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**"Who Mentored Augustine?"**  
**by**  
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### Chapter Three



## WHO MENTORED AUGUSTINE?

**M**odern travelers visiting the museums of Tunisia are immediately struck by the most unique art form from Roman Africa—the mosaic.<sup>1</sup> Constructed from tiny pieces of colored tile that combine to make a beautiful portrait or object, mosaics have survived wars, conquest, and the turnover of several civilizations to tell the story of daily life in this period. In piecing together a mosaic of Augustine’s life, we must recognize that individual tiles as well as the persons who laid them contributed to the overall portrait of his life and ministry. Before we can fully consider how Augustine mentored spiritual leaders of his day, we must pose an important question: who mentored Augustine? As we will see, several people of various backgrounds and personalities influenced him at different periods of his life. In this chapter we will consider the impact of his mother, Monica, and of some close friends, Ambrose, Simplicianus, and Valerius, while also showing how these influences became apparent in Augustine’s own mentoring.

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to credit William Harmless for this analogy; see Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 39.

## Monica

Monica occupies a venerated place as one of the most famous mothers in Christian history. Her presence was well recorded by Augustine in the *Confessions* as well in the Cassiciacum dialogues where it is clear that he regarded her as a model and guide for the Christian life. Like Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine benefited from a pious upbringing and his mother's influence. He wrote, "My mother did all she could to see that you, my God, should be more truly my father than he [Patricius] was."<sup>2</sup> Having surveyed the texts that show Monica's influence on her son, I suggest that she mentored him in at least four ways, mostly in the period before his conversion in 386: through her holy example, her practical faith, her commitment to sound doctrine and practice, and the early Christian education she provided at home.

### *Holy Example*

Monica was most often characterized in the *Confessions* as a woman of prayer and tears, and the focus of her supplications was often the spiritual welfare of her wayward son.<sup>3</sup> Augustine often reported that his mother experienced dreams and visions confirming that her prayers would be answered.<sup>4</sup> He also highlighted her upright character. Among friends and acquaintances, she refrained from gossip and resolved to be a careful listener and peacemaker.<sup>5</sup> Despite a rocky beginning with her mother-in-law, Monica won her affections because of her character.<sup>6</sup> She was faithful and showed respect to an unbelieving, hot-tempered, and often unfaithful husband; and this ultimately resulted in Patricius's conversion near the

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<sup>2</sup> *Confessions*, 1.11.17; all English translation of *Confessions* are from Maria Boulding in John E. Rotelle, ed., *Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> *Confessions*, 1.11.17; 3.4.8; 3.11.19; 3.12.21; 5.7.13; 5.9.15,17; 6.1.1; 6.2.2; 9.13.36; also André Mandouze, *Prosopographie Chrétienne du Bas-empire, Vol. I, Afrique (303–533)*, (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1982), 759.

<sup>4</sup> *Confessions*, 3.11.19; 3.12.21; 8.12.30; see Margaret O'Ferrall, "Monica, the Mother of Augustine: A Reconsideration," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 10 (1975): 40–41.

<sup>5</sup> *Confessions*, 9.9.21.

<sup>6</sup> *Confessions*, 9.9.20; see John O'Meara, *The Young Augustine* (London: Longmans, 1954), 17.

end of his life.<sup>7</sup> As a result, Monica was a model and mentor to other women struggling with difficult marriages.

Though Augustine consistently made note of her holy life, he certainly did not “saint” her.<sup>8</sup> Rather, he realistically presented her as a recovering sinner not immune to struggles or weaknesses. As a young woman, Monica apparently had struggled with wine.<sup>9</sup> He also criticized her failure to arrange a marriage for him—a young man struggling with lust—because she and Patricius seemed to care more about his academic success than his moral purity.<sup>10</sup> Finally, he admitted that she could be rather controlling.<sup>11</sup> So, through the example of Monica, Augustine learned that Christian piety did not necessarily exclude a continual struggle with sin.

The impact of Monica’s holy yet imperfect example would become evident in Augustine’s later ministry as a spiritual leader and mentor. Possidius, who wrote the *Life of Augustine* “based on what I saw of him and heard from him,” mentioned a pious example as Augustine’s most significant tool for influencing others.<sup>12</sup> Augustine’s example, which Possidius held up for imitation, was balanced with the transparent example of one who continued to struggle with sin. This was most apparent in his *Confessions* where Augustine spoke of his sinful past but more significantly, “what I am now.”<sup>13</sup> The bishop of Hippo openly shared his struggle with lustful thoughts and with gluttony; his fascination with sounds, shapes, and colors; and his lust of the eyes, pride, and the praise of men.<sup>14</sup> Like his mother, Augustine mentored others through a personal example somewhat untainted by an ongoing struggle with sin.

### *Practical Faith*

Monica’s example instilled in her son the importance of practical faith lived out in the real world. She was concerned with prayer,

<sup>7</sup> *Confessions*, 9.19, 22.

<sup>8</sup> O’Ferrall, “Monica,” 29–30.

<sup>9</sup> *Confessions*, 9.8.18.

<sup>10</sup> *Confessions*, 2.8.

<sup>11</sup> *Confessions*, 5.8.15.

<sup>12</sup> Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, preface.

<sup>13</sup> *Confessions*, 1.5.6; 1.10.16; 1.13.21–2; 1.19.30; 2.2.2; 3.1.1; 2.4.9; 10.4.6.

<sup>14</sup> *Confessions*, 10.30.42; 10.31.43, 45, 47; 10.33.49–50; 10.34.51; 10.35.54–57; 10.36.59; 10.37.61.

perseverance, and promoting peace in her most significant relationships.<sup>15</sup> Though on his spiritual journey Augustine became intrigued by philosophy and intellectual speculation, he would not escape Monica's influence of practical faith.

The most poignant example of Augustine's intellectual world and Monica's practical world converging was at the retreat at Cassiciacum. Augustine indicated that he was pleased that his mother was present in this rather philosophical community.<sup>16</sup> This was the same Augustine who, just a few years earlier, deceitfully left his mother behind in Carthage to continue an academic career in Italy.<sup>17</sup> According to the Cassiciacum dialogues, Monica was not simply present to cook and keep house, but she participated in the discussions as well.<sup>18</sup> Augustine wrote, "The power of her mind came home to me and I realized that it could not be more suited to true philosophizing. . . . I decided therefore, that when she was at leisure she should be present at our conversations."<sup>19</sup> In fact, she gained the reputation of being able to overturn a speculative conversation with a few simple thoughts. Brown writes that she was able to "dismiss a whole philosophical school in a single vulgar word."<sup>20</sup>

Monica's participation at Cassiciacum leads us to three conclusions. First, Augustine's intellectual world was open to his mother as he welcomed her to this community. The suggestion that this aspect of Augustine's life and faith was off-limits to his mother fails to take into consideration her presence at Cassiciacum.<sup>21</sup> Second, contrary to the conclusions of some scholars, Monica had the capacity to participate in philosophical discussions. Though she had not read Plato or Vergil, the fact that she could contribute to a conversation and even bring it to a grinding halt meant that she had the

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<sup>15</sup> See O'Meara, *Young Augustine*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> *On Order*, 2.1.1.

<sup>17</sup> *Confessions*, 5.8.15.

<sup>18</sup> *On the Happy Life*, 1.6; 2.16; 3.17; 4.23; *Against the Skeptics*, 1.11.31; 2.5.13; 2.6.14; see Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 761; and Angela Di Berardino, "Monnica," in *ATTA*, 570.

<sup>19</sup> *On Order*, 2.1.1; English translation from Di Berardino, "Monnica," *ATTA*, 570.

<sup>20</sup> *On the Happy Life*, 3.16.20; see Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: a Biography*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 111.

<sup>21</sup> O'Meara, *Young Augustine*, 16.

intellectual capacity to understand what was being said. Her lack of formal education did not keep her from being able to reason and articulate.<sup>22</sup> Third, her decision to contribute to the dialogues from a practical perspective of simple faith as opposed to adopting philosophical rhetoric showed that she placed greater value on the practical.<sup>23</sup> This value was most aptly communicated in her conclusion to the dialogue *On the Happy Life*: “Holy Trinity, hear our prayers. Here without a doubt is the happy life which is also a perfect life that includes a firm faith, a living hope and an ardent grace that guides our steps.”<sup>24</sup>

Augustine’s spiritual journey took him from the speculative to the practical. His pre-391 writings, written while at leisure in Cassiciacum or Tagaste, dealt largely with philosophical issues. Yet most of his books, letters, and sermons after his ordination in 391 were exegetical or pastoral, designed to serve the needs of the church, though he also wrote polemical works to refute the Manichees, Donatists, and Pelagians. As a presbyter and bishop, Augustine did not have the luxury of being a professional scholar, and many of his writings were composed at night after a day of dealing with the challenges of church work. His letter to a young philosopher in 410 illustrated rather bluntly his thoughts on philosophical speculation: “I wish I could snatch you away from your titillating disquisitions and ram you into the sort of cares I have to cope with.”<sup>25</sup> As Augustine took on the cares of the ministry, his focus went from philosophical speculation to practical Christian living.

