# On the Charism and Spirituality of the Augustinian Recollect Order

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

#### a. The Quest for Charism and Spirituality

Charism and spirituality are two different things but here I will discuss them together, because in the end they are realities deeply interrelated. The charism is like the fountain, from which springs up the water which fertilizes the whole life of the group, while the spirituality would be its external manifestation, the concrete form which the charism is taking up along the centuries in its interaction with local, temporal and personal circunstances. The charism, the gift given by the Spirit for the edification of the community (cf. 1Cor 12, 7), is the motivating force, the creative energy, the vital principle, which gives origin and sustenance to the community, and directs its life and activity. The spirituality, for its part, is a sum or an aggregate of principles and norms that make up and regulate the spiritual life and the practical activity of a person or of a group.

Until very recently theology of religious life and even spiritual theology at all did not speak of charisms. It preferred the term spirituality. After the Council of Trient the term charism had fallen into disuse in the Catholic Church and still provoked in many scholars misgivings, reservation, and even opposition.

At present the situation has greatly changed. In the modern writing and spiritual scholarship the charism has become one of the issues preferred by the students of the religious life inside as well as outside the Order. In the three last decades the speculation on the religious charisms has growed and is still growing incensantly. Day after day new books, pamphlets, essays, papers, lectures come to enrich the most various aspects of the religious life. Perhaps they are too abundant and many of them contribute little or nothing to the better understanding of the term and its significance in religious life.

Even in our own Order, which certainly does not excel in writing, it is spoken and witten a lot about charisms. The several courses of renewal celebrated in Spain, in America or in the Philippines, the months of preparation for solemn professions, spiritual retreats and any kind of meetings and conventions have promoted the study and publication of some worthy studies, which have created a new awareness in the Order, making clearer not only its historical and spiritual development but also showing its members the place they should occupy in the church and in the world. The best fruits of all these efforts are the new Constitutions, the Plan of Formation and the renovated interest in the Third Order or Recollect secular fraternities.

Nevertheless, the reflection and even some simple observations about our charism and spirituality still provoke among some of our religious misgivings and resistances. For them this task entails the danger of particularism of sad memory in our modern ecclesial history, when each community constituted a separate body with its own jealously guarded secrets. The lending of the Constitutions and any other official books to a other religious was a crime and therefore deserved a severe punishment. For others it constitutes a vain and inane task, since Christian spirituality is unique, as is its source, Christ and the Gospel.

These viewpoints, not infrequent in private conversations, where not much attention is paid to conceptual and linguistic precision, where social barriers are slackened and spontaneity is given free rein, were developped at length in 1964 by Besret in a notable paper. This writer was very harsh in his blaming of the efforts the religious communities were then dedicating to investigate and illuminate their own identity. For him it was no more than wasting time, money and work. In the first place, because it would contribute to revive the already mentioned risk of particularism, with the inevitable darkening of ecclesial horizon of the community and the risk of locking it up in its own restricted circle. In the second place, because these studies are always meaningless and lead nowhere, since the Christian spirituality is unique and indivisible.

#### b. Different Forms of Christian Spirituality

This attitude is dangerous, because, in part, is justifiable. Totally false ideas do not really deceive anyone. Imitating Christ, conforming with Christ, is certainly the path and the goal of all spirituality, and particularism or spirit of body collides directly with human openness and Christian fraternity and universalism. However, it is also certain that each person reaches Christ by a different path and history shows that in the bosom of the Church have sprung up and flourished quite different spiritualities.

The Christian spirituality has followed different paths in the East and in the West, and even in the West has known many expresions. In the early Middle Ages prevailed the Benedictine and Augustinian spiritualities, the first being practiced and spread by the monks, and the second by the canons. Afterwards, both in continuity and in contrast with these two main streams, there appeared the Franciscan and the Dominican spiritualities. At the end of the Middle Ages was the turn of the Brothers of Common Life. In the sixteenth Century flourished the Carmelite and Jesuit spiritualities, and the following centuries witnessed the formation and consolidation of other forms of Christian spirituality, such as those of Francis de Sales, Vincent de Paul, John Bosco, Charles de Foucault, Opus Dei, etc.

How can be explained this apparent anomaly? How from the only evangelical fountain has sprouted such a variety of historical forms of spirituality. What distinguishes from one another?. The the root of these differences is twofold. The first is to be looked for in the fact that Christian spirituality is something alive, something intimately intertwined with men’s daily life, something incarnated in human history, and therefore takes up the forms corresponding both to the men who live it and to the historical circunstances prevailing at one given era. The second, and more important, is to be related to the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church. The Spirit, ever present and attentive to the needs of the Church, which vary so much from time to time, elects some persons and endows them with the qualities needed to respond to the trials and challenges of the moment, opening in this way new paths to Christian spirituality. It is interesting to notice that at the origin of every new form of spirituality we find almost always a great charismatic man or woman. Pachomius and Basilius were the fathers of the Oriental spirituality; St. Augustine and Saint Benedict provided the basis for the Occidental one, which afterwards would be reformulated or reinterpreted by saints like Francis of Assisi and Dominic de Guzman in the Middle Ages, Ignatius de Loyola, Therese de Avila, John of the Cross in the Renaissance and Vincent de Paul, John Bosco and others in more recent times. These manifold varieties of Chistian spirituality derive directly from the action of the Spirit in the Church, but since his action is always incarnate in the human history, is also liable or subject to external elements or influences. To a certain extent his action is always fostered or restrained by historical and personal situations.

But what are then the traits which distinguish one Christian sipituality from another? Certainly they cannot affect its essence, for all Christian spiritualities have the same fundamental structures:

All of them share the same principles of the faith

All of them look to Christ as to the only model

All of them are animated by the same Holy Spirit

All of them are lived in the bosom of the Church

All of them face the same fundamental difficulties, those connatural to the man fallen and redeemed and the inevitable tension between sin and grace.

All of them go through the same fundamental stages, that is, purification, illumination and sanctification.

All of them have the same basic means of sanctification: sacraments, prayer, penance.

All of them are interested and engaged in the world and in its inhabitants.

All of them expect the same eschatological hope.

Since all forms of Christian spirituality must possess all these elements, we may conclude that in their essential points there cannot be any difference among them. But this does not mean that all of these elements are present in the same way or are given the same weith or intensity in all Christian spiritualities, nor that all of them use the same means to reach the same goals.

It may happen that, without refusing any esential trait of Christian doctrine, one spirituality may stress one over another or even single out it as the axle around which all the others will rotate. It may also happen that among the means for reaching the goals of Christian spirituality —all of them good and useful—, some of them be preferred to others, but without denying their validity. Consequently, diversity among the various forms of Christian spirituality may consist, in the order of goals, in the different stress given to some of them. In this way it is possible to reach the same ultimate goals —the glorification of God and the perfection of charity— through different proximate goals, —the contemplation, the apostolate, the works of charity—, and it is also possible to attain to the same goals (ultimate and proximate) through different means. So the monastic spirituality comes out from the preference given to contemplation; and the apostolic one from the careful cultivation of mission or apostolate. Even the very person of Christ may be regarded from different points of view. The Franciscans emphasize his poverty and aim at conforming themselves with Christ the poor. The Oratorians of the Cardinal Bérulle, for their part, see Christ as the true worshipper of the Father, and, consequently, they seek the imitation of his priestly ministry.

The diversity among Christian spiritualities may also proceed from the different stress given to the mysteries of Christian faith. When the stress is laid on the mystery of the Trinity, the resulting spirituality will be a Trinitarian one; if the emphasis is placed on the devotion to the Eucharist, it will come out a eucharistic spirituality; and if it is accentuated the role of Mary, we will have a Marian spirituality.

All this notwithstanding, it is necessary to keep always in mind that each spirituality is a kind of organism well framed, with a nucleus or center which directs and unifies all the essential elements of Christian spirituality. Only in this way a given spirituality will be efficient and lasting.

#### c. The Study of Our Own Charism and Spirituality

The possibility and real existence of different Christian spiritualities put before us a triple question. Firstly, we need a conclusive reasoning about the importance of arriving at an intimate persuasion of the goodnes and beauty of our spiritual tradition. An insufficient or superficial awareness of the corporate individuality weights heavily on the communities and hinders nor only their apostolic activities, but also the recruitment of new vocations and even the human and spiritual formation of their members. Secondly, we have to become acquainted with the directives of the Church on this issue. Is our Church really interested in maintaining these different spiritualities and charisms? And thirdly, we need also a careful investigation to isolate and describe the main traits of our spirituality, relating it or establishing the necessary connections with the various springs which have contributed to its formation or have flowed into it.

Fortunately, none of these three questions presents nowadays special difficulties. All of them have found more or less satisfactory answers.

The insufficient awareness of its individuality has been a danger which has accompanied our Order throughout the centuries. This is a threat that has haunted us throughout our history, and which we have not been able to evade. Frequently, it has negatively affected our lives and our spirituality. In the thirteenth century we abandoned eremitism and embraced the mendicant ideal. In the sixteenth century we allied ourselves enthusiastically to the reformist movement of the epoch. In the nineteenth century we lived and worked as an apostolic community and were on the verge of losing all the main traits of our spiritual tradition, that is contemplation, community life and ascecism.

In this trajectory, not always foreseen and even less often voluntarily planned out by the Order, it is not difficult to detect some positive values, such as the capacity for adaptation, which is one of the greatest privileges of any living organism. However, a careful and critical analysis obliges us to modify and slightly devalue this estimation. Some of these modifications and other less transcencendal ones have not been the fruit of free choice nor sufficiently meditated. On examining them, one remains with impression that they are simple products of an environment that is neither controlled nor critically assumed. In other words, instead of ruling the circunstances of each epoch, adopting its positive values and integrating them to our patrimony, at times we have been their victims. We have given entrance to new ideas and new values without succeeding in making an authentic synthesis with our own values, and contenting ourselves with a simple juxtaposition. And when such a juxtaposition was not possible, we have all the way easily renounced to clear values of our tradition to leave room for values that are doubtful or even harmful to our communitarian tradition.

Today we run similar risks. The temptation of the levelling off of our own perspectives, of an acritical, impersonal and unceasing accomodation to what is offered us by our surroundings has decreased; the promulgation of the our entire legislative Corpus, the attention given to our history and charism in courses and conventions, the new interest in the Third Order, which is being organized in almost all our ministries are some proofs of this assertion; but the temptation still is strong among us, haunting almost every aspect of our life, from our way of living, which hardly responds to the best ideals of the Order, to the running of our parishes and schools. How many among us search for nourishment for their study and prayer in our own laws and traditions? How many even consider them as they plan their apostolic activities? Where are our own particular devotions? The tepid reaction to the recent canonization of father Ezekiel Moreno is still another sign of the relative indifference with which many of our brothers look at the spiritual tradition of the Order.

Hence the urgency for arriving at a more profound awareness of our individuality. Only in this way we can operate with discretion, opening the door to factors that can enrich it and closing it to those that can denaturalize it. Religious communities, not less than physical persons or political societies need to be strongly anchored to their own personality to the point of being proud of it. Otherwise hardly can they contribute anything to the good of the whole. An insecure and unstable person, or an amorphous group without well-defined, jealously guarded and continually nourished patrimony, can contribute little or notihng to the common good.

#### d. Interest of the Church in the Religious Orders’ Charism and Spirituality

In the last decades, from the council on, the Church has developed a clear awareness of this psychological law. Many times, and ever with greater emphasis, has the Church in these years declared his interest in that each community become conscious of its own individuality, of its own charism and spirituality, and in what protects and constructs its proiect in accordance with the charism. I wil recall here some of them, beginning with the council and ending with the recent Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*..

Vatican II proclaimed this interest solemnly and on more than one occasion. In the decree *Perfectæ caritatis,* the council ordered that all institutes keep it well in mind in the renewal and adaptation of their legal, spiritual and apostolic structures to the circunstances of the present day.

«It serves the best interest of the Church for communities to have their own special character and purpose. Therefore loyal recognition and safekeeping sould be accorded to the spirit of the founders and also to the particular goals and wholesome traditions which constitute the heritage of each community».

