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The Trinity and Mission: *Missio Dei* in St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*

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The concept of *missio Dei*, which situates the source of mission in the nature of the triune God, is often considered to have originated at the International Missionary Conference at Willingen, Germany in 1952. However, the idea is quite present in Augustine's monumental work on the Trinity, *De Trinitate* (hereafter DT).¹

The *missio* (sending) of God as a theological category is a significant theme in Augustine's trinitarian doctrine. He sees God's revelation and redemption as accomplished through the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit in mission, who reveal the inner life of the Triune God in the generation (*generatio*) of the Son and the procession of the Spirit. Thus, mission in Augustine's trinitarian doctrine brings together the inner trinitarian life of God and human reconciliation with God. In this paper, I explore the relationship between *missio* and the Trinity in Augustine's thought.

I. The Trinity and Divine Missions

Theologically, for Augustine, mission refers to the economic activity of the trinitarian sending in the New Testament, by which the Father sends the Son and the Father and the Son together send the Holy Spirit (DT 4.29, 181–82). This mission is identified with the generation and procession of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The sending of the Son and the Spirit in mission is located in their being (*filiation* and *spiration*) from the Father. The Father is never said to have been sent because unlike the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Father 'has not got anyone else to be from or proceed from' (DT 4.28, 181).²

Mission is the self-communication of the Father, his sending forth of the Son and the Holy Spirit in their visible manifestations in the world—the permanent visible manifestation of the Son and the transitory visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit (DT 2.7–9, 101–8).³ More specifically, God's mis-

¹ Augustine, *De Trinitate* (The Trinity), trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991). Citations in the text give the book and paragraph number from Augustine, followed by the page number from Hill's translation.

² See Linda Darwish, 'The Concept of the Mediator in Augustine's Understanding of the Trinity', *Didaskalia* 13, no. 1 (2001): 71.

³ See Mary T. Clark, 'De Trinitate', in *The*

sion takes place only in the incarnation of the Son and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost—not in earlier Old Testament theophanies. In the incarnation, the Son's divine nature is united with human nature, and the inner trinitarian identity of the Holy Spirit is revealed in the Spirit's procession from the Father. The mission of God that occurred in the incarnation and Pentecost is the central event in the economy of salvation because it reveals the inner trinitarian life and God's reconciliation of humanity to God (DT 4.28–29, 181–83).⁴

The equality of the persons of the Godhead comes into sharp focus in Augustine's discussion of the divine mission, where he refutes the contention of his opponents that 'the *one who sends* is greater than the *one sent*' (DT 2.7, 101; emphasis added). The implication of such a claim, according to Augustine, is that because the Father sends the Son, the Father is greater than the Son and both are greater than the Holy Spirit.

Refuting the proposition that sending implies inequality, Augustine seeks to demonstrate the inseparability and equality of the trinitarian persons. Inseparability entails that sending (*missio*) is the activity of all three persons of the Godhead. The sending of the Son is the activity of both the Father and the Son: 'But God's Word is his Son. So when the Father sent him by word, what happened was that he was sent by the Father and his Word.

Hence, it is by the Father and the Son that the Son was sent because the Son is the Father's Word' (DT 2.9, 103).

Moreover, the presence of the Father implies the presence of both the Son and the Holy Spirit. Augustine asks:

Is there anywhere he [the Father] could be without his Word and his Wisdom, who *stretches mightily from end to end, and disposes all things properly* (Wis 8:1)? Nor for that matter could he be anywhere without his Spirit. ... [Therefore] both Son and Holy Spirit are sent to where they already are. (DT 2.7–8, 102)⁵

The trinitarian mission is historically demonstrated in the Father's sending of the Son 'in the fulness of time, made of woman' (Gal 4:4). The Son was sent from the Father into the world as attested in John 16:28: 'I came from the Father and have come into the world.' Accordingly, mission is the 'going forth [of the Son] from the Father and coming into this world' (DT 2.7, 102). For Augustine, this going forth of the Son must be seen in relation to the assertion that the Son 'was in the world, and the world came into being through him. ... He came to what was his own' (Jn 1:10–11). Accordingly, the Son was sent to the world where he already was. The same principle applies to the Holy Spirit: 'If God is everywhere, his Spirit is everywhere too. So the Spirit also was sent to where he was already' (DT 2.7, 102).

The mission of the Son was not without the Holy Spirit, because the Son was born of the Holy Spirit (Mt 1:18). Thus, the incarnation and the virgin birth are indivisible works of

Cambridge Companion to Augustine, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 93.

4 Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 34, 114–16.

