

REASON AND REVELATION IN THE CONVERSION ACCOUNTS OF THE CAPPADOCIANS AND AUGUSTINE¹⁾

For Augustine in the West, a paradoxical vision of *continentia* as the mother of many children²⁾; for Gregory of Nyssa in the East, an awe-inspiring vision of the Forty Martyrs³⁾. Why juxtapose two such different experiences? I want to highlight a characteristic difference of approach to the narration of personal religious experience at a vital spiritual turning point.

We will not embroil ourselves with controversies over factual veracity; what matters is the terms in which these authors phrase their experiences for the world at large. They do not relate them merely to entertain or for personal or family aggrandisement, but in works intended for the guidance of others. This is true of Augustine's *Soliloquies*, of his post-conversion *Dialogues* with their account of the retreat with friends at Cassiciacum, and of the *Confessions* themselves. So also with the Cappadocians, whether in a sermon, in the great funeral panegyrics for members of their families and each other, or in two specifically biographical works, the *Life of Macrina*, by her brother Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzen's own *De vita sua*. We should take the terms and images in which visionary or miraculous experiences are recorded very seriously indeed.

Such accounts can differ greatly, which is interesting since there are strong reasons why we might not expect this. These near contemporaries are in many other respects so similar. All had a Christian upbringing at an early stage⁴⁾. If Augustine's family circumstances were rather more straitened than those of the Cappadocians, they did not

¹⁾ A first draft of this paper was read at a conference on Augustine held in the Department of Scholastic Philosophy at the Queen's University of Belfast in 1987, when Professor van Bavel was our principal guest and speaker. I am very pleased to be able to offer it as a small tribute to him in this volume. I would also like to thank Dr. Margaret Mullett and Professor Michael McGann for their help at a later stage in the drafting.

²⁾ *Conf.* 8. 11 (27).

³⁾ *In xl mart. orat. laud.*, PG 46, 785B.

⁴⁾ For Augustine, see *c. Acad.* 2. 2 (5), *conf.* 1. 11 (17); for the Cappadocians, Gr. Naz., *in laud. Bas. magn.* 12 (PG 36 509B-C); Gr. Nyss. *v. Macrin.* 3 15-26 (Maraval); Gr. Naz. *de vita sua* 93-100 (Jungck).

preclude aspirations towards the same sort of career. Their intellectual training and upbringing are closely parallel, travel included; all received a classical philosophical education and were involved in a career in rhetoric⁵). The Cappadocians came into contact with some aspects of Platonism early as a result of their education, both Christian and secular. For Gregory of Nyssa at least, that influence was to prove enduring⁶). Augustine would come to it late, but be equally strongly affected⁷). All would demonstrate some ambivalence towards secular philosophy and culture, but in each the spoils of the Egyptians would serve eventually to enrich Christian philosophy⁸).

⁵) For Augustine, see *conf.* 1. 12-18 (19-29); 2. 3 (5); 3. 3-4 (6-8); 4. 2 (2); for the Cappadocians, Gr. Naz., in *laud. Bas. magn.* 13-25 (PG 36 512A-529C); Gr. Nyss. v. *Macr.* 6 1-13; *ep.* 13 (PG 46 1049A); in *xl mart. orat. laud.* (PG 46 785A); Gr. Naz. *ep.* 11 (Gallay). Of the three only Gregory of Nyssa did not travel extensively during his education, due to ill-health and weakness.

⁶) The question of Neoplatonic influence on the Cappadocians, which used to be assumed, has come under fire of late. It now seems likely that Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus heard little of either Plotinus or Porphyry during their student days. Plato's original texts and Middle Platonist ideas were more probably the general fare and in the area of orthodox theology are unlikely to have been directly influential. Certainly at Athens what Platonism Basil and Gregory did imbibe was preponderantly that already acceptable to their Christian rather than their secular instructors, and it should be remembered that many Platonic ideas had already been absorbed into Christian thinking by the earlier Fathers. Gregory is at pains to play down the importance of the secular teachers in his funeral panegyric on Basil (*In laud. Bas. magn.* 21 (PG 36 524A)). John M. RIST's essay 'Basil's "Neoplatonism"' (in P.J. FEDWICK, ed., *Basil of Caesarea, Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, Toronto, 1981, 136-220) provides a masterly guide in this difficult area. Rosemary RUETHER, *Gregory of Nazianzus* (Oxford, 1969), 26-27, comes to similar conclusions, also arguing that Gregory inherited his Platonism from Origen. Gregory of Nyssa is a very different question and of the three he provides the closest parallel to Augustine in this area. For him Plotinus and Platonism in general were of major and lasting significance. See H.F. CHERNISS, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa* (New York, 1930); J. DANÉLOU, *Platonisme et théologie mystique: doctrine spirituelle de s. Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris, 1944, repr. 1953). Rist remarks that apparently Neoplatonic influences on some of Basil's late writings may be due to his younger brother's interests (*op. cit.* 218, 220). Gregory's own highly Platonic late work, the *Life of Moses* bears witness to the enduring impression of Platonic ideas on this most philosophically inclined of the Cappadocians. See Daniélou's introduction to his SC edition (1968), 34-38.

⁷) *Conf.* 7. 9 (13); *c. Acad.* 2. 2 (5); 3. 17 (41); *de beat. vit.* 1. 4. It is clear that Plotinus was accessible to Augustine at this stage, although Porphyry does not seem to have exercised a direct influence until the end of the century. See RIST, *op. cit.* 148-149.

⁸) For Gregory Nazianzen, who is at one and the same the most overtly hostile to secular learning and the most obviously influenced by the secular rhetorical tradition, see RUETHER, ch. 4, 156-175. On Basil, *ad adolesc.* 1. 4 - 4. 10; 8. 1 and G.L. KUSTAS, 'Basil and the Rhetorical Tradition' (in FEDWICK, 1981) 221-279. Three passages from Gregory of Nyssa's v. *Moys.* best sum up this ambivalence: 2. 10-17; 37-41; 115-116. On all three Cappadocians, see Frances YOUNG, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (SCM 1983) 101-105. Although Augustine would argue against Neoplatonism in books 6-10 of the *City of God*,

These men were to write on the same themes; often, but not always, say the same thing and frequently express themselves in a similar way. For all, the Bible and its exegesis was to be central and they would set at its service a heady mixture of rhetorical excellence and an appreciation of the best that pagan philosophy had to offer. The result, east and west, was the forging of a new and confident Christian rhetoric that differed dramatically from what had preceded it. In addition their contributions to the development of monasticism probably cannot be over-estimated⁹).

