

*Amicitia* in Old English Letters:  
Augustine's Ideas of "Friendship" and Their Reception in  
Eangyth's Letter to Boniface

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ABSTRACT

Main themes under discussions of the Boniface's correspondences are the sources for his writings and the motif of "friendship". Although these aspects have often been examined in conjunction with patristic writings, nevertheless a concrete comparison between the patristic sources and the letters to and from Boniface has not been attempted. In this article, on the basis of Augustine's *Confessiones* and Eangyth's letter to Boniface, I would like to demonstrate that Anglo-Saxon writers adopted not only motifs and themes shown in Augustine's *Confessiones* but also his theories on friendship in particular, and that he can therefore be valued as the main source of Anglo-Saxon letter-writing in general.

In the rich correspondence of Boniface we find several letters written to and from women (Tangl 1955). Only a few scholars have concentrated on them so far, so that the present state of research is unsatisfactory. This goes especially for one of the central questions: the sources of these letters. Although pointing in the right direction, no concrete solutions are offered. The view that they are derived from continental patterns is correct but vague. Therefore, I wish to analyze the Classical and Patristic sources more profoundly, because I strongly believe that these letters are the results of Anglo-Saxon acculturation of specific

continental sources, the most striking connection being to Augustine. He can be valued as the main source for most of the medieval writers dealing with *amicitia* (friendship). I would here like to substantiate this hypothesis by comparing Eangyth's letter from the Boniface corpus and Augustine's ideas as expressed in the *Confessiones*.

The letter Eangyth (and her daughter Heaburg) wrote to Boniface, the English missionary on the continent around the year 719 A.D., follows the three-fold pattern of letter writing in the Early Middle Ages. The greeting, which includes the typical *salutem*-formula describes the rank of sender and that of the addressee and is followed by the introduction to the content. The women thank Boniface for his letter. Then they begin with their request. The letter is one of the longest of those transmitted by women to Boniface. It extends over five and a half printed pages in Tangl's edition and closes with the *vale*-formula. The letter is transmitted in three manuscripts of which the Codex Vindobonensis is the most important one. Michael Tangl gives a very detailed description of the manuscripts in his introduction (Tangl VIff).

In their request the women refer to a motif which is well known from other letters written by men and women in that age:

Omnis homo in sua causa deficiens et in suis consiliis diffidens querit sibi amicum fidelem, in cuius consiliis confidat qui in suis diffidet, et talem fiduciam habeat in illo, ut omnem secretem sui pectoris pandet et aperiat, et ut dicitur: Quid dulcius est, quam habeas illum, cum quo omnia possis loqui ut tecum? Et ideo pro his dumtaxat omnibus miseriarum necessitatibus, quae lacinoso sermone enumeravimus, nobis necessarium fuit, ut quereremus amicum fidelem et talem, in quem confidamus melius quam in nosmet ipsos, qui dolores nostros et miserias et paupertates suas deputaret et compatiens nobis fuisset et consolaret nos et sustentaret eloquiis suis et saluberiis sermonibus sublevaret. Diu quaesivimus et confidimus, quia invenimus in te illum amicum, quem cupimus et optavimus et speravimus (24).

[Every man, who fails in his affairs and is suspicious towards his own decisions, is looking for a true friend, in whose advice he trusts, suspicious to the own and he has so much confidence in him that he tells him and proclaims every secret from his heart and as it is said: What is sweeter than having someone you can talk to like to yourself? And therefore it was a necessity for us, because of all these needs in our misery we enumerated in brief words, to seek a true friend, someone, on whom we can better rely on than on ourselves, who takes our sorrow, our grief and our need as his, who suffers with us, gives us comfort, supports with his words and who lifts us with healing speeches. Long we were seeking and we are quite confident that in you we have found the friend, we desired wished and hoped for.<sup>1</sup>]

These words describe an ideal of "friendship" familiar to Anglo-Saxon writing. They depict the type of friend who is supportive when other friendships have failed. This friend has to make decisions for the woman in need because she is not capable of making her own. He also has to give advice because, at this very moment, he is the only person who knows what course of action should be taken. The woman seeking his help completely relies on him. She has complete and utter confidence in this friend and he becomes

responsible for her. Natural barriers do not exist between them; they fuse into one and the same person. One can communicate with the other as if to oneself. This powerful and ideal friend always understands the other because he shares the same thoughts and also possesses the same soul. He also shares the same misery and suffering. As the superior and dominant half of this friendship, he offers consolation, moral support, and words of comfort, thus giving the woman new hope. In the Anglo-Saxon letter under discussion, it is the abbess and her daughter who refer to this ideal because, they say, they are in urgent need of such a friend.

