«Ecce audio vocem de vicina domo» (Conf. 8,12,29)

The above words introduce what can be well be regarded as the principal climax of the narrative of the *Confessions*, when Augustine's conversion is brought about by obeying a mysterious voice which he takes to be of divine origin. The immediate setting for that climax is generally known as the conversion-scene in the garden at Milan, for it was in that city that Augustine was living when the events transpired. The garden involved was attached to the house which Augustine was then sharing with his mother Monica and his two friends and fellow-countrymen — Nebridius and Alypius[1]).

As is testified by the preceding pages of the *Confessions* Augustine had made a long and painful spiritual pilgrimage towards total commitment to the truth of the Catholic Church. However, according to the opening chapters of the eighth book he was still held back by the most painful renunciation of all — that of his long-accustomed indulgence in sexual gratification. It is with the final breaking of this strongest of bonds that the subsequent chapters of the eighth book are concerned (8,6,13).

In view of both their indelible portrayal and also of the lengthy controversy which has surrounded them, the events of the conversion-scene are too well-known to students of the text to require detailed repetition here. The immediate cause of the events was the visit of a certain Ponticianus and his edifying story about the conversion of two of his comrades (8,6,15). As has been observed[2]), this story is remarkably similar to the events about to be described in the conversion of Augustine and his friend Alypius.

According to the narrative of the *Confessions* (8,7,16-18), Ponticianus' little story had a profound effect upon Augustine, causing him to cringe with self-loathing even while he was listening. After the departure of Ponticianus, Augustine's inner turmoil boiled over into

[1]) *Confessions* 8,6,14. Henceforth, such a reference to the *Confessions* would be in the body of the text as simply: (8,6,14). It is also noteworthy that Nebridius was absent on the day of the events in question. (*ibid.*).

[2]) P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin*, Paris, 1968, pp. 197-8. In future, this wellknown book will simply be referred to as *Recherches*.

violent physical expression which so shocked Alypius as to reduce him to stunned silence (8,8,19-20). Augustine's inner struggle was so extreme as to admit of no compromise. Accordingly, followed by the silent Alypius he withdrew to the garden of their house where, without interruption, the struggle could be settled once and for all. That this act of withdrawing to the garden is no mere incidental detail is indicated by Augustine's repetitively describing the event in the text (8,8,19). I have shown elsewhere that the reason for this insistence is Augustine's interesting association of sin with wild vegetation and of grace with gardens[3]). The emphasis upon going into the garden therefore is not only an auspicious detail, but indicates the deliberate care with which the conversion-scene is described.

Once in the garden, Augustine and Alypius seated themselves as far as possible from the house (8,8,19). The intensity of Augustine's inner struggle of self against self is reflected in the use of "will" (*velle*) or its equivalents some two dozen times in the next few pages of text (8,8,20-8,10,22). After some digressional considerations on the Manichees' theory of the two wills (8,10,22-24), the drama of the conversion-scene resumes with a graphic depiction of Augustine's inner conflict (8,11,25-27) which leads on to the urgent need for a great outpouring of tears. In order that he may weep unrestrainedly, Augustine arises and leaves even Alypius (8,12,28).

Next there occurs the now-famous scene with Augustine's act of casting himself down on the ground beneath a certain fig-tree (*sub quadam fici arbore*) (8,12,28)[4]) and giving free rein to his tears. Regarding this detail in the description, first Courcelle, then especially Buchheit, have left no reasonable doubt as to the purposeful presence of the fig-tree in the scene, thus manifesting once again the careful craftsmanship with which the conversion-scene has been described[5]).

It is while he is in this prone position and engaged in weeping and prayerful entreaties to God that Augustine hears the mysterious voice from a/the neighbouring house: *ecce audio vocem de vicina domo* (8,12,29). The voice was that of either a boy or a girl, and was chanting

[3]) See my 'The Barren Field in Augustine's Confessions' *Augustinian Studies* 8 (1977) 55-70.

[4]) All Latin citations are from the Teubner-Skutella text of 1969. English extracts are from the Pilkington translation.

