

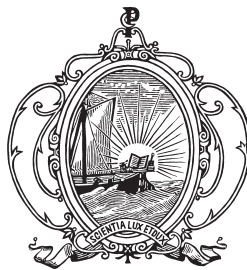
STUDIA PATRISTICA

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MARKUS VINZENT

Volume 18:
St Augustine and his Opponents



PEETERS

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La mystagogie chez S. Augustin

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ABSTRACT

Although Augustin is rarely known as somebody who has written mystagogical catecheses (even if his *Sermons for Easter* are of that nature), one has to conclude that, indeed, for him mystagogy is far broader and that his entire œuvre is mystagogical, his commentaries on *Genesis* as much as *De trinitate*, the *Confessions*, the *Homelies on the first Epistle of St John*... and the mystery which he suggests to discover is nothing but Christ who invites the reader to walk on the Easter route of love.

Habituellement, Augustin n'est pas compté au nombre des auteurs qui ont développé une mystagogie en cet âge d'or de la patristique que fut le IV^e siècle. Apparemment, il n'a pas proposé de catéchèses mystagogiques comme Cyrille de Jérusalem¹ ou Jean Chrysostome. À la différence de Maxime le Confesseur, par exemple, Augustin n'a pas non plus écrit de traité de mystagogie. Il n'en demeure pas moins que la mystagogie a une place importante dans son œuvre et que le cycle de *Sermons pour la Pâque*, rassemblé par Suzanne Poque, semble être, sans le dire, un ensemble de catéchèses mystagogiques. Augustin y montre, en effet, que «Pâques n'est pas seulement une *solemnitas*, mais aussi un *sacramentum*. La *solemnitas* vise les faits et l'enseignement objectif qu'ils comportent, le *sacramentum* introduit les chrétiens dans une réalité invisible qui les concerne directement»², une réalité qui «exprime autre chose que ce que l'on voit en elle», comme Augustin le précise dans le *Sermon 272*, ou encore qui fait passer *per visibilia ad invisibilia*, comme il le dit dans la *Cité de Dieu* (X, 14). Sans doute la formulation est-elle marquée par le néoplatonisme, mais la réalité qu'Augustin vise par là est autre, c'est l'actualisation du mystère pascal. En tant qu'évêque, il a préparé, chaque année, les catéchumènes³ au baptême célébré

¹ A.J. Doval, *Cyril of Jerusalem, mystagogue. The authorship of the mystagogical catecheses* (Washington, 2001).

² S. Poque, Introduction aux *Sermons pour la Pâques*, SC 116 (Paris, 1966), 14. Hubertus R. Drobner a montré qu'il en va de même pour Noël, en dépit de la *Lettre 55* qui a induit en erreur les commentateurs: H.R. Drobner, 'Christmas in Hippo: mystical celebration and catechesis', *Augustinian Studies* 35 (2004), 55-63.

³ B. Studer, 'Zum Triduum Sacrum bei Augustinus von Hippo', in I. Scicolone (éd.), *La celebrazione del Triduo Pasquale: anamnesis e mimesis* (Rome, 1990), 273-86.

lors de la Vigile pascale⁴, puis il les a réunis pendant l'Octave pascale, pour leur expliquer les sacrements, ce qui l'a amené à développer une mystagogie⁵ qui ne manque pas d'intérêt et qui se caractérise par son originalité.

