

AUGUSTINE, MANICHAISM AND THE GOOD

by

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Kam-lun Edwin LEE

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ABSTRACT Ph.D.(Th.) Thesis, St. Paul University, Ottawa

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by Kam-lun Edwin LEE

This thesis will investigate, by means of the historical-critical method, Augustine of Hippo's understanding of the Manichaean idea of the Good, and how this understanding affects his own related notions of summum bonum and personal evil, and, as a corollary, his doctrine of predestination. The question of a possible Manichaean influence is particularly pertinent because Manichaeism is at heart a dualistic solution to the issue of good and evil. The focus is not on Manichaeism per se but on Augustine's perception of it, as more directly affecting his thinking.

Augustine's treatise De natura boni (399) in part summarizes his treatment of "the nature of the Good" in earlier polemics. From his first writing, De pulchro et apto (380), to that point, Augustine understands the Manichaean concept as equating the Good with the Beautiful, the latter taken to mean that which engenders tranquil pleasure. Conversely, evil is thought of as a disturbance of this state, whether spiritually or physically.

Carrying over from the Manichaean expectations he held

in De pulchro et apto, Augustine perceives the summum bonum to be that which guarantees the soul's tranquil enjoyment. For the soul to attain tranquility, it must have modus, or the fullness of due order. God as the summum bonum can guarantee tranquility simply because, as summus modus, he exists fully, therefore cannot be lost as the soul's object of possession. In turn, God confers order on the contemplating soul.

Wickedness and mortality are deemed to be both spiritually and physically evil in Manichaean terms because they disturb a person's tranquil existence. In his non-metaphysical theory he designs to explain intrinsic personal evil developed in De uera religione (390), Augustine redefines these two notions as "sin" and "penalty," hence imposing on them a causal relation that makes the conception of a vicious circle mechanism possible. According to Augustine, in the human experience of evil habit (consuetudo), the mystery of one's bondage to sin, has to do with the vicious circle caused by the inherited penalty of the primal sin, resulting in bodily corruption, and by the effect of this corruption on the subsequent sinful defective turning of the will away from God toward preference for bodily pleasure. This defection is, in turn, reinforced by spiritual blindness, which is, again, the result of bodily

corruption. In his debate with Fortunatus (392), Augustine was challenged to reread the Pauline writings. From this he discovered that his theory of consuetudo remained incomplete so long as no serious consideration was given to the role of concupiscentia as the intrinsic principle of rebellion against God's Law. Augustine's notion of concupiscentia is also linked directly to the Manichaeian idea of evil as a disturbance of a person's inner tranquility. By the time he wrote De uera religione, Augustine had imported into that notion a strong sexual overtone by equating concupiscentia with the Manichaeian term libido, which implies sexual desire.

Augustine's development of the idea of predestination reveals the Manichaeian concept of the Good at work in three ways: on the framework of that development, in the implication of determinism, and on the context of the doctrine. To respond to the Manichaeian view of the universe as a mixture of good and evil, Augustine suggests an alternative theory of cosmic ordering. Despite the presence of evil, he believes that the whole cosmos is in harmonious beauty so long as evil is assigned to its proper place. God is to preserve this order in both the physical and the spiritual (moral) creations, an order portrayable with a two-tiered frame. Initially (around 388), Augustine thought that an individual person, as a spiritual creature, should have

self-determination by the exercise of the will. But gradually, due to his conviction that personal evil is inevitable (a view shared by the Manichees and demonstrated in his conceptions of consuetudo and concupiscentia), Augustine assigned determination of one's destiny to the jurisdiction of God. As he neared the maturation of his predestinarian idea (around 396), therefore, Augustine increasingly subsumed the individual's election or condemnation, which belongs to the moral order in the spiritual creation, into God's hidden eternal plan for the cosmos. Determinism, however, is not the only characteristic feature of Augustine's version of predestination. The cosmological and eschatological contexts of his doctrine demand the notion of summum bonum to warrant the beauty of the cosmic order as well as to assure the elect's eternal tranquil beatitude.

