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### Augustine's Theology of the Sacrament of the Altar as Understood from His Theory of "Signum" and "Res"

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AUGUSTINE'S THEOLOGY OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR AS  
UNDERSTOOD FROM HIS THEORY OF "SIGNUM" AND "RES"

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                           |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| INTRODUCTION . . . . .                                                                    | 1   |
| CHAPTER                                                                                   |     |
| I. AUGUSTINE'S THEORY OF SIGNS . . . . .                                                  | 3   |
| Introduction . . . . .                                                                    | 3   |
| <u>De Magistro</u> . . . . .                                                              | 4   |
| <u>De Doctrina Christiana</u> . . . . .                                                   | 7   |
| Augustine's Exegetical Method . . . . .                                                   | 14  |
| How do <u>signum</u> and <u>res</u> work<br>exegetically? . . . . .                       | 17  |
| II. AUGUSTINE'S THEOLOGY OF THE SACRAMENT ..                                              | 22  |
| <u>Signum-Sacramentum</u> . . . . .                                                       | 22  |
| <u>Res</u> as the Incarnated Word . . . . .                                               | 30  |
| The Gifts of the Sacraments . . . . .                                                     | 32  |
| Conclusion . . . . .                                                                      | 38  |
| III. AUGUSTINE'S THEOLOGY OF THE SACRAMENT<br>OF THE BODY AND BLOOD OF THE LORD . . . . . | 43  |
| Introduction . . . . .                                                                    | 43  |
| The Very Body and Blood of Christ . . . . .                                               | 46  |
| The Mystical Body . . . . .                                                               | 60  |
| The Sacrifice . . . . .                                                                   | 65  |
| The Sacrifice in the Old Testament. . . . .                                               | 66  |
| The Sacrifice of Christ . . . . .                                                         | 69  |
| The Sacrifice of the Altar . . . . .                                                      | 70  |
| CONCLUSION . . . . .                                                                      | 85  |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .                                                                    | 104 |

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ACW - Ancient Christian Writers
- CCSL - Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
- CSEL - Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
- FC - Fathers of the Church
- LF - Library of Fathers of the Church
- NPNF - Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
- PL - Patrologia Latina

## INTRODUCTION

Augustine's definition of sacrament and its consequent theology of the sacrament of the altar have profoundly influenced the doctrine of the sacraments of the whole Western Church. Both scholastics and reformers found support for their sacramental theology in Augustine. The answer to the question how this could be may be found by inquiring into the variety and complexity of forms of interpretation of this in the wide and diverse range of his writings.

Augustine's Platonic way of thinking causes him to see the things of this world as signs that point to a world beyond. Within the context of this way of thinking, that is, from lower to higher, from outer to inner, from visible to invisible, from temporal to eternal, we will seek to analyze his theology of the sacrament. In order to do this, this paper will examine the terms signum and res as employed by Augustine in his theory of sign and in his definition of sacrament. That, in turn, may enable us to relate this theory to his theology of the sacrament. On the basis of these preliminary studies, we shall attempt to follow the way his theology of "sacrament" influences his theology of the sacrament of the altar.

The research is organized in the following manner: In the first chapter, an analysis of his theory of signs will be presented as found in his works, De Magistro and De Doctrina Christiana. In the second chapter, Augustine's concept of the term sacramentum will be examined. This may bring us to an evaluation of his definition of the term. As a way of checking our findings we shall then take some samples from other works from various periods of his theological thought. The third chapter will be a study of the influence of these preliminary considerations upon some aspects of his theology of the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ such as their very presence, the mystical body, and the sacrifice.

With the exception of De Magistro, the English version to Augustine's works will be cited from The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, first series, Library of Fathers, and from The Fathers of the Church. The Latin texts will be taken from the Patrologia Latina, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina and Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum.

CHAPTER I  
AUGUSTINE'S THEORY OF SIGNS

Introduction

An analysis of Augustine's structuring of signs as well as their function reveals to us much more than a philosophical system regarding the significance and importance of language. Rather, his theory of signs serves his theological work which serves as the basis of his methodology in studying the Scriptures.

Our analysis of Augustine's theory of signs will be based especially on two works essential for such a study, the early De Magistro and the later De Doctrina Christiana, yet without ignoring some of his other relevant works. In the two works named, Augustine presents his theory both more objectively and extensively. So initially, a brief analysis of the structure and content of these works will help us to understand the method, content, and development of his theory. After that, an analysis of the signum--res relation will provide us the tools for understanding Augustine's sacramental theology, and as a result, his understanding of the

sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

De Magistro

This work, written in 389 (two years after his baptism),<sup>2</sup> is presented in the form of a dialogue between Augustine himself, and his son, Adeodatus. The dialogue begins with a conversation about the meaning of language and the grammatical role of words. Furthermore, Augustine moves beyond literary reflection and seeks to bring Adeodatus to a higher moral and religious doctrine, that is, the "truth" which embraces all things. At that point, Augustine discusses the different categories of signs,<sup>3</sup> the importance of language as signs of things, and our dependence on it. However, in the course of this discussion he confronts us with the paradoxical character of this dependence, which will be the movement of the moral to the reli-

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<sup>1</sup>"'Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord, [as] the King of Israel,' by 'in the name of the Lord' we are rather to understand 'in the name of God the Father,' although it might also be understood as in His own name, inasmuch as He is also Himself the Lord. . . . For the true teacher of humility is Christ, who humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. But He does not lose His divinity in teaching us humility; in the one He is the Father's equal, in the other He is assimilated to us." Philip Schaff, ed., Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 14 vols. (New York: Charles Scribners, 1903), 7:173 (On The Gospel Of John, 51.3). Hereafter abbreviated as NPNF.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph M. Colleran, trans., in Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe, ed., Ancient Christian Writers, 25 vols. (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1950), 9:115 (The Teacher, 10.30). Hereafter abbreviated as ACW.

<sup>3</sup>Vide infra p. 10, notes 17 and 18.



gious character of his dialogue with Adeodatus.

The paradox presented by Augustine brings us the following propositions: first, nothing can be learned or communicated without signs, with the exception of natural phenomena. He states: "Still, since speech itself is also a sign, it is not yet entirely clear that anything can be taught without signs."<sup>4</sup> Secondly, he says that even with words (signs), we cannot learn; for when a sign is given, if it finds one not knowing of what thing it is a sign, it can teach nothing. On the other hand, one might learn nothing, even if the sign is known. He argues: "For when a sign is presented to me, if it finds me ignorant of the reality of which it is a sign, it cannot teach me anything; but if it finds me knowing the reality, what do I learn by means of the sign?"<sup>5</sup>

The solution to the paradox is found in his theory of "illumination," that is, the truth that reigns in the mind of man. This truth within is identified as Christ, who is identified as "the unchangeable power of God and everlasting wisdom."

And He who is consulted, He who is said to dwell in the inner man, He it is who teaches--Christ--that is, the unchangeable Power of God and everlasting Wisdom. This Wisdom every rational soul does, in fact, consult. But

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<sup>4</sup>ACW, p. 170 (The Teacher, 10.30).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 173 (The Teacher, 10.33).

to each one only so much is manifested as he is capable of receiving because of his own good or bad will.<sup>6</sup>

So, no one learns anything from signs, but rather by consulting this wisdom within every rational soul, one learns what this "Inner Teacher" opens up (panditur).

In short, Augustine's thesis proposed in this work is to demonstrate that God is the ultimate cause when truth is comprehended within himself by man. The "Inner Teacher," as Augustine calls the Power of God imprinting on human intellect is a representation of reality, the illumination or the truth of our knowledge and judgment.

Augustine's theory of signs becomes theologically operative in the moment he concludes that all things signified through signs are comprehended by the illuminated mind, whose light comes from God.<sup>7</sup>

Signs by themselves have no autonomy to make us know physical realities unless we have experienced those objects through the senses. However, these signs will only make us see "intelligible" realities within the mind if it has been

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 177 (The Teacher, 11.38). "Ille autem, qui consulitur, docet, qui in interiore homine habitare dictus est Christus, id est incommutabilis dei virtus atque sempiterna sapientia, quam quidem omnis rationalis anima consulit, sed tantum cuique panditur, quantum capere propter propriam sine malam sine bonam voluntatem potest." Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 176 vols. (Turnholti, Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1964), 29.2.2:196. Hereafter abbreviated as CCSL.

<sup>7</sup>"For he [one] is taught not by my words, but by the realities themselves made manifest to him by God revealing them to his inner self." ACW, 9:179 (The Teacher, 12:40).

illuminated by the power and wisdom of God within. This is the movement up to the level of intellegere.

Augustine's principle in his theory of illumination comes from the writings of the Platonic philosophers.<sup>9</sup> He says in his Confessions: "And therein I read (books of the Platonists), not indeed in the same words, but to the self-same effect, enforced by many and divers reasons."<sup>9</sup> From this perspective, common points of view between Platonic philosophy and Augustine's theory are quite clear. For example, Socrates "maintained that the truth resides internally within the mind, so that no one 'teaches' or 'gives' truth."<sup>10</sup>

Augustine, however, applies the principle of this theory of illumination to the sphere of the person of Christ, with Christ being the "Light" which is the power of God and everlasting Wisdom.

For what else is the 'Light' of God, except the 'Truth' of God? Or what else is the 'Truth' of God, except the 'Light' of God? And the person of Christ is both of these. 'I am the Light of the world: he that believeth on Me, shall not walk in darkness.'<sup>11</sup>

### De Doctrina Christiana

The general objective of Augustine's De Doctrina

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>9</sup>NPF, 1:107 (The Confessions of St. Augustine, VII.9.13).

<sup>10</sup>ACW, 9:123.

<sup>11</sup>NPNE, 8:139 (On the Psalms, 43.4).

Christiana, begun in the year 397 and concluded (end of Chapter III and IV) in 426 or 427,<sup>12</sup> is to offer a method for teaching the Scriptures to those who are students of them. He states in the Prologue:

There are certain rules for the interpretation of Scripture which I think might with great advantage be taught to earnest students of the word, that they may profit not only from reading the works of others who have laid open the secrets of the sacred writings, but also from themselves opening such secrets to others. These rules I propose to teach to those who are able and willing to learn, if God our Lord does not withhold from me, while I write, the thoughts He is wont to vouchsafe to me in my meditations on this subject.<sup>13</sup>

Augustine presents his De Doctrina equipped with two primary principles. He says, "There are two things on which all interpretation of Scripture depends: the mode of ascertaining the proper meaning, and the mode of making known the meaning when it is ascertained."<sup>14</sup> So Augustine's De Doctrina deals with a "method" by which the Scriptures are understood (modus inveniendi), and a "method" for teaching what was understood (modus proferendi).

The first part of De Doctrina, which deals with modus inveniendi, is developed in Books I through III. There

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<sup>12</sup>Obras De San Agustin, Teofilo Prieto, ed., 32 vols. (Madrid: Editorial Catolica, 1955), 15:50.

<sup>13</sup>NPNF, 2:519 (On Christian Doctrine, Preface.1).

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 522 (On Christian Doctrine, 1.1.1). "Duae sunt res quibus nititur omnis tractatio scripturarum; modus inveniendi quae intellegenda sunt, et modus proferendi quae intellecta sunt." Patrologia Latina, J. P. Migne, ed., 120 vols. (Paris: Apud Garnieri Fratres, 1878), 34:19. Hereafter abbreviated as PL.

Augustine teaches that, "All instruction is either about things or about signs; but things are learnt by means of signs."<sup>15</sup> In that manner, res and signum are interrelated, so that the interpreter of Scriptures, to understand the res (doctrines), must know the signum (words), because it is through it the res is learned. So, in the first three books Augustine discusses the relation between res and signum.

In the first book, Augustine deals with the res which is discovered through the signum. At this stage, he distinguishes between the "thing" and the "things." He makes a differentiation between the thing to be enjoyed, which is God, and the things which are to be used. "Among all things, then, those only are the true objects of enjoyment which we have spoken of as eternal and unchangeable. The rest are for use, that we may be able to arrive at the full enjoyment of the former."<sup>16</sup> That is, any "thing" less than the "thing" which is God should be used as a means toward the enjoyment of God.

In the second and third books, Augustine presents his doctrine of signum. He differentiates between signum naturale, which is caused without human intention, and signum

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<sup>15</sup>NPNE, 2:523 (On Christian Doctrine). "Omnis doctrina vel rerum est signorum; sed res per signa discuntur." PL, 34:19.

<sup>16</sup>NPNE, 2:527 (On Christian Doctrine, 1.22.20).

datum,<sup>17</sup> which is intentional. Using the words in the context of "the knowledge of the language" as the signa data, he says, "Now there are two causes which prevent what is written from being understood: its being veiled either under unknown, or under ambiguous signs. Signs are either proper or figurative [propria vel translata]."<sup>18</sup> In fact, four points are raised and discussed in this stage. He deals with the problems of, first, the "Unknown Proper Signs"; second, the "Unknown Figurative Signs"; third, the "Ambiguous Proper Signs"; and fourth, "Ambiguous Figurative Signs."

For the first three classes of signs, that is, "Unknown Proper," "Unknown Figurative," and "Ambiguous Proper," Augustine teaches that these (he is speaking of Latin words used in translation) can be solved by the study of the original languages (Hebrew and Greek), historical and symbolical knowledge of things, and a correct punctuation and pronunciation.<sup>19</sup>

The fourth category of signs, "Ambiguous Figurative," is the central point of Augustine's exegetical disquisi-

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 535 (On Christian Doctrine, 2.1.2). "Signorum igitur alia sunt naturalia, alia data." PL, 34.36.

<sup>18</sup>NPNE, 2:539 (On Christian Doctrine, 2.10.15). "Duabus autem causis non intelleguntur, quae scripta sunt, si aut ignotis aut ambiguis signis obteguntur. Sunt autem signa vel propria vel translata." CCSL, 32.4.1:41.

<sup>19</sup>NPNE, 2:539-543 (On Christian Doctrine, 2.10.15-15.22).

tion.<sup>20</sup> For him, what distinguishes the figurative ambiguity from other kinds of signs is the fact that for one to reach the correct interpretation of it in the Scriptures, one has to reach first of all the highest level of sapientia. "Such a son ascends to wisdom, which is the . . . last step."<sup>21</sup> He presents this doctrine of ultimate sapientia as a process of purification involving seven steps. "Steps to wisdom: first, fear; second, piety; third, knowledge; fourth, resolution; fifth, counsel; sixth, purification of heart; seventh, stop or termination, wisdom."<sup>22</sup>

Augustine's seven steps begin with the fear of God, originating from the thought of iudicium Dei.<sup>23</sup> It accepts the scriptural authority, and grows to the love of God and the neighbor. Finally, as the last step in this perfecting of love, which is also a learning of the Scriptures, the true sapientia is reached. Of this last step, says Augustine:

Accordingly, that holy man will be so single and so pure in heart, that he will not step aside from the truth, either for the sake of pleasing men or with a

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 543 (On Christian Doctrine, 2.16.23).

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 538 (On Christian Doctrine, 2.7.11).  
"Talis filius ascendit ad sapientiam, quae ultima . . . est." PL, 34.40.

<sup>22</sup>NPNF, 2:537 (On Christian Doctrine, 2.7.9).

<sup>23</sup>"Tum vero ille timor quo cogitat de iudicio Dei, et illa pietas, qua non potest nisi credere et cedere auctoritati sanctorum Librorum, cogit eum seipsum lugere." PL, 34: 39 (De Doctrina Christiana, 2.7.10).

view to avoid any of the annoyances which beset this life.<sup>24</sup>

So, the seven steps of purification become the live experience of the res (the thing signified, God's will) which makes it possible for the reader of Scripture to interpret the ambiguous figurative signa.

Finally, in book IV, Augustine treats the modus proferendi (a "method" for teaching what was understood). With a view to the limits of the present paper, it may be enough to observe that here he presents a treatise on sacred rhetoric in which he says it is not an end in itself, and that truth is more important than its expression. He says, "But the man who cannot speak both eloquently and wisely should speak wisely without eloquence, rather, than eloquently without wisdom."<sup>25</sup> Basically, both works, the De Magistro and the De Doctrina Christiana, tell us, on the one hand, about the importance of, and man's consequent dependence on signs. On the other hand, these agree that unless man's mind be illuminated by the light which is God, no knowledge will be achieved through "words" which are the most important signa.

The relation between signum (sign-word) and a prior experience of res signata (the thing signified), which is the Word of God, forms the convergent point of these two

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<sup>24</sup>NPNE, 2:538 (On Christian Doctrine, 2.7.11).

