

## AUGUSTINE'S *Fraternus animus* (Confessions 10.5) A MONASTIC CONNECTION?

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“But to whom am I telling this story?” comments Augustine as he interrupts the narration of his *Confessions* early on in Book 2. As is often the case, the question is somewhat rhetorical but, at the same time clarifying. “Not to you, my God, rather in your presence I am relating these events to my own kin, the human race, however few of them may chance upon these writings of mine.”<sup>1</sup> Although cautious perhaps in his assessment of a possible readership, he is eminently clear about the universal appeal of his story which recounts the human depths from which the heart confesses. Beyond this initial identification of the future reader, there is little mention of the same in the so-called autobiographical Books, 1 through 9, of the *Confessions*. The text, which relates the process of conversion throughout these Books, is directed to God, a lengthy prayer, as has been so often mentioned.<sup>2</sup> The reader is, thus, privy to this conversation between Augustine and God and is occasionally invited to join in the praise, “so that all your worshipers who hear my tale may exclaim, *Blessed be the Lord, blessed in heaven and on earth, for great and wonderful is his name.*”<sup>3</sup>

There is evidence, however, that Augustine has specific readers in mind within this human race so akin to his own humanity. These, he addresses more particularly in the much discussed Book 10 of the *Confessions* in which there is a switch from the prayerful recollection of the past pattern of his conversion to a reflection on the present status of his work as a theologian and his life as a churchman. Within the audience of readers invited to share in his “work of truth” are those who

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<sup>1</sup> The English translation of the *Confessions* employed in this paper is from *The Confessions* translated by Maria Boulding, New City Press, Hyde Park, New York, (The Works of Saint Augustine, A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century), p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. M. Boulding, “Introduction”, *The Confessions*, “all Augustine’s labor in this book is prayer”. Also, Capánaga, V., *Agustín de Hipona. Maestro de la conversión cristiana*, Madrid 1974. “Con razón, San Agustín es el autor de las *Confesiones*, que han enseñado a conocerse y confesarse a la conciencia cristiana. Son un libro de oraciones que confiesan y de confesiones que oran...” p. 368.

<sup>3</sup> Ib. 8. 1. This is a typical example of the incorporation of the language of the Psalms into Augustine’s confessional narrative.

will be witnesses to his confession of the divine presence.<sup>4</sup> “Truth it is I want to do, in my heart by confession in your presence, and with my pen before many witnesses”.<sup>5</sup> But is it possible to share a truth told in the secret of the heart exposed to God in prayer, the most intimate of dialogues? His words would have been mere babble if this confession had not first been addressed to God in truth. Such self-knowing is itself a graced revelation. The intersubjective communication of a truth realized within the solitude of the confessing subject is a daunting if not impossible task as attested to by St. Paul and affirmed by St. Augustine on two occasions in Book 10.<sup>6</sup> “Who, for example, knows a man’s innermost self but the man’s own spirit within him? Similarly, no one knows what lies at the depths of God but the Spirit of God”.

Nonetheless, Augustine attempts, almost as if driven, to justify the communicability of his *Confessions*, a work of truth, to the reader relying again on the God-given matrix of all communication in truth which is charity. Once more, Paul provides the scriptural support. “There is no limit to love’s forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure”. (1 Cor. 13. 7) His reading of this text encourages him to affirm: “Yet charity believes without stint, at least among those who are bonded together in charity, and so I also confess to you, Lord, in such a way that people to whom I can offer no proof may discern whether I confess truthfully. I cannot prove it, but all whose ears are open to me by love will believe me”.<sup>7</sup>

A representative type apt for a dialogue with the author of the *Confessions* is recognized in the “fraternus animus”<sup>8</sup>, the “brotherly mind” which he describes at some length. In a sequence of comments concerning potential readers, Augustine rather angrily dismisses the curiosity seekers who will not be engaged in the confessional process which requires a sincere openness to truth, that is, not only the truth of the other but the “truth about oneself” which is the same as “knowing oneself” in light of the dialectic between author and reader.<sup>9</sup> Augustine also excludes the “mind of the stranger, the minds of alien foes who

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<sup>4</sup> Ib, 10. 1

<sup>5</sup> Ib.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. 2. 11 *Conf.* 10. 3; 10. 7

