

The Peculiar Appendage of Augustine's 'Enarratio in Psalmum LXI'

Augustine's *Commentary on Psalm 61* has an appendage which, to my knowledge at least, is not only quite unique, but also (at least *prima facie*) quite bizarre. Having treated of the Psalm itself, he then supposedly fixes his attention on a certain astrologer (*mathematicus*)¹⁾ in the audience, about whom he conducts an extemporaneous sermon. As the interpolation in the *Opera Omnia* has it:

Et post tractatum de Psalmo, cum mathematicus in populo monstraretur, de eo idem ipse intulit²⁾.

When one thinks about it, what follows is quite incredible. In spite of the fact that this *mathematicus* has renounced his former sins and has been received into the Church-- «et aliquando tamen admissus est» — Augustine indulges in a public and most unflattering disclosure of his former iniquities.

The reported discourse is doubly strange. In the first place, as far as I know, Augustine did not make a habit of sermonising about individual members of his congregation, whether they were good or bad³⁾. Secondly, it seems incredible that he should dredge up anew such iniquities as taking money for deceptions and lying, not to

1) The astrologers (*astrologi*) of Augustine's time were commonly called «*mathematici*» presumably because of all the calculations involved. They were also called «*genethliaci*» on account of the importance they attached to the date of birth (*De doctrina christiana* 2.32). Among other places, Augustine refers to the popularity and the power of the astrologers of his own day in *Expositio Epistolae ad Galatas* 35.

2) All quotes used in the present study are from the Maurist edition of the *Opera Omnia*, Paris (Gaume), 1836-1838. The text of the appendage, complete with interpolation, has been found to be identical with that in Migne (*P.L.* 36.640). There is an English translation of most of the *Commentary* on the Psalm (*Psalm LXII* in the King James Version) in vol. viii of Augustine's works in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*.

3) An obvious rare exception is the case of Tutuslysmeni (*Sermo CCCVIII.* 5), who apparently was no longer in the congregation. Moreover, as a comparison will show, the humorous treatment has little in common with the severity of the present appendage.

mention explaining away adultery and homicide — sins of which the astrologer had repented prior to his reception into the Church ⁴⁾. That Augustine should do all this in public and in the presence of the converted astrologer himself seems quite out of keeping with the Bishop of Hippo known to us.

If such considerations are not sufficient to discount the *prima facie* interpretation of the appendage — an interpretation claimed by the above-mentioned interpolation — there is yet more to follow.

After the many uncomplimentary things that he has to say about that one-time astrologer, Augustine then advises his congregation not only to watch him constantly and carefully, but also to enlist others in the same surveillance, lest the convert be seduced by the devil and return to his former ways:

Eum quem videtis cordibus amate, oculis custodite. Videte illum, scitote illum, et quacumque ille transierit, fratribus caeteris qui modo hic non sunt, ostendite illum: et ista dili-

⁴⁾ From the point of view of tenses, the description of the conversion of the « astrologer » presents an interesting inconsistency of crucial importance. At least three times in a row the conversion is described in the present tense: « convertitur ad misericordiam Domini », « convertitur ad Deum poenitens » and « poenitens est, non quaerit nisi solam misericordiam ». Not only does this seem to substantiate the presence of an astrologer in the congregation (as required by the interpolation), but it also appears to explain this presence. Presumably, having been converted, he is repentant of his former sinful profession and is therefore present because he seeks admission into the Church. (Cf. F. Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop* &c., (Battershaw and Lamb Translation) London and New York (Sheed & Ward) 1961, p. 64). However, that this is an understandable misinterpretation, seems to be definitely substantiated towards the end of the appendage when Augustine clearly points out, in the *past* tense, that the astrologer has *already* been received into the Church: « et aliquando tamen admissus est ». If this is so, then Augustine is delivering an almost incredible discourse, as is explained in the opening pages of the present article. However, the perspective presented in this same article not only avoids the various embarrassing implications of that incredible discourse, but it also eliminates the inconsistency of the tenses, just pointed out. Accordingly, it is claimed here that Augustine is *not* sermonising about some « astrologer » present in the congregation, but rather about himself at that particular stage of his sinful youth when he was deeply involved in astrology. The extemporaneous sermon is therefore basically a reminiscence in which, as practised orator, Augustine uses the present tense for realism and dramatic impact. Only at the end of that reminiscence does he return to the realism of his situation — the bishop addressing his congregation. In final analysis the truth of the matter is that he *has* been admitted to the Church, whence the past tense in the concluding words about the history of that astrologer: « et aliquando tamen admissus est ».

gentia misericordia est, ne ille seductor retrahat cor, et oppugnet. Custodite vos; non vos lateat conversatio ejus, via ejus; ut testimonio vestro nobis confirmetur vere illum ad Dominum conversum⁵⁾).

