

St. Augustine's «Confessions» and Erik Erikson's «Young Man Luther»: Conversion as «Identity Crisis»

According to R.G. Collingwood, the historian “is investigating not mere events ... but actions, and an action is the unity of the outside and inside of an event”¹). However, as the findings of a recent article on various analyses of St. Augustine's conversion demonstrate²), that insistence on recognizing the dialectical character of human behavior too often remains a desideratum, something more deferred to in principle than adhered to in practice. What was perceived as the inadequacy of traditional Augustinian historiography in explaining that event prompted inquiry into whether the psychological frame-of-reference might provide an ancillary avenue of research for interpreting the series of actions and web of circumstances that culminated in the classic scene in the garden in August of 386. Specifically, it was assumed that if “it is axiomatic ... for the entire psychoanalytic tradition, that human actions express both unconscious needs and conscious aims”³), then such a perspective could very well contribute conceptual and methodological insights to the elucidation of the conversion Augustine himself so keenly experienced and intensely examined. But the hypothesis floundered, if not failed, when its proof could not be demonstrated on the basis of psychological studies of Augustine's reorientation that are few in effort and futile in effect. For whereas historians have generally shied away from any explicit and systematic analysis of Augustine's mental state during the critical chapter of his biography, the psychoanalysts who have treated this issue — and surprisingly, given the rich and familiar material available for theoretical testing, they are not many — have imposed conventional Freudian theory at the expense of the saint's personal as well as social history, thereby producing a configuration of the convert

¹) R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 213.

²) Lawrence J. Daly, “Psychohistory and St. Augustine's Conversion Process: An Historiographical Critique”, *Augustiniana*, 28 (1978) 231-254.

³) Roger A. Johnson, “Introduction”, *Psychohistory and Religion: The Case of “Young Man Luther”*, ed. Roger A. Johnson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977) 12.

bordering on caricature. Thus, instead of realizing the kind of unity enjoined by Collingwood's dictum, this critique of the historical and psychological literature on Augustine's conversion process discovered in that scholarship a stubborn dichotomy between self and society, "inside" and "outside", that has yet to be bridged.

Whether because of a hostility or a hesitancy it shares with the larger professional community, Augustinian historiography has, for the most part, shown itself reluctant — and, in some instances, even resistant — to establishing and exploring the connection between internal and external reality in its interpretations of the most crucial and significant transition of Augustine's life. Nor, as already indicated, has that conversion proved, in terms of existing work, successful as a test case of the value, not to mention the validity, of the psychoanalytic approach. Granted the understated ambivalence of Paula Frederiksen's similar conclusion that "All these analyses combine some important and sensitive observations with much overinterpretation and mishandling of the texts"⁴), recourse to a psychological model, nonetheless, still seems neither unwarranted nor untoward. After all, as Thomas W. Africa has reminded colleagues in classical studies, "From Thucydides and Plutarch to Eric Dodds and George Devereux, psychology has thrown much light on ancient history"⁵). Aside from the rueful complaint that such efforts are intuitive in origin and allusive in operation, skeptics in the profession especially fault "an undertaking that presumes to re-create inner experiences, which do not usually manifest themselves in clear-cut fashion through specific and forthright documents"⁶). That caveat about evidence, which tends to inhibit the pursuit of a psychological mode of inquiry among historians, is hardly applicable, however, to an investigation and interpretation of Augustine's conversion. An intimate and vivid self-analysis, the *Confessions* explicitly contains the makings of a psychological profile of an author who frankly probes the emotional and intellectual as well as the familial and cultural factors at work in the development of his personality. Because of Augustine's fascination with the complexity of human behavior and the candor of his own introspection, the claim has

⁴) Paula Frederiksen, "Augustine and his Analysts: The Possibility of a Psychohistory", *Soundings* 61, 2 (Summer 1978) 209.

⁵) Thomas W. Africa, "The Mask of an Assassin: A Psychohistorical Study of M. Junius Brutus", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8, 4 (Spring 1978) 599.

