

The Consultation of Sacred Books and the Mediator: The *Sortes* in Augustine

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ABSTRACT

In the *Confessions*, after telling the audience about his internal struggle with desires, Augustine relates the famous *tolle lege* incident in a garden in Milan where Augustine happened to read a codex of Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*. With regard to the act of consulting a sacred book, Augustine appears to follow a venerable tradition in late antiquity, in which these words *tolle lege* chanted by children indicate a procedure of the oracle. Augustine also recorded the conversation he had with a knowledgeable physician, Vindicianus, earlier in the *Confessions* (4.3.5-6) where they discussed how astrological predictions often turned out to be correct. Vindicianus pointed out the prediction drawn from the consultation of a book of poetry. Yet, remarkably, although he concluded that the true predictions by astrologers were produced not by skill but by chance (*'non arte sed sorte'*), Augustine's attitude was not simply negative. Not only in the *Confessions*, but in some works (e.g. *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 45.2: *Epistula* 55.37), he was concerned about a source of inspiration for the oratorical process that had played such a crucial role in his conversion. Why did Augustine think about this kind of oracle? How did he follow the custom in late antiquity? In this paper I shall argue the significance and impact of this phenomenon in the thought of Augustine.

Introduction

Throughout late antiquity, Christian writers provided evidence of the popularity of what they took to be pagan and superstitious cults in which members of their congregations asked the popular advocates to apply their skills to daily cases. Among the practices inherited from classical antiquity, there was a set of procedures designated as divination, consisting of an oracular prognostication about the future or the problem-solving by means of supernatural powers. This indispensable element of the predictions was traditionally practiced by interpreting the flight of birds, the sacrificial animals, the natural phenomena, stars and constellations, dreams and ecstasies, divine communication – angels and prophets – with human beings, and omens, as for example a chance saying at a decisive moment: other less familiar techniques, for instance, were aleuromancy, catoptromancy, chiromancy, coscinomancy, iatromancy, lecanomancy,

necromancy, rhabdomancy, or sphondylomancy.¹ The Christian thinkers displayed a hostile attitude to popular divinations, even when they were challenged by those who in certain cases pointed to the diviners' apparent success in making predictions.

Around the same time as the composition of his anti-Manichaean disputation *Answer to Adimantus*,² probably in 394, Augustine preached several discourses against the Manichaeans. In the earliest detailed list of Augustine's writings, Possidius enumerates five tractates in this sequence of sermons, of which three (s. 1, 12 and 50) are extant.³ The second of these discusses the Manichaean Adimantus' attack on the suggestion of the devil's seeing God on one occasion in a passage from the book of *Job* 1:6.⁴ Augustine condemns the Manichaean refusal to integrate this passage with the Matthaean saying that 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (*Matth.* 5:8).⁵ Thus, he begins by showing a thorough survey of the various types of divine communication with human beings:

There are many ways in which God speaks to us. Sometimes he speaks to us through some instrument, like a volume of the divine scriptures. Or he speaks through some elements of the world, as he spoke to the wise men through a star ... He speaks through lots, as he spoke about ordaining Matthias to take the place of Judas. He speaks through a human soul, like through a prophet. He speaks through an angel, as we gather he spoke to some of the patriarchs and prophets and apostles. He speaks through some created sound effect, as we read and believe about voices coming from heaven, through no one could be seen with the eyes. Finally, God speaks directly to a man, not outwardly through his ears or eyes but inwardly in the mind, and that in more than one

¹ For the various forms of divination in classical Greece and Rome, see the articles of Jan N. Bremmer, *Brill's New Pauly* 4 (2004), 569-74, s.v. 'Divination, Greek'; Dominique Briquel, *ibid.* 574-7, s.v. 'Divination, Rome'; Jan den Boeft, *AL* 2 (1996-2002), 517-9, s.v. 'Diuinitio'. See also the following comprehensive studies, Auguste Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1879-1882); *M. Tulli Ciceronis De divinatione*, ed. Arthur Stanley Pease, University of Illinois Studies in Languages and Literature 6 (1920; repr. Darmstadt, 1963).

