

AUGUSTINE'S THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS OF INCARNATION. CONVERSION TO THE FLESH

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ABSTRACT: *Augustine's Theological Hermeneutics of Incarnation. Conversion to the Flesh* This article examines the enduring aspect of incarnating the spiritual, as expressed by Augustine, based on the foundational Christian claim: "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). It clarifies that it is not the flesh that transforms into the Word, nor does the flesh need to be spiritualized. Specifically, it explores the relevance of Augustine's anthropology in the twenty-first century through what Richard Kearney calls "carnal hermeneutics". As part of this exploration, the article offers insights from John Panteleimon Manoussakis's theological hermeneutics of incarnation, who introduced the concept of "conversion to the flesh" for Augustine's *Confessions*, as a third conversion, alongside the acknowledged conversions of the mind and heart. This idea becomes evident in Augustine's reversal of the traditional hierarchy of the senses, which prioritizes the sense of touch. It is also reflected in his use of the parable of the prodigal son to emphasize the importance of the flesh, as well as his language centered around hunger, eating, and feasting. The discussion begins by examining the principles of carnal hermeneutics. It continues with Augustine's reflections on human creation in the image and likeness of God, identifying the essential qualities of the mind and heart where he asserts that the divine image resides. It then considers how these qualities align with Manoussakis's

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view that the main goal of the *Confessions* is not to spiritualize the flesh but to incarnate the spirit. This framework provides a foundational perspective for the theological hermeneutics of incarnation. In conclusion, the article affirms that Augustine's treatise aligns with the core incarnational focus of Christianity and exemplifies carnal hermeneutics.

Keywords: Augustine's anthropology, incarnational hermeneutics, *imago Dei*, body-soul unity, spiritual senses, the inner man, *mens, cor*, conversion of the self, Manoussakis' conversion to the bodily.

1. Theological Hermeneutics of Incarnation: An Ongoing Dialogue in Carnal Hermeneutics

In broader terms, carnal hermeneutics offers a philosophical framework for understanding the body as a medium of interpretation. This approach emphasizes the corporeal experience as a crucial lens through which meaning can be derived, suggesting that the physicality of the body plays a fundamental role in shaping our interpretations and engagements with the world. As Richard Kearney and Brian Treanor describe, it engages with the “surplus of meaning that arises from our carnal embodiment, its role in our experience and understanding, and its interaction with the world.”² This shift towards a carnal approach in hermeneutics moves beyond the traditional dualism of rational understanding and embodied sensibility, positing that our most fundamental bodily sensations are already acts of interpretation. As interpretation truly goes “all the way down”, extending “from head to toe, sky to earth, sacred and sublime to tactile and terrestrial”, carnal hermeneutics contests the dichotomy between language and sensibility, word and flesh, text and body.³ Consequently, its foundation lies in the body: embodied being, embodied life, incarnation—the word is flesh, the text is body, and the body is text.⁴

² R. Kearney/ B. Trevor (eds.), *Carnal Hermeneutics*, New York 2015, 1.

³ Kearney/ Trevor, *Carnal Hermeneutics* 1.

⁴ Kearney/ Trevor, *Carnal Hermeneutics* 2.

From this viewpoint, although fundamentally anchored in the incarnation, Christian theology has largely yielded to the Platonic tendency to prioritize sight, with only a few notable exceptions.⁵ This has resulted in a hierarchical dualism that elevates the mind above the body, positioning the senses and emotions as intermediaries between two distinct ontological realms. It is only through the phenomenological revolution, which advocates for a return to sensory experience, that the analysis of touch has begun to be revitalized.⁶ Kearney highlights the fundamental principles of carnal hermeneutics, tracing “a hermeneutical genealogy of touch from Aristotle’s discovery of flesh (*sarx*) as medium (*metaxu*) to the revolutionary analyses of embodiment in the more contemporary works of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Ricoeur.”⁷ Since the term “savvy” encompasses both “savor” and “savoir”, linking taste and knowledge, hermeneutics is called upon to integrate sensory orientation alongside intellectual comprehension.⁸

According to Kearney, engaging in diacritical hermeneutics of flesh poses a significant challenge in the era of excarnation. This process involves interpreting “the carnal signs of our time as evinced in the increasing digitalization of the body and virtualization of our needs of communication and community.”⁹ The focus is on healing in the era of excarnation, seeking to establish the philosophical foundations necessary for the diacritical hermeneutics of the flesh.

Thus, Christ’s crucified body serves as a paradigm for healing. Throughout His earthly life, even before performing healings through His words, Christ remained incredibly tangible both before and after His death, receiving

⁵ See R. Kearney, *Touch: recovering our most vital sense*, New York 2021, 34, 80. Kearney remarked on testimonies celebrating touch, the theological voluntarists Francis of Assisi, the Franciscans, and mystics such as Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross.

⁶ See Kearney, *Touch* 45-55. The author notes that at the beginning of the twentieth century, the phenomenological movement was announced by Husserl, followed by existential phenomenologists, Heidegger, Sartre, Levinas, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and more recently, feminist existentialists, De Beauvoir, Irigaray, and Kristeva, who engaged in redeeming and rehabilitating Aristotle’s analysis of touch in *De Anima*.

⁷ Kearney/ Trevor, *Carnal Hermeneutics* 2.

⁸ Kearney/ Trevor, *Carnal Hermeneutics* 2.

⁹ R. Kearney, The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics, in: R. Kearney/B. Trevor (eds.), *Carnal Hermeneutics*, New York 2015, 15-56.

healing through touch and the laying on of hands.¹⁰ The Eucharistic kerygma, along with the assurance, “This is my body” —a tangible body that conceals wounds and reveals scars—encapsulates the revolutionary essence of the incarnation and stands as the heart of Christian theology.

