
SAINT AUGUSTINE

ON THE TRINITY

Translated by Edmund Hill, OP

Volume 2

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Latin Text of St. Augustine

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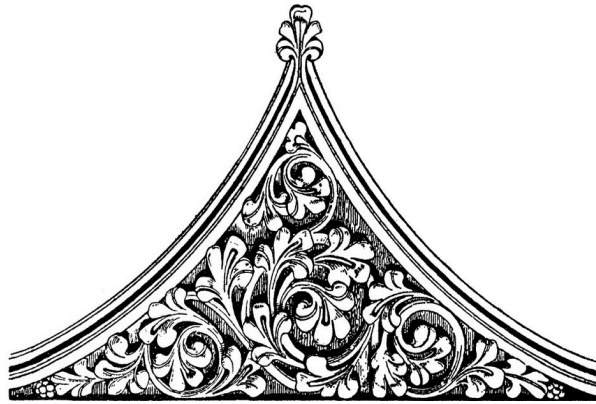
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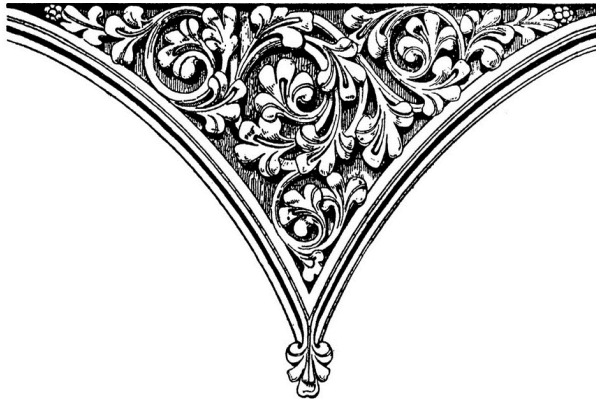
DEDICATED WITH LOVE TO
OUR LADY OF MT. CARMEL

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ON THE TRINITY



REVISIONS II

Chapter 15 (42)

Fifteen Books on the Trinity

1. Libros *De Trinitate*, quae Deus est, quindecim scripsi per aliquot annos. Sed cum eorum duodecimum nondum perfecissem, et eos diutius tenerem quam possent sustinere qui vehementer illos habere cupiebant, subtracti sunt mihi minus emendati quam deberent ac possent, quando eos edere voluissem.

Quod posteaquam comperi, quia et alia eorum apud nos exemplaria remanserant, statueram eos iam ipse non edere sed sic habere, ut in alio aliquo opusculo meo quid mihi de his eveniret dicerem.

Urgentibus tamen fratribus, quibus resistere non valui, emendavi eos, quantum emendandos putavi et complevi et edidi, adiungens eis a capite epistolam quam scripsi ad venerabilem Aurelium episcopum Carthaginensis Ecclesiae,¹ quo tamquam prologo exposui et quid accidisset, et quid facere mea cogitatione voluissem, et quid fratrum caritate compellente fecissem.²

2. In quorum libro undecimo, cum de corpore visibili agerem, dixi: *quocirca id amare alienari est*.³ Quod secundum eum amorem dictum est, quo aliquid sic amatur, ut eo fruendo existimet beatum se esse qui hoc amat. Nam non est alienari in laudem Creatoris amare speciem corporalem, ut ipso Creatore fruens quisque vere beatus sit.

Itemque in eodem ubi dixi: *nec avem quadrupedem memini, quia non vidi, sed phantasiam talem facillime intueor, dum alicui formae volatili qualem vidi adiungo alios duos pedes, quales itidem vidi*,⁴ haec dicens non potui recolere volatilia quadrupedia quae lex comme-

1. I wrote fifteen books *On the Trinity*, which is God, over the course of a number of years. But when I had not yet finished the twelfth of them, and I was holding on to them longer than those who vehemently desired to have them were able to bear, they were taken from me in a less corrected state than they should have been or could have been, when I would have wanted to publish them.

I found this out afterwards and, because other copies of them remained in our possession, decided not to publish them myself at the time but to keep them as they were, so that in some other work of mine I could relate what happened to me in their regard.

Urged on by the brothers, however, whom I could not resist, I corrected them as much as I thought they should be corrected, and I completed and published them. At the point where they began I added a letter that I wrote to Aurelius, the venerable bishop of the church of Carthage; it serves as a kind of prologue, and in it I explained what happened, and what, in my own thoughts, I had wanted to do, and what I did do out of a compelling love for the brothers.

2. In the eleventh of these books, when a visible body was under discussion, I said, *that is why it is foolish to love it*. This was said in reference to that love whereby something is loved in such a way that the one who loves it thinks that he is happy when he is enjoying it. For it is not foolish for someone to love a bodily form to the praise of the Creator, so that he is truly happy because he enjoys the Creator himself.

Again, in the same book I said, *I have no memory of a four-footed bird because I have not seen one, but it is very easy to form an image of one by adding two other feet, just like ones that I have seen, to any winged creature such as I have seen*. When I said this I could not recall the

1. Letter 174. Aurelius, a long-time friend of Augustine and a person of great importance in the African church, was bishop of Carthage from the early 390s until his death in 430.

2. *Fratrum caritate compellente*: “out of a compelling love for the brothers.” *Fratrum* is translated here as an objective genitive, but it could also be translated as a subjective genitive, in which case it could be rendered “as a result of the brothers’ loving urging.”

3. *On the Trinity* 11.5.9.

4. *On the Trinity* 11.10.17.

morat.⁵ Neque enim computat in pedibus duo posteriora crura quibus locustae saliant, quas dicit mundas et ideo discernit ab immundis talibus volatilibus, quae non saliant illis cruribus, sicut sunt scarabaei. Omnia quippe huiusmodi volatilia quadrupedia vocantur in lege.

