

AUGUSTINE'S FAMILY AS A SPACE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Few people have written as deeply and with such scholarly competence about Augustine's family as Professor van Bavel,¹ to whom I dedicate this paper on his 80th birthday. Augustine's family remains a subject of intense scholarly debate.² The reasons are twofold, though closely connected. Firstly, some of the facts are not entirely clear and remain open to interpretation. Secondly, the subject matter is of general current interest. Many people hold strong views on "the family" and these naturally influence their interpretation of historical phenomena. This is one of the reasons why some of the issues concerning Augustine's family continue to be hotly debated. This paper is not immune from this condition. It is only a small contribution to a much larger debate. But it might offer a new look at a particular aspect in a particular field, namely the family as a space of religious experience.

Contemporary family and religion – a paradox

It takes its starting point from a paradox in the current debate about the family and religion. Some recent opinion polls³ suggest that even in the most secularized parts of the world most people claim to have some sort of religious experience, or at least to seek such an experience. Similarly the family. Its death was announced decades ago. Yet according to some recent polls more than three quarters of those participating declared that their family supported them in life, not only materially, but also morally, and even spiritually. In Europe and the US in the early 1950s by contrast only one fifth of the

¹ I am especially indebted to his "Augustine's View on Women," in: *Augustiniana* 39 (1989) 5-53; see also *Ever Ancient, Ever New. Augustine's View on Women* (Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1990).

² See only recently D. Shanzer, "Avulsa a latere meo," in: *JRS* 92 (2002) 157-76.

³ The reflections that follow do not represent a specialist sociologist's analysis, but an informed lay person's interpretation of a series of polls conducted in the last three years in various countries in western Europe, e. g. by MORI, ICM and IMF (Allensbach). The results of these polls are in the public domain and can be checked on the websites of the relevant institutes.

population felt able to say that. But family life now, of course, whether in its ideal or in its real form, looks very different from family life then. Fewer people identify family with the small family unit (father-mother-children). More and more see it as a network of relationships, a cluster of several households, with members from several generations, and often with children and relatives from present as well as former married or non-married relationships and the partners from these relationships.

And for many this new kind of family does not merely serve as a pragmatic, or an emergency solution. By far the majority especially of young people experience the joys and difficulties arising from family life as enriching. Family for them is a place where they feel needed and called to take responsibility, but where they also experience joy, love, and fulfilment in life. And many associate these experiences with religion. Especially young parents seek to extend their family experience into a religious dimension. To them their family experience is a basic form of religious experience. At first glance this seems paradoxical. Nowadays religious experience is increasingly sought outside institutions. Yet the family, in spite of being itself an institution, seems to be experienced by many as a place that can facilitate religious experience. Also, many families seek to link themselves to religious communities. Practical theologians have, of course, already become aware of this and consider it a challenge and a chance.⁴ But the phenomenon might also prove interesting in the light of historical theology.

The family as an obstacle to and catalyst of Early Christian religious experience

One of my aims in this essay is to show that the paradox is not new. Already in the Early Church religious institutions in general and the family in particular were considered obstacles and catalysts of religious experience.⁵ Those who converted to Christianity were not isolated individuals, but members, and very often leading members, heads, of families. Sometimes the latter may have implied that

⁴ See, e. g., G. MARSCHÜTZ, "Zur Zukunft der Familie: soziologische Befunde – theologische Herausforderungen," in: *ThPQ* 149 (2001) 57–65.

⁵ For a recent study see H. JUNGBAUER, "Ehre Vater und Mutter" (WUNT 2.146; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002) 306–371.

a family converted as a whole,⁶ but not always. Still, at the beginning of the 5th century, at a time when paganism was already being suppressed, Augustine, as the bishop of Hippo, could only say that, while many families in his congregation had no more pagan members, most families had at least one Christian member.⁷ The least one can conclude from this remark is that most families in Hippo were heterogeneous in their religious beliefs. But this must have implied that children did not normally learn their faith from their parents; husbands and wives adhered to different faiths, as did grandparents and grandchildren, masters and slaves, landlords and workers. The impact of that on religious and family life must have been enormous, not just in terms of potential conflict, but especially in terms of ability to tolerate different beliefs, and live alongside very intimate friends and relations who sometimes held very different beliefs.

