

## **AUGUSTINE'S SEARCH FOR GOD AS TRINITY**

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### **Abstract**

*The spiritual quest of the young Augustine was "essentially an itinerarium mentis ad Deum, a journey of the mind to God." This paper carefully studied Augustine's mind's journey to the Trinity. It reveals that his mind's journey towards the Trinity has the quality of ascent. Augustine's arguments in his presentations of the spiritual ascent are based on the authority of the Scripture and reason. This subsection explores the metaphor of ascent of the soul in the context of Augustine's search for the Trinity. It argues that Augustine presents a reasoned seven-step spiritual programme for the Christian who is intent on searching for the Trinity, but also that this seeking has three moments (withdrawal, interiority and ascent proper) and that it is a lifelong process.*

**Keywords:** Augustine, God, Trinity, Soul, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

### **God and Soul as Augustine's *Loci Theologici***

Augustine's lifelong search for God unfolded around two themes: God and the human soul.<sup>116</sup> These themes were clear to Augustine at the beginning of his conversion, as this dialogue with himself shows:

Reason: Now what do you want to know?

Augustine: I desire to know God and the soul. R[eason]: Nothing more?

A[ugustine]: Absolutely nothing....<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> *Soliloquia*, I, 2, 7: *Pl.* 32, col. 872: "Ratio: Quid ergo scire vis? ... Augustinus: Deum et animam scire curio. Ratio: Nihilne plus? Augustinus: Nihil omnino." Translated by T.F. Gilligan, *Soliloquies* in *The Fatheq of the Church: Writings of Saint Augustine*, Vol. I (New York: CIMA Co. Inc., 1948). Henceforth, it will be abbreviated as *Solil.* Also see *De Ordine*, 11, 18, 47: CC XXIX, pp. 132-133. Also see R. J. O'Connell, *St Augustine's Early Theory of Man, A. D. 386-391* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 31-63; R. E. Buckenmeyer, "The Meaning of *judicium* and Its Relation to Illumination in the Dialogues of Augustine," in *Augustinian Studies* 1 (1970), pp. 93-95.

For Augustine, seeking God and seeking the soul are not two, but one and the same pursuit. To seek God is to seek oneself; and *vice versa*. He experienced that God initiated the search for the Trinity in him. To discover the Trinity is to discover the image of the Trinity. How could Augustine search and discover God as Trinity and the soul as image of the Trinity? He believed that the way to the knowledge of God and soul was that of divine authority and reason<sup>146</sup>. First is the authority of Christ, and then comes the reasoning of the Neoplatonists. These two, authority and reason, became important constructs of Augustine's theory of the soul's ascent to the Trinity.

### **Augustine's *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum ut Trinitatem***

The spiritual quest of the young Augustine was "essentially an *itinerarium mentis ad Deum*, a journey of the mind to God."<sup>147</sup> A careful study of Augustine's mind's journey to the Trinity reveals that it has the quality of ascent<sup>148</sup>. Augustine's arguments in his presentations of the spiritual ascent are based on the authority of the Scripture and reason. This subsection explores the metaphor of ascent of the soul in the context of Augustine's search for the Trinity. It argues that Augustine presents a reasoned seven-step spiritual programme for the Christian who is intent on searching for the Trinity, but also that this seeking has three moments (withdrawal, interiority and ascent proper) and that it is a lifelong process.

### **The Ascent of the Soul to the Trinity in Earlier Writings**

A number of scholars have explored the seven-stage theme of the soul's approach to God in Augustine's earlier works. S. Connolly considers the historico-philosophical influences at work in Augustine's ascent<sup>149</sup>. V. J. Bourke explores humanity's approach to God within the context of Augustine's three-level ontology and his psychology of the tripartite soul<sup>150</sup>. G. Lawless has underlined the ascetical and mystical import of Augustine's ascent to God in his

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<sup>146</sup> *Contra Academicos*, III, xx, 43; CC xxx. pp. 60-61; *De ordine*, II, 9, 27; CC xxx. pp. 122-123; J. J. O'Meara, "St. Augustine's View of Authority and Reason in A.D. 386," in *The Irish Theological Quarterly* XVIII (1951), pp. 338-346; J. R. Ramirez, "The Priority of Reason over Faith in Augustine," in *Augustinian Studies* 13 I (1982), pp. 123-131.

<sup>147</sup> O. Du Roy, "St. Augustine," in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. I, p. 1051.

<sup>148</sup> G. J. P. O'Daly has demonstrated that Augustine's hierarchical aspect of *ordo* affected his conception of ascent. See G. J. P. O'Daly, "Hierarchies in Augustine's Thought," in *From Augustine to Eriugena: Essays on Neoplatonism and Christianity in Honour of John O'Meara*, pp. 143-154.

<sup>149</sup> S. Connolly, "The Platonism of Augustine's 'Ascent' to God," in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 78/2 (1952), pp. 44-53; 80/2 (1953), pp. 28-36; 81/1 (1954), pp. 120-133; 260-269.

<sup>150</sup> V. J. Bourke, *Wisdom from St. Augustine* (Houston, Texas: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1984), pp. 63-77; G. P. Lawless, "Approaches to the Christian Life in Augustine's Early Writings," in *Angelicum* 64 (1987), pp. 376-394.

