

## **Saint Augustine and Inculturation: Toward a Creative Solitude**

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There are many scholars and investigators who enter into the huge library which houses the heritage of St. Augustine of Hippo. Specialists from a variety of disciplines required for a scientifically acceptable reconstruction of an authentically Augustinian text and context have provided studies, both massive and monographic which honor the title of Patristics. The ever-expanding bibliography, the accessibility to which has been globally enhanced by the electronic revolution, is, indeed, awesome and, to speak the truth, quite inhibiting to the neophyte student of Augustine.

In addition to the specialists in the fields of theology, philosophy, philology, and all of the other branches of specific modes of investigation, there are those whose interests go beyond the purely theoretical, that is, those pastors, teachers and agents of cultural change who seek an applicability, an ortho-praxis, which might be rooted in the broad lines of continuity which, indeed, exist between the perennial Augustine and the cultural realities which are the fields of operation for those who are engaged in the processes of humanization and cultural reform. In an age, for example, in which there is an often stated desire for identifying a spiritual dimension is it possible to *evoke*<sup>1</sup> a recognizable “Augustinian spirituality” fully respectful of the scientific studies of this inexhaustible religious genius while, at the same time, benefiting from the didactic, symbolic and transcendental qualities of both the man and his message?

The effects of electronic globalization in its innumerable facets of instantaneous diffusion of information, transferable technology, and world-spanning social, economic, and political institutions are patently present in the multiple phenomena of cultural interaction. Such interaction, often subsumed under the label of multi-culturalism or pluralism, confronts cultures and sub-cultural entities on the horizon of the present and in the verticalities of past to present and of present to future. For the purposes of this presentation, a direct and simple anthropological definition of *culture* is sufficient to initiate the logical unfolding of the argument which follows.

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<sup>1</sup> Voegelin, E.: *History of Political Ideas, Volume I, Hellenism, Rome and Early Christianity* (London 1997) pp. 228-231. Voegelin develops an interesting theory concerning the evocative power of language and symbol recovery as source of political and social change.

Culture, in an anthropological sense, may be usefully defined as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life”.<sup>2</sup>

More than a sign, a symbol re-presents that which is signified and makes possible “the exchange of meanings and ideas in social interaction”.<sup>3</sup> The contemporary cultural conflicts have to do with a clash of symbols, that is, words, images, institutions, and behaviors, representing values emerging from the plurality of ideational systems jockeying for attention or for domination but resting inevitably on a bed-rock of life itself always fruitful in possibilities of encounter. The anthropological approach to cultures and culture may well have heavily contributed to the relativism of the age but, in its better expressions, it has also recognized that it is senseless to study a cultural entity if such is absolutely beyond a degree of interpretation and communicability. Linguistics and word-games notwithstanding, there is “the simple truth of things artlessly apprehended, plain fact acknowledged by plain men”.<sup>4</sup> The possibility of and limitations to inter-subjectivity or to the transmittability of ideas are too well-known but the striving for communication and dialogue is a hallmark of an age in the process of globalization. To put the same in phenomenological terms, the following statement from a seminar on interculturality might well summarize the concern. “The incommensurability of lifeworlds does not mean that the intercultural understanding is impossible. There are always points of overlap and crisscrossing which provide a foundation for us to use our linguistic, emotional and cognitive imagination to grasp what is being expressed and said in *alien* traditions.”<sup>5</sup>

There is a wide range of opinion concerning the recuperability of the past. The contemporary discussions of the validity of interpretations and the

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<sup>2</sup> Geertz, C.: *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York, 1973) p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> Barber, B.: *Intellectual Pursuits: Toward an Understanding of Culture* (New York 1998) p. 26. Barber emphasizes, with the help of Talcott Parson’s theory of social systems, the dynamics of the cultural and symbolic patterns within the processes of the “action” which describe the social world.

<sup>4</sup> Geertz, C.: *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, (New York 1983) p. 10

<sup>5</sup> Zhang, R.: “Lifeworld and the Possibility of Intercultural Understanding”, in *Phenomenology of Interculturality and Life-World* (Ed.E. W. Orth and C-F. Cheung) (München, 1998) pp. 19-20.

imposition of the limitations of any hermeneutical approach to texts inhibit the wary and question the well-intentioned efforts of the average and, even, above average reader. Is Augustine out of reach? Is the unique didactic of “conversion” with all of its personal and universal usefulness and qualities of mimetic inspiration, an incommunicable message?

