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*2000 St. Augustine Lecture*

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**The Eucharist as the Foundation of Christian Unity in  
North African Theology**

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Since the Western Church began fighting about the mode of presence of Christ in the eucharist in the eighth century, Augustine has been quoted by most parties to the debate. The conflict was renewed in the Reformation when transubstantiation became the focus of intense controversy. Since the reform of the Catholic liturgy in Vatican II and the emphasis upon the eucharistic celebration as a building of church community, Augustine is beginning to be mentioned again. Texts quarried from the writings of Augustine have been mortared into very different buildings—and as with the building technique the Africans inherited from the Punic peoples, the result is often a mixture of half loose rubble and half concrete. Setting aside, for the moment, contemporary attempts to interpret the eucharist, this essay will explore the opportunities and problems Augustine faced and how he adapted the scriptures to meet them



in developing an understanding of the eucharist for the North African church of the fifth century. Only then will attention be turned to the resources this theory might provide to contemporary theology.

Augustine's only sustained reflection on the eucharist was given in those *Tractates on the Gospel of John* that deal with the Bread of Life discourse. The bishop also spoke regularly of the eucharist in the sermons to the neophytes on Easter morning but infrequently on other days. He dealt with it occasionally in his exposition of the Psalms, in a handful of letters on differing church practices, but more rarely than one might expect in his writings against the Donatists. In these sermons, commentaries, and letters, Augustine presented what appear to be different views: the eucharistic bread is the body of Christ who suffered on the cross; the wine is the blood of Christ shed by Jews; the elements represent the ecclesial body made up of true believers. In different contexts, perhaps for rhetorical effect, he was ready to imply either a realistic or a more symbolic understanding of the presence of Christ.

Contemporary scholars have suggested various means of integrating these diverse perspectives. Marie Francois Berrouard, editor of the *Bibliothèque Augustinienne* edition of the *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, has suggested that Augustine linked the eucharist to the church through the medium of the resurrected flesh and blood of Christ. In the eucharistic elements the Christian receives the heavenly body and blood of Christ, which in turn communicate a sharing in the Holy Spirit, itself the animating principle of the ecclesial body of Christ. The resurrected body of Christ becomes, in this interpretation, the means through which the ecclesial body is built up. Berrouard observed that Augustine's Plotinian philosophy supplied him with both an elaborate theory of symbolism and a limited appreciation for the religious significance of earthly bodies. These prevented the African bishop's development of the soteriological understanding of the eucharistic flesh and blood of Christ that characterizes the Alexandria tradition in general and Augustine's contemporary Cyril in particular.<sup>1</sup> Edward Kilmartin argued, in response, that Berrouard's reading of *Tractate 27* on John distorts the clear meaning of the text.<sup>2</sup> Walter Simonis suggested that Augustine was more interested in the subjective dispositions of the participant of the eucharist because, unlike the ritual of baptism, he was

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1. "L'être sacramental de l'eucharistie selon saint Augustin," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 99 (1977): 702-721.

2. "The Eucharistic Gift: Augustine of Hippo's Tractate 27 on John 6:60-72," in *Preaching in the Patristic Age*, ed. David Hunter (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), pp. 162-182.

not required to defend its validity when celebrated in schism. As a consequence, Simonis implies, Augustine was not particularly interested in the objective reality of the presence of Christ in the eucharist.<sup>3</sup> Gerald Bonner's essays on Augustine's eucharistic thought highlight its ecclesial dimensions without denying the presence of the heavenly body and blood of Christ.<sup>4</sup> Each of these scholars points, as we might expect, to certain statements and texts of Augustine that support the position advanced.

A certain ambiguity in Augustine's statements on the eucharist must be admitted, though at least some of these interpretations may involve a misreading of his text. Instead of focusing on the texts alone, this essay will attempt to elucidate Augustine's eucharistic theology by setting his statements in their theological and especially social context. For example, Augustine had a vital but largely concealed interest in the mode of presence of Christ in the eucharist. His eucharistic theology was focused on the ecclesial rather than the heavenly body of Christ because this harmonized with his response to Donatist claims. Yet he did exploit the heritage of Cyprian and understood the eucharist as an essential element in the constitution of the church. His theory was indeed soteriological but it conformed to the North African rather than to the peculiarly Alexandrian understanding of the economy of salvation, which had not yet taken root in the West.

## The Donatist Controversy

The context for a discussion of the eucharist will be set by a brief review of Augustine's solution to the problem posed by Cyprian, the Donatists, and the Roman Church of the efficacy of the ritual of baptism when the minister or the recipient falls short of true holiness, inside or outside the unity of the church.<sup>5</sup> Under pressure from the Roman church, the Africans had abandoned Cyprian's sacramental theology and accepted the validity of baptism performed in schism.

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3. *Ecclesia Visibilis et Invisibilis* (Frankfurt: Knecht, 1970), pp. 109–117.

4. "The Church and the Eucharist in the Theology of St. Augustine," *Sobornost*, ser. 7, 6 (1978): 448–461, reprinted in *God's Decree of Man's Destiny* (London: Variorum Reprint, 1987), and "Augustine's Understanding of the Church as a Eucharistic Community," in *Saint Augustine the Bishop*, ed. F. LeMoine and C. Kleinhenz (New York: Garland, 1994), pp. 39–63.

5. For a discussion of the issues of the Donatist controversy, see Gerald Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies*, rev. ed. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1986) and Y.-M. Congar, "Introduction," in BA 28.

Nearly a century later, Augustine explained that the sanctifying power operative in ritual washing comes from Christ himself, whom the presiding bishop serves as an agent. The instrumental role of the bishop depends neither upon his own fidelity to Christ nor on the unity and purity of the church in which he holds office. Both the baptism and episcopal orders of the schismatics are valid and effective, Augustine argued, just as are the ministry of sinful or unfaithful clerics within the unity of the Catholic church. The Holy Spirit, identified as the power to sanctify, was indeed given to the church by Christ. That gift is held and exercised not by the college of bishops or presbyters, as Cyprian and the Donatists believed, but by the saints within the church community who are bound together by the shared love of God and one another. What Augustine called the society of saints forms the holy church to which the scriptures refer as the pure bride of Christ. Augustine could not precisely specify the effect of baptism when it was conferred upon an unworthy recipient. The ritual might bring about the forgiveness of sins and confer the Holy Spirit, even when the recipient remains either intransigent outside the church or unrepentant within it, but in such cases baptism's salutary effect would be lost immediately. Augustine asserted that baptism always marks the initiate as belonging to Christ and would have its salutary effects if the recipient subsequently repented of sin and adhered to the unity of the church.

