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*1999 St. Augustine Lecture*

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***Spiritus sanctus secundum scripturas sanctas:  
Exegetical Considerations of Augustine on  
the Holy Spirit***

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Unlike the early Christian Pasch that was celebrated as an annual festival early in the church's history, the feast of Pentecost emerged only slowly. In the earliest sources the term *Pentecost* designated not a single feast day, but the period of time after Easter, what Tertullian called "a most joyous space for Baptisms."<sup>1</sup> Basil of Caesarea, writing in the middle of the fourth century, said that the "entire season of Pentecost" is a reminder of the future resurrection.<sup>2</sup> Pentecost was viewed as a continuation of Easter and had no distinctive character of its own. Only in the fifth century does it emerge as a feast day in its own right.

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1. *De baptismo* 19.2. For other reference see Francesca Cocchini, "L'Evoluzione Storico-Religiosa della Festa di Pentecoste," in *Rivista Biblica* 25 (1977): 316ff.

2. *De Spiritu Sancto* 27.66.

In some ways the history of the feast of Pentecost can serve as a metaphor for the development of the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Although the book of Acts makes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost a pivotal event in the formation of the Church (Acts 2), and hence of the economy, the ordered pattern of God's revelation in history, discussion of the status and character of the Holy Spirit trailed behind the debate about the Son. The earliest creeds mention the Holy Spirit, but it was only at the end of the fourth century, at the council of Constantinople, that a full article on the Holy Spirit was added to the creed.

This feature of the Church's teaching on the Holy Trinity was not lost on the church fathers. "Theology," says Gregory Nazianzus, "reaches maturity by additions." In the Old Testament the Father was proclaimed openly but the Son "obscurely." The New Testament revealed the Son, but only "gave us a glimpse of the deity of the Spirit." Only "now," by which he means the time of the Church, when "the Spirit has taken up residence among us does he give us a clearer manifestation of himself." To which he adds, acknowledging the audacity of his language, that it would have been imprudent when Father and Son had not been acknowledged to "burden us further with the Holy Spirit."<sup>3</sup> The truth arrives through time.

Gregory's arresting comment also suggests that the discussion of the Holy Spirit will proceed on somewhat different lines than the debate over the relation of the Son to the Father. Since it was through the "dwelling of the Holy Spirit among us" that his person and nature became clear, the theology of the Holy Spirit will be anchored in Christian experience, and in particular participation in the church's worship and sacraments: in Baptism, in the calling down of the Holy Spirit in the great prayer over the bread and wine in the Eucharist, in the laying on of hands during the ordination of bishops, to name the most obvious rites. No doubt this was one reason why Gregory's dear friend Basil could write that if one does not confess the divinity of the Holy Spirit, one would "deny what was received at Baptism."<sup>4</sup> What was done was evidence of what was to be taught. *Lex orandi legem statuit credendi*.

Christianity was religiously trinitarian before it was dogmatically trinitarian. In his book *The Doctrine of the Trinity* the English theologian Leonard Hodgson wrote: "Christianity began as a trinitarian religion with a unitarian theology. The question at issue in the age of the Fathers was whether the religion should

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3. *Oration* 31.26.

4. *De Spiritu Sancto* 10.26.

transform the theology or the theology stifle the religion.”<sup>5</sup> Nowhere is this dynamic of early Christian thought more evident than in the development of the doctrine of the Spirit.

Gregory says that the New Testament “manifests” the Son, but only “gave us a glimpse of the Spirit.” There is some exaggeration here, but his point is well taken. Although there are many references to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, they offer no clear and unequivocal testimony to the Spirit’s nature and character. The works are many, but it is not easy to discern what, if anything, is unique to them. As the church fathers knew well, within the New Testament the Spirit is most often presented as completing and perfecting the work of Christ. In one of the earliest extended discussions of the Holy Spirit in the early church, the Spirit is identified as the Spirit of the Son. “When we are enlightened by the Holy Spirit it is Christ who enlightens us,” wrote Athanasius, and “when we drink of the Spirit we drink of Christ.”<sup>6</sup> The offending text was 2 Cor. 4:17: “Now the Lord is the Spirit.” Was the expression “Holy Spirit” simply another way of depicting the work of Christ? As Robert Jenson puts it in his recent *Systematic Theology*: “Is Pentecost a peer of Easter or does it merely display a meaning that Easter would in any case have?”<sup>7</sup>

The ambiguity of the language of the Scriptures on the Holy Spirit presented early Christian thinkers with a particularly acute problem. The doctrine of the Spirit had to be constructed from the ground up using only the materials provided by the Scriptures. Of course one might say the same thing about the teaching on the Father and the Son, as the debates over the meaning of scriptural texts after Nicaea showed, but the church fathers knew that the teaching on the Holy Spirit was dependent on the Bible in a way that teaching on the Father and the Son was not. In his chapter on the Holy Spirit in book 1 of *First Principles* Origen says that it is possible to gain some idea of God (i.e., the Father) from the “visible creation” and “from those things that the human mind instinctively perceives.” He is thinking of Romans 1:20, “his invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.” And, with respect to the Son, even some philosophers believe that all things were created by “the Word of God or reason.” But knowledge of the Holy Spirit, says Origen, is not given to us through creation or the workings of reason. For “only those

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5. Leonard Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1944), p. 103.

