

## ISAIAH AND THE EARLY AUGUSTINE

This study is concerned with Isaiah in the works of Augustine up to the time that the *Confessions* was completed in 401<sup>1</sup>). The inspiration for the study is the episode in the ninth book of that work where bishop Ambrose commends the study of the prophet Isaiah to the newly converted Augustine (9, 5, 13)<sup>2</sup>). We shall therefore begin with an examination of the more obvious implications of this episode, then later consider the diachronic distribution of Isaiahan texts in Augustine's works in the period specified.

Some short time<sup>3</sup>) after the spiritual transformation signified by the well-known conversion scene of the eighth book (8, 8, 19 to 8, 12, 30), partly for reasons of ill health and partly in renunciation of worldly fame, Augustine resigned from his position of professor of rhetoric in Milan (9, 5, 13). He then wrote to bishop Ambrose repenting of his former heretical life as a Manichee and asking what parts of the Scriptures he should read in preparation for reception into the Church through the sacrament of baptism. Of the episode, addressing God, Augustine writes:

And by letters I notified to Thy bishop, the holy man Ambrose my former errors and present resolutions, with a view to his advising me which of Thy books it was best for me to read, so that I might be readier and fitter for the reception of such great grace.

In response, Ambrose suggested reading the prophet Isaiah — «at ille iussit Esaiam Prophetam» (*Ibid.*).

The first question is why, out of all the books of the Bible, Ambrose should have chosen Isaiah. The question becomes more intriguing in view of certain other details. A little further along in the text, Augustine confesses that he found Isaiah too difficult and put the

<sup>1</sup>) All dates are from the chronological tables in Peter Brown's well-known biography on Augustine.

<sup>2</sup>) Unless otherwise indicated, such bracketed references in the text are to the *Confessions*. Latin citations are from the Skutella text of 1969. English citations are from the Pilkington translation in vol. 1 of the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church* (First Series) (New York, 1902). Latin citations from other works are from the Gaume edition of the *Opera Omnia* (Paris, 1836-1839).

<sup>3</sup>) About six months according to Brown, p. 74. Such references are to the well-known biography.

book aside<sup>4</sup>). This would seem to imply that the Ambrose who had elsewhere displayed such a profound knowledge of human nature<sup>5</sup>), had badly erred in the case of Augustine by suggesting as introduction to the faith a book far too difficult for even a most intelligent convert. Or had he? As will be seen, Ambrose's suggestion may well have had hidden motives. Meanwhile, there is the question of what more obvious reasons might have prompted Ambrose's suggestion of Isaiah for prebaptismal reading for the newly converted Augustine.

In the first place, Augustine himself suggests a motive: «he recommended Isaiah the prophet; I believe, because he foreshadows more clearly than others the gospel, and the calling of the Gentiles» (9, 5, 13). This was Augustine's opinion in 397 to 401 while writing the *Confessions*. If we understand the Gospel as the good news of Christ's coming, then the above explanation is broadly consistent with another opinion on Isaiah expressed much later by Augustine, in the time-period of 414 to 417 when Augustine considered that Isaiah wrote on Christ in a symbolic way<sup>6</sup>). Again, yet later in his life, in that part of the *De civitate Dei* written about 425 (Brown, p. 378), he observes that Isaiah prophesied much more than the other prophets about Christ and the Church, that is about the King and the City that he founded<sup>7</sup>). It will be interesting, when we come to consider Augustine's use of Isaiah, to see to what extent his references confirm the above opinions on Isaiah.

Meanwhile, the fact that Augustine was convinced that Ambrose suggested Isaiah because he best fortells the good news of the Gospel and the calling of the Gentiles, does not exclude other motives on the part of Ambrose. The mere fact that Augustine had to speculate on Ambrose's motives is surely significant. Obviously his written

<sup>4</sup>) «Verum tamen ego primam huius lectionem non intellegens totumque talem arbitrans distuli repetendum exercitatio in dominico eloquio». Regarding this episode, and on the subject of Augustine's attitude to Isaiah, John Gibb and William Montgomery, in their Cambridge edition (1908) of the *Confessions*, allege (p. 246, n. 21) that «Augustine was more drawn to the Scriptures which deal with the inner life — to the Psalms and the Epistles of Paul. He did not, like Jerome, find his chief delight in the prophets». But Augustine is not merely recalling his initial dislike of Isaiah in the episode under consideration. He claims that he just did not *understand* him.

<sup>5</sup>) This is probably best illustrated by the masterful manner in which he successfully deprived his pagan adversaries of their traditional privileges. See my «Background to Augustine's City of God», *The Classical Journal* (U.S.A.) 67 (1972) 196-208, especially 199-201.

<sup>6</sup>) *Io. ev. tr.* 53, 12.

<sup>7</sup>) *Op. cit.*, 18, 29.

suggestion was tersely worded. There may well have been less obvious reasons for the laconic form of that suggestion, of which more later.

In the meantime however, there are other more obvious possible reasons on Ambrose's side as to why he would have suggested Isaiah as prebaptismal reading for the recently converted Augustine. The next most obvious such reason is that Ambrose had a certain predilection for Isaiah, in that he is quoted more often than any of the other prophets<sup>8</sup>). On the same topic of Ambrose's predilection for Isaiah, and also most significant, is the fact that Ambrose himself even wrote a commentary on Isaiah, sometime before 385/7<sup>9</sup>), and therefore possibly before he was approached by the newly converted Augustine in 386. Only a few fragments of this work are extant<sup>10</sup>).

Again, while Augustine refers to Ambrose's commentary on Isaiah, about half a dozen times in later life<sup>11</sup>), to my knowledge, there are no such allusions in Augustine's works prior to 418. This is surprising and surely significant, when we consider how valuable such a work would have been in Augustine's years of struggling with the Isaiah that he claimed that he found so difficult. Did he not find Isaiah so difficult after all? Or did he use the work of Ambrose without acknowledgement? Or did he only acquire a copy of it much later in life? These are questions, which to my knowledge, have not yet been investigated. Perhaps the present article can at least throw some light on the first of these questions.

