

Emanuel GROSU*

Vestigium Trinitatis

(Augustin, *Despre Treime*, bilingual edition, commentaries, and introductory study by Alexander Baumgarten, translation from Latin by Alexandra Anisie, Alexandra Baneu, Alexander Baumgarten, Cristian Bejan, Monica Brînzei, Daniel Coman, Ioana Curuș, Vlad Ile, Alin Luca, Andrei Marinca, “Biblioteca Augustiniană,” Polirom, Iași, 2022, 802 pp.)

Keywords: Augustine, Trinity, theology, vision of God, image, trace

One may end up consulting Augustine’s work through several paths.

You can be a specialist interested in certain defining aspects of Augustine’s thought (e.g., Professor Anton Adămuș – the works of whom¹ are a significant point of reference in the cultural space of the Romanian language – studies Augustine).

You can be a translator (I should cite all who have translated various works or fragments within the impressive work by the Bishop of Hippo).

You can be an author/editor of a bilingual edition, where the translation effort is doubled by the more substantial endeavour of text interpretation and annotation. I will cite, as follows, only some bilingual editions published by prestigious publishing houses in Romania over time: *De magistro* (translated by Mihai Rădulescu & Constantin Noica, Editura Humanitas, București, 1998), *Soliloquii* (bilingual edition, translation, and notes by Gheorghe I. Șerban, Editura Humanitas, București, 1993); *Despre minciună* (bilingual edition, translated by Lucia Wald, introductory study by Constantin Georgescu, Editura Humanitas, București, 2016); *Confesiuni* (bilingual edition, translation, introduction, notes and commentaries, chronological table, and index by Eugen Munteanu, Editura Humanitas, București, 2018) etc. I want to highlight here the effort of the Cluj-based translator and poet Vasile Sav to edit in Romanian (bilingual text) Augustine’s *opera omnia*; he published six volumes that include various works by the great thinkers (Editura Dacia of Cluj-Napoca, published between 2002 and 2003). In all the cases above, the intellectual effort of the persons involved is substantial: the terminology is hard to discern due to surprising semantic intercessions, there are various connections with certain currents of thought specific to Augustine’s period, sentences are more

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comprehensive, and reasonings are often hard to grasp. For all these reasons, it is necessary and mandatory to study other translations and interpretations already published in Romania and other cultures (to annotate, find the best translation solutions, comment on the texts, etc).

Anyone who has dealt with Augustine's works knows that the most accessible and useful source is the website <https://www.augustinus.it/>. There, one may find the Latin original of *Patrologia Latina*, volumes XXXII-XLV, all Augustine's texts, and translations into Italian, English, French, German, and Spanish. The Italian versions of Augustine's works reprise the one published in the "Nova Bibliotheca Agostiniana" collection (NBA) of Città Nuova Editrice. The impressive achievement began in 1965 with *Confessioni* (vol. I) that was still ongoing (though almost finished) in 2010: 50,000 pages for which 80 people worked. They comprise the entire work and support volumes, such as the vol. XXXIX, *Vita S. Augustini/Vita di S. Agostino* by Possidius Calamensis, or the volumes of iconography, indices, and bibliography (Torno, 2010), thus making the difference between the Italian and Spanish editions – *Obras Completas de San Agustín*, vol. I-XLI, "Biblioteca de autores cristianos."

Regardless of the consistency specific to the commented translations I have mentioned above (all of the "a click away," which is very convenient), I believe that all interested readers feel the permanent need to consult the Latin original or even an edition/translation (online or printed) in the mother tongue.

A further reason for me to be solidary with the endeavour initiated by Professor Alexander Baumgarten to inaugurate a new author series called "Biblioteca Augustiniană" – included from 2022 in the editorial plan of the famous Polirom Publishing House in Iași. This initiative is laudable from several points of view, but mainly because the texts will all be published in a bilingual format (hence, Romanian readers can easily compare the translation with the original). I also commend the editor's intention to print the entire work written by Augustine – one of the great founders of European thought. Naturally, it is difficult to predict a chronological timeframe for such a colossal enterprise, even in a culture that (still) justly appreciates classic studies accordingly.

