Within the quite extensive bibliography on Augustine, there are two themes which are very important but which have only attracted the attention of Augustinian scholars in a special way since the second half of the past century: one is the Augustinian theology of religious life; the other is the pastoral perspective of the figure and teaching of Saint Augustine.

With regard to the second, the work of F. van der Meer “Saint Augustine, Pastor of Souls”, is a classic, whose original publication in Dutch appeared in 1946. The proof of its acceptance was the swiftness with which it was translated to other European languages: German (1951), French (1955), English (1961), Spanish (1965), Italian (1971). Another well-known and widely distributed book in its time was the short but rich study on the priesthood in Saint Augustine published by M. Pellegrino under the title “True Priest. The Priesthood in the Experience and Thought of Saint Augustine” (original Italian edition 1965, Spanish edition 1966, English edition 1968). More recently, we can cite in chronological order some writings with important Augustinian texts, information or reflections on Saint Augustine as pastor: A. Trapé, Saint Augustine. Man, Pastor, Mystic (1976); A.G. Hamman, Daily Life in North Africa at the time of Saint Augustine (original French edition 1979, Spanish edition 1989); C. Boff, Saint Augustine of Hippo and the Pastoral Ministry of Liberation (1984); G. Ceriotti, Saint Augustine on the Priesthood (1985); E. Karlic, Saint Augustine, Bishop and Pastor (conference, later published in the ‘Congreso Agustiniano de Teología’ celebrated in Buenos Aires in August, 2004).

But this is not the moment to do an exhaustive investigation nor a complete synthesis of all that has been written about Augustine as pastor. Our objective, which is more modest, in accord with the title of this conference and the wishes of the organizing commission of this Congress, is to set forth the pastoral figure and teaching of Saint Augustine in order to clarify the identity and praxis of those who, having the charism of Augustine, serve Christian communities in pastoral ministry. I will try to do this without inferences or anachronisms, allowing, as far as possible, for Augustine the pastor to speak according to the following arrangement: the Pastoral Experience of Augustine, the Pastoral Theology of Augustine, and the Pastoral Praxis of Augustine.
If the person and thought of Augustine have been, and always are, so human and contemporaneous, it is because in them there is always an intimate connection between theory and practice. His reflections are never cold and abstract (he was not a theologian at work in a laboratory nor an ‘ivory tower pastor’) because they always originate in his own experience and are passionately alive.

Therefore, to approach Augustine as pastor, we must begin our reflection taking as our starting point what we could call the “vocation” of Augustine to pastoral ministry. This is a word (vocation) which, in Augustine’s case, I think must always be written in quotation marks and underlined, in order to make clear from the start that it is a question of a true vocation or call (he was called by God through the community), and only in this way is it similar to what we understand as a vocation to priesthood (the desire which someone has, discovers or expresses to devote himself to priestly ministry).

As we well know through the statement of his friend and biographer Possidius, Augustine never had such a desire; rather, he rejected it positively and took great care so as not to place himself in danger of being called to the priesthood, avoiding visiting Christian communities where there was no pastor. The same Augustine – now an elderly bishop of 71 years of age – will remind the faithful of Hippo in the famous Sermon 355 how he arrived at the priesthood. He had gone to that city with the intention of winning a friend of his for his monastery in Tagaste. That day the bishop, Valerius, spoke during the Liturgy of the need he felt to choose and ordain a priest to help him in his pastoral work, especially in his preaching, which he himself could barely manage to carry out due to his poor Latin and his advanced age. Augustine, present among the crowd and aware of the practice in vogue for the election of ministers of the community, began to shutter. Effectively, the inevitable happened. The eyes of the faithful focused quickly on him. Augustine would become the priest which the Church of Hippo needed. In vain did he make excuses and try to resist. Valerius confirmed the fortunate decision and shortly thereafter, among the jubilation of the crowd and the ample tears of the ordinand, he conferred the priesthood on Augustine. “I was obliged to accept by force”, Augustine would say in referring to his priestly ordination. His desire and his joy were the tranquil contemplative rest of the monastery, engaged in prayer and in the study of Scripture with the other brothers, and what is more – for this he wept – the responsibility of pastoral ministry frightened him. But he was chosen when he least expected it, and in that unanticipated choice he had to recognize the voice of the Lord who was calling him to serve his brothers and sisters. “The servant must not contradict his Lord”, Augustine explains in this same Sermon 355: therefore his generous heart responded to the call of God through the community and he accepted the priesthood. The same Lord who set him free with his blood – he thought – made him now the servant of his brothers and sisters (cf. Comm. on Psalm 103, Serm. 3,9).

He asked only two things of Valerius: that he would allow him to continue living in community and grant him some months of preparation (from January to Easter) before beginning to exercise the pastoral ministry (Cf Ltr. 21), a ministry that would occupy this
whole life, a long experience of 40 years (391-431), first as priest and shortly afterwards (beginning in 395) as bishop. With frequent trips to preach and participate in councils for the whole ecclesiastical region of North Africa, but with his see in Hippo: a diocese that did not exceed by much the size of our present-day parishes – some 30 or 40 kilometers in radius, full of life and conflicts just as in all of the proud African Church of the period, with eight Catholic churches in the same city and several chapels in the rural area, whose care fell to Augustine as Ordinary with the aid of three or four priests and six or seven deacons.

