Session III

Augustine the Controversialist
Augustine on the Incarnation as Criterion for Orthodoxy

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I derived the subject matter of this paper from my own question whether Augustine had ever worked out a central theological concept as a foundation for Christian faith (*recta fides/saluberrima fides*), a concept so pivotal that it would also demarcate for him the boundary between orthodoxy and heresy. It is clear that, for Augustine, Christian faith includes a set of beliefs (*ea quae creduntur*) which are indicated in the Scriptures and in various creedal statements, and which must be held by all believers. Chief among these beliefs, he maintains, is faith in the incarnation. In Sermons 182 and 183 Augustine comments on 1 Jn 4:1–3, “Dearly beloved, do not believe every spirit; but test the spirits, whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit which does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from God.” In a startling way, Augustine concludes from this passage that “all heretics deny Christ has come in the flesh.”

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in the flesh.”5 In Sermon 182 Augustine applies these Johannine verses against the Manicheans alone, arguing that they are heretics because they deny the incarnation.6 But in Sermon 183 he expands his treatment of these verses to include all heretics, naming explicitly the Arians, Eunomians, Sabellians, Photinians, Donatists, and Pelagians, before exclaiming, “And if we were to discuss all heresies, we would find that they all deny Christ has come in the flesh.”7 On the basis of this affirmation and of the two sermons that provide its context, is it correct to assert that, for Augustine, a proper faith in the incarnation constitutes the essential criterion for orthodoxy? If so, does faith in the incarnation also represent for him a theologically coherent boundary distinguishing orthodoxy from all heresies?

By the time Augustine preaches Sermons 182 and 183, he had already composed his Commentary on 1 John in 407. In that work he makes some of the same points that are found in Sermons 182 and 183. He acknowledges, for example, that 1 Jn 4:1–3 provides a way for Christians to discern the presence in their midst of any and every heretic and schismatic.8 He admits there, too, that many heretics claim to believe that Christ has come in the flesh, but that their verbal orthodoxy is not matched by their understanding of the divine and human natures of Christ.9 He names the Arians, Eunomians, Macedonians, Cataphrygians (the name given to the followers of Montanus) and Novatianists (Cathari), but says nothing in detail here concerning the specific ways in which it can be said that they deny the incarnation. He then turns his attention to the Donatists, to whom he dedicates some discussion. I shall have more to say about this Commentary when I turn to his treatment of the Donatists in Sermon 183.

Before examining more carefully Augustine’s assertions in Sermon 183, however, we ought to see what he says in De haeresibus ad Quoduultdeum about the difficulties involved in defining heresy. Augustine wrote De haeresibus during the

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5. Augustine, s. 183.13 (PL 38.993): “omnes haeretici negant Christum in carne uenisse.”
years 428 and 429, shortly before his death. The work responds to a request by the Carthaginian deacon Quodvultdeus for a manual of heresies against the Christian faith. Augustine tells Quodvultdeus that his intention is to do more than provide this compendium; he also intends to attempt a definition of heresy. He says this while admitting that it is difficult to say what a heresy is and is not. His fullest statement of this difficulty occurs in the Preface to De haeresibus, and it is worth quoting at length:

I especially want to produce this work . . . so that through it every heresy—both known and unknown—may be avoided and so that any that may become known can be correctly assessed. After all, not every error is a heresy; yet, since every heresy involves a defect, a heresy could only be a heresy by reason of some error. What makes one a heretic, then, in my opinion, either cannot at all, or can only with difficulty, be grasped in a definition in accord with the rules. This point will be explained in the course of this work, if God guides and brings my plan to the goal I intend. But we should look into and state the value of this investigation, even if we cannot grasp how a heretic should be defined. After all, who would not see its great value, if we could grasp it? The first part of this work will be about the heresies which arose against the teaching of Christ after his coming and ascension. . . . But in the second part there will be a discussion of what makes one a heretic.