6. Letter to Serapion 1.19 (PG 26, 573–576).

7. Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.146.

who are versed in the law and the prophets or profess faith in Christ can have any notion of the existence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>8</sup>

Origen was not alone in this view. In the *Confessions* Augustine said that when he was reading the books of the Platonists, “God and his Word kept slipping in.”<sup>9</sup> That is, it was possible to have some knowledge of the Father and the Son independently of the Scriptures. But, says Augustine, the “pages of the Platonic books have nothing to say . . . about the guarantee of your Holy Spirit.”<sup>10</sup> Because there were no analogues in human experience or thought to the Holy Spirit, the existence of the Spirit could be known only through the Scriptures and the life of the Church. Hence the discussion of the nature and character of the Spirit imposed constraints on Christian thinkers that were absent when speaking of the Father and the Son. The philosophical tradition would provide little guidance on this aspect of Christian doctrine.<sup>11</sup>

For these reasons it is not surprising that in the course of Book 15 of *De Trinitate* when Augustine comes to the Holy Spirit he says twice that he intends to discuss the Holy Spirit “*secundum Scripturas sanctas*.”<sup>12</sup> Of course at the beginning of *De Trinitate* Augustine had said that his purpose was to “establish by the authority of the Holy Scriptures” what was to be believed<sup>13</sup> and

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8. *On First Principles* 1.3.1. Origen, however, adds that one cannot however know “higher and more divine teaching about the Son of God” except through the Scriptures.
  9. *Confessiones* 8.2.3.
  10. *Confessiones* 7.21.27. Nello Cipriani observes: “in nessun luogo Agostino afferma di aver trovato nei libri neoplatonici l’intera Trinità et in particolare lo Spirito Santo.” He notes that in Book 10 of the *City of God* Augustine acknowledges that Porphyry knew the Father and the Son, but not the Holy Spirit. Nello Cipriani, “Le Fonti Cristiane della dottrina Trinitaria nei primi Dialoghi di S. Agostino,” *Augustinianum* 34 (1994): 257.
  11. There are of course some terms for the Spirit with philosophical overtones, particularly in Marius Victorinus. For example: “Adesto, sancte spiritus, patris et filii *copula*.” (Hymn 1, “Adesto, lumen verum,” line 3 (Marius Victorinus, *Traité Théologique sur la Trinité*, ed. P. Henry and P. Hadot, *Sources Chrétiennes* 68 [Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1960], p. 620); “Tu, spiritus sancte, *connexio* es; *connexio* autem est quicquid *connectit duo*; /Ita ut connectas omnia, primo connectis duo;/ Esque ipsa tertia *complexio* duorum atque ipsa complexio nihil distans uno, unum cum facis duo; O beata trinitas” (Hymn 3, “Deus, Dominus, Sanctus spiritus, O beata trinitas,” lines 242–247 in *SC* 68, p.650.
  12. *De Trinitate* 15.27; 15.39. The literature on Augustine’s doctrine is large. For summary discussion with up-to-date bibliography see Eugene Teselle, “Holy Spirit,” in *Augustine Through the Ages. An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A. (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans 1999), pp. 434–437; also the articles by B. Studer in his two volumes of collected essays, cited below; Rowan Williams, “Sapientia and the Trinity: Reflections on *de Trinitate*,” in *Collectanea Augustiniana I*, ed. B. Bruning (Leuven: Institut Historique Augustinien, 1990), pp. 317–332.

that “the aim of all the Catholic commentators” who had written on the Holy Trinity was to “teach according to the Scriptures.”<sup>14</sup> Yet the appearance of the phrase “*secundum Scripturas sanctas*” twice in Book 15 in the section on the Holy Spirit would suggest that any theologian who embarks on a discussion of the Holy Spirit will be occupied chiefly with expounding the Scriptures. Even a cursory look at the treatises on the Holy Spirit in the fourth century—Athanasius’s letters to Serapion, the pages in Hilary’s *De Trinitate*, the treatises of Ambrose and Didymus and Basil on the Holy Spirit, Gregory Nazianzus’s theological oration on the Holy Spirit<sup>15</sup>—will bear this out. In these works the discussion is overwhelmingly exegetical.

However, when one looks at these treatises on the Holy Spirit more closely, it becomes apparent that there is scant agreement as to which passages from the Bible count as relevant and how they are to be brought together to form a theological unity. Some texts appear again and again, e.g., 1 Cor. 2:12, Gal. 4:4, and John 4:24, but it is difficult to discern a pattern in their exegesis. Interpretation required something more than expounding the words of passages that mention the Holy Spirit. For if the exposition of individual texts did not summon up the whole, what the fathers called the *skopos*, the controlling conception of the matter at hand, they remained fallow and otiose. Yet in the case of the Holy Spirit it was precisely the whole, the Spirit’s character and distinctive work, that was at issue. Though there is much citing of the Bible, and passages are marshalled to support theological arguments, the fathers are less engaged in defending something than in searching for something. Only gradually and after peering intently at the murkiness before them does the goal of their quest come clear.<sup>16</sup>

Of course from the beginning certain theological claims had to be defended, and the earliest discussions focus on two questions: whether there is a Holy Spirit, and whether the Holy Spirit was a creature. In the chapter on the Holy Spirit in *First Principles* Origen cites a series of biblical texts, “take not thy

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13. *De Trinitate* 1.2.4.

