

**THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH**  
**Part II: The Ancient and Medieval Church**

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**I. INTRODUCTION.**

The study of ecclesiology is both an impressive and neglected area of scholastic endeavor. The area is so massive that even broad brush strokes are enormous generalizations; a full course needs and should be devoted to the history the theological development of the church! In this study the function of these lessons is to create a general overview as a basis for further study.

In the previous lesson the focus was upon the church through the era of Cyprian (third century); this lesson shall focus upon the development of ecclesiology from the era of Cyprian through Gregory I and the beginning of the Medieval era. The focus shall be upon the nature of the church and the sacrament of the Eucharist which is so pivotal to an understanding of the Reformation and the Reformers.

**II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SACRAMENTAL STRUCTURE IN THE CHURCH.**

The two giant figures in the development of a high episcopalianism, Medieval ecclesiology, are Augustine and Gregory I, the latter actually sustained and reformed the former. To grasp the church after Cyprian in its ongoing sacramental development is to grasp these two men—one a theologian; the other a theologian-pope.

**A. The Ecclesiology of Augustine (A.D. 354–430/31)**

**N.B.** At the outset of the study of Augustine’s doctrine of the church, it is crucial to understand the contextual matrix of its development. As Cyprian reacted against the schismatic Novations in the third century, Augustine debated the separatist Donatists. Klotsch wrote (*History*, 115): “At the beginning of the fifth century

Augustine entered the contest with the Donatists. The two questions that had given rise to the schism—(1) whether a church by tolerance of unworthy members within its pale lost the essential attributes of purity and catholicity, and (2) whether the character of a bishop affected his official acts—led Augustine to develop his conception of the church and the sacraments”.

1. Augustine and the nature of the church. In his horrified reaction to the Donatist schism he argues these points.
  - a) First, like Cyprian, he maintained that the true church is the one Catholic or Church universal because of geographic distribution throughout the world. To Petilian, the Donatist, he wrote (*Letter*, 2, 38, 91): “I too indeed have attained to a very slight knowledge of the Greek language, scarcely to be called knowledge at all, yet I am not shameless in saying that I know that *olon* means not ‘one,’ but ‘the whole;’ and that *kath’ olon* means ‘according to the whole:’ whence the Catholic Church received its name, according to the saying of the Lord, ‘It is not for you to know the times, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and in Samaria, and even in the whole earth””.
  - b) Second, the authority or apostolicity of the church is based on the apostolic succession whose successors are the bishops. It is possible to point to an uninterrupted succession beginning with Peter. At this point Augustine accepted Cyprian’s idea of the historic primacy of the apostolic chair, but he knows nothing of a special authority invested in Peter or his successors, simply Cyprian’s “federation concept.” Seeberg wrote (*History*. 1, 319), “Dogmatically there had been no advance from the position of Cyprian.” Augustine wrote of Peter (*On Baptism*. 2, 1, 1): “Here is a passage in which Cyprian records what we also learn in holy Scripture, that the Apostle Peter, in whom the primacy of the apostles shines with such exceeding grace, was corrected by the later Apostle Paul, when he adopted a custom in the manner of circumcision at variance with the demands of truth. If it was therefore possible for Peter in some point to walk not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, so as to compel the Gentiles to judaize, as Paul wrote in that epistle in which he calls God to witness that he does not lie; for he says, ‘Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not;’ and, after this sacred and awful calling of God to witness, he told the whole tale, saying in the course of it, ‘But when I saw that they walked not uprightly, according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them

all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live after the manner of the Jews, contrary to the rule of truth which the Church afterwards held, why might not Cyprian, in opposition to the rule of faith which the whole Church afterwards held, compel heretics and schismatics to be baptized afresh? I suppose that there is no slight to Cyprian in comparing him with Peter in respect to his crown of martyrdom; rather I ought to be afraid lest I am showing disrespect towards Peter. For who can be ignorant that the primacy of his apostleship is to be preferred to any episcopate whatever? But, granting the difference in the dignity of their sees, yet they have the same glory in their martyrdom. And whether it may be the case that the hearts of those who confess and die for the true faith in the unity of charity take precedence of each other in different points, the Lord Himself will know, by the hidden and wondrous dispensation of whose grace the thief hanging on the cross once for all confesses Him, and is sent on the self-same day to paradise, while Peter, the follower of our Lord, denies Him thrice, and has his crown postponed: for us it were rash to form a judgment from the evidence. But if any one were now found compelling a man to be circumcised after the Jewish fashion, as a necessary preliminary for baptism, this would meet with much more general repudiation by mankind, than if a man should be compelled to be baptized again. Wherefore, if Peter, on doing this, is corrected by his later colleague Paul, and is yet preserved by the bond of peace and unity till he is promoted to martyrdom, how much more readily and constantly should we prefer, either to the authority of a single bishop, or to the Council of a single province, the rule that has been established by the statutes of the universal Church? For this same Cyprian, in urging his view of the question, was still anxious to remain in the unity of peace even with those who differed from him on this point, as is shown by his own opening address at the beginning of the very Council which is quoted by the Donatists”.

