

## “And the Word became flesh” (John 1,14) Saint Augustine’s teaching on the Incarnation

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### 1. *The Confessions*

“I sought a way to obtain strength enough to enjoy you [o God]; but I did not find it until I embraced ‘the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus’ (1 Tim 2,5), ‘who is above all things, God blessed for ever’ (Rom 9,5).... The food which I was too weak to accept him mingled with flesh, in that ‘The Word was made flesh’ (John 1,14), ... To possess God, the humble Jesus, I was not yet humble enough. I did not know what his weakness was meant to teach. I had rather a different notion, since I thought of Christ my Lord only as a man of excellent wisdom which none could equal. I thought his wonderful birth from a virgin was an example of despising temporal things to gain immortality for us, and such divine care gave him great authority as teacher. But the mystery of the Word made flesh I had not begun to guess.... I thought that he excelled others not as the personal embodiment of the Truth, but because of the great excellence of his human character and more perfect participation in wisdom.... [Here follows a digression about Alypius who like the Apolinarians believed that Christ had no rational soul.] ... I admit it was some time later that I learnt, in relation to the words ‘The Word was made flesh’, how Catholic truth is to be distinguished from the false opinion of Photinus (*Conf.* VII 18.24-19.25).<sup>2</sup>

1. The following is the third lecture on the theme of Augustine’s *sermones ad populum* delivered by the Ref. Prof. H. Drobner Paderborn University, Germany, for IV Annual St. Augustine Lecture at the University of Malta in November 1998. The Lecture was founded in 1994, and is coordinated by the Rev. Dr. Salvino Caruana OSA SThD, Lecturer in Patristics at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Malta. The Lecture is organised in collaboration with the Foundation For theological Studies of the Archdiocese of Malta and the Maltese augustinian Province.
2. Translation taken from: Saint Augustine, *confessions*, (Translated with an introduction and notes by Henry Chadwick) (Oxford 1991) 128-129.

Thus book seven of St. Augustine's *Confessions* describes his idea of Christ at the time of his conversion, in 386, albeit with the knowledge and the vocabulary of the bishop in 398. Apart from the terms Augustine uses which, as he admits himself, he did not yet know at the time of his conversion, he obviously believed Christ to be only a man, a complete man it is true, extraordinarily born from a virgin, but nevertheless a solely human being as all the others. What set Christ apart from the rest of his fellow beings in the eyes of Augustine was not his divinity, but his unique human qualities, the perfection of his life, and his unique and all others outshining wisdom and merits, selected by God in order to be the most outstanding example and teacher of how to achieve immortality, but nothing more. He did not think of him as Son of God, nor as divine, nor as mediator. He did not even think in these terms at all and certainly did not yet know either, who Photinus and his heresy was, which he was implicitly committing.

At the time of his conversion Augustine's christology plainly did not exceed the limits of philosophy. For at this stage the fact that he accepted the full humanity of Christ has nothing to do with theology or the knowledge of Apolinarianism, because the explicit defense of Christ's rational soul as he presents it in the *Confessions* presupposes the notion of the divinity of Christ to which the flesh is united, and that precisely Augustine did not yet believe in. Augustine took the complete humanity simply for granted from a philosophical point of view. Being the most outstanding man of all, it never entered his mind that he could lack any human quality, and the testimony of the Scriptures confirmed it; he lived, he uttered ideas, he made decisions - all of it movements of a rational mind and soul.

Nevertheless the quoted passage from the *Confessions* shows at the same time, what Augustine had learned about Christ in the meantime: That he was the mediator between God and man, God's Word and wisdom through whom all things were created' divine, and extraordinarily humbling himself so deeply for man's sake becoming a man himself, taking upon him the complete humanity, body, mind and soul, united to the Word. Truly God and really become man "and dwelt among us".

## **2. John 1,14**

But when exactly was this "later" that Augustine grasped the full orthodox meaning of John 1,14? The earliest date we can ascertain is sometime after May 395 and before 28<sup>th</sup> August 397, the dates in between which his work *On 83 Various Questions* was composed. In *Quaestio 80* "Against the Apolinarians" he raises the

question of what the correct meaning of John 1,14 is, as the Apolinarians concluded from there in a strictly literal interpretation, that the Word of God, the Logos, only accepted a human body (flesh) without, however, a rational soul (*anima rationalis*) and consequently without human intelligence, sensations (*mens*) and will.

