

# Augustine on the Eucharist

Agustín en la Eucaristía

Agostino nell'Eucaristia

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## Artículo de Investigación

### ABSTRACT:

This article examines the discussion of the popular theory of the so-called disciplina arcani (the discipline of the secret). Then, on the meaning of the Eucharist for the life of the believers, we analyze the three terms (piety, pietas, unity, unitas, charity, caritas) that use Augustine, which express three different aspects of the sacrament of the Eucharist and they complete each other in his thought.

### Keywords:

Augustine, disciplina arcani (secrecy), Eucharist (Augustine), illumination.

### RESUMEN:

Este artículo examina la discusión de la teoría popular de la llamada disciplina arcani (la disciplina del secreto) así como el análisis de los tres términos que usa Agustín (piedad, pietas, unidad, unitas, caridad, caritas) los cuales expresan tres aspectos diferentes del sacramento de la Eucaristía y se complementan el uno al otro en su pensamiento de acuerdo al significado de la Eucaristía para la vida de los creyentes.

### Palabras

**clave:** Agustín, disciplina arcani (secreto), Eucaristía (Agustín), iluminación.

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## RIASSUNTO:

Questo articolo esamina la discussione della teoria popolare della chiamata disciplina arcani (la disciplina del segreto) così come l'analisi dei tre termini, che usa Sant'Agostino (pietà, pietas, unità, unitas, carità, caritas), questi esprimono tre aspetti diversi del sacramento dell'Eucaristia e si completano a vicenda nel loro pensiero, d'accordo al significato dell'Eucaristia per la vita dei credenti.

## Parole chiavi:

Agostino, disciplina arcani (segreto), Eucaristia (Agostino) e illuminazione.

## AUGUSTINE AND THE *DISCIPLINA ARCANI*

Can we speak of the Eucharist in the Fathers of the Church of the fourth century in general —and on this occasion in my particular case—in Augustine? The question is not rhetorical but concrete. According to the general theory of the so-called *disciplina arcani* (the discipline of the secret), it should not be possible, for if the Fathers were reticent regarding the Eucharist in their preaching, how can we reconstruct the liturgical ritual and their teaching on the Eucharist? It seems curious that some scholars completely ignore the problem (Di Nola, 1997). Others make mention of the *disciplina arcani* (Grossi, 2005), and then they explain the Eucharist thought of Augustine; beyond that, they present ample collections of texts as well. Normally, those who speak of the *disciplina arcani* do not confront the problem of how it could be possible to know the Eucharistic doctrine of the Fathers (and about baptism, too); they, however, who write about the *disciplina arcani*, omit to mention that the patristic teaching is well known<sup>1</sup>.

Recently some very academic studies by Michel-Yves Perrin (2008, 2009, 2010) have revisited the history of this theory starting from Francesco Bernardi Ferrari (c. 1577-1669), who treated the subject in *Veterum Patrum prudentia in concionando*. The expression *disciplina arcani* goes back to the Calvinist French Huguenot Jean Daillé (1594-1670); the syntagma enjoyed success<sup>2</sup>. It presupposes an absolute obligation of silence and secrecy, as occurred in the ancient mystery religions, about which we know next to nothing. Nevertheless, it is not apt for expressing the reality of ancient Christianity — something much more complex and involving the community — and therefore public. In the past, the theory of the *disciplina arcani* has given rise to many theological controversies between those of different Christian confessions.

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<sup>1</sup> A brief reference in Fitzgerald (2006, pp. 268ss).

<sup>2</sup> I owe much to Perrin (2008, 2009).

Recently, a scholar researching the Augustinianum gave considerable attention to the subject of the *disciplina arcani* in Ambrose of Milan (Vopřada, 2016, pp. 106-146). Still today the expression is much used and studied, though no longer with the polemical intentions of the past. In Christian circles, the *disciplina arcani* indicates the reserve and reticence which bishops and catechists had in divulging the Christian mysteries to the non-baptized, in particular, the rituals of Baptism and the Eucharist and their contents. Augustine writes:

What is that thing hidden and which is not public in the Church? It is the sacrament of Baptism, it is the sacrament of the Eucharist. Truly, the good works which we carry out are evident even to the pagans, while the sacraments remain hidden from them: but it is precisely from those things which they do not see whence arise those things they do see, thus as if from depth of the cross — plunged into the earth — arises everything else from the cross that appears and is noticed. (*Enar. in Ps. 103, sermo 1,14*)

The bishops sometimes made references — at times vague — in their speech to the Christian celebrations reserved for the *fideles*, in particular of the eucharistic prayers, of the accompanying ritual and of the meaning of the Eucharist. The information, which is available, is fragmentary and not developed in an organic manner. They also encourage not speaking of the ‘mysteries’ with strangers. Accepting such a position today would lead us to avoid television transmissions of the Mass and to ameliorate our tourist-filled churches, where people who know nothing of what is said and happens on the altar proceed even to receive communion.

The praxis of the *disciplina arcani* developed from the end of the second century, but especially during the fourth century, when the Christian communities grew at a rapid rate; churches were open to the public and not only the faithful, but also catechumens, pagans, and Jews present for preaching. For this reason, the catechumenate came to be better structured to confront these new necessities. There is a testimony to this praxis both in the East and in the West, and they come from various geographical regions. Basil in Cappadocia

(Basil, *De Spir.* 27,66), John Chrysostom at Antioch (*Hom. in Mt 23*, 3), Cyril of Jerusalem (*Cathech.* 1, 1). The pilgrim Egeria gives us ample witness for Jerusalem. In the West, there are two important witnesses: Ambrose for Milan (*De myst.* 2, 5) and Augustine for Africa. Still, there are differences and local — and even temporal — emphases in the application of the praxis of privacy (Day, 2001). It is not a praxis prescribed by general or local councils. Now, if it was so widespread, why do the normative texts never speak of it? No text punishes or reprimands those who speak of it to others or explain the Eucharistic rite to strangers or catechumens. A norm without the appropriate penalty be it spiritual or temporal, is an inefficient norm that is not observed.

I will cite a passage from Egeria, written around 384, who writes:

[...] the bishop says: in these seven weeks, you have been instructed concerning the whole law contained in the Scriptures, and you have heard us speak of the faith and of the resurrection of the flesh [...] but of a more profound mystery —that of baptism— you cannot yet hear, since you are catechumens. Nevertheless, you must not think that something is done without a reason: in fact, when you are baptized in the name of God, during the Octave of Easter after the leave-taking from the Church, Anastasis, you will hear more about it. Because you are still catechumens, the most secret mysteries of God cannot be revealed to you. (46,6; cf. Cyril, *Catechesis* 18)

And he adds

In that period no catechumen enters the Anastasis; only the neophytes and faithful who wish to hear the mysteries can enter there. The doors are closed, so that no catechumen may approach. While the bishop explains the scriptural facts and thence discusses their meaning, the voices of consent are so great that they are heard even outside the Church; and truly the bishop brings to light all the mysteries so well that no one can be unmoved by hearing them explained in such a manner. (47,2)

Since these post-baptismal catecheses were preserved, we are then able to know what happened and what was said when the bishop preached (Roten, 2005). The teaching concerning the ‘mysteries’ was regarding the baptismal rites and the Eucharist. From the church of Jerusalem, the five mystagogical catecheses are preserved, given after the baptisms and attributed to John of Jerusalem; and those of John/Cyril of Jerusalem, who, for example, said that he wished to await his hearers Baptism before he revealed to them its profound meaning (*Cathech.* 1,11; 2,1).

