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### The Relation of Christian Identity to Spiritual Training in Augustine's *Sermons*\*

In the current discussion and investigation of change and stability in Late Antique society, some scholars have argued that the division between religious groups was blurred in that it is difficult to define the identity of Christians through clear indications of belief, observance and practice. From some recent surveys and findings, it has been agreed that the distinction between pagans and Christians only can be seen as one of a candidate binary.<sup>1</sup> While the evidence from North African Christianity allows us to examine the question of what it meant to be a Christian, it is noticeable that there was a comprehensive approach to the mode of human behaviour: spiritual training and exercises in the Graeco-Roman tradition. What did Augustine think of the training? This question has received frequent attention in the scholarship, particularly in Pierre Hadot's work, in which he stresses the complexity of the mode of spiritual discipline. He explains it as a 'metamorphosis of our personality'.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to the understanding of spiritual exercises from the purely intellectual perspective, Hadot realises the necessity of investigating such exercises' wider diversity and the purgation of the soul within the context of all facets of human thought and behaviour. It is interesting to note that the spiritual training in question varied according to the circumstances of the Graeco-Roman tradition. More specifically, from the mid-fourth century, a crucial stage of more detailed modification

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<sup>1</sup> Markus 1990; Kahlos 2007; Rebillard 2012a; Rebillard and Rüpke 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Hadot 1995, 82 and 127. See also Chase, Clark, and McGhee 2013.

and development of the spiritual training occurred. It seems beneficial to revisit the subject in Augustine's works.<sup>3</sup> The intention of this article is, therefore, to focus on the evidence for the multiplicity of Christian and/or pagan identities in Augustine's *Sermones ad Populum*, thereby coming to some understanding of the occasions in which he made use of these multiple identities in speaking about spiritual training. I shall first examine how he referred to the Christian code of behaviour in his preaching, and then I shall ask what Augustine understood by spiritual training. Finally, I shall consider spiritual training from the viewpoint of its significance and its limitations for the constructive guidance necessary to nourish the Christian identity that Augustine hoped for in the North African Christian community.

### PROBLEMS OF CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

#### Inclusion of identities

My account of Christian identity begins by examining Augustine's claim, in two sermons preached during the same period, that there should be no dividing line in the faith community. He found himself preaching, not only to the faithful but also to the whole of his congregation, of the necessity of constituting a coherent identity as Christians. In *Sermon 352A* (= Dolbeau 14), preached in Carthage in 397,<sup>4</sup> Augustine deals with the passage from Mark 1:15 that states, 'Repent and believe in the gospel'. He regards it as a twofold call. After explaining the second imperative, 'believe in the gospel' as addressed to the pagans, he turns his attention to the first imperative. He states that, although 'there is no one, I take it, listening to me in this congregation, who does not yet believe in the gospel',<sup>5</sup> there exist two groups who are called to repent: catechumens and the faithful who live secularly. Augustine then proceeds to refer to a possible objection of a complaining catechumen: 'A catechumen can answer me, "Why say Repent to

<sup>3</sup> For the secondary literature on the spiritual training in the works of Augustine, see Leclercq 1961; Agaësse 1991; Ayres 1998; Madec 1996–2002; Kamimura 2005; Pollmann 2005; Claes 2007; Otten 2009; Kolbet 2010; Stock 2010; Stock 2011; Pavie 2012; Napier 2013; Kamimura 2014; Claes 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 352A (= Dolbeau 14): Dolbeau: after 396, Gryson: probably 413/414, Hill: 397, Hombert: around 413–414?, Rebillard: 397.

For the chronological survey of Augustine's sermons, see Kunzelmann 1931; Perler and Maier 1969; Verbraken 1976, 53–196; WSA 3/1–11; Rebillard 1999; Hombert 2000; Gryson 2007, 231–269; Dolbeau 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 352A (= Dolbeau 14).3; Dolbeau, ed., 108: *Nemo me, ut opinor, audit in hac multitudine, qui in euangelium nondum credit*. For the English translation of Augustine's sermons, see Hill, trans., WSA 3/1–11.

us? First let me become one of the faithful, and perhaps I shall live a good life, and I won't have to be a penitent".<sup>6</sup> Thus, quoting Acts 2:37–38 as proof text of the way of repentance ('Repent, and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ'), he encourages the audience to respond to the gospel's call for repentance: 'I'll say to both sorts [*scil.* some of the faithful and catechumens], "Change your way of life, in case you lose your life. Condemn past sins, fear the evil things that are going to come, hope for the good things".<sup>7</sup> In his moral preaching, Augustine includes both the catechumeni and *neglegentes fideles* with his treatment of all Christians.<sup>8</sup>

His emphasis on a common identity in his congregation is also taken from *Sermon* 301A (= Denis 17), probably preached in 401<sup>9</sup> in Bulla Regia (an inland town in Numidia about 130 miles west of Carthage).<sup>10</sup> Augustine perhaps stopped there on his journey back from Carthage.<sup>11</sup> As he reminds his audience in the sermon, Bulla Regia is a small town and entirely different from the great city of Carthage where Christians can excuse themselves for participating in certain evil deeds. But, as he sees it, Christians of Bulla Regia are quite sensitive about their municipal status comparing it with those of other North African cities, in particular of Carthage. Augustine is able easily to bear in his mind the possible objection: 'perhaps you will say, "We are like Carthage". Just as there is a holy and religious community in Carthage, so also there is such a vast population in a great metropolis, that they all use others to excuse themselves by. In Carthage, you can say, "The pagans do it, the Jews do it"; here, whoever is doing it, Christians are doing it'.<sup>12</sup> Bulla Regia was not Christianised to such

<sup>6</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 352A (= Dolbeau 14).4; Dolbeau, ed., 109: *Catechumenus respondet mihi: 'Quare nobis dicitis: paenitemini? Prius sim fidelis, et forte bene uiuam, et paenitens non ero'.*

<sup>7</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 352A (= Dolbeau 14).5; Dolbeau, ed., 110: *Iam ergo ad utrosque: Mutate uitam, ne perdati uitam. Praeterita peccata dammate, futura mala metuite et bona sperate.*

<sup>8</sup> For the fact that the audience included people from various kinds and types of North African society, see e.g. Harmless 2015, 188–189. Another point to note is that, from the statistical analysis of the addressees of his sermons and letters, Augustine did not make catechumens the prime target of his preaching: Harmless 2015, 227–229 and 229–232 for Chart 4, 'Sermons (and Letters) Addressed to Catechumens'.

<sup>9</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 301A (= Denis 17): Gryson: 1 Aug. 399, Hill: 399, Kunzelmann: 1 Aug. before 400, Perler: 1 Aug. 399, Rebillard: 1 Aug. before 400. For the dating of *Serm.* 301A, see also Rebillard 2015a, 298 n. 2.

<sup>10</sup> For Bulla Regia (Hammam Daradji, in Tunisia), see Lepelley 1979, 377–378; Lepelley 1981, 87. See also Lancel 1992.

<sup>11</sup> Perler and Maier 1969, 227 and n. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 301A (= Denis 17).7: MA I, 88: *forte dicitis: Nos Carthagini similes sumus. Quomodo apud Carthaginem est plebs sancta et religiosa, sic tanta turba est in magna ciuitate, ut se excusent omnes de aliis.*

a high degree as the neighbouring town of Simittu;<sup>13</sup> at the request of the local bishop, Augustine engaged with the problem of people's active involvement in civic festivities. It is interesting to mention that, in his critique of their enthusiastic commitment to theatre performances,<sup>14</sup> Augustine refers to the false division between clergy and laity. He claims that Christians should not encourage behaviour that was thought to be acceptable and appropriate for lay people as well as for the clergy.

