



Allusions and Omissions in Augustine's *Confessions*

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses possible biblical allusions and omissions in Augustine's *Confessions*, arguing that the themes he presents can be understood with greater nuance if viewed in light of not only the scriptural passages he chooses to support them but also the verses from the immediate context, which he omits. The paper will examine four examples from within the *Confessions*: the way that in the *Confessions* but not elsewhere, he only utilizes the second half of James 1:17, eliding the phrase 'Father of lights,' his use of the term *unam* for his concubine, his depiction of his mother Monnica like the apostle Paul, and possible reasons for his elision of portions of the prologue to John. As a result, this paper has offered four possible instances of Augustine omitting, or only allusively referring to, specific scriptures throughout the *Confessions*: his omission of God as the Father of lights when referencing James 1, his allusion to the *una columba* of the Cantic of Canticles in describing his concubine, his undertone of Pauline episodes in recounting the tale of Monnica's arrival in Rome, and finally his omission of John the Baptist from It has been suggested that, in each of these cases, a deeper grasp of the parts of the Bible that Augustine has left out can help us comprehend the major arguments that he has made in more depth.

Keywords: Allusions, Omissions, Augustine's *Confessions*

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INTRODUCTION

*Collocutus esne cum amante cara?
Fatus est de mene aliquid, uel ullis?
Maius omittens reteggit quam ea effans:
omnia dic mi!*

You spoke with my dear sweetheart?
Did she say anything about me... or about anyone else?
She gives more away when she leaves things out than she does when she works
them in: Tell me everything!

The purpose of this paper is to discuss possible biblical allusions and omissions in Augustine's *Confessions*, with the goal of suggesting that the themes he presents can be understood with greater nuance if viewed in light of not only the scriptural passages he chooses to support them, but also the verses from the immediate context which he chooses to omit.

Augustine's *Confessions* is a significant and moving Christian autobiography exploring an individual soul's philosophical and emotional development (Objantoro, 2020; Pucci, 1991). The *Confessions* broke entirely fresh ground as literature, and the genre of autobiography owes many of its characteristics to Augustine. The book is a richly textured meditation by a middle-aged man on the course and meaning of his own life (O'Donnell, 2022). Augustine's *Confessions* is a complex work that contains allusions to classical literature, such as Horace's Odes, which transform his recollections into contrived literary reflections (Pucci, 1991). The book also contains omissions, such as the lack of details about Augustine's family and his son's mother, which have puzzled scholars. The problem of evil is a critical aspect of Augustine's *Confessions*, and it is arguably critical for comprehending his life in Books 1 through 9 of the work (Matusek, 2011). Augustine's *Confessions* is not his autobiography but a deliberate effort to recall crucial episodes and events in which he can now see and celebrate the mysterious actions of God's prevenient and provident grace.

Following a brief section arguing that allusions and omissions do not appear in the *Confessions* by happenstance, and that reading scripture with reference both to what is said and what is not said is itself a part of Augustine's interpretive toolkit, the paper will proceed to discuss four examples from within the *Confessions* where the reader can gain a somewhat richer sense of the text by observing the verses to which he only alludes, and considering reasons for why he may have omitted them. The first of these examples will be Augustine's use of exclusively the second half of James 1:17 (in Augustine, 1876, secs. 3.6.10 & 4.15.25) to describe God, compared with the way he uses that verse in the remainder of his writings. The second example will be a brief discussion of his use of the term *unam* for his concubine in 4.2.2. Third, the paper will address the New Testament

backdrop to Augustine's depiction of his mother in 6.1.1–6.2.2, especially insofar as it evokes episodes from the life of the Paul the apostle. Finally, a fourth section will engage with possible reasons for Augustine's elision of portions of the prologue to the gospel of John which he discusses in 7.9.13–7.9.14.

It would be impossible to demonstrate beyond all question that Augustine had each of these passages in mind when he wrote the *Confessions*, but nevertheless it should not be counted excessive to aver that he would have been aware of these alternative or additional readings, and could have assumed that a portion of his readership would as well. This would have opened the door to his communicating with them—and with us—with a greater subtlety against the backdrop of not only what he kept in but also what he decided to leave out.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADJACENT TEXTS FOR AUGUSTINE