² *Retr.* 1.22.1; CChr.SL 57, 63: 'Eodem tempore uenerunt in manus meas quaedam disputationes Adimanti, qui fuerat discipulus Manichaei...'. For the importance of this disputation, see also François Decret, *AL* 1 (1986-94), 90-4, s.v. 'Adimantum Manichei discipulum (Contra-)'; Nicholas Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire: A Study of Augustine's Contra Adimantum* (Lewiston, NY, 2009).

³ Possidius, *Indiculum operum Augustini* IV: Contra Manicheos, 29-33, ed. Andre Wilmart, in *Miscellanea Agostiniana*, ii: Studi Agostiniani (Roma, 1931), 149-233, 167. For the date of these sermons, see Pierre-Patrick Verbraken, *Études critiques sur les sermons authentiques de saint Augustin*, Instrumenta Patristica 12 (The Hague, 1976), 53, 55 and 65; Edmund Hill, trans., *Sermons I*, WSA III/1 (New York, 1990), 172¹ and 305¹.

⁴ *S.* 12.1; CChr.SL 41, 165: 'Ecce uenerunt angeli in conspectum dei, et diabolus in medio eorum. Et deus ait diabolo: Unde uenis? Qui respondens dixit: Circuiens totum orbem adueni.'

⁵ *S.* 12.1; CChr.SL 41, 165: 'Beati qui puro sunt corde, quia ipsi deum uidebunt'. English translations in this paper are taken from WSA, except that of *Confessions*, trans. in Philip Burton, *The Confessions*, Everyman's Library 128 (London, 2001).

way, either in dreams, ... or by snatching a man's spirit away, which the Greeks call *ekstasis*, ... or in the mind itself, when someone understands God's majesty or will.⁶

Such is the way Augustine showed deep concern with various types of divination immediately before his consecration as bishop in 395. In this particular list, he leaves out not only some types of divination, such as haruspicy and consultation of demons, but some figures of diviners, despite the fact that these appear in both earlier and later writings. In the first book of his earliest work, *Contra Academicos*, the 'ariolus' Albicerius is the subject of careful and prolonged deliberation (*C. Acad.* 1.8.23);⁷ while teaching from 376 to 383 in Carthage, Augustine resists the temptation from a *haruspex* who promises to guarantee his victory in a poetry contest (*conf.* 4.2.3); and diverse kinds of diviners are charged in the sermons. But, these types of divination and the diviners may have been omitted because he was in doubt as to whether these could provide reasonable means for channelling divine knowledge to humankind. Indeed, in the *Confessions* 4.2.3, he finds these rites of haruspices intolerable because they involve the killing of animals or consultation of demons.

It is interesting to note that, in the *Confessions*, after telling about his internal struggle against desires, Augustine relates the now famous *tolle lege* incident in a garden, where he opened a codex of Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* and read the first heading he lit upon (*conf.* 8.12.29). With regard to this act of consulting the Scriptures, Augustine appears to follow a venerable tradition from classical antiquity.⁸ Earlier in the *Confessions* (4.3.5-6), he also recorded a conversation with a knowledgeable physician, Vindicianus, who pointed out

⁶ S. 12.4; CChr.SL 41, 167-8: '*Multi autem modi sunt, quibus nobiscum loquitur deus. Loquitur aliquando per aliquod instrumentum, sicut per codicem divinarum Scripturarum. Loquitur per aliquod elementum mundi, sicut per stellam magis locutus est ... Loquitur per sortem, sicut de Mathia in locum Iudae ordinando, locutus est. Loquitur per animam humanam sicut per prophetam. Loquitur per angelum, sicut patriarcharum et prophetarum et apostolorum quibusdam locutum esse accipimus. Loquitur per aliquam vocalem sonantemque creaturam, sicut de caelo voces factas, cum oculis nullus videretur, legimus et tenemus. Ipsi denique homini, non extrinsecus per aures eius aut oculos, sed intus in animo non uno modo deus loquitur, sed aut in somnis ... aut spiritu hominis assumpto, quam graeci ecstasin vocant, ... aut in ipsa mente, cum quisque maiestatem vel voluntatem intellegit*'. For the significance of this sermon, see William E. Klingshirn, 'Divination and the Disciplines', in Karla Pollmann and Mark Vessey (eds), *Augustine and the Disciplines: from Cassiciacum to Confessions* (Oxford, 2005), 113-40, 114-6.

