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Augustine's Trinitarian Theology in Dante's *Paradiso* 33

WHERE DOES ST. AUGUSTINE APPEAR in Dante's *Commedia*? As a literary character, the historical figure of the bishop of Hippo does *not* appear. We might expect Dante to place Augustine in *Paradiso* X, in the fourth sphere, the sphere of the Sun, along with the other theologians—Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Boethius, Dionysius the Areopagite, Isidore of Seville, Bede, and Richard of St. Victor, to name a few leading lights who have a place there. But Augustine does not appear there (or elsewhere). We have to wait until the penultimate canto—*Paradiso* 32—to discover his name—and *only* his name—(almost inadvertently) dropped among unnamed others (*e altri*).¹ The virtual absence of Augustine in Dante's *Commedia* is baffling, but also beguiling. After all, no one—save the apostle Paul—does as much as Augustine to cement Christian theology. The Doctor of Grace towers above the patristic era. Augustine's authority is of a singular character (recall that Aquinas simply refers to him as *The Theologian*). Why, then, this striking omission by the mystic Florentine poet?² In the *Commedia* Augustine does not speak, he is not spoken *to*; in fact, he is not spoken *about*.

We know Dante was very much familiar with Augustine and his writings.³ The first commentators on the *Commedia* make reference to the African bishop countless times.⁴ Also, strangely, this question—where is Augustine?—is not one that contemporary Dante scholars frequently entertain.⁵ No less of an authority than Robert Hollander remarks, “Dante’s treatment of Augustine remains a relatively infrequent object of the attention of *dantisti*, even if it is one of the most tantalizing aspects of his poem.”⁶

Tantalizing or not, I do not intend to speculate here on the question of *why* Dante seems to exclude the character of Augustine from the narrative of his poem. Rather, I want to consider in detail where Augustine—or at least his theology—*does* loom large. The concluding thirty lines of the poem are, I argue, decidedly Augustinian. At the climax of Dante’s great epic—Canto 33 of the *Paradiso*—the poet relates his mystical vision of the Holy Trinity in unmistakably Augustinian terms. Surprisingly, this theological dependence on Augustine has been virtually ignored.⁷ Further, Dante’s expression of the human person finding his place in that divine triad depends profoundly on Augustine’s theology of the *imago dei*. In both cases, I maintain, the direct *vorlage* is Augustine’s *De Trinitate*.

At the close of the poem, Dante audaciously claims to enjoy the beatific vision and to have beheld “that Light” (*quella luce*):⁸

*Così la mente mia, tutta sospesa
mirava fissa, immobile e attenta,
e sempre di mirar faceasi accesa.*

*A quella luce cotal si diventa,
che volgersi da lei per altro aspetto
è impossibil che mai si consenta.*

(*Par.* 33.97–102)

Thus all my mind, absorbed,
was gazing, fixed, unmoved and intent,
becoming more enraptured in its gazing.

He who beholds that Light is so enthralled
that he would never willingly consent
to turn away from it for any other sight.

As we come to the last lines of the Canto, Dante—at last—tells us *what* he saw, that is to say, the nature of the light beheld. He has seen God three in one and one in three. The poem concludes with two profound theological mysteries Dante professes to have seen, two mysteries that are interwoven. First, the mutual indwelling of the divine persons of the Holy Trinity. Second, the manner in which the human person images God. Dante articulates both of these mysteries in decidedly Augustinian terms.

I. Augustinian perichoresis in Dante's vision

*Ne la profonda e chiara sussistenza
de l'alto lume parvermi tre giri
di tre colori e d'una contenenza;*

*e l'un da l'altro come iri da iri
parea riflesso, e 'l terzo pareo foco
che quinci e quindi igualmente si spiri.*

(*Par.* 33.115–120)

In the deep, transparent essence of that lofty Light
there appeared to me three circles
having three colors but the same extent,

and each one seemed reflected by the other
as rainbow is by rainbow, while the third seemed fire,
equally breathed forth by one and by the other.