And this is done by Christians; I'd rather not say, and by the faithful. A catechumen, perhaps, has a low opinion of his worth. 'I'm just a catechumen,' he says. You're a catechumen? 'Yes, a catechumen.' Do you have one forehead on which you received the sign of Christ, and another which you carry along to the theater? Do you want to go? Change your forehead, and get along there. So, as you can't change your forehead, don't ruin it.<sup>15</sup>

Augustine's insistence on the inclusion of both catechumens and the faithful into the same membership is clearly advocated: 'I'm exhorting you all, addressing you all; you will see how much more honorable you will be in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>16</sup>

#### Relation to social obligations

Despite his confident assertion of a common identity in the faith community, some Christians would apply principles of action optionally and selectively, thus making the arbitrary choice of affiliation. In *Sermon 62*, preached around 399 to the Christians of Carthage,<sup>17</sup> he responded to objections over less devout Christians taking part in a local feast for the tutelary genius of Carthage. Many citizens of Carthage defended the view that festivals were important to maintain

*Pagani faciunt, Iudaei faciunt, potest dici Carthagine; hic, quicumque faciunt, Christiani faciunt.*

<sup>13</sup> See Rebillard 2015a, 299 and n. 24. For the christianisation of Bulla Regia, see also Oort 2009, 261.

<sup>14</sup> On the aspect of pagan spectacles and theatrical performances, see Lim 2012, 146–147.

<sup>15</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 301A (= Denis 17).8; MA 1, 88–89: *Et hoc a Christianis fit; nolo dicere: et a fidelibus. Catechumenus forte contemnit se. Catechumenus, inquit, sum. Catechumenus es? Catechumenus. Alia frons tua accepit Christi signum, et aliam tollis ad theatrum? Ire vis? Muta frontem, et vade. Ergo frontem, quam non potes mutare, noli perdere.*

<sup>16</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 301A (= Denis 17).8; MA 1, 89: *Omnes exhortor, omnes alloquor: videbitis quam honestiores eritis in nomine domini nostri Iesu Christi.*

<sup>17</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 62: Gryson: 403/404, Hill: 399 or 407/8, Kunzelmann: no later than 399, Perler: 399, Rebillard: 399. For the chronological range of *Serm.* 62, see Rebillard 2009b, 317 n. 80. See also Dossey 2010, 287 n. 83; Coninck, Coppieters't Wallant, and Demeulenaere 2009, 61 and n. 58.

the social fabric of the city. But fanatical Christians opposed their participation and conflicts arose. Augustine had to take a stand on the issue.<sup>18</sup> In this sermon, he discussed so with an exposition of 1 Corinthians 8:10–12, about idol meat. He takes his cue from the Pauline passage, thereby criticising the Christians who attend banquets at pagan temples. The Christian defenders of the festival claim that they are able to attend pagan rituals without undermining their faith. Augustine examines the argumentation against which Paul was contending in 1 Corinthians, where the moral issue of sacrificial eating was to be settled: the 'strong' who comprise the integrity of their consciences are not troubled a whit by eating food offered to idols; the 'weak' who can not resolve the issue will be led astray.

Do you ever wonder how people may be led astray by images, which they imagine are being honored by Christians? 'God knows my mind,' he says. But your brother doesn't know your mind. If you are weak yourself, beware of catching a worse illness still; if you are strong, be careful of your brother's weakness.<sup>19</sup>

Along with his dismissal of the possibility that some Christians could behave as the 'strong' in the community, Augustine enjoins them not to make a display of the strength of their faith. He uses this argument to turn their attention to the internal attitudes of their fellow Christians. Because of the indignation among more enthusiastic Christians, he emphasises the necessity that Christians should achieve and maintain the internal unity of their community.

In the latter part of the sermon, Augustine relates a fictitious dialogue with a member of his congregation. Some Christians might attempt to find plausible excuses for their attending sacrificial banquets. For example, one might try to justify his involvement as being required to fulfil the social obligations of the relationship between patron and client: "But I'm afraid," you will say, "lest I offend a superior".<sup>20</sup> Since Augustine views the sacrificial banquet as a religious occasion,<sup>21</sup> he maintains that there is no legitimate excuse for Christian's participation. His message has two points of interest. On the one hand, after defining

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion of Christians' participation in banquets in *Serm.* 62, see Rebillard 2009b, 313–317. See further Riggs 2001; Rebillard 2010, 174–176; and Kahlos 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 62.4.7; CCSL 41Aa, 302: *Quomodo putatis decipi posse simulacris homines, quae a christianis honorari putant? 'Nouit', inquit, 'Deus cor meum.' Sed frater tuus non nouit cor tuum! Si infirmus es, caue maiorem aegritudinem; si firmus es, cura fratris infirmitatem.*

<sup>20</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 62.5.8; CCSL 41Aa, 302: *'Sed timeo', inquit, 'ne offendam maiorem.'* Slightly adapted from Hill's translation.

<sup>21</sup> For the difference of view between Augustine and his congregation, see Rebillard 2015a, 297–298.

the invitation from patrons as a trial of idol worship,<sup>22</sup> he once again attempts to draw the congregation's attention to another aspect: without disregarding the pagan authorities in the social sphere, he stresses the need for a higher authority in Christians' devotional lives.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, Augustine argues that their refusing such an offer from a 'superior' does not cause serious harm to their lives.<sup>24</sup> He compares the patron with the persecutor of pagan times: 'The martyrs endured the butchery of their limbs, and are Christians going to dread the wrongs of a Christian age? The one who does you wrong now doest it timidly'.<sup>25</sup> Such a comparison leads to the implication that Augustine has reached the limit of what he would do for the congregation. As the superior is generously inviting them to attend a feast, whether public or private, those involved in the patronage relationship do not truly face the difficult situation of choosing between two conflicting options. They express less concern about the religious principle of their behaviour than should be expected. Thus, while putting emphasis on the consistency of their Christian identity from the internal viewpoint, Augustine recognises the vitality of the pagan cult in society. Due to the current demands of their lives, some Christians prefer to fulfil their civic obligations as the occasion requires.

### Christians on their deathbeds

Another indication of Augustine's concern for the identity of Christians is based on the fact that their mode of behaviour was fostered and maintained through the various environments in North African society.<sup>26</sup> In particular, in the situations that Augustine described in his sermons, the influence of the smaller, more immediate social networks was significant for the determination of the mode of action.<sup>27</sup> Regardless of their religious affiliation, people were more concerned about the intersection of family, friends and neighbourhood. Their primary attention appeared to be confined to these direct relationships in their community. Augustine's encounters with them, therefore, prompted him to consider

<sup>22</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 62.12; CCSL 41Aa, 307.

<sup>23</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 62.13; CCSL 41Aa, 308.

<sup>24</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 62.14; CCSL 41Aa, 309.

