



Augustine and Cappadocian Fathers' Summation of the Doctrine of the Trinity: A Theological Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The Trinity doctrine was created as a kind of mystery that humans are unable to fully comprehend. The individuals of this Trinity cooperate in all things as a perfect, indivisible, and unbreakable union. It is extremely deceptive to claim that the Christian concept of God is unique to the Trinity. The idea of the Trinity is founded on three scriptural truths: that there is only one God, that God exists in three separate people, and that each of those persons is completely God. This is something that can be seen by thoughtfully and carefully studying the Scriptures. The teaching of the Trinity has been attacked by numerous heresies, but it has been firmly established in Scripture. According to Augustine, each person in Trinity's activities should be considered in isolation from one another. The Trinity doctrine's historical roots appear to be in the Greek Patristic and Biblical traditions, according to Augustine. The Cappadocian school taught that three coequal, coeternal, and coessential people make up the one Godhead, and this is an unfathomable mystery. Although the Cappadocians recognized the coequality of the divine persons, they did not entirely distance themselves from the subordinationist notions that remained from the trinitarian movement of the third century. It was concluded that We are persuaded by Augustine's argument that he does not break from Cappadocian theology other than to the extent that he expands on it and raises pertinent issues for someone who has comprehended its main idea.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the Trinity is a foundational doctrine of the Christian faith (Nicolas & Kale, 2023; Volf, 1998). It is crucial for properly understanding what God is like, how He relates to us, and how we should relate to Him. But it also raises many difficult questions: How can God be both one and three? Is the Trinity a contradiction? From the Second Century to our present age, many people have found the Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity hard to understand. The doctrine of the Trinity recognizes that God is one God, co-existing in three distinct Persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three persons in one Godhead; the fact that God did not inspire the writers of Scripture to use the modern word "Trinity" does imply that it is not a Biblical truth. The first defense of the doctrine of the Trinity was in the early 3rd century by the early church father Tertullian. The great challenge that we ever face in our belief is we encounter various views regarding the doctrine of the Trinity originated in different times of Christian history. These views are almost contrary to each other because experts' result on the reading of the doctrine of the Trinity shows that these views fail to provide adequate sufficiency in the explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Therefore, among the tensions and compositionality between numerous interpretations of the doctrine of the Trinity; the first challenge is to recognize the false view which & how, and the second challenge is to realize the true one and maintain that.

2. METHOD

This study is a literature review. We took data from an internet source, including article journals.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Background to Augustine's View on Trinity

Augustine, popularly known as Augustine of Hippo helped to hold the secret of the Trinity, he classifies them as; Memory, Understanding, and Will. Augustine, the most important Father of the Church, wrote a great deal on the doctrine of the Trinity. In one of his sermons, he wrestled with the passage in Scripture recounting Jesus' Baptism. He wondered how it was possible the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit could be inseparable, while, in this passage, they do not seem unified, as all their works are separated. Augustine searches for an analogy to help his listeners comprehend the oneness of the Trinity but the distinct works of each Person (though it's important to remember that all Trinitarian analogies fall short). He talks about the mind's ability to remember, understand, and will. When you remember a story, you have understood the words that were being said and you need to "will" yourself to recall that story. When you seek to understand a concept, you must remember what the concept is and will understand it. When you "will" or "desire" something, you must understand what you are willing, and you must remember what you are willing.

A certain activity like remembering might be more visible or tangible, it necessarily depends on understanding and will. As these acts can never be fully separated, so too with God: The divine Persons are also inseparable in what they do. But within the single divine operation, each shows forth what is proper to him in the Trinity, especially in the divine missions of the Son's Incarnation and the gift of the Holy Spirit. While we might see the work of the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit more clearly in particular situations (the Father in Creation, the Son on the Cross, the Spirit at Pentecost), you can never divorce one from the other: Because it does not divide the divine unity, the real distinction of the Persons from one another resides solely in the relationships which relate them to one another. The Father

reveals the Son, the Son reveals the Father, and the Father and the Son are revealed by the Holy Spirit. Though the secret is difficult to comprehend and requires an act of faith to believe it, we should be thankful that we live in an age where we have concrete doctrine (or teaching) on the Trinity.

