RECONSIDERING THE *VITA AUGUSTINI* BY POSSIDIUS OF CALAMA: TOWARDS A METHOD FOR THE STUDY OF FREE SPEECH IN THE THOUGHT OF AUGUSTINE

Reconsideración de la *Vita Augustini* de Possidius de Calama: hacia un método para el estudio de la libertad de expresión en el pensamiento de Agustín

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Abstract

By applying tools of the history of emotions to study the *Vita Augustini* by Possidius of Calama –a friend, episcopal colleague, and the first biographer of Augustine of Hippo– the present article analyzes *parrhesia* or fearless speech as an exercise in the regulation of fear, of which authentic martyrdom is the ideal expression in early Christian North Africa. The study accentuates the centrality of *parrhesia* in Augustine's life and reflection and challenges current scholarly assumptions about the parameters of *parrhesia* as a social construct and about the nature of its Christianizing transformations in late Antiquity.

Keywords

Fearless Speech; *Parrhesia*; Martyrdom; Emotions; Augustine; Possidius; Hagiography; Early Christianity; North Africa; History of Emotions.

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Resumen

Mediante la aplicación de herramientas de la historia de las emociones al estudio de la Vita Augustini de Posidio de Calama –amigo, colega episcopal y primer biógrafo de Agustín de Hipona–, el presente artículo analiza la parresía o discurso sin miedo como ejercicio de regulación del miedo, del cual el martirio auténtico es la expresión ideal en el norte de África cristiano primitivo. El estudio acentúa la centralidad de la parresía en la vida y la reflexión de Agustín y desafía las suposiciones académicas actuales sobre los parámetros de la parresía como construcción social y sobre la naturaleza de sus transformaciones cristianizadoras en la Antigüedad tardía.

Palabras clave

Discurso sin miedo; *Parresía*; Martirio; Emociones; Agustín; Posidio; Hagiografía; Cristiandad temprana; Norte de África; Historia de las emociones.

Introduction

The license to convey a message with boldness and frankness characterizes free speech or fearless speech (*parrhesia*) in antiquity (Van Renswoude, 2019, p. 4). In the exercise of *parrhesia*, the emotions of courage and fearlessness help preserve a delicate balance between persuasive rhetoric and compelling truth (Van Renswoude, p. 5). With the onset of Christianity, the understanding of emotions undergoes important theological transformations, resulting in novel strategies for emotional management and, with these, in the emergence of unprecedented views on fearless speech. Accordingly, the "Christianization of emotions" (Bouquet and Nagy, 2018, p. 9) shaped approaches to fearless speech thereafter. However, with limited and notable exceptions, the tools and methods of the history of emotions have been rarely used to study early Christian texts. By applying concepts and methods from the study of the history of emotions to the analysis of the *Vita Augustini* (henceforth only *Vita*) by Possidius of Calama, whose work is representative of North African Latin hagiography composed in the 4th century, this contribution explores aspects of the neglected study of fear, fearless speech, and their relationship to martyrdom, in late Antique Christian discourse. Since free speech "is possible only against the silent background of what cannot be said," (Fish, 1994, p. 104) it is therefore, as has been argued, "a cultural construct, governed by social norms, legal rules, rhetorical conventions and scripted roles" (Van Renswoude, p. 3). To assess this view, we turn to the notion of emotional regimes, which provides a useful conceptual framework to analyze the silent background and rhetorical conventions regulating the exercise of *parrhesia* in early Christianity (Reddy, 2001, p. 129). Specifically, since the management and transformation of emotions was at the heart of nascent Christian praxes (Knuuttila, 2004, p. 112), we analyze how the management of *fear* shapes, conditions, forms and transforms classical and early Christian notions of *fearless speech* (*parrhesia*), its status as an emotive, and the resulting navigation of emotional regimes. This study, then, aims to assess broadly the navigation and management of the emotions of fear in the *Vita* and to assess whether *parrhesia* is a social construct by tracing the contours and nuances of the emotional regime which emerges in the *Vita*. The analysis draws from the methodological framework of the history of emotions, particularly the concepts of emotives and emotional regime, in light of which martyrdom emerges as the ideal of *parrhesia* in the *Vita*. The conclusion revisits, nuances, and challenges some commonplace views on *parrhesia* in late Antiquity.

