

The Relation of the Identity of North African Christians to the Spiritual Training in the Letters of Augustine*

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ABSTRACT

In contributing to the debate on the transformation of late Roman world, some scholars have claimed that the boundaries between religious groups were fluid with external and internal factors. Christian identity was not characterised by clear indications of religious belief, observance, and practice. Some intriguing surveys have shown that the difference between Christians and pagans can be seen as part of a discursive binary. While the North African evidence of their identity allows us to consider the question of what it means to be a Christian, it is noteworthy that there is a comprehensive framework for the understanding of human behaviour and thought: the ‘spiritual exercises’ in the Greco-Roman tradition. In the fourth- and fifth centuries, Christian thinkers began to pursue the matter in a more detailed way. A crucial stage of the development seems to be prepared by Augustine. Provided with some illuminating studies which consider the spiritual training in question as being linked with the context of his concern for Christianness in late antique North Africa, the correlation still remains in question. In this article, therefore, first I examine how he referred to the Christian code of behaviour in his letters. In particular, focusing my attention on epistolary correspondence of Augustine with two seemingly ‘pagans’, I show how he tried to impose his idea of the Christian norms of behaviour on his correspondents – with Dioscorus (*Ep.* 117 and 118) and with Volusianus (*Ep.* 132, 135, and 137). Then I ask what Augustine understood by spiritual training. For the sake of clarity, I have divided the letters along thematic lines into three groups – the intellectual and therapeutic (*Ep.* 26, 37, 56, 102, 162, 193, 202A, and 2*), the religious and eschatological (*Ep.* 92, 130, 131, 137, and 157), and the exegetical aspect (*Ep.* 28, 137, 149, 199, and 213). In each group I consider them chronologically as far as possible. Finally, I consider the principal feature of spiritual training, thereby coming to the enhancement of spiritual affinities and mutual relationships of which he made use in speaking about Christian identity.

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Introduction

In shaping the discussion on the changes of the late Roman world, some scholars have claimed that the borders between religious groups were flexible, in that, for instance, the identity of Christians was not accompanied by explicit indications of their belief, observance, and practice. After an inspiring approach to the issue of Christian identity,¹ some studies have indicated that the distinction between Christians and pagans could serve as a context-oriented and fluid mechanism in their community.² It is noteworthy that, while the North African evidence allows us to investigate the question of what it meant to be a Christian, there is a comprehensive and integrated framework for understanding the human behaviour and thought: the ‘spiritual exercises’ in the ancient philosophical tradition. The deployment of spiritual training has received frequent attention in Augustinian scholarship, in particular, with reference to Pierre Hadot’s seminal work. Hadot illustrates a complex set of mode of the discipline and defines it as a ‘metamorphosis of our personality’.³ Although some scholars have primarily considered it to be the purely intellectual training of the intelligence or mind, Hadot emphasises the need to explore its wider diversity and the purgation of the soul involving all facets of human thought and behaviour. A modification of the spiritual training in question appeared in late antiquity. In the North African Church, even sporadically and non-thematically Tertullian and Cyprian referred to the significance and limits of the spiritual discipline and, from the mid-fourth century in more detail than before, Christian writers began to look into the matter.⁴ A crucial stage of the development seems to be prepared by Augustine. Some surveys have described the discipline as being linked with the context of his concern for Christian identity in the faith community. However, the correlation still remains a question.⁵ In this article,

¹ Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990).

² Maijastina Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue: Christian and Pagan Cultures c. 360-430*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies (Aldershot, 2007); Éric Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200-450 CE* (Ithaca, 2012); Éric Rebillard and Jörg Rüpke (eds), *Group Identity and Religious Individuality in Late Antiquity*, CUA Studies in Early Christianity (Washington, D.C., 2015); Jörg Rüpke and Wolfgang Spickermann (eds), *Reflections on Religious Individuality: Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian Texts and Practices*, Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 62 (Berlin, 2012).

³ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford, 1995), 82 and 127. See also Michael Chase, Stephen R.L. Clark, and Michael McGhee (eds), *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancient and Moderns, Essays in Honor of Pierre Hadot* (Chichester, West Sussex, 2013).

⁴ J. Patout Burns and Robin M. Jensen, in collaboration with Graeme W. Clarke, Susan T. Stevens, William Tabbernee, and Maureen A. Tilley, *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of Its Practices and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2014), esp. chap. 11 (519-52) ‘Honoring the Victorious Heroes: The Cult of the Martyrs’ and chap. 12 (553-99) ‘Pious Practices of Christian Living’.

⁵ For the secondary literature on the spiritual training in the works of Augustine, see for example Paul Agaësse, ‘Exercitatio animi’, BA 16 (1991²), 612-4; Lewis Ayres, ‘The Christological

therefore, I shall first examine how he referred to the Christian code of behaviour in his letters.⁶ In particular, focusing my attention on epistolary correspondence of Augustine with two seemingly ‘pagans’, I will show how Augustine tried to impose his idea of the Christian norms of behaviour on his correspondents. Then I will ask what Augustine understood by the spiritual training. For the sake of clarity, I have divided the letters along thematic lines into three groups and in each group I will consider them chronologically as far as possible.⁷ Finally, I shall consider the principal feature of spiritual training, thereby coming to some understanding of the horizons on which he made use of the dimension in speaking about Christian identity.

Context of Augustine’s ‘De Trinitate XIII’: Toward Relocating Books VIII-XV’, *AugSt* 29 (1998), 111-39; Martin Claes, ‘Limitations to *Exercitatio mentis*: Changes in Rhetorical Style in Augustine’s Dialogues’, *Augustiniana* 57 (2007), 387-98; *id.*, ‘Exercitatio mentis and its Function in Mystagogy’, in Paul van Geest (ed.), *Seeing through the Eyes of Faith: New Approaches to the Mystagogy of the Church Fathers*, Late Antique History and Religion 11 (Leuven, Forthcoming); Naoki Kamimura, ‘Augustine’s First Exegesis and the Divisions of Spiritual Life’, *AugSt* 36 (2005), 421-32; *id.*, ‘Spiritual Narratives and Divine Providence: Spiritual Training in Augustine’s *City of God*’, *Patristica* supplementary volume 4 (2014), 43-58; Paul Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revisiting a Classical Ideal*, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity Series 17 (Notre Dame, Ind., 2010); Jean Leclercq, ‘Exercices spirituels’, *DS* 4/2 (Paris, 1961), 1903-8; Goulven Madec, *AL* 2 (1996-2002), 1182-3, s.v. ‘Exercitatio animi’; Daniel A. Napier, *En Route to the Confessions: The Roots and Development of Augustine’s Philosophical Anthropology*, Late Antique History and Religion 6 (Leuven, 2013); Willemien Otten, ‘Religion as *Exercitatio Mentis*: A Case for Theology as a Humanist Discipline’, in Alasdair A. McDonald, Zweder R.W.M. von Martels, and Jan R. Veenstra (eds), *Christian Humanism: Essays in Honour of Arjo Vanderjagt*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 142 (Leiden, 2009), 59-74; Xavier Pavié, *Exercices spirituels: leçons de la philosophie antique* (Paris, 2012); Karla Pollmann, ‘Augustine’s Hermeneutics as a Universal Discipline?’, in Karla Pollmann and Mark Vessey (eds), *Augustine and the Disciplines. From Cassiciacum to Confessions* (Oxford, 2005), 206-31; Brian Stock, *Augustine’s Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity* (New York, 2010); *id.*, ‘Self, Soliloquy, and Spiritual Exercises in Augustine and Some Later Authors’, *The Journal of Religion*, 91 (2011), 5-23.

