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Augustine's Quest for Perfection and the Encounter with the *Vita Antonii**

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1 INTRODUCTION

Before narrating the *tolle lege* incident in a Milanese garden in Book 8 of *Confessions* (400–402), Augustine explains how he had become familiar with the Latin version of the *Life of Antony* by Athanasius of Alexandria.[1] In the summer of 386, Augustine and his friend Alypius were visited by a fellow countryman and servant of the emperor, Ponticianus, who told them the story of Antony, an Egyptian monk already well respected in ascetic circles. To his surprise, Ponticianus learned that Augustine and Alypius had not known about the existence of a monastery in Milan under the care of Ambrose.[2] Ponticianus then proceeded to tell another story in which two members of the emperor's court at Trier were led to denounce worldly ambition by their reading of a manuscript of the *Vita*.[3] After Ponticianus took his leave from their house, Augustine, who was already involved in violent inner conflict, agonised over his own indecision, his fluctuated and divided will.[4] The climax to this narrative came after he reminded himself of the episode that Antony's

* A draft of this study was presented at the conference, Early Christian Centuries 1: Men and Women in Early Christianity, held at Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, on 4 October 2013.

[1] *Conf.* 8.6.14–16. English trans. in P. Burton (ed. and trans.), *Augustine, The Confessions* (New York: Everyman's Library, 2001).

[2] *Conf.* 8.6.15.

[3] Ibid.

[4] *Conf.* 8.8.19–10.24.

Research Report Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C) 23520098: 41–52

monastic vocation happened to be caused by hearing a passage from the gospel. Augustine heard a child's voice chanting *tolle lege*, decided to imitate Antony, and read a passage from Romans. He committed himself to the ascetic life and to the church.[5] After he was ordained to the priesthood in Hippo in 391 and engaged in studying the scriptures to prepare for this new role as a cleric,[6] Augustine started work on *On Christian Teaching*, by which he intended to offer a guide to the scriptural interpretation. Hence, approximately a decade after this first encounter with Antony in the preface to *On Christian Teaching*,[7] Augustine briefly referred to the Egyptian monk as an exemplar for readers of the scriptures. Augustine was particularly impressed with a passage from the *Life of Antony* (3.7) in which Antony is described as having a formidable memory which enabled him to remember the scriptures even though he lacked any knowledge of letters.

Outside these two texts—the preface to *On Christian Teaching* (396–397) and Book 8 of *Confessions* (400–402)—references to the monk Antony are hard to find in Augustine's works. Therefore, it is highly likely that, for some time after his conversion (386) and before his episcopal ordination in Hippo in around 395,[8] Augustine could read a Latin version of the *Life of Antony* and be inspired by the ascetic legacy, mostly under the authority of the scriptures.[9] Much ink has been spilt over these texts in

[5] *Conf.* 8.12.29.

[6] *Ep.* 21.3. The importance of this letter as the testimony of Augustine's debt to Valerius, especially about a scriptural framework for ministry is discussed in M. Cameron, 'Valerius of Hippo: A Profile', *AugStud* 40 (2009) 5–26.

[7] *Doc. chr.* pref. 4. English trans. in R. P. H. Green (ed. and trans.), *Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

[8] Indeed, with respect to the precise date of the crucial event in Augustine's life, there is still uncertainty among scholars: see S. Lancel, *Saint Augustine*, A. Nevill (trans.) (London: SCM Press, 1999) 184–185.