Late this summer, the first volume of this series was already published: *Despre Treime* – a fundamental treatise within Augustine's philosophical and dogmatic work. It is a bilingual edition coordinated by Professor Alexander Baumgarten. He also signs the introductory study – "*Amor indagandae veritatis*. On the possibility of theology as a science in the *On Trinity* treatise" (pp. 7-62) – the notes and the commentaries featured at the end of the treatise (pp. 757-784); in addition, he translated books I-II and VI-VII of the fifteen books. An entire team participated in the translation of the text, including Monica Brînzei (a renowned researcher within Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes); the others are

researchers and members of the Centre of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy of “Babeş-Bolyai” University with significant experience in the translation and interpretation of Latin texts from Late Antiquity and Latin Middle Ages.

The introductory study – substantial and focused on explaining the primary lines of Augustine’s thought in this treatise – is a reading key for his entire work: the information concerning dating and the context of the writing is associated with opinions related to the purpose of the treatise or its relations with previous dogmatic works within Greek or Latin Patristic studies. The introductory study also outlines the approach strategy adopted by Augustine; to divide his work between the presentation of intra-Trinity relations and the comparison of the Trinity with the faculties of the human soul; it draws attention to a recurring reference in Augustine’s meditations (Gen. I:27: *...ad imaginem Dei creavit illum...*). The study also features how the way Augustine understands the role of reason and faith in the knowledge of the transcendental is accompanied by commentaries upon difficult concepts/syntagms (*e.g., acies mentis*), despite their success among later thinkers. The same introductory study interprets the entire contents of the treatise from the perspective of seven interrogations (enumerated on p. 22) outlining the path covered by Augustine from “the soteriological value of the intellectual act” to the need for new science, *i.e., rerum divinarum scientia* (*De Trinitate*, XIV, 3). All these aspects prepare the readers for effective reading and warn them about the contents and investigation methods. The “treatise plan” (pp. 63-74) features – in order – the topics approached by each book (each of the fifteen). These topics are also reprised in the following section, which is bilingual (the Latin text is placed to mirror the Romanian one), as side notes accompanying the translations. This editing strategy is beneficial for people who consult this treatise only to analyse Augustine’s opinions on exact matters – *e.g.*, the relationship between angels and their bodies; intra-Trinity relations; the experience of thought/thinking as an inner trinity; sensory perception as a trace of Trinity; analogy between the Spirit and the will; The Holy Spirit as coming from both the Father and the Son,² etc. The side notes for Scripture citations (in italics) include all the biblical references. The 316 notes featured in a distinct section of the volume may seem too few for such a complex and comprehensive Latin text. Still, I believe the intention was to avoid making the reading more difficult with redundant explanations; thus, they limited the commentaries to the minimum necessary to understand the reasonings correctly. A selective bibliography and an index of biblical citations complete the structure of the volume.

At the beginning of the eleventh book in *De Trinitate*, Augustine aims to find a trace of the Trinity (*vestigium Trinitatis*) in the outer man, too. From the perspective of the act of perception, this “trace” comprises the three elements of the process: the object we see – the vision (*visio*) –

the attention (*intentio animi*). In the lack of a thing to be perceived, the sense is in a latent state (*sensus non formatus*), and it becomes a *sensus informatus* only when the process is completed by the presence of the other two elements. Similarly, there is another plan of the “inner” perception concerning “the inner man,” which Augustine names *cogitatio* (*De Trinitate*, XI, 3.6). Its corresponding elements are the following: memory (images/representations of the sensible bodies perceived by the senses) – inner vision (where the soul uses the representations of the sensible bodies stored in the memory) – the will (with the same role as attention/*intentio animi* at the level of outer perception). Whereas at the level of outer perception, constitutive elements are different in nature, at the level of inner perception, the likeness and equality have the same nature and substance (*De Trinitate*, XI, 7.12: *eiusdem naturae atque substantiae parilitas et aequalitas*). *Visio interius* concerns realities constructed with images/representations (obtained due to corporeal sensory experiences) stored in the memory: remembering precise episodes (what I supped on yesterday: *De Trinitate*, XI, 7.12) or representations derived from an arbitrary modification and/or combination of images imprinted in memory (“black swan,” “a bird with four feet”: *De Trinitate*, XI, 10.17) that Augustin calls *phantasma* (*ibidem*, XI, 3.6; 5.8). *Visio interius* can be assessed in very different contexts: either when the corporeal senses are inactive (as dreams during sleep; as hallucinations in pathological states; as predictions in states of trance) or when the five senses are operative but overwhelmed by an intense feeling (fear, desire, etc.).

