

MONICA ON THE WOODEN RULER (Conf. 3.11.19)*

DURING HIS sixteenth year, Augustine suddenly found himself released from all obligation to study. He had returned to his home-town of Thagaste from nearby Madaura where he had learned the beginnings of literature and rhetoric. His poor but determined parents had to find the means of financing the last stages of his professional training as an orator. This ambitious project would take him some three hundred miles away to the important schools of rhetoric in Carthage. Meanwhile the young Augustine had a year of complete freedom from books and the labours of learning.

Normally such a year of leisure would be only too welcome to a young lad of sixteen. But for the middle-aged Augustine writing his *Confessions* that idle year was anything but pleasant in retrospect. Indeed, the second book of the work which is devoted to that period of leisure, opens as follows:

I want to call back to mind my past impurities and the carnal corruptions of my soul, not because I love them, but so that I may love you, my God. It is for the love of your love that I do it, going back over those most wicked ways of mine in the bitterness of my recollection so that the bitterness may be replaced by the sweetness of you.¹

This introduction is followed by all kinds of imagery vividly suggestive of licentiousness—"I was tossed here and there, spilled on the ground, scattered abroad; I boiled over in my fornications"²—"I, poor wretch, boiled up and ran troubled along the course of my own stream, forsaking you"³—"The brambles of lust grew up right over my head."⁴ These are but a few of such symbols of sinfulness to be found in the course of the second book. This is a topic which I have explored else-

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¹ *Confessions* (hereafter: *Conf.*) 2.1.1. Extracts are from the Warner translation. Paragraph numbers (the third digit) are from the Pilkington translation.

² *Conf.* 2.2.2.

³ *Conf.* 2.2.4.

⁴ *Conf.* 2.3.6.

where.⁵ The climactic expression of such sinfulness is the renowned and enigmatical peartheft.⁶ The book closes with Augustine's woeful admission:

I slipped from you and went astray, my God, in my youth, wandering
too far from my upholder and my stay, I became to myself a waste-
land.⁷

The last word provided the title for T. S. Eliot's apocalyptic poem on modern life: *The Waste Land*. As the climax mounts in this work, the reader encounters the lines:

To Carthage then I came
Burning burning burning burning.⁸

Interestingly enough, the third book of the *Confessions* opens with a similar idea: "I came to Carthage, and all around me in my ears were the sizzling and frying of unholy loves."⁹ While the first chapter of this book is preoccupied with allusions to an illicit love, its object is not explicated until early in the fourth book when Augustine confesses:

In those years I lived with a woman who was not bound to me by
lawful marriage; she was one who had come my way because of my
wandering desires and my lack of considered judgement.¹⁰

Augustine also judges the theatre to have been another source of moral contamination for him while a student in Carthage. He considers it unhealthy that he came to feel "real compassion for fictions on the stage."¹¹ Too, plays presented to the spectators examples of lust by which he also was led astray: "In the theatres I used to sympathize with the joys of lovers, when they wickedly enjoyed one another."¹²

However, judging by its extended consideration in the third book, the religion of Manichaeism is seen by Augustine as the most serious source of his moral contamination.¹³ This exotic religion claimed

⁵ Leo C. Ferrari, "Symbols of Sinfulness in Book II of Augustine's 'Confessions'," *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971) 93-104.

⁶ *Conf.* 2.4.9. See also, Leo C. Ferrari, "The Pear-Theft in Augustine's 'Confessions'," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 16 (Paris 1970) 233-242.

⁷ *Conf.* 2.10.18.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, II, 307-8.

⁹ *Conf.* 3.1.1.

¹⁰ *Conf.* 4.2.2.

¹¹ *Conf.* 3.2.2. Note also that Augustine shows no notion of the cathartic function of plays as found in Aristotle's *Poetics*.

¹² *Conf.* 3.2.3.

¹³ He deals with it in chapters 6 to 10 inclusive, which treatment constitutes about half the third book.