[5]) Courcelle, *Recherches* pp. 188-202. Vinzenz Buchheit, 'Augustinus unter dem Feigenbaum, (zu Conf. VIII)' *Vigiliae Christianae*, 22 (1968) 257-271.

repeatedly the words: "*tolle lege, tolle lege*" ("take up and read, take up and read"). This mysterious voice intruded upon Augustine's own personal conflict, causing him first to wonder if any children's games employed such a chant, then to interpret the voice as a divine command to take up the volume of Paul which he had been reading and to seek enlightenment from the first verses he happened upon. After returning to the place where he had left the book with Alypius, there occurred the well-known reading of *Romans* 13,13-14, and Augustine's miraculous conversion, followed by that of Alypius, from reading the next verses. They went into the house and told Augustine's mother, Monica. There was great rejoicing that, with the conversion of her wayward son, the pious mother's prayers of many years had at last been answered.

That particular episode of the mysterious voice which Augustine claims to have heard, can well be regarded as the focal point of the scholarly controversy which has for so long surrounded the conversion-scene of the *Confessions*[6]). Indeed, by 1958 the controversy over that scene had become so marked as to prompt Marrou to publish his study: "La querelle autour du Tolle lege" in which he attempted to summarize the principal opinions, with particular attention to refuting the fictionalist interpretation of the eminent Pierre Courcelle[7]). In closing his study, Marrou regretted that the altercation had ever arisen, being concerned, as he saw it, with *un petit épisode, presque sans importance, un détail.*

One obvious disadvantage about this verdict was that it contradicted what seems to be Augustine's intended role of the mysterious voice as the climax of the narrative of the *Confessions*. As such, it was anything but *un petit épisode, presque sans importance, un détail.* Marrou's opinion also suffered from a regrettable disregard for the common modern attitude towards anyone who claims to be guided by a "voice". Such a person would become the object of intense and

[6]) For a bibliography of the relevant literature see *Fichier Augustinien* vol. 1 (Matières) pp. 248-249, as also Solignac's concise bibliography and valuable notes (pp. 546-549) in *Les Confessions*, livres VIII-XIII, in volume 14 of the *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (Paris, 1962). While much of the controversy seems to have grown out of Courcelle's articles from 1951 onwards, these by no means mark the beginning of the altercation. For example, an extensive survey and criticism of much earlier opinions on the subject can be found in U. Manucci's 'La conversione di S. Agostino e la critica recente' in *Miscellanea Agostiniana* (Roma 1930-31), vol. II, pp. 23-47. A treatment of more recent opinions is to be found in F. Bolgiani's *La conversione di S. Agostino e l'VIIIo libro delle 'Confessioni'*, (Turin 1956), especially pp. 15-52 and 110-126.

[7]) H.-I. Marrou, *art. cit.*, *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 53 (1958) 47-57.

widespread suspicion (not to mention continual surveillance), thereby demonstrating quite dramatically that the very last thing that contemporary culture would do, would be to dismiss the claim as *presque sans importance*. Therefore, far from disposing of the problem, Marrou's well-intended opinion, upon a little reflection, merely demonstrates its insistence.

As far as I have been able to ascertain, the many studies on the mysterious "voice" of the conversion-scene all seem to suffer from one severe deficiency. Understandably enough (being by scholars) they all assume that the *Confessions* was written primarily for scholars and therefore to be pored over in the secluded silence of a study. And therein, as I hope to show, lies a fundamental flaw in the general approach to the topic of the voice of the conversion-scene.

First, it is necessary to recall that the *Confessions* was written some thousand years before the Gutenberg galaxy[8]) appeared on the horizon. In that age, long before mass-production, books were both rare and precious. Secondly, from a similar lack of mass-education, very few people were capable of reading the comparatively small number of books then in existence. Both these factors, I would suggest, combined to make of reading a highly social occasion. As a result, a reading was indeed a recital in the modern, public sense of the word[9]). Such, for instance, is seen to be the case in every reference to "read" and "reading" in the Bible. One searches in vain for a case of silent and solitary reading.

The vocal and public nature of reading in the ancient world stands in complete contrast to the widespread modern habit of silent and solitary reading. Indeed, it has been claimed that the first reference to silent reading occurs in Augustine's *Confessions* when the author recounts his various visits to Bishop Ambrose who ignored his caller and continued reading in silence (6,3,3). The utter amazement that this silent reading aroused in Augustine has been preserved for posterity in his puzzlings immediately subsequent to his description of the event.