3.2. Augustine's Approaches to the Doctrine of the Trinity

Augustine takes up many elements of the initial agreement on the Trinity, for example, in his forceful rejection of any form of subordination (that is, treating the Son and the Spirit as lower to the Father within the Godhead). Augustine insists that the action of the entire Trinity is to be separated behind the actions of each of its persons. Thus, humanity is not merely created in the image of God; it is created in the image of the Trinity (Leemans, 2005). An important difference is drawn between the eternal Godhead of the Son and the Spirit and their place in the self-denial of salvation. Although the Son and the Spirit may appear to be next to the Father, this judgment only applies to their role within the process of salvation. Although the Son and the Spirit may appear to be subordinate to the Father in history, in eternity all are coequal. The most distinctive element of Augustine's approach to the Trinity concerns his understanding of the person and place of the Holy Spirit. Augustine's conception of the Spirit as the love that unites the Father, and the Son demands attention at this early stage.

Having identified the Son with "wisdom" (Sapientia), Augustine proceeds to identify the Spirit with "love" (Caritas). He admits that he has no explicit biblical grounds for this identification; nevertheless, he regards it as a reasonable inference from the biblical material. The Spirit makes us dwell in God, and God in us. This explicit identification of the Spirit as the basis of the union between God and believers is important, as it points to Augustine's idea of the Spirit as the giver of community. The Spirit is the divine gift that binds us to God. Therefore, Augustine argues, a corresponding relation within the Trinity itself. The gift must reflect the nature of the giver. God already exists in the kind of relation to which he wishes to bring us. And just as the Spirit is the bond of union between God and the believer, so the Spirit exercises a comparable role within the Trinity, binding the persons together. The Holy Spirit makes us dwell in God, and God is in us. But that is the effect of love. So, the Holy Spirit is God who is love (Leemans, 2005).

This argument is supplemented by a general analysis of the importance of love within the Christian life. Augustine, centering his ideas lightly on 1 Corinthians 13: 13 (These three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love), argues along the following lines: (i) God's greatest gift is loving, (ii) God's greatest gift is the Holy Spirit, (iii) Therefore the Holy Spirit is love. This style of analysis has been criticized for its obvious weaknesses, not least in leading to a curiously depersonalized notion of the Spirit. The Spirit appears as a sort of glue, binding Father, and Son together, and binding both to believers. The idea of being bound to God is a central feature of Augustine's spirituality, and it is perhaps inevitable. One of the most distinctive features of Augustine's approach to the Trinity is his development of psychological analogies. The reasoning which lies behind the appeal to the human mind can be summarized as follows: It is not unreasonable to expect that, in creating the world, God has left a characteristic imprint upon that creation. But where is that imprint (vestigium) to be found? It is reasonable to expect that God would plant this distinctive imprint upon the height of his creation.

The Genesis creation accounts allow us to conclude that humanity is the height of God's creation. Therefore, Augustine argues, we should look to humanity in our search for the image

of God. However, Augustine then takes a step that some of his critics consider unnecessary and unfortunate. Based on his neo-Platonic worldview, Augustine argues that the human mind is to be regarded as the apex of humanity. It is therefore to the individual human mind that the theologian should turn, in looking for traces of the Trinity (vestigial Trinitatis) in creation. The radical individualism of this approach, coupled with its clear intellectualism, means that he chooses to find the Trinity in the inner mental world of individuals, rather than the personal relationships (an approach favored by medieval writers, such as Richard of St. Victor). Furthermore, Augustine seems to regard the inner workings of the human mind as telling us as much about God as about the self-denial of salvation. Although Augustine stresses the limited value of such analogies, he appears to make more use of them than this critical appraisal would warrant. Augustine discerns a triadic structure to human thought and argues that this structure of thought is grounded in the being of God.

He argues that the most important triad is that of mind, knowledge, and love, although the related triad of memory, understanding, and will is also given considerable status. The human mind is an image inadequate to be sure but still an image of God himself. Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity is not ultimately grounded in his analysis of the human mind but in his reading of Scripture, especially of the fourth Gospel. Augustine's presentation of the Trinity exercised a major influence over later generations, especially during the Middle Ages.

