

MONNICA'S CONVERSION:  
A COMMENTARY ON *CONFESSIONS* IX.VIII.17 – IX.XIII.37

by

Nicholas Hatt

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts

at

Dalhousie University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
August 2018

© Copyright by Nicholas Hatt, 2018

*For Robert and Minerva*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: THE PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE OF THE <i>CONFESSIO</i> NS.....	3
2.1 ROBERT CROUSE’S PROPOSAL.....	3
2.2 BACKGROUND OF THE SCHOLARSHIP.....	15
CHAPTER 3: IX.viii.17-18: “ <i>consuetudinem malam</i> ”.....	20
CHAPTER 4: IX.ix.19-22: “ <i>pudice ac sobrie</i> ”.....	37
CHAPTER 5: IX.x.23-26 : “ <i>atingimus</i> ”.....	46
CHAPTER 6: IX.xi.27-28: “ <i>nihil longe est deo...</i> ”.....	55
CHAPTER 7: IX.xii.29-xiii.37: “ <i>aeterna Hierusalem</i> ”.....	59
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION.....	68
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	71

## ABSTRACT

Augustine's biography of his mother, Monnica, in *Confessions* IX.viii.17 to IX.xiii.37 is the story of her conversion. Augustine presents her biography using the same pattern of conversion with which he structures his own conversion and the *Confessions* as a whole. First identified by Robert Crouse, this pattern is summarised in Augustine's commentary on Psalm 145, in which he describes the soul's conversion as a movement away from carnal experience to a vision of the intelligible principles by which the soul is able to comprehend the meaning of those experiences, and finally to a vision of the divine source of the whole created order which includes the soul's own being, knowing, and willing: *ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab inferioribus ad superiora*. By means of his mother's conversion, Augustine achieves the final step necessary for his own conversion.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Above all, I thank my supervisor, Professor Michael Fournier, and my readers, Professors Peter O'Brien and Eli Diamond for their endless patience, encouragement, and correction. I also thank my supervisor, *honoris causa*, Professor Wayne Hankey, for our countless conversations about the *Confessions*, and for keeping me in the straight and narrow way with his formidable charity. Professor Robert Crouse (†2011) first introduced me to Augustine when I was an undergraduate. Without the support and guidance of these men, this thesis would not have reached completion.

Mrs Donna Edwards, the departmental secretary for Classics, fixed my administrative paperwork whenever I did it wrong (or forgot about it), and Patricia Chalmers of the Library at the University of King's College located all the books I could not find and renewed all of my books many, many times. Both women absolved me of many sins. The University of King's College permitted me time to do course work in the midst of my decanal duties, and Saint George's Round Church allowed me to take a three-month leave-of-absence soon after my arrival as Rector, which gave me the time I need to complete this work. Thank you.

Finally, I express my deep love and thanks to my parents, Austin and Lynn, my brother, Josh, and my grandparents, Robert and Minerva, whose support for me—and especially in my studies—has always been unconditional.

*Soli Deo gloria.*

Nicholas Hatt

Feast of Saint Augustine, 2018

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Why does Augustine include the biography of Monnica in Book IX of the *Confessions*? If his purpose is to tell us about his conversion to Catholicism, why does he find it necessary to tell us about his mother's life and upbringing, too? Some scholars have suggested that her biography is Augustine's final tribute to a woman who was deeply influential in his life and becomes an enduring image of the Catholic Church for him.<sup>1</sup> Others argue that he upholds her as the example of a faithful, pious, life-long Christian whom others ought to emulate, in contrast to his own sinful journey to Catholicism.<sup>2</sup> Still others think that Augustine uses "highly selective" memories about his mother in order to turn the narrative back towards himself, as a means of demonstrating his own story and thinking.<sup>3</sup> None of these accounts are to be denied, but in order to fully understand why Monnica's biography is included in Book IX, we must consider its place within the *Confessions*, both as it relates to the overall argument of the work and how it demonstrates that argument itself. As John J. O'Meara wrote in 1954, what Augustine "says of himself

---

<sup>1</sup> See William Mallard, *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine's Religious Thought Through the Confessions Story* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 173-174; or Garry Wills, *Augustine's Confessions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 85ff.

<sup>2</sup> See Colin Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1990), 247; also Colin Starnes, "Augustine's Conversion and the Ninth Book of the *Confessions*" in *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, Joanne McWilliam, Ed. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992), 52; also, John J. O'Meara, "Monica, the Mother of Augustine" *The Furrow* 5, no. 9 (September 1954): 555: "[Monnica] is the very type of the pious, persevering and affectionate mother."

<sup>3</sup> See Margaret R. Miles, *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine's Confessions* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 82 and 85: Monnica is "a mother whose story is told only because it reveals important facets of [Augustine's] life."

is intended, among other purposes, to illustrate a theme which he had evolved on the destiny of mankind; and the life he gives of Monica is related in turn both to the larger central theme, and also to the story of her son's conversion."<sup>4</sup>

The *Confessions* is about Augustine's conversion to God, and the conversion of the whole creation to union with the divine. I argue that the biography of Monnica in *Confessions* IX.viii.17 to IX.xiii.37 is the story of her own conversion, and that it follows the same cosmic pattern which governs both Augustine's conversion and that of the *Confessions* as a whole. The pattern they follow is that proposed by Robert Crouse, who suggests that for Augustine, every soul begins its pilgrimage to God by first collecting itself from its dispersion into temporal, corporeal reality. The soul continues its journey by retreating inward to discover the intelligible principles which govern the order of creation and define how the soul ought to relate to the world. Finally, the soul achieves divine union when it can see directly the divine source of those intelligible principles, and learns that it is itself governed by that source and that its own being and that of the world is dependent upon it. In following this pattern, Monnica's conversion demonstrates the universality of the pattern proposed by Crouse. However, Augustine also includes her biography in the *Confessions* because through it he will discover the final step he needs to make in order to participate in the same divine union which she achieves. Her conversion completes his conversion, and without it, *Confessions* as a whole would not be complete.

---

<sup>4</sup> O'Meara, "Monica, the Mother of Augustine", 555.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Purpose and Structure of the *Confessions*

#### 2.1 Robert Crouse's Proposal

In the *Retractions*, Augustine tells us the purpose of his *Confessions*:

The thirteen books of my *Confessions* praise the just and good God for my evil and good deeds, and also excite the human intellect and affection to him...they had this effect on me while I was writing them and they have this effect when I read them.<sup>5</sup>

Commenting on this passage, Robert Crouse claims that “[the *Confessions*] is intended as an *itinerarium mentis in Deum*”—a journey, or pilgrimage, of the mind into God.<sup>6</sup> It is, he says, a story about the wayfaring soul which wanders away from God and subsequently returns to him. Crouse claims that for Augustine this journey is always about the soul's movement away from the multiplicity and temporality of worldly experience towards the unity and stability of God who is the divine source of all things.<sup>7</sup>

According to Crouse, this *itinerarium* of the *Confessions* is triformal in structure: the soul begins by detaching itself from a fascination with what is material and corporeal, and it gradually retreats inward in a search for the stability of its knowing in the world. As

---

<sup>5</sup> *Retractiones*, II.xxxii: “*Confessionum mearum libri tredecim et de malis et de bonis meis deum laudant iustum et bonum, atque in eum excitant humanum intellectum et affectum. interim quod ad me adinet, hoc in me egerunt cum scriberentur et agunt cum leguntur.*” Corpus Christianorum, LVII, 94.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Crouse, “*Recurrrens in te unum: The Pattern of St Augustine's Confessions*” *Studia Patristica* XIV (1976): 389.

<sup>7</sup> Crouse, “*Recurrrens in te unum*”, 390.



a result of this turn upon itself, the soul discovers that it is only through its own inner powers of knowing that what is external to it has any meaning at all, as those externals are “judged and unified by the conscious self, in terms of principles of truth present to the soul.”<sup>8</sup> The journey continues as the soul searches for those principles, and discovers that its knowing—including its own self-knowing—depends upon that which is beyond its own mutability, which transcends and illuminates it, namely, eternal truth. The soul’s final goal is to see and possess that eternal truth and source of its knowing, being, and willing, as its foundation and ultimate stability. Tragically, the wayfaring soul is only able to catch glimpses of that beatitude, in “fleeting moments of extraordinary vision,”<sup>9</sup> and the journey cannot be fully completed; however, the way is clear: it is a triformal pattern of ascent, as the soul moves from external phenomena to the soul itself, and finally from the soul to God.<sup>10</sup> This movement, Crouse says, can be summed up in a phrase which comes from Augustine’s commentary on Psalm 145: “[T]he soul, urging itself to praise God [in the Psalm], recalls itself “*ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab inferioribus ad superiora*”<sup>11</sup>—from exterior things to interior things, from inferior things to superior things.

Crouse argues that this trifold pattern provides a structure to the *Confessions* both as a whole and within each of its major divisions. The autobiography of Books I-IX forms the first division,<sup>12</sup> and if we apply Crouse’s method to these books, the implications will become clear. In these first nine books, Augustine tells the reader how he found himself in

---

<sup>8</sup> Crouse, “*Recurrrens in te unum*”, 390.

<sup>9</sup> Crouse, “*Recurrrens in te unum*”, 390.

<sup>10</sup> Crouse, “*Recurrrens in te unum*”, 390.

<sup>11</sup> Crouse, “*Recurrrens in te unum*”, 390; *Enarration in Psalm CXLV.5*: “...revocat se ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab inferioribus ad superiora, et dicit: lauda, anima mea, dominum.” *Corpus Christianorum*, XL, 2108.

<sup>12</sup> Crouse, “*Recurrrens in te unum*”, 390.

the midst of various social, religious and intellectual confusions. In Book III, for instance, he tells us that he was an overly ambitious student, eager to impress others. He had become a master of rhetoric and was at the top of his class, and wanted to distinguish himself as a public orator. Looking back upon his youth, however, Augustine questions his motivation: “I wanted to distinguish myself as an orator for a damnable and conceited purpose, namely delight in human vanity,” he says.<sup>13</sup> To make matters worse, the practice of public oration and rhetoric rewards one for being deceitful. Its goal—especially when it is used in a court of law—is to deceive, and as one’s success as a public orator increases, the greater one’s reputation, which only reinforces one’s vanity. As Augustine writes, “...one’s reputation is high in proportion to one’s success in deceiving people.”<sup>14</sup> The practice itself becomes its own punishment. As Augustine says, “I was puffed up with conceit.”<sup>15</sup>

All of this changed, however, when Augustine encountered Cicero’s *Hortensius*. He tells us that he came across the text in the course of his regular studies. He had originally wanted to read it because of its eloquence, expecting that it would teach him some of the finer points of practicing rhetoric. Something unexpected happened to him, however. He was taken with the actual content of the book, rather than its literary expression, and it changed him, significantly:

The book changed my feelings and altered my prayers, Lord, to be towards you yourself and it made my values and desires to be otherwise. Suddenly every vain

---

<sup>13</sup> *Conf.* IV.iv.7. Translations are taken from Henry Chadwick, trans., *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992): “...*in qua eminere cupiebam fine damnabili et ventoso per gaudia vanitatis humanae...*”

<sup>14</sup> *Conf.* IV.iv.6: “...*ut excellerem in eis, hoc laudabilio, quo fraudulentior.*”

<sup>15</sup> *Conf.* IV.iv.6: “*tumebam typho*”.

hope became empty to me, and I longed for the immortality of wisdom with an incredible passion in my heart and I began to rise up and return to you.”<sup>16</sup>

Augustine does not tell us very much about what he read in the *Hortensius* that had such a profound impact upon him, and only fragments of the work remain, so we can only speculate what it might have been.<sup>17</sup> He insists, however, that Cicero’s exhortation “to love and seek and pursue and hold fast and strongly embrace wisdom itself, wherever found”<sup>18</sup> moved him deeply. Reading the *Hortensius* filled Augustine with a love for immortal wisdom, and everything else in his life seemed trivial, in comparison: “I burned, my God, with longing to leave earthly things and fly back to you.”<sup>19</sup>

Augustine’s ambitions to be a public orator had been dashed; reading the *Hortensius* had revealed them to be pure vanities. By teaching him about the riches of divine wisdom, the *Hortensius* had provided him with a mirror which allowed him to see the vanities which lay within his soul and made him begin to question his worldly hopes. He had begun to rise up (*redire, revolare*), turning away from his external ambitions and starting to see the internal realities—namely, his secular ambitions—within his own soul; and in relation to the superiority of divine wisdom, he had begun to see the inferiority of his ambitions. The triformal pattern of *ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab inferioribus ad*

---

<sup>16</sup> *Conf.* IV.iv.7: “*Ille vero liber mutavit affectum meum et ad te ipsum, domine, mutavit preces meas et vota ac desideria mea fecit alia. Viluit mihi repente omnis vana spes et immortalitatem sapientiae concupiscebam aestu cordis incredibili et surgere coeperam, ut ad te redirem.*”

<sup>17</sup> See Colin Starnes, *Augustine’s Conversion*, 78-79, note 43.

<sup>18</sup> *Conf.* III.iv.8: “*...sed ipsam quaecumque esset sapientiam ut diligerem et quaererem et assequerem et tenerem atque amplexarem fortiter...*”

<sup>19</sup> *Conf.* III.iv.8: “*Quomodo ardebam, deus meus, quomodo ardebam revolare a terrenis ad te...*”

*superiora* is present even within this first moment of conversion for Augustine, and within the autobiographical section as a whole it stands as a first step in the movement away from an entanglement and fascination with what is external and inferior. As Colin Starnes notes, commenting on Augustine's reading of the *Hortensius*, "He had begun his return from the depths on the journey which was eventually to lead him to God."<sup>20</sup>

An important moment within the triformal structure of the autobiography to which Crouse points us is Augustine's encounter with the books of the Platonists in Book VII and his accompanying vision.<sup>21</sup> Augustine tells us that he was given a translation of some of the works of the Platonists by a colleague.<sup>22</sup> Augustine does not tell us exactly what he read, although beginning with Pierre Courcelle's work, there is a general consensus that Augustine read work by both Plotinus and his student, Porphyry, including *Enneads* V and VI.<sup>23</sup> As a result of reading them, Augustine says, "I was admonished to return (*redire*) into myself" and "entered into my innermost citadel."<sup>24</sup> With the "eye of my soul" I saw "above the very same eye of my soul" an "immutable light above my mind". It transcended my mind, he says, insofar as it was superior to him because it made him, and he was inferior to it because he was made by it.<sup>25</sup> Augustine tells us the logical steps through which he was led to this vision:

---

<sup>20</sup> Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion*, 61.

<sup>21</sup> Crouse, "Recurrrens in te unum", 390-391.

<sup>22</sup> *Conf.* VII.ix.13.

<sup>23</sup> For a helpful, albeit brief, summary of the sources, see Chadwick, xxi-xxii and 123-127 nn.18-25; cf. also Paul Henry, *La Vision d'Ostie: Sa place dans la Vie et l'Oeuvre de saint Augustin* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1938), 17-26.

<sup>24</sup> *Conf.* VII.x.16: "Et inde admonitus redire ad memet ipsum intravi in intima mea duce te et potui, quoniam factus es adiutor meus."