⁶ For Augustine’s epistolary practices and its correlation with his view of the Christian code of behaviour, see for instance Daniel E. Doyle, *The Bishop as Disciplinarian in the Letters of St. Augustine* (New York, 2002); Jennifer Ebbeler, *Disciplining Christians: Correction and Community in Augustine’s Letters*, Oxford Studies in Late Antiquity (Oxford, 2012). See also for a selected bibliography on Augustine’s letters, see Johannes Divjak, *AL* 2 (1996-2002), 893-1057, 1046-57, s.v. ‘Epistulae’. Another comprehensive and critical information regarding the correspondence of Augustine is provided by a searchable database: *Scrinium Augustini: The World of Augustine’s Letters* (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland) <<http://www.scrinium.umk.pl>>, accessed December 2015.

⁷ With regard to the chronological survey of Augustine’s letters, see Klaus-D. Daur (ed.), CChr.SL 31 (2004), 31A (2005), 31 B (2009); J. Divjak, ‘Epistulae’ (1996-2002), 1027-36; Robert B. Eno, ‘Epistulae’, in Alan Fitzgerald *et al.* (eds), *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1999), 298-310, 299-305; Serge Lancel, ‘Introduction’, BA 40/A (Paris, 2011), 7-182, 159-75; Othmar Perler and Jean-Louis Maier, *Les voyages de saint Augustin*, CEASA 36 (Paris, 1969); Roland Teske (trans.), *Letters*, WSA II/1-4 (Hyde Park, NY, 2001-2005).

Christians and the plurality of their identities

Letter Exchange with Dioscorus

The first group of letters to be considered is *Letters* 117 and 118, the correspondence between Augustine and Dioscorus, the latter of whose prosopographical information is mostly provided by these letters.⁸ It is more than likely, in the autumn of 410, that they opened up communication by letter.⁹ Indeed, before departing Carthage where he was studying, a young native of Greece called Dioscorus wrote asking Augustine questions about the philosophical works of Cicero, in particular his *De natura deorum* and about some of his rhetorical tractates. Although the list itself is now lost, both the first letter written by Dioscorus (*Ep.* 117) and the the long answer from Augustine (*Ep.* 118) are available to us. According to the second letter in particular, it becomes clear that Augustine knows Dioscorus well enough to make many references to his life and activities: a young man, still unmarried, who first studied at Rome, most likely was the brother of Zenobius, a friend of Augustine and to whom he dedicated one of the Cassiciacum dialogues (*De ordine*). Then, what kind of other things would be known to us?

It is interesting to note that Possidius, Augustine's friend and his biographer, classified this letter exchange into the group designated 'Against Pagans' in his *Indiculum* of Augustine's works, appended to the *Life of Augustine*.¹⁰ Because of the main part of *Letter* 118 and Dioscorus' deep concern for pagan philosophy, some scholars have been inclined to consider him a pagan.¹¹ The communication between Augustine and such a pagan was developed on the basis of their rational behaviour, in particular of Augustine's politeness and courtesy. His response would be interpreted as an affirmation of Dioscorus' paganism and a respect for the Greco-Roman classical culture. This seems to be the same as

⁸ On Dioscorus, see *PCBE* 1, s.v. Dioscorus 2, 279-80; *PLRE* 2, s.v. Dioscorus 2, 367; Frank Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus von Hippo: Prosopographische, sozial- und ideologiegeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, Bochumer historische Studien, Alte Geschichte 11 (Bochum, 1993), 79-80; Jules Wankenne, 'A propos de Dioscorus correspondant de saint Augustin (*Epist.* CXVII-CXVIII)', *RBen* 84 (1974), 167-76; *id.*, *AL* 2 (1996-2002), 455-7, s.v. 'Dioscorus'. On *Ep.* 118, see also Michael Fiedrowicz, 'Augustins Brief an Dioskur (*ep.* 118): Kriterien authentischer Theologie', *Wissenschaft und Weisheit: Franziskanische Studien zu Theologie, Philosophie und Geschichte* 60 (1997), 177-88.

⁹ *Ep.* 117: Daur: 410, Divjak: 410, Lancel: hiver 410-411, Perler: septembre 410, Teske: the beginning of 410; *Ep.* 118: Daur: 410, Divjak: 410, Eno: late 410/early 411, Lancel: hiver 410-411, Perler: fin automne-hiver 410-411, Teske: in late 410 or early 411.

¹⁰ André Wilmart, 'Operum S. Augustini elenchus a Possidio eiusdem discipulo Calamensi episcopo digestus, post Maurinorum labores nouis curis editus critico apparatu numeris tabellis instructus', in *MA* 2 (Rome, 1930-31), 149-233, 163.

¹¹ See for example F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 79, 227; J. Wankenne, 'Dioscorus', 455-6.

the other pagan correspondents, for instance, Longinianus (*Epp.* 233-5),¹² Volusianus (*Ep.* 132),¹³ and Maximus (*Ep.* 17).¹⁴ However, with regard to the religious affiliation of Dioscorus, Augustine explicitly mentions that Dioscorus shows a decided preference for ‘Christian teaching’, rather than for all others: ‘You are confident that it [*sc.* Christian teaching] alone contains the hope of eternal salvation’.¹⁵ In fact, he is quite anxious for Dioscorus to seek another way of finding the truth: his warning is given against the deviation from the way that ‘he [*sc.* Christ] constructed who, as God, saw the weakness of our steps’.¹⁶ Although it is not certain whether they met in Carthage or somewhere around there, the various activities of Dioscorus were familiar to Augustine, in which the fact that he was not a pagan is included.

This letter provides the detailed compendium of his views on contemporary pagan philosophy. It comprises the teachings of the Stoics, Academics, Epicureans, and Platonists.¹⁷ Augustine dedicates over thirty long paragraphs to answer the questions posed by the young man, despite him being highly critical of ‘those old, worn-out errors of many people [*sc.* philosophers]’.¹⁸ Perhaps it might be suggested that Augustine feels real sympathy for a young ambitious dilettante because of the similarity of the current status to that of his own past. He does not show any reluctance to talk about his old self, who once instructed boys in rhetoric. However, Augustine’s criticism is explicit: due to the standpoint of Dioscorus, in which he is willing to shift Augustine back to his past as a professor of rhetoric, not attending to his present position as a bishop,

it is not evident to me that there is nothing improper involved in this matter [*sc.* Dioscorus’ questions]. For my mind fails to find a proper appearance of things when I think that a bishop, torn this way and that by noisy concerns of the Church, holds himself back from all these, as if suddenly he becomes deaf, and explains minor questions about Ciceronian dialogues to a single student.¹⁹

¹² On Longinianus, *PLRE* 2, 686-7; M. Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue* (2007), 81-3; Paolo Mastandrea, *AL* 3 (2004-2010), 1061-5, s.v. ‘Longinianus’; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 126.

