

Restless Hearts: George Fox and Augustine of Hippo

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Abstract

John Punshon once proposed that someone should undertake a comparison of early Quaker George Fox with ancient North African bishop Augustine of Hippo. Despite considerable differences between the two, a close look at turning points in their religious autobiographies shows common themes, particularly a Johannine sense of interiority and divine love. These turning points operated differently in their lives: for George Fox, it enabled him to embrace others whose unrighteousness had repulsed him, while, for Augustine, it enabled him to relax his terrified grip on those whom he loved.

Keywords

George Fox, Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*.

Those who knew John Punshon were often delighted and occasionally bemused by his obiter dicta. He once said in my presence, some twenty years ago, that ‘someone should undertake a comparison of George Fox and St Augustine’. John did not specify that someone, but as it seems that he did not bring pen to paper on that idea, it would be an appropriate gesture of honoring John Punshon’s memory by exploring this avenue of thought that clearly attracted him.

An Odd Couple

At first glance, the differences are so glaring and vast as nearly to extinguish the thought of a fruitful comparison. Augustine of Hippo has, over the centuries, come to represent nearly everything against which early Quakers revolted. He is considered the architect of religiously sanctioned use of force by the state as articulated in the just war theory, while George Fox eschewed violence

altogether. Augustine upheld the use of force not only against invading barbarians but also against other Christians deemed heretics, such as the Donatists.¹ The latter were a movement of moral rigourists who separated themselves from the larger church, and George Fox would have applauded both the moral rigour and the separation.² Augustine articulated the defence of infant baptism, which not only Quakers but other religious radicals at the time, such as Baptists and Anabaptists, also rejected. Quakers of course rejected the very practice of external sacraments at all, while Augustine regarded them as utterly essential to salvation. The bishop of Hippo held to the doctrine of original sin, which early Friends refused. Augustine composed a massive and profoundly influential treatise on the Trinity, a theological concept which early Friends shunned as unbiblical, even as they held to the divinity of Father, Son and Spirit. Augustine was a proponent of the concept of predestination, which George Fox and other Friends disavowed completely.³

So the prospect of comparison does not look promising at the start. Augustine is the very embodiment of the state-sponsored and state-supporting, hierarchical, highly liturgical and doctrinally defined church. George Fox is the religious radical who challenged all these qualities of the church. What might John Punshon have had in mind? Having heard John Punshon praise Augustine's *Confessions*, and knowing how fond he was of George Fox's *Journal*, I suspect that this is where John himself would have begun such an investigation.

The critical point in an autobiographical work is the moment when the heart is changed, the mind enlightened, the life dedicated or a new path becomes clear. This experiment in comparative theology will focus on those pivotal moments.

Turning Points: Augustine

Both of these religious autobiographies are justly renowned, and each discloses an earnest, even desperate struggle to find spiritual truth. Each writer finds his truth, though in the case of each the precise turning point is debated among readers.

1 'Why should the church not force [its] lost sons to return, if those lost sons were forcing others to perish, ... through terrible but salutary laws?' (Cur ergo non cogeret ecclesia perditos filios ut redirent, si perditii filii coegerunt alios ut perirent ... per terribiles sed salubres leges) http://www.augustinus.it/latino/lettere/lettera_189_testo.htm.

2 In 1677, Thomas Long, in *The History of the Donatists*, argued that, just as Augustine had endorsed the use of state force against the Donatists, the English government should deny toleration to Dissenter groups such as Friends. Long described the Circumcellions, a violently extremist group of Donatists, as 'much like our Quakers'. Thomas Long, *The History of the Donatists*, London: Printed for Walter Kettily, 1677, p. 60.

3 This does not mean that other early Friends did not read Augustine and even quote him with approval, such as William Penn, Robert Barclay, and Isaac Penington—early Friends who had the opportunity of advanced education. Much of Augustine was available only in Latin at the time.