[9] It is very likely that Augustine came to read the *Vita Antonii*, written by Athanasius in 357, in one of the Latin translations made by Evagrius of Antioch (from before 368 to around 388), which is often evaluated as loose one, while another, anonymous version is closer to the original work written in Greek. See on this P. F. Beatrice, 'Augustine's Longing for Holiness and the Problem of Monastic Illiteracy', in J. Baun, A. Cameron, M. Edwards, and M. Vinzent (eds.), *StudPatr* 49 (2010) 124–130; *pace* P. Monceaux, 'Saint Augustin et Saint Antoine: Contribution à l'histoire du monachisme', in *Miscellanea Agostiniana* 2 (Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1931) 61–89. For ancient translations of the *Vita*, see also H. Hoppenbrouwers, *La plus ancienne version latine de la vie de s. Antoine par s. Athanase: étude de critique textuelle* (Nijmegen: Dekkers and Van De Vegt, 1960); A. de Vogüé, *Histoire littéraire du mouvement monastique dans l'antiquité* 1 (Paris: Cerf, 1991)

the effort to assess the significance of Antony for Augustine, who propounds the utility of guidance in interpreting the scriptures and speaks about an iconic figure of the monastic tradition in reference to his own conversion.[10] How does Augustine evaluate the influence that the hagiographic text exerted both on the practice of biblical exegesis and on the determination of his way of life? More interesting and significant, though, is the process by which it would be necessary to undertake such an evaluation. Thus, we may ask, in what process did Augustine place Antony in the development of his early thought? In this paper, I have confined myself, first, to Augustine's description of the Egyptian monk in those two texts and, second, to the process of his consideration. Finally, I shall venture an explanation for its significance.

2 THE PREFACE IN *ON CHRISTIAN TEACHING*

Some scholars have attempted to explain the actual horizon of *On Christian Teaching*, thereby considering the problem of its intended audience. One would suppose that the purpose of this work is to construct the model for a widely recognised 'Christian culture', while the other claims that it should be regarded as the manual for the activity of preaching on biblical texts.[11] Those have entered into an agreement with the ab-

chap. 1 'La Vie de saint Antoine'; K. S. Frank, 'Antonius Aegyptius monachus', in *AL* 1 (1986–1994) 381–383 at 381–382; G. J. M. Bartelink (ed.), *Athanasius: Vie d'Antoine*, Sources chrétiennes 400 (Paris: Cerf, 1994); D. Brakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism* (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) 201–265; Ph. Rousseau, 'Antony as Teacher in the Greek "Life"', in T. Hägg and Ph. Rousseau (eds.), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angels: University of California Press, 2001) 89–109; J. W. Harmless, 'Monasticism', in S. A. Harvey and D. G. Hunter (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 493–517 at 498–501; Ph. Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian*, 2nd edn. (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010) 248–250.

[10] P. Monceaux, 'Saint Augustin et Saint Antoine', in *Miscellanea Agostiniana* 2; P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les confessions de saint Augustin*, 2nd edn. (Paris: De Boccard, 1968) 181–187; A. Zumkeller, *Augustine's Ideal of the Religious Life* (New York; Fordham University Press, 1986); G. Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); S. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1995) 163–184; A. de Vogüé, *Histoire littéraire du mouvement monastique* 2 (1993) and 3 (1996).

[11] Concerning the debate about the purpose and the characteristics of his treatise on biblical hermeneutics, see R. P. H. Green, *Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana*, ix–xxi; C. Schäublin,

stract aspect of his language,[12] and the issue is still open to dispute. It is because, in the prologue to this work, neither does Augustine dedicate it to a particular person nor refer to a specific reader by proper name. Instead, Augustine shows the three categories of possible critic, with which he replies beforehand to the objection that could be set against his undertaking. There are those who will reject his endeavour clearly because they could not understand what he has shown;[13] those who might understand it, but not able to follow the 'rules for interpreting the scriptures',[14] thus regarding his exposition as useless;[15] and those who would declare that their ability in interpreting obscure passages has no need of the precepts Augustine is explaining as follows:

> A third class of critic consists of those who either interpret the divine scriptures quite correctly or think they do. Because they see, or at least believe, that they have gained their ability to expound the holy books without recourse to any rules of the kind that I have now undertaken to give, they will protest that these rules are not needed by anybody, and that all worthwhile illumination of the difficulties of these texts can come by a special gift of God.[16]