Why are the three persons of the Blessed Trinity described as “three circles” (*tre giri*)? A circle neither begins nor ends, suggesting timelessness and eternity; it represents wholeness, completion,

perfection.⁹ But these three circles, although equal (*d'una contenza*), are not uniform.¹⁰ They are distinguished by "having three colors."¹¹ The diverse persons are all equally God and are one substance. They are distinguished only by way of origin, that is to say, the Father is Father *of the Son* and the Son is Son *of the Father*. Here Dante tracks basic Nicene theology codified in book five of Augustine's *De Trinitate*. When Dante describes one of the circles "reflected by the other" he invokes New Testament descriptions of the mode of the Son's procession as the image, representation, and very expression of the Father's essence (Cf. Col 1:15; Heb 1:3).¹²

Dante also articulates the Holy Spirit's mode of procession as "fire, equally breathed forth by one and by the other." The original creed at Nicaea did not contain the *filioque* now recited in Western Christianity ("who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*"). Augustine, however, makes the *filioque* central in his analysis of trinitarian processions.¹³ In sum, Dante's poetic expression of the distinct modes of procession proper to Son and Spirit is faithful to Augustine for whom the Son is eternally begotten (*natus*) while the Spirit is eternally given (*datus*).¹⁴

However, one might object that this is not unique to Augustine. Is this not standard fare for Western trinitarian theology? Could we not find the same truth stated in Boethius, Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, or the Victorines? In fact, is it not the case that the more immediate source of Dante's trinitarian theology is not Augustine, but the *reception* of Augustine in either its Dominican iteration (preeminently Thomas Aquinas) or its Franciscan iteration (preeminently Bonaventure)? In other words, we are straining to hear notes in Dante's trinitarian theology that are *distinctly* Augustine, and not "the atmospheric Augustinianism that one might find in almost any medieval work."¹⁵

One element in Dante's concluding lines leads me to think that it is Augustine *in particular* who stands as the source of the Florentine poet's trinitarian theology. It is the way in which Augustine insists—throughout his career—that knowledge of God and the soul are

correlative. One cannot begin to contemplate the mystery of the Holy Trinity without also considering the triadic mystery of the human person. Among Augustine's very first works is the dialogue *Soliloquies*. It begins with Augustine's prayer, *noverim me, noverim te*—may I know myself and may I know you.¹⁶ Knowledge of self coinheres with knowledge of God. The higher up is the deeper in: one ascends to God by greater interiority. For Augustine, our own being, knowing, and willing serve not only as a model, or a fertile analogical site, for launching our thinking about God, but by reflecting on the trinitarian mystery of God we also “return” to understand more truthfully our own being, knowing, and willing. These two mysteries—the holy Trinity and the human soul—are necessarily correlative. We cannot begin to understand ourselves without thinking about God, nor can we begin to contemplate God without considering ourselves. This, in fact, is Augustine's central thesis in *De Trinitate*.¹⁷

In Book 9 of *De Trinitate*, Augustine reminds his readers that the search for the Holy Trinity necessitates turning within. The human mind loves and knows. There you have three, notes Augustine: a mind, its love, and its knowledge. What makes this triadic analogy so fecund for our contemplation of God? When we turn within to consider our mind, its love, and its knowledge, we discover something wholly spiritual and noncorporeal. Further, these three are distinct, but inseparable. We can enumerate three realities, but they coinhere and are reciprocally constituted. Augustine drives home the point: one cannot have mind without its knowledge and love. Nor can one have knowledge without love and mind. Nor can one have love without mind and knowledge. Although these three can be conceptually distinguished, they are not “parts” of a whole. Nor are the three “mixed” together. Although three—mind, knowledge, and love—they exist wholly in each other while also whole in themselves.

Now the object of our love and knowledge is not always external—knowing and loving something or someone. I can also love and know myself. That is to say, the mind is also reflexive: there is self-knowing and self-loving. Augustine notes, “When the mind however

knows its whole self, that is knows itself completely, its knowledge pervades the whole of it; and when it loves itself completely it loves its whole self and its love pervades the whole of it.”¹⁸ Here the mind (*mens*), its self-love (*amor sui*), and self-knowledge (*notitia sui*) are wholly in each other. But they are not “parts” of one another nor are they “confused” like three ingredients mixed together in a drink. Rather, “they are each one in itself and each whole in their total, whether each in the other two or the other two in each, in any case all in all.”¹⁹ The mutual indwelling of mind, self-love, and self-knowledge, each wholly in the other, provides Augustine with a profound image in the created order for contemplating the mutual indwelling of the Holy Trinity—of God’s uncreated existence as “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). The technical theological term for this mutual indwelling of the divine persons is *perichoresis*, and, at least for Augustine, *perichoresis* is dimly perceived in the “disparate image” (*impari imagine*) of the human mind, its self-love, and self-knowledge.²⁰ As the mind (*mens*), its self-love (*amor sui*), and self-knowledge (*notitia sui*) are wholly in each other in a way that is neither partitive nor confused, so too (analogously?), the divine persons are “all in all,” mutually indwelling one another such that “each pair is in the other single.”²¹

Dante distills this entire Augustinian perichoretic theology in an elliptical, lyrical tercet:

*O luce eterna che sola in te sidi,
sola t'intendi, e da te intelletta
e intendente te ami e arridi!*

(*Par.* 33.124–126)

O eternal Light, abiding in yourself alone,
knowing yourself alone, and, known to yourself
and knowing, loving and smiling on yourself!