1. Emotives

William Reddy proposes the concept of emotive in his influential *The Navigation of Feelings* as a conceptual tool and framework to analyze the history of emotions. The concept of an emotive proposes a *via media* between constructionist and universalist approaches to the nature of emotions (Plamper, 2015). In the constructionist framework, "emotion is socially constructed" (Plamper, 2015, p. 252), whereas, and by contrast, emotion is indicative in the universalist framework. Considering emotions as a kind of speech act, Reddy reasoned, "universalism is comparable with the constative, a descriptive statement about the world, while social constructivism is comparable with the performative, a statement that changes the world" (Plamper, 2015, p. 252). However, emotions and speech about emotions often exhibit indicative *and* performative characteristics, the mix of which Reddy attempted to integrate through the concept of an *emotive* (Plamper, 2015, p. 252). Reddy defines an emotive as a "type of speech act different from both performative and constative utterances, which both describes (like constative utterances) and changes (like performatives) the world, because emotional expression has an exploratory and self-altering effect on the activated thought material of emotion" (Reddy, 2001, p. 128). Therefore, emotives are performative, constative, exploratory and self-altering.

In the *Vita*, Possidius (2008) presents the story of Augustine's life leading to conversion. Therein, conversion functions as an emotive, for indeed, Possidius narrates the conversion process with special care for reporting emotions and their performative, constative, exploratory and self-altering effect on Augustine, as evidenced in Augustine's encounter with Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. Possidius recounts Augustine's conversion and baptism as follows:

> At that time the bishopric in this city was administered by Ambrose, a priest most acceptable to God and eminent among the best of men. As he stood among the people in the church he used to listen in eager suspense to the frequent sermons of this preacher of the Word of God. Now at one time, while still a youth at Carthage, he had been carried away by the error of the Manichaeans and therefore was more eager than others to hear whether anything would be said for or against this heresy. And by the mercy of God the Deliverer who touched the heart of His bishop, it came to pass that the questions of the Law bearing on that error were solved, and so little by little Augustine was led on by the divine compassion until the heresy was driven from his soul. Straightway, established in the Catholic faith, an ardent desire was awakened in him to perfect himself in religion, and so with the coming of the holy days of Easter he received the water of baptism. And thus it happened that by divine grace he received through the great and illustrious prelate Ambrose the salutary doctrine of the Catholic Church and the divine Sacraments. (Possidius, 2008, p. 42)

The constative aspect of this passage is Augustine's reported state of mind. Augustine frequented the sermons of Ambrose among other listeners in the congregation. What characterizes Augustine, from other listeners, however, is the emotional stance of eagerness and suspense. Moreover, Possidius reports an exploratory element, for Augustine would not listen indifferently, nor with prior commitments. Rather, the basis for Augustine's eagerness was the desire to explore the Manichean views in earnest and to consider wholly arguments for *or* against them. With time, and in spite of Augustine, according to Possidius, divine compassion intercedes to transform the trajectory of the search for truth by satisfying questions, which is evidence of performativity. However, the performative action in question is of external and divine origin.

Eventually, the consequence is also internal and more importantly self-altering, for through the awakening of an ardent love, born from within, Augustine resolves to commit to perfection in religion. The process of Augustine's conversion culminates in baptism. Baptism functions as an emotive. The water of baptism materially indicates Augustine's conversion (constative), which introduces Augustine to a new *modus vivendi* and *modus credendi*, where belief and the practice of sacraments coincide (exploratory), thereby giving Augustine the doctrine and salvation of the Church (performative) and, finally, externalizing Augustine's changing inner dispositions through an ecclesial and public event (self-altering). Considering conversion as an emotive enhances the multidimensionality of the event in the opening narrative of Possidius in the *Vita*.

2. Emotional Regime

Reddy also underscores the communal dimension of emotions through the concept of an emotional regime. The experience of emotions has a communal embedding. Consequently, the complexity of emotives emerges and operates within the parameters of a social framework wherein individual experiences make sense. Lutz therefore notes, "existence and meaning are also negotiated, ignored, or validated by people in social relationships" (Lutz, 2011, p. 212). This presupposes that a society, at any given time, possesses a collective emotional repertoire. To capture the social dimension of emotions, and of emotives, Reddy proposes the concept of emotional regimes, which he defines as "the set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices, and emotives that express and inculcate them; a necessary underpinning of any stable political regime" (Reddy, 2001, p. 129). Human experience is largely articulated and experienced against the background of emotional regimes, which, moreover, regulate the conditions of everyday emotional life and its regulation.

