

# Understanding the Development of the Theme of Friendship in Saint Augustine that Culminates in Christian Fraternal Charity

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## Introduction

The theme of this paper is ‘Understanding the development of the theme of Friendship in Saint Augustine that culminates in Christian fraternal charity’. When we study Augustine, we come to understand that the theme of friendship is being developed out of his own experience of friendship. In what follows, I hope to show that not only was friendship instrumental for Augustine’s own conversion and growth in the spiritual life, but that it is also essential for all Christians to grow in charity, and is therefore a great contribution to Christian spirituality. I will explain in this paper how the friends of Augustine in his adolescence, young adulthood and adulthood influenced him in both good and bad ways, and how the Christian concept of friendship is being developed. It will attempt to answer how our friendship is helpful for us in our Christian living to seek God, to grow in charity and to attain salvation.

### 1. Adolescence: Self-centred Friendship

The *Confessions* provide little information about Augustine’s relations with childhood friends of Thagaste. It informs us that he loved nothing more than to play with them.<sup>1</sup> He used to steal food and drink from his parents’ cellar to win their companionship<sup>2</sup> and disobeyed and lied so as to spend more time in their company.<sup>3</sup> “Though quarrels frequently interrupted his games, leaving him unhappy and ill at ease, he never desired to play apart from his friends. Their presence absorbed all his interest.”<sup>4</sup>

#### 1.1. Friendship: To Love and to be Loved

Augustine provides us with more details about his adolescent relationships. “And what was it that I delighted in, but to love and be loved?”<sup>5</sup> are the very words with which he begins the explanation of the friendships formed during these days. He joined freely with his young companions of Madauros and Carthage, mingling with them in the amusements proper to the student life.<sup>6</sup> What pleased him at this stage of life was to be surrounded by a

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, trans. E. B Pusey (Oak Harbor, WA: Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1999), 1.9.15.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 1,19,30.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 1,16,30.

<sup>4</sup> Marie Aquinas McNamara, “Friendship in Saint Augustine” (Fribourg, University Press, 1958), 38.

<sup>5</sup> *Conf* 2,2,2.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 3,3,6.



group of enthusiastic friends at every moment.<sup>7</sup> “All his actions were dominated by a desire to be one with them, to gain their admiration and praise while showing them marks of his own affection.”<sup>8</sup>

### 1.2. The Memory of the Pear-theft

Augustine often disliked his companions’ actions but did not have the courage to resist them directly.<sup>9</sup> This lack of strength is described many times in the *Confessions*, but nowhere in such detail as in the pear-theft:

For had I then loved the pears I stole, and wished to enjoy them, I might have done it alone, had the bare commission of the theft sufficed to attain my pleasure; nor needed I have inflamed the itching of my desires by the excitement of accomplices. But since my pleasure was not in those pears, it was in the offence itself, which the company of fellow-sinners occasioned. What then was this feeling? For of a truth, it was too foul: and woe was me, who had it. But yet what was it? Who can understand his errors? It was the sport, which as it were tickled our hearts, that we beguiled those who little thought what we were doing, and much disliked it.<sup>10</sup>

The recollection of this pear-theft led him to cry, “O friendship too unfriendly! Thou incomprehensible inveigler of the soul, thou greediness to do mischief out of mirth and wantonness, thou thirst of others’ loss, without lust of my own gain or revenge: but when it is said, “let’s go, let’s do it,” we are ashamed not to be shameless.”<sup>11</sup>

### 1.3. Friendship Led Augustine to the Manicheans and to Seeking Sexual Matters

Years later he confessed that friendship was one of the ties that kept him within the belief of the Manicheans.<sup>12</sup> His desire to keep up with his companions forced him to try to equal their freedom in sexual matters. He had turned naturally to sensual enjoyments specifically from the time of his sixteenth year.<sup>13</sup>

