

CONFESSING WITH SAINT AUGUSTINE

HPRS5094/6094

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9 — AUGUSTINE ON THE SPIRITUAL LIFE



OUTLINE

1. Augustine and monasticism

1. The significance of community
2. Christian monasticism and monastic Rules
3. Augustine's monastery at Hippo
4. Rule of St Augustine

2. Augustine and mysticism

1. Can Augustine be considered a mystic?
2. Augustine's mystical experiences
3. Augustine's influence on medieval mysticism



AUGUSTINE AND MONASTICISM

AUGUSTINE AND THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

Significance of community (Cassiciacum, Tagaste – not strictly monastic).

Christian monasticism – directed towards union with God by renouncing the world, following the Gospel, withdrawing from society (renouncing marriage and property), and practising asceticism.





THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMUNITY FOR AUGUSTINE

Augustine on the monastic community (interpreting Psalm 132):

the Holy Spirit flows like ointment from Christ (the head) to the Church (the garment) and to the monastic community (the edge of the garment) – a perfected community dwelling in unity.

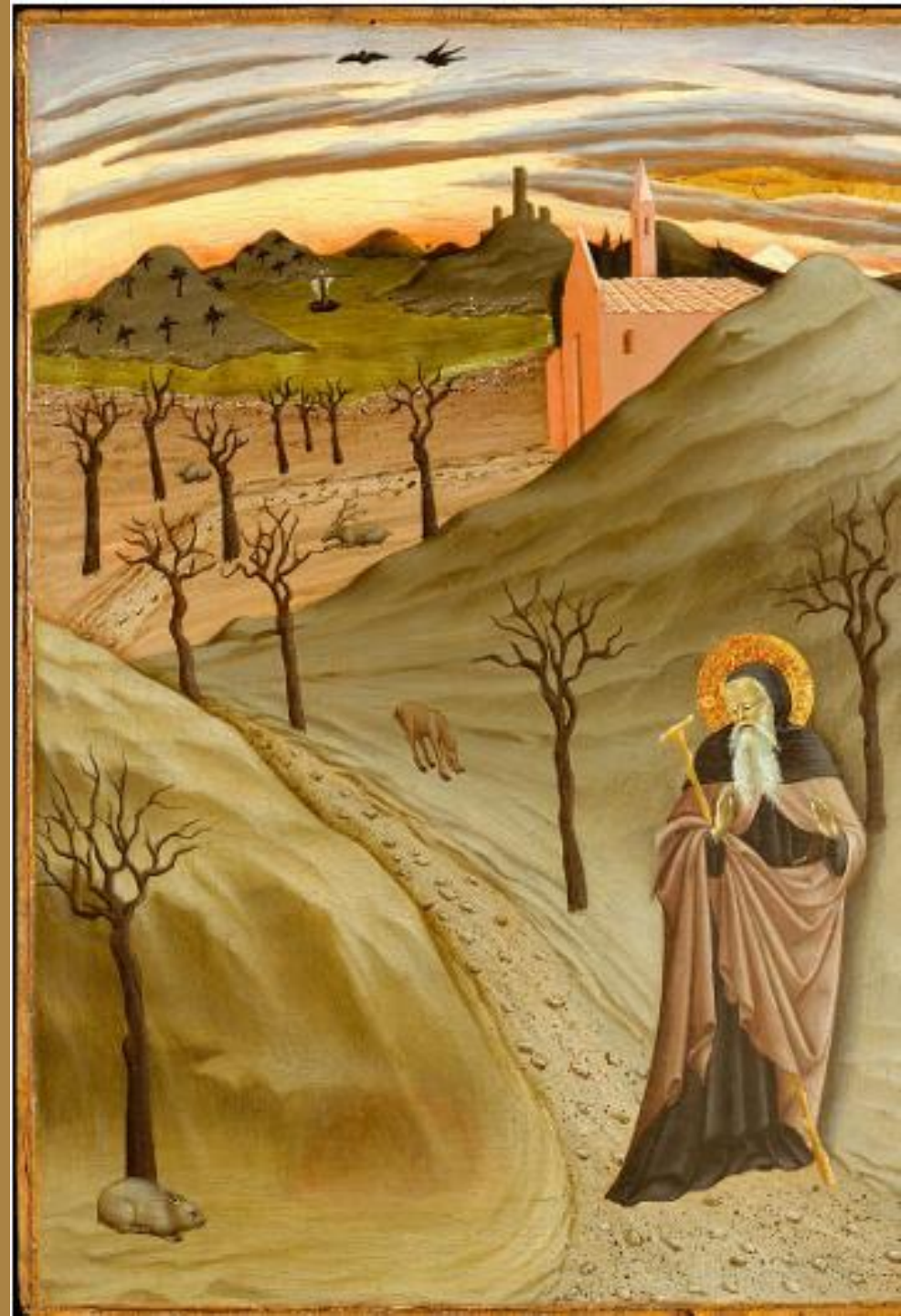
CHRISTIAN MONASTICISM: 3RD-5TH C.