Nonetheless, the allure of Gnosticism and excarnation has troubled Christian theology since its inception. Excarnation represents a critical and radical temptation, a profound betrayal of the Word made flesh, and a denial of incarnation. Kearney insightfully notes that Chris's character is *anacarnational*, meaning that the cross does not mark the conclusion of the incarnation; rather, the incarnation is renewed with the resurrection of the body, which includes both body and soul. Christianity can uphold its incarnational message by recognizing the sanctity of the senses and resisting any tendency to diminish them through punitive attitudes toward the flesh.¹¹

In agreement with Kearney, Manoussakis reflects on the central claim of all Christian confessions that the Word became flesh. He argues that a longstanding tradition of misreading has led to a greater emphasis on spiritualizing the flesh rather than on the incarnation of the spirit. This tendency is particularly evident in the marginalization of the Eucharist within Christian spirituality.¹²

Manoussakis offers a clear interpretation of Augustine's *Confessions* as a key example of carnal hermeneutics. He emphasizes a significant yet often overlooked concept: the conversion of the flesh, or more specifically, the conversion *to* the flesh.¹³ This concept adds to the more commonly recognized conversions of the mind and heart. By placing greater importance on touch, Augustine's approach underscores a shift in the traditional hierarchy of the senses. He uses the parable of the prodigal son to emphasize the flesh's significance.

¹⁰ Kearney, *Touch* 77. The author refers to the classic scene of Jesus and *touch*, when Thomas placed his hand in his side. Kearney explains that Thomas was not just an incredulous skeptic, as tradition has it, but a healer-educator of Jesus, who helped his master resist the erasure of scars in a Glorious Body that is no body at all.

¹¹ Kearney, *Touch* 80.

¹² J. P. Manoussakis, *On the Flesh of the Word: Incarnational Hermeneutics*, in: R. Kearney/B. Trevor (eds.), *Carnal Hermeneutics*, New York 2015, 308.

¹³ Manoussakis, *On the Flesh of the Word* 309.

Moreover, his writing is rich with language related to hunger, eating, and feasting. In this context, Manoussakis contrasts his views with those of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who argues that Augustine's *Confessions* presents a model of mystical ascent. In Balthasar's words:

Augustine, who, while vigorously denouncing the Neoplatonists' lack of Christ's descending humility in the *Confessions*, sets forth in his treatise on mysticism a decidedly ascending model—from bodily to imaginative to purely spiritual visions—which remained authoritative for the whole period that followed.¹⁴

To support Manoussakis' idea, it is important to examine Augustine's anthropology through the lens of his connection with the theological hermeneutics of incarnation as an ongoing dialogue of carnal hermeneutics.

2. Augustine's underlying principles

Augustine's quest for Truth, as vividly articulated in his *Confessions*, cannot be separated from his concerns regarding the meaning of human existence—a challenge that the Bishop of Hippo consistently addresses throughout his work. In the early stages of his writings, he emphasizes his desire to understand God and the soul.¹⁵ Furthermore, Augustine argues that the relationship between these two realities cannot be fully comprehended without considering the essence of humanity itself.¹⁶ He contends that the

¹⁴ Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic, vol. II: Truth of God*, San Francisco 2004, 110–111.

¹⁵ Cf. Augustinus, *Soliloquiorum libri duo*, Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, Roma 1, 2, 7, PL 32, (21.07.2025) <https://www.augustinus.it/latino/soliloqui/index2.htm>, (For this source, further quotations are available at this site). *Ecce oravi Deum. Quid ergo scire vis? Deum et animam scire cupio. Nihilne plus? Nihil omnino.* [Behold, I have prayed to God. R. What then would you know? A. All these things which I have prayed for. R. Sum them up in brief. A. God and the soul, that is what I desire to know. R. Nothing more? A. Nothing whatever.] (All Latin quotations in this paper are available at www.augustinus.it. The English translation can be found at <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02084a.htm>, unless mentioned otherwise.)

¹⁶ Cf. Augustinus, *Soliloquiorum libri duo* 2, 1,1: *Deus semper idem, noverim me, noverim te.* [God, always the same, let me know myself, let me know You.]

nature of human existence can only be genuinely understood by acknowledging its relationship with God.¹⁷

In his examination of Augustine's views on anthropology in *De Trinitate*, Fabio Dalpra highlights Augustine's mature understanding of human nature. This perspective emphasizes the revelation of human interiority and depicts humanity as the *imago Dei*, rather than attempting to define the divine essence of the Trinity, which Augustine maintained is ultimately beyond comprehension.¹⁸

2.1. The human person as *imago Dei*

It is essential to note that Augustine's anthropological reflections in *De Trinitate* are grounded in the concept of human creation in the image and likeness of God. As he argued:

Sometimes the meaning is altogether latent, as in Genesis: Let us make man after our image and likeness. Both *let us make* and *our* is said in the plural, and ought not to be received except as of relatives. For it was not that gods might make, or make after the image and likeness of gods; but that the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit might make after the image of the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, that man might subsist as the image of God. And God is the Trinity.¹⁹

Augustine's theology of *imago Dei* presents the human being as a composite of body and soul. By analyzing the semantics of "image" and "likeness", and

¹⁷ Augustinus, *De Trinitate libri quindecim*, Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, Roma 15, 2, 2, PL 42, (21.07.2025) <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/augustine/trin15.shtm> (For this source, further quotations are available at this site). *Ad hoc ergo debet esse homo intellegens ut requirat deum*. [For this, therefore, man should be understanding, in order to seek God].

¹⁸ F. Dalpra, Augustine of Hippo's Anthropology in The Trinity, in: F. Dalpra/ A.-C. Jacobsen (eds.), *Explorations in Augustine's Anthropology*, Berlin/ Bern/ Bruxelles/New York/ Oxford/ Warszawa/ Wien 2021, 153-165.

¹⁹ Augustinus, *De Trinitate* 7, 6, 12: *Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram. Et faciamus et nostram pluraliter dictum est et nisi ex relatiuis accipi non oportet, non enim ut facerent dii aut ad imaginem et similitudinem deorum, sed ut facerent pater et filius et spiritus sanctus ad imaginem ergo patris et filii et spiritus sancti ut subsisteret homo imago dei; deus autem trinitas.*

investigating the manifestation of *imago et similitudinem Dei* within humanity, Augustine delineates the duality of human existence. He posits that humans consist of both a corporeal and a spiritual dimension. The human soul is understood to comprise two distinct aspects: the inferior part, referred to as *anima*, and the superior part known as *animus* (or *spiritus*, *mens*). Notably, this division does not suggest an ontological separation of the soul's substance.²⁰ Rather, it emphasizes the differentiated functions of the soul.²¹

The relationship between the higher and lower functions of the soul allows for a connection between a person's material and spiritual aspects. There is a continuity between the body and soul regarding the knowledge of both corporeal and incorporeal things. As Augustine put it:

[B]ut that something of our own rational purpose, that is, of the same mind, must be directed to the using of changeable and corporeal things, without which this life does not go on.²²

The soul engages the bodily senses to understand physical realities, while it employs reason or intelligence to grasp incorporeal truths.