Some serious Augustinian scholars question the revivability of an Augustinian message for a contemporary culture so alien to the Latinity of Africa’s Roman provinces and the rhetoric of its most eminent representative.<sup>6</sup> Others wisely warn against any attempt to “domesticate” Augustine. “A. cannot be tamed and domesticated for our purposes; in fundamental ways, he is alien—to put it more gently, he is a challenge to all of us”.<sup>7</sup> Severe as well are the strictures imposed upon those who would dare to undertake the publication of yet another study of Augustine and Augustinianism.<sup>8</sup>

There are, however, other voices calling out, and from positions of scholarly preparation and professional rectitude, for another look at Augustine as a valuable source for a constructive dialogue with the complex and fragmented cultural configurations on the horizon of the new century. Alvin Plantinga, speaking from a perspective which is as rigorous as his professed Calvinism and as exacting as his practice of analytics, jolted an audience of Catholic philosophers by his passionate advocacy of a contemporary “Augustinian Christian Philosophy”.<sup>9</sup> J.B. Elshtain sees Augustine as the antidote to the various outbursts of the violent “libido dominandi” which perpetuate divisions, oppressions, and genocide at the dying of this chaotic century.<sup>10</sup> In the face of a panorama well-described by an historian as “looking into the abyss” of contemporary deconstructionism and seeing that “the beasts of modernism have mutated into the beasts of postmodernism—relativism into nihilism, amorality into immorality, irrationality into

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<sup>6</sup> Lancel, S.: *Saint Augustin*, Paris, 1999, “et il serait hors de propos, parfaitement inopérant et meme absurde de tenter d’imaginer comment, revenue par impossible sur cette terre, il adapterait son **message** a notre culture”.

<sup>7</sup> O’Donnell, J.J.: *Augustine Confessions* (Oxford, 1992) Vol. III, pp. 203-204.

<sup>8</sup> O’Meara, J.J.: “Research Techniques in Augustinian Studies”, *Augustinian Studies*, I, 1970, pp. 277-284.

<sup>9</sup> Plantinga, A.: “Augustinian Christian Philosophy”, *The Monist*, vol. 75, num. 3, July 1992, pp. 291-320.

<sup>10</sup> Elshtain, J.B.: *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, (Notre Dame, 1995) especially, “Why Augustine? Why Now?”, pp. 1-18.

insanity, sexual deviancy into polymorphous perversity”.<sup>11</sup> is there an agenda with which an Augustine *redivivus* might engage in dialogue?

P. Langa, in his recent *San Agustín y la Cultura* argues affirmatively in spite of the obvious difficulties of any inter-facing between a 4<sup>th</sup> century rhetorician and a quantifying, information-driven scientism more supportive of disposable “happenings” than of a transcendence with claims of ultimate truths and universal values.<sup>12</sup> This author suggests three possible positions which might be taken with regard to the postmodern configurations within the dominant theme of globalization, namely, radical separation, conciliation or subordination.<sup>13</sup> The option recommended is that of a conciliatory openness. The presupposition here is that the posture assumed has a point of departure, an ideological foundation from which to engage, reject or submit to a system of symbols, ideas and values distinct from or, apparently foreign to that of the interlocutor, in this case, Augustine of Hippo. If the author of the *Confessions* once set his heart “upon the gold which at your bidding your people brought out of Egypt”<sup>14</sup>, he would not be reluctant to mine the postmodern deposits of truth with which to reconstruct a deconstructed philosophical edifice.

### **Augustine of Hippo: A Paradigm of Intercultural Dialogue**

Undoubtedly, the philosopher, theologian or pastor who might seek to interpret the Augustinianism of Augustine, through the retrospective reappropriation of text and context in the spirit of a reasonable hermeneutic, would have at hand a wealth of scholarship to assist in the search of sources. The awesome array of such scholarship should not, however, overwhelm the reader of Augustine who offers himself as a communicator of his own experience and as desirous of confessing “in the ears of believing men and women, the companions of my joy and sharers of my mortality, my fellow citizens still on pilgrimage with me, those who have