In the *Vita*, soon after the narrative of birth, conversion and baptism, and for most of what follows, Possidius presents the profile of Augustine's mores in terms of his ability to regulate fear. Fear, and its absence, or fearlessness, are therefore the central characteristic of the emotional regime in the experience of a Catholic in early Christian North Africa. In the face of fear before a plethora of looming social threats, the true Christian rests fearlessly unmoved, in body and spirit. Fearlessness is, accordingly, the backbone of emotional regime in early Christian praxis.

2.1 Fear

From after Augustine's conversion at the age of thirty, Possidius presents fearlessness as the mark of wholesome commitment to the radical demands of the Gospel, based on Luke 12.32-34. In this passage, the evangelist exhorts against fear in the face of the radical Christian call to detachment for the sake of the gospel: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not" (Possidius, 2008, p. 42). Augustine exemplifies Christian resolve in the fearlessness to relinquish everything for God: "And soon from his inmost heart he relinquished all earthly desires, no longer seeking wife, children of the flesh, riches or worldly honors. But he determined to serve God with His saints,

desiring to be in and of that little flock" (Possidius, 2008, p. 42). As a Christian model, following the hagiographical intent of the story, Possidius insists on Augustine's prowess in overcoming fear (*timor*) for the sake of things divine (Possidius, 2008, p. 42). However, Possidius does not validate a wholesome rejection of fear but prescribes, instead, a moderate regulation thereof. For instance, Possidius considers the human dimension of fear when Valerius, the once bishop of Hippo and predecessor of Augustine, justifiably expresses fear. He writes, "[Valerius] began to fear, however, for such is human nature, that Augustine would be sought for the episcopal office and be taken from him by some other church which lacked a bishop" (Possidius, 2008, p. 15). In picturing Valerius and his concern, Possidius suggests that even the Christian may adequately express fear under some circumstances. Even after securing Augustine's presence in hiding, Valerius remains fearful, and legitimately so, because of his old age and in view of the weakness of his body (Possidius, 2008, p. 15). To distinguish between the righteous fear in reference to Luke and the human fear of Valerius, Possidius employs *temere* for the first kind of fear, and *metuere* and *formidere* for the second kind, thereby illustrating a nuanced repertoire to express the needful moderation of the emotional life. The Christian navigates life, in view of earning salvation, of which the search for truth and the repudiation of falsehood is essential, for instance in debating the Donatists, with "fear and trembling" (Possidius, 2008, p. 58). Fear is central to salvation. Possidius reports Augustine's fear not of things, such as food, but of lust, as in the fear of cupidity (*timor cupiditas*), which is the measure of drinking, eating and clothing (Possidius, 2008, p. 92). To support the view, Possidius cites Augustine at *conf.* 10.46. The moderation of human fear, and its orientation towards salvation, shapes the emotional regime of Christian life and Augustine's exemplary navigation thereof in the *Vita*.

2.2 Fear of God

The fear of God is a centripetal force in early Christian emotional regimes; fear of God demarks the true Christian from the false Christian. In a passage of the *Vita*, Possidius tells the story of a man who eagerly seeks to hear Augustine. This man is characterized as a good Christian because in having given away his possessions, he proved to uphold the fear of God (Possidius, 2008, p. 44). Fearlessness is the result of replacing fear of foregoing the lures of the world for the fear of God. Thus, Possidius introduces Valerius, Bishop of Hippo before Augustine, as a holy man based on his fear of God and elsewhere mentions a wise man of little learning from whom Augustine nevertheless learns how to be unafraid of death, but to fear God instead (Possidius, 2008, p. 108). That even the Donatists disparaged Augustine by claiming his lack of fear of God shows the emotional regime at work extends beyond confessional lines in Christian North Africa. The exemplification of *authentic* fear of God, then, delineates actual confessional parameters. Even in his secular engagements, Augustine communicated fear, for instance, through his labour as a judge. Possidius writes, "[Augustine] asked no other reward from those for whom he spent his time in this way except the Christian obedience and devotion which is due to God and man, rebuking the sinner before all, that others also might fear" (Possidius, 2008, p. 29). The sinner does not fear God, while the Christian fears God and neighbour and even one function of justice is to inspire remorse through the fear of God.