2.2. The unity of body and soul

Augustine claimed that when examining the threefold nature of humanity, comprising body, soul, and spirit (or mind), it is crucial to understand that not

²⁰ Augustinus, *De Trinitate* 10, 4, 6: *Sicut ergo mens tota mens est, sic tota uiuit. Nouit autem uiuere se; totam se igitur nouit.*

²¹ Augustine mentioned the two functions (*officia*) of the soul, cf. *De Trinitate* 12, 3, 3: *Et ideo quiddam rationale nostrum non ad unitatis diuortium separatum sed in auxilium societatis quasi deriuatum in sui operis dispertitur officio.* [And therefore, something rational of ours is not separated for the sake of unity, but is distributed as if derived from it in the service of society, in the office of its work.]; *De Trinitate* 12, 4, 4: *Cum igitur disserimus de natura mentis humanae, de una quadam re disserimus, nec eam in haec duo quae commemorauimus nisi per officia geminamus.* [Therefore, when we discuss the nature of the human mind, we discuss one thing, and we do not divide it into these two that I have mentioned except by functions.]

²² Augustinus, *De Trinitate* 12, 13, 21: *quiddam uero rationalis intentionis nostrae, hoc est eiusdem mentis, in usum mutabilium corporaliumque rerum sine quo haec uita non agitur dirigendum.*

everything in creation resembling God can be considered His image. Only that which is surpassed solely by God qualifies as His image. The image fully expresses God only when no other nature intervenes between it and God. In Augustine's words:

Certainly, not everything in creatures that is in some way or other similar to God is also to be called His image, but that alone to which He Himself alone is superior; for the image is only then an expression of God in the full sense, when no other nature lies between it and God.²³

This quote suggests that the divine image must refer to something greater than what exists—namely, God. However, Augustine further argued that the image exists solely in “the mind alone” (*solam mentem*), as it cannot be found within either the soul (*anima*) or the body. As he put it:

And hence each individual man, who is called the image of God, not according to all things that pertain to his nature, but according to his mind alone, is one person, and is an image of the Trinity in his mind.²⁴

2.3. *imago* and *vestigium*

To gain a deeper understanding of this argument, it is beneficial to revisit Augustine's assertions in an earlier work; he noted that while the *vestigia Dei*, or traces of God, radiate through all existence and life—signifying that all of creation reflects a “likeness” to God—human beings uniquely possess the capacity, through the inner man, to partake in the wisdom of God and are the

²³ Augustinus, *De Trinitate* 11, 5, 8: *Non sane omne quod in creaturis aliquo modo simile est deo etiam eius imago dicenda est, sed illa sola qua superior ipse solus est.* (English translation by S. McKenna in: G. B. Matthews (ed.), *On the Trinity: books 8–15*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, Cambridge 2002, 70).

²⁴ Augustinus, *De Trinitate* 15, 7, 11: *Quapropter singulus quisque homo qui non secundum omnia quae ad naturam pertinent eius sed secundum solam mentem imago dei dicitur una persona est et imago est trinitatis in mente.*

only creatures made in the image of God.²⁵ It is deducible that by focusing exclusively on the term “image” and omitting “likeness”, this argument subtly highlights the distinction between image (*imago*) and trace (*vestigium*).²⁶ The traces of God act as a form of training (*exercitatio*) that prepares humans to grasp multiplex realities.²⁷

It can be concluded that the multifaceted relationship between the body and the soul, as articulated by Augustine in terms of spirit, demonstrates an anthropological unity wherein the body and soul form a single human being.²⁸ Moreover, Augustine recognizes a substantial distinction that neither the soul nor the body can be reduced to the other. The distinct roles each plays provide epistemic complementarity, emphasizing the importance of ongoing functional continuity. It is essential to highlight Augustine’s conviction that the mind is central to human existence, reflecting the image of God. This belief elevates humanity to the pinnacle of creation, even though this divine image does not entirely define what it means to be human.²⁹

At this point, it is useful to reference another work by Augustine, where he asserted that the image of God resides within the heart. He urged,

²⁵ Augustine asserted that the call to conversion should be understood as a call to the restoration of the *imago*, cf. *Retractationum libri duo*, Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, Roma 1, 26, PL 32, (21.07.2025) <https://www.augustinus.it/latino/ritrattazioni/index2.htm>, *dixi: Et ipsa creatura, id est ipse homo, cum iam signaculo imaginis propter peccatum amisso remansit tantummodo creatura. Quod non ita est accipiendum, quasi totum amiserit homo quod habebat imagines dei. Nam si omnino non amisisset, non esset propter quod diceretur: Reformamini in nouitate mentis uestrae.*

²⁶ Cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 6, 10, 12: *Trinitatem intellegamus, cuius in creatura quomodo dignum est apparet vestigium*; *De Trinitate* 12, 5, 5: *Assuescat in corporibus ita spiritualium reperire vestigial.*

²⁷ Cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 13, 20, 26: *Placuit quippe uelut gradatim ascendentibus in utraque requirere apud interiorem hominem quandam sui cuiusque generis trinitatem sicut prius apud exteriorem quaesiui mus ut ad illam trinitatem quae deus est pro nostro modulo, si tamen uel hoc possumus, saltem in aenigmate et per speculum contuendam exercitatio in his inferioribus rebus mente ueniamus.*

²⁸ For the body-soul unity in Augustine’s thought, see also C. Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Augustine*, Oxford 1992, 152.

²⁹ See also Dalpra, Augustine of Hippo’s Anthropology 157.

“Return to your heart; see there what, it may be, you can perceive of God, for in it is the image of God”.³⁰

This raises a pertinent question: Did Augustine contradict himself about the place where the image of God lies? Can the image reside in the mind but also in the heart? The subsequent section addresses these apparent contradictions, aiming to identify the core qualities of the mind and heart in which the Doctor of the Church recognized the divine image.