- c) Third, the unity of the church is manifested in love and where there is not love and holiness there is no church. Outside of this one Catholic church, the body of Christ, there is no truth, no salvation. Separation from the Catholic Church is a renunciation of the Spirit of love; union with the church is essential to salvation. He wrote of unity as a prerequisite for the benefits of baptism (*Baptism*. 1, 12, 18): “And if it is mere madness to assert this, then let them confess that a man can be baptized with the true baptism of Christ, and that yet his heart, persisting in malice or sacrilege, may not allow remission of sins to be given; and so let them understand that

men may be baptized in communions severed from the Church, in which Christ's baptism is given and received in the said celebration of the sacrament, but that it will only then be of avail for the remission of sins, when the recipient, being reconciled to the unity of the church, is purged from the sacrilege of deceit, by which his sins were retained, and their remission prevented. For, as in the case of him who had approached the sacrament in deceit there is no second baptism, but he is purged by faithful discipline and truthful confession, which he could not be without baptism, so that what was given before becomes then powerful to work his salvation, when the former deceit is done away by the truthful confession; so also in the case of the man who, while an enemy to the peace and love of Christ, received in any heresy or schism the baptism of Christ, which the schismatics in question had not lost from among them, though by his sacrilege his sins were not remitted, yet, when he corrects his error, and comes over to the communion and unity of the Church, he ought not to be again baptized: because by his very reconciliation to the peace of the Church he receives this benefit, that the sacrament now begins in unity to be of avail for the remission of sins, which could not so avail him as received in schism”.

Again he is pointedly clear (*Baptism*. 4, 1, 1): “The comparison of the Church with Paradise shows us that men may indeed receive her baptism outside her pale, but that no one outside can either receive or retain the salvation of eternal happiness. For, as the words of Scripture testify, the streams from the fountain of Paradise flowed copiously even beyond its bounds. Record indeed is made of their names; and through what countries they flow, and that they are situated beyond the limits of Paradise, is known to all; and yet in Mesopotamia, and in Egypt, to which countries those rivers extended, there is not found that blessedness of life which is recorded in Paradise alone. So, therefore, the baptism of the Church may exist outside, but the gift of the life of happiness is found alone within the Church, which has been founded on a rock, which has received the keys of binding and loosing. ‘She it is alone who holds as her privilege the whole power of her Bridegroom and Lord;’ by virtue of which power as bride, she can bring forth sons even of handmaids. And these, if they be not high-minded, shall be called into the lot of the inheritance; but if they be high-minded, they shall remain outside”.

Though Augustine did not place as much stress as Cyprian upon the divine right of the episcopate, he made the belief of the individual Christian depend upon the authority of the Catholic

Church. He went so far as to declare that he believed the gospel only on the authority of the Catholic Church! Confronting the Manicheans he wrote (*Epistle*, 5): “But should you meet with a person not yet believing the gospel, how would you reply to him were he to say, I do not believe? For my part, I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church. So when those on whose authority I have consented to believe in the gospel tell me not to believe in Manichaeus, how can I but consent? Take your choice. If you say, Believe the Catholics: their advice to me is to put no faith in you; so that, believing them, I am precluded from believing you;—you say, Do not believe the Catholics: you cannot fairly use the gospel in bringing me to faith in Manichaeus; for it was at the command of the Catholics that I believed the gospel;—Again, if you say, You were right in believing the Catholics when they praised the gospel, but wrong in believing their vituperation of Manichaeus: do you think me such a fool as to believe or not to believe as you like or dislike, without any reason? It is therefore fairer and safer by far for me, having in one instance put faith in the Catholics, not to go over to you, till, instead of bidding me believe, you make me understand something in the clearest and most open manner. To convince me, then, you must put aside the gospel. If you keep to the gospel, I will keep to those who commanded me to believe the gospel; and, in obedience to them, I will not believe you at all”.

**N.B.** It must also be recognized that Augustine saw the church as composed of “wheat and tares”; the reception of Baptism was a sign only, not the reality of salvation. He wrote (*Baptism*. 3, 17, 22): “But if this be so, why should it not also be the case that, as each man comes from heresy or schism to the Catholic peace, his sins should be loosed through their prayers? But the integrity of the sacrament is everywhere recognized, though it will not avail for the irrevocable remission of sins outside the unity of the Church. Nor will the prayers of the saints, or, in other words, the groanings of that one dove, be able to help one who is set in heresy or schism; just as they are not able to help one who is placed within the Church, if by a wicked life he himself retain the debts of his sins against himself, and that though he be baptized, not by this hawk, but by the pious ministry of the dove herself”.