At the climax of Dante’s vision, we are invited to behold the communion of the divine persons. We see self-subsistent Life; the eternal God resting in his own perfect happiness. At the same time, we

witness what Catholic theology terms “the inner fecundity of the Divine Life,’ the productions of that Life within itself.”²² That is to say, the mode of procession proper to intellect (Word/the Son) and will (Love/the Holy Spirit). Dante articulates the procession of intellect with the words “*da te intelletta e intendente te*” (“known to yourself and knowing”), echoing Christ’s teaching regarding the mutual knowledge he and the Father share of one another. (“No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son” (Matthew 11:27); “As the Father knows me and I know the Father” (John 10:15)). The procession of will is described with the words “*ami e arridi*” (“loving and smiling”). John Carroll’s commentary remains superlative: “It is in the mutual knowledge of Father and Son that the Spirit ‘loves and smiles,’—the smile representing the happiness with which this activity of the Divine Life within itself is for ever filled.”²³

Dante takes as his own Augustine’s central insight, namely, that contemplating the mystery of God’s own inner life—*che sola in te sidi*—we can do no better than contemplate our own inner life, the mind’s self-love (*amor sui*) and self-knowledge (*notitia sui*). In this tercet, Dante *linguistically* reenacts Augustine’s trinitarian theology of the mutual coinherence of the divine Persons: language falls in on itself. In the words of Charles Singleton, “This remarkable tercet, turning—indeed, *circling*—upon itself, expresses in its very movement the self-containedness of the Trinity, One and Three.”²⁴ Perichoresis is a compound of two Greek words, *peri*, meaning “around” (hence, for example, the word “perimeter”) and *chorein*, meaning “stepping to give way” or “to come or go, making room.” *Chorein* suggests movement that makes space. And so, the word perichoresis has a dynamic, moving sense of “going around” and inclusive “encompassing.”²⁵ The dynamic, pulsating, energy of trinitarian life is a (simple and immutable) movement in which each divine person wholly encircles the other and pours his delight, adoration, exultation, and very self into the other two persons who each receive and return delight, adoration, exultation, and life. Our word *choreography*, related to dancing

or “flowing around,” is suggestive of the perichoretic energy of trinitarian self-gift.²⁶ Dante’s tercet syntactically expresses the reflexive nature of the mind’s self-love and self-knowledge that Augustine considers to be a preeminent image of trinitarian life.

II. “How the image fits the circle”: A dynamic theology of the *imago dei*

As Dante (the pilgrim) continues to gaze at these three perichoretic colored circles, he sees the color of one “to be painted with our likeness” (*pinta de la nostra effige*) (*Par.* 33.131). This is the second and supreme mystery that concludes the *Commedia*. The poem ends with the pilgrim rapt in wonder:

*tal era io a quella vista nova:
veder voleva come si convenne
l'imago al cerchio e come vi s'indova;
(Par. 33.136–138)*

Such was I at that strange new sight.
I tried to see how the image fits the circle
and how it found its where in it.

Augustine’s entire theological career is consumed with fascination by the same mystery. What is the relation between the created *imago dei* and the uncreated *imago dei*? What is the relation between Christ, “the image of God, the first born of all creation” (Col 1:16) and the human person, of whom God said, “Let us make man in our image and likeness” (Gen 1:26)? I want to suggest that here, at the climax of the poem, we see Dante’s most explicit and consequential embrace of Augustine. In Christ the image of God we see how humanity, created in the image of God, fits within “that circling”; how we find our place—our “where”—in God.²⁷ Espying the second circle “painted with our likeness” we discover our beginning and our end. It is the

second circle that assumed a human nature, thereby manifesting the Creator's original vision for integral humanity, but also revealing its eschatological perfection. Dante gazes intently at this second circle trying to discern how humanity "fits" therein. On the one hand this seems impossible. How can the finite be united with the infinite, creation with the Creator, time with eternity? How could we possibly "fit" there? And yet, in the hypostatic union humanity is united to the Word of God, securing us a "place" now and forever in the Holy Trinity.