If the last part of this text is correctly understood, Augustine would seem to be conscripting all his parishioners into guarding the converted astrologer day and night and even eavesdropping on his every conversation to make sure that he has been truly converted: «Custodite vos; non vos lateat conversatio ejus, via ejus; ut testimonio vestro nobis confirmetur vere illum ad Dominum esse conversum».

One is left with the bizarre conclusion that Augustine is masterminding an espionage net-work embracing all his parishioners. More bizarre still—the espionage network is all focused on one person—the former astrologer! Most ridiculous of all, if we are to understand the import of the above-quoted interpolation, the converted astrologer himself is present, as these (secret) directions for detailed surveillance of him are being dispensed! What could be more absurd? Indeed, one could be inclined to question the authenticity of the entire sermon on the astrologer. So much then for the *prima facie* interpretation of this strange appendage to the commentary proper on Psalm 61.

On the other hand, all these difficulties dissolve away, once the interpolation is ignored and it is realised that Augustine is *not* sermonising about a one-time astrologer in his audience, but rather *about himself*. Accordingly, it is argued that he is discoursing in the third person about the stage of his former sinful life when he was «an eager student of the books of those who make horoscopes»⁶⁾.

⁵⁾ It is worth reiterating here that all this supervision is aimed at one who has been converted and received into the Church — «et aliquando tamen admissus est». This is the fulcrum, as it were, of the present argument. Furthermore, just how opposed Augustine was to going over the faults and failings of the past is indicated by the importance he attributed to the words of Paul: «unum autem, quae quidem retro sunt obliviscens, ad ea vero quae sunt priora extendens meipsum» (*Philipp.* 3.13). Augustine comments (with approval) upon this passage nearly a dozen times in his writings: *De lib. arb.* 3.[21]61; *Enarrationes in Psalmos*: 38.6, 39.3, 89.5, 113.7 and 149.8; *Sermones*: 105.7, 255.6 and 261.3, *In Epist. Joannis ad Parthos*, tractatus 4.6 and *Contra duas epistolas Pelagianorum* 3.22.

⁶⁾ *Confessiones* 4.3.5. Henceforth, such a reference would appear in brackets in the body of the article as: *Conf.* 4.3.5.

Admittedly there have been several traditional impediments to this interpretation of the otherwise incredible appendage to the commentary proper on Psalm 61. In the first place, while there would have been nothing to have prevented Augustine from sermonising about himself in the third person, this fact could well have escaped the attention of the less perceptive members of his audience (including presumably, the *notarius* who recorded the entire commentary). His audience would therefore have understood him to have been talking about some man or other, without having realised that that man was Augustine himself ⁷).

His beloved Apostle Paul once did exactly the same thing in a more transparent fashion when referring to the man he knew who had been caught up into the third heaven who had heard things which transcend human speech ⁸). From the context, it is clear to the reader of the Bible that Paul is really referring to himself. However, in the case of Augustine's sermon on the astrologer, such a conclusion is much less obvious, at least on paper. By contrast, conditions would have much favoured the more perceptive members of the audience present on the occasion of the delivery of the commentary. At least they would have had the advantage of many significant non-verbal cues, such as voice tone, facial expressions and even revealing gestures by which to divine the true subject of the sermon.

On the other hand, someone reading the mere words of the discourse, on paper, and some centuries later at that, would be all too liable to misinterpret the concrete context of the address and perhaps even to conjure up an «astrologer» present in the audience, in order to satisfy the more obvious exigency of the occurrence of the word «astrologer» (*mathematicus*) in the printed version of the discourse. And this, it is claimed, is precisely what has been done. However, the error is not entirely undetectable. As has been pointed out, some well nigh incredible implications result and, though not

⁷) On second thought another possibility presents itself. It could have been so evident to everyone present (including the *notarius*) that Augustine was really talking about himself that it would have seemed like emphasising the obvious to have explained the fact. In addition, as both the *Sermones* and the *Enarrationes* amply illustrate, the *notarius* plainly regarded his work as being merely the precise word by word recording of what was said. Consequently, that was not expressed vocally by Augustine does not appear on the recorded *Enarratio* which has come down to us.

⁸) II Cor. 12.1-5.

immediately evident, they do become obvious upon careful examination of the text.

A second traditional impediment to understanding the true subject of Augustine's discourse, lies in the failure to realise just how deeply Augustine was involved with astrology prior to his conversion to the Church. With the exception of a few Dutch scholars ⁹⁾ the involvement has been widely neglected. Part of the reason for this is Augustine's much more obvious involvement with the Manichees, as is evident from his *Confessions* ¹⁰⁾ and also from the many works he wrote against those heretics ¹¹⁾.

