

CONFESSING WITH SAINT AUGUSTINE

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7 — AUGUSTINE ON THE SELF



OUTLINE

1. Augustine's different approaches to the Self
2. Exegetical – Commentaries on Genesis
3. Autobiographical / Mnemonic – The Confessions
4. The Divine Image – On the Trinity

BACKGROUND

Manichaeism

Mani (216-c. 277)

Metaphysical materialism

Dualistic: forces of Light and Dark in conflict

Extreme asceticism

Neoplatonism

Plotinus (205-270)

Enneads, edited by Porphyry (c. 250 c.305)

Hierarchy of being

The One, Mind, Soul

AUGUSTINE ARTICULATING THE SELF

The purpose of knowing oneself – not an end in itself, but to know, love and praise God.

Augustine's approaches to articulating the self:

1. Exegetical – interpreting the creation of man (Genesis commentaries)
2. Autobiographical/mnemonic – interpreting subjective experiences and the concept of memory (Confessions)
3. Analysing self-knowledge and the Trinitarian divine image (On the Trinity)





THE EXEGETICAL METHOD



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Augustine's commentaries on Genesis:

1. On Genesis Against the Manichees (388/389)
2. On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: an Unfinished Book (c. 393)
3. On Genesis Literally Interpreted (The Literal Meaning of Genesis) (begun after 404)
4. Confessions: Books 10-13 (397-400)
5. City of God: Book 11 (417/418)

METHOD OF GENESIS COMMENTARIES

Carnal and spiritual interpretations

Figures of speech

Genesis as history and prophecy: a narrative of events

Prefigurative

Anti-Manichaean

Aporetic approach



KEY FEATURES

Creator-creature distinction: the creation of man by God (not out of God)

Body-soul relation: these are joined by the divine breath (“And He breathed into him the breath of life, and man became a living soul,” Gen. 2:7)

The origin of the soul: theories —animated by divine breath; created; “pre-existent” in God’s wisdom

The divine image: rejecting the anthropomorphic view of God (anti-Manichaen)



**AUGUSTINE,
UNFINISHED
COMMENTARY ON
GENESIS 16:57,
184)**

“Every image is like that of which it is an image, but not everything which is like something is also its image.

Thus, because in a mirror or in a picture there are images, they are also like.

But if the one does not have its origin from the other, it is not said to be the image of the other.

For it is an image only when it is derived from the other thing.”

THE DIVINE IMAGE (IMAGO DEI)

The divine image is a type of likeness expressing its source.

Humans vs the Son of God: created to the image and likeness of God; vs being the “image and likeness of the Father” (see Augustine, Unfinished Commentary, 16:57)

Participation notion (Unfinished Commentary, 16:57) and the divine image’s “supernatural orientation” (Gerald Boersma)

Rationality: refers to the interior man or mind (the rational part of the soul): rational creatures are the only creatures made through and to the likeness

Rulership and “master by reason” (Gen. 1:28) of our affections and emotions.



EXEGETICAL APPROACH: CONCLUSIONS

Universal aspects: creaturehood and rationality

Distinction and similitude: creature-Creator
distinction; a certain likeness

The divine image indicates a particular relation to
God – to the Word and the Trinity specifically





THE EXEGETICAL METHOD

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL/MNEMONIC APPROACH

Scope and structure: *Confessions*, Books 1-9; Books 10-13

First-person narrative

The significance of interiority

Analysis of memory: Book X a quest for self-knowledge and knowledge of God

Augustine's "account of memory [...] [raises] the question of memory's relation to the individual's identity." (O'Daly, 2008)



AUGUSTINE,
CONFESSIONS
X:24 (35)

“See how widely I have ranged, Lord,
searching for you in my memory.

I have not found you outside it.

For I have found nothing coming from you
which I have not stored in my memory since
the time I first learnt of you.

Since the day I learnt of you, I have never
forgotten you.

[...] And so, since the time I learnt of you,
you remain in my consciousness, and there I
find you when I recall you and delight in
you.”

AUGUSTINE,
CONFESSIONS
X:16.25

“It is I who remember, I the mind.

And yet the power of my memory is not comprehended by me, since I cannot name myself without it.”

THE INWARD ASCENT TO MEMORY IN CONFESSIONS, BOOK X

Opening words of Book X: “May I know you, who know me. May I ‘know as I also am known.’ [1 Cor. 13:12]”—ConfessionsX:1(1), 179.

