

if we begin with the notion of authority. The Church is sometimes seen as a quasi-political entity constituted by a certain hierarchic structure of jurisdiction and the sacraments are located within that community. The objection to this view is that it obscures the fact that the whole Church is sacramental, is itself the mystery, is only truly visible to the eye of faith. The Church is first of all the sacramental presence of Christ in the world and from this it follows that there is authority and jurisdiction within it. There will be much more to say of the authority within the Church when I come to speak of the priesthood of the Church.

St Augustine on the Trinity—I

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The *De Trinitate* is not the best known of St Augustine's works. But in my opinion it is his masterpiece, of a far greater doctrinal importance in the history of the Catholic faith than the *Confessions* or the *City of God*. It is indeed something of a theological portent, and as befits such a portent it took an uncommonly long time in coming to birth. As he himself says in a letter to the Bishop of Carthage which prefaces the work: 'I was a young man when I began it, an old man when I had it published'. It seems that he began it about 400 A.D. Twelve years later it was still unfinished, and his friends getting impatient managed to publish the first eleven books of it and part of the twelfth, which was as far as he had got, without his consent. At this he stopped work on it altogether for some time, but was at length prevailed on to finish it—there are fifteen books of it in all—and publish it, perhaps round about 418 A.D. This slowness of composition indicates that it was not a work which had any pastoral or controversial urgency about it. Augustine wrote it because it was on a theme which was of deep personal interest to him; it is a work of reflection on the central mystery of the Christian religion for its own sake.

And yet he begins the work in a tone that is surprisingly polemical. The classic enemies of Catholic trinitarian belief were the Arians, who denied the full divinity of the Son, his uncreated consubstantiality with

the Father. But the Arian menace had been finally overcome before Augustine himself was even a Christian. Arianism was now confined more or less to the Germanic barbarians, many of whom were already settled in some of the European provinces of the Roman Empire as vassals and auxiliaries, and were soon to destroy it altogether in the west. It is not seriously probable that Augustine was aiming his *De Trinitate* at these barbarians.

The truth is, I suppose, that after a hundred years of ceaseless and vehement controversy on this central dogma of Christianity it was psychologically impossible to approach the subject in any but a polemical posture. It was almost, you might say, a matter of literary convention; the only known way of writing a book on the Trinity was to write it *Contra Aliquem*. Augustine has no particular rival to measure his strength with on this topic, and so he begins by introducing a somewhat nominal antagonist, for form's sake. 'My pen', he tells the reader, 'is alertly on guard against the misrepresentations of those who despise the starting point of faith, and are led astray by a love of reason that is premature and out of place'. The unbridled rationalist; a not uncommon animal, of course, but Augustine does seem to set him up here as something of an Aunt Sally, a purely artificial device by which to write himself into the subject. Indeed it is from the opposite wing that he has to meet more actual objections. He writes to a certain Consentius (Ep. 120) to allay his misgivings about applying rational processes to the mysteries of faith at all. And actually, once he gets into his stride in the *De Trinitate*, he shows quite clearly that he is not really concerned with controversy. He is expounding and probing and trying to understand the Catholic trinitarian faith, not defending it against attack.

In terms then of his conventional polemic against his conventional adversary, he sets out his plan. First he is going to prove the Catholic dogma by the authority of scripture, to show that this is the faith which has been revealed to us. He will establish the starting point of faith which his adversary despises, by showing how the dogma has been revealed. Then he will face the adversary with the apparatus of reason which he admires, and show up the hollowness of Arian arguments against the Catholic position, in the name of logic and reason.

The first part of this programme fills books I to IV. In book I Augustine discusses the language of scripture and its bearing on the defined doctrine of the equality and consubstantiality of the divine persons. He investigates with great thoroughness almost all the relev-

ant passages of the New Testament. While many plainly testify to the Son's consubstantiality and equality with the Father, there are others which appear to deny it. For the doctrine he adduces such sovereign texts as 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God' (John 1. 1); and 'Who, when he was in the form of God, did not think it robbery to be equal with God' (Phil. 2. 6); and 'I and the Father are one' (John 10. 30). Against it, 'The Father is greater than I' (John 14. 28); and 'But when all things are made subject to him, then also will the Son himself be subject to him who subjected all things to him' (I Cor. 15. 28). We will come across this last text again. But for the moment he finds the solution to this apparent contradiction in the principle stated in the Athanasian creed, that summary of Augustine's trinitarian doctrine, that 'Christ is equal to the Father in his divinity, less than the Father in his humanity'. Of course this bald utterance scarcely does justice to Augustine's tortuous and nimble investigations; but it does give us the key to his solution.