### 1.4. The Feeling of Emptiness in such Friendship

Augustine began to feel emptiness in the aimless companionship that had been his only pleasure.<sup>14</sup> His search for truth became deeply engrossing.<sup>15</sup> The first sign of Augustine’s thirst for something beyond the shallow enjoyment of his early friendships is found in his statement that Cicero’s *Hortensius* stirred in him a longing to know about philosophy and about God.<sup>16</sup> In his years of maturity, Augustine concluded that they were not friendships in the true sense.<sup>17</sup> “From that time on his companions were upright, intelligent, and earnest young men whose character reflects Augustine’s own, for he was the center of their friendship.”<sup>18</sup> Much of his youth was led independent of God, and it was in a spirit of grave criticism that he reviewed this stage of life once joyful days came, calling them “my past foulness, and the carnal corruptions of my soul.”<sup>19</sup> In fact, we need to conclude that adolescence is when Augustine becomes aware of the emptiness of aimless companionship

<sup>7</sup> Cf. McNamara, “Friendship in Saint Augustine,” 39.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Conf* 2,3,7.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 2,8,16-2,9,17.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 2,9,17.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Ibid., 4,1,1.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ibid., 2,2,4.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ibid., 4,1,1.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ibid., 3,5,9.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Conf* 3,4,7.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ibid., 4,4,7.

<sup>18</sup> McNamara, “Friendship in Saint Augustine,” 43.

<sup>19</sup> *Conf* 2,1,1.



and it marks the first stage of maturation in his friendships. This period gave him a desire to know more about God.

## 2. Young Adulthood: Love is the Basis of Friendship

When Augustine began to teach in Thagaste, he started to develop a certain friendship. He had a friend whom he called very dear to him.<sup>20</sup> The friendship was faithful and based on “a similarity of interests and deep, mutual affection.”<sup>21</sup> In the *Confessions*, he wrote that this friendship was “sweet to me above every sweetness of that my life”<sup>22</sup> “He had grown up of a child with me, and we had been both school-fellows and play-fellows. But he was not yet my friend as afterwards, not even then, as true friendship is.”<sup>23</sup> “With me he now erred in mind, nor could my soul be without him.”<sup>24</sup>

### 2.1. Searching Together the Truth in Manicheism

The unnamed friend joined the Manichees as a result of Augustine’s aptitude to bring others to his way of thought.<sup>25</sup> They shared intimate conversations about Manicheism and their love was strengthened. They searched together for the truth in the doctrine of Mani.<sup>26</sup>

### 2.2. Sorrow at the Sudden Death of the Unnamed Intimate Friend

The intimate friend of Augustine died when he was absent,<sup>27</sup> causing him great anguish. In his love for his friend, he thought that their souls were one; one soul in two bodies.<sup>28</sup> His “utter despondency at the loss of his companion manifests a certain idolatry of friendship.”<sup>29</sup> “He was tormented by his death, but it was not a real love in a true friendship. It would have been attachment of a vain tenacity. He did not realize until many years later that the friendship was not true because it was not in God.”<sup>30</sup> “Wretched I was; and wretched is every soul bound by the friendship of perishable things; he is torn asunder when he loses them, and then he feels the wretchedness which he had ere yet he lost them. So was it then with me; I wept most bitterly, and I found my repose in bitterness.”<sup>31</sup> “He remembered the feeling of emptiness and despair he felt when he lost a dear friend in death.”<sup>32</sup>

### 2.3. Manicheism is of No Comfort in this Sorrow

Shortly afterwards, he left his native town to teach in Carthage. “Less often would my eyes seek him where they were not used to seeing him, and from Thagaste I came to Carthage.”<sup>33</sup> He found himself still in utter despair and ignorance and the fables of the Manichees were no comfort to him. They had nothing to teach him about the fact that

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 4,4,7.

<sup>21</sup> McNamara, “Friendship in Saint Augustine,” 43.

<sup>22</sup> *Conf* 4,4,7.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Eunmee Park, “Looking at the Virtuous Friendship as Charity in St. Augustine” (Romae, Pontifica Universitas Gregoriana, 2000), 28.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Conf* 4,4,8.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 4,6,11.