<sup>7</sup> Ib. 10. 3

<sup>8</sup> Ib. 10. 5

<sup>9</sup> Ib. 10. 3

mouth falsehood and whose power wreaks wickedness”.<sup>10</sup> Augustine is also aware that his testimony relative to his conversion would find an audience among the sinners and the weak of will; those who utter “I cannot” in the face of sin’s burden of despair. “It is cheering to good people to hear about the past evil deeds of those who are now freed from them, cheering not because the deeds were evil but because they existed once but exist no more”.<sup>11</sup> “Will they recognize me?”, he rather plaintively asks. “Yes” he answers, “because the charity that makes them good assures them that I am not lying when I confess about myself; that very charity in them believes me”.<sup>12</sup>

It is the “fraternal mind” which epitomizes this pre-condition to knowing that truth which is, ultimately, a graced communication. What are the characteristics of the “brotherly mind” and what, if any, are the connections between this description cast in terms of fraternity and Augustine’s monastic experience?

First, as is evident from Augustine’s description, the “fraternal mind” is not a passive recipient of information; it is a mind with certain qualities of judgment, a mind engaged in a dialogic process of moral evaluation. Augustine does not hide the degree of sinfulness which kept him at a prodigal’s distance from God. The brotherly reader “deplores in me what you teach us to deplore”.<sup>13</sup> Such a reader knows how to exercise judgment either approving or disapproving, morally, what has been narrated. The use of “*approbat*” or “*improbat*” expresses both the need to make moral assessments and the limitations of such judgments.<sup>14</sup> These judgments are neither absolute nor excluding because there is a superior value which conditions the act of judging which is “whether it approves or disapproves it still loves me”.<sup>15</sup> The assurance of God’s love and mercy had made possible the *Confessions* of Augustine; such love is poured forth in a spirit of reciprocity in the hearts of “believing men and women, the companions of my joy and sharers of my mortality, my fellow citizens still on pilgrimage with me, those who have gone before

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<sup>10</sup> Ib. 10. 5. The language here is taken from Ps. 143: 7-8. The harshness of this rejection leads one to conjecture that the comment may be directed to the Manichaeans.

<sup>11</sup> Ib. 10. 4

<sup>12</sup> Ib.

<sup>13</sup> Ib. 10. 5

<sup>14</sup> Ib. Augustine employs the same antithesis in 3. 17, “*multa itaque facta, quae hominibus improbanda viderentur, testimonio tuo adprobata sunt...*”

<sup>15</sup> Ib. 10. 5

and those who will follow, and all who bear me company in my life”.<sup>16</sup> Wide, indeed, is the horizon of potential participants in the confessional process suggested by Augustine’s testimony. He wishes to be heard by “the people you command me to serve”.<sup>17</sup>

There remains, it would seem a paradigm group of fellow pilgrims who are those of the “fraternal mind”, a term, perhaps, which needs further explication and contextualization.<sup>18</sup> Augustine at the time of writing his *Retractationes*, cannot hide his contentment derived from his recall of the *Confessions*, a book which not only “continues” to move his own heart and spirit but also continues to please “many brothers”.<sup>19</sup> It is challenging to think of these “many brothers” who are not otherwise identified beyond the designation of a fraternal relationship. Certainly, Augustine employed the common language of fraternity derived from New Testament sources and of generalized and common usage in the early Christian communities. Indeed, in pre-Constantinian times, the idea of fraternity among the baptized was “inserted” in the heart of the Christology and the theology of salvation of the early period.<sup>20</sup> The same author traces the slow retreat of the broad employment of these expressions of universal fraternity due to the appearance and growth in importance of established hierarchies and to the tensions arising from the incidence of schismatic divisions.

Augustine, nonetheless, makes broad, if somewhat restricted, use of the terms of fraternity. In his earliest apologetical writings, he recognizes that, through the bond of religion, God joins brothers with brothers in a fraternal relationship stronger than that of blood.<sup>21</sup> “Brothers” are those

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<sup>16</sup> *Ib.* 10. 6

<sup>17</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>18</sup> The term, “fraternus animus”, elicits no particular comment in the *Corpus Christianorum* edition of the *Confessions* (ed. L. Verheijen), Vol. XXVII, p. 157. The nomenclature is not mentioned by O’Donnell in his otherwise detailed inquiry into Augustine’s vocabulary, *Augustine’s Confessions*, Vol. III, Commentary Books 8-13, Oxford, 1992, p. 163. Nor do we find special comment regarding the same in *Sant’ Agostino Confesiones*, Vol. IV, Libri X-XI, (ed. Marti Cristiani) 1996, p. 13. The same absence of specific reference to the term is evident in *Les Confessions*, BA, 14, Paris, 1962, p. 149 as well as in BAC, *Las Confesiones*, Madrid, 1979, p. 393.

