

"AD CHRISTIANAM FIDEM PIGRIUS MOVEBATUR" (CONF. VII.XX (25)) | ALYPIUS' MORE RELUCTANT MOVE TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH (COMPARED TO AUGUSTINE)

Introduction

In *Epistola* 3 Paulinus of Nola asked his new acquaintance Alypius to send him *suam historiam*, curious as he was about "qui genus, unde sis domi",¹ how his conversion to the Catholic faith had come about, and whether he, too, had been instructed and baptized by the great Ambrose of Milan. If this small-scale *vita Alypii* would have come down to us, it would have nicely complemented the conversion story of Augustine in *Confessiones*, since the spiritual Odyssey of Augustine and Alypius "weaved in and out in a kind of antiphony".² Their journey culminated in their shared conversion experience in a garden in Milan (at the end of July or beginning of August 386), and some eight months later in their joint baptism at the hands of bishop Ambrose of Milan.³ Imagine being able to read an account of the famous garden scene from the perspective of the closest witness of Augustine's conversion! Unfortunately, Alypius – torn between his love for Paulinus and his own modesty – asked his friend Augustine to fulfil this task instead. And so it happened that in *Epistola* 27 Augustine promised Paulinus of Nola, "cito ergo [...] totum Alypium inseram praecordiis tuis".⁴ A *vita Alypii* written by Augustine would still have been of great value. How would he have presented his own role in Alypius' conversion? What providential plan would he have discerned in his friend's journey towards the Catholic faith? Augustine wrote further that if his courier⁵ had not been in such a hurry, he would have managed to include the "spiritual biography" of his closest friend in the very same letter.⁶ Whether he ever fulfilled his

¹ PAULINUS OF NOLA, *Ep.* 3.4; this is a quote from VIRGIL (*Aeneid* VIII, 114).

² Words used by Colin Starnes, *Augustine's conversion: a guide to the argument of Confessions I-IX* (Waterloo (Ont.): Wilfrid Laurier University, 1990), p. 156.

³ During the Easter Vigil in the night of 23-24 April 387 AD.

⁴ AUGUSTINE, *Ep.* 27.5: "I will quickly introduce the whole of Alypius into your heart".

⁵ The courier happened to be Romanianus, a relative of Alypius, and Augustine's former patron.

⁶ AUGUSTINE, *Ep.* 27.5: "quod iam fecissem iamque illum legeres, nisi profectio fratris inprovisa repente placuisset". This shows that the projected *vita Alypii* could not have been very long.

promise later on, we do not know. If he did, the *vita Alypii* has thus far not come down to us. Luckily, Augustine did provide some details concerning Alypius' life in his own "spiritual biography". A large section of book VI of *Confessiones* is devoted to his best friend, and it contains some of the material Paulinus had asked for. Alypius further appears in one paragraph of book VII (about his misconception of the Catholics' understanding of Christ), in book VIII (because of their joint conversion moment in the garden), and in book IX (with some valuable information on Alypius' attitude between conversion and baptism). For the interesting period between conversion and baptism, another useful source has come down to us. Alypius decided to follow Augustine to Cassiciacum together with Augustine's relatives (mother, son, brother and two nephews), and two of his students (Licentius, who was a son of Romanianus, and Trygetius). There, they spent the autumn and winter (October 386 – end of February 387) *in otio*, far away from the hustle and bustle of public life. Stenographers recorded word for word the series of (philosophical) conversations held there. Augustine subsequently edited this raw material, and published the adapted conversations as philosophical dialogues in the style of Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*. Alypius made appearances in two of these so-called Cassiciacum dialogues (*De academicis* and *De ordine*), and here we perhaps come closest to hearing his authentic voice.⁷

All this material can help us to reconstruct the conversion story of Alypius, which – through circumstances – has not come down to us. Surprisingly perhaps, as far as I am aware, the only extensive study of Alypius' life already dates from 1904. It was written by Vivien Bardet, and appeared in four parts in *Revue augustinienne*.⁸ It is symptomatic that in reference works, such as the *Augustinus Lexikon* and Mandouze's *Prosopographie*, most attention goes towards Alypius the bishop, detailing the diplomatic journeys he made, and the important role he played at Augustine's side in the Donatist and Pelagian controversy in which he could bring to bear his legal expertise.⁹ There are

⁷ In *De academicis* and *De ordine*, but not in *De beata vita* and *Soliloquies*.

⁸ Vivien Bardet, "Un ami de saint Augustin: Alypius", *Revue augustinienne* 4 (1904), 1. Jeunesse et conversion: 52-62 (11 p.), 2. Cassiciacum: 134-145 (12 p.), 3. Le moine – l'évêque: 228-243 (16 p.), 4. Dernières luttes: 333-349 (17 p.).

⁹ Erich Feldmann (i-iii), Alfred Schindler (iv), Otto Wermelinger (v), *Augustinus Lexikon*, art. "Alypius", col. 245-267. i. *Alypius until his conversion* (4 col.), ii. *at Cassiciacum* (2 col.), iii. *until bishop of Thagaste* (1,5 col.), iv. *between 400 and 412* (3,5 col.); v. *between 412-430*: (8,5 col.). This means: 6 cols. devoted to Alypius from his youth until Cassiciacum, and almost 14 cols. devoted to the time after that; "Alypius" in André Mandouze, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire. 1: Afrique (303-533)* (Paris: CNRS, 1982), p. 53-65: Alypius' life until baptism: 3 p., against

also articles written on specific topics of Alypius' life, for instance, his birth year (A. Sizoo), and his (wrongly) presumed phase of Apollinarianism (Robert J. O'Connell), to which I will return.¹⁰ Why Alypius' conversion story received so little attention is probably because one too easily pictured him as being "*l'ombre d'Augustin*", assuming that he almost always blindly followed Augustine's spiritual lead.¹¹ The following statement of Ragnar Holte concerning Alypius' road to the Catholic faith is therefore no exception: "Alypius was a close witness to the whole process of his friend's conversion and followed him in all decisions, giving the same devoted and uncritical response as always".¹²

It is certainly not my intention to attempt here a full-blown reconstruction of the lost(?) *vita Alypii*. Instead, I will focus on a particular claim made about Alypius' conversion. The lack of scholarly interest in Alypius' spiritual journey may have made it easier for an Augustine scholar to breath new life into an old controversy. In his three-volume commentary of *Confessiones*, the North-American classicist James O'Donnell made the following bold statement concerning Alypius' mindset at Cassiciacum:

His is the attitude that many attribute to Augustine at Cassiciacum: he sees in Christianity a useful type of philosophy, but his principal allegiance is to philosophy. [...] This is an arresting suggestion of a limited conversion on Alypius' part as late as November 386.¹³

The contention that in a Milanese garden Augustine did not so much convert to the faith of his mother as to a life devoted to Neoplatonic philosophy has been in the past the cause of an intellectual storm.¹⁴ It has long since been convincingly refuted, and, with it, the

Alypius' life as bishop: 9 p. Thus two to three times more space has been devoted to his life as a bishop.

¹⁰ Alypius appears also in studies of Augustine dealing with, for instance, the theme of friendship (see: Marie Aquinas McNamarra, *Friendship in saint Augustine* (Studia Friburgensia N.S. 20) (Fribourg: University press, 1958).

¹¹ There is one exception: in 1970 Maurice Testard wrote an article dealing with Alypius' conversion moment, which has thus far not received the attention it deserves, and to which I will return shortly. The expression "*l'ombre d'Augustin*" has been taken from this article.

¹² Ragnar Holte, "Monica, 'the philosopher'", *Augustinus* 39 (1999), 293-316 (p. 298).

¹³ James O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessiones* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 3 vols, III, p. 90.

¹⁴ For a good summary of the debate, see Goulven Madec, *Petites études augustinienes* (Paris: Études augustinienes, 1994).

historicity of the conversion story in *Confessiones* has been restored. There is therefore no need to plead the case all over again, all the more because, more recently, Carol Harrison has persuasively argued once more against this thesis.¹⁵ Coincidentally, in her book she happens to refer to James O'Donnell's challenging statement quoted above, not to comment on the claim made about Alypius, but to remark that the many who still believe that in 386 AD Augustine converted to Neoplatonic philosophy are simply wrong.¹⁶ James O'Donnell has thus produced a kind of spin-off of an already dead controversy: what has been wrongly claimed about Augustine in the past he now declares to be true regarding his best friend Alypius. In his more recent book, he also claims that Alypius' overall attitude towards the Christian faith differed considerably from Augustine's:

Alypius had a decidedly untheological approach to Christianity. This is hard to see behind the veils of piety Augustine and Augustine's readers are always ready to cover him with, but already in the *Confessions* Alypius' religion has a different flavour.¹⁷

In a review of this publication, Frederik van Fleteren criticized James O'Donnell's provocative attitude, and he posited that only someone with sufficient historical, philosophical, theological and psychological knowledge can come to a correct assessment of Augustine's life and work.¹⁸ No doubt, the audacious statement concerning Alypius' limited allegiance to the Catholic faith at Cassiciacum is exposed to the same kind of criticism. However, as we will see, the quotation from *Confessiones* in the title of this article is but one of the surprising remarks Augustine made in this work about Alypius' attitude towards the Catholic faith. They do not permit us to dismiss James O'Donnell's claim out of hand, and they make clear that Alypius was not simply "*l'ombre d'Augustin*".

The contention that, unlike Augustine, Alypius experienced but a limited religious conversion in the garden in Milan will be examined in two stages: the conversion moment itself, which will be discussed in the present article, and Alypius' attitude between conversion and baptism, which will be discussed in a forthcoming, second article.¹⁹

¹⁵ Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's early theology: an argument for continuity* (Oxford: Oxford university, 2006).

¹⁶ Carol Harrison 2006, p. 255.

¹⁷ James O'Donnell, *Augustine: a new biography* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), p. 105.

¹⁸ Frederik van Fleteren, *Augustinian Studies* 36 (2005) 2, 447-452.

¹⁹ In this second article use will be made of the Cassiciacum dialogues, book ix of *Confessiones*, and the letters written during this period between conversion and baptism.

Part I: ALYPIUS' CONVERSION MOMENT (end of July/August 386 AD)²⁰

The short paragraph in book VIII of *Confessiones* in which Augustine recounts Alypius' conversion experience in a garden in Milan is a good place to start. James O'Donnell perceives a difference here between the two friends: "It is not so certain as we have always assumed that the garden scene had exactly the same place in the lives of Augustine and Alypius".²¹ He seems, however, to have overlooked an article of Maurice Testard written in 1970, titled: "Observations sur la conversion d'Augustin et d'Alypius au jardin de Milan".²² It is, as far as I am aware, the most detailed study of Alypius' conversion moment, and it insists that, although the conversions of the two men converge in a garden in Milan, they started off differently, and also afterwards they followed independent roads.²³ The author persuasively argues that despite the closeness and unity of the two men, their joint conversion moment showed an important difference: whereas Augustine came to adopt Alypius' high moral standard in life (i.e. by embracing continence), Alypius was in turn finally persuaded to embrace Augustine's religious faith.²⁴ Maurice Testard believes that even after his conversion, Alypius was still limping behind for some time when it came to commitment to the Catholic faith.²⁵ I will return to this thesis later.

