

Augustine and Ambrose

The Loyalty and Singlemindedness of a Disciple

It is relatively easy, and not unimportant, to assess the influence of one man on another by pointing to quotation or allusion in the works of the younger or dependent writer. No less important, but much harder to discover, are the ways in which one man can affect the habits of mind in another, and influence the course of his career. Augustine read and recycled the written statements of his master Ambrose, certainly; but that cannot describe exhaustively the relationship between them ¹). It persisted in deeper ways throughout Augustine's life, and did much to give it purpose and coherence.

They lived in an age when the experience of discipleship and patronage was central to the lives of educated men. What Ambrose may have thought of Augustine is almost impossible to tell; but Augustine regarded Ambrose, without a doubt, as master. Such a relationship had to develop within a setting, of which a variety was available — public duty, rhetorical training, the pursuit of philosophy (and in all these both Ambrose and Augustine had gained experience) —; but it is the possibility of relationship (between master and disciple) within the setting of the ascetic life that prompts the argument suggested here. Ambrose and Augustine were both ascetics; and the younger bishop averted specifically to the asceticism of his senior ²). I have argued already, in a preliminary way, that the episcopal authority of both men owed something to the authority exercised by ascetic masters ³). Hence they became involved, as bishops, in two important developments of the time: the gradual assertion of that authority over ascetic communities (as opposed to individuals); and the creation of an ascetic literature — apophthegmatic, legislative

¹) Peter BROWN, *Augustine of Hippo* (London, 1967), pp. 86-7; see also F. VAN DER MEER, *Augustine the Bishop*, trans. BATTERSHAW and LAMB (London, 1961), pp. 570f.

²) AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, VIII, vi; probably also *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae*, xxxiii (70).

³) 'The Spiritual Authority of the "Monk-Bishop"', *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. xxii (1971), pp. 380-419.

and hagiographic (authority in documented form). The further questions now to be pursued are whether the relationship between them can be seen as part of those developments, and what enduring effect it had on Augustine himself.

To begin, a look at some clues that arouse interest and suspicion : take first the *Confessions*. A chief reason why Augustine became disillusioned with the Manichees (so he suggests himself) was their failure to establish a convincing hierarchy of authority; a failure on the part of older men to initiate a constructive tradition of teaching that would satisfy and persuade those who sought their advice. Augustine saw himself trapped by the social habits of discipleship. He says of one leading Manichee, 'I was prepared to trust rather in his authority on account of his reputation for sanctity' ⁴). He persisted in his hope, when the opportunity occurred to hear the great Faustus (a hope frustrated) : 'I was disappointed that, with his flock thronging round him, I was not allowed to address him and put the questions that troubled me and discuss them as man to man and with comment back and forth' ⁵).

This intimate dialogue was precisely that enjoyed by many a desert ascetic in Egypt. Equally striking, the *Confessions* present Ambrose in exactly the same way. He is God's 'holy oracle' (although Augustine could extract from him only the briefest statements). There is the same desire for access, and the same frustration. Augustine 'could not ask of him what I wish as I wished' : throngs of people who had business with Ambrose separated Augustine 'ab eius aure atque ore' ⁶).

Evocations recur when Augustine approaches Simplicianus : 'He was now grown old; and it seemed to me that from a long lifetime spent in so firm a following of Your way he must have experienced much and learned much. And truly so it was. I hoped that if I conferred with him about my problems he might from that experience and learning show me the best way for one affected as I was to walk in Your path' ⁷). Such a statement, perhaps less polished, would not have been out of place in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. Note, however,

⁴) *Conf.* V, v. All quotations from the *Confessions* are in the translation of F. J. SHEED (London, 1948).

⁵) *Ibid.* vi.

⁶) *Ibid.* VI, iii.

⁷) *Ibid.* VIII, i.

the context of his remarks. Simplicianus recounts in reply the conversion of the rhetor Victorinus, with its emphasis on (among other things) the need to discover and express religious faith within a public ritual ('I shall not believe it nor count you among Christians unless I see you in the Church of Christ').⁸⁾ It was precisely within such a setting that Ambrose, preaching to assembled Christians in Milan, first impressed Augustine — a reminder (and more must be said below) that authority was to be sought for and responded to within a community⁹⁾.