The key to Augustine's understanding and explanation of the power and limits of the ritual of baptism was the connection he made between the unity of the church and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Cyprian had insisted that the Holy Spirit could not be separated from the unity of the visible church, thereby concluding that baptism itself could not be performed outside the communion of bishops and faithful. Augustine corrected this teaching by observing that unity among rational beings is established not through bodily presence and sharing of earthly goods but by agreement on the objects of love. The charity that is diffused into the hearts of the saints through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit establishes a harmony in love of God and neighbor among true Christians and forms them into the holy church. Thus the true and faithful church, the Body of Christ, cannot be identified with the visible communion, which contains weeds and wheat, good and evil; instead the society of saints is an invisible union living within and sustaining the visible communion spread throughout the world. Using this distinction, Augustine argued that baptisms performed for schismatics outside the visible church and for unrepentant Catholics within it are in fact equivalent. Apart from the true, invisible church, each is valid but neither is sanctifying.

Augustine's interest in the holy church as an invisible society of saints at the core of the larger, visible institution was an appropriate adjustment to the social realities of the Constantinian liberation of Christianity, the Theodosian establishment of its Catholic form, and particularly the imperial suppression of Donatism, all of which brought opportunistic and even reluctant communicants into the church. This focus on the invisible unity of the saints also permitted Augustine to develop the notion of the church as the Body of Christ or City of God, united by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and extending not only throughout the world but into the realms of the martyrs in glory and the pious dead awaiting resurrection.

As might be expected, Augustine's theology of the eucharist relied heavily on the explanations and distinctions he had developed in his controversial writings on the ritual of baptism. He presumed, for example, that the divine power operates through human agency in the sanctification of the bread and wine. The ordination that authorized a Donatist cleric to baptize also empowered him to celebrate the Lord's Supper, either in schism or after reunion with the Catholic church.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Augustine distinguished the sacrament itself from the invisible reality presented and represented by the symbolic words and actions. The sign is shared by all, including schismatics outside the church and the unconverted within it. The invisible reality signified by the ritual, however, is granted only to those actively participating in the unity of the invisible church through the gift of charity and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Eucharistic Presence**

For many reasons, however, Augustine's explanation of the presence of Christ in the eucharist had to be different from that of the operation of the Holy Spirit in baptism. Had he applied his sacramental principles in exactly the same way to baptism and eucharist, he would have asserted the validity and even sanctifying power of the eucharist celebrated daily in opposition to the unity of the church. He would have accepted the presence of Christ in the Donatist churches, which were conspicuously set against their Catholic rivals in the compact towns of Roman Africa. Augustine held back from such assertions, I suggest, because he recognized differences in the performance of the two rituals. Baptism was solemnly celebrated only once each year in each

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6. *Contra Cresconium* 2.10.12–12.14. On this question, see A.C. deVeer's *note complémentaire* 17, BA 31:766–771.



church and after extensive public preparation. The ritual itself, moreover, was shrouded in secrecy, individually conferred, experienced only once in the lifetime of each Christian and witnessed at first hand thereafter only by those who served as clergy. Although its effects were lasting, the ritual of baptism brought the individual and community into a momentary encounter with the divine power. After the ritual, used baptismal water could even be drained into the common sewer, though in some places it was allowed to leach into the ground. Nor were the oil and chrism treated as enduring media of the Spirit's presence. The eucharist, in contrast, was celebrated every Sunday and on many weekdays as well; the faithful partook regularly, and openly shared the bread and cup with most of those present. The eucharist bread was a more permanent holy thing that was regularly handled by the faithful: it was taken home, stored and shared during the week; it was carried on journeys; it was occasionally used to heal or ward off evil.<sup>7</sup> Thus Augustine might be uncertain of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the baptism of any particular person, even within his own church, without thereby undercutting the efficacy of the ritual itself. The presence and power of Christ in the eucharist, however, precisely because the one bread and cup were shared by all, could not be so transient or absent, could not so depend on the dispositions of individual communicants. The eucharist, and particularly the presence of Christ in the bread and wine, therefore, called for careful consideration and an interpretation quite different from that of baptism.

How then did Augustine explain the operation of Christ in the eucharistic celebration? He rejected a Manichean notion of the presence of Christ or of divinity in the form of the food ritually received by Christians.<sup>8</sup> The words of Christ himself spoken by the celebrant, rather than some primordial cosmic struggle, made the bread and wine the visible sign of an invisible reality, the sacrament of Christ's body and blood.<sup>9</sup> The power of the eucharist, moreover,

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7. Augustine reports only one such miracle, *Contra secundam responsionem Iuliani opus imperfectum* 3.162 (CSEL 85/1:467-468) but it indicates that one of the faithful had easy access to the eucharistic bread. In *de civitate dei* 22.8, demonic possession or haunting of a farm is reversed by the celebration of the eucharist at the place and cures are worked through baptism but only the relics of martyrs are assigned the power to heal by contact. Ambrose of Milan's brother Satyrus received a portion of the eucharistic bread from a fellow traveler during a shipwreck off the coast of Africa; he used it as a life-preserver. See Ambrose, *de excessu fratris* 1.43 (CSEL 73:233).

8. *Contra Faustum* 20.13.

9. *Sermones* 227, 229.3 (Denis 6), 229A.1 (Guelferbytani 7).

was not carnal but spiritual; it was food for the soul rather than the flesh. Thus he insisted that Christians partake of the eucharist to gain not immortality for the body but eternal life for the spirit.<sup>10</sup>

On some occasions, particularly in his sermons, Augustine spoke of the presence of the earthly body and blood of Jesus in the eucharist, usually in connection with his saving death. He exhorted the neophytes, on the morning following their baptism, to recognize in the bread the human body that had hung on the cross. In the cup they should acknowledge the blood that had flowed from Christ's side.<sup>11</sup> Over and over again, he observed that many of the Jews later drank in faith the same blood of Christ that they had spilled in fury.<sup>12</sup> He also remarked, though not as regularly, that these converted Jews were washed in the blood they had shed—without, however, provoking any subsequent speculation about the reality of baptismal water.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, Augustine explicitly rejected the notion that Christians eat the bloody flesh and drink the fleshly blood of Christ. In his analysis of the Bread of Life discourse in John 6, he showed that the disciples had failed to understand Christ's intention in asserting that his flesh was food and his blood drink. To clarify his meaning, Jesus had then promised that when they saw the Son of Man taking his body whole and living into heaven, they would recognize that he had not intended that they should consume his dead and butchered flesh.<sup>14</sup> At the Last Supper, Christ presented the apostles with his flesh and blood to eat and drink while he was still alive and well among them, so that they would not again misunderstand the meaning of his words.<sup>15</sup> The bread and wine, Augustine observed, were obviously not to be identified with flesh and blood of the hands that held and offered them, as the *Pange lingua* would later assert.

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10. *Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis* 26.11–12 (CCL 36:264–266).

11. *Sermo* 228B (Denis 3).

