

Friends Forever: St. Augustine, Friendship, and Catholic Evangelism

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This paper was written in preparation for a talk at the 2006 Saint Benedict Center Conference. The conference's theme was "Catholic Friends and Family: Christening Society." The conference was intended to be "A frank series of practical and doctrinal talks touching upon the proper Catholic living of parenthood, childhood, masculinity, femininity, and the important bond of friendship as necessary goods to be cultivated and as means to evangelizing our upside-down culture."

***Dedication —
In gratitude and friendship
to Monsignor A.B.C.,
who did a friendly thing
when he baptized me.***

Imagine that, a long time ago, you were a missionary in a foreign country. Let's say you were a Frenchman who came here with the North America Martyrs. You, like St. Jean de Brebeuf and St. Isaac Jogues, wanted to save the souls of the Hurons and Iroquois. Upon arriving here, you had to learn their language, live with them, eat their food, and adjust to their ways. At a certain point, you could communicate and, by sharing their joys, sorrows, and hardships, you could speak openly with them because some trust had been established. However, you were still mistrusted by many of them and lived in fear of your life because these superstitious and warlike people tended to blame you for whatever went wrong.

Before the Huron nation perished, you were instrumental in its near total conversion.

Now imagine that you are yourself. You are (*fill in the blank*), a business man, farmer, construction worker, housewife, teacher, or lawyer. You want to imitate the North American martyrs by helping to save souls, but you don't know how. If only you had the opportunities they did, you think, you may be able to accomplish *just some* of what they were able to do, with the help of God. The irony is that, in your daily life, there are probably many souls who need evangelizing. That is, there are many non-, ex-, or bad Catholics among whom you live, whose language you know, whose food and customs are familiar to you because they are yours, too. You

think you lack the advantages of the North American Martyrs, but what you really lack (besides, perhaps, their sanctity) are their numerous *disadvantages*.

What I hope to accomplish in this effort is to show that a certain outlook on social bonds — in this case, friendship — can give us all the opportunities we need, with the help of grace, to be *perpetual* missionaries — even at times, quite literally, in the comfort of our own homes. It is not a new apostolate, program, or agenda I am propounding. *What I am proposing is that friendship itself, lived according to the Christian ideal, is an evangelical tool, because it helps the Church in her work of saving souls.*

The conference theme this year has a verbose explanatory subtitle¹ which refers to social bonds, including friendship, as “necessary goods to be cultivated and as means to evangelizing our upside-down culture.” Friendship, seen in this light, is something sanctifying, both for you and for your friend, whether that friend be holier than you, less holy than you, or whether he be a mere acquaintance who is at present an unbeliever. By friendship, God sanctifies *you* — that is why it is a “necessary good to be cultivated” — and, by friendship, God *uses* you to sanctify others — that is why it is a “means to evangelizing our upside-down culture.”

The reason that I focus on St. Augustine is not that he invented the notion of Christian friendship. It is because he had a particularly cultivated outlook on it which benefited from the classical Roman view of friendship, from his profound study of the Scriptures and Christian Tradition, and also from the experiences of his long and saintly life as a student, teacher, monk, priest, and bishop. Being a man particularly sensitive to friends and friendship throughout his whole life, and being profoundly introspective and insightful, his considerations on the matter are both deep and practical.²

The Classical Notions of Friendship

In addition to the Gospels and other canonical Scriptures, in the background of St. Augustine’s thought on friendship are the doctrines of the Roman orator and Stoic philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero.³ Cicero put down his ideas on the subject in his *de Amicitia*, (*On Friendship*). The work is not original in its ideas, nor was it intended to be. It was an attempt by a great

1 For which I must take the blame.

2 Many saints wrote on the subject, including St. Francis de Sales, in his *Introduction to a Devout Life*, St. Aelred of Rievaulx, in *On Spiritual Friendship*, and St. Thomas, who comments on it in the *Summa Theologiae* under the virtue of Charity.

3 He lived from 106 B.C. to 43 B.C.

philosopher to set down the common teaching of those who had gone before him. Sister Marie Aquinas MacNamara, O.P., gives us a summary of Cicero's ideal in her beautiful book, *Friends and Friendship for Saint Augustine*, which is the main source I have drawn from in preparing this paper.

Here is Sister Marie Aquinas' resume of Cicero's ideas:

"Cicero defined friendship as an accord of wills, tastes, and thoughts, as a harmonious agreement in all matters, divine and human, accompanied by mutual goodwill and affection. True friendship is limited to the good, for friendship is founded on virtue and presupposes it. For him, the good or virtuous man is one of strong character, just and generous, loyal, upright, free from passion and insolence. [These are attributes of the Stoic ideal.] The more a man possesses these qualities, the more virtuous he is, the more capable of friendship. Friendship is born when such a person finds another whose habits and character are in agreement with his own, for friendship springs up naturally when two virtuous persons come in contact. Nothing is more lovable than virtue; nothing calls forth a more sympathetic response. Friendship of this type is necessarily rare and limited to a small circle.

"For Cicero, the mutual goodwill and affection which are a part of the harmonious agreement in friendship are essentially altruistic [that is, disinterested and not self-seeking]. Contrary to the Epicureans [the philosophical opponents of the Stoics], who claimed that friendship reposed in egotistical interests, he holds that affection is given to another purely for himself and independently of any personal satisfaction. Utility may be present, but as a result, not as a cause. Love is the cause.

"With regard to reciprocity in friendship, Cicero disagrees with those who teach that one's attitude toward his friend should correspond exactly to his friend's affection for him. Such a viewpoint is opposed to what is essential in friendship.

"Among the duties of friendship which he mentions, special stress is given to the following: friends must always be truthful with one another, for flattery and pretense destroy friendship. One must correct a friend when necessary; if one permits another to continue in wrongdoing, he is not a friend. Suspicion has no place in friendship, for fidelity is its foundation. Friendship's law is never to ask a friend to do something wrong.

“Because friendship engages one’s whole self, it must be entered into slowly, lest affections bestowed too quickly give way to enmities. If one discovers that his friend has incorrigible vices, he must renounce his friendship with him.

“Cicero distinguished common, ordinary friendship from the friendship of the virtuous. A union based on similar interests for the pleasure of benefit derived brings only an exterior delight which is not so genuine as the friendship based on mutual respect and love for the inner goodness of one another. [St. Thomas would call the former a “love of concupiscence” as distinguished from a “love of benevolence.”⁴] Those who prefer things other than virtue – riches, power, honors – are not capable of true friendship. For the most part, Cicero spoke of *vera et perfecta amicitia* [true and perfect friendship], considering it as one of life’s greatest treasures. He echoes Ennius’s⁵ thought that life is not livable without a friend, asking what could be sweeter than to talk to a friend, as to oneself. Life without friendship is like a world without sun, for it loses all charm without affection and benevolence. As an illustration of his theory of perfect friendship Cicero chose Scipio⁶ and Laelius.⁷ Between these two men there was mutual regard for inherent excellence. Constant association fostered their good will toward each other and engendered loyalty, sympathy and stability. They were in complete agreement in all matters and had a community of interests. Home, food, travel, periods of study and leisure were shared by them.”⁸

The reader will probably agree with Sister Marie Aquinas in her observation that “this conception [of friendship] was a much more intense one than ours.”⁹ As “intense” as it was, it was also considered normative for a virtuous man. For our present study, the importance of this Ciceronian conception of friendship is that it was *the Roman conception* dominant at the time of St. Augustine. Among the lettered, Cicero was still widely read and his synthesis of what other philosophers had taught on the subject was considered integral to an ethical Roman life. As Cicero was a great rhetorician whose works were studied by all those who pursued that art, and as

4 Summa Theologiae IIa IIae Q. 23, A. 1.

5 Quintus Ennius (239 - 169 BC), the Roman poet.

6 *Scipio Africanus Major*, in full Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus Roman general noted for his victory over the Carthaginian leader Hannibal in the great Battle of Zama (202 BC), ending the Second Punic War. For his victory he won the surname Africanus (201 BC).