Augustine's allegiance for some nine years of his life.¹⁴ It would appear that this religion was the major source of disquietude for his mother Monica: "she shrank from and detested the blasphemies of my error."¹⁵ She even went so far as to try and persuade a certain bishop to talk her stubborn son out of his heretical ideas.¹⁶ When this man wisely declined the undertaking, Monica was left with only her prayers and her tears as the means of effecting her son's return to the Catholic faith in which she had raised him.

Interestingly enough, tears figure prominently in the introduction to the dream in which Monica sees herself standing on a wooden ruler—the act which is the subject of the present study. The lachrymatory introduction to the dream is as follows:

My mother, your faithful servant, was weeping for me to you, weeping more than mothers weep for the bodily deaths of their sons. For she, by that faith and spirit which she had from you, saw the death in which I lay.¹⁷

Significantly too, Augustine has observed earlier in the same book that his mother had become a widow when he was seventeen.¹⁸ The above passage therefore bears an intended resemblance to the case of another widow who was weeping over her dead son. The episode transpired as Christ was approaching the city of Nain:

As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the young man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother.¹⁹

Monica's dream is to reassure her that God has heard her prayers and that like widow of Nain, her "dead" son will be returned to "life" (i.e. to the Catholic faith in which she reared him). In the case of Augustine however, his return to spiritual life will be purchased at the price

¹⁴ *Conf.* 4.1.1. For a recent very readable account of this religion, see Geo. Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism* (translated by Charles Kessler and revised by the author. London, 1965).

¹⁵ *Conf.* 3.11.19.

¹⁶ *Conf.* 3.12.21.

¹⁷ *Conf.* 3.11.19.

¹⁸ *Conf.* 3.4.7.

¹⁹ *Luke*, 7.12-15. Cf. 1. *Kings*, 17.17-24 and 2. *Kings*, 4.32-37.

of the physical death of his mother,²⁰ a tragedy which at the time of the dream still lay in the veiled future.

Again, in the introduction to the dream, Augustine repeats no less than three times his conviction that the occurrence of the dream is a sign that God has heard the prayers and tears of his holy mother: "You, Lord, heard her prayer. You heard her . . . indeed you heard her."²¹ Augustine therefore saw the dream as a divine promise of his eventual conversion; a fact which he states quite clearly at the end of the chapter in which the dream occurs:

For the consolation of her present distress, joy in the future was promised this holy woman. And the prediction was made long before the event. For nearly nine years after this I wallowed in the mud of the pit and in the darkness of falsehood²²

Augustine has therefore been at pains to leave no doubt in the reader's mind as to the divine origin and the prophetic nature of the dream which was granted to Monica. The dream itself is best described from the text:

In her dream she was standing on a sort of wooden ruler (*in quadam regula lignea*), and there came to her a very beautiful young man with a happy face, smiling at her, though she herself was sad and overcome with her sorrow. He then asked her . . . why it was that she was so sad, and she replied that she was weeping for my perdition. Then he told her to have no fear and instructed her to look carefully and see "that where she was, I was too," and when she did look she saw me standing close by her on the same ruler.²³

What is perhaps most intriguing about this dream is the enigmatical detail of the wooden ruler upon which Monica is standing. Again, since the ruler is mentioned twice in the description of the dream, its presence is obviously no mere accident. Indeed, that the wooden ruler has a purposed presence in the dream is further implied from the fact that in the *Confessions* Augustine was describing the dream some twenty-four

²⁰ *Conf.* 9.8.17. For an appreciation of the implications of Monica's death for Augustine see, Leo C. Ferrari, "The Background to Augustine's "City of God", "The Classical Journal, 67, n° 3 (February-March, 1972) 198-208.

²¹ *Conf.* 3.11.19.

²² *Conf.* 3.11.20. On this chapter see, Girard Wijdeveld, "Remarques sur trois passages des "Confessions": 1.5.6.; 3.11.20; 7.6.8., "Revue des Études Augustiniennes 5 (1969) 33-34.

²³ *Conf.* 3.11.19.

years after its occurrence.²⁴ In spite of the lapse of almost a quarter of a century, he still remembered that it was a ruler and more intriguing still, that it was made of wood. Both details would therefore seem to be endowed with some enduring significance for Augustine. The purpose of the present study is to attempt an explanation of this enduring significance.