12. *Sermones* 77.4, 80.5, 87.14, 89.1, 352.2, 313B.4 (Denis 15), 60A.2 (Mai 26), 229I.3 (Mai 86), 229E.2 (Gulferbytani 9), 313E.4 (Gulferbytani 28), *Sermo de symbolo ad catechumenos* 7.5, *Enarrationes in psalmos* 45.4, 65.5, 66.9, 93.8, *Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis* 31.9.

13. "His blood was indeed upon them, but it was to wash them, not to destroy them; well, upon some to destroy them, upon others to cleanse them; upon those to be destroyed, in justice; upon those to be cleansed, in mercy." *Sermo* 229F (Gulferbytani 10), in *Sermons*, trans. Edmund Hill (New Rochelle: New City Press, 1993) 6:285.

14. *Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis* 27.3,5; *sermo* 131.1.1.

15. *Enarrationes in psalmos* 98.9, 54.23.



Might Augustine have intended, as Berrouard has contended, that the resurrected flesh, now the heavenly and even divinized body of Christ, was presented to the faithful in the eucharist so that it could be shared without being consumed and could confer immortality on those who ate it? Although such a view was espoused by Gregory of Nyssa and Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine used no such interpretation.<sup>16</sup> A brief review of the text of the *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, which Berrouard cites in support of this theory, might clarify Augustine's meaning there. As has been remarked, he first noted the integrity of the body of Christ in his ascension as proof that his corpse was not to be parceled out among his disciples.<sup>17</sup> Augustine repeated this same point in commenting on Jesus's next statement, in John 6.63, that the spirit gives life while the flesh is useless. A cadaver is useless, he explained, meat from the market is useless.<sup>18</sup> Living flesh, which is invigorated by the spirit or soul, however, need not be useless; the fleshly works of both Christ and the apostles were useful for working our salvation. The preaching and writing, however, were actions of flesh invigorated by spirit, not the efficacy of dead bodies. Thus, Augustine concluded, Christ clearly rejected the consumption of his corpse.<sup>19</sup> This argument seems clearly focused on the earthly works of Christ and the disciples, on their animated flesh. Its objective was to establish that

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16. For an exposition of the role of the eucharist in Cyril's theology, see Henry Chadwick's "Eucharist and Christology in the Nestorian Controversy," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 2 (1951): 145–164.

17. In reference to Jn 6.62. Illi enim putabant eum erogaturum corpus suum; ille autem dixit se adscensurum in caelum, utique integrum. *Cum uideritis filium hominis adscendentem ubi erat prius*, certe uel tunc uidebitis quia non eo modo quo putatis, erogatur corpus suum; certe uel tunc intellegitis quia gratia eius non consumitur morsibus. *Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis* 27.3 (CCL 36:271.10–15).

18. In reference to Jn 6.63. Non prodest quidquam, sed quomodo illi intellexerunt: carnem quippe sic intellexerunt, quomodo in cadauere dilaniatur, aut in macello uenditur, non quomodo spiritu uegetatur. *Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis* 27.5 (CCL 36:272.10–14).

19. Nam si caro nihil prodesset, Verbum caro non fieret, ut inhabitaret in nobis. Si per carnem nobis multum profuit Christus, quomodo caro nihil prodest? Sed per carnem Spiritus aliquid pro salute nostra egit. Caro uas fuit; quod habebat adtende, non quod erat. Apostoli missi sunt; numquid caro ipsorum nihil nobis profuit? Si caro apostolorum nobis profuit, caro Domini potuit nihil prodesse? Vnde enim ad nos sonus uerbi, nisi per uocem carnis? unde stilus, unde conscriptio? Ista omnia opera carnis sunt, sed agitante spiritu tamquam organum suum. *Spiritus ergo est qui uiuificat, caro autem non prodest quidquam*; sicut illi intellexerunt carnem, non sic ego do ad manducandum carnem meam. *Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis* 27.5 (CCL 36:272.20–32). Augustine also drew a parallel between knowledge with and without charity: knowledge is useful not alone but when so accompanied.

Christ intended not his dead flesh but his living body, which is useful through its salvific works—not its immortal substance.<sup>20</sup> Clearly, the life-giving spirit to which Augustine referred in this instance was the soul animating the earthly body, not, as Berrouard proposes, the Holy Spirit dwelling in the heavenly flesh of Christ.<sup>21</sup>

The author and editor of the Gospel of John may indeed have asserted that Christ intended to give his resurrected, heavenly flesh to be eaten as food. Cyril's interpretation might have accurately discerned the original objective of the text. Augustine, however, ignored this possibility in the *Tractates on the Gospel of John* and seems never to have considered it elsewhere. Instead he regularly denied that Christ is carnally consumed in the eucharist.<sup>22</sup> After the ascension, he explained, Christ is present in the church by his majesty, providence, and grace but not according to his flesh; in his flesh, he is seated at the right hand of the Father.<sup>23</sup> Augustine excludes any eating of the heavenly flesh

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20. Note that Augustine concluded the exposition by returning to his thesis: *Sicut illi intellexerunt carnem, non sic ego do ad manducandum carnem meam. Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis 27.5* (CCL 36:272.31–32).

21. Berrouard follows Radbod Willems, the editor of the *Corpus Christianorum* text of the *Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis* in distinguishing the examples of Christ and the disciples. In the case of Christ, Willems capitalizes the word *Spiritus* in Augustine's statement: *Sed per carnem Spiritus aliquid pro salute nostra egit* (CCL 36:272.22–23). See the text in note 19 above. Berrouard then interprets the statement as a reference to the divinity of Christ, basing himself on the many other texts in which Augustine describes the divine nature as *spiritus*. When they come to the fleshly operations of the Apostles, however, in speaking and writing, Willems prints the same term *spiritus* in lower case and Berrouard interprets it as a reference to the human soul, which uses the flesh as its instrument in performing these works. The text originally preached or dictated—that is, without the distinction of upper- and lower-case letters—provides no real basis for reading *spiritus* as divinity in the reference to Christ and human soul in the exactly parallel reference to the Apostles. Moreover, Augustine then concluded the exposition by returning to his thesis: Christ did not give his flesh to be eaten in the way that his hearers understood the term, as meat. Augustine does not, however, make the positive statement: that Christ gives his human flesh—even his heavenly flesh—to be eaten as enlivened by either his divinity or his human soul. See Berrouard's "L'être sacramental de l'eucharistie selon saint Augustin," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 99 (1977): 710–715.

22. As observed in the prior note. See also, *Sermo 227.1*, for the extension of the same principle to the Christians who are members of Christ in the church.

23. He is commenting on Jn 12:8. *Potest et sic intellegi: Pauperes semper habebitis uobiscum, me autem non semper habebitis. Accipiant hoc et boni, sed non sint solliciti; loquebatur enim de praesentia corporis sui. Nam secundum maiestatem suam, secundum prouidentiam, secundum ineffabilem et inuisibilem gratiam, impletur quod ab eo dictum est: Ecce ego uobiscum sum usque in consummationem saeculi. Secundum carnem uero quam Verbum assumpsit, secundum*



by assuming the identity of the body taken from Mary and the body raised and carried into heaven. In the extended consideration of the condition of the resurrected bodies of the Christians, moreover, Augustine betrays the same belief that the bodies that enjoy heaven will be the same ones that worked on earth.<sup>24</sup> A distinction between the mortal and resurrected bodies that grants divine privileges to the heavenly body of Christ is not operative in his eucharistic theology.