2.3 Fear of Death

While fear of God is acceptable, fear of death is not, because the opposite of fear of death is an immoderate desire for life, which Possidius, like Augustine, classifies as a kind of fleshly cupidity (Possidius, 2008, p. 108). Operative in the *Vita* are various fears: fear of death itself, fearing suffering leading to death, fearing death because of what is lost in life (Possidius, 2008, p. 106). Insisting on the value of life and the inevitability of death, the fear of death regulates detachment from life, securing perseverance through suffering, and anticipating death confidently as a humble acceptance of human mortality. Augustine repeats the words of Ambrose (Hermanowicz, 2008, p. 76): "I have not so lived that I should be ashamed to live among you, yet I do not fear to die, for we have a Lord who is good" (Possidius, 2008, p. 108). Augustine hears and repeats often, from a man who, though of little learning, is wise in teaching against the fear of death, the fear of God instead (Possidius, 2008, p. 108): "If I were never to die it would be well; but if I am ever to die, why not now?" (Possidius, 2008, p. 39). Possidius compares the attitude of Ambrose and Augustine towards death to the fear reported by Cyprian. Cyprian writes in *De Mortalitate* (at *mort.* XIX) of a rebuke to priests praying for a life extension in the midst of illness, "You fear to suffer, you do not wish to die; what shall I do with you?" (Possidius, 2008, p. 39). Augustine moderates, then, fear for death and disdain for life through a detached celebration of life and through a fearless acceptance of mortality as an inevitable part of human life.

3. Fearless Speech

Parrhesia, considered as fearless speech, or courageous speech, is the ideal of the Christian in the *Vita*. Foucault defines *parrhesia* thus:

> *Parrhesia* is a kind of verbal activity where the speaker has a specific relation to truth through frankness, a certain relationship to his own life through danger, a certain type of relation to himself or other people through criticism (self-criticism or criticism of other people), and a specific relation to moral law through freedom and duty. More precisely, *parrhesia* is a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself). In *parrhesia*, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness in- stead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self- interest and moral apathy. (Foucault, 2009, p. 19)

In Foucault's dense and illuminating definition, *parrhesia* contains the key characteristics as follows: a speech act, a relation to truth, frankness in the face of danger, a critical relation to self and others, and a relation to the moral law by the exercise of duty and freedom. Possidius masterfully illustrates how Augustine exemplifies these aspects of *parrhesia* in the *Vita*.

3.1 Speech act

In the *Vita*, Augustine exercises *parrhesia* as a speech act in preaching, teaching and debating. The episcopal office conditions the modality of Augustine's *parrhesia*.

> As bishop he preached the Word of eternal salvation much more earnestly and fervently and with greater authority, no longer in one district only, but wherever he went in answer to requests, ready always to give an answer to every man that asked of him a reason of the faith and hope which is toward God. And the Church of the Lord flourished and grew rapidly and strongly. (Possidius, p. 13)

The content of the speech, the Word of God, has authority and transcends geographical limitations. Moreover, as a speech act, preaching is performative, for it transforms the listeners and edifies the Church.

3.2 Relation to Truth

A large portion of the *Vita* presents instances of Augustine's display and exercise of fearless speech in polemics with various interlocutors, where courage in the defense of truth is at stake. The Donatists and Manicheans, recognizing the wisdom of Augustine, would eagerly seek to engage with him as their interlocutor, to which fearless Augustine never refused (Possidius, 2008, pp. 9-10). In one passage, Possidius tells a story where, leading to a public meeting, Fortunatus feared his error, yet being ashamed to not debate Augustine before others, he conceded to hold an open discussion. Unable to defend the Manichean views, Fortunatus was publicly defeated by Augustine and truth prevailed. Possidius notes that because of Augustine's fearlessness, "the Catholic faith was declared and upheld as the true religion" (Possidius, 2008, p. 10). Fortunatus never returned to Hippo, his teachings were delegitimized, and error uprooted from his follower's hearts. Augustine's *parrhesia* shows a relation to truth, which is public, and communal therefore, and consequential to the listeners and its interlocutor.