<sup>25</sup> *Conf.* VII.x.16: "Intravi et vidi qualicumque oculo animae meae supra eundem oculum animae meae, supra mentem meam, lucem incommutabilem, non hanc vulgarem et conspicuam omni carni, nec quasi ex eodem genere grandior erat, tamquam si ista multo

I asked myself why I approved of the beauty of bodies, whether celestial or terrestrial, and what justification I had for giving an unqualified judgment on mutable things, saying ‘This ought to be thus, and that ought not to be thus’. In the course of this inquiry why I made such value judgements as I was making, I found the unchangeable and authentic eternity of truth to transcend my mutable mind. And so step-by-step I ascended from bodies to the soul which perceives through the body, and from there to its inward force, to which bodily senses report external sensations, this being as high as the beasts go. From there again I ascended to the power of reasoning to which is to be attributed the power of judging the deliverances of the bodily senses. This power which in myself I found to be mutable, raised itself to the level of its own intelligence, and led my thinking out of the ruts of habit. It withdrew itself from the contradictory swarms of imaginative fantasies, so as to discover the light by which it was flooded.<sup>26</sup>

---

*multoque clarius claresceret totumque occuparet magnitudine. non hoc illa erat sed aliud, aliud valde ab istis omnibus. nec ita erat supra mentem meam, sicut oleum super aquam nec sicut caelum super terram, sed superior, quia ipsa fecit me, et ego inferior, quia factus ab ea.”*

<sup>26</sup> *Conf. VII.xvii.23: “Quaerens enim unde approbarem pulchritudinem corporum, sive caelestium sive terrestrium, et quid mihi praesto esset integre de mutabilibus iudicanti et dicenti, ‘hoc ita esset debet, illud non ita’—hoc ergo quaerens, unde iudicarem cum ita iudicarem, inveneram incommutabilem et veram veritatis aeternitatem supra mentem meam commutabilem. atque ita gradatim a corporibus ad sentientem per corpus animam atque inde ad eius interiorem vim, cui sensus corporis exteriora nuntiaret, et quousque possunt bestiae, atque inde rursus ad ratiocinantem potentiam ad quam refertur iudicandum quod sumitur a sensibus corporis. quae se quoque in me comperiens mutabilem erexit se ad intellegentiam suam et abduxit cogitationem a consuetudine, subtrahens se contradicentibus turbis phantasmatum, ut inveniret quo lumine aspergeretur.”*

The movement *ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab inferioribus ad superiora*, shapes this entire episode. Having turned inward by looking for the foundation of his appreciation for external bodies (*corpora*), Augustine discovers and was raised up to see an immutable light which transcends (*supra*) his knowing and is the mind's foundation for making judgements about what it receives through the bodily senses. As Colin Starnes notes, Augustine had discovered that “the true reality of all mutable creation—both matter and mind—was its intelligibility, its likeness to God who alone was really real.”<sup>27</sup> According to Crouse, the result of ascent was a “unification of self in conversion,” as Augustine was granted the opportunity to see that the foundation of his knowing was not to be found in the world outside of his soul, but in the intelligible reality which transcended it. His soul was able to see beyond itself, but not possess that which it now knew to be above. This brings the second step of the triformal movement to completion within Augustine's overall conversion.

According to Crouse, the final step in the triformal structure within the autobiographical section of the *Confessions* occurs with the Vision at Ostia.<sup>28</sup> Monica and Augustine are traveling home to Africa, awaiting transport in the Italian port of Ostia. One day while they were alone, leaning out a window, and overlooking a garden, Augustine says they began to talk with one another intimately about the eternal lives of the saints in heaven. Their conversation led them to the conclusion that

---

<sup>27</sup> Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion*, 187.

<sup>28</sup> Crouse, “*Recurrere in te unum*”, 391.

the pleasure of the bodily senses, however delightful in the radiant light of this physical world, is seen by comparison with the life of eternity to be not even worth considering.<sup>29</sup>

Augustine says that during this conversation their minds “were lifted up by an ardent affection towards eternal being itself” and that “step-by-step [they] climbed beyond all corporeal objects and the heaven itself”. They then pondered the wonders of God’s creation and “entered into our own minds” but then moved beyond them to that “region of inexhaustible abundance” to see the “wisdom by which all creatures come into being, both things which were and which will be.” This was eternal wisdom, which Augustine says “is as it was and always will be”. Finally, through a “total concentration of the heart” he and Monica reached out and momentarily touched (*atingimus*)<sup>30</sup> this divine wisdom. This ecstatic moment, however, was unsustainable, and they fell back into the corporeal realm of temporal and material succession, “to the noise of our human speech where a sentence has both a beginning and an ending.”<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> *Conf. IX.x.24*: “*cumque ad eum finem sermo perduceretur, ut carnalium sensuum delectatio quantalibet, in quantalibet luce corporea, prae illius vitae iucunditate non comparatione sed ne commemoratione quidem digna videretur.*”

<sup>30</sup> O’Donnell notes that *atingere* is used by Augustine repeatedly to refer to the achievement of mind’s ascent. See James O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), III, “*atingimus*,” 130.

<sup>31</sup> *Conf. IX.x.24*: “*erigentes nos ardentiore affectu in id ipsum, perambulavimus gradatim cuncta corporalia, et ipsum caelum, unde sol et luna et stellae lucent super terram. et adhuc ascendebamus, interius cogitando et loquendo et mirando opera tua, et venimus in mentes nostras et transcendimus eas, ut attingeremus regionem ubertatis indeficientis, unde pascis Israel in aeternum veritate pabulo, et ibi vita sapientia est, per quam fiunt omnia ista, et quae fuerunt et quae futura sunt. et ipsa non fit, sed sic est, ut fuit, et sic erit semper: quin potius fuisse et futurum esse non est in ea, sed esse solum, quoniam aeterna est: nam fuisse et futurum esse non est aeternum. et dum loquimur et inhiamus illi, attingimus eam modice tot ictu cordis; et suspiravimus, et reliquimus ibi religatas primitias spiritus, et remeavimus ad strepitum oris nostri, ubi verbum et incipitur et finitur.*”

Looking back, Augustine is clear about what he and his mother experienced together<sup>32</sup> in that moment. It is best described in his own words:

If to anyone the tumult of the flesh has fallen silent, if the images of earth, water, and air are quiescent, if the heavens themselves are shut out and the very soul itself is making no sound and is surpassing itself by no longer thinking about itself, if all dreams and vision in the imagination are excluded, if all language and every sign and everything transitory is silent—for if anyone could hear them, this is what all of them would be saying, We did not make ourselves, we were made by him who abides for eternity—if after this declaration they were to keep silence, having directed our ears to him that made them, then he alone would speak not through them but through himself...Him who in these things we love we would hear in person without their mediation. That is how it was when at that moment we extended our reach and in a flash of mental energy attained the eternal wisdom which abides beyond all things.<sup>33</sup>

Their journey began with a consideration of corporeal reality; they then moved inward as they contemplated the principles underlying that corporeal reality; and finally, they considered how those eternal principles exist within their own minds as the source and

---

<sup>32</sup> Note that *Conf.* IX.x.24 is in the first person plural.

<sup>33</sup> *Conf.* IX.x.25: “*Dicebamus ergo: se cui sileat tumultus carnis, sileant phantasiae terrae et aquarum et aeris, sileant et poli et ipsa sibi anima sileat, et transeat se non se cogitando, sileant somnia et imaginariae revelationes, omnis lingua et omne signum et quidquid transuendo fit si cui sileat omnino—quoniam si quis audiat, dicunt haec omnia: Non ipsa nos fecimus, sed fecit nos qui manet in aeternum—his dictis si iam taceant, quoniam erexerunt aurem in eum, qui fecit ea, et loquatur ipse solus non per ea, sed per se ipsum...quem in his amamus, ipsum sine his audiamus, sicut nunc extendimus nos et rapida cogitatione attingimus aeternam sapientiam super omnia...*”



stability of their own knowing. Their experience reached a climax with a direct experience of God.

It is important to note that during this journey the soul does not purge or forget what is corporeal or temporal; rather, it attains a new understanding of how what is corporeal is related to the intelligible as its source, and how the soul ought to relate to the corporeal as a result of this new understanding. By doing this, the soul comes to learn that the intelligible which is the foundation of the corporeal is also the foundation of its own knowing. The pattern *ab exterioribus ad superiora* is present throughout Monica and Augustine's experience here. Andrew Louth summarises nearly a century's worth of scholarship on this passage by noting that it follows the path of a basic Neoplatonic *itinerarium*: "It is a way of ascent, upwards and inwards, passing beyond material things into the depths of the soul."<sup>34</sup>

Within the consideration of the triformal structure of the *Confessions* as a whole, Crouse argues that the second step in the work is achieved within Book X.<sup>35</sup> It is a study of the inner life of the soul, and Augustine begins it with a consideration of how the powers of the soul relate to the external world. After this, Augustine examines *memoria*, as a higher power of soul whose proper activity is to bring unity to the lower powers of soul, such as sense perception. His consideration of *memoria* concludes when he discovers that *memoria*

---

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 134. For a helpful summary of what the Vision at Ostia provides to subsequent mystical accounts in the Middle Ages, see Amy Hollywood, "Mysticism and Transcendence" in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Christianity in Western Europe c.1100 – c.1500*, Eds. Miri Rubin and Walter Simons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 297-307.

<sup>35</sup> Crouse, "Recurrrens in te unum", 391.

functions only through the illuminating presence of God who resides beyond it.<sup>36</sup> Again, the trifold pattern *ab exterioribus ad superiora* is present, as the examination of *memoria* began with a consideration of the soul's relation to the external world, concluding with the discovery of God who is its *superiora*. The main difference from Books I-IX is that this time the pattern is applied to the interior life of the soul. The pattern governs the structure of Book X itself, and within the *Confessions* as a whole Book X is the middle step—*ad interiora*—in the tri-fold pattern.

Finally, Crouse argues that Books XI to XIII are the last division of the *Confessions*, and constitute the final stage in the overall movement of the tri-fold pattern, *ad superiora*.<sup>37</sup> These three Books are a mediation on the creation narrative in the Book of Genesis. Book XI is the first step in the tri-fold movement within this section, through a consideration of how the creation is a temporal succession from God. Book XII takes us to the next step, *ad interiora*, by considering how the unceasing generation and corruption within this temporal succession exist timelessly within the realm of pure intellect, which delights exclusively in God and which Augustine calls the “heaven of heavens”.<sup>38</sup> Within these three books, the tri-formal pattern comes to a conclusion as Book XIII considers the Sabbath rest—what Crouse calls “the unfathomable unity of that divine activity wherein motion and rest are identical”<sup>39</sup>—in which the divine goodness is known in its perfection as the source of everything that the soul comprehended earlier in the temporal succession of the created

---

<sup>36</sup> *Conf. X.xxvi.37*: “*ubi ergo te inveni, ut discerem te? neque enim iam eras in memoria mea, priusquam te discerem. ubi ergo te inveni ut discerem te, nisi in te supra me? et nusquam locus, et recedimus et accedimus, et nusquam locus.*”

<sup>37</sup> Crouse, “*Recurrrens in te unum*”, 391-392.

<sup>38</sup> *Conf. XII.xi.12*: “*caelum caeli.*”

<sup>39</sup> Crouse, “*Recurrrens in te unum*”, 392.

order, “imposing control and converting it to receive form—but not as if the result brought you fulfilment of delight.”<sup>40</sup> Together, Books XI, XII and XIII each participate, respectively, as a separate moment in the tri-fold pattern identified by Crouse. As a whole, they bring to a conclusion the overall movement of the *Confessions* following the same tri-fold pattern, as the soul discovered the relation of the whole of the creation to its *principium*. Both as a whole, and within each section of the *Confessions*, the soul has moved from the external, corporeal realm to discover that which is both its own source and end, and that of the whole creation. Crouse attests that it was Augustine’s intention from the beginning to bring us to this point, and that this constitutes the integrity of the whole work:

That this concluding exposition of the relation of the creation to its *principium* is no after-thought, but integral to St Augustine’s initial conception of his *Confessions*, may be decisively established if one refers back to the introductory chapters of Book I, which serve to define the subject of the whole work. The problem of the restlessness of the human soul is there placed immediately within the context of general questions about motion and rest, time and eternity, creature and Creator. “In you,” says St Augustine, “abide the causes of all inconstant things, the immutable origins of all changeable things, the everlasting reasons of all irrational and temporal things.”<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> *Conf.* XIII.iv.5: “*ex plenitudine bonitatis tuae cohibens atque convertens ad formam non ut tamquam tuum gaudium compleatur ex eis.*”

<sup>41</sup> Crouse, “*Recurrents in te unum*”, 392, quoting *Conf.* I.vi.9.

## 2.2 Background of the Scholarship

Nearly a century's worth of scholarship has tried to understand the purpose and structure of the *Confessions*. This question has typically arisen from a desire to explain how the final four books are related to the first nine. Some scholars have responded by arguing that there is a deeply internal logic that governs the work and links the various sections together. Prominent among these is Robert O'Connell, who, building upon the work of Georg Knauer and John J. O'Meara, suggests that the work is held together by the logic of *peregrinatio animae*, the "wandering of the soul away from its beatific contemplation of God in the 'heaven of heaven,' into a universe of body and space and time, till eventually...providentially 'admonished' of its true condition, it turns back to him."<sup>42</sup> While this is undoubtedly complementary to Crouse's suggested logic, O'Connell notes that Knauer based his pattern on Biblical themes of wayfaring and pilgrimage,<sup>43</sup> with little acknowledgement of the Platonic sources that have been shown to have influenced the *Confessions*. O'Connell attempts to compensate for this by suggesting that these Biblical themes be "restructured by a Neo-Platonic theory of man, or more precisely, by Augustine's adaptation of the Plotinian theory of the soul's fall and return."<sup>44</sup> While O'Connell does show that a synthesis of Platonic and Biblical images and themes define

---

<sup>42</sup> Robert J. O'Connell, *St Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 11.

<sup>43</sup> See Robert J. O'Connell, *Soundings in St Augustine's Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), 69. "Knauer had been persuaded that there was a pattern in Augustine's citation of certain Psalms, one that argued for a unity of conception running from Book 1 right through Book 13."

<sup>44</sup> O'Connell, *St Augustine's Confessions*, 11.

the narrative and hold the *Confessions* together,<sup>45</sup> his conclusion does not go much beyond this. He says that the *Confessions* shows that we are

wanderers, aimless and lost like someone in a trackless desert. But then we may find a way, or, better, the Way may find us. We are awakened to our plight, reminded of the homeland, the native city we had perhaps forgotten. From that moment our journeying takes on a new quality: we now have a destination, a sense of direction; we can be confident that the Way is leading us back “home”... we must always walk onward, or preferably, as Paul depicts himself as doing, run: always on the stretch for that final rest in the homeland we sigh and groan for.<sup>46</sup>

This conclusion does not provide any particular logic indicating any progressive stages through which the soul must move as it makes its way home. O’Connell’s pattern therefore does not account for the unity of the *Confessions* as deeply as Crouse’s logic.

Related to O’Connell’s pattern are the suggestions of scholars such as Max Wundt and Joseph Ratzinger who have argued that the logic of *confessio* is what links the *Confessions* together: in Books I-IX Augustine confesses his past sins and God’s “marvelous works in converting him”, as a preparation for Book X in which he confesses his “present state of soul” while writing the *Confessions*; and finally, in Books XI-XIII, Augustine confesses—in the sense that he bears witness to—the Biblical faith that arises out of his interpretation of the Book of Genesis, meant to edify his readers, as a

---

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, O’Connell, *St Augustine’s Confessions*, 23-36. O’Connell tries to explicate what he calls Augustine’s “theory of man” and its reliance on various Biblical and philosophical sources, as a foundation for understanding the *Confessions*; also O’Connell, “*Peregrinatio Animae: The Wayfaring Soul*” in *Soundings*, 69-94.

<sup>46</sup> O’Connell, *Soundings*, 91.

demonstration to them of the outcome of his conversion.<sup>47</sup> This is certainly congruent with Crouse's schema, but it gives little indication as to why Augustine would structure the work in this way.