5 See Gioia, *Theological Epistemology*, 162.

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (DT 2.8–9, 102–3).⁶ Since the Father *who begot* and the Son *who was begotten* are one, the *one who sends* and the one *who is sent* are also one along with the Holy Spirit (DT 4.29, 181–82).⁷

This differentiated work of the Trinity in divine mission, for Augustine, presupposes unity in the substance of the Godhead and hence the equality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The equality of the Son and the Holy Spirit with the Father stems from their inseparability and unity within the Trinity, which affirm that the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit is the work of all persons of the Godhead. The fact of their being sent does not undermine the equality of the Son and the Holy Spirit; in fact, it signifies the mission of the Trinity. More specifically, the trinitarian mission constitutes the sending forth of the Son and the Holy Spirit by the Father. It is the manifestation in history of the second and the third persons of the Trinity. It was their going forth from the essential *invisibility* of the triune God to historical manifestation. Accordingly, the Father remains invisible as the sender, who is never said to have been sent, and the Son and the Holy Spirit are manifest to the world in their being sent forth by the Father (DT 3.3, 128–29; 4.32, 185).

The Son, who was jointly invisible

with the Father, is made visible in mission in the incarnation. Although the Son ‘appeared outwardly in created bodily form’ (*in creatura corporali*), he always remains invisible ‘in uncreated spiritual form’ (*intus in natura spiritali*) (DT 2.9–10, 106). The visibility of the Son in the incarnation was accompanied by the visibility of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit appeared in created guise like a dove (Mt 3:16) at the baptism of Jesus and again appeared as tongues of fire at Pentecost (Acts 2:3). Augustine calls these visible manifestations the mission (sending) of the Holy Spirit. Yet the substance of the Spirit, like that of the Son, is concealed, pointing to the Spirit’s essential invisibility and immutability (DT 2.10, 107).

However, there is a distinction between the manifestations of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit did not manifest in a creaturely form as the Son did; there was no hypostatic union. The Spirit did appear as a dove, a violent wind and tongues of fire, but the ‘Spirit did not make the dove blessed, or the violent gust, or the fire; he did not join them to himself and his person to be held in an everlasting union’, as did the Son who is eternally God and human (DT 2.11, 107). Thus, while the visible manifestation of the Son is permanent, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit is transient.

II. Incarnation, Pentecost and *Missio Dei*

Augustine’s discussion of the divine sending (*missio*) and theophanies occupies most of the second and the third books of *De Trinitate*. He had already rejected the traditional Christological interpretation according

6 See Malcolm Spicer, *The Mystery of Unity: A Commentary on Saint Augustine’s De Trinitate* (Québec: National Library, 1993), 26.

7 For Augustine, the oneness of God rests upon the inseparability, equality and consubstantiality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yet each person of the Trinity is differentiated from each other. See DT 1.7.

to which the second person of the Trinity appeared in the theophanies. Nevertheless, he believed in the trinitarian character of the theophanies, and accordingly he understood these visions as a symbolic representation of the Trinity.

Augustine concludes that the theophanies 'were produced through the changeable creation subject to the changeless God, and they did not manifest God as he is in himself, but in a symbolic manner as times and circumstances required' (DT 2.32, 124).⁸ 'Whenever God was said to appear to our ancestors before our savior's incarnation, the voices heard and the physical manifestation seen were the work of angels' (DT 3.27, 146).

Having ruled out the appearance of the Trinity, particularly the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the theophanies, Augustine returns to the mission of the Trinity as evidenced in the incarnation and at Pentecost. Two themes are inseparably linked to each other in Augustine's discourse on the mission of the Son: trinitarian revelation and reconciliation (mediation). For Augustine, mission is essentially both revelatory and redemptive. No revelation is conceivable without the mediation of the Son, and no human reconciliation with God is possible without revelation. Hence, the mission of the Son is the mediation of revelation and reconciliation—revealing God to humanity and reconciling humanity to God (DT 4.11–12, 164–66). The next two sections examine these two functions.

1. The *Missio Dei* and Trinitarian Revelation

Although Augustine does not rule out the trinitarian significance of the theophanies, for him the mission of God begins only in God's self-revelation in the incarnation of the Son. He seeks to establish this point in the latter part of the fourth book of DT, having rebutted the claim that theophanies represent the sending (mission) of the Son (DT 4.26, 178–79; 2.8, 102–3).⁹

The Son's mission has opened up the possibility of human redemption as well as human knowledge of the triune God. Despite God's revelation through the mission of the Son, humanity is incapable of perceiving it due to sin:

[W]e were incapable of grasping eternal things, and weighed down by the accumulated dirt of our sins, which we had collected by our love of temporal things, and which had become almost a natural growth on our mortal stock; so we needed purifying. But we could only be purified for adaptation to eternal things by temporal means. (DT 4.24, 175)

According to Augustine, temporal things have deluded us and rendered us incapable of contemplating eternal things (the divine mysteries). Interestingly, God has chosen to redeem us through temporality, in the mission of the Son. This entry into the world of human existence is an act of divine grace. We respond to this divine initiative with faith in the work of Christ who, being the eternal Son of God,

⁸ See also Kari Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God: Augustine's Transformation of Early Christian Theophany Interpretation* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 141–42.