14. *De Trinitate* 1.4.7.

15. *Oration* 31.

16. For a survey of early Christian theology of the Holy Spirit see F. Court, *Trinität in der Schrift und Patristik*, Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte, Vol. 2 (Freidburg: Herder, 1988); P. Smulders, “Esprit Saint. Pères latins,” *Dictionnaire de la Spiritualité* 4: 1272–83; Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. I (New York: Crossroad, 1997); Boris Bobrinskoy, *The Mystery of the Trinity. Trinitarian Experience and Vision in the Biblical and Patristic Tradition* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1999).



holy Spirit from me” (Ps. 51:13), “receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn. 20:22), “no one can say that Jesus is the Lord except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3), to argue that the Scriptures bear witness to the existence of the Holy Spirit. Having established that there is a Holy Spirit, he then introduces a second series of texts to show that the Holy Spirit was not “made” or “created.”<sup>17</sup>

Similarly in his letters to Serapion, Athanasius, responding to critics of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, does something similar, though at much greater length. Near the end of his letters he writes: “Therefore the Spirit is not a creature but is in God and of God.”<sup>18</sup> As in his great work *Contra Arianos*, Athanasius also deals with several texts that had been used by the detractors of the Holy Spirit. One of these was Amos 4:13: “I am he that establishes thunder and creates spirit and declares unto men his Christ, forming the morning and the darkness, and mounting on the high places of the earth. The Lord God almighty is his name.”<sup>19</sup> Here Athanasius faced a problem not unlike the one raised by the Arian interpretation of Proverbs 8:22, “The Lord created me the beginning of his ways.” As he then had to demonstrate from the Scriptures that the Son was not “created,” so now he had to show that the Holy Spirit was not “created.” Consequently his reasoning moves along parallel lines: as the one who redeems cannot be in need of redemption, so the one who sanctifies cannot be from among those who are in need of sanctification. What is confessed in the creed about the son is now applied to the Spirit: he is not a creature but is “one in essence with the Father.”<sup>20</sup>

It is not until one turns to the works of Hilary of Poitiers, Didymus the Blind and Ambrose that one has the sense that the interpretation of biblical passages on

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17. *On First Principles* 1.3.2–3.

18. Letter to Serapion 4.2 (PG 26, 640).

19. Letter to Serapion 1.3 (PG 26, 536). Another troubling text was 1 Timothy 5:21, “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without favor.” Here the Holy Spirit is not explicitly mentioned, and seems, according to some thinkers, to be counted with the angels, himself being the greatest in that category. Athanasius’s task was to show that this passage did not teach that the Spirit was a creature, albeit angelic (*ep.* 1.10 [PG 26, 556]).

20. Peter Widdicombe believes that there are hints in Athanasius that point in the direction of the Augustinian conception of the Spirit as the bond of love. “As the grace given is from the Father through the Son, so we can have no fellowship in the gift except in the Holy Spirit. For it is when we participate in him that we have the love of the Father and the grace of the Son and the fellowship of the Spirit himself” (*ep. ad Serap.* 1.30). The biblical texts are 1 Cor. 12:4–6 and 2 Cor. 13:13. But Athanasius speaks only of love flowing from God and drawing believers into fellowship, not of love between Father, Son, and Spirit. See his “Athanasius and the Making of the Doctrine of the Trinity,” in *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (1997): 472–3.

the Holy Spirit has moved to a deeper level. Hilary, for example, says that the question “whether the Holy Spirit exists” is not one that requires discussion. “He does exist,” writes Hilary, “since he is given, received, and possessed.”<sup>21</sup>

Hilary’s reasoning is noteworthy. Unlike Origen who had brought forth biblical evidence to show that there is a Holy Spirit, Hilary takes that for granted and focuses on the distinctive characteristics of the Spirit, that he is given, received, and possessed. In support he marshals a series of texts from St. Paul, among which are the following: “Because you are sons, God has *sent* [=given] the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba Father” (Gal. 4:6); “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God in whom you were *sealed* [=received]”; (Eph. 4:30); “We have *received* not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might know the things given us by God” (1 Cor. 2:12); “But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God *dwells* [= is possessed] in you” (Rm 8:9); “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead *dwells* [= is possessed] in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit which dwells in you” (Rm 8:11).<sup>22</sup>

After reciting this litany of Pauline texts Hilary concludes: “Since [the Holy Spirit] exists, and is given, and is possessed, and is of God, let his accusers be silent.”<sup>23</sup> The Holy Spirit then can be called “*donum fidelium*,” “the gift to the faithful.” *Gift* is a shorthand way of referring to being given, received, and possessed. Hilary has noticed something distinctive about the biblical language for the Holy Spirit, namely that there is a field of terms in the Bible associated with the Spirit that variously depict being given and poured out, on the one hand, and being received or indwelling on the other. That is, the “gift” is seen not only from the perspective of the giver, but also from that of the recipient. What is given enters into the life of the recipient and becomes his own, which in turn relates the recipient to the giver. *Gift*, as presented in the Scriptures, has built into it overtones of reciprocity and mutuality. Surprisingly, and this is an indication of how unsystematic the exegesis is at this stage of development, Hilary does not cite the one text that was a pillar for Augustine’s thinking, Romans 5:5, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.”