There are also many scholars who suggest that there is no overall, logical structure to the *Confessions* at all. J. J. O'Meara, for instance, claimed (almost sounding defeat) that scholars should not be too distressed over their inability to find a unifying logic for the *Confessions*, because, after years of his own research, he had concluded that there was none to be found. While O'Meara did suggest that the *Confessions* is governed by "the search for Truth under the guidance of Providence in the first part...and the enjoyment of Truth in the Scriptures in the third part,"<sup>48</sup> he felt that Book X is simply out of place, and that the last four books are merely an awkward combination of the theme of spiritual conflict with an interpretation of the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis. The outcome, he said, is that Augustine "merely plac[es] [the last four books] in succession one after the other. The result is a badly composed book."<sup>49</sup> These kinds of views led Henri-Irénée Marrou to famously suggest (although he later retracted it) that "Augustin compose mal."<sup>50</sup>

Pierre Courcelle tried to suggest that both groups of scholars were, in some sense, correct. Noting Marrou's comment, he asked whether it could be claimed that Augustine had at least some kind of logic in mind when he wrote the *Confessions*:

---

<sup>47</sup> O'Connell, *St Augustine's Confessions*, 7-8.

<sup>48</sup> J. J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine: The Growth of Augustine's Mind up to his Conversion* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1954), 18.

<sup>49</sup> O'Meara, 13.

<sup>50</sup> O'Connell, *St Augustine's Confessions*, 9; H. I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris: Boccard, 1938), 61.

Faut-il dire qu'Augustin compose mal, comme toujours, ou au moins qu'il n'a pas eu, cette fois, une conception d'ensemble? N'a-t-il pu se laisser conduire au gré des desiderata de son entourage? Certains amis désirent le récit du passé d'Augustin; d'autres, sans lui laisser le temps de terminer, réclament une description de son état present; d'autres encore lui posent des questions sur le début de la *Genèse*. Augustin se serait empressé de satisfaire chacun, et aurait réuni, un peu artificiellement, ces morceaux disparates sous le titre commun de *Confessions*.<sup>51</sup>

Courcelle went on to suggest that the *Confessions* is “une oeuvre de circonstance,”<sup>52</sup> and that (following Eduard Williger) Augustine probably wrote it at the request of some close friends and colleagues who asked him to explain his path to priesthood and the temptations he faced along the way, for the purposes of their own learning and edification.<sup>53</sup> Courcelle says that this is why the autobiographical sections include

les exhortations, terreurs, consolations, directions, songes, oracles, miracles, admonitions de toutes sortes, qu'il n'a pas toujours interprétés sur le moment comme d'origine divine, mais qui lui semblent maintenant avoir lentement préparé son adhésion à la foi chrétienne.<sup>54</sup>

Courcelle therefore also found merit in Max Wundt's claim that the *Confessions* was used as a tool for catechesis, which is the logic that loosely holds together the biographical and

---

<sup>51</sup> Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (1950; Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1968), 20-21.

<sup>52</sup> Courcelle, *Recherches*, 21.

<sup>53</sup> Courcelle, *Recherches*, 25-26.

<sup>54</sup> Courcelle, *Recherches*, 22-23.

exegetical books—the former are an example of life for catechumens, and the latter for their instruction in Scripture.<sup>55</sup> Courcelle also concluded, however, that Book X does not quite fit this scheme, because it is a later addition to the work, as a response to his Donatist critics who questioned his views on the nature of sin which they found expressed in the autobiographical books.<sup>56</sup>

Into the midst of this debate Robert Crouse offered his solution to the question of the unity of the *Confessions*. It is important to note that Crouse begins by extrapolating his suggested pattern from Augustine himself, therefore starting from the opposite direction of other scholars. Whereas they began with the various parts of the *Confessions* and attempted to see how they might fit together, Crouse begins by first considering what the work as a whole is meant to accomplish, and then examining whether the overall parts fit into that purpose. As Robert O’Connell himself remarked, perhaps if we begin with the meaning of the *Confessions*, and how that meaning draws the work together, we “may solve once and for all the nettling question of the unity of the work”.<sup>57</sup> It is into this larger discussion about the purpose of the *Confessions* that I will situate Monnica’s biography in Book IX of the *Confessions*, by showing how the conversion she undergoes follows this same pattern and thereby also completes Augustine’s own conversion.

---

<sup>55</sup> Courcelle, *Recherches*, 21.

<sup>56</sup> Courcelle, *Recherches*, 26 and 244-246.

<sup>57</sup> O’Connell, *St Augustine’s Confessions*, 5.



## CHAPTER 3

### IX.viii.17-18

#### *“consuetudinem malam”*

Augustine begins the biography of his mother by shifting our focus away from her role in his conversion to how God has formed her. The previous eight books of the *Confessions* had described the former, and now he intends to show how her life was held within the same divine embrace which had brought about his own conversion. “I speak not of her gifts to me, but of your gifts to her,”<sup>58</sup> he writes. He ascribes her whole being and character to God and positions her life within a divinely appointed order: “She had not made herself or brought herself up. You created her, and her father and mother did not know what kind of character their child would have.”<sup>59</sup> He then explains the means by which this divine ordering was accomplished: “She was trained ‘in your fear’ by the discipline of your Christ, by the government of your only Son in a believing household through a good member of your Church.”<sup>60</sup> In particular, Augustine makes reference to an elderly Christian maidservant who had served the family for many years, to whom the upbringing of Monnica and her sisters had been entrusted. Her presence and her role in Monnica’s life were by no means incidental for Augustine: “You have created us, you call

---

<sup>58</sup> *Conf.* IX.viii.17: “*non eius sed tua dicam dona in eam.*”

<sup>59</sup> *Conf.* IX.viii.17: “*neque enim se ipsa fecerat aut educaverat se ipsam. tu creasti eam (nec pater nec mater sciebat quails ex eis fieret)...*”

<sup>60</sup> *Conf.* IX.viii.17: “*et erudivit eam in timore tuo virga Christi tui, regimen unici tui, in domo fideli, bono membro ecclesiae tuae.*”

us, and you use human authorities set over us to do something for the health of our souls,”<sup>61</sup> he writes. As the following story demonstrates, the old maid tried to instill in Monnica and her sisters a discipline which would serve them well as they grew older.

In particular, Augustine tells us that outside of meal times the elderly maid—who governed with a “holy severity” (*sancta severitate*)—would often withhold water from Monnica and her sisters, even when they were “burning with thirst.” She explained to the young girls that this would teach them to avoid drinking too much wine when they were older, and thereby keep them from forming a “bad habit” (*consuetudinem malam*). Augustine admits that the severity of this training did indeed moderate the girls’ thirst and restrain their “greedy appetite” (*aviditatem*), but only for a while. Unbeknownst to her parents, Monnica started stealing wine from the cellar each day. She began by taking small sips, and gradually progressed to the point where “she had fallen into the habit (*consuetudinem*) of gulping down almost full cups of wine.”<sup>62</sup>

What happened? As Augustine explains in Book VIII, when our will has an inordinate desire for a created good and acts on that perversion, the result is a passion (*libido*) which, when left without resistance or check, can gradually result in the formation of habit (*consuetudo*). This further distorts the will until the habit becomes necessity (*necessitas*). This leaves the soul imprisoned by its own inability to choose, a result of its earlier choice.<sup>63</sup> Augustine calls this violence of habit (*violentia consuetudinis*) the “law of

---

<sup>61</sup> *Conf. IX.viii.18: “qui creasti, qui vocas, qui etiam per praepositos homines boni aliquid agis ad animarum salutem.”*

<sup>62</sup> *Conf. IX.viii.18: “in eam consuetudinem lapsa erat ut prope iam plenos mero caliculos inhianter hauriret.”*

<sup>63</sup> *Conf. VIII.v.10: “quippe ex voluntate perversa facta est libido, et dum servitur libidini, facta est consuetudo, et dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas.”*

sin” (*lex peccati*).<sup>64</sup> Monnica’s decision to try the wine which the old maid had forbidden started her descent into this habit. She was now trapped by an inordinate attachment to a sensual good, the consequence of her own willing consent.

Augustine attributes Monnica’s rebellion to the “surplus high spirits” (*superfluentibus aetatis excessibus*) of children, which can overflow into “playful impulses” (*ludicris motibus*). Augustine will later urge us to restrain (*continete*) the impulses (*motus*) of the soul because they can lead it into endless entanglement in sensual experience.<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, it is hard to know what Augustine means by this phrase, and perhaps it is a way of excusing young Monnica from any culpability. As James O’Donnell remarks, “Girls will be girls”!<sup>66</sup> Augustine is not, however, very forgiving of his own playfulness in childhood. He alludes to this when, in reference to Monnica’s playfulness, he notes that adults usually try to suppress such tendencies in children. Augustine tells us repeatedly in Book I that his parents often punished him for playing games (*ludere*) when he should have been doing his school work.<sup>67</sup> He says that they were right to do so because his disobedience arose not from a decision to do something better than his schoolwork, but

---

<sup>64</sup> *Conf.* VIII.vi.13: “*lex enim peccati est violentia consuetudinis, qua trahitur et tenetur etiam invitus animus eo merito quo in eam volens inlabitur.*”

<sup>65</sup> See *Conf.* XIII.xxi.30: “*continete vos ab immani feritate superbiae, ab inertii voluptate luxuriae, et a fallaci nomine scientiae, ut sint bestiae mansuetae et pecora edomita et innoxii serpentes. motus enim animae sunt isti in allegoria; sed fastus elationis et delectatio libidinis et venenum curiositatis motus sunt animae mortuae, quia non ita moritur ut omni motu careat, quoniam discedendo a fonte vitae moritur atque ita suscipitur a praetereunte saeculo et conformatur ei.*”

<sup>66</sup> O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, III, “quibusdam superfluentibus aetatis excessibus”, 118.

<sup>67</sup> See *Conf.* I.ix.15: “*sed delectabat ludere et vindicabatur in nos ab eis qui talia utique agebant. sed maiorum nugae negotia vocantur, puerorum autem talia cum sint, puniuntur a maioribus...*”

simply out of his love for playing (*amore ludendi*).<sup>68</sup> Augustine also confesses that he stole from his parents' cellar when he was a child, just like his mother. He says that he did this in part out of gluttony, but also because of his love for playing games, claiming that he would often use the food to bargain for toys with his friends, which he calls a "game" (*ludo*).<sup>69</sup> As a result of their playful tendencies, both mother and son disobey the rules put in place by their elders.

The irony, of course, is that Monnica succumbed to the very sin which the old maid had tried to prevent in the young girls. Perhaps it was inevitable? Augustine says that a "weakness for wine" gradually took hold (*subrepserat ei vinulentia*)<sup>70</sup> of young Monnica, which seems to be an enduring theme in her life. In Book VI Augustine seems to offer a defence of his mother's sobriety, insisting that she would only "sip" diluted wine and sought "devotion, not pleasure" when she would take offerings to the shrines of the saints.<sup>71</sup> While these remarks may contain a hidden suggestion that she struggled with alcoholism throughout much of her life, Augustine is very careful to detail how she succumbed to it as

---

<sup>68</sup> See *Conf.* I.x.16: "*non enim meliora eligens inoboediens eram, sed amore ludendi...*"

<sup>69</sup> See *Conf.* I.xix.30: "*furta etiam faciebam de cellario parentum et de mensa, vel gula imperitante vel ut haberem quod darem pueris ludum suum mihi quo pariter utique delectabantur tamen vendentibus. in quo etiam ludo fraudulentas victorias ipse vana excellentiae cupiditate victus saepe aucupabar.*"

<sup>70</sup> The construction of this sentence emphasises the insidious nature of the sin which captured Monnica. Augustine surrounds the subject with the verb *subrepserat*: "*Et subrepserat tamen, sicut mihi filio famula tua narrabat, subrepserat ei vinulentia.*"

<sup>71</sup> See *Conf.* VI.ii.2: "*non enim obsidebat spiritum eius vinulentia eamque stimulabat in odium veri amor vini...sed illa cum attulisset canistrum cum sollemnibus epulis praegustandis atque largiendis, plus etiam quam unum pocillum pro suo palato satis sobrio temperatum, unde dignationem sumeret, non ponebat, et si multae essent quae illo modo videbantur honorandae memoriae defunctorum, idem ipsum unum, quod ubique poneret, circumferebat, quo iam non solum aquatissimo sed etiam tepidissimo cum suis praesentibus per sorbitiones exiguas partiretur, quia pietatem ibi quaerebat, non voluptatem.*"

a child. He claims that she did not like the taste (*sensu*) of the wine and had no desire to be drunk (*ulla temulenta cupidine*). Her pursuit was not sensual pleasure. The importance of these details becomes clear when we examine them through the categories of sins which Augustine provides elsewhere in the *Confessions*.

In Book III, within a discussion about ethical behaviour, Augustine classifies all sin (*iniquitatis*) into three major categories: “domination” (*principandi*), the “lust of the eyes” (*spectandi*) and “sensuality” (*sentiendi libidine*).<sup>72</sup> Within the soul, they appear as three forms of lust (*cupiditate*), which Augustine uses to evaluate his own soul in Book X,<sup>73</sup> where he provides a more detailed account. The first temptation he calls the “lust of the flesh” (*concupiscentiam carnis*). It is the tendency to pursue the pleasure (*voluptas*) that comes from the enjoyment of corporeal objects through sense experience. In his examination of taste in Book X, Augustine highlights the “insidious trap of uncontrolled desire”<sup>74</sup> that lurks within eating and drinking,<sup>75</sup> which can lead to gluttony and drunkenness.<sup>76</sup> We naturally consume food and drink in order to restore the health of the body, but, Augustine says, a “dangerous pleasantness” (*periculosa iucunditas*) usually

---

<sup>72</sup> *Conf.* III.viii.16: “*haec sunt capita iniquitatis quae pullulant principandi et spectandi et sentiendi libidine aut una aut duabus earum aut simul omnibus...*”; cf. James O’Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 66-69 where he identifies the three lusts with the temptations of Jesus by the devil in Gospel of Matthew; also O’Donnell, *Commentary*, III, “a concupiscentia carnis...saeculi”, 204, where he traces Augustine’s thinking back to a consideration of 1 John 2:16, noting that it “emerges gradually to significance in A[ugustine]’s work.”

<sup>73</sup> *Conf.* X.xli.66: “*ideoque consideravi languores peccatorum meorum in cupiditate triplici...*”

<sup>74</sup> *Conf.* X.xxxi.44: “*insidiatur laqueus concupiscentiae.*”

<sup>75</sup> See *Conf.* X.xxxi.43-47 for Augustine’s examination of taste.

<sup>76</sup> *Conf.* X.xxxi.45 where Augustine notes the while God has rescued him from the temptation to drunkenness, gluttony occasionally creeps up on him: “*ebrietas longa est a me: misereberis, ne appropinquet mihi. crapula autem nonnumquam subrepat servo tuo...*”

accompanies it, which makes it very difficult for us to distinguish between necessity (*necessitas*) and pleasure (*voluptas*) and whether our “motive is necessary care of the body seeking sustenance or the deceptive desire for pleasure demanding service.”<sup>77</sup> When Augustine tells us that Monnica did not like the taste of the wine and had no desire to be drunk, he is absolving her of this sin.

