Chapter 1

Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology

Although it has been some time since Augustine's Trinitarian theology was studied in depth,[1] the last decade has seen a significant and widely expressed interest on the part of systematic theologians in the implications of Augustine's theology for the development of Trinitarian doctrine. For example, a consensus among systematicians on the existence and character of an early "economic" understanding of God has led, among other things, to the not uncommon judgment that Augustine's Trinitarian theology sacrificed this sense of *oeconomia,* with unfortunate consequences for later theology. This sacrifice is frequently contrasted not only with primitive Christianity's experience of God but with the emphasis on relationship in the Trinitarian theologies of the Cappadocians.[2] My purpose in this article is to examine many of these recent theological works for what they reveal about the methodological presuppositions operative, more or less, in most systematic treatments of Augustine today, and to critique those presuppositions from the point of view of a historical theologian whose speciality is patristic Trinitarian theology. After thus providing what could be called a general phenomenology of contemporary systematic appropriations of Augustine's Trinitarian theology, it will be possible to show how these presuppositions have figured in

1. One exception is Johannes Arnold's "Begriff und heilsökonomische Bedeutung der göttlichen Sendungen in Augustinus De Trinitate," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 25 (1991): 3–69. Arnold's work is of particular interest because he analyzes Augustine's Trinitarian theology specifically from the perspective of testing out its economic content.

2. An influential account of the opposition between Cappadocian and Augustinian Trinitarian theologies precisely in terms of a relational and economic theology versus a theology lacking both these dimensions is given in T. R. Martland, "A Study of Cappadocian and Augustinian Trinitarian Methodology," *Anglican Theological Review* 47 (1965): 252–63.

readings of Augustine by systematic theologians, in their methods, and, particularly, in their conclusions.[3]

Most accounts of patristic Trinitarian doctrine divide this theology into two fundamental categories: Greek and Latin. By this account, Greek theology begins with the reality of the distinct persons, while Latin theology begins with the reality of the unity of the divine nature. That this schema is true cannot be assumed; as I will show, the effect of assuming this schema has been to conceal as least as much as it revealed. But setting aside whether the schema is true, that is to say, whether it accurately describes the doctrines it purports to describe, what is certain is that only theologians of the last one-hundred years have ever thought that it was true. A belief in the existence of this Greek–Latin paradigm is a unique property of modern Trinitarian theology. This belief, and the associated diagrams that one finds in Margerie[4] and LaCugna,[5] or the "plurality-model–unity-model" jargon that one finds in Brown,[6] all derive from a book written about a hundred years ago, namely Théodore de Régnon's studies on the Trinity.[7] For it is Régnon who invented the Greek–Latin paradigm, geometrical diagrams and all.[8] Régnon's paradigm has become the *sine qua non* for framing the contemporary understanding of Augustine's theology. To this extent, works as otherwise diverse as LaCugna's and Brown's both exhibit a scholastic modernism, since they both take as an obvious given a point of view that is coextensive with the twentieth century. So do Mackey[9] and O'Donnell.[10]

All of these works organize patristic Trinitarian theology according to Régnon's paradigm. None of them shows any awareness that the paradigm needs to be demonstrated, or that it has a history. LaCugna and Brown need the paradigm to ground the specific problem they diagnose; although both Mackey and O'Donnell are frustrated by the strictures of the paradigm, neither of them notes that it is a creature of late-nineteenth-century scholarship, an observation that would have given them a way out of their frustrations. At times Moltmann seems to avoid Régnon's paradigm,[11] but in fact he only transforms it into its mirror image, namely that Augustine's unity paradigm may be distinguished from the Greek social paradigm through his use of a psychological

3. The scope of this article is limited to a critical analysis of works in contemporary systematics, and so my own proposal for a substantial alternative account of the economy and Augustine's Trinitarian theology will have to wait.

4. Bertrand de Margerie, *La Trinité chrétienne dans l'histoire* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1975) 227.

5. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991) 96.

6. David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (La Salle: Open Court, 1985).

7. Theodore de Régnon, SJ, *Études de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité*, four volumes bound as three (Paris: Victor Retaux, 1892/1898).

8. Régnon, *Études*, 1.339.

9. James P. Mackey, *The Christian Experience of God as Trinity*, (London: SCM, 1983) 142–63.

10. John J. O'Donnell, *Trinity and Temporality: The Christian Doctrine of God in the Light of Process Theology and the Theology of Hope* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1983) 40–52.

11. Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God* (London: SCM, 1991).

analogy—an argument which has been popular among French Augustinians for some time. Moltmann is wrong, however, for the psychological analogy of the Trinity based on the idea, as he puts it, of a "soul that controls the body,"[12] can be found in Eusebius of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, both Greeks.[13] All the above works thus illustrate in vivid fashion the degree to which modern reconstructions are captive to modern interpretative categories. To be fair, however, nothing is more common in contemporary systematics than the inability to read Augustine outside of Régnon's paradigm.[14]

Such modern appropriations of Augustine thus depend upon broad, general characterizations of Augustine's theology; these broad general characterizations themselves depend upon turn-of-the-century continental histories of dogma, of which, as I will show, Régnon's paradigm is but the most obvious.[15] Similarly, these contemporary appropriations share the same two presuppositions: the first is that characterizations based on polar contrasts are borne out in the details that are revealed clearly and distinctly through the contrasts; and the second is that the same process of presenting doctrines in terms of opposition yields a synthesizing account of the development of doctrine.[16] In short, there is a penchant among systematic theologians for categories of polar opposition, grounded in the belief that ideas "out there" in the past really existed in polarities, and that polar oppositions accurately describe the contents and relationships of these ideas. Why these categories would be so valued by late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century readers of dogma is a question I leave for specialists in those eras, although, as will become clear, I believe that this penchant for polar categories reveals something about methodological choices systematicians have made in this century. Whatever the origins of this emphasis on polar categories may be,

12. Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 60–62.

13. See Eusebius of Caesarea's *Demonstration of the Gospel* 4:5, edited by Ivar Heikel, GCS 6. 156.18–26. A similar argument to this effect, written for polemical purposes, may also be found in Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Making of Man* (PG 44.137d–140c).

14. Some time ago, Edmund Hill criticized Rahner's implicit dependence on Régnon; see his "Karl Rahner's 'Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise De Trinitate and St. Augustine" *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971): 67–80.

15. Such as the oppositions between "Greek" and "Latin," or between "economic" and "immanent," or, in more general applications, "Jewish" versus "Hellenistic."

16. Although all the oppositions noted in the preceding note could, theoretically, be used to describe static relationships, in practice these oppositions have been used to describe movement from one doctrinal form to another, whether it is a progressive or regressive movement. The typical use of such an opposition to describe doctrinal progression can be found, e.g., in Margerie, *La Trinité chrétienne dans l'histoire*, 223, 226, and in Crowe, *Doctrine of the Holy Trinity,* (Willowdale: Regis College, 1965/66) 110. I quote Margerie to illustrate: "[L]es Grecs et les Latins ont constitué deux branches différentes au sein de l'unique grande tradition chrétienne. On n'a peut être pas assez remarqué que la spéculation grecque représente un premier stade d'élaboration et d'évolution du dogme trinitaire, auquel la réflexion latine succède comme un stade postérieur" (Margerie, *La Trinité*, 223). By contrast, although Greek thought from pre-Socratic through to Hellenistic remained consistently dependent upon categories of polar opposition, such categories were often used to describe static or even eternal relationships. I suggest that it is the exclusive use of polar opposites to characterize development that constitutes an "idealistic" use of categories of polar opposition.

there are severe limitations in the histories produced by this polarizing hermeneutic of doctrine, and contemporary systematic theologians seem to have accepted these limitations as foundational.[17]

To take just one of these limitations, the standard division of Trinitarian theologies into the Greek tradition, paradigmatically expressed by the Cappadocians, and its opposite, the Latin tradition, paradigmatically expressed by Augustine, ignores the close affiliation that flourished between Alexandrian ("Greek") and Roman ("Latin") theologies a generation earlier. The more one tends to speak of a real division between Greek and Latin Trinitarian theologies in the late-fourth and early-fifth centuries, the more one must acknowledge and explain a fundamental shift away from the mid-fourth-century synthetic theology of Alexandria and Rome. The more one postulates a turn-of-the-century opposition between Greek and Latin theologies, the more one implicitly claims the loss of the prior consensus, and a dominant consensus at that, found in the theologies of Rome and Alexandria, a consensus that was above all "Nicene."[18]