The Manichaeian contribution to the success of Augustine's conception of predestination is both undeniable and indispensable. By engaging the Manichaeian question of unde sit malum?, he was able to achieve what other Christian leaders of his time could not: a Christian theory of the inevitability of personal evil and the cosmological implications for the role played by predeterminism in the doctrine of predestination.

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INTRODUCTION

So, why choose St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo as a dissertation subject? Well-meaning friends advised me against the choice for fear that I might not succeed. The advice is genuine because they have either heard horror stories or seen others fail. Or they themselves have once attempted a similar task but eventually decided to change direction. Yet, I doubted whether these were good enough reasons to avoid Augustine. In fact, according to statistics, the number of doctoral theses on Augustine is on the rise in recent decades. If it is only difficult, but not impossible, to write on Augustine, then I want to know if I can do it, by God's grace. So, this academic exercise besides being a personal spiritual pilgrimage of faith, is also a personal challenge.

On the academic front, my motivation to embark on this research project is in part due to my former Th.M. thesis director at Regent College in Vancouver, B.C., the late Prof. Klaus Bockmühl, whose constant advice was "major author, major theme." I naturally chose to study St. Augustine who has had incalculable influence on the whole Western Church tradition, Catholic and Protestant alike. My personal curiosity about predestination further helped me decide to

investigate Augustine's notion of the Good because the appreciation of the former is conditional upon the understanding of the latter.

Augustine of Hippo's notion of the Good is an important topic of study in its own right. To date, studies have been done on various aspects of Augustine's view of the Good, such as its Platonic roots,¹ the nature of created good,² goodness as order,³ the issue of theodicy,⁴ and that of

¹J. RIST, "Plotinus and Augustine on Evil," in Plotino e il Neoplatonismo in Oriente e in Occidente, Convegno internazionale, Roma, 5-9 ottobre 1970, (Problemi attuali di scienza e di cultura, 198) (Roma: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1974), 495-508; S. MACDONALD, "Augustine's Christian-Platonist Account of Goodness," The New Scholasticism 63 (1989): 485-509.

²S. KIKUSHI, "On Augustine's Understanding of the Created Good," Studies in Medieval Thought 31 (1989): 76-83; D.H. NIKKEL, "St. Augustine on the Goodness of Creaturely Existence," The Duke Divinity School Review 43 (1978): 181-187.

³P. SLATER, "Goodness as Order and Harmony in Augustine," in Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian, eds. J. MCWILLIAM, et al. (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992), 151-159; R.M. COOPER, "Saint Augustine's Doctrine of Evil," Scottish Journal of Theology 16 (1963): 256-276.

⁴E.g., F. BERTHOLD, "Free Will and Theodicy in Augustine: An Exposition and Critique," Religious Studies 17 (1981): 525-535; G.H. RANSON, "Augustine's Account of the Nature and Origin of Moral Evil," Review and Expositor: A Baptist Theological Journal 50 (1953): 309-322.

predestination in the context of divine goodness.⁵ Yet, so far no work has been done on the Manichaeic factor in his concept of the Good. It is well-known that Augustine's earliest controversy with the Manichees contributed significantly to the development of his thought throughout his life. Johannes Van Oort, one of the leading scholars on Augustinian and Manichaeic studies, remarks: "Seine Theologie ist sogar schwer zu verstehen ohne eine eingehende Kenntnis der Religion des Lichts, ihrer Hymnen und Gebete, ihrer Ethik und Dogmatik, ihrer Mythologie und Theologie."⁶ The study of a possible Manichaeic influence on Augustine's notion of

⁵J.M. SALAS MARTÍNEZ, "La maravillosa y misteriosa bondad de Dios hacia el hombre según San Agustín especialmente en sus escritos contra el Pelagianismo y Semipelagianismo" (Diss., Fac. Theol. Pontificiae Universitatis Gregorianae, Romae, 1964).

