

St Augustine and his friends

At the far end of the great Basilica of St Peter's, beyond the high altar and below the stained glass window of the Holy Spirit, is the chair of St Peter. No doubt St Peter never sat in it nor saw it but that is not really the point. There it is - a symbol of the apostolic church gifted with the authority given it by the Lord. Grouped round the chair are the four huge and powerful statues of four of the great early doctors of the Church. Depicted there are Jerome, Basil, John Chrysostom, Basil and Augustine. Their presence there is not merely decorative, these four were men whose thought, teaching and spirituality shaped and formed the Church as it journeyed ever more deeply into the mystery of Christ and the community which he brought into being. Ranking in influence only after Paul and the early apostolic community, these teachers left an imprint which remains clearly visible in the life of the Church today. They truly represent the great thinkers who uphold the living tradition symbolised in the chair of Peter.

Facing the group, the powerful, swirling figure on one's left is Augustine, holding some of the symbols which identify him in our iconography. Whenever I am in Rome, I always go to spend some time just looking at the statue and I am always impressed by it, even awed by it. I have, however, come to feel that it represents only part of the complex person Augustine was and is. The statue expresses something of the towering intellect, the creative imagination, the energetic teacher and preacher. Here, I feel is one of the giants of the Christian story. And so he is. So I stand in front of the statue and marvel not only at the physical size but also at the intellectual and spiritual stature which is represented. And yet I always feel that something is missing. The statue speaks of one I can admire, but from afar it speaks of one I can respect, but from a very lowly position: it speaks of one from whom I can learn, but not as from an equal.

While I am impressed and gain something from this dynamic portrait of Augustine, I find that I am more touched by the frescos of the life of Augustine which can be seen in San Gimignano. Here is a gentler and more approachable picture of Augustine which gives a balance to the St Peter's statue. One of the pictures which stays in mind is of Augustine sitting, surrounded by his followers obviously in discussion over some passage in the Scriptures. For me, this brings into focus an essential aspect of Augustine, an aspect of his personality and way of living which lies at the core of his spirituality and at the heart of any authentic following of Augustinian spirituality, namely relationship and friendship.

One of the aspects of the character of Augustine which makes him such an appealing person is the humanity which shines through in what he says and does. Reading the Confessions or some of the letters, it becomes very obvious that Augustine was a person with a passionate nature, a nature which is nurtured by relationships and friendships. Rarely do we get a picture of Augustine in isolation. It is true that there is the inner Augustine who strives alone, who prays alone, who, as all of us must ultimately do, faces God alone. Augustine appreciated that God alone can fulfil the longings of the human heart. Augustine, however, found that that inner journey and inner searching could be initiated, prompted and supported by the company of friends.

His warm, affectionate and passionate nature needed human companionship and love but, after his conversion, he began to understand the deeper significance and purpose of these friendships.

From the outset of his life Augustine is always to be found in the company of others. The early parts of the Confessions refer frequently to his need to be with others, it was part of his nature and, looking back on this period, Augustine was able to be realistic about its dangers but also about its graces:

Yet, Lord, I should have owed thanks to You, my God and the most excellent Creator and Ruler of the Universe, even if it had been Your will that I should not live beyond boyhood. For even then I was; I lived; I felt: even so early I had an instinct for the care of my own being, a trace in me of that most profound Unity whence my being was derived; in my interior sense I kept guard over the integrity of my outward sense perception, and in my small thoughts upon small matters I had come to delight in the truth. I hated to be wrong, had a vigorous memory, was well trained in speech, delighted in friendship, shunned pain, meanness and ignorance. In so small a creature was not all this admirable and reason for praise?