3.3 Moral Duty

In citing the mores of Augustine's life, Possidius gives an anecdote on the Bishop's habits around table.

> He always showed hospitality. At the table he loved reading and discussion rather than eating and drinking, and against that pest of human custom he had this inscription on his table: "Who injures the name of an absent friend/May not at this table as guest attend." Thus he warned every guest to refrain from unnecessary and harmful tales. And when some of his most intimate fellow-bishops forgot that inscription and spoke without heeding it, Augustine on one occasion became exasperated and so sternly rebuked them as to declare that either those verses would have to be removed from the table or he would leave in the midst of the meal and retire to his chamber. Both I and the others who were at the table experienced this. (Possidius, 2008, p. 32)

From a sense of moral duty, Augustine first confronts, then proceeds to challenge, and finally sternly rebukes those involved in gossip. Through a sense of integrity, Augustine is fearlessly ready, and at the expense of offending others, to leave his own table.

3.4 Free Exercise of Duty

Possidius also depicts free exercise of duty in the *Vita* when recounting how Augustine managed household affairs. Free exercise of duty consists, firstly, in delegating responsibilities and entrusting the care of buildings and property "to the more capable clergy" (Possidius, 2008, p. 33). Moreover, free exercise of duty requires oversight through the willing submission to mechanisms of accountability. For instance, Possidius writes, Augustine "never held the key nor wore his ring, but everything which was received and spent was noted down by these overseers of the house" (p. 33). Accountability also implies subsidiarity, the basis of which is trust. Possidius continues, "In many bills [Augustine] preferred to rely on the fidelity of the overseer of the house rather than to ascertain it by testing and proving his accounts" (p. 33). Detachment is central to free exercise of duty. The first is a detachment from the lust for possessions from whence Augustine's unwillingness to purchase property. Possidius writes, "A house or land or an estate [Augustine] was never willing to buy" (p. 33). The second is detachment from pride, hence Augustine's readiness to humbly accept gifts for the Church as legacy. Possidius continues, "But if perchance anything of the kind was given to the church by someone of his own accord or if it was left as a legacy, he did not refuse it, but ordered that it be accepted" (p. 33). Possidius further nuances Augustine's practice of detachment for the free exercise of duty. Sometimes detachment is better when receiving legacy from the dead, and when giving is offered rather than solicited. Possidius notes, "[Augustine] also said frequently that the church might with greater security and safety accept legacies left by the dead rather than gifts from the living which might cause anxiety and loss, and furthermore that legacies themselves should be offered voluntarily rather than solicited" (p. 34). Augustine exemplified spiritual detachment, in order to exercise his duty freely, and material detachment, in flawlessly returning to spiritual matters, once material matters were completed.

> Yet though following with inmost desire after the greater spiritual things, he sometimes relaxed from his contemplation of things eternal and turned to temporal affairs. But when such things had been arranged and set in order, then as though freed from consuming and annoying cares, his soul rebounded to the more intimate and lofty thoughts of the mind in which he either pondered on the discovery of divine truth or dictated some of the things already discovered or else emended some of the works which had been previously dictated and then transcribed. This he accomplished by working all day and toiling at night. He was a type of the Church on high, even as most glorious Mary, of whom it is written that she sat at the feet of the Lord and listened intently to His word; but when her sister who was cumbered about much serving, complained because she received no help, she heard the words: "Martha, Martha, Mary hath chosen that better part which shall not be taken away from her." (Possidius, 2008, pp. 34-5)

While maintaining a desire for spiritual things, and in order to return to them, Augustine turned to material affairs, following the example of Mary and Martha. Through continuous labour and spiritual detachment, Augustine was able to remain spiritual and committed in his duties.