<sup>29</sup> McNamara, “Friendship in Saint Augustine,” 45.

<sup>30</sup> Park, “Looking at the Virtuous Friendship as Charity in St. Augustine,” 30.

<sup>31</sup> *Conf* 4,6,11.

<sup>32</sup> Donald X Burt, *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine’s Practical Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1999), 4,2,57.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 4,7,12.



human souls must be loved in God. He learned this later from Christianity. For the moment Augustine's whole heart cleaved in searching for a merely mutable good.<sup>34</sup>

We conclude that through young adulthood, Augustine became convinced that friendship should be rooted in the love of God. "Through reflection on his unnamed friend Augustine was led to consider the truth, the charity of God. By opening his mind and heart he was prepared for those later friendships which would be rooted in Christ."<sup>35</sup> I agree with Park that the friendship with the unnamed friend was a lesson for Augustine to be prepared to have further friendships rooted in the love of God. Augustine says "If souls please thee, be they loved in God: for they too are mutable, but in Him are they firmly stablished; else would they pass, and pass away."<sup>36</sup> The friendship with the unnamed friend can be understood as the second stage of maturation or development of the theme of friendship in Augustine.

### 3. Adulthood – Friendships Rooted in the Love of God

For Augustine, Nebridius and Alypius were very intimate friends. His friendship with them was rooted in the love of God. Here I will be explaining their friendships and the influence of these friendships in detail.

#### 3.1. Nebridius

As we have seen, Augustine was severely saddened by the demise of his unnamed friend, and had left Thagaste for Carthage. But he could not envisage life without friends. His sadness did not remain long, because his longing for love had not yet ceased, but reached out to other friends.<sup>37</sup> Augustine describes Nebridius's upright character and virtuous friendship in the *Confessions*.<sup>38</sup>

##### 3.1.1. Longing for Being Together in Community

Augustine missed Nebridius significantly at Cassiciacum after making the decision to convert and to live in the love of God and give up everything which he could have gained by worldly reputation. Nebridius could not join him there, because he had already returned to Carthage. During his stay there, they communicated through letters to share and communicate profoundly to each other the intimacy of friendship.<sup>39</sup> "As soon as Augustine returned to Thagaste he wished to be with this friend in the newly founded community."<sup>40</sup> However, their longing for living in community never materialised, because Nebridius's mother would not allow him to leave. So, he chose to remain with his mother at Carthage. Through letters, however, Nebridius showed that he wanted to maintain the same intimate friendship with Augustine.<sup>41</sup>

##### 3.1.2. A Friendship Rooted in the Love of God

The friendship of Augustine with Nebridius was confirmed in the love of God. Believing in God, Augustine had the right of friendship to give him frankly, gently but directly, his advice when his friend had doubts about the Catholic religion and clung to former false doctrine.<sup>42</sup> "Wherefore, my well beloved and most amiable brother, by the friendship

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Park, "Looking at the Virtuous Friendship as Charity in St. Augustine," 31.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *Conf* 4,12,18.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Ibid., 4,8,13.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Park, "Looking at the Virtuous Friendship as Charity in St. Augustine," 32.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Ibid., 33.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Series 1, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Ethereal Library, 1886), 524.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Park, "Looking at the Virtuous Friendship as Charity in St. Augustine," 34.



which unites us, and by our faith in the divine law itself, I would warn you and..... to break off without delay whatever friendship may have been begun between you and them.”<sup>43</sup> “Their intimate communications were only possible through letters and their friendship had good and bad times. Nevertheless, the ideal and actuality of their true friendship did not stop. More and more Augustine penetrated the fact that true friendship must be rooted in love of God.”<sup>44</sup>

