

**Augustine on The Spirit as the Soul of the Body
or
Fragments of a Trinitarian Ecclesiology**

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quod autem est anima corpori hominis
hoc est spiritus sanctus corpori Christi,
quod est ecclesia.¹

I Introduction

Like others at this conference I would like to begin by remembering one who is not here. Tom Martin was to me something like an older brother for almost twenty years. Those who were his friends will understand the words Serapion wrote of St. Antony the Great, “Behold his separation from us has made apparent our immense loss in desolation; but how much more will his freedom make the joy which is in heaven apparent,”²

The idea that the Spirit maybe described as the soul of the body of Christ, the Church, has been a constant minor theme in official Catholic ecclesiology over the past 150 years. The theme appears in Leo XIII’s *Divinum Illud Munus*, and is again referenced in Pius XII’s *Mystici Corporis* and then in Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium*.³ The idea has lost prominence in decades since the council – it makes no appearance, for example, in John Paul II’s *Dominum et Vivificantem* and appears in an oddly

¹ s. 267. 4 (PL 38. 1231)

² See Serapion of Thmuis, “A Letter to the Disciples of Antony” (Armenian text) in Tim Vivian and Apostolos N. Athanassakis, *Athanasius of Alexandria. The Life of Antony* (Kalamazoo, 2003).

³ See e.g. *Divinum Illud Munus* § 6, *Mystici Corporis* § 57, *Lumen Gentium* § 7. All may be accessed at www.vatican.va.

dislocated way in the *New Catechism* of 1992 to 1997.⁴ Throughout this history, reference to Augustine as source is also constant. Indeed, for many Catholic writers in the mid-twentieth century the theme was understood as the key to Augustine's ecclesiology, as a central contribution of Augustine to ecclesiological reflection and, hence, as a key possession of Catholic ecclesiological tradition. Sebastiaan Tromp, for example, produced, in two small volumes, a selection of texts from the Greek and Latin Fathers to show the prominence of the theme in the Fathers.⁵ For English language readers Stanislaus Grabowski's highly synthetic *The Church: An Introduction to the Theology of St. Augustine*⁶ offers a perfect example of the tendency to present this theme as the key to and guiding foundation of Augustine's ecclesiology. Throughout this recent history one of the main functions of this theme has been to illustrate and distinguish the relative functions of Son and Spirit in their salvific mission. Although many writers often think of *Lumen Gentium* as demonstrating a turn to what is spoken of as a more explicitly "Trinitarian ecclesiology," they usually do so in (a partially unfair) comparison with *Mystici corporis*, and without noting the extensive Trinitarian usage present in Leo XIII's 1897 encyclical.

Now, to the scholar of Augustine, this history suggests three sets of questions. First, how important is this theme to Augustine? Is it really the unifying analogy of his ecclesiology? Second, how does this idea develop in Augustine's texts and what

⁴ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), § 797. For some reason this paragraph is the first in the section "The Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit." The idea is not mentioned in the previous section "The Church – Body of Christ."

⁵ Sebastianus Tromp, *De Spiritu Sancto Anima Corporis Mystici. I. Testomina Selecta e Patribus Graecis, II. Testimonia Selecta e Patribus Latinis* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1949 & 1952).

⁶ Stanislaus Grabowski, *The Church: An Introduction to the Theology of St. Augustine* (St. Louis: Herder, 1957).

are its sources? Third, does Augustine (and, if so, how?) employ the idea in an explicitly Trinitarian context? Does this analogy reveal to us the links between his ecclesiology and his Trinitarian theology? My focus in this paper is partially on the second set of questions, specifically the question of development, and on the third set as a whole. I hope eventually to address the first and the rest of the second in a future paper (oddly little having been written on the theme by modern scholars of Augustine).

We cannot proceed further without attempting to answer an obvious question: what does it mean to speak of an ecclesiology as “Trinitarian”? Some recent writers appear to operate with the assumption that the more pluralist and devolved an account of appropriate Church structures and practices, the more Trinitarian an ecclesiology becomes. Without much more theological discussion we would have here, however, only the projection of a model of plurality onto the divine and the claim that the same model was instantiated best in a particular account of the Church. I suggest, as a more directly theological alternative, that a Trinitarian ecclesiology is one that describes the nature and purpose of the Church as an integral part of the interrelated missions of Son and Spirit (and while questions about unity and plurality in the Church will no doubt play a part (cf., e.g., John 17:11) they will always need to be asked in the light of prior attention to the sort of unity and plurality appropriate for members of the body of Christ at this point in God’s economy, and they will always need to be related to epistemological questions about our knowledge of the divine plurality and unity prior to the beatific vision).

We need to begin with this fairly formal statement because there are a variety of ways in which a Trinitarian ecclesiology might be instantiated. While one could fairly claim that a Trinitarian ecclesiology will inevitably locate the Church within a

narrative of God's creative and salvific action in the world, a number of tactics are possible within this general strategy. One might, for example, describe the interaction of Son or Spirit with the Church by relating the character of their individual actions to their eternal characters. Or, one might attempt to show how the life of the Church reflects the eternal interrelationships and ordering of Father, Son and Spirit. Such a strategy, I would have thought, should immediately appeal to any theologian who sees the life of the Christian as an anticipation of a final vision of and participation in the divine life.