Whether they came to their final convictions swiftly or after lengthy struggles, the context of the family and particularly of its women was crucial, as all subsequently emphasize. For Augustine, Monica's ardent Christian piety must be set against Patricius's more traditional stance and very late conversion to Christianity¹⁰). But there is no doubt of Monica's overwhelming influence upon her son, however long it took him to return to the fold¹¹). Gregory Nazianzen's father Gregory was converted to orthodox Christianity from the sect of the Hypsistarii in no small part by the constant nagging of his wife Nonna. Gregory compares her efforts to a drop of water which finally hollows the rock below, a phrase which will strike all scholars of Lucretius with a slightly bizarre ring¹²). Indeed as a whole Gregory's account of Nonna is remarkably reminiscent of Monica¹³). If Gregory's sister

he still drew widely on many of its arguments throughout his career (see H. CHADWICK, *Augustine*, 1986, passim). That he later felt some aspects of his early post-conversion writings to be excessively Platonic is however clear from *retr.* 1. 1-4; 3. 2; 4. 3-4.

⁹) On Basil, YOUNG, *op. cit.*, 106-109; on Augustine, L. VERHEIJEN, *La Règle de Saint Augustin* (Paris, *Études Augustiniennes*); G.P. LAWLESS, *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, Oxford, 1987.

¹⁰) *Conf.* 1. 11 (17); 9. 9 (22).

¹¹) St. Augustine's account at the time of Monica's death gives the clearest impression: *conf.* 9. 8-12 (17-37). See further Gerald BONNER, *St. Augustine of Hippo, Life and Controversies*, 1986, 38-40; CHADWICK, 69.

¹²) Gr. Naz., *or.* 18. 5; 11 (*PG* 35 992A; 997C). The phrase is proverbial. See OTTO, *Sprichwörter der Römer* (Leipzig, 1890, repr. Hildesheim, 1964) s. *gutta* for Greek and Roman parallels. It is popular with Latin elegists, who use it to illustrate the persistence of love or to encourage perseverance with a lover's suit. At *DRN* 4. Lucretius uses the same metaphor to explain how long association with a well-behaved woman may result in love, even if she is ugly, and the context implies marriage or lengthy concubinage, rather than the passionate affairs he has criticized in the preceding sections. He may as elsewhere in Book 4 be parodying an amatory commonplace, but in view of Gregory's use of the motto with regard to Nonna and Gregory the elder, it may also have figured in Greek writings on marriage with which he was familiar.

¹³) The whole passage on Nonna, *or.* 18. 7-12 (*PG* 35 992D-1000B) bears comparison with Augustine's portrait of his mother in the *Confessions*. See also Gregory's

Gorgonia was not baptised until shortly before her last illness, nonetheless she brought her entire family into the fold with her¹⁴). In the family of Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, which had a longer history of orthodox Christianity, the women are again to the fore, from their grandmother the elder Macrina, through Emmelia their mother to their formidable sister, Macrina the younger, herself head of a household of nuns¹⁵).

With Augustine's years of rebellion, the similarities lessen. Certainly no Cappadocian father can be visualized rushing off into the arms of the Manichees¹⁶) or choosing Neoplatonism¹⁷) in preference to Christianity. Likewise it is hard to imagine any of them facing, shall we say Macrina, with a concubine or an illegitimate son as Augustine did Monica¹⁸). But that is not to say there was no sense of rebellion at all, or that the Cappadocians blandly proceeded towards their episcopal heights as along a preordained *cursus*.

Gregory Nazianzen's account of Basil's exemplary Christian behaviour as a student at Athens¹⁹) loses some of its force when Gregory of Nyssa relates how Macrina had to reprove Basil for his arrogance and secular ambitions on his return²⁰). Gregory of Nazianzen's life-long struggle with the attractions of his gift of rhetoric are well-known²¹); but the pull was no less strong for Gregory of Nyssa and several letters witness to his repeated backslidings even once he had been made a reader²²). Gregory Nazianzen at least would have preferred monastic contemplation to the priesthood²³), and in this he

briefers pen portrait of his parents in the funeral oration for his sister Gorgonia, *or.* 8. 4-5 (PG 35 793D-796A).

¹⁴) *Or.* 8. 8; 20 (PG 35 797B-C; 812D-813A).

¹⁵) See Gr. Nyss., *v. Macr.*, *passim*. For a recent evaluation of some of these women, Peter BROWN, *The Body and Society*, 285-304.

¹⁶) *Conf.* 5. 3-7; 10-11 (3-13; 18-21).

¹⁷) *Conf.* 7. 9-20 (13-26).

¹⁸) *Conf.* 6. 13; 15 (23; 25).

¹⁹) *In laud. Bas. magn.* 21-25 (PG 524A-529C).

²⁰) *V. Macr.* 6.

²¹) See above, n. 8.

²²) Gr. Naz., *ep.* 11 (Gallay); see also Gregory's own letters 13 and 14 to Libanius, which may belong to this period (PG 46 1048-1056A). For his less than ascetic estate at Vanosa, BROWN, *op. cit.*, 292.

²³) Basil's passionate enthusiasm for the practice of monasticism in his early days is well documented (e.g. *epp.* 2; 14). But when the practical defence of orthodoxy summoned him he does not seem to have offered much resistance. By contrast, although forced in practice to develop a mixed vocation, his friend Gregory remains loud in his preference for the monastic life, although his first experiences of Basil's retreat in Pontus are less than favourable (*epp.* 4; 5; RUETHER, 136-155).

parallels Augustine²⁴). Enforced ordination was common enough at this period, and Augustine suffered it at Hippo as did two of the Cappadocians in the East²⁵), but he seems to have been more like Basil in accepting episcopal responsibility when it came²⁶). One at least of the two Gregories had to be dragged kicking and screaming into both offices, he of Nazianzus protesting about tyranny till he died²⁷). Gregory of Nyssa was the only one to marry, a fact he would bewail as a bitter loss in a passionate defence of virginity as far preferable to the cares and responsibilities of marriage, a state for which he felt there were sufficient advocates without his testimony²⁸). There is an irony here: in the end Augustine was to abandon his mistresses not, as he had planned²⁹), for a wife, but for a passionate Christianity grounded in a willing acceptance of celibacy. Yet thanks to the theological debates of his time, it was he who would eventually write movingly in defence of

²⁴) See BONNER, 111-113; Possidius, *vita* 4, on Augustine's precipitate ordination at Hippo; with Aug., *ep.* 21, 1-2, on Augustine's reaction, and *serm.* 355, 1, 2 with Poss. *vita* 5, on the garden allowed by the bishop to the young priest, in which to build a monastery and so combine his new duties with his vocation.

²⁵) Gregory Nazianzen's enforced ordination by his father resulted in a precipitate flight from the new responsibilities and an unwilling and undignified return to take up his duties (*orr.* 1 & 2, PG 35 396-513).