¹³ On Volusianus, see note 22 below.

¹⁴ On Maximus, see *PCBE* 1, s.v. Maximus 3, 733-4; *PLRE* 1, s.v. Maximus 28, 585; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 122-3; Serge Lancel, ‘Note complémentaire, Lettres 16 et 17’, *BA* 40/A (2011), 609-11.

¹⁵ *Ep.* 118.11; CChr.SL 31B, 120: ‘*christianam doctrinam ... in ea sola esse praesumere spem salutis aeternae*’. For the English translation of Augustine’s letters, see R. Teske, *WSA* II/1-4 (2001-2005).

¹⁶ *Ep.* 118.22; CChr.SL 31B, 127: ‘*illo, qui gressuum nostrorum tamquam deus uidit infirmitatem*’.

¹⁷ For Augustine’s views on contemporary philosophy and rhetoric, see Isabelle Bochet, ‘Le statut de l’histoire de la philosophie selon la *Lettre* 118 d’Augustin à Dioscore’ *REAug* 44 (1998), 49-76.

¹⁸ *Ep.* 118.7; CChr.SL 31B, 117: ‘*multorum annosas et decrepitas falsitates*’.

¹⁹ *Ep.* 118.2; CChr.SL 31B, 113: ‘*In hac re nihil esse dedecoris, non mihi uidetur. Non enim dedecora facies rerum attingit sensum meum, cum cogito episcopum ecclesiasticis curis*

The basilica of the Christians at Hippo occurred to you as the place to deposit your concerns, because there now sits in it a bishop who once sold such ideas to children.²⁰

In chiding his literary correspondent for the eagerness to his intellectual pursuits once shared by himself, he would rather criticise Dioscorus for placing a higher priority on the previous identity of Augustine.²¹ Thus, although, in the lengthy reply to Dioscorus, Augustine's disapproval of the intellectual snobbery is often expressed, the central concern of this letter appears to be the hierarchical and irreversible order of identities and commitments: Dioscorus is fully expected to reconsider its arrangement based on his religious affiliation.

Letter Exchange with Volusianus

The second group of letters to be examined is *Letters* 132, 135, and 137, the letter exchange between Augustine and Volusianus, the latter of whose life and activities, and whose family members are also known to us through several documents (including *Vita Melaniae iunioris*, in which the story of his baptism on his deathbed is told).²² At the time when he was residing in Carthage in 411/412, Volusianus received a letter from Augustine (*Ep.* 132).²³ Then, Volusianus replied with a series of questions, prompted by Augustine to write back to him and because of the pressure and advice from his Christian mother (*Ep.* 132). Volusianus has appeared to be reluctant both to enter into correspondence with Augustine and to give positive attention to questions about the Christian faith from a pagan perspective (*Ep.* 135). However, Flavius Marcellinus, the tribune and notary, who was sent to Africa on a special mission from the imperial court at Ravenna, has been committed to serving as a reliable liaison between the literary-minded young aristocrat and his Christian friend.²⁴ It is not only

circumstrepentibus districtum atque distentum repente quasi obsurdescentem cohibere se ab his omnibus et dialogorum Tullianorum quaestiunculas uni scholastico exponere?'

²⁰ *Ep.* 118.9; CCHr.SL 31B, 118: 'Ubi has curas tuas deponeres, christianorum tibi basilica Hipponensis occurrit, quia in ea nunc sedet episcopus, qui aliquando ista pueris uendit'.

²¹ Christine McCann, 'Physician of the Soul: Augustine and Spiritual Mentoring', in Jane Baun *et al.* (eds), *SP* 49 (2010), 45-9; J. Ebbeler, *Disciplining Christians* (2012), 192 and n. 5.

²² On Volusianus, see *PCBE* 2, s.v. Volusianus 1, 2340-1; *PLRE* 2, s.v. Volusianus 6, 1184-5; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 125. For the exchanges between the bishop of Hippo and the distinguished Roman, see André Chastagnol, 'Le sénateur Volusien et la conversion d'une famille romaine au Bas-Empire', *REAug* 58 (1956), 251-62, 241-53; J. Divjak, 'Epistulae' (1996-2002), 945-6, 974-5; Christopher P. Jones, *Between Pagan and Christian* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 82-3, 93; Serge Lancel, *Saint Augustine*, trans. Antonia Nevill (London, 2002), 314-8.

²³ *Ep.* 132: Daur: 411/412, Divjak: 411/412, Eno: 411/412, Lancel: automne 411, Teske: 411 or 412.

²⁴ On Marcellinus, see *PCBE* 2, s.v. Flavius Marcellinus 2, 671-88; *PLRE* 2, s.v. Fl. Marcellinus 10, 711-2; Volker Henning Drecol, *AL* 3 (2004-2010), 1160-5, s.v. 'Marcellinus, Flavius'; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 112-4. For the role of Marcellinus played

because Marcellinus was involved in ‘a daily discussion with the same man [*sc.* Volusianus] ... driven by the entreaty of his holy mother’,²⁵ but also because he was concerned about Augustine’s predicament that a rich landowner from Hippo had been bitterly disappointed with the inability of the bishop to provide appropriate answers to these questions.²⁶ Indeed, it was Marcellinus whom Augustine ‘needed ... as a spokesman in the salons of Carthage’.²⁷ Thus, soon after receiving the letter from Marcellinus with further questions posted by Volusianus (*Ep.* 136), Augustine sent a reply to Volusianus (*Ep.* 137) and responded to the questions mentioned in these previous letters.

Augustine begins the communication with encouraging Volusianus to read the scriptures, in particular ‘the letters of the apostles’.²⁸ He also prompts Volusianus to write back with many questions as arising from this reading. It is noteworthy that Augustine would choose to think about such subject not by conversing but through correspondence. This may be partly due to the difficulty of scheduling a meeting. Yet another reason is perhaps more important. He is willing to distance himself and his interlocutor from ‘the intruding presence of those who are not suited for such an undertaking and find more delight in contents of the tongue than in the enlightenment of knowledge.’²⁹ In comparison with the genuineness of the scriptures, he once again criticises ‘the false beauty of rhetoric’ for enticing those who are longing for the truth ‘by obscure language’.³⁰ Augustine proposes, therefore, to exclude his interest in rhetoric and audience of the dialogue, both of which are assumed to be an obstacle to focus on the spiritual matter.