Si l'on considère le terme de mystagogie (μυσταγωγία⁶), il est composé des deux termes grecs: *mustes* qui désigne l'initié et qui renvoie aux mystères, et l'infinitif aoriste (*agagerein*) du verbe grec *agein* qui implique l'action de conduire. En d'autres termes, la mystagogie conduit vers les mystères pour les expliquer et donner ainsi d'en vivre. Or, le mystère par excellence est celui du Christ (Rm 16, 25; Col 1, 26-7), exprimé par l'eucharistie⁷, qui actualise le mystère pascal. Augustin ne s'y est pas trompé et a consacré à l'eucharistie des sermons importants: non seulement les *Sermons* 227, 229, 272 mais aussi le *Second commentaire sur le Psaume 33* (§10-12), ainsi que nombre d'autres textes, où il va très loin dans l'approfondissement. Il ne se contente pas d'expliquer le sens de l'eucharistie aux nouveaux baptisés, mais il en fait «le paradigme pour interpréter le chemin du catéchumène»⁸ et il met en évidence l'unité qu'elle réalise. Il souligne également le lien entre le baptême et l'eucharistie qui étaient conférés successivement dans l'Église ancienne, tout en déployant aussi sa mystagogie dans ses sermons pour le baptême, qui incluent une réflexion sur le *mysterium fidei*, contenu dans le Symbole de foi.

Cependant, comme l'a expliqué Enrico Mazza, Augustin ne choisit pas la facilité. Il organise sa mystagogie à partir d'une double dialectique: l'une visant à «comprendre le sacrement par la remontée du rite aux versets bibliques», l'autre amenant à «vivre le sacrement de manière fructueuse (pour remonter à Dieu)»⁹. Ces deux composantes sont mêlées dans sa prédication, où il s'attache à montrer au nouveau baptisé qu'il s'inscrit dans le peuple de Dieu, rassemblé par sa Parole et nourri par son pain qu'il lui revient de recevoir pour en vivre. Pour ce faire, l'évêque d'Hippone déploie sa mystagogie en quatre temps: il décrit, tout d'abord, ce qui s'est passé dans le rite, puis il remonte au texte biblique qui évoque l'événement du salut. Il en dégage, alors, le sens pour proposer une théologie biblique qu'il applique au rite liturgique¹⁰.

⁴ Cf. R. Cantalamessa, *La Pasqua della nostra salvezza. Le tradizioni pasquali della Bibbia e della primitiva chiesa* (Turin, 1971).

⁵ R. Nürnberg, 'Mystagogie in der Verkündigung des Augustinus', *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 55/2-3 (1992), 81-93.

⁶ G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexikon*, 4^e éd. remaniée et complétée (Oxford, 1976), 890 sq.; H. Stephanus, *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae* (Graz, réimpr. 1954), 1312 sq.

⁷ E. Mazza, 'Saint Augustin et la mystagogie', dans A.-M. Triacca, A. Pistoia (éd.), *Mystagogie: pensée liturgique d'aujourd'hui et liturgie ancienne*, BELS 70 (Rome, 1993), 201.

⁸ *Ibid.* 211.

⁹ *Ibid.* 226.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 216-7.

1. La mystagogie d'Augustin dans les *Sermons pour Pâques*

Dans le *Sermon* 227, il reprend cette méthode, de manière souple, afin d'inviter ses auditeurs: les nouveaux baptisés, qu'il appelle les *infantes*, à devenir ce qu'ils ont reçu, en d'autres termes: à être un dans le Christ. Augustin va directement à l'essentiel, en leur disant: «vous êtes ce que vous avez reçu», puis il les invite à lire les Actes des Apôtres, plus précisément le récit de la Pentecôte, pour la revivre, et réaliser dans leur vie et dans l'Église l'unité qu'ils ont reçue. Implicitement, il se réfère à la vision paulinienne de l'unité du corps du Christ.

Pour se faire mieux comprendre de ses auditeurs et les amener à vivre pleinement le mystère, il prend l'analogie du pain et explique que les grains de blé sont les catéchumènes, la meule: le jeûne et l'exorcisme, l'eau: celle du baptistère, le feu est l'Esprit Saint, symbolisé par l'huile. L'évêque d'Hippone développe cette analogie dans les *Sermons* 229 et 272, ainsi que *Morin Gulferbytanus* VII et il la complète par celle du vin: Comme les multiples grains de raisin passés au pressoir ne donnent qu'un seul vin, ainsi les nouveaux baptisés ne sont-ils qu'un dans le Christ.

