“To know someone only from the outside is not really to know the person; we do not know the nucleus of the person even if we see him many times and recognize him in the way he looks, acts, speaks, moves. Only with the heart are we able to truly know a person…. We substantially understand and get to know more about a person only through the heart, in friendship…. Heart speaks to heart in coming to know a person essentially, in his truth….” Pope Benedict XVI, October 8, 2008

FRIENDSHIP IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Deliciae meae esse cum filiis hominum.—Prov. 8:31
[My delight is to be with the children of men.]

Two Approaches:

First—Understanding what it is: OBJECTIVE approach (REALISM)

1. Theoretical basis: classical ontology (focus on human nature, essence).
2. Practical basis: classical ethics (focus on character formation in virtue).
3. Philia, amicitia (amor amicitiae) as social paths toward the development and perfection of a natural inclination for companionship based on common interests, quests (i.e., “seeing the same truth” [C.S. Lewis, The Four Loves]).
4. The substance of friendship: a common desire for and pursuit of the good (end) of human nature (happiness shared).
5. The growth of friendship: constant sharing strengthens and raises each partner above individual limitations (“ecstasy”).
6. Some key elements of friendship: basic similarities in life, character, and pursuits; mutual appreciation, esteem; unconditional commitment; reciprocal good will; intensity as developed by frequent association; mutual trust, confidence; nobility, dignity.
7. Some effects of friendship (as each molds the others to fuller maturity of character): union of likeness; mutual indwelling (spontaneous understanding); zealous resistance to all that opposes the good of the others.
8. Friendship and human virtues: “Prudence directs it, justice rules it, fortitude guards it, temperance moderates it.”
9. The classical definition (Cicero): “Complete agreement about all things, human and divine, with benevolence and affection…. Feelings of affection spring from our very nature; goodwill comes into being when we have seen clear signs of virtue. Men who make virtue their goal in life turn toward each other and grow closer and closer…. This sends a ray of good hope into the future, and keeps our hearts from faltering.”
10. The classical conclusion (Aristotle): “Whatever is a man’s purpose in life, whatever he likes most, that is the activity he wishes to pursue in the company of friends. Hence some drink together, others play games, engage in sports, or go hunting, while still others practice philosophy.”
Second—Practicing it: SUBJECTIVE approach (PERSONALISM)

1. Theoretical basis: modern phenomenology (focus on the person, experience).
2. Practical basis: modern anthropology (focus on communion).
3. *Philia, amicitia, amor amicitiae* as social paths toward the development and perfection of a communion of minds and hearts that enriches all that one is and has by giving it freely to (an)other person(s); personhood is preserved as it is transcended.
4. The substance of friendship: a gratuitous, reciprocal divine gift, an undeserved and unmerited privilege of souls whose self-possession enables them to donate themselves to the others.
5. The growth of friendship: how it happens is a natural mystery of God’s Providence; He uses it as an instrument in his work of revealing, recreating, and saving.
6. Some key elements of friendship: reverence for the others as higher spiritual selves; the affective participation of sharing the humanity of the others; correspondence of responsibility; sharing of sentiments (“sympathy”).
7. Some effects of friendship: each one discovers more of himself as he discovers more of the others, with common action as the medium; risks of suffering, which are accepted in advance as opportunities for self-sacrifice and purification on the way to self-transcendence. Wounds are accepted in advance (book of Proverbs).
8. Friendship and the theological virtues: “Religion directs it, charity rules it, hope guards it, faith moderates it.”
9. A new classical definition (Wojtyła): “Willingness of one man to sacrifice all particular interests, enabling him to realize his own value, which becomes greater and worthier through the pursuit of a common interest with others….The man realizes the value of his own person through spiritual generation as the other man accepts and realizes that same value; acting together, one carries in himself the person of the other and at the same time is carried by him.”
10. A new classical conclusion (Saint-Exupéry): “A friend is unique in all the universe.”

Synthesis of the two

Friendship participates in a vital unity that runs through and transcends the universe: What begins in the nature of man is perfected supernaturally in Jesus Christ: The perfecting of *philia/amor amicitiae* and *caritas* begins on earth, consummated in heaven.

Some Inauthentic (Self-Serving) Attitudes (Habits) that Threaten/Prevent Friendships:

1. Disillusionment over an apparent scarcity of kindred souls.
2. Superficiality resulting from a random craving for numerous friends.
3. Conformism and a renunciation of active, creative participation.
4. Possessive utilitarianism: using others to advance one’s self-interests.
5. Individualistic disengagement, alienation, separation from others.
6. Functionalism due to immersion in impersonal, mechanical bureaucracies.
7. Taking others for granted; using them as a diversion from serious pursuits.
Some Authentic (Self-Giving) Attitudes (Habits) that Foster/Secure Friendships:

1. Cultivating similarities of aspiration by carefully choosing companions.
2. Vigilant spontaneity which recognizes and seizes unexpected opportunities.
3. Solidarity of outlook; searching for and creating occasions for collaboration.
4. Readiness to spend time with others and seek ways to help them.
5. Practicing virtues that can be recognized and emulated by others.
6. Discovering how to correct each other—energetically, when necessary.
7. Faithfulness to prayer and contemplation which centers everything in God.

Some insights, implications, extensions, and questions

1. Friendship is providential in that it participates in the divine plan for a person. God is the protagonist of every genuine friendship. He arranges them in His own way as key elements in our path to holiness.
2. Friends are fellow pilgrims, helping each other to complete an arduous journey, the climb toward the sumnum bonum.
3. Friendship both requires and fosters personal conversion. It helps us to see our defects more clearly and to correct them more decisively.
4. Insofar as it lies beyond our complete understanding and control, friendship is mysterious. Each friend is somehow a mystery to himself and to the other.
5. In friendship, “agreement about things human and divine” becomes agreement about Persons human and divine. When two persons become friends, the value of each person is enhanced, but not of the things which attract their interest.
6. Therefore, one not only discovers his human identity in and through friendship, but also his “divine” identity. And not only his original identity, but what he comes to be. By opening ourselves to others, we discover who we really are and who we are becoming.
7. Can friendship alter one’s personal identity by moving one from who he is now to who God wants him to be?
8. The emphasis in friendship is not on the what (common interests), but on the who (kindred spirits).
9. A chemical analogy with friendship: In the formation of a salt crystal, an ion gives and receives electrons; its sharp edges remain, but form a well-ordered whole. The sharing of electrons is active, interactive. They can also attract others outside the crystal in a supersaturated solution—attract more members to the whole—and the crystal grows.
10. In friendship the focus is always on the other, not the self. Friendship formation is a process of getting over selfishness, an on-going effort to identify and overcome flaws caused by our imperfections. In this life no friendship is ever completely perfected.
11. Friendship, like every virtue, can grow or diminish; it is never static, never completed. It moves toward or away from the goal of the perfect
ideal of the mean. What gives a friendship its particular character is the path it takes.

12. Beyond that human dimension is the supernatural: God starts and aids the formation of this and every virtue by means of grace. Thus a purely human professional bond can be transformed into a spiritual one.  
13. Since friendship arises on the basis of human nature, both a capacity for friendship and barriers to its development come from within. So nature has to be disciplined: the capacity enlarged, barriers diminished.

14. Friendship and freedom: As we grow in consciousness of the other as loveable, friendship frees us from our natural need to be loved, our natural dependence on others.

15. True friendships are not possessive, due to a growing respect for each one’s honor and dignity.

16. Friendship lies at the heart of our spiritual desires, which it purifies and brings to a higher level.

**Ten Sources for Further Study**


3. **St. Augustine, Confessions, books IV (7-14), VI (11-26); The City of God, book XIX (5-9); Epistolae CCLVIII: To Marcianus (400, 426 A.D.);** ref: M. A. McNamara, *Friends and Friendship for St. Augustine* (1964).


5. **Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, The Little Prince, 19-21 (1943).**

6. **Antonin Sertillanges, Kinships, chap. 72-73, “Friends; The Rules of Friendship” (1953).**

7. **Dietrich and Alice Von Hildebrand, The Art of Living, esp. chap. 6 “Communion” (1965).**


Augustine on Friendship

These notes were developed from studying Peter Brown’s ideas on Augustine, friendship and society. Peter Brown says of Augustine, “He hardly ever spent a moment of his life without some friend, even some blood-relative, close by him. No thinker in the Early Church was so preoccupied with the nature of human relationships.”