3.5 Frankness in the Face of Danger

Augustine expresses frankness in the face of danger by accepting the office of presbyter. Possidius notes in the *Vita* that Augustine "understood with greater comprehension and mourned as he apprehended the many imminent dangers which threatened his life in the direction and government of the church, and for this reason he wept" (p. 8). In this situation, Augustine embraces the immanent danger of his newly bestowed office with frankness, to himself and to others, through the expression of tears. Moreover, Augustine accepts the immanent dangers, which in his context were persecutions and even martyrdom, with full knowledge. For instance, the "rebaptizing Donatists" (p. 11), especially some of its violent members called Circumcellions, posed a serious threat to the wellbeing and even to the life of Catholics in North Africa such as Augustine and his followers.

> They made daily and nightly attacks even upon the Catholic priests and ministers and robbed them of all their possessions; and they crippled many of the servants of God by tortures. They also threw lime mixed with vinegar in the eyes of some and others they murdered. Wherefore these rebaptizing Donatists came to be hated even by their own. (Possidius, 2008, p. 15)

Possidius recounts in an episode how Augustine escapes immanent danger unknowingly and because of an error.

> it once happened that although [Circumcellions] were out in full force, they yet failed to capture him. For through the error of his guide and yet, in fact, by the providence of God, it happened that the bishop with his companions came to his destination by a different road, and he learned later that through this error he had escaped their impious hands, and together with all he gave thanks to God, the Deliverer. And they, according to their custom, spared neither laymen nor clergy, as the public records witness. (Possidius, 2008, pp. 16-7)

The readiness to undergo bodily harm at any moment, even without expecting it, and even without knowing it at the time of the exposure to the danger itself, but only retrospectively, exemplifies the wholesome exercise of the frankness of Augustine's pastoral ministry in the face of danger.

3.6 Critical Relation to Self and Others

Augustine exhibits a critical relation to self and to others in the practice of preaching. Possidius notes that Augustine held with conviction the office of the preacher "as one whom the Lord made 'a watchman unto the house of Israel,' preaching the Word, instant in season, out of season, reproving, rebuking, exhorting with all longsuffering and doctrine, and he took special pains to instruct those who were able to teach others" (p. 29). The listeners of Augustine's preaching also risked attaining a new critical self relation, culminating even in conversion. Possidius recounts how upon digressing during a sermon, a merchant in the audience named Firmus converted.

"For while I was investigating the margins of the question proposed, by a digression of speech I passed over to something else and so, without finishing or explaining the question, I ended my discourse by attacking the error of the Manichaeans, about which I had intended to say nothing in my discussion, rather than by speaking about those things which I had intended to explain." And after this, unless I am mistaken, lo, on the next day or the day after, there came a certain merchant, Firmus by name, to the holy Augustine, who was seated in the monastery, and in our presence fell down on his knees and prostrated himself at his feet, shedding tears and asking that the priest and his holy companions intercede with the Lord for his sins. For he confessed that he had followed the sect of the Manichaeans, had lived in it for many years and so had paid out much money in vain to the Manichaeans, or rather to those whom they call the Elect; but recently by the mercy of God he had been in the church and was converted and made a Catholic by Augustine's sermons. (Possidius, 2008, pp. 21-2)

The proceeding lines illustrate the profound critical outcome of Augustine's sermon:

And from that time on this man held fast to the manner of life of the servants of God, gave up his business as merchant and progressing among the members of the church, by the will of God he was called and constrained in another region to enter the office of presbyter, wherein he maintained and persevered in his sanctity of life. And perhaps he is still in active life across the sea. (Possidius, 2008, p. 22)

All the elements of *parrhesia* as presented in Foucault's definition are present in the *Vita*, therefore suggesting that for Possidius, the life of Augustine exemplifies the regulation of fear.