2.4. *The spiritual senses of the heart*

Augustine’s approach in his Treatise XVIII on the Gospel of John established that the heart has senses. The biblical concept of the heart distinguishes itself through various senses: it sees, hears, smells, tastes, and touches. Importantly, this sensorial differentiation is not organic; the heart, as an undivided whole (cf. Ps 86:11), remains the same organ regardless of its different sensory functions. However, it is understood that bodily organs are metonymically representative of their functions.

According to Jean-Louis Chrétien, Augustine did not hesitate to contrast “bodily sense”, viewed in the singular, with another type of sense he described as “the inner man’s sense”.³¹ Through this, one can discern the Just and the Unjust: the Just is recognized for its intelligible beauty, while the Unjust is perceived as devoid of such beauty.³²

³⁰ Augustinus, *Evangelium Ioannis Tractatus Centum Viginti Quatuor* [= Ev. Io. Tr.], Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, Roma 18, 10, PL 35, (21.07.2025) https://www.augustinus.it/latino/commento_vsg/index2.htm, (For this source, further quotations are available at this site). *Redi ad cor; vide ibi quid sentias forte de Deo, quia ibi est imago Dei.*

³¹ J.-L. Chrétien, From the Limbs of the Heart to the Soul’s Organs, in: R. Kearney/B. Trevor (eds.), *Carnal Hermeneutics*, New York 2015, 97.

³² Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei contra Paganos libri XXII*, Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, Roma 11, 27, 2, PL 41, (21.07.2025), <https://www.augustinus.it/latino/cdd/index2.htm>, *Habemus enim alium interioris hominis sensum isto longe praestantiorum, quo iusta et iniusta sentimus, iusta per intellegibilem speciem, iniusta per eius priuationem.* [For we have another and far superior sense, belonging to the inner man, by which we perceive what things are just, and what unjust — just by means of an intelligible idea, unjust by the want of it.]

In addition, whenever Augustine discussed the various ways the objects are perceived, he consistently maintained a strict parallel between the inner and bodily senses. This is clearly illustrated in *Confessions*, where he characterized God in these words:

[A] certain kind of light, and sound, and fragrance, and food, and embracement in loving my God, who is the light, sound, fragrance, food, and embracement of my inner man — where that light shines unto my soul which no place can contain, where that sounds which time snatches not away, where there is a fragrance which no breeze disperses, where there is a food which no eating can diminish, and where that clings which no satiety can sunder.³³

Although God transcends bodily sense, these terms are similar to the objects of corporeal perception: light, voice, odor, food, embrace, and the verbs express foreseeable acts of inner perception, indicating an insightful stimulation of the inner man. Augustin's discourse is designed so that the untouchable can be approached in terms comparable to those expressing human receptiveness to sensible beauty.³⁴

Each of the five bodily senses corresponds to an aspect of the heart presented in a progressive order that reflects increasing intimacy: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. This sequence is well established, reflecting the emphasis on tactility within carnal hermeneutics. Augustine articulated this idea explicitly, highlighting the supremacy of Justice and illustrating each inner sense with a relevant biblical reference. As he stated:

³³Augustinus, *Confessionum libri XIII*, Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, Roma 10, 6, 8, PL 32, (21.07.2025), <https://www.augustinus.it/latino/confessionum/index.htm>, (For this source, further quotations are available at this site). *Cum amo deum meum, lucem, vocem, odorem, cibum, amplexum interioris hominis mei, ubi fulget animae meae, quod non capit locus, et ubi sonat, quod non rapit tempus, et ubi olet, quod non spargit flatus, et ubi sapit, quod non minuit edacitas, et ubi haeret, quod non divellit satietas.*

³⁴ See also G. Huian, *Gustavi et esurio et sitio...: Augustine and the Spiritual Taste*, in: *Homo viator. Ecumenical Perspectives in Anthropology*, Cluj-Napoca 2018, 73-92.

If you've got interior eyes, observe the light of justice: *For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light shall we see light* (Ps 36:9) ... if you've got interior ears, try to hear justice. Such were the ears he was looking for, the one who said, *Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear* (Lk 8:4). If you have an interior sense of smell, listen to the apostle: *For we are the good odor of Christ for God in every place* (2 Cor 2: 15). If you've got an interior sense of taste, listen to this: *Taste and see that the Lord is sweet* (Ps 34:8). If you've got an interior sense of touch, listen to what the bride sings about the bridegroom: *His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me* (Sg 2:6).³⁵

Therefore, an individual acknowledges five genuine inner senses, similar to the five bodily senses. The inner man, in essence, remains distinctly human. The orderly progression of the inner senses indicates a spiritual journey that leads to greater closeness to their object: God, His Word, and Revelation.

The heart's senses can be either open or closed; however, unlike the bodily senses, their opening is not a personal initiative. It is solely the work of God to unlock the space and channels through which He can be received. In Augustine's words:

You called, and cried aloud, and forced open my deafness. You gleamed and shine, and chase away my blindness. You exhaled odours, and I drew in my breath and do pant after You. I tasted, and do hunger and thirst.

³⁵Augustinus, *Sermones*, Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, Roma, 159, 4, PL 38, (21.07.2025) <https://www.augustinus.it/latino/discorsi/index.htm> (For this source, further quotations are available at this site).

Si habes oculos interiores, vide iustitiae lumen: Quoniam apud te est fons vitae, et in lumine tuo videbimus lumen ⁸. *De illo lumine dicit Psalmus: Illumina oculos meos, ne umquam obdormiam in morte* ⁹. *Item si habes aures interiores, audi iustitiam. Tales aures quaerebat, qui dicebat: Qui habet aures audiendi, audiat* ¹⁰. *Si habes olfactum interius, audi Apostolum: Christi bonus odor sumus Deo in omni loco* ¹¹. *Si habes gustatum interius, audi: Gustate et videte, quoniam suavis est Dominus* ¹². *Si habes tactum interius, audi quid sponsa cantet de sponso: Sinistra eius sub capite meo, et dextera eius amplexetur me* ¹³. (English translation by E. Hill in: J. E. Rotelle (ed.), *Sermons III/5 (148-183) on the New Testament*, The Works of Saint Augustine, New York 1992, 123)

