

MATERNAL ASPECTS IN SALVATION HISTORY ACCORDING TO AUGUSTINE

In Augustine's works, there is a line originating in God's motherly mercy, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, descending to Holy Scripture, the church, Moses, the prophets, and the other proclaimers of the faith, especially Paul, and finally Augustine himself. This descending line shows immediately how human beings carry on God's work of saving mercy. This subject is studied by several authors.¹ By this article I hope to contribute to the topic by giving a more comprehensive survey. The texts in which Augustine deals with this theme nearly all belong to the mature period of his writings. Therefore, it does not make much sense to treat them in chronological order.

1. God as mother

Isaiah is the prophet who insists strongly on the motherly aspects of God. Augustine refers to some facets of texts of Isaiah, but literal quotations are rather rare. In the *City of God* he gives a long quotation from the book of Isaiah, and qualifies the first part of the text - which is important for our subject - as hope for good people: "Thus says the Lord : Now towards them I will send flowing peace, like a river, and like a stream in spate inundating the glory of the nations. Their sons will be carried on the shoulders and comforted on the knees. Like a mother comforts I will comfort you. You will be comforted in Jerusalem. You will see and your heart

¹ See K.E. BØRRESEN, L'usage patristique de métaphores féminines dans le discours sur Dieu, in: *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 13(1982) 205-220. R.J. O'CONNELL, The God of Saint Augustine's Imagination, in: *Thought* 57 (n. 224) 1982, 30-40. Id., Isaiah's Mothering God in St. Augustine's *Confessions*, in: *Thought* 58 (n. 229) 1983, 188-206. M.L. DUTTON, "When I was a Child": Spiritual Infancy and God's Maternity in Augustine's *Confessions*, in: *Collectanea Augustiniana: Augustine "Second Founder of the Faith"* (ed. J. Schnaubelt and F. Van Fleteren). New York 1990, 113-140. K. POWER, Veiled Desire. Augustine's Writing on Women. London 1995, 71-93 (on Augustine the son, his mother Monica, and the mothering God).

will rejoice" (Is 66:12-14).² Another long quotation is found in a work that is now recognized as authentic: "For Zion was saying: the Lord has abandoned me, and God has forgotten me. Will a woman forget her baby, or is it possible that she shows no mercy to the fruit (*foetus*) of her womb? Even if she forgets, I will never forget you, says the Lord. See, I have branded your walls on the palms of my hands" (Is 49:14-16).³

When Augustine explains the text of Ps 27:10: "My father and my mother have abandoned me, but the Lord has taken me up", he says: "He (sc. the psalmist) has made himself a little child for God. He made God father and mother. He is Father because He has created, because He calls, He gives orders, and He governs. He is Mother because He fosters, He nourishes, He gives suck, and He holds on to the child ... Let us listen to the voice of the Lord who exhorts and comforts us; the voice of Him whom we have instead of the father and mother who have abandoned us".⁴

Male and female characteristics of God are described here in a rather conventional way. But the female divine qualities of God, *fovere*, *nutrire*, *lactare*, and *continere*, have all to do with God's care and mercy.

Fovere. This word means literally "to warm", a term associated with the image of a mother bird incubating her eggs, or a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings. It can also mean the warming action of love: to fondle, to caress, to foster. Another meaning has its use in a medicinal context: fomenting tumors and wounds with water. In his explanation of the psalmverse 91:4: "He will cover you between his shoulders, and you will hope under his wings", Augustine sees a connection between shoulders and wings, for wings are attached to the shoulders. God presses

² *De civitate dei* XX,21. CCL 48,736-737: "Haec dicit Dominus: Ecce ego declino in eos ut flumen pacis et ut torrens inundans gloriam gentium. Filii eorum super umeros portabuntur et super genua consolabuntur. Quem ad modum si quem mater consoletur, ita ego vos consolabor; et in Hierusalem consolabimini, et videbitis ... Ibi post labores aerumnarum curarumque mortalium consolabimur, tamquam parvuli eius in umeris genibusque portati".

³ *Epist. ad catholicos de secta donatistarum* 7,16. CSEL 52,248-249: "Dixit autem Sion: dereliquit me dominus et deus oblitus est mei. Numquid capiet oblivio mulierem filii sui vel potest fieri ut non misereatur foetus uteri sui? Nunc ecce etsi illam oblivio habebit, me tamen nullo modo oblivio capiet, dicit dominus. Ecce super manus meas descripsi muros tuos".

⁴ *Enarr. 2 in ps.* 26,18 and 23. CCL 38, 164 and 167: "*Quoniam pater meus et mater mea dereliquerunt me. Fecit se parvulum Deo; ipsum fecit patrem, ipsum fecit matrem. Pater est, quia condidit, quia vocat, quia iubet, quia regit; mater, quia fovet, quia nutrit, quia lactat, quia continet ... Dominus autem adsumpsit me, et regendum et nutriendum ... Audiamus et vocem Domini desuper exhortantis nos, consolantis nos; illius vocem, quem habemus pro patre et matre qui nos dereliquerunt; illius vocem audiamus*".

us on his bosom in order to protect us under his wings, so that the weak chickens cannot be carried off by birds of prey.⁵ It is part of God's mercy to foster good people, although his mercy also embraces wicked and ungrateful people.⁶ Speaking of God's mercy and warm love, Augustine also uses the word "incubate". It is enough that God incubates, takes possession of us, bends low over us, when our love has become cold.⁷ Thus Augustine prays: "Lord God, have mercy. Let not they who pass along the way trample upon the featherless young bird. Send your angel to put it back into the nest, so that it may live until it can fly". It is dangerous to leave the safe nest, before one can fly. Augustine continues recalling his own experience, and how the merciful Lord has taken him up and put back into the nest.⁸ In his *Confessions*, Augustine tells us that he has thought of God as a reality spread over unlimited spaces, and thus has made God into an idol of his own imagination. But God's hidden action did not leave him because "He fostered the head of the ignorant in order not to let him see vanity".⁹

Nutrire and *lactare* are closely connected to each other. Augustine brackets both words normally together. God shows us his maternal mercy (*materna misericordia*) by nourishing us with milk (Is 60:16). "The Lord, our God, is merciful and compassionate, consoling the distressed, nourish-

⁵ *En. in ps.* 90, s. 1,5. CCL 39,1258. *En. in ps.* 90, s. 2,2. ib. 1267: "Quomodo autem te protegit Deus? *Inter scapulas suas obumbrabit tibi*: id est, ante pectus suum te ponet, ut alis suis te protegat; si modo agnoscas infirmitatem tuam, ut quasi pullus infirmus fugias sub alas matris, ne a milvo rapiaris".

⁶ *De civitate dei* I,8. CCL 47,7: "Dicet aliquis: Cur ergo ista divina misericordia etiam ad impios ingratosque pervenit? ... Itemque misericordia dei fovendos amplectitur bonos, sicut severitas Dei puniendos corripit malos".

⁷ *Sermo* 273,4,4. PL 38,1250: "Sufficit quod incubuisti, sufficit quod possedisti, sufficit quod super prostratos recubuisti".

⁸ *Confessiones* XII,27,37. CCL 27,237: "... domine deus, miserere, ne implumem pullum conculcent qui transeunt viam, et mitte angelum tuum, qui eum reponat in nido, ut vivat, donec volet". *Sermo* 51,6. ed. P. Verbraken, *Revue Bénédictine* 91(1981), p. 27: "Quam securi discitis, quam tuti, quicumque adhuc parvuli estis, in nido fidei, et spiritua-lem escam accipitis. Ego autem miser, cum me ad volandum idoneum putarem, reliqui nidum, et prius cecidi quam volarem. Sed dominus misericors me, a transeuntibus ne conculcarer et morerer, levavit et in nido reposuit". Cf. *De musica* VI,1,1. PL 32,1163: "... praeceptis saluberrimae religionis, et nido fidei christianae pennas nutriant".

⁹ *Confessiones* VII,14,20. CCL 27,106: "Sed posteaquam fovisti caput nescientis et clausisti oculos meos, ne viderent vanitatem, cessavi de me paululum, et consopita est insania mea". See R.J. O'CONNELL, *Saint Augustine's Early Theory of Man*, A.D. 386-391. Cambridge Mass., 1969, p. 65-86.

ing the little ones, taking care for the weak".¹⁰ Telling the story of the publican and the pharisee, I think that we must interpret the words "The publican showed his dry throat, and he knocked piously against the breasts he wanted to be filled" as said of the breasts of God's mercy.¹¹ God is the origin as well of the pregnancy of the mothers as of the pregnancy of the world with its causes of things that are coming to birth.¹² Augustine calls himself a little child that sucks God's milk: "What am I, when all is well with me, except one sucking your milk and feeding on You, the incorruptible food?".¹³ Referring to Hebr 5:12 "You have become persons who need milk instead of solid food", Augustine warns not to remain dependent on milk alone, for Holy Scripture forbids this. God wishes to nourish us with milk in such a way that we do not remain at that level. "We should avoid and fear, sisters and brothers, that no one is taken away from milk prematurely. Every grown child is taken away from milk. But this should not be done when the child is still upon its mother's breast. It needs milk as long as the child which has been carried in the womb, is carried in the hands of the mother (for it has been carried in the womb to be born; it is carried in the hands to grow); it is still on the mother's breast". This stage of milk is the stage of humbleness. After having quoted again Hebr 5:12-14, Augustine declares that the milk of faith is necessary for those who are not capable of understanding spiritual things, in order to avoid erroneous doctrines.¹⁴ The same image of breasts, milk and the

¹⁰ *Enarr. 2 in ps. 30*, s. 1,9. CCL 38,197: "Hic enim lacte nos nutrit (sc. Deus) ... et usus est materna misericordia". *Epist. 69,1*. CSEL 34/2,244: "Sed dominus deus noster misericors et miserator consolans afflictos, nutriens parvulos, curans infirmos ...". Cf. *Enarr. in ps. 39,2*. CCL 38,425: "... etsi parvulus, etsi infirmus, exige misericordiam. Non vides teneros agnos capitibus pulsare ubera matrum, ut lacte satientur? *Sustinens*, inquit, *sustinui Dominum*".

¹¹ *Sermo 36,11*. CCL 41,443: "Aridas fauces ostendebat, pie ubera implenda pulsabat: Domine, inquit, tundens pectus, oculos deiciens in terram, *propitius esto mihi peccatori*". Cf. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, note 50.

¹² *De Trinitate III,8* (9,16). CCL 50,143: "Nam sicut matres gravidae sunt fetibus, sic ipse mundus gravidus est causis nascentium quae in illo non creantur nisi ab illa summa essentia ...".

¹³ *Confessiones IV,1,1*. CCL 27,40: "Aut quid sum, cum mihi bene est, nisi sugens lactem aut fruens te cibo, qui non corrumpitur?". Cf. It is God who fills the breasts of his mother and nurses with the consolations of milk: "Exceperunt ergo me consolationes lactis humani, nec mater mea vel nutrices meae sibi ubera implebant, sed tu ...". *Ib. I,6,7*. CCL 27,4.

¹⁴ *Enarr. in ps. 130,12-13*. CCL 40,1907-1909: "Sed rursus sunt quidam homines, qui cum audierint quia humiles esse debent, dimittunt se, nihil volunt discere, putantes quia si aliquid didicerint superbi erunt; et remanent in solo lacte. Quos reprehendit scriptura, dicens: *Et facti estis opus habentes lacte, non solido cibo*. Sic enim nos Deus vult nutrirī lacte, ut non ibi remaneamus ... Ergo non debet homo extollere cor suum in superbiam,

weaning of the child is used to describe how God has filled this world with bitterness just as mothers or wet-nurses spread something bitter around their nipples, to repel the babies so that they will no longer ask for milk.¹⁵ Putting our hope in a human being can also be equated with wishing to be nourished with milk. Augustine uses here the word "mammothreptus", a child nourished for too long a time by the breast. Therefore, nurses rub some bitter substance on their nipples, so that the little one starts to desire solid food, that is, people start to say: not any human being, but You are my God (cf. Ps 31:14).¹⁶ Augustine compares God also with a physician treating putrefying wounds, and with a mother rubbing her child in the bath, but both do this out of love.¹⁷

Continere is not so easy to translate. Literally it means "to keep together", "to hold on to", "to press in one's arms". God *continet* those in whom He dwells.¹⁸ I interpret this term as nearly synonymous with *amplectere*, to embrace. Thus Augustine describes God's mercy as embracing the good ones in order to fondle them.¹⁹ He refers also to examples taken from daily life. A woman who is pregnant hopes to have her baby, but does not see it yet; but when she gives it suck, then she embraces the child

sed debet levare in doctrinam verbi Dei ... Ergo cavendum, fratres, et timendum est ne quis ante tempus ablactetur. Nam omnis grandis puer separatur a lacte. Sed ne quis tunc a lacte separetur, quando adhuc super matrem suam est. Cum autem portatur manibus matris, qui portatus est utero (portatus est enim utero ut nasceretur; portatur manibus ut crescat), lacte opus habet; adhuc super matrem suam est". *In evang. Johannis tr.* 98,4-5. CCL 36,578-579: "Hoc ergo qui invalida et inexcercitata mente non possunt, profecto nisi fidei quodam lacte teneantur, ut et invisibilia quae non vident, et intelligibilia quae nondum intellegunt, credant, facile ad vanas et sacrilegas fabulas ... ducuntur".

¹⁵ *Sermo* 311,17,14. PL 38,1419: "Matres vel nutrices, ne pueri multum sugant, ubi eos grandescere viderint, et non jam decet ut lacte nutriantur, illos tamen moleste mammis inhiare, circumcidunt papillas suas aliqua amaritudine, qua offensus parvulus, lac ulterius non requirat ... Implevit Deus amaritudinibus mundum; et inhias tu, incumbis tu, sugis tu ...".

¹⁶ *Enarr.* 2 in ps. 30, s. 2,12. CCL 38,210: "Si adtendis adhuc hominem, et eum quaeris imitari, et ex illo pendere, adhuc lacte vis nutriri, et fies mammothreptus, quales dicuntur pueri qui diu sugunt, quod non decet ... Faciunt enim hoc nutrices mammothreptis, ut aliqua amara ponunt in papillis suis, quibus offensi parvuli ab ubere resiliant, et ad mensam inhient ... Non homo quisquam, sed tu es Deus meus".

¹⁷ *Enarr.* in ps. 33, s. 2,20. CCL 38,295: "Numquid dicis illud de Deo: Quanta patior, et nemo me audit? ... Sed medicus est, adhuc putre habes nescio quid. Clamas; sed adhuc secat ... Matres quomodo fricant in balneis ad salutem filios? Nonne parvuli clamant inter manus earum? ... Nonne plenae sunt pietate? ... Sic et Deus noster plenus est caritate".

¹⁸ *Enarr.* in ps. 122,4. CCL 40,1817: "In quibus Deus habitat, ipse illos continet". *Enarr.* 1 in ps. 21,11. CCL 38,118: "...non autem cecidi, quia continuisti me".

¹⁹ *De civitate dei* I,8. CCL 48,7: "misericordia dei fovendos amplectitur bonos".

she hoped for.²⁰ A mother animal pushes sometimes away her calf with a kind of irritation as it tries to suck; nevertheless, it embraces her calf with the inner disposition of a mother.²¹

In his *Confessions*, Augustine writes: "Cast yourself on Him. Have no fear. He will not draw back and let you fall. Cast yourself trustfully on Him: He will take you up".²² Taking up a child was an important action in former times; it meant the recognition of a newborn baby as one's own child. Augustine underlines the difference between the taking up of the child by its parents and by God. A mother does this in a temporal way which is by nature limited, God does it for all eternity.²³ God takes care of us before we are born; how can He fail to care for us now that we have been born and become believers? Here on earth, He fosters and helps us. Cast yourself on Him because He will carry and hold you fast. God carrying a human being reminds us of Is 46:4: "In your old age I shall be still the same, when your hair is grey I shall still carry you. I have already done so, and I will carry you". In the *Confessions* this theme occurs several times. "O Lord our God, under the shadow of your wings let us hope; protect us and carry us. You will carry us as little ones and even up to our grey hairs You will carry us".²⁴ "Behold, You are present, and You deliver us from all wretched errors, and You put us on your way, and You console us, and You say to us: Run forward. I will carry you, and I will bring you to the end and there also I will carry you".²⁵

Within this context, we find also the expression *sinus Dei*, the breast or lap of God. "Let them be converted, and behold, You are there within their hearts, within the hearts of those who confess to You, and cast

²⁰ *Enarr. in ps.* 39,27-28. CCL 38,444-445: "Habeat tui curam qui fecit te. Qui habuit tui curam antequam esses, quomodo non habebit curam cum iam hoc es quod voluit ut esses? ... Immo vero et hic fovet, et hic adiuvat, et hic necessaria subministrat, et noxia resecat ... Dic, Deus meus voluit, et portabit ipse et tenebit ipse. Iacta te in illum; noli putare inane esse, ut quasi praecipiteris. ... Etenim mulier praegnans in spe tumet filii, nondum videt filium; quae autem iam lactat, amplectitur quod sperabat".