<sup>19</sup> *Retractationes* II. vi. 1, “multis tamen fratribus os multum placuisse et placere scio”. CC LVII, 94

<sup>20</sup> Ratzinger, J., “Fraternité”, *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Tome V, Paris, 1964, col. 1151

<sup>21</sup> *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* 1. 63, “Tu fratribus fratres religionis, vinculo firmiore atque artiore quan sanguinis nectis. »

who are born of a common mother which is the Church.<sup>22</sup> It is even a matter of precept to call a schismatic “brother”<sup>23</sup> a title, however, which is not extended to the non-baptized who, in terms of the Gospel, are to be considered as “neighbor”.<sup>24</sup> The language of fraternity is extensively present in the Augustinian lexicon either in the adjectival form as “fraternus” or, in direct address, as “frater” or “fratres”.<sup>25</sup>

Among these multiple texts, there are some which are directed to the “brothers” who shared the common life with Augustine in the monastic experiences initiated at Tagaste and transferred to the “garden” monastery and, eventually, to the monastery of clerics in a period which embraces the years 388 to 396, a near decade of the common life prior to the episcopate. P. Monceaux maintains that “by *brothers* Augustine, before his episcopal consecration, meant the monks of the garden monastery, and thereafter, the members of the monastery of clerics.”<sup>26</sup> L. Verheijen, in an early work, makes the observation that Augustine’s confession is destined to be understood by the “brothers in the faith and, among these, only those who, by reason of charity, are truly good”.<sup>27</sup> While he adds a cautionary note that such a designated readership is not explicitly identified with the monastic brethren, Verheijen adds that Augustine seems to have had in mind those who, like Augustine, “are making a confession to God and, on whose behalf, he (Augustine), as in the case of Alypius, addresses words of humble recognition to God”.<sup>28</sup> This language of fraternity appears when Augustine narrates the possible sinful excess of his grief on the occasion of the death of Monica and appeals to the charity of those who “weep for my sins to you who are Father of all whom your Christ calls

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<sup>22</sup> *Sermon 255 A* (Fragm. Wilmart 18 ) “fratres, quia una nos genuit ecclesia mater”.

<sup>23</sup> In a letter to Maximinus, Augustine states, “*fratrem* uero ut uocem, non te latet praeceptum nobis esse diuinitus, ut etiam eis, que negant se fratres nostros esse”. Letter 23. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ratzinger, J., op. cit. col. 1154

<sup>25</sup> According to the information provided by *Corpus Augustinianum Gissene*, the word, “fraternus” and its variations appears 140 times in the works of St. Augustine while “frater” has 3650 references.

<sup>26</sup> Monceaux, P., “La formule, <qui mecum sunt fratres> dans la correspondance de S. Augustin” Bruges, 1930, cited in Zumkeller, A., *Augustine’s Ideal of Religious Life*, New York 1986, Note 306, p. 70.

<sup>27</sup> Verheijen, M. (L.), *Eloquentia Pedisequa. Observations sur le style des Confessions de St. Augustin*, Nijmegen 1949, p. 55.

<sup>28</sup> *Ib.*

his brethren”.<sup>29</sup> Again, he confesses to God, “a longing on fire not for myself alone but to serve the brethren I dearly love”.<sup>30</sup>

None of these references to “brothers” enables one to conclude that Augustine is specifically speaking to or about his monastic associates. There are, however, several descriptive elements attached to the “fraternal mind” which could possibly, although not definitively, relate this expression not in a restrictive but rather in an originating sense to the practices governing dialogue in Augustine’s monastic communities. The “fraternal mind” which knows how to discern between what it approves or disapproves does not restrict its judging to these moral considerations but submits to a higher order of judging which is dictated by charity. Augustine appeals to something similar in his analysis of the controversies which arise from the interpretation of Sacred Scripture and, concerning which, he advocates the same supremacy of charity in the formation of judgments.<sup>31</sup>