Nor does Augustine ever, as Theodore of Mopsuestia does in his baptismal homilies, suggest that the heavenly body of Christ serves as the medium for the communication of the Holy Spirit to the faithful.<sup>25</sup> Augustine discussed the giving of the Holy Spirit in response to faith and as the basis for good works many times, often in the context of baptism but never in connection with the reception of the eucharist. Augustine's eucharistic interest in the resurrected flesh of Christ was clearly focused on demonstrating that his body was not to be broken up and consumed by the faithful.<sup>26</sup> Augustine's statements about eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ intend something other than bodily contact between the mortal flesh of the Christian and the divinity-bearing and therefore immortalizing flesh of Christ, as both the Alexandrian theologians insisted and their Antiochene opponents inferred.<sup>27</sup>

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id quod de Virgine natus est, secundum id quod a Iudaeis prehensus est, quod ligno confixus, quod de cruce depositus, quod linteis inuolutus, quod in sepulcro conditus, quod in resurrectione manifestatus, *non semper habebitis uobiscum*. Quare? Quoniam conuersatus est secundum corporis praesentiam quadraginta diebus cum discipulis suis, et eis deducentibus uidendo non sequendo, adscendit in caelum, et non est hic. Ibi est enim, sedet ad dextram Patris; et hic est, non enim recessit praesentia maiestatis. *Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis* 50.13 (CCL 36:438.1–439.17).

24. *De civitate dei* 22.11–21.

25. Berrouard attempts to build this interpretation on the use of the phrase *spiritalia carnaliter sapiendo* in *Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis* 27.11 (CCL 36:276.6), which he then refers to the heavenly body of Jesus received in the eucharist. The entire section, however, clearly indicates that the *spiritalia* in question are the body and blood that are the church. Berrouard, "L'être sacramental," pp. 718–719. He is right in making the Holy Spirit the soul or principle of unity in the ecclesial body of Christ, but he has no basis in Augustine's texts—these or any others—for making the heavenly body of Christ the medium of the reception of the Holy Spirit. I am grateful to Leonidas Kotsiris for this insight into Theodore's eucharistic theology. The numbering of the various editions of Theodore's *Catechetical Homilies* is not consistent. The relevant material in A. Mingana's edition is to be found in *Woodbrooke Studies* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1933), 6:75–77, and in Edward Yarnold's version in *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Christian Initiation*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994), pp. 205–207.

26. Thus *sermones* 227.1, 131.1.

27. Berrouard seems disappointed that Augustine's neo-Platonism prevented his developing the kind of eucharistic theology which Cyril of Alexandria did. See "L'être sacramental," pp. 714–715.

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Augustine's interests were different. To the carnal eating that characterizes a misunderstanding of the eucharist, Augustine contrasted a spiritual partaking. Using Paul's reflections in 1 Corinthians 10 and 12 to interpret John 6, Augustine developed an appreciation of the eucharist as the ecclesial body of Christ, the holy church. Thus he explained in the commentary on John 6:

Christ wanted this food and drink to be understood as the society of his body and members, which is the holy church in those predestined and called, in the justified and glorified saints and the faithful. . . . The sacrament of this reality, that is of the unity of the body and blood of Christ, is prepared on the Lord's table in some places daily and in other places every few days. From the Lord's table the sacrament is received, by some for life and by others for destruction. The reality itself which corresponds to this sacrament, however, confers life and not death on all who share it.<sup>28</sup>

This text introduces the characteristic Augustinian distinction between *sacramentum* and *res*, sign and reality. The sign he specified as the food and drink, the bread and wine offered on the table of the Lord. The reality he named by three different sets of terms: the society of his body and members, the holy church in the saints and faithful, the unity of the body and blood of Christ. The referent is not, of course, the visible church, which includes both saints and sinners, those predestined to glory and those foreknown to destruction; it is rather the invisible church consisting of those who share the love of God and neighbor through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Many receive the sacrament, the bread and wine; fewer share this life-giving reality, the ecclesial body of Christ.<sup>29</sup>

In Easter sermons directed to the neophytes, Augustine sharply contrasted the body that Christ had taken from Mary—in which he had suffered on the cross, in which he had risen from the dead, and which he now bears in heaven—with that body in which Christ presents himself to the faithful on the altar. The

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28. Hunc itaque cibum et potum societatem uult intellegi corporis et membrorum suorum, quod est sancta ecclesia in praedestinatis et uocatis, et iustificatis, et glorificatis sanctis, et fidelibus eius. Quorum primum iam factum est, id est, praedestinatio; secundum et tertium factum est, et fit, et fiet, id est, uocatio et iustificatio; quartum uero nunc in spe est, in re autem futurum est, id est, glorificatio. Huius rei sacramentum, id est, unitatis corporis et sanguinis Christi alicubi quotidie, alicubi certis interuallis dierum in dominica mensa praeparatur, et de mensa dominica sumitur: quibusdam ad uitam, quibusdam ad exitium; res uero ipsa cuius sacramentum est, omni homini ad uitam, nulli ad exitium, quicumque eius particeps fuerit. *Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis* 26.15 (CCL 36:267.27–268.39).

29. The same idea is expressed in *epistula* 149.2.16.



eucharistic body he identified with the ecclesial unity, using the text of 1 Corinthians 10.17, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body," and 1 Corinthians 12.27, "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it."<sup>30</sup>

To eat and drink the reality of the eucharist is not an action of the teeth and tongue but of the heart, Augustine asserted. Thus in the commentary on John, he wrote:

Then Christ explains how what he is talking about can be accomplished, what it means to eat his flesh and drink his blood. "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood remain in me and I in them." To eat this food and drink this drink, then, is to abide in Christ and to have Christ abiding in oneself. Thus, those who do not abide in Christ, and in whom Christ does not abide, clearly neither eat his flesh nor drink his blood. Instead they eat and drink the sacrament of this great reality for judgment against themselves.<sup>31</sup>

To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ means to dwell in Christ, a spiritual rather than a carnal act.<sup>32</sup> Again, Augustine distinguished those who actually abide in Christ and share the reality from those who appear in the visible church but do not abide in Christ, who eat and drink only the signs, the bread and wine.

To abide in Christ, he then explained, was to belong to the body of Christ, by sharing the gift of charity in the unity of the church.