Augustine required several attempts to find his ultimate spiritual home. Early in his education he encountered Cicero's *Hortensius*, a proreptic dialogue that is lost to history but which moved Augustine to dedicate himself to a quest for philosophical truth as the means to genuine happiness. He identifies the wisdom that Cicero commends with the wisdom of the Christian church of his inheritance and so turns eagerly to the scriptures, only to be repulsed by their crude style, at least in the old Latin translation available at that time. He is then drawn to the Manichaeans, who replaced the coarseness of Christian literalism with their own sophisticated mythology, and adheres to Manichean teachings for nine years. A third turn occurs when he is led to the writings of Platonists, who offer what is for him a much more satisfying explanation for spirit and matter and a goal of returning to the One from whom we all derive and with whom we all yearn for reunion. Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, shows Augustine through his sermons that the Bible can be read allegorically, rescuing Augustine from the crudity of the literal text and enabling him to read it through the eyes of Neoplatonic philosophy. This is intellectually attractive for Augustine, but he still struggles with concupiscence, the desires of the flesh, which for him include all sensory delight, not simply sexual indulgence, although the latter is central to his personal struggle. Some scholars suggest that Augustine's embrace of Christianity is simply a baptising of Platonic thought, but the shape and rhetoric of the *Confessions* make clear that for him the decisive moment was in a garden in Milan.

Ponticianus, a fellow African and a Christian, comes to visit Augustine and his friend Alypius and is pleasantly surprised to find that Augustine, the great teacher of rhetoric, has been reading the apostle Paul. Ponticianus shares the story of Antony of Egypt, the great hermit, who undertook his ascetic life upon hearing in church the admonition from Matthew 19:21 to sell all, give to the poor and follow Christ. Two friends of Ponticianus had read the *Life of Antony* and immediately dedicated themselves to a monastic life. Augustine is deeply moved this story, which demonstrates a conviction that he has been striving but failing to achieve. He and Alypius retire to the garden to ponder what they have heard. Augustine reflects on the distressed condition of his own mind, in which two wills are in strife: the one cannot rise to the heights where it is uplifted by truth because it is weighed down by habit⁴—here, the habit of concupiscence. Augustine is moved to tears. Then, as he was speaking and weeping 'with the most bitter contrition of my heart' (*amarissima contritione cordis mei*), he heard a youthful voice chanting 'Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it' (*tolle lege, tolle lege*), which he understood as a divine command to open the book and read the first passage that he should come upon. He eagerly snatched up the book of the apostle Paul that lay there, and his eyes fell upon Romans 13:13–14: 'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not

4 *Aegritudo animi est, quia non totus adsurgit veritate consuetudine praegravatus* (*Conf.* 8.9.21). All quotations from the *Confessions* are from James J. O'Donnell's edition at <http://www.stoa.org/hippo/comm8.html#CB8C12S29>. Translations from the Latin are my own.

in debauchery⁵ and licentiousness, not in strife and envying; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in concupiscence.⁶ He felt no desire or need to read further. All darkness of doubt dispersed; it was as if a light of confidence⁷ infused his heart.⁸

For the purposes of this comparison, several points merit attention here. First, Augustine has already been reading the apostle Paul. Second, the reader of the *Confessions* has been prepared to expect that in some significant way Christ would be at the centre of this experience. Earlier, in Book Seven (7.9.13), Augustine had written of his encounter with certain books of the Platonists, where he encountered an essentially Christian cosmology, with the exception of the cross and the humility that it assumed. Yet these Neoplatonist texts admonished Augustine to return into himself, and he entered his innermost realm,⁹ where he encountered an unchanging light (*lucem incommutabilem*). To a great extent, it could be argued that Neoplatonist thought offered Augustine much of the truth that he had been seeking, but it did not grant him the power that he needed to overcome his struggle with concupiscence. For this, he required the humble but salvific Christ, who enabled him to commit himself to Lady Continence. Augustine spoke of three principal powers of the mind or soul: memory, understanding and will. Plotinus and company held out new possibilities for understanding, but Augustine still struggled with a recalcitrant will, and for that he needed the voice of Paul.

Turning Points: George Fox

George Fox reveals his temptations to despair, but he does not disclose a particularly sinful past, unlike Augustine, who, in order to examine the sinful quality of humankind, freely admits his own, from famously stealing pears for no good reason to his desires for prestige and sexual gratification. George Fox, the son of 'Righteous Christer' (not the unfaithful Patricius who was Augustine's father), outdoes his father in his quest for virtue. He informs his reader of his 'gravity and stayedness of mind and spirit', that he 'knew purity and righteousness' and that he dealt honestly and faithfully with all, 'being brought up into the covenant, as sanctified by the Word which was in the beginning, by which all things are upheld; wherein is unity with the creation'.¹⁰ George Fox was deeply troubled

5 The text from Romans quoted by Augustine and George Fox contained old-fashioned-sounding terms: *cubiles* (beds) for the former, and 'chambering' for the latter.

