

AUGUSTINE'S USE OF THE VERSES 1, 1 AND 1, 14 FROM THE GOSPEL OF JOHN IN THE FIRST TWO BOOKS OF ON THE TRINITY*

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ABSTRACT. Augustine's use of the verses 1, 1 and 1, 14 from the *Gospel of John* in the first two books of *On the Trinity*. In books 1-2 of *On the Trinity*, Augustine uses recurrently two verses from the *Gospel of John*, namely 1, 1 ("In the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God, and the Word was God") and 1, 14 ("And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us") in order to highlight the fact that Christ, in the form of a servant (*forma servi*) did not lose his divine form (*forma Dei*).

Keywords: *Trinity, The Gospel of John, forma servi, forma Dei*

In the treatise *On the Trinity*, Augustine proposes a model of knowledge on how the Trinity can be understood as a unique substance, but in the same time divided in three substances. Though we are entitled to ask ourselves if and how this knowledge can be achieved. Augustine's point of departure in the knowledge of the Trinity is relying in the first place on the hermeneutical method based on the Scriptural text. For example, in books 1-2 of the treatise *On the Trinity*, he uses recurrently two verses from the *Gospel of John*, namely 1, 1 and 1, 14 in order to explain the different attributes of each person from the Trinity, the Father, who created the world, through his own word, the two nature of the Son, the divine one (*forma Dei*) and the servant one (*forma servi*), which he received in the moment of the incarnation, and the different forms in which the Holy Spirit appeared.

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Secondly, these two verses from the *Gospel of John*, are used by Augustine in order to construct an epistemological model of knowledge of the Trinity, in the sense that the knowledge of the triune God cannot be achieved without using intermediaries. The fact that the verse 1, 14 is saying: “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” is helping him to explain the sending of the Son by the Father. The Father, in the role of the craftsman, was able to send him into this world in a human body, made of flesh, like all the immortals. Therefore, the epistemological model which can lead to the knowledge of the Trinity can be explained in Augustine’s view. Thus, the two forms of Christ are bringing humans attention to one of the mystery of the Trinity: how Christ can have both a divine and a human nature? Therefore, are all the humans able to achieve the knowledge of the two forms?

In book 11 of the treatise *Confessions*, Augustine proposed the knowledge of God in time. The man has to use his time in this world in a manner which can lead him to the true knowledge of God, and more than that, he has to live his life in time according to the Christian faith, to have the guarantee of salvation. Thus, as we will see through this paper, Augustine is not interested in the treatise *On the Trinity* to put a debate on how the humans can achieve the knowledge of God in time. Although, we have to mention that he is using, both in *Confessions* and later in the treatise *The Literal meaning of Genesis*, the verse 1, 1 from the *Gospel of John* with the same propose, to highlight the fact that God is the only creator of the universe, and his Word remains unchangeable and cannot be altered by time, time being also a divine creation.¹ Thus like the Trinity, time is not a material concept for

¹ “So what are we to say, then? Is the voice of God best understood as being the intelligible meaning of the audible utterance, *Let Light be made*, and not the audible utterance itself? And the question then arises whether this does not belong to the very nature of his Word, about which it is said, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and it is God that the Word was* (Jn 1:1)? Seeing that it is said about him, *All things were made through him* (Jn 1:3), it is evident enough that light also was made through him, when God said, “Let light be made.” If that is the case, then God’s saying *Let light be made* is something eternal, because the Word of God, God with God, the only Son of God, is co-eternal with the Father, although when God said this in the eternal Word, a time-bound creature was made. While “when” and “some time” are time words, all the same the time when something should be made is eternal for the Word of God, and it is then made when it is that Word that it should have been made, in the Word in which there is no “when” nor “some time,” because that whole Word is eternal.” AUGUSTINE, *The literal meaning of Genesis, Introduction*, translation and notes by E. HILL, O. P., New City Press, 2002, 1, 2, 6. “You call us, therefore, to understand the Word, God who is with you God. That word is spoken eternally, and by it all things are uttered eternally. It is not the case that what was being said comes to an end, and something else is then said, so that everything is uttered in a successions with a conclusion, but everything is said in the simultaneity of eternity”. (...) And so by the Word coeternal with yourself, you say all that you say in simultaneity and eternity, and whatever you say will come about does come about. You do not cause it to exist other than by speaking. Yet not all that you cause to exist by speaking is made in simultaneity and eternity.” AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, translated with an *Introduction* and notes by H. CHADWICK, Oxford University Press, 1991, 11, 7, 9.