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<sup>11</sup> Himmelfarb, G.: *On Looking into the Abyss: Untimely Thoughts on Culture and Society*, (New York, 1994) p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Langa, P.: *San Agustín y la Cultura*, (Madrid, 1998) passim.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 58

<sup>14</sup> Conf. 7.15 (Translation of M. Boulding, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*), (Hyde Park, NY, 1997) p. 172. Augustine repeats the same claim to the “gold of Egypt” in *De doctrina christiana*, 2.60

gone before and those who will follow, and all who bear me company in life.”<sup>15</sup>

It might be suggested that, for purposes of an inter-cultural dialogue between Augustine and the contemporary claims of an anchorless postmodernism, there are two facets of the Augustinian experience which might offer opportunities for engagement. The first of these is the paradigmatic quality of Augustine’s role as a transmitter and as a creator of culture. Details on this well-recognized role of Hippo’s bishop as the last exponent of the inherited rhetorical tradition and as the initiator of the new pedagogy of the “living word” are readily available.<sup>16</sup>

The second focal point for dialogue, however, consists of the kind of hermeneutical approach suggested by P. Langa, that is a dialectic of affirmation, promotion and questioning.<sup>17</sup> The perennial issues of personal identity, freedom, origin and destiny, morality, sociability and the meaning of time, personal and historical, are lines of possible communication which do indeed criss-cross in the engagement of philosophy with the cultural patterns which contemporaneously engulf the philosopher. To choose but one theme, preeminently Augustinian which sublates the above-mentioned existential questions, the choice could very well be that of “interiority”.

### **A Restless Heart or a Mask?**

Long associated with Augustine is the anthropology identified with the most frequently remembered identification of the human with the restlessness of desire, thought and affections with which he initiates his personal manifesto of what it means to be human in the first pages of the *Confessions* (1.1) The term, “restless heart”, while “unphilosophical even untheological,...is eminently scriptural and Augustinian”<sup>18</sup> It constitutes an evocative symbol for the world of interiority discovered by Augustine, a unifying theme

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<sup>15</sup> Conf. 10, 6. F. Young in an interesting commentary suggests that the *Confessions* is “fundamentally didactic” furnishing an archetype not entirely foreign to the postmodern claim that “we ourselves construct our own selfhood, on the cultural and indeed linguistic captivity of all experience, on mediation and intertextuality”. Cf. “The Genre of Augustine’s *Confessions*”, *Augustinian Studies* Vol.30, Number 1, 1999, pp. 1-16

<sup>16</sup> Marrou, H.-I.: *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, (Paris, 1958) p. 575 and passim.

<sup>17</sup> Langa, P., op. cit. p. 113

<sup>18</sup> O’Donnell, J.J., op. cit., Vol. II, p. 13

embracing the whole of his thought.<sup>19</sup> The philosophical reappropriation of the transcendental dynamics of a non-solipsistic subjectivity capable of re-affirming the centrality of the human person who can say, “my inner self recognized them all through the service of the outer..I, who was that inmost self, I, who was mind, knew them through the sense of the body” (Conf. 10.9), would challenge the substance-less self of masks and masquerades offered by post-modern nihilism.<sup>20</sup> This same discovered self of the *Confessions* further links with the obvious urge to know, “and so I questioned the vast frame of the world concerning my God, and it answered, ‘I am not he, but he made me’”. (Conf. Ibid.) M.F. Sciacca has accurately captured the elements of surprise and discovery which separate the Augustinian “inner self” from the “cogito” of Cartesian reductionism or a Kantian organizer of phenomena.<sup>21</sup> Augustine was grasped by a truth so powerful that he would have preferred to cast his own self-awareness to the margin rather than to deny this experience of the transcendental. (Conf. 7.16)

The Neo-Platonic inner self cedes ground to the vibrant “homo interior” of Pauline inspiration. This interior possibility of growth and regeneration overtakes the condemnation of time and natural decay in the outer man. On more than 60 occasions in his writings, Augustine refers to the dynamics implicit in 2 Corinthians 4.16, a scriptural justification for a psychology of a transcending inner renewal open to an infinity which is both beatific and trans-historical. The alchemy of faith and reason in Augustine is at the root of an anthropology of interiority which becomes a God-Creator and person-creature matrix out of which will emerge the timeless constructs of Augustinianism.<sup>22</sup> The privilege and the burden of the human is the gift of solitude not to be confused with the alienated loneliness of the post-modern observer of happenings. In order to dwell in the solitude of the interior life where the inner voices are heard, the post-modern man must learn again to enter into self and to dialogue with self as a condition for transcending conflict and for speaking from the heart the only words capable of achieving reconciliation, wholeness, and peace. Augustine summarizes well the process in his *Sermon 46*.