THE PASTORAL THEOLOGY OF AUGUSTINE

Pastoral theology is not, as it was thought many years ago, a kind of commentary on the ritual or a simple guide for exercising ministry; nor, as some still think today, is it the ‘poor stepchild of the theological sciences. It concerns, according to the classical definition of K. Rahner, a dynamic ecclesiology, capable of illumining what the Church must do here and now in order to faithfully and effectively fulfill its mission in the world. What might be a type of practical theology does not mean that it lacks a theoretical basis, just the opposite: but also here the statement is true that “the best theory is a good practice”... Expressed in more theological terms: the theoretical validity of theological discourse is proven by its ability to illumine reality and Christian praxis from the starting point of faith (and in this consists adequate pastoral theology), and the correct practical orientation of pastoral theology will depend on the soundness and certitude of its theoretical premises, especially in the area of theological reflection on Jesus Christ and the Church. From this perspective, Christology-ecclesiology and pastoral practice form an inseparable and mutually interrelated triad, and from there we move, although briefly and by way of summary, to Augustinian thought.

Christology

All the studies on Augustinian spirituality agree on its Christocentrism, as Thomas F. Martin has recently shown (cf. Our Restless Heart, Orbis Books, 2003). Although Saint Augustine did not write a systematic Christology, Jesus Christ undeniably occupies the center of his life, his thought and his activity. There is no one more “Christian”, in the etymological and strict sense of the word, than Augustine, including before his conversion: as he himself recognizes in the Confessions, he had suckled as a child the name of Christ together with his mother’s milk (Conf III,4,8). His whole experience of faith can be summed up as a pilgrimage through Christ and towards Christ: “Who journeys and walks by faith, though he may not be in his homeland, is already on the way... Where are we going? To Christ. Through what place are we going? Through Christ, he affirms (Comm. PS. 123, 2). And throughout his pastoral activity and his writings, he indicates who Christ is for him through the names or titles which he uses most frequently and which offer us a great, and at the same time intimately personal and relational vision, of the Lord Jesus:
Christ the Word (Verbum)

Beginning with the Gospel of John, the only one for which Augustine offered a complete and systematic commentary, the theology of the Word inspired the teacher of rhetoric and bishop of Hippo to present Christ as The Word. A word which does not consist only in syllables and sounds which enter into the ear, but which arrive at the heart, at the deepest ideals and desires of the human being, in order to reveal to him the love of God the Father and to establish with him a personal and permanent relationship. “You pierced my heart with your word and I have loved you!” (Conf X, 6, 8).

Christ the Physician (Medicus)

Through his incarnation, Christ is the physician and the medicine of God, the only salvation for humanity which is ill with pain and sin, the firm hope of whoever therefore accepts him: “Have confidence, you who are infirm, such a physician has come, and you despair? Serious was the sickness, the wounds were incurable, the pain was hopeless. Do you consider the seriousness of the evil and not the omnipotence of the Physician? You are despairing but he is omnipotent; those who made known the Physician and were the first to be cured are witnesses to this; and still they were cured more in hope than in reality.” (Comm. Ltr. Jn., 8,13)

Christ the Poor (Pauper)

The depth of his personal relationship with Christ is not equivalent for Augustine to a privatized intimacy; it is always a spirituality of solidarity with the poor Christ who appears at our door in the empty hands, the open mouths and the suffering hearts of the poorest. Augustine himself confesses (Serm. 389, 5) that Mt 25, 31ff. is the Gospel text that most moved him and which he, therefore, frequently recalls in his preaching, and he affirms clearly: “Here, on earth, Christ is poor and is in the poor” (Serm. 123,4).

The Whole Christ (Totus)

“The Church, which is made up of all the faithful, because all are members of Christ, has its Head in the heavens, who governs his body, which although separated by sight, is united with him through charity. The Whole Christ is head and body...” (Comm. Ps. 56,1). “When you love the members of Christ, you love Christ; when you love Christ, you love the Son of God; when you love the Son of God, you also love the Father. Love is indivisible: choose one of these three loves, the others will follow” (Comm. Ltr. Jn,10,3). A grandiose theological vision of the mystery of Christ (“a single Christ loving himself”, *ibid*) from which Augustine draws forth, in theory and in practice, the primacy of love, its ecclesial and communitarian meaning, his passion for unity.

With respect to our theme it is necessary, moreover, to highlight two other Christological titles to which Augustine refers: Christ as *Good Shepherd* (see Serm. 137-38; Comm. Jn, tr. 45-46) and as *Good Samaritan* (see the Commentaries on psalms 30 and 125; Serm. 341,3). Christ is the only good shepherd, model of all other pastors, called as he
is to feed his sheep in humility and love, and to give his life for them (especially the poorest, *the feet of the Lord*, Comm. Ltr. Jr. 10,8), not acting as mercenaries (“bad clergy” who only seek their own interest, money, honors and human praise) or thieves (separated from the unity of the Church such as the Donatists). And the good samaritan is for Augustine an allegory of Christ himself, who felt compassion for the human race which lay wounded on the road of life and entrusted his generous care to the apostles: “he did not abandon us on the way; he cured us, he placed us on his beast, that is to say, on his own flesh; took us to an inn, that is the Church, and entrusted us to the keeper who is the Apostle, and gave him two coins to cure us, namely the love of God and neighbor, since all of the law and the prophets are contained in these two commandments. And he said to the keeper: if you spend more than this I will repay you. (Lk. 10,35)” (Commentary on Ser. 125, 15).

**Ecclesiology**

As a believer, theologian and pastor, Augustine was, without a doubt, a man of the Church, (which is not the same as saying simply a ‘churchman’...). At the root of the process which brought him to conversion, he entered little by little into contact with the reality of the Church, which he discovered to be the port of salvation, dispenser of divine life, deposit and authorized interpreter of the truth which he had so long searched after...the catholic Church, extended throughout the earth, one, holy, apostolic...