⁷ See William E. Klingshirn, 'The Figure of Albicerius the Diviner in Augustine's *Contra Academicos*', *SP* 38 (Leuven, 2001), 219-23, and esp. for the exceptional usage of this word *ariolus* (or *hariolus*) in *Acad.* 1.8.23, see 221 and nn. 4 and 5; Karin Schlapbach, *Augustin, Contra Academicos (vel De Academicis) Buch I*, *Patristische Texte und Studien* 58 (Berlin, 2003), 202.

⁸ Useful surveys of this tradition can be found in *Ciceronis De divinatione*, ed. A.S. Pease (1920), 72-4; Pieter W. van der Horst, 'Sortes: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity', in Leonard V. Rutgers *et al.* (eds), *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World* (Leuven, 1998), 143-74; William E. Klingshirn, 'Inventing the *sortilegus*: Lot Divination and Cultural Identity in Italy, Rome, and the Provinces', in Celia E. Schultz and Paul B. Harvey, Jr. (eds),

a prediction drawn from consultation of a book of poetry. In what follows I have confined myself to lot oracle drawn from inspired books, as Augustine was concerned with it not only in the *Confessions*, but in some other works as well. How did he follow this custom, and how did he explain the specific mode of divine communication? First, I shall focus on Augustine's positive attitude towards this oratorical process, and then I shall turn to his discussions against the process. Finally, I shall venture to explain the significance of this kind of divination in Augustine's thought.

Attitude towards lot oracle through sacred books

The first evidence to be considered is *Confessions* (397-401), in which Augustine refers to predictions made by lots drawn from inspired books. First, he discusses Vindicianus' critique of predictions made by astrologers (*conf.* 4.3.5), and second, he uses the method of consulting sacred books by lot during his conversion experience in the garden (8.12.29). In the former episode, responding to the young rhetorician's question about the high accuracy of predictions by the astrologers, the learned physician defines the chance (*sors*) as a power diffused throughout the whole order of things (4.3.5).⁹ Then, from observation that one often arrived at answers to important matters when consulting a passage from a text of poetry selected at random, Vindicianus concludes that remedies available to the enquirer 'miraculously' (*mirabiliter*) emerge from within the soul not by skill but by chance.

It was, he insisted, no miracle, if, as a result of some kind of higher instinct unconscious of what is happening within itself, the human spirit produces some kind of resonance which chimes in with the circumstances and activities of the enquirer; not as the result of any skill on his part, but of sortilege.¹⁰

In the latter incident, Augustine offers a clear picture of himself as being in keeping with the tradition of this kind of divination.¹¹ The repeated crying of

Religion in Republican Italy (Cambridge, 2006), 137-61; A. Hoffmann, 'Los', in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 23, Lieferung 180/181 (Stuttgart, 2009), 471-510.

⁹ *Conf.* 4.3.5; BA 13, 414: 'respondit ille, ... uim sortis hoc facere in rerum natura usquequaque diffusam.'

¹⁰ *Conf.* 4.3.5; BA 13, 416: 'mirandum non esse dicebat, si ex anima humana superiore aliquo instinctu nesciente, quid in se fieret, non arte, sed sorte sonaret aliquid, quod interrogantis rebus factisque concineret.' For the implications of this passage, see W.E. Klingshirn, 'Divination and the Disciplines' (2005), 136-40.