Ambrose of Milan, in the West, frequently speaks of the *disciplina arcani*; he reserved his teaching on the mysteries to the baptized alone, therefore he admonishes them not to divulge what was revealed to them regarding the Eucharist (*De myst.* 1,2 e 9,55). In Ambrose, the term *arcanum* (secret) occurs 48 times, and it has different meanings, according to the context. Similar terms are also found, such as *occulta* (secret things) and *occultare* (to hide; to conceal) (Vopřada, 2016, p. 138, nota 256). This expresses a veiled mystery, not to be revealed to those who have not known of it. He writes:

(Satyrus), prior to his initiation in a perfect mystery (*perfectioribus esset initiatus*), having been involved in a shipwreck [...], not due to fear of death but lest he departs this life deprived of the mystery (*ne vacuus mysterii exiret e vita*), incessantly asked those, whom he knew to be initiated, for the sacrament of the faithful (*fideliū sacramentum poposcit*). He did not intend to gaze with curious eyes upon the mysteries (*non ut curiosos oculos insereret arcanis*), but to obtain help for his faith. (*De excessu fratris* 1,43)

The initiates participated in the mysteries for the first time at the Easter Vigil, and during the following week, they received instruction. Ambrose begins the *De mysteriis* with these words: “Now the time admonishes us to talk about the mysteries and the very nature of the sacraments” (*Nunc de mysteriis dicere tempus admonet atque ipsam ratione[m] sacramentorum*: *De myst.* 1, 1). Two works treat this catechesis: The *De mysteriis*, catechesis on the sacraments received — a work which does not present liturgical texts —; the *De sacramentis*

which is an oral catechesis, written with stenography and reserved to the faithful, but made known publicly. Now, if the *disciplina arcana* existed in a strict sense, how was it possible to circulate such a work, which spoke openly and at length of the Christian rites of Baptism and the Eucharist? One response — not convincing — is that it could have circulated only among the faithful or rather that it was just aimed at bishops. In fact, all were able to read the work.

The people, even the non-baptized, knew how a baptistery was made and of the baptismal rites. They knew how the altar was; they knew the gifts that were offered; they knew that the bishop and the faithful prayed and that the faithful consumed those gifts after the prayer. Beyond that in an ancient city, where there was no privacy, considering the sociological aspect, it was impossible that the catechumens and others would not have known the Christian rites. Who, so willed could be informed, even by reading the works and catechesis, which were in circulation.

The interpretative key for understanding the so-called *disciplina arcana*, it seems to me, is found in Ambrose himself, who in numerous passages insisted upon the mystery and on silence. To understand the mysteries, i.e., the sacraments, it was necessary to have an experience of them: from experience, one can trace the way to their explanation and understanding. But, to be able to have such an experience it was indispensable that they are rendered capable, qualified, as it were - ontologically, by a gift from God, which opens us to the experiential understanding. Ambrose calls such a gift *apertio* (*aperitio*), opening. He said: “So, what did we do Saturday? The “opening,” of course, which mysteries of the opening were celebrated when the priest touched your ears and nose. What does it signify? In the Gospel Our Lord Jesus Christ, when the deaf and dumb man was brought before him, he touched his ears and mouth; his ears because he was deaf and his mouth because he was mute. And he says: *Effetha* [...] Thus did the priest touch your ears, that your ears might be opened to reason and the speech of the priest. But you say to me: “Why the nostrils?”<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Ambrose observes that since women were baptized too, then the bishop – instead of the mouth – touched the noses of the *baptizandi*.

There, because he was mute, he touched his mouth, so that, because he could not speak the heavenly mysteries, he should receive (his) voice from Christ” (*De sacramentis* 1,2-3)<sup>4</sup>. Hence to understand the mysteries of baptism and of the Eucharist, it was first necessary to receive the *apertio narium et oculorum* (opening of the nostrils and the eyes). R. Étaix published a sermon on the rite of the Effetha, - a rite, which as it has been observed, is but little known - written perhaps only after Ambrose’s preaching. The anonymous author repeats the same concept: *applicatus es manibus sacerdotis, ut aures tuas quas tibi olim inimicus obstruxerat, operatio caelestis mysterii aperiret* (Aug 42[1996] p. 66) (as the hands of the priest are applied in order that your ears, which once the enemy has blocked, the operation of the celestial mystery could open). Therefore, the *apertio aurium* (opening of ears) was necessary – To hear and understand the contents of the mysteries.

Ambrose’s thought is still more explicit in his third sermon: “You went, you washed, you came to the altar, you began to see that which you saw not before. That means: by the Lord’s font and by the preaching of the Lord’s passion then were your eyes opened. You who before seemed to be blinded in heart, you began to see the light of the sacraments” (*De sacram.* 3,14-15)<sup>5</sup>. Already by the second-century baptism came to be called “illumination,” because it enabled one to see the mysteries of God. In the east, the baptistery was called *photisterion*, i.e., the place of illumination, where one is born again of water and the Holy Spirit, in as much as one dies with Christ and rises with Christ, receiving light and life. That illumination was obtained which enabled one to comprehend the mystery of Christ and the Christian mysteries.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ergo quid egimus sabbato? Nempe apertionem. Quae mysteria celebrata sunt apertionis, quando tibi aures tetigiti sacerdos et nares. Quid significat? In evangelio dominus noster Iesus Christus, cum oblatus esset surdus et mutus, tetigit aures eius et os eius, aures, quia surdus erat, os, quia mutus. Et ait: Effetha [...] Ideo ergo tibi sacerdos aures tetigit, ut aperirentur aures tuae ad sermonem et ad *alloguium* sacerdotis. Sed dicis mihi: “Quare nares?”. Ibi quia mutus erat, os tetigit, ut, quia loqui non poterat sacramenta caelestia, vocem acciperet a Christo.*

<sup>5</sup> *Isti, lavasti, venisti ad altare, videre coepisti, quae ante *ante* non videras. Hoc est per fontem domini et praedicationem dominicae passionis *tunc* aperti sunt oculi tui. Qui ante corde videbaris esse caecatus, coepisti lumen sacramentorum videre.*



At Milan in 387, Augustine heard the pre-baptismal and post-baptismal catechesis<sup>6</sup>, that is, the contents of the *De sacramentis*, and he came to know the Milanese praxis and the rhetorical figure of *aposiopesis*, utilized by the preacher (Corno, 2010), that is, reticence or suspension, whereby one makes some allusion to an argument yet does not say all there is to say, thus giving the hearer or reader the impression quite something else to say and to explain. Concerning ellipsis, which is the mere suppression of one element from the phrase, *aposiopesis* has a greater emotive connotation. Augustine, beyond his experience at Milan, knew the African tradition of catechesis. He conformed mostly to the African tradition and its exigencies in the local ecclesial context.