3. In duodecimo,⁶ velut *expositio verborum Apostoli, ubi ait: 'omne peccatum quodcumque fecerit homo extra corpus est,'* non mihi satisfacit; nec sic puto intellegendum quod dictum est: *qui autem fornicatur in corpus proprium peccat*, tamquam ille hoc faciat, qui propter adipiscenda ea quae per corpus sentiuntur, ut in his finem boni sui ponat, aliquid agit. Hoc enim longe plura peccata complectitur, quam illa fornicatio quae concubitu perpetratur illicito,⁷ de qua locutum, cum hoc diceret, Apostolum apparet.

Hoc opus, excepta epistola quae postmodum ad eius caput adiuncta est, sic incipit: *lecturus haec quae de Trinitate disserimus.*

four-footed flying creatures that the law mentions. Neither, with regard to feet, does this take into consideration the two hind legs with which locusts jump, which it calls clean and therefore distinguishes from the sorts of unclean flying creatures that do not jump with their hind legs—for example, beetles. All flying creatures of this kind are referred to as four-footed in the law.

3. In the twelfth, my explanation of the Apostle's words, when he says, *every sin whatsoever that a man commits is outside the body* (1 Cor 6:18), does not satisfy me. Nor do I think that the words, *he who commits fornication sins against his own body* (1 Cor 6:18), should be understood as though someone who does something for the sake of acquiring things that are known through the body, so as to locate his own ultimate good in them, does such a thing. For this includes far more sins than that fornication which is perpetrated through unlawful sexual union, which it appears that the Apostle was talking about when he said this.

This work, apart from the letter that was later added to its beginning, starts in this way: *the person who is about to read what we are discussing in regard to the Trinity.*

5. Cf. Lev 11:20–23.

6. *On the Trinity* 12.10.15.

7. Cf. *Revisions* 1.19.6; *Homily* 162.

PROLOGUE

Prefatory Letter from Augustine to Aurelius, Bishop of Carthage

Domino beatissimo, et sincerissima caritate venerando, sancto fratri et consacerdoti papae Aurelio,¹ Augustinus, in Domino salutem.

De Trinitate quae Deus summus et verus est libros iuvenis inchoavi, senex edidi. Omiseram quippe hoc opus posteaquam comperi praereptos mihi esse sive subreptos antequam eos absolverem et retractatos ut mea dispositio fuerat expolirem. Non enim singillatim sed omnes simul edere ea ratione decreveram quoniam praecedentibus consequentes inquisitione proficiente nectuntur.

Cum ergo per eos homines (qui priusquam vellem ad quosdam illorum pervenire potuerunt) dispositio mea nequisset impleri, interruptam dictationem reliqueram cogitans hoc ipsum in aliquibus scriptis meis conqueri ut scirent qui possent non a me fuisse eosdem libros editos sed ablatos priusquam mihi editione mea digni viderentur.

Verum multorum fratrum vehementissima postulatione et maxime tua iussione compulsus opus tam laboriosum adiuvante Domino terminare curavi, eosque emendatos non ut volui sed ut potui, ne ab illis qui subrepti iam in manus hominum exierant plurimum discreparent, Venerationi tuae per filium nostrum condiaconum² carissimum misi et cuicumque audiendos, describendos le legendosque permisi.

In quibus si servari mea dispositio potuisset, essent profecto etsi easdem sententias habentes, multo tamen enodatiores atque planiores quantum rerum tantarum explicandarum difficultas et facultas nostra pateretur. Sunt autem qui primos quattuor vel potius quinque etiam sine prooemiis habent et duodecimum sine extrema parte non parva, sed si eis haec editio potuerit innotescere, omnia si voluerint et valuerint emendabunt. Peto sane ut hanc epistolam seorsum quidem sed tamen

Augustine, to Pope Aurelius, his good lord, his truly beloved revered and holy brother, and his fellow high priest, greetings in the Lord.

I was a young man when I began these books on the Trinity which the one true God is, and I am now an old man as I publish them. I stopped working on the project when I discovered they had been lifted from my possession, and prematurely at that since I had not completed them, nor revised and polished them as I had planned to do. It had been my intention to publish them all together and not one by one, because the inquiry proceeds in a closely-knit development from the first of them to the last.

So when those people managed to get at some of them before I was ready, and thus made it impossible for me to carry out my plans, I did not resume the work of dictation that other preoccupations had interrupted; instead, I was seriously thinking of complaining about the matter in a special pamphlet, to make it as widely known as possible that those books had not been published by me but had been pirated before I considered them ready for publication.

However, at the urgent request of many of the brethren, and above all at your command, I have felt obliged to attend with the Lord's assistance to the completion of this laborious task. I have corrected the books as best I could, though hardly as I would or they might have varied too widely from the pirated copies that were already in people's hands. I now send them to your reverence by our dear son and fellow deacon, and give permission for anyone to listen to them, read them, or have them copied.

If I had been able to keep to my plans, the contents would indeed have been much the same, but their expression would have been much less knotty and much more lucid, as far as the difficulty of elucidating such deep matters and our own capacities would allow. Some people have the first four books, or rather five, without their prologues, and the twelfth without its considerable concluding section; but if they manage to learn about this edition, they will be able to correct their copies—if they want to and can afford it.

1. The title "pope" was given widely to the bishops of the more important sees. The bishop of Carthage was the permanent president of the African synod.

2. Augustine, though a bishop, will usually address or refer to a presbyter as his fellow presbyter and a deacon as his fellow deacon, because his episcopal office was seen as including and sharing in their subordinate ministries.

PROLOGUE

ad caput eorumdem librorum iubeas anteponi. Ora pro
me.

May I ask you to give instructions that this letter be placed
at the head of these books, though of course separately?
Pray for me.