3.3. Implication

Augustine's interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity seems about its Biblical and Greek Patristic background. Augustine's version of the doctrine of the Trinity was similarly an attempt to explain the meaning of ancient Biblical images: the images of God as Father, of the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit. These images had already taken on a trinitarian meaning earlier in the fourth century in the thinking of such figures as Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa, and the trinitarianism they developed was declared dogma by ecumenical councils whose authority Augustine accepted. He came to interpret them, however, in a radically new manner: he gave the doctrine a new meaning, attributing to the Trinity as such a fundamentally different structure from that which it had had for the Greek Christian thinkers who originated the doctrine. Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity with its double procession has to do with how, in a way that he thought clashes with human understanding, there can be three of something within the inscrutable absolute unity of the one God. No matter how many analogies he could use to suggest the threeness of the triune God they could not help but fail to image the absolute unity he also considered himself obliged to arm.

If one begins thinking with Augustine's assumptions and one is as honest as he was, one must end as he expressly did with the realization that one has not arrived at a concrete understanding of what one is talking about when one speaks of the Trinity. The approach to the doctrine of the Trinity proved to be an innovation with far-reaching consequences.

3.4. Cappadocian Fathers' View on the Doctrine of Trinity

The orthodox interpretation of Nicaea was formulated by Cappadocian Fathers. A term used in collection with three major Greek-speaking writers of the Patristic period: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa. All of whom date from the late fourth century. "Cappadocia" designates an area in Asia Minor in which these writers were based (modern-day Turkey). The Cappadocians are best known for the creedal "formula" that the Trinity is three "hypostases" of one "ousia", a position they defended between the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople. But the philosophy of these fathers goes well beyond a

confessional formula. An intensive study of these three fathers of the Church shows their reflections on the Trinity by considering the different ways in which the Father, Son, and Spirit are experienced. The Cappadocian fathers were crucial in developing the doctrine of the Trinity, an understanding and presupposition of the incomprehensibility and unknowability of God was vital in understanding the Trinity and in studying theology altogether. And it was chiefly through knowing who God is not through “apophatic” or “negative”; theology that one can truly grow in the pursuit of knowing the inexhaustible divine nature of God (Tracy, 1996).

The idea of the hiddenness, unknowability, and mystery of God has roots in both the Old and New Testaments (e.g., Isa. 45:15; 1 Tim. 6:16; John 1:18; Rev. 1:8). The fundamental problem for the Cappadocians was how to name the invisible or describe the nonmaterial or show what could not be seen or comprehend what had neither size nor quantity (LaCugna, 1993). Cataphatic (“positive”) theology was used by many to describe God, but the Cappadocians saw it as completely inadequate to describe God’s nature. For Basil, God is ‘inexpressible by human voice’ and ‘incomprehensible to human reason’ so we are therefore ‘powerless to express conceptions formed by the mind’. For Gregory of Nyssa, Cataphatic statements such as God is “incorruptible” or “powerful”, are terms that are not fit to express that nature is in its essence. For when we say that He is incorruptible, we declare what His nature does not suffer but we do not express what that is which does not suffer corruption. Cataphatic statements based on God manifesting Himself to us through His divine energies had to be negated with a corresponding antithesis when applied to the Holy Trinity. As Gregory of Nyssa affirms, Cataphatic affirmations taught under what conditions it was permissible to conceive of God as existing, but they did not inform men about the being of God essentially.

Human language about God was simply inadequate and even God’s revelatory language in Scripture though indeed explanatory of our conceptions of the Divine Nature. Man’s faculties in understanding God were likewise insufficient. Man cannot even understand the natural world. Gregory of Nazianzen affirms when it comes to discourse about God, the more perfect it would be the harder it is. There was thus a need for apophaticism when speaking of the divine and this is what undergirded Cappadocian theology (McGinn, 2001). For them, God is so other and so incomprehensible that to protect against distortion whether accidental or deliberate, any proper conceptions about the divine nature needed to begin with the fundamental premise that the divine nature was unlike anything known. God is simply completely transcendent and ineffable thus to define God in words is an impossibility for it is impossible to express God or to form a clear idea of Him. Every conception of God falls short of the reality of his goodness and submitting to negativity was therefore the only way though having no other words to employ, as Basil states, we employ what we have. Gregory of Nazianzen further explains that because man is unable to know eternal things, he looks for things on this earth to compare God to.