There is a background to the ethics governing fraternal communication to be discovered in the various writings which were developed by Augustine in the context of his monastic experience. This experience which underwent a number of mutations between 388 and 395, included what has been rightly called “a ground work” stage<sup>32</sup>, Tagaste, and the first and second monasteries of Hippo. These years of fraternal living constitute a significant yet somewhat under-studied aspect of the formation of Augustine’s “Augustinianism”. These years witnessed the decisive years of Augustine’s transition from a somewhat marginal existence as a Catholic lay intellectual with a principally philosophical agenda to the priesthood and his subsequent immersion in the tasks of Biblical exegesis. In an interesting paper presented at the 1999 Patristics Congress<sup>33</sup>, T. Fuhrer establishes a schema of six literary genres ranging from “commentaries” in a strict sense to the “tractates”. Among these works dealing with biblical themes there are those which are the products of antecedent discussions alluding to the role of the “brothers” in raising the issues which would take the form of “quaestiones et responciones”<sup>34</sup> The various “expositio” pertain to this

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<sup>29</sup> *Confessions*, op. cit. 9. 33.

<sup>30</sup> *Ib.* 11. 3

<sup>31</sup> *Ib.* 12. 35 p. 334

<sup>32</sup> Zumkeller, A., op. cit. Pp. 3-23.

<sup>33</sup> Fuhrer, T., “Zu Form und Funktion von Augustins exegetischen Schriften”, *Studia Patristica*, Vol. XXXVIII, pp. 136-152.

<sup>34</sup> *Ib.* p. 146

category whose confection reflect “a familiar environment of dialogue, inter-communication, and fraternal trust among all the brethren who question Augustine and, while he answers or dictates, they write, edit, and summarize his responses in order that these not be lost as is clearly pointed out in the *Retractationes*.”<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps, a stellar example of fraternal collaboration between Augustine and his monastic colleagues is the collection entitled *Eighty-three Different Questions*.<sup>36</sup> The particular circumstances which gave rise to this document are clearly recalled by Augustine in his *Retractationes*. “Among the things which we have written, there is also a work of a diffuse nature which, nonetheless, is thought of as a single book, and its title is *Eighty-three Different Questions*. However, the questions had been scattered through many leaves of paper, because, from the very beginning of my conversion and after our return to Africa, the questions were dictated, without any order having been preserved by me, in response to the brothers who were ever asking me things when they would see me unoccupied. When I became bishop, I ordered that the questions be gathered together and made up into a single book, and that numbers be added so that anyone could easily find what he wanted to read.”<sup>37</sup>

Of particular interest in this brief examination of connections, *Quaestio* 71 offers possibilities for clarifying the concept of fraternal understanding of the other as Augustine would have recommended the practice among the brethren. *Quaestio* 71 belongs to a group of questions dealing with biblical exegesis of texts. These apparently were formulated in that period of time coincident with Augustine’s priesthood and concomitant dedication to Scripture. Although the scattered questions belong to a time frame covering the years of 388 to 395, *Quaestio* 71 is generally placed among the questions relating to the apostle Paul and, thus, between 394-395.<sup>38</sup> The “brothers” request in

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<sup>35</sup> Madrid, T. C., “Introducción”, *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, BAC XL, Madrid 1995, p. 26. Translation of the Spanish text to English is the work of the author of this article. “Además respiran el ambiente familiar de diálogo, de intercomunicación y confianza fraterna que reina entre todos, porque le preguntan, él contesta o dicta, y ellos escriben, redactan y resumen las contestaciones de Agustín para que no se pierdan, como indica en las *Retractationes*”.

<sup>36</sup> The English text employed in this essay is *Eighty-three Different Questions*, a translation of *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII*, by D. L. Mosher, The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 70, Washington D.C. 1982, 271 pp.

<sup>37</sup> *Retractationes* 1. 26, CC LVII, p. 74. Translation provided by Mosher, pp. 1-2.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Mosher, op. cit., “Introduction”, p. 19.

their question an explanation of the Pauline text, *Galatians* 6. 2, “bear one another’s burdens, and in this way will you fulfill the law of Christ”.

