

Aenigma Salomonis: Manichaeon Anti-Genesis Polemic and the Vitium curiositatis in Confessions III. 6

Book III of St. Augustine's *Confessions* depicts the bleakest moments in a willful and erring life and, in two important places, the first signs of change in that life. After the description of his vicious student conduct in Carthage in III. 1-3, Augustine describes his conversion to *philosophia* after reading Cicero's *Hortensius* (III. 4), his turning to scripture and failure to understand it (III. 5), and his subsequent fall into Manichaeon sympathies (III. 6-10). Book III concludes with the second sign of change, after the conversion to *philosophia*, the hopes expressed in the dream of Monica and the promise of the nameless bishop: *fieri non potest, ut filius istarum lacrimarum pereat* (III. 11-12). The narrative structure of Book III thus consists of the two courses of sin, at Carthage and among the Manichaeans, punctuated by the first conversion and concluded by the hope of a second conversion. Although the conversion to *philosophia* divides the two courses, it does not dissolve the link between them. The link is structural, and it had been established in the meditation on the psychology of sin in Book II (II. 4-10).

Book III. 4-5 and *Sermo* 51 describe the illumination and fear that combine, for the first time, to instill hope and a more complex sense of purpose in the young and successful student¹). Having imbibed the name of Jesus with his mother's milk and determined that *philosophia* and Jesus must be one and the same, Augustine turns to scripture, whose truth he fails to perceive because of its lack of *Tulliana dignitas*. The student of rhetoric, brought to Cicero by the requirements of the study of rhetoric, is struck, not by Cicero's rhetoric, but by his great message, and, turning to that place where wisdom is in fact to be found, misses it because of his intellectual unpreparedness and superficial rhetorical expectations.

¹) This was illustrated by Pierre COURCELLE, *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin* (Paris, 1950), 60-67, and developed by A. SOLIGNAC in his introduction to the *Confessions*, *Œuvres de saint Augustin*, Vol. 13, *Les Confessions, livres I-VII* (Paris, 1962), 125-132.

It is no wonder that Augustine then succumbs to the "empty language", "glib delirium", and "vain fables" of the Manichaeans. He does not say whether they offered *Tulliana dignitas* (although he later mentions Faustus' pleasing speech), but they certainly offered something as inviting and persuasive to both his pride and his anxiety²). Specifically, they offered a resolution of Augustine's problem of the identity of *philosophia* and Jesus in a way that did not disturb his inability to perceive spiritual meaning in scripture. They discarded, repudiated, or allegorized those parts of scripture which had offended Augustine in III. 5 and dressed the remainder and their own explanatory writings in fable and myth. Manichaean "solutions" to the problems of the two genealogies of Christ, the Genesis creation narrative, the anthropomorphic depiction of the deity, the wickedness of the patriarchs, and the divine and human natures of Christ are noted in the *Confessions* and in other early writings of Augustine³). In the *Confessions*, Book III. 6 discusses Manichaean cosmology and cosmogony, and III. 7 considers Manichaean theodicy.

As Peter Brown has pointed out, "in [the *Confessions*] one constantly senses the tension between the 'then' of the young man and the 'now' of the bishop"⁴). Book III. 8-10 constitutes just one example of the bishop's mind at the time of writing rushing in to deal directly with the problems of justice, goodness, and evil that Manichaean teachings contain, as if it were not satisfied by the exposition in the *De Gen. c. Man.*, the *De moribus Man.*, or other anti-Manichaean writings. The two final sections indeed raise the hope of conversion, appropriately enough, not in the mind of the young Augustine, but in the tears of Monica and in the promises of Christ and the bishop.

Of the two courses of sin divided by the ambiguous conversion of III. 4, the second is both more and less serious than the first. Following the conversion to *philosophia*, Augustine falls into greater, because more intellectual error concerning God among the Manichaeans, but at the same time he is at least moving the right direction. He is seeking the right thing, *philosophia*, in the right place, the name of Jesus. By a long and

²) *Conf.* V. 6; cf. SOLIGNAC, 131.

³) SOLIGNAC, 128-9. For the two genealogies, see *Sermo* 51; on anthropomorphism, *De Gen. c. Man.* I. 17. 27-8, *Conf.* III. 7. 12; on the sins of the patriarchs, *C. Faust* VI. II, *Conf.* III. 7. 13, V. 10. 19, V. 14. 24; on Creation, *De Gen. c. Man.* I. II. 3; *Conf.* XI-XIII; and as this article argues, *Conf.* III. 6.

⁴) Peter BROWN, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), 164.

circuitous route, he will eventually find it, and the rest of the *Confessions* constitutes a description and verification (in the last three books) of that journey.

The appropriateness of the final three books of the *Confessions*, the exposition of the opening verses of Genesis, has been debated many times. Modern scholarly consensus has determined, rightly, I think, that the Genesis-exposition is indeed an integral part of the work and not an appendage. This study proposes to suggest the place of *Confessions* III. 6, or rather the events unclearly described therein, in Augustine's later studies on Genesis, and in fact in Augustine's attitude toward Genesis throughout the rest of his life as a Christian thinker and teacher. Its thesis is that *Confessions* III. 6, neither the clearest nor the most explicit part of the work, is a criticism and description of Manichaean attacks on Genesis and Christian cosmogony and cosmology, just as III. 7 is clearly a critique of Manichaean theodicy.