This literal Apolinarian interpretation of the word *caro* Augustine refutes on the very same philological level. He shows that the Bible frequently uses both *caro* and *anima* as *pars pro toto* for *homo*, e.g. Luke 3,6: "all flesh shall see the salvation of the Lord", and Gen 46,27 "all souls of the house of Jacob came into Egypt". Hereafter Augustine explains his own christology on the basis of John 1,14 in two steps. First of all Holy Scripture explicitly asserts Christ's soul, in particular the very same Gospel according to John, e.g. 10,18: "No one takes my soul from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again", or 15,13 "No one has greater love than he who lays down his soul for his friends". We usually translate "life", but the Latin in this case follows strictly the Greek "Psyche", meaning the rational force of life, that gives thinking and feeling. For the vegetative soul that just makes every living being function is called *animus* in Latin and thus used by Augustine, too.

The counterargument of the Apolinarians that John is using the word *anima* only in a figurative sense Augustine cannot accept either. How should one explain then the numerous passages in the Bible that speak of Christ's emotions, his suffering, his astonishment, his anger, his sadness, his joy etc.? These are all tasks of the rational human soul, not of the body. With that Augustine touches the core problematic of Apolinarianism. Emotions are no function of the body, and if Christ did not possess full humanity, lacking the rational soul as seat of his emotions, consequently his divinity must have been the author of them. But then this divinity would be mutable and therefore be no real divinity any longer. The Apolinarian theology collapses exactly with this argument. Denying a rational soul in Christ as the seat of his emotions finally denies his full divinity too.

Over the refutation of Apolinarianism Augustine asserts that *caro factum* does not mean "changed into flesh". The Logos did not become man by giving up his former divinity, but by adding to it "the form of a slave" (Phil 2,7) remaining the very Logos he had always been. This is the Photinian doctrine, though Augustine is not mentioning his name here.

Regarding the further development of Augustine's doctrine of the incarnation

one has to be aware of a general characteristic of his method of thinking: one might call it “additive”. He explores one aspect of this question after the other, always keeps the answers that convince him and adds to them his further insights until in the end he arrives at a complete theology of the incarnation, from which he will afterwards not deviate any more. The best method for explaining it is consequently to follow his very own method step by step and thus adding up to a complete picture of Augustine’s thought.

### 3. *The reasons for the incarnation*

This peculiar method of Augustine’s reveals itself already in the first step he takes after the “83 questions”, beginning in a rather systematic way to cover the whole field. He asks: “Why did the Son of God incarnate himself?”, dividing the question into various steps:

First of all: Was it indispensable that the Messiah should suffer and die in order to save the world? Or more precisely: Was God forced to do it? Was he subject to any kind of necessity? The problem Augustine touches on here is as old as Christianity itself. For a suffering and dying God is “a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1;23). A “God” that was subject to necessity certainly did not deserve the name of it. And for the popular platonic philosophy of the time God was the one superior, unchangeable and purely spiritual being above everything that did not mingle with matter. How then could reasonably be explained that God became man, suffered and died?

At first, Augustine replies rather harshly in 396/97 in *De agone Christiano* (On Christian Combat) 11.12: “Most assuredly, God could have devised another plan; but, if He had acted otherwise, He would incur your stupid displeasure just the same”. So much for the reproach of the inquirer, but what are the reasons for Christ’s incarnation? First: The eyes of the soul behold the Son of God as the eternal Light, but sinners, for whose redemption he was sent, could only see him with their bodily eyes, so he had to assume a visible form. Second: Christ is man in the perfect state of creation as he once was in paradise and shall be again through redemption. The incarnation presents therefore the example of a perfectly virtuous life men can follow; by that it cures all vices and especially pride, the primeval sin of humanity. Augustine here hints at three of his major christological themes he will develop further in his later writings: *Christus exemplum*, *Christus medicus*, and *Christus humilis*, but the answer remains somewhat on the level of Christ’s humanity and

only replies to the query, why the Son of God was made man, not yet, why he suffered and died in the precise way as he did.

A few years later (around 400) Augustine adds another line of reasoning in *De catechizandis rudibus* (On the Instruction Catecumens) 4.7: “What is a better reason for the incarnation of the Lord than his intention to show us God’s love towards us, ... for while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5,8)”. With that, Augustine for the first time hints at another type of reasoning for the incarnation than those given so far. To heal, to be an example, to save, to show God’s love, regard the aims of the incarnation, but not the causes lying at its roots. That is original sin.