In addition to these various considerations about the vocal and social nature of reading in Augustine's world, there is the important factor that he had himself been educated to the practice of rhetoric. By profession therefore, he regarded writings as essentially destined to public readings, beginning probably with the group of friends which continually sur-

[8]) *Cf.* Marshall McLuhan's book of the same name (1962).
[9]) See Courcelle, *Recherches* p. 155 & p. 197, n. 4.

rounded him. It would seem to follow therefore that his works were written *to be read aloud and in company*. Moreover, by reason of its very nature, this is particularly true of his *Confessions* in which he is confessing before God and before his fellow-men in the physical sense of an actual public recital: *tibi confiteor ut audiant homines* (10,3,3). Furthermore, as regards the *Confessions* itself, it is explicitly stated by Augustine that he intended the work to be read aloud and in company, when he writes in the tenth book: *nam confessiones praeteritorum meorum ... cum leguntur et audiuntur excitant cor.* (10,3,4).

This highly vocal character of the *Confessions* seems to be reflected in its vocabulary. Thus, *vox* and the verb *vocare* occur some one hundred forty times in the text, while in a complementary fashion, the verb *audire* is found on some one hundred eighty-three occasions[10]). Similarly, there are over fifty references to the ear; over sixty occurrences of *cantare* and even about three dozen cases of shouting (*clamare*).

In such a general context, as also in view of the preceding considerations, the mysterious voice in the conversion-scene becomes far less incongruous than first appears. In fact, and on the contrary, it now seems particularly appropriate as the climax to a dramatic recital, which would appear to be the manner in which the author intended the work to be read in the first place — whence the dramatic demonstrative adverb and the present tense in the phrase: *ecce audio vocem de vicina domo*. However, the centuries which have intervened since the writing of the *Confessions* have effected subtle and sharp changes in perspective, as has been explained. The net effect is that the voice of the conversion-scene is perceived by the modern reader in a completely different manner from that intended by the original author.

Another interesting aspect of the voice in the conversion-scene becomes obvious upon searching out other kinds of voices in the *Confessions*. That case is then seen to be merely the most prominent example of a fairly common phenomenon which may be termed the oracular voice. Courcelle has pointed out that this voice takes many different forms in the course of the *Confessions*[11]). The present study will

[10]) The source for these and similar data on the *Confessions* is a recently constructed *Index Verborum* produced at the School of Computer Science of the University of New Brunswick. Besides myself (the sole representative of St. Thomas University), the project involved Prof. J. Robert Smith of the Classics Dept. and Prof. Rodney H. Cooper of the School of Computer Science. The entire system was designed and the programs were written by Mr. Peter Ruddock, Programmer Analyst of the Computing Centre. The entire Skutella text was typed into the computer by Debra Ruddock.

[11]) See 'Les voix dans les Confessions', pp. 291-301 in *Recherches*.

only be concerned with those of demonstrable relevance to the voice of the conversion-scene.

In the first place, there are to be found what may be termed the oracular voices of Scripture. Indeed, early in the eighth book one such example anticipates the general renunciation of sex in the conversion-scene, when Augustine reports of hearing from the mouth of Scripture: *audieram ex ore veritatis esse spadones qui se ipsos absciderunt propter regnum caelorum* (8,1,2)[12]). Again in regard to the same outcome, the tenth book is notable in using the oracular voice of Scripture to underline repeatedly both the voice and the general message of renunciation of carnal concupiscence from the conversion-scene. This latter aspect is also in keeping with the stern self-examination of that book.

In the first of these repetitions, Augustine uses exactly the same *audio vocem* phrase of the conversion-scene, but uses *Luke* 21, 34, instead of *Romans* 13, 13-14: *audio vocem iubentis dei mei: non graventur corda vestra in crapula et ebrietate* (10,31,45). A few lines further along, essentially the same message is repeated, in the same oracular fashion, only this time using *Ecclesiasticus* 18, 30: *audivi aliam vocem tuam: post concupiscentias tuas non eas et a voluptate tua vetans.* Notable here is that the oracular voice is heard in the past tense. Yet another repetition of the renunciation is found further along in the text, but with a further departure from the form of communication of the conversion-scene. This time there is no mention of a voice, but only of having heard what is essentially the same message: *audivi alium rogantem, ut accipiat: aufer a me, inquit, concupiscentias ventris*[13]).