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21. Est enim quando quidem donatur, accipitur, obtinetur (*De Trinitate* 2.29).

22. *De Trinitate* 2.29.

23. *De Trinitate* 2.29.

Didymus the Blind, however, writing in the 380s, did cite Romans 5, "*caritas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris*," and noted the importance of the term *diffundo* (pour out, diffuse) and cognates, as for example, "give" (Luke 11:13), in the biblical depiction of the Holy Spirit.<sup>24</sup> In this connection he also cited Joel 2:29 (=Acts 2:17): "I will pour out (*effundam*) my Spirit on all flesh" and observed that "pour out" is a unique form of divine communication. "When God sends an angel or some other creature, he does not say, 'I will pour out my angel.'" This way of speaking, says Didymus, applies only to goods that are received "by participation," as in Romans 5, "the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us."<sup>25</sup> The Holy Spirit is *capabilis*, "capable of being participated in," a term not used for human beings or angels, but only for "uncreated being," says Didymus.<sup>26</sup> When the Spirit is received, the recipients "have communion with him." To be filled with the Holy Spirit then, does not mean filling one thing with another, as one would fill a glass with water, it means participate in. Because the Holy Spirit fills those who are able to receive (*capere*) wisdom and virtue, he is the "fullness of divine gifts" (*plenitudo munerum divinorum*).<sup>27</sup>

Ambrose, who knew Didymus's treatise (Jerome said he plagiarized it), also highlights the language of giving or bestowing embedded in the term *effundo* (pour out) that occurs in Joel 2:28, "I will pour out (*effundam*) my Spirit."<sup>28</sup> And he cites the text that will be so influential in Augustine's thinking, "the love of God is poured out (*effundit*) in our hearts through the Holy Spirit," and interprets the term *pour out* to mean that the Holy Spirit is "gift."<sup>29</sup> In expounding this passage, however, Ambrose highlights a term in the text that Didymus did not, namely, "love." Romans 5:5, says Ambrose, shows that the Holy Spirit is the "dispenser and abundant fount of divine love."<sup>30</sup>

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24. *De Trinitate* 49. Didymus's treatise, written in Greek, comes to us only in a Latin translation by Jerome. Text edited by Louis Doutreleau, S.J., *Didyme l'Aveugle. Traité du Saint-Esprit, Sources Chrétiennes* No. 386 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1992).

25. *De Spiritu Sancto* 50. On Didymus see A. Heron, "The Holy Spirit in Origen and Didymus the Blind: A Shift in Perspective from the Third to the Fourth Century," in *Kerygma und Logos*, ed. A. M. Ritter (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1979), pp. 298–310.

26. *De Spiritu Sancto* 55.

27. *De Spiritu Sancto* 34.

28. Ambrose, *De Spiritu Sancto* 1.7.85. Ambrose echoes Didymus in saying that this form of expression cannot be used of an angel.

29. *De Spiritu Sancto* 1.5.66. The term "effundo" occurs three times in this passage.

30. *De Spiritu Sancto* 1.8.94.

When we turn to Augustine with this background before us, it is clear that many of the elements that will provide an exegetical direction for Augustine's teaching are in place, Spirit as "gift," "pouring out" as a distinctive term for the sending of the Spirit, "being filled" or "indwelling" for receiving the Spirit, the Holy Spirit as the "dispenser and abundant fount of love," and key texts such as Rom. 5:5, to mention the most obvious. Furthermore, as in Ambrose, Didymus, and Hilary, what occupies Augustine's attention is the *proprium*, the distinctive character of the Holy Spirit. Yet a perceptible shift in focus is evident. In earlier thinkers the *proprium* of the Holy Spirit was discussed in relation to mankind; for Augustine the distinctiveness of the Holy Spirit is also discussed in relation to the Father and the Son. As he puts the question in Book 5: "Was he already gift before there was anyone to give him to?" In other words, does the term *gift* as a designation of the Holy Spirit apply only to the economy?

Before turning to the discussion of the Holy Spirit in Book 15, however, it is necessary to pause and consider some other factors that shape Augustine's thinking. Early in *De Trinitate* Augustine cites Gal. 4:4 to establish that there were two distinct "sendings" recorded in the Scriptures, the sending of the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit.<sup>31</sup> "But when the time had fully come, God *sent* forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has *sent* the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba Father!'" (Gal 4:4–5). This passage not only mentions the names used by the Church in confessing God as triune—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—it also states how the triune character of God is known, namely through the "sending" of the Son and the "sending" of the Spirit. Sending, Augustine says, is characteristic of both the Son and Spirit, and *only* of the Son and Spirit. "The Father alone," says Augustine, "is nowhere said to have been sent."<sup>32</sup>

The Son was "sent" when he was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The "sending" of the Son refers to what took place as a result of the Incarnation, including of course Christ's suffering, death, and Resurrection. Indeed, as Hilary had shown, it was the historical event of the Resurrection that is the basis for

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31. Johannes Arnold, "Begriff und heilsoekonomische Bedeutung der goettlichen Sendungen in Augustinus *De Trinitate*," *Recherches Augustiniennes* XXV (1991): 3–69. On the role of the Holy Spirit in the "sending" of the Son, that is the Incarnation, see the observations of Jacques Verhees in "Heiliger Geist und Inkarnation in der Theologie des Augustinus von Hippo," in *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 22 (1976): 234–253.