A few historians of dogma have bravely followed their own logic and admitted the loss of a Rome–Alexandria consensus. Harnack did so. The era we recognize, through Régnon, as the era of the paradigmatic expression of Greek and Latin theologies was, in Harnack's account, the era in which the Rome–Alexandria Trinitarian consensus was betrayed. Harnack was so critical of the new theology of the Cappadocians and Constantinople, in 381, that he described it as "semi-Arian" and a subversion of Nicaea.[19] On the other hand, we have a very different opinion from French Augustinians like Paissac and Malet,[20] who are of particular significance for Catholic theology since they have provided so much of the conceptual idiom which is the repertory of modern Catholic systematic theologians. French scholastic Augustinians have rejoiced that, as they saw it, Augustine left behind the inhibiting concepts of Nicaea, in particular the constraints imposed by the watchword *homoousia*. For these scholars, the development of the doctrinal era described by Régnon in his Latin, i.e., his Augustinian and proto-scholastic paradigm is the development of a happy separation from the earlier

17. An article similar to this one could be written analyzing the debt that contemporary reflections on *oeconomia* owe to the emphasis laid on this category of theology by nineteenth-century theologians at Tübingen and by John Henry Newman in his *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (1.1.3). Practically speaking, such scholars as these discovered the division between "economy" and "theology" and invented its modern significance. One might explore for ways in which contemporary systematic theology needs this division.

18. We may note that in 380 (leading up to the Council of Constantinople in 381) the normative expression of the imperially approved doctrine of the Trinity was the pro-Nicene doctrine(s) of Rome and Alexandria, as article 16.2 of the *Theodosian Code* makes clear.

19. Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, repr. as 7 books in 4 vols. (New York: Dover, 1960) 4.84–88.

20. Henri Paissac, *Théologie du Verbe: Saint Augustin et Saint Thomas* (Paris: Cerf, 1951); Andre Malet, *Personne et Amour dans la théologie trinitaire de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1956); also Le Guillou, "Réflexions sur la thélogie trinitaire," *Istina* 17 (1972) 457–64.

orthodox consensus.[21] Their frank separation of Augustine from Nicene theology well dramatizes the issues a Cappadocian–Augustinian opposition presupposes. Of the texts under discussion here, only LaCugna brings the French positioning of Augustine over against a Nicene consensus into the body of her discussion, though without any illumination; Congar refers to it in his notes.[22]

The overwhelming presence in systematic discussions of Augustine of a watered-down version of Régnon's paradigm, coupled with an ignorance of the origin of the paradigm, reveals the systematic penchant for using grand, broad-stroked narrative forms. Like turn-of-the-century historians, contemporary systematicians seem to be distinguished by the confidence with which they will deploy such grand, architectonic narrative forms. This confidence springs, I think, from two attitudes. First, the confidence reflects a positive sense of all the new things that we have learned as moderns through the mechanism of "paradigm shifts"; not the least of what we have learned is the existence of such paradigms themselves. Secondly, the confidence to speak in architectonic narrative forms reflects a general sense that details matter less than perspective, that historical facts are only epiphenomena of an architectonic paradigm or hermeneutic, so that a sufficient knowledge of "facts" can be acquired solely through the practice of a hermeneutical or an ideological critique in itself, since any "fact" can itself be reduced to an expression or the symptom of a hermeneutic or ideology. One can imagine that either or both of these attitudes would make historical judgments or characterizations more tentative and rare, but I think it is fair to conclude that this has not been the case.

The idea that historical facts are only epiphenomena of a hermeneutic is now implicit in left-wing histories of doctrine just as it has been implicit in right-wing histories of doctrine. It will be remembered that many of the accomplishments in Catholic historical theology (and Catholic theology generally) in the first half of this century were driven by a desire to escape the tendency of the right to regard the actual reading of historical sources as superfluous if not subversive in virtue of official interpretations (such as those of Thomas Aquinas). A striking illustration of a similar tendency on the left may be seen in a recent article by Thistlethwaite,[23] who is able to characterize the

21. See Paissac, *Théologie du Verbe*, 30–31; Malet, *Personne et Amour*, 21; Guillou, "Réflexions sur la thélogie trinitaire," 459; also Louis Legrand, *La Notion philosophique de la Trinité chez Saint Augustin* (París: Oeuvre d'auteuil, 1931) 133.

22. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* vol. 3 (New York: Seabury, 1983). Congar shows an awareness of the French scholastics Malet, Le Guillou, and Lafont (92n16). He also makes the influence of Régnon explicit (83; for more on Régnon, see 92nn10–11).

