

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

(continuation and end)

Part 2. Between conversion and baptism

Abstract

This second part investigates Alypius' understanding of his conversion to the Catholic faith between his conversion moment and baptism. Alypius' contributions in the *Cassiciacum dialogues* – for instance, his defence of the sceptic position, and his belief in the *auctoritas Ciceronis* – suggest that he was still very much moving within the context of traditional Roman ideology, having not yet fully grasped the radical nature of Augustine's conversion. Alypius' rejection of the latter's Christian interpretation of *Fortuna's* role (as *gratia Dei*) in man's life, and his resistance against including the name of Christ in their writings are further signs that he was reluctant to fully submit to the Catholic faith. Only towards the end of the Cassiciacum stay – presumably after having been further instructed by Augustine – Alypius seems to have become humble enough to do so, and to decide on baptism within the Catholic church.

The strong hold traditional ideology had on Augustine's friends, but also on himself, can be witnessed in how he tried to persuade his non-Catholic friends to follow his example. He thereby propagated his new Christian way of life as the final realization of an earlier failed attempt to live together in philosophy (*otium liberale*). Initially, he wanted to set up a kind of Christian philosophical community of likeminded friends in the intellectual milieu of Milan. This plan failed, mainly because of lack of (financial) resources, seeing that none of his friends (apart from Alypius, and later Evodius) could be persuaded to participate in it.

Introduction

In a previous article,¹ Alypius' commitment to the Catholic faith has been scrutinized up until his conversion moment in a garden in

¹ See *Augustiniana* 59(2009)1-2, 191-225. What follows is a short summary of its findings.

Milan. The agreement the two friends made involved moral reform – renouncing secular ambitions and embracing a life of continence – but also commitment to the Catholic Church, even though Alypius' faith was still weak. Both men decided there and then to become ascetic *christiani*, following the example of Antony and the two friends in the garden of Trier. When they informed Augustine's mother Monnica about what had happened, the emphasis was once more on the rupture with their worldly life, but Augustine must have made it also clear to her that he soon wished to receive baptism. He expressed this in a very personal manner, by way of referring to his mother's dream, which the reader encountered earlier on in book III of *Confessiones*.² Because of the highly personal character of this comment, nothing can (or ought to) be deduced with certainty from this regarding Alypius' adherence to the Catholic faith at his conversion moment. The provisional conclusion was that, at first, Alypius may not have fully shared Augustine's strong commitment to the Catholic faith, which included submission to baptism, even though the two friends "*jointly made a good resolution and affirmation of intention*"³ at their conversion, and despite the fact that Alypius was baptized together with Augustine the following Easter.

This second part focuses on the fascinating period between Alypius' (and Augustine's) conversion moment and baptism (August 386 – April 387). With the information supplied in book IX of *Confessiones* and in the *Cassiciacum dialogues* evidence will be gathered to support the thesis that, after his conversion, Alypius still needed further instruction and guidance about the kind of (Christian) life they had actually entered upon, and the role of the Catholic faith within it.

Firstly, Alypius' conversion will be placed in its wider (social) context, by examining the reaction of other friends to their conversion. Secondly, we will take a closer look at the way in which Augustine presented his new way of life to a broader audience in the *Cassiciacum dialogues*, assuming that this may well have been similar to the way in which he had conveyed it to Alypius. Thirdly, in order to get a better idea of his religious and philosophical mind-set at the time, we will focus on some of the contributions Alypius made during the discussions held at Cassiciacum. Finally, we will return briefly to *Confessiones* to assess the information about Alypius' (eventual?) decision to receive baptism.

² *Conf.* III.xi(19-20).

³ *Conf.* VIII.xii(29): "placitoque ac proposito bono [...] coniunctus est".

1. Informing and persuading his close family and friends

Augustine did not immediately go public with his radical plan to quit his teaching profession: worried about a negative response he decided to await the *uindemiales feriae* before handing in his resignation.⁴ Even then he was glad to use his poor health as a legitimate pretext.⁵ Initially, the two new converts, Augustine and Alypius, informed only their intimate circle of friends and relatives about their radical change in life.⁶ We can deduce from Augustine's comment that even from them they met with considerable opposition:

tu nobis a conuallē plorationis ascendētibz et cantantibz canticum graduum dederas sagittas acutas et carbones uastatores aduersus linguam subdolum, uelut consulendo contradicentem et, sicut cibum adsolet, amando consumentem.⁷

to us who were climbing out of the valley of tears and singing a song of steps, you had given sharp arrows and destroying coals to answer any deceitful tongue, which in seemingly offering helpful advice actually opposes us, and in offering love devours us in the way people consume food.

In all likelihood, his friends and relatives did not want him to throw away an already successful career now that even greater honours were within his reach: after all, they themselves would be the first to

⁴ *Conf.* IX.v(13). This seems to be in contradiction with *Conf.* IX.iv(7)), where he said he was liberated from his profession with the arrival of the Vintage Vacation (22 August – 15 October). Here, I believe, Augustine means that once the term was over and the vacation started, he knew this would be the end of his teaching profession, without actually officially handing in his resignation, which, according to *Conf.* IX.v(13), happened only towards the end of the vacation.

⁵ *Conf.* IX.ii(4); IX.v(13). *De academicis* I.i(3), *De beata vita* I(4), *De ordine* I.iii(5). This way, he would not have to deal with his students' (wealthy) parents, who must have been irritated because he suddenly abandoned his teaching responsibilities towards their sons, seemingly without a compelling reason. Note that it would indeed make sense that first, Augustine would (pretend to) wait and see whether his poor condition would not improve after this period of rest, before officially handing in his resignation on the grounds of ill-health at the end of the vacation.

⁶ *Conf.* IX.ii(2): "consilium ergo nostrum erat coram te, coram hominibus autem nisi nostris non erat". ("Our plan was formed with your knowledge but was not publicly known, except to our intimate circle").

⁷ *Conf.* IX.ii (2), and further (*Conf.* IX. iii(3)): "They [i.e. the examples given by God's servants] set me on fire with such force that every breath of opposition from 'any deceitful tongue' [ex lingua subdola] had the power not to dampen my zeal but to inflame it the more". Henry Chadwick (1998, p. 34) perceptively links these words to the famous pear theft episode, where Augustine is aware of the dangers of friendship: "o nimis inimica amicitia, seductio mentis inuestigabilis" "Friendship can be a dangerous enemy, a seduction of the mind lying beyond any reach of investigation" (*Conf.* II.x(17)).

profit from his further worldly success.⁸ They also may have been uneasy about the fact that he had converted to his childhood religion: several of his friends were still sympathetic to Manichaeism, a religious sect which mocked the – in their eyes – naïveté of Catholic Christianity.⁹ Augustine says nothing further about what must have been for him an unpleasant affair, but he does provide us with some details concerning the reaction of two close friends, who were also friends of Alypius: Verecundus and Nebridius. Their response can help us place Alypius' conversion within their (social) context.

Verecundus, a local grammar teacher, was very much taken aback by the news, and Augustine uses strong wording to describe his reaction: *macerabatur anxitudine*, meaning he was “violently upset”, or “chewed up with worry”.¹⁰ Verecundus, although realizing he was about to lose the companionship of two close friends, felt himself unable to follow their example. He could not become a *christianus*, Augustine explains, because of his marital status, even though his wife was a baptized believer (*fidelis*):

nondum christianus, coniuge fidei, ea ipsa tamen artiore prae ceteris compede ab itinere quod aggressi eramus retardabatur, nec christianum esse alio modo se uelle dicebat quam illo quo non poterat.¹¹

⁸ We find this indirectly expressed in *Soliloquies* (I.xi(18)) where Augustine admits he might pursue further worldly honours so that his friends may obtain them as well, if this was their pre-condition to join his philosophical project.

⁹ Augustine's reading of David's psalms at Cassiciacum, in which his comments were directed very much against the Manichees must have been about the many Manichaean friends, who scorned his return to the “naïve” Catholic faith of his mother. That Augustine was concerned about these friends, and wanted to convert them is shown by his book *De uera religione* (390/391, written to convert Romanianus), *De utilitate credendi* (391/392 in order to convert Honoratus), and *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et De moribus Manichaeorum* (388/389). Nevertheless, I think that his friends' criticism must have been mainly about his intention to resign from office, also because Augustine may have emphasized this aspect of his conversion, taking into consideration the way he presented his conversion in the Cassiciacum dialogues (see further).

¹⁰ *Conf.* IX.iii(5).

¹¹ Colin Starnes (1990, p. 268, n. 26) remarks: “Augustine does not make it clear if Verecundus was ‘held back’ by his wife because he wanted her, or she him”. Serge Lancel (2002, p. 99) thinks that Augustine wrote this not without a touch of mischief, whereby Verecundus was using this impossibility for him to lead an ascetic life (as a Christian), as an excuse for not becoming a *christianus* at all. Possibly Verecundus' wife would have opposed the idea that her husband would abandon his teaching post to join Augustine's and Alypius' little community, even if this would have meant that he would become a *christianus*; she probably was one of those *mulierculae* who would have resented the group's earlier plans to live together a life in (philosophical)

He was not yet a Christian, while his wife was a baptized believer. Yet, fettered by her more than anything else, he was held back from the journey on which we had embarked. He used to say that he did not wish to be a Christian except in the way which was not open to him.

Verecundus kindly offered them the temporary use of his *rus Cassiciacum* as a place to start their new lives, a deed which should be considered an act of Roman *humanitas* rather than Christian charity, according to Colin Starnes.¹² A year or two later, he, too, became a baptized Christian, albeit only *in articulo mortis* (i.e. on his death bed) just like Augustine's father Patricius.¹³

Whereas Verecundus was greatly disturbed by the news, Nebridius was pleased about it.¹⁴ In those days, the three friends Augustine, Alypius and Nebridius were living together in the same house.¹⁵ Moreover, Nebridius was already leading an exemplary chaste life.¹⁶ He had travelled all the way from Carthage to Milan, for the sole purpose of being with Augustine, so that together they could search for truth.¹⁷ As will become clear when discussing the Cassiciacum retreat, the fact that Nebridius was an ardent searcher of truth, even more so than Alypius, must have made him particularly suitable to join Augustine's new way of life.¹⁸ In Milan, he was careful not to

leisure (*Conf.* VI. xiv (24)) (see further). Whether Augustine himself would have been prepared to become a *christianus* while remaining within his teaching profession (as Victorinus did(!)) and marry his fiancée is highly questionable, even though this was the kind of life his mother Monnica had arranged for him.

¹² Colin Starnes 1990, p. 250. So also Marie Aquinas McNamara, *Friendship in saint Augustine* (Studia Friburgensia N.S. 20) (Fribourg: The university press, 1958), p. 80.

¹³ *Conf.* IX.iii(5) and IX.ix(22).

¹⁴ *Conf.* IX.iii(6): "angebatur ergo tunc ipse, Nebridius autem conlaetabatur".

¹⁵ *Conf.* VI.x(17) and VIII.vi(13).

¹⁶ *Conf.* IV.iii(6): "carissimus meus Nebridius, adulescens ualde bonus et ualde castus". He therefore did not face the insurmountable obstacle the married Verecundus was confronted with, nor did he have to go through the terrible struggle Augustine went through during his conversion crisis in order to embrace a chaste life.

¹⁷ *Conf.* VI.x(17): "nullam ob aliam Mediolanum uenerat, nisi ut mecum uiueret in flagrantissimo studio ueritatis atque sapientiae". James J. O'Donnell (1992, II, p. 369-370) aptly remarks on *ueritatis atque sapientiae*: "The phrase both reports their aim and hints at the manner of its fulfilment. The friends search, both knowing and not knowing what it is they seek, not seeing the (to A[ugustine] of 397, ineluctable) epithets of Christ in these words".

¹⁸ See *Conf.* VI.x(17): "beatae uitae inquisitor ardens et quaestionum difficillimarum scrutator acerrimus" ("an ardent investigator of the happy life and a very gifted examiner of the most perplexing questions"). The difference between Alypius and Nebridius is well brought out by Colin Starnes (1990, p. 156-157).

become too well known, so that enough leisure would remain at his disposal for the pursuit of wisdom. Only out of friendship did he take on the task of assisting Verecundus in his teaching job, but still

*uolebat habere liberum et quam multi posset horis feriatum ad quarendum aliquid uel legendum uel audiendum de sapientia.*¹⁹

he wanted to keep his mind free and to devote as many hours as possible to the pursuit of wisdom either by investigating some problem or by listening to conversation.