Early Writings. We shall not only draw from these scholars' insights into Augustine's Christian ideal of spiritual life, but also we are intent on underlining the point that this ideal "is characterized by a dynamic process, namely, the ascent of the soul to the Trinity. The texts that we have chosen are arranged according to their chronological order of composition.

### **As DESCRIBED IN *DE QUANTITATE ANIMAE* (387- 388)**

In *De Quantitate Animae*, Augustine describes seven levels<sup>151</sup> of the soul's ascent to God. In the first level, animation (*animatio*), Augustine affirms that the soul animates the body. The soul, therefore, unites and nourishes the entire body, it preserves the harmony and I proportion of the living organism as well as sustains the organism's growth and I reproduction<sup>152</sup>. At the second level, the soul goes beyond the act of animation to that of sensation (*sensus*). It expresses itself through the five senses of hearing, seeing, smelling and touching<sup>153</sup>.

The third act of the soul is characteristically human, possessed by both good and evil men[women]. Here, the soul transcends mere perception of the senses to the level of the activities proper to human beings. The soul participates in the development of skills (*anes*) that help humanity direct its affairs. Unlike animals, mankind uses the perceptive powers of the soul to create a culture that is uniquely its own<sup>154</sup>.

The fourth act of the soul is its progress to goodness and truth by way of purification (*purificatio*). The soul's movement towards goodness and truth requires purification of the soul and its submission to authority and the teachings of the wise men. The awareness of the reality of human defilement and the need for the purification of the soul establishes a relationship of duty and commitment between divine goodness and the soul: "It is to this divine goodness that the soul

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<sup>151</sup> The levels are better described as acts (actl). See *De quantitate animae*, 34, 78: The Latin text is that of *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. LXXXIX, edited by W. Hormann (Vienna: Holder-Pichler- Tempisky KG., 1986), p. 228: Augustine summarises the seven acts of the soul as *animatio, sensus, ars, virtus, i traequillitas, ingressio* and *contemplatio*. Hereafter this book will be cited as *De Q An.* and its Latin source indicated by *CSEL LXXXIX*

<sup>152</sup> *De Q. An.*, 33, 70: *CSEL LXXXIX*, pp. 217-218.

<sup>153</sup> *De Q. An.*, 33, 71: *CSEL x*, pp. 218-219.

<sup>154</sup> *De Q. An.*, 33, 72: *CSEL LXXXIX*, p. 220'

most dutifully and confidently commits itself for help and success in the difficult task of self purification."<sup>155</sup>

In the fifth grade, the soul rests quietly in joyful possession of itself: neither amid of nor anxious for anything. This is a preparatory stage for the next act of the soul. The soul having been freed from all imperfections and stains "advances towards God, that is, to the immediate contemplation of truth."<sup>156</sup> In the sixth level, Augustine describes the entering (*ingressio*) of the soul into contemplative life. "[T]he soul's highest vision" is the desire to understand truth and perfection<sup>157</sup>. The seventh and final act of the soul is the vision (*visio*) and contemplation (*contemplatio*) of truth (*veritas*)<sup>158</sup>.

### **DE GENESI CONTRA MANICHAEOS (388/389)**

In another work, *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos*, Augustine relates the six days of creation and God's rest on the seventh day to the stages of growth in Christian perfection. At first, there are six stages of spiritual growth; afterwards, there will be Sabbath rest in heaven. The first stage is the light of faith (*lux fidel*); in the second stage, one discerns between carnal and spiritual things (*discernit inter carnalia et spiritualia*); and the third stage is that of separation of the mind from stain and carnal temptation (*liberatio et fluctibus tentationum carnalium*). The fourth stage, Augustine argues, represents various spiritual knowledges (*spirituales intelligentias*). The spiritual person who has attained the fifth step participates in the actions of this turbulent world (*in actionibus turbulentissimi saeculi*). The sixth step is marked by stability of the mind (*stabilitate mentis*) and spiritual enjoyment (*spirituales fructus*). Finally, the seventh step is rest (*requiescere*)<sup>159</sup>.

### **THE ACCOUNT OF DE VERA RELIGIONE (389-391)**

Augustine also delineates seven stages of the soul's progress to God in *De Vera Religione*. The spiritual advance of humanity progresses from the "the old or exterior or earthly man" (*hominem, ... veterem et exteriorem et terrenum*) to "the new,

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<sup>155</sup> De Q An., 33, 73: CSEL LXXXIX, pp. 220-222. Translated by J. M. Collieran, *The Greatness of the Soul*, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 9, translated by J. M. Collieran (New York: Newman Press, 1950), pp. 102-103. J

<sup>156</sup> De- Q An. 33,74: CSEL LXXXIX, p. 222: "pergit in deum, id est in ipsam contemplationem veritatis " Translated by J. M. Collieran, *The Greatness of the Soul*, p. 103.

<sup>157</sup> De Q An. 33, 75: CSEL LXXXIX, pp. 222-223. 131

<sup>158</sup> De.Q An. 33, 76: CSEL x, pp. 223-225.