The first time Augustine expresses this only *en passant* in the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (Expositions on the Psalms) 36 s. II 15: “If you, o man, had not left God, God would not have been made man for you.” From 411 onward Augustine poses the explicit question “Why did God come into this world?”, and answers it especially in his sermons:

Sermon 171.1: “There was no other reason for Christ’s the Lord’s incarnation than to save the sinners”.

Sermon 174.2: “*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners* (1 Tim 1,5). Remember the gospel: *For the Son of man came to seek and to save what had got lost* (Luke 19,10). If man had not got lost, the Son of man would not have come.... Man had got lost through free will; God came as man through the grace that sets free.”

Sermon 174.8: “Why did he come to the world? *To save sinners*. There was no other reason at all why he should come into the world.”

These apodictic statement seem to exclude the formerly given reasons for the incarnation, but the solution of this difficulty lies on the different logical levels they belong to. The only cause of incarnation is indeed man’s sin, because without it all the aims of God’s incarnation would never have been necessary and come into existence. Only because man sinned, God decided to save him in his love, to heal the effects of sin, and to teach man the way to salvation by the example of his humility.

Man’s sin, however, never constituted any obligation for God. His decision to

redeem man, was totally free. He could as well have decided not to save man, as Augustine explains in chapter 99 of his catechetical manual (*Enchiridion*), written at about the same time around 412. Paul, he says, shows in chapter 9 of his letter to the Romans that salvation was an act of God's pure grace, while it had been only just to leave man in his freely chosen sinfulness.

One last step, however, is still missing, namely the question: Why did God choose precisely this way to redeem man, namely becoming man and dying for him? It is in his great tractate "On the Trinity" (*De trinitate*), composed after 412, that Augustine answers this question at three different points (10.13, 16.21, and 17.22). "Did God not have any other way to deliver man from his mortality than to have his only-begotten Son, the coeternal God, incarnate himself by putting on human body and soul, and have him die as mortal man" (*Trin* 10.13)? The answer is: surely there were plenty of other possibilities, but the method of redemption God chose was the most adequate one – an argument that is current in patristic theology in general. Christ's death was the most adequate way of redemption regarding all parties involved: God, man, and the devil as well. Regarding God Christ's death was most adequate, because it showed the free and extraordinary gift of the love of God towards men. Regarding man it was most adequate in order to show him not only his great dignity as God's creation, but also gave him in Christ an example of a perfect life without sin to follow. Regarding the devil it was finally the most adequate way of redemption, because he justly dominated man because of his sin, but badly failed when unjustly devouring Christ who had committed no sin. For this fault he justly lost all his former rights over men.

With this Augustine's reflections about the reasons for Christ's incarnation are complete:

1. Neither was God in any way forced to redeem man at all, nor in a specific way, and without man's sin there would not have been any cause for doing so in the first place.
2. God freely decided to do so out of his abundant love towards man, after man had sinned, in order to save him, to heal him, and show him an example of the perfect life he had lost and was to regain, in particular the example of humility as countermeasure against man's original sin: pride.
3. Therefore, though God could have redeemed man in a thousand various ways, he in all freedom chose precisely the incarnation, death and resurrection of his divine Son, because this was the most adequate way to attain the aims of redemption.

#### 4. “*Incarnate by the Holy Spirit, born from the virgin Mary*”

At the same time while Augustine is considering the reasons for the incarnation he reflects upon the concrete way of it, too, especially in his Christmas and Easter sermons, as well as in the preparation of the catechumens during Lenten season explaining to them the Creed. This genus makes his explanations very popular, but at the same time it renders difficult to ascertain any development of his thought, as the sermons are largely undated or controversially dated.

The earliest text seems to be sermon 190,1-2, presumably given on Christmas in between 391 and 400. First of all Augustine there asserts that the Son of God resolved his birth as a human being for reasons that are not open to human reasoning but only to faith. Of course he could have become man even without a human mother, being the creator of all men. But in order both to redeem all mankind and honour all mankind, men and women, he wanted to be born as a man from a woman. That he was born from a virgin, however, must be understood on the grounds of his eternal begetting by the Father. Christ was born twice: before all times from the Father without a mother; in time from a virgin with a father. (The Latin word “natus” permits this double meaning of “begotten” and “born”; compare the Latin Creed: “*et ex Patre natum ante omnia seecula*”). As here the doctrine of the double birth of Christ is mentioned, but not further developed as in other works of Augustine, where it plays a major role in his theology of the incarnation, this might be an indication for the early date of the homily.