4. Martyrdom

Considered simply as a speech act, *parrhesia* is not performative according to Foucault's description. However, within the framework of an emotional regime, where free speech is a case of a fearless act, *parrhesia* functions also, and mainly, as an emotive. This is evident when martyrdom is analyzed as a speech act wherein martyrdom exemplifies the Christian ideal of *parrhesia* in early Christian North Africa. In martyrdom, the paradigmatic example for which is Cyprian's in the Roman North African imagination, the Christian stands firm in the face of death and allows testimony, witness, literally martyrdom, to communicate fearlessness through a speech act. From the vantage point of the history of emotions, martyrdom should be interpreted as a complex mechanism to manage fear in the face of death and to communicate fearlessness through death for the sake of truth. It is against the background of the symbol of martyrdom alone, and in the imitation of the passion of Christ, that the Christian life acquires meaning. The account of Cyprian's martyrdom by the deacon Pontius shapes the emotional regime in which Possidius writes the *Vita.* However, since Augustine did not experience literal martyrdom, like Cyprian, Possidius is compelled to show why avoiding martyrdom is an acceptable and indeed lofty form of *parrhesia*, or he must prescribe, alternatively, as he does, the conditions wherein martyrdom is authentic *parrhesia*. In other words, Possidius must nuance an emotional regime deeply embedded in North African Christian practice and hagiography in which martyrdom alone does not immediately qualify as authentic Christian *pahrresia,* where the absence of martyrdom may in fact count as *parrhesia*. This is the significance of Augustine's letter addressed to Honoratus, which Possidius appends to the *Vita* (Possidius, 2008, pp.

44-56). The letter raises the question, as stated by Possidius, "whether or not the bishops or clergy should withdraw from the churches at their approach" (p. 44). Possidius includes the account because "it is very useful, even necessary, for proper conduct of the priests and ministers of God" (p. 44). The question has concrete moral directives, which, considered as moderation of fear, offer a window into the emotional regime for authentic martyrdom, the ideal of Christian fearless speech in fourth century North Africa. Augustine reconfigures the notion of authentic martyrdom by showing that Christian witness unto death, an instance of fearless speech, is not an end in itself, but rather, the outcome of love. In love, and not in sheer fear or fearlessness for its own sake, lies the essence of true fearless speech.

In the letter, Augustine discusses whether Christians should escape persecution and thus forsake the Churches. "For I said that those who desire to withdraw to places of safety, if they are able, should not be prevented, and that the ties of our ministry, by which the love of Christ has bound us not to desert the churches which we ought to serve, should not be broken" (pp. 44-5). In this passage Augustine explains that as long as the priest meets the needs of the community, deserting churches to avoid persecution is in fact acceptable. He continues,

> Let them by all means flee from city to city when some one of them in particular is sought by the persecutors, provided that the Church shall not be abandoned by the others who are not so persecuted, but that these may administer the food to their fellow-servants, who they know would otherwise be unable to live. But when the danger is common to all, that is, to bishops, clergy and laymen, let those who are in need of others not be abandoned by those of whom they are in need. Accordingly, either let them all withdraw to places of safety or else let not those who have a necessity for remaining be left by those through whom their ecclesiastical needs are supplied, so that they may either live together or suffer together whatever their Father wishes them to endure. (Possidius, 2008, p. 46)

Although it is legitimate to dessert a Church in the above conditions of persecution, Augustine insists on the nobility of laying down one's life for others, in the midst of persecution, as Christ did. Augustine explores martyrdom, as not only a duty, but also mainly in terms of a generous exemplification of Christian witness in the midst of suffering and compassion. He continues,

> But if it should happen that some suffer more and others less, or if all suffer equally, it is evident that they suffer for others who, though they were able to escape such woes by flight, preferred to remain so as not to desert others in their time of need. In this especially is that love exemplified which the Apostle John commends, saying: 'As Christ laid down His life for us, so also ought we to lay down our lives for the brethren.' For if those who flee or those who are bound by their duties and are unable to flee—if these are taken captive and suffer anything, they of course suffer for themselves, not for the brethren. But those who suffer because they are unwilling to forsake their brethren who have need of them for their Christian welfare, these undoubtedly lay down their lives for their brethren. (Possidius, 2008, p. 46)

Suffering with love and for love is the mark of authentic martyrdom. Dying from persecution alone, and even giving up one's life is not meritorious of the honorific title of martyr unless it be done with love and from a sense of duty for others. In other words, intention qualifies the essence of the martyr's act.

For when he who can escape does not flee from the onslaught of the enemy and so does not abandon the ministry of Christ, without which men could neither live a Christian life nor become Christians, he finds a greater reward of love than he who flees, not for his brethren's sake but for his own, and when taken captive does not deny Christ but suffers martyrdom. (Possidius, 2008, p. 47)

In an ensuing passage, Augustine considers the benefit of suffering martyrdom in the first place, especially in the face of pain and for no obvious reason. He writes, "If we must remain in the churches, I do not see what will be the advantage to us or to the people, except that men should be cut down before our very eyes, women outraged, churches burned, and we ourselves perish under torture when the things we have not are demanded of us" (Possidius, 2008, p. 47). Augustine proceeds to reconfigure the framework to identify authentic martyrdom.

