

THE DREAMS OF MONICA IN AUGUSTINE'S *CONFESSIONS*

The impressive figure of Monica, mother of Saint Augustine, has understandably enough been the subject of a considerable number of studies.¹ The reason for this is evident to any reader of Augustine's *Confessions*. It derives not only from the manner in which Augustine there portrays his mother, but also from her central importance to the action of his best-known book. As Peter Brown has well observed:

Few mothers can survive being presented to us exclusively in terms of what they have come to mean to their sons, much less to a son as complicated as Augustine. The relationship between mother and son that weaves in and out of the *Confessions*, forms the thread for which the book is justly famous.²

Monica's rôle there is the original, classical case of the pious mother weeping and praying for the return to religion of her wayward son. Though raised as a Catholic by Monica, Augustine deserted his mother's faith while away from home as a student of rhetoric at Carthage. From his nineteenth year to his twenty-eighth, he was an adherent of the exotic Manichean religion.³ At first his mother's reaction to this change in her son's religious persuasion was so extreme that she would not even allow him back into the very house where he had grown up. Later she relented and he was once more admitted to the family-circle. The reason for this change on Monica's part was a dream she had which reassured her of Augustine's eventual conversion back to the religion of his childhood.⁴ This is the first of Monica's dreams in the *Confessions*.

Meanwhile Monica did not cease to weep daily for her son's waywardness and to pray relentlessly for his return to the Catholic Church. Her consternation over his religious defection would hardly have been emolliated by the fact that while away at Carthage Augustine had formed an alliance with a woman of inferior status who had presented him with

¹ For the abundant literature on this topic, the reader is referred to *Fichier Augustinien* Boston Mass. (Hall) 1972, Matières, tome 1, 80-85.

² Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo; A Biography*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1969, p. 29.

³ *Confessions* 3.6 to 5.10, *passim*.

⁴ *Confessions* 3.11.19. Note- such a reference to the *Confessions* would appear in future simply as: 3.11.19.

a son. With them both, Augustine was destined to spend the next thirteen years of his life. Meanwhile he continued practising his profession as a teacher of rhetoric and became the author of several treatises of a more or less philosophical nature.

Suddenly his life was shattered by the death of a very dear friend. In the fourth book of the *Confessions* Augustine has left a touching description of the great void he felt at this untimely loss. Indeed, he was so grief-stricken that his own native town with all its poignant memories became hateful to him. Eventually he decided to forsake his country and seek a teaching post abroad in Rome. The necessary departure he effected by lying to his protesting mother and stealing away from her in the night.⁵

After teaching for a year in Rome he obtained the post of public orator in Milan.⁶ Meanwhile, notwithstanding his initial deception, his mother followed him relentlessly, even though this involved crossing the Mediterranean Sea in a storm of unprecedented ferocity. Indeed, so bad was the storm that even the sailors were in fear of their lives. Yet having been granted a vision by God of the safe arrival of the boat and all its passengers, Monica was in a position to comfort even the apprehensive sailors.⁷ Therefore, it is in regard to this sea-crossing that the second dream of the *Confessions* takes place.

Once in Milan, Monica apparently set about disposing of the mistress (she was sent back to Africa) so that Augustine could form an advantageous union with a woman more suited to his rank as an orator of some renown.⁸ They cast about for a suitable bride. It was in regard to this search that the third dream of the *Confession* should have taken place.⁹ In actual fact it did not. Though they besought God daily for some revelation in regard to Augustine's future proposed marriage, their prayers went unanswered. The reason for the lack of a vision eventually became clear—he was converted to God in such a way that he did not seek a wife, nor any other of this world's hopes.¹⁰ Thus, the last dream of the *Confessions* is a dream in wish only. It can therefore be termed a non-dream.

While the modern mind can afford to be sceptical about the prognosticating power of dreams, this was a well-recognized phenomenon of antiquity. From Cicero's *De divinatione* it is seen that dream-interpretation (often requiring professional advice) was an important part of the

⁵ 5.8.15.

⁶ 5.13.23.

