

The Trinity

(Second Edition)

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THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE

A Translation for the 21st Century

Part I—Books

Volume 5:

The Trinity

THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE

A Translation for the 21st Century

The Trinity

De Trinitate

(Second Edition)

introduction, translation and notes

Edmund Hill, O.P.

editor

John E. Rotelle, O.S.A.



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Foreword

Saint Augustine took a very long time writing this book; so much so that when he still had not finished it after fifteen years, some admirers got impatient and published the unfinished work with indecent haste, without the author's permission, and to his intense annoyance.

The case has been quite the reverse with this translation. I translated Book I in 1965 or 1966, while still in England at Hawkesyard Priory in Staffordshire. Then indeed I laid the project aside for some years when I was sent out to Saint Nicholas Priory, Stellenbosch in South Africa. But I took it up again in 1968 and completed it at Saint Peter's Seminary, Hammanskraal, in the Transvaal, in 1971. I took the opportunity of a sabbatical year in Manchester (1972–1973) to revise the introduction and some notes.

Already in 1970, when I had finished Book IV, I had started looking for a publisher. But for reasons totally incomprehensible to anyone outside the mysterious secret world of publishing, this translation has had to wait some years before being offered to the public.

I am therefore all the more grateful to John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., of the Augustinian Heritage Institute, for finally publishing it in this splendid series. We are friends of some years' standing, only, I regret to say, by correspondence and an occasional trans-Atlantic, trans-hemispherical telephone conversation.

My warmest thanks also to Martin Moynihan, whom I first had the pleasure of meeting when he was Her Majesty's High Commissioner in the Kingdom of Lesotho, and who did what he could, on his retirement, to secure a publisher, and who has been unflinching all along in his moral support.

I am also deeply grateful to Boniface Ramsey, O.P., of the American Saint Joseph's Province of the Order of Preachers, for all his help. He first expressed an interest in the translation during a visit to Lesotho in 1981. He has, in fact, been the midwife responsible for eventually bringing it to birth—Father Rotelle, you could say, being the family doctor.

Finally, my thanks and appreciation to Mrs. Jane Worsnip and Mrs. Val Hughes for producing a final typescript.

Edmund Hill, O.P.

Saint Augustine Seminary
Roma, Lesotho
Feast of Saint Augustine,
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Introduction

1

The place of the *De Trinitate* in Augustine's work¹

1. The most well known of all Saint Augustine's writings are the *Confessions* and *The City of God*. They are always known by their English rather than their Latin titles; they have long been available in a number of English translations. This is not the case with the *De Trinitate*, which it still feels more natural to refer to by its Latin name, and which was never translated until the late nineteenth century, when it appeared in the Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.

2. Yet these three works do form, in some sense, a kind of trilogy, and of the three the *De Trinitate* is the work of greatest genius and originality. I am not suggesting that Augustine wrote them as a trilogy, only that all three give expression in different modes to one of his basic theological intuitions. This was his keen sense of the historical, or perhaps a better word for it would be the dramatic, dimension to the truths of the Christian religion. He is indeed at his best, as a theological writer, in the dramatic presentation of truth, and at his weakest in the abstract statement of it. This goes a long way to explain, and even to excuse, his often tedious prolixity; to give expression to profound truths in dramatic form calls for a great many words. It is the merest commonplace, to be sure, that Christianity is a historical religion, even that its historical component is a dramatic one. But Augustine seems to have perceived, though he never explicitly defined this perception, that it is of the essence of Christian truth to be dramatic, to be an encounter cast in dramatic form between God revealing and man believing.

3. And so in the *Confessions* we have the history of his own personal drama, a drama primarily of faith. In *The City of God* we have the dramatic history of the Church, also a drama of faith, contrasted in a very complex pattern with unbelief. The book could in fact be called "A Tale of Two Cities," because it tells of the relations between the city of God and what Augustine calls the earthly city. And as each

1. When there is reference to the Introduction, the section numbers will be used.