Parochially Political: An Examination of The Political Nature of the Eucharist in the Thought of St. Augustine

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“The cup of blessing that we bless—is it not communion with the blood of the Anointed? The loaf of bread that we break—is it not communion with the body of the Anointed? Because of one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the loaf...you cannot drink from the cup of the Lord and the cup of daemonic beings; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of daemonic beings.”

– St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 10.16-17, 21
ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes to re-examine St. Augustine’s political thought through an exploration of the political ramifications of the sacrament of the Eucharist, particularly as it is described in Augustine’s “Sermon 227.” In the literature on Augustine, there appears to be little in terms of a political understanding of the Church’s practices, particularly as regards the sacraments. Sermon 227 proceeds in a way that forces the reader to consider the political implications of the Eucharist, especially as a practice that creates and sustains an entity, the Body of Christ. For Augustine, this body is understood sacrificially, and it is that theme of sacrifice that, we will see, is the centrepiece of the political nature of that body. Augustine’s formulation of the Eucharist in Sermon 227 thus reframes the question of the relationship between politics and the Church. Through a close textual analysis of Sermon 227, this thesis will demonstrate that, for Augustine, the relationship between the Eucharist and politics is one that goes to the very core of the practice itself.
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1. Introduction

Political thinkers have long drawn on St. Augustine to develop political orientations appropriate to their moment. Many have sought out Augustine for constructive purposes, using him as the foundation for a larger theory of politics or seeing him as a companion in political engagement. Others have sought him out for the purposes of criticism, both of theory and of certain political structures. Certain others view Augustine as an authoritative voice in the criticism of secularity and modern liberal democracy. In the 20th and 21st centuries, these Augustinianisms took on a number of forms. Eric Gregory, a scholar of Augustine, helpfully groups these modern political Augustinianisms into four main categories: Augustinian realism, Augustinian proceduralism, Augustinian civic republicanism, and Augustinian anti-liberalism.¹ For Gregory, these four schools represent the major trends in accounts of Augustine’s political work that attempt to remedy, or at least address, the issues faced in modern democratic and liberal societies, especially with regard to the place of the church in such societies.

The first school, championed by the 20th century Protestant ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr, considers the realm of politics to be one of constraint. Politics is, for Niebuhr, the way in which the fundamental human condition of human sinfulness is mitigated and managed. The primary task of the political domain is thus restraining evil. Niebuhr’s account of politics, on this view, is largely negative. The conception of government offered is an institution whose sole purpose is to restrain human beings’ worst impulses, which result from the condition of sin. This account leaves very little room for a positive or constructive account of what politics or even civic participation might be. All that remains for politics is to consider the lesser of the evils presented to it. This is, for Niebuhr, the persistent reality of sin. Niebuhr is able, nonetheless, to deduce a

thematic of hope from this political perspective. The hope he describes is, however, constrained by a misreading and subsequent misconstruction of the doctrine of original sin.²

The second school Gregory identifies, “Augustinian Proceduralism,” is characterised by an adherence to fairness as a virtue, deriving from the work of John Rawls. It is marked by a substantive synthesis of Rawls and Augustine, while also paying due attention to the Augustinian themes in Rawls’ work. The thinkers in this tradition maintain Niebuhr’s attention to sin, but this is tempered by the way fairness as a political virtue functions in a pluralistic society.³ Most prominently, this group includes the likes of Oliver O’Donovan and Jean Bethke Elshtain. With the introduction of fairness as a virtue, these thinkers are able to provide a broader domain for politics, namely, justice. On this account, politics can offer something positive and constructive, rather than playing the wholly negative role portrayed by Niebuhr. Politics is now open to ideals. The virtue of fairness limits the public operation of other virtues and good political ends. Gregory notes that this school has a turn towards the ecclesial (an “inward” turn) that “privatises important virtues such as friendship and compassion.”⁴ Here, Gregory identifies suspicion of democratic institutions’ ability to either provide the proper mechanisms or achieve the proper ends of notions of justice. Thus, such accounts inevitably turn inward, evading the political and public realms in favour of the private, of interpersonal relations not mediated by politics.

The third school, “Augustinian Civic Liberalism,” is the one in which Gregory envisions himself. Gregory names four prominent theologians who, for him, fall under this umbrella: Paul

² Niebuhr’s understanding of hope is, I think, actually not an account of hope in virtue terms, but is in reality quite a vicious hope. If hope as a virtue is the golden mean between presumption and despair, and yet the conception of politics is one where there are simply varieties of despair (lesser and worse evils), then the subsequent hope turns out to be a vice. For the kind of hope Niebuhr’s conception of politics actually renders, presumption is never even an intelligible opposite end of the scale. John Milbank provides a helpful substantiation of these points in Milbank, John, "The Poverty of Niebuhrianism," from *The Word Made Strange*, 233-254.
³ Gregory 12
⁴ Gregory 2
Tillich, Paul Ramsey, Gustavo Gutierrez, and Martin Luther King Jr. This school, which continues to build on the previous two by adopting their themes of both sinfulness and fairness, is also the first to fully articulate the Augustinian notion that a society is marked by what it loves. This school acknowledges that democratic societies inculcate certain virtues (and vices, of course) that are determined by such loves. On Gregory’s account, this school’s emphasis on love and civic responsibility is most capable of responding to the insufficiencies of the previous accounts. His account aims to supplement this school such that it can better defend itself against anti-liberal critics, as well as better respond to the concerns raised in thinkers like Hannah Arendt, for whom Augustine is a villain.

The fourth school, “Augustinian Anti-Liberalism,” takes liberalism, and subsequently liberal democracy, to be a bankrupt form of governance whose political structures are heretical in nature. Several prominent figures of this movement include Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and others of the “Radical Orthodoxy” mold (MacIntyre and Hauerwas fit a different brand of anti-liberal from Milbank and Pickstock). These figures find in Augustine a friend in critique, someone sympathetic to their concerns about the theological issues contained within liberalism’s suppositions. They tend to emphasise in their critiques of democracy a similarity in the ritual description of Rome and the virtues and values fostered in its social practices, something Augustine addresses for an extended period of time in City of God. Gregory calls this emphasis a concern with the “social expression of theological heresies.”

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5 The inclusion of King in this category is up for debate. I think Gregory’s reading of King is actually quite limited and does not sufficiently address questions brought up in the later King’s work, especially in Where Do We Go From Here. The King Gregory paints is, I believe, not the radical much of his writing would have us believe he is.

6 Gregory 12-13
These four schools furnish substantively different political visions, as well as essentially different renderings of Augustine. The tensions between the anti-liberals and the civic liberals are palpable, something made obvious both in the language each uses to describe the other and in their understanding of the project at the heart of central Augustinian texts such as *City of God*. However, as I will argue later in more depth, each of these four approaches makes the same fundamental mistake in their appropriation of Augustine: they each ignore the central role of the sacraments, and the Eucharist in particular, in Augustine’s thought. As a result, each misses the mark in the formulation of a coherent political Augustinianism. Though the four schools seem to be diametrically opposed in their conclusions about Augustine, from the position of my argument they make the same theoretical mistake. For example, in Milbank’s critique of Niebuhr, Milbank observes that Niebuhr exemplifies a “consequentialist ethics…characteristic of post-Kantian Christian ethics.” His solution to Niebuhr’s reading of Augustine is to “revert to the traditional Augustinian-Thomist, pre-enlightenment ethics and recover a genuine notion of an ethical end, a goal and purpose, [that can transcend Niebuhr’s] dichotomy.” In explaining this solution, however, Milbank pays no attention to the function of the sacraments in Augustine to disclose and tailor the “ends” Milbank takes as evident. That is, Milbank’s analysis takes the ends, and the goods they facilitate, to be given. His exposition of the virtue of charity illuminates the mistake of this line of thinking insofar as it does not acknowledge that the form charity takes in Augustine is inextricably linked to the formative aspects of the practice of the Eucharist.

In a similar fashion, Gregory’s book contains no mention whatsoever of the Eucharist, or of the sacraments at all. In a significant treatise on Augustine and politics, the absence is profoundly felt. The absence plagues his reading of Augustine. In some sense, his critiques fall

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7 Milbank 246
8 Ibid 246
flat without this substantiation. As an example, when Gregory discusses Hannah Arendt’s dissertation on Augustine, he notes that she “pays a high analytic price for abstracting Augustine’s account of love from his mature Christology.” The irony is that, in ignoring the sacraments in his Augustinian account, Gregory makes an analogous mistake: one cannot abstract Augustine’s Christology from his Eucharistic thought. The fact of the matter is that there is not Augustine without the Eucharist. If Augustine is to be relevant to modern discourse and discussions of democracy, his relevance must be as a thinker who cannot be separated from the practices that formed him. If we are to avoid the same abstractions Gregory points out in Arendt’s account of Augustine, then equally we must pay attention to the ways in which the Eucharist plays a central, nay the central, role in the development and intelligibility of his political thought.

The knowledge that Augustine is in some sense either indebted to the Eucharist or owes some part of his thought to the practice in which he readily participated is widely accepted. So also are treatments, both systematic and partial, of his Eucharistic theology. What remains largely absent in Augustinian scholarship is any attempt to connect his politics with this practice. This is the space this thesis attempts to fill. And it does so by taking to task accounts that attempt to translate Augustine away from his proper parochial context. Herein lies one of the central moves of this project: to provide a supplement to these accounts that reframes the constructive moves Augustine makes around the Eucharist, thus properly situating his project and providing an alternative account that does not fall into the same perennial debates as the

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9 Gregory 26
10 This is not to say that Augustine can only be understood in his time period or through contextual analysis. Nor is it to say that my picture of Augustine is any fuller than the next. I do not subscribe to this view. This is simply to say that it is difficult to understand the claims Augustine makes—and it is unclear why it is worth it to do so—without thinking through the Eucharist with him. We cannot understand Augustine’s contribution to theory without understanding the role the Eucharist plays as political event. This is what is meant by “parochial context.” The use of the sermon helps as well to situate Augustine in that mode.
schools listed above. For Augustine, I claim, worship and the Eucharist are political events in which a vision of the Church as a *body politic* is furnished.