So much for the *Confessions*. Given the parallels here to the world of desert hermits, it is interesting to examine one of the ways, at least, in which Ambrose's influence appears to have persisted in Augustine's life. There is an important reference, in the *Vita* by Possidius, to the way in which Augustine used to repeat sayings of Ambrose (the apophthegmata of a master preserved by his disciple)¹⁰⁾. His anxiety to safeguard the memory of the Bishop of Milan went further: he virtually commissioned Paulinus to write his biography¹¹⁾. Bearing in mind these loyal desires (so traditionally expressed), it is fascinating to catch Augustine sometimes thinking of Ambrose. Look, for example, at his Letter xxxi, to Paulinus of Nola. He refers to the 'loquacissimae quaestiones' of pagans, to which Paulinus was able, he says, to offer (like many a sound hermit) 'explicatissima ... responsa'; and he describes the 'pectus' of Paulinus as a 'Domini oraculum', echoing exactly the phrase he had used about Ambrose in the *Confessions* ('de tam sancto oraculo tuo pectore illius')¹²⁾. Letter xxxi and the *Confessions* are certainly near-contemporary texts; and the serious question arises whether these two passages might not have been written on the very same day, for Augustine, in Letter xxxi, prompted as it were by his own allusion, immediately goes on to speak of Ambrose¹³⁾. A slightly different example of

⁸⁾ *Ibid.* ii.

⁹⁾ *Ibid.* V, xiii; VI, iv.

¹⁰⁾ POSSIDIUS, *Vita Augustini*, xxiv recalls an oral statement of Ambrose ('Ambrosium se praesente in ecclesia tractavisse'), although it is documented also, in *De Officiis*, I, xxviii. See also *Vita*, xxvii, recounting the dying words of Ambrose (together with Augustine's comments, and several other recorded sayings): Possidius did not copy them from Paulinus of Milan, *Vita Ambrosii*, xlv.

¹¹⁾ PAULINUS, *Vita*, i; see BROWN, pp. 480f.

¹²⁾ AUGUSTINE, *Con.* VI, iii.

¹³⁾ *Ep.* xxxi 8.

loyalty occurs in Letter liv, to Januarius, where Augustine repeats a dictum of Ambrose originally intended for his mother Monica (using again the word 'oraculum')¹⁴). In the matter of fasting, the bishop had said, one should always follow local custom. What matters most is that in this letter (and in that following) Ambrose's particular and succinct statement is raised to the level of an ecclesiological principle¹⁵). It has taken on a persistent, 'hardened' form in Augustine's mind; and indeed even his earlier reference to the event comes at the end of the letter, after the principle had been enunciated in more general, impersonal terms¹⁶).

These references provide, as admitted, no more than clues; but they make investigation worthwhile. They recall the link between Augustine and the ascetic movement (particularly in the matters of discipleship and authority); but they suggest that his relationship with Ambrose may have developed as part of that tradition, acquiring thereby the same persistence. It is not just a question, therefore, of whether Augustine's life was dominated, and in some ways drawn together, by a tradition of authority, but also of whether it was Ambrose who initiated him into that tradition, and imposed that coherence.

Here the matter of method becomes important. One must look most at the context, the social setting, in which Augustine first met Ambrose. The formality of the period is a familiar feature, affecting Christians no less than anyone. For most converts (there are pagan parallels) religious initiation took place within a ritual — broadly speaking, that of catechesis and liturgy: two skills that Ambrose had particularly at heart (one has only to read his *De Mysteriis*, or recall the success of his hymns and the carefully staged discovery of martyrs' relics — matters of public relations as much as theology!)¹⁷).

¹⁴) The exchange is first mentioned in an earlier letter, xxxvi. 32.

¹⁵) *Ep.* liv. 3; lv, especially 18f.

