

“The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity:  
Mt. 5:8 in Augustine's  
Trinitarian Theology of 400”<sup>1</sup>  
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“Nothing must mute the fact that all truth lies right before the eyes, and that its appropriation is a natural consequence of the facts. There is no need for any additional perfection of man as though he could not focus on the ‘supernatural’ truth with his normal equipment for knowing.”

Wolfhart Pannenberg, Revelation as History

“Thus from every point of view our theological wisdom is bound up with the incarnate, personal wisdom of God, is conformed to him, and receives from him its characteristic divine-human signature.”

Matthias Joseph Scheeben, The Mysteries of Christianity

## **Introduction**

The subject of Augustine’s understanding of the vision of God has been described in modern scholarship primarily in terms of the problematic of a neoplatonic ascent to God, which was, it clearly seems, so much a part of Augustine’s early aspirations. At the same time, Augustine’s Trinitarian theology has recently seemed to some to possess too static a doctrine of God, with a diminished sense of the significance of Christology as the foundation of any theology of God, that is, of the Trinity. Yet to speak about “the vision of *God*” can itself lead inquiry away from the Trinitarian problematic that Augustine encountered so substantially towards the end of the fourth century, in which questions are cast in terms of the our vision of the individual Persons of the Trinity – and the difference in the “visions” of each Person possible for us.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank (alphabetically) Lewis Ayres and Basil Studer for their responses to an earlier draft of this essay. I would also like to acknowledge the influence of Ronald Heine’s Perfection in the Virtuous Life, Patristic Monograph Series, no. 2 (Cambridge: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975) as a precedent for the approach I take here to Augustine’s Trinitarian theology.

Books I-IV of de Trinitate are concerned with the question of the appearances of the Son in the theophanies of the Old Testament. According to Augustine's opponents, the Homoians,<sup>2</sup> the appearance of the Son in these theophanies serves as proof that the Son is not true God; only the invisible - and non-appearing - Father is the true or real God. The same argument is applied to the Incarnation. The very appearance of the Son, his visibility, the vision or sight of him, constitutes sufficient evidence that the Son is not, cannot be, God. If we restate this critique more precisely in terms of the economy of the Trinity, then what is being argued by the Homoians is that the Son's role as revealer of the Father means that the Son cannot be God as the Father is God. The very attributes which constitute, as it were, the Son's capacity to reveal are judged as decisive indications of the Son's inferior status to the Father who is revealed by the Son - the Father who is the "one true God". Augustine's engagement with this argument begins immediately at the beginning of de Trinitate, for Book I is concerned directly with the Homoian argument that the Son's character as revealer - or the Son's 'noetic visibility' - constitutes the Son's inferiority to the Father. Indeed, the Homoian argument for an anti-Nicene trinitarian theology based on the Son's character as revealer places that very character at the center of any account by Augustine of the Trinity; by the year 400 one of Augustine's primary tasks in de Trinitate (and in his trinitarian writings generally) is to articulate an understanding of the Son's revelatory role which supports a theology of the

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<sup>2</sup> "Homoian" names what past scholarship would have misleadingly called "Arian." The term derives from the characteristic doctrine that the Son is "like" the Father - as distinguished from the "homoiousian" doctrine that the Son is "like the Father in essence" or the "Anomoian" doctrine that the Son is "unlike the Father in essence."

Son's equal divinity with the Father. The "vision of God" has become a Trinitarian problem.

In the early books of de Trinitate Augustine develops his understanding of the Trinitarian and christological issues contained in the dispute over the content of the theophanies. As he makes this development Augustine uncovers *links* between Trinitarian doctrines and the experience of faith, between the question of what of God is seen in the theophanies (when is functionally equivalent to the question, When does one sees God?) and the question of how does faith bring the Christian to his or her proper end, namely, delight in the vision of God the Trinity? These two questions are brought together in the judgment by Augustine that Mt. 5:8 is significant for both questions. The exegetical connection of Mt. 5:8 to the question of how does faith bring the Christian to the vision of God is obvious, but, as we will see, there was a trajectory of Latin theology which also connected the beatitude – with its invocation of a vision of God -- to a theology of the Trinity and Incarnation. This connection is based in part on the decisive role visibility and invisibility played in traditional arguments against the modalists for the separate existences of the Father and the Son, as well as the role visibility and invisibility play in then-contemporary anti-Nicene doctrines of the different natures of Father and Son. There is thus a Latin tradition which gives Mt. 5:8 a real Trinitarian-christological significance, and Augustine incorporates that significance into his own Trinitarian and christological doctrines.

The Trinitarian controversy as Augustine encounters it is argued in terms of whether God can be seen at all, has the Son been seen, and if yes, when and how? Aside from the historical question of when was the Son seen (e.g., in the OT theophanies, the

Incarnation, etc.), there is an epistemological question at play, because for Augustine “to see” means “to know”. Augustine finds the answers to these questions in Phil. 2:5-7, the root narrative of the Trinity, the very language of which Augustine understands to describe visual or epistemological categories (i.e., *Form of God*, *Form of Servant*). Augustine’s judgment is that all the Persons of the Trinity can be seen only at the resolution of history – the endtime – and he describes the object(s) of this vision very specifically: what will be seen is either the Form of Man or the Form of God. Given the visual content of the christological drama described in Phil. 2:5-7 and the visual resolution of that drama at the final judgment, the statement Mt. 5:8 makes about the sight of God is of profound significance, for it is the promise of the very vision of which Augustine has spoken. As a promise, Mt. 5:8 carries both the tension of the delay in the vision Christians hope to have and the means to resolve that tension, namely, purity of heart. The meaning of purity of heart lies in the possession of faith, and faith “proves” the reality of that final vision through the reality of what is gained now through faith.

Augustine invokes Mt. 5:8 immediately in his polemical engagement with the anti-Nicene Homoians, and the passage appears repeatedly in Book I of *de Trinitate*.<sup>3</sup> Augustine treats Mt 5.8 explicitly in Book I because it is a foundation for what follows. The question of “the pure of heart will see God” is not a question specific to, or localized in, just book I of *de Trin* – it is not even specific just to books I-IV, although these books are indeed about one key kind of “seeing God” – the theophanies. The exegesis of Mt. 5:8

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<sup>3</sup> *Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi deum uidebunt*. Of the five citations of Mt. 5:8 in *de Trinitate*, four of these are in Book I of the work; the one other is in Book VIII: lib.1 , cap. 8, line 117; lib. 1, cap. 13, line 28; lib. 1, cap. 13, line 108; lib. 1, cap. 13, line 167; lib. 8, cap. 4, line 12 (according to CETEDOC).

provides the means by which Augustine “clears the ground” for a proper understanding of the sight of God.<sup>4</sup> Above all, Augustine starts with what Mt. 5:8 means “now,” that is, what it means for those Latin-speaking Christians who know their own tradition and who are aware of the state of doctrine in or around the year 400.

I will argue in this article that Augustine’s doctrine of the vision through Christ of the Trinity at the end-time should be understood as Augustine’s solution to the Homoian subordinationist understanding of the Son’s visibility. This specific thesis presupposes that Augustine’s doctrine of the eschatological vision of God should be understood as a polemical issue since the significance of the Son’s role as revealer of the Father was at that time a point of controversy in trinitarian theology. The historical context meant that any doctrine of the vision or knowledge of God was set within theologies of the Trinity and the Incarnation. This polemical setting of Augustine’s doctrine of the vision of God, is manifested in his exegesis of Mt. 5:8 in de Trinitate I, and it remains as the backdrop for his other treatments of the Trinity. In de Trinitate I the vision of the Trinity at the end-time is promised by God in Mt. 5:8; the christological character of this vision is structured by Augustine’s polemically motivated exegesis of 1 Cor. 15:24-28, while Phil.

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<sup>4</sup> The clearest example of the continuing presence of the Mt. 5:8-supported theology of de Trin. I-IV is to be found in Ep. 147 (dated to 413), which contains all the key points I am identifying in de Trinitate; the polemical Trinitarian provenance for Augustine of the question of our vision of God is especially clear in that epistle. (I will return to this work below.) Basil Studer shows the relationship between Ep. 147 and fourth century Latin readings of the theophanies in his Zur Theophanie-Exegese Augustins, *Studia Anselmiana* LIX (Roman: Liberia Herder, 1971).

2:5-7 specifies the alternate objects of knowledge or sight.<sup>5</sup> The constellation of these three Scripture texts supports Augustine's account of how the Son is revelatory.

Augustine offers what could be called a sophisticated account of what *exactly* is revealed by the Son in the Incarnation (and *when*). The real revelation is to a certain extent *ex post facto* since faith - which is not a kind of *sight* - is that which recognizes what is being revealed. Thus, having the *right* faith is important, since until the end-time what knowledge of the Trinity that we have is through faith.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This article has points of contact with the thoughts of at least two contemporary theologians, Colin Gunton and Jean Luc Marion. Gunton has argued that Augustine's Trinitarian theology is "uneconomic" because it is anti-material, and one important sign of this anti-material, anti-economic bent is Augustine's rejection of OT theophanies as being appearances of God. See Gunton's "Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990), 33-58. My article will show that such an account of Augustine's understanding of the significance of the theophanies misreads Augustine and renders his theology more simplistic than it is. On the other hand, Jean Luc Marion has, in a variety of writings, argued that Christians do not presently understand the event (the Incarnation) that they "know," that Christian faith entails accepting this present lack of understanding, and that understanding will come only eschatologically. In thoughts like these Marion has much in common with Augustine. Where Marion and Augustine differ is in their evaluation of the words that describe that event, the regula and creeds; with Augustine the creeds must be treated very seriously because they provide the intermediate step in the purification of the heart. Creeds have a primary place among the matter which works the discipline of faith upon us, enlightening our understanding. Without the creeds, Marion would not know that the event of two thousand years ago was the unequivocal and unique event it was, the event that is both fully real and wholly unintelligible in this lifetime.