On the other hand, it would seem that astrology had a much stronger grasp upon the young Augustine than did Manicheism. Thus, if we are to be guided by the *Confessions*, it would appear that in his search for the truth, he clung to astrology for several years after he had abandoned the Manichees ¹²⁾. Again, astrology had the advantage of being more concerned with the heavens which had so entranced the young Augustine. Accordingly, I have argued elsewhere for the detectable influence of Halley's Comet of 374 AD upon Augustine's initial involvement with the Manichees ¹³⁾. Like-

⁹⁾ Laurent Cornelis Petrus Joseph de Vreese, *Augustinus en de astrologie*, Maastricht (Vetman) 1933 and E. Hendriks, 'Waarzeggerij en Parapsychologie bij Augustinus', *Augustiniana* 4 (1954) 325-352. So far, the former has proven to be unobtainable. The latter does not treat of the present topic. Van der Meer (also Dutch) devotes some pages to the subject of Augustine and astrology (*op. cit.*, pp. 60-67). He even discusses the present episode involving the « astrologer » among Augustine's congregation. Unfortunately however, he sees it as « a good illustration of the pastoral methods of the time » (p. 64).

¹⁰⁾ *Conf.* 3.6.10-3.12.21; 4.1.1; 5.10.18 to 5.11.21; 9.4.8-10 and 13.30.45 are the principal references.

¹¹⁾ It is to be recalled that Augustine wrote some fourteen works directed almost exclusively against the Manichees.

¹²⁾ Thus, he decided to quit the Manichees at the end of the fifth book (*Conf.* 5.14.25) which was concerned with the events of his twenty-ninth year (*Conf.* 5.3.3). However, he had not given up astrology until much later (*Conf.* 7.6.8) which would seem to have been some time after his thirtieth birthday (*Conf.* 6.11.18), but before his thirty-second one (*Conf.* 8.7.17). On the other hand, when it comes to the chronology of the *Confessions*, one should always bear in mind Courcelle's reservations (*Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin* (nouvelle édition) Paris, 1968, pp. 43-46).

¹³⁾ Leo Ferrari, 'Halley's Comet of 374 AD — New Light upon Augustine's Conversion to Manicheism', *Augustiniana* 27 (1977) 139-150.

wise, the solar eclipses of 378 and 381 seem to have had implications which helped lead to his finally abandoning that same religion ¹⁴).

Bearing in mind Augustine's profound and prolonged involvement with astrology during the sinful years of his youth, then it is claimed here that we have to search no further than the holy Bishop himself for the identity of the certain «astrologer» who is the subject of the disclosures and condemnations in the concluding sections of his *Enarratio in Psalmum LXI*.

That Augustine is discoursing about his own past sinful life in this otherwise incredible appendage in his *Commentary on Psalm 61* is also implied by many significant details in the text itself. Thus, interestingly enough, he knows that the former astrologer had been a faithful Christian still earlier in his life: «iste ex christiano et fideli poenitens redit» and again: «seductus enim ab inimico cum esset fidelis». On the other hand, we know from the *Confessions* that in his boyhood, Augustine's mother and all the children believed, the father alone being a nonbeliever: «ita jam credebam, et illa et omnis domus, nisi solus pater». (*Conf.* 1.11.17).

Again, significantly enough, Augustine knows that that astrologer became a believer in appearance only, prior to abandoning the faith of his childhood: «simul etiam ut noveritis quam multi in commixtione Christianorum ore suo benedicant, et in corde suo maledicant, iste ex christiano et fideli poenitens redit». Upon reading this passage, we are reminded of a significant detail in the *Confessions* where Augustine is writing of that stage of his youth, when he also was a counterfeit believer: «ausus sum etiam in celebritate sollemnium tuarum, intra parietes ecclesiae tuae concupiscere et agere negotium procurandi fructus mortis». (*Conf.* 3.3.5).

Regarding the astrologer's fall from grace, even the very phrasing which Augustine uses to describe it is redolent of a similar passage in the *Confessions*. Thus, he says of that astrologer: «*seductus enim ab inimico cum esset fidelis*» (such italics are added for comparisons). This makes an interesting comparison with the sentence that Augustine uses to describe the loss of his own innocence in the sixteenth year of his life: «calcabat me *inimicus* invisibilis, et *seducebat* me, quia eo *seductilis* eram». (*Conf.* 2.3.8.).

¹⁴ Leo Ferrari, 'Astronomy and Augustine's Break with the Manichees', *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 19 (1973) 263-276.