which an equivalent in reality can be found. Augustine tried to find an answer regarding the nature of time, he wrote:

What is time? Who can explain this easily and briefly? Who can comprehend this even in thought so as to articulate the answer in words? Yet what do we speak of, in our familiar everyday conversation, more than of time? We surely know what we mean when we speak of it. We also know what is meant when we hear someone else talking about it. What then is time? Provided that no one asks me, I do not know.²

Even though, a correspondent of time cannot be found in the created world, time for Augustine can be perceived by the memory,³ in book 11 of *Confessions*, stated that there are three types of time, the first one being: “the present considering the past, is the memory”.⁴ But if the past can be perceived as a present in the memory, this fact means that the things from the past can be actualized in the memory as being present every time when they are actualized by it. G. O’Daly stated that one of Augustine’s favourite metaphor related to the memory is that he calls the memory “the stomach (*venter*) of the mind”, making reference to the power of the memory “to digest and reuse its images in knowledge, skills and action”.⁵ Therefore, in both cases of the knowledge of time or Trinity, the mind (*mens*) needs images on which to rely his knowledge.

In order to follow Augustine’s both hermeneutical and epistemological methods and the manner in which he is instrumenting the two verses from the *Gospel of John*, this paper will be divided in two parts: in the first part we will follow the tumultuous history of the treatise and in the second part we will lay our attention on the manner in which Augustine is instrumenting the verses 1, 1 and 1, 1, 14 from the *Gospel of John* in books 1-2, in order to understand how God can be known as a unique substance.

² AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, 11, 14, 17.

³ For a brief definition of the concept of memory in Augustine see: C. NADEAU, *Le vocabulaire de saint Augustin*, Ellipses, 2009, pp. 65–68.

⁴ “In the soul there are these three aspects of time, and I do not see them anywhere else. The present considering the past is the memory, the present considering the present is immediate awareness, the present considering the future is expectation. If we are allowed to use such language, I see three times, and I admit they are three.” AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, 11, 20, 26.

⁵ G. O’DALY, *Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind*, University of California Press, 1987, p. 133.

1. Dating the treatise *On the Trinity*

The composition of the treatise *On the Trinity* as A. Trapè⁶ noticed had a long and unsettled history and to reconstruct it, he propose to lay our attention on five sources which can lead to an accurate dating. The first one is the letter which Augustine is sending to Aurelius, the bishop of Cartage, the letter serves as the *Prologue* of the treatise⁷.

In this letter, Augustine is writing him that his intention was not to publish the books of his treatise one by one, but to publish the entire treatise all at once, but unfortunately it was stolen from him, before it was completed. After he finished all the 15th books, in order to publish it, he tried to emend the whole treatise, but the outcome was not what he wished for, though being compelled by some of his brethren and by the bishop himself he finally published it. In the last part of the *Prologue* Augustine is providing some important statements concerning the circulation of the stolen parts of the treatise, he wrote: "There are some persons, however, who have the first four, or rather five, books without the prefaces, and the twelfth with no small part of its later chapters omitted."⁸ Secondly, A. Trapè is making reference to the treatise *Retractationes* where Augustine is making a resume of the letter which he send to the bishop of Cartage, by stating again that it was stolen for him, the third source is the *Letter 120* to Consensius, the fourth is the *Letter 143* to Marcellinus and the fifth is the *Letter 160* to Evodius.⁹