Consequently, next to Alypius, Nebridius must have been the most likely to follow Augustine's example, and yet, however much Augustine hoped that his friend would join him, Nebridius in the end decided not to.²⁰

In *Confessiones* (IX. iii(6)) Augustine focuses once more on the Christian aspect:

*quamuis enim et ipse nondum christianus in illam foueam perniciosissimi erroris inciderat ueritatis filii tui carnem phantasmata crederet, tamen inde emergens sic sibi erat, nondum imbutus ullis ecclesiae tuae sacramentis, sed inquisitor ardentissimus ueritatis.*²¹

Even though he himself was not yet a Christian – he had fallen into that ditch of pernicious error, which taught him to believe that the flesh of Your Son, the Truth, was illusory – nevertheless, he was emerging from this to the attitude that, even though he was not yet initiated into any of the sacraments of your Church, he was an ardent seeker after truth.

Augustine concedes that, like Verecundus, Nebridius was not (yet) a *christianus*. Even though Nebridius was the first to spot a weakness in the Manichaean belief system,²² he still seems to have been influenced by some of its tenets in August 386, so that he could not

¹⁹ *Conf.* VIII.vi(13). This in contrast to Augustine, whose many obligations greatly encroached upon his free time *Conf.* VI.xi(18).

²⁰ *Conf.* IX.iii(6). This reminds somewhat of Augustine's inner struggle: he, too, came close to embracing a chaste life, but at the same time remained in doubt almost to an unbearable suspense. Unlike Augustine, Nebridius' struggle ended in an anti-climax, since in the end he decided not to join them after all. The letters between these two men attest how greatly Augustine missed his friend at Cassiciacum. On their correspondence, see Georges Folliet (1987). John J. Gavigan (1946, p. 51) believes that "Nebridius was anxious to go along with the company, but he was prevented from doing so, for Verecundus had demanded of their common friendship that Nebridius should assist him in the teaching of grammar at Milan". This puts Verecundus in a bad light, but on the other hand, Nebridius probably left Milan only after Verecundus died.

²¹ *Conf.* IX.iii(6).

²² *Conf.* VII.ii(3).

believe the Catholic understanding of Christ to be true. In choosing his words carefully here, Augustine gives the reader the impression that his friend stood closer to becoming a *christianus* than he actually may have been at the time: Nebridius was already emerging from the erroneous belief "*ueritatis filii tui carnem phantasmata crederet*" ("*that the flesh of truth, your son, was illusory*"),²³ and despite the fact he was not even a catechumen,²⁴ "*sed inquisitor ardentissimus ueritatis*" ("*but he was an ardent seeker after truth*").

By first tightly linking *veritas* with *filius tuus*, i.e. Christ, and then to state that Nebridius was an ardent searcher of *veritas*, Augustine is suggesting that Nebridius was already an ardent searcher of Christ [*Who is truth*], and thus on the brink of becoming a *christianus*.²⁵ But because Augustine admits that Nebridius was not even a catechumen at the time, it is not at all certain that he was trying to find truth within the Catholic faith!²⁶

The fact that he decided NOT to follow Augustine and Alypius could arguably be an indication that he was not yet prepared to make this crucial equation between Christ and (incarnate) truth.²⁷ Moreover,

²³ This was the heresy of Docetism. Henry Chadwick does not sufficiently bring out in his translation the fact that Nebridius was still in the process of ridding himself of Manichaean beliefs.

²⁴ Seeing that thus far he had not received any "sacraments" (A catechumen was someone who had received the sacraments of the cross on the forehead and the tasting of salt).

²⁵ The fact that he puts *ueritas* before *filius tuus*, where one should expect this the other way around, only highlights this connection.

²⁶ Actually, there is no indication whatsoever that his attitude had changed since book VI, where Augustine introduced him as simply an ardent searcher of truth (without believing Christ to be incarnate truth) (*Conf.* VI.x(16)); James J. O'Donnell makes this link (1992, III, p. 83).

²⁷ However, we should not reject out of hand another plausible reason why Nebridius did not join Augustine and Alypius at Cassiciacum: perhaps he did not wish to disappoint his friend Verecundus, who counted on him to continue assisting him in his grammar teaching in Milan, seeing that Verecundus did not join Augustine. Serge Lancel (2002, p. 490, n. 5) thinks Nebridius' teaching duties in Verecundus' school to be his alibi for not being at Cassiciacum. Nevertheless, he points out that even during the 'grape harvest vacation' (22 August – 15 October), which must have been a free period for Nebridius as well, there is no indication that he stayed with Augustine and Alypius. In a footnote Serge Lancel states that this total absence of reference to Nebridius continues to be disturbing, while a query remains over the Augustinian chronology of this period in 386. Indeed, the exact time of certain events remains uncertain: when exactly did Augustine hand in his resignation, when did he set out for Cassiciacum, and precisely when did he inform Ambrose about his intention to receive baptism? To have a correct chronology of these events would considerably help our understanding of this crucial period in Augustine's life.

half a year later, when the small group returned to Milan, and Augustine and Alypius enrolled themselves as *competentes* to prepare for baptism, Nebridius could still not bring himself to become a *christianus*, let alone a *fidelis*.²⁸ Perhaps he did not want to commit himself too rashly to any religion, and instead preferred to rely solely on his faculty of reason, considering his penchant for philosophy.²⁹ Only sometime later Nebridius decided to become a *christianus* as well, and to receive baptism.³⁰

The end result of Augustine soliciting his intimate circle of friends to join his new life at Cassiciacum proved to be utterly disappointing: no other friend was found prepared to follow Augustine's and Alypius' decision to become an ascetic *christianus*, neither did any of their friends follow them to Cassiciacum, or join the two in baptism the following Easter.³¹

²⁸ *Conf.* IX.iii(6); *Conf.* IX.vi(14).

²⁹ Augustine, once realizing that Manichaean teaching proved to be false, and that the Catholic faith became more feasible, remained for some time reluctant to believe that the Catholic faith was the true religion: "*Just as it commonly happens that a person who has experienced a bad physician is afraid of entrusting himself to a good one, so it was with the health of my soul. While it could not be healed except by believing, it was refusing to be healed for fear of believing what is false*" (*Conf.* VI. iv(6)). Nebridius (and other friends as well) may have adopted the very same attitude towards the Catholic faith for quite some time. Such an uncommitted position would have been bolstered by the academics' (pessimistic) view on the attainability of truth.

³⁰ This was already after Augustine with his small group of followers had returned to Africa in late 388, where they set up a little community in his own house in Thagaste (*Conf.* IX.iii(6): "*quam non multo post conuersionem nostram et regenerationem per baptismum tuum ipsum etiam fidelem catholicum, castitate perfecta atque continentia tibi seruientem in Africa apud suos.*" ("*Not much later after my conversion and regeneration by your baptism, he too became a baptized Catholic believer.*"). We have to be careful in interpreting Augustine's "non multo post conuersionem nostram". It remains problematic what Augustine exactly means with 'non multo post'. Even if Nebridius received baptism a year later, this might still seem to Augustine in 399 'non multo post conuersionem nostram'. Nebridius seems to have returned to Africa shortly after Verecundus' death. However, he did not travel to Thagaste to live together with Augustine and Alypius, but instead he returned to his own house in Carthage, where also his mother and brother lived. Attempts of Nebridius to persuade Augustine to come to his house in Carthage and *vice versa* came to nothing. A few years later (in 390?) Nebridius died. The correspondence between these two shows that Nebridius' insatiable inquisitiveness often concerned purely philosophical matters, sometimes to the frustration of Augustine, who did not want to spend too much time on these less important topics.

³¹ The only other person who became a member of the little community built around Augustine was the already baptized Evodius, who happened to be also from Thagaste. He joined them in Milan, after Augustine's and Alypius' baptism (*Conf.* IX.viii(17)).

What can the reactions of these friends tell us about Alypius' conversion? Firstly, in book IX of *Confessiones*, Augustine focuses on the Christian element of their new lives, which confirms the idea that becoming a *christianus* constituted an essential part of their conversion. Secondly, even though conversion to Christianity stood central in the description of the reaction of his friends, the issue of baptism was nowhere raised.³²

Thirdly, the fact that no one of their common group of friends, not even Verecundus or Nebridius, could be persuaded to join the two in their decision, shows that Alypius' resolution to become an ascetic *christianus* together with Augustine (probably by becoming a catechumen) should therefore already be considered a significant step, regardless of the fact whether he was actually prepared to commit himself to baptism or not.³³

2. "Ergo aggredere mecum philosophiam"³⁴

The dialogues inform us of how Augustine wished to present his new life to his (other) friends at the time.³⁵ One dialogue in particular is of interest here, for it shows how he tried to convert a relative of Alypius to their new way of life:³⁶ indeed, in *De academicis* (or

³² This is understandable: many of Augustine's friends had a Manichaean past and therefore were most likely considerably sceptical of, if not hostile to, the Catholic faith, and certainly to the idea of receiving baptism, which Manichees considered to be a superfluous and useless external act.

³³ The important role Monnica must have played in Augustine's return to the Catholic fold is hereby underscored. That Augustine greatly missed his friends is palpable in his *Soliloquies* (I.ix.16). He dearly wanted to have them with him at Cassiciacum, so that together they could search for truth. At the same time, he was troubled by the very fact that their absence upset him so much: it meant that his happiness still depended on them being with him, so he still had some way to go to enjoy that true and unperturbed happiness he longed for. See also *Epistula* 3 to Nebridius, and especially *Epistula* 2 addressed to Zenobius, in which he states that true philosophy teaches to be self-reliant, but he himself is not there yet, since he is longing for his friend Zenobius, and hopes he himself is desired by him in return. Yet, he keeps striving to love nothing which can be absent from him against his will.

³⁴ *De academicis* II.ii(3): "Come with me then to philosophy".

³⁵ For instance, in *De ordine*, he writes in the introduction to Zenobius: "[...] qualemque uitam nos uiuamus charissimi tui, et quem fructum de liberali otio carpamus, hi te libris satis, ut opinior, edocebunt" ("what manner of life we, your dearest friends, are now leading, and what fruit we are gathering from a cultured leisure, these books will, I believe, sufficiently show you").

³⁶ Indeed, even at Cassiciacum Augustine did not cease soliciting his friends to join the little community he had set up there.

Contra academicos) Augustine tried to woo no one less than his patron Romanianus, a very wealthy citizen from his hometown Thagaste, into joining his small community at Cassiciacum.³⁷ The way in which Augustine presented his patron with his new direction in life somehow has to resemble the way in which he had communicated his conversion to Alypius in that fateful garden of Milan, and also how they afterwards informed their intimate circle of friends about it.

In *Confessiones* Augustine wished to emphasize – for understandable reasons – the religious dimension of his new life.³⁸ This is the only comment he makes there about the Cassiciacum dialogues:

ibi quid egerim in litteris iam quidem seruientibus tibi, sed adhuc superbiae scholam tamquam in pausatione anhelantibus, testantur libri disputati cum praesentibus et cum ipso me solo coram te.³⁹

What I put there in writing attest my discussions with those present and with myself alone before You, and while these books were indeed now written in Your service, they still breathe heavily the spirit of the school of pride, as if at a respite.

In *De academicis* Augustine tries to persuade Romanianus to join them by presenting their break as a stay in the *portus philosophiae*, the harbour of philosophy: “Come with me then, to philosophy”, he writes.⁴⁰ Here, the Christian dimension seems to be overshadowed by the concept of a traditional *otium* (*philosophandi*), making his conversion seem to have been to philosophy rather than to the Catholic faith of his devoted mother. In *De ordine* he labels his new mode of life an *otium liberale*, a traditional way of retirement of the Roman elite in which one devoted oneself to study.⁴¹ Only in his

³⁷ Romanianus had to be in Milan, because of a lawsuit (*De academicis* II.ii(6)).

³⁸ That is why he devotes a considerable paragraph on describing how moved he was when reading the psalms at Cassiciacum, and why he remembers also how God came to his aid when he was in agony because of toothache (*Conf.* IX.iv(8-12)).

³⁹ *Conf.* IX.iv(7); see also *Retractationes* praef. 3: “nec ille sane praetereo quae catechumenus iam, licet relicta spe quam terrenam gerebam, sed adhuc saecularium litterarum inflatus consuetudine scripsi”. (“Certainly, I will not pass over the things I wrote while still a catechumen – although I had given up the earthly prospects which I used to cherish, but was still puffed up with the usages of secular literature”). Important to keep in mind is that these are criticisms made much later: at the time Augustine clearly saw nothing wrong in it.