⁶) Frank E. Manuel, "The Use and Abuse of Psychology in History", *Historical Studies Today*, ed. Felix Gilbert and Stephen R. Graubard (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972) 212.

been made that "he was far and away the best — if not the very first — psychologist in the ancient world"⁷). Nor have members of the profession belittled that nomination. Terming Augustine "possibly the greatest introspective psychologist before Freud", Charles Kligerman has described the North African bishop's autobiography as "essentially a psychiatric personal history without the contaminating presence of an interviewer"⁸).

Especially given the frankness of his reconstruction of an early life admittedly affected by the rivalry of parental ambitions, "Augustine has deservedly brought down upon his own head the attentions of modern psychological interpreters"⁹). But the result has been conceptually narrow-minded and methodologically heavy-handed. Representative of what John O'Meara has perhaps too severely censured as the "crudely drawn picture" psychoanalysts have constructed of Augustine's conversion process¹⁰) is the article by James Dittes in a journal volume that includes several other psychological studies of the Latin church father¹¹). Initially posing the kind of question about motivation that is peculiar to and profitable about the psychological perspective¹²), Dittes proceeds to belie the promise of that mode of inquiry by committing factual and theoretical legerdemain. One particularly egregious instance is his statement that "Augustine shared with Joseph of Egypt and with Freud of Vienna the fate of being the first-born son of a young woman and of an older and aloof father"¹³). On the one hand, it is not at all a fact that Augustine was "the first-born son"; indeed, he was younger

⁷) A.C. Outler, ed. & trans., *Augustine: Confessions and Enchiridion* ("Library of Christian Classics", Vol. VII; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955) 15.

⁸) Charles Kligerman, M.D., "A Psychoanalytic Study of the Confessions of St. Augustine", *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 5 (1957) 470-471.

⁹) Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967) 31.

¹⁰) John J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine: The Growth of St. Augustine's Mind up to his Conversion* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1965) 50.

¹¹) James E. Dittes, "Continuities between the life and thought of Augustine", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 5 (1965) 130-140.

¹²) *Ibid.* 130: "How did Augustine happen to come finally to make a particular set of affirmations? To answer this question, the intellectual historian can trace the influence of particular people, schools, and books. But with so many potential influences available, this only pushes the question a step or two back: why should Augustine respond to *these* influences? Can there have been something about the person of Augustine ... which was participating in the process of screening and selectively responding to the range of intellectual positions available to the growing young man?"

¹³) *Ibid.* 131

than his brother Navigius¹⁴). Aside from serving to vindicate Roland Bainton's caveat about collaboration between history and psychology ("The first step is to make the utmost effort to get the facts straight.")¹⁵), Dittes' elementary error underscores, on the other hand, the vulnerability of any theory straining for validation at the expense of the evidence itself. That deceptively simple declarative sentence begins a paragraph otherwise replete with tentative terminology ("Monica seems"; "If she ... she must have"; "we may assume") that is preliminary to the announcement of the unconditional controlling assumption in Dittes' essay: "It does not take an esoteric or subtle psychological theory to *suppose* that a boy raised by such an insistent woman would develop a strong attachment and dependence upon her"¹⁶). Undaunted by the lack of corroborating data for the diagnosis that Augustine was "mom-istic" in character due to an unresolved Oedipus complex, he readily explains the conversion experience as the repression of a neurotic conflict: "After years of the most vigorous assertion of his independence, Augustine submitted. He surrendered to his mother ... He abandoned, in short, the effort to be a father. Instead, he become an obedient son"¹⁷). Such fallacious analysis, in which the reach for monocausal explanation far exceeds the grasp of multi-variable reality, understandably invites the scorn of already skeptical historians that — to quote O'Meara again — "too much has been made in this matter of questionable psychological theories, too little care has been taken in their application, and not enough attention has been paid to the evidence"¹⁸).