<sup>159</sup> *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos*, 1,25,43: PL 34, cols. 193-194, II

the inward and the heavenly man" (*nouus homo et interior et caelestis*). This is how he explicates it:

In the first stage he [the new, inward and heavenly soul] is taught by the rich stores of history which nourish by examples. In the second stage he forgets human affairs and tends towards divine things. He is no longer kept in the bosom of human authority, but step by step by the use of reason he strives to reach the highest unchangeable law. In the third stage he confidently marries carnal appetite to strong reason, and inwardly rejoices in the sweetness of the union. Soul and mind are joined together in chaste union. There is as yet no compulsion to do right, but, even though no one forbids sin he has no pleasure in sinning. The fourth stage is similar, only now he acts more firmly, life and springs forth as the perfect man, ready to endure and overcome all the persecutions, tempests and billows of this world. In the fifth stage he has peace and tranquillity on all sides. He lives among the abundant resources of unchangeable realm of the supreme ineffable wisdom. The sixth stage is complete transformation into life eternal, a total forgetfulness of temporal life passing into the perfect form which is made according to the image and likeness of God. The seventh stage is the eternal rest and perpetual beatitude with no distinguishable ages. As the end of the "old man is death," so the end of the "new man is eternal"<sup>160</sup>.

### ***DE SERMONE DOMINI IN MONTE (393-394)***

Shortly after his ordination to the priesthood, Augustine composed his *De Sermone Domini in Monte*. The Sermon of the Lord on the Mount is the "perfect way of the Christian life" (*perfectum vitae Christianae modum*)<sup>161</sup>. Once again, he

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<sup>160</sup>133 *De vera religione*, 24, 49: CC XXXII, pp. 218-219: "Primam in uberibus utilis historiae, quae nutrit exemplis, Secundam jam obliuiscens humana d ad diuina tendentem, in qua non auctoritatis humanae contindur isinu, sed ad summam et incommutabilem legem passibus rationis innititur. Tertiam jam fidentiorem et carnalem appetitum rationis robare maritantem gaudentemque intrinsecus in quadam dulcedine coniugali, cum anima menti copulatur et uelamento pudoris obnubitur, ut jam recte uiuere non cogatur, sed etiamsi omnes concedant, peccare non libeat. Quartam jam id ipsum multo firmitus ordinatiusque facientem et emicantem in uirum perfectum atque aptam et idoneam omnibus et persecutionibus et Mundi huius tempestatibus ac fluctibus sustinendis atque frangendis, Quintam pacatam atque omni ex parte tranquillam uiuentem in opibus et abundantia in commutabilis regni summae atque ineffabilis sapientiae. Sextam omnimodae mutationis in aeternam uitam et usque ad totam obliuionem uitae temporalis transeuntem perfecta forma, quae facta est ad imaginem similitudinem dei. Septima enim jam quies aeterna est et nullis aetatibus distinguenda beatitudo perpetua, Vt enim finis ueteris hominis mars est, sic finis noui hominis uita aeterna," Translated by J. H. S., *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 249.

<sup>161</sup> *De Sermone Domini in Monte*, I, I, 1: *Pr*, 34, cols. 1229-1230.

asserts that the ascent of the soul to God progresses from *actio* to *contemplatio*, from *scientia* to *sapientia*. This gradual progress of the soul unfolds itself in seven stages. There is a link between the seven steps and the beatitudes, the seven operations of the Holy Spirit and the seven petitions of the Our Father. For Augustine, the seven beatitudes<sup>162</sup> which concern the poor in spirit (*humiles*), the sorrowful (*lugentes*), the meek (*mites*), those who hunger and thirst for justice (*esuriunt et sitiunt justitiam*), the merciful (*miseriordes*), the pure in heart (*mundi corde*) and the peacemakers (*pacifici*) give rise to corresponding seven stages in the soul's search for God. And they are humility (*humilitas*), piety (*pietas*), knowledge (*scientia*), hard work (*labor*), mercy (*miseriordia*), cleanness of heart (*cordis munditia*) and wisdom (*sapientia*) or contemplation of truth (*contemplatio veritatis*)<sup>163</sup>.

Accordingly, Augustine skillfully relates the seven steps to the beatitudes and the seven operations of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah 11: 2 - 3:<sup>164</sup> Thus, the fear of God (*timor Dei*) agrees with humility (*humilitas*), piety (*pietas*) goes with the meek (*mites*), knowledge (*scientia*) corresponds with the sorrowful (*lugentes*), fortitude (*fortitudo*) correlates with hard work (*labor*) or those who hunger and thirst for justice (*esuriunt et sitiunt justitiam*), whereas counsel (*consilium*) goes with the merciful (*miseriordes*), understanding (*intellectus*) agrees with the pure in heart (*mundi corde*) and wisdom (*sapientia*) correlates with the peacemakers (*pacifici*)<sup>165</sup>.

### **DE DOCTRINA CHRISTIANA (396: DDC., 1,1,1 - III; 25,35)**

In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine delineates a seven-step spiritual development programme for those whose responsibility it is to expound the Sacred Scripture. The first step is the fear (*timor*) that makes us recognise God's will: "what bids us seek and shun."<sup>166</sup>

The second step is the piety (*pietas*) that enables us to have respect for what God has revealed in the divine scripture<sup>167</sup>.

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<sup>162</sup> De *Sennone Domini* in *Monte*, I, 1,3-1,2,9: *Pr*, 34, cols. 1231-1233.

<sup>163</sup> De *Sennone Domini* in *Monte*, I, 3, 10: *Pr*, 34, cols. 1233-1234.

