The topic: The Unwritten Letters of Augustine of Hippo

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"I regard this letter as something more than a personal greeting from me to you...," wrote Augustine's concubine in Jostein Gaarder's "Vita brevis".[1] "it is also a letter to the Bishop of Hippo ... what I write will perhaps be equally a letter to the whole Christian church, for today you are a man of great influence." Modern scholarship on St. Augustine confirms what the fictional character from the *Confessiones* (6,15) suggests. Christian Tornau has convincingly shown that virtually all of Augustine's letters were "public letters", which forced the author to find a balance between the requirements of the individual recipient and those of the general public.[2] Ambrose writes that a letter is a *sermo cum absentibus*, a dialogue with those who are absent.[3] Pauline Allen and Mary Cunningham[4] have emphasised that we usually only know *half* of this dialogue, and letters from laypersons and ordinary members of the congregation are missing. But the subject of this paper is neither the methodological problem of the one-sided unbalanced tradition of letter-writing that only the letters received have been handed down, nor the exclusion of social groups or the difficulties in delivering the letters. So what, in fact, were Augustine's "unwritten letters"?

They are the secret or private letters which are, unusually, not intended for a broad public. The focus here is on what can be read either between the lines or not at all. Augustine wrote to Aurelius, the Primate of Africa:

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[1] J. Gaarder, *Vita brevis*, engl. translation Anne Born, London 1997, 29.

[2] Ch. Tornau, *Zwischen Rhetorik und Philosophie: Augustine Argumentationstechnik in De civitate Dei und ihr bildungsgeschichtlicher Hintergrund*, Berlin 2006, 35.

[3] Ambr. *Ep.* 7,48,1 (CSEL 82/2, 48): *Epistularum genus propterea repertum, ut quidam nobis cum absentibus sermo sit, in dubium non venit*. See M. Zelzer, 'Die Briefliteratur. Kommunikation durch Briefe: Ein Gespräch mit Abwesenden', in: L.J. Engels & H. Hofmann (eds.), *Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft 4, Spätantike*, Wiesbaden 1997, 321 f.

[4] See the studies in: M. Cunningham – P. Allen (eds.), *Preacher and Audience. Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics*, Leiden 1998, and P. Allen, 'It's in the Post: Techniques and Difficulties of Letter-Writing in Antiquity with regard to the Letters of Augustine of Hippo', Trendall Lecture 2005, in: *Proceedings of the Australian Academy of the Humanities*, Canberra 2006, 111-129.

"There are many regrettable things in my life and my surroundings which I do not wish to entrust to you in a letter. On the contrary: let there be no mediator between your heart and mine apart from my mouth and your ears."[5] The reason for this was simple: in the world of classical antiquity, there was neither copyright nor the right to confidentiality of correspondence. Augustine therefore could expect every letter he sent to be published. As a result, information that was personally and politically explosive was transmitted by word of mouth or on a separate enclosed sheet.[6] Oral transmission was always needed when there was an accident and a messenger lost his customer's letter, or when the sender did not want to entrust him with a document in writing, whether for convenience, to save time or for reasons of security. The commentaries of the messengers explained what the letter did not reveal. Not least, this was also the intention of the person who sent the letters and commissioned the messengers, and it was in his interest. The personal role of the messenger comprised more than merely transmitting letters. It is best shown by Augustine's answer to a woman called Ecdicia, who had dressed in widow's clothes to show her asceticism although her husband was still alive. After Augustine had read Ecdicia's letter, he said that he had questioned the messenger "on the points of the letter that had remained open" (*quae interroganda restabant*).[7] Was this a reference to the outward appearance of her dress or to her way of life and her attitude to marriage?

B. The role of the messenger

In the ancient world, the man who carried a letter was as important as the letter. The bearer of news, particularly the somewhat neglected concise salutations, was more than a mere messenger.

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[5] Aug. *Ep.* 22,2,9 (CSEL 34/1, 61), c. 392: *Multa sunt, quae de nostra vita et conversatione deflerem, quae nollem per litteras ad te venire, sed inter cor meum et cor tuum nulla essent ministeria praeter os meum et aures tuas.* The translation from Augustine is by the author.

[6] M. Zelzer, 'Die Briefliteratur', 331.