When one sees a glimpse of God then these are only the back of him. So, men can indeed make true cataphatic statements based on God’s manifestations on the earth, but these can never describe his nature or essence. Apophatic statements are therefore necessary for they are required and are useful in helping men understand God’s essence in a way cataphatic theology cannot though they still only give knowledge of God in part for God is ineffable. Gregory of Nyssa writes, believing the Divine nature to be unlimited and incomprehensible, conceive no comprehension of it but declare that the nature is to be conceived in all respects as infinite and that which is infinite is not limited in one respect while it is left unlimited in another but infinity is free from limitation altogether. Regarding the names of the Trinity even

"Father", "Son" and "Spirit" were inadequate: The divine nature cannot be expressed by any name and even God is a relative, not an absolute name for God, and not bound up with something else. This is why God declared himself as Yahweh, the one who just is. Gregory of Nyssa states, there was only one name for representing the proper nature of Christ, the single name of being above all names (Phil. 1:6-11).

The three divine names of God then do not designate modes of existence but instead denote modes of relation (Ayres, 2007). Furthermore, as names do not designate essence, there are consequently innumerable names for God, each with some special but apophatic implication. The relationships between the three persons of the Trinity which were vital in formulating the doctrine of the Trinity, find apophatic theology being key for the Cappadocians for even the relationships could not be grasped by human minds. The begetting of God (i.e the Son) must be honored by silence. Gregory of Nazianzen argues that it is only known truly by God. Therefore, though "unbegotten" and "begotten" are different, this does not mean that the father and the son are different. Similarly, the Cappadocian's disagreement with some around them asserted the Spirit's divinity but affirmed that the term "proceeds", like "unbegotten" or "only-begotten", is nevertheless unknowable for though the Spirit proceeds from God, 'He is no creature; since He is not Begotten, He is not Son; and since He is between the Unbegotten and the Begotten, He is God.' Further, Gregory of Nazianzen states about the Spirit's "proceeding", enter into the depths of God and provide an account of that nature which is so unspeakable and so utterly above our reason.

In a mysterious and unknown manner, the Trinity fulfills every operation of God not by separate action according to the number of the Persons but so that there is one motion and disposition of the goodwill which is communicated from the Father through the Son to the Spirit. Differences are of relation but it is not some deficiency in the Son which prevents His being Father. for these terms do not either a deficiency or a subordination concerning the divine essence But the Three are One concerning the divinity, and the One is Three concerning the properties. God therefore cannot be numbered or measured, for God is One in unity, essence, and power and cannot become worse or better by any addition. The Cappadocians affirm that God is known in part through experiencing his operations in the world but no man could boast of having taken in nature or seen the totality of God. This remains a paradox of knowing God, yet not knowing him and this is an extremely high and Scriptural view of God: God is 'beyond understanding' (Job 36:26 NIV); we know him not (Job 36:26 ESV); He dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16 ESV); and His ways are higher than our ways (Isa. 55:8-9 ESV).

There is no surprise that for Gregory of Nyssa 'the whole life-work of "ascent" culminates in noetic darkness as did Moses' ascent of Mt Sinai. Knowing God is therefore growing in worshipping and being aware of the incomprehensible and unfathomable Trinity, though never reaching a full understanding of him. However, we may truly know God's essence 'when the impenetrable darkness of this present age is taken away'; when God is seen "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). The Cappadocians affirmed the coequality of persons in the Godhead, they did not separate themselves of sub-ordinationistic ideas carried over from third-century trinitarianism. To retain a personal concept of God despite the impersonal essence that their theory called for, they identified the Father as the source, origin, and commander in the Godhead. In the writings of the Cappadocians, this subordination of Jesus and the Spirit is prominent. Basil taught, "You are therefore to perceive three, the Lord who gives the order, the Word who creates, and the Spirit who confirms", and "the natural Goodness and the inherent Holiness and the royal Dignity extend from the Father through the Only-begotten to the Spirit," and the Father is the "origin of God."

Gregory of Nyssa wrote Grace flows down in an unbroken stream from the Father, through the Son and the Spirit, upon the persons worthy of it. The idea of cause differentiates the Persons of the Holy Trinity: One is the Cause, and another is of the Cause one is directly from the first Cause, and another by that which is directly from the first Cause. Gregory of Nazianzus went so far as to say, I should like to call the Father the greater because from him flows both the Equality and the Being of the Equals (this will be granted on all hands) but I am afraid to use the word Origin, lest I should make Him the Origin of Inferiors. The word Greater does not apply to Nature but only to Originator. Basil responded that Hebrews 1:3 did not deny a plurality of persons but only showed the relationship of the Son to the Father. In other words, when we gaze on the Son we become aware of the Father also.