You touched me, and I burned for Your peace.³⁶

This revelation of the heart does not entail the creation of a new inner sense that the human being previously lacked. Every human heart is endowed with these senses. However, God's grace is essential to activating and enabling them to fulfil their ultimate purpose. While individuals lack the power to open these senses, they possess the ability to close them off and hinder their function. As Augustine claimed: "Be not foolish, O my soul, and deaden not the ear of your heart with the tumult of your folly. Hearken also. The [W]ord itself invokes you to return."³⁷

In contrast to the external senses, the activity of the heart's senses always matters at an absolute level since it results from a divine initiative and brings a human being into a relationship with God.³⁸ Moreover, one must dispose oneself actively to sense through the heart, even if a human being is incapable of initiating the process. As Augustine appealed:

O Lord my God, what You are to me. Say unto my soul, I am your salvation. So speak that I may hear. Behold, Lord, the ears of my heart are before You; open them, and say unto my soul, I am your salvation. When I hear, may I run and lay hold on You ... Cramped is the dwelling of my soul; expand it, that You may enter in.³⁹

According to Chrétien, these lines reveal the anticipatory grasp of the heart's hearing.⁴⁰ In other words, for a human being to ask that one's ears be open, it

³⁶ Augustinus, *Confessionum* 10, 27, 38: *Vocasti et clamasti et rupisti surditatem meam, coruscasti, splenduisti et fugasti caecitatem meam; fragrasti, et duxi spiritum et anhelum tibi, gustavi, et esurio et sitio, tetigisti me, et exarsi in pacem tuam.*

³⁷ Augustinus, *Confessionum* 4, 11, 16: *noli esse vana, anima mea, et obsurdescere in aure cordis tumultu vanitatis tuae. audi et tu: verbum ipsum clamat ut redeas.*

³⁸ See Chrétien, *From the Limbs of the Heart* 98.

³⁹ Augustinus, *Confessionum* 1, 5, 5-6: *Domine Deus meus, quid sis mihi. Dic animae meae: Salus tua ego sum. Sic dic, ut audiam. Ecce aures cordis mei ante te, Domine; aperi eas et dic animae meae: Salus tua ego sum. Curram post vocem hanc et apprehendam te...Angusta est domus animae meae, quo venias ad eam: dilatetur abs te.*

⁴⁰ Chrétien, *From the Limbs of the Heart* 99.

must be the case that they have already heard. Therefore, even if the undivided heart performs both the act of seeing and the act of hearing, they do not have the same usefulness. An individual can see and hear simultaneously because one must understand what to obey and obey what is understood. The eye sees for the ear and the ear hears for the eye to bring about the perfection of human action; each sense contributes. Augustine interprets the eyes of the heart as the “eyes of faith”, as he said: “blind hearts do open their eyes to the word of the Lord...[w]alk in faith to arrive at vision”.⁴¹

While the eyes and ears of the heart are often highlighted in the quest to understand God’s Word, they are not the only senses mentioned. Augustine embraced the biblical idea that the Word serves as nourishment, essential for human beings to seek and sustain life, referring to the “mouth” of the heart and the “palate” of the heart.⁴² In Augustine’s understanding, one must eat, drink, and ruminate on the Word:

In the very joy, or in the very mouth that we have within, we both eat and drink: as from this mouth for the refreshment of the body, so also from that mouth for the refreshment of the heart (*ad refectiorem cordis*).⁴³

The mouth and the ear engage with the Word in distinct ways. While the ear listens and obeys, the mouth consumes, whether by drinking or eating. The Word can be understood as both liquid and solid, as indicated in the biblical text. “I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.” (1 Cor 3:2) The mouth tastes, masticates, and

⁴¹ Augustinus, *Sermones* 88, 3-4: *sed quam multi habent aures clausas cordis, quae tamen verbo Dei penetrante patescunt, ut credant qui non credebant; Ambula per fidem, ut pervenias ad speciem.*

⁴² cf. Augustinus, *Confessionum* 9, 10, 23: *Sed inhiabamus ore cordis in superna fluentia fontis tui, fontis vitae, qui est apud te*; cf. Augustinus, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* [= *En. Ps.*], Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, Roma 125, 5, PL 36, (21.07.2025) https://www.augustinus.it/latino/esposizioni_salmi/index2.htm. (For this source, further quotations are available at this site) *Habemus autem intus os, id est in cordes.*

⁴³ Cf. Augustinus, *En. Ps.* 125, 6: *In ipso gaudio, vel in ipso ore quod habemus intus, et manducamus et bibimus: sicut de isto ore ad refectiorem corporis, sic et de illo ore ad refectiorem cordis.*

transforms what it absorbs before ruminating. Thus, it converts the Word into an integral part of one's being and life.

In his *Confessions*, Augustine described the attitude of the mouth of the heart in pursuing the divine Truth:

But yet we opened wide the mouth of our heart, after those supernal streams of Your fountain, the fountain of life, which is with You; that being sprinkled with it according to our capacity, we might in some measure weigh so high a mystery.⁴⁴

As evidence suggests, unlike the ears, keeping the inner mouth open is not simply an act of focusing one's attention and making oneself available. According to Chrétien, it is about "the open mouth of desire", an essential thirst of the heart, a problem of life and death.⁴⁵ This is the hunger and the thirst for Justice, which is comprised in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." (Mt 5:6)

Augustine emphasized the enigmatic nature of human interiority: while God must remove deafness and blindness to enable individuals to experience divine intimacy, hunger and thirst should persist, as humans remain perpetually receptive to encounters with God. Through God descending into human interiority from "outside" the self, this healing of the inner senses must become linked to the actualization of those senses in a continuous turning toward God, as though originating from "within" the self. The cognitive metaphors of hunger and thirst reflect this movement toward God and intense longing for the divine. The infinite desire for the Endless is mirrored in human receptivity, manifesting as an insatiable state, further enriched by the delight of a pure heart.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Augustinus, *Confessionum* 9, 10, 23: *sed inhiabamus ore cordis in superna fluenta fontis tui, fontis vitae, qui est apud te, ut inde pro captu nostro aspersi quoquo modo rem tantam cogitaremus.*

⁴⁵ Chrétien, *From the Limbs of the Heart* 101.