Again (*Baptism*. 1, 9, 12): “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have

not charity, I am nothing. What does it profit them, therefore, if they have both the voice of angels in the sacred mysteries, and the gift of prophecy, as had Caiaphas and Saul, that so they may be found prophesying, of whom Holy Scripture testifies that they were worthy of condemnation? If they not only know, but even possess the sacraments, as Simon Magus did; if they have faith, as the devils confessed Christ (for we must not suppose that they did not believe when they said, 'What have we to do with Thee, O Son of God? We know Thee who Thou art'); if they distribute of themselves their own substance to the poor, as many do, not only in the Catholic Church, but in the different heretical bodies; if, under the pressure of any persecution, they give their bodies with us to be burned for the faith which they like us confess: yet because they do all these things apart from the Church, not 'forbearing one another in love,' nor endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace,' insomuch as they have not charity, they cannot attain to eternal salvation, even with all those good things which profit them not".

In this sense Augustine can speak of the church visible and invisible. Salvation is only in the church, but many in the church are not saved. The Sacraments do not save! Salvation is only in the church because the truth is there. The Donatists were viewed as Christians because they were viewed as in the church, although they emphatically rejected the notion!

2. Augustine and the Sacraments. Augustine grappled with the sacraments within the context of the Donatist schism and the Pelagian era. The sacraments are gifts from God and the moral condition of the administrator cannot detract from the gift conveyed. He wrote (*Letter to Petilian. 2, 39.69*): "In this question you are speaking just as though we were at present inquiring what constituted a true priest, not what constituted true Baptist. For that a man should be a true priest, it is requisite that he should be clothed not with the sacrament alone, but with righteousness, as it is written, 'Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness.' But if a man be a priest in virtue of the sacrament alone, as was the high priest Caiaphas, the persecutor of the one most true Priest, then even though he himself be not truthful, yet what he gives is true, if he gives not what is his own but what is God's; as it is said of Caiaphas himself, 'This spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied.' But it is unavoidable that you should be always in the wrong, so long as you do despite to the sacraments of God because of the faults of men, or think that we take upon ourselves the sacrilege even of your schism, for the sake of the sacraments of God, to which we are unwilling to despite in you".

Augustine divided the sacraments in two parts: the symbol and significance. The visible signs are symbols of an invisible content; in the former, they are merely symbolical and, in the latter, there is an actual exertion of divine energy. Of baptism he wrote (*Baptism*. 5, 21, 29): “And so John too says, ‘They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us.’ Wherefore God gives the sacrament of grace even through the hands of wicked men, but the grace itself only by Himself or through His saints. And therefore He gives remission of sins either of Himself, or through the members of that dove to whom He says, ‘Whosoever sins yet remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.’ But since no one can doubt that baptism, which is the sacrament of the remission of sins, is possessed even by murderers, who are yet in darkness because the hatred of their brethren is not excluded from their hearts, therefore either no remission of sins is given to them if their baptism is accompanied by no change of heart for the better, or if the sins are remitted, they at once return on them again. And we learn that the baptism is holy in itself, because it is of God; and whether it be given or whether it be received by men of such like character, it cannot be polluted by any perversity of theirs, either within, or yet outside the Church”.

**N.B.** Yet, Augustine recognizes that grace is only in Christ by faith, hence, the invisible reality is within the sacraments (*Letter to Petilian*. 2, 4.9): “Christ is not faithless, from whom the faithful man receives not guilt but faith. For he believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, that this faith may be counted for righteousness”.

On the Lord’s Supper, Augustine spiritualizes the rite as a salvation-sacrament through believing for believers. The gift that the eucharist conveys is the gift of life. This is a spiritual gift and the eating and drinking are spiritual processes. (**N.B.**—The elements are not sensual, but animated life by the Spirit in the elements.) He wrote (*Commentary on John*, 25:12): “‘They said therefore unto Him, What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ For He said to them, ‘Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto eternal life.’ ‘What shall we do?’ they ask; by observing what, shall we be able to fulfill this precept? ‘Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He has sent.’ This is them to eat the meat, not that which perisheth, but that which endureth unto eternal life. To what purpose dost thou make ready teeth and stomach? Believe, and thou hast eaten already. Faith is indeed distinguished from works, even as the apostle says, ‘that a man is justified by faith without the works of the law:’ there are works which appear good, without faith in Christ; but they are not good, because they are not referred to that end in which works are

good; ‘for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth’”.