⁴⁰ *De academicis* II.ii(3): “ergo aggredere mecum philosophiam”. On the metaphor of *portus philosophiae* and its classical antecedents, see J. Oroz 1968.

⁴¹ Dennis E. Trout (1988, p. 136) rightly states: ‘Augustine conceptualized and publicized his life at Cassiciacum as a life in *otium*’.

Retractationes the Christian dimension of Cassiciacum surfaces again: there, he describes his stay as a *christianae uitae otium*.⁴²

The difference in flavour between the *Confessiones* and the dialogues can be explained by the different situation in which these works were written. At Cassiciacum Augustine was known as the up and coming African professor who suddenly resigned from his municipal chair of rhetoric at Milan (due to health problems) when he was not yet 32 years old; by the time he wrote *Confessiones* (ca. 398) he was, already for a few years, the Catholic bishop of North-African Hippo. Needless to say, these changes in life inevitably also affected his view on (his) life. We should further bear in mind that *Confessiones* was such a unique and intimate account of Augustine's winding path to the Christian faith, that even Alypius may have been surprised by some of the things he read in this work.⁴³ Of utmost importance is the fact that the two works deal with a different audience: *Confessiones* was written for Christians⁴⁴ to stir up their hearts towards God; the dialogues, on the other hand, were primarily written for a broader circle of educated friends and contacts in Milan, of whom only a few must have been *christiani*. We should hereby constantly keep in mind that Augustine's excellent rhetorical skills made it his second nature to adapt his words and style to the kind of audience he was addressing, in order to get his message across as effectively as possible.

In the dialogues, Augustine closely links his current retreat to what he regarded to be his first conversion, when he read Cicero's *Hortensius* at the age of eighteen.⁴⁵ The basic link between his earlier conversion to philosophy and the one to the Catholic faith in the garden of Milan is certainly not absent in *Confessiones*, seeing that his intellectual search for truth formed the thread of his Odyssean journey to Christianity. This also explains why he looks back on this first conversion to philosophy, when his conversion moment to the Catholic faith draws near:

quoniam multi mei anni mecum effluxerant (forte duodecim anni) ex quo ab undeicesimo anno aetatis meae, lecto Ciceronis *Hortensio*, excitatus eram studio sapientiae et differebam felicitate terrena ad eam inuestigandam uacare.

⁴² *Retractationes* I.i(1).

⁴³ The fact that Alypius was still alive when Augustine wrote his *Confessiones*, and that he had been a close witness of Augustine's road to conversion is a strong argument in favour of the truthfulness of his account.

⁴⁴ See *Conf.* x.iv(4)-(5).

⁴⁵ *Conf.* III.iv(7); James J. O'Donnell (1992, II, p. 167) rightly remarks that Augustine read Cicero at the age of eighteen, not nineteen, since Augustine writes: "annum aetatis undeicesimum" ("In my nineteenth year").

*Many years of my life had passed by – about twelve – since in my nineteenth year I had read Cicero’s Hortensius, and had been stirred to a zeal for wisdom. But although I came to despise earthly joy, I put off giving time to the quest for wisdom.*⁴⁶

Augustine’s conversion to the Catholic faith was thus closely tied to his (philosophical) search for wisdom.⁴⁷

This does not mean that at Cassiciacum the Christian dimension was entirely lacking, far from it! The heated controversy over whether Augustine had converted to (Neo-)Platonism rather than to the Christian faith, although this question has now been settled, has highlighted some undeniably Christian elements within the dialogues. Although few in number, they are often to be found at crucial places.⁴⁸ Romanianus is not just being encouraged to abandon his worldly life, and to join their life in philosophy, he is also expected to become a *christianus*. In order to convince him of the Catholic truth, Augustine is even prepared to send him another work, a commitment he fulfilled some years later with his magisterial *De uera religione* (ca. 390).⁴⁹ This puts Augustine’s understanding of philosophy firmly within the confines of the Catholic faith, so that he can indeed rightly claim in *Confessiones* that these dialogues were written in the service of God.⁵⁰ The least one can say, however, is that, as a *christianus*, Augustine did not share bishop Ambrose’s reticence towards (classical) philosophy.⁵¹

David Alexander rightly claims that the basic mode of the Cassiciacum stay did not originally come from any Christian source.⁵² This may seem surprising, seeing that the (conversion) stories which triggered Augustine’s conversion were all deeply Christian and not linked to any form of philosophy or *otium liberale*.⁵³

⁴⁶ *Conf.* VIII.vii(17).

⁴⁷ In *De academicis* Augustine has chosen the very same book, the *Hortensius*, as reading material in order to stimulate the interest of his two private pupils in *studia sapientiae*, apparently with some success (*De academicis*, I.i(4)). The importance of the *Hortensius* is also emphasized in *Soliloquies* (I.x(17)).

⁴⁸ In particular at the end of *De beata vita* and *De academicis*.

⁴⁹ *De academicis* II.iii(8).

⁵⁰ See *Conf.* IX.iv (7) and *Epistula* 15.1.

⁵¹ See Paul R. Kolbet 2010, p. 92.

⁵² David Alexander (2008, p. 48, also p. 49): “It seems clear that the fundamental mode of life exemplified at Cassiciacum was not primarily generated by the Church, or for that matter the Christian community”.

⁵³ The exemplary eremitical life of Antony, the existing monasteries in Milan, and the conversion of the two uneducated(!) *agentes in rebus* to an ascetic life devoted to the Christian faith, none of these had philosophical overtones.

Instead, in his attempt to persuade Romanianus to join his small community at Cassiciacum, Augustine harks back to a specific mode of community life, one in which his patron had already shown some interest: in his second cover letter he presents his current stay as the final realization of their earlier (failed) attempt to set up a small philosophical community of friends in Milan.⁵⁴ The idea was to abandon their worldly life and to adopt a traditional lifestyle of carefree leisure, to devote themselves full-time to the pursuit of wisdom. The moment they wondered what their – to some, prospective – wives would think of such a project, their carefully thought out plan fell to pieces.⁵⁵ Whatever the roots may have been of this project, whether it was Ciceronian, Epicurean,⁵⁶ Pythagorean or even Manichaeian,⁵⁷ it was not Christian.⁵⁸

Augustine mentions this unsuccessful attempt also in *Confessiones*.⁵⁹ The earlier philosophical project would be made financially possible by piling together the resources of all members in one common chest.⁶⁰ Augustine, Alypius, Romanianus, Nebridius, Verecundus, and Zenobius, who were all interested in philosophy, almost certainly

⁵⁴ *De academicis* II.ii(4). Significantly, while we tend to look further into the future when assessing the Cassiciacum stay, (i.e. by comparing it with the community of Thagaste and of Hippo), Augustine himself looks back to the community they had tried to set up in Milan. Perhaps we should therefore give more weight to this particular project in our evaluation of Augustine's view of community life.

⁵⁵ That a wife would agree to this kind of life was not evident, Augustine makes clear in *Soliloquies* (I.xi.18): "Quamquam, si eius amplo patrimonio certum sit sustentari posse omnes, quos tecum in uno loco uiuere otiose cupis, ipsa etiam concorditer id sinente, [...]" ("But what if it were certain that her [i.e. the wife's] great wealth could support all those whom you wish to have living peacefully with you in one place, while she herself would be in complete agreement with this, [...]").

⁵⁶ An Epicurean influence may well have been more important than hitherto assumed, bearing in mind that at the time Augustine would have given this philosophical school the palm of victory, if only he did not believe in life after death (*Conf.* VI.xvi (26)).

⁵⁷ John J. O'Meara (1954, p. 141-142); but rejected by R.J. Halliburton (1962, p. 331); Pierre Courcelle (1950, 178f.); James J. O'Donnell, (1992, III, p. 379). Manichaeian influence seems doubtful, even though many of his friends were still influenced at the time by this exotic religion.

⁵⁸ First of all, it is highly likely that none of the participants were Christians, and secondly, Augustine had not yet heard of a Christian form of community life. When he did, he became a *christianus*. That the kind of *otium philosophandi* of the Christian Manlius Theodorus may have inspired their project may well be possible, but the question here would be whether this *otium* had anything specifically Christian about it (about Manlius Theodorus as model, see Pierre Courcelle (1950, p. 334-335, p. 337)).

⁵⁹ *Conf.* VI.xiv (24).

⁶⁰ Note that this was a basic principle also of Augustine's first 'monastery' at Thagaste/Hippo. (See Possidius 5,1: "Factusque presbyter monasterium intra ecclesiam mox instituit et cum Dei seruus uiuere coepit secundum modum et regulam sub sanctis Apostolis constitutam".

belonged to this group of circa ten friends.⁶¹ Above all the taking part of the very wealthy Romanianus proved to be crucial for the financial feasibility of this plan.⁶²

In stark contrast, the “ill-assorted company”⁶³ which Augustine took with him to Cassiciacum mainly consisted of (poor) family dependents, who were a financial burden to him.⁶⁴ Alypius turned out to be the only one of the original group of ten men who was prepared to follow Augustine.⁶⁵ The non-attendance of other friends almost inevitably made his enterprise difficult to finance. The use of Verecundus’ country villa was very helpful, but it could only be a temporary solution.⁶⁶ Still in need of extra income, Augustine gave at Cassiciacum private tuition to Romanianus’ son Licentius and to another pupil Trygetius.⁶⁷ In a way, Romanianus was thus already sponsoring their stay in return for the education of his son.⁶⁸ There was actually not much free time available at Cassiciacum to study wisdom, since much labour needed to be done on the estate, and also the two students needed to be taught literature.

Augustine’s appeal to Romanianus in *De academicis*, while referring in his introductory letter to the financial support his patron had been prepared to give to this earlier philosophical project, and the hurry in which he sought to involve Romanianus into their new way

⁶¹ Zenobius knew Verecundus and Romanianus (see *De ordine*), and also Alypius (see *Epistula* 2), so he almost certainly belonged to the small circle of friends, seeing that he was interested in philosophy. Hermegonius, the addressee of the first letter was probably also a member of this group.

⁶² *Conf.* VI.xiv (24); *De academicis* II.ii(4).

⁶³ Peter Brown 2000, p. 113.

⁶⁴ His mother Monnica, his son Adeodatus, his brother Navigius and his two nephews.

⁶⁵ André Mandouze surely must be wrong in claiming that the original group of friends must have been very similar to this Cassiciacum party, of whom only Alypius and Augustine were really interested in philosophy. See André Mandouze (1968, 193, n. 1), criticized by James J. O’Donnell (1992, II, p. 381). Surprisingly, some include in this Cassiciacum group Nebridius (see Henry Chadwick (2009, p. 33)), or even Evodius (see John J. O’Meara, (2001, p. 196)). Also stating that Augustine was there with his friends (plural) is misleading: only Alypius really belongs to this category, since the rest consisted of his family (dependents) and two private pupils.

⁶⁶ Probably in return they had to do some work on the estate.

⁶⁷ Thus also Gerald Bonner (1086b, p. 94): “Since Augustine was giving up his post as an official teacher of rhetoric, it was desirable that he should find some other way of supporting himself and his dependants, and it is very likely that the tuition of these two was a source of income”.

⁶⁸ Dennis E. Trout (1988, p. 138): “The *otium honestum* of Cassiciacum [...] was only possible on the basis of personal wealth or patronage, and while it is impossible to assess Augustine’s own resources, it is clear that he drew upon those of Verecundus, Romanianus, and others in the autumn of 386”.

of life,⁶⁹ suggest that Augustine was hoping that his patron would provide the necessary financial support (and stability), so that they could afford to live together *in otio* pursuing (a now Christian) philosophy on a more permanent basis, and with much more time left to actually do philosophy.⁷⁰

Publicizing his conversion to the Catholic faith as a conversion to Christian philosophy, whereby he ostensibly remained within the format of a traditional *otium liberale*, must have been for Augustine the most expedient way of presenting his new life to his friends, certainly if he wished to interest them into this new project. The "double footing" of the Cassiciacum stay – advertised as a traditional *otium liberale* (with all its elitist worldly connotations), while firmly tied to the Catholic faith – tried to combine at heart two conflicting ideologies.⁷¹ This not only creates confusion for us when we attempt to label the Cassiciacum retreat,⁷² it probably also made it puzzling for Augustine's friends as well, including Alypius, to be able to grasp what exactly they were trying to set up.⁷³

⁶⁹ This is why the three books of *De academicis* were divided into two parts, whereby books II and III were sent afterwards. This explains the existence of a second cover letter at the beginning of book II: Augustine had already sent book I ahead to Romanianus, while the latter was still in Milan.