The careful reader of the third book of Augustine's *Confessions* will have noticed yet another mention of "ruler" in addition to the dream-description. Writing of the sins of those who are nevertheless making progress in sanctity, Augustine observes of such persons:

These, if judged aright, will be condemned from the point of view of the rule of perfection (*ex regula perfectionis*), but may be commended if they show hope of future fruit, as is the green blade of the growing corn.²⁵

Here, the rule (or ruler) implies the scale of moral perfection. As such, its principal function is that of being an instrument of *measurement*. This is implied in the cited passage, both by the degrees of perfection, and also by the analogy of the growing corn with its promise of future fruit. The same notion of the measuring rule is to be found in Augustine's beloved apostle, Paul: "Nos autem non in immensum gloria-bimur, sed *secundum mensuram regulae*."²⁶

However, in the case of Monica's dream, the measuring function of the ruler is not immediately relevant. She sees herself as *standing* on the ruler: "Vidit enim stantem se in quadam regula lignea."²⁷ On the other hand, it could be countered that the function of measurement does not apply to perfection until he is standing beside her at the dream's end: "and when she did look she saw me standing close by her on the same rule."²⁸

This objection raises the question of whether Monica saw Augustine as standing on the same ruler (though at a distance) at the dream's beginning. Such is not implied by the description of the dream. Monica merely saw a very beautiful young man coming towards her—"vidit . . .

²⁴ For nearly nine years after the dream, Augustine was a Manichean (*Conf.* 3.11.20). Now he was a Manichean from the age of nineteen to that of twenty-eight (*Conf.* 4.1.1.). Therefore the dream would have occurred about the year 373. Augustine began writing the *Confessions* about the year 397 (Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin* [nouvelle édition, Paris, 1968], 30-31).

²⁵ *Conf.* 3.9.17.

²⁶ 2. *Corinthians*, 10.13.

²⁷ *Conf.* 3.11.19.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

advenientem ad se juvenem splendidum."²⁹ This does not state explicitly whether Augustine is standing on the ruler or on the (presumed) surrounding terrain (whatever its nature may be). Again, both before and after the dream description, Augustine depicts himself in a contrary condition—rather than being elevated in any sense (as he presumably would be, on the ruler), he is sunken deep in sin. Thus, just prior to the dream, he says to God: "You stretched out your hand from on high and drew my soul out of that deep darkness (*de hac profunda caligine*)."³⁰ Likewise too, after the description of the dream, he observes: "For nearly nine years after this I wallowed in the mud of the pit and in the darkness of falsehood."³¹

The question of whether Augustine was initially standing on the same ruler as Monica would seem to be settled by a small detail at the end of the eighth book of the *Confessions*. Augustine had been converted, together with his friend Alypius in the memorable garden-scene.³² They both went inside to break the joyful news to Monica. Her happiness knew no limits. Then Augustine (obviously referring back to the significant dream) observes:

You converted me to you in such a way that I no longer sought a wife nor any other worldly hope. I was standing on that rule of faith (*stans in ea regula fidei*) just as you had shown me to her in a vision so many years before.³³

In other words, it would seem that by his conversion Augustine was at last standing on the ruler beside his mother, just as had been prophesied at the end of the dream: "*Stans in ea regula fidei in qua me ante tot annos ei revelaveras.*"³⁴ By his conversion he came at last to stand on that same ruler. Contrariwise, prior to his conversion, he had not been so situated. That such was the case is also intimated by the nature of the ruler, which is there designated—*regula fidei*. He could not have been standing on the rule of faith while being a Manichaean heretic.

The expression: *regula fidei* is elsewhere explained by Augustine as designating those things which must be believed in order to be saved.³⁵ Again, the notion would seem to come from Paul, who discounting cir-

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Conf.* 3.11.20.

³² *Conf.* 8.8-12.