<sup>6</sup> If I were to propose a definition of faith in technical language reasonably cognate to Augustine's thought, I would say that *Faith is a [affective] consent or assent through which one interprets events.*

### **I. The Trinitarian Content of Mt. 5:8: De Trinitate I.16-20**

Augustine's understanding of the Trinitarian significance of Mt. 5:8 appears in his earliest sermons on the creed, *Sermon* 214 (391) and *De Fide et Symbolo* (393). In *Sermon* 214, Augustine says that the credal affirmation that Christ will come to judge the living and the dead is to be understood with the sense that in the end time "Christ will judge in the same form as that in which he was judged." In this sermon Augustine casts the distinguishing features of the saved and the damned in visual categories: some believed in who and what they saw, and these are saved; others despised who and what they saw, and these are damned. Augustine then closes his discussion of the creed's theology of the Son by quoting Mt. 5:8. In *De Fide et Symbolo* Mt 5:8 again ends Augustine's summary of the faith: the beatitude supports Augustine's point that the truth of the Trinity is "seen" only by those with a pure heart – and seen by those only in proportion to the degree of their purity of heart. The "sight" that Augustine speaks of is not a beatific sight, but the intellectual sight (or knowledge) of propositions about God, as, for example, that there can be no accidents in God. In short, the knowledge arising from the "sight" of propositions of the faith – i.e., the creed – is conditioned by the relative purity of heart of the believer.

The first two appearances of the Beatitude in de Trinitate I occur within a tightly argued passage which runs from 16-19: this portion of the book consists of Augustine's explanation of 1 Cor. 15:24-28, a scriptural passage which anti-Nicenes claimed

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Through faith we are able to interpret the events (or words) of Jesus' life – those things materially perceived -- and recognize the truth about God that such events communicate or affirm.

supported their belief that the Son is not true God.<sup>7</sup> De Trinitate. I.16 begins with Augustine's assertion that "The Son will not be deprived of the kingdom when he hands it over." The idea that the Son *would* be deprived of the kingdom when he hands it over is not simply a thought experiment on Augustine's part. In the second half of the fourth century Latin Homoians articulated their opposition to the trinitarian faith by then associated with Nicaea, 325, through just such an exegesis of 1 Cor. 15:28.<sup>8</sup> For example, in the Acts of the Council of Aquilaea 39, the Homoian Palladius evidently cites 1 Cor. 15:28 when he says that the Son is subject to the Father.<sup>9</sup> In anti-Nicene eyes, this scriptural passage says that at the end of time the Son will be subject or

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<sup>7</sup> In Greek theology of the first half of the fourth century 1 Cor. 15:28 figured prominently in the hyper-Nicene (modalist) theology of Marcellus of Ancyra. Augustine seems unaware of the association of the Scripture passage with Marcellus.

<sup>8</sup> On Latin Homoianism, see (chronologically): Michel Meslin, Les ariens d'Occident 335-430 (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967); the Introduction by Roger Gryson to Scolies Ariennes sur le Concile d'Aquilée (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1980), Sources Chrétiennes 267; and Daniel H. Williams, Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene-Arian Conflicts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). The old judgment that Latin Homoianism owes *tout cour* to Ufilias and, through him, to Eunomius, is twice a canard. The most widely available survey of Homoian theology is that by R. P. C. Hanson in his The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988); Hanson, however, collapses the differences between Greek and Latin Homoianism and, as well, assumes a priori that all Homoians are devoid ("free") of any significant literacy in philosophy.

<sup>9</sup> See Gryson, Scolies Ariennes, p. 359. Some scholars think that this Palladius is the author of the Arian Sermon that Augustine later writes against.



subordinated to the Father.<sup>10</sup> Augustine, then, must offer a rebuttal of the Homoian exegesis of the First Corinthians passage. It is important to remember that by the time Augustine wrote de Trinitate I he had already devoted his attention to challenging the Homoian exegesis of this passage: Eighty-Three Diverse Questions # 69 (usually dated to 394-6) is, in fact, an exegetical reflection upon 1 Cor. 15:28 (with recurring attention to John 14:18 and Philippians 2:5-7).<sup>11</sup> The cause of Augustine's reflection upon 1 Cor. 15:28 is, as he tells us in the first line of the work, the heretical exegesis some give to the passage. Section 16 of de Trin. I thus begins with a problem already once engaged: "The Son will not be deprived of the kingdom when he hands it over."

Augustine's own exegetical argument then follows: "The fact is that the man Christ Jesus, mediator of God and man, now reigning for all the just who live by faith, is going to bring them to direct sight of God, to a face-to-face vision... that is what is meant by 'when he hands the kingdom over to God and the Father,' as though to say 'When he brings believers to a direct contemplation of God and the Father'."<sup>12</sup> Using the discourse

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<sup>10</sup> The fact that we use the word "subordination(ism)" as a generic category for a kind of trinitarian doctrine should not desensitize us to the fact that in Latin Homoian theology there is, literally, the attribution of a "subordinate" status to the Son, based upon exegesis of scriptural texts such as 1 Cor. 15:28.

<sup>11</sup> I have dealt extensively with Diverse Question # 69 in my "Rereading Augustine's Theology of the Trinity," in The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity, Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, S.J., and Gerald O'Collins, S.J., eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 145-176. See also Lewis Ayres, "'Remember that you are Catholic' (*serm.* 52.2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God," Journal of Early Christian Studies, 8 (2000), 39-82.

<sup>12</sup> All English translations of de Trinitate are taken from Saint Augustine - The Trinity, Edmund Hill, trans., The Works of Saint Augustine, Part I, Volume 5 (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991); here, p. 76. (Further citations from this translation will be referred to simply as Hill.)

to Philip in John 14, Augustine then makes the point that the vision of the Son *is* the vision of the Father, and vice versa. But Augustine has one very important qualification to add to this vision: not for the last time Augustine will cite 2 Cor. 5:6, “[A]s long as we are in the body we are abroad from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight.”<sup>13</sup>

The eschatological location of the turning over of the Kingdom is a consistent part of Augustine’s reading of the pauline text; eschatological, but *not* wholly unrealized. In Diverse Questions # 69 Augustine had argued that the “coming-to-be” aspect of the verse “Hallowed by thy name” in the Lord’s Prayer does not mean that God’s name is not now holy; rather, the prayer asks that God’s name be recognized as holy. Similarly (Augustine argued), “when he [the Son] will hand the kingdom over” does not mean that the kingdom is not now under the dominion of God; rather, Paul speaks of the time when God’s kingdom will be recognized in and through the Son. Or, as Augustine puts it, “when he [the Son] will show that the Father reigns”. At the endtime the Son will “show” or reveal that the Father reigns as He has always reigned. In Diverse Questions # 69 Augustine argued that God’s dominion has not always been, indeed has never been, *shown*: it has, rather, been *believed*. What will happen at the endtime is that the Son will *show* that the Father reigns, so that what believers have known through belief will be made manifest to them. Augustine says, “Therefore Christ will hand the kingdom over to God and the Father when through him the Father will be known by sight, for his kingdom consists of those in whom he now reigns through faith.”<sup>14</sup> For Augustine the meaning of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. See Sermon 21.1-4 and de Trin XIV.4 for developments of this idea.

<sup>14</sup> 83 Diverse Questions, David L. Mosher, trans., Fathers of the Church Series vol. 70 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), p.175.

“the Son will hand the kingdom over” is that *then the Father will be known by sight as He - and the Trinity (“God”) - are known now by faith.*

Augustine then concludes this part of his argument by invoking Mt. 5:8: “Contemplation in fact is the reward of faith, a reward for which hearts are cleansed through faith.... Proof that it is this contemplation for which hearts are cleansed comes from the key text, ‘Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.’”<sup>15</sup> In this the first appearance of Mt. 5:8 in de Trinitate Augustine’s understanding of the role of Mt. 5:8 is that it is proof that the vision of God is indeed to happen.<sup>16</sup> Christ promised that God can be seen; but that vision, we should understand, will occur in the future, at the

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<sup>15</sup> Hill, p. 77. Augustine adds that because of the inseparability of the Father and the Son, “it makes no difference whether sometimes the Father alone or the Son alone is mentioned as the one who is to fill us with delight at his countenance.”

<sup>16</sup> The “Trinitarian application” of Mt. 5:8 is also to be found in Augustine’s Third Tractate on John, a work roughly contemporary to the early books of de Trin. (perhaps exactly contemporary.) At 18.1 of the Third Tractate Augustine refers to the problem posed by the Homoians and answers: anything seen in an OT theophany was created and was not the substance of God, for those things were seen by the eyes of the flesh. “How is the substance of God seen? Ask the gospel. ‘Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.’ Those who do not understand the necessarily spiritual character of the vision of God – i.e., the Homoians – think that something uncreated can be seen through the sense of sight... or, Augustine dangles, do they imply that *the Son is best understood as created?* – a doctrine anti-Nicenes have otherwise tried to wash their hands of for decades due to its scandalous association with the early Arius. (Note, also, that by this logic, Augustine excludes the introduction of a possible third category, i.e., *not God but not created.*) Thus, in the Third Tractate Augustine links Mt. 5:8 with a correct understanding of what of God is visible (and how), and contrasts this understanding with the idea that the Son was visible in the OT theophanies. See Tractates on the Gospel of John 1-10, John W. Rettig, trans., Fathers of the Church Series vol. 78 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), p. 89.

endtime. Mt. 5:8 refers to an eschatological event;<sup>17</sup> next Augustine identifies the object of that future vision.

Augustine then introduces Phil 2:5-7 to explain what will be seen by the pure of heart when Christ reveals the kingdom – when the “King” is also revealed. Phil. 2:5-7 has already come into de Trin I as the “regula fidei” which provides a guide by which scriptural passages are to be understood.<sup>18</sup> Now Augustine uses the two-form distinction to describe the content(s) of the final vision; to be more precise, he uses Phil. 2:5-7 to distinguish the different visions believers and non-believers will experience. We need to note that Phil. 2:5-7 is cast in the language of sight: the Son moves from the “form” of God to the “form” of the servant. The Greek is *morphe*, the Latin is *forma*.<sup>19</sup> The visual character of this description may not have any continuing significance in the Philippians’ hymn, but for Augustine the visual component of “forma” is decisive: it names the proper object of sight – which is also the proper object of knowledge. The Son’s “two forms” thus correspond to two alternative epistemological acts and objects: *form of servant* or *of man* corresponds to the material object of perception of both believers and non-believers;

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<sup>17</sup> An explicit identification of that promised vision as an eschatological event is found in *Sermon 214*. When Augustine quotes Mt. 5:8 at de Trin. I.28 and in I.30 (and echoes its language at I.31), the vision is identified with the endtime judgment, and the object of that vision is Christ as Form of God (from Phil. 2:5-7).