"In my beginning is my end," writes T. S. Eliot ("East Coker") and this is especially the case for Augustine's iteration of the human person as "image of God." Genesis reveals our "beginning," and at the same time discloses our destiny. To be created in the image of God is, for Augustine, not a static reality—fashioned and finished, so to speak. Rather, to be made in the "image of God" is suggestive of a dynamic, existential unfurling of potency *from* its divine source and *towards* its divine end. It is this "journey," if you will, that constitutes Augustine's account of the human person created in the image of God.²⁸

Dante shares with Augustine precisely this *dynamic* account of the *imago dei*. The "strange new sight" that Dante beholds is humanity's place in one of the circles—and if in one of the circles, necessarily in all three. The created image of God "fit the circle" and "found its where in it" inasmuch as its origin and end is in the depths of trinitarian love. To be an "image" is to come forth as reflective, derived, indeed, *imitative* of that more primordial source. No one would look in a mirror, remarks Augustine, and say the images causes the person. Rather, the reverse is true; the movement of causality is monodirectional. Also, this is a cause that needs be ever present. The moment the source of the image steps away from the mirror, the image vanishes. To be created in "image of God" is to receive at each and every moment a participation in God's own trinitarian life of love. God does not create the human person as Michelangelo sculpts David—something beautiful but unrelated to himself—something

from which he walks away from when his work is done. Rather, as Augustine never tires of explaining, God's creative action is twofold: he creates all things at once, simultaneously (in an *ictus*), but he is also continually creating creatures; at each and every moment imbuing creation with his own life (*creatio continua*).

Augustine recognizes this dynamic character of the image of God inscribed in the Latin preposition *ad* used in the Latin text of Genesis: *ad imaginem dei*. To be made *ad imaginem* entails a driving force ordered *towards* an end. Only at the end of life's pilgrimage, when we are led by the holy angels into the presence of God, will the image be wholly restored.²⁹ The dynamic character of the imago, impressed at the moment of its inception, initiates an itinerary only complete in the new heaven and new earth.

The ongoing creation (*creatio continua*) of the imago dei—its dynamic propensity—is the process of its *re-creation* towards its trinitarian exemplar. By sin the human image is “deformed and discolored” (*deformis et decolor*), but by the mercy and power of God it is “reformed and renovated” (*reformatur atque renouatur*).³⁰ Augustine fills in what it means for the imago to be reformed by drawing on the apostle Paul's antithesis of the “old” and “new” man:

To this kind of approximation we are exhorted when it says, *Be refashioned in the newness of your mind* (Rom 12:2), and elsewhere he says, *Be therefore imitators of God as most dear sons* (Eph 5:1), for it is with reference to the new man that it says, *Who is being renewed for the recognition of God according to the image of him who created him* (Col 3:10).³¹

The convalesce of the created image of God is a postbaptismal, life-long process of being “conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29).³² And so, for Augustine, the imago dei is certainly a metaphysical and ontological datum—a given of our created nature—but it is also a moral imperative—an aspirational injunction. An image implies a primordial exemplar, the perfect uncreated image, which,

in Dante's arresting image, is the second circle *after which* we are fashioned and towards which our whole being strains.

Although Dante mysteriously scratches the great bishop of Hippo from the canvas of his epic, our saint appears, subtly and profoundly, in the exalted mystical pitch of the last thirty lines. Dante gives poetic expression to Augustine's two central theological insights articulated in *De Trinitate*. First, that contemplating the perichoretic unity of the Holy Trinity requires contemplating at the same time the triadic circling of our own mind, self-love and self-knowledge. And, second, that the *imago dei* is a transforming journey of being "conformed to the image" of Christ; this dynamic remains in a real sense an eschatological hope. In Dante's vision—in the beatific vision—we will, please God, share the poet's "strange new sight" and "see how the image fits the circle / and how it found its where in it" (138–139).

Notes

I'm grateful to Deana Basile Kelly for the invitation to contribute to a panel she organized on Dante's theology for the Honors Program at Ave Maria University. The ideas developed in this paper first germinated in that fertile conversation. Dr. Basile Kelly first alerted me to the profound theological import of Augustine on Dante's anthropology and encouraged me to explore this theme in the ultimate canto of the *Commedia*.

