

Augustine on Friendship: Some Remarks on the Letters with Christian and Pagan Intellectuals

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Introduction

In the corpus of Augustine's epistolary texts, some letters between Augustine and his correspondents describe his dealings with philosophical, theological, and ecclesiastical questions posed to or by himself.¹ He carried on a dialogue with them, which provided the evidence of the interest and activity, first of the leader of a monastic community of sorts and later of the bishop of a community of faith.² From 387 until the death of his close friend in 391, Augustine's epistolary exchange with Nebridius centred on the problem of the *beata uita, anima*, and the Platonic teaching.³ From the mid 390s, he entered into a correspondence with Paulinus of Nola and his wife Therasia. During a period of more than a decade, they exchanged views about spiritual, exegetical, and religio-political issues.⁴ There was another exchange of thoughts with Jerome, first from 394/5 to 405 and second from 415 to 419.⁵ It started from Augustine's question of a scriptural translation and the interpretation of Galatians. They expressed the view on the teaching of Pelagius and his followers.

It is interesting to note that some groups of letters serve as the means of writing comments

1 For a selected bibliography of Augustine's letters, see Johannes Divjak, *AL 2* (1996-2002) 893-1057 at 1046-1057, s.v. "Epistulae." Another comprehensive information of the correspondence of Augustine is given by a searchable database: *Scrinium Augustini: The World of Augustine's Letters* (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland) <<http://www.scrinium.umk.pl>>, accessed 29 September 2016.

2 For the chronological survey of Augustine's letters, see Klaus-D. Daur (ed.), *CCL 31* (2004), 31A (2005), 31 B (2009); J. Divjak, "Epistulae," *AL 2*: 1027-1036; Robert B. Eno, "Epistulae," in Alan Fitzgerald *et al.* (eds.), *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999) 298-310 at 299-305; Serge Lancel, "Introduction", in *BA 40/A* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2011) 7-182 at 159-175; Othmar Perler and Jean-Louis Maier, *Les voyages de saint Augustin*, CEASA 36 (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1969); Roland J. Teske (trans.), *Letters*, WSA II/1-4 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2001-2005).

3 For the correspondence between Augustine and Nebridius, see Georges Folliet, "La correspondance entre Augustin et Nébridius," in *L'opera letteraria di Agostino tra Cassiciacum e Milano*, Agostino nelle terre di Ambrogio (1-4 ottobre 1986) (Palermo: Edizioni Augustinus, 1987) 191-216; Alicia Soler Merenciano, "De Agustín a Nebridio y de Nebridio a Agustín: unas cartas y una amistad," in *Comunicazione e ricezione del documento cristiano in epoca tardoantica*, *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 90 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2004) 425-442.

4 For the correspondence with Paulinus and his wife, see Pierre Fabre, *Saint Paulin de Nole et l'amitié chrétienne*, Bibliothèque des Ecoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 167 (Paris: de Boccard, 1949); Joseph T. Lienhard, "Friendship in Paulinus of Nola and Augustine," *Augustiniana* 40 (1990) 279-296; Catherine Conybeare, *Paulinus noster: Self and Symbol in the Letters of Paulinus of Nola*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

5 For the correspondence between Augustine and Jerome, see Carolinne White, *The Correspondence (394-419) between Jerome and Augustine of Hippo*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 23 (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1991); Ralph Hennings, "The Correspondence between Augustine and Jerome," in *Studia Patristica* 27 (Leuven: Peeters, 1993) 303-310; Stuart Squires, "Jerome's Animosity against Augustine," *Augustiniana* 58 (2008) 181-199.

