Introduction

I

Even as summary accounts continue to repeat the established caricatures of the past century, new readings of Augustine's Trinitarian theology grow in scholarly detail and density. These new readings, which have largely emerged over the past three decades, argue for new accounts of the fundamental dynamics of Augustine's Trinitarianism; they suggest new questions that we should ask if we are to study him well; they suggest new texts from his corpus as paradigmatic. Many of the older readings of Augustine's Trinitarian theology that have been displaced by this body of scholarship – and which, it must be noted, have not been extensively defended in the scholarly literature for many years – tended to view Augustine in highly negative fashion as the initiator of disastrous trends in Western Christian thought. Augustine was presented as marking a shift in the history of early Christian Trinitarianism, his own overly strong commitment to the divine unity partially being the result of his Neoplatonic engagements and strongly influencing those who came after him. This commitment led him away from the heritage of earlier Greek Nicene theology (and, in some readings, from earlier Latin theology). Even many of those who viewed Augustine positively – and saw his differences from his predecessors as merely delineating sets of complementary theological trajectories – operated with similar assumptions about his work. At the same time, his Trinitarian theology was engaged through an almost exclusive focus on the *De trinitate*.[1]

[1] The significance of Theodore De Régnon's *Études de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité* (Paris: Retaux, 1898) in setting the agenda even for those who reversed or adapted his categories has been frequently noted since the publication of Michel Barnes's 'De Régnon Reconsidered', *AugStud* 26 (1995), 51–79. The two most influential twentieth-century treatments of Augustine, both of which offer the now standard critique, are Michael Schmaus, *Die psychologische Trinitätslehre des hl. Augustinus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1967) and Olivier Du Roy, *L'Intelligence de la Foi en la Trinité selon Saint Augustin. Genèse de sa Théologie Trinitaire jusqu'en 391* (Paris: etudes Augustiniennes, 1966). In many ways it was reaction to Du Roy's volume that began the shifts

This book is both parasitic on and a contribution to these new readings and it may thus be helpful to note in general terms some of their common themes and emergent trajectories. I say 'emergent trajectories' because, since the mid-1960s, most scholars of Augustine's Trinitarian theology have held to some of the positions I describe here: only in the past fifteen or twenty years has it begun to be possible to point to those who hold to all. It is important to note that these common themes concern not only questions of doctrinal 'content', but also questions of method. Thus, the past few decades have seen a growing emphasis on studying Augustine against the background of his immediate peers and predecessors, both theological and philosophical. In the specific field with which I am concerned, once the unlikelihood of Augustine's Trinitarian theology being best understood as primarily an adaptation of earlier Greek pro-Nicene theology was established by Berthold Altaner, scholars have come to put increasing weight on Augustine's interaction not only with major Latin theologians such as Ambrose and Hilary, but also with the less-well-known figures of late fourth-century Latin theology and on attempting to identify what might have been available to Augustine in translation. At the same time, rather than assuming that Augustine as major thinker must naturally have been in primary dialogue with the major figures of classical philosophy, scholars have come to see his philosophical knowledge as far more piecemeal, far more dependent on his readings in figures such as Cicero and Apuleius who summarized the opinions of those we moderns count as the 'major' figures of the ancient philosophical tradition. Students of Augustine have also become far more attentive to the extent to which his philosophical and theological knowledge grew over his extensive literary career: the Platonic engagements of the *De civitate Dei* tell us little about his knowledge during the 380s.

These methodological emphases have resulted in a greater readiness to note significant development in Augustine's thought and even the experimental quality of some of his mature texts. A text such as the *De trinitate* is thus increasingly viewed not as a non-polemical summative statement, but as the product of many years of development – and of a development that did not end with the final words of that text. Increasing awareness of the peculiar concerns and nature of this work is also leading scholars to become aware of discontinuities as well as continuities between Augustine's statements here and elsewhere in his corpus. Against

in reading of Augustine that I sketch here. For further discussion of modern readings specifically of the *De trinitate*, see Roland Kany's excellent *Augustins Trinitätsdenken. Bilanz, Kritik und Weiterführung der modernen Forschung zu 'De trinitate'* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

this background Augustine certainly appears as a distinctive figure, but he does so in part because of his highly personal engagement with those predecessors.

In terms of content, the new scholarship that I am delineating here has directly rebutted some of the most common charges against Augustine made in the last century or so. This recent literature has paid much attention to the ways in which Augustine's Trinitarian theology is deeply shaped by Christological themes. Our faith in the Trinity begins in attention to the scriptural rule of faith. Our growth in understanding is shaped by the transformation of intellect and affection from an obsession with the material to a love for the eternal that occurs in Christ (and through the Spirit) that, in turn, is a following in reverse of the route by which Christ's humanity reveals the divine.