<sup>164</sup> The positions of the seven Operations of the Holy Spirit must be inverted.

<sup>165</sup> De *Sennone Domini* in *Monte*, I, 4, 11: *Pr*, 34, cols. 1234-1235.

<sup>166</sup> De *Doctrina Christiana*, II, 9: *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina, vol. XXXII, edited by I. Martin (Munich: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1962), p. 36: "quid nobis appetendum fugiendumque praecipiat." Translated by E. Hill, *Teaching Christianity in The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, vol. 1/11 (New York: New City Press, 1996), p. 134. Henceforth, *De Doctrina Christiana* will be cited as DOC and its Latin source as CC XXXII.

<sup>167</sup> DDC., II, 9: CC XXXII, pp. 36-37.

The third step is the knowledge (*scientiae gradum*) that turns our love towards God, and for the sake of God, our neighbour<sup>168</sup>. The fourth step is that of fortitude (*fortitudo*). Fortitude makes a person seek for righteousness which translates into love of what is eternal and abiding, i.e., the Trinity. To be sure, fortitude is a frame of mind "in which one is hungry and thirsty for justice. For in this frame of mind one extricates oneself from all deadly delight in passing things, and turning away from that, one turns instead to love of eternal things, namely to the unchanging unity which is at the same time a trinity."<sup>169</sup>

The fifth step, then, is "in the resolve of compassion" (*in consilio misericordiae*)<sup>170</sup>. It is the perfection of the love of neighbour through the purging of the mind of "impurities accumulated by its desire of what is inferior" (*obstrepentem sibi de appetitu inferiorum conceptis sordibus*)<sup>171</sup>. The sixth step, the cleansing of the heart (*purgatio oculi cordis*), leads to the experience of the Truth: "[A]t this stage those who have died to this world so purge and clean the eyes of their hearts that they do not even put their neighbors before the truth, or on a level with it, nor themselves either, therefore, because not the ones whom they love as themselves<sup>172</sup>. The seventh step is the heart's ascent to wisdom (*ascensus ad sapientiam*); for wisdom is the final stage of those who seek God. God's children should ascend to wisdom "Such children of God are now climbing up to wisdom, which is the last and the seventh stage, which is to be enjoyed in peace and tranquillity. Thus *the fear of the Lord, you see, is the beginning of wisdom* (Ps 111: 10; Sir 1: 16); and it is through these stages at one moves from that to this<sup>173</sup>.

The study of these select texts from the earlier works of Augustine suggests the following conclusions. In the first place, Augustine's spiritual programme is a dynamic one. He employs the metaphor of ascent to articulate the dynamism of his spiritual insights. In the second place, Augustine's early theory of the Christian spiritual life is dominated by the pattern of the seven-step ascent of the

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<sup>168</sup> DDC., 11,10: CC XXXII, p. 37.

<sup>169</sup> DDC., II, 10: CC XXXII, p. 37: "quo esuritur et sititur iustitia. Hoc enim affectu ab omni mortifera r iucunditate rerum transeuntium sese extrahit et inde se auertens conuertit ad dilectionem aeternorum, incommutabilem scilicet unitatem eandemque trinitatem." Translated by E. Hill, *Teaching Christianity*, p. 133.

<sup>170</sup> DDC, 11,11: CCXXXII, p. 38.

<sup>171</sup> DDC., 11,11: CCXXXII, p. 38.

<sup>172</sup> DDC., II, 11: CC XXXII, p. 38: "In hoc autem gradu ita purgat oculum cordis, ut ueritati ne ipsum quid em praeferat aut conferat proximum, ergo nec se ipsum, quia nec ilium, quem diligit sicut se ipsum." Translated by E. Hill, *Teaching Christianity*, p. 133.

<sup>173</sup> DDC., 11,11: CCXXXII, p. 38: "Talis filius ascendit ad sapientiam, quae ultima et septima est, qua pacatus tranquillisque perfruitur. *Initium enim sapientiae timor domini*. Ab ilia enim usque ad ipsam per has gradus tenditur et uenitur." Translated by E. Hill, *Teaching Christianity*, p. 133.

soul. In the third place, Augustine varies the seven- step ascent of the soul from book to book. Although no two texts have elements identically arranged, yet, some texts have common elements and in all cases the final step concerns itself with a rest that suggests contemplation of *sapientia*. Augustine contemplates wisdom in books XII, XIV and XV of *De Trinitate*. Finally, although the metaphor of ascent is Neoplatonic, one must carefully note that Augustine's notion of the soul's ascent to the Trinitarian God presupposes the Christian doctrine of the descent of the second person of the Trinity. Through his historical incarnation, the Word of God came down to *us*, to live among us and to save *us*. By means of Christ's descent (incarnation), we ascend to the Trinity. Thus, the unfolding of Augustine's understanding of the spiritual life as an ascent of the soul to God the Trinity is influenced by his belief in the Christian idea of the incarnation.