[7] Aug. *Ep.* 262,1 (CSEL 57, 621): *Lectis litteris reverentiae tuae et earum perlatore interrogato, quae interroganda restabant, vehementer dolui …*

He might be a close friend or trusted bearer of important personal or political news.[8] Among the key qualifications of a messenger, therefore, Augustine counted reliability in carrying out the errand (*fides agendi*), eagerness to obey (*alacritas oboediendi*) and practical experience of travelling (*exercitatio peregrinandi*):[9] the presbyter Orosius was a model of this species. When the letter bearer arrived, depending on the contents of the letter he either handed it to the addressee or read it out aloud, or it was read out aloud by another person.

But a letter from Augustine often contained no more than a *salutatio;*[10] here, the letter bearer's task was all the more important. In this case, after the salutation, Augustine only gave a brief recommendation for the messenger, in order that the messenger could recite the message himself and in addition could answer the addressee's questions.[11] In this way, the messenger became a mouthpiece (*os tuum*), a letter, better than a written message (*veriorem litteris epistolam*).[12] Augustine described another messenger as the "most reliable of all his letter bearers" (*litterarum fidissimum perlatorem omnium nostrum*), although he did not actually carry a letter.[13] In exceptional cases, messages had to be transmitted orally to overcome language barriers, for example when Augustine's letters were delivered to Bishop John of Jerusalem, who spoke Greek, and the Bishop had to receive the letter through the words of an interpreter.[14]

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[8] P. Brown, *Augustine von Hippo, a biography*, expanded new edition (London 1967), German translation by J. Bernard and W. Kumpmann, Munich 2000, 173.

[9] Aug. *Ep.* 166,1,2 (on Paulus Orosius): *Nec mihi facile occurrebat idoneus et fide agenda et alacritate oboediendi et exercitatione peregrinandi.*

[10] Typical salutations are Aug. *Ep.* 42 (CSEL 34/2, 84) and Ep. 45 (pp. 122 f.), which are less than half a page long in the CSEL; cf. the wording "*ecce igitur salutamus vos"* (*Ep.* 45,1: p. 122).

[11] Aug. *Ep.* 45,2 (note 34).

[12] Paul. Nol. *carm.* 24,9 (CSEL 30, 206).

[13] Aug. *Ep.* 186,1 (CSEL 57, 45), cf. note 39: *... litterarum fidissimum perlatorem omnium nostrum ..., etiamsi non scriberemus ...*

[14] Aug. *Ep.* 179,5 (CSEL 44, 693): *Quid pluribus agam apud sanctitatem vestram, quando quidem me onerosum sentio, maxime quia per interpretem audis litteras meas?*

Not merely information, but even emotions can be transmitted in this way, even if two correspondents such as Augustine and Paulinus of Nola never met in person. The imagined dialogue between writer and reader suggests the "intimate space of letters",[15] an apparent closeness to the distant person. The sense of direct contact is emphasised by the act of personal delivery. Here, the identity and the role of the person who delivered the letter played a crucial part: for this reason, Augustine called two messengers "a second letter" from Paulinus "with voice and hearing", because they conveyed to him part of Paulinus' personality.[16]

In classical antiquity, the recipient saw the messenger as a representative of his correspondent,[17] as can be seen from the same letter from Augustine to Paulinus: "Whence or when or how could it ever be possible for you or could we ever wish you to tell us so much in writing as we heard from your mouth (**that is, the mouths** of the messenger**s**)? In addition, as no paper can show, the joy of the narrators was also shown in their faces and their eyes ... But this letter from you, that is, the soul of the brothers, when we read it in dialogue with them, was clearly all the more felicitous, the more it spoke about you yourself."[18] Augustine, the external reader, had the impression that – as in the case of a snapshot – he could take a quick look at the private world of the writer and his feelings. His reaction expresses the importance of the intimacy of the messengers with the writer of the letter: they became representatives of the absent writer, because their conduct and their manner contributed to the recipient's impression of Paulinus, whom he did not know.

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[15] R. Morello and A.D. Morrison (eds.), *Ancient Letters. Classical and Late Antique Epistolography*, Oxford 2007, IV: 'Editor's Preface'.

[16] Aug. *Ep.* 31,2 (CSEL 34/2, 2): *Sanctos fratres Romanum et Agilem, aliam epistulam vestram audientem voces atque reddentem et suavissimum partem vestrae praesentiae …*

[17] See C. Conybeare, *Paulinus Noster. Self and Symbols in the Letters of Paulinus of Nola*, Oxford 2000, 39 f.