<sup>18</sup> My own expectation is that the “normative” function of Phil. 2:5-7, as well as the great significance of “form” terminology specifically, are the products of the Apollinarian controversy.

<sup>19</sup> Most Latin patristic citations of Phil. 2:5-7 agree with the use of *forma* (as the Vulgate later will), but Tertullian uses *effigie* instead in Adversus Marcionem V. 20: “... quod in effigie dei constitutus non parinam existimavit paritari deo...sed exhausit semetipsum accepta effigie servi.”

*form of God* corresponds to the spiritual and immaterial object of perception at the endtime of those who have believed.<sup>20</sup> While under the *form of servant* the Son does not reveal God or divinity as direct knowledge:<sup>21</sup> while incarnated the Son reveals God or divinity only through the instrumentality of faith, which not being a kind of seeing is not “knowledge” in the sense that Augustine normally uses that word.<sup>22</sup>

At the endtime those who have responded to Jesus as *form of man* with faith will “see” God – that is, they will contemplate him. Those who did not respond with faith to Jesus as *form of man* will have their final vision limited to the human form of the Son that their faithlessness limited him to. Augustine’s own words are worth quoting here:

Both bad and good, of course, are going to look upon the judge of the living and the dead, but the bad, we may be sure, will only be able to see him in the form by which he is the Son of man, though in the proud splendor that will be his as judge, not in the mean guise he once presented as prisoner in the dock. The form of God, however, in which he is equal to the Father, this the wicked will undoubtedly not see. They are not pure of heart, and *Blessed are the pure of heart, because they shall see God*. This is to

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<sup>20</sup> This specific understanding of the two forms as objects of knowledge seems not to predate Augustine, and is likely his own development. As I will show in the next section, the “eschatological” and Trinitarian exegesis of Mt. 5:8 is found in Hilary of Poitiers.

<sup>21</sup> None of this is understood by Augustine to diminish the revelatory character of the Son as Form of God; indeed, as I point out, as Form of God the Son is transparent to the Trinity.

<sup>22</sup> Faith is not knowledge because it is not a “seeing,” either sensible or intellectual, and knowing is understood to be a kind of sight. Augustine’s understanding of the relationship between faith and knowledge is treated more fully in the last section of this article.

be a *face to face seeing*, and it is promised to the just as their supreme reward and it will happen *when he hands over the kingdom to God and the Father* (in which we understand the seeing of his own divine form)....<sup>23</sup>

If the resolution of the drama whose beginning is described in Phil 2:5-7 is one of sight, then Mt. 5:8 is the description of that resolution from the perspective of the saved, the pure of heart. If, at the endtime, the Form of God will be revealed, the pure of heart are those who will see it.<sup>24</sup> It is clear that Augustine thinks of this vision of the Form of God as a Trinitarian event. The testimony of Christ's words to Phillip in John 14 about the sight of the Son being the sight of the Father, and vice versa, as well as the credal-type testimony regarding the common substance and unity of operations shared by the

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<sup>23</sup> De Trin. I.28, Hill, p. 87. The decisive nature of the promise of Mt. 5:8 is referred to again in Augustine's later writing, Ep. 147: "Since, therefore, we do not see God in this life either with bodily eyes, as we see heavenly or earthly bodies, or with the gaze of the mind, as we see some of the things which I have mentioned and which you most certainly behold within yourself, *why do we believe that he is seen*, except for 'Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.'?" Ep. 147.3, Letters of Augustine, Wilfred Parsons, trans., Fathers of the Church Series vol. 20 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), p. 172, emphasis added.

<sup>24</sup> In her studies on the theme of "purity of heart" in early Christianity (especially monasticism) published in Studia Monastica VIII (1966), X (1968), XI (1969) and 12 (1970), Juana Raasch does not treat Augustine's exegesis of the Beatitude, and in general shows little interest in the Latin Patristic use of the concept. Recently reflecting upon Raasch's work and developing it further, Gertrude Gillette makes no comments on the presence of the exegesis of Mt. 5:8 in Augustine's articulations of his Trinitarian theology. See her "Purity of Heart in St. Augustine," in Purity of Heart in Early Ascetic and Monastic Literature, Harriet A. Luckman and Linda Kulzer, eds. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), pp. 161-195.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit provide the basis for Augustine to assert that the vision of the Son as Form of God will itself become a vision of the Father and of the Trinity. The Son - - as the vision of the “Form of God” -- will become transparent to the vision of the Trinity.<sup>25</sup>

Is the Son a revelation of the divine in any direct, available-to-the-senses, way? Is the Son divinity-insofar-as-it-may-be-perceived? The question can be pushed even further: is the Son, as divine, the occasion of human faith? Augustine’s answer to all of these questions is *No*: the Son *is not* a revelation of the divine in any direct, available-to-the-senses, way; the Son *is not* divinity-insofar-as-it-may-be-perceived; the Son, as divine, *is not* the occasion of human faith (the Son, as human, is). The divinity of the Son is, until the eschaton, unseen and unseeable, although it can be symbolized or signified by some created artifact, just as the divinity of the Father and Holy Spirit can be, and is.<sup>26</sup> If the Homoians have defined divinity as necessarily invisible, then Augustine can be unflinching because one could hardly have a firmer or more emphatic doctrine of the necessarily invisible character of divinity than Augustine does - which is why Augustine says, as he must say, that the divinity of the Son is invisible. This invisibility must describe the Son’s divinity whenever or however he exists: whether as pre-Incarnate

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<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that when speaking of this eschatological vision Augustine does not employ union, participation, or assimilation language in any significant way; the object of our vision – the Trinity – remains “out there,” not something we are assimilated into by that vision. In this regard at least, Augustine’s position corresponds more to Plato’s understanding than to Plotinus’.

<sup>26</sup> In the Incarnation, the divine Word reveals his presence through the signification of a created human nature. See Mark D. Jordan, “Words and Word: Incarnation and Signification in Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*,” *Augustinian Studies* 11 (1980), 177-196.

Word, as Incarnate, or as ascended but not yet glorified. All that is visible in the Son is his humanity, or, more aptly identified, all that is visible in the Son is the “*form of servant*” or the “*form of man*”; before taking on the “*form of servant*” and taking on a human existence the Son was invisible, since he was only in the “*form of God*”. In short, Augustine does not dispute the identification of divinity as invisible, just as he does not dispute that any of the other attributes enumerated or implied by, e.g., 1 Timothy 6:16-17 - such as “immortal” “only” or simple - applies to divinity.<sup>27</sup> He merely argues that such attributes must be applied equally to and univocally of the Son (or to the Holy Spirit) as they are applied to the Father.<sup>28</sup>

The last point I want to make in this section of the article is to note that the use of 1 Cor. 15:24-28 in constellation with Mt. 5:8 and Phil. 2:5-7 to ground a doctrine of the eschatological vision and its christological locus is a feature exclusive to de Trinitate, Book one.<sup>29</sup> After de Trin. I, the Corinthians passage drops out of Augustine’s description

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<sup>27</sup> Another Latin of Nicene sympathies who identifies divinity with invisibility is Niceta of Remensiana. Like Augustine, Niceta speaks of the Incarnation using the categories of “unseen divinity, seen humanity,” but Niceta uses these categories as part of his argument for the reality of the Incarnation. See his de Fide 4, written sometime between 375-85.

<sup>28</sup> For example, the invisibility of the divinity - the *Form of God* - in Jesus is why Augustine argues so strongly for the importance of John the Baptist, John’s recognition of Christ, and his announcement of Jesus’ identity. As Jesus walked in the darkness that recognized him not, his divinity was hidden except for the light that John the Baptist shone upon him, so Augustine says in the Second Tractate on John, another work that is roughly contemporary to the first four books of de Trinitate.

<sup>29</sup> It should be observed that these three scriptural passages, like many other key passages in books I-IV, also figure in the Anthropomorphite controversy. It is hard to say to what degree this controversy carries over into Augustine’s engagement with anti-Nicene theology at this time, except to note that both



of the doctrine of the character and type of the final vision. Just as I remarked at the beginning of this essay that all but one of the references to Mt. 5:8 in de Trinitate occur in the first book, so too is it true that all but one of the references to 1 Cor. 15:24-28 in de Trinitate occur in the same book; the one other occurs in Book II.<sup>30</sup> Only in the Reply to the Arian Sermon, usually dated to 419, and his Debate with Maximinus, usually dated to 428, is 1 Cor. 15:24-28 once again invoked, but not as a witness to the delivery of the kingdom to the vision of God. Between de Trinitate I and the Reply to the Arian Sermon 1 Cor. 15:24-28 makes no appearance whatsoever in Augustine's writing on the Trinity. I believe that this change in Augustine's understanding of scriptural testimony on the final vision alerts us to the fact of specific influences at work as he writes de Trin. I. These influences, which I will describe momentarily, are the theological environment in which Augustine developed his doctrine of the eschatological drama by which God is seen by the faithful. This doctrine, once developed, remained in Augustine's thoughts about how and what the Son reveals of God. The doctrine, as I have described it here, is repeated frequently by Augustine in his writings after de Trin. I. However, in the writings after de Trinitate I, it is Mt 5:8 that provides the scriptural witness to the fact of vision occurring at

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the Anthropomorphite and Homoian movements cite many of the same scriptural passages in order to prove the Son's intrinsic visibility, although the Anthropomorphites are orthodox in the Trinitarian theology (as Augustine remarks in Ep. 148). See Alexander Golitzin, "'The demons suggest an illusion of God's glory in a form': Controversy over the Divine Body and Vision of Glory in some late Fourth, early Fifth Century Monastic Literature," Studia Monastica (forthcoming).

<sup>30</sup> In other words, either Augustine's polemical engagement with 1 Cor. 15:24-28 ends, or his exegetical rehabilitation of that scriptural text is transformed into another kind of argument.

the endtime.<sup>31</sup> I would hazard to say that the over-all eschatological character or logic of Augustine's theology as a whole later became so pronounced and structured that a specific witness to the eschatological timing of the vision enjoyed by the pure of heart was unnecessary. As we will see, the eschatological placement of the fulfillment of Mt. 5:8 is something that Augustine shares with Hilary; I will show, moreover, that the doctrinal circumstances in which Augustine invokes the Beatitude are identical to the circumstances in which Hilary invokes the Scripture passage in his work on the Trinity, namely in order to refute a doctrine of the Son's intrinsically *visible* and therefore *subordinate* status.<sup>32</sup> I turn now to the Latin context for Augustine's Trinitarian understanding of Mt. 5:8.