³³ *Conf.* 8.12.30.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Sermo* 186, 2 (Citations from the Latin and the numbering of the sermons are from the Gaume edition of the *Opera Omnia* (Paris, 1836-8). Cf. *Sermo*, 362, 7.

cumcision and uncircumcision as efficacious to eternal life, insists instead upon the supreme importance of the Cross of Christ and all it signifies. Then follow the words: "et quicumque *hanc regulam sectantur*, pax super illos."³⁶ This same passage Augustine interprets as being addressed to those who are being truly prepared for the vision of God.³⁷ Here however, it would seem to be question, not of the ruler as a means of measuring, but rather primarily that which is being followed: "quicumque *hanc regulam sectantur*." Such people would therefore be following the rule of perfection, inasmuch as it leads to perfection. This rule of perfection could therefore also be called the way or path of perfection, or in its most general sense—the Tao.³⁸

Here it would seem that another meaning has been signified by *regula*. The short length of straightness which it embodies signifies *lack of deviation to left or to right*.³⁹ Those who will find God must follow faithfully the path which leads to him and not deviate from it either to left or to right. Thus does Augustine explain elsewhere this notion of *regula*:

If by chance some human infirmity creeps up on you and the heart begins to will something other than God wills, may you see the depravity of your heart as outside the rule (*extra regulam*). Fix it to the rule (*ad regulam*) and your heart will be directed towards God.⁴⁰

Taken in this sense, *regula* would also seem to signify the *via recta*, the straight path trodden by the virtuous; a path which is so often mentioned in the Bible.⁴¹ To leave this path is to deviate from it to left or to right. One who does so, wanders into the terrain infested with the snares of the devil. Thus, the path which leads to God is the only safe ground on which to tread, and this way is Christ.⁴² To the left there are traps and to the right there are traps:

³⁶ *Galatians*, 6.16.

³⁷ *Epistolae ad Galatas, Expositionis liber unus*, 63.

³⁸ Cf. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*.

³⁹ The modern mind, steeped as it is in Euclidean geometry finds this concrete and obvious notion a hard one to grasp. The tendency is to think of the short ruler as capable of being extended infinitely in both directions so that to "follow the rule" would be to walk for ever in a straight line. Clearly this is not intended.

⁴⁰ *Enarratio in Psalmum*, 93, 19. Cf. 18.

⁴¹ *Genesis*, 24.48; *1. Esdra*, 8.21; *Psalms*, 26.11, 106.7; *Proverbs*, 2.13; 12.15; 14.2; 16.25; 21.2; 21.8; 39.2, *Wisdom*, 10.10; *Ecclesiasticus*, 2.16; 49.11; 51.20, *Isaias*, 26.7; 40.3, *Hosea*, 14.9, *Matth.* 3.3, *Luke*, 3.4, *Mark*, 1.3.

⁴² *John*, 14.6.

What is *in medio laqueorum* (Ecclesiasticus 9.20.]? This is along the way of Christ, for here there are traps and there there are traps; traps to the right, traps to the left: traps to the right—temporal prosperity; traps to the left—temporal adversity; traps to the right, promises; traps to the left, threats. You must walk in between the traps. Do not leave the way [i.e. Christ].⁴³

The *regula* upon which Monica was standing in her dream signifies the *via recta*—the right (straight) path. It is straight in the sense just distinguished—one must not deviate from it to left or to right. To do so is to stumble upon the terrain infested with the traps of the devil. Once this meaning of *regula* is understood, it is seen to be of repeated relevance to the preceding chapters in the third book of the *Confessions*. Indeed soon after the opening of the book Augustine observes: "I hated security and a path without snares."⁴⁴ He then proceeds to recount his wanderings from the right path:

Above me hovered your mercy, faithful however far I strayed . . .
I followed the path of sacrilegious curiosity, allowing it to lead me,
in my desertion of you, down to the depths of infidelity and the beguiling service of demons.⁴⁵

He sees his life at Carthage as that of one who had left the path of God and was following his own wilful ways in the company of others who were no less lost:

My God, my refuge from those terrible destroyers, among whom I wandered with a stiff neck on my path further and further away from you, loving my own ways and not yours (*amans vias meas et non tuas*), loving the liberty of a runaway.⁴⁶

The groups with which Augustine associated in Carthage included the "subverters"—a number of students intent on intimidating ordinary people with jeers and mockings. However Augustine stresses the fact that while he was friendly with these intimidators he took no part in their harassments. In retrospect he sees them as having been deceived by demons: "there were hidden within themselves deceiving spirits, laughing at them and leading them astray."⁴⁷ Yet if this folly of the subverters was symbolized by the traps to the left of the correct path,

⁴³ *En. in Psalmum*, 141, 9.