There are important links between III. 1-3 and III. 6-7, most notably in Augustine's virtuoso use of the *vitium curiositatis* to describe both his earlier and later sympathies and affections. The Manichaeans are, structurally at least, parallel to the *eversores*; they too are "overturners" and "wreckers". They too attract the weak and the morbid interest of those who, like Augustine himself, can admire, if not wholeheartedly join them. The admirer of the *eversores* and the "Hearer" of the Manichaeans is the same man, and the final lack of commitment to the former may prefigure an eventual lack of commitment to the latter. There are indeed a few rays of hope in Book III, but they are not many, and they are not soon realized.

To be converted to a life of *philosophia* in fourth-century North Africa, whether by the *Hortensius* or anything else, was to be converted to a way of life, a religious calling to free the soul from earthly attachments so that it might know its true nature and mount up to its celestial home⁵). Manichaeism, like Gnosticism before it, rejected any alternative cosmology, particularly the Jewish and Christian cosmology and cosmogony as told in Genesis and referred to elsewhere in scripture and haggadah⁶). Although Augustine fell in with a group of particularly

⁵) BROWN, *Augustine*, 40-45; Anne-Marie MALINGREY, *Philosophia. Étude d'un groupe de mots dans la littérature grecque des Présocratiques au IV^e siècle après J.-C.* (Paris, 1961); Salignac, 86.

⁶) These themes may be traced in the work of FESTUGIÈRE, PUECH, A.H. ARMSTRONG, Georges VAJDA, and others. Much of it is cited in my study, "What Was God Doing Before He Created the Heavens and the Earth?" cited below n. 22.

intellectualist Manichaeans, his story is not a warning simply to any bright young man with a yearning for philosophical wisdom. For Augustine regarded his conquest by the Manichaeans as something to which he was particularly vulnerable precisely at the moment he met them. The encounter, and the beginning of the Manichaean theme that extends through Books Three, Four and Five, does not occupy a separate book, but takes up the second part of a book that details at its outset a notably distinctive and personal set of experiences, from Augustine's return to Carthage to his fascination with the *eversores*. In Augustine's mind the two episodes are connected. The conversion to *philosophia* and the prophecies at the end of the book punctuate, but do not dissolve the unity of conscience and the powerful and accusatory sense of self that works in the book from beginning to end. It remains to determine exactly what kind of conscience and sense of self that Augustine regarded himself as having brought, first to the conversion, and then to the Manichaeans.

A close reading of Book III. 1-2 reveals that it is not only the sins of lust, voyeurism, and academic pride that Augustine confesses, but his own psychological preparedness for and enjoyment of them. Anticipating the later sections, III. 1 begins with a description of the young Augustine searching madly and unsatisfactorily for love, as he was later to search for *philosophia*. Dreams of love, "fables and fictions", and the illusions of the theater reveal a young man who is guilty not simply of lust and voyeurism, but one who is attracted to these expressions of sin because of a particular personality history that finds these as the natural and adequate expressions of its fault. The fault, in III. 3, is *sacrilega curiositas*, a vice, I will argue, that Augustine regards as especially characteristic of his own moral condition, not to the exclusion of pride and *concupiscentia carnis*, but in his own case as an organizing and dominant vice, linking his student rioting with his inability to understand scripture and finally with his fascination for and vulnerability toward the fables of the Manichaeans.

Augustine's concept of *curiositas* is the subject of a respectable literature. He was, in fact, the third Latin writer, after Apuleius and Tertullian, to make extensive use of the term⁷⁾. Arguments deriving

⁷⁾ H.-I. MARROU, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris, 1938), 148-57, 277-80, 350-52; Hans BLUMENBERG, "Augustins Anteil an der Geschichte des Begriffs der theoretischen Neugierde", *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 7 (1961), 35-70; idem, "Curiositas und veritas. Zur Ideengeschichte von Augustin, *Confessiones* X. 35", *Studia*

Augustine's concept and usage of the term from either or both of his fellow North African writers (whose work he knew) have not, however, been uniformly persuasive. Moreover, most Augustinian scholarship focuses upon Augustine's use of the term in *Confessions* V. 3, where he finally condemns Manichaean cosmological speculations as well as pagan astronomy generally, and X. 35, where Augustine emphatically links *curiositas* with *concupiscentia carnis* and *superbia vitae* as the three great sins catalogued in 1 John 2. 16. The extensive scholarship of Hans Blumenberg on the subject has focused chiefly upon Augustine's condemnation of astrological and astronomical speculation, and although Heiko Oberman has emphasized the individual moral dimension of *curiositas* in Augustine and his relation in this to earlier Christian writers, Greek and Latin, few writers on the Augustinian sense of *curiositas*, except for the purpose or cataloguing Augustine's usage of the term, have considered *Confessions* III. 3 and III. 6⁸).