⁷ 6.1.1.

⁸ 6.15.25.

⁹ 6.13.23.

¹⁰ 8.12.30.

larger art of divination. Again, among the many works imputed to Aristotle is the *De divinatione somnium* which appealed to resemblances based on empiricism for the interpretation of dreams. A more practical book for the same purpose was Artemidorus' *Onirocritica*. More theoretical in approach were Synesius' *De insomniis* and Macrobius' *Commentarium in Somnium Scipionis*.

Again, within the biblical tradition, prediction by means of dreams was anything but uncommon. While some night visions were recognized as being of no consequence,¹¹ the Old Testament recognized God as the source of dreams and His aid was sought in interpreting them.¹² This was necessary because while some dreams were simple in character and their meaning obvious, others were symbolic and had to be interpreted.¹³ Finally, and in a manner directly relevant to the dreams of the *Confessions*, it was through dreams that God was seen to reveal His will to chosen individuals.¹⁴

It remains therefore that Monica's ability to foresee future events through dreams is not so unusual when appreciated against the backdrop of the tradition in which Augustine wrote his *Confessions*. As a result, the dreams of this work are to be accepted as at least in accord with a lengthy tradition. The aim of the present study is not therefore to question the veracity of these dreams, but rather to appreciate their contents, structure and justification in the *Confessions* as a work of art.

The first thing to be remarked about the dreams in this book of Augustine's is that not one of them comes from the author himself. Considering that Augustine's *Confessions* is autobiographical in character, this may occasion some initial surprise. On the other hand, it must be appreciated that precisely because the work is autobiographical in nature, the introduction of personal dreams, however relevant to the theme would nonetheless simply result in an intensification of the subjectivity of such a work. One thinks of Poe's "dream within a dream." In a literary perspective, the dream of some one else is appreciated by the reader as more "objective" and therefore more suasive in character than would be the case with the author's dream.

¹¹ Job. 20.8; Psalms 73.20; Ecclesiastes 5.7; Isaiah 29.8.

¹² Genesis 40.8; Daniel 2.19-23. Also, on dreams in the OT see: E. L. Ehrlich, *Der Traum im Alten Testament*, Dissertation, Basel, 1953. For dreams in the NT: A. Wikenhauser, 'Die Traumgeschichte des NT in Religionsgeschichtlicher Sicht' in *Pisciculi, Mélanges F. J. Dölger*, 1939.

¹³ For the former: Genesis 20.3 & 6-7; 31.10-13 & 24; Matthew 1.20; 2.12; Acts 9.10. For the latter: Genesis 37.5-10; 40.5 to 41.36; Daniel 2.

¹⁴ Job 33.15-16; I Samuel 28.6; Numbers 12.6. For a good exposition of the dream, not only in the Bible, but also in the pagan and christian traditions, see the first part of Martine Dulaey's *Le rêve dans la vie et la pensée de saint Augustin*, Paris (Etudes Augustiniennes) 1973.

Again, while the *Confessions* contains no accounts of Augustine's own dreams, the same applies to all other characters in the work, with the exception of his mother, Monica. Granted that the dream is a revelation of God to the dreamer, as previously intimated, then this singular exception focuses the attention of the reader upon Monica as the important mediatrix between God and the wayward Augustine. That this is the intention of the author can be appreciated from the way in which his conversion is portrayed as obviously being an answer to her tearful prayers. Furthermore, the dreams all occur at critical phases of Augustine's spiritual battle with himself. The first dream coming upon his fall from God's grace and the rejection of his religion foretells his eventual return to the faith of his mother. The second dream comes as Monica is risking even her very life for her wayward son. The last non-dream by its very non-occurrence is seen by Augustine as predicting the future life which he is to live as devoted exclusively to the word of God. At these three critical stages in Augustine's spiritual journey, the rôle of Monica as mediatrix of God's grace is underscored.