<sup>8</sup>) Thus, to take a random example, in the English translations of Ambrose's works in the *Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers of the Church* (Second Series, vol. 10); the index to the biblical quotes (pp. 489-497), indicates that Isaiah is quoted about 120 times, while the next most popular prophet, Jeremiah, is far ahead of the others, yet is cited only 40 times.

<sup>9</sup>) C.C. 14, 404.

<sup>10</sup>) C.C. 14, 405-408. However, its recognized existence at about the time of Ambrose's encounter with Augustine, together with the fact that the latter did not immediately read the recommended text of Isaiah, seem to have have inspired one author with the erroneous belief that Ambrose gave Augustine a book which he did not read. See p. 285 in Angelo PAREDI, *Saint Ambrose; His Life and Times* (1960), (tr. M. Joseph Costelloe s.j., 1964). This claim is not supported by the text of the *Confessions*: «Et insinuavi per litteras antistiti tuo viro sancto Ambrosio, pristinos errores meos et praesens votum meum ut moneret, quid mihi potissimum de libris tuis legendum esset, quo percipiendae tantae gratiae paratior aptiorque fierem. At ille iussit Esaia prophetam» (9, 5, 13).

<sup>11</sup>) The locations, with the date of each work in brackets, are: *grat. et pecc. orig.* 1, 49, 54; 2, 41, 47 (418); (Henceforth, the date of each work will be in brackets, at the end of the reference, as shown.) *nupt. et conc.* 1, 35, 40 (419/421); *c. Iul.* 1, 11; 2, 22 (421/422); *c. ep. Pel.* 4, 11, 29-31 (420/421); *persev.* 64 (428/429).

But Isaiah was by no means Ambrose's favourite source of references. He is far surpassed by John, Matthew and Luke, in that order<sup>12</sup>). Even more popular still are the works which were to become so beloved of Augustine — the psalms and the writings of Paul<sup>13</sup>). Again therefore, and even more so, one may well ask: why Isaiah?

In this regard, another, but less obvious possible reason, is the fact that Augustine had been but recently converted from the Manichean heresy. According to the founder of this belief, the Old Testament in general, and the Law and prophets in particular, were to be attributed to Satan<sup>14</sup>). Consequently, as Augustine himself repeatedly testifies, the Manichees made a habit of attacking the Law and the prophets<sup>15</sup>). Moreover, what it came down to, in the eyes of the Manichees, was that the surest sign of authentic Christianity was the rejection of the Jewish Scriptures<sup>16</sup>). Furthermore, the Isaiah which Ambrose recommended for reading was not merely one of the books of the Jewish Scriptures. It was one of the prophets expressly rejected by the Manichees, and even more, it was one of the so-called «major prophets». As a sincere Manichee of some ten years duration, Augustine would have cultivated a special contempt for the book of Isaiah and would likely have been very reluctant to read it.

Therefore, in thus suggesting that Augustine read Isaiah, it could well be that the wily Ambrose was testing the sincerity of this newly converted Manichee. Indeed, his possible reservations about Augustine would not have been without foundations. Perhaps Augustine's recently

<sup>12</sup>) Again, from the source of footnote 8, for a random sample, John, Matthew and Luke are each referenced several hundred times. Also noteworthy is the fact that Ambrose wrote a commentary on Luke.

<sup>13</sup>) Again from the same source of footnote 8, the psalms are referenced over 400 times, while the works of Paul account for more than 800 references.

<sup>14</sup>) «Le fondateur du manichéisme ... déclarait que les Écritures de l'Ancien Testament n'étaient elles-mêmes que l'œuvre d'un Yahweh-Satan»: F. DECET, *Aspects du manichéisme dans l'Afrique romaine* (Paris, 1970) 123-124, and «déclarations attribuées à Mani: ... c'est à Satan, dit-il, qu'on doit attribuer les enseignements de la Loi et des Prophètes. C'est lui qui a parlé par l'intermédiaire de ces derniers» (*Ibid.*).

<sup>15</sup>) *Retr.* 1, 22, 1: «Disputationes Adimanti qui fuerat Manichaei discipulus, quas scripsit adversus Legem et Prophetas velut contraria eis evangelica et apostolica Scripta demonstrare conatus». Cf. *op. cit.*, 2, 7, 1: «Contra Faustum Manichaeum blasphemantem Legem et Prophetas».

<sup>16</sup>) «Ainsi la polémique contre les Écritures vétéro-testamentaires est dans la plus authentique tradition manichéenne et, pour les Manichéens, le rejet des Écritures juives constitue le critère le plus sûr du véritable christianisme» (F. DECET, *op. cit.*, 124). See also P.J. De MENASCE O.P., «Augustin Manichéen», *Freundesgabe für Ernst Robert Curtius* (Bern, 1956) 79-93, especially 85-86.

claimed conversion was not so much a change of faith, as a result of realizing both the power of Ambrose and also of the imperial might now aligned against the Manichees. The former is attested to by Augustine himself, when he witnessed Ambrose stand up to the ire of the empress over the famous affair of the basilica of Milan (9, 7, 15-16)<sup>17</sup>). Doubtless too, Augustine knew of Ambrose's phenomenal success against the entire pagan cause centered in Rome; a success which occurred just prior to Augustine's arrival in Milan in 384<sup>18</sup>). Regarding the Manichees, imperial persecution had begun as early as 297. However, it became much fiercer with the accession of Theodosius I in 379<sup>19</sup>).

The imperial enmity would have been brought home to Augustine in a very forceful and painfully personal manner in 386 by the purge of the Manichees at Carthage (Brown, 74), which Augustine had left just three years previously, and where he had initially studied, then taught, over a period of some dozen years (Brown, 16). Consequently, his many Manichean friends there would no doubt have kept him well informed of the ominous events. And by an inconvenient coincidence, Augustine was converted in August of 386 (Brown, 74); the very same year as the earlier purge of the Manichees in the same Carthage<sup>20</sup>). These various events would also have been known to Ambrose, as probably also Augustine's reputation as a victorious Manichean debater against Christians<sup>21</sup>). Then there was the capital fact that Augustine owed his very appointment as public orator of Milan to Ambrose's most bitter enemies — the pagan faction in Rome (5, 12, 23)<sup>22</sup>). So it would be reasonable to conclude that to the discerning Ambrose, Augustine must have seemed a notorious Manichee, suddenly and suspiciously turned convert. Probably these factors accounted for the taciturn front presented to Augustine by Ambrose (6, 3, 3)<sup>23</sup>). Therefore, the suggested reading

<sup>17</sup>) Cf. *ep. 44* 4, 7 (398). See also PAREDÌ, *op. cit.*, ch. 11 and F.H. DUDDEN, *The Life and Times of St. Ambrose* (1935, 2 vols.), ch. 11 in vol. 1. For a brief account of Ambrose's power in master-minding, almost single-handedly, the final extinction of paganism, see my «Background...», (footnote 5).