Why is friendship important?
A. Friendship is fundamental to our nature.
   • Humans are basically social in nature.
   • “There is nothing so social by nature or so anti-social by sin as a human being.” – City of God
   • Humans are naturally driven to in society. Our social groupings are expressions of what is best in us, not what is worst. Imperfection in society is due to sin not due to society.
   • “In this world two things are essential: a healthy life and friendship. God created humans so that they might exist and live: this is life. But if they are not to remain solitary, there must be friendship.” – Sermon
   • “The first thing a baby sees when opening its eyes are its parents, and life begins with their friendship.” – Sermon
B. Love in friendship perfects us.
   • We are perfected as humans by our love for other humans.
C. Friendship helps meet our need to share life experiences with others.
   • “It’s hard to laugh when you are by yourself.” – Confessions
   • Augustine realizes that joy expands and grief contracts in the presence of friends.

What is friendship?
A. Friendship is the highest expression of family.
   • Friendship begins in the family.
   • Augustine enjoys a loving relationship with his parents, particularly his mom. Augustine cared for his mother in her later years and was at her side when she died. He sees the example of child-parent relations in Jesus command to John when he was on the cross.
   • So that a human being might not be alone a system of friendship was created. Friendship begins with one’s spouse and children, and from there moves on to strangers. But considering the fact that we all have the same father (Adam) and the same mother (Eve) who will be a stranger? Every human being is neighbor to every other human being. Ask nature: Is this man unknown? He’s still human. Is this woman an enemy? She’s still human. Is this man a foe? He is still a human being. Is this woman a friend? Let her remain a friend. Is this man an enemy? Let him become a friend.” - Sermon
B. Friendship shapes two minds into one heart.
   • “For any one who knows us may say of him and me, that in body only, and not in mind, we are two, so great is the union of heart, so firm the intimate friendship subsisting between us; though in merit we are not alike, for his is far above mine.”
C. Friendship is an expression of mutual love.

- “Without friends even the happiness of the sense which I then possessed would have been impossible, no matter how great the abundance of carnal pleasures might be. I loved these friends for their own sakes and I felt that I was loved in return by them for my own sake.” – Confessions
- The loss of a friend is one of the terrible burdens of this life
- “…pangs of longing which tear me apart because those who are fastened to me by the bond of the strongest and sweetest friendship are not here physically present to me.” – Letter to Novatus
- “My great and only delight is that I am unable to avoid delight when you are with me and I am unable to avoid sorrow when you are far away.”
- “The consolation of other friends did the most to repair the damage and give me strength after the death of my friend. The interchange between us captured my mind: conversation and joking, doing favors for each other, reading together good books, being foolish and being serious together, disagreeing without hatred almost as though I was debating with myself, sometimes falling into disagreement but thereby remembering on how many things we agreed, teaching and learning from each other, waiting impatiently for the absent to return and rejoicing when they did. These and so many other like signs coming from the hearts of friends are shown through their eyes and mouths and speech and a thousand little gestures. All of these expressions of friendship brought our hearts together like bundled kindling, making one out of many.” – Confessions
- “What is there to console us in this human society so full of errors and trials except the truth and mutual love of true and good friends.” – Confessions

How do we cultivate friendship?
Augustine uses one primary concept to discuss cultivating friendships: Concordia. Concordia is the union of hearts. The vital force behind concordia is love. Attributes required for concordia: reciprocity, equality, benevolence, truth, grace
A. Reciprocity – When love ceases to be reciprocal, friendship ceases.
B. Equality – We love the other neither more or less than ourselves. The eyes of friendship neither look down nor look up to a friend: they look at the friend.
C. Benevolence –
- We love not as ends in themselves but as a means whereby we can achieve the one eternal good: God himself.
- The love between friends is a mutual desire that good should come to the other.
- Based on an altruistic love – values the good that is in the friend rather than the good that the friend can give.
- Wishing our friends well including their salvation. Our true love for our neighbor is shown in our desire to bring them to God. “He truly loves a friend who loves God in the friend, either because God is actually present in the friend or in order that God may be so present. This is true love. If we love another for another reason, we hate them more than we love them.” – Sermon. Love cannot be present when we cease to respect our friend’s place in creation. Only God can be enjoyed for the sake of Himself. We love our friends for the sake of the love of God,
loving the love of God in them. God is the only glue that can bind heart, soul, mind and strength.

- Bearing our friends’ burdens. Ideally there will be no burdens to bear—only perfect love. But in this life we bear one another’s burdens. The love we shower in good times is proven in bad times.

D. Truth – Accepting the strengths and weaknesses of our friends. I must know the reality of my friend. We do not form friends abstractly or anonymously. “A person must be a friend of truth before they can be a friend of a human being.”

- Truth requires frankness between friends. Our honest and frank exposure is never complete because in this fallen world we do not even know ourselves fully. “Since I do not know myself, what shame can I possibly inflict on a friend when I say he is unknown to me, especially when…as I believe…he does not know himself? – Soliloquies

- Augustine returns to the theme of not knowing ourselves or our friends or our future again and again. He even suggests that we can confuse foe and friend: “How confused it all is! One who seems to be my enemy turns out to be my friend and those whom we thought our good friends in fact are our worst enemies.” – Sermon

- “In this journey of our earthly life, each one carries his own heart, and each heart is closed to every other.” “Humans can speak. Then can be seen to move their limbs and their words can be heard. But who can penetrate their thoughts; who can see their heart?” “I do not know what you are thinking and you do not know what I am thinking. Only our own spirit (and the Holy Spirit of God) is witness to our thoughts, and indeed God knows these things about us that even we do not know about ourselves.” Comm. On Gospel of John

- We can never be completely sure of the heart of another, so we always take the risk of opening our heart to them as a friend.

- It is bad to betray a trust, but it is worse to refuse to trust again.”

- “True friendship can harbor no suspicion; a friend must speak to his friend as freely as to his second self.”

E. Grace - True friendship is only possible by the grace of God. Our openness to others in friendship is dependent on God’s grace.

**Who can be our friends?**

A. We cannot be friends with darkness. “Wherefore, my well beloved and most amiable brother, by the friendship which unites us, and by our faith in the divine law itself, I would warn you never to link yourself in friendship with those shadows of the realm of darkness, and to break off without delay whatever friendship may have been begun between you and them.”

B. Yet, we keep open the hope for universal friendship. “It (friendship) must include all those to whom love and affection are due. It may go out more readily to some, more slowly to others, but it must reach even to our enemies for whom we are commanded to pray. The conclusion is simply this: there is no member of the human species to whom love is not due, either because they return our love or at least because we are united to them through our common nature as human beings.” – Letter – This reality
to which Augustine refers is ultimately only possible in the new heaven and new earth because we cannot physically become friends with every person on earth: there are multiple limitations. As Burt says, “We will not meet every human in a lifetime but we can strive to make every human we meet a friend. We can avoid rejecting out of hand anyone who offers to be our friend. At the very least we can deem them worthy of our friendship and try to bring them to a point where mutual, truthful, frank and trusting friendship is possible.” We can even love our enemies as friends—not because they are but because we hold out the hope of possibility. This ultimately has to do with hope or potentiality for friendship with all.

C. Augustine also applies his ideas to the family suggesting that it also might be a society of friends. Thus a marriage is first and foremost, a union of friends. This union is exclusive.

Where is friendship heading?

A. Friendship is the highest expression of a person’s social nature. The more a society becomes a society of friends, the more perfect it becomes as a society. (Augustine applies his vision of friendship to society and sees how our culture might actually be a society of friends. He discusses how authority and other aspects of regulated power might function within this society but this is beyond the scope of our study.)

B. The ultimate goal of family: to be forever friends with one’s spouse, children and Lord.

C. The true love found in the union of hearts (concordia) cannot be broken—even at death. (Communion of saints).
SAINT AUGUSTINE AND CHRISTIAN FRIENDSHIP *

The Classical Notions of Friendship

In addition to the Gospels and other books of the New Testament, the background of St. Augustine’s thoughts on friendship includes the writings of the Roman orator and Stoic philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero, whose ideas are chiefly to be found in De Amicitia, (On Friendship). This work, in dialogue form, was this great philosopher-statesman’s attempt to record the common teaching and practice of those who had gone before him.