1. I have used the translation by Robert and Jean Hollander: Dante, *Paradiso* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007). Of this sole reference Peter Hawkins comments, "The saint who by anyone's estimation should merit at least a canto's discourse in the *Paradiso* becomes instead a beatific face in the crowd, a name barely mentioned." Peter Hawkins, "Divide and Conquer: Augustine in the Divine Comedy," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 106 (1991): 472. It seems Augustine is also referenced in *Paradiso* (hereafter "*Par.*") 10.120: "*quello avvocato de' tempi cristiani / del cui latino Augustin si provide*" ("that advocate of the Christian times, of whose account Augustine made use"). This is likely referring to Orosius's *Historiarum adversum paganos*, commissioned at Augustine's behest.
2. Some suggest that Augustine's absence can be explained by Dante's preference for the Thomistic-Aristotelian theological synthesis as distinct from the Platonic-Christian mystical tradition. Cf. Carlo Calcaterra, "Sant'Agostino nelle opere di Dante e del Petrarca," *Rivista di filosofia neo-scholastica* 23 (1931): 422–99. However, this

- explanation fails to account for the fact that throughout the poem, Dante draws in profound ways from both theological wellsprings, allowing representatives from each “tradition” to give voice to their particular spiritual worldview. A more compelling explanation for the exclusion of Augustine is Dante’s positive appraisal of Rome, her *imperium*, and her poet, Virgil. In this regard, the *Commedia* is a theo-political riposte to Augustine’s *City of God*. Peter Hawkins argues, “Augustine negated pagan Rome, discredited Vergil, and refused the idea of temporal beatitude as a legitimate human ‘end.’ It was against his authoritative naysaying that Dante had to contravene in his own bid to underwrite not only a renewed Roman empire but a vision of redeemed political life of earth.” Hawkins, “Divide and Conquer,” 472. For a similar claim see Robert Hollander, “Dante’s Reluctant Allegiance to St. Augustine in the *Commedia*,” *L’Alighieri* 32 (2008): 5–16; Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 147–91; Jeffrey Schnapp, *The Transfiguration of History at the Center of Dante’s Paradise* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).
3. In *Monarchia*, Dante maintains that the writings of Augustine seem to share with Scripture a source of divine inspiration: “Sunt etiam Scripture doctotum, Augustini et aliorum, quos a Spiritu Sancto adiutos” (3.3). Augustine is also mentioned in *Convivio* 4.4.
 4. Hollander considers at length the place of Augustine in Dante’s commentators—both early and modern—and concludes, “The number of citations of Augustine in Dante’s first commentators dwarfs that of similar important major figures in the early history of the church. . . . It seems that the early commentators thought either that Dante knew Augustine well or, if he did not, that his ideas and ways of expressing them were similar to Augustine’s.” Hollander, “Dante’s Reluctant Allegiance,” 5–6. Dante’s son and one of his first commentators, Pietro di Dante, mentions Augustine 342 times in the three versions of his commentary. Cf. G. Fallani, *Dante e S. Augustino*, in *L’esperienza teologica di Dante* (Lecce, Miella, 1976), 193; Hawkins, “Divide and Conquer,” 480n3; Hollander, “Dante’s Reluctant Allegiance,” 5.
 5. There are some significant twentieth-century exceptions, which seem to break into three areas of interest. First, those who consider the manner in which the architectonic structures of the *Commedia* map onto those of the *Confessions*. See John Freccero, *The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986). Second, those who compare how the three types of vision outlined in Augustine’s *De Genesi ad litteram* 12 serve as a structuring feature of the *Commedia*. See Marguerite Mills Chiarenza, “The Imageless Vision and Dante’s *Paradiso*,” *Dante Studies* 90 (1972): 77–92; John Freccero, *The Poetics of Conversion*; Francis X. Newman, “St. Augustine’s Three Visions and the Structure of the *Commedia*,” *Modern Language Notes* 82 (1967): 56–78. Finally, those interested in how Dante rewrites Augustine’s theology of history so as to recast ancient Rome and the poet Virgil in a more theologically favorable light. See Hawkins, “Divide and Conquer,”; idem., “Polemical Counterpoint in *De civitate Dei*,” *Augustinian Studies* 6 (1975): 97–106; Ronald Martinez, *Dante, Statius, and*

the Earthly City (PhD diss. University of California, 1977); Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert*, 147–191; Jeffrey Schnapp, *The Transfiguration of History*.