In the decree *Christus Dominus* religious are encouraged to collaborate on the edification and development of the mystical body of Christ, but always maintaining the individual character of the respective institute: «each according to his proper vocation» (CD 33), and «imbued with the spirit of the religious community and remain faithful to the observance of their rule and to submissiveness toward their own superiors» (*Ibid* 35,2). Even the bishops are urged to respect all this: «especially in view of the urgent need of souls and the scarcity of diocesan clergy, religious communities which are not dedicated exclusively to the contemplative life can be called upon by bishops to assist in various pastoral ministries. The particular character of each community should, however, be kept in mind» (*Ibid* 35,1).

Paul VI reiterated these ideas many times and shed new light on them in both general documents and discourses of a more particular nature. In Motu proprio *Ecclesiæ Sancæ* , August 6, 1966, he encouraged religious institutes to depeen their understanding of the primitive charism —*primigenii spiitus*— and expressed his confidence in that this understanding would hep them to liberate themselves from the stagnation of the ages.

##### «For the good of the Church, institutes must seek after a genuine understanding of their original spirit so that they will preserve it faithfully when deciding on adaptations, purify their religious life from alien elements and free it from what is obsolete».

In the exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio*, June 29, 1971, he affirmed that the primitive charism of each religion is not a simple impulse emanating from the body and blood, but rather an authentic fruit of the Spirit. The charism was for him the dynamic element of religious life, the only one capable of liberating it from the snares of formalism and stagnation, and he linked the possibility of an authentic renewal to the fidelity demanded by the charism itself.

On September 8 of the same year he confirmed once again the Benedictine charism, encouraging the monks to follow it faithfully, because it was «an excellent interpreter of the charism of God». A few days later he exhorted the Augustinians to be true Augustinians, conserving the charism of their own Order, and, if necessary, reviving it:

##### «Most beloved sons, be true Augustinians, worthy of your name; be faithfully to the charism of your Order, make it more fruitful every day, and, if need be, revive it».

The same ideas are found in the message of John Paul II to the last General Chapter of the Discalced Carmelites in April, 22, 1991:

##### «Be faithful to your founders. An ever greater and more convinced fidelity of your Order is my most heartfelt desire. And this is also the particular service the Church expects from you. If you follow always the steps of the most ancient carmelite tradition, you will be always ready to face without special difficulties the trials and challenges of this particular historical moment»[[1]](#footnote-0) .

The Church, far from being afraid of the individual charism of each community, promotes an potects it: «The Church», it is said in *Lumen Gentium* 44, «preserves and fosters the special character of her various religious communities». The variety of religious, besides manifesting the multiform wisdom of God, beautifies the Church as well, contributing —“valde contulit”— to enable it to perform good works and to facilitate its mission of building the body of Christ.

Thirteen years later the valuable document *Mutuæ Relationes* insisted in the necessity of paying attention to religious charisms. According to the Vatican authorities the assiduous cultivation of charism and spiritual peculiarities of religious institutes will be highly beneficial not only for the institutes themselves but also for the whole Church:

##### «In this hour of cultural evolution and ecclesial renewal, therefore, it is necessary to preserve the identity of each institute so securely that the danger of an ill-defined situation be avoided, lest religious, failing to give due consideration to the particular mode of action proper to their character, become part of the life of the Church in a vague and ambiguous way» (MR 11).

This idea has found new theological and pastoral development in the recent exhortation on *The Fraternal Life in Community*. The Roman Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life explains with extraordinary clarity the nature of the religious’ apostolic activity and their place in the local church. The risk of reducing religious life to pastoral functions is ever incumbent on religious and communities without a proper understanding of their charism.For them it becomes almost impossible to conjugate harmonically religious life with pastoral activities and insertion in the local Church. On the contrary, the religious with strong charismatic identity are always ready to attend the ever more frequent calls of the local Church to cover some specific pastoral areas. The whole number 60, a golden number indeed, is dedicated to elucidate these paramount issues and urge the mutual understanding and collaboration between religious communities and local churches. I think it would be useful to read the whole text here:

##### 60. The missionary presence of a religious community is developed within the context of a particular Church, to which the members bring the richness of their consecration, of their fraternal life and of their charism.

##### By its mere presence, not only does a religious community bear in itself the richness of Christian life but as a unit it constitutes a particularly effective announcement of the Christian message. It can be said that it is a living and continuous preaching. This objective condition, which clearly holds religious themselves responsible, calling them to be faithful to this, their primary mission, correcting and eliminating anything which could attenuate or weaken the drawing power of their example, makes their presence in the particular Church identifiable and precious, prior to any other consideration.

##### Since charity is the greatest of charisms (cf. 1Cor 13:13), a religious community enriches the Church of wich it is a living part, first of all by its love. It loves the universal Church and the particular Church in which is inserted because it is within the Church and as a Church that it is placed in contact with the communion of the blessed and beatifying Trinity, source of all goods. In this way it becomes a privileged manifestation of the very nature of the Church herself.

##### A religious community loves the particular Church, enriches it with its charisms and opens it to a more universal dimension. The delicate relationships between the pastoral needs of the particular Church and the charismatic specificity of the religious community has been dealt with in Mutuæ Relationes. In addition to the theological and pastoral orientations it provides, that document has made an important contribution to more cordial and intense colaboration. The time has come to take another look at that document, in order to give a new thrust to the spirit of true communion between religious community and the particular Church.

##### The growing difficulties of mission work and the scarcity of personnel can tempt both the religious community and the particular Church to a certain isolation; this, of course, does nothing to improve mutual understanding and collboration.

##### The religious community runs the risk, on the one hand, of being present in the particular Church with no organic link to its life or to its pastoral programme and, on the other hand, of being reduced to merely pastoral functions. Moreover, if religious life tends more and more to emphasize its own charismatic identity, the local Church often makes pressing and insistent demands on the energies of religious for the pastoral activities of the diocese or parish. The guidelines provided by *Mutuæ Relationes* take us far from the isolation and independence of a religious community in relation to a particular Church and far from the practical assimilation of a religious community into the particular Church.

##### Just as a religious community cannot act independently of the particular Church, or as an alternative to it, or much less against the directives and pastoral programme of the particular Church, so the particular Church cannot dispose, according to its own pleasure and according to its needs, of a religious community or of any its members.

##### It is important to recall that a lack of proper consideration for the charism of a religious community serves neither the good of a particular Church nor that of the religious community itself. Only if a religious community has a well-defined charismatic identity can it integrate itself into an “overall pastoral programme” without losing its own character. Indeed, only in this way will it enrich the programme with its gift.

##### We must not forget that every charism is born in the Church and for the world and the link to its source and purpose must be continuously renewed; each charism is alive to the extent that one is faithful to it.

##### The Church and the world make possible its interpretation, request it and stimulate it to a continued growth in relevance and vitality. Charism and particular Church should not be in conflict but should rather support and complete each another, especially now that so many problems of living out the charism and its insertion into a changed situations have arisen.

##### At the root of many misunterstandings is perhaps a mutual partial knowledge either of the particular Church or of religious life, including study of its dogmatic, juridic and pastotral aspects; religious should in turn receive adeaquate theological formation concerning the particular Church.

##### Above all, however, a truly fraternal religious community will feel in duty bound to spread a climate of communion that will enable the entire Christian community to consider itself “the family of the Children of God”» (FL 60).

The Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* has taken up some of these ideas, given them solmnity and new force in one of its first numbers: «Communion in the Church is not uniformity, but a gift of the Spirit, who is present in the variety of charisms and states of life. These will be all the more helpful to the Church and her mission the more their specific identity is respected. For every gift of the Spirit is granted in order to bear fruit for the Lord in the growth of fraternity and mission» (4).

I think that it is already well established that the study and cultivation of our own charism is not only licit, but also useful and even necessary. There is no more place for doubting this. On the one hand, the rejection or even simple fear of the diversity of charisms can denote a lack of sensibility toward the free activity of the Spirit and an incomprehension of healthy ecclesial pluralism. And on the other, without a serious study of its original charism, every effort to renew our community life will be vane and even harmful. The first assertion was eloquently expressed by Luis Gutiérrez some years ago

##### «In the old [particularistic] vision [of religious life] the ecclesial dimension was often lacking, as a result of the absence of an authentic vision of the Church. In the new perspectives ecclesiality is lacking as a result of not understanding the Church as a fruit of the multiform manifestations of the Spirit, irrepresible and creative in its different gifts. Formerly it was thought possible to be Church while being only an institute; later it has been wanted to be Church without even being an institute. It is necessary to become Church being precisely an institute within the Church: the institute should be regarded as a gift for the edification of the very Church».

The second one was underscored by father Tillard in the already far away 1967. In a famous book on the renewal of the religious life he warned against the dangers that are involved in all attempts to renew the religious life of a corporation without a serious study of its original charism. It easily may degenerate into a simple adaptation to external circunstances, without a solid basis in the theology of religious life.

#### e. Identification of the Charism

Unfortunately, it is not easy to isolate and to delineate the charism of a religious congregation. Like all concrete things, the charism is more accessible to sensibility than to intellectual abstraction. It is much easier to feel it than to define it. According to what is indicated by the decree *Perfectæ Caritatis* 2b, the tendency is to identify the carism of an institute with that of the founder and healthy traditions.

In the decree *Perfectæ Caritatis* and subsequent documents the charism of the founder was of almost exclusive importance. It was the only authentic source, and should always remain as such throughout the centuries. The members of an institute always must have in mind it as their principal point of reference. Healthy traditions were worth much less. Their function would be reduce to concretizing or tinting the charism of the founder. Only with the instruction *Mutuæ Relationes* do they began to acquire a more specific importance.

In this instruction the charism of the founder is given a more dynamic character. It is not a simple divine gift transmitted to the community so that it be content with jealously guarding it. The community must also live it, deepens it and develop it «in harmony with the body of Christ continually in the process of growth». It is also recognized that individual religious possess their own personal gifts received from the Spirit. «They are usually intended for the enrichment, development, and rejuvenation of the life of the institute in its communitarian cohesion».

Consequently, it is no longer possible to identify plainly the charism of the institute with that of the founder. This will always occupy the central position, since from it the institute receives the primitive inspiration, its own physiognomy and ecclesial function. But together with it, and prominently, it is necessary to include the “healthy traditions” or the charismatic interpretations elaborated by the community throughout the centuries, especially those declared authentic by the Church. Our Constitutions recognize and sanction these two dimensions.

This recognition is especially consoling to those communities that, like ours, along the centuries have gone through such a variety of circunstances that have been forced to repeated and profound reelaborations of the primitive charism. But there is another side to this story. If it is always difficult to detect the authentically charismatic aspects of the founder, those which constitute the gift received from the Spirit to be communicated to his disciples for the building of the Mystical Body of Christ, freeing them from cultural accretions and even from his own personal qualities, which being intransferrable, do not form part of the charism, then it will be much more difficult to isolate the valid elements which are charismatic in nature and are present in those interpretations. Hence comes the demand of a careful and intelligent study, which among us, at least in part, has been already made.

As it has been already stated, the celebration of courses of renewal, months of preparation for solemn professions, and the Fourth Centennial of the founding Order, as well as the preparation of the *General Plan of Formation* and, above all, of the new constitutional text have required notable efforts which have already yielded fruit. The Constitutions, along with the Rule of St. Augustine, contain the present expression of our charism, an expression that has been approved and authenticated by the competent authority. The adequacy of this expression may be questionable, but there is no doubt that it is the best available and the only one authorized. The same Constitutions, as if they were conscious of the fact, state it explicitly: «These present Constitutions express and concretize this common ideal of life according to our particular Augustinian Recollect charism» (C. 515).

The role of the Rule is recognized and reaffirmed in numbers 7, 37, 62, 108, 324, 332 and 498 of the Constitutions and in other numbers of the Additional Code. A special significance should be given to number 37, which orders that religious profession be made «according to the purpose and Rule of St. Augustine».