The faithful recognize the body of Christ as long as they strive to be the body of Christ. Let them become the body of Christ if they want to live by the spirit of Christ. Only the body of Christ lives by the spirit of Christ. Understand, brothers and sisters, what I just said. You are human; you have both a spirit and a body. By a spirit I mean what is called a soul, which makes you human; you are made up of body and soul. You have, then, an invisible soul and a visible body. Tell me which of these provides your life:

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30. *Sermones* 227, 272.

31. Denique iam exponit quomodo id fiat quod loquitur, et quid sit manducare corpus eius, et sanguinem bibere. *Qui manducat carnem meam, et bibit meum sanguinem, in me manet et ego in illo.* Hoc est ergo manducare illam escam, et illum bibere potum, in Christo manere, et illum manentem in se habere. Ac per hoc qui non manet in Christo, et in quo non manet Christus, procul dubio nec manducat carnem eius, nec bibit eius sanguinem, sed magis tantae rei sacramentum ad iudicium sibi manducat et bibit. *Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis* 26.18, (CCL 36:268.1-9). On the integrity of this text and the questionable version in Willems's *Corpus Christianorum* edition, see Berroruard's *note complémentaire* 65, in BA 72:823-824.

32. See also *de civitate dei* 21.25.4.

does your spirit live by your body or does your body live by your spirit? Anyone alive can answer that (and I doubt that any who cannot answer are actually alive). What would anyone alive say? My body lives by my spirit. Do you, then, want to live by the spirit of Christ? Then be in the body of Christ. Doesn't your body live by your spirit? Mine lives by my spirit and yours by yours. The body of Christ can live only by the spirit of Christ. The Apostle Paul makes this point in explaining this bread: "We though many are one bread," he says, "one body." O sacrament of piety! O sign of unity! O bond of charity! Any who want to live have here the source and means of living. Let them come, let them believe, let them be incorporated, so they may be enlivened. Let them not disdain the gathering of members; nor be a rotting member which deserves to be pruned off; nor be a twisted limb which brings shame. Let them be beautiful, fit, and healthy; let them stick to the body; let them live by the God who is from God. Let them labor on earth now so that they may reign in heaven later.<sup>33</sup>

The following sentences confirm that the spirit of Christ to which Augustine refers here is the Holy Spirit, the life force in the ecclesial body of Christ, which is to be identified with the animating soul of neither the heavenly body of Christ nor the earthly body of the Christian. Christians endowed with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit share the gift of charity, which first joins them together in love of God and one another, then performs all good works in them.<sup>34</sup> To share the reality and not just the sacrament of the eucharist one must be joined into that invisible unity and thus become the body of Christ. When Augustine exhorted his congregation to become and to be what they received,

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33. *Norunt fideles corpus Christi, si corpus Christi esse non negligent. Fiant corpus Christi, si uolunt uiuere de Spiritu Christi. De Spiritu Christi non uiuit, nisi corpus Christi. Intellegite, fratres mei, quid dixerim. Homo es, et spiritum habes, et corpus habes. Spiritum dico quae anima uocatur, qua constant quod homo es; constas enim ex anima et corpore. Habes itaque spiritum inuisibilem, corpus uisibile. Dic mihi quid ex quo uiuat: spiritus tuus uiuit ex corpore tuo, an corpus tuum ex spiritu tuo? Respondet omnis qui uiuit; (qui autem hoc non potest respondere, nescio si uiuit) quid respondet omnis qui uiuit? Corpus utique meum uiuit de spiritu meo. Vis ergo et tu uiuere de Spiritu Christi? In corpore esto Christi. Numquid enim corpus meum uiuit de spiritu tuo? Meum uiuit de spiritu meo, et tuum de tuo. Non potest uiuere corpus Christi, nisi de Spiritu Christi. Inde est quod exponens nobis apostolus Paulus hunc panem, *Vnus panis*, inquit, *unum corpus multi sumus*. O sacramentum pietatis! o signum unitatis! o uinculum caritatis! Qui uult uiuere, habet ubi uiuat, habet unde uiuat. Accedat, credat, incorporetur, ut uiuificetur. Non abhorreat a compage membrorum, non sit putre membrum quod resecari mereatur, non sit distortum de quo erubescatur; sit pulcrum, sit aptum, sit sanum, hareat corpori, uiuat Deo de Deo; nunc laboret in terra, ut postea regnet in caelo. *Tractus in euangelium Ioannis* 26.13 (CCL 36:266.10–267.33).*

34. *Sermones* 267.4, 268.2.

the Body of Christ, his referent was a spiritual union of Christians in Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The statement was neither figurative nor allegorical.<sup>35</sup> Its literal, historical object, however, was not the resurrected flesh of Christ but the society of saints, the true church spread over the earth and in heaven.

The eucharistic participation of the unconverted within the visible church was also clearly described by Augustine's theory of the presence of Christ. Although they were baptized and joined the community for worship, false Catholics were not united to Christ and did not share the Spirit's gift of love. As a result, when they participated in the eucharist, they ate and drank only the sacrament, the sign, with their tongues and teeth; they did not receive the reality, Christ, with their spirits.<sup>36</sup> Because they took the sacrament rather than ordinary bread and wine, however, they were judged and perhaps even destroyed by it.<sup>37</sup> The destruction would be a spiritual death brought on by unworthy partaking. Augustine did not look to the eucharist for bodily healing or immortality and thus did not expect that unworthy reception would cause bodily harm.<sup>38</sup>

Augustine's understanding of the presence of Christ in the eucharist, then, is quite clear. The bread and wine are visible signs of an invisible reality, the sacrament of the ecclesial body of Christ. To partake of the invisible reality through visible eating and drinking means to belong to the body of Christ by sharing in the unity of love. The body whose soul is the Holy Spirit is not the heavenly but the ecclesial body of Christ; by the gift of charity, the Spirit joins Christ's members into the body of love and performs all good works in them.

## The Theological and Social Setting

Having examined the texts of Augustine, let us now turn attention to the theological and social setting of his explanations. This understanding of the eucharist as the sacrament of the ecclesial rather than the heavenly body of Christ fits well

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35. *Sermones* 272, 228B.3–4 (Denis 3).

36. *Epistula* 185.11.50, *Enarrationes in psalmos* 103.1.9, *sermo* 272, *In Ioannis epistulam ad Parthos tractatus* 3.5.

37. *Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis* 26.11–12, 15, 18.

38. Cyprian, in contrast, reported the convulsions and other injuries suffered by secret idolaters when they approached the eucharist, *de lapsis* 23–26, (CCL 3:234–236). As has been noted above, Augustine recorded only one miracle of healing through topical application of the eucharistic bread, *contra secundam responsionem Iuliani opus imperfectum* 3.162, (CSEL 85/1:467–468).

into the context of Christianity in Roman Africa. Augustine's theology may have been influenced by his theory of signs or his Platonic disregard for the religious significance of the earthly body, as Berrouard contends.<sup>39</sup> Far more significant were the conflict with the Donatists, the African understanding of the salvific work of Christ, and particularly the link that Cyprian had established between the gift of the Spirit, the eucharist, and the unity of the church.