This thesis examines Augustine’s political thought by first paying due attention to the Eucharist and the politics that lie therein. I do this through an analysis of Augustine’s Sermon 227. Sermon 227 is devoted to explicating the nature of the Eucharist to a group of recently baptized initiates called the “infantes.” In his explication, it becomes obvious that, for Augustine, worship is at the very center of who and what Christians are, of what kind of people they ought to be. Therefore, it would seem that whatever Augustine has to say about Christian ethics, about Christian participation in the political world, would center around worship as an ethical act. In the literature described above, there seems to be little offered in terms of a political understanding of the Church as constituted through the act of worship and the formation of the Eucharist. But for Augustine, especially in Sermon 227, sacramental theology is tied essentially to the political. The alterity of the Church as a political community, specifically as an alternative body to the Roman polis, cannot be distinguished from Augustine’s arguments of the unity the Church receives and obtains in its practices of worship. That is, the participation in the sacrament of Eucharist substantively transforms those gathered into a community of faith called the Church. Thus, for Augustine, it seems that any claim about Christian ethics, especially political practice, is lacking if it does not take seriously the claim that, in participating in worship (defined as hearing the word preached and receiving the sacraments), Christians “are what they receive,” that is formed into a particular kind of people whose lives are manifestly distinct because of how they have been joined together, quite literally in communion.

From Sermon 227, we find a clear delineation of the Eucharist as a political event. To be clear, the “politics” of the Eucharist is not “politics” in the modern sense, as having to do with
policy and governance. “Politics” (and, relatedly, ethics) in the context of Augustine refers to a people (polis) and the form of life practiced. The notion of the politics of the Eucharist developed here—the creation of an alternative political structure—is indebted to this understanding. Given this, the Eucharist cannot but function politically, if it is the case that the Eucharist begets the commitments Augustine seems to think it has. As we will see in the analysis of Sermon 227, the Eucharist must be a formative event if it is to call into being a particular polis, or body politic, capable of resisting the formative powers and practices of Rome.¹¹

The thesis proceeds as follows. The first section is devoted to an in-depth analysis of the text of Sermon 227 particularly focused on drawing out the political themes involved both explicitly and implicitly in Augustine’s description of the Eucharist. Augustine employs frequently the vocabulary of the body to think through the ramifications of a collective people partaking in the Eucharist. The body Augustine describes has particular characteristics that make it distinct, namely, that it is conceived sacrificially. The second portion of this thesis differs in substance. I move from a close reading of Sermon 227 to an engagement with interpretations of Augustine in order to make sense of some of the claims he argues in the sermon. The section focuses particularly on fleshing out the sacrificial theme in two steps. First, I argue an understanding of the sacrifice of the Eucharist secondary and subsidiary to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Second, I argue that this secondary sacrifice is, in Sermon 227, indicative of a consubstantial understanding of the Church, rather than an incarnational one. Finally, I take up sacrifice as a theme structuring the relations of the Church, both internally and externally.

¹¹ Rome functions as both the real context of Augustine’s thought and, in the reception of Augustine in 20th/21st century thought, as a metaphor for the modern state.
With this in mind, one last note is required in this introduction. Here, similar to Gregory, the interest is not in a historically reconstructive project of Augustine’s thought. My claim is essentially narrow: in order to understand Augustine’s contribution to politics, and thus to develop a coherent political Augustinianism, the Eucharist must be understood as a political event. I argue that Augustine is not engaged in the project of offering a general theory of community and politics, but instead in offering a particular vision of a Eucharistic community. Looking at his sermons, and particularly Sermon 227, helps us to see the locality of his project, as well as to make sense of some of the claims deployed in his broader vision of political configurations. For Augustine, I argue, the Eucharist is required not just for a coherent political account of the Church, but for the Church to be substantively political at all.

2. The Body of Christ

If one were to enter any given Church on any given Sunday in our time, one would be able to sense almost immediately the tension felt in the sanctuary at the mention of anything “political.” Phrases such as “Sermons shouldn’t be political,” “I can’t believe you would bring in your politics to my church,” and “leave the politics out! I want to hear about Jesus” readily abound. The supposition common to all of these injunctions is that the worship of Jesus is a non-political act the bears only on the private life of the parishioner. The success of Enlightenment philosophy and the privatisation of religion in the United States has caused serious consternation regarding these complaints. As James K.A. Smith notes, many observations and proposed remedies to the problem of “Church and State,” or more bluntly, “Church and Politics, tend to produce solutions that spatialise politics, rather than understanding politics as the negotiation of a
way of life.”

So posited, the assumption is that the political is a space that is inevitably marred and scarred by the *intrusion* of certain supposedly non-political entities or spaces, such as the church. The problem faced by churches and public arenas, conceived in terms of space, is not whether Jesus has a political character, but whether such politics have their proper place in the Church or public realm. Such a simplistic spatial account, Smith notes, is inadequate to address not only the competing claims of either entity, but actually does not address the supposed tension at all. Smith observes:

> The political is less a space and more a way of life; the political is less a realm and more of a *project*. When we reduce the political through [a] twofold spatialization and rationalisation, what is lost and forgotten is an appreciation for the way that *polis* is a *formative* community of solidarity and the fact that political participation requires and assumes just such formation…political animals are *made* not born.

That is, politics requires an anthropology, and an anthropology is void if it does not account for the way we as human creatures are formed. The problem of Church and State, we will see, is not a matter of intrusion into particular, otherwise pure, spheres, but rather a question of competing formations.

Enter Augustine. Nearly 1500 years ago in modern-day Algeria, Augustine, then a bishop, preached a sermon on Easter to his congregation explaining the meaning and function of the sacrament of the Eucharist, the focal point of their liturgy. This sermon provides insight and resources that, I wager, issues a much-needed salve to the problems illustrated above. The sermon, labelled simply “Sermon 227,” is a brief but dense account of the politics that are enacted in the Eucharist. In what follows, I argue for a reading of Sermon 227 that renders not only the Eucharist itself as. Apolitical event, but a practice that produces a particular people with certain political commitments and attitudes that are revealed and tailored by the practice itself.

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12 Smith, James K.A. *Awaiting the King*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017, 8-10

13 Ibid 9
In showing the Eucharist to be a formative act, Augustine simultaneously conceives of it as a political event. This section is dedicated to the explication of that connection. As I argue, Sermon 227 indicates that what Augustine thinks Christians receive in the sacrament is the body of Christ; thus, what Christians collectively become through participation in the Eucharist is the body of Christ. As a collective body, it is also a formative community. That is, for Augustine, the politics of the Church emerge from the formative event of the Eucharist. Insofar as that is true, it is a community of competing formations and thus, under Smith’s formulation, a player in politics. Understanding the connection between the Eucharist and the Body will let us see what it means for the Church to become the body of Christ and to recognise Christ as its head.

A. Formative Practice, Formative Body

Augustine’s task in Sermon 227 is “to explain the sacrament of the Lord’s table.” It is not evident, then, that what appears on the altar in a worship service is what it immediately appears as. The bread and the wine are not immediately known as what they are, or at least what they signify. The understanding of what the bread and wine are is critical for the newly baptized. “You ought to know what you have received, what you are about to receive, what you ought to receive every day,” Augustine writes. Why it is important to understand what is received, beyond a mere perception of bread and wine, is revealed in the transformation that occurs when the sacrament of Eucharist is taken. Augustine writes that the community becomes what they receive in the reception of the sacraments. “You are yourselves what you receive,” he notes. Understanding what the elements truly are is critical not only for a sufficient theological perspective, but for a developed ecclesiology, a defined self-understanding within the community itself.

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When Augustine urges the community to “receive the sacrament in such a way that you think about yourselves,” he is urging them to take to heart how the sacrament fundamentally changes and forms the kinds of people the community ought to be. He is interested, that is, in the people and the community that the Eucharist creates. As Philip Cary describes, “the Eucharist follows as the meal of the household of God, the reborn family of brothers and sisters in Christ, conceived as a continuation of Jesus’ table-fellowship with his disciples and therefore of his presence among the people who are called his Body.” In order to understand the community itself, it is necessary to understand the transformation that is the liturgical event of the Eucharist. The Eucharist, as Cary’s observation implies, places participants into relations with each other that they would not form on their own. Those who were not of the same family become “brothers and sisters.” Those familial structures, which in part constitute the self-understanding of the Church, gain their visibility only through the relation to the “continuation of Jesus’ table-fellowship.”

Similarly, the bread and the wine on the altar begin as simple elements. There is nothing more to them than what is seen by the naked eye until they are transformed by the liturgical movement. Augustine claims that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ when they are “sanctified by the word of God,” where the word of God is both the Bible and the liturgy itself. The sanctification is the process by which the community in its liturgy places the elements in the narrative of God’s work in the world. When understood within the narrative of scripture that is playing out in the liturgy itself, the elements are transformed. They take on a meaning, become a sign, because they are understood within the story of Christ. Augustine argues that the bread and wine are “great sacraments and signs…serious and important

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sacraments…what you can see passes away, but the invisible reality signified does not pass away, but remains.” That is, there is a transformation by which the material reality of the elements comes to signify a different metaphysical reality. This is the function of the “sign;” but this change cannot be understood without the proper purpose of the elements being framed within the story by which they gain meaning.

Though not explicit in the text, we can understand Augustine to say that the bread and wine remain simple bread and wine until Christ is worked through them. That is, the transformation is an act of God’s grace. The assumption operative in Augustine’s logic of transformation is that Christ’s presence accounts for the shift in reality. The sacrament, after all, is known as the “Lord’s table,” meaning that the table is only such a table when the Lord is present at it. Thus, the elements cannot become what they become without Christ’s presence. Given such a presence, there remains for Augustine no ambiguity about what they are. The bread is the body of Christ, and the wine is the blood of Christ. The reality goes beyond the form the elements take. The change in the matter of the elements, however, is what is perceived by the church. The matter is perceived in such a way because of the narrative function the liturgy takes. The transformation of the elements comes from Christ’s intent with them, something indicated in the sanctification by the narrative. Augustine writes that the elements have their new form only because they are “the means…that the Lord Christ wished to present us with his body and blood, which he shed for our sake for the forgiveness of sins.” The intent of Christ to maintain presence with the church gives the bread and the wine their new meaning. They are void elements without the reality the church professes, and they are void again without the primary action they serve to replicate, namely, the forgiveness of sins. All that, for Augustine, is to say that the movement of the elements from bread and wine to body and blood serves the
function both of mediating Christ’s presence to the church and resituating the church within the terms of the Eucharist itself.