32. *De Trinitate* 2.5.8.

the Christian confession that Christ is God. It was only after the Resurrection, he wrote, that the apostles knew that God was not a "solitary God."<sup>33</sup> As the "sending" of the Son means that certain things took place, so also the "sending" of the Holy Spirit refers to what had taken place in history. "If the Son is said to have been sent in that he appeared outwardly in created bodily form while inwardly in uncreated spiritual form remaining always hidden from mortal eyes, then it is easy to understand how the Holy Spirit can also be said to have been *sent*." Augustine explains: "He was visibly displayed in a created guise which was made in time, either when he descended on our Lord himself 'in bodily guise as a dove' (Mt. 3:16), or when ten days after his Ascension 'there came suddenly from heaven on the day of Pentecost a sound as of a violent gust bearing down, and there appeared to them divided tongues as of fire, which also settled upon each one of them' (Acts 2:2)."<sup>34</sup> The "sending of the Holy Spirit," says Augustine, has reference to an "*operatio*," an "action visibly expressed and presented to mortal eyes." The purpose was that the "public manifestation of his coming in time" might stir the minds of men to his "hidden eternity which is always present."<sup>35</sup>

Each sending, that of the Son and that of the Holy Spirit, is unique and has its own distinct character (which is to say that each sending is historical). Augustine is very precise here. The Son appeared as a human being and formed a bond between the flesh and the divine Word. The flesh of Christ is permanently united with the Word. But the Holy Spirit did not have such a relation to the material things in which he appeared. As Augustine puts it, the Holy Spirit did not make the dove (at Jesus's Baptism) "blessed" (as in "blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus"), nor did the fire and wind at Pentecost become "blessed." He did not join these things to himself in an "everlasting union." Hence, though the dove is called the Spirit and the apostles spoke as the Spirit gave utterance, we cannot say that the Spirit is "God and dove" or "God and fire" as we say that the Son is "God and man." Nor does the use of "rock" for Christ in 1 Cor. 10:4 offer a parallel, because the rock already existed and

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33. *De Trinitate* 7.12. On this point see Robert L. Wilken, *Remembering the Christian Past* (Grand Rapids: W. B Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 63–94.

34. *De Trinitate* 2.5.10.

35. *De Trinitate* 2.5.10. The Orthodox theologian Nikos Nissiotis says that the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is "a new intervention of the Holy Trinity in time" (*Die Theologie der Ostkirche im oekumenischen Dialog* [Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswert, 1968], p. 74; cited by Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, p. 146, n.3).

came to have a symbolic meaning. But the dove and fire “came suddenly into existence” to “signify something and then pass away.”<sup>36</sup>

By Augustine’s day Pentecost was a separate liturgical festival, and Augustine understood Pentecost as the celebration of an event that had taken place at a particular moment in space and time. We are celebrating, he says in a sermon preached on the day of Pentecost, “the solemnity of a day so holy, that today the Holy Spirit himself came.”<sup>37</sup> Or: “This day that we are celebrating . . . is the one on which the Lord Jesus Christ, glorified after his Resurrection and glorified in the Ascension sent the Holy Spirit.”<sup>38</sup> The feast of Pentecost is an annual “feast” that recalls the “coming of the Holy Spirit,” “something that happened once.”<sup>39</sup> The Holy Spirit existed before Pentecost (e.g., Zacharias, father of John the Baptizer, was filled with the Holy Spirit), but at Pentecost “there was a kind of giving which had not happened before.”<sup>40</sup>

Augustine also refers to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, in the prayer over the gifts in the Eucharist, in the laying on of hands at the ordination of a bishop.<sup>41</sup> And he knew the creed with its separate article on the Holy Spirit. In his writings Augustine most often mentions the Apostles Creed, but it is clear that he knew the Creed of Nicaea.<sup>42</sup> He mentions it explicitly only late in life,<sup>43</sup> but allusions to it are scattered throughout his writings, including *De Trinitate*.<sup>44</sup> The creed of the council of Constantinople in 381, without the anathemas and a fuller article on the Holy Spirit, however, was unknown in the West during Augustine’s lifetime. But in his early exposition

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36. *De Trinitate* 2.6.11.

37. *Sermon* 270.1.

38. *Sermon* 271.1. See also *Sermon* 272b.1

39. *Sermon* 267.1 and 169.1.

40. *Tractate on John* 32.6; also *Tractate* 52.8.

41. Ordination: *De Trinitate* 15.26.46; Baptism: *De Trinitate* 5.26.46; Eucharist: *De Trinitate* 3.4.10. On this topic see Cristina Simonelli, *La fede nella risurrezione di Cristo nel De Trinitate di Agostino* (Rome: Augustinianum 1999), pp. 133–142.