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<sup>19</sup> Solignac, A.: “Homme Intérieur”, *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris, 1968) Fasc. 655-656.

<sup>20</sup> An excellent treatment of G. Vattimo’s, *Il soggetto e la maschera. Nietzsche e il problema della liberazione*, is W.R. Darós article, “El sujeto humano y moral en el clima **light** de la posmodernidad”, *Contrastes*, Suplemento 2, (Malaga, 1998) pp. 57-82.

<sup>21</sup> Sciacca, M.F.: *La interioridad objectiva*, (Barcelona, 1963) p. 17

<sup>22</sup> This notion of creation and re-creation as the process of human development is admirably summarized in *Contra Faustum* 24.2

*“In solitude. What’s in solitude? Inside, in the conscience. It’s a solitude indeed, because not only do no other human beings cross it, they don’t even see it. Let us dwell there in hope, because we are not yet there in fact. After all, everything we have outside chops and changes with the storms and trials of the world. The desert inside, that’s where we should interrogate our faith. Let us ask if there is charity there inside. Let us see if it’s not just the lips but the heart uttering, when we say **Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors (Mt. 6:12)**. If it rings true, if we are speaking the truth where nobody can see, that’s the desert where we can rest in hope.”* (Serm. 46.23)<sup>23</sup>

What results from the ontological status of interiority is both the liberating encounter with being and the emergence of the becoming of conversion, the formation of the unformed as well as the deformed, not in a cycle of turnings but in an ascent to fullness which responds to the crisis of personal and social fragmentation in a society identified with trivial pursuits and massive addictions. The “restless” never ceases to be what it is. Desire is universal and in this abyss of longing there is either a bottomless nothingness or a moment of recollection, the paradigmatic turning to self of the broken prodigal. Such is the perfect metaphor for the process of re-humanization and liberation that is the constant Augustinian message, the primordial intuition of a philosophical and theological world-view which beckons for re-statement and engagement in the cultural dialogues of the new century.

In spite of the “end of history”<sup>24</sup> fantasy of postmodern speculation, human beings and institutions of their making still continue to “live time”<sup>25</sup> either in a spirit of cyclical pessimism or in the hope of what Augustine would call “the seventh day” which “has no evening and sinks toward no sunset”. (Conf. 13.51) The process which takes place in historical and personal time is itself a pilgrimage toward an “eschatological transfiguration”<sup>26</sup> recapitulating and achieving “this whole order of beautiful things, intensely beautiful as it is”. (Conf. 13.50) The recovery of such an open-ended vision of the ultimate future would indeed lift the tired pedestrian of history wandering as he must in the details of a proximate history full of uncertainties.

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<sup>23</sup> Translation by Edmund Hill in *Sermons: The Works of St. Augustine* Vol. III-2, (Brooklyn 1990) p. 318

<sup>24</sup> Himmelfarb, G., op. cit., especially the interesting chapter, “Postmodernist History”, pp. 130-161.

<sup>25</sup> Sciacca, M.F., op. cit., p. 125

<sup>26</sup> Marrou, H.-I.; *The Resurrection and Saint Augustine’s Theology of Human Values*, (Villanova, 1965) p. 31.

At this breaking-point in the ages of man, a theme of constant interest to St. Augustine (De Trin. 4.4.7; De civ. Dei. 22.30.5), what new symbols will appear and what will be the sources of the narrative? If life is defined as a “quest for narrative” or “a narrative in its nascent state”<sup>27</sup>, it might be suggested that there is an archetypical quality to Augustine’s adventure of conversion and its originary experience of the transcendental which could be the object of a phenomenological retrieval as well as a restorative re-reading. Indeed, Augustine anticipated such a fraternal intentionality when he appealed to the “brotherly mind” (Conf. 10.2.5) among the readers of *Confessions*. While not entering into the epistemic conditions for inculturating or inserting an ancient narrative into a meaningful dialogue with contemporary idioms, it is suggested in this brief paper that the “divided” or “fragmented” self of the world of shopping malls and happenings might confess to a need for a corner of solitude open to an illuminating experience of its own infinite horizons.