²¹ *Sermo* 82,2,2. PL 38,506: "In ipsis quoque pecoribus mater aliquando bucula sugentem vitulum taedio quodam avertit irascens: sed visceribus amplectitur matris".

²² *Confessiones* VIII,11,27. CCL 27,130: "Proice te in eum, noli metuere; non se subtrahet, ut cadas: proice te securus, excipiet te".

²³ *Enarr. in ps.* 45,11. CCL 38,525: "Putasne sic te suscepit Deus, quomodo infantem te suscepit mater tua? Non sic, sed in aeternum".

²⁴ *Confessiones* IV,16,31. CCL 27,56: "O Domine, Deus noster, in velamento alarum tuarum speremus, et protege nos et porta nos. Tu portabis et parvulos et usque ad canos tu portabis". Cf. ib. I,4,4. CCL 27,2: "Deus ... portans et implens et protegens".

²⁵ Ib. VI,16,26. ib. 91: "Et ecce ades et liberas a miserabilibus erroribus et constituis nos in via tua et consolaris et dicis: 'Currite, ego feram et ego perducam et ibi ego feram'".

themselves upon You, and weep upon your breast".²⁶ We should cast all our care upon the Lord and cast ourselves wholly upon Him. He will not withdraw Himself, and let us fall. Those who are put into the lap of God should not be afraid of a human being. They must see to it that they themselves do not fall out of God's lap.²⁷

Explaining the Psalmverse "And in the covering of your wings, I will exult" (Ps 63:7), Augustine states that we are little ones who need always the protection of God's wings, even when we have grown greater. We may never become self-sufficient, for without God's protection we are nothing. If we remain always little ones under Him, then we can be great in Him.²⁸

Maternal images for Christ

What else has God done than what a loving mother does?²⁹ With this statement Augustine is referring to the incarnation of God's Wisdom, so that the incomprehensible Wisdom of God could become accessible and understandable for us, little human beings. Like a mother, God let his Word become a human being in order that this Word became fit for us. The son of God speaks as a little one to little ones. But this little one is at the same time great. We, little ones, are great in Him.

Therefore, He speaks as one who fondles and nourishes sucklings who are growing up by loving.³⁰ Mother Wisdom has herself changed into milk (*lactescere*) for the *parvuli*, so that we see at our feet a weak

²⁶ Ib. V,2,2. ib. 57: "Ipsi convertantur, et ecce ibi es in corde eorum, in corde confidentium tibi et proicientium se in te et plorantium in sinu tuo ...".

²⁷ *Sermo* 62,10,15. PL 38,421: "Omnem curam vestram super Dominum mittite, prorsus vos ipsos totos projicite in illum. Non se subducit, ut cadatis ... Quid times hominem, o homo in sinu Dei positus? Tu de illius sinu noli cadere".

²⁸ *Enarr. in ps.* 62,16. CCL 39,804: "*Et in velamento pennarum tuarum exultabo ... Parvuli sumus: ergo protegat nos Deus sub umbraculo alarum suarum. Quid cum maiores facti fuerimus? ... Nemo dicat: Protegat me, cum parvulus sum, quasi aliquando ad tantam magnitudinem possit pervenire, quae sibi sufficiat. Sine protectione Dei nihil es. Semper ab illo protegi velimus; tunc semper in illo magni esse poterimus, si semper sub illo parvuli simus*".

²⁹ *Sermo Lambot* 21,4. PLS 2,819: "Et ipse dominus quodammodo ad nos lactandos videte quid fecit. Sapientiam suam ... idonei sunt angeli capere ... homines autem tali cibo uti non possunt, quia infirmi sunt, quid ergo fecit deus, nisi quod pia mater?".

³⁰ *In Iohannis evangelium tr.* 21,1. CCL 36,212: "Qua hoc arte sapientiae suae faciat, in eius verbis agnoscimus. Loquitur enim parvulis parvus; sed ipse ita parvus ut et magnus; nos autem parvi, sed in illo magni; loquitur ergo tamquam fovens et nutriens lactantes, et amando crescentes".

Godhead.³¹ Here on earth Christ who promised us a heavenly food, has fed us with milk, showing his motherly mercy. Thus the Lord made his Wisdom like milk for us.³² The incarnation can be compared with the milk that fills the breasts of a mother and that she gives her sucking child. When Augustine answers the question "How could Christ have been born in such a great weakness?", he responds to the Pelagians that Christ's flesh was "in the likeness of the sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3). Then, he describes the difference between the weakness of a human child and the young of animals. Even the smallest animals can run about, recognize their mothers, and suck the udder without external help. They discover with remarkable ease their mother's udder, although it is concealed from ordinary sight. But newborn human babies cannot walk, and need the help of their mother to find her breast. Even close to the nipple, and despite their desire for food, they cry instead of sucking.³³

Milk has the figurative significance of grace, because it is not the mother who creates milk, but it is God's free gift (*gratis*) to his creature in order to feed the children.³⁴ The same idea occurs again, when Augustine states that Christ can be called a "mountain with a rich production of

³¹ *Confessiones* VII,18,24. CCL 27,108: "... verbum caro factum est, ut infantiae nostrae lactesceret sapientia tua, per quam creasti omnia ... sed potius infirmarentur videntes ante pedes suos infirmam divinitatem ...". In *Johannis evang. tr.* 98,6. CCL 36,579: "Sicut fecit etiam mater ipsa Sapientia, quae cum sit in excelsis angelorum solidus cibus, dignata est quodam modo lactescere parvulis, cum Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis". The expression *mater sapientia* occurs also in *Sermo Denis* 13,6. MA I,60. *Enarr. in ps.* 110,9. CCL 40,1625. *De civitate dei* XIII,21. CCL 48,404 and the texts quoted in note 54.

³² *Enarr. 2 in ps.* 30, s. 1,9. CCL 38,197: "Hic enim lacte nos nutrit, qui nobis caelestem cibum promisit, et usus est materna misericordia. Sicut enim mater lactans eandem escam, cui sumendae idoneus infans non est, per carnem traicit, et lac infundit ... sic Dominus sapientiam suam ut lac nobis faceret, carne indutus venit ad nos. Ergo corpus Christi loquitur: *Et enutries me*". See T. VAN BAVEL, *L'humanité du Christ comme lac parvulorum* et comme *via* dans la spiritualité de saint Augustin, in: *Augustiniana* 7(1957) 245-281.

³³ *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* I,38,69. CSEL 60,69-70.

³⁴ *Sermo Lambot* 21,4. PLS 2,819: "... lac significat gratiam, quia gratis datur ... lactis sucus currit ad ubera ut parvulos esurientes gratuito pascatur ... lac, si nemo suxerit, onerat matrem ... Et ipse dominus quodammodo ad nos lactandos videte quid fecit. Sapientiam suam, quam nemo nostrum posset mente comprehendere tamquam solidum cibum ... traicit soliditatem cibi mater in carnem, et quodammodo incarnat ut sit aptus infanti. Sic deus incarnavit verbum ut esset aptum parvulis nobis". *Enarr. in ps.* 143,2. CCL 40,2074: "Quia ergo gratia fecit impleri legem, significatur autem gratia lacte; hoc enim est in carne gratuitum, ubi mater non quaerit accipere, sed satagit dare; hoc mater gratis dat, et contristatur si desit qui accipiat". *S.* 25,1. CCL 41,335: "Gratia eius significata est nomine lactis et mellis. Dulcis et nutritoria est". *S.* 32,7. CCL 41,402: "Quid tam significans gratiam quam lactis copia?".

cheese" (*mons incaseatus*, according to the translation Augustine had before him). Christ is called that way because of the little ones who must be fed with milk, and milk is the material for making cheese. Now milk signifies in a wonderful way grace and mercy, for it flows from the abundance of the internal organs of the mother.³⁵ However, the divine grace does not mean that we have to do nothing. The reality of the incarnation must not be seen only as an activity of the merciful God, it is at the same time an appeal made to us. If there is nobody to suck the mother's milk, then this fact causes inconvenience for her and creates a painful situation.³⁶

This idea can be applied to Christ. He made Himself a human being by his birth and suffering, so that human beings could talk about Him who remains ineffable as God. His *forma servi* is no appearance but reality: He is born as a human being, He has suffered, was crucified, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. Speaking about the woman seeking the lost drachma, Augustine sees the woman as the image of the flesh of Christ.³⁷ For the same reason, he can describe Christ as being in birth pangs.³⁸ We must take his incarnation seriously, that is, we should suck what He has become for our benefit. Sucking, however, is not an end in itself. It is our only means to grow, so that we become able to understand that Christ is more than merely a human being. We must ascend to his divine dimension as Word of God.³⁹ Thus Christ is the truth as well for

³⁵ *Enarr. in ps.* 67,22. CCL 39,885: "Ipse (sc. Christus) est mons incaseatus, propter parvulos gratia tamquam lacte nutriendos; mons uber, ad roborandos atque ditandos donorum excellentia; nam et ipsum lac, unde fit caseus, miro modo significat gratiam; manat quippe ex abundantia viscerum maternorum, et misericordia delectabili parvulis gratis infunditur". Cf. *Enarr. in ps.* 118, s. 17,8. CCL 40,1722: "*Mons incaseatus, mons uber*; et intelligitur gratia plenus; nam et illud quidam *coagulatus* interpretati sunt". Hilary and Ambrose, on the other hand, consider *lac coagulatum vel caseatum* in a negative way as corrupted, bitter milk, *nec suavitatem habens nec gratiam* (HILARY, *Tractatus super psalmos*, ps. 67,15. and ps. 118,9,7. PL 9,454 and 562. AMBROSE, *Expositio de psalmo* 118, s. 9,19. PL 15,1397).

³⁶ *Sermo* 82,2,2. PL 38,506: "... mater aliquando bucula sugentem vitulum taedium quodam avertit irascens ... Quasi taedium facit, cum impingit: quaeritur tamen, si deest". For the expression "lac, si nemo suxerit, onerat matrem", see note 34.

³⁷ *In Joh. evang. tr.* 7,21. CCL 36,79: "... mulier invenit drachmam, sed quaesivit drachmam. Quae est mulier? Caro Christi".

³⁸ See later, note 51.

³⁹ *Enarr. in ps.* 119,2. CCL 40,1779: "Quia et Christus talem se fecit nascendo et patiendo, ut possent de illo homines loqui: quia de homine homo facile loquitur. De Deo homo quando loquitur sic quomodo Deus est? ... Quomodo ergo cibum mater comedit, ut per carnem traiciat ad infantem lac factum, sic cibus angelorum Dominus Verbum caro factum est, et factus est lac ... *Jesum Christum*, inquit, *et hunc crucifixum* ... Suge quod pro te factus est, et crescis ad id quod est". Cf. *Enarr. in ps.* 109,12. CCL 40,1611-1613.

the stronger ones as for the little ones; for the former He is bread, for the latter He is milk. To the little ones the humility of Christ is preached, that is, the flesh of Christ and his crucifixion, because He is the milk that is sufficient for the little ones.⁴⁰ The rule of faith is the same for the little ones and for the great ones, and also the heavenly bliss will be the same for both.⁴¹ There is no contradiction between the message addressed to the little ones and to the more learned ones. The crucified Christ is milk for those who can only think in a fleshly or material way; He is solid food for those who are able to grasp spiritual things. This does not mean that they hear a different message, but it means that their understanding is weaker or stronger. The stronger ones understand better all the implications of the message, such as: Christ is the wisdom, the justice, the sanctification, and the salvation of God; Christ is God, creator and mediator.⁴²

De vera religione 26,49. CSEL 77,35: "in uberibus utilis historiae"; this expression indicates the stage of faith based on authority. Cf. *En. in ps.* 8,5. CCL 38,51: "Consultitur autem cum illi quoque nondum capaces cognitionis rerum spiritualium atque aeternarum, nutriuntur fide temporalis historiae, quae pro salute nostra post Patriarchas et Prophetas ab excellentissima Dei virtute atque sapientia etiam suscepti hominis sacramento administrata est ... ut auctoritate commotus... possit currere cum sanctis, non iam parvulus in lacte, sed iuvenis in cibo, comprehendere latitudinem, longitudinem, altitudinem et profundum, scire etiam supereminentem scientiam caritatis Christi". Cf. IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haereses* IV,38,1. SC 100**, 946: "Et propter hoc, quasi infantibus, ille qui erat panis perfectus Patris lac nobis semetipsum praestavit, quod erat secundum hominem ejus adventus, ut quasi a mamilla carnis ejus nutriti et par talem lactationem assueti manducare et bibere Verbum Dei".

⁴⁰ *Sermo* 8,5. CCL 41,84: "Veritatem et in pane et in lacte, in pane magnorum, in lacte parvulorum. Idem quippe panis, ut lac fiat, per carnem traicitur". *En. in ps.* 131,24. CCL 40,1924: "Deus ipse est panis. Panis, ut lac nobis fieret, descendit ad terram; et ait suis: *Ego sum panis vivus, qui de caelo descendi*". *C. Julianum* II,10,37. PL 44,700: "... oppugnans catholicam fidem quam in lacte suxerunt, quam in cibo sumpserunt, cujus lac et cibum parvis magnisque ministraverunt ...".

⁴¹ *Epist.* 187,8,29. CSEL 57,106-107: "Hos tales etiam si, antequam perveniant ad spiritalem mentis aetatem, ubi non lacte alantur sed solido cibo, dies vitae huius extremus invenerit, perficiet in eis habitator illorum, quicquid hic intelligentiae minus habuerunt ... regulam fidei pusillis magnisque communem in ecclesia perseveranter tenent ... donec eis deus revelet ...". Cf. *Epist.* 120,1,4. CSEL 34/2,707-708.

⁴² *In evang. Johannis tr.* 98,2-3. CCL 36,576-577: "... ipse Christus crucifixus ... non eo modo a carnalibus quo ab spiritualibus cogitatur, et illis est lac, istis cibus; quia et si non audiunt amplius, intellegunt amplius". Ib. 6. ib. 579: "Sed huic lacti absit ut sit contrarius cibus rerum spiritualium firma intelligentia capiendus ... Proinde nec sic parvuli sunt lactandi, ut semper non intellegant Deum Christum, nec sic ablactandi, ut deserant hominem Christum". The *parvuli* possess the Holy Spirit, even if they cannot understand what the Holy Spirit is: *Sermo* 71,18,31. ed. P. Verbraken, Rev. Bén. 75 (1965), p. 99: "Habent ergo istum spiritum in ecclesia constituti parvuli in Christo, adhuc animales atque carnales, quid habeant percipere non valentes". Cf. *Sermo* 154,8,8. PL 38,837. *Confessiones* XIII,23,33. CCL 27,261.