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<sup>31</sup> Explicit recourse to Mt. 5:8, alone or in constellation with 1 Cor. 15:24-28 or Phil. 2:5-7, does not occur again in de Trinitate, but it does occur in writings parallel in time to that work, and there are what I would identify as implicit references to Mt. 5:8 in books XIV and XV of de Trin. in descriptions of the significance of the Incarnation: In de Trin XIV.4, Hill, p. 372: "We do not see now, but because we believe, we shall deserve to see, and shall rejoice at having been brought through to sight by faith."; in XV.44, Hill, p. 429: "Faith unfeigned would be purifying the [... believers'] heart in order that what is now seen in a mirror might one day be seen face to face." This doctrine, introduced in de Trin I, becomes fundamental in Augustine's theology, and finds substantial and moving expressions in his other works (such as En. Ps. 86).

<sup>32</sup> However, I do not want to leave the impression that an eschatological and Trinitarian understanding of Mt. 5:8 such as Augustine offers is the only possible orthodox understanding of that Beatitude. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, in his sermon on this passage, concludes that the promised vision of God is an interior vision of the restored image of God in us, insofar as we are the "image and likeness of God". Here the Matthew passage is not an "end-time" or eschatological promise, nor is the object of that promise - i.e., the sight of God - externalized, or as Augustine would put it, a "face-to-face" vision. A Greek position more like Augustine's can be found in Clement of Alexandria (a statement that is true for many subjects) at Stromata V.1.

## II. The Polemical Context for Latin Exegesis of Mt. 5:8

According to Latin Homoians in the second half of the fourth century, the appearance of the Son in the theophanies and the Incarnation serves as proof that the Son is not true God; only the invisible - and non-appearing - Father is the true or real God. These appearances by the Son, his visibility, constitute sufficient evidence that the Son is not God. A succinct articulation of this Homoian doctrine can be found in the fragments from Palladius collected in the Scolia Arriana. Palladius says:

There is the question of whether the Son is the invisible God. It is written of the Father: “No man has ever seen, nor can see” [1 Tim. 6.16] him; and similarly, “The invisible, immortal, only God” [1 Tim. 6:17]; and “No one has seen God and lived” [Ex. 33.20]; and again “No one has ever seen God, the only-begotten who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” [Jn. 1.18]. But about the Son it is said, “We have seen his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father” [Jn. 1.14]; and “God appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre” [Gen. 18.1]; and then there is the episode with the blind man, who said, “Where is the Son of God, that I may believe in him?” and the Son of God himself said in reply, “He whom you would see, and to whom you would speak, I am that one.” [Jn. 9.36-37]<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Fragments of Palladius, #106. Gryson, Scolies Ariennes, pp. 290-1.

There are several features to note about the theology articulated here. First, a key distinguishing feature of the true God is understood to be His invisibility. Second, the Son's distinguishing feature is his visibility. Third, theophanies of the OT - such as the appearance to Abraham at Mamre - are understood to be appearances of the Son. We can note in passing that such an understanding is traditional in both Latin and Greek theology - a point I will return to below. Note also that OT titles for God's presence - specifically, the "Glory" - are appropriated to the Son. Fourth, as one might expect from point three, the Son's visibility is found equally in the NT and the OT - Palladius moves seamlessly from appearances in the OT to appearances in the NT. The fifth feature to note about the theology of the Scolia fragment- even if of a slightly different order than the first four - is that Palladius expresses this theology as exegesis. First Timothy 6:16-17 figures prominently, as does Ex. 33.20 and John 1:18. The First Timothy passage is an important one for every generation of what we will call 'anti-Nicenes' - beginning with Arius' own theology.<sup>34</sup> The fact that First Timothy 6:16-17 is the key text by which all the other appearance texts are understood is of fundamental importance for an appreciation of the sight of God as a point of Trinitarian and christological controversy in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.

The Palladius fragment I have quoted does not include any reference to Mt. 5:8, and there are no references to that Beatitude in all of the material collected in the Scolia. The partially surviving Homoian text known as the Opus imperfectum in Matthaem is

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<sup>34</sup> See my "Exegesis and Polemic in De Trinitate I," Augustinian Studies 30 (1999), 43-59; here, p. 47.

lacking what exegesis of 5:8 there might have been originally.<sup>35</sup> There are, however, two citations of Mt. 5:8 in the fragments of Latin anti-Nicene writings edited by Gryson.

These fragments date from the late 4<sup>th</sup> or the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. The first comes from a

Commentary on the *Gospel of Luke*:

"In a beautiful way does the Gospel describe the arrangement and description of events because instruction is commended, and spiritual issues: piety and justice, holiness and truth, frugality and moderation. [A]nd if anything is called a *virtus* from the virtues [it is that] which is not seen with the eye and is contemplated with a *pure heart*; not regarded by sight but embraced by the mind: `Blessed are the *pure in heart* for they will see God`".<sup>36</sup>

This passage offers two interesting points. First, it begins by attributing a conventional or traditional set of moral virtues to the Christian life, and then links the possession of these virtues to "purity of heart". Second, the fragment specifies that what is to be seen is not seen with the eye but with the mind. This is a commonplace judgment that will be typical of Augustine's theology as well, although he will not be using such a conclusion to use visions of the visible Son as a means of excluding Him from true divinity as the Homoian author probably was doing here.

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<sup>35</sup> See Franz Mali, Das "Opus imperfectum in Matthaeum" und sein Verhältnis zu den Matthauskommentaren von Origenes und Hieronymus, Innsbrucker theologische Studien, Band 34 (Tyrolia-Verlag: Innsbruck, 1991), p.359; and Opus imperfectum in Matthaeum, J. van Banning, S. J., ed. CCL 87B (Turnholt, 1988).

<sup>36</sup> Expositio euangeli secundum Lucam, 1,1, Roger Gryson, ed., CCL 87, p. 199.

The second fragment comes from an Exposition of Psalm 15:

“With this knowledge, therefore, of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, it is proper that we seek eagerly this which is promised in the present Psalm, namely a dwelling in the tabernacle of the Lord and rest in his holy mountain because such a soul is without sin, and that soul, led up to the heights, is able to walk the way, concerning which we related earlier. With clear and undistracted eye, and able to attend that journey and always to look upon these good things which are prepared accordingly, it is said, ‘Where your treasure is there will be your heart also’; it [the soul] also sees God as the giver of good things, as it is said, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.’ This is why it is said ‘he who walks without sin and acts in justice’.”<sup>37</sup>

Again Mt. 5:8 is connected to a fundamentally moral or ethical reading, which is to be expected given that the Psalm is a moral exhortation. Indeed, what these two Homoian fragments have in common is precisely a moral or ethical exegesis of this Scripture passage. However traditional such a reading of Mt. 5:8 may have been in Latin Christianity, we will see a change among some Latins Nicenes, as I will show shortly; for the moment, there is more to say about the moral reading of the Matthew passage.

The same kind of moral understanding of the Matthew passage is found in Hilary’s Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew.

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<sup>37</sup> Fragmenta theologica arriana e codice Bobiensi rescripto, Frag. 16, Roger Gryson, ed., CCL 87, p. 252.

“*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.* To those who are pure in heart - for they follow after nothing polluted or filthy, [nothing] contrary to divine splendor nor, seeking for a vision of God, do they allow their acuity to be dulled by a defiled conscience – he [the Lord] promises the vision of God. In other words, those who endure for the sight and encounter with God through the brightness of the soul and purity of life become capable of beholding Him. Not until we are perfected in spirit and changed into immortality [I Cor. 15:53] will we discern what has been prepared only for those who are pure in heart, which is in the immortal God.”<sup>38</sup>

This is a passage that Doignon has worked through carefully and fruitfully - both in his notes to the Sources Chrétiennes edition of Hilary’s *In Mattheum* and in separate articles.<sup>39</sup> In particular, Doignon has identified Hilary’s description of what it means to be “pure in heart” – specifically, where Hilary says “... for they follow after nothing polluted or filthy, [nothing] contrary to divine splendor nor, seeking for a vision of God, do they allow their acuity to be dulled by a defiled conscience...” - as a citation of material from Cicero.<sup>40</sup> This passage makes it clear that the moral reading of Mt. 5:8 is conventional among a variety of Latin Christians of the mid-fourth century – although we do not find this passage appearing in Augustine’s writing. There is another exegesis of

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<sup>38</sup> *In Matt. IV.7., Sur Matthieu*, Jean Doignon, ed. and trans., Sources Chrétiennes 254 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1978), pp.126 -127.

<sup>39</sup> Jean Doignon, “Une exégèse d'Hilaire de Poitiers sur le désir de voir la face de Dieu (Hil., *In Psalm 118*, 8, 7/8),” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 41 (1994), 542-545.

<sup>40</sup> In “Une exégèse d'Hilaire de Poitiers” Doignon identifies “...nihil enim pollutum et sordidum ad occursum diuinae claritatis insistit et ad conspectum Dei acies obsoletae mentis hebetatur” as being from Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* I.73, and the *Hortensius* fragment 97 (Muller).

Mt 5:8 by Hilary that is more directly significant for Augustine, namely de Trinitate XI.39, which is the only time that Hilary cites Mt. 5:8 in his de Trinitate. The development in Hilary's theology that we find in de Trin XI is profound and deserves substantial attention on just those terms, but now I turn to Hilary's de Trin. XI for how it figures as a precedent for Augustine.