#### **4. The Soul's Progress to the Trinity in the *Confessiones* (397-401) and *De Trinitate* (399- 419)**

The *Confessiones* and *De Trinitate* have the advantage of having been written at the *height* of Augustine's intellectual powers. His thoughts are strongly influenced by Sacred Scripture. He had become the leader of *his* local Christian *community*, and clearly he had attained adequate Christian maturity to discourse at length, *with* authority, on virtually all aspects of Christian doctrinal and spiritual questions. It *is* true that there *is* the influence of Neoplatonism on Augustine's style of writing. *Yet his* quest for God and the themes of the soul's progress towards the Trinity developed in these volumes are characteristically Christian.

Here, also, *Augustine* stresses the interiority of the triune soul that *includes its* ascent and always seeking of the face of the living God.

### **THE GOD WHO IS WITHIN**

The *Confessiones* and *De Trinitate* reveal that *Augustine's* spiritual search for the Trinity of God has the characteristics of a progressive movement of the soul from *without* to *within*, a concentration of the soul on *itself* (interiority) and an ascent of the soul to *union with* the Trinity. The basic truth *Augustine discovered in his* search was that God could not be found *outside* the self; *God is within* the soul, and therefore, found there. A representative text *which indicates this truth is* worth quoting in full:

(A Publication of the Augustinian Institute in collaboration with AATREPSCHOLARS)



I was caught up to you by your beauty and quickly torn away from you by my weight. With a groan I crashed into inferior things. This weight was my sexual habit. But with me there remained a memory of you. I was in no kind of doubt to whom I *should* attach myself; but was not yet in a state to be able to do that. "The body, which is corruptible, weighs down the *soul*, and our earthly habitation drags down the mind to think many things" (Wisd. 9:15). Moreover, I was *wholly* certain that your invisible nature "since the foundation of the world is understood from the things which are made, that is your eternal power and divinity" (Rom.1:20).

I asked myself why I approved of the beauty of bodies, whether celestial or terrestrial, and what justification I had for an unqualified judgements on mutable things, saying "This ought to be thus, and that ought not to be thus." In the course of this inquiry why I made such value judgements as I was making, I found the unchangeable and - authentic eternity of truth to transcend my mutable mind. And so step by step I ascended from bodies {1} to the *soul* {2} which perceives through the body, and from there to its inward force {3}, to which bodily senses report external sensations, this being as high as the beasts go. From there again I ascended to the power of reasoning [4] to which is to be attributed the power of judging the deliverances of the bodily senses. This power, which in myself I found to be mutable, raised itself to the *level* of intelligence [5], and *led* my thinking out of the ruts of habit. It withdrew itself from the contradictory frames of imaginative fantasies, so as to discover the light by which it was flooded. At that point it had no hesitation in declaring that the unchangeable is preferable to the changeable, and that on this ground it can know the unchangeable

[6], since, unless it *could* somehow know this, there *would* be no certainty in preferring it to the mutable. So in a flash of a trembling glance it attained to that which is (7). At that moment I saw your invisible nature understood through the things which you made (Rom.1: 20)<sup>174</sup>.

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<sup>174</sup> *ConE*, VII, xvii, 23: CC XXVII, p. 107: "rapiebar ad te decore tuo moxque diripiebar abs te pondere meo et ruebam in ista cum gemitu; et pondus hoc consuetudo camalis. Sed mecum erat memoria tui, neque ullo modo dubitabam esse, cui cohaererem, sed nondum me esse, qui cohaererem, quoniam corpus, quod corrumpitur, aggrauat animam et deprimit terrae inhabitatio sensum multa cogitantem, eramque certissimus, quod inuisibilia tua a constitutione mundi per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur, sempiterna quoque uirtus et diuinitas tua. Quaerens enim, unce approbarem pulchritudinem corporum siue caelestium siue terrestrium et quid praesto esset integre de mutabilibus iudicanti et dicenti: 'Hoc ita esse, illud non ita,' hoc ergo quaerens, unce iudicarem, cum ita iudicarem, inueneram incommutabilem et ueram ueritatis aeternitatem supra mentem meam commutabilem. Atque ita gradatim a corporibus ad sentientem per corpus animam atque inde ad eius interiorem uim, cui sensus

This text maintains the seven-step ascent of the soul to God. It has the quality of an account of a mental process of introspection<sup>175</sup>. It is a unique experiential act of Augustine's mind as well as a summary of his lifelong search for the Trinity. Augustine's search, his spiritual *itinerarium*, is a progressive movement from the condition of changeable things, from a life lived *without* among changeable things to a gradual awareness of the self and God *within*.

Before his conversion, Augustine was living outside of himself; he desired a happy life, love, wisdom, and other human refinements. He was erroneous in thinking that these things were found in changeable things. Although he attributes his life *without* to his own weight, i.e., his disordered passion, to his intellectual pride and rationalism, his dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church as well as his association with the Manichees and Sceptics contributed towards his long stay outside of himself

The Neoplatonists and the examples of holy Christians convinced him of the need to stop living in the external world and to go back into himself Augustine withdrew into himself and there he discovered the Trinity *within (intus)*; the God within was always with him, seeking *him*:

Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you have made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all. You called and cried out and shattered my deafness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and