But it is not so that in our religion there are secrets which must be kept hidden from the weaker ones. The essence of our faith, which is to be preached to all, is contained in the Creed and the Our Father. When it happens that the stronger ones speak to the weaker ones about things they are unable to understand, the former must beware of causing an aversion to their discourse about the truth; rather, they should make them understand the truth in their discourse.⁴³ In this context, Augustine describes faith as milk (*lac fidei* or *fides lactis*).⁴⁴

Speaking about the psalm-verse "Like a child in its mother's arms that has been weaned" (Ps 131:2), Augustine describes the process of ascension from Christ as milk to Christ as the Word with God as an *ablactatio*, the weaning of a baby. The child has to get out of the habit of drinking only milk. First we should believe strongly in what Christ has become in view of our weakness, but later our attention must be directed to Christ as the bread of the angels.⁴⁵ We must listen to the incarnate Word of

⁴³ *In evang. Johannis* 3. ib. 577: "Hoc igitur primo cognito, quod ea ipsa quae simul audiunt spiritales atque carnales, pro suo quisque modulo capiunt ... illi ut lactis alimentum, isti ut cibi solidamentum, nulla videtur necessitas, ut aliqua secreta doctrinae taceantur, et abscondantur fidelibus parvulis". Ib. 5. ib. 579: "Ex quo fit ut spiritales ista carnalibus non omnimodo taceant, propter catholicam fidem, quae omnibus praedicanda est, nec tamen sic disserant, ut volentes ea perducere ad intellegentiam non capacem, facilius fastidiri faciant in veritate sermonem, quam in sermone percipi veritatem ... Quod autem in lactis commemoratione posuit et doctrinam, ipsa est quae per symbolum traditur et orationem dominicam".

⁴⁴ *En. in ps.* 130,11. CCL 40,1907: "Hinc crescimus, ipso lacte nutriamur; antequam validi simus ad capiendum Verbum, non recedamus a fide lactis nostri". For *fidei lac*; see *En. in ps.* 10,6. CCL 38,79. *In Joh. evang. tr.* 18,7 and 98,4. CCL 36,184 and 578. *Epist.* 243,8. CSEL 57,575. Cf. *In Johannis evang. tr.* 1,17. CCL 36,10: "A Christo per carnem nato non recedat, donec perveniat ad Christum ab uno Patre natum". *En. in ps.* 64,15. CCL 39,836: "Parvulis enim adhuc et infirmis stillantur quaedam de sacramentis, quia non possunt capere plenitudinem veritatis ... tamen primo de ipso cibo cui minus idoneus erat, illi lac factum est".

⁴⁵ *Enarr. in ps.* 130,9. CCL 40,1905-1906: "*Quemadmodum qui ablatus est a lacte super matrem suam ... Sed cresce de lacte, ut ad panem pervenias. Et quomodo, inquis, cresco de lacte? Quod tibi factus est Christus ad infirmitatem tuam, hoc primum crede et fortiter tene ... Panis ergo de mensa traicitur per matris mamillam, ut sic perveniat idem alimentum ad parvum infantem. Sic Dominus noster Jesus Christus cum esset Verbum apud Patrem ... ut panem angelorum manducaret homo ... Verbum caro factum est*". Ib. 13-14. ib. 1909: "...impleat praecepta humilitatis. Habet ubi se exerceat: credat in Christum, ut possit intellegere Christum. Videre Verbum non potest, capere non potest aequalitatem Verbi cum Patre ... credat hoc, et sugat ... Quid ergo? cum videro quae non poteram videre, et cepero quae non poteram capere, iam securus ero? perfectus ero? Non, quamdiu hic vivis". See also *Enarr. in ps.* 117,22. CCL 40,1664: "... quicumque Deum Verbum intellegere volunt, non eis sufficiat caro, quod propter eos Verbum factum est, ut lacte nutrentur".

God, that is, we must patiently suck milk in order to be fed by the food of Wisdom itself. There is a difference between the solid food a mother transforms into milk and the Word of God, for the Word of God remains as such unchanged.⁴⁶

Although Augustine uses almost exclusively the image of milk with regard to Christ's humanity, there is at least one text (written after the year 420) in which he makes a serious reservation. The likeness between transcending Christ's humanity and the weaning of a child has its shortcomings. This likeness does not completely hold true. *Ablactare* puts an end to sucking milk and the child does no longer look for the breast. This is different with regard to Christ's humanity. Christian faith never means deserting Christ as a human being. The crucified Christ remains an essential element of faith as well for the little ones who suck milk as for those who are more advanced. For this reason, Augustine prefers the image of Christ as a foundation. A foundation does not disappear and is never withdrawn; on the contrary, upon the foundation the rest of the house is built.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Sermo* 117,10,16. PL 38,670: "Audiamus Verbum carnem factum. Ideo enim venit, ideo suscepit infirmitatem nostram, ut possis firmam locutionem capere Dei portantis infirmitatem tuam. Et vere dictum est lac. Lac enim dat parvulis, ut cibum sapientiae det maioribus. Lactare patienter, ut avide pascaris ... Quid facit mater? Incarnat escam, et conficit lac de ista. Conficit nobis quod capere possimus. Sic Verbum caro factum est, ut lacte parvuli nutriremur, qui ad cibum quidem eramus infantes".

⁴⁷ *In Johannis evang. tr.* 98,6. CCL 36,580: "In hoc quippe non convenit huic rei similitudo materni lactis et solidi cibi, sed potius fundamenti; quia et puer quando ablactatur, ut ab alimentis infantiae iam recedat, inter solidos cibos non repetit ubera quae sugibat; Christus autem crucifixus, et lac sugentibus, et cibis est proficientibus. Fundamenti vero ideo est aptior similitudo, quia ut perficiatur quod struitur, additur aedificium, non subtrahitur fundamentum". We speak here of the insufficiency of the image of *lac*. The idea, however, that the life and works of Jesus here on earth, and especially his Cross, are sufficient for the Christians occurs often in Augustine's works. See *Enarr. in ps.* 120,12. CCL 40,1797: "Parvulis praedicatur humilitas Christi, et caro Christi, et crucifixio Christi; quia ipsum est lac quod sufficit parvulis. Et ideo non relinquuntur in nocte parvuli"; *Enarr. in ps.* 109,12. CCL 40,1611-1612: "Hoc credimus de forma servi, quod possumus capere, dum adhuc servi sumus. Hoc est enim illud lac parvulorum ..."; *In Johannis evang. tr.* 2,3. CCL 36,13: "Melius est ergo non videre mente id quod est, et tamen a Christi cruce non recedere, quam videre illud mente, et crucem Christi contemnere"; *Sermo* 160,3. PL 38,874: "Mane, noli transire". Cf. *De fide et operibus* 10,15. CSEL 41,52-53.

The theme of *Christus fundamentum*, and especially the idea of faith in Jesus' activity on earth as foundation of our faith, occurs frequently in Augustine's works. A foundation belongs to the building: *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 7,12. PL 44,970: "... quasi ad aedificium, inquam, non pertineat fundamentum! Quod si in primis et maxime pertinet, in vanum laborat praedicando aedificans fidem, nisi eam Dominus miserando intus aedificet". *In Johannis evangelium tr.* 39,3. CCL 36,346: "... a fundamento fidei non recedamus, ut ad culmen perfectionis veniamus". *Ib.* 40,8. *ib.* 354: "Magnum est quod incipit a fide, sed contemnitur. Fundamentum solet etiam in aedificio ab imperitis contem-

To conclude this section I wish to pay attention to two other thoughts. There is a link between Christ as milk and the eucharist. The humble Christ is also the deepest ground of the eucharist, for Christ wished to be our saviour in his body and blood. By virtue of his humility He commended his body and blood to us. If He were not humble, He could neither be eaten nor drunk. In this way, too, the table of the Lord is like milk for the little ones.⁴⁸

Commenting on the psalm-verse "Like the eyes of slaves fixed on their master's hand; like the eyes of slave-girls fixed on the hand of their mistress" (Ps 123:2), Augustine draws the conclusion that Christ is at the same time *dominus* and *domina*. Christ is not only *dominus* insofar He is divine, but, as the power and the wisdom of God, He is also *domina* (cf. 1 Cor 1:24).⁴⁹ Christ can be called bridegroom and bride, for bridegroom

ni". With regard to the facts of Jesus' life, we read: *Sermo* 362,7,7-10,10. PL 39,1614-1617: "... et cum praedicantur, fidei nostrae actiones quaedam temporales et transitoriae praedicantur. Numquid quia ipsae transeunt, quod per eas aedificatur similiter transit? ... aedificabatur aliquid in fide christiana ... quod vivit in aeternum etiam ipsa in illo natura humana, quam suscipere, et in qua nasci, et in qua mori et sepeliri dignatus est, hoc aedificatum est, hoc semper manet ... in terra fundamentum praemittitur; ut supra fundamentum securus instruat qui aedificat".

⁴⁸ *Enarr. in ps.* 33, s. 1,6. CCL 38,277: "In corpore et sanguine suo voluit esse salutem nostram. Unde autem commendavit corpus et sanguinem suum? De humilitate sua. Nisi enim esset humilis, nec manducaretur, nec biberetur ... Oportebat ergo ut mensa illa lactesceret, et ad parvulos perveniret ... per humilitatem mamillae et lactis sucum, de ipso pane pascit infantem. Quomodo ergo de ipso pane pavit nos sapientia Dei? Quia *Verbum caro factum est*". Cf. *Sermo* 130,2. PL 38,726: "Si enim hoc [= homo] non factus esset, carnem ipsius non haberemus; si carnem ipsius non haberemus, panem altaris non manducaremus". See also the mention of *mensa dominica* in the text quoted note 134. The theme of the eucharist as milk is frequent in the Fathers: see J. BETZ, Die Eucharistie als Gottes Milch in frühchristlicher Sicht, in: *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 106(1984) 1-26. 167-185. Augustine's predecessors base themselves on 1 Peter 2:2 "tamquam modo nati infantes rationabile et innocens lac concupiscite", which I found only once in Augustine, *Sermo* 353,1,1. PL 39,1560.

⁴⁹ *Enarr. in ps.* 122,5. CCL 40,1817-1818: "Et servi sumus, et ancilla sumus. Ille et dominus est, et domina est ... Non mirum si servi sumus, et ille dominus est; sed mirum si ancilla sumus, et ille domina est. Sed neque hoc mirum quia ancilla sumus; ecclesia enim sumus; nec illud mirum, quia et ipse domina est; virtus enim est et sapientia Dei ... Cum ergo audis Christum, leva oculos tuos in manus Domini tui; cum audis Dei virtutem et Dei sapientiam, leva oculos tuos in manus dominae tuae: quia et servus et ancilla es: servus, quia populus es; ancilla, quia ecclesia es". *Populus* seems to be a reference to humankind as such, whereas *ancilla* refers to the members of the church. The interpretation of this text causes some difficulty. S. SOENNECKEN, Misogynie oder Philogynie? Philologisch-theologische Untersuchungen zum Wortfeld *Frau* bei Augustinus. Frankfurt a. M. 1993, p. 115 sees here a direct application of the term *domina* to God. I think, however, that this application is only indirect: Christ is only *domina* as power and wisdom of God, and this might be a veiled reference to the incarnate Christ, for the Pauline

and bride are one person, but only with regard to the flesh of Christ, and not to his divinity. He is *sponsus* as our Head, He is *sponsa* in his Body. It is clear that Augustine refuses to speak of a complete identity between Christ and the faithful or the church; for him it is a matter of identification based on love.⁵⁰ In this way, we can call Christ bridegroom and bride.

Within this context, Augustine attributes labour pains to Christ. The Head is above, the members below. If Christ were not in labour and in pain, He would not have said: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). Christ was first in labour, and then He made that Paul was in labour.⁵¹ Christ as bridegroom (*vir*) is also the source of the regeneration brought about by the sacraments, regardless whether they are administered by the church as mother or by a maidservant.⁵²

Christ as gallina and pelicanus

Augustine has been always fascinated by the care of the most savage beasts for their young; by their cohabitation, by begetting, bearing, suckling and rearing their young. He refers to the example of tigers, lions, wolves, foxes, eagles and owls. What kite, however solitary in circling over his prey, does not join a mate for reproduction, build a nest, hatch the

text declares "*ipsis vero vocatis Iudaeis et Graecis, Christum Dei virtutem et Dei sapientiam*"; the unconverted among them do not consider Him as *virtus et sapientia Dei*. JEROME explains *domina* as said of the Holy Spirit; strictly speaking, he says, in God there is no sex: *In Esaiam* 11,40,9-11. CCL 73,459.

⁵⁰ *Sermo* 91,7,8. PL 38,571: "Nam ut noveritis, quia unus homo est sponsus et sponsa, secundum carnem Christi, non secundum divinitatem: nam secundum divinitatem quod est ille, nos esse non possumus ... Ipse sponsus, ipsa sponsa. Ipse plane sponsus in capite, sponsa in corpore". I have found no text in which Augustine declares explicitly that the *logos* or Christ is father and mother; however, we find this affirmation in some Christian writers; but *logos* has for them nearly the same meaning as Augustine's *mater sapientia*. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA speaks of the *logos* being all for the little ones: father and mother, pedagogue and nurse; the divine wisdom is a mother for human beings (*Paid.* I,6,41-42. SC 70,186-188. *Stromata* VI,16. PG 9,378A). Clement speaks also of the breasts of the *logos* and the breast of the Father: see J. BETZ, a.c., 13-15. ORIGEN (or more likely EVAGRIUS PONTICUS) holds that one can call Christ father and mother; mother because the child needs milk (with a reference to 1 Cor 3:1-2; *Exp. in Proverbia* 20,6. PG 17,212A). Cf. A. MÜLLER, *Ecclesia-Maria*. Freiburg i.d. Schw. 1951, p. 106-107.

⁵¹ *Enarr. in ps.* 52,1. CCL 39,638: "Pro parturiente sive dolente. Quis autem in hoc saeculo parturiat et doleat, agnoscunt fideles, quia inde sunt. Christus hic parturit, Christus hic dolet; caput est sursum, membra deorsum. Neque enim non parturiens et dolens diceret: *Saule, Saule, quid me persequeris?* Quo persequente parturiebat, eum conversum parturire fecit".

⁵² *De baptismo* I,10,14. CSEL 51,160: "Ergo ipsa generat et per uterum suum et per uteros ancillarum ex eisdem sacramentis tamquam ex viri sui semine".

eggs, rear the young birds, and maintain with the mother of his brood as peaceful as possible a domestic society?⁵³ Christ, too, did not think beneath his dignity to compare himself with a hen: "How often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you refused" (Mt 23:37). Augustine's commentaries on this text highlight several aspects contained in the description of Christ as a caring mother bird. The starting point is mostly the idea we dealt with in the former paragraph, namely, the divine Wisdom as mother. The hen is an image of *mater sapientia*, even *mater nostra sapientia dei*.⁵⁴ But the divine Wisdom has become weak adapting or assimilating herself to us. In this way, we can say that the Weak One feeds the weak ones.⁵⁵ Because of the weakness of the young of the turtle-dove (image of the church) Christ gave us the material to make a nest (image of faith). He dressed Himself with the hay of flesh in order to come to us. The nest is our faith in the incarnate Christ. The turtle-dove found a nest where she may lay her young (Ps 84:3-4; image of the faithful and their good works); this text can be applied to the church making a nest from the wood of the Cross.⁵⁶

To illustrate Christ's weakness Augustine gives a realistic description of the outward appearance of a hen. We see many other birds making nests, but we cannot see whether they have eggs or young in their nests. But we can recognize a mother hen by her appearance. She changes her voice, so that it breaks into a kind of hoarseness. Her feathers become bristly and loose.⁵⁷ The motive of this weakness is motherly love (*mater-*

⁵³ *De civitate dei* XIX, 12. CCL 48,677.

⁵⁴ *Quaestiones evangeliorum* I,36. CCL 44/B,28: "Sic etiam mater nostra sapientia dei per carnis susceptionem infirmata quodammodo ... protegit infirmitatem nostram". *Enarr. in ps.* 90, s. 1,5. CCL 39,1258: "Neque enim sine causa comparata est gallina ipsi Sapientiae Dei ... Quia ergo et nos infirmi eramus, infirmam se fecit Sapientia Dei; quia Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis". *Enarr. in ps.* 90, s. 2,2. CCL 39,1267: "Fugiamus sub alas matris Sapientiae, quia et ipsa Sapientia infirmata est propter nos; quia Verbum caro factum est. Sicut infirmatur gallina cum pullis suis, ut protegat eos alis suis ...".

