

The scope and quantity of the works of St Augustine have placed him within parameters that make him a central figure in western thought, and his teachings, a vade mecum in ecclesiastical and secular circles. He occupies a central place in the development of theology and the evolution of philosophical thought. During the transition from paganism to the new religion (Christianity), the weight of the conflict which pressed upon the souls of Christian believers is profoundly expressed in the person and writings of Augustine. In fact, to have understood the spirit in which Augustine wrote and resolved conflicts is to penetrate in a mysterious way the struggles of Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, Jerome, among others. The present work on schedule on AUGUSTINE THROUGH THE AGES: ECHOES OF FAITH AND REASON is yet another attempt by the Friars and friends of the Province of Saint Augustine of Nigeria, the Saint's African spiritual sons to keep the fascination of St. Augustine alive and attractive even in modern time - Prof. KANU, I. Anthony, O.S.A

AUGUSTINE THROUGH THE AGES

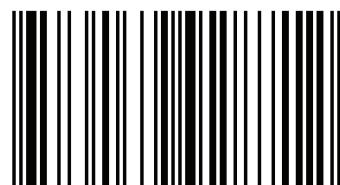


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AUGUSTINE THROUGH THE AGES: Echoes of Faith and Reason

In celebration of the 80th Anniversary of the Order of Saint Augustine in Nigeria: 1938-2018

Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony (Ed.)
Chabi Kolawole (Ed.)



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REDISCOVERING THE AUGUSTINIAN IDENTITY

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Introduction

Generally, spiritual traditions are revitalised when their contents are examined in the light of new needs and concerns emerging from the concrete situations in people's lives. But along with this contextualisation, there is a need for a thorough renewal of the original inspiration that brought members together. This finds perfect expression the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Religious life which suggested a return "*to the primitive inspiration of institutes, and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time*".¹ The Order of Saint Augustine, attentive to this exhortation, constantly reflects on the ways and means of Rediscovering Augustinian Identity in our life together and our service to others. This paper aims at indicating some guidelines of reflection that could help us in the rediscovery.

In the first place, to adequately investigate a matter, it's important to ask a number of questions about the issue under consideration. Thus following the ways of the Latin thinkers of old, I'm first of all going to ask a question about the *quid?* i.e. what really is the Augustinian Identity? And then I will examine the *unde?* Meaning the place where this identity shows forth. Once I consider those

*This article is a slight modified version of a paper I presented at the African Federation of Augustinians (AFA) held in Cotonou (Benin Republic) 2nd-6th February 2015.

¹ *Perfectae caritatis* 2.

two aspects, I will then suggest some approaches to the important and urgent discovery of the very Identity that is ours.

1. The Augustinian Identity: What does it entail?

Our identity is basically the ideal of life we have freely chosen to live, and thus it is our Spirituality actually lived out. But since there is much ambiguity and confusion around this concept of Spirituality, there is a need to shed some light on it from the Christian point of view before we get down to the specific dimension of the Augustinian ways.

Christian spirituality could be defined as the *“art of living the Gospel and conforming oneself to the teachings of Jesus Christ under the action of the Holy Spirit.”* In a narrower way, A. F. Vermeulen defines spirituality as *“being focus on what give substance to my life”*.² It could also be understood as a state of mind that provides a person’s values and influences, how he/she lives and exercises judgment in such things as deciding between right and wrong. It is such a personal thing that it can be considered part of one’s identity. Going by Vermeulen’s definition, the focussing on the essential without embracing with equal intensity all the values of the Gospel, justifies the fact that a selection of biblical themes and values are made which give rise to particular spiritualities, like the spirituality of the hospitality and the spirituality of compassion. Religious congregations and people organize themselves around the life style of a holy person, as found in the radical poverty of Francis of Assisi.

² Ad. F. Vermeulen, *Augustinian Spirituality, A Source of fruitful Apostolate*, in J. Rotelle (ed.), *Augustinian Spirituality and the Charism of the Augustinians*, Augustinian Press, Villanova 1995, 200.