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<sup>27</sup> Gyllenhammer, P.; “From the Limits of Knowledge to the Hermeneutics of Action (From Derrida to Ricoeur)”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Volume LXXII, 1998, No. 4, p. 578. The author summarizes Paul Ricoeur’s “hermeneutics of action” in these terms.



An Up-date on the Augustinian Recollects

Post-Vatican II developments within the Recollection.

1968 – General Chapter of Renewal

1974 - 1980 Revision of provisional Constitutions

1982 - Papal approval of text

After almost 400 years of institutional life lived in the “house of tradition” or under the roof of ecclesiastical “authority”, supported by the culture of the Tridentine reform, this “Baroque” congregation, accustomed to the uniformity of cultural symbols, a Madrid to Manila enclosure of common religious practice, and a consensus on conduct and morality, had to find

The Church paved the way to adaptation by requiring a community search of soul and history which would discover for the congregation a charismatic identity, perhaps, lost somewhere under the centuries of a history largely confined to the territorial limits of a fading Spanish empire.

The requirements of “*Perfectae Charitatis*”, “*Evangelica Testificatio*”, “*Vita Consecrata*”, etc. call for this charismatic theology, this return to the sources, reading of the signs, and adequate adaptation.

The AR “charism” is grounded in that “gift” of the Holy Spirit which has been historically mediated by St. Augustine of Hippo and the long historical tradition of his spirituality in the various religious families which are gathered under this *Regla ad Servos Dei*. It has been an immense river of thought, theological and philosophical, which continues to flow into contemporary spirituality.

Vatican II continues to be the center of focus for inspiration and guidance in the pastoral mission of the Church. The Church continues to study the signs of the times and to call for a “new Evangelization”, that is, a conversion in depth of Christians in search of voice and authenticity in the media dominated culture of contemporary globalization.

Internal Renewal: The large number of studies, publications, history of the Order, etc. The challenge for each religious community is to seize the content of the charism as the directing principal of not only community life but also of ministry. The three loves which emanate from the single Trinitarian source embrace contemplation, community and apostolate.

The problem seems to arise from the incorporation of this charismatic identity into the ministry and pastoral life. Our religious become easy prey

to the various offerings in the market of evangelizing techniques. There is, however, a characteristically Augustinian approach to the Gospel and to the preaching of the same that needs restatement and incorporation in our pastoral life. It is not only a tactic of survival but a duty imposed upon us by the Church. Citing VFC 61, our last General Chapter reminds us that “the best service a religious community can give to the Church is that of being faithful to its charism” and, in PC 2c; VC 36, “the Church asks us to serve the kingdom of Christ in fidelity to our own charism”.

John Paul II summarized this Augustinian presence in his Apostolic Letter of 1986 directed to the Augustinian religious families. “Our task”, concludes Our Holy Father is to “keep alive and attractive the enchantment of St. Augustine for modern society”, and that is, “hunger for God, fascination of Christ, love of wisdom and truth, the need for grace, prayer, virtue, fraternal charity, and the longing for eternal happiness”. A tall order! All of these elements come together in the writings and in the life of Augustine; they are summarized in that theological anthropology of the “restless heart”.

In addition to St. Augustine, the common source for Augustinian religious communities, philosophers and theologians of all ages, we have inherited a rather strange nomenclature in the word “Recollection”. We know of its historical origins among the mendicants of the 14 and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries but we are not too sure of what it says to us today. Certainly, the word itself echoes the notion of interiority which is so prevalent in the works of St. Augustine. St. Teresa of Avila considers “recollection” to be the preparatory prayer to contemplative prayer, the gathering together within self of the powers of memory, imagination, and thought in a quieting process of openness to a graced encounter with the Divine.

I would suggest that there is much to do in order to locate this word and its implications in the culture of today. Modern Personalist philosophy uses the word to identify those attempts we make to “return” introspectively to the sources of the authentic or the real in our interior dialogue. Heidegger, the giant of continental thought, sees it as the absolute condition for all philosophizing. Levinas uses the word to describe the recovery of those inner spaces of “welcome” where one receives and is received. Merton reminds us simply that it is the means of touching base with that which is authentic in the human being.