If psychoanalysts have failed to pay sufficient attention to the historical data, historians can be faulted for, at best, merely making allusion to the emotional content of Augustine's testimony. Gleaning the biographical details but glossing over the psychological constituents to be found in the *Confessions*, their treatments of that religious odyssey have been essentially impressionistic in narration and fundamentally unsystematic in interpretation. Nock's abbreviated analysis of Augustine's conversion, for example, presents it as a matter of rational

¹⁴) Augustine *de beata vita* I, 6, II, 7 & 14; *de ordine* I, 3, 7.

¹⁵) Roland H. Bainton, "Psychiatry and History: An Examination of Erikson's *Young Man Luther*", *Psychohistory and Religion*, ed. R.A. Johnson, 56.

¹⁶) Dittes, *art. cit.* (n. 11 above) 133. (Emphasis added.)

¹⁷) *Ibid.* 118 & 137.

¹⁸) O'Meara, *op. cit.* (n. 10 above) 207.

calculation of options, a decision arrived at without any sense of urgency or attended by any complexity of feeling; in much the same vein, O'Meara's "new study of the development of Augustine's mind", while insisting that moral conflict was as much a part of the decision-making process as intellectual confusion, is, in the end, much more concerned with the rationality of the choice than the personality of the convert¹⁹). Even Peter Brown's first-rate biography, with its express recognition of the "deep psychological authenticity" of the *Confessions* as "a manifesto of the inner world" of its author²⁰), harbors an ambivalence about the efficacy of the psychological perspective that forfeits the anticipated correlation of the cognitive and affective dimensions of Augustine's "inner world". "The studies known to me", Brown comments in explaining why the very data that invite psychological speculation seem, in his opinion, to inhibit historical explanation, "... show that it is as difficult as it is desirable to combine competence as an historian with sensitivity as a psychologist"²¹). Quite frankly, however, all that prevented Brown himself from fully realizing that combination was not doing explicitly and systematically what, in fact, he was doing implicitly and intuitively so well. Both overstating the difficulty of collaboration and underestimating the range of his own capabilities, he has produced a work rightly considered, in Fredriksen's apt phrase, "a 'closet' psychobiography"²²). Yet the very success of Brown's tentative and cautious venture into this area suggests, if it does not strengthen, the feasibility of employing a model that spells out and stresses the psychological variables at work in Augustine's conversion process. Moreover, not only is such a mode of inquiry feasible, but it is also available for elucidating the circumstances and explicating the causes of that change in human behavior over time. As sociologists have already been informed, "... the body of [psychoanalytic] theory exists for *anyone* to use. Neither personal analysis nor clinical training is a guarantee of superior insight"²³).

¹⁹) A.D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933) 261ff.; O'Meara, *op. cit.*, 8.

²⁰) Brown, *op. cit.* (n. 9 above) 113-114 & 168.

²¹) *Ibid.* 31, n. 4. The cited works are "notably B. Legewie, *Augustinus: Eine Psychographie*, 1925, E.R. Dodds, 'Augustine's Confessions: a study of spiritual maladjustment', *Hibbert Journal*, 26, 1927-1928, pp. 459-473, Rebecca West, *St. Augustine*, 1933 and C. Klegemann [sic], 'A psychoanalytic study of the Confessions of St. Augustine', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, V, 1957, 469-484".

²²) Fredriksen, *art. cit.* (n. 4 above) 214.

²³) Fred Weinstein and Gerald M. Platt, *Psychoanalytic Sociology: An Essay on the Interpretation of Historical Data and the Phenomena of Collective Behavior* (Baltimore and

Despite the wrongheaded scruples as well as outdated theories that have handicapped previous research efforts into "l'importance de cette crise ... dans l'évolution psychologique d'un homme"²⁴), there are, then, both empirical data and theoretical constructs at hand for construing and controlling a psychohistorical analysis of Augustine's decision to commit himself fully to Catholic Christianity. Indeed, Erik Erikson — the publication of whose *Young Man Luther* provoked "an intense and prolonged controversy concerning the viability of psychoanalysis as an ally of historical inquiry"²⁵) — has invited as well as initiated interdisciplinary co-operation of the kind ruefully wished for by Brown:

But we clinicians [says Erikson] have learned in recent years that we cannot lift a case history out of history, even as we suspect that historians, when they try to separate the logic of the historic event from that of the life histories which intersect in it, leave a number of vital historical problems unattended. ... Clinical as well as historical scholars have much to learn by going back and forth between these two kinds of recorded history²⁶).