L. Ayres is stating in the same manner as A. Trapè, that the treatise *On the Trinity* was composed in a long time and the fact that it was stolen from him before he completed the 12th book. L. Ayres is stating also that Augustine reviewed especially the earlier books by adding substantial discussions to the beginnings of each of them. Unlike A. Trapè, L. Ayres affirmed that the letters and the text from the *Retractationes* can be interpreted and the questions which are put into debate about the dating of the treatise must have as a point of departure the researches of A. M. La Bonnardière and P. M. Hombert and also Roland Kany's text about the two studies.¹⁰

In his treatise *Augustine and the Trinity*, L. Ayres is offering the both opinions of the two researchers as it follows:

⁶ A. TRAPÈ, *Introduzione*, in AGOSTINO, *La Trinità*, introduzione di A. TRAPÈ e M. F. SCIACCA, traduzione e note di G. BESCHIN, indici di F. MONTEVERDE, Città Nuova, 2011, p. XIX. Through this paper I will quote the English translation of Augustine's treatise *On the Trinity* made by A. W. HADDAN, T. & T. Clark, 38, George Street, 1873.

⁷ Augustine wrote at the end of the Letter: "At any rate, I have to request that you will order this letter to be prefixed separately, but at the beginning of the Books."

⁸ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, Prologue.

⁹ A. TRAPÈ, *Introduzione*, p. XIX.

¹⁰ L. AYRES, *Augustine and the Trinity*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 118.

I. The method of A. M. La Bonnardière:

- (1) Augustine began the work after 404;
- (2) between 411 and 414 Augustine wrote the bulk of *De Trinitate* 2-4 as a literary unity, except the prefaces and later additions which she identifies;
- (3) commencing in 416-17 Augustine wrote or redacted *De Trinitate* 5-7 (as the same time as *civ. II*) after he acquired some knowledge of Eumonian doctrine;
- (4) in 417-18 Augustine compiled *De Trinitate* 8-12a (ending at 12. 14. 23);
- (5) in a final period beginning in 419 Augustine finished the work, ending sometime between 420 and 425.

II. The method of P. M. Hombert, which is making reference only to the four books of the treatise:

- (1) 400-03, *De Trinitate* 1;
- (2) 411-13, *De Trinitate* 2-3;
- (3) 414-15, *De Trinitate* 4¹¹.

The opinion provided by L. Ayres about the dating of the treatise *On the Trinity* is that he assumes that Augustine began to write his work in 400-405. He agrees with A. M. La Bonnardière that the books 2-4 were written between 411-415, thus he is arguing that he found a significant material which originates in the texts from 400-410, hence is stating that this material is not having such a great significance on the dating of the treatise. Though, L. Ayres does not completely agree with A. M. La Bonnardière about the dating of the books 5-7 after 416, and other opinions are concluding that maybe Augustine begin to work on them after 414, with the amendment that it can be established that the books which we do know now have been redacted. Though, unlike A. M. La Bonnardière, L. Ayres has the certitude that books 5-12^a were written between 414 and 418, and the last ones between 419 and 427.¹²

A. Trapè's final assumption about the dating of the treatise is that Augustine begin to work on it in 399 and a provisory redaction had place in 412 and the final redaction took place between 420 and 421.¹³

¹¹ L. AYRES, *Augustine and the Trinity*, p. 119.

¹² L. AYRES, *Augustine and the Trinity*, p. 120.

¹³ A. TRAPÈ, *Introduzione*, p. XXI.

2. The books 1-2 of the treatise *On the Trinity*

In the previous section of this paper we have traced the history of Augustine's treatise *On the Trinity* and the periods of time in which it was composed. The Bishop of Hippo noted in the letter send to Aurelius, that he began to write his treatise "as being a young man and finished it as being old".¹⁴ Perhaps this is one of the reasons for which most of the researchers are putting a separate debate on the books 1-4, due to the fact that they are appertaining to his youth writings.¹⁵ It is not the intention of this paper to continue the debate about this fact, even though in the next part of the paper we have choose to focus our attention only on the books 1-2 of the treatise, and we will ask the reader as Augustine wanted, to be aware of the fact that these books were edited in his elder years.