⁷⁰ As we will see later, Augustine regrets in *De academicis* that at Cassiciacum so little time was left to actually hold philosophical discussions, because work needed to be done on the estate, while also the two students needed to be taught. No doubt, this, too, may have been written to signal to Romanianus that more financial support was currently needed for them in order to be able to pursue philosophy without any other tasks encroaching upon their precious free time. Notice that the availability of spare time was of major importance to Augustine when still a professor (*Conf.* VI.xi(18)), while also Nebridius was careful to have as much free time as possible for his search of wisdom (*Conf.* VIII.vi(13)). It must have been frustrating for Augustine, now that he had given up his worldly life to "give time to the quest for wisdom", that still so many other obligations were preventing him from philosophizing.

⁷¹ These two conflicting ideologies he would masterly elaborate upon in his *De civitate Dei*.

⁷² David Alexander (2008, p. 50, n.132) states that using the term *monasterium* in connection with Cassiciacum is "premature and ambiguous", while one should even remain very cautious in applying it to the Thagastan community. See, e.g., R.J. Halliburton (1962, p. 329-340): "It would appear that it [i.e. the Thagastan retreat] is in its essentials a continuation of the retreat of Cassiciacum and not to be associated with the *monasterium* which, it is claimed by Paulinus of Nola, existed there in the year 394" (p. 339).

⁷³ A good example of this potential misconception for the participants, I believe, can be found in the poem of Licentius (the son of Romanianus) written several years later (ca. 395) about his Cassiciacum stay: the poem breathes classical sophistry, with the Cassiciacum stay portrayed as nothing else than a traditional *otium liberale*. Yet, Licentius claims at the end he is a *christianus*. Augustine is highly displeased in this letter with the worldly engagement of his former pupil, in which he still seems to be too traditionally Roman minded to be a true *christianus*. See Danuta Shanzer (1991).

Even so, Augustine was not ashamed to advertise a more humble version of dignified leisure, and this, I believe, happened under the impulse of his conversion to the Catholic faith. The level of education of some of the participants necessitated this anyway: whereas the two uneducated nephews only made a brief appearance in *De beata uita*, Augustine's illiterate mother Monnica played an important role in the philosophical discussions of both *De beata uita* and *De ordine*. At one time, Augustine even praises her for having conquered the pinnacle of philosophy, and this thanks to her Christian faith!⁷⁴ Her involvement surely must have surprised Augustine's friends,⁷⁵ and one can see him at pains defending and justifying her partaking.⁷⁶ As Gillian Clark rightly states, Christianity was able to open up the elitist attitude of a Graeco-Roman philosophical *otium*, to take no longer into consideration gender, status or education.⁷⁷ And so, in *De ordine*, Augustine can only hope that, concerning his writings, some men would "not disregard the lowliness of the doorway, and proceed to enter".⁷⁸

Despite the more humble features of his retreat, the fact remains that Augustine preferred to advertise his stay as a genuine *otium liberale*, and its continuation after Cassiciacum required some substantial resources, which for the moment, Augustine did not possess.

At the end of each dialogue we learn more about what Augustine's new way of life involved. Its scope was clearly not limited to the Cassiciacum stay, since he presented it as a programme for (the

⁷⁴ Monnica's role in the dialogues is elaborately discussed in the book of Catherine Conybeare (2006). See also Emilien Lamirande (1989). Also in *Confessiones* Augustine praises his mother when she stayed with them at Cassiciacum (*Conf.* ix.iv(8)). Augustine's high regard of his mother is certainly already noticeable in the early dialogues, so that her prominent role in *Confessiones* should not be regarded as some kind of strategy to make his faith more Catholic than it was (this against, for instance, Ragnar Holte's view (1994, p. 301): "When writing his *Confessions*, Augustine obviously finds it important that such a strong and faithful woman can give him a full Christian legitimization"). In *De beata uita* (ii(6)) she is introduced as "nostra mater, cuius meriti credo esse omne quod uiuo" ("our mother, to whose merit, I believe, is due all that I am"). What more praise can one heap on one's mother?

⁷⁵ No doubt, she could never have occupied such an important place in the original philosophical project: there, she would merely be considered a family dependent of Augustine (if she would have agreed to come along with Augustine).

⁷⁶ F.i. *De ordine* i.xi(31-32); *De beata uita* ii(10).

⁷⁷ Gillian Clark 2007, p. 160-161.

⁷⁸ *De ordine* i. xi (31): "contempta uilitate liminis". I believe here the Christian humility already rings through, a virtue of such tantamount importance to Augustine. For a recent study on the importance of *humilitas* to Augustine, see Baumann Notker (2009).

happy) life. In *De academicis* (III.xx(43)), he explains that he will follow the path of reason along (Neo-)Platonic lines, but at the same time he does not want to depart from the authority of Christ. He does not yet expect the two approaches to be at odds with each other, something which he later will have to retract.⁷⁹

In *De beata uita*, the most religious one of the dialogues,⁸⁰ and the only one dedicated to someone whom we know for certain was a *christianus*⁸¹, the happy life is defined in more religious terms (the perfect knowledge of God), whereby also God's assistance is required to come to truth and to know Him. Monnica concludes the discussion by quoting a verse of a hymn of bishop Ambrose: 'foue precantes, trinitas', adding that one attains the happy life by unwavering faith, eager hope, and ardent love.⁸² Notice that in this "religious" dialogue Alypius was not present, and Monnica played a big part.⁸³

Towards the end of *De ordine*, Augustine presented a more detailed programme of their new way of life, one with high moral demands, whereby training in the liberal disciplines was of great import.⁸⁴ Indeed, at the time, even though he acknowledged two paths to come to truth (reason and authority), Augustine was convinced that only someone sufficiently trained in the liberal arts could reach true happiness *in this life*.

Qui autem sola auctoritate contenti bonis tantum moribus rectisque uotis constanter operam dederint, aut contemnentes, aut non ualentes disciplinis liberalibus atque optimis erudiri, beatos eos quidem, cum inter homines uiuunt, nescio quomodo appellem.⁸⁵

But as to those who are content to follow authority alone, and who apply themselves constantly to right living and holy desires, whilst they make no account of the liberal and fine arts, or are incapable of being instructed in them, I know not how I could call them happy as long as they live among men.

⁷⁹ *Retractationes* I.i(4): "contra quorum errores magnos defendenda est Christiana doctrina".

⁸⁰ This Augustine mentions in the introduction of *De beata uita* (i.(4): "disputationum mearum, quod mihi uidetur religiosius euasisse".

⁸¹ But most likely not a *fidelis*.

⁸² *De beata uita* v(35).

⁸³ It is very difficult to assess the relationship between Alypius and Monnica. Obviously this was far less intimate than between Augustine and his mother. A possible friction may have existed when Alypius tried to discourage Augustine from marrying, while Monnica was the main force behind arranging a marriage for her son. Also the fact that she was a Catholic, while Alypius was for quite some time a Manichaean may have weighed upon their relationship.

⁸⁴ For a brief discussion of this programme, see Peter Brown 2000, p. 113-6.

⁸⁵ *De ordine* II.ix(26).

This is one of the statements he later came to regret in his *Retractationes*,⁸⁶ but at the time Augustine was convinced of the importance of the *artes liberales*.⁸⁷ Such a view suits a traditional *otium liberale*, maybe even a Christian philosophical retreat, but it would be out of place in a monastery.

That he took this idea seriously is shown by his subsequent ambitious plan to write a series of textbooks on the liberal disciplines.⁸⁸ Taking on such an enormous project indicates that Augustine's plans went much further than the temporary Cassiciacum stay and his baptism.⁸⁹ When he returned to Thagaste in 388/9, he was still working on these study books, but in the end he abandoned the project, also because he came to realize that this was not the right way of

⁸⁶ *Retractationes* I. i (2): "uerum et in his libris displicet mihi [...] quod multum tribui liberalibus disciplinis, quas multi sancti multum nesciunt, quidam etiam qui sciunt eas sancti non sunt". "I regret that in these books [...] I attributed a great deal to the liberal disciplines about which many saintly persons do not know much – some, in truth, know them and are not saintly". In *Confessiones* V.vii Augustine writes: "[artium] quorum quidem ignarus posset ueritatem tenere pietatis, sed si manichaeus non esset" ("Ignorance of the [liberal] arts is compatible with holding authentic piety, but not if one is a Manichee").

⁸⁷ See Paul Kolbet (2010, p. 98-102) on the elitist aspect of this belief. A glimpse of this traditional elitist thinking can also be detected during Augustine's conversion crisis. The fact that two uncultured(!) men at Trier (see *Conf.* VIII.viii(19)) made the necessary sacrifices to capture heaven, might have been the crucial incentive for the highly cultured Augustine to finally do the same as well, i.e. to cut down the ties of worldly success and of any other physical delights in favour of an ascetic life, in his case, to devote himself to the search for wisdom. H.M. Gatt (1984, p. 20) perceptively comments: "We note that even here a touch of Augustine's pride emerges for 'they [i.e. the uncultured men] have gone before us'".

⁸⁸ *Retractationes* I.vi: "per idem tempus, quo Mediolani fui baptismum percipiturus, etiam disciplinarum libros conatus sum scribere interrogans eos, qui mecum erant atque ab huiusmodi studiis non abhorrebant, per corporalia cupiens ad incorporea quibusdam quasi passibus certis uel peruenire uel ducere.[...] sed eosdem sex libros iam baptizatus iamque ex Italia regressus in Africam scripsi; inchoaueram quippe tantummodo istam apud Mediolanum disciplinam".

⁸⁹ I have it therefore difficult with the following view expressed by Gustave Bardy (in *BA* 12, p. 565, n. 11): "Il semble qu'avant de devenir chrétien par le baptême, il tienne à mettre en ordre ces papiers, à ne rien laisser d'inachevé qui lui rappelle son ancienne vie. Il faut qu'une existence toute renouvelée puisse commencer pour lui dès le moment de sa regeneration. Les livres sur les disciplines libérales sont le témoignage de l'adieu au passé. Il fallait les écrire, ou du moins les entreprendre, puisqu'ils étaient en quelque sorte préparés. Mais ensuite on ne reviendra plus en arrière, pour s'en inquiéter et on les abandonnera à leur sort". The author does not take sufficiently into account the importance Augustine attached to the liberal disciplines at Cassiciacum, nor the fact that the programme Augustine laid out in *De ordine* looked well beyond the time of his Cassiciacum stay or his baptism: in the dialogues Augustine presented a programme to be followed for the rest of their lives.

serving God.⁹⁰ *De doctrina christiana* contains the final outcome of this original plan, and one can see in this impressive work just how far he had moved away from the great importance he once attached to the liberal arts.⁹¹

The fact that Augustine sought the attention of eminent learned men such as Manlius Theodorus and Zenobius, the respective dedicatees of *De beata uita* and *De ordine*,⁹² and tried to involve them in his enterprise, shows that he was striving to chisel out a niche for himself and his little group within Milanese (Christian) intellectual society. Thus far, he did not seek to compromise his social position, nor did he want "to openly break ranks with the inherited conglomerate of elite values" as the hermit Antony had done.⁹³ We can conclude that in *De academicis* Augustine was hoping to persuade Romanianus, who was not (yet) a *christianus*, to join his small community, and to provide the financial means to lead a (Christian) leisured life at Milan in a more definite way, with more time available to pursue philosophy.

To conclude, according to the dialogues Augustine converted to a leisured life of (Christian) philosophy, and he propagated his current Cassiciacum stay to Romanianus as the final realization of an earlier plan to live together in philosophy with a small group of (educated!) friends near Milan, in the hope that his wealthy patron would join him. Thus far, the small circle staying with him consisted, next to Alypius, of Augustine's (uneducated) dependents and two private pupils.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ David Alexander (p. 235, esp. n. 256) rightly points out that writing a series of study books on the liberal arts could hardly be part of the duties within a real *monasterium*.

⁹¹ See Frederick van Fleteren (1995, p. 14-24).

⁹² Dennis E. Trout (1988, p. 144, n. 29): "Among the various purposes served by the dialogues – displaying Augustine's literary talents, catching the eyes of important men (remember the *De pulchro et apto* addressed to the orator Hierius, Conf. 4,14) – one was to announce the way of life adopted by Augustine at Cassiciacum. Cf. *De ord.* 1.7(20)". Notice that no work was dedicated to Simplicianus, Ponticianus or Ambrose, even though they all played a pivotal role in Augustine's return to the Catholic faith.