⁶J. VAN OORT, "Augustin und der Manichäismus," Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte 46 (1994): 126-127. Also, idem, "Augustine and Mani on Concupiscentia Sexualis," in Augustiniana Traiectina, communications présentées au colloque international d'Utrecht, 13-14 novembre 1986, eds. J. DEN BOEFT & J. VAN OORT (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1987), 137; idem, "Augustine on Sexual Concupiscence and Original Sin," in Studia Patristica 22, papers presented to the Tenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1987, ed. E.A. LIVINGSTONE (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1989), 385; J.K. COYLE, Augustine's "De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae": A Study of the Work, its Composition and its Sources (Paradosis, 25) (Fribourg: University Press, 1978), 6; G. BONNER, St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies, revised ed. (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1986), 194; M.A. VANNIER, "Manichéisme et pensée augustiniennne de la création," in Collectanea Augustiniana: Augustine, Second Founder of the Faith, eds. J.C. SCHNAUBELT & F. VAN FLETEREN (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 421-431; W.S. BABCOCK, "Augustine on Sin and Moral Agency," Journal of Religious Ethics 16 (1988): 28-55.

the Good is particularly pertinent because Manichaeism is at heart a dualistic solution to the problem of good and evil.

To date, the most substantial treatment of Augustine's notion of the Good from the viewpoint of his Manichaean background is G.R. Evan's Augustine on Evil.⁷ But, from the consideration of Manichaean influence, the concept of evil is not exactly the same as the mere opposite of what is good. It is, therefore, the purpose of this dissertation to determine how Augustine's understanding of the Manichaean idea of the Good influences his own related notions of the Good. It is assumed here that Manichaeism as seen through the eyes of Augustine would be different from the Manichaeism with which he came into contact. Our focus on the former is reasonable because in the final analysis it is Augustine's own understanding which directly contributes to the development of his thinking. Hence, there will be no treatment here of the notion of the Good in Manichaeism per se, nor any discussion of the objectivity of Augustine's reports on his former religion.

Our investigation will employ the historical-critical method, which seeks to unravel the true meaning of a text by

⁷G.R. EVANS, Augustine on Evil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982; reprint, 1991) (subsequent page references are to the reprint edition).

examining its inner consistency and by putting the text within a larger context (in this case, Augustine's corpus), those traditions on which it drew, and the circumstances under which it appeared. The choice of this method does not mean to exclude the possibility of others but to show how the historical-critical method can contribute to the understanding of our study. This study will be based on critical editions of Augustine's works where available. For texts unavailable in a truly critical edition, we will resort to Jacques-Paul Migne, Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina.

This research proceeds in two stages: the establishment of Augustine's understanding of the Manichaean notion of the Good throughout our period of inquiry; and the study of how this concept influenced his related ideas. The first stage consists of showing what Augustine understands by the Manichaean notion of the Good in De natura boni (399),⁸ his last formal anti-Manichaean treatise, as well as in De

⁸Unless otherwise stated, all dating of Augustine's works in this dissertation will generally follow the suggestions of O. PERLER, Les voyages de saint Augustin (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1969), 430-477, with reference to the chronological tables of P. BROWN, Augustine of Hippo: A Biography (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 16, 74-77, 184-187, 282-285, 378-379; E. TESELLE, Augustine the Theologian, (London: Burns & Oates, 1970) 11-14; H. HOHENSEE, The Augustinian Concept of Authority, (Folia, Supplement II) (New York: Paulist Press, 1954), 5-8; and COYLE, Augustine's "De Moribus", 13-16.

pulchro et apto (380), his earliest writing. In the process, the issues of dating and occasion of composition of De natura boni are examined, and the content and motive of writing of De pulchro et apto are explored. The second stage entails the investigation of the continuous influence of the notion of the Good, in the writings between 380 and 399 (except for Confessiones XIII [400]), and this in two senses: 1) Augustine's choice of approach, despite the use of a Neoplatonic vehicle, to the treatment of God as summum bonum and to the problem of evil, and 2) his development of the notion of predestination, already in place with Ad Simplicianum (396).

In the investigation of the contributing Manichaean influences on Augustine's summum bonum, we will attempt, first, to identify the place of summus modus in both his earliest and latest anti-Manichaean treatises; second, to trace how this idea developed in De beata uita as an answer to his consideration of the happy life in De pulchro et apto; and third, to show that the same idea also acquires a creational aspect.