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corporis exteriora nuntiaret, et quousque possunt bestiae, atque inde rursus ad ratiocinantem potentiam, ad quam refertur iudicandum, quod sumitur a sensibus corporis; quam se quoque in me comperiens mutabilem erexit se ad intelligentiam suam et abduxit cogitationem a consuetudine, subtrahens se contradicentibus turbis phantasmatum, ut inueniret quo lumine aspergeretur, cum sine ulla dubitatione clamaret incommutabile praefendum esse mutabili, unde nasset ipsum incommutabile quod nisi aliquo modo nasset, nullo modo illud mutabili certa praeponebat et peruenit ad id, quod est in ictu trepidantis aspectus. Tunc UCLa inuisibilia tua per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspexi " Translated by H. Chadwick, *Saint Augustine, Confessions*, pp. 127. I have inserted the numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7) into the text to clearly indicate the seven steps of the soul to God. Also see similar passages: *ConE*, IX, x, 23-26: CC XXVII, pp. 147-148; *ConE*, x, vi, 8-10: CC XXVII, pp. 158-160. See also: P. Courcelle, "La premiere experience augustiniene de l'extase," in *Augustinus Magister* I, pp. 53-57; F. E. Van Fleteren, "Augustine's Ascent of the Soul: A Reconsideration," in *Augustinian Studies* 5 (1974), pp. 29-72.

<sup>175</sup> Turner, 111c *Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 53.

now pant after you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours<sup>176</sup>.

## INTERIORIY

*Augustine's* search for God has a second moment, interiority. Interiority is the meeting point of the soul and the Trinitarian God, the point at which the soul contemplates the Holy Trinity to attain enlightenment. The soul requires purification at this stage:

Our enlightenment is to participate in the Word " Yet we were absolutely incapable of such participation and quite unfit for it, so unclean were we through sin, so we had to be cleansed. Furthermore, the only thing to cleanse the wicked and the proud is the blood of the just man and the humility of God; to contemplate God, which by nature we are not, we would have to be cleansed by him who became what by nature we are and what by sin we are not<sup>177</sup>.

This passage underlines the christological and soteriological dimensions of purification in Augustine's conception of the ascent of the soul to the Trinity. To participate in the Word and to contemplate God, one must be purified by the blood of Jesus, the just man and humble God. The purification of the soul is followed by divine illumination: "the mind has, as it were, eyes of its own, analogous to the soul's senses. The certain truths of the sciences are analogous to the objects which the sun's rays make visible, such as the earth and earthly things. And it is God Himself who illumines all."<sup>178</sup> The soul, after a period of sustained concentration on God, purification by Christ, and illumination, realises that it is made to the image of the Trinity. God's image in human beings is found in the human *animus*, the seat of *sapientia*, where there is internal unity and mutual relationships between the memory, intellect, and will.

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<sup>176</sup> *Cont.* X, xxvii, 38: CC XXVII, p. 175: "Sero te arnau, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam noua, sero te arnau! Et ecce intus eras et ego foris et ibi te quaerebam et in ista formosa, quae fecisti, deformis inruebam. Mecum eras, et tecum non eram. Ea me tenebant longe a te, quae si in te non essent, non essent. Yocasti et clamasti et rupisti surdiditatem meam, coruscasti, splendisti et fugasti caecitatem meam, flagrasti, et duxi spiritum et anhelum tibi, gustasti et esurio et sitio, tetigisti me, et exarsi in pacem tuam. B Translated by H. Chadwick, *Saint Augustine, Confessions*, p.201.

<sup>177</sup> *Trin.*, N, 4: CC L, pp. 163-164: "In lumen quippe nostra participatio uerbi est "Huic autem participationi prorsus inhabiles et minus idonei eramus propter immunditiam peccatorum; mundandi ergo eramus. Porro iniquorum et superbiorum una mundatio est sanguis iusti et humilitas dei, ut ad contemplandum deum quod natura non sumus per eum mundemur factum quod natura sumus et quod peccato non sumus. Deus enim natura non sumus; homines natura sumus; iusti peccato non sumus. B *Trinity*, pp. 154-155. '60Solil., I, 6, 12: PL, 32, col. 875.

<sup>178</sup> Solil., I, 6, 12: PL, 32, Col. 875.

## ASCENT OF THE SOUL

The third and the final moment in Augustine's lifelong search for God is the ascent of the triune soul to the Trinity. The soul ascends to the Trinity in order to participate in the divine transcendental attributes of unity, truth, goodness, beauty, love, and happiness. The process of participation is, in fact, the transformation of the soul (*capax Del*) to the proper image of Trinity (*imago Trinitatis*). For Augustine, a soul participates in the life of God when it remembers, understands, and loves the Trinity "by whom it was created with a capacity for him and able to share in him."<sup>179</sup> In sum, a clean heart having been prepared;<sup>164</sup> the final consequence of the participation of the soul in the life of the Trinity is the vision of God (*visio Del*).

## SEEK HIS FACE ALWAYS

Augustine's *De Trinitate* has its basis in the Christian faith<sup>165</sup> as a search, a seeking for the Trinitarian God. But does the search, the seeking, stop, even if God's presence is found and one is walking in it? For Augustine as for the Psalmist, we should seek the face of God always.