⁹³ Dennis E. Trout (1988) is a useful article dealing with Augustine's attitude towards the traditions of aristocratic *otium honestum* or 'dignified leisure'.

⁹⁵ James J. O'Donnell (1992, III, p. 380) comments: "We should not lose sight of what his friends and associates would have noticed at the time: that the retreat to Cassiciacum in late 386 bore a strong resemblance to the project spoken of [...] in perhaps late 385, differing mainly in its impermanence; but even that impermanence may not have been obvious to those friends and associates. Cassiciacum may have seemed to others as a nucleus and a beginning of a reorganized project, now undertaken by a smaller cadre consisting entirely of unmarried men (but not excluding women: Monnica)".

Augustine did not yet want to compromise his social position, and he still wished to be seen as an academic teacher, this time not of rhetoric but of philosophy,⁹⁶ hence his ambitious project to publish a series of study books on the liberal disciplines. With the help of Romanianus and other friends he hoped to establish a more definite version of his philosophical retreat close to Milan.

Alypius may therefore well have thought that with Augustine deciding on embracing chastity, throwing overboard his marriage plans, and giving up his worldly life,⁹⁷ their dream to live together *in otio* could finally be realized.⁹⁸ That this was to happen within a Christian context was a novelty. The inspiring examples of Antony and the two men at Trier showed that the Catholic faith counted among its members some impressive holy men leading a perfect (moral) life. Within such a perspective it is more understandable that baptism may not have been immediately an issue, and that Alypius was not yet aware of how profoundly the Christian element would affect their original plan of living together in philosophy.

What then made Augustine and his little group of family and friends decide to return to Thagaste after he, Alypius and Adeodatus were baptized?⁹⁹ I believe it was his failure to involve Romanianus

⁹⁶ See Paul R. Kolbet (2010, p. 88-117); Robert Lane Fox (2006, p. 184-185) suspects Porphyrian influence in the connection between the study of the *artes liberales* and the mystical ascent of the soul, but already Varro had made this connection. He posits that "it gave him a much-needed programme for his imminent future. He could still be a teacher, but now he could teach the basic liberal arts (on which he then writes separate texts) as part of a religious and mystical training. By giving up *spes saeculi*, Augustine was potentially without a social context". On Augustine profiling himself as a teacher, see Laura Holt (1998). One should therefore not reject out of hand the possibility that Augustine was playing with the idea to set up some sort of private school near Milan, this time not of rhetoric, but of (Christian) philosophy, hence his plan to write academic textbooks on the disciplines.

⁹⁷ The *mulierculae* obstacle was thereby radically removed.

⁹⁸ Notice that, before, Alypius concurred with Augustine as they debated "*what manner of life ought to be adopted*" (*Conf.* VI.x(16)) "*talis ille nunc inhaerebat mihi mecumque nutabat in consilio, quisnam esset tenendus uitae modus.*"

⁹⁹ It has been suggested by Jörg Trelenberg (2009, p. 390 and p. 80) that Augustine was already thinking at Cassiciacum of returning to his *Heimat* in Africa, because occasionally he wrote from an African perspective, and seemed to have had already an African audience in mind (see *De ordine* I.iii(6): "*quod in Italia etiam pecuniosis prope necesse est.*" ("Die hier bereits eindeutig über Italien hinausreichende Blickrichtung, in Verbindung gesetzt mit der später erfolgten eigenen Rückkehr nach Thagaste [...] kann als Indiz gewertet werden, dass Augustin bereits im November 386 – nicht erst im Sommer 387, wie *Conf.* 9,9,17 glauben machen will – an eine Rückkehr in seine Heimat denkt") (p. 80). However, most of his

and other friends into their project, and the fact that prominent men such as Manlius Theodorus and Zenobius did not respond in the way Augustine had hoped they would, that made it (also financially) impossible for him to continue leading the kind of leisured life he so much desired close to Milan.¹⁰⁰ In order to be able to afford the kind of independent *otium* they had enjoyed at Cassiciacum, the small group decided then to set up their community on Augustine's small estate in the backwater of Thagaste, so that Augustine and Alypius had to leave behind their former circle of (intellectual) friends at Milan.¹⁰¹ This decision came at a price: we have seen that already at Cassiciacum much farm work needed to be done at the property, while his private pupils needed further instruction, so that often there was little time left to pursue philosophy.¹⁰² In a letter from Nebridius, we learn

"Milanese" friends originally came from North-Africa, so that this already could explain the African perspective in some of his utterances in the dialogues. For instance, Augustine's foreign accent was being censured in Milan (*De ordine* II.xvii(45)). It was not unusual that the contingent of African ambitious educated men living in Milan formed their own little community there: Alypius, Verecundus, Nebridius, Ponticianus, Manlius Theodorus, Zenobius and also Evodius, all these were North-African men belonging to the same group of friends.

¹⁰⁰ So also Serge Lancel (2002, p. 115): "He probably also felt that his relationships with his Milanese friends, like Hermogenianus and Zenobius, on which he had at one point set great store, had come to a sudden end; and even with Manlius Theodorus, on whom he had placed too many hopes, and who had let him down. Moreover, quite simply, he had to earn a living. Who would subsidize him? [...] the hospitality of various friends, such as Verecundus, could not last indefinitely; and the eternal provider of funds, Romanianus, had crossed the sea". However, Serge Lancel also believes that Augustine simply wanted to break away from Milan, now that he had given up his worldly ambitions, as if Milan had no longer much to offer: surely the intellectual milieu, with men such as Manlius Theodorus and other Neoplatonic minded people, friends such as Nebridius and Verecundus, but also spiritual leaders such as Ambrose and Simplicianus could have helped Augustine in his search for wisdom.

¹⁰¹ Augustine says that after they were baptized, they (including a new member: Evodius) sat together discussing what to do next, and they decided to return to Africa: "quaerebamus quisnam locus nos utilius haberet seruientes tibi; pariter remeabamus in Africam." ("We looked for a place where we could be of most use in your service; all of us agreed on a move back to Africa" (*Conf.* IX.viii(17)). He seems to gloss over the fact that because so many of his friends did not want to join him, and also others had let him down, he simply could not afford living in *otio* in Milan.

¹⁰² See *De academicis* I.v(15); II.iv (10); III. ii(2). As Gerald Bonner (1986b, p. 93) perceptively remarks: "Men do not get up early to work in the fields simply to lend verisimilitude to an idyllic rural existence".

that at Thagaste Augustine had to perform many (curial?) services for his citizens, and this inevitably encroached upon the time available for contemplation.¹⁰³ More importantly, as so often in Augustine's life, the surrounding in which Augustine found himself had a great impact on his thinking.¹⁰⁴ One can imagine that his move back to Thagaste, far away from the highly intellectual Neo-Platonic (Christian) milieu at Milan, would have a considerable impact on his view of the ideal community life.

3. Alypius' mindset at Cassiciacum: some of his contributions

First of all, it should be noted that Alypius had been absent for quite some time from the dialogues: in *De academicis* he briefly appears at the beginning of the first book, only to reappear from the middle of the second book onwards. He does not feature at all in *De beata uita*, and he appears only in the second half of *De ordine*.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, Alypius' limited contributions can teach us something about his philosophical and religious position during that period. In *De academicis*, Alypius initially receives the role of arbiter in the discussion on the sceptic position, because he already had arranged a journey to Milan, which meant that he would have to leave during the discussion.

a) Alypius and the academic position

It gets more interesting when Alypius returns from the city and joins the debate in the second book, this time as a defender of the

¹⁰³ *Epistula* 5; for a recent discussion of these services Augustine had to perform for his citizens, see Claude Lepelley (2008).

¹⁰⁴ It is remarkable that many milestones in Augustine's thoughts coincided with a change of milieu: having moved to Carthage he became a Manichee, at Rome he adopted the more sceptic attitude of Cicero, moving to Milan led him to explore Neo-platonic thought, and eventually brought him to Christianity.

¹⁰⁵ This could help putting the dialogues in chronological order: Between book 1 and books 2 and 3 of *De academicis*, the discussions of *De beata uita* and *De ordine* may have taken place, that is if Alypius only went one time away. Possibly, this journey of Alypius (and Augustine's brother Navigius who went along) to Milan, could be linked to the arrangement of their earlier project at Milan to look after the practical matters of their retreat arrangement, so that the rest could spent more time in leisure. See also André Mandouze 1968, p. 125-126, n. 6, referring to the unpublished thesis of Josette Navarre-Domere, *Alypius de Thagaste, évêque africain*. As Jörg Trelenberg (2009, p. 81, n. 15) points out: "Es ist anzunehmen, dass nicht wenige Ideen der damaligen (in Bezug auf den Personenkreis teilweise identischen) Gruppe in Cassiciacum in ähnlicher Form verwirklicht wurden."

academic position. Here, Alypius expresses what he claims to be his honest belief concerning the academic position, so that one cannot simply assume this was said for the sake of the debate:

addo etiam quod de academicis flagitabas, nec posse inueniri me putare, non solum inolita, quam semper fere animaduertisti opinione mea, sed etiam auctoritate magnorum excellentiorumque philosophorum; quibus nos praebere colla siue imbecillitas nostra, siue sagacitas ipsorum, ultra quam nihil iam inueniri posse credendum est, nescio quomodo compellit.¹⁰⁶

I add, too – a point on which you were questioning me in connection with the Academics – that I think that it [i.e. truth] cannot be found, not only because of my ingrained conviction which you have observed in me practically from the start, but also on the authority of great and outstanding philosophers, to whose opinions we are somehow induced to submit, whether through our own mental impotence, or because of the keenness of their minds, which, we are forced to believe, cannot possibly be surpassed.

Such a strong conviction over the unassailability of the academic position may be surprising, taking into account the (Neo-)Platonic philosophy and the Catholic idea that Christ is truth, but there is more: Alypius is willing to submit to an *auctoritas*, not of Christ, but of Cicero!¹⁰⁷

Alypius' respect for – and reliance on – *auctoritas Ciceronis* has been highlighted in Augustine Curley's study of *De academicis*.¹⁰⁸ During Alypius' absence, Augustine had convinced his pupils to question the authority of Cicero, even to free themselves from the yoke of authority all together.¹⁰⁹

Alypius on the other hand very much remains within the boundaries of classical Roman philosophy, and initially, he is apparently not (yet) prepared to embrace Augustine's solution to break through the academic's sceptic position with the help of reason and Christian faith. Notice that, in the past, Cicero's recommendation to pursue philosophy had pushed Augustine away from his Catholic faith, into the arms of Manichaeism, and even after he rejected the tenets of this sect, he was still reluctant to accept the Catholic teachings, "*refusing to be healed for fear of believing what is false*".¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ *De academicis* II. xiii(30).

¹⁰⁷ Again in *De academicis* II.x.24: "ex auctoritate illa Tulliana".

¹⁰⁸ Augustine J. Curley 1996, p. 88-95.

¹⁰⁹ Augustine J. Curley 1996, p. 85-87.

¹¹⁰ *Conf.* VI.IV (6): "ne falsa crederet, curare recusabat".

An important piece of information coming from *Confessiones* reveals something about Alypius' view of philosophy, and its relation to the Catholic faith. It also tells us something about the editing procedure of the dialogues:

[...] quoque modo ipsum etiam Alypium, fratrem cordis mei, subgeris nomini unigeniti tui, domini et saluatoris nostri Iesu Christi, quod primo dedignabatur inseri litteris nostris.¹¹¹

[...] how You subjected Alypius, too, my heart's brother, to the name of your only-begotten Son, our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. For at first he was scornfully critical of inserting Christ's name.

At first, Alypius did not want the name of Christ to appear in their philosophical dialogues at all! For someone who had just become a *christianus* this is quite an astonishing piece of information (especially if one assumed he was preparing for baptism).¹¹² One could argue that these were in essence philosophical writings, and that this dispute between Augustine and Alypius about the name of Christ merely concerned the style of the dialogues.¹¹³ However, in his search of truth, twice Augustine had turned away from the writings of

¹¹¹ *Conf.* ix.iv(7).

¹¹² I find the interpretation of Tarmo Toom (*Thought clothed with sound: Augustine's Christological hermeneutics in De doctrina christiana* (International theological studies; contributions of Baptist scholars 4) (Bern: Lang 2002, p. 39 n.86) highly unlikely: "Alypius thought that it was improper for Augustine to mention Christ's name in his writings, because it would have been, in some sense, a lowering of the high name of the Son of God".