¹⁶) *Ep.* xxxvi. 1: 'In his enim rebus de quibus nihil certi statuit scriptura divina, mos populi Dei, vel instituta majorum pro lege tenenda sunt'. Something similar may have happened in Augustine's use of the scriptural tag quoted by Ambrose (*De Paenitentia*, i. 13), 'Omnes homines sub peccato nascimur': see A. PAREDI, 'Paulinus of Milan', *Sacris Erudiri*, xiv (1963), pp. 208-9.

¹⁷) On baptismal initiation and Augustine's experience of it, F. HOMES DUDDEN, *The Life and Times of St Ambrose* (Oxford, 1935), i, pp. 336f.; BROWN, pp. 123f.; VAN DER MEER, pp. 347f. On Ambrose's hymns, and liturgy generally, HOMES DUDDEN, i,

There are incidental points to notice. A ritual framework did not preclude intensity, either of religious experience or of relationship with mentors. This was an age that successfully combined formality and emotion. The conversion of Victorinus, as recounted by Augustine, tells us much in this regard. So also his account of his own experiences in Milan: 'I wept at the beauty of Your hymns and canticles, and was powerfully moved at the sweet sound of Your Church's singing' ¹⁸). Ascetics of the period were developing the same skill, building up spiritual relationships within the regular framework of monastic communities. One should note also that Augustine's experiences in Milan — his acquaintance with the Christian community there, and his own conversion and baptism — represented (in forms personified by Ambrose and Monica) the successful reassertion of traditional pressures upon him — the Catholicism of his own childhood (so strangely present throughout the *Confessions*), and what was by this time a cultural heritage, the external cultus of the western church.

Bearing in mind, then, this question of setting, the *Confessions* reveal two main influences on Augustine (both mediated, in part at least, through Ambrose); one philosophical, the other biblical. Philosophy in this period was something pursued in the company of others (a setting) ¹⁹). One can see in Augustine's experience at Cassiciacum not only the Christianized Neoplatonism that would recur, albeit differently, in the *Confessions* themselves, but also the other more social elements connected with the philosophical tradition — 'otium', dialogue, the sense of secluded community, the master-disciple relationship between Augustine and some of his companions (Licentius, for example). As for the exposition and study of Scripture, that too could encourage a 'school tradition' (more, perhaps, elsewhere than in Milan ²⁰) — a link here with the world of

pp. 293f.; ii, pp. 442f. On Gervasius and Protasius, AMBROSE, *Ep.* xxii; AUGUSTINE, *Con.* IX, vii; PAULINUS, *Vita*, xiv-xvii; HOMES DUDDEN, i, pp. 298f.

¹⁸) AUGUSTINE, *Conf.* IX, vi.

¹⁹) H.-I. MARROU, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité* (Paris, 1948), pp. 283f. He suggests quite clearly (although not, perhaps, intentionally) a parallel with monastic experience: 'l'essentiel de son [sc. le philosophe] enseignement n'était pas donné du haut de la chaire, mais au sein de la vie commune qui l'unissait à ses disciples: plus que sa parole important son exemple, le spectacle édifiant de sa sagesse pratique et de ses vertus' (p. 287). More specifically on Augustine's experience in Milan, see Brown, pp. 101-14, 125-6.

²⁰) But see R. LORENZ, 'Die Anfänge des abendländischen Mönchtums im 4. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, lxxvii (1966), p. 41.

the philosophers : one thinks of Origen and Clement in the previous century (not to mention Plotinus); but also, nearer home, of Victorinus (exegete, as well as rhetorician). There was also a link with the monastic world (not so remote, in any case, from Cassiciacum, as concerned with virtue as with truth): ascetic communities were becoming, perhaps more than all else, places where one studied Scripture; and the tradition of discipleship within those communities was increasingly interwoven with the concerns of the commentator and the exegete. Jerome is the outstanding example; but Ambrose, himself involved in the ascetic movement, linked that enthusiasm with an understanding of biblical texts ²¹).