These manifold repetitions of what is essentially the same message of *Romans* 13, 13 to 14[14]) in the conversion-scene demonstrate the importance that Augustine attached to the biblical injunction and precisely as coming *from the voice of Scripture.* However, outside the carefully constructed drama of the conversion-scene, the voice from the neighbouring house is no longer considered significant[15]).

So much then for the supposed uniqueness of the voice of the

[12]) The reference is to *Matt.* 19, 12.

[13]) *Ecclesiasticus.* 23, 6.

[14]) *Non in comessationibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubilibus et impudicitiis ... sed induite dominum Iesum Christum.*

[15]) This may well be contrasted with the repetitive insistence in the third book upon the fact that God heard his mother's prayers: *exaudisti eam, domine. Exaudisti eam nec despexisti lacrimas eius ... exaudisti eam.* (3,11,19).

conversion-scene. It owes its prominence partly to the high drama of the scene and partly to the positioning of that voice right at the climax of the events. Deprived of these circumstances, both the voice and the message are found repetitively in the tenth book, as has been seen. Finally, in regard to this biblical type of oracular voice, it is significant that in the twelfth book of the *Confessions*, Augustine refers to Scripture itself speaking: *hoc enim sentio, deus meus, cum audio loquentem scripturam tuam: in principio fecit caelum et terram* ... (12,13,16).

The second kind of oracular voice of interest here is attributed directly to God and is concerned with His calling His chosen ones back to Himself. Thus, as Augustine says to God: *vocasti gentes in haereditatem tuam* (7,9,15). Other instances of this communal calling (sometimes using the first person plural) are not uncommon in the *Confessions*[16]). Corresponding to this type of calling are the references to returning (*redire*) to God, which are commoner in the first four, and the last four books[17]). Connected with these general allusions to God's calling and the reciprocation of creatures, there are also to be found a number of general references to those who are far (*longe*) from God[18]).

Coming next to the personal case of Augustine himself in these various contexts, there are some dozen references in the *Confessions* to his being far (*longe*) from God[19]), with some referring to his going even further away[20]). He refers also to hearing the voice of God calling upon him to return: *audivi vocem tuam post me, ut redirem* (12,10,10). Significantly too, he describes God as calling insistently from afar in many different kinds of voices: *institisti crebescens multimodis vocibus, ut audirem de longinquo et converterer* (13,1,1). Of the many different kinds of voice used by God, that of a boy or of a girl in the conversion-scene is the most memorable: *audio vocem ... quasi pueri an puellae, nescio ...* (8,12,29)[21]). These personal allusions to hearing the oracular voice of God in its various disguises and to the responses of Augustine are not

[16]) For other examples, see: 2,7,15; 4,11,19; 11,1,1; 11,2,4; 11,7,9 & 12,25,34.

[17]) 1,13,20; 1,18,28 (twice); 2,6,14; 3,8,16; 4,11,16; 4,11,19 (3); 4,12,18; 4,15,26; 4,16,31; 7,7,11; 8,3,8; 8,4,9; 9,13,37; 10,42,67 & 11,8,10 (2).

[18]) 2,1,3; 2,6,14; 4,16,31; 5,2,2; 7,21,27; 10,35,54 & 10,42,67.

[19]) 1,18,28 (twice); 2,1,2; 2,1,3; 3,3,5 (2); 3,6,11 (2); 5,3,3; 7,10,16; 10,27,38 & 11,31,41.

[20]) 2,2,2 & 2,3,7.

[21]) On the subject of the voice of a boy or a girl, see Courcelle's interesting speculations (*Recherches* pp. 194-196).

always mentioned in chronological accord with the sequence of the narrative of Augustine's conversion. One result of this random distribution is that there is not a neat progressive development in the story with the voices growing louder as the repentant Augustine approaches closer and closer to their source. Nevertheless, the phrase: *ecce audio vocem de vicina domo* can be seen as the climax of an implicit theme in the earlier pages of the *Confessions* as a few considerations will show.

Early in the work, it becomes evident that the parable of the prodigal son is important to Augustine's expression of his alienation from God[22]). Thus, even in the first book he compares himself quite definitely to that other son:

> I was far from Thy face through my darkened affections. For it is not by our feet, nor by change of place, that we either turn from Thee or return to Thee. Or, indeed did that younger son look out for horses, or chariots, or ships, or fly away with visible wings, or journey by the motion of his limbs, that he might, in a far country, prodigally waste all that Thou gavest him when he set out? (1,18,28).