There are also a number of passages which seem on the face of it to make the Son less than the Father, but which cannot always be applied to Christ's humanity; for example, 'The Son cannot do anything of himself except what he sees the Father doing' (John 5. 19), and 'Just as the Father has life in himself, so he also gave to the Son to have life in himself' (John 5. 26), and again, 'My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me' (John 7. 16). These passages are to be applied to the Son in his divinity, but as testifying to his being *from* the Father, *Deum de Deo*; such words 'indicate his being born of the Father, not any inequality with the Father' (Bk. II, 3).

This first book is concerned with how Catholic faith, as now defined, is to be got out of scripture, and so it is largely an exercise in language, in showing that the doctrine has been revealed. It treats revelation as something static, treats it rather academically as something contained in scripture and to be extracted from scripture by a complex process of linguistic analysis. But this is an inadequate treatment, and it does not satisfy Augustine. Even in this first book he shows himself sensitive to the dynamics and the drama of revelation. When he discusses the text from I Corinthians already mentioned, or rather the whole passage in which it occurs, beginning 'Then shall be the end, when he (Christ) has handed over the kingdom to God and the Father' (15. 24), he is not content merely with interpreting it according to the 'Athanasian' principle already stated; when Christ has handed over the kingdom to God and the Father, he says, means when he has led all the just to the con-

templation of God and the Father face to face. It is only then that revelation will be finally complete; it is to that goal of heavenly vision, of seeing the divine persons as they are, that the revelation of the mystery on which our faith rests in the present dispensation is directed. The doctrine of the Trinity has eschatological dimensions; it only really means anything to a man, to a Church, which is looking forward to the last things.

So revelation is not just a lesson written rather obscurely in a book called the Bible, and rearranged more lucidly by the Church's definitions. It is a long dramatic process of God making himself known, and unfolding his saving will in saving acts. It is to this drama of revelation that Augustine turns his attention in books II to IV. In more technical language, he begins to investigate the *missions*, the sendings of the divine persons. The term 'mission' fits into the linguistic analysis of book I as a word which connotes neither the equality of Christ with the Father in his divinity nor his inferiority to the Father in his humanity, but simply the origin of the Son (and of the Holy Ghost) from the Father in the eternal divine processions. But our interest in the idea of the missions here is that it is by *sending* his Son to become man, and by *sending* the Holy Ghost in the tongues of fire and the mighty wind of Pentecost that God has revealed to us the mystery of those eternal 'goings-forth', the processions within the Godhead; that he has revealed the mystery of the Trinity.

Augustine first considers the element of visible manifestation involved in the divine sendings; the invisible Word manifested visibly in the flesh, the invisible Spirit manifested visibly in the dove (at our Lord's baptism) and in the tongues of fire. He remarks on the important difference in the two cases. We do not and cannot say that the Spirit became dove or fire in the same way as we say that the Word became flesh. In the case of the sending of the Holy Ghost there is no taking on of a created nature, no union of divine and created natures in one person. We do not have a mystery of the 'incolumbation' or the 'ignition' of the Holy Ghost to match the mystery of the incarnation of the Son. It is clear then that the idea of mission, of a divine person being sent, does not involve such a permanent making visible as we have in the incarnation. A transient manifestation is enough to realise a mission.

This being the case, can we talk about any sendings of the Son or the Holy Ghost, or even of the Father, in the Old Testament? After all, there were plenty of visible manifestations of God in the Old Testament; God walking in Paradise in the cool of the evening, the

three mysterious visitors of Abraham, the being who wrestled with Jacob—in both these stories there is a significant oscillation in the text between the Lord and the angel of the Lord; the burning bush, the pillar of fire and cloud, the still small voice that spoke to Elias on Horeb, the vision of Isaias in the temple, the visions of Daniel. Augustine examines all these occasions at great length, and decides that we cannot properly call them missions of one or other of the divine persons, in the full sense in which this divine activity is displayed to us in the New Testament.