Increasing attention to this Christological focus has been closely related to a growing interest in the exegetical foundations of his Trinitarian theology. Rather than viewing Augustine's Trinitarianism as the product of primarily philosophical concerns, recent scholarship has seen Augustine's theology as deeply rooted in the exegetical dimensions of the Trinitarian controversies that were so central a part of late fourth-century theological development. We will see a number of significant examples of this engagement throughout the book.

The same scholarship has argued against the idea that Augustine's Trinitarian theology inappropriately asserts the unity of God over the diversity of the persons. One of my own central arguments in this book will be that while recent scholarship has rightly emphasized Augustine's insistence on the irreducibility of the persons, we can push further and see him as moving, in the decade between 410 and 420, towards a sophisticated account of the divine communion as resulting from the eternal intra-divine acts of the divine three. While this account is stated very tentatively, Augustine is consistently clear that the Trinitarian life is founded in the Father's activity as the one from whom the Son is eternally born and the Spirit proceeds. In this emphasis Augustine is, I will suggest, revealed as one of the most interesting and important interpreters of Nicaea's 'God from God and Light from Light'. Building on the recent work of Richard Cross, I will also argue that Augustine's idiosyncrasy and theological fruitfulness stem in part from the manner in which he rejects the usefulness of genus and species terminologies for describing the relations between the divine three.

It is important to note that the scholarly trends I have summarized here have resulted not only in the development of a sophisticated response

to the extensive critique made of Augustine's Trinitarianism over the past century, but also in a reappraisal of the positive reading of Augustine common within the Thomist tradition. In a way parallel to the best of the *ressourcement* movement during the twentieth century, this new reading suggests that while Augustine is at times a precursor of medieval concerns, at many points he is pursuing a different agenda in a different theological and philosophical context. The emergence of this new Augustine, then, need not be tied to an attempt to supplant Thomas, but to present others alongside Thomas as sources for the Catholic theologian.

I intend that this book contribute to these revisionist readings by focusing on two themes: Augustine's struggles to articulate the Trinitarian communion or life of the three irreducible 'persons'; his developing understanding of how we grow in understanding of the Trinity, how we progress towards the contemplation of God that is a participation in the Trinitarian life. Given these foci, it is important to note three things that this book is not. In the first place, it is not a detailed study of the development of Augustine's Trinitarian theology through to the end of his career. I have discussed the development of particular aspects when it was important to do so, but I have made no systematic attempt to describe the history of every theme that I discuss. In particular, although I have made some use of material from Augustine's *Contra sermonem Arrianorum* (418) and from his late polemical engagement with the Homoian bishop Maximinus (427), I offer no extended treatment of these works. Eventually, I hope, Michel Barnes will produce a book on the development of Augustine's Trinitarian theology complementary to this that will fill significant gaps in our knowledge. In the second place, this book is not a commentary on the *De trinitate*. Although I spend considerable time with the *De trinitate*, I frequently use exposition of that text as a way into other key texts of Augustine's corpus that help to illustrate its concerns. In other places I discuss the *De trinitate* in order to highlight its peculiar and at times unique status. This is especially true of the extended discussions of Chapters 10 and 11.[2]

In the third place, this book does not offer a detailed study of how Augustine sees the saving action of God as a Trinitarian event, nor how

[2] A full-scale commentary on the work is much to be desired. Basil Studer, *Augustins De Trinitate. eine Einführung* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005) is a welcome addition to the literature. But while Studer's work is of great significance for the revisionary scholar of Augustine's Trinitarian theology, in many ways it represents only a bridge between older and newer ways of reading him. For example, it is interesting that he continues (pp. 186–8) to see in Augustine a 'unitarian' tendency in part based on his supposed reliance on a 'psychological' analogy.

he consequently sees Christian life as shaped by the Trinity. Some central themes are developed, others adumbrated. Most importantly, at a number of points through the book I discuss ways in which Augustine understands Christian life as a growth towards a contemplation that is also a participation in the divine life. Augustine sees this growth as occurring through the reformation of the soul by Christ and Spirit. The exploration of faith is an activity both philosophical and, for those so gifted, an integral part of the reformation effected through grace. Chapter 6 hints at a number of ways in which Augustine sees the Spirit as active within the Body of Christ, demonstrating that for all his insistence on the interior leading of the individual Christian, Augustine sees the work of sanctification as a corporate and ecclesial work. The Epilogue to the book in part draws together some of these themes, but there is room here for a host of further studies.

