

Pierre-Marie HOMBERT, *Nouvelles recherches de chronologie augustinienne*. Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes. Turnhout, Brepols, 2000. 682 p. BEF 2611,61. ISBN 2-85121-180-3.

During the conference on Augustine as a preacher at Chantilly in 1996, F. Dolbeau, the editor of 26 newly discovered sermons of Augustine at Mainz, Stadtbibliothek I 9, invited his audience to make a general revision of the chronology of the works of Augustine. The author, P.-M. Hombert, has accepted this invitation with a great degree of courage, for such a study demands an enormous amount of energy and time, for which we cannot be but thankful. Hombert knows that he is not infallible and he is prepared to recognize his mistakes. He considers his study as a contribution to further investigations and he declares the debate opened. What does he offer here? First, he assigns a date to each work that is mentioned in *Retractationes* II,6-26; special attention is called for *Confessiones* X-XIII (d. 403), *Contra Faustum* (d. 400-402), *De Trinitate* I. I (d. 400-403), I. II-III (d. 411-413), I. IV (d. 414-415), *De sancta virginitate* (d. 404+412), *De Genesi ad litteram* I. I-IIIb (d. 404-405), I. IIIb-XII (d. 412-414). A fixed chronological datum is for Hombert (and also for me): 411-412 as the beginning of Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings, first without naming Pelagius and later, from 416 on, mentioning his name. Second, Hombert tries to date each sermon of the manuscript of Mainz plus that of three related sermons (showing at the same time that one must exclude the traditional date of 397 for the group of Carthagian Sermons). Finally, a third part of the book deals with the dating of fifty other sermons. On pp. 638-642 one finds a list of the dated or re-dated writings. The method of the author runs as follows. Where concrete data, the so-called *realia*, are lacking, nothing remains than a systematic exploitation of the parallels. Therefore, all the texts treating the same subject and being based on the same references to Holy Scripture have to be studied. Concerning the references to the Bible, the author follows the method of Anne-Marie La Bonnardière. One should never forget how much Augustine was a man of the Bible. His theology as well as his spirituality are essentially based upon Holy Scripture. Groups of biblical references are indications of a controversy or a theological theme. Hombert is well aware of the difficulties of chronological investigations based upon internal criteria. In the book some of the difficulties are enumerated. 1) It is nearly impossible to be sure that one has found all the biblical references and all the theological themes. 2) We have to reckon with the fact that the greater part of Augustine's sermons is lost. 3) One is



inclined to assign the same date to this or that biblical reference depending on the greatest concentration of that reference. 4) There are always exceptions to statistical laws. 5) An argument *a silentio* is always fragile. 6) Augustine was often writing different books at the same time. 7) There is normally a risk to make a deduction from something which is only probable.

I admire the work of Hombert for it is more than a collection of chronological proposals. It supposes a profound theological and historical knowledge with regard to Augustine's life and work. I see no possibility to criticise this study without redoing the work; and who is able to do that? The only remark I would like to make is that I wish Hombert had proceeded with a bit more caution in a few instances. When the author says that a group of biblical references occupied the mind of Augustine during some weeks or months, and then were forgotten, I have my doubts regarding the word "forgotten" (p. VI). On p. 277 we read that Augustine remembers what he has said a year ago and he alludes to it. After having stated the probability of a date, I would not say "ne laisse aucun doute" (p. 76 and p. 417). Sometimes Hombert concludes from the similar wording of a parallel that there is also a proximity in time (p. 79), but on p. 97 one reads "again, one should not interpret this parallelism as a proof of the contemporaneity of both works". The author declares that a strong similarity would be strange, if these texts were spoken or written with an interval of eight years (p. 350; on p. 581, with an interval of five or six years); elsewhere, however, he admits that the same biblical text can give rise to identical comments even after an interval of many years (p. 339 and p. 345, p. 416). I find that the attribution of the Letter to the Hebrews to the apostle Paul in two late texts of Augustine remains a puzzle, and I think that Hombert will agree. Let there be no mistake that these minor remarks do not diminish the importance of this book.

T. J. VAN BAVEL

Thomas Gerhard RING, Die „unvergebbare“ Sünde wider den Heiligen Geist in Mt 12,31f. nach der Deutung des hl. Augustinus. (Cassiciacum Bd. XLVIII). Würzburg, Augustinus-Verlag, 2000. XVI-119 S. ISBN 3-7613-0197-9.

Dans cette étude on peut distinguer trois parties. La première s'arrête à l'interprétation du verset difficile "Le blasphème contre l'Esprit ne sera pas remis... Si quelqu'un parle contre l'Esprit Saint, cela ne lui sera remis ni en ce monde ni dans l'autre". Dans la tradition