Augustine takes the directive of Eucharistic practice, that Christ “wished to present us with his body and blood,” and combines it with the Pauline observation, “we, being many, are one loaf, one body,”\(^{16}\) to conclude that in the receiving of the sacrament, “you are yourselves what you receive.” For Augustine, there is no distinction between who you are and what you have received: the new Christians have received the body of Christ, and thus they are the body of Christ. The content of this body will be discussed below. To be the body of Christ, however, is to be first part of a whole that is not primarily made of individuals. That is, the members of the community are not primarily individuals; the language of individuality is reduced and a communal understanding of to what or whom they belong becomes primary. To be, in any sense of the word, Christ is at its core to understand oneself first in terms of Christ. The Eucharist has a functional creative capacity, a capacity to gather a people in a particular way and form them in a particular mould. The partaking in the sacrament could be figured in terms of voluntarism, which would instead assume that the community comes as a result of different individuals collectively deciding to do something together. However, such an assumption decentres the Eucharist from the community itself. The collective body that partakes in the Eucharist, the argument goes, cannot understand itself apart from the Eucharist, which not only holds it together but also brings it into being.

Understood as both theological and ethical, Augustine conceives the Eucharist as capable of rendering a people who have been made a people by the grace of Christ in the sacrament. The sacrament serves a mediating purpose, but that does not make it incidental. That Christ is

\(^{16}\) 1 Corinthians 10.17
mediated persistently and consistently through purposeful and gifted practices is crucial for the creation of the community called the Church precisely because, as Paul and Augustine agree, such a community can be fashioned in no other way. The claim is on its face tautological. Undergirding this tautology, however, is the theological claim that what makes the Church distinct as a community is not necessarily that it has practices. Every political community does. Rather that the primary way the Church understands itself is as a community constituted through such practices. The practices themselves, moreover, must not be communally created, at least not principally (the nuances of the practice may change). The sacrament of Eucharist in particular, which carries such formative force for both Augustine and Paul, is, as Augustine says earlier, the way that “Christ wished to present us with his body and blood.” That is, the practice first comes from Christ, and insofar as that is true, the community can come to be. The creation of one body out of many particulars is not an action that Augustine thinks the Church itself accomplishes. The community relies not on voluntarism, but on the inextricability of both self and community from the sacrament of Eucharist, a notion Augustine borrows from Paul. A transformation, analogous to and logically coincidental with the change in the elements, is

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17 Many arguments against a voluntarist understanding of the Church and the sacraments have been offered. Two have been particularly helpful in the development of this point, those of Rowan Williams and John Milbank. They take similar approaches in acknowledging that to say the sacraments have formative qualities, one must acknowledge then that choice is no longer an intelligible communal priority. Voluntarism, as both of the arguments suggest, stems from the precise Enlightenment separation of the individual from the community as such. The metaphysical prioritization of the absolute nature of the individual reverberates into the political realm as well. As I highlighted in the introduction, this supplies the base conditions for the development of the idea of the “separation of Church and State,” which essentially functions on the grounds of the separation of the individual from community and the spherical understanding of the political realm. If we do away with the idea that the individual can be known or can know themselves without recourse to anything other than themselves, then the notion of community as formative and productive of the self can be more properly understood. For Milbank’s argument, see Milbank, John. Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006. See especially chapters 1 and 12. For Williams’ argument, see Williams, Rowan. On Christian Theology. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000. See particularly section 4, chapter 2, “The Nature of a Sacrament,” and chapter 3, “Sacraments of a New Society.” A helpful supplement to these arguments is Alasdair MacIntyre’s development of the notion of a “tradition.” See MacIntyre, Alasdair C. After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory 2nd ed. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984. See especially chapter 5, “Why the Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality Had to Fail,” and chapter 15, “The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life, and the Concept of a Tradition
enacted on the people who receive it such that a community is produced; and, critically, such a transformation is necessary to understand the subsequent political obligations and ethical necessities of a Christian life.

Augustine draws on the Pauline language of the body in order to make these requirements intelligible. He explicitly references the Pauline theme of the “one body” with Christ as its head. He writes, “after all, if you have become members of [the body of] Christ, where is your head? Members have a head.” Augustine claims the body of Christ must have a head, and he implies that the head is Christ. These metaphors—Church as body, Christians as members of that body, Christ as head of the body—are anthropomorphic. But they also have social and political implications. The Latin word *membrum*, translated here as ‘member,’ can also be understood as a limb or an organ of the body. The use of anthropomorphic language is meant to indicate the inextricability of the members from each other in the same way that the eye, if it is to be properly understood as an eye, cannot be divorced from its position in the face. That is, it situates the members such that they cannot understand themselves apart from the biology of the Church. In other words, the member is first a limb or organ of a body, and what follows is an understanding of the body formed in such a way that it is political.

**B. The Discipline of Christ as Head**

In referring to Christ as “head” of the Church, Augustine situates Christ as the source of perception, authority, and political direction of the Church. I will address each of these elements in turn.

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18 Augustine is borrowing the language of the head from St. Paul in Ephesians 5.23 and Colossians 1.18. Augustine is not just putting it to use for expository purposes; rather, under this reading, he is simply showing what is already there—his borrowing of the term functions creatively insofar as it is true to the always-already political nature of St. Paul’s thought. The application of St. Paul in terms of the liturgy transmutes and reveals a political nature into the action of the liturgy and the sacraments.
The first interpretation of Christ as head understands him to function perceptively. Recalling the context of this sermon, the parishioners hearing it are recently baptized, which means for Augustine that they have recently been given new life, a new way of seeing the world. Baptism functions here as the precondition for the transformation that occurs in the Eucharist. Augustine describes baptism as the “sacrament of regeneration.” In this phrase, no aspect of the body is left out: the flesh, the mind, the heart, the soul—all are included in the regeneration of baptism. Given the condition of the ‘infantes,’ Christ as head stands in the place of their own head, that which houses the faculties of perception. The use of language of the head, in this case, indicates to the newly baptized that the eyes with which they see are now ones capable of seeing the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood. In baptism, one gains the eyes to see Christ in the elements as they are transformed. This is where the Eucharist, or the consumption thereof, functions in conjunction with baptism. The full perceptive transformation is understood jointly as the perceiving of the body and blood, and the consumption of the body and blood such that one ‘becomes Christ,’ and thus perceives differently. Baptism and Eucharist, working jointly, fundamentally shift the perceptive faculty of the individual members.

By referring to Christ as head of the Church, Augustine also suggests that Christ is the source of Authority for the Church and its members. Augustine follows the invocation of the term “If the head hadn’t gone ahead before, the members would never follow. Where has our head gone?” There are salvific overtones on open display here: narratives such as the resurrection and the ascension are obviously the backdrop of Augustine’s claim here.  

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19 For a more detailed discussion of baptism, see Augustine’s On Baptism, Against the Donatists and A Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on the Baptism of Infants.

20 The resurrection narratives can be found in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20. The ascension narrative is in Acts 1.9-11.
However, we can also read this in a way that remains thematically continuous with Augustine’s emphasis on Christ as the head. That Christ has ‘gone ahead’ cannot be abstracted from the theological claim that Christ is in heaven. As the Nicene Creed notes, he is “seated at the right hand of the Father.” Augustine must make the theological claim because without it he is impotent to show precisely why the members must follow Christ. The theological claim of Christ’s ascension as the background for Augustine’s conception of Christ as head gives credence to the authority with which Augustine understands Christ to be invested. The determination of where precisely the head went is thus a question about where the authority into which those taking the Eucharist are conscripted lies.

Finally, by referring to Christ as head, Augustine situates Christ as the political leader of the Church. There are many facets and consequences of formulating Christ as head in a political sense, but the main contention from which the consequences derive is the fact that Christ is not Caesar. That is, the body that has Christ as its head is a church that, through the Eucharist, becomes a body whose identifying trait is its allegiance to a lord other than Caesar. The political commitments of the Church proceed from this distinction in authority. This is not a matter of simple assent to a different authority. Because the Eucharist is formative not just in terms of mental comportments but in terms of bodily disciplines as well, the introduction of Christ as a political head requires that the community that takes the Eucharist have the necessary practices to develop disciplines that can sufficiently counter the disciplines of Rome.

One account of how these disciplines function can be found in William Cavanaugh’s *Torture and Eucharist*, a sustained analysis of the Catholic Church’s response to the Pinochet regime in Chile.21 Cavanaugh observes that torture was one of the central methods of population

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control employed by the government. Cavanaugh argues that Pinochet employed torture “as a ‘mode of governance,’ a commonly used extension of the state’s normal functions of social control.”22 That is, torture functioned not only to harm certain individuals, but to discipline the collective citizenry such that no social bodies were capable of contesting state power. In this, the state determined the reality of Chile insofar as torture restrained the imagination of the public. Torture effectively blinded the public to an imagination of Chile apart from Pinochet’s centralised power. As Cavanaugh notes, the “performance [of torture] atomizes the citizenry through fear, thereby dismantling other social bodies which would rival the state’s authority over individual bodies.”23 If individuals could not conceive of themselves as part of something bigger, they were limited in their power to think about the state differently, and thus to imagine different political possibilities. Torture, deployed as part of the imagination of the state, produced a reality that effectively effaced the imaginative power of collectives. Under the Pinochet regime, Cavanaugh notes, it was not just those who publicly opposed the regime that were targets. “To unite for any purpose with one’s neighbours, to participate in a soup kitchen or a sewing circle, is enough to bring one under suspicion,” Cavanaugh writes.24 Any practice that united people in a way that was not directly dependent on state power was viewed as a threat, thus uniting the people (involuntarily) only through their individuated relationship with the state. They were united only insofar as they were atomized individuals. This is the end that Pinochet sought through torture: “torture [made] real the power of the state on the body of the individual and on the body politic. Torture is the ‘liturgical’ enactment of the imaginative project of the state.”25

22 Ibid 24
23 Ibid 2
24 Ibid 38
25 Ibid 56
This is, obviously, an extreme example. But such an extreme example functions to draw attention to the fact that states and empires through history have invoked practices—indeed have produced practices—that function to discipline the body in particular ways such that it adheres, ideologically speaking, to the state, that is, such that the political ordering of the public was necessarily conceived of in terms of state power. Rome’s Colosseum, and the practices it was built for, is exemplary of this. In Book 19 of the *City of God*, Augustine articulates the way in which Rome inscribed its power through the inculcation of glory as the highest civic virtue. Cavanaugh characterizes Augustine’s account in this way: “[the highest civic virtue] glory, however, is by its nature individualizing, since it is won by competition with others. The [order of glory] is atomistic in its foundations, because it excludes true worship of God from the political.” One can see this on display in the Colosseum: the gladiators, who serve at the pleasure of the emperor, would fight to the death, with the winner being crowned with glory and, occasionally but importantly, their freedom. The practices of the Colosseum were exemplary in providing the connective tissue between the public’s understanding of freedom and the power of the state to give it and revoke it. On this view, we can see again that the act of worship, insofar as it instantiates a body capable of resisting the order of glory, *must be* a political act. As Cavanaugh emphasises, the order Rome sought to inculcate, and which Augustine wrote tirelessly against, is both atomistic and an act of worship of Rome. For Augustine, the worship of the Trinitarian God—to have a practice like the Eucharist—is to oppose the connection Rome forged between the emperor and freedom.