Augustine, in a discourse recently discovered by Dolbeau and preached in 404, says:

The faithful know in which moment of the canon the martyrs are remembered during the celebration of the sacrament, when our hopes and prayers are lifted up to God. The faithful know this, the catechumens should hasten that they be able to know it. (Dolbeau 26,12)

In another sermon, Augustine begins thus:

As you have heard during the reading of the Gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ, with his promise of life eternal, exhorted us to eat his flesh and to drink his blood. Some of you who have listened to these words have not yet understood. You who have been baptized and are among the number of the faithful, you know what I wished to say. Those of you, however, who are still catechumens and also those who are called 'hearers,' were able to hear this too, but – just maybe – were they able to understand? Therefore,

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<sup>6</sup> "quam fuerimus attenti atque solliciti quid nobis praeciperent a quibus catechizabamur, cum fontis illius Sacramenta peteremus, atque ob hoc Competentes etiam vocaremur; vel non intueamur alios, qui per annos singulos ad lavacrum regenerationis accurrunt, quales sint ipsis diebus quibus catechizantur, exorcizantur, scrutantur, quanta vigilantia conveniant, quo studio ferveant, qua cura pendeant?" (De fide et operibus 6,9).

our discourse is aimed at both the first and the last group [...] Do we appreciate the sense of that which he said: *My flesh is food indeed and blood is drink indeed?* How is the flesh of the Lord eaten and how is the blood of the Lord drunk? Let us consider this for a second: what does he say? Who barred your access from comprehension so that you should be ignorant of this? The sense is hidden, but, if you should wish it, it will be revealed. Adhere to the profession of faith, and you have resolved the question. In fact, the faithful already know what the Lord Jesus has said. You, on the other hand, are called a “catechumen,” you are called a “hearer,” yet you are deaf. The ears of your body you have opened so that you might hear the words spoken, however, you have the ears of your mind closed still so that you do not understand the sense of that which has been expressed. (*Serm.* 132,1)

When Augustine set about to illustrate the Creed, a summary of the Christian faith, he held it easy to teach the neophytes and at the same time fully and completely comprehensible only to spiritual persons, those most advanced in divine knowledge; one of his explanations, therefore, searched to defend it from the erroneous interpretations of heretics (*De fid. et symb.* 1).

These short formulae are presented to the faithful so that, by believing, they may submit themselves to God, and thus submissive to Him they may live rightly, and by living rightly they may purify their heart, and once their heart is purified, they may comprehend that which they believe. (*De fide et symb.* 10,25)

I did a quick research project on Augustinian reticence, that is, when there is more or less of a hint to the Eucharist. He very often used the syntagma: *Norunt fideles* (the faithful know) or other similar expressions<sup>7</sup>. The faithful know, the others do not know and do not understand. Of these texts, I cite only two:

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<sup>7</sup> Sermo 4,10; 4,28 e 31; Sermo 5,7; 56,6 e 10; Sermo 57,7,7; 58,5; Sermo 68,6; Sermo 90,1; Sermo 90,5; 131,1.1; Serm 132A,1; Sermo 232,7; Sermo 234,2; Sermo 235,3;

The faithful understand what I mean: they too recognize Christ in the breaking of the bread: not any bread whatsoever but the bread receiving the blessing of Christ becomes the body of Christ. While he broke bread the two recognized him and, filled with joy, they ran to their fellow disciples, but they found them already up to date about everything. (*Serm.* 234,2)<sup>8</sup>

And the Lord showed himself to them in the act of breaking bread. Learn where to the Lord is to be sought, where he is held, where he is recognized: it is when you are eating him. In this reading, the faithful know how to understand something better than those who have not yet come to know [certain teachings]. (*Serm.* 235,3)<sup>9</sup>

Here we have the *fideles*, in as much as they have a personal and direct experience, who can understand the Eucharist and that comes during its very reception. Underlying is the conception according to which only the faithful, in so much as they are illuminated and have an experience of it, can grasp what is said to them concerning the sacraments, because with their baptism they received a greater spiritual capacity for comprehension: expertise and understanding go together. For the catechumens, the door of knowledge is closed (*Serm.* 232,7)<sup>10</sup>, or rather it is necessary to enter the second curtain (Ambrose). Even the catechumens, and others, if they wish, know all

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297,3; Sermo 308A,6; Sermo 374aug, 19; In Ps 33,1,5; In Ps. 39,12; In Ep. Ioh tr. 3,5 ; In Ps 21,2 e 27-2; 21,2,28; 33,1,5; 33,2,2; 39,12; 103,1 e 14;109,17; In Ev, Io tract. 6,15; 11,3; 22,5; 26,13; 45,9; 96,3; De civ. Dei 19,23; Sermo Dolbeau 18,1; 23,19; 26,12.

<sup>8</sup> *Norunt fideles quid dicam: norunt Christum in fractione panis. Non enim omnis panis, sed accipiens benedictionem Christi, fit corpus Christi. Ibi illi agnoverunt, exsultaverunt, ad alios perrexerunt: iam scientes invenerunt.*

<sup>9</sup> *Sermo 235,3: Discite ubi Dominum quaeratis, discite ubi habeatis, discite ubi agnoscatis. Quando manducatis. Norunt enim fideles aliquid quod melius intellegunt in ista lectione, quam illi qui non noverunt.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ambulabat cum illis, suscipitur hospitio, panem frangit et cognoscitur. Et nos non dicamus quia Christum non novimus; novimus si credimus. Parum est, novimus si credimus; habemus si credimus. Habebant illi Christum in convivio, nos intus in animo. Plus est Christum habere in corde quam in domo. Cor enim nostrum interius nobis est quam sit domus nostra. Iam vero ubi eum debet fidelis agnoscere? Agnoscit qui fidelis est; qui autem catechumenus est, ignorat. Sed ianuam contra illum nemo claudat ut non intret.*

the details of the Eucharistic celebration, but only he who is believing, baptized, and illuminated, knows how to understand and rightly value the mystery of Christ's presence. The *fideles* (faithful), in as much as they are baptized, know something that they understand better – concerning those who are not among the faithful (*Serm.* 235,3).

## AUGUSTINE AND THE EUCHARIST: SOME ASPECTS

Augustine did not write a treatise dedicated to the Eucharist; he did not perceive the necessity to do so, for it was not an argument in discussion, or the heretics or schismatics did not contest it<sup>11</sup>. No other ancient writer or preacher profusely treated the Eucharist, because they were all of one accord regarding the praxis of its celebration and about its meaning. On the other hand, the argument was important in his pastoral work for the spiritual growth of each one of the faithful and of the community. The liturgical celebration consisted almost exclusively of the explanation of the Scripture utilizing preaching, open to all (faithful, catechumens and non-Christians) and in the participation of the sacrament of the Lord's body. For this reason, Augustine, as do the other Christian authors, treats the Eucharist especially while preaching, during which time he makes countless allusions to it, or he presents explanations which are more or less vast and broad, or by metaphors and comparisons<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, in dictated or written works, we do not find much to inform us; sometimes it is exact, as in *De civitate Dei* and *De Trinitate*. An attentive reading finds Eucharistic allusions, even when it seems that he is speaking only of the Word of God as daily food and nourishment: the Eucharist is also daily nourishment<sup>13</sup>. The two types of food alternate in the Augustinian sermons and they reference one another, for both give life to the believers and they are sources of life. He passes easily from one argument to another: from that of the Word of God to the Eucharist, and from the Eucharist to the Word of God. The famished

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<sup>11</sup> Here and there a mention of ancient heretics like the Ophytes (*De haer.* 17), Cataphrygians (*De haer.* 26), and the Artotirites (*De haer.* 28).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. NBA, Opere di sant'Agostino, Indice analitico generale (C-F), NBA 44,2, a cura di F. Monteverde, Roma 2008, pp. 641-648 and the Augustinian eucharistic anthologies.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Cf. *Sermo* 57,7.

man, the pilgrim, needs two sorts of food, which are – in reality – one and the same: Christ, the Son of God, made man for his loving mercy towards us. “This bread for the inner man certainly requires a hunger” (*Tract. in Ioan evan.* 26,1).