⁵⁵ *In Johannis evang. tr.* 15,7. CCL 36,153: "Nutrit ergo ipse infirmus infirmos, tamquam gallina pullos suos; huic enim se similem fecit ...". *Sermo* 264,2. PL 38,1213: "Tuebatur autem eos revera, quemadmodum ipse dicere dignatus est, tanquam gallina pullos suos. Sicut enim gallina propter infirmitatem pullorum et ipsa infirmatur".

⁵⁶ *Enarr. in ps.* 83,7. CCL 39,1152: "Nam propter infirmitatem pullorum turturis tuae dignatus est Dominus praebere tibi unde nidum faceres; indutus est enim feno carnis, ut ad te veniret. In ista fide pone pullos tuos; in isto nido operare opera tua". *Enarr. I in ps.* 101,8. CCL 40,1432: "Et turtur nidum sibi, ecclesia Dei nidum de lignis crucis ipsius, ubi ponat pullos suos, parvulos suos".

⁵⁷ *Sermo Denis* 13,6. MA I,60: "Videte gallinae habitum, quando pullos alit, quemadmodum mutatur vox eius, et in quamdam raucetudinem frangitur. Pennae ipsae non collectae et alacres, sed hispidae et languidae: ita ut, si videas avem aliam, cuius nidum

na caritas), or rather: this weakness is love.⁵⁸ The mother hen cares for her chickens in different ways. She fosters them by her motherly warmth (*vapore materno*).⁵⁹ She protects and shelters the chickens from bad weather and especially from birds of prey. The chickens are safe under her wings. This is for Augustine an opportunity to tell the unbelievers and the Donatists that they must seek refuge under the wings of Christ: "Let not the enemy lead us astray from the way. May He who gathers us like chickens under his wings, foster us. Let us not stray from his wings and let not the hawk of the air carry us off while yet unfledged. For the Christian ought not to hope in himself; if he wishes to be strong, let him be reared by his mother's warmth".⁶⁰ In addition to keeping warm (*fovere*) and bringing forth (*generare*), it is a characteristic of the hen that she gathers and keeps together her chickens (*colligere*). The text of Matthew is also a strong argument against the Donatists dividing the church. This mother hen, that is, Christ, is full of charity, when she enfeebles herself for the sake of the chicks, lowering her voice to the cheeps of the chicks, spreading out her wings: *How often, He says, have I longed to gather your children?* To gather, not to divide. It is also used in a more anti-Pelagian sense: not to think that we can protect ourselves.⁶¹

ignores, non agnoscas an ova habeat vel pullos; gallinam autem cum videris, etiam si ova eius non videas, nec pullos eius videas, ex ipsa voce et habitu coporis intellegas matrem. Quid ergo fecit mater nostra sapientia? In carne infirmata est ...". In *Johannis evang. tr.* 15,7. CCL 36,153. *Enarr. in ps.* 58, s. 1,10. CCL 39,736. *Enarr. in ps.* 88, s. 2,14. CCL 39,1244 : "... propter pullos suos infirmata est usque ad mortem".

⁵⁸ *Enarr. in ps.* 58, s. 1,10. CCL 39,736: "Deponuntur alae, laxantur plumae, et vides circa pullos nescio quid aegrotum, et ea est materna caritas quae invenitur infirmitas. Quare ergo Dominus, nisi propter hoc, gallina esse voluit in sancta scriptura ...? Ergo hoc maternae infirmitatis est, non amissae maiestatis". *Sermo* 264,5. PL 38,1217. *Enarr. in ps.* 108,6. CCL 40,1588.

⁵⁹ *Enarr. in ps.* 88, s. 2,14. CCL 39,1244.

⁶⁰ *Ib.*, *ib.* 1243-1244: "Non nos avertat inimicus a via, ut qui colligit nos tamquam pullos suos sub alis suis, foveat nos; ne aberremus ab alis eius, ne accipiter aereus rapiat implumes adhuc pullos. Non enim de se debet sperare christianus: si vult esse firmus, vapore materno nutriatur". *Enarr. in ps.* 62,17. CCL 39,805: "Sic sunt diabolus et angeli eius, quasi milvi; sub illius gallinae alis sumus, et non nos potest contingere: gallina enim quae nos protegit, fortis est. Infirma est propter nos; sed fortis est in se Dominus noster Iesus Christus, ipsa sapientia Dei".

⁶¹ *Sermo* 265,9,11. PL 38,1224: "Ipsa charitate plena est gallina illa propter pullos infirmata, cum pullos humilians vocem suam, extendens alas suas: *Quoties*, inquit, *volui colligere filios tuos?* Colligere, non dividere". *Enarr. in ps.* 90, s. 1,5. CCL 39,1258: "Hoc dicit, ne tua protectio a te tibi sit, ne putes quia tu te potes protegere ... Si gallina protegit pullos suos sub alis suis, quanto magis tu sub alis Dei tutus eris ... Neque enim sine causa comparata est gallina ipsi Sapientiae Dei ... nos confitentes infirmitatem nostram, sub alas Dei fugiamus; erit nobis enim tamquam gallina protegens pullos suos".

Hoping under the wings of Christ can be compared with an egg under the wings of the hen. An egg is for Augustine a symbol of hope, for hope is there where the reality is not yet reached. The egg is already present, but the chicken not yet; one can see the egg, but not the chicken. The same is true for our hope of the future bliss.⁶² Christ's members should not despair when troubled at the approach of death. With reference to the text "My soul is troubled" (Jn 12:27), Augustine declares that Jesus Christ transposed us into Himself, He saw us, He found us weary, and took us in and cared fondly (*fovet*) for us. In order to prevent that we should be broken by despair, He turned his attention to his weak ones, even the utmost weak of his members, gathered them into his bosom, and covered these not very brave members with his wings as a hen covers her chickens.⁶³

Only once in his writings, Augustine refers to what is said of pelicans, although he explicitly declares not to know if it is true or false. Pelicans are said to slay their young with blows of their beaks, and for three days to mourn them when slain by themselves in the nest. After which, they say, the mother wounds herself deeply, and pours forth her blood over her young, and bathed in her blood they recover life. Augustine applies this image to Christ as mother-bird. The image of the pelican consists in the fact that Christ has given us life through his blood.⁶⁴

⁶² *Sermo* 105,8,11. PL 38,623: "Nos ovum nostrum sub alis illius gallinae ponamus evangelicae, quae clamat: Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... Illa enim gallina divina Sapientia est: sed assumpsit carnem, ut pullis congrueret".

⁶³ *Sermo* 305,4. PL 38,1399: "*Anima mea turbata est. Nos in se transfiguravit; nos vidit, nos inspexit, nos fatigatos suscepit et foveit ... Ne ergo desperatione frangerentur, ipsos infirmos suos intendit, ipsa membra sua ultima non fortia collegit in sinum suum, ipsa non valde fortia tanquam gallina texit pullos suos*".

⁶⁴ *Enarr. in ps.* 101, s. 1,8. CCL 40,1431: "Congruit illi (sc. Christo) quod matris caro vivificat sanguine suo filios suos; satis congruit. Nam et ipse gallinam se dicit super pullos suos: *Ierusalem, Ierusalem, quoties volui congregare filios tuos, tamquam gallina pullos suos sub alas suas, et noluisti?* Habet enim paternam auctoritatem, maternum affectum". An allusion to this image is perhaps found in *In Johannis epistolam tr.* 2,4. PL 35,1992, in which we read with regard to Paul: "exponit viscera sua, conscindit quodammodo verbis ubera sua". About the sources of this image, see D. LAU, Animal, in *Augustinus-Lexikon* I, fasc 3, p. 362; according to this author, because it is not certain that Augustine has known the Latin translation of *Physiologus*, it is perhaps better to consider it as a popular tradition. W. LAMPEN, Pie Pelicane, Iesu Domine, in *Antonianum* 21(1946) 68-92 holds that Augustine knew the Latin translation of *Physiologus*. The image of the pelican is very old and belonged to the first redaction of this work written at the end of the second century. Cf. B. FISCHER, Jesus, unsere Mutter. Neue englische Veröffentlichungen zu einem wiederentdeckten Motiv patristischer und mittelalterlicher Christusfrömmigkeit, in *Geist und Leben* 59(1985) 147-156. The image of the pelican occurs frequently in later literature, for example in PSEUDO-JEROME, *Breviarium in psalmos*, ps. 101, written after 450.

We must mention here also the text of Eph 5:29-30 in which Christ's attitude towards the church is described as *nutrire* and *fovere*. I have found only one text in which Augustine explains the words *nutrire* and *fovere* applied to Christ in his relationship with the church. Everyone following Christ tries to heal his flesh by restraining it when it lusts against the spirit, and yet nourishes and cherishes its good nature, since no one ever hates his own flesh. This also does Christ with the church, so far as it is fitting to compare lesser with greater matters. Christ restrains the church by rebukes so that she does not crumble by impunity, and raises her up with consolations so that she does not collapse because of weakness. It is clear that Augustine has in mind the church as the community of believers.⁶⁵ Christ feeds and cherishes the faithful by teaching them self-control and comforting them in their sorrows.

The motherly aspects of the Holy Spirit

God does not work under the limits of time by motions of body and soul. He works by the eternal *rationes* of his co-eternal Word and by a kind of brooding action of his co-eternal Holy Spirit. Augustine remarks that there is a difference between the Greek and Latin translations of Gen 1:2 on the one hand, and the Syriac translation on the other hand. The former translate: the Holy Spirit "was hovering over (*superferabatur*) the waters"; but the rendering of the latter is: "He was brooding (*fovebat*) over the waters". This is clearly a maternal aspect in the context of the creation. *Fovere* does here not have the meaning of a medical action treating swellings or wounds, but rather that of a bird that broods over its eggs. The mother bird helps her young to develop by the warmth from her body, through a kind of loving affection in its own way. However, we may not stick literally to the text in a human way. Then, Augustine refers to Mt 23:37. Also Christ wished that we should cease being children in mind. As the incarnate divine Wisdom, He came to gather the children of Jerusalem under his wings, as a hen gathers her young, but not with the intention that

⁶⁵ *De continentia* 11,25. CSEL 41,174: "Quod ergo nunc agit cum carne sua quisque secundum Christum vivens, cum et concupiscit adversus eius malam concupiscentiam, quoniam sanandam continet, quam nondum sanatam tenet; et tamen eius bonam nutrit fovetque naturam, quoniam nemo umquam carnem suam odio habet: hoc etiam Christus agit cum ecclesia, quantum fas est comparare minora maioribus. Nam et correptionibus eam reprimat, ne in punitate inflata dissiliat, et consolationibus erigit, ne gravata infirmitate succumbat". Cf. my article "No one ever hated his own flesh" Eph 5:29 in Augustine, in: *Augustiniana* 45(1995) 45-93.

we would remain always little children.⁶⁶ Since the first meaning of the word *fovere* is to warm, we should also mention texts in which the heat (*calor*) of God's Spirit and God's word are mentioned. About the *spiritus sapientiae*, we read that this spirit of wisdom is very fervent, and that no one can hide from his or her heat (Ps 19:6).⁶⁷ Even now the fire is burning in the heat of the word, and the reality is in the fervour of the Holy Spirit. The word is here considered as a sign that refers to another reality, that is, the fervour of the conversion of the human heart. That heat belongs to the Holy Spirit as we are told by Paul: "In ardour of spirit" (Rom 12:11).⁶⁸

In his *Confessions*, Augustine did not yet know the reading *fovebat*, but read there *superferebatur*. However, the motherly character of love is not passed over. The expression *mater caritas* is in its terseness untranslatable; an approximative translation could be: the love which is our mother). He prays: "Tell me, I beseech you, by charity, our mother (*per matrem caritatem*), tell me what was the reason, why after heaven and earth, invisible and without form, and darkness upon the deep were named, your Scripture finally named your Spirit?". Augustine continues explaining the fact that the Spirit was hovering over the waters, is referring to the supereminence of charity poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, raising

⁶⁶ *De Genesi ad litt.* I,18,36. CSEL 28/1,26-27. BA 48,130-132: "... non temporalibus quasi animi sui aut corporis motibus operari deum ... sed aeternis atque incommutabilibus et stabilibus rationibus coaeterni sibi verbi sui et quodam, ut ita dixerim, fotu pariter coaeterni sancti spiritus sui. Nam et illud, quod per graecam et latinam linguam dictum est de spiritu dei, quod superferebatur super aquas, secundum syrae linguae intellectum, quae vicina est hebraeae - nam hoc a quodam docto christiano Syro fertur expositum - non superferebatur, sed fovebat potius intellegi perhibetur ... sicut ova foveantur ab alitibus, ubi calor ille materni corporis etiam formandis pullis quodammodo adminiculatur per quendam in suo genere dilectionis adfectum ... Non enim ad hoc ipsa dei sapientia nostra infirmitate suscepta venit ad conligendos sub alas suas filios Hierusalem quemadmodum gallina pullos suos, ut semper parvuli simus, sed ut malitia infantes mente esse pueri desinamus". See P. AGAËSSE - A. SOLIGNAC, L'Esprit porté sur les eaux, in: BA 48, Paris 1972, p. 590-593 (with bibliography): "Quoiqu'il en soit de l'identité du docte Syrien, on peut, avec B. Altaner, tenir qu'Augustin tient son information de Basile par l'intermédiaire d'Eustathius". JEROME also knows the reading *fovebat*: *Liber quaestionum hebraicarum in Genesim* 1,2. CCL 72,3.

⁶⁷ *Enarr. in ps.* 147,22. CCL 40,2158: "Ergo ferventissima est; nec est qui se abscondat a calore eius".

⁶⁸ *Sermo* 22,7. CCL 41,297: "Et modo ardet ignis in calore verbi, res est in fervore spiritus sancti, sicut diximus iam dudum, quia scriptum est in alio psalmo: *Nec est qui se abscondat a calore eius*. Spiritus autem sancti esse calorem dicit apostolus: *Spiritu ferventes*". See R.J. O'CONNELL, Augustine's Imagination ... a.c., 32-35. J. VERHEES, God in beweging. Een onderzoek naar de pneumatologie van Augustinus. Wageningen 1968, p. 185-197 (chapter on the Holy Spirit and affectivity).

us aloft by love.⁶⁹

The theme of rebirth from the Holy Spirit can be considered also as a motherly aspect. It would lead us to far treating this theme in its fullness. We mention only a few texts. When Paul is in labour in order to give birth out of love, it is the Holy Spirit who is in labour.⁷⁰ Our rebirth, which brings about the forgiveness of all past sins, takes place in the Holy Spirit: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, one cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5). But it is one thing to be born of the Spirit, another to be nourished by the Spirit, just as it is one thing to be born of the flesh, which happens when a mother gives birth, and another to be nourished from the flesh, which happens when she suckles the infant. The infant is turned to drink with delight from the breasts of her who gave

⁶⁹ *Confessiones* XIII,6,7-7,8. CCL 27,245: "... obsecro te per matrem caritatem, obsecro te, dic mihi, quae causa fuerat, ut post nominatum caelum et terram invisibilem et incompositam, et tenebras super abyssum tum demum scriptura tua nominaret spiritum tuum? An quia oportebat sic eum insinuari, ut diceretur superferri? ... Iam hinc sequatur qui potest intellectu apostolum tuum dicentem, quia caritas tua diffusa est in cordibus nostris per spiritum sanctum ... sanctitas tua attollens nos superius amore securitatis, ut sursum cor habeamus ad te, ubi spiritus tuus superfertur super aquas ...". The expression *mater caritas* contains in my opinion a reference to the Holy Spirit. Cf. *Contra Faustum* II,2. CSEL 25/1, 255: "... si matris caritatis vocem sibi ex ore apostolico (sc. Pauli) personantem audiant ...".