As I hope to argue elsewhere, Augustine's usage of *curiositas* from its first occurrence in the *De musica* (vi. 13. 39) to the passages concerning his own youth in the *Confessions* are specialized and personal. They may derive somewhat from Apuleius and Tertullian (particularly the former), but in these early works, particularly those written about the Manichaean period during the Neoplatonist period, *curiositas* is not yet the broad vice that it becomes in later Augustinian and general Christian usage. The later bishop deals with the term as a category of moral theology and describes it in ways that are applicable to Christians generally. But not all, nor most Christians will be as vulnerable to the vice as was the young Augustine. The spiritual autobiographer is specific and individual; he knows himself as he was, and the keys to his own soul.

From the end of *Confessions* V, Augustine is guided, first by the example of Monica and then by the example and preaching of Ambrose,

Patristica 6 (1962), 294-302; Pierre COURCELLE, *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris, 1963), 101-109; Hans BLUMENBERG, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt, 1966), Part III; idem, *Der Prozess der theoretischen Neugierde* (Berlin, 1973), Heiko Augustinus OBERMAN, *Contra vanam curiositatem* (Zurich, 1973). André LABHARDT, "Curiositas. Notes sur l'histoire d'un mot et d'une notion", *Museum Helveticum* (1960), 206-224, is a catalogue rather than an analysis. R. JOLY, *Curiositas, L'Antiquité Classique* 30 (1961), 33-44. H. J. METTE, *Curiositas, Festschrift Bruno Snell*, München, 1956, 227-235. And see below, n. 18.

⁸) An exception in this regard is Robert J. O'CONNELL, *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man, A.D. 286-391* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), 146-183. Cf. COURCELLE, *Les Confessions*, 100-109.

further and further away from his Manichaean sympathies, from which he had originally begun to be dislodged by his own intellectual abilities, critical intelligence, and conscience. Although he confessed to a tendency toward *curiositas* at later periods in his life, that *curiositas* is treated more as a tendency towards distraction and thoughtless preoccupation, a somewhat generalized intrusion of the senses upon the mind⁹⁾. Thus, Augustine seems to be essentially freed from the most personal and destructive consequences of the vice when he is freed from the Manichaeans. The *curiositas* peculiar to the young Augustine is a dominant theme only during the nine years between his student days at Carthage and the drawn-out final years of the tiring hearer of the Manichaeans. *Curiositas* in III. 3-6 is not the later, generalized vice applicable to the Christian Everyman, but the unique state of mind and morals, sense impressions and intellect, of the young North African rhetorician and pupil of Manichaean *philosophia*.

The reluctance of some modern commentators on the *Confessions* to appreciate Augustine's sense of the character of his personal moral state in Book III has sometimes led to their underestimating his catalogue of sins in Carthage, just as it has sometimes led to an underestimation of his obsession with the theft of the pears. Augustine, according to these views, is confessing relatively trivial and routine actions of a privileged fourth-century student at Carthage, perhaps out of an overscrupulous converted conscience. But Augustine seems not to be confessing specific acts as much as he confesses his own psychological sympathies with the evils those acts represent. He is drawn to them because of his temperament. His temperament creates a particular attitude toward them, and that attitude and the ensuing vulnerability it creates is Augustine's concern.

Confessions III. 3. 5 contains Augustine's indictment of his actions described in the immediately preceding sections:

Et circumvolabat super me fidelis a longe misericordia tua. In quantas iniquitates distabat et sacrilega curiositate secutus sum, ut deserentem te deduceret me ad ima infida et circumventoria obsequia daemoniorum, quibus immolabam facta mea mala, et in omnibus flagellabas me.

These are not new and otherwise unspecified sins, but the *curiositas* behind the lust, voyeurism, and academic pride that he has already

⁹⁾ Cf. *Conf.* X. 35; BROWN, *Augustine*, 180.

recounted; these are his "sacrifices" to demons. Scholarly pride lies behind his rejection of scripture, and scholarly pride and hunger for *philosophia* (an ambivalent *curiositas*, both good and evil) make him prey to the *curiositas* of the Manichaeans.

These parts of *Confessions* III are, as Courcelle remarked, "*peu clair*". But several points ought to be remembered as one approaches them. First, as all Augustinian *curiositas* scholarship on *Confessions* V. 3 and X. 35 agrees, both the separation from Manicheism, and the later conviction of the importance of 1 John 2. 16 are associated particularly with the kind of errors Manichaeans make. It is not, given Augustine's style and method, unlikely, then, that the beginning of his association with Manicheism will also deal with *curiositas* and that *curiositas* is a personal link between the sins of Carthage in the academy and those with the Manichaeans. Indeed, *Confessions* III. 8. 16 already explicitly remarks the triadic sin of 1 John:

*Haec sunt capita iniquitatis, quae pullulant principandi et spectandi et sentiendi libidine aut una aut duabus earum aut simul omnibus, et vivitur male adversus tria et septem, ...*¹⁰⁾

With these suggestions in mind, and the reference to 1 John 2. 16 already clearly set out in Book III, we may approach III. 6 with an eye to both *curiositas* and the problem of Genesis.