to inquiries and questions.⁶ Presumably from 411 in different circumstances, Augustine started to communicate with the imperial commissioner Flavius Marcellinus and the distinguished pagan or less-committed Christian Volusianus.⁷ First, in May of 411, *Letters* 128 and 129 were sent to Marcellinus on behalf of the African episcopate (these two letters are legitimately attributed to Augustine) and, towards the end of 411 (or the beginning of 412), Augustine wrote to Marcellinus (*Epp.* 133 and 139) and to Apringius, proconsul of Africa and brother of Marcellinus (*Ep.* 134). While these letters are of special interest on account of the light they cast on the Conference with the Donatists in June 411 and the position of Marcellinus who adjudicated the Conference in Carthage, there was another series of letters (*Epp.* 132, 135, 136, 137, and 138) between September 411 and the end of February 412. Apart from the immediate problem of the Donatist schism, Augustine entered into an exchange with Volusianus (*Ep.* 132) who was at the time living in Carthage. In reply to the invitation of Augustine, in *Letter* 135 Volusianus posed questions about Christian teachings and in *Letter* 136, with reference to the questions raised by Volusianus, Marcellinus sent further questions to Augustine. Shortly after these letters, in *Letter* 137 addressed to Volusianus Augustine replied to questions posed by both Volusianus and Marcellinus and, in *Letter* 138, Augustine turned to Marcellinus with the explanation about questions referred to in *Letter* 136. This dossier of letters, in particular the sub-group of *Letters* 135, 136, and 137, reveals the characteristics of a sort of commentary to questions. From a social and cultural perspective of friendship and the communication, what do we know from these letters? What did Augustine consider to be a basis for uniting them in mutual exchange?⁸ In this

6 See Roland J. Teske, "Augustine of Hippo and the Quaestiones et Responsiones Literature," in Annelie Volgers and Claudio Zamagni (eds.), *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004) 127-144. See also Ariane Magny, *Porphyry in Fragments: Reception of an Anti-Christian Text in Late Antiquity*, Ashgate Studies in Philosophy & Theology in Late Antiquity (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014) 105-106.

7 Madeleine Moreau, "Le Dossier Marcellinus dans la Correspondance de saint Augustin," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 9 (1973) 3-181; Lewis Ayres, "Christology as Contemplative Practice: Understanding the Union of Natures in Augustine's *Letter* 137," in P.W. Martens (ed.), *In the Shadow of the Incarnation: Essays on Jesus Christ in the Early Church in Honour of Brian E. Daley, S.J.* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008) 190-211. On Marcellinus, see *PCBE* 2, s.v. Flavius Marcellinus 2, 671-688; *PLRE* 2, s.v. Fl. Marcellinus 10, 711-712; Volker Henning Drecoll, *AL* 3 (2004-2010) 1160-1165, s.v. "Marcellinus, Flavius"; Frank Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus von Hippo: Prosopographische, sozial- und ideologegeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, Bochumer historische Studien, Alte Geschichte 11 (Bochum: Universitätsverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer, 1993) 112-114. For the role of Marcellinus played in Augustine's literary, social, and ecclesiastical activities, see e.g. Walter Dunphy, "Who was Flavius Marcellinus?", *Academia: Humanities and Social Sciences* (Nagoya, Japan) 75 (2002) 233-249; Jennifer Ebbeler, *Disciplining Christians: Correction and Community in Augustine's Letters*, Oxford Studies in Late Antiquity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 191-192; 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: Philosophy Documentation Center, 1999) 29-44. 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 Augustine and Volusianus, see also André Chastagnol, "Le sénateur volusien et la conversion d'une famille romaine au Bas-Empire", *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 58 (1956) 251-62 at 241-53; J. Divjak, "Epistulae," *AL* 2: 945-946, 974-975; Christopher P. Jones, *Between Pagan and Christian* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014) 82-83, 93; Serge Lancel, *Saint Augustine*, trans. Antonia Nevill (London: SCM Press, 2002) 314-318.

8 See Stefan Rebenich, "Augustine on friendship and orthodoxy," in Mark Vessey (ed.), *A Companion to Augustine*, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) 365-374.

paper, I shall focus on three letter exchange with a Christian and pagan in North African society, thereby examining the evidence of revealing the shared vision.