However, once we speak of Trinitarian ecclesiology within a Nicene context, other questions also impinge. For example, those theologians who have written most strongly in favor of drawing out with ever greater clarity the Trinitarian character of the Church's nature and purpose generally assume that two tactics best lead to this clarity: (1) increasing clarity about the roles of Son and Spirit; and (2) an ever stronger attention to a narrative that distinguishes the relative actions of Son and Spirit. But in a Nicene context what are the limits of such differentiation when the interpenetration and inseparable operation of the persons is confessed? Examining this particular theme in Augustine's corpus will provide us with much material for reflection on this set of questions.

II AD 393-397

Two basic elements of Augustine's soul and body language first appear together in the *De sermone Domini monte* of 393. In Book 1 Augustine writes:

Let anyone who seeks the delights of this world and the riches of temporal things under the Christian name remember that our blessedness is within. As it is said of the soul of the Church by the mouth of the prophet, "all the beauty of the

king's daughter is within (Psalm 45:13).” Slanders and persecutions and disparagements from without are promised; and yet, from these things there is a great reward in heaven, which is felt in the heart of those who endure, those who can now say, “We glory in tribulations: knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope makes not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” (Rom. 5:5)... it is not said merely, “Blessed are those who endure persecution;” but it is added, “for the sake of righteousness” (Matt. 5:10). Now, where there is no sound faith, there can be no righteousness, for the just [righteous] man lives by faith (Rom. 1:17; cf. Hab. 2:4). Neither let schismatics promise themselves anything of that reward; for similarly, where there is no love, there cannot be righteousness, for “love does no harm to a neighbor”; (Rom. 13:10) and if they had it, they would not tear in pieces Christ's body, which is the Church.⁷

The two elements are these. First, the collective unit of the Church is treated as parallel to the individual human soul. Second, the soul is the source of love and it is love that holds the whole together. At the same time, we should also note that Augustine deploys the analogy in the context of anti-Donatist polemic, as an argument against those who “tear” the body of Christ.

Just a few years later we find a fascinating reference in *Ad Simplicianum*. Commenting on Romans 9:20-21, “has not the potter power over the clay...” Augustine draws in Sirach 33:10ff., a passage in which the same language occurs:

In all there is form and the fitting together of the body in such concord of the members that the apostle can use it as an illustration of how charity is obtained.

⁷ *s. dom. mon.* 1. 5.13

In all a life-giving spirit vivifies the earthly members, and man's whole nature is wonderfully attuned, as the soul rules and the body obeys...⁸

In this passage Augustine is describing the *original* unity of humankind in Adam and suggesting that Paul's body language is a *similitudo* that draws on it. That original unity is perverted by our common sinfulness, and out of it God draws one set to salvation and leaves the rest to their just condemnation. For our purposes, however, we must also note Augustine's fuller description of the Spirit's vivifying function. The Spirit produces a harmony of the limbs of the original social body, and a harmony that depends on the soul's focus and exercise of its ruling function. This account of the soul's functions follows directly along lines traced some years before in *De immortalitate animae* (386-7) and it appears again in the *De agone Christiano* of 396.⁹

In 394 Paulinus of Nola and his wife Therasia wrote to Augustine, a previous letter having gone unanswered. In a complex rhetorical flourish Paulinus argues that even though he and Theresia might seem not to know Augustine because of a lack of words from Hippo, they do know him because they recognize Augustine in the Spirit because they are all members of the one body and are in the one spirit (cf. Eph. 3:5-6 and par.).¹⁰ Augustine seems not to have replied until 396 or 397. But when he finally did so, he quotes Paulinus asserting that Augustine shares in the same body and grace; and when Augustine then glosses Paulinus, the analogy of the Spirit and the body is far more clearly articulated than it was in Paulinus's letter:

⁸ *Simpl.* 1. 2.20.

⁹ *imm. an.* 16. 25; *agon.* 20. 22. This latter text is an interesting one because it is one of the few where Augustine speaks of the head (Christ) working through the limbs (the Church) like the soul in the body, but without reference to the Spirit.

¹⁰ *ep.* 30. 2. The previous letter is preserved as Augustine, *ep.* 25.

My holy brother and sister, whom God loves, members with us of one body, who would doubt that we are kept alive by one Spirit except someone who does not experience the love by which we are bound to one another?¹¹

Given Paul's own linking of s/Spirit and body in such texts as 1Cor. 12 and Eph 4. 4, one might fairly suggest it is unsurprising that we find Paulinus offering his own brief play on the language. Nevertheless, Augustine brings to this language a particular and conscious use of a language of the soul's functioning and its parallels to the Holy Spirit's mission. Indeed, while Tromp's short volumes were intended to show the constancy of this analogy through early Christian tradition, it is noticeable that his Latin volume actually demonstrates that while occasional play on the language is a constant, it is only with Augustine that we see the theme developed through an extended analogy between the powers of the soul and the work of the Spirit.¹²

III: AD 407

In the first decade of the fifth century our analogy begins to appear in a more developed form, and it does so in the joint context of anti-Donatist polemic and reflection on the meaning and place of Pentecost. The one extended discussion that we can securely date to this decade occurs in the sixth of Augustine's ten homilies on the first epistle of John, preached in 407 – and it is a discussion that rewards careful attention. Toward the end of the homily Augustine comments on the receiving of the Spirit at Pentecost and offers his standard exegesis: the apostles spoke in tongues as a sign that all nations would receive the Spirit; now that this has been fulfilled, the sign

¹¹ *ep.* 31. 3.