The preceding information leads us to conclude that at the present time all attempts to describe or elucidate our charism and spirituality must **start** from the Constitutions. They furnish us with the major directives which certainly must be strengthened and embellished with recourse to other sources. The principal ones are indicated in the very Constitutions and are «the life, doctrine and Rule of St. Augustine […], the examples of sanctity and self-abnegation for the Kingdom of God that were given throughout the centuries by so many illustrious religious» (n. 7), the fith definition of Chapter of Toledo (n. 3 and 4) and the *Forma de vivir* (n. 5 and 6). In this too brief list an allusion to the formation of the Order of St. Augustine in the thirteenth century is altogether missing. This was also a charismatic moment. In historical reality it is one of the two o three charismatic moments that are essential to the life of the Order, and thus we cannot ignore its teachings. As pope Paul VI told the Jesuits in 1975, the charism of religious institutes is the common good of the Church and therefore no institute may modify it at whim. Ultimately, the arbiter of the charism is the pope.

Forgetting history and medieval tradition of the Order is no more than a simple consequence of this first instance of neglect. The Constitutions of Ratisbon (1290), the doctrine of theologians such as Giles of Rome († 1316), the blessed Simon of Cascia († 1348), Hermann of Schildesche († 1357), Jordan of Saxony († ca. 1380) or Gottschalk Hollen († 1481) and the examples of saints such as Juan de Sahagún († 1479), Tomás de Villanueva († 1555) or Alonso de Orozco († 1591) certainly deserved being mentioned. Besides forming an indisputable part of our patrimony, their teachings would have contribute a lot to both illuminating and providing the family warmth to the coldly academic exposition of the first chapters of teh Constitutions.

Even though it may not be a constitutive element of the charism, but rather its sign or external manifestation, when describing or analizing it, we cannot ignore the atmosphere of our communities, nor the climate which reins in them and which continues to be transmitted from generation to generation, impregnating the most intimate recesses of the souls of all members, joining them in the primordial attitudes and ways of life.

A careful combination of all these elements will give us a clearer vision of our charism and spirituality. As it is almost impossible to discover and analyze the charism in itself, I have decided to examine also its effects, trusting the validity of the scholastic axiom: «operari sequitur esse». The effect leads us to the cause. I will speak then of both charism or the vital principle which gave birth to the community and directs its whole life, and spirituality or the way of life prevailing in it.

The present Constitutions present a similar view of the charism, when insisting that attention be paid to it in the formation of the religious (n. 122-125, 140, 141, 267), the organization of common life, and in putting the apostolate into action (255, 278, 283, 289, 301, 310).

### 2. Constitutive Elements of the Augustinian Recollect Charism

To my thinking, there are four elements which have contributed to forming the charism and spirituality of the Order. The Constitutions mention only two: the monastic ideal of St. Augustine and the aspirations to a more perfect and austere way of life in the sixteenth century. They make no allusion to either the mendicant spirituality of the thirteenth century, which was the nucleus of the Order until the end of the sixteenth century, nor to the great structural and spiritual changes experienced throughout the nineteenth century, recognized and sanctioned, provisionally, by the General Chapter of San Millán (1908) and by the Constitutions of 1912, and definitively the Constitutions of 1937. Perhaps it should be added also an allusion to the Vatican Council and its far-reaching consequences in the understanding and organization of the whole religious life.

#### a. The Monastic Ideal of St. Augustine

Some Methodological Remarks

The monastic ideal of St. Augustine has moved the mind and the pen of many scholars. However, it seems that we are still far from having arrived at an agreement on his true charism, that is, on the nature of the gift or divine impulse which induced him to found monasteries. Some years ago, Fr. Teofilo Viñas summarized no less than eight different theories, and, as none of them fully satisfied him, he felt obligated to formulate another. And still another can be added to his list, that of Tirso Alesanco, of which Viñas does not seem to be aware.

A dispassionate reader, little inclined to get tangled up in every word and comma, would not attach excessive importance to these divergences. Quite often, the disagreement is reduced to a question of emphasis or shades in the meaning of a determinate word. Some times, nevertheless, the disagreement is deeper. Nor is there a lack of theories whose very process of formulation seems flawed. Father Luciano Rubio has criticized this last point in a rather recent article. Not always the scholars «distinguish in the monk or religious the different aspects that meet in him». With some frequency, when defining the Augustinian religious or monk, those characteristics and demands of his human, Christian and monastic conditions become jumbled indistinctly, and the religious is characterized not only by what classifies him as a monk, but often preferential attention is paid to what refers to him by the simple fact of being a man and a Christian.

I think that our Constitutions have not escaped this danger. This very objection can be made to the essay of Fr. Tirso which is the most detailed and authorized study of the Constitutions in this regard. What they say, for example, about contemplation, is very beautiful and very true, but it sems to me that it can be applied with identical truth to every man and every Christian. If there is a difference, it is only of degree. Therefore, this idea of contemplation cannot constitute the differential element or the point of departure of the Augustinian monasticism.

This being said, I gladly acknowledge the central position that contemplation must occupy in our lives, as is correctly proposed in the numbers 8-13 of the Constitutions. They faithfully reflect the way of life St Augustine established in his monasteries and we find described in some passages of the *Vita* of Possidius.

There is a general agreement among scholars on the fundamental role the interiority plays in the whole life and thought of St. Augustine. All his life and experience are dominated by a continuous calling to it. The man is worth what he is in his interiority, in the presence of God, who reads in the hearts; in the interior of the man has its dwelling the truth which illuminates him, and there the Holy Spirit builds the temple of God. The only way the man has to trascend himself and meet God is by going into himself. «The quest for God or Augustinian interiority», wrote some decades ago F. Manrique, «is, without doubt, the generic mark which characterizes the whole of the work of Augustine, a mark which does not seem to correspond to any other Father, at least with such depth. Hence his theology might be defined in a general way as a search for God through the image of God in the soul; his philosophy, as a search for God through the truth and wisdom; and his religious-life, as a search for God through the common life»[[2]](#footnote-1).

In search for the origin and a definition of the religious ideal of St Augustine, the preference must be given to his writings on monastic theme, among which the Rule holds a privileged and unrivaled place. Firstly, because it contains the most complete synthesis of his thinking and as such he bequeathed it to his sons. A prestigious modern scholar considers it a kind of handbook of his oral teachinbgs. «For those familiar with Augustine the Rule has certainly been a kind of “aide-mémoire”, which he handed over to them and which has kept alive his oral teachings»[[3]](#footnote-2) Secondly, because it is the guide the Church has given us.

It is followed in importance by the booklets *De opere monachorum* and *De sancta virginitate*, sermons 355 and 356, letters 48, 60, 78, 157, 21o, 211, and 243, the commentary on Psalm 132, some chapters in *De moribus Ecclesiæ,* the *Confessions*, and the *City of God*, as well as some other sermons and letters. St Possidius’ Vita is also of high importance, as it provides us with precious details of Augustine’s everyday life.

Other writings of the Saint help us to better understand his thinking and personality, and, therefore, we cannot set aside them when trying to trace the sources of the particular way in which he conceived and lived the religious life. But not all the details of his daily life or versatile thinking are part of his charism as founder. There can be found in them many things belonging to a world which has definitely passed and others which are part of his personal qualities, talents and gifts, which, as a rule, are intransferrable. Not every Augustinian can be another Augustine! Once more we can check how the rich and multifaceted figure of the Saint complicates the work of identifying his true founding charism.

In these notes, a product of the reflections of an interested but not specialised reader, I will focus my attention primarily on the *Rule*. However, I will frequently refer to other writings to clarify and complete points not sufficiently explained in it.

The basic Orientation of the Augustinian Charism: Community life

A superficial reading of the *Rule* is enough to get a basic idea of its orientation. Everything in it tends to build an authentic common life, as it is clrealy stated in its first chapter, the most important of all. This chapter begins with a presentation of the purpose of the community, which is unanimity and harmony in God: «The main purpose for which you have come together is to live harmoniously in the house and to have one soul and one heart intent upon God» (R 1,2). And it ends with an exhortation to comply faithfully with said puprpose or objective: «Let all of you then live united in mind and heart, and mutually honor God in yourselves, whose temples you have become» (R,1,8).

The importance of this advice is to be emphasized because it entails a fruitful and attractive concept of community. For Augustine, both the community itself and each one of its members are temple or dwelling of God. «We are all together his temple, as each one is by himself», he wrote in the *City of God*, «for God deignes to dwell in the community of all men as he does in us one by one» (CD 10,3). Hence every act that fosters the unanimity and harmony of the brethren is also an act of worship of God. Moreover, it is indeed the act of worship which most pleases him, since it honors Him in his individual temple, every man in the state of grace, and contributes to the building and beautifying of his collective temple, which is the community.

The love for common good becomes the measure of charity and of the perfection of the brothers. This is explicitly stated both in the *Rule* (5,2), where the expresion “in caritate” of the Pauline text (1Cor 16,14) is substituted for the expresion “in commune”, and in other works too. In *De vera religione* Augustine warns whoever loves his own good and overlooks the common one not to be surprised if he does not reach the Kingdom of God. In the commentary on Psalm 105 he identifies the interests of Jesus Christ with those of the community and teaches that it is imposible to pretend to be in the company of God if the private good is placed before the common good: «He who, in this pilgrimage, sincerely and ardently desires to be in the company of God shall become used to preferring the common good over his own -*assuescit privatis præferre communia*-, not seeking his own interests, but rather those of Jesus Christ, so as not to anger God, by overestimating self: «ne sibi sapiens et sibi consulens exacerbet Deum consilio suo».

The reason is clear. The surrender of the very person to the service of the community displaces selfishnes, which is the source of all sin, honors God in the neighbor and, through harmony, builds a house in which God dwells in a more perfect way.

Poverty or Community of goods

Between these two sentences, St. Augustine developes two ideas which are inseparable from his concept of common life. They are the community of goods and humility. Monastic life and community of goods are two strongly interrelated ideas in the writings of the Saint. The monk has devoted himself, he writes in *De opere monachorum*, «to the charity of common life, intending to live in the companionship of those who have one soul and one heart intent upon God, so that no one calls anything his own but all things are held in common». In *Contra Fautsum* he describes monastic communities as «fraternal congregations not having anything as individual persons but possessing all things in common». And with identical or very similar expressions he characterizes religious life in his commentaries on different psalms. In the commentary on psalm 83 speaks of «that common life in which no one calls anything his own, but all things are held in common»; in that on psalm 99 refers to «that holy life, in which no one claims anything as his own»; and in that on 132 defines the monks as they who «had one soul and one heart in God, with no one calling anything his own, but having all things in common». And the same ideas we find in his booklet *On the Holy Virginity*, in the *City of God* and in various other sermons.

The Augustinian poverty is a rather complex concept, in which we can distinguish three dimensions. The first refers to the real or social poverty, which implies lack of material things, and is indicated in his writings with the latin “non habere”; the second is the spiritual or evangelical poverty, indicated with the words “non inhærere”, and consist in the affective detachment from the riches; the third, indicated with the words “non præsumere” was a profund attitude of the heart which may be identified with Christian humility.

St. Augustine justifies his insistence on poverty, or rather on community of goods, with historical-religious and philosophical and theological reasons. The example of the primitive community of Jerusalem was decisive. It is not necessary to underline it here because it is already well-known, and Augustine himself reaffirmed it on various solemn occasions. But Augustine was incapable of adopting a mode of life or a norm of conduct without establishing a theoretical and rational basis for it. The community of goods is for him a sign and an indispensable condition for the union of hearts. It makes it possible and manifests it and, as a consequence, makes the community a place or temple of God. Without poverty the union of hearts remains an illusion or a simple utopia, for private property concentrates man on himself and on material goods, which, being limited, cannot be shared by all and thus lead inevitably to individualism and discord.