Regarding the actual sources of dreams, it is noteworthy that Augustine allowed for the production of some dreams by the actions of demons. Possessing extremely subtle aerial bodies, they would be capable of passing through our gross bodies and producing effects which would be evident to us (i.e. dreams), but whose causes would escape detection by our crude senses.¹⁵ However, since such dreams do not come under consideration at any time in the *Confessions*, they are not relevant to present considerations. The same avails for venereal dreams whose source can be not only demons, but also the body itself as loosed in sleep from the control of the dreamer.¹⁶

Two other possible sources of dreams are distinguished at the site of the non-dream in the *Confessions*. Monica and Augustine had been imploring God to reveal something about the proposed marriage. However, to this end Monica's dreams are non-productive:

She saw indeed several vain and fantastic things, such as the earnestness of a human spirit, bent thereon, conjured up; and these she told me of, not with her usual confidence when Thou hadst shown her anything, but slighting them. For she could, she declared, through some feeling which she could not express in words, discern the difference betwixt Thy revelations and the dreams of her own spirit.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Letter 9 3*. References to letters, and indeed to all of Augustine's works, are in accord with the enumeration of the Gaume edition of the *Opera Omnia* of 1836-38. For an exposition of Augustine's thought on the nature and origins of dreams, see Dulaey, *op. cit.*, chapters 4-7.

¹⁶ *De Genesi ad litteram* 12.31 (15). Cf. Dulaey, *op. cit.*, ch. 7.

¹⁷ 6.13.23.

Here Augustine makes explicit the distinction between dreams whose source is the spirit of the dreamer and those dreams whose author is God Himself. For purposes of divination, it was of course, of critical importance to be able to distinguish between the two kinds of dreams. Apparently, this was a gift which Monica possessed; a factor essential to her rôle of mediatrix.

This passage is also of interest in that it disposes of one possible objection that when Augustine uses the phrase *per visum* he does not necessarily mean a revelation in a dream; an objection which could possibly be made about the dream of the boat's safe arrival at the beginning of the sixth book. There the phrase used is again *per visum*. In the above cited passage, Augustine is seen to use the phrase in regard to a dream. Thus they were praying that God would show Monica something through a vision (*per visum*). That this phrase refers to a dream is evident from the end of the cited passage, where it is observed that Monica could distinguish between God's revelations and her own spirit dreaming (*animam suam somniantem*).

Another noteworthy implication from the cited passage is that such revelations from God would seem to have been not unusual with Monica. Nor apparently, did she hesitate to communicate with her son over such experiences. Both conclusions would seem to be inferred from the words: "and these she told me of, not with her usual confidence (*non cum fiducia qua solebat*) when Thou hadst shown her anything." Indeed, in one way or another, Monica seems to have been the recipient of many communications from God; an implication which follows the description of the first dream in the *Confessions*: "and meanwhile Thou grantedst her another answer, which I recall; for much I pass over, hastening on to those things which the more strongly impel me to confess to Thee, and much I do not remember."¹⁸

More reassuring than the hoped-for dream in regard to Augustine's future marriage was Monica's dream in connection with the perilous sea-voyage from North Africa to Rome. So violent were the seas that even the sailors were in fear of their lives. Monica however had been assured of a safe arrival through a dream; an assurance which proved an asset during the perilous voyage:

By this time my mother, made strong by her piety, had come to me, following me over sea and land, in all perils feeling secure in Thee. For in the dangers of the sea she comforted the very sailors (to whom the inexperienced passengers, when alarmed, were wont rather to go for comfort), assuring them of a safe arrival, because she had been so assured by Thee in a vision (*per visum*).¹⁹

¹⁸ 3.12.21. Cf. 5.9.17.

¹⁹ 6.1.1.