Augustine, on the proper track of *philosophia* and Jesus, failed to find wisdom in Scripture, because:

tumor meus refugiebat modum eius et acies mea non penetrabat interiora eius.

Pride as a scholar and rhetorician and intellectual inadequacy combined to deflect Augustine from the proper search for truth. For Scripture did not open itself to the wisdom of the world, which Augustine had applied to it, and it concealed deep truths and veiled mysteries behind apparent rough texture and simple narrative. Thus the Manichaeans became the perfect guides for such a personality, driven by *bona curiositas* and misled by *mala curiositas*. The pride of the scholar is indeed *superbia*, but it does not necessarily lead to the worst or most characteristic forms of *superbia vitae*, the *libido dominandi* or *principandi* of the political man. Nor is the

¹⁰⁾ Evidence elsewhere in Book III is noted in R. J. O'CONNELL, *St. Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of a Soul* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969) 51 f.

scholar's lust simply for the flesh of others. In the academic *curiosus* these become subordinated to that one of the three great vices that most effectively enables them to injure the soul, *curiositas*, the lust for and pride in knowledge that points to nothing beyond itself, the desire vicariously to experience not merely the flesh, but the emotions of others, real or imagined, desirous of learning the secrets of the universe and the soul but improperly equipped and disciplined for learning that for which pride and lust drive him on. Such was Augustine when he met the Manichaeans¹¹).

Arthur Darby Nock pointed out some years ago the interest that gnostics and Manichaeans took, precisely in those parts of scripture which Jewish scholarship had reserved for the study only of those with mature minds¹²). The opening verses of Genesis, the vision of Ezekiel, and other strategic parts of the Old Testament were not to be discussed before the uninitiated or immature. For these, one required age and experience. But these were often the very first targets of gnostic and later Manichaean exegesis. Irenaeus and Tertullian had cautioned both Christians and heretics to avoid putting questions to certain parts of scripture and, in the case of Irenaeus, to leave certain questions to God which someday, perhaps, He may see fit to divulge to humans in another state, "so that God may everlastingly teach, and men may everlastingly learn"¹³). Augustine's own lament in *Confessions* III. 7-9 is precisely over his own intellectual and spiritual incapacity to perceive the Manichaeans' presumptuous and erroneous treatment of these difficult questions and texts.

Augustine's first observation about the Manichaeans concerns their proud and carnal talkativeness. The snares of the devil were in their mouths, and although they mixed the syllables of the names of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, these were merely mixings of sounds from their mouths, not sentiments from their hearts. They spoke of Truth, but truth was not in them, merely a word in their many and clever books. Here Augustine, the proud rhetorician, hears his own unredeemed

¹¹) SOLIGNAC, Introduction, 126-8.

¹²) Arthur Darby NOCK, "Gnosticism", in NOCK, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, ed. Zeph STEWART, Vol. II (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 947-8.

¹³) IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* II. 28. 2. See W. C. VAN UNNIK, "Theological Speculation and Its Limits", in William R. SCHOEDEL and Robert L. WILKEN, eds., *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition in Honorem Robert L. Grant* (Paris, 1979), 33-44; and Jean DANIELOU, "Recherche et tradition chez les pères", *Studia Patristica* 12 (1975), 3-13.

language, in Colish's phrase, echoed in the equally fallen language of the Manichaeans¹⁴). And he is seduced by the latter, as he had taken improper pride in the former.

The rest of *Confessions* III. 6 describes the further illusions of Manichaean teaching. They tell Augustine of the Creator and the first principles of creation. Their false language taught Augustine Manichaean cosmology, "the sun and moon, great works of yours, but not you, not even the greatest of your works". The sun and moon of the Manichaeans are compared to false food that does not satisfy the real hunger of the starving man. The images of sun and moon, celestial lights, false food, and perverted language all suggest that the III. 6 recounts Manichaean challenges to Genesis' account of creation and cosmology.

Augustine then applies to himself the image of the prodigal son in Luke 16, who desired even the *siliquae porcorum* which swineherds fed to the pigs, a reference which, as Bernhard Blumenkranz long ago showed, was consistently interpreted as profane learning in both Jewish and Christian haggadah¹⁵). Augustine twists the reference, for he states that he was not even able to eat the *siliquae*. That is, to believe the fables and

¹⁴) Marcia L. COLISH, *The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (New Haven, 1968), 24-82.