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 596 (On Christian Doctrine, 4.28.).



works. For Augustine, the Scriptures, like any other document, are signs called words; however, any method of reading and interpreting these words is a "reflection on words as analogous to Christ the Word."<sup>26</sup> This analogy, in turn, moves in two directions. On the one hand, the human verba are like the Verbum in the sense that the inward element, the Verbum (res signata), is not affected by the outward element, the verba (the signum). Thus he can say:

'The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' Just as when we speak, in order that what we have in our minds may enter through the ear into the mind of the hearer, the word which we have in our hearts becomes an outward sound and is called speech; and yet our thought does not lose itself in the sound, but remains complete in itself, and takes the form of speech without being modified in its own nature by the change; So the Divine Word, though suffering no change of nature, yet became flesh, that He might dwell among us.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, the human verba convey the Verbum. "The fulfillment and the end of the Law, and of all Holy Scripture, is the love of an object which is to be enjoyed, and the love of an object which can enjoy that other in fellowship with ourselves."<sup>28</sup> In that way, the human verba reflect the Incarnation in order that they actualize the Incarnation to the Church.

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<sup>26</sup>Mark D. Jordan, "Words and Word: Incarnation and Signification in Augustine's De Doctrina Christiana," Augustinian Studies, vol. 11 (Villanova, PA: Villanova University, 1974), p. 177.

<sup>27</sup>NPNF, 2:526 (On Christian Doctrine, 1.13).

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 2:533 (On Christian Doctrine, 1.35.39).

Augustine's Exegetical Method

On the basis of an analysis of Augustine's theory of signs, as seen in his De Magistro and De Doctrina Christiana, it is possible to say that for him every signum has a res signata, and that everything, except God himself, is a signum. In other words, all things or actions can be symbolically communicative, and therefore, what they communicate is the inner potency of the sign, which moves upward to God, the ultimate res signata.

Augustine's theory, according to what was said above, represents his cultural world, whose characteristic is "a whole dynamic world of people-perceiving-things-as-signs."<sup>29</sup> From that perspective, Augustine's theory of signs is his methodological proposal for interpreting the Scriptures. Be it literal or figurative, his task is to find within it the inner and higher spiritual meaning. He speaks of this in De Doctrina Christiana as love's God-centering potency.

For in this every earnest student of the Holy Scriptures exercises himself, to find nothing else in them but that God is to be loved for His own sake, and our neighbor for God's sake; and that God is to be loved with all the soul, and with all the mind, and one's neighbor as one's self--that is, in such a way that all our love for our neighbor, like all our love for ourselves, should have reference to God.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Lawrence F. Frankovich, "Augustine's Theory of the Eucharistic Sacrifice" (Ph. D. diss., Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1976), p. 39.

<sup>30</sup>NPNF, 2:537-538 (On Christian Doctrine, 2.7.10).

And again, "Let us regard the scripture of God to be, as it were, the field where we wish to build something. Let us not be slothful, nor be content with the surface; let us dig deeply until we come to the rock: 'and that rock was Christ.'"<sup>31</sup> So, in Augustine's exegetical methodology, the Scriptures are a signum within the world that by itself is also a signum, and whose res, that is, its ultimate significance, is God.

In De Magistro he says that we do not have knowledge of a signum unless we know of what it is a signum. "We do not learn anything by means of the signs called words. For, as I have said, we learn the meaning of the word--that is, the signification that is hidden in the sound--only after the reality itself which is signified has been recognized."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, from the scriptural point of view, to know the sign means to know its ultimate meaning, or rather, to know its higher spiritual meaning.

Augustine's exegetical principle is grasped from the fact that all biblical signs point to "the will of God,"<sup>33</sup> which is that God is to be loved as well as the neighbor. He says:

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 7:150 (On The Gospel Of St. John, 23.1).

<sup>32</sup> ACW, 9:174 (The Teacher, 10.34).

<sup>33</sup> "In all these books those who fear God and are of a meek and pious disposition seek the will of God." NPNE, 2: 539 (On Christian Doctrine, 2.9.14). Vide infra p. 18, note 42.

. . . we should clearly understand that the fulfillment and the end of the Law, and of all Holy Scripture, is the love of an object which is to be enjoyed, and the love of an object which can enjoy that other in fellowship with ourselves.<sup>34</sup>

Augustine himself explains the meaning of the words "an object which is to be enjoyed," when he says:

The true objects of enjoyment, then, are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are at the same time the trinity, one being, supreme above all, and common to all who enjoy Him, if He is an object, and not rather the cause of all objects, or indeed even if He is the cause of all.<sup>35</sup>

The same idea is more clearly stated in In Joannis Evangelium Tractatus where he says, "Understand Christ in them [the prophetic books], and what thou readest not only has a taste, but even inebriates thee; transporting the mind from the body, so that forgetting the things that are past, thou reachest forth to the things that are before."<sup>36</sup> Here the movement is from signum to res signata, from lower to higher, as from body to mind, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, and to Christ within. This has consequences for anthropology, Christology, and for the Lord's Supper (Cf. pp. 20, 21, 38 and 39).

Finally, regarding biblical inspiration, it is possible to say that Augustine sees it as obvious, since everything is a sign of God's power. Likewise, the biblical fig-

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<sup>34</sup>NPNE, 2:533 (On Christian Doctrine, 1.35).

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 524 (On Christian Doctrine, 1.5).

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 7:64 (On the Gospel of St. John, 9.3).

urative language is not a problem because God foresaw all possible interpretations, and all of them lead ultimately to the same truth. He says:

For what more liberal and more fruitful provision could God have made in regard to the Sacred Scriptures than that the same words might be understood in several senses, all of which are sanctioned by the concurring testimony of other passages equally divine?<sup>27</sup>

This indicates the way he would teach according to Scripture.

#### How Do "Signum" and "Res" Work Exegetically?

Augustine says:

A signum is a thing which, over and above the impression it makes on the senses, causes something else to come into the mind [thought] as a consequence of itself: as when we see a footprint, we conclude that an animal whose footprint this is has passed by.<sup>28</sup>

Through a definition which would become classic throughout the Middle Ages, Augustine relates an external thing which is perceived by the senses (praeter speciem quam ingerit sensibus) to an internal something which is brought to thought (in cogitationem) by perception of the external thing.

For Augustine, the most important signs used by men are spoken and written words.

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 2:567 (On Christian Doctrine, 3.27).

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 535 (On Christian Doctrine, 2.1). "Signum est enim res, praeter speciem quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire: sicut vestigio viso, transisse animal cuius vestigium est, cogitamus; et fumo viso, ignem subesse cognoscimus." PL, 34:35.

For among men words have obtained far and away the chief place as a means of indicating the thoughts of the mind . . . . For I have been able to put into words all those signs, the various classes of which I have briefly touched upon, but I could by no effort express words in terms of those signs.<sup>39</sup>

The above makes clear that Augustine refers to "words" as the most important of signa, not because they are qualitatively greater, but rather because they are the most common signum.

It is important to mention that the term signum as employed by Augustine has no relation to the Greek term "semeion" employed in the Scriptures. They use the term in two different senses: "(1) of distinguishing marks or indications such as circumcision, and (2) of miracles or wonders such as the Egyptian plagues."<sup>40</sup>

Augustine does not establish essential differences among the signs; that is, all of them have the same modus operandi. In De Doctrina Christiana he says: "And all these signs are as it were a kind of visible word."<sup>41</sup> So, words or tangible things are equally "significant." There are no qualitatively different signs, except one is words and one is tangible, but all of them "operate identically."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>NPNF, 2:537 (On Christian Doctrine, 2.3.4).

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 2:536 (On Christian Doctrine, 2.3.).

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Vide supra p. 17, note 37.

Now, Augustine fits his theory with Holy Scriptures and says that these words are presented to us by men, and are intentionally given by God (signa data). He says: "And in reading it, men seek nothing more than to find out the thought and will of those by whom it was written, and through these to find out the will of God, in accordance with which they believe these men to have spoken."<sup>43</sup>

Speaking more specifically about the signs he says:

And in like manner, whensoever illustrative symbols are borrowed, for the declaration of spiritual mysteries, from created things, not only from the heaven and its orbs, but also from meaner creatures, this is done to give to the doctrine of salvation an eloquence adapted to raise the affections of those who receive it from things seen, corporeal and temporal, to things unseen, spiritual and eternal.<sup>44</sup>

In Augustine's theory of signs, no confusion of the two elements is allowed. He refuses to identify the signum with the res. He says: "Realities signified are to be esteemed more highly than their signs. For whatever exists for the sake of something else must be inferior to that for whose sake it exists."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>NPNF, 2:536-537 (On Christian Doctrine, 2.5).

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 1:307 (Letters of St. Augustine, 55.7.13). "Si quae autem figurae similitudinum non tantum de coelo et de sideribus, sed etiam de inferiori creatura docuntur ad dispensationem sacramentorum, eloquentia quaedam est doctrinae salutaris, movendo affectui discentium accomodata, a visibilibus ad invisibilia, a corporalibus ad spiritualia, a temporabilibus ad aeterna." PL, 33:211.

<sup>45</sup>ACW, 9:163 (The Teacher, 9.25). ". . . res quae significantur, pluris quam signa esse pendendas. Quidquid enim propter aliud est, vilius sit necesse est quam id propter quod est." PL, 32:1209.

However, just as there is a clear distinction between these two (one is external and perceptible to the senses, and the other internal and spiritual),<sup>46</sup> so also these two cannot be separated. There is an analogy between the signum and the res which is identified by the unity itself. One half of this unity does not suffice. So the signum and the significatur, or the res and the res signata, are not identical, and yet are not separate.

As a result of this non-separable unity, Augustine saw signum not as resolving into a mere abstraction of the mind, as Platonistic philosophy tended to do, but he saw signs as something perceptible which give access to the spiritual things they signify. He says:

I believe that the emotions are less easily kindled while the soul is wholly involved in earthly things; but if it be brought to those corporeal things which are emblems of spiritual things, and then taken from these to the spiritual realities which they represent, it gathers strength by the mere act of passing from the one to the other, and, like the flame of a lighted torch, is made by the motion to burn more brightly, and is carried away to rest by a more intensely glowing love.<sup>47</sup>

Of this the person of Christ is the ultimate paradigm. That is, the body of Christ is the signum that points to the res which is his divinity. Although as God He was

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<sup>46</sup>Vide supra note 43.

<sup>47</sup>NPNE, 1:309-340 (Letters of St. Augustine, 55.11.21).



hidden<sup>48</sup> in this body until His resurrection, the death of His flesh became man's salvation. He says, "For He took upon Him earth from earth; because flesh is from earth, and He received flesh from the flesh of Mary. And because He walked here in very flesh, and gave that very flesh to us to eat for our salvation."<sup>49</sup>

As we will see in the Third Chapter, Christ as the ultimate paradigm is the basis of Augustine's understanding of the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ. The Christological consequences of this will be the emphasis for our discussion of Augustine's theology of the "very body and blood of Christ" in the sacrament of the altar.

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<sup>48</sup>"He appeared in low estate and was despised. For He hid His Majesty, and manifested His infirmity. . . . 'For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.' . . . On the third day He rose again, He showed Himself to His disciples." Ibid., 6:376 (Sermons on New Testament Lesson, 37.9).

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 8:485 (On the Psalms, 49.8).

CHAPTER II  
AUGUSTINE'S THEOLOGY OF THE SACRAMENT

"Signum" - "Sacramentum"

Augustine did not write a treatise on this subject; what he says evidences a wide use of the term. However, the methodology for his scriptural exegesis in De Doctrina Christiana and De Magistro offers us a basis for understanding his overall use and explanation of the way how signs work, and so then, of the way how they work in his doctrine of the sacrament.

Modern scholars have found three categories in Augustine's use of the term "sacramentum."<sup>1</sup> They make reference to mysteries of man's life in Christ, scriptural symbols, and rites. However, "These three categories flow into one another; the mystery of Christ is announced in scripture and celebrated in ritual."<sup>2</sup> All this is said to be derived from Augustine.

Augustine pursued the attempt to define sacramentum by

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<sup>1</sup>Stanislaus Grabowski, The Church: An Introduction to the Theology of St. Augustine (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1957.), p. 176.

<sup>2</sup>Lawrence F. Frankovich, "Augustine's Theory of the Eucharistic Sacrifice," (Ph. D. diss., Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1976), p. 68.

bringing the term into a closer relation with the meaning of the sign itself. He says, "because of their pertaining to divine things, they are called sacraments."<sup>3</sup> That is, sacraments are signs that relate to divine things. When the key words of this definition, signa and res (divine things), are considered, the term sacramentum must be understood with a twofold sense, that is, the physical element which is "significative of" (signum) something which has a meaning beyond itself; and the non-physical element (res), which is the divine reality to which it (signum) refers.

From this perspective, Augustine's "theory of signs" brings clarity to the understanding of his definition of sacramentum. Thus as the term signum is applied in a broad sense, that is, to all physical realities which are perceptible to the human senses, so also sacramentum is applied in the same context. However, the term sacramentum should not be confused with signum, because the latter, as we saw above, includes all things that can be symbolically communicative, while the former is "to be received with reverence as sacred."<sup>4</sup> So, for Augustine, sacramentum was understood in the broadest possible sense--signum rei sacrae.

F. Van der Meer, commenting on Augustine's various usages of the term, says that ultimately "their common char-

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<sup>3</sup>Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Philip Schaff, ed., 14 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1886), 7:483 (Letters, 138, 7). Hereafter abbreviated as NPNE.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 303 (Letters, 55.1.2).

acteristic is that they are all of some spiritual importance and they are externally visible."<sup>5</sup> The problem here is that Van der Meer inserts the word "visible," restricting Augustine's definition of sacrament to the things (signa) perceptible to the sense of vision only. But according to Augustine, the term signum is applied in reference to things perceptible to all senses, that is, in its broadest possible meaning. "Our Lord, it is true, gave a sign through the odor of the ointment which was poured out upon His feet [John 12:3]; and in the sacrament of His body and blood He signified His will through the sense of taste."<sup>6</sup>

However, for Augustine, the sacrament is not sacrament because the external element is visible, audible, tangible, smellable, or tastable, but it is sacrament because these physical elements are to be considered, not what they are, but what they show. "He, on the other hand, who either uses or honors a useful sign divinely appointed, whose force and significance [vim significationemque] he understands, does not honor the sign which is seen and temporal,

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<sup>5</sup>F. Van der Meer, Augustine the Bishop, trans. Brian Battershaw and G. R. Lamb (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 280-281.

<sup>6</sup>NPNF, 2:536 (On Christian Doctrine, 2.3.4). "Nam et ad ore ungenti dominus, quo perfusi sunt pedes eius, signum aliquod dedit et sacramento corporis et sanguinis sui per gustatum significavit, quod voluit." CCSL, 32:34.

but that to which all such signs refer."<sup>7</sup> In other words, the res, or the divine reality to which the signum refers is the determinant element of the sacramentum.

Among other usages, the term sacramentum is also employed with reference to the "words of Scripture." However, this usage should still not be considered in a narrower sense. But as any other "sacramental signum," the "word" spoken and written is for Augustine only another kind of signum which he classifies as the most common and important.<sup>8</sup>

Van der Meer, on the other hand, seeks to demonstrate that "the sacrament of the word," in spite of being considered by Augustine as such, does not carry for itself the same weight as the other "visible sacraments" (baptism and the body and blood of Christ). He argues with Augustine's words:

The symbols which serve to proclaim divine truth are treated by us with great reverence, even when they make use of all manner of common things such as the winds, the sea, birds, fishes, trees, cattle, flowers and human beings. In our sermons we often make use of all manner of such symbols, but when it comes to celebrating the sacraments of Christian freedom, then we

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 2:560 (On the Christian Doctrine, III.9.13).  
". . . qui vers aut operator aut veneratur utile signum divinitus institutum, cuius vim significationemque intellegit, non hoc veneratur, quid videtur et transit, sed illud potius, quo talia cuncta referenda sunt." CCSL, 32:34.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 536 (On the Christian Doctrine, 2.3.4).

are most sparing, confining ourselves to water, wine, corn and oil.<sup>7</sup>

The point here is that Van der Meer seems to understand signum as if it were sacramentum, that is, "words" as signum, and "words" as "sacramental signum." In the quotation above, Augustine makes no mention of the "word" as sacrament, rather he is concerned about the "words" as signs used in the sermon. Even in the broad sense, it is not just any "word" that can be considered sacrament, but only the "words" which result in the offer of grace. Any "word," as Augustine himself gives evidence in the text above (winds, sea, birds, fishes, trees, cattle, etc.), is only a sign which is not directly linked to the "Word" which is the power of God. So, "words as sacraments" are those which refer to the scriptural signs, which point to a spiritual reality by way of themselves, through which grace works.

For Augustine, the words of Scripture are themselves a sacrament. With this quality, they also are present in the sacramental rites (baptism and the body and blood of Christ) as an external (audible) element which, together with the visible elements, are significant of, and point to, and communicate a higher reality which is ultimately the Triune God.