Such were the social traditions impinging upon Ambrose and Augustine at the time, and in the circumstance, of their first acquaintance. The Bishop of Milan was a philosopher in very real senses; he was also a catechist, an ascetic and an exegete — all roles with social as well as intellectual connotations. When we come to assess, therefore, the meaning, the total force, of Ambrose's influence upon Augustine, we should be trying to discover how persistently conjoined in his own life these various elements were: the poses, so to speak, and social settings; the intellectual concern with Scripture and asceticism in particular; and the sense of discipleship and loyalty.

Clearly, one could embark at this stage on a comparative biography of the two bishops. Let us rest content for the moment with examples of an approach that others might document further at varying levels of detail. The task is to follow a path from Ambrose. We start, therefore, with the *Confessions* — Augustine's restatement, in a different key, of what he discovered at Milan: Plato and the Bible. Having reached (in Books VIII and IX) the moment of his conversion and of his mother's death, Augustine is forced by the sacred centrality of those events to reflect upon the very possibility and purpose of recollection and continuity in his life (Book X); and then he leans forward, as it were, to his own fresh commentary on Scripture. This was his third engagement with Genesis, pervaded by a clear anxiety to "get it right this time". These last three books echo a little the earlier *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, and anticipate the *De Genesi ad Litteram*; but, in spite of their truncated reference, they are more perfect; a fragment that captured light from the whole

²¹) PAULINUS, *Vita*, xlix; HOMES DUDDEN, i, pp. 147f.

Bible — only in the *City of God* did Augustine unravel all their implications. The care and the achievement stem, undoubtedly, from Augustine's personal involvement, his need to connect his past experience with his own understanding of the sacred text — to recapture in maturer form the exhilaration that Ambrose had aroused, as he preached in his cathedral.

We should concentrate for our purpose on the moment of transition, from memory to exegesis. Towards the end of Book X, Augustine asks how he may be reconciled to God. Some place their faith in angels, others in visions. No, says Augustine (now in the final chapter of the Book): only Christ, who has, as it were, a foot in both words, can really achieve reconciliation between men and God. The temptation of 'flight to the desert' is there; but then comes the final affirmation: 'See, Lord, I cast my care upon Thee, that I may live: and I will consider the wondrous things of Thy law'. It is from this point that Augustine proceeds to his analysis of Scripture: Scripture, the 'law', is the mediating voice, the word, of God; and so begins Book XI.

Therefore Scripture and mediation (the point will recur) are closely linked. The key phrase is 'doce me et sana me'. Wider implications of this facet in Augustine's thought have been excellently described by his biographer ²²). The *Confessions* mark a stage between the confidence of Cassiciacum (where for Augustine 'veritas' was still perceptible, described as 'Dei facies' ²³) and a phrase in one of his sermons, 'For the meantime, let the Scriptures be the countenance of God' ²⁴). In the *Confessions* themselves, the point is made with moving clarity. The Scriptures are like the firmament of heaven spread out between God and men. Only by death does one pass through to see God's face, to 'read without syllables spoken in time what is willed by Your eternal will'. 'I know no books so destructive of pride, so destructive of the enemy who stands up in the justification of his sins, resisting reconciliation with You. ... Grant me in my subjection to understand these words, O good Father, because it is for those in subjection that You have established them' ²⁵). The intensity of the passage is not isolated: Augustine had already said, a year or so before, 'Let those rail against you who do not know how

²²) BROWN, pp. 259f.

²³) AUGUSTINE, *De Ordine*, i. 23.

²⁴) *Sermo* xxii. 7.

²⁵) *Conf.* XIII, xv.

difficult it is to cleanse the eye of the inner man, so that he may gaze upon his sun' ²⁶).