[18] Aug. *Ep.* 31,2 (CSEL 34/2, 2), esp. l. 17-20: *… Hanc autem epistulam vestram, fraternam scilicet animam, sic in eorum conloquio legebamus, ut tanto beatior appareret nobis, quanto uberius conscripta esset ex vobis.*

Not only information could be transmitted by messengers, and not only sympathy or antipathy could be passed on to the recipient. Christians such as Augustine were the heirs of a great culture of letter-writing, whose pagan models, Cicero and Pliny, used letters as a powerful instrument to establish social and political networks in the Mediterranean world. Like them, Augustine did not hesitate to exercise influence, and in doing so he used the traditional means of his social class. One of these was letters of reference or recommendation – a novelty for an ascetic, but something that went without saying for a member of the ruling elites. Augustine deliberately used brief formulae of salutations or notes which referred only tersely or not at all to their occasion in delicate situations where personal and religious crises called for discretion, or in political negotiations whose aim was not intended to be public; he did this because they could not then fall into the wrong hands or be misinterpreted. In these interventions, his position as a bishop merges with that of the ascetic, whose assistance, according to Peter Brown[19] enjoys a kind of supernatural authority.

C. Discretion and cooperation

But neither Augustine's reputation as a patron nor the conduct and identity of the person recommended could in themselves achieve the desired effect. *Litterae commendaticiae* created a complex social framework between three persons: the object, the writer and the recipient of the recommendation, and it was the interaction of these that decided on success.[20] Occasionally, the facts appear agonisingly vague, because Augustine mentioned neither the occasion of the recommendation nor the *curriculum vitae* of the person recommended, as for example in the case of a traumatised boy called Vetustinus. In autumn 396, Augustine sent him with Romanianus on a voyage to Nola because he could hope for a miracle at the tomb of St. Felix.

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[19] 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man', *JRS* 61 (1971) 80-101.

[20] See G.W. Bowersock's contribution to the discussion on S. Roda, 'Polifunzionalità della Lettera Commendaticia', in: F. Paschoud (ed.), *Colloque Genevois sur* Symmaque, Paris 1986, 205 f.

In addition to the early dialogues[21] Romanianus was also carrying a letter from Augustine and several *commendationes*, including a reference for his protégé. This showed that Vetustinus, whose misfortune even aroused pity in the "godless", had resolved to enter the clergy. But Vetustinus was to tell his host the reason for his journey himself[22] – Augustine was discreet and did not mention this. The newly consecrated Bishop of Hippo had sent him to Paulinus so that he could reconsider his decision there, when he had recovered from the shock and had grown up.[23] In another case, the beneficiary remained completely in the background, as in the case of the nameless and faceless protégé of Paulinus; in contrast, the *sanctae orationes* of his patron were accorded all the more authority. Augustine only wrote that he consented to Paulinus' "merciful plan", which God had inspired in him. He explained the reasons for his positive decision by saying that "that greatly loved man had attained his goal not only through his good deeds, but also as a result of Paulinus' sacred pleas, and had been recommended".[24]

In the atmosphere of political crises which overshadowed Africa and led to endless conflicts on religious policy with Donatists, pagans and heretics at the beginning of the 5th century, Augustine became the "architect" of the victory over the Donatists.[25] The dispute was not always conducted in books, letters or heated debates as we know them from the Conference of Carthage in June 411.[26] Occasionally there was icy silence between two adversaries, and so communication was only possible through messengers. When

[21] Including the books "Against the Academics"; in each case see the introduction and commentary by Th. Fuhrer, *Augustin. Contra Academicos*, Books 2 and 3, Berlin – New York 1997 or K. Schlappbach, *Augustin. Contra Academicos vel De Academicis*, Book 1, Berlin – New York 2003. On the complete consignment of books see S. Mratschek, *Der Briefwechsel des Paulinus von Nola. Kommunikation und soziale Kontakte zwischen christlichen Intellektuellen*, Göttingen 2002, 478-89.