Again (*Commentary on John*, 26:1): “Wherefore, the Lord, about to give the Holy Spirit, said that Himself was the bread that come down from heaven, exhorting us to believe on Him. For to believe on His is to eat the living bread. He that believes eats; he is sated invisibly, because invisibly is he born again. A babe within, a new man within. Where he is made new, there he is satisfied with good”.

Kelley wrote of Augustine (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 449): “He goes further than his predecessors in formulating a doctrine which, while realist through and through, is also frankly spiritualizing. In the first place, he makes it clear that the body consumed in the eucharist is not strictly identical with Christ’s historical body, and represents Him as saying, ‘You must understand what I have said in a spiritual sense. You are not going to eat this body which you see or drink that blood which those who will crucify me are going to shed.’ The historical body ascended in its integrity to heaven. In any case, the eucharistic flesh is not like ‘flesh rent asunder in a corpse or sold in the meat market.’ This crude idea was characteristic of the Capharnaites. Secondly, and more positively, the gift which the eucharist conveys is a gift of life. This is a spiritual gift, and the eating and drinking are spiritual processes. The eucharist body is not the sensible flesh; rather we receive the essence of this flesh, viz. the spirit which quickens it”.

**N.B.** Augustine’s view of the Lord’s Table is non-sacramental though spiritually real, being the gift of life!

## **B. The Ecclesiology of Gregory I (A.D. 540–604)**

**N.B.** Between Augustine and Gregory I stands a massive figure and crucial political events which shaped later history, particularly the emergence of the hierarchical primacy of Rome.

1. Political event. Following the battle of Adrianople in A.D. 378 political Rome collapsed under the pressure of Attila and others. The bishops of Rome came to political and ecclesiastical prominence as preservers of the West. Their success brought prestige!
2. Leo I, the Great was the bishop of Rome from 440–61. He pressed the primacy of Rome being conscious of inherited Petrine prerogatives as the head of the church under Augustine’s City of God. He wrote (*Sermons*. 3, 3): “The dispensation of Truth therefore abides, and the blessed Peter persevering in the strength of the Rock, which he has received, has not



abandoned the helm of the Church, which he undertook. For he was ordained before the rest in such a way that from his being called the Rock, from his being pronounced the Foundation, from his being constituted the Doorkeeper of the kingdom of heaven, from his being set as the Umpire to bind and to loose, whose judgments shall retain their validity in heaven, from all these mystical titles we might know the nature of his association with Christ. And still to-day he more fully and effectually performs what is entrusted to him, and carries out every part of his duty and charge in Him and with Him, through Whom he has been glorified. And so if anything is won from the mercy of God by our daily supplications, it is of his work and merits whose power lives and whose authority prevails in his see. For this, dearly-beloved, was gained by that confession, which, inspired in the Apostle's heart by God the Father, transcended all the uncertainty of human opinions, and was endued with the firmness of a rock, which no assaults could shake. For throughout the Church Peter daily says, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,' and every tongue which confesses the Lord, accepts the instruction his voice conveys. This Faith conquers the devil, and breaks the bonds of his prisoners. It uproots us from the earth and plants us in heaven, and the gates of Hades cannot prevail against it. For with such solidity is it endued by God that the depravity of heretics cannot mar it nor the unbelief of the heathen overcome it".

Next to Augustine Gregory I stands at a major crossroads in the development of Medieval ecclesiology. Klotsch wrote (*History*, 117): "Leaning entirely upon the great Augustine, Gregory transferred the old doctrine of the church into the new ecclesiastical forms which grew out of national readjustments . . . The dwarfed type of Christianity which finds expression in Gregory's writings became the religion of the Middle Ages."

3. Gregory and the nature of the church. Gregory understood the church to be the kingdom of heaven—one, holy, and universal—although it is composed of "wheat and tares." Salvation is limited to the institution where the unity of love exists. Seeberg summarizes Gregory when he wrote (*History*. 2, 26): "The holy universal church proclaims that God cannot, except within it, be truly worshiped, asserting that all who are without its bounds will by no means be saved (*Mor.* xiv. v. 5; *Ep.* xi. 46). Only the church's sacrifice avails; only its members are in the valid bond (*compages*) of love; only is its martyrdom meritorious (*Mor.* xxxv. 8.12; xcii. 26.40). Separation from the church proves lack of love (*Mor.* xviii. 26.41f.). But everything upon which the necessity of the church to salvation depends lies in the hands of the "officers" (rulers, *regentes*, and subjects, *subditi*, *Mor.* xxx. 6.23; iv. 31.61; *reg. past.* ii. 6; in *reg.* vi. 2.21). Binding and loosing are prerogatives of the clericals. And 'whether the pastor binds justly or unjustly, nevertheless the pastor's declaration

(*sententia*) must be revered by the multitude' (Ev. ii. 26.5f.). They watch over the lives of those under them (*subditi*), lead them to repentance, dispense absolution (*Mor.* xi. 14.22; xiii. 18.21; dial. ii. 23), present the sacrifice, etc. For the accomplishment of her work, the church lays claim to the aid of the unchristianized state. 'The holy church, because she is not sufficient in her own strength, seeks the assistance of that rhinoceros' (Job 39:9), i.e., the prince of this world (*Mor.* xxxi. 5.7)".