¹² One of the few examples of direct comparison between the characteristics of the human soul and the Spirit is to be found in Hilary at *in Ps.* 118.19.8. Note, however, that here Hilary makes no comment about Christ and seeks only to illustrate the Spirit's omnipresence.

is no longer needed. Because of this fulfillment, we need not fear that the newly baptized do not speak in tongues. However, we do need to ask: How we may know that they have received the Spirit? In the first place, love of one's brother is the abiding of the Spirit, but Augustine immediately qualifies this by equating such love with love of the peace, love and unity of the Church spread through the world. We must love not only the one nearest to us and seen by us, but also those to whom we are joined in the unity of the Spirit. He continues:

Let [the Christian] take care not to love only that brother of whom he takes notice before his eyes, for we do not see many brothers of ours, and yet, we are joined to them in the unity of the Spirit. What wonder that they are not with us? We are in one body, we have one head in heaven. Brothers our eyes do not see themselves; they do not, as it were, know themselves. Can it be that they do not know themselves in the love of the bodily structure? For, that you may know that they know themselves in the conjoining of love, when both are open, it is not permitted for the right eye to take notice of anything of which the left one does not take notice. Direct the ray of the right eye without the other if you can. They converge at the same time, they are directed at the same time. Their focusing is one; their locations are different. If, then, all who love God with you have one focusing with you, take no care that you are separated in place by the body; you have together fixed the sight of your heart on the light of truth... [ending in citation of Rom. 5.5, "...the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us"]¹³

In this text the language Augustine used to Paulinus is filled out considerably. The analogy of the soul and the body enables Augustine to talk of the spatial separation

¹³ *ep. Io. tr. 6. 10.* On Rom. 5.5 see A.-M. La Bonnardiere, 'Le verset paulinien Rom. V, 5, dans l'oeuvre de S. Augustin', *AugMag* I: 657-665.

between members of the Church as irrelevant to their actual unity because of the unifying role of the Spirit. The reality of the body rests here almost entirely in the Spirit.

The anti-Donatist context is fairly clear. At the beginning of the homily Augustine condemns those who “declare themselves martyrs in heresies and schisms”, and here Augustine emphasizes that the Church is spread throughout the world, and when he speaks of “they” who are not with us, his reference is the Donatists. But note that Augustine also speaks here of the sacrament of baptism and its effects, and he does so in highly pneumatological terms. The visible water and words of the sacrament are one thing, its invisible and hidden power another. The power of the sacrament here is directly equated with the Spirit and maybe known in the love that one feels for one’s brothers in the Church. Extensive argument is offered to demonstrate that John’s “rivers of living water” (cf. John 4:10-11) refers to the Spirit who cleanses the soul.¹⁴ The primary role of the Son here is to send the Spirit: the culmination and effectiveness of baptism rests in Christ’s sending of the Spirit. Thus, throughout the passage, for particular anti-Donatist purposes, it is the Spirit who takes center stage.

The rhetorical focus on the Spirit in this homily stands out best with a counterpoint, and for that we can turn to the 10th tractate where Augustine again turns to the unity of the body of Christ. Here Augustine’s emphasis is on Christ’s dwelling in his body. Thus while the unity of the body is here constituted by love, the specific role of the Spirit is not specified. It is also here that Augustine states famously:

No one can love the Father unless he should love the Son, and he who loves the Son loves also the sons of God. What sons of God? The members of the Son of

¹⁴ *ep. Io. tr. 6. 11.*

God. And, by loving, he also himself becomes a member and by love comes to be situated in the structure of the body of Christ, and there will be one Christ loving himself. (*erit unus Christ amans seipsum*).¹⁵

In what follows, Augustine speaks about the Christian loving Father and Son again at length, but without mentioning the Spirit. Only in passing, when he argues that both Christ and Love maybe said to be “the end”, does he emphasize that Father, Son *and Spirit* are God and are love, so that love is the end.¹⁶

Thus Augustine shifts his rhetorical focus. His concern in this homily is to link together love of Christ (and the Father) and love of our neighbors in the Church; to do so he emphasizes the unity in love of the *totus Christus* recommended to us by Christ himself before his Ascension.¹⁷ But to do this is to attribute to Christ the loving that was earlier attributed to the Spirit. This shift, then, forces us to ask whether Augustine has a fixed understanding of the relative roles of Son and Spirit in the Church, and whether (and how) he draws boundaries between functions attributed to the Spirit and functions attributed to the Son. It is, perhaps, already clear that the answer to these questions will depend upon Augustine’s Nicene understanding of the unity of the divine three; the unity of Father, Son and Spirit has been a point of reference throughout this series of homilies, and it is once more made explicit here.¹⁸

III Two Pentecost Sermons: AD 405 & 412?