²⁶) He was consecrated, probably in 395 as Valerius' coadjutor and succeeded him in 396. See BONNER, 120-121. That is not to say that he actively pursued the episcopate as did Basil that of Caesarea in 370, when faced with the prospect of a heretical successor to Eusebius (Gr. Naz., *ep.* 40-46, with *in laud. Bas. magn.* 37).

²⁷) *Ep.* 48; 49; *de vita sua* 386-485. As regards Gregory of Nyssa we are less well informed. It seems clear that his elevation was due to Basil's policy, although he appears to have been canonically installed (Basil, *ep.* 225). In Basil, *ep.* 98, the Gregory who has clearly been complaining about the nature of the see he has received is now thought to be Gregory of Nazianzus, rather than Nyssa.

²⁸) A long standing dispute still rages over whether Gregory was really married, or whether the two pieces of evidence should be otherwise interpreted. Gregory of Nazianzus' late letter of consolation (*ep.* 197) on the death of one Theosebeia to whom he refers as both Gregory of Nyssa's yokemate (σύζυγος) and sister has been variously interpreted as referring to a wife (and sister in God) or to a real sister who helped him in his work. The evidence on this is summarized by Gallay in his edition (Berlin, 1969), xxiv-xxv. There is also Gregory's bitter admission at *de virginitate* 3 that he has separated himself by a gulf across which he cannot return from true virginity and this evidence could stand alone without reference to the letter. Some have argued that, since virginity in that work covers embraces not merely sexual abstinence, but also the whole question of the secular life, Gregory refers to his earlier secular career rather than to a marriage. Aubineau (*Traité de virginité*, SC 119, Paris, 1961), 65-77, accepted the marriage and has been followed most recently by Brown, 292. Since the passage in *de virg.* forms part of the introduction to a vicious attack on marriage that savours strongly of bitter personal experience, I am inclined to follow them.

²⁹) *Conf.* 6. 13 (23).

Christian marriage³⁰). It is to a similar irony that we must now turn in examining two rather different approaches to conversion accounts.

For Augustine my chief concern is naturally Augustine's extensive documentation in *Confessions* 8 of the crucial series of events leading to his conversion. To that may be added both the phenomenon as a whole of the *Cassiciacum Dialogues*, since they constitute his more immediate response to the experience of conversion, and, more specifically, the parallel account in *Contra Academicos* 2 to the episode in the *Confessions*. In addition, I would cite the shared religious experience of Augustine and his mother Monica at the time of her death, as Augustine narrates it in *Confessions* 9. My concern throughout is the manner in which Augustine's presentation of these dramatic and almost visionary experiences is articulated, and my argument will be reinforced by the fact that one source, the *Dialogues*, offers a response very close to the time of the experience, whilst both passages in the *Confessions* are written in the light of lengthy reflection³¹). I do not want on this occasion to stress contrasts between the two documents, but rather instead their remarkable consistency, given the changes wrought in Augustine's life during the interval.

In terms of philosophical argument and image, Cicero's *Hortensius* and those translations of 'certain books of the Platonists'³²), whose identities we only wish we knew, were a paramount influence on Augustine's gradual movement towards Christianity. But also after his conversion, when he is speaking of more mystical experiences, his reaction is still heavily coloured by his earlier pagan philosophical training. Its images never entirely disappear although, as time goes on, biblical and Christian thought and images are increasingly interwoven with them.

As regards the *Contra Academicos*, the work perhaps most heavily influenced by the *Hortensius*, it is well known that Augustine talks for the most part here in terms of an unspecified "philosophy" with rather infrequent references to an avowedly Christian God. His addressee is the pagan Romanianus whom he hoped to convert to his new Christian philosophy³³), and at *Contra Academicos* 2.6, Augustine for the first time describes the moment of his own conversion and draws the famous contrast between φιλοσοφία, love of wisdom, and φιλοκαλία³⁴), love

³⁰) *De bon. conj.* esp. 1 (1); 15 (17).

³¹) The *Dialogues* in 386, the *Confessions* in the first three years of his episcopate.

³²) *Conf.* 7. 9 (13).

³³) *C. Acad.* 1, 1-3; 2. 1-5.

³⁴) *C. Acad.* 2. 7.

of material beauty. He speaks of snatching up the writings of Paul³⁵) and it is to them that he attributes his vision of philosophy, so the context is quite certainly Christian, but the surrounding imagery is almost entirely Platonic. In 2.5, we meet the true fire and its pale shadow from Plato's parable of the Cave in the *Republic*, also the bondage of mortal life and the return home to the religion of childhood as from a journey, all images which had fired Neoplatonists³⁶). In 2.6, Augustine speaks in a manner reminiscent of Cicero³⁷) and Seneca³⁸) of gazing like a lover upon Philosophy's face. The twin image of the lover of φιλοσοφία and the lover of her sister φιλοκαλία is subsequently developed in a more obviously Platonic manner, with particular reference to the *Phaedrus* myth³⁹): the lover would fly (*advolare*) to the beloved, and has elements nascent in his soul that would permit this, were it not for the thickets of vices and error that tend to choke and deform its budding leaves (here an image used by Cicero of the Stoics⁴⁰). Likewise for φιλοκαλία herself; whilst her sister soars free above her, she has been enticed to earth by the bird-lime of desire and imprisoned wingless in a cage⁴¹). Enough has been said to demonstrate that Augustine's immediate response to a Christian illumination that he represents as visionary is almost entirely the product of his pagan philosophical training, although one should perhaps reiterate the caveat that all this is directed at a pagan who is a potential convert to Christianity.

When we come to the *Confessions* it is clear that all has *not*

³⁵) *C. Acad.* 2. 5.

³⁶) See primarily Plat. *Rep.* 7 514a-517c, where the prisoners in the cave have limbs and necks in chains. Plotinus in 1. 6, *on the Beautiful* (held by Courcelle and others to be among the *libri Platonici*), a work deeply concerned with the nature of the ascent towards perception of the true Sun in Plato's parable, makes striking use of the image of the return to the homeland by contrast with the dark Hades of the material world (1. 6, 8). Certainly by the time Augustine wrote the *Confessions* he knew this passage well, for he conflates with it the parable of the Prodigal Son (P. COURCELLE, 'Quelques symboles funéraires du Néo-Platonisme Latin', *REA* 46, 1944, 65-93 and below, note 96). It should be added that some of these images would also have been accessible to Augustine from Cicero.

³⁷) See P. COURCELLE, 'Le personnage de Philosophie dans la littérature latine', *Journal des Savants*, 1970, 209-252, and esp. *Tusc.* 5. 2, 5-6; *De fin.* 1. 14, 46.

³⁸) *Ep.* 115. 3-7. See COURCELLE, 233 ff.

³⁹) 246a-257a.

⁴⁰) *Acad.* 2. 35, 112. See also fragment 24 M from the lost *Hortensius* and *Tusc.* 2. 13. Compare Boethius' use of a similar image at *DCP* 3. m. 1 1-4.