<sup>25</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 62.10.15; CCSL 41Aa, 310: *Laniatus membrorum martyres pertulerunt, et timent christiani iniurias temporum christianorum! Qui tibi facit iniuriam, modo timens facit.*

<sup>26</sup> For the comprehensive survey of North African Christianity and its various environments, see e.g. Lepelley 1979 and 1981; Decret 1996; Dossey 2010; Jones 2014; Burns and Jensen 2014.

<sup>27</sup> For the direct and indirect influence on the mode of behaviour and thought, see n. 1. See also Rambo 1993; Rambo 2012; and Kim 2012.

how Christians should associate their identities as Christians with their practices and principles of behaviour. It is interesting to note that, when he reminded the congregation of the importance of allowing Christian identity to flow from practices, he referred to a Christian on his deathbed who had refused to be cured by charms and magical remedies for illness.<sup>28</sup>

In *Sermon* 286, preached on the birthday of Protasius and Gervasius in 428 at a *memoriae* dedicated to these two Milanese martyrs near Hippo Regius,<sup>29</sup> Augustine related a story to the congregation.<sup>30</sup>

A believer is lying in bed, wracked with pain [...] along comes trial and temptation by tongue; either some female, or a man [...] approaches the sickbed, and says to the sick man, 'Tie on that amulet, and you will get better; let them apply that charm, and you will get better. So-and-so, and So-and-so and So-and-so; ask, they all got better by using it.' He doesn't yield, he doesn't agree, he doesn't give his consent; he has to struggle, all the same.<sup>31</sup>

Since Augustine delivered many of his sermons, this one included, on the feast days of martyrs, he used the martyr theme in his sermons.<sup>32</sup> One of the key features of his message is that a celebration of martyrs can be realised through the internal imitation of their virtuous acts. He encourages the congregation to follow the martyrs as exemplary figures in their sufferings. He also confirms that there is no persecution in the current time of peace.<sup>33</sup> Thus, in this sermon, the focus of his reflection is not on a physical threat from their persecutors but rather

<sup>28</sup> See Eno 1989, 62–63; Rebillard 2012a, 74–75.

<sup>29</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 286: Gryson: 19 June, not before 425, Hill: 428, Kunzelmann: 19 June, 425 at the earliest, Perler: 19 June, 426/430, Rebillard: 19 June after 425. For the dating and place, see also WSA 3/8, 105 n. 1.

<sup>30</sup> For Augustine's story of those who resisted superstitious remedies at their deathbed, see also *Serm.* 4.36: CCL 41, 47–48; *Serm.* 306E (= Dolbeau 18).7–8: Dolbeau 2009, 215–216; *Serm.* 318.3: PL 38, 1439–1440; *Serm.* 328 (= Lambot 13).8: RB 51, 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Serm.* 286.7; PL 38, 1300–1301: *Iacet fidelis in lecto, torquetur doloribus, [...] uenit linguae tentatio, accedit ad lectum aut muliercula aliqua, aut uir, [...] et dicit aegroto, fac illam ligaturam, et sanus eris: adhibeatur illa praecantatio, et sanus eris. Ille et ille et ille, interroga, sani inde facti sunt. Non cedit, non obtemperat, non cor inclinatur, certat tamen.* For Augustine's criticism of the superstitious practices and ligatura, see further *Doctr. chr.* 2.20.30; *En. Ps.* 33 s. 2.18; *En. Ps.* 50.8; *En. Ps.* 93.20; *En. Ps.* 70 s. 1.17; *En. Ps.* 136.21; *Ep.* 254.2; *Io. eu. tr.* 7.12; *Serm.* 260D (= Guelf. 18).2; *Serm.* 318.3; *Serm.* 328 (= Lambot 13).8. See Meer 1955, 108–114; Markus 1996, for the limited meaning of the conventional superstitions; and Klingshirn 2005, 130–134.

<sup>32</sup> For Augustine's view of the martyrdom and its theological aspect, see Lambot 1949; Lapointe 1972; Den Boeff 1989; Dupont 2006; and Dupont 2014, 137–159.

<sup>33</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 306B (= Denis 18).6: MA 1, 96: *et certe tempus est pacis; Serm.* 305A (= Denis 13).2: MA 1, 56: *uerumtamen, quamuis alio sit tempore pax, alio persecutio, deest alicui tempori occulta?*

on the internal aspects of Christians' suffering, death and divine promise—that is, eternal life. With the mention of martyrs' fight against sin and allurements, Augustine describes the narrative of a Christian on his sickbed: 'He has no strength, and he conquers the devil. He becomes a martyr on his sickbed, and he is crowned by the one who hang for him on the tree'.<sup>34</sup> Those surrounding the dying man may have been pagans; Augustine compares his visitors with the devil against whose hidden and powerful forces he had to struggle inwardly. But he does not explain anything further about their religious affiliation. It is very likely that the dying man was surrounded by a group of people whose mode of action was principally based on their local and traditional rituals.

In *Sermon* 335D (= Lambot 6), preached in Hippo Regius in or after 424 or 425, perhaps at a suburban parish,<sup>35</sup> Augustine exhorted his congregation on a possible way of sharing the benefit of martyrdom. Here too, an appeal to the imitation of martyrs is linked with a vivid illustration of the situation in which a critically ill patient lies on his sickbed and people gather around him. Seeing that his health is deteriorating, they seek the help of diviners and astrologers. People suggested hanging charms around his neck.

But the one who says, 'I won't do it'—when a friend suggests it, a neighbor mutters something about it, or a neighbor's maid, sometimes even his own old nurse—who says, 'I won't do it; I'm a Christian. God prohibits this sort of thing. These are the sacraments of demons. Listen to the apostle: I do not wish you to become the associates of demons (1 Cor 10:20)'—well, he gets this answer from the one who is suggesting it: 'Do it, and you'll get well. So-and-so and such-and-such did it. What? Aren't they Christians? Aren't they believers? Don't they hurry off to church? And yet they did it and got well.'<sup>36</sup>

In the final part of the sermon, Augustine relates the behaviour of the old nurse again: 'a neighbor at your bedside, and a friend and a maid, even perhaps, as I said, your old nurse, bringing wax and an egg in her hand and saying, "Do this and get better. Why prolong your illness? Tie on this amulet. I heard someone

<sup>34</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 286.7; PL 38, 1301: *Vires non habet, et diabolum uincit. Fit martyr in lecto, coronante illo qui pro illo pendit in ligno.*

<sup>35</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 335D (= Lambot 6): Gryson: feast of martyrs, Hill: in or after 424 or 425?, Verbraken: feast of martyrs.

<sup>36</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 335D (= Lambot 6).3; PLS 2, 778: *qui autem dicit: non facio—suggerente amico, et mussitante uicino aut uicina ancilla, aliquando et dematricula ei <us>—qui dicit: non facio: christianus sum; deus prohibet hoc; sacramenta sunt daemonum; audi apostolum: nolo uos socios fieri daemoniorum, respondetur illi ab illo qui suggerit: fac et sanus eris; ille et ille fecerunt. quid? non christiani? non sunt fideles? non ad ecclesiam currunt? et tamen fecerunt et sani sunt.*



invoke the name of God and the angels over it and you will get better”<sup>37</sup>. It is not explicitly stated that she was not a Christian. Perhaps she already knew that some Christians refused to tie an amulet on their bodies. All the same, there was a situation in which the Christian identity could not serve as a guiding principle of behaviour in the community.