The second temptation is the “lust of the eyes” (*concupiscentiam oculorum*) or “curiosity” (*curiositas*). It is rooted in the soul’s appetite for knowing, and also occurs through sense perception. In its most dignified form it is called “knowledge” and “science.”<sup>78</sup> Unlike the “lust of the flesh” which pursues the pleasure that arises from “beautiful objects—what is agreeable to look at, to hear, to smell, to taste, to touch,” *curiositas* seeks “the contraries of these delights with the motive of seeing what the experiences are like, not with a wish to undergo discomfort, but out of a lust for experimenting and knowing.”<sup>79</sup> In its worst form, Augustine says it makes crowds of people stand around and gawk at a mangled corpse even though the sight of it is revolting, while others satisfy their curiosity by going to theatrical shows to witness outrageous

---

<sup>77</sup> See *Conf. X.xxxi.44*: “*saepe incertum fit utrum adhuc necessaria corporis cura subsidium petat an voluptaria cupiditatis fallacia ministerium suppetat.*”

<sup>78</sup> *Conf. X.xxxv.54*: “*praeter enim concupiscentiam carnis, quae inest in delectatione omnium sensuum et voluptatum, cui servientes depereunt qui longe se faciunt a te, inest animae per eosdem sensus corporis quaedam non se oblectandi in carne, sed experiendi per carnem vana et curiosa cupiditas nomine cognitionis et scientiae palliata. quae quoniam in appetitu noscendi est, oculi autem sunt ad noscendum in sensibus principes, concupiscentia oculorum eloquio divino appellata est.*”

<sup>79</sup> *Conf. X.xxxv.55*: “*ex hoc autem evidentius discernitur quid voluptatis, quid curiositatis agatur per sensus, quod voluptas pulchra, canora, suavia, sapida, lenia sectatur, curiositas autem etiam his contraria temptandi causa, non ad subeundam molestiam sed experiendi noscendique libidine.*”

sights.<sup>80</sup> It can descend into a vain desire for knowledge for its own sake when there is no “advantage in knowing.”<sup>81</sup> It distracts us from recognising the divine ordering of the creation<sup>82</sup> and can lead to a fascination with the very created things over which we should have mastery.<sup>83</sup> While it occurs through the activity of sense perception, the soul’s pleasure and attachment comes not from the sensible object in itself but from the knowledge and experience acquired through it. This is where Monnica’s sin primarily began. She was a curious youngster. She took the forbidden wine because she wanted to know what the experience was like, and she took more and more each day because she needed it in order to satisfy her curiosity and have a new experience each day. This is why she was able to forego the taste which should have repelled her, and did so without any desire for drunkenness. Augustine says that it was curiosity which led him to partake in theatrical shows as a young man, which he calls “the games of adults”.<sup>84</sup> The difference is that Monnica’s game was wine, not theatre.

The third temptation Augustine describes as the “wish to be feared or loved by people for no reason other than the joy derived from such power.”<sup>85</sup> He indirectly calls it

---

<sup>80</sup> *Conf. X.xxxv.55: “quid enim voluptatis habet videre in laniato cadavere quod exhorreas? et tamen sicubi iaceat, concurrunt, ut contristentur, ut palleant...ex hoc morbo cupiditatis in spectaculis exhibentur quaeque miracula.”*

<sup>81</sup> *Conf. X.xxxv.55: “hinc ad perscrutanda naturae, quae praeter nos est, aperta proceditur, quae scire nihil prodest et nihil aliud quam scire homines cupiunt.”*

<sup>82</sup> *Conf. X.xxxv.57: “pergo inde ad laudandum te, creatorem mirificum atque ordinatorem rerum omnium, sed non inde esse intentus incipio.”*

<sup>83</sup> N. Joseph Torhia, “Curiosity,” *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p. 260.

<sup>84</sup> *Conf. I.x.16: “eadem curiositate magis magisque per oculos emicante in spectacula, ludos maiorum...”*

<sup>85</sup> *Conf. X.xxxvi.59: “timeri et amari velle ab hominibus, non propter aliud sed ut inde sit gaudium.”*

“pride” (*superbia*)<sup>86</sup> (although he later refers to it directly as such)<sup>87</sup> and says that it happens when “We cease to find our joy in [divine] truth and place it in the deceitfulness of men. It becomes our pleasure to be loved and feared not for [God’s] sake but instead of [God].<sup>88</sup> One particular form it can take is when we take offence at someone who points out our faults. Augustine says that this happens when we love something that is not true in the place of something that is true but prefer the former to be true. When someone reveals our error, we take offence because we do not wish to appear to others to be deceived or mistaken. The result is that “we hate the truth for the sake of the object which [we] love instead of the truth.”<sup>89</sup> As the rest of the story reveals, Monnica was not subject to this temptation in this episode because of the teaching of the old maid, which is what also helped save her from her fall into sin.

Monnica was saved from her drinking habit by what initially appears to have been a random event. One day, she was alone arguing with a young slavegirl who used to accompany her down to the cellar. In anger, the girl accused Monnica of being a drunkard (*meribibula*).<sup>90</sup> The result, Augustine says, was that Monnica “reflected upon her own foul addiction, at once condemned it, and stopped the habit.”<sup>91</sup> It caused Monnica to take a step

---

<sup>86</sup> *Conf. X.xxxvi.59: “ideoque tu superbis resistis, humilibus autem das gratiam.”*

<sup>87</sup> See *Conf. XIII.xxi.30: “continete vos ab immani feritate superbiae, ab inerti voluptate luxuriae, et a fallaci nomine scientiae, ut sint bestiae mansuetae et pecora edomita et innoxii serpentes. motus enim animae sunt isti in allegoria.”*

<sup>88</sup> *Conf. X.xxxvi.59: “...a veritate tua gaudium nostrum deponamus atque in hominum fallacia ponamus libeatque nos amari et timeri non propter te sed pro te.”*

<sup>89</sup> *Conf. X.xxiii.34: “amatur veritas ut, quicumque aliud amant, hoc quod amant velint esse veritatem, et quia falli nollent, nolunt convinci quod falsi sint? itaque propter eam rem oderunt veritatem, quam pro veritate amant.”*

<sup>90</sup> “... it is a word known nowhere else in Latin.” Robin Lane Fox, *Augustine: Conversion to Confessions* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 44.

<sup>91</sup> *Conf. IX.viii.18: “quo illa stimulo percussa respexit foeditatem suam confestimque damnavit atque exiit.”*



back from her immediate, sensual experience, so she could see herself and what she was doing. The rebuke had caused Monnica to turn inward, to evaluate her behaviour in light of the truth which she had been taught. The old maid had taught Monnica and her sisters the harm that would come to them if they started drinking at such a young age, and now she could see it for herself. Augustine reports that “the taunt hurt,”<sup>92</sup> but it is remarkable that Monnica did not seem to take deeper offence. This was because the old maid had taught Monnica and her sisters so well that she could see the harm caused by her drinking and how far she had fallen. This enabled her to correct her behaviour without taking offence at the slavegirl’s rebuke because she was more concerned about her well-being than justifying her actions to someone else. Without the old maid’s teaching, Monnica likely would have taken offence, because she would not have been able to recognise what was happening to her. This is exactly the kind of strict upbringing Augustine says would have benefited him, when he laments that his parents did not have him baptized at a young age, even though it was contrary to church custom at the time. He implies that if they had they done so, his sexual promiscuity likely would have been better kept in check as he got older.<sup>93</sup> Earlier in the story Augustine had asked, rhetorically, “Where then was the wise old woman and her vehement prohibition?”<sup>94</sup> The answer now comes into view: the old woman and her prohibition were still with Monnica, but her youthful experimentation with alcohol had led her to forget it until the slavegirl’s retort had reminded her of it.

---

<sup>92</sup> *Conf. IX.viii.18: “quo...stimulo percussa.”*

<sup>93</sup> See *Conf. I.xi.18: “rogo te, deus meus: vellem scire, si tu etiam velles, quo consilio dilatus sum ne tunc baptizarer, utrum bono meo mihi quasi laxata sint lora peccandi. an non laxata sunt?...quanto ergo melius et cito sanarer et id ageretur mecum meorum meaque diligentia, ut recepta salus animae meae tuta esset tutela tua, qui dedisses eam. melius vero.”*; See also Chadwick, 13, n. 19.

<sup>94</sup> *Conf. IX.viii.18: “ubi tunc sagax anus et vehemens illa prohibitio?”*

The irony is that the slavegirl had not intended for any of this to happen. Her insult had been hurled out in anger, in the heat of an argument: “[She] sought to wound her little mistress, not to cure her,”<sup>95</sup> Augustine says. Nonetheless, the remark brought healing to Monnica, and Augustine repeatedly claims it was an act of God: “How did you cure her? How did you restore her health? You brought from another soul a harsh and sharp rebuke, like a surgeon’s knife, from your secret stores, and with one blow you cut away the rottenness.”<sup>96</sup> This reveals one of the constant and enduring themes of the *Confessions*, that nothing falls outside the limits of the divine beneficence. All of our loving—even our worst motivations and intentions, and those of the people around us—is grounded in the divine loving which is always seeking our conversion back to God, and it follows the pattern identified by Crouse, which begins with a movement away from an entanglement with sensual, worldly experience. Augustine had prefaced this story by noting that “[Monnica] could have had no strength against the secret malady unless your healing care, Lord, were watching over us.”<sup>97</sup> Now he reiterates the point, in conclusion: “But you, Lord, ruler of heaven and earth, turn to your own purposes the deep torrents. You order the turbulent flux of the centuries. Even from the fury of one soul you brought healing to another.”<sup>98</sup>

Margaret O’Ferrall says that this is Monnica’s conversion story, akin to Augustine’s conversion in the Milanese Garden. She argues that it conforms to a

---

<sup>95</sup> *Conf. IX.viii.18: “illa enim irata exagitare appetivit minorem dominam, non sanare...”*

<sup>96</sup> *Conf. IX.viii.18: “unde curasti? unde sanasti? nonne protulisti durum et acutum ex altera anima convicium tamquam medicinale ferrum ex occultis provisionibus tuis et uno ictu putredinem illam praecidisti?”*

<sup>97</sup> *Conf. IX.viii.18: “numquid valebat aliquid adversus latentem morbum, nisi tua medicina, domine, vigilaret super nos?”*

<sup>98</sup> *Conf. IX.viii.18: “at tu, domine, rector caelitem et terrenorum, ad usus tuos contorquens profunda torrentis, fluxum saeculorum ordinate turbulentum, etiam de alterius animae insania sanasti alteram.”*

conversion pattern which Augustine uses repeatedly throughout the *Confessions* for himself, his friends and colleagues such as Victorinus, Simplicianus, and Alypius, and his mother. According to O’Ferrall, the pattern is very simple: a soul first develops a “bad habit” (*consuetudo mala*) and must then be rescued from it through a divine intervention, which often appears as a random occurrence.<sup>99</sup> She maintains that the episode probably tells us very little about Monnica herself, that “it was probably one episode chosen out of many to illustrate Augustine’s theory of the insufficiency of man and the efficacy of grace, a theory which if operative must apply as much to his mother’s life as to his own.”<sup>100</sup>

O’Ferrall is correct, this is Monnica’s conversion story. However, Augustine’s choice of this particular story is important. Augustine tells us about this particular episode in his mother’s life in order to illustrate how she was saved from a propensity to alcoholism with which she seems to have struggled for most of her life. Augustine had first hinted about this in Book VI when he told how Monnica was quick to obey the local bishop in Milan who forbade her from making oblations at the shrines of the local saints, as she had done back home in Africa. He offers a fulsome, detailed defense of her sobriety, perhaps in response to rumours that she was too fond of drink:<sup>101</sup>

Her spirit was not obsessed by excessive drinking, and no love of wine stimulated her in into opposing the truth, as is the case with many men and women who, when one sings them the song of sobriety, feel as nauseated as drunkards when offered a watery drink. After bringing her basket of ceremonial food which she would first

---

<sup>99</sup> Margaret More O’Ferrall, “Monica, the mother of Augustine: A reconsideration” in *Recherches Augustiniennes* X (1975): 28-30.

<sup>100</sup> O’Ferrall, “Monica, the mother of Augustine”, 30.

<sup>101</sup> Lane Fox, *Augustine*, 44.

taste and then share round the company, she used to present not more than one tiny glass of wine diluted to suit her very sober palate. She would take a sip as an act of respect. If there were many memorial shrines of the dead which were to be honoured in that way, it was one and the same cup which she carried about and presented it at each place. The wine was not merely drenched with water but also quite tepid; the share she gave to those present was only small sips. Her quest was devotion, not pleasure.<sup>102</sup>

Had Monnica not learned this restraint and been saved at an early age from her propensity for alcohol, she very likely would have become a drunk. Augustine tells us this story from her youth because it shows us how she was saved from becoming completely lost and dispersed in sensual experience, in her own particular way, just as he himself was saved from his sexual habit in the Garden in Milan. Without the particularity of the story, nothing is really achieved in Monnica's conversion, and it is just a random event in Monnica's life which has no substantive meaning or purpose. If that is the case, then there is no reason for Augustine to have told it to us, and he could have just left it out of the biography altogether. We must also remember that it was Monnica herself who told Augustine the story. He opened the episode with this claim: "Nevertheless, as your servant told me her son..."<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> *Conf.* VI.ii.2: "non enim obsidebat spiritum eius vinulentia eamque stimulabat in odium veri amor vini, sicut plerosque mares et feminas qui ad canticum sobrietatis sicut ad potionem aquatam madidi nausiant, sed illa cum attulisset canistrum cum sollemnibus epulis praegustandis atque largiendis, plus etiam quam unum pocillum pro suo palato satis sobrio temperatum, unde dignationem sumeret, non ponebat, et si multae essent quae illo modo videbantur honorandae memoriae defunctorum, idem ipsum unum, quod ubique poneret, circumferebat, quo iam non solum aquatissimo sed etiam tepidissimo cum suis praesentibus per sorbitiones exiguas partiretur, quia pietatem ibi quaerebat, non voluptatem."

<sup>103</sup> *Conf.* IX.viii.18: "sicut mihi filio famula tua narrabat..."

This story was important to Monnica, and given that it is told within the context of her death, it may also be her deathbed confession, which makes it only more poignant.

Kim Paffenroth suggests that this episode is similar to the rebellious theft of pears episode in Augustine's life.<sup>104</sup> However, Augustine claims repeatedly that he would not have stolen the pears if had he been alone,<sup>105</sup> and that what he loved in that act of theft had nothing to do with the pears, but was "to be associated with the gang in whose company I did it."<sup>106</sup> Augustine gives no indication that this was the reality for Monnica; this more so describes someone who was subject to the third temptation which Augustine describes in Book X, the "wish to be feared or loved by people for no reason other than the joy derived from such power."<sup>107</sup> Paffenroth's conclusion is that the Monnica we see here is "shown as having once been exactly like [Augustine]."<sup>108</sup> This is only half true: certainly, she is in need of reform like her son, but her sin arose out of curiosity, which was very different from Augustine's sin.

Paffenroth also says that this episode is "probably the only place in the *Confessions* in which we see Monica as flawed and sinful...seen here for the only time as someone in need of the exact same correction that Augustine himself has struggled to get and receive throughout the book."<sup>109</sup> However, Augustine's depiction of Monnica throughout Books I to VIII shows just the opposite. She is hypocritical and controlling, and hardly seems to

---

<sup>104</sup> Kim Paffenroth, "Tears of Grief and Joy: *Confessions* Book 9: Chronological Sequence and Structure" *Augustinian Studies* 28:1 (1997), 151.

<sup>105</sup> *Conf.* II.viii.16: "et tamen solus id non fecissem (sic recordor animum tunc meum), solus omnino id non fecissem."

<sup>106</sup> *Conf.* II.viii.16: "ergo amavi ibi etiam consortium eorum cum quibus id feci."

<sup>107</sup> *Conf.* X.xxxvi.59: "timeri et amari velle ab hominibus, non propter aliud sed ut inde sit gaudium."

<sup>108</sup> Paffenroth, "Tears of Grief and Joy", 151.