BOOK 1

UNITY AND EQUALITY OF THE TRINITY

Chapter 1

He writes against those who, by abusing reason, corrupt faith; three errors about God

1. Lecturus haec quae de Trinitate disserimus, prius oportet ut noverit, stilum nostrum adversus eorum vigilare calumnias, qui fidei contemnentes initium,¹ immaturo et perverso rationis amore falluntur. Quorum nonnulli ea quae de corporalibus rebus, sive per sensus corporeos experta notaverunt,² sive quae natura humani ingenii et diligentiae vivacitate vel artis adiutorio perceperunt, ad res incorporeas et spirituales transferre conantur, ut ex his illas metiri atque opinari velint. Sunt item alii qui secundum humani animi naturam vel affectum de Deo sentiunt, si quid sentiunt; et ex hoc errore, cum de Deo disputant, sermoni sue distortas et fallaces regulas figunt.³

Est item aliud hominum genus, eorum qui universam quidem creaturam, quae profecto mutabilis est, nituntur transcendere, ut ad incommutabilem substantiam quae Deus est, erigant intentionem: sed mortalitatis onere praegravati, cum et videri volunt scire quod nesciunt, et quod volunt scire non possunt;⁴ praesumptiones opinionum suarum audacius affirmando, intercludunt sibimet intelligentiae vias, magis eligentes sententiam suam non corrigere perversam, quam mutare defensam.

Et hic quidem omnium morbus est trium generum quae proposui:⁵ et eorum scilicet qui secundum corpus de Deo sapiunt; et eorum qui secundum spiritualem creaturam, sicuti est anima; et eorum qui neque secundum corpus, neque secundum spiritualem creaturam, et tamen de Deo falsa existimant,⁶ eo remotiores a vero, quo id quod sapiunt, nec in corpore reperitur, nec in facto et condito spiritu, nec in ipso Creatore. Qui enim

1. The reader of these reflections of mine on the Trinity should bear in mind that my pen is on the watch against the sophistries of those who scorn the starting-point of faith, and allow themselves to be deceived through an unseasonable and misguided love of reason. Some of them try to transfer what they have observed about bodily things to incorporeal and spiritual things, which they would measure by the standard of what they experience through the senses of the body or learn by natural human intelligence, lively application, and technical skill. There are others whose concept of God, such as it is, ascribes to him the nature and moods of the human spirit, a mistake which ties their arguments about God to distorted and misleading rules of interpretation.

Again, there is another type; people who indeed strive to climb above the created universe, so ineluctably subject to change, and raise their regard to the unchanging substance which is God. But so top-heavy are they with the load of their mortality, that what they do not know they wish to give the impression of knowing, and what they wish to know they cannot; and so they block their own road to genuine understanding by asserting too categorically their own presumptuous opinions, and then rather than change a misconceived opinion they have defended, they prefer to leave it uncorrected.

Indeed this disease is common to all three types I have mentioned—to those who conceive of God in bodily terms, those who do so in terms of created spirit such as soul, and those who think of him neither as body nor as created spirit, but still have false ideas about him, ideas which are all the further from the truth in that they have no place either in the world of body, or in that of derived and created spirit, or in the Creator himself. Thus whoever

1. Cf. Sir 25:16.

2. Patrologia Latina (PL): *noverunt*, “what they know about.”

3. Cf. Wis 14:21–30.

4. Cf. Wis 9:13–16; Jerome, *On Hezekiah* 13.42; *Letters* 53.9.2; 57.12.4; Cicero, *Academica* 2.23.74.

5. Cf. Augustine, *On the Happy Life* 1.2–4; Sir 25:3.

6. Cf. Wis 14:30.

opinatur Deum, verbi gratia, candidum vel rutilum, fallitur; sed tamen haec inveniuntur in corpore. Rursus qui opinatur Deum nunc obliuiscens, nunc recordans, vel si quid huiusmodi est, nihilominus in errore est;⁷ sed tamen haec inveniuntur in animo. Qui autem putat eius esse potentiae Deum, ut seipsum ipse genuerit, eo plus errat, quod non solum Deus ita non est, sed nec spiritualis nec corporalis creatura: nulla enim omnino res est quae se ipsam gignat ut sit.⁸

thinks that God is dazzling white, for example, or fiery red, is mistaken, yet these are realities of the bodily world. Or whoever thinks that God forgets things one moment and remembers them the next, or anything like that, is certainly quite wrong, and yet these are realities of the mental world. But those who suppose that God is of such power that he actually begets himself, are if anything even more wrong, since not only is God not like that, but neither is anything in the world of body or spirit. There is absolutely no thing whatsoever that brings itself into existence.

Sacred Scripture did not shun words proper to any kind of thing by which our intellect could rise up to divine things

2. Ut ergo ab huiusmodi falsitatibus humanus animus purgaretur, Sancta Scriptura parvulis congruens, nullius generis rerum verba vitavit, ex quibus quasi gradatim ad divina atque sublimia noster intellectus velut nutritus assurgeret. Nam et verbis ex rebus corporalibus sumptis usa est, cum de Deo loqueretur; velut cum ait, *sub umbraculo*⁹ *alarum tuarum protege me*. Et de spirituali creatura multa transtulit, quibus significaret illud quod ita non esset, sed ita dici opus esset; sicuti est, *ego sum Deus zelans*; et, *poenitet me hominem fecisse*.

2. It was therefore to purify the human spirit of such falsehoods that Holy Scripture, adapting itself to babes, did not shun any words, proper to any kind of thing whatever, that might nourish our understanding and enable it to rise up to the sublimities of divine things. Thus it would use words taken from corporeal things to speak about God with, as when it says *shelter me under the shadow of your wings* (Ps 17:8); and from the sphere of created spirit it has transposed many words to signify what was not in fact like that, but had to be expressed like that; *I am a jealous God* (Exod 20:5) for example, and *I am sorry I made man* (Gen 6:7).

De rebus autem quae omnino non sunt, non traxit aliqua vocabula, quibus vel figuraret locutiones, vel sirparet¹⁰ aenigmata. Unde perniciosius et inanius evanescent, qui tertio illo genere erroris a veritate secluduntur, hoc suspicando de Deo, quod neque in ipso, neque in ulla creatura inveniri potest.¹¹

But from things that simply do not exist it never has drawn any names to form into figures of speech or weave into riddles. Hence those who are shut off from the truth by the third kind of error fade away into the meaningless even more disastrously than the others, since they imagine things about God that have no place either in him or in anything he has made.