⁴¹) *C. Acad.* 2. 7. Augustine echoes the phrase *visco libidinis*, this time with *concupiscentiae*, in his discussion of sexual dreams at *conf.* 10. 30 (42). Boethius finely develops the image of the caged bird at *DCP* 3. 2. 17-26.

changed. Certainly throughout the work we find ourselves welcome eavesdroppers on a conversation with God, and much of the language is clearly Christian and frequently biblical. Where an image, as for example that of thickets of vice and error choking the budding leaves of the soul in the earlier *Contra Academicos*, seems to derive at least primarily from secular philosophy, by the time it reemerges as a major image in the *Confessions* there can be no doubt that the weeds and choking brambles are now primarily biblical⁴²). Nonetheless their earlier Ciceronian associations are not so much lost as overlaid, and it remains true that it would be perfectly possible to write entirely convincing and parallel accounts of the eighth book of the *Confessions*, one in terms of Platonic imagery and the other of biblical, so closely fused are these two strands at this particular point.

At the crucial point in book 8 the interplay between pagan and Christian reference becomes particularly frenetic. Ponticianus has told how two friends of his read the *Life of Antony* in a little house in some gardens at Trier and were converted, a tale that clearly foreshadows what is to follow⁴³). Augustine is disgusted at his own continuing bondage to the carnal and the material⁴⁴). Significantly his first reaction to this essentially Christian exhortation is to bewail twelve years' wasted time since he first read Cicero's *Hortensius* and was stirred up to the study of wisdom⁴⁵). He has not cast off the baggage of vanity, whilst others have without effort received wings of freedom upon their shoulders⁴⁶). Both references are susceptible of a Christian interpretation, but the word for baggage is *sarcina*, used by Seneca in a similar context⁴⁷), rather than the *onus* or *pondus* more usual in the New Testament⁴⁸), and the reference to shoulders shows that these wings are Platonic, sprouted by the soul as it dissociates itself from the materialistic slough of the body⁴⁹).

⁴²) *Conf.* 2. 2-3 (2-3; 5-6), cf. *Gen.* 3. 18, *Matt.* 13, 24-30, with note 40 above and Leo C. FERRARI, 'Symbols of Sinfulness in Book II of Augustine's "Confessions"', *Aug. Stud.* 2, 1971, 93-104 and 'The Barren Field in Augustine's Confessions', *Aug. Stud.* 8, 1977, 55-70.

⁴³) *Conf.* 8. 6 (14-15).

⁴⁴) *Conf.* 8. 7 (16).

⁴⁵) *Conf.* 8. 7 (17).

⁴⁶) *Conf.* 8. 7 (18).

⁴⁷) *Conf.* 8. 7 (18), referring back to the explicitly military use of the metaphor at 8. 5 (11-12). See Seneca, *epp. mor.* 15. 2 and esp. 65. 16 ff.

⁴⁸) *Matt.* 11. 30; 23. 4; *Luc.* 11. 46 (but the plural, *sarcinas* does also occur there); *Gal.* 6. 5.

⁴⁹) *Plat. Phaedr.* 251b-d.

Carrying a volume of St. Paul, Augustine goes into the garden and Alypius follows at a distance⁵⁰). Ferrari has recently argued for Genesis symbolism in this garden in which Augustine, still undecided, places the maximum distance between himself and the house whose master is absent but which is occupied by Monica in his view a symbol here for Christ and the Church⁵¹). This last detail I find a little dubious but that this is no ordinary garden is clear. As Augustine agonizes over abandoning the world's delights he personifies them as trifles and vanities, *nugae nugarum*, former mistresses, *amicae*, of his who whisper enticements and call him back to shameful trysts⁵²). Their voices grow fainter as an opponent appears. Here at last is that *continentia* whom I introduced to you at the start. Chaste and dignified, her laughter and blandishments are the opposite of those of the tormenting *amicae*. Her pious hands are ready to embrace him as they already do a great company of good examples, men and women of every age in whom she dwells. She is not barren but rather *fecunda mater filiorum, gaudiorum de marito te, domine*⁵³). If others can be like this, why not Augustine, for all are so in God, and not of themselves. Let him cast himself upon God, who will not let him fall⁵⁴). Augustine blushes that he can still hear the blandishments of the *nugae*, though *continentia* bids him close his ears. Then the flood of tears, and the distant fig-tree where he casts himself down weeping and asks: *quare non hac hora finis turpitudinis meae?*⁵⁵). *Tolle lege* comes the child's voice from a *vicina domus*. And he does 'take up and read'. Following Anthony's example, he takes the *sortes* of St. Paul and is rewarded with the famous passage ending 'put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ; and make not provision for the flesh'⁵⁶). Alypius reads further, and both, convinced and converted, go into the house to give Monica the glad tidings⁵⁷).

⁵⁰) *Conf.* 8. 8 (19).

⁵¹) "'Ecce audio vocem de vicina domo" (*Conf.* 8, 12, 29)', *Augustiniana* 33, 1983, 232-245.

⁵²) *Conf.* 8. 11 (26).

⁵³) In some sense this image is picked up at the close of the book (8. 12 (30)), describing Monica's joy at her son's conversion to God and away from the secular world and the search for a wife. Her grief is turned into a gladness more fertile (*uberius*) than she had wished as well as dearer and more chaste than she had once sought when she hoped for physical grandchildren. Monica is as it were subsumed into the image of a *continentia* who is the grandmother of spiritual goods.

⁵⁴) *Conf.* 8. 11 (27).

⁵⁵) *Conf.* 8. 12 (28).

⁵⁶) *Rom.* 13. 3.

⁵⁷) *Conf.* 8. 12 (30).

In the second of these two dramatic incidents, with the fig-tree, the *tolle, lege*, whatever we are to make of it, the framing mention of the example of Anthony, whose life was changed by a chance hearing of a Gospel passage, and the quotation from *Romans*, the setting would seem to be exclusively Christian and biblical. But what of the vision of *continentia* and the opposing harlot-like *nugae*? In a sense it is a doublet of what is to follow, and both episodes will be signed, sealed and delivered by the words of St. Paul⁵⁸). Yet matters here are more complex. Is this mere personification, a complex allegory of Augustine's divided will? If so, did he think these thoughts at the time, or do they belong rather to the account of the *Confessions*? Did he really have a vision or is this rather a mental picture? He does not claim it as a divine vision, but equally some of the verbs he uses, most notably *aperiebatur*⁵⁹) and the difference between his description of the *nugae* and of *continentia* leave the question almost as open as that of the mysterious child's voice to follow. Certainly no-one has ever argued that that was not significant and so this portrayal should be regarded with equal attention.