Unfortunately for us, death intervened and Augustine never completed the second part of his treatise, so he never got round to discussing the question, “what makes one a heretic.” Commenting on the difficulty that Augustine alludes to in

11. Cf. Quoduultdeus at Augustine, ep. 221; ib., 223. Cf. also Augustine, haer. praef. 3.
12. Augustine makes this point on two occasions to Quodvultdeus: cf. Augustine, ep. 222.2; haer. praef. 7.
13. Cf. Augustine, haer. praef. 7 (CCL 46.289): “ego uero magis hoc uolo facere, si et deus uelit, unde possit omnis haeresis, et quae nota est et quae ignota, uitari, et unde recte possit quaecumque innotuerit iudicari. non enim omnis error haeresis est, quamuis omnis haeresis quae in uitio ponitur nisi errore aliquo haeresis esse non possit. quid ergo faciat haeticum regulari quadam definitione comprehendi, sicut ego existimo, aut omnino non potest aut difficilime potest. quod in过程中 huius operis declarabitur, si deus rexerit ad iuditum intendo perduxerit dispositionem meam. quid autem prosi ipsa inquisitio, etiamsi non potuerimus comprehendere quomodo sit defi niendus haeticus, suo loco uidendum atque dicendum est. nam si hoc comprehendit potuerit, quis non uideat utilitas quanta sit? erunt ergo primae partes operis huius de haeresibus quae post Christi aduentum et ascensum aduersus doctrinanm ipsius existerunt, et utcunque nobis innotescere potuerunt. in posterioribus autem partibus, quid faciat haeticum disputabitur. cum ergo dominus ascendisset in caelum, hi haetici exorti sunt.” Cf. also Augustine, gest. Pel. 18.
formulating such a definition, Roland Teske points out, “The problem is that error involves a falling short of the truth and there are [sic] an endless number of ways in which one can fall short of the truth. Thus, a definition by genus and species is impossible.” Of course Teske’s point is valid in terms of a concise approach to a definition, one in which genus and species are indicated briefly, as in the definition of human being as “a rational animal.” Understanding Augustine in this way, his statement, “What it is that makes one a heretic, in my opinion, either cannot at all, or can only with difficulty, be grasped in a definition in accord with the rules,” makes sense to us, since the “rules” that he has in mind are conventional rhetorical norms for *definire*. But he also says in this Preface, “But we should look into and state the value of this investigation (inquisitio), even if we cannot grasp how a heretic should be defined,” and he concludes by saying, “in the second part [of this work] there will be a discussion of what makes one a heretic—‘*quid faciat haereticum disputabitur*’.” So Augustine’s intention for the second part of this treatise was probably not limited to working out a definition in the limited sense of the term (*definire, definitio*). Anticipating difficulty or even failure in that attempt, he nevertheless intended to carry on a discussion, *disputatio*, concerning what makes a heretic in general terms. There is value in attending to the distinction Augustine sometimes makes between defining (*definire*) and discussing (*disputare*) certain key concepts, for example, at *City of God* 19.21, where he distinguishes between defining and discussing the meaning Cicero attached to the expression “*consensus iuris*.”

Before leaving the text of *De haeresibus*, it is worth mentioning that in cataloguing the eighty-three heresies mentioned in the work, Augustine never cites 1 Jn 4:2–3, the passage which forms the heart of Sermon 183, “Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit which does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from God.” Moreover, I have discovered in *De haeresibus* only one or two cases in which Augustine accuses a heretical group of denying that Christ came in the flesh in

15. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 7.3.2–3, says that a concise definition consists mainly in the statement of genus, species, difference and property.
language parallel to that found in Sermons 182 and 183: “[negare] Christum in carne uenisse.” The weaker of these two occasions occurs in regard to the Manicheans, as one would expect, given the prominence that this phrase holds in Sermon 182 in relation to the sect.18 At De haeresibus 46.15 Augustine asserts that the Manicheans “say that Christ came (uenire) in recent times to liberate souls, not bodies, and that he did not exist in real flesh: “nec fuisse in carne uera.” The second occurrence of the expression is found at De haeresibus 60, where Augustine briefly mentions the Proclianites, a group known to us only through Philaster.19 Augustine claims that the Proclianites followed the teachings of the Seleucians or Hermians, except that they also held that Christ had not come in the flesh. The expression given here, “Christum non in carne uenisse,” exactly parallels that found in Sermon 183.20 There are of course multiple other ways in which Augustine in the course of De haeresibus accuses various groups either of denying the incarnation altogether, or of holding a theologically deficient account of it.21 But it is interesting that the precise language of Sermon 183 is generally lacking in De haeresibus, given the emphasis he places in that sermon on the text of 1 Jn 4:2–3 and the insistence with which he concludes there “omnes haeretici negant Christum in carne uenisse.”

Augustine begins Sermon 183 by pointing out that the case he made against the Manicheans in the previous sermon is air-tight, because they explicitly deny that Christ came in the flesh.22 However, he acknowledges that the Arians, Eunomians, Sabellians, and Photinians acknowledge that Christ came in the flesh, and he admits that this confession of faith is even stronger among the Donatists and Pelagians. So, he asks, if 1 Jn 4:2 claims that “every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,” how can these groups be rightly judged heretical?23 He then examines each heresy one by one, arguing that in each case the doctrine that Christ has come in the flesh is somehow negated.

He begins with the Arians. Although they confess Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, they do not, in Augustine’s view, “know Jesus Christ as more than a man,” and therefore, “they simply don’t know Jesus Christ,” because, Augustine continues,
“if he’s only a man, and nothing further, he isn’t the real Jesus Christ.”24 Augustine cites Mt 16:14–16, Peter’s confession that Jesus is “the son of the living God.” Augustine understands the expression “son of God” to refer to Christ’s consubstantiality with the Father. In this same context, Augustine also reflects on the view of Christ presented at Jn 1:1–3 and Phil 2:6–7 in order to argue that the Arians fail to acknowledge Christ’s true divinity and his equality with the Father. Hence, in his view, the “Christ” whom they confess to have come in the flesh is not the same Christ attested by the Scriptures and upheld by orthodox Christian faith.25

After dismissing the Arians, he applies much of the same theological reasoning against the Eunomians.26 He also rejects the Sabellian modalist concept of Christ, explaining that it, too, is theologically deficient.27 Finally, he accuses Photinus of denying altogether that Christ was God.28

Thus far, Augustine’s challenges to the doctrine of the incarnation as held by various heretical groups are based, we may say, in creedal statements concerning the precise nature of Christ’s divinity and humanity. Regardless how we choose to judge the historical accuracy of Augustine’s charges against the Manicheans, Arians, and the other groups mentioned, we can see that his arguments cohere with the largely standard, orthodox Christian faith of his day. For this reason, too, we may say that up to this point, Sermon 183 is not particularly outstanding or even interesting. But when Augustine moves on to dismiss the faith in the incarnation as professed by Donatists and Pelagians, his sermon clearly breaks new ground. I cannot find evidence that anyone prior to Augustine had ever charged either group with an unorthodox understanding of this key doctrine.29

In shifting his argument, Augustine acknowledges that “most Donatists confess the same as we do about the Son, that the Son is equal to the Father, and of the same substance.”30 He further acknowledges that, for this reason, his charge

24. Cf. Augustine, s. 183.3 (PL 35.989): “qui haec confitebantur uel confitentur, Iesum Christum plus quam hominem non nouerunt. si autem Iesum Christum plus quam hominem non nouerunt, Iesum Christum utique non nouerunt.”
27. Cf. Augustine, s. 183.7.
29. Optatus of Milevis, De schismate Donatistarum 1.10, regards the Christology of the Donatists as orthodox.
30. Cf. Augustine, s. 183.9. Cf. idem, en. Ps. 32.2.2.29, together with Madec, op. cit., 893–895. Augustine’s charge at s. 183.9 that there are some Donatists who confess that the Son is of the same substance as the Father, but not that he is equal to the Father, is echoed at haer. 69.2, principally in reference to Donatus of Casae Nigrae. But Augustine also implies in both passages that the number of Donatists who believe this way is small and not representative of the majority.
“requires a rather more intricate discussion (subtilior disputatio).”