Curiously what prompted that recognition of the need for collaboration was a dissatisfaction with dogmatism and reductionism in psychological treatments of Luther that have likewise plagued Augustinian studies. The censure Erikson levelled against Preserved Smith's claim that "Luther is a thoroughly typical example of the neurotic quasi-hysterical sequence of an infantile sex-complex"²⁷) could just as well be applied to James Dittes' portrait of Augustine as "a cowering 'mama's boy'"²⁸). Eschewing that kind of theoretical rigidity and historical insensitivity, the author of *Childhood and Society* (whose cardinal premise that "societies create the only conditions under which human growth is possible"²⁹) became the informing principle of his later biographies of

London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) 1, n. 1 (emphasis added); the same point is made in their "History and Theory: The Question of Psychoanalysis", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2 (1972) 432, n. 33. This is not to say that such expertise does not decidedly help.

²⁴) Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (4th ed.; Paris: Editions E. de Boccard, 1958) 164-165.

²⁵) Johnson, *op. cit.* (n. 3 above) 1.

²⁶) Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1958) 15-16 (hereinafter cited as "Luther").

²⁷) *Ibid.* 28, quoting from Smith's "Luther's Early Development in The Light of Psychoanalysis", *American Journal of Psychology* 24 (1913).

²⁸) Dittes, *art. cit.* (n. 11 above) 133.

²⁹) Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950) 277.

Gorki, Luther, and Gandhi) developed an approach seeking to incorporate a sensitive appreciation of the mental contour of a personality with an equally sensible attention to its social context. As Manuel has pointed out, "Erikson, joining forces with Freudian ego psychologists, struck off in a truly new direction of psychological history, and in the sixties popularized the term 'psychohistory'"³⁰). The distinctive features of Erikson's contribution to a social perspective as amenable to historical inquiry on the part of psychoanalysis have been more specifically delineated by Weinstein and Platt:

First, he has indicated the positive as well as the negative consequences of the resolutions of conflict attached to the several developmental stages; by indicating the sources of strength involved in human endeavor Erikson helped to correct the earlier picture that one might easily have come away with — namely, that anything a man did that was significant enough to be worthy of attention must have had some neurotic core. Second, Erikson elaborated psychosocial stages of development which complement the psychosexual stages described by Freud; this is precisely the kind of step which links the demands made upon children and adults to the specific society in which they live. And, third, Erikson extended developmental stages beyond the oedipal and latency periods through adolescence to maturity and old age³¹).

As a result, Erikson's biographical studies neither assume that any religious decision is simply a rational and conscious choice made without severe emotional and environmental pressures nor presume that a subject's religiosity is *a priori* proof of some neurosis indelibly fixed in early childhood. Rather, by coupling the needs of the self with the demands of society, he sets out to demonstrate that, as in Luther's own case, "his renaissance of faith portrays a vigorous recovery of his own ego-initiative"³²).

Given a psychological frame-of-reference whose orientation is both sympathetic to and systematic about religious behavior, Augustinian historiography would do well to test at least the applicability of Erikson's *Young Man Luther* as a model for configuring and investigating Augustine's conversion. For, besides the striking resemblances between their situationally grounded quests for meaning and belonging in culturally changing worlds (the relative similarity, for example, of the

³⁰) Manuel, *art. cit.* (n. 6 above) 221.

³¹) Weinstein and Platt, *op. cit.* (n. 23 above) 57-58.