It would seem that those of us who have been gifted with the name and the association of the same with Augustine have an obligation to travel these interior byways of the soul in search of that image of God, a reflection of the primitive creation and restored brilliantly in the new creation of the redemption. In brief, it would help us greatly if we could take to heart this road of interior recollection with an Augustinian map in hand and guided by the Holy Spirit. This is the preliminary “*exercitatio animae*” for a fruitful ministry. It is also something to be shared with the People of God who come

under our care. With a sense of urgency, the Church asks us to re-discover our charismatic identity and the we learn how to transmit the “kerygma” of the Gospel which has come to us through the millennial and a half spirituality identified with Augustine. There are many questions about how this can be done. In all of the Pastoral Weeks and provincial chapters, we are asking the same questions about the application of this charism, the orthopraxis of an orthodoxy.

1. The example of St. Augustine is a clear lesson. His desired for retirement to philosophical contemplation was cut short by his call to the priesthood and , subsequently, to the episcopacy. Yet, we find in his innumerable works a pastoral thrust. The final section of Book 10 of the *Confessions* relates his reason for his pastoral involvement. “Filled with terror by my sins and my load of misery I had been turning over in my mind a plan to flee into solitude, but you forbade me, and strengthened me by your words. *To this end Christ died for all, you reminded me, that they who are alive may live not for themselves, but for him who died for them.* (2 Cor. 5. 15) See, then, Lord, I cast my care upon you that I may live, and I will contemplate the wonders you have revealed. You know how stupid and weak I am: teach me and heal me. Your only Son, in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge, has redeemed me with his blood. Let not the proud disparage me, for I am mindful of my ransom. I eat it, I drink it, I dispense it to others, and as a poor man I long to be filled with it among those who are fed and feasted. And then do those who seek him praise the Lord.” (Conf. 10. 70) Augustine’s pastoral approach originates in his personal experience and is extrapolated from the same.
2. There are many obstacles to evangelization and to spirituality which arise from the surrounding cultures each day more homogeneous in this epoch of electronic globalization. While communication is the prime motor of the information industry, what is communicated is consumer oriented, economic facts, and whatever lends itself to quantification. What we find is a culture of alienation and fragmentation. Some of the conclusions drawn from the discussions of the Order’s Pastoral Weeks are the following:
  - a. culture of consumption, technological progress without an adequate ethical development for the same;
  - b. collective forgetfulness of cultural and religious patrimony, ignorance of language and a loss of unifying symbols;
  - c. religious and ideological indifference, anonymous living;
  - d. sociological Catholicism neither evangelized nor ecclesial;

- e. fragmentation of families, communities, etc.

Example: “Nike is not just a sneaker or a shoe, it is a model for living. Nike is a style and a vision of the world. Its advertisements are evangelical! They not only sell. They indoctrinate. They not only convince, they convert.”

3. The Jonas Complex. There is no group excluded from salvation.
4. Sermon unedited, 14. “Brothers, I hear you daily murmuring against God. Terrible times! Rotten times! When the celebrations are over we say, “bad times”, “Not like the old times!” and , yet, we go on organizing our shows and spectacles. If times are bad and tough, change them! Do you think the times are so bad, well, even worse are you who do not change the times!”
5. Suggestions. We have to begin with the conviction that we have something to offer the world, something personal and communitarian, something we love and appreciate both intellectually and affectively. We have to know what this “something” is. Study, formation! “Don’t allow the busy things of the moment captivate you and dominate you to such a point that you say <I have no time to read>.” (En. Ps. 66.10) Small groups offer the best opportunity for a catechesis and for the development of an Augustinian spiritual pedagogy. The great lines of Augustinian spirituality resonate in the inner lines of life in a universal way. No matter what the social position of the persons, the “restless heart” remains the best definition of the human. Such perennial themes as, conversion, interiority, community, the human condition, the meaning of life and history, the providential presence of the Triune God, human solidarity in the “Totus Christus”, etc. Pedro Langa suggests that the Augustinian approach to the contemporary world includes three facets:
  - a. metaphysical – saving a sense of solidarity and unity in the midst of growing pluralism;
  - b. ethical – foster a sense of solidarity, from common experience of sin to community of grace;
  - c. axiological – foster movement from oppression to liberation.