Thus, not even the angriest of seas were to deter the faith of this pious woman. Following the course of her duty she braved even the perils of the deep. Yet it is most interesting to observe that a strikingly similar episode befell the apostle Paul. As a prisoner, he was being sent by ship from Caesarea to Rome to stand before the emperor. A terrifying storm arose so that nothing was seen of the sun or stars for several days, and hope had been abandoned. Then was Paul able to stand in the presence of all and console them with the words:

I now bid you take heart; for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and lo, God has granted you all those who sail with you.'²⁰

Monica too was assured of a safe arrival, and with her, as with Paul, the safety of all on board the ship. As a result of such a revelation, she was able to reassure even the sailors. And Monica it was who played such an important rôle in Augustine's conversion, as the pages of the *Confessions* amply testify. But Paul's singular influence on the same critical transformation of Augustine must also be underscored. Thus, in the earlier stages of this change he turned above all to the writings of Paul for guidance: "Most eagerly, then, did I seize that venerable writing of Thy Spirit; but more especially of the apostle Paul."²¹ Later on too, Augustine was visited by a compatriot, Pontitianus, who held high office in the imperial court. Noticing a book on the table, "he took it up, opened it, and, contrary to his expectation, found it to be the apostle Paul."²² Yet again, at the very climax of his conversion, in the memorable garden-scene, Augustine desists from his weeping as he hears a child's voice chanting the now-famous words: "tolle, lege; tolle lege." In obedience to what he interprets as a heavenly injunction, he searches out the book he had been reading and opens it at random, whereupon his eyes fall upon the counsel which was to change his life:

Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.²³

Again, of course, the book was that of Paul, who together with Monica, proved so essential to the process of Augustine's conversion.

²⁰ *Acts* 27.22-24.

²¹ 7.21.27. Cf. *Contra Academicos* 2.2.5.

²² 8.6.14.

²³ 8.12.29. The passage is from *Romans* 13.13-14.

And Paul was brought to Rome in chains, where he was to lay down his life for the same religion. Monica also was compelled to go to Rome by maternal solicitude for her wayward son chained to his fleshly lusts.²⁴ There too she sacrificed her life for the very same religion.²⁵ And by a singular coincidence, both Paul and Monica received strangely similar reassurances in dreams during their respective storm-tossed voyages to Rome.

Yet another reason for Augustine's mentioning this dream of Monica's, some thirteen years after the actual event, is evident upon adverting to the sea-imagery in the *Confessions*. Even in the very first book, Augustine observes: "But how numerous and great waves (*fluctus*) of temptation appeared to hang over me after my childhood."²⁶ Again, in the second book, he bemoans the lack of a legitimate outlet for his strong, youthful lusts:

Oh for one to have regulated my disorder, and turned to my profit the fleeting beauties of the things around me, and fixed a bound to their sweetness, so that the tides (*fluctus*) of my youth might have spent themselves upon the conjugal shore.²⁷

Near the same place he also uses the metaphor of the sea to express the turbulence of those early passions: "But I, poor fool, seethed as does the sea, and, forsaking Thee, followed the violent course of my own stream."²⁸

These examples suggest some kind of literary correspondence between the storms raging in Augustine's passionate young breast and the storm which Monica braved at sea in order to come to him at Milan. Such an intimation is strengthened by the passage immediately prior to the mention of the storm at sea. Writing there of his own conflicts, Augustine observes:

Yet did I wander about in dark and slippery places, and sought Thee abroad out of myself, and found not the God of my heart; and had entered the depths of the sea (*veneram in profundum maris*), and distrusted and despaired of finding out the truth.²⁹

²⁴ 6.1.1. That Augustine was conscious of himself being chained to his fleshly lusts is manifest from the eighth book of the *Confessions* which contains numerous references to those chains. See also: Vinzenz Buchheit, 'Augustinus unter dem Feigenbaum (zu Conf. VIII)' *Vigiliae Christianae* 22 (1968) 257-271.

²⁵ 9.8.17.

²⁶ 1.11.18.

²⁷ 2.2.3.

²⁸ 2.2.4.

²⁹ 6.1.1.