Once ordained priest, in the first years of his ministry he was exploring theologically the mystery of the Church, concentrating his reflections and his writings on the themes of “Mother Church”, “Virgin and Spouse”, the “Whole Christ” (Head and members). And also, by way of his own pastoral experience and his contact with the Donatist heresy, he was growing in his understanding of the reality of the Church, enriched with its historical and eschatalogical dimension, coining the concept of the “City of God”, pilgrim in the world.

It is not easy to organize systematically the theology of Augustine on the Church. Perhaps it is not possible at all, and of course this is not the moment nor the place to attempt to do so. But we can pause to illustrate to what point the ecclesiology of communion, which characterizes the theology of the Church of the Second Vatican Council, has deep roots in Saint Augustine, explicitly and significantly cited in the Constitution *Lumen gentium*, n. 32: “If what I am for you frightens me, what I am with you consoles me as well. For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian. The former expresses a duty, the latter a grace; the first a danger, the second salvation” (Serm. 340,1, cited in LG 32). A good example, certainly, of how Augustine understood the Church as communion.

An image is worth more than a thousand words...Augustine, expert orator and singular expert on the use of language, uses a whole series of eloquent images in his
preaching and writings to make the mystery of the Church understood as communion. The greater number are pauline in origin and some of the most expressive are the body, the temple or building, the bread and wine of the Eucharist, the choir or symphony.

The Body of Christ

The “Whole Christ” (Head and members) is the Augustinian formula for refering to the mystery of the Church as the Body of Christ. “We are the holy Church,” Augustine used to say encouraging his catechumens: not only we ourselves, but all Christians (Serm. 213, 8). The Church is the Whole Christ, the body of Christ, having various parts united to the Lord, its head. And the first effect of the reality of the Church-communion is for Augustine the participation of all the members in its life, each one according to the vocation he or she has received. Who has heard the call of the Lord – he says – “only the virgins and not the married; or only widows and not the women who still have their husbands; or only monks and not married men; or the clergy, but not the laity; but let the whole Church, the whole body, all the members, distinguished and distributed through their various offices, follow Christ...Each one in its kind and place and own way” (Serm. 96, 9).

The Building which is the Temple

In one of his best known sermons, on the feast of the dedication of a church, Augustine explains that: “What happened here when this building was erected, happens now when the faithful in Christ come together. Believing is, in a certain way, the same as uprooting the trees and stones from the woods and hills; being catechized and formed is similar to the task of being cut and cleaned and polished by the hands of carpenters and stonemasons. Still, these beams and stones do not make the house of God unless they are fitted together by charity. If these beams and stones are not united in a certain order, if they are not fitted together peacefully, if they are not joined in a mutual embrace, so to speak, no one would enter here” (Serm. 336,1). The process of Christian initiation, the necessity for ecclesial communion and the very constitution of the Church are thus beautifully illustrated through this image, on which Augustine will continue his reflection in the form of an allegory in order to draw forth some practical conclusions: "Place as cement in your hearts the counsels of the prophets and apostles. Place before you humility, as clean and smooth pavement. Defend together in your hearts, sound doctrine with prayer and the Word, as firm walls. Illumine them with divine testimony as though they were lamps. Support the weak as though they were columns. Protect beneath the ceiling the needy, so that the Lord our God will repay your temporal goods with eternal ones, and take possession of you forever once the building is completed, constructed and dedicated.” (Serm.337, 5).

The Bread and Wine of the Eucharist

In the same sense as in the previous image, Augustine uses Eucharistic bread and wine: “Be a member of the body of Christ so that your Amen will be valid. Why precisely in
bread? Let’s add nothing personal here, and listen once again to the Apostle, who speaking of the same sacrament, says: Being many, we are one bread, a single body. Understand this and be filled with joy: unity, truth, piety, charity. A single bread: who is this single bread? We, the many, are one bread. Call to mind that bread is not made from a single grain, but from many. When you received the exorcisms you were like ground wheat; when you were baptized, you were sprinkled; when you received the fire of the Holy Spirit you were as though baked. Be what you see and receive what you are. This is what the Apostle said concerning the bread. What we are to understand concerning the chalice, though without saying so expressly, he showed well enough. So that this visible species of bread might exist, many grains were united together in a single mass of dough, just as the Sacred Scriptures say happened regarding the faithful: They had one mind and one heart in God. The same is to be said of the wine. Remember, brothers, how wine is made. Many are the grapes in the bunch, but the juice from them is mixed, forming a single wine. Thus Christ the Lord is symbolized for us; he desired that we belong to him, and consecrated at his table the mystery of our peace and unity. He who receives the mystery of unity and does not possess the bond of peace, does not receive a mystery for his advantage, but testimony against himself (Serm. 272).

The Choir

A more original image of the Church as communion is this: "What is a symphony? The harmony of voices... The Apostle referred to a symphony when he said: - I pray you brothers, to all agree and to have no divisions among you (1 Cor, 1, 10). Who does not take delight in a holy symphony, that is, the harmony of voices, not each one off to himself, with nothing that is defective or out of tune, that can offend the ear of the listener? Harmony is of the essence of a choir. In a choir, what is pleasing is a single voice, the result of many voices, which looks to unity without dissonance nor discordant tones" (Serm. 119A, 9).