3rd c.: Christians retreat to the Egyptian desert from the start of Decius' persecution (250-251).

Eremitic (solitary) monastic life (Greek **eremos** – “desert”).

St Anthony (c. 251-c.351): the acknowledged founder of eremiticism.

Cenobitical monasticism (Greek **koinos** – “common”): communal ascetic life





MONASTIC RULES

Monastic rules – codes for monastic communities; inspired by the Eastern monastic tradition

Examples:

- Rules of St Basil (4th c.) and St Pachomius (4th c.)
- Rule of the Master (6th c.)
- St Benedict's Rule (6th c.)

Monastic rules express principles informing the life of the religious community (charity, spiritual doctrine on prayer etc.) and practical regulations (ascetical guidelines, administrative roles, etc.)

ST AUGUSTINE'S MONASTERY AT HIPPO

Monastery at Hippo – Augustine granted permission by Bishop Valerius

After becoming bishop in 395, Augustine moved the monastery to the episcopal residence; he maintained the monastic household until his death in 430

Augustine combines his pastoral life as bishop with monastic discipline

Augustine's monastery informed by the Apostles' example (Acts 4:32-35).



AUGUSTINE,
SERMON 355 TO
THE
CONGREGATION
AT HIPPO, 425

“All of you know that we live in that house which is called the bishop’s house in such a way as to imitate those saints of which the Acts of the Apostles speaks,

‘No one called anything his own, but they held all things in common.’”

THE RULE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Composed c. 397 – around the time when Augustine arrived at his episcopal residence in Hippo.

Addressed to one monastic house – no indication it was to be used in other religious communities.

Augustine calls this Rule a “*libellus*” (booklet, pamphlet)

A series of texts associated with the Rule – ***Ordo monasterii, Regula; Letter*** (in 2 versions)



THE RULE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Authorship debate:

- Augustine does not mention his authorship;
- Augustine was credited as its author about 100 years after his death;
- Modern scholarship suggests Augustine is the author of the Rule based on internal textual clues and comparative analysis with other texts

“The chief motivation for your sharing life together is to live harmoniously in the house and to have one heart and one soul seeking God.”
(Augustine, Rule, Ch. 1:2)



KEY ASPECTS OF AUGUSTINE'S RULE

“Community and individuality coinhere.” (Charles Brockwell)

For Augustine, monasticism combined with ordination is the “highest form of Christian life” – even though Augustine realises that those living in the monasteries do not always live up to the highest monastic ideals. (William Collinge)

Unity – being one in mind and heart. (Rule, Ch. 1)

Charity – love of God and man; bonds the community; informs every aspect of monastic life.