His immediate reason for this conclusion is that it is impossible to decide from the text in any given case whether it was the Father, the Son, or the Holy Ghost who was being manifested. In making this point Augustine is engaging in a more live controversy than the rather formal one with which he opened the work, though curiously enough in introducing the subject he affects to dismiss the opinion, which he is about to demolish with relentless thoroughness. 'Let us leave aside', he says, 'those who have been so carnally minded (he means "materialistic") as to think that the Word of God, and the Wisdom which abiding changelessly changes all things, that he whom we call the only Son of God is not only changeable but even visible by nature' (Bk. II, 14). These crude and crass amateur theologians among the faithful—he does not seem to have had any definite heretics in mind—thought that all the Old Testament theophanies were appearances of the Son, on the grounds that he is the visible member of the Trinity. This opinion represents the hardening or fossilisation of a venerable ecclesiastical tradition, which is to be found as something more vital in a number of second-century writers, Pseudo-Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons. They were very much concerned to establish from scripture the 'pre-existence' of Christ, that is to say his existence as the Son or the Word before the incarnation. They 'proved' it simply by attributing the Old Testament theophanies to the Son. Thus Pseudo-Barnabas says in his *Epistle*, 'He (Christ) conversed with Moses' (14. 3). This sort of procedure was not as arbitrary as it may seem at first sight. There is of course no question of proof in any strict sense from the Old Testament of the 'pre-existence' of Christ, but of showing that there was no discrepancy between the Old Testament and Christian belief, and indeed that what Christians believe was the same sort of thing, only more so, as the Old Testament itself bore witness to. Justin Martyr, in his controversy with the Jews, had to stress the Old Testament credentials of Christ; Irenaeus fighting the Gnostics had to display the

Christian testimonials of the Old Testament, which his opponents rejected as the work of a barbarous, not to say evil, deity. Irenaeus therefore countered that the God of the Old Testament, as manifested and revealing himself in it, was none other than Christ. His position is summed up in this sentence: 'What is invisible in the Son is the Father; what is visible in the Father is the Son' (*Adv. Haereses* IV, 6, 6). In other words the Son is not so much the visible member of the Trinity as the *revealing* member—as scripture itself suggests by calling him the Word of God. This is the position which had been vulgarised into the opinion Augustine took exception to, an opinion which in effect treated the incarnate visibility of the Word as an essential attribute, imagined it back into the Old Testament, and thus robbed the incarnation of any special significance.

Augustine, then, first of all states and defends the essential invisibility of the whole Trinity, and has no difficulty in showing up the crudity of the contrary opinion. All theophanies or manifestations of the divine, even the incarnation itself, are showings forth of God through created instruments and in creaturely symbols or likenesses. And all such created effects, again including the incarnation itself, are the work of all the divine persons without distinction. And so we are left with no *a priori* reason for ascribing the Old Testament theophanies to the Son. If we examine each of them on its merits—as Augustine most conscientiously does—the text never provides us with incontrovertible arguments for considering any of them to involve the mission or sending of any one divine person. The relevant texts of the New Testament on the other hand are quite explicit and unequivocal. To take only one, a cardinal text for trinitarian doctrine from *Galatians*: 'But when the fulness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, in order that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying Abba Father' (Gal. 4. 4-6). At the Lord's baptism he himself is unmistakably the Son, because the voice from heaven says so. The voice therefore can only be a manifestation of the Father; and the Holy Ghost, the evangelists tell us in so many words, comes upon him in the likeness of a dove.

This is just what one would expect, seeing that it is in the New Testament and not in the Old that the ultimate mystery of the divine Trinity is revealed. Not that Augustine had any doubt that the Old Testament was full of hints and intimations of this mystery. But they

were no more than intimations, preparing the ground for the full revelation when it should come; they did no more than 'insinuate' the mystery, putting the true hearer and reader of God's word on his guard. Augustine was also alive to the fact that when the mystery was unfolded in the New Testament, this was done in figures, images and language taken from the Old. Hence it was both easy and legitimate for Christian writers to read back into the Old Testament passages, which the New alluded to, at least a presage of the full New Testament revelation—to see in Noah's dove, for example, a type of the Holy Ghost's appearance in the form of a dove at our Lord's baptism, or in the 'man' with whom Jacob wrestled at the ford of the Jabbok a shadow of the incarnation cast before. What Augustine could not admit was that such Old Testament manifestations were sendings, for the very plain reason that they were not unmistakably revelations of the divine persons. At the most they were *testimonia*, one might almost translate 'prospectuses', of the missions to come.

According to the New Testament (e.g. Hebrews 1. 14) these theophanies, like the law and the whole of the old dispensation, to which they were designed to lend the divine prestige, were immediately the work of angels. In this idea the New Testament is simply following rabbinic tradition, the origin of which can be clearly seen in the Old Testament stories themselves. We have already referred to the curious hesitation in the text of many of these stories, as to whether it is the Lord or his angel who is the subject of them; for example the three mysterious men who visit Abraham (Gen. 18) are simply called the Lord, and seem to merge into a single figure as the conversation with Abraham proceeds, first about the son Sara is going to bear, and then about the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorra. The chapter ends and the next begins as follows: 'And the Lord departed, after he ceased talking with Abraham, who returned to his own place. And the two angels came to Sodom'. In other words in the Old Testament God can be said to have appeared and spoken to men, but it was through the ministrations of his messengers the angels 'in the hand of the mediator' (Gal. 3. 19). Augustine interprets this phrase of St Paul as meaning 'in the hand of Christ', that is at his disposition or service. So in effect it was angels who were sent in the Old Testament, not the mediator himself, nor any other of the divine persons.