23. Thistlethwaite, "On the Trinity," *Interpretation* 45 (1991) 159–71. Thistlethwaite's readings are produced by, and in support of, a feminist hermeneutic, but her specific purpose in recounting early Christian Trinitarian theologies follows from a larger hermeneutical project which is neither limited to, nor intrinsically a feature of, feminist theology, namely, the reduction of early Christian Trinitarian theologies to episodes in a *Logos* theology. (Here the rise of an imperialistic *Logos* theology is the architectonic narrative.) My position remains, however, that the more tightly controlled a reading is by an ideological end the more damaged is the historical sensitivity. Such ideologies limit systematic

sense of Trinitarian language in all the apostolic fathers, the Apologists, and Tertullian without ever citing a single specific text or even a mediating secondary source.[24] Her argument pivots on a characterization of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian theology that appears all but manufactured to support her own position.[25] The idiosyncratic nature of Thistlethwaite's judgment that Gregory held a *Logos*-centered theology is telegraphed by the fact that she cannot provide a single primary source in support of this position and that she can only draw upon a secondary source that is a hundred years old to get as far as impugning Gregory by association with Origen.[26] Thistlethwaite thus provides a painful illustration of a grand narrative which is based upon something other than a knowledge of the texts being narrated, indeed a narrative which is positively based on conceptually bypassing the need, simply put, to read the texts being narrated. The texts have no content(s) apart from the grand narrative, and thus no integrity that would demand a direct encounter.

The preferred narrative form among systematic theologians is, as I have already called it, the architectonic, by which I mean two things: first, an account that is open-endedly comprehensive; and second, a description of the development of doctrine in terms of the internal logic of an idea. What seems to me to be distinctive about the systematicians' quest for comprehensiveness is the way in which it is tied to understanding change in a cultural form, that is to say, in a doctrine, in terms of the logic of an idea. Yannaras's recent account of the influence of Augustine on Western civilization provides a conspicuous example of this kind of idealizing account of doctrine.[27] Yannaras argues that the rise of "logocentrism" in the culture of Western Christendom

theology's appropriation of the subject of historical theology (i.e., the Christian tradition) to an exploitation of this subject through the usual mechanism of cultural exploitation, namely a transformation of the material for the sake of consumption.

24. Ibid., 163.

25. Thistlethwaite is attempting to refute the position that "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" are the proper names of God. To do that, she contests the significance of Gregory as an authoritative witness of an early "proper name" theology. In particular, Gregory's authority is questioned: "[Nyssa] is not widely regarded to be the theologian his teacher and master, Basil of Caesarea, was" (Thistlethwaite, "On the Trinity," 166). There is no indication by Thistlethwaite of specifically who it is that widely lacks this regard for Gregory, a point which is not moot, given that the normal scholarly evaluation of Gregory is precisely that he was *more* a theologian than Basil was. E.g., Johannes Quasten says, "If we compare Gregory of Nyssa as a theologian with the two other Cappadocians, we recognize his superiority immediately" (Quasten, *Patrology,* 3:283). More recently, R. P. C. Hanson offered that "Gregory of Nyssa is to be sharply distinguished from the other two Cappadocian theologians in that he devised a doctrinal, indeed a philosophical, system more coherent and more elaborate than any the other two ever produced" (*Search for the Christian Doctrine*, 719). Such evaluations of Gregory's eminence could be multiplied indefinitely (this side of Harnack). Moreover, the question of Basil's preeminence is relevant only if Basil and Gregory disagreed on the issue of the character of divine names (which they do not).

26. Thistlethwaite, "On the Trinity," 166. Thistlethwaite's authority for Gregory's relationship to the theology of his day (given in her nn17–18) is the introduction to the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* volume on Gregory (1892).

27. Christos Yannaras, *Philosophie sans rupture* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1986).

(as opposed to the culture of Eastern Christendom) is due to Augustine's influence as the theological paradigm of the West. Yannaras takes the same description of Augustine as the theologian of the *logos* par excellence that one finds in the French Augustinians mentioned earlier and applies the logic of idealism to Augustine's influence: each historical epoch is defined by Yannaras by the way it purifies and enlarges as an idea the scope of what was originally a doctrinal insight by Augustine. This method of describing the development of doctrine in terms of conceptual purification and expansion appears in a number of treatments of doctrine in general and Augustine's doctrine in particular; LaCugna's and Jenson's works, especially, follow this pattern.[28]

Yannaras's own work with Martin Heidegger makes it impossible to deny his debt to German idealism, and he would not want to deny it. Let me offer the thesis that (1) the fascination with conceptual categories of polar opposition, (2) the use of the logic of ideas to describe cultural forms, and (3) the claim to comprehensiveness on the basis of polar categories and ideal logic all suggest that the influence of German idealism among systematic theologians is not limited to Yannaras. There has been a decision by systematicians to prefer an architectonic and idealistic style of writing; this decision has been objectified, for no one can remember making it. Aside from amnesia, the problem with the influence of idealism in systematic appropriations of patristic theology is not that philosophy in general has no place in theology, or even that idealism in particular has no place in theology. Rather the problem is that, unacknowledged, idealism draws to itself bad history: the integrity of the discipline of historical studies is ruptured by the need to find a "historical" account which is already cast in idealistic terms.[29] History is then treated as the material enstructuring of those themes which are constitutive of contemporary systematics. The dialogue between systematic theology and historical theology is transformed into a conversation between a ventriloquist and her or his prop.