<sup>109</sup> Paffenroth, "Tears of Grief and Joy", 151.

take direction from her religious superiors. In Book II, for instance, Augustine criticises his parents—especially his mother—for not encouraging him to marry when he was younger, because it might have at least somewhat restrained his later sexual promiscuity. Despite Monnica’s deep desire to see her son live his life as a Catholic, and her concern that he would commit adultery with another man’s wife,<sup>110</sup> Augustine says that she did not want him to marry because she worried that it would interfere with his education and his prospects for a good career.<sup>111</sup> Monnica’s hypocrisy is striking, and the result, Augustine says, was that he strayed further and further from God: “There was no strict discipline to keep me in check, which led to an unbridled dissoluteness in many different directions.”<sup>112</sup> In Book V, Augustine tells us about his mother’s attempts to control his life. He describes a wildly dramatic scene in which she tried to prevent his going to Rome to take up a new teaching position. The day he was to leave, she ran after him and pleaded with him to stay or at least take her with him, hoping that if she could keep him under her watchful eye he would eventually give up his association with the Manichees and become a Catholic. Augustine was only able to escape by slipping away secretly at night while she was praying at one of the local shrines. “As mothers do, she loved to have me with her, but much more than most mothers,”<sup>113</sup> he says. Years earlier, she had been told by a bishop not to behave

---

<sup>110</sup> *Conf.* II.iii.7: “*volebat enim illa, et secreto memini ut monuerit cum sollicitudine ingenti, ne fornicarer maximeque ne adulterarem cuiusquam uxorem.*”

<sup>111</sup> *Conf.* II.iii.8: “*mater carnis meae, sicut monuit me pudicitiam, ita curavit quod de me a viro suo audierat, iamque pestilentiosum et in posterum periculosum sentiebat cohercere termino coniugalis affectus, si resecari ad vivum non poterat. non curavit hoc, quia metus erat ne impediretur spes mea compede uxoria, non spes illa quam in te futuri saeculi habebat mater, sed spes litterarum, quas ut nossem nimis volebat parens uterque...*”

<sup>112</sup> *Conf.* II.viii.8: “*relaxabantur etiam mihi ad ludendum habenae ultra temperamentum severitatis in dissolutionem affectionum variorum.*”

<sup>113</sup> *Conf.* V.viii.15: “*amabat enim secum praesentiam meam more matrum, sed multis multo amplius.*”

in this way. In Book III Augustine tells us how Monnica pleaded with a bishop to try and talk her son out of his Manicheism. The bishop refused, and told her to “Let [Augustine] be where he is...only pray the Lord for him. By his reading he will discover what an error and how vast an impiety it all is.”<sup>114</sup> When she persisted, the bishop rebuked her and said, “Go away from me: as you live, it cannot be that the son of these tears should perish.” Augustine says that Monnica took “these words as if they had sounded from heaven.”<sup>115</sup> However, given her later attempts to control her son, it hardly seems like she learned her lesson. As Peter Brown argues,

the balanced picture of Monica which Augustine provides in book Nine of his *Confessions*, dissolves during most of the early books...Monica appears, above all, as a relentless figure...[an] all absorbing mother, deeply injured by her son’s rebellions, [this] is the Monica we usually see through Augustine’s eyes.<sup>116</sup>

None of this contradicts Paffenroth’s overall point, however, that Monnica is a sinful, flawed individual, in need of correction, just like her son. Augustine tells us about this incident in his mother’s life in order to show us that despite the complexity and the subtlety of sin, which appears differently for different people, and at different points in people’s lives, no one is beyond the saving health of the divine operation.

---

<sup>114</sup> *Conf.* III.xii.21: “‘sed’ inquit ‘sine illum ibi. tantum roga pro eo dominum. ipse legendo reperiet quis ille sit error et quanta impietas.’”

<sup>115</sup> *Conf.* III.xii.21: “‘vade’ inquit ‘a me. ita vivas: fieri non potest, ut filius istarum lacrimarum pereat.’ quod illa ita se accepisse inter conloquia sua mecum saepe recordabatur, ac si de caelo sonuisset.”

<sup>116</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (1967; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 18.

Augustine also tells us about this incident in his mother's life in order to show us that everyone—even the most pious—must overcome sin and temptation of one form or another in their life, and that this correction ultimately depends upon the grace of God. Without this story, we might be tempted to assume, for instance, that Monnica was always pious. To suppose this, however, is to succumb to the kind of presumptuous pride of the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son.<sup>117</sup> In the parable, the older brother takes offence when he sees his father welcoming back into the family his repentant, younger brother who had squandered his inheritance in “riotous living”. The older brother had faithfully served his father while his younger brother was away, and so he complains that his younger brother is not deserving of his father's affections in the same way that he is: “Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.” His father tells him that they are both worthy of his affections, and that he should simply be glad over his younger brother's conversion: “Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.” The point is that the older brother must not presume that that he is more worthy of his father's love than his younger brother because of his good works. Both sons are received equally by their father, not on account of any merit, but simply because they are loved. The implication is that the older brother should examine his life more closely: were he aware of his true status he would realise he is loved by his father on the same grounds as his younger brother, and

---

<sup>117</sup> Luke 15:11-32 (King James Version).



he should not be so arrogant to presume otherwise. In Book I, in his discussion of the distractions caused by worldly lusts, Augustine identifies himself with the young brother in the Parable.<sup>118</sup> While his mother's experimentation with alcohol was nowhere near as salacious as his sexual promiscuity, this story reveals that she, too, had gone astray and was in need of correction, just like him, and that she received that correction from God himself.

---

<sup>118</sup> See *Conf. I.xviii.28*: “*nam longe a vultu tuo in affectu tenebroso. non enim pedibus aut a spatiis locorum itur abs te aut reditur ad te, aut vero filius ille tuus minor equos vel currus vel naves quaesivit, aut avolavit pinna visibili, aut moto poplite iter egit, ut in longinqua regione vivens prodige dissiparet quod dederas proficiscenti, dulcis pater quia dederas, et egeno redeunti dulcior: in affectu ergo libidinoso, id enim est tenebroso, atque id est longe a vultu tuo.*”

## CHAPTER 4

### IX.ix.19-22

#### *“pudice ac sobrie”*

Having shown us how Monnica was saved from becoming completely lost in the pleasures of sensual experience, Augustine now turns to the careful, disciplined way in which his mother lived her life thereafter so as not to fall into sin again in the way she had as a child. As a Catholic, she implicitly understood that as a daughter, wife, and friend she had particular obligations to people which imposed an order on her life and governed these relationships and the social realities in which she found herself. Augustine tells us about all of these relationships, but before he does this, he notes the general disposition which was instilled in her from an early age: “So she was brought up in modesty and sobriety.”<sup>119</sup> While this probably confirms the success of the old maid’s teachings, and that the young servant girl’s rebuke was not only effective in the moment but remained with Monnica throughout her childhood, it also suggests that these qualities will continue to govern Monnica’s life, most especially the relationships she has with other people. These qualities not only save Monnica from excessive drink, but enable her to live in an ordered way with others.

Augustine first tells us about Monnica’s relationship with her parents, where we learn how she first acquired the dispositions of modesty and sobriety which will serve her throughout her life. Augustine says that she was “made by you obedient to her parents

---

<sup>119</sup> *Conf. IX.ix.19: “educata itaque pudice ac sobrie.”*

rather than by them to you.”<sup>120</sup> It seems that Monnica was generally a good child and did what her parents told her to do, which is probably what enabled them to instill that modesty and sobriety in her. However, with this curious phrase Augustine reveals a deeper reality: the same divine beneficence which had freed Monnica from her disordered relation to sensual reality through the external rebuke of the slavegirl was also working to try and prevent her from falling into disorder in the first place, by ordering her soul and giving her a right relation to the external world in which she found herself. Augustine is trying to show us that God works to bring about our conversion both from within our souls and from without, for if our conversion begins by detaching ourselves from an inordinate relation to the sensual world, then the soul requires a disposition which accords with that pattern. In this particular instance, Monnica was given a divine gift of obedience which enabled her to live in modesty and sobriety, and the more she lived in this way, the more these qualities were instilled in her as she grew up, which would keep her safe from temptation in all its many forms.

The next relationship Augustine examines is Monnica’s marriage to Patricius, where her modesty and sobriety was put to good use. She “served him as her lord,”<sup>121</sup> Augustine says, and with patience endured his quick temper and marital infidelities,<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> *Conf. IX.ix.19*: “*potiusque a te subdita parentibus quam a parentibus tibi.*”

<sup>121</sup> *Conf. IX.ix.19*: “*tradita viro servivit veluti domino.*”

<sup>122</sup> O’Connell makes an interesting suggestion, that *cubilis iniurias* does not refer to infidelities outside of the marriage, but rather to “an excess of sexual ardor on Patricius’ part rather than the reverse. We must always remember that the expression comes from the same Bishop of Hippo who urged abstention from marital relations during Lent, preached that marital intercourse was always venially sinful and justified only for purposes of procreation...It would scarcely surprise if he was here imputing to his mother his own (and perhaps North African Catholicism’s) puritanical view of married sexuality. While still a pagan, of course, Patricius would not consider himself bound by Monica’s view in the

hoping that the example of her virtue (*moribus*) would eventually lead to his conversion to Catholicism and make him chaste: “For she looked forward to your mercy coming upon him, in hope that, as he came to believe in you, he might become chaste.”<sup>123</sup> When questioned by other wives as to why she did not quarrel with her husband about these things, Augustine says that Monnica would explain that she regarded the “matrimonial contract” as a “legally binding document” which made them all servants (*ancillae*) of their husbands, and that they should not therefore “proudly withstand their masters”.<sup>124</sup> While we must understand this within its social and cultural context, for Monnica it meant that a particular order had been imposed upon her life when she married, akin to the order and discipline imposed upon her as a child by her parents and her old nursemaid years before. She understood that it was not her job to oppose her husband, even despite his failings. To do so would lead her to transgress the order in which she found herself, by asserting an authority over him which had not been given to her. She also knew that he would not respond well to her opposition, and would become more violent. As a believer, however, she knew that if her husband were to become a Catholic these problems would likely be resolved because of the discipline the church would impose upon him. She implicitly knew that the same God who had sought her conversion and had made her obedient to her parents so that she was brought up in modesty and sobriety and thereby saved from becoming completely lost in the temptations that arise from sensual and worldly experience was also

---

matter...” See Robert O’Connell, *Images of Conversion in Augustine’s Confessions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 23.

<sup>123</sup> *Conf.* IX.ix.19: “*expectabat enim misericordiam tuam super eum, ut in te credens castificaretur.*”

<sup>124</sup> *Conf.* IX.ix.19: “*ex quo illas tabulas quae matrimoniales vocantur recitari audissent, tamquam instrumenta quibus ancillae factae essent deputare debuisse; proinde memores condicionis superbire adversus dominos non oportere.*”

seeking her husband's conversion in order to save him from the same fate. If Monnica could patiently wait for his conversion, she would eventually find respite. To do otherwise would only cause further disorder within her marriage.

Next, Augustine tells us about Monnica's relationship with her mother-in-law. O'Donnell observes that "[t]his paragraph has been unanimously ignored in the major secondary studies. Mother-in-law stories are interesting only if unflattering."<sup>125</sup> This story does, however, tell us a lot about Monnica's character. Early on in her marriage, Augustine says that Monnica was the object of malicious gossip by maidservants who turned her new mother-in-law against her. Through her "respectful manner and by persistence in patience and gentleness," Monnica eventually won her over, and the servants were punished at her mother-in-law's request, restoring "domestic harmony" amongst the household.<sup>126</sup> Monnica could have opposed her mother-in-law, but to do so would have only further raised her ire and caused additional strife within the household. Again, her modesty and sobriety had taught her to eschew gossip, and not to be tempted by the opinions of others, whether positive or negative. As Augustine warns us in Book X, within his examination of pride and the dangers of praise, to do so is to place our joy in "the deceitfulness of men."<sup>127</sup> It is ultimately better, he says, to be hated by others for doing good than to be praised for wrong doing, for otherwise we prefer praise over truth. By simply treating her mother-in-

---

<sup>125</sup> O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, III, "9.9.20," 120.

<sup>126</sup> *Conf.* IX.ix.20: "*socrum etiam suam primo susurris malarum ancillarum adversus se inritatam sic vicit obsequiis, perseverans tolerantia et mansuetudine, ut illa ultro filio suo medias linguas famularum proderet, quibus inter se et nulum pax domestica turbabatur, expeteretque vindictam. itaque posteaquam ille et matri obtemperans et curans familiae disciplinam et concordiae suorum consulens proditas ad prodentis arbitrium verberibus cohercuit...*"

<sup>127</sup> *Conf.* X.xxxvi.59: "...a veritate tua gaudium nostrum deponamus atque in hominum fallacia ponamus..."; also see above note 88.

law well, despite the ill treatment she received from her, and patiently abiding the malicious rumours spread about by the servants, Monnica was able to avoid becoming entangled in the web of deceit created by their gossip, so that her mother-in-law could see and judge for herself Monnica's true character. The beatings the servants received as punishment must obviously be lamented, and we can only hope that the wickedness of those who beat them was turned to good, just like the slavegirl's rebuke of Monnica. The "gentle benevolence" in which the household lived thereafter is perhaps an indication that it had.<sup>128</sup>

Finally, Augustine tells us how Monnica's friends and neighbours were affected by her modesty and sobriety, too. He explains that she was a "peacemaker" (*pacificam*) who refused to pass on gossip and tried, whenever she could, to reconcile "dissident and quarrelling people."<sup>129</sup> She would only reveal things she had heard about people if she thought that it might help resolve any divisions there were amongst them. By behaving in this way, Monnica again refused to enter into the sport of praise and condemnation, because she knew that it would only stir up what Augustine calls "the bilious and undigested vomit that discord brings up, the crude hatreds that come out in acid gossip in the presence of one woman who is a friend in the absence of another who is an enemy."<sup>130</sup> To do so would have also been to pass judgements on people, deciding who was right and who was wrong, just like her friends were doing in their gossip about one another. She knew, however, that she had no authority to do so. Instead, Augustine says, "it should be regarded as a matter of

---

<sup>128</sup> *Conf. IX.ix.20: "nullaque iam audente memorabili inter se benivolentiae suavitate vixerunt."*

<sup>129</sup> *Conf. IX.ix.21: "hoc quoque illi bono mancipio tuo, in cuius utero me creasti, deus meus, misericordia mea, munus grande donaveras, quod inter dissidentesque atque discordes quaslibet animas, ubi poterat."*

<sup>130</sup> *Conf. IX.ix.21: "qualia solet eructare turgens atque indigesta discordia, quando praesenti amicae de absente inimica per acida conloquia cruditas exhalatur odiorum."*

common humanity not to stir up enmities between people nor to increase them by malicious talk” and that one should “try to extinguish them by speaking generously.”<sup>131</sup> This is exactly what Monnica’s modesty and sobriety had led her to do.

Augustine concludes this series of stories about his mother by telling us how she gave herself in service to others, the result of a life lived in modesty and sobriety. Augustine describes her as the perfect example of a Christian widow, emphasizing that her whole life, from beginning to end, was encompassed by this desire to serve.<sup>132</sup> Borrowing Scriptural language from 1 Timothy,<sup>133</sup> he says that she was the wife of one husband,<sup>134</sup> devoted to her parents, her children, and her household,<sup>135</sup> full of good works, and devoted to caring for others:<sup>136</sup> “she exercised care for everybody as if they were all her own children. She served us as if she was a daughter to all of us.” She was even “a servant of your servants” (i.e. the clergy) who held her in high regard on account of her “holy way of life”,<sup>137</sup> which

---

<sup>131</sup> *Conf. IX.ix.21: “cum contra homini humano parum esse debeat inimicitias hominum nec excitare nec augere male loquendo, nisi eas etiam extinguere bene loquendo studuerit.”*

<sup>132</sup> *Conf. IX.ix.22: “fuerat enim unius viri uxor, mutuam vicem parentibus reddiderat, domum suam pie tractaverat, in operibus bonis testimonium habebat. nutrierat filios, totiens eos parturiens quotiens abs te deviare cernebat.”*

<sup>133</sup> Chadwick notes the Scriptural references within the text of his translation; see also Starnes, 258, who provides a helpful summary of the references.

<sup>134</sup> 1 Timothy 5:9: “Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man” (King James Version).

<sup>135</sup> 1 Timothy 5:4: “But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God” (King James Version).

<sup>136</sup> 1 Timothy 5:10: “Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints’ feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work” (King James Version).

<sup>137</sup> *Conf. IX.ix.22: “...ita curam gessit quasi omnes genuisset, ita servivit quasi ab omnibus genita fuisset.”*

also helped her finally succeed in gaining her husband's conversion to Catholicism.<sup>138</sup> Augustine presents her as the epitome of someone who has guarded her soul from becoming entangled in all the temptations that accompany human life so that she can live in an ordered way with her family, friends, and neighbours.