³²) Erikson, *Luther* 206.

personal, parental, and societal factors at work in the agonized passage from puberty to maturity, not to mention the decisive impact of reading texts from Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* in triggering release from the paralysis of uncertainty and indecision), each man's conversion essentially involved a process in which the final disclosure of God's will depended on the ultimate discovery of one's self. What Luther unconsciously experienced — and Erikson has explicated — Augustine had already consciously expressed: "But where was I when I looked for you [Lord]? You were there before my eyes, but I had deserted even my own self. I could not find myself, much less find you" (*Conf.* V 2)³³). That psychologically revealing statement, neatly encapsulating the gist of the struggles recounted in the saint's autobiography, substantially corresponds, moreover, to the subjective ("ego") and objective ("self") aspects of Erikson's theory of identity and its formation³⁴). To be sure, even a perusal of the *Confessions* suggests that Augustine eventually achieved no less than "something of a *self-realization coupled with mutual recognition*"³⁵). When interpreted specifically within a research framework postulating ego-identity "as a subjective experience and as a dynamic fact", however, his autobiography becomes as much an inquiry into as a story about how "self-esteem grows to be a conviction that the ego is learning effective steps toward a tangible collective future, that it is developing into a defined ego within a social reality"³⁶).

Augustine's account of losing and finding his self in terms of a network of relationships extending from Thagaste through Carthage to Milan conforms almost exactly to Erikson's description of the pattern of identity formation:

³³) St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. w. an Intro. by R.S. Pine-Coffin (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961) 92. Hereinafter, the pagination of the Penguin edition will be included with the recension within parentheses in the text of this paper.

³⁴) Erik H. Erikson, "The Problem of Ego Identity", *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 4 (1956) 105 (hereinafter cited as "Ego").

³⁵) *Ibid.* 69.

³⁶) Erik H. Erikson, "Ego Development and Historical Change", *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, II (New York: International Universities Press, 1946) 362-363. "The conscious feeling of having a personal identity is based on two simultaneous observations: the immediate perception of one's selfsameness and continuity in time; and the simultaneous perception of the fact that others recognize one's sameness and continuity. What I propose to call ego-identity concerns more than the mere fact of existence, as conveyed by personal identity; it is the ego quality of this existence.

"Ego-identity, then, in its subjective aspect, is the awareness of the fact that there is a self-sameness and continuity to the ego's synthesizing methods and that these methods are effective in safeguarding the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others" (*ibid.*).

It arises from the selective repudiation and mutual assimilation of childhood identifications, and their absorption in a new configuration, which, in turn, is dependent on the process by which a *society* (often through subsocieties) *identifies the young individual*, recognizing him as somebody who had to become the way he is, and who, being the way he is, is taken for granted³⁷).

Indeed, the complex interplay of personal associations and social situations reconstructed in the *Confessions* reveals an author very much aware of and alert to the sequential and cumulative course of human experiences. Anyone who recognized that he had left but not lost his infancy (*Conf.* I 8, p. 29) will not have quarreled with the view that "Man is not organized like an archaeological mound, in layers; as he grows he makes the past part of all future, and every environment, as he once experienced it, part of the present environment"³⁸). Overlapping as it unfolds, an individual's identity is, to quote Robert Coles, "an 'accrued confidence' that ... in the second or third decades reaches a point of decisive substance, or indeed fails to do so"³⁹). What Augustine himself intuited as "the brink of resolution ... the step by which I should die to death and become alive to life" (*Conf.* VIII 11, p. 175), Erikson has made the crucial — and perhaps most controversial — operational stage in his structural-developmental theory of personality. "I have called the major crisis of adolescence", he says,

the *identity crisis*; it occurs in that period of the life cycle when each youth must forge for himself some central perspective and direction, some working unity, out of the effective remnants of his childhood and the hopes of his anticipated adulthood; he must detect some meaningful resemblance between what he has come to see in himself and what others judge and expect him to be⁴⁰).

For *Young Man Luther*, of course, that configuration of identity took place during the twelve years (1505-1517) Martin spent as a member of the Augustinian order. Erikson's thesis has been succinctly stated by Donald Meyer:

It began with his decision to be a monk; by every means he knew Luther tried to become what, so far as he knew, he wanted to be; and he failed. The triumphant conclusion to his crisis was a

³⁷) Erikson, "Ego", 68.