Therefore, the reconstruction of the Eucharistic thought of Augustine can be done by gathering and putting together phrases of various origins and which may have been spoken in diverse contexts and at different times. Just as a preacher today, when he directs himself to the Eucharistic assembly, does not articulate a carefully constructed theology, but rather alludes and gives exhortations for the fruitful reception of the Eucharist. All of this creates a difficulty in reconstructing the Augustinian Eucharistic theology in light of formation and of polemics, both those of history and those current. Modern theologians find it difficult because they are moved by other problems and controversies. They observe a contradiction between the realistic language of insisting on the concrete reality of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist and the metaphorical and symbolic language. The Eucharist as the true body and blood of Christ and as a figure of something else (Bonner, 1987). This was not the case with Augustine or with other preachers, who were exclusively interested in a fruitful celebration and the spiritual benefits for their Christian communities.

Augustine insists on the existential significance, on the spiritual fruits of the Eucharist and its symbolic reality about Christ and to his current body, which is his Church, composed of believers, that celebrates Christ's presence (Poque, 1986, pp. 87-98). Augustine's attention was directed to the historical Jesus Christ and the whole Christ, his Church (*Christus totus: Enar. in Ps.* 17,51). These two aspects, when he speaks of the Eucharist, frequently go together and are in a parallel; they recall each other. He does not treat the Eucharist considered in itself, as we find in modern theology, and he says little about the liturgical rites. He was interested in the meaning of the Eucharist for humanity, for their existence and their spiritual life, as pilgrims of the City of God (Perler, 1957, pp. 125-145). When we reach the City of God, the Eucharist, like other sacraments and biblical reading, will be no longer necessary (cf. *Sermo* 57,7,7).

The prayer continues, *Give us this day our daily bread* (Mt 6:11). Whether we are asking the Father for the provision our bodies need, including under the heading of 'bread' whatever it is we need, or whether we take it to mean that daily bread which you are going to receive from the altar, we do well to ask him to give it to us this day, that is, during this present time. We need it in this present time when we are hungry, but when we find ourselves in the other life and hunger will be no more, shall we have any need to ask for bread? Or if it's this bread I said we receive from the altar, we do well to beg him to give it to us. What is it we are begging for, after all, but that we may not allow any such evil into our lives as would cut us off from the bread of that sort? The word of God, which is proclaimed every day, that too is bread. The fact that it isn't bread for the belly doesn't mean that it isn't bread for the mind. But when this life is over, we won't be requiring either the bread that hunger demands, nor do we have to receive the sacrament of the altar, because then we shall be with Christ whose body we receive, nor will these words have to be spoken which I am speaking to you, nor will a book have to be read, when we see him who is the Word of God. (*Sermo* 59,3,6)

On numerous occasions, he affirms that the Eucharist is the body and the blood of Christ, or that it is his flesh and blood. Some of these affirmations are brought forth in this text. Sometimes he is very much a realist in affirming that it is the body that hung on the cross: "We too are fed from the Lord's cross when we eat his body!" (*En. in Ps.* 100,9); "Indeed it is true, for he gave us as our food the body in which he suffered so intensely, and his blood as our drink" (*En. in Ps.* 33, ser. 2,25); "The divine Redeemer, the human Savior proposing to us our price, his blood. He was speaking to us, wasn't he, about his body and blood; he called his body food, his blood drink" (*Sermo* 131,1,1)<sup>14</sup>. "The Jews who killed Christ [...] being converted to the one they killed, as believers they drunk the blood which they

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Sermo* 132,1; 352,1,2; *Enr. in Ps.* 45,5; 66,9; 93,8; *Sermo Mai* 26,2 = NBA 60A; 86,3 = NBA 229I; *Sermo Guelf.* 9,2 = NBA 229B.

had shed as raging enemies” (*Sermo Denis* 15,4; NBA 313B, 4); “Now those who crucified Christ, who wished to remain in that sin, perished [...] If any of them repented [...], they did deserve pardon; they were baptized. As rabid enemies, they shed the blood of Christ; as believers, they drank it” (*Sermo Guelf* 28,4; NBA 313E,4).

The Eucharist is the daily bread, which we receive after our baptism (*Sermo* 56,6,10) and we receive it every day, wherefore it is daily in the Western praxis and not in the Eastern Rites (*De serm. Dom. in monte* 2,7,25 e 26).

There is also another very good way of understanding *Give us today our daily bread*; your Eucharist, daily food. The faithful know what they are receiving, and it is good for them to receive the daily bread that is necessary for this time on earth. They are begging for themselves; that they may become good, that they are preserved in goodness and in faith and in a good life. (*Sermo* 58,5)

“Our daily bread on this earth is the word of God, which is always being served up in the Churches [...] Again, by this daily bread of ours you can understand what the faithful receive, what you are going to receive when you are baptized” (*Sermo* 56,10). This food, which is given to the faithful in this life, is necessary because with it the faithful can draw towards the Lord; but when we shall have come to the vision of the Word, no longer shall we be in need of this distribution of His body (cf. *Sermo* 264,5). Now such food is necessary for adults and for children that they should attain eternal life, for which reason it is prepared and offered every single day:

The sacrament of this reality, that is, of the unity of Christ’s body and blood, is placed on the Lord’s table and received from the Lord’s table – in some places every day, in others at fixed intervals of time - leading some to live and others to ruin (*Tract. in Ioan* 26,15)

Explaining the Gospel of John, Augustine often repeats that only the person who receives the body and the blood of the Lord will have

eternal life; it is given therefore to children no less, with this end in mind (cf. *C. Iulianum op. imp.* 2,30; *C. Iul.* 1,6,22; *De pecc. mer. et rem.*, passim). Not all receive it fruitfully:

Now many people receive the sacrament of his body, but not all who receive the sacrament are also going to have the place in his company promised to his members. Nearly all people indeed say the sacrament is his body because all are feeding together in his pastures. (*Sermo* 354,1,2; cf. *Sermo* 90,5)

Discernment, knowledge, the importance of this sustenance and its connection with the believing community pertain to the Christian's fundamental notions.

I had promised those of you who have just been baptized a sermon to explain the sacrament of the Lord's table, which you can see right now, and which you shared in last night. You ought to know what you have received, what you are about to receive, what you ought to receive every day. That bread which you can see on the altar, sanctified by the word of God, is the body of Christ. That cup, or rather what the cup contains, sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ. It was using these things that Christ the Lord wished to present us with his body and blood, which he shed for our sake for the forgiveness of sins. If you receive them well, you are yourselves what you receive. You see, the apostle says: We, being many, are one loaf, one body (1 Cor 10:17). That's how he explained the sacrament of the Lord's table; one loaf, one body, is what we all are, many though we be. [...] What you can see passes away, but the invisible reality signified does not pass away, but remains. Look, it's received, it's eaten, it's consumed. Is the body of Christ consumed, is the Church of Christ consumed, are the members of Christ consumed? Perish the thought! Here they are being purified; there they will be crowned with the victory's laurels. So, what is signified will remain eternally, although the thing that signifies it seems to pass away. So,



receive the sacrament in such a way that you think about yourselves, that you retain unity in your hearts, that you always fix your hearts up above. (*Sermo* 227).