¹¹³ For instance Goulven Madec (1986, p. 214): "parce qu'il estimait que les formules spécifiquement chrétiennes rompaient avec l'esthétique classique des Dialogues philosophiques". This is also Carol Harrison's view (2006b, p. 254-255): "We must also, of course, remember the genre of the dialogues, and in this sense Alypius' objections are quite understandable: they are philosophical dialogues following a definite Ciceronian model, in which it is not the absence of Christ's name which is surprising, but the fact that it occurs at all". Indeed, the aspect of style and literary form is an important one. The works of Cassiciacum were composed "within a tradition of cultivated leisure, [...] characterized by stylistic conventions admitting spontaneity and personal detail only of the most studied and self-conscious variety" (J. Matthews 1975, p. 221). However, Augustine was trying to anchor this traditional thinking within a new Christian context, and this Alypius seems to have resisted at first (perhaps he even failed to notice this!) when he did not want Christ's name to be included in their writings. Possibly, Alypius had the (purely) philosophical writings of Manlius Theodorus in mind, but Augustine was attempting something quite different with his dialogues. The fact that Manlius Theodorus was probably "only" a *christianus* and not a *fidelis* could help explain Alypius' reluctance to receive baptism himself: if the highly honoured Manlius Theodorus did not think it necessary to be baptized, why would he? After all, the pressure on Augustine to receive baptism came above all from his mother Monnica, who had no philosophical aspirations.

Cicero, simply because they lacked the name of Christ. Surely Augustine would not have considered the absence or presence of Christ's name to be a matter of mere style in his writings! Secondly, Augustine says he could not give himself wholeheartedly to the academic position, because their writings were without Christ's saving name, and this seems to have been the moment he decided to become a catechumen again in the Catholic Church, "mihi a parentibus commendata".¹¹⁴ Unlike Augustine, the absence of Christ's name in Cicero's writings would certainly not have put off Alypius, so he could give himself more readily to the academics' teaching. What is more, unlike Augustine, he would not have felt the need to turn to the Catholic faith and its Church. Therefore, in *De academicis* Alypius approved of the academic position in a way Augustine could never have done.

Thirdly, the way in which Augustine describes this dispute between the two friends, points indirectly towards something else as well: the humility Alypius still needed to assume in order to become a true *christianus*, a humility necessary to submit (fully) to the Catholic faith and to the sacraments of its Church. This is already present in the Latin: "*subegeris nomini tui [...] quod primo dedignabatur inseri litteris nostris.*"

This need to become humble was exactly the lesson which Augustine received when hearing the conversion story of Victorinus, and also his own conversion moment was an immensely humbling experience, exposing the weakness of his will power to the bone.

As it happens, Augustine (unconsciously?) links the passage about Alypius' resistance to include the name of Christ in their philosophical dialogues to the conversion story of Victorinus, and this through verbal repetition, for the passage continues:

magis enim eas uolebat redolere gymnasiorum cedros, quas iam contriuit dominus, quam salubres herbas ecclesiasticas aduersas serpentibus.

The only other instance in *Confessiones* in which Augustine uses this Biblical imagery of "*cedars, which the Lord has felt down*" is in the Victorinus episode. There, the cedars embodied the pride of the pagans in contrast to the humility of true Christians. The only difference between these two "cedar" references is that in Alypius' case the cedars have already been felt by the Lord (... cedros, quas iam

¹¹⁴ *Conf.* v.xiv(25): "Quibus tamen philosophis [i.e. academicis], quod sine salutare nomine Christi essent, curationem languoris animae meae committere omnino recusabam. Statui ergo tamdiu esse catechumenus in catholica ecclesia mihi a parentibus commendata, donec aliquid certi eluceret quo cursum dirigerem".

contriuit dominus), while in the case of the pagans the Lord had not yet felt the cedars ("ex cedris Libani, quas nondum contriverat dominus").¹¹⁵ This nicely fits our thesis, that Alypius did indeed follow Augustine in becoming a *christianus*, but that he had not yet fully realized the repercussions of his conversion to the Catholic faith, since he still wanted the writings they produced at Cassiciacum to smell of these cedars.¹¹⁶

At the end of *De academicis*, after a lengthy exposé of Augustine's thoughts, Alypius is happy to claim defeat, and he says to his pupils:

Quare iam, socii mei, expectationem uestram, qua me ad respondendum prouocabatis, certiore spe mecum ad discendum conuertite. Habemus ducem qui nos in ipsa ueritatis arcana, Deo iam monstrante, perducatur.¹¹⁷

Accordingly, my friends, exchange your expectation by which you were inciting me to make a reply for a more certain hope: to learn with me. We now have a leader who may bring us to the sanctuaries of the truth, which God may now show us.

Here we see Alypius accepting Augustine as his leader, who possesses the key towards wisdom, and showing his willingness to become his student as well. Augustine will have to take the lead in this new manner of life, and to set out its lines. Likewise, in the second book of *De ordine*, Augustine is again praised by Alypius:

permagna, [...] uitae imago abs te ante oculos nostros, cum plene, tum breuiter constituta est: cui quamuis quotidianis praeceptis tuis inhiemus, tamen nos hodie cupidores flagrantioresque reddidisti.¹¹⁸

A grand view of life, a succinct but complete view, has been placed before our eyes by you. And although we daily hang upon your teaching, yet today you have inflamed us with greater eagerness and zeal for that life.

It is as if Alypius still needs to make his own Augustine's recent discoveries concerning truth, and their newly adopted way of life, which is now embedded in Christianity. Therefore, at Cassiciacum Augustine introduces his unique kind of philosophy not only to his

¹¹⁵ *Conf.* viii.ii(4): 'amicos enim suos reuerbatur offendere, superbos daemoniacos, quorum ex culmine Babylonicae dignitatis quasi ex cedris libani, quas nondum contriuerat dominus'.

¹¹⁶ Therefore, only during the editing process Alypius was ready to submit and humble himself to (the name of) Christ, and this is further indication that submission to baptism was not part of the joint agreement at their conversion.

¹¹⁷ *De academicis* iii.xx(44).

two private pupils Licentius and Trygetius, but also to his dear friend Alypius!

b) *Proteus imagery – becoming Augustine's true friend*

Another passage worth looking into is where Alypius brings the figure of Proteus into the discussion:¹¹⁹

suamque imaginem et quasi speculum quoddam in Proteo illo animaduerti oportere, qui traditur eo solere capi quo minime caperetur, inuestigatoresque eius numquam eundem tenuisse, nisi indice alicuiusmodi numine. quod si adsit, et illam nobis ueritatem quae tantum curae est demonstrare dignetur, ego quoque uel ipsis inuitis, quod mimime reor, illos superatos esse confitebor.

The likeness and 'image' (so to speak) of the academics should be seen in Proteus. It is said that Proteus was typically captured by some means that barely captured him, and his pursuers never were sure they really had him except by the indication of some divine spirit. May that divine spirit be present, and may he deign to show us the truth that is of such importance to us! Then I'll also admit that the academics have been overcome, even if they don't agree, although I think they will.

Alypius is convinced that the position of the academics cannot be dislodged that easily. He first compares the academics themselves with Proteus. When a persuasive argument is brought against them, this in itself can be used in support of their thesis: no consent ought to be given to this argument, for it only demonstrates that truth is relative. And so, the very means by which one believes one has captured the academics actually only strengthen their case. Just as was the case with Proteus, it would take a *numen* to indicate that he was captured. Then Alypius somewhat alters the meaning of Proteus as being now a symbol of truth itself, wishing there was such a spirit (*numen*) present which could reveal to them *truth*. If so, then he will gladly admit defeat (even if the academics would not do so).

According to Therese Fuhrer, Alypius' wish that a divinity would reveal itself (quod si adsit) is to be understood not as an *eventualis*, but as an *irrealis*.

Erwähnung des Gottes... nicht als Eventualis, sondern als Irrealis zu verstehen", d.h. die Enthüllung der "Wahrheit" durch einen *numen* wird von ihm nicht als reale Möglichkeit erwogen, sondern bleibt

¹¹⁸ *De ordine* II.x 28.

¹¹⁹ *De academicis* III.v(11).

hypothetisch. Als offenbarungstheologische Aussage werden Alypius' Worte erst in Augustins Interpretation in §13 verstanden.¹²⁰

Such a reading goes perhaps too far: Alypius simply leaves it in the middle whether such a *numen* will really present itself, and therefore this must be a *neutral* hypothetical statement: if a *numen* would deign to show us truth, then I will admit defeat.¹²¹

Augustine is keen to pick up the Proteus imagery symbolising truth,¹²² and he lavishly praises Alypius for such a pious utterance. But whereas Alypius retains a neutral position, Augustine resolutely takes a more positive stance, modifying it into a more Christian statement: man can obtain truth, for a divine power, i.e. Christ, reveals to him this truth.¹²³

Again Therese Furher:

Alypius' kurzer Hinweis in 3, 5, 11 wird von Augustin aufgegriffen und uminterpretiert: Der Mensch kann zur Wahrheitserkenntnis gelangen, wenn eine göttliche Macht im die Wahrheit offenbart. Die Aussage wird damit von Augustin auch umgedeutet im Sinn einer positiven Antwort auf die in 3, 4, 10 gestellte Frage nach der Möglichkeit, als Mensch *sapientia* erlangen zu können.¹²⁴

Augustine thus takes what Alypius has stated a step further, by giving it a more pronounced Christian meaning: truth is revealed through Christ, who Himself is truth.¹²⁵ Augustine can now say that

¹²⁰ Therese Fuhrer 1997, p. 275.

¹²¹ I am grateful to prof. Gert Partoens for explaining to me the exact meaning of the Latin here.

¹²² Actually, the equation of Proteus with truth rests on an unusual reading of Virgil's verse: *uerum ubi correptum manibus uinclisque tenebis* (*Georgics* IV.405), whereby *uerum* is not taken as an adversative particle parallel with *tum* in IV.406, but as a noun (Peter King 1995, p. 63, n.129).

¹²³ See also the comment made by John J. O'Meara 1951, p. 186-7, n. 10; Robert J. O'Connell, "The visage of philosophy at Cassiciacum", *Augustinian studies* 25(1994), 65-76 (p. 70-71), who links Proteus and this *numen* to the incarnation.

¹²⁴ Therese Fuhrer (1997, p. 277-8).

¹²⁵ Another intriguing, but admittedly less persuasive, interpretation would be that Alypius refers with this *numen* not to Christ, ... but to Augustine himself! That this idea is not too far-fetched can be shown by the way Licentius uses the Proteus-imagery eight years later in his poem (transmitted in *Epistula* 26), which refers to the Cassiciacum stay: in this poem Licentius is lying helpless before the intransigent works of Varro, who is compared to Proteus. Licentius must call upon an intercessory divinity, in this case not a nymph, but no one else than his former teacher Augustine. Licentius believes that once Augustine has sent him his *De musica*, the truth will be manifest (See Danuta Shanzer 1991, p. 133). The exuberant praise Alypius heaps upon Augustine at the end of *De academicis* and *De ordine*, while recognizing him as his leader would corroborate such an interpretation. After all, it is in the end

he and Alypius (finally?) agree in divine matters as well, so that (from now on?) Alypius can be truly called a friend of Augustine, quoting thereby Cicero's famous definition of friendship.¹²⁶ Actually, Augustine had first subtly modified Alypius' response to suit a more explicit Christian reading, taking Alypius' originally neutral stance to be a resolute affirmation that a *numen* really exists (namely Christ).

When Augustine makes clear to Alypius that he can only be his true friend if he also agrees with him in divine matters as well, i.e. if he accepts the Christian faith, then this could be considered in its most pejorative reading that Alypius is, through Augustine, being put under (social) pressure to conform to his Christian belief.¹²⁷

Of particular relevance in this context is *Epistula* 258, a letter from Augustine to Marcianus, whom he calls *antiquissimus amicus*. This friendship dates back to the time that he was still seeking fortune and fame. Also here, Augustine refers to Cicero's definition of friendship, and he intersperses the letter, like the dialogues, with quotations from other classical writers as well, such as Virgil and Terence. Clearly, Marcianus was an educated man who could appreciate learned quotations. Augustine writes that, although in the past they agreed on human things, they could not be called true friends: true friendship only exists in Christ.¹²⁸ For that reason he is delighted to learn that Marcianus now also agrees in divine matters as well, i.e. he has

Augustine who refutes the academics, and reveals their hidden(!) truth. That the Proteus reference in *De academicis* proved to be an attractive topic is demonstrated by a poem of Godfrey of Saint Victor (12th c.), a canon of saint Augustine from the great Parisian house of his order. One stanza (lines 101 to 104) of his poem *Preconium Augustini* echoes the exchange between Alypius and Augustine on Proteus (See Edward A. Synan 1988, p. 277-283). Edward A. Synan concludes that according to Augustine in *De academicis* "the presence of divinity, necessary for the capture of Proteus-like truth, is the incarnate wisdom of the biblical God" (p. 282).