⁴⁶ Augustinus, *Confessionum* 13, 21, 29: *nam tu puri cordis uitales deliciae*; see also Huian, *Gustau et esurio et sitio* 77.

Moreover, the palate of the heart (*palatum cordis*) has been refined as an organ of taste. It is indeed possible to savor, consume, and find joy in spiritual nourishment. This notion sheds light on the experience of tasting divine sweetness, whether through the words of God or the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.⁴⁷ Augustine regarded taste as integral to the interplay of desire and delight in spiritual nourishment, as he claimed: “There is a certain pleasure of the heart, to which that heavenly bread is sweet.”⁴⁸ Nevertheless, hunger can apply not only to spiritual taste but to all spiritual senses, as a desire for God without Whom one cannot live.⁴⁹

Returning to taste, and to better explain Augustine’s idea, it can be concluded that it opens us to the perception of Truth, as does the sense of hearing. The Truth is then secretly disclosed in the heart, which prepares the impassioned touch, the endless desire to embrace the divine revealed as peace. In Augustine’s words: “You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.”⁵⁰

Moved by the untouchable, the Bishop of Hippo— as Manoussakis asserts— “reached out and touched what lies beyond creation, intangible”.⁵¹ In doing so, Augustine reversed the Platonic hierarchy of the senses, which prioritized sight above all else, and instead elevated the significance of touch, as Nicholas James Perella has argued:

⁴⁷ Augustinus, *En. Ps.* 30, en. 4, s. 3, 6: *Palatum cordis non habes ad haec bona gustanda; quid tibi faciam? Quomodo ostendam? Non est cui dicere: Gustate, et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus*; Augustinus, *In Epistolam Ioannis ad Parthos tractatus decem*, Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, Roma, Prologus, PL 35, (21.07.2025), https://www.augustinus.it/latino/commento_lsg/index.htm, *praesertim quia in ipsa Epistola satis dulci omnibus quibus sanum est palatum cordis, ubi sapiat panis Dei, et satis memorabili in sancta Ecclesia Dei, maxime Caritas commendatur*; see also F. Posset, The “Palate of the Heart” in Saint Augustine and Medieval Spirituality, in: *Augustine Biblical Exegete*, New York 2001, 253-278.

⁴⁸ Augustinus, *Evangelium Ioannis Tractatus Centum Viginti Quatuor* [= *Ev. Io.Tr.*], Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, Roma 26, 4, PL 35, https://www.augustinus.it/latino/commento_vsg/index2.htm, (For this source, further quotations are available at this site) *Est quaedam voluptas cordis, cui panis dulcis est ille coelesti*.

⁴⁹ See J.-L. Chretien, *Saint Augustin et les actes de parole*, Paris 2002, 39.

⁵⁰ Augustinus, *Confessionum* 10, 27, 38: *tetigisti me, et exarsi in pacem tuam*.

⁵¹ J. P. Manoussakis, *God after Metaphysics: A Theological Aesthetic*, Bloomington 2007, 144.

In the spiritual senses, sight and hearing are lowest (though not scorned), whereas smell and, even more, taste and touch are the most exalted. This was a development whose importance was to be second to none in the history of Western mysticism.⁵²

Augustine identified love with desire, as he claimed: "It is charity, by which we desire, by which we strive to attain, by which we burn, by which we hunger and thirst."⁵³

In this context, *love as desire* resides at the very core of human existence, within the realm of profound interiority, depth, and concealment: "longing is the heart's treasury".⁵⁴ Spiritual hunger and thirst emerge as affections of the heart, representing the most hidden aspects of the self. They illustrate the restless heart⁵⁵ and affirm the human journey as a progression driven by desire.⁵⁶

Transferring from the *sensorium* to the *motorium* and reflecting on the human experience of moving through time, Augustine referred to the "foot of the soul", which signifies its love. He explained:

The foot of the soul (*pes animae*), is well understood to be its love, which, when depraved, is called coveting or lust; but when upright, love or charity...

⁵² N. J. Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane*, Berkeley 1969, 39. Perella quoted St John of the Cross, according to whom the sense of touch is the highest in the order of the spiritual senses, and "the kiss is the greatest touch that God gives to the soul".

⁵³ Cf. Augustinus, *Sermones*, Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, Roma 53, 11, PL 38, (21.07.2025), <https://www.augustinus.it/latino/discorsi/index.htm>, (For this source, further quotations are available at this site). *Deinde et caritas, qua desideramus, qua pertingere conamur, qua inardescimus, qua esurimus et sitimus.*

⁵⁴ Augustinus, *Ev. Io. Tr.* 40, 10: *desiderium sinus cordis est.*

⁵⁵ Augustinus, *Confessionum* 1, 1, 1: *inquietum est cor nostrum.*

⁵⁶ Augustinus, *Ev. Io. Tr.* 26, 4: *Da amantem, et sentit quod dico. Da desiderantem, da esurientem, da in ista solitudine peregrinantem atque sitientem, et fontem aeternae patriae suspirantem: da talem, et scit quid dicam.* [Give me a man that loves, and he feels what I say. Give me one that longs, one that hungers, one that is travelling in this wilderness, and thirsting and panting after the fountain of his eternal home; give such, and he knows what I say.]; See also Huian, *Gustavi et esurio et sitio* 84.

And the Apostle says, “That being rooted and grounded in love, you may be able to take in.” (Ephesians 3:17-18).⁵⁷

It is through love that one moves towards those which desires, aligning with the biblical notion: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Mt 6:21) In this way, Augustine clarified that the soul’s location is not defined by physical space but rather coincides with where the soul finds joy and fulfilment.