Conf 1:31

The grace of his nature, however, was also the source of his sin. His desire and need for friendships brought out in Augustine that all too frequent desire in young males to be "one of the lads". He records that he stole food and drink from his parents, disobeyed and lied to spend time with his friends, cheated at games, squabbled with his companions and allowed himself to be drawn in to actions and behaviour which he knew to be wrong. The famous incident of the fruit stealing sums it up:

There was a pear tree near our vineyard, heavy with fruit, but fruit that was not particularly tempting either to look at or to taste. A group of young blackguards, and I among them, went out to knock down the pears and carry them off late one night, for it was our bad habit to carry on our games in the street till very late. We carried off an immense load of pears, not to eat — for we barely tasted them before throwing them to the hogs. Our only pleasure in doing it was that it was forbidden . . . Now — as I think back on the state of mind then — I am altogether certain that I would not have done it alone. Perhaps then what I really loved was the companionship of those with whom I did it. . . Since the pleasure I got was not in the pears, it must have been in the crime itself, and put there by the companionship of others sinning with me. . . We laughed together as if our hearts were tickled to be playing a trick upon the owners, who had no notion what we were doing and would have strongly objected.

Conf. 2:9-11

Reflecting on it, Augustine cries:

O friendship unfriendly, unanalysable attraction for the mind, greediness to do

damage for the mere sport and jest of it. . . Someone cries, "Come on, let's do it — and we would be ashamed to be ashamed."

Conf. 2:17

This desire for friendship, he writes "My longing then was to love and be loved "(Conf Ill. 1), He desired to be accepted, to be admired and to achieve:

I went headlong on my course, so blinded that I was ashamed among the other youths that my viciousness was less than theirs; I heard them boasting of their exploits, and the viler the exploits the louder the boasting; and I set about the same exploits not only for the pleasure of the act but for the pleasure of the boasting . . . I grew in vice through desire of praise; and when I lacked opportunity to equal others in vice, I invented things I had not done, lest I might be held cowardly for being innocent, or contemptible for being chaste.

Conf 2:7

What a contemporary ring that has! How many of us who are parents or teachers have witnessed that same thing in young people — we won't explore how many can identify through personal experience!

As Augustine grew, the shallowness of these childhood and early adolescent relationships became more and more apparent to him. This type of "unfriendly friendship" had not brought him the peace for which he longed. Augustine experienced a great hunger of the heart, he writes "For within me was a famine". His friendships began to change and he searched for friends among those with whom he could find some peace of heart.

Among the friends he made in early adulthood, none was more dear to him than one with a young man whose name he does not give us. Of this friendship, Augustine says that it was "sweeter than all the sweetness of my life."

During the period in which I first began to teach in the town of my birth, I had found a very dear friend, who was pursuing similar studies. He was about my age, and was now coming, as I was, to the flowering-time of young manhood. He had indeed grown up with me as a child and we had gone to school together and played together. Neither in those earlier days nor indeed in the later time of which I now speak was he a friend in the truest meaning of friendship . . . with me he went astray in error, and my soul could not be without him.

Con.4:7

When this friend became gravely ill, he was reconciled to the Church and was baptised. Augustine ridiculed his friend but his friend rebuffed him:

He looked at me as if I had been his deadly enemy, and in a burst of independence which startled me warned me that if I wished to continue his friend I must cease that kind of talk

Conf 4:11

Augustine kept his silence but planned to resume the debate when his friend recovered. In the event the friend died shortly after. His death threw Augustine into deep and overwhelming grief.

At this sorrow my heart was utterly darkened, and whatever I looked on was death.. .My eyes sought him every where. .. and I hated all places because he was not in them.

Conf 4:4

I marvelled that he should be dead and I his other self living still. Rightly has a friend been called "the half of my soul".

Conf 4:11

Still wrapped in the pain of his loss, Augustine returned to Carthage. Later in life Augustine wrote in one of his letters:

Whenever a person is without a friend, not a single thing in the world appears friendly to him

Letter 130

In Carthage, Augustine again drew friends around him, recording this time he says:

The comfort I found in other friends — and the pleasure I had with them in things of earth — did much to repair and remake me . . . All kinds of things rejoiced my soul in their company — to talk and laugh, and to do other kindness; to read pleasant books together; to pass from lightest jesting to talk of deepest things and back again; to differ without rancour, as a person might differ with themselves, and when most rarely dissensions arose, to find our normal agreement all the sweeter for it ; to teach each other and to learn from each other.

These and such things kindled a flame that fused our very souls together and made us one out of many.