Perhaps we can also attribute to Monica Augustine’s practice of communicating with less-educated audiences in a simple, understandable manner. Despite Frend’s assertion that Augustine’s ideas were too intellectual for rural Donatists, his famous *Psalm Against the Donatists* was a thorough apologetic in the form of a simple jingle.<sup>26</sup> Augustine filled his sermons with illustrations related to

<sup>22</sup> See Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 762; *On the Happy Life*, 2.10; *On Order*, 2.17.45.

<sup>23</sup> *On the Happy Life*, 2.8; 3.21; Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 761–62.

<sup>24</sup> *On the Happy Life*, 4.35; translation from Gustave Bardy, *Saint Augustin: L’homme et l’œuvre* (7ème éd., Paris: Bibliothèque Augustinienne, 1948), 117.

<sup>25</sup> *Letter* 118.1.1; English translation in Brown, *Augustine*, 297.

<sup>26</sup> The Donatists were a schismatic group that sought to establish their own church in Africa. See W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), 238; and

local life in Hippo.<sup>27</sup> According to van der Meer, “In the pulpit he never used language that was above his hearers’ heads, but always chose his words in such a fashion that everyone would understand him.”<sup>28</sup> Augustine’s sermons addressed specific issues and sins his listeners were facing.<sup>29</sup>

### *Sound Teaching*

A third way Monica mentored her son was through her commitment to sound teaching. Though simple and uneducated, her commitment to orthodoxy is recorded on at least three occasions in the *Confessions*. First, when she learned that Augustine had become a Manichean, she expelled him from her home.<sup>30</sup> Unwilling to tolerate heresy in her own son, only the consolation of a dream revealing that he would return to the true faith moved her to allow him back in the house again. Second, Monica’s concern for sound teaching was clear in her willingness to part with the African custom of bringing offerings to the tombs of martyrs when she came to Milan. She was motivated to obey Ambrose, who had forbidden the practice, because she respected him as an “illustrious preacher and exemplar of piety,” one who gave practical instruction from a sound interpretation of the Scriptures.<sup>31</sup> Third, Augustine noted the stand that Monica took together with Ambrose and the Milanese believers who filled the Portian Basilica in protest against the Emperor Valentinian’s widow Justina, who sought to give the church to the Arians.<sup>32</sup>

We have considered the value of sound teaching in preachers and exegetes like Paul, Cyprian, Basil, and Ambrose. In the case of Monica, we find someone who demonstrated a commitment to sound teaching not through exegesis but through practical application.

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Frederick van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, trans. B. Battershaw and G. R. Lamb (London: Sheed & Ward, 1961), 258.

<sup>27</sup> See Christine Mohrmann, “Saint Augustin Écrivain,” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 1 (1958): 59–62.

<sup>28</sup> See Frederick van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 258.

<sup>29</sup> Lee Bacchi, *The Theology of the Ordained Ministry in the Letters of Augustine of Hippo* (San Francisco: International Scholars, 1998), 12–13.

<sup>30</sup> *Confessions*, 3.11.19.

<sup>31</sup> *Confessions*, 6.2.2.

<sup>32</sup> *Confessions*, 9.7.15; see Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 760.

As will be shown in the following chapters, Augustine was also committed to sound teaching based on correctly interpreted Scriptures. He wrote letters, sermons, and treatises fighting against the heresies of the Manichees, Donatists, Pelagians, and Arians while expending significant energy in church councils defending orthodoxy. Augustine was firm with heretics, but like his mother who allowed him back into the house following a dream, he also extended grace and kindness to his theological opponents.<sup>33</sup>

### *Christian Education*

In the section of an article entitled “before his conversion,” Madec argues that “Augustine was always a Christian.”<sup>34</sup> If Augustine was always a Christian, then what did he become after his conversion? Augustine’s own understanding was that he embraced Christian faith as an adult in a villa near Milan, that this was largely the faith his mother had taught and modeled for him for most of his life and that he had been successfully avoiding. Indeed, Monica had trained up her son in the way he should go, and he did not depart from it when he was old.<sup>35</sup>

Hence, a fourth way Monica mentored her son was by providing a Christian education at home.<sup>36</sup> Although Augustine was clear that Patricius did not oppose Monica’s raising her son as a Christian, Patricius’s contrary example did not seem to hinder Augustine’s Christian education. Apart from registering him as a catechumen, Monica’s program of education was informal.<sup>37</sup> As noted, she mentored her son through her example of virtue, prayer, and devotion to the church and also warned him about sin, particularly against

<sup>33</sup> See *Letter 146* to Pelagius.

<sup>34</sup> Goulven Madec, “Christian Influences on Augustine,” trans. Allen Fitzgerald, *ATTA*, 151.

<sup>35</sup> Prov 22:6.

<sup>36</sup> André Mandouze, *L’aventure de la Raison et la Grace* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1968), 84–86.

<sup>37</sup> *Confessions*, 1.11.17; 3.4.8; 5.14.25; *Against the Skeptics*, 2.2.5; see Eugene Kevane, *Augustine the Educator* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1964), 33; Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 80; and Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 759.



sexual immorality.<sup>38</sup> As Brown puts it, she was “the voice of God in his early life.”<sup>39</sup>

Though he remained unconverted during his youth and early adulthood, Monica’s mentoring did have an impact. Augustine rejected pagan philosophy because it lacked “the name of Christ . . . [that] my tender little heart had drunk in . . . with my mother’s milk, and in my deepest heart I still held on to it.”<sup>40</sup> Similarly, when Augustine became dissatisfied with being a Manichean and later a skeptic, he reverted to his Christian upbringing until he could find something more compelling. He wrote, “I resolved therefore to live as a catechumen in the catholic church, which was what my parents had wished for me, until some kind of certainty dawned by which I might direct my steps aright.”<sup>41</sup> The impact of Monica’s training was ultimately felt when Augustine stood before his mother in the villa near Milan converted to faith in Christ.<sup>42</sup>

Following Augustine’s conversion, Monica continued in her role of mentor as she encouraged and affirmed him in his faith. During their time together at Ostia near Rome just before Monica’s death, we witness not only a mother and a son talking about spiritual matters, but also two spiritual sojourners enjoying fellowship and offering mutual encouragement in the faith.<sup>43</sup>

Monica’s training program was informal and largely accomplished through an example that Augustine could imitate. Yet it was obviously effective as Augustine embraced the faith of his mother and continued to live as a Christian for the rest of his life while serving the church.

Monica’s legacy seems to have also impacted Augustine’s philosophy of training new believers, particularly in his manual *On the Instruction of Beginners*. First, Augustine related to Deogratias, a

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<sup>38</sup> *Confessions*, 2.7; 5.9.17; see Louis Bertrand, *Autour de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Fayard, 1921), 32–33; Trapé, *Saint Augustin*, 23–24; and O’Meara, *Young Augustine*, 32.

<sup>39</sup> See Brown, *Augustine*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> *Confessions*, 3.4.8; also Thomas O’Loughlin, “The *Libri Philosophorum* and Augustine’s Conversions,” in Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey, eds., *The Relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1992), 119.

<sup>41</sup> *Confessions*, 5.14.25.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.12.30.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.12.30; 9.10.23.

deacon of Carthage, that the teacher must be experiencing the faith, hope, and love of Christ and that these qualities should be contagious to the student.<sup>44</sup> Augustine seemed less concerned with transferring religious propositions than with handing down a living faith as he had received from his mother. Second, Augustine believed that the teacher would be more motivated and effective if he loved the new believer as a brother, a father, or a mother.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, it was a mother's love that motivated Monica to train Augustine in the faith.

### Friends

We have previously alluded to Augustine's natural disposition to friendship. During Augustine's youth, friends influenced him to steal pears from a tree.<sup>46</sup> Later he attempted to bring together a community pursuing the "happy life"—a group of friends with a common interest in philosophical pursuits.<sup>47</sup> After his conversion he gathered a diverse group of friends at Cassiciacum for a retreat focused on philosophical and spiritual understanding.<sup>48</sup> Hence for Augustine community and friendship became necessary elements for spiritual growth. Although friendship and community and their relationship to mentoring will be taken up in the coming chapters, we will consider here the mentoring impact of some of Augustine's friends leading up to his conversion and in the period immediately after.