He who seeks for the truth, therefore, must be submissive, must acknowledge a master — this is one of the basic assertions of the *Confessions* —; and the very text of Scripture itself comes to acquire this teaching and cleansing role. The point takes on further meaning if we look at other statements of Augustine's early career, such as those of the *De Moribus* (begun in Rome, shortly before his return to Africa). This is where Augustine begins to look back at former errors from the new basis of his Catholicism. He appears to take up already something of his stance in the *Confessions* — authority, he says, comes before reason —; ²⁷) but the point is made only after an opening statement of some importance: a man must find an interpreter of the Scriptures (here is the element of authority) equal to his capacity for inquiry (the sphere of reason). This was precisely the conviction that had led him, in ways discussed, to Faustus and to Ambrose ²⁸). Augustine goes further: since we are addressing Manichees, we must start on the side of reason, and lead the rational inquirer (already aware of God's existence) to submit to an authority that can mediate between him and the unseen God ²⁹). Augustine uses the phrase 'opacitas auctoritatis' (anticipating the clouds of the firmament at the end of the *Confessions*); and he refers, among other things, to the way in which the written text of Scripture moves between the inquirer and God. What distinguishes Catholics from Manichees is that, while the latter parade their 'stultae atque impiae disputationes', the former depend on 'piorum doctissimorumque hominum sermones' (evoking a legitimate tradition of authority, marked by sanctity and erudition, and declared within a social context of liturgy and catechesis) ³⁰).

The threads of allusion hold together. Augustine is a questioner, rational, approaching authorities: men who will teach partly as philosophers, more especially as exegetes within the public rituals of the Christian community. Augustine inquires above all of the

²⁶) *Contra Ep. Fund.* 2. One may take, perhaps, as another intermediate text *De Doctrina Christiana*, I, x (10), linking 'purgatio' with 'navigatio ad patriam'.

²⁷) *De Mor. Eccles.* ii (3); iii (4); xxv (47).

²⁸) *Ibid.* i (1).

²⁹) *Ibid.* vii (11).

³⁰) *Ibid.* x (16); see also xxiii (72).

scriptural text itself, which still retains its link with the mediating authority of the teacher. But attention must be maintained upon that other thread, the monastic tradition: one with which both Ambrose and Augustine were associated, and one which was itself connected with the exegesis of Scripture within a religious community.

A useful starting place is Sermon ccclv. Augustine describes how the clergy in Hippo lead a corporate, ascetic life; and yet they have a very public function ³¹). In his own words, they have to attend as much to 'fama' as to 'conscientia'; as much to their reputation with others as to their judgement on themselves ³²). This is not an idea without a past for Augustine. As early as the *Confessions* he had faced such a problem: how to relate usefully his own sense of guilt and his obligation to encourage others ³³). Another point is made in this later sermon: the clergy are imitators — they imitate the early Christian community described in the Acts ³⁴); and they imitate Augustine himself (here cast as master, rather than disciple) ³⁵). This remark too has a place within the general framework of Augustine's writings. Clergy and monks represent an *élite*, who mediate by their example, and by its invitation to imitation, between God and those less perfect. They are the 'spiritales', faced with the 'carnales' — a type of distinction that occurs for Augustine also in the context of interpreting Scripture; most famously, perhaps, in the *De Doctrina Christiana*, which also discusses the inquirer's need for a master (and for rules) ³⁶).

To hint at so wide a context is a vague and easy gesture, and one sermon may seem an arbitrary starting point; but, once the theme is identified, precise examples reveal how links were forged in a chain, once again, of allusion and memory. Letter xli (to a bishop, Aurelius) suggests that the people should imitate the clergy, just as the clergy imitate Christ ³⁷). In a contemporary work, the *De Agone Christiano*, Augustine makes the same point (with even clearer reference to Paul —

³¹). VAN DER MEER, pp. 199f. This in itself represents a certain dependence on Ambrose: see the views expressed in his *Ep.* lxiii, especially 66 and 71.

³²) AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* ccclv. 1.

³³) See especially *Conf.* II, iii.

³⁴) Particularly Acts, ii. 42-7; iv. 32-5.

³⁵) AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* ccclv. 2.

³⁶) *De Doctrina Christiana*, Prologue, especially 1, 3 and 5. See the implications of II, vi (18), and compare *Conf.* VI, v; *City of God*, XVI, ii.