⁹ The transition to this significant theme of the Son's mission is marked by 4.25 (178) and continues to the end of the fourth book.

became the Son of man. When our minds have been purified by faith, we are enabled to contemplate eternal things (DT 4.24, 175). The contemplation of God, according to Augustine, is the eternal reward of the new covenant.¹⁰

Faith itself is related to the realm of temporality and is generated by grace. Our faith is then transformed into truth, 'when we come to what we are promised as believers', namely the eternal life which is to know the Father (Jn 17:3) (DT 4.24, 176).¹¹ Knowing the Father involves knowing both the Son and the Holy Spirit, because the trinitarian persons are inseparable (DT 1.17–19, 80–83).

Revelation is impossible unless the eternal God enters into our created world and unites himself to our mutable human condition. In the mission of the Son, God has 'provided us with a bridge to his eternity' in order that we may 'pass from being among the things that originated to eternal things' (DT 4.24, 177). Thus, in the incarnation as well as at Pentecost—i.e. through the missions of the Son and the Spirit—humanity is given a glimpse of the mystery of the Trinity. The transition to this significant theme in *De Trinitate* is marked by the following remarkable passage towards the close of the fourth book:

There you have what the Son of God has been sent for; indeed there you have what it is for the

Son of God to have been sent. Everything that has taken place in time in 'originated' matters which have been produced from the eternal and reduced back to the eternal, and has been designed to elicit the faith we must be purified by in order to contemplate the truth, has either been testimony to this mission or has been the actual mission of the Son of God (*testimonia missionis huius fuerunt aut ipsa missio filii dei*). (DT 4.25, 178)¹²

The visibility of the Son in the incarnation, which marks the actual mission of God, and his visible nature and actions are intended to generate faith that 'may be consummated in the contemplation of eternity when we truly see that which the visible Christ represents'.¹³

One of Augustine's most central concerns in *De Trinitate* is to establish the unity and equality of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit from the authority of Scripture. For Augustine, the sending of the Son is compatible with his generation from the Father, and thus it underlines the essential unity and equality of the Father and the Son. 'On this foundation', writes Lewis Ayres, 'Augustine articulates the principle that one of the central purposes of this sending is the revealing of the Son and Word as Son and Word, that is a revealing of the Word as *from* the Father and as the Word *with* Father and Spirit'.¹⁴

The outward movement of the Son

¹⁰ Augustine, 'The Spirit and the Letter', in *Augustine: Later Works*. The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 8 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 223.

¹¹ See Edward W. Poitras, 'St. Augustine and the *Missio Dei*: A Reflection on Mission at the Close of the Twentieth Century', *Mission Studies* 16, no. 2 (1999): 36.

¹² See also Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 184.

¹³ Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 184.

¹⁴ Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 185; emphasis added.

and the Spirit into the world in visible forms results in the temporal mission of God. Augustine writes, '*I went forth from the Father*, he [Jesus] says, *and came into this world*' (Jn 16:28). So that is what being sent [*mitti*] is, going forth from the Father and coming into this world' (DT 2.7, 102).¹⁵ However, the divine mission points to the dimension of both the Son's visibility and invisibility. The Son who was *timelessly* begotten by the Father was sent in *time* in the world. His appearance in the corporeal world was in created bodily form, and yet, being timeless in his eternal and essential (spiritual) being, the Son was always 'hidden from mortal eyes' (DT 2.10, 106–7; 15.47, 438).

Mission, for Augustine, is the economy of salvation that reveals the mystery of the inner trinitarian life, the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit. Yet generation and procession themselves are not mission; rather, mission, as noted earlier, is the coming forth of the Son and the Spirit from the Father and their coming into the world (DT 2.7, 102), at the incarnation and at Pentecost, respectively. By revealing the inner life of God in this way, mission signifies the economic dimension of the Trinity. Hill's observation is quite pertinent here:

The divine missions in fact constitute the very form of the economy of redemption. God is not constituted a triad by the economy. ... [God] is revealed as a triad by the economy, because in fact the eternal divine triad unfolds the saving

economy according to a triadic pattern. So the mystery of the Trinity is of the essence of our redemption.¹⁶

Mission reveals that in their being sent, the Son and the Spirit are known to be from and proceed from the Father. 'And just as being born means for the Son his being from the Father, so his being sent means his being known to be from him. And just as for the Holy Spirit his being the gift of God means his proceeding from the Father, so his being sent means his being known to proceed from him' (DT 4.29, 182).¹⁷ While distinguishing mission from the eternal generation and procession, Augustine identifies mission not only with being sent, but with being known in the world.¹⁸

Augustine captures the trinitarian interiority and inseparability in mission as follows:

Since then it was a work of the Father and the Son that the Son should appear in the flesh, the one who so appeared in the flesh is appropriately said to have been sent, and the one who did not to have done the sending. Thus events which are put on outwardly in the sight of our bodily eyes are aptly called *missa* because they stem from the inner designs [*apparatus*]

16 Edmund Hill, 'St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*: The Doctrinal Significance of Its Structure,' *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 19 (1973): 285–86.