It is this phenomenon which interests me in this paper, the Late Antique family as a place where adherents of different religions and beliefs, different ways of life, pagans, heretics, schismatics, catechumens, baptised persons, clergy, ascetics and ordinary lay people shared their experience, including their religious experience, and how this impacted on Christianity in that culture during that period.

My approach is limited by the available sources. Augustine (with his family) is one of the very few examples, where we can paint a slightly fuller picture, though even in his case many questions must remain unanswered. Other examples would be the Cappadocians, to a lesser extent the circles around Rufinus of Aquileia and Jerome, and of Paulinus of Nola. Augustine, of course, is not only interesting as a historical figure. He also had a tremendous influence on the formation of western ideas about the relationship of the individual, especially the individual adolescent and young adult, to his or her family. And in one way or another this influence is still tangible today. But in this paper I can only hint at that latter aspect.

A note on the phrase "religious experience". I am aware of its vagueness. But I think it might be useful in this context. For despite the huge gap between the Late Antique situation and the situation

⁶ See, e. g., famously, Acts 16:15 on the baptism of Lydia "and her 'house'" (*oikos, domus*); cf. below for the high degree of equivalence in this context of *domus* and *familia*, "house" and family.

⁷ *Sermo* 302.19 (PL 38, 1392): *unum scio ... in hac ciuitate multas inueniri domos, in quibus non sit uel unus paganus; nullam domum inueniri, ubi non sint Christiani*; for the Early Christian character of this state of affairs generally see P. LAMPE, "Urchristliche Missionswege nach Rom: Haushalte paganer Herrschaft als jüdisch-christliche Keimzellen," in: *ZNW* 92 (2001) 123-27.

today it of all concepts might provide a ground for reflecting on what the two situations have in common, and where they remain irreconcilably different. This might help towards interpreting, halfway adequately, Late Antique reality, but also to formulate anew, in a qualified and timely manner, the norms and values of Early Christian *praxis* for Christian life today.

Augustine's family – some hard facts

Now, what was, for Augustine, his family? In what way, or ways (!), was it, for him and other members of his family a "space", or *locus*, of religious experience? Augustine was born in 354 in Thagaste, a small Roman settlement in what is now northeast Algeria. His father Patricius was a taxable citizen, a *curialis* or *decurio*. He owned land, slaves, a relatively comfortable house, a small fortune, reputation. He was *honestior*, and a *paterfamilias*.⁸ One of his ancestors had acquired Roman citizenship after becoming a freedman in the early 3rd century.⁹

To be established in this sense was always important for Augustine. It was one of many attitudes of his which his conversion did not change. Though he did once say that he was of a poor upbringing¹⁰ – he may (or may not) have meant this in a literal sense –, he also claimed, in what has to be considered a far more significant remark, that his paternal inheritance, probably a third of his father's fortune, made the church of Hippo one twentieth better off.¹¹ How does this square with the fact that as a sixteen year old he had to interrupt his studies because of lack of funds?¹² The explanation is that

⁸ POSSID. *Vit. Aug.* 1 (PL 32, 33).

⁹ See for this the discussion in G. BONNER, *Saint Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1986) 36.

¹⁰ *Sermo* 356.13 (PL 39, 1579-80); cf. also D. C. LAMBOT, *Sancti Augustini sermones selecti duodeviginti* (SPM 1; Utrecht: Spectrum, 1950) 140-41; and the discussion in B. D. SHAW, "The Family in Late Antiquity: The Experience of Augustine," in: *Past and Present* 115 (1987) 3-51.