PASTORAL MINISTRY

From this Christological and ecclesiological perspective of which we have just spoken, how did the Bishop of Hippo understand his pastoral ministry? Before getting into details, there is this text which sums up the attitude of pastoral charity and reveals the pastoral heart of Augustine: What is it that I want, what do I long for, what do I desire? – he says to the faithful who are listening to him – Why do I speak, why am I here, why do I live? There is only one reason: so that together we might live with Christ. This is my whole desire, my honor; my joy and my riches. This is my glory... But I do not wish to save myself without you” (Serm. 17, 2).

Augustine never wrote, as other Fathers did, a treatise on the priesthood. Even in the Confessions he limits every allusion to his priestly ordination to a few brief references. He cannot avoid having his intense experience of ministerial priesthood, however, appear often
in his sermons and writings. And, if we exclude Sermons 355-356, Letter 21 is surely the most precious Augustinian document on the priesthood. It was written in January, 391, almost immediately after the priestly ordination of Augustine, who asks his bishop Aurelius for some months to prepare himself adequately for the exercise of pastoral ministry. It reflects therefore the sentiments which filled the heart of Augustine at that moment, his first reflections on the priesthood. And therefore it calls attention in a powerful way to the clarity with which the new priest of Hippo sets forth the basic ideas which will always preoccupy him relative to priestly ministry: the priesthood as service, its frightening responsibility, and its demand for holiness and knowledge.

The Priesthood as Service

In Letter 21, Saint Augustine uses two expressions to describe a priest: *homo Dei* (man of God) and *homo qui populo ministrat sacramentum et verbum Dei* (the man who offers people the service of the sacraments and of the word of God). Two inseparable dimensions, the second of which Saint Augustine underscores more strongly. The priest is “a man of God”, but he is so precisely in order to bring the divine to people. His mission is conceived in terms of others and of service: *ministrare populo; Ecclesiam ministrare; ecclesiasticis ordinationibus ministrare; ministrare ad salutem aliorum non quaerens quod mihi utile est, sed multis, ut salvi fiant = to serve the people, the Church and its commitments, to be at the service of others so that they be saved and so that I not seek my own interests...* The priest is the servant occupied full time in cultivating that field which has been watered with the blood of the Lord, that is, his Church. Everything in his life must become secondary to this mission and must exist to better prepare him for this mission. It is for this reason that Augustine asks for a little time of Valerius, in the hope that his absence from the community will be “fruitful for the Church and for my brothers and fellow servants”. In a few phrases, Augustine sums up the whole theology of Christian priesthood as ministry, service, ordered to the salvation of others, putting them in touch with the word and sacred signs and, through them, with God.

And this category of **service** will always occupy a central place in Augustinian life and teaching in relation to ecclesial ministry. As bishop he will continually apply to himself the term **servant, fellow servant, servant of the Church, servant of the people**: "He who presides over the people must keep in mind, first of all, that he is the servant of many. And he must not take this as a dishonor; he must not take as a dishonor, I repeat, this being the servant of many, because even the Lord of lords did not spurn serving us. The Lord, directing himself to the apostles and confirming them in holy humility, having set before them a child as their example, said to them: who among you wishes to be the greatest, is to be your servant (Mt. 20, 26)...So, to say this in a few words, we are your servants, servants of yours, servants just as you are; we are your servants but we all have but one Lord; we are your servants, but in Jesus... ...Let us see then, who the presiding
bishop is a servant: in the same way that the Lord served... who did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life. This is how the Lord served, this is how he instructed us to be servants” (Serm. 340 A 1ff.; v. s. 24, 5; s. 339; On the Work of Monks 29, 37; Conf. IX, 13,37...).

“Servi sumus Ecclesiae”, we are servants of the Church. The priest carries with him the Pauline “preoccupation for all the Churches”, he is the servant of all in Christ, who did not come to be served but to serve and to hand over his life for the salvation of the human race: the Lord, who set him free with his blood, has made him servant of his brothers. This is for Saint Augustine the key to his whole theology of the priesthood, outlined in Letter 21, witness to his attitude of service, commitment and generous availability which will make of this new priest, in the words of Possidius, “a spotless instrument for every honor, useful to the Lord and effective for every good work” (Life of Augustine, 3).

The Responsibility of the Priesthood

“Responsibility in the exercise of the ministry of pastor” (Serm. 46, 2), was almost an obsession for Augustine from the very day of his priestly ordination. “There is nothing in this life and especially in these times – affirms Augustine strongly at the beginning of Letter 21 – more easy, pleasing or of greater esteem in the eyes of men than the office of bishop, priest or deacon, if it is carried out for mere compliment or praise. But at the same time, nothing is sadder, more deplorable and more abominable before God. In the same way, there is nothing in this life, and above all in these difficult times, more burdensome, toilsome and hazardous than the office of bishop, priest or deacon, even if there is nothing holier before God if it is carried out as the Lord wishes”.

But precisely when he tried to begin learning this way that is pleasing to the Lord – Augustine, trembling, continued to say – if he has placed in my hands the steering wheel, when I am not capable of taking up the oar... He always considered the priesthood as a “very dangerous ministry”, but once ordained – he confesses – “I experienced difficulties much greater and more numerous than I had anticipated... Still I did not recognize sufficiently my deficiency and now it torments and terrifies me”.

The priesthood is not an honor, but a heavy burden, says Augustine, playing on the Latin words honor and onus. And the strong awareness of one’s own inadequacy (quod mihi deest al tale opus, quod me non habere cognovi) in facing this great responsibility (magnum onus, magnum pondus, magnus labor) will always be with Augustine, inviting him to great effort and above all to humility and trust in God.