In the second book, the feeding of the stolen pears to the swine (2,4,9) also recalls a similar activity of the prodigal son[23]). This particular association is quite explicit in the next book, where Augustine says of his former belief in the fables of the Manichees: "Far, indeed, was I wandering away from Thee, being even shut out from the very husks of the swine, whom with husks I fed". (3,6,11). The same parable comes up again in the third book, containing the well-known discovery of Cicero's book, *Hortensius*. Of the effect of this book upon him, Augustine observes with an allusion to the prodigal son: "I yearned for an immortality of wisdom and began now to arise that I might return to Thee" (3,4,7)[24]).

A more definite comparison occurs in the fourth book, where, writing of his facility for mastering the liberal arts, Augustine says of this gift:

> So, then, it served not to my use, but rather to my destruction, since I went about to get so good a portion of my substance into my own

[22]) *Luke* 15, 11-32. See also my 'The Theme of the Prodigal Son in Augustine's Confessions' *Recherches Augustiniennes* 12 (1977) 105-118.

[23]) *Luke* 15, 15-16.

[24]) *Cf. Luke* 15, 18.

> power; and I kept not my strength for Thee, but went away from Thee into a far country, to waste it upon harlotries. (4,16,30).

In the biblical parable, it is to his father's house that the prodigal son decides to return, for in that house, even the servants are better off than he in his fallen condition of swine-herd[25]). Likewise, in the *Confessions*, Augustine's spiritual pilgrimage is to return to the Father's house. Accordingly, early in the work, he observes how his youthful sinfulness was alienating him from that house: *quam longe exulabam a deliciis domus tuae* (2,2,4). The subsequent events of the narrative are to bring him closer and closer to that house, until with his final conversion, he actually enters it.

That this is no forced interpretation is indicated by the distribution of references to the house of God in the *Confessions*[26]). Prior to the conversion-scene of the eighth book, such references are quite rare[27]). However, subsequent to the conversion, the text is notable for containing some dozen rhapsodic references to the House of God[28]). Of these allusions, perhaps the one most illustrative of the aim of Augustine's spiritual pilgrimage is to be found in the twelfth book, where he observes in a personal context:

> Whence the soul, whose wandering has been made far away, may understand, if now she thirsts for Thee, if now her tears have become bread to her, while it is daily said unto her 'where is Thy God'? if she now seeketh of Thee one thing, and desireth that she may dwell in Thy house all the days of her life. (12,11,13).

These various considerations suggest a mystical interpretation for the house featured in the conversion-scene through the words: *ecce audio vocem de vicina domo*. It becomes the House of God, to which Augustine is at last so close after the long pilgrimage of the previous pages[29]). In the early pages of the *Confessions* Augustine was so far removed from that house that he thought that he did not hear the voice of God at all, as he (Augustine) wandered further away from Him: *audeo dicere tacuisse*

[25]) *Luke* 15, 17.

[26]) Here, Courcelle's observations on the *domus Dei* in the *Confessions* are relevant. See *Recherches* pp. 301-302.

[27]) 2,2,4; 2,3,6 & 4,16,31.

[28]) 9,7,16; 9,8,17; 11,31,41; 12,11,12; 12,11,13 (2); 12,15,19; 12,15,21; 12,15,22; 12,17,25; 13,9,10 & 13,18,22.

[29]) For the interesting presence in a very early manuscript of *de divina domo* instead of *de vicina domo*, see *Recherches* 195 & 301-302.

te, deus meus, cum irem abs te longius? (2,3,7). As he was to realize later, God was even then talking to him, but through the voice of his mother in whom God had taken up His dwelling: *te tacere putabam atque illam loqui, per quam mihi tu non tacebas* (2,3,7).

From this early condition of seeming not to hear the voice of God, it took considerable calling on God's part to make His voice known to the rebellious young Augustine. Indeed, He even had to shout at the wayward youth to overcome both the distance and Augustine's spiritual deafness, as the famous *sero te amavi* passage informs the reader:

> Too late did I love Thee, O fairness, so ancient, and yet so new! I, unlovely, rushed heedlessly among the things of beauty Thou madest. Thou wert with me, but I was not with Thee. Those things kept me far from Thee, which, unless they were in Thee, were not. Thou callest, and criest aloud, and forced open my deafness (*vocasti ... et clamasti et rupisti surditatem meam*). (10,27,38).