Rebus enim quae in creatura inveniuntur, solet Scriptura divina velut infantilia oblectamenta formare, quibus infirmorum ad quaerenda superiora et inferiora deserenda, pro suo modulo tamquam passibus moveretur aspectus.¹²

The divine Scriptures then are in the habit of making something like children's toys out of things that occur in creation, by which to entice our sickly gaze and get us step by step to seek as best we can the things that are above and forsake the things that are below.

Quae vero proprie de Deo dicuntur, quaeque in nulla creatura inveniuntur, raro ponit Scriptura divina; sicut illud quod dictum est ad Moysen, *ego sum qui sum*; et, *qui est, misit me ad vos*. Cum enim esse aliquo modo

Things, however, that are peculiar to God and do not occur anywhere in creation are rarely mentioned by Sacred Scripture; an example would be what was said to Moses; *I am who I am*, and *he who is sent me to you* (Exod 3:14).

7. Cf. Gen 6:7; Exod 20:5; Rom 9:14–18; Sir 25:16; Eccl 1:15, 6:9.

8. Cf. Augustine, *The Immortality of the Soul* 8.14.

9. PL: *in tegmine*, “under cover.”

10. PL: *spissaret*, “pack.”

11. Cf. Rom 1:19–21.

12. PL: *affectus*, “inclinations.”

dicatur et corpus et animus, nisi proprio quodam modo vellet intellegi, non id utique diceret.

Et illud quod ait Apostolus, *qui solus habet immortalitatem*: cum et anima modo quodam immortalis esse dicatur et sit, non diceret, *solus habet*, nisi quia vera immortalitas incommutabilitas est, quam nulla potest habere creatura; quoniam solius est Creatoris. Hoc est Iacobus dicit: *omne datum optimum, et omne donum perfectum desursum est, descendens a Patre luminum, apud quem non est commutatio, nec momenti obumbratio*. Hoc et David: *mutabis ea, et mutabuntur; tu vero idem ipse es*.¹³

Since in one way or another both body and spirit are said to be, Scripture would not surely have said that, unless it were meant to be understood in some special way peculiar to God.

Then there is the Apostle's remark, *who alone has immortality* (1 Tim 6:16); since the soul too is called, and is, immortal in some way, he would not have said *who alone has*, unless it were the case that true immortality is unchangingness, which nothing created can have as it is peculiar to the Creator. James too makes the point: *every best bounty and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change nor moving shadow* (Jas 1:17), and so does David: *you will change them and they shall be changed, but you are the selfsame* (Ps 102:27).

We are nurtured by faith so that we may be made fit to grasp divine things

3. Proinde substantiam Dei sine ulla sui commutatione mutabilia facientem,¹⁴ et sine ullo suo temporali motu temporalia creantem, intueri et plene nosse difficile est: et ideo est necessaria purgatio mentis nostrae, qua illud ineffabile ineffabiliter videri possit;¹⁵ qua nondum praediti, fide nutrimur, et per quaedam tolerabiliora, ut ad illud capiendum apti et habiles efficiamur, itinera ducimur.

Unde Apostolus in Christo quidem dicit esse *omnes thesauros sapientiae et scientiae absconditos*; eum tamen quamvis iam gratia eius renatis, sed adhuc carnalibus et animalibus, tamquam parvulis in Christo, non ex divina virtute in qua aequalis est Patri, sed ex humana infirmitate ex qua crucifixus est, commendavit.¹⁶ Ait namque: *neque enim iudicavi me scire aliquid in vobis, nisi Iesum Christum, et hunc crucifixum*. Deinde secutus ait: *et ego in infirmitate, et timore, et tremore multo fui apud vos*. Et paulo post dicit eis: *et ego, fratres, non potui loqui vobis quasi spiritualibus, sed quasi carnalibus. Quasi parvulis in Christo, lac potum dedi vobis, non escam; nondum enim poteratis; sed nec adhuc quidem potestis*.

Hoc cum dicitur quibusdam, irascuntur, et sibi contumeliose dici putant; et plerumque malunt credere eos potius, a quibus hoc audiunt, non habere quod dicant, quam se capere non posse quod dixerint. Et aliquando afferimus eis rationem, non quam petunt cum de

3. So then it is difficult to contemplate and have full knowledge of God's substance, which without any change in itself makes things that change, and without any passage of time in itself creates things that exist in time. That is why it is necessary for our minds to be purified before that inexpressible reality can be inexpressibly seen by them; and in order to make us fit and capable of grasping it, we are led along more endurable routes, nurtured on faith as long as we have not yet been endowed with that necessary purification.

Thus the Apostle indeed says that *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ* (Col 2:3); yet to people who though reborn by his grace are still fleshly and "all too human," like babies in Christ, he presents him not in the divine strength in which he is equal to the Father, but in the human weakness through which he was crucified. *Nor did I consider myself to know anything among you*, he says, *except Jesus Christ, and crucified at that*; then he adds, *and in weakness and fear and much trembling was I among you* (1 Cor 2:2). And a little later he says to them, *and I, brothers, could not speak to you as spiritual people, but only as fleshly; I gave you, like babies in Christ, milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet capable of it—indeed you are not capable of it even now* (1 Cor 3:1–2).

When some people are told this they get angry and think they are being insulted, and very often they prefer to believe that the ones they hear it from have nothing really to say, rather than consider themselves unable to grasp what they say. And sometimes we give them reasons—not

13. Cf. Heb 1:12.

14. Cf. Gen 1:21.

15. Cf. Matt 5:8; Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23.

16. Cf. 1 Cor 1:13–23; John 3:3–5; 1 Pet 1:23; 2 Cor 13:4; Phil 2:6; Matt 28:5.

Deo quaerunt; quia nec ipsi eam valent sumere, nec nos fortasse vel apprehendere vel proferre; sed qua demonstretur eis quam sint inhabiles minimeque idonei percipiendo quod exigunt. Sed quia non audiunt quod volunt, aut callide nos agere putant ut nostram occultemus imperitiam, aut malitiose quod eis invidemus peritiam; atque ita indignantes perturbatique discedunt.

indeed the ones they ask for when they inquire about God, since they are not capable of taking them, nor perhaps are we of mastering or presenting them—but reasons to show them how unfit they are, how little suited to receiving what they demand. But as they do not hear what they want, they presume that we are behaving craftily to conceal our lack of learning, or spitefully because we grudge them their learning, and so in ruffled indignation they take their departure.