6 *Non in comessationibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubilibus et impudicitiiis, non in contentione et aemulatione, sed induite dominum Iesum Christum et carnis providentiam ne feceritis in concupiscentiis.*

7 Other translators have rendered *securitatis* variously as serenity, certainty and relief.

8 *Nec ultra volui legere nec opus erat. statim quippe cum fine huiusce sententiae quasi luce securitatis infusa cordi meo omnes dubitationis tenebrae diffugerunt.* The use of the word 'light' is of course immediately noticeable for Friends.

9 *Et inde admonitus redire ad memet ipsum, intravi in intima mea.*

10 Quotations from George Fox's *Journal* are taken from the edition of John L. Nickalls,

by the unrighteousness of others, and he felt commanded by God to ‘forsake all’ and ‘be as a stranger unto all’, and so he left his relations in a quest to obtain wisdom.¹¹ He recounts his quest for spiritual learning, turning in disappointment from one Puritan divine to another. Echoing the language of Job’s denunciation of his so-called friends who offered nothing of value to Job in his misery, George Fox calls them ‘miserable comforters’.¹² He begins to experience ‘openings’ from God.¹³ These include the insights that theological training is not enough to qualify one truly to be a minister; God does not dwell in buildings constructed by humans but in people’s hearts. He tells of ‘great openings’ regarding the meaning of the Book of Revelation. Yet he alternates between periods of temptation to despair and of great joy and the love of God.¹⁴

Cambridge: University Press, 1952, here pp. 1–2. For his use of the phrase ‘unity with creation’, see Geoffrey Nuttall, “‘Unity with the Creation’: George Fox and the hermetic Philosophy”, in *The Puritan Spirit: essays and addresses*, London: Epworth Press, 1967, pp. 194–203.

11 Fox, *Journal*, pp. 3–4.

12 Job 16:2; Fox, *Journal*, p. 5.

13 Openings were an experience common to others at that time. As Hugh Barbour points out in *Quakers in Puritan England* (New Haven: Yale, 1964), p. 26, ‘Among radical puritans the Spirit was far more often seen as the cause of a sudden insight or with the “opening” of a suddenly remembered Bible verse, as happened constantly to John Bunyan.’ This wider sense of opening may suggest a parallel to Augustine’s chance reading of a verse from Paul. Both require an openness to discovering meaning in a scriptural text that is apparently randomly (or providentially) encountered rather than the product of a conscious decision.

14 Fox, *Journal*, pp. 6–10. Others offer more speculative and psychologised readings of George Fox’s condition. H. Larry Ingle, in *First among Friends: George Fox & the creation of Quakerism*, Oxford: University Press, 1994, p. 33, argues that George Fox both indulged in sexual gratification and felt great guilt about it at a young age. Thus his troubled spiritual search would have been, like Augustine’s, a quest for continence. Ingle writes: ‘In an unusually candid letter written less than a decade later [than 1644], he confessed that “I have drunk the cup of fornication.”’ The text that he cites is a fragment preserved in Henry J. Cadbury (ed.), *Annual Catalogue of George Fox’s Papers*, Philadelphia: Friends Book Store, 1939, p. 36. The full fragment reads as follows:

I have drunk the cup of fornication, I have drunk the cup of indignation of the wrath of God poured out without mixture; yet I have the cup in my hand to give her double, as she hath given to me which is of the mother of harlots—

It is of course impossible to know the private matters of George Fox’s life for which no evidence remains. It is, however, quite a leap to conclude that this passage is a confession of the ‘lure of sexual adventure’ (Ingle, *First*, p. 33.) The passage is filled with allusions to the Book of Revelation (especially 17:1–6, but also 14:10, 16:19 and 18:6), where fornication is certainly not meant literally. The whore of Babylon was understood by George Fox’s contemporaries to be Rome (specifically, the Church thereof). Considering, as mentioned above, that Fox has already alerted the reader that he had ‘great openings’ with regard to the meaning of this Biblical book, Ingle proposes a strikingly literal reading of an allusion to what is arguably the most symbol-laden book of the Bible. Given that all the imagery in this fragment is metaphorical, it is a stretch even to presume that the ‘I’ refers to George Fox himself. Ingle’s reading is astonishingly inventive but equally unconvincing to readers