Whereas enduring violence against one's body and without consent is reprehensible, notes Augustine, more reprehensible still is the loss of spiritual wellbeing. He writes, "For chastity is not destroyed in the body when the will of the sufferer does not shamefully take part in the deeds of the flesh, but without consenting endures another's violence. Rather let us fear that the living stones may be destroyed while we are absent than that the stones and wood of the earthly buildings may be burned while we are present" (Possidius, 2008, pp. 49-50). The harm of the physical body is nothing compared to the harm caused to the body of Christ: "let us fear that the members of Christ's body may be destroyed when deprived of spiritual nourishment than that the members of our body may be put to torture when overpowered by the attack of the enemy" (pp. 49-50). Authentic martyrdom considers spiritual wellbeing over material and physical safety.

Conversely, authentic martyrdom does not actively seek to be bodily when it is avoidable. Augustine continues: "Not that these things are not to be avoided when possible, but rather that they are to be endured when they cannot be avoided without impiety—unless, perchance, someone will maintain that the minister is not impious who withdraws his ministry which is needful for piety at the time when it is most needful" (Possidius, 2008, pp. 49-50). Through nuance, Augustine adjusts the emotional regime of martyrdom and in thus doing he conceives it as a case of fearless speech.

He concludes the letter with a useful summary. On the one hand, "whoever flees under such circumstances that the necessary ministry of the Church is not lacking because of his flight, does as the Lord commands or permits" (Possidius, 2008, p. 56). Hence, fleeing persecution, if not at the expense of those being ministered, is permissible. On the other hand, "whoever so flees that he deprives the flock of Christ of that nourishment from which it has its spiritual life, is an hireling who sees the wolf coming and flees because he cares not for the sheep" (p. 56). It is never lawful to escape persecution at the expense of the wellbeing of the flock. Authentic martyrdom is not an end in itself, but the outcome of expressing love and commitment for others. In a pure intention alone, guided by love, lies the mark of authentic *parrhesia* even in martyrdom, *parrhesia*'s ideal Christian form.

Conclusion

The *Vita* by Possidius presents Augustine's exercise of fearless speech as a complex phenomenon exemplified in early Christian North African Latin hagiography. The history of emotions helps to methodologically consider fearless speech as an emotive or indicative and performative action, and as an emotional regime or the framework against which early Christians imagined the meaning and moral orientation of life. Thus, in early Christian discourse, free speech is not principally a linguistic utterance, but mainly a speech act, restricted cases of which classified as authentic martyrdom, like that of Cyprian of Carthage. Cyprian's was an ideal expression of Christian life, and death, after the passion and death of Christ, for which love is the *litmus* test of authenticity.

The following observations, by way of conclusion, delineate key insight gained from employing tools of the history of emotions to analyze early Christian texts, particularly in view of exploring a theology of free speech. Firstly, in the *Vita*, fear operates as an emotive, and therefore, the regulation of fear through fearless speech is performative. Consequently, in early Christianity fearless speech is *not* a social construct. Secondly, while relying on the paradigmatic example of Cyprian's martyrdom, Possidius presents a nuance of the conditions when martyrdom is authentic, and when persecution may and even must be avoided. This nuance shows that even with the phenomenon of Christianization of emotions, emotional regimes were regional, in this case proper to persecutions in North Africa, with a dynamism which reflects the reality of a rapidly changing sociopolitical landscape. Thirdly, North African early Christianity accomplishes the popularization of antiquity's rhetorical ideal. With martyrdom as the Christian paradigm of fearless speech, licence to speak is unnecessary to engage in *parrhesia*. The willingness to undergo martyrdom with love, and for love, is Christianity's emerging ideal after the *passio Christi* and the example of Cyprian. Christianity supplants, therefore, the licence of an office of authority as a prerequisite to speak fearlessly, with the willingness to embrace the *sequela Christi* as the basic demand of every Christian life, even unto death, with love, and for love.

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