³⁸) Erikson, *Luther* 117-118.

³⁹) Robert Coles, *Erik H. Erikson: The Growth of His Work* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970) 165.

⁴⁰) Erikson, *Luther* 14.

consequence of a breakthrough to a higher stage of self-integration, a fuller recognition of the grounds of selfhood generally⁴¹).

No less, it seems, could be said of Augustine's *Confessions*, which — with all due allowance for a different data base — is also essentially the history of “a rather endangered young man” who, without forfeiting his past and foreclosing his future, likewise was “suffering and deviating dangerously through what appears to be a prolonged adolescence”⁴²).

As defined and described by Erikson, Luther's “coming of age”, bracketed between the decisions to enter the monastery at Erfurt and to quit in Wittenberg, provides, then, a framework for studying Augustine's conversion in equivalent terms. Although popularly abused and professionally misused⁴³), the conceptual scheme of identity crisis seems especially appropriate as a heuristic device in analysing that religious transformation. Precisely because it is rooted in a conception that conversion is neither a neurotic product nor an idiosyncratic process, its application does not entail susceptibility to the faults already noted in previous treatments of that phenomenon by conventional Freudians and traditional historians. A compelling recommendation for its immediate adoption is that Erikson's basic insistence that “early development cannot be understood on its own terms alone”⁴⁴) prescribes an approach that scrupulously avoids what he has awkwardly (albeit deliberately) termed “originology” — “a habit of thinking which reduces every human situation to an analogy with an earlier one, and most of all to that earliest, simplest, and most infantile precursor which is assumed to be its ‘origin’”⁴⁵). Particularly prevalent among psychoanalysts still locked in to a primitive Freudian paradigm, this bias in perspective has grievously flawed their interpretations of Augustine's behavior. Even a sensitive and

⁴¹) Donald B. Meyer, Review of *Young Man Luther* by Erik H. Erikson, in *History and Theory* 1 (1960-61) 291.

⁴²) Erikson, *Luther* 15.

⁴³) Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968) 15-16: “‘Identity’ and ‘Identity Crisis’ have come to be used in a great variety of fields. But more often than not they circumscribe something so large and seemingly also so self-evident that to demand a definition would be petty. At other times, they designate something made so small for purposes of measurement that the overall meaning is lost and the thing could just as well be called something else. ... Such usages have, in fact, become so indiscriminate that the other day a German reviewer of a new edition of my first book (in which I first used the term in the context of psychoanalytic ego theory) called the concept the pet subject of the *amerikanische Popularpsychologie*”.

⁴⁴) Erikson, “Ego”, 76.

⁴⁵) Erikson, *Luther* 18.

competent scholar like Eric Dodds, in an essay which was one of the first serious attempts to psychoanalyze the young Augustine, explained his "spiritual maladjustment" as the permanent consequence of a neurosis engendered in childhood by the trauma of parental incompatibility:

Duae voluntates meae confligebant inter se ("two wills were at war within me"): this is the recurrent ground-theme of the *Confessions* ... The origins of the conflict are to be looked for in Augustine's family history. ... Of this ill-assorted union [of the pious Christian Monica and the pagan squire Patricius] Augustine was the fruit. It was his tragic destiny to combine in a small and sickly body the warring souls of both his parents and a fastidious intellect which served each soul in turn⁴⁶).

Although the deleterious effects of intra-familial hostility (especially on the part of Monica) on Augustine's personality from nursery through episcopacy has become the *idée fixe* of psychologically-oriented analyses of his conversion experience, its popularity (outside as well as inside of scholarship) should not be taken as proof of its validity. Quite the contrary, it is, in fact, an hypothesis that has proved neither viable nor valuable. On the one hand, the positing of a fundamental conflict between Patricius and Monica internalized within their son is an allegation that cannot find substantiation in the *Confessions*⁴⁷); on the

⁴⁶) E.R. Dodds, "Augustine's *Confessions*: A Study of Spiritual Maladjustment", *The Hibbert Journal* 26 (October 1927-July 1928) 460-461 (The opening quotation is from *Conf* VIII 5). Augustine himself would not have agreed with that "dualistic" interpretation: "When I was trying to reach a decision about serving the Lord my God, as I had long intended to do, it was I who willed to take this course and again it was I who willed not to take it. It was I and I alone. So I was at odds with myself. I was throwing myself into confusion. All this happened to me although I did not want it, but it did not prove that there was some second mind in me besides my own. ...