Before presenting the examples of omission and allusion themselves, it is important to highlight the extent to which Augustine himself would have been comfortable with this method of interpretation. An instance from the *Confessions* itself is salient. Near the conclusion of the garden scene in 8.12.29–8.12.30, the reader finds Augustine, having heard the child's voice singing so unusually from the neighboring house, "*nihil aliud interpretans divinitus mihi iuberi nisi ut aperirem codicem et legerem quod primum caput invenissem.*" ("I understood it as nothing short of divine providence that I was being ordered to open the book and read the first passage I came across." (Augustine, 1876, sec. 8.12.29)). The passage which Augustine encounters is Romans 13:13–14, which he marks with his finger, crediting the whole process to the direct agency of God, specifically on account of how unusually he was motivated to read it and how randomly he chose it. But for Augustine, there was an even further proof that he had been divinely impelled to read this passage. Returning to Alypius, who asks to also read what he has just read, Augustine thrice highlights the presence of an additional passage which had an enormous impact upon his friend, writing that Alypius, "*attendit etiam ultra quam ego legeram. et ignorabam quid sequentur. sequebatur vero*" ("He looked even further on than I had read. I did not know what came next. But this is what came next" (Augustine, 1876, sec. 8.12.30)).

The marginal references presented in the modern text somewhat undersell the proximity of the two sections; although the verse which so impacted Augustine is chapter thirteen of Romans, and that which Alypius read is in chapter fourteen, the second in fact immediately follows the first, not simply over the page, but immediately in sequence. In fact, although the latter verse stands within its own sentence, it very likely would have been presented in *scripto continua*, with perhaps not even a space between them, though perhaps with a section break noted in the margin. M. P. Parkes (1992, p. 161) discusses an extant manuscript which may have been similar to Augustine's, containing

fragments of the earliest surviving copy of the Vulgate version of the Gospels... produced in Italy at the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century. The text is laid out in two columns and has been copied in *scripto continua* ... Each *periodus* or *kapitulum* ... begins on a fresh line with a *littera nobilior* set out to the left in the margin. Within the *kapitula* no medial pauses are marked.

The MS is listed in Parkes's (1992) text as, 'St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 1935'. Compare also even Nestle's modern *Novum Testamentum Latine*, which runs Romans 12–15 together in one long sense block, beginning and ending with a line space, with chapter numbers set off in the margin.

Both Augustine and his first readers would have been familiar with texts similar to the St. Gall manuscript described here. For Augustine himself, part of the outstanding significance of the text that changed his life was not only its own content and timing, but the fact that immediately adjacent to it was another text equally impactful for someone of far different disposition than he himself. See 8.12.30 where Augustine notes of the *mores* of Alypius that, "a me iam olim valde longeque distabat." "It was in keeping with his own character; in that respect he had already been markedly different from me for a long time, and for the better." Even though he did not at the time know what the hidden context of Romans 13–14 was, it mattered to him, and when he discovered it, it affected the way he understood how God was at work through the text he had read.

A second instance from outside the *Confessions* makes an even stronger argument. Partway through his exposition of Psalm 43, Augustine makes a methodological digression and draws in a portion of the 22nd Psalm to help explain the inscription of the 43rd. He writes that

Hoc [‘ad intellectum’] et in illo psalmo est, cuius primum versum ipse Dominus de cruce dixit: ‘Deus meus, Deus meus, respice in me, quare me dereliquisti?’ . . . vocem de cruce non dixit suam, sed nostram. Non enim umquam eum dereliquit Deus, nec ipse a Patre umquam recessit; sed propter nos dixit hoc: ‘Deus meus, Deus meus, utquid me dereliquisti?’ Nam sequitur ibi: ‘Longe a salute mea verba delictorum meorum.’ Et ostendit ex quorum persona hoc dixerit; non enim in ipso delictum potuit invenire.” (Augustine, 1841b, sec. 43.2 (col. 483))

This phrase [‘for the understanding...’] is also in that Psalm whose first verse the Lord says from the cross: ‘My God, my God, look at me, why have you forsaken me?’ . . . the voice from the cross did not speak of himself, but us. For God has not ever left him, and neither has he ever receded from the Father; but he says this concerning us: ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ For it follows there: ‘Far from my salvation are the words of my faults.’ And this shows which person this Psalm is spoken of; for it is not possible that fault would be found in him.” (Augustine, 1841b, sec. 43.2 (col. 483))

Augustine's goal here is to describe the person of whom both Psalms are speaking, and his argument is that when Jesus speaks from the cross, as recorded in Matthew 27:46, he only quotes the first half of the first verse of Psalm 22, “my God, my God, why have you

forsaken me;” but the full meaning of that quotation is only found by reading forward to what follows. In the other half of the verse, which is omitted in Matthew’s gospel, the psalmist says, “far from my salvation are the words of my faults.” As well as the following verse, in regard to which Augustine repeats his argument, but elided here in the interest of space. According to Augustine, since any talk of having faults cannot apply to Jesus, it is clear that the Psalm (as well as the lament from the cross), must be understood as addressing the body of Christ, the church, and not Christ himself. In short, correct conclusions about Matthew 27 (and Psalm 43) can only be reached if both the spoken and the unspoken portions of Psalm 22 are kept in mind.