### *Alypius*

Alypius, the friend most often mentioned in the *Confessions*, was also a native of Tagaste who studied rhetoric under Augustine in Tagaste and Carthage and who later followed him into the Manichean sect.<sup>49</sup> After a period of working in Rome, Alypius joined Augustine in the villa near Milan where together they listened to Ponticianus

<sup>44</sup> *On the Instruction of Beginners*, 3.6.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.17; see George Howie, *Educational Theory and Practice in St. Augustine* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1969), 150.

<sup>46</sup> *Confessions*, 2.4.9.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.14.24; Brown, *Augustine*, 81; and Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 53.

<sup>48</sup> *Soliloquies*, 1.12.20; see Joseph Lienhard, "Friendship, Friends," *ATTA*, 372–73.

<sup>49</sup> *Confessions*, 6.7.11–12; see Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 53; and Mandouze, *L'aventure*, 188.

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recount the life of Antony.<sup>50</sup> Augustine's famous conversion experience was paralleled by that of Alypius, who was also moved by a verse of Scripture and independently resolved in his heart to become a Christian. Alypius was also present for the retreat at Cassiciacum and was baptized alongside Augustine.<sup>51</sup>

How did Alypius have a mentoring impact on Augustine? Augustine referred to Alypius as "my heart's brother" (*fratrem cordis mei*); that is, he was Augustine's peer and confidant on the journey to faith.<sup>52</sup> While Augustine needed an intellectual sparring partner, he also needed someone for support and encouragement on this delicate and uncertain journey. The two continued as friends, providing mutual support after their conversions and were ordained to the ministry at roughly the same time. While Augustine will forever appear the genius and the strong one, he clearly needed Alypius.<sup>53</sup>

### *Nebridius*

Nebridius was born in Carthage, where he made Augustine's acquaintance. Later he followed Augustine to Milan as a partner in search of the "happy life" where, along with Alypius, the three engaged in dialogue over philosophical and spiritual issues.<sup>54</sup> Augustine, reflecting on this time from a spiritual perspective, said that they were "looking to you [God] to give them their food in due time."<sup>55</sup> Though Nebridius was not present at Cassiciacum because he had returned to Carthage, he nevertheless exchanged letters with Augustine during this period in which the content resembled the discussions at Cassiciacum.<sup>56</sup> Augustine reported that Nebridius

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<sup>50</sup> *Confessions*, 8.6.13–7.18; see Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 53–54.

<sup>51</sup> *Confessions*, 8.12.30; *Against the Sceptics; On Order*; see Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 54–55.

<sup>52</sup> *Confession*, 9.4.7; 6.7.11; also Kim Paffenroth, "Bad Habits and Bad Company: Education and Evil in the *Confessions*," in Kim Paffenroth and Kevin Hughes, *Augustine and Liberal Education* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000), 9.

<sup>53</sup> Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 56.

<sup>54</sup> *Confessions*, 6.7.11; see Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 774.

<sup>55</sup> *Confessions*, 6.10.17.

<sup>56</sup> *Letters* 3–4; see Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 775.

was converted along with his family not long after his return to Africa and before his premature death around 391.<sup>57</sup>

How did Nebridius mentor Augustine? First, like Alypius, Nebridius was a peer and a sounding board in their quest for understanding. Second, and more significantly, Nebridius managed to play a large role in convincing Augustine to give up his involvement in the Manichean sect and his interest in astrology.<sup>58</sup> As a friend he exhorted Augustine to set aside frivolous thinking and ideologies, which helped to clear up Augustine's mind toward accepting Christianity. Third, once Augustine had settled back in Africa with his group of "servants of God" in Tagaste, Nebridius made a point to encourage him to take time to rest as the demands of his new life were leaving him tired.<sup>59</sup> Finally, it is worth mentioning that Nebridius was apparently the first recipient of any letter from Augustine—a form that Augustine would go on to employ greatly in his ministry of mentoring and encouraging spiritual leaders of his day.

### *Evodius*

Though Evodius was also a native of Tagaste, he did not meet Augustine until 387 in Milan after Augustine's baptism and time at Cassiciacum. He was already a Christian when he met Augustine and ended up joining the group of "servants of God" who were en route to Tagaste.<sup>60</sup>

The main way Evodius influenced Augustine was through his participation in two dialogues with Augustine while the two were in Rome delayed for a year before their return to Africa.<sup>61</sup> In the first dialogue, *On the Greatness of the Soul* (c. 388), Augustine and Evodius wrestled

<sup>57</sup> *Confessions*, 9.3.6; also *Letter* 98; Brown, *Augustine*, 57; Allen Fitzgerald, "Nebridius," *ATTA*, 587–88; and Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 775.

<sup>58</sup> *Confessions*, 7.2.3; 7.6.8; 4.3.6; Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 774.

<sup>59</sup> *Letter* 5; also Roy W. Battenhouse, ed., *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 57.

<sup>60</sup> Evodius would go on to be ordained bishop of Uzalis, a city near Carthage. See James J. O'Donnell, "Evodius of Uzalis," *ATTA*, 344; Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 367; and Brown, *Augustine*, 120.

<sup>61</sup> See Othmar Perler, *Les Voyages de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1969), 146–47.

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over issues related to the nature of the soul.<sup>62</sup> The second dialogue, *On Free Will* (c. 387–388), generally dealt with the tension between God’s foreknowledge and human free will that became apparent as they discussed the origin of evil and the definition of sin.<sup>63</sup>

Evodius served as a peer mentor to Augustine through these dialogues as the two pursued truth together. Yet these works were later published, and Augustine alone is credited for the thought involved. The structure of *On Free Will* is such that it began in the form of dialogue between Augustine and Evodius before later becoming a complete discourse by Augustine.<sup>64</sup> Even if the work was largely the thought of Augustine, we must still recognize the presence of Evodius, whose questions and thoughts helped bring the best out of Augustine in articulating his early thought on the tension of divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

### Ambrose

Not only did Ambrose mentor other leaders in the period prior to Augustine’s ministry; he also had a personal impact on Augustine. In his *Confessions* Augustine introduced Ambrose as a mentor: “So I came to Milan and to Bishop Ambrose. . . . Unknowingly I was led by you to him, so that through him I might be led, knowingly, to you.”<sup>65</sup> The main ways that Ambrose mentored Augustine were through his holy example, the primacy of properly interpreted Scriptures, the “language” of preaching, and preparing him for baptism.

### *Holy Example*

Like Monica, it was Ambrose’s holy life that profoundly touched Augustine. Augustine described him as “one of the best of men,” “a devout worshipper of you [God],” and a “man of God.”<sup>66</sup> Augustine added that Ambrose treated him like a son:

<sup>62</sup> Also *Letters* 158–64; 169; Roland Teske, “*Animae quantitate, De*” *ATTA*, 23; and Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 368.

<sup>63</sup> See *Letter* 162; and Teske, “*Liberio arbitrio, De*,” *ATTA*, 494.

<sup>64</sup> See Teske, “*Liberio arbitrio, De*,” *ATTA*, 494.

<sup>65</sup> *Confessions*, 5.13.23; see Mandouze, *L’aventure*, 108–9.

<sup>66</sup> *Confessions*, 5.13.23; also Michelle Pellegrino, *The True Priest: The Priesthood as Preached and Practiced by St. Augustine*, trans. Arthur Gibson (Langley, UK: St Paul,

This man of God welcomed me with fatherly kindness and showed the charitable concern for my pilgrimage that befitted a bishop. I began to feel affection for him, not at first as a teacher of truth, for that I had given up hope of finding in your church, but simply as a man who was kind to me.<sup>67</sup>

Though Ambrose and Augustine are reputed for their exegesis and thought, Augustine's heart was first touched by Ambrose before his mind was challenged. Perhaps Ambrose was filling the void in Augustine's life of a spiritual father figure, a role Patricius had failed to play.

Ambrose's kindness to Monica seems to have also impacted Augustine. Though Augustine had limited personal contact with Ambrose, Monica apparently enjoyed more contact. Ambrose praised the faith and example of Monica, and she was highly impressed with her new bishop.<sup>68</sup> Hence, the pious examples of his mother and Ambrose so influenced the searching Augustine that one might speculate that the two were conspiring to bring the wayward Augustine to faith.