⁷⁰ *Enarr. in ps.* 147,14. CCL 40,2149: "... cum caritas eos parturiebat, Dei Spiritus parturiebat". See text note 117. The motherly aspects of the Holy Spirit are always seen by Augustine in relation to human beings. Unlike M. VICTORINUS, *Adv. Arium* I,57-58 (Sources Chrét. 68,366-370; see the explanation of this difficult text by P. HADOT in SC 69,870-876), Augustine refuses to consider the Holy Spirit as the mother of Christ, both in his eternal and temporal birth. Nevertheless, his rejection of this idea is very nuanced. He cautions for a too biological and corporeal approach, but this ought not to upset anyone of good sense. He himself is not afraid of thinking that the Holy Spirit is the immutable love and, so to speak, the *coniux Dei patris*, coming forth from the Father. His main reason why he dislikes this opinion, is that the Son is not the child or offspring (*proles*) of the Father or the Holy Spirit, because within the Trinity the three persons are equal, and the human being is created in the image of the three divine persons. *De Trinitate* XII,5,5-6,6. CCL 50,359-360: "Omitto enim quale sit spiritum sanctum matrem filii dei putare et coniugem patris. Fortassis quippe respondeatur haec in carnalibus habere offensionem dum corporei conceptus partusque cogitantur ... Sed tamen in spiritualibus illis summis, ubi non est aliquid violabile aut corruptibile nec natum ex tempore nec ex informi formatum, si qua dicuntur talia ... non debent cuiusquam sobriam perturbare prudentiam ne cum vanum devitat horrorem in perniciosum incurrat errorem ... Non ergo propterea respuimus istam sententiam quia timemus sanctam et inviolabilem atque incommutabilem caritatem tamquam coniugem dei patris de illo existentem sed non sicut prolem ad gignendum filium ..., sed quia eam falsam divina scriptura evidenter ostendit". See my article: *Woman as the Image of God in Augustine's "De Trinitate XII"*, in: *Signum Pietatis. Festgabe für C.P. Mayer*, herausg. von A. Zumkeller, Würzburg 1989, 267-288, esp. 273-276.

it birth in order to live, so that it receives the food to live from the source from which it has received the possibility of being brought into life.⁷¹ God brings forth children from the church, and the Spirit is present so that we can be born.⁷²

Motherly aspects of Holy Scripture

In his *Commentary on Genesis against the Manichees*, Augustine states that we have to be fed in a spiritual way with the food of the Holy Scriptures and the divine Law. The spiritual person is fed so that he understands many things which the carnal person, that is, the little one in Christ, like God's gregarious animal (*pecus*), has to believe because he cannot yet understand. Nevertheless, both groups have the same food for the doctrine is the same.⁷³ About 393, Augustine insists already on the fact that God has bent down the Scriptures towards the level of capacity of infants and sucklings, as is sung in Psalm 18:9: "He has bent down the heaven, and descended".⁷⁴ We are reborn from the seed of the word of God.⁷⁵ Even the hypocrites in the church are able to transmit the milk of faith, that is, the truth of the divine Scriptures, so that the little ones may be fed.⁷⁶ The verb *parturio* can already be applied to the words of the prophets who

⁷¹ *Sermo* 71,12,19. PL 38,454-455: "Nam et illa regeneratio, ubi fit omnium praeteritorum remissio peccatorum, in Spiritu Sancto fit, dicente Domino: *Nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et Spiritu, non potest introire in regnum Dei*. Sed aliud est, nasci de Spiritu; aliud, pasci de Spiritu: sicut aliud est, nasci de carne, quod fit cum parit mater; aliud est, pasci de carne, quod fit cum lactat infantem, ad hoc conversum ut cum voluptate biberet, unde natus est ut viveret; ut inde accipiat vivendi alimentum, unde accepit nascendi initium". See J. VERHEES, o.c., p. 140-154.

⁷² *In Johannis evang. tr.* 12,5. CCL 36,123: "Generat Deus de ecclesia filios ... Adest Spiritus, ut nascamur: Spiritus invisibiliter adest unde nasceris".

⁷³ *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* I,23,40. PL 34,193: "Sed spiritualis sic istis alimentis pascitur, ut multa intelligat; carnalis autem, id est parvulus in Christo, tanquam pecus Dei, ut multa credat quae intelligere nondum potest: tamen eosdem cibos omnes habent". See also notes 41-45.

⁷⁴ *Enarr. in ps.* 8,8. CCL 38,52: "Inclinavit ergo scripturas Deus usque ad infantium et lactentium capacitatem, sicut in alio psalmo canitur: *Et inclinavit caelum, et descendit*". Cf. *En. in ps.* 130,12 quoted in note 14.

⁷⁵ *In Joh. evang. tr.* 21,1. CCL 36,212: "de semine verbi Dei renati".

⁷⁶ *Sermo* 10,8. CCL 41,159: "... veritate tamen scripturarum parvulos infirmosque nutritent ... iam in malis moribus simulatio constituta retinet tamen in memoria, tamquam in uberibus, verba fidei doctrinamque christianam, quae omnibus ad ecclesiam venientibus traditur ... Inde segura est vera mater, cum etiam a simulatoribus in ecclesia parvulus eius divinarum scripturarum catholicae fidei lacte nutritur".

announced Christ in a figurative way.⁷⁷

We are snatched from the darkness by the light of the Gospel (cf. Col 1:12-13). Therefore, we ought to watch and pray. We should watch in the mother-light (the spiritual light as mother!), and pray to the Father of lights from the bosom (*sinu*) of our mother-light.⁷⁸ The two Testaments are the two breasts of our mother the church. There we suck the milk of all the sacraments which are performed in time for our eternal salvation. Fed and strengthened by them we should arrive at eating the solid food of the divine Word. The humble Christ is milk for us, but the same Christ, equal to the Father, is solid food for us.⁷⁹ In itself Scripture is spiritual, but it adapts itself to carnal people, going along (*ambulat*) with them who can only think in an imperfect way. For a mother, too, loves to feed her little child, but she does not wish that it remains little. She holds it in her bosom, she cherishes (*fovet*) it with her hands, she comforts it with caresses, she feeds it with milk. She does all these things for her baby, but at the same time she wants that it grows.⁸⁰ Holy Scripture does not abandon us in our weakness. Helped by a mother's way of walking (*materno incessu*), adapted to the child's going with slower and shorter steps, we will make progress. Holy Scripture, indeed, speaks in such a way as to mock the proud with its heights, terrify the attentive with its depths, feed the great

⁷⁷ C. *Faustum* XXII,94. CSEL 25/1,701: "Christum igitur sonant haec omnia ... scribentium litteras vere sacras omnis parturivit intentio". *De mendacio* 5,8. CSEL 41,423: "propheticiis figurationibus parturivit".

⁷⁸ *Sermo* 222. PL 38,1091: "Ab illis ergo tenebris evangelica luce distincti ... vigilate et orate ... Adversus tenebras earumque rectores in matre luce vigilate, et Patrem luminum de sinu matris lucis orate".

⁷⁹ *In epistolam Johannis tr.* 3,1. PL 35,1998: "Est autem mater Ecclesia; et ubera ejus duo Testamenta Scripturarum divinarum. Hinc sugatur lac omnium sacramentorum temporaliter pro aeterna salute nostra gestorum, ut nutritus atque roboratus perveniat ad manducandum cibum, quod est, *In principio erat Verbum ... et Deus erat Verbum* (Jo 1:1). Lac nostrum Christus humilis est; cibus noster, idem ipse Christus aequalis Patri". According to HYPOLYTUS (*In Cant.* 1,2), the two Testaments are the breasts of Christ, and their commandments are their milk; see J. BETZ, a.c., 16.

⁸⁰ *Sermo* 23,3,3. CCL 41,310: "Cum sit ergo illa spiritalis, tamen saepe cum carnalibus quasi carnaliter ambulat. Sed non eos vult remanere carnales. Quia et mater parvulum amat nutrire, sed eum non amat parvulum remanere. In sinu tenet, manibus fovet, blanditiis consolatur, lacte nutrit. Omnia parvulo facit, sed optat ut crescat". *De Trinitate* I,1,2-3. CCL 50,28-30: "Ut ergo ab huiusmodi falsitatibus humanus animus purgaretur, sancta scriptura parvulis congruens nullius generis rerum verba vitavit ex quibus quasi gradatim ad divina atque sublimia noster intellectus velut nutritus assurgeret", with a reference to 1 Cor 3:1-2 "lac potum vobis dedi".

ones with its truth, and nourish the little ones with kindness.⁸¹ The faith of little living beings is strengthened in a healthful manner by the most lowly way of God's words and their weakness is carried, so to say, in their mother's bosom.⁸²

The image of the nest can be applied to Holy Scripture. The divine readings and the holy oracles of God which have sounded in our ears should make a nest in our minds. May they not fly away as birds of passage, or stay for a moment and then depart, but instead may they bring forth young. For if the *sparrow has found herself a house, and the turtle-dove a nest where she may lay her young* (Ps 84:3-4), how much more the sparrow which is the word of God and the turtle-dove which is the mercy of God.⁸³

The church as mother

It is not our intention to dwell at great length on the theme of *ecclesia-mater*. That has been studied more than once.⁸⁴ We will limit our-

⁸¹ *De Genesi ad litteram* V,3,6. CSEL 28/1,141: "... tu autem cum scriptura non deserente infirmitatem tuam et materno incessu tecum tardius ambulante proficias, quae sic loquitur, ut altitudine superbos inrideat, profunditate adtentos terreat, veritate magnos pascat, affabilitate parvulos nutriat".

⁸² *Confessiones* XII,27,37. CCL 27,237: "In quibus adhuc parvulis animalibus, dum isto humillimo genere verborum tamquam materno sinu eorum gestatur infirmitas, salubriter aedificatur fides ...".

⁸³ *Sermo* 343. ed. C. Lambot, *Revue Bénédictine* 66(1956), p. 28: "Divinae lectiones et sancta oracula dei, quae insonuerunt auribus nostris, nidum faciant in mentibus nostris. Non volent et transeant, aut sedeant et discedant, sed aliquid pariant. Nam si *passer invenit sibi domum, et turtur nidum ubi reponat pullos suos*, quanto magis passer verbum dei, et turtur misericordia dei".

⁸⁴ F. HOFMANN, *Der Kirchenbegriff des hl. Augustinus in seinen Grundlagen und in seiner Entwicklung*. Münster i. W. 1933 and 1978, p. 46-48; 263-275. J.C. PLUMPE, *Mater Ecclesia. An inquiry into the concept of the Church as Mother in early Christianity*. Washington D.C. 1943. A. MÜLLER, *Ecclesia-Maria. Die Einheit Marias und der Kirche*. Freiburg i.d. Schw. 1951 and 1955, p. 179-204. J. RATZINGER, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche*. München 1954, p. 23-28; 84; 87-89. P. RINETTI, *Sant'Agostino e l' "Ecclesia Mater"*, in: *Augustinus Magister* II, Paris 1954, p. 827-834. J. PINTARD, *Mater viventium*, in: *Etudes Mariales. La Nouvelle Eve IV. Bulletin de la Société française d'Etudes Mariales* 15(1957), 61-86. H. RAHNER, *Die Gottesgeburt. Die Lehre der Kirchenväter von der Geburt Christi aus dem Herzen der Kirche und der Gläubigen*, in: *Symbole der Kirche*. Salzburg 1964, 11-87. R. PALMERO RAMOS, "Ecclesia Mater" en San Agustín. *Teología de la imagen en los escritos antidonatistas*. Madrid 1970, p. 131-168; 239-245. P. BORGOMEO, *L'Eglise de ce temps dans la prédication de saint Augustin*. Paris 1972, p. 173-185. C.P.E. SPRINGER, *The Prosopopeia of Church as Mother in Augustine's Psalmus Contra Partem Donati*, in: *Augustinian Studies* 18(1987), 52-65. E. LAMIRANDE, *Un siècle et demi d'études sur l'ecclésiologie de saint Augustin*, in: *Revue*

selves to some texts immediately connected with our subject. After having referred to Christ as *gallina* (Mt 23:37-38), Augustine illustrates the love of God for his church by the example of human love between a father and a mother, a husband and a wife in marriage. This love is so intimate that one cannot love one without loving the other, neither offend one without offending the other.⁸⁵

The first text in which Augustine describes the church as mother and the necessity of her milk for the little ones is found in *The magnitude of the soul* (d. 388): "Then we shall know how true are the things that we are commanded to believe, how well and healthfully we were nourished by mother church, or what is the advantage of that milk which the apostle Paul declared to have given as drink to the little ones. It is very proper to take this nourishment when one is nourished by a mother, but shameful when one is already grown. To reject it, when needed, is pitiable; to blame or despise it at any time is a mark of wickedness and impiety, but to explain and dispense it in a suitable manner is an action full of praiseworthiness and of charity".⁸⁶ With these last words our obligation to explain the faith is underlined.

The church is a mother who has nourished her children with the milk of faith and, up to now, she nourishes us by preparing stronger food. This mother is sad about the fact that in many places her members grow cold and therefore less able to cherish (*fovere*) her little ones. For this reason, she seeks help from other sons and other members. She wishes to

des Etudes Augustiniennes 8(1962), 1-125. Concerning the *ecclesia caelestis, Ierusalem (Sion) caelestis, aeterna civitas*, often qualified with the term *mater*, see E. LAMIRANDE, *L'Eglise céleste selon saint Augustin*. Paris 1963.

⁸⁵ *Enarr. in ps.* 88, s. 2, 14. CCL 39, 1244. When Augustine warns the little ones of the snares of Faustus, the protecting wings of the church are also mentioned: *Contra Faustum* XIV, 9. CSEL 25/1, 410: "... atque ita sub alas catholicae matris pullis fugientibus non congregaret (sc. Faustus), quae non peperit".

⁸⁶ *De quantitate animae* 33, 76. CSEL 89, 224: "Tunc agnoscemus, quam vera nobis credenda imperata sint quamque optime ac saluberrime apud matrem ecclesiam nutriti fuerimus quaeve sit utilitas lactis illius, quod apostolus Paulus parvulis se potum dedisse praedicavit; quod alimentum accipere, cum quis matre nutritur, saluberrimum, cum iam grandis est, pudendum, respuere, cum opus est, miserandum, reprehendere aliquando aut odisse sceleris et impietatis, tractare autem ac dispensare commodè laudis et caritatis plenissimum est". Cf. *Enarr. in ps.* 130, 14. CCL 40, 1910: "Et adhuc adtendite apostolum sequi ad palmam supernae vocationis. Dicit enim ... : *Quotquot ergo perfecti, hoc sapiamus; et si quid aliter sapitis, hoc quoque vobis Deus revelabit* (Phil 3:15). Si forte erras in aliquo, quare non redis ad lac matris? ... Si autem hoc ipsum quod aliter sapitis, defendere vultis ... fit vobis maledictum hoc quod dixit: super matrem cum estis et foris a lacte separamini, foris a visceribus matris fame moriemini".

show her most inner feelings of love and her heavenly breasts.⁸⁷ Those who turned away from the church out of a proud aversion are called back to her breasts under tears.⁸⁸ The expression "the breasts of the church" occurs often.⁸⁹ Sometimes it is used against the Donatists and refers to the church exhorting them⁹⁰, other times it is used in a more general sense, namely, that she offers her breasts to nourish the little ones among her members.⁹¹ The church broods (*fovet*) as it were the eggs under her carring wings and nourishes her infants with milk, while remaining fertile without corruption, being at the same time mother and virgin.⁹²

⁸⁷ *Epistula* 243,8. CSEL 57,574-575: "Mater ecclesia mater est etiam matris tuae. Haec vos de Christo concepit, haec martyrum sanguine parturivit, haec in sempiternam lucem peperit, haec fidei lacte nutrit et nutrit cibosque maiores praeparans ... Ignavia etiam atque torpore quorundam, quos gremio continet, et membra sua frigescere plurimis locis et fovendis parvulis minus idonea fieri dolet. Unde nisi per alios filios, unde nisi per alia membra ... iustum ac debitum poscit auxilium? ... Nonne cariora viscera et caelestia ubera ostentat?". Cf. *En. in ps.* 52,1. CCL 39,638: "Si autem abundabit iniquitas et refrigeret caritas multorum, quis remanebit qui parturiat?".

⁸⁸ *Epistolae ad Romanos inchoata expositio* 15. CSEL 84,167: "Nonne omnes ad ubera sua, quae superbo fastidio reliquerunt, cum lacrimis revocat?".