<sup>18</sup>) «Et veni Mediolanum ad Ambrosium episcopum, in optimis notum orbis terrae» (5, 13, 23). See also the article in footnote 5.

<sup>19</sup>) See p. 56 and 59ff. in Erich-Hans KADEN, «Die Edikte gegen die Manichäer von Diokletian bis Justinian», in *Festschrift für H. Lewald*, Basel, Helbing und Lichtenstein, 1953, 55-68.

<sup>20</sup>) F. DECRET, *L'Afrique manichéenne... I*, 215-217.

<sup>21</sup>) *Duab. an.* 9; *conf.* 3, 12, 21.

<sup>22</sup>) See my article of footnote 5, especially pp. 199-201.

<sup>23</sup>) This explanation seems far more reasonable than the ridiculous claim by one author that Ambrose would not talk to Augustine because he felt himself too inferior to

of Isaiah could well have been the proverbial acid test of the sincerity of Augustine's claimed conversion to Catholicism.

If such were indeed Ambrose's motives behind the recommended reading of Isaiah, then Augustine failed the test<sup>24</sup>). As he himself tells us, not understanding the first part, he put the book aside until he would be better trained in the style of the Scriptures (9, 5, 13). This failure to understand the Scriptures reminds one of a previous fruitless attempt by Augustine.

At the early age of nineteen, after having been inflamed with a desire for wisdom by the reading of Cicero's *Hortensius*, the young Augustine then ventured into the Scriptures, but was repelled by their lack of polished style (3, 5, 9). This was an understandable reaction of the nineteen year-old Augustine, who was then deeply immersed in the study of rhetoric. In retrospect, and as an afterthought, Augustine also says that his spiritual eye was then not able to penetrate into the depths of the Scriptures (3, 5, 9)<sup>25</sup>): Some thirteen years later, in the case of the book of Isaiah, Augustine again pleads lack of understanding as reason for abandoning the suggested reading, but here it is manifestly the principal reason, and the lack of polished style is not even mentioned. This second fruitless venture calls for several observations.

In the first place, the above two encounters with the Scriptures are separated by just over a dozen years<sup>26</sup>). It would be a matter for some surprise if the reactions of Augustine at the ages of nineteen and of thirty-two would have been the same. Secondly, we know that Augustine also made studies of the Scriptures in between the two encounters, when his favourite scriptural reading matter seems to have been the epistles of the Apostle Paul<sup>27</sup>). But we know from other

the highly cultured Augustine. See H. TESCARI, «Quid causae fuerit, cur Ambrosius cum Augustino colloqui noluerit», *Latinitas* 3 (1958) 83-86.

<sup>24</sup>) That Augustine was received into the Church with reluctance is corroborated by a detail I have unearthed elsewhere. See my «The Peculiar Appendage of Augustine's 'Enarratio in Psalmum LXI'», *Augustiniana* 28 (1978), 18-33, especially 32-33.

<sup>25</sup>) «I turned towards those Scriptures, but they appeared to me to be unworthy to be compared with the dignity of Tully; for my inflated pride shunned their style, nor could the sharpness of my wit pierce their inner meaning».

<sup>26</sup>) The first venture into the Scriptures occurred at the age of nineteen (3, 5, 9), and the second, just prior to his baptism (9, 5, 13), late in 386, or early in 387, when he was just thirty-two.

<sup>27</sup>) Thus, there was the famous seizing upon the Scriptures and especially the Apostle Paul, after the study of the books of the «Platonists» (7, 21, 27). See also my article, «Augustine's 'Discovery' of Paul's Writings (Conf. VII, 21, 27)», *Augustinian Studies*. (In press.) Further, there is also the episode, just prior to the conversion scene, where the visiting Ponticianus was surprised to find a book of Paul lying upon

sources that Augustine would have been quite familiar with these pauline epistles from his years as a Manichee among whom Paul was highly regarded<sup>28</sup>).

Thirdly, regarding Augustine's encounter with Isaiah's works, the reason he gives for putting aside the book of Isaiah, was not its lack of polished style, as in the earlier episode (see above), but that he could not understand it (9, 5, 13). Yet this reason seems to ring hollow beside certain earlier passages in the *Confessions* where Augustine is describing at length how, from the age of twenty onwards, he could easily understand all the most difficult books of the liberal arts without the aid of any human teacher (4, 16, 28-31). How then could he have found Isaiah so difficult? The question becomes more insistent when we realize that, if we are to be guided by the order of the *Confessions*, Augustine was engaged in the rapturous reading of the psalms (9, 4, 8-11) before he wrote Ambrose for guidance in his prebaptismal reading (9, 5, 13). Quite obviously he was having no major difficulties in understanding the psalms. Why then should Isaiah have proven so daunting?

Regarding Augustine's reading of the psalms, it is important to realize that, as with the works of the Apostle Paul, Augustine, while a Manichee, would have become thoroughly familiar, if not with the biblical psalms, at least with the psalm as a form of communal prayer. This is strongly suggested by a large collection of Manichean psalms unearthed in the earlier part of this century, and of which the second part has found its way into print<sup>29</sup>). Moreover, affinity between the Christian and Manichean psalmic traditions is evidenced by some borrowings of the latter from the former<sup>30</sup>). Indeed, of the importance of the psalm to Manicheism, in my opinion, Geo Widengren put it well when he wrote:

Manichean piety shows itself in the large collections of psalms that have been preserved. They indicate the sentiments that inspired

Augustine's table (8, 6, 14). Augustine's reply was that he gave the greatest attention to those works.