Letter 135: Mutual greetings and the passing of their interest

In response to the suggestion Augustine made in *Letter 132* (that is, to read the scriptures and to ask as many questions as might arise),⁹ Volusianus begins by sending greetings to Augustine: “You, a man of goodness and an example of righteousness, ask me to question you on some ambiguous passage of scripture in order that I might be taught in a learned manner.”¹⁰ Then he submits the report of a recent meeting with his friends in Carthage, in which they discussed various topics. In particular, the *partitio rhetorica* (rhetorical distribution of parts) was considered. Because of the recognition that Augustine was a teacher of rhetoric, Volusianus reports first on the technical issues examined in the gathering: “They spoke of the great ornament in the arrangement of parts, the charm of metaphor, and the great loftiness of comparison. They spoke of light and smooth verses and, as I said, the harmonious variety in the divisions of lines.”¹¹ He turns to summarise the tradition of philosophical schools and the principal achievement. Apart from the interest in this review undertaken by a pagan intellectual in late antiquity, it is noteworthy that Volusianus attempts to turn the attention of Augustine to a close correlation between rhetoric and philosophy: “The topic was, nonetheless, the rhetorical distribution of parts in a discourse. I speak to someone who knows about that.”¹² His expectation is clearly that “you do not leave even this part of eloquence unmentioned and without honor.”¹³ He appreciates the significance of Augustine’s philosophical investigation: “Then the talk turned to philosophy which you yourself are accustomed to cultivate as esoteric in the manner of Aristotle.”¹⁴ What does Volusianus, as a member of the Carthaginian circle, hope for? Volusianus would invite him to join the circle as a master of rhetoric. It seems also likely that he defends their engagement “in accord with our various talents and interests”¹⁵ from the authority of the bishop of Hippo.

As for the questions he was asked to write back to Augustine, Volusianus poses not his own but questions from a friend in the latter part of the letter. After he points to a difficulty of the philosophical pursuit of both “the endless passion for argument” and “the truth that is known

9 Aug. *Ep.* 132; CCL 31B, 240; WSA 2/2, 202: “hortor, ut ualeo, ut Litterarum uere certeque sanctarum studio te curam non pigeat impendere. [...] Praecipue apostolorum linguas exhortor ut legas; [...] Si quid autem, uel cum legis uel cum cogitas, tibi oritur quaestionis, in quo dissoluendo uidear necessarius, scribe, ut rescribam.”

10 Aug. *Ep.* 135.1; CCL 31B, 249; WSA 2/2, 208: “Petis me, uir probitatis iustitiaeque documentum, ut aliqua ex ambiguis lectionis perite discenda perconter.”

11 Aug. *Ep.* 135.1; CCL 31B, 250; WSA 2/2, 208: “Dicebatur ergo, quantus oeconomiae esset ornatus, quae metaphorarum uenustas, quanta in comparatione sublimitas; iam leues enodesque uersus atque, ut ita dixerim, caesurarum modulata uariatio.”

12 Aug. *Ep.* 135.1; CCL 31B, 249; WSA 2/2, 208: “Erat tamen sermo rhetorica partitio. Apud agnoscentem loquor”.

13 Aug. *Ep.* 135.1; CCL 31B, 250; WSA 2/2, 208: “ne hanc quidem eloquentiae partem tacitam aut inhonoram relinquis”.

14 Aug. *Ep.* 135.1; CCL 31B, 250; WSA 2/2, 208: “Tunc ad familiarem tuam philosophiam sermo deflectit, quam ipse Aristoteleo more tamquam esotericam fouere consueueras.”