Conf 4:8

Perhaps it was in this experience that Augustine began to understand and value friendship even more deeply. Even though in his old age, when he re-read what he had written in the Confessions, he was very self-critical of the power of his emotion, this friendship was very formative in his understanding of friends. In his grief he was comforted by his friends and later he wrote:

When we are weighed down by poverty, and grief makes us sad; when bodily pain makes us restless and exile despondent, or when any other grievance afflicts us, if there be good people at hand who understand the art of rejoicing with the joyful and weeping with the sorrowful, who know how to speak a cheerful word and uplift us with their conversation, then bitterness is for the most part mitigated, worries are alleviated, and our troubles are overcome.

Letter 130

Among the friends he made in this period, two are particularly significant. Nebridius and Alypius. Nebridius was Augustine's companion of the mind. The two had many similarities. One writer says of their friendship:

There were many similarities which drew them together and made possible easy communication of thought and feeling: both possessed unusual gifts of intelligence, shared a quest for truth, were of delicate health and apt to exhaust themselves in study, were loveable and loving by nature.

McNamara P67

Nebridius went to Italy to be with Augustine. There he began to question aspects of the Manichean beliefs and the astrology which had captured Augustine and the group of friends. His intellect gave him the power to challenge Augustine and helped to prepare him for the moment of grace in which Augustine was to turn to Christ. At some point Nebridius returned to Africa. There is some correspondence between the two. It is filled with affection and familiarity. Both felt the separation keenly. Even though Nebridius wished to join Augustine after his return to Africa, this was not to be.

When Nebridius died he lost a friend who was almost if not entirely his intellectual equal. The pain of loss was now entirely different from that which he experienced when the unnamed friend died.

Blessed is the man who loves you, O God, and his friend in you, and his enemy for you. For he loses no one who is dear to him, if all are dear in God who is never lost.

Conf. 4:14

And with great tenderness, Augustine writes:

And now he lives in Abraham's bosom. Whatever is meant by that bosom, there my Nebridius lives, my most beloved friend.

Corif 9:6

Along with Augustine and Nebrjdius there was a third who made up the group who searched for truth, Alypius.

Thus there were together the mouths of three needy souls, bitterly confessing to one another their spiritual poverty and waiting upon you that you might give them their food in due season. And amidst the bitter disappointments . . . we turned away in the deepest gloom saying: "How long shall these things be?" This question was ever on our lips, but for all that we did not give up our worldly ways, because we still saw no certitude which it was worth changing our way of life to grasp.

Conf 6:17

In this restless trio if Nebridius was the friend of Augustine's head, Alypius was the friend of his heart. Both Augustine and Alypius had their weaknesses and each was deeply concerned for the change of the other. Alypius, deeply sensitive, knew that his presence was strength for Augustine. No where is this more gently yet powerfully put than in the story of the dramatic moment when Augustine's heart was pierced:

There was a garden attached to our lodging, of which we had the use. . To this garden the storm in my heart somehow brought me, for there no one could intervene in the fierce suit I had brought against myself.. Alypius was close on my heels; for it was still privacy for me to have him near, and how could he leave me to myself in that state? We found a seat as far as possible from the house . . . A mighty storm arose within me, bringing a mighty rain of tears. That I might give way to my tears and lamentations, I rose from Alypius: for it struck me that solitude was more suited to the business of weeping.

He remained where we had been sitting, still in utter amazement.

Conf VIII 25

It was with Alypius that Augustine first shared the spiritual breakthrough which had

occurred and, sharing this with him, was for Alypius also the moment of conversion. What could weld two people more closely together? Now the two truly shared the unity of friendship which Augustine was later to state very clearly:

Friendship has been rightly and with just reverence defined as "agreement on things human and divine combined with good will and love."

Contra Acad III 13

After the momentous event in Milan, Augustine retired to Cassicaicum. Many might have gone into solitary retreat but this was not in Augustine's nature. He went there with family and friends. Here the mixture of community, prayer and study was established. We get hints of life at this time from the Confessions and from the dialogues which were recorded. It is fascinating to see in the dialogues how the interchange moved from high theology and philosophy to prayer and to laughter. It is beautiful to read of the joyous harmony which existed. One of the insights which amuses me most is when at one point in the Dialogue on the Happy Life Augustine notes "at this point even mother smiled" — it seems to me to tell us so much about Monica! Augustine, his son Adeodatus and Alypius were baptised on Easter Sunday 387. From there they returned to Africa and for three years lived in a community of fraternal charity prayer and study. Prior to baptism and after Alypius is frequently figured in the dialogues which have come down to us. Always he is presented as a close, admired and much loved friend. In one of his letters, Augustine wrote:

In body only, and not in mind, we are two, so great is the union of hearts, so firm the intimate friendship subsisting between us.