This significant passage, in introducing the description of the storm at sea, would seem to relate it in some way to the storms of passion which assailed him. Such a suggestion is strengthened by some interesting details in the eighth book of the *Confessions*. It is there that Augustine portrays in a masterful manner the final breaking of the chains of his lusts, as Buhheit's fine study has demonstrated.³⁰ The eighth book also contains a significant mention of the sea, which not only implicitly refers to Monica's dream (and perhaps too, to the episode involving Paul), but also brings to mind an episode in the Gospel and is too, singularly appropriate to the events of that book. The text in question is as follows:

The storm tosses the voyagers, threatens shipwreck, and every one waxes pale at the approach of death; but sky and sea grow calm, and they rejoice much, as they feared much.³¹

Such is indeed the movement of the eighth book, as Augustine's subsequent description manifests — the struggle within himself mounts to a gripping crescendo, then just before he throws himself down under the fateful fig-tree at the climax of his suffering, the storm motif again finds expression:

But when a profound reflection had, from the secret depths of my soul, drawn together and heaped up all my misery before the sight of my heart, there arose a mighty storm, accompanied by as mighty a shower of tears.³²

This passage, together with the previously cited one, brings to mind the episode of the storm that arose at sea when Christ was crossing the expanse of water with his disciples. The various accounts are reminiscent of the last passage cited from Augustine's eighth book of the *Confessions*. Thus, in Matthew 8.24: "there arose a great storm on the sea"; in Mark 4.37: "and a great storm of wind arose" and finally, in Luke 8.23: "a storm of wind came down on the lake." Yet, when the sleeping Christ was awakened by the terrified disciples he merely told the wind and the waves to behave themselves, whereupon a great calm came over the elements. The disciples were amazed and overjoyed, or to quote from the above text of Augustine: "sky and sea grow calm, and they rejoice much as they had feared much."³³

³⁰ Buhheit, *art. cit.*

³¹ 8.3.7.

³² 8.12.28. Cf. Joseph Balogh, 'Unbeachtetes in Augustins Konfessionen; Amor amoris Dei, Deo plenus, Imber lacrimarum' *Didaskaleion* n.s. 4 (1926) iii-iv 5-21.

³³ 8.3.7.

Short as the rest of the eighth book, is, it is possible to find there also, further evidence that Augustine is very conscious of Christ's taming of the elements at sea when describing the final stilling of his seething passions. In addition to the storm similarities already observed, three episodes pertain to the subsequent calming of the elements: first, the lifting of the storm; secondly, the resulting tranquility; and thirdly, the rejoicing heightened by the previous apprehensions. All three episodes can be found in the concluding paragraph of the eighth book, following upon Augustine's stormy conversion. Thus, the lifting of the storm is signified: "by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart,—all the gloom of doubt vanished away" (*omnes dubitationis tenebrae diffugerunt*).³⁴ Again, there is found the element of resulting tranquility: "closing the book . . . I now with a tranquil countenance (*tranquillo jam vultu*) made it known to Alypius."³⁵ Finally, there is found the element of rejoicing heightened by former apprehensions:

Thence we go into my mother. We make it known to her,—she rejoiceth. We relate how it came to pass,—she leapeth for joy, and triumpheth, and blesseth Thee, who art able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think; for she perceiveth Thee to have given her more for me than she used to ask by her pitiful and most doleful groanings.³⁶

And this is the same mother who had braved the perils of the deep and who in a dream had been assured by God of a safe end to the sea-voyage. Her subsequent arrival in Milan expedited Augustine's conversion and her presence was an important factor in stilling the seething passions of Augustine's restless soul—a transformation which effected his final return to the Catholic faith which he had deserted some twelve years earlier.

It is noteworthy that the above events and descriptions all associated with the sea and culminating in Augustine's conversion had, in a general way, been adumbrated in a work written some eleven years prior to the *Confessions*. Thus, the opening sections of Augustine's *On the Happy Life* propose the voyage to the harbour of "philosophy" over the happy seas of life.³⁷ Speculations on the venture convey a feeling of youthful enthusiasm. The sombre associations with the sea so evident in the *Confessions* are absent. In this regard it is to be recalled that that earlier work was written during Augustine's stay at Cassiciacum, while awaiting the healing waters of baptism. Too, his mother

³⁴ 8.12.29.