All of these episodes must be read with Augustine's teaching on continence in mind. "The haughtiness of pride, the pleasure of lust, and the poison of curiosity are the passions of a dead soul," he writes in Book XIII, referencing the three temptations through which he examined his soul in Book X. The soul's death comes about when, as a result of these passions, the soul is "absorbed by the transitory world and conformed to it."<sup>139</sup> The only way in which we can guard ourselves against this dispersion into worldly and temporal experience is by restraining those desires:

Be not conformed to this world. Restrain (*continete*) yourselves from it. By avoiding this world the soul lives; by seeking it the soul dies. Restrain (*continete*) yourselves from the savage cruelty of arrogance, from the indolent pleasure of self-indulgence, and from 'knowledge falsely so called'.<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>138</sup> *Conf.* IX.ix.22: "denique etiam virum suum iam in extrema vita temporali eius lucrata est tibi."

<sup>139</sup> *Conf.* XIII.xxi.30: "sed fastus elationis et delectatio libidinis et venenum curiositatis motus sunt animae mortuae, quia non ita moritur ut omni motu careat, quoniam discedendo a fonte vitae moritur atque ita suscipitur a praetereunte saeculo et conformatur ei."

<sup>140</sup> *Conf.* XIII.xxi.30: "nolite conformari huic saeculo, continete vos ab eo. evitando vivit anima, quae appetendo moritur. continete vos ab immani feritate superbiae, ab inerti voluptate luxuriae, et a fallaci nomine scientiae..."



The result is that the soul's affections will be tamed. Augustine explains this by using the wild animals and beasts in the creation narrative of the Book of Genesis are an allegory for it:

...there will be beasts that have become good by the gentleness of their behaviour...There will be good 'cattle' experiencing neither excess if they eat nor want if they do not eat. There will be 'serpents' that are good, not harmful and dangerous but astute in their caution and exploring temporal nature only to the extent sufficient to contemplate eternity 'understood through the things which are made'. For these animals serve reasons when they are restrained from their deathly ways. Then they live and are good.<sup>141</sup>

Taming the soul's affections does not simply keep them under control, but it also renews and reorders them. No longer hindered and distracted by temptation, we will be able to begin to see and understand things as they are, in their proper relation to one another. We will seek out knowledge, not for its own sake, but so we can understand the created order; we will take food and drink, but only what is sufficient for the body; and we will not desire power over others, nor seek to gain from them, but will instead treat people with generosity, knowing our place in our families, relationships, and communities. Through the created order the intelligible reality by which God has ordered the world will become apparent to

---

<sup>141</sup> *Conf. XIII.xxi.31: "ita erunt in anima viva bestiae bonae in mansuetudine actionis. mandasti enim dicens, 'in mansuetudine opera tua perfice et ab omni homine diligeris.' et pecora bona neque si manducaverint, abundantia, neque si non manducaverint, egentia, et serpentes boni non perniciosi ad nocendum, sed astuti ad cavendum et tantum explorantes temporalem naturam, quantum sufficit, ut per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciatur aeternitas. serviunt enim rationi haec animalia, cum a progressu mortifero cohibita vivunt et bona sunt."*

us. Augustine therefore quotes Romans 12:2: “Be renewed in the newness of your mind to prove what is God’s will, which is a thing good and well-pleasing and perfect.”<sup>142</sup> The passions which were once our downfall become the means by which we renew and restore a properly ordered relation to the cosmic order in which we find ourselves.

Augustine says that God requires continence (*continentiam*) because through it “we are collected together and brought to the unity from which we disintegrated into multiplicity.”<sup>143</sup> It orders our loving and enables us to love God more fully and all things in relation to God: “He loves you less who together with you loves something which he does not love for your sake.”<sup>144</sup> Importantly, Augustine says that continence is not simply an exercise of the human soul, but a gift from God: “no one can be continent except God grants it.”<sup>145</sup> Thus, he prays, “You command continence; grant what you command, and command what you will.”<sup>146</sup> Augustine presents his mother as the epitome of such a soul. Monnica is a devout, faithful, Christian woman who lived a modest and sober life in obedience to her parents and her husband, and in service to others. Her continence is the condition necessary for her to undergo the spiritual ascent which Augustine relates next about her life.

---

<sup>142</sup> (King James Version).

<sup>143</sup> *Conf. X.xxix.40*: “*per continentiam quippe conligimur et redigimur in unum, a quo in multa defluximus.*”

<sup>144</sup> *Conf. X.xxix.40*: “*minus enim te amat qui tecum aliquid amat quod non propter te amat...*”

<sup>145</sup> *Conf. X.xxix.40*: “*quia nemo potest esse continens, nisi deus det...*”

<sup>146</sup> *Conf. X.xxix.40*: “*continentiam iubes: da quod iubes et iube quod vis.*”

## CHAPTER 5

### IX.x.23-26

#### *“atingimus”*

“What happened at Ostia? We will never know,” says James O’Donnell. “We must not believe, much less try to demonstrate, that the ‘experience’ was either really neo-Platonic or really Christian. Experience does not come with neatly printed labels.”<sup>147</sup> Endless scholarship throughout the past century has tried to determine what Monica and Augustine experienced that day, how it happened, how it compares to his other ecstatic experiences within the *Confessions*, and whether it was Christian or Neoplatonic or both or neither.<sup>148</sup> However, O’Donnell urges us to avoid such attempts to categorise the experience,<sup>149</sup> and to instead simply focus on what Augustine tells us about what happened, which is that he and his mother had some kind of ecstatic religious experience and, for a brief moment, touched (*atingimus*) “eternal being itself” (*idipsum*). As Wayne Hankey notes, Augustine presents this eternal being “as if it were the absolute One/Good, and the One/Good is treated as if it were simple, stable, eternal Being.”<sup>150</sup> Within this eternal being is “the wisdom (*sapientia*) by which all creatures come into being, both things which were and which will be,” which Augustine calls “life” (*vita*). However, because this wisdom is

---

<sup>147</sup> O’Donnell, *Commentary*, “9.10.24,” III, 127.

<sup>148</sup> For a helpful, although somewhat dated, summary of the scholarship, see J. Kevin Coyle, “In Praise of Monica: A Note on the Ostia Experience of *Confessions* IX” *Augustinian Studies* 13 (1982): 87-90.

<sup>149</sup> O’Donnell, *Commentary*, “9.10.24,” III, 127-128.

<sup>150</sup> Wayne J. Hankey, “*Recurrens in te unum*: Neoplatonic Form and Content in Augustine’s *Confessions*” in *Augustine and Philosophy*, Eds. Phillip Cary, John Doody, and Kim Paffenroth (Toronto: Lexington Books, 2010), 102.

eternal, Augustine says it is not brought into being itself, “but is as it was and always will be”; in it “there is no past and future” because “to exist in the past or in the future is no property of the eternal.” Hankey summarises by pointing us to Augustine’s examination of time in Book XI where he claims, “In the eternal, nothing is transient, but the whole is present.”<sup>151</sup>

It is no coincidence that Monnica and Augustine therefore began this experience by reflecting on what “quality of life (*vita*) the eternal life of the saints will have, a life which ‘neither eye has seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man’.”<sup>152</sup> The saints are those human souls whose lives (*vita*) have conformed to the eternal wisdom (*sapientia*). Through this experience Monnica and Augustine are about to do the same thing, for just a moment. The lives of the saints will guide their journey. In Book XIII, Augustine calls the saints “lights in the firmament.”<sup>153</sup> Having “abandoned everything to follow the Lord,”<sup>154</sup> they have passed from an active life in the world to a life of contemplation, and hold in themselves the “word of life”.<sup>155</sup> They are perfected human souls (as distinguished from angels),<sup>156</sup> in which the “old things have passed away and new things are created.”<sup>157</sup> By the example of their life they “give light over all the earth,” a pattern for us to imitate, by which we can divide and distinguish darkness from light, sensible things from intelligible

---

<sup>151</sup> Hankey, “*Recurrrens in te unum*,” 102; see *Conf.* XI.xi.13: “*non autem praeterire quicquam in aeterno, sed totum esse praesens.*”

<sup>152</sup> *Conf.* X.ix.23: “*quaerebamus...qualis futura esset vita aeterna sanctorum, quam nec oculus vidit nec auris audivit nec in cor hominis ascendit.*”

<sup>153</sup> *Conf.* XIII.xviii.25: “*in firmamento luminaria.*”

<sup>154</sup> *Conf.* XIII.xix.25: “*qui dimisistis omnia ut sequeremini dominum.*”

<sup>155</sup> *Conf.* XIII.xviii.22: “*et de ista inferiore fruge actionis in delicias contemplationis verbum vitae superius obtinentes.*”

<sup>156</sup> *Conf.* XIII.xix.25: “*et lucete in firmamento, ut caeli enarrent gloriam eius, dividentes inter lucem perfectorum, sed nondum sicut angelorum.*”

<sup>157</sup> *Conf.* XIII.xviii.22: “*quia vetera transierunt, ecce facta sunt nova.*”

things.<sup>158</sup> Their lives are the reconciliation of corporeal and spiritual reality. From them, mortals can therefore learn how to adapt their own lives to the eternal wisdom and thereby be joined with it. Monnica and Augustine begin their ascent by considering the lives of the saints because they need a tangible way to begin this experience, and this is what the lives of the saints provides. Were Monnica and Augustine about to see some abstract infinity, they would not need to begin in this way because their experience would be limited to intelligible realities. However, they are about to touch the divine wisdom which is the life of all things. Nothing will be neglected or left behind in this experience; rather, they will discover the perfection of the entire created order. Otherwise, the whole is not present in this eternity. The lives of the saints are an instance of the fullness of that eternity and are therefore the means by which Monnica and Augustine—and, indeed, all Christians—can begin to experience it and also imagine their own lives within it.

With these reflections leading the way, Augustine says that with the “mouth of the heart wide open” he and his mother “drank in the waters flowing from your spring on high, ‘the spring of life’ which is with you.”<sup>159</sup> They ascended “step-by-step” through a consideration of external, corporeal reality, turning inward into their own minds where they considered intelligible reality, until finally they reached beyond themselves—including their own

---

<sup>158</sup> *Conf. XIII.xviii.22: “ibi enim nobiscum disputas, ut dividamus inter intellegibilia et sensibilia tamquam inter diem et noctem vel inter animas alias intellegibilibus, alias sensibilibus deditas, ut iam non tu solus in abdito diiudicationis, sicut antequam fieret firmamentum, divides inter lucem et tenebras, sed etiam spiritalis tui in eodem firmamento positi atque distincti manifestata per orbem gratia tua luceant super terram et dividant inter diem et noctem et significant tempora.”*

<sup>159</sup> *Conf. IX.x.23: “sed inhiabamus ore cordis in superna fluenta fontis tui, fontis vitae, qui est apud te.”*

minds—to eternal being.<sup>160</sup> While Augustine’s description of the ascent begins with and depends upon a gift of divine grace which was afforded to him and his mother, the goal was finally achieved by what Augustine calls a “total concentration of the heart” (*toto ictu cordis*).<sup>161</sup> Human effort is an important and necessary part of this journey. As Hankey observes, this spiritual ascent at Ostia (as compared with Augustine’s other spiritual ascents recorded in the *Confessions*, as, for example, in Book III when he read Cicero’s *Hortensius*,<sup>162</sup> in Book VII after he reads the Platonic Books,<sup>163</sup> or in Book VIII when he is finally converted to Catholicism in the Garden in Milan<sup>164</sup>) “is especially full at the upper end...there is much more emphasis on human effort in the final stage of the mystical union, less on grace, patience, waiting on the One/Good to give what is beyond human striving.”<sup>165</sup>

Augustine next describes the characteristics of this striving which matches the pattern of the ascent. These are the conditions under which the ascent proceeds and divine union will be achieved. It begins and relies upon an act of continence by which the soul withdraws from the distractions and sensual experiences of corporeal reality so that the

---

<sup>160</sup> *Conf.* IX.x.24: “*erigentes nos ardentiore affectu in idipsum, perambulavimus gradatim cuncta corporalia et ipsum caelum, unde sol et luna et stellae lucent super terram. et adhuc ascendebamus interius cogitando et loquendo et mirando opera tua. et venimus in mentes nostras et transcendimus eas, ut attingeremus regionem ubertatis indeficientis, ubi pascis Israhel in aeternum veritate pabulo, et ibi vita sapientia est, per quam fiunt omnia ista, et quae fuerunt et quae futura sunt, et ipsa non fit, sed sic est ut fuit, et sic erit semper.*” See above, pages 9 to 12, for my more detailed treatment of the various steps in this ascent, and how it fits with the triformal pattern of conversion identified by Crouse.

<sup>161</sup> *Conf.* IX.x.24: “*et dum loquimur et inhiamus illi, attingimus eam modice toto ictu cordis.*”

<sup>162</sup> See *Conf.* III.iv.7-8.

<sup>163</sup> See *Conf.* VII.x.16-23.

<sup>164</sup> See *Conf.* VIII.viii.19-xii.29.

<sup>165</sup> Hankey, “*Recurrrens in te unum,*” 102.

“tumult of the flesh” (*tumultis carnis*) falls silent. This enables the soul to turn inward where it must continue to restrain itself from the distractions of the data and content derived from sense-perception, including “dreams and visions in the imagination” which could stall its ascent. The soul must even keep itself from thinking about itself, because this would distract it from ascending beyond itself.<sup>166</sup> If we paid close enough attention, Augustine says that every created thing would speak to us of its divine origins,<sup>167</sup> however, to do this would result in a mediated relationship with God. We must ascend beyond all such things—beyond “the tongue of the flesh,” the “voice of an angel,” “the sound of thunder,” “the obscurity of the symbolic utterance,” beyond “language in every sign and everything transitory,” including even the soul itself—to hear God “in person,” himself (*ipsum*).<sup>168</sup> The only way to do that is to restrain the soul from every possible entanglement in both corporeal and intelligible existence because they will only lead it astray, no matter how lofty the soul’s indulgence.