The great distance of the young Augustine from God's house[30]), as well as God's difficulty in making His calling heard, suggest a phrase which, while not used as such by Augustine, would however well describe his first apprehension of God's calling voice: *ecce audio vocem de longinqua domo*. The first hearing of this voice from the far distant house would then mark the beginning of Augustine's pilgrimage back to God's house and of which, when at last close by, Augustine says in the conversion-scene: *ecce audio vocem de vicina domo* (8,12,29). The implicit contrast between the above two expressions would then seem to explain the source of inspiration for this latter phrase in the conversion-scene. It derives ultimately from the notion of the father calling from his house for the prodigal son to return home[31]).

Such an interpretation receives substantiation from additional details in the eighth book of the *Confessions*; details which show how important is that parable to the conversion-scene itself. Thus early in the eighth book Augustine describes how his earlier ambitions for honour and wealth no longer excited him when compared with his newfound love of God's house: *iam enim me illa non delectabant prae dulcedine tua et decore domus tuae, quam dilexi* (8,1,2). A few pages further along in the text, Augustine recalls the trilogy of the parables of the lost sheep, the

[30]) *Cf. quam longe exulabam a deliciis domus tuae (2,2,4).*

[31]) *Cf. audivi vocem post me, ut redirem* (12,10,10) and *institisti crebescens multimodis vocibus, ut audirem de longinquo et converterer* (13,1,1).

lost drachma and the lost (prodigal) son[32]). Furthermore, it is most significant that in that place in the text Augustine describes how the last parable was of particular appeal to him, even to the extent of bringing tears to his eyes when read in the house of God:

> And the joy of the solemn service of Thy house constraineth to tears, when in Thy house it is read of Thy younger son that he 'was dead, and is alive again, and was lost, and is found'. (8,3,6).

Augustine's predilection for this parable, particularly in the present context, causes him to refer to it yet again a little further along in the text, when he returns to the joy experienced by the finding of the lost son (8,3,8). During the conversion-scene, there is yet another allusion to the prodigal son's journey abroad, and this time in regard to the very house which Augustine had left for the garden, when he says of entering God's service:

> And we enter not therein by ships, or chariots, or feet, no, nor by going so far as I had come from the house to that place where we were sitting[33]).

Finally on the presence of the prodigal son parable in the eighth book of the *Confessions*, after the conversion of Augustine (and also Alypius), there is the going into the house from which they had left, and the subsequent great rejoicing, which sequence brings to mind yet again, the welcome that the prodigal son received upon returning to his father's house[34]).

These various allusions strengthen the case for the ultimate identity of the house from which Augustine hears the mysterious chanting in the conversion-scene. It would seem to be the *domus divina* or the *domus Dei*. The same conclusion is urged by considering the nature of that house in the conversion-scene itself. In this regard, it can first be asked why the mysterious voice should have as its source a house, rather than say the fig-tree beneath which Augustine was weeping (8,12,28), or a cloud[35]), or heaven itself, or some unstated source. One suspects that there is something significant about the presence of the house.

[32]) 8,3,6. *Cf. Luke* 15, 4-30.

[33]) 8,8,19. Compare with the journey of the prodigal son, as described in the earlier cited extract from 1,18,28.

[34]) *Luke* 15, 22-24.

[35]) *Cf. vox de nube* (11,6,8).

This suspicion is strengthened by adverting to the very words used. Augustine says simply: *de vicina domo*. However, when describing the fig-tree beneath which he casts himself in bitter tears, he says: *sub quadam arbore fici* (8,12,28). This wording implies that any fig-tree would satisfy the requirements of his description. If the same applied to the house then one would expect the phrase: *de quadam vicina domo*. Since he does not use this, one has the feeling that he had some particular house in mind. Before following this further, it should therefore be pointed out here that the common tendency to translate *de vicina domo* as "from a neighbouring house" seems to stray from the spirit of the text in implying that any house in the neighbourhood would suffice as origin of the mysterious voice.