It is admitted that the position of these critics is a challenge that troubles him much more than the previous categories. Augustine does indeed give a lengthy and detailed reply to this class of objectors. Who does

'*De doctrina christiana*: A Classic of Western Culture?', in D. W. H. Arnold and P. Bright (eds.), *De doctrina christiana: A Classic of Western Culture* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) 47–67; K. Pollmann, 'Doctrina christiana (De –)', in *AL* 2 (1996–2002) 551–575 at 554–555; T. Toom, *Thought Clothed With Sound: Augustine's Christological Hermeneutics in* De doctrina Christiana (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002) 71–74; K. Pollmann, 'Augustine's Hermeneutics as a Universal Discipline?', in K. Pollmann and M. Vessey (eds.), *Augustine and the Disciplines: From Cassiciacum to Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 206–231; E. Morgan, *The Incarnation of the Word: The Theology of Language of Augustine of Hippo* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010) 43–45.

[12] See K. Pollmann, 'Augustine's Hermeneutics', 209; J. J. O'Donnell, '*Doctrina Christiana, De*', in *ATA* (1999) 278–280 at 279.

[13] *Doc. chr.* pref. 2.

[14] *Doc. chr.* pref. 1; CSEL 80,3: 'praecepta quaedam tractandarum scripturarum'.

[15] *Doc. chr.* pref. 2.

[16] *Doc. chr.* pref. 2; CSEL 80,3–4: 'Tertium genus est reprehensorum qui divinas scripturas vel re vera bene tractant vel bene tractare sibi videntur. Qui quoniam nullis huiusmodi observationibus lectis quales nunc tradere institui, facultatem exponendorum sanctorum librorum se assecutos vel vident vel putant, nemini esse ista praecepta necessaria, sed potius totum quod de illarum litterarum obscuritatibus laudabiliter aperitur, divino munere fieri posse clamitabunt.'

belong to this class? Despite of the elusive expression in his response, there have been serious attempts to specify the third group. An interesting effort to identify them is that of Ulrich Duchrow:[17] according to him, those mentioned in the preface were the body of 'charismatics' mentioned in the writings of John Cassian, which he composed at the monastery in Massilia about in the 420s.[18] A monk replied to a question, for instance, from his brothers that they should not depend on secular erudition. These monks devoted all their energy to the biblical exegesis, but only through divine illumination in their prayers. However, since there exists a similarity between the 'charismatics' and the third objectors, the other possibility should not be ignored. In *On the Work of Monks*, written in ca. 401 by Augustine, the presence of these 'charismatics' is shown: they claim for their scriptural interpretation depend on a putative revelation obtained by divine gift through their prayers.[19] The relation between the preface in *On Christian Teaching* and the reference in his monastic booklet seems to be more proximate in its chronological context.[20]

[17] 'Zum Prolog von Augustins "De doctrina christiana"', *Vigiliae Christianae* 17 (1963) 165–172. His arguments are also discussed in I. Opelt, 'Materialien zur Nachwirkung von Augustins Schrift "De doctrina christiana"', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 17 (1974) 64–73; G. J. M. Bartelink, *Athanasius: Vie d'Antoine*, 41; *pace* C. P. Mayer, ' "Res per signa". Der Grundgedanke des Prologs in Augustins Schrift *De doctrina christiana* und das Problem seiner Datierung', *REAug* 20 (1974) 100–112. See also E. Kevane, 'Paideia and Anti-Paideia: The *Prooemium* of St. Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*', *AugStud* 1 (1970) 153–180; K. B. Steinhauser, 'Codex Leningradensis Q.v.I.3: Some Unresolved Problems', in Arnold and Bright (eds.), *De doctrina christiana*, 33–43; I. Bochet, 'La date de composition du prologue et les adversaires visés', in M. Moreau, I. Bochet, and G. Madec (eds.), *La doctrine chrétienne*, in BA 11/2 (1997) 429–433.