Currently, the Christian community is celebrating in a banquet with the body of Christ, and it is a continual feast: “It is the banquet and the feast that the Church celebrates now which is spread and dispersed throughout the whole world. Actually, that lamb is offered to the Father in the Body and in the Blood of the Lord, and it nourishes the entire household” (*Quaest. evang.* 2,33,3).

The normal bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ during the prayer of the community and the words spoken by the celebrant: “What you can see here, dearly beloved, on the table of the Lord, is bread and wine; but this bread and wine, when the word is applied to it, becomes the body and blood of the Word” (*Sermo* 229, 1).

And from there we come now to what is done in the holy prayers which you are going to hear, that with the application of the word we may have the body and blood of Christ. Take away the word, I mean, it’s just bread and wine; add the word, and it’s now something else. And what is that something else? The body of Christ, and the blood of Christ. So, take away the word, and it’s bread and wine; add the word, and it will become the sacrament. To this, you say, *Amen*. To say *Amen* is to add your signature. (*Sermo* 229,3)<sup>15</sup>

The praying and celebrating community is at the center of his attention and experience. Augustine finishes the tenth book of his Confessions with this phrase:

Your only Son— He ‘in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Col 2. 3) — has redeemed me with his blood. Let not the proud speak evil of me, because I consider my ransom, and eat and drink, and distribute;

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<sup>15</sup> Cfr. *Sermo* 227; 234,2.

and poor desire to be satisfied by Him, together with those who eat and are satisfied and they praise the Lord that seek him (Conf. 10,43,70)

Christ, the redeemer and savior, is first of all his food and his salvation (personal aspect)<sup>16</sup>, but as bishop he gives it to others (ministerial aspect): and all together feed themselves by the same food (communitarian aspect). In a discourse on the occasion of the anniversary of his ordination, he emphasizes the communitarian aspect of his service:

Where I'm terrified by what I am for you, I am given comfort by what I am with you. For you I am a bishop, with you, after all, I am a Christian. The first is the name of an office undertaken, the second a name of grace; the one means danger, this one salvation. (Serm. 340,1)

The bishop is the dispenser of the Word and the Sacrament to a community<sup>17</sup>. This celebrating community is at the center of his preaching, not so much the Eucharist in itself, but in so much as spiritual nourishment, that vivifies and transforms the person who eats and drinks of it<sup>18</sup>.

And therefore, receive and eat the body of Christ, yes, you that have become members of Christ in the body of Christ; receive and drink the blood of Christ. In order, not to be scattered and separated, eat what binds you together; in order not to seem cheap in your estimation, drink the price that was paid for you. Just as this turns into you when you eat and drink it, so you for your part turn into the body of Christ when you live. (Serm. 228B,3 = Denis 3,3)

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<sup>16</sup> Conf. 7,10,16: "everywhere I seemed to hear the voice from on high: 'I am the nourishment of adults. Grow up, and you will eat of me, without therefore turning myself into you, as the nourishment for your flesh; but you will be transformed into me'".

<sup>17</sup> Bonner (1994, pp. 39-63, 1987, pp. 209-240, pp. 448-461).

<sup>18</sup> Athanase Sage, *L'Eucharistie dans la pensée de saint Augustin*: Revue des études augustinienes 15 (1969) 209-240.

Augustine lives this experience of faith concerning sharing in the eating and drinking within his community, as daily food, which gives life, and as a regular remedy for sin<sup>19</sup>.

So, this holy and spiritual mother (Church) daily prepares a spiritual meal for you, with which to nourish not your bodies but your souls. She lavishes on you bread from heaven (Ps. 105:40), she gives you the cup of salvation (Ps 116:13) to drink. She doesn't want any of her children to be spiritually starved. Take every care, for your own sakes, dearly beloved, not to forsake such a mother, so that you may get your fill from plenteousness oh her house, and she may give you to drink from the torrent of her delights (Ps 36:38), and commit you to God the Father as worthy children, to be devotedly reared by her and brought through, safe and sound and free, to eternal life. (*Sermo 255A,2*)

In the Eucharist, the memory of His death and resurrection is fulfilled (*Ep. 55,1,2; Serm. 51,22,32; 229,1*).

(Paul) yet was able to preach the Lord Jesus Christ significantly, in one way by his tongue, in another by epistle, in another by the sacrament of his body and blood - since, certainly, we do not call either the tongue of the apostle, [...] the body and blood of Christ; - but that only which we take of the fruits of the earth and consecrate by mystic prayer, and then receive duly to our spiritual health in memory of the passion of our Lord for us: and this, although it is brought by the hands of men to that visible form, yet is not sanctified to become so great a sacrament, except by the spirit of God working invisibly; since God works everything that is done in that work through corporeal movements, by setting in motion primarily the invisible things of his servants. (*De Trinit. 3,4,10*)

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<sup>19</sup> As a remedy for sin: Sermon 17,5; 56,9,13.

But it is also our sacrifice, united to the sacrifice of Christ (*sacrificium mediatoris*); we become a sacrifice:

Then, after the consecration of the sacrifice of God, because he wanted us to be ourselves his sacrifice, which is indicated by where that sacrifice was first put, that is the sign of the thing that we are; why, then after the consecration is accomplished, we say the Lord's prayer, which you have received and given. (*Serm. 227*)

It follows that the whole redeemed city, that is to say, the congregation or community of the saints, is offered to God as our sacrifice through the great High Priest, who offered Himself to God in His passion for us, that we might be members of this glorious head, according to the form of a servant. [...] This is the sacrifice of Christians: we, being many, are one body in Christ. And this also is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, known to the faithful, in which she teaches that she is offered in the offering she makes to God. (*De civ. Dei 10,20*)

An identification between Christ and Christians is realized:

And referring to his members he said: for them do I sanctify myself. I for them: so, that is, it may benefit them (for they too are I) just as it benefited me myself (granted that I am man even without them); I sanctify myself: in me I sanctify them as if they were myself, for they too are part of me by the union which they have with me. (*Tract. in Ioan. 108,5*)

So, Christ the Lord, who offered by suffering for us what by being born he had received from us, has become our high priest forever and has given us the order of sacrifice which you can see, of his body that is to say, and his blood. When his body, remember, was pierced by the lance, it poured forth the water and the blood by which he canceled our sins. Be mindful of this grace as you work salvation since it is at work in you, and approach with fear and trembling

to partake of this altar. Recognize in the bread what hung on the cross, and the cup what flowed from his side. (*Serm.* 228B,2 = Denis 3,2)

The brief sermon 272, given on Pentecost Day, is a synthesis of Augustinian Eucharistic thought.