Being known and unhidden to God: “Lord, to your eyes, the abyss of human consciousness is naked. [...] I would be hiding you from myself, not myself from you.” —ConfessionsX:2 (2), 179.

Explains his act of confession and turns inward: identifies himself as a man with a body and a soul; confesses the superiority of the interior (the soul). — Confessions X:6 (11), 185.



THE INWARD ASCENT TO MEMORY IN CONFESSIONS, BOOK X

Inward ascent through the soul and beyond the mind: “What then do I love when I love my God? Who is [He] who is higher than the highest element in my soul? Through my soul I will ascend to him.” — Confessions X:6-8 (12), 185.

Arrival to the “fields and vast palaces of memory where are the treasures of innumerable images of all kinds of objects brought in by sense perception” — Confessions X:7-8 (12), 185



THE CONCEPT OF MEMORY

“Objects” within memory:

1. Sense impressions (the storehouse of sense impressions)
2. Inwardly discerned notions – “already in the memory, but so remote and pushed back into the background, as if in most secret caverns [.]” –Confessions X:11 (18), 189.

Difficulties: vastness of one’s memory; inconsistency between affections as experienced vs as remembered; the understanding of forgetfulness

Can we really know ourselves as we are through one’s memory?





SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND THE TRINITY

SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND THE TRINITARIAN IMAGE ON THE TRINITY (*DE TRINITATE*)

On the Trinity (414): Scriptural analysis (Books 1-4);
the “grammar” of the Trinity (Books 5-7); the image
of God (Books 8-15)

Explication of the doctrine of the Trinity: how to
understand what is believed about the Trinity

Explaining the Trinity with reference to the human
mind as the image of God, books 8-15



DEFINITIONS AND DISTINCTIONS: THE DIVINE IMAGE

“The image of the Creator [...] in man’s rational or intellectual soul must be something that is ‘immortally ingrafted in its immortality.’” – DT XIV:6 (4)

Criteria: triadic structures of the mind must show equality and consubstantiality (and not be merely trinitarian analogies) – like the divine persons.



DEFINITIONS AND DISTINCTIONS: THE DIVINE IMAGE

Contrast: the divine image vs analogies

- The divine image: e.g. the mind and its activities of remembering, understanding and willing
- Trinitarian vestiges: retaining, contemplating and loving knowledge (a temporal, not eternal object) – DT XIV:3 (4)



THE TRINITARIAN DIVINE IMAGE: FIRST VERSION DE TRINITATE IX: 3-6

The mind, its self-knowledge and self-love

The triadic structure – the mind's very essence

The mind's substantiality is shown by the mind's self-knowledge – the mind is always present to itself (pre-reflexive self-awareness).

The mind, its self-knowledge and self-love are equal and consubstantial to the mind (of the same substance)



AUGUSTINE'S ANALYSIS OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Necessity of true self-knowledge

The maxim “Know Thyself” means the mind should think about itself and live according to its nature. – DT X:5 (7)

The mind is as closely present to itself as it can be. It knows itself as a whole, not in part. – DT DT X:4 (6)

Following this injunction, the mind will realise it exists, thinks and wills with certainty. – DT X:10