⁴⁴ *Conf.* 3.1.1.

⁴⁵ *Conf.* 3.3.5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Conf.* 3.3.6.

the simulated wisdom of the philosophers to the right was no less a danger, for: "there are some who lead us astray by means of philosophy."⁴⁸

The path which leads to God is a narrow one, in contrast to the broad path leading to perdition.⁴⁹ And likewise by broad paths are the throngs drawn to theatrical spectacles.⁵⁰ Theatre too became one of the sources of Augustine's downfall at Carthage: "I was carried away too by plays on the stage."⁵¹ Again, the idea of straying from the right path is implicit in the effects upon him of his passion for the theatre: "Unhappy sheep that I was, straying from your flock and impatient of your keeping."⁵²

One bright spot in Augustine's picture of his moral deterioration at Carthage was the discovery of Cicero's *Hortensius*.⁵³ This book fired him after his errant youth.⁵⁴ His first reaction to Cicero's call to the search for wisdom was apparently to seek such wisdom in the Scriptures. However, as he observes of himself in that venture, he lacked then the qualities of humility which would permit him to enter upon the right way: "the way is low and humble . . . and I lacked the qualities which would make me fit to follow the pathway."⁵⁵ Apparently Manichaeism offered the next best substitute, and so, wandering from the right path he fell into "the snares of the devil."⁵⁶ As he was to realize later, the many fables which decorated that religion were only the traps of the devil: "far indeed was I straying from you . . . for even the stories of the poets and the masters of literature are better than these deceitful traps."⁵⁷ Not knowing at that time that the way back to God was through humility and devoutness, he spent the next nine years wallowing in the errors of Manichaeism:

⁴⁸ *Conf.* 3.4.8.

⁴⁹ *En. in Psalmum 39*, 6-7, *En. in Psalmum 118*, sermo 11, 5. Cf. *Matthew*, 7.14.

⁵⁰ *En. in Psalmum 39*, 6-7.

⁵¹ *Conf.* 3.2.2.

⁵² *Conf.* 3.2.4.

⁵³ *Conf.* 3.4.7-8.

⁵⁴ Thus, more than eleven years after the discovery of the *Hortensius* its message was still of the greatest importance to Augustine (*Conf.* 6.11.18 and 8.7.17.). Too, after his conversion, when at Cassiciacum, he put the book in the hands of Trygetius and Licentius, hoping that its message would win them over to the pursuit of philosophy (*Answer to Skeptics*, 1.1.4).

⁵⁵ *Conf.*, 3.5.9.

⁵⁶ *Conf.*, 3.6.10.

⁵⁷ *Conf.*, 3.6.11.

For nearly nine years after this I wallowed in the mud of the pit and in the darkness of falsehood, often trying to rise and then being plunged back again all the more violently.⁵⁸

The theme of wandering from the right path is not of course confined to the third book of the *Confessions*. It is there however that the theme in various guises receives repeated emphasis—in the same book which draws to a close with the recount of Monica's dream of herself standing on the wooden ruler. At the dream's end Augustine too is standing on that same ruler; a detail which prophesies his conversion from those paths of the devil over which he depicts himself as wandering far from the path which leads to God.

Before leaving this theme of Augustine's wanderings, it is noteworthy that further instances are to be found in the opening chapters of the fourth book of the *Confessions*. Here, the first three chapters contain some obvious flash-backs to Augustine's student-days in Carthage. In the first of these chapters he prays to God: "grant me the power to survey in my memory now all these wanderings of my error in the past . . . for without you what am I to myself except a guide to my own downfall."⁵⁹ Again, in the second chapter, when writing of his first experiences in teaching, he says to God: "from afar you saw me stumbling in that slippery path."⁶⁰ Another important instance in the same chapter obviously concerns his student-days. This is the confession about his former mistress; an admission where the wandering image again appears; "In those years I lived with a woman who had come my way because of my wandering desires."⁶¹ The wording in the next is also significant: "quam indagaverat vagus ardor": literally translated as: "a woman whom a wandering desire had tracked down." Just how wandering that desire was is signified by the wording. Augustine does not say: "*meus* vagus ardor" but simply: "vagus ardor". It was a wandering desire indeed, devoid of even an owner to lead it along.