All these ideas can be found scattered throughout his various works. But at least once he mixed all of them together. It was in a sermon, given, according to the scholars, in the year 417 in Carthage:

##### «My brothers, how many thousands believed on Pentecost Sunday and placed the sum of their goods at the feet of the Apostles! And what is said in the Scriptures about them? That they became the Temple of God. Not only each individual was the Temple of God, but all together. In other words, they had been changed into a place dedicated to God. And so that you know that all of them together constituted one place for the Lord, the Scriptures say: “They had one heart and one soul intent upon God.” (Acts 4,32) Many, so as not to become a place consecrated to God, seek personal goods, enjoy their talents and long for personal interests. On the contrary, whoever desires to prepare a dwelling for the Lord must not seek personal goods, but rather the common good. That is what the primitive Christians did with their personal goods: made them common. . . Pay close attention to what I am saying. The things which each one of us possess in particular are the source of disputes, enmity, dissension ,wars, quarrels, contention, scandal, iniquity, and homicide among mankind. What is cause of all these calamities? Perhaps we ever quarrel over that is possessed in common? We all breathe the air; we all see the sun. Blessed therefore are those who prepare a dwelling for the Lord, renouncing all privately held goods. A person of such frame of mind was indicated by the psalmist when he said: “Will I enter the house I live in?” (Psalm 131,3). By this he meant private property and he knew that all goods possessed exclusively were obstacles to preparing a dwelling for the Lord. Thus he begins by remembering his own property: “I will not enter the house I live in until I find . . . What is meant by this? Perhaps that once you have found a place for the Lord, you will enter your house? Or, better yet, isn’t your house the very place that you have found for the Lord? Why, because you yourself will be the temple of the Lord and constitute one body with all those who have become the dwelling of the Lord. Let us abstain, then, my brothers, from holding any private property, or, it this is not possible, let us renounce at least our love for it, and thus we will prepare a dwelling for the Lord».

Although the topic of of community of goods as liberation is constantly recurring in Augustine, this is not at all his favourite approach. Quite quickly another consideration becomes more important. Sharing one’s possessions is then considered in the perspective of building up of community with one another; it becomes the expression of relationships among people. It is no longer in the first place a question of economic decision, nor even of a gesture of detachment. We are concerned, rather, with an attitude to life which wishes to leave behind all self-seeking in order to find happinesss in love for the other. A6t thed very center of things is human community in Christ. In his opusculum *De opere monachorum* or *On the Manual Labour of Monks*, Augustine puts it as follows:

##### «When a person is converted to the life of a monk, he should not think that he is still doing the same work as he did before. For it is no longer his desire to increase his own possessions, even though they may be very few; his attention is now directed to love of life in community. He now no longer seeks his own interests, but he serves the interests of Jesus Christ».

Community of goods is for Augustine not merely a condition for love of one another. Sharing of goods belongs to the essence of love itself. Love sees to it that whatever each individual has becomes the common property of all. That is the strange power hidden in love: If love is really present, then others own what is mine, and I own in others what I do not have in myself. Whoever loves is never completely without possessions. For if a person loves the whole, then everyone who possesses anything has something for him: «Take envy away, and what I have is yours. Take envy away, and what you have is mine. Possess love and you possess everything» (*Sermons on John’s Gospel* 32, 8).

When Augustine speaks inythe Rule of community of goods, then he intends in the first place material goods. It would, however, be mistaken to limit the idea of community of goods tio this. It is evident that we ought also to make our spiritual goods availablke to one another. The concept “spiritual goods” is very broad and difficult to describe. But it certainly comprises one’s own talents, character, temperament, thougths and ideas, inspiration and faith. The sharing of spiritual goods seems to be presupposed where Augustine says of religious state that in their dealings with one another: «their hearts should seek the nobler thinhgs, not vain earthly appearances» (R. 1, 6).

We could give the passage of the Rule on community of goods the classical title of “the wow of poverty”. But I think better to avoid the word “poverty”, because this word does not render Augustine’s line of thought well. He never considered poverty , in the sense of lack of necessary material goods, is a value in itself. Poverty as deprivation is never a good thing and has to be fought with all available force. Material poverty acquires a positive meaning for Augustine only when is linked to projects of value, for instance when povertry is placed at the service of freedom, salidarity and love. Enforced poverty, however, is never a positive thing. Therefore expressions such as “community of goods” or “simplicity of life” are better fitted to the spirituality of Augustine.

Eve after these clarifications, it is perhaps good to review once again the question as to why the Rule attaches such importance to the sharing of material goods. For Augustine community of goods is clearly very important, and in this he faithfully follows his model from the *Acts of trhe Apostles*. We moderns could ask ourselves the question whether we do not too easily underrate the material basis of life in community. We are inclined to esteem spiritual integration much more highly than material unity. But are we not skipping a step? Aiugustine’s reflections on love for one’s neighbour start from a very realistic standpoint: with sharing what we possess. Sharing material goods in common belongs to the first phase of love. This is the first realization of openness towards others, a first form of living together, For, by doing so, we give notice that we no loger wish to live for ourselves, or to acquire goods only for our own purposes. Giving up our own possessions has the aim of eliminating our egoism and our selfishness, our craving for domination and power; it is precisely these distorted loves which hinder people from coming together in authentic community.

Voluntary undertaken simplicity can be lived out in various ways. To mention just a few: a person can practice simplicity as a process of inner, personal liberation; or as a witness to the world that the divine is the highest imperishable value in human existence; or as a solidarity with other who are doomed out of bitter necessity to live in privation and dire poverty; or, for example, as a sharing with one another in order to move forward to a better society. For Augustine the stress clearly lies on the last of these. The building up of an authentic community of love among people. Simplicity for him is at the service of the building up of a true brotherhood and sisterhood among all. (VAN BAVEL).

St. Augustine adds still another reason to distrust private property and banish it from the monastery. It is that private property leads to pride: «Privata enim res, ubi homo acquiescit, superbos facit», that is: «When a man yields to private property, he becomes proud».

These ideas explain both the profound pain he experienced when he discovered, in the year 425, that one of his clerics, Januarius, had lived as a proprietor, as well as the severity of his censure and the promptness with which he repaired the situation by imposing again the common life:

This priest, our companion who lived with us and professed the common life, had made a will, had left heirs. What sad company was his! What bitter fruit not born of the tree planted by the Lord! […] If he had professed our way of life, he should have remained faithful to it, he should not have possessed anything, he should not have made a will…

Whoever wants to possess his own goods and live by them, thus breaking our precepts, not only shall not remain in our company, but shall be deprived of even his state or dignity as a member of the clergy […] Now that with the help of God, all have opted for the common life, I tell you that if I happen to find someone who, living hypocritically, has reserved something for himself, I shall not only not permit him to make a will, but I shall also delete his name from the list of clergy».

Humility

Humility is no less necessary to the Augustinian community. It is the virtue which frees man from the tower where egotism and pride have him in chains, and opens the door which leads to meet the other, making possible a true interpersonal relationship. In such a strongly hierarchical society as Roman society, its necessity was even more evident. Only humility would be capable of extending a bridge over the abyss which separated the different social classes, joining them in a community which demands a full communion of ideals and intentions from its members. Without profoundly living humility, religious coming from higher social classes would continue to be prisoners of their pride and prejudice and would refuse to become fully integrated with those religious from lower classes: “Those who have come into this holy brotherhood from the condition of poverty” (R 1,7). This was very clearly demonstrated by the convent founded in Bethlehem at the end of the fourth century by St. Paula, a follower of St. Jerome. This illustrious Roman matron did not succeed in ridding herself of her aristocratic prejudices, and distributed her nuns in three communities, corresponding to the three social classes. .Each community had its own superior and conducted a complete autonomous life, except but in the liturgy and prayers.

St. Augustine considered the gravity of this danger and recognized humility as the only means capable of overcoming it. Therefore, he insists on it. The example of a God who gives up his dignity, all he has, and voluntarily surrenders himself to death for wretched mankind can cure the rich man of the tumor of pride, making him able to accept his poor brother into his company. On the other hand, it will help the poor not to glory in his new company and to pursue his former life of work and service.

In the *Rule* and other monastic writings, St. Augustine is particularly interested in the social values of humility, and thus left out those aspects which he explained in other writings. It is sufficient to state that, for him, as for many of his contemporaries, humility is not so much an isolated virtue as an attitude of the soul which makes all virtues possible, since it clears the way and prepares the should so that Christ may dwell in it. St. Augustine saw no other way leading to Christ and to perfection. To his correspondent Dioscorus he wrote that humility is the first, the second and the third way, “And as many times you may ask me, I will answer you in the same way, not because there is no other precept, but because if humility does not precede, accompany and follow all our good works, pride will snatch from our fingertips any good that we may have done». The *Rule* gives the reason: «Every vice prompts people to do evil deeds, whereas pride lurks also in good works seeking to destroy them». His personal experience had taught him that the way to perfection begins with recognizing his own imperfection, and continues with the acceptance of the weakness of the mediator:

##### «I sought for a way of gaining strength sufficient for me to have joy in you, but I did not find it until I embraced “the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus […] who has calling unto me and said: “I am the way, the truth and the life … But I was not yet lowly enough to hold the humble Jesus as my God, nor did I realize what lesson this embracing of our weakness was teaching me».

In the booklet *On Holy Virginity* he devotes many pages to illustrate the relationship between humility and Christian virginity. The first is, for St. Augustine, the only guarantee of the second. Following the tradition of the Fathers, he sees virginity as a jewel so precious and so exposed to the attacks of the enemy that only the God who has his dwelling within the humble heart can safeguard it successfully. This conviction moves him to warn the virgins again and again against the danger of pride: «The greater is your gift, the more I fear the thief of pride». In previous pages he had explained the decisive role of humility in the life of virgins with wise reflections on the relationship between charity and humility. Humility, without charity lacks sense, and this, in turn, is incompatible with pride, because God resists the proud and makes his dwelling in the humble heart.

In summary, humility must occupy a central place in every Augustinian monastery because it falicitates dialogue and interpersonal comunication, makes chastity possible and is the only way leading to Christ.

The following chapters of the *Rule* contain many other suggestions and norms to protect and to foster community life. This primordial idea permeates all their pages. They are much more interested in the communitarian implications of the monastic life of the brethren than in the individual perfection of each of them. Whereas is almost absent any ascetical norm, they deal at length with the sick and the weak (3, 3-4; 6, 8), the fraternal correction (4, 7-20), the use and care of common goods (5, 1-4) and the pardon of injuries (6, 1-2). These preferences are by no means surprising, since on joining the Augustinian community the young monk professed above all the common life. Therefore, his first goal was to be not striving after his own perfection through isolation, ascetism, mortification, and works of penance; but rather looking for fraternity and charity, and, through them and by them, to reach the human and Christian maturity.

Authorty and Obedience

The Augustinian idea of authority and obedience (7, 3-4) holds special interest for us because of its newness, which is one of the signs of the authenticiy of a charism, and because of its freshness. Saint Augustine certainly knew the necessity and different functions of authority in a wel-organized society. The common good may demand recourse to correction, punishment and even the expulsion of rebellious members. The very *Rule* speaks of this (4, 9-11; 6, 3; 7, 2-3). However, that is not its principal function (7,3). The superior and the rest of the religious of the monastery form a family and familiar love sould preside over all of its relations. On the one hand, the Augustinian suoperior does not have the majesty and the hegemonic and magisterial position of the Eastern and Benedictine abbots, and, on the other, the Augustinian monk trascends the position of the simple disciple, always dependent on the mouth of the superior. They both constitute an authentic community of love in which all walk together toward the same goal, directed by the Interior Teacher. The emphasis then is laid not on the superior as the only mediator of the will of God, as it happens in not a few ancien and modern Rules, but in the community as a temple of God. Authority and obedience are merely means used by the community to protect the common good, to foster the values which sustain and explain its existence, and to reach easier the end desired. To sum up, obedience is one of the absolutely necessary means of obtaining unanimity and harmony: the “anima una” and the “cor unum” of the first chapter of the Rule.