The same notion of seduction is linked with deception when Augustine describes the career of the astrologer: « seductus seducens, deceptus decipiens, illexit fefellit ». This brings to mind a remarkably similar passage in the *Confessions*: « seducebamur et seducebamur, falsi et fallentes ». (*Conf.* 4.1.1.)¹⁵. Here, Augustine is writing of the nine years that he spent with the Manichees, during most of which time he was also involved in astrology¹⁶. Of the length of that Manichean sojourn, Augustine several times uses the qualification « diu »¹⁷. Likewise of the astrologer's career he observes: « diu mathematicus fuit ».

Of this man, Augustine claims that he tried to impute his sins not to his own will, but to influences caused by the stars: « iste dicebat quia adulterium non faciebat voluntas propria, sed Venus; et homicidium non faciebat voluntas propria, sed Mars »¹⁸. Interestingly enough, when Augustine is treating of his own involvement with astrology in the fourth book of the *Confessions*, he makes a similar claim regarding the astrologers of whom he then was a colleague: « dicunt: 'de caelo tibi est inevitabilis causa peccandi,' et, 'Venus hoc fecit, aut Saturnus, aut Mars'. Scilicet ut homo sine culpa sit ». (*Conf.* 4.3.4.)¹⁹.

¹⁵ Cf. *In Joannis Evangelium*, tractatus 8.8 where Augustine refers to the astrologers as « vaniloqui et seducti seductores ». Likewise, in *Conf.* 7.2.3, he says of the Manichees: « sat erat mihi, domine, adversus illos deceptos deceptores ».

¹⁶ Augustine's initial involvement with the Manichees (*Conf.* 3.6.10) apparently dates from his nineteenth year: « cum agerem annum aetatis undevigesimum » (*Conf.* 3.4.7). His first encounter with the astrologers (*Conf.* 4.3.4) seems to belong to about the period when he began teaching rhetoric in his home-town of Thagaste (*Conf.* 4.2.2 and 4.4.7). This would indicate that he first consulted the astrologers when he was about twenty-one, or a year or two after his induction into Manicheism. For his abandonment of both interests, see footnote 11.

¹⁷ The significant employment of the word « diu » in regard to the length of Augustine's Manichean sojourn is to be found in *De beata vita* 4 and *De duabus animabus* 9.11.

¹⁸ Cf. *En. in Psalmum 31*, enarratio 2.16 and *En. in Psalmum 140.9*.

¹⁹ Just prior to his first mention of the astrologers (*Conf.* 4.3.4), Augustine admitted to living with a woman to whom he was not married (*Conf.* 4.2.2). Hence, it could have well been that he wished to blame the sexual sins of his youth upon the influence of the planet Venus. In this regard, his liberation from the spell of astrology contains a significant reference to chains: « jam itaque me, adjutor meus, illis vinculis solveras » (*Conf.* 7.7.11). The strong sexual connotations of the same word « vinculum » in the next book of the *Confessions* has been well demonstrated in the fine study of

Augustine seems well informed of yet other evils of the life of that astrologer, when he says: «et alia multa *sacrilega* non parva», which calls to mind a similar vague allusion in the *Confessions*: «in quantas iniquitates distabui, et *sacrilegam* curiositatem secutus sum» (*Conf.* 3.3.5.), and again later on: «ieram per vias pravas *superstitione sacrilega*» (*Conf.* 8.7.17.).

Judging by the context in the appendage, those other *sacrilega* involved the taking of money from Christians and the selling of lies: «Quam multis eum putatis Christianis nummos abstulisse? Quam multi ab illo emerunt mendacium?» Whether Augustine is referring to the selling of horoscopes to Christian clients is a moot point²⁰). More obviously in accord with the exigencies of the *Confessions* is the profession of teaching rhetoric which Augustine had practised and which he regarded as quite incompatible with his new life as a Christian²¹). He had sold this art because he was himself overcome by a love of making money: «Docebam in illis annis artem rhetoricam, et victoriosam loquacitatem victus cupiditate vendebam» (*Conf.* 4.2.2.)²²).

It is in relation to this buying and selling of lies that Augustine comes the closest to revealing quite explicitly the identity of the astrologer who is the subject of his discourse. Thus, he slips into the first person (albeit in the plural form), when he says: «Quam multi ab illo emerunt mendacium, quibus *dicebamus*: filii hominum, usquequo graves corde? utquid diligitis vanitatem, et quaeritis

Vinzenz Buchheit; 'Augustinus unter dem Feigenbaum (zu *Conf.* VIII)', *Vigiliae Christianae* 22 (1968) 257-271.