Letter 28

The intimacy of the few years following his conversion could not continue in the same way after his ordination first as priest and then as bishop. The circle had to widen if Augustine was to fulfil his pastoral responsibilities. There always remained those who were dear to him and they were a support to him when he felt weighed down by the duties which were now his. Writing to Jerome, he says:

I confess that I readily throw myself entirely upon the charity of my friends, especially when I am wearied with the scandals of the world, and I can rest in that without anxiety. Indeed I feel that God is there, and I cast myself on Him and rest in Him without care. In that carefree state I do not in the least fear the uncertain tomorrow of human frailty . . . Whenever I feel a person burning with Christian charity and love for me has become my friend, when I entrust any of my plans and thoughts to him, I am entrusting them not to a man, but to Him in whom he abides, so as to be like Him, for God is love, and the one who lives in love lives in God."

Letter73

Then in his old age when he was burdened not only with the care of his people in Hippo but also with the theological disputes which were raging while the society in which he had lived was falling apart, he wrote in *The City of God*:

Is not the unfeigned confidence and mutual love of good and true friends our one solace in human society?

De Civ Dei 19:8

Inevitably many of his friends were called on to leave the community he had established in Hippo to serve the Church in other ways. These separations were not easy for Augustine. In a letter to Novatus, a fellow bishop, he says:

One day, you yourself will begin to surrender some of the very dearest of those you have reared, to the needs of the churches situated far from you.

It is then that you will understand the pangs of longing that stab me on losing the physical presence of friends united to me in close and sweet intimacy.

Letter 84

As bishop he developed many friends and engaged in lengthy correspondence with many of them. He had friends among the nobility, government officials and scholars. One friendship which is worth mentioning is the friendship he managed to establish and, with no inconsiderable difficulty, maintain with the somewhat crusty Jerome who was living in Jerusalem. Alypius had made contact with Jerome on Augustine's behalf in 393. Both had an admiration for the other's scholarship. Augustine wrote to Jerome. Jerome had gone to Palestine to study Hebrew with a view to producing a translation of the Bible using Hebrew sources. Augustine was not convinced of the value of the exercise and expressed his reservations to Jerome. In particular the two disagreed over an interpretation of a text in the Letter to the Galatians. The story is complex but misunderstanding piled on misunderstanding. Jerome wrote to Augustine:

Friendship should be free of all suspicion and one should speak to a friend as another self. Some of my intimates, servants of Christ, of whom there are many at Jerusalem and in the holy places, have been suggesting that your conduct was not single minded, but that your motive was a desire of praise and small renown and cheap popularity: that you wished to gain credit at my expense . . . I am so not silly as to think myself injured if you have views different from mine. But, if you attack my writings . . . and question the authority of the writer . . . then by that conduct friendship is injured and the bonds of intimacy broken . . . You are harassing an old man; you are goading a silent one to speech; you seem to make a show of your learning. . . I write this that we may not seem to be engaging in a childish contest, and may not give grounds of contention to our mutual supporters or detractors, because I

wish to love you with a pure, Christian love, and I would not keep in my heart anything that differs from my words.

Augustine wrote to Jerome:

If I cannot mention what seems to me faulty in your writing, nor you in mine, without suspicion of jealousy or injury to our friendship, then let us drop this for the sake of our lives and salvation.

Letter 73

He wrote again trying to pacify Jerome. In this letter he also tried to plead for understanding between Jerome and Rufinus after a quarrel between the two of them. Augustine, so concerned that he might not be handling the situation, even went to the extent of asking a fellow bishop to review his letters to Jerome in case there might be anything to offend. Despite this care, Jerome took offence. His reply is energetically waspish:

I have received three letters . . . containing what you call inquiries, but which I consider criticisms of my work . . . I pass over the greetings and compliments with which you anoint my head; I say nothing of the flattery with which you try to make up to me for your reproof of me. . . Do not go on thinking that I am a master of lies . . . and do not stir up against me a mob of ignorant people, who respect you as a bishop and receive you with priestly honour when you preach in the church, but who have little use for a man like me, old and almost feeble and living an obscure life in a country monastery. In other words, find yourself some other people to teach or criticise.