The treatise *On the Trinity*, as A. Trapè remarked,¹⁶ is not addressed to a particular recipient, in the first chapter of book 1 of the treatise Augustine is announcing what was his intention when he began to write his treatise and he distinguishes between three categories of people, he wrote:

(1) Now one class of such men endeavour to transfer to things incorporeal and spiritual the ideas they have formed, whether through experience of the bodily senses, or by natural human wit and diligent quickness, or by the aid of art, from things corporeal; so as to seek to measure and conceive of the former by the latter. (2) Others, again, frame whatever sentiments they may have concerning God according to the nature of affections of the human mind; and through this error they govern their discourse, in disputing concerning God according to the

¹⁴ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, Prologue.

¹⁵ L. GIOIA in the chapter "Against the 'Arians': Outline of Books 1 to 7" from his book *The theological Epistemology of Augustine's De trinitate*, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 24–39, p. 24, is stating that: "most commentators treat books 1 to 4 separately from books 5 to 7 and consider them as discrete, independent unities. On the contrary, the treatment of boos 1 to 7 as a single unity is crucially important for the correct interpretation of Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity." Thus, the fact that the first four books are appertaining to his young writings is not entirely valid, but the discussions about this fact are still open. Aside, L. AVRES in the chapter "Recommending the source" from the book which we have quoted previously, *Augustine and the Trinity*, pp. 177–198, p. 177, is announcing that his intention in this chapter is to argue about Augustine's "second exegetical rule that Augustine suggests at the beginning of *De trinitate*", he is focusing his attention in the first part of the chapter on the 2 book of the treatise. But, with an amendment for his readers concerning the editing of the 2 book: "At the very least, much of Book 2 seems to have been the subject of extensive editing, and it is on these sections of the book that I focus my attention in the first half of the chapter. Thus, it is best for the reader to be cautious and treat the ideas I discuss here as the product of Augustine's mature thought finally edited, if not simply composed, in the period between 415 and 420."

¹⁶ A. TRAPÈ, *Introduzione*, p. XI.

nature or affections of the human mind; and through this error they govern their discourse, in disputing concerning God, by distorted and fallacious rule. (3) While yet a third class strive indeed to transcend the whole creation, which doubtless is changeable, in order to raise their thought to the unchangeable substance, which is God; but being weighed down by the burden of mortality, whilst they both would seem to know what they do not, and cannot know what they would, preclude themselves from entering the very path of understanding, by an over-bold affirmation of their own presumptuous judgements choosing rather not to correct their own opinion when it is perverse, than to change that which they have once defended.¹⁷

The intention of Augustine was to sketch the fact that each category of people is finding themselves in error. The first one is basing his knowledge on corporeal existence, the second one on the affection of the human mind, and the third one is putting a debate on creation. The error which is occurring concerning the first category of people is the fact that their opinions are based only on the bodily senses, which for Augustine is wrong, due the fact that the true knowledge of God cannot be achieved through corporeal sensitivity. For the bishop of Hippo the body has to be looked as a divine creation, God has created the human body after his image.¹⁸

The first category is related to third one, which are putting a debate on creation. Since, Augustine in the continuation of the passage that we have quoted is stating that first category is in error when is thinking “that God can be white or red and yet these things are found in the body”.¹⁹ In addition, the human body was made after the image of the divinity, this does not mean that in God such things as the colours can be found, because the result it will be, as Augustine is saying, that God could generate himself.²⁰ If he would have generated himself that would, signify that God did not existed from the eternity, which it comes in contradiction with the beliefs of Christian faith.

The second category of people are finding themselves in error, due to the fact that they are not possessing the true meaning of the mind and they get affected by it. For Augustine the mind (*mens* or *anima*, *animus*, *spiritus*) has the following

¹⁷ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, Book 1, 1, 1, the numeration from the quoted passage belongs to me, with the intention to facilitate the reading of it.

¹⁸ For a more detail debate on the meaning of the body in Augustine and for the meaning of the biblical verse: *Faciamus homine ad imagine et similitudine nostram* see G. P. BOERSMA's chapter: “The body and the Imago Dei” in G. P. BOERSMA, *Augustine's early theology of image – a study in the development of pro-Nicene theology*, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 207–223.

¹⁹ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 1, 1, 1.