<sup>28</sup>) See F. DECRET, *op. cit.* 171-174. As Ries puts it, «Paul est devenu un favori de la secte». See p. 323 in «La Bible chez saint Augustin et chez les Manichéens», *Revue des études augustiniennes*, 10 (1964) 309-329. This is the third and last article in a series in the same periodical, which article is principally concerned with the more recent studies on the general topic of the Bible and the Manicheans. Also noteworthy, but less accessible, is A. BÖHLIG, *Die Bibel bei den Manichäern* (thesis), Münster, 1947.

<sup>29</sup>) *Manichaean Manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Collection*, vol. II, *A Manichaean Psalm Book, part II*. Edited by C.R.C. Allberry (Stuttgart, 1938).

<sup>30</sup>) See De MENASCE, *art. cit.* 92-93.

Mani's followers and render it easier to understand Manichaeism's triumphs<sup>31</sup>).

Again, regarding the above observations on Manicheism in relation to both Paul and the psalms, there is the significant fact that Augustine himself remarks how the Manichees delighted in reading Paul, or in a sober psalm<sup>32</sup>). These considerations are to be borne in mind in regard to Augustine's ardent reading of the fourth psalm of David and his repeated wishes that the Manichees had been witnesses of that event (9, 4, 8-11).

Finally on Augustine's claim that he could not understand Isaiah, this encounter provides the basis for an instructive comparison with his slightly earlier venture into «certain books of the Platonists» (7, 9, 13). Modern researches have established that it is here mainly question of certain of the *Enneads* of Plotinus<sup>33</sup>). In the first place, while Isaiah was recommended to Augustine by Ambrose whom Augustine greatly admired, the books of the Platonists were presented to Augustine by an unnamed man whom Augustine considered to have been «inflated by a most monstrous pride» (7, 9, 13). These are strong words indeed. If personalities had been the principal factor, then Augustine should have taken to Isaiah's writings far more readily than to the *Enneads* of Plotinus. Some other factor(s) must have been operative. Secondly, although the books of the Platonists dealt with the heady heights of metaphysics, Augustine seems to have had no difficulty in understanding their contents (7, 9, 13-15). However, though the writings of Isaiah concerned the concrete warnings of an earthy prophet, nevertheless, Augustine claims that he could not understand them. Again, one can suspect the influence of some other factor(s). Regarding the identity of such factor(s), it is relevant that on closer examination, Augustine's description strongly implies that at that time he was *not interested* in understanding those writings. As he himself says, he merely read a little of the beginning before laying the writings aside till some future date<sup>34</sup>).

<sup>31</sup>) P. 84 in the 1965 English translation of *Mani and Manichaeism*, History of Religion Series (New York, Chicago and San Francisco).

<sup>32</sup>) «For I ask them, is it a good thing to have delight in reading the Apostle, or good to have delight in a sober psalm...?» (8, 10, 24).

<sup>33</sup>) See the illuminating notes of A. SOLIGNAC, in *Les Confessions*, livres I-VII, vol. 13 (pp. 682-689), in the collection *Œuvres de saint Augustin* (Bibliothèque Augustinienne), 1962.

<sup>34</sup>) «Verum tamen ego primam huius lectionem non intellegens totumque talem arbitrans distuli repetendam exercitatio in dominico eloquio» (9, 5, 13).

Yet a most significant earlier experience in the *Confessions* would seem to belie not only Augustine's implied lack of interest in Isaiah, but also his claim that he could not understand his writings. That earlier experience was the discovery of the cardinal difference between the letter and the spirit (2 *Cor.* 3: 6) to be applied when reading the Old Testament, a distinction he acquired from Ambrose, as Augustine recounts on two occasions (5, 14, 24 and 6, 4, 6). Moreover, Ambrose illustrated this capital distinction by applying it to very many cases in the Old Testament — *plerisque illorum librorum locis expositis* (5, 14, 24). Again, in both places where Augustine recounts the discovery of this distinction, he explains that lacking knowledge of it as a Manichee, he had completely misunderstood the Law and the prophets of the Old Testament. But Isaiah is precisely such a prophet and a major one, as explained. Therefore, subsequent to the revelation of the distinction and the many illustrations provided by Ambrose, Augustine should have been both very interested in reading Isaiah and also well equipped to understand him. But according to the *Confessions*, neither proves to be the case. Therefore, accepting the narrational sequence of the relevant events as given, then the covert influence of some other factor(s) becomes much more likely.

As a result of the previous considerations, it now appears quite possible that Augustine's Manichean background of some ten years had a considerable influence on his initial reactions to the various books of the Catholic Bible. This would be a purely human reaction and in no way is commenting on it meant to detract from the sincerity of his conversion. Accordingly, from what has been seen above, it would be expected that Augustine would have taken to Paul's epistles and even to David's psalms with more enthusiasm than to the books of the Old Testament. After Augustine's ten years of sincere Manichean belief, the Old Testament would have been the object of great initial suspicion. Regarding the present study, such would probably have been particularly the case with the book of Isaiah, against which his lengthy Manichean background would have strongly prejudiced him. Isaiah was not merely one of the despised prophets, he was even a *major* prophet, as has been mentioned.

This expectation is substantiated by a comparative examination of the diachronic distribution of his references in regard to the various books of interest here. Such a comparison is found in Table A<sup>35</sup>).

<sup>35</sup>) In this Table, each reference number represents both citations and allusions without distinction and may cover one or more verses, so that the numbers are indications

Table A - Biblical References

| <i>Bible sources</i> | 386-390 | 391-396 | 397-401 |
|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Ezechiel             | 1       | 9       | 23      |
| Isaiah               | 4       | 33      | 77      |
| Jeremiah             | 0       | 5       | 32      |
| Law                  | 1       | 10      | 30      |
| Psalms               | 20      | 122     | 457     |
| Paul                 | 117     | 643     | 1480    |