[18] Cassian, *De institutis coenobiorum* 5.33–34 and *Colationes* 14.9–10. See U. Duchrow, 'Zum Prolog von Augustins', 165–169; P. Brunner, 'Charismatische und methodische Schriftauslegung nach Augustins Prolog zu "De doctrina christiana"', *Kerygma und Dogma* 1 (1955) 85–89; P. F. Beatrice, 'Augustine's Longing for Holiness', 120–122.

[19] *Op. mon.* 1.2; 17.20, are keen to emphasise that these Carthaginian monks only focus on scriptural reading and prayers with psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles.

[20] See P. F. Beatrice, 'Augustine's Longing for Holiness', 122–124: Dependent on some similarities between the third group and 'charismatic' monks is Duchrow's opinion that becomes the focus of Augustine's direct dependence of this preface on Cassian's writings, thereby claiming that the preface was published only in 426–428 with the completion of *On Christian Teaching*. But, the matter can be settled by the fact that the preface, along with the the first two books of the work, was circulated long before as an unpublished manuscript (the so-called St Petersburg Q.v.I.3, written around 400) among the reader. Consequently, it is more reasonable that Augustine was not obliged to read Cassians treatises to ac-

Although these efforts to the identification of possible critics have not resolved the problem, through their investigations, I may rather realise the mutually exclusive ways of interpreting difficult passages in the scriptures: one is the way of exegesis, which does not require any need of the kind of guidelines, yet inspired by the outpouring of divine gift, thus being properly designated as 'charismatic'; and the other is the way which is delivered by human teachers systematically, being appropriate for the methodical and technical practice of exegesis.

> Yet that would be no good reason for them [scil. those who exult in their divine gift] to feel humiliated by the holy and perfect Egyptian monk Anthony, who, though lacking any knowledge of the alphabet, is reported to have memorized the divine scriptures by listening to them being read, and to have understood them by thoughtful meditation; . . . [21]

It is interesting to note that, in his criticism against the third class of objectors, Augustine draws the figure of Anthony. Does the mention of this exemplary character play a particular role in the emphasis not only on the uneducated, but even on the illiterate? Augustine, in fact, claims that those critics should not forget that they learned the alphabet with human help. Thus, I may wonder whether the reference to Antony may serve as a lesson for those who boast of their lack of human teaching. Why does Augustine present the figure in the advocacy of his methodical way of exegesis?

3 THE STORIES OF CONVERSION IN *CONFESSIONS*

In the book 8 of *Confessions*, several years after he wrote the prologue to *On Christian Teaching*, Augustine reminds himself of the first encounter with Antony occurred about fifteen years ago. In Milan, immediately before his final choice of a way of life, a casual guest, a fellow-African,

cess to the information about the activities of these 'charismatics'. For these Carthaginian monks, see also G. Folliet, 'Des moines euchites à Carthage en 400–401', *StudPatr* 2 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957) 386–399; A. Zumkeller, *Augustine's Ideal*, 81 n. 33; R. Arbesmann, 'The Attitude of Saint Augustine Toward Labor', in D. Neiman and M. Schatkin (eds.), *The Heritage of the Early Church* (Rome: Pontificio Istituo Orientale, 1973) 245–259.

[21] *Doc. chr.* pref. 4; CSEL 80,4: 'nec propterea sibi ab Antonio sancto et perfecto Aegyptio monacho insulari debere, qui sine ulla scientia litterarum scripturas divinas et momoriter audiendo tenuisse et prudenter cogitando intellexisse praedicatur, . . . '.