So if it's you that are the body of Christ and its members, it's the mystery meaning you that has been placed on the Lord's table; what you receive is the mystery that means you. It is to what you are that you reply *Amen*, and by so replying you express your assent. What you hear, you see, is the body of Christ, and you answer, *Amen*. So, be a member of the body of Christ, to make that *Amen* true. (*Serm.* 272)

The faithful also know a spiritual sustenance, which you too are going to know and to receive from the altar of God. That too will be a daily bread, necessary for this life. I mean, are we going to go on receiving the Eucharist when we have come to Christ himself, and when we have begun to reign with him forever? So, the Eucharist is our daily bread; but we should receive it in such a way that our minds and not just our bellies find refreshment. You see, the special property to be understood in it is unity, so that by being digested into his body and turned into his members we may be what we receive. Then it will really be our daily bread. And the fact that I am dealing with this subject for you, and that you hear readings in the Church every day, is daily bread; and that you hear and sing hymns is daily bread. These things we need on our pilgrimage. (*Serm.* 57,7,7)<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Sermo* 131,1: "We have just heard the truthful Master, the divine Redeemer, the human Savior proposing to us our price, his blood. He was speaking to us, wasn't he, about his body and blood; he called his body food, his blood drink, the baptized can recognize the sacrament of faithful, but mere hearers – what else but what they hear? [...] But let those who eat, eat, and those who drink, drink; let them feel hunger and thirst; let them eat life, drink life. To eat that is to be nourished; but nourished in such a way that you are nourished by is not diminished. And what can it be to drink that, but to live? Eat life, drink life; you will have life, and the life is complete and entire, However, this will the case, that is to say, the body and blood of Christ will be life for everyone, if what is take visibly in the sacrament is spiritually eaten, spiritually drunk in very truth.

## The personal dimension of the Eucharist:

Finally, he explains how what he is talking about happens and what it means to eat his body and to drink his blood. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him (Jn 6:56). This, therefore, is eating that food and drinking that drink: abiding in Christ and having him abide in oneself. And thus, if someone does not abide in Christ and Christ does not abide in him, there can be no doubt that he does not eat his flesh or drink his blood, but rather he is eating and drinking the sacrament of such great reality to his condemnation. (*Tract. in Ioan.* 26,18)

Augustine also speaks often of the interior dispositions for receiving the Eucharist fruitfully, in as much as it is received by the righteous and the unrighteous, but it does not have the same effect for both (*C. litt. Pet.* 2,47 and 110; *Tract. In Ioan. Ev.* 62,1). However, this argument requires an adequate treatment. At this time, it suffices to cite one phrase alone:

After all, we too receive a visible food today; but a sacrament is one thing, quite another is the benefit (*virtus*)<sup>21</sup> of the sacrament. How many receive from the altar and die, die by receiving! Of such the apostle says, One eats and drinks judgment upon himself (1 Cor 11:29). (*Tract. in Ioan.* 26,11)

## THE EUCHARIST, SACRAMENT OF UNITY

The union between the Augustinian theological concept of a close connection between Christ, the head, and the Church (the whole Christ), and the experience of the dramatic division of the African Church are the reasons for Augustine's insistence upon the Eucharist as the bond of unity of ecclesial union. To indicate the Church, the two images - among so many others - preferred by Augustine are those of

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<sup>21</sup> The virtue of the Sacrament: «This refers to the grace of the sacrament, not to the sacrament we can see; to those who eat inwardly, not outwardly, who eat in the heart, who do not just chew with teeth" (*Tract. in Ioan.* 26,12).

'body of Christ' (also 'the Lord's body') and 'spouse of Christ.' These express the tight bond between Christ and His Church, in the sense that the Church's life depends on him and without him is nothing. Above all, the whole Christ (*totus Christus*; or *integer, unus, universus*) is composed of the head (Christ) and the body, that is, the faithful who are the members. The Church as the spouse (so *uxor, coniux, matrona, femina*) of Christ expresses the same idea in as much as Christ, and the Church are two in one flesh (*Sermon 341,1,1; Enar. in Ps. 71,17*). The image affirms the concept of the unity and the love of Christ for his Church, and hers for him (*Enar. in Ps. 143,18*). There is the Church in time or of the present age, of *nunc*, and that of the coming times, i.e., at the end of the ages, of *tunc*. That of *nunc* (today, at present) is mixed together with sinners (*Brev. coll. 3,20; Post coll. 9,12*). The consequence is that in this world we cannot but have an *ecclesia permixta* (*corpus permixtum*, the mixed Church), that is one that contains in her bosom the just and the malignant, one beside another; as is mixed in the farm's fields both the wheat and the straw. There is a "mixture of good and evil in the Church's bosom" (*Enar. in Ps 99,12*).

The Eucharist, "the Sacrament of the faithful" (*Ep. 140,24,61*), in as much as it is *fractio panis* (the breaking of bread), is of the community by its nature and is celebrated by praying community and it produces unity. Of the other aspects, the Eucharist is for Augustine principally the *sacramentum unitatis* (the sacrament of unity) between the believing recipient and Christ, and between all the *fideles* (faithful) among themselves to create one sole body; and also between the Church, body of Christ, and its head (Christ), which renders his Church holy. He takes up an ancient image, which was already in the Didache – that of the grains of wheat, which milled and then knead, constitute a unity; it is found in Irenaeus (*Adv. haer. 3,17,2*) and Cyprian (*Ep. 63,14,4*) (Rordorf, 1978, pp. 167-174).

In this loaf of bread, you are given clearly to understand how much you should love unity. I mean, was that loaf made from one grain? Weren't there many grains of wheat? But before they came into the loaf they were all separate; they were joined together by means of water after a certain

amount of pounding and crushing. Unless wheat is ground, after all, and moistened with water, it can't possibly get into this shape, which is called bread [...] So the Holy Spirit comes, fire after water, and you are baked into the bread, which is the body of Christ. And that's how unity is signified (*Serm. 227*).

The image of many grains of wheat, crushed and then baked together, which form one bread and thus the baptized, is often found in Augustine, because it renders the idea of multiplicity which creates a unity within the Church (cf. 229A,2; 305,1; 313G,3). They represent each believing Christian, who is pounded and crushed in the press, forming the elements of the Eucharist, the bread, and the wine. These, employing the words of the consecration, become the sacrament of the Body and the Blood of Christ. The Church is a Eucharistic community, born from baptism, but quickened continually by the Eucharist: *si bene accepistis, vos estis quod accepistis* (if you received them well, you are yourselves what you receive) (*Sermo 227*).

The Eucharist creates a strictly correlated triple unity: among each of the baptized and Christ; between all the baptized, who as the dispersed grains become one bread, and Christ; between all the baptized among themselves, as a living body, with Christ as their head. For Augustine one, tightly connected reality exists between the sacramental body of Christ and His ecclesial body. This concept permitted him to move continuously from the affirmation of the concrete fact of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist to its mystical depiction, of the body of the Church. From the multiplicity of persons, unity is formed in Christ, as the bread and wine come from the many grains or the many grapes.