THE TRINITARIAN DIVINE IMAGE: SECOND VERSION DT X:11-12

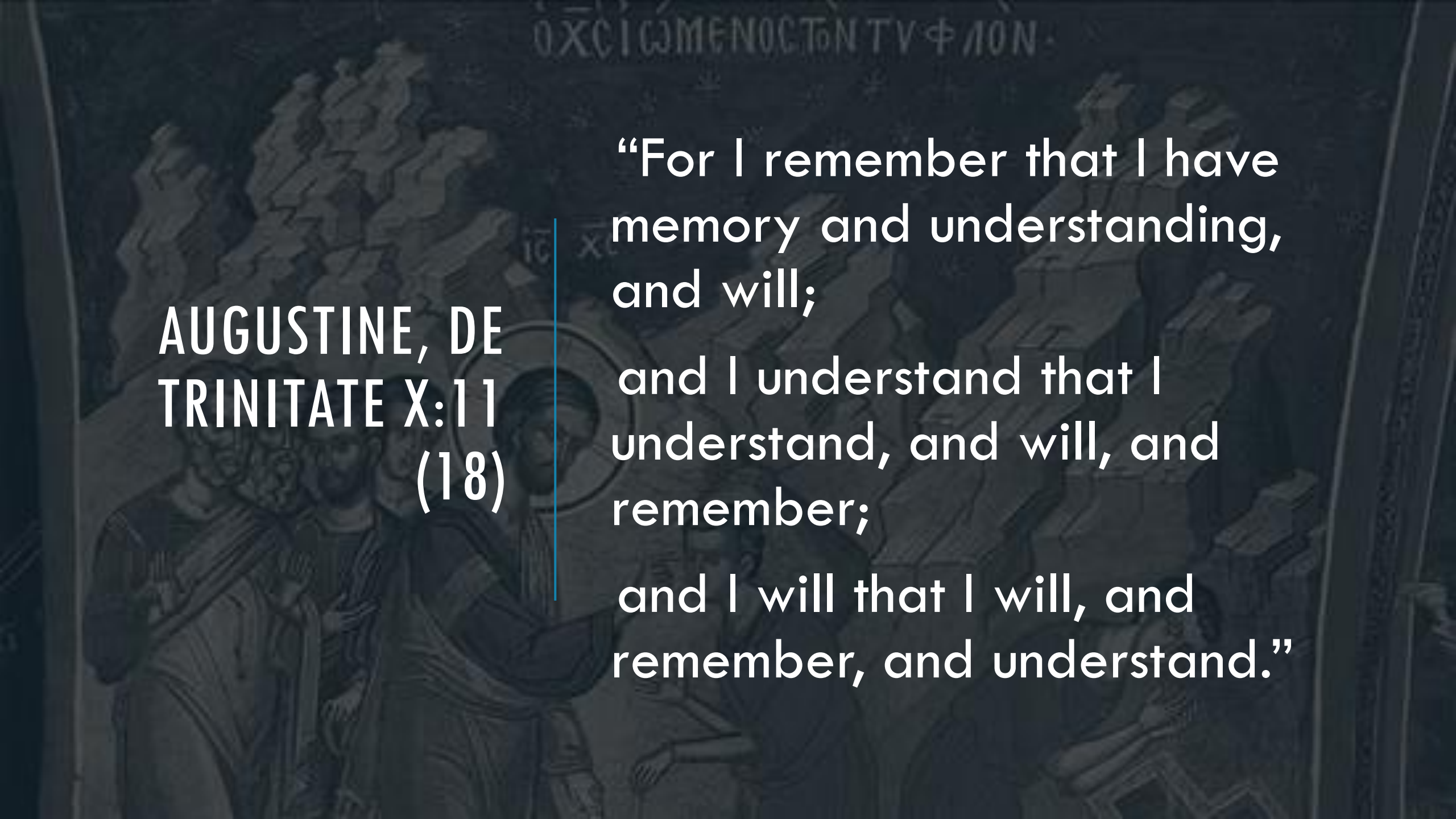
Memory, understanding (intelligentia), will (voluntas)

Equal and consubstantial: one mind and one substance — DT X:11 (18)

“One life, one mind, one essence” — yet when mutually referred to each other, they are three. — DT X:11 (18)

Mutually contain each other: “for not only is each contained by each, but also all by each.” — DT X:11 (18)





AUGUSTINE, DE
TRINITATE X:11
(18)

“For I remember that I have
memory and understanding,
and will;
and I understand that I
understand, and will, and
remember;
and I will that I will, and
remember, and understand.”

FINAL NOTES ON THE DIVINE IMAGE

“Switching on” the divine image: using the abilities of remembering, understanding and loving (Edmund Hill)

“This trinity, then, of the mind is not therefore the image of God, because the mind remembers itself, and understands and loves itself; but because it can also remember, understand, and love Him by whom it was made.” – DT XIV:12 (13)

The mind becomes wise “not by its own light, but by participation of that supreme Light.” – DT XIV:12 (15)

Gradual, ongoing renewal of the image in this life –not in a “single moment of conversion” – but by forgiveness of sins, “progress in the knowledge of God, and in righteousness and true holiness.” – DT XIV:17 (23)



READING

Confessions, Book XI

Brachtendorf, Johannes. "Augustine on Self-Knowledge and Human Subjectivity." in *Self-Knowledge: A History*. Ed. Ursula Renz. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 96-117.

Cary, Phillip. "Philosophical and Religious Origins of the Private Inner Self." *Zygon* 46;1 (2011): 121-134.