### SPIRITUAL TRAINING

Augustine gives a clear picture of his experiences with Christians whose religious identity resulted in no conflict with their social and communal obligations: they ‘activate different allegiances, depending on the different contexts of interaction.’<sup>38</sup> While there were clear examples of the maintenance of social networks, apart from Augustine’s continued concern about how to integrate Christian conduct into one’s life, consciousness of the tension between religious and secular activities seemed to be of little interest in the faith community. As a bishop who confronted the vicissitudes of his congregation, therefore, Augustine was eager to provide them with means to associate their identity as Christians with their unique principles of action. But how did he encourage them to consider the significance and necessity of spiritual training?

#### The ascetic aspect

The *Indiculum* of Possidius enumerates five sermons delivered by Augustine as those under the subheading ‘Tractatus aduersus memoratos’ within the group entitled ‘Contra Manicheos’.<sup>39</sup> Two of these homilies have not been discovered and identified by scholars; while the other three are *Sermons* 1, 50, and 12.<sup>40</sup> In the second anti-Manichaean sermon on Possidius’ list, *Sermon* 50, dating from around 394 or 395,<sup>41</sup> Augustine expounds upon a passage from Haggai 2:9: ‘Mine is the gold and mine is the silver.’ Although the location of this sermon cannot be determined, Augustine begins by criticising Manichaean exegesis for

<sup>37</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 335D (= Lambot 6).5; PLS 2, 780: *adstat uicinus et amicus et ancilla, etiam dixi, forte dematricula, ceram uel ouum manibus ferens et dicit: fac hoc et saluus eris. quid prologas tuam aegritudinem? fac hanc ligaturam. ego audiui qui nomen dei et angelorum ibi inuocat et eris sanus.*

<sup>38</sup> Rebillard 2012b, 52.

<sup>39</sup> Possidius, *Indiculum*; Wilmart 1931, 167.

<sup>40</sup> BeDuhn 2013 (*Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion*), 456 n. 7. For the relationship between *Serm.* 50 and *C. Adim.*, see De Veer 1969; Baker-Brian 2009, 211–218.

<sup>41</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 50: Gryson: 394/395; Hill: before 396; Kunzelmann: 394–395; Rebillard: 394–95. For the dating of *Serm.* 50, see also Drobner 2013, 500–502.

simply comparing the outwardly contradicting verses. While he points to the mammon of iniquity in Luke 16:9 as driving the avarice, Manichaeans regard it as the seemingly earthly property in Haggai 2:9. But Augustine's reply to their criticism against the prophet indicates another way of finding the value of having worldly possessions.

*Mine*, he says, *is the gold and mine is the silver*, not yours, you wealthy ones of the earth. [...] As the divine justice distributes its property, good deeds are thereby publicized and sins are thereby punished. Gold and silver, you see, and every kind of earthly possession are both a means of exercising humanity [*humanitas*] and of punishing greed. When God bestows things on good people, he shows by their example how many things are thought lightly of by the mind whose real wealth is the one who bestowed them.<sup>42</sup>

According to Augustine, possessions were bestowed by God upon people who loved God more than mammon. Augustine's solution emphasizes the possibility that all humans (*humanitas*) would be exercised by sharing their 'earthly' property without imposing severe constraints on themselves. He does not compel his congregation to totally renounce all possessions. It is not their real possessions that he directs close attention to but the inward disposition of their souls.<sup>43</sup> In the face of the Manichaeans' argument for the extreme and probably impossible way of asceticism,<sup>44</sup> he focuses on the necessity of spiritual exercises (*exercitatio humanitatis*) to purge the 'humanitas' of the daily sins. In this regard, his exhortation was addressed to the whole of his congregation, not only, for example, to the wealthy, the educated or the catechumens. Notwithstanding the wide diversity of their backgrounds, he did not intend to divide them into smaller subgroups. This can be explained on the basis of the pastoral intention of his preaching.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to the theoretical and speculative writings, it is clearly admitted that, in his sermons, Augustine underlined the unity of the congregation and an awareness of common membership. Exhortation to the spiritual discipline could be expected to reinforce the solidarity of the group of audience.

<sup>42</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 50.2–3; CCL 41, 625–626: *Meum est, inquit, aurum, et meum est argentum, non uestrum, o diuites terrae. [...] Rem suam diuina distribuente iustitia, et recte facta inde manifestantur, et peccata inde puniuntur. Namque aurum et argentum atque omnis terrena possessio et exercitatio humanitatis est et supplicium cupiditatis. Cum talia deus nobis hominibus tribuit, ostendit in eis quanta contempnat animus, cuius diuitiae sunt ipse qui tribuit.*

<sup>43</sup> Allen and Morgan 2009, 146 (total renunciation) and 132–133 (inner disposition).

<sup>44</sup> For the difference between Manichaean asceticism and Augustine's monasticism, see BeDuhn 2013, 73–87.

<sup>45</sup> For the pastoral intention of Augustine's sermons, see Müller 2012, 308; A. Dupont 2012, 161–162 for the pastoral intention in his anti-Donatist sermons.

In *Sermon* 70, dating from between 394/395 and 400,<sup>46</sup> preached at Carthage, Augustine expounded Matthew 11:28–30, thereby following *Sermon* 69, which dealt with the same passage.<sup>47</sup> In this short sermon, after revealing profound insights into the Apostle's terrible and terrifying experiences in 2 Corinthians (6:4; 11:24–25), Augustine shows the audience the manifold work of the Holy Spirit that the Apostle had with him: 'That just shows you how comfortable was the yoke of Christ he [*scil.* Apostle] bore, and how light the load'.<sup>48</sup> Then, he stirs up his congregations' minds by showing them the burdensome requirements imposed by their daily lives: the laborious works of the soldier, merchant and hunter. It is noteworthy, however, that here, Augustine adds another example of the burden that would not be grouped into the same category.

To what torments of almost daily bearings are the tender years of children subjected! Again, how they are kept at work in schools, and harried with long hours and short rations—not to learn wisdom but to learn the use of numbers and letters and clever tricks of argument for the sake of accumulating empty riches and honors!<sup>49</sup>

This serves to remind us of not the harsh realities of his assembly but of the educational experiences during Augustine's schooldays.<sup>50</sup> Although he may be critical both of its object as well as of the strenuous form of these exercises, the fact that, at this stage, he abruptly brings up the pedagogical aspect of these exercises does not invalidate the exercises' usefulness. However, he discusses the topic no further in this sermon.

*Sermon* 9, preached perhaps around 420 in Chusa,<sup>51</sup> provides an interpretation of the Decalogue by reference to the ten strings of the harp of a psalter, as *Sermon* 8 does with the ten plagues of Egypt.<sup>52</sup> Augustine draws more extensively on the

<sup>46</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 70: Gryson: 395/400, Hill: 398, Perler: 2 Feb. 413, Rebillard: 2 Feb. 413. For the dating of *Serm.* 70, see Perler and Maier 1969, 312 and n. 4; Coninck, Coppieters't Wallant, and Demeulenaere 2009, 66 and n. 83.

<sup>47</sup> For the rhetorical strategies expressed in these sermons, see Bisson 2000, 64–155.