Augustine replied:

I hope that there may reign between us not only the love, but even the freedom of friendship, and, if we object to anything in each other's letters, you must not fail to criticise mine as I shall do yours, but of course it must be with such dispositions as do not displease the eyes of God in the love of brothers.

Letter 82

It was ten years before they corresponded again which indicates that Augustine's efforts to regain and retain the friendship of Jerome had been successful. Perhaps their friendship was not that of true friends as Augustine would wish but nonetheless there was friendship to a degree. What is most significant was the desire of Augustine to cherish his friendships and his belief that these could only exist if there was openness and honesty and even correction in the relationship. Such is necessary for the demands of love:

Love and do what you will; if you hold your peace, of love hold your peace; if you cry out, of love cry out; if you correct, of love correct; if you spare, spare through love; let the root of love be within; from this root nothing can spring but what is good.

In Ep Jo &:8

While Augustine gained friendship, he also lost friends; such breakdowns in relationships always caused Augustine immense pain. Among those whose friendship was lost was Julian of Eclanum. Julian was the son of Bishop Memorius, one of Augustine's closest friends. Julian was a young man of great promise and, at a young age, was consecrated bishop of Edanum by Pope Innocent I. Augustine had high hopes of the young bishop but Julian took up the cause of Pelagius and embarked on a ruthless attack on Augustine. Time and again Augustine reached out to Julian. In one letter he wrote:

My dear son, Julian, I hope, with the help of the Lord. . . to make you understand, if that be possible, how unfortunate it is for you to believe what you seek to convince others of.I have not forgotten your father, Memorius, of blessed memory, with whom I was united by a close friendship through letters. It was he who inspired me with a tenderness for you...

As for me, in virtue of the tenderness I have for you and which, with the grace of God, no insult will ever tear from my heart, I wish ardently, Julian, my dearest son, that by a better and stronger youth, you will triumph over yourself.

Contra Jull 1:2

It is only when Julian attacks Monica that Augustine was moved to anger:

Your passion for evil speech has led you to insult even my mother who has hurt you in no way . . . But is it surprising that you cannot tolerate her? You cannot even support the grace of God, that grace which has liberated my mother from this weakness of her youth. I knew your parents; they were both honest Catholic Christians, and I am happy that they died before seeing you become a heretic!

It is interesting to note that Augustine had to correspond and relate to a number of opponents. While he disagreed strongly with their theology, he always spoke and wrote with love and concern for the persons involved.

As the end of his life approached it is perhaps surprising that Augustine asked to be left alone. As he prepared to face the Beauty for which he longed he wanted to be left undisturbed. Throughout his life he had surrounded himself with friends, delighting in their company, discovering God with them and in them. But within Augustine there was always that recognition of the isolation which is the final condition of every man and

woman. The journey with friends leads eventually to a place where the other cannot go. Augustine knew this and recorded it in the Confessions:

But as to what I now am while I am writing my Confessions, there are many who desire to know — both people who know me personally, and people who do not, but they have heard something from me or about me. Yet they have not their ear at my heart, where I am what I am. They wish, therefore, to hear from my own confession what I am inwardly, where they cannot pierce with eye or ear or mind. They desire to know and are prepared to believe, but will they know?

Conf 10:4

In another place he writes:

Each heart must remain closed to another's heart.

This is not a pessimism but a realistic appreciation of the uniqueness and individuality of each person. Despite the ultimate aloneness of the human person, Augustine was strengthened, consoled and enriched by his friendships throughout his life and he in turn gave his love to others both in friendship and fraternal charity. These friendships sustained him, drew him towards God but in the end he knew:

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

Conf 1:1

St Augustine's Concept of Friendship

Having looked at some of the friendships which were so much part of Augustine's life, what conclusions can we begin to draw about what this all meant for him? What is the purpose of friendship? What are the duties of friendship? What are its limitations?