15 Aug. *Ep.* 135.1; CCL 31B, 249; WSA 2/2, 208: “pro ingenii studiisque sententiae”.

less after one has presumed that it can be known",¹⁶ he gives a brief account of the meeting: "We were stunned and silent."¹⁷ It is because "one of the many asked, '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?' "¹⁸ They had some serious doubts as to the *sapientia christianitatis* in the pursuit of truth. A friend of Volusianus enumerates the list of objections: the wonder of Christ's conception and birth and the virginity of Mary, the mystery of the Incarnation, and the miracles attributed to him. It is further reported that "we interrupted him though he had further questions".¹⁹ Thus, from the final part of the letter, it is admitted that, despite Augustine's request to send the questions of his own interest, Volusianus submitted the report of a circle and the questions from a member. This letter was far from what Augustine expected to read. Indeed, these is a clear incongruity in the concern and expectation of both correspondents.

Letter 136: Complementary warning information

In the opening of *Letter 136* addressed to Augustine, Marcellinus tells him that "The illustrious lord, Volusianus, read to me the letter of Your Beatitude; in fact, at my insistence, he read it to many others. I thoroughly admired what you said, though everything you say is truly admirable."²⁰ Along with the admiration for Augustine's generous invitation to Volusianus ("the letter of Your Beatitude", that is, referring to *Letter 132*), Marcellinus' remark in *Letter 137* also suggests that, not only does he know well about the gatherings in Carthage, but he may read *Letter 135* addressed to Augustine: "as you yourself will also be able to see, he [*scil.* Volusianus] has demanded in a cultivated and precise language and with the clear splendor of Roman eloquence."²¹ Thus, as a person who knows the circumstances, Marcellinus wrote this *Letter 136* to Augustine, which could be defined as a kind of appendix to the previous letter (*Ep.* 135) and as a report of the meeting from different viewpoint.

Marcellinus first takes up the problem of miracles that was shown by Volusianus in the closing part of *Letter 135*. He refers to those who "set before us their Apollinius and Apuleius and other practitioners of the arts of magic, and they claim that their miracles are greater"²² than

16 Aug. *Ep.* 135.1; CCL 31B, 250; WSA 2/2, 209: "quid inter omnes infinita disputandi libido tuncque magis ignorata ueritas, postquam praesumptum est quod possit agnoscere."

17 Aug. *Ep.* 135.2; CCL 31B, 250; WSA 2/2, 209: "Stupemus tacentes."

18 Aug. *Ep.* 135.2; CCL 31B, 250; WSA 2/2, 209: "'Et quis,' inquit, 'est sapientia ad perfectum christianitatis imbutus, qui ambigua, in quibus haereo, possit aperire, dubiosque assensus meos uera uel uerisimili credulitate firmare?'"

19 Aug. *Ep.* 135.2; CCL 31B, 251; WSA 2/2, 209: "Interuenimus ulterius inquirenti."

20 Aug. *Ep.* 136.1; CCL 31B, 253; WSA 2/2, 210: "Vir illustris Volusianus beatitudinis tuae mihi litteras legit, immo me quidem cogente pluribus legit, quae, licet omnia quae a te dicuntur, uere miranda sint, usquequaque miratus sum."

21 Aug. *Ep.* 136.1; CCL 31B, 253; WSA 2/2, 210: "Sed tamen satis, sicut etiam ipse probare dignaberis, culto accuratoque sermone, et Romanae eloquentiae nitore perspicuo, aliqua sibi exsolui impendio postulauit."

22 Aug. *Ep.* 136.1; CCL 31B, 254; WSA 2/2, 210-211: "Apollonium si quidem suum nobis et Apuleium aliosque magicarum artis homines in medium proferunt, quorum maiora contendunt exstitisse miracula."

what the Lord did. Then he informs Augustine about other objections. Indeed, Volusianus did not agree “to remain unspoken”²³ about many questions. He claims that it is necessary “to give a clear reason why this God, who is also maintained to be the God of the Old Testament, took delight in the new sacrifices after having rejected the old ones.”²⁴ Another objection is raised in a different context: “the preaching and teaching of Christ is in no way compatible with the practices of the state. [...] who would permit an enemy to take something from him or would not want to redress evil by the right of war against a plunderer of a Roman province?”²⁵ This objection is related with a much more current political situation: some pagans have blamed Rome’s sack on Christianity. Although Volusianus does not make a further criticism, it is indispensable for the Carthaginian circle to discuss and explore approaches to this problem. For it is admitted that several members of the gathering took refuge in Carthage after the sack of Rome. Since Marcellinus was familiar with them in Carthage, he demanded a response from Augustine who later sent him *Letter* 138.