Volusianus replied to the invitation from Augustine and wrote back with some questions. It is clearly admitted that, although he seems to fulfil his promise to address various questions, his main concern is to report the recent gatherings of a circle of friends in Carthage and to share the achievement in their discussions. Volusianus informs Augustine about the ‘various talents and interests’ of the discussants.³¹ These learned friends are pagans and Roman aristocrats, with whom he has some particular interest in common. They all are comfortable

in Augustine’s literary and other activities, see for instance J. Ebbeler, *Disciplining Christians* (2012), 191-2; Neil B. McLynn, ‘Augustine’s Roman Empire’, in Mark Vessey, Karla Pollmann, and Allan D. Fitzgerald (eds), *History, Apocalypse, and the Secular Imagination: New Essays on Augustine’s City of God* (Bowling Green, Oh., 1999), 29-44; Madeleine Moreau, ‘Le dossier Marcellinus dans la Correspondance de saint Augustin’, *RechAug* 9 (1973), 3-181.

²⁵ *Ep.* 136.1; CChr.SL 31B, 253: ‘*Est enim ... cum eodem cottidiana ... disputatio, sanctae si quidem matris eius precatione compulsus*’.

²⁶ *Ep.* 136.3; CChr.SL 31B, 255.

²⁷ N. B. McLynn, ‘Augustine’s Roman Empire’ (1999), 42.

²⁸ *Ep.* 132; CChr.SL 31B, 240: ‘*apostolorum linguas*’.

²⁹ *Ep.* 132; CChr.SL 31B, 240: ‘*Eorum irruentem praesentiam, qui plerumque non sunt apti tali negotio magisque linguae certaminibus quam scientiae luminibus delectantur*’.

³⁰ *Ep.* 132; CChr.SL 31B, 240: ‘*fucatis eloquiis ... linguae tectorio*’.

³¹ *Ep.* 135.1; CChr.SL 31B, 249: ‘*ingeniis studisque sententiae*’.

talking with one another about the pleasure of rhetorical composition, the eloquence of poetry, and the great accomplishment of philosophers. Not only does he repeatedly remind Augustine of his former career as a professor of rhetoric and the education he has received: 'I speak to someone who knows about that. For you also taught this a little before. ...with which [*sc.* philosophy] you are familiar and which you yourself are accustomed to cultivate...';³² but further at the end of the letter, with apparently a polite and sympathetic attitude towards his position, Volusianus urges Augustine to determine their relationship from the viewpoint of a group of his friends:

It is a matter of interest for your reputation that I come to know the answers to my questions, because ignorance may somehow or other be tolerated in other priests without harm to the worship of God, but when it comes to Augustine, the bishop, whatever he may happen not to know is a failing in what is right.³³

According to his report on the cordial meeting, one of the participants interrupted their conversation and raised a series of unsuitable questions about Christianity.

'And who is perfectly imbued with the wisdom of Christianity, who can resolve certain ambiguous points on which I am stuck and can strengthen my hesitant assent with true or probable grounds for belief?' ... 'I wonder whether the Lord and ruler of the world filled the body of an inviolate woman, whether she endured those long annoyances over ten months, and whether, though a virgin, she nonetheless had the child in the ordinary manner of giving birth and after this her virginity remained intact'.³⁴

It is noticeable that Volusianus tells Augustine about questions raised by a friend of the circle, not about those of his own. Neither does he attempt to pose some questions about the scriptural reading, nor to communicate with Augustine about his own uncertainty as to the incarnation and the miracles Christ performed. Despite the fact that Marcellinus writes to Augustine to make known the questions about these issues, which have 'been examined again and again' by Volusianus and his fellows in Carthage,³⁵ Volusianus intends to deflect the attention of the bishop from the teachings of Christianity. Indeed, it is difficult to determine whether Volusianus was a pagan when he received the

³² Ep. 135.1; CChr.SL 31B, 249-50: '*Apud agnoscentem loquor; etiam ista paulo ante docuisti. ... ad familiarem tuam ... quam ipse ... fouere consueueras*'.

³³ Ep. 135.2; CChr.SL 31B, 251: '*Interest famae tuae, ut quaesita nouerimus. Vt cumque absque detrimento cultus diuini in aliis sacerdotibus toleratur inscitia, at cum ad antistitem Augustinum uenitur, legi deest, quicquid contigerit ignorari*'.

³⁴ Ep. 135.2; CChr.SL 31B, 250-1: "'*Et quis*", inquit, "*est sapientia ad perfectum christianitatis imbutus, qui ambigua, in quibus haereo, possit aperire dubiosque assensus meos uera uel uerisimili credulitate firmare?*" ... "*Miror, utrum mundi dominus et rector intemeratae feminae corpus impleuerit, pertulerit decem mensium longa illa fastidia mater et tamen uirgo enixa sit solemnitate pariendi et post haec uirginitas putatur intacta*".

³⁵ Ep. 136.1; CChr.SL 31B, 253: '*usquequaque detrita est*'.

letter from Augustine.³⁶ But, it is certain that, contrary to Augustine's concern for the spiritual health of the young aristocrat, Volusianus invited him to the circle of erudite friends. Volusianus explicitly preferred his own intellectual interest shared with others to the religious affiliation, the latter of which was not high on the list of priorities.

The letters that I have considered so far give a clear picture of Augustine's experience with less committed Christians whose religious identity resulted in no conflict with the social and intellectual engagement: they 'activate different allegiances, depending on the different contexts of interaction'.³⁷ They would communicate with Augustine because of them knowing about Augustine's former career as a professor of rhetoric. Although Augustine has repeatedly focused on how to accommodate a way of Christian living, it seems of little interest to both Dioscorus and Volusianus to be conscious of the incongruity between these codes of behaviour and thought. As a bishop who was confronted with an intellectual traditionalist, he would persuade his correspondent to pay attention to the exclusive privilege granted to the Christian way of life. But how did he suggest a way of disciplining them to conform to it?

Spiritual Training in the Letters of Augustine

The intellectual and therapeutic aspect of spiritual training

The first letter to be considered is *Letter 26*, dating from the period 394 or 395,³⁸ addressed to Licentius,³⁹ the son of Augustine's wealthy patron, Romanianus. Licentius had sent Augustine a lengthy poem (*Carmen*) attached to this letter, which, blended the Roman mythology together with the Christian scriptures, and would exhibit a compendium of the mathematical disciplines and an upwards journey and an ascent towards light.⁴⁰ While pointing to reasons for anxiety that he felt about his former student's circumstances, his reply indicates another way of finding the path to God, distinguished from that of an apparently Varronian (Varro of Reate) path in Licentius' poem. Augustine speaks of

³⁶ See for example A. Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (2011), 196; É. Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities* (2012), 81-2.

³⁷ Éric Rebillard, 'Religious Sociology: Being Christian in the Time of Augustine', in Mark Vessey (ed.), *A Companion to Augustine* (West Sussex, 2012), 40-53, 52.

³⁸ *Ep.* 26: Daur: 394, Divjak: 394, Eno: 395, Lancel: été-automne 395, Perler: 395 mi-avril/mi-mai, Teske: 394 or 395.

³⁹ On Licentius, see *PLRE* 2, 682; *PCBE* 1, s.v. 'Licentius', 640-2; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 11-2 and 42. See also Serge Lancel, 'Note complémentaire, Lettre 26', *BA* 40/A (2011), 624-8.