**N.B.** Gregory greatly extended the ecclesiastical power and prestige of Rome. He recognized the supremacy of his episcopate, but would not take the title of Father (pope). To the bishop of Constantinople, he wrote (*Dialogues.* 5, 44): "Consider, I pray thee, that by this rash presumption the peace of the whole Church is disturbed, and that it is in contradiction to the grace poured out on all in common; in which grace thou thyself wilt be able to grow so far as thou thyself will determine to do so. And thou wilt become by so much the greater as thou restrainest thyself from the usurpation of proud and foolish titles; and thou wilt advance in proportion as thou are not bent on arrogation by the humiliation of thy brethren. . . . Certainly Peter, the first of the Apostles, was a member of the holy and universal Church; Paul, Andrew, John—what are they but the heads of particular communities? And yet all are members under one Head. And to bind all together in a short phrase, the saints before the Law, the saints under the Law, the saints under grace, all these making up the Lord's body were constituted as members of the Church, and not one of them has ever wished himself to be called 'universal.' . . . Is it not the fact, as your fraternity knows, that the

prelates of this Apostolic See, which by the providence of God I serve, had the honor offered them by the vulnerable Council of Chalcedon of being called 'universal'? But yet not one of them has ever wished to be called by such a title, or seized upon this rash name, lest, if in virtue of the rank of the pontificate, he took to himself the glory of singularity, he might seem to have denied it to all his brethren".

4. Gregory and the structure of the church. Gregory was essentially a gifted administrator who organized and gave structured form to the church.
  - a) **The Mass**, a sacrifice. Gregory conceived of the Eucharist as a real transubstantiation, though a non-meritorious sacrament, by stressing the actual alteration of the elements through the act of consecration a sacrament of the altar, a continually repeated sacrifice. He wrote (*Dialogues.* 4, 58): "Living in himself immortally and incorruptibly, he is for us again immolated in this mystery of sacred oblation. For there his body is taken, his flesh is broken for the salvation of the people, his blood is poured out, not now into the hands of unbelievers, but into the mouths of believers. Hence we consider what is the nature of this sacrifice for us, which

always repeats for our absolution of the passion of the Only-begotten. For who of the believing can have a doubt that in the very hour of the immolation the heavens are opened at the voice of the priest, that the choirs of angels are present in that mystery of Jesus Christ, that the lowest things are associated with the highest? . . . Also ev. ii. 37.7. ‘The host offered with the tears and benignity of the sacred altar pleads in a peculiar way for our absolution, because He who, arising by His own power, now died no more, through it in His mystery suffers again for us’”.

- b) **Purgatory.** Gregory appears to have borrowed from Cyprian and Augustine in advocating the doctrine of the interim state. Commenting on Matthew 12:32 Gregory stated (*Moralia*. 4, 39), “In this sentence it is given to understand that many sins can be remitted in this world but also many in the world to come.”
  - c) In addition, Gregory introduced **ritualism, chants, into the church and a stress on miracles.** “Wonderful things are to be believed by faith, and not searched by reason; for if reason could show them before our eyes they would no longer be wonderful” (*Moralia*. 6, 15). This has led Gonzalez to conclude (*History*. 2, 72): “In summary, Gregory is an indication of the manner in which, in the midst of a period of political and intellectual decline. Augustine’s theology was accommodated to popular faith in two main ways: by mitigating the most extreme aspects of the doctrines of grace and predestination, and by making room for superstitious beliefs and practices”.
- N.B.** With Gregory the shift from “federated” bishops is all but complete; he assumes supremacy or primacy although he rejects the title pope (universal).

### III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUCHARIST IN THE CHURCH.

Of the seven sacraments that gained currency in the Medieval Church, which was dogmatized at Trent in the sixteenth century, the Eucharist, as a continual sacrifice, was most hated and repudiated by the Reformers. Because of this fact, it would do us favorably to focus upon the origins and development of the Eucharist as “the Mass.”

#### A. The Development of the Eucharist to Origen

Religious scholars indicate that prior to the late third century the Lord’s Table was conceived as a dualism, both a real and a symbol sacrament. It did not have a transubstantial connotation, although there was a deep realism.