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26 Cavanaugh writes in the introduction that, while his analysis is specific, it would be “unhelpful to confine this analysis of state pathologies to Pinochet’s Chile alone… even where torture is absent the power of modern states is often predicated on the same control of bodies and individualisation of the citizenry at which torture aims” (Ibid 14-15). In the United States’ ideology of the individual, one sees certain resonances of this statement, though of course the substantiation of this claim is outside the scope of the work here.

27 Ibid 10
Cavanaugh’s analysis helps us understand an important aspect of what it means for Christ to be a political head, namely, whether this claim has relevance to day-to-day life or if it is simply a claim about a kingdom far off. That is, one might ask whether Christ’s reign is of this world or of heaven. One can certainly give an account of Augustine in support of both a strictly eschatological politics (one of a far off kingdom) or a more *parousia*-oriented politics, with its emphasis on the present nature of Christ’s lordship. Indeed, it is not immediately clear from Sermon 227 what view might be supported. Augustine adopts a tone about the location of Christ that may lead us to conclude that Christians ought to retract from their political obligations to the world. “So our head is in heaven,” Augustine writes. The fact that Christ is in heaven does not, however, lead Augustine to a strong distinction between heaven and earth, or subsequently between obligations to God or to rulers of the world, or at least not in the way we ordinarily conceive of it (i.e. as a spatial-temporal distinction).

As noted, Cavanaugh posits that the political function of the Eucharist is also an imaginative one. The key to this, Cavanaugh argues, is the Eucharist as a social and political practice that is at the same time an imaginative act. In the context of torture, the bodily disciplines of the state function to delimit the imaginative possibilities of the public, while reinforcing the “imaginative project of the state.” In the Eucharist, however, one “[lives] inside God’s imagination…as human persons, body and soul, are incorporated in the performance of Christ’s *corpus verum*, they resist the state’s ability to define what is real through the mechanism of torture.”

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28 If one looks closely at the different accounts offered in the introduction to this essay, one can see that this question of the nature of Christ’s lordship—and in particular its relevance to community resistance and political involvement—is a subtext of much of the debate between the four camps. Each reading of Augustine renders a distinct politics dependent on how this theological problem is thought.
29 Cavanaugh 56
30 Ibid 279
meaning that Christ is ‘far away,’ but instead as a claim about the imaginative possibilities of his lordship. Read this way, we can reorient the question of the relevance of Christ’s lordship around a reimagining of the political through a bodily practiced that does not depend on the state’s deployment of individualising measures. Thus, the claim “you are yourselves what you receive” carries new force when read as involving a new body whose “‘mysterious channels’…assume the pain of the tortured.”31 To read Augustine in this way is to imagine a body in which pain—particularly that inflicted by a regime—is shared with others. This body is disciplined by such sharing and is thus capable of resisting measure that seek to make pain an isolating and individualising experience.

In fact, this body is precisely a reality that persists even though the external signs of the Eucharist, the bread and wine, seem to “disappear.” Augustine writes, “what you can see passes away, but the invisible reality signified does not pass away, but remains…Is the body of Christ consumed, is the Church of Christ consumed, are the members of Christ consumed? Perish the thought!” The polemical style of the conclusion of the sermon is meant to remind the congregation, but particularly the ‘infantes,’ that the reality the Eucharist enacts is not one that vanishes with the digestion of the bread and wine. The body is not dependent on persistent concrete elements that persist through time. Rather, Augustine’s reminder of the perpetual reality signified in the Eucharist is to say that, just because there is not a present political sign of power (say, for example, the face of Caesar on the Roman coin), the Church’s relation to Christ, and particular their allegiance to his lordship, is not diminished. As Cavanaugh writes, “in

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31 Ibid 280. The language of “mysterious channels” of the body is appropriated from the Sebastián Acevedo Movement. Of this movement, Cavanaugh writes, “Christians, nevertheless, make the bizarre claim that pain can be shared, precisely because people can be knitted together into one body. The Sebastián Acevedo Movement relies on the ‘mysterious channels’ of this body, its joints and ligaments, to assume the pain of the tortured. On a larger scale, the Vicaría frustrates the torture of the body politic by forming communities where sufferings and deprivations can be shared and overcome” (Ibid 280)
giving their bodies to Christ in the Eucharist, a confession is made…the Eucharist requires the confession that Jesus is Lord of all, and that the body belongs to him,” and, we might add, the body does not belong to Caesar. Augustine reminds the ‘infantes’ that the Eucharist serves not only to mediate Christ to them in the sense of presence, but also that it reinforces the political obligations—the confessions—that are a result of such presence. Thus, for Augustine the fact that the Church’s “head is in heaven” does not mean that the Church needs to subscribe to another political authority while on earth. To say so assumes that what Augustine means by heaven is distinct from how he views the politics of the Church. Instead, with Cavanaugh, we can read Augustine’s claim about heaven as a claim about other imaginative possibilities, in tension with those of earth. The ruler enthroned in heaven is in palpable tension with the world and the ruler(s) enthroned there.  

C. Centring Christ, Discovering Sacrifice

Augustine’s implicitly political observations about the head of the body comes in the midst of a discussion on the liturgy, on the practices used to prepare the community for the reception of the Eucharist. He explicates the movements of the liturgy in order to make proper sense of the elements placed on the altar. Why, one might ask, does Augustine think these steps are necessary? They are necessary, he replies, because they signify the reality on which the community is based. “Let us give thanks,” Augustine notes, “because unless he had enabled us to lift [our hearts] up, we would still have our hearts down here on earth.” The motion of the lifting of the hearts signifies both the contingency of the community and the ‘anatomy’ of the

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32 It could be objected that Augustine would not think this given the very recent history of Constantine and the emergence of the Church as the religion of Rome. However, such a claim does not give due credit to the way Augustine implicitly understands the Eucharist to bring the community called Church into tension with the world. His notion of heaven, of where true authority lies, is not escapist, but rather acknowledges and encourages Christians to confront the tensions inherited in taking on that name, to imagine alternate possibilities for the body politic.
community’s allegiance. The former interpretation of the motion centres the contingency of the community on the act of worship, particularly the Eucharist itself.

The latter interpretation, that the community’s very anatomy is expressed in the lifting up of the hearts, strikes as an intervention against attempts to separate the self-understanding of the community from its political allegiance. For that reason, the sentence immediately following includes a reference to what is just: “And you signify your agreement by saying, *it is right and just* to give thanks to the one who caused us to lift up our hearts to our head” (emphasis in text).

The movement of the heart to a position equivalent to the head is a metaphor for the unity of what the heart and head represent. The meaning of the heart and head for Augustine is not immediately clear from the text, but we can at least conclude that he is attempting to show that the heart and the head cannot be divorced in the context of worship. The more important aspect of the quote above is the use of “just.” Though Augustine is here quoting from the liturgy, it is a confusing statement – confusing, that is, if the act of worship is separable from the political and ethical sphere. What purpose does it serve to say that the giving thanks is both “right” and “just?” Why does worship, a critical element of which is the acknowledgment of both ontological and political contingency, require a phrase such as the naming of giving thanks as “just?” These questions did not arise for Augustine, or they were at least not his concern here. That the lifting up of the heart and head is both right and just appears strictly logical. The assumption carrying that statement is that in worship that which is “right” and “just” finds its definition. That is, the community discovers through worship what it is that is right and just. It is not so much a development or a dialectic that gives the definitions of right and just. Augustine, in centring the Eucharist, identifies the focal point of such justice, namely, the character, mission, and person of Christ.
That justice enters the frame through the liturgical preparation for the reception of the Eucharist is not incidental to the politics that inhere in Augustine’s sermon. The assent of the community, the agreement that the hearts ought to be lifted to the head (Christ), is immediately followed by the consecration of the bread and wine. The consecration itself is not a focal point of Sermon 227; rather, Augustine glosses over the consecration itself and explicates its immediate effect on the people who gather to participate in it. These people, it should be reminded, are the body that has been described above. Augustine is not, in this sense, thinking about an ideal, but rather pointing out the nature of the people who sit in front of him. Here, he adds another layer to their self-understanding: that of sacrifice. Augustine writes, “then, after the consecration of the sacrifice of God, because he wanted us to be ourselves his sacrifice.”

Because the Eucharist occupies such a central role not only in the ethical vision and comportment of the community but also at the very origin of the community itself, the sacrifice it signifies is recapitulated in the community itself. This does not break with the previous understanding that Augustine elaborates. It is simply the extended logical conclusion of what he notes before: “you are yourselves what you receive.” The Eucharist is not only the way that Christ is mediated to the community, but also a signification of the sacrifice of Christ himself. The Eucharist takes sacrificial form because Christ sacrifices himself. Thus, the community, in becoming what they receive, also become a sacrificial body.