¹¹ *Epist.* 126.7 (CSEL 44, 13): *uix enim uigesima particula res mea paterna existimari potest in comparatione praediorum ecclesiae, quae nunc ut dominus existimor possidere*. Augustine would not make this claim, if he was not particularly proud of it, or certain that it could be verified, or at least not be falsified. He is keen to be on record of having said that. But on the other hand he also compares himself here with "really" rich people like Romanianus or Melania the Younger, whose inheritances (in the case of the latter) may have constituted the entire wealth of more than one big diocese.

¹² See *conf.* 2.3.5; 6.7.11 (CCL 27, 19-20; 80-81).

these were probably cash flow problems, serious no doubt, but temporary, as it turned out. His father had just died, and probably taxes had to be paid. Perhaps debtors defaulted in turn. But the family estates remained intact. Augustine's brother Navigius soon followed the father as a *curialis*, and he could pay off his brother and his sister. This family was neither destitute nor ruined, but on the contrary rather well endowed, and also, equally important, well connected. Within a year Augustine had a sponsor who helped him to continue his studies in Carthage and later on even to pursue his career in Rome and Milan, Romanianus, a local magnate and friend and patron of the family – probably also with financial interests (as creditor or debtor?). What may also be considered for the situation of 370 is the cut throat nature of the whole system of financing higher education. Not only students, professors, too, were constantly short of cash. Augustine tells of his worries as a professor in Rome, when his students did not pay their fees at the end of term.¹³ But again, young men from less established and well endowed families, less well connected, simply would not have continued with their studies or chosen another profession.

The established life style of his family always remained an important aspect of Augustine's religious experience. He does say once that Christian poverty is more authentic if it does not depend on earthly inheritance,¹⁴ but the whole point is that he himself was unacquainted with such a poverty. His inheritance gave security to himself, his family, and later to his religious community and his church.

Law and love

Family, *familia*, for Augustine, consists of several layers. The core at the centre are his father, mother, brother and sister. But in the outer areas it also comprises a larger group of people, not so much "extended family" in a social anthropological sense, but a group of people fixed by law, the members of the house (*domus*), like slaves and tenants (*inquilini*).¹⁵ Clearly, these people were not family in the sense children, cousins or grandparents were. They had duties, but few rights, or should we say privileges. Often, they were crushed

¹³ See *conf.* 5.12.22 (CCL 27, 72).

¹⁴ See *epist.* 126.7 (CSEL 44, 13): *multo ergo liquidius et securius in hoc amatur christiana paupertas, in quo nulla rerum ampliorum potest putari cupiditas.*

¹⁵ See SHAW (n. 10) 15 n. 40.

between warring factions. Thus when one day tensions ran high between Augustine's mother and her mother-in-law and the *paterfamilias* had to step in, they accused some of their slaves of upsetting the *pax domestica* by spinning intrigues. In return, the father subjected these slaves to *disciplina familiae*, i. e. he gave them a sound thrashing, thus restoring *concordia suorum*.¹⁶

There is hardly anything sentimental about such conditions. Yet none the less it would be quite wrong to think of these structures merely in legalistic terms. True, a *paterfamilias* had the right over life and death, not only of slaves, but also of his wife and children. He could treat them as he pleased, maltreat them, and even kill them. He could establish a quasi second wife¹⁷ in his household, as Augustine did in 385 in Milan, after he had engaged himself to a ten year old girl. He had to wait for his bride to reach her legal age for marriage and meanwhile to content himself with a more mature mistress. He had already dismissed his common law wife, the love of his life from his youth. There is no indication that anyone could have done anything against such behaviour on his part, though equally we must not conclude that such behaviour was generally considered acceptable, on whatever grounds.¹⁸ Even if conservative minded women, like Augustine's mother as portrayed by her son, did not openly protest against it, their quiet disapproval alone may well have been damnable, and not just from a Christian perspective. True, there was a hard edge to the Roman soul. Justice was held supreme. It was expected to be enforced with severity¹⁹ to maintain discipline, order, and the traditional way of family life, be it against the *improbitas* of an intransigent first born son, or the *perversitas* of a power-hungry wife aspiring to take charge of the *familia* herself.²⁰ But deep down at the bottom of the heart there was also a profound desire for enduring passionate and compassionate love. Augustine tells of a slave wet-nurse, who before him had brought up his mother and her father.²¹ And, more famously, he also tells credibly and movingly of the love of his first (common law) wife. The split with her, on his initiative and therefore

¹⁶ See *conf.* 9.9.20 (CCL 27, 145-46) and the discussion in SHAW (n. 10) 15.