The real problem is that in Augustine we do not find

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<sup>7</sup>Van der Meer, p. 281. See NPNE, 1:307 (Letters of St. Augustin, 55.7.13).

sacraments distinguished and separated into either a broad or strict sense. This may be a fact inherent in his signum theory and so in what he says of sacramentum. Central to what he says of sacramentum is his definition of it as a "sacred sign." So, speaking about the sacraments of the Old and New Testament, Augustine says that these sacraments operate identically, and deal with, the same objective.

. . . they mistake who conclude, from the change in signs and sacraments, that there must be a difference in the things which were prefigured in the rites of a prophetic dispensation, and which are declared to be accomplished in the rites of the gospel; or those, on the other hand, who think that as the things are the same, the sacraments which announce their accomplishment should not differ from the sacraments which foretold that accomplishment.<sup>10</sup>

What can clearly be seen from this text is that the distinction between the sacraments of the Old and New Testaments is not in the sacraments themselves. Instead of the sacraments or the sacramental signa in the New Testament being different from those of the Old, the res (gratia) and the modus operandi of the signa remain the same. In other words, if the modus operandi and the res are the same in various signa, the signum used will refer to a holy reality, which is grace, Christ, the Triune God.

But if the difference is not in the sacrament itself,

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<sup>10</sup>NPNE, 4:244 (Reply to Faustus, 19.16). "'This is the bread which cometh down from heaven.' Manna signified this bread; God's altar signified this bread. Those were sacraments. In the signs they were diverse; in the thing which was signified they were alike." Ibid., 7:171 (On the Gospel of St. John, 26.12).

where is it? For Augustine the real difference between the sacraments of the Old and those of the New Law consists in the fact that by means of the "Mystery" these sacraments are brought to their very meaning. That is, he sees it in terms of our perception of Christ's incarnation. Therefore he can say,

But at the present time, after that the proof of our liberty has shone forth so clearly in the resurrection of our Lord, we are not oppressed with the heavy burden of attending even to those signs which we now understand, but our Lord Himself, and apostolic practice, have handed down to us a few rites in place of many, and these at once very easy to perform, most majestic in their significance, and most sacred in the observance; such, for example, as the sacrament of baptism, and the celebration of the body and blood of the Lord.<sup>11</sup>

For him, the quantitative difference does not concern the external signa, but it concerns the res signata.

In this point, there is not a contradiction in Augustine's speech. But in the context of his exegetical methodology, God's incarnation has shown, that is through revelation of the "Mystery," a visible proof of His grace. In other words, sacraments, as he has defined them, always maintain their own characteristics. They operate within the same mechanism (modus operandi) and retain the same res, (grace).

For Augustine, the sacraments of the Old Law had a prophetic function, but the sacraments of the New Law are

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 2:560 (On the Christian Doctrine 3.9.13).  
Vide also 4:244 (Reply to Faustus, 19.13).



witnesses of the incarnation. "For the law and the prophets up to the time of John the Baptist had sacraments which foreshadowed things to come; but the sacraments of our time bear testimony that that has come already which the former sacraments foretold should come."<sup>12</sup>

It is also important to note that this differentiation is not only a problem of temporality (before and after Christ), but also that in the person of the Incarnate, all sacraments of the New Testament find their fulfillment. It is from a Christological perspective that Augustine defines and understands the sacraments. And it is in these terms that he can say:

But at the present time, after that the proof of our liberty has shone forth so clearly in the resurrection of our Lord, we are not oppressed with the heavy burden of attending even to those signs which we now understand, but our Lord Himself, and apostolic practice, have handed down to us a few rites in place of many, and these at once very easy to perform, most majestic in their significance, and most sacred in the observance; such, for example, as the sacrament of baptism, and the celebration of the body and blood of the Lord.<sup>13</sup>

As Gunther Wenz points out, for Augustine the sacraments are the "historical signs of salvation," which are present in the sacrament of the Incarnation, namely, that in Christ it has been founded and ordered.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 4:552-553 (The Letters of Petilian, 2.37.87).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 2:560 (On Christian Doctrine, 3.9.13).

<sup>14</sup>"Sakramente sind geschichtliche Heilszeichen, die sich im sacramentum incarnationis zusammenfassen bzw. in ihm begründet und gestiftet sind." Gunther Wenz, Einführung in die evangelische Sakramentenlehre (Darmsatadt: Wissen-

This Christological approach is clearly seen when Augustine speaks about, the "useless" signs of the Gentiles and the "useful" signs of the Jews. He says:

Accordingly the liberty that comes by Christ took those whom it found under bondage to useful signs, and who were (so to speak) near to it, and, interpreting the signs to which they were in bondage, set them free by raising them to the realities of which these were signs. And out of such were formed the churches of the saints of Israel. Those, on the other hand, whom it found in bondage to useless signs, it not only freed their slavery to such signs, but brought to nothing and cleared out of the way all these signs themselves. . . .<sup>15</sup>

### "Res" As The Incarnate Word

Augustine distinguishes between the external element, or the sacramental sign, and the power (virtus) of sacrament. "Although all the Sacraments were common, grace, which is the virtue of the Sacraments, was not common to all."<sup>16</sup> Apart from the res, defined as invisible grace, the sacramental sign has no power of itself; only its res signata, this invisible gratia, can give it effect, and this only when its virtus is operative.<sup>17</sup> Speaking about the sacrament of Baptism, Augustine says, "Take away the

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schaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), p. 17.

<sup>15</sup>NPNE, 2:560 (On The Christian Doctrine, 3.8.12).

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 8:367 (On the Psalms, 78.2). ". . . et cum essent omnia communia sacramenta, non communis erat omnibus gratia, quae sacramentorum virtus est." Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 176 vols. (Turnholti, Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1964), 39:1067. Here after abbreviated as CCSL.

<sup>17</sup>Vide infra p. 33, note 24 and p. 33, note 25.

word, and the water is neither more nor less than water. The word is added to the element, and there results the Sacrament, as if itself also a kind of visible word."<sup>18</sup> Here, in his classical definition of a sacrament, he shows the very essence of the sacrament to be the res, whose "word" acts with the elementum, "water" and the "spoken words." Then the elementum as signum has become a signum sacrum, that is, a sacramentum.

Speaking in the same terms, Robert W. Jenson says:

When the Bible's God speaks to us, when his word comes to us, it comes to and then with some 'element,' some piece of the external world. His self-communication in one way or another attaches to itself that 'visible' reality that stands out there over against our subjectivity; and then that self-communication comes to us with that reality to be itself an external, 'visible' word. Just so God truly addresses us; just so he speaks to us from outside us. God's word is a word with a bath or a meal or a gesture.<sup>19</sup>

The power of the words linked with the element effects the sacrament where it pulls conjoingly higher and inward. For Augustine, the movement is from signum to res signata, from external words to the inner Word. His general understanding of sacramentum as a sign of a sacred thing (res) gives evidence by itself of the real meaning of the term. The grace or the promise that goes with this "Word" is the

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<sup>18</sup>NPNE, 7:344 (On the Gospel of St. John, 80.3). "De-  
trahe verbum, et quid est aqua nisi aqua? Accedit verbum  
ad elementum, et fit Sacramentum, etiam ipsum tamquam visi-  
bile verbum." CCSL, 36:529.

<sup>19</sup>Robert W. Jenson, Visible Words: The Interpretation  
and Practice of Christian Sacraments (Philadelphia: Fortress  
Press, 1978), p. 3.

objective and the power (virtus) of the sacrament. Regarding this grace, he stresses in On The Psalms, "What hast thou given unto God? Thou wert wicked, and thou wert redeemed! What hast thou given unto God? What is there that thou hast not 'received' from Him 'freely'? With reason is it named 'grace,' because it is bestowed (gratis, i.e.) freely."<sup>20</sup>

### The Gifts Of The Sacraments

In Augustine's definition of sacramentum, signum and res form the sacramental unity. Augustine sees this unity as working toward an ever higher unity<sup>21</sup> and understands the sacraments as the means of the operation of the grace they signify toward the ultimate unity in the Triune God. Van der Meer says that for Augustine, "They [sacraments] cause a historic event in this process of salvation to be actually present as a means of the individual salvation of every one of us, and so 'insinuate the spiritual gift' which 'the power makes effective by means of them.'"<sup>22</sup>

Augustine contrasts these spiritual gifts with the external elements of the sacrament.

For while God is eternal, the water of baptism, and all that is material in the sacrament, is transitory: the very word 'God,' which must be pronounced in the consecration, is a sound which passes in a moment. The

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<sup>20</sup>NPNE, 8:143 (On the Psalms, 44.13).

<sup>21</sup>Vide infra p. 38, note 35.

<sup>22</sup>Van der Meer, p. 308.

actions and sounds pass away, but their efficacy remains the same, and the spiritual gift thus communicated is eternal.<sup>23</sup>

This efficacious grace is the sanctifying influence of the sacraments which Augustine calls the character of the sacrament, or the sacramental grace, with Christ being the only giver of this grace. "For it is one thing to baptize in the capacity of a servant, another thing to baptize with power. For baptism derives its character from Him through whose power it is given; not from him through whose ministry it is given."<sup>24</sup>

The validity of sacrament is determined by the potestas and not the minister who administers it. In Augustine's treatise, De Baptismo, contra Donatistas, he says: "But men put on Christ, sometimes so far as to receive the sacrament, sometimes so much further as to receive holiness of life. And the first of these is common to good and bad alike; the second, peculiar to the good and pious."<sup>25</sup>

It is also through the gifts attained in the sacra-

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<sup>23</sup>NPNE, 4:244 (Reply to Faustus, 19.16).

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 7:33 (On the Gospel of St. John, 5.6). "Aliud est enim baptizare per ministerium, aliud baptizare per potestatem. Baptisma enim tale est, qualis est ille in cujus potestate datur; non qualis est ille per cujus ministerium datur." Patrologia Latina, J. P. Migne, ed., 120 vols. (Paris: Apud Garnieri Fratres, 1878), 35:1417. Here after abbreviated as PL.

<sup>25</sup>NPNE, 4:475 (On Baptism, against the Donatists, 5.24.34).

ments that the differentiation between the sacraments of the Old and those of the New Testament is made clear. Although the sacraments of the Old Testament were also considered "spiritual" (they came from God and carried in themselves a significative and prophetic power), these were only figures of the gifts to be attained in Christ. Augustine says:

The Sacraments of the New Testament give Salvation, the Sacraments of the Old Testament did promise a Saviour. . . . But the Law itself through Moses was given, Grace and Truth came through Jesus Christ: Grace because there is fulfilled through love that which by the letter was being enjoined, Truth because there is being rendered that which was promised.<sup>26</sup>

However, in order for one to receive the gifts that these sacraments signify, faith is necessary, or rather, is an essential primary element in this process. Augustine, speaking about baptism, says: "And whence has water so great an efficacy, as in touching the body to cleanse the soul, save by the operation of the word; and that not because it is uttered, but because it is believed."<sup>27</sup> Here he contrasts faith with the simple (and valid) doing of the rite.

It is relevant to mention that when Augustine says, "the operation of the word," he is making reference to the external element (word as signum). So, the "spoken word" (uttered) refers to the signum, while the "word believed"

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 8:343 (On the Psalms, 74.1).

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 7:344 (On the Gospel of St. John, 80.3).

refers to the res, that is, the invisible gratia. Without pursuing the questions of the level which faith occupies in the progression, we may observe here that its relation is to Christ Incarnate and His work.

Likewise, speaking about the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, he says that mere oral reception of the elements does not suffice, but this act must be accompanied by a lively faith. "The faithful recognise the Sacrament of the faithful. . . . It is hard, but only to the hard; that is, it is incredible, but only to the incredulous."<sup>26</sup>

So, when looking for a comparison between the "manna" and the body and blood of the Lord, he says these were the "same food," but what became the latter--the true "spiritual food"--is by way of a lively faith in the Incarnate Christ. "For to believe on Him is to eat the living bread. He that believes eats; he is sated invisibly, because invisibly is he born again."<sup>27</sup>

An important point that could help us to understand the higher level of faith in its relation to the sacrament is Augustine's theory of "illumination." He says that as one apprehends the res signata, one must be illuminated by the "Light," which is Christ. And in this process, faith,

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 6:501 (Sermons on New-Testament Lessons, 81.1).

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 7:168 (On the Gospel of St. John 26.1).

when illuminated, makes it possible for one to move a further step higher from the signum to the res. So, although faith unilluminated is less than faith illuminated, it is yet superior to the sacrament.

It is through faith that the "Inner Teacher," Christ, illuminates the human spirit, the light which brings the knowledge of spiritual realities.<sup>30</sup> He says, "It was by faith in this mystery [Incarnate Christ], . . . that purification was attainable even by the saints of old."<sup>31</sup> In other words, faith drawn by knowledge attains the res signata. Therefore, when he says that the knowledge of "realities signified are to be esteemed more highly than their signs, for whatever exists for the sake of something else must be inferior to that for whose sake it exists,"<sup>32</sup> he is saying that faith is superior to the exterior sacramental element, signum, and yet in relation to the next level up it is inferior to illumination.

In short, Augustine says that faith, which is a gift worked by God, is the only way through which one can come to understand the Mystery of the Incarnate Christ.

Seeing then that it is a hard matter for us to comprehend this, but no hard matter to believe it [the mys-

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<sup>30</sup>Vide supra p. 6, note 6.

<sup>31</sup>NPNF, 2:195 (The City of God, 10.25).

<sup>32</sup>Joseph M. Colleran, trans., in Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe, eds., Ancient Christian Writers, 25 vols. (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1950), 9:163 (The Teacher, 9.25). Here after abbreviated as ACW.



tery of Christ]; for Isaiah says, 'Unless ye believe ye shall not understand;' let us 'walk by faith as long as we are in pilgrimage from the Lord, till we come to sight where we shall see face to face.'<sup>33</sup>

Finally, it must be mentioned that Augustine does not see sacrament only in the God-man relation, that is, individual sanctification, but he also sees it in the relation God-Church. Even though he does not use the term sacramentum directly in reference to the whole Church, his doctrine of the mystical body of Christ reveals that he considers it thus. He says, "This also may be understood of the Body, but only if thou consider the Body of Him not one man: for in truth one man is not the Body of Him, but a small member, but the Body is made up of members. Therefore the full Body of Him is the whole Church."<sup>34</sup> It is the spiritual communion of the Church with Christ which he uses as the basis to interpret it as a sacrament, with the Church itself being the signum, and the mystical body of Christ its res.

Now, if the Church itself is a sign of the mystical body of Christ, then the sacraments are also a sign of this spiritual unity. He says, "There can be no religious socie-

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<sup>33</sup>NPNE, 6:400 (Sermons On The New-Testament Lessons, 41.9).

<sup>34</sup>A Library of Fathers of The Holy Catholic Church, 39 vols. (Oxford, John Henry Parker; J. and F. Revington, 1838), 30:368 (Enarraciones 1 in Psalmes, 68.11). "Potest hoc et a corpore intellegi; sed si corpus eius non unum hominem ponas; quia revera non est unus homo corpus eius, sed exiguum membrum; corpus autem ex membris constat. Corpus ergo eius plenum, tota ecclesia." CCSL, 39:911.

ty, whether the religion be true or false, without some sacrament or visible symbol to serve as a bond of union."<sup>35</sup>

So Augustine sees sacrament in a twofold manner, that is, as a signum whose res works a progressive, quantitative process of individual sanctification, and at the same time, as a sign whose res draws those being thus sanctified ever higher into the spiritual unity of the Church, the spiritual body of Christ (corpus mysticum).

### Conclusion

Augustine's tradition and his writings show that his understanding of sacraments is quite broad, without the complex systematization of the following centuries. For him, the sacraments are the external means by which God continues to be perceptible to man, just as He was in the Incarnation; and, by means of this perception, He offers to man the gift of grace whose fruits are personal sanctification with those being thus sanctified being drawn ever higher into spiritual unity with Christ and his body, the Church.

It is this understanding that separates the signum from the "sacramental signum," and its res. The signum points to realities beyond itself, whose ultimate reality is the Triune God. The "sacramental signum" points to Christ, and through this that man receives the promise

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<sup>35</sup>NPNE, 4:243 (Reply to Faustus, 19.11).

which is the reality signified. However, the "sacramental signum" is still not the sacrament itself. It is only a means through which the sacrament, the res sacra, is communicated.

For Augustine, the essence of the sacrament is the res, or the grace or virtue of the sacrament itself, which is ultimately Jesus Christ. This virtue, just as Christ's power, is spiritually hidden. He says, "the sacrament is one thing, which even Simon Magnus could have; and the operation of the Spirit is another thing . . . which only the good [of good conscience, and of faith unfeigned] can have."<sup>36</sup>

Augustine calls this power (he is speaking of Baptism) the "character of the sacrament," or as he says in the Letter to Boniface, "the mark of the Lord,"<sup>37</sup> that is, a mark impressed on the soul which distinguishes Christians from non-Christians.