1. **Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 140–202)** the bishop of Lyons, understood that the Holy Spirit unites the Logos with the elements and makes them something that they were not before, namely, the body and blood of Christ. Neve wrote (*History*. 1, 160): “This is not meant to be transubstantiation but it is the union of the Logos with the elements that makes these the body and blood of the Lord.” Irenaeus wrote (*Against Heresies*. 4, 18, 5, 6):

“5. Then, again, how can they say that the flesh, which is nourished with the body of the Lord and with His blood, goes to corruption, and does not partake of life? Let them, therefore, either alter their opinion, or cease from offering the things just mentioned. But our opinion is in accordance with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn established our opinion. For we offer to Him His own, announcing consistently the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit. For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it received the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity”.

“6. Now we make offering to Him, not as though He stood in need of it, but rendering thanks for His gift, and sanctifying what has been created. For even as God does not need our possessions, so do we need to offer something to God; as Solomon says: ‘He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord.’ For God, who stands in need of nothing, takes our good works to Himself for this purpose, that He may grant us a recompense of His own good things, as our Lord says: ‘Come, ye blessed of My Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you. For I was an hungered, and ye gave Me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took Me in; naked, and ye gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took Me in; naked and ye clothed Me; sick and ye visited Me; in prison, and ye came to Me.’ As, therefore, he does not stand in need of these [services], yet does desire that we should render them for our own benefit, lest we be unfruitful; so did the Word give to the people that very precept as to the making of oblations, although He stood in no need of them, that they might learn to serve God; thus it is, therefore, also His will that we, too, should offer a gift at the altar, frequently and without intermission. The altar, them, is in heaven (for towards that place are our prayers and oblations directed); the temple likewise [is there], as John says in the Apocalypse, ‘And the temple of God was opened;’ the

tabernacle also; ‘For, behold,’ He says, ‘the tabernacle of God, in which He will dwell with men’”.

**N.B.** The elements are conceived as real and Christ really present. However, it is for Christians, not as a medium of forgiveness, but thanks for forgiveness. Christ is not re-sacrificed thereby removing venial sins. Luther adopts this view as held by Irenaeus. It is a real sacrifice of praise!

2. **Tertullian (ca. 155–240/60 A.D.)**, lawyer of Carthage, advocated a similar realism though at times, manifested as symbolic interpretation (*Against Heresies*, 4, 40): “He likewise when mentioning the cup and making the new testament to be sealed ‘in His blood,’ affirms the reality of His body. For no blood can belong to a body which is not a body of flesh. If any sort of body were presented to our view, which is not one of flesh, not being fleshly, it would not possess blood. Thus, from the evidence of the flesh, we get a proof of the body, and a proof of the flesh from the evidence of the blood. In order, however, that you may discover how anciently wine is used as a figure for blood, turn to Isaiah, who asks, ‘Who is this that cometh from Edom, from Bosor with garments dyed in red, so glorious in His apparel, in the greatness of His might? Why are thy garments red, and thy raiment as His who cometh from the treading of the full wine-press?’ The prophetic Spirit contemplates the Lord as if he were already on His way to His passion, clad in His fleshly nature; and as He was to suffer therein, He represents the bleeding condition of His flesh under the metaphor of garments dyed in red, as if reddened in the treading and crushing process of the winepress, from which the labourers descend reddened with the wine-juice, like men stained in blood. Much more clearly still does the book of Genesis foretell this, when (in the blessing of Judah, out of whose tribe Christ was to come according to the flesh) it even then delineated Christ in the person of that patriarch, saying, ‘He washed His garments in wine, and His clothes in the blood of grapes’—in His garments and clothes the prophecy pointed out his flesh, and His blood in the wine. Thus did He now consecrate His blood in wine, who then (by the patriarch) used the figure of wine to describe His blood”.

**N.B.** The Fathers emphasized “realism” in the context of refuting Docetism and Gnosticism. These movements would explain that emphasis!

3. **Origen (ca. A.D. 185–253/54)**, teacher at Alexandria, was the first to set forth a purely symbolic view of the Eucharist. He wrote (*Commentary on Matthew*, 8:5):

“That bread which God the Word declares to be His body is the nutritious word of souls, the word proceeding from God the Word . . . And that drink

. . . is the word thirst-quenching and splendidly inebriating the hearts of those who drink it . . . For not that visible bread which He held in His hand, did God the Word call His body, but the word in whose sacrament (*mysterium*) that bread was to be broken. And not that visible drink did He call His blood, but the word in whose sacrament that drink was to be poured out. For the body or blood of God the Word, what else can it be than the word which nourished and the word which delights the heart?