In constructing his argument for the validity of baptism performed in schism, Augustine had asserted that upon leaving the unity of the church the Donatists had taken with them both baptism and the power to confer it.<sup>40</sup> In their attempt to heal the schism of the African Church, the Catholic bishops had recognized the validity of schismatic orders, offering to place a reconciled Donatist bishops over a Catholic congregation when its bishop died.<sup>41</sup> A similar recognition of the validity of schismatic eucharist was implied: the sacrament was celebrated by these bishops in their Donatist churches; the reality of the sacrament, however, could be neither received nor retained in schism.<sup>42</sup> The unity of the body of Christ in love, Augustine explained, was the invisible reality signified by the sanctified bread and wine. In the very act of celebrating this ritual in opposition to the unity of the universal church, however, the Donatists were rejecting the reality it signified, the *res*, and thereby destroying the meaning of the *sacramentum*. The Donatist shared the visible sign of the eucharist but lacked its invisible reality. By retaining the creed, ritual, and moral code, the schismatics might bear the outer appearance of Christians, but by breaking away from the bond of unity they rejected and lost its inner life.<sup>43</sup> By identifying the eucharistic presence as the ecclesial rather than the heavenly body of Christ, Augustine could easily demonstrate that the Donatist celebration in separation from the church was an empty shell, a sign pointing to nothing. Had he taken a different approach, the approach advocated by the Alexandrians and the medieval theologians, he would have been forced either to admit the

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39. As Berrouard suggests, "L'être sacramental," pp. 715–716.

40. *Contra epistulam Parmeniani* 2.13.28, *de baptismo* 1.1.2. In his commentary on the *acta* of the Council of Carthage of 257, however, Augustine avoided making the connection to the eucharist, though the *sententia* of Caecilius of Bilita introduced just this argument, *de baptismo* 6.8.11–12.

41. In this, they were following the precedent set by the Roman bishop Miltiades at the outset of the controversy: Augustine, *epistulae* 43.5.16 (CSEL 34:98.4–14), 185.10.47 (CSEL 57:41.2–13). On this question, see A.C. deVeer's *note complémentaire* 17, BA 31:766–771.

42. In *de baptismo* 5.8.9, Augustine even argued that the body and blood of Christ was offered to the Donatists, just as it had been to Judas and the unworthy Christians of Corinth.

43. *Epistula* 185.6.24, 11.50; *de ciuitate dei* 21.25.3; *sermones* 229.2, 268.2.



continuing bodily presence and operation of the heavenly Christ in a competing ecclesial communion or to deny that the eucharist, unlike baptism, could be celebrated in schism. Had he applied his own theory of the operation of the Holy Spirit in baptism, he would have recognized that Christ might be transiently or momentarily present among the schismatics. But Augustine could stretch Cyprian only so far. That his eucharist theology so deftly avoided the problem of the bodily presence of Christ among the Donatists, that he solved it without explicitly bringing it up, was neither unintentional on Augustine's part nor unnoticed by his colleagues.

The African understanding of the economy of salvation also exerted an influence in the development of Augustine's explanation of the eucharist. Unlike the Alexandrian and Cappadocian theologians, Augustine did not rely on the union of divine and human in Christ as a means of reversing the corruption and overcoming the passions of the flesh and then stabilizing the changing creature in immortality and happiness. In the economy of salvation that God had established for Adam and Eve in Paradise, he explained, they were preserved from disease and decay by the fruit of the tree of life.<sup>44</sup> Once their fidelity to God's command and the process of sexual generation had filled up the number of their children determined appropriate for the Kingdom of God, their human bodies would have been transformed by a creative act and made forever immortal and incapable of corruption.<sup>45</sup> In the economy established after the fall, the salvific work of Christ was directed not to the rescue of the flesh from corruption but to the sanctification of the human spirit by the indwelling of the divine Spirit for the forgiveness of sins and the performance of good works. These mysteries were the necessary means not of reversing death and conferring bodily immortality but of justifying the outpouring of the Spirit.<sup>46</sup> By his unjust assault on Christ's innocent human life, Satan forfeited all claim to dominion over sinners and thus could not gainsay their gratuitous liberation by the unmerited gift of divine love. The incarnation and death of the Son of God were the means of humanity's salvation through the humility that reversed and overcame the usurpation of Satan and the pride of Adam. Christ's bodily resurrection, in Augustine's view, was a demonstration of that divine might which he had humbly held in check in order to establish the priority of justice over

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44. *De genesi ad litteram* 6.25.36

45. *De genesi ad litteram* 9.3.6

46. *Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis* 26.10–12, 20.



power.<sup>47</sup> Unlike many other points in his theology, Augustine's explanation of the redemptive work of Christ changed little, if at all, over the forty years of his ministry. This may indicate that the theory he espoused was well established among African Christians and thus that his congregation looked to Christ's eucharistic presence for liberation from sin and servitude rather than death and corruption.

## The Eucharist and the Unity of the Church

Augustine's understanding of the eucharist as sacrament of the ecclesial body of Christ was, I believe, a development of the North African understanding of the eucharist as the foundation and sign of the unity of the church. The incarnation and the eucharist did, of course, fit into Augustine's soteriological understanding of signs and symbols. In the original condition of created spirits, both angels and humans, the mind had been interiorly illumined by the divine Light of Truth, itself symbolized by the fountain that watered Paradise. After the fall, however, humans had to rely on bodily signs to communicate with one another and God used such symbols to direct attention to the interior presence of Truth, from which sinners had turned away.<sup>48</sup> In the seventh book of *Confessions*, Augustine recounted his failure to adhere to the Light that he had decried from a distance and his resigned acceptance of the more humble way of return, through the human ministry of Christ.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, in the analysis of mental functioning in *On the Trinity*, he noted carefully the distinct roles of sense perception and the regulative principles independently operative in the mind.<sup>50</sup> His theory of conversion turned on the external preaching of the gospel and the interior movement of the Spirit that made it effective in faith.<sup>51</sup> So with the eucharist. The sharing of bread and cup signified and effected the invisible unity of Christ and his members. By the interior action of the Holy Spirit, by their mutual forgiveness and solidarity in Christ, Christians became the reality they signified.

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47. Augustine discussed the process of redemption three times: *de libero arbitrio* 3.10.31, *de trinitate* 4.13.16–17, 13.14.18–15.19.

48. *De genesi contra Manichaeos* 2.4.5; *de genesi ad litteram* 8.27.49

49. *Confessiones* 7.16.22–18.24.

50. *De trinitate* 12, esp. in the distinction between theoretical and practical intelligence.

51. *Epistula* 194.3.9–4.18.



Augustine's understanding of the eucharist as sacrament of the ecclesial body of Christ was a development of other views well established in North African Christianity. Three are particularly important: the shared communion as the definer of church unity, the identification of the church with Christ, and the establishment of the universal church by the mutual recognition of bishops.