With this concept St. Augustine overrides the authoritarian social and religious structures which faced him, and takes refuge in the humble evangelical novelty (Lk. 22, 25-26) “Honor” and “potestas” give way to humble service. The superior must really be the servant of the community: “he is to prostrate himself at your feet.” He is at the head of the community to safeguard discipline (R 5, 5-7; 7,2), to care for the material needs of each of its members (1, 3; 5,3,6) and to promote their spiritual good (4,9; 7,4), which he must account for before the tribunal of the Lord (7,4). Leadership, then, is not an honor in which to glory (7,3) which will endanger the mission of the superior: “Those in power are hurt by pride,” but rather a task, a “humile servitium” performed on behalf of the community (7,3), the same as the episcopacy for the ecclesial community.

This task or “sarcina” –“the baggage of the soldier”– must have been fairly heavy in the heterogeneous Augustinian monasteries. St. Augustine was fully aware of it and wanted his monks to make it more bearable with a prompt and docile obedience. On obeying, the monks take upon themselves part of the common burden from the shoulders of the prior. In this way, St. Augustine slightly removes obedience from the field of faith and asceticism and transfers it to charity. Every act of obedience becomes an act of love and compassion toward the superior; while every act of disobedience is a demonstration of a lack of charity against the superior and against the community, to which the disobedient refuses his collaboration.

These ideas, combined with the preceding ones on the community of goods and humility, already stamp the definite seal of the Augustinian community. Nevertheless, its contours would not be sufficiently defined without an allusion, however brief, to St. Augustine’s respect for friendship and the radical importance he gives to the union of hearts and souls.

Friendship plays an important role in his life and his writings. Manrique wrote that it “forms one of the natural foundations of his monastic ideal.” Even before his conversion he cultivated the dream of placing his goods in common with a group of friends in order to dedicate himself, along with them to the pursuit of wisdom. In Tagaste he made this dream a reality, beginning his religious life with a group of friends and fellow countrymen. St. Possidius explicitly made mention of this detail. During the rest of his life he continued cultivating friendship with letters and visits, and especially by talking to his monks. Nothing pleasant did he found in life without a friend. On one occasion he declared from the pulpit that only two things were necessary on this earth: health and a friend.

Friendship unifies the souls of the friends, wrote Cicero, and in another place he had defined it as the loving and benevolent agreement between the individuals in all human and divine things. St. Augustine appropriated this definition and practiced it throughout his entire life. Before and after his conversion he lived surrounded by friends with whom he shared earthly aspirations and religious ideals. When some friend did not succeed in following the rhythm of his religious evolution, the Saint did not rest until be brought this person to his new belief. Only thus could he continue to call this person a friend, because for him only those with whom one could share all the secrets of his heart deserved to be so called: «we can say that a person has been received into friendship when we dare to communicate with him out all our plans». He confessed to St. Jerome in a letter that in difficult moments he found in his friends a true refuge and that when he had the luck of finding a faithful friend, “caritate christiana flagrantem”, he entrusted him “consilia et cogitationes” with the same candor with which he would trust in God. He even declared himself disposed to renouncing discussion, thus sacrificing on the altar of friendship some of his passion for arriving at the truth.

The operative capacity of these sentiments is quite evident. In themselves, they are enough to create a frank community, open to fraternal and trusting dialogue. St. Augustine reinforced this even more with continual reflection on the primitive community of Jerusalem and the text in which it is described. Again an again he turned his attention to Chapter 4, 32-35 of the Acts of the Apostles, with the intention of reproducing in his monasteries the model of the community which is proposed there. At first he interpreted it in an individual and ascetic sense: “cor unum et anima una” would be synonymous with “cor simplex, non combinatum,” Sthat is, not divided or dispersed in creatures, but fully intent on God, without duplicity or lies. Those people are of one mind and of one heart who have achieved simplicity of heart by detaching themselves from the stream of temporal, transient things, and who dedicate themselves entirely to God (*Sermon on Ps.4*,10). Here is clearly a matter of the unity within a person as individual, of inner unity in itself. Around the year 396, influenced by an idea of St. Paulinus of Nola, which he found in accord with his own character and with the Ciceronian definition of friendship, he began to give it a collective and apostolic interpretation. Henceforth, “anima una et cor unum” would mean, for him, the union of all brothers in one soul and one heart, and this soul would be none other than the soul of Christ. On entering the monastery, he once wrote to the novice Laetus, «your soul is not your own, but is shared by all the brethren whose souls are also yours, or, rather, whose souls form with yours not many souls, but one soul, the single soul of Christ».

The union of hearts is the essential requirement in any human community which is not simply functional, because only on this level an authentic encounter among men can be reached: “You only live together if you have one heart: “si unum cor habetis”. If there is no such union, one can only speak of an agglomeration or group of people. Such a union is even more necessary in a religious community, since without it, it is impossible to please God: «In disagreement with your brother you are not blessing God». The very name monk demands this, for only he deserves this name who so closely unites with others that constitutes one unity with them. Monks are «many bodies, but not many souls: they are many bodies, but not many hearts. Thus it can be said that they are “monos”, that is, one alone». Hence, the rule expressly states that in the monastery those who do not try to live in harmony with brothers are there to no purpose: «He who is never willing to ask pardon or who does not make the request with sincerity is in the monastery to no purpose even if he is not dismissed» (R. 6,2).

Such an intimate union cannot be the fruit of mere human interests, affinity of character or natural sympathies. In the last instance, its only source is the charity of Christ (cf. *Vita Consecrata* 19). Thus, the individual who does not have it does not deserve the name monk, despite the fact that he may live in a monastery:

##### «Only those who possess the charity of Christ in a perfect way truly live the common life. Those who do not possess the perfection of charity, even when they do live together, hate, bother, disturb the rest with their impatience, and are always looking for an excuse to talk (gossip) about them. They are like the untamed mule yoked to the harness. Not only does it not pull with the others, but, by kicking, breaks the strap. But if this mule does possess the dew of Hermon, which descends on the mountains of Zion, it is tame, humble, tolerant, and responds to gossip with a prayer. In effect, detractors are magnificently described in the Scriptures: “The heart of the fool is like the wheel of a cart” (Ecc. 33,5). What does this mean? That it carries straw and it creaks. The wheel of the cart can do nothing more than squeak. Many of the brethren are like this: those who live together only in body. But who are those who truly live together? Those about whom it is written: “they had one soul and one heart intent upon God, and no one had anything to call his own, but everything was held in common».

St Augustine arrives at the same conclusions by means of theological and philosophical reasoning. The philosophical speculation teaches him that only God, eternal truth and infinite good, can unite intelligent and free beings in one common love. And from theological thinking he draws out the conclusion that only Christ can overcome the conflicts created in community life by sin, concupiscence, and selfishness (*De Trin*. iv, 9º PL 42, 896).

In brief, the Rule tends in all his chapters to build up a true common life, following the example of the primitive Christian Community of Jerusalem. The religious gather in the monastery «to live together in harmony, being of one mind and one heart». But only will they reach this goal if they are humble, detached from all private property and entirely devoted –in the body and in the soul– to the community; if they respect the individuality of each and every one of them; if the suoperior lives at the service of the religious and these ones show compassionate to him, helping him to bring his heavy burden; and if all of them behave themselves not as children weighed down like slaves straining under law, but as free persons under grace».

The Perfect Augustinian Community

The perfect Augustinian community is, then, a community of love, born of the grace of God and consecrated to His service; a community of simple and sober life, in which everything is placed in common: talents, affections, and material goods; in which neither authoritarianism nor privilege have a room; but which respects the personality of the members and pays attention to their needs; a community that lives in fraternal and trusting dialogue and which communicates with the local church; a community which, although it may lack a well determined and concrete mission, must live always attentive to the Lord’s voice and the necessities of the Church.

But St. Augustine was all too aware that the ideals never reach a fulfillment in reality. Even within the walls of the monasteries tehre are snares and false brethren. In several writings he regrets the vanity of those who fail to recognize this sad reality and exhorts them not to lower the vigilance. Only by watching the discipline, the harmony can be maintained, and when they fail, is no other way to reestablish it than charity in its different manifestations: the forgiveness of the offenses and fraternal correction, to each of which he dedicates one chapter in the Rule.

From this simple descriptions we can deduce some important practical applications: on common prayer, openness to others, recreation in common, fraternal correction, assuming apostolic works, exercise of authority, the candidates’ aptitude for dialogue, etc.

It is certain that at present time there is no religious institute which does not emphasize the communitarian aspect of religious life. However, I think that as Augustinians we must cultivate it with particularly careful attention, because it is the fundamental element of the monastic charism of our Father. Augustine, more than any other of his predecessors –Basil and Pachomius– laid great stress on community life. He was convinced that the orientation to one’s own self and individualism formed the greatest obstacle to the realization of the gospel. For him the first community of Jerusalem plays the role of an ancient dream which becomes an ideal for the present and for the future. We could characterize his Rule as a call to evangelical equality of the people. It voices the Christian demand to bring men and women into full communion. And at the same time it sounds an implicit protest against inequality in a society which is so clearly marked by possessiveness, pride, and power. According to Augustine, therefore, a monastic community sould offer an alternative by striving to build up a community that is not motivated by possessiveness, pride and power, but by love for one another. And, in this sense, his *Rule* is also socially critical.

Other important elements of Augustine’s charism are the principle of interiorization, without which neither his life nor his work would be properly understood, and which «is repeatedly applied in the Rule (2, 3; 3, 2; 4, 1; 5, 1 etc): the external alone is not sufficient, for it must be the symbol of what happens inwardly. The external ought not to remain empty, but should be animated from within»[[4]](#footnote-3) This is, for example, the essence of the Rule’s teachings on prayer: «When you pray to God in psalms and songs, the words spoken by our lips should also be alive in your hearts» (R 2, 3). This, according to Augustine, is the basic law of prayer. There has to be harmony between lips and heart, between the exterior and interior, between theory and practice, between ideal and life. Our prayer should be part of our depest selves»[[5]](#footnote-4). A similar transition from the external to the internal, from physical hunger to the hunger of the heart makes the Saint when speaking on the reading at table: «listen without interruption or discussion to what is usually read for you; not only should your mouths partake of food, but your ears also should hunger for the word of God» (3,2). And in chapter 5 he recalls that the religious’ dress is to be simple, because clothes make not the man, «rather, our attitudes towards life makes us what we are. God does not seek handsome appearance, but a good heart»[[6]](#footnote-5). Complaining or quarrelling about clothes is a sad indication that something important is lacking or wrong in the heart.

The apostolic disponibility, which induced him to skip over the presumed incompatility between priesthood and monastic life, the ascetic moderation and freedom in the use of the wordly things are other traits of Augustine’s monastic ideal deserving a mention. This moderation represents something new in the history of monasticism. For him the religious life does not consist primarily on leading an asctical life in a material sense by denying oneself food and drink, or by self-chastisement, but rather in establishing a community life as a victory over self-seeking.

#### b. The Forma de vivir

The *Forma de vivir* contributes the second element to the present charism of the Order. The Constitutions in force so proclaim it, on affirming that its members «endeavour to achieve perfect charity according to the charism of St. Augustine and in conformity with the spirit of our early legislation, most especially our *Forma de vivir*» (n. 6). Its fourteen chapters summarize and transmit to us the “collective charism” which animated «a number of religious of the Augustinian Province of Castile» to «live with renewed fervor, and according to new norms the consecrated life whic St. Augustine established in the Church, illustrated by his doctrines and examples and ordered in the Rule».

This explicit and open recognition of the importance of the *Forma de vivir* in the regulating of our lives constitutes one of the greatest achievements of our new Constitutions. It is a decisive determination which again links us to our origin, thus assuring us our corporate identity and ridding us of ambiguity and indecision. From the middle of the last century, this relationship had been disregarded. One can even say that it had disappeared from the conscience of many religious. The Constitutions of 1928 and 1937 had completely set it aside. Now, it returns to the surface of our collective and individual consciences, reminding us that in the long history of the Augustinian Order, there was a collective and charismatic moment which gave origin to a new way of living and understanding the religious ideal of St. Augustine, of which the Recollect Order feels itself the legitimate heir, declaring itself ready to assume its values, as they are expressed in the *Forma de vivir*.