There is a balance of biblical and pagan here. Any reader of the Book of *Proverbs* will be aware of its powerful imagery on the subject of harlots⁶⁰), and these *nugae nugarum* were not called *vanitates vanitatum* without an eye to *Ecclesiastes*⁶¹). Equally the biblical personification of Wisdom as a woman⁶²) offers a parallel to *continentia*. Her words are certainly Christian, including the quotation from *Colossians*. The picture of her as not sterile but a fertile mother of children inverts an image from *Psalms* 112 (9) and may also be connected to Paul, speaking of the many spiritual children he has engendered⁶³). Gregory of Nyssa cites the same verse of the psalm in his treatise *De virginitate* in a somewhat similar passage on the virtues as spiritual offspring preferable to physical children⁶⁴).

⁵⁸) *Continentia*'s quotation of *Colossians* 3. 5 is balanced by the words from *Romans* that Augustine picks up and reads and is indeed echoed by their subject matter.

⁵⁹) *Conf.* 8. 11 (27).

⁶⁰) E.g. 5. 3-23; 7. 5-27; cp. *Ecclesiasticus* 23. 16-27.

⁶¹) 1. 2.

⁶²) *Prov.* 1. 20-33; 3. 13-18; 8. 1-18; *Sap. Sol.* 1. 4-6; 6. 12-10. 21; *Ecclesiasticus* 1. 1-20; 4. 11-19; 6. 18-31; 24. 1-22; 51. 13-22.

⁶³) 1 *Cor.* 4. 15 and *Gal.* 4. 19. In the latter case Paul continues the theme of spiritual children, calling his addressees children of the Jerusalem above and quoting *Isaiah* 54. 1 which parallels *Ps.* 112. 9.

⁶⁴) *De virg.* 13. Gregory links this with a spiritual interpretation of 1 *Tim.* 2. 15 concerning a woman saved in child-bearing: τίς γάρ οὐκ οἶδεν, ὅτι τῆς μὲν σωματικῆς

The biblical evidence cannot be denied. But it is not sufficient on its own. This is not the first time Augustine has described this visionary episode. We have already examined the earlier version in book II of the *Contra Academicos* and seen echoes of it, the reading of St. Paul, the image of the bird and that of the bondage of sin in the earlier sections of the *Confessions* conversion narrative⁶⁵). The attributes of *continentia* herself can, also be paralleled from Cicero and Seneca as well as from the *Dialogues*⁶⁶). It follows that the attempt to describe the vision by means of a dual and contrasted personification, here that of the *nugae* and of *continentia*, derives from the earlier decision to use personification of φιλοκαλία and φιλοσοφία for the same purpose⁶⁷).

Strong biblical elements in the conversion narrative belong to the later account of the conversion experience, written with a Christian audience in mind by a man now more at ease within the framework of a Christian rhetoric, but not so much so as to abandon all he had gained from the other philosophical tradition, rather capable now of a synthesis of the two. We may guess perhaps that the substitution of *continentia* for φιλοσοφία represents a more honest appraisal in retrospect, as well as one more harshly biblical, but there is little doubt that the concept still owes as much to Augustine's roots in pagan rhetoric and to insights from Cicero and Neoplatonism as to his increasing understanding of the Bible.

Before leaving the *Confessions*, it is also worth calling attention to

συναφείας τὸ ἔργον σωμάτων θνητῶν ἐστι κατασκευή, τῆς δὲ πρὸς τὸ πνεῦμα κοινωνίας ζωῇ καὶ ἀφθαρσίᾳ τοῖς συναφθεῖσιν ἀντὶ τέκνων προσγίνεται; καὶ καλῶς ἐστι τὸ ἀποστολικὸν εἰπεῖν ἐπὶ τούτου ὅτι Σφίζεται διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας ταύτης ἡ τῶν τοιούτων τέκνων μήτηρ εὐφραίνομένη, καθὼς ἐν θείοις ὕμνοις ὁ ψαλμῶδὸς ἀνεφώησεν εἰπών· Ὁ κατοικίζων στεῖραν ἐν οἴκῳ μητέρα ἐπὶ τέκνοις εὐφραίνομένην. εὐφραίνεται γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἡ παρθένος μήτηρ ἡ τὰ ἀθάνατα τέκνα κυοφοροῦσα διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος, στεῖρα διὰ τὴν σωφροσύνην ὑπὸ τοῦ προφήτου ὀνομασμένη.

⁶⁵) Above, notes 36; 41 (cf. 44; 46). Some elements of the bird metaphor recur years later in Augustine's interpretation of *Ps.* 54. 9. 'O for the wings of a dove', although the Platonism is less explicit there.

⁶⁶) The image is not solely biblical. Cicero in particular makes a practice of referring to the fecundity of philosophy or *sapientia*: *de leg.* 1. 24, 62; *de orat.* 1. 39. The famous passage from *Tusc. Disp.* 5. 2, 5-6 uses the image of philosophy as mother and protector of her children: *in sinum ... peperisti ... vitae parentem...* and 5. 7, 19, *ullumve esse philosophiae promissum uberius...*, also Seneca at *epp. mor.* 103. 4. Compare *conf.* 8. 11 (27): *et extendens ad me suscipiendum et amplectendum pias manus...* Augustine himself dwelt strikingly on the idea at *c. Acad.* 1. 1 (3-4) and presented *temperantia* as a wife at *c. Acad.* 2. 9 (22). For the Christian associations present on this occasion, see n. 64.

⁶⁷) Furthermore the tradition of the personification of two women, one good and one bad, goes right back to early Greek literature, most notably Prodicus' famous choice of Heracles between Virtue and Vice, a theme that St. Basil in the 4th century still thought appropriate reading matter for a young Christian (*ad adolesc.* 5 (11-14)).

Augustine's account of the vision of eternal *sapientia* which he shared with his mother Monica at Ostia shortly before her death. This too stands out as an event which made a deep spiritual impression on Augustine, perhaps only slightly less dramatic than the earlier conversion experience, and in many ways more profound. Their eager ascent through various levels of perception *interius cogitando* towards a momentary unity with the timeless divine⁶⁸) has long been acknowledged as a classic account of the experience of temporary unity with the One achieved by some Neoplatonists through interior contemplation⁶⁹). In Augustine's account there are occasional Christian and biblical references on a very small scale⁷⁰), but for the most part the only thing that marks this piece of narrative off from Neoplatonism is the fact that the experience was a shared one.

Turning now to the Cappadocians I would like to begin with a slightly less familiar account of a young reprobate's vision. It is found in a sermon preached by Gregory of Nyssa on the feast of the Forty Martyrs probably at Caesarea at a service at which Basil's earlier sermon on the same topic had already been read⁷¹). The Forty Martyrs, soldiers martyred on a frozen lake at Sebasteia, were the object of devoted cult in the family of Basil and Gregory. Indeed their family was largely responsible for the fourth century expansion of the cult, not to mention the distribution of the martyrs' relics⁷²). The occasion of this sermon seems to have been a thoroughly relaxed family affair, for Gregory, rather unusually, appends some more personal reminiscences about the martyrs. He tells us that he possesses relics of the Forty and has buried his parents close beside them 'so that in the day of resurrection they may awake with helpers bold in their confession of faith'⁷³). Further, he reports a healing miracle involving a lame

⁶⁸) *Conf.* 9. 10 (23-26).