To begin, from where does Augustine draw his thinking about friendship? It would seem that the desire and need for friendship was simply part of Augustine's nature. He was, by nature, a passionate man. His immense intellectual capacity did not mean that he was cut off from the affective side of his nature. One writer says of Augustine:

It can truly be said that Augustine was passionate, that he was even too passionate. His, however, was no simple passion. One must not suppose that it expended itself fully on lust and anger or other violent emotions and experiences. Of this kind of passion he doubtless had his share. Nevertheless, his passion was on the whole less violent, but

more sustained; less disturbing but more insistent; less an appetite of the senses, but more a hunger of the heart.

O'Meara The Young Augustine

It can also be said of Augustine that alongside his intellectual genius, he had a genius for friendship. This natural genius was fostered by his reading of the work of Cicero on friendship, this work echoed his own thinking and desires. The basic tenets of Cicero's exposition are:

Firstly, friendship is an accord of wills, tastes and thoughts. It is a harmonious agreement in all things, divine and human and is accompanied by mutual good will and affection.

Secondly, true friendship is limited to the good. It is founded on virtue and presupposes it. The more virtuous the person, the more capable the person is of friendship.

Thirdly, love is the cause of friendship.

Fourthly, Friends must be truthful with one another, they correct each other. Suspicion has no place in friendship. One never asks a friend to do anything which is wrong.

Friendship must be entered into slowly and should a friend have incorrigible vices, the friendship must be renounced.

Throughout his writings it is possible to see the thinking of Cicero shining through what Augustine says and not a few times he quotes directly from the writings of Cicero. But, after his conversion and particularly after he has studied and reflected on the writings of St John, Augustine goes beyond the thinking of Cicero and brings to his theories aspects which are specifically Christian.

Firstly, Augustine sees friendship as a grace. Friendship comes from God, God is the author and giver of friendship. Augustine says:

There is no true friendship unless You weld it between souls that cleave together by the charity poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit

Conf 5:10

If you love your brother (or sister) whom you see, by that very fact you will also see God, because you will see charity itself and God dwells in the interior.

In ep Jo 17:8

Secondly, Augustine understands that friendship springs from the love of God expressed to us in Christ and, therefore can only be made secure in Christ:

You did not look down on being the friend of the humble and returning the love that was shown to you. For what else is friendship but this? It gets its name from love alone, is faithful only in Christ, and in him alone can it be eternal and happy.

Con Pel 1:1

In the Confessions he writes:

If souls please you, then love them in God because they are mutable in themselves but in him firmly established; without him they would pass and perish.

Conf 4:18

Thirdly, Augustine understands that Christian friendship is transfigured by grace. While the pagan ideal demanded that friends should wish for each other the highest moral good and natural virtue, Christian friends not only wish but also pray for supernatural virtue, spiritual healing and eternal life:

Love your friends in him, and draw as many souls with you to him as you can, saying to them: "In Him let us love"

Conf 4:18

Knowing the limits of human power and resource in the face of human pain, Augustine says:

My words cannot help them; but by praying for them perhaps I will do them some good.

En in Ps 54:8

Fourthly, Augustine understands that friendship will only attain its perfection in heaven, there he says:

We shall offer praise, we shall all be one in Christ, directed toward the one God.

En in Ps 147:28

Augustine also give a greater emphasis to some points which are included in Cicero's thought. Augustine emphasises that affection for a friend is always accompanied by solicitude. In the City of God he writes:

The more numerous are our friends and the more scattered the places they live, the more our fears grow and multiply at the thought that they may have to undergo some of the evils that are so much part of this life.

Civ Dei 19:8

Time and again throughout his long correspondences one sees the evidence of this solicitude which Augustine had for his friends. This solicitude must be accompanied by an appreciation of the ways in which to help friends:

Love is in labour with some, becomes weak with others; strives to edify some, dreads to be a cause of offence to others; stoops to some, before others stands with head erect; is gentle with some and stern to others; an enemy to none, a mother to all.