It is not a question, however, of a complete and indiscriminate assumption of all its norms, nor even the entire philosophy which sustains and justifies them, At present, the Order is interested in the spirit of the *Forma*[[7]](#footnote-6) not in its letter; in its perennial charisma, not in its cultural and temporal additions. Unfortunately, the identification and isolation of this perennial or essential charism is not easy. Ignorance, superficiality, prejudice, lead easily to false or hasty conclusion, making us confuse the charism with our personal preferences. Only by trying to free ourselves from our prejudices and with a detailed and serious study of the social, cultural and religious environment in which the *Forma de vivir* was composed can we be guaranteed the adequacy of a definite interpretation or a critical reading.

The present Constitutions presuppose the existence of this study and offer us a critical interpretation or reading which we can consider as authentic. According to them, the presently valid elements of the *Forma de vivir* include the following points:

1. The idea or concept of recollection, which includes the “spirit or exercise of prayer... Penitence and continuous conversion” which is manifested in external works, even in the external organization of the Order, which “must promote interior peace, silence of spirit, study, and piety” (C 12, 13).

2. The value of peace and concord among the brothers as a “certain sign that the Holy Spirit lives among them” (21).

3. Effective and affective poverty, both individual and communitarian. (49, 51, 55)

4. The dignity of divine worship (66).

5. The appreciation of penitence as an indispensable requirement for the life of prayer and the proper formation of the religious (137, 209).

6. Attention to the care of the sick (91).

It seems evident that the criterion which has governed this interpretation has been the conformity or at least, the compatibility of a definite idea or attitude with the thinking of St. Augustine and the demands of present day thinking. Such criterion finds justification in the guidelines or directives of *Perfectae Caritatis* 2 b-c and in the intention of the reformers of the sixteenth century, who would not have proposed creating a new Order, but rather “reactualizing the thinking and spirit of St. Augustine”[[8]](#footnote-7).

This “intention”, however, offers some difficulties which could even compromise the validity of the adopted criterion. It seems certain that the friars of the sixteenth century aspired to reproduce in the communities the primitive ideal as they found it described in the tradition and in ancient chronicles. St. Teresa, the Franciscans and Benedictine Recollects, Discalced Mercedarians and Trinitarians, as well as the different communities of recollect and discalced sisters looked for inspiration and example in the founding age of their respective Orders. St. Teresa, for example, wanted to join with the hermits of Mt. Carmel, “whose lives we try to imitate”[[9]](#footnote-8). The Augustinian Recollects “want to live according to the ancient rigor of the Constitution which by dispensation and the custom are mitigated”[[10]](#footnote-9).

There is no reasonable doubt that the Augustinian Reformers had their eyes fixed on St. Augustine and his communities.[[11]](#footnote-10) Unfortunately, their information about these was very deficient. They shared the belief, all too common then, that the Holy Doctor, immediately after his conversion, had founded communities of a more or less purely eremitic character. Consequently, they associated his religious message with those practices which are typical of hermitism: silence, solitude, austerity, limited apostolate, lack of involvement in formal studies, etc. On the other hand, these were also the practices most regarded by the reform movement of the time, saturated as it was by the spirituality of the Franciscan observances[[12]](#footnote-11).

The Augustinian reformers, sons of their times and of a deficiently interpreted Augustinian monastic tradition, could do nothing more than look at these observances with predilection and give them full admittance into their lives. This is. to my way of thinking, the explanation of the strongly ascetic character of the *Forma de vivir*. It does not proceed form a real St. Augustine, but rather, from an encounter of the ideas of the age with those of the monastic tradition attributed to the Saint. Thus, all attempts to conciliate these ideas with those of Augustine’s ideal orwith our present aspirations are useless if, as it seems, the Order has decided once an for all to elect St. Augustine as its first teacher and guide.

Nevertheless, in the *Forma de vivir* there are other ideas which are firmly rooted in the best Augustinian tradition and in Augustine himself: the primacy of charity in its two manifestations, the tendency toward interiority and the great esteem for perfect common life. The presence of these ideas in the *Forma de vivir* also has an easy explanation. Although they have different shadings and coloring, these three ideas form part of both the reformist program of the age and of the Augustinian Order’s tradition. I have already illustrated the first part of this statement in paper on the spirituality of the Recollect Movement. In regard to the second part, it is enough to state here that such frequent and basic ideas in the writings of St. Augustine could not escape the attention of an Order which, barely having secured its future, dedicated itself with singular devotion to a detailed and loving study of his life and doctrines. The weekly reading of his *Rule* and of the *Commentary* of Hughes de San Victor, which, from the beginning of the 14th century was always to accompany it, was enough to instill them into its religious. In fact, the communitarian character of the Augustinian foundations had already been strongly emphasized about the middle of 14th century by Jordan of Saxony, one of its most authorized spiritual masters, by Hermann of Schildesche, Gottschalk Hollen (†1481), as well as other writers.

The *Forma* de vivir was approved by the oprovincial definitorium of Csastile on September 19, 1589, and eight years later was retified by Clement viii. Although it was only in force until 1637, when it was substituted by more developped Constitutions, its influence on the spiritual, institutional, and cultural organization of the Order was decisive until the Spanish War for Independence (1808-14), and even until the Mendizalbal’s disentailment laws (1835-36). Some of its demands, especially those concerning poverty and exemptions, fell soon into disuse. Neither the apopstolic nor the cultural life of the Order faithfully followed all of its guidelines.

The spirtual orientation of the *Forma de vivir* is most clear. It translates the desire for greater perfection which the Toledo Chapter talked about into an intensification of community and contemplative life and into a highlighting the ascetic lines of religious life.

Prayer ought to saturate the whole life of the Recollects. They will dedicate two hours daily to mental prayer, they will restict their absence from the monastery and will make an effort to create in it an atmosphere of quiet and peace which favors contemplation. From time to time they will intensify their solitude and recollection by retiring to the small hermitages to be found in all the monasteries. The novitiate will last two years and on finalizing tje ecclesiastical studies, the religious will strengthen their spirit afresh with another year of recollection.

The love of the perfect common life shines through the document. A communitarian atmosphere impregnates it from start to finish. The friars walk together, prayed together, recreate together. All enjoy the same rights and are subject to the same obligations. The monastery makes everybody equal. In it there is no room for privileges, the peculium or favoritism. No one can own any property no matter how small; and meals, dress, rooms and other things are to be the same for all. The honorary titles are thrown out completely. Only the sick deserve special attention.

«Community life has a natural connection with the love of God, since from this, which is «our goal, our principal concern and study of all, is born charity towards our neighbor». This charity, which is clearly opposed tio the divisionof wills”, is concretized and visualized in the fratenal peace which is underscored as a condition of symbol, since it is “a very certain sign that the Holy Spirit lives among them”; the building up of peace, on the other hand, is a task for which the whole community must feel itself responsible, since «we ought to pay careful attention to whatsoever may be conducive to this peace» (FV 2,1).

Three important conclusions are immediately to be derived from this principle of charity. The first refers to limitation of the number of religious in each monastery, a limitation which is not due to any other motive than the conviction that “love is better conserved among a few” (FV 2, 2). In order to properly understand this position of the *Forma*, it is worthwhile remembering that, in the xvi century, communities with many religious were quite numerous. The second conclusion is found in the proposal to establish an equality of treatment in all the aspects of community life: in mutual treatment, titles of honor, exemptions, preferences: “We command that the treatment both of prelates and subjects be the same for all and in all things with no exceptions or differences in food, clothing, the cells or authority. Necessity is to be the only rule”(FV 2,2). It is necessary to point out that this equality was desired as a means which would contribute powerfuly to charity, since «love […] grows stronger in an ambiance of equality, because those having similar attitudes seem naturally to love one another» (FV 2, 2). The third conclusion is complemetary to the previous, and refers, in evident relationship to Augustinian thought to the care of the weak and the sick, which ought to be practiced with “all generosity”, so that there be no “scarcity, nor any poverty, nor anything that might excuse [priors or subjects]” from adding these significant details, and the fundamental reason for this is that “they are cherishing and waiting upon God in them” (FV 2,3;14,7).

Another significant aspect of the type of community designed in the *Forma de vivir* is the role which is attributed to recreation in common. In a way of life strongly characterized by austerity, mortification and withdrawal, the various references made to recreation, with the detailed consideration given concerning it and the rather notable length of time prescribed for it, give a tone of authentic humanism and sincere fraternity»[[13]](#footnote-12).

The ascetic tendency has its origins in an evangelical radicalism and an idealised memory of the primitive communities of the Order and manifests itself in a hundred ways to make up the total life of the friar. The austerity of the buildings, the smallness of the cells, meanness of dress and footwear, the abundance of fasts and Lenten fare, the frequency of the discipline, silence, retreat, all these reminded the Recollect friar of his commintment to follow Christ, the poor man, through privations, renunciation and the austerities which poverty always carries with it.

Poverty, esteemed as one of the principal means for reaching interior peace, is described in all of his principal aspects: poverty in common and in particular, its affective and effective characteristics, means of living, physical labor as a natural expression of poverty, construction of buildings, cells, etc. Although the value of this virtue might be somewhat overstated, it admits the principle that the common life ought to cover all the needs of friars, and establishing as a rule necessity and not superfluity nor excess. It is also important, finally, to point out the importance which is given to its sign value, in such a way “that in all things and in every direction poverty may cast its rays” (FV 4, 6).

But ascetism is never regarded as an end to be sought for its own sake. In accord with the teachings of St. Augustine and the traditional practice, it is presented as a simple means to mitigate the passions, quiet the heart, free the spirit and prepare it for prayer.

These norms, already very significant in themselves, acquire more emphasis if they are placed in the environment in which they developed. Common life was corrupted among the Augustinians by peculium and the abundance of privileges and exemptions conceded to preachers, to the officials of the monastery, and above all, to the masters of theology. These last even had religious in their service. Fr. Quijano, who has left us his precious memories on the life of the Augustinian province of Castille at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, was the servant (famulo) of Jeronimo de Guevara, one of the promoters of the recollection. Mental prayer occupied a very secondary place in the order. It was reduced to a daily period of undetermined duration before the “serotina”. General Petrocchini, president of the Chapter of Toledo, was content with ordering, in the decrees which he gave to the province at the end of his visit, that, at least in major monasteries, if not be omitted: «The exercise of mental prayer, customarily held after compline, should never be omitted, particularly in the larger monasteries, where regular observance should flourish and be more vigorous». Nevertheless, we have evidence that the Augustinian convent of Manila, at the beginning of XVII dedicated some time to the mental prayer, and several chapters and visitators tried to extend it to all Augustinian convents and ministries of the Archipelago. But, as a body, the Augustinians still would take another century to extend the meditation to all their convents, and even then the time dedicated to it was very short, hardly 15 minutes in the mornings and as many in the afternoons.

It seems that the practice of discipline was not very common either. The Constitutions of 1581 limited themselves to ordering that it not be omitted where it was customarily practiced: “ubi sunt in consuetudine.” Community or conventual poverty was also a novelty, if we except the Observant Congregations of the XV century.

At times the *Forma de vivir* has been charged with not being sufficiently Augustinian in nature. In previous pages I myself have affirmed that some of its ideals are difficult to reconcile with the vision of St. Augustine. Perhaps, Fr. Fernando Mayandia was the one who has most clearly emphasized this alleged incompatibility. In noteworthy book (*Orientationes*, 1926), which has not been circulated in the Order, he writes that the fourteen chapters of the *Forma de vivir* are “the beautiful desires of a burning heart, more than the ordinances of an illustrated intelligence,” and that the reform delineated in these chapters «was a discalced recollection canonically introduced into the Order of Hermits of St. Augustine, but was not a true Augustinian Recollection».