In the 12th book of *De Genesi ad litteram* written between 401 and 415, in the same period as *De Trinitate* (around 400-418), the considerations of the Bishop of Hippo are significantly more nuanced. The verse of Matthew 22:39 (“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”) applies three types of perception: *visio per oculos/visio corporalis*, through which the lecturer perceives the letters within the verse; *visio per spiritum hominis/visio spiritualis*, through which we represent the neighbour as an image, though he is absent; and *visio per contuitum mentis/visio intellectualis* focusing on concepts, such as “to love, love etc.,” namely the realities that we cannot represent in images and keep in our memory as such. The three “visions” are ordered hierarchically: the corporeal and spiritual are common to all animated beings. At the same time, *visio intellectualis* is specific to humans and angels – the only creatures endowed with reason. Furthermore, “corporeal vision is inferior to the spiritual” because the latter can only take place as a reflex of the first. In contrast, both corporeal and spiritual visions “are inferior to the intellectual” (*De Genesi ad litteram*, XII, 11.24) because it is the only one capable of showing the meaning of the previous ones when it exists.

The universe of spiritual vision is immaterial, of similarities, regardless of the underlying causes and the circumstances of these visions:

dreams, delirium (natural causes), ecstasies (spiritual causes) where subjects lose totally or partially the use of the five corporeal senses. The spaces within this universe are crossed by something similar to the body (like in a dream), and this simile corpori perceives through similarities of the senses (*De Genesi ad litteram*, XII, 32.60). However, the joy or sorrow experienced is authentic – as they are in dreams due to their spiritual nature. The information within various passages in *In Evangelium Ioannis Tractatus* completes practically the aspects featured in *De Trinitate* and *De Genesi ad litteram*. However, here the author posits an entirely new thesis: *visio spiritualis* is different from the sensory perception because – though the soul is the subject in both cases (cf. *De Genesi ad Litteram*, XII, 24.51) – in *carne tua alibi audis, alibi vides: in corde tuo ibi audis ubi vides* (*In Evangelium Ioannis Tractatus*, 18.10). This statement may be viewed as a different standpoint from Tertullian's thesis of soul corporeality.

Both corporeal and spiritual visions are inferior to *visio intellectualis*, through which a soul reaches the truth through the divine grace elevating it (*De Genesi ad litteram*, XII, 26.54). This vision is reserved for the “pure in heart” (*Mat.* 5:8) or the angels. It may be experienced during ecstasy or after death when the soul – separated from the body – can see, just like the angels, “the immutable essence of the Creator” (*De Genesi ad litteram*, XII, 35.68).

By associating the three types of visions – *visio corporalis*, *visio spiritualis*, and *visio intellectualis* – with the three skies in *2Cor.* 12:2-4 (*De Genesi ad litteram*, XII, 34.67), Augustine provides the later authors of *visiones animarum* with a reason and justification for the sensory perspective applied to the description of the afterworld/s. Nonetheless, in an equally succinct and severe critique, he almost pulls apart *Visio Pauli* (...nescio quibus fabulis plenam... – *In Evangelium Ioannis Tractatus*, 98.8) – a fundamental source of medieval visions, inspired by the same Pauline verses (*2Cor.* 12:2-4)

I went through the above observations in Latin and Italian to try and find an explanation for a particular aspect. In the medieval *visiones animarum* (e.g., *Visio Baronti*, *Visio Drychtelmi*, *Visio Wettini*, *Visio Tnugdali*, etc.) or in mystical experience accounts (e.g., Hildegard von Bingen, Scivias), to describe essentially spiritual/immaterial worlds, the authors use a language specific to the sensory experiences generally describing our interactions with the material world where we live. They use smells, tastes, pleasant or horrible views, colours, sounds, extreme cold or hot sensations, etc. The assumption I started from – that this language is exclusively figurative – should be nuanced, at least based on the three perceptive levels in Augustine's assessments. I believe they must have had an overwhelming influence on the description of spaces within the other world (even in *Divina Commedia*), which excluded almost entirely the idea of mental suffering. Concerning the same texts, I reviewed step by step all

the passages in Augustine (Confessiones, IX; Civitas Dei, XXI; De fide et operibus; Enchiridion, 110 etc.) that Jacques Le Goff (Le Goff 1955, I, 119-151) invokes to prove the influence of the Bishop of Hippo in outlining the idea of the Purgatory – present as a function or space in some of the visions mentioned.

I can only wish – to both myself and the initiator of this collection – to have the pleasure of reading its last volume as soon as possible.

Notes

¹ For example, Adămuț 2001; Adămuț 2009.

² The thesis was later included among the canons of the Third Council of Toledo (589), at the end of the second book in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great or discussed within the Palatine School of Charles the Great.

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