Ponticianus tells Augustine and his friend, Alypius, the story of two colleagues at Trier. Their sudden experience of reading a manuscript of the *Life of Antony* inspired them to renounce the world. When Ponticianus has finished the story and leaves Augustine standing in the garden with Alypius, Augustine is tormented by interior conflict and starts to talk to himself. This is not the first story of conversion that stimulates his own conversion. What is the initial one? As becomes clear from the preceding passage, Augustine struggled with it, when Simplicianus, a Milanese priest, told him the story of Marius Victorinus' conversion.[22] Since he was a professor of rhetoric at Rome, sometime after his baptism, when a law was passed under the reign of the Emperor Julian that prohibited Christians from teaching literature and rhetoric, 'Victorinus had welcomed that law with open arms, and had chosen to abandon the verbiage of the schools rather than abandon your Word'.[23] After hearing the story of Victorinus, Augustine was keen to imitate him by embracing the happiness he has been looking for so long. Victorinus' immediate resignation becomes an exemplar for Augustine in his hesitation. It is the stimulus which leads him to the renunciation of the world.

Any reader familiar with the story of conversion in *Confessions* would be impressed with their reading of the *Life of Antony* in the story of Ponticianus and regard the Egyptian monk as the prototype of the monastic way of life. Besides, it is easily seen that, within the sequence of the conversion stories, not only two imperial officials at Trier but even Augustine himself, with Alypius in a garden, are affected by a decisive influence that this hagiographic text exerts upon the renunciation of the world. Does the model-monk make the same impact on these conversions? It is noticeable that both the imperial agent and Augustine raises the anxious questions about their situation. One of the officers says to his colleague:

'Tell me this: all these tasks we endure—where are they taking us? What is it we are looking for? For what reason are we in the Imperial Service? Can we have any greater hope at Court than of becoming Friends of the Emperor?'[24]

[22] *Conf.* 8.2.3–4.9.

[23] *Conf.* 8.5.10; BA 14,28: 'quam legem ille amplexus loquacem scholam deserere maluit quam uerbum tuum'.

[24] *Conf.* 8.6.15; BA 14,38: 'dic, quaeso te, omnibus istis laboribus nostris quo ambimus peruenire? quid quaerimus? cuius rei causa militamus? maiorne esse poterit spes nostra in palatio, quam ut amici imperatoris simus?'

In like manner Augustine cries out to his friend:

'What is it we are enduring? What is it? What have you heard? The untaught arise and *lay hold of heaven* (Matt. 11.12) while we, for all our learning, have no heart—see where we wallow in flesh and blood! Are we ashamed to follow them, merely because they have gone first? Should we not rather be ashamed not to follow them?'[25]

Indeed, all of them are invited to the renunciation of the world. And after knowing and hearing the story of the Egyptian monk, they make their final choice of the monastic life. However, in the exclamation just before the decisive moment, Augustine refers to the conflict between the ignorance and the learning, the latter of which has occupies his mind and turns him into the state of a sinful life. Thus, his encounter with the *Life of Antony* reveals the contrast between himself (and his friends) and the uneducated, the former of whom is anxious that 'the untaught' might be led to celestial life without any hindrance.

4 AUGUSTINE'S QUEST FOR PERFECTION

After his resignation from professorship, Augustine withdrew from Milan to the Cassiciacum estate with a group of his friends. During the rural retreat to the villa, he was acutely conscious of his duty as the 'disciplinary guide' for pursing a good life. Thus, in the latter part of the Book 2 of his dialogue, *On Order*, he emphasises the importance of having instruction in the liberal arts.[26] This process of education is considered to be the indispensable preparation for the cognition of truth. Later in *Reconsideration* (written in 427), Augustine re-examines and criticises such heavy emphasis on the disciplines, whereas he confirms that 'the liberal disciplines, which many holy persons know very little about'.[27] Apart from such an approach, what evidence is there for the fact that Augustine's view of the ignorance after his encounter with the Egyptian

[25] *Conf.* 8.8.19; BA 14,46: 'quid patimur? quid est hoc, quid audisti? surgunt indocti et caelum rapiunt, et nos cum doctrinis nostris sine corde ecce ubi uolutamur in carne et sanguine! an quia praecesserunt, pudet sequi et non pudet nec saltem sequi?'