¹⁵) Exegetical criticism of worldly learning has been traced by Bernhard BLUMENKRANZ, "*Siliquae porcorum* (cf. Luc, XV, 16). L'Exégèse médiévale et les sciences profanes", *Mélanges ... Louis Halphen* (Paris, 1951), 11-17. Blumenkranz traces the early medieval exegesis on Luke's story of the prodigal son's wishing that he could have even the slops that a man fed his pigs in terms of the Fathers' and later commentators' understanding of the *siliquae* as signifying profane learning. Ambrose, offering *inanis philosophia* as one possible interpretation of the text (gluttony being the other), probably derived this suggestion from Origen. Origen may have inspired Jerome as well, although Blumenkranz suggests that one of Jerome's Jewish Hebrew teachers may have suggested a Talmudic text to illustrate the significance. Other Talmudic discussions of this theme are in I. EPSTEIN, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud. Seder Mo'ed*. Vol. IV (London, 1938): *Hagigah*, trans. I. Abrahams, pp. 59-104. Chapter II of the *Hagigah* is an important commentary on Jewish theories of esoteric learning and its place in Talmudic study. The Mishnah states that "Whosoever speculates upon four things, a pity for him | He is as though he had not come into the world. [to wit] what is above, what is beneath, what before, what after. And whosoever takes no thought for the honour of his maker, it were a mercy if he had not come into the world". The defense of esoteric knowledge in this text is emphasized by its citation (infrequent in the Talmudic literature although popular generally) of Ecclus. 3. 21-22: "Seek not things that have been permitted thee, think thereupon; thou hast no business with the things that are secret". (p. 73). I am grateful to Michael PANITZ of the Jewish Theological Seminary for discussion of this reference. On food imagery in the *Confessions*, see Leo C. FERRARI, "The 'Food of Truth' in Augustine's *Confessions*", *Augustinian Studies* 9 (1978), 1-14.

lies of the pagan writers would have been had enough, but he did not believe these. But the fables of the Manichaeans he did believe.

Augustine's blindness in *Confessions* III. 6-7 is not simply the result of intellectual unpreparedness. After all, he had penetrated to the great message of Cicero's *Hortensius* through the routine rhetorical expectations he and others brought to it. He pointedly contrasts his scepticism toward the literary fables of the poets with his succumbing to the fables of the Manichaeans. He avoided the trap, pointed out by both Cicero and St. Paul, of falling into step with one another philosophical school, and he aims directly at *philosophia* itself. These were considerable intellectual achievements in the fourth century, as they would have been in the first. Augustine's *acies* was sufficient to prevent him from falling into quite common intellectual traps, but it was not sufficient to open the veiled mysteries of Scripture to him, and this particular failure made him the prey of Manichaeans. It was a particular quality of Augustine's mind and spirit, not its intellectual incapacity, that led to his errors in III. 6-7¹⁶).

In Books IV and V there is more of this. In IV. 2, Augustine rejects the advances of a sorcerer who offered him success in a rhetorical competition. In IV. 3 he flirted with astrology and *sortes*, but he was advised by a friendly physician to avoid the errors of astrology and did. In IV. 16, unlike others who merely praise it, Augustine read and digested Aristotle's *Categories*, as he also read and easily understood other works on rhetoric, logic, geometry, music, and mathematics¹⁷). These last works may have been the "scientific books" which Augustine notes that he had read and later brought to bear in his encounter with Faustus (V. 3). The authors of these works did not know God, and, in an echo of Tertullian, became obsessed with the works of the Creator rather than adoring the Creator Himself¹⁸). And yet, even these books of the *curiosi* could easily overcome the smooth, but utterly unlearned doctrines of Faustus (III. 7.)¹⁹). Finally, just before his encounter with Ambrose

¹⁶) SOLIGNAC, Introduction, 85-93.

¹⁷) Ibid. 166-67.

¹⁸) TERTULLIAN, *Ad nat.* II. 4. 19. The most extensive discussion of Tertullian's use of the term is that of Jean-Claude FREDOUILLE, *Tertullien et la conversion de la culture antique* (Paris, 1972), 412-442. Fredouille, however, focuses somewhat too narrowly upon Tertullian's use of *curiositas* exclusively as a criticism of polymathy.

¹⁹) It should be noted that Augustine appreciates the scholarly accuracy of his sources and their intellectual competence, which was superior to that of the Manichaeans. His criticism is therefore not of learning itself, but learning detached from the ultimate

(V. 13–14: deftly introduced as a repetition of Augustine's initial encounter with Faustus), Augustine is moved further from Manicheism by his interest in Academic scepticism and by the dexterity of his friend Elpidius in attacking Manichaean scriptural exegesis. Throughout the experiences described in Books III–V, Augustine's intellectual astuteness brings him rewards and recognition: teaching in Carthage, the move to Rome, and the call to Milan. These constitute an external recognition of the intellectual skills which were not only not dulled, but actually developed (and emphasized in the *Confessions*) during the period of his Manichaean sympathies.

Augustine's wits are sufficiently sharp and his learning sufficiently broad to achieve success in a world with both very high critical standards and very many intellectual and spiritual traps. These are no small attributes, even though they prevented Augustine from accepting the teachings of Ambrose (VI. 4) at first, because, although Ambrose indeed lifted the *velamentum* from Scripture (cf. *velata mysteriis*, III. 5), Augustine could not then accept a new criterion for *certitudo*, and his perplexity became more intense. In the course of Book VI, however, the Manichaean period is over, and the sceptical period is waning. We must now turn back to the problem of Manichaean *curiositas*.