[22] Aug. *Ep.* 31,7 (CSEL 34/2, 6): *Vetustinum, impiis quoque miserabilem puerum, vestrae benignitati caritatique commendo. Causas calamitatis et peregrinationis eius audietis ex ipso. Nam et propositum eius, quo serviturum se esse pollicetur deo, tempus prolixius et aetas robustior et transactus timor certius indicabunt.*

[23] Aug. *Ep.* 31,7 (pp. 6 f.): *Nam et propositum eius, quo serviturum se esse pollicetur deo, tempus prolixius et aetas robustior et transactus timor certius indicabunt.*

[24] Aug. *Ep.* 149,1 (CSEL 44, 348): *Et adprobo misericordiae consilium, quod tibi dominus inspiravit mihique insinuare dignatus es. Ipse et hoc adiuvet, ipse prosperet, ut iam curam nostrum ex magna parte lenivit, quia pervectus et commendatus est carissimus homo non solum bonis operibus, sed etiam sanctis orationibus tuis.* On the dating, see S. Mratschek, *Der Briefwechsel des Paulinus von Nola*, 361, note 11.

[25] W.H.C. Frend, *The Donatist Church. A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa*, Oxford² 1971, 226.

[26] Brilliantly described by P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 330 ff. in the chapter "Unity Achieved".

When Augustine entrusted two laymen, Theodorus and Maximus, with a letter for Macrobius, who in summer 410 was his direct rival in the same city as the Donatist Bishop of Hippo, Macrobius at first even refused to have the letter read out to himself.[27] He then did not deign to send his adversary a reply in writing, but instead, after being intensively pressed by the messenger, allowed him to transmit his refusal by word of mouth.[28] How did Augustine react to this massive violation of the rules of correspondence in classical times, which had always been based on a reciprocal obligation?[29] He discredited his opponent's attitude, but not by putting this in writing himself. Instead, he included his messenger's report (*Ep.* 107) with all its details in his collected letters and made it public. It is possible that Macrobius did not act out of arrogance, but on the basis that he did not want any written documents to fall into his opponent's hands. However, Augustine simply recounted the facts and so suppressed this aspect.

D. Political crises and diplomatic activities before 412, a time, in which

Nola became a stopover to the imperial court and to the bishop of Rome in 397/8-408

In contrast, (but) the cooperation on religious policy between Augustine and Paulinus continued to prove its worth. In 398 the tomb of St. Felix in Nola was so famous that Augustine sent it not only his psychological problem cases, but also his legal ones, in order to leave it to St. Felix to establish the truth by way of a kind of "divine judgement".[30] Here, he referred to the *notissima sanctitas loci*, the "well-known holiness of the place of worship", "which was unequalled by any martyr's tomb in his African home country", and he even gave

[27] Aug. Ep. 107 (CSEL 34/2, 611): *Ad quem* (i.e. *episcopum Macrobium*) *cum litteras beatitudinis tuae perferremus, primo negavit se, ne eidem legerentur.* On his person cf. *PBCE de l'Afrique chrétienne*, ed. A. Mandouze, Paris 1982, Macrobius 2, pp. 662 f.

[28] Aug. *Ep.* 107 (CSEL 34/2, 611 f.): *Deinde aliquando ex nostra suggestione commotus easdem sibi voluit recitari, quibus relectis ait: "…" Quod necesse habuimus his litteris sanctitati tuae significare.*

[29] On the conventions of correspondence in late antiquity see Symm. *Ep.* 7,129 (ed. Seeck 213 f.), cf. J.F. Matthews, "The Letters of Symmachus", in: idem, *Political Life and Culture in the Late Roman Society*, London 1985, 81.

[30] Including young Vetustinus, Licentius and two monks who had quarrelled with each other, see S. Mratschek, *Der Briefwechsel des Paulinus von Nola*, 582-585.

Nola precedence over Milan.[31] What he failed to mention was the fact that for a decade (397/8-408), Nola also outshone Milan as a political centre, and for a short time Nola became the major stopover for the legations of the African bishops on their way to the imperial court or to the Bishop of Rome. The crucial reason for this was that especially since Alaric's incursions into Upper Italy,[32] there were better possibilities of communication with Paulinus in Campania than with the imperial court in Milan. And it is from this time that the great majority of Augustine's unwritten letters date. Paulinus never mentioned the concerns of the visitors, and Augustine only hinted at them in passing. But their stay in the Nola monastery takes on quite a different dimension if one is aware of the religious-policy context of the journeys.