It is from this perspective that Augustine says a sacrament is a perceptible grace, that is, God revealing Himself in a perceptible way. This proceeds by way of what is heard, what is seen, what is believed, what is understood, what is known, what is loved, the beginning point for all of which is the signum sacram, the sacramentum.

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 4:443 (On Baptism, Against the Donatists, 3.16-21).

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 1:408 (Letters, 98.5).

Augustine can speak of the number of sacramental signa as identical with the whole world, that is, everything in creation signifies God. However, the real sacraments of the church are those which offer the grace that they signify. So they are few in number. Martos, speaking about the number of sacraments in Augustine, says:

. . . sacraments of the word such as sermons, prayers, and the reading of the scriptures awakened and enlivened the faith of the believer. Sacraments of action such as water and wine, blessings and rituals involved him in worship and other sacred mysteries. But all of them were sacraments because they helped make divine realities present to anyone who understood the meaning of the signs.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, it is also important to note that Augustine presents the sacraments of baptism and the body and blood of Christ as instituted directly by Christ. Thus it would seem these are simply contingently mandated by the Lord and are not the product of a signum theory. He says, in his letter to Januarius:

. . . in accordance with which He has bound His people under the new dispensation together in fellowship by sacraments, which are in number very few, in observance most easy, and in significance most excellent, as baptism solemnized in the name of the Trinity, the communion of His body and blood, and such other things as are prescribed in the canonical Scriptures.<sup>37</sup>

For Augustine, signum and res are parts of one and the same unity of lower and higher, the higher only by way of

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<sup>36</sup>Joseph Martos, Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966), p. 59.

<sup>37</sup>NPNE, 1:300 (Letters, 54.1.1). See also Ibid., 2:560 (On Christian Doctrine, 3.9.13).

the lower, and thus, in continuity, we see God operating through this bonding unity to communicate His grace. He does not understand the "sacramental signum" as a mere "reminder" of the signified thing, nor does he identify it with the res. But he understands a sacrament as two combined things, one, humanly perceptible, and another, divine and invisible, and yet not separate. In other words, Augustine is at the same time symbolist and realist, to use terms later used, to separate what for Augustine went together. He says:

If thou regardest things visible, neither is God bread, nor is God water, nor is God this light, nor is He garment nor house. For all these are things visible, and single separate things. What bread is, water is not; and what a garment is, a house is not; and what these things are, God is not, for they are visible things. God is all this to thee: if thou hungerest, He is bread to thee; if thou thirstest, He is water to thee.<sup>40</sup>

This is the remarkable difference between Augustine's doctrine of the sacraments and that of the scholastics. For him, the sacraments have a functional, and at the same time, a symbolic meaning. It is functional because it is through the "sacramental signum" that grace is received; and symbolic, because the "sacramental signum" points to this signified reality. It is from this perspective that he finds a "similitude" between signum and res.

For if sacraments had not some points of real resemblance [similitude] to the things of which they are the sacraments, they would not be sacraments at all. In the most cases, moreover, they do in virtue of this

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 7:88 (On The Gospel of St. John, 13.5).

likeness bear the names of the realities which they resemble. As, therefore, in a certain manner the sacrament of Christ's body is Christ's body, and the sacrament of Christ's blood is Christ's blood, in the same manner the sacrament of faith is faith.<sup>41</sup>

We may observe that he speaks here not directly of Christ's body, but of the sacrament of Christ's body, and of the necessity of similitude for there to be a sacrament. At this point, it is impossible to resolve the differences, or at least the tensions in what Augustine says of sacramentum, but not regarding that unity toward which Augustine sees the grace of God pulling.

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 1:410 (Letters, 108.9). "Si enim sacramenta quamdam similitudinem earum rerum quarum sacramenta sunt, non haberent, omnino sacramenta non essent. Ex hac autem similitudine plerumque etiam ipsarum rerum nomina accipiunt. Sicut ergo secundum quemdam modum sacramentum corporis Christi corpus Christi est, sacramentum sanguinis Christi sanguis Christi est, ita sacramentum fidei fides est." PL, 33:364.

CHAPTER III  
AUGUSTINE'S THEOLOGY OF THE SACRAMENT  
OF THE ALTAR

Introduction

The understanding of Augustine's sacramental theology of the body and blood of Christ has been much encumbered by the theological elaboration of scholasticism. We may not ignore his own cultural context and even less his ecclesiastical context. F. Van der Meer says, "He wrote at an epoch when the worship of the body and blood of Christ consisted simply in reverent reception, handling and consumption."<sup>1</sup> Augustine did not organize a synthesis of this sacramental doctrine. Much of this is to be found incidentally in his comments on biblical passages.<sup>2</sup> He was not under pressure to synthesize because subjects such as the real presence of the body and blood of Christ, or the sacrifice, were not matters of controversy. For him the texts of the gospels were quite clear, that is, the body and blood of

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<sup>1</sup>F. Van Der Meer, Augustine The Bishop, trans. Brian Battershaw and G. R. Lamb (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 312.

<sup>2</sup>Obras De San Agustin, ed., Teofilo Prieto, 32 vols. (Madrid: Editorial Catolica, 1955), 13:65.

Christ are sacramentally (mysteriously) present on the table of the altar.

As it was mentioned above, Augustine saw earthly things as signs which finally had their true meanings in the mind of God and were, therefore, tasks to be understood by the illuminated mind of man. Consequently, the external elements as bread and wine mean to the believer what they mean to God, His self-communication.

The sacraments of the body and blood of Christ, like other sacraments, contain together in its unity a signum and a res. The signum is the species which Augustine calls the sacramentum, and the res is the very body and blood of Christ. He writes in one of his sermons for Easter Sunday, "That Bread which you see on the altar, consecrated by the word of God, is the Body of Christ. That chalice, or rather, what the chalice holds, consecrated by the word of God, is the Blood of Christ."<sup>3</sup> The Spiritual fruit, in turn, is the personal sanctification and the communion with all members of the Church. He says, "Through the accidents the Lord wished to entrust to us His Body and the Blood which He poured out for the remission of sins."<sup>4</sup> And again, "For a unity is formed by many grains forming together; and another unity is effected by the clustering together of many

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<sup>3</sup>The Fathers of the Church, Ludwig Schopp, ed., 48 vols. (New York: CIMA Publishing Co., 1947), 17:196 (Sermon 227). Hereafter abbreviated as FC.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



berries."<sup>5</sup>

By the way of the similitude, the res, or the spiritual use or fruit of this sacrament, received by the eating and the drinking of the body and blood of Christ, symbolizes a higher vital union with Christ and a true participation in His mystical body. He says, "He then who is in the unity of Christ's body (that is to say, in the Christian membership), of which body the faithful have been wont to receive the sacrament at the altar, that man is truly said to eat the body and drink the blood of Christ."<sup>6</sup> However, as we will see, this eating of the very body of Christ is to be not only an outward eating but an inward eating through faith in the "Word." And, this "Word," Christ, becomes present on the altar by means of His "word." "But when a word is added, that bread and wine become the body and blood of the Word. . . . He suffered for us, and has left us His body and blood in this sacrament."<sup>7</sup>

Aided by the foregoing evidence, we will now seek to analyze Augustine's theology of the sacrament of the altar by probing for such doctrines as the very presence of the Christ's body and blood, the mystical body of Christ, and the sacrifice as they may be understood by Augustine.

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<sup>5</sup>Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Schaff Philip, ed., 14 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1903), 7:173 (On The Gospel Of John, 26.17). Hereafter abbreviated as NPNE.

<sup>6</sup>NPNE, 2:472. (The City of God, 21.25).

<sup>7</sup>FC, 11:321. (Sermons, 6).

The Very Body and Blood of Christ

One theme that initially is brought to our attention in Augustine's writings concerning the sacrament of the altar is his understanding of the very presence of Christ's body and blood in this sacrament. As we will see, this very presence is spoken of under two apparently discordant points of view, namely, in straightforward statement (it "is"), and in symbolical or upper level language. However, in order to understand Augustine's conception of the very presence, it will be fundamental to understand first his conception of the sacramental body of Christ.

For Augustine, the very presence of Christ is not the body of the flesh in which Christ was sin for us, the body of his death, but the body of his resurrection, the glorified body. He summarizes this christological problem when he says:

If thou belongest to the body represented by Peter, thou hast Christ both now and hereafter: now by faith, by sign, by the sacrament of baptism, by the bread and wine of the altar. Thou hast Christ now, but thou wilt have Him always; for when thou hast gone hence, thou wilt come to Him who said to the robber, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." . . . But in respect of the flesh He assumed as the Word, . . . "ye will not have Him always." And why? Because in respect of His bodily presence He associated for forty days with His disciples, and then, having brought them forth for the purpose of beholding and not of following Him, He ascended into heaven, and is no longer here. . . . In other words, in respect of His divine presence we always have Christ; in respect of His presence in the flesh it was

rightly said to the disciples, "Me ye will not have always."<sup>e</sup>

And again, in On the Gospel of St. John:

'When ye shall see the Son of man ascending where He was before;' certainly then, at least, you will see that not in the manner you suppose does He dispense His body; certainly then, at least, you will understand that His grace is not consumed by tooth-biting.<sup>f</sup>

It is important to mention that Augustine stresses, in two of his sermons for the Easter season<sup>10</sup>, that Jesus celebrated the sacrament of His body with the disciples of Emmaus (Luke 24:17). It seems that this picture serves for him as an analogy to the doctrine of the very presence. According to the text of Luke, the disciples only recognized the Lord when He broke the bread ("Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight." Luke 24:31). Augustine understands from this text that in the moment when He broke the bread, the body of Christ, recognized by the disciples, was no longer His body of the flesh as it was before His resurrection, but a "spiritual body." He says:

He did not wish to be recognized except in the act, for the sake of us who were not destined to see Him in the flesh but who, nevertheless, would eat His flesh. . . . let the breaking of bread bring consolation to you. The

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<sup>e</sup>NPNE, 7:282-283 (On the Gospel of St. John, 50. 12-13). Vide infra p. 53, note 22.

<sup>f</sup>Ibid., 7:174 (On the Gospel of St. John, 27.3).

<sup>10</sup>FC, 17:222-231 (Sermons, 234 and 235).

absence of the Lord is not real absence; have faith, and He whom you do not see is with you."<sup>11</sup>

In other words, the body of Christ according to the episode of Emmaus, could not be identified by the disciples, but the Lord was really present. Christ's body was no longer the body of the flesh, but His glorified body.

It is also of great help to mention that Augustine seems to suggest an interesting approach concerning the doctrine of the resurrected body of Christ. While under the influence of Neo-platonic analogy of body--soul, he understood the body of the resurrection within a complete disassociation between matter and spirit. In or around 395<sup>12</sup> Augustine wrote:

God hath ordered everything, and made everything: to some He hath given sense and understanding and immortality, as to the angels; to some He hath given sense and understanding with mortality, as to man. . . . He hath ordered His creation, from earth up to heaven, from visible to invisible, from mortal to immortal. This framework of creation, this most perfectly ordered beauty, ascending from lowest to highest, descending from highest to lowest, never broken, but tempered together of things unlike, all praiseth God.<sup>13</sup>

From this Neo-platonic point of view he would understand the body of the resurrected Christ with angelic and spiritual qualities only. He says, "Then shalt thou have in full what thou wishest, when 'death shall have been swal-

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 229 (Sermons, 235.2).

<sup>12</sup>Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 176 vols. (Turnholt, Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1956), 38:xv (Enarr. in Psalms). Hereafter abbreviated as CCSL.

<sup>13</sup>NPNF, 8:659 (On the Psalms, 145.9).

lowed up in victory; when this mortal body has been raised, and is changed into the condition of the angels, and rises aloft to a heavenly quality."<sup>14</sup>

However, this Neo-platonic view (matter--spirit) seems to yield towards a more holistic understanding in which Augustine sees the "body of the resurrection" in a perfect relationship between body and spirit. "He rose again on the third day, destined to die no more, and, having taken again the substance of the flesh which had laid aside, He was the first to show us an example of incorruptible resurrection."<sup>15</sup> And again, "after His resurrection, and when now in spiritual but yet real flesh, He ate and drank with His disciples; for not the power, but the need, of eating and drinking is taken from these bodies."<sup>16</sup> Now the body of the resurrection, as understood by Augustine, does not lose its earthly characteristics, but it maintains its whole qualities. He says:

So, the divine power is able to remove whatever qualities He wills from that visible and palpable nature of bodies, while some qualities remain unchanged; so He is able to add an unwearying strength to mortal members, preserving the characteristic marks of their form, even when they have died because of the corruption of mortality, so that mortal appearance is there, but wasting

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 654 (On the Psalms 144.3).

<sup>15</sup>FC, 17:231 (Sermon, 235.3).

<sup>16</sup>NPNF, 2:257 (The City of God, 13.22). ". . . quod etiam post resurrectionem, iam quidem in spirituali carne, sed tamen vera, cibum ac potum cum discipulis sumpsit. Non enim potestas, sed egestas edendi ac bibendi talibus corporibus auferetur." CC, 58:405.

disease is absent; motion is there, but fatigue is not; the ability to eat is there, but the necessity of hunger is not."<sup>17</sup>

Now, Augustine seems to understand the "body of the resurrection" as no longer captive to the earthly space nor does he see it in a strictly spiritual way. But, at the same time that he recognizes the qualities of the matter and of the spirit separately, he also recognizes the unique qualities of this resurrected body. He calls these new qualities of the body of the resurrection "heavenly body." "And He is the heavenly Man of Paul's passage, because He came from heaven to be clothed with a body of earthly mortality, that He might clothe it with heavenly immortality."<sup>18</sup> Still, speaking about this glorified body, he says:

. . . whether it shall become pure spirit, so that the whole man shall then be a spirit, or shall . . . become a spiritual body in such a way as to be called spiritual because of a certain ineffable facility in its movements, but at the same time to retain its material substance, which cannot live and feel by itself, but only through the spirit which uses it . . . and whether, if the properties of the body then immortal and incorruptible shall remain unchanged, it shall then in some degree aid the spirit to see visible, i. e. material things, as at present we are unable to see anything of that kind except through the eyes of the body, or our spirit shall then be able, even in its higher state, to know material things without the instrumentality of the body.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>FC, 13:11 (Sermons, 205).

<sup>18</sup>NPNF, 2:257 (The City of God, 13.23). ". . . quem coelestem hominem vult intelligi, quia de coelo venit, ut terrenae mortalitatis corpore vestiretur, quod coelesti immortalitate vestiret." PL, 41:398.

<sup>19</sup>NPNF., 1:503 (Letters, 148.16).

For Augustine, it is the body of Christ's glorification and not the body "Humility" that stays in this world with the believers. This the body of Christ's "Majesty" that is under the altar, and not the body of His flesh.<sup>20</sup> So, when Augustine talks in terms of the presence of His "Majesty" he is talking the "body of His "Majesty." When he mentions about His presence in the flesh, he means the "body" of the "Humility."

Chemnitz has a helpful comment here on Augustine concerning the meaning of the absence of Christ's body on the earth after His ascension and relating that to the Lord's Supper, he says:

. . . in In Evangelium Joannis tractatus 50, explaining the statement of Christ: "You will not have Me with you always," even though he [Augustine] says that according to the presence of His majesty we always do have Christ but that this statement: "You will not have Me with you always" is spoken with reference to the presence of His flesh, yet he does not dare to say this in opposition to the words of Christ's testament. For in the same place he says: "The church holds to Christ only by faith, not by sight. You have Christ in your presence by faith, through the sacrament of Baptism, through the food and the drink of the altar, but you will not always have Him if you live an evil life."<sup>21</sup>

But Augustine says more.

For in respect of His majesty, His providence, His ineffable and invisible grace, His own words are fulfilled, "Lo, I am with you always, even to end of the world." But in respect of the flesh He assumed as the Word, . . . "ye will not have Him always." . . . In other

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<sup>20</sup>Vide supra p. 49.

<sup>21</sup>Martin Chemnitz, The Lord's Supper, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1979), p. 252.

words, in respect of His divine presence we always have Christ; in respect of His presence in the flesh it was rightly said to the disciples, "Me ye will not have always."<sup>22</sup>

Here we may observe how Augustine, beginning with "His majesty" extols "His divine presence" with His human presence at lower (signum) level, the body of Christ's "Humility" being the signum to the res signata, which is the body of His "Majesty," which in term, is in conformity and unity with the Spirit. However, Augustine does not seek to explain the very presence through these Christological considerations, that is, the "heavenly body." Rather, he recognizes that this sacramental presence is "very," not only because of the qualities of His resurrected body, but because the work of Christ and His salvific universality deluges the whole world, whose gifts, in turn, are received by faith. That is, the immensity and the power of God that are responsible for His sacramental presence, "His majesty."