### 3.1.3. The Grief at the Death of Nebridius is Different from that of the Unnamed Friend

The death of Nebridius was the loss of a great friend who was kind, joyful, and remarkably intelligent. Augustine does not give us the information about how he reacted to his friend’s death, but the grief at Nebridius’s death was certainly different from the death of his unnamed friend. His belief in Christ made it possible to think that his friend found real life in God.<sup>45</sup> “When we truly love others and are joined to them by affection, they are never far from us in spirit even though they may be physically distant. Even death cannot stand in the way of our “oneness of heart.”<sup>46</sup>

### 3.2. Alypius

Augustine and Alypius got along very well together. In the words of Augustine, Alypius was a man of natural goodness.<sup>47</sup>

#### 3.2.1. A Correction Well Received

During the time when Alypius began to attend the classes of Augustine, he was seized with an intense attraction to the circus. Augustine worried about him that this obsession might destroy Alypius’s bright prospects.<sup>48</sup> While Augustine worried about the conduct of Alypius, he had a chance to direct him against the evils of the circus. Alypius took Augustine’s words seriously.<sup>49</sup> “But he took it wholly to himself, and thought that I said it simply for his sake.”<sup>50</sup> “Although unintentional, this was Augustine’s first service of friendship for the one who was soon to become the brother of his heart.”<sup>51</sup> Alypius loved Augustine more dearly than before because of this correction. “Rebuke the wise and he will love you for it.”<sup>52</sup> “In true friendship one cannot evade the duty of pointing out another’s errors.”<sup>53</sup>

#### 3.2.2. Intimacy of Friendship: Two in Body and One in Mind

It seems like Augustine did not have other friendships while in Rome. “At this time in Rome, Augustine and Alypius were already ‘two in body but one in mind’ in intimacy and friendship.”<sup>54</sup> “A oneness in heart manifested in some harmony in thinking and a warm caring for the other.”<sup>55</sup> Yet, during these days, they were aware of “a great lack in their lives which they were unable to define.”<sup>56</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Series 1, Volume 1*, 530.

<sup>44</sup> Park, “Looking at the Virtuous Friendship as Charity in St. Augustine,” 36.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Burt, *Friendship and Society*, 4,2,61.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Park, “Looking at the Virtuous Friendship as Charity in St. Augustine,” 38.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Park, “Looking at the Virtuous Friendship as Charity in St. Augustine,” 39.

<sup>50</sup> *Conf* 6,7,11.

<sup>51</sup> McNamara, “Friendship in Saint Augustine,” 54.

<sup>52</sup> Prov 9:8, *New Jerusalem Bible*. (New York: Doubleday, 1985).

<sup>53</sup> Park, “Looking at the Virtuous Friendship as Charity in St. Augustine,” 39–40.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> McNamara, “Friendship in Saint Augustine,” 56.



### 3.2.3. Friendship Rooted in God through the Conversion Experience

Alypius turned gradually towards the Catholic Church, for he still adhered to the false belief of the Manichees.<sup>57</sup> When he was convinced that it was a wrong belief, he moved towards the Catholic faith.<sup>58</sup> The conversion story of the two young men derived from Ponticianus.<sup>59</sup> “When Augustine reached a state of unmanageable and fervent emotions, Alypius sensed that it was a moment not to intrude on him. He just stayed with him as a part of his friend's own soul.”<sup>60</sup> Alypius remained there silently.<sup>61</sup> “Augustine became calm and this moved him to make his own decision. Now without hiding what had happened in his heart, he told all to his friend Alypius.”<sup>62</sup> “And by this admonition was he strengthened; and by a good resolution and purpose, and most corresponding to his character, wherein he did always very far differ from me, for the better, without any turbulent delay he joined me.”<sup>63</sup> “Eventually they became Christians. From that moment on, the friendship between the two men was firmly rooted in Christ.”<sup>64</sup>