In one memorable moment, George Fox—much like Augustine, whose *Confessions* can be justly described as a lengthy prayer addressed to God—shifts from speaking of God in the third person to speaking to God in the second person, where he contrasts spiritual and fleshly knowledge. This passage is remarkable in that it echoes many biblical sources, but nevertheless focusses on a cluster of terms that are central to the Gospel of John: knowing, life, love, glory, spirit—only to reach its climax in the language of the apostle Paul.

Oh, the everlasting love of God to my soul when I was in great distress! When my troubles and torments were great, then was his love exceeding great. Thou, Lord, makest a fruitful field a barren wilderness, and a barren wilderness a fruitful field;¹⁵ thou bringest down and settest up;¹⁶ thou killest and makest alive;¹⁷ all honour and glory be to thee, O Lord of glory! The knowledge of thee in the spirit is life,¹⁸ but that knowledge which is fleshly works death. And while there is this knowledge in the flesh, deceit and self-will conform to anything, and will say, ‘Yes, yes’, to that it doth not know. The knowledge which the world hath of what the prophets and apostles spake is a fleshly knowledge;¹⁹ and the apostates from the life, in which the prophets and apostles were, have got their words, the Holy Scriptures, in a form, but not in the life nor spirit that gave them forth. And so they all lie in confusion and are making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof, but not to fulfil the law and command of Christ in his power and spirit; for that, they say they cannot do, but to fulfil the lusts of the flesh, that they can do with delight.²⁰

The last sentence contains a reference to Romans 13:14, the very passage that Augustine credits with persuading him to convert.²¹ This passage from George Fox’s *Journal* comes shortly before what is often regarded as the crucial turning

of George Fox who have studied his use of Scripture. My conclusion, of course, does not argue that George Fox was necessarily untempted by libido. All arguments based on silence are unsubstantiated and untrustworthy.

15 Cf. Isa. 32:15, ‘Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.’ Two pages later in his *Journal* George Fox returns to this theme, again in the midst of a passage of effusive joy and praise: ‘Therefore, all wait patiently, whatsoever condition you be in: it is the great work of God to make a wilderness out of that which is pleasant to the outward eye and fleshly mind; and to make a fruitful field of a barren wilderness. This is the great work of God’ (Fox, *Journal*, p. 13).

16 Cf. Ps. 75:7: But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.

17 Cf. 1 Sam. 2:6: The LORD killeth, and maketh alive.

18 Cf. Jn 17:3: And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

19 Cf. 2 Cor. 15:16: Therefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.

20 Fox, *Journal*, p. 11.

21 For another reference to Rom. 13:14 by George Fox, see his ‘Cause Why Adam And Eve Were Driven Out Of Paradise’, in *Works of George Fox*, Philadelphia, 1831, vol. 6, p. 156. Viewed at the Digital Quaker Collection: dqc.esr.earlham.edu.

point in his autobiography, where he recounts his leaving behind all ministers and ‘those called the most experienced people’ in the spiritual life:

For I saw there was none among them that could speak to my condition. And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, or could tell what to do, then, Oh then, I heard a voice which said, ‘There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition’, and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.²²

A significant difference in their use of Rom. 13:14 is that George Fox employs the verse to refer to the sins of others, while Augustine interprets the passage as referring to himself. Augustine’s reading of Paul’s exhortation enables him to make the shift from his famous prayer ‘grant me chastity and continence—but not yet!’²³ to life with the chaste dignity of continence, a virtue that is hypostasised in the *Confessions* as a serene and cheerful female figure, modestly beckoning him to come.²⁴ In an odd mix of metaphors, he is to woo and wed continence but to clothe himself with Christ.

Friends and Teachers, Loners and Chums

Here it is important to note that each writer was seeking something different. George Fox sought a teacher and found it in Christ, after a lengthy series of disappointments in his quest for a human teacher who could address his inward state, or, as he put it, speak to his condition. Augustine’s quest was not only for truth but also for a friend, a loved one, who would not die on him.