³⁵ 8.12.30.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *De beata vita* 1-5. See also, Henri Rondet, s.j., 'Le symbolisme de la mer chez saint Augustin' *Augustinus Magister* (1954) II. 691-701.

was with him, having braved the deep during the hazardous voyage from North Africa, during which the previously considered dream occurred. But Augustine was not to know then that Monica would never live to journey back with him. At that time he had not paid the full price of his earlier defiant flight across the Mediterranean to Rome.³⁸

Such then are some of the implications and associations of the second dream of Monica in the *Confessions*—the dream which, as has been seen, predicted the safe arrival of her storm-tossed boat in Rome. Not only is Monica's experience amazingly similar to that of Paul, who was also so important to Augustine's conversion, but he seems to regard the very circumstances of Monica's dream as symbolically significant.

Before examining the first dream which occurs in the *Confessions*, it is worthy of mention that the three descriptions of the dreams become progressively incomplete. The third dream is incomplete even to the extent that it does not occur, as has been observed. The second dream suffers from an incompleteness of description. The reader is informed only of the occurrence of the dream in that Monica had been assured of the boat's safe arrival. Descriptive details of the dream are quite absent. By far the most complete description is to be found in the case of the first dream which is predictive of Augustine's eventual return to the Catholic faith. Of the three, it is most relevant to the *Confessions* as a whole; a fact which would seem to justify its greater completeness of descriptive detail.

The first dream is found towards the end of the third book of the *Confessions*. In the earlier sections of that book, Augustine has described the evil ways into which he fell after leaving home to further his studies in distant Carthage. As a lusty youth of seventeen far removed from the constraints of home, and already in love with love, he sought someone to love and fell headlong into the trap for which he had so much longed.³⁹ He was led still further from the path of virtue by licentious plays which deeply impressed him.⁴⁰ The third catastrophe which befell him was an involvement with the Manichaeans; an association which was to last for the next nine years.⁴¹ He was probably all the more vulnerable to the myths and promises of revelations from that religion because of his encounter with the *Hortensius* of Cicero at the age of nineteen. This work filled him with noble thoughts and a vague

³⁸ 5.8.15.

³⁹ 3.1.1.

⁴⁰ 3.2.2-4.

⁴¹ 3.6-10. See also: Leo Ferrari, 'Augustine's 'Nine Years' as a Manichee' *Augustiniana* 25 (1975) 208-215.

yearning for "philosophy",⁴² for which the Manichaean myths were the most accessible substitute.

During this dark and tumultuous period of his life, his mother's tearful prayers for her wayward son's conversion back to the Catholic faith ascended ceaselessly to the throne of God. Her condition is depicted by a curiously appropriate biblical passage:

Let no man rejoice over me a widow, and desolate; I am forsaken of many for the sins of my children, because they departed from the law of God.⁴³

Two events towards the end of the same third book intimate that Monica's fervent prayers would not go unanswered. The more concrete of these (which comes second in order of description) is the well-known reply of a certain harried bishop to Monica's repeated entreaties that he meet with her wayward son and reason him out of his pernicious error. When she fortified her insistence with copious tears, the resourceful bishop replied: "Go thy way, and God bless thee, for it is not possible that the son of these tears should perish."⁴⁴ This reply, Monica accepted as if it were heaven-sent, as she was often to remind Augustine later in life.⁴⁵

The reassuring encounter with the bishop is of interest in that it recalls a similar episode in the Bible:

In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'vindicate me against my adversary.' For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.' . . . Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night.⁴⁶

Again, the episode involving the bishop can be seen as adding confirmation to the prophetic dream which had preceded it. In this regard it is to be observed that there is another reference to dreaming in the third book. Just before half way, Augustine had occasion to remark of the fables of the Manichees as spiritual food for the members of that sect: "Food in our sleep appears like our food awake; yet the sleepers are

⁴² 3.4.7-8.

⁴³ *Baruch* 4.12.

⁴⁴ 3.12.22.

⁴⁵ 'Quod illa ita se accepisse, inter colloquia sua mecum saepe recordabatur, ac si de coelo sonuisset.' (*Ibid.*).