The representatives of the Catholic bishops of Africa often travelled on secret missions. For many of them who visited Paulinus, even revealing their identity was a security risk. One of them who visited Paulinus in Nola had to breach the blockade of the Mediterranean, which Gildo had closed in autumn 397, in order to establish contact with Gildo's mortal enemy Mascezel and the bishops of Rome and Milan. The political situation had worsened when the *comes* Gildo stopped the deliveries of wheat, which were vital for Rome, allied himself with the Donatists after the Synod of Carthage and was declared a public enemy, while his brother Mascezel, threatened by Gildo, had to seek refuge in Italy.[33] There is not the slightest hint either of his name nor of the reason for his journey in the letter which the courier presented to Paulinus in Nola: "It will be more expedient," is Augustine's explanation "if he tells you himself what is being done in the matter, and you may also ask him about details that have

[31] Aug. *Ep.* 78,3 (CSEL 34/2, 335 f.): *Multis enim notissima est sanctitas loci, ubi beati Felicis Nolensis corpus conditum est, quo* (i.e. *Nolam*) *volui ut pergerent, quia inde nobis facilius fideliusque scribi potest, quicquid in eorum aliquo divinitus fuerit propalatum. Nam et novimus Mediolani apud memoriam sanctorum …*
[32] 18 Nov. 401 (Pollentia), summer 402 (Verona) and 403 (new recruitment by Stilicho).
[33] On Gildo as *hostis publicus* see CIL IX 4051 = ILS 795, AE 1926,124, cf. A. Demandt, *Die Spätantike*, Munich² 2007, 173 f. The Donatist Bishop Optatus of Timgad was a follower of Gildo, see P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 201.

aroused your interest."[34] So great were the danger of espionage and the fear of political intrigues. Paulinus was expected to give a recommendation (*commendatio*). For the bearer of the message, this was a guarantee, because he feared that his addressees, who were also unnamed, "might be hostile to his good cause, the *bona causa*".[35] The crisis which North Africa was undergoing at the time makes it likely that the messenger, on the instructions of Augustine and Alypius, was to contact the leading circles of the government and the Catholic church in Italy; Mascezel was increasingly falling under their influence. It was not by chance that the African bishops emphasised their personal attachment to the messenger, whom they gave a good reference in their home country.[36] The terse note ends in an implicit appeal to the recipient: if Augustine and Alypius expressed their thanks that they "could be glad of the safety of their brother in Christ, with the help of Paulinus",[37] this was a clear reference to the urgency of the commendation – and to the danger for their messenger.

How highly Augustine and Alypius rated the effect of their friend's letters on influential circles in Italy they showed once more in summer 417, when they indirectly called on Paulinus at the last minute to intervene against Pelagius and his followers, in order to prevent Pelagius from being officially rehabilitated. In a postscript, the two African bishops indicate what "good services" the letters of their brother Paulinus could render their cause once again.[38] In all religious policy disputes, the procedure was the same: again, the bishops sent a confidant (*fidissimum perlatorem*) to Nola.

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[34] Aug. *Ep.* 45,2 (CSEL 34/2, 122): *Quid in re agatur, comodius ipse* (sc. *perlator*) *narrabit, qui etiam ad singula, quae forte animum moverint, interrogari potest.*

[35] Aug. *Ep.* 45,2 (p. 122): *Rogat* (sc. *perlator*) *per nos sanctimonium vestrum, ut eum commendare dignemini, cum quibus ei negotium est et apud quos ne bona causa eius opprimatur, timet.*

[36] Aug. *Ep.* 45,2 (p. 122): *Carus nobis est* (sc. *perlator huius epistulae*), *cuius aestimationi in regionibus nostris possumus non temere bonum testimonium perhibere.*

[37] Aug. *Ep.* 45,2 (p. 123): *Nos gratissimum habemus et apud dominum deum nostrum sincerissimae vestrae benignitati gratias agimus, si per vestram operam de Christiani fratris securitate gaudeamus.*

[38] Aug. *Ep.* 186,39 (CSEL 57, 78): *Deinde, ut, si quid nostra disputatione deo adiuvante possemus, tua non fides sed fidei contra tales adminicularetur assertio, sicut nos quoque in hanc facultatem tuae germanitatis litteris adiuvamur.*