1. The immediate cause: the story of Ponticianus and Augustine's conversion

Usually, when in biographies of Augustine one arrives at the conversion moment, large sections of this famous episode are quoted nearly literally from *Confessiones*, without much further comment:

²⁰ "PART II: ALYPIUS BETWEEN CONVERSION AND BAPTISM (Oct. 386 – Early March 387)" will be treated in the forthcoming article referred to above.

²¹ James O'Donnell 1992, II, p. 467.

²² This article was published in *Forschungen zur römischen Literatur. Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Karl Büchner* (ed. Walter Wimmel) vol. 2 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1970), p. 266-273. The argumentation in Maurice Testard's article is persuasive and I will make use of several of its findings, providing some further evidence in support of his thesis, but I will also stipulate where I think he is not entirely right.

²³ Maurice Testard 1970, p. 272; see also p. 270, where he talks of "deux crises différentes" and describes the two friends in the garden of Milan as "étrangers spirituellement l'un à l'autre".

²⁴ Although I agree with many points made in this article, I think it is necessary to nuance this particular claim of Maurice Testard, as will become clear further on in this article.

²⁵ Maurice Testard 1970, p. 272.

one seems to want to let the text speak for itself at such a sacrosanct moment, as if the words themselves have become sacred.²⁶ However, from a scholarly point of view, the text – in particular the paragraph dealing with Alypius' conversion – raises many questions, as it excels in elusiveness.

We pick up the thread at the moment Augustine and Alypius receive a visit from Ponticianus, a North-African who held a high position in the emperor's household, and who was also a baptized member of the Catholic Church.²⁷ Unknowingly(?), he would provide the two friends with information which would trigger their conversion. Both Alypius and Augustine reacted with great surprise and wonder when they heard Ponticianus dwelling on the Egyptian hermit Antony and his amazing feats, all done "in fide recta et catholica ecclesia".²⁸ He further mentioned the flocks of holy men in Christian monasteries, and their "mores suaveolentiae tuae"²⁹. He told them that there existed a monastery just outside the city of Milan, led by bishop Ambrose. Yet, Augustine and Alypius had never heard of these things! Then Ponticianus recalled how two friends hit upon the *vita Antonii* during their walk in a garden at Trier. Inspired by this book, one of them decided there and then to abandon his worldly life (which meant resigning from his post at the court, and breaking off the engagement with his fiancée), and to become an *amicus Dei*. His companion decided to follow his friend's example, and, being in a similar situation, he, too, resigned from his post and broke off the engagement with his fiancée.

As soon as Ponticianus left, both friends reacted quite differently to what they just had heard. Only Augustine was greatly upset by these stories. He began to rave at a perplexed Alypius about the pathetic lives *they both* were currently living: "Quid patimur? [...]"

²⁶ For instance, Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: a biography* (new ed.) (London: Faber and Faber, 2000); Serge Lancel, *Saint Augustine* (transl. by Antonia Nevill) (London: SCM, 2002); Gerald Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and controversies* (rev. ed.) (Norwich: The Canterbury Press Norwich, 1986).

²⁷ *Conf.* VIII.vi.14–15.

²⁸ *Conf.* VI.vii(11)–x(16): "in orthodox faith and in the Catholic Church"; for *Confessiones* the Latin text is used of James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) vol. I, and the translation is usually from Henry Chadwick (*Saint Augustine: Confessions*, (Oxford: OUP, 1991)), but sometimes also based on R.S. Pine-Coffin's translation published in the *Penguin Classics* series (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1961), and W. Watts' translation in the *Loeb classical library* (London: Heinemann, 1968 [= 1912]).

²⁹ "their manner of life well pleasing to you".

an quia praecesserunt pudet sequi et non pudet nec saltem sequi?"³⁰ During his crisis, Augustine is very specific about Alypius' whereabouts. At first it did not disturb him that his friend, who was worried about him after such a violent outburst, followed him when he ran into the garden. But when tears started welling up, Augustine once more walked away from his friend, seeking total solitude in the back of the garden.³¹ Alypius, understanding his friend's need for privacy, decided not to follow him, but to silently await the outcome of this crisis at the front of the garden. Maurice TESTARD appositely remarks that even when somewhat later Augustine came back to where his friend was seated, it was not to talk to him, but only to pick up the booklet of Paul's epistles lying on the gaming table nearby.³² It shows how self-absorbed Augustine was during those crucial moments of his excruciating inner struggle. It also reveals something else important: his conversion moment was a purely private event, in which not even his closest friend Alypius played the slightest role. Only when his conversion to the Catholic faith had come about,³³ did Augustine finally turn to Alypius. He then calmly explained to his friend what had happened: "tranquillo iam vultu indicavi Alypio".

2. Alypius' conversion account (*Conf.* viii.xii(30))

We now arrive at the short paragraph which deals specifically with Alypius' conversion. First, it should be noted that when Augustine recounts the conversion story of the two friends at Trier more than a decade after having heard it from Simplicianus, he well remembers the defensive attitude the first man adopted towards his friend after his conversion: "te si piget imitari, noli adversari".³⁴ When the two friends bump into their other two colleagues, among whom Ponticianus, "petiverunt ne sibi molesti essent si adiungi recusarent".³⁵ This, I believe, is a further indication of how personal Augustine's decision

³⁰ *Conf.* viii.viii.19: "What is wrong with us? [...] Is it because they have led the way that we are ashamed to follow? Is it not worse to hold back?"

³¹ This is an important departure from the conversion story of the two friends at Trier.

³² Maurice Testard 1970, p. 269.

³³ Inspired by a child's voice chanting "tolle, lege", he performed the "sortes Paulinae", and hit upon verse *Rom.* 13.13, which finally united his divided will behind his holy intention.

³⁴ *Conf.* viii.vi(15): "If you will not follow my lead, do not stand in my way".

³⁵ *Conf.* viii.vi(15): "They asked their friends, if they would not join them, at least not to obstruct them". The two friends congratulated them on their decision, but did not follow them.

must have been, and it signals how he himself may have expected opposition even from his (closest) friends. When he returned to Alypius, he probably was not at all sure how his friend was going to react; for all he knew, Alypius might even try to dissuade him from going through with his newly chosen direction in life.³⁶

This was Alypius' response:³⁷

at ille quid in se ageretur (quod ego nesciebam) sic indicavit:
But what went on inside himself (which I did not know), he showed as follows:

During Augustine's personal crisis something must have been going on inside Alypius, too. Of this, Augustine had been unaware.³⁸ The reader inevitably wonders: what then went on inside Alypius, especially after having enjoyed the privilege of reading such an intimate and detailed account of Augustine's inner struggle. However, the only thing Augustine has to say about this is that his friend disclosed his inner thoughts in the following manner ("sic indicavit"):

petit videre quid legissem.
He asked to see what I had read.

Alypius asked Augustine to hand him the codex of Paul's epistles, so that he could read for himself Augustine's oracular text. Are we meant to infer from this request that Alypius went through a comparable crisis, was struggling with the same issues, and expected to arrive at the same conclusion by performing in turn sortilege with Paul's epistles ("*sortes Paulinae*")?

ostendi, et attendit etiam ultra quem ego legeram. et ignorabam quid sequeretur. sequebatur vero "*infirmum autem in fide recipite*".
I showed him, and he noticed a passage following that which I had read. I did not know how the text went on; but the continuation was: "But him that is weak in faith, receive".

³⁶ When Augustine and Alypius afterwards confided to some of their intimate friends what they had decided upon, they actually were being discouraged by them from going through with it. See *Conf.* IX.ii(2), in which Augustine uses quite strong wording: "[...] linguam subdolum, velut consulendo contradicentem et, sicut cibum adsolet, amando consumentem" ("*a cunning tongue, which in pretending to offer helpful advice actually speak against us and which in offering love devours us in the way people consume food*").

³⁷ *Conf.* VIII.xiii(29).

³⁸ This is of course perfectly understandable, taking into account Augustine's self-preoccupation during his crisis.

Significantly, Alypius does not wish to obtain the same *sors* as Augustine, which could have been an option. Instead, he preferred to read further from where Augustine had stopped. Earlier on, Augustine had specifically mentioned that he himself did not want to continue reading when hitting upon the text of *Rom.* 13: 13-14, simply because there was no need to do so.³⁹ The verse "non in comessationibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubilibus et impudiciis, non in contentione et aemulatione, sed induite dominum Iesum Christum et carnis providentiam ne feceritis in concupiscentiis"⁴⁰ already proved to be compelling enough for him. Probably, Alypius thought Augustine's oracle text to be less relevant to his own situation. He preferred to receive his personal *sors*, uniquely appropriate to himself, and this he found in the (half-)line immediately following Augustine's verse: "infirmum autem in fide recipite". In a sense, Alypius' decision to read further can be seen as an expression of the particular kind of relationship that existed between the two friends: Alypius followed Augustine (i.e. he, too, wished to rely on sortilege, using Paul's epistles), but at the same time he retained his independence by wanting to receive his own *sors*.

Augustine continues:

quod ille ad se rettulit mihi quae aperuit.

which he applied to himself, and made clear to me.

The crucial question here is: in what way did Alypius apply this verse to himself? Commentators sometimes ignore the difficulty the text poses here, finding it unnecessary to explore its ambiguous meaning, so typical of oracles.⁴¹ If one were to draw a parallel with Augustine's conversion moment, one would assume that Alypius is here commanded to receive the person weak in faith: an oracular text usually tells you what you should do. In Augustine's case this was "induite" and "ne feceritis", and, here, the command is "recipite". One could read in it a (providential) instruction for Alypius as the future leader of his congregation as bishop of Thagaste. But this cannot have been the way this *sors* was interpreted in the garden: neither Augustine

³⁹ *Conf.* VIII.xii(29): "nec ultra volui legere, nec opus erat" ("I neither wished nor needed to read any further"). Note that this comment somewhat reduces the miraculous aspect of the sortilege: it seems that if Augustine would not have found something persuasive in the first passage he read, he would have continued reading until he hit upon something which would 'do the trick', i.e. until he found a line which would gather his divided will completely behind the "better" (*melius*) course in life.

⁴⁰ *Conf.* VIII.xii(29): "Not in revelling and drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, put on the Lord Jesus Christ; and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts".

⁴¹ Gerald Bonner 1986, p. 91; Serge Lancel 2002, p. 97.

nor Alypius had any intention of becoming bishop, even though they both had received their episcopal ordination nine years later.⁴² James O'Donnell suggests that (also) Augustine was "infirmus",⁴³ but could Alypius really have felt admonished to receive an Augustine (still) weak in faith? This seems highly unlikely. Surely, in applying this text to himself, Alypius identified himself with the "infirmus", the one who is weak in faith.⁴⁴ Who then is commanded to do the receiving? One could conjecture that the Catholic Church in general is meant here.⁴⁵ Most likely, however, Alypius considered this oracular text to be a kind of addendum to Augustine's oracle.⁴⁶ According to this interpretation, it is Augustine who is admonished to receive an Alypius who is (still) weak in faith. This indicates that Alypius' faith in the *catholica ecclesia* was not (yet) strong. The next sentence seems to confirm such a reading:

sed tali admonitione firmatus est.

But by such admonition he was strengthened.