In studying how Augustine's grasp of the Manichaean concept of the Good affects his notion of evil, we will investigate the Manichaean concept of evil--again, as

Augustine understood it. Here, we will attempt to see how Augustine retains the Manichaean insight regarding the upset state of the subjective disposition, yet replaces the ontological explication of evil by the concept of the flesh in his development of the notions of consuetudo and concupiscentia.

On the idea of predestination, we understand Augustine's mature notion in Ad Simplicianum to mean that God's gracious but hidden election predetermines the salvation or condemnation of each one belonging to the massa damnata. While some are left alone, God's prevenient grace prepares for the faith of the elect to respond favourably to the divine calling. In this context, two fundamental issues can be identified: the hiddenness of God's gracious election and the inevitability of personal evil. Here, we will attempt to show two aspects of influence from the Manichaean notion of the Good. First, in Augustine's consideration of cosmic order as beautiful, we will show that he tries to address the Manichaean view concerning things in the universe: that which is beautiful is good. Second, Augustine's maturation of the concept of personal evil, which will have been shown to be of Manichaean influence, forces a change in the framework of the cosmic order that is reflective of the notion of hiddenness of divine election. Last but not least, we will attempt to

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place Augustine's doctrine of predestination into its foundational context in both the eschatological and cosmic aspects, which are based on the idea of summum bonum.

CHAPTER 1

AUGUSTINE AND MANICHAEISM

1 AUGUSTINE'S MANICHAEAN YEARS

Although Augustine was never fully initiated into Manichaeism,⁹ he is credited by scholars with knowing it reasonably well.¹⁰ Possibly still keeping some ties with the Catholic Church,¹¹ Augustine for nine years¹² was a Manichaean auditor.¹³ It is, therefore, no surprise that he

⁹Unless otherwise stated, the terms "Manichaeism," "Manichaean doctrines," etc. refer to the Roman African version of Manichaeism with which Augustine first came into contact. See section 2, below.

¹⁰For example, see F. DECRET, Aspects du Manichéisme dans l'Afrique romaine: Les controverses de Fortunatus, Faustus et Félix avec saint Augustin (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1970), 31; P. ALFARIC, L'évolution intellectuelle de saint Augustin (Paris: E. Nourry, 1918), 216-218; COYLE, Augustine's "De Moribus", 51-52.

¹¹L.C. FERRARI, "Young Augustine: Both Catholic and Manichee," Augustinian Studies 26 (1995): 109-128.

¹²Pierre Courcelle observes that the length of time Augustine spent as a Manichaean auditor should be ten years. See P. COURCELLE, Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin, rev. ed. (Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1968), 78. Nevertheless, Augustine consistently refers to his sojourn in Manichaeism as only extending to nine years. Leo Charles Ferrari has offered some possible solutions to explain this apparent inconsistency. See L.C. FERRARI, "Augustine's 'Nine Years' as a Manichee," Augustiniana 25 (1975): 210-216.

¹³On the subject of Augustine as a Manichaean auditor, see BROWN, Augustine of Hippo, 40-114; M. PELLEGRINO, Les Confessions de saint Augustin: Guide de lecture (Paris: Éditions Alsatia, 1960), 83-144; P. COURCELLE, Recherches,

appears to have had comprehensive knowledge of Manichaeian doctrines, at least in their Roman African form. Though Augustine in his polemics cites only two writings of Mani by name, Epistula Fundamenti and Thesaurus (e.g., nat. bon. xlv),¹⁴ it is obvious that he knew of more. He knew many of the Manichaeian works in existence at that time (conf. III.vi.10; Faus. XIII.6; fund. xxviii), and he seems to have made the reading of Mani's own writings a personal goal.¹⁵ Prior to his first encounter with Faustus, a well-known speaker on evangelistic discourse and a debater in the Manichaeian sect whose reputation went well beyond the bounds of North Africa,¹⁶ Augustine had been studying Mani's writings with zeal (conf. V.vii.13) and he took care to compare Mani's pronouncements regarding astrology with the teachings of the philosophers on the subject of astronomical

60-92; ALFARIC, L'évolution intellectuelle, 79-225; COYLE, Augustine's "De Moribus", 50-57; DECRET, Aspects du Manichéisme, 27-38.