²⁰) Apparently numerous Christians were clients of the astrologers. As Augustine complains in one of his treatises: «plena sunt conventicula nostra hominibus qui tempora rerum agendarum a mathematicis accipiunt» (*Expositio Epistolae ad Galatas* 35). Also, it is not impossible that the reference to the selling of lies applies to a period during the younger Augustine's prolonged involvement with astrology when he actually sold horoscopes to clients. That he must have had a reputation as an astrologer of some ability is implied by the episode with Firminus (*Conf.* 7.6.8-9), who asked him what was indicated by the stars in regard to some worldly ambitions of the latter.

²¹) Cf. Augustine's decision to quit the profession of oratory upon being converted (*Conf.* 9.2.2-4). Indeed, as he remarks at the end of this section, some of his fellow-Christians may have judged him guilty of sin for spending even one hour in that professorship of lying (*cathedra mendacii*) after his heart had been converted to God.

²²) Cf. *Conf.* 9.2.4, where Augustine alludes to the fact that his love of money had sustained him in his teaching of rhetoric.

mendacium?»²³) Interestingly enough, this latter portion of the extract, regarding the sons of men, makes several significant appearances in Augustine's *Confessions*. The text is from the fourth Psalm upon which Augustine rhapsodises in *Conf.* 9.4.8-12. In that place, he quotes the very same passage twice in regard to the Manichees. The time is just after his conversion and he wished (somewhat naively to the modern reader) that the Manichees would have been present without his knowing it, to see with what transports of joy he read that particular Psalm. More directly relevant to the present context is the occasion on which Augustine cites the same passage from the fourth Psalm in regard to his profession of teaching rhetoric. He refers to the spark of honour which he displayed in that profession devoted to the lovers of vanity and the seekers of a lie: «in illo magisterio diligentibus vanitatem et quaerentibus mendacium» (*Conf.* 4.2.2.). Nor is this the only place where Augustine refers to the rhetoric which he professed as consisting of lies and fraudulence²⁴).

As to the conversion of that astrologer back to the faith of his childhood, Augustine knowingly mentions twice in the discourse, how the conversion was motivated by fear and terror: «territus potestate Domini convertitur ad misericordiam Domini» and «convertitur ad Deum poenitens. Putamus, fratres, de magno timore cordis accidisse». Again, in the *Confessions* there is no dearth of such allusions. Perhaps the most memorable one is to be found a few pages prior to the conversion scene when Augustine is horrified at the realisation of his own spiritual condition. Addressing God, he says: «et constituebas me ante faciem meam, ut viderem quam turpis essem, quam distortus et sordidus, maculosus et ulcerosus. Et videbam et horrebam; et quo a me fugerem non erat». (*Conf.* 8.7.16)²⁵).

On yet another point of similarity, it is to be observed that early in the eighth book of the *Confessions* (*Conf.* 8.3.6-8), before

²³) Other places where Augustine discourses on this «filii hominum» text (from *Psalm* 4.3) are: *En. in Psalmum* 88, sermo 2.9; *Sermo* 72.6 and *Sermo* 231.4.

²⁴) Two other notable references in the *Confessions* are: «habebant et illa studia quae honesta vocabantur, ductum suum intuentem fora litigiosa, ut excellerem in eis, hoc laudabilior, quo fraudulentior» (*Conf.* 3.3.6) and «cum pararem recitare Imperatori laudes, quibus plura mentirer, et mentienti faveretur ab scientibus». (*Conf.* 6.6.9).

²⁵) Cf. «contremui amore et horrore» (*Conf.* 7.10.16) and the «muta trepidatio» of *Conf.* 8.7.18, as well as the «inhorresco» of *Conf.* 11.9.11.

describing his own conversion, Augustine refers quite explicitly to the three parables of *Luke* 15 regarding the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son. As I have explained elsewhere, this last parable is of particular importance to the *Confessions* as a whole ²⁶). In *Conf.* 8.3.6. Augustine writes of the prodigal son: «mortuus erat, et revixit; *perierat et inventus est*». The same wording recurs when Augustine is writing of man in a more general sense in *Conf.* 10.31.45: «[homo] *perierat et inventus est*». Several times also, Augustine refers to himself in the *Confessions* as the proverbial lost sheep ²⁷). However, the act of being found is expressed more explicitly on one occasion regarding the lost coin: «*perdiderat enim mulier drachmam et quaesivit eam*». (*Conf.* 10.18.27). A comparison of the italicised words shows just how much Augustine had the trilogy of parables in mind when he said of the astrologer: «Hoc utique propter gloriam Dei, ne tales etiam perditī desperarentur ab illo qui novit *quaerere* quod *perierat*. *Perierat* ergo iste; nunc *quaesitus, inventus, adductus est*». However, as Augustine well realised, the conversion of the astrologer was not a purely passive process that he underwent, but rather something very active— he had to follow where Truth led him. Consequently, Augustine refers to his knocking, as it were, on the door of the Church: «Sciatis eum tamen, fratres, olim pulsare ad Ecclesiam ante Pascha». We know that Augustine was baptised on Easter night, April 24-25, 387 ²⁸) and had been actively seeking baptism only from some time after the middle of October previously ²⁹), which accords well enough with the requirement of the cited passage. He therefore sought Baptism for something less than six months prior to Easter. Again, a point of added interest concerns the reference to knocking — «pulsare ad Ecclesiam». Significantly enough, this petitionary sense of «pulsare» occurs some half a dozen times