In this way, the Lord affirmed that he is also here in us. In this way, the whole Christ grows; because just as he is here in us, so we too are there in him. This is brought about by the cement of charity. The one is our head, is the savior of his body. So, Christ is preaching Christ, the body preaching his head, and the head looking after his body. (*Sermo 354,1*)



Christ is the head of this body; the unity of his body is expressed by our sacrifice. The apostle briefly signified this when he said, we, though many, are one bread, one body (1 Cor 10:17.14). Through our head, we are reconciled to God, because in him the divinity of the Only-Begotten came to share in our mortality so that we might share in his immortality. (*Ep.* 187,6,20)

This is the reason, as men of God before our time understood perfectly well, why your Lord Jesus Christ presented us with his body and blood in those things which are made one out of many. Thus, one bread is brought together as one from many grains; the other flows together from many grapes. (*Tract in Ioan* 26,17)

The sacrament of the Lord's table: one loaf, one body, is what we, being many, are (1Cor 10:17) [...] However many loaves may be placed there, it's one loaf; however, many loaves there may be on Christ's altars throughout the world, it's one loaf. But what does it mean, one loaf? He explained very briefly: one body is what we, being many, are. This is the body of Christ, of which the apostle says while addressing the Church, *But, you are the body of Christ and his members* (1 Cor 12:27). What you receive is what you yourselves are, thanks to the grace by which you have been redeemed; you add your signature to this when you answer *Amen*. What you see here is the sacrament of unity (*sacramentum unitatis*). (229A,1 = Guelf. 7,1)

Unity, truth, piety, love. One bread; what is this one bread? The one body which we, being many, are. Remember that bread is not made from one grain, but from many [...] That's what the apostle said about the bread. He has already shown clearly enough what we should understand about the cup, even if it wasn't said. After all, just as many grains are mixed into one loaf to produce the visible appearance of bread, [...] so with the wine. (*Serm.* 272)

In the Eucharist, our belonging to Christ is realized, that consecrates the sacrament of our peace and unity (*mysterium pacis et unitatis nostrae*) upon the table (*mensa*) of the Eucharist. The reception of the sacrament of unity (*mysterium unitatis*) brings with it the obligation to preserve peace among the members of the body of Christ, which is the Church. For Augustine, the food and the drink in the Eucharist create “the fellowship of the saints, in which there will be peace and full and perfect unity” (*Tract in Ioan. 26,17*)<sup>22</sup>. The Eucharist, the sacrament of unity (*Ep. 185,11,50*), is also the fountain of the unity of the many: “in this sweet food indeed, the delicious food of our unity in Christ of which the apostle speaks: Because there is but one bread, we, though many, are one body” (*In hanc escam tam suavem, tam dulcem unitatis Christi quam commendat Apostolus, dicens: Quia unus panis, unum corpus multi sumus* (1 Cor 10, 17) (*Enar. in Ps. 68, sermo 2,6*). Augustine had already said to the catechumens: “the special property to be understood in it is unity, so that by being digested into his body and turned into his members we may be what we receive.” (*Sermo 57, 7, 7*). This unity is a dynamic reality, which is being continually built, for continuously it is attacked by human sin. To the neophytes he taught:

That too the Lord Christ signified to us, how he wished us to belong to him, how he consecrated the sacrament of our peace and unity on his table. And who receive the sacrament of unity, and do not hold the bond of peace, do not receive the sacrament for their benefit, but a testimony against themselves. (*Sermo 272*)<sup>23</sup>

In this text, Augustine presupposes the consecration of the bread and wine, of which he had spoken shortly prior, and he talks about its meaning, of the *res* (a thing, being), in as much as in that very act there is the ‘sacrament of unity and peace.’ The reception of the Eucharist entails the obligation to conserve peace, i.e., union among

<sup>22</sup> *Id est societas ipsa sanctorum, ubi pax erit et unitas plena atque perfecta.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ita et Dominus Christus nos significavit nos ad se pertinere voluit, mysterium pacis et unitatis nostrae in sua mensa consecravit. Qui accipit mysterium unitatis, et non tenet vinculum pacis, non mysterium accipit pro se, sed testimonium contra se.*

believers. The background to this affirmation is the Donatists, who—though receiving such a sacrament— did not preserve unity.

By receiving the body of Christ, the faithful become the body of Christ, the Church, which is animated by the Spirit.

What our spirit, that is our soul, is to the parts or members of Christ, to the body of Christ. That's why the apostle, after mentioning one body, in case we should take it as a dead body, - One body, he says. But I ask you, is this body alive? It's alive. With what? With one spirit. And with one spirit. (*Sermo* 268,2; cf. 267,4).

On the table of the Lord, is bread and wine; but this bread and wine, when the word is applied to it, becomes the body and blood of the Word. [...] For that reason, because he also suffered for us, he also presented us in this sacrament with his body and blood, and this is what he even made us into as well. Call to mind what this created object was, not so long ago, in the fields; how the earth produced it, the rain nourished it, [...] When, as catechumens, you were being held back, you were being stored in the barn. You gave in your names; then you began to be ground by fasts and exorcisms. Afterward, you came to the water, and you were moistened into the dough and made into one lump. With the application of the heat of the Holy Spirit, you were baked, and made into the Lord's loaf of bread. (*Sermo* 229,1)

As has already been mentioned, Augustine moves with facility from assertions of the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine (“this bread and wine becomes the body and blood of the Lord”) to claims about the existential meaning of the Eucharist, regarding its symbolic meaning: the unity of the faithful who receive with Christ and at the same time unity among themselves, by means of an undivided love and faith. The mention of heretics (the Donatists) furnishes the context of his continued insistence on unity. The reception of the Eucharist—its *virtus*— produces this double unity: personally, with Christ and with all the believers, who constitute a

body of Christ, the Head. The following text, a continuation of the preceding excerpt from the same sermon, is a clear illustration of this. The Eucharist expresses a present, and it is a sign of something else; in so much as *sacramentum*, it is essentially a sign.

There you have what you have received. So just as you can see that what has been made is one, thus you be one yourself too in the same way, by loving each other, by holding the same faith, the same hope, an undivided charity. When the heretics receive this sacrament, they receive what a testimony against themselves is; because they insist on division, while this bread is a sign of unity. So too the wine was there in many grapes, and has now been concentrated into a unity; it is one in the pleasant taste of the cup, but only after the pressure of the wine-press. And you, after those fasts, after the hard labors, after the humiliation and the contrition, have now at last come, in the name of Christ, into the Lord's cup, so to say, and there you are on the table, and there you are in the cup. You are this together with us; we all take this together, all drink together because we all live together. (sermo 229,2)

Some Pauline expressions – there is one bread, we, though many, are but one body – are the biblical basis of his ecclesiology of communion (*Ep.* 185,11,50), like the other expression “one sole body and only one spirit” (Eph. 4:4; Col 1:18). The Pauline citations are ordered together with quotes from the Sixth Chapter of the Gospel of John (6:41-59), treated in Sermon 26 of the Commentary on the Gospel of John.