The fact that Augustine develops his incarnational theology in sermons and catechetical works instead of theological treatises seems to suggest that he is answering questions the faithful put to him. Christ’s incarnation by the Holy Spirit quite logically raised various questions. From about 400 onwards: Who worked Christ’s incarnation, the Holy Spirit only or the whole Trinity? And about 412, more precisely and much more provokingly: Does the overshadowing of Mary by the Holy Spirit mean that he is the father of Christ?

The first part of the question Augustine refutes in sermon 225,2 with reference to Colossians 1,16 and Proverbs 9,1: “In him everything in heaven and on earth was created”, “Wisdom has built her own house”.

In the *Enchiridion* ch. 38-40 Augustine, however, admits that it is not easy to explain how Christ was engendered by the Holy Spirit without being his father.

Basically, however, it seems to be for Augustine a terminological, not a theological problem, for his answer remains exclusively on the language level. He explains, that the Latin expression "*natus de*", "born from", has a broad spectrum of meanings that do not exclusively refer to being engendered by your parents, but can mean a variety of coming into being, emerging, being produced, result from etc.

The first example Augustine gives compares the birth of man and of living beings. Certainly man is born in another way than a hare or a mouse or a worm, but at least one may understand immediately how "to be born" has quite a variety of meanings. If one looks for a fitting comparison in order to understand what "born from the Holy Spirit" means, one should not look to the bodily birth of man, but to his rebirth in baptism. There, too, he is born "from water and the Holy Spirit" (John 3,5), nevertheless the parents of the faithful are not water and Holy Spirit, but God is called their father and the church their mother. The expression "born from" therefore does not necessarily point to a father-son relationship, but can refer to a mediator or instrument of bringing forth as well. "Born from the Holy Spirit" therefore means: "born through the working of the Holy Spirit" without impairing the fatherhood of God.

The second part of Augustine's argumentation changes the point of view to the notion of son. The word "son" does not exclusively refer to bodily issue in a strictly physical sense. The law calls adopted progeny sons as well, and in a figurative sense everyone who has an intimate relationship to someone or to something. Matthew 23, 15 speaks of "Sons of hell", Matthew 8, 12 of "Sons of the kingdom". Augustine therefore concludes: "Summing up one can say that something may be born from something else without being its son, and that someone who calls himself son of someone else needs not necessarily be born from the one who's son he calls himself."

The comparison of Christ's birth from the virgin Mary by the working of the Holy Spirit with the rebirth of the faithful in baptism and Mary's general exemplariness for the Church can be found in many passages in the works of St. Augustine, it becomes for him a theological topos taken for granted (e.g. Sermon 215.4). In connection with the doctrine of original sin, however, the virgin birth assumes yet another christological significance. As according to Augustine's view original sin is passed on by the fleshly concupiscence in the act of procreation, it was only consequent and fitting that Christ was born from a virgin. "For him the mother conceived from faith, not by concupiscence" (*Ench* 38 and 41). This



conception of offspring free from sin through faith then becomes the type of rebirth in the baptism of the Church.

### 5. *The reality and integrity of the incarnation*

Augustine defends the reality and integrity of Christ’s incarnation against three misconceptions of it: docetism, which allows Christ only to have an unsubstantial, feigned body; photinianism, which thinks of Christ as being purely a man; and apolinarianism, which recognised Christ being God, but asserted that he had assumed only a body without a human rational soul, which was replaced by his divinity. Moreover apolinarianism defended according to St. Augustine, that John 1,14 “*Verbum caro factum est*” meant that the Son of God was converted into a man losing his divinity by his incarnation. When one looks through the works of St. Augustine, one notices that docetism and photinianism do not play a major role in his theology, most of the time he is dealing with apolinarianism.

Docetism Augustine refutes rather concisely in *questio* 14 of his *83 Questions*: “If Christ’s body was only simulated, Christ deceived; and if he deceived, he cannot be the truth. But Christ is the truth, therefore his body cannot have been simulated.” Augustine does not name the persons uttering this heresy, but as the *83 Questions* were composed before his bishop’s ordination, one may assume with rather high probability that he speaks of the Manichees to whom he had belonged for nine years. Manichaeism could not allow Christ to have a real body, as according to their doctrine God never ever was contaminated by mingling himself with matter.