7 Gaius Laelius (died after 160 BC,) Roman general and politician who contributed to Roman victory during the Second Punic War (218–201) between Rome and Carthage.

8 MacNamara, O.P., Sister Marie Aquinas, *Friends and Friendship for St. Augustine*, (Staten Island: Alba House, 1964), pp. 21-23. I have taken the liberty to remove all of her copious footnotes to Cicero’s *de Amicitia*.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

the rhetorician was a respected figure still in St. Augustine's day,¹⁰ Cicero's ideas were ingrained in the fabric of the Empire. This is noteworthy considering St. Augustine lived almost four centuries after Cicero's death.

Cicero's noble and virtuous view of friendship was, we shall see, the natural foundation upon which grace would later build, both in St. Augustine's personal life, and in his philosophy. For his personal life, it was his embracing and generous capacity for friends and friendship that opened him to the love of God. For his philosophy, the classical Roman view of friendship provided an ethical framework upon which the Doctor of the Church could build a supernatural edifice of theology, just as the fathers could "baptize" the philosophy of Plato, or St. Thomas could christen the moderate realism of Aristotle.

Soon, we shall see St. Augustine build upon the basic Ciceronian definition of friendship, making it fully Christian, so it is worth putting it across here: "agreement on things human and divine combined with good will and love."

St. Augustine's Disposition toward Friendship.

By his temperament, his upbringing, even his ethnic roots, Aurelius Augustinus was well disposed to friendships, both good ones and bad ones. The Roman North Africa of his day was a combination of three cultures: the Roman, the Phoenician, and the Berber. While the first of the three is known to be a restrained sort of character, the ancient African races added their imagination, sensitiveness, mystical bent of mind, fieriness, stubbornness, and passionate, often violent temperaments to the mix.¹¹ They were very social creatures who engaged in lively conversation and wanted to convince others of their convictions.

The German Catholic historian, Hefele, "remarked that there was a definite tendency toward sociability and friendship was characteristic of Saint Augustine's age."¹² This was so, he says, because in the days of the Empire, politics was in the hands of the monarch, and what the

10 Of course, St. Augustine was a rhetorician himself. It is believed by some that it was his venal pursuit of a good name that led him to this career — all the more proof of the importance attached to the rhetorician.

11 Sister Marie Aquinas, pp. 17-18. Regarding this fiery temperament, we can consider what some commentators on the *Rule* of St. Augustine have mentioned in regard to the passage on table readings: "At table listen quietly and in silence to that which according to custom is read to you until you rise from the meal so that not only your bodies may be refreshed with food, but your minds also may be strengthened with the word of God." It is said that, when someone disagreed with an author's thoughts, verbal eruptions could come from the monks, interrupting the reader and causing great disorder. This was, according to these commentators, something St. Augustine wished to discipline.

12 Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 20.

people could not have by way of political involvement they made up for in their social lives: in their families, in their friendships, and (lamentably) in the macabre and debauched public spectacles the Emperor provided them by way of the games: “bread and circuses.”

In addition to the ethnic and political considerations, one factor predisposing our saint for friendship was his family setting, which did much to incline him toward affability, tenderness, and sensitivity to others. St. Monica, a generous and kind soul, imbued such traits in her son.

Sister Marie Aquinas cites one of our saint’s biographers, Bardy, writing of “his gift of universal sympathy which he possessed to an eminent degree; his mind is vast enough to understand all, his heart large enough to love all.”¹³ This special genius of the African Father for friendship has been noted by many of his biographers.¹⁴

In his *Confessions*, he himself painted a sweet and colorful picture of friendship, showing what an attraction it held for him. Friends could “talk and laugh and do each other kindnesses; read pleasant books together, pass from lightest jesting to talk of the deepest things and back again; differ without rancour, as a man might differ with himself, and when most rarely dissension arose find our normal agreement all the sweeter for it; teach each other or learn from each other; be impatient for the return of the absent, and welcome them with joy in their home-coming; these and such like things proceeding from our hearts as we gave affection and received it back, and shown by face, by voice, by the eyes, and a thousand other pleasing ways, kindled a flame which fused our very souls and of many made us one. This is what men value in friends...”¹⁵

Bad Friendships

This genius which seemed natural to Augustine was something that could be and was easily corrupted. As he himself said, “The bond of human friendship has a sweetness of its own, binding many souls together as one. *Yet because of these values, sin is committed, because we have an inordinate preference for these goods of a lower order and neglect the better and the higher good.*”¹⁶

13 Ibid., p. 21.

14 Ibid., p. 20.

15 *Conf.*, IV, 13-14, cited in Ibid., p. 58.

16 *Conf.*, Book II, Chapter V, translation by Albert C. Outler, Ph.D., D.D., http://www.ccel.org/a/augustine/confessions/confessions_enchiridion.txt, emphasis mine. (Unless citations come from Sister Marie Aquinas, all references to the *Confessions* are from this translation.)

Those familiar with the *Confessions* will remember, perhaps smilingly, the mischievous adventure of the stolen pears related in Book Two. Succumbing to peer pressure, the young Augustine, with some other neighborhood rascals, stole pears from a neighbor's farm only for the perverse pleasure of the theft. St. Augustine's notes that the fruit "was not particularly tempting either to look at or to taste... . Our only pleasure in doing it was that it was forbidden... Now — as I think back on the state of my mind then — *I am altogether certain that I would not have done it alone.* [Note this: It was friendship, false friendship, that led him to do it.] Perhaps then what I really loved was the companionship of those with whom I did it.... 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."¹⁷

He also admitted that, later in life, it was friendship that kept him in the grips of the Manichean sect.

Of course, the most infamous friendship of his life was his lustful liaison with the mother of Adeodatus, the woman from a lower class, whom St. Augustine cohabited with from his sixteenth to about his twenty-sixth year, whose name we do not know. She was not Augustine's only paramour.

Writing as a bishop, he could recall that, in his youth, "My one delight was to love and to be loved."¹⁸ The devil can evidently seize on such a delight!

Development of Friendships

Even before his conversion, when he did not enjoy what he would later call "true friendship," St. Augustine learned, through his genuine love of others, to go outside of himself, to love another *for the sake of another* and not only for the sake of the pleasure he derived from that person. This "love of benevolence," which far exceeds the "love of concupiscence" is what would prepare his heart for the love of God. As Sister Marie Aquinas puts it, "There is little doubt that this strong sentiment of friendship, which escaped Augustine's basic tendency toward egoism, was what later made it possible for him to become completely absorbed by the love of God."¹⁹

In Book Four of the *Confessions*, Augustine writes of a childhood friend with whom he renewed his acquaintance when he became a teacher of rhetoric in his home town of Tagaste.

17 Ibid, Book II, Chapter IV.

18 Ibid. II, 2, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 59.

19 Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 79.

Augustine was about 21 years old when the two renewed their association. This unnamed friend shared an interest in intellectual pursuits with our subject, and came to follow his lead in all things, including his lately-embraced attachment to the Manichean heresy.