6. Hollander, "Dante's Reluctant Allegiance," 9.
7. In a penetrating study of the place of dialogue in Dante's theological anthropology, Deana Basile Kelly points to Augustine as a key source for *Paradiso* 33, recognizing the critical lacuna: "Dante's unique poetic use of the Augustinian approach to the Trinity, especially in this final canto, has not yet been adequately recognized by scholars." Basile Kelly, "Rejection of Dialogue with the Father: Vanni Fucci as Infernal Adam," in *A Garland of Gifts: Essays in Honor of Olga Zorzi Pugliese*, Vol. I, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler and Pasquale Sabbatino (Welland, ON: Soleil Publishing, 2021): 47–68 at 46n10. Basile Kelly notes that in *Par.* 33 it is Augustine's relational theology of image that serves as the positive counterpoint to Vanni Fucci's rejection of divine dialogue in *Inferno* 24 and 25. Beyond this, to my knowledge, no modern commentator has offered a detailed study of the central place Augustine plays in Dante's concluding trinitarian vision.
8. Dante boldly asserts what Scripture states to be impossible: to see God in this life. God tells Moses emphatically, "No man shall see Me, and live" (*Ex* 33:20). The apostle Paul teaches that God "dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see" (1 *Tim* 6:16) and that "eye has not seen . . . what God has prepared" (1 *Cor* 2:9). Interestingly, however, both Moses and Paul *did* see God. Moses spoke to God face to face as to a friend (*Ex* 33:11) and the Apostle was "caught up to the third heaven" where he "heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 *Cor* 12:2–4). A maelstrom of medieval theological commentary sought to make sense of these remarkable exceptions—men who saw God and lived. Undaunted, Dante places himself in a category with Moses and the apostle Paul, such that one commentator remarks, "No Christian except for St. Paul has seen so much—or such is the unspoken claim the poet makes us share." Dante, *Paradiso*, trans. Robert Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), 924.
9. Dante inherits a rich theological tradition of speaking of the Trinity in terms of a "circle." One of the most compelling examples is Nicholas of Cusa. See David Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies: Nicholas of Cusa and the Legacy of Thierry of Chartres* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), esp. 243–252. For a broader discussion see Georges Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, trans. C. Dawson and E. Coleman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966). Most translators render the *tre giri* "three circles"; however, in a detailed study of these lines (*Par.* 33.115–120), Arielle Saiber and Aba Mbirika point out that *giro* occupies a broader semantic range than the English "circle"; *giro* can describe a disc, sphere, ball, cylinder, spiral or other round thing. Regardless, the conclusion of the *Commedia* "is a monument to the use of geometric imagery to describe the ineffable." Arielle Saiber and Aba Mbirika, "The Three 'Giri' of *Paradiso* 33," *Dante Studies* 131 (2013): 242. The authors also raise the fascinating question of whether the *tre giri* that the Pilgrim spies are spinning or still: "In their very shapes, circles and spheres evoke both eternal stillness and eternal

- motion. On the one hand, they are free from a beginning and an end; on the other, they are in themselves both beginning and end, like the *giro* of Christ, the alpha and omega" (Saiber and Mbirika, "The Three 'Giri,'" 247–248).
10. Similar questions surround the meaning of *contenenza*. Many translators take it to entail spatial dimension ("extent"), such that the *tre giri* are "of the same size." Given its trinitarian reference, however, it is perhaps better to render *d'una contenenza* "of the same substance / essence." Cf. Saiber and Mbirika, "The Three 'Giri,'" 248–249.
 11. In addition to questions about what *contenenza* means in reference to the *tre giri*, there is also ambiguity about how to render "*di tre colori*." Does Dante intend three distinct colors? If so, it would lend credence to the claim that Dante explicitly adopts the trinitarian illustration of the Franciscan abbot, Joachim of Fiore. Marjorie Reeves and Beatrice Hirsch-Reich maintain that Joachim of Fiore is the source for Dante's reference to three distinctly colored circles. See *The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore* (Oxford: Clarendon: 1972), 323–324. See also Beatrice Hirsch Reich, "Die Quelle der Trinitätskreise von Joachim von Fiore und Dante," *Sophia* 22 (1954): 170–178; Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Poet and his World* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1984), 98–104; Robert Wilson, *Prophecies and Prophecy in Dante's Commedia* (Florence: Biblioteca Dell'archivum Romanicum 2008), 213–214. In the *Liber figurarum*, Joachim depicted three rings interlocking on a horizontal plane; the first ring (the Father) is green, the second ring (the Son) is blue, and the third ring (the Holy Spirit) is red. Of course, Dante does not mention three distinct colors and he is well aware that the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) condemned Joachim for undermining the unity of the divine substance with such illustrations. (On the other hand, Dante includes the condemned abbot among the beatified theologians in the sphere of the Sun in *Par.* 12.140–141.) Cf. Steno Vazzana, "*Parvemi tre giri* (*Par.* 33, 116)," *L'Alighieri* 24 (1983): 53–61. On this score Saiber and Mbirika note, "It appears that Dante wanted to avoid attributing a single color to each *giro*, perhaps in order to avert the criticism that Joachim of Fiore received by giving the three persons three separate colors in his illustration of the Trinity." Saiber and Mbirika, "The Three 'Giri,'" 250. In any case, the *tre colori* are linked in the next line to double rainbow. Pietro di Dante suggests that the rainbow connects the poet's vision with the vision in the Apocalypse of God's throne in heaven: "And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald" (Rev 4: 2–3).
 12. Other trinitarian references in the *Paradiso* include *Par.* 10.1–6; *Par.* 13.25–27, 52–57, 79–87; *Par.* 14.28–29; *Par.* 15.47; *Par.* 24.139–144; *Par.* 31.28.
 13. Augustine, *De Trinitate* (hereafter "*De Trin.*"). 5.13.14–4.14.15; 6.5.7; 15.26.47. Commenting on the poet's description of divine processions, Pietro di Dante also makes the connection here to Augustine's *De Trinitate*.
 14. *De Trin.* 5.13.14–4.14.15. The dual procession of the Holy Spirit is important to