After the formalized introduction, Eangyth gives concrete reasons for her despair talking about her and her daughter's fate and misery: Their life and thoughts were sinful and therefore they were strongly criticised by others. Quarrels and differences arose in the monastery; they were persecuted by the king, slandered by jealous people, and they could no longer pay their taxes. But the most disturbing point of her lament is the fact that they have lost their friends and relatives through death. No male guardian protects or defends them from the king. Their only relatives are female, apart from one male cousin who suffers from mental illness. Although living in a monastery which grants a certain amount of protection the women feel that they are alone in the world. They are neither able to manage the situation they find themselves in nor are they able to organise their lives in general. Therefore, they seek a friend they can rely on and who can offer them advice. In Boniface, they believe to have found such a friend.

Ursula Schaefer, in her comparison of Eangyth's letter and the Old English elegy *The Wife's Lament*, raised the question: Why is Eangyth in search of such a friend, since they are already protected by the monastic order? (Schaefer 499). The letter gives no indication of any personal duties of Boniface towards the women; neither is it any kind of family relationship, legal obligation or sexual attraction that binds them together. Nevertheless, Boniface is addressed as if he was the only person in the world who could help them and in whom they could trust. If there are no concrete personal or legal reasons for this plea for help, we must then look for more abstract, or spiritual reasons. The phenomenon this kind of friendship describes is the "soul-friendship," derived from the Latin form of *amicitia*. Schaefer mentioned Boniface's "soul friendships" as a common element of his letters.<sup>2</sup> Gerchow expanded this point to cover Anglo-Saxon letters in general. Although he did not use the term "soul friendship", his description of the friendship referred to by Anglo-Saxon writers clearly fit this phenomenon. For him, *amicitia* constitutes one of the main themes in Anglo-Saxon correspondences (Gerchow 28). In her article, Schaefer offers a general explanation for 'soul-friendship': [...] I want to propose that *friendship* is just such a value, either considered in terms of our modern understanding of the concept, or attributed to the *comitatus*, or even ignored as a particular value" (Schaefer 493). She draws the vague conclusion that the *amicus spiritualis* (spiritual friend), among other elements of the text, is an idea derived from a "certain cultural repertoire" prevalent in Old English texts, "[...] be it the allusion to patristic texts and the Bible, or the handling of rhetorical devices or both" (518).

I would now like to elaborate on this point in order to corroborate her views and point to specific patristics writing on the continent in the fourth century. The focus will be on Augustine and on how his idea of "friendship" formed the model for Eangyth's letter. First,

however, I will give a brief outline of the development of the motif of “soul-friendship” beginning with Cicero. The comparison of the Anglo-Saxon letter and the Augustinian *Confessiones* suggests that what has been claimed as typically Anglo-Saxon is not the use of the motif itself, but how its culture-specific adaptation served Anglo-Saxon literary needs.

The most striking figure among classical scholars writing on “friendship” was Cicero (106-43 B.C.). In comparison to the given norms of writing, which consisted of formalized rhetorical patterns, Cicero was very progressive, giving deep insights into his personality and private life which is why his letters became the ideal for nearly all subsequent authors. His definition of friendship: “ Est enim amicitia nihil aliud nisi omnium divinarum humanarumque rerum cum benevolentia et caritate consensus” (Cicero 20) [Friendship is nothing else than the benevolent and loving agreement in all divine and human things] became established and was transmitted throughout the centuries to the High Middle Ages. For him, “friendship” was based on *virtus* (virtue), not on wealth or power (Geerlings 266). Cicero's ideas about friendship initiated a development which was later taken up and continued by the early Fathers, especially Augustine (354-430), who often interpreted the Ciceronian model in a more radical way, e.g. limiting friendship exclusively to private life. Continuing the Ciceronian tradition, Augustine was the next author to also provide us with insights into his personality and private life. The fundamental thoughts common to both Cicero and Augustine defined “friendship” as being one of the essential elements for a happy and rewarding life on earth. Before Augustine reached his ideal—the “soul-friendship”—he experienced different stages of “friendship”. They are important for his personal development as well as for his intellectual theories. These ideas were often taken up by his successors and appeared in various texts either in isolated or combined form as in Eangyth's letter to Boniface.