While the reply of Augustine is applicable to all Christians, the context of his response concerning the formation of judgments is the circumscribed setting of a monastic community concerned about what it means to bear the fraternal burden (*onera fraterna*) not only with patience but also with generosity (*libentissime sustineri*).<sup>39</sup> Augustine reminds his listeners that this is a temporal condition not to be necessary in eternity and that such condition of temporality is one which lacks transparency. The human condition is one of imperfection and obscurity; what is made manifest in the other is always partial. A brother may see the weakness of his companion before he sees the goodness. Displays of anger, talkativeness, stubbornness, sadness and other exterior manifestations of weakness are not only in the other but also in oneself, thus, a fraternal encounter should never be rash or one-sided. Such weaknesses are universal and no reason for one to be proud when, at the time of observing the weakness of the other, one is free of the same. The brother should “bend down” to the afflicted brother, not from a sense of superiority, but in the spirit of Christ’s bending down to reach our humanity. “The precise point is this: just as that one did not look after his own interest but ours, in that as the Word he became flesh, and lived among us, and he assumed our sins, although he was without sin, so also should we, in imitation of him, willingly bear one another’s burdens”.<sup>40</sup> While a recognition of the limited ability to know the other as well as to know self imposes frontiers and boundaries in the matter of judging, the key to a correct assessment of the other rests with the initiation of friendship. Indeed, “in the case of some man whom one does not know, one must not pass any judgment at all; and no one is known except through friendship”.<sup>41</sup>

Friendship is thus proposed as the primordial relationship among the brothers and, by extension, to “anyone who offers himself for the association of friendship”.<sup>42</sup> Such friendship does not rest upon parity in human stature but, rather, upon trust; “we can say that a person has been received into friendship to whom we dare pour out all our

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<sup>39</sup> *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, CC XLIV A, Turnhout, 1975, 71. 5. p. 205

<sup>40</sup> *Question* 71. 3. p. 182

<sup>41</sup> *Ib.* 71. 5. p. 183

<sup>42</sup> *Ib.* 71. 6. p. 183

plans”.<sup>43</sup> Does this analysis not resonate with a description of the “fraternal mind” which, whether approving or disapproving what one confesses, it can hold in love the revelation of the secrets of the other?

In the search for resonating texts or symbolic similarities which might further indicate some relationship between the very descriptive “fraternal mind” of the *Confessions* and monastic inspiration, there are references which might hint at such a connection in the *Praecepta* or *Regula Sancti Augustini*. In the text from the *Confessions* under consideration, Augustine, expanding upon the notion of abiding charity to be found among those of the “fraternal mind”, identifies these “brethren” in liturgical language as “censers”<sup>44</sup> whose prayers are elevated on his behalf to God. These hymns and laments constitute the “fragrance which pervades your holy temple”.<sup>45</sup> Although still a debated issue, the dating of the composition of what has become known as the *Praecepta* or *Regula Recepta* is widely held to be around the year 397 which would place it within the period of the writing of the *Confessions*.<sup>46</sup> Augustine advises the brothers who live according to the *Rule* to be “lovers spiritual beauty, exuding the fragrance of Christ”<sup>47</sup> echoing the sentiments of Paul in 2 Cor. 15: “We are an aroma of Christ for God’s sake, both among those who are being saved and those on the way to destruction”. This fragrance of prayer “pervades your holy temple”<sup>48</sup> and serves as a plea for mercy and the grace to finish the unfinished work of the *Confessions* which is the work of conversion. In the *Rule*, Augustine also uses the “temple” image to identify the “brothers” with the Pauline reminder to the Corinthians, “you are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor. 6: 16).

Although such possible connections between the language of the *Confessions* and monastic sources may seem to be tenuous at best and no more than a partisan conjecture, there would seem to be an area of investigation yet to be adequately pursued which is that of Augustine’s

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<sup>43</sup> Ib. The latin text reads: “Illum enim receptum in amicitiam possumus dicere, cui omnia consilia nostra refundere audeamus”. CC. Op. cit. p. 205

<sup>44</sup> *Confessions*, 10. 5: “Respirent in illis et suspirent in his et hymnus et fletus ascendant in conspectum tuum fraternis cordibus, turibus tuis”.

<sup>45</sup> Ib. “Tu autem, Domine, delectatus ordore templi sancti tui”.

<sup>46</sup> For an ample treatment of the dating of the composition of the *Rule*, consult Lawless, G., *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, Oxford 1987, pp. 148-152.

<sup>47</sup> *Regula Sancti Augustini*, text is from Lawless, G., ib. p. 103: “tamquam spiritualis puchritudinis amatores et bono Christi odore de bona conversatione flagrantes”.

<sup>48</sup> *Confessions* 10. 5.

monastic experience as a factor in the ideological and psychological mutations leading to the *Confessions*, a work still enjoyed by so many brothers.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Retractationes* 2. 6. 1.