17 Hill, in note 98 on page 182, observes that this passage is the culmination of Augustine's discussion on divine missions that he began in Book 2, showing that mission 'reveal[s] the inner core of the trinitarian mystery'. See also Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 185.

18 Hill, 'St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*', 282.

15 See David Coffey, 'The Holy Spirit as the Mutual Love of the Father and the Son,' *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 200.

of our spiritual nature. (DT 2.9, 105–6)

The mission of the Son is grounded in his being from the Father and in his being known or perceived to be from the Father. Therefore,

the Son of God is not said to be sent in the very fact that he is born of the Father, but either in the fact that the Word made flesh showed himself to this world; about this fact he says, *I went forth from the Father and came into this world* (Jn 16:28). Or else he is sent in the fact that he is perceived in time by someone's mind. ... That he [the Son] is born means that he is from eternity to eternity—he is *the brightness of eternal light* (Wis 7:26). But that he is sent means that he is known by somebody in time. (DT 4.28, 181)¹⁹

The fact that this mission of God takes place in our temporal world demonstrates that by God's grace, humanity is given the privilege of knowing God through temporal reality.²⁰ The invisible, immutable and unknowable God is made known to us in grace through the temporal missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This mission of God, accomplished in the incarnation of Christ and his redemptive work, is central to the revelation of the triune God and of eternity. The God whom

the Son reveals in his mission is the triune God. Therefore, the revelation of God in the incarnation is fundamentally a trinitarian revelation.

2. *Missio Dei* and Reconciliation

According to Augustine, God's revelation to humanity and human comprehension of that revelation are both the work of God. Our inability to perceive God's revelation is healed in the mediatorial work of the Son, which reconciles humanity with God.

Augustine expounds this reconciliatory (mediatorial) mission of Christ against the background of Plotinian metaphysics of 'the one and the many'. Many scholars have seen the influence of Plotinus' philosophy on Augustine's trinitarian doctrine, particularly in his doctrine of the unity of God.²¹

The problem of the one and the many emerged as a prominent philosophical challenge in the ancient world, and it continues to defy simple solutions. It emerges from the assumption of an underlying unity behind the universe and the diversity and multiplicity in the world.²² There have been attempts to discover the origin of the 'many-ness' in the world from a single universal principle (often termed as 'idea', 'mind', or 'God') behind everything, and thus to reconcile the many with the one (principle or reality). Augustine discovers the origin of the multiplicity in the one

19 Augustine distinguishes between the eternal generation (begottenness) of the Son from the Father and 'the human experience of the Son's being sent in the mission of redemption' as testified in the New Testament. Scott A. Dunham, *The Trinity and Creation in Augustine: An Ecological Analysis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 146.

20 Gioia, *Theological Epistemology*, 80.

21 See Thomas A. Wassmer, 'The Trinitarian Theology of Augustine and His Debt to Plotinus', *Harvard Theological Review* 53, no. 4 (1960): 261–68.

22 See Gareth B. Matthews and S. Marc Cohen, 'The One and the Many', *Review of Metaphysics* 21, no. 4 (1968): 630–55.

God from whom are all things (DT 4.3, 154). The one and the many are resolved in the incarnation of Christ who mediated on behalf of humanity and reconciled them to the one God (DT 4.2–6, 153–59; 4.11, 164–65).²³ Humanity, through sin, has fallen into the many—into discord and division—and consequently moved away from the one true God. The ultimate salvation of disintegrated humanity lies in being restored to unity and to God. This, Augustine believes, has been accomplished through the mediation of Christ (DT 4.11, 164–65).²⁴

The incarnation of Christ is also a revelation of human sinfulness. God's self-manifestation both brings in the knowledge of the triune God and displays our sinful situation. Therefore, God's mission in Christ takes place in the context of human sin and estrangement, and of our inability to know God. Without the incarnation, we would be unable to know God because of our sinful nature and alienation from God (DT 4.2, 153).²⁵ Through the Son revealing to us the triune God, we come to see our sinful nature and the depth of God's love and are thus led into God's way of humility. As Augustine explains:

First we had to be persuaded how much God loved us, in case out of sheer despair we lacked the courage to reach up to him. Also we had to be shown what sort of people we

are that he loves, in case we should take pride in our own worth, and so bounce even further away from him and sink even more under our own strength. So he dealt with us in such a way that we could progress rather in his strength; he arranged it so that the power of charity would be brought to perfection in the weakness of humility. ... So we needed to be persuaded how much God loves us, and what sort of people he loves; how much in case we despaired, what sort in case we grew proud. (DT 4.2, 153–54)

Calling attention to Romans 5:8, Augustine underscores the necessity of incarnation as the demonstration of God's love and grace towards humanity and finally as God's redemption of humanity (DT 4.2, 154). In the divine mission, incarnation was indispensable for the hypostatic union of the divine and the human in Christ, so that he could reconcile humanity to God through his death. In the incarnation, God's mission presents a suffering God who identifies himself with suffering humanity.²⁶

The mission of Christ's mediation is itself a trinitarian work. Although Christ is the Son of man and the mediator between God and humanity, he is also the Son of God, equal to the Father and consubstantial with him. The object of the Son's mediation on behalf of all who believe in him, as reflected in his high priestly prayer in John 17, is their ultimate oneness and reconciliation with the triune God.

23 See Hill's introduction to Book 4 (DT, 149); Spicer, *The Mystery of Unity*, 47.

24 See also Isabelle Bochet, "The Hymn to the One in Augustine's *De Trinitate* IV", *Augustinian Studies* 38, no. 1 (2007): 42.

25 See also Gioia, *Theological Epistemology*, 32–33; Maarten Wisse, *Trinitarian Theology Beyond Participation: Augustine's De Trinitate* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 136.

26 A clearer expression of this point is found in Augustine, *Exposition on the Psalms* 64.11, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (hereafter NPNF), 1st Series, vol. 8 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 265–66.

Augustine writes:

This is what he means when he says *That they may be one as we are one* (Jn 17:22)—that just as Father and Son are one not only by equality of substance but also by identity of will, so these men, for whom the Son is mediator with God, might be one not only by being of the same nature, but also by being bound in the fellowship of the same love. Finally, he shows that he is the mediator by whom we are reconciled to God, when he says, *I in them and you in me, that they may be perfect into one* (Jn 17:23). (DT 4.12, 165–66)²⁷

The apparent lack of oneness of the disciples, implied in the prayer, reflects divided humanity, full of 'clashing wills and desires, and the uncleanness of their sins' (DT 4.12, 165). The mediation of Christ offers hope for humanity, alienated from the one true God, to become united with God in Christ in the Spirit of love. The ground of their oneness with God is the unity that exists eternally in the Trinity. Their oneness with each other is derived from their oneness with the triune God through Christ, and from the reconciliation with God accomplished through his mediation. Therefore, human salvation through the mission of the Son as the mediator cannot be thought of apart from the mystery of the Trinity.²⁸

In Augustine's view, as is evident in the above passage, there is a particularity in this human reconciliation and unity with the triune God which points to the relationship between the Church and the Trinity. Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity and his ecclesiology are profoundly intertwined.²⁹ The Son who unites human nature to himself in his incarnation is also the one who, through his own mediatory work, unites the Church with the triune God. This unity is derived from the Church's union with Christ: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt in us." To that flesh the Church is joined, and so there is made the whole Christ [*Christus totus*], Head and body.³⁰

In the unity of the Son with the Father and the unity of the Son with the Church, Christians are 'fused somehow into one spirit in the furnace of charity ... bound in the fellowship of the same love' (DT 4.12, 166). Thus, one can say here that 'the church shares in the life of the Trinity through the Son's giving of the Spirit

economy is fundamental to Augustine's trinitarian theology. See Hill, 'St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*', 284–86.

²⁹ See Adam Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church: A Reading of the Anti-Donatist Sermons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

³⁰ Augustine, *Homily 1 on the First Epistle of John 1.2*, in *NPNF*, 1st Series, 7:461. *Christus totus*, according to Augustine, suggests that the head (Christ) and the body (Church) constitute one Christ. However, this does not imply that Christ is not 'complete without the body, but that he was prepared to be complete and entire together with us too, though even without us he is always complete and entire'. Augustine, *Sermon 341.11*, in *Sermons (341–400) on Various Subjects*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (New York: New City, 1995), 26.

²⁷ See Gioia, *Theological Epistemology*, 89. Strangely enough, Augustine does not talk about the Trinity in the fourth book until near the end, where he takes up the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. See Bochet, 'Hymn to the One', 41.