“But he was not then my friend, nor indeed ever became my friend, in the true sense of the term; for there is no true friendship save between those thou dost bind together and who cleave to thee by that love which is ‘shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us.’ Still, it was a sweet friendship, being ripened by the zeal of common studies. Moreover, I had turned him away from the true Faith — which he had not soundly and thoroughly mastered as a youth — and turned him toward those superstitious and harmful fables which my mother mourned in me.”²⁰

Later, this friend fell ill and was baptized while unconscious. When the sick young man woke up, the unbelieving Augustine began to mock his baptism, thinking that the friend would join him in his anti-Catholic jocosity. On the contrary, having corresponded with the grace of baptism, the young man was not amused:

“But he recoiled from me, *as if I were his enemy*, and, with a remarkable and unexpected freedom, he admonished me that, if I desired to continue *as his friend*, I must cease to say such things. Confounded and confused, I concealed my feelings till he should get well and his health recover enough to allow me to deal with him as I wished. But he was snatched away from my madness, that with thee he might be preserved for my consolation. A few days after, during my absence, the fever returned and he died.”²¹

Note the sensitivity expressed in the use of the words “friend” and “enemy.” Perhaps the strength of these words is lost on us today. It may help to know that the Latin *amicus* (friend) comes from the word *amare* (to love). A friend is a “loved one.” St. Augustine tells us of this connection when he says, “Friendship is the return of love which another has offered; it is nothing other than love from which it draw its name... .”²² Similarly, enemy (*inimicus*), is literally one “not loved.” Our Doctor would later identify this benevolent love of friendship with the theological virtue of Charity (more commonly rendered *caritas* in Latin, not *amor*).

20 *Conf*, Book IV, Chapter IV. The friend, like Augustine, had not been baptized as an infant. The deferring of baptism, both for infants and for adult catechumens, was an abuse the Doctor would later address in his preaching.

21 *Ibid*.

22 *Contra duas epist. Pelag.* I, 1, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 221.

Writing about twenty-two years later as a bishop, St. Augustine recalled the terrible agony that the loss of this friend caused him. The extremity of this despondency may surprise us: “My heart was utterly darkened by this sorrow and everywhere I looked I saw death. My native place was a torture room to me and my father’s house a strange unhappiness. And all the things I had done with him — now that he was gone — became a frightful torment. My eyes sought him everywhere, but they did not see him; and I hated all places because he was not in them... Nothing but tears were sweet to me and they took my friend’s place in my heart’s desire.”²³

Much later, in his *Retractions*, the aged shepherd faulted himself for his youthful emotion about this episode. Regardless, the whole affair tells us a lot about Augustine as a friend. He loved this man for himself, even if the love were not only purely natural, but very sentimental at that. He had not been transformed by grace yet, and his affections were as yet quite uncontrolled. Later, when relating the death of St. Monica, his manner of expression is comparatively Stoic in its restraint. This is no doubt due to the fact that Augustine had matured to a whole different understanding of friendship.²⁴

Not long after the death of this friend, when he was still in his early to mid twenties, St. Augustine befriended two other men, a wealthy Carthaginian youth named Nebridius, and his fellow Teganian, Alypius. Alypius was Augustine’s student, while Nebridius (an man roughly Augustine’s age) was himself a teacher who attached himself to Augustine as a mentor.

This mention of our Saint’s being Nebridius’ “mentor” brings up a development in his friendships from childhood to manhood: In youth, St. Augustine tended to be a follower; later, he tends to be the leader. From this point forward, he will be at the lead of various circles of friends. As he matures and goes from laymen to monk to priest to bishop, he will see more and more people attracted to him, desiring to enter his intimate circle, at least by way of correspondence.²⁵

Nebridius was the “friend of Augustine’s mind” while Alypius was the “friend of his heart.” The three formed an intimate circle, with Augustine clearly at the head. Both followed Augustine into Manicheanism; but, whereas Alypius stayed with the sect as long as his Master did, Nebridius saw the absurdities of it and soon abandoned the heresy. By his discerning objections Nebridius would eventually wear down Augustine’s confidence in Manicheanism, thus re-

23 Ibid.

24 It is not wrong to count St. Monica as a friend of her son. Sister Marie Aquinas spends a great deal of effort on the various stages of their friendship (pp. 27-45).

25 He had many such friendly correspondences. The modern reader is bound to be surprised at the degree of intimacy which arose in those times between two people who only know each other by letters. He never met St. Paulinus of Nola or St. Jerome, but counted them both as friends.

vealing why Nebridius was the “friend of Augustine’s mind.” He was unique in that his excellent bent of intellect made him Augustine’s equal in that area that normally saw the Master standing head and shoulders above all else. Nebridius later proved his friendship in an extraordinary way. He took a teaching post under Verecundus, Augustine’s friend, as a *quid pro quo* for Augustine and his other friends being allowed the use of the country villa that belonged to Verecundus. This is the famous Cassiciacum, located somewhere in the rural environs outside Milan, where St. Augustine, Alypius, and Adeodatus withdrew with St. Monica and others to prepare for baptism. Thus, Nebridius magnanimously excluded himself from this country retreat whither his friends were going for prayer, study, and stimulating discussion. This was a great sacrifice for a man who left his estate and his mother in Africa for the sole purpose of following Augustine into Italy.²⁶

Alypius is perhaps best remembered as the companion of his conversion. The account given in the *Confessions* of their double conversion is unforgettable to all who have read it even once:

“There was a garden attached to our lodging, of which we had the use... To this garden the storm in my breast 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 in 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.... Suddenly I heard a voice from some nearby house, a boy’s voice or a girl’s voice, I do not know; but it was a sort of sing-song, repeated again and again, “Take and read, take and read,”... I was moved to return to the place where Alypius was sitting, for I had put down the Apostle’s book there when I arose. I snatched it up, opened it and in silence read the passage upon which my eyes first fell: ‘Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh and its concupiscences. (Romans

26 Nebridius did convert to Catholicism, and influenced his family to do the same. He wanted to join St. Augustine at the latter’s newly-founded monastery at Tagaste (388), but his mother would not hear of it, for she had been deprived of him too long. The two kept up a correspondence until Nebridius’ untimely death in 390.

XIII, 13) I had no wish to read further, and no need. For in that instant... all the darkness of uncertainty vanished away.”²⁷

After St. Augustine explained to his friend the tempest that had raged in his soul, and shown him the passage in St. Paul, Alypius, “asked to see what I had read. I showed him, and he looked further than I had read. I had not known what followed. And this is what followed: ‘Now him that is weak in faith, take unto you,’ He applied this to himself and told me so. And he was confirmed by this message, and with no troubled wavering gave himself to God’s good will and purpose — a purpose indeed most suited to his character, for in these matters he had been immeasurably better than I.”²⁸

Sister Marie Aquinas comments on this beautiful scene: “With their simultaneous conversions the friendship between Augustine and Alypius was raised to a different plane. From that moment on, it was firmly rooted in Christ and so, for the first time, they were friends in the true sense of the word.”²⁹

In his Dialogues, St. Augustine reveals his love for Alypius in a Christian-Ciceronian fashion: “I cannot find words to express how highly I value [this blessing which has come upon me]. I find my most intimate friend agreeing with me not only on probability as a factor in human life, but also on religion itself — a point which is the clearest sign of a true friend; for friendship has been rightly and with just reverence defined as ‘agreement on things human and divine combined with good will and love.’”³⁰

After baptism, Alypius — *Saint* Alypius (Feast day on the Augustinian Calendar: May 16) — would follow Saint Augustine into the monastic life and beyond. Their friendship would only grow with age and their mutual progress in sanctity. The *Roman Martyrology* for the fifteenth of August (the day he died) pays a touching tribute to their association: “At Tagaste in Africa, St. Alipius, bishop, who was the disciple of blessed Augustine, and the companion of his conversion, his colleague in the pastoral charge, his valiant fellow-soldier in disputing heretics, and finally his partner in the glory of heaven...”³¹

Writing to Saint Jerome — the holy yet acerbic scholar who pushed his Numidian correspondent’s friendly forbearance to the limit! — Augustine payed tribute to his love for Alypius:

27 *Conf.* III, 7, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 80-81.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 81-82.