Perhaps, this is an overly categorical affirmation. It is true that its predilection for austerity, it concept of solitude as a refuge of flight from the world, it legislation on concealed caretakers (secret monitors), do not seem to be very Augustinian in nature. But these confrontations seem, to say the least, somewhat artificial, since the terms compared are too heterogeneous. On one part, it is taken into account the whole monastic doctrine of St. Augustine, while, on the other, we have only a short legal text, which leaves uncovered many lines of the community life and only wants giving a legal basis to the spiritual aspirations which were being sprang up in it. The *Forma de vivir* is a mere complement to the General Constitutions of the Order and too little attention is paid to its interpretation by the primitive Recollect communities. Actually, it does not reflect their entire life.

It is clear, as already stated, that St. Augustine is not the source of the ascetic and apostolic ideas of the *Forma de vivir*. Sometimes it turns out difficult to conciliate them with the teachings of his Rule. With the humanism which permeates his monastic writings and his pastoral activity. His writings and the example of his life, as well as that of his disciples contributed a lot to bring together monasticism and clerical life, freeing the first from the exaggerated asceticism of the Fathers of the Desert and making it more viable for the Western man. But St. Augustine had a great regard for asceticism. He believed it necessary to dominate one’s passions, to facilitate prayer and to purify the soul. However, he never conceived it as the nucleus of the monastic life nor did he feel strong enough to practice it, at least in the way in which it was practiced by the anchorites of his times. “Excedit nostram tollerantiam”, he wrote in the book *Customs of the Church*. Leaving aside the long and unavoidable chapter on chastity, in the Rule he only introduced one strictly ascetic precept, that of fasting, and he even subordinated this to one’s health: “Subdue your flesh by fasting and abstinence as far as your health allows” (R. 3,1). Asceticism was at man’s service and had to aid the development of his personality. In any other way it was not valid.

The asceticism of *Forma de vivir* pursues the same goals, although their wording was not so clear and accomplished. On the other hand, by no means, it is sure that the asceticism of the communities derived from the *Forma de vivir* had been superior to that of the monasteries of Tagaste and Hippo. St. Augustine wrote in a time of overgrowing asceticism, while the Castillian reformers were fighting for its recovering.

The alleged incompatibility between the pastoral activity of the primitive Augustinian communities and the “apostolic misgivings” of the *Forma de vivir* does not rest either on well-grounded basis. St. Augustine was not an unconditional supporter of the monks’ apostolate. Rather, he looked upon it with suspicion, and only the pressing needs of the African Church moved him to break with his reserves. On the other hand, “the apostolic misgivings” of the *Forma de vivir* are not so clear as to be taken for granted. It is evident, as I have already pointed out, that its norms tended to foster a life of strong contemplative character, in which ascesis, silence, solitude and prayer prevailed over the apostolate. But this was never excluded. The only things prohibited were the assistance in a group at funerals, that was an act of social courtesy or a way of soliciting the daily sustenance, rather than an act of authentic apostolate; and the confessions outside the monastery, which offered too many pretexts to sidestep the law of enclosure and to be on the streets more than was right or proper. In fact, the chapters, visitors and superiors of that time were enacting the same norms. On the other hand, history tells us that the primitive Recollect communities, from the very beginning, did not find any difficulty in dedicating themselves to preaching and hearing confessions.

Other ideas and fundamental values of the *Forma de vivir* are of clear Augustinian ascendancy and perhaps were underestimated among the Augustinians of the time. I am referring myself to interiority and perfect common life, with its condition and material expression, which is the poverty of disappropriation of each religious. Without them, no community can consider itself to be truly Augustinian. The importance of the first two is already recognized by all and, in fact, they have been accepted into the constitutional text. Perhaps, nevertheless, we have not yet recognized the meaning that individual poverty had for St. Augustine. A quick reading of Sermons 355 and 356 is enough to observe that for him is was an indispensable condition, “sine qua non”, of religious life. It is worthy of notice how strict he was with transgressors. The individual who violated it did not deserve a place among the servants of God.

I believe that we must recognize and cultivate these three ideas with particular attention in the Order, because they are, at the same time, so Augustinian and so Recollect. St. Augustine is a kind of cosmos, impossible to grasp entirely. We should be able to specialize in these aspects, and thus remain profoundly faithful to the system of life that our fathers in the Sixteenth century understood but were unable to express properly.

Recently, Fr. Antonio Sanchez Carazo, in a remarkable article, has pointed out many Augustinian Resonances in the *Forma de vivir*. The first chapter, “On Worship and Divine Office”, reproduces the Augustinian scheme of interiority. Silence and recollection of the soul, so strongly underscored in the *Forma de vivir*, would correspond to the first step of the Augustinian program: Noli foras ire. The second Augustinian step, in te ipsum redi, would appear in the tranquillity of the soul of the *Forma de vivir*, which for both St. Augustine and the *Forma,* is the first fruit of silence and recollection. St. Augustine himself uses sometimes the word “tranquillitas” to indicate the second step. The third step, transcend te ipsum, is meant in the *Forma de vivir* with the term purity of the soul. The wording, writes Carazo, is different but the sense is the same, and as a proof of his statement adduces some Augustinian phrases.

In the second chapter, “On Charity and love: for one another”, Carazo underlines the presence of two fundamental Augustinian ideas, that is, the equality of treatment of all members of the community in food, clothing, cell and prestige, and the great respect for their differences of character, family background, education and health.

In the third chapter appears the only explicit quotation of St. Augustine Rule: “The prior is to be obeyed as a Father.” The role of the superior and his relationship with the members of the community are presented in a prospective quite similar to that of St. Augustine. Both do see in the superior the representative of God - of the Father in St. Augustine, of Christ in the *Forma*. Both require from the religious a great reverence for the superior and the surrender of their will into his hand.

In the fourth chapter, “On Poverty”, the Augustinian traces are particularly abundant. In perfect consonance with St. Augustine, the *Forma* distinguishes between the mere material poverty, which consists only in not possessing things, and interior poverty, which requires also the spiritual detachment from all creatures. Other similarities come to sight in the directives about asking or receiving alms, the need as the only criterion in the use of temporal goods, the possession or use of such common things as money, food, gifts and books, as well as in supplying the friars with everything they would need, “whether it be in the matter of clothes, cell, or food, as in health so in sickness, whether they remain at home or are traveling.”

In the fifth chapter, “on Facts and Austerity”, Carazo finds similarities and differences. The *Forma* reduces asceticism to one of the three practices which formed the Biblical and Patristic ascetic scheme. It deals only with fasts and austerities, while St. Augustine would have added prayer and giving alms. Nevertheless, both conceived in the same way the relationship between fasting and prayer. For both, fasting, by softening passions, is as a wing which facilitates the flight of the soul up to the altar of God.

The sixth chapter of the establishes the necessity of labor on four grounds: the teachings of St. Paul, the examples of ancient religious, the human nature and the religious poverty. Three of these themes were developed by Augustine in his famous booklet De opere monachorum.

#### c. Formation of the Order of Hermits of St. Augustine

The foundation of the Augustinian Order in the 13th century is still another charismatic moment essential to our history. The Constitutions have overlooked it, except for an allusion in number 7.

The research of the last four decades has dissipated part of the fog that has enshrouded it, and although many hazy zones still exist, we possess some clear indications which should serve as landmarks to guide the scholar’s path. They are the following.

1. The order of Hermits of St. Augustine has neither direct nor indirect ties to the foundations of the Saint.

2. The formation of the Order, slow and laborious, was the fruit of various fusions of different eremitic Italian groups.

3. The eremitic groups which continued in this union after the year 1256 had accepted the Rule of St. Augustine from up to 15-30 years before.

4. In these fusions, the role of the Holy See was decisive, which during almost the entire process availed itself of the ascendence and authority of Cardinal Ricardo Annibaldi (+1276).

5. The Holy See was motivated by a double purpose: the first disciplinary in character, and the second apostolic. According to the religious politics of Innocence III and the directives of Council IV of Letran (1215), it was proposed , on one hand, to assure the control of the Holy See over some groups of Hermits, which up to then were born and still were growing. Spontaneously; and on the other, to endow them with a juridical and spiritual organization, which would make it possible for them to engage in the urban apostolate, which was so necessary in the convulsed middle class world of the age.

During this entire unifying process, which runs through 1223 to 1256, the mendicant model was more or less present, gaining strength as experience was going on manifesting its validity. In 1256, its influence was decisive. In the Chapter celebrated in Rome, in March of that year, presided over by Cardinal Annibaldi, the fusion of five eremitic groups or families was completed: the Hermits of St. Augustine of Tuscany, the followers of St. John Bono, the Hermits of Brettino, the Williamites, and those of Montefavalle. All of these groups lost their own identity in order to give life to a new religious Order with its own unique name, habit, government, objectives, and observance. The Williamites and the Montefavalians, who felt closer to the Cistercian model than to the mendicant, did not continue in union of 1256, which came to light under the sign of St. Augustine and was being organized according to the mendicant patterns.

The new Order was called the Order of Hermits of St. Augustine, dressed in a black habit without the hermitic staff, and would open the doors to the apostolate - “to counteract the attack of the devil” - and would adapt to the one and the same regular discipline, renouncing, in accordance with the mendicant pattern, the ownership of earthly goods: “eis iuxta conceptum votum paupertatis spontaneae perpetua possessionum terrestrium abdicatio remaneret.”

The new Order maintained the word “hermit” in its official title, but not its meaning. The name and loving study of the past kept the memory of eremitism alive in the Order, but, outside of particular cases and moments, its practical incidence was very limited. The body of the Order enthusiastically supported the pontifical projects and in a few decades of admirable activity and efforts adapted its life and legislation to the mendicant model. Around the year 1300 the layman had given way to the cleric; the wilderness hermitage to the urban monastery; solitude to the city; and the *devota simplicitas* to the apostolate and to study. The Augustinians were already friars fully recognized by the Roman Curia, with houses in the main cities and towns of the Christian world, and fully integrated to the city apostolate and university life. Some even were ashamed of the name hermit, which certainly no longer corresponded to reality. Even Jordan of Saxony, who blamed the attitude of those religious and saw the differential elements of the Order in the expression *hermits of St. Augustine*, was very much aware of its mendicant and apostolic character. The juridical structure, spirituality, government, and activity of the Order were mendicant until the birth of the Recollection. St. Augustine was little more than a banner, an object of devotion and a theme of study. The Augustinians, who from the third decade of the fourteenth century had begun to feel themselves true sons of Augustine, rendered him very special cult and enthusiastically studied his writings, but did not succeed in making him the inspiration and guide of their religious life. Reading the Rule, studying his works and honoring him familiarized many of them with his doctrine, but was not sufficient to induce the Order to organize its life according to a truly Augustinian pattern. Perhaps, the time was not ripe. Perhaps such an organization is never feasible. Of course, the faded contours of the real life of Augustinian monasteries do not facilitate it.

New way of being religious. They called themselves brothers (fratres). They lived in small houses (convents). They mingled with the people, preached, heard confessions, and assisted the secular clergy, They were not attached to a particular house and, in this manner, were available to transfer from one place to another. They lived from their work and from the alms of the faithful, not from the income of landed property.

Mendicant spirituality is fairly complex. However, its most significant elements, at least during its first decades, were effective poverty and apostolic life, or better the union of both. Albigensians, Waldensian, humble and poor Catholics, and other groups of itinerant preachers had strongly interwoven the concepts of poverty and apostolic life, and they were the two pillars on which Dominican and Franciscan life, and later Augustinian and Carmelite life, were first established. They constitute the nucleus of the mendicant message in today’s world, a message as current today as it was in the Middle Ages.

Mendicant poverty was private and common, of the individual and of the monastery. It did not limit itself to prohibiting holding property or to submitting the use of things to the will of the superior. It necessarily entailed privations, austerity, renunciations, and insecurity, the insecurity of the “incerta mendicitas”. Clothing, food, lodging everything had to be base and proper to the poor people. Mendicant friars embraced poverty because they wanted to really share the privations and humiliations of the poor and indigent Christ, and to imitate the Apostles’ lack of provisions when they were on their mission through the villages and fields of Galilee (Lk. 9, 1-12; Mt. 10, 5-15) and finally because they saw in radical poverty a means for repudiating the social differences that the recepient monetary economy was creating.