Another argument that could help us to understand the meaning of the real presence is that Augustine rejects the fraction of the body of Christ in the sacrament. Christ is everywhere one; therefore He is undivided. He sees the body of Christ as an immortal body which cannot be fractioned. So, he says, "They [the disciples] indeed understood the flesh, just as when cut to pieces in a carcass, or sold in

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<sup>22</sup>NPNE, 7:282 (On the Gospel of St. John, 50.13).



the shambles; not as when it is quickened by the Spirit."<sup>23</sup>

So, as a result of these considerations (heavenly body, the immensity of God, and non-fractioning of His body) Augustine contemplates the picture of the "Supper" not as the fleshly Christ descending to His church, but as the church ascending to Him in the heavens. He, commenting upon the Sursum Corda of the liturgy, says:

Therefore, our Head is in heaven. Hence, when the 'Lift up your heart' is said, you answer: 'We have [them lifted up] to the Lord.' Then, because this lifting up of your hearts to God is a gift of God and lest you should attribute to your own strength, your own merits, and your own labors the fact that you have your hearts thus lifted up to the Lord. . . . Let your hope be, not on earth, but in heaven; let your faith be firm and acceptable to God.<sup>24</sup>

In short, Augustine's conception of the "very" is not linked to his early platonic dualism (matter--spirit) nor to a local earthly presence. In contrast, his conception is linked to a very presence--hidden, and yet revealed to faith. The body of the very presence, or the sacramental body of Christ is the body of His Majesty. It is from this perspective that Augustine understands the text of Luke 24:30-31 in which the glorified body of Christ after his resurrection could only be recognized when Jesus broke the bread and allowed His disciples to recognize Him.

Certainly they saw Him, but they did not recognize Him, for 'their eyes were held, that they should not recognize him,' as we have heard today. They were not pre-

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 175 (On the Gospel of St. John, 27.5).

<sup>24</sup>FC, 17:197 (Sermons, 227).

vented from seeing Him, but they 'were held that they should not recognize him.' Ah, my bretheren, where was it that the Lord wished to be recognized? In the breaking of bread. We are safe; we break bread, and we recognize the Lord.<sup>25</sup>

Or, by the figure of the hidden body as described in In Joannis Evangelium Tractatus:

For at present Christ's body is as it were mixed on the threshing floor: 'But the Lord knoweth them that are His.' If thou knowest what thou threshest, that the substance is there hidden, that the threshing has not consumed what the winnowing has purged; certain are we, brethren, that all of us who are in the Lord's body, and abide in Him, that He also may abide in us, have of necessity to live among evil men in this world even unto the end.<sup>26</sup>

It is from this perspective that Augustine's texts concerning the very presence will be understood in this paper. In this manner, when he uses emphatic terminology ("For my flesh,' saith He, 'is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.'<sup>27</sup>), he is not being emphatic in regard to the "fleshly presence" of Christ, but about the presence of Christ's glorified body ("Therefore, indeed, it is, even as men of God understood this before us, that our Lord Jesus Christ has pointed our minds to His body and blood in those things, which from being many are reduced to some one

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 229 (Sermons, 235.2).

<sup>26</sup>NPNE, 7:178 (On the Gospel of St. John, 27.11).

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 173 (On the Gospel of St. John, 26.17). "Caro enim mea, inquit, vere est cibus, et sanguis meus vere est potus." PL, 35:1614.

thing."<sup>26</sup> And, when he uses symbolical language ("'He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.' This it is, therefore for a man to eat that meat and to drink that drink, to dwell in Christ, and to have Christ dwelling in him."<sup>27</sup>), he is not making reference to an exclusive spiritual presence; on the contrary, he refers to the very presence of the "body" that died, rose, and ascended into heaven. In other words, Augustine's straightforward and symbolical language run together in his understanding of the very presence of Christ's body and blood.

Therefore, he can say:

'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man,' says Christ, 'and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.' This seems to enjoin a crime or a vice; it is therefore a figure, enjoining that we should have a share in the sufferings of our Lord, and that we should retain a sweet and profitable memory of the fact that His flesh was wounded and crucified for us.<sup>28</sup>

So, when Augustine says that it "is a figure," he is not saying that the sacrament of the altar is a figure of the very body of Christ, but that Christ's fleshly body which died on the cross is now, in the sacrament, a figure of his

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 173 (On the Gospel of St. John, 26.17). "Propterea quippe, sicut etiam ante nos foci intellexerunt homines Dei, Dominus noster Jesus Christus corpus et sanguinem suum in eis rebus commendavit, quae ad unum aliquid rediguntur ex multis." PL, 35:1614.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 173 (On the Gospel of St. John, 26.18). "'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." PL, 35:1614.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 2:563 (De Doctrina Christiana, 3.16.24).

true glorified body.

By the fact that the body of Christ can not be recognized by our earthly eyes, it is through faith that He is identified. Consequently, for Augustine it is possible to distinguish two kinds of receiving of the body and blood of Christ. That is, he identifies those who eat this sacrament with faith and those who eat without faith, and so there is a "lower eating" and a "higher eating." He says "For to believe on Him is to eat the living bread. He that believes eats."<sup>31</sup>

For Augustine, to eat Christ's body is not to participate only in the signum of His body and blood, but it is to participate in the res signata. He says it more clearly In Joannis Evangelium Tractatus: "The bread they [disciples] ate was the Lord Himself; he [Judas] ate the Lord's bread in enmity to the Lord: they ate life, and he punishment. 'For he that eateth unworthily,' says the apostle, 'eateth judgment unto himself.'<sup>32</sup> Augustine himself explains the problem when he says:

For it was not the mouthful given by the Lord that was the poison to Judas. And yet he took it; and when he took it, the enemy entered into him: not because he received an evil thing, but because he being evil received a good thing in an evil way. See ye then, brethren,

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<sup>31</sup> NPNE, 7:168 (On the Gospel of St John, 26.1). "Credere enim in eum, hoc est manducare panem vivum. Qui credit, manducat:" PL, 35:1607.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 308 (On the Gospel of St John, 59.1).

that ye eat the heavenly bread in a spiritual sense; bring innocence to the altar."<sup>33</sup>

So, for Augustine, the receiving of the body and blood of Christ is done spiritually through the bread and wine. However, this spiritual operation does not imply a negation of the very presence. Rather, as we saw above, it affirms that the bread upon the altar only will have positive fruit if it is spiritually eaten. He is clear when he says that Judas took a good thing (the very body and blood of Christ) in an evil way.

On the basis of his teaching of the receiving of this sacrament it is possible to say that Augustine identifies three possible ways of eating the body of Christ. He understands that someone can receive it as: a physical eating of the signum, that is, of the external elements (bread and wine); as only a spiritual eating of the res; and finally, as the sacramental eating which is the receiving of the very body of Christ through the signa of the bread and wine.

Just as signum and res are not the same thing and yet are not separated (sacramental union), so the body of Christ and the bread are not the same thing and yet are not separated. In other words, in the sacrament of the altar, the body of Christ is not physically eaten nor is the bread spiritually eaten, but this "sacramental-mystery" is physically and spiritually eaten as a whole. In this manner,

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 171 (On the Gospel of St. John, 26.11).

through this sacramental union, this eating becomes truly "substantial."<sup>34</sup> Therefore, when Augustine uses the words of the Gospel of John 6:56, ("He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him,"<sup>35</sup>) he is pointing to what it is in reality to eat His body, that is Christ's glorified body. And again, "This, then, He has taught us, and admonished us in mystical words that we may be in His body, in His members under Himself as head, eating His flesh, not abandoning our unity with Him."<sup>36</sup>

For Augustine, it is clear that all men, good and evil, may externally eat the sacrament of the body and blood; however, the very body is not eaten except spiritually. And therefore, says Augustine, "The bread they ate was the Lord Himself; he ate the Lord's bread in enmity to the Lord: they ate life, and he punishment. 'For he that eateth unworthily,' says the apostle, 'eateth judgment unto himself.'"<sup>37</sup>

Augustine understands the true flesh of our Lord in connection with his Divinity. In In Joannis Evangelium

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<sup>34</sup>"He rose again on the third day, destined to die no more, and, having taken again the substance of the flesh which He had laid aside, He was the first to show us an example of incorruptible resurrection." FC, 17:231 (Sermon 235). Vide supra p. 50, note 14; p. 51, note 18; p. 55, note 25.

<sup>35</sup>NPNE, 7:173; 2:473 (On the Gospel of St. John, 26. 18; The City of God, 21.25).

<sup>36</sup>NPNE, 7:174 (On the Gospel of St. John, 27.1).

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 308 (On the Gospel of St. John, 59.1).

Tractatus, he says: "My body lives by my spirit, and thy body by thy spirit. The body of Christ cannot live but by the Spirit of Christ."<sup>36</sup> And again:

. . . let all this, then, avail us to this end, most beloved, that we eat not the flesh and blood of Christ merely in the sacrament, as many evil men do, but that we eat and drink to the participation of the spirit, that we abide as members in the Lord's body, to be quickened by His Spirit, and that we be not offended, even if many do now with us eat and drink the sacraments in a temporal manner, who shall in the end have eternal torments.<sup>37</sup>

Just as, in his theory of signs, Augustine contrasts the signum with the res, while never breaking with the unity between them, so he understands the external elements of the sacrament of the altar as an equally invisible and yet equally real substance of the very body and blood of Christ. Van der Meer says:

Yet when on one occasion he speaks of the symbol or sign of the body and blood of Christ and on another of the actual body and blood themselves, then these are the expressions of two convictions simultaneously entertained, which in no way exclude one another. It is not a case of ideas vacillating between two extremes, that of an inspiring and spiritualizing symbolism and traditional realism. It is merely that a consistent body of ideas finds varying expression.<sup>40</sup>

In sum, when Augustine says that the Eucharist is the body of Christ, this assertion must be understood in the literal sense as containing the true body of Christ, and at the same time, in the symbolical sense, as referring to

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 172 (On the Gospel of St. John, 26.13).

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 178 (On the Gospel of St. John, 27.11).

<sup>40</sup>Van der Meer, p. 312.

spiritual eating through faith.

### The Mystical Body

In the sacrament of the altar, says Augustine, we receive what we are, that is, the body of Christ.

And thus He would have this meat and drink to be understood as meaning the fellowship of His own body and members, which is the holy Church in his predestined, and called, and justified, and glorified saints and believers. . . . The sacrament of this thing, namely, of the unity of the body and blood of Christ, is prepared on the Lord's table. . . .<sup>41</sup>

The teaching of the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ as a signum sacram of the mystical body of Christ is presented by Augustine as having its origin in the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:17. Augustine says, "The body of Christ cannot live but by the Spirit of Christ. It is for this that the Apostle Paul, expounding this bread, says: 'One bread,' saith he, 'we being many are one body.' O mystery of piety! O sign of unity! O bond of charity!"<sup>42</sup>

Likewise, the systematization of the sacrament of the body of Christ as a signum sacram of the mystical union is not a process started by Augustine; the similitude is already present in the Didache. There we are told:

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<sup>41</sup>NPNE, 7:173 (On the Gospel of St. John 26.15).

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 172 (On the Gospel of St. John, 26.13). "Non potest vivere corpus Christi, nisi de Spiritu Christi. Inde est quod exponens nobis apostolus Paulus hunc panem, Unus panis, inquit, unum corpus multi sumus (I Cor. X, 17). O Sacramentum pietatis! o signum unitatis! o vinculum charitatis!" PL, 35:1613.



As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountain tops and after being harvested was made one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom. . . . Remember, O Lord, Thy Church, deliver it from all evil and make it perfect in Thy love, and gather it from the four winds, sanctified for Thy kingdom, which Thou hast prepared for it.<sup>43</sup>

However, it is in Augustine's writings that this doctrine is extensively discussed.

For Augustine the most important point regarding the Lord's body and blood is that the believers become one with him and with each other. This sacrament is the "bond of the unity." He says, ". . . He suffered for us, and He has left us His body and blood in this sacrament. He has even made us His body, for we have become the body of Christ. Through His mercy, therefore, we are that which we receive."<sup>44</sup> That is, the "mystery" that lies on the table of the Lord is the "mystery" of man himself in his relation with God.

However, the important thing in this mystical union is not the unity itself, but the fact that if we are the body of Christ, then what is on the altar is our own mystery embodied in Christ. That means Augustine's emphasis is in the fact that we are linked as one body in Christ, and that we cannot offer Christ without offering ourselves. In other words, the body which is on the altar under the signum of bread is we ourselves. "The whole redeemed city, that

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<sup>43</sup>FC, 1:179 (Didache, 9.4).

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 13:321 (Sermons, 6).

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."<sup>45</sup> Here we see unity and community issuing in sacrifice.

An important point to be considered is related to the fact that, for Augustine, there is an identification between the real (the glorified body), sacramental, and ecclesial body of Christ. He does not separate the functions and actions of the mystical body of Christ, but he understands the sacramental and ecclesiastical body as signa of the same, true and mystical body of Christ. In his De Civitate Dei, he explains this point when he says: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him," shows what it is in reality, and not sacramentally, to eat His body and drink His blood."<sup>46</sup> However, when Augustine says, "it is in reality, and not sacramentally," he is not denying Christ's sacramental presence; but because of those who have passed over to heresy and schism ("For they are not in that bond of peace which is symbolized by that sacrament."<sup>47</sup>), he denies any possibility for them to inherit the kingdom of God through an external eating.

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<sup>45</sup>NPNE, p. 184 (The City of God, 10.6).

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 473 (The City of God, 21.25).

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 472 (The City of God, 21.25).

The mere fact that someone has received the baptism of Christ and participated in the bread of the altar does not qualify him to receive the grace of His kingdom. But, "He then who is in the unity of Christ's body (that is to say, in the Christian membership), of which body the faithful have been wont to receive the sacrament at the altar, that man is truly said to eat the body and drink the blood of Christ."<sup>48</sup>

So, in order to receive Christ through the sacrament one must be a member of this true body. This is the motive by which Augustine calls this sacrament signum unitatis. However, this unity is not primarily a communion between Christ and the believer as an individual. But it should be understood as part of a whole, of the body of the church, the corpus mysticum. Consequently, the eucharistic, sacramental, and ecclesiastical body of Christ should not be separated in parts because it would, in fact, lacerate the very body of Christ.

In that point, Augustine's theology of the sacrament of the altar fuses with his doctrine of the "Church" which also is the heavenly body of Christ. Adolph von Harnack, speaking about the caelestis societas, says, "This ancient traditional idea stood in the foreground of Augustine's practical faith. What the Church is, it cannot at all be

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

on earth; it possesses its truth, its seat, in heaven."<sup>49</sup>

However, this unity of the mystical body under the form of the sacrament of the altar is not completed by the simple act of the congregational union, but it finds its validity by the essence of the communion which is the received food. This food is the real body of Christ and, consequently, His own Church.

Wherefore, he that eateth not this bread, nor drinketh this blood, hath not this life; for men can have temporal life without that, . . . And thus He would have this meat and drink to be understood as meaning the fellowship of His own body and members, which is the holy Church.<sup>50</sup>

This eating, in turn, has to do not with human metabolism, but it makes reference to the exercise of faith. "This is then to eat the meat, not that which perisheth, but that which endureth unto eternal life. Faith is indeed distinguished from works, even as the apostle says, 'that a man is justified by faith without the works of the law.'<sup>51</sup> So, to receive the body of Christ through the bread and wine means to receive the grace of Christ which is active by the feeding.

. . .if thou belongest to the body represented by Peter, thou hast Christ both now and hereafter: now by faith, by sign, by the sacrament of baptism, by the bread and wine of the altar. Thou hast Christ now, but thou wilt have Him always; for when thou hast gone

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<sup>49</sup>Adolph von Harnack, History of Dogma, 7 vols. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1958), 5:164.

<sup>50</sup>NPNE, 7:172 (On the Gospel of St. John, 26.14).

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 164 (On the Gospel of St. John, 25.12).

hence, thou wilt come to Him who said to the robber, 'To--day shalt thou be with me in paradise.'<sup>52</sup>

In sum, it could be said that the corporate personality of the Church comes from being the mystical body of Christ in which He dwells. So, when the members of His body partake of the sacrament of the altar, it is truly and directly He who offers and is offered with all members of His body, His own, and whole Church to the Father. The sacrament of the altar is in Augustine's view, the signum whose res signata is the unity of Christ and Christians, which pushes upward to the ultimate unity in the Triune God. This upward movement is the sacrifice.

#### The Sacrifice

Augustine's definition of sacrifice can be found in the tenth book of De Civitate Dei where he states, "A sacrifice, therefore, is the visible sacrament or sacred sign of an invisible sacrifice."<sup>53</sup> Just as with the sacrament, the term sacrifice is also presented within the paradigm of signum--res; that is, the sacrifice of the altar is the signum, and the sacrifice of the cross is the res. However, in order to understand how Augustine relates the sacrifice with his theory of signs, the meaning and use of the term needs to be analyzed.