29 Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 82.

30 *Contra Acad.* III, 13, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 84.

31 The Roman Martyrology, from the Third Turin Edition, translated by Rev. Raphael Collins, B.A. (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, No Year Given), p. 179.

“Anyone who knows Alypius and me will say that we are two in body but one in mind, at least so far as perfect agreement and truest friendship are concerned; not in merit, however, in which he excels.”³²

Julian of Eclanum, the treacherous ingrate who betrayed Augustine and viciously attacked his aging master, paid a backhanded tribute to his friendship with Alypius, calling the latter St. Augustine’s “slave of sin.”³³

A poignant detail of St. Augustine’s association with Alypius regards the origin the lengthy passages on him in the *Confessions*. St. Paulinus of Nola, the mutual friend of Alypius and Augustine, requested that Alypius send him something of his life story. Out of humility, Alypius did not want to write it. Augustine saw the desire of the one and the humility of the other and decided that he would come to the rescue. What he wrote was largely incorporated into the *Confessions*.

Now that we see Augustine a Christian, I shall break off this biographical treatment in order to explore his developed, converted notions of friendship, as embodied by his now baptized relationship with Alypius. Biographical matters will, from here on, only enter our treatment occasionally to help us savor some of his deeper thoughts on friendship.

Augustine’s Conception of Friendship

St. Augustine’s matured notions of friendship introduce to the classical one the twin concepts of Christian unity and grace. By “Christian unity,” I mean a polyvalent idea including unity in the Mystical Body (the Catholic Church), the unity of two friends through the excellent, mutual exercise of the theological virtues (especially Charity), and, of course, a unity of sacraments (especially Baptism and the Eucharist).

As an example of this idea of “Christian Unity,” (an idea that we shall see grow in our development), we cite one example of St. Augustine’s application of the Pauline phrase “in

32 Letter 28, 1, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 130.

33 Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 132. Julian was the son of a bishop Memorius, a good friend of St. Augustine’s. Like St. Paulinus of Nola, Augustine had great hopes for this talented young man, who became bishop of Eclanum. Their hopes were dashed when the youthful bishop became an ardent Pelagian. Disregarding the bitter personal invectives against himself, Augustine wrote the wayward soul a beautiful letter in an effort to win him back to the Faith, but the young upstart only grew worse, even resorting to attacking the long-deceased St. Monica with vitriol.

Christ” to friendship: “No friendship is faithful except in Christ; in Him alone can it be happy and eternal.”³⁴

As we would expect from the Doctor of Grace, the notion of interior grace enters into his doctrine on friendship, and perhaps to a surprising degree; for, to Augustine, true friendship is *impossible* without grace. An already-cited passage from the *Confessions*, the account of his friend who died in youth, speaks to this necessity of grace: “for there is no true friendship save between those *thou dost bind together* and who cleave to thee by that love which is ‘shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us.’”³⁵

Sister Marie Aquinas resumes the great anti-Pelagian’s thoughts: “For him, the only true friendship is that sent by God to those who love each other in Him. He considers it a gift of God like chastity, patience, charity, and all virtues. This is the heart of Augustine’s conception of friendship and his great innovation. It is God alone who can join two persons to each other. In other words, friendship is beyond the scope of human control. One can desire to be the friend of another who is striving for perfection, but only God can effect the union.”³⁶

All that is necessary for the supernatural life is necessary for true friendship. And all that is necessary for the spiritual life to be lived excellently (sanctity), is necessary for friendship to be lived excellently. What we have said and shall say of the place of theological Charity in friendship is dependent of the more foundational virtue of Faith, for there is no supernatural Charity without it.

Never one to let sentiment overrun orthodoxy, Augustine states this truth in stark, virile words: “A man must be a friend of truth before he can be a friend to any human being.”³⁷

Baptizing Cicero

This necessity of Faith and grace for true friendship is something Augustine explains methodically by expanding on the definition of Cicero:

“[T]here can be no full and true agreement even about human things among friends who disagree about divine things, for it necessarily follows that one who despises divine things es-

34 *Contra duas epist. Pelag.* I, 1, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 215.

35 The friend, like Augustine, had not been baptized as an infant.

36 Sister Marie Aquinas, pp. 220-221.

37 Letter 155, 1.1.

teems human things otherwise than he should, and that whoever does not love Him who has made man has not learned to love man aright.”³⁸

So a Christian anthropology is necessary for a Christian friendship, but this is no mere question of “outlook” or “world view.” The *interior* nature of the thing is contingent on the love of God, a theme which rests on the very foundations of Augustinian thought on society as expressed in his *opus magnum*, *De Civitate Dei*: the “two cities” which are formed by “two loves.” For the author of the *City of God*, theological Charity *orders* all our other loves, purifying them, setting them aright, elevating them, and orienting them properly in relation to one another.

The *Magister* goes deeper into the supernatural by artfully weaving Cicero’s definition into the twin evangelical commandments of charity:

“‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and soul and with thy whole mind’ and ‘thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself’... In the first of these, there is agreement on divine things; in the second, on human things, joined with good will and love. If one is with his friend in holding firmly to these two commandments, his friendship will be true and everlasting, and it will unite him not only to his friend, but to the Lord himself.”³⁹

Two things should be carefully noted here. The first is that evangelical friendship will not only be *true*, but *everlasting*. Here, we have gone beyond the pagan authors into completely Christian territory. Cicero has been used but *transcended*. Second, the Christian agreement on human and divine things by way of the evangelical commandments unites us not only to our friends, but also to *Our Lord*. This makes friendship a “good to be cultivated” not only for the purposes of helping others, but also *for one’s own sanctification*. The fact that, through Christian friendship, each friend both sanctifies himself and assists the other to the same end shows how exalted a thing *amicitia* is, for it is not only an *expression* of charity, but something which actually *effects* it.

The importance of friendship to increase Divine Charity ought not be diminished, for, as we know from the *Summa*, Christian perfection consists in nothing more than the perfection of the theological virtue of Charity.⁴⁰

Augustine’s comments in a letter to Pope St. Celestine probe deeper into this sanctifying and Charity-augmenting aspect of friendship:

38 Letter 258, to Martianus, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 219.

39 Ibid.

40 *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae, Q 184, A1: “Therefore the perfection of the Christian life consists radically in charity.”

“But I always owe you love, the only debt which, even when it has been paid, holds him who has paid it a debtor still. For it is given when it is paid, but it is owing even after it has been given, for there is no time at which it ceases to be due. Nor when it is given is it lost, *but it is rather multiplied by giving it; for in possessing it, not in parting with it, it is given*. And since it cannot be given unless it is possessed, so neither can it be possessed unless it is given; nay, *at the very time when it is given by a man it increases in that man, and, according to the number of persons to whom it is given, the amount of it which is gained becomes greater.*”⁴¹

The point is emphasized with typically Augustinian irony: Charity, by being *given*, is augmented. The letter goes on to contrast money with charity; the former decreases when given, while the latter increases.