The most important soteriological element in the eucharistic doctrine of Augustine, and indeed for the North African church, was the role of the shared communion in identifying and establishing the unity of the church. The connection between the eucharist and the unity of the church is evident in Christian practice as early as Paul's ministry in Corinth.<sup>52</sup> Cyprian had elaborated his congregation's firmly held belief that participation in the eucharistic fellowship was a condition essential for salvation.

The extraordinary efforts that the Christians of Carthage made to maintain and regain eucharistic fellowship during and after the Decian persecution shows that they regarded the privilege as essential for salvation.<sup>53</sup> Those who were excluded because they failed to resist the imperial command to sacrifice persisted in the search for a way to be readmitted to communion. Many had immediate recourse to the confessors and martyrs as intercessors before Christ and the bishop;<sup>54</sup> others sought communion in a schismatic church set up by laxist presbyters and deacons;<sup>55</sup> others accepted public penance and appealed for the privilege of deathbed reconciliation at the first sign of illness.<sup>56</sup> The rigorist movement headed by the Roman presbyter and schismatic bishop Novatian, a movement that urged penance but refused reconciliation and communion even at the time of death,<sup>57</sup> never took root in Africa. Its supposition that Christ might forgive what the church could or would not must have appeared implausible to African Christians.<sup>58</sup>

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52. 1 Cor 10.14-30, 11.17-34.

53. In *epistula* 15.2.1, Cyprian recognized that the lapsed were anxious to return to the communion of the church and did not expect them to exercise restraint. *Epistula* 21 in the collection of Cyprian's letters is a plea for a letter of peace for lapsed friends in Rome that is sent by a Carthaginian living there. *Epistula* 27.3.1 indicates the pressure exercised on the clergy.

54. *Epistulae* 15-17. The bishops refused to act on these letters: *epistulae* 13.6; 11.3-7, 15.2, 16.1, 17.1.

55. *Epistula* 16.2.

56. See *epistulae* 13.6, 11.3-7, 15.2, 16.1, 17.1 for those who submitted; *epistulae* 18.1, 19.2, 20.3 for reconciling the dying; *epistula* 55.13.1 for the problems created by reconciliation of the sick.

57. *Epistula* 55.17-18, 26, 28.

Although Cyprian himself at one time refused communion even to dying penitents, his fellow bishops quickly brought him around to the African belief that salvation could be attained only by those who died within the communion of the church.<sup>59</sup> Subsequently he not only defended the practice of reconciling the dying but warned that God would hold rigorist bishops responsible for the damnation of those penitents to whom they had refused communion.<sup>60</sup> Christ would forgive and accept into heaven, he asserted, only those whom the bishops had already loosed on earth.<sup>61</sup> Thus Cyprian made actual participation in the communion of the church an all but absolute condition for entering the Kingdom of Christ.

The unity of the church's communion as the means of salvation became even more settled in North African Christianity during the fourth-century conflicts between Catholics and Donatists. Each side not only identified itself as the true church but asserted that participation in its own communion was essential for salvation. Belief in the communion of the church as the medium of salvation remained firm in Augustine's day. The changed social context, however, allowed him to modify Cyprian's theology in significant ways.

Augustine, as has already been seen, strengthened the theoretical structure of this belief in the unity of the church as a medium of salvation by identifying the Holy Spirit's gift of charity as the principle of both unity and holiness within the church, as well as of the individual Christian's power to love God and obey the commands of Christ. He was thus able to assert that outside the church no one could receive or retain the Holy Spirit and thus could neither fulfill the commandments nor be forgiven their violation. In developing his theology of the church, as has been seen, Augustine distinguished between the visible community and the invisible society of saints. Like Cyprian, he assumed that the saints would normally be found within the visible communion;

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58. The notion that Novatian urged penance but refused reconciliation is implied in Cyprian's charges of inconsistency and in Ambrosiaster's later demonstration of the inconsistency of the position, *Quaestiones*, 102, esp. # 23. Cyprian countered that anyone urged to penance but refused reconciliation even at death would despair and leave the church permanently. See *epistula* 55.17.2, 28.1.

59. *Epistulae* 18.1, 19.2, 20.3, 55.17.

60. *Epistulae* 55.13.1, 57.5.2, 68.4.2.

61. *Epistula* 57.1.1. While conceding that a penitent might gain salvation by martyrdom, Cyprian refused to extend this privilege to voluntary exiles who died by accident or were murdered while in legitimate flight from persecution, *epistula* 57.4.3.



unlike Cyprian, he was prepared to make significant exceptions. He explicitly noted three cases in which a Christian might be within the invisible unity of charity even though outside the visible communion of the Catholic church. In case of necessity, unbaptized Catholics in danger of death should seek baptism from an available Donatist bishop and thereby attain forgiveness, sanctification, and salvation.<sup>62</sup> Unjustly excommunicated Catholics might still be joined into the invisible unity of the church, since a bishop's misguided judgment or abuse of power could not deprive them of the gift of love.<sup>63</sup> Finally, he urged sinners who had failed a second time after a public, canonical penance to repent and undertake satisfaction for their sin. Even though the church denied them a second opportunity to be reconciled and admitted to communion, they could throw themselves upon the mercy of Christ.<sup>64</sup> They too might receive the saving gift that the church would neither mediate nor acknowledge. Augustine seems to have recognized the implications of his eucharist theology: any who shared the gift of charity were joined into the Body of Christ and thereby sharers in the eucharistic communion—as part of the reality received if not as its receivers.

Augustine adopted and adapted another of Cyprian's theses, the identification of the church with Christ and the symbolizing of this unity in the eucharist. Cyprian's insistence on the use of wine rather than water to represent the blood of Christ in the eucharist<sup>65</sup> and on allowing penitents to drink the eucharistic blood of Christ in order to gain the power to shed their own blood for Christ<sup>66</sup> are justly recognized as indicators of his realistic understanding of the presence of Christ in its celebration. No less significant, however, was his reflection on the mingling of Christ and the church in the union of grain and grapes, water and wine in the eucharist. The water mixed with the wine that would become the blood of Christ signifies the unity of Christ with the people; once joined, they are inseparable.<sup>67</sup> As the loaf is made from many grains that are harvested, milled, and mingled together, so is the church one body with Christ.<sup>68</sup>

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62. *De baptismo* 1.2.3.

63. *De baptismo* 1.17.26. For an instance of the abuse of the power to excommunicate see *epistulae* 250, 1\*.

64. *Epistula* 153.3.6–8.

65. *Epistula* 63.2.1–2.

66. *Epistulae* 63.15.2, 57.2.2.

67. *Epistula* 63.13.1–3.

68. *Epistula* 63.13.4–5.