¹²⁶ *De academicis* III.vi(13): "Hoc ergo tertium bonum mihi accidit, quod non inuenio quanti aestimem. mecum enim familiarissimus amicus meus, non solum de probabilitate humanae uitae, uerum etiam de ipsa religione concordat, quod est ueri amici manifestissimum indicium, siquidem amicitia rectissime atque sanctissima definita est, rerum humanarum et diuinarum cum beneuolentia et caritate consensio". On Augustine's use of Cicero's definition of friendship, see, e.g., T.J. van Bavel (1987), John F. Monagle (1971).

¹²⁷ One wonders whether Augustine used the very same argument of friendship when he succeeded in converting his friends to Manichaeism.

¹²⁸ This is a recurring theme in Augustine's writings. See, for instance, also *Confessiones*, IV.iv(7), when he describes the friendship between him and another boy at his hometown Thagaste who died very young as "less than a true friendship, which is not possible unless you bond together those who cleave to one another by the love which 'is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us'" (Rom. 5:5).

become a *christianus*. However, in the letter Augustine is still exhorting his “wise and honoured friend” that he would be with Augustine in holding with tenacity the two commandments (*Love the Lord with all thy heart,... and thy neighbour as thyself*), so that their friendship will be genuine and everlasting, joining them not merely to each other, but also to the Lord Himself. Then he writes:

Quod ut fiat, exhortor grauitatem et prudentiam tuam, ut iam etiam fidelium sacramenta percipias; decet enim aetatem et congruit, quantum credo, moribus tuis. [...] iam profecto sic uiuis ut sis dignus baptismo salutari remissionem praeteritorum accipere peccatorum. [...] tua sumere rescripta desidero et te nomen uel dedisse inter competentes uel daturum esse iam iamque cognoscere. (*Ep.* 258, CCL 57, p. 609, 5-6. 11-12; p. 610, 5-6).

That this may be so, I exhort you, my wise and honoured friend, to partake of the sacraments available to those in full communion, for this would become one of your age and be in conformity, in my opinion, with your moral conduct. [...] You certainly are living now in such a way as to be worthy of receiving through the saving rite of baptism the remission of your past sins [...] I long to receive a reply from you and to learn at any moment that you have entered your name among the candidates for baptism or are on the point of doing so.

This may well have been similar to Alypius' situation at Cassiciacum. It is wonderful to discover that they now agree in divine matters as well, Alypius says, but Augustine probably also must have urged him to receive baptism together with him, so that their friendship will be genuine and everlasting, “*joining them not merely to each other, but also to the Lord Himself*”.

c) *Fortuna as diuinum auxilium*

Finally, there is another aspect which demonstrates that Alypius was still thinking very much within the frame of Roman tradition, not realizing how fundamentally different the perspective had changed for Augustine by becoming a *christianus*: the understanding of the workings of *Fortuna*.¹²⁹ An important thread which runs throughout the

¹²⁹ The importance of *Fortuna* has been downplayed by Jan den Boeft in his lemma on *Fortuna* in the *Augustinus-Lexikon* (3.1/2, c. 56-58). Seeing that Augustine re-interpreted this pagan concept as *gratia Dei*, its significance should not be taken too lightly, even though the term only sporadically appears in Augustine's writings. Moreover, the multifaceted concept of *Fortuna* offers us a window of opportunity to compare and confront Roman traditional “ideology” with Augustine's Christian “ideology”. See my unpublished thesis *Fortuna caeca: symptom of ideological failure in Roman society, and Augustine's Christian alternative* (University of Wales, Swansea, 2004).

dialogues (and as a matter of fact throughout Augustine's whole corpus) is that God's help is needed in order to become truly happy. This has become one of Augustine's most fundamental Christian insights. It had the most profound impact on his life, regardless of whether we connect it with his moral conversion, i.e. his adoption of a life of continence, or whether we look at it in a more intellectual context, in which Augustine realizes that the (Neo-)Platonic ideal is beyond his reach and recognizes within himself much more the psychological weak condition of Paul, rather than the self-controlled state of a Neo-Platonic sage.¹³⁰ Acknowledging that one cannot simply rely on one-self, but is in need of God's aid in order to reach the happy life will become the primary motivation and justification for Augustine to submit in the end to the sacramental rituals of his childhood religion. This realization that one needs God's help (read: *diuinum auxilium* but also *gratia Dei*¹³¹) becomes immediately clear in the first words of the dedicatory letter to Romanianus in *De academicis*. In this letter Augustine admits that *uirtus* in itself is not strong enough to reach the happy life, in this case the *portus philosophiae*, and that therefore *Fortuna*'s help is needed to get there:

O utinam, Romaniane, hominem sibi aptum ita uicissim uirtus fortunae repugnanti posset auferre, ut ab ea sibi auferri neminem patitur! [...] sed quoniam ita comparatum est, [...] ut diuinum animum [...] nequaquam sapientiae portus accipiat [...] nisi eo illum ipsa (sc. fortuna), uel secunda, uel quasi aduersa perducatur: nihil pro te nobis aliud quam uota restant [...].¹³²

I wish, Romanianus, that Virtus, who never allows Fortuna to take anyone away from her, could, for her part, snatch from Fortuna, resist as she might, the man suited to her purpose.[...] The fact is that the divine spirit [...] can never reach the harbour of wisdom [...], unless Fortuna herself, good or bad – but only seeming so –, bring it thither: accordingly, we can do nothing for you but pray [...].

This is, of course, a very un-Roman statement: at the heart of Roman ideology stands the maxim that one has to fight against the vicissitudes of *Fortuna* with one's own *uirtus*. Above all the Stoic Seneca insisted on making one's own this attitude.¹³³ Augustine has

¹³⁰ James J. O'Donnell 1992, II, p. 479.

¹³¹ On *Fortuna* as *gratia Dei* in the dialogues, see Carol Harrison (2006a).

¹³² *De academicis* I.i(1). For a good discussion of this passage and the dedicatory epistle as a whole, see Augustine J. Curley (1996, p. 39–42).

¹³³ See Gerda Bush (1961).

borrowed the imagery of a ship sailing on a rough sea to the port of philosophy from Cicero's *Tusculan disputations*.¹³⁴ According to Cicero, the disaster which befell his beloved *respublica* provided him with the leisure during which he could pick up a favourite time passing of his youth, namely the pursuit of philosophy.¹³⁵ He did not, however, believe this disaster to be therefore a good thing, he merely saw this one comfort arising from his current idleness, but there is no doubt that he would have preferred to be holding the rudder of the *respublica*. Secondly, Cicero insists that man has to become his own doctor: the idea of self-sufficiency and reliance on one's own *uirtus* in order to reach the happy life is essential to his beliefs, and it is also a basic principle of Roman traditional ideology in general.¹³⁶ Cicero cannot accept that one's happiness would depend on *Fortuna*.¹³⁷

Augustine then describes his own life in terms of this imagery. We learn that, even though he knew where the happy life was to be found, he could not get there, because he was too entangled in the allurements of riches and honours. It required therefore a blow of *Fortuna* – in the form of his ill-health – to finally sever these fetters, and to be able to reach this blessed port. This “misfortune” he perceives to be the helping hand of God, who arranged the circumstances

¹³⁴ CICERO, *Tusculan disputations* v.ii(5): “Cuius in sinum cum a primis temporibus aetatis nostra uoluntas studiumque nos compulisset, his grauissimis casibus in eundem portum, ex quo eramus egressi, magna iactati tempestate confugimus”. There exists also another source of this boat-imagery: Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, where Lucius after having been transformed into a donkey, is haunted and harassed by *Fortuna*. In the end, this blind *Fortuna* proved to be nothing else than (a seeing) Isis, who had been providentially guiding Lucius all along through his many miseries to his new blessed state. When Lucius gained back his human form, he converted to the Isis cult. One witnesses here the appeal of these Eastern religions in Roman society.

¹³⁵ CICERO, *Tusculan Disputations* I.i(1).

¹³⁶ CICERO, *Tusculan Disputations* III.iv(7): “est profecto animi medicina, philosophia, cuius auxilium non ut in corporis morbis petendum est foris, omnibusque opibus atque uiribus, ut nosmet ipsi nobis mederi possimus, elaborandum est” (“Assuredly there is an art of healing the soul – I mean philosophy, whose aid must be sought not, as in bodily diseases, outside ourselves, and we must use our utmost endeavour, with all our resources and strength, to have the power to be ourselves our own physicians”).

¹³⁷ CICERO, *Tusculan Disputations* v.i(2): “[...] uirtutem ad beate uiuendum se ipsa esse contentam. [...] sin autem uirtus subiecta sub uarios incertosque casus fortuna fortunae est nec tantarum uirium est, ut se ipsa tueatur, uereor ne non tam uirtutis fiducia nitendum nobis ad spem beate uiuendi quam uota facienda uideantur”. (“[...] that virtue is of itself sufficient for a happy life. [...] If virtue, as being subject to such various and uncertain accidents, were but the slave of fortune, and were not of sufficient ability to support herself, I am afraid that it would seem desirable rather to offer up prayers, than to rely on our own confidence in virtue as the foundation for our hope of a happy life”).

in such a way that Augustine could finally do that what he was trying to achieve for some time.

In the second introductory letter of *De academicis* he would write to Romanianus:

nullam mihi uideri prosperam Fortunam, nisi quae otium philosophandi daret; nullam beatam uitam, nisi qua in philosophia uiueretur.¹³⁸
I did not consider any fortune to be good fortune save only that which would give leisure for philosophy, nor any way of life to be happy save only that wherein one lived, so to speak, in philosophy.

The blow of *Fortuna* proved to be a stroke of luck, the same "luck" he believed had fallen upon Victorinus when he was forced to resign from his teaching post due to a decree of Julian, which banned Christians from teaching.¹³⁹

The same kind of 'luck' can be seen at work in Augustine's description of his conversion moment in *Confessiones* as well: here, God ordered the events in such a way that Augustine would (want to) convert: chance events (the sudden chant of a child singing "*tolle, lege*" when in desperate need of guidance, followed by the random(!) opening of the codex of Paul's epistles) really proved to be no chance events after all, but they formed part of God's divine order, assisting those who (humbly) pray for Him to come to their aid.¹⁴⁰ Augustine believes that the same *auxilium diuinum* is currently at work in the life of Romanianus: the financial setback his patron recently received might well turn out to be this decisive blow of *Fortuna*, which really should be interpreted as a Godsend, because it could lead Romanianus to the *portus philosophiae* and the true happy life, leaving behind empty riches and honours.¹⁴¹ Romanianus, too, is exhorted to pray together with Augustine for God's heavenly assistance.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ *De academicis* II.i(4).

¹³⁹ *Conf.* VIII.v(10).

¹⁴⁰ The same goes up for Augustine's infatuation with sex: he first thought, under impulse of Alypius, that leading a chaste life depended on one's own resources. His conversion moment, made him experience and thus believe that God's help was needed in order for him to accomplish this. (See the vision of Lady Continence).

It is therefore intriguing that although both 'conversion accounts' appertain to two different experiences (his ill-health on the one hand, and Augustine's grace experience in the garden of Milan on the other hand), they both essentially arrive at the same conclusion: one should rely on God and not (solely) on one's own strength to reach the happy life.

¹⁴¹ *De academicis* I.i(1-3).

¹⁴² *De academicis* II.i(1-2): "quotidianis uotis auras tibi prosperas orare non cesso. [...] multum autem me adiuuabis pro te deprecantem, si non nos exaudiri posse desperes, nitarisque nobiscum et tu non solum uotis, sed etiam uoluntate, atque illa

This is not the only example in the dialogues where chance events turn out to be a providential order guiding people to God and the happy life. In *De ordine*, a book which actually has this divine order as subject matter, we witness a (semi-)conversion of another participant: Licentius.¹⁴³ Here, Augustine ‘reads’ chance (co-)incidents as being part of an astoundingly intricate and magnificent order, which seems to bring about the conversion of Licentius not just to philosophy, but also to the Christian faith.¹⁴⁴ All these instances illustrate the fundamental principle that, because we are weak, we need God’s help, and therefore we have to pray (and submit ourselves to Him) so that he may come to our aid. It is this humble submission to Christ, which is essential in becoming a *christianus*.