Common to each Bible source is an increase in references with each successive time-span, thus indicating Augustine's increasing immersion in the Bible over the lengthy period of some fifteen years<sup>36</sup>). The works of Paul are by far the most frequently referenced<sup>37</sup>), thus confirming Augustine's previous knowledge of Paul as a Manichee and the reality of the episode already mentioned from the *Confessions*, where, just prior to the depiction of his conversion, Augustine asserted that he gave the greatest attention to the works of Paul (8, 6, 14). Next most frequently referenced are the psalms<sup>38</sup>), but judging by the number of references in the first time-span, initially Augustine was not nearly as familiar with them as with the works of Paul, though much more so than with any of the major prophets. Again, the initial numbers for the psalms give some general credence to Augustine's fondness for psalmic prayer from his former years as a Manichee and

of general interest, rather than precise measurements of anything. As can be seen, the time-spans heading the second through fourth columns are approximately equal. The Table gives the number of references in Augustine's relevant works under each specified time-span which heads each column. Works of an uncertain extended date, ranging over more than one time-span, are not included. If a work is dated over two years which overlap two time-spans, the number of references is divided between the two spans. The Table is based on the biblical references in the footnotes of the appropriate works in the Maurists' *Opera Omnia* (Gaume, Paris, 1836-1839). A computer file of all the references was sorted on the appropriate fields, thus providing easy access to records by date ranges, or by books of the Bible. Besides the major prophets (counts for the others were considered insignificant), and the concise and complete formulations of the Mosaic Law (Ex. 20, 2-17 and Deut. 5, 6-21) (listed as 'Law'), other references are to the psalms (listed as 'Psalms'), and to all the works of Paul, including *Hebrews* (all of which are listed as 'Paul').

<sup>36</sup>) In this regard, it is noteworthy that after his ordination in 391, he wrote his bishop, Valerius, requesting leave of absence precisely to deepen his knowledge of the Bible (*Ep.* 21 3-4).

<sup>37</sup>) To the references to Paul in Table A, for the first two time-spans, must be added 141 references found in the *div. qu.* 83, written over the period 388-396.

<sup>38</sup>) Again, the numbers found in the first two time-spans of Table A are to be boosted by 17 references found in the *div. qu.* 83 which was written over the period 388-396.

also to the episode mentioned above, of the rapturous reading of the fourth psalm (9, 4, 8-11). Further possible evidence for Augustine's rapid and passionate adoption of the psalms is the claim that by 392 he had written commentaries on the first thirty-two psalms<sup>39</sup>).

With the other works, the numbers of references in the initial time-span add more evidence for the previously mentioned theory that as a newly converted Manichee, initially at least, Augustine could have retained a prejudice against the works of the Old Testament. Thus, all references to the major prophets and to the Mosaic Law are very low in comparison with references to the other works in Table A. However, if the numbers are accepted as criteria, this prejudice fades dramatically in each succeeding time-span. That this initial reluctance applied also to Isaiah, seems indicated by the small number of references in the initial time-span, compared with those of Paul. However, among the major prophets, number-wise, Isaiah certainly stands out in every time-span. Also, unlike the other major prophets, counts for Isaiah over the first two time-spans are also further boosted by some seven references over the years 388 through 396, as found in the *De diversis questionibus* 83<sup>40</sup>). The only other major prophet represented in the work is Jeremiah, with one reference. One is tempted to see these more numerous references to Isaiah as the fruits of Ambrose's earlier suggestion of this prophet for prebaptismal reading, as explained above.

Further, it is noteworthy that Isaiah is the first of the prophets to be cited, and in the year 388<sup>41</sup>). Augustine's first unsuccessful attempt at reading Isaiah occurred late in 386, or early in 387, just after his conversion and before his baptism (Brown, 74), but he put the book aside until he was «better practised in Our Lord's words» (9, 5, 13). Judging by the above early reference to Isaiah in 388, Augustine must have considered himself thus fortified less than two years later, by 388. Two intervening events of possible relevance were the death of his mother in the previous year of 387 (9, 8, 17), and perhaps the «Vision of Ostia» of the same year (9, 10, 23-24).

<sup>39</sup>) Brown, 74. See also, H. RONDET, «Essais sur la chronologie des 'Enarrationes in Psalmos' de saint Augustin», *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique*, 61 (1960) 111-127, especially 113-127, and also 258-286, as well as S. ZARB, «Chronologia Enarrationum S. Augustini in Psalmos», a series of articles in the *Angelicum* from 1935 through 1940, 1947 and 1948.

<sup>40</sup>) The locations are: 59, 3; 61, 3; 64, 3; 65; 69, 4; 80, 2; 81, 2.

<sup>41</sup>) *Lib. arb.* 1, 2, 4. This is probably a year before the next prophet cited, which is Ezechiel in *Gn. c. Man.* 2, 12, 17 (388-389). Daniel is first cited in the *mag.* 10, 33 (389).

The verse of Isaiah first cited by Augustine also came to be the most popular one in the whole period under consideration, where it occurs ten times. The verse is from Isaiah 7: 9 and in the Septuagint is: «Nisi credideritis non intelligetis» — «Unless you believe, you will not understand»<sup>42</sup>). One can appreciate that Augustine could have seen this verse as a reproach to himself for all the preceding years during which he had given reason priority over faith. Thus, towards the end of the fourth book of the *Confessions*, writing of his earlier intellectual acumen, which had coexisted with his spiritual poverty, he repeats no less than five times the self-reproach: «Quid mihi proderat?» — «What did it profit me?» (4, 16, 28, 29, 30 and 31 (twice)). The last formulation is:

What profited me then my nimble wit in those sciences and all those knotty volumes disentangled by me without help from a human master, seeing that I erred so odiously, and with such sacrilegious baseness in the doctrine of piety?

It would appear then, that at least part of the reason for the appeal of Isaiah 7: 9 to Augustine was its painful applicability to his own particular case, especially during his prior Manichean sojourn.