⁴⁶ *Luke* 18.3-7.

not nourished by it, for they are asleep." ⁴⁷ Monica's dream, as recounted in the second last chapter of the book is clearly not this kind of fantasy, for it is confirmed in the concrete by the interview with the bishop, himself a man nourished (*nutritum*) in the Church.⁴⁸

As to the dream of Monica, it is briefly described, but with some interesting details:

She saw herself standing on a certain wooden rule, and a bright youth advancing towards her, joyous and smiling upon her, whilst she was grieving and bowed down with sorrow. But he having inquired of her the cause of her sorrow and daily weeping (he wished to teach, as is their wont, and not to be taught), and she answering that it was my perdition that she was lamenting, he bade her rest contented, and told her to behold and see 'that where she was, there was I also.' And when she looked she saw me standing near her on the same rule.⁴⁹

The effect of the dream upon Augustine is undeniable. Not only is it evident from his concise but detailed description of it in the *Confessions* some twenty-four years after the event, but even when recounting it so much later, he seems amazed by the dream as an answer to Monica's earnest prayers. Thus, no less than three times he affirms the supernatural character of the communication: "Thou heardest her, O Lord. Thou heardest her . . . yea, Thou heardest her."⁵⁰ At the time of the event described, the young Augustine had good reason to welcome the revelation, for it so mollified the formidable Monica that she allowed her wayward son to take his place once more in the family circle. Yet, on the other hand, if Augustine's words be taken literally, what impressed him even more than the dream itself was his mother's unhesitating defence of it and of its clear meaning. Thus when he attempted to interpret it as a prediction of Monica's conversion to Manichaeism, her immediate defence of her own interpretation not only took Augustine off guard, but so profoundly impressed him that he often had occasion to recall the episode:

She immediately, without hesitation, replied, "No; for it was not told me that 'where he is, there shalt thou be,' but 'where thou art, there shall he be.'" I confess to Thee, O Lord, that, to the best of my remembrance (and I have often spoken of this), Thy answer through my watchful mother . . . even then moved me more than the dream itself.⁵¹

⁴⁷ 3.6.10. Cf. *Isaiah* 29.8.

⁴⁸ 3.12.21.

⁴⁹ 3.11.19. See Dulaey's interesting comments (*op. cit.* 158-165).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ 3.11.20.

Regarding the contents of the dream itself, a detail of immediate significance is that Monica was "grieving and bowed down with sorrow" (*moerens et moerere confecta*). That this is meant to suggest death is evident from Augustine's preface to the description of the dream:

My mother, Thy faithful one, wept to Thee on my behalf more than mothers are wont to weep the bodily deaths of their children. For she saw that I was dead by that faith and spirit which she had from Thee.⁵²

This emphasis on the holy widow's mourning over the spiritual death of her son recalls the episode in the Bible where Christ comes upon that other mourning widow:

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 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 dead man sat up and began to speak.⁵³

In this regard, an interesting detail would seem to link this dream with the second dream of the *Confessions* concerning Monica's safe arrival in Rome. Immediately after the mention of the hazardous sea-voyage and the dream associated with it, Augustine recounts that his mother found him no longer a Manichaeon, but not yet a Catholic. Then follows a passage strongly reminiscent of the mourning in the first dream and its preface:

She was now reassured as to that part of my misery for which she had mourned me as one dead, but who would be raised to Thee, carrying me forth upon the bier of her thoughts, that Thou mightest say unto the widow's son, 'Young man, I say unto thee, arise,' and he should revive, and begin to speak, and Thou shouldest deliver him to his mother.⁵⁴

This is of course precisely what happens in a spiritual sense in the *Confessions*, with the added ironical twist that Augustine's spiritual life is revived at the cost of Monica's physical death.

The dream involving the wooden ruler plays an obviously important rôle in the drama of the *Confessions*. Thus, immediately after the conversion-scene in the garden, both Augustine and his friend Alypius recount the joyful news to Monica, whereupon Augustine refers to the prophetic dream in the very closing lines of the eighth book:

⁵² 3.11.19.