Saint Augustine, therefore, will frequently speak of the great responsibility which the episcopal ministry involves, but its greatness and the ecclesial mission do not prevent him from recognizing at the same time what we in today’s language call the common
priesthood of the faithful and its ecclesial corresponsibility. Commenting on Revelations 20, 6 (“They will be priests of God and of Christ and they will reign with him for a thousand years”), he states in The City of God 20, 10: “This last item does not refer only to bishops and priests, who are those properly called priests in the Church, but equally to those whom we call Christians, anointed with the same chrism; thus we can call all priests in that they are members of the one priest. Of these the apostle Peter says: ‘chosen race, royal priesthood’ (1 Pet. 2, 9)”.

And in practice, in accordance with the custom of the African Church, he heard and consulted frequently with the “senior laity”, a group of laymen who formed a type of council or senate to advise the bishop in the administration of ecclesial goods, processes and problems of greater difficulty, community affairs and questions relative to the family and other areas within their competency (cfr A.G. HAMMAN, [Daily Life in Africa at the time of Saint Augustine], La vida cotidiana en África del norte en tiempos de San Agustín, CETA-OALA, Perú 1989, p.363).

The Demands of Priesthood

We should not be surprised by the fact that Augustine, conscious of the heavy responsibility which the exercise of pastoral ministry requires, is extremely demanding with regard to this matter, and not only for himself. Some of his strongest criticisms are directed, therefore, to bad priests and bishops (ignorant, ambitious, desirous of power and money, who are in their sees like scarecrows, cf. Letter 85; Serm. Guelf. 32,6). Even before becoming a priest himself, Augustine had dared to criticize and reprove the defects of some of the ministers of the Church. So he confessed in Letter 21, attributing also to his sinfulness, his unexpected and swift call to the clerical states. It is – he says – as though the Lord had mercifully laughed at me, placing me in a situation which would have me discover my own misery.

He feels incapable of measuring up to what he considers to be two fundamental demands of the priesthood – holiness of life and knowledge of sacred sciences – which is the reason why he asks Valerius to give him some time to prepare himself for the ministry. And it is in Sacred Scripture that he hopes to find the solution to his needs: “Without doubt, in the Sacred Books, there can be found counsels which must be known and understood so that the man of God can concern himself with ecclesiastical ministry and live in an exemplary way, or die at the hands of evil men, so as not to lose that life for which humble and gentle Christian hearts yearn. How can this be done except by asking, seeking, calling, as the Lord himself says, that is, praying, reading and weeping?” (Ep. 21, 4).

Orare, legere, plangere: here is the Augustinian program of preparation for priestly ministry and the key to living it, carrying its heavy burden and responding in the measure possible to its demands, such that all activities flow from a rich interior life, nourished by
prayer, study and meditation on the divine Word. A program which Saint Augustine will carry out faithfully and honestly throughout his whole life.

AUGUSTINE’S PASTORAL PRAXIS

Beginning with the figure of Jesus Christ, Priest and King, and with his missionary mandate at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, as well as with the basis of the “summaries” which describe the life of the first Christian community of Jerusalem (Acts 2, 4 e 5), pastoral activity customarily is divided into three inseparable and complementary dimensions: the prophetic or that pertaining to the Word (martyria), the liturgical or sacramental (leiturgia), and the social or that having to do with charity (diakonia). This is a triple division to which pastoral agents today add a fourth aspect, the building up of ecclesial communion (koinonia), which is the result of a consideration of pastoral activity not only “ad extra” (outward-looking, social pastorale activity), but also “ad intra” (the life of charity within the community itself). We will follow this basic outline to complete our reflection, presenting more succinctly the pastoral praxis of Augustine.

Ministry of the Word

We recall that Aurelius ordained Augustine priest with the primary objective that he assist him in preaching, a ministry which he carried out without interruption until his last days, “with joy and strength, with a clear mind and healthy advice” (Possidio, Vita Augustini, 31). In Hippo he preached at least twice a week (Saturday and Sunday), but sometimes more often, including several times on the same day. He did so also at Carthage and in other places in order to speak to the people, and frequently – even before becoming bishop – he preached in African episcopal assemblies. His sermons were long, some lasted more than an hour, except on feasts: the people usually listened while standing and participated actively (laughing, with acclamations, protests, murmurings, the beating of their breasts...). His style varied according to his audience: the great rhetorician, capable of using with skill a play on words, metaphors and litterary forms, reached down and adapted himself to the popular culture of the sinners of Hippo in order to reach everyone.

But the greatest characteristic of the preaching of Augustine is his profound biblical content: before speaking he prayed and meditated on the Scripture, nourishing himself with the same Word which he would offer to the people (cf. Serm. 309, 3; Serm. 296, 5): orator antequam dictor..., unde pasco inde et pascor… Thomas Martin (op.cit., p. 48ff.) has underlined the centrality of the Word of God not only in the preaching, but also in the life of Saint Augustine, from the Confessions: They begin and end with two biblical citations (Ps. 47, 2 and Mt. 7, 7), they tell of how initially Augustine rejected the Bible (III, 5, 9), later took it up to read Paul (VII, 21, 27), is converted by his words (VIII, 12, 29), experiences insatiable hunger for the psalms (IX, 4, 8), anddevotes himself to their study (XI-XIII); they are his “chaste delights” (XI, 2, 3).
A whole life devoted to the reading, study, meditation upon and preaching of the Word; in writing and in speaking; in thousands of sermons, catechesis, Scriptural tracts and commentaries; at the root and center of all his works... With good reason an observer of the Augustinian tradition, Hugh of Saint Victor, asked the followers of Augustine: “Let us see if we are the sons of our holy Father Augustine, truly his followers. Let us ask whether we are lovers of the Word of God after his own example, imitating his reading, meditation, study and preaching of this Word, in accordance with the grace that has been given to us...” (Hugh of Saint Victor, Serm. 84 in festum s.p. Augustini, cited by T.Martin, op.cit.).