⁴⁰ For an edition of this enigmatic poem and its commentary, see Danuta Shanzer, 'Licentius's Verse Epistle to Augustine', *REAug* 37 (1991), 110-43; Michele Cutino, *Licentii Carmen ad Augustinum*, *Saggi e testi classici, cristiani e medievali* 13 (Catania, 2000).

the temporal stage of progress towards eternal embrace, in which wisdom has first prepared us and ‘tamed by certain laborious exercises’.⁴¹ When he sets out what stimulates him by the poem, the allusion to the problem of Licentius’ way of life would be seen as the urge to concentrate his attention on the mind, thereby compelling him to cling to Christ: ‘Christ is the truth.’⁴² This emphasis on the thoroughgoing internal reflection which also evokes their – Licentius, Augustine, and their friends – experience at a villa of Cassiciacum is taken very seriously by Augustine.⁴³ It is one of the essential elements of his view which has followed ancient tradition of spiritual training: they were the acute consciousness of the purification and the rectification of the mind.

Next we consider the group of *Letters* 37, 56, 102, 162, 193, 202A, and 2*, composed from 397 to 428, thus covering almost his entire episcopal period. The first of these letters, *Letter* 37, dating in approximately 397,⁴⁴ is addressed to his first mentor and friend, Simplician, who succeeded Ambrose as bishop of Milan in 397, and was probably accompanied by Augustine’s work, *De diuersis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum libri duo*.⁴⁵ In this short letter, not only does he express the pleasure that his writings have been of particular interest to his friend but pointed to his attempt to respond to a small set of queries from him. Despite the difficulties of resolving these problems he has faced, Augustine clearly acknowledges that Simplician would expect him to be exercised in such a way as to consider the problems, which come to be his first literary work as a bishop of Hippo, conforming to the various scriptural passages under investigation.

Letter 56, written perhaps around 402 and addressed to Celer,⁴⁶ the wealthy landowner of senatorial rank in Hippo Regius, provides a typical example of Augustine’s encouragement ‘to be trained in the studies leading to salvation in the knowledge of things human and divine.’⁴⁷ With regard to his idea about spiritual progress of mind, it is interesting to note that Augustine here refers to a more difficult task as ‘to break the chain of sinfulness, which has become habitual

⁴¹ *Ep.* 26 (1) 2; CChr.SL 31, 76: ‘exercitatoriis quibusdam laboribus edomuerit’.

⁴² *Ep.* 26 (3) 3; CChr.SL 31, 86: ‘Christus est ueritas’.

⁴³ For the narrative function of Licentius in the Cassiciacum dialogues, see Catherine Conybeare, ‘The Duty of a Teacher: Liminality and *disciplina* in Augustines *De ordine*’, in K. Pollmann and M. Vessey (eds), *Augustine and the Disciplines* (2005), 49–65.

⁴⁴ *Ep.* 37: Daur: 397, Divjak: 397, Eno: 397, Lancel: en 396-397, Perler: 396 printemps, Teske: ca. 397.

⁴⁵ O. Perler, *Les voyages de saint Augustin* (1969), 165-6; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 43.

⁴⁶ *Ep.* 56: Daur: 402(?), Divjak: 402?, Eno: 396-410, Lancel: sans doute en 402, Perler: 402, Teske: perhaps around 400. On Celer, see *PCBE* 1, s.v. Celer 1, 202-3; *PLRE* 2, s.v. Celer 2, 275; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 43. See also S. Lancel, *Saint Augustine* (2002), 276.

⁴⁷ *Ep.* 56.1; CChr.SL 31A, 3: ‘Salubribusque studiis in rerum diuinarum atque humanarum cognitione oblectari atque exerceri uelim’.

and like a friend',⁴⁸ that is, the view of spiritual exercises bringing together its intellectual aspect with a therapeutic one, depending on the comparison between temporal and eternal life promised us 'through Christ and in Christ.'⁴⁹

Letter 102, written in around 409,⁵⁰ is addressed to Augustine's fellow-priest, Deogratias of Carthage,⁵¹ so long that in *Retractationes* 2.31 he described it as a book entitled *Quaestiones expositae contra paganos*. After considering six questions which might partially derive from those of Porphyry,⁵² at the end of this letter, Augustine stresses the importance of those questions concerning divine scriptures from the viewpoint of the exercises of mind: 'But clearly, once we already hold onto the faith, we should investigate those questions with great eagerness in order to bring the minds of the faithful to experience pious delight, and we should share without any arrogance or pride whatever light we find in them.'⁵³

Letter 162, a part of the exchange between Augustine and his friend Evodius,⁵⁴ the bishop of Uzalis, was written in 414 or 415.⁵⁵ At the beginning of this letter, as a preliminary to replying to the questions Evodius asked him in the previous letters (159, 160, and 161), Augustine openly admits the fact that even those 'who are endowed with a mind that is less sharp and less well trained'⁵⁶ devote themselves to reading and understanding what he writes about complicated problems. These are referred to later in this letter, such as the correlation between body and soul, Christ's conception and birth, and so on. He would reflect on them afterward cautiously, thus admonishing Evodius for having much care in writing to them who want to consider these questions minutely.

Letter 193, written in the end of 418, is addressed to Marius Mercator,⁵⁷ who was a Catholic layman and the author of two treatises against Pelagianism (now

⁴⁸ *Ep.* 56.2; CChr.SL 31A, 4: '*Sed ad sectandam insolitam rectitudinem, usitatae et quasi familiaris peruersitatis uinculum abrumpere*'.

⁴⁹ *Ep.* 56.2; CChr.SL 31A, 3: '*per Christum atque in Christo*'.

⁵⁰ *Ep.* 102: Daur: 409, Divjak: 409, Eno: near 409, Lancel: entre 405 et 411, Perler: vers 409, Teske: between 406 and 412.

⁵¹ *PCBE* 1, s.v. Deogratias 1, 271-3; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 57.

⁵² *Ep.* 102.8; CChr.SL 31B, 13: *Ep.* 102.28; CChr.SL 31B, 26: *Ep.* 102.30; CChr.SL 31B, 27-8. For Porphyry's idea in this letter, see Isabelle Bochet, 'Les *quaestiones* attribuées à Porphyre dans la *Lettre* 102 d'Augustin', in Sébastien Morlet (ed.), *Le traité de Porphyre contre les chrétiens*, CEASA 190 (Paris, 2011), 371-94; Ariane Magny, 'How Important were Porphyry's Anti-Christian Ideas to Augustine?', *SP* 70 (2013), 55-61.

⁵³ *Ep.* 102.38; CChr.SL 31B, 33: '*Sed plane retenta iam fide ad exercendam piam delectationem mentium fidelium studiosissime requirendae et, quod in eis eluxerit, sine typho arrogantiae communicandum, quod autem latuerit, sine salutis dispendio tolerandum*'.