⁶⁹) The main source is Plot. *Enn.* 1. 6, 'On the Beautiful'. See P. HENRY, *La vision d'Ostie, sa place dans la vie et l'oeuvre de s. Augustin*, thesis, Paris, 1938; P. COURCELLE, *Recherches sur les Confessions de s. Augustin*, Paris, 1950, 222-226, with bibliography at 222, n. 3. He remarks (226) that the experience was 'sans doute moins spécifiquement plotinienne dans la réalité que dans le récit des *Confessions*' and stresses that what we have are Augustine's words rather than those of Monica herself.

⁷⁰) See the references listed by Verheijen in his edition, *CCSL* 27, 147-148.

⁷¹) *In xl mart.*, PG 46 776A.

⁷²) See P. MARAVAL, 'Les premiers développements du culte des xl martyrs de Sebastée dans l'Orient byzantin et en Occident', and A. M. WILSON, 'A stephanos for the martyrs', both forthcoming in M.E. Mullett (ed.), *The Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia. Belfast Byzantine Colloquia I*.

⁷³) PG 46, 784B.

soldier's dream of the martyrs, to which he can himself bear personal witness⁷⁴). Finally he adds the story with which we are concerned:

"But if I may set forth also something touching myself in particular, I will say this. For when we were preparing to celebrate the first festival in honour of the relics, and to lay the funerary urn in the sepulchre, my mother, for she it was who together with God was convening and preparing the feast, bade me come to participate in the proceedings, although I was living far away and still young and numbered among the laity. As often happens in urgent matters, I was busy and in my folly received my mother's summons ill, blaming her for not putting off the festival for another time, instead of disturbing me from many concerns and dragging me off there just for one service. But I came to the spot. Whilst a vigil was in progress in the grove where the relics of the saints were actually being honoured by the singing of psalms, I received the following vision in a dream as I slept in a little house nearby. I seemed to want to enter the grove where, in my dream, the vigil was taking place. But as I stood before the gate, there appeared a multitude of soldiers seated before the entrance. They arose in a body, brandishing their staves and rushed upon me threateningly, nor would they grant me access. I would even have received blows, had not one of them, whom I dreamt was more kindly than the rest, pleaded for me. When I awoke and thought over my delinquency in the matter of the summons, I realized the significance of the terrifying vision of the soldiers. I lamented my stupidity with much weeping and poured forth bitter tears upon the very receptacle of the relics beseeching that God might be gracious to me and that the blessed soldiers might grant me forgiveness.

I have told you this that we may be convinced that the martyrs live and are God's guardsmen and attendants who to this day assist and adorn our Church"⁷⁵)

There are no grounds whatsoever for thinking that Gregory is not absolutely sincere. The fact that he recalls an event of his student days in a later sermon indicates the impression it made. Set against Augustine it offers a bizarre mixture of parallels and contrasts. One is faintly reminded of Augustine's adult distress at his boyhood assault upon the pear tree⁷⁶). Again we meet the contrast between a rebellious youth and a deeply pious mother who seems to have a hot line to God, this time Emmelia instead of Monica. Coincidentally, the action is

⁷⁴) PG 46, 784C-D.

⁷⁵) PG 46, 784D-785B.

⁷⁶) *Conf.* 2. 4-8 (9-16).

again centred on a house outside a garden. But this time the garden is a sanctuary grove and the house the scene of the delinquency. Finally the reaction to the vision is once again the outpouring of bitter tears of repentance and the account refers to a decisive experience some years in the past.

But despite the similarity of framework the differences are startling. That the whole experience is perhaps less significant is not so important. The narrative's whole approach contrasts sharply with that of Augustine. It is explicitly a visionary dream, with an assumption of the downright miraculous. Augustine in the *Confessions* reserves such things for his mother as a mark of special divine assistance in coping with the vagaries of her son⁷⁷). In Gregory there is none of the mysteriousness or the hesitations that we have seen were a special feature of *Confessions* 8. The experience is sharp and direct and contains a punitive warning element. The effect is nightmarish, which may well be what it actually was. There is a kindly soldier who defends him from the blows of the rest, but he does not open the gate to the grove and let him in. The whole experience is terrifying, although in retrospect essentially benign, and perhaps, though Gregory does not spell it out, a mark of the special relationship between his family and the martyrs. Finally and most strikingly there is the contrast between Gregory's very concrete vision of the martyrs and Augustine's complex and allusive vision of *continentia*. Augustine may countenance Monica's dreams, and at a later stage in the *City of God*, miracles for others through prophetic dreams or the relics of saints, rarely the two combined⁷⁸), but he is more than a little chary in his own case⁷⁹).

What are we to make of it? Apparently Gregory, quite as much a Platonist as Augustine, reserves his Platonic flights for his more abstract theological works⁸⁰); when it comes to personal religious

⁷⁷) See FERRARI, 'Monica on the Wooden Ruler', *Aug. Stud.* 6, 1975, 193-205, and The 'Dreams of Monica in Augustine's *Confessions*', *Aug. Stud.* 10, 1979, 3-18.

⁷⁸) *DCD* 22. 8. See also the bones of the martyrs Gervase and Protasius, revealed to Ambrose in a dream at *conf.* 9. 7 (16), which perform healing miracles. But that discovery must have been the talk of Christian Rome at the time.

⁷⁹) We do hear that Augustine's former pupil, Eulogius, at a loss over a passage of Cicero for his pupils in Africa, dreamt that Augustine, then asleep in Milan, appeared and explained the problem. *Aug. De cura pro mort. ger.* 11. 13. The fact that Augustine seems to have been subject to a number of sexual dreams after his conversion, *conf.* 10. 30, may indicate a certain distrust of dreams in his own case.

⁸⁰) There has already been occasion to mention the *vit. Moys.* several times in this respect and if it is perhaps the most Platonic work of all, it is nonetheless representative of a general trend.

experience, we are met with what seems to be a much simpler approach altogether. Nor is this instance isolated. There are several accounts of miraculous visions in the families of the two Gregories. Most concern birth legends, which may legitimately be used for comparison in that they constitute virtual dedication of the child to God, an event quite as significant as, and not all that dissimilar to, an account of a change of heart.