His defense of the accusation rests on the confluence of two of his better known Christological doctrines, that of Christ as the bridegroom of the Church (sponsus ecclesiae) and of the “whole Christ, head and body” (Christus totus). In summary, he argues that Christians do not properly understand the incarnation unless they believe that in becoming man, Christ united himself to the Church as it exists in history, in such a way that to reject the Church in its historical form and mission is to deny what Christ became when he came in the flesh. Given this principle, he concludes that the Donatists deny the incarnation because they reject the historical form and mission of the Church as it is presented, for example, at Lk 24:44–46. In this passage the evangelist records that the risen Jesus, appearing to his disciples at Emmaus, tells them, “It was necessary for Christ to suffer, and rise again from the dead on the third day, and for there to be preached in his name repentance and forgiveness of sins throughout the world.” Quoting this passage, Augustine insists that it represents Christ as bridegroom describing his bride, the Church. Augustine echoes the Gospel’s description of the Church’s mission as preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Though Augustine’s comments about this point are extremely brief and summary (in keeping perhaps with the form of his argument throughout this sermon); nevertheless, there is something about the contrast he draws between the expressions all the nations and beginning at Jerusalem that underscores the need he sees for believers to embrace the Church, as Christ’s bride, in its concrete and contemporary form, in which it really exists in plural nations and not in one, exclusive nation or people—the one, that is, which is so familiar to the Donatists. So I suggest that one finds in this argument an insistence on otherness and difference as essential qualities of the make-up of Christ as he is known and worshipped in the flesh of his bride, the Church. This emphasis undergirds Augustine’s critique of Donatist refusal to affirm the totality of what is signified in the doctrine of the incarnation.

I have already mentioned that Augustine treated the Donatists in relation to 1 Jn 4:1–3 earlier on in his Commentary on 1 Jn. Reading what Augustine has to say there about the Donatists in relation to the doctrine of the incarnation enhances our

31. Cf. Augustine, s. 183.10 (PL 38.991): “De illis subtilior disputatio est.”
33. Cf. Augustine, s. 183.10–11.
34. An expanded version of this argument can be found at cath. fr. 7; ibid. 17–18; 22; 24; 29; 40–41; c. litt. Pet. 2.74; c. Gaud. 1.22.
understanding of his argument in Sermon 183. Whereas in the sermon, Augustine concentrates his criticism on the lack of universality in the Donatist conception of the church, in the Commentary he emphasizes that they fail to promote the church’s mission in preaching the forgiveness of sins in Christ, implying strongly that they refuse reconciliation to those who are not in their fold.35

His case against the Pelagians also requires “intricate discussion,” as he puts it. Central to his accusation in this sermon that they lack a valid understanding of the incarnation is the text of Rom 8:3, “God sent his son in the likeness of the flesh of sin.”36 Those of us who are familiar with Augustine’s anti-Pelagian writings will recognize the difference he frequently draws between the “flesh of sin” (caro peccati), in which he holds that all human beings following Adam and Eve are born, and the “likeness of the flesh of sin” (similitudo carnis peccati), in which he claims that Christ was born.37 As revealed in his writings against the Pelagians, Augustine’s decision to set Christ’s freedom from all sin in radical discontinuity with the consequences of original sin which befall all other human beings reflects a difference between his position and that of the Pelagians over the nature and function of Christ’s person and work.38 Augustine does not initially charge the Pelagians with a heterodox understanding of Christ, as far as the tenets of the Christian creeds are concerned.39 He