Augustine is at pains to point out that 'not only were all those things (in the Old Testament theophanies) done through angels, but they were also done *for us*, that is for the people of God who are promised

the inheritance of eternal life' (Bk. III, 22). They were done for us by way of preparing us for the supreme act that would be done for us. Perhaps the most profound reason for refusing to say that the Son or the Holy Ghost were sent in the Old Testament is that the purpose for which they were sent, our redemption and sanctification, were only accomplished in the New. Every Sunday we say in the creed, '*Qui propter nos et propter nostram salutem descendit de caelis et incarnatus est*'. The revelation of the mystery of the Trinity, which is made by the sending of the Son and the Holy Ghost, is a saving revelation, it is done for us. And so in Bk. IV Augustine goes on to give a truly magnificent account of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ. He would not regard this as a digression from his trinitarian theme, for the sacrifice of Christ is precisely the term and the completion of the sending of the Word, it was what it was for, and you cannot understand something properly unless you know what it is for.

'Man had to be convinced', says Augustine, introducing the theme, 'how much God loves us, and also what sort of people we are that he loves; how much he loves us, to stop us despairing; what we are like, to stop us being proud. This supremely necessary point is made by the Apostle as follows: "God demonstrates his love for us, in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us; much more surely, therefore, being now justified in his blood, shall we be saved from wrath through him" (Rom. 5. 8)' (Bk. IV, 2). As the climax of what is best described as a quasi-mystical meditation on the redemption, he gives us this classical statement of the sacrifice of Christ: 'What more just and holy a priest could there be than the only Son of God, who had no need to sacrifice for the purging of any sins of his own? And what could be more appropriate for men to receive when it was offered for them than human flesh? And what could be more suitable for this sacrificial death than mortal flesh? And what could be purer for purifying the vices of mortals than flesh conceived without any infection of fleshly lust in a virgin's womb? And what could be more acceptably offered and received than the flesh of our sacrifice, which was our priest's own perfect body? For in every sacrifice there are four things to consider, whom it is offered to, whom it is offered by, what is offered, and whom it is offered for; and here, the one true Mediator, reconciling us by a peace offering to God, remained one with him *to* whom he offered it, made one in himself *for* whom he offered it, and was himself *who* offered one and the same as *what* he offered'. (Bk. IV, 19).

The purpose of this sacrifice, of this redemption, is to join us to

God, in whom alone we can hope for eternal life. Eternal life means knowing him in truth as he is. Augustine quotes John 17. 3: 'This is eternal life, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent'. And so in the sending, God is revealed to our faith, as he will at the end be revealed to our vision, as he is. The sendings manifest to our faith those eternal processions within the Godhead which in heaven will be manifested to our vision. So it is with this consideration of the sending of the Son and the Holy Ghost that Augustine concludes in this fourth book the first part of his work on the Trinity, in which he has been 'establishing the starting point of faith'. I cannot do better than myself conclude by quoting his own words: 'Thus the Word of God is sent by him whose Word he is; he is sent by him of whom he is born; the begetter sends, the begotten is sent. And then precisely is he sent to anyone when he is known and perceived by him, insofar as he can be known and perceived. The Son therefore is not said to be sent because of his being born of the Father, but either because of his appearance in this world as the Word made flesh, about which he says: "I came forth from the Father, and came into this world" (John 16. 28); or even because at any time he is perceived by someone's mind, as it is said, "Send her (divine Wisdom) to be with me and work with me" (Wisd. 9. 10). Insofar then as he is born eternally, he is eternal; but that he is sent in time means that he is made known to someone

But when the Father becomes known to someone in time, he is not said to have been sent, for there is no other person for him to be from or proceed from. Wisdom indeed says: "I came forth from the mouth of the Most High" (Eccli. 24. 5), and of the Holy Ghost it is said: "He proceeds from the Father" (John 16. 26); but the Father proceeds from no one. As therefore the Father begot and the Son is begotten, so also the Father sent and the Son is sent . . . And as being born means for the Son being from the Father, so being sent means for the Son his being known to be from the Father. And as being the gift of God means for the Holy Ghost proceeding from the Father, so being sent means for the Holy Ghost his being known to proceed from the Father' (Bk. IV, 28-29).