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 282 (On the Gospel of St. John, 50.12).

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 2:183 (The City of God, 10.5). "Sacrificium ergo visibile invisibilis sacrificii sacramentum, id est sacrum signum, est." PL, 41:282.

Augustine employs the term sacrifice in a threefold way. He identifies sacrifice as foreshadowed, as accomplished, and as commemorated. He says: "Before the coming of Christ, the flesh and blood of this sacrifice were foreshadowed in the animals slain; in the passion of Christ the types were fulfilled by the true sacrifice; after the ascension of Christ, the sacrifice is commemorated in the sacrament."<sup>54</sup> As we will see, the clear comprehension of this tripartite idea (ante, in, and post) is fundamental to the understanding of Augustine's theology of the sacrifice of the altar. Separations here also run counter to Augustine's methodology, which enables him to confess a continuity up to the ultimate unity.

#### Sacrifice in the Old Testament

For Augustine, the sacraments of the Old Testament led to and pointed to something real. The paschal lamb,<sup>55</sup> and all sacrifices,<sup>56</sup> had some relationship to the sacrifice of Christ. That is, they signified (typified) Christ's sacrifice. Augustine says:

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 4:262 (Reply to Faustus, 20.21).

<sup>55</sup>"'A bone of Him ye shall not break:' an injunction which was laid upon those who were commanded to celebrate the passover by the sacrifice of a sheep in the old law, which went before as a shadow of the passion of Christ." Ibid., 7:435 (On the Gospel of St. John, 120.3).

<sup>56</sup>"In those which were Thy holy places, that is, in the temple, in the priesthood, in all those sacraments which were at the time." Ibid., 8:344 (On the Psalms, 124.5).

If I were to reply at length on this subject, I might prove to him [Faustus] that sacrifice is due only to the one true God, and that this sacrifice was offered by the one true Priest, the Mediator of God and man; and that it was proper that this sacrifice should be prefigured by animal sacrifices, in order to foreshadow the flesh and blood of the one sacrifice for the remission of sins contracted by flesh and blood, which shall not inherit the kingdom of God: for the natural body will be endowed with heavenly attributes, as the fire in the sacrifice typified the swallowing up of death in victory.<sup>57</sup>

Augustine says the sacraments of the Old Testament "have ceased" and that those of the New Testament bring the "announcement" that Christ has accomplished what the sacraments of the Old Law foretold.<sup>58</sup> For in spite of the fact that these sacraments are not used any more, they retain their symbolical authority.

. . . while we consider it no longer a duty to offer sacrifices we recognize sacrifices as part of the mysteries of Revelation, by which the things prophesied were foreshadowed. For they were our examples, and in many and various ways they all pointed to the one sacrifice which we now commemorate. Now that this sacrifice has been revealed, and has been offered in due time, sacrifice is no longer binding as an act of wor-

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 4:277 (Reply to Faustus, 22.17).

<sup>58</sup>"It is proved that He did not destroy, but fulfill those things, because the prophecies of His birth, and passion, and resurrection, which were represented in these ancient sacraments, have ceased, and the sacraments now observed by Christians contain the announcement that He has been born, has suffered, has risen. He who came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them, by this fulfillment did away with those things which foretold the accomplishment of what is thus shown to be now accomplished." Ibid., p. 245 (Reply to Faustus, 19.13).

ship, while it retains its symbolical authority [auctoritate].<sup>59</sup>

That is, he sees the sacrifice of the Old Testament as part of the mysteries of God's revelation. "This mystery of eternal life, even from the beginning of the human race, was, by certain signs and sacraments suitable to the times, announced through angels to those to whom it was meet."<sup>60</sup>

However, even though Augustine speaks in terms of "mysteries of revelation," he does not understand this sacrifice as propitiatorium, but as figurarum of Christ's sacrifice of blood.

As regards animal sacrifices, every Christian knows that they were enjoined as suitable to a perverse people, and not because God had any pleasure in them. Still, even in these sacrifices there were types of what we enjoy; for we cannot obtain purification or the propitiation of God without blood. The fulfillment of these types is in Christ, by whose blood we are purified and redeemed. In these figures of the divine oracles, the bull represents Christ, because with the horns of His cross He scatters the wicked; the lamb, from His matchless innocence; the goat, from His being made in the likeness of sinful flesh, that by sin He might condemn sin. Whatever kind of sacrifice you choose to specify, I will show you a prophecy of Christ in it.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 169 (Reply to Faustus, 6.5). ". . . sic illa jam non esse in operibus nostris, ut ea tamen in mysteriis divinarum Scripturarum, at intelligenda quae his praementiata sunt, amplectamur: quia et ipsa figurae nostrae fuerunt, et omnia talia multis et variis modis unum sacrificium, cujus nunc memoriam celebramus significaverunt. Unde isto revelato et suo tempore oblato, illa de agendi celebritate sublata sunt, sed in significandi auctoritate." PL, 42:231.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 2:140 (The City of God, 7.32).

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 4:238 (Reply to Faustus, 18.6). "De sacrificiis autem animalium quis nostrum nesciat, magis ea perverso populo congruenter imposita, quam Deo desideranti obla-



The Sacrifice of Christ

The sacrifice of Christ on the cross is the fulfillment of the promise of the Old Testament, the fulfilling, the propitiatory sacrifice signified by the old sacramental sacrifice. It is in the suffering and death of Christ that the true sacrifice took place. Augustine says, "Before the coming of Christ, the flesh and blood of this sacrifice were foreshadowed in the animals slain; in the passion of Christ the types were fulfilled by the true sacrifice."<sup>42</sup>

In contrast with the sacrifice of the Old and New Testament, Augustine makes reference to the sacrifice of the cross as "true." Only one sacrifice is the true sacrifice, that of the cross. He says in De Civitate Dei:

Of this true Sacrifice the ancient sacrifices of the saints were the various and numerous signs; and it was thus variously figured, just as one thing is signified by a variety of words, that there may be less weariness

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ta? Sed tamen etiam in his figure nostrae fuerunt; quia nostra mundatio, et Dei propitiatio nobis sine sanguine nulla est, Sed illarum figurarum veritas Christus est, cuius sanguine redempti et mundati sumus. Nam in figuris eloquiorum divinatorum, et taurus dictus est propter virtutem crucis, cuius cornibus impios ventilavit; et aries, propter innocentiae principatum; et hircus, propter similitudinem carnis peccati, ut de peccato damnaret peccatum; et si quod aliud sacrificii genus expressius commemoraveris, in eo quoque tibi Christum prophetatum esse monstrabo." PL, 42: 346-347.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 262 (Reply to Faustus, 20.21). "Hujus sacrificii caro et sanguis ante adventum Christi per victimas similitudinum promittebatur; in passione Christi per ipsam veritatem reddebatur . . ." Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, ed. Josephus Zycha. 87 vols. (Vindobonae, F. Tempsky, 1891), 25.1:564.

when we speak of it much. To this supreme and true sacrifice all false sacrifices have given place.<sup>63</sup>

For Augustine, the function of the sacrifice of the cross was to reconcile men to God, overcome the alienation of sin, and to bring men to unity with Him. And to the fulfillment of this work, Christ himself is both offering and offerer. He says in De Trinitate:

In such wise that, whereas four things are to be considered in every sacrifice,--to whom it is offered, by whom it is offered, what is offered, for whom it is offered,--the same One and true Mediator Himself, reconciling us to God by the sacrifice of peace, might remain one with Him to whom He offered, might make those one in Himself for whom He offered, Himself might be in one both the offerer and the offering.<sup>64</sup>

The offering, the sacrifice is to God. The dominant theme is unity which moves progressively up into the ultimate unity of the Triune God.

#### The Sacrifice of the Altar

Augustine says, "This sacrifice is also commemorated by Christians, in the sacred offering and participation of the body and blood of Christ."<sup>65</sup> Augustine's idea of the sacrifice of the New Testament is also linked with his theory of signs. This is so because this sacrifice, just as the sacrament, is a signum which points to the res signata, the true sacrifice of Christ. "A sacrifice, therefore, is

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 2:193 (The City of God, 10.20).

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 3:79 (On the Trinity, 4.14.19).

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 4:261 (Reply to Faustus, 20.18).

the visible sacrament or sacred sign of an invisible sacrifice."<sup>66</sup> However, the theory of signs can not be applied to the sacrifice without it first being made completely clear what kind of bodily presence is on the altar.

The sacrificial idea of Augustine carries with itself aspects of his Neo-platonic tendencies, that is, the idea that the sacrifice of the altar is a signum that points to the res which is the body of Christ. However, as we saw,<sup>67</sup> this body should not be understood as reference to the body of the flesh but the body of His majesty; this is the body in which the church finds its union, and so becomes the corpus mysticum. He says in a sermon from the Easter season, "that Sacrifice is a sign of what we are."<sup>68</sup> And again, "And thus He would have meat and drink to be understood as meaning the fellowship of His own body and members, which is the holy Church in his predestinated, and called, and justified, and glorified saints and believers."<sup>69</sup>

In the rite of the eucharist, it is not Christ's fleshly body of the cross that is sacrificed but the body of the church. He says:

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 2:183 (The City of God, 10.5).

<sup>67</sup>Vide supra p. 51, note 21, and p. 52, note 22.

<sup>68</sup>FC, 17:197 (Sermons, 227). ". . . sacrificium Dei et nos, id est signum rei quod sumus . . . ." PL, 38:110.

<sup>69</sup>NPNF, 7:173 (On the Gospel of St. John, 26.15).

Bodily desires constitute the flesh, and the precepts of justice, the nails with which the fear of the Lord pierces our flesh and crucifies us as victims acceptable to the Lord. Whence the Apostle says: 'I exhort you therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God.'<sup>70</sup>

So, the identification of which body is sacrificed on the altar is the basic clue to one's understanding of Augustine's theology of the sacrifice. It is within the context of the Lord's very presence in the sacrament of His body and blood that he will focus his theology of the sacrifice. Following this principle then, Augustine's doctrine of sacrifice will not be understood in any other way than a "memorial," (sacramentum memoriae) as he says, "after the ascension of Christ, this sacrifice is commemorated in the sacrament."<sup>71</sup> This is so, simply because the external signum cannot be identified with the res signata. In other words, the external elements (bread and wine) do not refer to the fleshly body of the cross, but the res vera which is the glorified body of the resurrection. Augustine, concerning Christ's body after his death, says:

. . . they [the disciples] were no more to see after He had passed from this world to the Father; and such, also, is the righteousness of faith, whereof the apostle says, 'Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more.' This, then, He says, will be your righteousness whereof the world shall be reproved, 'because I go to the Father, and ye shall

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<sup>70</sup>FC, 17:83-84 (Sermons, 205.1).

<sup>71</sup>NPNE, 4:262 (Reply to Faustus, 20.21). ". . . huius sacrificii caro et sanguis . . . post ascensum Christi per sacramentum memoriae celebratur." CSEL, 25.1:564.

see me no more: ' seeing that ye shall believe in me as in one whom ye shall not see; and when ye shall see me as I shall be then, ye shall not see me as I am in my humility, but in my exaltation.<sup>72</sup>

And, speaking about the presence of Christ in the sacrament of the altar,

. . . in respect of His divine presence we always have Christ; in respect of His presence in the flesh it was rightly said to the disciples, 'Me ye will not have always.' In this respect the Church enjoyed His presence only for a few days: now it possesses Him by faith, without seeing Him with the eyes.<sup>73</sup>

So, on the one hand, the sacrifice of the altar cannot be a repetition of Christ's death, but only a celebration of a sacramentum memoriae<sup>74</sup> of the blessings which His death brought to the faithful. On the other hand, it is the sacrifice of the glorified body of Christ with which the whole Church is united in the celebration of this "memory."

In short, for Augustine the sacrifice of the altar is not the propitiatorium sacrifice itself, but the remembrance of this act. He says in De Civitate Dei, "for that which in common speech is called sacrifice is only the symbol of the true sacrifice."<sup>75</sup>

As a result of this "memorial sacrifice," Augustine identifies the eucharistic rite as endowed with a twofold

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 7:370 (On the Gospel of St. John, 95.3).

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 282-283 (On the Gospel of St. John, 50.13).

<sup>74</sup>Vide supra p. 72, note 71.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 2:183 (The City of God, 10.5). ". . . quoniam illud ab omnibus appellatur sacrificium, signum est veri sacrificii." PL, 41:283.

meaning. He sees it as "thanksgiving," and as "propitiation" for sins. He says in the Enchiridion: "When, then, sacrifices either of the altar or of alms are offered on behalf of all the baptized dead, they are thank-offerings for the very good, they are propitiatory offerings for the not very bad."<sup>76</sup>

Within Augustine's understanding of the act of memorial, the term propitiatorium has religious value in the sense that through man's oblation, Christ's salvific work is celebrated. He only points to the fact that the sacrifice of the altar symbolizes the uniqueness of Christ's sacrifice, which is beyond man's limitations. In other words, from the point of view of remaining sin, it is propitiation because it is the work of God commemorated on the altar. However, even though this commemoration is performed by human ministry, it is Christ the High Priest who offers and is offered. "There is nowhere a priesthood and sacrifice after the order of Aaron, and everywhere men offer under Christ as the Priest."<sup>77</sup> It is from this perspective that he says, "Was not Christ once for all offered up in His own person as a sacrifice? And yet, is He not likewise offered up in the sacrament as a sacrifice, not only in the special solemnities of Easter, but also daily

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 3:272-273 (Enchiridion, 110).

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 2:355 (The City of God, 17.17).

among our congregations."<sup>78</sup>

Now, from the point of view of the faithful, the sacrifice of the altar means thanksgiving because this sacrifice is the celebration of the unique work completed by Christ's death on the cross. What man has to offer to God is only praise and thanksgiving for the gift received from Christ's sacrifice celebrated in the sacrifice of the altar--or, what Augustine also calls sacrificium iustitiae.

. . . he [Isaiah] declares that those who shall be purified shall then please the Lord with sacrifices of righteousness, and consequently they themselves shall be purified from their own unrighteousness which made them displeasing to God. Now they themselves, when they have been purified, shall be sacrifices of complete and perfect righteousness.<sup>79</sup>

On the other hand, this memorial is not only and merely a figurative one but according to his theory of signs, it brings about what it signifies. For Augustine, what it signifies, (he uses the term significatur) is the mystical union between Christ and His Church. So, the sacrifice of the altar is the sacrifice of the Church, through which Christ's mysteries are externally received. And, it is through this sacrifice that the believer seeks communion with the whole church and Christ--where the believer's

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 1:410 (Letters, 98.9).

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 2:446 (The City of God, 20.25). ". . . utique ostendit [Isaiah] eos ipsos, qui emundabuntur, deinceps in sacrificiis iustitiae Domino esse placituros, ac per hoc ipsi a sua iniustitia mundabuntur, in qua Domino displicebant. Hostiae porro in plena perfectaue iustitia, cum mundati fuerint, ipsi erunt." PL, 41:700.

spiritual progress is advanced. He says in De Civitate Dei:

And who is so foolish as to suppose that the things offered to God are needed by Him for some uses of His own? . . . Then he [psalmist] goes on to mention what these signify: "Offer unto God the sacrifice of praise, and pay thy vows unto the Most High. . . ." Now mercy is the true sacrifice, and therefore it is said, as I have just quoted, "with such sacrifices God is well pleased."<sup>80</sup>

And again, "Thus a true sacrifice is every work which is done that we may be united to God in holy fellowship, and which has a reference to that supreme good and end in which alone we can be truly blessed."<sup>81</sup> That supreme good and end is God.

This seems to demonstrate that, for Augustine, the sacrifice of the altar does not have so much a Christological, but rather, an ecclesiological function, or at least both. That is, even though he uses the picture of the immolation of Christ as the act (rite) of the sacrifice of the altar, he does not understand this sacrifice as the sacrifice of the cross. Rather, he sees it in the Pauline sense (Rom. 6:13), the sacrifice of the church.

In short, it is possible to say that while Augustine identifies the eucharistic body as the very body of the Lord, that is, the heavenly body, he also understands the eucharistic sacrifice as the sacrifice of the corpus mysti-

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 183 (The City of God, 10.5).

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 183 (The City of God, 10.6). "Proinde verum sacrificium est omne opus, quod agitur, ut sancta societate inhaereamus Deo, relatum scilicet ad illum finem boni, quo veraciter beati esse possimus." PL, 41:283.



cum; and, the sacrifice of the corpus mysticum as the daily sign of the sacrifice of the cross. "And He designed that there should be a daily sign of this in the sacrifice of the Church, which, being His body, learns to offer herself through Him."<sup>e2</sup> So Christ is sacrificed daily and the Church with Him when the believer commemorates, through his offerings of thanksgiving, the benefits of the cross.