Discipline and fraternal correction

Responsibility of the strong for the weak



KEY ASPECTS OF AUGUSTINE'S RULE

Practical aspects: prayer at appointed hours; manual work; reading

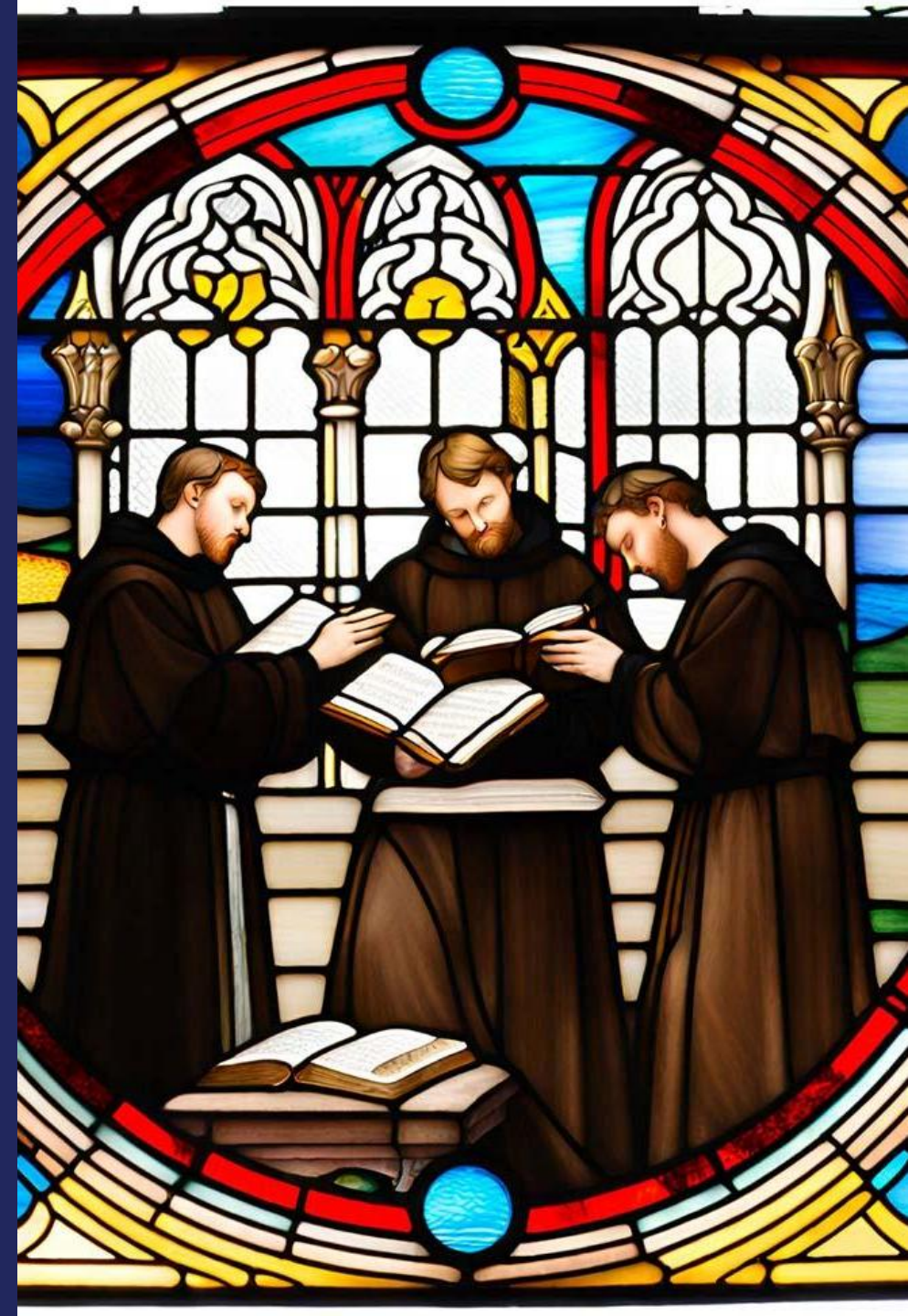
Asceticism – not severe

Oratorium – prayer room (separate from the work room)

Work: every brother assigned work (manual labour or administrative tasks)

Educating the religious: some of the educated religious of Hippo's monastery later became bishops

Attire: neither expensive “nor ostentatious,” so as not to cause pride in appearance



THE LEGACY OF AUGUSTINE'S RULE

The language of Augustine's Rule is “revolutionary” (Tars van Bavel) – considering the “power-consciousness” of the Roman Empire and the Rule’s attitude towards status within the monastery.