¹⁷ For the difficulties of the exact description of the relationship as well as for the other terms in this passage see now Shanzer (n. 2). Mistress and concubine are not quite what is meant.

¹⁸ Cf. J. EVANS GRUBBS, *Law and Family in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) 155.

¹⁹ Cf. SHAW (n. 10) 24 on the motif of *durus pater*.

²⁰ Cf. SHAW (n. 10) 28 on the *pax perversa* of a *domus*, in which a woman is in charge; *ibid.* 31 also on the *ira* of a husband, father, and lord.

²¹ *Conf.* 9.8.17 (CCL 27, 143); SHAW (n. 10) 42.

on his responsibility (or fault), he records, broke his heart, in spite of being, in his opinion, legal, morally justifiable, and above all spiritually (i. e. religiously) motivated.²² This clash of hard-hearted legalism and sentimental desire for inner fulfilment clearly indicates the fault lines in the social, and mental and emotional landscape in which Augustine's and his family members' religious experience can be situated.

Inner space and outer boundaries

Harsh and brutal though it may be, the *dominatio* by the *paterfamilias* remains ultimately an external force, and under normal circumstances it does not last very long due to the normal life expectancy of men. In the long run Augustine's family was dominated by women. Augustine never got to know his grandfathers.²³ They had died long before he was even a child. When his father died in 370, Augustine was 17, his mother 41. It was her who from now on till her death in 387 seems to have acted at least *de facto*, if not *de iure*, as *materfamilias*, a situation which the law tolerated, though it was rarely ratified. Ironically, as a bishop Augustine later condemned the practice.²⁴ Yet his mother being in charge as *materfamilias* was by far not the only *de facto* arrangement in his family during his teens. It was during his mother's headship of the family that his partner and their child stayed with her "under one roof." Apparently the quasi marriage was never ratified by any sort of valid contract. As a consequence it could easily be dissolved. Impossible to say if that was what was intended from the outset. Certain legal impediments may have prohibited a legal marriage. But, whatever the original intention, the arrangement contained a convenient get-out clause for Augustine and his family, as turned out fourteen years later, in the events of 385. Generally, an unmarried partner staying with the other family was not legally a member of that family. Nor was any child from such a union. Woman and child could easily be sent away, and Augustine's, or better, Monica's, family, now residents of Milan, did just that. They sent away the woman, though not her (and Augustine's) son. One can only assume that that was done by mutual consent. In legal

²² See EVANS GRUBBS (n. 18) 300, who notes that Augustine could even rely on the backing of his move by the local bishop, Ambrose.

²³ Cf. *mus.* 6.11.32 (PL 32, 1130); SHAW (n. 10) 18.

²⁴ For a discussion of his views on the matter see SHAW (n. 10) 33.

terms Adeodatus should have returned with his mother to her family, which was also his. In Augustine's family, with Monica in charge, his legal status remained ambiguous, to say the least. He certainly had no legal entitlement. Had Augustine died, he might have been left with nothing to live on. In the event it was him who died only three years later, very much to the dismay of his father, and no doubt also his mother.