À une époque où le donatisme ébranlait l'Église d'Afrique du Nord, Augustin met l'accent sur l'unité, à la fois ontologique et éthique. Il procède de même dans son *Traité du baptême*, qu'il a écrit pour répondre au donatiste Petilianus. De plus, au début de l'ouvrage (I, 2), il établit une nette distinction entre la mystagogie qui est réservée à ceux qui ont suivi l'initiation chrétienne, mais qui est reconnue par tous et sa contre-façon: la pseudo-discipline du secret préconisée par les donatistes.

L'évêque d'Hippone précise également sa méthode mystagogique dans le *Sermon* 272, en introduisant un élément nouveau: le passage de la foi à la raison. Comme «la foi désire comprendre», il opte pour la méthode analogique afin de rendre compte des sacrements qui sont en quelque sorte des signes ou des symboles. Il engage une réflexion qui est encore actuelle¹¹, tout en hésitant sur les deux termes. Les sacrements ont une dimension symbolique, mais ce sont aussi des signes des réalités à venir, comme en témoigne le binome *sacramentum et exemplum*¹² qu'Augustin utilise souvent et qu'il applique à la Pâque, «le *sacramentum* s'appliquant plus aisément à la Pâque de l'homme intérieur, fondée sur un rite sacré, tandis que l'*exemplum* convenait davantage à la Pâque de l'homme extérieur»¹³. En fait, les sacrements semblent être, pour Augustin, des signes plutôt que des symboles, dans la mesure où «ils ont une certaine ressemblance avec les réalités dont ils sont les sacrements»¹⁴. «La sacramentalité

¹¹ Cf. L.M. Chauvet, *Symboles et sacrements* (Paris, 2008).

¹² B. Studer, 'Sacramentum et exemplum chez S. Augustin', *Recherches Augustiniennes* 10 (1975), 87-141.

¹³ *Ibid.* 170 (in: Dominus salvator).

¹⁴ *Lettre* 98.

consiste donc en la *similitudo*, qui désigne ce qui ne tombe pas sous les sens»¹⁵ et la mystagogie a pour fonction de la faire découvrir et d'y participer. Sans doute la notion de participation a-t-elle une dimension platonicienne, mais Augustin la revisite pour rendre compte de la pénétration dans le mystère et de la conformation au Christ qui s'ensuit.

Dans le Second Sermon du *Commentaire sur le Psaume 33* (§10-12), Augustin fait, de nouveau, ressortir la dimension mystagogique de l'eucharistie, qu'il interprète, cette fois, en termes d'illumination. Comme il ne s'agit pas d'une catéchèse mystagogique pour les nouveaux baptisés, mais d'une simple homélie, Augustin ne reprend pas la méthode qu'il avait mise en œuvre dans sa catéchèse, mais il invite ses auditeurs, en l'occurrence ici les Gentils, à pénétrer dans le mystère pour en vivre, en être transformés et entrer ainsi dans la création nouvelle. Il adjoint une création verbale, dont on n'a ici qu'un écho, mais qui, par la métaphore de la lumière qu'il introduit, lui permet de développer sa mystagogie, avec ses talents de rhéteur.

2. Une nouvelle mystagogie

Compte tenu de la réinterprétation qu'il fait de la mystagogie, on peut se demander si l'œuvre du «converti de Milan qui est devenu le convertisseur d'Hippone»¹⁶ n'est pas fondamentalement mystagogique. Dès l'introduction du thème du Maître intérieur, qui n'est autre que le Christ, dans les écrits de jeunesse, Augustin invite son lecteur à une démarche mystagogique. Sans doute n'envisage-t-il pas alors les sacrements, mais l'être humain, créé à l'image et à la ressemblance de Dieu (la notion de *similitudo* est déjà présente).

Plus tard, dans ses cinq commentaires de la Genèse, depuis le *De Genesi contra manichaeos* jusqu'à la *Cité de Dieu*, on a également une dimension mystagogique, dans la mesure où Augustin cherche à pénétrer le mystère de la création, à aller *per visibilia ad invisibilia* et invite son lecteur à passer, par le baptême, de la création à la création nouvelle. C'est là l'écho de sa catéchèse, qu'il présente dans le *De catechizandis rudibus*.