"So let us hear no more of their assertion, when they observe two wills in conflict in one man, that there are two opposing minds in him, one good and the other bad, and that they are in conflict because they spring from two opposing substance and two opposing principles" (*Conf.* VIII 10, pp. 173-174).

⁴⁷) Indeed, Augustine, while admitting what Peter Brown (*op. cit.* [n. 9 above] 41) has termed "subterranean tension" within his family, specifically states, nonetheless, that the circumstances of his parents' relations, though strained, were more harmonious than in most other homes in Thagaste: "... my mother was brought up in modesty and temperance. It was you [Lord] who taught her to obey her parents rather than they who taught her to obey you, and when she was old enough, they gave her in marriage to a man whom she served as lord. She never ceased to try to gain him for you as a convert, for the virtues with which you had adorned her, and for which he respected, loved, and admired her, were like so many voices constantly speaking to him of you. He was unfaithful to her, but her patience was so great that his infidelity never became a cause of quarreling between them. For she looked to you to show him mercy, hoping that chastity would come with faith.

other hand, the failure to document that proposition with evidence instead of speculation simply confirms the judgment, made on other grounds, that "it is not possible to render an analysis of historical and cultural problems in terms of drives and psychosexual phases"⁴⁸). Alternatively, then, the major advantage of Erikson's *modus operandi* is that he extends the range of analysis beyond infancy to encompass the stages of adolescence and adulthood as independent foci of growth and development in the individual. "Psychoanalysis has tended to subordinate the later stages of life to those of childhood", Erikson has complained.

It has lifted to the rank of a cosmology the undeniable fact that man's adulthood contains a persistent childishness: that vistas of the future always reflect the mirages of a missed past, that apparent progression can harbor partial regression, and firm accomplishments, hidden childish fulfillment. ...

In this book we will add ... the historical concomitance which teaches us how, in the period between puberty and adulthood, the resources of tradition fuse with new inner resources to create something potentially new: a new person; and with this new person a new generation, and with that, a new era⁴⁹).

Thus, Erikson's emphatic conviction that adolescence rather than childhood is the key to finding the coherence of the adult Luther echoes Augustine's perception of the course of his own developmental stage as it comes to a climax, after more than a decade of working itself out, in his thirty-second year: "By now my adolescence, with all its shameful sins, was dead. I was approaching mature manhood, but the older I grew, the more disgraceful was my self-delusion" (*Conf.* VII 1, p. 133). To that extent, the *Confessions*, with its account and analysis of a recognizably

Though he was remarkably kind, he had a hot temper, but my mother knew better than to say or do anything to resist him when he was angry. If his anger was unreasonable, she used to wait until he was calm and composed and then took the opportunity of explaining what she had done. Many women, whose faces were disfigured by blows from husbands far sweeter-tempered than her own, used to gossip together and complain of the behavior of their men-folk. My mother would meet this complaint with another — about the women's tongues. ... These women knew well enough how hot-tempered a husband my mother had to cope with. They used to remark how surprising it was that they had never heard, or seen any marks to show, that Patricius had beaten his wife, or that there had been any domestic disagreement between them, even for one day" (*Conf.* IX 9, pp. 194-195).

⁴⁸) Weinstein and Platt, *op. cit.* (n. 23 above) 47.

⁴⁹) Erikson, *Luther* 18-19, 20.

transitional period rooted in infancy but reaching for maturity, can be likened to a kind of palimpsest of *Young Man Luther*.