Augustine also noted the use of “feet” in the plural, interpreting it as a representation of love’s division into two essential precepts: the love of God and the love of neighbor.⁵⁸ If either one of these is flawed, one’s spiritual gateway will be crippled, belated, and slow. He further elaborated on what it means to draw closer to God or to distance oneself; this movement is achieved not through physical space but through resemblance and dissemblance, as the condition of one’s heart determines spiritual mobility. In Augustine’s words:

For it is not in space that any one is far from God, but in affections. Thou lovest God, you are near unto Him. Thou hatest God, you are far off. You are standing in the same place, both while you are near and far off.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Cf. Augustinus, *En. Ps.* 9, 15: *Pes animae recte intellegitur amor: qui cum pravus est, vocatur cupiditas aut libido; cum autem rectus, dilectio vel caritas. ... Et Apostolus dicit: Ut in caritate radicati et fundati possitis comprehendere.*

⁵⁸ Cf. Augustinus, *En. Ps.* 33, en. 2, s.1, 10, 6: *Fide sectando, corde inhiando, caritate currendo. Pedes tui, caritas tua est. Duos pedes habeto, noli esse claudus. Qui sunt duo pedes? Duo praecepta dilectionis, Dei et proximi.* [By following with faith, by longing with the heart, by running with charity. Your feet are your charity. Have two feet, be not lame. What are your two feet? The two commandments of love, of your God, and of your Neighbour. With these feet run to God, approach Him.] (English translation by M. Boulding, in: J. E. Rotelle (ed.), *Expositions of the Psalm III/16* (33-50), The Works of Saint Augustine, New York 2000, 31)

⁵⁹ Augustinus, *En. Ps.* 85, 6: *Gradus, affectus sunt; iter tuum, voluntas tua est. Amando ascendis, neglegendo descendis. Stans in terra, in coelo es, si diligas Deum. Non enim sic levatur cor, quomodo levatur corpus: corpus ut levetur, locum mutat; cor ut levetur, voluntatem mutat.* (*En. Ps.* 85, 8 on New Advent).

The human body moves from one place to another using its feet. Consequently, the feet of the inner man symbolize not only affections but also the decision-making process, which determines the direction one chooses and ultimately one's final destination. As Mirosław Mejzner remarks, Augustine often associated the "heart" with intellectual capacity.⁶⁰ According to Augustine, to think is to converse with oneself in the heart.⁶¹ This idea also encompasses the heart's ability to distinguish between good and evil.⁶²

In a similar vein, Augustine posited that the mind transitions from internal to external understanding by connecting one mental triad—mind, knowledge, love (*mens, notitia, amor*)—to another: memory, intelligence, and will (*memoria, intelligentia, voluntas*).⁶³ In essence, the self-focused knowledge and love of the mind catalyze the subsequent activities of memory, intelligence, and will, which ultimately guide the individual toward the transcendent and innermost reality—God.⁶⁴

The transition from one's mind to God, articulated in Latin through the use of the pronoun *sui* and the genitive *dei*, signifies a pivotal choice occurring within the inner depths of the human being. One can choose to

⁶⁰ M. Mejzner, *The Way of the Heart in the Experience and Reflection of St. Augustine*, *Collectanea Theologica* 90, 5, 2020, 477–504. Mejzner observes that Augustine's concept of *cor* appears to be broader than *conscientia*. Cf. Augustinus, *En. Ps.* 7, 9; *En. Ps.* 57, 1.

⁶¹ Cf. Augustinus, *De Trinitate* 15, 10, 19: *Formata quippe cogitatio ab ea re quam scimus, verbum est quod in corde dicimus*. [For the thought that is formed by the thing which we know, is the word which we speak in the heart].

⁶² Cf. Augustinus, *Ev. Io. Tr.* 18, 10.

⁶³ Cf. Augustinus, *De Trinitate* 15, 7, 12: *Itemque in hoc magna distantia est quod siue mentem dicamus in homine eiusque notitiam et dilectionem, siue memoriam, intelligentiam, voluntatem, nihil mentis meminimus nisi per memoriam nec intellegimus nisi per intelligentiam nec amamus nisi per voluntatem*.

⁶⁴ Augustine's reflections that the image of God must be sought in the very essence of the human mind, as the mind is an image of God by the very fact that it is capable of it, are developed in *De Trinitate* 14, 8, 11: *Sed prius mens in se ipsa consideranda est antequam sit particeps Dei, et in ea reperienda est imago eius. Diximus enim eam etsi amissa Dei participatione obsoletam atque deformem, Dei tamen imaginem permanere. Eo quippe ipso imago eius est, quo eius capax est, eiusque particeps esse potest*; see also Dalpra, *Augustine of Hippo's Anthropology* 159.

approach God (*ad deum*) in a manner that reflects His likeness or to distance oneself from God (*ab deo*)⁶⁵ in a way that emphasizes unlikeness. As Dalpra pointed out, the two prepositions *ad* and *ab* illustrate the dynamic nature of Augustine's anthropology.⁶⁶ Human beings are characterized by their capacity for movement, continually striving to transcend their limitations.⁶⁷

When contemplating whether the image of God can dwell within the mind and heart, Augustine's explanation of the inner sense of touch provides valuable insight. This intersensory connection enables interaction between the outer and inner realms, serving as a medium for this engagement. Given that touch involves the whole body, it follows that one's soul encompasses the essence of that tactile experience.⁶⁸

3. Incarnating the spiritual

This analysis of Augustine's writings accounted for his emphasis on the corporeal, supporting Manoussakis' claim that the *Confessions* exemplifies the principles of carnal hermeneutics. By consistently employing the language from the Lucan parable of the prodigal son, Augustine's narrative not only seeks to Christianize the Neoplatonic notions of descent and ascent of the soul that underpin the *Confessions* but also transforms these ideas to enhance the understanding of incarnational hermeneutics.

⁶⁵ Cf. Augustinus, *De Trinitate* 11, 5, 8: *In quantum ergo bonum est quidquid est, in tantum scilicet, quamvis longe distantem, habet tamen nonnullam similitudinem summi Boni; et si naturalem, utique rectam et ordinatam; si autem vitiosam, utique turpem atque perversam.* [as anything that is, is good, in so far plainly it has still some likeness of the supreme good, at however great a distance; and if a natural likeness, then certainly a right and well-ordered one; but if a faulty likeness, then certainly a debased and perverse one.]

⁶⁶ Dalpra, Augustine of Hippo's Anthropology 160.

⁶⁷ Cf. Augustinus, *Confessionum* 10, 17, 26: *Transibo et hanc vim meam, quae memoria vocatur, transibo eam, ut pertendam ad te, dulce lumen.* [I will pass even beyond this power of mine which is called memory — I will pass beyond it, that I may proceed to You, O Thou sweet Light].

⁶⁸ See J.-L. Chrétien, Body and Touch, in: *The Call and the Response*, New York 2004, 92-94.