This sermon or treatise, in its brevity, beyond being very beautiful, is also extremely rich with ideas dear to Augustine; it is a synthesis of Augustinian eucharistic theology on the unity between Christ, His body, that is the Church on earth and in heaven. This discourse can be subdivided into two parts; in the first he responds to the objections of the Jews, “these people were such that they failed to grasp the meaning of the bread coming down from heaven; because they were full of their own justice, they were not hungry for the justice of God”

(*Tract. in Ioan 26,1*). The second part of the sermon, from paragraph 13, comments on the verses 51-59, starts with verse 51 (If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world). This entire paragraph is like a commentary on the concise definition of the Eucharist given by Augustine. Above all, he says: “The faithful know the body of Christ if they do not neglect to be the body of Christ. Let them become the body of Christ if they wish to live by the Spirit of Christ. Only the body of Christ lives by the Spirit of Christ” (*Tract. in Ioan 26,13*). The faithful can fully understand the Eucharist if they work to belong to the body of Christ (the Church) and they may become the body of Christ (*fiant corpus Christi*), then they are quickened<sup>24</sup> by the Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit, invisible, is the soul of this ecclesial body, which is one visible reality. Only the person who belongs to the body of Christ is vivified by the Spirit of Christ: “So then, do you also wish to draw life from the Spirit of Christ? Be in the body of Christ [...] when the apostle Paul is explaining this bread to us, he says, ‘we being many are one bread, one body’ (1 Cor 10:17) (*Tract. in Ioan 26,13*)”. After the citation from Paul, he adds the famous definition of the Eucharist, a remarkable synthesis of his Eucharistic theology: “O mystery of piety! O sign of unity! O bond of charity!” (*O Sacramentum pietatis! o signum unitatis! o vinculum caritatis!*)<sup>25</sup>

The entire phrase from Augustine includes three exclamations composed of three nominatives followed by three possessive genitives or genitives of quality. These statements form a unique whole and complete each other, in so much as each phrase expresses an essential element of the sacrament of the Eucharist. (Folliet, 2004, p. 520)

This famous sentence<sup>26</sup> will come to be cited many times by Catholics, beginning with the medieval writers (Folliet, 2004,

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Tract. 27*, passim.

<sup>25</sup> Saint Thomas speaks of the *sacramentum caritatis* (*Summa Theologiae*, III, 73, a. 3), an expression that recurs seven times in the Commentary on the Sentences and seven times in the Third Part of the *Summa Theologica*.

<sup>26</sup> This was even set to music by Francisco Valls (†1747) (the entire phrase, including that which follows) and by Marc-Antoine Charpentier (two motets).

p. 533 y ss) and used by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*<sup>27</sup>, who echoes Augustinian theology when he defines the Eucharist: “the spiritual common good of the whole Church (*bonum commune spirituale totius ecclesiae* (*Summa* III,65,3,1m); “the Eucharist is the sacrament of the ecclesial unity, which depends on the fact that many people are one in Christ”: *Eucharistia est sacramentum unitatis ecclesiasticae, quae attenditur secundum hoc quod multi sunt unum in Christo* (o.c., 82,2,3m). Beyond this, the Augustinian definition has often been used by the last Popes, starting with Paul VI, and in many documents – even in the recent Catechism (n. 1323).

The numerous modern translations differ when translating the term *pietas* (love, mercy, true faith, piety, goodness). Folliet (2004) interprets the term in the cultic sense (a religious act, the cult of God), and at the end of every exclamation, he supposes to be the term ‘*ecclesia*’ to be understood, taken as the Body of Christ (p. 526)<sup>28</sup>. In favor of this interpretation I will add another citation:

And because He walked here in very flesh, and gave that very flesh to us to eat for our salvation; and no one eats that flesh, unless he has first worshipped: we have found out in what sense such a footstool of our Lord's may be worshipped, and not only that we sin not in worshipping it, but that we sin in not worshipping. (*Enar. Psalmos* 98,9)

At the same time Pio de Luis (Vizcaíno, 2006), though recognizing the validity of such an interpretation (Vizcaíno, 2006, p. 54), proposes another for us. He suggests as possible that term indicates the *pietas* of God toward humanity (the love of God) and not man's love of God. The understood word, after every exclamation, is different and could be a person of the Trinity to the Church.

Without entering into a discussion of the details, I will bring forward only one well-known text, which confirms that the Eucharist is a sacrifice and is offered by the Christians:

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas, *Sum. Theol.*, III, qu. 79, a. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Pag. 526: *O Sacramentum pietatis (ecclesiae)! o signum unitatis (ecclesiae)! o vinculum caritatis (ecclesiae)!*

Such is the sacrifice of the Christians: 'We, the many, are one body in Christ.' This is the sacrifice, as the faithful understand, which the Church continues to celebrate in the sacrament of the altar, in which it is clear to the Church that she is offered in the very offering she makes to God. (*De civitate Dei*, X, 6)

The three terms used (piety, *pietas*, unity, *unitas*, charity, *caritas*) express three different aspects of the sacrament of the Eucharist and they complete each other in the thought of Augustine. The term *pietas*, as indicated, has been understood differently, but the cult is a fundamental aspect, which in the Eucharist we offer to the Triune God. *Caritas*, this too is a fruit of the Eucharist, includes its second dimension – towards God and our neighbor. In the context of the Donatist polemic and the ecumenical context, the term *unitas* is repeated by Augustine with diverse undertones and variations.

In the African Church, the unity of the community was felt strongly, especially beginning with Cyprian, who speaks of the of the sacrament of unity (*unitatis sacramentum*)<sup>29</sup>; the bread, together the fruit of many grains, is the image of the unity of the Church, in so much as “in Christ who is the bread from heaven there is only one body” (Cyprian, *Ep.* 63,13,4; cf. *Ep.* 69,5,2). The unity (*unitas*) of the Christians with Christ and among themselves is the proper *virtus* (the grace of the Sacrament) of the Eucharist (Augustine, *Sermo* 57,7), according to the Pauline affirmation (1Cor 10:17<sup>30</sup>: One bread, one body, we are many, *unus panis, unum corpus multi sumus*). The Lord consecrates in the bread and the wine: “He consecrated the sacrament of our peace and unity on his table. Anywho receive the sacrament of unity and do not hold bond of peace, do not receive the sacrament for their benefit, but a testimony against themselves” (*Sermo* 272). The unity is born of the assimilation to Christ: “not only have we become Christians, but we have become Christ himself” (*Tract in Ioan.evang* 21,8). The body of Christ is either the Eucharist, which

<sup>29</sup> Cyprian, *De cath. eccl. unitate*, 7; cf. *Ep.* 66, n. 8, 3.

<sup>30</sup> This text will be cited many times.

is the table of the Lord, or the Church; just as the first is received, so is one a member of the Church to receive the life which is love. In short (cited) Sermon 272 he says furthermore:

Brothers, just remind yourselves what wine is made from; many grapes hang in the bunch, but juice of grapes is poured together in one vessel. That too is how the Lord Christ signified us, how he wished us to belong to him, how he consecrated the sacrament of our peace and unity on his table.

We must not take this Augustinian definition of the Eucharist as complete. Augustine would not be happy. It is completed by the following words, which express life and unity in love in prayer of the faithful:

O sacrament of piety, O sign of unity, O bond of charity! The one who wants to live has somewhere to live, has something to live on. Let him approach, let him believe, let him belong to the body to be given life. Let him not shudder at the make-up of its members, let him not be a festering member which needs to be amputated, nor a crooked member of which it would be ashamed; let him be beautiful, well suited, healthy; let him cling to the body, live for God and by God. Let him work now on earth to reign later on heaven<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> *Qui vult vivere, habet ubi vivat, habet unde vivat. Accedat, credat ut incorporetur, ut vivificetur. Non abhorreat a compage membrorum, non sit putre membrum quod resecuri mereatur, non sit distortum de quo erubescatur: sit pulchrum, sit aptum, sit sanum; haereat corpori, vivat Deo de Deo: nunc laboret in terra, ut postea regnet in coelo.*



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