II

Like most authors I would be delighted if readers begin with the Introduction and make their way through the whole of this book. Nevertheless, without offering a hostage to fortune (or reviewers) it may be helpful to note that there are a number of points at which one could begin reading. Chapters 1–3 form a distinct unit, discussing the origins of Augustine's Trinitarian theology. I argue that Augustine's texts, even those written before his baptism in the spring of 387, reveal a twofold engagement with non-Christian Platonism and with Latin pro-Nicene theology. Over the years that follow, these initial engagements are sustained, Augustine's developing Trinitarianism being formed significantly by his anti-Manichaean concerns. These concerns set an agenda and push Augustine in directions that will mark his Trinitarian theology throughout his career. In 393 we see Augustine's pro-Nicene debts emerge with far greater clarity in the *De fide et symbolo*, a text whose importance has been consistently underrated. These chapters revolve around very detailed readings of a few early texts in Augustine's corpus and will be hard going for those readers unfamiliar with this material. Nevertheless, for a persuasive case to be developed, this work is necessary.

Chapters 4–6 also form a unit. Chapter 4 initially considers a summary text from *De trinitate* 1 whose date is uncertain but which likely contains some early material, and ends with a wider consideration of Augustine's attitude to the text of Scripture as a foundation for doctrinal argument. Chapter 5 considers the background to Augustine's account of our

possible growth in understanding of Trinitarian faith, looking at his early engagement with the Liberal Arts tradition. It is this engagement, despite a number of significant shifts, that will shape his career-long meditation on the character of understanding and analogical reasoning. Chapter 6 discusses Augustine's 'Christological epistemology' which emerges in and which lies at the heart of *De trinitate* 1–4. Only as we come to understand how Christ teaches about the immaterial and simple divine life through speaking in temporal and material terms can our intellects ascend towards understanding of that divine life.

In Chapters 7–10 I approach Augustine's mature Trinitarian ontology, his account of the divine three as irreducible even as the Trinity is necessarily the one simple source of all. Chapter 7 considers Augustine's treatment of Son and Spirit as revealers of the Father's 'hidden eternity'. It is the revelation by Son and Spirit of the Father that provides the dogmatic foundation for Augustine's account of our ascent towards contemplation. At the same time, this discussion begins to suggest an account of the role of the Father and the nature of the divine communion very different from that one might expect from summary accounts of Augustine's Trinitarian theology. After an initial outline of Augustine's understanding of the divine being and substance, Chapter 8 explores Augustine's rejection of genus and species terminologies for explaining the divine unity and diversity and looks at the alternative language he suggests. Chapters 9 and 10 argue that hints about the relational existence of the divine three found in *De trinitate* 5–7 only come to fruition outside that work, and particularly in exegesis of John 5.19 and Acts 4.32. In his mature reading of these texts Augustine develops an account of the Spirit as the one who – as the Father's eternal gift – eternally brings into unity Father, Son and Spirit. In this account we find one of the most striking and fruitful, if also most idiosyncratic, of pro-Nicene Trinitarian theologies.

Finally, Chapters 11 and 12 also form a unit, focusing on aspects of *De trinitate* 8–10 and 14. My goal here is to draw out the experimental nature of the arguments offered and the problematic status of describing the argument as analogical. The practice of reflection Augustine recommends and models is one in which the terms of Trinitarian faith guide investigation of the *mens*, and investigation of the *mens* promotes understanding of the terms of faith: the entire process occurs within the grace-led life. In these discussions we see the mature product of Augustine's early engagement with the Liberal Arts.

Throughout this text readers expecting detailed engagement with the numerous modern abuses and (more recently) celebrations of Augustine's

Trinitarian theology will be disappointed. I have also restricted my overt discussions of the great body of scholarly writing on Augustine's Trinitarian thought; I have purposely focused on exposition of his texts. Similarly, extensive discussion of Augustine's understanding of what has come to be termed 'selfhood' is also absent. Some of these discussions have been very useful, but I have wanted to resist diverting attention from Augustine's discussions of the Trinity itself. In the interests of retaining readers who may not be familiar with Augustine's texts – and those of the others considered through the book – I have also quoted a little more extensively than strictly necessary.