²⁸ Bochet, 'Hymn to the One', 42. According to Hill, the Trinity as a mystery of the divine

to his own body'.³¹ The oneness of the Trinity is extended to the Church in the Son's sacrifice, as Augustine states: 'This one true mediator, in reconciling us to God by his sacrifice of peace, would remain one with him to whom he offered it, and *make one in himself those for whom he offered it*, and be himself who offered it one and the same as what he offered' (DT 4.19, 171; emphasis added).

Through the sacrifice of the Son, as a redeemed and reconciled community, the Church shares in the divine-humanity of the Son and, through him, in the triune God. There is 'a new level of oneness in which the many come together in the person of Christ. ... We are united to Christ and in Christ, united to God.'³² In 'becoming a partaker of our mortality he [Christ] made us partakers of his divinity' (DT 4.4, 155). Thus, in Augustine's thought, one might say that the Church has its existence in the Trinity.³³

3. *Missio Dei* and Pentecost

The Holy Spirit was sent and manifested in the world, similar to the Son albeit in a different manner. The manifestation of the Spirit was the Spirit's coming forth from the hiddenness of God into visibility in the world in some bodily form, just as in the incarnation. This sending of the Spirit occurred at Pentecost, 'as a dove in bodily guise and as fire in divided tongues' (DT 3.3, 129; 2.10, 106–7). However, Augustine stresses that as

in the incarnation of the Son, the Holy Spirit's essential spiritual being always remains invisible to mortal eyes.

Also, the Son's becoming flesh (human) and assuming human form has a dimension of perpetuity, and hence he is eternally God and human. Unlike the incarnation, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in corporeal form was transitory and served merely as a temporary signification adapted to our mortal senses of vision. The Spirit did not become a dove or fire so as to be united to them in eternal union as humanity was united eternally with divinity in the Son (DT 2.10–11, 107–8).³⁴

The sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, like the incarnation of the Son, reveals the mystery of the trinitarian life of God. The mission of the Holy Spirit emerges from the Spirit's coming forth (spiration) from the Father and the Son (DT 4.29, 182).³⁵ Although the procession of the Spirit itself is not the mission of the Spirit, it is nevertheless an important aspect in Augustine's understanding of the Spirit's mission.

Augustine's views on the Holy Spirit's procession must be viewed in the light of his emphasis on the unity of God, which was very central to his battle against Arianism. Although he noted distinctions within the three persons of the Trinity, their unity was of paramount importance to him. He particularly regarded the place of the Holy Spirit within the triunity of God as very crucial in affirming the unity of the Godhead. Augustine refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit

31 Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church*, 3.

32 Darwish, 'The Concept of the Mediator', 81–82.

33 See Gioia, *Theological Epistemology*, 91.

34 See Spicer, *The Mystery of Unity*, 26.

35 See also Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 185.

of both the Father and the Son, the communion and love of the Father and the Son, and their unity. '[T]he Holy Spirit is something common to Father and Son, whatever it is, or is their very commonness or communion, consubstantial and coeternal. Call this friendship, if it helps, but a better word for it is charity [love]' (DT 6.7, 210; 15.27, 421).³⁶

Being the Spirit of the Father and the Son, and as their common gift, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father principally and also from the Son (DT 15:29, 422–23). Augustine affirms this double procession of the Spirit more convincingly in the final book of *De Trinitate*. He argues that the generation of the Son from the Father and his consubstantiality with the Father necessitate the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son as well. In other words, the procession of the Spirit from the Son is given to him by the Father in his co-eternality and consubstantiality with the Father:

And anyone who can understand that when the Son said, *As the Father has life in himself, so he has given the Son to have life in himself* (Jn 5:26), he did not mean that the Father gave life to the Son already existing without life, but that he

begot him timelessly in such a way that the life which the Father gave the Son by begetting him is co-eternal with the life of the Father who gave it, should also understand that just as the Father has it in himself that the Holy Spirit should proceed from him, so he gave to the Son that the Holy Spirit should proceed from him too, and in both cases timelessly; ... to say that the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Son is something which the Son has from the Father. If the Son has everything that he has from the Father, he clearly has from the Father that the Holy Spirit should proceed from him. (DT 15.47, 438)

Augustine seems to base his argument for this double procession of the Holy Spirit on two key Johannine texts: 'whom [referring to the Holy Spirit] I will send you from the Father' (Jn 15:26) and 'whom the Father will send in my name' (Jn 14:26). These statements indicate to Augustine that (1) the Spirit is of both the Father and the Son; and (2) the Father is the origin (*principium*) of the Godhead. Here one must not ignore Augustine's emphasis on the purpose of missions, which is to reveal the Father as the source of all (DT 4.29, 182; 15.27, 421). Yet we must also guard against misconstruing him as subordinating the Son and Holy Spirit to the Father. Augustine is fully convinced that the three persons of the Godhead are united in love and that the Spirit is the consubstantial bond between the Father and the Son (DT 15.37, 429).³⁷

³⁶ Augustine's view of the Holy Spirit as love between the Father and the Son, followed in the Western Church, has elicited strong criticism from the East. The Eastern Church has felt that in identifying the Holy Spirit as the mutual love of the Father and the Son, the West is depersonalizing the Holy Spirit and upsetting the personal relationships within the Trinity. See Gerald Bray, 'The Double Procession of the Holy Spirit in Evangelical Theology Today: Do We Still Need It?' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41, no. 3 (1998): 422–23.