### *Primacy of Scripture*

Previously we have shown that Ambrose mentored spiritual leaders by his commitment to sound teaching based on properly interpreted Scriptures. Ambrose succeeded in opening the Scriptures for Augustine, arousing in him a desire to discover them for himself. Augustine wrote, "Another thing that brought me joy was that the ancient writings of the law and the prophets were now being offered to me under quite a different aspect from that under which they had seemed to me absurd when I believed your holy people held such crude opinions."<sup>69</sup> The "crude opinions" that led him to leave the

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1968), 95.

<sup>67</sup> *Confessions*, 5.13.23.

<sup>68</sup> *On the Happy Life*, 1.4; *Confessions*, 6.2.2; 6.1.1; see Brown, *Augustine*, 119.

<sup>69</sup> *Confessions*, 6.4.6; also Maurice Jourjon, "Le Saint Évêque d'Hippone," in R. Fourrey, ed., *La Tradition Sacerdotale* (Paris: Éditions Xavier Mappus, 1959), 133; and Brown, *Augustine*, 77.

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church as a young man and join the Manichean sect included the church's supposed teaching on the nature of God, the problem of evil, and the constitution of Christ.<sup>70</sup> Yet Ambrose, demonstrating a background in the liberal arts and Platonic thinking in particular, resolved these interpretative difficulties for Augustine by using an allegorical hermeneutic that featured Christ as the center of the Scriptures. Augustine added:

I delighted to hear Ambrose often asserting in his sermons to the people, as a principle on which he must insist emphatically, the letter is death-dealing, but the spirit gives life. This he would tell as he drew aside the veil of mystery and opened to them the spiritual meaning of passages which, taken literally, would seem to mislead.<sup>71</sup>

Though Augustine would eventually develop different views on evil, the nature of Christ, and other questions, Ambrose convinced him of the divine authority of the Scriptures, which ultimately provided more satisfying answers than what the Manicheans had offered.<sup>72</sup>

Augustine went on to spend his career as a presbyter and bishop studying, expounding, and defending the Scriptures, never losing the conviction of their divine authority. Even toward the end of his life, as he taught younger men how to interpret the Scriptures, he held up Ambrose as one who understood the Scriptures and made them clear to others.<sup>73</sup>

### *The Language of Preaching*

Augustine admitted that in his initial trips to hear Ambrose preach, he was not interested in "what Ambrose was saying, but interested

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<sup>70</sup> J. Patout Burns, "Ambrose Preaching to Augustine: The Shaping of Faith," *Collectanea Augustiana*, J. C. Schnaubelt, F. Van Fleteren, eds. (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 374.

<sup>71</sup> *Confessions*, 6.4.6; also Kevane, *Augustine the Educator*, 211; and Neil McLynn, "Ambrose," *ATTA*, 17.

<sup>72</sup> Burns, "Ambrose Preaching to Augustine," 374; and Kevane, *Augustine the Educator*, 210.

<sup>73</sup> *Teaching Christianity*, 4.46; 48; 50; also J. Loughlin, "St. Ambrose," *New Advent* [www.newadvent.org/cathen/011383c.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/011383c.htm).

only in listening to how he said it.”<sup>74</sup> At this time Augustine was earning his living teaching people how to speak eloquently, and he went to hear Ambrose to take notes from a gifted communicator. Despite his initial motives Augustine became attracted to this man who was not only kind but also demonstrated that it was possible for someone to be both an intellectual and a Christian.<sup>75</sup> As Ambrose’s allegorical approach to the Scriptures proved to be appealing, Augustine began listening to his sermons for their content more than their eloquent packaging. As Possidius explained, “This preacher of God’s word spoke very often in the church; Augustine was present in the congregation, listening with great interest and attention.”<sup>76</sup>

As his hunger increased for the life that Ambrose described, Augustine desired to speak with him. Rousseau asserts that Augustine, following in the Egyptian monastic tradition of master-pupil dialogue, was coming to Ambrose to dialogue.<sup>77</sup> Yet, according to the *Confessions*, Augustine found it difficult to find a time when Ambrose was not occupied. Thus, the two ended up having very little personal contact, and when Augustine was converted he informed Ambrose of his decision by letter!<sup>78</sup>

If Ambrose had such little personal contact with Augustine, can we really consider him Augustine’s mentor? Our early Christian model of mentoring insists on the need for close, human interaction in the process of spiritual growth. Ambrose and Augustine seemed to enjoy a sense of intimacy at a distance through the form or “language” of preaching. Augustine was apparently uncomfortable speaking one-on-one with Ambrose. Yet, when Ambrose stood to preach the Scriptures, unveiling through skilled interpretation the inspiring content of their meaning in a form that was eloquent and even entertaining, this medium was a familiar “language” that Augustine the rhetor could connect with on a profound level.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>74</sup> *Confessions*, 5.14.24; also Mandouze, *L’aventure*, 109.

<sup>75</sup> See McLynn, “Ambrose of Milan,” *ATTA*, 17; and O’Meara, *Young Augustine*, 111.

<sup>76</sup> Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 1.3; *Confessions*, 6.3.4; also Burns, “Ambrose Preaching to Augustine,” 373–74.

<sup>77</sup> See Phillip Rousseau, “Augustine and Ambrose: The Loyalty and Single-Mindedness of a Disciple,” *Augustiniana* 27 (1977): 152.

<sup>78</sup> *Confessions*, 6.3.3; 4.4; 11.18; 9.5.13; see Trapé, *Saint Augustine*, 73.

<sup>79</sup> See Mandouze, *L’aventure*, 110–11.



### *Who Mentored Augustine?*

Although Ambrose was the only one speaking, the sermon became a quasi-dialogue. As Augustine assimilated Ambrose's teaching, the sermon served as a catalyst for Augustine's ongoing commitment to seeking truth, a pursuit that often included dialogue with others.

Augustine the rhetor would go on to become Augustine the preacher who would deliver many more sermons than Ambrose as he greatly valued this form of teaching. Yet he would despise eloquent delivery at the expense of nourishing content in a sermon. Certainly Ambrose should be credited with helping Augustine go from a rhetor to a preacher.

### *Preparation for Baptism*

After Augustine made his profession of faith, he wrote to Ambrose sharing the news of his conversion, submitted his name for baptism for the coming Easter, and requested advice on what he could read to grow in his new faith. Ambrose encouraged him to read Isaiah, but Augustine found it inaccessible and quickly put it aside.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps Ambrose overestimated the abilities of one trained in the liberal arts to understand Isaiah. Also, such advice revealed Ambrose's preference for teaching from the Hebrew Scriptures. Even so, Augustine began to prepare for baptism in the same way he had come to faith—in the company of close friends.

Besides assigning reading in Isaiah, how did Ambrose prepare Augustine for baptism? First, according to Paulinus, Ambrose was personally involved in initiating all catechumens. Though Ambrose and Augustine had little personal contact, they would have spent considerable time together during the period of Lent leading up to the Easter baptism.<sup>81</sup>

Second, in the context of a daily liturgical setting, Ambrose taught the catechumens a series of organized lessons.<sup>82</sup> The teaching consisted of a "moral education" based on principles of holy living prescribed in the Scriptures and demonstrated through the lives of

<sup>80</sup> *Confessions*, 9.5.13; 9.6.14; see Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 93.

<sup>81</sup> Paulinus, *Life of Ambrose*, 38; also Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 94.

<sup>82</sup> Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 100; also Edward Yarnold, *The Awe Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the R.C.I.A.* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 98–149.

the saints of Scripture.<sup>83</sup> Ambrose's content also included a "handing over" or a thorough line-by-line treatment of the Creed, which included teaching on the nature of the Trinity.<sup>84</sup> Finally, Ambrose's teaching also included an exhortation to take seriously the commitment to the Christian life.<sup>85</sup>

In addition to the content of Ambrose's prebaptismal teaching, it is important to note the forms in which he delivered it. Though the context was a small group of catechumens, Ambrose still communicated through his preferred method of the sermon, which, as we have shown, would also have been meaningful for Augustine.<sup>86</sup> When communicating the creed, Ambrose employed a "chiastic rhyme scheme" that Harmless says "made his passage memorable—aptly framed to impress itself on the oral memory."<sup>87</sup> In a similar way, catechumens like Augustine were able to commit to memory the theological truths they were learning through hymns. Augustine wrote, "How copiously I wept at your hymns and canticles, how intensely was I moved by the lovely harmonies of your singing church! Those voices flooded my ears, and the truth was distilled into my heart until it overflowed in loving devotion."<sup>88</sup> Ambrose was innovative in introducing hymns into the Milan church, a controversial practice at the time.