So much then for the significance of the ruler upon which Monica was standing in her dream. The second aspect of present considerations concerns the curious detail that it was made of wood: "Vidit enim stantem se in quadam regula *ligna*."⁶² It would seem surprising that Augustine remembered this seemingly insignificant detail some twenty-four years after the event.

⁵⁸ *Conf.*, 3.11.20. Regarding the "nine years" however, see Courcelle, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

⁵⁹ 4.1.1.

⁶⁰ *Conf.*, 4.2.2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Conf.* 3.11.19.

An obvious objection to the significance of the wooden character of the ruler would seem to be the claim that in those days there was nothing else from which a ruler could be made. However, in view of the widespread use of iron and bronze, even in pre-Homeric times, this objection hardly avails. Again, considering the obvious advantages of a metal ruler over one made of wood, the detail becomes all the more intriguing.

The wooden ruler was ultimately derived from a tree, and trees possessed a special significance for Augustine, as I have observed elsewhere.⁶³ Again, the trees of the forest symbolize for Augustine the pagans which can be brought into the Church (i.e. felled (humbled) then tooled by the Carpenter Christ).⁶⁴ Tooled wood has a special significance for Augustine. The tooled wood of the cross is the symbol of eternal life: "We say that wood is life, but according as is understood the wood of the cross."⁶⁵ Likewise too, the wooden ark of Noah is a symbol of the cross of Christ.⁶⁶ Too, the wooden rod (*virga*) which appears from time to time in the Bible is a symbol of the cross.⁶⁷ The wonders accomplished by such instances of the use of the wooden rod were merely anticipations of the supreme wonder which Christ was to accomplish through the wooden rod (*virga*, i. e. the cross) upon which he would be hung.⁶⁸ Without even having to make allowances for dream symbolism, it remains therefore that the wooden ruler upon which Monica saw herself standing possesses an obvious meaning in terms of Augustine's metaphors.

Lest it be thought that this symbolism has been carried too far, it remains next to carry it even further. The wood of the ruler upon which Monica saw herself standing can be understood not merely as

⁶³ See footnote 6. Also; Leo C. Ferrari, "The Mystical Tree in the Western Christian Tradition," *Communio Viatorum*, 14 (Prague 1971) 1-13. See especially pp. 1, 2, 4 and 7.

⁶⁴ *En. in Psalmum 30*, enarratio 2, sermo 2, 6 (in 12). Cf. *En. in Psalmum 95*, 13 (in 12, 13).

⁶⁵ *In Joannis Evangelium Tractatus I*, 16.

⁶⁶ *De catechizandis rudibus*, 32.

⁶⁷ The most memorable episodes concern Moses and his rod. Thus, he could turn it into a serpent (*Exodus* 4. 2ff & 7.9ff). When this did not impress the Pharaoh he produced a plague of gnats by striking the ground with his rod (*Exodus* 8.16ff). He produced thunder, hail and fire by pointing it at the heavens (*Exodus* 9.23) and by stretching it out over the sea caused it to divide, thus enabling the Israelites to pass safely across to the other side (*Exodus* 14.16). Again, as long as Moses on a hill-top held up his rod, the army of Israel prevailed over that of Amalek (*Exodus* 17.9). Finally with Moses, there is the episode when he produced water from the rock by striking it with his rod (*Numbers* 20.8).

⁶⁸ *Sermo de cataclysmo* 8 (This is a sermon of doubtful authenticity).

symbolizing Christ himself. As has been shown, the ruler symbolizes the "way" or the "path" towards God. But this is exactly the claim that Christ made of himself: "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me.*"⁶⁹ The importance for Augustine of this notion of Christ as the "way" towards God is evidenced from the numerous occasions on which he employs the metaphor in the course of his writings.⁷⁰ It remains therefore to consider Christ as the "way" in relation to the wooden ruler of Monica's dream.