Cicero defined friendship as an accord of wills, tastes, and thoughts, a harmonious agreement in all matters, divine and human, accompanied by mutual goodwill and affection. True friendship is limited to the good, for friendship is founded on virtue and presupposes it. The good or virtuous man has a strong character, is just and generous, loyal, upright, free from passion and insolence. These are attributes of the Stoic ideal. The more a man possesses these qualities, the more virtuous he is, the more capable of friendship. Friendship is born when such a person finds another whose habits and character are in agreement with his own, for friendship springs up naturally when virtuous persons come in contact. Nothing is more lovable than virtue; nothing calls forth a more sympathetic response. Friendship of this type is necessarily rare and limited to a small circle.

For Cicero, the mutual goodwill and affection that form part of the harmonious agreement among friends are essentially altruistic (that is, disinterested and not self-seeking). Contrary to the Epicureans, who claimed that friendship reposed in egotistical interests, he holds that affection is given to another purely for himself and independently of any personal satisfaction. Utility may be present, but as a result, not as a cause.

Among the duties of friendship, special stress is given to the following: friends must always be truthful with one another, for flattery and pretense destroy friendship. One must correct a friend when necessary. Suspicion has no place in friendship, for fidelity is its foundation.

Those who prefer things other than virtue – riches, power, honors – are not capable of true friendship. For the most part, Cicero spoke of vera et perfecta amicitia (true and perfect friendship), considering it as one of life’s greatest treasures. He echoes Ennius’s thought that life is not livable without a friend, asking what could be sweeter than to talk to a friend, as to oneself. Life without friendship is like a world without sun, for it loses all charm without affection and benevolence. As an illustration of his theory of perfect friendship Cicero chose Scipio and Laelius. Between these two men there was mutual regard for inherent excellence. Constant association fostered their good will toward each other and engendered loyalty, sympathy and stability. They were in complete agreement in all matters and had a community of interests.

The Ciceronian conception of friendship is relevant here because it was the Roman conception dominant at the time of St. Augustine. Among the educated, Cicero was still widely read and his synthesis of what other philosophers had taught was considered integral to an ethical Roman life. As Cicero was a great rhetorician whose works were studied by all those who pursued that art, and as the rhetorician was a
respected figure in St. Augustine’s day, Cicero’s ideas had become ingrained in the fabric of the Empire by the time of Augustine, four centuries later.

Cicero’s noble and virtuous view of friendship was, we shall see, the natural foundation upon which grace would later build, both in St. Augustine’s personal life, and in his philosophy. For his personal life, it was his embracing and generous capacity for friends and friendship that opened him to the love of God. For his philosophy, the classical Roman view of friendship provided an ethical framework upon which the Doctor of the Church could build a supernatural edifice of theology, just as the fathers could “baptize” the philosophy of Plato, or St. Thomas could christen the moderate realism of Aristotle. We shall see how St. Augustine builds upon the basic Ciceronian definition of friendship: “agreement on things human and divine combined with good will and love.”

**St. Augustine’s Disposition toward Friendship.**

By temperament, upbringing, even his ethnic roots, Aurelius Augustinus was well disposed to friendships, both good ones and bad ones. The Roman North Africa of his day was a combination of three cultures: Roman, Phoenician, and Berber. While the first of these is known to be a restrained sort of character, the ancient African races added imagination, sensitivity, a mystical bent of mind, fieriness, stubbornness, and passionate, often violent temperaments to the mix. The Africans were very social creatures who engaged in lively conversation and wanted to convince others of their convictions.

A German historian remarked that a definite tendency toward sociability and friendship was characteristic of Saint Augustine’s age. This was so, he says, because in the days of the Empire, politics was in the hands of the monarch, and what the people could not have by way of political involvement they made up for in their social lives: in their families, friendships, and (lamentably) in debauched public spectacles the Emperor provided them by way of “bread and circuses.”

In addition to ethnic and political considerations, one factor predisposing Augustine for friendship was his family setting, which did much to incline him toward affability, tenderness, and sensitivity to others. St. Monica, a generous and kind soul, imbued those traits in her son. One of his biographers has noted Augustine’s gift of universal sympathy which he possessed to an eminent degree, a mind vast enough to understand all, a heart large enough to love all. This special genius for friendship has been noted by other biographers as well.

In the *Confessions*, he painted a sweet and colorful picture of friendship, showing what an attraction it held for him. Friends could “talk and laugh and do each other kindnesses; read pleasant books together, pass from lightest jesting to talk of the deepest things and back again; differ without rancor, as a man might differ with himself, and when most rarely dissension arose, find our normal agreement all the sweeter for it; teach each other or learn from each other; be impatient for the return of the absent ones, and welcome them with joy in their home-coming. These and such like things proceeded from our hearts as we gave affection and received it back, showing by face, voice, eyes, and a thousand other pleasing ways, a flame that fused our very souls and of many made us one. This is what men value in friends...” *Conf.*, IV, 13-14.
Misguided Friendships

This genius which seemed natural to Augustine was something that could be and was easily corrupted in his youth. As he himself said, “The bond of human friendship has a sweetness of its own, binding many souls together as one. Yet because of these values, sin is committed, because we have an inordinate preference for these goods of a lower order and neglect the better and the higher good.” Conf., II, 5

Those familiar with the Confessions will remember the mischievous adventure of the stolen pears related in Book Two. Succumbing to peer pressure, the young Augustine, with some neighborhood rascals, stole pears from a neighbor’s farm only for the perverse pleasure of the theft. St. Augustine notes that the fruit “was not particularly tempting either to look at or to taste... . Our only pleasure in doing it was that it was forbidden... Now — as I think back on the state of my mind then — I am altogether certain that I would not have done it alone. Perhaps what I really loved was the companionship of those with whom I did it.... O friendship unfriendly, unanalyzable attraction for the mind, greediness to do damage for the mere sport and jest of it... Someone cries, ‘Come on, let’s do it’ — and we would be ashamed to be ashamed.” Conf. II, 4.

He also admitted, later in life, that it was friendship of a sort that kept him in the grips of the Manichean sect. Of course the most infamous friendship of his life was his lustful liaison with the mother of his son, Adeodatus, an unnamed woman with whom St. Augustine lived from 16 to 26. She was not his only paramour. Writing as a bishop, he could recall that in his youth “My one delight was to love and to be loved.” Conf. II, 2. The devil can evidently seize on such a delight!

Development of Friendships

Even before his conversion, when he did not enjoy what he would later call “true friendship,” St. Augustine learned, through love for others, to go outside of himself, to love another for the sake of the other and not only for the sake of the pleasure he derived from the companionship. This love of benevolence, which far exceeds love of concupiscence, is what would prepare his heart for love of God. There is little doubt that this strong sentiment of friendship, which escaped Augustine’s basic tendency toward egoism, was what later made it possible to become completely absorbed by the love of God.

In Book Four of the Confessions, Augustine writes of a childhood friend with whom he renewed his acquaintance when he became a teacher of rhetoric in his home town of Tagaste. Augustine was about 21 when the two renewed their association. This unnamed friend shared an interest in intellectual pursuits with him, and came to follow his lead in all things, including his lately-embraced attachment to the Manichean heresy. “But he was not then my friend, nor indeed ever became my friend, in the true sense of the term; for there is no true friendship save between those You bind together and who cleave to You by that love which is ‘shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us.’ Still, it was a sweet friendship, being ripened by the zeal of common studies. Moreover, I had turned him away from the true Faith — which he had not soundly and thoroughly mastered as a youth — and turned him toward those superstitious and harmful fables which my mother mourned in me.” Conf; IV, 4.
Later, this friend fell ill and was baptized while unconscious. When the sick young man woke up, the unbelieving Augustine began to mock his baptism, thinking that the friend would join him in his anti-Catholic jocosity. On the contrary, having corresponded with the grace of the sacrament, the young man was not amused: “He recoiled from me, as if I were his enemy, and, with a remarkable and unexpected freedom, admonished me that, if I desired to continue as his friend, I must cease to say such things. Confounded and confused, I concealed my feelings till he should get well and his health recover enough to allow me to deal with him as I wished. But he was snatched away from my madness, that with You he might be preserved for my consolation. A few days after, during my absence, the fever returned and he died.” Conf, IV, 4.