42. On this point see Basil Studer, “Augustin et la Foi de Nicée,” in *Dominus Salvator. Studien zur Exegese der Kirchenväter* (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 1992), pp. 371–377.

43. *In Contra Maximinum Arianum Libri* 2.14.3.

44. *De Trinitate* 15.14.23. See also *De Genesi ad litteram opus imperfectum* 1.2: “Deum patrem omnipotentem universam creaturam fecisse atque constituisse per Filium sum unigenitum, id est Sapientiam et Virtutem suam *consubstantialiam sibi et coaeternam, in unitate Spiritus sancti, et ipsius consubstantialis et coaeterni.*”

of the Apostles Creed, *De fide et symbolo*, he has a lengthy exposition of the article, "I believe in the Holy Spirit."<sup>45</sup>

Because the sending of the Holy Spirit is distinct from the sending of the Son, as is evident in the festival of Pentecost or the calling down of the Spirit on the gifts during the anaphora, Augustine interprets the Scriptural texts on the Holy Spirit to mean that the Spirit is not simply the Spirit of the Father or the Spirit of the Son but has a unique identity or *proprium*. This is most apparent in the pivotal discussion of 1 John 4:13 in *De Trinitate* 15:31. "In this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit" (1 Jn 4:13). Both Didymus and Ambrose had cited this passage to establish the unity of the Spirit with the Father and the Son. Didymus says that 1 John 4:13 (and other texts) demonstrate "that the substance of the Trinity is inseparable and indivisible."<sup>46</sup> Ambrose, citing the text from 1 John, says that it refers to the "unity" of the Holy Trinity.<sup>47</sup> Augustine, however, cites 1 John 4:13, not as a text on unity, but of *differentiation*, in the midst of a discussion of whether the Holy Spirit is properly called "love." Augustine had already argued that the term "spirit" (as in "God is Spirit" in John 4:24) can have a general sense to refer to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but also a particular sense to refer specifically to the Holy Spirit.<sup>48</sup>

Now he proceeds to show that the term "love," which can be used of Father, Son, and Spirit, is used to refer specifically to the Holy Spirit. 1 John 4:13 reads: "By this we know that we abide (*manemus*) in him and he is us, because he has given us of his own Spirit." In this passage, says Augustine, the writer wanted to say something more plainly about the *proprium* of the Holy Spirit, namely that it is the Holy Spirit "that makes us abide in God and him in us." In other words the text describes an activity that is distinctive to the Spirit, to make us abide in God. "But," says Augustine, "that is precisely what love does." For the goal of love is to bring one into fellowship with the beloved. If then love is the work of the Spirit, as is evident from Romans 5:5 (which Augustine cites once again), "the love of God has been poured (*diffusa*

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45. *De fide et symbolo* 9.19 ff. Already in 393 when this discourse was delivered Augustine noted that the key theological task was to identify the *proprium* of the Holy Spirit, "quo proprio fit ut eum neque Filium neque Patrem dicere possimus, sed tantum Spiritum sanctum."

46. *De Spiritu Sancto* 189-90.

47. *De Spiritu Sancto* 2.9.95.

48. *De Trinitate* 15.17.27.

est) into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us," it follows then that the Holy Spirit is the "gift of God who is love."<sup>49</sup>

Interestingly, his argument on the distinction between the general and particular sense of a term is supported not by a philosophical discussion but by an appeal to scriptural usage. Augustine shows that the term "law" is sometimes used to refer to the "books of the Old Testament" (as in 1 Cor. 14:21 and Jo. 15:25), but sometimes to refer specifically to the Law of Moses (as in Mt. 11:13). Just as the term "law" can be used "in a general sense" (*communiter*) to refer to the law and the prophets, so it can be used "particularly" (*proprie*) to mean the Law of Moses.<sup>50</sup> A few paragraphs later he also appeals to Scriptural usage to explain why "gift of the Holy Spirit" means simply "Holy Spirit." "Just as the 'body of the flesh' (in Col. 2:11) is nothing other than 'flesh,' so the 'gift of the Holy Spirit' is nothing other than the Holy Spirit. He is the gift of God in as much as he is given to those to whom he is given. But in himself (*apud se*) he is God even if he is not given to anyone, because he was God, coeternal with the Father and the Son, before he was given to anyone."<sup>51</sup>

The *proprium* of the Holy Spirit is expressed almost wholly in language of participation and mutuality. As we have seen, Augustine singles out the phrase "abide in him" in 1 John 4:13, "we abide in him because he has given us of his own Spirit." If the Holy Spirit causes us to "abide in God and [God] in us," then he is rightly called love. That is to say, the gift by its very nature is reciprocal, for it creates a communion between the one who receives and the giver. This is why the pairing of Romans 5:5 with 1 John 4:13 is so significant. The gift of the Spirit "enkindles love for God," that is, turns the recipient toward God. But this turning takes place only because love has its origin in God. "Man has no capacity to love God except from God."<sup>52</sup>

But Augustine wants to say not only that the gift of the Holy Spirit creates a communion between God and the believer, the Spirit is also the "communion" between Father and Son. There is "a good reason," he writes, "for distinctively calling him love." He drives the point home by yoking "communio"

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49. *De Trinitate* 15.17.31.

