

GOD/TRINITY—TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Trinity and Conversion in Augustine
Convener: Aristotle Papanikolaou, Fordham University
Moderator: Anthony Godzieba, Villanova University
Presenters: Andrew Salzmann, Benedictine College
Anthony Keaty, Blessed John XXIII Seminary

In his paper entitled “Conversion to the Trinity: The Shape of Augustine’s Thought,” Andrew Salzmann’s central thesis is that, contrary to recent trinitarian dismissals of trinitarian appropriations, the affinities between postmodern and premodern forms of thought warrant a retrieval of Augustine’s understanding of Trinitarian appropriations modified through the lens of Hugh of St. Victor. Salzmann begins with a reading of Augustine’s *De Trinitate* given by Lewis Ayres in his recent book, *Augustine and the Trinity*. On Salzmann’s reading, Ayres attempts to argue against the general trend of interpreting the psychological analogy in the *De Trinitate* as the most adequate analogy. For Ayres, the psychological analogy is simply the culminating analogy in a lifetime of searching for Trinitarian analogies with the world at large. Augustine’s search for analogical triads was a search for a particular kind of analogy for a particular kind of triune God: not a God whose unity in trinity could be described as three persons in one essence, an explanation which, Ayres argues, Augustine rejects, but rather a God who is irreducibly threefold. Salzmann amplifies the claim that understanding this kind of God is what drives Augustine’s attempt to make sense of the notion of inseparable common operation, which grounds the notion of appropriations. If God acts in a threefold manner, then all created realities reflect this threefold causality, and being itself is threefold. In no divine action does the trinitarian person ever act alone, but the mind’s eye, when formed by faith and reason, can “see” the trinitarian persons reflected in divine actions and appropriate characteristics of those actions, or even entire actions to one particular person.

Against Karl Rahner’s and T. F. Torrance’s rejection of the notion of appropriation, Salzmann draws on the work of Neil Ormerod, who distinguishes between that which is cognitively defensible in the doctrine of the Trinity and that which is still meaningful but not cognitively defensible. Salzmann argues that the doctrine of appropriations should be classified with the latter. Ormerod argues that appropriations allows for an integration of the Trinity into broader theological discourse in a meaningful, if not cognitively flawless, way. Augustine’s understanding of appropriations, however, needs modification from Hugh of St. Victor, the *Alter Augustinus*, to account for how the Incarnation can be spoken of as an action proper to the Word alone yet one performed by the entire indivisible Trinity. Salzmann ends by drawing in the Australian theologian, Graham Hughes, who asserts that the theological payoff of this modified form of trinitarian appropriations is a fruitful engagement with postmodern threefold pattern of thought, in contrast to modern thought’s tendency toward binary thinking.

In “The Role of the Conversion from the Outer to Inner Person in Augustine’s Understanding of Procession,” Anthony Keaty argues that one reason Augustine turns to the psychological analogies for the triune God in books 8–15 of the *De*

Trinitate is because obstacles that prevent acceptance and deeper adherence to the living, triune God manifested in the economy of salvation lie in false convictions and warped desires within us. Keaty makes this argument by first turning to Augustine's discussion of the divine mission of the Son in book 4, in which Augustine explains that the sending of the Son is directed toward an inner transformation, which is required in order to perceive the mission of the divine Son. According to Keaty, the structure of the *De Trinitate* reflects Augustine's view that we cannot convincingly talk about the economy of salvation, the missions of the Son and Spirit, without also talking about the desperately needed inner renewal in the human person that the missions bring and that understanding the missions properly requires. For Augustine, the faith as professed at Nicaea cannot be rendered convincing without facilitating and deepening this inner renewal.

It is for this reason among others that Augustine begins book 8 with a discussion of many of the same themes discussed in books 1–7 but in an inner mode that will involve a discussion of mind, understanding and will, as well as arguments meant to make convincing the inner attitude of faith that is the beginning of transformative healing. After discussing a knowledge of self in distinction from the studious acquisition of knowledge of the world around us and identifying the trinity of memory, understanding, and will in book 10, Augustine discusses this psychological trinity when the mind is occupied chiefly with created things (books 11 and 12) and when the mind begins to be healed (books 13 and 14). Keaty argues that a consideration of book 13 indicates that the psychological analogies provide Augustine with the opportunity to advance inner healing brought by the divine missions by persuading and encouraging the reader to make this healing vision of faith in the crucified and risen One her own. Keaty ended by suggesting that Augustine's use of psychological analogies in order to address the inner obstacles to faithful adherence to the living, triune God, is an important conversation partner with contemporary trinitarian theologies, such as that of Elizabeth Johnson, who in *She Who Is*, challenges exclusive patriarchal metaphors for imaging God, calling them obstacles to human flourishing with God.

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