¹⁵ *ep. Io. tr. 10. 3* (SC 75. 414).

¹⁶ *ep. Io. tr. 10. 5*.

¹⁷ See *ep. Io. tr. 10. 9*. For further examples of this anti-Donatist reading of the Ascension see *s. 267* and *268*, discussed in the next section. Note that in those cases Christ’s teaching prior to his Ascension is used to demonstrate the centrality of the Spirit in Christ’s body.

¹⁸ *ep. Io. tr. 10. 5* (SC 75. 420): ...*finis praecepti caritas, et Deus caritas: quia Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus unum sunt*. See also e.g. *ep. Io. tr 7. 6*.

A number of Augustine's Pentecost sermons survive; two offer accounts of our theme, possess an anti-Donatist edge, and have frequently been taken to be paradigmatic of Augustine's ecclesiology.¹⁹ While the two have been fairly consistently dated some years apart, in 405 and in 412, the dating of neither is secure and I think it best to treat them together. Indeed, the close similarity in approach between these two texts only adds to the difficulty of dating.

Sermon 268 was dated by Kunzelmann to 405, although others have offered only 405-410 and little certainty is possible.²⁰ The homily focuses on the unity of the Church: even though seven weeks of seven days makes 49 days, Pentecost is celebrated on the 50th day, the extra day signifying unity.²¹ After discussing the analogy that concerns us, Augustine further emphasizes unity by reference to God's creating of all humanity from one human being, in distinction from the creating of all other things in original pluralities (and thus uniquely taking up the theme of the original unity of humanity from the *Ad Simplicianum* in discussion of the Spirit as the soul of the body of Christ).²²

Between these discussions, Augustine reflects on Eph. 4:4 ("one body and one spirit"). Just as one spirit binds together, gives life to and co-ordinates the parts of the body, so the Spirit joins and co-ordinates the Body of Christ. If one "part" suffers, all

¹⁹ In the other Pentecost sermons only *s.* 270. 6 makes any use of our analogy. Outside these homilies and in anti-Donatist contexts the analogy almost appears at *ep.* 185. 9.42.

²⁰ For the range of dates offered see P. –P. Verbraken, *Études critiques sur les sermons de authentiques de Saint Augustin*, Instrumenta Patristica 12 (Steenbrugge, 1976), 124. For the uncertainty of Kunzelmann's suggestion see A. Kunzelmann, "Die chronologie der Sermons des hl. Augustinus, *Miscellanea Agostiniana* 2 (Rome, 1931), 441.

²¹ *s.* 268. 1.

²² *s.* 268. 3.

“parts” feel the pain. But, and here we hear Augustine’s anti-Donatist voice, if a limb is cut from the body it retains its shape but loses its life.²³

The second half of the sermon offers us an account of the risen but not yet ascended Christ recommending the Church – his bridegroom - by preaching (in Luke 24) continuity between his own resurrection and the spreading of the gospel from Jerusalem throughout the world. Paul’s rejection of schism at 1 Cor. 1:11-13 – “has Christ been divided up?” – further indicates the importance of a unifying love for the head of the body. In Acts 1:7-8, Christ’s statement that the Spirit will come upon the Apostles, is used to link Ascension, Pentecost and Augustine’s hearers in the Church: that which is commended by Christ and discussed by Paul is the Church as it exists in fifth century Africa.²⁴

The polemical tone of the sermon – the narrative connection Augustine draws between Christ and his Church existing in the Spirit – needs no more Trinitarian context than a simple narrative distinction between Son and Spirit. The analogy of Spirit as soul is very clearly stated, but serves only to reinforce the principle that the body has a necessary unity with it if it is to live. Nevertheless, we do see here that the more clearly Augustine can articulate the Spirit’s function in achieving that unity the stronger his rhetoric becomes. The battle with Donatism thus forces on Augustine the need for particular sorts of clarity about the analogy, and a need for precision about its Trinitarian underpinnings is not among them.

Sermon 267, which also has the Donatists very much in mind, has been placed by a number of scholars from Kunzelmann to La Bonnardière in 412, and here the dating

²³ s. 268. 2.

²⁴ s. 268. 4.

seems a little more secure.²⁵ The text is short and for the most part follows lines apparent in 268. In the first half Augustine points back to his Ascension sermon where he discussed Christ “recommending his Church.”²⁶ If the 412 date is correct, then Sermon 265 seems to be the intended referent. In that sermon Augustine again turns to Acts 1. In response to the apostles asking whether Israel is now to be restored, Christ negatively declares that “it is not for you to know the times...”, before more positively noting that, “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8).²⁷ Interweaving reference to the unity of the Church as the one bridegroom and the seamless robe, Augustine interprets this speech as Christ’s last will and testament to the Church: only by receiving the Spirit who is Love, and consequently desiring unity, can we receive the inheritance.²⁸ In sermon 267 Augustine had emphasized that the Church has spread from one house to all the corners of the world (Psalm 113:3) and now speaks with the tongues of all nations. Thus, one shouldn’t ask why we do not speak in tongues if we have received the Spirit because it is through the Spirit that we become one body and thus do speak in many tongues. The spirit or soul gives life to the parts of the body: it sees, hears, smells, speaks, works, walks through the body; it is present simultaneously to all parts and gives each part its role. The functions are diverse, but the life is common (*officia diversa snt; vita communis*).²⁹

²⁵ See Verbraken, *Études critiques*, 123 (who also notes occasional dissension from this date); A. M. La Bonnardière, *Biblia Augustiniana II: les Épitres aux Thessaloniens, à Tite et à Philémon* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1964) **; on the relationship between s. 267 and 265 see Kunzelmann, “Die chronologie,” 449.