36. Cf. Augustine, s. 183.12 (PL 38.992): ‘quid dicis, Pelagianista? audite quid dicit. uidetur confiteri Christum in carne uenisse: sed discussus inuenitur negare. Christus enim in carne uenit, quae similitudo esset carnis peccati, non esset caro peccati. apostoli uerba sunt: misit deus filium suum in similitudinem carnis peccati [Rom 8:3], non in similitudinem carnis, quasi caro non esset caro; sed in similitudinem carnis peccati [Rom 8:3], quia caro erat, sed peccati caro non erat. iste autem Pelagius et ceteram carnem omnis infantis carni Christi conatur aequare. non est, carissimi. non pro magno commendaretur in Christo similitudo carnis peccati, nisi omnis cetera caro esset caro peccati. quid ergo prodest, quia dicis Christum in carne uenisse, et omnium infantium carni eum conaris aequare’?
37. Cf., for example, Augustine, pecc. mer. 1.43; 1.55; 1.61; 1.68; 1.69–70; 2.37–38; 2.47–48; 2.55–59; 3.20–21.; spir. et litt. 34; nat. et gr. 15; ibid. 71; gr. et pecc. or. 2.37; nupt et conc. 1.13; 2.42; c. ep. Pel. 2.3; 3.2; 3.15–17; 4.24; s. 294.13; ep. 140.18; 190.25. There are additional references in his writings against Julian of Eclanum, which I have not included here.
38. Christ’s unique freedom from sin and its consequences occurs especially as a theme in Augustine’s writings against the Pelagians. Cf. Augustine, pecc. mer. 1.57 ; 1.60 ; 2.57 (CSEL 60.125): “Solus unus est qui sine peccato uisit inter aliena peccata”; spir. et litt. 1; nat. et gr. 15; perf. ius. 12; 29; nupt. et conc. 1.13 ; 1.27; c. Iul. imp. 2.56. Cf. also ep. 179.44; 187.10; ench. 28; 34–40; c. s. Arrian. 9.7; ciu. 20.26, in conjunction with F.-J. Thonnard, Le don d’intégrité et l’état de justice originelle, in Œuvres de saint Augustin, vol. 23: Premières polémiques contre Julien, ed. François-Joseph Thonnard et al., Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1974, 717–21, and Basil Studer, Le Christ, notre justice, selon saint Augustin, in Recherches Augustiniennes 15 (1980): 99–143, at 122–124. For this reason, Christ is the only human being in history who is completely just (solus iustus). Cf. Augustine, ciu. 17.4; Io. eu. tr. 41.9; en. Ps. 36.2.14; 50.9; 98.7; s. 161.9.
knows they confess that Christ is both fully God and man, that he is the savior, and that human beings are redeemed from sin by his death and resurrection. However, as his controversy with the Pelagians progresses, his objections to their implicit Christology also intensify.

For Augustine, these objections are ultimately rooted in the view he takes of the unity of Christ’s two natures, another point of disagreement with Pelagius. In Augustine’s view, it is only as a consequence of its unity with his divine nature that Christ’s human nature can be completely free of sin. Pelagius and his associates reject Augustine’s understanding of original sin, and for this reason they do not posit a radical difference between Christ’s humanity and that of all other human beings. Pelagius assumes that human beings are able to imitate Christ’s moral example with greater or lesser success, depending upon their will to do so and upon other factors, such as the quality of the moral guidance provided to them.