³⁷) *Ep.* xli. 1.

'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ'). But one is led, in the *De Agone*, to much more than an echo of this one point. According to Augustine there, God cares directly for those who 'serve him with their whole will'; but his providence is mediated to those less perfect through these 'holy souls' ³⁸). And if men feel unable to accept that authority, then they should accept the authority that is mediated to them through the Scriptures ³⁹). We are still in the world of social relationships and authority, and of exegesis.

We are still in the world also of the *Confessions*, and the tension between guilt and encouragement. Augustine had become aware that not only did he need an authority himself, but that he occupied a position of authority over others. The book marks, in some ways, the moment at which he took on the role of master in a new and important sense: 'To whom am I telling this? Not to Thee, O my God, but in Thy presence I am telling it to my own kind' ⁴⁰).

One takes too much for granted Augustine's candour, a skill combined with humility by very few with any great success. Even more remarkable is that candour should have later become an authoritative habit. In his *Obiurgatio* (traditionally linked — as Letter ccxi — with an adaptation of his monastic *Rule*) Augustine writes, 'And rather than show my face to you, I have chosen to pour out my heart to God on your behalf, and to handle this matter, involving you in so much danger, not by addressing you on your own ground, but by weeping in the presence of God' ⁴¹). The important thing was to do it loudly, and in written form. In exactly the same way, in what was probably a contemporary text, Paulinus of Milan immortalized the skill of Ambrose, who wept that others might repent ⁴²).

Ascetics achieved, therefore, a practical impact on the life of others; an impact that went in tandem with an understanding of Scripture, and demanded the acknowledgement of masters. But there were structural as well as moral implications in Augustine's asceticism. His reference, in that Sermon ccclv, to the early Christian

³⁸) *De Agone Christiano*, 9.

³⁹) *Ibid.* 11.

⁴⁰) *Conf.* II, iii.

⁴¹) *Obiurgatio*, 2, ed. Luc VERHEIJEN, *La Règle de saint Augustin* (Paris, 1967), i, p. 105; for authenticity and date, see ii, pp. 202-5. My thanks to Dr. Verheijen for further guidance on these texts.

⁴²) PAULINUS, *Vita*, xxxix.

community of the Acts is one that recurs regularly; and he alludes to it also in the all-important Letter cexi ⁴³). Another text of Scripture he regarded as useful (and already one begins to see the connection between his asceticism and his exegesis) was Psalm cxxxii — especially the opening verse, 'Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity'. His *enarratio* on this psalm he takes precisely as an opportunity to offer a portrait of the monastic life; and in this context also, as well as in the clerical, he refers to the Acts ⁴⁴).

It is at this stage, with his link between an image of the church and an image of the monastery (and the associated discussion of the importance of unity), that we can begin to see a correlation between lines of thought in Augustine's head and his public experience as Bishop of Hippo. The threads that have run from Ambrose through the *Confessions* to these later texts are immediately relevant to Augustine's handling of the Donatist controversy. Here was a dispute over the meaning of the church, and over the meaning of unity; but it was also (as we shall see more in a moment) a dispute over the role of teachers in the church, of persuasion and authority.

The *enarratio* on Psalm cxxxii, however, introduces us to another field of experience for Augustine. He says that the monastic life represents the change from Judaism to the early Christian community: it is from this movement that monasticism is born — 'de illo pariete circumcisionis prius nata est ista benedictio' ⁴⁵). The ascetic brotherhood represents, in other words, a transition from law to grace: 'invicem onera vestra portate, et sic implebitis legem Christi' ⁴⁶). And Augustine adds, 'The psalmist, dearest brothers, wishes you to understand that for brethren to dwell in unity is a gift of God. It is achieved not by their own efforts, or because of their merits: it is his gift, his grace, like dew from heaven' ⁴⁷). At once we face Pelagius.

That preoccupation is reflected in other ascetic references. An aspect of the monastic life that Augustine felt important was poverty: he presents frequent and carefully balanced arguments in its defence, one of the best texts on the subject being his Letter clvii to Hilarius. Followers of Pelagius were equally concerned with the dangers and

⁴³) LORENZ, 'Anfänge', p. 57.