The unanimity of Christians and their union with Christ are manifest in the loaf made from many grains and the wine crushed from many grapes, which Christ calls his body and blood.<sup>69</sup> In the *Didache*, one will recall, the symbol of the grain gathered into one loaf looks forward to the eschatological union of the church;<sup>70</sup> in Cyprian, however, it celebrates the realized union of Christians with Christ and one another in the eucharist.<sup>71</sup>

By attributing to Cyprian his own understanding of spiritually eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ as the union of Christ and Christian,<sup>72</sup> Augustine developed this allegory of the making of bread and wine. Looking back over the neophytes' preparation for baptism, he reminded them that they were milled by fasting and exorcism, moistened in baptism, baked by the fire of the Spirit, and thus had become members of the body of Christ. Through fasts, labors, humiliation, and repentance, they were crushed and flowed into the Lord's cup.<sup>73</sup> Like Cyprian, Augustine emphasized not the individual grains or grapes but their being brought into unity to symbolize the church. No matter how many loaves might be presented on a single altar, or on the altars of Catholic communities throughout the world, he insisted, all true Christians form a single loaf, the one Body of Christ.<sup>74</sup>

Cyprian's reflections on the unity of the church and upon the eucharistic celebration as its manifestation centered initially and primarily on the local church. He used Peter, for example, as a model for the local bishop, a point that he had to clarify in his later controversy with the bishop of Rome.<sup>75</sup> Local communities were joined together to form the universal church by the mutual recognition and cooperation of their individual bishops.<sup>76</sup> Although all bishops shared a single power of sanctifying and a responsibility for the Lord's

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69. *Epistula* 69.4.1.

70. *Didache* 9.4.

71. See the commentary in G. W. Clarke, *The Letters of Cyprian* (New York: Newman Press, 1984–89) 3:297, n. 32, and Berrouard, *note complémentaire* 64, BA 72:822–823.

72. *Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis* 26.17 (CCL 36:268.6–11).

73. *Sermones* 227, 229.1–2. See also *Tractatus in euangelium Ioannis* 26.17 (CCL 36:268.10–11), where Augustine credits the image to his predecessor.

74. *Sermo* 229A.1–2 (Guelferbytni 7)

75. *De unitate* had to be revised to prevent its being used to establish a kind of Roman oversight of the African church. The revisions are extensive and not limited to the substitution of a new version of chapter 4. See CCL 3:244–247.

76. *De unitate* 4–5,8; *epistulae* 45.3.2, 55.24.2, 59.14.2, 66.4.2,8.3, 68.3.2, 77.7.1–2,11.1.



entire flock, each was locally elected and enjoyed a certain autonomy in governing his church.<sup>77</sup> This understanding of the universal church as a voluntary union of bishops meant that one bishop's recognition of another implied an approval of his membership in the episcopal college, and thus a certain level of responsibility for the sins of an unworthy bishop. A consciousness of the danger of communion with apostate, schismatic, or otherwise unworthy bishops is evident in the care with which the African episcopate approached the disputed election of Cornelius in Rome,<sup>78</sup> in the maintenance of lists of approved African bishops that were supplied to overseas colleagues,<sup>79</sup> and in Cyprian's charge that Stephen of Rome might himself be held guilty of the crimes of an apostate and blasphemous bishop whom he insisted on accepting back into communion.<sup>80</sup> The Donatists later exploited this weakness in Cyprian's model of the universal church, making the worldwide episcopate guilty of the idolatry of a single African traitor.

Augustine, in contrast to Cyprian, presented the eucharist as the visible sacrament not of the local church alone but of the full City of God, which included all whom God had originally destined for glory. Thus the faithful in each local church were brought into communion with the faithful all over this world and in the world to come. Since the reality in which they were joined together was itself the Body of Christ, in which only those endowed with love could participate, the sharing of the eucharist could not transmit sin and contamination. Thus faithful Christians could tolerate sinners in the church, sinners who not only received but even presided at the celebration of the sacrament. Though all shared the sacrament of the Body of Christ, only the saints received and were united in the reality it symbolized.<sup>81</sup> The Donatist theory of pollution spreading throughout the church found no foothold in Augustine's theology of the eucharist. This was more than a happy coincidence.

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77. *Epistulae* 36.4.1, 43.7.2, 68.3.2, 4.2, 5.2. For local autonomy, see *epistulae* 55.21.1, 72.3.2.

78. *Epistulae* 44, 45, 48. See also, *epistulae* 54.3.3, 55.8.1-4.

79. *Epistula* 59.9.3.

80. *Epistula* 67.9.1-2. Stephen reversed the judgment of a Spanish council which had excommunicated two lapsed bishops.

81. It must be recognized that even in Cyprian's theology the celebration of the sacraments within the unity of the Catholic church never posed a threat of contamination. Only the unsanctified schismatic baptism and eucharist could pollute their recipients. The episcopal network was vulnerable because the union was accomplished not by sharing the eucharist but by mutual recognition.



## Implications for Modern Ecclesiology

Augustine understood the presence of Christ in the eucharist as his ecclesial body and the participation of communicants in that reality through sharing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In the loaf and cup on each altar, the pure church was symbolized and made visible, the Body of Christ was shared and thereby established. This theory functioned within the fifth century church of Roman Africa, where it fit with the contemporary understanding of the Donatist schism and of the visible church as a mixed body of good and evil persons who would be sorted out only at the final judgment. How would such an understanding of the eucharist function today? The liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council certainly focus the liturgy on the presence of Christ in and as the gathered community sharing the sacramental bread and wine.

Move one step further, however, and combine this shift with the changed recognition of the status of schismatic Christian churches and ecclesial communities. Separated Christians—not to speak of practitioners of nonchristian religions—may indeed share in the saving gift of Christ. By Augustine's theory, would this not make them part of that invisible society of saints that is the Body of Christ and thus necessarily incorporated into the reality whose full and proper sign is the eucharist celebrated within the Catholic communion? The Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, asserts the presence of the Catholic Church in those other churches in which the eucharist is validly celebrated.<sup>82</sup> It does not, however, recognize the presence of all whom God has chosen, called, and sanctified in the eucharist wherever it is truly celebrated. By Augustine's theology, the communion of all who share Christ's grace is accomplished in every eucharist.

The declaration *Dominus Iesus* insists that the church has an indispensable and necessary relationship to the salvation of every human being and it exhorts theologians to continue seeking to understand the church's mysterious relationship to the salvific grace of God.<sup>83</sup> By developing Augustine's eucharist theology, one might propose that the gift of charity, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, joins all the elect into the one Body of Christ, an invisible reality that is visibly signified and received in the eucharist celebrated within the Catholic church. The eucharist would bring all true Christians into communion, as reality received if not as receivers. Catholics would then share the eucharist as an affirmation of unseen unity and as a hope-filled prayer for the eschatological unity of all in Christ.

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82. *Dominus Iesus* 17.

83. *Dominus Iesus* 20, 21.