The word of Christ, of which the elements are a symbol, is, therefore, the effectual thing in the eucharist”.

**N.B.** The Origenist interpretation of the Christological debate (Apollarianism) was discredited and, unfortunately, in some instances, Origen’s interpretation of other doctrines as well. Hence, there was a departure from “symbolism” to a stronger realism that included the idea of an actual sacrifice.

## **B. The Development of the Eucharist after Origen**

### **1. In the East**

a) **Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. A.D. 315–85)** had a developed transubstantiation, though non-meritorious, view of the Lord’s Table. He considered the Eucharist upon the invocation of the priest, to be the very body and blood, but most uniquely that it was a spiritual sacrifice of propitiation (the latter phrase is most decisive!). He wrote (*Catechetical Lectures*. 22, 3): “3. Wherefore with full assurance let us partake as of the Body and Blood of Christ: for in the figure of Bread is given to thee His Body, and in the figure of Wine His Blood; that thou by partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, mayest be made of the same body and the same blood with Him. For thus we come to bear Christ in us, because His Body and Blood are distributed through our members; thus it is that, according to the blessed Peter, we become partakers of the divine nature”.

Again (*Catechetical Lectures*. 23, 7, 8):

“7. Then having sanctified ourselves by these spiritual Hymns, we beseech the merciful God to send forth His Holy Spirit upon the gifts lying before Him; that He may make the Bread the Body of Christ, and the Wine the Blood of Christ; for whatsoever the Holy Ghost has touched, is surely sanctified and changed”.

“8. Then, after the spiritual sacrifice, the bloodless service, is completed, over that sacrifice propitiation, we entreat God for the common peace of the Churches, for the welfare of the world; for kings; for soldiers and allies; for the sick; for the afflicted; and, in a word, for all who stand in need of succor we all pray and offer this sacrifice”.

- b) **Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395)** clearly teaches that the elements are transformed and, most particularly, that salvation grace is thereby obtained (*Catecheism*, 37): “Rightly, then, do we believe that now also the bread which is consecrated by the Word of God is changed into the Body of God the Word. For that Body was once, by implication, bread, but has been consecrated by the inhabitation of the Word that tabernacled in the flesh. Therefore, from the same cause as that by which the bread that was transformed in that Body was changed to a Divine potency, a similar result takes place now. For as in that case, too, the grace of the Word used to make holy the Body, the substance of which came of the bread, and in a manner was itself bread, so also in this case the bread, as says the Apostle, ‘is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer’; not that it advances by the process of eating to the stage of passing into the body of the Word, but it is at once changed into the body by means of the Word, as the Word itself said, ‘This is My Body.’ Seeing, too, that all flesh is nourished by what is moist (for without this combination our earthly part would not continue to live), just as we support by food which is firm and solid the solid part of our body, in like manner we supplement the moist part from the kindred element; and this, when within us, by its faculty of being transmitted, is changed to blood, and especially if through the wine it receives the faculty of being transmuted into heat. Since, then, that God-containing flesh partook for its substance, and support of this particular nourishment also, and since the God who was manifested infused Himself into perishable humanity for this purpose, viz. that by this communion with Deity mankind might at the same time be deified, for this end it is that, by dispensation of His grace, He disseminates Himself in every believer through that flesh, whose substance comes from bread and wine, blending Himself with the bodies of believers, to secure that, by this union with the immortal, man, too may be a sharer in incorruption. He gives these gifts by virtue of the benediction through which He trans-elements the natural”.
- c) **John of Damascus (d. 794)** formulated and finalized the doctrine of transubstantiation for the Eastern Church. John taught, that by virtue of consecration, the elements are transformed into actual

body and blood of Christ. Seeberg wrote (*History*. 1, 302): “The eucharist (is conceived) in light of the ‘unbloody mystic God-appearing sacrifice’ as a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ which only a priest can administer and which is efficacious for the living and the dead.”

2. In the West. Neve wrote (*History*. 1, 164): “It was Augustine who threw back for centuries the development in the West towards transubstantiation. And it was the authority of this church father that has kept transubstantiation from being a unanimously adopted dogma absolutely in the Roman Catholic Church.” Augustine advocated both a “realism” and a “symbolism,” but not a grace-giving regenerative rite. His theological impact was immense in the West.

The church did progressively come to a purely sacramental view at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and is perhaps best expressed by Aquinas. He wrote (*Summa Theological*. 3, 76.1): “I answer that, It is absolutely necessary to confess according to Catholic faith that the entire Christ in this sacrament. Yet we must know that there is something of Christ in this sacrament in a twofold manner: first, as it were, by the power of the sacrament; secondly, from natural concomitance. By the power of the sacrament, there is under the species of this sacrament that into which the pre-existing substance of the bread and wine is changed, as expressed by the words of the form, which are effective in this as in the other sacraments; for instance, by the words—This is My body, or, This is My blood. But from natural concomitance there is also in this sacrament that which is really united with that thing wherein the aforesaid conversion is terminated. For if any two things be really united, then where ever the one is really, there must the other also be: since things really united together are only distinguished by an operation of the mind.”