Note the sensitivity expressed in the use of the words “friend” and “enemy.” Perhaps the strength of these words is lost on us today. It may help to know that the Latin amicus (friend) comes from the word amare (to love). A friend is a “loved one.” St. Augustine tells us of this connection when he says, “Friendship is the return of love which another has offered; it is nothing other than love from which it draws its name...” Contra duas epist. Pelag., I, I. Similarly, enemy (inimicus), is literally one “not loved.” Augustine later identified this benevolent love of friendship with the theological virtue of charity (caritas in Latin).

Writing about 22 years later as a bishop, St. Augustine recalled the terrible agony that the loss of this friend caused him. The extremity of this despondency may surprise us: “My heart was utterly darkened by this sorrow and everywhere I looked I saw death. My native place was a torture room to me and my father’s house a strange unhappiness. And all the things I had done with him — now that he was gone — became a frightful torment. My eyes sought him everywhere, but they did not see him; and I hated all places because he was not in them... Nothing but tears were sweet to me and they took my friend’s place in my heart’s desire.” Conf, IV, 4.

Much later, in his Retractions, the aged shepherd faulted himself for his youthful emotion about this episode. Regardless, the whole affair tells us a lot about Augustine as a friend. He loved this person for himself, even if the love was not only purely natural, even sentimental. He had not yet been transformed by grace, and his affections were still quite uncontrolled. Later, when relating the death of St. Monica, his manner of expression is comparatively Stoic in its restraint. This is no doubt due to the fact that Augustine had matured to a wholly different understanding of friendship.

Not long after the death of this friend, when he was still in his early to mid twenties, St. Augustine befriended two others, a wealthy Carthaginian youth named Nebridius, and his fellow citizen of Tegaste, Alypius. Nebridius (roughly Augustine’s age) was himself a teacher who attached himself to him as a mentor. Alypius was Augustine’s student. This mention of Nebridius brings up a development in Augustine’s friendships from childhood to manhood: In youth, he tended to be a follower; later, he is more of a leader. From this point forward, he will be at the lead of various circles of friends. As he matures and from layman becomes a monk, a priest, a bishop, he will find more and more people attracted to him, desiring to enter his intimate circle, at least by way of correspondence.

Nebridius was a friend of Augustine’s “mind” while Alypius was a friend of his “heart.” The three formed an intimate circle, with Augustine clearly at the head. Both
followed him into Manicheanism; but, whereas Alypius stayed with the sect as long as his teacher did, Nebridius saw its absurdities and soon abandoned the heresy. By his discerning objections Nebridius would eventually wear down Augustine’s confidence in Manicheanism, thus revealing why Nebridius was the friend of his mind. An excellent bent of intellect made him Augustine’s equal in a respect that normally gave him standing above his students. Nebridius later proved his friendship in an extraordinary way. He took a teaching post under Verecundus, Augustine’s friend, who allowed the use of his country villa by Augustine and his other friends, who went there for prayer, study, and stimulating conversations. This is the famous Cassiciacum, located near Milan, where Augustine, Alypius, and Adeodatus later withdrew with Monica and others to prepare for baptism.

Alypius is perhaps best remembered as the companion of his conversion. The account given in the Confessions is unforgettable to all who have read it even once: “There was a garden attached to our lodging, of which we had the use... To this garden the storm in my breast somehow brought me, for there no one could intervene in the fierce suit I had brought against myself..... Alypius was close on my heels: for it was still privacy for me to have him near, and how could he leave me to myself in that state? We found a seat as far as possible from the house.... A mighty storm arose in me, bringing a mighty rain of tears. That I might give way to my tears and lamentations, I rose from Alypius: for it struck me that solitude was more suited to the business of weeping...

...He remained where we had been sitting, still in utter amazement.... Suddenly I heard a voice from some nearby house, a boy’s voice or a girl’s voice, I do not know; but it was a sort of sing-song, repeated again and again, “Take and read, take and read,”... I was moved to return to the place where Alypius was sitting, for I had put down the Apostle’s book there when I arose. I snatched it up, opened it and in silence read the passage upon which my eyes first fell: ‘Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh and its concupiscence.’ (Romans XIII, 13) I had no wish to read further, and no need. For in that instant... all the darkness of uncertainty vanished away.” Conf. III, 7.

After Augustine explained to his friend the tempest that had raged in his soul, and shown him the passage in St. Paul, Alypius, “asked to see what I had read. I showed him, and he looked further than I had read. I had not known what followed. And this is what followed: ‘Now him that is weak in faith, take unto you,’ He applied this to himself and told me so. And he was confirmed by this message, and with no troubled wavering gave himself to God’s good will and purpose — a purpose indeed most suited to his character, for in these matters he had been immeasurably better than I.” Conf, III, 7.

Augustine’s love for Alypius is set forth in a Christian-Ciceronian fashion in his Dialogues: “I cannot find words to express how highly I value [this blessing which has come upon me]. I find my most intimate friend agreeing with me not only on probability as a factor in human life, but also on religion itself — a point that is the clearest sign of a true friend; for friendship has been rightly and with just reverence defined as ‘agreement on things human and divine combined with good will and love.’ ” Contra Acad. III, 13.

After baptism, Alypius — Saint Alypius (feast day, May 16) — would follow Saint Augustine into the monastic life and beyond. Their friendship would grow with age and mutual progress in sanctity. The Roman Martyrology for August 15 (the day he died)
pays tribute to their association: “At Tagaste in Africa, St. Alipius, bishop, who was the
disciple of blessed Augustine, and the companion of his conversion, his colleague in
pastoral office, his valiant fellow-soldier in disputing heretics, and finally his partner in
the glory of heaven...” Writing to Saint Jerome — the holy yet acerbic scholar who
pushed his Numidian correspondent’s friendly forbearance to the limit! — Augustine
paid tribute to his love for Alypius: “Anyone who knows Alypius and me will say that we
are two in body but one in mind, at least so far as perfect agreement and truest friendship
are concerned; not in merit, however, in which he excels.” Letter 28, 1.

A detail of Augustine’s association with Alypius regards the origin of lengthy
passages on him in the *Confessions*. St. Paulinus of Nola, a mutual friend of Alypius and
Augustine, requested that Alypius send him something of his life story. Out of humility,
Alypius did not want to write it. Augustine saw the desire of the one and the humility of
the other and decided that he would come to the rescue. What he wrote was largely
incorporated into the *Confessions*.

At this point, a biographical treatment will yield to an exploration of Augustine’s
more developed notions of friendship. Biographical matters, from here on, will only enter
occasionally to help illustrate his deeper thoughts on friendship.

**Augustine’s Conception of Friendship**

St. Augustine’s matured notions of friendship introduce to the classical one the
twin concepts of Christian unity and grace. “Christian unity” includes the unity of the
Mystical Body, the unity among friends through the mutual exercise of the theological
virtues (especially charity), and, of course, a unity of sacraments (especially Baptism and
the Eucharist). As an example of Christian unity, here is Augustine’s application of the
Pauline phrase “in Christ” to friendship: “No friendship is faithful except in Christ; in
Him alone can it be happy and eternal.” *Contra duas epist. Pelag*. I, 1.

As we would expect from the Doctor of Grace, the notion of interior grace enters
into his doctrine on friendship, and perhaps to a surprising degree; for, to Augustine, true
friendship is impossible without it. An already-cited passage from the *Confessions*, the
account of his friend who died in youth, speaks to this necessity for grace: “for there is no
true friendship except between those You bind together and who cleave to You by that
love which is ‘shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us.’ ”

The only true friendship is sent by God to those who love each other in Him.
Augustine considers it a gift of God like chastity, patience, charity, and all the Christian
virtues. This is the heart of Augustine’s conception of friendship and his great innovation.
It is God alone who can join persons to each other. In other words, friendship is beyond
the scope of human control. One can desire to be the friend of another who is striving for
perfection, but only God can effect the union.