⁴⁴) *Enarr. in Ps. cxxxii.* 1.

⁴⁵) *Ibid.* 2.

⁴⁶) *Ibid.* 9, quoting Gal. vi. 2.

⁴⁷) *Ibid.* 10.

responsibilities of wealth, as well as with the issue of freedom and grace: so it is no surprise to find Augustine moving in this letter towards full reference to the Pelagian issue, and to problems other than those of wealth itself. The first question raised brings us back to his comments on Psalm cxxxii (and so to our immediate thread): it concerns the purpose of law. Law, he says, tells you no more than where you stand. Once you know that, you should be led to thank God and to seek for his help — entering, in other words, into a relationship with God ⁴⁸). Law can lead a man to a relationship; but it does not by itself establish that relationship. This is a distinction, clearly, of some importance in the context of the monastic life also — touching the relationship between masters and their disciples, or between the leader of an ascetic community and its members —; and it offers some comment on the place of rules in such communities ⁴⁹).

Augustine then goes on to talk about the connection between law and grace, in exactly the terms that had horrified Pelagius in the *Confessions*: ‘jubet ergo Deus continentiam, et dat continentiam’ ⁵⁰). ‘Jubet’ refers, of course, to the realm of law; ‘dat’ to that of grace. He adds, ‘Jubet per litteram, dat per Spiritum’: first one reads; and then the subsequent alchemy of grace transforms insight into action. This was exactly the task that faced the disciple, and not least the disciple of the scriptural text (especially one released from the letter of that text by a master such as Ambrose — although here, as in the *Confessions*, the text itself is referred to as a mediator) ⁵¹).

Another point of interest in this letter concerns the rich young man of the gospel: he had fulfilled the highest legal ideal of the Jewish people — ‘All these things have I observed from my youth’. Augustine’s point is that life can indeed come from obedience; but perfection comes from following (in this case, Jesus) — again, the emphasis on discipleship ⁵²).

⁴⁸) *Ep.* clvii. 6. Augustine had thought along these lines before Pelagius became a problem to him personally: see *De Spiritu et Littera*, x (16).

⁴⁹) For Lorenz, this represented the contribution made by Augustine to monastic development: ‘Anfänge’, p. 39.

⁵⁰) AUGUSTINE, *Ep.* clvii. 9; see *De Dono Perseverantiae*, 53, referring to *Conf.* X, xxxi.

⁵¹) See *Conf.* V, xiv: ‘Especially after I had heard explained figuratively [‘spiritualiter’] several passages of the Old Testament which had been a cause of death for me when taken literally [‘ubi, cum ad litteram acciperem, occidebar’].’

⁵²) *Ep.* clvii. 25, referring to Mark, x. 20.

Asceticism, ecclesiology, discipleship and exegesis, together with reference to Donatism and Pelagius: all are involved in this network of related quotations. But the thread runs on still, leading us back from Pelagius to the Donatists again, and to the *De Moribus* (where Augustine discusses the question of 'disciplina', distinguishing between 'coercitio' and 'instructio' — both of them examples of 'disciplina', and both central to an understanding of his handling of the Donatist controversy). This particular twist in the inquiry is forced upon us by that same Letter clvii: for there Augustine also says, 'Coercion achieves its end through fear, instruction through love' (obviously linked with the discussion of law and grace); ⁵³) and he goes on to connect that distinction with Scripture, saying that fear is typical of the Old Testament, love of the New. Exactly the same emphasis is made in the monastic context, in Augustine's *Rule* (the *Praeceptum*), where he says to superiors, 'Although both are necessary, you should seek more to be loved than to be feared' ⁵⁴); and he wished ascetics to be 'not like slaves under the law, but like freeborn men under grace' ⁵⁵).