But what does it mean to be a community, a body of sacrifice? It is to this question that I now turn.

3. A Sacrificial Body

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33 The Latin text here is a bit jumbled and difficult to translate, but what is clear from it is Augustine’s intention to describe the connection between the Eucharist as sacrifice and the community as sacrifice.
As shown above, the central concern in Sermon 227 is the explication of the Eucharist to the recently baptised. And as we have seen, Augustine cannot help but explain concurrently the political nature of that sacrament. In fact, to speak of the Eucharist without the politics would be unintelligible to Augustine. His rhetoric readily supplies an undeniably political account. It is notable that Augustine preached Sermon 227 as part of a series in the liturgies of Easter morning, at the peak of the theo-drama of Holy Week and when Christians are most readily congregated together to celebrate and remember the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.34 In the sermon, Augustine highlights the formative nature of the sacrament, as well as the function of the liturgy in preparing and forming the participants to receive the Eucharist, the high point of the mass. Here, Augustine posits that the Eucharist, insofar as it is formative, functions on both the individual and the communal levels. When Augustine refers to the effect of the Eucharist in Sermon 227, he almost exclusively uses the plural. The extensive use of the plural indicates Augustine’s understanding that the Eucharist, and consequentially Christ, initiates a community, which serves as the locus for the individual’s self-understanding. Through the Eucharist, the members of the Church become the body of Christ.

Most accounts of Augustine’s understanding of the Eucharist have correctly understood it to be central to his view of the life of the Church. Few, however, have recognized its place for Augustine as the operative practice from which the politics of the Church emerges. The four schools noted in the introduction share this in common, though the absence or lack of exploration takes different shapes. In the Niebuhrian camp, the dominance of sin renders the Eucharist a practice of the private realm, one that communicates personal repentance and forgiveness, but as an outward and communal practice its place is not clear. Though it makes some advances from

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34 Augustine would have celebrated several masses on Easter Day, beginning with the baptismal vigil in which the newly baptised would first receive the Eucharist.
the Niebuhrian position, the school of Augustinian proceduralism does not consider that the Eucharist is a formative event, that its practice in Augustine’s thought leads to the inculcation of virtues. For example, in an essay on Book 19 of *City of God* (a book ripe with discussions of sacrifice), Oliver O’Donovan, a prominent voice in this camp, makes no mention of the Eucharist, though discussion of Augustine’s social vision and political philosophy abound. His discussion of sacrifice relates Augustine to a more universal project, but sacrifice’s role in Augustine’s thought remains unclear. I argue this is precisely because the Eucharist is side-lined for other more explicitly social and political concerns. The third camp, Augustinian Civic Liberalism, makes a similar mistake as Augustinian Proceduralism insofar as they give accounts of loves and virtues as parts of democratic societies, but do not give much thought to the way that the practice of the Eucharist might reveal the proper loves one ought to have, especially Christians. And the fourth camp, Augustinian Anti-Liberalism furnishes a substantive vision of the place of the church as a sort of antinomy to liberal society. The branch of this camp that includes people like Milbank and Pickstock understanding the centrality of the Eucharist, but place emphasis on politics elsewhere. A certain branch of this camp, inclusive of the likes of Hauerwas and Cavanaugh, do argue that the church must be constituted in terms of a Eucharistic ecclesiology, but rarely is the Eucharist seen as the centrepiece of the politics. Most often it is a practice reflective of pre-existing politics, rather than generative of the church’s politics as such. For Augustine, I argue, the Eucharist as sacrifice is generative of the politics of the church. The very event witnesses the birth of the body of Christ, a formative and political entity.
William Cavanaugh’s discussion of the Eucharist as a political practice that disrupts the atomization of the modern state is the most promising account I am aware of.\textsuperscript{35} Cavanaugh’s discussion, as we saw above, opens the possibility of a unitive body, of the sharing of pain in and through the Eucharist. His discussion invokes the language of “body” frequently, and it is that notion that is picked up in this section more. The relations constituting that body are, I argue, sacrificial.

Sacrifice is the central theme of Augustine’s Eucharistic vision, and thus an account of the political implications of the Eucharist must also involve an understanding of the effects of sacrifice on such a community. The purpose of this section is to expound on the notion of a community as sacrificial, something that emerges as a clear theme in Sermon 227. The theme of sacrifice is paramount for Augustine’s notion of the Eucharist, for reasons that will be developed below. Once this is shown, we must get clear on the implications of sacrifice as the central thematic of the community, especially in light of the emphasis on the “body of Christ” developed in the previous section. With this as the centrepiece, there are several considerations that must be elaborated.

This section proceeds in two parts. First, Augustine calls his audience to first see the way in which Christ himself is a sacrifice in order to understand how the Church is constituted sacrificially. On Augustine’s view, Christ’s sacrifice is original, and in this sense opens the possibility of sacrificial relations. The possibility of sacrificial relations is the domain of the

\textsuperscript{35} Cavanaugh’s is the most promising in terms of accounts that explicitly work to address the political. However, other accounts of the Eucharist and its role in the formation of the body of Christ. One particularly interesting account is that of Karen O’Donnell, who argues that the body of Christ is a traumatised body, and that the Eucharist represents this to parishioners physically, allowing the Church \textit{qua} body of Christ to reconstruct itself not as a whole or pure, but as that through which we come to understand our own bodies as broken and yet loved. O’Donnell, Karen. \textit{Broken Bodies: The Eucharist, Mary and the Body in Trauma Theology}. London: SCM Press, 2019. See in particular chapters 5-7. For a discussion of formation of the virtues and the body of Christ as it relates to disability, see Clifton, Shane. \textit{Crippled Grace: Disability, Virtue Ethics, and the Good Life}. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2019.
second portion of this section. One of Augustine’s contributions, I argue, is the notion that sacrifice orders the relations of the members of the body. Dwelling on this question will lead to the final consideration of the section, namely, the sense in which this implies a politics that has as its name “the Church.”

Sermon 227 thematically centres the formative function of the Eucharist. This discussion in the homily comes to a head after the consecration of the Eucharistic elements themselves, the bread and the wine. The consecration is not itself the focus of the homily: Augustine is determined to tell the newly baptised the effect of what they are about to participate in. To that end, Augustine glosses over the theologically rich material of the consecration and dives right into the force of the formation that that theology enacts. Augustine has already, as we saw above, built up the theme of the “body of Christ” earlier in the homily, but it should be noted again that the people to whom he speaks are to understand themselves in terms of a body, in terms of a corporate and corporeal collective in which each person is determined by their relation to all others in the body. The self is on this view relational. With that in mind, Augustine writes:

> Then, after the consecration of the sacrifice of God, because he wanted us to be ourselves his sacrifice, which is indicated by where the sacrifice was first put, that is the sign of the thing that we are; why, then after the consecration is accomplished, we say the Lord’s Prayer, which you have received and given back. After that comes the greeting, *Peace be with you*, and Christians kiss one another with a holy kiss. It’s a sign of peace; what is indicated by the lips should happen in the conscience; that is, just as your lips approach the lips of your brothers or sisters, so your heart should not be withdrawn from theirs.36 Here, Augustine outlines the basic foundation of what can appropriately be called a “community of sacrifice,” or better, a “body of sacrifice.” That is, he identifies with the community the marker of sacrifice. Insofar as this is an identification in which the relations of the community that form its being are adjudicated, the marker of sacrifice imputes both ontological and political status. The members of the community are sacrificed to each other; they understand themselves

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to be constituted sacrificially. This sacrificial constitution is understood primarily through the event of Christ on the cross, the broken gift of God-self. The status of Christ as sacrifice becomes central to the community through the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the act through which the community learns and is formed in the mould of Christ’s sacrifice. The political constitution of the community, when understood through the Eucharist, is posited in terms of sacrifice. Under the notion of politics assumed here, both the ontological and political terms of sacrifice, which are essentially inextricable, have relational implications that are intelligible only given the Eucharistic constitution of the community. That is, there simply is no reason to do or be this way, to be a member of this particular body, if the sacrifice of Christ is not true. The Eucharist is the lens through which this is understood and actualised. In what sense this is the case in the question we now face.

A. Understanding Christ’s Sacrifice

The Eucharist is the practice through which the sacrifice of Christ is understood by the community. The Eucharist is that which forms the community to understand how Christ himself is a sacrifice. However, how this understanding is engendered in the community itself is not clear. Rowan Williams, himself a long-time student of Augustine, provides helpful insight into precisely how this occurs. In a discussion of the societal implications of the sacraments, Williams remarks that the Eucharist is the activity through which “[the] community [describes] itself in a way that is importantly at odds with other sorts of description.”37 That is, sacraments

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37 Williams, Rowan. *On Christian Theology*. 209. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000. Williams has elsewhere treated Augustine explicitly, and his contributions to understanding how Augustine can be used to reconceive of politics as such has been helpful in the development of this argument. However, I am not here addressing his broader exposition of Augustine, for this would require a full-length paper in itself. His insights inform and contour some of the broader notions at play, such as the reformulation of the Church as the body of Christ, the interpretation of politics in terms of practices and bodily disciplines that are formative, and the contentious and never-settled nature of the relationship between the Church and the state. For a broad reading of Augustine, see Williams, Rowan. *On Augustine*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016. For a particular study on the way in which
are how the community describes itself, how it comes to understand who it is. This, for Williams, is importantly at odds with other modes of description precisely because a new mode of belonging appears in such self-descriptive activities. On first glance, this appears to be a symbolic understanding of the sacraments. A symbolic understanding would see the Eucharist as a sign of something deeper, as a means of communicating a certain underlying end. However, the self-description is at the same time a narration of Christ’s story. The Eucharist is the practice through which Christ’s sacrificial story is, quite literally, consumed. That this is self-descriptive means that it is the description of Christ that determines the identity of the community. As Augustine writes in Sermon 227, the church ought to receive the Eucharist “in such a way that you think about yourselves.” The self-description holds true here only insofar as the narrative force is identified primarily not with the community but first with Christ. It is Christ’s sacrifice that does the work. The ingestion of the sacrifice in turn gives the narrative by which the community can evaluate and understand itself. Williams, along with Augustine, rejects the notion of a ‘marketplace of narrative’ from which the members of the church simply choose the narrative they would like to have. There is no competition in the Eucharist. There is only, in the words of Paul, “Christ and him crucified.” The Eucharist is focused on the independent action of Jesus Christ as mediated in the sacraments. Thus, the community is not practicing an activity that gives them the capability to think about themselves and decide who they want to be. Rather, the Eucharist is fundamentally a narrative practice that teaches the community who and what it is by a standard determined independent of the community itself.