It is to be observed that the name of Christ has a declared importance to the events of the third book of the *Confessions*. The one thing which withheld Augustine from completely and unreservedly embracing the advice of Cicero's *Hortensius* was the absence of the name of Christ—"for this name, Lord, this name of my Saviour, your son, had been with my mother's milk drunk in devoutly by my tender heart, where it remained deeply treasured."⁷¹ Noteworthy in this passage is the early and intimate association of the name of Christ with his mother; an association which is not irrelevant to present considerations. The same name of Christ also attracted the young Augustine to his first (and unsuccessful) study of the Holy Scriptures.⁷² Too, when he fell in with the Manicheans, the name of Christ was one of the prime enticements which recommended that sect to him.⁷³ Thus, three times in the course of the third book Augustine emphasizes the importance for him (even in his errant student-days at Carthage) of the notion of Christ as the "way" towards Wisdom. Only when standing on the wooden ruler of his mother's dream was he to be truly on that way.

Elsewhere Augustine explains the notion of Christ as the way, with an apt relevance to the considerations of the third book of the *Confessions*:

The devil and his angels tend traps (*muscipulas*) like hunters, but the men who walk in Christ (*homines qui in Christo ambulant*), walk far from these traps, for the devil does not dare to set a trap in Christ. He sets his traps around about the way (*circa viam*), but not on the way itself. Your way is Christ and so you do not fall into the trap of the devil. But to anyone deviating from the way (*aberranti a via*) there is

⁶⁹ John, 14.6.

⁷⁰ Besides the *Confessions* (7.18.24), the most notable places where this theme is treated would seem to be as follows: *In Joannis evangelium*, tractatus 34, 9; tractatus 69, 2; *Sermo* 141, 1-2, 5; 170-11; 306-10; *Enarratio in Psalmum* 66, 5; 123, 2 and *De canto novo*, 3-4.

⁷¹ *Conf.* 3.4.8.

⁷² *Conf.* 3.5.9.

⁷³ 3.6.10.

already a trap. The devil places snares (*laqueos*) here and there. Here and there he sets a trap. You walk between the snares. Do not deviate to left or to right.⁷⁴

The last sentence of this extract emphasizes yet again the property already seen to be important to the notion of *regula* in the present context: lack of deviation to left or to right. Again, bearing in mind the functions of the words *muscipulas* and *securus* in the cited extract, one can reread with a new appreciation the Latin text in the opening of the third book where Augustine confesses that he hated security and a way not beset with traps: "et oderam securitatem, et viam sine *muscipulis*."⁷⁵ Again, as the cited extracts states: "the devil (*diabolus*) places snares (*laqueos*) here and there." This is to be compared with Augustine's description of the Manicheans, in whose mouths were the snares of the devil: "in quorum ore *laquei diaboli*."

Finally, yet another detail helps explain why Augustine had good reason to remember the wooden nature of the rule some twenty-four years after his mother's account of her dream. All human kings rule by iron. The rule of Christ the King is unique—he has conquered death by the cross and so he alone of all kings rules by wood.⁷⁶ The rule of Christ is therefore a wooden rule: *regula lignea*. Augustine with his persistent love of word-play had a good reason to remember the wood of the rule in Monica's dream—the holy woman had seen herself *in quadam regula lignea*, or, *in regula Christi*.⁷⁷

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Since the writing of the present article, the following book has appeared: Martine Dulaey, *Le rêve dans la vie et la pensée de saint Augustin* (Paris, 1973). The reader is referred to the treatment of Monica's dream (pp. 158-165), which treatment contains helpful material (mostly of a complementary nature) to the background of the present article.

⁷⁴ *Enarratio in Psalmum 90*, sermo 1, 4 (in 3).

⁷⁵ *Conf.* 3.1.1.

⁷⁶ *Enarratio in Psalmum 95*, 2.

⁷⁷ *Conf.* 3.11.19. So the *regula lignea* is Christ, in Monica's dream. Cf. Gert Haendler, "Christus im Traum nach lateinischen Texten des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 95 (1970) 481-490.