¹¹ See Bernard Bruning, 'De l'astrologie à la grâce', in *Collectanea Augustiniana: Mélanges T.J. Van Bavel* (Leuven, 1990), 575-643, 622-38; P.W. van der Horst, 'Sortes' (1998), 151-71; Kathrin Susan Ahlschweig, 'Tolle lege. Augustins Bekehrungserlebnis (*conf.* 8,12,29)', in Andreas Haltenhoff and Fritz-Heiner Mutschler (eds), *Hortus litterarum antiquarum. Festschrift für Hans Armin Gärtner zum 70* (Heidelberg, 2000), 19-30. For the much debated issue of the historicity

the children, *‘tolle lege, tolle lege’* that he interprets as ‘a God-sent command’ (8.12.29) to take up the Scriptures introduces the procedure of oracle consultation. The words *tollere* and *legere* have specific meanings in the use of divination: the former means the act of drawing a lot, while the latter is used to refer to the practice of reading the response written on the lot. A further evidence for his attention to the oracular process is given by another case of Anthony, in which he was immediately converted through hearing the Matthaean passage as *oraculum* (8.12.29). However, in the case both of Anthony and of Vindicianus, no chant acted as a stimulus to consult the scriptures: Vindicianus briefly introduced the chance consultation of a poet for mantic purposes; and Anthony heard a passage from the Gospel publicly read by the celebrant of the mass. What implication does this chant hold for him? Apart from such lexical continuity, Augustine’s initial reluctance to heed the admonitory voice is evident. He was reflective rather than simply reactive: ‘I began to ponder most intensely whether children were in the habit of singing a chant of this sort as part of a game of some kind’.¹² Indeed, since he thought that ‘there would be no one there to hinder my blazing indictment of myself’,¹³ he went off to the garden and willing to stand alone before God. Suddenly, he heard the voice from a nearby house beyond the garden wall. Augustine felt an irresistible urge to abandon the initiative to plunge into the innermost of his soul, then turned to the practice of oracular consultation, from which he read a passage from *Romans*.¹⁴ The crucial point is thus to assess the impact of an external source on him, far beyond his expectations, and with this realisation he comes another enthusiasm for the transformation totally into the new one. Augustine does place much more emphasis than one might expect on the relation between the voice and the orientation of his soul. Augustine points to the unusual and extra incentive for accepting transformation of his life, thereby indicating the presence of the mediating power.

It is noteworthy that, when discussing his final separation from astrology, Augustine reminds the reader of a conversation with Vindicianus and changes the pagan definition of lot (*‘sors’*) into a definition of divine grace.¹⁵ It is in

of Augustine’s description, although I shall put it aside in this article, see Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin*, nouv. éd. (Paris, 1968), 188-202; James J. O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford, 1992), III 59-69.

¹² *Conf.* 8.12.29; BA 14, 66: *‘intentissimus cogitare coepi, utrumnam slerent pueri in aliquo genere ludendi cantitare tale aliquid’*.

¹³ *Conf.* 8.8.19; BA 14, 46: *‘ubi nemo impediret ardentem litem, quam mecum aggressus eram’*.

¹⁴ *Rom.* 13:13-4 in *Conf.* 8.12.29; BA 14, 66: *‘non in comisationibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubiliis et inpudiciis, non in contentione et aemulatione, sed induite dominum Iesum Christum et carnis prouidentiam ne feceritis in concupiscentiis.’* For the significance of this passage, see, e.g. J.J. O’Donnell, *Augustine* (1992), III 66-9; Carl G. Vaught, *Encounters with God in Augustine’s Confessions: Books VII-IX* (New York, 2004), 95-9.

¹⁵ See B. Bruning, ‘De l’astrologie à la grâce’ (1990), 603-4 and n. 93.

explanation of this change that Augustine treats the idea of Vindicianus explicitly from the biblical viewpoint as follows:

O Lord, most righteous Moderator of the universe, *out of the depth of your judgement* (*Ps.* 36:3 [*Ps.* 35:7]), bring it about that by some hidden instinct, without the knowledge either of consultor or consulted, every consultor hears what it is right that he should hear, according to his souls' hidden deservings. Let no man say to him, 'What is this?' or 'Why is this?' Let him not say it. Let him not say it. He is a man.¹⁶