⁸⁹ Augustine speaks also of "the breasts of the Synagogue" in *Enarr. 1 in ps.* 21,10. CCL 38,118: "... spes mea Deus, non ex quo uberibus virginis lactari coepi, nam et ante utique; sed ab uberibus Synagogae ...". The Synagogue can be called *mater* because she possesses the words of God, but not the works of faith, which bring about salvation: *Enarr. in ps.* 138,18. CCL 40,2002-2003. Here lies the reason why Augustine says that Jesus left his mother, the Synagogue, in order to adhere to the church, although the Synagogue is the mother of Christ in a bodily sense. See E. LAMIRANDE, *Reliquit et matrem synagogam*. La Synagogue et l'Eglise selon saint Augustin, in: *Augustiniana* 41 (1991) 677-688.

⁹⁰ *Sermo Denis* 19,12. MA I,111: "Clamor eius non auditur, sed tamen ubera caritatis manare exhortatione non quiescunt". *Epistula* 23,4. CSEL 34/1,67: "... unius verissimae matris, quae omnibus gentibus et regenerandis praebet sinum et regeneratis ubera infundit". *Enarr. in ps.* 10,1. CCL 38,74. Against the Pelagians: *De natura et gratia* 21,23. CSEL 60,249: "... non solum praecepti incapaces ... sed vix capaces papillae cum esuriunt, eos tamen in matris ecclesiae gremio cum salvos gratia sua facere velit ...". See also *Contra Julianum* II,10,37, text quoted note 40. *Sermo* 183,8,12. PL 38,992.

⁹¹ *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* 10,17. CSEL 90,21: "Itaque illi quos quasi videntes catholicae ubera sustentant ... pro suo quisque captu viribusque nutriuntur". *Ib.* 30,64. *ib.* 67: "Iam vero cum haec humana dilectio inhaerentem uberibus tuis nutriverit et roboraverit animum ...". In *Johannis evang. tr.* 12,3. CCL 36,121: "Renascantur (sc. catechumeni) ex aqua et Spiritu, proferat ecclesia quos parturit. Concepti sunt, edantur in lucem; habent ubera quibus nutriantur, non timeant ne nati suffocentur, ab uberibus matris non recedant". Cf. what Augustine writes with regard to the virgins in *De sancta virginitate* 36,37. CSEL 41,277: "... in ecclesia tua eruditum est hoc genus; illic tibi a matris uberibus pullulavit, in nomen tuum ad loquendum linguam solvit, nomen tuum velut lac infantiae suae suxit infusum".

⁹² *Contra Faustum* XV,3. CSEL 25/1,420: "... quos vel tamquam ova sollicitis alis foves vel tamquam infantes lacte nutris, sine corruptione fecunda virgo mater".

The image of a brooding bird evokes the image of a nest. Augustine connects the image of the nest of faith with the nest of the church: "What great disadvantage was a far slower mind to your little ones? For they did not depart from You, but they grew their wings safe within the nest of your church, and they strengthened the wings of charity on the food of a sound faith".⁹³ Many pagans and heretics perform good works, but not within the church; they lay their young outside the church. The turtle-dove finds the nest where she may lay her young (Ps 84:3/4) only in the true faith, in the faith of the Catholica, in the community and unity of the church; there she should bring forth good works. In this sense faith itself is a nest for the young of the church.⁹⁴ It is no wonder that the bishop uses similar maternal images in his exhortations addressed to the faithful. They wish to become pregnant. They should become pregnant, that is, through the hope of the life hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3). Then their giving birth will be certain, and not abortive, not temporal. They will embrace what they brought forth in all eternity, for Isaiah 26:18 says: "We have conceived and brought forth the spirit of salvation".⁹⁵ The simplicity of doves is an example for the faithful. Notice how much they enjoy company; they fly everywhere together, they feed together, they do not want to be alone, they enjoy communion. They love ardently, they moan and murmur with love, they beget their young with kisses.⁹⁶

We must make a distinction between bearing witness to the light and the light itself. Thus our mind can make progress in the faith of Christ, so that we do not remain children who always seek the breast and have an aversion of solid food. It is the task of Christ's church to nourish

⁹³ *Confessiones* IV,16,31. CCL 27,55-56: "Aut quid tantum operat parvulis tuis longe tardius ingenium, cum a te longe non recederent, ut in nido ecclesiae tuae tuti plumescent et alas caritatis alimento sanae fidei nutrentur?"

⁹⁴ *Enarr. in ps.* 83,7. CCL 39,1151-1152: "Quam multa multi ... non in ecclesia operantur, non in nido pullos ponunt? Conculcabuntur ... Sed non ubicumque turtur inveniat nidum sibi, ubi ponat pullos suos; in fide vera, in fide catholica, in societate unitatis ecclesiae pariat opera sua ... Permanendo ergo in fide, ipsa fides nidus est pullorum tuorum".

⁹⁵ *Enarr. in ps.* 39,28. CCL 38,445-446: "Praegnantantes sunt, qui spe intumescunt; mammantantes autem, id est lactantes, qui iam adepti sunt quod concupierant ... Impraegnari vis, hinc impraegnare, ipsa sit spes tua; certus erit partus tuus, non erit abortivus, non temporalis; amplecteris quod pepereris in aeternum. Sic enim per Isaiam dicitur: *Concepimus et parturivimus spiritum salutis*". Cf. *En. in ps.* 5,8. CCL 38,23: "... quibus civitas illa constabit, quam nunc parit et paulatim parit ecclesia".

⁹⁶ *Sermo* 64,7. ed. C. Lambot, *Revue Bénédictine* 51(1939), p. 13-14: "Attende columbas in societate gaudere: ubique simul volant, simul pascuntur, nolunt esse solae, communione gaudent. Caritate fervent, gemitibus amoris innummunt, osculis filios generant".

us, but also to wean us from milk so that we become able to take more solid food.⁹⁷ Anyone caresses his or her little ones, and the little ones caress their father or mother, but the latter want that their children may grow up.⁹⁸

Besides the fact that the church nourishes her children with the milk of faith, she does this with her mysteries or sacraments, which also can be considered as "milk".⁹⁹ Especially the sacrament of baptism belongs to the maternal task of the church.¹⁰⁰ Augustine admonishes a son who beats his mother, that by doing this he beats also his spiritual mother, the church, and hits her with regard to her sacraments through which she has brought him forth and fed him.¹⁰¹

The source of all these actions is maternal love. The church should serve by maternal love. Therefore, she is treating differently those who leave her but repent, and those who have never been hers but embrace her peace for the first time. She loves both and by healing both, she serves them with maternal love.¹⁰² She gives even the weak preference over the stronger ones, for charity cherishes (*fovet*) her children like a nurse. This is no infringement of the order of love, because it is not so that the weak are more worthy of love, but because they need more help. She wishes the weak to be like the others who are stronger and whom she passes over for

⁹⁷ *In Johannis evang. tr.* 35,3. CCL 36,318: "Discernite ergo ista, ut proficiat mens vestra in fide Christi, ne semper infantes sitis ubera quaerentes, et a cibo solido resiliatis. Debetis apud matrem sanctam ecclesiam Christi nutriri et ablactari, et ad escas solidiores accedere, mente, non ventre".

⁹⁸ *Enarr. in ps.* 127,15. CCL 40,1878: "Filii sunt parvuli; blandiris parvulis, blandiuntur parvuli: numquid stant in eo? Sed optas ut crescant, ut accedat aetas optas".

⁹⁹ *C. epistulam Parmeniani* II,9,19. CSEL 51,65: "... atque ita adversus filium matris suae, id est parvulum adhuc in fide et sacramentorum lacte nutriendum, perniciosissimum scandalum ponunt". *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* I,25,38. CSEL 60,37: "... mater ecclesia, quae cor et os maternum eis praestat, ut sacris mysteriis inbuantur". *De baptismo* V,27,38. CSEL 51,294-295: "Quidam vero adhuc carnales ... ut cibo spiritualium fiant idonei, sanctorum mysteriorum lacte nutriuntur". See also the texts in notes 52 and 117.

¹⁰⁰ *Sermo* 119,4,4. PL 38,674: "Ecce sunt: sed ex Deo nati sunt. Vulva matris, aqua baptismatis". *Sermo R. Etaix, Rev. Benedictine* 86(1976), p. 45: "Si ergo sine dubio ecclesia est coniunx Christi, potest tamen esse alio quodam modo, alio quodam sano intellectu ecclesia mater Christi. Si enim de una qualibet dici potuit: *Qui facit voluntatem eius qui misit me, frater, soror, mater est*, quanto magis hoc de universa ecclesia dici potest, quae cotidie in catechumenis concipit membra Christi et de infidelibus parit membra Christi?".

¹⁰¹ *Epistula* 34,3. CSEL 34/2,24: "... prohibet hoc ecclesia, mater spiritalis; caeditur et ipsa in sacramentis quibus genuit et nutrit ingratum".

¹⁰² *Epistula* 93,13,53. CSEL 34/2,496: "... utrosque diligendo, utrisque sanandis materna caritate serviendo".

a time as a mark of trust, not by despising them.¹⁰³ Especially with regard to the Donatists, Augustine speaks of *dolor materni cordis*, *materna sollicitudo*, and *materna caritas*.¹⁰⁴ There is a certain woman, namely the church, in whom is shown in a spiritual way what is said to Eve: "In sorrow you shall bring forth children" (Gen 3:16). The church as bride of Christ brings forth children, but by bringing them forth she is in labour. Paul who said "My little children, I go through the pain of giving birth to you over again, until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19), was amongst the members of the church who was in labour. Augustine compares the womb of the church with the womb of Rebekah. But the twins struggled with one another inside her womb; and this was the reason of her pain and suffering (Gen 25:22-23). The bishop of Hippo considers the two nations in the womb of Rebekah as an image of the good and the wicked in the church.¹⁰⁵ The image of the womb of mother church induces Augustine to make the following appeal to the candidates for baptism: "Behold, it is the womb of mother church; behold, she is groaning in her labour in order to give you birth and to bring you forth into the light of faith. Do not in your impatience kick against her womb, and thus constrict the passage to your delivery. Nation that is being created, praise your God. You who are being created, praise your Lord. Because you are being suckled, praise Him; because you are being fed, praise; because you are being nourished, advance in wisdom and age".¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ *Epistula* 139,3. CSEL 44,153: "Caritas enim, quae tamquam nutrix fovet filios suos, non ordine amandi, sed ordine subveniendi infirmiores fortioribus antepōnit, quos tales vult esse, quales iam illi sunt, quos non contemnendo sed de his confidendo interim praeterit".

¹⁰⁴ *Epistula* 185,8,32. CSEL 57,29-30. Ib. 10,46. ib. 40. *Epistula* 89,6. CSEL 34/2,423. Augustine urges the rulers of North Africa to follow the *mansuetudo* of the mother church, for if they do this, the church is doing it: *Epistula* 133,3 and 134,4. CSEL 44,84 and 87.

¹⁰⁵ *Enarr. in ps.* 126,8. CCL 40,1863: "Est quaedam mulier, in qua spiritaliter ostenditur quod dictum est Evae: *In gemitu parturies*. Parit enim ecclesia filios coniux Christi; et si parit, parturit ... In membris parturientis erat ille qui dicebat: *Filioli mei, quos iterum parturio, donec Christus formetur in vobis* ... Cuius ventris? ecclesiae: in cuius ventre, quia eius typum Rebecca gestabat, duo illi gemini tamquam duo populi luctabantur ... Sic et modo, fratres, quamdiu gemitus datus est ecclesiae, quamdiu parturit ecclesia, ipsi sunt intus et boni et mali". Cf. *In Johannis evangelium tr.* 11,10. CCL 36,116.

¹⁰⁶ *Sermo* 216,7,7. PL 38,1080: "Ecce uterus matris Ecclesiae, ecce ut te pariat, atque in lucem fidei producat, laborat in gemitu suo. Nolite vestra impatientia viscera materna concutere, et partus vestri januas angustare. Popule qui crearis, lauda Deum tuum: lauda, qui crearis, lauda Dominum tuum. Quia lactaris, lauda; quia aleris, lauda; quia nutriris, profice sapientia et aetate". *Enarr. in ps.* 57,5. CCL 39,713: "Si patiens fueris, usquequo formeris, usquequo in te certa sit doctrina veritatis, continere te debent materna viscera. Si autem impatientia tua concusseris latera matris, cum dolore quidem te excutit foras, sed

Moses and Paul

The fullness of God's love is revealed through the Word of God, and especially through the dispensation of Christ's humiliation. But the human mind must first be nourished by simple faith, in order that it may become capable of understanding things heavenly and eternal. This faith teaches us that in the foolishness which is wiser than human knowledge and in the weakness which is stronger than human strength, is contained the hidden means of our justification and glorification. There are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, which are never opened to one who despises the food transmitted through the body (*caro*) of the mother, that is, the nourishment of milk transmitted to us through the breasts of the prophets and apostles.¹⁰⁷ The more learned who are enlightened by God's truth, have the same task as the prophets and the apostles, that is, they should help the little ones to understand the divine message. When the little ones are troubled, they start asking questions, and their questioning is a kind of pushing at the mother's breasts with their head, to make them yield as much milk as will satisfy the little ones.¹⁰⁸

Among the prophets and the apostles, Moses and Paul are for Augustine the great examples of maternal love. The context is again the coexistence of good and bad people in the church. The easiest way is to leave the bad to fend for themselves, but this is not the way of love. Although God offered another people to Moses, the latter intercedes for the sinful people, when God threatens to destroy it from before his face. Moses chooses the side of the sinners, and prays for them. How does he pray? With the love of a mother. His maternal instincts are roused, and on their behalf he stands up to the anger of God: "Lord, if You will forgive them this sin, forgive; but if not, blot me out from the book You have written" (Ex 32:32).¹⁰⁹ Another example of maternal love (*caritas mater*) is found

magis tuo malo quam suo". Cf. *Sermo* 228,1. PL 38,1101.

¹⁰⁷ *Contra Faustum* XII,46. CSEL 25/1,375: "Et ibi sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae absconditi, qui nulli aperiuntur, si sibi [tibi] per maternam carnem traiectionem cibum, id est per apostolica et prophetica ubera lactis alimenta contempserit et tamquam infantilem victum ... fastidiens ...".

¹⁰⁸ *Sermo* 51,7,11. PL 38,339: "... inquisitio eorum, quasi percussio est de capite in ubera matris, ut tantum manent, quantum parvulis sat est. Illi turbati quaerunt; qui autem norunt et didicerunt, quia scrutati sunt, et aperuit illis pulsantibus Deus, aperiunt et ipsi turbatis. Et sic fit ut illi sint utiles ad inveniendam veritatem".

¹⁰⁹ *Sermo* 88,21,24. ed. P. Verbraken, *Rev. Bénéd.* 94 (1984), p. 100: "Magna probatio dilectionis, fratres. ... Videte illam, de qua saepe locuti sumus, maternam quodam modo caritatem. Cum deus minaretur sacrilego populo, pia Moysi viscera tremuerunt ... Quam paternis maternisque visceribus, quam securus hoc dixerit, attendens iustitiam et misericor-

in the story of the two prostitutes quarreling over the question who the mother was of the dead and who of the living baby. Augustine considers the answer of one of them: "May it please you, my lord, let them give her the child, and do not let them think of killing it" (1 Kgs 3:26) as an incomparable sign of maternal love. He continues immediately with the example of Moses, in whom love exclaims: "Lord, either forgive them, or blot me out of your book" (Ex 32:32). In the same context, the bishop of Hippo warns against the insincerity of the Donatists claiming for themselves a spurious dignity of motherhood. Nonetheless, Donatism retains in its memory, as in its breasts, the words of faith and the Christian doctrine, and from this milk even the spurious mother can give suck of the true faith to the sucking infant.¹¹⁰

With regard to Paul, Augustine refers particularly to three texts: 1 Cor 3:1-2: "What I gave you as little children in Christ to drink was milk, not solid food"; Gal 4:19: "I go through the pain of giving birth to you over again, until Christ is formed in you"; 1 Thess 2:7: "I have become a little child in the midst of you, like a nurse caring fondly (*fovens*) for her children".