In de Trinitate XI Hilary is arguing against Homoians who take certain NT passages as proof that the Incarnation disqualifies the Son from being true God as the Father is true God. These Homoians regard 1 Timothy 6:16-17 as a definition of the Father's divinity which excludes the Son (just as has been seen to be the case for Palladius). The key Scripture passages which Hilary is concerned to rehabilitate or re-interpret are Phil. 2:5-7 and 1 Cor. 15:27-28. The Homoians evidently understand both the "form" language and the talk of a transition from divine to servant in Phil. 2:5-7 as indications of the Son's subordinate status. 1 Cor. 15:27-28 is the passage that speaks of the Son "handing over" the kingdom to the Father at the end of time - a description which again indicates the Son's subordinate status. Hilary's use of Mt. 5:8 occurs in his explanation of 1 Cor. 15:27-28:

He [the Son] shall deliver the Kingdom to God the Father, not in the sense that He resigns His power by the delivering, but that we, being conformed to the glory of His body, shall form the Kingdom of God. It is not said, *He shall deliver up His Kingdom*, but, *He shall deliver up the Kingdom*, that is, deliver up to God those of us who have been made the Kingdom by the glorifying of His body....The just shall shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father, and the Son shall deliver to the Father, as His



Kingdom, those whom He has called into His Kingdom, to whom also He has promised the blessedness of this Mystery, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

This passage from Hilary is significant for several reasons. Hilary is offering a polemically motivated counter-exegesis of 1 Cor. 15:27-28 to refute a subordinationist reading of that Scripture text by Homoians. Hilary's argument assumes that the "handing over of the kingdom" by the Son to the Father is a way of articulating the eventual realization of human salvation. This salvation occurs through our being joined to the glorified or transfigured "body" of the Son. According to Hilary, Mt 5:8 is the promise of our eschatological vision of God, the Father, through the activity of the Son. Such a logic, sketched here in its bare essentials, forms the basis of Hilary's argument not simply to the effect that the Son's giving of the Kingdom to the Father is by no means an act of subservience or subordination, but also that the handing over of the kingdom is in fact a Trinitarian or christological event (as we might say that the transfiguration was a "christological" event), for it is the transformation of the "body" of Christ that is (as we can call it) the material, efficient, and formal cause of our salvation. The end or resolution of that salvation is the enjoyment of God, which is what - according to Hilary - Mt 5:8 promises: the final contemplation of God. *The pure of heart* are otherwise known as members of the Kingdom united in Christ's "body"; *the sight of God* is the Son presenting that Kingdom - in that "Body" - to the Father. If the "handing over of the kingdom" can legitimately be described as a Trinitarian event then so is the "vision of God" as the climax of that event. At this point in Hilary's theology, it need hardly be remarked, Mt 5:8 is no longer simply about being a good person. What *can* be usefully

remarked is that much of Augustine's argument about the vision of God through the Son is to be found in Hilary: the exegesis of the Beatitude as the promise of an eschatological vision, the link between this exegesis with that of the "handing over of the Kingdom"; and the anti-Homoian application of this argument to refute a subordinationist understanding of the Son's visibility.

There is one last example that we need to mention of a Latin author using Mt 5:8 in a Trinitarian context: Novatian. This author is the earliest of all the pre-Augustinian authors I cite here, and he obviously predates the Trinitarian controversies of the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Yet it is worth remarking that Novatian stands as one of the last representatives of the Trinitarian controversies of the late second and early third centuries, controversies primarily (but not exclusively) involving modalism.<sup>41</sup> Mt. 5:8 figures explicitly in Novatian's anti-modalist argument at De Fide 28 (26-28). There Novatian says:

[I]f Christ had been the Father himself, why did he promise, as though it were a future reward, what he had already bestowed and granted? When he says "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God," we find him promising the contemplation and vision of the Father. Therefore, he had not yet granted it; for why would he promise it, if he had already granted it? He would have given it, were he the Father; for he was being seen and had been touched. When Christ himself is seen and touched by the

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<sup>41</sup> Other figures in these controversies would be Tertullian, Hippolytus and Origen, as well as "Praxeus," Noetus, Paul of Samosata and Sabellius. A very insightful account of second and third century Latin Trinitarian theology which should not go forgotten is that by Ernest Evans in the Introduction to his edition, with translation, of Tertullian's Treatise Against Praxeas (London: S.P.C.K., 1948).

crowd and yet promises and declares that the clean of heart shall see God, he proves by this very fact that he, who was then present, was not the Father because he promised, while actually present to their gaze, that whoever was clean of heart would see the Father.... However, because he was the Son and not the Father, it was fitting that the Son, inasmuch as he is the Image of the Father, should be seen; and the Father, because he is invisible, is deservedly promised and designated as the one who would be seen by the clean of heart.<sup>42</sup>

In short, because Mt 5:8 is a promise of the vision of God, and Christ himself, in plain view as it were, offers this promise, Christ cannot be the object of this vision. Novatian uses this argument to show that the Son cannot be the Father, and thus the modalists are wrong. But, as Novatian says explicitly here and elsewhere in *De Fide* the Son is to be understood as intrinsically visible in contrast to the Father's intrinsic invisibility. This is a common anti-modalist argument at this early time: we distinguish the Son from the Father - and we are thus certain of their separate identities - on the basis of the Son's visibility and the Father's invisibility.<sup>43</sup> This way of distinguishing Father

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<sup>42</sup> *Novatian: The Writings*, Russell J. DeSimone, trans., Fathers of the Church Series vol. 67 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1974), pp. 98-99.

<sup>43</sup> In *Against Praxeus* 14-15 Tertullian argues that a real distinction between Father and Son is proved by the scriptural understanding that God the Father is invisible but the Son is visible, God that has been seen. Tertullian says, for example, "Here one of our adversaries will wish to contend that the Son also is invisible as Word and as Spirit, and, maintaining that the Father and Son are in like case, to affirm rather that Father and Son are one and the same. But we have deposed that the Scripture, by its distinguishing of visible and invisible, advocates a difference." Evans, p. 149. The same reasoning is found later in Novatian: in *On the Faith* 31 Novatian lists the different categories of existence that distinguish Son from

from Son is the bedrock of Latin Trinitarian theology: the Son is distinguished from the Father as the visible Image of the invisible Father. This is the theological function, in early Latin Trinitarian theology, of the identification of the Son as the one who appears in the OT theophanies. Origen is the occasion of a tectonic shift in *Greek* Trinitarian theology when he describes the Son as the “invisible” Image of the Father, but it is not until Hilary – one hundred and thirty years later - that a Latin will argue that the Son, too, is invisible, and that the Son must be invisible if he is truly the Image.

I have lingered over Novatian in this way not simply because he is a striking example of an early Latin use of Mt. 5:8 in a Trinitarian context - though I do think that this is indeed true of Novatian. I have lingered over Novatian’s use of Mt. 5:8 because I think that he is a source - albeit not the exclusive source - of a tension in the Trinitarian theologies of Hilary and Augustine.<sup>44</sup> There is a mainstream, authoritative tradition in

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Father; along with born/unborn, begotten/unbegotten and comprehensible/incomprehensible, there is visible/invisible. The Trinitarian significance of the difference between visible and invisible was treated in full earlier at [On the Faith](#) 18. I think that A. D’Ales misrepresents the significance of Novatian’s doctrine of the Son’s visibility by resolving the antinomy (between invisible Father and visible Son) via an anachronistic reading. See his [Novatian: Etude sur la theologie romaine au milieu de III siecle](#) (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1925), p. 126.

<sup>44</sup> I am not here specifically claiming that Augustine read Novatian, but that Novatian, like Tertullian before him and Lactantius after him, taught the received orthodox Latin Trinitarian theology: *the Son is distinguished from the Father by the Son’s visible nature*. This doctrine is a Latin Trinitarian commonplace. However, that Augustine did indeed read Novatian – despite the latter’s schismatic status – is more possible than is perhaps first imagined: some of Novatian’s writings travel under Cyprian’s name; and Gregory of Elvira uses him freely in his writings of the 360s and again in 404, indicating that Novatian’s writings were not without authority and currency. (Gregory is an important precedent to note,

Latin Trinitarian theology which allows for a subordinationist christology for the sake of combating modalism, and this subordinationist christology centers directly upon the role - the identity - of the Son as the revealed presence of God. This, I think, is why fourth and fifth centuries Latin Trinitarian theologies found the theophanies such a difficulty for Nicene orthodoxy: not simply because there were spokesmen articulating a problematic, subordinationist doctrine of the theophanies, but because such subordinationist interpretations of the theophanies were traditional. This fact was the foundation for Latin Homoian theology, and it presented those with Nicene sympathies with what I think can most accurately be described as a “double-bind,” namely, that the doctrine of the Son’s visibility supports the understanding that he has a real, separate existence (he is not the Father), but the doctrine of the Son’s visibility also supports the understanding that the Son’s divinity is not the same as the Father’s.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, it is not simply anti-Nicene Homoians who understand the Son to be visible while the Father is invisible, it is the tradition. Hilary and especially Augustine have to deal with this fact; their theology must face this double-bind.<sup>46</sup>

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because we know that Augustine had read him. See *Ep.* 148, as well as Studer’s discussion of Gregory in *Zur Theophanie-Exegese Augustins*, pp. 17-27.) Besides, if it were true that a problematic ecclesiastical standing excluded a Latin author from being appropriated by later, more Catholic authors, then the tradition of Latin Trinitarian theology would begin in the mid fourth century, since no earlier Latin theologians of the Trinity remained in good Catholic standing.

<sup>45</sup> The Son’s visibility likewise served as the basis for describing the soteriological role or economic mission of the Son.

<sup>46</sup> “Double-bind” is admittedly an American idiomatic expression, which nonetheless is most apt for describing Augustine’s theological position on the issue of the Son’s visibility. Other expressions with

### III. Augustine in 400, or: la non SimPLICITÉ du regard

Thus far I have spoken of the relationship between vision and faith in Augustine's early Trinitarian theology as that theology is developed in the first books of de Trinitate. I have, in particular, looked at the ways in which Augustine's understanding of the relationship between vision and faith is shaped by the then contemporary polemical Trinitarian debates and by the determinations of traditional Latin theology on the Trinity. Yet at the same time – circa 400 -- that Augustine is developing an understanding of faith and how divinity is “seen” in its historical manifestations (i.e., the theophanies and the incarnation), he is also coming to an understanding of the relationship between faith and the vision of divinity as epistemological events in the immediate life of the believer. It is Augustine's general understanding of faith and the vision of divinity that I turn to now. The most important point to be made is this: there is a connection between Augustine's development of a doctrine of the primacy of faith as the discipline of virtue and as the basis for “knowledge” about God and his development of the doctrine that the divinity of the Son is made manifest only at the endtime and that there are, properly speaking, no theophanies of the Son (or of any other Person of the Trinity).