The similarity between these two instances is not the subject matter itself, but the way that in each Augustine gains something by drawing in nearby scripture passages which were left unmentioned in the original text (that is, Romans 13 or Matthew 27). The goal of this paper is to employ that same interpretative tool within Augustine’s own text and, as he did, incorporate an assessment of surrounding and omitted texts to help draw heightened impressions or conclusions about the use of the texts which are mentioned.

THE ‘FATHER OF LIGHTS’ FROM THE BOOK OF JAMES IN *CONFESSIONS* 3.6.10 AND 4.15.25.

The first example of Augustine omitting a portion of a biblical text concerns his use of James 1:17, which occurs twice in the *Confessions*. In book three, in the middle of a reflective critique of the emptiness of Manichaean doctrine, he writes, “*ego nec priora illa, sed te ipsam, te veritas, in qua non est commutatio nec momenti obumbratio, esuriebam et sitiebam.*” (“But I was hungering and thirsting not for those primary works, but for you yourself, you who are Truth, in whom is no variation nor shadow of turning.” (Augustine, 2014, sec. 3.6.10). Again in book four, he writes of God that, “*es enim tu lumen verum quod inluminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum, quia in te non est transmutatio nec momenti obumbratio.*” (“You are the true light that lightens everyone who comes into the world, for in you is no variableness nor shadow of turning.” (Augustine, 2016, sec. 4.15.25.)). The interesting thing about these two citations is not the small ways that they differ, the two are very similar in sense both to one another—‘You are truth/ light of truth ... and in you is no variation or shadow of turning’—and to the Vulgate text of James 1:17. (“*Omnem datum optimum, et omne donum perfectum, desursum est, descendens a Patre luminum, apud quem non est transmutatio, nec vicissitudinis obumbratio.*”). Sabatier (1743, sec. 3.936) in fact shows instances of Augustine interchanging ‘commutatio’, ‘immutatio’, ‘demutatio’, and ‘transmutatio’ in his use of this verse.

No, the curious thing is not their variation, but their similarity in only quoting the latter half of the verse, which itself is a subordinate clause in the source. The key phrase that Augustine cuts in both cases is the one referring to God as *Pater luminum*; in James,

it is the Father of lights who does not change, specifically because his nature is light and not shadow.

This is a surprising move for Augustine because he seems quite comfortable referring to God as the Father of lights in the context of James 1:17 across a wide selection of his other works, as Suzanne Poque writes, “*il n’a pas hésité à donner à Dieu, comme l’avait fait Mani, le nom de ‘Père de la lumière.’*” Poque’s study on symbolic language in Augustine, includes a helpful survey of Augustine’s use of ‘light’ terminology against a Manichaean backdrop, including the discoveries of the 20th century: “*Son symbolisme de la lumière ne répudie pas des formulations qu’il avait rencontrées dans le manichéisme.*” (Poque, 1984, p. 350). Seven times he quotes the verse in its entirety, and seven other times quotes it up to the end of the sense unit naming God as the Father of lights, leaving off the terminal subordinate clause (all in the context of describing the gifts of God). Four times he quotes the second half of the verse only, as in the *Confessions*, but in each of the other two of those cases it comes in a context where he has been specifically discussing God as Father, and as the creator of the heavenly lights, in other words, such that adding the descriptor, “*quem non est transmutatio,*” fills in James’s full meaning rather than excluding a part of it. Three other instances discuss God as the Father of lights, but lack any reference to ‘shadows’; one further reference refers to Jesus himself as *rex luminum*, and one to Mary as *matris lucis* (perhaps as a reference to her being the mother of Jesus, who is the light).

This leaves the two passages in the *Confessions* as somewhat unique. The first, in 3.6.10, comes right after a discussion of God’s *opera ... lucida et caelestia*—the reader can see that he has them in mind—but God is not mentioned as Father in this section, and the works themselves are mentioned specifically in order to discount their importance. Even moreso, in 4.15.25 he not only omits mentioning God as the Father of lights, but in fact takes a phrase from John 1:9 that originally refers to Jesus, and includes the word light, and applies that to God *instead* of calling him Father of lights.