Because a breast and milk are connected notions, Augustine can speak of the breasts of the apostle Paul. He sees this as an example of prophetic and figurative language, when he deals with the text of Hosea 9:14: "Give them empty wombs, and dried-up breasts". He bases his talk of Paul's breasts on the three Pauline texts just quoted.¹¹¹ Earlier, we have already mentioned a passage in which Paul is described as the mother-charity, who in Paul is travailing in birth; thereby mother-charity rends, as it were, her breasts with words, which is an allusion to the suffering caused by the proclamation of the word of God.¹¹² But sucking the breast is not an end in itself for, in his *Commentary on the letter to the Galatians*, Augustine considers it as the task of a pedagogue to make himself superfluous. The role of a pedagogue is comparable with nourishing an infant by the breasts, but with the intention that it no longer needs them. This

diam dei".

¹¹⁰ *Sermo* 10,8. CCL 41,159: "Dicat ergo caritas mater: *Date illi puerum ...* In Moyse caritas exclamat: Domine, aut ignosce illis, aut dele me de libro tuo ... Iam in malis moribus simulatio constituta retinet tamen in memoria, tamquam in uberibus, verba fidei doctrinamque christianam ... Ex isto lacte poterat etiam falsa mater verae tamen fidei succum sugenti parvulo infundere".

¹¹¹ *Contra Adimantum* 25. CSEL 25/1,183: "Et ubera quaedam habebat apostolus, cum diceret: *lac vobis potum dedi, non escam ...*".

¹¹² *In epist. Johannis tr.* 2,4. PL 35,1992: "Nam dividitibus sibi Ecclesiam, et partes facere de unitate conantibus parturiens parvulos mater charitas in Apostolo, exponit viscera sua, conscindit quodammodo verbis ubera sua, plorat filios ...". See also note 64.

applies also to a ship returning to one's native country; when one has arrived, one does no longer need the ship. The same is true of the Law; from the moment that one has understood the Law in a spiritual way, it is forbidden to live in a carnal way under it.¹¹³ *Infantes* and *lactantes* are those to whom Paul says: "What I gave you as little children in Christ to drink was milk, not solid food" (1 Cor 3:1-2). It must be admitted that some members of the churches no longer do drink milk. But if there were only perfect people, the churches could not be of any help for the human race.¹¹⁴

Insisting on the text "I go through the pain of giving birth to you over again, until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19), Augustine draws the conclusion that we should follow Paul as a parent. Paul says this rather in the name of mother-church, for he speaks also of himself as a nurse caring fondly for her children (1 Thess 2:7). Then Augustine mentions the four phases of the origin of a baby: conception, formation, labour pains, birth. The conception and the formation in the womb precede being in labour so that the child can be born. This can lead to questions concerning Paul's statement. Augustine makes therefore a distinction between *parturitio* and *nativitas*. In Gal 4:19, *parturitio* has the meaning of the anguishes and troubles connected to taking care of others. First, in order that they may be born in Christ, and secondly that they may not be exposed to the dangers of seduction which Paul sees threatening the Christians. But in the text of Gal 4:19 it is not a question of the beginning of faith, for the addressees of the letter are already born. *Quos iterum parturio* is said for the sake of strength and perfection.¹¹⁵ Being in labour in order to give birth is an act

¹¹³ *Epistolae ad Galatas expositio* 17. CSEL 84,73: "Hoc autem agitur per paedagogum, ut non sit necessarius paedagogus, sicut per ubera nutritur infans, ut iam uberibus non indigeat, et per navem pervenitur ad patriam, ut iam navi opus non sit, sive per legem spiritualiter intellectam legi mortuus est, ne sub ea carnaliter viveret". Cf. *Confessiones* XIII,22,23. CCL 27,260: "Ad hoc enim dispensator ille tuus generans per evangelium filios, ne semper parvulos haberet, quos lacte nutriret et tamquam nutrix foveret: *Reformamini*, inquit, *in novitate* ...".

¹¹⁴ *Enarr. in ps.* 8,5. CCL 38,50-51: "Non possum accipere alios infantes et lactantes, quam eos quibus dicit apostolus: *Tamquam parvulis in Christo lac vobis potum dedi, non cibum* ... Sunt enim in ecclesiis etiam hi qui non iam lacte potantur, sed vescuntur cibo ... sed non ex his solis perficiuntur ecclesiae, quia si soli essent, non consuleretur generi humano".

¹¹⁵ *Epist. ad Galatas expositio* 38. CSEL 84,106-107: "*Quos iterum*, inquit, *parturio, donec Christus formetur in vobis*. Magis hoc ex persona matris ecclesiae locutus est, nam et alibi dicit: *Factus sum parvulus in medio vestrum, tamquam si nutrix foveat filios suos* ... Sed cum homines a matribus concipiuntur, ut formentur, iam formati autem parturiantur, ut nascantur, potest movere, quod dictum est: *quos iterum parturio, donec Christus formetur in vobis*. Nisi parturitionem hanc pro curarum angoribus positam intelligamur,

of love. It is love that is in labour; it is the Spirit of God who is in labour, for the love of God is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). And this love is paternal love, but also, and even more, maternal love. The love of Paul, especially for the weak endangered by error, expresses itself in his care (*sollicitudo*) that is full of paternal and maternal love.¹¹⁶ Maternal love can also be called maternal affection. Explaining the text of Job 39:1 "Have you ever watched over the hinds in labour?", Augustine applies it to the spiritual ones in the churches who are persuading others *materno affectu* to follow them. However, they are not watched over by themselves but by God, for they give birth by the gospel. Augustine refers to the words *iterum parturio* of Gal 4:19 and speaks also of the milk of the sacraments.¹¹⁷

The expression *tamquam nutrix fovens filios suos* (1 Thess 2:7) evokes the image of the mother-hen. Paul covered with spread wings the chickens and cared fondly (*fovebat*) for them, as he himself said: "I have become a little child in the midst of you, like a nurse caring fondly for her children". Thus he was like a mother-hen by his love for his children.¹¹⁸ After having referred to the example of Christ who emptied Himself by taking the form of a slave (cf. Phil 2:6-8) and became weak with the weak (cf. 1 Cor 9:22), Augustine describes Paul as the follower of Christ. Paul,

quibus eos parturivit, ut nascerentur in Christo, et iterum parturit propter pericula seductionis, quibus eos conturbari videt ... Non ergo propter initium fidei, quo iam nati erant, sed propter robur et perfectionem dictum est: *Quos iterum parturio, donec Christus formetur in vobis*. Cf. *Epist.* 82,4,30. CSEL 34/2,381: "... (filios suos) pariendos parturiebat". *S.* 362,15,18. PL 39,1622-1623.

¹¹⁶ *Contra epistulam Parmeniani* III,1,3. CSEL 51,103: "Quid moderatius, quid diligentius, quid sollicitudine pia et paterna ac materna caritate plenius fieri aut dici potest?" (referring to 2 Cor 2:4-11); *Sermo* 361,4,4. PL 39,1600. *Enarr. in ps.* 98,13. CCL 39,1390.

¹¹⁷ *Enarr. in ps.* 147,14. CCL 40,2149: "Isti filii sancti iam laudantes et gaudentes, parturiti et parti sunt matre caritate, inclusi sunt colligente caritate. Audi caritatem parturientem illos: qua praeditus Paulus apostolus, non solum paternum, sed et maternum cor gerens in filios: *Filii mei*, inquit, *quos iterum parturio*. Cum Paulus eos parturiebat, caritas parturiebat, Dei Spiritus parturiebat; *caritas enim Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum sanctum, qui datus est nobis*". Cf. *Adnotationes in Job* 39. CSEL 28/2,616-617: "*Aut partus cervarum custodisti?* Ecclesiarum in numero spiritualium, materno adfectu imitationem suam persuadentium ... tamen et tales custodiuntur non de se, sed de deo praesumentes ... non enim pariunt nisi per evangelium ... *Et nutristi hinnulos earum sine metu?* in lacte sacramentorum non timidos ... *Exibunt* tamquam ex angustiis doctrinae, quae per homines incipientibus traditur; *et non revertentur* matribus suis, non iam opus habentes lacte nec doctoribus hominibus indigentes".

¹¹⁸ *Sermo* Denis 13,5-6. MA I,60-61: "Tegebat expensis alis, fovebat pullos, sicut ipse ait: *Factus sum parvulus in medio vestrum, tamquam nutrix fovens filios suos* ... Paulus caritate filiorum ut gallina remanebat".

too, became a little child in the midst of us, like a nurse cherishing her children (1 Thess 2:7). For is it a pleasure to murmur into the ear broken and mutilated words, if love does not invite us to do so? And yet human beings wish to have infants for whom they may do this. For a mother it is more pleasant to chew morsels small and to spit them into the mouth of her little son¹¹⁹ than to chew and consume large morsels herself. My dear people, Augustine says, let not the thought of the hen leave your mind, who with her drooping feathers covers her tender brood and with broken sound calls her peeping chicks to her side, while those that turn away from her caressing wings, in their pride, become the prey of hawks. Love seeks nothing of those to whom it descends, except their eternal salvation.¹²⁰ And following on the image of the pelican applied to Christ, Augustine declares that Paul is father and mother at the same time. He is both, not by himself but by the gospel. He is father by saying: "Although you might have many pedagogues in Christ, you do not have many fathers; for it was I who begot you in Christ Jesus by preaching the gospel" (1 Cor 4:15). He is mother as appears from his words: "My little children, for whom I go through the pain of giving birth to you over again, until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19).¹²¹

Paul followed the example of the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. He ascended into the third heaven (2 Cor 12:2), and became milk for the little ones (cf. 1 Cor 3:1-2 and 1 Thess 2:7). Paul makes himself a little one like a nurse and mother who speak mutilated words and shake their tongues, in order to form charming childish words from a skilful language, because if they speak according to rule, the baby does not understand nor profit. A father who is an eloquent speaker does the same, when he returns home from the forum or the judgment-seat. In child's language he descends to his little one. Thus the preachers of God's

¹¹⁹ This is clearly a custom of that time; cf. CICERO, *De oratore* II,39,162. Ed. E. Courbaud, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1966, p. 72-73.

¹²⁰ *De catechizandis rudibus* 10,15. CCL 46,138: "Hinc ergo factus est parvulus in medio nostrum, tamquam nutrix fovens filios suos. Num enim delectat, nisi amor invitet, decurtata et mutilata verba immurmurare? Et tamen optant homines habere infantes, quibus id exhibeant; et suavius est matri minuta mansa inspuere parvo filio, quam ipsam mandere ac devorare. Non ergo recedat de pectore etiam cogitatio gallinae illius, quae languidulis plumis teneros fetus operit, et susurrantes pullos confracta voce advocat; cuius blandas alas refugientes superbi praeda fiunt alitibus ... caritas ... nihil quaerendi ab eis ad quos descendit, praeter eorum sempiternam salutem".

¹²¹ *Enarr. in ps.* 101, s. 1,8. CCL 40,1431-1432: "Habet enim (sc. Christus) paternam auctoritatem, maternum affectum; sicut et Paulus et pater est et mater est; non per seipsum, sed per evangelium: pater ubi dicit: *Etsi habeatis multos paedagogos in Christo, sed non multos patres; in Christo enim Iesu per evangelium ego vos genui*; mater autem ubi ait: *Filioli mei, quos iterum parturio, donec Christus formetur in vobis*".

word follow also the Lord's example of ascending and descending. They ascend by following the Lord, they descend by preaching the gospel.¹²² Paul has made himself a little one like a nurse cherishing her children; he did not wish to be a burden on anyone of the Thessalonians by trying to get money. Thus he wanted to avoid dangers for the weak, who could be agitated by false suspicions and hate the gospel as something that could be bought. Trembling for them, he did this, so to speak, with paternal and maternal feelings of love.¹²³ He wishes to be like a mother for the little ones, because the good work of the preaching of the gospel is not his work, but that of God's grace with him collaborating.¹²⁴

A weak Christian is called, according to Augustine, mother's son, not yet father's son, because he needs still milk, and lies on the breast. Therefore, Paul says: a mother I have been to you, as is said in another place: "I became a little one in the midst of you, like a nurse cherishing her children". Not a nurse nourishing children of others, but a nurse cherishing her own children. For there are mothers who, when they have given birth, give their babies to nurses. But Paul himself had given birth, he himself cherished, and did not commit the child to a nurse. He cherished it, and gave it suck.¹²⁵ In this text, we discover a new aspect. A distinction is made between the love of a nurse and that of a mother: a nurse takes care of the children of others, but a mother does so regarding her own children. The same idea occurs in two other sermons. How can Paul

¹²² In *Johannis evangelium* tr. 7,23. CCL 36,80-81: "Quaere quo adscenderat. Usque in tertium caelum. Quaere quo descenderit. Usque ad lac parvulis dandum ... Videmus enim et nutrices et matres descendere ad parvulos; et si norunt latina verba dicere, decurant illa, et quassant quodammodo linguam suam, ut possint de lingua diserta fieri blandimenta puerilia; quia si sic dicant, non audit infans, sed nec proficit infans. Et disertus aliquis pater ... cum ad domum redierit, seponit forensem eloquentiam quo adscenderat, et lingua puerili descendit ad parvulum ... Si ipse Dominus adscendit et descendit, manifestum est quia et praedicatores ipsius adscendunt imitatione, descendunt praedicatione".

¹²³ *De opere monachorum* 12,13. CSEL 41,554: "Infirmorum enim periculis, ne falsis suspicionibus agitati odissent quasi venale evangelium, tamquam paternis maternisque visceribus tremefactus hoc fecit".

¹²⁴ *Sermo* 10,8. CCL 41,159: "Dicit enim apostolus tamquam matrem se exhibuisse parvulis in quibus bonum opus evangelicum fecerat, non ipse sed gratia dei cum illo".

¹²⁵ *Enarr. in ps.* 49,27. CCL 38,595: "Ideo infirmus ille *filius matris* dictus est, nondum patris, adhuc lacte indigens et uberibus adhaerens. Portatur adhuc sinu matris ecclesiae, non valet accedere ad solidum cibum mensae patris sui, sed de ubere matris victum trahit ... Mater vobis fui, quomodo dicitur alio loco: *Factus sum parvulus in medio vestrum, tamquam nutrix fovens filios suos*. Non nutrix nutriens filios alienos, sed nutrix fovens filios suos. Sunt enim matres quae cum peperint, dant nutricibus; illae quae pepererunt, non foveant filios suos, quia nutriendos dederunt ... Iste vero ipse pepererat, ipse fovebat, nulli nutrici quem pepererat committebat ... Fovebat ergo, et lactabat". See S. SOENNECKEN, *Mysogynie oder Philogynie?* o.c., p.151-154 concerning nursing tasks.

speak of himself as a nurse and, at the same time, of his "own" children? In other texts Augustine has given sometimes the impression that Paul had only the task of a nurse, while the task of giving birth should be attributed to Christ, which is theologically speaking a healthy view. Nonetheless, Augustine insists on the fact that Paul did not disdain to call himself a mother according to 1 Thess 2:7. From this the conclusion can be drawn that Paul takes on the role both of a nurse for he speaks of "a nurse caring fondly" and of a mother for he speaks of "his own children". Paul is, at the same time, he who nourishes and he who fondles, as he declares in another text.¹²⁶ The most explicit text is found in *sermon Dolbeau 7* that offers a fragment preserved by Bede. The context tells us that Paul is able to break open the scriptural passages which remain closed. He will do so because he has a paternal love, as appears from the text: "Although you might have many pedagogues in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for it was I who begot you in Christ Jesus by the preaching of the gospel" (1 Cor 4:15). He has also a maternal love according to the text: "I became a little one in the midst of you, like a nurse caring fondly for her children" (1 Thess 2:7). Paul did not call himself "mother", because mothers who are rather dainty or do not love their children, give their newborn to another. On the other hand, if he had said only *like a nurse fondling*, and had not added *her children*, it would seem as if he had accepted to nourish the children of another who is the real mother. This was the reason why he called himself a nurse because it was he who nourished; he spoke of his children because it was he who had given birth. But he is in labour like the church gives birth, that is, through his womb, not through his seed. We can call Paul father or mother as we wish; he will not be angry, since he wished to be both because of his affection, although he is neither on account of his sex.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ *Sermo 23,3*. CCL 41,310: "Videte apostolum. Melius enim ipsum intuemur, qui se etiam matrem non dedignatus est dicere, ubi ait: *Factus sum parvulus in medio vestrum, tamquam nutrix fovens filios suos*. Sunt enim nutrices foventes quidem, sed non filios suos. Item sunt matres nutricibus dantes, non foventes filios suos. Apostolus vero, germano et pingui caritatis affectu et nutricis personam suscepit dicendo: *fovens*, et matris addendo: *filios suos*. Idem ergo nutritor et fotor alio loco dicit, quod paulo ante commemoravi: *Cum timore et tremore multo fui apud vos*".