Although “friendship” played an important role in his life, Augustine never wrote a treatise on *amicitia*. Nevertheless, nearly all his writings reveal some of his ideas on friendship. Especially his *Confessiones*, written between 397-401, depict his changing views, depending on personal events and experiences. The *Confessiones* are not to be valued as a biography or as a theoretical work but rather as a book on edification which uses examples from Augustine's own life. They tell of his birth, youth, learnings, conversion and goal in life. His ideal, like his personality, underwent a constant development. From Classicism to Manicheism and Neo-Platonism, he finally became the bishop of Hippo and served the Christian ideal of *caritas christiana* (Christian love). The ideas depicted in the *Confessiones* are also exemplified in Augustine's letters, which he wrote to both men and women as works of advice and guidelines to life (Duckett 15).

In the early Middle Ages, the *Confessiones* formed part of the literary canon read by the educated classes. The work served as a sample text for pupils and authors. This bore the consequence that motifs, themes and stylistic features from the *Confessiones* were adopted in continental writing as well as on the British Isles, but with a different emphasis. As already pointed out, by using the *Confessiones* as a model for literary composition, the monastic pupils often combined different ideas, not only from Augustine but also from other authors. One also has to take into consideration that in the eighth century the definition and function of the genre of the “letter” were completely different nowadays.

On the one hand, it still followed the classical and patristic tradition, in which “letters” formed part of rhetorics in the teaching of the *septem artes liberales*. On the other hand, “letters” were regarded as literature and therefore contained certain degrees of fictionality as well as features, motifs and themes also known in other literary genres.

In his youth, Augustine describes “friendship” as the *mutua caritas* (mutual love), the response to the love one person shows another. “Die wahre Freundschaft wird getragen von amor, caritas, benevolentia und dilectio,” says W. Geerlings (Geerlings 269). [True “friendship” consists of love, goodwill and respect]. The classical element of living closely together, sharing life's lust and pleasure, dominated his early theory. But this is not the kind of “friendship” which laid the foundation for a deep “soul friendship”. It only touched the surface of the relationship and it was determined by the permanent obligation to please others. Augustine's efforts to emulate his source reached its peak in the completion of a theory foreshadowed by Cicero: A true friend mirrors one's own personality, i.e. the souls of the friends merge into one. The person talking to his friend feels as if he is talking to himself because the friends form one soul. Furthermore, within friendship, the longing for friends becomes so strong that although they are absent or even dead, they are nevertheless always present: “verum enim amicum qui intuetur, tamquam exemplar aliquod intuetur sui. quocirca et absentes adsunt et gentes abundant [...]” (Cicero 23).

Augustine gradually turned away from the Ciceronian ideal and began to seek self-knowledge and self-understanding in order to understand the true nature of mankind. He turned to Manicheism whose focus was placed on the search for cognition. Augustine wanted to gain absolute knowledge through learning pure rational thinking. He pursued Manichean teachings for about nine years. Gradually, he became more sceptical of this doctrine and after hearing the preachings of Ambrose in Milan in 384, he saw a possibility to overcome the Manichean criticism of the Bible. Before finally turning to Christianity, he also studied Neo-Platonism, believing to have found a new understanding of reality in which the soul and the spirit are more real than concrete things (Flasch 37), the soul now being the central element in his doctrine. Around the same time, Augustine explored the important criteria of *amicitia spiritualis* (“soul friendship”). He again became familiar with the preachings of Ambrose, which ultimately led to his conversion to Christianity.