The choice of the word "firmatus" indeed recalls the "infirmus" of the oracular text "*infirmum autem in fide recipite*", with both thus referring to Alypius. Again, we have to decide how we are to understand this "firmatus". It does not necessarily mean that the "infirmus in fide" has suddenly become "firmus in fide". More likely, after having read his *sors*, Alypius felt strengthened in his decision to join Augustine, knowing that even someone whose faith was (still) weak would nevertheless be welcome to join the new way of life Augustine had chosen. In other words, James O'Donnell's shrewd observation may well be correct: "His [i.e. Alypius'] verse [...] was not a text about the strengthening of faith but about the place of the shaky-footed one inside the community".⁴⁷

⁴² Alypius became bishop of his hometown Thagaste towards the end of 394 AD, while Augustine was ordained priest in Hippo in 391 AD, and elevated there to the episcopacy possibly in the summer of 395.

⁴³ James O'Donnell 1992, III, p. 70.

⁴⁴ See also Anton van Hooff, "Confessiones 8: die Dialektik der Umkehr", in Norbert Fischer & Cornelius Mayer (eds), *Die Confessiones des Augustinus van Hippo: Einführung und Interpretationen zu den dreizehn Büchern* (Forschungen zur europäischen Geistesgeschichte 1) (Freiburg: Herder, 1998), p. 343-388 (p. 380).

⁴⁵ Carl G. Vaught sees Augustine's *sors* admonishing Augustine to put off the lusts of the flesh and put on Christ; but with Alypius' *sors* he switches to the more anonymous "Paul's readers" who are now being admonished to accept the ones who are weak in faith (Carl G. Vaught, *Encounters with God in Augustine's Confessions: books VII-IX* (New York: State University of New York, 2004), p. 100).

⁴⁶ In this sense, although Augustine said he had no need to read further, Alypius did so for him.

⁴⁷ James O'Donnell 1992, III, p. 105.

Carl Vaught, who devotes some attention to Alypius' conversion in his study of books VI-VIII of *Confessiones*, emphasizes the importance of the teacher-student relationship in the lives of the two friends:

The conversion of Alypius is derivative on the experience of Augustine. This is appropriate; for throughout the *Confessions*, Augustine has been the teacher and Alypius the pupil.⁴⁸

Indeed, Alypius was Augustine's former student. According to A. Sizoo,⁴⁹ Alypius may well have been nine years younger than Augustine, so that, according to this estimation, Augustine was thirty-one, and Alypius probably just twenty-two years old at their conversion moment.⁵⁰

Dagmar Kiesel sees the identification of Alypius with the *infirmus* as a logical expression of this important element in their friendship:

Das Verhalten des Alypius und seine Deutung von Röm 14,1 explizieren deutlich das Verhältnis der beiden Freunde als eine Lehrer-Schüler-Beziehung, wobei offensichtlich ist, dass Alypius nicht von Augustin in die Rolle des zu Belehrenden gedrängt wird, sondern sich aus eigener Initiative heraus der Autorität des Freundes unterordnet.⁵¹

Colin Starnes' fine study on the first nine books of *Confessiones* brings out well the reciprocity in the special relationship between the two men, wherein Alypius was in awe of Augustine's wisdom and goodness, while Augustine admired Alypius' solid virtue and strength of will.⁵² He found the correct equilibrium by recognizing Alypius' individual voice, while confirming his inclination to follow Augustine:

Alypius was converted at the same time and in the same way *according to his own particular nature*. That is, Alypius, who found it easy to do the good once he knew what it was, was content to follow August-

⁴⁸ Carl G. Vaught 2004, p. 101.

⁴⁹ A. Sizoo, "The year of Alypius' birth", *Vigiliae Christianae* 2 (1948) 2, 106-108.

⁵⁰ Vivien Bardet ("Un ami d'Augustin: Saint Alype: 1. Jeunesse et conversion" *Revue augustinienne* 4 (1904), 52-62 (p. 53)) believes the age difference to be not more than four or five years; Erich Feldmann writes: "Al[ypius] [...] wurde wie A[ugustinus], nur wenige Jahre später, in Thagaste geboren" (art. "Alypius", *Augustinus Lexikon*, col. 245). A. Sizoo is the only one who has gathered all possible evidence concerning the year of birth of Alypius, and I cannot see a conclusive reason to reject his calculation, even though some of the evidence from *Confessiones* remains susceptible to a different reading.

⁵¹ Dagmar Kiesel, *Lieben im Irdischen: Freundschaft, Frauen und Familie bei Augustin* (Symposium 130) (Freiburg im Breisgau: Alber, 2008), p. 100-101.

⁵² This was also what Augustine said about it in *Conf.* vi.vii(11).

tine, trusting that he could safely follow if his friend had concluded that Christianity was the true and proper course. [*Italics are mine*]⁵³

Even in Alypius' unique *sors*, there is thus the connotation of following Augustine's lead. Having clarified this interpretational problem concerning Alypius' biblical *sors*, another already awaits the reader in the next sentence. One would expect Augustine to specify the commitment both friends jointly made, and this would then be the culmination – and logical conclusion – of their joint conversion experience. Yet, the closing line of Alypius' conversion moment reads:

placitoque ac proposito bono congruentissimo suis moribus, quibus a me in melius iam olim valde longue distabat, sine ulla turbulenta cunctatione coniunctus est.

Then he attached himself to the good resolution and purpose, which was most agreeable to his disposition, wherein he did always very far differ from me, to the better, without any turbulent delaying.

With this surprisingly vague formulation of their joint agreement Alypius' conversion story has come to an end. Why does the author of *Confessiones* wish to remain so elusive here? What exactly does this resolution contain to which they both subscribed? Before answering these questions, we will look first at the actual concluding lines of book VIII. The reason for adding this extra paragraph becomes immediately clear: it brings a most prominent figure of Augustine's road to salvation into the lime-light, forming a fitting closure for his conversion story (but not really for that of Alypius):

inde ad matrem ingredimur, indicamus: gaudet. narramus quemadmodum gestum sit: exultat et triumphat et benedicebat tibi, qui potens es ultra quam petimus et intellegimus facere, quia tanto amplius sibi a te concessum de me videbat quam petere solebat miserabilibus flebilibusque gemitibus.⁵⁴

From there we went in to my mother, and told her. She was filled with joy. We told her how it happened. She exulted, feeling it to be a triumph, and glorified you 'who are powerful to do more than we ask or think'. She saw that you had granted her far more than she used to ask in her unhappy and tearful lamentations.

What Augustine and Alypius said to Monnica must be in line with the joint agreement they just had made, and also with what Augus-

⁵³ Colin Stames 1990, p. 236. Notice that this small paragraph is the only thing he has to say about the section on Alypius' conversion, which shows once more that Alypius' conversion story is not given much attention in commentary books on *Confessiones*.

⁵⁴ *Conf.* VIII.xii(30).

tine had told Alypius straight after his conversion. James O'Donnell attempts to answer this question: "What did they tell Monnica? Perhaps, even probably, that *they* had decided to take baptism eight or nine months hence, but more definitely that *A[ugustine]* had chosen to change his ways".⁵⁵ However, it will be argued that in fact the opposite is more likely to be true: probably, *only Augustine* had decided to take baptism eight or nine months hence, but more definitely, *they both* [Augustine and Alypius] had chosen to change their ways. The concluding lines of book VIII read:

convertisti enim me ad te, ut nec uxorem quaererem nec aliquam spem saeculi huius, stans in ea regula fidei in qua me ante tot annos ei revelaveras, et convertisti luctum eius in gaudium multo uberius quam oluerat, et multo carius atque castius quam de nepotibus carnis meae requirebat.

You converted me to yourself, so that I no longer desired a wife or placed any hope in this world, but stood firmly upon the rule of faith, where you had revealed me to her so many years before. And you turned her sadness into rejoicing, into joy far fuller than her dearest wish, far sweeter and more chaste than any she had hoped to find in children begotten of my flesh.

At last, in the final passage of book VIII, Augustine specifies what *his* conversion was about:⁵⁶ embracing a life of continence, and abandoning his worldly ambitions. The immediate consequences of this resolution were at least as dramatic for him as they had been for the two friends in Trier: he, too, had to resign from his worldly position and break off the engagement with his (now eleven year old) fiancée. On top of that, he also had to dismiss the (second) concubine he had recently procured to continue gratifying his sexual lust after the first one was sent back to Africa.⁵⁷ The text, however, also articulates the religious aspect of his conversion, the element which was hardly – if at all – present in the vague formulation of their joint agreement: only now Augustine sees himself standing upon that rule of faith, where his mother had revealed him to be so many years before in a dream.⁵⁸ According to Carl Vaught, this piece of information rules out too Neoplatonic an interpretation of Augustine's conversion.⁵⁹ Monnica's exultant reaction is another strong indication that her only

⁵⁵ James O'Donnell 1992, III, p. 70.

⁵⁶ After all, *Confessiones* is the spiritual biography of Augustine.

⁵⁷ James O'Donnell (1992, III, p. 70) comments: "The second concubine was apparently bundled off (to receive much less sympathy from history than the first)".

⁵⁸ Referring to the episode of *Conf.* III.xi(19).

⁵⁹ Carl G. Vaught 2004, p. 101.

wish in life had come true: she finally saw her son becoming a *christianus catholicus*.⁶⁰ But there is more: a year before, she was convinced that Augustine would become a *fidelis catholicus* during her lifetime,⁶¹ and recently she had found her son becoming more and more prepared to consider such a step.⁶²

A closer look at Augustine's use of terms such as *christianus*, *catechumenus* and *fidelis* is fitting here. Both *catechumenus* and *fidelis* have something to do with ritual and sacramental membership of, and commitment to, the Church. A *catechumenus* was someone who had received the "sacraments"⁶³ of the Cross on the forehead and the tasting of salt, and perhaps some instruction (*catechesis*). From that moment on, if he truly believed and accepted the doctrines of the Church, he was considered to be a *christianus*.⁶⁴ Those who also received the sacrament of baptism were called *fideles*, and they became full members of the *catholica ecclesia*. It was not exceptional that *catechumeni* postponed their baptism:⁶⁵ they often delayed it as long as

⁶⁰ *Conf.* IX.x(26): "unum erat propter quod in hac vita aliquantum immorari cupiebam, ut te christianum catholicum viderem priusquam morerer".

⁶¹ *Conf.* VI.i(1): "Respondet mihi credere se in Christo quod priusquam de hac vita emigraret me visura esset fidelem catholicum". "*She replied to me that she had faith in Christ that before she departed this life, she would see me a baptized Catholic believer*". She said this when she was about 51 years old. She would live another three years. Within a year of Augustine's baptism, she died.

⁶² *Conf.* VI.xiii(23): "quo me iam coniugatum baptismus salutaris ablueret, quo me in dies gaudebat aptari et vota sua ac promissa tua in mea fide compleri animadvertibat" ("*Her hope was that once married I would be washed in the saving water of baptism. Every day she rejoiced to find me more prepared to consider it, and she saw her vows and your promises fulfilled in my faith*").