**Liturgical and Sacramental Ministry**

The Paschal Mystery as the basis of the life and faith of Christians, the centrality of the celebration of Easter and the Sunday Eucharist in the Liturgical life of the community, the need for a serious sacramental catechesis and the importance of the sacraments and programs of Christian initiation, are present-day priorities of Liturgical Pastoral activity: in relation to these the practice and teaching of Saint Augustine are also revealing.

In contrast with the ritualism of Byzantium and Rome, which passed over in large part into our liturgy, in the African Church the bishop or principal celebrant was the great animator of the assembly. And, Hamman comments, (op.cit. p. 281) -, he is more than an officiant of rites, father and teacher of the gathered community, the actor of a “sacred mime” who occupies the entire scene, but he unites the people to his act; he is the conductor of a lively, multicolored liturgy, in which the people speak, protest, applaud, reply, laugh, weep, participate. Augustine at times descends from his chair and draws near to the people to re-establish order, comes and goes among the small groups which are formed to bring them into harmony, sings with them, comments at length on the Scriptures, improvises... During the Eucharistic Liturgy (cf. ib. 299ff), the atmosphere is one of greater silence and recollection, once the procession with the offerings and the common prayers have been concluded. Augustine then proclaims the great Eucharistic prayer, freely and spontaneously, gives thanks in the people’s name to God the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. He gives thanks for the wonders of God, creation and salvation. The Our Father and the Rite of Peace give way to the distribution of the Eucharist: the bishop looks intently at each communicant before placing in his or her right hand the consecrated bread: he knows his people and is assured that no public sinner or unbaptized person receives. The deacons offer the chalice, while all sing. After the final prayer and blessing they dismiss the people.

The activity of the bishop and his clergy intensified every year as Easter drew near (cf. Hamman, op.cit.). The catechumens were enrolled at the beginning of Lent in order to be baptized, and these candidates or *competentes* became the center of all pastoral attention during the forty days of preparation for baptism, advancing through the various ritual stages: the scrutinies, exorcisms, presentation and recitation of the creed and the Our
Father. Bishop Augustine, as Saint Ambrose did in Milan, personally assumed this preparation most of the time: his catechesis is lively and stimulating, with frequent references to his own experience as a convert and baptized adult, and includes doctrinal, moral and liturgical aspects. He welcomed and assisted as well the penitents who would be reconciled with the Church, exhorting them to fasting, prayer and good works. Thus, led and directed by their pastor, the entire community prepared for the most beautiful of all nights, to celebrate the Easter Vigil and the sacraments of Christian initiation in the cathedral which was filled with light and extensively decorated.

On Easter Sunday and during the entire week, the bishop met again with the neophytes, who, dressed in white, participated in the Eucharistic celebration. Augustine lived with them the joy of their new birth in Christ and strove to have them understand the mysteries which they had received and which they are now called to live and bear witness to in union with the Church community of Hippo. A reading of the Augustinian Sermons corresponding to the liturgical period of Lent and Easter is certainly the best way to understand how Saint Augustine lived the Liturgy and celebrated the sacraments. And both F. van der Meer (op. cit. Chpt. II: Worship) and A. G. Hamman (op.cit., Chpt. IX: A Sunday in Hippo, Chpt.X: The Most Beautiful of All Nights) offer us a detailed, beautiful and moving description of the liturgical-sacramental ministry of the pastor of Hippo, in now-classical texts which of course are all worth reading.

Social Pastoral Activity

“Help the poor. I pray you, I advise you, I command you... From the very moment in which I leave to come to church and go back again, the poor come to me and ask that I say something to you so that they will receive something from you. They have charged me to speak to you about this and when they receive nothing, they think my work with you is useless. They also expect something from me. I give them what I have, I give according to my ability. Am I perhaps able to satisfy all their needs? I am not, and for this reason at least I act as their advocate with you.” (s. 61, 13). In such a way did the Bishop of Hippo frequently speak to his faithful, commenting often on texts such Mt 25, 31ff (the final judgment and works of mercy), Lk. 16,19 ff (the rich man and poor Lazarus) or 1 Tim 6, 9-10 and 17ff (the danger of riches and the exhortation to the rich to share generously). Every winter, Augustine saw to the organization of a collection for the poor (his ‘companions in poverty’), Possidius says, witness to his simple and austere life, op. cit. 23), who were the special guests at his table on the anniversary of his ordination (Serm. 339, 3). He would visit the sick and did not fail ‘to melt the sacred cups to take care of the needy and many other destitute people’ (Possidius, op.cit. 24).

These facts about the works of charity and the generosity in sharing of the Bishop of Hippo, are surely already well known. But it is possible that not as well known is the practical experience of Saint Augustine as a servant of justice and peace for his people, not only in his pastoral work as bishop, but also in his role as judge. The 

episcopalis audientia
or administration of justice, exercised by the Bishop of Hippo, constitutes an important part of what today we would call his social pastoral work, in a sense much more than almsgiving or simple charitable assistance.