In cat rudibus 15:23

Augustine saw friendship as a great grace. Not only did it bring the pleasures of human warmth and love, things which Augustine so needed, it also brought a union with and in God. Augustine was acutely aware, after his conversion, when he realised that God was within him and he outside himself, that in the meeting of friends was either the invitation to meet with the indwelling God or the opportunity to bring another to find the indwelling God:

He loves his friend truly who loves God in him, either because God is already in him or in order that he may be in him.

Sermon 361:1

What Augustine realised was that in every friendship there is a third person, namely God. One writer says of this understanding of Augustine:

God is the invisible partner in every relationship, provided he is loved in Himself and in the friend, and in the relationship of love itself: for our relationships with our human brothers (and sisters) are meant to be transparent to the divine image of God's life, and only sin and egoism, those fatal enemies of love and friendship, can make opaque what in itself and to the eyes of wisdom should be translucent.

McEvoy Recherces de theoloie ancienne et medievale LIII (1986)

The recognition of this trinity of love ensures a purity of love, in De Trinitate Augustine writes:

Not that the creature ought not to be loved, but if that love is referred to the Creator then it will not be desire but love. For it is desire when the creature is loved for itself. And then it does not help a man through making use of it but corrupts him in the enjoying of it.. For as you ought to enjoy yourself not in yourself but in Him who made you, so also him whom you love as yourself. Let us enjoy there, both ourselves and our brethren in the Lord.

De Trinitate 9:vii:12

If together with me you hold firmly to these two commandments (love of God and love of neighbour), our friendship will be true and everlasting, and it will unite us not only to one another, but to the Lord himself

Letter 258

With the gift of friendship there are responsibilities. Like Cicero, Augustine believed that friendships should be entered into with caution and reserve. If this is not done the relationship may have a false foundation and may, later, have to be dissolved. Once of friendship is established it should not be put to the test but must be maintained in trust and confidence. Augustine says:

You discern your friend's countenance with your body, and you discern your own faith by means of your mind. But your friend's faith is not appreciated by you if there is in you no reciprocating faith by which you may believe that there is in him what you do not see.

De Fide rerum 1:2

Discernment in friendship is important because we entrust our innermost selves to a friend and the confidence to be able to do that is a mark of true friendship;

We can consider that person to have been accepted by us as a friend with whom we have the courage of sharing our inmost thoughts.

De div quae 83:71

Because of the indwelling of God, Augustine states that when one entrusts something to a friend it is, more importantly, entrusted to God:

Whenever I feel a person burning with Christian charity and love for me has become

my friend, when I entrust any of my plans and thoughts to him, I am entrusting them not to a man, but to Him in whom he abides, so as to be like Him, 'for God is love, and the one who lives in love lives in God."

Letter 73

Augustine many times spoke of the need for truth and frankness in friendships, without these no friendship could be real. Friendship is not simply a human pleasure, it is a way in which friends journey together towards the perfection of God. Therefore it is essential for a true friend not only to want and pray for the moral and spiritual welfare of the other but also to take active steps to help the friend to grow in virtue. Loving correction is, therefore, essential in true friendship:

No one can be truly a friend to another if he is not first of all a friend of the truth. When I speak up for your own good, I will be all the more frank with you the more I am your friend, because I will be all the more a friend the more I am faithful to you.

Letter 155

More than that, the humble acceptance of correction is also a mark of true friendship:

I shall most gratefully receive a rebuke offered in such a friendly way.. If I receive your correction calmly as a medicine, I shall not be pained by it.. . And even though because of a natural or personal weakness I cannot help feeling saddened. . . it is better to put up with the pain while the abscess on the heads is being healed, rather than not be cured so as to avoid the pain.

Letter 73

Augustine understood that if there was not this truth and honesty in a friendship then the basis of the friendship is flawed and no real friendship exists:

I take no pleasure in being thought by my dearest friends to be such as I am not Obviously they do not love me, but another in my name, if they love, not what I am, but what I am not.

Letter 143

Augustine, therefore, condemned flattery. To flatter is to betray. He goes as far as saying that enemies are preferable to flatterers:

Someone hates his enemy and pretends friendship for him; he sees him do something evil and praises him; he wants him to rush into the dangerous ways of his passions from which he will perhaps not return . . . Another sees his friend do something similar and calls him back; if his friend does not hear him he will chastise and rebuke him. Sometimes it comes to this, that we must quarrel with a friend.