²⁰ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 1, 1, 1.

meaning as we can find it defined in *Le vocabulaire de Saint Augustin*: “(...) la mens produit à la fois une connaissance des choses sensibles et de leurs principes. Elle est donc aussi bien une raison qu’une intelligence (intellect) qui elle-même permet d’accéder à la sagesse.”²¹

After the Bishop of Hippo delimited the three categories of people, he is urging his readers that there are some difficulties in contemplating God’s substance who can make things to change and whom creates temporal things without changing himself. Though, he said that the process of the purging of the mind is necessary in order to comprehend the divine substance,²² and the main issue which occurs in contemplating God’s substance is the fact that Christ has both a form of a servant (*forma servi*) and a divine form (*forma dei*).²³ Christ received the form of the servant in the moment when he was born, thus in his divine form is equal to the Father.²⁴

Moving forward, in the 4th chapter of book 1, Augustine continues the debate about the divine nature. In the beginning of the chapter, he is remembering those whom were writing about the Trinity according to Scriptures, before him. The bishop of Hippo is making clearly the fact that the divine Trinity is God, all of the three persons from the Trinity: the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit are sharing the same “divine unity of one and the same substance in an indivisible equality”.²⁵ Then Augustine is outlining the fact that there are not three Gods but only one. The Father is the one from whom the Son is born, and the Holy Spirit, says Augustine, is the Spirit of both the Father and the Son, the three persons are partaking to the same unity in the Trinity, with the amendment that: the Father cannot be the Son, and Son cannot be the Father, and the same with the Holy Spirit.²⁶

²¹ C. NADEAU, *Le vocabulaire de Saint Augustin*, Elipses 2009, p. 12. About the terms *anima* and *animus* and mind G. O’DALY noticed: “*Anima*, as well as *animus*, can apply without distinction of meaning to the human soul in general, and in the work *de immortalitate animae* and elsewhere the two terms are employed interchangeably. The mind (*mens, ratio*) is a ‘part of the soul’ (*pars animi*) namely its best ‘part’ (c. *Acad.* 1.5), or ‘that which is pre-eminent in the soul’ (*quod exellit in anima*, *trin.* 14. 26). *Animus* can, however, also mean ‘mind’ and is not used with reference to the souls of non-rational beings. Augustine can also distinguish between aspects or powers of soul by means of an epithet added to *anima*: thus the *anima rationalis*, the seat of mind and will, is contrasted with the *anima irrationalis*, whose powers of appetite sense-perception and memory are common to men and animals. Augustine further recognize the existence of a vegetable soul, even if he usually refers to it as ‘life’, i.e. non-sentient life, rather than ‘soul’”, p. 7.

²² AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 1, 1, 3.

²³ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 1, 1, 3.

²⁴ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 1, 1, 3.

²⁵ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 1, 4, 7.

²⁶ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 1, 4, 7.

Further, Augustine is explaining the roles of the three persons of the Trinity and how they are perceived. As we have noticed, Christ, the Son, has two natures, but this does not mean that the whole Trinity has it, just the Son was the one who was born from the Virgin Mary, died and then resurrected and ascended to the heaven, but not the whole Trinity. The Holy Spirit was the one who appeared when Christ was baptized, and after the ascension of Christ at Pentecost, not the whole Trinity. Also the Father's voice was the one which Christ heard when he was baptized, not the whole Trinity.²⁷ Therefore, until this point it is obvious that the persons from the Trinity are forming a unity, are sharing the same substance, even if their roles in the Trinity are different. Augustine is using the verses from the *Gospel of John* 1, 1 and 1, 14 in the beginning of the 6th chapter, book 1, in order to respond to those who are contesting the fact that Christ is not God, due to the fact that his nature is changeable (*forma servi*), and he is saying:

They who have said that our Lord Jesus Christ is not God, or not very God, or not with the Father the One and only God, or not truly immortal because changeable, are proved wrong by the most plain and unanimous voice of divine testimonies; as, for instance, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." For it is plain that we are to take the Word of God to be the only Son of God, of whom it is afterwards said, "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," on account of that birth of His incarnation, which was wrought in time of the Virgin.²⁸

The first verse from the Gospel of John is used here by Augustine to outline, again, the fact that the Christ is sharing the same substance with the Father, and in the "beginning" when all things were made, Christ, in his divine form (*forma Dei*) was with the Father, therefore he was not created. The word "beginning" is used here to highlight the beginning of time, but not the "beginning" of God, whose nature is eternal and does not have a beginning in time.