Some other Isaiahan passages, judged to be less popular on the basis of their frequency of repetition, appear half a dozen times, or less, in the period under consideration. In descending order of frequencies of references, they concern the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost (*Isaiah* 11: 2)<sup>43</sup>), the fragility of human flesh which withers away like grass (*Isaiah* 40: 6-8)<sup>44</sup>), and the silent suffering of God's Chosen One, as he was led

<sup>42</sup>) Besides being in *lib. arb.* 1, 2, 4 (388), the verse also occurs in *en. Ps.* 8, 6 (before 392?), and in *div. qu.* 83 81, 2 (388-396). It also occurs again in *lib. arb.*, but in that part (2, 2, 6) written between 391 and 395. Occurrences in three other works are more precisely dated: in *f. et symb.* 1, 1, 1 (393); in the part of *doct. chr.* (2, 12, 17) written in 396, and in *agon.* 13, 14 (396). Finally, the verse is found three times in *c. Faust.*: 4, 2; 12, 46; 22, 53 (397-398). No references were found in the last three years of the period up to, and including 401. According to one author, the absence of Is. 7: 9 in these later years is merely the absence of the Septuagint translation of the verse. What had happened was that Augustine had come to prefer Jerome's Vulgate version, based not on the Greek, but on the original Hebrew, when the verse was more accurately translated as «Si non credideritis, non permanebitis». The changed verse has not been picked up by the compilers of the references. See p. 190 in: Robert J. O'CONNELL S.J. «Isaiah's Mothering God in St. Augustine's *Confessions*», *Thought* 58 (1983) 188-206.

<sup>43</sup>) *En. Ps.* 11, 7 (before 392?); *s. dom. m.* 1, 4, 11 and 2, 25, 87 (394); *Gal. exp.* 13 (394-395); *c. Faust.* 12, 15 (397-398); *conf.* 13, 4, 5 (397-401).

<sup>44</sup>) *En. Ps.* 1, 3 (before 392?); *div. qu.* 83 61, 3 (388-396); *conf.* 13, 15, 18 (397-401); *cat. rud.* 16, 24 (399-400); *s.* 288, 2 (401).

like a lamb to the slaughter (*Isaiah* 53, 7)<sup>45</sup>). It is noteworthy that all but one of the references to the last mentioned verse occur from 397 onwards, which is late in the period being examined. This tardiness could perhaps indicate that, at least initially, as a former Manichee, Augustine was not principally concerned with the physical reality of Christ's sufferings, which were not regarded as physically real<sup>46</sup>).

This last speculation, about the enduring influence of the previous ten years of immersion in Manicheism, is perhaps further substantiated by the occurrences of *Isaiah* 7: 14: «Behold a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel»<sup>47</sup>). This verse is not cited until 392, when it appears in the *Contra Fortunatum*, but as coming from Fortunatus himself<sup>48</sup>). Thereafter, it is not taken up by Augustine until 397-398<sup>49</sup>). Finally, he cites it once more in 400<sup>50</sup>). This tardy entrance of *Isaiah* 7: 14 into Augustine's usage is also seen from the employment of *Matthew* 1: 23 where the verse is again quoted. This verse, in the context of *Matthew* 1: 23, appears three times in Augustine's works, but only beginning as late as 396<sup>51</sup>).

During his ten years as a sincere Manichee, Augustine would have been taught, and would have firmly believed, that the coming of Christ in fleshly form, and therefore through a physical birth, was an obscene claim, since it involved the evil flesh<sup>52</sup>). These tardy references to *Isaiah* 7: 14 therefore become understandable, though the tardiness also applies to other verses from *Isaiah*. Therefore, it can perhaps be more accurately said that, judging by the above findings, during the first ten years after his conversion, Augustine did not feel compelled to defend the physical realities of Christ's sufferings, or the predicted virginal birth of the Saviour, using relevant texts from *Isaiah*.

Another *Isaian* verse of some understandable appeal to Augustine, and also implying another problem, is 56: 5 where God promises an everlasting name, never to lapse into obscurity, to those

<sup>45</sup>) *C. Faust.* 12, 43 (397-398); *cat. rud.* 20, 34 (399-400); *ep.* 55 16, 29 (400); *s.* 279 3 (401). It is noteworthy that *Isaiah* 53: 7 is repeated in *Acts* 8, 32-33, where the Ethiopian eunuch is reading the passage while riding in his chariot. However, this episode is only the subject of one reference in the time-period of this examination, and Augustine does not there cite the passage from *Isaiah* (*doct. chr.*, proem. (391)).

<sup>46</sup>) *C. ep. fund.* 8, 9; *c. Faust.* 26, 1ff.; 29, 1ff.

<sup>47</sup>) «Ecce virgo concipiet, et pariet filium, et vocabunt nomen ejus Emmanuel».

<sup>48</sup>) *C. Fort.* 19.

<sup>49</sup>) *C. Faust.* 13, 3 & 4; 23, 5.

<sup>50</sup>) *Cons. ev.* 1, 26, 41.

<sup>51</sup>) *Agon.*, 22, 24 (396); *cons. ev.* 1, 26, 41; 2, 5, 17 (400).

<sup>52</sup>) *C. ep. Mani* 8, 9 (396); *c. Faust.* 3, 1; 11, 1; 27, 1; 28, 1 (397-398).

eunuchs who obey his commandments<sup>53</sup>). The five references to this verse are found over the years 394 through 401<sup>54</sup>). One is reminded of Matthew 19: 12 with its distinction between those who have been made eunuchs by men and those who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God. This verse receives a great deal of attention from Augustine, but again over the same time-span as the previous one<sup>55</sup>).

Again, these texts become important to Augustine only long after his conversion. They both first appear as late as 394, but nearly three-quarters of them are found in works of the years 397 through 401. But their tardy appearance is especially surprising in view of Augustine's starkly dramatic description of his struggle against sex in the eighth book of the *Confessions*, a struggle which culminates in his conversion according to which he «sought neither a wife, nor any other of this world's hopes» (8, 12, 30). This epochal event occurred in 386, yet the first few references to Isaiah 56: 5 and Matthew 19: 12 do not occur until 394, making a lacuna of some eight years. This lacuna remains something of an enigma revealed by the present investigation, but at least is consistent with the tardy appearance of other Isaiahan verses, as already noted.

Finally, on the subject of individual verses meriting special mention, is Isaiah 40: 3-4 concerning the voice crying in the wilderness for the way of the Lord to be made straight. I have explained elsewhere how Augustine has made deliberate use of this passage in the *Confessions*<sup>56</sup>). The ruler of Monica's dream (3, 11, 19) is the same rule of faith upon which Augustine sees himself standing after his conversion (8, 12, 30). Using a paraphrase of Isaiah 40: 3-4, he seemingly contrasts that ruler's smooth straightness with the rough and crooked ways he has trodden before his conversion (9, 4, 7). In view of these considerations, the diachronic distribution of Isaiah 40: 3-4 in Augustine's earlier writings becomes a matter of some interest.