The soul which has persevered under such continence can become what Augustine calls in Book XIII “spiritual persons” (*spiritalis*).<sup>169</sup> They are people in the church, both men and women, who have the capacity to exercise spiritual judgement (*spiritaliter iudicant*).<sup>170</sup>

---

<sup>166</sup> Conf. IX.x.25: “*si cui sileat tumultus carnis, sileant phantasiae terrae et aquarum et aeris, sileant et poli, et ipsa sibi anima sileat et transeat se non se cogitando, sileant somnia et imaginariae revelationes, omnis lingua et omne signum, et quidquid transeundo fit si cui sileat omnino...*”

<sup>167</sup> Conf. IX.x.25: “*quoniam si quis audiat, dicunt haec omnia, ‘non ipsa nos fecimus, sed fecit nos qui manet in aeternum’.*”

<sup>168</sup> Conf. IX.x.25: “*ut audiamus verbum eius, non per linguam carnis neque per vocem angeli nec per sonitum nubis nec per aenigma similitudinis, sed ipsum quem in his amamus, ipsum sine his audiamus.*”

<sup>169</sup> Conf. XIII.xxiii.33: “*spiritalis.*”

<sup>170</sup> Conf. XIII.xxii.32: “*ita homo renovatur in agnitione dei secundum imaginem eius, qui creavit eum, et spiritalis effectus iudicat omnia, quae utique iudicanda sunt, ipse autem a nemine iudicatur.*”

They do not necessarily spiritually “preside” in the church, as in the case of the clergy, although certainly they can be ordained.<sup>171</sup> By imitating Christ through the example set by others,<sup>172</sup> such spiritual persons have restrained their affections through the gift of continence and have freed their minds from the distractions and disturbances of worldly lust and experience, which gives them the capacity to make those spiritual judgements. There is a limit to their powers of discernment, however: it is not their role to cast judgement or make speculation about the lives of the saints, because they should look to them as an example of holy life; neither should they make judgements about Holy Scripture, even when it seems unclear, instead submitting themselves to it, “hold[ing] for certain that even language closed to our comprehension is right and true.”<sup>173</sup> They are also not permitted to make judgements about other Christians, deciding “which persons are spiritual and which carnal.” Such things are known to God alone. By virtue of these limits, they submit themselves to the medicines and tutelage of the church, so that their minds which have been unhindered and purified can begin to contemplate immortal Truth, and they can start to comprehend the spiritual principles at work in the world.<sup>174</sup> They perceive

---

<sup>171</sup> *Conf. XIII.xxiii.33: “ergo in ecclesia tua, deus noster, secundum gratiam tuam, quam dedisti ei, quoniam tuum sumus figmentum creati in operibus bonis, non solum qui spiritaliter praesunt sed etiam hi qui spiritaliter subduntur eis qui praesunt (masculum enim et feminam fecisti hominem hoc modo in gratia tua spiritali, ubi secundum sexum corporis non est masculus et femina, quia nec Iudaeus neque graecus neque servus neque liber) -- spiritaliter ergo, sive qui praesunt sive qui obtemperant, spiritaliter iudicant...”*

<sup>172</sup> *Conf. XIII.xxi.31: “...in verbo tuo per evangelistas tuos animam continentem imitando imitatores Christi tui.”*

<sup>173</sup> *Conf. XIII.xxiii.33: “spiritaliter iudicant, non de cognitionibus spiritalibus, quae lucent in firmamento (non enim oportet de tam sublimi auctoritate iudicare); neque de ipso libro tuo, etiam si quid ibi non lucet, quoniam summittimus ei nostrum intellectum certumque habemus etiam quod clausum est aspectibus nostris recte veraciterque dictum esse...neque de illa distinctione iudicat, spiritalium videlicet atque carnalium hominum.”*

<sup>174</sup> *Conf. XIII.xxiii.33: “hoc enim agit per mentis intellectum, per quem percipit quae sunt spiritus dei.”*



“what things are of the Spirit of God,”<sup>175</sup> enabling them to make spiritual judgements about the world. As a result, their souls are renewed and recreated in the image and likeness of God in which they were originally created. They have moved beyond simply imitating Christ and begin to conform to the divine Word through whom they and the world were created which means that they can come to know and understand directly, without human intervention, the will and truth of God,<sup>176</sup> “the Trinity of the Unity and the Unity of the Trinity.”<sup>177</sup>

When Monnica and Augustine hear God “in person” “through himself,” (*in idipsum*) at the height of their spiritual ascent in Ostia, they are experiencing the same thing which the spiritual person achieves at the summit of their journey. This episode at Ostia is meant to show us that Monnica is indeed one of these spiritual persons, as Augustine outlines in Book XIII. The stories he has told about her up to this point revealed that she had acquired the spiritual discipline necessary to become such a person. She had learned to restrain her soul from the temptations of sensual pleasure and experience, and the desire to claim an authority over others which she does not have. She makes spiritual judgements about her relationship with her husband, family, and friends, and acts on them with generosity to ensure that those relationships are governed in an ordered and disciplined way. Now, at Ostia, we learn that she is able to experience eternal being, without any human or created intervention or mediation, but through the Trinity himself.

---

<sup>175</sup> *Conf. XIII.xxiii.32: “...percipit quae sunt spiritus dei.”*

<sup>176</sup> *Conf. XIII.xxii.32: “mente quippe renovatus et conspiciens intellectam veritatem tuam homine demonstratore non indiget ut suum genus imitetur, sed te demonstrante probat ipse quae sit voluntas tua, quod bonum et beneplacitum et perfectum.”*

<sup>177</sup> *Conf. XIII.xxii.32: “trinitatem unitatis vel unitatem trinitatis.”*

Monnica and Augustine were able to participate in this spiritual ascent at Ostia together, despite their very different backgrounds and experiences, because the primary conditions of the ascent were not knowledge and experience but a gift of divine grace and the acquisition of spiritual discipline. Both mother and son had embraced a continent life, Monnica through her sobriety and modesty, and Augustine through his recent renunciation of his sexual habit. While Monnica had spent a lifetime receiving the spiritual medicines and tutelage of the church, Augustine had recently been baptized and received the Eucharist, giving him full access to the same spiritual graces on offer. Both had acquired the spiritual disposition necessary for the journey.

Despite all of their effort and striving, neither mother nor son were able to remain in this ecstatic state. After their momentary touch of eternal being, Augustine says they “sighed and left behind us ‘the firstfruits of the Spirit’ bound to that higher world” and returned to “the noise of human speech where a sentence has both a beginning and an ending,”<sup>178</sup> the realm of temporal change and transience. He laments that they would have been able to remain there “If only...other visions of a vastly inferior kind could be withdrawn!”<sup>179</sup> Monnica’s lament takes the form of a declaration that her life is now complete: “My son, as for myself, I now find no pleasure in this life. What I have still to do here and why I am here, I do not know.” Her only remaining hope had been to see her son’s conversion, but “God had granted this in a way more than I had hoped,”<sup>180</sup> she said,

---

<sup>178</sup> *Conf. IX.x.24: “et suspiravimus et reliquimus ibi religatas primitias spiritus et remeavimus ad strepitum oris nostri, ubi verbum et incipitur et finitur.”*

<sup>179</sup> *Conf. IX.x.25: “si continuetur hoc et subtrahantur aliae visiones longe imparis generis.”*

<sup>180</sup> *Conf. IX.x.26: “fili, quantum ad me attinet, nulla re iam delector in hac vita. quid hic faciam adhuc et cur hic sim, nescio, iam consumpta spe huius saeculi. unum erat propter quod in hac vita aliquantum immorari cupiebam, ut te christianum catholicum viderem*

because Augustine had chosen an ascetic life which she valued far more than the secular hopes she had originally held for him. With this now fulfilled in an even more excellent way than she had expected, and purged from her final worldly hope, there was simply nothing more for her to do or accomplish in this life except die.

---

*priusquam morerer. cumulatus hoc mihi deus meus praestitit, ut te etiam contempta felicitate terrena servum eius videam. quid hic facio? ”*

## CHAPTER 6

### IX.xi.27-28

*“nihil longe est deo...”*

Only a few days after Monnica and Augustine had their conversation overlooking the garden in Ostia, Monnica fell gravely ill. She died only a few days later. Just before she died, however, she told Augustine and his companions to bury her body anywhere they wanted, and not to worry about transporting it back home to Africa for burial. Augustine says that his mother had long ago decided and made arrangements to be buried next to her husband, and that it had been a great concern of hers so that “posterity might remember [her]”.<sup>181</sup> Certainly, it would have been customary and expected by others that she would do so,<sup>182</sup> so it is understandable that both Augustine and his friend were taken aback by her statement. Augustine’s friend tried to comfort her by suggesting that “he hoped she would be buried not in a foreign land but in her home country,”<sup>183</sup> but she reproached him for the suggestion and ridiculed him to her son. Augustine, on the other hand, was “filled with joy and gave thanks” that “this vain thought” (*inanitas*) had begun to disappear from her heart.<sup>184</sup>

---

<sup>181</sup> *Conf. IX.xi.28: “commemorari ab hominibus.”*

<sup>182</sup> Carl G. Vaught, *Encounter with God in Augustine’s Confessions: Books VII to IX* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 134.

<sup>183</sup> *Conf. IX.xi.27: “frater autem meus quiddam locutus est, quo eam non in peregre, sed in patria defungi tamquam felicius optaret.”*

<sup>184</sup> *Conf. IX.xi.28: “gaudebam et gratias tibi agebam, recolens quod noveram, quanta cura semper aestuasset de sepulchro quod sibi providerat et praeparaverat iuxta corpus viri sui...quando autem ista inanitas plenitudine bonitatis tuae coeperat in eius corde non esse, nesciebam.”*

Monnica had finally come to realise explicitly what she had previously only known implicitly, that her life was held within a divine, beneficent embrace which was the very ground and source of her being and had been seeking her conversion for many years. That same divine embrace had freed her from her drinking habit as a young girl and had given her the gift of continence by which she was able guard herself against the temptations that appear in ordinary, everyday life, especially within our relationships with our family, friends, and neighbours. As a result of this ordered, disciplined way of life she was able to lead, she was also afforded the grace necessary to participate in an ecstatic, religious experience with her son. The latter had revealed to her the utter dependence of the whole created order—including herself—upon the divine beneficence of God, and she had come to see this first-hand in herself when she realized that God had granted her son’s conversion to Catholicism in a way that was far more wonderful and substantial than she had ever expected. Monnica’s hope no longer lay in the trappings of earthly experience, but in the divine favour she had now experienced many times in her life and upon which she knew all things depended. She now knew that it made no real difference as to where her body was buried, because that divine embrace which had sought her out for so many years would not forget her, no matter where on earth her body was located. It was not bound by corporeal limits. She therefore stated with confidence to the assembled crowd, that “Nothing...is far from God, and there is no ground for fear that he may not acknowledge me at the end of the world and raise me up.”<sup>185</sup>

---

<sup>185</sup> *Conf. IX.xi.28: “nihil’ inquit ‘longe est deo, neque timendum est, ne ille non agnoscat in fine saeculi unde me resuscitet.’”*

Monnica made one other request before she died, however. She asked to be remembered “at the altar of the Lord”.<sup>186</sup> Even though she was confident that she would not be overlooked by the divine beneficence, she knew that she was not capable of achieving lasting union with God on her own accord or merit. Her modesty was probably her chief teacher in this regard, but more directly she would have remembered how she and her son could only maintain for an instant the divine union they experienced only a few days earlier because of the presence of what Augustine called at the time “other visions of a vastly inferior kind”.<sup>187</sup> Despite all their striving and effort, Augustine and Monnica could not sustain the divine vision they had achieved because they were still in a region of temporality and change, where reality has a beginning and ending, dissimilar to the eternal being “where there is no past or future, but only being.”<sup>188</sup> Here, at her death, Monnica knew that regardless of how much she had strived to restrain and purge from her soul worldly experience, carnal pleasure, and vain ambition which turn the soul away from its divine source, it was impossible to expect that she had been able to reach perfect purity in this matter. She would never be able to overcome, by her own merit, the carnality that defines life in the body. Lasting union with the Good would only be finally achieved through a beneficent act of the Good itself. A mediator is needed to bridge the divide between God and the human, and for Monnica, this was accomplished through the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ, perpetually offered through the Eucharist. Augustine

---

<sup>186</sup> *Conf. IX.xi.27: “ponite’ inquit ‘hoc corpus ubicumque. nihil vos eius cura conturbet. tantum illud vos rogo, ut ad domini altare memineritis mei, ubiubi fueritis.”*

<sup>187</sup> See *Conf. IX.x.25: “aliae visiones longe imparis generis.”*

<sup>188</sup> See *Conf. IX.x.24: “futurum esse non est in ea, sed esse solum.”*

will discover for himself the need for this divine Mediator, and the character of it, when he confronts his grief over his mother's death, which comes next in the narrative.

## CHAPTER 7

### IX.xii.29-xiii.37

#### *“aeterna Hierusalem”*

Augustine was overwhelmed with grief (*maestitudo ingens*) at his mother’s death, but he held back his tears. He, along with the others who had gathered around Monnica’s deathbed, “did not think it right to celebrate the funeral with tearful dirges and lamentations, since in most cases it is customary to use such mourning to imply sorrow for the miserable state of those who die.”<sup>189</sup> Monnica had lived a holy and devout life, and had served everyone with great humility, “as if she was a daughter to all of us.”<sup>190</sup> Augustine and his friends were proud of her, convinced that her virtuous way of life (*documentis morum*) and “faith unfeigned” (*fide non ficta*) meant that she would receive eternal life. When Monnica’s grandson, Adeodatus, burst into tears, they therefore urged the boy to stop crying: there was no need for despair. Augustine says that he did the same thing within his own heart: “In this way too something of the child (*puerile*) in me, which had slipped towards weeping, was checked and silenced by the youthful (*iuvenali*) voice, the voice of my heart.”<sup>191</sup> This is an implicit reference to Christ’s command that “Except ye be

---

<sup>189</sup> *Conf.* IX.xii.29: “*neque enim decere arbitrabamur funus illud questibus lacrimosis gemitibusque celebrare, quia his plerumque solet deplorari quaedam miseria morientium.*”

<sup>190</sup> *Conf.* IX.ix.22: “*servivit quasi ab omnibus genita fuisset.*”

<sup>191</sup> *Conf.* IX.xii.29: “*hoc modo etiam meum quiddam puerile, quod labeatur in fletus, iuvenali voce cordis cohercebatur et tacebat.*” Maria Boulding translates “*iuvenali voce cordis*” as “the man’s voice of my heart” which makes the distinction between the “child” and “man” who were at odds within Augustine’s heart more obvious. See Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Maria Boulding, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (1997; New York: New City Press, 2012), IX.12.29.



converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>192</sup>

Augustine and his friends were proud of his mother’s piety, and they knew that she would be saved because of it. Were Augustine to cry, he would appear childish, as though he lacked the faith needed to fully trust in God’s ability to save her. However, as this final section of Monnica’s biography reveals, Augustine will need to overcome this pride in order to acquire the humility necessary to partake in eternal life, like his mother. She had already acquired this humility, and through her death, and through his grief, Augustine will learn his need for the same. This is Monnica’s final gift to her son.

The first indication of Augustine’s pride in his mother’s piety appears when he begins to examine the nature of his grief. He initially supposed that he was so deeply grieved when his mother died because they had lived together for many years and during that time they had become very close. He was used to her kindness and affection, and her death had caused a “break in the habit” (*consuetudine*), deeply wounding his soul. With her now gone, he had lost the “immense support she gave” and his life was “torn to pieces”.<sup>193</sup> This seems like a very reasonable explanation for his grief, but Augustine hints that he was perhaps a bit too accustomed to her care and affection. During the final few days of her life, whenever he would attend to her care, he says that she would praise him as a “devoted son” or would recall that she had never heard him “speak a harsh or bitter word to her.”<sup>194</sup> He says that this would make him feel very “glad indeed” (*gratulabar*

---

<sup>192</sup> Matthew 18:3 (King James Version).

<sup>193</sup> *Conf. IX.xii.30: “quoniam itaque deserebar tam magno eius solacio, sauciabatur anima et quasi dilaniabatur vita, quae una facta erat ex mea et illius.”*

<sup>194</sup> *Conf. IX.xii.30: “gratulabar quidem testimonio eius, quod in ea ipsa ultima aegritudine obsequiis meis interblandiens appellabat me pium et commemorabat grandi dilectionis affectu numquam se audisse ex ore meo iaculatum in se durum aut contumeliosum sonum.”*

*quidem*), especially considering how badly he had treated her for so many years. To be praised by a woman as devout and pious as her was a great comfort and source of pride, especially for someone so new to the Catholic faith as him.

Even though he now knew the reason for his pain, Augustine was frustrated that his grief persisted. He fought hard at his mother's wake and the funeral to hold back his tears. He managed to convince everyone that he was not upset, even though his heart was filled with sorrow. He remained convinced that Monnica's salvation would come to her because of her holy life, and "was using truth (*veritatis*) as a fomentation to alleviate the pain".<sup>195</sup> However, he felt very ashamed that, despite being convinced of this truth, he could not overcome his grief: "...it caused me great displeasure to see how much power these human frailties had over me, though they are a necessary part of the order we have to endure and are the lot of the human condition."<sup>196</sup> The result is that he "was tortured by a twofold sadness":<sup>197</sup> he was not only sad that he did not have Monnica in his life anymore, but also that his trust in God seemed too weak to assure him of her salvation. He asked God to take away his grief, but he did not do so. Augustine says that he believes this was because God was trying to teach him "the truth that every habit (*consuetudinis*) is a fetter (*vinculum*) adverse even to the mind that is not fed upon deceit."<sup>198</sup> What he means is that even though he had been baptized and become a Catholic, he had become too accustomed to his

---

<sup>195</sup> *Conf. IX.xii.31: "eoque fomento veritatis mitigabam cruciatum."*

<sup>196</sup> *Conf. IX.xii.31: "et quia mihi vehementer displicebat tantum in me posse haec humana, quae ordine debito et sorte conditionis nostrae accidere necesse est."*

<sup>197</sup> *Conf. IX.xii.31: "alio dolore dolebam dolorem et duplici tristitia macerabar."*

<sup>198</sup> *Conf. IX.xii.32: "credo commendans memoriae meae vel hoc uno documento omnis consuetudinis vinculum etiam adversus mentem, quae iam non fallaci verbo pascitur."*

confidence that Monnica's piety would save her, and this had led him into error. Only by working through the intricacies of his grief would he discover this error, however.