⁵⁴ *PCBE* 1, s.v. Euodius 1, 366-73; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 26. See also Wolfgang Hübner, *AL* 2 (1996-2002), 1158-61, s.v. 'Euodius'.

⁵⁵ *Ep.* 162: Divjak: 414/415, Eno: 414/415, Lancel: en 414/415, Teske: 414 or 415.

⁵⁶ *Ep.* 162.1; CSEL 44, 511: '*qui minus acuto minusque exercitato ingenio praediti*'.

⁵⁷ *Ep.* 193: Divjak: 418, Lancel: fin 418, Perler: 418 fin octobre, Teske: approximately 418. On Marius Mercator, see Edgardo Martín Morales and Robert Dodaro, *AL* 3 (2004-2010), 1179-81, s.v. 'Marius Mercator'; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 90.

not extant). They, too, contain the pedagogical aspect of these exercises and their correlation with the audience for the writings of Augustine and other people.

For we ought not to be teachers who cannot be taught, and it is certainly better that a little fellow be corrected than a rigid one be broken, for what we have written exercises and trains our weakness or that of others, even though our writings are not established with anything like the authority of the canon of scripture.⁵⁸

As already mentioned in the case of *Letter* 102, Augustine first draws the attention of the reader to the relevant issues and, in comparison with these problems, emphasises the importance of the scriptures from the intellectual aspect of spiritual training.

The next reference to these exercises in *Letter* 202A, dating to the beginning of 420, written to Optatus of Milevis,⁵⁹ is made in the similar context of pedagogical care for those who provide rashly and thoughtlessly an answer to a problem they do not know about. Although he himself still has not found out how the soul derived original sin from Adam, Augustine clearly offers the proper place to stop their investigation, in which 'they either find what they want or exercise the keenness of their mind by investigation'.⁶⁰ With regard to such a crucial problem, therefore, those seem to be invited exclusively to the exercise of their mind through the intensive enquiry.

Letter 2*, one of the so-called Divjak Letters (which Johannes Divjak discovered in 1981), was written probably in 428,⁶¹ that is, the last in time of the Divjak Letters, addressed to Firmus,⁶² a cultivated nobleman of Carthage, who had previously written to Augustine, sending a sample of his young son's declamation. After exhorting Firmus to receive baptism in the body of this letter (§ 3-11), Augustine finally points to the question of Firmus' unnamed young man.⁶³ The natural talent, fine liberal education, and skilled in rhetoric of the unnamed young man is highly commendable. It seems noticeable that, a very kind remark made to him, Augustine does hope the young man may devote himself not only to eloquence (which Cicero regards as useless without

⁵⁸ *Ep.* 193.4.10; CSEL 57, 173: '*Neque enim debemus indociles esse doctores et certe melius homo corrigitur paruus, quam frangitur durus, cum his, quae scripsimus, ita nostra uel aliorum exerceatur et erudiat infirmitas, ut tamen in eis nulla uelut canonica constituatur auctoritas*'.

⁵⁹ On Optatus of Milevis, see *PCBE* 1, s.v. Optatus 7, 803-5; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 45-7.

⁶⁰ *Ep.* 202A.2.6; CSEL 57, 305: '*Donec aut id, quod uolunt, reperiant, aut ipsa inquisitione aciem mentis exerceant*'.

⁶¹ *Ep.* 2*: Divjak: 427/428, Eno: probably 428, Lancel: en 426/427, Teske: probably 428.

⁶² *PCBE* 1, s.v. Firmus 4, 460; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 77. For this letter, see René Braun, 'Note complémentaire, Lettre 2*', BA 46B (1987), 427-9.

⁶³ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography. A New Edition with an Epilogue* (Berkeley, 2000), 471-3; Henry Chadwick, 'New Letters of St. Augustine', *JTS* ns 34 (1983), 472-8.

wisdom),⁶⁴ but to the nourishment for a more wholesome character. Although he may be reminded of the benefit of the rhetorical exercises in his youth, he cannot leave behind the path to which the way of life should be led. Therefore, he provides the young man with same advice on the rectification of the mind as what he did to his fellow Licentius, as mentioned above, in *Letter 26*.

The religious and eschatological aspect of spiritual training

Next comes a group of letters which were seemingly composed between 408 and 415 and pertain to Augustine's religious dimension of these exercises, contained in *Letters 92, 130, 131, 137, and 157*. *Letter 92*, dating to 408 or 409,⁶⁵ was written to Italica,⁶⁶ a wealthy noblewoman who recently lost her husband and had asked Augustine if God could be seen with bodily eyes. With regard to the problem which he had turned again and again to try to resolve,⁶⁷ in the case of this letter, he plainly touches on the absurdity of such a view that God is a body. And he says that the vision of God is promised to us as a reward of faith. Certainly it may not be striking that he speaks of the exercises of the saints' mind as trained to purposefully attaining divine vision.

Letter 130, dating probably to 411 or 412,⁶⁸ was addressed to a wealthy Roman widow, Anicia Proba Faltonia,⁶⁹ who had fled to North Africa when the Goths attacked Rome. The bishop of Hippo then, answering her question on the prayer to God, refers to the exercises of the mind by taking up the scriptural texts. Three passages are given to her: *2Cor.* 6:11, *1Cor.* 2:9, and *Rom.* 8:26. First, he stresses the discontinuity between our need for prayer and the knowability of God, 'who knows what we need before we ask him'. In fact, although God cannot fail to know what we have need of, this is not enough: 'Our desire, by which we can receive what he prepares to give, [is] to be exercised in prayers'.⁷⁰ This leads Augustine on to *2Cor.* 6:11: 'Make your heart bigger so that you do not bear that yoke with unbelievers', which follows the explanation of the greatness of his gift as: 'That which is, indeed, very great, "which the eye has not seen", because it is not a color, "and the ear has not heard",

⁶⁴ Cicero, *De inuentione* 1.1 and Aug. *De doctrina christiana* 4.5.7.

⁶⁵ *Ep.* 92: Daur: 408/409, Divjak: 408/409, Eno: 408, Lancel: 408/409, Perler: 408/409, Teske: sometime prior to 408.

⁶⁶ On Italica, see *PLRE* 2, 465-6; S. Lancel, *Saint Augustine* (2002), 238-9; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 89.

⁶⁷ *Ep.* 147 addressed to Paulina around in 413; *Retractationes* 2.41.

⁶⁸ *Ep.* 130: Daur: 411/412, Divjak: 411/412, Eno: after 411, Lancel: entre 411 et 413, Teske: not much later than 411.

⁶⁹ *PCBE* 1, 921; *PLRE* 2, 732-3; S. Lancel, *Saint Augustine* (2002), 393; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 80. See also Carolinne White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge, 1995), 205-6.