The reader may wonder whether what is being described here is not something peculiar to friendship, but the charity which is due to even our enemies by Our Lord’s command. In the passage which immediately follows where we have left off, Augustine shows he is speaking of friendship, and draws a distinction in how Christian charity is given to friends and enemies:

“Moreover, how can that be denied to friends which is due even to enemies? To enemies, however, this debt is paid with caution, whereas to friends it is repaid with confidence.”⁴²

He is making an *a fortiori* argument: If enemies ought to be loved, *how much more* ought we to love friends? This extension of more charity to friends is in no way contrary to the Gospels, which, while they command that we love our enemies, nowhere mandate an *equal* love being given to all. Elsewhere, Augustine’s thinking on this is made transparently reasonable:

“It stands to reason that friendship goes out more readily to some, more slowly to others.... Those who love us mutually in holiness and chastity give us the truest joy.”⁴³

Not limiting himself to mere theory, our teacher recognized in his own life when he had crossed the Ciceronian-Christian divide. We have already seen it in the case of his relationship with Alypius. We see it again in his association with a friend of his youth, Maritimus. When the latter converted to the Faith, Augustine congratulated him in a heartfelt letter: “I did not ‘have’ you really and completely when I did not ‘have’ you in Christ; agreement on divine things is the foundation of an authentic friendship — as Cicero has already said.”⁴⁴

41 Letter 192 (A.D. 418), <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102192.htm>.

42 Ibid.

43 Letter 130., cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 118.

44 Letter 258, 1-5, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 205.

He expressed his intimate joy that their friendship has become “true and perfect” as it now hopes for “eternal life”:

“How can I express in words my happiness and joy in finding a true and perfect friend in him with whom I was formerly united in an imperfect friendship?... You who formerly made me taste with such sweetness the days of this mortal life, you are henceforth with me in *the hope of eternal life*. Even human things will not be a subject of dissension between us, since the knowledge of divine things permits us to judge them at their true value... .”⁴⁵

To summarize the foregoing considerations, we can say that Christian friendship, contrasted with its merely natural counterpart, is

- ◆ *sanctifying*, because it increases Divine Charity in the soul;
- ◆ *everlasting*, because it will continue in the Beatific Vision (assuming the friends persevere in Divine Charity and grace);
- ◆ and *meritorious*, because, in augmenting Charity in the soul, it makes us bear spiritual fruit through the increase of Sanctifying Grace, which is the subject of merit.
- ◆ At the same time, like all meritorious works, it is *a fruit of grace*, which is absolutely necessary for it to exist.

In this effort to savor the African Doctor’s thoughts on Christian friendship, I am not pretending to carry out a complete or methodical study. Rather than attempt a truncated overview of his teaching, I am highlighting certain aspects as they touch upon friendship as a *means of perfection* and a *means of evangelizing others*. The first aspect has already had sufficient treatment for such a brief study. I now wish to explore the Augustinian doctrine on *amicitia* specifically as it draws others to God. It is this aspect which will enable the Catholic to be what we have called a “perpetual missionary” through the proper living of friendship.

I will attempt a logical order in this, beginning with Augustine’s notions of unity and progressing to the more explicitly *missionary* aspects of friendship.

45 Ibid., 2, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 205. This is an example of how divine Charity *orders* our loves, as we stated earlier.

Friendship as Unity: *Concordia*

To say that unity is a pervasive theme in the writings of St. Augustine would be an understatement. In his thoughts on the Blessed Trinity⁴⁶, on the Church, on the Eucharist, on monastic life, on grace, and even his polemical works against heretics and schismatics, the theme of unity is pervasive. Here is a beautiful example, from his *Homily 10 on the First Epistle of John*. Commenting on the verse, “In this we know that we love the sons of God,” Augustine says:

“Therefore, he that loves the sons of God, loves the Son of God, and he that loves the Son of God, loves the Father; nor can any love the Father except he love the Son, and he that loves the sons, loves also the Son of God. What sons of God? The members of the Son of God. And by loving he becomes himself a member, and comes through love to be in the frame of the body of Christ, *so there shall be one Christ, loving Himself.*”⁴⁷

Here, it is theological Charity which effects union.

One word, with its various derivatives, which serves St. Augustine’s purposes to express the unity of Charity is “concord” (*concordia*), which literally means “a union of hearts,” or “hearts together.” The words *concordia* (noun), and *concordare* (verb) abound in the writings of the Father from Tagaste. For instance, the passage from the *Contra Academicos* we cited earlier, the one in which he tells Alypius that “I find my most intimate friend agreeing with me... also on religion itself,” reads thus in the Latin: “*verum etiam de ipsa religione concordat.*”⁴⁸ “To agree” is one of the meanings of *concordare*, which can also mean, “to be united, to be of one mind, and to harmonize.”

This *concord*, this union of hearts and minds, is rooted in Faith and Charity. It brings us toward each other and toward God, who is the final object of the Christian’s love. Better, we could say that it brings us together toward God: “I will always hold as more truly my friends those who share more intimately the object of my love with me.”⁴⁹

Elsewhere, Augustine shows the intimacy of this concord: “What is a friend but a partner in love, to whom you conjoin and attach your soul, with whom you unite and desire to become one, to whom you commit yourself as to a second self...”⁵⁰

46 E.g., this excerpt from *De Doctr. Christ* (I,5): Unity is in the Father, equality in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost is the concord of unity and equality.” (Cited by St. Thomas in the *Summa Theologiae*, Ia Q. 39, A. 8).

47 <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/170210.htm>.

48 http://www.sant-agostino.it/latino/contr_acc/contr_acc_3.htm.

49 *Soliloquies*, I, 22, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 106.

50 *De Officiis* III, 133. cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 96.

In his polemical writings, especially against the Donatists, St. Augustine accuses heretics and schismatics of attacking the unity of the Church. Schismatics, in particular, sin against “Catholic peace.” The classical distinction between heresy as a sin against Faith and schism as a sin against Charity is found, perhaps first, in Augustine: “By false doctrines concerning God heretics wound Faith, by iniquitous dissensions schismatics deviate from fraternal Charity, although they believe what we believe.”⁵¹

Religious Life

If the concord of Church unity was something Augustine knew to be necessary for salvation, so too, is the concord of monastic life helpful to Christian perfection. The idea of spiritual friendship makes its way into his *Rule for Monks*, in which he commands his followers to “dwell together in unity in the house and be of one mind and one heart in God.” The thinking is based on Acts 4:32: “And the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul.” It fits in with St. Augustine’s conception of the religious life as a living of the primitive intense unity of the Church of Pentecost as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

Herself a Dominican nun, Sister Marie Aquinas had this *Rule* as the legislation of her own Order⁵² She tells us that her Legislator’s “conception of monastic life was that of a supernatural friendship where brothers living together in mutual understanding and help would lift each other to God.”⁵³

This desire for friends living in common so as to assist each other in their union with God was something Augustine had even before his Baptism. The country estate where he prepared to enter the Church was his first effort at this: “Cassiciacum, his first attempt at religious life, was to be the basis for his famous rule for religious.”⁵⁴

51 *De fide et symbolo*, ix. We should point out that, for Augustine (as for the Church’s Magisterium), these matters have eternal consequences, for the eschatological unity God wills for the blessed is effected by a unity *in via* through membership in Christ’s body, the Catholic Church. In other words, there is no salvation outside the Church: “A man cannot have salvation except in the Catholic Church. Outside the Catholic Church he can have everything except salvation. He can have honor, he can have Sacraments, he can sing Alleluia, he can answer Amen, he can possess the Gospel, he can preach faith in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: but never except in the Catholic Church will he be able to find salvation.” (*Discourse to the People of the Church at Caesarea*, Migne, PL, 43, 689, 698; cf. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. III, p. 130.)