At the beginning of the third book Augustine introduces the discussion of *Fortuna* into the philosophical discussion proper, and Alypius’ view can be considered a litmus test for his understanding of this need for God’s help. Regretting that so little time was left that day to pursue philosophy, Augustine states that it is his conviction that in order to become wise we need the help of *Fortuna*: “ut autem sapiens fiat, plurimum necessariam esse fortunam”.¹⁴⁵ This is completely in

tua naturali mentis altitudine” (“I do not stop praying for favourable winds for you in my daily prayers [...] You will help me a great deal while I’m praying for you if you exert yourself with us, not only with your prayers but also with your will and the natural profundity of that mind of yours”). Also, as referred to before: *De academicis* I.i(1) “nihil pro te nobis aliud quam uota restant” (“Accordingly, we are left with nothing to do for you but pray”).

¹⁴³ On Licentius and his semi-conversion see Phillip Cary (1998, 141-163) (I cannot, however, agree with the author’s claim that the events recounted in *De ordine* were of a fictional character); see also Jörg Trelenberg (2009, p. 409-415).

¹⁴⁴ First there is the irregular sound of water flowing at night which puzzles Augustine, and he tries to find the cause of this irregularity. Then there is the unexpected emergence of a mouse in the room next door where the boys are sleeping. Licentius tries to kill the mouse with a stick, and this makes Augustine realize that both his students are awake. He calls them in and a discussion arises in the middle of the night on the problem of evil and order, starting from the causes of the irregularity of the water flow. Licentius is very alert and suddenly he feels himself inspired and comes up with very insightful responses concerning the issue under discussion. Only when Licentius gives thanks to Christ for what he just has experienced Augustine is overjoyed: “et cum suspirio gratias Christo agebat. accepi ego haec, quid dicam, libenter.” (*De ordine* I.viii(21)). Unfortunately, Licentius’ “conversion” is not lasting, and soon he is again more preoccupied with his classical poetry than with the search for wisdom. The almost unbelievable coincidences which triggered the nightly debate led John J. O’Meara (1951) to consider the story to be fiction: “It is to be noted that the debate is supposed to have risen by accident. It was a too convenient accident!” (p. 174)

¹⁴⁵ *De academicis* III.ii(3); and even more reflecting the idea in the dedicatory letter: “ita quisquis ad sapientiae portum, et quasi firmissimum et quietissimum solum

line with the dedicatory letters, (which Alypius may not have yet read, since they were composed afterwards). Augustine probably also had a particular incident in mind. During his stay he had suffered from such a ferocious toothache that it became impossible for him to speak or to learn anything new.¹⁴⁶

dolore dentium tunc excruciabas me, et cum in tantum ingrauesceret ut non valerem loqui, ascendit in cor meum admonere omnes meos qui aderant ut deprecarentur te pro me, deum salutis omnimodae.

At that time you tortured me with toothache, and when it became so bad that I lost the power to speak, it came into my heart to beg all my friends present to pray for me to you, God of health of both soul and body.

If this pain would have persisted, he no longer would have been able to philosophize and thus to become happy, but miraculously the pain disappeared. This is another, more vivid, illustration of the basic rule that we need (to humbly pray for) the help of God in order to become happy.¹⁴⁷

In this discussion on the power of *Fortuna*, Alypius, however, does not agree with Augustine's position, and instead he holds on to a more traditional Roman concept of *Fortuna* and her relation to *uirtus*. Therese Fuhrer perceives an overall difference between the two friends' understanding of *Fortuna*, the concept which played

peruenire uoluerit [...] necessariam mihi uidetur ad id, quod concupiuit, habere fortunam" ("it seems to me that whoever wishes to arrive at the most sure and most tranquil port of wisdom, must enjoy *Fortuna*'s favour in order to arrive at that which he desires").

¹⁴⁶ We have two testimonies of this incident: *Conf.* IX.IV(12) (quoted here), but also *Sol.* I.XII(21)).

¹⁴⁷ I believe that Augustine's continuous desire for riches and wealth, this time subordinated to the search for wisdom, seems to be part of this as well: considering Augustine's current financial difficulties in continuing to lead the kind of leisured life he had embarked upon, he may well have believed that God would help him in finding a solution for this: he would not desire these riches for their own sake, only to make possible his search of truth together with his friends (See *Soliloquies* I.XI(18): R.: "si tibi persuadeatur aliter cum multis carissimis tuis te in studio sapientiae non posse uiuere, nisi ampla res aliqua familiaris necessitates uestras sustinere possit, nonne desiderabis diuitias et optabis? A.: Adsentior". ("Suppose you were convinced that you could not live the life of the pursuit of wisdom together with your many dear friends unless substantial private resources could meet your daily needs, would you not want and wish for wealth?" A.: "I would"). That is why, I believe, he had high hopes that Romanianus would be "converted", because this would make it at the same time financially possible for him to enjoy his so much desired leisured life together with his friends, which would render him the happy life. In the end, Augustine had to fall back on his own modest resources in Thagaste in order to continue enjoying a life in leisure, and this without many of his former friends.

such an important role in Augustine's proselytizing strategy in *De academicis*:

Es handelt sich vielmehr um einen Gedankenaustausch, wobei deutlich wird, dass Augustins *Fortuna*-Begriff grundsätzlich positiv geprägt ist (im Sinn eines *diuinum auxilium*), während Alypius sich an heidnischen Vorstellungen orientiert (*Fortuna* als unberechenbare Macht, die es zu bezwingen gilt).¹⁴⁸

Alypius merely accepts the idea that *Fortuna*'s whimsical behaviour makes man realize that her goods are unreliable. It does not follow for him that *Fortuna* is benign, and even less so – a view which is anathema to a Roman philosopher – that man becomes dependent on her (favour) in order to become wise, and thus to be happy. Contrary to Augustine's opinion, he still seems to stick to the Ciceronian view that man's *uirtus* is strong enough to do without *Fortuna*'s assistance in order to become happy. Clearly, Alypius does not perceive *Fortuna* to be *auxilium christiani Dei*: he does not want to assign to *Fortuna* such an important and positive role, otherwise it would then depend on her whimsicality as to whether we would become happy or not.¹⁴⁹

Augustine ends the discussion on this topic without the two sides really having arrived at a common position.¹⁵⁰ Alypius keeps holding on to a classical viewpoint, while Augustine has already exchanged his for the Christian idea of perceiving God's helping hand in events. Again, Alypius, although having become a *christianus*, still seems to adhere more to (the authority of) Cicero than to Christ.¹⁵¹

Note, however, that what Alypius says in *De ordine* after having praised Augustine for presenting his magnificent programme of life, could undermine this thesis:

Nam nescio quomodo, quod utinam uel a nobis procul absit, animus humanus dum haec audiendo caelestia diuina ac prorsus uera esse proclamet, in appetendo aliter se gerit, ut mihi uerissimum uideatur aut diuinos homines, aut non sine diuina ope sic uiuere.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Therese Fuhrer 1997, p. 233.

¹⁴⁹ We already encounter here an idea that Augustine will develop later: it is in God's hands who will be saved.

¹⁵⁰ I disagree here with Therese Fuhrer (1997, p. 233), who believes that Augustine in the end agrees with Alypius, so that his initial complaint that their household duties were preventing them from holding further discussions is rejected. When Augustine ends the debate on *Fortuna*, he does so not because he agrees in the end with Alypius, but because he cannot immediately persuade Alypius to adopt his position.

¹⁵¹ For a good summary of the discussion, see Augustine J. Curley (1996, p. 98-99).

¹⁵² *De ordine* II.x(28).

Alypius cannot understand why so many people proclaiming the mentioned maxims for a happy life to be absolutely true, still behave differently in real life. Therefore, he thinks that those few who live accordingly are either divine or have divine assistance. Augustine subsequently tries to show that we ourselves cannot know what goes on inside other people, and that this *diuinum auxilium* actually fulfills its office of mercy in favour of all peoples, and more abundantly than many imagine.¹⁵³ Augustine further also praises Alypius, for whom these rules are easy to follow thanks to his admirable nature, that he has become an example to him for their practical content.¹⁵⁴ The question remains: is Alypius sufficiently aware that he himself needs God's helping hand (visible at times in the whimsicalities of *Fortuna*) in order to live by these maxims, and, in recognizing his weak condition, should humbly submit to the sacred rites of the Catholic Church?¹⁵⁵ This crucial question remains highly doubtful. In praising Pythagoras and his "almost divine teaching" later on¹⁵⁶ one still has the impression that Alypius' outlook on life is very traditionally Roman, not Christian,¹⁵⁷ while accepting Augustine as his spiritual and philosophical guide.

4. Alypius' (late) decision to be baptized together with Augustine

Only towards the end of their stay at Cassiciacum, Alypius seems to have adopted the humility expected of someone who wants to receive the holy sacrament of baptism. Indeed, the following

¹⁵³ *De ordine* II.x(28): "illud diuinum auxilium, latius quam nonnulli opinantur officium clementiae suae per uniuersos populos agit".

¹⁵⁴ Augustine uses the phrase *deificari in otio* in a letter to Nebridius. Such an expression could easily be given a less 'Catholic' meaning, also by some of his friends. On the difficulties interpreting this expression, and its possible (Neo-)Platonic source, see f.i. Georges Folliet (1962); for Augustine's more general understanding of deification, see Gerald Bonner (1986), and for a critique of Georges Folliet's article, see Roland J. Teske (1992).

¹⁵⁵ In this passage, Augustine refers to the sacred rites into which they are being initiated. Even if this means that the whole group at Cassiciacum was being initiated into the baptismal rite of the Catholic Church, then clearly, this initiation does not necessarily entail that they all will be baptized at Easter, seeing that neither Licentius, nor Trygetius joined Augustine in baptism.

¹⁵⁶ *De ordine* II.xx(54).

¹⁵⁷ Vivien Bardet (1904, p. 143) comments: "Alype surtout a l'air d'être bien plus engoué des théories de Pythagore et des philosophes grecs qu'épris de la simplicité de l'Évangile".

passage of *Confessiones* makes sense if before Alypius had not been so keen on baptism:

Inde ubi tempus aduenit quo me nomen dare oporteret, relicto rure Mediolanium remeauimus. placuit et Alypio renasci in te mecum.¹⁵⁸

When the time came for me [i.e. Augustine] to give in my name for baptism, we left the country and returned to Milan. It pleased also Alypius to be reborn in You with me.

Alypius demonstrated this required humility on his return to Milan in a manner most appropriate to his character:

iam induto humilitate sacramentis tuis congrua et fortissimo domitori corporis, usque ad Italiam solum glaciale nudo pede obterendum insolito ausu.

He had already embraced the humility befitting your mysteries, and tamed his body to a tough discipline by asceticism of extraordinary boldness: he went barefoot on the icy soil of Italy.

Such heroic demonstration of his outstanding (inborn) *uirtus* makes the humbleness he embraced questionable. Regardless of the fact that such extreme ascetic practice was sternly rebuked by the Church authorities,¹⁵⁹ Alypius' behaviour still reminds of the Manichaean show of continence, much admired by him, but condemned by Augustine for being no true virtue.¹⁶⁰ I think we are nevertheless justified in perceiving a change behind the initial "dedignabatur inseri nomen tuum litteris nostris", via "subegeris Alypium nomini unigeniti tui", to arrive at "iam induto humilitate sacramentis tuis congrua".¹⁶¹ Probably, Alypius was, just as Victorinus, prepared to privately claim "iam sum christianus", but at first still reluctant to submit to the sacraments of the Church. If this was the case, then this shows how crucial Simplicianus' story of Victorinus' conversion actually must have been, even if it did not immediately have the sought after result on Augustine.

Geert VAN REYN

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¹⁵⁸ *Conf.* IX.vi(14); James J. O'Donnell (1992, III, p. 90) suggests that placuit et Alypio... "may record a further decision".

¹⁵⁹ James J. O'Donnell 1992, III, p. 105.

¹⁶⁰ *Conf.* VI.vii(12).

¹⁶¹ It seems impossible that Alypius would "iam induto humilitate sacramentis tuis congrua" while he still "dedignabatur inseri nomen Christi litteris nostris".

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