<sup>48</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 70.2; CCSL 41Aa, 472: *Ecce quam suave iugum Christi portabat et quam leuem sarcinam.*

<sup>49</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 70.2; CCSL 41Aa, 473: *Quantis cruciatibus prope cotidianarum plagarum tenera puerorum aetas subditur? Quantis etiam grandiusculi uigiliarum et abstinentiae molestiis exercentur, non propter discendam sapientiam sed propter opes honoresque uanitatis, ut numeros et litteras et disertas fallacias eloqui discant?*

<sup>50</sup> For his similar reminiscences of rhetorical exercises in his youth, see *Ep.* 2\*, one of the Divjak letters, addressed to Firmus. See also Braun 1987.

<sup>51</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 9: Gryson: Winter 403/404, Hill: 420. For the dating and place of *Serm.* 9, see also Lambot 1969; Perler and Maier 1969, 409; and Drobner 2003, 155–156.

<sup>52</sup> See Raveaux 1982; Geerlings 2011. For the numerological interpretation in Augustine's works, see Comeau 1930, 127–142, esp. 135 (number ten); Bonner 1970, 559–560.

fifth and ninth commandments and proceeds to the numerical treatment of the number ten and the ten strings of the psalter: ‘O God, I will sing you a new song, on a harp of ten strings I will play to you’.<sup>53</sup> He makes exposition of the Decalogue in the followings: ‘So the decalogue relates to two commandments, that is, to love of God and neighbor. Three strings relate to the first, because God is three. But to the other commandment, that is, the love of neighbor, seven strings refer, how people should live together’.<sup>54</sup> Then, he turns his attention to a passage from Matthew 5:25: ‘Come to an agreement with your adversary quickly’, and to the means of coming to an agreement with the *adversarius*, that is, *sermo dei*.

But in order to that agreement, keep yourselves from detestable and corrupting practices, [...] If any pleasure of the world creep into your thoughts, school yourselves in works of mercy, school yourselves in almsgiving, in fasting, in prayer. These are the means of purging ourselves of the daily sins which we cannot help creeping into our thoughts because of our human weakness.<sup>55</sup>

It is therefore inevitable that, contrary to the devaluation of the divine commandment, Augustine’s interpretation of it affects his view of caring for others and ascetic exercises. He indicates the way of purifying the soul, thereby urging his congregations towards almsgiving accompanied by obligations such as fasting and prayer.<sup>56</sup> Here, too, he attempts to establish the correlation between spiritual training and the solidarity of his congregation.

Despite objections from Christians whose arrangement and alignment of the religious and secular realm form the basis for their way of life, Augustine claims that there exists the necessity of changing one’s lifestyle. In *Sermon 335D* (= Lambot 6), in which he advocates the imitation of martyrs, after admiring the behaviour of an ill patient, Augustine compares those gathered at the deathbed of a Christian to ‘flesh and blood [...] raging against the holy martyrs’. He

<sup>53</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 9.6; CCSL 41, 117: *Deus canticum nouum cantabo tibi, in psalterio decem chordarum psallam tibi.*

<sup>54</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 9.7; CCSL 41, 120: *Ad duo itaque praecepta, id est, ad dilectionem dei et proximi pertinet decalogus. Ad primum praeceptum tres chordae pertinent, quia deus trinitas. Ad alterum uero praeceptum, id est, ad dilectionem proximi, septem chordae: quomodo uiuatur inter homines.*

<sup>55</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 9.17; CCSL 41, 141: *Vt autem concordetis, abstinete uos a detestabilibus corruptelis, a detestabilibus inquisitionibus, [...] Si quae delectationes saeculi subrepunt in anima, exercete uos in misericordia, exercete uos in elemosinis, in ieiuniis, in orationibus. His enim purgantur quotidiana peccata, quae non possunt nisi subrepere in anima, propter fragilitatem humanam.*

<sup>56</sup> For this tripartite model of the ascetic exercises, see Allen and Morgan 2009, 131–132 and n. 84; Drobner 2003, 217–218.

bases this assessment on his interpretation of a passage from Ephesians 6:12: 'Your conflict is not against flesh and blood'.<sup>57</sup> 'Flesh' and 'blood' represent mortal human beings who adhere to their way of life. Augustine urges them to integrate their principles into their actions.

Why is it, brother, that you are raging, why are you so churned up? It's against me, indeed, that you're raging, but yourself that you're losing. Oh, if only you would change your frame of mind! Oh, if only you would change your way of life! Because we are all going to die and rise again. I, indeed, place my hopes in God, for whose sake I am suffering these things.<sup>58</sup>

The same approach of advocating for the future is also found in *Sermon 352A* (= Dolbeau 14), where Augustine emphasises the common identity of his congregation, thereby enhancing the security of their future repose: 'Change your way of life, in case you lose your life. Condemn past sins, fear the evil things that are going to come, hope for the good things. The bad man should begin by not contradicting himself in hoping for good things, while not being good himself. You're hoping for the good; be hope what you hope for'.<sup>59</sup> His exhortation centres on the relationship between present disciplines and the replacement of sins and evil with divine repose in the future. He confirms that those who expect and believe in eternal repose should also consider how to attain it.

In *Sermon 360B* (= Dolbeau 25), preached probably in 404,<sup>60</sup> he referred to the attendance of pagans in his congregation. At the end of this sermon, after the dismissal of catechumens and pagans, the deacon performed the mass. It is noteworthy that he gives short exhortations in favour of 'leading good lives' (*bene uidento*)<sup>61</sup> both after the pagans leave and in the middle of his discourse. Augustine stresses the necessity for 'the eye of the mind and heart' (*oculus cordis*) to be inwardly purified.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 335D (= Lambot 6).3; PLS 2, 779: *non est uobis conluctatio aduersus carnem et sanguinem. caro enim et sanguis saeuiebat in martyribus sanctis.* See La Bonnardière 1965.

<sup>58</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 335D (= Lambot 6).3; PLS 2, 779: *quid est quod saeuis, frater, quid exagitaris? mihi quidem saeuis sed tibi peris. o si mutes mentem. o si mutes uitam! quia omnes morituri et resurrecturi sumus. ego quidem spem in deo habeo pro quo ista patior.*

<sup>59</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 352A (= Dolbeau 14).5; Dolbeau, ed., 110: *Mutate uitam, ne perdati uitam. Praeterita peccata dammate, futura mala metuite et bona sperate. Homo malus primo ipse sibi non contradicit ut bona speret, qui bonus non est. Bonum speras: esto quod speras.*

<sup>60</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 360B: Dolbeau: after 1 Jan. 404, Gryson: after the visit of Honorius, in Rome, early December 403, Hill: 404.

<sup>61</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 360B (= Dolbeau 25).28; Dolbeau, ed., 267.

<sup>62</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 360B (= Dolbeau 25).3; Dolbeau, ed., 249.

[M]en ought [...] to behave humbly before God, to entreat their creator, to confess their sins and groan over them, to tell their doctor of their sickness so that they may be inwardly cured, and have that inner eye cleansed, with which alone that light may be seen that never can be seen as long as a man's inner eye is still that of 'man'.<sup>63</sup>

Having 'that inner eye cleansed' is his expectation that the audience, not excluding pagans and catechumens, 'all live in a manner worthy of God'.<sup>64</sup> He insists that the treatment by the 'doctor', that is, Christ, enables them 'to be numbered among the sons of God'.<sup>65</sup> The crucial element in the message is that the care for souls is possible only in the case of 'Purifying their hearts by faith' (Acts 15:9),<sup>66</sup> and that, all the same, his audience begins by their efforts to lead good lives. With the hope of the future purification, they should give precedence to the active engagement and practices of the spiritual training.