Dante's trinitarian theology. Upon entering the Sphere of the Sun in *Paradiso* 10, Dante invites the reader to join him in raising his eyes to behold triune unity: "Gazing on His Son with the Love / the One and the Other eternally breath forth" (*Par.* 10.1–2). In *Par.* 13.57 the Holy Spirit is described as "the Love that is intrined with them." "Intrined" captures Dante's neologism *intrearsi* ("to inthree oneself"). Cf. Hollander, *Paradiso*, 357.

15. Hawkins, "Divide and Conquer," 472.
16. *Soliloquies*. 2.1.1.
17. Cf. Lewis Ayres, "The Discipline of Self-knowledge in Augustine's *De trinitate* Book X," In *The Passionate Intellect*, ed. Lewis Ayres (London: Rutgers Press 1995), 261–296; Rowan Williams, "The Paradoxes of Self-Knowledge in Augustine's Trinitarian Thought" in *On Augustine* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum 2016), 155–170.
18. *De Trin.* 9.7. I have used the translation by Edmund Hill, *The Trinity* (New York: New City Press, 1991).
19. *De Trin.* 9.8.
20. *Perichoresis* is a theological term of art describing the "necessary being-in-one-another or circumincession of the three divine Persons of the Trinity because of the single divine essence, the eternal procession of the Son from the Father and of the Spirit from the Father and (through) the Son, and the fact that the three Persons are distinguished solely by the relations of opposition between them." "Perichoresis," in *Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 377. The term likely derives from the Stoic notion of mixture, *krasis di'holon*, whereby two or more substances wholly interpenetrate one another while preserving their distinct properties. Cf. August Deneffe, "Perichoresis, circumincesso, circuminssio. Eine terminologische Untersuchung," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 47 (1923): 497–532. The first Christian theological use of *perichoresis* is not trinitarian, but Christological. Gregory Nazianzen uses the term to describe what will be codified at Chalcedon (451) as the *communicatio idiomata*. He writes, "Just as the natures are mixed (*kirnamenon*), so also the names pass reciprocally (*perichorouson*) into each other by the principle of this coalescence (*sumphuias*)" (*ep.* 101 [PG 37.181C]). In the seventh century, Pseudo-Cyril uses the term *perichoresis* in reference to trinitarian relations. The three hypostases share a common essence differing only according to their mode of origin. Further, while being undivided and unconfused, they "possess coinherence in each other" (*ten en allelais perichoresin echousai*) (*De Trin.* 10 [PG 77.1144B]). John of Damascus seems to have been familiar with Pseudo-Cyril's use of the term. In the *De fide orthodoxa*, Damascene maintains that the three Persons of the Holy Trinity "are made one not so as to commingle, but so as to cleave to each other, and they have their being in each other (*kai ten en allelais perichoresin*) without any coalescence or commingling" (*De fide orthodoxa* 1.8 [PG 94.829A]). The application of *perichoresis* shifts in its technical theological usage from serving to articulate a Christology of two natures to articulating trinitarian relations. What is retained, however, is the initial (Stoic) sense of term as preserving distinct and