38 1 Corinthians 2.2
So determined, Christ’s sacrifice is central to the Eucharist and therefore to the constitution of the community. This sacrifice has two aspects, as Williams notes in his description of the Eucharist as a “double-sacrifice”\(^\text{39}\) As a double-sacrifice, the bread and wine of the Eucharist signify both the sacrifice of Christ’s Incarnation and, following Simone Weil’s injunction, Christ’s surrender to materiality. The Eucharist is thus itself a double outpouring of God, first into flesh and then into the inanimate material of bread and wine. The double-sacrifice requires further elaboration. The first moment is straightforward in that it is the surrender of Christ into human form in the incarnation. This entails not only the Christmas story but the Easter story as well, meaning that the incarnation is not separate from the passion and resurrection. Rather, the incarnation entails the passion and resurrection, for both Williams and Augustine, neither of whom distinguishes fundamentally between the two as distinct events. The first sacrifice, then, is understood as the Incarnation and all that it entails.

The second aspect is Christ’s surrender to materiality, that is, Christ’s ongoing presence in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Christ’s surrender to materiality is precisely what makes the Eucharist a distinct practice at all. Simone Weil’s insistence on considering this second surrender to inanimate matter forces consideration of what exactly is occurring when the Eucharist is practiced.\(^\text{40}\) In discussing the function of the Eucharist as a formative event, Augustinian scholar Sarah Stewart-Kroeker describes its effect on the receiver as “part of the remaking of the believer out of death. The sacraments are symbols of that salvific moment of creation from nothing, unmaking unto death, and remaking unto resurrection.”\(^\text{41}\) The second moment of sacrifice that is the gift of the Eucharist functions in a sense as the resurrection of the

\(^{39}\) Williams 217-218  
\(^{40}\) Weil is quoted in Williams 217. The quote is from her *Notebooks* 283.  
believer. In Stewart-Kroeker’s reading of Augustine, the Eucharist is not just a formative process, but a movement from death to life. The very inanimate nature of the elements of the sacrament, the bread and the wine, give life to the recipient. In the repetition of the second sentence, she makes clear that Augustine does not imagine this to be a metaphor, but an event in which the dead are brought to life.\(^{42}\)

Contained in this move from death to life is the Eucharist’s power to bring into existence something not previously there, namely, the Church. The second sacrifice as the movement to life from death, from the deadness of the inanimate bread and wine to the life of the believer, is also the moment in which the church is born. By combining Simone Weil’s suggestion with the understanding proffered by Stewart-Kroeker, we can conclude further that the Eucharist represents not just the movement of the believer in isolation from death to life, but the beginning of the church from death to life. The Eucharist as God’s second sacrifice contains within it the possibility of the Church only insofar as it is the practice through which the church is brought out of death and into life. Because the Eucharist has a narrative function, and because the believer cannot be described as such without the church, the essential relation between the Church and the believer is established in terms of the Eucharist. The Eucharist gives life to the Church, and thus also brings the believer from death to life. The constitution of the Church in this manner means that, for Augustine, it cannot be conceived apart from the Eucharist itself.

The close relationship between Christ and the Eucharist, especially as the latter is considered here to create the Church, might on first glance lend itself to an incarnational understanding of the Church. That is, with such a construction between the Eucharist and Christ, there is a danger in positioning the Church as a literal extension of the body of Christ, as

\(^{42}\) Stewart-Kroeker cites both \textit{City of God} and Augustine’s \textit{Commentary on the Gospel of John} to substantiate this claim. The reference to John suggests this may be informed by the story of Lazarus in John 11.
essentially Christ’s physical replacement post-ascension. However, Augustine maintains elsewhere in his work that there is a distinct separation between the Church and Christ in his historical manifestation. It must be acknowledged that much of the rhetoric to be found in Augustine, especially in the sermons, can lead one to conclude that Augustine extends his understanding of the incarnation to include the church. That is, the language of the Body of Christ comes in these interpretations is understood as a literal extension of Christ, rather than a body constituted by a secondary sacrifice. With the understanding of the Eucharist as the second sacrifice of God, the church conceptually maintains its ontological distance from the person of Christ without losing the essential connection of His mediation. From this point of view, the Church can be considered, as has been previously formulated in the Christian tradition, to be both human and divine. The Church appears here to reflect a consubstantial understanding of the Eucharist. If the Eucharist holds the human and divine aspects of Christ together, then the Church as an instantiated community has an analogous property. The Eucharist is, for Augustine, still very much the body of Christ. The understanding here, though, avoids the conclusion that this statement need necessarily be understood as Christ’s literal physical extension, while also maintaining sufficient connection so as not to be entirely symbolic. What is made clear from this analysis is that the understanding of the body as Eucharistic and an extension of Christ’s body lies somewhere between the symbolic and the literal. The dichotomy

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43 See Augustine’s On the Trinity, particularly Book IV, On Christian Doctrine, and Expositions of the Psalms. Michael McCarthy’s account of ecclesiology in Augustine’s Expositions of the Psalms is also helpful in seeing how Augustine distinguishes and develops a notion of the Church that is not reliant on a secondary mediating force, namely the priest, that takes the form of patriarchal and patrilineal succession. This, at least theoretically, assuages some concerns of See Michael McCarthy, “An Ecclesiology of Groaning,” Theological Studies 66 (2005): 23-48. 44 The Church as a witness, in the substantive sense, to the truth of Christ can be successfully recovered. Witness here does not denote a passive condition but instead an active, political, sacrificial orientation to the truth as given in the Eucharist. Some linguistic context is helpful here: in the Greek, ‘witness’ and ‘martyr’ share the same root noun, μάρτυρας, though they provide judicial and metaphorical meanings, respectively. In each case, however, the function remains analogous: the status of a witness is an active condition requiring a distinctive orientation and political status.
of symbolic and literal, in a sense, forms a disjunction that forces the consideration of possibilities in the space beyond this duality. This is what I propose to be the realm of the consubstantial.

When one receives the Eucharist, then, one receives (and becomes) this double-sacrifice. In offering a reading of Augustine, recourse to Williams’ formulation can offer substantive resources for understanding Augustine’s claims. In Sermon 227, Augustine lays out the basic structure of what it means to ingest the sacrifice of the Eucharist. It is four-fold: “you are yourselves what you receive”; what you receive is Christ; Christ is given in the broken form of material food which is itself a sacrifice; and this meant at what you, collectively, are is a broken body, a body that does not begin in the ideal but rather in the very materiality of the inanimate, which in turn yields new life and “the forgiveness of sins.” The double-sacrifice reverberates within the community itself, structuring relations and saturating the world with sacramental meaning such that one cannot but be in a sacrificial relation to even the lowliest of inanimate matter (surely, this lowly estate is signified in the bread and wine). Williams draws the attention towards a profound and substantive notion of the sacrifice at the heart of the Eucharist. The double-sacrifice is the sense in which Christ himself is a sacrifice. In the sacrament, the sacrifice on the cross is not only rearticulated, but is also deepened through the descent of God even into the inanimate. The sacrifice is an absolute giving, a total giving up on the end of God, and with Augustine, we can read this as having imparted something to the community that receives it.

The mention of the double-sacrifice structuring the internal relations of the community should cause pause. The questions of sacrifice and sacrificial relations we are concerned with here are, historically speaking, bound up in the particular hierarchical form of the Church in Augustine’s day. Many feminist and womanist theologians and philosophers of the late 20th
century have inquired into the relationship between sacrifice and patriarchy, giving rise to the question of whether relations in the Church that are hierarchical are necessarily dominating. To say that sacrifice structures the relations of the community itself does not escape or settle the question. In fact, the introduction of sacrifice as a centrepiece of the understanding of the body proffered here invites such criticisms. One of the more powerful critiques of sacrifice and its relation to social structure can be found in the work of Nancy Jay. Jay, a sociologist and philosopher of religion, argues that the purpose of sacrifice is to create and perpetuate patrilineage; as she put it, sacrifice is remedy for having been born of woman. In her discussion of the reforms enacted in Vatican II, for instance, she writes that “without sacrifice there can be neither a hierarchical priesthood nor its institutionalised genealogy linking males in unilineal descent.” That is, the administration of the Eucharist justifies the all-male priesthood. The relationship between sacrifice, especially as detailed in the practice of the Eucharist, and the hierarchical, dominating ordering of the Church are constitutive of an “ethic that maintains women’s subordination.” As sacrifice, the Eucharist perpetuates a hierarchy in which men stand in as the full and complete ideal of the human. The question Jay’s argument raises as regards Augustine is whether, given the centrality of sacrifice to the understanding of the body developed here, there remains a possibility of non-patriarchal ordering.

Such a possibility was raised during the Second Vatican Council, with its debates over lay participation in the liturgy. Ultimately, those debates were decided against lay participation in the Eucharist. Jay argues that, despite the summary changes in the position of the priest as opposed to the laity, Vatican II maintained that “those who are outside the sacrificial cult are

46 Ibid 123
47 Stewart-Kroeker 167
outside the true succession of Christianity.”\textsuperscript{48} That is, the Catholic Church maintained that sacrifice was central to the perpetuation of apostolic lineage. Apostolic lineage in Vatican II is, of course, patrilineal, a lineage threatened by the “call for active lay participation in the liturgy.”\textsuperscript{49} The participation of laity in the liturgy would threaten the priesthood’s control over sacrificial practice, Jay argues. In so doing, laity involvement in the sacrament would threaten the power of the Eucharist to perpetuate patriarchal lineage.