From the foregoing, we can say that the spiritual identity of a religious order is usually acquired from that aspect of the Christian message which strongly influenced the formation of its founder's spirituality. Augustinian spirituality is the particular spirituality with two sources separated by a time period of some eight hundred years:

- a. Augustine's inspiration rooted in the "*one mind and one heart*" of the Jerusalem community portrayed in the *Acts of the Apostles*³ and
- b. the ecclesial vision of apostolic fraternity when the Order of St. Augustine was formed by the gathering of hermit communities in 1244 and 1256 in the historical context of the mendicant Orders.⁴ The community of brothers living in oneness of heart and mind in their search for God, and ready to share in the mission of Church through their dedicated service. That is our identity.

Augustine developed his spirituality in an age of crisis and rapid changes⁵; Think of the sack of Rome and subsequent changes in the Roman world. This makes his spirituality, matched with the tradition our Order, all the more relevant today. Despite all the tremendous turmoil of that age of the deterioration of a civilization, Christianity was growing in influence through the writings of the Church Fathers, such as our Holy Father Augustine. This is a clear indication that by faithfully clinging to

³ Acts 4, 32-36.

⁴ In modern Augustinian scholarship on the history of the Order, a very good reading is that of L. Marin De San Martin, OSA, *The Augustinians. Origins and Spirituality*, Institutum Historicum Augustinianum, Roma 2013.

⁵ Cf. C. T. Clark, *Augustinian Spirituality*, in *Augustinian studies* 15 (1985), 84.

our ideals expressed in the pillars of our Spirituality *viz.* Interiority, Community, Service to the Church,⁶ we can bring about great renewal in our society.

2. Where and how does our Identity manifest itself?

Most importantly, our identity shows forth in that which reveals our peculiarity and differentiates us from other ways of life. Thus, I wish to point out that Augustinian spirituality differs from other spiritualities in three distinct ways which I am going to list below and examine:

- a. Firstly, rather than being based on a set of previously ascertained principles or milestones, Augustinian spirituality is based on a journey, a lived experience of search and discovery. Interiority is the main word that leads in this journey.
- b. Secondly, the Augustinian model is based on community - rather than the strictly personal set of values and judgments often found amongst other spiritualities.
- c. Thirdly, Augustinian spirituality is not passive or meditative, but a call to action. Augustine preached that it is through this spiritual communion of living our faith through ministry that we come to find God.⁷ So Augustinians understand this action as Service to the Church in any possible capacity and Evangelisation.

⁶ Interiority, Community and Service to the Church and Evangelisation are the traditionally known pillars of our Spirituality, in the Luis Marin's above-mentioned work he suggests, Interiority, Community, Poverty and Ecclesiality. But nothing changes substantially.

⁷ Cf. S. Loughland, *Augustinian Spirituality*, in *Friends of St. Augustine - Prayer Resource Guide*, March 2014, 3-4.

The journey to deep spiritual understanding is a lifelong process, and paradoxically both inherently simple and complicated. As such, Augustinian spirituality differs from those which espouse clear a process and ritual as the source of understanding - Augustinian spirituality is a journey, a constant search for truth. This search starts from the interior of each person. Augustine himself was anguished during his student years at Carthage, in search of this truth. He journeyed through interior instability until when he eventually was able to recognise the voice of God within and to say in humility and with gratitude: "*You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they rest in you*".⁸ So the journey is a route toward a resting place which Augustine indicates as God himself who made us.