3.5. Difference between Cappadocian Fathers and Augustine's View on the Doctrine of the Trinity

The orthodox interpretation of Nicaea was formulated by three Greek Church Fathers from Cappadocia in Asia Minor: Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, his brother, and Gregory Naziansen, Basil's friend, who presided at the council of Constantinople in 381, where his orations on the doctrine of the Trinity earned him the title "the Theologian" (i.e. the pre-eminent interpreter of the Christian doctrine of God). These Cappadocian Fathers not only established the meaning of ousia as a kind of thing (by contrasting it with "hypostasis," which they gave the technical meaning of a particular thing) but they also developed the Nicene council's confession of the divinity of Christ into a fully trinitarian doctrine by insisting on the full divinity of the Holy Spirit as well so that the Holy Spirit too is homo-ousios with the Father. As a result, the Cappadocians were the first to face the question: why not three Gods? If there are three distinct particular things (i.e., hypostases) that are each divine in the same sense, then why are they not three gods just as three distinct human hypostases (like Peter, Paul, and Mary) make three humans?

The basic idea is that all general terms (wisdom, power, goodness) refer to God in the singular: there is only one wisdom, one power, and one goodness in God, not three. But the Cappadocians went farther than that. They taught that there is only one Will and Activity (Greek *energeia*, Latin *operatio*) in God. It is not like Peter, Paul, and Mary, who may cooperate or not as they choose. Everything God does is done by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together. They do not merely agree, on having three wills in harmony, but rather have only one Will in the first place. Hence Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three distinct centers of will and activity that may or may not harmonize. Every work of God is necessarily the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the work of one God. Augustine, the great fountainhead of the distinctively Western tradition of Nicene trinitarianism, has convinced me that he does not depart from the Cappadocian theology, except in the sense that he builds on it and asks the appropriate questions for someone who has understood its point. Working in the generation after the council of Constantinople, Augustine wrote a multi-volume treatise *On the Trinity*, which greatly influenced Western thought. In books 5-7 of this treatise, he works out the logic of the Cappadocian doctrine in great detail, using categories borrowed from Aristotle.

Augustine, the great fountainhead of the distinctively Western tradition of Nicene trinitarianism, has convinced us that he does not depart from the Cappadocian theology, except in the sense that he builds on it and asks the appropriate questions for someone who has understood its point. Augustine used the word "persona" because it was the standard technical term in Latin to designate what was three rather than one in the Trinity.

4. CONCLUSION

Conclusion for the doctrine of the Trinity is not possible with the human mind. Therefore, finally, scholars conclude in their formulations that Trinity is some kind of mystery that human beings cannot fully understand. For us, affirmation of the trinity and some attempt to intellectually comprehend it, as well as experience it and the acquisition of a vocabulary and explain faith are an inevitable and inescapable corollary of Christian certitude. The doctrine of the Trinity represents a rare instance of a theological issue of concern to both the eastern and western churches. Theological debates that were specifically linked with the western church have both come to be particularly associated with Augustine of Hippo. Any thoughtful and careful study of the Scriptures will reveal that the doctrine of the Trinity is built upon three biblical truths: there is one God, God exists in three distinct persons and each of those persons is fully God. However, when these core truths, either in whole or in part are not embraced, false teachings and unbiblical heresies are sure to arise. Throughout the history of the church, many heresies have attempted to assail the doctrine of the Trinity, but this doctrine has been biblically affirmed throughout the pages of the Scripture.

The Cappadocian taught that the one Godhead subsists in three coequal, coeternal, coessential persons, and this truth is an incomprehensible mystery. There is a communion of substance but the distinction of personhood. This trinity is a perfect, inseparable, indivisible union, and the persons work together in all things. The affirmation that the Trinity is the distinctively Christian idea of God is seriously misleading. What is true is that from the third century onwards the distinctively Christian idea of God began to fit itself into a Trinitarian mold. This mold was adopted and adapted from Hellenistic philosophy. If the oneness of divine and human nature, had been recognized by the Nicene theologians, the doctrine of the Trinity would have been unnecessary; the religious interest to find God in Christ could then have been conserved, as it was by the Modalists, without distinguishing the pre-existent Son of God from the Father.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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