Such is the way Augustine shows us that the former astrologer was distracted from the 'fallacious divinations and impious delusions',¹⁷ not simply because they were part of the pagan cults, but because he could expound them and prove the facts he had learned. He does not refrain from harking back to his past errors in the reckoning of the future, and further proceeds to integrate it into another marvellous rationality, with which astrologers could happen upon true predictions. This rationality demonstrates the truth of divine creative force: the sortilege of the unpredicted events is concealed in the depth of the right judgement. This is said to be able to mediate between 'every consultor' and God's 'hidden instinct'. God mysteriously inspires an enquirer in light of the 'hidden deservings' of that enquirer's soul. The effects of this inspiration are limited with regard to some souls for reasons understood by the 'depth' of divine grace: because they are only human beings, through the consultation of the mediator of the 'universe', they will be able to follow it. It would allow us to appreciate the central event in the *Confessions* as a form, not of divinations by skill, but of divination through the 'most righteous Moderator of the universe'.

Descriptions of the consultation from the opposite viewpoint

Apart from such reflexive consideration, what evidence is there for the fact that Augustine's recurring references to divination of this kind include the contradictory assessment of its characteristics? It may help us to appreciate his approach to divination.

In question 45 of his *Miscellany to Eighty-Three Questions* (388-96), entitled 'Against mathematicians',¹⁸ Augustine begins by pointing out the inability of

¹⁶ *Conf.* 7.6.10; BA 13, 602: 'tu enim, domine, iustissime moderator uniuersitatis, consulentibus consultisque nescientibus occulto instinctu agis, ut, dum quisque consulit, hoc audiat, quod eum oportet audire occultis meritis animarum ex abyssu iusti iudicii tui. cui non dicat homo: «quid est hoc?» «ut quid hoc?» non dicat, non dicat; homo est enim.'

¹⁷ *Conf.* 7.6.8; BA 13, 594: 'fallaces diuinationes et inopia deliramenta'.

¹⁸ For the various implications of the word *mathematicus*, see e.g. Aimé Solignac, 'L'influence des astres', BA 48 (1972), 609-12; B. Bruning, 'De l'astrologie à la grâce' (1990), 595⁶²; Wolfgang Hübner, *AL* 3 (2004-2010), 1203-6, s.v. 'Mathematici, -us'.

those trained in the science of numbers (as arithmetic and geometry) to predict the future, quoting a passage from *Wisdom* 13:8-9: ‘Again, this must not be forgiven them. For if they were able to know so much, so that they could investigate the world, how did they not more easily discern its lord?’¹⁹ He says that some difficulties have arisen from their loose constellations despite the fact that ‘they have predicted many true things’.²⁰ Augustine’s dissatisfaction of ‘their utterances’ is clear from the last part of this question, in which he criticises the act of divination by ‘the dead skins of manuscripts’,²¹ not because those books are never successfully used to foretell the future, but because ‘some prediction of future events ... emerges, not by skill but by chance, from a speaker’s mind’.²² Augustine does not explain further what he means by the set phrase ‘not by skill but by chance’. However, after citing the passage from *Wisdom* mentioned above, he suggests the following reasoning that seems to lie below the surface of this treatise:

Even though it [*scil.* the human mind] acknowledges that it is changeable on account of its decreasing and increasing in wisdom, it finds that above itself is unchangeable truth. And thus, clinging to it, as it is written, *My soul has clung to you* (*Ps.* 62:9), it is made blessed, and it also finds within itself the creator and lord of all things visible.²³

This view of love as something like glue and cement lies in fact at the heart of Augustine’s view of the unifying force of love.²⁴ People move towards what they love and are glued to it by love. Yet, not only do they turn away from the supreme object of their love because they can neither see nor think about God, but, being conscious of the fundamental asymmetries between the changeable and the unchangeable, the earthly and the heavenly, and the creatures and the creator, they would be allowed the practice of divinations dependent on divine initiative, not on human skill. What he does is to maintain the proper boundaries

¹⁹ *Diu. qu.*, q. 45.1; CChr.SL 44A, 67: ‘*Iterum nec his debet ignosci. Si enim tantum potuerunt scire, ut possent aestimare saeculum, quomodo huius dominum non facilius inuenerunt?*’

²⁰ *Diu. qu.*, q. 45.2; CChr.SL 44A, 69: ‘*multa uera eos praedixisse*’. See B. Bruning, ‘De l’astrologie à la grâce’ (1990), 601, 605-6.