In the closing section of this letter, Marcellinus praises Augustine for his erudition. At the same time, he comments that Augustine’s response to these objections “will undoubtedly be passed on to the hands of many.”²⁶ Marcellinus’ remark about “a wealthy landowner and lord from Hippo Regius”²⁷ in the gatherings seems to be useful warning and advice to cope with the situation and background of the group: he “praised Your Holiness with ironic flattery and claimed that, [...] he was hardly satisfied.”²⁸

Letter 137: What is the focus of Augustine’s reply?

This letter is well structured as a sequence of strenuous effort to offer a compelling explanation of Christian teaching towards both members of the Carthaginian circle and Volusianus himself. It also provides a repertoire of rhetorical devices, which is corresponding to the style and design of his correspondent. As he is reminded about the start of the letter exchange, Augustine tells Volusianus that he is keen on answering questions proposed in *Letter* 135: “I thought that it was hardly just that I should put off a questioner whom I myself had encouraged to ask questions.”²⁹ Thus, in the beginning of this letter he treats Volusianus with politeness and courtesy and, at the same time, draws attention to the need for the care of the soul, “not for the well-being of this life,

23 Aug. *Ep.* 136.2; CCL 31B, 254; WSA 2/2, 211: “tacere non passus est.”

24 Aug. *Ep.* 136.2; CCL 31B, 254; WSA 2/2, 211: “reddi [...] ad liquidum possit cur hic Deus, qui et Veteris Testamenti Deus esse firmatur, spretis veteribus sacrificiis delectatus est novis.”

25 Aug. *Ep.* 136.2; CCL 31B, 254-255; WSA 2/2, 211: “eius praedicatio atque doctrina reipublicae moribus nulla ex parte conueniat [...] Nam quis tolli sibi ab hoste aliquid patiatu uel Romanae prouinciae depraedatori non mala uelit belli iure reponere?”

26 Aug. *Ep.* 136.3; CCL 31B, 254-255; WSA 2/2, 211: “multorum manibus sine dubio tradetur”.

27 Aug. *Ep.* 136.3; CCL 31B, 255; WSA 2/2, 211: “eximius Hipponensis regionis possessor et dominus praesens”.

28 Aug. *Ep.* 136.3; CCL 31B, 255; WSA 2/2, 211: “Sanctitatem tuam sub ironiae adulatione laudaret, [...] minime satisfactum esse contenderet.”

29 Aug. *Ep.* 137.1; CCL 31B, 256; WSA 2/2, 213: “nequaquam iustum esse arbitratu, ut quem ad quaerendum exhortatus ipse fueram, differrem quaerentem.”

[...] but for that well-being whose attainment and eternal possession we are Christians".³⁰ For Augustine maintains that the pastoral care for "proud little souls [who] place no value on it [*scil.* the dispensation of so great a grace]"³¹ is a crucial element to be integrated into his reply to Volusianus.

After restating the question as to the virginity of Mary and the miracles, Augustine warns Volusianus to exhibit overconfidence in the intelligence, experience, and learning of himself. And he claims the necessity of "the faith without which one does not live a pious and upright life".³² Because of the profundity and insight of the Christian writings, he advises the reader that they should always be a beginner: "there remain to be understood by those making progress so many things, and things cloaked with so many shadows of mysteries, and there lies hidden so great a depth of wisdom".³³ Then, from the next section, Augustine considers the problem of the Incarnation. He clearly rejects the view that God is a body. Since God "is able to be whole everywhere and to be contained in no place",³⁴ God should not be understood from a materialistic point of view. By shifting attention from the sensible to the spiritual, Augustine's focus on the Word of God shows him a way of comparing its omnipresence with "a passing word of a human beings".³⁵ Based on the reflection that "God is great not by mass but by power",³⁶ it can be admitted that God was not taken into the body of an infant. Here Augustine makes clear the basis for the line of argument: "If a reason is asked for, it will not be miraculous; if an example is demanded, it will not be singular. Let us grant that God can do something that we admit that we cannot search out."³⁷