²⁶ s. 267. 3.

²⁷ s. 265. 4.5-5.6.

²⁸ s. 265. 6.7-8.9.

²⁹ s. 267.4.

The close connections between the arguments of these sermons – and the Scriptural texts discussed – might suggest either a closer relationship between them (or, perhaps, the persistence of a particular anti-Donatist argument in Augustine’s mind) than the current consensus on the date does, but this is not my concern here. For our purposes Sermon 267 only reinforces the argument that the anti-Donatist focus of Sermon 268 reveals the rhetorical utility of a detailed account of the soul’s necessity for unitary life (and thus the necessity of the Spirit of unity) in anti-Donatist use of the analogy, but this context does not similarly demand any detailed Trinitarian development. Thus the irony that, while these texts have been frequently quoted to illustrate our analogy, thanks to their clarity about the soul’s function, they are not accounts that reveal much if we ask about the Trinitarian structure of Augustine’s ecclesiology.

IV AD c.413 – c.420

Extensive reflection on our analogy occurs only in a homiletic context. And, as we have already begun to see, it is only when Augustine preaches over a number of days and is consequently able to draw out Trinitarian themes slowly that we find him reflecting on the Trinitarian underpinnings of this account of the Spirit’s role. We have seen him begin to do so in the series of homilies on 1 John; we will now see it again in the most mature treatment of our analogy in Augustine’s extant corpus: the 26th and 27th of the *Tractates on John*. These two tractates constitute a unified argument, delivered over consecutive days. Dating these two tractates is also difficult: none of the current attempts do much more than plausibly suggest somewhere

between c.413 and c.420, my own preference being for a date toward the end of this period.³⁰

The famous 26th tractate concerns the Eucharistic discourse of John 6: 41-59. Alluding to 1Cor. 1: 30, Augustine begins by arguing that Christ is our justice and thus that we become just only through grace: “no one fulfills the law except he whom grace, that is, the bread which comes down from heaven, has helped.”³¹ This intriguing comment announces the major rhetorical strategy of the sermon: it is Christ who is both the visible and the invisible bread, the Spirit here is always named as the Spirit of Christ. The act of faith in Christ is to eat the living bread.³² But how are we drawn to believe? We are drawn because the revelation that is Christ draws out of us delight, this revelation excites the will toward belief. This belief that draws is the belief that Christ is the Son of God and thus is wisdom, justice, truth, eternity and everlasting life itself.³³ We should note the particular focus of this rhetoric. Although Augustine has long been clear about the importance of God providing both external or internal objects of desire *and* the motive power to delight in and follow those objects, here his focus is solely on the manner in which *Christ* as revelation answers to the soul’s deepest need and hence draws out a response.³⁴ We are certainly talking of grace, and of grace within the body that is the Church, but this particular argument demands that the Spirit stands in the shadows at the side of the stage.

³⁰ See in particular the discussion of A. –M. La Bonnardière, *Recherches de Chronologie Augustinienne* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1965), 87-104. An excellent summary of the long history of dating questions with reference *Io. ev. tr.* is provided by Rettig in *FoC* 78, pp. 23-31.

³¹ *Io. ev. tr.* 26. 1.

³² *Io. ev. tr.* 26. 1.

³³ *Io. ev. tr.* 26. 4-5, 7.

³⁴ See e.g. *Simpl.* 1. 2.21-22.

Augustine focuses next on the reception both of Christ's teaching as a whole and the Eucharist in particular. The teaching is grasped if received "spiritually": the bread is eaten truly when it is eaten with the heart:

The faithful know the body of Christ if they should not neglect to be the body of Christ. Let them become the body of Christ, if they want to live from the Spirit of Christ. Nothing lives from the Spirit of Christ except the body of Christ.

Understand, my brothers, what I have said. You are a man; you have a spirit, and you have a body. I say spirit which is called the soul, because of which it is substantiated that you are a human being; for you are a substance composed of body and soul. Tell me what lives from what. Does your spirit live from your body, or your body from your spirit? Everyone who lives answers (but he who cannot answer this, I do not know if he lives); what does everyone who lives answer? 'My body of course, lives from my spirit.' Do you therefore also wish to live from the Spirit of Christ? Be in the body of Christ?³⁵

Here the Spirit from which we live is Christ's Spirit. Only a little later Augustine writes "And so he wants this food and drink to be understood as the society of his body and his members, that which is called holy Church..."³⁶ With this statement we must parallel another found a little later: "to eat that food and to drink that drink is to abide in Christ and to have him abiding in oneself".³⁷ Abiding in Christ and living from the Spirit of Christ are identical, and identical to possessing truth, justice and eternal life.