The subject and plan of the work

4. Quapropter adiuvante Domino Deo nostro suscipiemus et eam ipsam quam flagitant, quantum possumus, reddere rationem, quod Trinitas¹⁷ sit unus et solus et verus Deus, et quam recte Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus unius eiusdemque substantiae vel essentiae dicatur, credatur, intellegatur;¹⁸

ut non quasi nostris excusationibus illudantur,¹⁹ sed reipsa experiantur, et esse illud summum bonum quod purgatissimis mentibus cernitur, et a se propterea cerni comprehendique non posse, quia humanae mentis acies invalida in tam excellenti luce non figitur, nisi *per iustitiam fidei*²⁰ nutrita vegetetur.

Sed primum secundum auctoritatem Scripturarum Sanctarum, utrum ita se fides habeat, demonstrandum est. Deinde si voluerit et adiuverit Deus, istis garrulis ratiocinatoribus, elatioribus quam capacioribus, atque ideo morbo periculosiore laborantibus, sic fortasse serviemus, ut inveniant aliquid unde dubitare non possint, et ob hoc in eo quod invenire nequiverint, de suis mentibus potius quam de ipsa veritate, vel de nostris disputationibus conquerantur.²¹

Atque ita si quid eis erga Deum vel amoris est vel timoris, ad initium fidei et ordinem redeant, iam sentientes quam salubriter in sancta Ecclesia medicina fidelium constituta sit, ut ad perceptionem incommutabilis veritatis imbecillem mentem observata pietas sanet,²² ne in opinionem noxiae falsitatis temeritas inordinata prae-

4. That is why, with the help of the Lord our God, we shall undertake to the best of our ability to give them the reasons they clamor for, and to account for the one and only and true God being a Trinity, and for the rightness of saying, believing, understanding that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one and the same substance or essence.

In this way, instead of feeling that they have been fobbed off by my excuses, they may actually come to realize that that supreme goodness does exist which only the most purified minds can gaze upon, and also that they are themselves unable to gaze upon it and grasp it for the good reason that the human mind with its weak eyesight cannot concentrate on so overwhelming a light, unless it has been nursed back to full vigor on *the justice of faith* (Rom 4:13).

But first we must establish by the authority of the Holy Scriptures whether the faith is in fact like that. Only then shall we go on, if God so wills and gives his help, to accommodate these talkative reason-mongers who have more conceit than capacity, which makes the disease they suffer from all the more dangerous. We shall do them such a service, perhaps, that they are able to discover reasons they can have no doubt about, and so in cases where they are unable to discover any they will sooner find fault with their own minds than with the truth itself or our arguments.

In this way if there is a particle of the love or fear of God in them, they may return to the beginning and right order of faith, realizing at least what a wholesome regimen is provided for the faithful in holy Church, whereby the due observance of piety makes the ailing mind well for the perception of unchanging truth, and saves it from being

17. The word *trinitas* is more merely numerical in meaning than the English “Trinity,” which has come almost to demand a capital T. But the Latin word means no more than “threeness,” or more concretely, “threesome,” “a three.”

18. Cf. Isa 7:9.

19. Cf. Augustine, *Against the Academics* 3.12.27; *The Sermon on the Mount* 1.3; *Revisions* 1.1.9.

20. Cf. 1 Tim 6:16.

21. Cf. Sir 25:12–23.

22. Cf. Sir 25:14–16.

cipitet.²³ Nec pigebit autem me, sicubi haesito, quaerere; nec pudebit, sicubi erro, discere.

plunged into opinions of a noisome falsehood by the random whims of temerity. Nor will I for my part, wherever I stick fast be loath to seek, nor wherever I go wrong be ashamed to learn.

Augustine's pious covenant with all who read what he writes

5. Proinde quisquis haec legit, ubi pariter certus est, pergat mecum; ubi pariter haesitat, quaerat mecum; ubi errorem suum cognoscit, redeat ad me; ubi meum, revocet me. Ita ingrediamur simul caritatis viam, tendentes ad eum de quo dictum est, *quaerite faciem eius semper*.²⁴ Et hoc placitum pium atque tutum coram Domino Deo nostro cum omnibus inierim, qui ea quae scribo legunt, et in omnibus scriptis meis, maximeque in his ubi quaeritur unitas Trinitatis, Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti; quia nec periculosius alicubi erratur, nec laboriosius aliquid quaeritur, nec fructuosius aliquid invenitur.²⁵

Quisquis ergo cum legit dicit, "Hoc non bene dictum est, quoniam non intellego," locutionem meam reprehendit, non fidem; et forte vere potuit dici planius; verumtamen nullus hominum ita locutus est, ut in omnibus ab omnibus intellexeretur. Videat ergo cui hoc in sermone meo displicet, utrum alios in talibus rebus quaestionibusque versatos cum intellegat, cum me non intellegit; et si ita est, ponat librum meum, vel etiam, si hoc videtur, abiiciat, et eis potius quos intellegit operam et tempus impendat.

Non tamen propterea patet me tacere debuisse, quia non tam expedite ac dilucide quam illi quos intellegit eloqui potui. Neque enim omnia quae ab omnibus conscribuntur, in omnium manus veniunt; et fieri potest ut nonnulli qui etiam haec nostra intellegere valent, illos planiores non inveniant libros, et in istos saltem incendant.

Ideoque utile est, plures a pluribus fieri diverso stilo, non diversa fide, etiam de quaestionibus eisdem, ut ad plurimos res ipsa perveniat; ad alios sic, ad alios autem sic.²⁶ At si ille qui se ista non intellexisse conqueritur, nulla unquam de talibus rebus diligenter et acute di-

5. Accordingly, dear reader, whenever you are as certain about something as I am go forward with me; whenever you stick equally fast seek with me; whenever you notice that you have gone wrong come back to me; or that I have, call me back to you. In this way let us set out along Charity Street together, making for him of whom it is said, *seek his face always* (Ps 105:4). This covenant, both prudent and pious, I would wish to enter into in the sight of the Lord our God with all who read what I write, and with respect to all my writings, especially such as these where we are seeking the unity of the three, of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. For nowhere else is a mistake more dangerous, or the search more laborious, or discovery more advantageous.