His story thus far in the *Confessions* has been one of loss. In the fourth book, he tells of the death of a cherished friend, which occasions an extended meditation on his vast grief. Augustine describes his relationship with an unnamed friend from his childhood in his home town of Thagaste as ‘sweet to me beyond all the sweetness in my life’.²⁵ Augustine describes his reaction to this death: ‘Grief darkened my heart. Wherever I gazed, I saw only death.’²⁶ His attachment was so powerful that he had ignored the inevitability of mortality. When reality struck, Augustine’s words burst with anguish, melancholy and self-absorption:

I was miserable, and miserable is every soul that is fettered by friendship to mortal things, and torn apart when one loses them through death ... I believe that the more I loved him, the more I feared and hated death, which had taken him from me, as if death were my most ferocious enemy. I considered death as ready to

22 Fox, *Journal*, p. 11.

23 Da mihi castitatem et continentiam, sed noli modo. *Conf.* 8.7.17.

24 *Casta dignitas continentiae, serena et non dissolute hilaris, honeste blandiens ut venire. Conf.* 8.10.27.

25 *Suavi mihi super omnes suavitates illius vitae meae.*

26 This passage echoes Lam. 5:19. *Quo dolore contenebram est cor meum, et quidquid aspiciebam mors erat.*

devour suddenly all humanity, as it had consumed him. Such was my state, as I remember.²⁷

In a telling moment, Augustine confesses that the ties between friends are so strong that two selves seem to become one.

I was astounded that other mortals continued to live when he whom I had loved as though he would never die was dead. I was even more astounded that I was still alive when he was dead, for I had been his other self. Someone expressed it well that his friend was half of his soul, for I felt that my soul and his had been one soul in two bodies. So life to me was horror, because I had no desire to be only half alive.²⁸

In the course of the *Confessions* Augustine suffered other losses. His dear friend Nebridius dies. His unnamed consort is sent home to North Africa after living with him for a decade and a half. Her presence had become an obstruction to a socially profitable marriage for Augustine that then never materialises when he dedicates himself to a life of continence. Augustine remembers this loss in terms similar to those used above: of a heart torn, wounded and trailing blood.²⁹ His son by that unnamed woman, Adeodatus, perishes while still an adolescent. His mother Monica, who had loomed large in his life and in his autobiography, dies. Looking back, Augustine perceived a progress in his understanding of these losses. By learning to love his friends through God, he came to accept their deaths. God became for him the friend who would not die on him and bring him such terribly human pain. Returning to the language of Rom. 13, by clothing himself in Christ he overcame grief in a love that would not perish. This brings him close to the rest for which he longed, as he expressed in the first paragraph of the *Confessions* in words addressed to God: ‘You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.’³⁰

Clearly, a friendship with Augustine was an extreme experience. In another aside, John Punshon confided to me that there were two kinds of people in the world: ‘loners and chums’. He would have classified Augustine as a chum. He always surrounded himself with friends. When he leaves North Africa to become a teacher of rhetoric in Milan, his friends come along. When he becomes a Manichaean, so do his chums. When he switches his allegiance to the Catholics,

27 *Miser eram, et miser est omnis animus vincit amicitia rerum mortalium, et dilaniatur cum eas amittit, et tunc sentit miseriam qua miser est ... credo, quo magis illum amabam, hoc magis mortem, quae mihi eum abstulerat, tamquam atrocissimam inimicam oderam et timebam, et eam repente consumpturam omnes homines putabam, quia illum potuit. sic eram omnino, meminere.*

28 *Mirabar enim ceteros mortales vivere, quia ille, quem quasi non moriturum dilexeram, mortuus erat, et me magis, quia ille alter eram, vivere illo mortuo mirabar. bene quidam dixit de amico suo, ‘dimidium animae suae’. nam ego sensi animam meam et animam illius unam fuisse animam in duobus corporibus, et ideo mihi horrore erat vita, quia nolebam dimidius vivere ... Portabam enim concisam et cruentam animam meam impatientem portari a me, et ubi eam ponerem non inveniebam.*

29 *Cor ... concisum et vulneratum mihi erat et trahebat sanguinem.*

30 *Fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te. Conf. 1.1.1.*

so do his friends. When he becomes a bishop, he keeps his friends close by. In the turning point in the garden described above his dear friend Alypius is at hand and likewise converts at that time. Even Augustine's mystical experiences happen in company, as in the famous episode in Ostia, just shortly before his mother's death, when he and Monica share an intimate sense of divine presence.³¹ It might be argued that Augustine needed such intimate relationships in order to see himself more clearly. As they became more like him, he could understand who he was.³² As a result of his turning point, it could be argued, he comes to understand himself on his own. He is still a chum but not to a pathological degree. He is no longer quite so dependent on his intense friendships.