²¹ *Diu. qu.*, q. 45.2; CChr.SL 44A, 69: ‘*illorum responsis ... mortuas membranas scriptas quaslibet*’.

²² *Diu. qu.*, q. 45.2; CChr.SL 44A, 69: ‘*ex animo loquentis non arte sed sorte exit liqua praedictio futurorum*’.

²³ *Diu. qu.*, q. 45.1; CChr.SL 44A, 67: ‘*Quae ... cum etiam se propter defectum profectumque in sapientia fatetur esse mutabilem, inuenit supra se esse incommutabilem ueritatem; atque ita adhaerens post ipsam, sicut dictum est: Adhaesit anima mea post te, beata efficitur, intrinsecus inueniens etiam omnium uisibilium creatorem atque dominum*’. For diverse interpretations of this verse, see Joseph T. Lienhard, ‘“The Glue Itself is Charity”’: Ps 62:9 in Augustine’s Thought’, in Joseph T. Lienhard *et al.* (eds), *Augustine: Presbyter Factus Sum* (New York, 1993), 375-84.

²⁴ For the characteristics of this unifying function of love, see, *e.g.*, the well-considered study of John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine*, The Hulsean Lectures for 1938 (London, 1938), 100-3 and 141.

between these spheres, thereby indicating the mysterious working out of divine will.

In approximately 400, after the composition of *Confessions*, he replied to some questions from Januarius, a Catholic layman, in *Letters* 54 and 55. In the second of these two letters, Augustine discusses some Church habits that should be abolished. He provides practical advice to the layman concerning those 'who read their fortunes in the pages of the gospels'.²⁵ It is interesting that not only did he himself follow this tradition at the decisive moment in the garden, but that his reader at the time may have seen a clear picture of himself that emerged from the *Confessions*.²⁶ Therefore, he carefully distinguishes between consultation with 'the words of God that speak of the next life'²⁷ and demonic divination that applies this practice to worldly matters.²⁸ While the latter should be censured, Augustine's answer implies a positive evaluation of his own use of the practice at that divinatory event. Yet, the further inquiry whether all the sacred things may be admitted is not conducted.

Augustine continues his attack on diviners and criticises divination of this kind in his *Sermons*, *Expositions on the Psalms*, and other sermonic commentaries, for example in his commentary on *John's Gospel*.²⁹ While, in *Sermon* 12 as mentioned above, leaving out diviners from the list, he in turn does not explain in detail various types of divination in other homiletic treatises. When he explores the problem of baptism against the Donatists (406-407), he compares people in the church who 'seek out fortune-tellers and consult astrologers secretly'³⁰ to the crows among whom the dove is groaning. No further explanation is given in that text, but in some sermons he often mentions the *sortilegus* and the *mathematicus* together and deals with these diviners just as he did in the tractate 'Against mathematicians'. Particularly in *Sermon* 9, after emphasising the necessity of coming to an agreement with adversaries, Augustine sarcastically refers to several types of diviners: 'But in order to come to that agreement,

²⁵ *Ep.* 55.20.37; CSEL 34,2,212: 'qui de paginis euangelicis sortes legunt'.

²⁶ *Retr.* 2.6.1; CChr.SL 57, 94: 'multis tamen fratribus eos multum placuisse et placere scio.' For the problematics of the audience for the *Confessions*, see Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000), 152-3; Annemaré Kotzé, *Augustine's Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 71 (Leiden and Boston, 2004).

²⁷ *Ep.* 55.20.37; CSEL 34,2,212: 'propter aliam uitam loquentia oracula diuina'.

