession of the Holy Spirit. Prior to Augustine, if theologians thought about the procession of the Spirit at all, they often subsumed it under the obvious and unimaginative notion of breathing–The Father *breathes* out the Spirit, in contrast to the Father's *speaking* the Logos. The problem is that notion of breathing out the Spirit fails to yield any systematic connection with the notion of speaking the Logos; they seem like completely different acts with no cohesive relation. Augustine advanced the analysis by connecting the procession of the Spirit, not with the metaphor of breathing, but with the phenomenon of will (*voluntas*), which he equated with love. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son analogously to the emergence of will or love within the rational soul.[15] The advantage of this analysis is that it explains both the difference of the Spirit's procession from the speaking of the

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[14]Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 15:40.

[15]Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 15.17.27; 15.17.29; 15.20.38; 15.21.40-41.

Logos and their relation. They differ analogously to the difference between intellect and will. They are related in the same ways in which intellect and will are related in the human mind. The human mind, then, which is the image of God, comprises memory, intellect and will together with their relations.[16]

A few more words on the difference of will from intellect may be helpful. Previous philosophers and theologians acknowledged the distinction of intellect from passions and desires. They also recognized the existence of choice and deliberation; however, they did not think of "will" as a distinct category of moral psychology as Augustine did. Of course, Augustine did not think of the will as an object existing independently of intellect. The will is not an independent subject of action; to speak of the will is to speak of the human person who acts volitionally. It is thus the human person who wills, not the will that acts. The will is, moreover, essentially united with intellect in the unity of the human person.[17] Nonetheless, unlike previous theologians and philosophers, Augustine treated the will as a phenomenal reality on par with the intellect. They are united in the unity of the human person but are also analytically distinct–we can separate them in our thinking and consider the distinct properties of each.

The relation of will to intellect is subtle for Augustine. In one way, the will presupposes intellect, for we can't love something unless we know it.[18] That is why, in the trinitarian analogy, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*. But in another way, will precedes intellect, for the process of coming to know must be preceded by desire (*appetitus*) that finds satisfaction in achieving knowledge. Knowledge, in other words, is teleologically driven and finds its end in love, which is

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[16]Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 15.21.41.

[17]For a statement of the unity of will and intellect, see, for example, Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 10.11.18.

[18]*On the Trinity*, 9.17.12 and 15.27.50.

enjoyment of the object of knowledge. Will comprises the teleological movement from *appetitus* to love.[19]

Augustine's identification of will and love is especially important for grasping his theological anthropology.[20] By distinguishing will from intellect and identifying it with love, Augustine was arguing (in implicit contrast to much of the classical tradition) that intellect alone is insufficient for achieving human good. This is because it is love (and therefore will) that connects us to the teleological realm of goods. Although it is necessary to know the good in order to attain it, knowing is not having. Besides knowing the good we must will the good–it must become an object of our love, since it is through love that we enjoy the good and find satisfaction in it. Knowledge, then, does not bring enjoyment and satisfaction apart from will.[21] It is, accordingly, the will that accounts for the teleological character of human nature. It is because we are volitional creatures that we seek enjoyment and satisfaction. Of course, because of the unity of intellect and will acts of knowledge are always accompanied by some form of love; known objects are always located in a teleological scheme of goods. Further, it is possible to love objects wrongly and so we must keep our eyes on the highest good and subordinate our love for lesser goods to our love for the highest good.[22]

Augustine's account of the image of God marks an advance in Christian thought because it depicts the soul as something more than reason. Early Christian thought, with its affinity for classical philosophy, identified the highest and truest part of human nature with its rational mind. Although there are many places in Augustine's writings that agree with this view, his teaching about the image of God is notable for ensconcing will and love into the nature of mind. Mind, in other

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[19]*On the Trinity*, 9. 12.18 and 15.26.47.

[20]See Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 14.6.8, 14.7.10, and 15.20.38 for the equation of will and love.

[21]Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 10.10.13 and 10.11.17.

[22]Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 11.6.10.

words, is not simply rationality; it also embraces will and love. Moreover, in accordance with the analogy with the Trinity, the equality of Persons militates against any attempt to subordinate will to reason. At least in principle, this provides Augustine's theology with a basis for affirming the existence of nonrational elements of mind in the resurrection state and for defending a positive evaluation of the nonrational elements, a basis that more classically oriented approaches did not enjoy.

## Concluding Remarks on Theological Anthropology Today

Today, Christian theology is in the midst of a long-term rethinking of human nature. One stimulus for this rethinking is the substantial developments in philosophy, such as the critiques of rationalism presented by David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and others. Another stimulus is the views of the human self proposed by the various sciences. The net effect of these stimuli has been to encourage the theological community to reconsider the thesis that the soul is essentially reason and that is possesses nonrational functions only accidentally, as a result of its association with the body.

There is today a substantial and growing body of scientific research showing that the traditional distinction between reason and the nonrational elements of the soul is overwrought. Experimental evidence shows convincingly that emotion plays an essential role in cognition generally and in moral reasoning and behavior. Christian theologians are obliged to pay attention to this research, especially as its results become increasingly more secure.

Given the Christian tradition's near uniform commitment to the rationalist interpretation of the image of God, Augustine's interpretation opens up for us some ways in which to think creatively about human nature in response to scientific theories. Although these theories do not constitute the substance of the idea of the image of God, they can contribute to a theological understanding of the image. To this end, Augustine's conception of the image as including both intellect and will

encourages us to assimilate scientific research and to employ it in the task of understanding the content of the Christian faith.