George Fox, on the other hand, was a loner. As noted above, it was the sins of others that troubled him, not his own. As a result of his turning point, he comes to see his own possibility for sin and is therefore more able to relate to others. Shortly after his account of hearing the voice declare that Christ can speak to his condition, he recounts another inward experience.

Yet I was under great temptations sometimes, and my inward sufferings were heavy ... the Lord shewed me that the natures of those things which were hurtful without were within, in the hearts and minds of wicked men. The natures of dogs, swine, vipers, of Sodom and Egypt, Pharaoh, Cain, Ishmael, Esau, etc. The natures of these I saw within, though people had been looking without. And I cried to the Lord, saying, 'Why should I be thus, seeing I was never addicted to commit those evils?' And the Lord answered that it was needful I should have a sense of all conditions, how else should I speak to all conditions; and in this I saw the infinite love of God. I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. And in that also I saw the infinite love of God; and I had great openings.³³

Thereafter he is able to engage with people, not be so withdrawn, having realised that the source of evil is within and therefore that other people are not to be run away from. He writes in the following chapter of his *Journal*, 'Now I was sent to turn people from darkness to light that they might receive Christ Jesus', and his experience of the natures of dogs, swine, vipers and the rest prepared him for this mission. Christ had spoken to his condition, then revealed the conditions of others

31 *Conf.* 9.10.24.

32 Peter Brown, the great biographer of Augustine in the last century, wrote that 'Augustine was an imperialist in his friendships. To be a friend of Augustine's meant only too often becoming a part of Augustine himself' (Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: a biography*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, p. 63).

33 Fox, *Journal*, p. 19. It was Quaker historian Hugh Barbour who first pointed this out to me in conversation, building on his remarks in his *Quakers in Puritan England*, New Haven: Yale, 1964, p. 35. He further noted the allegorical nature of this list of animals and biblical villains, evident not only from texts but also in the stained glass of English churches, representing vices such as gluttony, jealousy, lust, cruelty, oppressions, murder, self-satisfaction, hatred, etc.

to him, so that he was enabled to speak to theirs. Earlier he had simply withdrawn from others whom he regarded as less virtuous than himself. Withdrawing, however, is not the same as turning inward, and the latter is the crux to the spirituality of both George Fox and Augustine.

Turning Within

Both Augustine and George Fox can be considered theologians of interiority. The case for either hardly needs to be made at this point in this essay. Augustine famously and beautifully describes how he found rest for his weary soul by turning within and finding there a presence that is at once old and new, recognised because known at some deep level and inviting him to self-transcendence. Augustine's friendships and his losses drove him to a journey within, where he encountered a timeless care. Augustine confesses his own slowness to realise this:

Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new, late have I loved you! And see, you were within and I without, and there I sought you, and in my wretched state I rushed into those beautiful things that you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. They held me far from you, though they had no existence at all if they did not have their existence in you.³⁴

There is no evidence that George Fox read Augustine's *Confessions*, but other early Friends turned to Augustine and found some resonance with Quaker teachings. In his *Apology*, early Quaker theologian Robert Barclay makes note of Augustine's emphasis on interiority, and he quotes Augustine's *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, which attests to the presence of the indwelling teacher:

'It is the inward master (saith Augustine) that teacheth, it is Christ that teacheth, it is inspiration that teacheth: where this inspiration and unction is wanting, it is in vain that words from without are beaten in.' And thereafter: 'For he that created us, and redeemed us, and called us by faith, and dwelleth in us by his Spirit, unless he speaketh unto us inwardly, it is needless for us to cry out.' (Augustine, *ex Tract. Epist. John 3.*)³⁵

A Pauline Turning Point, but a Johannine Spirit

This interiority expresses itself in a distinctly Johannine spirit in both writers. Such inwardness is not alien to the apostle Paul (nor is love, as anyone knows who has been to a wedding and heard 1 Corinthians 13 read), but the focus on

³⁴ *Sero te amavi, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova, sero te amavi! et ecce intus eras et ego foris, et ibi te quaerebam, et in ista formosa quae fecisti deformis inruebam. mecum eras, et tecum non eram. ea me tenebant longe a te, quae si in te non essent, non essent.* Robert Barclay refers to this passage in his *Apology*, Proposition 5/6, Section 27, p. 166.