In Tractate 27, Augustine's focus is on the relationship between body and spirit. The Apostles thought that Christ - who stated that they must eat his body (John 6.57) -

³⁵ *Io. ev. tr.* 26. 13.

³⁶ *Io. ev. tr.* 26. 15.

³⁷ *Io. ev. tr.* 26. 18.

was going to “disburse his body” (*illi enim putabant eum rogaturum corpus suum*), but Christ himself now teaches that “it is the spirit that gives life” (John 6:63), and thus “his grace is not consumed in bite-sized pieces” (*gratia eius non consumitur morsibus*).³⁸ “Flesh”, Augustine continues, profits us only when to it is added “spirit”. The incarnation of the Word, the sending of the apostles, just as the vocal chords and the pen used by a writer are all examples are the flesh being used by the Spirit:

All these things are works of the flesh, but with the spirit playing it, its musical instrument, as it were... ...we abide in [the Lord] when we are his members; but he abides in us when we are his temple. But that we may be his members, unity joins us together. That unity may join together, what causes it except love? And whence is the love of God?... [quotation of Rom 5:5] ... Therefore, “it is the Spirit that gives life” for the spirit produces living members. And the spirit produces living members only which it has found in the body which the spirit itself enlivens. For the spirit which is in you, by which it is clear to you that you are human, does it give life to a member which it has found separated from your flesh? I call your soul your spirit. Your soul gives life only to the members which are in your flesh; if you should remove one, it is no longer given life from your soul...³⁹

The importance of the Spirit in this argument demands Augustine turn to his central pneumatological language, and it is no surprise that he quotes Romans 5.5. Viewing the sermon cycle of Tractates 26 and 27 together offers further justification of my comments about homilies 6 and 10 on 1John: Augustine is able to shift the weight of his argument to place either Son or Spirit in center stage, depending on his strategic

³⁸ *Io. ev. tr.* 27.3. Cf. CCSL 36, p. 271.

³⁹ *Io. ev. tr.* 27.5-6.

goal. Doing so enables him to draw on different sets of (usually Scriptural) terminologies and metaphors associated with the two, as he now offers extensive commentary on the notion of “spirit” and the functions of the Spirit. At the same time, we can note the significance in tractate 26 of justice, truth, and wisdom, terms primarily associated with the Son, over against the prominence on love and spirit in tractate 27. Of course, Augustine also makes use of terms that are appropriate to either Son or Spirit: The Son loves, the Spirit is love; the Son is Life, the Spirit gives life. We can perhaps imagine a Venn diagram of Scriptural terminologies and titles, different circles for Son and Spirit (and Father), but circles that also overlap and encompass a partially common field. Augustine attends to the circumscriptions of this diagram both when he wishes to give prominence to Son or Spirit, and when it serves his purpose to speak of Son and Spirit in the same terms.⁴⁰

Tractates 26 and 27, however, offer us a little more than an extended example of Augustine’s ecclesiological and Trinitarian rhetoric. In both Augustinedraws more directly on some themes of his mature pneumatology to identify the Spirit as the Spirit *of* Christ and to link the Spirit’s work in the Incarnation to the Spirit’s work in the body of Christ that is the Church. This knot of ideas becomes central to Augustine’s pneumatology only in the first decade of the fifth century, and suggests to us not so much a new Trinitarian solution to our question about how Son and Spirit interrelate in the Church, but a new clarity about what the question is: if the Spirit is always the Spirit of the Father, and of the Son, how can we distinguish their work in

⁴⁰ The diagram we must imagine is further complicated in Augustine’s case because of his willingness in principle (and sometimes very clearly in practice) to attribute to each of the divine three a term that Scripture seems to “appropriate” to a particular one. Thus “Wisdom” and “Holy” are used by the New Testament primarily of Son and Spirit respectively, but we must also be able to predicate them of each of the divine three (and Scripture provides us with evidence that we should do so, see e.g. *trin.* 7. 3.4). These assumptions only increase the area of overlap in the diagram.

the body of Christ without separating Christ from his Spirit?⁴¹ In more formal terms, how does the particular account of perichoresis that Augustine espouses allow *and intentionally prevent* clear separation of the work of Son and Spirit?

V Failure or Promise?

I have now offered comment on all of the texts where Augustine discusses directly the analogy of the Spirit as the soul of the body of Christ.⁴² While Augustine's accounts of Son and Spirit in these text certainly draw on his standard accounts of each divine person's *proprium*, none of these texts offers overt reflection on the ways in which the interrelationship of Son and Spirit within the life of God as such is reflected in the function of the Spirit as soul of the body. Tractates 26 and 27 offer some hints when they relate the Spirit as the body's "soul" to the Spirit being Christ's Spirit. At the same time, while we have been able to discern a careful rhetorical practice in how Augustine manipulates Scriptural language for Son and Spirit, we have achieved no clarity about the relative functions of Son and Spirit in the work of redemption.