⁶³ For the notion that also the rituals of the catechumenate (applying the sign of the Cross on one's forehead and receiving the salt) were regarded as "sacraments", see James J. O'Donnell 1992, II, p. 67: "The catechumenate represented sacramental [...] admission to the Christian community, but not full membership", referring hereby to Augustine's *De baptismo contra donatistas* 4.21.28: "catechumeni sacramentum". See also William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), p. 150-151 (p. 150): "Augustine considered the salt a 'sacrament' which, in some sense, 'preserved' and 'seasoned' the candidate". The fact that Nebridius was not yet initiated into any of the sacraments ("nondum imbutus ullis ecclesiae tuae sacramentis" (*Conf.* IX.iii(6)), surely must mean that he even had not yet received the "sacraments" of the catechumenate, i.e. the sign of the Cross and the tasting of salt).

⁶⁴ William Harmless, *Augustine and the catechumenate* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995), p. 150-151; see also Henry Chadwick, *Saint Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford World's Classics) (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p. 13, n. 19: "Catechumens were entitled to bear the name 'Christian' but not that of the 'faithful' (*fidelis*)".

⁶⁵ William Harmless 1995, p. 47-48, 59-61.

possible, to benefit the most from the remission of all past sins.⁶⁶ Indicative is that in several instances Augustine combines the terms *christianus* and *fidelis*: Verecundus (at first *nondum christianus*, but on his deathbed he was *christianus et fidelis factus*), and Ponticianus (*christianus quippe et fidelis erat*). There is further Verecundus' wife (*fidelis*) and Nebridius (first *nondum christianus*, later *fidelis catholicus*). From this it can be deduced that a *christianus* is not necessarily already a *fidelis*, i.e. a baptized member of the Church, because otherwise Augustine would not always mention this separately. In the case of Manlius Theodorus, since Augustine only refers to him as a *christianus*, without mentioning "the tell-tale *fidelis*", one could reasonably assume that he was an unbaptized *christianus* of the Catholic Church.⁶⁷

Taking into consideration that Monnica was convinced that her son would become a *fidelis catholicus* before she died, and the fact that she triumphed at hearing what had happened in the garden, it is highly likely that at his conversion Augustine also decided to receive baptism, and this very soon. This is, after all, also what his biblical *sors* admonished him to do: "induite domine Iesum Christum" not only reveals that this was a conversion to *fides catholica*, and not just to (mere) *philosophia*:⁶⁸ it can also be interpreted as a call to baptism.⁶⁹ This is confirmed by the fact that sometime in October 386 AD, not long after he resigned from office, Augustine made known in a letter to bishop Ambrose his wish to receive this holy sacrament, asking him what would be suitable for him to read as preparation.⁷⁰ His Cassiciacum stay should therefore be understood as a time of preparation for baptism, even if he did lay aside quite quickly the reading Ambrose recommended to him (i.e. the prophet Isaiah).⁷¹ Augustine

⁶⁶ See David C. Alexander, *Augustine's early theology of the church: emergence and implications, 386-391* (Patristic studies 9) (New York: Lang, 2008) p. 67 (n. 47), and James O'Donnell 1992, p. 21.

⁶⁷ James O'Donnell 1992, III, p. 420. Theodorus will be important in the second article, because to him *De beata vita* was dedicated.

⁶⁸ Carl G. Vaught 2004, pp. 98-99.

⁶⁹ James O'Donnell (1992, III, p. 61) makes clear there is a baptismal link in this verse (via *Gal. 3:27-28*): "Baptism, a ritual that comes with a new white garment, is the moment of that investiture [i.e. of putting on the Lord Jesus Christ]. James O'Donnell 1992, III, p. 69: "Does the present text suggest a baptismal garment? Brown, *Body and Society*, 439, n. 43, says that Amb[rose] equates baptism with 'putting on Christ'. See also Carl G. Vaught 2004, p. 98-99.

⁷⁰ *Conf. IX.v(13)*.

⁷¹ *Conf. IX.v(13)*. I therefore cannot agree with James O'Donnell's suggestion that Augustine's decision to receive baptism in the garden was provisional, and that even

was then baptized at Easter Vigil the following year (24-25 April AD 387).

3. Alypius' decision at his conversion

Can we now simply assume that Alypius decided there and then to become an ascetic *christianus* as well, and that he also wished to receive baptism along with Augustine the following Easter – which in fact he did! – and that this was already implicit in their joint agreement? This question will be treated in two parts: first the moral aspect of Alypius' conversion will be dealt with, and then the religious aspect.

3.1. The moral dimension of Alypius' conversion

There is no doubt that in the vague wording of their joint resolution Augustine was referring to Alypius' greater natural virtue, and that leading an ascetic life was going to be an essential part of their new direction in life. Throughout his life, embracing continence had been for Augustine *the* most difficult thing to do, and not surprisingly it proved to be for him the ultimate hurdle during his birth pangs towards his new life.⁷² The vision of Lady Continence epitomizes the central place this virtue occupied in Augustine's conversion crisis.⁷³

Can we assume that this decision to lead a celibate life was as difficult and central for Alypius as it was for Augustine? The fact that Augustine tells us that Alypius joined Augustine's decision "*sine ulla turbulenta cunctatione*" suggests that the morally solid and self-con-

the letter to Ambrose was not a definite commitment. One of his arguments is that the peculiar character of the Cassiciacum dialogues are a sign of this "neither-fish-nor-fowl" state of Augustine's mind and commitment at the time (James O' Donnell 1992, I, p. xxviii). He sees the Cassiciacum stay as a time in which Augustine first wanted "to test his resolve" (James O'Donnell 1992, III, p. 70 and 104), something which I cannot agree with. I believe that the peculiar nature of the Cassiciacum dialogues says much more about the religious commitment of his companions and of the addressees of these dialogues than Augustine's.

⁷² *Conf.* VIII.ii(2): "*mihi autem displicebat quod agebam in saeculo [...] sed adhuc tenaciter conligabar ex femina*" ("*My secular activity I held in disgust [...] but I was still firmly tied by woman*"). Only the chain of sexual lust thus remained a (serious) problem.

⁷³ She asks Augustine: "*quid in te stas et non stas? proice te in eum!*" ("*Why do you try to stand on your own strength, and fail? Cast yourself upon him*"). (*Conf.* VIII.xi(27))

trolled Alypius had less problems with committing himself to this "better" way of life.⁷⁴ From early on, Alypius had led a chaste life, and he could not understand why Augustine did not do likewise.⁷⁵ Despite having been won over in the end by Augustine in wanting to experience the delights of sexual pleasure and to seek a wife – to find out why exactly Augustine could not live without it –,⁷⁶ as far as we know, Alypius had still not forfeited his chastity.⁷⁷ Even if there were some psychological ties with concupiscence to cut loose, these could never have been that strong. Notice that, in any case, embracing a chaste life had less practical consequences for Alypius: unlike Augustine (and unlike the two friends at Trier) he had no fiancée to take into consideration, neither was there a concubine to "bundle off".

Perhaps Alypius had more difficulties in giving up his worldly ambition. His profession must have been for him an excellent platform to demonstrate his admirable virtuous behaviour.⁷⁸ His parents had, just as Augustine's parents, great expectations for their son.⁷⁹ Alypius himself appears to have been at times less enthusiastic to practise law.⁸⁰ In Milan, he stood behind the project of leading a life of contemplation with a group of friends.⁸¹ The immediate consequences for abandoning a worldly career in AD 386 were also less dramatic for him, seeing that he was unemployed at the time.⁸² One

⁷⁴ See Maurice Testard 1970, p. 269: "La conversion d'Alypius ne connut ni trouble ni hésitation, à l'inverse de celle d'Augustin". The apostle Paul recommended chastity as "melius", although he did not forbid his followers to marry (*Conf.* VIII.ii (2)).

⁷⁵ *Conf.* VI.xii(22).

⁷⁶ *Conf.* VI.xii(22).

⁷⁷ Colin Starnes claims that at the time Alypius "became tied to lust he deplored in Augustine", and further, "by a thoughtless flirting with a danger he did not have to face, he himself was caught by the same lust which held Augustine. Alypius was to remain in these "sweet snares" (VI, xii, 21) until his conversion" (pp. 158-159). But Augustine clearly states that Alypius, through his curiosity, perhaps (*fortasse*!) would have fallen in the same bondage (*Conf.* VI.xii(22)). This, in fact, proves that he did not. Also Maurice Testard (1970) is convinced that Alypius was still leading a chaste life at the time of his conversion.

⁷⁸ *Conf.* VI.x(16).

⁷⁹ *Conf.* VI.viii(13).

⁸⁰ *Conf.* VI.x(16).

⁸¹ *Conf.* VI.xiv(24).

⁸² *Conf.* VIII.vi(13). We only need to recall how difficult it was for Augustine to actually hand in his resignation: he gladly seized upon his worsening health problems to resign on grounds of illness, so as not to upset the (wealthy) parents of his students (*Conf.* IX.ii(4)); see also the introductory letter of *De beata vita* and *De academicis* book I.

also has to take into account the (financial) dependents of these men. Not only did Augustine have his (second) concubine and his son Adeodatus to support, several relatives and friends travelled to Milan, expecting to profit from Augustine's rise in society.⁸³ His family had invested greatly in his education and worldly career.⁸⁴ Just at a time when everything had been put in place to reap even greater rewards through arranging a career marriage, Augustine took the radical step of abandoning his worldly career. Needless to say, this had serious consequences for those who financially depended on him, and Augustine must have known this would cause great upheaval among them.⁸⁵

Alypius, on the other hand, came from a much wealthier Thagastan family than Augustine.⁸⁶ One can imagine that the young Alypius, having no immediate dependents to look after, probably found it easier to let go of his worldly ambitions. Nevertheless, how strongly Alypius was tied to his ambition for worldly success remains hard to determine, also because Augustine gives us no further details in the small paragraph on Alypius' conversion. The fact remains that he made the decision "*sine ulla turbulenta cunctatione*", and that he did join Augustine at Cassiciacum, even though he was not always present there.⁸⁷

⁸³ Claude Lepelley, "Un aspect de la conversion d'Augustin: la rupture avec ses ambitions sociales et politiques", *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 88 (1987), p. 243.

⁸⁴ For a good discussion of Augustine's breaking with his worldly ambitions, see Claude Lepelley 1987, 229-246.

⁸⁵ Augustine's decision to become an ascetic *christianus* must have been very upsetting for his intimate circle: their own worldly ambitions received a serious blow, while they also may have resisted Augustine's conversion to the Catholic faith, because of their lingering(?) Manichaean sympathies.

⁸⁶ *Conf.* vi.vii(11).

⁸⁷ He had to be in Milan for an unspecified reason. This does not necessarily mean that he had difficulties in letting go of his worldly ambitions. Maybe he was one of the two "*chargés d'affaires*", foreseen in their earlier plans for a philosophical retreat, which never took off because of the "*mulierculae*" (James O'Donnell 1992, III, p. 84). Notice further that Alypius was the only one of Augustine's friends who was prepared to follow him to Cassiciacum: Verecundus and Nebridius could not bring themselves to do so. According to Therese Fuhrer, Alypius' journeys to Milan show that he has not completely given up his professional activities (Therese Fuhrer, "Augustin in Mailand", in: *Die christlich-philosophischen diskurse der Spätantike: Texte, Personen, Instituten* (Akte der Tagung vom 22.-25. Februar 2006 am Zentrum für Antike und Moderne der Albert Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg) (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2008), pp. 63-79 (p. 73).