### 3.2.4. The Idea of Community Life

For their Baptism preparation, Augustine and Alypius went to a quiet place at Cassiciacum. “Sharing everything during that time, they had an experience of the true sense of community for the first time.”<sup>65</sup> On Easter Sunday, 387, both of them were baptized by Saint Ambrose, the bishop of Milan. “Soon after baptism, they returned together to Africa to their home town of Thagaste. There they established a lay community that had long been their hope. They were devoted to prayer and study, in common with like-minded friends, for three years in union of fraternal charity.”<sup>66</sup> “The story of Augustine’s friendships did not end with his conversion, but began all over again and developed in a monastic context.”<sup>67</sup>

### 3.2.5. True Friendship Depends on God Being the Glue

Alypius devoted his life to the friendship of Augustine in God especially from the time of conversion.<sup>68</sup> “True friendship depends on God being the glue that binds friends together. We are joined together there because we are all ‘glued’ to God and, through him, ‘glued’ to each other.”<sup>69</sup> “In *Contra Academicos*, Augustine confirmed that Alypius was his most intimate friend who agreed with him about human life and also about religion itself.”<sup>70</sup>

Augustine wrote about Alypius and Nebridius in the *Confessions*, “and yet these friends I loved for themselves only, and I felt that I was beloved of them again for myself only.”<sup>71</sup> Thus, we need to conclude that Augustine’s adulthood friendships with Nebridius and Alypius marks the third stage of the development of the theme of friendship. He found in them friends in its true sense. Their friendship made significant impact on Augustine towards his conversion and forming the idea of community life.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Conf* 7,19,25.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *Ibid*.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 8,7,16.

<sup>60</sup> Park, “Looking at the Virtuous Friendship as Charity in St. Augustine,” 45.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Conf* 8,12,28.

<sup>62</sup> Park, “Looking at the Virtuous Friendship as Charity in St. Augustine,” 46.

<sup>63</sup> *Conf* 8,12,30.

<sup>64</sup> Park, “Looking at the Virtuous Friendship as Charity in St. Augustine,” 46.

<sup>65</sup> Park, “Looking at the Virtuous Friendship as Charity in St. Augustine,” 47.

<sup>66</sup> McNamara, “Friendship in Saint Augustine,” 49.

<sup>67</sup> James McEvoy, “Anima Una et Cor Unum: Friendship and Spiritual Unity in Augustine,” *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 53 (1986): 42.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Park, “Looking at the Virtuous Friendship as Charity in St. Augustine,” 48.

<sup>69</sup> Burt, *Friendship and Society*, 4,2,63.

<sup>70</sup> Park, “Looking at the Virtuous Friendship as Charity in St. Augustine,” 48.

<sup>71</sup> *Conf* 6,16,26.



#### 4. Augustine's Conception of Christian Friendship

In this chapter, I will develop Augustine's conception of Christian friendship. In Augustine the term *amicitia* is used to convey several meanings. Most often it indicates the bond which unites two or more persons in mutual sympathy.<sup>72</sup>

##### 4.1. The Concept of Christian Friendship According to Augustine

Augustine uses Cicero's famous definition to explain his own ideal.<sup>73</sup> "Cicero defines friendship as an accord of wills, tastes, and thought, all of which blend into the harmony of good will and affection."<sup>74</sup> "Friendship is born when such a man finds another whose habits and character are similar to his own."<sup>75</sup> "After noting that Alypius, agreed with him on religion, which is the clearest sign of a true friend, he adds that for friendship has been rightly and with just reverence defined as 'agreement on things human and divine combined with good will and love.'<sup>76</sup> Augustine goes beyond Cicero's definition and "adds a specifically Christian note: this agreement on things human and divine, joined with good will and love, takes place in Christ Jesus our Lord."<sup>77</sup> "He adapts Cicero's words to the double commandment of love. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and soul and with thy whole mind' and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."<sup>78</sup> There can be seen agreement on divine things and human things respectively.