Now, if this is as close as Augustine gets to a "Trinitarian ecclesiology," then we might be tempted to think it an oddly undeveloped theme in his work. Of course, the historical theologian must always be careful when accusing a given subject of not answering questions that may only be ours. And at the same time, I have peered

⁴¹ We first see this language at *trin.* 1. 4.7, 1. 8.18. It then appears in summary statements in *Io. ev. tr.* 9. 7, *serm.* 52 and *trin.* 4. 20.29. It first receives extensive discussion only at *trin.* 5. 11.12ff, c. 414-6. See my *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chp. 10.

⁴² Thus excluding texts where, for example, Augustine states that we are in one body and have one spirit, but does not directly mention our analogy. Consideration of whether all such texts can be considered implicit references to it, as authors such as Grabowski assumed (see his *The Church*, 234ff), must be left for a different occasion.

through only a small window onto Augustine's ecclesiology and much might be found elsewhere. While this last observation is certainly true, this small window actually shows us far more than we might at first imagine.

To progress further we should begin by noting that there are good reasons for expecting Augustine to do precisely what he seems not to do. One of the most well known principles of Augustine's Trinitarian theology is that missions reveal processions. In his mature articulations of the principle, for example in *De trinitate* 4, a text which probably dates from around 413-5 (and thus probably preceding Tractates 26 and 27), Augustine speaks of the missions of Son and the Spirit as intended to reveal that they are from God. In fact, of course, he means, "from God" in a fully Nicene sense. Son and Spirit are from the Father as co-equal divine realities possessing the one fullness of divinity and yet inseparable from the Father. Indeed, Augustine pushes further and tells us that the missions of Son and Spirit reveal to us (as we grow in understanding of Scripture) that the Father is the *principium* in the Trinity, eternally speaking his Word and eternally giving rise to the Spirit. The missions thus are intended to reveal the eternal ordering of the divine life.⁴³ But Augustine is clear that the missions of the Son and Spirit can reveal to us the ordering of the divine life by the Father only if we learn how to ascend with heart and intellect along the path down which Scripture draws the intellect.⁴⁴ This is the path which travels from faith and in faith toward understanding and thus always in confession of our inability to grasp the reality of the divine three existing in true and ineffable simplicity.⁴⁵

⁴³ *trin.* 2. 5.9, 4. 19.25, 4. 21.32. See also my *Augustine and the Trinity*, chp. 7.

⁴⁴ *trin.* 4. 20.29, 21.32.

⁴⁵ One of the more important features of this journey toward contemplation in Augustine's account is the necessity for the contemplative reader of Scripture to seek

There are also a number of other contexts where Augustine inchoately offers a positive account of the work of Son and Spirit that seems to sketch how this agenda *might* be fulfilled. But in each case the work of differentiation ends always with a new clarity about the mystery of the divine life because of the mutual interpenetration and inseparable operation of Son and Spirit. Let me indicate two.

One of the most interesting themes in his mature pneumatology appears in Augustine's exegesis of Acts 4:32. In a handful of places, Augustine offers an analogy that presents the Spirit's work among Christians as reflective of the Spirit's eternal relationship to Father and Son. One of the most developed is to be found in the 39th Tractate on John (c.420):

...[if] many souls through love are one soul, and many hearts are one heart, what does the very fountain of love do in the Father and the Son?... If, therefore, "the love of God [which] has been poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5) makes many souls one soul and many hearts one heart, how much more does [the Spirit] make the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit one God, one light, one *principium*?⁴⁶

This text is particularly interesting because of its wider context in the tractate. This is the one place in Augustine's corpus where he unambiguously states that the divine three of Father, Son and Spirit are not only spoken of *ad aliquid*, but are noted to exist *ad aliquid*. This statement is held, however, alongside the partially explicit principle not only that missions disclose processions, but also that the intra-divine acts that

interpretations of Scripture's material and temporal terminologies for the divine that allow for a real correspondence between those terminologies and the realities they describe. See e.g. *serm.* 53 and my *Augustine and the Trinity*, chp. 6.

⁴⁶ *Io. ev. tr.* 39. 5. For the Latin, cf. CCSL 36, p.348. In the original, this final sentence reads: "Si ergo caritas Dei... multa corda facit unum cor, quanto magis Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus, Deus unus, lumen unum, unumque principium? See also my *Augustine and the Trinity*, chp. 9.

Scripture attributes to the divine three are constitutive of them (there being nothing accidental in God).

This emergent principle in the mature Augustine actually serves to heighten a key tension: while it does focus our attention on Scriptural description of the three, it also makes it even more clear to us that the mode of existence of the divine three lies beyond our noetic grasp. It does so because we know that all these scriptural predications are true of the three in ways that necessarily transcend our experience of them: we can speak of the Son's being as constituted by his seeing of the Father (John 5.19) and of the Spirit's being as constituted by his loving, but either of these acts must be identical to all other acts predicated of a particular divine person and, in the case of the Spirit, the key term is one that is only appropriated. At the same time these acts are identical to the Son and Spirit being generated or spirated and occur in an atemporal context.⁴⁷ Thus turning to Scripture's description of the three in this manner leads only to a highlighting of the darkness that awaits at the end of the long noetic climb toward God.