3.2. *Alypius' commitment to the catholica ecclesia: becoming a christianus*

What about the religious aspect of Alypius' conversion? It is significant that his *sors* centred on faith, and not on moral issues such as continence or worldly ambition, while in the joint agreement the emphasis was precisely on moral change. As argued before, Alypius probably found it easier than Augustine to convert to a strict ascetic life, partly through his particular situation (he was unemployed, had no dependents, no fiancée, and was wealthier), partly through his innate abilities (he may well have been leading a chaste life already). His main problem seems to have been to live such an admirable life *within the catholica ecclesia*. A short history of Alypius' attitude towards the Catholic faith is needed here, and since this was tightly bound to Augustine's turbulent journey towards the Catholic faith, a summary of this will be given first.

3.2.1. Augustine's religious journey towards the Catholic faith

Already at birth Augustine was made a catechumenus,⁸⁸ and considered a *christianus* (*catholicus*). When as a boy he became seriously ill, he begged his mother to receive baptism, but Monnica refused, worried as she was about the many (sexual) temptations he still would have to face while growing up.⁸⁹ At university in Carthage, he was completely taken in by the search for wisdom after having read the *Hortensius*, Cicero's protreptic to philosophy. Because this work lacked the name of Christ, he turned to the Bible but was appalled by its crudity. Soon, he found himself enthralled by the Manichaeans, who promised truth through reason, and not through authority. He now considered himself no longer a *christianus catholicus*: from a "hearer" in Catholic Christianity, he had become a "hearer" in Manichaean Christianity, much to the horror of his mother Monnica.⁹⁰ More than a decade later, at the end of 384, disappointed as he was by Manichaean teaching, he decided to abandon this sect altogether and instead he adopted to some degree the sceptic position advocated by Cicero. Once again, he could not give his heart completely to this philosophy, since Christ was not mentioned in these writings.⁹¹ He therefore decided to remain a

⁸⁸ See AUGUSTINE, *De utilitate credendi* I.2.

⁸⁹ *Conf.* I.xi(17).

⁹⁰ William Harmless 1995, p. 80.

⁹¹ The same problem occurred after having read Cicero's *Hortensius* (*Conf.* III.iv(8)).

catechumenus in the Catholic Church, although he was still reluctant to commit himself to the Catholic faith, and he adopted a waiting position instead.⁹² This first step towards a return to the Catholic fold, Augustine may well have kept to himself, because many of his friends were still influenced by Manichaean beliefs, and thus disdainful of the Catholic faith. When Monnica somewhat later joined her son in Milan, Augustine could tell her that he was no longer a member of the Manichaean sect, but that he did not yet consider himself to be a *christianus*.⁹³ Seeing that this was after he had informed us that he had decided to remain a *catechumenus*, there existed thus also what we would call a sceptic or a politic *catechumenus*: a *catechumenus* who does not consider himself a *christianus*, because he does not yet believe.⁹⁴ After his enthusiastic encounter with Neoplatonic philosophy, he turned to the Bible, in particular to Paul's epistles, and there he finally discovered truth in all its glory.⁹⁵ However, he still could not bring himself to submit to the authority of the *catholica ecclesia*. That is why it is only at his conversion in the garden in Milan that Augustine finally became a *christianus* (*catholicus*). As argued before, Augustine's conversion was more radical than that: he decided there and then to become a strict ascetic *fidelis* within the *catholica ecclesia*.

3.2.2 Alypius' spiritual journey up to his conversion (compared to Augustine)

It is likely that Alypius also received the "sacrament" of a *catechumenus* at a very young age.⁹⁶ Later, during his student years at Carthage, he converted to Manichaeism through the proselytising efforts of his teacher Augustine.⁹⁷ What attracted Alypius to this eccen-

⁹² *Conf.* v.xiv(25).

⁹³ *Conf.* vi.i(1): "cum indicassem non me quidem iam esse manichaeum, sed neque catholicum christianum [...]".

⁹⁴ See Carl G. Vaught, *Encounters with God in Augustine's Confessions: books VII-IX* (p. 34-36) on what it means to become a Christian, stating that, although Augustine made a *notional* commitment to Christianity after having read the Neoplatonic books, it was only at his conversion that he made an *existential* commitment to it.

⁹⁵ The finest description of this moment can be found in *De academicis* II. ii(5-6).

⁹⁶ This is also the position of Vivien Bardet (1904, p. 53). The text quoted above of *De academicis* II.ii (5) suggests that Romanianus had been a *catechumenus* in his childhood, and the chance is therefore likely that Alypius had been, too. Also the fact that Augustine explicitly mentions that in AD 387 Nebridius had not yet received any sacraments (*Conf.* ix.iii(6): "nondum imbutus ullis ecclesiae tuae sacramentis"), leads us to assume that his other intimate friend Alypius had received the "sacrament" of a *catechumenus* in his childhood.

⁹⁷ *Conf.* vi.vii(12).

tric religion was probably not so much their promise to come to the truth via reason instead of through mere authority,⁹⁸ but the elects' demonstration of a strict chastity and a rigorous way of life.⁹⁹ We do not know when exactly Alypius broke with the Manichaean religion. Notice that many of Augustine's friends held on to Manichaean beliefs,¹⁰⁰ even after Augustine's conversion to the Catholic faith, so that we should not too easily assume that Alypius soon followed Augustine in his decision to abandon this religion.¹⁰¹ Like Augustine, Alypius felt attracted to the philosophy of the sceptics.¹⁰² When Augustine tells us that, despite the appeal of scepticism, he wished to remain a *catechumenus*, and actually stood increasingly open to the possibility of finding truth in the Catholic Church,¹⁰³ it is but the question whether Alypius followed him in this. Augustine does not mention his friend in this passage, and it is hard to believe that he would not inform his readers if his "heart's brother" would have felt the same towards the Catholic Church. It again shows how personal Augustine's rapprochement of the *fides catholica* was. The first time Alypius is actually described as a *catechumenus* is during his stay at Cassiciacum, in the winter of 386-387 AD.¹⁰⁴ This led André Mandouze to assume that it was only at his conversion that Alypius decided to become a *catechumenus* (again).¹⁰⁵

An even stronger case can be made than this *argumentum e silentio* for assuming that Alypius did not follow Augustine in the lat-

⁹⁸ This had been Augustine's main motivation to join the Manichaeans.

⁹⁹ *Conf.* VI.vii(11). This has been pointed out by Colin Starnes (1990, p. 156). See also AUGUSTINE, *De moribus ecclesiae et de moribus manichaeorum* I.i(2) in which he states that their show of their so-called chaste life and admirable self-control was one of the most important means for them to recruit new followers.

¹⁰⁰ The greatest evidence for this is Augustine's comment on the Psalm he sang at Cassiciacum. There, he deeply regretted that many of his friends were still influenced by Manichaeism, and he dearly wished they would join him in his newly found life (as a *christianus catholicus*) (*Conf.* IX.iv(8)-(11)).

¹⁰¹ For instance, Henry Chadwick (*Augustine* (Past Master's series) (Oxford: OUP, 1986), p. 25) believes that in 386 Alypius was still shedding Manichaean beliefs.

¹⁰² Alypius' attitude towards scepticism will be explored further in the forthcoming second article, in which *De academics* will be discussed.

¹⁰³ Before his final break with Manichaeism, Augustine admits: "praesertim desperantem in ecclesia tua [...] posse invenire verum" ("In particular I had no hope that truth could be found in your Church") (*Conf.* V.x(19)).

¹⁰⁴ *Conf.* IX.iv(8).

¹⁰⁵ "Dans le jardin de Milan, A[lypius] est témoin de la "conversion" d'Augustine et s'associe à sa décision de mener une vie ascétique. Désormais catéchumène comme Augustine, A[lypius] fait partie du groupe associé à la retraite de celui-ci à Cassiciacum" [Italics are mine] ("Alypius" in: André Mandouze, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire. 1: Afrique (303-533)* (Paris: CNRS, 1982), p. 53-65 (p. 54).

ter's warming to the Catholic Church. The quotation of *Confessiones* mentioned in the title of this article tells us that Alypius' move to the *catholica ecclesia* was slower, more reluctant ("pigrius") than Augustine's. It comes from a paragraph – the only one of book VII in which Alypius is mentioned – which has been problematic for two reasons. Firstly, there has been a misunderstanding about the reason for this slowness, which Robert O'Connell tried to stamp out in his article "Alypius' 'Apollinarianism' at Milan (*Conf.* VII, 25)".¹⁰⁶ Alypius resented the Catholic faith not because his view of Christ came close to Apollinarianism. Actually, his own idea about Christ must have been not that much different from Augustine's heretical Photinian view. The reason he moved slower than Augustine to the Catholic faith was that, unlike Augustine, Alypius believed that *the Catholic Christians* held a conception of Christ, which he later found out to be that of the heretical Apollinarianists:

Alypius autem deum carne indutum ita putabat credi a Catholicis, ut praeter deum et carnem non esset in Christo anima, mentemque hominis non existimabat in eo praedicari.¹⁰⁷

Alypius, on the other hand, thought Catholics believed him [i.e. Christ] to be God clothed in flesh in the sense that in Christ there was only God and flesh. He did not think they held him to possess a human soul.

Since Christ acted and behaved in the Bible as someone endowed with a human mind, he himself could not subscribe to such a view, and therefore, Alypius "ad ipsam christianam fidem pigrius movebatur".¹⁰⁸

The second problem concerns the length of the time in which Alypius held this wrong view of the Catholic Christology, which

¹⁰⁶ *Revue des études augustinienes* 13 (1967) 3-4, 209-210.

¹⁰⁷ *Conf.* VII.xix(25).

¹⁰⁸ "Alypius' approach to the Christian faith itself was more reluctant". That Robert O'Connell was unsuccessful in laying to rest once and for all this confusion about Alypius, is demonstrated by Carol Harrison's – otherwise fine – book *Rethinking Augustine's early theology*, in which she writes (p. 254): "He [i.e. Augustine] and Alypius had their Christology wrong: he verged on Photinianism (a sort of adoptionism which included the virgin birth) and Alypius held views dangerously close to what they later realized was Apollinarianism". See also her book *Christian truth and fractured humanity* (Christian theology in context) (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 31, in which she wrongly translates *Conf.* VII.xix (25): "He [i.e. Alypius] held that in Christ there was only God and flesh", while it should be: "He believed that they [i.e. the Catholics] held that in Christ there was only God and flesh".

prevented him from hoping to find truth within the *catholica ecclesia*.¹⁰⁹ We are only given a surprisingly relative indication of time: Alypius realized his mistake *before* Augustine discovered that his own view on Christology was that of the Photinian heresy.¹¹⁰ Notice that this does not necessarily mean that Alypius arrived at a correct Christology before Augustine did. Needless to say, Augustine's Christology has already been the subject of several studies, but their findings are not conclusive concerning the exact time Augustine came to a right understanding of Christ.¹¹¹ The later we date this event, the longer the period may have been during which Alypius resented the Catholic faith, because of "their" unacceptable ideas concerning Christ's nature.¹¹² Although the exact moment of when Alypius discovered his mistake is hard to establish, and notwithstanding the fact that it is also difficult to evaluate the consequences of this discovery for him,¹¹³ certain is that for quite some time Alypius must have been put off by the Catholic faith, while Augustine, who saw his own (wrong) Christology confirmed by what he thought was the Church's teaching, more easily warmed to it.