⁷⁰ *Ep.* 130.17; CChr.SL 31B, 225: '*Qui nouit, quid nobis necessarium sit, priusquam petamus ab eo ... exerceri in orationibus desiderium nostrum, quo possimus capere, quod praeparat dare*'.

because it is not a sound, “nor has it ascended into the heart of a human being”(1*Cor.* 2:9).⁷¹ This view of the relation between the need for prayer to God (at all times) and its reward lies in fact at the centre of Augustine’s religious and eschatological aspect of these exercises. Another text which is correlated with his view is *Rom.* 8:26: ‘We do not know what we should pray for as we ought’, which would suppose those who do not know what benefit the vexations and troubles in this life provide.⁷² The belief in the magnificence of its reward occurs in the context of the exhortation to the prayer. Here, too, we find the statement that the affections, that is ‘the swelling of pride’ and ‘patience’, should be tested and exercised through the prayer in order to receive the greatness of the reward.

The next letter in the group under consideration, *Letter* 131 to the same widow in between 411 and 413,⁷³ contains the same passage from *Rom.* 8:28. In agreement with her comment that the corruptibility of the temporal body (*corpus corruptibile*) is the burden to the soul,⁷⁴ Augustine resorts to the texts of *Wisd.* 9:15: ‘For the corruptible body weighs down the soul, and the earthly dwelling presses down the mind as it thinks of many things’. Again, he refers to the necessity of the exercises of our patience for ‘the hope of the world to come’.

Letter 137, written in 411 or 412 and addressed to the layman Volusianus,⁷⁵ deals with the question of Christ’s divine and human nature. In the main part of this letter (§ 2-18),⁷⁶ Augustine gives a careful account of the grounds for the central Christian beliefs, among which are the miracles of Christ. His argument against those who do not believe in the greatness of his miracles move on to the description of the history of the Christian religion, in which he suggests that the persecution and heresies have emerged as the touchstone of its teaching: ‘In alternating times of adversity and of prosperity they vigilantly practice patience and temperance.’⁷⁷ And not only does he suggest the necessity of these exercises in the life to come but he can even situate the practice of these exercises in the salvific functions of the Church, imperfect and uncertain though they be, as a foreshadowing of the true reward to come.

⁷¹ *Ep.* 130.17; CChr.SL 31B, 225: ‘*Tanto quippe illud, quod ualde magnum est, quod nec oculus uidit, quia non est color, nec auris audiuit, quia non est sonus, nec in cor hominis ascendit*’.

⁷² For Augustine’s interpretation of *Rom.* 8:26 in this letter, Anne-Marie la Bonnardière, ‘La lettre à Proba (*Rom.* 8, 26)’, in A.-M. la Bonnardière (ed.), *Saint Augustine et la Bible*, Bible de tout les temps (Paris, 1986), 181-8.

⁷³ *Ep.* 131: Daur: 411/412, Divjak: 411/412, Eno: 412/413, Lancel: entre 411 et 413, Teske: 412 or 413.

⁷⁴ Frederik Van Fleteren, ‘Augustine’s Exegesis of Wisdom 9:15’, *SP* 27 (1993), 409-16.

⁷⁵ *Ep.* 137: Daur: 411/412, Divjak: 411/412, Eno: 411/412, Lancel: printemps 412, Teske: 411 or 412. On Volusianus, see note 22.

⁷⁶ Gerald O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God: A Reader’s Guide* (Oxford, 1999), 33.

⁷⁷ *Ep.* 137.16; CChr.SL 31B, 271: ‘*Alternis aduersitatibus et prosperitatibus rerum patientiam et temperantiam uigilanter exercent*’.

Letter 157, written in 414 or 415 and addressed to Hilary, a Catholic layman from Syracuse in Sicily,⁷⁸ deals with a series of questions about some Pelagian teachings which he had asked for Augustine to engage with.⁷⁹ Part of his answer is that concerning the baptism of infants the Pelagians must not impede the salvation through the grace of Christ, and once again the focus is on the exercise of faith.⁸⁰ For in the case of those who are redeemed by the death of Christ, for the time being the temporal death of the body remains and the exercise of their faith should not be taken away. The reign of death is ended in the renewal of the body that the resurrection promises.

The exegetical aspect of spiritual training

We come now to consider *Letter 28*, 137, 149, and 199, composed from 394 to seemingly 420, thus occurring sporadically in his episcopal period. The first of these, *Letter 28* is addressed to Jerome (dating in 394 or 395),⁸¹ who received this one of their correspondence only many years later after it had circulated in Rome and elsewhere.⁸² Although he has been critical to Jerome's interpretation of *Galatians* (*Gal.* 2:11-4), in his greetings before getting down to business, Augustine praises him for his diligent and 'liberal pursuit (*exercitatio liberalis*)' of scriptures.⁸³ In accord with his expression, in *Letter 72* (dated to 403), Jerome has high praise for the exegete Augustine, for diligently and successfully engaging in the study of scriptures.⁸⁴

The second letter is *Letter 137*, as mentioned above, addressed to the layman Volusianus, that was written in response to the christological questions in 411 or 412.⁸⁵ After discussing the issue of the growth of the Christian religion, in the end of this letter, he turns to Christ's twofold commandment of love of God and of neighbour, in which all wisdom of philosophy is embodied. He refers then to the simplicity of the scriptural language in contrast with the hidden truth in the scriptures: 'And it [*sc.* scripture] not only feeds them with the evident truth but also exercises them with the hidden truth, though it has the same truth in clear matters as in hidden ones. ... By

⁷⁸ *Ep.* 157: Divjak: 414/415, Eno: 414/early 415, Lancel: 414, Teske: 414 or 415.

⁷⁹ F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 93; Georges de Plinval, 'Introduction à la lettre d'Augustin à Hilaire', BA 21 (1966), 27-30.

⁸⁰ *Ep.* 157.3.19; CSEL 44, 468.

⁸¹ *Ep.* 28: Daur: 394/395, Divjak: 394/395, Eno: 394/395, Lancel: printemps 395, Perler: 395 printemps, Teske: between 394 and 395.

⁸² F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 70-1; R. Teske, WSA II/1 (2001), 90. See also Carolinne White, *The Correspondence (394-419) between Jerome and Augustine*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 23 (Lewiston, NY, 1990).

⁸³ *Ep.* 28.1; CChr.SL 31B, 92: '*exercitatio liberalis*'.

⁸⁴ *Ep.* 72.3; CChr.SL 31A, 41 (= Jerome, *Ep.* 105.2.3; CSEL 55, 244).

⁸⁵ *Ep.* 137: Daur: 411/412, Divjak: 411/412, Eno: 411/412, Lancel: printemps 412, Teske: 411 or 412.

these, evil minds are salutarily corrected, little minds are fed, and great minds are delighted.⁸⁶ This is the place for both the unlearned and the learned to practice their exercises by approaching the ‘lowly language’ of the scriptures.

The next two letters, *Letter 149* and *199*, deal with obscure passages found in the scriptures. First, *Letter 149*, among the correspondence between Augustine and Paulinus of Nola, was written in 416 as a reply to *Letter 121* written by Paulinus, in approximately 413.⁸⁷ Augustine’s comprehensive response to the query contains the interpretation of difficult passages from *Psalms* (§ 3-10), *Ephesians* (§ 11), *1Timothy* (§ 12), *Romans* (§ 18-22), *Colossians* (§ 23-30), and the *Gospel* (§ 31-3). He closes the letter by explaining the significance of those interpretations connected with the spiritual training of the mind.