Even once was Christ sacrificed for us, when we believed; then was thought; but now there are the remnants of thought, when we remember Who hath come to us, and what He hath forgiven us; by means of those very remnants of thought, that is, by means of the memory herself, He is daily so sacrificed for us, as if He were daily renewing us, that hath renewed us by His first grace.<sup>e3</sup>

Augustine's teaching of the mystical body reveals his inner conception of sacrament, that is, the sacramental unity through which signum and res coexist and the res signata fulfils the signum. In the sacrifice of the altar this unity is found in the figure of the mystical body. Here, the believer is a member of this body which has Christ as the head, and through which Christ dwells in man, and man dwells in Christ.

Augustine demonstrates the mechanism of this unity employing the figure of the bread (I Cor 10:17). He says:

Thus he [the Apostle] explained the Sacrament of the Lord's table: 'The bread is one; we though many, are one body.' So, by bread you are instructed as to how you ought to cherish unity. Was that bread made of one

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<sup>e2</sup>Ibid., p. 193 (The City of God, 10.20).

<sup>e3</sup>Ibid., 8:358 (On the Psalm, 76.10).

grain of wheat? Were there not, rather, many grains? However, before they became bread, these grains were separate; they were joined together in water after a certain amount of crushing. For, unless the grain is ground and moistened with water, it cannot arrive at that form which is called bread."<sup>84</sup>

This is the reason why the term communio carries such great importance in Augustine's theology of the sacrifice. It is precisely in the communio that the term sacrificium finds its true and deepest meaning. Communio is the point to which his views of the sacrifice converge. For him, it is in the communio that the universality of Christ's work becomes visible and real. This is the motive for which he sees the sacrifice, not as something individual; but common to all believers.

Communio, then, has its fruition in offering to God and with Christ the fruits of a Spiritual life. He says in his letter to the bishop of Nola:

Consequently, I think that at this Consecration and this preparation for Communion the Apostle fittingly wishes that proseuchas, that is, prayers, should be made, . . . requests [postulations] are offered while the blessing is being given to the people, for at the time, by the laying on of hands, the bishops, as intercessors, offer the members of their flock to the most merciful Power.<sup>85</sup>

Just as the sacrifice of the cross is ultimately universal in its action, so the sacrifice of the church acquires also universal qualities. In this resides the power of the mystical body, in Augustine's understanding,

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<sup>84</sup>FC, 17:196 (Sermons, 227).

<sup>85</sup>FC, 11:251 (Letters, 149.16).

that there is a sacrificial unity between Christ and the church which is universal.

This unity, in turn, is reached by way of the eating and drinking of the bread and wine. Through this oral receiving, bread and wine bring the true body and blood of Christ, which are in turn the signa for their res signata, which are ultimately the mystery of this same spiritual unity. Consequently, the body of the altar is the true body of Christ (signum) and also, the body of all believers (res signata). Allan J. Macdonald says:

Augustine makes vivid the symbolism of unity by describing the communion as a feeding of the members upon themselves, that is to say, the effective principle of union lies not merely in the act, but in the content of the action, in the food received. This food and drink he wishes to be understood as the society and members of His body, which is the Church.<sup>86</sup>

According to what we have seen, Augustine's theology of the sacrifice of the Church should be understood through a bi-focal vision: the sacrifice that the Church receives from God, which is the self-oblation of God himself accomplished in Christ--the propitiatorium sacrifice; and the sacrifice that the Church offers to God, which is the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. In Augustine, there is no room for any external signum which is a way of propitiating man to God. "We must believe, then, that God has no need, not only of cattle, or any other earthly and material

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<sup>86</sup>Allan John Macdonald, The Evangelical Doctrine of Holy Communion (Cambridge, W. Heffer & Sons, 1930), p. 73.

thing, but even of man's righteousness, and that whatever right worship is paid to God profits not Him, but man."<sup>e7</sup> So then, what man can offer to God is nothing more than himself, who is, in turn, incorporated in the spiritual body of Christ, the corpus mysticum. Gesteira Garza, commenting on the same dual dynamism, says:

He sees it, firstly, as a movement that advances from the Head to the ecclesial body. In this movement the presence of the sacrifice of Christ in the eucharistic celebration generates the sacrifice of the church. Secondly, he describes a movement that returns from the body to the Head. In that point the eucharistic celebration of the church goes back as a worship addressed to the Heavenly Father through Christ.<sup>ee</sup>

From this, we observe that it is God Himself who first offers the gift which man will also offer back to Him. Augustine says in the Confessions, "I would sacrifice to Thee the service of my thought and tongue; and do Thou give what I may offer unto Thee."<sup>e8</sup> This is the reason why Augustine never emphasized the liturgical action of the offertory.

The bringing forward of material gifts in the eucharistic celebration does predate Augustine, but he himself gives it little, if any, attention. . . . Hence, Augustine never mentions the bread and wine as gifts of the land offered to God; he mentions bread and wine

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<sup>e7</sup>NPNE, 2:183 (The City of God, 10.5).

<sup>ee</sup>M. Gesteira Garza, La Eucaristia. Misterio de Comunión (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1983.), p. 381-382.

<sup>e8</sup>NPNE, 1:163 (Confessions, 11.2.3).

only in the context of their being the symbols for the sacrifice of Christ.<sup>70</sup>

The author quoted above furthermore argues from the fact that, "A canon from the Synod of Hippo in 398, recognizes that the practice of bringing gifts to the altar was a custom, but the practice is forbidden."<sup>71</sup>

It is also important to observe that, because of the sacramental unity by which signum and res are related, at the same time that we talk about "no identification" of the signum (bread and wine) with the fleshly body of the cross, we must also talk about "no separation." That is, the "memorial sacrifice" by which the believers search for comfort and forgiveness for their sins has (by way of signum to res signata) relationship to the unique and propitiatorium sacrifice of Christ.<sup>72</sup>

In Augustine's theology there is no dichotomy between sacrament and sacrifice. Although the sacramental and sacrificial ideas are present in his thinking--namely, that through the sacrament God reveals Himself and offers His grace to give salvation; and, through the sacrificial action man is drawn with Christ to offer the "invisible sacrifice" which is the sacrifice of thanksgiving--yet he

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<sup>70</sup>Lawrence Frankovich, "Augustine's Theory of Eucharistic Sacrifice" (Ph. D. diss., Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1976), p. 133.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Vide supra p. 72, note 71.

understands all this liturgical action as a complete and inseparable unity, so that the sacrifice of the altar is the res signata of the sacrament. That is, on the one side, it is "Christ's sacrifice" through which grace is revealed; on the other side, through the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, Christ dwells with man and makes him a participant in His heavenly body which, in turn, is the corpus mysticum, which He offers up to God.

Finally, it should be said that for Augustine the sacrifice of the Church does not occur by the simple participation in the table of the Lord, but only he who participates and receives the fruits of the true sacrifice through faith, dwells in His mystical body. Therefore, Augustine says "This is then to eat the meat, not that which perisheth, but that which endureth unto eternal life. To what purpose dost thou make ready teeth and stomach? Believe, and thou hast eaten already."<sup>3</sup> It explains why he is extremely careful to limit the benefits of sacrifice to the effectively baptized.<sup>4</sup>

As in the case of the sacrament of the body of Christ, the validity of the sacrifice does not depend on who administers it, but its efficacy is located in those who partake of it. Writing to Petilian, he speaks about the peculiarity and individuality of man's sacrifice.

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<sup>3</sup>NPNE, 7:164 (On the Gospel of St. John, 25.12).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 74 (On the Gospel of St. John, 11.1).

We say that in the case of every man the sacrifice that is offered partakes of the character of him who approaches to offer it, or approaches to partake of it; and that those eat of the sacrifices of such men, who in approaching to them partake of the character of those who offer them. Therefore, if a bad man offers sacrifice to God, and a good man receives it at his hands, the sacrifice is to each man of such character as he himself has shown himself to be, since we find it also written that 'unto the pure all things are pure.'<sup>95</sup>

The eucharistic sacrifice is directly related to the faith which enlivened makes possible the fulfillment of the law of the New Testament, the love of God and neighbor.<sup>96</sup>

"From the heart's coffer bring forth the incense of praise; from the store of a good conscience bring forth the sacrifice of faith. Whatsoever thing thou bringest forth, kindle with love."<sup>97</sup> This is the reason why the reality of the sacrifice is only for the members of the body of Christ, the faithful (those alive with love by the Holy Spirit), because only they can effectively share in what they already are. "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 herself is offered in the offering she makes to God."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>NPNE, 4:561 (The Letters of Petilian, 2.52).

<sup>96</sup>NPNE, 2:183 (The City of God, 10.5).

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 8:224 (Psalm, 56.17). "De cordis arca profer laudis incensum, de cellario bonae conscientiae profer sacrificium fidei. Quidquid profers, accende charitate." PL, 36:659.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 2:184 (The City of God, 10.6).

From the context of his writings, it is possible to argue that Augustine does not understand the sacrifice of the altar as an oblation through which a victim is presented to God and upon which salvation depends. On the contrary, he sees it from a perspective where God does not need man's oblation, but where it is done through the communion of the body of Christ as sacrifice of thanksgiving, for the sake of man himself, as commanded in the Gospel, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).



## CONCLUSION

As we saw above, Augustine's theory of signs is built upon Neo-platonic thought.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence of this, his theology of the sacrament,<sup>2</sup> and more specifically, his theology of the sacrament of the altar, are expressed in the same way of thought.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it will be our intention in this conclusion to show how his theory of signs fits with his theology of the sacrament, and to what extent it can work with his theology of the sacrament of the altar.

As was reported in chapters I and II, in Augustine's thought, just as in Neo-platonism, the man-God relation is a process by which men, step by step, in an ascending movement, walk in God's direction. That is, the movement up, from lower to higher, from signum to res signata, shows the progression by which men go in the direction of the last res signata which is God.<sup>4</sup>

Augustine thought of all physical elements as Divine

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<sup>1</sup>Vide supra p. 6, note 7, and p. 7, notes 9 and 10.

<sup>2</sup>Vide supra p. 23, note 3.

<sup>3</sup>Vide supra p. 44.

<sup>4</sup>Vide supra p. 19, notes 43 and 44.

symbols in the sense that they had a meaning in the mind of God, which was to be their true meaning. In this way, signa, as seen by him, are the way through which God shows His power and communicates with men in order to bring them to the next level of this progression in an unbroken movement.<sup>5</sup>

Thus identified and defined as an element of communication and progression,<sup>6</sup> the signum finds its completeness in the res<sup>7</sup> which is the internal and spiritual element. The res signata, in turn, after being identified and understood, becomes the signum for the next res signata.

As a result of this Neo-platonic thought, Augustine's theory of signs (signum-res progression) permits him to see all things as signa which move upward to the ultimate res signata (God).

It is from this perspective that Augustine understands the sacraments, that is, as signs which relate to divine things.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, he identifies in the sacramentum two

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<sup>5</sup>Vide supra p. 48, note 13.

<sup>6</sup>Vide supra p. 19, notes 44 and 45.

<sup>7</sup>Vide supra p. 17, note 38.

<sup>8</sup>"Because the soldiers cast lots for the tunic which 'was without seam, woven in one piece from the top,' rather than tear it, sufficient indication was given that any persons whatsoever, whether good or bad, may possess the visible signs, even the garments of Christ." The Fathers of the Church, Ludwig Schopp, ed., 48 vols. (New York: CIMA Publishing Co., 1947), 17:167 (Sermons, 218). Hereafter abbreviated as FC. Vide supra p. 23, note 3.

elements: first, a physical element, the signum (lower level). This signifies the second, a non-physical element, the res (higher level), which by such progressive steps is the divine reality.<sup>9</sup>

Augustine, however, is careful in not confusing the terms signum and sacramentum. In spite of the fact that both are symbolically communicative (sacramentum is a "sacred sign"),<sup>10</sup> sacramentum has by itself a much more important function than the signum. That is, the difference between signum and sacramentum is in the fact that while the signum only points to the spiritual reality, the sacramentum points to the spiritual reality but also carries within itself the power (potestas),<sup>11</sup> which is the sacramental grace.

In short, Augustine identifies in the sacrament two elements. First, there is the external element (the signum, or the "sacramental signum") which has a double meaning, namely, a functional and symbolic meaning. It is functional (virtus) because through it grace is received; it is symbolic because this signum points to the res signata. Second, the internal element (the res signata) is the essence of the sacrament, or its power, whose grace, which

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<sup>9</sup>Vide supra p. 23, note 3.

<sup>10</sup>"Signum rei sacrae." Vide supra p. 23, note 4.

<sup>11</sup>Vide supra p. 33, note 24.

Augustine calls "virtue of the sacrament,"<sup>12</sup> acts through the "Word."<sup>13</sup>

Now, what makes it difficult for the reader of Augustine's writings to understand his theology of the sacrament and to separate it from signa is the fact that he also uses the term sacramentum synonymously with signum, that is, in a broad sense.<sup>14</sup> From that perspective, all physical realities are sacraments in the sense that they point to a divine reality to which this signum (sacramentum) refers. However, Augustine himself solves the problem by making clear reference to the sacraments of the New Testament (Baptism, Holy Communion and the Word<sup>15</sup>) as the true (useful) sacraments.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, he explains that they are more important sacraments because of their efficacy,<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Vide supra p. 31, note 16. Vide supra "Character Dominicus", p. 39, note 37.

<sup>13</sup>Vide supra p. 31, notes 18 and 19.

<sup>14</sup>"I have placed before them [newly born] what they ought to believe about the sacrament of the Creed; I have discussed the sacrament of the Lord's Prayer and how they should say it; and I have also treated of the sacrament of the font and baptism." FC, 17:200 (Sermons, 228).

<sup>15</sup>"As for the blood and water which His side, pierced with the lance, poured forth upon the earth, without a doubt they represent the sacraments by which the Church was formed." Ibid., p. 169 (Sermons, 218.14). For a detailed discussion about the "Word" as sacrament, vide supra pp. 25-27.

<sup>16</sup>Vide supra p. 29, note 13, and p. 30, note 15.

<sup>17</sup>"And now that the righteousness of faith is revealed, and the children of God are called into liberty. . . other sacraments are instituted, greater in efficacy,

that is, the grace offered.

So, Augustine contrasts the sacraments of the Old and the New Law. For him, the most important difference between the sacraments of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament is the fact the latter are witnesses of the incarnation, and because of the fact that they offer a visible proof of God's grace.<sup>18</sup>

It should be clear that Augustine does not speak in terms of two different kinds of sacraments, or in a broad or strict sense of the term. He only distinguishes between signs (signa) that point to divine realities, and signs (sacramenta) that point to divine realities which are commanded by God,<sup>19</sup> and offer the sacramental grace.<sup>20</sup> In short, Augustine understands and defines "sacrament" from an exclusively Christological point of view. It is in Christ, the res signata, that the sacraments find their fulfillment.

Now, in the same way that signum and res are not understood as two completely separate realities, but two parts of the same unity,<sup>21</sup> so also in Augustine's defini-

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more beneficial in their use, easier in performance, and fewer in number." Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Philip Schaff, ed., 14 vols. (New York: Charles Scribners, 1903), 7:244 (Reply to Faustus, 19.13). Hereafter abbreviated as NPNF.

<sup>18</sup>Vide supra p. 29, note 12.

<sup>19</sup>Vide supra p. 88, note 17.

<sup>20</sup>Vide supra p. 30, note 16, and p. 33, note 23.

<sup>21</sup>Vide supra p. 20, note 46.

tion of sacramentum,<sup>22</sup> the "sacramental signum" and the res signata are not two different realities, but two parts of the same "sacramental unity." This "unity" between the signum and the res, and between the "sacramental signum" and the res signata is an important element in the development of Augustine's theology of the sacrament, and of the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, as will be seen.

The starting point for the understanding of Augustine's "sacramental unity" is his Christological approach to the sacrament. That is, the Person of Christ is the ultimate paradigm to represent this "sacramental unity," in which His "human nature" is the signum, and His "divine nature," the res signata.<sup>23</sup> Contrary to the Manicheans, who saw Christ only as God, Augustine sees in the Person of Christ not only God, but also a true man. He says:

Since, then, they were written truthfully, I acknowledged a perfect man to be in Christ--not the body of a man only, nor with the body a sensitive soul without a rational, but a very man; whom, not only as being a form of truth, but for a certain great excellency of human nature and a more perfect participation of wisdom, I decided was to be preferred before others.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Vide supra p. 23, note 3, and p. 41.

<sup>23</sup>"Therefore, when the wounds and limbs of His Saviour had been presented to him to be touched, the disciple touched them and exclaimed: 'My Lord and my God!' He touched a Man; he recognized God. He touched flesh; he looked upon the Word, because 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.'" FC, p. 367 (Sermons, 258.3).