##### 4.2. The Characteristics of Christian Friendship According to Augustine

After his conversion Augustine becomes more and more convinced that there can be no true friendship unless it is rooted in the common love of God.<sup>79</sup> "He loves his friend truly who loves God in him either because God is in him or in order that He may be in him. God is the author and the reference of Christian friendship"<sup>80</sup> "It is Christ, the Way, the Truth and Life who purifies the whole man and cleanses friendships."<sup>81</sup> The elevation and transformation of friendship is accomplished by the Holy Spirit and by the reception of God's grace through Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>82</sup> According to Augustine Christian friendships "are joined by the bonds of charity shed in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us."<sup>83</sup> "If one or both friends turn from God, the bond which united their hearts is broken, for sin, which is the enemy of charity, is also the enemy of friendship; it destroys friendship and makes the heart incapable of it until the bond of unity is restored."<sup>84</sup> "Augustine believed that only Christians who lived their faith were capable of perfect friendship."<sup>85</sup> Christian friendship finds its perfection in heaven where a selfless love can be found that rejoices in the common joy of all.<sup>86</sup> The ties of friendship will include the holy angels

<sup>72</sup> John F Monagle, "Friendship in St. Augustine's Biography," *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971): 81.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. McNamara, "Friendship in Saint Augustine," 199.

<sup>74</sup> Monagle, "Friendship in St. Augustine's Biography," 81.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> McNamara, "Friendship in Saint Augustine," 199–200.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Monagle, "Friendship in St. Augustine's Biography," 85.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Monagle, "Friendship in St. Augustine's Biography," 86.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Aurelius Augustinus, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, 1950), 13,24.

<sup>83</sup> McNamara, "Friendship in Saint Augustine," 202.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>86</sup> Augustinus, *The City of God*, 15,3.



“towards whose society and assembly we sigh while in this toilsome pilgrimage.”<sup>87</sup> Friends will enjoy the happiness of eternal life<sup>88</sup> and peace.<sup>89</sup>

### 4.3. Obligations of Friendship

According to St. Augustine, there are obligations which a Christian assumes towards his friends. They are mainly three: (1) Love (2) Fraternal correction, and (3) Prayer.<sup>90</sup>

#### 4.3.1. Love

Love is the first obligation of friendship. “The first obligation is the proper order of love for God first and then friends for his sake. Love is the very source of friendship and is inculcated by God in two precepts.”<sup>91</sup>

But as this divine master inculcates two precepts- the love of God and the love of our neighbor- and as in these precepts a man finds three things he has to love- God, himself, and his neighbor- and that he who loves God loves himself thereby, it follows that he must endeavour to get his neighbour to love God, since he is ordered to love his neighbour as himself.<sup>92</sup>

“The *pondus(weight)* of love must be upwards because we are men created in the image of our creator and are members of a holy fellowship in agreement on things human and divine, combined with good will toward each other. Such a fellowship draws near to God to form one City of God, each pilgrim along the way bearing the other’s burdens in mutual support.”<sup>93</sup> “One’s neighbour should be loved neither more nor less than oneself since the salvation of one’s neighbour is equally important.”<sup>94</sup> “Essentially friendship for Augustine remains altruistic if properly understood.”<sup>95</sup> When we analyse the friendships of Augustine in his adulthood, we need to understand that his friendships were obviously altruistic.

#### 4.3.2. Fraternal Correction

According to Monagle the most important obligation of a friend is that of fraternal correction and forgiveness.<sup>96</sup> “One has no right to reproach another if he has a personal grievance against him and delivers his reproach with disdain. Only a friend can know beforehand of another’s willingness to accept correction.”<sup>97</sup> “Not only do friends have the obligation to correct each other when there is reason, but they must take care that their friends have a true impression of them, recognizing their faults.”<sup>98</sup>

For often we wickedly blind ourselves to the occasions of teaching and admonishing them, sometimes of even reprimanding and chiding them, either because we shrink from the labour or are ashamed to offend them, or because we fear to lose good friendships, lest this should stand in the way of our advancement or injure us in some worldly matter, which either our covetous disposition desires to obtain or our weakness shrinks from losing.<sup>99</sup>

In all these situations friends should obey the precepts “which carefully inculcates mutual forgiveness.”<sup>100</sup> As we analyse the friendship of Augustine, we see that Augustine

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 11,31.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 6,12.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 19,11.