"Through him" Paulinus would be able to discover everything relating to Augustine's diocese "as through a living and thinking letter – *tamquam per viventem atque intellegentem epistulam*."[39] According to Augustine, it was a rare stroke of luck to find a messenger such as the presbyter Ianuarius: it is not surprising that, following the conventions of epistolary literature, he identified him with the letter itself! As with all important news, the messenger was recommended, Augustine signed as the sender and Alypius countersigned, in order to give the matter the necessary weight.[40] Although after 416 Augustine's opinions on the Pelagians spread to the furthest corners of the Roman Empire, to Rome, Alexandria, Bethlehem and Constantinople, on 21 September 417 Pope Zosimus confirmed his "*absoluta fides*"[41] in Pelagius. And Paulinus was diplomatic enough to wait until the problem solved itself as the result of a rescript of Emperor Honorius, which on 30 April 418 ordered Pelagius to be banished.[42] Augustine's friendship with him had not suffered from this reticence, as the continuity of their correspondence from 395 into the year 421 shows.[43]

Between 404 and 408, after Nola had become the leading ascetic centre in Italy and before Paulinus was ordained Bishop of Nola, there was a rapid increase in diplomatic activities. A letter written by Augustine in March 405 merely states that two of his fellow-bishops, Theasius and Evodius, visited Paulinus and his wife in Nola.[44]

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[39] Presbyter Ianuarius, cf. Aug. *Ep.* 186,1,1 (CSEL 57, 45): *Tandem aliquando providit nobis deus litterarum fidissimum perlatorem omnium nostrum merito carissimum fratrem Ianuarium, per quem etiamsi non scriberemus, omnia, quae circa nos sunt, posset sinceritas tua tamquam per viventem atque intellegentem epistulam noscere.*

[40] Cf. the superscriptio *Alypius et Augustine*.

[41] Zos. pap. *Ep.* 3 = *Avell.* 46 (JK 330), c. 2-3; 17 (CSEL 35, 103; 108).

[42] Fragments of the *epistula tractoria* in PL 20, 693-704 (JK 343), esp. *frg.* 2 (p. 694) and Aug. *Ep.* 190,23 (CSEL 57, 159), cf. on the condemnation of Pelagius J. Lössl, *Julian von Aeclanum. Studien zu seinem Leben, seinem Werk, seiner Lehre und seiner Überlieferung, VCS* 60, Leiden, Boston, Cologne 2001, 267-272. Between Aug. *Ep.* 149 and 186 on Pelagius no reply from Paulinus is extant – by chance or intentionally?

[43] On the duration of the correspondence see Mratschek, *Der Briefwechsel des Paulinus von Nola*, 272. Even on his deathbed, Paulinus permitted Pelagians who had been excluded from the church to take communion in his basilica, cf. Uran. *Ep. de obitu* 2 (PL 53, 860 f.). See P. Brown, 'The patrons of Pelagius: The Roman Aristocracy between East and West', in: idem, *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine*, London 1972, 212 and D.E. Trout, *Paulinus of Nola. Life, Letters, and Poems*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1999, 228-235 on the relations between Paulinus and Pelagius.

[44] Aug. *Ep.* 80 (CSEL 34/2, 347), see below.

He fails to mention the fact that they had been sent to negotiate at the court of Emperor Honorius on the instructions of the general Synod of Carthage of 16 June of the previous year. But in fact they were to give a *commonitorium* for the Emperor,[45] which informed him of attacks by the circumcellions and called for the statutes of Theodosius against the Donatists to be enforced; these imposed a punishment of ten pounds of gold for acts of violence.[46] On their arrival, however, the emissaries learnt that because of an attempted assassination of the Bishop of Bagai, the Emperor had already taken measures that satisfied the Synod's demands.[47]

Paulinus had become acquainted with one of the ambassadors, Evodius of Uzalis, a former agent of the imperial secret police,[48] ten years earlier in Rome.[49] It remains unclear when he and Theasius interrupted their Italian journey. Before a ship sailed to Italy, Augustine had quickly dictated some "fleeting thoughts" to Paulinus and promised to write him a longer letter later – in Augustine's own words: "as soon as I have satisfied my curiosity about you at least in part after our revered brothers, my colleagues Theasius and Evodius, return.[50] For we hope ..., that you will soon come to us in their hearts and words."[51]

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[45] *Conc. Africae*, Reg. Carth. 93 (CCL 149, 211): *Commonitorium fratribus Theasio et Evodio legatis ex Carthaginiensi concilio ad gloriosissimos religiosissimosque principes missis* ... Recommendations were directed to the Emperor and to the Bishop of Rome - *litterae ad episcopum Romanae ecclesiae de commendatione legatorum ... vel ad alios ubi fuerit imperator* (CCL 149, 213). J.-L. Maier, *Le dossier du donatisme*, vol. II: *De Julien L'Apostat à Saint Jean Damascène, 361-750*, Berlin 1989, 130, no. 74.

