

In the age of Augustine, within the classical structures of society, nothing was more valued than friends and friendship. Augustine was an innovative thinker and friendship represents a good example of his flair for reconfiguring its framework into an ecclesial setting. He wrote: 'what greater consolation do we have in this human society, riddled with errors and anxieties, than the unfeigned faith and mutual love of true and good friends?'. Yet, as a Christian Bishop, how would he reconceive this well established and treasured institution? Friendship was certainly something that became recast within the light of his conversion and immersion into the life of the Church. In Augustine's exchange with the Donatists, we glimpse his most fully developed vision of friendship. Through his preaching on John's gospel, which comes to us as his *In Iohannis Euangelium Tractatus*, Augustine reveals this vision of what friendship is. Given that John's gospel gives such weight to the incarnation and to friendship, we can witness through his hermeneutical strategy of figuration, his notion that friendship with God comes in belonging to the *totus Christus*, 'the whole Christ'. For Augustine, the universal nature of the Church as Christ's body and bride enjoys a continued connection to the head (Christ) and through the Church, its members live within the embrace of the Spirit. With this foundation of friendship, Augustine cried out to those separated by schism: belong—be bound—be friends with God in Christ.

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