Emotional development and failure

In an outpouring of grief over his son's death Augustine professed how deeply he had loved him, just as his mother. But very little of that love had been tangible in 385. What indeed would Adeodatus's legal status have been after Augustine's marriage to a promising heiress? How must he have felt? All entitlements would have been with her children. And, to be sure, it was primarily Augustine's plan to pursue that marriage, not Monica's. True, Monica helped with the arrangements. But that was her duty as acting head of the family, not from her own ambition. It was the convention, and she had been explicitly asked to do so by her son.²⁵ Yes it also may have seemed reasonable under the circumstances, but on the whole the situation was confused. Augustine's behaviour was extremely erratic. Monica can hardly have felt comfortable in her role. Augustine had chosen the girl, but all of a sudden he was not so sure any more. It is hardly surprising that when he asked his mother for advice he found her evasive and unhelpful. His own feeble attempts at dream divination, too, yielded no satisfactory results. He remained undecided.

Moreover, with the bride being two years under age the marriage had to wait in any case. This drove Augustine to begin another non-marital relationship.²⁶ It did not last for very long, a few weeks, or months, at most, it seems. Obviously, it was not able to fill the gap that had opened up. Only now, confronted with a major life crisis, Augustine decided to enter the ascetic life. Only later, much later, it turned out that it was for good. To a contemporary onlooker, who would have witnessed Augustine's "conversion" reeling off in real time, it might well have looked quite pathetic in its unintentional display of male vanity and human weakness. But that is not the point

²⁵ See *conf.* 6.12-13 (CCL 27, 88-89), and K. POWER, "'Sed unam tamen': Augustine and His Concubine," in: *AugStud* 23 (1992) 49-76, 57 n. 99; for this passage in *conf.* also Shanzer (n. 2).

²⁶ For the different layers of motivation see POWER (n. 25) 56-58.

here, nor, by the way, is the fact that many individual elements of the conversion narrative are literary motifs. Augustine may have styled his story, but that does not (necessarily) mean that he invented it in its entirety. His account may be extremely one-sided, subjective, even questionable and objectionable, but it is not a piece of fiction, be it historical or allegorical. This is why it can be used (albeit critically) as a source for historical and biographical research.

What is most striking in the present context is how much Augustine's life after his conversion remained very much the same as before. The continuity is striking. His ascetic life begins in the bosom of his family. To Cassiciacum he moves with his mother, his son, his brother, two cousins and the sons of two patrons. Yes, his partner is missing, but we are told that he knows that she went back to Africa also to join the ascetic life. So could that indicate that he deems her still in union with him, at least in some sense? In any case, his mother continues to be in charge, for the time being; for she will be dead in little more than half a year. Two years will pass before Adeodatus also dies, and a very close friend, too, Nebridius.

This whole phase in Augustine's life, from 385 to 387, is characterised less by the workings of family relationships as such than by different sorts of relationship crises and breakdowns with which Augustine's life was riddled during that period. In part Augustine was himself responsible for the disasters that befell him, in part he was the "victim" of fate, or divine providence, as he himself would have put it. In 385 alone he ruined no less than three marital, or quasi marital, relationships, in 386 his professional career. In 387 his mother died, in 389 his son Adeodatus, and his close friend Nebridius. Clearly, these events demonstrated the limits of human life on earth, including family life, not only in physical but also in principal terms. And yet, far from abandoning the family as a model for any kind of life, including religious life, Augustine continued to interpret his life in these very terms. He not only continued to live consciously in the context of his family thus making use of his family as a space for religious experience and development, he also interpreted the latter in terms of the former, and increasingly so, beginning with Cassiciacum, and ending in the Hippo of the late 420s.

Family in a context of religious diversity

Having sketched out the development of Augustine's family life up to 387 with a focus mainly on himself individually, I will now

try to focus on his family in the religious context of his time. Here and there we have already been able to throw a glimpse at his family as a space of religious experience. In what follows now, this aspect should become even more compelling.