### The exegetical aspect

In some sermons, Augustine described how Christians were providing rationales from scriptural passages in an attempt to legitimise their behaviour. For instance, in *Sermon* 361, probably preached in winter 410–411,<sup>67</sup> Augustine criticises the status quo: Christians have made advantageous use of the scriptural text in order to find support for attending the festival in honour of the dead, that is, the 'parentalia'.<sup>68</sup> They quote a passage from Tobit 4:17 as a proof text: 'Break your bread and pour out your wine on the tombs of the just, but do not hand it over to the unjust'.<sup>69</sup> After making an objection to their custom—'this doesn't benefit the dead, [...] it's a custom of the pagans, [...] it doesn't flow from the channel

<sup>63</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 360B (= Dolbeau 25).6; Dolbeau, ed., 251: *deberent homines [...] humiliari deo, supplicare creatori, confiteri, gemere in peccatis, adlegare medico aegritudinem, ut sanarentur intrinsecus et oculum illum mundarent, unde lux illa uideri potest, quae tamdiu non uidetur, quamdiu oculus interior hominis adhuc est hominis.*

<sup>64</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 360B (= Dolbeau 25).28; Dolbeau, ed., 267: *uos digni deo uixeritis.*

<sup>65</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 360B (= Dolbeau 25).15; Dolbeau, ed., 257: *ex homine fiat inter filios dei.*

<sup>66</sup> For the repetition of this passage in *Serm.* 360B and its relation to Augustine's focus on divine initiative to the purification of the soul, see Dupont 2013a, 155–156. See also n. 105.

<sup>67</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 361; Gryson: December 403, Hill: 411, Kunzelmann: Winter 410–411, Rebillard: winter 410–11.

<sup>68</sup> See also *Serm.* 172 and 173.1; Burns and Jensen 2014, 505–506. For the parentalia and its relationship with the church, see Rebillard 2009a, 142–153, esp. 151–152; Rebillard 2015b.

<sup>69</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 361.6; PL 39, 1602: *frange panem tuum, et effunde uinum tuum super sepulcra iustorum, et ne tradas eum iniustis.*

of justice derived from our fathers the patriarchs'<sup>70</sup> —Augustine takes a stand on the allegorical interpretation. He argues that the passage in question should be understood as the offering of mass for the dead. In contrast to his rejection of their attempts to justify their behaviour through the scriptures, his concern for the side effects and difficulty of scriptural interpretation is evident: 'So nobody should try to turn a remedy into a hurt, and attempt to twist a rope from the scriptures, and with it lob a deadly noose over his own soul. It's as plain as a pikestaff how that text should be understood, and this celebration of Christians is open and above board and entirely salutary'.<sup>71</sup>

It is noteworthy that he repeatedly spoke of the difficulty of interpreting the scriptures and the relationship of interpretation to the necessity of spiritual training. In *Sermon* 71, dating between 419 and 420,<sup>72</sup> he deals a passage from Matthew 12:32: 'Whoever speaks a word against the holy spirit will not be forgiven, neither in this age nor in the age to come'. In the sermon, Augustine mentions twice the strength of these exercises with regard to the difficulty of exploring the meaning of texts.

Obviously, what he [*scil.* God] wanted to do was to exercise our minds with a difficult problem not to deceive us with a false statement.<sup>73</sup>

Actually in the whole wide field of the holy scriptures we are nourished by the passages that are clear, exercised by those that are obscure; the first kind relieve us from hunger, the second save us from boredom.<sup>74</sup>

A similar reference to its effect is found in *Sermon* 363, which was probably preached in Hippo Regius around in 414 during the Easter Vigil.<sup>75</sup> At the very beginning of this short sermon, he once again shows the double consequences of exegesis: 'Our thoughts, [...] in reflecting on and discussing the holy scriptures

<sup>70</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 361.6; PL 39, 1601: *ad mortuos non pertinere, et consuetudinem hanc esse paganorum, non uenire de propagine illa et uena iustitiae patrum nostrorum patriarcharum.*

<sup>71</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 361.6; PL 39, 1602: *nemo ergo quaerat de medicina uulnus, et de scripturis conetur torquere unculum, unde laqueum mortis iniciat animae suae. manifestum est quemadmodum illud intellegatur, et aperta atque salubris est haec celebratio christianorum.*

<sup>72</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 71; Gryson: 419/420, Hill: 417–420, Hombert 419–420, Kunzelmann: 417, Rebillard: 417?, Verbraken: 417?

<sup>73</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 71.10; RB 75, 73: *exercere quippe nos uoluit difficultate quaestionis, non decipere sententiae falsitate.*

<sup>74</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 71.11; RB 75, 75: *in omni quippe copia scripturarum sanctorum pascimur apertis, exercemur obscuris; illic fames pellitur, hic fastidium.*

<sup>75</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 363; Gryson: 414, probably Easter Vigil, Hill: 414, Kunzelmann: 412–416, Rebillard: Easter vigil (?) 412–16.

must be guided the indisputable authority of the same scriptures, so that we may deal faithfully both with what is said clearly for the purpose of giving us spiritual nourishment, and what is said obscurely in order to give us spiritual exercise'.<sup>76</sup> In conjunction with the exegetical difficulty, Augustine draws a contrast between the literal and spiritual senses of the scriptures in some sermons.<sup>77</sup>

*Sermon* 4, probably preached between 410 and 419,<sup>78</sup> gives the congregation a long commentary on Esau and Jacob in Genesis 27:1–40, the significance of which Augustine explained at the end of the sermon.<sup>79</sup> At the beginning of the sermon, before entering into discussion of the issues, Augustine compares two contrasting methods for interpreting scriptural texts: 'Taken literally, of course, the reading sounds rather materialist. But any one who has received the Spirit of God will understand it spiritually'.<sup>80</sup> This distinction between '*carnaliter*' and '*spiritualiter*' is consistently referred to in his reading of the scriptures.<sup>81</sup> Here, Augustine defines the '*exercitatio animae*' as those that give adequate training to enable the minds of the exegetes to make sense of what they do not yet understand: 'The exercise of our minds in faith, hope and love makes them fit to grasp what is yet to come'.<sup>82</sup>

*Sermon* 23, preached at the Faustus Basilica in Carthage in January 413,<sup>83</sup> followed by *Sermon* 53, treats with the vision of God. With regard to the significance of the spiritual discipline, he starts with a passage from 2 Timothy 3:16: 'Every divinely inspired scripture is useful for teaching, for reproof, for exhortation, for doctrine'.<sup>84</sup> He claims that the interpreters have no grounds for blaming a scriptural text, 'if we happen to deviate in any way, because we

<sup>76</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 363.1; PL 39, 1634: *sensum nostrum, [...] in scripturis sanctis considerandis atque tractandis regere debet earundem scripturarum manifestissima auctoritas; ut ex eis quae aperte dicta sunt ad nutriendos nos, ea quae obscurius dicta sunt ad exercendos nos, fideliter disserantur.*

<sup>77</sup> For the secondary literature on Augustine's literal/spiritual interpretation, see e.g. Dulaey 1998; Cameron 1999; Bochet 2004; Cameron 2012, 3–19; Williams 2014.