The Manichaean manuscripts recovered in the 20th century can help add context to Augustine’s decision to use James 1:17 in this way. Samuel Lieu writes of these that, “the newly discovered ‘Prayer of the Emanations’ from Kellis begins with praise for the Great Father of Lights (i.e. Father of Greatness), the principal deity of the Manichaean pantheon: ‘I worship and glorify the Great Father of Lights For you are God the foundation of every grace and life and truth.’” (Cf. Gardner, 2011, p. 88; Lieu, 1998, p. 226). If Augustine, when he wanted to use the portion of James that speaks of God’s immutability, had quoted the entire passage (wherein all good gifts come from the Father of lights), it would have immediately created resonances of these Manichaean themes in the context of the *Confessions*, which he certainly would have wanted to avoid, especially in light of the allegations Augustine himself was facing of remaining a partial or crypto-Manichaean. Jason BeDuhn notes that these allegations were at least partially in the

background of the *Confessions*, writing that, “certain peculiarities in the structure and emphases of *Confessions* raise the possibility that Augustine’s most famous work began life as his defense to the charges of Megalius.” (BeDuhn, 2013, 2:241-2).

Augustine wanted to draw on the support of the book of James as an authority for the unchangeableness of God, but at the same time wanted to avoid giving any ammunition to his opponents who were pressing him with incriminations that he was still a follower of Mani under the surface. The argument of this paper is that he carefully used the portion of James that he wanted to, and intentionally elided (or replaced) the remainder. In seeing this, the reader gains a greater appreciation both for his nuance in laying out his argument, but a clearer picture of quite how present the charges of crypto-Manichaeism must have felt to him at the time of writing.

AUGUSTINE AND HIS CONCUBINE IN *CONFESSIONS* 4.2.2.

In *Confessions* 6.15.25 Augustine records his painful separation from the African woman who had been his concubine for a decade and a half, sent away so that she would not be an impediment to his newly planned marriage. Besides historical materials which would allow the modern reader to recreate the social and personal aspects of the life of a woman like this generically. As in Powers’ (1993) excellent essay, “*Sed Unam Tamen*,” (esp. 49–50) in which she incorporates generic material with references from the *Confessions* and later works to create a composite picture. The full story of this woman, and even of the details of her relationship with Augustine, are, as Margaret Miles (2007, p. 168) writes, “tantalizingly inaccessible. Readers of Augustine’s *Confessions* can do no more than glimpse her, and we cannot with confidence identify her influence on her well-known partner. Without using far too much imagination, we cannot reconstruct a fully fleshed character.” All we have are the slightest of clues left within the text.

One of these clues regarding the story of Augustine’s concubine after he sent her home to Africa can perhaps be seen in his *Quaestiones in Exodum*. Of the many questions Augustine discusses, he gives by far the most space to three: the Ten Commandments, the numerological significance of the number of exiles who left Egypt, and then, interestingly, the case of what to do if a son is given a slave girl as a wife but then later decides he would prefer to marry someone else, a case very close to Augustine’s own (Ex. 21:8-9). Although concubinage is not mentioned in the Exodus text itself, Augustine goes to comparative great lengths in arguing that this is specifically a concubine who is being discussed, and specifically one who has been used regularly and sexually by the son, again aligning it with Augustine’s own experience. In Exodus, Moses prescribes that she may be put away, but she cannot be deprived of three things: food, clothing, and the sexual opportunity to produce a descendent. Augustine, however, reinterprets this to mean that if the concubine is pushed out of the house she ought to take some kind of benefit with her, such as someone with the class of ‘daughter’ might, but he limits even this by

saying that if the son has humiliated her by the means of concubinage (“*concumbendo hunliasset,*” (2.78.3), then it ought to be sufficient that she is set free and does not continue in servitude (“*id est, satisfaciet ei non teneri in servitute,*” 2.78.4). This does not mean *with necessity* that Augustine’s concubine was treated exactly in this way, but it is instructive perhaps to see how carefully he treats this passage.

An additional clue is the title that Augustine gives her in *Confessions* 4.2.2. “*In illis annis unam habebam,*” he writes, “*non eo quod legitimum vocatur coniugio cognitam.*” (“During those years I kept to one woman . . . but it was not that form of union which alone is recognized as legitimate.” (Augustine, 2016, sec. 4.2.2)). Her name is not given, either here or elsewhere, and in fact the Latin text does not even provide the word ‘woman’, but simply names her as *una*, as the ‘one’ whom Augustine had during all those years. A variety of ideas have been proffered for why she remains nameless, from the misogynistic to the compassionate; after surveying a number of the alternatives, Miles (2007, p. 169) suggests that,

...it is at least possible that, for Augustine, her name remained, after a decade, too resonant with the pain of their parting to mention. Perhaps Augustine also remembered all too well the pleasures and delights of intimate relationship, and these memories threatened his new life as a celibate priest and bishop.