All that is necessary for the supernatural life is necessary for true friendship. And
all that is necessary for the spiritual life to be lived excellently (sanctity) is necessary for
friendship to be lived to the full. The place of charity in friendship is dependent on the
more foundational virtue of faith, for there is no charity without it. Never one to let
sentiment overrun orthodoxy, Augustine states this truth in stark, virile words: “A man
must be a friend of truth before he can be a friend to any human being.” Letter 155, 1.1.
Baptizing Cicero

This necessity of Faith and grace for true friendship is something Augustine explains by expanding on Cicero’s definition: “There can be no full and true agreement even about human things among friends who disagree about divine things, for it necessarily follows that one who despises divine things esteems human things otherwise than he should, and that whoever does not love Him who has made man has not learned to love man aright.” Letter 258, to Martianus.

So a Christian anthropology is necessary for a Christian friendship, but this is no mere question of “outlook” or “world view.” The interior nature of the thing is contingent on the love of God, a theme which rests on the very foundations of Augustinian thought on society as expressed in his *opus magnum*, *De Civitate Dei*: the “two cities” which are formed by “two loves.” For the author of the *City of God*, theological Charity *orders* all our other loves, purifying them, setting them aright, elevating them, and orienting them properly in relation to one another.

Augustine goes deeper into the supernatural by artfully weaving Cicero’s definition into the twin evangelical commandments of charity: “‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and soul and with thy whole mind’ and ‘thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself’... In the first of these, there is agreement on divine things; in the second, on human things, joined with good will and love. If one is with his friend in holding firmly to these two commandments, the friendship will be true and everlasting, and it will unite them not only to each other, but to the Lord himself.” Letter 258, to Martianus.

Two things should be carefully noted here. The first is that evangelical friendship will not only be true, but everlasting. Here, we have gone beyond the pagan authors into Christian territory. Cicero has been transcended. Second, the Christian agreement on human and divine things by way of the evangelical commandments unites us not only to our friends, but also to Our Lord. This makes friendship a “good to be cultivated” not only for the purposes of helping others, but also for one’s own sanctification. The fact that, through Christian friendship, each friend both sanctifies himself and assists the other to the same end shows how exalted amicitia is, for it is not only an expression of charity, but something that actually effects it.

The potential of a friendship to increase divine Charity ought not be diminished, for Christian perfection consists in nothing more than the perfection of the theological virtue of Charity. Cf. *Summa Theologicae*, Ila IIae, Q 184, A1.

Augustine’s comments in a letter to Pope St. Celestine probe more deeply this sanctifying and Charity-augmenting aspect of friendship: “But I always owe you love, the only debt which, even when it has been paid, holds him who has paid it a debtor still. For it is given when it is paid, but it is owed even after it has been given, for there is no time at which it ceases to be due. Nor when it is given is it lost, but it is rather multiplied by giving it; for in possessing it, not in parting with it, it is given. And since it cannot be given unless it is possessed, so neither can it be possessed unless it is given; nay, at the very time when it is given by a man it increases in that man, and, according to the number of persons to whom it is given, the amount of it that is gained becomes greater.” Letter 192 (A.D. 418).
The point is emphasized with typically Augustinian irony: Charity, by being given, is augmented. The letter goes on to contrast money with charity; the former decreases when given, while the latter increases.

One may wonder whether what is being described here is not something peculiar to friendship, but rather to the charity which is due even to our enemies by Our Lord’s command. In the passage immediately following, Augustine shows he is speaking in particular of friendship; he draws a distinction between Christian charity given to friends and to enemies: “Moreover, how can that be denied to friends which is due even to enemies? To enemies, however, this debt is paid with caution, whereas to friends it is repaid with confidence.” Letter 192.

He is making an *a fortiori* argument: If enemies ought to be loved, *how much more* ought we to love friends? This extension of more charity to friends is in no way contrary to the Gospels; while they command that we love our enemies, nowhere do they mandate an *equal* love being given to all. Elsewhere, Augustine’s thinking on this is clear: “It stands to reason that friendship goes out more readily to some, more slowly to others.... Those who love us mutually in holiness and chastity give us the truest joy.” Letter 130.

Not limiting himself to mere theory, Augustine recognized in his own life when he had crossed the Ciceronian-Christian divide. We have already seen it in the case of his relationship with Alypius. We see it again in his association with a friend of his youth, Maritianus. Upon his conversion to the Faith, Augustine congratulated him in a heartfelt letter: “I did not ‘have’ you really and completely when I did not ‘have’ you in Christ; agreement on divine things is the foundation of an authentic friendship — as Cicero has already said.” Letter 258, 1-5.

He expressed his intimate joy that their friendship has become “true and perfect” as it now hopes for “eternal life”: “How can I express in words my happiness and joy in finding a true and perfect friend in him with whom I was formerly united in an imperfect friendship?... You who formerly made me taste with such sweetness the days of this mortal life, are henceforth with me in the hope of eternal life. Even human things will not be a subject of dissension between us, since the knowledge of divine things permits us to judge them at their true value.... ” Letter 258, 2.

To summarize these considerations, we can say that Christian friendship, contrasted with its merely natural counterpart, is sanctifying, because it increases divine Charity in the soul; everlasting, because it will continue in the Beatific Vision (assuming the friends persevere in Charity and grace); and meritorious, because, in augmenting Charity in the soul, it makes us bear spiritual fruit through the increase of Sanctifying Grace, which is the subject of merit. At the same time, like all meritorious works, it is a fruit of grace, which is absolutely necessary for it to exist.

This effort to express Augustine’s thoughts on friendship, does not pretend to carry out a complete or methodical study. It simply highlights certain aspects as they touch upon friendship as a means of perfection and a means of evangelizing others. The first aspect has already had sufficient treatment for such a brief study. Let us now explore the Augustinian doctrine on amicitia specifically as it draws others to God, beginning with his notions of unity and progressing to the more explicitly missionary aspects of friendship. This aspect will enable us to be what we have called “perpetual missionaries” through the proper living of friendship.
Friendship as Unity: Concordia

To say that unity is a pervasive theme in the writings of St. Augustine would be an understatement. In his thoughts on the Blessed Trinity, on the Church, on the Eucharist, on monastic life, on grace, and even his polemical works against heretics and schismatics, the theme of unity is pervasive. Here is a beautiful example, from his Homily 10 on the First Epistle of John. Commenting on the verse, “In this we know that we love the sons of God,” Augustine says: “Therefore, he that loves the sons of God, loves the Son of God, and he that loves the Son of God, loves the Father; nor can any love the Father except he love the Son, and he that loves the sons, loves also the Son of God. What sons of God? The members of the Son of God. And by loving he becomes himself a member, and comes through love to be in the frame of the body of Christ, so there shall be one Christ, loving Himself.” Here, it is theological Charity that effects union.

One word, with its various derivatives, which serves St. Augustine’s purposes to express the unity of Charity is “concord” (concordia), which literally means “a union of hearts,” or “hearts together.” The words concordia (noun), and concordare (verb) abound in St. Augustine’s writings. For instance, the passage from the Contra Academicos we cited earlier, the one where he tells Alypius that “I find my most intimate friend agreeing with me... also on religion itself,” reads thus in the Latin: “verum etiam de ipsa religione concordat.” “To agree” is one of the meanings of concordare, which can also mean, “to be united, to be of one mind, and to harmonize.”

This concord, this union of hearts and minds, is rooted in Faith and Charity. It brings us toward each other and toward God, who is the final object of the Christian’s love. Better, we could say that it brings us together toward God: “I will always hold as more truly my friends those who share more intimately the object of my love with me.” Soliloquies, I, 22. Elsewhere, Augustine quotes Cicero to show the intimacy of this concord: “What is a friend but a partner in love, to whom you conjoin and attach your soul, with whom you unite and desire to become one, to whom you commit yourself as to a second self....” De Officiis III, 133.

In his polemical writings, especially against Donatists, Augustine accuses heretics and schismatics of attacking the unity of the Church. Schismatics, in particular, sin against “Catholic peace.” Augustine expresses the classical distinction between heresy as a sin against faith and schism as a sin against charity: “By false doctrines concerning God heretics wound faith, by iniquitous dissensions schismatics deviate from fraternal charity, although they believe what we believe.” De fide et symbolo, ix.