³⁵ Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Glenside, PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002, Proposition 2, Section 2, pp. 24–25.

inwardness and love is especially Johannine, as is the Quaker emphasis on light.³⁶ For George Fox and other Friends, another premier proof-text is John 4:24, which speaks of worshipping God in Spirit and in truth. The First Epistle of John is known for its proclamation that God is love (1 Jn 4:16). For Augustine, the basic human problem is not that we love the things that we should not. All creation is good and therefore worthy of love. The problem is that humans love things in the wrong order, and the proper ordering of our loves is a central task. As noted above, once Augustine learned to love God first and to love his friends through God, he came to peace. As he famously noted in his *City of God*, peace is the tranquillity that comes of order.³⁷ In his *City of God*, Augustine is examining the outward ordering of matters. In the *Confessions*, he is ordering the loves within his soul.

Mystical Encounters

The Gospel of John has been called the mystical gospel since it focusses on oneness between God, Christ and the believer. Both Augustine and George Fox had mystical experiences, though quite distinct from each other's.

George Fox recounts being taken up in spirit to Eden, where first he had to pass the cherubim that God had stationed there with a fiery sword to guard the way to the tree of life.³⁸

Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus, so that I can say I was come up to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell ... I was immediately taken up in spirit, to see into another or more steadfast state than Adam's in innocency, even into a state in Christ Jesus, that should never fall.³⁹

It is noteworthy how different this is from Augustine's vision at Ostia, where the journey is into the mind, where he and Monica encounter eternal wisdom, in which there is neither past nor future, but only being. They touch upon that wisdom of God which is the Word of God, and then return to the sound of human utterance, where words have beginnings and endings (8.10.24). The final pages of the *Confessions* look to an eschatological rest in God that mirrors this Platonist goal of the return to the One. Augustine struggles with a tension between a Christian

36 For more on Quakers and John, see Stephen W. Angell, 'The Light of Life', in Buckley, Paul and Angell, Stephen W. (eds), *The Quaker Bible Reader*, Richmond, IN: Earlham School of Religion, 2006, pp. 161–85.

37 *Pax omnium tranquillitas ordinis. De civitate Dei* 19:13.

38 Cf. Gen. 3:24: So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

39 George Fox, *Journal*, p. 27.

sense of theological meaning in human history as the arena of God's mighty acts and a Plotinian metaphysical realm that steps outside of history and time itself. Later, in his *City of God*, after the political crisis and cultural shock of the sack of Rome, Augustine will focus more directly on the meaning of history and the earthly city, but that is some years after the composition of his *Confessions*. For George Fox, one might say that political crisis occurred repeatedly in the course of his life. The English Civil War shaped his youth. Unlike Augustine, he did not have to wait until mid-life for a season of social and political turmoil. Hence his concerns for justice are evident from his early days, reflected in his openings as well as his actions. On matters of justice, George Fox was, as noted from the start of this essay, a religious radical. Augustine could not be fairly accused of such a stance. George Fox's response to civil turmoil was to seek to remake human society, to build the new Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land. Augustine's impulse was to preserve, even as his ultimate loyalty was to a heavenly rather than an earthly Jerusalem.

Hearing Voices, Listening to Love

Despite their considerable differences, both writers are keenly insightful psychologically, observant of interior states and cognisant of the very human proclivities toward self-indulgence, self-aggrandisement and prideful presumption. Both heard voices, whether they proclaimed 'There is one, even Christ Jesus' or 'Pick it up and read', and these voices were catalysts for their listening to the love of God. For each of them, this love of God was one that overcomes extremes, either the temptation to separate ourselves from others from a fear of moral contagion or the enticement to love others possessively to the point of swallowing them. Each found thereby a path to a heretofore undiscovered freedom. As a result, their autobiographies still speak to the conditions of their readers across the centuries, as they spoke to John Punshon.

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