52 St. Dominic gave his Order the Augustinian *Rule* as the foundation of their religious life. He supplemented it with the Constitutions of the Order of Preachers. It was fitting that he would choose this *Rule*, since, before he founded the Order, he lived the Augustinian *Rule* as a canon regular, the sub-prior, in fact, of the cathedral chapter at Osma. The masculine and feminine variants of the Augustinian Rule differ in very little.

53 Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 121.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 105. The activities at Cassiciacum consisted of “philosophical discussions outside under the trees... time also for the reading of Virgil, common study of Scripture, and chanting of the psalms” (104-105).

Friendship as Evangelism

If friendship is rooted in Christian unity, it makes sense that it helps to expand that unity by way of evangelism. This is to propose that friendship, by extending itself to the non-Catholic, can be *missionary*. The Latin axiom “*Bonum est diffusivum sui*” comes to mind here. “Goodness is diffusive of itself.” The supernatural *goods* of the three theological virtues, beginning with Faith, are meant to be contagious. While St. Augustine did not consider that there could be a true friendship between those who did not agree on divine things, still, the offer of friendship, the invitation to a perfect union of hearts, could be a cause for conversion:

“He truly loves a friend who loves God in the friend, either because God is actually present in the friend *or in order that God may be so present*. This is true love. If we love another for another reason, we hate him more than we love him.”⁵⁵

Sister Marie Aquinas says that “In teaching friends to love God in one another, Augustine urges them to a *creative love*, which, like Christ’s own, loves men not for what they are, but in order that they may *become*, leading them to the goal where God is all in all.... God is the end as he is the beginning of all true friendship.”⁵⁶

The term “creative love,” if perhaps exaggerated,⁵⁷ is conceptually rich in its expression of what we are trying to say in this paper. God’s love *makes us lovable*, whereas without it, we are unlovable. That is, by loving us and sending the Spirit of Love to abide in our souls, he beautifies our soul, and makes us pleasing to him.⁵⁸ So, too, *mutatis mutandis*, the love of benevolence given by one in love with God to an unbeliever, has a certain efficacy to lead the other to conversion. In other words, by being a true friend to another, the committed, zealous Catholic is ever occasioning the conversion of his friend.

Elsewhere, Augustine expresses this “creative love” in this way:

55 Sermon 336.

56 Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 223.

57 Perhaps “efficacious love” would be more to the point. Strictly, only God “creates,” but man can effect.

58 This is theologically precise, following perfectly the teaching of the Council of Trent on Justification (see Denz. 800). True, God loved us “while we were yet sinners,” but that love is to heal us and bring us into the state of grace, by which divine Charity will become operative in our soul. Compare these two passages: See Romans 5:6-10: “For why did Christ, when as yet we were weak, according to the time, die for the ungodly? For scarce for a just man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man some one would dare to die. But God commendeth his charity towards us; because when as yet we were sinners, according to the time, Christ died for us; much more therefore, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from wrath through him.” After Justification, “the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us” (Rom 5:5).

“To love the neighbor in the right way demands that we act towards him in such a way that he comes to love God with all his heart, soul, and mind.”⁵⁹

Augustine’s Own Example

The obvious question — how to do this? — is something Augustine answered by his whole life. He imparted the Faith in the course of his obligatory priestly and episcopal duties (e.g., preaching and giving other instructions), but he also did so in personal letters, in chance meetings, in the numerous sacrifices he made for people, including helping them in certain purely secular affairs. Many of his books were written at the request of friends⁶⁰ and many letters went to them to strengthen them in their Faith. Letters were also sent to enemies of the Faith, to whom he showed great sympathy, charm, and ardent charity, while never flagging in his objective assessment of their errors and whither they lead. In fact, his certain knowledge of these dogmatic truths kindled his zeal to befriend *and convert* the non-Catholic, for “A man must be a friend of truth before he can be a friend to any human being.”⁶¹

At the beginning of his episcopate, he preached a sermon to the people of Hippo in which he bemoaned the treachery of the Donatist schismatics in whose midst they all had to live. Note the ardent love it shows for the wayward:

“Pray for us, pray for us who live in so precarious a state, as it were between the teeth of furious wolves. These wandering sheep, obstinate sheep, are offended because we run after them, as if their wandering made them cease to be ours. —Why dost thou call us? they say; why dost thou pursue us? —*But the very reason of our cries and our anguish is that they are running to their ruin.* —If I am lost, if I die, what is it to thee? what does thou want with me? —What I want is to call thee back from thy wandering; *what I desire is to snatch thee from death.* —But what if I will to wander what if I will to be lost? —Thou willest to wander? thou willest to be lost? *How much more earnestly do I wish it not!* Yea, I dare to say it, I am importunate; for I hear the Apostle saying: ‘Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season.’ In season, when they are willing; out of season, when they are unwilling. Yes then, I am importunate: thou willest to perish, I will it not. And He wills it not, who threatened the shepherds saying: ‘That which was

59 *Christian Doctrine*, 1.22.21, cited in Burt, Donald X., O.S.A., *Friendship and Society, an Introduction to Augustine’s Practical Philosophy*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p. 63.

60 One of these who stands out was a layman, the Imperial Commissioner Marcellinus, who died a martyr (feast day: April 6). To St. Marcellinus, the bishop dedicated his most monumental works: *The City of God*, *On the Merits of Sinners*, and *On the Spirit and the Letter*, as well as his books on the Trinity and on Genesis.

61 Letter 155, 1.1.

driven away you have not brought again, neither have you sought that which was lost.’⁶² Am I to fear thee more than Him? I fear thee not; the tribunal of Donatus cannot take the place of Christ’s judgment seat, before which we must all appear. *Whether thou wilt it or not, I shall call back the wandering sheep, I shall seek the lost sheep.* The thorns may tear me; but however narrow the opening may be, it shall not check my pursuit; I will beat every bush, as long as the Lord gives me strength; so only I can get to thee wherever thou strivest to perish.’⁶³

Mention of “the teeth of furious wolves” was no exaggeration, for these fanatical schismatics “were a treacherous, murderous, and violent lot. Not content with corrupting men’s souls with heresy, they often resorted to brutal marauding, falling upon groups of Catholics whom they killed and mutilated. They killed Marcellinus, an imperial delegate who judged that Augustine had beaten them in a famous debate in Carthage. They attempted the murder of three bishops, including Augustine himself. Worst of all, they went so far as to forcibly occupy Catholic churches, burning the altars, scraping the walls, and throwing the Most Blessed Sacrament to the dogs.”⁶⁴

Abbot Guéranger’s apt comments on Augustine’s zeal in the Donatist’s regard are penetrating and deep. Having just mentioned that Augustine’s work was done, not in quiet leisure and retirement, but in the midst of absorbing episcopal occupations, he gives us an important insight concerning the fruits Augustine reaped:

“There is no fecundity on earth without sufferings and trials, known sometimes to men, sometimes to God alone. When the writings of the saints awaken in us pious thoughts and generous resolutions, we must not be satisfied, as we might in the case of profane books, with admiring the genius of the authors, but think with gratitude of the price they paid for the supernatural good produced in our souls. Before Augustine’s arrival in Hippo, the Donatists were so great a majority of the population, that, as he himself informs us, they could even forbid anyone to bake bread for Catholics. When the saint died, things were very different; but the pastor, who had made it his first duty to save, even in spite of themselves, the souls confided to him, had been obliged to spend his days and nights in this great work, and had more than once run the risk of martyrdom. The leaders of the schismatics, fearing the force of his reasoning even more than his

62 Ezech. 34:4. The entire sermon is a commentary on Ezechiel 34:1-16, on pastors.

63 Sermon 46, 14. The translation, and peculiar orthography, are that which appears in Dom Prosper Guéranger’s *Liturgical Year*, Vol. 14, p. 96-97 (Loreto Publications edition).