¹⁰⁹ "Quand donc Alypius fut-il éclairé? Nous manquons d'éléments pour le préciser." Goulven Madec, "Une lecture de *Confessiones* VII, ix, 13-xxi, 27 (Notes critiques à propos d'une thèse de Robert J. O'Connell)", *Revue des études augustinienne*s 16(1970)1-2, 79-137 (p. 122).

¹¹⁰ *Conf.* VII.xix(25): "ego autem aliquanto posterius didicisse me fateor, in eo, quod verbum factum est, quomodo Catholica veritas a Photini falsitate dirimatur".

¹¹¹ See the excellent study of Tars van Bavel, *Recherches sur la christologie de saint Augustin: l'humanité et le divin dans le Christ d'après saint Augustin* (Paradoxis: Études de littérature et de théologie ancienne 10) (Fribourg, Éditions universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1954), p. 5-12; William Mallard, "The incarnation in Augustine's conversion", *Recherches augustinienne*s 15(1980), 80-98.

¹¹² See also Goulven Madec 1970, 79-137 (esp. 112-115 on Augustine's Photinism). R.M. Price's article "Augustine, *Confessiones* VII: autobiography or apologetic?" in *Studia Patristica* 43 (14th Int. Conference, Oxford, 2003) (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), p. 221-225 illustrates just how widely people differ about the dating of the period. The author argues that the apologetic purpose of this paragraph on their incorrect Christology is more important than the autobiographical one, whereby he believes that Augustine's error of Photinianism must already have been corrected even before he encountered the Neoplatonists.

¹¹³ Precisely because of the lack of information about Alypius' spiritual journey, translators render the Latin text "sed postea haereticorum Apollinaristarum hunc errorem esse cognoscens, Catholicae fidei conlaetatus et contemperatus est" with different nuances: "But later when he knew that this was the error of the Apollinarian heretics, he was glad to conform to the Catholic faith" (Henry Chadwick 1998, p. 129) sounds rather different than, for instance, "But understanding afterwards, that this was the error of the Apollinarian heretics, he was pleased with the Catholic faith and better disposed to it" (Carl G. Vaught 2004, p. 60). In the first translation it seems that once Alypius realized his error, he very happily embraced the Catholic faith, while in the second, this only meant a step closer towards accepting the Catholic faith.

When Augustine discovered Neoplatonism, a philosophy in which he was admonished to turn within himself,¹¹⁴ his search for truth almost certainly became even more private. From holding joint discussions on philosophical topics with his friends (Alypius and Nebridius) à la Cicero's disputations,¹¹⁵ Augustine started to probe his inner self. The question is again how far Alypius followed Augustine in this. Did Alypius, too, begin to investigate his innermost being? We should take into account that Alypius was never as fanatically captivated by philosophy as Augustine or Nebridius, that other close friend of Augustine and ardent searcher of the truth.¹¹⁶ Colin Starnes rightly remarks:

Although [...] the two [i.e. Augustine and Alypius] were like twins in spirit, [...] there is no evidence that he [i.e. Alypius] ever came to the philosophical knowledge of God.¹¹⁷

As pointed out before, Alypius does not figure at all in the "Neoplatonic" book VII, apart from the paragraph dealing with Christology.¹¹⁸ It is therefore reasonable to have reservations about the following statement made by Heinrich Lesaar concerning the two friends:

Alles, was in den Mailänder Jahren in Augustins Seele voring, seine platonisch-plotinischen Erlebnisse, die Eindrücke, die *Monnikas* schlichte Frömmigkeit hinterliess, den gewaltigen Eindruck, den der grosse Mailänder Bischof Ambrosius durch sein machtvollendes Wirken auf der Lehrkanzel und als Kirchenfürst machte, – all das erlebte Alypius in engster Fühlung mit seinem 'Herzensbruder' mit. Vor Alypius hatte Augustin kein Geheimnis. Ihm vertraute er an, was sein Innerstes bewegte und aufwühlte.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ *Conf.* VII.x(16): "et inde admonitus redire ad memet ipsum, intravi in intima mea" ("And being hence admonished to return to myself, I entered even into my innermost being"). Also in the prologue to book II of *De academicis* this period of (philosophical) introspection was considered an important step (*De academicis* II. ii(5): "Prorsus totus in me cursim redibam" ("Swiftly did I begin to return entirely to myself"). Translations of *De academicis* are usually taken from John O'Meara, *St. Augustine: Against the Academics* (Ancient Christian writers 12) (New York: Newman press, 1951).

¹¹⁵ *Conf.* VI.xvi(26).

¹¹⁶ *Conf.* VI.x(17). Nebridius' inquisitiveness in philosophical matters also emerges from his correspondence with Augustine between 387 and 391 (AUGUSTINE, *Epistulae* 3-14).

¹¹⁷ Colin STARNES 1990, p. 156. Of the two close friends of Augustine, it was Nebridius who more closely resembled Augustine in his passion for the rational search of truth (p. 157).

¹¹⁸ Vivien Bardet's assumption that they read Victorinus' translation of Plato together (I, p. 59), and that they both arrived at the region of the intelligibles, finds no support in the text of *Confessiones*.

¹¹⁹ Heinrich Hubert Lesaar, "Alypius", in *Miscellanea augustiniana: een gedenkboek samengesteld uit verhandelingen over s. Augustinus bij de viering van*

The following shows that at least part of Augustine's inner struggle remained hidden from even his closest friends. Even though he states in book VI, "et ingemui et locutus sum cum amicis, qui mecum erant, multos dolores insaniarum nostrarum",¹²⁰ he writes somewhat later,

et cum in silentio fortiter quaererem, magnae voces erant ad misericordiam tuam tacitae contritiones animi mei. tu sciebas quid patiebar, et nullus hominum. quantum enim erat quod inde digerebatur per linguam meam in aures familiarissimorum meorum! numquid totus tumultus animae meae, cui nec tempora nec os meum sufficiebat, sonabat eis?¹²¹

Likewise, in his *Soliloquies* Augustine pointed out that much of Alypius' soul remained hidden from him, and that he did not know Alypius that well, even though they were close friends.¹²²

Next, there is Augustine's marked turn to Paul's epistles after having absorbed Neoplatonic philosophy.¹²³ We do not know how much Alypius was involved in his friend's (renewed?) study of Scripture either. It is perhaps meaningful that later, when Ponticianus showed his surprise at seeing Paul's epistles lying on the table, Augustine declared "[...]illis me scripturis curam maximam impendere"

zijn zalig overlijden over 15 eeuwen (Rotterdam: Augustijnen der Nederlandse provincie, 1930), p. 220-232 (p. 226).

¹²⁰ *Conf.* VI.vi(9): "I groaned and spoke with my friends accompanying me about the many sufferings that result from our follies".

¹²¹ *Conf.* VII.vii(11): "As in silence I vigorously pursued my quest, inarticulate sufferings of my heart were loudly pleading for your mercy. You knew what I endured; no human being knew. How little of it my tongue could put into words for the ears of my closest friends! Neither the time nor my powers of speech were sufficient to tell them of the full tumult of my soul".

¹²² *Soliloquies* I.iii(8). Next to the philosophical disputations he held with a small group at Cassiciacum (*De academicis*, *De beata vita*, and *De ordine*), his inner probing produced this dialogue. *Soliloquies*, a word coined by Augustine, consisted of the unusual dialogue between a person and his own *ratio*. This is further evidence of Augustine's great need to turn within himself and to privately probe his inner self.

¹²³ That this turning to Paul's epistles and the Catholic teaching was an important step is clear from *Confessiones* (VII. xxi(27)) as well as from the preem to book II of *De academicis*. Important in *De academicis* is that towards Romanianus, who was his patron and a relative of Alypius, and possibly still sympathetic towards Manichaeism, Augustine seems quite embarrassed and almost apologetic about his decision to reach back to the Catholic faith of his childhood: "Respexi tamen, confiteor, quasi de itinere in illam religionem, quae pueris nobis insita est, et medullitus implicata" ("But I looked back, I confess, as if from a journey, to that religion which is implanted in us in our childhood") (*De academicis* II.ii (5)). This turn to his childhood religion must have been no obvious step to take for some of his friends.

¹²⁴ *Conf.* VIII.vi(14).

("those scriptures were the subject of deep study to me"), even though Alypius was there with him.¹²⁴ Most likely, Augustine continued his introspection, this time with the help of Paul's writings, and in these texts he encountered a picture of the human condition much more in line with his own restless soul than the lofty image of the calm, Plotinian sage propagated by Neoplatonism.¹²⁵ It should be noted that for the Manichaeans, Paul was an important writer,¹²⁶ so that the study of his epistles would not *an sich* have been considered a move towards the Catholic faith.

Finally, there is the conversion moment itself. I believe we can safely assume that, along with Augustine, Alypius decided to become a *christianus*, and not just a mere (politic) *catechumenus*, even though his faith was still weak. But it seems indeed possible if not highly likely, that Alypius became a *christianus* without thinking it necessary to immediately commit himself to receiving baptism. He certainly was not under the kind of pressure Augustine experienced from his mother Monnica to become a *fidelis catholicus*.¹²⁷ When in October AD 386 Augustine notified bishop Ambrose of his wish to receive baptism,¹²⁸ there is again no mention of Alypius. This decision, too, seems to have been wholly personal. So, even though Augustine states that at Cassiciacum, he was a *catechumenus* together with the *catechumenus* Alypius, ("catechumenus in villa cum catechumeno Alypio")¹²⁹ he may well have been glossing over an important difference between the two friends at the time: the *catechumenus* Augustine was preparing himself for baptism at Easter, while the (only recently made?) *catechumenus* Alypius may still have been doubting as to whether he should put himself forward for baptism. Furthermore, the text "*placuit et Alypio renasci in te mecum*",¹³⁰ stated when it was time for Augus-

¹²⁵ This is well pointed out by James O'Donnell (1992, II, p. 479).

¹²⁶ See John O'Meara, *The young Augustine: the growth of st. Augustine's mind up to his conversion* (2nd rev. edition) (New York: Alba house, 2000), p. 155-160 (esp. p. 155): "To the Manichees the Epistles of the Apostle Paul represented the best and purest part of the Christian Scriptures"; Peter Brown 2000, p. 97: "The African Manichees had appealed constantly to Paul as the prophet of Mani *par excellence*".

¹²⁷ Five days before Monnica passed away, she told Augustine: "nulla re iam delector in hac vita. [...] unum erat propter quod in hac vita aliquantum immorari cupiebam, ut te christianum catholicum viderem priusquam morerer". ("I now find no pleasure in this life [...] the one reason why I wanted to stay longer in this life was my desire to see you a Catholic Christian before I die") (Conf. IX.x(26)).

¹²⁸ Conf. IX.vi(13).

¹²⁹ Conf. IX.iv(8).