Parallel to this spiritual development, a woman became the most important person in his life. His mother Monnica, herself a strong believer in God, began to influence his soul. She became the helping and protecting friend. In the sixth book of the *Confessiones* he says that both their lives had become one and the same. After his mother's death, he fell into a deep despair. Baptized by Ambrose in 387, and struggling to overcome the bitter feelings of death with Christian consolation, his inner thoughts were still marked by classical education. At this time he found friends who were in similar situations and according to Venantius Nolte: “[...] aus aller Seelen steigen tröstende, helfende und einigende Kräfte. Es wird die Freundschaft zu einer engen Lebensgemeinschaft” (Nolte 29). [... and from all souls arose consoling, helping and unifying powers]. “Friendship” now acquired other functions: to help and console and thus influence the friends to find a common future with the aim of searching for the truth. It becomes a kind of long-term relationship. A strong feeling of confidence emerged which retained the feeling of love for a friend and finally fulfilled the criteria of “soul friendship”.

A short dialogue taken from his *Soliloquia*, written 386-387, exemplifies this view: Augustine, who said that he only loved God and the souls, was asked if he then does not love his friends. He answered: "How could I not love them, when I love the soul"? For him God and soul does not mean God and oneself, but God and real life and this, above all, friendship. "Soul" is not just individual, but is characterized by the link to the real good. For him it is everybody's good and not a private one (Flasch 147f).

The new community of friends established itself in Cassiciacum. Taking a different approach, they attempted to solve the problem that friendship had posed so far: the Christian attitude of life (Nolte 33). After studying the letters of the Apostles, Augustine's personality underwent a complete change. "Religion" became the fundamental idea and again it was his mother and her attitudes towards Philosophy which became central for him. Religion also became the most important element in "friendship". Only two people with the same belief can be friends; therefore he did not consider friendship between a heathen and a Christian possible. God is the pinnacle of religion. If the friends are separated, they can be reassured that they will be later reunited in God, i.e. even if they are physically alone, the presence of God means the presence of friends. Augustine prays to God for his friends and asks Him to help, console and protect them, and he expects that they do the same for him (cf. 35f). God is their leader and holds them together. Their whole strivings are directed towards Him.

Neben allem neuplatonischen Einschlag und antiker Formung des Freundschaftslebens wird hier doch lebendig wirksam die christliche Liebesaktivität, die aus Gott fließt und zu ihm zurückkehrt. Gott und in ihm der Mensch: das ist nun das werdende Ideal der Freundschaftslove bei Augustin (37).

[Besides the influence of Neo-Platonism and the Classical forms of friendship, Christian love coming from God and returning to him becomes obviously active. God and in God mankind is the emerging ideal of love-friendship in Augustine.]

The next part of this work will illustrate how Augustine's ideas of friendship also apply to Eangyth's letter. One notices that her elaborate language is an indication that she has received a good education. This is not an exception as it is well-known that Anglo-Saxon girls were educated in monasteries and very often the abbesses teaching in these houses belonged to renowned centres of learning.<sup>3</sup> Eangyth obviously knew important literary texts as well as books containing classical and patristic rhetorics, grammar and metrics, which were available in monastic libraries of Anglo-Saxon England and which formed the basis for early medieval writing. Because we have no direct evidence for women composing literature outside the letters in Anglo-Saxon England, we can assume that women in general found their medium only in the epistolary genre (Classen 255).

In the following, I will point to analogous elements of Eangyth's letter and the *Confessiones* in order to support my hypothesis of an Augustinian reading of this letter.

In her report, Eangyth emphasised that she is not only worrying about her and her daughter's soul, but more seriously, about the souls of others who were entrusted to their

leadership. At the same time, she expresses her fears of the after-life. There, she has to stand before God and has to account for her deeds and thoughts:

[...] et non tantum recordatio animarum nostrarum, sed, quod difficilius est et multo gravius, universarum commissarum animarum promiscui sexus et aetatis et multorum mentibus et diversis moribus deserviturae et postea ante tribunal Christ rationem redditurae non solum pro manifestis peccatis gestorum sive dictorum, sed simul pro occultis cogitationibus, quae homines latent Deo tantum teste et cum simplici acie adversus duplicem et cum X milibus adversus XX milia duellium ducture (Tangl 22f).

[...] And it is not only the thought of our souls, but, and this is even more difficult and a burden, the thinking of all other souls of different sex and age entrusted to us, and thinking that we will fit to the opinions of many and to completely different habits and therefore, later on, we have not only to give account for our obvious failure in words and deeds before Christ's tribunal, but at the same time for our secret thoughts, hidden for mankind, because only God witnesses it, and wage war with one legion against two and with ten thousand against twenty thousand.]