<sup>24</sup>NPNF, 1:113 (The Confessions of St. Augustine, 7.19.25).

However, in Christ there are not two persons, but only one, who is the Theanthropos, God-man.<sup>25</sup>

Having the Person of Christ as paradigm to his theory of signs, he finds in the relation signum-res signata a perfect unity which, in turn, becomes a model for the "sacramental unity" of the sacraments of the New Law.

Just as God was incarnate in Christ becoming perceptible in this world through His human nature, by way of similitude, so the sacraments are also the external means through which God continues to be perceptible in this world, a perceptible grace.

In the same manner, just as Christ was hidden in His body and only revealed Himself as God in the body of His glorification, so also the power of the sacraments is hidden and is only understood and received through faith.<sup>26</sup>

From this "sacramental unity," which is basic to the understanding of Augustine's theology of the sacrament, some

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<sup>25</sup>"That Christ be believed to be not merely Man, that Christ be believed to be not only God, but that He be believed to be both Man and God--that is the fullness of faith because 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.'" FC, 17:367, (Sermons, 258). "He shall come to men; He shall come as a Man; but He shall come as the God-Man. He shall come as true God and true Man to make men like unto God." Ibid., p. 409 (Sermons, 265.1).

<sup>26</sup>"The Lord Jesus was recognized and, after being recognized, He was nowhere to be seen. He withdrew His bodily presence from those who now possessed Him by faith. In fact, the Lord withdrew His corporeal presence from the whole Church and ascended into heaven, so that the faith might be built up." Ibid., p. 230 (Sermons, 235). Vide supra p. 21, note 48, and p. 39, note 36.

important points become clear. That is, the signum (the lower level) and the res (the higher level) find their differences only in the fact that one is the external (physical) element and the other the internal (spiritual) element. However, both the "sacramental signum" and the "sacramental res" are interdependent, that is, there is no sacrament without both parts.

It is in this "sacramental unity" that Augustine finds a "similitude" between signum and res,<sup>27</sup> that is, they (signa) "are" what they symbolize (res signata). So he can say, "the bread and wine under the altar are the body and the blood of Christ."<sup>28</sup>

It will be the task of this last part of this conclusion to relate Augustine's theory of signs and his theology of the sacrament to the three aspects of Augustine's theology of the sacrament of the altar discussed previously, namely, the Very Body and Blood of Christ, the Mystical Body, and the Sacrifice.

First, in order to combine Augustine's theory of signs with his theology of the sacrament of the altar, some questions should be initially answered. How can the Neoplatonic theory of signs, as used by Augustine, fit with the biblical texts of the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ? Or how can the Neo-platonic progression from

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<sup>27</sup>Vide supra p. 42, note 41.

<sup>28</sup>Vide supra p. 44, note 3.



the lower toward the higher level (signum toward res signata) fit with the biblical statement that the bread and wine "are" the body and blood of Christ? Or still further, how can these two completely different realities, the signum (physical) and the res (spiritual), work in the same "unity," since from the Neo-platonic point of view, the movement upward from signum toward res signata does not work as a unity, but as steps which go higher and higher?

In truth, it is a difficult task, if not impossible, to determine to what extent Augustine, after his baptism,<sup>29</sup> broke with Neo-platonism; or to what extent, even unconsciously, he still maintained the same philosophical thoughts; or to what extent the Scriptures directed his philosophical thoughts.

Some of these questions we began to answer above by showing how for Augustine, Christ is the paradigm by which one can understand the signum-res signata relation. In sum, the person of Christ must be presented as decisive for the questions raised above.

Now, if Augustine's approach to the sacrament is from a Christological point of view,<sup>30</sup> that is, if Christ is the true essence of the sacraments, then the mystery of the incarnation (in his "Humility") gives him the key to define

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<sup>29</sup>Vide supra p. 4, note 2.

<sup>30</sup>Vide supra p. 34, note 26, p. 45, note 6, and p. 47, note 8.

"sacrament," and to understand the meaning of the sacrament of Christ's body and blood.

Therefore, if it is possible to talk in terms of Augustine's break with Neo-platonism, it is in the doctrine of the Incarnation that he finds the central arguments to qualify it, and to bring a new direction to his theory of signs as well as to his theology of the sacrament.

To the extent that the Word was with God and was God, he did not find problems in relating it to Neo-platonism. However, the statement of John 1:1-14, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," is a complete novelty not known by the Neo-platonists. The Mystery of Christ and His humility were beyond Neo-platonic speculation. Thus in commenting about his readings in Plotinus, Augustine says in his Confessions, ". . . that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, that I did not read."<sup>31</sup>

This means that Augustine now understands the body of Christ's incarnation as the signum which points to the res signata, which is God Himself.<sup>32</sup> For him, the great novelty here is that signum and res signata are the same thing. The Incarnate is God himself. That is, the physical reality (the signum) of the body of Christ can now be percep-

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<sup>31</sup>NPNE, 1:108 (The Confessions of St. Augustine, 7.9.14). "Sed quia Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis, non ibi legi." Patrologia Latina, J. P. Migne, ed., 120 vols. (Paris: Apud Garnieri Fratres, 1878), 32:741.

<sup>32</sup>Vide supra p. 49, note 15, p. 50, note 18, and p. 54, note 26.

tible to men, what to the Neo-platonism is a complete impossibility.

To the Neo-platonist, the movement is always upward, that is, from the lower toward the higher. There is no "unity" between signum and res because it would break the upward movement and would make of the signum the same reality as the res signata. That is, the "unity" would bring the signum to the same level as the res signata.

Augustine, however, faces an entirely opposite movement, that is, from the higher toward the lower. God descends in man's direction. That is, res signata becomes signum, and God becomes perceptible as a man to men.

This new movement, which is the mystery of God's Incarnation, also brings Augustine in line with the Scriptures in the sense that he recognizes in the person of the Incarnate the Son of God, something contrary to Neoplatonic philosophy. So, in confronting the Scriptures with Plato's writings, he says:

What shall 'wretched man' do? 'Who shall deliver him from the body of this death,' but Thy grace only, 'through Jesus Christ our Lord,' whom Thou hast begotten co-eternal, and createdst in the beginning of Thy ways, in whom the Prince of this world found nothing worthy of death, yet killed he Him, and the handwriting which was contrary to us blotted out? This those writings contain not.<sup>33</sup>

Once Augustine's theological basis for the sacramental unity has been presented, his theology of the sacrament of

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<sup>33</sup>NPNE, 1:114-115 (The Confessions of St. Augustine, 7.21.27).

the altar can be analyzed. The three aspects of his theology of the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ mentioned in the third chapter are an evident proof of how Augustine relates his definition of "sacrament" to the sacrament of the altar.

Keeping in mind that for Augustine the physical element, the signum, has a communicative function,<sup>34</sup> and the non-physical element, the res, is the true meaning in God's mind,<sup>35</sup> so also the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ has a communicative function, that is, it means to the believer God's self-communication. God offers himself through the body and blood of His Incarnation.<sup>36</sup>

The signum, the species of the bread and wine, and the res signata, the body and blood of the Christ, the Lord, are the elements of this sacrament with which Augustine has to fit his theology of the sacrament.

For Augustine, the Scriptural texts concerning the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ were completely clear. That is, the species upon the altar were the body and blood of Christ.<sup>37</sup> However, the problem Augustine faced in his time was concerning what kind of body was on the altar. In other words, for him, the most important

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<sup>34</sup>Vide supra p. 17, note 38, and p. 18, note 41.

<sup>35</sup>Vide supra p. 19, notes 44 and 45.

<sup>36</sup>Vide supra p. 44, notes 3 and 4.

<sup>37</sup>Vide supra p. 44, note 4.

thing was not the discussion about the presence of Christ, but the conception of Christ's sacramental body. Thus, in order to understand what kind of "body" is the body of the very presence in the sacrament of the altar, it is important to understand the difference between Christ's body of the "Humility" and the body of His "Majesty."

As Augustine himself mentions, God was hidden in the former body until His glorification.<sup>38</sup> Only after His resurrection does He reveal His "Majesty" hidden in that fleshly body. The point here is how Augustine understands Christ's body of his "Humility" and Christ's body of his "Majesty." For him, the substance of Christ's body before and after His resurrection is the same, that is, it did not lose its qualities as body, but it received divine qualities, God's "Majesty."<sup>39</sup>

In his Sermon on the Ascension of the Lord into heaven, Augustine testifies to his position regarding the very body of Christ after His resurrection:

For the Lord our Saviour who departed from His body and later assumed it again, after He rose from the dead, manifested Himself alive to His disciples who had lost hope in Him as one dead. After that, He presented Himself to be viewed by their eyes and touched by their hands, building up their faith by disclosing the truth. Since it would be too great a tax on human frailty and insecure anxiety to reveal so great a miracle and to withdraw it again within one day, He remained with them on earth, as we heard when the book of the Acts of the Apostles was read; He associated with them on earth for

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<sup>38</sup>Vide supra p. 54, notes 25 and 26.

<sup>39</sup>Vide supra p. 50, note 17.

forty days, coming in and going out, eating and drinking, not because He needed to do so, but in order to manifest the truth. Therefore, on the fortieth day which we celebrate today, while they looked on and followed Him with their eyes, He ascended into heaven.<sup>40</sup>

Now once the body of the resurrection maintains the same qualities as the body of the "Humility," then the body of the two states of Christ should be considered equally a signum. And more than that, Christ's fleshly body (the body of His "Humility") in which God was hidden, and the body of His "Majesty" are also a res signata. In other words, it is a signum because this body points to God, and it is a res signata because this body is God Himself revealed to us.

Therefore, the sacramental body present on the altar is the very body of the glorified Christ which is recognized and eaten through faith. The body of Christ's "Majesty" no longer has a local presence, but it is a body whose power and immensity deluges the whole world, and therefore is present on every altar.<sup>41</sup>

So, by analogy of the "unity" between Christ's human nature and His divine nature, and by the analogy of the "unity" of the very and only body of Christ before and after His resurrection, the signum upon the altar (the species of the bread and wine) is the very body and blood of Christ.

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<sup>40</sup>FC, 17:408 (Sermons, 265).

<sup>41</sup>"Now the grace of Christ has been diffused throughout the world and the world is divided into four parts." Ibid., p. 395 (Sermons, 263).

And also by analogy, the very hidden presence of God in the body of "Humility," the very body and blood of Christ on the altar (His sacramental body) is hidden in the species, and yet revealed by faith.<sup>42</sup>

Another important point in Augustine's theology of the sacrament of the altar is his doctrine of the corpus mysticum. Just as the analogy of the doctrine of the body of Christ's Majesty and His very presence in the sacrament of the altar bring us to the "sacramental unity," so also Augustine's theology of corpus mysticum can demonstrate this "sacramental union" between signum and res signata.

The corpus mysticum of which Augustine teaches is the believers' participation in Christ's body offered in the sacrament.<sup>43</sup> In other words, the sacrament of the altar is the signum unitatis<sup>44</sup> between Christ and the Church.<sup>45</sup> He says:

Because He [the Lord] suffered for us, He left us in this Sacrament His Body and Blood which He made even as He made us, also. For we have become His Body, and through His mercy we are what we receive.<sup>46</sup>

From that perspective, then, the sacrament of the altar is a signum because it points to the Church, the body

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<sup>42</sup>Vide supra p. 54, notes 25 and 26.

<sup>43</sup>Vide supra p. 61, note 44.

<sup>44</sup>Vide supra p. 60, note 42.

<sup>45</sup>Vide supra p. 64, note 50.

<sup>46</sup>FC, 17:201 (Sermons, 229).

of Christ, but it is also a res signata because this "ecclesiastical body" is Christ himself. That is, the very body of Christ can not be divided into real, sacramental, and ecclesiastical, but it is all of this and yet maintains its unity. So, speaking about Christ's Second Coming, Augustine says, "Let us, believing that we see the Lord present here in His Mystical Body, say to Him: 'Lord, will you be presented at this time, and when will the kingdom of Israel come?'"<sup>47</sup>

In short, the "unity" between Christ and His Church is that in which we participate, even in this world, in the same and very body of Christ's glorification. Commenting on John 3:13, "No one has ascended into heaven except him who has descended from heaven: the Son of Man who is in heaven." Augustine says:

But this was said on account of the unity by which He is our Head and we are His body. Although He ascended into heaven, we are not separated from Him. He who descended from heaven does not begrudge it to us; on the contrary, He proclaims it in a certain manner: 'Be My members if you wish to ascend into heaven.'<sup>48</sup>

And again, "Although He descended without a body, He ascended with a body and with us who are destined to ascend, not by reason of our own virtue, but on account of our oneness with Him."<sup>49</sup> The "sacramental unity" between the

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 411-412 (Sermons, 265).

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 393 (Sermons, 262).

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 394 (Sermons, 263).



external elements, the species of the bread and wine (signum), and the spiritual element, the very body of Christ (res signata), is also, by analogy, drawn from the corpus mysticum of Christ.

Finally, the study of Augustine's theology of the sacrifice also reveals the "sacramental unity" to which the sacrament of the altar is related. The sacrifice, just as the sacrament, is defined in the relation signum-res. That is, the sacrifice of the altar is the signum that points to the sacrifice of Christ (res signata).<sup>50</sup> However, this (the sacrifice of the altar) does not imply that Christ's propitiatory sacrifice is repeated,<sup>51</sup> but that it is celebrated.<sup>52</sup> Just as the "sacramental body" of Christ (the signum) is no longer the body of the cross, but the body of His glorification, the corpus mysticum, so the res signata is no longer the body of the cross but the body of His "Majesty." In short, the sacrifice of the altar can not be the repetition of Christ's propitiatorium sacrifice, but only a remembrance of it, because the body of the sacrifice upon the altar is no longer Christ's fleshly body, the body of His Humility in which He was sacrificed on the cross, but the body of His Majesty. So the sacrifice of the altar is the sacrifice of Christ's mystical body, His whole Church.

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<sup>50</sup>Vide supra p. 70, note 65.

<sup>51</sup>Vide supra p. 72, note 71, and p. 77, note 82.

<sup>52</sup>Vide supra p. 72, note 70.

Augustine says:

Then, after the consecration of the Holy Sacrifice of God, because He wished us also to be His sacrifice, a fact which was made clear when the Holy Sacrifice was first instituted, and because that sacrifice is a sign of what we are, behold, when the Sacrifice is finished, we say the Lord's Prayer which you have received and recited.<sup>53</sup>

For Augustine, the unity in the eucharistic sacrifice lies also in the fact it has universal qualities, that is, the body of the eucharistic sacrifice is the corpus mysticum in which Christ and his "Church" offer the sacrifice and are being offered.<sup>54</sup> The signum, the eucharistic sacrifice, and the res signata, the propitiatorium sacrifice, by analogy, have as their unity the "universality" of the act. It is in that context that Augustine uses the term communio, expressing through this the "unity" and "universality" of the eucharistic sacrifice.<sup>55</sup>

According to what was presented in this paper, signum and res signata, the elements of Augustine's sacramental theology, are not the same thing (lower level-higher level), and yet are not separate (sacramental unity), just as bread is not the body of Christ, but the bread of the altar, by the "sacramental union," is the very body of Christ. It is Augustine's theology of the "sacramental unity," in which res and res signata are related, that permits him to under-

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<sup>53</sup>FC, 17:197 (Sermons, 227).

<sup>54</sup>Vide supra p. 76, note 81, and p. 77, note 83.

<sup>55</sup>Vide supra p. 78, note 84.

stand the very presence of the body of Christ in the sacrament of His body and blood, His Mystical body, and the eucharistic sacrifice.

In listening to Augustine, one learns at times his confessing what the Scriptures say, at times what the church teaches, at times what he saw as the best way of saying things according to the best way of thinking things through that he knew, which resolves everything into an ultimate unity. Yet, to understand him as separating things is to misunderstand him; unresolved tensions remain. However, the tension between the signifying (spiritual) and the effective (real) tendencies of the Augustinian doctrine of the sacraments would not cause tension if one will not assume that they are opposite.<sup>54</sup>

An examination and analysis of Augustine's theory of signs and the implication of this for his theology of the sacrament, and of the sacrament of the altar, is fundamental for, and valuable help to the study of the doctrine of the sacrament of the body and blood of the Lord.

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<sup>54</sup>"Konnten die Spannungen zwischen den signifikativ-spirituellen und effektiv-realistischen Tendenzen der augustinischen Sakramentenlehre im Kontext eines platonischen Urbild-Abbild-Symbolismus noch halbwegs ausgeglichen werden, so kommt es bei den Epigonen zur Alternative von Spiritualismus und sakramentalem Realismus." Gunther Wenz, Einführung in die evangelische Sakramentenlehre (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), p. 20.

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