¹²⁷ *Sermo Dolbeau 7,22*. Vingt-six sermons au peuple d'Afrique, Paris 1996, p. 574-575: "Franget - noli timere - qui et paternam caritatem in te habet, cum dicit: *Etsi multos paedagogos habetis in Christo, sed non multos patres*. In Christo enim Iesu per evangelium ego vos genui, et maternam cum dicit: *Factus sum parvulus in medio vestrum, tamquam nutrix fovens filios suos*. Ideo non dixit matrem, quia aliquando matres vel delicatiores vel non amantes filios suos, cum pepererint, aliis tradunt nutriendos. Rursus si solum dixisset: *Tamquam nutrix fovens*, et non addidisset: *filios suos*, tamquam alia pariente nutriendos accepisse videretur. Ergo et nutricem se dixit, quoniam alebat, et filios suos,

Motherly aspects in Augustine's apostolic activity

It is obvious that Augustine's own practice was strongly inspired by the models given by the preachers of the gospel before him. This was in the first place Paul, but also John. The latter's teaching on love is significant: "Brethren, let us gladly embrace a maternal solicitude. Not without cause is a mother solicitous about us, whereas others rejoice. By the mother I mean charity. For charity dwelt in the heart of John, when he spoke these words". "These words" refer to John's fear of the darkness, which can befall the faithful when they hate their neighbours. Augustine and his audience wish to follow the example of John: maternal love, but not carelessly.¹²⁸ Augustine refers also to the example of Cyprian who by his paternal and maternal love followed the example of Paul forbearing those, who were ill-disposed and envious towards him, out of the same love towards the church.¹²⁹ Cyprian was in labour for those who were not yet in Christ as well as for those who were already reborn in Christ.¹³⁰ In particular against the Donatists, the "breasts of love" of Cyprian are mentioned. The error of Cyprian with regard to rebaptism is a birth mark on the brightness of a holy soul, a birth mark that the *ubera caritatis* covered.¹³¹

quia ipse pepererat dicens: *Filioli mei, quos iterum parturio, donec Christus formetur in vobis*. Parturit autem, sicut parit ecclesia, utero suo, non semine suo. Da ergo huic patri vel matri - quod vis appella: non irascitur, cum utrumque voluit esse adfectu, cum sit neutrum sexu ...". It is noteworthy what Augustine observes about babies: they recognize by sense the touch and nearness of their nurses, and the odour of others to whom they are not accustomed, is repellant to them (*De quant. animae* 28,54. CSEL 89,201).

¹²⁸ *In epist. Johannis tr.* 1,11. PL 35,1986: "Fratres, maternam sollicitudinem libenter amplectamur. Non sine causa mater sollicita est de nobis, cum alii gaudent: matrem dico charitatem; ipsa enim habitabat in corde Joannis, cum ista diceret". See also *En. in ps.* 119,2. CCL 40,1779 where Augustine mentions Paul, John, and Isaiah as models: "Descendentes qui sunt? Qui quamvis, quantum homines possunt, fruuntur intellegentia spiritalium, tamen descendunt ad parvulos, ut talia eis dicant, qualia possunt capere, et lacte nutriti possint idonei fieri et validi ad capiendum cibum spiritalem. Isaias, fratres, etiam ipse ad nos de descendentibus fuit". Cf. note 122.

¹²⁹ *De baptismo* IV, 9,12. CSEL 51,237: "Et tamen eos propter Christum, qui pro infirmis mortuus est, ne ante tempus eradicatis zizaniis simul eradicaretur et triticum, paternae et maternae caritatis visceribus toleravit, imitatus utique apostolum Paulum, qui malivolos et invidos sibi eadem circa ecclesiam caritate sustinuit".

¹³⁰ *Epist.* 93,10,41. CSEL 34/2,485: "Vides eum (sc. Cyprianum) parturientem, non solum ut parvuli in Christo concepti nascantur, verum etiam ne iam nati de sinu matris excussi moriantur".

¹³¹ *De baptismo* I,19,29. CSEL 51,173: "... nam illum naevum in candore sanctae animae caritatis ubera contegebant ...". Cf. ib. VI,6,9. ib. 303. *Epistula* 93,10,40. CSEL 34/2,484: "... aut hoc postea correxit in regula veritatis aut hunc quasi naevum sui candi-

Augustine describes himself as follows: "Why do I speak of myself, who was then a Catholic Christian, and who, nearly exhausted and parched after my long thirst, had at that time sought again with all avidity the breasts which nourished me, and, weeping and deeply groaning, have pressed these breasts, that there might flow sufficient (milk) to revive me in my state ...?"¹³² Therefore, he addresses himself preferably to the little ones in the church, for the experience of his conversion from Manicheism to the Catholic church might be profitable to others. The truth is in the milk of the church, just as it is in the bread of the church. The church feels secure with regard to the full-grown children, but the bishop of Hippo wants to speak to the little ones, his brothers, his sons and his masters, whom the church cherishes (*fovet*) like eggs under her caring wings, or nourishes like infants with milk.¹³³ The bishop wishes to speak to the little ones who are still in need of milk, in order that they may become able to eat solid food.¹³⁴

The proclamation of the word of God is not only something a bishop should pay heed to, but it is also a task and obligation for him.¹³⁵ Being in labour pangs in order to give birth through preaching is a task of love.¹³⁶ He knows that he has to begin with the incarnate Christ; he charms the little ones among the faithful by Christ's condition of a slave,

dissimi pectoris cooperuit ubere caritatis". Whatever opinion about rebaptism one has: "Hos omnes catholica unitas materno sinu complectitur", *De baptismo* II,6,8. ib. 183.

¹³² *De utilitate credendi* 1,2. CSEL 25/1,5. BA 8, p. 211-212: "Sed de me quid dicam, qui iam catholicus christianus eram? Quae nunc ubera post longissimam sitim paene exhaustus atque aridus tota aviditate repetivi eaque altius flens et gemens concussi et expressi, ut id manaret, quod mihi sic adfecto ad recreationem satis esse posset ...".

¹³³ *Contra Faustum* XV,3. CSEL 25/1,420: "Sed tibi profecerint etiam pericula mea, cui nunc servit liberatio mea ... Noli decipi nomine veritatis; hanc sola tu habes, et in lacte tuo et in pane tuo; in hac autem tantum nomen eius est, ipsa non est. Et in tuis quidem grandibus secreta es; sed appello in te parvulos tuos, fratres, filios, dominos meos, quos vel tamquam ova sollicitis alis foves vel tamquam infantes lacte nutris ... hos in te appello teneros fetus tuos ...".

¹³⁴ *En. in ps.* 38,3. CCL 38,405: "Sic parvulum alloquimur, in sinu matris ecclesiae pio lacte nutriendum, et ad escam mensae dominicae idoneum faciendum", with a reference to 1 Cor 3:1-2.

¹³⁵ *S. Denis* 3,1. MA I,18: "Reddendi sermonis officium, et cura qua vos parturivimus, ut Christum formaretur in vobis, compellit nos admonere infantiam vestram ...".

¹³⁶ *Gesta c. Emerito* 1. CSEL 53,182: "... quantum in me poterant viscera caritatis, omnes in periculo animae suae constitutos in illo meo sermone parturiebam et parere domino cupiebam". Cf. *De opere monach.* 28,36. CSEL 41,585: "... sine me paululum, sancte frater ... eos ipsos adloqui filios et fratres nostros, quos novi quanta nobiscum dilectione parturias, donec in eis apostolica disciplina formetur".

but he reserves for the future Christ's divine state.¹³⁷ Therefore, he exhorts them not to be angry because they have to suck the breast, and to bear that they must remain in the nest.¹³⁸

In a sermon the bishop excuses himself because of his weak voice, and continues: "The spirit, you see, is willing toward you, but the flesh is weak. And the spirit itself is in labour with whatever joys it has conceived from the Scripture of God, and seeks to give these joys birth in your ears and minds. Prepare in yourselves a nest for my sermon. The turtle-dove seeking a nest where she may lay her chicks is also recommended in Holy Scripture".¹³⁹ In his *Commentary on the first letter of John*, Augustine is glad that the faithful are claiming that he continues his exposition, because where charity is, is he who claims not bitter, but sweet; and, at the same time, charity makes the labour light for the speaker. He gives as an example the natural love of animals; the mother animal likes that her calf sucks and, if it is not there, she calls for it to come. The bishop applies to himself the text of 1 Thess 2:7: "I became a little one in the midst of you, like a nurse caring fondly for her children".¹⁴⁰ He bears witness that he administered the sweetness of the Lord to his faithful by his office of wet-nurse. They should live according to a holy infancy.¹⁴¹ The bishop considers it as an obligation to care for the newly baptized for whom he is in labour: "As you, (newly baptized) brothers and sisters, will recall, when the fledglings of swallows and house sparrows begin to fly from the nest, their mothers fly round them loudly twittering and with their anxious loving voices warn their young of the dangers".¹⁴² He applies the Pauline words

¹³⁷ *En. in ps.* 43,16. CCL 38,488: "Videtis formam servi, occulta est forma Dei: per hanc vobis blandior, illam vobis servo; hac vos parvulos nutrio, illa grandes pasco".

¹³⁸ *En. in ps.* 54,24. CCL 39,674: "Parvulus es, nondum intellegis secreta verborum: forte tibi panis latet, et adhuc lacte nutriendus es; noli irasci uberibus, ipsa te idoneum reddent ad mensam". *En. in ps.* 103, s. 3,9. CCL 40,1508: "Vos in terra inveniri, et ante vultis volare quam pasci; prius nutrimini, educamini, ferte nidum".

¹³⁹ *Sermo* 37,1. CCL 41,446: "Et ipse animus, quaecumque forte gaudia de scriptura dei concepit, parturit et parere quaerit in auribus et mentibus vestris. Praestate in vobis nidum sermoni. Commendatur enim et in scriptura turtur, quaerens nidum sibi ubi ponat pullos suos".

¹⁴⁰ *In epist. Joannis tr.* 9,1. PL 35,2045: "Si ergo est in nobis illa charitas spiritualis, de qua apostolus dicit: *Factus sum parvulus in medio vestrum, tanquam nutrix fovens filios suos*; tunc vos diligimus quando exigitis".

¹⁴¹ *Sermo* 351,1,1. PL 39,1560: "Proinde quia gustastis, nos testis sumus: nos vobis hanc suavitatem nutricis officio ministravimus. Agite itaque admoniti sanctae instar infantiae, deponite malitiam".

¹⁴² *Sermo* 376,2,3. PL 39,1670: "Necesse est ergo, ut parturientes eos alloquamur. Sicut enim recolitis, fratres mei, hirundinum vel domesticorum passerum pullos, quando volare de nido coeperint, matres cum strepitu circumvolant, et vocibus piis testantur

"I gave you birth through the gospel" (1 Cor 4:15) to himself, saying that the faithful are not only his brothers, but also his children.¹⁴³ And to pope Celestine Augustine writes: "What am I to do? I do not want to accuse to your Reverence one whom I fostered and cherished. On the other hand, I do not want to abandon those for whom I was in labour pangs in order to bring them together with fear and sorrow".¹⁴⁴ The monks of Capraria are exhorted not to prefer their peaceful retirement to the needs of the church; otherwise, if there were no good people to minister to the church in travail, you would find no way of being born yourselves.¹⁴⁵

Especially important are the texts from Augustine's book *The first catechetical instruction*. W. Harmless describes the situation of the catechumens as a time of leaving the old and marking out the new: "In this transition, Augustine played midwife, mixing firmness and gentleness: on the one hand, calling them not to flee the labor pangs, and on the other, encouraging them to look forward and love the new self coming to birth".¹⁴⁶ Addressing himself to the catechists, Augustine suggests that, to counteract boredom in teaching, one takes Christ's example and Paul's advices to heart, which constituted certainly also his own attitude. But one can ask the question if the term "midwife" remains not a bit too external (in the sense of someone who stands outside the event) in comparison with the texts of Paul and, consequently, of Augustine himself? A midwife assists only other women in childbirth. But the labour pangs are not only in the catechumen, but also in the catechist. Does the word "midwife" fully do justice to "maternal" love, as Augustine says: "If it is disgusting to us to repeat over and over things that are familiar and suitable for little children, let us suit ourselves to them with fraternal, paternal and maternal love; when we are united to them in heart, these things will seem even new to ourselves. For so great is the power of sympathy that, when people are affected by us as we speak, and we by them as they learn, we dwell

pericula filiorum".

¹⁴³ *Sermo Mai* 92. MA I,332: "... admoneo tanquam fratres et filios: fratres, quia una nos genuit ecclesia mater; filios, quia *per evangelium ego vos genui*".

¹⁴⁴ *Epist.* 209,4. CSEL 57,349: "... nolo deserere quos colligendos timoribus et doloribus parturivi".

¹⁴⁵ *Epist.* 48,2. CSEL 34/2,138: "Nec vestrum otium necessitatibus ecclesiae praepo-
natis, cui parturienti si nulli boni ministrare vellent, quo modo nasceremini, non invenire-
tis". See also note 87.

¹⁴⁶ W. HARMLESS, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*. Collegeville Minn., 1995, p. 294.

each in the other".¹⁴⁷ Augustine describes his own experience as follows: "As we are now treating of instructing candidates, I can testify to you from my own experience that I am differently stirred according to the person I see before me and whom I should catechize: a cultivated person or a dullard, a fellow citizen or a stranger, a rich or a poor person, a private citizen or someone honored by a public office, a person having some official authority, a person of this or that family, of this or that age or sex, coming from this or that sect, or from this or that popular error. In keeping with my own varying feelings my discourse opens, proceeds, and closes. And although to all the same love is due, the same medicine is not to be applied to all. In the same way, love is in labour with some, and becomes weak with others; love is at pains to edify some, and dreads to be a cause of offense to others; love stoops to some, and stands with head erect before others; love is gentle to some, and stern to others; love is enemy to none, and mother to all".¹⁴⁸

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¹⁴⁷ *De catechizandis rudibus* 12,17. CCL 46,14: "Iam vero si usitata et parvulis congruentia saepe repetere fastidimus: congruamus eis per fratrum, patrum, maternumque amorem, et copulatis cordi eorum etiam nobis nova videntur. Tantum enim valet animi compatiens affectus, ut cum illi afficiuntur nobis loquentibus, et nos illis discentibus, habitemus in invicem".

¹⁴⁸ *Ib.* 15,23. *ib.* 147-148: "Sed quia de rudibus imbuendis nunc agimus, de me ipso tibi testis sum, aliter atque aliter me moveri, cum ante me catechizandum video eruditum, inertem, civem, peregrinum, divitem, pauperem, privatum, honoratum, in potestate aliqua constitutum, illius aut illius gentis hominem, illius aut illius aetatis aut sexus, ex illa aut illa secta, ex illo aut illo vulgari errore venientem: ac pro diversitate motus mei sermo ipse et procedit et progreditur et finitur. Et quia cum eadem omnibus debeatur caritas, non eadem est omnibus adhibenda medicina: ipsa item caritas alios parit, cum aliis infirmatur; alios curat aedificare, alios contremiscit offendere, ad alios se inclinat, ad alios erigit, aliis blanda, aliis severa, nulli inimica, omnibus mater".