<sup>53</sup>) «Haec dicit Dominus spadonibus eis qui custodierint praecepta mea ... dabo illis in domo mea et in muro meo locum nominatissimum, meliorem multo filiorum atque filiarum; nomen aeternum dabo illis, nec unquam deerit». (This text is taken from *c. Adim.* 3, 4.)

<sup>54</sup>) *C. Adim.* 3, 4; 25 (394); *c. Faust.* 14, 13 (397-398); *virg.* 25, 25; 30, 30 (401).

<sup>55</sup>) *C. Adim.* 3, 4; 23 (394); *Gal. exp.* 42 (394-395); *doctr. chr.* 3, 17, 25 (396); *c. Faust.* 16, 22; 30, 4 (397-398); *conf.* 2, 2, 3; 8, 1, 2 (397-401); *op. mon.* 32, 40 (400); *b. coniug.* 13, 15; 21, 25 (401); *virg.* 1, 1; 9, 9; 23, 23; 30, 30; 36, 37 (401).

<sup>56</sup>) See my «'Christus via' in Augustine's *Confessions*», *Augustinian Studies* 7 (1976) 47-58, especially 55-57, as also my «The Dreams of Monica in Augustine's *Confessions*», *Augustinian Studies* 10 (1979) 3-17, especially 16-17.

Those verses of Isaiah do not receive any attention until 400, when they become the subject of lengthy considerations in the *De consensu evangelistarum* 2, 12, 25. Then again, in 401, a lengthy treatment is found in *Sermo* 288 2-5<sup>57</sup>). A third lengthy treatment occurs in *Sermo* 289, but this is only datable as prior to 410<sup>58</sup>). These findings would indicate that Isaiah 40: 3-4 only acquired the above personal significance for Augustine during the writing of the *Confessions*<sup>59</sup>).

Another possible analysis of Augustine's early use of Isaiah is not merely through the repetitious use of certain individual verses, but through the repetition of the same idea, in various different verses. Under this aspect, we find solid evidence for Augustine's earlier mentioned opinion that Ambrose had suggested the reading of Isaiah because he prophesied preeminently about the coming of Christ. This is acknowledged in many places by Augustine and in a variety of verses from Isaiah. However, as will be seen from the footnotes, yet again these references do not occur till late in the period under consideration.

Accordingly, Isaiah 11: 2 and 3, concerning the spirit of God upon his Chosen One receive considerable attention<sup>60</sup>), but what is remarkable, is that the verses are always referenced for the seven spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit, without alluding to God's Chosen One<sup>61</sup>). Therefore, these references do not belong to the present topic. Less popular verses about the Chosen One are Isaiah 11: 10 and 28: 16<sup>62</sup>), together with two verses from Isaiah 52<sup>63</sup>).

Chapter 53 of Isaiah, with its various predictions of the Messiah, is referenced on many occasions by Augustine. In fact, it is at the heart of the longest single quote from Isaiah, which consists of some twenty verses<sup>64</sup>). In addition, various individual verses from the same lengthy

<sup>57</sup>) For the date of this sermon, see P.-P. VERBRAKEN, *Études critiques sur les sermons authentiques de saint Augustin* (Hague, 1976) 129.

<sup>58</sup>) See VERBRAKEN, *op. cit.*, 129.

<sup>59</sup>) That this occurred independently of pauline texts featuring «regula», is indicated by Augustine's lack of interest in such texts as 2 Co. 10: 13, 15 & 16; Gal. 6: 16, and Phil. 3: 16 during the period of 386 through 401.

<sup>60</sup>) See footnote 43.

<sup>61</sup>) A possible clue is suggested on examining the context. Isaiah 11: 1 describes the root of Jesse and the flower that will arise from it, which flower is traditionally interpreted as being Jesus. Perhaps Augustine found this imagery to be uncomfortably close to the Manichean myth about the origin of trees (*nat. b.* 44 & 45 (399)) and their doctrine of the *Jesus patabilis* hanging from every tree (*c. Faust.* 20, 2 & 11 (397-398)).

<sup>62</sup>) Occurrences are respectively: *c. Faust.* 13, 3 (397-398); *cat. rud.* 23, 43 (399-400).

<sup>63</sup>) 52: 7 is referenced in *c. Faust.* 32, 10 (397-398), while 52: 15 is found in *qu. ev.* 2, 33 (397-400).

<sup>64</sup>) Isaiah 52: 13 through 54: 5 is quoted in *cons. ev.* 1, 31, 47 (400).

block of text are to be found elsewhere in Augustine's writings. Thus, Isaiah 53: 1 concerning the revelation embodied in God's Chosen One is referred to on two occasions<sup>65</sup>), as also is verse 53: 3 about the rejection of, and contempt for, the Saviour<sup>66</sup>). Verses 53: 5 and 53: 7, about the Saviour's silent sufferings on our behalf, are found in several places<sup>67</sup>). Verse 53: 8 about the Saviour's generation, is cited twice<sup>68</sup>), while verse 53: 11, concerning the Saviour's bearing our sins, occurs only once<sup>69</sup>).

The previous examples give an extensive idea of the importance to Augustine of Isaiah's various prophecies about the Messiah, and therefore substantiate the above-mentioned reason why Augustine thought that Ambrose had suggested Isaiah for prebaptismal reading. What seems to have been uncovered in the previous detailed examination of the diachronic distribution of such references in Augustine's works is that almost all the firmly dated references occur from 397 onwards. Therefore, it seems that only about ten years after Augustine began seriously studying Isaiah (from about 387) did he really begin appreciating the preeminence of Isaiah in prophesying about the Messiah. Therefore, this reason which he imputes to Ambrose for suggesting the reading of Isaiah does not seem to have been very important to Augustine before 397. Again, this tardiness concurs with previous diachronic distributions.

Other favourite topics in Augustine's use of Isaiah are the faults of God's chosen people, principally their blind rebelliousness<sup>70</sup>), their hypocrisy<sup>71</sup>) and their coming punishment<sup>72</sup>). Yet other popular themes are the power of God<sup>73</sup>), his exaltation<sup>74</sup>), his regard for the

<sup>65</sup>) *En. Ps.* 9 13 (before 392?) and *qu. ev.* 2, 33 (397-400).