To the question of whether or not non-dominating hierarchy—especially non-patriarchal hierarchy—is possible, there is no easy answer. Augustine himself does little to clear the waters. It is clear, both from the practices of the church in Augustine’s age and from the writings of Augustine himself, that hierarchy exists in the church’s structure, and further, that Augustine believes that this must be the case. In Augustine’s mind, the church is not an egalitarian society with no hierarchical structure. The prevailing interpretations of the role of women in the Church in Augustine’s day did not lend themselves to ecclesiologies of absolute equality. Moreover, the jury remains out on a judgment on Augustine’s systematic treatment of women. Augustine certainly supported the institution of the male priesthood. And we cannot say that the historical structure in which Augustine worked was fair, equitable, and innocent of claims of harmful discrimination.\textsuperscript{50} However, what can be suggested is this: that what Augustine is thinking about in terms of sacrifice is not necessarily a sacrificial morality as such, and that the understanding of a body of sacrifice need not immediately be understood institutionally, or as having to do with the perpetuation of an institution of power relations.

\textsuperscript{48} Jay 127
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid 119
\textsuperscript{50} The particular historical nuances of the structure of the church in Northern Africa during Augustine’s life is outside the scope of this project, but the questions such a project poses are questions a theoretical exposition of Augustine must be responsive to. While this is true, the historical work need not have the final say.
In Sermon 227, the operative notion of sacrifice for Augustine is not of morality or institution, but of gift. The sacrifice of Christ is not concerned with the institution of the Church; rather, it is concerned with the salvation of humanity. In part, we can read the brief mention of sacrifice in the sermon to indicate that the Church is not an institution as such, but a witness to God’s sacrifice in Christ. The importance of this distinction is in the fact that the Church can, at least theoretically, be rendered as a disciplined body of witness, rather than a vertical institution of hierarchy. The very grammar of sacrifice in Sermon 227 belies a non-institutional reading.

“After the consecration of the sacrifice of God, because he wanted us to be ourselves his sacrifice, which is indicated by where that sacrifice was first put,” Augustine writes. The sacrifice offered is not that of the Church or the priest. There is here no fundamental relation between the episcopacy and the sacrifice because it is, at its core, not the Church’s sacrifice. As a body, the Church simply becomes the sacrifice of the Eucharist, in the way elaborated above.

The uniqueness of Christ’s sacrifice, and of Christ as sole mediator, is due in part to the fact that the dominations of patriarchy are, in the crucified body of Christ—a part of his mediating work, it is worth noting—shown to be “precisely… sinful.”\textsuperscript{51} That is, Christ’s sacrifice reveals the problem with patrilineal understandings of sacrifice because the violence inflicted on the cross is wrong. The sacrifice of the cross is, accordingly, uniquely not interested in the perpetuation of hierarchy or an institution.

I have no interest in defending Augustine’s conviction of the need for and maintenance of a male priesthood. Jay is certainly correct that the practice of the Eucharist in the Catholic Church has functioned to secure and perpetuate patrilineal descent. However, this is not to say that there are not resources within Augustine’s work that can help solve this problem. Here, we

\textsuperscript{51} Stewart-Kroeker
can read Augustine against himself, separating the explicit claims he makes about church structure and male lineage from the commitments implicit in his writings. That is, there is a contradiction in Augustine’s sets of commitments, particularly as they pertain to the Eucharist. On the one hand, Augustine is committed to the male priesthood. On the other hand, there is an abiding theme in his writings and preaching of the effects of the Eucharist on those who partake it, especially as these effects relate to the constitution of the Church as a political body. Given his understanding of sacrifice as it relates to the Eucharist, we can see that the way hierarchy manifested in Augustine’s day, and his particular role in that institutionalisation, need not be the derivative case from his claims about the Eucharist. When considered in the context of Sermon 227, Augustine’s vision of sacrifice is couched within broader themes Augustine relates to the Eucharist, such as justice and peace. Right before the sacrifice of the Eucharist is consecrated, the parishioners acknowledge that the lordship of Christ is “right and just.” As indicated in the analysis in section 1, the acknowledgment of that which is right and just has far reaching implications. The object of that assent serves as a boundary by which sacrifice can both take shape and be kept in check. The same is true of the “kiss of peace” that occurs immediately following the consecration. Attending to the context, content, and grammar of sacrifice in Sermon 227 helps us see, but perhaps not solve, the problem in a new way.

In returning to Williams’ account, the theological complexities of the Eucharist as double-sacrifice have manifest implications for how sacrificial relations are conceived, especially given an understanding of the Church that retains its substantive and bodily connection to Christ without being confused, or being put at risk for confusion, with the incarnation of Christ himself. In Sermon 227, Augustine characterises the constitution of the community as integrally connected to this picture of the Eucharist. That is, the way in which
Augustine means that the Church is the Body of Christ matters significantly to how we think about the sacrificial relations it is endowed with. Augustine’s Eucharist is an instituted practice; the sacrament itself creates “one loaf, one body…what we all are, many though we be.” The Eucharist is the practice through which the community is both created and sustained. It, in every instance, is both a sacrifice and forms the beginning and end of the community. It is the sacrifice by which the community is made possible, logically speaking, and it offers the telos by which the community evaluates and understands itself.\(^52\) The centrality of the Eucharist, as well as the communicability of the identity of the community from the practice, to Augustine’s understanding of the Church means that sacrifice, as dictated and determined by the Eucharist, weighs substantively on the political and ethical comportment of the community.

**B. Christ’s Sacrifice and Ecclesiology**

In Augustine’s formulation, the Eucharist is both a sacrifice and a creative act. It is constitutive of a community as a sacrificial body. Given the elaboration above, we can see that Augustine holds that the Eucharist is a sacrifice in its own right, as the second sacrifice of God into inanimate materiality, thus giving life to the Church out of death. How sacrifice structures and saturates the relations of that body is the driving question of this section.

As we have seen, sacrifice is at the core of an Augustinian Eucharistic ecclesiology. That sacrifice weighs on the ethical and political comportment of the Church on the whole consequently means that the internal relations of the community must be constituted sacrificially as well. If the body is understood on the whole as sacrifice or sacrificial, this must be reflected in the relations between individual members of the corporate body. It must structure how they relate to each other, given the language of their corporeal ties to each other. The concern with

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\(^{52}\) The telos of the community is precisely what Augustine notes is one of the evocative actions of the Eucharist: to be made into Christ’s body. To adopt the words of Genesis, to “be formed in our image.”
these relations is reflected in Augustine’s elaboration of the kiss shared among parishioners directly after their consecration as sacrifice. The kiss of peace follows directly after the Eucharist in Augustine’s liturgy. I argue that this is not a coincidental placement. Rather, the fact that the kiss follows directly from the incorporation of the body, the making of parishioners into the *Corpus Christi*, is meant to indicate the structure of the relations the members of the body ought to have. Augustine’s elaboration of what is meant to occur in the kiss provide insight into what, exactly, it is to live in and as a sacrificial community. That is, the kiss follows directly the incorporation of the parishioners such that the sacrifice they have become is necessarily relational. As we will see, “the walls of the church define those who choose to live within them as a community that exists *for the sake of those outside*…insofar as the community [of sacrifice] represents the…economy of sacrifice, its members commit to dwelling together as a gesture of unity for the sake of those outside.”\(^5^3\) Their relations witness both to themselves and the world a possibility beyond the atomization of state, in Cavanaugh’s terms.

If sacrifice is relational, then members of the body within the sacrificial frame must admit of the ways they are sacrificed to each other. That is, they must admit to the claims made on them by other members, given their sacrificial orientation. To be sacrificially oriented in this way is to participate in what Joshua Nunziato calls an “economy of sacrifice.” Nunziato’s book, *Augustine and the Economy of Sacrifice*, explores an account of sacrifice through which he is able to elaborate an Augustinian understanding of community. Nunziato’s account borrows the notion of claims in economic exchange and proceeds to remake this notion in terms of sacrifice and ecclesiology.

The body of sacrifice, following the above discussion of disciplines, must have a set of internal relations that distinguish it from other communal structures. That is, it must have an alternative understanding of how the members relate to one another, and these relations must align with the ethical and political identification of the community as such. As noted, I argue that this is exemplified in the passing of the peace, the kiss shared among the parishioners in the moments immediately after the consecration of the Eucharist. Of the kiss, Augustine writes:

After [the Lord’s Prayer] comes the greeting, *peace be with you*, and Christians kiss one another with a holy kiss. It’s a sign of peace; what is indicated by the lips should happen in the conscience; that is, just as your lips approach the lips of your brothers or sisters, so your heart should not be withdrawn from theirs. (Augustine 255).

It is not immediately clear how this relates to the theme of sacrifice. It seems at first glance that Augustine views the kiss as a mechanism of reconciliation: when Christians kiss one another, the action is meant to elicit a consequent reconciliation of their hearts to each other. But something deeper appears operative here. Understanding the kiss requires an understanding of the story it rewrites, that of Judas Iscariot. When Judas comes to betray Jesus, he kisses him to indicate to the soldiers with him which one of those gathered is Jesus. His kiss is the seal of Christ’s death. If, in the canonical Gospels, the kiss signifies betrayal and death, why does Augustine use it here as an indicator of the peacefulness of the church? The kiss of betrayal, in light of the consecration of the elements, itself undergoes a kind of symbolic inversion. Similar

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54 The matter is not simply one of biblical or scriptural literacy. Augustine’s invocation of liturgical events like the kiss signify ethics only insofar as they are provided the background of an interpretive tradition. That is, the kiss may function as a sign of peace in other communities, but its relationship to the Eucharist places it for Christians immediately into the context of narratives of Jesus’ life. The fundamental understanding of the kiss is not, then, simply knowing the story, but being immersed in the story of Christ, as testified to by disciples. The kiss cannot become clear without a people shaped by the narrative itself. This is in part what Augustine means when he notes earlier in the sermon that, “we here are your books.”

55 Matthew 26.47–50, Mark 14.43–45

56 Luke 22.48: “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”
to the language that Paul uses to discuss the appearance of the cross as a symbol to the world, Augustine reveals the inversion of the kiss of betrayal that occurs in light of Christ’s sacrifice.\footnote{1 Corinthians 1.18: “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” There are other places where Paul discusses the inversion of world values more explicitly, but this passage from 1 Corinthians indicates the fundamental tension the cross has with the world.}

The liturgical kiss is not, I think, primarily a reconciling tool, though reconciliation does play a central role in any attempt at peace. The primary function, here, is to communicate not only the relationships of the community, but the relationships as relationships between sinners, people prone to betraying God and neighbour. Thus, the kiss itself, as a sign of the internal relations of the community, is an acknowledgment of the fundamental flaws of everyone engaging in the endeavour of peaceful Christian living.