For, when you argue as you ask questions, you both ask with acuteness and teach with humility. It is useful, however, to discover many opinions on the obscure passages of the divine scriptures, which God wanted to be there in order to provide exercise for our minds, when different people have different views, though they are all nonetheless in accord with the teaching of sound faith.⁸⁸

The similar references to the meaning of scriptural interpretations are found in *Letter 199*, written to Hesychius, bishop of Salonae in Dalmatia, who had asked him about the end of the world: to the letter, he refers in the *City of God* 20.5.4, which dated to 418-420.⁸⁹ In this long letter, being the size of a small treatise, Augustine attempts to interpret the Lord’s eschatological discourse, thereby thinking carefully about which of those signs in various scriptural passages refers to which of those events at the second coming of the Lord.⁹⁰ Then, he warns him ‘not to be content with their [scriptural] surface meaning’,⁹¹ because the exegete is required to exercise the mind by understanding the hidden

⁸⁶ *Ep.* 137.5.18; CChr.SL 31B, 272-3: ‘*Sed inuitat omnes humili sermone, quos non solum manifesta pascit, sed etiam secreta exercent ueritate hoc in promptis quod in reconditis habens. ... His salubriter et praua corriguntur et parua nutriuntur et magna oblectantur ingenia*’.

⁸⁷ *Ep.* 149; Divjak: 414-416, Eno: late 415, Lancel: entre 414 et 416, Perler: 415 fin de l’année, Teske: toward the end of 416. See *PLRE* 2, 681-3; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 40-2.

⁸⁸ *Ep.* 149.3.34; CSEL 44, 379: ‘*Cum enim interrogando disputas, et quaeris acriter et doces humiliter. utile est autem, ut de obscuritatibus diuinarum scripturarum, quas exercitationis nostrae causa deus esse uoluit, multae inueniantur sententiae, cum aliud alii uidetur, quae tamen omnes sanae fidei doctrinaeque concordent*’.

⁸⁹ *Ep.* 199; Divjak: 418/420, Eno: uncertain, Lancel: entre 418 et 420, Teske: 419/420. On Hesychius, see S. Lancel, *Saint Augustine* (2002), 370, 409; F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus* (1993), 48. See also Anne-Marie la Bonnardière, ‘Hesychius de Salone et Augustin (lettre 197-198-199)’, in A.-M. la Bonnardière (ed.), *Saint Augustine et la Bible*, Bible de tout les temps (Paris, 1986), 229-50.

⁹⁰ *Ep.* 199.9.26; CSEL 57, 266.

⁹¹ *Ep.* 199.11.42; CSEL 57, 280: ‘*nec earum superficie debemus esse contenti*’.

meaning of the passages. The obscure passages in the scriptures express the intention of God, in which 'God has chosen to exercise our minds'.⁹²

Letter 213, prepared by Augustine as the record of the ecclesiastical proceedings, is not included in the letter properly speaking. On 26 September 426, he summoned his clergy and laity to the *Basilica Pacis* in Hippo in order to designate the priest Eraclius (Heraclius) as succeeding him in the bishopric.⁹³ And he intentionally produces this document so as to facilitate the change of leadership in the church and to remind Eraclius of this important ceremony. It may even be regarded as the remarkable testimony, not only because the ecclesiastical secretaries were faithfully and attentively noting these *Acta ecclesiastica*, but also because it expresses Augustine's own hope with which he would commit himself to his concern in the rest of his life, 'so that I at long last, if God grants me a little more time in this life, may not devote my remaining days to laziness or spend them in inactivity but may exercise my mind in the holy scriptures as much as he permits and grants.'⁹⁴ Augustine denies that he retires from all administrative duties in the church and that the new bishop should do them by himself alone. But, he asks his congregation's permission to turn his mind to his own matter: 'Let no one, then, begrudge me my leisure, because my leisure will involve important work.'⁹⁵

Concluding observations

Augustine's letters considered in this article cover a wide span, more or less encompassing his entire episcopal period with a sustained effort to encourage his correspondents to confirm the significance of spiritual training. However much one might naturally expect the evolution of Augustine's view of the exercises from the first half of the 390s until 428 (immediately before his death in 430), the evidence for multiple aspects of these exercises suggests that he seems to have avoided the development and change in his thought. Although he repeatedly turned to the necessity of the spiritual discipline as a means for persuading his readers through the epistolary conversation, it was not the major focus of his letters. Augustine did not write any letter devoted mainly to the issue of spiritual training. This does not mean, however, that his continual invitations had only limited significance for him and his correspondents. For instance, while some Christians were skilled at providing a rationale for their

⁹² *Ep.* 199.11.45; CSEL 57, 284: '*nostras intellegentias deo placuit exercere*'.

⁹³ P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (2000), 411-2; S. Lancel, *Saint Augustin* (2002), 457-8.

⁹⁴ *Ep.* 213.6; CSEL 57, 378: '*Et ego tandem aliquando, si quantulumcumque spatium mihi donauerit deus, ipsamque meam quantulumcumque uitam non dem segnitiae nec donem inertiae, sed in sanctis scripturis, quantum ipse permittit et largitur, exerceam*'.

⁹⁵ *Ep.* 213.6; CSEL 57, 378: '*Nemo ergo inuideat otio meo, quia meum otium magnum habet negotium*'.

curiosity and intellectual interests, Augustine attempted to direct their attention to the correlation between the 'liberal pursuit' and scriptural exegesis, thereby enabling them to follow and obey the scriptural injunction to serve one another in love: 'All successful biblical interpretation must result in ethically good behaviour: love towards God and one's neighbour.'⁹⁶ In fact, however, there were Christians whose religious identity was not in serious conflict with their social, cultural, and civic contact and network density. It looks as if they switched to different types of identity under different circumstances. Being confronted with the arbitrary choice of identities, 'Augustine does not agree with this' state of affairs.⁹⁷ It is important to note that, because of his repeated claims in epistolary exchanges to be open and that his letters circulated publicly (probably in small groups),⁹⁸ these letters could have served as spiritual and pastoral resources in Hippo and other African communities and that, despite his determined efforts directed towards the practice of spiritual training which assists the spiritual improvement of his correspondents, they may not have respond to the social realities in late antiquity. Thus, when one attempts to read his letters as a discourse for the improvement of the whole Christian community, his teaching of spiritual training would be considered to be a spiritual, but eventually failed device for connecting the personal discipline with communal salvation. As well as the confirmation of its role in helping the shared progress towards salvation, the spiritual training for every individual soul was expected to enhance the spiritual affinities and the affectionate relationship in the community.

⁹⁶ K. Pollmann, 'Augustine's Hermeneutics as a Universal Discipline?' (2005), 230.

⁹⁷ É. Rebillard, 'Religious Sociology' (2012), 51.

⁹⁸ J. Ebbeler, *Disciplining Christians* (2012), 15.