[46] *Conc. Africae*, Reg. Carth. 93 (p. 212): *Nota est enim et saepe legibus conclamata circumcellionum qua furiunt detestabilis manus ... Simul etiam petendum est, ut illam legem quae a religiosae memoriae eorum patre Theodosio de auri libris decem in ordinatores vel ordinatos haereticos seu etiam in possessores, ubi eorum congregatio deprehenditur, promulgata est, ita deinceps confirmari praecipiant.*

[47] On 12 February 405, cf. Aug. *Ep.* 88,7 (CSEL 34/2, 414); 185,7 (CSEL 57, 25), see *PCBE de l'Afrique chrétienne* 1, Evodius 2, p. 369 and Theasius, p. 1105.

[48] Aug. *conf.* 9,8,17 (CCL 27, 142 f.): ... *consociasti nobis et Evodium iuvenem ex nostro municipio. Qui cum agens in rebus militaret, prior nobis ad te conversus est et baptizatus et relicta militia saeculari accinctus in tua.*

[49] In order to give him a rare codex for Alypius before he left for Africa (Paul. Nol. *Ep.* 3,3: CSEL 29,15): *Quod et sanctos viros, quos indice caritatis ipsorum tuo sermone cognovimus, Comitem et Evodium rogavimus, ut scribere ipsi curarent, ne vel parenti Domnioni codex suus diutius deforet ...*

[50] Aug. *Ep.* 80,1 (CSEL 34/2, 347): *Proinde pauca haec ilico arripui dictanda atque mittenda prolixioris epistulae me confitens debitorem, cum post reditum venerabilium fratrum nostrorum collegarum meorum Theasi Evodi primum vestri ex parte satiatus fuero.*

[51] Aug. *Ep.* 80,1 (CSEL 34/2, 347): *Uberius enim ad nos in eorum pectoribus et oribus vos esse venturos iam iamque in Christi nomine atque adiutorio speramus.*

Here too Augustine preferred private oral reports to putting the political situation in writing when he attempted to persuade his friend to evacuate his whole monastic community to Africa in view of the threat from the Goths.[52] He hoped to learn more of Paulinus' reaction to his suggestion and of the success of their legation to the imperial court when the messengers returned.

Four years after them, another delegation led by Possidius of Calama travelled to Italy in summer 408. We know very little of their stay in Nola, but we are well informed of the reasons for the legation and its circumstances and outcome. On his visit to Nola, the Bishop of Calama only gave his host Paulinus a letter of recommendation from Augustine, and then he informed him in person on the latest excesses in his diocese. "When you ... have heard from our brother Possidius himself" wrote Augustine "what sad matter has led to him having the pleasure to visit you, you will realise that I am speaking the simple truth."[53] The messenger was at the same time both the responsible person and the person affected, since he had tried to break up a forbidden procession of pagans in Calama and had barely escaped the town's lynch mob.[54] A second letter from Augustine to Nectarius, one of the responsible dignitaries of Calama, reveals the purpose of the legation.[55] Augustine reacted immediately by sending Possidius to Ravenna by way of Nola in order to request the support of the Emperor, but he did not even mention this to outsiders in a letter. He informed Nectarius, the frightened curialis of Calama, only that the decision on their punishment was not for him to make, but solely for the government.[56]

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[52] Aug. *Ep.* 80,2 (p. 348): *... cum dixisses ita te illo, quo felicior uteris, loco perseverare decrevisse, ut, si quid de te aliud domino placuerit, eius voluntatem praeferas tuae ...*

[53] Aug. *Ep.* 95,1 (CSEL 34/2, 506): *Proinde ad istam laetitiam, qua vobiscum est frater Possidius, cum ex ipso audieritis, quam tristis eum causa compulerit, hoc me verissime dicere cognoscetis.*

[54] For a detailed account of this, see S. Mratschek, '*Te velimus ... consilii participem*. Augustine of Hippo and Olympius – a case study of religious-political cooperation in the fifth century', *Studia Patristica* 38, Leuven 2001, 224-232.

[55] Aug. *Ep.* 91,8 (CSEL 34/2, 432), cf. 104,5 (p. 585) und *CTh* 16,5,43; 16,10,19 = *ConstSirm* 12, cf. J.-L. Maier, *Le dossier du donatisme II*, 153-157, no. 85.