In his work *De haeresibus* (On Heresies), written in 428, few years before his death, Augustine confirms this christological doctrine of the Manichees: “They assert ... that Christ did not exist in real flesh, but only presented a feigned form of flesh in order to deceive the human senses” (46.15). Apart from the Manichees Augustine knows other heresies defending the same error, e.g. the Valentinian gnostics, about whom he writes in *De haeresibus* 11: “They assert ... that when Christ was sent by his father ... he carried a spiritual or celestial body with himself and did not assume anything from the virgin Mary.” How far, however, he thinks of them already before ordination as a bishop we do not know.

Augustine had already mentioned the Photinians in his *Confessions* (VII 19.25), though without explaining in any detail in which respect the Photinian misinterpretation of John 1,14 “and the Word was made flesh”, is distinguished

from the Catholic truth. One can only surmise from the context that Photinianism for Augustine meant to deny Christ's divinity. From Augustine's further works one may conclude that beyond that basic fact, he never had any deeper knowledge of Photinianism; it seems to have simply remained a general label. For even towards the end of his life, in *De haeresibus* 44-45, he cannot report any more details. Following the testimonies of Epiphanius of Salamis and Filastrius of Brescia – his almost exclusive sources for the *De haeresibus* – he connects Photinus with Paul of Samosata: both had taught the same doctrine, namely that Christ was only man; He had not existed from eternity, but only came into existence when he was born from Mary. Moreover Augustine adds, according to Epiphanius, that Photinus and Paul differed in one point of their teaching, but he did not know what that detail was. That is all Augustine knows about Photinianism.

Augustine discusses Apollinarianism most frequently. Even before *quaestio 80* of the *83 Questions* we heard earlier how he insists in sermon 214.6, probably preached in 391, shortly after his priest's ordination, that Christ assumed a complete man, body and rational soul. In this respect Augustine's christology shows no development, he just keeps insisting on the integrity of Christ's incarnation and explains it in more detail. In *De haeresibus* 55 he explains that the Apollinarians had first denied any soul in Christ; he was supposed to have taken on only flesh. As this doctrine, however, could not hold against the testimony of Scripture, they slightly changed their position to saying that Christ did not assume the *mens*, the rational part of the soul, while having a vegetative soul as the source of the functions of life. Beyond that the Apollinarians asserted according to Augustine that the Word of God and Christ's flesh are of the same substance whereby they converted Word of God in a human being.

Against the Apollinarian heresy Augustine defends the orthodox catholic doctrine with three arguments:

1. What Apollinarius teaches would mean that the Word of God only dwelled in the flesh, but did not become flesh, i.e. become man: "One thing is the Word in the flesh, and quite another one Word and flesh; one thing is the Word in man, and quite another one Word and man.... The Word was made man" (*De trinitate* 2.6.11).
2. Holy Scripture proves both the reality of Christ's body and the presence of a rational soul in it. He walks, he sits, he sleeps, he is taken prisoner, he is scourged, he is crucified, and he dies - all functions of the body. But he is also hungry and thirsty, which are functions of the soul (*Enarratio in Psalmos* 29 sermon 2.3).

3. Christ took upon himself the whole man in order to redeem him wholly (sermon 237.4). This argument strongly reminds of Gregory of Nazianzus’ famous letter 101 to Cledonius: “what is not accepted, is not redeemed”, and one may rightly assume that Augustine knew Gregory’s theology through bishop Ambrose of Milan.

Augustine’s frequent assertion that Apolinarianism understood John 1,14 as the Word of God having been converted into flesh at first seems incompatible with the fundamental intention of Apolinarius, namely to preserve the Word’s divinity unimpaired. *De haeresibus* 55, however, gives the key to it. Augustine concludes from the Apolinarian doctrine that the Word of God and Christ’s flesh are of the same substance, that thereby the Word of God is converted into a human being. In this respect, however, Augustine grossly misinterprets Apolinarianism. It is true that Apolinarius speaks of μία φύσις (one nature), μία ουσία (one essence) and μία υπόστασις (one substance/person) in Christ, but quite with the opposite intention as Augustine makes it. The very reason for Apolinarius’ christology is his philosophical conviction that two complete substances cannot be joined into a true unity. Therefore only divinity or humanity can be a substance, one of them has to remain incomplete and therefore have no substance of its own, and that is humanity for Apolinarius. So if Augustine’s reasoning can be correct at all, Apolinarius would have converted the man Christ into God, not vice versa.