- diverse characteristics within a common unity. Cf. John Egan, "Toward Trinitarian Perichoresis: Saint Gregory the Theologian, Oration 31.14," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39 (1994): 83–93; Daniel Stramara, "Gregory of Nyssa's terminology for trinitarian perichoresis," *Vigiliae Christianae* 52 (1998): 257–263; Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity," *New Blackfriars* 81 (2000): 432–445; Randall Otto, "The Use and Abuse of Perichoresis in Recent Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001): 366–384.
21. *De Trin.* 9.8. Cf. *De Trin.* 10.11.18: "These three then, memory, understanding, and will, are not three lives but one life, not three minds but one mind. . . . Therefore since they are each and all and wholly contained by each, they are each and all equal to each and all, and each and all equal to all of them together, and these three are one, one life, one mind, one being." In the words of Etienne Gilson, "The consubstantiality, at least the relative consubstantiality, of the elements constituting these created trinities [in the soul] enables us to obtain some idea of the real consubstantiality of the three Persons in the Trinity." Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* (New York: Random House, 1960), 219. Gilson continues, "The distinctive feature of this first image is that it unfolds entirely within the substance of the *mens* before it appears in acts. The thing which guarantees the substantial unity of the *mens* with its love and knowledge is also the basis for the substantiality of its knowledge and love. If self-love and self-knowledge were in the mind as accidents in a subject, the mind could only know or love itself, but the fact is that it can love and know anything else. Therefore it is not a mind which has a knowledge or love itself; it is a mind which is love and knowledge *substantially* and therefore naturally capable of knowing and loving itself pending the time when it will love and know everything else. And vice versa, the love and knowledge the mind has of itself are substances in virtue of their being its substance. There substantiality is born of their consubstantiality, and this is the reason why these three terms constitute a trinity." *Ibid.*, 220–221.
 22. John Carroll, *Exiles of Eternity (Inf.); Prisoners of Hope (Purg.); In Patria (Par.)* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904–1911). Basile Kelly articulates how Augustinian interiority underwrites Par. 33 and that to achieve the vision of the Trinity, the pilgrim must first perceive the trinity within. She writes, "The light of the Triune God activates a seemingly reciprocal transformation. The Trinity itself is of course perfect, never changing, and so we must understand that the pilgrim himself must experience participation and inner transformation in order to perceive it. According to Augustine, man comes to know God through his own mind, through the impression of the Trinity that exists in the mind. Similarly, the pilgrim perceives the Triune God by experiencing an interior change and recognition, mirroring the visual transformation of the Trinity within his mind." Basile Kelly, "Vanni Fucci as Infernal Adam," 45–46.
 23. John Carroll, *In Patria*.
 24. Charles Singleton, *The Divine Comedy, Translated, with a Commentary* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970–1975).

25. Cf. περιχωρέω in *Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon* (1940) and Slobodan Stamatović, "Perichoresis," *Open Theology* 2 (2016): 303–323.
26. Perichoresis and choreography are, in fact, false cognates that are frequently confused. Although they appear etymologically related (and a "divine dance" seems a wonderful expression of trinitarian perichoresis), χορεύω is the Greek verb "to dance" while χωρέω is another verb altogether expressing backward and forward movement. Χωρέω entails "to go back;" or "withdraw" and "go forward" or "proceed." Cf. Slobodan Stamatović, "Perichoresis," *Open Theology* 2 (2016): 303–323.
27. Translating *indova* as "where" is an excellent choice. Dante coins the verb "indova" from the adverb *dove*.
28. In a similar vein, John Took argues that a fundamental existential convergence is discerned in Dante and Augustine: "Dante's theology, like Augustine's, is the theology of becoming. It focuses, not simply, nor ever primarily, on the nature of God in himself (the whole enterprise thus resolving itself in an act of understanding), but on the notion of oneness with God as existential possibility. . . . It entails, over and above the act of understanding, the act of commitment, the risk and irrationality of choice; hence, in Dante, the purposefulness of the whole undertaking. There is no time to be lost. There can be no dallying over past distractions, no waylaying of the spirit by pleasures apt to detain and to divert it. All instead is dedication, Dante's concept of human experience flowing characteristically into the categories of struggle and of arduous ascent. John Took, "Dante and the 'Confessions' of Augustine," *Annali d'Italianistica* 8 (1990): 378.
29. *De Trin.* 14.17.23: "For only when it comes to the perfect vision of God will this image bear God's perfect likeness."
30. *De Trin.* 14.16.22.
31. *De Trin.* 7.6.12. Augustine readily avails himself of these Pauline texts in his account of the restoration of the image. Cf. *De Trin.* 12.7.12; *De Trin.* 14.18.24. See Marie-Anne Vannier, "*Creatio*," "*Conversio*," "*Formatio*" chez *S. Augustin* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg, 1991).
32. *De Trin.* 14.17.23.

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