By the year 400 Augustine had come to understand that in this life we were incapable of a vision of God – that we were now incapable of direct knowledge of the truth. This discovery is, of course, dramatized in Confessions, and we would expect two works from the same few years in Augustine's life to offer the same conclusion.<sup>47</sup>

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roughly the same meaning would include “Between Scylla and Charybdis,” “Etre pris entre deux feux,” or “Zwischen dem Teufel und dem See”.

<sup>47</sup> At de Trin. IV.20 Augustine criticizes those who pridefully claim to be able to rise to the sight of God through their own efforts. Some scholars have thought that this comment referred to Pelagius and

Augustine had also come to understand something else about such visions: fundamentally, there was no virtue to them; there was no salvation through them.<sup>48</sup> In short, Augustine had a new understanding not simply of the (im)possibility of a vision of God in this life, but of the significance of any such vision, whether complete or incomplete: whatever joy might be experienced from the sight (or even the near-sight), there was, nonetheless, no salvation in or from that vision.<sup>49</sup> Salvation came from faith –

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was thus a later insertion by Augustine into de Trinitate. But that conclusion seems to me to be unnecessarily complicated: the most obvious candidate for someone who would make such vain claims is the younger Augustine himself. "... [T]here are some people," Augustine says, "who think that they can purify themselves for contemplating God and [for] cleaving to him by their own power and strength of character, which means in fact that they are thoroughly defiled by pride.... Their reason for assuring themselves of do-it-yourself purification is that some of them have been able to direct the keen gaze of their intellects beyond everything created and to attain, in however small a measure, the light of unchanging truth; and they ridicule those many Christians who have been unable to do this and who *live* meanwhile *out of faith* [Rom. 1:17, italics Hill's] alone." Hill, p. 167.

<sup>48</sup> One can say that Augustine saw that philosophy, like the Law, required what it could not enable: the ability to be virtuous. Only a sage, purified from his passions, could expect to see the Good, but – Augustine discovered – philosophical training could not provide the very purification it held up as the natural state for humans. John Dillon is a hostile witness to Augustine's critical judgment of hellenistic soteriology in pages 324-25 of his "'A Kind of Warmth': Some Reflections on the Concept of 'Grace' in the Neoplatonic Tradition," in The Passionate Intellect, Lewis Ayres, ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995), pp.323-32.

<sup>49</sup> The most accurate description of Augustine's judgment about the possibility of a vision of God in this life is that it cannot happen, but it sometimes does anyway. (Something similar is documented by Roland Teske in his article, "St. Augustine and the Vision of God," Augustine: Mystic and Mystagogue, F. Van Fleteren, J. C. Schnaubelt and J. Reino, eds. [New York: Peter Lang, 1994], pp. 287-308.) Such

this is faith's "utility".<sup>50</sup> Such a judgment is not merely one about discipline, as though the virtue of faith was primarily the act of obedience. The utility of faith for salvation lies in the fact that it marries an epistemology with a moral anthropology, and then grounds them both in christology: "Everything that has taken place in time... has been designed to elicit the faith we must be purified by in order to contemplate the truth, [and] has either been testimony to this mission or has been the actual mission of the Son of God."<sup>51</sup>

One of the distinctive features of Augustine's thought is the emphasis he places on the understanding that "knowing" is a "seeing," for while this understanding was certainly a philosophical commonplace Augustine makes it the foundation for much of

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exceptions are due to God's sovereign initiative. It is possible, however, to attain to visions of the intelligible realm or even to something like the "region" of God. Yet these intellectual visions have a limited character to them: they are not visions of God as Trinity, which is what is promised to us at the endtime. The visions of Confessions VII mark the limits of the ascent of reason unaided by grace, although even the vision bounded by that limit is more than a modern might think would be available to "reason alone," i.e., philosophy. Nonetheless, we need to be clear about the limits of the vision compared to what Augustine had come to expect of philosophy, not simply in term of duration, but in terms of content. It may indeed be that a pagan philosopher can rise to the vision of the World-Soul or the Forms – or, for that matter, that a Christian philosopher can as well. But such a vision is well short of God, and guarantees nothing for the eternal state of that mind.

<sup>50</sup> Wetzel is right to speak of the "discipline of virtue," but he does not take the further step of making clear that Augustine identifies this discipline with *faith*, i.e., the "disciplina fidei," as at de Lib Arb III.60. See James Wetzel, Augustine and the Limits of Virtue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 45 ff.

<sup>51</sup> De Trinitate IV.25, Hill, p. 171.



his thought.<sup>52</sup> To know is to see, either with the eyes of our corporeal senses, or with the eyes of mind in interior vision.<sup>53</sup> One consequence of such an equation is to put knowledge – true knowledge – very much in the realm of direct experience.<sup>54</sup> In such a line of reasoning there is a kind of parallelism between sensation and intellection: as in sight we know what is “right before our eyes,” so too in thought we truly know only what

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<sup>52</sup> A succinct description of this aspect of Augustine’s thought is provided by Robert A. Markus in his contribution to the The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy, A. H. Armstrong, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 348-50. Markus and I differ, however, in our respective emphasis on the difference for Augustine between faith and knowledge. See also, e.g., John J. O’Meara, “St. Augustine’s View of Authority and Reason in A. D. 386,” Irish Theological Quarterly 18 (1951), 338-46.

<sup>53</sup> Something like this is remarked by Ambrose in the previously cited passage from his Commentary on Luke (as quoted by Augustine in Ep. 147): “... no one has experienced it [God’s full divinity] with mind or eyes, for the word ‘seen’ is to be referred to both.”

<sup>54</sup> The origins of this understanding are platonic, as John M. Rist makes clear in Augustine – Ancient Thought Baptized (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 45: “For the most basic principle of Platonic epistemology is not the distinction between ‘intelligibles’ and ‘sensibles’ (important though that is), but the distinction between the first-hand experience which gives ‘knowledge’ (*episteme*) and second- (or other) – hand experience which gives various sorts of more or less justified ‘belief’ (*doxa*).” There were, as well, Jewish exegetical traditions which linked vision with knowledge; such traditions may be of interest given that they speak of the knowledge gained in terms of *measure, weight and number* (following Wisdom XI:20): see Ithamar Gruenwald, “Knowledge and Vision,” Israel Oriental Studies III (1973), 63-107.

is “right before our mind’s eye.”<sup>55</sup> (I will return to this parallelism shortly.) Augustine himself subsumes these two kinds of vision under the limit he finds expressed in Romans 1:20, namely, that created things can themselves be known and in this way they reveal their creator, but the knowledge extends no further than of the created things.<sup>56</sup>

This notion of “knowledge” involves elements of both platonic and stoic thought. That true knowledge is best understood as a kind of seeing is, as already noted, a platonic commonplace. The stoic component lies in the understanding that this “seeing” is really not itself knowledge, but the basis of knowledge, that is to say, it is the basis for our assent to propositions that are manifestly true. For example, the data from our senses is understood as the proposition, “Here is a journal made of paper.” The mind assents to that proposition – but the key question is “Why?” What is the basis for my assent? I assent because I see (and feel) the paper. “Here is a journal made of paper” is knowledge properly speaking because it is known directly. “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” is another proposition which gains my assent because its truth is known directly – in this case, to my mind’s eye. By contrast, propositions of the faith, e.g., *regula*, are assented to because of the disposition of our will.

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<sup>55</sup> “Is me autem aliquid docet, qui uel oculis uel ulli corporis sensui uel ipsi etiam menti praebet ea quae cognoscere uolo.” *De Magistro* XI,36. A contrasting understanding of “knowledge” would be to find it most purely and certainly in deduction.

<sup>56</sup> As, for example, at *Confessions* VII.xvii (23). The two paragraphs of section 23 are written in parallel to each other, the second elaborating upon the first but describing the same sequence of events, each paragraph climaxing with the invocation of Romans 1:20, by which the tension or drama described in that paragraph is resolved.

The Incarnation does not bring salvation in such a way that allows knowledge (direct sight) to be the basis for our assent to propositions which are in fact true, and to which we must assent if we are to be both virtuous and saved.<sup>57</sup> The most important fact about the identity of Jesus of Nazareth cannot be known, for it is not available to any kind of sight, material or noetic.<sup>58</sup> Obviously this is true for those who live “now” (an era which includes both Augustine and ourselves), since Jesus the Son of God is not available to be seen.<sup>59</sup> More importantly, this was true for those who lived when Jesus

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<sup>57</sup> Augustine’s favorite parallel to this, used in de Util. Cred. and appearing more than once in Confessions, is our assent to the proposition, “That man is my father” – an assent which is made entirely on the basis of the disposition of our will, i.e., love, and the trust that follows from it. Augustine’s other preferred example of a case of faith being necessary for virtue is that of friendship, in which we believe in the existence of a love we cannot prove: “Ecce ex cordo tuo, credis cordi non tuo; et quo nec carnis nec mentis dirigis aciem, accommodas fidem.” De fide rerum quae non videntur II (written in 400 or shortly thereafter).

<sup>58</sup> The connection between this doctrine and a two-“natures” Christology can already be discerned: in Christ there really is a something that can be seen, and there really is a something that cannot be seen; these “somethings” exist in two different epistemological fields, but they both exist with full integrity as what they are. See de Trin. I.22 and IV.6. In de Trin. IV.26 Augustine remarks, apropos of John 14:9, “Does this [John 14:9] not mean that he both could and could not be seen?” (Hill, p. 172), a comment which is as much a rejoinder to Novatian’s exegesis of Mt. 5:8 as it is to Homoian “visible Son” theology. (See also Third Tractate on John 4 (1) for an example of Augustine’s polemical application of the “seen/not seen” distinction in Christ.)