The way in which systematic appropriations of Augustine are based upon "historical" accounts pre-selected for mirroring the idealizing methods of systematic theology can be seen in two specific properties of such appropriations. First, there is the ubiquitous presence of the work of Olivier du Roy as a mediating authority in the reading of Augustine's theology.[30] To discover this presence, one sometimes has to pay attention to footnote references, as in the case of Muller,[31] but LaCugna brings her debt to Du Roy into the body of the text, so that what was originally a methodological

28. Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

29. I note that making sense of theological history through German idealism is not limited to Christian theology: see Richard Taylor's review of Ian Newton's *Allah Transcendent* in *The Middle East Journal* 44 (1990): 521–22. Taylor criticizes Newton's depiction of Islamic philosophers as an "almost Hegelian view of the advance of Islamic" thought, in which they are "controlled by their chosen mythologies" and their thoughts are organized as "historical phenomena in an unfolding drama."

30. Olivier du Roy, *L'intelligence de la foi en la trinité selon saint Augustin* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1966).

31. Earl C. Muller, SJ, *Trinity and Marriage in Paul* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 468nn167–69.

presupposition in Du Roy becomes a theological conclusion in LaCugna. Congar is a rare example of a theologian who has noticed just how "radical" Du Roy's perspective is, and how Du Roy is driven to it in reaction to the French Augustinians that I mentioned earlier.[32]

Du Roy's description of Augustine's Trinitarian theology shows significant methodological idiosyncrasies. One important idiosyncrasy is Du Roy's description of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity in terms of a fundamental relationship with philosophy, not in terms of a fundamental relationship with doctrine.[33] In this, Du Roy fits in with dominant twentieth-century systematic presentations of Augustine's Trinitarian theology. While there are a number of monographs on Augustine's Trinitarian debt to philosophy, sustained discussions of a similar debt to his immediate Christian Latin predecessors are few and far between. Such discussions as there are reduce Augustine to Tertullian, or position this debt in terms of Régnon's paradigm: e.g., How does Augustine's theory of relations differ from that of Gregory of Nazianzus'? We are brought to the odd position that, according to many systematic theologians, the influence of philosophy in religious doctrine is fundamental, while the influence of prior expositions of religious doctrines is not.

Another distinctive feature of Du Roy's methodology is that Augustine's Trinitarian theology is presented statically or thematically. Although Du Roy's apparent perspective is developmental, his operating principle is that Augustine's Trinitarian theology consistently reduces to a triadology, although Augustine's preferred terms for the triad change over time, from text to text, or from chapter to chapter (for which one consults Du Roy's appendix).[34] Such a description leaves no room for the observation that in *De Symbolo ad Catechumenos*, Augustine's argument for the unity of the Trinity is indistinguishable from that of his Greek contemporary, Evagrius.[35] They both argue, "against the Arians," that John 5:19, "the Son can do nothing without the Father," is a declaration of the Son's natural relationship with the Father, since common activities require a common nature and only a common nature can produce common activities. In the form of Régnon's paradigm typical of the contemporary works discussed in this article, this argument and this language are thought to be "Cappadocian," but in any case exclusively Greek.

32. Congar speaks of Du Roy's description of Augustine's debt to Neoplatonism as "radical," and knows that Du Roy is reacting to authors such as Malet, Le Guillou, and Lafont (*I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3:92n16).

33. Rowan Williams recently characterized Du Roy's work as one which presents "Augustine's Trinitarian thought as monist and essentialist, a scheme in which the economy of salvation plays relatively little part" ("Sapientia and the Trinity," *Collectanea Augustiniana: Mélanges T. J. van Bavel* [Leuven: University Press, 1990] 317–332, at 319 n. 6).

34. It goes almost without saying that Du Roy's emphasis on the triadology in Augustine's Trinitarian theology is related to the hermeneutical privileging of philosophy as Augustine's "source."

35. See "Basil's" (i.e., Evagrius') *Letter* 8:9.