64 “The Church of History,” by Brother André Marie, <http://www.catholicism.org/church-of-history.html>.

eloquence, refused all intercourse with him; they declared that to put Augustine to death would be a praiseworthy action, which would merit for the perpetrator the remission of his sins.”⁶⁵

The zealous shepherd would meet privately with Donatist laymen who came to him, asking them to put down in writing the arguments of their bishops. Then he would exhaust himself in refuting them. Donatist bishops would receive his written refutations along with friendly invitations to debate (which they generally refused). In this way, the shepherd won the confidence of the Donatist lay people, and the charlatans that were their bishops slowly lost control.

Other heretics whose conversion he sought were the Manicheans, to which sect Augustine had belonged as a youth. St. Possidius, Augustine’s friend, brother bishop, and first biographer, tells us of one Felix, a Manichean whom Augustine debated. At the end of the debate, Felix was convinced and became a Catholic. Our polemicist was not merely interested in *hammering* the heretics, he wanted their souls, and showed them such holy gentleness, that he won many of the sect.

Here is the beginning of one of St. Augustine’s polemical works against his former co-religionists. It is a mirror of the gentle, magnanimous soul of its author, a man who completely understood the psychology of sin:

“[We desire] that we might attain our end in your correction, not by contention, and strife, and persecutions, but by kindly consolation, by *friendly exhortation*, by quiet discussion; as it is written, ‘The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle toward all men, apt to teach, patient; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves’ [2 Timothy 2: 24-25]. It is ours, I say, to desire to obtain this part in the work; it belongs to God to give what is good to those who desire it and ask for it.

“Let those rage against you who know not with what labor the truth is to be found and with what difficulty error is to be avoided. Let those rage against you who know not how rare and hard it is to overcome the fancies of the flesh by the serenity of a pious disposition. Let those rage against you who know not the difficulty of curing the eye of the inner man that he may gaze upon his Sun, — not that sun which you worship, and which shines with the brilliance of a heavenly body in the eyes of carnal men and of beasts, — but that of which it is written through the prophet, ‘The Sun of righteousness has arisen upon me;’ and of which it is said in the gospel, ‘That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.’ Let those rage

65 Dom Guéranger’s *Liturgical Year*, Vol. 14, p. 95-96.

against you who know not with what sighs and groans the least particle of the knowledge of God is obtained. And, last of all, let those rage against you who have never been led astray in the same way that they see that you are.”⁶⁶

Having shown great sympathy and admitted his own early attraction to their errors, he successively destroys one after another of the fables to which these people adhered. St. Augustine cooked ahead of time the apostolic recipe for success famously uttered by his Counter-Reformation brother bishop, St. Francis de Sales: “You can catch more flies with a spoonful of honey than with a barrel of vinegar.”

Obviously, the every-day Catholic is not capable of the intellectual output of this Church Father. (Neither are most of the exceptionally well educated, either!) These letters, sermons, and debates are referred to by way of showing the various outlets of his zeal. But his charity found other outlets, ones more accommodated to every Catholic striving for sanctity in the apostolate. In his every day life, even as a bishop, he could spread the good odor of sanctity in the most ordinary of ways. This included extending friendship to all.

St. Possidius gives us a picture of the holy social graces of our subject when he writes that “He practiced hospitality at all times. Even at table he found more delight in reading and conversation than in eating and drinking.

“To prevent one plague that afflicts social intercourse he had these words inscribed on the table: ‘Let those who like to slander the lives of the absent know that their own are not worthy of this table.’⁶⁷ In this way he reminded all his guests that they ought to abstain from unnecessary and harmful gossip.

“On one occasion, when some fellow bishops, close friends of his, had forgotten the inscription and disobeyed its warning, he rebuked them sternly, being so upset as to say that either the verses must be erased from the table or he would get up from table in the middle of the meal and retire to his room, I and others at that meal witnessed this.”⁶⁸

66 *Against the Fundamental Epistle of Manichaeus*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1405.htm>. The gentility expressed here did not preclude occasional severity on Augustine’s part. When the fury of the Donatists was unable to be remedied by kindness, Augustine was in favor of bringing in the secular arm to punish the wayward. Keeping in mind that Augustine’s thoughts on society (including what we would now call Church-State relations) make him very much the Father of Christendom, we should appreciate that the same kind, evangelical soul who wrote these words also thought that the state should, according to her limited capacity and within strict bounds, assist the Church in the work of saving souls. Here, as in so many places, a return to his thought would be of great benefit to the life of the Church.

67 *Quisquis amat dictis absentum rodere vitam,
Hanc mensam vetitam noverit esse sibi.*

68 Possidius of Calama, *The Life of Saint Augustine*, translated by Audrey Fellowes, edited by John E. Rotelle,

Edifying conversation, hospitality, and frank rebukes as needed: the young man who was so in love with friendship did not lose this love with age. Even the old man still needed friendship. In a letter to Darius written just one year before his death, he tells this young man, so fortunate to be the last received into the patriarch's inner circle:

“Receive, then, my son... the books of my *Confessions* which you longed for; in them behold me and praise me not beyond what I am; in them believe what I say of myself, not what others say of me... When you find me in those pages, pray for me that I may avoid defection and reach perfection; pray, my son, pray.

“I feel deeply what I am saying...

“I hope to have letters from you wherever you are, and you shall have them from me as long as I am able.”⁶⁹

Sister Marie Aquinas concludes of the aging Augustine: “He felt more than ever that he was weak and alone without his friends, and that if he were to be admitted to heaven it would be because of their prayers.”⁷⁰

Friendship's Demands: Frankness

There is a frankness that friendship demands, a frankness which Catholics can and must use for the edification and conversion of their friends. Recall that, as Sister Marie Aquinas resumed it for us earlier, even in the classical pagan notion of friendship, “friends must always be truthful with one another, for flattery and pretense destroy friendship. One must correct a friend when necessary; if one permits another to continue in wrong-doing, he is not a friend.”

If Cicero would demand this, surely Christ would all the more, as Our Lord admonished us to rebuke our brothers who have offended against us.⁷¹ St. Augustine would too; says Sister Marie Aquinas: “One worthy of the name friend must be able to sacrifice the pleasure of being agreeable for the good of his friend's soul. This is not easy, nor is it done without wounding both the friend who offers correction and the one who accepts it. It is a sacrifice made willingly by both out of love for God who is Truth. Our Model for this ‘love that chastises’ is God Himself.”⁷²

O.S.A., Augustinian Press, 1988, p. 92. St. Possidius is listed in the Roman Martyrology for May 16, the day on which the Augustinians celebrate him together with St. Alypius.

69 Ep. 231, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 163.

70 Ibid.

71 Mt. 18:15. This evangelical precept is found in the Augustinian *Rule*, in the section on fraternal correction.

72 Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 224-225.

She cites as an example of Augustine’s view of chastising love, the following passage from his epistle to Vincentius:

“Who could love us more than God does? Yet He continually teaches us sweetly, as well as frightens us for our good... Do you think then that no force should be used to free a man from destructive error, when you see, by the most convincing examples, that God Himself does this — and no one loves us more advantageously than He does.”⁷³

For his part, the recipient of such a rebuke ought to know that “Not everyone who spares is a friend, nor is everyone who strikes an enemy.”⁷⁴ The friend should be grateful for the correction, as Alypius was when his (yet unconverted) teacher unintentionally rebuked him in class. As our Master relates in the *Confessions*, Alypius came in (late!) one day to class, while Augustine was lecturing. In the lecture, the professor went on a tangent and began to impugn the savagery of the gladiatorial games. The teacher had no intention to correct Alypius, who was addicted to that vice; he was simply speaking his mind on the issue. “But [Alypius] took it to himself, and thought that I would not have said it but for his sake. And what any other man would have made a ground of offence against me, this worthy young man took as a reason for being offended at himself, and for loving me more fervently.”⁷⁵

St. Augustine applied the words of Proverbs 9:8 to his student: “Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.”