This future perspective is most frightening for her as a Christian, because living in a religious community, God is the highest authority. She knows that he witnesses human life, judges people, and will never be defeated. This clearly hints at the Christian teaching Augustine also adheres to after his baptism. Moreover, the duty of the two women to care for others mirrors part of the Augustinian doctrine of ideal friendship. After this reference to Christian belief, which has a forceful meaning and function for her, she names her concrete personal problems: the loss of friends and relatives. Their absence throws them into depression. Life becomes unbearable and they are unable to continue living because they feel repugnance to life:

Additur his omnibus miseriis amissio amicorum et contribulim, caterva propinquorum et con-sanguineorum turba. Non habemus filium neque fratrem, patrem aut patruum, nisi tantum unicam filiam penitus destitutam omnibus caris in hoc saeculo, preter unam tantum sororem eius et matrem valde vetulam et filium fratris earum, et illum valde infelicem propter ipsius mentis statum et quia rex noster eius gentem multum exosam habet. Et nullus est alius qui noster sit necessarius; sed diversis casibus transtulit illos Deus [...]

Pro his omnibus et huiuscemodi causis [...] tedebit nos vitae nostrae et pene nobis pertesum est vivere (23f).

[In addition to all this misery there is the loss of all friends and the tribe, many relatives and a lot of cousins. We have neither son nor brother, no father or uncle, only one daughter, who has lost all her beloved ones in the world, apart from one sister of hers and her very old mother and a cousin of theirs, who also lives in misery because of his mental state and because the king hates his family. There is nobody else being our relative by blood, because God has taken them all in a variety of ways.

Because of these and similar reasons, [...] we hate our life and to live on is nearly a disgust.]

Augustine also relates losses of beloved friends. He refers to the days of his youth. In a very vivid manner he describes his sorrow when a friend died. Life becomes unbearable for him, disgusting. The separation throws him into complete turmoil and his tortured soul is constantly reminded of his dead friend. Restless, he leaves his home:

[...] post paucos dies me absente repetitur febris et defungitur. Quo dolore contenebratum est cor meum, et quidquid aspiciebam mors erat. Et erat mihi patria supplicium et paterna domus mira infelicitas, et quidquid cum illo communicaveram, sine illo in crutiatum immanem verterat. Expetebant eum undique oculi mei, et non dabatur; et oderam omnia, quod non haberent eum, nec mihi iam dicere poterant: "Ecce veniet", sicut cum viveret, quando absens erat (Augustinus *Confessiones* 4,4).

[...] a few days later, I was not with him, he got fever again and died.

Grief-stricken, my heart became dark and everything I saw looked like death. Home was pain for me, unhappy my father's house and everything I experienced with him turned into pain without him. My eyes were looking for him everywhere, but he wasn't to be seen. And I hated everything, because it did not bear him and could not say to me: "Look, he is coming soon", as it was before when he was away for a while.]

He feels the same repugnance to life as Eangyth. Furthermore, he is under the impression that his soul is cut in half and he realizes that he and his friend had been one soul living in two bodies, "Nam ego sensi animam meam et animam illius unam fuisse animam in duobus corporibus, et ideo mihi horrore erat vita, quia nolebam dimidius vivere [...]" (*Confessiones* 4,6). [I thought my soul and his soul have been one soul in two bodies; therefore my life was a horror for me, because I do not want to live by halves]. In spite of these overwhelming feelings, one has to differentiate these early stages from his mature ones and as Nolte remarks:

Und doch war die Freundschaft bloß an der Oberfläche haften geblieben. Nicht volle innere Wertung war Grund des seelischen Verstehens. Und mag Augustin auch sprechen von der Hälfte seiner Seele, so war das Verhältnis nicht zur geistigen Seelendurchdringung und Seelenverbindung gekommen. Er zweifelt selbst, ob seine Freundschaft so stark war, daß er sein Leben hingegeben hätte für seinen Freund (Nolte 24).

[Friendship remained only on the surface. Not complete inner respect was the reason for spiritual understanding. And even if Augustine is talking about the half of his soul, the relationship did not reach the point of soul-penetration and soul-affinity. He himself doubted, if his friendship would have been so strong, that he had given his life for his friend.]