Although conjectural, both of these possibilities bear weight because they are grounded in textual evidence of a long term, faithful relationship, which would have been attended with strong feelings, even after the separation.

That background perhaps opens the door to see the woman’s title here, *una*, as alluding to something more than simply a statement of how many concubines were in Augustine’s life, especially as the latter half of his sentence gives that description much more effectively: “*sed unam tamen, ei quoque servans tori fidem.*” (“Still, she was the only one, and I kept faith with her as with a spouse.” (Augustine, 2016, sec. 4.2.2)). Given the second ‘*una*’ in the text, the first would be almost redundant if its only purpose was enumeration. Rather, it makes more sense within its sentence as a substantive, giving the sense of, ‘I had a *something* . . . but only one of those *somethings*.’ In this sense, a possible comparison, or oblique allusion, that could stand behind his use of the word *una* is the dense use of *una* in the Canticle of Canticles or in Psalm 44.

Canticle 6:7–8 speaks this way: “*Sexaginta sunt reginae, et octaginta concubinae, et adolescentulae quarum non est numerus. Una est columba mea, perfecta mea, una est matri suae.*” (“There are sixty queens, and eighty concubines, and young women beyond number. But my perfect dove is one, the only one born of her mother.”) Sabatier (1743) notes that Cassiodorus attests the even fuller (and quite lovely), “*una est dilecta mea, una est sponsa mea, una est columba mea.*” Compare also Cant. 5:2 where Augustine has, “*soror mea, proxima mea, perfecta mea, columba mea.*” (Sabatier, 1743, secs. 2.382, 385). If Augustine felt constrained—internally or externally—to not give her name, here

he perhaps deftly uses that very act of not naming her to praise her and to quietly express both his fidelity and his intense feelings for her, through a subtle second layer in the text, by allowing the Canticle's beautiful depiction of its young lovers to refer also to him and his own *unam*. The beloved in the Canticle is also unnamed, and also in a relationship of tremendous social imbalance but passionate mutual affection. It is interesting to note further that earlier in the Vulgate of the Canticle where the beloved describes herself as, "*nigra sum, sed formosa*," Augustine attests a reading of, "*fusca sum et speciosa*," perhaps (even unconsciously) using a word more suitable for someone of north African origin. Cant. 1:5. "I am black, but beautiful," and "I am brown, but beautiful," respectively (Augustine, 1841a, sec. 3.32.45, 1841c; Cf. Sabatier, 1743, p. 376). In fact, to the extent that verse seven, given above, describes the situation in which she is leaving Augustine, verse eight would read well as his reassuring reply, as he finds his own story in the biblical text (Augustine, 2016, As in Confessions 8.12.29, described above). The *Confessions* show amazing similarity to the context of Canticle 6:7–8: there in fact will be another concubine for Augustine, and (as was then planned) a teenaged princess, but never again, we can perhaps hear him alleging as he remembers the pain of their separation, another 'one, his *una columba perfecta*.

An additional faint echo of this depth of feeling can also be heard in his discussion of the unity of the church in his commentary on Psalm 44: "*Ecce Roma, ecce Carthago, ecce aliae et aliae civitates filiae regum sunt; ... et ex omnibus fit una quaedam regina*." ("Take a look at Rome," he says, "and Carthage, and these and those other cities: they are all daughters of the king; ... and from all of them is only one queen." (Augustine, 1841b, sec. 44.25)). On the one hand, the faithful union of king and queen remains for him a powerful image, useful for describing the unity of the church. On the other though, when here, later in his life, he is talking about the *una regina* of the king, he names cities from his own story as representing her origin, of course, but also the cities of *her* origin, those of his *una columba*. There have are many cities—her cities, and others also—and many people in them, but there is only one queen. The simile is effective precisely because it draws on the reality of the relationship; there is a duality of sense.

Which is to say, when Augustine uses *unam* in book four of the *Confessions*, there is more going on than simply enumeration. He is also depicting the depth of his own emotional attachment and his relationally fidelity to her against the backdrop of the use of *una* as a term for one's beloved in the Canticle and the Psalms, texts he used and with which he was familiar (Prelipcean, 2014).

MONNICA AND PAUL IN CONFESSIONS 6.1.1–6.2.2.