Augustine, his friends, and fellow catechumens were baptized by Ambrose on Easter in 387. As was the custom in Milan, Ambrose, perhaps with the help of an exorcist, laid hands on each catechumen and invited them to renounce the works of Satan before baptizing them.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Ambrose, *On the Mysteries*, 1; also Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 94–95.

<sup>84</sup> While conforming in essence to the Nicene Creed, there were apparently some variations in the wording of the Creed in Milan and in Augustine's later ministry. See *Sermons*, 212–15, and *On the Creed, to Catechumens*; and Joseph T. Lienhard, "Creed, Symbolum," *ATTA*, 254–55.

<sup>85</sup> *On Faith and Works*, 6.9; see Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 93, 96–98.

<sup>86</sup> *On the Mysteries*, 1; Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 94.

<sup>87</sup> Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 101; also Paul Achtemeier, "Omne Verbum Sonat: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity," *JBL* 109 (1990): 7.

<sup>88</sup> *Confessions*, 9.6.14; 9.12.31; *Sermon Against Auxentius*, 34; also Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 99.

<sup>89</sup> *Confessions*, 9.6.14; *Letter 147.52*; also Yarnold, *Rites*, 102.

### *Who Mentored Augustine?*

Ambrose had a lasting influence on Augustine. When Augustine became a presbyter in Hippo in 391, one of his first roles was preparing catechumens for baptism.<sup>90</sup> As bishop in 399, Augustine devoted *On the Instruction of Beginners* to training new believers for baptism. Like Ambrose, Augustine was passionate about articulating the Creed. His *On Faith and the Creed* was a commentary on the Creed that served as a revised version of the teaching he gave to the clergy at the council of Hippo in 393.<sup>91</sup> Toward the end of his life, Augustine authored yet another commentary *On the Creed, for Catechumens*.<sup>92</sup>

### Simplicianus

Simplicianus was Ambrose's theological teacher and mentor and eventually succeeded Ambrose as the bishop of Milan. While Augustine was following Ambrose's sermons and going through an intense period of searching, he met Simplicianus, who was more available than Ambrose. Simplicianus mentored Augustine in three clear ways: as an intellectual resource, by emphasizing the authority of the church, and by modeling that the mentor is still a disciple.

#### *Intellectual Resource*

Simplicianus, like Ambrose, appealed to Augustine as a thinking Christian who was trained in the liberal arts and understood the philosophers.<sup>93</sup> Though Augustine looked to Simplicianus as an intellectual resource, he first made note of Simplicianus's pious character, as he had done with Ambrose:

I regarded him as your good servant, a man from whom your grace radiated. Moreover I had heard how from his youth he had lived for you in complete dedication and since he was an old man by now I

<sup>90</sup> *Sermon*, 216.1–2; Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 105.

<sup>91</sup> See Finbarr Clancy, "*Fide et Symbolo, De*," *ATTA*, 360–61.

<sup>92</sup> The creed was also the subject of *Sermons*, 212–15; also Allan Fitzgerald, "*Symbolo ad Catechumenos, De*," *ATTA*, 820.

<sup>93</sup> *Confessions*, 8.1.1–2; see Madec, "Christian Influences on Augustine," *ATTA*, 151; and Brown, *Augustine*, 95, 97.

assumed that after following your way of life for long years and with such noble zeal he must be rich in experience and deeply learned.<sup>94</sup>

As Augustine's faith concerns at this point were intellectual, Simplicianus was qualified and available to dialogue with him over some of the key issues.<sup>95</sup> Burns understands that Simplicianus was especially helpful in explaining the "union of the divine and human in Christ."<sup>96</sup>

Simplicianus also encouraged Augustine by recounting the story of Marius Victorinus, a Platonist who had become a Christian in large part through dialogue with Simplicianus.<sup>97</sup> While Ponticianus's account of the holy man Antony had profoundly touched Augustine's heart on his journey to conversion, Simplicianus's account of a Platonist coming to Christ equally moved him to have the courage to confess Christ. Augustine recounted, "On hearing the story I was fired to imitate Victorinus; indeed it was to this end that your servant Simplicianus had related it."<sup>98</sup> If Ambrose, Simplicianus, and Marius Victorinus were educated and thinking Christians, then Augustine could also be a Christian.

Though Augustine's faith would become less speculative after his ordination as presbyter and bishop, the example of Simplicianus appeared later to impact the manner in which Augustine prepared for baptism those from an intellectual background. In *On the Instruction of Beginners*, Augustine instructed Deogratias to take into account the superior knowledge of the Scriptures that someone trained in the liberal arts would have compared to someone less educated and to orient the training program to the level of understanding of the educated catechumen.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>94</sup> *Confessions*, 8.1.1; also *Letter* 37.1.

<sup>95</sup> *Confessions*, 8.1.1; 2.3.

<sup>96</sup> See Burns, "Ambrose Preaching to Augustine," 377.

<sup>97</sup> *Confessions*, 8.2.4.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.5.10.

<sup>99</sup> *On the Instruction of Beginners*, 8.12.

*Authority of the Church*

Through his account of Marius Victorinus, Simplicianus also emphasized to Augustine the spiritual authority of the church. Although Victorinus initially did not see the relationship between the four walls of the church and his faith, he did not want to cause problems for himself socially and professionally. So Simplicianus insisted that he needed to experience salvation and declare his faith within the church.<sup>100</sup> This message was intended for Augustine, and he ultimately responded by being baptized in the church and remaining in it for the rest of his life. As Augustine's ecclesiology developed, Simplicianus's impact was surely felt, for Augustine would later affirm in his preaching and writing that salvation needed to be experienced within the spiritual authority of the church and that being a Christian required fellowship with other believers.<sup>101</sup>

*Mentor as Disciple*

Simplicianus demonstrated that a mentor should still be a learner by writing to Augustine, as well as Ambrose, posing theological questions.<sup>102</sup> The teacher was asking a former student for help! As we will see, Augustine also demonstrated the posture of a learner, progressing in his understanding and practice of the Christian life as he served as a bishop and mentor to spiritual leaders.

Valerius

Each of Augustine's mentors mentioned to this point were those who either influenced him prior to his conversion or in his first years as a Christian. Yet, when considering Augustine's preparation for pastoral ministry, the activity that filled most of his days for the final 40 years of his life, there is another mentor who is largely overlooked in the study of Augustine—his predecessor, bishop Valerius

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<sup>100</sup> *Confession*, 5.8; 6.4; 8.2.4; Rousseau, "Augustine and Ambrose," 153.

<sup>101</sup> *Exposition on the Psalms*, 132.2; Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 3; *On Baptism*, 3.13.18; 4.1.1; 4.2.2; also Jourjon, "Le Saint Évêque d'Hippone," 130.

<sup>102</sup> *Letter 37*.

of Hippo (d. 397).<sup>103</sup> In fact, in a perusal of key encyclopedias and dictionaries of early Christianity, one is hard pressed to find a single entry dedicated to Valerius.<sup>104</sup> Even the excellent volume *Augustine Through the Ages*, which hardly leaves a stone unturned regarding Augustine's life and work, contains no article on Valerius. Although what is known about Augustine's predecessor is scant, being limited to a few letters and sermons of Augustine and to Possidius's biography, this evidence is sufficient for a profitable study.<sup>105</sup>

The greater issue is whether Valerius is important to the study of Augustine. My argument is that upon Augustine's ordination and preparation for a lifetime of pastoral ministry, Valerius was his most significant mentor—particularly from Augustine's ordination as presbyter in 391 until Valerius's death in 396 or 397. Valerius mentored Augustine in four distinct ways: by selecting him for ministry, by maintaining a personal mentor-disciple relationship, by involving him increasingly in ministry, and by releasing him to ministry.

### *Selection*

Possidius wrote that, for some time before Augustine's visit to Hippo in 391, the aging, native-Greek-speaking bishop had been in search of a presbyter: one "capable of building the Lord's church by preaching the word of God and salutary doctrine."<sup>106</sup> While Valerius was concerned about the future leadership for the church of Hippo,

<sup>103</sup> A form of this section first appeared in my article "An Unrecognized and Unlikely Influence? The Impact of Valerius of Hippo on Augustine," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 72:3 (2007): 251–64. I am especially thankful to Thomas O'Loughlin, Alan Fitzgerald, and Michael Conway for their feedback on the article and this section.