When Augustine was born in 354, Constantius II. (337-361) was in sole charge of the Roman Empire.²⁷ The opponent of Athanasius and patron of the Homoeans was known in Africa as the scourge of the Donatist schismatics and a champion of the orthodox, or catholic, Caecilian cause. Fear of the Emperor drove the Donatist town of Thagaste back to Catholicism, Augustine writes.²⁸ In 362 Constantius' II. successor Julian revoked the measure, but with little consequence for Augustine's family. The most dominant Christian in it, his mother, came from a *domus* which, as it seems, was already catholic when she was born, around 330.²⁹ In those days, even more significantly, Thagaste had been mainly pagan. It had been a different age. Augustine's father still originated from that generation. It was the generation that separated him from his wife, in terms of years as much as in terms of how he viewed the world. He was still an old style pagan, who submitted to baptism only on his death bed. There were Donatists among Augustine's relatives, for example a cousin Severinus, whom Augustine labels wealthy, educated and prudent. They were on good terms.³⁰ But Augustine himself was not attracted by Donatism. His career, as it turned out, led him elsewhere.

The mother's religious authority and influence upon the family was strong, not only on the children, but also on the husband. Augustine reports that it was mainly due to her that towards the end of his life he became a catechumen and let himself eventually be baptised; though this was only very shortly before his death. Thus it could equally be argued that he put up a staunch and principled resistance against her advances until he was too weak to resist. Augustine and his brother and sister, too, became catechumens, whilst they were still children. The fact that less than a generation later Augustine had his

²⁷ For what follows cf. W. H. C. FRENDE, "The Family of Augustine: A Microcosm of Religious Change in North Africa," in: G. MADEC U. A., HRSG., *Congresso internazionale su S. Agostino nel XVI centenario della conversione, Roma, 15-20 settembre 1986* 1-3 (SEA 24-26; Rom: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1987) 1, 135-51. Covering the same ground as Frend I shall focus not so much on the aspect of religious change as on that of a continuing religious diversity.

²⁸ See *epist.* 93.17 (CSEL 34/2, 462): *...ciuitas mea, quae cum tota esset in parte Donati, ad unitatem catholicam legum imperialium timore conuersa est.*

²⁹ See *conf.* 9.8.17-18 (CCL 27, 143-44); A. MANDOUZE, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas Empire 1: Afrique 303-533* (Paris: CNRS, 1982) 758-62.

³⁰ *Epist.* 52 (CSEL 34/2, 149-51).

son baptised as a baby might indicate a change in the practice, though this could also be due to regional differences (between the respective homes of Adeodatus's mother and father).

Augustine was not only exposed to orthodox (catholic) Christianity represented by his mother, he also got to know other religions. Later in his life he remembered Madauros, Apuleius' birthplace, not only as a place of excellent grammar schools, but also as a city where traditional classical paganism was still very much alive, e. g. in the person of his grammar teacher. His own attitude to classical education as one aspect of an ancient and archaic set of religious beliefs and practices, though universally relevant, was strongly influenced by that late childhood experience of that kind of education offered in a still functioning traditional context. One has to remember that he belonged to one of the last generations in the west who enjoyed that privilege. In the course of the 5th century secondary and higher education was to become a prerogative of the church.

In fact, his positive encounter with and respectful attitude towards paganism in the shape of classical education could in part explain why, as a student of rhetoric in Carthage, Augustine was less interested in the austere and evangelical doctrine of Donatism than in the seemingly philosophical, free and enlightened spirituality of Manicheism. On the other hand his interest in Manicheism and his long (albeit loose) adherence to it as hearer (*auditor*) was probably superseded by the fact that he never stopped being a catechumen in the catholic church.³¹ Thus one could say that between 371 and 383 Augustine lived, more or less, in two parallel universes as far as his religion was concerned. That he retained his catechumenate was due at least in part to the continuing influence of his mother. It may have been easier to reconcile with a loose adherence to Manicheism than a dedicated commitment to Donatism. There would have been a real alternative. But his mother, too, was ambiguous. Considering to exclude her son, when she first heard of his religious escapade, she decided otherwise, not on religious principle, but on what one may interpret as pastoral and family grounds: She reckoned (and not in vain) that this would enable her to continue to exert religious influence not only on her son, but also on her grandson, to whom she also became very much emotionally attached. And on both counts she may in turn have been influenced by Augustine's partner, who, like her, was strongly committed to the Catholic faith.