In order to strengthen his argument against the Pelagians that Christ’s total freedom from sin is not a function simply of his human nature, but that it is grounded in the substantial unity between his human and divine natures, Augustine begins in 411 to speak of Christ explicitly as “one person” (una persona) when discussing the uniqueness of his virtue as compared to that of all other human beings. Although he clearly arrives at such an understanding prior to the beginning of this dispute, he only begins to employ this precise terminology after his first contact with the thought he comes to associate with the Pelagians. More importantly, he

42. Tarcisius van Bavel, Recherches sur la christologie de saint Augustin. L’humain et le divin dans le Christ d’après saint Augustin, Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1954, 20–26, argues that between AD 400–411, Augustine develops an account of the unity of Christ’s divine and human natures, first in terms of a union of grace, but later as a substantial union in terms of a single personhood (una persona). Hubertus Drobner, Person-Exegese und Christologie bei Augustinus. Zur Herkunft der Formel Una Persona, Leiden: Brill, 1986, shows that Augustine originally employs the term “persona” in conjunction with prosopographical exegesis in order to identify the speaker of a particular biblical passage. Drobner (153–169) further demonstrates that by AD 411, Augustine transfers the meaning of “persona” from its grammatical context to an ontological one, which can be used in order to represent this unity of natures in Christ. Cf. also Dodaro, op. cit., 93 n. 85.
43. Cf., for example, Augustine, pecc. mer. 1.60 and ep. 140.12. Both texts were composed sometime between AD 411/412. Cf. also Augustine, c. s. Arrian. 7.6–9.7; ench. 35–36; perseu. 67. For indications of other texts, see Drobner, op. cit., 241–253. Van Bavel, op. cit., 20, observes that, “l’on ne puisse attester avec certitude l’apparition de la formule una persona qu’en 411, tandis que unitas personae semble déjà familière à saint Augustin dès 400. A partir de cette dernière date, la doctrine de l’union personnelle se confirme de plus en plus et elle peut être considérée comme définitive.”
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does so principally in contexts which are predominantly anti-Pelagian. By insisting in these terms that Christ, the God-man, is a unique being, Augustine intends to demonstrate the flaws in Pelagius’s understanding of Christ. He suggests that if Pelagius believes Christ’s human nature to be morally comparable in all respects to that of all human beings, then he must have no proper conception of the unity and dynamic interrelationship between Christ’s human and divine natures. Otherwise, he would agree with Augustine that Christ’s complete freedom from sin as a human being must be explained in terms of this interrelationship, and that his two natures can be thought to interact in this way only if they are united with each other in a manner that is unique in human history. To affirm that God unites himself with all human beings in precisely the same way that one finds in Christ is to deny the uniqueness of the incarnation, either because its special grace is not exclusive to Christ, or because it must not involve a radical unity between Christ’s natures. Only a failure to acknowledge Christ’s essential unity can lead one to understand his human nature as sufficiently detached from his divine nature as to be morally similar to that of all human beings. For this reason, in De peccatorum meritis et remissione and in Sermon 294, Augustine accuses Pelagius and his associates of positing “two Christ’s,” one divine, the other human. Augustine’s brief remarks in Sermon 183 concerning the inadequacy of the Pelagian understanding of the incarnation thus point to an argument which, as Goulven Madec rightly points out, he only rarely exposes, but which is fundamental to his teachings concerning original sin, grace and predestination.

In looking at Augustine’s arguments in this sermon that both the Donatists and Pelagians understand the incarnation in fatally inadequate ways we notice that in both cases the deficiency can be traced to the way in which Christ unites himself to human beings. On many occasions, Augustine uses the terms sacramentum or mysterium to convey the nature of this union. One of the principal biblical passages he frequently employs in his explanations of this union is Eph 5:29–32:

For no one ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall

44. Cf., for example, Augustine, pecc. mer. 1.60; s. 294.9; perseu. 67; corrept. 30; c. Iul. imp. 4.84. I would also argue from the context of the arguments that the reference to Christ’s “one person” at ep. 140.12; ibid. 187.10; and ench. 36 reflect opposition to positions which he associates with the Pelagians.
45. Cf. Augustine, pecc. mer. 1.60 (CSEL 60.61): “ne quasi duo Christi accipiantur, unus deus et alter homo, sed unus atque idem deus et homo”; s. 294.9 (PL 38.1340): “quia in hoc utroque non duo Christi sunt, nec duo filii dei sed una persona, unus Christus dei filius, idemque unus Christus, non alius, hominis filius; sed dei.”
become one’ (cf. Gn 2:24). This is a great mystery (*sacramentum magnum*), and I mean in reference to Christ and the church.