50. *De Trinitate* 15.17.30. On this point see B. Studer, "Zur Pneumatologie des Augustinus von Hippo (*De Trinitate* 15,17,27–27,50)," in *Mysterium Caritatis. Studien zur Exegese und zur Trinitaetslehre in der Alten Kirche* (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 1999), p. 321.

51. *De Trinitate* 15.19.36.

52. *De Trinitate* 15.27.31.



to “ambo” (both) in the phrase “*communio amborum*,” the bringing together of two into fellowship. Though the Holy Spirit is not “alone in being either holy or spirit, because the Father too is holy and the Son too is holy, and the Father too is spirit and the Son too is spirit . . . yet he is properly called the Holy Spirit, and with good reason. Because he is common to them both, he is called properly what they are called in common.”<sup>53</sup>

Now at one level one might say that what makes this exegesis work is the conjunction of 1 John 4 with Romans 5, and that certainly is the case, for the two passages give Augustine the key words for his discussion—“poured out” which signifies “gift,” and “love”—and uses them for the work of the Holy Spirit. Though both passages are cited in Didymus and Ambrose, each is used to make a different point. In Augustine they are brought in relation to each other. Yet what Augustine finds in these texts is not simply drawn from the words of the text. We are accustomed to think of exegesis as a matter of drawing out the meaning of a text by seeking to discover what the words in the text signify. In this view the interpreter begins with the words, that is, signs, and seeks to discover the *res*, the subject matter about which the text speaks, assuming that one can know what the text means by understanding the signs.

But one might say that the interpreter does not know what the words mean unless he already has some knowledge of the *res* to which they refer.<sup>54</sup> In our print-oriented culture we tend to think that what is written on the page (or on the computer screen) is the word. But the written word is only a sign for the spoken word, which is in turn a sign of the *res*. The better one knows the thing to which it refers the more likely one is able to pronounce it correctly, pronunciation being not simply a matter of vowels and consonants, but accent, emphasis, tone, hence of meaning.

In the same way the interpreter of the Bible does not come to the text without prior knowledge of the realities to which the text refers. How well one interprets the text depends not simply on how skilled one is in the language of the biblical writer or the literary genre of the work, how well one knows the Bible’s idiom, the history it portrays and assumes, its leading ideas and themes,

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53. *De Trinitate* 15.19.37. See also *Sermon* 71.18: “*Insinuat nobis in Patre auctoritas, in Filio nativitas, in Spiritu sancto Patris Filioque communitas, in tribus aeualitas.*”

54. On the importance of the *res* in patristic exegesis see the observations of Basil Studer, *Die patristische Exegese, eine Aktualisierung der Heiligen Schrift*, in *Mysterium Caritatis. Studien zur Exegese und zur Trinitaetslehre in der alten Kirche* (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 1999), pp. 113–116.

but also on one's participation in the mysteries of the faith as known through the Church's worship, creeds, and life. The meaning of the text is accessible only if one has prior knowledge of the reality to which the text refers, the thing itself of which the words are signs. It is only when one knows a painting at first hand that the words of the art critic are satisfying. Having a painting described in words, or even looking at a picture of a painting, is not the same as seeing it for oneself. It is only by actually looking at the painting, having a sense of its size, observing the shades of color, studying the strokes of the brush or the thickness of the paint, peering closely at details or standing back to grasp the whole, that one can read what is said of the painting with profit. In the same way it is only after one has visited a historic site that a guidebook comes to life.

What Augustine discovered in the biblical texts about the Holy Spirit did not come from the texts alone. In part what he said depended on how he related the several texts to each other and which ones are privileged. Terms and images of certain texts provided an interpretive key to the other texts, and it is only as the texts are brought into relation to one another, and the Bible as a whole, that their meaning becomes apparent. But there is something else at work here. Augustine knew what he was looking for. The Holy Spirit was not a religious idea or concept that was spun out of the mind. For Augustine the Holy Spirit was a living presence, a throbbing reality, known in history, by experience, in particular through the Church's worship, and in the creed.

It is perhaps stretching the point to say that the entire discussion hangs on certain biblical words—"pour out" (*effundo*, or *diffundo*), "gift" (*donum*), "abide in" (*manere*), "love" (*caritas*)—that provided the linguistic leverage that allowed Augustine to forge conceptual categories to speak about the *proprium* of the Holy Spirit. The term "poured out" as used both in the passages that speak of the "sending" of the Holy Spirit on mankind (e.g., Joel 2:28) and in texts that speak about the Holy Spirit entering the hearts of the believer (e.g., Romans 5:5) designated a distinctive kind of communication. When this term is linked with texts in which "give" is used in connection with the Spirit (diligently, even pedantically cited one by one in a long section in 15:33–35), it becomes clear how "gift" and "poured out" and "love" came to be seen as complementary, each expressing from a different perspective a distinctive activity. Note, for example, how they are yoked together in this passage near the very end of Book 15: "As for the reason why he first gave (*daret*) the Holy Spirit . . . I think it is because love (*caritas*) is poured out (*diffunditur*) in our hearts through this gift (*donum*)."