Even further, one can see in the acknowledgement of the sinful character of those who participate a kind of sacrificial offering in the motion of the kiss. Insofar as one acknowledges that the person one kisses is a sinner, there is an opening for harm; the parishioners purposefully sacrifice themselves to others insofar as they make themselves vulnerable to harm. The kiss is a corporeal sign of this vulnerability. In the kiss, the parishioners offer themselves up, themselves embodying peaceful relations. For Augustine, on Nunziato’s reading, this is true only through incorporation into the “flesh of Christ.” That is, the way claims are made visible is in and through Christ himself. Nunziato expands the analysis of the body by developing on Augustine’s doctrine of Christ as mediator. both between God and humanity and between people. Nunziato translates what is perhaps Augustine’s most profound Christological development into the ecclesial setting. As such, Christ is the necessary background through which relations of flesh are made possible between members. It is only through incorporation into a body that claims on other bodies become intelligible.
Nunziato’s understanding of sacrifice as a particular set of relations involving claims that members of the body can make on each other is further developed in his analysis of Augustine’s separation from his girlfriend and his subsequent conversion. Nunziato uses this story to illustrate some of the ramifications of the sacrificial constitution of the Church. Of Augustine’s conversion in the garden, Nunziato writes that, “only by learning to acknowledge that Christ gave him his flesh could [Augustine] offer God the recognition…that God alone deserves.”\(^58\)

Christ’s sacrifice is, here, the origin point at which the sacrifice of Augustine’s own flesh in the act of celibacy—a recognition, we should remember, of another’s claim on him—becomes intelligible. Nunziato continues, arguing that sacrifice in the Church, considered in terms of the utterly original sacrifice of Christ, is not self-sacrifice, but sacrifice of that which has already been offered (or, rather, made an offering) in Christ. To be made a composite member of Christ’s body (the most frequent analogy Augustine deploys to describe the Church) is to be made an offering that has already been offered.

This requires, Nunziato argues, moving beyond the conception of a gift-economy, which is the standard conception on which sacrifice is typically analysed.\(^59\) This move is required precisely because what one comes to offer in the Church is not one’s own. That is, what the church offers when it becomes a sacrifice through the Eucharist is Christ’s body. The entirety of the gift-economy is reframed because what is offered is the only sacrifice God accepts: his own. Again, Nunziato turns to Augustine’s conversion in the garden to explicate this issue:

What Augustine finally saw when he read Paul…was that he himself was the sacrifice to be made. His sex life and his career ambitions were not tokens of an offering that he

\(^{58}\) Nunziato 155

\(^{59}\) Nunziato is borrowing the term ‘gift-economy’ from Moshe Halbertal’s *On Sacrifice*. The first section of the text analyses biblical narratives of sacrifice the first section of which is dedicated to exploring the gift-economy as a theory of sacrifice in biblical narratives. See Halbertal, Moshe. *On Sacrifice*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015.
could not bring himself to make. Instead, nothing remained to be given—except the acknowledgment that he had already become an offering. Augustine makes a similar acknowledgment in *City of God* 10.3:

To [God] we owe our service—what is Greek is called *latreia*—whether in the various sacraments or in ourselves. For we are his temple, collectively, and as individuals. For he condescends to dwell in the union of all and in each person. He is as great in the individual as he is in the whole body of his worshippers, for he cannot be increased in bulk or diminished by partition. When we lift up our hearts to him, our heart is his altar...we vow to him and offer to him the gifts he has given us, and the gift of ourselves.

Augustine’s purpose in moving past the gift-cycle conception of sacrifice is not to make claims about the ownership of bodies between people. The purpose in this passage, as well as the Nunziato, is to show that sacrifice is carefully nestled already within the gift of Christ to the Church. Through the practice of the Eucharist, the bodies of church members are recognised for what they are, reinscribing the beauty of creation and the fullness of God into each one present.

Recalling the brief discussion of Cavanaugh’s book in the preceding section, the political import of acts like the liturgical kiss of peace is apparent both as a reminder of the offering the

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60 Nunziato 155
62 I recognise some of the language employed above has been critiqued by feminist and womanist scholars who have rightly raised concerns about the role of the language of sacrifice, servanthood, and humility prominent in the history, development, and application of white male Christian ethics, especially as regards bodies that have rarely been treated or recognised with respect and autonomy. These issues have been fundamental in the perpetuation of misogyny, racism, exploitation, colonialism, and much more, and even today the language is employed to support such crimes. As I have tried to show with my reading of and response to Nancy Jay, I think there are ways to read Augustine that open up promising theories of sacrifice that do not necessarily fall into the same patterns and systems of dominance. In quoting from *City of God* 10.3, I think Augustine provides the resources for balancing—and checking—a theory of sacrifice with that of the beauty of the individual person. Insofar as God is *just as great* in the image of each person, a sacrificial relation to that person must be just, peaceful, non-dominating, non-rapacious, non-patriarchal, and loving. It is precisely because the Church learns through the Eucharist to see that God inhabits all things and all people—the whole of creation—that a non-dominant sacrificial relation can be made intelligible. This is an inadequate and insufficient response to the numerous, detailed, and vigilant concerns expressed in the critiques of sacrifice. A full response would require a thesis unto itself. Those critiques are deserving of such careful study and response. As far as Augustine goes, the answer, I think, is similar to what was given above with Jay: there are potential resources, but the way forward is unclear. Our only hope to recover sacrificial relations in such a way that we can deter the patriarchal bend they have historically had is to attempt redress through understanding the reinscription of the beauty and goodness of all creation, and its fundamental equality in and through God. God, Augustine says, has given us to each other, but only because he first gave himself. It is in the recognition of the full-fledged wrecking of God’s justice in the world through resurrection that sacrificial relations *may* be possible.
Church as a whole and as individuals is, and as a reinforcement of the relations of sacrifice Augustine’s insights open up. The kiss as shared between members is but one example of the kinds of disciplines a sacrificial ecclesiology requires, first and foremost because of what it communicates, namely, relations of love and peace between members, relations that are inherently non-rapacious and non-dominating. These relations are resistant to the individuation and isolation of the order of glory Augustine so vehemently attacked, but they are also respectful of the individual insofar as God inhabits that person directly.

But there is also a certain realism that follows from Augustine’s emphasis on the kiss of peace. He notes that this kiss “should happen in the conscience,” which is to say that when it does not, the community has failed to understand it. The practice of communicating peace with the kiss is, at its base, a practice that belies a particular reality with which Christians must live: they are sinners. The acknowledgment that Christians themselves are sinners not only a requisite of Christian life, Augustine implies, but the practice of the kiss and the acknowledgment of the fragility therein is indicative of the virtues embodied by the community. In this case, that virtue is humility. Christians are meant, in this scenario, to turn to those next to them who could potentially be their downfall (literally, unto death on the cross) and offer to them a sign of peace. Humility recognizes that the person could just as likely be either of them. Again, the sacrificial theme resurges. The community offers peace to each other, knowing that sacrifice (not necessarily mortal or corporeal) of themselves for the other is required of that peace. Augustine writes that the “brothers and sisters” of the community must not “[have their] heart…withdrawn from theirs.” The sacrificial community is not, then, simply one that sacrifices material goods or is particularly benevolent to the poor, though those may be true. The sacrificial community is primarily configured in terms of their partaking of the Eucharist, which forms them into a
community capable of emulating the sacrifice of Christ on the cross – that is, the sacrifice of the body. The peace that is communicated in the kiss, then, is the comportment that the community as sacrifice maintains.

4. Conclusion

I began this paper by describing four different models of political Augustinianisms: Augustinian realism, proceduralism, civi republicanism, and anti-liberalism. These four heuristics helpfully map most of the literature of the reception of Augustine in modern political theory. As I have attempted to show, though they render distinctive visions both of politics and Augustine, they share one fundamental connection, namely, the absence of the Eucharist as the generative moment of the politics of the Church.

That is, on the reading of Augustine offered above, the Eucharist is not just one practice among many that the church engages in. Nor is it an apolitical practice of personal reconciliation. Rather, I have argued that the Eucharist is the centrepiece of Augustine’s political vision, and that it is the Eucharist he has in mind when he discusses sacrifice. The first section of this paper attempted to show that Sermon 227 motivates a particularly nuanced vision of the Eucharist as a substantively political event. The second portion attempted to delineate just how the Eucharist as a sacrifice reverberates politically. The Eucharist as a sacrifice structures and saturates the relations among those who partake it, forming them into the body of Christ and inculcating particular non-dominant practices among them.

The problem with the political Augustinianisms is that they do not take seriously the role the Eucharist plays in deciphering and understanding Augustine’s thought on the Church. As such, among many of the camps the first question of politics is what people ought to do. But this
does not seem to be Augustine’s concern, and it is a pressing question whether a reading of him could render that as his primary object of interest in discussing politics. Augustine’s understanding of politics goes far deeper than debating what course of political action Christians ought to take. It seems, from the reading of Sermon 227 and the discussion of Eucharistic relations that followed, that Augustine is much more invested in seeing that Christians are formed by the Eucharist such that they can, as the body of Christ, witness to Christ’s political vision. The centrality of the Eucharist to an Augustinian understanding of the church cannot be neglected. The alterity of the Church as political community cannot be distinguished from the gifts it is given in the Eucharist. The sacrificial mode of living that Christians, Augustine thinks, are called to live is a life lived in disciplines of the body that forge solidarity against and in spite of the atomising effects of the modern state or, in Augustine’s time, the order of glory. Christian resistance to such individuation has as its centre the Eucharist. The Eucharist gives rise to a politics that proclaims allegiance not to the dominant forces of this world, but instead to Christ, who commands his people to live in peace with one another—a difficult task in a world plagued with sin and violence. As a people sacrificed to each other, contingent on other’s witness to the truth revealed in the Eucharist, Augustine’s Christians offer a different witness to the world. Augustine reminds those people that it is not the world that dictates their politics, but the Eucharist—Christ in bread and wine.