<sup>104</sup> See *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Charles G. Herberman, ed. (New York: Appleton, 1912); *Enciclopedia Cattolica* (Roma: Città del Vaticano, 1953); *The Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, Richard McBrien, ed. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995); *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, F. L. Cross, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed., Everett Ferguson, ed. (New York; London: Garland, 1997); *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, Angelo DiBerardino, ed. (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1992); and *ATTA*.

<sup>105</sup> See Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 1139–41. Valerius had also been treated in Brown, *Augustine*; Barty, *Saint Augustin*; van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*; Michelle Pellegrino, *True Priest*; Bacchi, *Ordained Ministry*; and Gerald Bonner, *St. Augustine: His Life and Controversies* (Norwich: Canterbury, 1986).

<sup>106</sup> Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 5.2.

it seems that he was also looking for someone to serve in areas where he was weak. Though some have suggested that Valerius was not a strong theologian or that he was incapable of mounting an effective apologetic against the growing Donatist movement in Hippo, it is safest to conclude that Valerius's main weakness was language. Having immigrated or perhaps come as a missionary to Africa, he was searching for someone who could effectively communicate and preach in Latin.<sup>107</sup>

Valerius began to pray and let the need be known for a qualified presbyter in Hippo. Then, with Augustine present in the church assembly on that momentous Sunday in 391, Valerius repeated to the congregation their great need for another minister, which forced something of a selection by stealth.<sup>108</sup> Though Augustine was clearly not comfortable with the events, this manner of setting apart leaders was nevertheless common in his day and served as Valerius's official means of selecting Augustine to an office of spiritual leadership.<sup>109</sup>

Though Valerius had orchestrated the ordination by force because of the great needs of the Hippo church, his decision was still risky. Would he let a former Manichean serve and teach in the church? It was precisely for this reason that Megalius of Calama, the senior ranking bishop in Numidia, initially opposed Augustine's ordination. Yet Valerius stood firm and succeeded in having Augustine ordained as presbyter for the church of Hippo.<sup>110</sup>

How could Valerius take such a chance on Augustine and not give in to the pressure of those who opposed his choice of presbyter? It seems that Valerius knew something of Augustine's reputation as a "servant of God" in Tagaste. Augustine admitted in a sermon many years later that at the time of his ordination he had "already

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<sup>107</sup> See Andre Hamman, *Etudes Pabristiques: Methodologie, Liturgie, Histoire* (Paris: Beanchesne), 273; Brown, *Augustine*, 132; and Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 1139.

<sup>108</sup> Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 4.1; Bardy, *Saint Augustin*, 157; and van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 4.

<sup>109</sup> *On Adulterous Marriages*, 2.20.22; also Pellegrino, *True Priest*, 18; and Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 4.2. This manner of ordination had also been the experience of Ambrose, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus.

<sup>110</sup> *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, 3.16.19; also Brown, *Augustine*, 198; Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 120; and Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 5.4.

begun to acquire a reputation of some weight among the servants of God.”<sup>111</sup> Similarly, Possidius affirmed, “The catholics already knew of Augustine’s way of life and teaching.”<sup>112</sup> Despite Augustine’s Manichean background, Valerius was able to mitigate the risk in his selection because Augustine had spent the previous three years in Tagaste living according to the moral principles taught in the Scriptures, teaching sound doctrine, and exercising spiritual gifts and natural talents that could help the church.

Second, Valerius was willing to take a risk with Augustine because he recognized his potential for church ministry. Pellegrino explains, “Valerius judged the new priest to be fully fit for the exercise of the priestly ministry, whereas Augustine himself, with his better and deeper knowledge of himself, was convinced he could not face it without a more searching preparation.”<sup>113</sup> Pellegrino is referring to Augustine’s request of Valerius to take a period of concentrated study in the Scriptures before assuming his duties as presbyter.<sup>114</sup> While Augustine was aware of his own shortcomings, there is no indication that Valerius ever wavered on his choice of Augustine.

Valerius’s selection of Augustine in 391 charted a new and perhaps unforeseen life direction for Augustine. While one cannot pretend to know what Augustine was thinking about a future in ministry in late 390, he was nevertheless not on any observable course for the ministry. Rather, since his conversion four years earlier and following his contact with monasteries in Milan and Rome, he had returned to Africa and fulfilled his plan of establishing a community of “servants of God” in Tagaste.<sup>115</sup> His experience there was something of a “holy leisure” (*otium sanctum*) characterized by prayer, reading, dialogue, and writing—a world away from the burden (*sarcina*) of the ministry in Hippo.<sup>116</sup> So when Valerius ordained Augustine in

<sup>111</sup> *Sermon*, 355.2; also Bardy, *Saint Augustin*, 158.

<sup>112</sup> Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 4.1.

<sup>113</sup> Pellegrino, *True Priest*, 33.

<sup>114</sup> *Letter* 21.

<sup>115</sup> *Confessions*, 8.6.15; *On the Catholic and Manichean Ways of Life*, 1.33.70; and *Sermon*, 355.2.

<sup>116</sup> “Burden” (*sarcina*) was Augustine’s preferred term to describe the ministry. See *Letters* 31.4; 69.1; 71.2; 85.2; 86; 101.3; 149.34; 242.1; 20\*.4; Maurice Jourjon, “L’évêque et le Peuple de Dieu Selon Saint Augustin,” Maurice Jourjon et al, eds., *Saint Augustin Parmi*



### *Who Mentored Augustine?*



*The baptistry attached to the basilica of peace in Hippo.*

391, he had a vision for Augustine's potential that Augustine did not seem to have for himself. Yet Augustine did not reject this vision, nor did he depart from it in the next five years with Valerius, or in the nearly 40 years that he spent in church ministry in Hippo.<sup>117</sup> Augustine needed a catalyst like Valerius in his life, not only to see his potential but also to "push him in the water" by actively calling him to the ministry.

During his 34 years as bishop of Hippo, Augustine also valued the recruitment of qualified men for the needs of the ministry, and he saw a steady flow of men join him in the monastery in Hippo and serve the church of that city.<sup>118</sup> While Augustine would ordain

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*Nous* (Paris: Éditions Xavier Mappus, 1954), 155–57; George Lawless, "Augustine's Burden of Ministry," *Angelicum* 61 (1984): 295–315; Thomas F. Martin, "Clericatus Sarcina (ep. 126.3): Augustine and the Care of the Clergy," *The Practice of Christianity in Roman Africa*, <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/augustine.html>, accessed May 28, 2004; Lienhard, "Ministry," *ATTA*, 568; and Bacchi, *Ordained Ministry*, 79.

<sup>117</sup> See Mandouze, *L'aventure*, 218.

<sup>118</sup> Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 5.1; *Sermons*, 355–56.

many men in Hippo and elsewhere, he broke with Valerius on the practice of ordination by force. This is most evident in his refusal to allow Pinian to be ordained by force in Hippo in 411.<sup>119</sup>

### *Mentor-Disciple Relationship*

In his only letter to Valerius, Augustine addressed him as “sincerely beloved father” and “father.”<sup>120</sup> In letters to others, Augustine referred to him as “most blessed and venerable father” or “most blessed father.”<sup>121</sup> Augustine’s esteem for Valerius seemed to be strengthened by the aging bishop’s holy character. In a letter to the Donatist bishop of Hippo, Augustine described Valerius as a man who “desires peace, . . . not tossed about by the inanity of vain pride.”<sup>122</sup> In a letter to Aurelius of Carthage, Augustine called Valerius “a man of such modesty and gentleness and also of such prudence and solicitude in the Lord.”<sup>123</sup> Possidius joined in the chorus by calling him “a devout and God-fearing man.”<sup>124</sup>

Augustine also respected Valerius’s authority as the bishop of Hippo. Again, in *Letter 21*, Augustine addressed him as “most blessed and venerable lord” and “your holiness” and repeatedly referred to him as old (*senex*).<sup>125</sup> This last title, though perhaps strange or even disrespectful to the modern reader, was Augustine’s sign of respect for his bishop. Augustine’s respect for the authority of his bishop seems significant in that just a few years prior he had been critical of clergy in general.<sup>126</sup>

Though Valerius was in a position of authority over Augustine, the old bishop regarded his young presbyter with respect. As noted,

<sup>119</sup> *Letter 126*.

<sup>120</sup> *Letters 21.1; 21.3*; unless otherwise noted, English translations of *Letters 1–149* are from WSA pt. 2, vol. 3, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2001); *Letters 150–269* are from <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102.htm>; *Letters 1\*–29\** are from *Saint Augustine: Letters Vol. VI (1\*29\*)*, trans. Robert B. Eno, in FC vol. 81, ed. Thomas P. Halton et al. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989)

<sup>121</sup> *Letters 33.4; 31.4*.