[26] See *Ord.* 2.16.44

[27] *Retr.* 1,3.2; CCSL 57,12: 'liberalibus disciplinis, quas multi sancti multum nesciunt'. English trans. in B. Ramsey (trans.), *Revisions*, in R. Teske (ed.), WSA I/2 (2010).

monk contained some suggestions while being changed into a distinctively Christian concept? It must be seen that, in the late 380s, Augustine is becoming detached from his zeal for the liberal arts. First, in the earliest commentary *On Genesis, against the Manicheans* (388/389), and second, in the preface of the companion treatise *On Music* (387–390), he states that he should write in a simple way that those 'weak' (*informi*) and 'little' persons (*parvuli*) could understand without difficulty. They are also called the 'unlearned' (*indocti*) and the 'educated' (*imperiti*), who have not been well instructed in the liberal arts. In the former commentary, Augustine exhorts the 'little' ones not to be defeated by the Manichaeans who deceive them with false premises of their material way of thinking.[28] An alternative way is suggested based on the biblical exegesis, which should presuppose humble belief.[29] In the latter treatise, he advices the 'weak' (*tantillus*) ones not to devote themselves to the secular erudition.[30] Instead, they would imitate those who are purified through their praise for the Trinity, following the authority of the scriptures. Therefore, despite of the difference in these advices, his understanding is that their path towards the one and true God requires the humble search of faith for understanding.

It is evident from the development of his early thought that Augustine repeatedly gave the descriptions of the human perfection from the sensible things to the divine contemplation. With his biblical (*cantica graduum* in Psalms 119–133), classical (Varro's encyclopaedic work and various doxographies), and Plotinian (*Enneads* 1.6, *On Beauty*) predecessors, he shared the characteristics of the septenary ascending stage of the soul.[31] The enumeration of the seven steps appears first in the earliest treatise

[28] *Gen. adv. Man.* 1.1.1–2. See N. Kamimura, 'Augustine's First Exegesis and the Divisions of Spiritual Life', *AugStud* 36 (2005) 421-432 at 422–423.

[29] *Gen. adv. Man.* 1.1.2; 2.2.3. See F. Van Fleteren, 'Principles of Augustine's Hermeneutic: An Overview', in F. Van Fleteren and J. C. Schnaubelt (eds.), *Augustine: Biblical Exegete* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001) 1–32 at 2 n. 9.

[30] *Mus.* 6.17.59. See D. C. Alexander, *Augustine's Early Theology of the Church: Emergence and Implications, 386–391* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008) 264–270.

[31] See O. Du Roy, *L'Intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon saint Augustin* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1966) 256–267, esp. 257 n. 2; G. Madec, 'Ascensio, ascensus', in *Petites Etudes Augustiniennes* (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes, 1994) 137–149; F. Van Fleteren, 'Ascent of the Soul', in *ATA* (1999) 63–67 at 63–64; N. Kamimura, 'Friendship and the Ascent of the Soul in Augustine', in W. Mayer, P. Allen, and L. Cross (eds.), *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church* 4 (Sydney: St Pauls Publications, 2006) 295–310.

On the Greatness of the Soul (written in 386/387),[32] then in *On Genesis, against the Manicheans* (388/389),[33] in *On True Religion* (390/391),[34] in *On the Lord's Sermon on the Mount* (393/395),[35] and in *On Christian Teaching* (396).[36] According to the diversity of their subjects, the explanation of the seven steps differs respectively. For example, that of *On Genesis, against the Manicheans* is connected with the seven days of creation in Genesis, thus being defined as the temporal process of human perfection, while that of *On True Religion* relates to the two types of spiritual life in the economy of salvation, in which, based on the unity created by the Holy Spirit, the love of neighbour plays an essential role in the human progress. With regard to the issue in question, that is, the conflict between the ignorance and the learning, there has been a consistency in the combination of the humility and knowledge-based activities. Thus, if we pick up the stages in *On the Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, where, in his first extended exegesis on the New Testament, Augustine interprets the eight maxims in Matthew (5: 3–10) and shows the seven gifts for the soul's progress towards its perfection.[37] The first and the third stages are described as follows:

1. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit', the individual, dreading death and punishment, is converted to God through humility = Gift of fear.[38]

3. 'Blessed are those who mourn', he understands the divine commandment of scripture, and laments its loss of the supreme good = Gift of Knowledge.[39]

This correlation between the humility and the learning becomes indispensable for the explanation of human perfection: these stages clarify how the soul directs itself to God and seeks its own purification. Humbly subject to the divine order, the soul undertakes the difficult task of learning to penetrate spiritual realities. Not mutually exclusive way, but through the gradually ascending steps towards the law of God, both the humility and the learning serve as the complementary of its future perfection.

[32] *Quant.* 33.70–76.
[33] *Gen. adv. Man.* 1.25.43.
[34] *Vera rel.* 26.48–49.
[35] *Serm. dom. mont.* 1.2.4–4.12.
[36] *Doc. chr.* 2.7.9–11.
[37] See N. Kamimura, 'Friendship and the Ascent of the Soul in Augustine', 303–305.
[38] *Serm. dom. mont.* 1.1.3.
[39] *Serm. dom. mont.* 1.2.5.

5 CONCLUSION

Augustine's approach to the encounter with Antony is influenced by the development of his early thought. His devotion to the liberal arts interacts with his deep concern about the perfection of human soul. The earliest Augustine expressed his positive attitude towards the liberal disciplines from the viewpoint of the constitutive in the philosophical tradition of Late Antiquity. But, through the recurring theme of the human perfection, which lies at the centre of the coenobitic way of life, what Augustine desires for both himself and his small community would be considered not as the conflict between the erudition and the ignorance, but as the spiritual quest of like-minded individuals. The instruction and human teachers is required by the soul to be one of the useful steps of an ascent. Augustine also realises that this dimension of the perfection should be anchored to the humble state of mind in regard to which significance of the faith in Christ would be exposed by the Pauline epistles. Thus, making progress his exegesis, Augustine's motif of the spiritual life is inspired by the immeasurable will of God.

From the description of the Egyptian monk in his conversion, it is quite likely that Augustine does not include him into those whose contempt of the secular erudition does not require any treatment of the precepts and human mediation.

> Antony, on chancing to enter church in the middle of the Gospel reading, had taken heed of what was being read as if it were addressed to himself: *Go and sell all that you have; give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me* (Matt. 19.21). By this divine utterance ... he was immediately converted to you.[40]

After his monastic calling has been prompted by the hearing of the divine command, without any hesitation and with a humble attitude, Antony was subject to it. Despite of the fact that Antony appears to be an exceptional case of the uneducated, Augustine confirms that there exists no connection with the dangerous appeal of trying to ignore the imperfect condition of human beings, that is, the pride is the beginning

[40] *Conf.* 8.12.29; BA 14,66: 'de Antonio, quod ex euangelica lectione, cui forte superuenerat, admonitus fuerit, tamquam sibi diceretur quod legebatur: *uade, uende omnia, quae habes, da pauperibus et habebis thesaurum in caelis; et ueni, sequere me*, et tali oraculo confestim ad te esse conuersum.'

of sin.[41] Pride is at the root of disobedience, a falling away from the good.

[41] *Civ. dei* 12.6; CCSL 48,359: 'Initium quippe omnis peccati superbia.' See also *Civ. dei* 14.13; 19.12. For discussions of Augustine's concept of pride, see D. J. MacQueen, 'Augustine on *Superbia*: The Historical Background and Sources of His Doctrine', *Mélanges de science religieuse* 34 (1977) 193–211; R. A. Markus, '*De civitate Dei*. Pride and the Common Good', in J. C. Schnaubelt and F. Van Fleteren (eds.), *Collectanea Augustiniana: Augustine, Second Founder of the Faith* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990) 245–259.