¹³⁰ Conf. IX.v(13).

tine to return to Milan to hand in his name for baptism, seems to imply that, Alypius indeed made this weighty decision only towards the end of his Cassiciacum stay. This passage elicited the following comment from James O'Donnell:

Was Alypius less enthusiastic at first? The first sentence here suggests that it was A[ugustine]'s decision to take baptism that came first and determined the group's plans.¹³¹

After this brief outline of Alypius' spiritual journey, it has become clear that an important element is what Alypius understood by "becoming a christianus catholicus" at the time of his conversion, assuming that this step formed part of their joint agreement. Precisely the question of what it means to be a *christianus* was treated extensively by Augustine at the beginning of book VIII, where he presented another conversion story.

3.3. *The conversion story of Victorinus: the difference between a christianus and a [Neoplatonic] philosopher sympathetic to the Christian faith*

There is a conversion story in *Confessiones* which explicitly deals with an issue which stands at the heart of this article. It explains the difference between a true *christianus* and a (Neoplatonic) philosopher who privately acknowledges the truth of the Christian faith, but who does not think it necessary to submit himself to the Catholic Church and to seek baptism: the conversion story of Victorinus, told by the old priest Simplicianus, at the beginning of book VIII.¹³² Important is that only Augustine heard this story, since he alone paid a visit to the old priest Simplicianus, hoping that he could help him with his personal problems, seeing that Ambrose had no time for him.¹³³ Augustine already had come to view his secular activity with disgust, and he believed the nub of the problem to be that he was still firmly tied by women. Augustine further describes his situation as "et inveneram iam bonam margaritam, et venditis omnibus quae haberem emenda

¹³¹ James O'Donnell 1992, III, p. 105. Actually, James O'Donnell contradicts himself here, because, as noted before, earlier on he assumed that both Augustine and Alypius decided on baptism at their conversion in the garden of Milan (James O'Donnell 1992, III, p. 70). Further, the idea that Augustine's decision determined the group's plans is an exaggeration, seeing that of this group only Alypius and Augustine's son Adeodatus joined him in baptism.

¹³² *Conf.* VIII.ii(3)-v(11).

¹³³ *Conf.* VI.ii(3).

erat, et dubitabam".¹³⁴ Surprisingly, Simplicianus' story of Victorinus does not seem to deal with Augustine's particular problem of breaking the chains of sexual desire and rescuing him from the slavery of worldly affairs. Instead, the old priest is keen to explain to him the difference between a Neoplatonic philosopher who privately claims to be a *christianus*, and a true *christianus*, and this is quite a different issue.¹³⁵ Here the sacraments – becoming "sacramentally" a member of the Church – stood central, regardless of whether one wished to marry or not.¹³⁶ In the story, Victorinus was finally prepared to face the full weight of his pagan friends' hostility, when he decided to become truly a *christianus* and to receive the sacraments of the Church, i.e. to seek baptism. While his former friends gnashed their teeth, the Christian community was ecstatic about welcoming such a high-profile new member into their midst.

Apparently Simplicianus thought Augustine still needed to learn the lesson that it is not enough to consider oneself merely privately a *christianus*: one also has to formally (and publicly) commit and submit oneself to Christ and the *catholica ecclesia*, which entailed becoming part of the ecclesiastical community and receiving baptism. Simplicianus had good reason to think that, just like Victorinus, Augustine would shrink from openly proclaiming his Catholic allegiance, even though he had privately become sympathetic towards it: in particular

¹³⁴ *Conf.* VIII.i(2): "I had discovered the good pearl, but to buy it I had to sell all that I had, and I hesitated".

¹³⁵ We do not need to look for forced interpretations, as James O'Donnell (1992, III, p. 7) does, when he tries to find common ground between Augustine's sexual lust and Victorinus' fear of his pagan friends, which he both describes as "native disinclinations". The answer may be simple: when in telling his life story Augustine mentioned his "wandering in errors" (i.e. his Manichaean period) and his interest in (Neo)platonist books, Simplicianus may have interrupted him here, already thinking that he knew what Augustine's problem was: he congratulated him for not having fallen for other philosophies, and then started telling the story of Victorinus' conversion, to exhort him to the humility of Christ. (*Conf.* VIII.ii(3)). For a former Manichaean turning a Neoplatonic philosopher with Christian interests, it seems likely that full commitment to the Catholic Church (i.e. baptism) was going to be a key problem, and not so much continence. The story of Ponticianus centred much more on the issue of continence and on an ascetic life, and not so much on baptism.

¹³⁶ This has been also noted by Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's 'conversion': historical fact or literary device?", *Augustinus* 38 (1993), 103-119 (p. 111): "In the meantime, Augustine had his conference with Simplicianus and had learned of the humility of Victorinus, who had accepted baptism without any concessions being made to his social standing and dignity [...] however committed the mind may be, the sacraments are essential for making a Christian." Initially, Victorinus demonstrated the attitude of a pagan philosopher, who was above religious rituals.

his Manichaean past made him potentially "allergic" to the sacraments of the Catholic Church.¹³⁷ Many of his friends were still influenced by Manichaean ideas, and Augustine himself had been barking against the Catholic faith when he was a proselytising member of the sect. For him, to out himself as a *christianus catholicus* must have met with disbelief and resentment from his friends. Also from a philosopher's point of view it must have been humiliating to join the Catholic Church, since a philosopher wishes to arrive at wisdom by relying on the faculty of reason, and not by having to submit oneself unconditionally to the authority of the Church.¹³⁸ Philosophers who privately may acknowledge the truth of the Catholic faith while refusing to submit to its sacraments must have been a real problem at the time, hence Ambrose's (now lost) treatise, titled *De sacramento regenerationis sive de philosophia*.¹³⁹

Anyhow, when Simplicianus finished his story, Augustine says he was on fire to imitate the heroic decision of Victorinus,¹⁴⁰ which must mean that he, too, wished to seek baptism and risk receiving the full weight of his old (Manichaean) and Neoplatonic friends, who must have been almost as opposed to this step as Victorinus' pagan friends were to his holy decision. Only later, as a kind of anecdote, did Simplicianus add that, when Victorinus was forced to choose between Christianity and his profession as a teacher of rhetoric, due to a decree of emperor Julian, he bravely resigned from office.¹⁴¹ No doubt, Simplicianus told this story solely with the intent of showing how steadfast and heroic Victorinus remained in his faith, and he had no intention whatsoever to try and persuade Augustine to give up his worldly profession. After all, once baptized Victorinus happily continued to

¹³⁷ Note that Augustine himself refers to this in *Conf.* IX. iv(8): "[quod] illa sacramenta, illa medicamenta nescirent et insani essent adversus antidotum quo sani esse potuissent" ("they [i.e. the Manichaeans] are ignorant of those sacraments, those remedies, and madly hostile to the antidote which could have cured them").

¹³⁸ Within this context, Augustine's *De utilitate credendi* and *De vera religione* can teach us something about the kind of opposition Augustine must have faced from his friends when he decided to convert to the religion of his mother.

¹³⁹ James O'Donnell (1992, I, p. xxxviii-xxxix) writes about its content: "Paraphrased, that would be 'On Baptism; or Concerning Philosophy'. The argument is straightforward enough: the way of the philosophers is not the true way, it is not enough to know the truth, one must have in addition sacramental membership in the Christian Church".

¹⁴⁰ *Conf.* VIII.v(10).

¹⁴¹ Important here is the chronological order: First Simplicianus tells of Victorinus' baptism, then Augustine says he was eager to imitate this famous Roman teacher of rhetoric, and only then does the old priest tell of Victorinus' brave resignation.

lecture on rhetoric, and did not even think about giving up his profession until Julian's decree forced him to if he wished to remain a *christianus*.¹⁴² Augustine's reaction to this anecdote – if he openly showed it – surely must have surprised Simplicianus: “non mihi fortior quam felicius visus est, quia invenit occasionem vacandi tibi, cui rei ego suspirabam”.¹⁴³

The fact that Augustine learned this lesson before his conversion is another strong argument in favour of the idea that Augustine really converted to the Catholic faith, and did not (merely) become a “Christian” Neoplatonic philosopher. Also for this reason one can assume that in the garden of Milan Augustine was already fully committed to receiving baptism next Easter.

However, we now need to find out how much of this lesson regarding becoming a *christianus* Augustine may have passed on to Alypius before his conversion. Nothing about this is known. With this we return once more to the question: if in the garden of Milan Alypius decided to follow Augustine into a life of celibacy and a renunciation of a worldly life, and if he accepted becoming a *christianus*, even though he was weak in faith, can we really be sure that this was not along the lines of Victorinus' private claim in the story “iam christianus sum”?¹⁴⁴ More precisely, did their joint agreement include the intent of receiving the sacrament of baptism in the near future, and to become a “full member” of the Church? If Alypius' commitment was less Christ-centred than Augustine's and did not yet imply a readiness to receive baptism, this could explain the elusiveness about Alypius' conversion and the vagueness of their joint agreement: both conversions entailed a commitment to become a strict ascetic *christianus*, but the two friends may have differed over what “becoming a *christianus*” stood for.

¹⁴² This shows that continence and abandoning worldly ambition was not Simplicianus' greatest concern.

¹⁴³ *Conf.* VIII.v(10): *I felt that he was not so much courageous as fortunate to find occasion for dedicating all his time to You. I sighed after such freedom...*. Such a “fortunate” occasion would present itself also to Augustine when his health problems (breathing difficulties) worsened (See also *De beata vita* i(4) and *De academicis* i.i(3)).

¹⁴⁴ James O'Donnell (1992, III, p. 21) comments: “In the fourth century there was a distinct alternative for men like Victorinus: ‘associate membership’ in the church, marked by admission to the catechumenate and deferred baptism”. Alypius may well have been someone who thinks that when one worships God as a *catechumenus* and lives an upright, even ascetic, life, what need is there for baptism?

3.4. *Converting a pagan virtus to a Christian virtus: Self-reliance versus submission to God*

To conclude this first part, a central idea in Maurice Testard's article will be picked up because it deals with an – in Augustine's eyes – essential aspect of what it means to be a *christianus*. According to Maurice Testard, the conversion was not just about Augustine being finally persuaded by Alypius that to live a communal philosophical life *in otio* would be impossible once married,¹⁴⁵ and that therefore strict continence was a *conditio sine qua non* for their ideal way of living. Augustine himself soon came to realize that a combination of marriage and philosophy, which in the past he had claimed to be workable,¹⁴⁶ was not good for him after all. In his attempts to achieve the (Neoplatonic) ascent to God he felt that it was his sexual lust which weighed him down again into inferior things, and which made him unstable.¹⁴⁷ At their conversion, Maurice Testard emphasizes the fact that Alypius, too, had to give in to Augustine, since he followed him in embracing the Catholic faith. He puts his finger on Alypius' problem when he states, "la vertu d'Alypius n'était pas douteuse; elle n'était pas chrétienne".¹⁴⁸

What we understand under a Christian *virtus* as opposed to a pagan (or even a Manichaeian) *virtus* becomes therefore an important issue. For some time Augustine thought that chastity depended on one's own resources, which he knew he himself did not possess.¹⁴⁹ This was most likely Alypius' view also, and perhaps he even encouraged Augustine into thinking like this, because of the moral strength he displayed and which Augustine admired so much.¹⁵⁰ Augustine's personal crisis in the garden made it crystal clear to him that this virtue does not depend on one's own resources, but that God's help is required to achieve it. This was in his case a profound experience, because of the depth of his crisis. At the heart of his conversion, letting go of concupiscence and embracing continence was intrinsically tied up with casting himself upon Jesus Christ in faith, and to stop relying on himself.¹⁵¹ The whole event was also an immensely hum-

¹⁴⁵ *Conf.* VI.xii(21).