Concerning the second point of our peculiarity, we realise that this journey towards rest is also a journey carried out from within a community and its shared experiences. We rightly think of spirituality as inherently personal, yet the Augustinian experience is one based on *communio* with those united with us as members in the body of Christ, the Church. Attention to others is very important. As Augustine writes in *The City of God*:

No one should spend so much time in contemplation that they ignore the needs of a neighbour, nor be so absorbed in action that they feel no need for contemplation of God. What should draw us to contemplation is not escape or laziness, but the opportunity to search for and discover truth, knowing

⁸ Aug., *conf.* I, 1, 1 (CCL 27, 1): "*Fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te*".

that as we make progress in this search we share our discoveries with others.⁹

In this way, we come to realise that in Augustine's eyes, spirituality is not meant to be an isolated, personal journey but a shared experience, where sharing and mutuality in faith and love provides the foundation for deeper understanding. To express the strength of communion with others in spiritual life, Augustine said in his *Letter 73 to Jerome*:

I admit that I find it easy to abandon my whole self to the love of them [his friends], especially when I am wearied by the scandals of the world, and I find rest in that love without any worry. I, of course, feel that God is in that person to whom I abandon myself with security and in whom I find rest in security. And in that security I do not at all fear that incertitude of tomorrow stemming from the human fragility that I lamented above. For, when I perceive that a man is aflame with Christian love and has become my loyal friend with that love, whatever of my plans and thoughts I entrust to him I do not entrust to a human being, but to him in whom he remains so that he is such a person.¹⁰

⁹ Id., *ciu.* XIX, 19 (CCL 48, 686): "*Nec sic esse quisque debet otiosus, ut in eodem otio utilitatem non cogitet proximi, nec sic actuosus, ut contemplationem non requirat Dei. In otio non iners vacatio delectare debet, sed aut inquisitio aut inventio veritatis, ut in ea quisque proficiat et quod invenerit ne alteri inuideat*".

¹⁰ Id., *ep.* 73, 10 (CSEL 34,2,277): "*In quorum ego caritatem, fateor, facile me totum proicio praesertim fatigatum scandalis saeculi et in ea sine ulla sollicitudine requiesco. Deum quippe illic esse sentio, in quem me securus proicio et in quo securus requiesco. Nec in hac mea securitate crastinum illud humanae fragilitatis incertum, de quo superius gemui, omnino formido cum enim hominem christiana caritate flagrantem eaque mihi fidelem amicum factum esse sentio, quicquid ei consiliorum*

The third and last way in which Augustinian spirituality differs from spirituality in general is in its active rather than passive nature. While spirituality is often considered psychological, cerebral, pondering or meditative, Augustinian spirituality is a call to action. Augustine promoted Matthew 25 as the basis for social justice ministry (or more accurately, ministry and service), but made a point of acknowledging its focus on action: Augustine says in a sermon:

People will not be invited to receive the kingdom prepared for them because they have lived chaste lives...have not practiced deceit or oppressed the poor...have not trespassed on the rights of others or misled them by taking a false oath. It is not this that Christ says but 'receive the kingdom because I was hungry and you gave me to eat.' How greatly this outweighs all the rest. For on every other matter the Lord is silent. He mentions this alone.¹¹

This is what appeals most to me in Augustinian spirituality is that it is not removed from reality, but is ingrained in it. For want of a better phrase, it's not afraid to get its hands dirty: *"Each of you expects to receive Christ when you meet him in heaven. Take care of*

meorum cogitationumque committo, non homini committo sed illi, in quo manet, ut talis sit".

¹¹ Id., *Sermon 389*, 5 (RB 58 (1948), 50): *"Forte enim casti erant, non fraudatores, non ebriosi, abstinentes se ab operibus malis. Si hoc non adderent, steriles remanerent ... Verumtamen etiam ipsis non ait: Venite, percipite regnum: caste enim vixistis, nulli fraudem fecistis, neminem pauperem oppressistis, limitem nullis invasistis, neminem iurando fefellistis. Non dixit haec, sed: Percipite regnum. Quare? Esurivi enim et dedistis mihi manducare. Quanto hoc excellit, quando cetera tacuit et hoc solum Dominus nominavit!"*.