The loss of his mother touched him much more deeply. The consequences of her death were harder to bear because his mother had already reached the ideal of a "soul-friend" he himself had aimed for. At first glance, the description of his pain after her death seem to

be similar to those experienced in his youth. He also feels that his soul is wounded because it had been part of his mother's soul: "Quoniam itaque deserebar tam magno eius solacio, sauciabatur anima mea et quasi dilaniabatur vita, quae una facta erat ex mea et illius (*Confessiones* 9,12)." [Because she, my great consolation, left me alone, that's why my soul is wounded, the life that became, through mine, one and the same was like being torn apart]. But this exemplifies his spiritual development. Now, it is not the loud lament, the despair and restlessness that makes his suffering obvious and through which he tries to overcome the friend's death, but it is a lonely and quiet grief which excludes others. Even his friends are not allowed to see his tears or participate in his misery. He is constantly fighting an inner battle with his feelings in an effort to suppress them. His heart is full of bitterness. At this moment it is only God who can help and console him, in whom he can confide in and in whose presence he can mourn. This is the stage where Augustine describes the ideal friend as God and soul:

[...] et libuit flere in conspectu tuo de illa et pro illa, de me et pro me. Et dimisi lacrimas quas continebam ut effluerent quantum vellent, substernens eas cordi meo: et requievit in eis, quoniam ibi erant aures tuae, non cuiusquam hominis superbe interpretantis ploratum meum (*ibidem.*).

[...] and before you, one should cry, over her and for her. And I let the tears go, which I kept, that they could flow as they wanted. I put my heart into it and it rested in them, because there were only your ears, not those of a human being, who would have taken my loud crying cold-hearted.]

Further on in her letter, Eangyth reveals her wish to go on a pilgrimage to Rome in order to atone for her sins. Unsure of her decision, she asks Boniface for advice and requests that he should be a protecting and supporting "powerful mountain" for her:

[...] pro his ergo incertis et occultis ambae te supplices atque prostratis vultibus flagitamus, ut sis nobis Aaron, id est mons fortitudinis, orationum tuarum nos suffragio fulcias [...] (Tangl 25).

[...] because of this uncertainty and seclusion we both request with obedient and lowered eyes that you should be an Aaron for us, i.e. a mountain of strength, and to support us with the help of your prayers [...]]

In his friendship with his pupil Alypius, Augustine was also the "powerful mountain". He, older and more mature, became the (spiritual) leader of the younger, who highly esteemed and admired him, "[...] et postea Carthagini; et diligebat multum, quod ei bonus et doctus videre [...]" (*Confessiones* 6,7). [...] and afterwards at Carthage; and he loved me very much, because I seemed to be good to him and well learned [...]]. For Alypius, his teacher was the concrete portrayal of the ideal human being, in which he strongly believed (Nolte 24). Compared to the friendships of his youth, what marked this friendship as a special one was Augustine's more mature character. The spiritual exchange formed its very basis and thus became a "soul-love". Alypius' wish to gain wisdom through the

help of Augustine formed the classical element of their friendship which reflects Cicero's ideal of pursuing learning and teaching together.

At the end of her letter, Eangyth again refers to a feature which is obviously derived from Augustine and which became a characteristic of Anglo-Saxon letters. The nun asks Boniface to pray for her and her daughter:

Amicus diu quaeritur, vix invenitur, difficile servatur. Ora pro nobis, ut non noceant nobis noxarum crimina amara (Tangl 26).

[The search for a friend is long, hardly found, he is only with difficulties to hold. Pray for us that the bitter crimes of our sins will not harm us.]

The request for intercession by prayer is a common feature of nearly all letters in early medieval England. Gerchow has already drawn the attention on this fact:

[...] Dennoch ist die Intensität der so oft wiederholten und deshalb formelhaft werdenden Gebetsbitte nicht etwa Gemeingut der Brieffliteratur des Frühmittelalters, sondern besonderes Charakteristikum der Angelsachsenbriefe. Auch innerhalb ihrer Briefcorpora gibt es solche ohne diese Formeln, was beweist, daß sie nicht selbstverständlich in jedem Brief eingesetzt sondern bewußt und differenziert verwendet wurden (Gerchow 32).