Thus, Manoussakis pointed out that the prodigal's *metanoia*, which propels him back to his father's house, is not merely a mental, spiritual, or psychological transformation; it is profoundly physical, as visceral as hunger itself.⁶⁹ The objective of the *Confessions* is not to spiritualize the flesh but to incarnate the spirit.⁷⁰ In this light, the vertical framework of Platonic and Neoplatonic ascents and descents must be set aside to foster a communion between the exteriority and interiority of a person. However, as long as hunger remains confined to the "interior," or spiritual realm, it does not even register as true hunger.⁷¹

Accordingly, in the Lucan parable of the prodigal son, the evangelist specifically chose the metaphor of hunger for human misery. Eating serves not only as a recognition of humans' dependency on one another and the world, but it also allows the assimilation of the external world into ourselves, transforming that which is outside into something internal. This process, echoed by Augustine, marks a significant shift from an external state to an internalized experience, illustrating the distance and fragmentation within human existence.⁷² Augustine's remedy for the fragmentation of the self lies in the process of conversion, which entails a twofold unification: the "conversion of the self", signifying a return to the one God, and a "return to oneself". (cf. Lk 15:17). This narrative of self-unification, as Manoussakis notes, is founded on the assumption of a unified self.⁷³

⁶⁹ J. P. Manoussakis, On St. Augustine's Body: The Conversion of Phenomenology, Psychoanalysis, and Theology, in: E. Severson / B. Becker / D. M. Goodman (eds.), *In the Wake of Trauma: Psychology and Philosophy for the Suffering Other*, Pittsburgh 2016, 35-56.

⁷⁰ Manoussakis, On St. Augustine's Body 36; see also Manoussakis, *God after metaphysics* 152. Quote: "The specificity of Christ's body is being 'sublated' in the body of Christ (the Church) - which is occasioned by the double movement of the ascent of Christ and the descent of the Spirit and thus becomes appropriated by and common to all Christians."

⁷¹ Cf. Augustinus, *Confessionum* 3, 1, 1: *quoniam fames mihi erat intus ab interiore cibo, te ipso, Deus meus, et ea fame non esuriebam*. [For within me I had a dearth of that inward food, Yourself, my God, though that dearth caused me no hunger.]; see also Manoussakis, On the Flesh of the Word 310.

⁷² J. P. Manoussakis, *The Ethics of Time: A Phenomenology and Hermeneutics of Change*, London/Oxford/ New York/New Delhi/Sydney 2016, 104.

⁷³ Manoussakis, *The Ethics of Time* 83.

The act of eating serves as a means to bridge this rift; in experiencing hunger, as Manoussakis argues, one inherently longs for the Other.⁷⁴ Through eating, we actively engage in the dissolution of isolation that arises from our fragmented realities. It is only through embodiment that one can authentically experience hunger, and likewise, it is through this corporeal existence that individuals can engage in the act of eating.

It is no coincidence, as Manoussakis continues, that we consume the Eucharist and that the liturgy is structured as a meal, much like the feast the Father holds to celebrate the return of the lost son (cf. Lk 15:23).⁷⁵ In Christ, God transcends the concept of a distant deity and becomes a God who engages with us physically, who can be touched, even to the extent of being consumed in the act of eating.

Through eating, one transforms the world into one's flesh and blood—not merely in a spiritual sense, but in a truly incarnate way. This allows for the incorporation of the world into our being, preventing it from remaining an abstract notion. This ethical awakening, understood as a *belated desire* in Augustine's *Confessions*⁷⁶, is first inscribed within and stirred in the body.⁷⁷

In line with Augustine, Manoussakis claims that our desires were bestowed upon us by God as a pedagogical tool to teach us how to search for that which lies beyond ourselves. In his own words, “the flesh as a bait...that, in catching us, might drive us outside our spiritual selves”.⁷⁸ Ultimately, the body as the Word-bearer serves as the fundamental locus and embodiment through which the Spirit manifests in the world, facilitating its presence among us.

⁷⁴ Manoussakis, *The Ethics of Time* 104.

⁷⁵ Manoussakis, *On the Flesh of the Word* 311.

⁷⁶ Augustinus, *Confessionum* 10, 27, 38: *Sero te amavi, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova, sero te amavi!* [Too late did I love You, O Fairness, so ancient, and yet so new! Too late did I love You!]

⁷⁷ Manoussakis, *The Ethics of Time* 106.

⁷⁸ Manoussakis, *On the Flesh of the Word* 313.

Concluding remarks

This analysis of Augustine's writings demonstrates that he not only integrated the Neoplatonic framework of the soul's descent and ascent into his thought but also significantly modified it in ways that are essential for incarnational hermeneutics. This transformation promotes an understanding that emphasizes the embodiment of the spiritual within the material realm. Manoussakis highlights this alongside a previously unacknowledged conversion in Augustine's *Confessions* — the conversion *to* the flesh — complementing the two traditionally recognized ones: the conversion of the mind (in Book VII) and the conversion of the heart (in Book VIII).

By intertwining the parabolic language of the prodigal son throughout the *Confessions*, Augustine emphasized the importance of flesh in this renovation process, understood as a double unification: the “conversion of the self”, involving a return to the one God and a “return to oneself” (cf. Lk 15:17).

An act of embodiment, according to Manoussakis, such as engaging in eating, serves as a moment of truth by bridging the gap between self and itself through a descent into the corporeal. However, this descent remains a sought-after longing that can never be completely achieved, given the inherent nature of desire, which is always articulated.⁷⁹ In essence, desire represents a demand directed toward the Other—the desire for the Other's desire. It is only for one who has fully and completely become flesh, who embodies the declaration of love, “this is my body”, that the descent into the bodily can become conceivable and manifest in a desire that transcends longing to be truly lived.

Augustine recognized the need for divine help in this process, highlighting the role of the inner master, Christ, in a journey that starts from the outside and moves inward (*ab exterioribus ad interiora*), then continues from the lower to the higher (*ab inferioribus ad superiora*). For Augustine, it is God's persuasiveness that delights and seizes the heart and converts the mind, thus affixing the soul to love Him.

⁷⁹ Manoussakis, *On the Flesh of the Word* 315.

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