²⁸ See P.W. van der Horst, 'Sortes' (1998), 154-5 and n. 42; Leo C. Ferrari, 'Augustine and Astrology', *Laval théologique et philosophique* 33 (1977), 241-51, 244; William E. Klingshirn, 'Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*: Gibbon, Du Cange, and Early Christian Lot Divination', *JECS* 10 (2002), 77-130, 83-4; Jochen Rexer, *AL* 3 (2004-2010), 620-30, 627, s.v. 'Inquisitiones Ianuarii (Ad -)'.
²⁹ For the prevalence of 'sortilegi' among the diviners in his *sermons*, see François Dolbeau, 'Le combat pastoral d'Augustin contre les astrologues, les devins et les guérisseurs', in *Augustin et la prédication en Afrique* (Paris, 2005), 111-26.

³⁰ *Ioh. eu. tract.* 6.17; CChr.SL 36, 62: 'occulte ... sortilegos quaerunt, mathematicos consultant.'

keep yourselves from detestable and corrupting practices, from going with detestable inquiries to astrologers, to soothsayers, to fortune-tellers, to augurs, to sacrilegious rites of divination'.³¹ This is the case, too, with people either care for seriously ill child in *Expositions* 133.2 (406-407),³² or suffer from headaches in *Sermon* 4.36 (410-419).³³ Consequently, Augustine gives his congregations advance warning of its popularity and potentially dangerous practices: 'We see today, brothers and sisters, how many earthbound people commit fraud for the sake of gain, and perjury to further their fraud: we see how many are driven by their fears to consult soothsayers and astrologers.'³⁴

Concluding remarks

Augustine's continued engagement with the problem of human approach to divine knowledge is found later in the *Literal Meaning of Genesis* (412-416), when he interprets a passage from *Wisdom*.

And perhaps the reason he said, I obtained a good soul by lot ... is that things given by lot are usually given from on high by God. ... So when the Word eventually became that flesh and dwelt among us, this idea of its being a lottery presented itself, to dispel any suspicion of preceding merits.³⁵

Again in the exposition of *Psalms* 30 (around in 412-415), he explicitly refers to this issue:

The fate allotted to me is in your hands. Not in other people's hands, but in yours. Now what is this talk about being allotted? Why lots? When lots are mentioned we must not

³¹ *S.* 9.17; CChr.SL 41, 141: '*Vt autem concordetis, abstinete vos a detestabilibus corruptelis, a detestabilibus inquisitionibus, a mathematicis, ab haruspicibus, a sortilegis, ab auguribus, a sacris sacrilegis*'. Another sample would include *S.* 15A.4; *S.* 63A.3; *S.* 335D.3; *S.* 388.2. For the *S.* 388, while considered by many scholars to be of dubious authenticity, see P.-P. Verbraken, *Études critiques* (1976); Anna Maria Quartiroli and Marcella Recchia in *NBA* 34 (1989); Edmund Hill suggests the possibility of its authenticity, even tentatively in *WSA* 3/10 (1995), 403 n. 1 and 7.

³² *En. Ps.* 133.2; CSEL 95/3, 338: '*Aegrotabat filius, forte quaesisti mathematicum, sortilegum. Forte non de lingua, sed de moribus tuis exiit maledictio in domino*.' For the date, see CSEL 95/3, 7-8.

³³ *S.* 4.36; CChr.SL 41, 47: '*Quibus illecebris persuadet ut eas ad sortilegos, ad mathematicos, quando dolet caput. Qui dimittunt deum et eunt ad ligamenta diabolica, uicti sunt a diabolo*.' For the date, see E. Hill, *WSA* 3/1, 206¹. For those depend on superstitious remedies, see also *Ioh. eu. tract.* 7.7 (406-407).

³⁴ *En. Ps.* 59.11 (412-413); CSEL 94/1, 404: '*Hodie videmus, fratres, quam multi terreni pro lucro fraudes, pro fraudibus periuria, propter timores sortilegos mathematicos ... terreni*'. For the date, see CSEL 94/1, 378.