<sup>122</sup> *Letter 31.4*.

<sup>123</sup> *Letter 22.4*.

<sup>124</sup> Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 5.2.

<sup>125</sup> *Letters 21.1; 21.4; 21.5, 6; 29.7, 11*; Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 8.1.

<sup>126</sup> Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 4.3.

Augustine petitioned Valerius for a period of study before reporting to Hippo, to which Valerius apparently consented.<sup>127</sup> While Hamman suggests that Augustine was granted one year for study, in which he succeeded in memorizing the Scriptures, neither assertion can be supported from Augustine's writings.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, Valerius's agreement to a preassignment study sabbatical, a rarity in most any profession, revealed respect for the new presbyter; Valerius was allowing Augustine to have a say in what he needed to be successful in the ministry.

Yet Valerius did not restrict Augustine from continuing in the monastic lifestyle that had been his practice in Tagaste. Rather, Valerius gave him the freedom to pursue his convictions and desires and effectively become his own kind of presbyter. Valerius went a step further and gave him some land on which to build a house in the garden by the Hippo church, where he could establish a community of clergy and "servants of God."<sup>129</sup> Thus, instead of imposing controls on his new presbyter, Valerius empowered and resourced Augustine to live out his own vision of the ministry.

While Valerius demonstrated respect for his young and talented presbyter, it is also apparent that he was not threatened by Augustine.<sup>130</sup> We recall that Valerius had deliberately recruited someone better than himself for preaching. How many bishops in Valerius's day, or at any point in the history of the church, would have demonstrated such humility? When Augustine's reputation as a teacher and apologist increased, Valerius did not try to suppress his presbyter; rather, he sought to create even more opportunities for him to shine. Paulinus of Nola appropriately referred to Valerius as "that blessed old man, whose most pure mind has never been touched by any stain of jealous envy."<sup>131</sup> Clearly, Valerius was thinking more about the present and future needs of the Hippo church

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<sup>127</sup> *Letter 21; Sermon*, 355.2.

<sup>128</sup> In *Letter 21.4*, Augustine asked for "a short time for myself, say, up to Easter." See Hamman, *Etudes*, 273–74.

<sup>129</sup> *Sermon*, 355.2; see Bacchi, *Ordained Ministry*, 4; Bardy, *Saint Augustin*, 160; and Brown, *Augustine*, 133.

<sup>130</sup> Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 114.

<sup>131</sup> *Letter 32.2*.

than his own career ambitions, modeling what Augustine would later articulate as the “burden” of the ministry.

While loving Augustine as a son and giving him the freedom to become his own type of minister, Valerius was also courageous to give his protégé significant tasks for which Augustine did not feel prepared—beginning with his ordination. Valerius asked him to preach on the morning of the feast of St. Leontius to give what would surely be an unpopular message against the drunken excesses that typically accompanied the festival. Augustine later confessed that Valerius “did not hesitate to lay upon my shoulders the very dangerous burden of commenting on the words of the truth on their account.”<sup>132</sup> After getting through that challenging message, Valerius made Augustine preach yet a second time to those who came to the church in the afternoon. Augustine added, “Though I was reluctant, since I now wanted so perilous a day to be over with, old Valerius forced me under an order to say something to them.”<sup>133</sup> This account shows that Valerius did not mind forcing Augustine into some awkward and uncomfortable situations because he believed in his presbyter and continued to see his potential even when Augustine did not. Though Augustine would have much rather been somewhere else on that day, the experience would prepare him for many other confrontational sermons that he would give in his career.

During Augustine’s time as bishop, his relationship with his clergy was also characterized by a clear sense of authority. By his nature he had been the driving force and natural leader of the premonastery in Tagaste as well as the monastery in Hippo before his consecration as bishop.<sup>134</sup> Yet the authority (*auctoritas*) he possessed as bishop of the church in Hippo also extended to its clergy and at times was expressed in disciplining wayward clergy.<sup>135</sup> Augustine’s belief in the authority of a spiritual mentor can be further traced

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<sup>132</sup> *Letter 29.7.*

<sup>133</sup> *Letter 29.11.*

<sup>134</sup> Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 5.1.

<sup>135</sup> *Letters* 65.2; 78; 82; 85; 96; 186; 209; 219; *City of God*, 20.9.2; *Sermons*, 46–47; 355–56; *Expositions in Psalms*, 126; 132; *On the Sack of the City of Rome*, 15; see Jan M. Jonas, “Clergy, North African,” *ATTA*, 215; and Bardy, *Saint Augustine*, 163.

through the authority that was assigned to the monastic superior in his *Rule*.<sup>136</sup>

Though Augustine had authority through his spiritual stature and his position as bishop, the clergy in the monastery seemed more motivated to follow him because of his holy life.<sup>137</sup> Possidius wrote, “I believe, however, that they profited even more who were able to hear him speaking in church and see him there present, especially if they were familiar with his manner of life among his fellow human beings.”<sup>138</sup> The clergy in the Hippo monastery were the ones most intimately aware of who he really was. Possidius’s intended response was to “emulate and imitate him in the present world.”<sup>139</sup> Hence, it seems that Augustine also experienced an intimate mentoring relationship with his fellow clergy in the monastery at Hippo—which was by nature a community of friends.

Finally, in the same way that Valerius allowed Augustine the freedom for some initial time of study and to start a monastery in Hippo, Augustine demonstrated to his clergy a level of respect in developing their own convictions about ministry. Possidius recorded that though Augustine did not allow property willed to the church to be held in a trust, he let other clergy make this decision for themselves. Although he was not interested in building buildings, he did not forbid other clergy from doing so given that they were reasonably modest.<sup>140</sup>

### *Involving in Ministry*

Valerius was looking for a man superior to himself in communication, and he found that man in Augustine. Early in Augustine’s ministry as presbyter, Valerius began to give the former teacher of rhetoric teaching assignments of increasing responsibility. As Cyprian had done with his presbyters and probably deacons as well, Valerius entrusted Augustine with teaching catechumens as they

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<sup>136</sup> *Rule*, 6.3; 7.1.

<sup>137</sup> Luc Verheijen, “Saint Augustin: Un Moine Devenu Prêtre et Evêque,” *Estudios Agostinos* 12 (1977): 315; *Confessions*, 10.36.58–59; *Letter* 22.9.31; *Expositions in Psalms*, 116.3.

<sup>138</sup> Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 31.9.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.11.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.9, 11.

prepared for baptism.<sup>141</sup> In this role Augustine had the opportunity to “hand over” the Creed that he had received from Ambrose and Simplicianus just a few years before.

Valerius probably invited opposition from the North African bishops by setting Augustine apart to preach in the Hippo church while he was still a presbyter.<sup>142</sup> Having come from the Eastern church, where this was not an uncommon practice, Valerius apparently did not mind going against the tradition of the North African churches because Augustine’s teaching ability, which was superior to his own, was benefiting the church.<sup>143</sup> According to Pellegrino, the North African bishops were justified in their concern about allowing a presbyter to preach because of the legacy of the presbyter Arius, who had spread his heresy from the pulpit in Alexandria.<sup>144</sup> In light of the bishops’ concern, Valerius’s resolve to have Augustine preach was significant.

Before Valerius is unduly cast as a rebel or someone starstruck by newfound talent, involving Augustine in preaching seems consistent with Valerius’s overall mentoring program. Possidius sheds some light: “[Valerius] gave his priest permission to preach the gospel in church even when he himself was present.”<sup>145</sup> Hence, instead of merely setting Augustine free to preach where and when he liked, Valerius supervised Augustine in this greater task.

Possidius also recorded that, in addition to having him preach in the church, Valerius encouraged Augustine to use his gifts by “holding frequent public discussions.”<sup>146</sup> This was surely a reference to Augustine’s debate in Hippo with Fortunatus the Manichean as well as Augustine’s teaching of an apologetic nature “against all the African heretics, especially the Donatists, the Manicheans, and the pagans.”<sup>147</sup>

<sup>141</sup> *Sermons*, 214–216; also Brown, *Augustine*, 134.

<sup>142</sup> Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 5.3; also Bacchi, *Ordained Ministry*, 4; Bardy, *Saint Augustine*, 164; and Brown, *Augustine*, 133.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.4.

<sup>144</sup> See Pellegrino’s commentary on Possidius, 5.3, in John E. Rotelle, ed., *Life of Saint Augustine* (Villanova: Villanova Press, 1988), 48.

<sup>145</sup> Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 5.3.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 6; 7.1.