<sup>66</sup>) *Div. qu.* 83 64, 3 (388-396); *qu. ev.* 2, 33 (397-400).

<sup>67</sup>) *C. Faust.* 12, 43 (397-398); *cat. rud.* 20, 34 (399-400); *ep.* 55 16, 29 (400); *s.* 279 3 (401).

<sup>68</sup>) *C. Faust.* 22, 54 (397-398); *cons. ev.* 2, 1, 2 (400).

<sup>69</sup>) *Exp. prop. Rom.* 32-34 (394-395).

<sup>70</sup>) *Is.* 1: 2: *s. dom. m.* 2, 4, 15 (394); *Is.* 1: 3: *c. Faust.* 13, 11 (397-398); *Is.* 2: 5-8: *cons. ev.* 1, 28, 44 (400); *Is.* 3, 12: *diu. qu.* 83 59, 3 (388-396); *ep.* 33 3 (396); *c. ep. Parm.* 3, 5, 26 (400); *Is.* 51: 21: *c. Faust.* 15, 9 (397-398).

<sup>71</sup>) *Is.* 29: 13: *en. ps.* 4 6 (in 5) (before 392?); *c. Faust.* 22, 55 (397-398); *s.* 88 14, 13 (400); *bapt.* 7, 44, 87 (400-401).

<sup>72</sup>) *Is.* 2, 9-21: *cons. ev.* 1, 28, 44 (400); *Is.* 5: 6: *s. dom. m.* 1, 23, 79 (394); *s.* 89 2 (396-397); *Is.* 5: 20: *ep.* 36 8, 20 (396-397); *adn. Iob.* (in 17) (399); *c. ep. Parm.* 2, 1, 1 (400).

<sup>73</sup>) *Is.* 45: 7: *mor.* 2, 7, 9 (388); *c. Adim.* 27 (394); *c. ep. fund.* 39, 45 (396); *Is.* 46: 4: *conf.* 4, 16, 31 (397-401) (see also O'CONNELL, *art. cit.* 191); *Is.* 65: 17: *vera rel.* 23, 44 (389-391).

<sup>74</sup>) *Is.* 6: 1-3: *c. Adim.* 28, 1 (394); *c. Faust.* 12, 48 (397-398); *ep.* 55 16, 29 (400);

humble<sup>75</sup>), and his rewards for the obedient<sup>76</sup>). What is certainly not in prominence among these themes is that of Christ the King, and the City that he founded in the form of the Church. As observed above, this is a theme that Augustine imputes to Isaiah while writing his *De civitate Dei* and presumably therefore has more to do with this undertaking than with Augustine's earlier studies of Isaiah. Last, but by no means least, on the topics from Isaiah of appeal to Augustine, there is the interesting and imaginative study by O'Connell on the theme of the mothering God in the *Confessions*<sup>77</sup>).

A final overview of Augustine's earlier work on Isaiah reveals that he only references about half the chapters of Isaiah, with the favourite ones being, in order of popularity: the seventh (the sign of Immanuel); the fifty-third (on the suffering and glory of the Servant); the sixty-third (judgement and hope) and the fortieth (on comfort for God's people). Of those not referenced at all, the largest gap is chapters 15 through 25, with the next largest being chapters 30 through 33. Chapters not referenced at all total thirty-four, or about half of the sixty-six chapters. Of those not referenced at all, only six merit a notable reference<sup>78</sup>) after 401. Moreover, as seen above, in works before 401 Augustine is particularly partial to references prophesying the coming of the Messiah. In view of this partiality, it is surprising that in the same time-period, chapter 43 is omitted with its paeon of Israel's Redeemer. Even more amazing is the omission of any reference to chapter 9 containing the lines devoted to the Kingly Child who will ascend the throne of David and establish his everlasting kingdom<sup>79</sup>). One can only speculate that perhaps Augustine's text of Isaiah contained certain omissions.

In conclusion then, this article has considered various possible reasons for Ambrose's suggestion of Isaiah for prebaptismal reading for the newly converted Augustine, as also for the latter's claim that he could not understand that prophet. Both aspects seem to involve the continuing importance of Augustine's Manichean background. The

*conf.* 12, 7, 7 (397-401); *Is.* 40: 5: *div. qu.* 83 80, 2 (388-396); *Is.* 42: 10: *qu. ev.* 2, 33 (397-400); *Is.* 66: 1: *en. Ps.* 9 6 (in 5) (before 392?); *c. Adim.* 18, 1 (394); *s. dom. m.* 2, 9, 32 (394).

<sup>75</sup> *Is.* 66: 2: *Gal. exp.* 45 (394-395); *virg.* 39, 40; 50, 51 (401); *s.* 279 6 (401).

<sup>76</sup> *Is.* 56: 4-5: *c. Adim.* 3, 4 & 25 (394) (see also footnotes 52 and 53); *Is.* 58: 10: *en. Ps.* 7 19 (in 18) (before 392?); *adn. Iob* (in 39) (399); *conf.* 10, 5, 7 (397-401).

<sup>77</sup> See footnote 42.

<sup>78</sup> A notable reference is one found in the scriptural index in the concluding volume of the *Opera Omnia* (see footnote 2).

<sup>79</sup> It is noteworthy that neither of these last two passages merits a notable reference in the works after 401.

study also considered Augustine's references to Isaiah from 386 up until he completed the *Confessions* in 401. Both the diachronic distribution of the references and also the verses used, revealed some interesting, if enigmatical, insights. Of principal interest in the light of Augustine's Manichean background, is the initial minimal use of the prophets, then gradually increased recourse to them with each passing time-span considered. At all stages, Isaiah continued to be the most favoured prophet, a fact which seems to manifest the enduring influence of Ambrose's initial advice to the newly converted Augustine, to study that prophet. Finally, on this same topic, examination of Augustine's most favoured verses and themes from Isaiah, substantiates the important reason he later imputed to Ambrose for that initial suggestion. In broad terms, he saw that reason as consisting in the fact that Isaiah prophesied in a pre-eminent manner about the coming of Christ.

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