Book III. 6, when set against the problems that Augustine says the Manichaeans claimed to "solve", says nothing about the two genealogies of Christ, the anthropomorphic representation of the deity, the sins of the patriarchs, or the two natures of Christ, although, to be sure, these are considered elsewhere in the anti-Manichaean writings²⁰). It does, however, describe and criticize in figurative language some aspects of Manichaean cosmology, introduced by the reference to Manichaean teaching *de te ... sed etiam de istis elementis mundi, creatura tua*. Out of their *libris multis et ingentibus*, the dishes out of which false food was served, the Manichaeans offered Augustine accounts of the sun and the moon, *pulchra opera tua, sed tamen opera tua, non tu, nec ipsa prima*.

Since Schmidt's discovery of the *Kephalaia* of Mani in 1930, much of Augustine's frame of reference in III. 6 can be understood more clearly²¹). The pre- and creation-narrative of the Manichaeans was the

purpose of learning. This is the substance of his attacks upon the *curiosi* in V. 3. Like the Romans and the earthly city, these thinkers have their value, but it is of a different order from that seeking which leads to salvation.

²⁰) Above, n. 2.

²¹) There is a large bibliography on the subject, from John P. MAHER, *Saint*

foundation of their dualistic beliefs and must have been asserted, as Gnostic precreation scenarios also were, against the creation narrative of Genesis and the precreation scenarios contained in Midrash²²). The sun and the moon are the outposts of the kingdom of light, created as a result of the first great battle between representatives of light and darkness, out-posts to be explained and revered by those aware of the particles of divinity in themselves and of the evil nature of the dark bodies in which those particles were entombed.

These, then, are the *phantasmata splendida*, the *fabula longa et vana*, the Manichaean alternative to the Genesis creation narrative. Here, for the first time, Augustine encountered Genesis through the eyes of its Manichaean opponents. It is the occasion of his fall away from the road to truth and already points toward the redemptive exegesis in the last three books of the *Confessions*.

All of this error, and in III. 6 it seems to be the error of Manichaean anti-Genesis polemic, Augustine says, came from his improper carnal use of senses given to all humans by God. The use of the intellect, by which God intended humans to be superior to beasts, was distorted by the senses. This is Augustine's essential definition of *curiositas*.

At the end of III. 6, Augustine offers a striking image that draws together these earlier themes and images:

Offendi illam mulierem audacem, inopem prudentiae aenigma Salomonis, sedentem super sellam in foribus et dicentem, panes occultos libenter edite, et aquam dulcem furtivam bibite, quae me seduxit quia invenit foris habitantem in oculo carnis meae et talia ruminantem apud me, qualia per illum vorassem.

Augustine's Defense of the Hexaemeron against the Manichaeans (Rome-St. Meinrad, Ind., 1946), and H.-Ch. PUECH, *Le Manichéisme* (Paris, 1949), to François DECRET, *L'Afrique manichéenne (IV-V siècles). Étude historique et doctrinale*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1978), esp. I, 239-352.

²²) I have considered this topic in much greater detail in my study "What Was God Doing Before He Created the Heavens and the Earth?" *Augustiniana* 34 (1984), 53-74. To the Augustinian texts cited in that study, I must now add a reference to *Contra Adversarium legis et prophetarum libri duo*, PL 42, 603-666. This work refutes the arguments of a book that Augustine found, *concurrentibus turbis periculosa curiositate et delectatione legeretur*. The work attacks Genesis, not only, "as do the Manichaeans", merely the law and the prophets, but in its doctrine of *Deum mundi fabricatorem*. In I. 2. 2 Augustine notes: *Quaerit ergo: Quo principio? eiusne quo idem Deus esse coepit, an ex eo quo illum esse vacuum taeduit? Cui respondetur, quia nec Deus esse coepit, nec eum vacationis suae taeduit, qui neque aliquando non fuit, nec cessando torpuit, nec operando laboravit: nec sine coelo sedis indiquit, nec facto coelo sedem tanquam finitis erroribus peregrinus invenit*. Augustine seems to suggest that the work may be of Marcionite origin. I am grateful to James J. O'Donnell for providing me with this reference.

The text is a pericope of Prov. 9, 13-18 (cf. Prov. 7. 24-7):

A foolish woman, clamorous and full of allurements and knowing nothing at all, sat in the door of her house upon a seat, in the high place of the city, to call to them who pass on the way and go about their own business. "He that is a little one, let him turn to me", and to the fool she said, "Stolen waters are sweeter, and hidden bread is more pleasant". And he did not know that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of Hell.

In the Hebrew text, the woman is Folly herself, the opposite of Wisdom, whose house, banquet and invitation to eat and drink so as to overcome ignorance are described in the parallel text in Prov. 9. 1-6. The *Aenigma Salomonis*, then, would seem to be for Augustine, as it had been for the writers of Proverbs, Dame Folly personified.

But *Confessions* III. 6 is not Augustine's only usage of the reference²³). In the *De Gen. contra Man.* II. 27. 41, Augustine refers to the false food that is the *fallacia haereticorum* and then explains the reference to Proverbs 9:

Haereticorum quippe superba et curiosa cupiditas in libro Proverbiorum clamat sub mulieribus imagine et dicit: *Qui stultus est, divertat ad me* ...