³⁷ See Augustine, *De Trinitate* 15.37, in *NPNF*, 1st Series, 3:219. Lewis Ayres, 'Augustine on the Triune Life of God', in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. David V.

Delving a little more deeply into Augustine's thoughts can help us gain a clearer picture of double procession. The fact that the Spirit is of both the Father and the Son, for Augustine, seems to convey the idea of procession. Although the two Johannine texts (14:26; 15:26) do not explicitly speak of double procession, they evidently refer to the Spirit's procession from the Father. Augustine comes back to John 15:26 in the final book of *De Trinitate* and asks, 'So if the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, why did the Son say *he proceeds from the Father* (Jn 15:26)?' (DT 15.48, 439; cf. 4.29, 182). He then builds his case for double procession in a somewhat convoluted manner, stating that it was characteristic of Jesus to attribute to the Father all that belonged to himself. For instance, Jesus said, 'My teaching is not mine but his who sent me' (Jn 7:16). Jesus certainly did not say that the Holy Spirit did *not* proceed from him. Therefore, according to Augustine,

He (the Father) from whom the Son has it that he is God—for he is God from God—is of course also the one from whom he has it that the Holy Spirit proceeds from him as well; and thus the Holy Spirit too has it from the Father that he should also proceed from the Son as he proceeds from the Father. (DT 15.48, 439)

Further, Augustine seeks to infer double procession in a nuanced manner from John 5:26: 'As the Father has life in himself, so he has given the Son to have life in himself.' This is, Augus-

tine says, the Father's eternal begetting of the Son and by virtue of his eternal begetting, the Father 'gave to the Son that the Holy Spirit should proceed from him' as the Spirit proceeds from the Father (DT 15.47, 438). Therefore, the Father and the Son together are the one 'origin of the Holy Spirit (*patrem et filium principium esse spiritus sancti*); not two origins [since the] Father and Son are one God' (DT 5.15, 201).³⁸

Augustine draws further support for the double procession of the Spirit from John 20:22: 'He [Jesus] breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."' He treats the material sign of Jesus breathing on the apostles as 'a convenient symbolic demonstration that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father' (DT 4.29, 182). This post-resurrection action, for Augustine, also demonstrates that the Holy Spirit is a virtue that went out from the Son (DT 15.45, 436). He seeks to ground his claims for double procession in Scripture; however, his attempts to extrapolate an immanent Trinity from a corporeal sign, rather than drawing it from the whole collection of biblical data and especially from the New Testament, have not fared well with modern biblical scholarship.³⁹

³⁸ The issue of the double procession of the Spirit was important for Augustine, and he wished to give it further consideration as indicated in DT 2.5 (100). However, towards the end of *De Trinitate*, he admits that perceiving the mystery of the double procession of the Holy Spirit is beyond any human reasoning. He reconciles himself to the hope that the mystery of the procession will ultimately be revealed only in eternity (DT 15.45, 435).

³⁹ See Coffey, 'The Holy Spirit as the Mutual Love', 194–95.

The mission of the Spirit is assumed to be emerging from the Spirit's procession from the Father and the Son. We have earlier referred to the Spirit's indispensable role in the incarnation and thereby in the Son's mission prior to Pentecost. In the fullness of time, when God sent his Son, God did not send him without the Holy Spirit. In fact, Mary 'was found to be with the child of the Holy Spirit' (Mt 1:18). Even prior to this, says Augustine, Isaiah prophetically described the Son as sent by the Spirit: 'And now the Lord, and his Spirit, has sent me' (Is 48:16) (DT 2.9, 103).

However, the mission of the Holy Spirit would take on a unique character at Pentecost, as the Spirit's mission was awaiting the glorification of the Son. Augustine says:

As for what the evangelist says, *The Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified* (Jn 7:39), how are we to understand it, except as saying that there was going to be a kind of giving or sending of the Holy Spirit after Christ's glorification such as there had never been before? (DT 4.29, 182–83)

Augustine views the sending forth of the Spirit at Pentecost as a distinct and unique event in the economy of God. The manifestation of the Spirit occurred in perceptible signs and languages, to indicate that the redemption accomplished in the mission of the Son would be realized in the life of nations and peoples through the mission of the Spirit, when they 'believe in Christ by the gift of the Holy Spirit' (DT 4.29, 183). The saving work accomplished through the Son is actualized in the life of believing humanity through the work of the Spirit. This happens by faith that works through love—and both of which come

through the ministration of the Holy Spirit: 'In order that faith might work through love, the charity [love] of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us (Rom 5.5). And he was given to us when Jesus was glorified in his resurrection' (DT 13.14, 355).