So whoever reads this and says, "This is not well said, because I do not understand it," is criticizing my statement, not the faith; and perhaps it could have been said more clearly—though no one has ever expressed himself well enough to be understood by everybody on everything. The person then who feels this grievance against my discourse should see if he can understand others who have busied themselves with such matters and such questions, when he fails to understand me. If so, let him lay my book aside (or throw it away if he prefers) and spend his time and effort on the ones he does understand.

However, he has no grounds to consider that I should have kept quiet, simply because I have not been able to express myself with such facility and clarity as those whom he can understand. Not everything, after all, that is written by anybody comes into the hands of everybody, and it is possible that some who are in fact capable of understanding even what I write may not come across those more intelligible writings, while they do at least happen upon these of mine.

That is why it is useful to have several books by several authors, even on the same subjects, differing in style though not in faith, so that the matter itself may reach as many as possible, some in this way others in that. But if the person who complains that he has not understood

23. Cf. Titus 1:1.

24. Cf. 1 Chron 16:11.

25. Cf. Eccl 8:17.

26. Cf. 1 Cor 7:7.

sputata intellegere potuit; secum agat votis et studiis ut proficiat, non mecum querelis et conviciis ut taceam.

Qui vero haec legens dicit, “intellego quidem quid dictum sit, sed non vere dictum est;” asserat, si placet, sententiam suam, et redarguat meam si potest. Quod si cum caritate et veritate fecerit, mihique etiam (si in hac vita maneo) cognoscendum facere curaverit, uberimum fructum laboris huius mei cepero. Quod si mihi non potuerit, quibus id potuerit, me volente ac libente praestiterit.

Ego tamen *in lege Domini meditabor*, si non *die ac nocte*, saltem quibus temporum particulis possum; et meditationes meas, ne oblivione fugiant, stilo alligo; sperans de misericordia Dei, quod in omnibus veris quae certa mihi sunt, perseverantem me faciet; *si quid autem aliter sapio, id quoque mihi ipse revelabit*, sive per occultas inspirationes atque admonitiones, sive per manifesta eloquia sua, sive per fraternas sermocinationes.

Hoc oro, et hoc depositum desideriumque meum penes ipsum habeo, qui mihi satis *idoneus est* custodire quae dedit, et *reddere quae promisit*.²⁷

this book has never been able to understand anyone else's painstaking and penetrating investigations of such subjects, he should set about improving himself with serious study, instead of trying to silence me with querulous abuse.

On the other hand, if anyone reads this work and says, “I understand what is being said, but it is not true,” he is at liberty to affirm his own conviction as much as he likes and refute mine if he can. If he succeeds in doing so charitably and truthfully, and also takes the trouble to let me know (if I am still alive), then that will be the choicest plum that could fall to me from these labors of mine. If he cannot do me this service, I would be only too pleased that he should do it for anybody he can.

All I am concerned with is *to meditate on the law of the Lord* (Ps 62:7), if not *day and night* (Ps 1:2), at least at whatever odd moments I can snatch, and to prevent forgetfulness from running away with my meditations by tying them down to paper; trusting in God's mercy that he will make me persevering in all truths I am sure of, and that *if in anything I am otherwise minded he will reveal this also to me himself* (Phil 3:15–16), either by hidden inspirations and reminders, or by his own manifest utterances, or by discussions with the brethren.

That is what I pray for, that is my deposit and my heart's desire, placed in the keeping of one who is a sufficiently *reliable* custodian of goods he himself has given and *redeemer of promises he himself has made* (Rom 4:17).

*Augustine would prefer to be censured by falsehood's censurer
than to receive its praiser's praises*

6. Arbitror sane nonnullos tardiores, in quibusdam locis librorum meorum opinaturos me sensisse quod non sensi, aut non sensisse quod sensi. Quorum errorem mihi tribui non debere quis nesciat, si velut me sequentes neque apprehendentes deviaverint in aliquam falsitatem, dum cogor per quaedam densa et opaca viam carpere; quandoquidem nec ipsis sanctis divinatorum Librorum auctoritatibus ullo modo quisquam recte tribuerit tam multos et varios errores haeticorum; cum omnes ex eisdem Scripturis falsas atque fallaces opiniones suas conentur defendere?²⁸

Admonet me plane ac mihi iubet suavissimo imperio lex Christi, hoc est caritas,²⁹ ut cum aliquid falsi in libris meis me sensisse homines putant quod ego non sensi, atque id ipsum falsum alteri displicet, alteri

6. I do not doubt, of course, that some people who are rather slow in the uptake will think that in some passages in my books I meant what I did not mean, or that I did not mean what in fact I did. Nobody, I trust, will think it fair to blame me for the mistake of such people if they stray off the path into some falsehood in their effort to follow and their failure to keep up with me, while I am perforce picking my way through dark and difficult places. After all, no one would dream of blaming the sacred authors of God's own books for the immense variety there is of heretical errors, though all the heretics try to defend their false and misleading opinions from those very Scriptures.

Undoubtedly, though, it is required of me by the gentle authority of Christ's law, which is charity, that when people think I meant something false in my books which in fact I did not and this falsehood is disliked by one and welcomed

27. Cf. John 17:12.

28. Cf. Eccl 25:2.

29. Cf. John 13:34; 1 John 5:3; 1 Tim 1:5.

placet,³⁰ malim me reprehendi a reprehensore falsitatis, quam ab eius laudatore laudari. Ab illo enim quamvis ego non recte, qui hoc non senserim, error tamen ipse recte vituperatur; ab hoc autem nec ego recte laudor a quo existimor id sensisse quod vituperat veritas, nec ipsa sententia quam vituperat veritas. Ergo in nomine Domini susceptum opus aggrediamur.

by another, I should prefer to be censured by the censurer of falsehood than to receive its praiser's praises. The first, though he is wrong to blame me, since I did not in fact mean what he thinks I did, is right to blame the error; but the second is neither right in praising an opinion that truth condemns, nor right in praising me for something he thinks I meant that truth condemns. Without further ado, then, let us apply ourselves to the task we have undertaken.