¹⁴Despite the dispersion of various Manichaeian writings in different regions, only a few titles such as the letters of Mani and Thesaurus enjoyed wide circulation. R. LIM, "Unity and Diversity among Western Manichaeians: A Reconsideration of Mani's sancta ecclesia," Revue des études augustiniennes 35 (1989): 245.

¹⁵For the possible ways Augustine could have acquired knowledge of Manichaeism, see VAN OORT, "Augustin und der Manichäismus," 128-135.

¹⁶S.N.C. LIEU, Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China, 2nd rev. ed. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 154-155.

manifestations (conf. V.iii.3, 6). To the heaven-oriented Augustine, astrology is the testing ground for the validity of Manichaeism. His fascination with the former might, in the first place, have drawn him toward the latter, which regards the heavenly bodies as the dwelling place of divine beings.¹⁷ The reason for his break with Manichaeism was Faustus' inability "to vanquish the astronomers and vindicate the Manichaean worship of Sun and Moon."¹⁸ Despite his fame as a well-known speaker in matters of evangelistic discourse, it seems evident in the debate with Augustine that Faustus might not have been good at inter-faith dialogues.¹⁹ The very fact that the heavenly bodies revered by the Manichees were subject to calculations and predictions by the philosophers must have made Augustine think twice about the divine nature of the beings dwelling in these bodies. It has been convincingly argued that Augustine's decision to break with the Manichees was precipitated by the accuracy of astronomical predictions of two solar eclipses during his Manichaean years between 372/373 and 383 (the year when

¹⁷See L.C. FERRARI, "Augustine and Astrology," Laval théologique et philosophique 33 (1977): 241-243, 247-248.

¹⁸Idem, "Astronomy and Augustine's Break with the Manichees," Revue d'études augustiniennes 19 (1973): 271.

¹⁹LIEU, Manichaeism, 154-155.

Faustus went to Carthage).²⁰ Nevertheless, Augustine's break with Manichaeism seems also to have been due to the ever-increasing problems he found with the sect in terms of the inherent contradictions within their professed faith--especially the violability of God (e.g., mor. II.xii.25)--which possibly was the motive behind his early desire to meet with Faustus.²¹ Eventually, after his encounter with Faustus, an occasion he expected to solve all his doubts, Augustine decided to detach himself from the sect (conf. V.vii.13). His wide exposure to general literature enabled him to judge right away that Faustus had not read beyond those works of his own sect which were in Latin (conf. V.vi.11). Due to his knowledge of Manichaean doctrines, Augustine was able to see through the problems implied in the system. Subsequently, he conscientiously attempted to steer clear of these problems as he adapted their notion of the Good.

Certainly, Augustine was not the only Christian thinker

²⁰The solar eclipses occurred on September 8th, 378 and January 12th, 381. See FERRARI, "Astronomy and Augustine's Break with the Manichees," 272-276. According to Othmar Perler, Augustine would have been teaching at Carthage from 375/6 to 383. PERLER, Voyages, 133. And since there are no high mountains around Carthage and rain is infrequent in that region, Augustine should have been able to clearly witness both eclipses.

²¹COYLE, Augustine's "De Moribus", 56.

writing against Manichaeism in his time, and so it is very possible that his ideas are not all original. But Augustine did have a privileged position among other anti-Manichaean polemicists in the fact that he alone had belonged to the Manichees.²² Also, there is clear evidence that he relies partly on Plotinus in his attack, although Plotinus did not write against Manichaeism but Gnosticism. Augustine's general familiarity with Platonic ideas, which he applies to his anti-Manichaean refutation, may be illustrated by the similarity in style, and sometimes even in content, between the anti-Manichaean treatise of the Middle Platonist Alexander of Lycopolis and the anti-Manichaean writings of Augustine himself.

2 THE MANICHAEISM OF ROMAN AFRICA

The Roman African branch of Manichaeism is recognized by some scholars as having characteristics that distinguish it from Manichaeism in other places. In fact, L.H. Grondijs cautions that due to the extreme adaptability of Manichaeism to its environment, each sect has its own unique content of belief. He even attempts to trace the sources (current Christian and philosophical ideas) which the North African

²²Ibid., 52.