<sup>59</sup> Following this line of thought, Augustine says that the reason for Christ’s ascension into heaven was to remove the resurrected Jesus from sight, so that faith would be both necessary and possible. See de Trin. I.18. (“Now” in this context means “After the ascension and before the eschaton;” i.e., the “Sixth Age”.)

was available to be seen: all that could be seen was the human, Jesus of Nazareth. But for the purposes of refuting the Homoian argument, the most important statement Augustine can make about visibility is that it was always true that the true existence or being of God could not be known, for it has never been available to any kind of sight, material or noetic: the theophonies did not make God available to be seen. Since the fall, at least, divinity has never been self-evident. In Old Testament times, as in all periods of salvation history, neither the Son of God nor the Father could be seen; only a created mark or instrument of Their presence could be seen (e.g., the angels of Mamre, the burning bush, the pillars of fire, etc.).<sup>60</sup> The Incarnation likewise employed a created mark or instrument of His presence, namely human nature.<sup>61</sup> In sum, we must note that the soteriological limits of our knowledge make an act of faith<sup>62</sup> fundamental to our salvation. We must also note that material sensation – e.g., sight – with its limited access to truths is nonetheless made completely fundamental to our salvation: in all cases, a created mark or instrument of God's presence is the occasion for us either to assent to the unseen signified, or to decline to assent, thereby denying the unseen. As Augustine put it, "... we

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<sup>60</sup> Again it must be noted that in his criticism of Homoianism, Augustine does not dispute their fundamental presupposition, namely, that divinity is invisible and anything visible is not divine. (The Anthropomorphites did not make this presupposition; rather, they taught that there was visible divinity.) Augustine's argument is that precisely because the Son is divine He was invisible apart from created marks of his presence.

<sup>61</sup> Albeit, in the case of the Son a created instrument peculiarly appropriate to or commensurate with the mission of the Presence it signified, which is not the case for the Father or the Holy Spirit. Augustine occasionally seems to treat the miracles as evidence of Jesus' divinity, but even so, the miracles are not decisive for our assent, just as mystical visions of ascent are not decisive.

<sup>62</sup> That is, an assent on the basis of the disposition of our will and not by sight.

could only be purified for adaptation to eternal things by temporal means like those we were already bound to in a servile adaptation.... Now just as the rational mind is meant, once purified, to contemplate eternal things, so it is meant while still needing purification to give faith to temporal things.”<sup>63</sup>

If even noetic knowledge is most properly understood as a kind of sight, and faith is not sight but the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things *not seen* (Heb. 11:1), then clearly faith is not knowledge, but something else – Augustine is emphatic on this point. Yet if faith is not really spiritual knowledge,<sup>64</sup> faith nonetheless is that which is now most like spiritual knowledge: charitable in its necessary dependence on others and its reception of a common experience; wise in its ability to take the proper measure of material objects and to know the real significance of those objects; certain in its judgment; and imaging the kenotic life of the Trinity in its assent to humility. Assent by faith to propositions gives us “sight” of (knowledge of) those propositions as

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<sup>63</sup> De Trinitate IV.24, Hill, p. 169. Compare with de Lib. Arb. III.30: “But the human soul is rational.... And was brought so low that by surmising from visible things it might strive to understand invisible things. The Food of the rational creature became visible, not by changing his own nature but by adapting it to ours, in order that he might recall those who follow visible things to embrace him who is invisible. So the soul, which in its inward pride had forsaken him, finds him again in humble guise in the outward world. By imitating his visible humility it will return to its invisible position of superiority.” Augustine: Earlier Writings, John S. Burleigh, trans., Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 190.

<sup>64</sup> What I mean exactly by “spiritual knowledge” will become clear shortly, namely, knowing which does not have sensation as its underlying form.

signifiers. The limitations of language (signs) are important to remember here.<sup>65</sup> The proposition “The cow is brown” is understood only if we have seen a cow and the color brown; for anyone who has not seen either (much less both), the proposition fails to communicate since we only understand what is meant by “cow” and “brown” from our previous direct knowledge of these. The proposition “God is a Trinity” is unlike the proposition “The cow is brown” in that we cannot ever have seen God or the Trinity. The proposition “God is a Trinity” becomes meaningful through faith, in which we know that the proposition is true even if we really don’t know what “God” or “Trinity” is, having seen neither. Our mind rushes to build images to see, the way it rushes to build “Alexandria” from mental images of cities we have seen.<sup>66</sup> Some of these images may be correct, many are not, but our constructed idea of Alexandria becomes tied to the word “Alexandria” and allows us to recognize what the word refers to from our mental montage: a montage built upon reasonable similarities, but a montage nonetheless.<sup>67</sup> Our

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<sup>65</sup> Augustine’s understanding of the limitations of signs is fully developed well before 400; see his discussion of this point in de Magistro X,33-34; see also Rist’s comments at Augustine – Ancient Thought Baptized, pp. 23 ff. Is the insistence that language is dependent upon sensation from Porphyry? See his in Catagorias 91,8;20.

<sup>66</sup> The importance of this process for Trinitarian theology is later the subject of substantial study by Augustine in, e.g., de Trin. VIII.9, but the interior construction of “Alexandria” from “Carthage” is already discussed by Augustine in Against Fortunatus XX.7.

<sup>67</sup> At de Doctrina Christiana II.vi.8 Augustine discusses similitude as a way of language signifying and having content; he is concerned in particular with the affect of pleasure produced in a reader by signification-through-similitude. This kind of signification, then, has a particular pedagogic function (not unlike the Incarnation).

montages of “God” tend to be misleading and need correction, even if the correction amounts to a prohibition of using certain mental images in our montages.<sup>68</sup>

If we know that “God is a Trinity” is a true proposition, then we know that certain propositions must follow (many of these propositions are revealed), and must be assented to: if “God is a Trinity” then, for example, we know that other words about this truth must refer to some unity and some triad. “God is three Persons” is assented to, even though we do not really know what a “person” is, because it has been revealed (through the Church) that “person” is a suitable word for the kind of “Three” we are talking about, (a suitable component of our mental montage) but, as Augustine later says in *de Trinitate*, the real utility of “three *persons*” lies in the fact that we must say three *somethings* and in a consistent manner. The humility of the faithful, the discipline of faith, then, lies in what can be called, albeit anachronistically, a submission to intellectual *rebuke*, in which we must reject and cast out those inappropriate components of our montage for “God in Trinity” (or perhaps our entire “picture”).<sup>69</sup> Together these elements constitute what can

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<sup>68</sup> *Ep.* 147 (from 413) is in many ways the mirror image of *de Trin.* I-IV, as the same Trinitarian issues are treated, though with the vision/faith distinction in the fore: in this epistle Augustine works hard to relate knowledge (things seen by the eyes or the mind) to faith (things unseen). L. J. van der Lof invokes *Ep.* 147 when he speaks of Augustine’s distinction between “videre” and “comprehendere,” a text he then connects to *Sermon* 117. In the sermon Augustine is responding to Ambrose’s *Commentary on Luke* I.25, as the Latin for the Lucan passage juxtaposes the key terms. “Tout en,” van der Lof concludes, “se basant sur Matthieu 5,8.” See “L'exégèse exacte et objective des théophanies de l'Ancien Testament dans le 'De Trinitate'," *Augustiniana* XIV (1984), 485-499; here, p. 488. For the present, however, the significance of *Ep.* 147 is that it shows that the conclusions Augustine reached in 400 continue in his later thoughts.

<sup>69</sup> See, e.g., *de Doctrina Christiana* I.vii.7--ix.9 for an example of Augustine building up a correct conceptual “montage” of God, and the end of II.vii.10 for a description of the success of this process in

be called (with only minimal violence to the terminology) “an epistemology of faith”.<sup>70</sup> The epistemological implications of faith and purification are set out in already in 83 Diverse Questions #68: “Therefore sinners are commanded to believe in order that they might be purged of sins through believing, for sinners do not have a knowledge of what they will see by living rightly. For this reason, since they cannot see except they live rightly, nor are they capable of living rightly except that they believe, it is clear that they must start from faith, so that *the commandments by which believers are turned from this world might produce a pure heart capable of seeing God*. For, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, because they will see God.’”<sup>71</sup>

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developing love for the Trinity. My use of the word “rebuke” is especially appropriate if one remembers Augustine’s statements on the will’s role in the production of an improper or erroneous inner montage. Examples of intellectual “rebuke” may be found in, e.g., Sermon 53, a later sermon by Augustine on the Beatitudes; there the exegesis of Mt. 5:8 leads to an extended discussion of the kinds of mental images of God that must be rejected. Something similar, again clearly connected to Mt. 5:8, but with a less extended “rebuke,” can be found in Sermon 4.5; some of the “pictures” of God rebuked in this sermon apply as much to the error of the Anthropomorphites as they do to that of the Homoians. Finally, it should not be forgotten that Augustine spent most of the first half of his life in intellectual self-rebuke, trying to lose the material component of his own montage of God.

<sup>70</sup> The so-called “psychological analogy” (which appears at the end of de Trin. IV) is better understood as a correction to our inevitable noetic montage for “God the Trinity”: intellectual images like those of the “analogy” should replace our material images of the Trinity, knowing, as we do, that material signs cannot signify the unity of common operations (see de Trin. IV.30). These replacements are not properly called analogies and indeed Augustine declines to call them such. See Ayres, “‘Remember That You Are Catholic,’” pp. 58-62.

<sup>71</sup> 83 Diverse Questions No. 68, Mosher, trans., p. 161, emphasis added.



The mind's "servile adaptation" to sense knowledge does not lie only in its need to know through sense, but also (and more importantly) in the mind's adoption of the dynamic structure and limitations of sense knowledge as its own. Sight is itself one kind of sense knowledge, and any "vision" – physical or mental – follows the material form of sensation: the mind thinks in a material way or form, even when it thinks about immaterial realities (i.e., the Trinity, goodness, the nature of evil, etc.)<sup>72</sup>. This material "form" of even intellectual vision shapes knowledge in the way the mind regards matter as the paradigm for existence, for example, or through the presupposition that knowledge is an individual or private act the way sense knowledge is individual or private.<sup>73</sup> The alternative "epistemology of faith" is articulated by Augustine not only in the first four

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<sup>72</sup> The limits of language also show the material form of our knowing: unless we already have seen (materially) what the words refer to, the words are meaningless. Words can tell us nothing that is truly new since language depends upon the repetition of a previous, non-linguistic, learning-event – a "sight". This is Augustine's explicit conclusion at de Magistro X,33.