In the *Life of Macrina* Gregory of Nyssa recounts a vision of Emmelia during Macrina's birth. Emmelia dreams that she is holding in her arms the unborn child. A person of supernatural majesty appears and gives her child the name of Thecla whose life is famous among virgins. This happens three times; and Emmelia awakes to find the girl child in her arms. Although Macrina is actually named after her grandmother, Thecla becomes her secret name thanks to this miraculous vision of the famous heroine of the popular apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla*⁸¹). Again, the same author reports his father's vision of God when Basil was ill as a boy. This prominent magistrate has already been compared to Elijah the Tishbite and Samuel. Now the Lord appears to him in a dream as to the nobleman in the Gospel and says 'Go, your son lives'⁸²).

Similarly in Gregory Nazianzen's autobiographical poem, *De vita sua*, his mother Nonna prays like Samuel's mother Anna for a son and is rewarded on the night of Gregory's birth by a dream in which his face and future name is shown to her. In so far as he has in his life proved worthy of his mother's prayer Gregory attributes it to God's gift, in so far as he has not, to his own sin⁸³).

Later he confesses that the attractions of pagan rhetoric were very strong in him as a student before it occurred to him to make anything of his Christian upbringing. But he undergoes an experience as frightening as his namesake's dream⁸⁴). Whilst en route from his studies in Alexandria, he endures a great storm near Cyprus lasting several days and his ship is nearly destroyed. At the worst he bitterly reproaches himself for allowing these deathly waters to cut him off from the purifying ones of baptism which he had failed as yet to receive. He weeps and cries out in his prayer, tearing his garments in

⁸¹) *V. Macr.* 2.

⁸²) *In laud. frat. Bas.*, PG 46 808B-C.

⁸³) *De vita sua*, 68-81.

⁸⁴) *De vita sua*, 111-120.

distress. He finds it miraculous that the sailors abandon their own fears and join their prayers to his own in sympathy for his plight. He launches into a great hymn of praise to Christ his saviour, concluding: 'I am yours, both before and now again; twice you receive me as a possession dear to you, the gift of land and sea, dedicated to you by a mother's prayer and by overpowering terrors. I will live for you if I escape the twofold danger; you will acquire a servant if you protect me. Once again is a disciple upon the deep. Shake off from me sleep (presumably that of death) or come and let fear be stilled.' As he finishes the waves are stilled. They reach Rhodes and the whole crew goes off blessing Christ⁸⁵).

The biblical ethos of all this in a work, it must be remembered, that is close in spirit to Augustine's *Confessions* is clear. The primary literary model is Paul's voyage to Rome in the *Acts of the Apostles*. Gregory's storm off Cyprus reflects Paul's off the coast of Crete, not merely in form⁸⁶) but in vocational significance. We remember that Paul's vision during the storm confirmed his mission to Rome, and Gregory's experience gives baptism and a Christian rather than a secular vocation a new significance for him. Strikingly he links this dedicatory experience with the earlier dedication to God at birth when he refers in his prayer of being twice dedicated, both by his mother's prayer and by this threat of death⁸⁷). The passage is also linked to the disciples' experiences upon the sea of Galilee⁸⁸) and again the idea of acceptance of a vocation is implied. Precisely the same point emerges as with Gregory of Nyssa's dream. The experience marks a vital shift in Gregory Nazianzen's attitude to his faith; it is effectively a conversion narrative. When the account of Gregory's education resumes it comes as no surprise to find that Athens comes next and the crucial friendship with Basil which will shape his future life, a benefit he attributes to God⁸⁹).

⁸⁵) *De vita sua*, 124-210.

⁸⁶) Act. Ap. 27, 6-28. 1. Small details also match. Paul's ship is Alexandrian and Gregory sails from there. The storm hits the ship off one island and landfall is eventually made on another, whence another ship is found to continue the journey: natural enough events, perhaps, but giving a very similar shape to the two tales. The big difference, of course, is in the character at that stage of the two protagonists.

⁸⁷) *De vita sua*, 194-199.

⁸⁸) The final part of the narrative, particularly Gregory's appeal to Christ for help, strongly evokes *Matt.* 9. 23-27; 14. 22-34. The tone of Gregory's prayer is one of the passages in this poem that comes quite close to Augustine's addresses to God in the *Confessions* although the circumstances render it perhaps more emotional.

⁸⁹) *De vita sua*, 211-236.

Despite variations, these accounts have much in common compared with Augustine. Most obviously they are more at ease with the downright miraculous, minus any Augustinian haze of mystery. Their dreams are more concrete than Augustine's vision of *continentia*, or, come to that, than Monica's sometimes mysterious and symbolic dreams. There is a far stronger narrative line within the vision itself. Again, the stilling of Gregory's storm is an almost down to earth consequence of the prayer: it seems as much a direct intervention to the young Gregory as did the dream of the Forty Martyrs to his namesake. Even in the *tolle, lege* scene, Augustine is much vaguer and more allusive about the whole experience.

Partly we have a difference in literary and rhetorical approach. The most improbable prophetic birth miracles for important people are two a penny in the Greek biographical tradition since time immemorial and are indiscriminately applied to poets, philosophers, sometimes even statesmen. Given the slightly incestuous nature of Cappadocian hagiobiography⁹⁰), it is no surprise that in an intentionally edifying genre these Fathers relate such things of each other, and, by extension, of themselves. Unlike many of their secular predecessors they were clearly convinced of the truth in some sense as well as the appropriateness of what they wrote. This colours all their biographical writing and can be seen most notably in their frequent use in narrative of the biblical σύγκρισις.

The σύγκρισις or comparison originates in pagan rhetoric in which the subjects of panegyric were favourably compared to the heroes of mythology or history⁹¹). The Cappadocians christianize this practice, plundering the Bible for their parallels⁹²). This is no mere

⁹⁰) I use the word to distinguish the biographical type of hagiography which comes to the fore in the fourth century, beginning with Athanasius' *Vita Antonii*, from the earlier martyrion form. In French, Maraval has used the phrase 'littérature bio-hagiographique' (*Vie de sainte Macrine* (SC 178, Paris, 1971), 33).

⁹¹) Menander Rhetor provides many types of speech in which such comparisons were made. The most influential of all types of epideictic oratory in this respect was the βασιλικὸς λόγος. See 370. 5-8; 23-26; 371. 5-12 (which recommends miraculous births and dreams about them as a topic); 372. 1-2; 374. 1-3; 375. 13-18 (= 78-88, Russell and Winterbottom). Finally at 376. 31 - 377. 9 (92, R. & W.) Menander gives instructions for the final large-scale σύγκρισις, and summarizes the general theory of the earlier running comparisons.