Understanding Apolinarianism, however, as he did, Augustine time and again insists on the fact that the Word did in no way lose his divinity when becoming man: “He was born of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary.... That is the way in which the Lord Christ was clothed with flesh, the way the one who made man was made man; by taking on what he was not, not by losing what he was. The Word, you see, was made flesh, and dwelt among us (John 1, 14). Not “the Word was turned into flesh”, but remaining the Word, by receiving flesh” (sermon 213.3). “The Word is unchangeable and was in no way changed towards the more lowly when it shared in the flesh through the rational soul” (letter 140.4.12). With this it becomes even clear what place Christ’s rational soul has in Augustine’s christology: it is the mediator between God and man.

## **6. Christ God and man**

How does Augustine precisely understand and describe this unity of divinity and humanity in Christ? In this respect Augustine’s christology is clearly divided into two periods: a period of research until 411, and a period of having found and

applying the definitive formula of “one person in two natures” from 411 on.

During the period of searching for an adequate formula Augustine tries to express the complete and united double nature of Christ either by expressions describing the way how they were united or else the result of the union.

Most frequently Augustine formulates the way of union in terms of “acceptance”: the Son of God accepts man (*suscipit, accipit carnem/hominem*), takes him up (*assumit*) or clothes himself in flesh (*induit*). This theology of the *homo assumptus*, however, contains two major dangers which Augustine expressly avoids: the danger of a purely moral union between God and man in Christ, and the danger of adoptianism, which both do not think of a real union of two autonomous parts; the first thinks only of a link between them, the latter attributes to humanity a merely accidental role. A purely moral union Augustine already refutes in his early work *De agone christiano* 17.19: Christ is not only wise and just by being linked to the wise and just God, who is just because he is wisdom and justice, but he is wisdom and justice in person, too. Regarding adoptianism Augustin distinguishes between *adoptio* and *assumptio*. Both ways of being united to God are worked by the grace of the Holy Spirit, but they are not on the same level. The *homo assumptus* is taken into the person of the Word and participates in all its specific properties (*idiomata*), an adoption, however, imparts something to a human being which it is not or has not, but does not infringe on its independence as a person. In Christ’s case this would mean that his humanity had first existed separate from his divinity, which it never did.

The second set of vocabulary Augustine uses describes the unity of God and man in terms of “acting”: God has (*habet*), leads (*agit*), bears (*portat*) or acts (*gerit, gestat*) man (*hominem*) resp. flesh (*carnem*). Lest he leaves any doubt that of course this cannot mean in a docetist manner that Christ only used his body as an outward instrument, the Word being the subject of all actions, Augustine enlarges these formulae by the “person of wisdom”: *gestare, sustinere, habere, agere (naturaliter) personam sapientiae*. In connection with his clear distinction between being wise, i.e. participating in the wisdom that God is, and being wisdom in person, these formulations clearly aim at a personal unity of God and man in Christ without, however, attaining a definitely satisfactory way of expressing it yet. What is achieved by it is the introduction of the term “persona” into the reflections on the unity in Christ, though at first only on a grammatical level, the formulations *personam agere, sustinere, gerere* etc. belonging to the ancient technique of “prosopographic exegesis”.

A third way of describing the divine and human unity in Christ, rather popular with Augustine before 411 and rapidly falling into disuse after that, is the vocabulary of “mixture”: God and man mingled into a unity as body and soul are mingled in man. In letter 137 to Volusianus which is the joint piece of the two periods of research and the definitive application of the term of *persona*, Augustine explains the union between God and man like this. Christ appeared as mediator between God and man in a way that he united the two natures into one person. Those two natures, however, have by no means equal rank, so that in the union two opposite movements result: The usual (*solita*), i.e. the human nature, is raised by the unusual (*insolita*), i.e. the divine nature, while the unusual is toned down by the usual. Thus the incarnation consists of a double process moving from both ends above and below towards a meeting point of unity. In order, however, to prevent any misunderstanding of the, “moderation” of the divinity, Augustine stresses that of course the Son of God remained unaltered, changeable man is added to his divinity, not the divinity changed in any way towards humanity. God and man in Christ are mingled in the unity of a person like soul and body in man. Augustine takes this comparison from Neoplatonic philosophy, but notes its dangers, too. A mixture could mean that the two original parts of it lose their characteristics in the mingling, and the resulting blend would be something new, a third essence different from both of which it consists of. Augustine therefore adds that one must not imagine the unity of God and man like a blend of two liquids, but rather like the intermingling of light and air which intertwine without losing anything of their particular characteristics. Nevertheless from 411 on Augustine gives up this misunderstandable image of a mixture, because at the same time he has found the new and trend-setting formula of the *una persona*.