³⁵ *Gn. litt.* 10.18.33; CSEL 28, 321: '*et fortasse ideo ait: sortitus sum animam bonam ... quia solent quae sorte dantur diuinitus dari ... ut cum ea uerbum caro fieret et habitaret in nobis, ad auferendam suspicionem praecedentium meritorum sortis nomen accessit*.'

think of soothsayers. The casting of lots is not a bad thing in itself; it is the means by which God's will is indicated when human beings are in doubt ... When God, though, found no merits on our part, he saved us by the 'lot' of his will, saved us because he willed it, not because we were worthy. That is our lot.³⁶

This view of the relation between the preceding merits, lots, and divine will seems to lie at the centre of his view of divination, despite the fact that these treatises do not directly discuss the problem of divination in question. The vague prescription derived from his observations of this practice, that people should not consult the diviner for their earthly fears, seems to be given a new direction. Augustine reforms the problem of divination, for he confirms to his congregation that '*By grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not your own doing ... We are his own handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph. 2:8-10).*'³⁷ This was first directed through his own consultation of a codex of Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*.

Indeed, Augustine's thinking about the problem of divination is closely associated with the role of Christ as mediator from the message in his biblical consultation. Already in the middle of 390's when he considered the act of divination in the *Eighty-Three Questions*, he expressed the view that a radical break between God and human beings is required in divination. In his interpretation of *Psalm 62:9*, '*My soul has clung to you*', even if implicitly, he indicated the reconfiguration of the practice of divination only given by divine initiative. It would enable him to keep a clear and definitive boundary between the Creator and his creation, thereby showing another possibility of human access to the divine. Therefore, as William Klingshirn has persuasively argued about the closing passage of *Confessions* 10,³⁸ it is only through Christ, '*in whom the treasure of wisdom and knowledge are hidden*' (*Col. 2:3*),³⁹ that divine knowledge would be known to the creatures. As a result of the sporadic interest Augustine shows, in texts written after *Confessions*, in the consultation

³⁶ *En. Ps.* 30.2, s. 2.13; CChr.SL 38, 211: '*In manibus tuis sortes meae: non in manibus hominum, sed in manibus tuis. Quae sunt istae sortes? quare sortes? Audito nomine sortium, non debemus sortilegos quaerere. Sors enim non aliquid mali est: sed res est in dubitatione humana diuinam indicans uoluntatem. ... quando autem deus nulla merita nostra inuenit, sorte uoluntatis suae nos saluos fecit, quia uoluit, non quia digni fuimus. Haec est sors.*' For the date, see Henri Rondet, 'Essais sur la chronologie des *Enarrationes in psalmos* de saint Augustin', *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 61 (1960), 111-27 and 258-86; and the 'Tabula Chronologica' in CChr. SL 38, XV-XVIII.

³⁷ *En. Ps.* 30.2, s. 2.13; CChr.SL 38, 221: '*Gratia salui facti estis per fidem, et hoc non ex uobis ... Ipsius enim sumus figmentum, creati in Christo Iesu in operibus bonis*'.

³⁸ W.E. Klingshirn, 'Divination and the Disciplines' (2005), 138-40, where, in so doing, Klingshirn confirms the discussion by Carol Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*, Christian Theology in Context (Oxford, 2000), 36-8. See also Goulven Madec, *Le Christ de saint Augustin: La Patrie et la Voie*, Jésus et Jésus-Christ 36, nouv. éd. (Paris, 2001), 14 and 78.

³⁹ *Conf.* 10.43.70; BA 14, 268: '*in quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae absconditi*'.

of inspired books, it looks as if he might avoid taking a more comprehensive approach to the problem of oracular consultation. But, already 'in the mid-390s ... in this thinking about divination and the disciplines of knowledge', Augustine has shifted the 'emphasis on Christ's role as mediator that made biblical learning, biblical disciplines, and biblical divination'.⁴⁰ Thus, as we can look back, his narrative at the garden shows us a privileged feature of this consultation: Augustine was conscious of the estrangement between God and human beings and yet believed that the alienation could be bridged by Christ's mediation. This allowed him to appreciate the central event in *Confessions*, thus causing him to place considerable emphasis on divine initiative.

⁴⁰ W.E. Klingshirn, 'Divination and the Disciplines' (2005), 138.