<sup>73</sup> All human sensations occur in an individual, and cannot be known as a shared experience: I see, without need for anyone else, and that very sight cannot be shared with anyone else. For fallen humanity, with our atomized mode of perception, "common" perception (e.g., "common" sight) is defined according to there being a common object of sensation (e.g., we all see the same tree), which is a very weak sense of a "common" perception. What if not simply the external object, but the very act of seeing was performed in common? If one can abandon the presumption that knowing is "necessarily individuated" – a presumption that derives from projecting a material and unspiritual character upon the act of knowing -- then one can gain an insight into the spiritual knowing shared within the Trinity. The very best example of knowledge bound by a material form may be the character of our very self-consciousness; in particular, our inability to know our knowing or the knower as such, which mimics our inability to "see seeing" or to see that by which we see.

books of de Trinitate, but also in a range of works written by and around the turn of the fifth century, and we must keep them in mind as we read the first four books of de Trin. (and vice versa).<sup>74</sup> The task of de Natura Boni, for example, is to help the mind think of existence not in terms of matter but in terms of being,<sup>75</sup> while de Doctrina Christiana I teaches us how to value existents properly.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, de Libero Arbitrio III offers a description of what the act of assent is like when freed of material habits. And what non-individuated, “common” seeing might be like is provided in the experience Augustine shared with his mother in their vision at Ostia, described in Confessions IX.x.

There is a strong tendency in contemporary theology to read the Trinitarian theology of Augustine (and Gregory of Nyssa) for models of community based upon classic doctrines of divine relations. Other perspectives need to be developed for reading

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<sup>74</sup> In later works Augustine uses the contrast between “scientia” and “sapientia” to address the overcoming of the limited and problematic form of “knowledge,” but this terminology (used in a linked way) does not appear in the writings under consideration here.

<sup>75</sup> One of the more conspicuous problems faced by a mind that is thinking in too materialist a manner is that it cannot conceive of the co-existence the Trinity shares; “Arian” theology manifests this formal weakness which results in its doctrinal error. (See, e.g., de Trin. II.25.) Yet the epistemological weakness of materialist thinking mirrors the ontological weakness of material objects themselves as marks or signs of the Trinity: the Three, one in substance and acting inseparably, “cannot be manifested inseparably by creatures which are so unlike them, especially material ones.” De Trin. IV.30, Hill, p. 175. Augustine then refers to that great trap the material world sets for our thoughts about God: as our words exist in intervals, separated from one another, so, too, do we imagine that the Three exist in intervals, separated from one another.

<sup>76</sup> See de Doctrina Christiana I.xxviii.28 where Augustine says that the Christian who lives justly will have a correct judgment of the true worth of things.

Augustine (etc.). Despite strong contemporary assertions to the contrary, Augustine's Trinitarian theology is in fact elaborated with the character and "place" of the believer in mind. To talk about the Trinity is necessarily to address the questions of the varying quality of the mind's "sight" and the dependence of that quality upon the integrity of the will.<sup>77</sup> The link between the quality of the mind's understanding and the integrity of the will is captioned by Augustine's notion of *purity*. Communal models influenced by Augustine's Trinitarian theology must begin with the subject of the believer's "purity," a subject which unites both epistemology and anthropology. From this beginning comes the question of *what the pure community might be like*. Such an understanding connects Augustine's Trinitarian theology to his own broad concerns with the quality of the mind's understanding and the integrity of the will, and to his specific engagements (in a variety of forms) with that very same question: what does the community of Christian purity look like? How does it exist?<sup>78</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>77</sup> This notion of the type of unity that holds between the mind and the will is one which Augustine gained from Stoic "monistic" psychology, such as that of Seneca. It is this psychology which will support Augustine's christology in *de Trinitate* XI-XIII.

<sup>78</sup> The connections to the ascetic movements that so concerned Augustine are obvious. Less obvious, perhaps, is the way in which such an approach connects Augustine's Trinitarian theology, with its attention to the believer's purity, to approaches in the Gospels, as well as concerns expressed in "two ways" texts (such as the *Didache* and its Jewish predecessor at Qumran, "The Community Rule"), as well as the apocalyptic tradition of the early church. (Thus the appositeness of angels in the discussion of the final vision at *City of God* XXII.29.)

For Augustine there were no direct appearances of the Son recorded in the Old Testament, just as there were no direct appearances of the Father or Holy Spirit. What appeared in the Old Testament theophanies was created matter being used as an instrument of communication by the Trinity. What was seen was not God; it was an instrument of God's presence. An encounter with such an instrument, such as experienced by the patriarchs and prophets, was an occasion for assent to be given to that which remained unseen and only symbolized: in short, an occasion for faith in God. Similarly, Jesus' divinity was not visible while he lived in Israel. What appeared in events such as the theophany atop Mt. Tabor was created matter being used as an instrument of communication by the Trinity. What was seen was not Jesus' divinity; the light was a created sign of the unseen divine presence.<sup>79</sup> The vision of that light was an

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<sup>79</sup> As the centuries go by, Byzantine theology will emphasize a very different judgment; namely, that the "light" the Apostles saw atop Mt. Tabor was in fact a Divine Light, i.e., an uncreated Light. The Greek theologians now regarded by the Byzantine church as especially definitive of the character of its theology are those who emphasize the visible-through-the-senses nature of that uncreated Light: e.g., Simeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas. The theology of Basil the Great has been recast in the mold of an "essence-energy" Neo-Palamite theology so that he too might stand as one such definitive theologian. The Augustinian point of view represents a completely different theological judgment from that of the uncreated Light tradition in Byzantine theology, and this difference has figured significantly in acts of self-definition by the East and the West. (This is not to say that there is no overlap between the Augustinian and Palamite theologies on other subjects. It is now clear that Gregory Palamas read Augustine's *de Trinitate* in translation and made substantial use of the latter books. It is also clear that Gregory had no use for the theology expressed by Augustine in the early books of *de Trinitate*, i.e., the theology which is the subject of this essay. Not unlike some modern western theologians, Gregory Palamas read the second half of *de Trinitate* severed from the first.)

opportunity to assent to the reality of what remained unseen. The Son never possessed a kind of visible divinity, whether one understands such a divinity to be less than or equal to, different from or the same as, the divinity of the Father. What was hidden in the Father was hidden in the Son, and the same is true of the Holy Spirit.

For Augustine there are no visions of the divine in the present life of the Christian. What appears to the Christian are created instruments of God's presence. What is seen is not God; it is a sign or symbol of God's presence. The list of such signs runs, on the one hand, from all of history to, on the other, the Church and the Eucharist. Especially important are the propositions given to us about God, the *regula* and *doctrina*. Each created instrument (including words) is an occasion for a Christian to assent to the existence of what remains unseen. The discipline of faith causes our understanding of the sign set before us to grow: Lot knew his visitors were angels, though the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah, who saw what Lot saw, knew them only as young men. Many looked upon Jesus and saw only a young man, but a few knew what was unseen – because they believed in what Jesus said.

The Trinitarian controversy as Augustine encounters it is about whether God can be seen at all, has the Son been seen, and if yes, when and how? Aside from the historical question of when was the Son seen (e.g., in the OT theophanies, the Incarnation, etc.), there is an epistemological question at play, because for Augustine “to see” means “to know”. Augustine finds the answers to these questions in Phil. 2:5-7, a root narrative of the Trinity, the very language of which Augustine understands to describe visual or epistemological categories (i.e., *Form* of God, *Form* of Servant). Augustine's judgment is that all the Persons of the Trinity can be seen only at the resolution of history – the

endtime – and he describes the object(s) of this vision very specifically: what will be seen will be either the Form of Man or the Form of God. Given the visual content of the christological drama described in Phil. 2:5-7 and the visual resolution of that drama at the final judgment, the statement Mt. 5:8 makes about the sight of God is of profound significance, for it is the promise of the very vision Augustine has spoken of. As a promise, Mt. 5:8 carries both the tension of the delay in the vision Christians hope to have and the means of the resolution of that tension, namely, purity of heart. The meaning of purity of heart lies in the possession of faith, and faith “proves” the reality of that final vision through the reality of what is gained now through faith.

How is Augustine’s doctrine of the eschatological vision through Christ of the Trinity a solution to the Homoian subordinationist understanding of the Son’s visibility? The Son is not visible before the Incarnation. The Son is visible only as an object of faith in the Incarnation. Jesus could be seen as any human can be seen, but *understanding* who and what Jesus was (and remains) is a matter of faith, not of simple sight.<sup>80</sup> Even in the Incarnation there is not a direct revelation via the Son’s material existence (or “via matter”). One can “see” Christ and not recognize who and what he is. This is why

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<sup>80</sup> It is through revelation and not through reason that we understand the fact of the Trinity – but we must use our reason in order to understand the revelation. Revelation does not come to us like a diamond piercing our skull; it comes to us through sensation, and it is the character of our understanding, our nature, that our sensations are more than simply physiological events only insofar as we make mental judgments upon and from these sensations. The mental judgments we make upon and from these sensations is a necessary part of what we call understanding. Ultimately, because of what we are – i.e., the character of our way of knowing -- revelation does not yet appear *to us* until it appears *in our understanding*. Thoughts such as these guide Augustine in the epistemological concerns treated in the second half of de Trinitate.

Augustine refers repeatedly - thus emphasizing - to the fact of those who saw only the human and failed to recognize who Christ was, and the condemnation of these. If it is possible for us to say that Augustine reserves the vision of God to the end-time, then we can also say that Augustine reserves the direct revelatory content of the Son's incarnated existence to the end-time<sup>81</sup> -- which is why the Transfiguration does not figure significantly in Augustine's Trinitarian theology (as it does in Hilary's). Those who recognize the Transfiguration as theologically significant recognize it as a "before the end-time" occasion of the direct revelatory content of the Son's incarnated existence. For Augustine, such events (which may indeed occur) are not definitive for an account of the revelation in Christ.

Earlier I suggested that the problem of the epistemological status of faith – what is the kind of knowledge that is gained through it? -- arises out of Augustine's firm denial of any simple, direct knowledge of God through the Son. If the divinity of the Son is invisible, if God is not seen directly in the Son – both assertions which must be true or else the Homoians are right -- then Augustine is left with the task of describing what *is* given to us positively in faith. One might also offer the converse, namely that after Book one of de Trinitate Augustine must eventually follow through and offer an account of how what is known directly – through the vision of sight or mind – is related to the assent of faith. Such a concern is, I take it, a significant part of Augustine's subject in the latter books of that work.

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<sup>81</sup> For an example of how this doctrine of Augustine's figures in an individual's faith life, see the Second Reading, the Thirty-third Wednesday in Ordinary Time, The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite (which quotes from Augustine's Sermon 21.1-4.)

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