Elsewhere he mentions *fallax doctrina imagine sedens mulier*²⁴). In the *Tractatus* 97 on the Gospel of John, the woman represents the *vanitas impiorum*, as La Bonnardiére suggests, the followers of magicians. *Aenigma* was a technical term in Greek and Latin, associated with other terms designating riddle, parable, allegory, and mystery²⁵). In scripture, it was a technique particularly associated with Solomon, especially in Ecclus. 47. 17 and III Kings 10. 1-10. *Confessions* III 6 uses this kind of

²³) See the references in A. M. LA BONNARDIÈRE, *Biblia Augustiniana. A. T. Le Livre de Proverbes* (Paris, 1975), 51-54.

²⁴) Ibid. 52. Cf. *Tract. in ep. Ioh.* II. 13.

²⁵) T I. 985-7, s.v. *aenigma*, citing particularly QUINTILIAN, *Inst.* 8.6. 52: *allegoriae ... obscurior*; TERTULLIAN, *Scorp.* 11: *ut allegoriae, ut parabola, ut aenigmata*. For general late antique use, see Jean PÉPIN, *Mythe et allégorie* (Paris, 1976). The pejorative sense of Quintilian, or the neutral classical usages were perhaps modified by the famous use of the term in the Greek text of 1 Cor. 13. 12. Augustine's usage of the term is much wider than the L'Enfant concordance suggests. Until the full Augustine concordance appears from Eindhoven, consult particular recent concordances to individual works. For later use of these images, see the studies collected in Edouard JEAUNEAU, '*Lectio philosophorum*' *Recherches sur l'École de Chartres* (Amsterdam, 1973), and Peter DRONKE, *Fabula: Exploration into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism* (Leiden-Cologne, 1974), 32-47.

terminology more than once. Failing to understand that scripture is "veiled in mysteries", *velatam mysteriis*, Augustine succumbs to the *fabulae* of the Manichaeans, and finally becomes the prey of the *Aenigma Salomonis*. Not until his encounter with Ambrose (VI. 4) will Augustine see the *velamentum* lifted from scripture. To those whose intellect is distorted by the senses, who seek to pierce mysteries with the *oculus carnis* rather than the *oculus mentis*, the world will always be full of deceptive mysteries, veils, fables, and myths²⁶).

The *Aenigma Salomonis* calls up images of unschooled childhood, foolishness, and deceptive, illusory food — *panis absconditus et aquae furtivae* — which exclude the seeker after wisdom from the banquet which Wisdom has prepared in Prov. 9. 1-6 and are associated with the Manichaean "carnal" approach to the mysteries of creation. Augustine had used such imagery elsewhere. In the *De musica* (VI. 13. 39) his first use of the term *curiositas* associates it with the process by which the soul turns away from eternal things out of love for *vanissima cognitio* and turns to sensual things. In the *De Gen. c. Man.* (II. 17-26 — II., 18. 30) he associates *curiositas* which God's curse upon the serpent, that it shall crawl on breast and belly and eat earth, "for whoever eats earth penetrates into profound and shadowy things, temporal and earthly". In *De vera rel.* (III. 4) Augustine addresses to the *curiosi* the words of 2 Cor. 4. 18:

Seek not after those things which are seen, but after those which are not seen. For those which are seen are temporal, and those which are not seen are eternal.

Although it is not possible to demonstrate it here, this early and specialized usage of *curiositas* may be closely related to Augustine's Neoplatonic readings, particularly Neoplatonic explanations for the falling away, descent, and separation from the One, a topic very close to the center of Plotinus' conflict with gnosticism. The Greek terms applied to those souls who turn to the sensual world — *tolma*, *periergia*, *polupragmosune* — each convey a combination of pride, audacity, and inquisitiveness that their Latin equivalents — *superbia*, *audacia*, and *curiositas* — usually do not²⁷).

²⁶) On this distinction, see, most recently, Karl F. MORRISON, "'From Form into Form': Mimesis and Personality in Augustine's Historical Thought", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 124 (1980), 276-294, at 281.

²⁷) See O'CONNELL, *Early Theory of Man*, 146-83.

Since Augustine's other usages of the figure of the *Aenigma Salomonis* identify her, not as Folly, but sometimes as the error of heretics, *fallax doctrina*, and the *vanitas impiorum*, his citation of the figure in *Confessions* III. 6 suggests a somewhat more specialized meaning than personified Folly. From Apuleius to Tertullian, *curiositas* had been associated with magic and heresy. Earlier, Augustine had accused himself of *curiositas* during his student days, and *curiositas* had entangled him with Manichaean fables and myths. Summing up his youthful and then his Manichaean errors, Augustine evokes the image of the *aenigma* in Prov. 9, I suggest, as *curiosa cupiditas*, *concupiscentia oculorum*, *curiositas*, diverting those who mind their own business (a traditional sign of *periergia* and *polupragmosune* in Greek), promising wisdom to the unlearned, offering a banquet of false food, and sitting at the doorway, not of the seven-pillared mansion, but of the house of death. Augustine, after Plutarch and Apuleius, thus contributed a striking image to the early iconography of *curiositas*²⁸).