In Ep Jo 10:7

Not everyone who spares is a friend, nor is everyone who strikes an enemy. "Better are the wounds of a friend than the proffered kisses of an enemy. (Pr 27:6) Love mingled with severity is better than deceit with indulgence.

Letter 93

In friendship prayer and intercession on behalf of the loved ones is a necessity:

Let us strive, then, with the greatest possible effort to bring to Him those whom we love as ourselves

Letter 155

Frequently in his letters Augustine asks the prayers of his friends:

Surely, you will also remember to pray attentively for me, for I do not wish you, out of regard for the position I occupy, to my own peril, to deprive me of the help I recognise as necessary.

Letter 130

The love which should exist in friendship must be based on:

love which is pure and unselfish.

Letter 155

The characteristic of such love is the willingness to bear one another's burdens. The ability to do this comes as a grace and from the example of the Lord:

Nothing could make us willingly take up such a mighty task as carrying the burdens of others, except it be the consideration of how much the Lord has suffered for us.

De div quae 83

One of the aspects of friendship in which Augustine differs from the classical concept is in the range of friendships. Cicero would take the view that friendship was confined to a small group and certainly, in his younger days, Augustine would have taken a similar line. His conversion and his later responsibilities in the community at Hippo and as bishop gradually changed his view. It is probable that he considered a small group of friends as his intimates but he began to develop a much broader concept. Though his

instinct was for close, intimate friends, he came to understand that familial charity had a greater claim than the joy and blessings of his earlier friendships.

Friendship must not be circumscribed by narrow limits. It embraces all those to whom affection and love are due, even though it goes out more readily to some and turns more hesitantly towards others. Friendship even extends to our enemies, for whom we are also obliged to pray. Therefore, there is no one in the human race to whom love is not owed, if not by reason of mutual affection, at least because we share a common human nature. On the other hand, it is only right that those especially delight us, by whom we are mutually loved in a holy and chaste way.

Letter 130

This gift of love offered to all is in order that they may be drawn to God:

Obtain from God the gift to love one another. Love all men, even your enemies, not because they are your brothers, but that they may be your brothers; that you may at all times be on fire with brotherly love, either toward him who has become your brother, or toward your enemy, that, by being loved, he may be your brother. Whenever you love a brother you love a friend. Now he is with you, now he is knit with you in unity. . If a man is not yet your brother, love him to this end, that he may be your brother. In this way, all your love is brotherly love, toward Christians, towards all His members.

In Ep Jo 10:7

In reaching out to make friends by drawing others to Christ, we diminish evil and build up community:

For if your enemy died, you lost an enemy but you did not find a friend. If however his wickedness died, then you lost an enemy and gained a friend.

Sermon 61

Here we see that longing which so marked the life of Augustine, his longing for unity and harmony. He believed this so deeply that he wondered if the refusal of the unity which Christ came to establish was the sin against the Holy Spirit:

And perhaps this is the sin against the Holy Spirit: through malice and hatred to attack fraternal charity after having received the grace of the Holy Spirit, which sin the Lord says will be forgiven neither here nor hereafter.

Sermon 23

Preparing these two papers has been a challenge but also a joy. I have known of

Augustine since I was child and over the years been drawn to him. It is only latterly, however, that I feel that I have moved from knowing of him to the beginnings of what I hope is knowing him. What have I found? I have certainly found the awesome intellect and the powerful energy depicted in the statue in St Peter's. In this brief survey of the complexity of Augustine's thought on friendship I have found a man who over the centuries still speaks with power in our own day when friendships and relationships are all too transitory and superficial. I find a man who speaks to the church of our need to build genuine community based on familial love and friendship where all are valued and respected. I find a bishop who is aware of the presence of God in his people and respects that God within them.

Most importantly for me, however, I have found a man with a passion, a genius for love, a touching vulnerability. I have found someone who is a spiritual father, a loved brother and, please God, a good friend.

In all the words and ideas perhaps it can be summed up in that wonderful line from the Rule, a great synthesis of what Augustine believes:

My dear brothers and sisters, let us be of one mind and one heart on the way to God.

Rule 1:2

Nigel Bavidge