Chapter 2

The Catholic faith's teaching about the Trinity

7. Omnes quos legere potui, qui ante me scripserunt de Trinitate, quae Deus est, divinorum Librorum veterum et novorum catholici tractatores, hoc intenderunt secundum Scripturas docere, quod Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus, *unius eiusdemque substantiae* inseparabili aequalitate divinam insinuent unitatem; ideoque *non sint tres dii, sed unus Deus*; quamvis Pater Filium genuerit, et ideo Filius non sit qui Pater est; Filiusque a Patre sit *genitus*, et ideo *Pater non sit qui Filius est*; Spiritusque Sanctus nec Pater sit nec Filius, sed tantum Patris et Filii Spiritus, Patri et Filio etiam ipse coequalis, et ad Trinitatis pertinens unitatem.³¹

Non tamen eamdem Trinitatem natam de Virgine Maria, et sub Pontio Pilato crucifixam et sepultam, tertio die resurrexisse et in coelum ascendisse,³² sed tantummodo Filium. Nec eamdem Trinitatem descendisse in specie columbae super Iesum baptizatum;³³ aut die Pentecostes post ascensionem Domini, sonitu facto de coelo quasi ferretur flatus vehemens, et linguis divisus velut ignis,³⁴ sed tantummodo Spiritum Sanctum.³⁵ Nec eamdem Trinitatem dixisse de coelo: *tu es Filius meus*, sive cum baptizatus est a Iohanne, sive in monte quando cum illo erant tres discipuli; aut quando sonuit vox, dicens. *Et clarificavi, et iterum clarificabo*: sed tantummodo Patris vocem fuisse ad Filium factam; quamvis Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus, sicut inseparabiles sunt, ita inseparabi-

7. The purpose of all the Catholic commentators I have been able to read on the divine books of both testaments, who have written before me on the Trinity which God is, has been to teach that according to the Scriptures Father and Son and Holy Spirit in the inseparable equality of *one substance* present a divine unity; and therefore there are *not three gods but one God* (1 John 5:7); although indeed the Father has begotten the Son, and therefore he who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son is *begotten by the Father*, and therefore he who is *the Son is not the Father*; and *the Holy Spirit* is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, himself coequal to the Father and the Son, and belonging to the threefold unity.

It was not however this same three (their teaching continues) that was born *of the Virgin Mary*, crucified and buried *under Pontius Pilate*, rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven, but the Son alone. Nor was it this same three that came down upon Jesus *in the form of a dove* at his baptism, or came down on the day of Pentecost after the Lord's ascension, with a roaring sound from heaven as though a violent gust were rushing down, and in divided tongues as of fire, but the Holy Spirit alone. Nor was it this same three that spoke from heaven, *you are my Son*, either at his baptism by John (Mark 1:11), or on the mountain when the three disciples were with him (Matt 17:5), nor when the resounding voice was heard, *I have both glorified it (my name) and will glorify it again* (John 12:28), but it was

30. Cf. 1 Cor 10:33; Gal 1:10.

31. Cf. Ps 2:7, 109:3; Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5, 5:5.

32. Cf. Matt 10:20; Gal 4:6.

33. Cf. Matt 3:16; Mark 1:9–10; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:32.

34. PL adds *sedisse super unumquemque eorum*, “settled on each of them,” a gloss in one manuscript completing the text of Acts 2:3.

35. Cf. Acts 2:2–4.

liter operentur.³⁶ Haec et mea fides est, quando haec est Catholica fides.

the Father's voice alone addressing the Son; although just as Father and Son and Holy Spirit are inseparable, so do they work inseparably. This is also my faith inasmuch as it is the Catholic faith.

Three questions which worry some people

8. Sed in ea nonnulli perturbantur, cum audiunt Deum Patrem, et Deum Filium, et Deum Spiritum Sanctum, et tamen hanc Trinitatem non tres deos, sed unum Deum; et quemadmodum id intellegant quaerunt; praesertim cum dicitur, inseparabiliter operari Trinitatem in omni re quam Deus operatur, et tamen quamdam vocem Patris sonuisse,³⁷ quae vox Filii non sit; *in carne autem natum*, et *passum*, et *resurrexisse*, et *ascendisse*³⁸ nonnisi Filium; *in columbae autem specie* venisse nonnisi Spiritum Sanctum.³⁹

Intellegere volunt, quomodo et illam vocem, quae nonnisi Patris fuit, Trinitas fecerit; et illam carnem, in qua nonnisi Filius *de Virgine natus est*,⁴⁰ eadem Trinitas creaverit; et illam columbae speciem, in qua nonnisi Spiritus Sanctus apparuit, illa ipsa Trinitas operata sit. Alioquin non inseparabiliter Trinitas operatur, sed alia Pater facit, alia Filius, alia Spiritus Sanctus; aut si quaedam simul faciunt, quaedam sine invicem, iam non inseparabilis est Trinitas.

Movet etiam quomodo Spiritus Sanctus in Trinitate sit, quem nec Pater, nec Filius, nec ambo genuerint, cum sit Spiritus et Patris et Filii. Quia ergo quaerunt ista homines, et taedio nobis sunt; si quid hinc ex dono Dei sapit infirmitas nostra, edisseramus eis ut possumus, *neque cum invidia tabescente iter habeamus*.

Si dicimus nihil nos de talibus rebus cogitare solere, mentimur; si autem fatemur habitare ista in cogitationibus nostris, quoniam rapimur amore indagandae veritatis, flagitant iure caritatis ut eis indicemus quid hinc excogitare potuerimus.

*Non quia iam acceperim, aut iam perfectus sim*⁴¹ (nam si Paulus apostolus, quanto magis ego longe infra

8. Yet this statement of the faith worries some people, when they hear that the Father is God and the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet this threesome is not three gods but one God. They wonder how they are to understand this, especially when it is said that the Trinity works inseparably in everything that God works, and yet that an utterance of the Father was heard which is not the Son's utterance, and that on the other hand only the Son was born *in the flesh* and *suffered* and *rose again* and *ascended*; and that only the Holy Spirit came *in the form of a dove*.