<sup>78</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 4: Gryson: 22 Jan. 403, Hill: before 420, Kunzelmann: 22 Jan. 410–19, Rebillard: 22 Jan. 410–19. For the dating of *Serm.* 4, see also Drobner 2000, 93–95.

<sup>79</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 4.36; CCSL 41, 46. See Nauroy 2008.

<sup>80</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 4.1; CCSL 41, 20: *Et lectio quidem illa carnaliter sonat. Qui autem spiritum dei accipit spiritualiter sapit.*

<sup>81</sup> Drobner 2000, 79.

<sup>82</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 4.1; CCSL 41, 20: *Exercitatio autem animae in fide, in spe et caritate, facit eum idoneum capere quod uenturum est.*

<sup>83</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 23: Gryson: 20 Jan. 413, Hill: 413, Kunzelmann: 20 Jan. 413, Perler: 20 Jan. 413, Rebillard: 413 or just after 415, Verbraken: 413. See also Dupont 2013a, 238; Yates 2013, 188.

<sup>84</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 23.3; CCSL 41, 310: *Omnis Scriptura diuinitus inspirata utilis est ad docendum, ad arguendum, ad exhortationem, ad doctrinam.*



haven't understood it'.<sup>85</sup> He regards the 'mental exercises' as a preliminary means of interpreting spiritually a scriptural text that 'appears to speak in a crude, materialistic way in many places, though the law is always spiritual'.<sup>86</sup> Thus, he appeals to the scriptural evidence from Romans 7:14: '*For the law, as the apostle says, is spiritual, but I am carnal*'.<sup>87</sup> Because of the difficulties that he himself experiences in interpreting the scriptures, he evaluates the efficacy and necessity of the spiritual exercises.

Once again, in *Sermon* 32, preached at the shrine of Saint Cyprian in Carthage in 403,<sup>88</sup> Augustine spoke of the different kinds of the scriptural texts: one kind is difficult to interpret and contains hidden meanings, and the other can be understood more easily. He affirms his exhortation to training through scriptural exegesis: 'some things are hidden more thoroughly in the scriptures in order to stretch and test the students, while others are set there openly and ready to hand for the immediate treatment of the patients'.<sup>89</sup> Although Psalm 144 includes many hidden meanings, which will be treated hereafter in this sermon, Augustine encourages the congregation to overcome such difficulties. This is the same case as that shown in *Sermon* 4 and 23.

*Sermon* 140, preached around 427 or 428 on Christmas day,<sup>90</sup> shows us the general correlation between exercises of the mind and scriptural interpretation. This sermon explicates the words from the Gospel of John in which, at the end of the sermon, Augustine considers how the gospel 'puts our minds through their paces, planes them smooth and defleshes them, to make sure we think about God in a spiritual, not a fleshly, material kind of way'.<sup>91</sup> Here again, the spiritual interpretation is conflicted with that of the '*carnaliter*'.

Augustine explained spiritual training in some sermons from a perspective that did not directly correspond to the literal and spiritual understanding of the scriptures. In *Sermon* 80, preached probably in 410,<sup>92</sup> before approaching

<sup>85</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 23.3; CCSL 41, 310: *si nos forte, illa non intellecta, in aliquo deuiemus.*

<sup>86</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 23.3; CCSL 41, 310: *in multis locis uelut carnaliter loquitur, cum lex semper spiritalis sit.*

<sup>87</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 23.3; CCSL 41, 310: *Lex enim, ut ait apostolus, spiritalis est, ego autem carnalis sum.*

<sup>88</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 32; Gryson: 17 Sept. 403, Hill: 403, Kunzelmann: end of Sept. 403, Perler: 17 Sept. 403, Rebillard: 403.

<sup>89</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 32.1; CCSL 41, 398: *alia secretius in scripturis absconduntur ut quaerentes exerceant, alia uero in promptu et in manifestatione ponuntur ut desiderantes curent.*

<sup>90</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 140; Gryson: 427/428, Hill: 428, Kunzelmann: Christmas 427-428, Rebillard: 427-428. For Augustine's sermons delivered on December 25, see Dupont 2013b.

<sup>91</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 140.6; PL 38, 775: *exercet mentes [...] limat et excarnat, ut de deo non carnaliter, sed spiritaliter sapiamus.*

<sup>92</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 80; Gryson: near 410, Hill: 410, Kunzelmann: near 410, Rebillard: near 410.

passages from Matthew 17:18–20, Augustine alludes twice to Matthew 7:7: ‘Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock, and it will be opened’.<sup>93</sup> He expects his congregation to grasp as true what is spoken in the scriptures. He also expects them to be humble when they encounter difficult scriptural passages: ‘See how they were carrying their hears, so to say, to the wellhead, and knocking to get it opened up, so that they may fill them up there. He wants to make them knock at his door in order to exercise them in desiring, not to rebuff them in their knocking’.<sup>94</sup> Humble submission to the scriptures enables exegetes to be exercised through their commitment to scriptural interpretation. Also, in the concluding part of *Sermon* 71, he speaks of exercises for the pious and devotional exegetes, then assigns two different tasks to them: one is ‘to see what needed to be understood’ and the other is ‘to explain it if I did understand’.<sup>95</sup>

At the start of the *Sermon* 156, preached two days after *Sermon* 155 in 419,<sup>96</sup> Augustine is concerned with these exercises in general and refers to their effects. Once again, he alludes to the passage from Matthew 7:7 as mentioned above in *Sermon* 81.

The depths of meaning in the word of God are there to excite our eagerness to study, not to prevent us from understanding. If everything was locked up I riddles, there would be no clue to the opening up of obscure passages. Again, if everything was hidden, there would be nothing for the soul to derive nourishment from, and so gain the strength which would enable it to knock at the closed doors.<sup>97</sup>

### The comprehensive aspect

A comprehensive aspect of the spiritual training is confirmed in the framework of the spiritual life, which allows one to deepen the spiritual consciousness in the transformation of the self. With reference to his view of spiritual discipline, Augustine’s attitude to the growth of the soul’s awareness is determined by the

<sup>93</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 80.1; PL 38, 494 and 80.2; PL 38, 494. For the crucial function of Matth. 7:7 in Augustine’s search for the truth and God, see e.g. Knauer, 1957; Kienzler 1989; Ferrari 1994.

<sup>94</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 80.1; PL 38, 494: *uidete si non corda sua quasi ad fontem portabant, et ut eis unde impleant, aperiretur, pulsabant. pulsari ad se uoluit, non ut repelleret pulsantes, sed ut exerceret desiderantes.*

<sup>95</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 71.38; RB 75, 108: *uel intelligenda conspicerere, uel intellecta explicare.*

<sup>96</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 156: Hill: 419, Kunzelmann: 17 Oct. 418, Perler: 17 Oct. 419, Rebillard: Oct. 417, Patroens/Lössl: 17 Oct. 417 or May 418. See Lössl 2008, 44–46.

<sup>97</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 156.1; CCSL 41Ba, 135: *Verbi dei altitudo exercet studium, non denegat intellectum. Si enim omnia clausa essent, nihil esset unde reuelarentur obscura. Rursus si omnia tecta essent, non esset unde alimentum perciperet anima et haberet uires quibus posset ad clausa pulsare.*

tradition of the ascending stages of the spiritual life.<sup>98</sup> It is interesting to note that, in its Christian context, closely linked with problems of pneumatology,<sup>99</sup> the imagery of growth in the spiritual life encourages reflection on the role of the Holy Spirit in the ascent of the soul to God through seven distinctive stages. In *Sermon* 347, chronologically uncertain,<sup>100</sup> from the interpretation of the passage from Psalm III:10, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom',<sup>101</sup> Augustine enters into the treatment of the sevenfold gradus of the maturing of the soul.