A third example of instructive allusion in the *Confessions* occurs in the first two sections of book six, in which Augustine speaks about his mother Monnica. Like any historiographer, Augustine selects certain events to narrate Monnica's story, and presents

them with purpose. In particular, this section will examine how three consecutive episodes selected by Augustine to tell his mother's story heavily allude to accounts regarding the apostle Paul in the New Testament: the storm, the lack of joy at Augustine's half-conversion, and Monnica's foreswearing of her practice of visiting the chapels or the saints with food and drink.

The first episode is that of Monnica and the sailors as she makes her way back to Augustine, having previously been left inconsolate on the beach after he had fled during the night. Augustine (2016, sec. 6.1.1) writes that, "across the perils of the seas she offered encouragement even to the sailors, who were more accustomed to offer comfort themselves to travelers inexperienced in seafaring. She assured them that they would make land safely, because you had promised her this in a vision." This scene is strongly resonant of the crossing of the Mediterranean towards Rome by Paul described in the book of Acts, wherein Paul too exhorts the sailors on his own ship, saying, "take courage! None of you will lose your lives ... last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, and he said, 'Don't be afraid, Paul, for ... God in his goodness has granted safety to everyone sailing with you.'" (Acts 27:22-24 *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, 1996). It is interesting to note that upon Paul's arrival, on Malta, not at Rome, because of the shipwreck, he himself is shown impervious to danger (uninjured by a snake bite) and then attending the sick and healing them with his prayers. Each of these accounts shows encouragement being given, by the less experienced and authoritative person, a supernatural vision, and a promise of safety which was fulfilled.

The second episode is that of Monnica's earnest pleading for—and confidence in the return of—her son's faith, and in particular her disinterest in celebrating his departure from the Manichaeans until he had fully accepted the Catholic faith. "In fact," Augustine (2016, sec. 6.1.1) writes, "because she was convinced that you would yet grant everything that was still unfulfilled of your complete promise to her, she replied to me with utter sincerity, in the total faithfulness of her heart, that she believed in Christ that before she departed this life she would see me a catholic Christian." This is a direct mirror of the attitude of Paul as he writes to the church in Philippi, where he says, "I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns ... Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith." (Philippians 1:6, 25 *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, 1996). A further parallel here can be seen in the sentence which follows, where Monnica's "prayers and tears poured out more abundantly, begging you to hasten to help and to lighten my darkness," which is a regular Pauline theme of groaning in prayer and tears on behalf of the church, as in Galatians 4:19 where Paul specifically uses the imagery of a mother ("Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." NLT) and II Corinthians 11:28 (besides all

this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches.” NLT). Again, each selection has commensurate components: a partial beginning effected by God, certainty of full completion, and lack of concern that death might somehow interrupt the relationship of the two parties before that time.

Finally, the third episode is that of Monnica’s decision to give up visiting the shrines of the saints, to which, Augustine (2016, sec. 6.2.2) writes, “she acquiesced with such obedient devotion that I myself was astonished.” The reason that was given (from Ambrose) for the proscription of this activity was not theological, but, “so as to give no opportunities to drinkers to consume alcohol to excess.” (Augustine, 2016, sec. 6.2.2). Here again is a strong echo of the practice of Paul. In his first letter to the Corinthian church, in response to a question about a specific practice (eating meat sold by unbelievers in the market), Paul noted that there was no spiritual problem with it, but that he was happy to walk away from it anyway. He writes that:

not all believers know this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated... For if others see you—with your ‘superior knowledge’—eating in the temple of an idol, won’t they be encouraged to violate their conscience by eating food that has been offered to an idol? ... So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live. (I Corinthians 8:7–13 *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, 1996).

Each reader of course approaches the text differently, and none of the above are verbally identical, but it is perhaps a small surprise that none of these three parallels are marked in Hammond’s text; de Labriolle has a note in the Budé edition referencing Galatians 4:14 as background for *Confessions* 6.1.1. Although the type of food being eaten differs, both Monnica and Paul begin with one practice, see the way that it could injure another believer, and then swiftly abandon it.