Second, in Book XV of the *De trinitate* Augustine attempts to sum up the parallels that we may draw, in the first case, between the eternal Word or Son and the human internal Word and, in the second case, between the Holy Spirit and the will.⁴⁸ Throughout these two discussions it is noticeable how few comments he offers

⁴⁷ See e.g. *Io. ev. tr.* 18. 10-11, 23. 9.

⁴⁸ Even this account is not quite accurate. Augustine actually brings in the possible parallels between the Spirit and will only at the very end of his pneumatological discussion (at *trin.* 15. 21.41), whereas the parallels between Word and word are the structuring principle of his discussion of the second of the divine three. Augustine's discussion of the Spirit actually focuses on the links between Spirit, Gift and Love. For a detailed explication of this passage, see Basil Studer, "Zur Pneumatologie des Augustinus von Hippo (De Trinitate 15.17.27-27.50)," in *Mysterium Caritatis: Studien zur Exegese und zur Trinitätslehre in der Alten Kirche*, Studia Anselmiana 127 (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 1999), 311-327.

regarding the relationship between understanding and will as illustrative of the relationship between Son and Spirit. Importantly, both these discussions are prefaced by an account of the failure of the mental triad to image the divine life *precisely because* doing so might lead us to parse out mental functions to each divine “person”.⁴⁹ Thus, Augustine twice lets us know that we should not think of the divine three as each corresponding to one term in the mental triad: each of the divine three must possess the unitary full reality of the divine life even as they are irreducible. Thus, in good Trinitarian reflection there comes a point at which the unity of the persons must be recognized as defeating our understanding (although remaining intelligible): only thus can we grasp the task involved in moving into the divine mystery.

The manner in which Augustine uses the analogy of the spirit as the soul of the body of Christ should not then surprise; however, it should instruct. The more directly one attempts to parse out how Son and Spirit work in the life of the Church, the closer one comes to attempting an articulation of the eternal relationship of the two and the more one runs the risk of importing into the Godhead ether language imbued with the material and the temporal or a conceptual apparatus foreign to Scripture. In attempting such a presentation, one moves, as it were, precisely in the direction that Augustine sets out as the direction from scriptural language toward the mysteries of the persons’ interpenetration and their inseparable operation. We have seen that Augustine’s accounts of Son and Spirit follow Scriptural patterns of predication, and that they reflect his standard ways of speaking about each person’s eternal characteristics. An essential feature of those patterns of predication is the possibility of speaking of Son and Spirit using a common set of titles and

⁴⁹ *trin.* 15. 7.12 & 15. 17.28.

predications. But this pattern of predication reflects the mysterious existence and working of the three who are one: the more closely we speak of the eternal interrelationship of Son and Spirit, the more we should expect to find the mysterious interchange of actions and attributes that prevents any easy parsing out of “responsibilities” in the body of Christ.

What is it, then, that we learn from Augustine with reference to the character of a “Trinitarian ecclesiology”? We have only begun to examine the resources he offers. Indeed, much more would have to be done before any global judgment could be offered.⁵⁰ But let me suggest some rather obvious principles that follow from this brief discussion. In the first place, Augustine shows us very clearly that a Trinitarian ecclesiology which follows Scriptural patterns will take as its guiding narrative the manner in which the Spirit’s work in the Church both witnesses to and continues the redemptive work of the Son. Through meditation on the *totus Christus* and the *corpus Christi*, Augustine draws us into a complex reflection on the interplay between Son and Spirit without succumbing to a simple narrative separation into two distinct “ages”. But, in the second place, in doing so, Augustine witnesses to the peculiar constraints that attend upon a fully Nicene theology. The more one explores not only the co-eternity of the divine three, but also the inseparably operating presence of those three in the life of Christ’s whole body, the more ecclesiology is rooted in the attempt to describe the divine life as such, and, thus, the more clearly it seems to be rooted in mystery. The presentation of the Spirit as the soul of Christ’s body has frequently seemed to possess great explanatory power because it so clearly separates Son and

⁵⁰ We might well also expect Augustine to offer a far more detailed account of the correspondence between Scripture’s account of Son and Spirit in the Church and the eternal relationship between Son and Spirit – even given the ultimately mysterious character of their joint operation. Whether Augustine does offer anymore than we have seen here must await further research and analysis.

Spirit; placing Augustine's usage against the background of his Trinitarian theology should remind us that this explanatory power is illusory if it does not also draw us to the mystery of the joint work and interpenetration of Son and Spirit. In the third place, and in a way that should gain the attention of all Nicene theologians, Augustine shows how entering into Scriptural narratives and language sets should disrupt our thought, how a practice of attentive rhetorical supplementation and adaptation – reflecting Scripture's own usage - remains essential for the gradual advance of mind and heart toward the Trinitarian mystery.⁵¹

⁵¹ The consonance between this argument and that of Robert Dodaro's study in these proceedings should be noted. His argument concerning the mediation of virtue further demonstrates Augustine attributing to Son and Spirit overlapping functions. I, of course, concur with his account of the significance of the Trinity's inseparable operations behind this account.