Gradus 1: fear of the Lord, humbled heart as sacrifice to God (Matth. 5:3)

Gradus 2: piety, belief in the authority of the scriptures (Matth. 5:4)

Gradus 3: knowledge, 'not only of the evil of their past sins, [...] but also of the evil condition of this mortality and this exile from the Lord',<sup>102</sup> leading to grief (Matth. 5:5)

Gradus 4: courage, hunger and thirst for justice (Matth. 5:6)

Gradus 5: counsel, in conflict with all adversaries, to exercise love of neighbour (Matth. 5:7)

Gradus 6: understanding, 'hearts are to be cleansed of all the false values of the carnal vanity, so that their purified gaze may be directed toward their true end'<sup>103</sup> (Matth. 5:8)

Gradus 7: wisdom, enjoyment of the triumph of security and peace: 'the stage from which he [*scil.* Isaiah] started to come down by way of teaching us'<sup>104</sup> (Matth. 5:9)

The scriptural evidence for the soul's return is provided by Isaiah 11:2–3, in which the prophet Isaiah, descending from his contemplation of God, enumerates the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and offers them the guidance of the ascent. It is

<sup>98</sup> For the tradition of the ascending pattern of the spiritual life, see *e.g.* Rahner 1967. For variants of the septenary ascent of soul in the corpus of Augustine, see *An. quant.* 33.70–76; *Conf.* 11.1.1; *Diu. qu.* 44; 53.1–2; 58; 64; *Doctr. chr.* 2.7.9–11; *En. Ps.* 11; 119; 150.1; *Gn. adu. Man.* 1.25.43; *Ord.* 2.18.47–48; *Serm. dom. m.* 1.3.10–4.12; *Vera rel.* 26.48–49; *Serm.* 8; 249; 347. For the secondary literature on this scheme, see Van Lierde 1994; Madec 1994; Kamimura 2005, 425–429; Pollmann 2005, 225–231; Bright 2006; Dobell 2009; Kenney 2013.

<sup>99</sup> See Bright 2006, 26. For the problem of Augustine's pneumatology in general, see Schumacher 1957; Ayres 2008b; Barnes 2008; Gerber 2012. See further Dupont 2013a, 90 n. 1/3 at 92.

<sup>100</sup> *Aug. Serm.* 347: Hill: about 420, Gryson: around 420?

<sup>101</sup> *Aug. Serm.* 347.2; PL 39, 1524: *initium sapientiae timor domini.*

<sup>102</sup> *Aug. Serm.* 347.3; PL 39, 1525: *non solum mala praeteritorum peccatorum suorum, [...] sed etiam in quo malo sint huius mortalitatis et peregrinationis a domino.*

<sup>103</sup> *Aug. Serm.* 347.3; PL 39, 1526: *ab omni falsitate carnalis uanitatis corda mundantur, ut pura intentio dirigatur in finem.* For the purification of hearts, see n. 69; Pollmann 2005, 226 n. 50.

<sup>104</sup> *Aug. Serm.* 347.3; PL 39, 1526: *unde coepit ipse ad nos docendo descendere.*

admitted that his treatment of the convergence of the beatitudes in Matthews and the gifts in Isaiah is the first one in the tradition of an ascending plan for the Christian way of life.<sup>105</sup> Augustine integrates the messianic viewpoint of the spiritual life with the moral progress of the individual, thereby confirming the necessity of the help of the Holy Spirit for the soul's ascent and placing the ascent in its eschatological dimension. Augustine asks the congregation, 'where do we have to climb to?'<sup>106</sup>

What can this place be, but the place of rest and peace? There, you see, is to be found that bright and never fading wisdom. So it was to exercise us in successive steps of doctrine that Isaiah came down from wisdom to fear, from the place, that is, of everlasting peace to the vale of time-bound tears; [...].<sup>107</sup>

This ascent is not made by the feet of the body but by the affections of the heart. In his meditations on the ascending steps towards God, Augustine presents a series of laborious tasks of penetrating spiritual realities as care and training for the soul, thus offering the possibility of the inner dynamic of transformation and renewal of the self with the help of the Holy Spirit. Humbled in the fear of God, the soul finally approaches its transformation and holds fast to the 'full and everlasting peace' (*pax plena atque perpetua*).<sup>108</sup> It must be understood that Augustine does not consider this transformation to be a 'cumulative enumeration' of the spiritual life, which is made explicit in the passage from Isaiah, but rather as 'a progressive sequence in which every step must follow the one before'.<sup>109</sup> It is the spiritual progress of every individual that is crucial, while the messianic viewpoint in Isaiah stresses change in the social order. Augustine's emphasis is on the decisive effects of divine initiative on the spiritual discipline of the soul.

## CONCLUSION

One would naturally expect Augustine's view of the spiritual training, with a convergence towards spiritual progress transformed by the role of the Holy

<sup>105</sup> For the possibility of Augustine's indebtedness to Gregory of Nyssa's interpretation of the beatitudes, see Pollmann 2005, 227 n. 54; Kamimura 2015, 240–242.

<sup>106</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 347.2; PL 39, 1525: *et quo ascendum est?*

<sup>107</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 347.2; PL 39, 1525: *quis iste est locus, nisi quietis et pacis? ibi enim est illa clara, et quae nunquam marcescit sapientia. unde ad nos exercitandos quibusdam doctrinae gradibus descendit isaias a sapientia usque ad timorem, a loco scilicet sempiternae pacis usque ad conuallem temporalis plorationis.*

<sup>108</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 347.3; PL 39, 1526.

<sup>109</sup> Pollmann 2005, 228.

Spirit, to be characterised by his pastoral experience and the increasing consciousness of the vicissitudes of the faith community. With regard to the chronological development in his sermons, it is difficult to discern a difference between the earlier and later ones on the basis of content-related evidence. Though the explanation given for spiritual training is not a major focus of his preaching, this does not necessarily mean that the consistent exhortation has only limited significance for the congregation. In particular, while some Christians were skilled at formulating a rationale from the scriptures to justify their behaviour, Augustine directs their attention to the effect and interaction of exegesis and the exegete, thus confirming the validity of the mental exercises as enabling one to gain insight into the basis for the spiritual life and activities. This spiritual life and these disciplines result in the ethically unified principle of behaviour: love of God and neighbour. In fact, however, there were Christians whose religious identity was not in serious conflict with their social contact and network density. It looks as if they switched to different kinds of identity depending on their circumstances. Being confronted with the selection of multiple possible identities, Augustine could not afford to view the status quo as unalterable. It is noteworthy that, despite his central claim that the Christian identity should be the basis for the Christian's way of life, it could not respond to the social realities in North African Christian community. Thus, when one attempts to read his sermons as a discourse replying to the current situation and reinforcing the unity and solidarity of the congregation, his teaching of spiritual discipline may be considered a renewed impetus for spiritual progress with an initiative in divine grace. In addition to the role of the Holy Spirit in the ascending return to God, spiritual training for every individual soul was expected to serve, with no alternatives, as the essence of the Christian way of life.