[[...] Nevertheless, the intensive use of the often repeated and therefore formulaic prayer intercession is not a feature of all letters of the Early Middle Ages, but a characteristic feature of Anglo-Saxon letters. Within their corpus of letters there are some without prayer-intercession, too, which proves that it is not used automatically in every letter but in a conscious and differentiated way.]

Some letters contain the sole element of asking for prayer-intercession such as the one to an unnamed man or nun (Tangl 54f and 138f). This feature can also be found in Aldhelm's, Lul's, or Alcuin's correspondences as well as in individual letters of otherwise unrecorded persons like that of a woman called Berthgyth (284ff). The rank of the person who is requested to intercede is of no significance. It is also possible that several persons ask the same person for a prayer, e.g. Denehard, Lul and Burchard asking the abbess Cuniburga for prayer intercession (78ff), or one person asks several, e.g. Boniface to Leobgytha, Tecla and Cynehilda (139f).

In his letters, Augustine also often refers to the common prayer. He stresses the importance of *sentire deum* as a main duty in friendship. He himself believes that God is omnipresent. He finds inner peace through him and in him; therefore the bond between two friends also exists in God (Augustinus *Epistulae*). God is a source of strength and in order to take the best out of each others friendship, they must consult him (Nolte 100). In this sense, Nolte explains the line in Augustine's letter 130, 18 III 60,5: "In ipsa ergo fide et spe et caritate continuato desiderio semper oramus" [Therefore, in belief, hope and love we always pray with continuing desire]:

Die menschliche Liebe drängt zum geistigen Verkehr und Gefühlsaustausch und erst recht die Liebe zu Gott, zu dem die Freunde in heiliger Gemeinschaft sich hingezogen fühlen (102).

[Human love and especially love for God to whom the friends are attracted in holy community, presses for spiritual and emotional exchange.]

The friends form a prayer community in which they encourage each other to do good. The friends hope to reach inner perfection by the help of each other's prayers. Thus prayer is necessary for friendship, because real friends can help others to reach the highest values (101). Within prayer, friends can unify in God, their souls forming one unity of pureness and love (102). The ideal of "friendship", according to Augustine, is reached at this point.

## Conclusion

The short outline of Augustine's ideas as well as the comparison with Eangyth's letter show that the Anglo-Saxons were well aware of patristic teachings on "soul-friendship" and that they borrowed elements for their own writings, Augustine being the main source. The motif of *amicitia* and its ideal form, the "soul friendship" occupied a central position. "Soul friendship" consists of four elements: 1. Love: absolute love is reached in loving the friend as oneself, leading the friend to God and "fusing" with him in God; 2. Confidence: the friend puts his complete trust in the other and completely relies on him; 3. Honesty: true friendship accepts words of truth and criticism; 4. Prayer: this is the most important element for a long lasting "friendship" because it leads to God and helps to enlighten the friend.<sup>4</sup> The elements of "love" and especially "confidence" are to be found in Eangyth's letter to Boniface. However, these elements are also evident in Berthgyth letters to her brother, Balthard, or in Leobgyda's writings to Boniface.

Prayer-intercession is, as I have described above, to be found extensively in Anglo-Saxon writings. It would be of interest to learn why this was so important for early English writers and less so for those on the continent. Eangyth's letter demonstrates that not all of these four elements always occur together. In her case, the third point is missing.

Finally, I would like to emphasise again that these motifs obviously relate to Augustinian ideas. Apart from Eangyth's letter, there is also evidence for their reception in other letters. Scholars valuing the contents of the Anglo-Saxon correspondences as something originally and purely Anglo-Saxon can be proven wrong. Without the reception of Augustine, these early English texts would not have come into existence.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> All translations in brackets are mine.

<sup>2</sup> Schaefer, p.515. She mentions the letters to and from Ecgburh, Bugga and Eadburh, Abbess of Thanet, pp.18-21; 54; 60.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Albrecht Classen, "Frauenbriefe an Bonifatius", p.255, who refers to other secondary readings, for example, Christine Fell, *Anglo-Saxon Women* stating this fact.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Geerlings, p.270f. He names "Freimut" instead of "Ehrlichkeit". He explains the terms in greater detail and values the features differently.

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