If not for the purpose of evoking Monnica’s similarity to the apostle, it is difficult to say why Augustine would have chosen precisely these three narratives, and have grouped them together back to back to tell the story of her arrival. Instead, the position of this paper is that he is not only telling Monnica’s story, but also signaling his awareness, perhaps newly at this juncture within the *Confessions*, of Monnica as the apostle sent by God for his benefit. Rather than Ambrose, or others, whom Augustine would rather have selected as a preacher for himself, God has appointed a different preacher to come to him on mission—facing dangers, suffering long through prayer and tears, and setting aside the preferences of self (Please cf. Augustine, 2016, sec. 1.1.1 on Augustine’s awareness of his need for a preacher). Though she does not reference the scenes at the outset of book six, Janet Soskice (2002, p. 449) reinforces this as one of the genuinely Augustinian themes of the *Confessions*, that “this, Augustine has come to believe, is the way God elects to speak to us, by means of neighbors, friends, family and in his case, although he

did not always see it so, through Monica, his mother.” Soskice in this section is specifically referencing *Confessions* 1.1.1, regarding the role of the preacher, and 2.3.7 regarding Augustine’s slowness to see that God was speaking to him through his mother. “Preachers, teachers, mothers—other people—that is how God chooses to teach us,” (Soskice, 2002, p. 450). By recognizing the way that Augustine presents Monnica through vignettes resonant with themes from the life of Paul, the reader can gain added clarity as to the role that Augustine sees her playing in his life in general and during the season from now through his conversion especially.

AUGUSTINE’S OMISSION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST FROM JOHN 1 IN *CONFESSIONS* 7.9.13–7.9.14.

A fourth and final example of Augustine’s strategic use of omission can be seen in the way that he interacts with the first chapter of John’s gospel in book 7.9.13–7.9.14. Amid the crush of biblical citations—especially his running quotations from John chapter one—it might almost feel surprising that Augustine left anything out as he discusses the value of the themes which he read in the works of the Neoplatonists. Hammond (Augustine, 2016, sec. 323 n. 30), Augustine’s translator, notes in the margin that, “the Scripture saturation in this section reaches a peak of intensity, as A. sets out side by side where the two belief systems coincide, and where Christianity contains what classical wisdom lacks.” But more is going on here than simply a crush of quotations; Augustine, as always, has curated his list to illustrate exactly what he wants to say.

There are, however, two significant omissions from his lengthy quotation from John. The first is that the reference to the Law and to Moses in verse 17 is elided; rather than saying that the Law came through Moses and grace through Christ, Augustine cuts out the natural climax of the passage altogether and ends with verse 16 (Augustine, 2016, sec. 7.9.14). Second, and even more amazingly, all the references to John the Baptist, whose story is interwoven with that of Jesus as God the Word in John’s prologue (in verses 6, 7, and 15), are abruptly cut. In each case, Augustine quotes right up to the mention of John, and then simply passes right over him. In fact, in verses 6–8, John the Baptist is not only excised from the text, but replaced! In this section of the *Confessions*, every component of John 1:5–9 is quoted intact (if paraphrased), except for the omission of John the Baptist, who is replaced by the phrase *anima hominis*, the “soul of man” as God’s designated witness to the light (Augustine, 1876, sec. 7.9.13).

On the surface, this seems like an unusual move for Augustine, who elsewhere is very comfortable discussing John the Baptist, and who has access throughout his other works to the complete text of the first chapter of John, both in written form and, considering that it is such a notable passage, likely also in memory. Lienhard (2001, p. 197) notes that, “Augustine often mentions John the Baptist, with name and title about one hundred fifty times, and far more often simply as ‘John,’” Sabatier (1743, p. 325)

demonstrates that there is almost no variation between Augustine's text and either the Vulgate or Sabatier's own reconstructed *Vetus Italica*, which in these verses are themselves identical. Allan Fitzgerald (in Augustine, 2009, pp. 15–16) remarks of John 1 that, "after many years [Augustine] would remember and record the words of Simplician about the prologue of John: 'This passage should be inscribed in letters of Gold and set up in the most prominent place in every church.'" It is not the humanity, or fleshliness, of John which seems to be the difficulty, for Augustine includes here John's references to human flesh and sexual procreation unproblematically, as foils to God the Word just as John the Baptist himself is. From John 1:13: "*verbum, deus, non ex carne, non ex sanguine non ex voluntate viri neque ex voluntate carnis.*" ("The Word, which is God, was not born of flesh, nor of blood nor of human will nor of the will of the flesh." (Augustine, 1876, sec. 7.9.13)). Nor is there any significant anti-semitic or anti-Mosaic Law bias here or elsewhere in the *Confessions*; Augustine is comfortable praising God's plan and his Law (and at the very least mentioning them) even when they are not fully understood. Cf., for example, *Confessions*, 4.9.14, where he presents the themes of law and truth in parallel, just as would have been the case here had he completed John's prologue with verses 17 and 18: "*lex tua veritas, et veritas tu.*" ("Your law is truth and you are Truth." (See also Augustine, 1876, sec. 6.4.6)).