*Let the heart of those who seek the Lord rejoice; seek the Lord and be strengthened; seek his face always (ps 105: 3).* Now it would seem that what is always being sought is never being found, and in that case how is the heart of the seekers to rejoice and not rather grow sad, if they cannot find what they are looking for? He does not, you see, say "Let the heart of those who find," but "of those who seek the Lord rejoice." And yet the prophet Isaiah testifies that the Lord God can be found provided he is sought, when he says, *Seek the Lord and as soon as you find him call upon him, and when he draws near to you let the godless man forsake his ways and the wicked man his thoughts* (Is 55:6). So if he can be found when he is sought, why does it say *Seek his face always*? Does he perhaps have to be sought even when he is found? That is indeed how incomprehensible things have to be searched for, in case the man who has been able to find out how incomprehensible what he is looking for is should reckon that he has found nothing. Why then look for something when you have comprehended the incomprehensibility of what you are looking for, if not because you should not give up the search as long as you are making progress in your inquiry into things incomprehensible, and because you become better and better

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<sup>179</sup> A *Trin.*, XN, 15: CC L , pp. 442-443.

by looking for so great a good which is both sought in order to be found and found in order to be sought? It is sought in order to be found all the more delightfully, and it is found in order to be sought all the more avidly. This is how we might also take the words of Wisdom in the book of Ecclesiasticus: *Those who eat me will be hungry still those who drink me will be thirsty still* (Sir 24:29). They eat and drink because they find, and because they are hungry and thirsty they still go on seeking. Faith seeks, understanding finds; which is why the prophet says, *Unless you believe you shall not understand* (Is 7: 9, Septuagint). And again, understanding still goes on seeking the one it has found; for, *God gazed down upon the sons of men ... to see if there is any who is understanding or looking for God* (1's 14:2)<sup>180</sup>

This text, which occurs in the last book of *De Trinitate*, indicates that Augustine, throughout his life, was devoted to a continuous search for the Trinity of God. To seek the face of God is to seek for his presence<sup>181</sup>. He firmly believed that although God is incomprehensible, he could be found if he were sought. For unless the seeker is convinced that he is making a progress in his search for the incomprehensible God and that he is becoming better and better by such a search, he will not keep at looking for this God whom he has understood to be incomprehensible. Augustine says quite clearly in our text (*Trin.*, XV, 2): "It [the incomprehensible God] is sought in order to be found all the more delightfully, and it is found in order to be sought all the more avidly." The search for the

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<sup>180</sup> *Trin.*, XV, 2 : CC LA, pp. 460-462: "*Laetetur cor quaerentium dominum. Quaerite dominum et confirmamini; quacrite faciem eius semper.* Videtur enim quod semper quaeritur numquam inueniri, et quomodo jam laetabitur et non pocius contristabitur cor quaerentium si non potuerint inuenire quod quaerunt? Non enim ait: *Laetetur cor 'inuenientium'* sed *quacrentium dominum.* Et tamed deum dominum inueniri posse dum quaeritur testatur Esaias propheta cum dicit: *Quaerite dominum et mox ut inueneritis inuocate cum, et cum appropinquauerit uobis derelinquat impius uias suas et uir iniquus cogitationes suas.* Si ergo quaesitus inueniri potest, cur dictum est: *Quaerite faciem eius semper?* An et inuentus forte quaerendus est? Sic enim sunt incomprehensibilia requirenda ne seexistimet nihil inuenisse qui quam sit incomprehensibile quod quaerebat potuerit inuenire. Cur ergo sic quaerit si incomprehensibile comprehendit esse quod quaerit nisi quia cessandum non est quamdiu in ipsa incomprehensibilium rerum inquisitione proficitur, et melior meliorque fit quaerens tam magnum bonum quod et inueniendum quaeritur et quaerendum inuenitur? Nam et quaeritur ut inueniatur dulcius et inuenitur ut quaeratur audius. Secundum hoc accipi potest quod dictum est in libro ecclesiastico dicere sapientiam: *Qui me manducant adhuc esurient et qui bibunt me adhuc sitient.* Manducant enim et bibunt quia inueniunt, et quia esuriunt ac sitiunt adhuc quaerunt. Fides quaerit, intellectus inuenit; propter quod ait propheta: *Nisi credideritis, non intelletis:* Et rursus intellectus cum quem inuenit adhuc quaerit: *Decus enim respexit super filios hominum,* sicut in psalmo sacro canimr, ut *uideret si est intellegens aut requirens* deum. Ad hoc ergo debet esse homo intellegens ut requirat deum." Translate by E. Hill, *Trinity*, pp. 395-396. Also see *Trin.*, I, 5: CC L. p. 32; *Trin.*, Ix, 1: CC L. p. 292.

<sup>181</sup> *Enarrationes in Psalm os*, 104,3: P4 37, cols. 1391-1392.

Trinity was a lifelong spiritual programme that helped Augustine to seek and find the Trinity in the faith of the Church and human understanding.

The reflections on the texts of *Confessiones* and *De Trinitate* allow us draw the following conclusions. As in his earlier writings, Augustine proposes a seven-stage progress of the triune soul to the Trinity as model for Christian spiritual life. His search for God had three moments: movement from *without* to *within*, interiority, and ascent. He underlines the centrality of Christ in the purification of the soul as it ascends to the Trinity. The search for God as Trinity was Augustine's main concern throughout his life. Finally, and most importantly, the study of the soul's ascent to God provides a conceptual and a theoretical framework in which we can explore Augustine's search for God as Trinity; for, "[t]hroughout Augustine's writings we find the path of the soul's ascent to God mapped out in Neoplatonic terms: it is a movement of withdrawal from the world and into oneself; a movement that involves purification and the acquiring of the virtues, leading to contemplation of God"<sup>182</sup>.