<sup>90</sup> Monagle, “Friendship in St. Augustine’s Biography,” 88.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Augustinus, *The City of God*, 19,14.

<sup>93</sup> Monagle, “Friendship in St. Augustine’s Biography,” 88.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Ibid., 88.

<sup>97</sup> McNamara, “Friendship in Saint Augustine,” 208-209.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>99</sup> Augustinus, *The City of God*, 1,9.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 15,6.





warned Nebridius as he clung to the false belief of the Manicheans. Augustine corrected Alypius concerning his obsession with circus. Both of them received the corrections in the right sense and in fact, these corrections strengthened their friendship.

### 4.3.3. Prayer

Prayer is very important factor in friendship “for we cannot of ourselves bring another to God. We ought to ask Him unceasingly to fill our hearts and those of our friends with His love.”<sup>101</sup> Prayer brings friends nearer to God who best knows our needs. It is done through worship, “each of us severally and all of us together”<sup>102</sup> through the priest at the altar.<sup>103</sup> Augustine counted much on the prayer of his friends and he wrote frequently to his friends to ask their intercession for his various needs.<sup>104</sup> “Prayer is more powerful than anything we can say or do, and if we leave all to God in these moments, He, who knows the needs of our friends far better than we, will do what is best for them.”<sup>105</sup>

In the Gospel of Mark, we read that one of the scribes asked Jesus, “Which is the first of all the commandments?”<sup>106</sup> Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: you must love your neighbour as yourself.”<sup>107</sup> Therefore, through fulfilling the first obligation of friendship, loving God and another, friends are moving towards salvation. Through fraternal correction and prayer, friends are helping each other towards their sanctification and salvation.

### Conclusion

In his adolescence, from the experience of his school companions, Augustine learned what friendship in the true sense is not. From such experiences, he understood how bad friendships can lead one in wrong directions. In his young adulthood, his friendship with unnamed intimate friend taught him the lesson that even though the friendship was based on love, God was lacking in their friendship. The adulthood friendships of Augustine with Nebridius and with Alypius were based on the love of God. We can observe that the concept of friendship is being transformed in each of these stages. Once converted, Augustine seeks to gather his friends to seek God together in the monastery and we learned that the idea of living together in community is derived from the friendships of Augustine.

The Christian friendship of Augustine helps us to understand how true love can be practiced in our day-to-day life in loving God and neighbour. Through fulfilling the obligations of friendship, we are being sanctified and advanced towards salvation. Our friendships are part of our love for God and our way of salvation. Through the description of the characteristics and obligations of Christian friendship, Augustine teaches us how friendship is helpful for our sanctification and salvation. Augustine takes Cicero’s reflections on *amicitia*, ponders upon it in conjunction with Scripture and his experience of friendship and raises the concept of friendship to a level of Christian fraternal charity.

We are all on a pilgrimage or spiritual journey towards salvation. We may have friends on our way as we move forward. We have learned from Augustine how a wrong friendship can lead us away from God. At the same time, we have learned what true friendship is supposed to be and how helpful it is in our spiritual journey by seeking God together and growing in fraternal charity. We learned through this paper that friendship was

<sup>101</sup> McNamara, “Friendship in Saint Augustine,” 211.

<sup>102</sup> Augustinus, *The City of God*, 10,3.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. McNamara, “Friendship in Saint Augustine,” 211.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Mk 12:28, *New Jerusalem Bible*.

<sup>107</sup> Mk 12: 29-30, *New Jerusalem Bible*.



instrumental for Augustine towards his conversion and spiritual growth. In fact, not only for Augustine, but for all Christians, true friendship is essential. The friendship of Augustine helps us to reflect if our own friendships are true friendships which help us to seek God and grow in charity. It is a lesson for Christians to learn what true friendship is, how we can form a true friendship and how the friendships lead us towards our own sanctification and salvation.

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