Monastic Life

If the concord of Church unity was something Augustine knew to be necessary for salvation, so too, is the concord of monastic life helpful to Christian perfection. The idea of spiritual friendship makes its way into his Rule for Monks, in which he commands his followers to “dwell together in unity in the house and be of one mind and one heart in God.” This expression reflects Acts 4:32: “And the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul.” It fits in with Augustine’s conception of religious life as living the intense unity of the Church of Pentecost as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Monastic
life was conceived as a supernatural friendship where brothers living together in mutual understanding and help would lift each other to God.

This desire for friends living in common who would assist each other in striving for union with God was something Augustine had experienced even before his Baptism. The country estate where he prepared to enter the Church was his first effort at this. Cassiciacum would be the basis for his famous rule for religious. Activities there consisted of philosophical discussions outside under the trees... time also for reading Virgil, common study of Scripture, and chanting of the psalms.

Friendship as Apostolic Outreach

If friendship is rooted in Christian unity, it makes sense that it helps to expand that unity by way of apostolic activity. When it extends itself to non-Catholics, friendship can also be missionary. The Latin axiom “Bonum est diffusivum sui” comes to mind: “Goodness is diffusive of itself.” The supernatural goods of the three theological virtues, beginning with Faith, are meant to be contagious. While Augustine did not consider that there could be a true friendship between those who did not agree on divine things, still, the offer of friendship, the invitation to a perfect union of hearts, could be a cause for conversion: “He truly loves a friend who loves God in the friend, either because God is actually present in the friend or in order that God may be so present. This is true love. If we love another for another reason, we hate him more than we love him.” Sermon 336. Teaching friends to love God in one another is motivated by a creative love; like Christ’s own love, it treats people not so much as they are, or for what they are, but as they may become, leading them to the goal where God is all in all. He is the end, as he is the beginning of all true friendship.

The term “creative love,” is perhaps exaggerated; “efficacious” may be more exact, but it is conceptually rich in its expression of what Augustine had in mind. God’s love makes us lovable; without it, we are unlovable. That is, by loving us and sending the Spirit of Love to abide in our souls, God beautifies the soul and makes it pleasing to him. So, too, love of benevolence extended by one in love with God to an unbeliever, has a certain efficacy to lead the unbeliever to conversion. By being a true friend of another, a committed Catholic is ever occasioning conversion of his friend.

Augustine expresses “creative love” as loving one’s neighbor “in the right way”: This means “that we act towards him in such a way that he comes to love God with all his heart, soul, and mind.” Christian Doctrine, 1.22.21.

Augustine’s Own Example

St. Augustine answered the obvious question — how to do this? — by the way he carried out his duties: imparting the Faith through preaching and giving instructions, and by personal letters, chance meetings, and the numerous sacrifices he made for people, helping them in their ordinary daily needs. Many of his books were written at the request of friends and he sent them letters to strengthen their faith. He wrote also to enemies of the Faith, showing sympathy, charm, and ardent charity without prejudice to his objective
assessment of the causes and probably consequences of their errors. His knowledge of
dogmatic truths kindled his zeal to befriend and convert: “A man must be a friend of truth
before he can be a friend to any human being.” Letter 155, 1.1.
At the beginning of his episcopate, he preached a sermon to the people of Hippo
bemoaning the treachery of the Donatist schismatics in whose midst they had to live.
Note his ardent love for those astray: “Pray for us, pray for us who live in so precarious a
state, as it were between the teeth of furious wolves. These wandering sheep, obstinate
sheep, are offended because we run after them, as if their wandering made them cease to
be ours. —Why do you call after us? they ask; why do you pursue us? —But the very
reason of our cries and our anguish is that they are running to their ruin. —If I am lost, if
I die, what is it to you? what do you want with me? —What I want is to call you back
from your wandering; what I desire is to snatch you from death. —But what if I want to
wander what if I want to be lost? —You want to wander? You want to be lost? How
much more earnestly do I wish it not! Yea, I dare to say it, I am impotent; for I hear
the Apostle saying: ‘Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season.’ In season,
when they are willing; out of season, when they are unwilling. Yes then, I am
importunate: You want to perish, I will it not. And He wills it not, who threatened the
shepherds saying: ‘Those who were driven away you have not brought back again,
neither have you sought those who were lost.’ Ezekiel 34:1-16. Am I to fear you more
than Him? I fear you not; the tribunal of Donatus cannot take the place of Christ’s
judgment seat, before which we must all appear. Whether you will it or not, I shall call
back the wandering sheep, I shall seek the lost sheep. The thorns may tear me; but
however narrow the opening may be, it shall not prevent my pursuit; I will beat every
bush, as long as the Lord gives me strength; only thus can I can get to you wherever you
are striving to perish.” Sermon 46, 14.
Augustine’s work was done, not in quiet leisure and retirement, but in the midst of
absorbing episcopal occupations. There is no fruitfulness on earth without sufferings and
trials, known sometimes to men, sometimes to God alone. When the writings of the saints
awaken in us pious thoughts and generous resolutions, we must admire with gratitude the
price they paid for the good they helped to produce in souls. Before Augustine arrived in
Hippo, the Donatists were such a majority of the population that they could even forbid
anyone to sell food to Catholics. When Augustine died, things were different, but the
pastor who had made it his first duty to save, even in spite of themselves, the souls of
those around him, had to spend days and nights in this great work, and more than ran the
risk of
martyrdom. The leaders of the schismatics, fearing the force of his reasoning even more
than his eloquence, refused all intercourse with him; they declared that to put Augustine
to death would be praiseworthy and would merit for the assassin the remission of his sins.
Bishop Augustine would meet privately with Donatist laymen who came to him,
asking them to put down in writing the arguments of their bishops. Then he would
exhaust himself in refuting them. Donatist bishops would receive his written refutations
along with friendly invitations to debate (which they generally refused). In this way, he
won the confidence of Donatist lay people, and their bishops slowly lost control.
Other heretics whose conversion he sought were Manicheans, a sect Augustine
had identified himself with as a youth. St. Possidius, his friend, fellow bishop, and first
biographer, tells of a Manichean named Felix whom Augustine debated. At the end of the debate, Felix was convinced and became a Catholic.

Augustine was not interested in hammering heretics, but in winning them with gentle persuasion. His argumentative works against Manicheanism bring out the magnanimous soul of a man who well understood the psychology of sin: “My desire is to help you correct yourself, not by contention, strife, and persecution, but by kindly consolation, by friendly exhortation, by quiet discussion; as it is written, ‘The servant of the Lord must be gentle toward all men, apt in teaching, patient; instructing in meekness those who oppose him’ [2 Timothy 2: 24-25]. My intention is to play that part in the work; it belongs to God to give what is good to those who desire it and ask for it. Let those rage against you who are unfamiliar with what labor the truth is to be found, with what difficulty error is to be avoided. Let those rage against you who know not how hard it is to overcome the cares of the flesh by the serenity of a pious disposition. Let those rage against you who know not the difficulty of curing the eye of the inner man that he may gaze upon his Sun, — not the sun you worship, that shines with the brilliance of a heavenly body in the eyes of men and beasts, — but the sun of which the Prophet writes: ‘The Sun of righteousness has arisen upon me;’ and of which it is said in the Gospel: ‘He was the true Light the enlightens every man who comes into the world.’ Let those rage against you who have never been led astray in the same way you are.” Against the Fundamental Epistle of Manichaeus.

Against the Fundamental Epistle of Manichaeus.

Showing sympathy and admitting his own early attraction to their errors, he destroys one after another the fables to which they adhered. Augustine wrote ahead of time the successful recipe famously spoken by his Counter-Reformation fellow bishop, St. Francis de Sales: “You can catch more flies with a spoonful of honey than with a barrel of vinegar.”