Christ now as he lies by the roadside; take care of Christ who hungers, freezes, is destitute and a stranger.”¹²

One cannot deny the fundamental good in Augustine’s overwhelming love for his fellow man “*we are moved to intervene out of love for humankind*”. Indeed he sold the sacred vessels of his Hippo church to take care of the poor, and lived repeating that “*not giving to the needy what is superfluous for you is a sort of theft*.”¹³ This stands as evidence for the Augustinian model of action - to sit passively in the face of adversity is not encouraged but in fact is to be discouraged. Our is a spirituality that evolves, grows and solidifies through action — demonstrating justice and love for our neighbours and consequently demonstrating love for God.

Thus, Augustinian spirituality appeals to me for three reasons, each of which separates it from other spiritualities: in its ongoing, lifelong journey mirroring Augustine’s life; in its foundation on community; and finally, in its call to action, service to the Church and Evangelisation. We are never entirely sure of how to find God, and that is part of the divine mystery. But we grow closer to this mystery through devoted searching, demonstrating love for our fellow human beings, and action in showing charity, love, humility and justice in our world.

¹² Id., *Ibid.* 25, 8 (CCL 41, 339): “*Expectat unusquisque uestrum suscipere Christum sedentem in caelo. Attendite illum iacentem sub porticu, attendite esurientem, attendite frigus patientem, attendite egenum, attendite peregrinum*”.

¹³ Id., *Ibid.* 206, 2 (PL 38, 1041): “*Quando sentit simile esse fraudi, si superflua sua non tribuerit indigenti*”.

3. How do we revitalise the priceless Heritage?

Before we seek ways and means to rediscover our identity, it is good that we should reflect on what drew each and everyone to the life together as Augustinians. I think generally, the appeal of an order's spirituality is often what attracts a person to join it. Those who join an order, however, will still retain their own individual spirituality, and there needs to be compatibility between the individual's spirituality and the spirituality which is common to the group; otherwise, the person may become a misfit or even a disaster in the order.

So, I think the very first thing we need to do is to identify who we really are as individuals and see our stands as Christians, our relationship with Christ. It is important that each person discover his or her spirituality to be able to reconcile it to that of the fraternity we form. Otherwise, we could run the risk of labouring in vain thinking of constructing a life together, because it will only exist in appearance as long as the individual has not yet returned to himself. Augustine actually developed a theology of the "*cor*" as the desirous centre of human identity¹⁴. That is why a return to the heart is urgent if we are to discover our personal and collective identity as Augustinians. And here Augustine's exhortation in the various passages finds all its weight: "*Enter into your heart, and from there rise up to God. Indeed, you are much closer to God once you enter into your heart*"¹⁵

¹⁴ P. T. Sanlon, *Augustine's Theology of Preaching*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2014, 43.

¹⁵ Aug., s. 311, 13 ; Cf. *vera rel.* 39,72 ; *Sol.* 1,9,16, *Conf.* 10, 17, s. 102, 2, *trin.*, 8, 7.11 , s. 53, 15. Etc.

The much spoken of “Interiority” that is a pillar of our spirituality as an Order, functions first of all for the individual and when we join the resources of our interior lives together, we have something unique to offer as a Community, as an Order. So, it is through this movement oscillating between the inner self and others, this combination of introspection and sharing the results of such an introspection with others that we gain a deeper understanding of how it is that we are to love God and our neighbours more earnestly and serve them as we would serve Christ if we were to meet as such.

Augustine converted to the Christian way of life as a mature adult and this experience influenced him; it helped him to identify with and be compassionate towards other people struggling to live Christian lives. He has even been referred to as a patron for struggling Christians. By rediscovering our Identity, we shall surely become more compassionate towards those we minister to and show forth a unique trait of who really are.