Aquinas then says that it actualized forgiveness of venial sins (*Summa Theologica*. 3, 79.4): “I answer that, Two things may be considered in this sacrament, to wit, the sacrament itself, and the reality of the sacrament: and it appears from both that this sacrament has the power of forgiving venial sins. For this sacrament is received under the form of nourishing food. Now nourishment from food is requisite for the body to make good the daily waste caused by the action of natural heat. But something is also lost daily of our spirituality from the heat of concupiscence through venial sins, which lessen the fervor of charity, as was shown in the Second Part (II-II, Q. 24, A. 10). And therefore it belongs to this sacrament to forgive venial sins. Hence Ambrose says (*De Sacram*. v) that this daily bread is taken as a remedy against daily infirmity”.



**PARENTHESIS:** The first council to explicitly affirm the eucharist as a work of superogation, a duty that obligates God to forgive sin, is the Council of Florence (1455). It affirmed the Eucharist, as well as, six other sacraments (baptism, confirmation, marriage, penance, orders, and Extreme Unction).

**The Council of Florence (1438–45).** In the context of the turmoil caused by John Huss (burned, 1415) the church articulated clearly the meritorious nature of the sacraments. Though Peter Lombard enumerated seven sacraments, this council makes them explicit for the first time (i.e., the number and benefit).

“There are seven sacraments of the New Law, viz. baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders, and marriage. These are quite different from the sacraments of the Old Law, which did not cause grace, but foreshadowed the grace that was to be bestowed solely through the passion of Christ. Our sacraments, however, not only contain grace, but also confer it on those who receive them worthily. The first five have been ordained for the spiritual perfection of every individual in himself, the last two for the government and increase of the whole Church. Through baptism we are spiritually reborn; through confirmation we grow in grace and are strengthened in faith. Having been regenerated and strengthened, we are sustained by the divine food of the eucharist. But if we become sick in soul through sin, we are healed spiritually through penance, and healed spiritually as well as physically, in proportion as it benefits the soul, through extreme unction. Through orders the Church is governed and grows spiritually, while through marriage it grows physically.

Three elements are involved in the full administration of all these sacraments, viz. things as the matter, words as the form, and the person of the minister performing the sacrament with the intention of doing what the Church does. If any one of these is lacking, the sacrament is not effected. There are three of the sacraments, baptism, confirmation, and orders, which imprint on the soul an indelible character, i.e., a kind of spiritual seal distinct from the others. They are not, therefore, to be received more than once by the same individual. The rest, however, do not imprint a character and may be performed more than once.”

And, finally, the Canons of the Council of Trent are quite explicit of creedal Romanism, the official unalterable position of the church (Canons II, V, and VI):

“Canon II—If any one saith that, in the sacred and holy sacrament of the Eucharist, the substance of the bread and wine remains conjointly with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and denieth that wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body; and of the whole substance of the wine into the blood—the species only of the bread and wine remaining—which conversion indeed the Catholic Church most aptly calls Transubstantiation: let him be anathema.

Canon V—If any one saith, either that the principal fruit of the most holy Eucharist is not the remission of sins, or that other effects do not result therefrom: let him be anathema.

Canon VI—If any one saith, that, in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist, Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, is not to be adored with the worship, even external of latria; and is, consequently, neither to be venerated with a special festive solemnity, nor to be solemnly borne about in procession, according to the laudable and universal rite and custom of the holy Church; or, is not to be proposed publicly to the people to be adored, and that the adorers thereof are idolaters: let him be anathema”.

#### IV. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this lesson has been to trace the unique ecclesiastical characteristics of the late Ancient and Medieval Church. Pivotal in the structure of the Romish church were Augustine, with his concept of unity (based on apostolic succession and the primacy in Rome), although he rejected hierarchicalism and sacrificial sacramentalism, Leo I with a stress on primacy and Gregory I who actualized that primacy and substantively organized the fabric of Romish theology. He embryonically organized the ecclesiology of the church that would be defined and delineated in the Medieval era. The doctrine of non-meritorious transubstantiation received currency in the East and ascendancy in John of Damascus. In the West progress was slowed by allegiance to Augustine until the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and, finally, at the Council of Trent were a meritorious notion of the real presence was dogmatically taught. Enormous changes in ecclesiology will become evident in the great Reformation which is now before us!!