This new formula also supersedes the double expressions Augustine used so far to describe the result of the union like “God and man”, “Word and man”, “God-man and man-God”, “God Christ and man Christ”, “God incarnate”, “God in man and man in God”, together with the traditional Irenaean formula .“*unus atque idem*”, “the one and same who is God is also man”.

### **7. Christ one person in two natures**

The new and, after 411, practically exclusively used formula “Christ one person in two natures, God and man” solves all fundamental problems regarding christology:

1. Against Arians and Photinians it safeguards Christ’s unimpaired divinity, his

being the Son of God, consubstantial and coeternal with the Father.

2. Against Manichees and Apolinarians it preserves at the same time Christ's real and integral humanity, i.e. his birth from the virgin Mary as Son of man, his becoming man, not flesh in a defective sense, his subordination under the Father as man, and his mediatorship between God and man.

3. Finally it describes a true unity of both natures, the unity of person as the subject of all actions, and the unity of both divine and human will, without curtailing either of the two natures or dividing Christ in two sons.

This mature christology of Augustine's can be shown quite clearly in a selection of key texts, starting from sermon 186.1 which is practically contemporary to letter 137: "He already was, before he was made; and being almighty, he was able to be made, while remaining what he already was. He made a mother for himself, while he was still with the Father; and when he was made from his mother, he remained in his Father. How could he cease to be God on beginning to be man, when he enabled his mother not to cease to be a virgin when she gave him birth? Hence that the Word became flesh (John 1,14), does not mean that the Word passed into flesh by perishing, but that flesh was attached to the Word to prevent flesh itself from perishing, with the result that just as man is soul and flesh, so Christ would be God and man. The same one God who is man, the same one man who is God; not by a compounding of nature, but by unity of person. In a word, the one who as Son of God is coeternal with his begetter and always from the Father, is identical with the son of man who began at a particular time from the virgin. And thus humanity was indeed added to the divinity of the Son; and yet this did not result in a quaternity or foursome of persons, but the Trinity or threesome remains."

Most comprehensively and densely Augustine presents his teaching on the incarnation in his *Manual (Enchiridion) on Faith, Hope, and Love* 33-36. Now, ten years later, his language is more precise, and he does not fight single heresies but teaches concisely the orthodox faith: "Christ Jesus, Son of God, is thus both God and man. He was God before all ages; he is man in this age of ours. He is God because he is the Word of God, for "the Word was God" (John 1,1). Yet he is man also, since in the unity of his Person a rational soul and body is joined to the Word. Accordingly, in so far as he is God, he and the Father are one. Yet in so far as he is man, the Father is greater than he. Since he was God's only Son – not by grace but by nature – to the end that he might indeed be the fullness of all grace, he was also made Son of Man - and yet he was in the one nature as well as in the other, one Christ. 'For being in. the from of God, he judged it not a violation to be what he

was by nature, the equal of God. Yet he emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant' (Phil 2,6-7), yet neither losing nor diminishing the form of God. Thus he was made less and remained equal, and both these in a unity as we said before. But he is one of these because he is the Word; the other, because he was a man. As the Word, he is the equal of the Father; as a man, he is less; he is the one Son of God, and at the same time Son of man; the one Son of Man, and at the same time God's Son. These are not two sons of God, one God and the other man, but one Son of God - God without origin, man with a definite origin – our Lord Jesus Christ” (35).

### ***Conclusion***

After this one could, of course, continue to explain Augustine's teaching on the incarnation in a broader sense, i.e. his christology in general. Given the natural limits of a lecture, however, we shall stop here at the point where Augustine's doctrine on the incarnation ends in a stricter sense of the word, i.e. regarding the question: How did God become man? Or in the words of John's gospel: How did the Word become flesh?

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