III

In the preface to *Nicaea and its Legacy* I suggested that this treatment of Augustine would constitute a companion volume. While this is still the case, it is so in ways that may not be immediately clear. Most directly, I intend this book to offer an account of one of the most significant, idiosyncratic and compelling examples of pro-Nicene Trinitarian theology. In *Nicaea*, I argued for the importance of particular shared themes among pro-Nicene theologians and suggested the importance of further work on the relationship between different pro-Nicene traditions. This book offers both an example of how those themes are refracted by one particular author's work and thus something of how that author relates to his own tradition. Rather than assuming that Augustine is representative of 'Western' tradition, I suggest ways in which Augustine demonstrates common themes found in virtually all pro-Nicenes, ways in which Augustine shares themes with other Latin pro-Nicenes, and ways in which Augustine's developing theology separates him from those other groups. Of course, my own thinking about many of the questions in *Nicaea* has itself changed considerably over the past few years. It is my hope to produce a much larger and more comprehensive version of *Nicaea* at some point in the future.

In the second place, my intention is that this book model aspects of the theological practices I commended in the last chapter of *Nicaea* (and which are for the most part a selection of those used by many other historical theologians). Frequently it has been the more polemical aspects of that discussion that have caught the attention of readers.[3] Without much

[3] For further discussion of *Nicaea*, see the papers contained in a special edition of *HTR* 100/2 (2007).

overt discussion my hope is that the patterns of attention to Augustine's texts I show here give further indications of how I think some of the positive aspects of that earlier discussion might be borne out.

One aspect of that earlier discussion hidden, I suspect, by the broad nature of my argument about the structure of modern 'systematic' theology, was my statement that I did not think I was offering a dense vision of what theology should 'look like'. While I think I can isolate some of the factors that have made modern systematic theology engage the legacy of Nicaea so thinly, I do not think that we can pretend that we can practise theology simply as Christians did in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. In part, this is so because of some significant differences in the social contexts and structures within which we practise. In part, it is so because Christians (at least those who accept the Spirit's guidance of the Church in the ways at which I hinted there) find themselves at the end of much further definition and discussion of the structure of our basic dogmas and mysteries. In part, it is so because our adaptation of Nicene theological practices should, I suggest, sit alongside our adaptation of some forms of modern historical consciousness. We need to learn a different plurality of reading practices than that which the ancients assumed.

In the context of such uncertainty about the practice of theology – and here it is important to remember that my fundamental concern is with our theological thinking about the most basic questions of dogmatic theology – what then should we do? One aspect of the answer to this question must be that we will not all do the same thing. Just as an author or teacher is most self-deluded when she imagines her book to be the only one on a putative reader's shelf, so we must think of multiple ways beyond modern theological practices. The ways in which I choose to practise as theologian and historian will not be the only game in town. It is against this background that I strongly suggest the importance of learning modes of close attention to those held up before us in the Church's memory. Eventually I will have to produce a longer study of how 'newness' enters theology, but for the moment it is necessary only to restate the principle suggested towards the end of *Nicaea*'s last chapter, that I see little need, in our attempts to understand the most basic articles of faith, for separate moments of 'historical' and 'systematic' theology. My own contribution to conversation about the future of dogmatic theology is to suggest that exploration of the Trinitarian theology of a figure such as Augustine necessarily combines fidelity to those the Church holds up before us in its memory with the arrival of newness into the world.

It may also be worth saying that in any such longer study I would argue that the modes of attention and accountability to the past that a theologian ought to show should be understood not only as displays of appropriate scholarly commitment, but also as modes of prayer. Reverence for those held up in the Church's memory need not be an alternative to critical study, but a mode of testimony to the action of God in human lives that were always only on the path of sanctification: we may combine attention to the failings of those the Church holds up before us with confidence that their thought provides an ever-trustworthy point of reference in our own search to understand the faith. In other terms, attention to the surviving texts of an author is perfectly compatible with imagining those authors not to be dead, but as now living in and through the light of Christ. We imagine them now perhaps not as ever-present defenders of their works, but as aware of the failings of those very same texts, aware that all our searching is completed in final contemplation. Thus our historical investigations may be rigorous and searching even as we are guided towards these authors as constant foci for the attention. That attention rewarded is also of course the work of grace. If our historical work is of value in the struggle to understand what we believe then it is so as both our work and that of the Spirit:

> When people see [your works] with the help of your Spirit, it is you who are seeing in them. When, therefore, they see that things are good, you are seeing that they are good. Whatever pleases them for your sake is pleasing you in them. The things which by the help of your Spirit delight us are delighting you in us. 'For what man knows the being of man except the spirit of man which is in him? So also no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.'[4]

[4] *conf.* 13. 31.46 (CCSL 27. 269).

PART I

Origins