³¹ See for this L. C. FERRARI, "Young Augustine: Both Catholic and Manichee," in: *AugStud* 26 (1995) 109-128.

Religion, culture, and education and the family

A striking feature of North African Manicheism, as portrayed by Augustine, is its attraction for well educated, rich and ambitious men from the provincial urban elite. Augustine, Alypius, Romanianus and his son Licentius, they all belonged to the best families of Thagaste. What attracted them to Manicheism, a cult that was considered a dangerous, heretical, form of Christianity by pagans, Donatists, and Catholics alike. Already illegal in the 370s it was severely banned, or persecuted, from 382. (Interestingly, it was a year later that Augustine finally decided to quit.) Manicheism had no church discipline like Catholics and Donatists and it rejected the Old Testament as part of the Christian tradition. Instead it offered a seemingly intellectually open, rational and, above all, aesthetic religion. It lacked what might have been considered the strict legalism of Catholicism and the fanatic enthusiasm of Donatism. Its aestheticism resulted from a materialist ontology. One of its more tangible effects was a morbid obsession, not dissimilar to that in modern forms of materialism, with the body, its beauty and its purity. While a Manichee Augustine wrote a work, later lost, about beauty. He was morbid about his body, understood it as life doomed to death,³² but led at the same time an extremely body conscious life, sexual life included. Since Manicheism saw every human life as a soul lost or damned in the flesh, it recommended sexual abstinence to its members in order to avoid the conception of further human beings. But clearly, there were other ways to avoid conception. Thus less dedicated members ("hearers" like Augustine) not prepared to achieve the highest degree of purity through sexual abstinence, could be sexually active, but they had to practise contraception. Later Augustine writes that he used practices to that effect which his partner detested.³³ Apparently they violated not only her religious convictions but even her dignity as a human being and woman.

Thus the affectuated intellectualism of North African Manicheism as practised and experienced by Augustine and his "mates", while claiming to be emancipated, enlightened and mature, seems rather to be characterised by what impresses as an adolescent, immature, male arrogance, while the Catholic faith of his mother and his partner, which the young Augustine rejected as infantile and

³² For the sources see FREND (n. 27) 147.

³³ See *bono coniug.* 11.12 (CSEL 41, 203-204); SHAW (n. 10) 45; POWER (n. 25) 55.

unacceptable for an educated gentleman, strikes as far more mature, responsible and down to earth. Moreover, both, Augustine's mother and his partner are not in the least uneducated or narrowminded. His mother, it seems, knew her Bible,³⁴ and in the *Cassiciacum* dialogues she is portrayed as a capable, even superior, participant with a dry sense of humour and a sharp, critical mind.³⁵ Again, questions regarding the historicity of particular passages in the dialogues aside, the mere fact that Augustine presents Monica as a participant in the dialogues, and the role he ascribes to her, should be sufficient to conclude that he had remained in some form of a continuous dialogue with her. That in itself should be astonishing enough. And what is almost proven in the case of the mother might also be safely assumed of the partner.³⁶ And this has a lot to do with education.

Education was not, and certainly not primarily, a characteristic of Augustine's Manicheism. It is a general characteristic of religious experience in his family. It enabled all members not only to develop and grow each in their own, individual, religious experience, but also to tolerate others in theirs. And there was, even for today's standards, an enormous range of religious experience lived and shared in that family. There was the father, brought up in a largely traditional pagan culture, but married to a Christian wife and slowly considering his position. There was the mother, a Catholic in a predominantly Donatist environment. There were relatives who were Donatists. There were the children, brought up as catechumens, yet also well educated and socially functional. Augustine's sister married off and after the early death of her husband established as a widow. His brother as the family heir. There were also risks involved, and Monica is reported as having taken such risks. She kept in contact with Augustine, his partner and their child, even though it was in breach of her authority that Augustine adhered to Manicheism. In the long run, the family stayed together, not just as a unit driven by economic necessity, but as a group with social, cultural, and religious objectives. That is the impression one gets from the *Cassiciacum* dialogues. Besides Monica even the brother Navigius strikes as witty, liberal minded, critical, and interested in intellectual discourse, if not as genial as Augustine and Adeodatus. Only death was going to part them.