Other rebukes were not so happy in their outcome. Julian of Eclanum has already been mentioned. Another was Count Boniface, an Imperial official whose promiscuity and defection from the faith led him to betray his country with tragic results. It was the alliance he formed with the Vandals that allowed Genseric’s eight-thousand-strong army to march on North Africa. Although Boniface recovered his sense of duty (we don’t know if he recovered his Faith), his return to loyal Imperial service was too late. He was twice repelled and North Africa fell to the Arian Vandals. It was Augustine who wrote him a stirring and touching letter to arouse Boniface to penance.

At times, when the wayward friend proves incorrigible or perfidious, a simple rebuke is not sufficient; the friendship must be terminated. This applies to the cases of certain moral infractions of larger moment, as well as the rejection of the true Faith:

73 *Ep.* 93, 4-5 to Vincentius in 408, quoted in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 290.

74 *Ep.* 93 to Vincentius in 408, p. 289.

75 *Conf.* V, 7.

“Where he was unbending was in his requirements for friendship. To him, accepting the Catholic faith meant giving himself completely to God. Because he knew no half measures, he found it inconceivable to continue a friendship with one who was not generous with God. His parting with Romanianus, Licentius, and Mallius Theodorus gives us proof of this.”⁷⁶

His sensitivity as a friend made such matters difficult, so much so that he applied to them Our Lord’s mandate to cut off our own bodily members if they scandalize us:

“The most significant notion suggested to me is that of a most beloved friend, for this is something which we can assuredly call a member that we love very much.”⁷⁷

Friendship’s Demands: Prayer

It stands to reason that if true friendships are something only God can grant by his grace, then prayer is ordinarily necessary for it; for it is a theological truth that whatever is a proper subject of grace is also a proper subject of prayer. Thus, prayer becomes an additional duty of friendship. St. Augustine realized this and frequently asked for the prayers of his friends, promising them his own as well. We already read from his tender letter to the young Darius. He wrote to the virgin, Proba, in 412:

“Surely, you will also remember to pray attentively for me, for I do not wish you, out of regard for the position which I occupy, to my own peril, to deprive me of a help which I recognize as necessary.”⁷⁸

About 423, he promised his prayers to a convent of nuns in Hippo, who had need of his help:

“Rather than show my face among you I chose to pour out my heart to God for you and to plead the cause of your great peril, not in words before you, but in tears before God, that He may not turn to sorrow the joy I am wont to feel on your account.”⁷⁹

Tying it all Together

The title of this paper, “Friends Forever,” is meant to be a little ironic. The expression is one that high school girls tend to write in each others’ yearbooks at graduation. Often times, such

76 Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 116.

77 *De sermone Domini in monte*, XIII, 38, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 231.

78 Letter 130, 31, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 292.

79 Letter 211, 2, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 292. This is the convent of which his own blood sister had previously been the superior. The problems started upon her death, when some of the sisters did not accept the new superior. One can easily understand the bishop’s reticence to walk into such a situation!

friendships, whether or not they are worthy of the name, last not too long after graduation. The only way to make friendships last forever is to base them in Christ, for “No friendship is faithful except in Christ; in Him alone can it be *happy and eternal*.”⁸⁰

That such friendships do truly last forever is a common opinion of theologians, for one of the “secondary” or “accidental” subjects of the beatitude of the elect is the enjoyment of each other in the Beatific Vision where the *concord* of the Mystical Body will make us “one heart” with the Sacred Heart of Jesus: “And there will be one Christ loving Himself.”⁸¹

It was my intention to outline, using the thoughts of St. Augustine, the evangelical and apostolic utility of the bond of friendship, as well as its power to sanctify the individual who extends it. All of us have “friends” of some type or another, even if they are not truly worthy of the name. We can take advantage of these bonds, however tenuous or superficial, for our own advantage, as well as that of our neighbors. We may *think* we lack the apostolic advantages of the North American Martyrs, but what we really lack (besides, perhaps, their sanctity) are their numerous *disadvantages*. One advantage we have over them is that, in our “mission territory,” we are already known and have established a rapport with the natives.

In order to use friendships for such a holy end, the soul of the individual must be steeped in supernatural virtue, which implies the living of a devout life: frequently receiving the sacraments, praying, practicing the moral virtues, the theological virtues, and sailing on the breath of the Holy Ghost by utilizing His seven-fold gifts. This supernatural panoply begins with, and depends upon Faith, that virtue which is the *initium salutis*, the beginning of salvation,⁸² for “A man must be a friend of truth before he can be a friend to any human being.”⁸³ Thus we see that the interior life, a good in itself (*bonum honestum*), is also a useful good (*bonum utile*) for the purposes of evangelism.

By failing to live the life of virtue, which even the pagan Cicero recognized as necessary for this union, those friendships we have may become easily corrupted and an occasion for our own damnation. We must heed the caveat of our guide and teacher, all too familiar as he was

80 Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 215.

81 *Homily 10 on the First Epistle of John*, cited in M. Eugene Boylan, O. Cist. R., *This Tremendous Lover*, The

82 The Council of Trent used this expression of St. Fulgentius of Ruspe (468-533), from his work *De Fide* (Denz. 801). Although he was born 38 years after Augustine’s death, this fellow North African was saturated in the teachings of the *Magister* and defended them admirably, especially when St. Augustine was accused of teaching that certain people are predestined to evil. He discovered his monastic vocation while reading St. Augustine’s *Enarrationes* on Psalm 36.

83 Letter 155, 1.1.

with the vices occasioned by bad friendships: “The bond of human friendship has a sweetness of its own, binding many souls together as one. Yet because of these values, *sin is committed, because we have an inordinate preference for these goods of a lower order and neglect the better and the higher good.*”⁸⁴ For friendship inevitably unites us to our friends “and of many [makes] us one,”⁸⁵ and of close friends it can be said that they are “two in body but one in mind,”⁸⁶ so we must choose our friendships wisely and terminate them when they become a danger, while never ceasing to pray for and exhort our former friends, as our Master did for Julian and Boniface.

In order to make these friendships become holy and advantageous to all concerned, we must recall the necessity of grace, and the consequent necessity of prayer, which is a duty of Christian friendship: “for there is no true friendship save between those *thou dost bind together* and who cleave to thee by that love which is ‘shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us.’”⁸⁷

Friends Forever

In this life, friendships are uncertain. Augustine’s own sad experience with Julian of Eclanum and others taught him that hidden treacheries, instability, and other vices always threaten friendships and make us, frail creatures as we are, ever vulnerable: “How confused it all is! One who seems to be an enemy turns out to be a friend and those whom we thought our good friends in fact are our worst enemies.”⁸⁸

Only heaven, with its uninterrupted, ecstatic union with our Final End can give men the constancy they need to be “friends forever”:

“Blessed is he who loves his friend in Thee... for he alone loses none dear to him, to whom all are dear in Him who cannot be lost.”⁸⁹

84 *Conf.*, Book II, Chapter V.

85 *Conf.*, IV, 13-14, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 58.

86 Letter 28, 1, cited in Sister Marie Aquinas, p. 130.

87 *Conf.*, Book IV, Chapter IV.

88 Sermon 49.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 209.