Augustine and his friends were not wrong to suppose that his mother would likely receive eternal salvation—indeed, she herself had reassured them of this just before she died—but it would not be on account of her piety. Her final, dying request had been that she should be remembered at the Eucharist. Her trust and confidence lay wholly in the mercy of God and not her own virtue. Her piety had indeed led her to make this humble petition, but she would not acquire her salvation on account of it. The problem for Augustine was that he could not conceive of the value of such humility. He was convinced that his mother's salvation would only be achieved through her piety, but as Monnica herself had testified, no human act or earthly good could accomplish this. Augustine was still too attached to worldly experience to understand that the humility his mother had acquired was the condition of her acceptance of the divine beneficence which would save her. Augustine, however, could not see this error: to him it simply felt like he did not have a faith strong enough to believe in Monnica's salvation. If he cried over her death, this would be revealed, and he would appear weak and foolish.

Augustine tried to overcome his sorrow by going to the bath, hoping that would calm his anxiety. It had no effect. No earthly comfort could console him. However, after a good night's rest his tears began to flow. This is not insignificant. Upon waking, he had recalled a hymn composed by Bishop Ambrose which attributed to God the rule and care and renewal of all things:

Creator of all things.

You rule the heavens.

You clothe the day with light  
And night with the grace of sleep.

So rest restores exhausted limbs  
to the usefulness of work.

It lightens weary minds  
And dissolves the causes of grief.<sup>199</sup>

With this hymn in mind, Augustine began to remember his mother's humility, how deeply she had been devoted to God, and her "holy gentle and considerate treatment" of others.<sup>200</sup> He was finally able to weep. Augustine had realised that his mother's salvation depended not upon her piety, but upon the divine beneficence alone, and that she herself knew this. Just as the night's rest had renewed Augustine, so would her "rest" in Christ be the means of her eternal renewal and salvation, which is why she was able to be so confident about her eternal salvation as she lay dying. The "dissolving of grief" is a reference to the New Jerusalem mentioned in the Book of Revelation, where "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, no crying..."<sup>201</sup> The implication is that God does not simply restore creation, but renews and recreates it in a new and better way. Augustine is alluding to the Resurrection of the Dead, that just as God

---

<sup>199</sup> *Conf. IX.xii.32: "deus, creator omnium / polique rector vestiens / diem decoro lumine, / noctem sopora gratia, / artus solutos ut quies / reddat laboris usui / mentesque fessas allevet / luctuque solvat anxios."*

<sup>200</sup> *Conf. IX.xii.33: "atque inde paulatim reducebam in pristinum sensum ancillam tuam conversationemque eius piam in te et sancte in nos blandam atque morigeram, qua subito destitutus sum."*

<sup>201</sup> Revelation 21:4 (King James Version).

had granted Monnica more joy than she had ever expected when her son was converted to Catholicism, so here the same God would grant her eternal life, simply because of his goodness in which his mother's life and his life had been held all along.

Augustine also realised that no matter how holy and devout his mother's life had been, she was not blameless: "I do not dare to say that, since the day when you regenerated her through baptism, no word came from her mouth contrary to your precept."<sup>202</sup> No created thing is able to achieve perfection of its own accord, because as a created thing its very nature is less than perfection. Our hope for union with the Good rests in its goodness alone, expressed through mercy. Therefore, Augustine says, "Woe to those of praiseworthy life if you put their life under scrutiny and remove mercy. But because you do not search our faults with rigour, we confidently hope for some place with you."<sup>203</sup> After all, Augustine adds, and as he has pointed out on numerous occasions throughout Monnica's biography, whatever merits we do possess are given to us by that same divine goodness which embraces the whole created order, so there is no point in trying to suppose that in themselves they are the means of our union with the One. Our life is already incorporated into the divine life, and that union will only be finally achieved by an act of the divine goodness itself. Augustine therefore ends Monnica's biography by pleading for divine mercy on her behalf: "Now please forgive her debts if she contracted any during the many years that passed after she received the water of salvation. Forgive, Lord, forgive, I beseech

---

<sup>202</sup> *Conf. IX.xiii.34: "non tamen audeo dicere, ex quo eam per baptismum regenerasti, nullum verbum exisse ab ore eius contra praeceptum tuum."*

<sup>203</sup> *Conf. IX.xiii.34: "et vae etiam laudabili vitae hominum, si remota misericordia discutias eam! quia vero non exquiris delicta vehementer, fiducialiter speramus aliquem apud te locum."*

you. ‘Enter not into judgement’ with her. Let mercy triumph over justice.”<sup>204</sup> Augustine was finally able to weep “about [Monnica] and for her, about myself and for myself,”<sup>205</sup> because he now knew that to do so was an appeal for divine mercy, and not an expression of despair:

Now I let flow the tears which I had held back so that they ran as freely as they wished. My heart rested upon them, and it reclined upon them because it was your ears that were there, not those of some human critic who would put a proud interpretation on my weeping.<sup>206</sup>

There was no reason for Augustine to be ashamed of his grief anymore because he knew that to weep was a means by which he could express his confidence that God would grant eternal life to his mother. He realised that his mother’s weakness was the means of his incorporation into the divine life, and in doing so he also realised that his own weakness would do the same for him.

Augustine therefore concludes Monnica’s biography with a vision of her union with God which includes, as part of its fullness, the community of the faithful. “I believe you have already done what I am asking of you,”<sup>207</sup> he says in his prayer for her, recalling his appeals for mercy for her. He reminds us of how she had eschewed all earthly goods at

---

<sup>204</sup> *Conf. IX.xiii.35: “dimitte illi et tu debita sua, si qua etiam contraxit per tot annos post aquam salutis. dimitte, domine, dimitte, obsecro, ne intres cum ea in iudicium. superexultet misericordia iudicio.”*

<sup>205</sup> *Conf. IX.xii.33: “et libuit flere in conspectu tuo de illa et pro illa, de me et pro me.”*

<sup>206</sup> *Conf. IX.xii.33: “et dimisi lacrimas quas continebam, ut effluerent quantum vellent, substernens eas cordi meo. et requievit in eis, quoniam ibi erant aures tuae, non cuiusquam hominis superbe interpretantis ploratum meum.”*

<sup>207</sup> *Conf. IX.xiii.36: “et credo, iam feceris quod te rogo.”*

the end of her life, no longer concerned about where her body might be buried or whether any earthly memorial or tomb would be set up in her memory. “[S]he desired only that she might be remembered at your altar,”<sup>208</sup> just as she had done throughout her life with her daily attendance at the Eucharist. There “she knew that what is distributed is the holy victim who ‘abolished the account of debts which was reckoned against us.’”<sup>209</sup> Her hope for lasting union with the One lay in God’s own act of complete and total humility, by which he incorporates the creation into his own life, the crucifixion and death of Christ, who “through the remedy for our wounds [] hung upon the wood.”<sup>210</sup> Monnica herself had acquired this same humility, which is the condition of her incorporation: “For she will not reply that she has no debts to pay, lest she be refuted and captured by the clever Accuser. Her answer will be that her debts have been forgiven by him to whom no one can repay the price which he, who owed nothing, paid on our behalf.”<sup>211</sup> Augustine ends by praying that Monnica would rest in peace with her husband, again recalling her humility through the way she patiently persevered in bringing him to Christ. He appeals to others to pray for his parents as well, hoping that his mother’s request might “receive a richer response through the prayers which many offer and not only those which come from me.”<sup>212</sup> In this he points us towards the “eternal Jerusalem” (*aetera Hierusalem*) which is an eternal community of

---

<sup>208</sup> *Conf. IX.xiii.36: “sed tantummodo memoriam sui ad altare tuum fieri desideravit.”*

<sup>209</sup> *Conf. IX.xiii.36: “unde sciret dispensari victimam sanctam qua deletum est chirographum quod erat contrarium nobis.”*

<sup>210</sup> *Conf. IX.xiii.35: “per medicinam vulnere nostrorum, quae pependit in lingo.”*

<sup>211</sup> *Conf. IX.xiii.36: “neque enim respondebit illa nihil se debere, ne vincatur et obtineatur ab accusatore callido, sed respondebit dimissa debita sua ab eo cui nemo reddet, quod pro nobis non debens reddidit.”*

<sup>212</sup> *Conf. IX.xiii.37: “ut quod a me illa poposcit extremum uberius ei praestetur in multorum orationibus per confessiones quam per orationes meas.”*

all the faithful, which, like Monnica, is their beginning and their end: “For this city your pilgrim people yearn, from their leaving it to their return.”<sup>213</sup>

---

<sup>213</sup> *Conf. IX.xiii.37: “cui suspirat peregrinatio populi tui ab exitu usque ad reditum.”*



## CHAPTER 8

### Conclusion

Monnica's conversion began when she was saved from a life of drunkenness at a young age. An angry servant girl's insult had recalled for her years of teaching and discipline she and her sisters had been taught by their family. For her son, it was an act of divine grace and mercy which had purged her soul of an inordinate attachment to a created good. Although it had begun as a seemingly innocent act of youthful curiosity, it would have eventually left her lost and dispersed in sensuality and worldly experience. God had worked both from within and without, transforming the wicked intentions of the servant girl to a good purpose by giving Monnica the gift of continence by which she was able to withdraw and break the chain of her recently-formed habit. For Augustine, the whole episode was a sign of the overwhelming beneficence of God, within which the whole created order is held, which is ever seeking the conversion of the creation back to its divine source.

As Monnica grew older, she continued what she had been taught. She lived her life according to the disciplines of the Catholic Church, and served her husband, children, family, friends, and neighbours with modesty and humility. In doing so, she tried to structure her whole life, and those of the people around her, according to what she understood was a divinely appointed order of reality which would keep her and her loved ones from succumbing to the temptations to worldliness with which every soul must struggle. While she did not know directly the principles through which God had ordered the world in which she found herself, the disciplines she adopted enabled her to live in

accordance with them. The result was her ongoing conversion to those principles and thereby to the life of God himself who was seeking her conversion to him through them.

A few days before her death, as she and her son talked about the life of the saints, she was granted a vision of the intelligible reality which gave order to her life and those of the people and the world around her, and for an instance she saw the God upon whom the whole created order depended, both corporeal and intelligible reality. Having tried so hard for many years to structure and order her life in accordance with that intelligible reality, she had finally come to know her proper end and goal which did not exclude her life as she had known it, but perfected it and brought it into union with the One who had created and ordered it in the first place. She realized that the final union depended entirely upon the beneficence of that divine Source, because all created things, including her own life, derived the totality of their being from it. In his goodness, God had set in motion and sustained her conversion at every stage, and out of that same goodness he would complete the task.

The purpose of this study was to show that Monnica's life followed the pattern of conversion described by Robert Crouse, beginning with a detachment from an inordinate attachment to worldly experience, moving inward to see the intelligible principles upon which that worldly experience depends, and finally to union with the Source upon which both the corporeal and intelligible worlds derive their being. In doing so, I have tried to support the universality of Crouse's claim, but also show that Augustine's own conversion, which follows the same pattern, was not complete until he had acquired the same humility which his mother had acquired through her own conversion. Even though he had converted to Catholicism and been baptized, he still relied upon his own cunning and

accomplishments. Her death had revealed to him that the soul's final union is not achieved through its own merit and striving, but only on account of the goodness and mercy of God. Accordingly, the only condition under which the soul can participate in this final union is a humility which accepts its own weakness and imperfection. Augustine discovered and overcame this through the grief he experienced upon his mother's death. On numerous occasions in the *Confessions* Augustine says that she labored throughout her life to bring about his conversion. As she served him in life, so too, in death.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Augustine, Saint. *Confessions*. Henry Chadwick, trans. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Augustine, Saint. *The Confessions*. John E. Rotelle, ed. Maria Boulding, trans. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. 1997; New York: New City Press, 2012.
- Augustini, Sancti Aurelii. *Ennarationes in Psalmos CI – CL*. Corpus Christianorum, XL. E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont, eds. Turnholti: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii: MCMLVI
- Augustini, Sancti Aurelii. *Retractionum Libri II*. Corpus Christianorum, LVII. Almut Mutzenbecher, ed. Turnholti: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, MCMLXXXIV.
- Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. 1967; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000.
- Courcelle, Pierre. *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1950; Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1968.
- Coyle, J. Kevin. "In Praise of Monica: A Note on the Ostia Experience of *Confessions* IX." *Augustinian Studies* 13 (1982): 87-96.
- Crouse, Robert. "Recurrrens in te unum: The Pattern of St Augustine's *Confessions*." *Studia Patristica* XIV (1976): 389-392.
- Fitzgerald, Allan D., ed. *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.
- Hankey, Wayne J. "Recurrrens in te unum: Neoplatonic Form and Content in Augustine's *Confessions*." In *Augustine and Philosophy*, Phillip Cary, John Doody, and Kim Paffenroth, eds. Toronto: Lexington Books, 2010.
- Henry, Paul. *La Vision d'Ostie: Sa place dans la Vie et l'Oeuvre de saint Augustin*. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1938.
- Hollywood, Amy. "Mysticism and Transcendence." In *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Christianity in Western Europe c.1100 – c.1500*, edited by Miri Rubin and Walter Simons, 297-307. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Lane Fox, Robin. *Augustine: Conversion to Confessions*. New York: Basic Books, 2015.

- Louth, Andrew. *The Origins of the Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Mallard, William. *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine's Religious Thought Through the Confessions Story*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.
- Miles, Margaret R. *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine's Confessions*. New York: Crossroad, 1992.
- O'Connell, Robert J. *Images of Conversion in Augustine's Confessions*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1996.
- O'Connell, Robert J. *Soundings in St Augustine's Imagination*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1994.
- O'Connell, Robert J. *St Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969.
- O'Donnell, James J. *Augustine: A New Biography*. New York: Harper Collins, 2005.
- O'Donnell, James J. *Augustine: Confessions*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.
- O'Ferrell, Margaret More. "Monica, the mother of Augustine: A reconsideration." *Recherches Augustiniennes* X (1975): 23-43.
- O'Meara, J. J. *The Young Augustine: The Growth of Augustine's Mind up to his Conversion*. London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1954.
- O'Meara, John J., "Monica, the Mother of Augustine." *The Furrow* 5, No. 9 (September 1954): 555-562.
- Paffenroth, Kim. "Tears of Grief and Joy: Confessions Book 9: Chronological Sequence and Structure." *Augustinian Studies* 28, no. 1 (1997): 141-154.
- Ratzinger, Joseph. "Originalität und Überlieferung in Augustins Begriff der *Confessio*." *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 3, no. 4 (1957): 375-392.
- Starnes, Colin. *Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1990.
- Starnes, Colin. "Augustine's Conversion and the Ninth Book of the *Confessions*." In *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*. Joanne McWilliam, Ed. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992.

Vaught, Carl G. *Encounter with God in Augustine's Confessions: Books VII to IX*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004.

Wills, Garry. *Augustine's Confessions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Wundt, Max. "Augustins Konfessionen." *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche*. 22, no. 2 (1923): 161-206.