### **The Problem of Knowledge in the Search for the Trinity**

Augustine's quest for the Trinity led him to the problem of knowledge of and language for God. We cannot fully understand God, for he is inaccessible; our human language is rather a weak tool for expressing the ineffable Trinity. While emphasizing the problem of the divine knowledge, Augustine stresses the importance of the religious language of praise in the search for the Trinity.<sup>169</sup> This idea is best enunciated in his *Confessiones*.

'Grant me Lord to know and understand' (Ps. 118: 34, 73, 144) which comes first-to call upon you or to praise, and whether knowing you precedes calling upon you. But who calls upon you when he does not know you. For an ignorant person might call upon someone else instead of the right one. But surely you may be called upon in prayer that you may be known. Yet 'how shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe without a preacher?' (Rom. 10: 14). 'They will praise the Lord who seeks for him'(Ps. 21: 27).

In seeking him they find him, and in finding they will praise him. Lord, I would seek you, calling upon you - and calling upon you is an act of believing in you. You have been preached to us. My faith, Lord, calls upon

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<sup>182</sup> A. Louth, "Augustine," in *The Study of Spirituality*, edited by C. Jones et al. (London: S. P. C. K, 1992), p. 136.

you. It is your gift to me. You breathed it into me by the humanity of your Son, by the ministry of your preacher<sup>183</sup>.

As this text indicates, Augustine's search for the Trinity led him to the ultimate in divine intimacy with all its concomitant problems of religious knowledge and language. Is it possible for humans, who are both creatures of God and sinners, to know and understand God? How can one talk about God? Can one praise God and pray to him even when one is not able to name God? Augustine is aware of the fact that words can misrepresent reality and can mislead one in his judgements. There is the danger of misnaming God<sup>184</sup>. To name God is to risk idolatry, i.e. to make God according to one's image. But how can one speak about God without manipulation? Augustine has no "quick fix" solutions to these questions.

He acknowledges the limitation of our knowledge of divine things; the result of our sinful state. Also, he appeals to the importance of prayer, praise, the incarnation of Christ and the ministry of preachers in seeking and finding God, in naming and talking about him. In this manner, Augustine asserts that the golden way to the Trinity is that of prayer, praise, the ministry of God's preacher and, above all, "the road he [the Father] has made in the beauty of the divinity of his only Son" (*per uiam quam strauit humanitate diuinitate unIgemt sui*).

## **Conclusion**

In the first chapter of this work, we have surveyed Augustine's search for God as Trinity within the contexts of his life. It has been shown that we can neither neglect Augustine's condition of restlessness of heart as an instrument of search for happiness and wisdom, nor exaggerate his indebtedness to Neoplatonic literature and good Christians for helping him develop interest in the search for God as absolutely simple and transcendent, as well as incomprehensible source

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<sup>183</sup> Conf, I, i, 1: CCXXVII, p. 1: "Da mihi, domine, scire et intellegere, utrUm sit prius inuocare te an laudare te et scire te prius sit an inuocare te. Sed quis teinuocat nesciens te? Aliud enim pro alio potest inuocare nesciens. An potius inuocaris, ut sciaris? eomodo autem inuocabunt, in quem non crediderunt? Aut quomodo credunt sine praedicante? Et laudabunt dominum qui requirunt eum. eaerentes enim inueniunt eum et inuenientes laudabunt eum. eaeram te, domine, inuocans te et inuocem te credens in te: praedicatus enim es nobis. Inuocat, domine, fides mea, quam dedisti mihi, quam inspirasti mihi per humanitatem filii tui, per ministerium praedicatoris tui." Translated by H. Chadwick, *Saint Augustine, Confessions*, p. 3. Also see J. J. O'Donnell, *Augustine Confessions*, vol. 2: *Commentary Books 1-7*, pp. 8-17; *DDC.*, I, 6, 6: CC XXXII, pp. 9-10.

<sup>184</sup> M. Soskice, "The Gift of the Name: Moses and the Burning Bush," in *Gre.gorianum* 79/2 (1998), pp. 231-246.

of goodness, truth, love, happiness, beauty, peace and mercy. Augustine experienced God as Trinity at his conversion to Christianity.

The Neoplatonic philosophy and mysticism of ascent of the soul provided Augustine a set pattern to follow in the search for the Trinity and expression of his spiritual experience. Augustine's ascent to the Trinity involved a movement from the *without* to the *within* of the self and there he discovered that God was waiting and inviting him to come in and stay. His discovery of the Trinity *within* the soul led him to conclude that human beings were made to the image and likeness of the Trinity. The theme of ascent is necessary for the understanding of Augustine's search for God as Trinity and reformation of humanity to the image of God in books VIII to XIV of *De Trinitate*.

Still, the above summary description of the life of Augustine and some of the spiritual themes (which characterized his lifelong search for God) offered; makes it easier for us to locate Augustine's Trinitarian experience and understand better his spiritual concerns in *De Trinitate*. Finally, we must make the effort of situating *De Trinitate* within the context of Augustine's other works and influences by investigating the factors of the historical relationship between *De Trinitate* and Augustine's other books, its audience, dates and circumstances of its composition. We shall discuss these themes in the next chapter.