The key to understanding this puzzling omission can perhaps be found with the help of Joseph Lienhard, who prepared a careful study surveying all instances of Augustine's mention of John. In "John the Baptist in Augustine's Exegesis," Lienhard (2001, p. 202) notes that Augustine uses John flexibly, depending on demands of the context, as a pivot point between the old age and the present one and "twice calls John the *limes*, the boundary-stone, between the testaments." Sometimes John is deployed as a symbol of the closure of the old era, sometimes as the opening of the new. "When Augustine entered into controversy, however," Lienhard (2001, p. 203) continues,

he had to treat the two eras more subtly. The verse *lex et prophetae usque ad Johannem* might seem tailored to Manichean dualism, dividing the Old Testament from the New, and creation from redemption ... [and] writing against the Donatist Petilian, who had argued that John's baptism was without effect, ... Augustine distinguishes *sacramentum praefigurantia rem futuram* from the *nostri temporis sacramenta*, which attest that what the former sacraments proclaimed would come has indeed come.

The question to ask therefore is this: insofar as the *Confessions* can be considered a document written into the context of controversy, what could stand behind Augustine's omission of John the Baptist here?

In fact, what if instead of thinking about John the Baptist having been discarded, what if instead Augustine is considered to have deployed him flexibly, silently, in the background of a passage so famous that many of his readers would have noticed his

absence? Rather than John the Baptist having been *replaced* by ‘the soul of man’, what if Augustine is using this omission to make the point that in his own personal journey (and perhaps that of others too), the soul of man is to the arrival of the new era of his life as John the Baptist was to the arrival of the incarnate God the Word: a God-sent forerunner necessary to prepare the way for the ultimate Truth. What if the omission is intentionally designed to evoke the idea that, in one sense, the soul of man here *is* John the Baptist? This subtle move would stand up well against the Donatists in maintaining a high value for John’s ministry and his baptism. It would stand up well against the Manichaeans in avoiding the dualism of saying that bad old fleshly John is the thing that needed to be surpassed by the eternal light of the Word—instead, it is an element of the kingdom of light (the soul of man) which itself is surpassed by the ultimate Truth—and maintaining the unity of God as the single actor behind both creation and redemption. Lienhard (2001, p. 205) succinctly comments that, “against Manichaeans and (to a lesser extent) Donatists, Augustine had to defend the continuity of the old dispensation, including John the Baptist, with the new.” And it would stand up well against the Neoplatonists, or those who thought Augustine was too influenced by them: their philosophy had an important place, even one ordained by God, just like John the Baptist did, as Jesus said, “of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of God is greater than he is!” (Luke 7:28 *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, 1996). By having John the Baptist present in this text, though in the background, Augustine is signaling to his readers that philosophy is his John the Baptist, and can play the same role that John did for the ministry of Jesus, that of one who comes shouting in the desert and preparing the way. In doing so he charts a careful course between the Manichaeans, the Donatists, and those over reliant on the Neoplatonists, and offers this nuanced pathway of processing the place of philosophy to the alert reader as well.

CONCLUSION

“The *Confessions*,” says Outler in the introduction to his 1955 translation, “are deliberate.” Augustine writes with precision and with intentional rhetorical goals. “He omits very much indeed. Yet he builds his successive climaxes so skillfully that the denouement in Book VIII is a vivid and believable convergence of influences, reconstructed and ‘placed’ with consummate dramatic skill.” (Outler, 1955, p. 17 in the introduction to, *Confessions and Enchiridion*). In the *Confessions*, Augustine is fully in control of his medium, his narrative, and his sources; he is capable both of including just the right vignette or reference to illustrate an idea, or leaving out or alluding to another to give it shape or a fuller sense. The argument of this paper has been that by giving special attention to the allusions and omissions that Augustine uses, the attentive reader can gain a more nuanced sense of his text, just as Augustine was himself aware of the importance of keeping the wider context of the scriptures he was reading in mind.

As such, this paper has presented four potential examples of Augustine omitting, or speaking only allusively of, certain scriptures over the course of the *Confessions*: his omission of God as the Father of lights when referencing James 1, his allusion to the *una columba* of the Cantic of Canticles in describing his concubine, his undertone of Pauline episodes in recounting the story of Monnica's arrival in Rome, and finally his elision of John the Baptist from his discussion of John chapter one. It has been argued that, in each of these instances, understanding better the portions of the Bible that Augustine has left out can help add depth to our understanding of the portions that he has worked in, and the key points that he uses them to support. Against the Manichees who said the universe was splitted; alone without his perfect dove whom Europe's shores had quitted; his mom to Paul, his soul to John, by narrative he fitted: it's no surprise we learn so much by what he has omitted.

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