*Who Mentored Augustine?*

If Augustine's preaching in Hippo had not already raised concerns among the North African bishops, there was probably some resistance to the presbyter of only two years and a former Manichee addressing the council of bishops in Hippo in 393. According to Bonner, Augustine's purpose for speaking was to resource the large number of uneducated bishops with teaching on the Creed.<sup>148</sup> While it cannot be proven that Valerius orchestrated Augustine's prominent role in this council, he must have at least allowed Augustine this influential opportunity through his authority as Augustine's bishop.<sup>149</sup> Hence, by not standing in his way, Valerius seems to allow Augustine another ministry opportunity of increasing responsibility.

As Valerius involved his presbyter in ministry, Valerius gave him assignments in ministries that corresponded with Augustine's strengths and talents. Augustine was a gifted communicator, teacher, writer, and orator in debate. Valerius put him to work where those skills were needed in the church and where Valerius himself was unable to meet the need. Though later as a bishop Augustine performed duties that he did not care for or that left him drained, Valerius's wisdom to involve Augustine in ministries that corresponded with his strengths seems to be an important quality of a mentor.<sup>150</sup>

While serving as bishop, Augustine also involved clergy in ministries where he was weak or limited and where they were gifted. For example, in the final years of his ministry, he set apart Eraclius, his eventual successor, to relieve him of the load of rendering civil judgments as well as administering church property so that he could concentrate on studying and writing.<sup>151</sup> Augustine was also happy to entrust to Alypius and Evodius the task of traveling to Italy on church-related business; Augustine despised travel, and Alypius's background in law made him more qualified to appeal to the secular authorities about issues facing the church.<sup>152</sup> Finally, though his appointment of Antoninus as bishop of Fussala was a colossal fail-

<sup>148</sup> Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 115.

<sup>149</sup> It seems evident that Bishop Aurelius of Carthage used his influence to put Augustine's gifts to use at the African church councils from 393 to 427.

<sup>150</sup> This principle can also be found in Ambrose, *On the Duties of Ministers*, 1.215.

<sup>151</sup> *Letter* 213.5; also Bacchi, *Ordained Ministry*, 32, 39.

<sup>152</sup> *Confessions*, 6.9.15; *Letters* 44; 10\*; 15\*; 16\*; 22\*; 23A\*; also Bacchi, *Ordained Ministry*, 28; Brown, *Augustine*, 156; O'Donnell, "Evodius of Uzalis," *ATTA*, 344.

ure, Augustine did at least one thing right: he attempted to ordain a Punic-speaking bishop.<sup>153</sup> As Fussala was located some 40 miles from Hippo, Augustine or one of his presbyters could have made the journey at least on occasion to preach and minister there except for the fact that they could not speak Punic. Like Valerius years before, Augustine was humbly seeking to recruit a man who could most effectively communicate the Scriptures in the language of the people.<sup>154</sup>

With regard to his decision to have Augustine preach while still a presbyter, Valerius seems to have brought some innovation to the North African church in this area. In *Sermon* 20, Augustine also encouraged the practice of presbyters preaching and modeled this by having his own presbyter Eraclius preach under his supervision.<sup>155</sup> Augustine's *Letter* 41 indicates that Aurelius had also adopted the practice with his Carthaginian presbyters.<sup>156</sup> Finally, Possidius recorded that presbyters throughout North Africa began to be involved in preaching, a development that certainly came through the influence of Aurelius and Augustine—both of whom were probably influenced by Valerius.<sup>157</sup>

### *Releasing to Ministry*

In the initial four years of his ministry, through faithfulness and success in assignments of increasing levels of responsibility, Augustine was realizing the potential Valerius saw in him. According to Possidius, Valerius began to fear that Augustine would be “selected” for another place of ministry in much the same manner Valerius had conscripted him in 391. Thus, after consorting

<sup>153</sup> *Letters* 209; 20\*; also Bacchi, *Ordained Ministry*, 19–22; and Brown, *Augustine*, 468. Though we do not know anything about Augustine's initial choice for bishop for Fussala, the fact that his second choice was a Punic speaker and that Fussala was a Punic-speaking area makes probable that his first choice would have been a Punic speaker as well.

<sup>154</sup> Similarly, in *Letter* 84 to bishop Novatus of Sitifis, Augustine requests the services of the deacon Lucillus for the ministry in the region of Hippo as Lucillus was a Punic speaker and able to minister to the needs of the non-Latin speakers in the diocese. Verheijen, *Saint Augustine*, 332–33.

<sup>155</sup> *Sermon*, 20.5; see Pellegrino in Rotelle, *Life of Saint Augustine*, 48; and van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 413.

<sup>156</sup> *Letter* 41; also Bardy, *Saint Augustin*, 165.

<sup>157</sup> Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 5.5.



with the bishops of Carthage and Calama, as well as presenting the idea to the congregation at Hippo, Valerius made Augustine his cobishop in 395.<sup>158</sup> Despite Augustine's resistance to the idea and Valerius's apparent oversight of the canons of Nicea, which forbid two bishops serving in the same church, Valerius succeeded in having Augustine ordained bishop.<sup>159</sup>

Indeed, demonstrating his burden for the ministry, Valerius wanted to see the church of Hippo in the capable hands of Augustine for many years to come;<sup>160</sup> but Possidius added that what Valerius really wanted "was not so much a successor as a fellow bishop here and now."<sup>161</sup> Paulinus of Nola, in a letter to Augustine about Valerius's decision, wrote, "That blessed old man . . . now gathers from the Most High fruits worthy of the peace of his heart, for he has now merited to have as a colleague the man whom he simply desired to have as his successor in the priestly office."<sup>162</sup> At this stage of the ministry, Valerius was recruiting Augustine to be his equal, which testifies once again to Valerius's humility and to the fact that he was not threatened by Augustine. Rather, for the sake of the church, he was happy to share the work of ministry and to release a young leader to service and responsibility.

Augustine was well aware of his strengths and weaknesses in his ministry as bishop.<sup>163</sup> He humbly entrusted tasks of administration, civil judgments, lobbying, traveling, and preaching in another language to those who were better qualified than he. He released men with the authority and responsibility to minister. Possidius recorded that the Hippo monastery became an important training center for

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.1–3.

<sup>159</sup> *Letter* 213.4. Pellegrino cites canon 8 of the council of Nicea in his commentary of Possidius, 8.5 in Rotelle, *Life of Saint Augustine*, 54. Although we cannot know for sure whether Valerius, along with Aurelius and Megalium, was ignorant of the canons of Nicea or simply ignoring them to help his cause in getting Augustine ordained bishop, we must note that he would not be the first spiritual leader to ignore church canons when setting apart a key leader. This was also the case of Basil's ordination of Poemenius of Satala. Basil, *Letters* 102–103; also Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World yet Leading the Church* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 87.

<sup>160</sup> *Letter* 31.4; also Mandouze, *L'aventure*, 141, 143.

<sup>161</sup> Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 8.2.

<sup>162</sup> *Letter* 32.2.

<sup>163</sup> Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 19.6.

church leaders and that at least 10 North African bishops were sent out from there.<sup>164</sup>

Yet unlike Valerius Augustine did not attempt in any observable way to hold back a minister from another church that was in need. Instead, Possidius indicated that Augustine freely “gave [clergy] upon request to the various churches.”<sup>165</sup> Valerius had a vision for resourcing the local church at Hippo, but Augustine was committed to resourcing the universal church in North Africa. In addition, having clearly apprehended the canons of Nicea, which forbade ordaining two bishops in the same church, Augustine (unlike Valerius) was careful to honor this church legislation; and, as a result, Eraclius was not consecrated as bishop of Hippo until Augustine’s death.

### Summary

When we look more closely at Augustine’s mosaic, especially those who shaped him into what he would become, the influences were diverse. A simple and uneducated mother modeled prayer and piety, emphasized practical faith, remained sound in doctrine, and raised him as a Christian. Friends were simply there with him on the delicate journey to faith; one rebuked him for strange ideas while another brought out his greatness in dialogue. A distinguished and eloquent bishop showed him the kindness of a father, opened the Scriptures to him for the first time, communicated in a medium he understood, and probably personally oversaw his initiation into the church. Another educated man, available to him for intellectual dialogue, impressed upon Augustine the necessity of the church while demonstrating the posture of a lifelong disciple. Finally, a humble, fatherly figure with an accent ordained him to the ministry, gave him the freedom to become his own type of minister, involved him increasingly in the work of ministry, and then released him to his own work. With this mosaic in mind, we may now begin to consider how Augustine served to shape and color the mosaics of the spiritual leaders of his day.

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<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.1–3.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.3.