⁵³ Luke 7.12-15. Cf. I Kings 17.17-24 and II Kings 4.32-37.

⁵⁴ 6.1.1.

For Thou didst convert me unto Thyself, that I sought neither a wife, nor any other of this world's hopes,—*standing in that rule of faith* in which Thou, so many years before, had showed me unto her in a vision.⁵⁵

Obviously, the ruler therefore signifies the rule of faith.⁵⁶ However, it would seem that there is more to its symbolism than that. Thus, it is curious that Augustine should recall that the ruler was made of wood, when recounting the dream some quarter of a century after its occurrence. Again, there is the seemingly insignificant detail that Monica is also supported by wood in the context of the dream amidst the storm-tossed ocean. As a result of such observations, I have argued elsewhere that the wooden ruler symbolises the rule of Christ, or the *regula Christi*.⁵⁷ Augustine appreciated the fact that while human kings rule by iron, Christ the King is unique in that he rules by wood.⁵⁸ By the wood of the Cross, he conquered even death itself.

Nor would this seem to exhaust the significance of the wooden ruler in the symbolism of the complicated Augustine. When one reflects upon the many references in the *Confessions* to the rough and crooked paths which he followed before he found The Way (*i. e.* Christ),⁵⁹ one is tempted to see an intended contrast to the smooth and straight nature of the wooden ruler of Monica's dream. Not only does this seem to be so, but the genius of Augustine appears to have taken its inspiration for such a contrast from the well-known exhortation of Isaiah, to make straight the path of the Lord.⁶⁰ Thus, early in the ninth book of the *Confessions* writing of the process of his conversion, which has been described a few pages earlier, Augustine has occasion to observe of God's transformation in him:

Pleasant it is to me, O Lord, to confess unto Thee, by what inward goads Thou didst subdue me, and how Thou didst make me low, bringing down the mountains and hills of my imaginations, *and didst straighten my crookedness, and smooth my rough ways*.⁶¹

In view of such considerations, Monica's dream about herself upon the wooden ruler becomes much more than a mere episode in the *Con-*

⁵⁵ 8.12.30. Italics added.

⁵⁶ *Galatians* 6.15-16 and *Philippians* 3.16. Cf. Dulaey, *op. cit.* 161-162.

⁵⁷ Leo Ferrari, 'Monica on the Wooden Ruler (*Conf.* 3.11.19)' *Augustinian Studies* 6 (1975) 193-205.

⁵⁸ *Enarratio in Psalmum* 95 2.

⁵⁹ For a treatment of Christ as the Right Way (*via recta*), in contrast to the crooked ways which Augustine had followed in his sinful youth, see: Leo Ferrari, 'Christus Via' in Augustine's *Confessions* *Augustinian Studies* 7 (1976) 147-157.

⁶⁰ *Isaiah* 40.3-4. Notice also that this is the same *Isaiah* which Augustine as a catechumen had once found so difficult to understand (9.5.13).

fessions. The genius of Augustine has made of this memorable dream, not only the alpha and the omega of his own conversion, but also the subtle substance of his story.

Finally, in view of the evidence of the preceding pages, it can be appreciated to what extent Augustine had come to regard his mother, Monica, as a mediatrix between himself and God. In particular, through her dreams, Augustine, author of the *Confessions* came to see that holy woman as manifesting the very will of God. As Augustine himself expressed it:

Far be it from Thee that Thou shouldst delude her in those visions and the answers she had from Thee,—some of which I have spoken of, and others not,—which she kept in her faithful breast, and, always petitioning, pressed upon Thee as Thine autograph.⁶²

Leo Charles Ferrari
St. Thomas University and
The University of New Brunswick
Fredericton, N.B., Canada

⁶¹ 'Quemadmodum me complanaveris, humilitatis montibus et collibus cogitationum mearum, et tortuosa mea direxeris, et aspera lenieris' (9.4.7). Italics added.

⁶² 5.9.17.