These letters, sermons, and debates are brought up to sample various expressions of his zealous practice of charity. It found other outlets as well, more accommodated to the ordinary practice of apostolate. In his every day life, even as a bishop, he spread the fragrance of sanctity by extending friendship. St. Possidius gives us a picture of Augustine's social graces: “He practiced hospitality at all times. Even at table he found more delight in reading and conversation than in eating and drinking. To discourage a common affliction of social intercourse he had these words inscribed on the table: ‘Let those who like to slander the lives of the absent know that their own are not welcome to this table.’ In this way he asked his guests to abstain from harmful gossip. On one occasion, when some fellow bishops, close friends of his, had forgotten the inscription and disobeyed its warning, he rebuked them sternly, telling them either to observe those lines or he would get up from the table and retire to his room. Several of us were there to witness this.” Possidius of Calama, The Life of Saint Augustine.

Edifying conversation, hospitality, and frank rebukes as needed: the young man who was so in love with friendship never lost that love. Even as an old man he still needed friendship. In the last year of his life, he tells a young man named Darius: “Receive, then, my son... the books of my Confessions you asked for; in them behold me and praise me not beyond what I am; believe what I say of myself, not what others say... When you find me in those pages, pray for me that I may avoid defection and reach perfection; pray, my son, pray. I feel deeply what I am saying... I hope to have letters
from you wherever you are, and you shall have them from me as long as I am able.” Letter 231. Evidently the elder Augustine felt more than ever the need for friends; if he were to be admitted to heaven it would be because of their prayers.

**Friendship’s Demands: Frankness**

There is a frankness that friendship demands, a frankness Catholics can and must use for the edification and conversion of their friends. Recall that even for the classical pagans, friends must always be truthful with one another, for flattery and pretense destroy friendship. One must correct a friend when necessary; if one permits another to continue in wrong-doing, he is not a friend.

If Cicero would demand this, surely a Christian can expect even more. For Augustine, someone worthy of the name friend must be able to sacrifice the pleasure of being agreeable for the good of a friend’s soul. This is not easy, nor is it done without wounding both the friend who offers correction and the one who accepts it. It is a sacrifice both make out of love for God who is Truth. Our Model for this ‘love that chastises’ is God Himself. Augustine gives an example of chastising love, in an epistle to Vincentius: “Who could love us more than God does? Yet He continually teaches us sweetly, as well as frightening us for our good... Do you think then that no force should be used to free a man from destructive error when you see, by the most convincing examples, that God Himself does it — and no one loves us to better advantage than He does.” Epistle 93, 4-5.

For his part, the recipient of such a rebuke ought to know that “not everyone who spares is a friend, nor is everyone who strikes an enemy.” Epistle 93. The friend should be grateful for the correction, as Alypius was when his (yet unconverted) teacher unintentionally rebuked him in class. Alypius had come late one day while Augustine was lecturing. In an aside he impugned the savagery of gladiatorial games. The teacher did not have Alypius in mind, but he was addicted to that vice, and so “he took it to himself, and thought I would not have spoken that way but for his sake. And what any other man would have made a ground of offence against me, this worthy young man took as a reason for being offended at himself, and for loving me more fervently.” *Confessions* V, 7.

Other rebukes were not so happy in their outcome. Count Boniface, an Imperial official whose promiscuity and defection from the faith led him to betray his country with tragic results, eventually recovered his sense of duty. But when North Africa fell to the Arian Vandals Augustine wrote Boniface a stirring and touching letter to arouse him to repentance. When a wayward friend proves incorrigible or perfidious, a simple rebuke is not sufficient; the friendship must be terminated. This applies to moral infractions of larger moment, as well as rejection of the true Faith: Because he knew no half measures, he found it inconceivable to continue a friendship with someone who was not generous with God. His sensitivity as a friend made such matters difficult, so much so that he applied to them Our Lord’s mandate to cut off our own bodily members if they scandalize us: “The most significant notion suggested to me is that of a most beloved friend, for this is something we can assuredly call a member that we love very much.” *De sermone Domini in monte*, XIII, 38.
Friendship’s Demands: Prayer

It stands to reason that if God alone can grant the grace of a true friendship, then prayer will be a necessary element of it; for whatever is a proper subject of grace is also a proper subject of prayer. Augustine realized this and frequently asked for the prayers of his friends, promising them his own as well. We already read from his tender letter to the young Darius. He wrote to the virgin, Proba, in 412: “Surely, you will also remember to pray attentively for me, for I do not wish you, out of regard for the position I occupy, to deprive me of a help which I recognize as necessary.” Letter 130, 31.

About 423, he promised to pray for a convent of nuns in Hippo, who needed his help: “Rather than show my face among you I chose to pour out my heart to God for you and to plead the cause of your great peril, not in words before you, but in tears before God, that He may not turn to sorrow the joy I am wont to feel on your account.” Letter 211, 2. His own sister had previously been the superior of this convent; problems began upon her death, when some of the nuns refused to accept the new superior.

Tying it all Together

A concluding consideration concerns the longevity of true Christian friendships. A common opinion of theologians is that they endure into eternity, for one of the “secondary” or “accidental” benefits of the beatitude of the elect is enjoyment of each other in the Beatific Vision where the concord of the Mystical Body will make us “one heart” with the Sacred Heart of Jesus: “And there will be one Christ loving Himself.” Homily 10 on the First Epistle of John.

Other considerations: the evangelical or apostolic utility of the bond of friendship; its power to sanctify the individual who extends it. All of us have “friends” of some degree, even if not fully expressive of the content of friendship. We can make these bonds advantageous for others as well as ourselves. We may think we lack the apostolic advantages of the many saints (such as St. Thomas More) who are well known for their many true friendships, but we also lack (besides their heroic sanctity) numerous disadvantages. In order to derive holiness from genuine friendships, a person has to be consciously striving for an ever deeper interior life through prayer, reading, and the sacraments, as well as the practice of the human and theological virtues. As Augustine said, “a man must be a friend of truth before he can be a friend to any human being.” Letter 15, 1.1.

The interior life, a good in itself (bonum honestum), is also a useful good (bonum utile) in apostolic activities. Apart from a life of virtue, as Cicero recognized even before Augustine, friendships are likely to go astray. In St. Augustine’s words, “the bond of human friendship has a sweetness of its own, binding many souls together as one. But…sin is committed, [if] we have an inordinate preference for those goods of a lower order and neglect the better and higher good.” Conf., II, 5. For friendship inevitably unites us to our friends “and of many [makes] us one,” Conf., IV, 13-14. Of close friends it can be said that they are “two in body but one in mind,” Letter 28, 1. And so friends must be chosen wisely, and the relationship terminated when they become a danger, without ever ceasing to pray for and exhort former friends, as Augustine did for Julian and Boniface.
If friendships are to become holy and advantageous for all, grace must necessarily be present: “there is no true friendship unless You bind them together and they stay close to You by the love that is ‘shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us.’ ” *Conf*, IV, 4.

**Friends Forever**

In this life, friendships are uncertain. Augustine’s own sad experience with Julian and others taught him that hidden treacheries, instability, and other vices always threaten friendships and make us, frail creatures as we are, ever vulnerable: “How confused it all is! One who seems to be an enemy turns out to be a friend and those we thought our good friends in fact can become our worst enemies.” Sermon 49.

Only heaven, with its uninterrupted, ecstatic union with our final end can give men the constancy they need to be “friends forever”: “Blessed is he who loves his friend in You... for he alone loses no one dear to him, to whom all are dear in Him who cannot be lost.” Sermon 49.

* This selection is based upon a paper by Bro. André Marie, which in turn incorporates ideas from a book, *Friends and Friendship for Saint Augustine* by Sr. Marie Aquinas.
Sir Thomas More, 1478-1535

The English statesman, Sir Thomas More, canonized as Saint Thomas More (1935), was born the son of a lawyer who later became a judge. He was educated at St. Anthony's School and was appointed a page in the home of Archbishop (later Cardinal) Morton, who sent him to Canterbury Hall, Oxford, in the early 1490s. At Oxford, More studied under Colet and Linacre. More left Oxford without a degree to study at new Inn and Lincoln's Inn in London. His lectures dealt not only with law but also with St. Augustine's City of God. He spent three years as a reader in Furnival's Inn and spent the next four years in the Charterhouse in "devotion and prayer." He early composed various English poems and Latin epigrams that were not printed for several years. However, a Latin translation of four Greek dialogues of Lucian appeared in 1506, and an English translation of the Latin life of his model, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, in 1510.