The use of the Augustinian Rule spread throughout Italy and Gaul.

Influential for medieval monasticism – from the 11th c. onwards, what became known as the “Augustinian Rule” (the 11th-century version of the text) was adopted by monastic communities of the canons regular, Premonstratensians and others.

“Augustinians” – priests who lived in common; “clergy living under a monastic rule” in the 11th-12th c.



THE LEGACY OF AUGUSTINE'S RULE

Augustinian foundations today include a wide array of religious orders, independent monasteries, and charitable foundations that operate under the Rule of St. Augustine.

They focus on community, scholarship, and social justice, and often have been historically connected to schools and universities – e.g. Villanova University, USA, or Austin Friars School in Cumbria, UK.





AUGUSTINE AND MYSTICISM

AUGUSTINE ON PRAYER

Letter 130 (To Proba) (dated 412) – probably Augustine’s best-known letter – on the Lord’s Prayer.

Proba – a widow who took refuge in Africa after the Gothic army pillaged Rome; she formed a community of religious women in Carthage.

Augustine responds to Proba’s question on how one ought to pray: Augustine describes private prayer, the desired interior condition for prayer, the purpose of prayer – attaining the blessed life – and advises brevity, teaching that prayer is to be complemented by good works.

The Lord’s Prayer – a perfect example of prayer; contains everything necessary that is to be expressed.

“For in most cases prayer consists [...] in tears rather than in words.” (Augustine, To Proba, §20)

MYSTICISM AND MYSTICS

Mysticism: a “constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions and experiences aimed at human transformation, variously defined.” (Richard Jones and Jerome Gellman, "Mysticism", The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy.)

Characteristics of mystical experiences –unitive (the soul's union with God); visions, auditions, out-of-body experiences; knowledge or insight of “ultimate reality”; ineffability; passivity (cannot be achieved by intellectual effort; God grants mystical union)



AUGUSTINE AS A MYSTIC

Can Augustine be considered a mystic?

Augustine describes several mystical experiences:

- “Moments of direct consciousness of God’s presence.”
- Hearing God
- God acting on the inner senses, illumination etc.

However, scholars argue about the quality or type of Augustine’s mysticism.





MYSTICAL THEMES IN AUGUSTINE'S WORKS

Mystical themes

Divine incomprehensibility (Sermon 117:
De verbis Domini)

Divine ineffability – God is beyond all
speech and description. (McGinn, citing
De doctrina christiana 1:13)

Perception of God through the inner
senses (Confessions, Book X)

Ascent to divine truth (Confessions, Book
VII)

Vision at Ostia: vision of eternal wisdom
(Confessions, Book VIII)

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AUGUSTINE FOR MEDIEVAL MYSTICISM

Augustine's *Confessions*, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, *De vera religione*, *De quantitate animae*, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, *De Trinitate* all have significant influence on later mystical traditions in the Catholic Church.

Augustine influences:

1. Bernard of Clairvaux
2. Hugh and Richard of St Victor
3. Bonaventure



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AUGUSTINE FOR MEDIEVAL MYSTICISM

Augustine's doctrines of grace and human freedom

The divine image: humans created in the image and similitude of God – potential participation in God

Theory of illumination: divine illumination

Time and eternity

Doctrine of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology) – the Spirit as gift to humanity; as bond between the Father and the Son



DE MAGISTRO,
AUGUSTINE,
14:45

“When teachers have explained, using words, all those subjects which they profess to teach, even the science of virtue and wisdom, then the ones we call pupils consider within themselves whether what they have heard is true.

This they do by gazing attentively at that interior truth, so far as they are able.

Then it is that they learn, when within themselves they discover that what has been taught is true...”

READING

Confessions, Book XIII

Augustine. Letter 130 (To Proba). Trans. J.G. Cunningham. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol 1. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887)

Augustine. Rule. In George Lawless, 'Latin Texts and English Translations', in Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule.(Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks,1990; online edn, Oxford Academic, 3 Oct. 2011).