The process of the purging of the mind, which Augustine mentioned in the first chapter of book 1, is necessary in order to comprehend the fact that the existence of the divine Trinity is eternal. Aside, the human mind can actualize the image of Christ as carnal, due to the fact that it can find a correspondence in reality, "the Word was made flesh",²⁹ and therefore in this case the process of the purging of the mind it is not necessary. For example, the second category of people on which Augustine puts a debate in the first chapter of this book, will never use the

²⁷ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 1, 4, 7.

²⁸ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 1, 6, 9.

²⁹ JOHN, 1, 14.

full power of the mind, in order to understand that the word “beginning” does not have a temporal valence, but they can affirm easily that Christ has only a form of servant (*forma servi*) and it lost his divine form (*forma Dei*), due to his changeable nature.

In the 7th chapter of book 1, Augustine’s intention is to strengthen his position regarding the fact that Christ did not lose his divine nature, even if, in the Scriptural text there are passages where it is affirmed that the Father is greater than the Son. In the beginning of the debate is using, again, a verse from the *Gospel of John* (15, 28): “My Father is greater than I”, but he is using also a verse from *Philippians*, 2, 7: “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but emptied Himself, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and was found in fashion as a man.”³⁰ Therefore, Christ in his divine nature is equal with the Father, he was the Word “by whom all things are made”,³¹ but in his form of a servant was born from a woman. Though in his both forms, Christ is the only Son of God, and it can be said that the Father is greater than the Son only when the last one received the form of a servant.³²

In the first two chapters of book 2 of the treatise, Augustine is recommencing the discussion about the two forms of Christ.³³ In the 5th chapter the Bishop of Hippo debates the sending of the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit, thus Augustine is outlining the fact that the Father was not sent. Once more, Augustine is making reference to the text of the Scripture in order to explain the sending of the Son and his human nature. The Son came into the world as the Apostle said: “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law”.³⁴ Augustine in this chapter is continuing the discussion from book 1 of the treatise, where is pointing that each person from the Trinity has a different role, even if they are sharing the same unity of the substance. Only the Son was born from the Virgin Mary, not the whole Trinity.³⁵ Though, the Holy Spirit was with the Son, too: “She was found with child by the Holy Spirit”.³⁶ Until this point of the 5th chapter, it is certain that the Father sent both the Son and Holy Spirit, and that the Son was not send alone. Thus, further Augustine

³⁰ PHILLIPIANS, 2, 7.

³¹ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 1, 7, 14, JOHN, 1, 3.

³² AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 1, 7, 14.

³³ See the chapters 2 and 3 from book 2 of *On the Trinity*.

³⁴ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 2, 5, 8.

³⁵ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 2, 5, 9.

³⁶ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 2, 5, 9.

is trying to establish the two natures of the Son, by pointing that the Son is not losing his role in the Trinity, by saying that “the Word of God is the Son of God Himself”,³⁷ this fact means that the Son was sent both by the Father and by himself.³⁸

Augustine, once more, is outlining that the existence of the Word cannot be a temporal one, and he is using again the two biblical verses from the *Gospel of John* 1, 1 and 1, 14, to sustain the eternal nature of the divinity and the sending of the Son, the bishop of Hippo wrote:

Therefore, since without any commencement of time, the Word was in the beginning, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word itself without any time, at what time the Word was to be made flesh and dwell among us. And when the fullness of time had come, “God sent His Son, made of a woman,” that is, made in time, that the Incarnate Word might appear to men; while it was in the Word Himself, apart from time, at what time this was to be done; for the order of times is in the eternal wisdom of God without time.³⁹