³⁴ See the revealing hint in *ord.* 2.1 (CCL 29, 106.5-10): *mater nostra cuius ingenium atque in res divinas inflammatum animum...*

³⁵ See FRENCH (n. 27) 143.

³⁶ See POWER (n. 25) 52.

Conclusion

No doubt material wealth was of decisive importance for Augustine's family. It guaranteed to a high degree its identity, integrity, social status and mere existence. It also mattered for the size of the family, the fact that it transcended the core unit (father-mother-children), though that core unit remained the spiritual and material centre of the family. But material wealth, besides social and legal status, was only a means to an end. Augustine's family could persist on a minimum of all of these. It was not merely an economic, social, or legal institution. It had a spiritual heart, a living soul, with an emotional potential that enabled individual family members to use economic, social and legal grey zones. These often experienced a hot-and-cold bath between economic utilitarianism, social pragmatism and legal formalism on the one hand, and genuine affection and compassion on the other. Forced into a straitjacket of traditions, social conventions and legal requirements, they were also able to experience, or at least deeply to wish for, that individuals would treat other individuals on an individual basis, and grant exceptions sometimes to themselves, and sometimes to others as well, in all fields of life, including religion.

There was therefore genuine religious experience, but it was constrained, and, more importantly, it was embedded in the context of the family. The family was the place of religious experience. But that is not all. Education, it turned out, was decisive for the way religious experience was consciously made, reflected upon, and shared. It mainly made possible that degree of mutual tolerance necessary to allow for the diversity which individual experience inevitably creates. Seen from this perspective it is not surprising that we find exactly these three vital elements present in Augustine's family, to an astonishing degree: education, tolerance, and a diversity of religious experience.

And one could argue further that it was that tolerance that made it possible for Augustine to deepen the religious experience, which accompanied his failure and the rupture of the fabric of his previous life in 385/6, to an encounter with God in the crisis, and a transcendence of that religious experience itself. Thus tolerance is here once more not an end in itself, but a by-product of the deepseated conviction that the personal, practical, example is more effective and more authoritative than any form of rhetoric and coercion. But then of course it has always been easier to put this conviction again itself into rhetoric rather than into practice; which is one of the reasons why,

apparently, there was a development away from the seemingly more open situation between 360 and 390, towards more homogeneity, and at the same time, less tolerance. One could argue that this may also be due to the way in which Augustine records that period in his autobiographical writings, that he even intended that period to look more open in order to contrast it with the more secure period of his later years (the 420s). But on the other hand the religious situation in Augustine's family during those years did reflect a wider development in society. There simply was less religious tolerance and diversity under Theodosius I. than there had been in the previous decades; though this could again be due to the fact that we draw such a lot of our information regarding religion and religious change during that period from Augustine and writers recording similar experiences.

In spite of fundamental differences between the Late Antique situation and the situation today there may be areas where we can compare the two; for today, too, one important question is whether the family, especially through the newly found openness towards it, as outlined at the beginning of this paper, can offer space for religious experience and development; or are we facing the danger that a deficit in education and, consequently, in the ability to tolerate the respective other as other, will contribute to the erosion of the kind of religious identity that leads to strength in spirit, mind, and will? In other words, is there a tendency (in spite, or precisely because of, the accelerated secularization process) towards more homogeneity and less tolerance, or can an emphasis on personal witness guarantee a high degree of religious identity, plurality and tolerance? Augustine's family offers an interesting case study for both phenomena, for the potentials and the dangers of the family as a space of religious experience.

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