They want to understand how that utterance which was only the Father's was caused by the three; and how that flesh in which only the Son *was born of the Virgin* was created by the same three; and how that form of the dove in which only the Holy Spirit appeared was fashioned by the Trinity itself. Otherwise the Trinity does not work inseparably, but the Father does some things, the Son others and the Holy Spirit yet others; or if they do some things together and some without each other, then the Trinity is no longer inseparable.

Another puzzle is in what manner the Holy Spirit is in the three, being begotten neither by Father nor Son nor both of them, while being the Spirit both of the Father and the Son. People ask us these questions to the point of weariness, so we must set before them as far as we can what God has granted our weakness to understand, and on no account *take gnawing envy as our traveling companion* (Wis 6:25).

If we say that we do not usually think about these things, we are being untruthful; if we confess to our questioners that these matters live permanently in our thoughts because we are carried away by a love of tracking down the truth, then they can demand of us by right of charity that we should show them what conclusions we have been able to reach on the subject.

Not that I have already attained or am perfect (if not Paul the Apostle, how much less may I, prostrate far below

36. Cf. 1 John 5:7; Augustine, *The Predestination of the Saints* 8.13.

37. Cf. Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11, 9:6; Luke 3:22; John 1:32.

38. PL adds *in caelum*, "into heaven."

39. Cf. Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10.

40. Cf. John 1:14; 1 John 4:2.

41. Cf. Phil 3:12.

illius pedes iacens, non me arbitror apprehendisse?);⁴² sed pro modulo meo, si ea *quae retro sunt obliviscor*, et *in anteriora me extendo*, et *secundum intentionem sequor ad palmam supernae vocationis*,⁴³ quantum eiusdem viae peregerim, et quo pervenerim, unde mihi in finem reliquus cursus est, ut aperiatur desideratur a me, illis desiderantibus quibus me servire cogit libera caritas.

Oportet autem, et donabit Deus, ut eis ministrando quae legant, ipse quoque proficiam; et eis cupiens respondere quaerentibus, ipse quoque inveniam quod quaerebam.⁴⁴ Ergo suscepi haec, iubente atque adiuvante Domino Deo nostro, non tam cognita cum auctoritate disserere, quam ea cum pietate disserendo cognoscere.

his feet, *count myself to have apprehended?*), but in my own poor measure *I forget what lies behind and stretch out to what lies ahead*, and *press on intently to the palm of the supernal vocation* (Phil 3:12); and so I am desired to declare how much of the way I have covered and what point I have reached, from where in fine the rest of the course lies ahead of me, and free-born charity compels me to be the slave of those who desire this of me.

But it is proper, and God will surely grant it, that I should also do myself a little good by serving them with something to read; and that in being prompt to answer their questions I should also find the answers to my own. And so at the bidding of the Lord our God and with his aid I have undertaken, not so much to discuss with authority what I have already learned, as to learn by discussing it with modest piety.

The Son is true God, of the same substance as the Father

9. Qui dixerunt Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum non esse Deum, aut non esse verum Deum, aut non cum Patre unum et solum Deum, aut non vere immortalem, quia mutabilem, manifestissima divinorum testimoniorum et consona voce convicti sunt; unde sunt illa: *in principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum*. Manifestum est enim quod Verbum Dei, Filium Dei unicum accipimus, de quo post dicit, *et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis*, propter nativitatem incarnationis eius, quae facta est in tempore *ex Virgine*. In eo autem declarat, non tantum Deum esse, sed etiam eiusdem cum Patre substantiae, quia cum dixisset, *et Deus erat Verbum: hoc erat*, inquit, *in principio apud Deum; omnia per ipsum facta sunt, et sine ipso factum est nihil*. Neque enim dicit, *omnia*; nisi quae facta sunt, id est omnem creaturam. Unde liquido apparet ipsum factum non esse *per quem facta sunt omnia*. Et si factus non est, creatura non est; si autem creatura non est, *eiusdem cum Patre substantiae est*. Omnis enim substantia quae Deus non est, creatura est; et quae creatura non est, Deus est. Et si non est Filius eiusdem substantiae cuius Pater; ergo facta substantia est; si facta substantia est, non *omnia per ipsum facta sunt*; at *omnia per ipsum facta sunt*; unius igitur eiusdemque cum Patre substantiae est. Et ideo non tantum Deus, sed et verus Deus. Quod idem Ioannes apertissime in Epistola sua dicit: *scimus quod Filius Dei venerit, et dederit nobis*

9. Those who have affirmed that our Lord Jesus Christ is not God, or is not true God, or is not with the Father the one and only God, or is not truly immortal because he is subject to change, have been confuted by the utterance of the clearest and most consistent divine testimonies, for example *in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1). It is clear that we are to take the Word of God for the only Son of God, of whom he goes on to say, *and the Word became flesh* (John 1:14), with reference to his incarnation birth which took place in time *of the Virgin*. Now in this passage he clearly shows that he is not only God but also of the same substance as the Father, for after saying *and the Word was God*, he adds, *this was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was made nothing* (John 1:2). By *all things* he means only what has been made, that is every creature. So it is crystal clear that he *through whom all things were made* was not made himself. And if he is not made he is not a creature, and if he is not a creature he is *of the same substance as the Father*. For every substance that is not God is a creature, and what is not a creature is God. And if the Son is not of the same substance as the Father he is a made substance; if he is a made substance then *not all things were made through him*. But *all things were made through him*; therefore he is of one and the same substance as the Father. And thus he is not only God, but also true God; as the same John says quite explicitly in his

42. Cf. Phil 3:13.

43. Augustine's text reads *secundum intentionem*, which is a literal but inaccurate rendering of the Greek *kata skopon*. The Vulgate translates correctly *ad destinatum*, "to the goal."

44. Cf. Matt 7:7–8; Luke 11:9–10.