Next, he proceeds to the second of the objections: "the very fact that he relaxes in sleep, is nourished by food, and feels all the human emotions convinces human beings that it is a man whom the Word does not consume but assumes."³⁸ Given the assertion that Christ imparts faith to the minds and brings them to the contemplation of the truth, he confirms that the mediator between God and human beings unites two natures in one person: "The man, of course, was added to God; God did not withdraw from himself."³⁹ His account proceeds from the union of soul and body to the Word of God. Augustine brings together the threads of argument and points to the importance of the incarnation: "the Word came to human beings as a source of

30 Aug. *Ep.* 137.1; CCL 31B, 256; WSA 2/2, 213: "ad salutem non huius uitae, [...] sed illam salutem, propter quam adipiscendam et in aeternum obtinendam christiani sumus".

31 Aug. *Ep.* 137.1; CCL 31B, 256-257; WSA 2/2, 213: "tantae gratiae dispensatio, quam superbae animulae nihili pendunt".

32 Aug. *Ep.* 137.3; CCL 31B, 258; WSA 2/2, 214: "fidem [...] sine qua pie recteque non uiuitur".

33 Aug. *Ep.* 137.3; CCL 31B, 258; WSA 2/2, 214: "tam multa, tamque multiplicibus mysteriorum umbraculis opacata intellegenda proficientibus restant, tantaque [...] latet altitudo sapientiae".

34 Aug. *Ep.* 137.4; CCL 31B, 259; WSA 2/2, 215: "Nouit ubique totus esse et nullo contineri loco".

35 Aug. *Ep.* 137.7; CCL 31B, 262; WSA 2/2, 216: "uerbum hominis transiens".

36 Aug. *Ep.* 137.8; CCL 31B, 262; WSA 2/2, 216: "Neque enim mole sed uirtute magnus est deus".

37 Aug. *Ep.* 137.8; CCL 31B, 263; WSA 2/2, 217: "Hic si ratio quaeritur, non erit mirabile: si exemplum poscitur, non erit singulare. Demus deum aliquid posse, quod nos fateamur inuestigare non posse."

38 Aug. *Ep.* 137.9; CCL 31B, 263; WSA 2/2, 217: "illud, quod in somnos soluitur et cibo alitur et omnes humanos sentit affectus, hominem persuadet hominibus, quem non consumpsit utique, sed assumpsit."

39 Aug. *Ep.* 137.10; CCL 31B, 264; WSA 2/2, 218: "homo quippe deo accessit, non deus a se recessit."

teaching and of help for attaining everlasting salvation. [...] He came as a source of help, [...] without the grace of faith, which comes from him, no one can conquer his sinful desires and be purified by pardon and forgiveness".⁴⁰

Augustine deals with the third of the objections about the miracles of Christ which, according to the opponents, were not greater than what the Jews and the magicians of the Egyptians did. Although it is explicitly admitted that Christ performed miracles of his own, "to be born of a virgin, to rise from the dead, to ascend into heaven",⁴¹ those who did not believe the miracles of Christ regarded them as unworthy of him. He suggests the futility of further discussion and debate on these problems. As mentioned in the beginning of this letter (§ 3), he reminds him of the necessity of the faith that "opens the door for understanding, while unbelief closes it."⁴² Not only the whole history of the Jewish people but the expansion of the Church of Christ offers the conclusive proof of the truth: "Christ came; in his birth, life, word, deeds, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension all the prediction of the prophets are fulfilled."⁴³ Twofold commandment "upon which Christ says that the whole law and the prophets depend",⁴⁴ that is, love of God and of neighbour is confirmed. "In these commandment" there is the welfare of the society. He adds that in the simplicity of the scriptural language "it [*scil.* scripture] not only feeds them with the evident truth but also exercises them with the hidden truth, [...] evil minds are salutarily corrected, little minds are fed, and great minds are delighted."⁴⁵ His attention is, therefore, directed to the spiritual care for the well-being of not only the state but the individual. And in the closing part of the letter, Augustine asks Volusianus to reply with further questions.