For Augustine, and other early Christian thinkers, the words of the Bible were vehicles of discovery, one word reminding them of other words in the Bible, each being illuminated by its juxtaposition with others. The words of the Bible not only inflamed the heart, they also excited and provoked the mind. It was the words, not the ideas or concepts, of the Bible that worked on the imagination. Like tiny lenses that magnify, they allowed Christian thinkers to penetrate more deeply into the mysteries of the faith. As the church fathers struggled to find ways of defining the *proprium* of the Holy Spirit, words such as “poured out” and “gift” offered a place to start, a kind of conceptual scaffolding that could be used to construct the house of Christian doctrine. When Hilary said the Spirit does exist “because he is given, received, and possessed,” he gave later thinkers a series of terms that would help give content to the biblical term “poured out.” Augustine’s unique contribution was to add another biblical word “love,” linking “abide” in 1 John 4:13 to “love” in Romans 5:5. By interpreting these two texts in tandem Augustine is able to see “gift” and “poured out” as designations of something that is received, hence possessed, which turns the recipient toward the giver. “So the love which is from God and is God is distinctively the Holy Spirit; through him the *love* of God is *poured out* in our hearts, and through it the whole triad *dwells* in us. This is the reason why it is most fitting that the Holy Spirit, since he is God, is also called the *gift* of God, and this *gift* is properly (*proprie*) understood to be nothing other than the *love* that *brings* us through (*perducit*) to God, without which no other *gift* of God whatsoever can bring us through to God.”<sup>55</sup> In Rowan Williams’s nice phrase, speaking of the inner Trinitarian relations: “*Sapientia* exists by being, quite simply, love in search of an object.”<sup>56</sup>

On first reading the extended exegetical discussion at the conclusion of Book 15, the final book of *De Trinitate*, comes as a surprise. After all that has gone before, particularly the elaborate discussion of the image of the Trinity in the mind of man in the first part of Book 15 and in previous books, the reversal of strategy is jarring. At the beginning of Book 15 Augustine had said he would be discussing the image of God in man by examining the workings of the human mind. And that is what he does for the first half of the book. But beginning with 15.27, the section on the Holy Spirit, Augustine’s strategy changes and the argument becomes wholly exegetical. Now he moves from text to text and from word to word. He introduces no analogies from the human mind, he provides no discussion of the inner word in relation to spoken

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55. *De Trinitate* 15.18.32.

56. “*Sapientia* and the Trinity,” p. 328.

words, he does not cite Vergil (as he had in 15.25). Instead he builds his argument by teasing out the meaning of words given in the Bible.

Which returns me to where we began. Origen had realized in the early third century that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit posed a unique challenge for Christian thought. Augustine had echoed this view when he wrote the *Confessions*. But only when he came to write *De Trinitate* did he realize the truth of what he had said. Without the Scriptures he could say nothing on the Holy Spirit. Hence when he finally brings his great work to a climax and seeks to fulfill his promise to the reader at the beginning of Book 8 to discuss the Trinity "in a more inward manner" than he had in earlier books (which were largely concerned with the Scriptures), he found this was possible only with the Father and the Son. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit drove him back to the Scriptures and the words of revelation.

Yet when Augustine came to the Scriptures he did not come empty-handed. No only did he have before him a dossier of texts examined by others, he was guided by the suggestions of earlier commentators, and he drew on his experience of the Church's festivals, in particular Pentecost, and sacraments. I suppose that one might conclude from all this that Augustine's teaching on the Holy Spirit is evidence of the ancient truth that the Scriptures do not stand alone and are intelligible only in light of tradition. Yet that formula is too neat, too abstract, too intellectual. There is no tradition here with a capital T. Tradition is many-sided and worked on Augustine's mind in subtle and complex ways. What is most evident in the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the power of the biblical language, when read in the context of the Church's life and worship, to fire the imagination and serve as an instrument of thought. Rather than limiting the discussion, the language of the Bible opened Augustine's thinking to new possibilities. One might say, with only a little exaggeration, that in the end it was the Scriptural language that allowed him to make sense of the philosophical categories he had elaborated earlier.

No doubt one reason Augustine privileged the Holy Scriptures is that "understanding" the Holy Trinity is not solely a matter of the mind and intellect, it is also an affair of the heart and the will. And the words of the Bible are uniquely capable of moving the heart and inciting the will. At the beginning of Book 12 of the *Confessions* Augustine had said, "In my needy life, Lord, my heart is much exercised by the pounding it receives from the words of your Holy Scripture."<sup>57</sup> At the very end of *De Trinitate* Augustine cites a lengthy passage from

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57. *Confessiones* 12.1.1.

his homilies on the Gospel of John, again turning the reader's mind back to the Scriptures. For, he says, "if people are not capable of seeing in what way these three things in their mind [memory, understanding, and will] are true," they would do well to "believe what is to be found in the sacred writings about the supreme trinity which God is." Augustine's final advice for those who would seek to understand the Holy Trinity is that they put their trust in the Holy Scriptures as the "truest of witnesses . . . and pray and seek and live rightly, and in this way take steps to understand."<sup>58</sup>

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58. *De Trinitate* 15.27.49.