¹⁴⁶ *Conf.* VI.xi(19).

¹⁴⁷ *Conf.* VII.xvii(23); *Conf.* VIII.ii(2).

¹⁴⁸ Maurice Testard 1970, p. 271.

¹⁴⁹ *Conf.* VI.xi(20): "propriarum virium credebam esse continentiam, quarum mihi non eram conscius" ("I believed continence to be achieved by personal resources which I was not aware of possessing").

¹⁵⁰ Maurice Testard 1970, p. 267.

¹⁵¹ The truth that one has to cast oneself upon God has been brought home through the vision of Lady Continence ("an vero isti et istae in se ipsis possunt ac non in

bling experience: being confronted with one's own weakness (of the will) to such a degree must have made it in the end easier for Augustine to renounce his self-determination, and to humbly submit himself to Christ. This idea of self-reliance versus reliance on God is crucial to understanding Augustine's conversion to the Catholic faith, in which humility occupied such a central place.¹⁵² It marked out the difference between a "self-conceited" Neoplatonic philosopher and a humble *christianus*, and this appears to be also the crucial lesson in Victorinus' conversion story.¹⁵³

In *Confessiones* Augustine repeatedly refers to this required humility. Another aspect of this readiness to humble oneself and to submit to Christ, was to pray for help: "nec iam ingemescebam orando ut subvenires mihi".¹⁵⁴ When emphasizing the difference between the Christian faith and Neoplatonism he states: "non habent illae paginae vultum pietatis huius, lacrimas confessionis, sacrificium tuum, spiritum contribulatum, cor contritum et humiliatum".¹⁵⁵

domino deo suo?" ("Do you think them capable of achieving this by their own resources and not by the Lord their God?") *Conf.* VIII.xi(27)). See also *Conf.* VI.xi(20), in which he says, referring to Scripture, "neminem posse esse continentem nisi tu dederis. utique dares, si gemitu interno pulsarem aures tuas et fida solida in te iactarem curam meam" ("no one can be continent unless you grant it. You would surely have granted it if my inward groaning had struck your ears and with firm faith I had cast my care on you").

¹⁵² On the centrality of humility versus pride in Augustine's conversion, see, for instance, David C. Alexander 2008, p. 67-79, in which the story of Victorinus exemplifies this thesis. Peter Brown's biography on Augustine is particularly strong in bringing out this tension between self-reliance and casting oneself upon God.

¹⁵³ "ut me exhortaretur ad humilitatem Christi sapientibus absconditam et revelatam parvulis Victorinum ipsum recordatus est" ("To exhort me to the humility of Christ hidden from the wise and revealed to babes he recalled his memory of Victorinus himself") and "non erubuerit esse puer Christi tui et infans fons tui, subiecto collo ad humilitatis iugum et edomita fronte ad crucis opprobrium" ("Yet, he was not ashamed to bow his head to the yoke of humility and to submit his forehead to the reproach of the Cross"). (*Conf.* VIII. ii(3)). This idea is repeatedly referred to especially on the subject of the Neoplatonists: "non enim tenebam deum meum Iesum, humilis humilem [...] ne fiducia sui progredierentur longius, sed potius infirmarentur" ("To possess my God, the humble Jesus, I was not yet humble enough [...] They [i.e. the Neoplatonists] are no longer to place confidence in themselves, but rather to become weak...") (*Conf.* VII.xviii(24)). Augustine also introduces his encounter with the books of the Neoplatonists as a lesson in humility from God: "et primo volens ostendere mihi quam resistas superbis, humilibus autem dat gratiam" ("First you wanted to show me how you resist the proud and give grace to the humble") (*Conf.* VII.ix(13)).

¹⁵⁴ *Conf.* VI.ii(3). "I had not yet come to groan in prayer that you might come to my aid".

¹⁵⁵ *Conf.* VII.xxi(27): "Those pages [of the Neoplatonic books] do not contain the face of devotion, tears of confession, your sacrifice, a troubled spirit, a contrite and humble heart".

Such tears of confession and a contrite and humble heart were overwhelmingly present at his conversion. His crisis was about surrendering his autonomy, as he himself states at the start of book IX: "et hoc erat totum, nolle quod volebam et velle quod volebas".¹⁵⁶ Also Peter Brown stresses this crucial difference between the self-determination of the [Neoplatonic] philosopher and the humility of the christianus, who is prepared to stop relying on himself, and instead chooses to rely on God and seek his aid.¹⁵⁷

Taking into account that Augustine's intense confrontation with his own weakness, which was an exceptionally humbling experience, must have helped him to submit to Christ, and to decide on baptism within the *catholica ecclesia*, can we simply assume that this was also Alypius' experience and conclusion at his conversion? This is unlikely, since he had such an outstanding natural ability for virtuous behaviour and self-control, and this he displayed also at this conversion, since he made this commitment "sine ulla turbulenta cunctatione". Someone with such admirable qualities surely would have found it much more difficult to acknowledge that he should not just rely on himself but should cast himself upon God instead.¹⁵⁸ Remarkable is that within the small *vita Alypii* of book VI, Augustine mainly focused on those episodes from Alypius' life which illustrate that even someone who is endowed with a great solid virtue, should not rely on himself, but always on God, otherwise it will all go terribly wrong. For instance, after having recounted Alypius' "fall" into the pleasures of the gladiatorial games, Augustine states, "et inde tamen manu validissima et misericordissima aruisti eum tu, et docuisti non sui habere sed tui fiduciam, sed longe postea".¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ *Conf.* IX.i(1): "The nub of the problem was to reject my own will and to desire yours. [...] Thereby I submitted my neck to your easy yoke and my shoulders to your light burden".

¹⁵⁷ Peter Brown (2000, p. 95-96) on the moment Augustine turned to the Bible after reading the Neoplatonic books: "The issue was one of spiritual autonomy: to what extent could a man be expected to work out his own salvation by his own power alone? [...] Thus, in the summer of 386, Augustine refused, for the last time in his life, to resist the temptations of complete spiritual autonomy".

¹⁵⁸ See also Anton van Hooff 1998, p. 381: "Wie Augustinus muß auch er [i.e. Alypius] zum Glauben kommen, um diesen Weg als unmögliche Möglichkeit schätzen zu lernen, ihn nicht selbstbehauptend durchzuführen, sondern als Gabe Gottes zu empfangen".

¹⁵⁹ *Conf.* VI.viii(13): "From this you delivered him by your most strong and merciful hand, and you taught him to put his confidence not in himself but in You. But that was much later". We need to ask ourselves: How much later?

(Provisional) conclusion

When Ponticianus confronted Alypius with the story of Antony, and the latter's "heroic resistance to the almost overwhelming diabolical assailments against his chastity",¹⁶⁰ this probably had the same effect on him as the austere Manichaean elects and their demonstration of ascetic discipline and chastity had on him in the past.¹⁶¹ It may well have been above all this excellence in *virtus* demonstrated within the Catholic fold by Antony and by the monks at Milan which suddenly made the Catholic Church a much more appealing alternative to him (and most likely also to Augustine).¹⁶²

We can safely assume that at his conversion in the garden of Milan, Alypius had decided to become an ascetic *christianus* just like Augustine. He would be the only one of Augustine's friends to do so at the time. But it seems that in becoming a *christianus*, unlike Augustine, Alypius had not yet let go of his self-reliance, and was not yet ready to humble himself and to submit himself to the yoke of Christ and to the Catholic faith by receiving baptism. After all, *his sors* did not contain an exhortation of the kind of Augustine's "induite dominum Iesum Christum", which alluded to baptism; on the contrary: his oracle text, "infirmum vero in fide recipite", seemed to allow for a less committed place within the *catholica ecclesia*. Neither did the conversion story of the two friends at Trier refer explicitly to baptism, unlike the conversion story of Victorinus, which only Augustine heard. Most likely, no (emotional) pressure was exerted on him from

¹⁶⁰ John O'Meara 2000, p. 175.

¹⁶¹ According to Augustine (*Conf.* vi.vii(12)), this display of the Manichaeans' continence was a false virtue (only a semblance of true continence), precisely because it was not accompanied with the necessary humility and reliance on God.

¹⁶² In this context, Augustine's early work (390 AD) *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* must have been music to the ears of Alypius, because it demonstrated and promoted the superiority of the Catholic morals in comparison with those of the Manichaeans. Indicative is that Augustine especially calls on the example of the Eastern hermits and the monasteries to illustrate the excellent virtuous behaviour of Catholic Christians. It demonstrates that hearing from Ponticianus of the existence of holy men in monasteries and hermits living such excellent virtuous lives within the *catholica ecclesia* must have had a big impact: it presented Augustine as well as Alypius with a way of life which met their high moral demands and this within the Catholic community. Before that, Augustine admitted that he was confused, since he saw in the Church married as well as unmarried believers, which was a marked difference from Manichaeism, and which gave the impression that the Manichaeans followed the highest principles (*Conf.* viii.i(i)) and were morally superior to the Catholic Church.

his mother to become a *fidelis*, while Augustine emphasized the predominant role Monnica played in his return to the Catholic fold. Furthermore, the way in which Alypius embraced chastity (if he not already had done so) and renounced his worldly ambition "sine ulla turbulentia cunctatione",¹⁶³ which is so much in contrast with Augustine's excruciating struggle, still reminds very much of the young Alypius, who, when admonished about the circus games, "excussit animum forti temperantia, et resiliuerunt omnes circensium sordes ab eo".¹⁶⁴ There are thus several indications that submission to Christ and acknowledging the need for baptism within the *catholica ecclesia* was something Alypius still had to learn, so that only towards the end of the Cassiciacum stay, he came to realize that humility and surrender to God (and to the *catholica ecclesia*) was essential for their new way of life. In a forthcoming article, this tentative conclusion will be further explored by looking into Alypius' religious mind-set between conversion and baptism, and this mainly on the basis of the Cassiciacum dialogues and book IX of *Confessiones*.

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In diesem Artikel wollen wir untersuchen, welche Rolle die Inkarnation bei der *conversio* Augustinus spielte und darüber hinaus wie Augustinus diese im Verlauf seines Lebens weiterentwickelt hat. Ausschließlich die Frage nach den Heilsfunktionen der Menschwerdung Christi.

Terminologie

Augustinus hat insgesamt 124mal das Wort „*incarnatio*“ verwendet. Die „*incarnatio*“ bedeutet nach Augustinus den Vorgang, dass Gott sich mit dem Menschen uniert hat. Über die sprachliche Vielfalt dieses Vorgangs genügt es, wenn wir auf die von T. van Bavel in seiner

¹⁶³ *Conf.* VIII.xii(30).

¹⁶⁴ *Conf.* VI.vii(12): "[...] he roused up his mind with a well resolved moderation; and all those filths of the circensian pastimes flew off from him".