Concluding observations

In response to the request from Augustine, Volusianus sent him *Letter* 135 in which he raised questions about the heart of Christian teaching. Although he seems to complete the assignment, Volusianus incorporates another element into his reply: an appreciation of the philosophical investigation of Augustine that is expressed together with a variety of rhetorical devices and the report of a Carthaginian circle. Indeed, it can be accepted that the questions Volusianus explained in the letter were established by the consensus of members of the gathering. It is also admitted that his primary interest is in the art of rhetoric, which he shared with the members of the circle. Marcellinus' complementary letter (*Ep.* 136) would relate to the circumstances in

40 Aug. *Ep.* 137.12; CCL 31B, 266-267; WSA 2/2, 219: "uenit hominibus magisterium et adiutorium ad capessendam sempiternam salutem: [...] adiutorium autem, quod sine gratia fidei, quae ab illo est, nemo potest uincere concupiscentias uitiosas et, [...] ueniali remissione purgari."

41 Aug. *Ep.* 137.13; CCL 31B, 268; WSA 2/2, 220: "nasci de uirgine, a mortuis resurgere, in caelum ascendere."

42 Aug. *Ep.* 137.15; CCL 31B, 269; WSA 2/2, 221: "intellectui [...] aditum aperit, infidelitas claudit."

43 Aug. *Ep.* 137.16; CCL 31B, 270; WSA 2/2, 221: "Venit et Christus, complentur in eius ortu, uita, factis, dictis, passionibus, morte, resurrectione, ascensione, omnia praeconia prophetarum."

44 Aug. *Ep.* 137.17; CCL 31B, 272; WSA 2/2, 222: "ex quibus Christus dicit totam legem prophetasque pendere".

45 Aug. *Ep.* 137.18; CCL 31B, 272-273; WSA 2/2, 223: "non solum manifesta pascit, sed etiam secreta exercent ueritate [...] His salubriter et praua corriguntur et parua nutriuntur et magna oblectantur ingenia."

Carthage. Not only did he take up and explain the objections posed by Volusianus, but he turned the attention of Augustine to the atmosphere of the circle. His comment on the wide circulation of the letter implies that Augustine should be cautious about the way of withdrawing the objection to “Christian doctrine.”

Another letter (Ep. 137) appears to have a double-layered structure, in which first to the reader, that is, to the members of the circle whose primary interest was in the examination of some doubts about Christian teaching, Augustine had to explain in detail and approach these problems from diverse angles. Following the advice of Marcellinus, most part of this letter would be written as a long apology and defence to pagan aristocrats in Carthage. Second to his correspondent Volusianus, Augustine incorporates another kind of message into the letter. In the beginning of the letter, he clearly insists that his concern is for the care of the “proud little souls” and, ultimately, the welfare in the city of God. In so far as Augustine attempted to develop a one-to-one relationship with Volusianus, he asked him to change the perception of Christian teaching. In the body of the letter repeatedly and consistently does he show Volusianus the way to the truth and faith and, in the concluding part, focuses on the way to the wisdom of Christianity: twofold commandment and the exercise of mind by the scriptural interpretation. It is very likely that, in this subsidiary part of the letter, Augustine sends him a message of the basis for their shared vision: the well-being in the grace of Christ. While both Augustine and Volusianus seem to prepare different scripts for their own interest, Augustine’s comments to questions intend to function as the means of the care of the soul.