A practice officially recognized and frequently employed by the people when Augustine came to be Bishop of Hippo, consisted in the fact that litigants (not only in relation to ecclesiastical matters, but also regarding any theme or cause) were able to have recourse to civil courts or submit their cause to the bishop. He had to judge in accord with pastoral criteria, but also follow the basic norms of Roman law, and his sentence was officially recognized and valid in all its effects. In fact, the majority of people – especially the poorest and most humble, but also many people of lofty social status – preferred bringing their cases to the bishop rather than to the civil court. And this was so for two principal reasons: for fear of corruption and a lack of impartiality which often were the case in civil courts and, especially, because these cases were usually very expensive, while the “episcopal hearing” was free. Moreover, civil justice was very slow and cruel (it was achieved frequently by torture); the bishop, on the other hand, acted ordinarily with fairness and speed, limiting himself in the worst of cases to imposing the punishment of a few lashes...

The biography written by Saint Possidius presents the Bishop of Hippo seated every morning for long hours exercising his judicial office. It is a scene which could be portrayed in this way: (Cfr. F. VAN DER MEER, San Agustín Pastor de almas, Herder, Barcelona 1965, pp. 346ss.; A.G. HAMMAN, La vida cotidiana en África del Norte en tiempos de San Agustín, CETA, Perú 1989, pp. 340ss):

The bishop is present every day in the “secretarium”, a kind of large hall next to the cathedral, surrounded by some clergy and notaries. Near the church and with the bible within hand’s reach, Augustine is seen as a successor to the judges of Israel. And he knows everyone can approach him, without an appointment, for his judgment or decision in any matter. Thus, the bishop serves justice in civil matters: inheritances, guardianship, rights of succession, or property, of boundary lines... These are touchy questions where passions are raised when it is a question of wills or inheritances. Often there are unimportant matters: a dividing wall, a window opened on a wall, construction which is too high and blocks the neighbor’s light, the distribution of some head of cattle. Others come with more complicated matters: my brother has unjustly accused me, my slave has escaped, I’ve been slandered and I am going to go to jail, my brother-in-law is trying to rob my inheritance, my son has run away from home, my wife has gone with another man... And Augustine has to listen to all this, put up with the lengthy report of minute details and particular circumstances which both parties allege.

Even outside the days and hours of operation, the people of Hippo – even the non-Catholics – continually came to Augustine with their questions, quarrels, personal or family problems, economic pressures and cases not foreseen in the law. They went to be
consoled, to complain, to speak about their worries, to vent their anger, to ask for alms, to seek justice. And the bishop took advantage of the opportunity to shame the shameless, call back to the right path the stray, reconcile all kinds of differences, implement restitutions, promote as far as possible the fulfilment of Gospel mores, maintain peace, publicly correct sinners, challenge the guilty. It was a practice that united a hearing, spiritual direction, Church discipline and the episcopal tribunal.

The bishop acted as judge and arbiter when both parties asked it of him. This allowed for a speedy solution that was honest and impartial, a type of justice of half measure between conciliation and judgment properly so called. But in whatever case, the sentence was irrevocable, which frequently brought forth reactions on the part of the loser. Some questioned the impartiality of the bishop, others his wisdom; the rich doubted his impartiality, the poor his benevolence. And it all grieved Augustine who did not hesitate in complaining openly (cf. Comm. on ps. 25, 13; Comm. on ps. 47, 4.10). Before the sentencing, both parties affirmed that they would accept my decision, ‘may he be condemned who dares to protest against it,’ they would say, ‘may it be as your holiness decides.’ But when, after the secret deliberation, the verdict is read and the sentence is made public, the losing side begins to complain against the judge. But how else is there to proceed? I have to judge in favor of one of the parties. If the rich man is the one who gains, the other says that the bishop has been bought with a gift. If I judge in favor of the poor man, they say I’ve acted only to keep people from saying that I am against the poor... The basic rule, comments Saint Possidius: never make exceptions and try always to find some good solution before resolving a case authoritatively (cf. Life of Augustine, 27 and 24).

Always in defense of the lowliest, Augustine frequently issued appeals (cf. Ltr. 154); he was not afraid to appeal to the conscience of imperial judges, nor to intervene directly in favor of the most needy. He warned a certain Romulus, whom he himself had baptized, about “the anger which he had amassed for God’s day of judgment” for taking from his poor share-croppers or renters double the rent they owed him (Cf. Letter 247). He was willing, if necessary, to enter the home of the rich and powerful to denounce their injustices and say to them as John the Baptist had: “it is not right for you to do this”, while knowing that on the part of this kind of person the bishop who would dare to say such a thing is a bad bishop, while another who would keep silent would be considered good. But he felt obligated to be a critical conscience for them and also, when it was opportune and charity demanded it, for his own faithful. At times, he said, the pastor must shout loudly, as the concerned father must do with his own children (cf. En in Ps. 128, 4; Serm. 83, 4), or denounce abuses of power, for example, when the imperial police violated the right of sanctuary which the churches enjoyed, a right which was an important victory for those times. (cf. Ltr. 151).

Frequently Augustine also carried out the task which, properly called, was “public defender” (defensor civitatis). All of this was, undoubtedly, for him the heaviest burden of
his office: “it is simply frightening – he wrote to a friend; they all come to me with all kinds of issues, and, unfortunately, I can neither escape nor fail to give them a hearing” (Letter 139, 3). In the face of such a host of foreign problems, worries, material concerns and work, Augustine’s only consolation was “the help of the One to whom the cries of the captives ascend” (Letter 48, 1). This prompting of faith is of course deeply present in the heart of Augustine and the ultimate reason for considering the administration of justice and the conciliatory search for peace, as a necessary social service.