On retrouve une démarche analogue dans le *De Trinitate*, où Augustin cherche à pénétrer le mystère de la Trinité pour vivre de la vie trinitaire, ce qui l'amène à mieux comprendre et à expliquer la dimension trinitaire du baptême.

Même les *Confessions* sont de l'ordre de la mystagogie. Sans doute ne se situent-elles pas dans le contexte liturgique où s'effectue la mystagogie, mais l'avènement du sujet Augustin qui se réalise en dialogue avec son créateur au fur et à mesure de l'ouvrage, répond et illustre l'objectif de la mystagogie.

¹⁵ E. Mazza, *L'action eucharistique* (Paris, 1999), 173.

¹⁶ A. Mandouze, 'Du converti de Milan au convertisseur d'Hippone', in *Congresso Internazionale su S. Agostino nel XVI centenario della conversione* (Rome, 1987), 89-98.

Enfin, on peut se demander si les *Homélies sur la Première Épître de S. Jean* ne sont pas, à leur manière, des catéchèses mystagogiques. Elles semblent l'être, quant au moment auquel elles ont été prononcées: l'Octave pascale et quant aux thèmes qu'elles développent: le baptême, l'onction, l'eucharistie, mais la mystagogie qu'elles présentent est originale, tant par sa forme que par son contenu. Au lieu de commenter directement les sacrements, Augustin part, en effet, du texte de la Première Épître de S. Jean et le mystère auquel il entend introduire ses lecteurs n'est autre que celui de la charité, qui est l'expression même de Dieu¹⁷, de la Trinité¹⁸. Si ce n'est pas un *sacramentum*, c'est du moins un *exemplum*, qui est proposé dans la Première Épître de Jean, dans la mesure où l'évêque d'Hippone rappelle que: «La valeur de la charité, toute l'Écriture nous la fait connaître, mais (il) ne sait si on l'enseigne ailleurs mieux que dans cette Épître»¹⁹. En fait, sous un mode différent de celui de ses *Sermons pour la Pâque*, il invite ses lecteurs à revivre le mystère pascal, à passer de la création à la création nouvelle, en vivant la charité. Dans la *Troisième Homélie* (13, BA 76, p. 177), il approfondit plus radicalement le mystère du Christ et propose toute une mystagogie. En reprenant le thème du Maître intérieur, il explique que «le maître qui enseigne à l'intérieur, c'est le Christ qui enseigne; c'est son inspiration qui enseigne. Là où il n'y a ni son inspiration ni son onction, nous faisons retentir en vain nos paroles à l'extérieur». Il fait, en même temps, ressortir que la mystagogie met en échec les donatistes qui reconnaissent le Christ par leur parole, mais qui le refusent par leurs actes. Ainsi divisent-ils l'Église et deviennent-ils des antichrists. Cette fois, Augustin met en œuvre la mystagogie pour exhorter les chrétiens d'Hippone à vivre l'unité dans la charité.

* * *

Contrairement à ce qu'on aurait pu penser, la mystagogie est omniprésente dans l'œuvre d'Augustin, même si elle n'est pas nommée comme telle et si elle a une forme originale. L'évêque d'Hippone s'attache, en effet, à faire connaître à ses contemporains le mystère du Christ, afin qu'ils lui soient conformés. C'est là l'expression de sa recherche depuis le temps de sa conversion, c'est aussi la dynamique de sa vie en tant que pasteur: connaître la filiation divine et aider les autres à y être introduits par sa prédication, afin d'être membres de cet organisme vivant qu'est le corps du Christ, ce qui prend un relief particulier au moment du schisme donatiste, mais qui a aussi une actualité qui traverse les siècles et qui amène à réenchanter le monde.

¹⁷ *In ep. Ioh. Tr.* V, 7; VII, 10; IX, 10.

¹⁸ *De Trinitate* VIII, 8, 12.

¹⁹ *In ep. Ioh. Tr.* V, 13.

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MARKUS VINZENT

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