Increasingly involved in public affairs, More became a member of Parliament in 1504, beginning the career that led to the well-known events of his chancellorship and his martyrdom. Introduced to Henry VIII through Wolsey, More became master of requests (1514), treasurer of the exchequer (1521), and chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1525). He was speaker of the House of Commons, and was sent on missions to Francis I and Charles V. On the fall of Wolsey in 1529, More, against his own strongest inclinations, was appointed lord chancellor. In the discharge of his office he displayed virtue and simplicity. He witnessed with displeasure the successive steps that led Henry to the final schism with Rome. In 1532 he resigned the chancellorship.

In 1534 Henry was declared head of the English Church and More's refusal to recognize any other head of the church then the pope led to his sentence for high treason after a harsh imprisonment in the Tower for more than a year. He was beheaded July 7, 1535.

More was twice married. His daughter Margaret, the wife of his biographer William Roper (Life of Sir Thomas More), was distinguished for her high character, accomplishments, and pious devotion to her father. With his Utopia (1516, English trans. 1556. A 1518 Latin text is available), More takes his place with the most eminent humanists of the Renaissance. See also his Tower Works and voluminous Letters.

* * * * *

What follows is a description of Thomas More rendered by his close friend, Desiderius Erasmus in 1519.

You ask me to paint you a full-length portrait of More as in a picture. Would that I could do it as perfectly as you eagerly desire it. At least I will try to give a sketch of the man, as well as from my long familiarity with him I have either observed or can now recall. To begin, then, with what is least known to you, in stature he is not tall, though
not remarkably short. His limbs are formed with such perfect symmetry as to leave nothing to be desired. His complexion is white, his face fair rather than pale, and though by no means ruddy, a faint flush of pink appears beneath the whiteness of his skin. His hair is dark brown, or brownish black. The eyes are grayish. The eyes are grayish blue, with some spots, a kind which betokens singular talent, and among the English is considered attractive, whereas Germans generally prefer black. It is said that none are so free from vice.

His countenance is in harmony with his character, being always expressive of an amiable joyousness, and even an incipient laughter, and, to speak candidly, it is better framed for gladness than for gravity and dignity, though without any approach to folly or buffoonery. The right shoulder is a little higher than the left, especially when he walks. This is not a defect of birth, but the result of habit, such as we often contract. In the rest of his person there is nothing to offend. His hands are the least refined part of his body.

He was from his boyhood always most careless about whatever concerned his body. His youthful beauty may be guessed from what still remains, though I knew him when he was not more than three-and-twenty. Even now he is not much over forty. He has good health, though not robust; able to endure all honourable toil, and subject to very few diseases. He seems to promise a long life, as his father still survives in a wonderfully green old age.

I never saw anyone so indifferent about food. Until he was a young man he delighted in drinking water, but that was natural to him (id illi patrium fuit). Yet not to seem singular or morose, he would hide his temperance from his guests by drinking out of a pewter vessel beer almost as light as water, or often pure water. It is the custom in England to pledge each other in drinking wine. In doing so he will merely touch it with his lips, not to seem to dislike it, or to fall in with the custom. He likes to eat corned beef and coarse bread much leavened, rather than what most people count delicacies. Otherwise he has no aversion to what gives harmless pleasure to the body. He prefers milk diet and fruits, and is especially fond of eggs.

His voice is neither loud nor very weak, but penetrating; not resounding or soft, but that of a clear speaker. Though he delights in every kind of music he has no vocal talents. He speaks with great clearness and perfect articulation, without rapidity or hesitation. He likes a simple dress, using neither silk nor purple nor gold chain, except when it may not be omitted. It is wonderful how negligent he is as regards all the ceremonial forms in which most men make politeness to consist. He does not require them from others, nor is he anxious to use them himself, at interviews or banquets, though he is not unacquainted with them when necessary. But he thinks it unmanly to spend much time in such trifles. Formerly he was most averse to the frequention of the court, for he has a great hatred of constraint (tyrannis) and loves equality. Not without much trouble he was drawn into the court of Henry VIII., though nothing more gentle and modest than that prince can be desired. By nature More is chary of his liberty and ease, yet, though he enjoys ease, no one is more alert or patient when duty requires it.

He seems born and framed for friendship, and is a most faithful and enduring friend. He is easy of access to all; but if he chances to get familiar with one whose vices admit no correction, he manages to loosen and let go the intimacy rather than to break it off suddenly. When he finds any sincere and according to his heart, he so delights in their society and conversation as to place in it the principal charm of life. He abhors games of tennis, dice, cards, and the like, by which most gentlemen kill time. Though he is rather too negligent of his own interests, no one is more diligent in those of his friends. In a word, if you want a perfect model of friendship, you will find it in no one better than in More. In society he is so polite, so sweet-mannered, that no one is of so melancholy a disposition as not to be cheered by him, and there is no misfortune that he does not alleviate. Since his boyhood he has so delighted in merriment, that it seems to be part of his nature; yet he does not carry it to buffoonery, nor did he ever like biting pleasentries. When a youth he both wrote and acted some small comedies. If a retort is made against himself, even
without ground, he likes it from the pleasure he finds in witty repartees. Hence he amused himself with composing epigrams when a young man, and enjoyed Lucian above all writers. Indeed, it was he who pushed me to write the "Praise of Folly," that is to say, he made a camel frisk.

In human affairs there is nothing from which he does not extract enjoyment, even from things that are most serious. If he converses with the learned and judicious, he delights in their talent; if with the ignorant and foolish, he enjoys their stupidity. He is not even offended by professional jesters. With a wonderful dexterity he accommodates himself to every disposition. As a rule, in talking with women, even with his own wife, he is full of jokes and banter.

No one is less led by the opinions of the crowd, yet no one departs less from common sense. One of his great delights is to consider the forms, the habits, and the instincts of different kinds of animals. There is hardly a species of bird that he does not keep in his house, and rare animals such as monkeys, foxes, ferrets, weasels and the like. If he meets with anything foreign, or in any way remarkable, he eagerly buys it, so that his house is full of such things, and at every turn they attract the eye of visitors, and his own pleasure is renewed whenever he sees others pleased.

[Source: T. E. Bridgett, *Life and Writings of Blessed Thomas More* (1913).]

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Testimonials to Thomas More's Greatness

1. "Friendship he seems born and designed for; no one is more open-hearted in making friends or more tenacious in keeping them, nor has he any fear of that plethora of friendships against which Hesiod warns us.... Nobody is less swayed by public opinion, and yet nobody is closer to the feelings of ordinary men."

2. "More is a man of an angel's wit and singular learning. He is a man of many excellent virtues; I know not his fellow. For where is the man (in whom is so many goodly virtues) of that gentleness, lowliness, and affability, and as time requires, a man of marvelous mirth and pastimes and sometime of steadfast gravity – a man for all seasons."
   - Robert Whittington, 1520
3. Thomas More: "the best friend the poor ever had"... who embodied a "marriage of wit and wisdom."

_Book of Sir Thomas More_, by Shakespeare et al, 1590

4. Thomas More: "a man of the most tender and delicate conscience that the world saw since Augustine."


5. "He's a learned man. May he . . . do justice

For truth's sake and his conscience."

- Shakespeare's _Henry VIII_, 1613, Act 3, Scene 2.

6. "He was the person of the greatest virtue these islands ever produced."


7. "Blessed Thomas More is more important at this moment than at any moment since his death, even perhaps the great moment of his dying; but he is not quite so important as he will be in about a hundred years' time."

G. K. Chesterton, 1929, _The Fame of Blessed Thomas More_.

8. Thomas More: "a strong and courageous spirit...[who] knew how to despise resolutely the flattery of human respect."

_Canonization_, 1935.

9. "He lived his intense public life with a simple humility marked by good humor, even at the moment of his execution. This was the height to which he was led by his passion for the truth. What enlightened his conscience was the sense that
man cannot be sundered from God, nor politics from morality.... And it was
in defense of the rights of conscience that his example shone brightly."

- John Paul II’s Proclamation of Thomas More as Patron of Statesmen,