In the service of communion

We have already spoken of the “ecclesiology of communion” as a key to the teaching and praxis of Saint Augustine. Therefore it is not necessary to speak at length of his service to ecclesial koinonia or fraternal common life, after the example of that first community of Jerusalem which inspired the pastor of Hippo from the time of his conversion. He was always conscious that his first responsibility was precisely to be concerned that the Church was truly Church, that is, the Body of Christ in unity, a Christian community capable of living communion in all its dimensions and being changed into the sacramental image of the heavenly city of God and of the Trinity itself. The way of understanding hierarchical ministry as service, the recognition of the role of the laity in the Church and the need for corresponsibility and active participation in the community are the three most important consequences of this Augustinian ecclesiological vision.

To serve ecclesial communion is the basic responsibility of the pastor, it is to call all without distinction to ecclesial communion in the authenticity of Christian life.

“I embrace a Church filled with wheat and straw: with the word and the discipline of the Lord, I correct those I can and I put up with those I cannot correct. I do not wish to be straw, but neither will I abandon the threshing floor so that it turn to nothing” (Contr. Cresc. donat. 3, 25; cf Letter. 47, 9). This was not an easy task in practice in the “mixed Church” of Africa, sinful and divided, but it was a consolation to think that ‘many who are not of us are within and many who are ours are as though outside’ (Letter. 106, 14), since it is evidently certain that the expressions ‘within’ and ‘without’ the Church must be understood as regarding the heart and not the body” (On Bap. 5, 28, 39).

Within the context of this preoccupation for ecclesial communion the apologetical work of Augustine must be situated, especially in relation to Donatism, the schism which had torn the African Church apart and which the pastor of Hippo felt very much in his own person: there there existed two communities (Catholic and Donatist), two cathedrals and two bishops, two parallel liturgies (frequently held at the same time and rivaling one another by the loudness of their singing), and even the Donatist bakers refused to sell bread to those who belonged to the Catholic community...Besides, continually preaching against the schism and heresy, Saint Augustine did not fail to directly face the Donatist leaders,
continuing his arguments in writing and encouraging the Council of Carthage (411) to definitively reject the Donatist schism, the *pars Donati*.

For Saint Augustine, the Church is called to be the One Body of Christ, his faithful Spouse, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, who gives it life and preserves it in unity through love. It is the seamless tunic of the Lord: “Its garments are its sacraments; heretics might tear them apart, but there remains an indivisible garment. There was the tunic, fashioned from above, says the Gospel” (Comm. Jn, 19, 23) and that tunic is the unity of charity, which no one can divide: “what is the tunic other than unity?” (Comm. on Ps. 21, 19). “As division and discord make heretics, peace and unity form Christians” (Against Cart., Pet II, 95, 219), affirms Augustine: a good principal for building ecclesial communion both within and without the same Christian community.

**By Way of Conclusion**

“A Day in the Life of the Bishop” is the evocative title of one of the sections of Chapter XI of the work of A.G.Hamman (p.345ss) to which we have referred various times. We will conclude briefly summarizing its content as a way of achieving a global and practical vision of the figure of Saint Augustine as pastor.

His day began early with the celebration of the Eucharist, surrounded by the clergy and the community, monks and nuns included. Normally, he preached only on feast days and on weekends, having prepared his sermon carefully in advance. In the morning, several days a week, he was in his office next to the cathedral, to listen to civil cases, a task which particularly tired him. The days he was not engaged in this, were filled with visits: people passing through, the poor, widows, travelers…Without practically any free time, it was the hour for lunch, which was frugal (vegetables and fruit, meat occasionally) but with wine: the bishop shared his meal with the clergy who lived with him and frequently with some visiting guests. There was reading or conversation, but evil talk was not tolerated.

In the afternoon, Augustine made some visits (to the sick, elderly...) and saw to administrative matters of various kinds. If there was time, he took care of more urgent matters, answered mail which arrived from everywhere, and recorded the acts of episcopal meetings. Come night, following supper which was also taken in common, Augustine felt free from his daily tasks and stole some hours from his sleep for prayer, study, and the writing of whatever it was he had in his hand...

Thus, day after day, unless he had to travel to Carthage or other places to preach or take part in episcopal meetings, “always – we finish with these words of Possidius, (op. cit.) solicitous and vigilant to work for the Church” which he served as pastor.
For Personal or Group Reflection

1. Thinking back on the origin and early development of our own vocation, how did we understand our priestly identity and how have we progressed in achieving it?

2. What image of Christ do we proclaim, what Christology inspires our experience of faith and our pastoral activity?

3. What is the central category of our ecclesiology; is it near to Augustine’s and Vatican II’s?

4. How do we understand, live and carry out our pastoral activity? With a spirit of service, conscious of our responsibility, concerned with our ongoing formation?

5. Can we say sincerely and honestly that we are at the service of the People of God or are we still too clerical and overbearing? What is our relationship with the laity like?

6. What can we and should we learn from Augustine in the exercise of the ministry of the Word? Is our spirituality and biblical formation truly operative?

7. What can we and should we learn from Augustine in relation to liturgical and sacramental pastoral activity? Are we conscious, as he was, of the challenges which the program of Christian initiation presumes?

8. In the area of social activity, what is the principle lesson that we can learn from the experience and teaching of Augustine?

9. Are service to ecclesial communion, the building up of communities, the common sense of Christian living, truly priorities of our pastoral activity to the point of characterizing our pastoral style?

10. What would Augustine say today to Augustinian pastors?