[56] Aug. *Ep.* 91,9 (CSEL 34/2, 434): *Quid eos, qui restant, nullane censes disciplina cohercendos et proponendum aestimas inpunitum tam immanis furoris exemplum? ... a nobis curam officiumque oportet inpendi, quousque videre conceditur ...*

E. To conclude with Augustine's politics and strategies of communication

When we analyse short notes and salutations that have as yet been scarcely investigated, and consider their integration in their historical context and the comparison with other collections of letters, records of African synods and imperial constitutions, we are given a vivid picture of what impulses for early Christianity proceeded from the diocese of Augustine in Hippo to resolve conflicts between church and state. Thus, paradoxically, it is precisely the "unwritten letters" of Augustine, which can often only be understood by reading between the lines, which reveal the broad spectrum and the whole extent of personal scandals, legal and religious conflicts within the local clergy and the merciless power struggle in the course of schisms and political crises to a far greater degree than the multitude of ordinary letters which were intended for the public. From a sermon of Augustine's on the anniversary of his consecration as a bishop, Caesarius of Arles borrowed a list of what was expected of a bishop: "Rebuking troublemakers, comforting the fainthearted, looking after the weak, refuting opponents, being on guard against the devious, teaching the ignorant, rousing the lazy, restraining the quarrelsome, resisting the conceited, calming people fighting, helping the poor, liberating the oppressed, encouraging the good, tolerating the bad – and loving them all".[57] In Augustine's opinion, "He who governs the people" (including the bishop) "must first realise that he is the slave of many."[58]

Augustine's strategy for dealing with such borderline situations by only touching on them in cautious allusions or remaining silent about them at all shows the energy with which he pursued his goals and the care with which he styled his letters.

[57] *Homilia sancti Augustini in natale episcopi* (Aug. *sermo* 340,1) in Caes. Arel. *sermo* 232,1 (CCL 104, 919): *Corripiendi sunt inquieti, pusillanimes consolandi, infirmi suscipiendi, contradicentes redarguendi, insidiantes cavendi, inperiti docendi, desidiosi excitandi, contentiosi cohibendi, superbientes reprimendi, desperantes erigendi, litigantes pacandi, inopes adiuvandi, oppressi liberandi, boni adprobandi, mali tolerandi, omnes amandi.*

[58] Aug. *serm.* 340 A (MiAg 1, 563): *Debet enim, qui praeest populo, prius intellegere se servum esse multorum.*

It is striking that no letters are extant from the period of his "Manichaean past" before his conversion in the year 386.[59] Approximately 300 letters from his correspondence have survived, covering only a small fraction of his extensive religious and social networks, and we have only 1/14 of his sermons, although he is estimated to have preached 8,000 times.[60] It is all the more surprising that he sought his intellectual home elsewhere: "For nothing is better, nothing more pleasant than studying the divine treasures, far away from all noise," Augustine confessed in one of his sermons.[61] "It is pleasant and good; but preaching in public again and again, arguing, criticising, edifying, being available to everyone – that is a heavy burden, a great oppression, arduous labour. Who would not prefer to escape this?"

[59] On Augustine's attitude to the Manichaeans, see J. van Oort, O. Wermelinger, G. Wurst (eds.), *Augustine and the Manicheism in the Latin West*, Proceedings of the Fribourg-Utrecht Symposium of the International Association of Manichaean Studies (IAMS), Leiden, Boston, Cologne 2001.

[60] On the number of letters, see M. Zelzer, 'Die Briefliteratur', 346 f. On the number of sermons, P. Allen, 'It's in the Post', 121, note 97 with a reference to H.R. Drobner, 'Studying Augustine. An overview of recent research', in: R. Dodaro & G. Lawless (eds.), *Augustine and His Critics. Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner* (London – New York 2000) 33, note 15 and further literature.

[61] Aug. *serm.* 339,4 (SPM 1, p. 115): *Nihil est melius, nihil est dulcius, quam divinum scrutari nullo strepente thesaurum: dulce est, bonum est; praedicare autem, arguere, corripere, aedificare, pro unoquoque satagere, magnum onus, magnum pondus, magnus labor. Quis non refugiet istum laborem?* It remains open whether *corripere* is to be understood as "knuckle down", "fascinate, carry away" or "rebuke". – An enticing supplemental account is given by C. Rapp in her chapter 'The Episcopate: Work or Honor?', *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity. The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 2005, 166-171.