²⁶) Leo, Ferrari, 'Symbols of Sinfulness in Book II of Augustine's Confessions', *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971) 93-104.

²⁷) *Conf.* 3.2.4; 10.18.27 and 12.15.21.

²⁸) Possidius, *Vita* 1: «propinquantibus diebus sanctis Paschae salutis aquam perciperet».

²⁹) Augustine and his friends left the country retreat at Cassiciacum at the end of the «feriae vindemiales» and returned to Milan (*Conf.* 9.5.13). Those holidays would have ended in mid-October (see Courcelle, *op. cit.* p. 201-202). Only after this time did Augustine give his name in for baptism (*Conf.* 9.6.14).

in the *Confessions* ³⁰). Of particular relevance to the present topic are the two cases when Augustine uses it in describing his state prior to his own conversion. Thus, in the sixth book, writing of his ignorance of the divine nature, he observes: «cum ergo nescirem quomodo haec subsisteret imago tua, *pulsans* proponerem quomodo credendum esset». (*Conf.* 6.4.5.). Later on in the same book, realising that he had misunderstood many things about the Catholic doctrine, especially (again) about the divine nature, he asks himself: «et dubitamus *pulsare*, quo aperiantur cetera»? (*Conf.* 6.11.18.). So much then for the references to knocking common to both texts.

A final point worthy of some consideration in the sermon about the converted astrologer is connected with the reference in the Bible to the burning of the books of those who had practised magical arts, as described in *Acts* 19.19. Augustine recalls the event as follows:

Nostis in Actibus Apostolorum esse scriptum quia multi perdit, id est talium artium homines, et doctrinarum nefariarum sectatores, omnes codices suos ad Apostolos attulerunt; et incensi sunt libri tam multi, ut pertineret ad scriptorem aestimationem eorum facere, et summam pretii conscribere.

With the above as prelude, Augustine a little later on, says of the astrologer: «portat secum codices incendendos, per quos fuerat incendendus; ut illis in ignem missis, ipse in refrigerium transeat» ³¹). Does this in reality refer to an event in Augustine's own life, subsequent to his rejection of astrology, as recounted in *Conf.* 7.6.8-10? It is to be recalled that much earlier in the *Confessions*, the wise and fatherly Vindicianus, upon learning that the young Augustine was an eager student of the books of the astrologers, advised him to

³⁰) *Conf.* 6.4.5; 6.11.18; 11.2.3; 11.2.4; 12.1.1. (repeatedly); 12.12.15 and 13.38.53. Indeed, the closing lines of the *Confessions* testify to its importance: «a te petatur, in te quaeratur, ad te pulsetur: sic, sic accipitur, sic invenietur, sic aperietur». The biblical source of the reference to knocking is of course, *Matthew* 7.7.

³¹) There also seems to be an allusion here to the line in *Psalms* 65.12: «Transivimus per ignem et aquam, et eduxisti nos in refrigerium» See para. 17 in Augustine's commentary on the same Psalm. The following words from his *Enarratio in Psalmum XCIV* (para. 4) also seem very relevant to the present context: «'Venite' ergo dixit [i. e. Deus], ut recedamus jam a peccatis nostris, et non nobiscum deducat rationem de praeteritis: sed *tanquam tabulae novae fiant, incensis omnibus chirographis debitorum nostrorum*».

throw such books away: «ubi cognovit ex colloquio meo libris genethliacorum [i.e. astrologorum] esse me deditum, benigne ac paterne monuit, ut eos abjicerem». (*Conf.* 4.3.5.). That Augustine finally did not throw these books away, but rather ended up burning them, would seem to be indicated by a small detail in one of Augustine's treatises. The detail concerns the words of Christ: «nondum venit hora mea» (*Joan.* 2.4), which, according to Augustine were used by the astrologers (*mathematici*) as a biblical basis for astrological determinism. Even Christ himself had to wait until the stars were in the right positions. Of this Augustine concludes:

Sic inveniant mathematici occasionem fallaciae suae, quia dixit, 'Nondum venit hora mea'. Et si hoc secundum mathematicos dixit, *sacrilegium fecimus incendendo codices eorum. Si autem recte fecimus*, sicut Apostolorum temporibus factum est [i.e. *Joan.* 2.4.]; non secundum eos dixit Dominus, 'Nondum venit hora mea' ³²).