To propose the hypothesis that Augustine's conversion process was an "identity crisis" does not mean, of course, that its demonstration is self-evident or its interpretation self-explanatory. But the employment of that conceptualization does render an otherwise singular event amenable to an exploratory model that is both comparative and theoretical in approach. The analysis of that conversion especially requires such an approach, since, as Brown has tellingly indicated,

The *Confessions* are, quite succinctly, the story of Augustine's "heart", or his "feelings" — his *affectus*. An intellectual event, such as the reading of a new book, is registered only, as it were, from the inside, in terms of the sheer excitement of the experience, of its impact on Augustine's feelings: of the *Hortensius* of Cicero, for instance, he would never say "it changed my views" but, so characteristically, "it changed my way of feeling" — *mutavit affectum meum*⁵⁰).

This is not to say that Augustine's reconstruction of his critical passage to adulthood was some Proustian recollection of *temps perdu*. Rather, the story of his past, culled from a precocious memory, constituted an inquiry into his own identity. "In [my memory] I meet myself as well. I remember myself and what I had done, when and where I did it, and the state of my mind at the time" (*Conf.* X 8, p. 215). The emphasis that he places on the affective as well as the cognitive aspects of an experience suggests, therefore, that, in his mind, emotional effect became a measure of its significance. Yet, despite Augustine's admission that "My memory contains my emotions" (*Conf.* X 14, p. 220), that criterion of narration in his autobiography remains ignored — and unexploited — as a clue to its interpretation. Perhaps sharing his opinion that the "hairs [on a man's head] are more easily counted than his feelings and the emotions of his heart" (*Conf.* IV 14, p. 84), historians have overlooked the connection Augustine made between emotions and situations in the recall of past behavior. By not taking it into account, though, they may have forfeited a valuable hint about how to handle his conversion, a phenomenon "which is of course strongly psychological in nature and for the most part nonempirical"⁵¹). The emotional factor is,

⁵⁰) Brown, *op. cit.* (n. 9 above) 169 (the citation is from *Conf.* III 4).

⁵¹) Ronald L. Johnstone, *Religion and Society in Interaction: The Sociology of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 92.

however, an insight that psychological history, whose claims traditional historians are wont to dismiss or deride as essentially questionable and eventually quixotic for their task, is particularly equipped and disposed to pursue; for, as Weinstein and Platt have pointed out, "psychoanalytic theory has a remarkable potential for systematically explaining ... the fundamental reasons for behavior, not only in terms of interest, but also in terms of the emotional based for compliance or non-compliance"⁵²).

Accordingly, it is argued here that Erikson's *Young Man Luther* provides a theoretical model for organizing and explaining comparatively Augustine's *Confessions*, insofar as the former yields a set of transferable concepts (much of the evidence for which is based on clinical studies) applicable to the group of phenomena described in the latter. What transpired at Milan in the late summer of 386 was, then, neither unique nor isolated. Viewed from within the Erikson framework, Augustine's "identity crisis" marked the conclusion of a psychosocial stage which occurs, with varying intensity and longevity, during the transition from adolescence to maturity, when options are to be reviewed, doubts faced and resolved, and commitments made. Thus, if Augustine, like Luther, can be perceived as someone "beset with a syndrome of conflicts", to which he also "found a spiritual solution"⁵³), the model which Erikson has developed includes concepts like "moratorium", "identity diffusion", and "negative identity" which are available as well as amenable for construing the chain of events described in the *Confessions*. More significantly for historical research, its adoption permits a longitudinal analysis of the clusters of personal, ideological, and occupational configurations that both shaped Augustine's behavior at particular phases and shifted with the passage of time, thereby generating different relationships. As Erikson himself realized, "The fact that Luther experienced these clearly separate stages of religious revelation might make it possible to establish a psychological rationale for the conversion of other outstanding religionists, where tradition has come to insist on the transmission of a total event appealing to popular faith"⁵⁴).

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⁵²) Weinstein and Platt, *art. cit.* (n. 23 above) 419.

⁵³) Erikson, *Luther* 15.

⁵⁴) *Ibid.* 39.