The two first aspects were very much present in the Recollect movement, and the third also has some typically Augustinian resonances: poverty prepares the way for the union of hearts, makes it possible and manifests it.

#### d. The Disentailment and its effects in the Organization of the Order

Here we have the last charismatic moment in the history of the Order if it can be considered as such. Not everyone will be able to detect the presence of the Spirit in a period of time in which political passion and anticlericalism erupted in the life of the community, violently destroying its structures and throwing it in a direction which seemed to contradict a tradition of more than two centuries of life. This is a question which I would like to see studied by experts in spiritual theology. For my part, I limit myself to make three simple observations:

1). The contradiction of the so-called contemplative (1588-1835) and active (1835-present) periods of the Order perhaps is not so radical as had once been affirmed. The apostolic activity during the contemplative period of the Order was much more intense than what has been admitted until now. In a certain way, this contradiction is also visible in the majority of mendicant orders.

2). The Order and the Church definitely approved this change in orientation. In the beginning, the Order simply tolerated a situation which was imposed from the outside and which was incapable of modifying. When, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth, the Order was in condition to program its life with a little more freedom, it was already too late. The Order was accustomed to a new way of life and did not feel it necessary to modify it. Actually, it took advantage of the first solemn opportunity (1908) to confirm it publicly. Afterwards, the Holy See ratified that option of the Order.

3). In the present Constitutions there is not single reference to these events, but they are presupposed. Many of their prescriptions, (C 275-316) would be incomprehensible in the Recollection of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Community and the religious delineated in the text are, above all, products of a system of life initiated with the despoliation (1835) and consolidated by 150 years of life.

With these considerations, I will now describe the despoliation and its consequences in more detail.

With the death of Ferdinand VII (September 1833) and the return of the liberals to power, a decade of apparent bonanza for religious communities ended and persecution began anew. On April 12, 1834, the government prohibited the admission of new novices; on July 25, 1835, all monasteries with less than 12 religious were closed, two thirds of which had to be clerics, and finally, on March 6, 1836, with the general law of despoliation, almost all of the monasteries of men in Spain were suppressed. The first article of law was categorical.

«All monasteries, convents, colleges, congregations, and all other houses of community or male religious institutes, including those of secular clerics and those of the four military Orders and that of St. John of Jerusalem, existing in the peninsula, adjacent islands, and Africa are suppressed»[[14]](#footnote-13).

Other articles prohibited the religious habit and specified the destination of the goods of suppressed monasteries. The buildings and land were assigned to the State, which would sell them at public auction; In special cases, some buildings were destined for public use. Books, paintings, and other objects of artistic or cultural value were assigned to institutes of arts and sciences, provincial libraries, museums, academies and other establishments of public instruction”[[15]](#footnote-14).

The consequences of these decrees were transcendental for the Order. Between September 1835 and January 1836 some 32 monasteries of the 33 that the Order had in Spain were confiscated and their inhabitants were obliged to abandon religious life. Some were able to become affiliated to one diocese or another; others, nevertheless, lost the meaning of their religious life and were forced to survive on miserable state pension. Only the minority, some 2, were able to give new meaning to their religious life without abandoning the Order, preparing themselves for missions and traveling to the Philippines.

These decrees very well could have caused the total extinction of the Order. In fact, some Orders of national character, like the Orders of St. Jerome and of St. Basil, did not survive. From the human point of view, we owe our survival to our mission in the Philippines, since neither the Vicar General nor the majority of religious gave any indication of great religious or corporate spirit. The Vicar General was timid and indecisive. In 1834 he retired to Berzocana (Cáceres), his native village, where he disengaged for all practical purposes from the affairs of the Congregatio.[[16]](#footnote-15). Nor did the individual religious apply means with which to remedy the situation.

However, the Spanish government was aware of the political importance of the Spanish missionaries. It knew that these missionaries alone were able to assure the sovereignty of Spain the Philippines. Therefore, the government could not permit itself the luxury of ignoring them, and was obligated to exempt from suppression the houses destined for the formation of their students.

##### “Those exempted from the previous article are: 1) the missionary seminaries from the provinces of Asia of Valladolid, Ocaña and Monteagud”[[17]](#footnote-16).

This article freed Monteagudo from suppression, and thus saved the Order. Without it, the Order would not have survived. Later, it served as legal support to solicit and obtain the foundation of other monasteries. The continual growth of the population in the Philippines demanded an equal increase of missionaries, and consequently, more centers for their formation. In 1865 the government permitted the foundation of Marcilla, which, from the juridical point of view, was no more than a simple extension of the college at Monteagudo. The government always was interested in the progress of these colleges which it would later protect during the Revolution of 1868.[[18]](#footnote-17) The foundation of San Millan in 1878 also has a direct relationship with our missionary efforts in the Philippines.[[19]](#footnote-18)

However, the despoliation not only deprived the Recollection of its Spanish monasteries, but also modified its very spiritual orientation. Until 1835, the Recollection had been a corporation with clearly contemplative tendencies. From 1835 on it was mainly an apostolic corporation. Until 1835 strictly monastic life was prevalent. Prayer, silence, and retreat were its main characteristics. The friars lived an austere and poor life, discalced, fasting almost half the year and disciplining themselves three times a week. The apostolate, although constantly expanding, occupied a secondary position. The Philippine missions were no more than an appendage. the center of the Order consisted of the 38 monasteries of Spain and Colombia. Now, despoiled of its convents and without the possibility of practicing the common life, the Order became an apostolic and missionary corporation, adapting to the way of life which up to then had exclusively belonged to the Province of the Philippines. Common life was relegated to the monasteries of Monteagudo and Marcilla (from 1865) which were destined for missionary formation, and to Manila, which was destined for the shelter of the aged. Consequently, those called to Manila for disciplinary corporate bonds were loosened. In the isolation of the parishes, each religious thought more about its interests and the interests of parishioners than about those of the community.

The phenomenon repeated itself in Colombia in 1861. At this time, General Mosquera exclaustrated all religious and confiscated their goods. Our religious became simple parish priests, separated from their superiors and with very few corporate bonds. Almost all of them began to administer parishes and chaplaincies, and felt satisfied there, emotionally more attached to the diocese than to the Order[[20]](#footnote-19).

In the restoration of the Province (1889-1894), the St. Ezekiel tried to revive some of the values of the first Recollection, intending to harmonize the apostolate with the demands of the common life and the perfect observance of the Constitutions. As a son of the missionary province of the Order, he saw no incompatibility between these two aspects of our religious tradition. The apostolate was an essential element of it, the one which had most contributed to configure its very life, and thus, he could do no less than keep it very much in mind when reorganizing the Province. He had learned the tremendous value of the common life in the reading of the Rule of St. Augustine and in the book of his own life. During his years in the Philippines (1870-1885) he lived the dangers of loneliness and isolation, and was not disposed to exposing his religious to them all over again. As a young missionary he had dared to propose the instruction of the common life on the island of Mindoro to his Provincial. His wish did not have any practical effect at the time. Now, however, endowed with authority, he strove to make his wish a reality. He imposed the common life rigorously in El Desierto, and above all, he strove to extend it throughout residences and missions, with all the demands that such type of life carries with it: common prayer, the total exclusion of peculium, various observances, etc. He hoped that no religious would live alone, deprived of the company of his brothers and detached from his superior. In each parish, there would be a small community, constituted at the very least by three religious.[[21]](#footnote-20)

His immediate successors (1894-1901) pursued this same line of conduct. Afterwards, due to the difficulties caused by the civil war, the urgency of the missionary apostolate and other instances of socio-economic character, apostolic activity began to acquire excessive value, and the demands of the common life were again ignored. Thus the Order forgot the luminous example of St. Augustine, who tried hard to reconcile both aspects, and never sacrificed the common life for the apostolate[[22]](#footnote-21).

With the Philippine Revolution (1898) and the consequent expansion of the Order throughout Spain and America, the field of its apostolate changed, but it continued being the most visible characteristic of the life and spirituality of the Order. In Spain and Colombia, as well as in Brazil, Venezuela, or Panama, the Augustinian Recollects lived devoted to pastoral task in residences, parishes, or missions. The General Chapter of San Millán (1908) took note of this reality and solemnly proclaimed that the new end of the Order was the Apostolate.

##### The present Chapter declares and determines that the current end of our Congregation is apostolic life in all its manifestation, such as teaching, and above all, the missions. All efforts must be directed to this end.[[23]](#footnote-22)

This same chapter ordered that the work being realized by some religious to adapt the Constitutions to the new system of life continue[[24]](#footnote-23). In accordance with this order, Fr. Enrique Pérez (1854-1927), helped by some other religious, intensified this work and in 1912 he was able to publish substantially different Constitutions. With them, the dangerous dichotomy existing between the real and legal life of the Order came to an end, sanctioning its apostolic character and adapting the juridical structure to it:

The secondary and special end of our Order consists in taking care of the spiritual welfare of souls. The apostolic life, therefore, belongs to the goal of the Order. The apostolic life entails various forms of sacred ministry, Christian education and above all, the missions which should be expanded and strengthened with all our resources... In order to attain the secondary end of the Order it is necessary that our young religious be adequately prepared in the sciences and liberal arts as well as in the human and divine disciplines.[[25]](#footnote-24)

These Constitutions did not receive the sanction of the competent authority[[26]](#footnote-25), but were in force for 16 years, until 1928, when a new edition was published and adapted to the norms of the new Canon Law. This edition is an important landmark in constitutional history of the Order, but in the aspect which interests us now it faithfully continues with the channel opened by the text of 1912.

Consequently, the Augustinian Recollects continued to be fully dedicated to the apostolate. It can be said that between 1835 and 1945 practically no Augustinian Recollect existed who did not spend a great portion of his life in a mission or ministry. Even in its preparatory schools the title “missionary” or “apostolic” stood out. Only a small minority, consecrated in monasteries to the formation of future missionaries, did not work on some parcel of mission land. However, even the life and activity of this minority was, in a certain way, oriented to the apostolate. Moreover, even some of this minority spent some years in the ministry of the apostolate. It will suffice to name among others, Frs. Fernando Mayandia, Nicolas Casas, Santiago Matute, Cayetano Fernandez and Francisco Garcia, who are regarded among the most egregious agents of formation of the last century.

Around 1940, the Order opened its doors to the educational apostolate, which is rapidly acquiring stability and is gradually surpassing the traditional ministerial apostolate, to such an extent that in one nation ( the Philippines) it has practically supplanted it. The apostolate has changed, yet the apostolate continues to be the principal characteristic of the Order.

### 4. Conclusive Remarks

This fast trip through the pages of our history and legislation has placed, I think, before our eyes the main constituent elements of present Recollect charism. St. Augustine has left us, among many other things, a strong esteem and love for community life and some of its main characteristics: dialogue, friendship, familiar relations, sharing of all our talents, common prayer, fraternal correction, sober living, ascetic moderation, apostolic disponibility. The *Forma de vivir* strengthens the interiority tendency of Augustinian community life and colors it with ascetic hues. And, lastly, the mendicant spirituality and that of recent history open it to the apostolic needs of every moment. These needs, however pressing may they be, must never induce us to overlook the prevalent spiritual well-being of the community and its members. In this regard, we should always keep in mind the wise warning of St. Augustine in the City of God, and which are reminded of in the present Constitutions:

##### No man must be so committed to contemplation as, in his contemplation, to give no thought to his neighbors’ needs, nor so absorbed in action as to dispense with the contemplation of God... as by no means ought delight in the truth be abandoned, lest the sweetness of contemplation disappear, and the frenzy of activity overwhelm us (*City of God.* XIX, 19).

1. Ecclesia 10-17 August 1991, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Manrique, Teología 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Van Bavel, Vocabulaire [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Van BAVEL, Commentary, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Ibid. 62 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Ibid 73 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Bull St Augus 274-275 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
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