Passages in Augustine’s writings in which this biblical text with its reference to *sacramentum magnum* are cited in relation both to his treatment of Christ as “bridegroom of the Church” and as “head of his body, the Church” are well known to most scholars, as are their applications both to the Donatist and Pelagian controversies. I suggest that, although the term is absent from Sermon 183, the concept behind it, which describes the way in which Augustine conceives of the union between Christ and the Church, is nevertheless at work. I further suggest that it is also the central theological concept in his thought, about which I spoke at the beginning of this paper, and, as such, it provides him with a way of thinking about the essential difference between orthodox Christian faith and heresy. I have suggested elsewhere that Augustine’s concept of *sacramentum Christi* governs the manner in which he thinks grace reveals to the mind essential saving truths, which are otherwise not available to it, because they are not products of human reasoning. It is interesting in light of this assertion to note as well that, following his criticism of the Pelagians in Sermon 183, Augustine talks about this kind of revealed, saving knowledge in relation to the apostle Peter. Augustine asks from where Peter got the insight to affirm about Christ, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” In answering his own question, he cites Christ’s words to Peter, “Blessed are you, Simon bar-Jona, because flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 16:16–17). Augustine comments that the only thing Peter could produce from his own resources was fear of death, of Christ’s death and of his own, whereas the key insight into the person of Jesus Christ came to Peter as a grace. Parallel arguments to this can be found in Augustine’s anti-Pelagian writings, specifically in relation to Christ as sacrament or mystery.

The “great mystery” (*sacramentum magnum*) referred to at Eph 5:32 thus holds, for Augustine, a double sense. Its content concerns both the precise way in which the God-man, Jesus Christ, unites himself to human beings, and the consequences for human beings of that union. But *sacramentum* also describes the graced manner in which these and other essential, saving truths are communicated to the mind. In

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50. I have isolated three such passages: *spir. et litt.* 64; *nat. et gr.* 17; *gr. et pecc. or.* 1.11–12, about which, cf. Dodaro, *Christ*, op. cit., 168–171.
the case of the Donatists, Augustine indicates that what is lacking in their theology is an appreciation of the corporate, social form and context of salvation in Christ; in the case of the Pelagians, what is lacking in his view is an appreciation of the radical moral dependence upon Christ that salvation requires. Augustine expresses what is lacking in Donatists and Pelagians that is essential to a complete grasp of the logic of the incarnation in other terms as well, elsewhere in his writings. For example, in the passages from his Commentary on 1 John which I mentioned earlier, he accuses the Donatists of lacking charity (caritas) and says that the incarnation was the primary demonstration of charity in history, so that their refusal to be reconciled with the universal Church is tantamount to a rejection of the incarnation.\textsuperscript{51} It seems, therefore, from the way he employs the term sacramentum in his writings in general, and in particular within the Donatist and Pelagian controversies, that it is the kind of concept capable of bearing the multiple applications which his thinking about Christ in relation to the Church and human salvation demands.

What we may have in Sermon 183, then, is a sketch or outline of a theological idea or approach to a question, the direction and consequences of which are highly suggestive for Augustinian theology and for the history of western Christian theology beyond him. I do not conclude from this analysis that Augustine arrived in the clearest of terms at the concept of sacrament or mystery in relation to Christ as a boundary distinguishing orthodoxy from all heresies, but I believe his thinking clearly tends to this conclusion.

\textsuperscript{51} Cf. Augustine, \textit{ep. Io. tr.} 6.13; 7.3.