Here, as the italicised sections indicate, Augustine refers in the first person plural, to astrological books that he has personally burned. It would seem rather extreme to claim, as one author has done, that he went about burning such books, while Bishop of Hippo ³³). Rather would he appear to be telling us what eventually became of those books of the astrologers that he pored over as a youthful enthusiast of that art.

The previous pages have argued that the strange appendage at the end of Augustine's *Enarratio in Psalmum LXI* is not, as claimed by the interpolation, about a certain «astrologer» present in his congregation. As has been seen, such a situation would have several well-nigh incredible implications. These embarrassments are avoided if it is conceded that the true subject of the sermon is none other than Augustine himself at a youthful stage of his search for truth.

This perspective has been confirmed in the preceding pages by numerous similarities which can be grouped under two main headings. In the first category are significant details of Augustine's life which are also found in the description of the life of that «astrologer». The second category consists of tell-tale similarities between the language of certain passages in the sermon on the «astrologer» and

³²) In *Joannis Evangelium*, tractatus 8.8.

³³) Van der Meer, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

the language of selected passages (overtly describing his own life) in Augustine's *Confessions*.

If it is conceded that Augustine is really sermonising about his own youthful involvement with astrology, then it can be understood why he said of the subject of his sermon that there was no silencing the fame of his life: « non enim silebit fama de vita ejus ». As is well known, the fame of the holy Bishop of Hippo Regius spread far and wide, even in his own life-time ³⁴).

At this stage it can well be asked what detectable elements in the commentary on Psalm 61 evoked that seemingly extemporaneous sermon on Augustine's own sinful youth; particularly on that stage of it when he was an eager student of astrology.

Early in his commentary on the Psalm ³⁵), Augustine imputes the words « interficite omnes » of the fourth verse, to the person of Christ as the head of the mystical body, which is the Church. This perspective leads to the notion of that City whose King is Christ himself: « illa una est Jerusalem coelestis, civitas sancta: haec una civitas unum habet regem. Rex hujus civitatis Christus est ». (para. 4). Opposed to this, in Augustine's perspective, is the other mystical City of Babylon, whose king is the devil. A large section of the exegesis is concerned with comparing and contrasting these two Cities (paras. 4-10). This is a theme of major importance in Augustine's thought and, apparently, very much so at the time he executed the *Commentary on Psalm 61* ³⁶).

³⁴) Thus, in 393, while only a presbyter of thirty-nine years, Augustine addressed all the bishops assembled at Hippo for the General Council of Africa. Every succeeding year brought increased recognition of his genius. One sign of the regard in which he came to be held in the highest places can be recognized from an episode in the year 416. The Emperors sent an official letter to the Primate of all Africa. Though Augustine was not a Primate, their imperial majesties took good care to send him a copy of the letter also.

³⁵) Paragraph 4, to be precise. In future, such a reference would be abbreviated to: para. 4.

³⁶) See Antoine Lauras, 'Deux cités, Jérusalem et Babylone; Formation et évolution d'un thème central du De civitate Dei', *La Ciudad de Dios* tomo I, vol. 167 (1954) 117-152. Lauras estimates that the *Enarratio in Psalmum LXI* was composed a little after 416. If this is so, then, having completed his first ten books of the *City of God* directed at the old paganism of Rome, Augustine would have been well into the exegesis of the Bible in accord with his two Cities theme.

Again, and following from the previous observations, a point of relevance for the present perspective concerns Augustine's exegesis of the words «cucurri in siti» (verse 5) which are imputed to Christ as head of the mystical body of the Church. Augustine points out the mystical manner in which Christ is constantly thirsting for souls ³⁷), whence the thirst of the Church: «sic et corpus capitis hujus usque in finem ab initio cucurrit in siti. Et quasi ei diceretur, Quid in siti? quid tibi deest, o corpus Christi, o Ecclesia Christi»? (para. 10).

Interestingly enough, Augustine's extemporaneous sermon on the «astrologer» begins precisely from this point — his audience can see with their own eyes he whom that thirst of the Church wants to drink. As the opening words of the appendage express it: «Illa Ecclesiae sitis etiam istum, quem videtis, bibere vult».