Further in this chapter, Augustine is explaining that the sending of the Son can be perceived only by the eyes of the body, the Son received a visible body, and this is the main reason from whom it is said that the Son is sent and the Father is the one who is sending him. Though, in the act of the sending both Father and the Son participated equally, therefore the act of the sending has to be understood as an inside structure which is finding his existence in the spiritual nature, on which the human mind does not have a direct access. The different roles which each person from the Trinity are having are once again brought to the attention, due to the fact that the Son and the Father are having the same invisible substance, but only the Son is receiving the visible substance, thus the humans with the eyes of the body cannot see his invisible nature.⁴⁰

Augustine, in the chapters 6 and 7 of book 2, examines the forms of the Holy Spirit. As we have noticed, until this point, we do not know surely if the Holy Spirit is sharing the same invisible nature with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit did not receive the form of a servant, like the Son, but he appeared in form of a dove, fire or wind, thus the bishop of Hippo said previously that he was sent with

³⁷ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 2, 5, 9.

³⁸ For a detailed discussion about the sending of the Son in the first books of *On the Trinity*, see M. T. CLARKE, in E. STUMP and N. KRETZMANN, *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 93–94.

³⁹ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 2, 5, 9.

⁴⁰ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 2, 5, 9.

the Son. Aside, the difference between the Son and Holy Spirit in their appearance is the fact that the Holy Spirit changed his forms of appearance, but the Son remained in his human form. To fortify the distinction between the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the different manners in which the Holy Spirit appeared, Augustine wrote:

For the word in the flesh is one thing, and the Word made flesh is another"; *i.e.* the word in man is one thing, the Word that is man is another. For flesh is put for man, where it is said, "The Word was made flesh; and again, "And all flesh shall see the salvation of God." For it does not mean flesh without soul and without mind; but, "all flesh," is the same as if it were said, every man. The creature, then in which the Holy Spirit should appear, was not so taken, as that flesh and human form were taken, of the Virgin Mary⁴¹.

Though, even if, the Holy Spirit is capable to change his form of appearance, this does not mean that he is unchangeable, or that he is not sharing the same substance with the Father and the Son. In chapter 9th of book 2, Augustine is stating the entire Trinity is unchangeable, sharing the same invisible substance.⁴² Therefore, by following the Scriptural text, the bishop of Hippo, does not admit the changeable nature of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The book III of the treatise is finding his starting point by resuming again the discussion about the sending of the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit, thus he is not interested to put a longer debate on it, in the same manner in which he did in the previous one.⁴³

Conclusion

In the beginning of the article we said that one of the mysteries of the Trinity is caused by the two forms of Christ, and we asked if all the humans are able to achieve the knowledge of the two forms. Augustine did not offer an exact answer, on how the two forms of Christ can be known by the humans, thus he proposed two methods of knowledge, the hermeneutical one and the epistemological one. Even if Augustine did not find an answer concerning the mystery of the Trinity, the methods which he proposed lead to the constitution of a dogmatic tradition. His treatise circulated throughout the Middle Ages and the later authors which were

⁴¹ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 2, 6, 11.

⁴² AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 2, 9, 15.

⁴³ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, book 3, *Preface*.

putting a debate on the Trinity were finding in his treatise a starting point of their research, from Boethius' treatise *On the Trinity* to Peter Lombard's *Book of the Sentences* and its commentators.

The fact that Augustine presented in the beginning of his treatise the three categories of people can lead us to the assumption that perhaps Augustine was finding himself in each category before his conversion to Christianity. Therefore, due to the fact that he was formed first as a rhetor, is trying to explain all the erroneous judgments that he made before the conversion, by laying his attention on the Scriptural text. Even though in books 1-2 the hermeneutical model precedes the epistemological one, beginning with book 4, this order will be changed. In book 4, in a subtle manner, Augustine is trying to suggest us an example of contemplation, based on the epistemological knowledge, by saying:

For we ourselves, too, are not in this world, in respect to our grasping with the mind as far as we can that which is eternal, and the spirits of all the righteous are not in this world, even of those who are still living in the flesh, in so far as they have discernment in things divine.⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, 4, 20, 28.

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