Turning next to the question of what might have caused Augustine to say: *de vicina domo*, one can examine the entire conversion-story from beginning (8,6,14) to end (8,12,30) and find only one house mentioned in the actual description. This is the house where Augustine and his company were staying and from which he and Alypius went into the garden (8,8,19) where the conversion-scene was to transpire. Furthermore, once in the garden, they seated themselves *as far as possible* from this house (*ibid*) for the utmost privacy; a motive which excludes the possible presence of nearer houses. Yet again, it is with respect to their own house that Augustine illustrates his reluctance to enter into God's service:

> And we enter not therein by ships, or by chariots, or feet, no, nor by going as far as I had come from the house to that place where we were sitting.(*Ibid.*).

Finally, it is to that same house that they return in joyful exaltation after the conversion-scene (8,12,30). It is at this point in the narrative that one sees a very concrete reason for that house as the source of the mysterious voice. It contains Augustine's mother, Monica, to whom they go to break the joyful news. It is the dwelling-place of that holy woman whom Augustine depicts throughout the *Confessions* as a divinely appointed mediatrix between God and himself[36]). Elsewhere too, he depicts her even as a holy mouth-piece for divine communications[37]).

But in addition to these general recommendations, Monica has a

[36]) See my 'The Dreams of Monica in Augustine's Confessions' *Augustinian Studies* 10 (1979) 3-17.

[37]) *The Happy Life* 2, 10.

special relevance to the struggle of the conversion-scene. As has been mentioned, this struggle was particularly concerned with the breaking of the bonds of sexual indulgence and therefore with Augustine's final renunciation of all forms of sexual pleasure. The particular relevance of Monica to that drama goes back to the sixteenth year of Augustine's life, when he was home from studies for a year and again sharing a house with his holy mother (2,3,5-6). It was then too, with the first burgeonings of young manhood, that the thorns of lust began growing over the soul of the young Augustine (2,3,6). Also at that time, as Augustine testifies in the *Confessions*, God had already begun building His habitation in the breast of that holy woman (2,3,6). Consequently, as Augustine was only to realize later in life, when his mother, in that sixteenth year of his youth, warned him in the most solemn tones against sexual indulgence, he did not realize that it was really God speaking to him through his mother. Accordingly, Augustine writes of those warnings of his mother:

> These appeared to me but womanish counsels, which I should blush to obey. But they were Thine and I knew it not, and I thought that Thou heldest Thy peace, and that it was she who spoken, through whom Thou heldest not Thy peace to me, and in her person wast despised by me, her son, 'the son of the handmaid Thy servant' (*Psalm* 116, 16). But this I knew not. (2,3,7).

Fittingly therefore, this is the same holy woman who was in the house nearby during the drama of the conversion-scene in the eighth book of the *Confessions* when the bonds of sexual lust were at last being severed, a fact which seems to amply justify the allusion to the house in the phrase: *ecce audio vocem de vicina domo*. That Augustine was mindful of her presence in the house is quite evident from the speed with which they go in to tell her the joyful news at the end of the conversion-scene. Through that experience Monica's son had at last been converted, as had been foretold in a dream which she had had years before, when she foresaw him standing beside her on the rule of faith (3,11,19). This event, as well as the specific renunciation of sex in the conversion, are recalled by Augustine in the closing lines of the eighth book:

> For Thou didst so convert me to Thyself that I sought neither a wife, nor any other of this world's hopes — standing on that rule of faith in which Thou, so many years before, had showed me unto her in a vision. And Thou didst turn her grief into a gladness, much more plentiful than she had desired, and much dearer and chaster than she used to crave, by having grandchildren of my body.

In conclusion, there has been seen to be a most appropriate fittingness to the source of the mysterious voice of the conversion-scene. In thinking that it came from the nearby house, Augustine was localizing its source as the actual dwelling-place of his holy mother. She it was who, as the mouthpiece of God, had formerly tried unsuccessfully to dissuade the sixteen-year-old Augustine from sexual indulgence (2,3,7). Some sixteen years later, it is fitting therefore that she should have a special connection to the dramatic climax of the conversion-scene in which Augustine finally renounces all forms of sexual pleasure. Accordingly, it is to the actual physical dwelling-place of his holy mother, Monica, that Augustine imputes the origin of the mysterious voice which precipitates the final climax of the autobiographical section of the *Confessions*; which climax consists in the renunciation of all sexual gratification.

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