The ideal and the promotion of community reach their highest point in the development of genuine friendship. Love of neighbour is an act of benevolence and asks for no response except possibly gratitude, whereas friendship consists in loving and being loved in return. Relationships that do not have the same depth of loyalty and familiarity that friendship has, still have great value and must be developed in any effort to promote community. Augustine had a very high regard for friendships, as the following statement of his suggests:

Good human beings seem even in this life to provide no small consolation. For, if poverty pinches, if grief saddens, if bodily pain disturbs, if exile discourages, if any other disaster torments, provided there are present

human beings who not only know how to rejoice with those in joy, but also to weep with those who weep (*Rom* 12:15) and can speak and converse in a helpful way, those rough spots are smoothed, the heavy burdens are lightened, and adversity is overcome. But he who by his Spirit makes them good does all this in them and through them. If, on the one hand, riches abound, no death occurs, bodily health is present, and one lives in a country safe from attack, but evil beings also dwell there among whom there is no one who can be trusted, no one from whom one does not suffer and fear deceit, fraud, anger, quarrels and attacks, are not those former things bitter and hard without anything joyful or pleasant in them? Thus, in no human affairs is anything enjoyable to a human being without a friend.¹⁶

Individuals in a family or a parish community influenced by the Augustinian spirituality will be striving for equality of all and, instead of looking after only their own individual needs and interests, they will also promote the common good. People will listen to each other and share ideas – even spiritual insights. Authority will not be seen as an exercise in power but as one of

¹⁶ Aug., *ep.* 130, 4 (CSEL 44, 43-44): “*Homines autem boni videntur etiam in hac vita praestare non parva solatia. Nam si paupertas angit, si luctus moestificat, si dolor corporis inquietat, si contristat exsilium, si ulla calamitas alia vexat, adsint boni homines qui non solum gaudere cum gaudentibus, verum etiam flere cum flentibus non norunt, et salubriter alloqui et colloqui sciunt; plurimum illa aspera leniuntur, relevantur gravia, superantur adversa. Sed ille hoc in eis et per eos agit, qui spiritu suo bonos fecit. E contra, si divitiae circumfluant, nulla orbitas accadat, adsit sanitas carnis, incolumi habitetur in patria, et cohabitent mali homines, in quibus nemo sit cui fides habeatur, a quo non dolus, fraus, irae, discordiae, insidiae timeantur, atque sustineantur; nonne illa omnia fiunt amara et dura, nec aliquid laetum vel dulce est in eis? Ita in quibuslibet rebus humanis nihil est homini amicum sine homine amico*”.

service to the group. Obedience and a mutual willingness to listen will go hand in hand and be acts of caring. In this way, the community members become supportive of each other and become a caring people. Their behaviour can also imply a kind of protest against greed and individualism. They express a form of social criticism by following another path and presenting an alternative way: living as a Christian community. They will be honouring and serving God in each other. Ours is the duty to show people this way of life by living according to what we believe.

Conclusion

At this point, we need to yield to the St Augustine's exhortation with which I opened this paper. Let's not be contented with what we think we have achieved if really we intend to rediscover that which has been under some shadow as regards our Identity. According to Our Holy Father, woe betides they who think they have done enough.

But if we have actually not done much, or that we have destroyed what the Lord has put into our hands and so we are discouraged, the same Patron saint of struggling Christians tells us that we can resurrect. We can come back to life if we agree to let Lord bring us back.

The last thing I'd like to bring in to close this paper is that the rediscovery of our Identity could also come through a new appraisal of Our Augustinian Saints. As Fr. Luis Marin rightly observes that the spirituality of the Order of Saint Augustine shines forth in its saints.¹⁷ A deeper knowledge of the lives and

¹⁷ L. Marin, *The Augustinians*, 235.

teaching of our saints, along with the promotion of devotion to them could greatly contribute to our renewal. Many of them are only known by name and little is known about the example of virtue they left for us.¹⁸ A reconsideration of the icons of holiness and examples of perseverance would be of help to us.

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¹⁸ There are 22 saints belonging to the Augustinian Family in the Order's liturgical calendar, in addition to numerous blessed and venerable. Cf. F. Rojo Martinez, *La seduccion de Dios. Perfiles de hagiografia agustiniana*, Pubblicazioni Agostiniane, Roma, 2012.