Augustine's identification of the Holy Spirit as mutual love between the Father and the Son, and as the consubstantial bond between the Father and the Son, is a distinct manner of conceiving the mystery of the Trinity. He contends that 'if the love by which the Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father, ineffably demonstrates the communion of both, what is more suitable than that He should be specially called love, who is the Spirit common to both?'⁴⁰ Through this love, redeemed humanity is united to one another in Christ and through him to the Father. Furthermore, the unity within the Godhead is not only because of the equality of divine substance; it also comes through their unity of will and through the mutual love that exists between the Father and the Son, which is the Holy Spirit (DT 4.12, 166).

Augustine admits that his inference that the Holy Spirit is the mutual love between the Father and the Son is not found in Scripture. Yet he seeks to adduce an array of scriptural passages (e.g. 1 Jn 4:13) in a rather nuanced manner to substantiate his claim. He concludes, 'So the love which is from God and is God is distinctively the Holy Spirit; through him

⁴⁰ Augustine, *De Trinitate* 15.37, in *NPNF*, 1st Series, 3:219. I have used Philip Schaff's translation here because I believe that it is clearer than Hill's.

the charity of God is poured out in our hearts, and through it the whole triad dwells in us' (DT 15.32, 425; 15.27–31, 421–424).

Although the Spirit is of the same equality of divine substance, it is through the Spirit that the Father and the Son are united to and love each other. The Holy Spirit is the 'supreme charity conjoining Father and Son to each other and subjoining us to them, and it would seem a suitable name since it is written God is love (1 Jn 4:8,16)' (DT 7.6, 226). This unity of the Trinity that comes through 'love in the Holy Spirit provides the *content* of the metaphysical notion of unity of essence or consubstantiality'.⁴¹ This love of the Holy Spirit through which the Father and the Son are eternally united is translated through the missions of the Son and the Spirit into redeemed humanity so that we are not only united with the Father, but also reconciled to each other.⁴²

The Holy Spirit as love of the Father and the Son demonstrates inner trinitarian relations at the deepest level. God's eternal plan to bring humanity into that communion is accomplished through his mission. The trinitarian communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is replicated in God's communion with us as the triune God abides in us and as we are given the Holy Spirit, the spirit of love and unity (DT 15.31, 424).

Two crucial things emerge from this discussion: only in the mission of the Son and the Spirit can humanity have a glimpse of the inner trinitarian life; and human communion with the triune God and with each other would

never be realized without God's *missio*.

III. Conclusion

Augustine seeks to drive home the equality and inseparability within the Godhead which necessitate that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be equally invisible. Since divine invisibility evidently presupposes that God is unknowable, how does God reveal himself to the world? Augustine seeks the answer to this question in the divine mission, the incarnation of the Son and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Mission becomes the pivotal point of trinitarian revelation in the generation of the Son from the Father and in the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. Mission is actualized visibly in the sending of the Son and the Spirit so that the human race would be reconciled to God through the mediation of the Son. Thus, God's visibility in the economy of salvation becomes revelatory and reconciliatory to the extent that humanity is privileged to know God and be saved.

Augustine locates *missio* as an activity of the triune God in the interior filiation and procession and in the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation. The objective of this divine sending is the revelation of the triune God as well as the reconciliation of humanity to God. For Augustine, mission is the inner-trinitarian work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in a much wider sense—namely, God's overarching plan of human redemption. Hence, mission belongs to the triune God who is both the initiator and author of mission. It can be described as the work of God the Father, through the

41 Gioia, *Theological Epistemology*, 130.

42 Gioia, *Theological Epistemology*, 126.

Son, in the Holy Spirit.

Recognizing mission as the work of the triune God calls into question the contemporary perception of mission, which takes as its point of departure the experiences, contexts and existential realities of suffering, marginalized and oppressed groups, rather than the triune God who is the author of mission.⁴³ In the divine *missio* man-

ifested in the incarnation of the Son, the triune God comes down to a suffering and hurting world. As Augustine says, the Son became human to suffer, to be smitten, and finally to be crucified and die as human. *Missio Dei*, for Augustine, takes place in response to human need for God's love and for ultimate union with God. Therefore, the answer to the physical suffering of the oppressed and marginalized cannot be sought apart from the mission of the triune God.

⁴³ See Poitras, 'St. Augustine and the *Missio Dei*', 42.