This vice, developed during his student days at Carthage, strengthened and redirected in his search for *philosophia* and his presumptuous misreading of scripture, led him straight into the maze of Manichaean fables, from which he was to take nine years to extricate himself. In the concept of *curiositas*, which had a longer Greek than Latin history and possessed no consistent meaning or importance to most of the Latin Fathers after Tertullian, certainly not to Arnobius, Lactantius, or Ambrose, Augustine found one of the keys to his great dilemma, the condition and character of his mind and life before the conversion in Milan²⁹). It served him well. It also served him uniquely, because his later treatment of the vice broadened its senses so as to make it applicable to more aspects of Christian life than simply his own experience. From some of his later works, and particularly from the thought of John Cassian, *curiositas* entered the vocabulary of monastic

²⁸) Interesting use of the image has been made by Richard KAY, *Dante's Swift and Strong* (Lawrence, Kan., 1978), 300-306. For APULEIUS, see the *Metamorphoses*; for PLUTARCH, *Moralia* 515B-523B. There is a large literature on both works; see the study of LABHARDT (above, n. 7), and more recently, J. L. PENWILL, "Slavish Pleasures and Profitless Curiosity: Fall and Redemption in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*", *Ramus* 4 (1975), 49-82.

²⁹) ARNOBIUS, *Adv. Nat.* II. 57. 17; AMBROSE, *De Int. Iob et David* I. 9. 28 f. Cf. G. MADEC, *Saint Ambroise et la philosophie* (Paris, 1974), 177-246, esp. 181-2. In a work in progress, Richard NEWHAUSER and I will survey the history of the idea and term *curiositas* from its Greek origins to the nineteenth century.

psychology, where it generally remained until the theology of St. Anselm and the new intellectual circumstances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries restored to it some of its earlier Augustinian features³⁰).

Augustine was a careful and systematic writer. Looking back from the time of writing the *Confessions*, after the years of thinking about the life they described, he perceived to his own satisfaction what had happened to him and why his life had taken the shape it had. Illusion, deception, fable, and myth were the early lot of one who was unprepared, uninstructed, and possessed of a proud and concupiscent spirit. And this lot was introduced, not only by the particular qualities of his riotous living at Carthage, but by the traps of the Manichaeans, by their theodicy in III. 7, but most dramatically and crucially in their cosmogony and cosmology in III. 6. The young man who failed to perceive the veil of scripture was trapped in yet other veils. At the end of his Manichaean period Augustine could freely accuse himself and the Manichaeans of *curiositas*, not merely because of excessive attention to learning about the created world and not about its creator, but more profoundly, in that combination of ignorance, willfulness, and desire that necessarily prevents the soul from approaching God.

At the end of the *Confessions*, the exposition of the opening verses of Genesis testified to the redemption of this part of his life. Genesis became clearly the great door to Christian belief and, as it had been for Philo, the beginning of wisdom³¹). To repair the errors about Genesis that Augustine and the Manichaeans had made in *Confessions* III. 6, the first chapter of Genesis and its proper exposition had perhaps become a credo, or rule of faith, particularly important in the case of a former hearer of the Manichaeans whose first recorded contact with them had led directly into a sympathy for their false and "carnal" anti-Genesis polemic and their substitute cosmogony. For the Christian Augustine, scripture was "the countenance of God", and when, in the *De Trinitate*, Augustine urged his readers with him to "enter the path of charity, in search of Him of whom it is said: *Seek His face evermore*", both seeking and the countenance were intended to be conducted and understood in

³⁰) See Richard NEWHAUSER, "Towards a History of Human Curiosity: A Prolegomenon to its Medieval Phase", *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift* 56 (1982), 559-575.

³¹) PHILO, *De opif. mundi*. 54; Pierre GEOLTRAIN, "Quelques lectures juives et chrétiennes des premiers versets de la Genèse, de Quomran au Nouveau Testament", in *In principio. Interprétations des premiers versets de la Genèse*, Centre d'Études des religions du livre (Paris, 1973), 47-60.

terms of the proper exposition and understanding of scripture, the place where God's countenance was to be found, but with the *oculus mentis*, not the *oculus carnis*³²). *Curiositas* had blocked that door once for Augustine, and no earthly sciences had been able to open it. For they too, unless conducted in the right spirit, were also manifestations of *curiositas*. Like the earthly city, their knowledge pointed to nothing beyond itself. Setting out in search of Wisdom, indeed, invited by Cicero and St. Paul to her banquet and house built upon seven pillars, Augustine had mistaken for her the *aenigma Salomonis* and had mistaken the book of Genesis for a rough and offensive account of ignorance. Following the prophecies and vision at the end of Book III, the remainder of the *Confessions* is an account of how long and complex was the journey to the house of Wisdom and how far from the right road Augustine, misled by *curiositas*, had originally wandered.

Edward PETERS

University of Pennsylvania

³²) BROWN, *Augustine of Hippo*, 162, 262-3, 270-80.