⁹²) The best examples are Gregory of Nyssa's *In laud. fratr. Bas.* (PG 46 788C-817), which uses running biblical comparisons throughout, to such an extent that it is difficult to disentangle the narrative from the biblical parallels, and Gregory Nazianzen's *in laud. Bas. Magn.*, which has in addition a lengthy and systematic set of Old and New

literary glorification, but part of their profoundly biblical understanding of what it is by God's grace to live a Χριστιανὸς βίος, to attempt to imitate Christ. This attempt they see mirrored in the careers of the biblical patriarchs and apostles and also of the martyrs⁹³). Their family upbringing seems to have offered them a much greater feeling of the church's continuity within history down to their own day than was as yet Augustine's at the time of the *Confessions*. Involvement with martyr cult in general⁹⁴) may have had something to do with this, since both miracles of this sort and the technique of σύγκρισις are also characteristic of the developed form of the *martyrion* and the hagiographical sermon in general⁹⁵). So it comes very naturally to them to talk autobiographically in terms of second Samuels and second Pauls and of miraculous visions of the family's own pet martyrs and to leave their platonizing to their more theoretical and intellectual works.

By contrast, it is the Latin philosophical tradition and above all Neoplatonism that have so shaped Augustine's thinking and his emotions as to allow him access to the Bible at all. He may have abandoned his crutches at the crucial moment of his conversion, but it would be a very long time, if ever, before he walked without a stick. This is one reason why his expression of what is in essence a personal encounter with God is couched in terms as much Platonic as biblical. Even in its biblical aspects it is different. Where a Cappadocian might more optimistically see himself or his family in terms of one of the future great, a Paul or a Peter among sinners, Augustine's role models more often lack such obviously redeemable potential. He is an Adam or a Prodigal Son⁹⁶), sunk far lower and surviving, rather than succeeding, by Grace.

Testament figures outdone by Basil as a grand finale just before the death scene (70-76, PG 36 589D-597C).

⁹³) As Maraval has pointed out, Gregory of Nyssa is at pains to set his sister Macrina on a level with the martyrs throughout the *v. Macr.* (intr., p. 25). It is also striking to notice how Gregory Nazianzen narrates Basil's struggles against the heretic emperor Valens and his officials in terms reminiscent of the *martyrion*. The second brush with these authorities is even presented in the oldest hagiographical format of all, that of the *procès verbal* during times of persecution: *in laud. Bas. Magn.* 44-53 (PG 36. 553C-564B; see also 30-33. 536C-541B).

⁹⁴) Apart from their involvement in the cult of the martyrs, see Basil's enthusiastic acquisition of the relics of Sabas: *epp.* 155; 164; 165.

⁹⁵) See for example Greg. Nyss., *in laud. xl mart. b*, PG 46. 767B; 769D; *in xl mart. or. laud.*, PG 46. 780D; 785C-D.

⁹⁶) He makes frequent reference to his state as one of the sons of Adam: *conf.* 1. 9 (14); 5. 9 (16); 8. 9 (21); 10 (22). There are various verbal allusions to the Prodigal Son parable of *Luc.* 15. 11-32 (for which see Green's *CSEL* index) of which two may be

The Cappadocians do not write, any more than they lived, entirely as individuals. One is constantly aware that their lives are still lived to a degree within the nexus of those two closely bonded families. What they write of themselves is not so very different from what they write of one another, and it is founded on a concept of similarity between one human life and another, contemporary or biblical, in the face of the experience of God. In literary perhaps more than in actual terms we have a sense of a community and of communal enterprise. Much has been written of Augustine's love of company, his friendships, his close involvement with the various communities he initiated, and this is true, perhaps particularly so, of the group of friends which surrounded him at the time of his conversion. But I do not think it is the whole story. If it is the case that Basil was the great leader of his group, to whom the others looked for leadership, nonetheless they emerge eventually as his peers as well as his sometimes reluctant allies. When we think of Augustine, it is hard to point to anyone with whom he was truly associated in quite the same way. In Italy, Ambrose was his mentor rather than his close associate. The friends at Milan were in no sense his intellectual peers. The deaths of Nebridius, of Monica and of his son deprived him of his closest companions. There was the sharp break of the departure for Africa where he seems always to have stood head and shoulders above his friends and allies, even Alypius, whilst spending much of his ministry embroiled in acrimonious controversy with other great figures of the time. The result is in some senses a splendid but perhaps lonelier isolation than his vast correspondence might at first indicate. In his autobiographical writings he often seems a figure apart, involved in a lonely struggle with himself. For the internal catechism of the *Soliloquies*, for the impassioned dialogue with God of the *Confessions*, the wider community may have been intended as an audience, but the self-portrait Augustine has left us is overpoweringly that of a man for whom his inner life dwarfs even the most crucial

singled out: a highly Plotinian interpretation of the parable at 1. 18 (28), applied to Augustine's spiritual exile, and a long sequence at 8. 3 (6), which summarizes virtually the whole of Luke 15, including the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin as well as the Prodigal Son. The nearest he comes to one of the great New Testament saints is a comparison of Victorinus to Paul, the least of the Apostles, at *conf.* 8. 4 (9), but the reference is exclusively to the humbling of Paul's pride to accept Christ's yoke, not to his subsequent achievements. If Augustine intends a parallel to his own case later in the narrative, as he very likely does, it is in much the same vein as the use of the Prodigal Son image.

encounters with the friends he loved. Above all, perhaps, he is a man alone at his desk talking, and that passionately, with God⁹⁷).

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⁹⁷) It will be apparent that, by concentrating on Augustine, I have omitted one very famous Western revelatory experience, namely the Lenten vision of Jerome. He was having grave trouble in giving up Cicero and Plautus, but falling ill, was taken up in the spirit to stand before the Judge's tribunal. His plea that he was a Christian was dismissed: he was really a devotee of Cicero, for his treasure was where his heart was. Condemned to a flogging of which he claimed to bear the bruises on awaking, he was rescued by bystanders pleading for a second chance and swore never to read another worldly book (*ep.* 22. 30). This story perhaps warns against making too hard and fast a divide East and West, perhaps one should really think of Augustine and 'the Rest'. Many features are more like the Cappadocian stories. Indeed the whole shape of the narrative, with the flogging and the bystanders' help is very reminiscent of Gregory of Nyssa's equally terrifying dream. The structure is equally simple and direct. Even the occasion may have been the same in that Gregory of Nyssa's business elsewhere could well have included his secular studies, and the problem is not unlike that of Gregory of Nazianzus with secular rhetoric. There is also some similarity to Eulogius' dream *about* Augustine (above, n. 79). However there are some features in common with Augustine, a truly agonizing conflict between secular and religious concerns, and the fact that the vision's content relates specifically to intellectual matters (albeit banal by comparison with Augustine's experience), and is so presented. Where Augustine's revelation is inherently philosophical and cuts rights across all his problems, intellectual and otherwise, Jerome's is, however, more bookish. Characteristically Augustine sticks to his resolve, whereas Jerome, caught out breaking his oath some years later, can dismiss the whole affair as only a dream (*Apol.* 1. 30 ff).