Turning back, then, to the *De Moribus* with these later statements in mind, one is struck not only by relevance to Donatism but also by anticipation of the *City of God* (Augustine's third great practical enterprise as bishop). Talking of ascetics in community, he discusses the virtue of obedience, and sees it as a pact between a superior and his charges: the 'pater' commands with 'auctoritas'; his subjects obey with 'voluntas' — for Augustine, an essential element in submission ⁵⁶). This emphasis on agreement as a basis of ordered society, the 'concordissima vita', is a prelude to much in the later work — not only the 'pactum societatis' of robber bands, but also the 'concor communio' of more general definitions ⁵⁷). And in the earlier description of ascetic society, bound together in religion, Augustine displays his clear sense of the manifold relationships within such a community — relationships understood by everybody; each member knowing how to respond to all the others ⁵⁸). Hierarchy and order were valued still

⁵³) *Ibid.* 56.

⁵⁴) *Praeceptum*, vii. 3 (ed. VERHEIJEN, i, p. 436).

⁵⁵) *Ibid.*, viii. 1 (VERHEIJEN, i, p. 437). For links with the Donatist controversy, See BROWN, *Religion and Society in the Age of St Augustine* (London, 1972). pp. 260-78.

⁵⁶) *De Mor. Eccles.* xxxi (67).

⁵⁷) *City of God*, IV, iv; XIX, xiv and xxiv.

⁵⁸) *De Mor. Eccles.* xxxii (69).

in his later analyses ⁵⁹). Finally he alludes to the phrase of Paul, 'Those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it', which anticipates his teaching in the *City of God* on 'making use of earthly and temporal things like a pilgrim in a foreign land', but also looks forward, once again, to Letter clvii ⁶⁰).

These circuits through Augustine's writings may appear inconclusive. The purpose (let it be said again) is not to establish the dependence of one text upon another, nor to document fully the growth of argument: it is to identify habits of mind, the constant reiteration of basic themes; and to link these with Augustine's relationship to Ambrose. So the move from text to text is not chronological but associative, dependent on Augustine's own willingness to combine allusions and memories. We have chanced, at different stages, upon different facets of his mind; but they are facets joined in one man's sense of loyalty to his religious past, and in an abiding sense of direction to his episcopal career. The crucial feature of the argument is that we pursue through Augustine's writings not ideas as such, but his persistent concern with the social settings in which those ideas could become applicable. These were those situations in which Augustine found himself as disciple, exegete and ascetic — situations (all three) that he experienced most vividly in his first meetings with Ambrose. Our chief discovery is that, by plotting this persistence in what may appear the byways of the Augustinian corpus — letters, sermons, minor *ad hoc* treatises —, we come across ideas, again and again, essential to the main concerns of his public career: the Donatist schism, the conflict with Pelagius, asceticism, and the *City of God*.

It is easy to present Augustine as a man harried by circumstance, compelled to keep pace with opponents, offering to the crisis of the moment an argument not necessarily consistent with former or subsequent statements. There is room for such a judgement; but it cannot be more than half the story. Beneath the great outcrops of theology and polemic there lay a continuous bed of principle and reflection. Whenever Augustine "rose to an occasion", he did so armed with convictions linked to an understanding of these three themes at least: authority (together with associated concepts of discipleship, teaching

⁵⁹) E.g. *City of God*, XIX, xiv; XXII, xxx.

⁶⁰) *De Mor. Eccles.* xxiv (75). The allusion is to I Cor. vii. 31. See *City of God*, XIX, xvii; *Ep.* clvii. 30-35; and also the *locus classicus* on the gold of the Egyptians, *De Doctrina Christiana*, II, xl (60).

and imitation); the relationship between religious inquiry and the text of Scripture; and the ascetic life. All three themes acquired full meaning only within a social context — the church, the liturgy, the religious community —; all were linked; and all pointed back to Augustine's experience in Milan.

Clearly, this is not to say everything about his relationship to Ambrose, nor indeed about his career as a whole. It is to suggest how one should explore that relationship, and that career; to nag a little at the issue, rather than to unravel it. We must be sure that our methods are adequate, before we become too greedy for results!

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