Returning to the commentary on the Psalm, the topic of the Church then leads on to the distinction between those who are true believers and those who are believers in appearance only. It is to these latter that the words of the fifth verse of the Psalm properly apply: «ore suo benedicebant, et corde suo maledicebant». Significantly too, here Augustine particularises in the commentary, by using the first person singular: «non attendo ad os; novit ille qui me instruxit, 'corde suo maledicebant'». (para. 10). Again, as was seen above, the very same passage from the fifth verse was applied in the appendage to the «astrologer» at that stage of his life when he was merely a counterfeit believer in the Church.

Again in the commentary proper, Augustine also particularises through the use of the first person singular (para. 11), in regard to the words of the second and sixth verses: «Deo subjiçietur anima mea: quoniam ab ipso est patientia mea». While this passage is not dealt with explicitly in the appendage, it does seem to be charged with strong personal associations for Augustine ³⁸).

Judging by the comments (para. 13) on the words of the eighth verse: «in Deo salutare meum», this would appear to be the immediate source for the reference in the appendage to the «astrologer» seeking the medicine of the Church: «ante Pascha enim coepit petere de Ecclesia Christi medicinam». Likewise the tenth verse with its references to lying, while being the source of Augustine's comments

³⁷) Thus, as Augustine points out, the significance of the episode with the woman at the well (*John* 4.7), as also of the thirsting of Christ upon the cross (*John* 19.28).

³⁸) See his comments on this verse in *Sermo CCLXXXIII.I*.

(paras. 15 and 16), also was probably the initial source of his many allusions to the same vice in the «astrologer». Finally, the topic of homicide comes under consideration in the commentary proper (para. 22) which could well have had something to do with its reappearance in the appendage: «homicidium non faciebat voluntas propria, sed Mars».

In conclusion, granted that the erstwhile errant young Augustine is the true subject of the extemporaneous sermon about the «astrologer», the question can well be asked as to what (if anything) can be derived from this identification. To me, it seems that such an identification would provide new and illuminating insights into two episodes connected with Augustine's conversion.

First, it would seem that, contrary to popular opinion, Augustine was *not* eagerly welcomed back into the Church of his childhood. His prolonged associations with the Manichees, his more enduring involvement with astrology and his proficiency at rhetorical deception, (not to mention the resulting victories in debates); all these would have made him a *persona non grata* in the christian community³⁹). Such an unsavoury reputation built up over some years would doubtless have been a considerable handicap to proving the sincerity of his conversion back to the Church⁴⁰). Accordingly, one can read with added interest what Augustine said of the «astrologer»: «sed quia talis est ars in qua exercitatus erat quae suspecta esset de mendacio atque fallacia, dilatus est ne tentaret et aliquando tamen admissus est, ne periculosius tentaretur».

This hesitancy on the part of the authorities of the Church seems well corroborated by at least one memorable episode in the *Confessions*. Disillusioned with the Manichees and increasingly attracted to the Church, Augustine went to seek advice from the great Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. Notwithstanding the fact that Augustine and his companions presented themselves often (*saepe*) in the Bishop's visit-

³⁹) For Augustine's former success in arguing with Christians, see *Conf.* 3.12.21 and *De duabus animabus* 9.11.

⁴⁰) This may have been part of the reason why Augustine sought out Simplicianus (*Conf.* 8.1.1), the spiritual father of the Ambrose (*Conf.* 8.2.3) who had so deftly ignored Augustine's frequent appearances in the Bishop of Milan's visiting room (*Conf.* 6.3.3). Of his reason for seeking out Simplicianus, Augustine observes: «unde mihi ut proferret volebam, conferenti secum aestus meos, quis esset aptus modus sic affecto, ut ergo eram, ad ambulandum in via tua». (*Conf.* 8.1.1).

ing room and sat waiting silently for long periods (*sedentesque in diuturno silentio*), Ambrose blithely ignored them, preferring to pass the time reading silently to himself ⁴¹).

The second matter upon which the preceding pages would seem to throw some light, was the newly converted Augustine's practice of avoiding visiting those churches in which there was a vacancy for a bishop, in case the congregation coerced him into accepting the post ⁴²). Presumably this was due to Augustine's humility ⁴³). This may well have been so. It was also a very diplomatic move, for as Augustine says of the « astrologer »: « namque si ex pagano converteretur mathematicus, magnum quidem esset gaudium; sed tamen posset videri quia si conversus esset, clericatum quaereret in Ecclesia ».

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⁴¹) *Conf.* 6.3.3.

⁴²) Possidius, *Vita* 4.

⁴³) He could also have been warned by the experience of Ambrose (see *Vita Sancti Ambrosii* 6-9, by Paulinus).